THE POST OFFICES OF EDMONSON COUNTY, KENTUCKY

Midway between Louisville and Nashville in south central Kentucky are the 302 square miles (and 10,000 residents) of Edmonson County, the home of the famed Mammoth Cave National Park. Brownsville, its seat and largest town, is seventy three air miles ssw of downtown Louisville, at the western edge of the 52,369 acre park, and twenty six miles northeast of Bowling Green, the area's principal commercial center. Edmonson is drained exclusively by the tributaries and main stream of the Green River which runs roughly east to west through the center of the county. Green River branches serving as reference points for many of the county's settlements are Nolin River, Bear Creek, the three Beaverdam Creeks, Alexander Creek, Big Reedy Creek, and Honey Creek.

Established by legislative act in January 1825, Edmonson County, the 79th Kentucky county in order of formation, was taken from sections of Hart, Grayson, and Warren Counties. It was named for Virginia-born Capt. John Edmonson (1764-1813), one of the nine officers killed at the Battle of River Raisin in January 1813 for whom Kentucky counties were named. No other counties were taken in whole or part from Edmonson.

Brownsville, the county's only incorporated city (with an estimated 840 residents) lies on the south bank of the Green River, just above the mouth of Beaverdam Creek, on a site that may first have been called Point Pleasant. The post office, established on May 23, 1826 (with Jesse Crump, postmaster) and the town itself, created in January 1828, were probably named for Gen'l. Jacob J. Brown (1775-1828), the New Yorker who commanded the U.S. Army from 1821 to 1828.
On July 17, 1828 the county’s second post office was established by Walter Rodes on the present US 31 W and called Dripping Springs for the nearby aptly named source of water for the early settlers of southeastern Edmonson County. With the arrival of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad in 1859, the office was moved 3 3/4 air miles southeast to a point just north of the tracks and renamed Rocky Hill Station. William Newman was then postmaster. The history or derivation of the latter name is not known; it may have referred to the rocky terrain which hampered early efforts to farm it or to the area’s limestone outcroppings and deep sink holes. A trade center for southeastern Edmonson County grew up around the station and post office in the second half of the nineteenth century. Station was dropped from the post office name in 1923. The office still serves a small village extending for nearly half a mile along Ky. 259, just short of the Warren County line, and 12 3/4 miles southeast of Brownsville.

The two post office of Chameleon (Springs) in the south central part of the county and the post office of Chalybeate (Springs), over a mile east, commemorate the early significance of mineral springs to the people of that section. In 1825 at (Robert) Bryant’s Tavern at the head of what was once called the Left Fork of Alexander Creek (now probably Sulphur Branch), the county’s first court was held. Here the Chameleon Springs were developed as a major resort which, for over a century, attracted visitors from all over Kentucky and nearby states to enjoy the area’s chalybeate, sulphur, and chameleon waters. Chameleon itself refers to potassium manganate (K₂MnO₄) that results from combining manganese oxide with potash or nitre. This assumes a variety of colors when dissolved in water.
The first Cameleon Springs (sic) Post Office was established by William Mitchell in the vicinity of Bryant's Tavern and a later three story resort hotel and operated there from January 28, 1837 through mid July 1839. A second Chameleon Post Office served the same vicinity, some seven miles sse of Brownsville, from February 21, 1898 to April 1903. Though the springs remain, the resort is long gone.

The hamlet of Chalybeate ("kɔ/lihb/ee/at") at the junction of the present Ky. 101 and 1649, six miles sse of Brownsville, also served a turn of the century health resort. The post office established as Chalybeate Springs on October 12, 1888 (with William T. Dunn, postmaster) became merely Chalybeate in 1895 and closed in 1931. The name denotes the existence of iron salts in the local springs, considered quite salubrious.

As noted above, Edmonson County has always been the home of Mammoth Cave which was discovered as early as 1799. The 52,369 acre national park established around the cave in 1941 and lying in part within the adjacent Hart and Barren Counties, occupies roughly one-fourth of Edmonson's territory. Since its inception on December 23, 1842 (with Archibald Miller, postmaster), a post office has intermittently served the cave community, half a mile east of Green River, three miles north of Ky. 70, and fourteen miles east of Brownsville, in the vicinity of the Cave's Historic Entrance.

