

Nearly every area which has been carved from the early American wilderness has at least one blood-curdling tale of early gold or silver mines, Indian attacks or stage robbers, resulting in a lost mine, fabulous amounts of buried treasure or both. The Daniel Boone National Forest is no exception. The prize lost mine and buried treasure story of this area is that of the "SWIFT SILVER MINE".

There are many versions of this tale, each having some scrap of documentary evidence or historical facts sufficient to authenticate it in the minds of eager listeners. Historic research indicates

SWIFT, JOHANNATHAN

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that John Swift was an Indian trader working with the Northern Indian tribes well before the French and Indian War. It is rumored that he married a beautiful Indian maiden (the daughter of a Chief no doubt) and that possibly he was made a member of the tribe. He is believed to have traveled with these Indians into Kentucky where they came to obtain silver which they traded to the French for various types of trade goods. It is believed that in this way John Swift learned of the presence of silver in the Eastern Kentucky area.

Fortunately, for the documentation of this story at least, trader John Swift was a methodical man who kept a detailed journal of his later travels which not only provides much of the following information but also includes a map of the middle Kentucky River country. It is known that he made a series of trips from his home in Alexandria, Virginia to the Eastern Kentucky country in 1761, 1762, 1764, 1767-1768, and 1768-1769. All of the earlier trips were made to Kentucky well before Daniel Boone's first visit there. In addition, trader John Swift's diaries refer to three other trips which were not documented, all probably prior to the initial documented trip of 1761. On these journeys John Swift and his party started from Alexandria, Virginia, proceeded as a group to the head of the Big Sandy River and from there scattered over a considerable area in their explorations, prospecting and mining. These widely scattered operations have served to confuse historians and others not familiar with the entire story.

While there are as many versions to the John Swift Silver Mine story as there are story tellers, the many stories and legends may be grouped into two principal versions.

The first story relates that John Swift and three companions, Mundy, Gries, and Jeffery, mined silver somewhere in the Kentucky River country, probably in the drainage of the Red River, over a period of approximately eight years (1761-1769). This story says that during that period they had smelted approximately \$273,000 value in silver bullion and coins which were kept buried in the floor of a Kentucky cave. About 1769 they attempted to bring \$70,000 in value back to Virginia. Enroute they were attacked by Indians, buried the \$70,000 worth of silver, and in trying to escape, Swift's three companions were killed. Swift eventually reached the eastern settlement and his home in Alexandria, Virginia, alone. This means that the \$70,000 worth of silver was buried somewhere on the trail between the Red River and the eastern seaboard settlement where, as far as is known, it remains today, as an irresistible lure to seekers of buried treasure as it has in each of the generations since the day it was buried. The remaining \$200,000 of silver bars was left buried in a Kentucky cave and, as far as it is known, remains there to this day.

The second, or other version of this story, is similar but takes a more sinister turn. This story states that when John Swift returned to the Kentucky country of his earlier adventures with the Indians he was



accompanied by a Motley crew of adventurers including ex-sailors, ex-soldiers and a few well-known pirates and cutthroats from the seaboard settlements and the Spanish Main. It is recorded that one of the members of his party was a former worker in the mint of England. This party came into the region with several loaded pack horses and when they started back to Virginia a few months later, the pack horses were more heavily loaded than when they came in.

On one thing all stories are in agreement. John Swift and his companions were refining silver ore and were making counterfeit money. This is verified somewhat by a later story, that John Swift was put on trial in Alexandria, Virginia for counterfeiting, but was acquitted at this trial and released when it was proven that his "pieces of eight" contained more silver than did the coinage of either Spain or England.

Here again the trail branches out in speculation over where the silver came from originally. Some believe, as in the first story above, that Swift and his companions mined and smeltered this silver on location, although geologists have stubbornly maintained that there is no silver ore in Kentucky. Another story, which has some basis of fact, is that the silver bars were taken from Spanish ships, either captured by the English Navy or by pirates working in connection with Swift and his companions. It is well established that Swift had connections with the piracy trade of his day and time, and was part owner in twelve ships sometimes engaged in that trade. Further rumor has been that he was forced to testify at the trial in England of his fellow buccaneer, Blackbeard. If this could be established as a fact, it would lend much credence to the entire Swift Silver Mine story. From this point, the main version of the second story closely parallels that of the first story; that is, while packing the silver back to the Virginia settlement, the party was attacked by Indians, Swift's companions killed and the treasure buried along the trail. At this point, another sinister version of the story relates that the party was not attacked by Indians on the return trip, but that John Swift, wishing to have the entire treasure and location of the mine for himself, killed his companions, buried them and the silver on the trail, and returned to the settlement with the story of Indian raids to explain the absence or nonreturn of his companions.

It is related that shortly after his return to the seaboard settlements, John Swift traveled to England in the hope of interesting investors there to the extent of outfitting an expedition to recover the caches of rich silver bullion and to operate the fabulous silver mine further. While in England, the American Revolutionary War broke out and because John Swift had made many public statements as a true American and had given the public his opinion of the King and others, he was put in jail in Dartmoor prison where he remained until the end of the American War of Independence. As a result of spending many years in a dark and damp cell block, John Swift lost his eyesight and returned to the Colonies a blind man.



Once back in the Colonies, "Blind John" as he was known, was unable to go into the woods by himself. As a result of his fabulous tales of lost treasure, he was able to interest and assemble a party who agreed to accompany him to Kentucky in an attempt to recover the treasure. On this exploring trip, his principal companion was a man by the name of Anderson who wrote, "it was pitiful to see the old man hobble over the rocky ground; up cliffs and across the mountain streams, searching frantically for the site of his former mining adventure". For fourteen years, "Blind John Swift", accompanied by various companions attracted by his stories of fabulous wealth, searched the Kentucky country for the identifying reference marks he recorded in his journal that he had made to assist in relocating the various caches of buried treasure. In the year of 1800, broken in spirit and in body, John Swift lay dying, and with almost his last breath he admonished his companions; "it is near a 'peculiar rock' boys, don't never quit hunting for it. It is the richest thing I ever saw. It will make Kentucky rich".

Since that day hardly a year has passed that one or more searching parties has not been found in the hills of Eastern Kentucky, usually with a copy of the journal and a map which someone has sold them as "the original", searching diligently for the lost treasure. As an example of the type of working in Swift's journal which excites the interest and inflames the passion for finding buried treasure, we find the entry: "On the first of September, 1769, we left between \$22,000 and \$30,000 in crowns on a large creek, running near a south course. Close to the spot we marked our names (Swift, Jefferson, Mundy, and others) on a beech tree --- with a compass, square and trowel. No great distance from this place we left \$15,000 of the same kind, marking three our four trees with marks. Not far from these, we left the prize, near a forked white oak, about three feet underground and laid two long stones across it, marking several stones close about it. At the forks of Sandy, close by the forks, is a small rock, has a spring in one end of it. Between it and a small branch, we hid a prize under the ground; it was valued at \$6,000. We likewise left \$3,000 buried in the rocks of the rock house".

For nearly 200 years the lure of John Swift's lost mine and buried treasure has served as a Kentucky El Dorado. John Swift's dying words have rung in the ears of prospectors and treasure seekers as a certain promise of riches. The "boys" have never given up the search. One of these was Old Man Cud Hanks at Campton, Kentucky, who tramped the hills above the town looking for Swift's silver lode. Uncle Cud claimed that he knew Sailor John and that he had first-hand information of the mine. Like the others, death overtook him too, before he could find the precious cache. While many communities in Eastern Kentucky believe that their community is the "real" site of John Swift's fabulous silver mine, the majority of treasure seekers tend to concentrate their search on that portion of the Daniel Boone National Forest along Swift Camp Creek between the vicinity of Rock Bridge and the junction of the creek with the Red River. This area of high cliffs, rough and broken topography and lack of clearly marked trails may well provide succeeding



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generations of treasure seekers with much needed strenuous physical exercise and many hours of enthusiastic and romantic contemplation. If the past is any indication, the future will not want for searchers for the Swift Silver Mine Treasure of the Daniel Boone National Forest.



PLEY, MRS. ROVENA ALDERSON	3700 Norbourne Blvd., Louisville
SPEED, WILLIAM S. [died December 8, 1955]	Louisville
STEWART, J. ADGER [died June 15, 1954]	Louisville
STEWART, MRS. J. ADGER [died March 7, 1954]	Louisville
STEWART, J. CARTER	Mockingbird Valley Road, Louisville
STOLL, MRS. BERRY V.	Lime Kiln Lane, Louisville
THRUSTON, R. C. BALLARD [died December 30, 1946]	Louisville
TUCKER, COL. CHARLES E.	786 Chinoe Road, Lexington
TURNER, MRS. OTIS TALBOT	2139 Edgeland, Apt. 1, Louisville
VERHOEFF, HERMAN [died March 14, 1893]	Louisville
VERHOEFF, MISS MARY [died June 25, 1962]	Louisville
WASHINGTON, MRS. MAY BRUCE BRENNAN [died July 10, 1959]	Louisville & N.Y.
WATSON, MRS. ALEXANDER MACKENZIE [died March 11, 1954]	Harrods Creek
WHITE, ROBERT L. [died March 13, 1961]	Louisville
WHITE, MRS. ROBERT L. [died July 18, 1944]	Louisville
WHITFIELD, B. W., JR.	Brookside
WHITNEY, CORNELIUS VANDERBILT	P. O. Box 890, Lexington
WHITNEY, MRS. CORNELIUS VANDERBILT	P. O. Box 890, Lexington
WOLFORD, LEO T. [died December 6, 1971]	Louisville

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# THE FILSON CLUB

## HISTORY QUARTERLY

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### UNCOVERED — THE FABULOUS SILVER MINES OF SWIFT AND FILSON

BY JOE NICKELL\*

#### Part I: The Legend

For nearly two centuries a legend has persisted in eastern Kentucky concerning the "lost silver mines" of one "Jonathan Swift." In his alleged *Journal*, Swift relates how he and a company of men preceded Daniel Boone into Kentucky, making annual trips from Alexandria, Virginia to mine silver. From June 21, 1760 until late 1769, they "carried in supplies and took out silver bars and minted coins" which Swift used to buy vessels for his "shipping interests." Plagued by Indians, a mutiny of his workmen, and other troubles, and after a pious change of heart, Swift discontinued his venture, walled up his mine and a cave full of treasure, and headed for "England or France" to "get a party interested in . . . working the mines on a large scale." When he returned after a fifteen-year delay (he says he was imprisoned in England), Swift had become blind — unable to find his fabulous treasure!<sup>1</sup>

Many have undoubtedly accepted the legend at face value. J. H. Kidwell says: "Men, hoary with age and gray haired, half insane on the subject of the Swift mines ranged the mountains and the likely places, and died in the belief that they were very near the source of the mines as outlined in the *Swift Journal*. . . ."<sup>2</sup> To some, a treasury warrant of 1788 whereby John Filson (the early Kentucky mapmaker and historian) recorded 1,000 acres alleged to contain Swift's mine, has lent credence to the legend.<sup>3</sup> (Part III of this article explores the "Filson connection.")

