ELLIOTT COUNTY: One wishing to contact a typical mountain county with people truly representative of real hill people, would do well to visit Elliott County. This county situated on the headwaters of Little Sandy River, surrounded by Carter, Lawrence and Rowan Counties is perhaps one of the most isolated counties in the state, as there are no railroads here, but one can travel this county in a car during the summer months by way of dirt roads.

Sandy Hook, the County seat, is a small hamlet of some 300 population.

The people are kindly hill folk, that is to strangers, and enjoy a visit from the outside world. One might travel here, and by staying nights and taking meals with these hospitable people, he would need neither "purse nor scrip," as they are glad to furnish such accommodations to a traveler in exchange for their pleasure in his company. Of course, like other people in the hills of Eastern Kentucky, they are a taciturn folk, they attend strictly to their own business and expect others to do the same.

Home Life: The log cabin is the usual home in this hill county, often not more than one large room, while few take newspapers, and the usual diversions of more modern communities such as the picture show, theater, etc., is denied them, the people are all neighborly and entertain themselves at corn huskings, bean stringings, shuck tearings, log rollings, and singing schools where old mountain melodies and religious hymns are sung to old fashioned tunes in the old fashioned manner. If money is needed for their churches or other social activities it is raised by a pie supper or box social.

This latter is done by having the young ladies prepare a pie or box containing good food, each of them bringing her contribution in
this way. The young men, who came, bid for these and the pies and boxes are auctioned off to the highest bidders. Aside from the appetizing dainties thus secured, the successful bidder is rewarded by having the company of the young lady who prepared his purchase, for the rest of the evening after eating supper with her. At the close of festivities he is permitted to escort her home. Naturally the competition at the auction is keen.

Of the other activities, named above, every one is familiar, except perhaps the "shuck tearin". In the hill country, those who are unable to secure mattresses of modern manufacture or feather beds, are compelled to make their own by filling ticks with shredded corn husks. So when the corn is ripe, the person who wishes to make up some of these husk beds, just gathers a great quantity of corn husks ("shucks") and invites the neighbors in for the evening to shred the husks, that they may make a comfortable bed mattress. The "shuck tearin" is the occasion for much good "eatin, visitin and fun makin."

The workers are spurred to do their fastest work by knowing that a keg of cider, and often a more potent beverage, is buried in the bottom of the pile of husks, and the first one who uncovers it will get the first drinks.

When the stranger hears the man of the house say "Git down and rest your saddle," he knows that he is welcome to stay all night and help himself to all he wants to eat at the table without paying for it. He may have to sleep in the same room with the rest of the family, when after his evening meal and visiting are finished, the oil light is extinguished and everyone goes to bed in the bunks built along the wall in the end of the room away from the fire.

While the language of these hill people is not as fantastic as some writers portray, such words as "right smart" for plenty or large
quantity, 'nath' for hearth, 'kivers' for covers, 'whar' for where, 'done' for did are used. This latter word is not only used in the wrong tense, but is often used superfluously as, 'I done done hit' 'hit' being often used for it.

Not only are the bed mattresses home made, but the quilts, comforters and bed spreads are likewise home made, every home has a plentiful supply, each young married couple, when starting a home of their own is given a supply of these from home. Carpets are woven on looms in the home, made from rags, often dyed in gay colors.

It is restful to the feet to walk on one of these rag carpets under which is a thick layer of wheat straw, you sink clear into your ankles.

Courting: When a young man of this community pays court to the girl of his choice, he is permitted to call on her at her home, tho he is compelled to do his courting under strict surveillance on the part of the old folks, they, if not in the same room, are in the next, with the door open, so they may hear all that is said, the young swain sits on one side of the room, his "sweety" on the other, and he fully understands that when the hour of 8:30 p.m. arrives, he is expected to leave.

Meetings: The prevailing religious sects here are the "Campbellites" and "Hard Shell Baptists." The country preachers who minister to these folks are not high salaried theologians, but are hard handed working men, through the week making their living by their toil in the fields, on Sunday they preach without pay, as their religious tenets forbid them taking pay for preaching.

An amusing story is told of one of these hill preachers. Outside of the church was a great oak tree. Its boughs spread out over a great area like a tent, under this tree, those, who come from far and near to worship, would tie their horses in the shade.
The preacher, as usual, rose to read the first verse of a hymn they were about to sing and started out. "Jesus, my savior to heaven has gone," he glanced out the window and a horse, which had been tied to the tree, suddenly broke loose and trotted away, he finished up; "Yonder goes a horse with a side saddle on."

