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The Post Offices of Letcher County, Kentucky

Part I

by Robert M. Rennick

On March 3, 1824 the Kentucky legislature created Letcher County, the state's 95th, from parts of Perry and Harlan Counties. It was named for former Congressman and then governor Robert P. Letcher (1788-1861). To the county's original 340 square mile area were added sixty more square miles from Perry County in 1858 and a ten mile section along the Elkhorn and Beethive valleys from Pike County in April 1884. A month later Letcher lost eighty square miles toward the formation of Knott County. Its present 339 square mile territory has a population of some 26,000.

Like other eastern Kentucky counties Letcher's terrain is rugged and hilly, and nearly all of its settlements have been in its narrow stream valleys, the headwaters of three major Kentucky rivers. The county's most distinguishing topographic feature is the impenetrable 125 mile-long Pine Mountain ridge, extending from the southwest to the northeast, ending near Elkhorn City in Pike County, and marking the boundaries of Letcher and Harlan County and Letcher and Virginia's Wise County. Its highest point, at 3,273 feet, is just above Whitesburg, the county's somewhat centrally located seat.

It is generally accepted that the first significant settlement in what became Letcher County was made in 1803 at the mouth of Pert Creek, on the Kentucky River's North Fork, near the present Mayking. Other pioneer families were the Caudills, Dixons, Stampers, Colliers, Lewises, Whitakers, Wrights, Crafts, Brown's, Holcomb's, Holbrooks, and Bentleys. By 1810 every major valley in the future county had been settled. By 1815 the pioneer families had been joined by Banks, Maggards, Days, Fields, Morgans, Blairs, Breedings, Fraziers, Bakers, Hogs, Combs, and Mullins. Most of the county's settlement and geographic feature names were taken from these early families.

Letcher lies in the heart of the eastern Kentucky coal country. But until mining began in earnest with mineral rights acquisitions in the early 1900s, the county was one of Kentucky's most isolated and least economically viable areas. Many of its larger communities began as coal towns, while others grew up around rail stations and distribution centers supplying vicinity mines and camps. Some of the earlier settlements developed around timbering operations or continued to provide merely basic sustenance for small family holdings. Mining and quarrying remain the county's main economic support. Few non-extractive manufacturing jobs are available. The uneven terrain severely limited commercial agriculture. Tourism holds some promise for the future.

Letcher's 127 operating post offices will be considered below according to their locations in the main valleys of the headwaters of three major Kentucky River systems: The Poor Fork of the Cumberland River, the North Fork of the Kentucky River, and the Big Sandy River's Levisa Fork. Offices will be located by road miles from the courthouse in downtown Whitesburg or from the other offices in the same valley.

The fifth class city of Whitesburg, with some 1,600 residents, is 151 road miles southeast of downtown Lexington, via the Mountain Parkway and Ky 15, and 31 road miles east south-east of Hazard. It was founded in 1842 on land offered by Stephen Hiram Hogg to attract the new county's seat from the Adams settlement, two miles up North Fork, where the first session of the county's court had been held. It was named for Daugherty White of Clay County who introduced Letcher's enactment bill in the state legislature. The local post office, the county's first, was established on February 10, 1843 as Whitesburgh Courthouse with William Caudle, postmaster. Courthouse was soon dropped as was, in 1892, the terminal "h".

The town was incorporated on March 6, 1876, and until the arrival of the railroad in 1911-12 and the building of the area's coal camps shortly thereafter, it was the county's only town of any significance. By the late 1920s it had become Letcher's main shipping point and trading center. As with other Kentucky River towns, though, its physical situation on the river and between hills has limited expansion, and its population...
has never increased from a high of 1,800 in 1930. Yet an influential regional media center and its public radio station, a community college, and a progressive newspaper have given Whitesburg a cosmopolitan atmosphere shared by few other mountain towns.²

Post Offices on Letcher County’s Poor Fork of the Cumberland River and its Several Branches

The fifty mile-long Poor Fork heads less than one fourth of a mile from the Virginia line, two miles south of Blitvia, near the highest point in Letcher County’s Pine Mountain. It extends between this range and Black Mountain to join Clover Fork at Baxter in Harlan County. Here it helps form the main Cumberland River, one of Kentucky’s major waterways. Poor Fork is said to have been early named for the unproductivity of the soil along its banks. Eight post offices served its Letcher County residents.

The earliest of these offices was Colliers Creek, somewhere on this four mile-long Poor Fork branch, settled early by the Backs, Morgans, and Colliers.³ William Collier was its only postmaster between August 5 and late December 1858.

The Partridge [pa:t/rihdj, though often pronounced pah/rihdj by older residents] post office was the next to be established, on January 7, 1869, probably at the mouth of Little Joseph Day Branch. Rebecca Ann and Joseph Day were its first two postmasters. It is traditionally believed to have been named for the many game birds early encountered in that vicinity. In 1923 Jess B. Eversole had the office moved some 4 ½ miles down the Fork to a site just above the mouth of Lewis Creek. It is now on US 119 (which parallels the entire Poor Fork route), 1 ¼ miles below the mouth of Colliers, one mile from the Harlan County line, and eighteen miles southwest of Whitesburg.

The Lewis Creek area had earlier been served by two offices. The Lewis Creek office operated at the mouth of this stream between October 7, 1878 and mid-November 1888, supplying the needs of a settlement called Claysville for the family of Jesse Clay, the first of its two postmasters. The creek probably honored the family of John J. Lewis, a Harlan County judge, born at the mouth of Colliers Creek. On April 5, 1906 this office was re-established as Path, named for a small local road. Millie A. Jenkins served as Path’s only postmaster through September 30, 1907.