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<sup>1</sup> Except as otherwise noted, all quotes from Swift's *Journal* are taken from the version reproduced in Michael Paul Henson's *John Swift's Lost Silver Mines* (Louisville: privately printed, 1975), pp. 8-25.

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Kidwell, *Silver Fleece* (New York: Avondale Press, 1927), vii. (This is a novel based on the Swift legend. The quote is from Kidwell's introduction.)

<sup>3</sup> Lincoln County No. 10117, issued May 17, 1788 and filed in the Land Office at Richmond, Va. Copy available from the Land Office in Frankfort, Ky. Reproduced by Henson, p. 37.



Skeptical geologists and historians have advanced quite another theory which has also achieved legendary status.<sup>4</sup> This theory supposes that Swift concocted the tale of silver mining as a cover for piracy and counterfeiting. Although the theory has persuaded many, it raises more questions than it answers: Why make the arduous and extremely dangerous journey to Kentucky in order to melt silver when the backwoods near Alexandria would do?<sup>5</sup> For that matter, the coinage could have been minted on board ship. And why go to all the trouble of producing a spurious journal? Such literary ability — employing phrases like “deeming it imprudent” — is indeed remarkable for one who went to sea “when a boy.”

What, then, is the answer? Before attempting to reach a solution it will be necessary for the reader to suspend judgement and begin to focus critically on the details of the evidence.

The scientific evidence seems to preclude fabulous silver treasure being mined in Kentucky. Geologists as well as park naturalists, rangers, and other knowledgeable officials I interviewed expressed skepticism of the Swift bonanza. Mr. Warren H. Anderson of the Kentucky Geological Survey responded in writing to my query:

Silver occurs in a variety of geologic environments, is generally associated with certain minerals and is found throughout the geologic time scale. From a geologic standpoint it is possible for silver to occur in sandstones in eastern Kentucky, but this does not mean that silver actually exists in economic quantities. Some silver has been reported in the western Kentucky fluorspar district (Hall and Heyl, 1968, *Economic Geology*, V. 63, No. 6, p. 655-70) as well as trace amounts in the central Kentucky mineral district (Jolly and Heyl, 1964, Kentucky Geological Survey, Series X, Reprint 15). As these reports indicate silver does occur in small amounts in Kentucky.<sup>6</sup>

Note that the precious metal exists only in trace amounts and in parts of Kentucky beyond the eastern section.

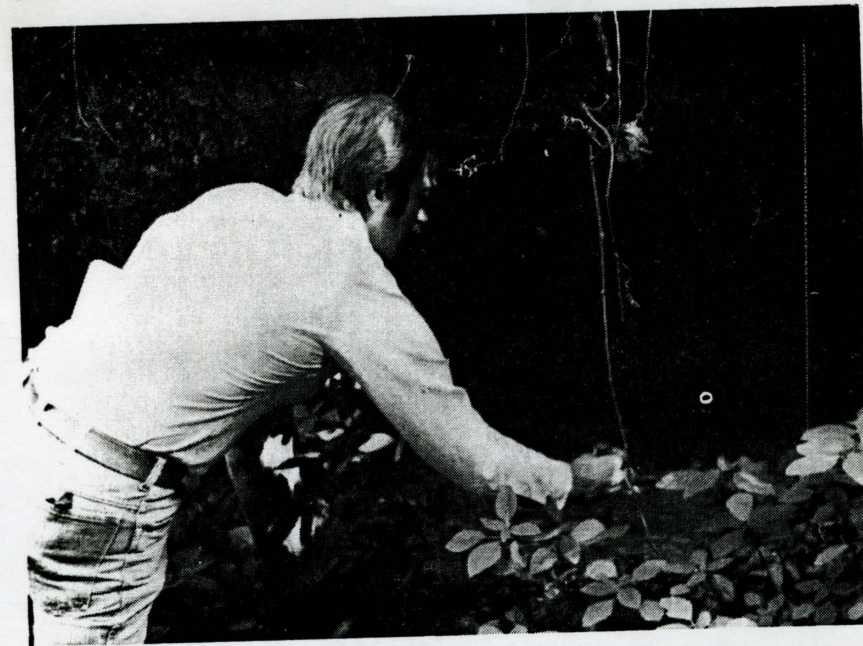
How this contrasts with Swift's purported find! He states he had two “workings,” with his company “divided into two parties . . . My party had four places where we obtained silver ore that were later connected by trails or “Tomohawk” [*sic*] paths.” He also alleges that Frenchmen who “worked mines to the south” had no less than two furnaces in operation.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Thomas S. Watson, “John Swift's Lost Silver Mines—A Joke?”, *The State Journal* [Frankfort, Ky.], Feb. 22, 1976, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, citing opinion of Dr. Thomas D. Clark, Kentucky historian.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to author, Sept. 26, 1978.

<sup>7</sup> *Journal*, pp. 11, 19.



*The Author Prospecting In Eastern Kentucky*

Swift claims he found several “veins” of silver! Such abundance — when two hundred years of highway construction, excavation, and strip mining, not to mention cave exploration and treasure hunting, have failed to unearth even a single “vein” of silver. Yet Swift alleges a wounded *bear* had led to the discovery of a cave containing “a very rich vein of silver ore.”

In researching the Swift story (and doing a little prospecting myself), I came across reports of “silver nuggets” from the Wolfe County area. My cousin, John May, was able to coax one sample from its owner and gave it to me to test. It was pyrite — “fool's gold.” Or in this case, fool's silver. (Only afterward did John reveal that he had previously shown the “nugget” to three geologists and obtained the same opinion.)

Similarly a U.S. Forest Service official told me he had tested samples of ore brought in to a Wolfe County ranger station and found them to be “iron sulfides” — that is, pyrite. He stated he also had found samples of lead sulfide (galena), which the lay person could easily mistake for silver.

A parks official confided that about two or three years ago, an attempt was made to sell the State of Kentucky a tract of land —



alleged to contain Swift's mine — for approximately a million dollars. Another official, he said, agreed to be taken, blindfolded, to a prospector's pit. The "silver" actually glittered: it was mica.

A friend recounted another incident. He was exploring in the rugged Red River Canyon, popularly assumed to be the general location of the mines, with a companion who got excited by a "silver vein" in a rock face along the river. My friend recognized it for what it really was: a scrapping from an aluminum canoe. Some time later he preyed on his companion's gullibility by "salting" an area with some filings of "silver." And old "John Swift" had — with a wink — claimed another victim.

Clearly the geologic evidence demands that we closely scrutinize the Swift *Journal*, or rather, journals, since numerous versions compete in the claim for authenticity.<sup>8</sup> These differ in varying degrees. One, headed "John Swift's Manuscript Journal," begins, "I was born October 3, 1712, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, my ancestors first came to America in 1637."<sup>9</sup> Another, from Tennessee, commences: "I, George William Swift, was born at Salisbury, England in the year of 1689, A.D., a son of William Swift, who was a miner of copper, silver, and lead."<sup>10</sup> Even versions with some distinct similarities contain discrepancies in the dates and number of the excursions as well as the directions for finding the mines.

Probably the most detailed version is reproduced in Michael Paul Henson's *John Swift's Lost Silver Mines*.<sup>11</sup> But it demands skepticism: A journal which begins, "I was born . . ." is immediately suspect. This version does agree substantially with quoted fragments from Connelley and Coulter's *History of Kentucky*.<sup>12</sup> But portions of the text — wherein Swift is alternately paraphrased and quoted — seem to have been 'lifted' by the unknown compiler of this particular version of the *Journal*.

Some of the *paraphrased* portions are recorded word for word in the *Journal*. Further, the latter work carelessly preserves one

<sup>8</sup> In addition to versions cited, there are these: Kidwell, pp. 1-8; Henson, *Lost Silver Mines and Buried Treasure of Kentucky*, privately printed, Louisville, 1972, pp. 6-13; et al. There are also numerous unpublished versions.

<sup>9</sup> Henson, p. 8. Henson believes Swift died in Tennessee in 1800 and that the *Journal* was taken to Pennsylvania and later to Louisville. (See Henson, pp. 7, 40-41.) But if the *Journal* was not circulated until after 1800, how do we explain Filson's treasury warrant of 1788 containing wording which implies Filson possessed a copy?

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Hardie Dougherty, "The Legend of the Swifts' and Monday Mine" [sic], undated typescript in the McClung Collection, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville. Unpaginated. (Dougherty says his brother "procured a very old and faded document from an old man in Virginia by the name of Boatwright," from which the text was transcribed.)

