THE POST OFFICES OF FRANKLIN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

The 212 square miles of Franklin County, comprising sections of
Kentucky's Inner and Outer Bluegrass areas, are drained by the wholly
navigable Kentucky River (which more or less bisects the county as it
meanders some twenty seven miles northward) and its tributaries, the
main stream and two forks of Elkhorn in the east, the Benson Creeks in
the southwest, and the Flat and Stoney Creeks in the north. More than
half of the county's 44,000 residents live in Frankfort, its seat and
only incorporated community, twenty eight road miles northwest of down-
town Lexington.[1]

The county's first settlement was in 1775 by a party led by Hancock
Lee at a buffalo crossing on the river that was soon known as Leestown.
This was one mile below (north of) the later established Frankfort of
which it is now a part. The act establishing the county from Woodford,
Mercer, and Shelby Counties was passed by the Kentucky legislature on
December 7, 1794. It was the new state's eighteenth in order of formation.
From Franklin came parts of four other counties. By February 1, 1827,
with the creation of Anderson County, its present boundaries were set.
It was likely named for Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), the American states-
man, diplomat and scientist.

Frankfort, the county's seat and the state's capital, is a second
class city centered on a "double curve" of the Kentucky River which divides
it roughly in two. Until World War Two most of the city's population was
confined to the flood plain; the post war development and political incor-
poration of the upland sections overlooking the river produced its present
configuration with most of its 26,000 residents now residing in a number
of hilly neighborhoods. Frankfort's original site on the north bottoms of

the river was surveyed in 1773 by Hancock Taylor for the pioneer
McAfee brothers. Preferring a settlement on the Salt River in the present
Mercer County, the McAfees abandoned their plans for this site which was
soon acquired by Humphrey Marshall. He shortly sold it to James
Wilkinson who, envisioning a major Kentucky River shipping port here,
laid out a town on one hundred acres of his holdings and named it for
one Stephen Frank.

Frank is said to have been one of a party from Bryan's Station (now a
part of Lexington) who, in 1780, while on their way to the salt deposits
south of the present Louisville, camped for a night nearly opposite the
entrance to Devils Hollow, just above the mouth of Benson Creek. Here
they were attacked by Indians and Frank was killed. Soon this spot, a
natural fording place on the river, became known as Frank's Ford.[2]

In October 1786 Wilkinson had the town chartered by the Virginia
General Assembly as Frankfort. In 1792 Andrew Holmes, to whom Wilkinson
had sold his holdings earlier that year, offered the site for Kentucky's
permanent capital just as, two years later, it became the new county's
seat. The Frankfort post office was established before October 1, 1794
with Daniel Weisiger as its first postmaster.[3] Until 1850 the town was
limited to the north bottoms of the river across from the separate
community of South Frankfort. The two merged in that year. While Frank-
fort's main economic base has been state government, it has also enjoyed
some success as a trade and manufacturing town.

Franklin County's second post office may have been the shortlived
Oakley, with Lilas M. Noel, its first (and only?) postmaster. It
operated for two years from February 14, 1827 on the Owenton Road (now US
127), just south of the present Stonewall Estates, and less than 4½ miles
north of Frankfort.

Another post office to serve this vicinity, probably located at the southwest corner of the subdivision, operated from September 17 through October 1898. Asa P. Robinson's Holmes post office may have been named for the Frankfort pioneer, Andrew Holmes and/or the two Frankfort Holmeses, Duncan C. and J.D. who were shortly to represent Kentucky in the Spanish-American War.

One of Kentucky's earliest named streams, Elkhorn Creek, gave its name to three Franklin County post offices before the Civil War. This stream and its two forks had been so identified at least by 1774 when references were made to them in land surveys. The configuration of the two forks and their many branches may have reminded even earlier travelers of the prongs of an elk's horn (or antler).[4]

The first of the three post offices was Mouth of Elkhorn which Joseph Settle operated for two years (from March 1827) where the creek joins the Kentucky River in the northern part of the county.

On May 15, 1828 John Bartlett established the Elk Horn post office two miles above the mouth, where the Owenton Road crosses the creek, ten miles north of Frankfort. It closed in June 1858.