The first of the two Oven Fork post offices was established by David M. Collier on February 6, 1879, probably up what is now Meadow Fork but which, according to turn-of-the-twentieth-century maps, was an extension of the stream for which it was named.⁴ This stream, probably settled before 1800 by the Backs (Backs) and other families of Thuringian descent, is said to have been named for the open ovens used by the early German settlers to produce bricks for local chimneys or, more likely, to bake their bread. The stream is now entirely called Franks Creek, a name earlier limited to a 3 ½ mile-long upper branch. Sometime later, but before the First World War, the office was half a mile up Meadow Branch of Poor Fork, a separate stream, four miles above (east of) the mouth of Oven Fork, and 11 ½ miles southeast of Whitesburg, where it closed in April 1922.

In the spring of 1945 the Oven Fork post office, with Winnie Sumpter, postmaster, was re-established nearly half a mile below the mouth of Oven Fork (by the Franks Creek) and, till January 1993, served the scattered homes along a 2 ½ mile stretch of US 119.

Descendants of Samuel and Rebecca Maggard, who settled on Poor Fork before 1810, gave their name to the Maggard post office. This occupied two sites from February 5, 1885 through June 1911, first at the mouth of Maggard Branch, two miles below (southwest of) Partridge’s first location, and then at the mouth of Colliers, 1 ½ miles further downstream. David W. Webb, the first postmaster, was succeeded by James T. Maggard, a mill owner, in 1887.

On January 5, 1892 John S. Coldiron established the Eolia [e/oh/lee, e/oh/luh] post office at or near the mouth of Meadow Fork, half a mile below the old Franks-Smith Creeks confluence where, after several vicinities moves, it continues to serve the entire upper Poor Fork valley. No one knows how or why it was so named. Speculations include someone’s taste in classical literature, from the Greek mythological Aeolus, the wind god (could it have been named on a very windy day?); a famous brand of piano and organ no one recalls; or a feminine name (though none of that name are included in area censuses.)

The least recalled, shortest lived, unlocated, and inexplicably named office of Vada [va:dah] occupied two sites somewhere above Oven Fork from March 30, 1900 through 1902, with Wilson C. Mullins, the first of its three postmasters.
Post Offices in the Valleys of the North Fork of the Kentucky River below Whitesburg: Bull Creek

Bull Creek is the higher of the two peaks of the Carcassonne Community Center and extends for nearly six miles to the North Fork, a mile and a half within Letcher County, and a mile above Cornettsville. Three Letcher post offices are known to have served its primary valley and a branch.

The Arminta post office, whose name derivation is not known, was at the mouth of Mare Branch, three fourths of a mile within Letcher County, and 3 ¾ miles up Bull from North Fork. John Haynes and Pauline Blair operated it from June 23, 1905 through May 1919.

On March 27, 1907, Harrison Banks established a post office near the head of Montgomery Creek and named it Gander for the wild goose that would gather in that place every fall. By the 1920s, maybe earlier, the office had been moved across the mountain south of Montgomery, to a site three fourths of a mile up the Meadow Fork of Bull.

In 1923 the Rev. Hendrick D. Caudill, surveyor, teacher, and agricultural extension agent, opened a settlement school at a site about half a mile up the creek from Meadow Fork. He named it Carcassonne Cavefork as its physical layout reminded him of a photo he once saw of the famed cathedral town in the south of France. In 1937 the Gander post office was moved to the settlement school, and when Anna Caudill, Hendrick’s wife, became postmaster in 1939, she renamed it for the school. By the time the school was discontinued in 1974, the building was in use as a community center under the direction of the Caudills’ son Clifton. On the retirement of Carcassonne’s last postmaster, Clifton’s wife Ruby, in 1980, the office closed.

Line Fork Post Offices

Line Fork, or Line Fork Creek, as it’s often called by Letcher residents, is the first North Fork tributary to drain that county exclusively. It’s just short of the Harlan County line, at the northern edge of Pine Mountain, and extends for some twenty-seven miles east, north, and northwest to the North Fork at the Perry County line, just below the present site of Ulvah. According to the late Letcher historian Harry Caudill, the stream was named by pioneers Gideon Ison, Gideon Ingram, and William Cornett who, on arriving there in 1790, spotted a long line of marked trees allegedly hacked by land agents to delimit boundaries for American war veterans. Samuel Cornett, William’s brother, later settled in this valley, and was his family’s Letcher County progenitor.

The earliest Line Fork post office may have been Cornett’s, established on May 31, 1848 by a later Samuel Cornett. On December 12, 1850, though, Nathaniel B. Kelly had the name changed to Boone Valley. It closed in December 1853. It may have been on (or at the mouth of) Cornetts Branch, fourteen miles up the creek from North Fork, that’s known to have been settled by Samuel Cornett whose family were its only inhabitants for much of the nineteenth century. But it’s not known to what Boone Valley referred. Historian William T. Cornett thought that whatever it was had been named for one Boone Cornett of that family. But no such person is listed in Cornett family records.

The mouth of Cornetts Branch was the first site of the Line Fork post office itself which Oliver G Halcomb (or Holcomb), the local magistrate, established on May 5, 1879. It was soon the center of a village of some 400 residents, several mills, and Gideon Ison’s store. It survived an intermittent operation and a name change in 1890 to Linefork. By 1931 it was serving a community then, as yet, called Kingdom Come, half a stream mile above its original location. It still operates, just below the Four Square Church, the Kingdom Come Settlement (Elementary) School, and the Kingdom Come State Park.

Three post offices in succession served the upper end of the Line Fork valley. The first was Arthur, established by Clark Cornett on August 15, 1883, nine miles above (west of) the Line Fork post office, probably at the mouth of Long Branch. In November 1892 it was moved a mile upstream, probably to Koyles Branch, and closed in November 1897. Historian Cornett wondered if it had been named for then U.S. President Chester Alan Arthur, for this was then a heavily Republican area.

On June 7, 1907 Charlie McKnight opened the Bear Branch post office at the mouth of this 2 ½ mile-long north side tributary of Line Fork to serve a community that may also have been called Melton for one or more area families. The office closed in mid-November 1908.