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> William Elsey Connelley and E. Merton Coulter, *History of Kentucky* (Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1922), pp. 130-33.

quoted excerpt in quotation marks with the untenable result of having Swift begin quoting himself in mid-sentence!<sup>13</sup> Another discrepancy involves the ending of the *Journal* — allegedly penned by Swift after his return from England, although in it he states that he has become completely blind and therefore would have been unable to write.<sup>14</sup>

We might explain that away by suggesting Swift dictated the portion. But what of the statement, ". . . that treasure will lie in that cave for eternity," written (if the *Journal* can be believed) during 1765?<sup>15</sup> Why would Swift pen such a hopelessly defeatist remark — one anticipating events not to be realized for twenty years — while he was still making excursions to the mines? Other seriously questionable aspects of the *Journal* will be discussed presently (and still others will be treated later).

Was there really a John or Jonathan Swift?

Well, of course, there was the famous English satirist by that name who wrote the allegorical *Travels Into Several Remote Nations of the World* (better known as "Gulliver's Travels"). Like "Swift," "Gulliver" was a ship's captain and the title of "his" work is echoed in a phrase from Swift's *Journal* stating that the smelting furnace was "in a very remote place in the west."<sup>16</sup> But that Jonathan Swift died in 1745. It would seem that, at best, he could only have unwittingly inspired the creation of a Swift legend.

At the end of the *Journal* in Henson's book is added a 'cut signature' (as collectors of autograph materials say of "Jonathan Swift." Henson says he placed it there "to lend a touch of authenticity to the document. This is an exact reproduction of Swift's signature that appears on an old land grant I obtained from an attorney in Kentucky."<sup>17</sup> But Mr. Henson is in error.

I researched the matter, finally tracking down the entire deed from which the actual signature in question was reproduced.<sup>18</sup> I carefully compared the signatures and found them to be identical, stroke for stroke. The document does substantiate that there really was a bona-fide Jonathan Swift and that he was from Alexandria, Virginia, as the *Journal* alleges, and further that he was a "merchant" (which at that port could mean that he had shipping interests as claimed).

<sup>13</sup> *Journal* (Henson), p. 15. (Cf. Connelley and Coulter, p. 132.)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> *Journal* (Henson), p. 17. Jonathan Swift, the allegorist, was known to early Kentuckians. A creek named "Lulbegrud" (from "Gulliver's Travels") appears on Filson's 1784 map.

<sup>17</sup> Henson, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> Court of Appeals Deed Book A, p. 307. August 1, 1795. Kentucky Land Office, Frankfort.



Unfortunately, further research proved Mr. Swift re-acquired the land and deeded it a second time in 1809<sup>19</sup> — nine years after "Swift's" reputed death.<sup>20</sup> The documents also enabled me to establish that the "signature" on the first deed was not actually by Mr. Swift's own hand but was — like the entire document — in the handwriting of the recorder who had copied it into the deed book!

This real Mr. Jonathan Swift could not have been the Swift of silver-mine mythology as will be clear from his biography. It informs us that he "was born at Milton, near Boston, Mass., and became a resident of Alexandria prior to 1785; was an importing merchant and prominent citizen during the forty years of his residence. . . ." He married and had "several children." He died in 1824 and "was buried with Masonic honors. . . ."<sup>21</sup> Clearly Mr. Swift was not the supposed blind pirate, nor is it likely he reached the remarkable age of one hundred and twelve years.

The genealogical data of some versions of the *Journal* must be discounted. Not journals — but brazen attempts to perpetrate fraud — begin so. (Some details even appear to have been copied — usually carelessly and quite late — from Swift genealogies.<sup>22</sup>) Indeed the *earliest documented references* to the legend mention only "a Certain man named Swift,"<sup>23</sup> "one Swift,"<sup>24</sup> "Swift,"<sup>25</sup> and "said Swift."<sup>26</sup> (And the Tennessee version cited previously gives an entirely different first name.)

There *were* numerous Swifts. Some were actually named John or Jonathan, which is, after all, a common first name. But there is *no proof* that there was an actual person named "Swift" — whether "Jonathan" or not — who early mined silver in Kentucky. To the contrary, there are indications that versions of the *Journal* have been tampered with. And not all such tampering can be explained away simply by copyists' errors.

We turn now to the seemingly-exact directions for locating the

19 Court of Appeals Deed Book N, p. 142. November 4, 1809. Kentucky Land Office, Frankfort.

20 Henson, pp. 7, 27.

21 Franklin Longdon Brockett, *The Lodge of Washington* (Alexandria, Virginia: 1899), pp. 127-28.

22 e.g., William Swyft of Sandwich and Some of his Descendants, 1637-1899, compiled by George H. Swift (Millbrook, N.Y.: Round Table Press, 1900).

23 1788. (Filson's treasury warrant.) See Footnote 3.

24 1823. (Judge John Haywood's *History of Tennessee*, p. 33, 34. Cited by Connelley and Coulter, p. 115.)

25 1791. (Fayette Co., Va., Entry Book, p. 333, in the Kentucky Land Office. Full text of this document is given below, pp.

26 1791. (*Ibid.*)

mines which make up the latter part of the *Journal* and which have inspired thousands of searches. But just how exact are they? We can take a cue from the coy statement therein that the furnace is "in a very remote place in the west." Landmarks are liberally given together with some directions and distances. Naturally these vary from version to version.

Although Swift maps have been widely reputed to exist, they are scarce in relation to copies of the *Journal*. (A couple of imperfect ones are reproduced in books,<sup>27</sup> and I have another in my collection.) So, with the help of my father, Wendell Nickell — who has often acted as a guide in the Red River area and who reads maps at his leisure — I constructed a hypothetical map of the mines and buried treasure. I based it primarily on the rather detailed version of the *Journal* in Henson's book. (See illustration.) It was immediately apparent that great flexibility of interpretation was required, pointing up the true vagueness of the description.

But Swift actually gives the latitude and longitude of the mines:

The richest ore is to be found in Latitude of 37° 56 minutes north [some versions read "57 minutes"]. The ore vein of little value is in Latitude of 38° 2 minutes north. By astronomical observations and calculations, we found both veins to be just a little west of the longitude of 83 degrees.<sup>28</sup>

While this is seemingly specific, exactly how far is "just a little" west?

Taken literally, the latitude and longitude of "the richest ore" pinpoint a location in Morgan County (where I am writing from) near Relief, Kentucky. Alas, neither the proper configurations nor the mine is to be found there. Despite all this, several factors conspire to fuel the search: Errors in "Swift's" calculations are reasonably assumed; partial configurations are located or 'interpreted' as necessary; new maps and alleged copies of the *Journal* are drafted; newspaper editors experience weeks in which no man bites a dog; and skeptics are shunned by a public eager to believe.

And so virtually every county in eastern Kentucky lays claim to the silver mines. The legend persists as well in Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina; and presumably it is everywhere good for business. A "Monument Rock" here, a "Balanced Rock" there, is often enough to set metal detectors and spades — even heavy equipment — in motion.

27 Henson, pp. 88-89.

28 *Journal* (Henson), p. 18.





Not long ago Job Corpsmen at the Frenchburg Job Corps Conservation Center located on Tarr Ridge in Menifee County searched (according to the *Menifee County Journal*) "an area from Sky Bridge and Rock Bridge westward along the Red River to Raven Rock, Court House Rock and Indian Creek where they have found several of the landmarks. . . ." <sup>29</sup> A "mining and exploring" com-

pany is searching in Wolfe County. There and elsewhere other groups and individuals are pursuing the myth and finding their treasure in the form of publicity.

Years ago, the Swift mania cost one man his health, and after his death his widow returned to the search, squandering her fortune and her remaining years in futile pursuit of the treasure.<sup>30</sup> The legend of "John Swift" had struck again.

### Part II: The Treasure of Ophir

If, as the geological evidence indicates, Swift found no great veins of silver, it follows that the *Journal* is a fabrication. Putting aside the 'cover-for-piracy' theory (which is a very leaky boat), we come to another. In *Silver Fleece*, Kidwell states: ". . . thousands of transactions in real estate have hinged around the probability that it abounded with the abundant source of the Swift mines."<sup>31</sup> Isn't it conceivable the document was created for use in land schemes? It does appear it was later used for such a purpose. But, as I intend to demonstrate, there is a further possibility.

Swift says he marked a tree with "the symbols of a compass [some versions read "compasses"], trowel and square."<sup>32</sup> These symbols are meaningless in any but a single context: A combined compass (a drawing compass, or 'pair of compasses') and square compose the emblem of the 'secret' society, Freemasonry. The trowel is the symbol of the Freemason's craft.

Freemasonry, or Masonry, is a benevolent society. It is not, Masons state, a 'secret society' but a 'society with secrets.' First carried to America in the early 18th century, it has been defined as "a peculiar system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols."<sup>33</sup>

Swift says he marked various trees and rocks with symbols which he referred to as "curious marks" and again as "peculiar marks." He identified one location of buried treasure with "a symbol of a triangle." Not just a triangle, but a symbol — one important in

<sup>30</sup> *Early and Modern History of Wolfe County* (Campton, Ky.: Wolfe County Woman's Club, 1958), pp. 13-14. See also, *Licking Valley Courier* [West Liberty], October 19, 1978.

<sup>31</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. vii.

<sup>32</sup> *Journal* (Henson), p. 16. The version in *Silver Fleece* (Kidwell, p. 4) reads "compass square and trowel" [sic].

