

THE POST OFFICES OF ROBERTSON COUNTY

Robertson, Kentucky's 111th county, was created by legislative act on February 11, 1867 and named for George Robertson (1790-1874), a justice of the Kentucky Court of Appeals (1828-1843 and 1864-1871). Its one hundred square mile area was taken from parts of Bracken, Harrison, Mason, and Nicholas Counties, and it all but assumed its present boundaries at inception.¹

Robertson's mostly hilly terrain is drained by the Licking River, which forms the county's western and southern boundary with Harrison and Nicholas Counties, and Licking's North Fork which separates it on the north from Bracken County. Main interior branches are West, Greasy, Cedar, and Johnson Creeks (Licking River), and Drift Run, Mud Lick, Salt Lick, and Panther Creek (North Fork). The county is nearly altogether agricultural, though more than half of its gainfully employed adults commute to jobs beyond its borders.

According to the 1995 Census adjustment, Robertson had only 2,226 residents and is thus the state's smallest county in population.² It also had the fewest post offices of any Kentucky county. The ~~eight~~ ^{nine} offices described below will be located by road miles from the county's only extant office in its somewhat centrally located seat, Mount Olivet, twenty four road miles southwest of downtown Maysville.

Robertson's oldest settlement with its first post office was Kentontown. On US 62, 6½ miles southwest of Mt. Olivet, it was chartered in 1795 as Newtown. Since it was laid out by John Kenton, Simon's older brother, it was later renamed in his honor. The post office also operated as Kentontown from September 23, 1830 through

November 1918, Andrew Cameron was its first postmaster.

The county's seat, and its largest and only incorporated community, is a fifth class city with a ~~1990~~ population of fewer than ~~400~~. Mount Olivet, founded around 1820, incorporated in 1851 (and again in 1871), traces its name to the Bible, though no one knows why or just when it was applied. There is no evidence that it was first called Hell's Half Acre as is popularly believed.³ The post office, with Joshua Burlow, its first postmaster, has operated, though intermittently, since April 26, 1850.

Aaron H. and George Washington (Wash), the sons of John Bratton, founded a community on then Flat Lick (later ~~Mud~~ Lick) Creek, about a mile from Licking's North Fork. To serve his local store, mill, and tobacco prizing house, Wash established the Bratton's Mill post office on January 25, 1865. By then, or at least shortly thereafter, the community was also known as Pinhook.⁴ The office closed in August 1875, but was re-established on May 10, 1882, simply as Bratton. Its closing in 1941 has left Mt. Olivet with the county's only extant post office. What remains of this place is still locally called Pinhook, and the names Bratton and Bratton Mills are barely recalled.

Whence Pinhook? Alta Mae Walton recalled the story of the boy who would fish in Flat Lick Creek using a bent pin for a hook. She and others believe that it was at this place that the term pinhooker for a shady tobacco dealer had its origin.⁵

There never was much to the settlement of Abigail in the sparsely populated northeast corner of the county but a church, school, store, post office, and a few homes. Only the homes remain, on Ky 616, 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles northeast of Mt. Olivet. According to a local account, post-

master-designate James E. Pyles, seeking a name for his new office, was attracted by the name of a postal inspector's girl back in New Jersey.⁶ The office operated between October 2, 1883 and mid March 1913.

The hamlet of Piqua [peek/wā, pihk/wā] lies just off Ky 165, 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles south of Mt. Olivet. Its vicinity was settled very early in the nineteenth century by a school teacher, Isaac Chamberlain, who had come from Piqua, Ohio, a town near the site of an old Shawnee village destroyed by George Rogers Clark's Kentuckians in 1780. This Robertson County post office, with John William Overbey, its first postmaster, served a mill, at least two stores, a couple of churches, a leaf tobacco house, and some homes from September 14, 1889 to February 1937.

The store and post office of Burika [bōō/rə/kee, byū/rə/kee, bihr/ə/kee] operated from May 15, 1890 through August 1916 on the present Rt. 1029, half a mile north of Ky 165, and 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles ^{sse} ~~southeast~~ of Mt. Olivet. It was named by Jesse Mullikin, the first postmaster, for "Dutch Henry" Burika, the local storekeeper. Only a home now marks the site.

On July 17, 1890 the post office that, between September 1857 and April 1861 and from February 1875 to July 1877, served several stores and a mill on the Bracken County side of Licking's North Fork, was re-established, also as Bridgeville, on the Robertson County side. Zachariah Thompson was its first Robertson County postmaster. The fact that it was listed in Collins' 1874 history as a Robertson County community and in an 1876 Kentucky gazetteer as a small village in Bracken County, suggests that, at that time, it actually straddled

the Fork, on both sides of the old bridge that gave it its name. When the Robertson office closed in mid January 1915, it was on the present Ky 875, $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Mt. Olivet.