One or more Gilley families gave their name to the third upper Line Fork post office. It was established at the mouth of Koyles Branch by Martha Lewis who
called it Gilley since her first choice, Arthur, probably for its predecessor, had been preempted in 1898 by another Arthur in Edmonson County. Gilley opened on June 24, 1914 with Henry T. Holcomb, its first postmaster. In 1935 it was moved one mile up the Fork to the mouth of Jakes Creek; and in mid-1939 was moved another 1 ¼ miles up to serve the Head of Line Fork neighborhood, at a site just west of Bear Branch. Here it closed at the end of 1988. A little over nine miles up Line Fork, just below the mouth of Big Branch, was the first of the two aptly named Chestnut Hill post office sites. This office was first operated between December 6, 1890 and June 23, 1892 by Moses S. Ison. It was re-established on November 14, 1893 by Monroe Holcomb who, in 1900, had it moved three fourths of a mile downstream to the mouth of Whitaker Branch where it closed in September 1904.

From February 25, 1921 to 1988 the lower end of Big Branch was served by another post office. Finding his preferred name Meadowville in use in Whitley County, Major Corbett then proposed the name Skyline for, it’s been said, he envisioned a time when mail would be carried by air. That, or a more prosaic and obvious explanation. Most recently this office was one fourth of a mile up Big Branch from Line Fork, just above the old Big Branch School.

From the First World War till 1986 the area at the mouth of Line Fork, twelve stream miles below Whitesburg, was served by the Ulvah (Uhl/vuh or Uhl/vee) post office. This office began on November 1, 1897, with William T. Haney, postmaster, as Gourd (name derivation unknown). Sometime before 1907, for reasons also unknown, the office was moved 2 ½ miles up the North Fork to a site just above the mouth of Talent Branch (across from the future Red Star mining company’s camp).

In 1912 the L&N Railroad reached Gourd’s first post office site and, it’s said, named its local station for these lines from the Scottish poet Thomas Campbell’s 1803 ballad “Lord Ullin’s Daughter”:

Oh, who be ye would cross Lochgyle, this dark and stormy water? Oh, I’m the chief of Ulva’s isle, and this is Lord Ullin’s daughter.”

The ballad tells the familiar Scottish story of the rich man’s daughter and her lover who, on eloping, are pursued by her angry parent, come to the banks of a stream where they hire a boat to take them across. But the boat sinks in a sudden storm and they are drowned, leaving the grieving father to regret the chase and forgive the lover.

By March 1914 the Gourd post office had been moved half a mile further up North Fork to a point half a mile below the mouth of Orchard Branch and assumed the Ulvah name. Sometime before 1919 the Ulvah office was returned to the vicinity of its first site to serve the Ulvah Station and several area coal camps, truck mines, and sawmills. By the time it closed in 1926 the office was in the community’s only remaining store, one fourth of a mile above the Line Fork confluence and the Perry County line.

Serving a small North Fork coal mine and camp and the Pershing (rail) Station, two miles above the mouth of Line Fork, was the Bluefield post office. The station’s name, undoubtedly that of America’s World War One commander, was first proposed for the office, but gave way to Bluefield, possibly for the West Virginia coal town. It operated from April 17, 1920, with Charles W. Murphy, its first postmaster, through July 1928.

Gordon was established at the mouth of Trace Fork of Line Fork Creek on August 12, 1898 to serve one of eastern Kentucky’s most rugged, isolated areas, at the northern edge of Hurricane Gap Mountain. According to first postmaster Sarah V. Field’s Site Location Report, the first name proposed for her office, then just south of Trace Fork, was Benton (in use in Marshall County). But that was replaced by the name of an old area family of whom there is no record. The office closed in mid-November 1924, but was reopened on March 16, 1927 by Frank Helton at the mouth of Valley Branch, four miles above the Linefork post office’s present site. Here it remained through September 1992.

Just below the mouth of Turkey Creek is the Line Fork’s active Hallie post office. Alexander Whitaker, who established it on June 16, 1916, is said to have named it for a local lady who also remains unidentified.

Two offices served Turkey Creek, Line Fork’s first major tributary. Banks, established on April 21, 1900 and named for the family of its first postmaster Clem Banks, was mostly at the mouth of Bates Fork. 1 ½ miles up Turkey, and two miles south Hallie. It closed in 1965.
At two sites, two to three miles above Banks, in the vicinity of Turkey’s Deadening Branch, was Isaac and George B. Ison’s Josie post office. It operated from June 14, 1902 through July 1913, and it and its name source are unremembered today.

From June 11, 1905 through March 1912 Lucinda Morgan (Mrs. William B. Lusk) operated the Lusk post office one and a half miles up Line Fork. The Lusks were the descendants of Samuel Lusk (1785-1876) who settled at the mouth of Line Fork around 1806. William Lusk of Indian Bottom was the county surveyor in the 1870s.

The Flint post office, established by Loranza Boggs on September 14, 1907, could have been called Peach if there hadn’t then been an Oldham County office by that name. The Letcher office was 2 1/2 miles up Ingram Creek, a Line Fork branch, and may have been named for Flintfield Branch which joins Ingram one mile below the post office site. The office closed in April 1931, and was re-established on May 18, 1938, with Astor Boggs, postmaster, but closed for good in 1957.

Defeated Creek, a 4 1/2 mile-long westside branch of Line Fork, was one of several eastern Kentucky streams named early for an alleged white settler’s losing encounter with marauding Indians. From October 21, 1909 till 1943 Matilda Ison and her storekeeper brother Byrd Ison, children of Gideon, Jr. and Mary (Banks) Ison, ran the Defeated Creek post office on Line Fork, just above the creek’s mouth. According to Miss Ison’s Site Location Report, her new post office would be serving a locality called Hubert.