<sup>33</sup> *Masonic Heirloom Edition Holy Bible* (Wichita, Kan.: Heirloom Bible Publishers, 1964), p. 26. (Before proceeding further, let me state that I requested no Mason to compromise himself by revealing society secrets. Data on Masonic symbols and other matters revealed in the following pages is found in encyclopedias and books on Masonry sold to the general public. If I have inadvertently revealed any treasured secrets, that has not been my motive, nor do I intend criticism of Freemasonry in any of my statements.)



masonry. Another Masonic symbol is the "Broad Arrow," also represented in the Journal; and there are many others.<sup>34</sup>

In the Masonic ritual of the Entered Apprentice, or First Degree, is the statement that there is "nothing more fervent than heated charcoal, it will melt the most obdurate metals."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in the *Journal* Swift states, "We were able to make charcoal in large quantities, for our use in smelting the ore."<sup>36</sup>

The *Journal* continues in this vein (no pun intended): As part of the allegory, Swift claims that — when he left the "richest mine" for the last time — he "walled it up with masonry form."<sup>37</sup> Otherwise an unlikely expression, we need only capitalize "masonry" to see that this says, in effect, that the meaning has been concealed or 'veiled' in Masonic fashion. It may be read with a knowing wink.

Now, among the essential elements of any true Masonic group are these: "a legend or allegory relating to the building of King Solomon's Temple" and "symbolism based on the stonemason's trade."<sup>38</sup> Masonry incorporates many legends of King Solomon, his masons, and the building of the temple. Indeed, the Masonic Lodge is held to represent some part of Solomon's Temple.<sup>39</sup> The lodge is oriented east and west, with east regarded as the most sacred of the cardinal points.<sup>40</sup>

Thus it is that our allegorist, "Swift," places his furnace in a "rockhouse that faces the east." From the rock house, he says, "facing the east you can see two monument rocks" (two tall rock pillars).<sup>41</sup> These are coincident with the Masonic/Solomonic "two great pillars" symbolizing Strength and Establishment.<sup>42</sup>

The remote and fabled mines, the fleet of ships (which supposedly bore Swift's silver to the "trade of the seas"), even the corral for horses — all tally with Solomon, his fabled mines (in "Ophir"), his great fleet, trade, and stables. Just as Swift refers to his

34 *Journal* (Henson), pp. 11, 12, 17. Cf. *Masonic Bible*, pp. 16, 24. Albert G. Mackey, *Symbolism of Freemasonry* (Chicago: Charles T. Pownor Co., 1975), p. 122 states that Freemasonry is "a science of symbolism."

35 *Look to the East!*, revised edition, edited by Ralph P. Lester (Chicago: Ezra A. Cook Publications, 1977), p. 60.

36 *Journal* (Henson), p. 18.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

38 *Collier's Encyclopedia* (1978), "Freemasonry." Mackey (p. 315) explains that an allegory is "a discourse or narrative, in which there is a literal and figurative sense, a patent and a concealed meaning; the literal or patent sense being intended by analogy or comparison to indicate the figurative or concealed one." (Curiously, one of Swift's men was named "Guise.")

39 *Masonic Bible*, p. 10.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

41 *Journal* (Henson), p. 17.

42 *Look to the East!*, p. 123.

43 I Kings 10:27.

"occupation as a silver-smith," Masons extol Solomon's Master Mason (whom they call Hiram Abif) — a smith, a craftsman in precious metals. And, like Swift who supposedly found so much silver he could not transport all of it, Solomon "made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones. . . ."<sup>43</sup>

The Swift story admirably teaches its moral about the futility of 'laying up treasures.' It is not a true story but a parable in the form of a legend "veiled in allegory." In the *Journal*, Swift states the story's moral in a philosophical monologue: He says, in part, that "the works of man are always unfinished and unsatisfactory" and that "the life of man should be at some period turned about for reflection on God. . . ."<sup>44</sup>

Let us unveil a bit more. When Swift allegedly returned, years later, his blindness prevented him from re-locating his treasure. This is the punch-line of the allegory. In Masonry — which has been called the "Great Light" — light symbolizes enlightenment. (Swift says that from the "richest mine" you could "see a hole through the cliff and see the sky beyond." He called this formation "The Lighthouse."<sup>45</sup> In contrast, applicants for the Degrees of Masonry are first required to enter the lodge — like Swift — in *complete blindness*.<sup>46</sup> The "all-seeing eye" (depicted, for example, on the back of a dollar bill) is a prime Masonic symbol.<sup>47</sup>

Not only Swift's furnace but his "richest mine" was in a cave. He and his men camped in another. And he had rich stores of silver (walled up with "masonry form") "hidden in the great cavern . . . which fact was known to no living soul beyond our company."<sup>48</sup> (Like Masons, the members of Swift's "company" were "sworn to secrecy.") To this end, we should note that caves or "Clefts of the Rocks" figure prominently in Masonic symbolism. Too, there is the Masonic legend of the "Secret Vault," Solomon's subterranean depository of certain great secrets.<sup>49</sup>

The Masonic rites of the Third Degree feature a quest after such vague secrets (specifically "that which is lost") which, in the end, *remain lost*.<sup>50</sup> That, precisely, is the simple plot of the Swift legend. A "sea captain" figures in that Degree; and it will come as no surprise to learn that Swift states, "I became captain of a ship."

44 *Journal* (Henson), p. 16.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

46 *Look to the East!* p. 26.

47 Mackey, p. 190ff.

48 *Journal* (Henson), p. 16.

49 *Masonic Bible*, p. 12, 37, 63.

50 *Look to the East!* p. 150 ff.



The parallels go on and on. Swift's landmarks include a "Look-out Rock," "Hanging Rock," "Remarkable Rocks," etc., including the two pillars or "Monument Rocks" previously noted. In Masonry, "Landmarks" — originally stone pillars for boundaries — are symbols distinguishing Masons from others.<sup>51</sup>

Various directions from the furnace are given in distances of "three miles." (For example, "We carried the ore three miles to the furnace"; Furnace Creek forks "about three miles below the furnace"; again, "North of the furnace about three miles is a large hill. . ."). In Masonry, *three miles* represents a "Cable Tow's Length" which is "symbolic of the scope of a man's reasonable ability."<sup>52</sup> Numerous times Swift employs the number three — a number with definite significance in Freemasonry.

The preceding only begins the possibilities. Such Masonic terms as "The Conclusion of the Whole Matter," "The Camp," "The Contentment Among Brethren," "The Left Hand," "The Right Hand," "Treasure Room," "Royal Arch," "Cardinal Points" (of the Compass), "The Broken Column," "Degrees," "The Winding Stairs," "Covenant of Masonry," "Circumambulation," "Darkness to Light," "Weary Sojourners," "Foreign Country," "The Lost Word," "Distressed Worthy Brother," "The Rejected Stone," etc., etc., all seem to have definite counterparts in the allegorical Swift *Journal*. So do such symbols as the crescent moon, grapevine, laurel, crown, and others.<sup>53</sup>

There are historically dubious points in the *Journal* which are probably directly attributable to allegory. Arthur Edward Waite points out that "the significance is in the allegory and not in any point of history which may lie behind it."<sup>54</sup>

At least one dubious historical point is instructive. Swift refers to Indians "called Meccas." (Note the qualification that they were "called" that.) Although there was no such tribe, Henson guesses that "Meccas" or "Maccas" may be a corruption of Mequechakes, a tribe of Shawnees.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, in Masonic lore a copyist error appears with reference to "Maacha" (which is part of the Solomonic legend); Masons were referred to in the early charges and laws as "Maccones"; and the heroic Jewish family of Macabees also figures in Masonry.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Masonic Bible, p. 48.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>53</sup> Masonic Bible, pp. 1-63. See also Arthur Edward Waite, *A New Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (New York: Weatherstone Books, 1970), I, xlii ff; Mackey, p. 313 ff.

<sup>54</sup> Waite, I, 367.

<sup>55</sup> Henson, *Lost Silver Mines and Buried Treasure of Kentucky*, p. 31.

<sup>56</sup> Masonic Bible, p. 50.

I had a hunch that the allegorist might attempt to play games with numbers, especially since Masons make symbolic use of them. Swift's phrase, "reflection on God," suggested a look in the Bible. In four chapters of Isaiah — 37, 56, 38, 2, indicated by the degrees and minutes of latitude — are to be found an amazing number of passages paralleling the Swift story. In Isaiah 2, for example, is this: ". . . Their land also is full of silver and gold [Swift lists both silver and gold as part of his treasure], neither is there any end of their treasures. . . ." (Isa. 2:7) In this one chapter alone are allusions to Solomon, ships, idols cast of silver (Swift cast coins and silver bars), plus a phrase (adopted by Masons!): "Clefts of the Rocks." (Isa. 2:13, 16, 20-21)

In Isaiah 37 the reader will learn why the Swift allegorist created a duel with swords, resulting in the death of one man; why he uses the strange expression, "The Drying Ground"; and why he says that, in searching for the mine, he and his guide "wandered around all day. That night we came back to the place we started from." (Isa. 37: 7, 25, 34)

The following chapter reveals why Swift claims that for *fifteen years* he was prevented from finding his treasure. (Isa. 38:5) Also from this chapter: "Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees. . . ." (Isa. 38:8) Of the few references to "degrees" in the Bible, how very striking it is that we find the phrase in a passage we were directed to by a cryptic reference to degrees! (It is worth noting that in Masonry the various grades are known as "Degrees.")

In the same chapter is the question, "What is the sign . . . ?" (Isa. 38:22) We may ask another: Is the sign in the Swift allegory? Well, Swift refers to "myrtle" which is a biblical tree. *One* of the very few biblical passages mentioning it has special meaning; and it *immediately prefaces* the designated chapter 56. It reads: ". . . and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the LORD for a name, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." (Isa. 55:13) Here is how this "myrtle," this "*sign* that shall not be cut off," is represented by "Swift"; "Munday [his guide] said, 'I see the myrtle thicket. I know the way from here!'"<sup>57</sup>

Chapter 56 refers again to this sign, as well as to "the sons of the stranger," to greed, and blindness. (Isa. 56:6, 10-11) Chapter 38 elaborates on the latter point: "Mine age is departed . . . mine eyes fail . . . [remember Swift became blind in his later years]

<sup>57</sup> *Journal* (Henson), p. 19; Mackey, p. 260, 347.