Some 4½ miles south of Mammoth is a smaller cave called Proctor's Cave. This was discovered in 1863 by a slave, Jonathan Doyle, and later acquired by its name source, one or more of the Proctor brothers, prominent area politicians and businessmen. The most notable of them was Larkin J., an attorney and legislator who had operated the Mammoth
Cave concession for visitors just before and after the Civil War. His nephew, John R. Proctor was Kentucky State Geologist in the late nineteenth century. The Proctor Cave Post Office on the present Ky. 70 and just north of the then Mammoth Cave Railroad tracks was operated by William L. Hawkins from March 23, 1894 through March 1906.

Seven other extinct post offices were also located within Edmonson's Mammoth Cave National Park area.

Eaton's Mills Post Office operated from March 12, 1864 to January 1867 probably in the Turnhole Bend of the Green River, three miles west of Mammoth Cave. Its first postmaster was Joseph Eaton. The Bend has been described as "an almost closed loop of the Green River" while Turnhole derives its name from a whirlpool at the influx of an underground river.

About a mile southeast of Turnhole Bend on the present Ky. 70 (8 1/2 miles ese of Brownsville) was the Elko Post Office. Established by William T. Gentry on August 4, 1902, this office served the rural families of Joppa Ridge by which name this area is now generally known. Joppa refers to the Biblical city while Elko, applied only to the post office, is of unknown origin. The office closed in July 1913.

The post office of Cade, three miles northwest of Mammoth Cave and 1 1/2 miles north of Green River, was established in June 6, 1905 with Alvin Parker, the first postmaster, and closed in August 1913. No explanation of this name has ever been given.

An imprecisely located post office called Houchins was some two miles northeast of the confluence of the Nolin and Green Rivers, three miles above (northeast of) Brownsville. It may have been on or near First Creek, aptly named Nolin tributary. The office was established on April 30, 1910
and named for the family of its only postmasters, Walter and Robert W. Houchin. A pioneer ancestor, either Francis or John Houchin, is said to have discovered Mammoth Cave in 1799 while chasing a bear. The office closed in December 1915.

Another old Edmonson County family gave its name to the shortlived Crump Post Office at or close to the hamlet of Sloans Crossing on Ky. 70, three miles south of Mammoth Cave and eleven miles ese of Brownsville. When its only postmaster, Shobe Minyard's family name was rejected by postal authorities, Crump (probably for local proprietor Doug Crump) was suggested instead. The office operated for five months from April 3, 1911.

Two post offices on the boundary, but at opposite ends, of the Park were Chaumont and Bloslora. Chaumont, just south of Ky. 70, less than ½ mile from the Barren County line, and 13½ miles ese of Brownsville, was established on June 30, 1892 with Elias D. Gardner, postmaster, and discontinued in July 1932. It was named by a wealthy French settler, Louis Charlet, for his old world home.

Bloslora, whose name derivation remains a mystery, was half a mile north of the confluence of the Nolin and Green Rivers, and some two air miles northeast of downtown Brownsville. It was established on September 27, 1910 with Eldred Parsley, first postmaster, and discontinued in October 1914.

Other than Mammoth Cave itself, the only extant post office in the immediate vicinity of the park is Ollie, at the northern edge, on the Houchins Ferry Rd., nine miles northeast of Brownsville. It was established on March 30, 1898 by Joseph L. Sanders, the local storekeeper, but was not, as commonly believed, named for his wife or her mother. According to his
daughter, LaVerne Alexander, Sanders' wife, Cornelia or Nealie (nee Estes) named the office but not for any member of her family; it is simply not known for whom it was named.

When it closed in October 1936, the Bigreedy Post Office was on Ky. 185, less than one mile from the Butler County line and 13½ miles northwest of Brownsville. It was established as Big Reedy on March 14, 1850 by Arthur B. Nash and named for its site then on the aptly named Big Reedy Creek, a north side Green River tributary, which drains most of the Butler-Edmonson County border country. It was later moved to the road, half a mile east of the creek, but retained its name, though by 1924 that was spelled as one word.

The Bee Spring Post Office serves a hamlet of this name centering at the junction of Ky. 238 and 259, 8½ miles north of Brownsville. The vicinity was first settled by 1800 around a spring that attracted a large swarm of bees. The still active post office was established on August 22, 1854 with Frederick Merideth, the first postmaster.

Three miles north of Bee Spring, also on Ky. 259 and less than half a mile from the Grayson County line, was the post office of Goff. In operation from June 3, 1886 through December 1911, it was named by and for its first postmaster, William H. Goff.