The third and longest lasting of the Elkhorn offices was aptly named Forks of Elkhorn. It was located where the North and South Forks of this stream meet to form the main channel, some eighteen miles above its confluence with the Kentucky River, and 4½ miles east of Frankfort. The office was established on January 13, 1848, with I.S. Hodson, the first postmaster, and served a village long known locally simply as The Forks that had been founded before 1800. In its latest years, until it closed in August 1965, the post office was in the depot of the Frankfort and Cincinnati Railway station inexplicably called Elsinore. Today the village on

US 460 consists of three stores, a church, a state-maintained fish hatchery, a large mobile home park, and some homes.

A post office called Laputa [lə pū̄ tə] was established on April 4, 1834 somewhere on or near Dry Ridge, in the vicinity of the present Ky 12, and very close to the Shelby County line. John B. Russell was the first postmaster. By 1838 it had moved into Shelby County but had returned to Franklin County by 1850 and closed in October of 1851. It is not known why it was named for Jonathan Swift's flying island whose inhabitants were noted for their eccentric interests and behavior.

The remains of the once bustling town of Bridgeport lie on the east bank of South Benson Creek, just south of US 60 and five miles wsw of Frankfort. The first home within its present limits was built in 1797 by Sherman Nunnery. In 1826 the site was acquired by a Marylander, Frederick Robb who, over the next thirty years, sold parcels of it for commercial and residential occupancy. A post office was established here on June 19, 1837, with Landon Carter, the first postmaster, and was named, as was the community it was to serve, for two nearby bridges. It was not chartered as a town until 1848 and was platted the following year. In the late nineteenth century a disastrous fire destroyed its chances for continued prosperity. The post office closed in February 1904. Some of the town's old homes survive on the Old Bridgeport Road, along with several stores, two churches, a consolidated school, and a number of new homes of Frankfort commuters.

On January 4, 1847 William Polgrove opened a post office probably at the mouth of Flat Creek, a west side Kentucky River tributary at the Franklin-Henry County line, and named it for the creek. It operated till April of the following year. Within a few years, at a point just above the mouth of

the creek, some 13½ miles north of Frankfort. Polsgrove had established a store and landing to provide area farmers entree to river commerce. This was soon called Polsgrove Landing. Here, from July 7, 1870 to April 1875, Polsgrove operated another post office called Polsgrove Store. George W. Guthrie re-established the office as Polsgrove in April 1880 and it continued to serve north central Franklin County through June 1962. William was one of the many distinguished descendants of Virginia-born George Polsgrove who had settled on Flat Creek in 1821 and whose forebears, of German descent, originally spelled their name Paltzgraff.

Another post office that William Polsgrove may have operated, from December 12, 1857 to October 1861, was called Spring Bank, but its location and name derivation are not known. Nor are we sure that its only postmaster was the same William Polsgrove.

In the 1830s, Thomas and Benedict, the two sons of Virginia-born pioneer Benjamin Farmer, opened a store on the present US 127, some 6½ miles south of Frankfort. About half a mile northeast was a popular health resort called Scanlan (or Franklin) Springs which was run by Oliver Perry Scanlan. On February 25, 1841, to serve the settlement that was growing up around the Farmers' store and the nearby resort, Thomas established a post office he called Farmdale. It closed after less than two months.

In 1845 a Washington, DC-born West Pointer named Robert T.P. Allen purchased the Scanlan resort and established what he first called The Kentucky Institute. Two years later this was chartered as the Kentucky Military Institute, a prep. school for southern boys, of which he remained Superintendent until it closed in 1887. On February 7, 1848 Col. Allen re-established the local post office at his school and called it Military Institute. In May 1856 the office was moved back to the Farmer store with

Benedict as postmaster and was again called Farmdale until it closed in October 1920. For a brief time, from August 1858 through October1861, another Military Institute post office operated at the school with Edwin W. Morgan, postmaster. In 1894 the school site was acquired by Dr. J.Q.A. Stewart whose family has since operated a home there for the treatment and education of developmentally disabled children. By then the military school had reopened in Jefferson County where it continued until financial pressures forced it to close for good in 1971.

