TRADITIONAL ACCOUNTS
OF SOME
EASTERN KENTUCKY PLACE NAMES

by

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Some Introductory Remarks: A Folklorist Studies
Kentucky's Place Names

In 1976 I was asked by the University Press of Kentucky to prepare for publication a dictionary of place name derivations--accounts of the origin of the names of some 2000 Kentucky communities and post offices. This book and my continuing research on all kinds of Kentucky place and feature names grew out of my longstanding interest in traditional or oral place name narratives. In fact, I accepted the assignment for the book and, earlier, the responsibility to head the Kentucky phase of the inventory of all U.S. place names data for the opportunity these would give me to systematically explore the rich storehouse of Kentucky place name lore.

Early in my studies I learned that most Kentucky place names and the accounts of their derivations fail to meet the popular conception of "folk" as exotic or fanciful; they do not appeal to those seeking colorful stories about unusual names. As is true of other states, the large majority of Kentucky's names are quite ordinary and their origins and meanings are most plausible and obvious.

Yet the sparsity of written records and the lack of direct testimony of the namers themselves have led me and other name surveyors to local informants and
traditional explanations or to secondary sources only once or twice removed from oral renditions. I learned that the skills and training of the folklorist may come in very handy, in fact should be considered essential, for the conduct of place names research. In my work I have renewed my respect for oral traditions or, at least, I have learned not to discount them, particularly in the absence of written accounts. I have never shared the attitude of some place name researchers who eschew folk accounts of name derivations, preferring to say nothing at all about a name when they cannot come up with "authenticated explanations" (meaning those from written sources).

Why should oral accounts be suspect, or considered less reliable than written ones? One may argue about the evanescence of human memory or challenge the informant who knowingly imparts false information to keep a local secret or who prefers, for tradition's sake, to repeat an old tale or anecdote which he may or may not take seriously but which is generally known to be inaccurate. (I've met my share of local persons who derive enormous satisfaction out of "teasing the tourists" and that includes the itinerant folklore collectors who annoy them with their questions.)
There are the *ex post facto* accounts that are made up to explain names whose derivations have been forgotten. Informants share the all too human need to come up with some ready explanation when questioned on something about which they have no knowledge. Discounting the obviously implausible yarns, these oral accounts with the ring of truth are thus often taken at face value by those who solicit them.

But the question remains--are the folk accounts necessarily less reliable than the written ones? For one thing, I've learned that many published historical accounts--those derived from documentary evidence--were ultimately based on oral traditions or direct observations or else could be traced to original records of questionable validity. (I've written elsewhere "that many legal documents were actually prepared from false declarations and were intended to deceive.")

We know that much human experience has never been recorded. Many incidents, including the naming of many places, have been considered too trivial or perhaps too personal to be written down. Yet a place naming account may be a part of a locality's oral tradition and one must seek this from local tradition bearers.
If by "oral traditions" we mean simply conventional explanations of something that have been transmitted in this way by the residents of some community or the members of some cultural grouping, one should not necessarily assume that these are fictitious or that they cannot be verified or even that they have not been verified. Many folk or oral accounts, even what may seem, to the uninformed, to be "folk etymologies", have been found, on investigation, to be historically accurate. Other accounts which have yet to be scrutinized may also turn out to have a basis in fact. Even with the so-called "migratory legend" one cannot rule out the possibility of an independent local occurrence similar to those found in other places.

It goes without saying that, in place names research, as elsewhere, there is no substitute for checking each account whatever its source. Automatically ruling out a possibility because it sounds "forced" or "way out" is as reprehensible as taking something for granted simply because it sounds plausible or has the weight of authority.

What follows are the oral accounts of the derivations of some eastern Kentucky place names that I collected both before and since I began my systematic survey of Kentucky's nomenclature. These accounts are mostly in the words of the informants who were usually my only
sources of any information I was able to acquire about the names. Although a few of the accounts were clearly not expected to be believed, others were told as if they were true and, indeed, most were accepted as true by the tellers themselves or at least by their friends and neighbors. The accounts are loosely organized around several basic themes of traditional place name legendry. They may tell how a place or feature was named, why it was given that name, who gave it that name, and/or what happened at the site before the name was given. The informant's name and post office and the date of the interview are given at the end of each text.
Names Derived from Local Historical Events

Most of Kentucky's colorful or unusual names may be explained by accounts of events that took place at or near the sites they identify. Many of these were single occurrences while others were customary activities or typical behavior patterns of local residents.

The late Floyd County historian, Henry P. "Buck" Scalf often told about a buffalo hunt in the 1790s and how Cow, Calf, Buffalo, and Bull Creeks got their names. "Well, there was a well defined tradition about the names of those creeks--the tradition preserved in the old Leslie family who were the early settlers (of Floyd Co.) and related to me by L.C. Leslie, one of the early teachers. He told me that Acquilla Harmon and some of the other members of the Harmon family went on a hunt in pioneer days when there was just a fort or two in this section... On the present Buffalo Creek, which is about ten or twelve miles long, they encountered a big bull bison, and they began to track him and chased him down Buffalo Creek, up Home Branch, down Cow Creek, and up on to Calf Creek. At the same time now they were chasing a buffalo bull and a cow and a calf. They killed the cow on the present Cow Creek and that's how it got its name. And Calf Creek, which is a little parallel stream right beside of it, is where they killed the calf. But the old bull survived the chase until he got over on to Bull
Creek and he was killed over there by those early Harmons and they named all them creeks." (Henry P. Scalf, Stanville, May 16, 1971)

"Daniel Boone and a group of soldiers established a camp at (what is now the hamlet of Boons Camp in Johnson County) and hunted this area for deer and bear. Greasy Creek (which flows through this area) was named because it was in the late winter and early spring when they (Boone and the others) were here. And that, to preserve the meat before packing it back into the settlements, they tied it and weighted it down in the cold waters of the creek which (is) partly spring-fed up here. And the grease going down the creek...caused it to become noticeably greasy...." (Arthur Pope, Williamsport, Jan. 10, 1971)

Lucy White, who lives nearby, has always heard that Bruin Creek, and later the post office, got their name when someone killed a bear. "...Johnny Mullins had a dog named Bruin and Johnny lived a little ways over the hill in the Brushy community. And the dog was missing one morning and when he started looking for him he found him on this creek and he had a bear at bay. He heard the dog barking and he had a bear at bay. And he just called the creek Bruin then, and he thought that would be a good name for it since his dog's name was
Bruin and he killed a bear when he got there. I don't know if that's true or not." (Lucy White, Sandy Hook, July 28, 1978)

"A girl was sent to drive in the cows. A bear chased her and she tore her coat trying to get away. And that was the origin of (Tearcoat Creek, the Clinton County stream) that joins the Cumberland River at Wells Bottom. Until recently it was a very in accessible place." (Eva Conner, Albany, Mar. 22, 1979)

Of Missouri Branch of Johns Creek (in Pike Co.), "Buck" Scalf has told this story. In the 1830s "the Blackburn family decided they were going to move to the state of Missouri....And they came out of Virginia and down Johns Creek and when they got to the mouth of Missouri Creek--it didn't have its name then--one of the leaders of the Blackburn family said 'Well this is Missouri. Not goin' any further. This is Missouri.'" (Henry P. Scalf, Stanville, May 28, 1971)

Wheelrim, a Morgan Co. settlement with discontinued post office and school, "was named for the Wheelrim Fork of Johnson Creek in (the) edge of Magoffin and Morgan County. It was so called because an early settler's wagon broke down and he threw the wheel rim up in a tree and it stayed there for years. The settlers came to refer to the creek as Wheelrim." (Raymond Benton, Caney, June 11, 1979)
Defeated Creek, a branch of Line Fork Creek in Letcher County, was named for William T. "Terry" Cornett's great great great grandfather in the 1790s. According to Cornett, a Letcher Co. historian, "William Cornett and George Gideon Ison came over here from Virginia on an exploratory mission to see whether this area would be worthy of moving into. And so they were hunting to try to pay their trip over here and they were keeping pelts to take back to Virginia to sell. And they, one night, were all camped there on that little creek and some Indians attacked them and stole all their pelts and shot at them and all this sort of thing. They didn't get any of their pelts back on their horses. And so, in 1804, when they came back and decided to settle--both the Ison family and the Cornett family--supposedly William Cornett was going by this creek and he made some comments: 'Ah, that's where we were defeated; that's the old Defeated Creek.' And from that day on, it's been called that." (William T. Cornett, Whitesburg, Dec. 24, 1977)

"In the 1790s, so the story goes, there was an Indian fort (sic) called Graham's Station (in Lewis Co.) A Mr. Quick and his family were in the fort when it was attacked by Indians. Quick made a deal with the Indians giving them horses for their agreement to spare his family. They made their escape and the creek became Quick's Run." (Beulah Faye Lykins, Vanceburg, Feb. 3, 1979). In more imaginative "folk" versions of this name,
Mrs. Lykins told me later, Mr. Quick is said to have had to run the gauntlet or was chased the length of the stream by pursuing Indians.

Local fights have suggested the names, or at least the nicknames, of a few eastern Kentucky places. The area around the post office of Newfoundland in Elliott County has often been referred to as Crackers Neck. "The men had gathered up at this store--they used to do that in this country. They called it loafing. They'd come up here for the socializing. And two men got in an argument and were fighting and someone in the crowd yelled to his friend--one of them that was fighting--and said 'crack his neck.' Now that's the story they tell. Now Crackers Neck reaches ...over three miles...takes in Newfoundland.... According to tradition, settlers came in, leveled several acres, and called it a 'new found land.'"

(Lucy and Bert White, Sandy Hook, July 28, 1978)

"At one time Morgan County was a part of Floyd County. In 1822 a group of people went to Prestonsburg (then, as now, the Floyd Co. seat) with a petition to form a county. At the same time a group went from Piketon (in what became Pike Co.) with a petition to form a separate county there. The people from Pike said they were going to name their seat Liberty so the Morgan group decided that since they were west of
Liberty, they'd call their seat West Liberty. Liberty, though, never existed. (The Pike Co. seat was actually established at Piketon, now Pikeville, a few miles north.)" (Lynn Nickell, West Liberty, Dec. 1, 1978)

Everyone asks Lionel Duff (now of Lexington, Ky.) how the little Knott County community of Decoy got its name. He says: "Henry Shepherd, sometime just before the turn of the century, had wanted to better himself so he figured he'd buy himself a dictionary. So he ordered one from Sears. He soon got the reputation of being the knowingest man in the community. One day he was thumbing through it and he came upon the word 'decoy' meaning to set a trap. Later he came to suspect that his wife wasn't being faithful to him and decided to set a trap for her and her man. He told his wife he was going on a trip and wouldn't be back for a few days. And he made like he was going but doubled back to the house in time to catch his wife with the other man. He was later to say to one and all that he had decoyed them. When it came time to establish a post office in the community and to pick a name for it, he was asked to be the postmaster because he was the knowingest man in the community, and he suggested as its name that word Decoy because the word had meant
so much to him." (Lionel Duff, Decoy, Dec. 20, 1960)

"Tutor Key (Johnson County) was once called Mingo and Toms Creek. According to the postmaster, there were already post offices with these names and so they kept pressing this Daniels lady who was postmistress there to name it something. And she told me that she looked up on this shelf and there she saw a shoe polish called 'Tutor Key Shoe Polish.' And she said she couldn't think of anything else and she told that inspector...the name of the post office shall be Tutor Key. (Arthur Pope, Williamsport, Jan. 10, 1971)

The name for Ola, an Estill County post office, was literally pulled out of a hat. "People in that locality of Big Doe Creek at the foot of Barnes Mountain needed a post office. And they wrote to the Postmaster General and he wrote back to them asking them to select a short name for their post office. And the members of the community gathered together at a store and wrote several short names down and dropped them into a hat and then they drew the name out of the hat and the name they drew was Ola." But Kathryn C. Carter, my informant, never could learn for whom it was named. (Kathryn C. Carter, Irvine, Feb. 11, 1978)

Local customs, conventions, and values--economic and other--have accounted for a number of eastern Kentucky place names.
The way Meathouse Creek, a branch of Wolf Creek in Martin County, "got its name--was the old settlers claim that there's a hollow sycamore near the mouth of this creek in which they kept the meat stored and maybe lived in part of the time...and they called(it) Meathouse....The sycamores grew big, 12 to 15 feet in diameter and they'd be hollow." (Rufus Reed, Lovely, July 4, 1971)