O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me [blind, Swift became "dependent upon others"] . . . they that go down into the pit [the mine] cannot hope for thy truth. . . ." (Isa. 38:12, 14, 18)

So many parallels with the Swift allegory! Reading and understanding these passages from Isaiah (containing symbolism adopted by Freemasonry) help us to understand the moral of the Swift allegory. After almost two hundred years, the key to the 'cipher' has been broken.

One of the problems allegories present is that of interpretation. It has not been my intent to twist facts to fit a theory. I can only repeat that the *Journal* itself demands comparison with Freemasonry since so many Masonic symbols are expressly given therein. Clearly these elements — compasses, square, and trowel — refer to Masonry to the exclusion of any other meaning.

This does not mean "Swift" was a Mason, of course, since his very existence is doubtful. Nor does it necessarily mean that the original version of the *Journal* (long lost!) contained such symbolism — although every indication is that it did. In the forthcoming section I will detail evidence which strongly suggests the author's intent as well as indications of who he was and when the allegory was drafted. As we shall see, John Filson is conspicuously present in the Swift affair.

### Part III: John Filson, John Swift

The earliest documented reference to Swift's silver mines is this land record of May 17, 1788:

Robert Breckinridge and John Filson as Tenants in Common Enters [sic] 1000 acres of land upon the balance of a Treasury Warrant No. 10,117 about sixty or seventy miles North Eastwardly from Martins Cabbins in Powells Valley to Include a silver mine which was Improved about 17 years ago by a Certain man named Swift at said mine, wherein the said Swift Reports he has extracted from the oar [sic] a Considerable quantity of Silver some of which he made into Dollars and left at or near the mine, together with the apparatus for making the same, the Land to be in a Square and the lines to run at the Cardinal Points of the Compass including the mine in the Centre as near as may be.<sup>58</sup>

Filson is of course the famous Kentuckian who produced the first map of the state together with the first history, *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke* (1784) in which he wrote: "Iron ore and lead are found in abundance, but we do not hear of any silver or gold mines as yet discovered."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> See note 3.

<sup>59</sup> Revised edition, New York: Corinth Books, 1962, p. 25.

Now Filson's book, and the statements in it, contained endorsement by "Daniel Boon, Levi Todd, James Harrod." The opinions of these exceedingly knowledgeable men should have been the best obtainable; and they hadn't even *heard*, in all their travels, an allegation of silver mines. Yet in four years the name "Swift" had come to light; his mine had been located; and it was Filson who had gotten lucky. Weigh the odds.

There is, in fact, *absolutely no evidence of the "Swift Mines" legend prior to the 1788 Filson document*. It would be interesting if we could ask John Filson how he had located the mine. But since we cannot, we *can* look at the man and his activities in hopes of clues. They are forthcoming.

Consider this portrait of Filson by William Masterson of Rice University:

His was a strange personality. Fiercely acquisitive, he secured, on paper at least, over 12,000 acres of land. For gain he plunged into arduous schemes, sued and was sued, and endured all the hardships of an incredibly savage frontier. For gain, despite pious explanations to the contrary, he wrote his book and drew his map, the products of hours and days of interviews, travel, and technical skill. He was not friendly and was possessed of a deadly quality of impatience and pompousness. Like his map he lacked perspective — the map at the eastern and western ends, the man in any direction that touched upon personal standing and relationships. Except for the map and book he was in all his endeavors, including his one known courtship, almost ludicrously unsuccessful. He died penniless. . . .<sup>60</sup>

Masterson adds: "Yet Filson's very energy attracts." His frontier travels were extensive. He taught at Transylvania, studied medicine and untold other subjects, conducted countless interviews, surveyed roads, wrote poetry and created sundry documents at the request of others, helped to found a city, and attempted to found a seminary (tuition: "one half cash the other property"<sup>61</sup>).

If the reader suspects I am about to 'accuse' Filson of perpetrating the Swift hoax, he is partly right: I wish to suggest that there are numerous *indications* — if not conclusive evidence — that he did so. Let us examine the indications.

First, there are Masonic symbols and allusions in the text of Filson's land record; but we cannot be certain they are not purely coincidental. For example, "Cardinal Points of the Compass" is a definite Masonic term, while on the other hand nothing precludes a non-Mason's innocent use of the expression in a deed. Too, the

<sup>60</sup> From Masterson's introduction to *Kentucke*, 1962 Corinth edition, vi.

<sup>61</sup> *Kentucky Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1787; John Walton, *John Filson of Kentucke* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1956), p. 100.

APP-KY/VERT



"Square" may just be meant literally. In Masonry it can refer either to the four-sided figure which symbolizes morality (or duty), or to the trying square, which, with the compass, composes the Masonic emblem. (The serious student may wish to look up in Masonic texts and glossaries the following: "North-East Corner," "Working Tools," "Legend," "The Lost Word," "Circumambulation," "Quest," and even "Alchemy.") But I belabor my point: presently we shall look at Filson's Masonic ties; first, let us consider other evidence.

In that pioneer era of Kentucky, Filson was one of the very, very few who could have met *all* the necessary requirements for drafting the *Journal*. His scholarship, his ability to write and to create maps would obviously have been necessary talents together with his excellent knowledge of Kentucky. There was nothing in his mixed character to preclude a motive — and several motives present themselves.

Putting words into "Swift's" mouth would have been child's play for Filson; for after all, he had given these words to Daniel Boone in a ghostwritten account of the hero's exploits:

The aspect of these cliffs is so wild and horrid, that it is impossible to behold them without terror. The spectator is apt to imagine that nature had formerly suffered some violent convulsion; and that these are the dismembered remains of the dreadful shock: the ruins, not of Persepolis or Palmyra, but of the world!<sup>62</sup>

Exclamation mark indeed! Anyone who could bestow upon a backwoodsman such an instant education would have no trouble saddling an untutored "sea captain" with a phrase like "deeming it imprudent."

Filson occasionally sounds like the surveyor he was, with a string of "thences": "... thence down the same to the mouth; thence up the Ohio. . . ."<sup>63</sup> as if he were drafting a deed of land. Swift writes: "We . . . came to Leesburg, thence to Winchester, thence to Littles, thence to Fort Pitt. . . ."<sup>64</sup>

"Swift's" division of his manuscript into sections — "Description of the Mines and Country," "Ore South of the Furnace," etc. — parallels Filson's treatment of his book: "Situation and Boundaries," "Soil and Produce," etc. Filson evidently patterned his miscellany after Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, manu-

<sup>62</sup> *Kentucke*, 1962 Corinth edition, p. 58.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> *Journal* (Henson), p. 11.

script copies of which were in circulation *after 1781*.<sup>65</sup> (Let us hope no one suggests Jefferson copied "Swift!")

After relating some of the early history of exploration, Filson (following Jefferson's approach) described the boundaries. He began: "Kentucke is situated, in its central part, near the latitude of 38° north, and 85° west longitude, and lying within the fifth climate. . . . It is bounded on the north by great Sandy-creek. . . ."<sup>66</sup> And "Swift," after recounting his comings and goings, gives his "Description of the Mines and Country," including, as previously noted, the latitude and longitude. He says the furnace is on "a long rocky branch."<sup>67</sup>

Let us compare style. In Filson's little book we find this:

The lands below the mouth of Elkhorn, up Eagle Creek, and towards the Ohio, are hilly and poor, except those contained in a great bend of the Ohio, opposite Great Miami, cut off, as appears in the map, by the Big-bone and Bank-lick creeks, interlocking and running separate courses. Here we find a great deal of good land, but something hilly.<sup>68</sup>

And here for comparison is "Swift":

Most of the mountains have but little timber and are poor and barren. North of the furnace about three miles is a large hill, seven or eight miles long, upon which there is good timber of different kinds, where we were able to make charcoal in large quantities for use in smelting the ore. South of the furnace there is little timber worth notice.<sup>69</sup>

In such passages there is a similarity of both style and outlook.

But did Filson have the particularly literary (and not just journalistic) turn of mind necessary to contrive a complex allegory replete with clever symbolism? The answer is emphatically yes. He was, for one thing, a poet. But an example of his genius for cleverness is found in the name he proposed for the city he helped to found. He called it "Losantiville." As he explained: "L for Licking River; os, Latin for mouth; anti, Greek for opposite; and ville, French for city." Read *backward*, it translates as 'city opposite the mouth of the Licking'! Although later the name was changed to Cincinnati, some Filson notes have survived to reveal his pedantic virtuosity.<sup>70</sup>

Filson may well have been a Freemason; certainly some of his closest associates and contemporaries were. One was Levi Todd,

<sup>65</sup> Walton, p. 31.

<sup>66</sup> *Kentucke*, 1962 Corinth edition, p. 11.

<sup>67</sup> *Journal* (Henson), p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> *Kentucke*, 1962 Corinth edition, p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> *Journal* (Henson), p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> Walton, p. 113.



an endorser of his book.<sup>71</sup> Humphrey Marshall — controversial Tory, historian, surveyor, and Mason<sup>72</sup> — is presumed a Filson friend; although speculation that Marshall wrote, or helped write, *Kentucke* is based on too-meager evidence.<sup>73</sup> Filson almost surely came in contact with such Freemasons as Samuel January, an early settler of Lexington, who later opened an establishment at Limestone (Maysville) with the Masonic name "Sign of the Square and Compass." (Two taverns in Lexington also bore Masonic names — "Sheaf of Wheat" and "Sign of Cross-Keys.")<sup>74</sup> Insofar as is known Filson never met George Washington (America's most famous Freemason), but it was to him that Filson publicly dedicated his map.

