

Rowan Co Hist

COUNTY ORGANIZED IN 1856; TAKEN FROM FLEMING AND MORGAN

Farmers Perhaps The First Settlement In This Section---

COHIST

Box 4 File 19

--Morehead Comes Next

Come all you fathers and mothers,
Sisters and brothers;
As here we relate,
The history of Rowan,
Best mountain country in the State.

An earlier historian tells us that about July 26, 1773, a party of surveyors from Pennsylvania visited a part of what is now Fleming county and did some prospecting. It is generally believed that they followed a trail from the Big Sandy into the Triplett valley, and were probably the first white settlers that ever visited what is now Rowan county. No doubt they surveyed and prospected in the valley at or near the present site of Morehead.

This party was led by George William Thompson, and consisted of Col. James Perry and James Hamilton, surveyors, and Joshua Archer, and assistant.

The first settlers in the vicinity of Morehead, for the most part came from Virginia to take up claims given them as military grants. These settlers were much influenced by the geography of the region and the fertility of the soil in the beautiful valleys of the Licking River and Triplett Creek.

The county of Rowan, the one hundred and fourthⁱⁿ order formed in the State, was established by an act of the State Legislature in 1856,[?] out of parts of Fleming and Morgan, and named in Honor of Judge John Rowan, distinguished jurist and United States Senator from Kentucky for six years, 1824-1830. It is situated in the northeast mountain portion of the State and bounded on the north by Lewis, east by Carter and Elliott, south by Morgan and west by Bath and Fleming. The Licking River and the

Sargent, Edward, Historical and Progress Edition, Page 2; The Morehead Independent, Morehead, Kentucky. October, 1934.

Triplett Creek, with their tributaries, drain almost the entire county. The licking and its North Fork form most of its southern and south-eastern boundary.

The sturdy pioneer that first settled this section was greatly influenced by the natural beauty of the region, as well as the abundance of good timber available, and the early industries of the county consisted of milling and lumber operations. The first saw-mill erected near Morehead was an old upright outfit located near the present site of the city water pumping station, on the land owned by Charles Proctor. This mill was built and operated by Jake Wilson, who later added a grist mill and ground corn and wheat.

The tyrography of the land made the district an ideal retreat for wild game, and this fact probably had a big influence on the early settlement, as the pioneers were largely dependent on wild game for a livelihood. Deer and wild turkey have been killed near Morehead since the Civil War.

Probably most of the early travel through Morehead was due to the salt works on the Little Sandy river in Carter county. Salt, an important substance to early settlers, was transported from these salt works, through Rowan county and into Montgomery, Bourbon and Mason counties.

Confederate Cross Roads, afterwards known as Farmers Cross Road and today as Farmers, was perhaps the first settled village in the county. Situated at the junction of the trails that lead from east to west and north and south, it was once a thriving little city. It was here that the first drug store of the county was established, and here the first physicians located. Major Brain was probably the first settler. Other old residents were Nick McIntyre, Jim Tabor and Vince Calvert. Isaac Johnson, the first sheriff of the county, lived at Farmers when the county was formed, and afterward moved to Morehead, building the second house in the county seat. This house was located on Main street near the Bays building. Dixon Clack, an old Virginia aristocrat, settled at Clearfield, on a Virginia land-grant and ran a small store, saw-mill and grist-mill there. Level land was rather

plentiful in that section, and naturally new settlers settled near Mr. Clack and gradually spread to the present site of Morehead.

Mrs. Abbie Oxley is generally considered to have been the first resident of Morehead, and lived somewhere near the center of the present city. Col. John Hargis was the first postmaster and storekeeper. He built his home near a spring on the present S. M. Bradley property. His first business house, which was a combination of inn, store, postoffice and saloon, was located in the present site of the Cozy building and adjacent to the court house. The hotel or inn was known as the Galt House and the story goes that Mr. Hargis contracted with William Nickell to build the log house and cover it for a yoke of cattle.

A Richard Hawkins owned the land now occupied by the court house, and in 1856, at the time of forming the county, he gave the court house square, one acre, to the county. It is interesting to note that the first county officials were selected without any particular creed or politics. They were elected for their personal qualifications, and today this seems to remain the regular order of affairs--Democrats and Republicans alike win when they are good men.

William Black was the first County Judge. He was from what is now Elliott county. His wife was a daughter of Neil Howard, a pioneer of Elliott county, and said to have been the richest man in the county. Houston Logan was the first County Clerk. He lived at the old Frank Nickell place, just below town, the late residence of Dr. A. L. Blair.

The natural resources of Rowan county, such as stone, coal, oil and gas, have played an important part in the development of the county, and will mean more and more as they are developed and put to commercial use. This is particularly true of the coal, oil and gas. The three important quarries of the county are of the Beuna Vista member of the Cuyahoga foundation, and are found at Farmers, Freeston and Bluestone. The sandstone is bedded and eventextured, fine grained and of medium hardness, and gray to bluish gray in color. Because the stone splits easily in all directions,

it is called Rowan County Freestone. It is readily dressed or sawed.

The present day population of Rowan county come from Scotch-Irish, Irish and English settlers of pioneer times. The names of the inhabitants bear evidence of their direct descent from these early settlers.

In Capt. Leander M. Cox's regiment recruited for the Mexican war in 1847, there were 25 men over six feet. Rowan county was a part of Fleming county at that time.

Col. John Hargis was the first postmaster at Morehead and the first post-office was on the site of the present Cozy building.