Only a few homes mark the site of the small settlement that grew up around Benson Station (or depot) on the Louisville Cincinnati and Lexington (later L&N) Railroad and the Benson post office, just east of confluence of (Big) Benson and North Benson Creeks, six rail miles west of Frankfort. The post office, established on June 6, 1854, with Aaron B. Dooley, postmaster, served the area through May 1920. The Benson Creeks are said to have been first explored by and named for Richard Benson, a scout for James Harrod's party on their first ascent of the Kentucky River in 1774. In the early spring of 1775 Benson returned to this area from Harrodsburg, built a cabin, and settled at the mouth of Little Benson.[5]

Stedmantown was a once thriving paper mill town on Elkhorn Creek, just beyond Frankfort's northeast city limits. In 1833 the brothers Ebenezer and Samuel Stedman from Georgetown purchased Amos Kendall's Franklin Paper Mill (which the onetime Frankfort newspaperman and future US Postmaster-General had acquired in 1823.) The village of Stedmanville was soon established for the mill's employees, and by this name a post office operated from June 21, 1855 to July 1857. For nearly thirty years

the mill and village flourished with a production of a high
grade linen paper that supplied the official state printers and a number
of area newspapers. Ebenezer's Confederate sympathies and the likelihood
that he supplied that government with its paper money did not exactly
endear him to his strongly pro-Union neighbors. By the end of the Civil
War the mill had ceased operations. By 1875 the Stedman businesses
including grist and saw mills were sold to an employee, James Martin.
James' son, Samuel, ran the local grist mill until 1890 when its dam was
totally destroyed by an Elkhorn flood. By the late 1870s residents had
begun referring to the place as Stedmantown by which, in retrospect, it
has been known since. Nothing remains of the mill or the town but a few
crumbling walls.[6]

Strung out along the east bank of Elkhorn Creek, 10½ miles nne of
Frankfort, is the village of Peak's Mill. The water-powered grist and
saw mill was built in 1817 by Pennsylvanian Thomas H. Gouldman whose
widow, in 1838, sold it to John J. Peak (ca. 1789-1855). It operated
under several owners until the 1920s. To serve the mill and the commu-
nity growing up around it the post office of Peak's Mill was established
on June 17, 1856 with Asabeyon Tarrant, its postmaster. For three months
before it closed in December 1859 it was inexplicably known as Tiger.
The town of Peaks Mill was incorporated by the legislature in 1873,and an-
other Peaks Mill post office opened on May 4, 1877 with Samuel G. Gaines,
postmaster. It operated until March 1907. A brick store building now
occupies the old mill site.

A post office called Bald Knob was operated by William J. Bailey
between December 12, 1857 and September 1861 at some as yet unlocated site
in the hilly Bald Knob Precinct of northwestern Franklin County. If it had

been named for its proximity to the aptly named elevation of Bald Knob
it would have been a forerunner of the Flag Fork post office, where the
present US 421 crosses that stream, just north of the knob.

The Flag Fork post office, serving the community of Baileys Mill,
was established on May 5, 1875. According to postmaster-designate
John T. Deakins, it was to replace the recently closed Baileys Store
post office just over the Shelby County line. Romulus L. Bailey had
established the latter in January 1870 in his store. A kinsman and
neighbor, A.A. Bailey soon opened one of Flag Fork (Bailey Mill)'s two
general stores and the grist mill for which the community, 11½ miles nnw
of Frankfort, was named. The Flag Fork stream, whose name origin is not
known, is given on contemporary maps as Little FlatCreek which joins
(the main) Flat Creek three quarters of a mile east of the post office
site. The community declined with the closing of its post office in
April 1909 and only some homes now mark the site.

The Bald Knob name has long been applied collectively to several
rural neighborhoods in the northwest section of the county. It/also has
designated one of the two head forks of Flat Creek and a school, 3½ miles
south of the Flag Fork post office. Several other rural post offices
served this area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Joshua, a post office half a mile up Bald Knob Branch and 8½ miles
nnw of Frankfort, operated from May 12, 1881 to July 1884. It was named
for its only postmaster, the local storekeeper and blacksmith, Joshua L.
Greenwell, who had moved here from his native Owen County in 1878.