According to Buck Scalf, "there's several traditions (about Mare Creek in Floyd County). One tradition was that the name of it was originally Marrow Creek. I know the tradition is that in the early days the Indians of some tribe or other used to camp at the mouth of it and they would crack bison bones and eat the marrow out of them, and there was a great quantity of bone cracked it there. And some of the early settlers called Marrow Creek. But then there's another tradition that James S. Layne, an early settler on the river nearby (Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River) had lost a black mare in pioneer days and he hunted for her and he found her on the creek, and after that he called it Mare Creek. I'm rather inclined to think that...it was named Marrow Creek and it was corrupted to Mare Creek." (Henry P. Scalf, Stanville, May 16, 1971)

Austin Wireman gave this account of the name of Magoffin County's Mashfork. "Back years ago when they'd
have a bunch of hogs they'd turn them out on the mash, they'd call it. And it was like beechnuts and acorns. And they said there was a lot of beech (trees) up on that fork. That's what I've heard." (Austin Wireman, Fredville, April 24, 1979) His wife, Connie, suggested another origin: "Ogie Williams wanted to name this post office Marsh Fork because of the marshy land in the area. That name was already in use by another post office so she settled for Mash Fork. Said the land was soggy and mashy. I learned this from Ogie's niece." (Connie Wireman, Fredville, April 24, 1979)

Wild Kitchen was the name of an old Wayne County school discontinued these many years. Shortly after the War of 1812, "a group of settlers came here from Virginia and they set up a camp down here at that spot. And during the night, their horses wandered away and escaped and they left their families there while they chased the horses all the way back to Virginia....And the families stayed there something like two or three months before the husbands got back. And they set up a kitchen and lived there under the timber....And the place earned the nickname Wild Kitchen. And later a school was built there." (Garnett Walker, Monticello, July 23, 1973)

"Gunrack Hollow (in Martin County) is taken from the old pioneer name. When they used the long rifles they put 'em up on a—they'd drive nails to pegs in the wall and
hang their— or lay their— rifles upon these and call it the 'gun rack.' And evidently, some old hunter lived there at that time and had a rack to put his rifle on at night....That's how it got its name.” (Rufus Reed, Lovely, Aug. 1, 1971)

"These (Russell County) settlers...didn't have much money...and whenever they got ahold of a small amount of money...they kept it securely for...sooner or later they had to pay the county taxes; otherwise their farm would be sold. And various people would apply the name Stingy Ridge to a particular little ridge that ran off and was formed by the creeks...for the simple reason that there was a whole lot of stingy folk lived on it." (Richard M. Blair, Jamestown, Nov. 27, 1971)

The rural neighborhood of Torch Ridge in Russell County is considered one of the most depressed in south central Kentucky. According to the story told to Mrs. Beatrice Allen, teacher at the local school, by her pupils, "a century ago, Torch Ridge was/home of bootleggers. There was a great deal of drinking. Many people made their own moonshine. And people used to have dances which would often last for days on end, people dancing through the night in shifts until the moonshine gave out. They'd take sticks and put pitch on them and make torches of them and they'd burn on and on. An old man (don't know his name) would play the fiddle, and when he'd get tired
and want to stop playing, they'd jerk their torches out of the ground and would have burned him if he hadn't gone on playing." (Mrs. Beatrice Allen, Russell Springs, Nov. 26, 1971)

"Smoky Bottom Neighborhood," said the late Rufus Reed, Kentucky poet, naturalist, and folk historian, "is now the town of Lovely. At that time, when it was first settled, it was a pretty rugged neighborhood. They'd meet here—a lot of outlaws would—and drink and shoot their pistols and make the air right smoky. So they called it Smoky Bottom for a long time from the pistol smoke (is) how it got its name. But we who live here now resent the name because we have a better, a more civilized community than that....(but) a lot of people still call it (Smoky Bottom)." (Rufus Reed, Lovely, July 18, 1971)

Before the Civil War, Kate Branham ran an inn on the old toll road (now US 27), in the present McCreary County, between Jacksboro, Tennessee and Lexington, Kentucky. It was first called Katie's Inn. "...a man would come in with his horse and he'd pay so much for his room and board and his horse's room and board to spend the night. They'd charge the same for any person that came but they made a difference in the price of feed for the horse. Maybe they'd have an 'eight ear horse.'
Or he'd be a bigger horse--maybe he's a 'twelve ear horse'--they had to feed him twelve ears of corn instead of eight. So they charged by the number of ears of corn they fed the horse. One fellow that stayed there got caught in a storm and stayed two or three days and noticed his horse was pretty gone so he slipped around...to see that he was getting fed what he's supposed to. And he'd listen to Katie throw those ears of corn in the trough, and he'd count them...well, even though he'd listen to them throw those ears of corn in the trough, his horse was looking pretty skinny so he slipped around and watched Katie throwing those ears in. And it wasn't ears of corn at all but it was pine knots that she was throwing into the trough. And then she'd slip around and retrieve them later on. So he traveled up and down Jacksboro Pike and told the other drummers about it. The word spread and they didn't call it Katie Branham's any more. They started calling it Katie's Pine Knot. Then they changed the inn to the Pine Knot Inn...Then when they got enough of a concentration of population here for a post office they called it Pine Knot." (Smith Ross, Pine Knot, June 22, 1978). An account of the Katie Branham story appeared in William E. Barton's classic Pine Knot and Ross's own book Come Go With Me (1977), Pp. 95-6)
In the early 1920s, Dr. Walt Stumbo used to ride the Beaver Creek passenger train going up that valley (in Floyd County) to visit patients and he'd want to get off there at that place but there wasn't any railroad stop and the conductor wouldn't stop for him. But the conductor did concede this much. He said, "I'll let you jump." And he slowed the train down and Dr. Walt would jump off. So that went on for a few years and when they'd get up pretty close to it, the conductor'd holler out 'jump, jump!' And Walt would get up and he'd jump out. The train'd slow down and he'd jump out. Then when they established the post office there, they called it Jump." (Henry P. Scalf, Stanville, May 16, 1971)

Names Derived from Personal Names

Many eastern Kentucky places and features were given the names of their founders or early settlers, and often colorful stories have been told to explain this. Usually these are local event accounts that incidentally refer to the persons whose names have been applied.

Russell Creek. Adair County's main stream, was "named for old man Russell. I do not know his first name and there's no proof that it was William Russell (the name source of adjacent Russell County)....Some of the (Long) Hunters' descendants reported, in the
Draper manuscripts, that Russell was an old man, almost blind. He had to put a white rag on the end of his gun. But he got lost—went hunting and got lost. And his grandson—now who his grandson was has bugged me—found him two days later by this big creek. And this is the first time they had run up on Russell Creek and they named it Russell Creek after him." (Nancy Berley, Columbia, interviewed for the Kentucky Place Name Survey by Henry Giles, Knifley, July 1979)

"According to accounts I've heard from people who lived there...William Lair had a settlement on the south side of the Cumberland River (in Russell County) at what was later known as Rowena Ferry....(He) had a daughter named Rowena and she—according to their family tradition—she was crossing the creek—the river—one day at the Wild Goose Shoals, where the river spread out and there's a lot of slick rocks; it was an entirely rocky bottom. And she was wearing one of the old fashioned riding skirts that women wore back in that time....It was just a piece of cloth that was wrapped clear around her....Well, in crossing the river, while the river was in low flow, in the fall of the year, her horse slipped on this slick rock and, with this voluminous skirt on, she was unable to get back ahold of the horse and the current pushed her over into deeper water and she was
drowned. And her father named this post office and the community after her, Rowena." (Richard M. Blair, Jamestown, July 25, 1973)

 Probably coincidentally applied to the naming of Robinson Creek in Laurel County is this seemingly localized version of a very popular "migratory legend." "Well, the story that I always heard about how it got its name—two pioneers coming along...by that creek and they saw a squirrel up in the tree. And one of 'em said it was a grey squirrel, and the other one said it was a red squirrel....And they agreed that whichever one was right about it would name the creek for himself. So when they killed it, the man named Robinson was correct and named the creek. I don't vouch for that; that's just a story." (Barbara Ewell, London, April 29, 1972)

 Brightshade in Clay County was named for Bright Short. "You know about the man named Bright that kept the store there and people comin' up that way would say, 'We're tired and thirsty; we'll just wait awhile till we get to Bright's Shade (referring to the shade of the trees by his store). And when they made the post office they called it Bright's Shade and they kept it that way for several years and then the Post Office Department asked them to drop the 's' and call it Brightshade." (Glade Cobb, Manchester, June 29, 1977)
The Letcher County coal camp of Hot Spot was earlier called Dalna and then Elsiecoal. "In 1915 a Tennessee man came in here and decided to build a coal camp. And he was dating a woman at that time whose name was Dalna Hayes... (He) decided he would name the coal camp after the woman he liked and so it came to be called Dalna, Kentucky. Well, this love didn't last too long and he decided to rename it for the woman he liked at that time and her name was Elsie and so the place became known as Elsiecoal." (William T. Cornett, Whitesburg, Dec. 24, 1977)

Some names were formed by combining two or more personal names. An example is Willaila in Rockcastle County which is said to have been named for Will Owens and his wife, Alila. But this folk whimsy was almost inevitable: "A man named Willie lived in the neighborhood and he was always sick; he was always ailing. And so they just put it together and called it Willaila. That's the story I've always heard." (Mrs. Philip Davis, Librarian, Mt. Vernon, April 29, 1978)

Names Derived from Local Geography

The geography of a locality--terrain, climate, wild and domesticated life, natural occurrences or processes, or other aspects of its natural setting--
has given rise to many an eastern Kentucky place name. Here are some oral accounts of names derived from local geography.

"Years ago, when the young people (of Clay County) would meet at night, someone accidentally or somehow struck a match and started a fire on the ground; natural gas poured out; there was natural gas comin' out everywhere, all over the place. You can go down there now and drill a well and you have to burn it off ....It's been one of the best natural gas places in the country, tremendous gas in there. Well, they would meet at night, these young people would, around these fires, and roast potatoes and play. It would burn up a big light. Had no electricity and there was this gas burning for light....And they'd say, 'Oh, let's go over to Burnin' Springs where we can have a good time,' and they named it Burning Springs....The People's Gas Company captured the springs--got it under control, but I don't know when. So they're no longer burning. They're piping gas now to different towns. But if someone wants to drill a well in the area they'd probably hit gas." (Marion Martin, Manchester, June 29, 1977)
Kentucky has its share of Blue Hole Hollows. One is in Wayne County. "Why there's a big hole there that stands full of water all the time. Nobody knows how deep it is. It ain't very big around. All the water comes in from different hollers and sinks there. Can't get out....Just as blue at the time as it can be." (Alonzo Hurt, Monticello, Aug. 9, 1976)

"...what gave it the name is a large hole in the ground that used to always stand full with just as blue a water as you ever saw, and us children were always told that it had no bottom. "Don't get about the Blue Hole."" (Isaac Hucaby, Monticello, Aug. 9, 1976)

"When I was a child," said Rufus Reed of Martin County, "I heard "em talk about these passenger pigeons. They established large roosts in Pigeonroost....It was wild woods and full of oaks, and these pigeons liked acorns, and they'd come in there to get the acorns and then they'd roost in there in such great numbers that they said they'd darken the sky when they flew over. They'd break the timber down when they'd latch--so many of them by sheer weight of numbers. There was millions and millions of them. But now...they're all extinct when man got to shooting them down." (Rufus Reed, Lovely, July 10, 1971)
"Dogtown (in Whitley County) is just a rural neighborhood with several homes," said former Congressman Eugene Siler. "Everytime the mail carrier would come through there the dogs would bark at him and run after him. And he said, 'the name of this place ought to be Dogtown.' And they named it Dogtown. Unofficially, of course. But that name grew up with it. And people know what you're talking about when you say 'I'm going over to Dogtown.' (Eugene Siler, Sr., Williamsburg, June 23, 1978)

"Will Payne and his wife, Rebecca (of Knox County) petitioned the U.S. Postal Service for a post office and selected the name for it. Mr. Payne owned a prize pair of work oxen, one named Bim and the other named Bill. Mr. Payne coined the name Bimble from the combination of some of the letters from each name of his oxen." (Beckham Garland, Bimble, Oct. 18, 1979)

"He'd (Bill Vitatoe) always heard that they were sitting in Stockton's store trying to decide on a name for the post office when someone saw a bug running up the wall and he said, 'What a hell of a bug.' And from that remark, they decided to call the (Clinton County) post office Bug. I don't know how true this is." (Eva Conner, Albany, March 22, 1979)
Literary Origins of Some Names

Some eastern Kentucky places have traced their names to works of literature and the Scriptures or, more specifically, to characters and sites mentioned therein.