Another early settlement and post office named for a nearby stream is Sunfish. This active post office, at the junction of Ky. 187 and 238, eleven miles northwest of Brownsville, was established as Sun Fish on June 27, 1856 with William H. Bush, the first postmaster. It closed in July 1862 but was re-established in November 1890 by J.E. Hayes whose proposed name Hayesville was replaced by the original name, now spelled as one word Sunfish. The creek, a Grayson-Edmonson intercounty
feature that joins Bear Creek one mile north of Huff, has borne this name since the early nineteenth century. It undoubtedly refers to the local sunfish, one of the genus lepomis, characterized by a "deep compressed body." A county tradition has it that the fish in that stream would come very close to the surface of the water, giving the impression of sunning themselves.

Just below the mouth of Alexander Creek, on the south bank of Green River, five miles below (ssw of) Brownsville, were the post offices of Parish Mills and Raymer. The first was operated by Daniel C. Parish at his mills, ferry, and store from January 3, 1873 to May 1875. On July 20, 1886 Henry E. James, when his proposed name Long City was unacceptable to the Post Office Department, re-established the office as Raymer, the name of several prominent Edmonson County families. It closed after only two months.

Another mill that gave its name to a post office was Dickey's Mills which was established on January 7, 1874 (with John W. Macy, postmaster) where the Nolin River crosses the Grayson County line, a place then called Mt. Vernon. After several short distance moves across the county line, it returned in 1924 to a point one mile south of the Grayson County line where it closed in December 1932. Some say the mill was owned by and named for a Mr. Dickey about whom nothing else is known. Others refer to the story of a Dick Skaggs who co-owned a water-powered grist mill in the vicinity with a Mr. Atwood. According to this account, the mill burned around 1880 and Atwood, thinking that Skaggs had been responsible, killed him.
Jasper Newton Miles established three post offices at the head of Beaverdam Creek in the southeastern part of the county. The first, about one mile south of the creek, in the vicinity of the earlier Dripping Springs Post Office, was established on May 27, 1878 as Dripping Spring Mills. It closed in July 1879. On May 10th of the following year, Miles established another office, one mile northeast, which he named Miles. It closed less than three months later.

On September 23, 1880, at the junction of Ky. 259 and 422, five miles north of Rocky Hill and 7½ miles southeast of Brownsville, Miles established yet another post office which was given the name Pig. Whether this unusual name had been applied to the community before its post office was established is not known. Traditionally it is believed to have been given early to the local store, allegedly for the domestic animal of that name. But many have attributed the name to the establishment of the post office itself and relate this tale: The residents, assembled to select a name, couldn't agree on one for each wanted it named for himself. Deliberations seemed about to break down when one man said, in disgust, "I see a pig out on the road, and the way we're carrying on reminds me of that pig. I suggest we call our post office Pig." And they did. The post office closed in July 1904.

Some 2½ miles up Little Beaverdam Creek from the Green River and less than a mile from the Warren County line (in the southwestern part of the county) was the aptly named post office of Cedar Bluff Mills. Thomas and John D. Poteet were the only postmasters from its establishment on May 5, 1879 to its closing in May 1911.

The hamlet and active post office of Huff is now located on Ky. 70, just west of its junction with Ky. 187, on the northwest bank of Bear Creek and 7½ miles northwest of Brownsville. It was established on
June 29, 1881 by Henry P. Logsdon, its first postmaster, on (and near the head of) Sunfish Creek, some distance north of its present site at which, after several moves, it arrived in early 1926. It was named for an area family, perhaps the descendants of William Huff.

Two late nineteenth century post offices were established to serve communities settled in part by Swedish immigrant families. The first, called Stockholm, for the Swedish capital, was just north of the Mammoth Cave National Park (some 5½ miles north of the cave itself). According to one account, this office was established on July 3, 1882 (with P.M. Dorsey, Jr., its first postmaster) to serve an area lumber operation which attracted several Swedish families. Ambitious plans for a town that was laid off here never materialized, and by the time the post office closed in November 1913 little remained. Today only a few descendants of the original Swedish settlers still worship at the local Stockholm Church on Ky. 1352.

The second Swedish settlement, called Sweeden, is a viable village extending for about half a mile along Ky. 259, 1½ miles northwest of the park and five miles north of Brownsville. It was founded and presumably named by Larkin J. Proctor, a land developer, as part of an effort to promote the county’s economic development. In the early 1880s he arranged for several families of Swedish immigrants then living in or near Chicago, Illinois to move to land he had acquired here. The local post office was established as New Sweden on December 28, 1892 with Bradley Musick, the first postmaster. It was inexplicably renamed Sweeden in 1894 and survives.
Serving the extreme northwestern section of the county from September 1, 1884 to August 1924 was the post office of Nash. This was at the junction of the present Ky. 185 and 1075, on the east bank of Big Reedy Creek, 0.1 mile from the Grayson County line, and 14 3/4 miles northwest of Brownsville. Christopher C. Miller, the first postmaster, named it for the families of Arthur B. Nash, Jr. (1818-1862) and his father (1780-1854). The Virginia-born Arthur Sr. had settled early on Big Reedy and was among the county's first magistrates.