The descendants of James M. Harp (1794-1876) were honored by the Harp
post office which Hugh Burns established on April 25, 1883 1½ miles up
Marshalls Branch of Flat Creek, 9½ miles north of Frankfort. It closed
in February 1908.

In early 1892 storekeeper George V. Harrod's attempt to re-establish the Joshua post office succeeded though that name had recently been assumed by another post office in Owsley County. The Franklin post office was officially opened on February 9, 1892 as Saffell, the name of a prominent south Franklin County family of distillers.[7] In February 1902 Nicholas Rodgers secured a site change one mile south, at the junction of the present US 421 and Ky 12, just west of the Bald Knob School. This office closed in December 1909.

Another Shelby County post office to move to Franklin County was Scrabble. Established on July 9, 1880 in Thomas Wilborn's store on Backbone Creek, it was undoubtedly named for nearby Scrabble Creek, a 1½ mile long east bank tributary of Backbone. By the late spring of 1902, when Mary T. Cain became postmaster, it was moved up Scrabble Creek to a site just within Franklin County where it closed in December 1903. Could Scrabble Creek have been derived from Hardscrabble, a "po' mouthing" name suggesting a hard place in which to make a living or a relatively inaccessible place (hard to scrabble out of, or in the case of a stream, to cross)?[8]

Centering on George W. Parker's Cedar Creek Mill in the northeast corner of the county, sixteen miles northeast of Frankfort, was the once prosperous village of Elmville. For a brief time in the 1880s the place was also known as Wigginton for a local family. The post office, established on June 21, 1877, with Hiram West as its first postmaster, closed in April 1880. It was re-established as Wigginton on October 17, 1882 in postmaster William S. McCord's store, and closed again in March 1884. When it was re-established once more in February 1891, Spencer O.

Wigginton was unable to use his family's name as it had recently been given to a post office in Hardin County., and the post office was again known as Elmville. It closed for good in December 1917.

The hamlet and post office of Woodlake on US 460, seven miles east of Frankfort, was named for Henry C. McDowell's farm and its large pond, some 3/4 mile northwest. The post office, established on March 17, 1879 with Christopher C. Wallace, the first postmaster, operated through September 1910. The local country store still serves southeastern Franklin County.

Though storekeeper John H. Switzer gave his name to the post office he established on North Elkhorn Creek, some nine miles northeast of Frankfort, the office experienced its first twelve years with its name misspelled Swittzer. In (in)1894 this error was officially corrected and Switzer [swa:t/sər] it remained till it closed in March 1957. But locally, and on all other public documents and maps the post office and its community were Switzer as was the station established there on the newly completed (1889) Kentucky Midland Railway.

On US 60, just north of I-64 and just southeast of Frankfort's south-eastern city limits, is the suburban community of Jett. This was part of the large farm acquired in 1822 by Virginia-born Thomas Jett (1787-1858). Sixty years later, his heirs donated land for the L&N's Jett's Station from which area farm produce was soon being shipped. On January 16, 1883 Lee A. Owen, who had opened the first store shortly after the station was built, petitioned for the establishment of the Jetts post office. But for some still unknown reason the office was called Fogg instead, probably for the family of Elijah Fogg (1803-1881) whose Spring Garden farm was a mile or so up the road (now US 60) and just over the Woodford County line. The office closed after only a month but re-opened

as <u>Jett</u> less than two weeks later (on February 26, 1883). After some
vicinity site changes it closed in March 1971. By then the community's
separate identity had all but ended and there is now little to
distinguish it from Frankfort.

Close to the Shelby County line, probably on the Mt. Zion Road, a
mile or two north of the Mt. Zion Christian Church, was a store, mill,
and post office called <u>Tioga.</u> Morison Rogers established the office on
July 5, 1883 and may have named it for one of the counties in New York
or Pennsylvania for reasons unknown. <u>Tioga</u> is an Iroquois term denoting
the forks of a stream or road. The office operated through September
1903.