“Mr. (James Anderson) Burns who established the Oneida Institute was so well educated and firmly believed in teaching literature and was so strong on Shakespeare that he required his pupils to study Shakespeare. Some got to talking and calling that (Clay County) community Brutus. So when they were ready to name the post office, some of the students suggested Brutus. And that’s how they named it that. That’s just a story.” (Marion Martin, Manchester, March 24, 1979)

The Biblical reference to Egypt has accounted for many names all over the country. Of the several Kentucky Egypt examples, this account from Jackson County might be cited: "I think the people that named this were the Amyxes that came from Hawkins County, Tennessee...and settled here shortly after the Civil War...and the reason they called it Egypt was they felt like they were exiled because they were away from the promised land." (Q. Where would the promised land be for them?) “The promised land is down in Hawkins County, Tennessee. They felt like it was a fur piece from nowhere when they moved up here because of the isolation, the homesickness; they felt like they were..."
exiled in Egypt like the—harking back to the Biblical Egypt...as if they were sojourning in a strange land."
(Jess D. Wilson, Manchester, July 9, 1977)

If the popular family newspaper *Grit* can be considered "literature", the Magoffin County post office of *Gunlock* could be said to have a literary derivation. "Roy (Shepherd) wrote down three names that he would like to have the post office named. And the name that the government picked was *Gunlock*. And the way that Roy got that name is he got the *Grit* newspaper and he was reading a story in it about a ranch named the *Gunlock Ranch*. So he sent that name in. That's how *Gunlock* got to be named (back in 1936)...." (Connie A. Wireman, Fredville, April 20, 1979)

**Names Derived from Spoken or Written Words**

The expressed sentiments of an early settler or some words spoken at the site are said to have given rise to a number of place names. The following accounts of such verbalizations are among the most popular tales of eastern Kentucky name lore.

The Martin County seat of *Inez* was first called *Eden*. "...they were trying to get the county seat established. They had one at Warfield and they didn't like it and wanted to establish one in the middle of the county some place....Tivis Newberry, one of the pioneer settlers— he and Cal Wriston came here from Virginia and settled just
after the Civil War. And Tiv took out a patent in
there.... He wanted the court house there (in the
central part of the county). He told them it was
a regular land of Eden here; he was trying to get
them to put the court house there--having a big
meeting, you know, people were. He said 'land of
Eden here,' and they called it Eden after that for
a long time." (Rufus Reed, Lovely, July 4, 1971)

Probably the best known of all Kentucky place
names is Hell for Certain, that of a creek in Leslie
County. "The two travelers were traveling through
that section on foot, before the place was settled.
Only one or two families living in the valley (then).
And there come an awful rain on them, and the waters
of the creek got up and they had to go right up the
creek because there were no roads. They got tired
out and sat down to rest, and one made the remark
'This is Hell.' And the other said, 'This is Hell
for sartin.' And it's been Hell-fer-Sartin ever
since." (Floyd D. Baker, Winchester, April 23, 1973)

This is just a story, said Lucy White, an Elliott
County historian, and there may be nothing to it.
"This man got lost for quite a while and when they
found him he was sitting on a rock and was just
irrational. And he had his head in his hands and
was saying 'I'm ruined, I'm ruined.' And they called
the place Ruin then. This was probably at Big Stone
on Ruin Creek." (Lucy White, Sandy Hook, July 28,
1978)

Legends differ in accounting for the curiously
named Owsley County settlement of Whoopflairee. "One
tale is that a bunch of Long Hunters up there camping
heard screaming noises at night like some animal--
something--they interpreted it to be going
'whoop-fal-air-ee, whoop-fal-air-ee, whoop-fal-air-ee'
and they called it that. Another legend which has
been written up in some book is some fella's lost
in a hunting party and his name's Larry and they
'whoop-fal-air-ee'--calling for Larry. I don't know
whether either one of these got any basis in fact but
I've read both of them. But I do know that it was a
U.S. post office for many years and (is) still called
Whoopflairee although the post office is gone."
(Fred Gabbard, Booneville, July 8, 1978)

An example of the difficulties attendant upon the
naming of a post office is this tale about Fixer in
Lee County. "They were getting a post office there
and they were trying to decide on a name. And they'd
send in one name and it was too long and the Post
Office Department would send back to send them another
name. And they did that three or four times and
finally they got together one night and wrote the
Post Office Department and said, "You fix 'er."
And the Post Office Department just put it down

**Fixer:** F-i-x-e-r. And that's the way I've been
told it got its name." (Nevyle Shackelford,
Beattyville, July 8, 1978)

Among other explanations, this has been offered
for the name of the settlement of **Jugornot** in
Pulaski County. "At one time, I don't know when
but probably during Prohibition, some people in the
community did a thriving business producing and
selling moonshine whiskey. There was one price if
customers brought their own container but an
additional charge was made if they didn't. So the
common question was, when someone came to buy
whiskey, 'jug or not?' Meaning did he bring his
own jug? It's still locally called that." (Mary
Weaver, Somerset, March 23, 1979)

**Fanciful Explanations**

The following folk accounts are fanciful explana-
tions of name derivations for, in each instance, the
real explanation is already known. Those accounts
that are not taken seriously by those who relate them
nor are expected to be accepted by others are simply
"place name jokes." While my informants generally
passed these off as "jokes", they pointed out or
implied that others often accepted them at face value.

"A traveling salesman came to Holechawa (in Wolfe County) via train...and when he got off someone asked him about the trip. He replied, 'It is truly Hell each way.'" In fact, this post office and former railroad stop was named for Helen Chase Walbridge.

(Berta K. Cecil, Campton, June 9, 1969).

"A story that comes through my family's tradition is that my great great grandfather, Judge Joseph E. second Cornett, who was the county judge here, was the man who was given the responsibility to lay the town of Whitesburg (Letcher County) out....And when they got ready to do the surveying work, a big snow storm came up and the ground was white for days. And the story was, jokingly, my great great grandfather named it Whitesburg because of that. Now that's just a legend; I've never heard that anywhere confirmed." The town was actually named for Daugherty White who helped get the county organized through the state legislature.

(William T. Cornett, Whitesburg, Dec. 24, 1977)

Though Wolfe County's Callaboone Creek (and later post office) was probably named for the relative difficulty in getting out when the water level was up, the story has been told of "a woman named Calla who had a penchant for making moonshine, and she had enough clout to get a post office named for her."
But somehow the spelling came out 'boose' instead of 'booze.'" (Hazel Booth, Campton, Jan. 6, 1979)

One tale to account for the naming of Pactolus (Carter County): "They had this dam down here...in the river and they had a grist mill, water fed. And the farmers would ride up with their grain and say 'Here's my pack, toll it.' I don't know whether that's true or not; I've heard the tale. Don't know who named it." (Lowell Lusby, Grayson, Sept. 23, 1977)

Another: "...people said it was so named because a man at Pactolus had a good pack mule or ass named Pac and this man's name was Toll. So somehow the name was Pac, Toll's Ass or Pactolus. (Joan Easterling, Oldtown, July 14, 1971) Most likely the name derived from the Pactolus Torrent in Asia Minor where Croesus panned for gold, a suggestion to early furnace owners here of the potential for wealth and the success of their investments."
Concluding note: As with all such ventures in the presentation of a state or area's folklore, I'm using this opportunity to whet reader appetites and, brazenly as it seems, to elicit additional accounts—authenticated or not—of eastern Kentucky's place name derivations.

# FOOTNOTES


2. Sponsored by the American Name Society with the encouragement, though not the financial support, of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names.


4. To keep this article at a reasonable length, however, I made liberal use of ellipses in the original texts and added parenthetical comments when I felt greater clarification was necessary.

5. Kentucky Place Names, op. cit., P. xx
Most of Kentucky's (more) colorful or unusual names may be explained by accounts of events that took place at or near the sites. Many of these were single occurrences while others were customary activities or typical behavior patterns of local residents.

Owsley County's "Buck Creek was so named because Col. James Moore killed a buck at the mouth of the creek with an old flint lock gun which was later made into a more modern gun with a hammer and cap....The gun also has a powder pouch which is said to have been made from the skin of the buck that Col. James Moore killed...."


"Before Kentucky was completely settled a few adventurous men made a journey into this part of the country and when they came to a creek now known as Elkhorn Creek, they looked up in a small knoll and saw an elk make his bold appearance out of a pine thicket. The elk received a deadly shot between the eyes. The adventurers left the elk lying where it had fallen and
a few years later some more men seeking adventure came to this creek. They found the elk's horns and called the place Elkhorn. The word city was added to the name in the years of the coal boom when (Pike County's) Elkhorn City was built up. And from that day to this it has been called Elkhorn City." (Madeline Elswick, Pikeville Coll. student contributor to Folk Tales of the Cumberlands, mimeo. booklet, n.d., n.p.)

"Hunters passing through this area (of Pike County) killed a wild bull. They couldn't carry it all so they skinned the bull and climbed a big tree to stretch the hide so the animals couldn't get to it. They needed the skin so they put wood ashes in a pit and put the skin in there with the heavy side out. This made the hair come out. They worked the skin until it got flexible and made clothing, tents, etc. from it. Some other hunters came through and saw the hide in the tree and said that creek would be known as Beefhide because of the big beef hide." (Collected by Rodney Tackett from his father-in-law, Malvray Johnson, for Leonard Roberts, Pikeville Coll., 1970.)
Wolf Creek, in Martin County, "got its name when a group of men were camping and fishing one night when they caught a wolf in one of their traps set along the creek for muskrats. The wolf was caught and brought back to camp alive where they skinned it, or attempted to. They got it almost skinned when it came back to life and ran away, dragging the partly skinned hide behind it. Thus Wolf Creek was born." (Homer Marcum for Leonard Roberts, Pikeville Coll., 1969.)

I once asked Floyd County historian Henry P. "Buck" Scalf about the buffalo hunt and how Cow, Calf, Buffalo, and Bull Creeks got their names. "Well, there was a well defined tradition about the names of those creeks—the tradition preserved in the old Leslie family who were the early settlers (of Floyd Co.) and related to me by L.C. Leslie, one of the early teachers. He told me that Acquilla Harmon and some of the other members of the Harmon family went on a hunt in pioneer days when there was just a fort or two in this section.... On the present Buffalo Creek, which is about ten or twelve miles
long, they encountered a big bull bison, and they begin to track him and chased him down Buffalo Creek, up Home Branch, down Cow Creek, and up on to Calf Creek. At the same time now they were chasing a buffalo bull and a cow and a calf. They killed the cow on the present Cow Creek and that's how it got its name. And Calf Creek, which is a little parallel stream right beside of it is where they killed the calf. But the old bull survived the chase until he got over on to Bull Creek and he was killed over there by those early Harmons and they named all them creeks."

("When did this take place? "Oh, it occurred sometime in the 1790s."")(Interview, 5/16/1971.)

"Daniel Boone and a group of soldiers established a camp at (what is now the hamlet of Boons Camp in Johnson County) and hunted this area for deer and bear. Greasy Creek (which flows through this area) was named because it was in the late winter and early spring when they (Boone and the others) were here. And that, to preserve the meat before packing it back into the settlements,
they tied it and weighted it down in the cold waters of the creek which (is) partly spring-fed up here. And the grease going down the creek...caused it to become noticeably greasy...." (Arthur Pope, 1/10/1971)

Lucy White, who lives nearby, had always heard that Bruin Creek (and later the p.o.) got its name when someone killed a bear. "...Johnny Mullins had a dog named Bruin and Johnny lived a little ways over the hill in the Brushy community. And the dog was missing one morning and when he started looking for him he found him on this creek and he had a bear at bay. He heard the dog barking and he had a bear at bay. And he just called the creek Bruin then, and he thought that would be a good name for it since his dog's name was Bruin and he killed a bear when he got there. I don't know if that's true or not." (Lucy White, 7/28/1978)
"A girl was sent to drive in the cows. A bear chased her and she tore her coat trying to get away. And that was the origin of Tearcoat Creek, the Clinton Co. stream) that joins the Cumberland River at Wells Bottom. Until recently it was a very inaccessible place." (Eva Conner, Albany, Ky., 3/22/1979)

Rockhouse Creek "got its name when James Collins came into Letcher Co. to settle on it, because it was so close to winter he didn't have time to build a cabin. So he built a rock house. He found an overhanging rock and built around the sides, and this was his home." (Marilyn Cornett, Skyline, Ky., collected for the Letcher Co. PNS, 10/25/1972)

"The story (of Little Cake in Adair Co.) was that one winter, years and years ago, they were so short of food that they—to cook their cornmeal bread they put it on holes and made little cakes out of it...." (Henry Giles, Knifley, Ky., 3/22/1979)
Of Missouri Branch of Johns Creek (in Pike Co.)

"Buck" Scalf tells this story. "The Blackburn family decided they were going to move to the state of Missouri.