Post Offices on Rockhouse Creek and its Tributaries

Rockhouse Creek, which heads one third of a mile from the Pike County line, west of the old Etty post office, extends for some twenty-five miles roughly southwest to the North Fork at Blackey. Among its earliest settlers were the family of James Collins, a Methodist preacher from Virginia, who arrived at the mouth of Camp Branch in the winter of 1803-04.

According to tradition, the family was kept by the snow and cold from building more permanent quarters and were forced to erect a makeshift shelter under a rockhouse on the banks of the creek that thus took its name. It’s also been said that Camp Branch was named for the Collins’ winter camp. Both streams were so named by 1817, according to Clay County order books of that year. Over the years, nineteen post offices served the residents of the main Rockhouse valley and six more served Camp Branch families.

The first Rockhouse post office, just above the mouth of Camp Branch, was appropriately named Rockhouse. It was established on July 31, 1876 with Millard Collins, its first postmaster, and within a few years was serving several stores, James M. Collins’s mill, and other businesses. (For awhile, from August 1878 to February 1879, the office was called Collins with Millard and James its postmasters, and for some unknown reason was listed in Post Office Department records as a separate office) Rockhouse closed in January 1905. By today’s roads (Ky 931 via Camp Branch and Sand Lick Creek) the office site is only nine miles north of Whitesburg.

Camp Branch Post Offices

The first office in this stream valley was Lucas which operated four miles up the branch, just below its head. between September 23, 1880 and early January 1884. Samuel Breeding, its first postmaster, preferred the small community’s full name, Lucastown, a name still identifying that site on published maps. From September 14, 1891 till late July 1892 the community was served by another post office, Aaron, with William and Mary E. Lucas, its only postmasters. Both the village, then apparently called Aaronsville, and the two post offices, were probably named for Aaron Lucas (1827-1923), William’s father.

Less than a mile below Lucas(town) and Aaron(sville) was the Lester post office that Samuel T. Webb, a school teacher, established on September 28, 1893 to serve several area mills. It’s said to have been named for a well known area preacher, about whom I know nothing. It closed in 1947.

Then there was Effie (derivation unknown) run by Thomas Bowens between June 15 and September 9, 1897, somewhere between the mouth of Camp Branch and the mouth of the latter’s Little Sandlick Branch, near the site of the later Polly.

Polly, named for the local descendants of pioneer Edward Polly (1758-1845), began as the post office of Fall, maintained by Sarah Polly between January 8, 1902 and mid-January 1905. It was re-established as Polly on April 27, 1909, one fourth of a mile up Little Sandlick two (of today’s) road miles from the main Rockhouse Creek, and run by the brothers James M. and Andrew J. Clay, neighbors of the Pollys, till
September 1921. On June 15, 1935 Edward D. Polly moved his Sandlick post office to the mouth of Little Sandlick and renamed it Polly. It too closed in 1947. Neither Fall nor James Clay’s first name preference, Luna, have been derived.13

From August 5, 1903 through 1913, the Sandlick post office served residents of Sandlick Creek, which extends for 4 ¼ miles from its head, just south of Sandlick Gap, to the North Fork within Whitesburg’s present western limits. Georgia and Charles H. Back were the office’s only postmasters at a site one fourth of a mile south of Jim Hogg Branch, about a mile below the head of the creek, and 2 ½ miles south of Polly. It was re-established, also as Sandlick, on November 10, 1923 by Edward D. Polly, but it’s not known if it was then at the mouth of Little Sandlick or if it moved there in 1935 when Edward D. had it renamed Polly.

Three post offices served the upper end of Rockhouse Creek. The first, Razorblade, was at the mouth of Razorblade Branch, 5 ¼ miles above the mouth of Camp Branch. Established on April 9, 1883 by John T. Bentley, it lasted till January 1887. Neither its name nor the stream’s has been derived.

On September 18, 1889, at or near the mouth of Mill Creek, some 500 yards above Razorblade, Thomas M. Mead (sic) established the Deane post office. Named, it’s said, for a local man (identity unknown), it was moved several times in its vicinity, and is now one fourth of a mile up Mill Creek.

The third area office was Democrat. This was a transfer, on February 8, 1893, of an office called Stick that had been established on February 12, 1889 in Knott County, some three miles north, by Elhanan King. Probably at the outset, but certainly by 1913, Democrat was at the mouth of Big Branch, two (current road) miles on Ky 7 below Deane. In recent years, till it closed in 1985, it was on Ky 7, opposite the mouth of Lower Appletree Branch, half a mile above Big Branch. Though no one seems to know the source of Stick, everyone agrees that Democrat was named for the one lone Democrat in a staunchly Republican precinct. Mr. King himself.

Once a thickly settled community with over 1,000 residents, Jeremiah is now but a settlement of modest bungalows stretched out along Ky 7 and Rockhouse Creek. It is centered on its active post office between Spring and Doty Branches. 4 ½ miles above Blackey. This office was established on May 27, 1884 and named for its first postmaster, a local storekeeper Jeremiah P. Dixon (1856-1932). Dixon was called “The Prophet” by his neighbors, and indeed his middle initial stood for “Prophet,” for he was named for the Biblical prophet Jeremiah.

Somewhere in the Rockhouse valley (site unlocated but known to have been one mile east of the main stream and between the Rockhouse and Deane post offices) was an office actually named Profitt. But it was named for local families of that name. Isom Sergent, who was later to establish the Isom post office, was its only postmaster between May 28, 1891 and early June 1893. The Profitts were the descendants of one Jeremiah Profitt, whose name in county records was sometimes spelled Prophet, and his wife Phoebe (nee Roark).14

Another short-lived (June 3, 1892 to mid-June 1894) and unlocated post office on Rockhouse Creek, also between Deane and the Rockhouse post office, was Cline. The Clines were a Pike and Floyd family whose connection with Letcher County and Martin V. Bates, the office’s only operator, is unknown.