<u>Harvieland</u> and <u>Pennville</u> were the proposed names for a post office
and settlement half a mile up Davis Branch of Stoney Creek, and 5½ miles
nnw of Frankfort. The descendants of John Harvie and Charles Penn still
owned much of the vicinity when John W. McQuillen became the first post-
master of <u>Harvieland</u> on September 10, 1883. The site was part of the
5,000 acre tract that had been surveyed in 1796 for Virginia-born John
Harvie, the first Registrar of the Kentucky Land Office who was to
represent the new county in the state legislature. Around 1810, soon
after his arrival in Kentucky, Charles Penn, a Marylander, built his
home near the mouth of Stoney. Not much of the Harvieland settlement
survived the closing of its post office in April 1909. The name is
still attached to a church on Ky 12, nearly two miles north of the post
office site, and to the road between US 421 and Ky. 12.

In 1887 William H. Fitzgerald was unable to apply the settlement's early name Dottsville to his new Long Branch (of Elkhorn Creek) post office. It was called Swallowfield instead, presumably for the large number of such birds found in that area. It served three stores, grist and saw mills, two churches, and a number of homes from August 6, 1887 through August 1940 on the present US 421, twelve miles north of Frankfort. The origin of Dottsville has not yet been determined.

Somewhere on the present US 421 and Stoney Creek (perhaps at the mouth of Bark Branch), and five miles northwest of Frankfort, was the inexplicably named post office of Honeysuckle. This was operated, in turn, by the brothers Charles and Benjamin Marshall, from November 27, 1891 through November 1907.

Another imprecisely located and inexplicably named post office was the shortlived Cave Point which Charles Hamilton operated from August 6, 1892 to May 1893. This was somewhere between (Big) Benson Creek and the Shelby County line, and between Bridgeport and the Hatton post office in Shelby County.

The late nineteenth century village of Hodges, just west of Elkhorn Creek and midway between Frankfort and Peaks Mill, had a post office called Forsee. Its only postmaster (from December 17, 1894 through September 1903) was Anna Marie Forsee who apparently named it for the family of her husband Samuel N. (1825-1905). Anna was probably the daughter of the Baptist preacher, Frank Hodges, whose relatives still lived in that community and presumably gave it its name.

Another post office whose name remains a mystery was Elmoro. This was on the Old Lawrenceburg Pike (now Ky 420), just east of Cedar Run, and just south of I-64. It was established on March 29, 1900, with Ambrose Parker as the first of its three postmasters, and closed in September 1903.

Ottusville may have been the last post office established in Franklin County. In the fall of 1901, George Samuel Gaines, unable to call his new office Gaines, agreed to have it called Ottusville instead. The suggestion that this was a "corruption" of his daughter's name Alice[9] has not been confirmed. The office operated from December 17, 1901 through November 1926 on the east bank of Flat Creek, two air miles south of the Henry County line, and nearly twelve miles north of Frankfort.

Another post office, Chase. however, may have been Franklin's last post office. An office by this name is listed in the Post Office Register as having been established in Franklin County on October 21, 1905 with J.L. McDuff as postmaster. But no mention is made of any succeeding postmasters or of the date of the office's closure. And there is no Site Location Report for such an office. Itis unlikely that this office was mistakenly listed in Franklin County instead of the records for some other county (as sometimes happened) for the only other Chase post office in Kentucky, at any time, was a shortlived office in Montgomery County that had opened and closed several years before.

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Only one of Franklin's thirty four post offices is still in operation, serving its only incorporated community, Frankfort. Nine offices served villages, only three of which--Bridgeport, Forks of Elkhorn, and Peaks Mill-survive as such. All of the other post offices served rural neighborhoods or smaller settlements--most still viable--around local stores, landings, or stations.

One post office, Williams, was established at an unknown site on July 3, 1900, but David Hall's authorization to operate it was rescinded the following month.

Thirteen post offices were named for local or area persons or families. Seven referred to their locations or were given geographically descriptive names. To five were transferred the names of nearby features (three creeks, a hill, and an estate). One had a probable literary reference. One identified a local activity. One may have been named for a county in one of the northeastern states. The sources of six post office names are not known. Four offices (Bald Knob, Spring Bank, Cave Point, and Chase) have not been located.