A post office called Cloud whose name was probably inadvertently corrupted from the intended name Claude and never corrected served the upper Alexander Creek area from June 4, 1891 to June 1903. It was located at two sites some four to five miles up Alexander Creek from Green River, about 1 1/2 miles from the Warren County line and some 8 1/2 miles south of Brownsville. Who Claude was remains a mystery; there were no known persons by this name in the family of William N. Wingfield, the first postmaster, nor among his neighbors.

The hamlet of Rhoda is now centered at the junction of Ky. 101 and 259, just east of Beaverdam Creek and four miles south of Brownsville. Its post office, operating from December 5, 1891 to July 1904 was to have been called Bufordville for its first postmaster, William W. Buford; but whether it was actually named for his wife, as is popularly believed, has not been confirmed.

The post office of Nick was established on July 14, 1893 about a mile south of the mouth of Alexander Creek. After several moves it ended its days, in May 1956, at a site over one mile west, and some 6 1/2 miles southwest of Brownsville. The derivation of Nick is not known. Thomas L. Sullivan, the local storekeeper and first postmaster, had no son named Nick (or Nicholas); nor was this the name of any of his neighbors.
The hamlet of Roundhill with its active post office is on Ky. 70, 0.2 miles from the Butler County line and eleven miles wnw of Brownsville. The post office, established in Butler County on October 14, 1893 with John Willis, Jr., postmaster, and named for the shape of a local hill, was moved in September, 1937 half a mile east to its present site.

Marcellus Hazelip (1860-1918) started two post offices several miles northwest of Brownsville. One, established on June 1, 1883 at a point on the present Ky. 70, four miles northwest of Brownsville, was given his name, Marcellus when his proposed name Hollyspring (for a nearby church, school, and cemetery) was found unacceptable. The community that grew up around this is called Windyville which aptly describes the weather conditions on its ridge location at certain times of the year.

Hazelip's other post office, Fairchild, was established somewhere in the vicinity of Marcellus-Windyville on March 3, 1894, less than a year after the Marcellus office closed. Its name derivation is not known; no Fairchild families are known to have lived in the county. It closed in August 1901.

About one air mile north of Windyville (on Ky. 1365, 4½ miles northwest of Brownsville) is the settlement of Grassland. Its post office of this name, which was also to have been called Hollyspring or Holly, was established by Charles A. Alexander on March 12, 1895 and was named for the abundance of grass and the dearth of other vegetation in the area. It closed in December 1963.
In 1894, when Samuel P. York established a post office about 1/2 miles east of Bear Creek, he proposed his family name only to learn that York had recently been given to a Greenup County post office. His office, which operated from June 26, 1894 through January 1954 on the present Ky. 655, 8 1/2 miles wnw of Brownsville, was named Segal instead. This name is said to have been that of a local family, but no such named family is listed in any Edmonson County Census. The closest were several related families of Sego, descendants of an early nineteenth century Irish immigrant, which lived in other sections of the county.

The post office of Arthur on Ky. 70, four miles ese of Brownsville, was established on December 12, 1898 by Markas L. Tunks and is said to have been named either for a local resident or for the late President Chester A. Arthur by local Republicans. The office closed in October 1936.

A post office called Bear was operated by Thomas J. Patterson from February 6, 1902 to June 1905 at the mouth of Bear Creek (a Green River tributary) just north of the junction of Edmonson, Butler, and Warren Counties, 11 3/4 miles wsw of Brownsville. According to tradition, in a cave near its banks the pioneer hunter Samuel Willis shot a bear "by the light of its eyes."8

The post office of Chill, whose name derivation and even existence is not known to most county historians, was established on June 7, 1902 with Andrew J. Potter, postmaster, on the north bank of Green River, about one mile above (southeast of) Honey Creek, and six miles southwest of Brownsville. It closed in February 1913.

The Straw Post Office, established by Robert T. Miles on May 2, 1904, was just east of the junction of the present Ky. 728 and 1827, fourteen miles northeast of Brownsville. It closed in August 1936. The source of its name is also unknown.
Three Edmonson post offices recall the extensive quarrying of rock asphalt in the county in the early twentieth century. The first, Asphalt, was established just northwest of the mouth of Honey Creek (a Green River tributary) on May 10, 1905 (with Walter B. White, postmaster). After several moves, it finally located at a site on the present Ky. 655, one mile north of the river, and 6½ miles west of Brownsville, where it closed in 1958.

