Johnson County is rich in natural resources, for it is in the heart of the coal, oil and gas fields of east-central Kentucky. It is also noted for its good building material. Several sandstones caverns are in the county. It also has good timber. Hickory, ash, locust, chestnut, oak, beech, pine, walnut, poplar, and other grades of timber are found in this county. The finest poplars and walnuts have been marketed. Other grades are found in enormous quantities, especially oak, hickory, ash and beech.

There are several stone quarries in this county. The Mayo Mansion's columns are made of rock obtained from the quarry on the farm of Bud Stafford, near Paintsville. About a dozen quarries have already been tested and found suitable for masonry and base courses in road and street construction; one-fourth mile south of the Chesapeake and Ohio railroad station at Paintsville, another on the Mayo Trail between Tay's Branch one and one-half miles up Turner's Branch, another three or four miles north of the last one, another on the Mayo Trail on the George's Creek, another at East Point and one on the Garrett Highway at the mouth of Davis Branch.
In a little mining town lived a miner and his wife. Every day the man would go to his work and was very happy, but his wife was always cross or angry and every time anyone would say anything to her she would say, "It could have been worse," or give them an answer of some kind that was foolish.

One day a man came with the news that her husband had been killed in the mines. She only grunted and said, "It could have been worse." The man very surprisingly said, "I would like to know how it could have been worse." She said, "It could have crippled him up so that he would have been in my way for the rest of his life."
In Johnson County several people believe in ghosts and haunts. A man says, "Yes, I have seen ghosts and I believe they are a warning of some trouble or disaster. I was traveling one very dark night and immediately I heard a slight noise behind me and I looked around and there I saw a bright colored shadow and shortly there appeared something like a dog of a strange blue color. It came very close to where I was standing. This excited me very much for I thought it was a vicious dog that would probably bite me. I drew a gun and began to shoot at it but this had no effect on the ghost. Every shot I fired I could see the fire from the gun go through the shadow and immediately it floated away into the air and was gone.

Only a short time afterwards I was working in a mine and met with an accident that was almost fatal to me and I still believe that this "ghost dog" was a warning as to my accident."

Another man tells how he and his friend attended a party one night and being a long way from home decided that they would sleep in an old church house that stood by the side of the road the rest of the night.

They went into the church house and pulled the seats up together so that they may have a comfortable place to sleep, and go on their way home in the morning.

They were about to fall asleep when they heard a noise like two horses coming running as fast as they could run. It seemed that the horses came running up to the church house door and stopped and something like two men wearing heavy boots leaped from the horses and came rushing through the door which was locked very tight. There were three rows of seats in the building and one man taking one aisle and the other man the other, marched up to the front of the house, giving each seat a very hard kick. Then turning came back down the aisles giving the seats in the middle row where the men were sleeping the same kind of a kick. They marched on to the door and out and immediately the horsemen were on their way. But the strange thing about it was that there were no signs or tracks where the horses and the horsemen had made their round. The men say that they have never heard of anything like this before and that it was quite unusual and eerie.
Before the advent of the railroad and the opening of mines and oil wells in Johnson County, lumbering was the first and chief industry in this section. Many of the older citizens realized large fortunes from the sale of timber and remember a colorful past that many still talk about.

The method of logging and transporting the products of our virgin forest to market provides us with one of the more interesting aspects of the timber industry. Lumber camps were established in the forest usually by logging companies where men and oxen worked in "bluffing" logs from the hills into small streams which took them to the river.

I interviewed my great-uncle, Dr. Paul B. Hall, concerning the timber industry and how it developed. He stated that, "In the early 1890's and 1900's, the citizens of Eastern Kentucky, the John's Creek, Big Sandy and Paint Creek areas, made a living cutting and selling timber, then by what we called "rafting it." They ran it down the river to Catlettsburg, Kentucky, which at that time was the largest lumber market in the world. People came there by the hundreds and bought lumber to be shipped all over the world."²

Oxen were used to pull the timber to the creeks which in turn would send them to the river. The Blantons, McKenzies, and LeMasters were considered some of the most accomplished ox drivers at the time.³ Workmen would then construct "splash dams" or would wait for a heavy
rain to carry the logs down to the river. There they would be rafted together with what was called "dog chains" for the long trip to Catlettsburg, Kentucky.