...and they came out of Virginia and down Johns Creek and when they got to the mouth of Missouri Creek--it didn't have its name then--one of the leaders of the Blackburn family said 'Well this is Missouri. Not goin' any further. This is Missouri.' (5/28/1971)

"Buck" told me how Bedstead Branch of Mare Creek (in Floyd Co.) got its name. "Tandy R. Stratton came here and settled on Mare Creek about 18 and 48...It was primitive country then. There wasn't but about 2 or 3 houses on the creek--this whole 4½ mile long valley (referring to Mare Creek) and people had no--had to make their furniture and tools. He needed a bedstead. He went to housekeeping down the road here about a mile--and he needed a bedstead. And so one day (he) put his axe on his shoulder and walked up through here a-hunting for a poplar tree that he could cut down and make him a
bedstead. And he cut down a tree here and took it and
made him a bed with a turnin' lathe, an old fashioned
turnin' lathe that usually--treadle with your foot some-
way. And he made a bed. And he named it Bedstead Branch."

And Buck named his farm there (on Stratton's land) The
Bedstead and it's so registered with the Ky. Agriculture
Department. (5/28/1971)

"About 7 or 8 miles up Straight Creek (in Bell Co.)...
proceeding on the right fork and in view of the Pine Mt.
is...a little basin...known as Kettle Island. There was a
small island in the Straight Creek proper where the stream
emptied from this basin, a kind of a little pocket or a
valley, and on this little island there was found a kettle
in the early days and it became very natural to call it
Kettle Island." (Edward Bell, Jr., MD, Pineville, Ky.,
11/27/1978)

(Morgan County's Wheelrim (a settlement with disconti-
nued post office and school) "was named for the Wheelrim
Fork of Johnson Creek in (the) edge of Magoffin and Morgan
County. It was so called because an early settler's wagon broke down and he threw the wheel rim up in a tree and it stayed there for years. The settlers came to refer to the creek as Wheelrim."

(Raymond Benton, Caney, Ky., 6/11/1979)

The most complete account of the naming of Breathitt County's Lost Creek came from an article, "Creek Names" in the Jackson Hustler (4/18/1890). The creek "took its name from the fact that an Irishman by the name of Ned O'Grady went hunting in that region in early times and got lost... He remained in the woods several days and nobody knew what had become of him and it is doubtful wheather (sic) he knew himself. Finally his friends began (sic) a serch (sic) and after a tedious march over hill and dale they accidentally ran upon him him near a large rock (on) Lost Creek which is to this day called after him--Neds Rock. Having grown tired of hunting and dispaired (sic) of ever finding his way back he had built sort of temporary camp (sic) at this rock and settled down to meet the inevitable..."
Laurel Co. historian, The late/Logan Ewell once told me about Deadman's Grave and Deadman's Hill. "One day two squirrel hunters are comin' down that great big hill and one of 'em stepped over a log and he just barely missed a corpse layin' there—a man. He'd been shot twice, I think, through the chest here. And his coats and clothing folded back over him and buttoned just as nice as you please and he had a song book and a Bible in his hand ... You know, they kept that man up there in the court house. And people thought he was so-and-so, and they'd almost ready to take him away and claim him, you know, for burial, and so forth, and first thing you know 10 to 15 men, somebody'd come along 'Well, no, that's not him, he showed up today', or somethin' like that. And he's buried up on old Cemetery Hill there (now known as Waterworks Hill in London, Ky.) and he's buried in the grave that's unknown and unmarked; it's just known as The Dead Man's Grave. And it's no longer—you can't find it anymore, I don't know." (Q. When was this?) "Well,
let's see, it was before 1900...They kept him up there
—and I'll tell you they's a half dozen or more people
just positive he was the man they's looking for."

(4/29/1972)

Defeated Creek, a branch of Line Fork Creek in
Letcher Co., was named for (Terry) Cornett's great great
great grandfather in the 1790s. According to Cornett,
a Letcher Co. historian, "William Cornett and Geo.
Gideon Ison came over here from Virginia on an exploratory mission to see whether this area would be worthy of moving into. And so they were hunting to try to pay their trip over here and they were keeping pelts to take back to Virginia to sell. And they, one night, were all camped there on that little creek and some Indians attacked them and stole all their pelts and shot at them and all this sort of thing. They didn't get any of their pelts back on their horses. And so, in 1804, when they came back and decided to settle--both the Ison family and the Cornett family--supposedly Wm. Cornett was going by
this creek and he made some comments: 'Ah, that's where we were defeated; that's the old Defeated Creek.' And from that day on, it's been called that." (Terry Wm. T. Cornett, Whitesburg, Ky., 12/24/1977)

Indians are said to have had a camp on Indian Creek, says Knox Co. historian K. Sol Warren. "When Dr. Thomas Walker built the first house in Kentucky on the Cumberland River, 5 miles south of Barbourville, tradition says there came some families...some years afterwards and established (a settlement). And they were overcome by Indians. And they moved into the Indian Creek area. And then the Indians finally captured all of them and did exterminate them. With some of the settlers' blood, they took and painted on the rocks and on the trees in the gap over there, telling anybody else to beware, not to invade. And so, consequently, they called it Indian Creek and Painted Gap." (6/23/78)
In the 1780s, so the story goes, there was an Indian fort (sic) called Graham’s Station (in Lewis Co.) A Mr. Quick and his family were in the fort when it was attacked by Indians. Quick made a deal with the Indians, giving them horses for their agreement to spare his family. They made their escape and the creek became Quick’s Run.” (Beulah Faye Lykins, Vanceburg, Ky., 2/3/79.

In more imaginative "folk" versions of this name, Mr. Quick is said to have had to run the gauntlet or was chased the length of the stream by pursuing Indians.)

The Civil War has accounted for a share of Kentucky's place names. (Two accounts of the name of Cannon in Knox Co.) "When (Confederate General Felix) Zollicoffer approached the town of Barbourville (the seat of Knox Co.), he was obstructed by the local militia and finally the militia retreated and went up Little Richland to (the community since called) Cannon and there they set up breastworks including a cannon to obstruct his troops as they went to the saltworks. So, thereafter, the place was called Cannon."
(Sol Warren, 6/23/1978 who says it's more likely the place was named for an early family of Cannons, a member of which, Henry L. Cannon, established the post office in 1901)

Local fights have suggested the names or at least the nicknames of a few eastern Kentucky places. The area around the post office of Newfoundland has often been referred to as Crackers Neck. "The men had gathered up at this store—they used to do that in this country. They called it loafing. They'd come here for the socializing. And two men got in an argument and were fighting and someone in the crowd yelled to his friend—one of them that was fighting—and said 'crack his neck.' Now that's the story they tell. Now Crackers Neck reaches...over three miles...takes in Newfoundland....According to tradition, settlers came in, leveled several acres, and called it a 'new found land.'" (Lucy & Bart White, 7/28/1978)
Some names, such as the ubiquitous "Lovers Leaps", tell of suicides. The Pulaski County city of Burnside was once called Point Isabel. Though no one really knows why, some Pulaski Countians, like Mary Weaver, refer to the "legend of a girl named Isabel who, disappointed in love, committed suicide by jumping off the bluff." (3/23/79). Then there's Jump Off (in Russell Co.), a "hundred foot bluff rising above the Cumberland River at Swan Pond Bottom. This bluff has a public road leading down to the valley. (A) tale (is) told that a man despondent over losing his sweetheart, committed suicide by jumping over this bluff; hence the name." (O.L. Lester to Stella Holt for her "Points of Scenic Interest", WPA-Russell Co.)

(However, Jump, in Floyd Co., had a different origin. 

"...there wasn't any railroad stop there years ago..."
In the early 1920s, Dr. Walt Stumbo used to ride the Beaver Creek passenger train going up that valley to visit patients and he'd want to get off there at that place but there wasn't any railroad stop and the conductor wouldn't stop for him.)
But the conductor did concede this much. He said 'I'll let you jump.' And he slowed the train down and Dr. Walt would jump off. So that went on for a few years and when they'd get up pretty close to it, the conductor'd holler out 'Jump, jump!' And Walt would get up and he'd jump out. The train'd slow down and he'd jump out. Then when they established the post office there, they called it

Jump." (Henry P. Scalf, 5/16/1971)

Nigger Hill, in Lewis County, is now, of course, called Negro Hill. "Late one evening before the Civil War, a slave dealer on his way to Old Kenton Furnace with a bunch of slaves chained together, stopped at the home of (Willard) Horsley (the informant's) great grandfather. Travel at night was slow and difficult in those days and so the slave master made camp and spent the night at Great Grandfather Horsley's farm. One of the slaves was a very small crippled boy. This boy was about the same age as the two Horsley boys, Jonathan and Dudley.
The three children...were at once attracted to each other and played together. The boys begged their father to buy the little slave boy and the master offered to sell him for a yoke of oxen. Mr. Horsley did not buy the boy as he thought it was wrong to 'own' someone. The next morning the trader started on his way with his gang of slaves. Before he had gone far the wagon in which the little crippled boy was riding turned over and the little boy was killed. His body was taken back to the Horsley farm and buried. Great grandfather Horsley always regretted not buying this little slave boy...." (Alma Glore of Greenup Co. from Willard Horsley of Garrison, Ky. This is in the Leonard Roberts coll.)

"The naming of the post office at Torchlight (in Lawrence Co.) began with old Col. Jay N. Northup....Col. Northup, a dyed-in-the-wool Republican from New York State, first came to Ashland about 1840-1850. He was instrumental in the building of the old Chatteroi Railroad from Ashland to Peach Orchard, which was later sold to the C&O. Col. Northup was in the Union Army,
was interested in minerals, and owned many acres of land.

In the days of Col. Northup, elections were great cele-

brations. Republicans had been unable to elect a

Congressman. Around 1879-1882 the Republican Party was

able to place a man in the Congressional seat. The big

celebration was held in Greenup. Torches were always

lit and carried by the winning party enthusiasts. So,

on this evening of the election the torch bearers got
drunk, threw torches in the hotel at Greenup and burned

up the hotel. In those days, news traveled at a slow pace.

Two or three weeks after the election Col. Northup was
talking to several men of his area, at a place about 6

miles south of Louisa on the railroad side. They were
discussing the digging of coal and the cutting of timber.

Someone in the crowd asked Northup what he was going to

name the town. Col. Northup knew about the recent cele-
bration and the burning of the hotel in Greenup, so he

immediately answered 'Torchlight.' This story was told to

Louise Kingsmore of Louisa,

by Jim Hammond of the Boyd Co. Historical Society.
"At one time Morgan Co. was a part of Floyd Co. In 1822 a group of people went to Prestonsburg (then, as now, the Floyd Co. seat) with a petition to form a county. At the same time a group went from Piketon (in what became Pike Co.) with a petition to form a separate county there. The people from Pike said they were going to name their seat Liberty so the Morgan group decided that since they were west of Liberty, they'd call their seat West Liberty. Liberty, though, never existed. (the seat was actually established at Piketon, now Pikeville, a few miles north.)" (Lynn Nickell, 12/1/1978)

Everyone has asked Lionel Duff (now of Lexington, Ky.) how the little Knott Co. community of Decoy got its name. He says: "Henry Shepherd, sometime just before the turn of the century, had wanted to better himself so he figured he'd buy himself a dictionary. So he ordered one from Sears. He soon got the reputation of being the knowingest man in the community. One day he was thumbing through it and he came upon the word 'decoy' meaning to
set a trap. Later he came to suspect that his wife
wasn't being faithful to him and decided to set a trap
for her and her man. He told his wife he was going on
a trip and wouldn't be back for a few days. And he made
like he was going but doubled back to the house in time
to catch his wife with the other man. He was later to
say to one and all that he had decoyed them. When it
came time to establish a post office in the community
and to pick a name for it, he was asked to be the post-
master because he was the knowingest man in the community
and he suggested as its name that word Decoy because the
word had meant so much to him." (c1961)

The Acorn Post Office in Pulaski Co. was established
in 1893 by J.N. Mayfield. "A number of names submitted
to the Post Office Department were rejected. While
pondering for new ones, a falling acorn hit him on the
head. This suggested the name Acorn to him. He submitted
it and it was accepted. A variant account tells that Mr.
Mayfield had his hogs out in the woods eating acorns."
(Mary Weaver, 3/23/1979)
"Tutor Key (Johnson Co.) was once called Mingo and once called Toms Creek. According to the postmaster, there were already post offices with these names and so they kept pressing this Daniels lady over here, who was postmistress there to name it something. And she told me that she looked up on this shelf and there she saw a shoe polish called 'Tutor Key Shoe Polish.' And she said she couldn't think of anything else and she told that inspector...the name of the post office shall be Tutor Key."