The names of seven offices were not those originally proposed for them. Two served communities with other names. Seven names were changed during the lifetime of their offices.

(Note: Post offices are located by road miles from the court house in downtown Frankfort).

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FOOTNOTES

1. This figure is the approximate distance between the two court houses.

2. Historians still disagree on the precise location of this ford. Several shallow places on the river could have been this crossing point: opposite the mouth of Devils Hollow, at the buffalo crossing at Leestown, at the mouth of Benson Creek, or at Edlins Spring near the iron bridge.

3. The precise dates of establishment of this and other pre-1800 post offices are not known since Post Office Department records containing this information were destroyed by a fire in 1836. October 1, 1794 is the date of the first quarterly account sent to Washington by Mr. Weisiger. Except for Danville's, these offices had been authorized on June 11, 1794. [cf J.M. Donaldson, Chief Inspector of the US Post Office Department, in a letter to South Trimble, Clerk of the Kentucky House of Representatives,

May 28, 1943, in the Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, Vol. 43, January 1945, Pp. 75-77; and William Jennings Price, "Danville Was the First Post Office Established in Kentucky...." in the Filson Club History Quarterly, Vol. 14, October 1940, Pp. 191-204].
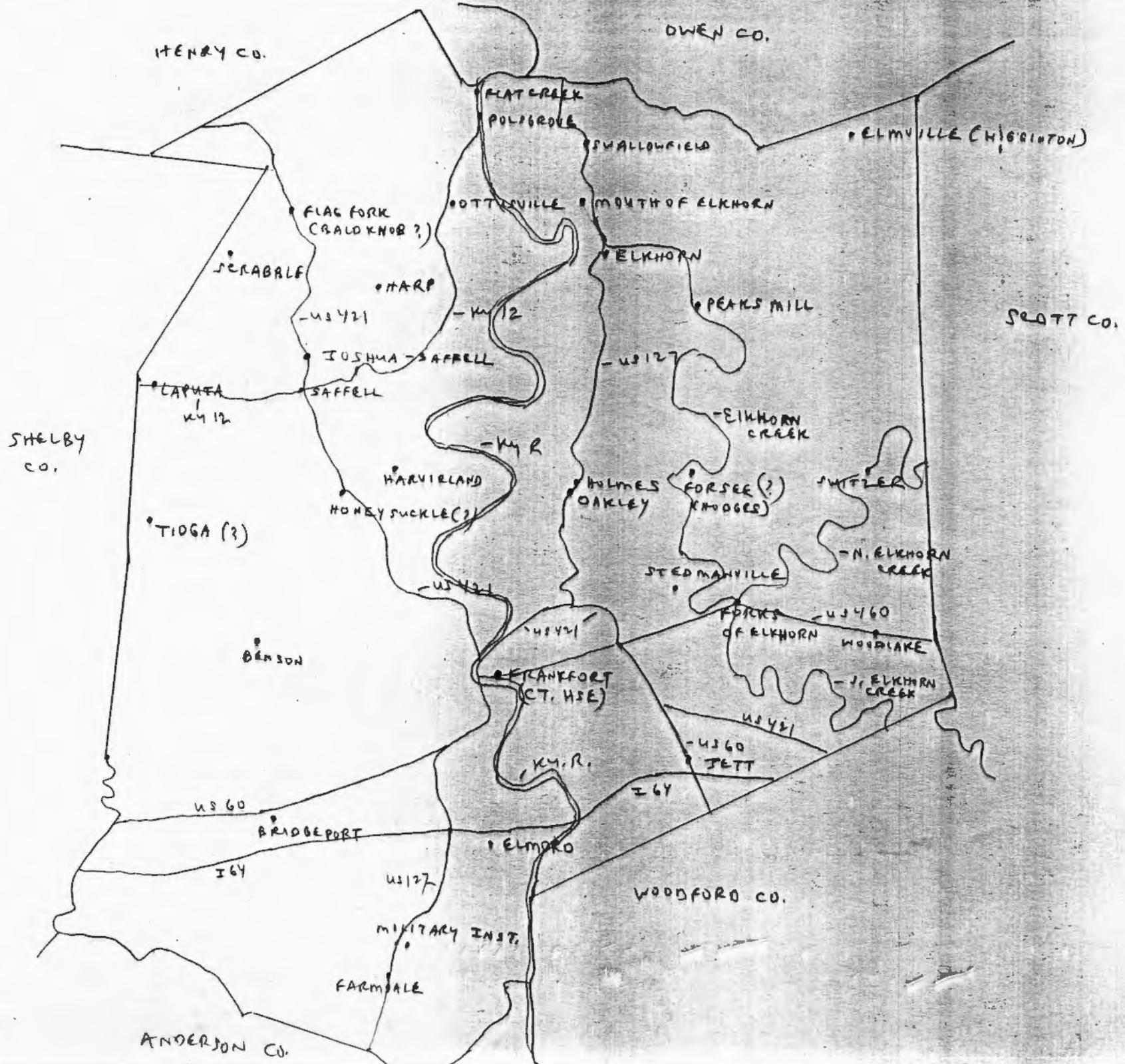
4. Mrs. Ermina Jett Darnell once recorded this literary legend to account for the stream's name: "A runaway couple pursued by an angry father fled on the back of a friendly elk. As they reached a luxuriant valley in Kentucky, the elk was struck by an arrow, but in dying he turned his face toward the enemy and his horns formed an impassable barrier. The pursuer turned back, and where the elk's horns sank into the ground there appeared a beautiful stream which the grateful couple, in memory of their faithful friend, called 'Elkhorn.'" (The State Journal of Frankfort, July 16, 1961).