The Colson [kohl/suh] post office was established on May 26, 1897 by Elisha L. Creech, and named for David Grant Colson (1861-1904) of Middleborough, then representing eastern Kentucky in the U.S. Congress. It may first have been located somewhere on Camp Branch, but by 1902 is known to have been one fourth of a mile up the Branch near the Rockhouse post office, and two miles below Fall (Polly). It was later moved one mile up Rockhouse (north) to the mouth of Trace Fork, and when it closed in 1975 was half a mile up Trace (and Rt. 1410) just above the Andy Hollow (now Camp Fork).

About half a mile up Trace from Colson’s last site was Saluda [suh/luh/duh] which May Cook operated from May 30, 1907 through July 1908. While the name derives from some Indian word for “corn river,” suggesting that corn was once planted on the banks of a stream, and identifies features in Virginia and the Carolinas, the reason for its application to a Letcher County post office is unknown.15

A post office called Joseph, at two locations on or near Rockhouse Creek, was operated by J. Edward and Walter B. Thomas between January 25, 1898 and mid-February 1902. The sites may have been just below the Betze (later Sackett) post office, for Site Location Reports sited them four to five miles south of Bath (in Knott County) and 4 ½ to five miles north of Tillie. Eva, for his nine year old daughter, was J.
Edward's first name choice, while Bill may have been Walter's first preference. But Joseph has not been identified.

The Betze [bɛtЗ] post office was just below the mouth of Daniels Branch, and three miles below Camp Branch. Established on November 26, 1901 by John W. Collins, it's said to have been named for a Mrs. Betze Collins, a highly respected old lady in the community. But there is no known relationship between her and John W. The office was discontinued in mid-November 1916, but was re-established at or close to the first site by J.R. Maggard on September 12, 1928. His first name choice Betze was succeeded by Sackett which, according to Keitha McKenzie, Maggard's granddaughter, was the name of a then postal inspector. This office closed for good in 1957.

Now at the junction of Ky 15 and 7, where Stamper Fork meets Rockhouse Creek, and 1 ⅓ miles below (southwest of) Betze-Sackett, is the Isom [ɪз/əm] post office. It was established on February 10, 1898 at the mouth of Little Colly Creek, one fourth of a mile above, and, with its community, was named for the Isom families who had settled in the area after the Civil War. The spelling of the name, though, may suggest that of Isom Sergent, its first postmaster. In recent years, the name has mostly identified the active post office, while the community has been locally known as The Stock Sale, referring to its role, since the 1930s, as a market for area livestock.

Two miles up Little Colly Creek from Rockhouse and the Isom post office was Tillie. This began on June 14, 1890 as Hogg for a branch of this important Letcher County family. But on February 4, 1895, Ira S. Hill, its first postmaster, had the name changed to Tillie for the family of James M. Tilley (ne ca. 1830) and his wife Mary. Hogg's first site is not known but, as Tillie, the office was at several locations on Little Colly, including the junction of the old routes on Ky 7 and 15, and the site of the Little Colly Church, half a mile above its last site, at the mouth of Cow Branch, to which it had moved by 1926, and where it closed in late May 1933.

Grouse, Tocsin, and Greenleaf were short-lived post offices in the Rockhouse system that operated from 1906 till just before the First World War. Neither their names nor their locations have been precisely derived.

Grouse, between May 18, 1906 and mid-June 1912, may have been at the head of Low Gap Branch of Elk Creek, 2 ½ miles above the later Blackey post office's first site. William Dixon was the first of its two postmasters. (Could it have been named for the game bird?)

Tocsin [təks\n] was established on June 22, 1906, 1 ½ miles up Beaversdam Branch, four miles above Colson, and four miles west of Democracy. Postmaster Ezekiel Elberson Bentley's first name choice was Don. By 1909, when Henry Baker was postmaster, it had probably moved to the main Rockhouse Creek where it closed at the end of April 1914. (Could there be any tie-in with the Anglo-French word for a bell or the sound made by one?)

Letcher County's Greenleaf (not to be confused with the earlier offices of this name in Floyd and Knott Counties), was established on October 22, 1906 with Cordelia Hammons, postmaster, somewhere three miles southeast of Amelia and three miles north of Isom. In March 1908 Millie and George A. Combs had it moved 2 ½ miles east to serve the village of Greenleaf whose location has not been determined. According to Combs family records, George A. and Millie were then living in the vicinity of Elkhorn Branch (now Race Track Hollow), between Sackett and Isom, at or certainly near the earlier Joseph (see above). Wherever the Greenleaf community and office were, the latter closed in March 1912.

About halfway up the 2 ½ mile-long Caudills Branch of Rockhouse Creek, and 3 ¾ miles from North Fork, William Caudill, on December 26, 1908, established the David post office named for David Caudill. In 1916 the office was moved three fourths of a mile down the branch, but in 1923 it was moved by William Mandt one mile north to serve the Caudills Branch Coal Company camp and Walbot Station on the L&N's new Caudills Branch spur. By 1926 the coal company had become Carbon Glow and, on February 16 of that year, the post office took that name. It's believed that, in seeking a name to mark the superior quality of its coal, the company modified "glowing coal," which had that connotation, by taking "carbon" as a more impressive rendition of coal and reversing the words to come up with the catchy Carbon Glow. Or, as county historian William T. Cornett suggested, the company may have sought to trade on the success of the Welsh mining towns called "Glo" this and that, as did the East Tennessee Coal Company in Perry County which had founded and named a camp Glomawr in 1914. The Carbon Glow post office closed in 1957, and some slate dumps are now
the only evidence of the mining that characterized the upper end of the Caudill Branch valley for several decades.