In 1788 (the year in which the *Journal* was probably created, or at least finished), *Filson was actually living in the home of a prominent Mason, Colonel Robert Patterson*<sup>75</sup> — soon to be a Filson partner in founding "Losantiville." It was in this significant year of 1788, on November 17, that the "first lodge west of the Alleghanies," Masonic Lodge No. 25 at Lexington, was issued a charter.<sup>76</sup> The date of the application for the charter is unknown, but surely it was some time (weeks or even months) before. (Prior to that time, Kentucky's Freemasons had to make the difficult, dangerous trip to the Grand Lodge in Richmond, Virginia.) Unfortunately, the names of the charter members of Lodge No. 25 are irretrievably lost;<sup>77</sup> but it does seem that while plans were being made to establish the lodge, Filson — living in Patterson's home — was close at hand. And it is very likely that, with his extraordinary curiosity and his admiration for Masons, he sought membership in the society.

While there is no direct proof the "Swift Silver Mines" allegory was adopted for actual use by Masons, Freemasonry is, after all, a "society with secrets." Further, many appendant orders of the brotherhood have flourished briefly before passing into obscurity. If Filson had written the allegory (say at the request of Patterson),

71 J. Winston Coleman, *Masonry in the Bluegrass* (Lexington: Transylvania Press, 1933), p. 31.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

73 Walton, p. 48.

74 Coleman, *Masonry*, p. 28; Coleman, *Stage-Coach Days in the Bluegrass* (Louisville: Standard Press, 1935), p. 54; Chas. R. Staples, *The History of Pioneer Lexington (Ky.): 1779-1806* (Lexington: Transylvania Press, 1939), pp. 11-12. Masonry was obviously in a vigorous phase.

75 Walton, p. 109; Coleman, *Masonry*, p. 31.

76 Coleman, *Masonry*, p. 30.

77 *Ibid.*

it might simply have suffered the same fate as "Losantiville." Or possibly another fate, which I will touch on presently.

Filson's talents frequently earned him requests to write documents for others. For example, it was he who drafted the petition to Congress on behalf of the families at Post St. Vincent pleading for military protection (and for the establishment of a "permanent land office here, for the purpose of obtaining valid rights to lands. . . .")<sup>78</sup> Land was a Filson obsession, and he dwells on explaining how to acquire it in his book.) He also wrote the announcement for a proposed Lexington seminary (a "bizarre" document, as his biographer admits)<sup>79</sup> as well as the prospectus for the proposed settlement of "Losantiville." It was *at the request of Colonel Patterson* that Filson set to the task of conjuring up that 'veiled' name.<sup>80</sup>

In mid-1788 Filson wrote to his brother — who was being harassed by Filson's creditors — a letter most revealing of his character. He said, in part:

I have supported a good credit here [Lexington], and have enough to support me. I resumed my studies last winter . . . and this spring have begun to study Physic with Doctor Slater . . . two years I study, as soon as my study is finished I am to be married, which will be greatly to our advantage. Stand it out 2 years my dear brother, you shall have negroes to wait of you.<sup>81</sup>

The letter was written just ten days after Filson recorded his supposed discovery of the silver mine, yet he makes no reference to it! Did he *know* the mine was only legendary?

He did not travel to the mine. Instead he headed in the opposite direction. A month later, at Beargrass (near Louisville), he composed a poem, indicating he had been spurned in love and threatening suicide.<sup>82</sup>

By September 23, Filson had arrived at "Losantiville" with his two partners: Colonel Patterson, and Matthias Denman of New Jersey (who had obtained the land). After a preliminary survey, Filson disappeared. He was rumored killed by Indians, although his body was never found; and another surveyor, Israel Ludlow, took his place in the partnership. John Walton, Filson's biographer, states: "Years later, sworn testimony was given that these men ransacked Filson's trunk and destroyed his papers in order to de-

78 Walton, pp. 85-86.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

80 John Bach McMaster, *A History of the People of the United States* (8 vols.; New York: D. Appleton, 1883-1913), I, 516.

81 Walton, pp. 105-106. The letter was written May 27, 1788.

82 *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.



fraud his heirs."<sup>83</sup> Could the Swift allegory have been among the papers in the ransacked trunk?

A great deal of circumstantial evidence connects Filson with the "Swift" manuscript. *Someone* certainly contrived it, and at every turn, Filson is suspiciously present.

Wherever we find Filson in the Swift matter, Colonel Robert Patterson is not far behind. After Filson's death, the records are silent as to "Swift's Mine" for more than two years. Then there is this entry:

April 1791. Eli Cleveland withdraws his entry of 200 acres made January 5, 1791 on Warrent No. 15132. Eli Cleveland and John Morton enters [*sic*] 1483 acres of land on two Treasury Warrants No. 15132 and 12128 on a branch of Red River to Include an Old Camp in the Center where there is some old troughs at said Camp by the branch side. The said Camp is a place difficult of access Supposed to be Swift's Old Camp and others including a mine said to be occupied formerly by said Swift and others.<sup>84</sup>

John Morton (who later became a banker) was a Mason,<sup>85</sup> and his partner, Eli Cleveland, may have been. Cleveland was closely linked with Colonel Patterson since they were (at roughly this time) fellow magistrates of Fayette County.<sup>86</sup>

In two more years these county lawmen were to learn of a bizarre and tragic episode in the "Swift" saga. Colonel James Harrod, prominent as the founder of Harrodsburg, was reported murdered after being lured on a search for the mines<sup>87</sup> by a man named Bridges — a man with whom Harrod "had a lawsuit about property."<sup>88</sup> In his little book, Filson had called Colonel Harrod "a gentleman of veracity."<sup>89</sup>

Several years later, in 1815, Colonel Wm. McMillan of Clark County, with eleven other men, formed a "company"<sup>90</sup> to search for the Swift mines. McMillan possessed, at least according to later legend, the "original" *Journal* and map. As to the latter: "From notes relating to it, it must have been in cipher, for finding the place appeared to depend upon the phases of the moon or signs of the zodiac or some mysterious combination of circumstances, per-

<sup>83</sup> Walton, pp. 119-20.

<sup>84</sup> Fayette Co., Va., Entry Book, p. 333, in the Kentucky Land Office, Frankfort.

<sup>85</sup> Coleman, *Masonry*, p. 82.

<sup>86</sup> Staples, *Pioneer Lexington*, p. 78.

<sup>87</sup> Conneley and Coulter, p. 113.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Kentucke*, 1962 Corinth edition, p. 24.

<sup>90</sup> "Swift" also termed his group a "company." In the *Journal* (see Henson, p. 10) he actually places the word in quotation marks. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1960: "Freemasonry"): the Freemason was "understood to be a mason who was free in the sense of being a member of a guild or company" (my italics).

haps never revealed."<sup>91</sup> Had the map survived, only then might we do more than guess that the "cipher" was composed of Masonic symbols.

I did succeed in establishing that "William McMillin" [*sic*] was active in Clark County,<sup>92</sup> and that a "Wm. McMillan" was at "Los-antiville" in 1788! He arrived with a party brought by Colonel Patterson shortly after Filson's reported death. . . .<sup>93</sup> This much is clear: Any further clues concerning "Swift's Mines" will be unearthed — not in the soil of Kentucky — but in the neglected dust of archives.

<sup>91</sup> From a typescript, "Clark County Chronicles," in the files of the Kentucky Historical Society.

<sup>92</sup> Willard Rouse Jillson, *Early Clark County Kentucky: A History (1674-1824)* (Frankfort: Roberts Printing Company, 1966). p. 65.

<sup>93</sup> Beverly W. Bond, Jr. (ed), "Dr. Daniel Drake's Memoir of the Miami Country, 1779-1794," *Quarterly Publication of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio*, XVIII (1923), p. 57.





## SWIFT'S SILVER CAMP

John Swift's fabulous journals report silver operations in East Kentucky. References to ships on the Spanish Seas and to coinage of silver in this area with six trips from Atlantic Coast to this region, 1761 to 1769, is unsolved mystery. Intrepid searchers have found no trace of cache or mine. One Swift camp reputed to have been on site of this Court House.



Legend - myth - saga  
mystery - vault -  
enigma - new founder  
Puzzler  
baffler  
Curious - unsolvable problem  
Greid Moore  
Bizarre - grotesque  
fantastic

# The Legend Of The Swift Silver Mine

*A vein of ore allegedly purer than the finest  
British Sterling has lured treasure hunters  
to Eastern Kentucky for more than 200 years*

by Winfred Partin

**D**oes there exist, within the rugged mountains of eastern Kentucky, a "treasure trove" estimated to be worth more than \$100 million, or have hundreds of people wasted their time for two centuries seeking an unattainable fortune?

The saga of Swift's Silver Mine is viewed by some as historical fact, by others as legendary fabricating. Geology experts have repeatedly denied the existence of a massive vein of silver ore in Kentucky. However, the saga has continued for 200 years and has extended far beyond the boundaries of the Bluegrass State.

Jonathan Swift, an Englishman, is supposed to have found a rich vein of silver ore while exploring eastern Kentucky in the 1760s. He is further alleged to have worked the mine for years and to have buried millions of dollars worth of bullion in nearby caves.

The location of the trove has been debated for years. Some have placed Swift's activities in an area extending from the Big Sandy Valley westward to present-day Lee County. Others

believe his work was centered in the southeastern region of Bell and Whitley Counties, west of the Cumberland Gap.