Dr. Hall told a story about what would happen when one of these "splash dams" would break. He stated, "When one would break, the owners would strike off down the river in a boat hollowing 'the booms broke, the booms broke', and the farmers along the river would get out and start searching for the logs, and they would get twenty-five cents for every log they could hold. In other words, if they could hold a hundred logs, they would get twenty-five dollars. If they had to hold them for thirty days or more, they would get fifty cents apiece."

My grandmother, whose father was Ashley Ward, one of the most prominent lumbermen in the Big Sandy Valley, told me about going down to the river with her father and "rolling the logs". She was a very little girl at the time, but she would walk the logs that covered the surface of the river just like the men did. If she had fallen through, there would have been no way to save her. She also said she still had the calipers with which her father measured the logs.

Timber trade along the Big Sandy was very small until around 1840, then it began to grow rapidly. In ten years, the number of logs cut quadrupled and the price increased considerably. But when the Civil War years arrived, the demand for timber almost entirely ceased.
in 1866, it started picking up again. People began rebuilding a nation that was returning to peace. The demands for the fine timber of Eastern Kentucky came from all over the world.

From the late 1870's until shortly after World War I, the finest hardwood in the world came from the mountainous area of Eastern Kentucky along the various branches of the Big Sandy River.

Oak, beech, maple, hickory and tulipwood from the region brought premium prices in France for wine casks, in England for ship beams, and in Italy for fine furniture. As this may show, Eastern Kentucky wood was truly considered among the finest in the world. It was also used to a great degree in the mining and railroad industries of this country. Any kind of timber down to a very small size was used for this purpose, and consequently, the mountain slopes adjacent to these operations were almost bare; which, combined with the fact that no attention was given to the subject of forestry, and no effort was made to replace the timber on the hills, left them practically denuded.

It is interesting to note how the lumberman would buy and sell the timber. The timber buyers would go to a farmer and say, "I'll give you one dollar a standing tree", which was the going price for a long time. Then he would cut and haul the timber down to the creek and send it on down to the river after marking each log on the end with a large iron hammer which had the owner's initials stamped on it. Later the prices changed to fifty cents for the poorer trees and two dollars
for the better trees. At the market in Catlettsburg, the timber that would sell for around five dollars would bring as high as fifty or sixty dollars on today's market. The sad thing about this business was when a "saw-logging" man would put a hundred logs in the river to go to market, he would only get about sixty or seventy-five logs there because of high tides or they would be stolen.

I would like to quote directly from a deposition about my Great-grandfather, Ashley Ward, concerning some logs he was supposed to have stolen. I have included the incorrect spelling and punctuation that was used in the deposition.

John Pendleton vs. Ashley Ward
October 26, 1910

"Mr. Owens on the witness stand said that I with an unknown man that he saw me brand one of J. B. Gullett's logs booth with red pain and the letters J.B.G. on the log and that he saw me brand the same log with the P.S. hammer and that I gave the hammer to the unknown man and told him to brand the other log and the unknown man says this is not your log and that I told him it was that I said to the unknown man to brand it - that - I said that I knew where the log come from and I said to Owens Brother I don't want to disturb you but when you swear that you swear a dam lie which I know was a ly. I never had any one to brand timber on Mine Fork fro me in 1908 that is in the creek except Ira Jenkins.

He said in his deposition that he did not know the man nor had never saw the man before nor since as he knew of.

This is a correct statement of these facts as near as I could make them - W.H.V."
My Great-grandfather was, of course, proven innocent of this charge of log rustling.

As the raftsmen would float the timber down river they would have to eat and sleep on the shore, so they would tie up their huge log rafts and go to the nearest house on the river bank and pay twenty-five cents for supper, twenty-five cents for a place to sleep, twenty-five cents for breakfast and twenty-five cents for a packed lunch to take with them. When Dr. Hall and his sister were young, they would bake apple pies and take them down to the river bank and sell to the passing loggers for ten cents a pie. They thought they were really making money.

The raftsmen had quite a reputation. Most of them were husky, young men that didn't care to fight at the drop of a hat. After delivering the logs in Catlettsburg, the "bossmen" would pay them, then they would spend two or three days in town before catching the train for home. They became so boisterous that the C & O railroad attached a special car to the train in which the raftsmen rode. They were locked in the car and turned loose at White House which was the end of the line. They were very drunk and most carried guns with them. One train conductor by the name of Frank Blevins had been quite rough on them for several years and one day when a crowd of them got off at the end of the line, some of the raftsmen cornered him and shot him to death. The valley people were very shocked at such a horrible act being committed in their midst.
Another story I heard was more in the lighter vein. It concerned a big, raw-boned raftsman from the Big Sandy Valley who bet another raftsman he could swim across the river at the mouth carrying him on his back. A good spot containing no logs was found and the braggart took on his handicap and started dog-paddling across.