By the early 1920s two stations on the newly established Rockhouse Branch of the L&N were serving several recently opened coal mines in the lower end of that valley. One station, at the mouth of Caudill Branch, was Duo. On November 6, 1926 Roger F. Cooper opened a post office here that, instead of his preferred Duo, was called Letcher for the county. Sometime later the post office was moved three fourths of a mile down the creek to serve the Letcher Station and the Presbyterian-owned Stuart Robinson School near the south end of Crases Branch. After the school closed in the late 1950s, its campus was taken over by the short-lived Calvary College.

To be continued . . . .

**WWII Comic Cachets of Seargent John Ludway**

The cover illustrated above is one of only three pieces in my collection featuring the comic artistry of Seargent John Ludway, and I would be very interested in hearing from La Posta readers who might have similar work in their collections.

Seargent Ludway was assigned to Headquarters Detachment of the Army’s Ninth Corps, and the covers in my collection date from November 1942, when the unit was stationed at Fort Lewis, Washington, to March 1944 when it was at Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Georgia. Ninth Corps headquarters remained in the U.S. throughout most of the war. It was transferred to Hawaii in October 1944 and on to the Philippines in July 1945.

I have no details regarding Seargent Ludway other than his obvious skill with pen & ink, and would be delighted to correspond with readers who might be able to shed more light on the man and his work. Please contact Richard W. Helbock at La Posta. [helbock@la-posta.com]
The Post Offices of Letcher County, Kentucky: Part II

by Robert M. Rennick

(continued from Volume 32, No. 6)

The North Fork Post Offices of Indian Bottom and Blackey

Half a mile above the mouth of Rockhouse Creek was the nineteenth century settlement of Indian Bottom, named for the many Indian relics early found along the North Fork banks in that vicinity. On June 10, 1856 Stephen Hogg established the Indian Bottom post office which, for the next fifty years, served several mills and stores maintained by the Caudills, Dixons, and Backs of the lower Rockhouse area. On September 10, 1908, at the mouth of Elk Creek, two miles below the Indian Bottom post office, James H. Brown established the Blackey post office which he named for his older brother Joseph Preston Brown (1860-1943), a respected local carpenter called "Joe Blackey" for his dark complexion.

By the time it closed in late February 1913, the Blackey post office may have been serving the newly opened Blackey (rail) Station, a mile above Elk Fork and half a mile below Rockhouse Creek. To this site, shortly after the closing of Blackey, John II. Summer moved the Indian Bottom post office which, till then, had a non-continuous existence above the mouth of Rockhouse. On November 12, 1919 Richard B. Caudill had that office renamed Blackey for the station and the newly incorporated community that was growing up to serve newly opened area coal mines.

By the late 1920s, with a number of stores and shops, mills, a bank, a theater, and other businesses and a population of some 890, the town sought to rival Whitesburg, sixteen miles upstream. Then came the 1927 flood, several fires, and the later depressed coal industry, from which the town never recovered. Yet the post office survives, and the town was recently re-incorporated with a population of 200. The famed Caudill store, run by the Joe Begleys, and long the community's center, is now a museum. Some homes remain along the strip once called Indian Bottom, though that name has been preserved only in two nearby churches.

Kings Creek Post Offices

The seven mile long Kings Creek was settled in the early nineteenth century by Fields, Hoggis, Cornetts, Halecombs, and Isoms and was so identified by the early 1840s. Yet no one knows for whom or what it was named. No known King families have been found among its early residents.

The first of the creek's post offices was appropriately called Kings Creek. This was established on January 8, 1877 with storekeeper David D. Fields, its first postmaster, and was soon serving several stores, mills, and a population of some 500. Its first known location was six miles up the creek, just below the present Rt. 931 (that extends along Cowan Creek). Around 1907 it was moved less than a mile above to a site at the mouth of Abner Branch. In February 1944 it was moved down the creek, to a site just above Fugate Branch (some eleven miles southwest of Whitesburg, via 931 and Cowan Creek) where it closed in 1984.

Just below the mouth of Kings Creek, ten miles below (west of) Whitesburg, storekeeper and lumberman George Hogg, descendant of the area's first settler James Hogg (ca. 1806), established a post office. The first name proposed was Swift Station, but it opened on January 5, 1891, as Roxana (rahx/nah/ee). According to historians, it was named for a local lady, but no such person, nor anyone of that name connected with the dominant Hogg family, has been identified. Whence Swift Station is even more curious since the railroad didn't arrive till 1912.

The post office of Grape served the middle section of Kings Creek from April 10, 1901 to mid-February 1913. Arnett and Isaac Mitchell were its first postmasters. It was on the creek, one fourth of a mile above the mouth of Lynn Branch, roughly halfway between Roxana and the Kings Creek office. Its name derivation can only be guessed at.

The Smoot Creek Post Office

The seven mile long Smoot Creek, which joins the North Fork eight miles below (west of) Whitesburg, had at least eight post offices, with several more serving the area around its mouth. Settled early in the nineteenth century by Combs, Fraziers, Pollys, and
Wrights, it had received its inexplicable name at least by the early 1840s. Smoot, a Dutch family name referring to one who renders lard, has never been found in Letcher County except as a nickname given to Moses Spencer Adams (1812-1890), son of Moses and Mary Garland Adams of the Pert Creek Adamses. But whether Adams was named for the creek or the creek was named for him is not known, and probably won’t be.

The earliest Smoot Creek post office was aptly called Smoot Creek and was established at least three miles up the creek by the blacksmith Jonathan (sic) H. Frazier on December 6, 1890. In 1908 it was moved to the mouth of the creek where it closed at the end of January 1914.

The vicinity to which Smoot Creek was moved in 1908 had an earlier post office, first called Mill when it opened on March 27, 1902 with Stephen P. Frazier, postmaster; but on August 24th of that year it was renamed Cromona. This is not to be confused with the later Cromona, the office that still serves the old coal town of Haymond (see below). It’s not known why the name of the north Italian town and province was given to either office. Cromona was discontinued in May 1906.