(Arthur Pope, 1/10/1971)

"When citizens applied for a post office at what is now Disputanta (Rockcastle Co.), the petition was returned by the Postal Department several times asking that some other name be used instead of the one already suggested. D.N. Williams suggested that inasmuch as there was some dispute over the matter, the post office should be called 'Disputanta,' and it was so named." (Opp Bussell, Jr., 4/29/1973)
The name for Ola, Estill Co. post office, was literally pulled out of a hat. "People in that locality of Big Doe Creek at the foot of Barnes Mt. needed a post office. And they wrote to the Postmaster General and he wrote back to them asking them to select a short name for their post office. And the members of the community gathered together at a store and wrote several short names down and dropped them into a hat and then they drew the name out of the hat and the name they drew was Ola." But Kathryn C. Carter, my informant, never could learn who it was named for.

(2/11/1978)

Local customs, conventions, and values--economic and other--have accounted for a number of eastern Kentucky place names.

The way Meathouse Creek (a branch of Wolf Creek in Martin Co.) "got its name--was the old settlers claim that there's a hollow sycamore near the mouth of this creek in which they kept the meat stored and maybe lived in part of the time... and they called (it) Meathouse....The sycamores grew big, 12 to 15 feet in diameter and they'd be hollow." (Rufus Reed, 7/10/1971).
At least one example can be given of a name for which several explanations have been offered. Buck Scalp once said of Mare Creek (Floyd County): "Well, there's several traditions on it. One tradition was that the name of it was originally Marrow Creek. I know the tradition is that in the early days the Shawnee Indians or Indians of some tribe or other used to camp at the mouth of it and they would crack bison bones and eat the marrow out of them, and there was a great quantity of bone cracked there. And some of the early settlers called it Marrow Creek. But then there's another tradition that James S. Layne, an early settler on the river nearby (Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River) had lost a black mare in pioneer days and he hunted for her and he found her on the creek, and after that he called it Mare Creek. I'm rather inclined to think that it was named Marrow Creek and it was corrupted to Mare Creek." (5/16/1971)
Austin Wireman gave this account of the name of Magoffin Co's. Mashfork. "Back years ago, when they'd have a bunch of hogs they'd turn them out on the mash, they'd call it. And it was like beechnuts and acorns. And they said there was a lot of beech (trees) up on that fork. That's what I've heard." (4/24/1979) His wife, Connie, suggested another origin: "Ogie Williams wanted to name this post office Marsh Fork because of the marshy land in the area. That name was already in use by another post office so she settled for Mash Fork. Said the land was soggy and mashy. I learned this from Ogie's niece." (Ibid.)

Wild Kitchen was the name of an old/school, (gone for) many years. "A group of settlers came here from Virginia and they set up a camp down there at that spot. And during the night, their horses wandered away and escaped and they left their families there while they chased the horses all the way back to Virginia...And the families stayed there something like two or three months before the husbands got back. And they set up a kitchen and lived..."
there under the timber... And the place earned the nickname Wild Kitchen. And later a school was built there."

(Q. Now when was this?) "Well, that happened sometime around 1815 to '20, very early." (Garnett Walker, Wayne Co. historian, rejects the traditional accounts of the small restaurant where lots of fights occurred giving it the reputation of a wild place.

(7/23/73)

"Gunrack Hollow (in Martin Co.) is taken from the old pioneer name. When they used the long rifles they put 'em up on a--they'd drive nails to pegs in the wall and hang their--or lay their rifles upon these and call it the "gun rack." And evidently, some old hunter lived there at that time and had a rack to put his rifle on at night, lay it up there every night. Why they called it the gunrack. That's how it got its name, from the old-pioneer hunters." (Rufus Reed, 8/1/1971)
Clay Co.
The old/post office of Fogertown is said by some
to have been named for Sal, "the smoking woman" who'd
fog up the air with her pipe. According to Marion
Martin, the county librarian, Sal "never combed her
hair hardly; it was real foggy and made it kind of curl
and fogged around and just wooshed up around her head.
And she also smoked this pipe and kept this smoke just
a-going...and when she'd come around a-visitng the
little stores and everything they'd say, 'Well, thar comes
Sal.' They finally nicknamed her 'Foger,' you know.
'Well, there comes Sal Foger. And from that day on they
called her Sal Foger. And when they took up a petition
...to get a post office...they began to figure on naming
it they named it Fogertown." (6/29/1977)

"These (Russell Co.) settlers... didn't have much
money...and whenever they got ahold of a small amount
of money...they kept it securely for...sooner or later
they had to pay the county taxes; otherwise their farm
would be sold. And various people would apply the name
Stingy Ridge to a particular little ridge that ran off
and was formed by the creeks...for the simple reason that there was a whole lot of stingy folk lived on it.”

(Richard M. Blair, 11/27/1971)

On top of the hill on old Ky 90 (in western Wayne Co.) "they built a block building and opened a restaurant and garage. It became the only swinging place around. People would go there to party and get happy and it became the center of a little community there. And it got its name Happy Top from that. Before that building was erected the community was called Old Bethel...It's still called Happy Top though the building is now identified as Patton's Grocery." (Dick Bell, Susie, Ky., 11/1/1974)

The rural neighborhood of Torch Ridge, in Russell Co., is considered one of the most depressed in sc Ky. According to the story told to Mrs. Beatrice Allen, teacher at the local school, by her pupils, "a century ago, Torch Ridge was the home of bootleggers. There was a great deal of drinking. Many people made their own moonshine. And people used to have dances which would often last for days on end, people dancing through the night in shifts until
the moonshine gave out. They'd take sticks and put
pitch on them and make torches of them and they'd burn
on and on. An old man (don't know his name) would play
the fiddle, and when he'd get tired and want to stop
playing, they'd jerk their torches out of the ground
and would have burned him if he hadn't gone on playing."

(Mrs. Beatrice Allen, Russell Springs, Ky., 11/26/1971)

Kate Branham ran an inn on the old toll road (now
in the present McCreary Co.,
US 27) between Jacksboro, Tenn. and Lexington. It was
first called Katie's Inn. (This was before the Civil War)

"... a man would come in with his horse and he'd pay so
much for his room and board and his horse's room and
board to spend the night. They'd charge the same for
any person that came but they made a difference in the
price of feed for the horse. Maybe they'd have an 8
ear horse. Or he'd be a bigger horse -- maybe he's a 12
ear horse; they had to feed him 12 ears of corn instead
of 8. So they charged by the number of ears of corn
they fed the horse (horse). One fellow that stayed there--
got caught in a storm and stayed two or three days and
noticed his horse was pretty gone so he slipped around
...to see that he was getting fed what he's supposed to.

And he'd listen to Katie throw those ears of corn in the
trough, and he'd count them... Well, even though he'd
listen to them through those ears of corn in the trough,
his horse was looking pretty skinny so he slipped around
and watched Katie throwing those ears in. And it wasn't
ears of corn at all but it was pine knots that she was
throwing into the trough. And then she'd slip around and
retrieve them later on. So he traveled up and down Jacks-
boro Pike and told the other drummers about it. The word
spread and they didn't call it Katie Branham's any more.
They started calling it Katie's Pine Knot. Then they
changed the inn to the Pine Knot Inn... Then when they
got enough of a concentration of population here for a
post office they called it Pine Knot." (Smith Ross, Pine
Knot, Ky., 6/22/1978. An acct. of the Katie Branham story
appeared in Wm. E. Barton's Pine Knot... and Ross's own book
Come Go With Me, 1977, Pp. 95-6.)
"Smoky Bottom Neighborhood," said the late Rufus Reed, "is now the town of Lovely. At that time, when it was first settled, it was a pretty rugged neighborhood. They'd meet here—a lot of outlaws would—and drink and shoot their pistols and make the air right smoky. So they called it Smoky Bottom for a long time from the pistol smoke (is) how it got its name. But we who live here now resent the name because we have a better, a more civilized community than that... (but) a lot of people still call it (Smoky Bottom)." (7/18/1971)
The community of Parrot in Jackson County was once called Letter Box; at least this was the name of the local school, though the post office was always Parrot.

"The reason it's called Letter Box," says Jess Wilson, "is that there used to be a letter box tacked on the side of a tree on the route from London to McKee. And the people locally would get their mail—the mail carrier would leave it in this letter box." (Q. How long ago was this?) "It must have been back around the time of the Civil War." (Jess Wilson, Possum Trot, Ky., 7/9/77)

Oven Fork, one of the oldest communities in Letcher Co., "probably got its name in one of two ways. There was a brick oven there that for around 20 or 25 years produced a lot of the bricks for the chimneys of some of the homes that were built there....I don't know that I believe that because I feel like that almost all the old log buildings that I've seen with few exceptions built in the 1850s and afterwards had stone chimneys, but it could be that. The other one was that since there were a lot of Germans there, many of them baked bread out in the open,
in ovens in the early days, around 1800 or so. And there were so many on one part of that Cumberland River area that they decided to call it the Oven Fork. I'm not really sure." (Terry Cornett, 12/24/1977)

Rufus Reed told me how they named the Tarkiln Branch of Hood Creek in Lawrence Co. "The reason that's called Tarkiln—the word 'kiln' refers back to the old way of making outdoor ovens for drying fruit and things of that sort...It was built out of stone, had a flue through the middle of it, went all the way through it, and then it was covered over with mud on top. On the top of this kiln they would use it to dry apples, fruit...peaches. And tar too. (They'd) take the crude oil and make tar for use around the home, I suppose." (8/1/71)

"A lot of the smaller coal camps wanted to give a kind of name to their coal that denoted the quality of their product. And 'glowing coal,' of course, meant it was good quality coal. And they didn't want to just say 'coal glow'...They decided it would sound fancier, I guess, to say 'Carbon Glow.' Maybe to some extent it
sounds a little bit like a Welsh mining name. A lot of Welsh mining towns have 'Glo this or that' in it...."

Anyhow, says Terry Cornett, that's how Carbon Glow in Letcher Co. probably got its name. (12/24/1977)

"Fagan (an old post office in Menifee Co.) got its name because they used to burn charcoal instead of coal that they'd put up in those charcoal kits and called 'em fagan; that's the name of it. So they had a lot of area that they made charcoal in around that country. And they'd call it Fagan after that coal. And this was in, oh, 1850s, probably 50s or 60s. And that's when all the furnaces were running here in Powell Co., Bath Co., and all over the place. And they were pretty well being expanded out to get the charcoal.

Well, fagan is the guidepole/that goes into a charcoal pile. That's what they build the entire charcoal pile around is a fagan." (Don Fig, USFS, 6/17/1978)
Many eastern Kentucky places and features were given the names (first or family, or both, or nicknames, or those of relatives or friends) of their founders or early settlers, and often a colorful story has been told to explain this. Usually these are local event accounts that incidentally refer to the person whose name has been applied. Sometimes, though, the oddity or the inherent humor of the personal name itself is the basis of the tale.

Russell Creek, Adair County's main stream, was "named for old man Russell. I do not know his first name and there's no proof that it was William Russell (the name source of adjacent Russell Co.)... Some of the (Long) Hunters' descendants reported, in the Draper manuscripts, that Russell was an old man, almost blind. He had to put a white rag on the end of his gun, but he got lost--went hunting and got lost. And his grandson--now who his grandson was has bugged me--found him two days later by this big creek. And this is the first time they had run up on Russell Creek.
and they named it Russell Creek after him." (Nancy Berley, interviewed for me by Henry Giles, 7/1979)

**Longs Creek** (in Breathitt Co.) "took its name from a rather sad circumstance. Two Virginians had come out into this wild region on a hunting expedition. One of them bore the...name of Long. And as the story goes they had killed a bear on this creek and were in the act of carrying him home—suspended between them on a pole when the flint lock (sic) of one of their guns accidentally struck a bush causing it to fire and kill Long. The creek has ever since bourn (sic) his name." ("Creek Names" JACKSON HUSTLER, 4/18/1890)

"...Daniel Boone was accompanied by a man named Yocum, a settler near the town of Evarts, known as Yocum's Creek (sic). These two men were captured by the Indians...It being the custom for Indians to scalp all white people, they left off this custom in order to make a sporting affair with this man who had heretofore outsmarted them (meaning Boone). It was ordered that he must run the
gauntlet....Now Daniel Boone's cunning saved him again and he got through the gauntlet without getting seriously injured. So this man, Yocum, was ordered to do likewise. Yocum felt it would be impossible for him and he declined momentarily. When the Indians insisted, Yocum hopped upon a nearby stump and waving his arms high over his head he crowed like a rooster. This delighted the Indians and they laughed and made merry, and called on him again to rooster, which he did, and the Indians turned both prisoners loose to go their way. From this event this creek till this day is called Yocum's Creek." (Anna Mae Chivers, carrier, Pack Horse Lib....)