5. Though North and South Benson are main tributaries of (Big) Benson Creek, Little Benson is a separate stream which forms part of Franklin County's southern boundary with Anderson County and joins the Kentucky River three miles east of Frankfort. (Big) Benson Creek's confluence with the river, just opposite downtown Frankfort, marks the dividing line of Kentucky's three original counties--Jefferson (north of Benson), Fayette (north of the river), and Lincoln (south of Benson). The four Benson streams are all identified as such in the very earliest Kentucky land grants and deeds.

6. The name of the family and the town was mistakenly spelled Steadman in some nineteenth century records and by Franklin County historian L.F. Johnson.

7. The Saffells were descendants of Anderson County pioneer Joshua Saffell. Saffells Bend, one mile up the Kentucky River from downtown Frankfort, opposite the mouth of Cedar Run, was the home of the pre-Prohibition James Saffell Distillery.

8. George R. Stewart, <u>American Place Names</u>, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, P. 197. Shelby County's <u>Scrabble Creek</u> is shown on an early twentieth century map as <u>Falling Rock Branch</u>.

9. <u>Frankfort 200-Celebration 1786-1986</u>, Paducah: Turner Publishing Co., 1986, P. 27

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3. <u>Ibid.</u>, <u>Filling The Chinks</u>, Frankfort: Roberts Printing Co., 1966

4. <u>Ibid.</u>, Happy Days at Jett, manuscript, 1932,in the Library of the Kentucky Historical Society

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HENRY CO.

OWEN CO.

FLAT CREEK
POLSGROVE
SWALLOWFIELD

ELMVILLE (HIGGINTON)

FLAG FORK
(BALD KNOB?)

OTTISVILLE

MOUTH OF ELKHORN

SCRABBLE

HARP

ELKHORN

PEAKS MILL

SCOTT CO.

US 421

KY 12

JOSHUA - SAFFELL

US 127

LA PUTA
KY 12

SAFFELL

ELKHORN CREEK

SHELBY CO.

KY R

HARVIELAND

HOLMES
OAKLEY

FORSEE(?)
(HODGES)

SHIFLER

HONEYSUCKLE(?)

TIOGA (?)

N. ELKHORN CREEK

STEDMANVILLE

US 421

US 460

FORKS OF ELKHORN

WOODLAKE

BENSON

US 421

J. ELKHORN CREEK

FRANKFORT
(CT. HSE)

US 421

US 60
JETT

KY R.

I 64

US 60

BRIDGEPORT

ELMORO

I 64

US 127

WOODFORD CO.

MILITARY INST.

FARMDALE

ANDERSON CO.