Feudists: Elliott, in common with many other counties, has been the fighting ground of many family feuds. These people are extremely clannish, with the tribal instinct strong, and when one member of the family is wronged it concerns every member of the family, when in former days the law was further away, the hill people settled their family quarrels by whole families on both sides of a controversy lining up and fighting it out just as nations do under similar circumstances. This practice, happily, has about died out, either because of more education or the people have softened and are not so warlike as formerly.

Two feuds of the Elliott county families were that of the Harper and Johnsons and between the Johnsons and Scaggs. Many on both sides lost their lives.

Superstition: There is a strong superstitious strain among these people. They believe in ghosts.

A Mrs. Hays relates that she had an Uncle Pete Marek, who, tho he had never married, had three natural children. He was fairly wealthy and at his death he had willed his property to these three children. Mrs. Hays says that shortly after his death, she was awakened from her sleep by her uncle's voice, coming from the room he always occupied, when alive, in her father's house, saying, Oh Lord! and moaning as if in great pain. She called her father, who unable to hear the sounds, tried to convince her that the noise was made by rats, but she says that she knows it was her uncle pete's ghost, as she knew his voice.
Also, at the top of a ridge near her home, known as "Blue Ash Knob," where some captured Yankee soldiers had been killed by their "Confederate" captors, during the Civil War, she and her sister saw and heard things "that couldn't a been anything but ghosts," and her sister was so frightened that she fainted.

Fortune telling: The Alliott County girls believe that if one will throw a ball of yarn through the open window of a deserted house, keeping hold of the end of the yarn string so it will unroll and repeat: "Hemp seed I sow, hemp seed I strow, come follow me true love, wherever I go, her future husband will be in the house, will catch the ball of yarn and come out to her, rolling up the yarn as he comes. Again if a girl of marriagable age will take a mirror and go to an open well, first take nine steps backward then up to the well and hold the mirror up so it will reflect the water in the well, her future husband's image will appear in the mirror. Mrs. Hayes says she knows this will work accurately, as she tried it two months before she met the man she married and she saw him, even to the kind of clothes he wore and everything just as he looked when she met him later.

Also if a girl will take nine steps backward and dig where her heel falls on the last foot step, she will find a hair just the color of that of her future husband.

Every one here believes that it is an ill omen for a cat to cross the road in front of you, and that it is a sign of death in the family if a dog howls at night.

A great excitement was caused here about 1905 or 1906 when a miner from England, or rather, an Englishman from South Africa, found a rock and soil formation similar to that of the diamond fields of South Africa. A company was formed in Ashland, Ky., and much prospecting was done; either the diamonds were not there or not in sufficiently
paying quantities, for the project was abandoned, tho many still believe there are diamonds in these Elliott County hills.

Name of County: The county was named in honor of the Elliott family, who were among the founders, and from whom descended the famous statesman and jurist, Hon. John M. Elliott, who was assassinated by a crazed fanatic by the name of Budford. Judge Elliott was a brilliant lawyer, having served with distinction, several terms in the Kentucky State Legislature. At his death he was a judge of the Kentucky State Court of Appeals. A decision of this court brought on Judge Elliott the enmity of his assassin, who fired the fatal shot March 26, 1879. A magnificent monument, with a life sized statue of the judge thereon, was erected by his widow and now stands in the county court house yard at Catlettsburg, Boyd County, Kentucky.
REFERENCE:

Collins, John W., County Treasurer, Greenup, Kentucky, born March 10, 1849 at Ironton, Ohio. Mr. Collins was educated in common schools, and was engaged in farming the 50 years he has lived in Kentucky. Has been County Treasurer for six years, formerly served four years as Sheriff of Greenup County. Interviewed 3/19/37.

Womack, Watt J., Merchant, Greenup, Kentucky, born March 16, 1853 at Greenup, Kentucky. Mr. Womack is engaged in the hardware business in Greenup, has been in business about 50 years succeeding his father in business. Has a high school education. Interviewed 3/22/37.

Merill, Joe, Grays Branch, Greenup County Kentucky, Collector Federal Land Bank and Insurance, born May 23, 1879. Mr. Merill has been railroad employee, farmer and timber man before taking up present work. He has high school education. Interviewed 2/22/37.

Hay, Mary J., Gimlet, Elliott County Kentucky, born Feb. 1863. common school Education. Mrs. Hay has spent a life time in Elliott County and while not highly educated, is well informed and an interesting talker. Interviewed 3/24/37.


Ashland Daily Independent, Published Ashland, Kentucky, Friday March 19, 1937. Vol. XLII No. 86. Reference track at Raceland, Ky.

Personal knowledge.