Another Harlan Co. stream is English Creek and this story is told of its name. "A band of Indians chased a white woman from the top of (Black Mt.) down to the creek. She jumped in the creek to get away from them and was about to drown when some white people came along and threw some stout cords to her to hold to and she got out on the other side from the Indians and made her escape.
The woman's name was English and after that this creek has always went by the name of English Creek." (Thelma Kirby, Loyall, Ky., Pack Horse Libr. Carrier, Harlan Co. as told to her by A.H. Howard, then over 80 yrs. old, for WPA, mid 1930s)

"According to accounts I've heard from people who lived there...William Lair had a settlement on the south side of the Cumberland River at what was later known as Rowena Ferry... (He) had a daughter named Rowena and she--according to their family tradition--she was crossing the creek--the river--one day at the Wild Goose Shoals, where the river spread out and there's a lot of slick rocks; it was an entirely rocky bottom. And she was wearing one of the old fashioned riding skirts that women wore back in that time...It was just a piece of cloth that was wrapped clear around her...Well, in crossing the river, while the river was in low flow, in the fall of the year, her horse slipped on this slick rock and, with this voluminous skirt on, she was unable to get back ahold of the horse and the current pushed
her over into deeper water and she was drowned.

(Russell County)

And her father named the post office and the community after her, Rowena."  (Richard/Blair, Jamestown, Ky., 7/25/1973)

(An example of one of the many "migratory legends" told to account for the naming of places is this example.)

Probably coincidentally applied to the naming of Robinson Creek in Laurel County is this seemingly localized version of a very popular "migratory legend."

"Well, the story that I always heard about how it got its name--two pioneers coming along—they saw a—-they was by that creek and they saw a squirrel up in the tree. And one of 'em said it was a grey squirrel, and the other one said it was a red squirrel....And they agreed that whichever one was right about it would name the creek for himself. So when they killed it, the man named Robinson was correct and named the creek. I don't vouch for that; that's just a story," (Barbara Ewell, London, Ky., 4/29/72)
Brightshade in Clay Co. was named for Bright Short. "You know about the man named Bright that kept the store there and people comin' up that way would say, 'We're tired and thirsty, we'll just wait awhile till we get up to Bright's shade. And when they made the post office they called it Bright's Shade and they kept it that way for several years and then the Post Office Department asked them to drop the 's' and call it Brightshade." (Glada Cobb, 6/29/1977)

The Letcher Co. coal camp of Hot Spot was earlier called Dalna and then Elsiecoal. In 1915 a Tennessee man came in here and decided to build a coal camp. And he was dating a woman at that time whose name was Dalna Hayes...(He) decided he would name the coal camp after the woman he liked and so it came to be called Dalna, Ky. Well, this love didn't last too long and he decided to rename it for the woman he liked at that time and her name was Elsie and so the
place became known as Elsiecoal." (Terry Cornett, 12/24/1977)

(Pike Co.) "I lived at Pinsonfork/when the railroad was built up Pond Creek...I was told that Peg Station (the railroad station that served that community) was named for an old man who had a wooden leg and everyone called him 'Peg.' I can't think of his name." Apparently no one else in that vicinity can either. (Mrs. Albert Scott, Vero Beach, Fla., pm. from 1931-1964, letter, 2/4/1970)

(according to the daughter of the first postmaster, "several names had been rejected by the Post Office Department. While some other possibilities were being discussed, a young fellow, Henry Whitaker, whose nickname was 'Squib,' came in. Someone said 'let's call it Squib.' So they sent in his name."

(This, too, seems to have become a fairly widespread method of naming.)

(omit)
Post Office Department errors are said to have accounted for some eastern Kentucky place names. Mazie, in Lawrence Co., may have been one of these.

"Britt Maxie was responsible for the establishment of Mazie. He wrote Washington to get the post office established and requested that it be called Maxie. Washington misread the name and called it Mazie. Mr. Maxie never corrected the mistake and let it go as Mazie." (Mrs. Louise Kingsmore, Louisa, 3/27/1969)

The Johnson Co. community of Thealka was named for either the girl for whom the steamboat was named. Acc. to Dan Wheeler, its captain, "The Thealka was built by Cap'n. Green Meek and he wanted to name it for his daughter, Alka Meek, (the future Mrs. John C.C. Mayo) and he told the painter what he wanted on it, and he (the painter) misunderstood him. He told him he wanted The Alka and the painter run the sign altogether so it spelled..."
Thealka instead of 'The Alka.'" (Interview with Wheeler by Harry D. McKenzie, Paintsville, Ky., PCC student, 11/30/1971)

✓ Some names were formed by combining two or more personal names. An example is Willailla in Rockcastle Co. which is said to have been named for Will Owens and his wife, Ailla. But this folk etymology was almost inevitable: "A man named Willie lived in the neighborhood and he was always sick; he was always ailing. And so they just put it together and called it Willailla. That's the story I've always heard." (Mrs. Philip Davis, Librarian, Mt. Vernon, Ky., 4/29/1978)
The geography of a locality—shape, terrain, climate, wild and domesticated life, natural occurrences and processes, and other aspects of its natural setting—have given rise to many an eastern Kentucky place name. Here are some oral accounts of names derived from local geography.

The late Osco Hicks didn't really know how Sunnybrook (Wayne Co.) got its name other than to guess it's a sunny brook. "A branch come down through Sunnybrook...a spring branch come out...from under the mountain, come right down through there...and the sun would shine on it and they called it Sunnybrook...That Sunnybrook country was just a cat gut inbetween two mountains, I called it..." (11/3/1974)

"They were tring to decide on a name (for the new Elliott Co. post office) and one morning they's all gathered around the breakfast table, and their children with them discussing what the name of the post office would be. And the lady (May Goodman) looked out the
window and the dew was dripping off the roof and she said
'Well, why not call it Dewdrop.'” And they did. (Lucy
White, 7/28/1978)

“It is rumored that (Frozen Creek in Breathitt County)
got its name from having been a creek that's so exposed
to the north winds that the sun didn't hit it too often and
from the time the first icicles froze, they said it stayed
right on until they melted about the first of May. And the
people just started calling it Frozen because you were frozen
to death when you passed that... maybe five or six miles
along that had that frozen area.” (Clara Jackson, 6/30/78)

(Then there's Ice, which started as a Letcher Co. coal-
camp before 1920)

✓ "Years ago, when the young people would meet at night,
someone accidentally or somehow struck a match and started
a fire on the ground; natural gas poured out; there was
natural gas comin' out everywhere, all over the place. You
can go down there now and drill a well and you have to burn
it off... It's been one of the best natural gas places in
the country, tremendous gas in there. Well, they would meet at night, these young people would, around these fires, and roast potatoes and play. It would burn up a big light. Had no electricity and there was this gas burning for light... And they'd say, 'Oh, let's go over to Burnin' Springs where we can have a good time,' and they named it Burning Springs... The People's Gas Co. captured the springs—got it under control, but I don't know when. So they're no longer burning. They're piping gas now to different towns. But if someone wants to drill a well in the area they'd probably hit gas." (Marion Martin, 6/29/77)

John L. Crawford explained the naming of the Whitley Co. settlement of Tidalwave this way: "Kentucky mountain people used to call the flood of a stream a big tide... And why they called it a tide I don't know except that most of our people from this area came from (the British Isles) and lived close to the coast and they were used to ocean tides. So that's the one reason I know you would find the use of tides for flood stages here. And
Tidalwave is just, I imagine, somebody said well, you've got a big tide in this branch here. And this evolved into Tidalwave. I guess there was a flood at the time it was named but I don't really know." (John L. Crawford, E&P, Corbin T&T, Corbin, Ky., 6/22/78)

Kentucky has its share of Blue Hole Hollows. One is in Wayne Co. "Why there's a big hole there that stands full of water all the time. Nobody knows how deep it is. It ain't very big around. All the water comes in from different hollers and sinks there. Can't get out... Just as blue at the time as it can be." (Alonzo Hurt, 8/9/76) "...what gave it the name is a large hole in the ground that used to always stand full with just as blue a water as you ever saw, and us children were always told that it had no bottom. 'Don't get about the Blue Hole.'" (Isaac Kucaby, 8/9/76)
"During Indian days, someone killed a lot of buffalo and left what they didn't want in the creek. Sometime later a bunch of white people came this way going up the creek; they found a stinking mess—hence (Stinking Creek) (Knox Co.) (Jake Winkler, Flat Lick, Ky. collected by Edith Farmer for Leonard Roberts, Union Coll., c1955)

The California redwoods may have met their equals in Kentucky's giant sycamores. One of the largest is said to have stood at the mouth of Sycamore Creek on Pike County's Johns Creek. "There used to stand a giant sycamore in pioneer days—was 10 or 12 feet in diameter, and it was hollow. And the early hunters used to take refuge in it....One of the early (Leslie family) settlers used it instead of a cabin until he could build a cabin."

(Buck Scalf, 5/16/1971)
"A (Laurel Co.) resident...said that her grandfather told her about the naming of Lily. He was going to the meeting and on the way he saw these lilies by the side of the road and he just suggested that they name the town for the lily." (Barbara Ewell, 4/29/1972)

Redbush (Johnson Co.) was "named for the fact that these small red oak (trees) whose leaves turn very red in the fall—pinoak, they call 'em, or red oak—were very plentiful on those hills around Redbush, and I guess whoever come in there at that particular season of the year may have...just called it Redbush to identify it." (Arthur Pope, Williamsport, Ky., 1/10/1971)

Breathitt County's "Turkey Creek was so isolated—no roads up the creek that there was nothing to disturb the habitat of the wild birds. It was so thickly populated by wild turkeys that hunters went in there to get their turkeys. So they started saying 'Let's go to Turkey' and they got to calling the creek Turkey Creek and it's gone by that name since. The community there is officially Turkey Creek but local people just call it
Bearwallow, a sparsely settled McCreary Co. neighborhood "takes its name from a large rock about 40 feet in diameter and 12 to 16 feet high on top of which is a large basin or 'wash bowl' which catches water when it rains; folklore has it that many years ago bears would gather and bathe here." (Clark Stephens, WPA)

"When I was a child," said Rufus Reed of Martin Co., "I heard 'em talk about these passenger pigeons. They established large roosts in Pigeonroost....It was wild woods and full of oaks, and these pigeons liked acorns, and they'd come in there to get the acorns and then they'd roost there in such great numbers that they said they'd darken the sky when they flew over. They'd break the timber down when they'd latch--so many of them by sheer weight of numbers. They was millions and millions of them. But now...they're all extinct, when man got to shooting them down." (7/10/1971)
Says Sherman Oxendine lives at Swan Pond in Knox Co.

"In 1750 Dr. Walker marched right through my front yard here. I can show you his foot prints... and he went down the river there and crossed the river. And he built the first house in Ky. near here.... He came right up this mountain back here. Well, somewhere down through here he saw a—he doesn't say how big but a body of water and there was some swans on it and he called it Swan Pond, and it's had that name ever since." This is stated in his diary. Prof. Oxendine (of nearby Union College) doesn't know where or if there ever was an actual pond there, though there is one in the vicinity now but it's manmade and fairly recent. (6/23/1978)

"Cat Creek (Lawrence Co.) was named for wildcats in the area. Of the last two that were killed in that area—a big one was killed on what became Big Cat Creek and a little one was killed on Little Cat Creek...." (Marie Carey, 10/14/1977) This is what I always assumed (and still do) until I came across this account in an
old WPA ms. "Stories that Tell about Streams" by Edna Lane Carter: "This stream derived its name from Wm. S. Catt. When Ky. was a county of Virginia, Wm. S. Catt with a company of merchantmen often crossed this stream on his way from eastern Va. to the old King Salt Works from where his caravans of pack horses carried all the salt to the east. Once a year, early in the Autumn these caravans would come down the west side of the Big Sandy River and a little south of the present town of Louisa, cross the mt. near the old 'Sprinkle' farm and up Catt to what is known as the 'Winding Stair' near the head of the creek. At this point a large rock or cave offers good protection from the weather and the salt traders made it a point to camp here and rest for several days. On one of these camping periods Mr. Catt fell ill with pneumonia and died and was buried on the hillside just south of the camp. His grave long since has been forgotten and no evidence marks the spot but the creek bears his name."
"Cow Creek (Magoffin Co.) got its name in the early pioneer days. The settlers on Cow Creek often got their herds of cattle together to move them to market or a new grazing place. During this time the roads were very muddy and this created a grave problem for the farmers. Because the cattle got mired up in the mud and they were unable to get them out. Therefore they lost most of their herd. This was the origin of Cow Creek name where my family and I have been living all our lives. (Mrs. Lonnie Dunn, PM, Stella, Ky., 1/23/1970)

Clara Jackson, a Breathitt Co. historian, explained the community called Shoulderblade. "I have been told that Shoulder Blade"

"Dogtown (in Whitley Co.) is just a rural neighborhood with several homes," said former Congressman Eugene Siler. "Everytime the mail carrier would come through there the dogs would bark at him and run after him and he said, 'the name of this place ought to be Dogtown.' And they named it Dog-
town. Unofficially, of course. But that name grew up with it. And people know what you're talking about when you say 'I'm going over to Dogtown.'" (Williamsburg, Ky., 6/23/1978)

"Will Payne and his wife, Rebecca, petitioned the US Postal Service for a post office and selected the name for it. Mr. Payne owned a prize pair of work oxen, one named Bim and the other named Bill. Mr. Payne coined the name Bimble from the combination of some of the letters from each name of his oxen. (Beckham Garland, Bimble, Ky., 10/18/1979)

"He'd (Bill Vitatoe) always heard that they were sitting in Stockton's store trying to decide on a name for the post office when someone saw a bug running up the wall and he said, 'What a hell of a bug.' And from that remark, they decided to call the (Clinton Co.) post office Bug. I don't know how true this is," said Eva Conner. (3/22/1979)
Some eastern Kentucky places have traced their names to works of literature and the Scriptures or, more specifically, to characters and sites mentioned therein.