That there was a man named Jonathan Swift is a generally accepted historical fact. He was a sailor with an early background in mining, who came to Alexandria, Virginia, in the mid-1700s. He became an Indian trader in the Ohio River region in the early 1750s. He spent considerable time with the Shawnee Indians and possibly had a wife who was a member of their tribe.

Early records in Alexandria state that a Jonathan Swift was tried in that city in the late 1700s on charges of "counterfeiting" English currency. A silversmith, who was called to testify, stated that Swift's alleged counterfeit contained a purer silver than the genuine article. Other records show that a Jonathan Swift secured a land grant in present-day Kentucky, south of the Green River, in the 1700s.

Once beyond the historical facts, the story becomes muddled. One generally accepted version is that George Munday followed a bear into a cave in 1740 and found a rich vein of silver ore. He was captured by Indians, who knew all about it, and for a few years helped them mine the silver. Later, after he

escaped, the English sailor Swift befriended him and was told the secret.

Swift, Munday and others reportedly made yearly trips to eastern Kentucky in the 1760s, extracting the ore, smelting it into coinage, and secreting it away in the rugged mountains. The operations ceased around 1769, because the men had gained wealth beyond their wildest dreams and because the years on the frontier had "worn away (their) strength." A small party, consisting of Swift, Munday and five others, returned in 1790, and found their bullion still safely cached away. Swift is alleged to have murdered his companions in a cave in order to be the sole owner of the treasure.

Growing blind with age, Swift went to Bean's Station, in East Tennessee, where he lived his remaining years with a Mrs. Joseph Renfro. He is said to have given Mrs. Renfro the original map showing directions to the mine in return for her favors. Swift died around 1800.

There is doubt as to whether the "original" map was fact, or just a fabrication of an old man. Shortly after Swift's death, many "original" maps and numerous manuscripts, all purported to be "Swift's Journal," began appearing throughout eastern Kentucky and east Tennessee. Roy

*A marker in front of the Wolfe  
County Courthouse links the  
site with the Swift legend.*



Price, of Jellico, Tennessee, who has been researching the Swift legend for years, has stated that has obtained 28 copies of the map and 35 manuscripts of Swift's journal.

In the early 1800s, searchers began descending on eastern Kentucky. Companies formed "expeditions" to search for the treasure, offering shares to local residents in order to raise operating capital. These companies usually reaped all the money they could from an area, then disappeared, taking monies and hopes with them.

Kentucky pioneer James Harrod supposedly succumbed to greed for the Swift treasure. One of his enemies came to him, saying that he had the "original" Swift map; offering to split the bounty with Harrod if the latter would go into the wilderness with him and finance the project. Harrod, believing money to be thicker than feuding blood, accompanied the man into the wilderness. The man appeared a few months later in another part of the state wearing some of Harrod's clothes, and the story began circulating that the pair had been attacked by Indians, with Harrod, who was never seen again, being slain.

In the early 1800s, Colonel John Tye was ambushed on the headwaters of Poplar Creek, near the present Bell-Whitley County line, by Shawnee Indians. Tye was supposedly searching for the mine. His son was slain in the attack. In 1937, a party of five people from Knoxville, Tennessee, were arrested after a gun-battle with the county sheriff in Primroy, a remote section of Campbell County, Tennessee, near the Whitley County line. The party said they were hunting for the fabled mine, using a map, which one of the women said had been in her family since 1914.

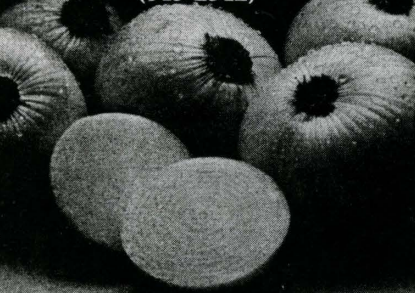
Within the last 50 years, the search for Swift's Mine has centered primarily in the southeastern region drained by the Cumberland River. Searchers still trek the rugged mountains of eastern Kentucky, however, and reports have emerged from the latter region of the treasure having been found. Articles appeared in *The Pineville Sun* in 1914, stating that the mine had been located on a farm near Beattyville, in Lee County. Other reports of finding the treasure have surfaced, but nothing conclusive.

Many of the "journals" supposedly

authored by Swift give a location that places the mine in the rugged mountains of Bell and Whitley Counties in Kentucky and Campbell County, Tennessee. Within this region is a triangular area stretching from the top of Pine Mountain on Kentucky Route 1595, southwestward through Laurel Fork (Whitley County) into Primroy and eastward through Frakes (Bell County) along Clear Creek. Many searchers believe the mine, if it exists, and the furnaces used to smelt the ore are located in this triangle.

Scott Warwich Partin, a descendant of the first settler in the Frakes area of Bell County, spent most of his life searching for the treasure. His story, along with a "transcript" of Swift's journal, was published in a series of articles in 1947, in the *Middlesboro Daily News*. The journal, filled with names of Indian villages and geometric directions, states that Swift "heard of the silver mine while in Portsmouth, Virginia," said mine being "500 miles west" of the Virginia Colony city. After detailing their operations between 1760 and 1767 in an area "west of the Long Blue Ridge" between the "36th and 38th degrees of

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latitude," the author notes the location of "Furnace Creek" (adjacent to the mine): "From the doors of the Cumberland on the top you will run north forty degrees west, stop about 41 miles and, if on the right course, you will find stones marked all the way."

Near the top of Pine Mountain, within a few feet of Route 1595, are rocks with ancient markings carved on them — arrows, horse tracks, etc. In the Primroy section are rocks with other markings, many similar to those described in Swift's journal. Some people believe these markings are the directional indicators noted in Swift's journals. Others avow them to be nothing more than Indian signs, showing locations where good hunting abounded or where warriors died.

Some disclaimers believe if a treasure ever existed, someone would have surely unearthed it during all the strip mining that has gone on in the region during the last 50 years. As for a smelting furnace at Davisburg (which many claim to have been constructed by Swift), R. L. Gray, a resident of Frakes who has searched the region for years, believes it is nothing more than a blacksmith's furnace built and maintained by the railroad company when the line was extended into the region in the 1880s.

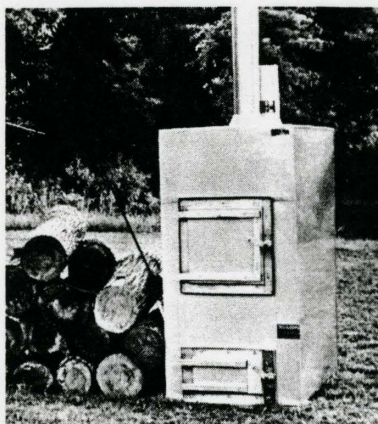
Roy Price, however, believes in the possibility of such a massive lode of ore in the state. Having studied geology in college, Price agrees it is unlikely a major vein existed in Kentucky. But he says a concentration of silver ore could be located in one small area, such as an unexplored cave. Price, an experienced spelunker, has explored or knows of 14 caves in the rugged terrain of Campbell and Whitley Counties, and Kentucky has long been known as a "cave-infested" state with hundreds as yet unexplored.

A few years ago, a resident of the area unearthed an Indian arrowhead made of silver, which when tested proved to be of a very high-grade silver. The discovery led some people to believe the ancient tribes had a source of high-grade silver.

Some people believe Jonathan Swift was a master con artist, who fabricated the legend of a silver mine and sold maps and journals to finance his pirate adventures. For others, however, the thought remains in the back of their minds that just maybe there is a treasure in them thar hills. ☐

*The author is from Morristown, Tennessee.*

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# The Outdoor Almanac

# In Search Of

# John Swift's Hidden Treasure

By: Harold Barber

The following story has never before been published. It is a supposedly true account of two young men's search for a cache of precious metals that many people believe were buried about 200 years ago by a legendary character named Swift, at a time when he and his party were trying to avoid an encounter with hostile Indians.

Many versions of the Swift legend and "Journal" have been printed by others, and they need not be repeated here. For the benefit of readers who are not familiar with those accounts, silver mines and buried treasures were supposedly located somewhere in the mountainous Appalachian region. Various locations have seemed to fit the descriptions reportedly given by Swift in his declining years, and various sites have been searched — but as far as is known, no such treasure has ever been found and recovered.

Although the principal characters in this latest account have all been dead for several years, their names are omitted here to avoid any possible embarrassment to their living relatives. The story itself is basically the same as was told by Boyd — many times over the years, and first heard by me about 1938.

I visited Boyd in 1963, a few years before his death, and asked him to repeat the story, and so I could write it down, and I also told him that I might someday want to publish it. At that time he was 73 years old. He showed some reluctance to discuss the matter in detail, but finally said, "What the heck, I'm too old to do anything about it now, so I might as well tell you everything."

Boyd's story as he related it in 1963 differed significantly in one respect from the account he gave when he was younger. Before he became elderly he would not tell the names of the creeks that he explored, or the name of the creek on which the treasure was supposedly found.

His memory was clear in regard to the names and general locations of the main streams and landmarks, but he had forgotten one or two of the smaller streams. I was able to prompt him with the aid of a contour map. The story follows:

heads up, near the head of Devil Branch, close to the Menifee-Morgan County line.

The turkey track pointed up Cave Branch and was supposed to direct us to the next landmark. According to the manuscript, we should now look for another turkey foot carving from where we would be able to look forward onto another fork of the Licking River. We searched the entire ridge that separates Cave Branch from Devil Branch, but we were never able to find this landmark. It was not clear from the manuscript whether this track had been carved into a rock or a tree, and if a tree was used it was probably no longer standing.

We gave up on ever finding this landmark and began to look for the next one, which should be "A Turkey Track carved into a Rock." This track would, according to the directions, be found on "A Creek that flows Upstream." We could not picture water as flowing upstream, and we had no idea what this direction meant.