By 1915, after the arrival of the railroad and the establishment of its Smoot Creek Station, coal production began at the mouth of this stream. The first local mines were opened that year on land leased from Monroe Frazier by Dave Hayes (or Hays), a Whitesburg attorney, and his partners Charlie Back and John A. Webb, operating as the Dalna Coal Company. This had been named for Hayes’ eldest daughter Dalna (nee ca. 1901) who later married the Whitesburg banker Herman Hale. The camp and rail station soon took the name Dalna, as did the post office, re-established on July 1, 1918, with William B. Price, postmaster.

Several years later, the mine and camp were acquired by the Elsiecoal Mining Company and the post office, on July 18, 1923, took that name. The community and station, though, remained Dalna for awhile.

In 1930 the Elsiecoal Mining Company was discontinued. By then the community had extended at least a mile up Smoot Creek to the mouth of Johnson Branch where the commissary and several businesses were located. The Elsiecoal post office, though, remained at the mouth of Smoot when, on December 1, 1932, it and the station became Hot Spot. By then, the mines had been reopened by John P. Gorman’s Hot Spot Coal Company. On June 1, 1942, after O.J.E. Johnson and D.E.M. Howard acquired the mines and camp, the post office, still at the mouth of Smoot, took their company name Premium. By 1960 Hot Spot returned its station at the mouth of Smoot while the Premium Station served the Smoot Creek spur line two miles up the valley. The Premium post office continues to serve the Smoot valley, half a mile from the river, though what’s left of the community is still locally called Hot Spot. Hence Elsiecoal and Premium remain a mystery. (Perhaps, as local tradition goes, Elsie really was someone’s girlfriend.)

The county’s shortest run (September 7 through November 1900) and least remembered post office Fern was at the head of Trace Fork, 1 ½ miles up from Smoot Creek, just off the present Ky 15-160. Its name has not been derived. On October 24, 1906 Hiram Whitaker sought to re-establish the office to serve the growing Trace Fork area and named it Van, probably for Van B. Combs, one of the dominant area families. But in late January 1907 Whitaker’s authorization was rescinded. Then, on September 2, 1908, Fern’s only postmaster Shade R. Combs successfully opened the Van post office in his home at or near his first post office site.29 Sometime between 1937 and 1942 the Van office was moved to the mouth of Trace, four miles up Smoot Creek, and five miles northwest of Whitesburg, via Ky 15, where it ended in 1987.

A post office named Cup, also for reasons unknown, was authorized on June 11, 1906, but Robert Holcomb’s order was rescinded in February of the following year. However, on September 2, 1908, he succeeded in opening this office on Smoot, one and a half miles above (northeast of) the mouth of Trace. Henry B. and Allen Collins maintained the office through January 1914.

Then Allen Collins re-established the office on October 6, 1915 as Willa­face [with lab loo]. He remained as its postmaster here and at a site half a mile above (just below the head of) Smoot till it closed in mid-March 1929. According to (then) contemporaries, it was named for Wilks Lewis, of whom nothing seems to be known.

Another short-lived post office (April 8, 1907 to June 15, 1909) called Beefork [beef/la e] is said to have been at the mouth of Bee Tree Fork of Smoot, three miles from North Fork. This is curious, if that’s so, since at the time of its establishment the office would
have been at the first site of the Smoot Creek post office. Even more curious is the fact that, according to the July 1907 Site Location Report of its only postmaster William Banks, it was 3 1/2 miles west of (below) the Smoot Creek post office. Anyway, county historians have assumed that the name refers to the creek which may have been named for local honey bees.

Two Post Offices Serving Kingdom Come Creek

One of eastern Kentucky's more unusual and provocative names was applied early to the five mile long stream that joins the North Fork 8 1/2 miles below Whitesburg. According to J.A. Bowles of Whitesburg, in his 1949 county history, a man named King was the creek's first settler and that later arrivals, asking who had come there first, were customarily told that "King Done Come." Yet, according to the creek's own historian Marie Frazier Day, who took issue with this account, there is no record of any early settlers named King. The creek's first settlers were, in fact, the brothers George and John Ison who lived at its lower and upper ends, respectively. They were soon joined by Solomon Frazier and, later, by Banks, Caudills, Hamilton, Fields, and Days. Rather, she believes, the name came from the Lord's Prayer and had been given the stream by its highly religious first settlers.

The first of Kingdom Come's town post offices was established by George Stamper at its North Fork confluence and operated between May 26, 1899 and mid-September 1903. Since his name preference Dingus was in use in Morgan County, he named his office Alice but no one knows why. His next door neighbors, though, were Martin and Lucinda Akmon (sic) who had a fourteen year old daughter Alice who later married a Halcomb.

The other office was the equally enigmatic Oscaloosa [ah kuh loo suh] which may have been named for local honey bees. It was established on July 27, 1900 by storekeeper Harvey Ison, John's son, probably just above the mouth of Stillhouse Branch (now called Poplar Log Hollow). In 1910 Jasper Ison had it moved one mile down the creek to the mouth of Oldhouse Branch, one mile above North Fork. It later moved to a site just above the mouth of Frazier Branch, 1 1/4 miles from North Fork, where it closed in 1987.

So, why was the office called Oscaloosa instead of Kingdom Come or Kingdom Come Creek? By then, the Post Office Department was insisting on one word names (though some exceptions were being made), and probably also wished to avoid confusion with nearby Kings Creek. Oscaloosa (spelled Oskaloosa) is the name of towns and post offices in Illinois, Missouri, and Kansas, and was ultimately derived from an earlier town of that name in Iowa. Perhaps Letcher's was, too.

According to Mrs. Day, the name was suggested by Dr. Gideon Ison, a local man, and may have derived from the tale of the Indian chief with several beautiful wives whose favorite, the last and most beautiful of them, was aptly named Oscaloosa.