(James Anderson) Burns
"Mr. Burns, who established the Oneida Institute was so well educated and firmly believed in teaching literature and was so strong on Shakespeare that he required his pupils to study Shakespeare. Some got to talking and that (Clay County) calling the community Brutus. So when they were ready to name the post office, some of the students suggested Brutus. And that's how they named it that. That's just a story." (Marion Martin, 3/24/1979)

The Biblical reference to Egypt has accounted for many names all over the country. Of the several Kentucky examples, this account from Jackson Co. might be cited:

"I think the people that named this were the Amyxses that came from Hawkins Co., Tenn...and settled here shortly after the Civil War...and the reason they called it Egypt was they felt like they were exiled because they were away from the promised land." (Q. Where would the promised land be for them?) "The promised land is down in Hawkins
Co., Tenn. They felt like it was a fur piece from nowhere when they moved up here because of the isolation, the homesickness; they felt like they were exiled in Egypt like the—harking back to the Biblical Egypt... as if they were sojourning in a strange land." (Jess Wilson, 7/9/1977)

If the popular family magazine Grit can be considered "literature", this account of the naming of Gunlock (Magoffin Co.) can be cited here: "Roy (Shepherd) wrote down three names that he would like to have the post office named. And the name that the government picked was Gunlock. And the way that Roy got that name is he got the Grit newspaper and he was reading a story in it about a ranch named the Gunlock Ranch. So he sent that name in. That's how Gunlock got to be named (back in 1936)...." (Connie Wireman, 4/20/1979)
Names derived from spoken words

The expressed sentiments of an early settler or some words spoken at the site are suspected of having given rise to a number of place names. The following accounts of such verbalizations are among the most popular tales of eastern Kentucky namelore.

Nevyle Sheckelford doesn't think there's much to this obvious folk account of Whynot (Lee Co.) but offers it anyway. "They tell me that that's where there's a big flat bottom across the river from Old Landing...where they used to land the rafts of a night when they'd reach there... (and tie up the raft of a night). And somebody had a big house there--a boarding house where raftsmen could spend the night...And I've heard (it called) Whynot and I don't know why they called it that but that was the first name before Old Landing...Somebody told me one time that two men were coming down a raft and one said 'let's tie up here' and the other said 'why not'? (7/8/78)
The Martin Co. seat of Inez was first called Eden. seat
"...they was trying to get the county/established. They had one at Warfield and they didn't like it and wanted to establish one in the middle of the county some place....

Tivis Newberry, one of the pioneer settlers—he and Cal Wriston came here from Virginia and settled just after the Civil War. And Tiv took out a patent in there...

He wanted the court house there. He told them it was a regular land of Eden here; he was trying to get them to put the court house there—having a big meeting, you know, people were. He said 'land of Eden here,' and they called it Eden after that for a long time." (Rufus Reed, 7/4/1971)

Probably the best known of all Kentucky place names is Hell for Certain Creek in Leslie Co. "The two travelers were traveling through that section on foot, before the place was settled. Only one or two families living in the valley (then). And there come an awful rain on them, and the waters of the creek got up and they had to go right up the creek because there were no roads. They got tired
out and sat down to rest, and one made the remark 'This is Hell.' And the other said, 'This is Hell fer sartin,' and it's been Hell-fer-Sartin ever since.'

(Floyd D. Baker, Winchester, Ky., 4/23/1973)

✓ This is just a story, said Lucy White, an Elliott Co. historian, and there may be nothing to it. "This man got lost for quite a while and when they found him he was sitting on a rock and was just irrational. And he had his head in his hands and was saying 'I'm ruined, I'm ruined.' And they called the place Ruin then. This was probably at Big Stone on Ruin Creek." (7/28/1978)

Then there's Lonesome Creek in Wayne Co. "I've heard the tale told that the man moved in there when they were settling that up--they built them a house--man and wife--and this woman was dissatisfied and the man was out at work and she wrote a note and left it on the table, set the lamp on that note, said, I'M a leaving this lonesome old holler.' And went back to Virginia....So they said that's what gave it the name of Lonesome." (Rector Burnett, Griffin, Ky., 8/10/1976)
"Legends differ (in accounting for the curiously named Owsley County settlement of Whoopflarea.) One tale is that a bunch of Long Hunters up there camping heard screaming noises at night like some animal—something—they interpreted it to be going whoop/whoop/whoop and they called it that. Another legend which has been written up in some book is some fella's lost in a hunting party and his name's Larry and they whoop/whoop calling for Larry. I don't know whether either one of these got any basis in fact but I've read both of them. But I do know that it was a US post office for many years and (is) still called Whoopflarea although the post office gone."

(Fred Gabbard, 7/8/1978)

Terry Cornett has offered two possible accounts of the name of Neon in Letcher Co. "...there was a black (railroad) conductor who, all the time, instead of saying 'all aboard' would say 'Ne-on, Ne-on!' like that, get your knees on, you know, the step and walk up into the train. And somebody, as a joke, said why don't we call it
Neon. I've always heard it pronounced Nee/ohn.... Another story I heard was--about that time, about 1920 or so, somebody bought a neon light for his business and put it out there; they liked that so much they decided to call the town after it." (Terry Cornett, 12/24/1977)

"Several names for this post office had been rejected. When another rejection was received, the postmaster disgustedly said, 'O.K! ' That name was submitted and accepted. Not sure of this" but it's the story that's been told to account for OK in Pulaski Co. (Mary Weaver, 3/23/1979)

Another example of the difficulties attendant upon the establishment of naming of a post office is this tale about Fixer in Lee Co. "They were getting a post office there and they were trying to decide on a name. And they'd send 'n one name and it was too long and the Post Office Department would send back--they'd send them another name. And they did that three or four times and finally they got together one night and wrote the Post Office Department and said, 'You fix 'er.' And the Post Office Department just put it down Fixer--F-i-x-e-r. And that's
The following folk accounts are fanciful explanations of name derivations for, in all instance, the real explanations are already known. Those accounts that are not taken seriously by those who relate them nor are expected to be accepted by others are simply "place name jokes." (ft. to book, P. xx) While my informants generally passed these off as "jokes", they pointed out or implied others that (thnxthxxxx) often accepted them at face value. (67)

While Crum is a family name in ne Ky., this Lewis Co. community's name has inspired several jokes. One was shared by Beulah Faye Lykins: "A Lykins woman told me that...they had friends that lived on down what they called Crum so, in kidding them, they'd say 'Well, that was just a little old crum off of Petersville" (a nearby, larger community.) (6/20/77)

"A traveling salesman came to Helechawa (in Wolfe Co.) via train...and when he got off someone asked him about the trip. He replied, 'It is truly Hell each way.'" In fact, this post office and former rr stop was named for Helen Chase Walbridge. (Berta K. Cecil, 6/9/69)
"Years ago, before Kentucky was so thickly settled, there was a big saw mill came to Royalton (Magoffin Co.), Co. which then didn't have a name. The mill was called 'The Big Mill' or Dawkins Lumber Co. Right away houses sprang up all around. There was grocery stores, a school, and a bank... One day, the governor of Ky. came to see this fair growing town... and when he looked it over he said, 'Well, boys, you have a royal little town here.' So from that the place was called Royalton. I don't remember who the governor was but my great uncle told me this and he should know. He lived in Royalton all his life even before that was the place's name." (Sarah Shepherd, Mag. folklore Co., student of Leonard Roberts, MSU, 1958) The Dawkins Co. was financed by the Royal Bank of Canada which really accounted for its name.

"A story that comes through my family's tradition is that my great great grandfather, Judge Joseph E. Cornett, who was the second county judge here, was the man who was given the responsibility to lay the town of Whitesburg (Letcher Co.) out)... And when they got
ready to do the surveying work, a big snow storm came up and the ground was white for days, and the story was, jokingly, my great great grandfather named it Whitesburg because of that. Now that's just a legend; I've never heard that confirmed anywhere. The town was actually named for Daugherty White who helped get the county organized through the state legislature. (Terry Cornett, 12/24/77)

Though Wolfe County's Callaboose Creek (and later post office) was probably named for the relative difficulty in getting out when the water level was up, the story has been told of "a woman named Calla who had a penchant for making moonshine, and she had enough clout to get a post office named for her. But somehow the spelling came out 'boose' instead of 'booze.'" (Hazel Booth, 1/6/1979)

One local tale for the naming of Pactolus (Carter Co.):

"They had this dam down here...in the river and they had a grist mill, water fed. And the farmers would ride up with their grain and say 'Here's my pack, toll it.' I don't know whether that's true or not; I've heard the tale. Don't know who named it. (Lowell W. Jr., Newport, Ky. 9/23/77)"
Another: "...people said it was so named because a man at Pactolus had a good pack mule or ass named Pac and this man's name was Toll. So somehow the name was Pactolus. (Joan Easterling, Oldtown, Ky., 7/14/71) Most likely the name derived from the Pactolus Torrent in Asia Minor, where Croessus panned for gold, a suggestion to early furnace owners here of the potential for wealth and the success of their (efforts) investments.

Several Kentucky "runs"--simply small feeder streams--have inspired tales of flight--someone running to avoid or, more specifically, shouts of encouragement to persons fleeing from something. "Sugar Run (in Bell Co., where sugaring was once a main activity) "was so called because of a boy and his sweetheart. One time they had been courting and her father didn't like the boy, so when he came out and found the girl and him together, he ran back in and got his shot gun and started shooting and the girl began hollering: 'Run, sugar, run!'" (Jimmie Faulkner, Ingram, Ky. to Leonard Roberts, Union Coll., 1955.)
"Around 1800, when this part of the country (Lewis Co.) was first being settled, on one of the tributaries of Cabin Creek a pilfering settler by the name of Brown got his living by stealing from all the other settlers. Mr. McClure noticed that corn was disappearing from his corn patch. Early one morning he cut him a strong hickory stick, went down to the corn patch to see who was getting his corn. Just as the sun came up Brown cautiously stole through the brush fence and began gathering roasting ears. Mr. McClure took after Brown waving his stick and squalled, 'Drop my roasting ears.' Brown was not about to give up his dinner without a chase so he shouldered his sack and went tearing down the creek. Mr. Pen Lyons was just starting to milk the cow when Mrs. Lyons saw Brown dashing down the creek and called to her husband 'Look at Brown run.' After that the creek was called Brown's Run. (Collected from Julian Gillespie, who heard it from his father, by Donna Gaegley of Lewis Co. a stud. of Leonard Roberts', MSU, 1961)
"When the white soldiers were searching for the Indians along (Tygarts Creek) they would stop and tie-the-girth of their saddles before swimming across. When they came to the creek they would yell, 'Tie-girth time, boys.' Many old people say that this is how Tygarts got its name."

