

## Local Trivia

### What's In A Name?

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## SECTION C

# History

THE MOREHEAD NEWS, MAY 4

## About the Author



Dr. Ellis retired from Morehead State University Library and directed a research...

# Morehead Memories:

## People & Places

### Place names and their origin

By Jack D. Ellis  
Special to The Morehead News

"A good name is better than precious ointment" (Ecc. 11:1).

Farmers. The town of Farmers, located on the banks of Licking River in Rowan County was originally called Crossroads. It was the first community of any size in Rowan County, and was settled by veterans of the Revolutionary War. As early as 1792 they awarded early land grants in the Licking River Valley. These grants included rich river bottom farmland which was the dream of every early settler.

Also, the river was teeming with fish, and game was plentiful, and the hills and valleys were covered with virgin timber. Native stone was prevalent in the area. It was a land of opportunity for those early settlers. Farmers was originally called Crossroads because it was where the east to west toll road that followed the Licking River from south to north. During the Civil War the community was called Confederate Crossroads because of the many Southern sympathizers in the area. Following the Civil War, the name was changed to Farmer. In 1881, after the railroad came through, an "S" was added making the name officially "Farmers" as we know it today.

Christy Creek was named for two brothers, Ambrose and Lauden Christy. They traded with the Indians for the land and later the Governor of Kentucky gave them a deed for the land. Lauden Christy lived near the confluence of Christy and Triplett Creeks and Ambrose lived about a mile up Christy Creek.

The Licking River is formed in Magoffin County and flows over 300 miles northwest into the Ohio River near Cincinnati. It forms Rowan County's western border between Morgan, Menifee, Bath and Fleming counties. Today it is the principal water supply for those counties. The river was first called "Nepernine" by the Indians. Early explorer Thomas Walker discovered the river in 1750 and named it "Frederic" River. Later the river was called "Great Salt Lick Creek" because of the many salt deposits along the river where animals would come to lick the salt.

However, Charles Kerr's History of Kentucky (1922),

states that it was later named "Licking" from an early Indian word meaning "land with springs and meadows". But the early settlers in the valley said the name Licking came from the early salt licks along its banks. Therefore, one would logically conclude that the name Licking came from a shortened version of "Great Salt Lick Creek", that was named for the many 'salt licks' along its banks. (Other sources: Encyclopedia of Kentucky (1992) Ed. by John Kleeber).

The Licking was first used by the Indians as they moved with their canoes to new hunting grounds or made raids on warring tribes. Later the river provided them a means to transport furs for trading with early central Kentucky settlers. The first white settlers along the river used it to transport timber, stone and coal to market. In February 1848, the first boat load of coal was shipped from Morgan County down the Licking to Claysville and hauled by wagon to Cynthiana and sold for 21 cents per bushel.

One of the earliest recorded floods on the Licking River was on January 14, 1848 when heavy rains fell for two days and nights in Northern and Eastern Kentucky. It was reported that the Ohio River rose 20 feet in 24 hours and the Licking rose two feet higher than ever recorded prior to 1848.

Bearskin is a small hollow near Haldeman, KY. In the late 1800's Ned Hamilton and Ebenezer Proctor were bear hunting near the head of the

hollow. It was early winter and the weather was unusually cold and their dogs treed a bear. The bear was fat and ready to hibernate. After killing their prey, the two men skinned and dressed the bear, and loaded it onto a makeshift sled in order to haul the meat home.

Ebenezer Proctor's clothing was pretty thin for the early cold winter weather. Therefore, as soon as they skinned the bear he stuck his arms through where the front paws were and wore the fresh uncured bearskin home. Hence the name Bearskin Branch.

Clack Mountain. A name and a place familiar to many Moreheadians and countless college students. (They used to party a lot on that mountain top). Clack Mountain is located on 519 four miles south of Morehead at the head of Morgan Fork, a place that will be discussed later. Clack Mountain is named for Joseph Clack. Mr. Clack was a wealthy land owner, storekeeper and mill operator near today's Clearfield Community. He was the chairman of a three man committee appointed by the 1856 Kentucky Legislature to establish the boundaries for Kentucky's 104th county. The other members of the committee were Houston Logan and William Powers. That committee was also empowered to select the name of the county and establish the county seat.

Morehead, (then called Triplett) was selected as the county seat from farms owned by Ben Evans and Sylvia Oxley. The land and buildings were paid for by a poll tax (no

real estate taxes). Dixon Clack owned two slaves "Old Jim" and a woman named "Sukey".

Sharkey. During the early 1900s, when cock fighting was a major sport in Kentucky there were two champion fighting roosters in the Northern section of Rowan County near the Fleming County border. One rooster was named "Shine Eye" the other was named "Sharkey". The owner of "Shine Eye" wanted the new post office named for his rooster, and the owner of "Sharkey" wanted the Post Office named for his rooster. They decided to let the two roosters fight it out and the one left standing after the battle would have the honor of having the community and Post Office named for him.

Of course, Sharkey won because there was a Post Office by that name for over 50 years. Also there is still a very close knit community by that name and the rooster today is a symbol of their homemakers group. (This story is recorded from an old family Bible of one of their members). This writer also thought that fighting rooster could have been named for an early American world champion heavyweight boxer by the name of Jack Sharkey.

Mills Branch. Named for Jacob Clack's water powered sawmill and grist mill. Mr. Clack also ran a general store

and owned thousands of acres of land in southern Rowan County.

Gills Mills. Located about four miles upriver from Farmers near the Ragland Oil Fields. Early records show that the father of Mark Gills owned the Mills and hundreds of acres of the surrounding land. (He also was an extensive slave holder). The

mills were powered by dams extended part into Licking River.

Those dams were frequently and have been rebuilt. The mills were used to grind wheat, cut lumber and card wool. It was argued in court that the mills were responsible for the Licking River's change in course in the late 1800's.

**MOREHEAD MEMORIES - PEOPLE AND PLACES**  
**Place Names and Their Origin**  
by  
**Jack D. Ellis**

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Also, the river was teeming with fish, and game was plentiful, and the hills and valleys were covered with virgin timber. Native stone was prevalent in the area. It was a land of opportunity for those early settlers. Farmers was originally called Crossroads because it was where the <sup>only</sup> east to west toll road <sup>crossed</sup> that followed the Licking River <sup>eastward</sup> from south to north. <sup>into the Ohio River. In fact, served travellers going north and south.</sup> During the Civil War the community was called Confederate Crossroads because of the many Southern sympathizers in the area. Following the Civil War, the name was changed to Farmer. In 1881, after the railroad came through, and "S" was added making the name officially "Farmers" as we know it today.

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