Frank Hitt gave his family's name to the post office he established on June 15, 1897 on the present Ky 165, five miles nnw of Mt. Olivet. The small settlement that once focused on the post office, the Hitt School, and the Corinth Christian Church was called Hittsville. The office, known only as Hitt, closed in August 1910.

On the other hand, John D. Clark was not able to apply his family's name to the new office he was to establish near the Fleming and Mason County lines, eight miles southeast of Mt. Olivet. Since Clark was already in use in Jefferson County, he named his office Alhambra [haem/brā, ael/haem/bree] instead, and it operated from May 22, 1900 through November 1933. Why or even if it was named for the old Moorish palace at Granada, Spain, popularized in the 1820s by Washington Irving, is not known.

Mount Olivet, the county's only extant post office, may have had a biblical name origin. Of the other eight offices, four were named for local persons or families; one may have honored a distant person; one or two may have been named for distant places; and the name of another referred to a local bridge. One office had a name not originally proposed for it, and another served a community with a different name.

1. Shortly after its establishment, Robertson lost negligible acreage to Mason County to accommodate a local property owner.
2. Robertson is Kentucky's second smallest county in area, only one square mile larger than Gallatin. Curiously, though its land area remained virtually unchanged since its creation, its present population is only forty per cent of what it was in 1870.
3. Hell's Half Acre, if for real, may have been inspired by the town's several saloons. E.S. Montgomery, who moved to Mt. Olivet in 1876, ascribed its name (in a letter to the local newspaper) to a stranger's belief that "all of it" deserved to be called "Hell's Half Acre". (Retold by Ross Moore in his Echoes From the Century, 1867-1967, 1967, n.p.)
4. Collins' 1874 history refers to the community only as Pinhook.
5. Pinhooking is a "tobacco marketing term describing the sharp trading practices of small time speculators, late nineteenth century and early twentieth century itinerants who would buy directly from the growers and resell at the regional markets for a considerable profit. They often purchased by deception, frequently using an assumed name, by taking advantage of the growers' ignorance of the market price or their unproficient grading practices, reclassifying the leaves and quickly reselling them before anyone was the wiser...." (Robert M. Rennick, "Pinhook As a Place Name in Indiana and Kentucky" in Midwestern Journal of Language and Folklore, Vol. 12, Spring 1986, Pp. 38-42, 39.)
6. John Van Willigen, Professor of Anthropology, University of Kentucky, from his interview with a 92 year old Abigail area

resident, in a letter to the writer, February 8, 1980.

- 6 -

REFERENCES

1. Moore, T.Ross, editor, Echoes From the Century: 1867-1967, 1967
2. Rennick, Robert M. Kentucky Place Names, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984
3. Robertson Review Centennial Edition, July 8, 1971
4. Robinson, Lucian, Piqua, Ky., interviewed by the writer on April 22, 1972 and April 16, 1978
5. Van Willigen, John, Professor of Anthropology, University of Kentucky, in a letter to the writer, February 8, 1980
6. United States Post Office Department: Site Location Reports--Robertson County, Ky. Post Offices, National Archives (Washington, D.C.)
7. Walton, Alta Mae, Mount Olivet, Ky., in a letter to the writer, June 5, 1984.

Robertson Co. communities

- *1. Abigail (com) (dpo) X
- *2. Bratton (dpo) had been Brattons Mill (com) ← Pinhook
- *3. Kentontown (com. & dpo) had been New Town (C)
- 4. Mount Olivet (co. seat) (C) once nicknamed Hell's Half Acre
- *5. Piqua (dpo) (com) X
- *6. Burika (dpo) ?
- *7. Hitt (dpo) Hittville (com)
- 8. Alhambra (com. & dpo)
- * Cabin (dpo) (Pul. Co.)
- *10. Bridgeville (dpo)
- 11. Brierey Ridge Ngbr.
- 12. Central Ridge Ngbr.
- 13. Craigs Store Ngbr.
- *14. Five Lick Ngbr.
- 15. Kentontown Pike Ngbr.
- 16. Linville Ngbr.
- 17. Mt. Pleasant Ngbr.
- *18. Ogden Ridge Ngbr.
- *19. Pinhook Ngbr.
- 20. Piqua Pike Ngbr.
- 21. Sardis Ngbr.
- 22. Sardis Pike Ngbr.
- 23. Sycamore Corner Ngbr.
- 24. West Creek Ngbr.
- 25.

Ngbr = 14 (excl.)
Nr = (10)

(C) = sample
X = reserves