Halfway over, he realized the river was wider than he reckoned. "Young feller", he puffed to the man on his back, "if'n I was you, I think I'd help out by kickin' a mite!"

Timber being Johnson County's first true money-making industry set many local families on the road to prosperity. Eastern Kentucky's fine timber not only made a name the world over, but provided us with a lively, colorful past that will always be a part of our rich heritage. I am fortunate enough to have had a family who took part in that heritage. As I have mentioned, my great-grandfather, Ashley Ward, was one of the most prominent men engaged in the timber industry. He was a large man and a very capable lumber and raftsmen. He also served as the sheriff of Johnson County once.

Dr. Paul B. Hall, who provided much of the material for my research paper, dabbled in the lumber industry before it dwindled down and our forests were depleted.

The Big Sandy Valley got its first big boost from the timber industry and I believe it would still be big business had our ancestors had the foresight to replant the forest instead of just taking the timber out and not replacing it.
FOOTNOTES


2 Dr. Paul B. Hall, Paintsville, Ky.


4 Dr. Paul B. Hall, Paintsville, Ky.


5 Ibid.

6 Golda Ward Fraim, Paintsville, Ky.


8 Ibid.

9 Joe Creason's Kentucky


11 Ibid.

12 Dr. Paul B. Hall, Paintsville, Kentucky,

March, 1971


14 Dr. Paul B. Hall, Paintsville, Kentucky,


15 Ibid.

16 Joe Creason's Kentucky

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Hall, Dr. Paul B., Paintsville, Kentucky, March, 1971

Frisim, Golda Ward, Paintsville, Kentucky, March, 1971

I. Timber was Johnson County's first industry.
   A. It provided us with a colorful past.
   B. Our older citizens still remember and talk about it.

II. The method used in logging and transporting the timber is interesting.
   A. Lumbermen "bluffed" the trees from the hills and took them to the nearest stream.
   B. They "rafted" it together in the river for the trip to Catlettsburg.

III. Oxen were used to transport the timber to streams and rivers.
   A. Oxen drivers were considered a special breed of men.
   B. Oxen drivers and workmen constructed splash dams to hold logs.
   C. They sometimes had to wait for heavy rains to move the logs.

IV. Dr. Paul B. Hall told an interesting story concerning what happened when a splash dam broke.
   A. The owners started down river informing residents of the break.
   B. The farmers would look for logs and hold the ones they found.
   C. They received twenty-five cents for each log and fifty cents if held thirty days.

V. My Grandmother would "roll the logs" when she was very young.
VI. Timber trade was very small until around the 1840's.
   A. In ten years, the trade quadrupled.
   B. The Civil War caused a sharp decrease in trade.
   C. Then trade increased greatly with the coming of peace.

VII. Eastern Kentucky's hardwood was considered the finest in the world.

VIII. Oak, beech, maple, hickory, and tulipwood brought premium price on the world market.
   A. Foreign countries bought the timber.
      1. France bought it for wine casks.
      2. England for ship beams.
      3. Italy for fine furniture.
      4. United States for railroad and mining industry.
   B. Timbermen didn't replace cut trees; consequently, left our forest nearly bare.

VIII. The manner in which the lumbermen purchased their timber was interesting.
   A. The going price for a long time was one dollar a tree, later changed to fifty cents for poor trees and two dollars for better trees.
   B. The 'saw-logging' men would not get to market with more than fifty or seventy-five of the hundred logs started with.
IX. My Great-grandfather, Ashley Ward, was once accused of log stealing.
   A. John Pendleton accused Great-grandfather and an unknown man of stamping A. W. on another man's logs.
   B. He was proven innocent of the crime.

X. The raftsmen would eat and sleep in farmer's houses along the river.
   A. They would pay twenty-five cents for each meal and twenty-five cents for a place to sleep.
   B. Dr. Hall and his sister made pies and sold to passing raftsmen.

XI. The raftsmen were a rowdy, husky group of young men spoiling for a fight.
   A. They would spend two or three days in town drinking before starting the trip home.
   B. A special car was attached to the train to carry them.
   C. They murdered the conductor on one trip and had the area residents upset.

XII. One bragging raftman claimed he could carry another across the river on his back but discovered it was farther than he thought.

XIII. The timber industry not only afforded Johnson County with a prosperous business, but a heritage which should not be forgotten.