(Collected by Dorothy Major of Greenup Co., Ky. from her mother, Mrs. Martha Wells of Oldtown, Ky. Student of Leonard Roberts', MSU, 1960). The creek that flows through Carter and Greenup Co. to the Ohio River was actually named for Michael Tygart, the pioneer companion of Simon Kenton, who was drowned in the stream in 1785.
the way I've been told it got its name." (Nevyle Shackelford, 7/8/1978)

Among other explanations, this has been offered for the old settlement of Jugornot in Pulaski County. "At one time, I don't know when but probably during Prohibition, some people in the community did a thriving business producing and selling moonshine whiskey. There was one price if customers brought their own container but an additional charge was made if they didn't. So the common question was, when someone came to buy whiskey, 'jug or not'? Meaning did he bring his own jug? It's still locally called that." (Mary Weaver, 3/23/1979)
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Nevyle Shuckelford didn't think there's much to this obvious folk account of Whynot (Lee Co.) but offers it anyway. "They tell me that that's where there's a big flat bottom across the river from Old Landing... where they used to land the rafts of a night when they'd reach there... (and tie up the raft of a night). And somebody had a big house there—a boarding house where raftsmen could spend the night... And I've heard (it called) Whynot and I don't know why they called it that but (xxxx) that was the first name before Old Landing... Somebody told me one time that (xxxx) two men were coming down a raft and one said 'let's tie up here' and the other said 'why not'? (7/8/78)"
Indians are said to have had a camp on Indian Creek, says Knox Co. historian K. Sol Warren. "When Dr. Thomas Walker built the first house in Kentucky on the Cumberland River, 5 miles south of Barbourville, tradition says there came some families...some years afterwards and established (a settlement). And they were overcome by Indians. And they moved into the Indian Creek area. And then the Indians finally captured all of them and did exterminate them. With some of the settlers' blood, they took and painted on the rocks and on the trees in the gap over there, telling anybody else to beware, not to invade. And so, consequently, they called it Indian Creek and Painted Gap." (6/23/78)
The late Osco Hicks didn't really know how Sunnybrook (Wayne Co.) got its name other than to guess it's a sunny brook. "A branch come down through Sunnybrook... a spring branch come out... from under the mountain, come right down through there... and the sun would shine through on it and they called it Sunnybrook... That Sunnybrook country was just a cat gut inbetween two mountains, I called it..." (11/3/1974)

They were trying to decide on a name (for the new Elliott Co. post office) and one morning they's all gathered around the breakfast table, and their children with them discussing what the name of the post office would be. And the lady (May Goodman) looked out the
window and the dew was dripping off the roof and she said

'Well, why not call it Dewdrop.' And they did. (Lucy
White, 7/28/1978)

"It is rumored that (Frozen Creek in Breathitt County)
got its name from having been a creek that's so exposed
to the north winds that the sun didn't hit it too often and
from the time the first icicles froze, they said it stayed
right on until they melted about the first of May. And the
people just started calling it Frozen because you were frozen
to death when you passed that...maybe five or six miles
along that had that frozen area." (Clara Jackson, 6/30/78)

(Then there's Ice, which started as a Letcher Co. coal-
camp before 1920)
The most complete account of the naming of Breathitt County's Lost Creek came from an article, "Creek Names" in the **Jackson Hustler** (4/18/1890). The creek "took its name from the fact that an Irishman by the name of Ned O'Grady went hunting in that region in early times and got lost...He remained in the woods several days and nobody knew what had become of him and it is doubtful whether (sic) he knew himself. Finally his friends began (sic) a search (sic) and after a tedious march over hill and dale they accidentally ran upon him near a large rock (on) Lost Creek which is to this day called after him—Neds Rock. Having grown tired of hunting and dispaired (sic) of ever finding his way back he had built sort of temporary camp (sic) at this rock and settled down to meet the inevitable..."
"During Indian days, someone killed a lot of buffalo and left what they didn't want in the creek. Sometime later a bunch of white people came this way going up the creek; they found a stinking mess--hence Stinking Creek (Knox Co.) (Jake Winkler, Flat Lick, Ky. collected by Edith Farmer for Leonard Roberts, Union Coll., c1955)

The California redwoods may have met their equals in Kentucky's giant sycamores. One of the largest is said to have stood at the mouth of Sycamore Creek on Pike County's Johns Creek. "There used to stand a giant sycamore in pioneer days--was 10 or 12 feet in diameter, and it was hollow. And the early hunters used to take refuge in it....One of the early (Leslie family) settlers used it instead of a cabin until he could build a cabin."

(Buck Scalf, 5/16/1971)
"Cow Creek (Magoffin Co.) got its name in the early pioneer days. The settlers on Cow Creek often got their herds of cattle together to move them to market or a new grazing place. During this time the roads were very muddy and this created a grave problem for the farmers. Because the cattle got mired up in the mud and they were unable to get them out. Therefore they lost most of their herd. This was the origin of Cow Creek name where my family and I have been living all our lives. (Mrs. Lonnie Dunn, PM, Stella, Ky., 1/23/1970)

(Clara Jackson, a Breathitt Co. historian, explained the community called Shoulderblade. "I have been told—"
"Years ago, before Kentucky was so thickly settled, there was a big saw mill came to Royalton (Magoffin Co.), Co. which then didn't have a name. The mill was called 'The Big Mill' or Dawkins Lumber Co. Right away houses sprang up all around. There was grocery stores, a school, and a bank... One day, the governor of Ky. came to see this fair growing town... and when he looked it over he said, 'Well, boys, you have a royal little town here.' So from that the place was called Royalton. I don't remember who the governor was but my great uncle told me this and he should know. "He lived in Royalton all his life even before that was the place's name." (Sarah Shepherd, Mag. folklore Co., student of Leonard Roberts, MSU, 1958) The Dawkins Co. was financed by the Royal Bank of Canada which really accounted for its name.
Wolf Creek, in Martin County, "got its name when a group of men were camping and fishing one night when they caught a wolf in one of their traps set along the creek for muskrats. The wolf was caught and brought back to camp alive where they skinned it, or attempted to. They got it almost skinned when it came back to life and ran away, dragging the partly skinned hide behind it. Thus Wolf Creek was born." (Homer Marcum for Leonard Roberts, Pikeville Coll., 1969.)
Nigger Hill, in Lewis County, is now, of course, called Negro Hill. "Late one evening before the Civil War, a slave dealer on his way to Old Kenton Furnace with a bunch of slaves chained together, stopped at the home of (Willard) Horsley (the informant's) great grandfather. Travel at night was slow and difficult in those days and so the slave master made camp and spent the night at Great Grandfather Horsley's farm. One of the slaves was a very small crippled boy. This boy was about the same age as the two Horsley boys, Jonathan and Dudley.
Rockhouse Creek "got its name when James Collins came into Letcher Co. to settle on it, because it was so close to winter he didn't have time to build a cabin. So he built a rock house. He found an overhanging rock and built around the sides, and this was his home." (Marilyn Cornett, Skyline, Ky., collected for the Letcher Co. PNS, Alice Lloyd Coll, 10/25/1972)

"The story (of Little Cake in Adair Co.) was that one winter, years and years ago, they were so short of food that they—to cook their cornmeal bread they put it on holes and made little cakes out of it...." (Henry Giles, Knifley, Ky., 3/22/1979)
a few years later some more men seeking adventure came to this creek. They found the elk's horns and called the place Elkhorn. The word city was added to the name in the years of the coal boom when (Pike County's) Elkhorn City was built up. And from that day to this it has been called Elkhorn City." (Madeline Elswick, Pikeville Coll. student contributor to Folk Tales of the Cumberlands, mimeo. booklet, n.d., n.p.)

"Hunters passing through this area (of Pike County) killed a wild bull. They couldn't carry it all so they skinned the bull and climbed a big tree to stretch the hide so the animals couldn't get to it. They needed the skin so they put wood ashes in a pit and put the skin in there with the heavy side out. This made the hair come out. They worked the skin until it got flexible and made clothing, tents, etc. from it. Some other hunters came through and saw the hide in the tree and said that creek would be known as Beefhide because of the big beef hide." (Collected by Rodney Tackett from his father-in-law, Malvay Johnson, for Leonard Roberts, Pike Coll., 1970.)
bedstead. And he cut down a tree here and took it and made him a bed with a turnin' lathe, an' old fashioned turnin' lathe that usually--treadle with your foot someway. And he made a bed. And he named it Bedstead Branch."

And Buck named his farm there (on Stratton's land) The Bedstead and it's so registered with the Ky. Agriculture (210) Department. (5/28/1971)

"About 7 or 8 miles up Straight Creek (in Bell Co.)...

proceeding on the right fork and in view of the Pine Mt.
is...a little basin...known as Kettle Island. There was a small island in the Straight Creek proper where the stream emptied from this basin, a kind of a little pocket or a valley, and on this little island there was found a kettle in the early days and it became very natural to call it

Kettle Island." (Edward Bell, Jr., MD, Pineville, Ky., 11/27/1978)
Lon$ Creek (in Breathitt Co.) "took its name from a rather sad circumstance. Two Virginians had come out into this wild region on a hunting expedition. One of them bore the...name of Long. And as the story goes they had killed a bear on this creek and were in the act of carrying him home--suspended between them on a pole when the flint lock (sic) of one of their guns accidentally struck a bush causing it to fire and kill Long. The creek has ever since bourn (sic) his name." ("Creek Names" JACKSON HUSTLER, 4/18/1890)

"...Daniel Boone was accompanied by a man named Yocum, a settler near the town of Evarts, (known as Yocum's Creek (sic)). These two men were captured by the Indians....It being the custom for Indians to scalp all white people, they left off this custom in order to make a sporting affair with this man who had heretofore outsmarted them (meaning Boone). It was ordered that he must run the
MORE KENTUCKY PLACE NAME STORIES

In its early days, Meade County's Battletown is said to have been a pretty violent place. One of the many fights that occurred there was a day long affair between Nathan Hubbard and Jimmy Bennett over either a woman or the naming of the post office, or even the post office's location--no one really knows what brought it on. Though the fight ended in a draw, it churned up sufficient local sentiment that someone suggested they name the new post office for the fight itself. And they did.

Jonathan Scott's Ohio River tavern, above the mouth of Green River, was the meeting place for early nineteenth century rowdies and river rats whose Saturday night scuffles led to naming the local settlement and its post office Scuffletown.

Knockum Hill, near the Christian County post office of Herndon, is said to have been named from a local tradition that an Indian was fatally injured there by a knock on the head from an early white settler.

Then there's Skullbuster, northwest of Georgetown (in Scott County), which was the first name of the old Corinth Church. Back in the 1830s, say local folks, a tall man failed to heed the warning of a friend that he duck as he entered the church or he'd "bust his skull". He struck his head on the lintel, and though he didn't exactly "bust his skull", he certainly learned to duck on future occasions, and this incident gave the church its name.
Perry Hall of Harold, Ky. once told me that near his home is the only place in Kentucky where an egg would boil in cold water. Nonsense, I told him. There can be no such place. There certainly is, he said, it's any place on the Coldwater Branch of the Big Sandy, just below Harold. And he was right.

Isaac Newton wasn't the only person to be affected by a falling object and named something for his experience. One day, while J.N. Mayfield was trying to come up with an acceptable name for his new Pulaski County post office, one that the Post Office Department wouldn't turn down as they did all the others he submitted, a falling acorn hit him on the head. That did it. He submitted Acorn to the authorities and it was accepted. His wife Mary assumed charge of the office when it opened in 1896.

When the late Terry Cornett of Whitesburg was asked how some of the eastern Kentucky coal towns got their names, he came up with several suggestions. Many of the smaller coal companies wanted their names to reflect the quality of their product. "Glowing coal," for instance, sounded like really good stuff. So did "coal glow". But neither of these names were as impressive as Carbon Glow and so that's what one company named itself and its town in nw Letcher County. Maybe that sounded like a good Welsh mining name for the Welsh were always such successful miners. Several Welsh mining towns have names like Glo something. There's Glo in Floyd County named for the Glogora Coal Co. and Glomawr in Perry County which simply means "high coal." Then there's Beauty in Martin County which may have been named for the brand of coal mined there that reflected its quality or at least the general attractiveness of the area.
Here's an assignment for an enterprising Kentucky college student. It might even make a challenging masters thesis topic for a university's humanities program. It involves reading and analyzing map names or, better yet, visiting a sample of Kentucky drainage areas and asking local people the names of the area's streams. It's a test of an assumption once made by William E. Mockler (in his "Surnames of Trans-Allegheny Virginia, II," Names, V. 4, 1956, P. 109) about the incidence of family names applied to different sized streams. According to him, the smaller the stream the more likely it is to bear a personal name, while the larger streams—those designated as rivers and major creeks and forks—are more likely identified by some descriptive word. Worth considering.

There really is a post office called Eastern, Kentucky. And there used to be a post office called Northern, Kentucky. And for awhile Northern Kentucky was a mile southwest of Eastern Kentucky. Eastern is still on the Right Fork of Beaver Creek in Floyd County, some 4½ miles above Martin, and serves the Allen Central High School. Actually there have been two Eastern post offices. The first operated between 1924 and 1943. Two years later the post office of Northern, which had been established in 1919, was moved to the eastern site and renamed Eastern. But this is not the story I want to tell. What is, reflecting the fact that most people outside of Floyd County don't know of the Eastern post office (much less its northern, that is, southwestern neighbor), is this: A patron, on a visit to Lexington, meets this girl and they promise each other they will write. "So," she asks, "what's your mailing address?" "Oh," he says, "just send the letter to Eastern Kentucky. It'll get to me," That's
hard to believe, she thinks, no one can be that well known in so
large a region. But what the heck, she'll write him anyway, though
she hardly ever expected to hear from him again. But she did. She
got the surprise of her life when a few days later she received
his response to her letter.