We spent most of one summer looking for either the second or the third landmark and were finally about ready to give up. We had already searched along the trails and along the main ridges and streams, and were now simply hunting at random. Then one day while we were on a low ridge overlooking the mouth of Blackwater Creek Flem slipped and fell while coming down a steep rocky point, and in doing so his foot scuffed some moss off a large rock exposed on the surface. Flem then saw a carving that had

been hidden by the moss; it was in the shape of a turkey track, and the size of a turkey foot.

Flem called to me, and after I had joined him we examined this second, almost unbelievable find. The middle toe of the track pointed across the Licking River to a high cliff on the far side.

We now realized the meaning of the instructions regarding "A creek that flows upstream." Tributary streams usually flow in a generally downstream direction before joining the larger stream, but Blackwater Creek flows at an angle almost parallel to the river, in an upriver direction, for about half a mile before joining it.

After finding this mark we crossed the river and climbed to the top of the cliff that the track pointed to. Another turkey track was found there, carved into the rock, and now we were on the right trail. We were now on a ridge between Pretty Branch and Sinking Branch, and the "Fork of the Licking" that was visible from there turned out to be Sinking Branch.

The instructions were to proceed on in the direction pointed out by the turkey track to a "Rock shaped like a Haystack," from which we would be able to see a "Ridge shaped like a Mule's Back."

Finding the Haystack Rock took additional time. When we finally spotted it this rock looked so much like an old-fashioned haystack with a pole sticking up through the center that at the first glance I thought

it actually was a haystack. It was located near the ridge between Sinking Branch and Laurel, and we had to cross Sinking to reach the rock. Near the base of the Haystack Rock we found another turkey track carving, which was supposed to point to the Muleback ridge. We could find it, however, that fitted the description, and we were forced to undergo another loss and discouraging search before we again got back on the route of the Swift expedition.

In hunting for the Muleback Ridge we climbed a steep rock point one day and found ourselves on a narrow rock outcropping that felt steeply away on each side, bringing fairly smooth along the top. Since this led in the general direction that the last turkey track had pointed, we followed along this ridge until it ended at another point which sloped downward to the valley floor. We went down this point, and when we looked back at the ridge we had just left we discovered a feature from our present viewpoint that had not been apparent before: from this angle, the ridge looked exactly like a profile of a mule's back as seen when the animal is lying down. The resemblance was so marked that both Flem and I wondered at it.

We were now in the rough, clifty area near Little Laurel Branch. Our instructions were to travel straight on in line with the Mule's Back until we came to "Rocks shaped like Oar Blades," but much searching failed to reveal any rock that fitted that description. We finally climbed to a high vantage point in order to see where we were, and in the distance we saw two huge slabs of rock standing on end. These rocks were wider at the top than at the base, and from where we stood they appeared very similar to boat oars or

oars that had been struck in place. I lowered myself down onto the ground.

When we moved on we discovered why the Oar Blade rocks had been so hard to find. It was the case with the Mule's Back, they presented the described appearance only when viewed from a certain angle, and if we moved a short distance to either side they looked like ordinary rocks. After we had traveled to these rocks we found another turkey track carved into the base of one of them.

According to the manuscript, we were now near the journey's end. This track should point to a crevice in a cliff, "Across a Fork of the Licking River," where the treasure was hidden "secure from the Indians." We went on in line with the route that the turkey track had indicated, and were soon overlooking the valley of North Fork Creek.

From where we stood we could now see a high cliff off to the north, across North Fork, and directly in line with the turkey track carved at the base of the Oar Blades. And we were looking directly toward a shelf or crevice located about midway up the cliff.

The cliff proved to be about 100 feet high, being about 60 feet up to the crevice and another 50 feet on to the top. Since we had no way of reaching the crevice we had to leave and postpone further exploration until we could return with some tools.

We went back the next day with an axe and a rope, and laboriously cut poles and constructed a long ladder, but when I climbed it I found that it lacked a few inches of being able to climb onto the edge. The ladder was so wobbly and insecure that Flem thought I would fall and be killed. After much effort, I finally gave up trying to reach the ledge from below, and leaving the ladder

in place I lowered myself down from above on a rope.

Once on the ledge, I found a wide, low-roofed cave in the face of the cliff. In the rock floor of the cave was a crack about 16 inches wide and several feet long. This crack was filled with loose stone for a few feet in the center, but on each side of this it was empty. The loose rock appeared to have been placed there, and appeared to have been beat in place with a sledge hammer or a heavy stone. I started removing it and found that the loose rock covered a dense blue substance, of concrete or a similar material, but harder than any concrete that I've ever seen. I could not chip it with the tools I had with me, and I don't believe it could be chipped with an ordinary pick, or even with a hammer and chisel.

Since night was now coming on, and since Flem was very much concerned about how I was to get down from the cliff, I decided to leave for the time being and come back at a later date with better equipment. I could not see the pole ladder from the ledge, but finally I lowered myself until I was hanging to the ledge only my finger tips, with Flem giving me instructions from below, and when he assured me that my feet were only inches from the ladder I let go my hold and dropped, grasping for the ladder.

Although I never said so to Flem, at this time I was beginning to doubt that I'd ever get down while still alive. As it happened, I almost missed the ladder, but managed to grab it and hang on, although my body swung down until I was hanging underneath the ladder. I was not able to get back on top of it, but managed to let myself back down to the ground by climbing down the underside of the ladder.

We have not been back to recover the treasure, although we have discussed it many times over the years and have intended to do so. Removing the treasure would be complicated and dangerous because of the extreme difficulty of getting into the cave, and because of the need for powerful explosives to blast off the dense concrete-like substance after getting there. Another obstacle was that we did not own the land and did not know the law on such matters, and did not know whether we would be permitted to keep the treasure or sell it even if we succeeded in getting it. (Author's note: much of the land in the vicinity referred to was purchased by the U.S. Forest Service in 1937.)

According to Swift's journal, three horse-loads of gold and silver are buried there, in slabs or ingots of 12 to 14 pounds each.

With his story now ended, Boyd stared silently off across the ridges; his aging body no longer able to climb the rocks and move swiftly along the trails that his eyes and memory still envisioned. I closed my notebook, thanked him, and left — after promising to return at another time.

Several aspects of the story seemed rather impossible at first. For one thing, how could a party of wilderness travelers have obtained the materials needed to make concrete, and an unusually fine grade of concrete at that? But then I dimly remembered something about concrete, and a check with my library confirmed that lime plaster is made by heating crushed limestone, a type of stone that is plentiful in the North Fork drainage. It would have been entirely possible to have sealed the crevice with a type of concrete made on the spot.

Another puzzler was the ridiculously roundabout route, which ended not too many miles from the starting point; but then I remembered that they were supposedly trying to elude a party of Indians, and the route suddenly appeared much more feasible. Cliffs line the ridges and tributary streams in the vicinity that Boyd told about, and a party traveling on horseback would be very limited in their choice of possible travel routes.

In the summer of 1963 Boyd and I went to look at some of the terrain along and near North Fork Creek. We traveled by Jeep, mainly on hard-surfaced roads, and I couldn't help feeling a bit guilty when I thought of how laboriously he and Flem had explored the surrounding ridges and hollows on foot many years before.

Boyd was confused by the changes that had occurred, and couldn't seem to get properly oriented. He commented: "Why, there used to be a railroad here, and the other road was just a narrow wagon trace. Now the railroad is gone and there is a paved highway." He thought once that he recognized the Muleback Ridge, but was unsure from our angle of view; and I gently pointed out that the Muleback could not possibly be located at that particular spot.

We finally departed and turned homeward, with Swift's buried treasure and hidden secrets no nearer to a solution than before.

Some readers may wonder what my feelings are as to the authenticity of this account. I will merely state that I know definitely from other people that Boyd did in fact spend several months searching for a buried treasure. My opinion as to what he found is of little importance; I simply thought it was too good a yarn to be permitted to become extinct.

What do you think?

Sandy Hook, Ky. July 12, 1980

PAGE THREE



An old manuscript was owned by an elderly man named Bob, who valued it highly and kept it in the back of an old-fashioned clock on the mantel over the fireplace. He had permitted very few people to see it. I don't know how he came by the manuscript, which was supposed to give directions for finding Swift's buried treasure.

Bob's nephew, Flem ———, and I were friends. We became interested in the account and decided to try to obtain it. After several unsuccessful attempts to borrow the papers from Bob, we made friends with his wife and obtained her support. Flem took Bob a jug of moonshine whiskey, and after he had partaken freely of the jug's contents his wife turned the manuscript over to us. We were supposed to return it, but it became so worn out from handling that it finally became illegible. No copy was made.

The manuscript was written partly in ink, with additional notes that had been made with a pencil, and much of the spelling was poor. The handwriting was of a style not in use today. It was very difficult to read and had puzzling gaps in the narrative, and the directions for finding the treasure seemed almost impossible to follow.

Nevertheless, Flem and I set out to search for it. We were young men then and spent much of our time roving the country anyway. The only stream actually named in the manuscript was the Licking River, other streams being referred to simply as "A Fork of the Licking River."

Although we did not know where to begin, we decided from the descriptions of landmarks that the treasure must be located somewhere in the cliff country of the Licking, which would place it somewhere between Salt Lick Branch and Grassy Creek.

The first landmark mentioned was "A Turkey Track carved on a Tree at a Fork of the Licking River." Flem and I set out to find it. Beginning at the mouth of Salt Lick and working our way upriver, we examined hundreds of trees where tributary streams joined the Licking.

One day while we were eating lunch I wandered over to look at a tree that we had not yet examined, and I saw a carving on it in the shape of a turkey foot! When I called to Flem and told him that I had found he didn't believe me at first. The tree had grown until the track was wider than I could span with both hands stretched wide. The mark was