In the hill above the mouth of Pigeon Creek, just west of Nolin River, and seven miles north of Brownsville, was Kyrock. This town was founded around 1911 as the processing, shipping, and maintenance center of the Louisville-based Kentucky Rock Asphalt Co., the country's biggest producer of rock-type asphaltic paving material. The Kyrock Post Office served the operation and its peak population of almost 2000 from June 21, 1920 through January 1955. Production ceased in 1957 and virtually nothing remains at the site.

Another post office named for the abundance of rock asphalt in its vicinity was Natural Rock. From July 21, 1928 to October 1936 it served the community of Blanton (for local families) on Bear Creek, less than two miles north of Segal and some seven miles northwest of Brownsville.

The shortlived (from November 7, 1910 to September 1913) post office of Jock, said to have been named for resident Peter Jockey Meredith, was on the Meredith Road, less than one mile southeast of Ky. 259, at Broadway, and 11½ miles north of Brownsville. Isabel Willis was its only postmaster.
Two post offices opened in the 1930s. One, on the hill east of Bear Creek, half a mile from the Grayson County line and 1½ miles north of Brownsville, was established in 1934 in Earl Carroll's store to serve a community still known as Salem. Since another Salem Post Office (in Livingston County) precluded the use of this name, Carroll submitted the name Prosperity. He had just enlarged his store, installing a gas-powered generator for electricity, and his neighbors thought the place would have a prosperous future. This was shortlived; the office closed in 1954 and little but the New Salem Baptist Church, survives.

The last post office to be established in Edmonson County (on August 22, 1935) was Lindseyville. It still serves a community by this name that was once called Midway for its site on Ky. 259, between Bee Spring and Brownsville, four miles south. Since Midway was already in use by a post office in Woodford County, Gilbert L. Webb, the postmaster, submitted the name of the largest of the community's families.

Of Edmonson County's forty seven post offices only one, Brownsville, has identified an incorporated community, the county's seat. Eight served villages, five of which survive to this day. The others served rural neighborhoods, some with local stores. Ten (Bee Spring, Brownsville, Huff, Lindseyville, Mammoth Cave, Ollie, Rocky Hill, Roundhill, Sunfish, and Sweeden) are active post offices.

Thirteen offices were named for local persons or families. One (possibly two) were named for non local persons. Twelve referred to geographic features and conditions or physical processes in the area. To six were transferred the names of nearby features (streams or mills).
Three were named for distant places. Two denoted events or activities carried on in the vicinity. One referred to local aspirations. One had been corrupted from an intended name. The derivations of eight post office names are still unknown. One post office (Fairchild) has not been precisely located.

Four post offices—Self, Ess, Wildcat, and Granville—were established but never operated. The locations of none of these are known. Self, authorized on June 23, 1893, was named for the family of its postmaster-designate George W. Self whose appointment was rescinded the following May. Ess was established on April 25, 1898 by Joseph L. Sanders who had become the postmaster of Ollie less than a month before. Wildcat and Granville (the latter named for its postmaster-designate, Granville M. Simmons) were both established on Feb. 5, 1902 and rescinded on July 22nd of the same year.

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(Note: The distances given for the post offices in this article are road miles from downtown Brownsville.)

Footnotes

1. From an undated photo in the Edmonson Co. Vertical Files, Library of the Kentucky Historical Society. The word chameleon, of course, refers to the ability of something to change its colors.

2. Edmonson's share is 45,532 acres or 87 per cent of the entire park territory.

3. Arthur C. McFarlan; Behind the Scenery in Kentucky, Kentucky Geological Survey, Series IX, Special Publication #10, 1958, P. 51
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3. Meredith, Lancie, University of Kentucky student from Edmonson Co., research project for Prof. Thomas P. Field, Dept. of Geography, c1972

4. Peger, Betty, Edmonson County Historical Society, Brownsville, Ky., letter to the author, August 30, 1990


7. U.S. Post Office Dep't., Site Location Reports--Edmonson County Post Offices, National Archives

8. Whittle, Charles E. "Sketches in Edmonson County History--Flashlights in Folklore" serialized in the Edmonson County News, c. 1955

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10. Ibid., "Place Names in the Mammoth Cave Region" Kentucky Folklore Record, XIV (1), Jan-Mar. 1968, Pp. 8-13