Henry Gannett, an early twentieth century U.S. government place names authority, traced the name to one of the seven wives of Chief Mahaska (or White Cloud (the Elder) of the Iowas. But this was discounted by John Rydjord in his Indian Place Names who pointed out that Mahaska's youngest and favorite wife was called Rantchewatine (which translates roughly as "female flying pigeon") and that none of his wives, nor those of his son, Mahaska II, were called Oskaloosa. Rydjord also questioned the romantic translation of Oskaloosa as "the last of the beautiful." But the name, he said, could have come from one of the wives of the Seminole chief Osceola, of whom, including their names, nothing is known. Or it could be a corruption of the Creek Okaloosa, meaning "black water." Or, according to the late Virgil Vogel, another authority on Native American names, it could have derived from Ishki (mother) and Isu (black) thus "black mother," and may have been a byname of Osceola's wife Chechoter (mourning dove) who is said to have been enslaved for having "black blood."

In any event, only the post office was Oscaloosa; the creek and what remains of its valley neighborhood have been Kingdom Come.

The Dry Fork Area Post Offices

The aptly named, 4 1/2 mile long Dry Fork, joins the North Fork just below the old Field post office site, five miles below Whitesburg. Its two post offices were Crown and Tyra.

Crown, whose name also remains underived, but has also been mostly confined to the post office, was established on April 22, 1898 with John C. Brown, its
first postmaster. (Could his name have been corrupted to Crown?) The office was on or just off Loggy Hollow, half a mile west of the Fork, where it remained till 1930 when it was removed by Maggie Taylor to the Fork itself. In 1937 Florence Brown had it moved one mile up the Fork to serve the community of Dry Fork, three miles up from the North Fork. Its operation was suspended in August 1990.

Tyra [tyrə] served the upper Dry Fork area, one mile north of Crown's post 1937 site, from April 6, 1905 to mid-November 1910. It was named for the local descendants of David Tyree, Sr. (ca. 1785-1876), a Dry Fork landowner and the grandfather of the first postmaster Rachel (Mrs. Elihu) Brown.

In 1912, at a site 1.4 miles below the mouth of Dry Fork, and six miles below Whitesburg, the L&N Railroad opened a station it called Uz. W.S. Morton, Jr., the engineer responsible for laying the tracks through that stretch of the North Fork valley, later accounted for that name. From the very beginning, he reported, the railroad had problems in this area: property owners at first refused to let surveying parties cross their land; then they wouldn't sell the right-of-way or the depot site for a reasonable price; the contractor was falling behind in his commitments, and he and the resident engineer were always arguing; and bootleggers kept the construction camp in an uproar. Finally, after listening to a summary of Morton's complaints, the L&N's supervisory engineer, J.E. Willoughby, suggested the analogy to the difficulties of the biblical Job and agreed to Morton's request that they name the new station for Job's homeland. It became Uz, but it's always been pronounced yu/zzee.

The post office that served the station and surrounding area began as Field, just above the mouth of Dry Fork. It opened on March 2, 1906 with Clinton Boatright, its first postmaster, and may have been named for descendants of pioneer James Fields. On September 10, 1914 J. Henry Brown had it moved to the station where it too became Uz and closed in 1939.

Cowan Creek Post Offices

This 6 ½ mile long stream (sometimes called Big Cowan to distinguish it from Little Cowan, its largest tributary), heads in Pine Mountain and joins the North Fork at Ice, three miles below Whitesburg. It’s said to have been named for the brothers Thomas and Bill (?) Cowan [kowun or Kown] who had explored and patented the valley in the very early nineteenth century but never settled there. The first known permanent settlers were Samuel and John Maggard who were followed by Fields, Brown, Banks, Blair, and Day families.

Mandrake was the first of Cowan’s four post offices. Crockett M. and James R. Fields maintained it between May 9, 1884 and mid-January 1917 in a stretch between Sturgill Branch and Beetree Fork (now called Long Branch). A possible name source is the mandrake or may apple, a highly poisonous perennial herb of the barberry family.

According to tradition, when a visiting postal inspector Ritter Myers arrived at the mouth of Cowan in February 1896 the North Fork there was so jammed with ice that he easily persuaded the postmaster-designate Leslie Brown to name the new office Ice. It opened on December 23, 1897 and by the First World War was serving a modest coal camp. Both were gone by 1934.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries newspaper stories of events in faraway places inspired a number of American place names. One such place, a post office established at the mouth of Cowan on July 30, 1901 (with Nancy Day, its first postmaster), was Dongola [dahng/uh/luh]. In 1896 the American media reported the capture of the Sudanese city of Dungulah (or Dongola) [dahng/uh/luh] on the Nile, the capital of the old Nubian Kingdom, thus suppressing the Mahdist rebellion and assuring continued English control of that large territory. After several moves along the creek, this Letcher office ended in 1984 at the mouth of Grapevine Branch, two miles above the North Fork.

The family of Clark (1880-1956) and Dimah (nee 1878) Day, which moved to Cowan in the late nineteenth century, gave its name to the Day post office at several sites just above the earlier Mandrake. It operated as an independent office, with Mrs. Bonnie Hammond Day and others of that family as postmasters, from 1937 to 1959. Then it became a Whitesburg rural branch at the mouth of Long Branch, 2 ½ miles above Dongola.

Other North Fork Post Offices Below Whitesburg

A mile and a half below Tolson Branch, midway between Blackey and Roxana, was Gideon and Jonah Ison's inexplicably named Extra. This office oper
ated from August 5, 1905 through November 1912, and is now nearly altogether forgotten. Gideon's first name preference may have been the equally unexplained Excellent.

The Whitco [wiht'koh] post office served the Whitesburg Coal Company camp and its rail station from January 22, 1918 to 1933. Edward L. Williams was its first postmaster. Surviving fires and flooding, the site is now a working class residential suburb of Whitesburg, two miles above. Attempts to incorporate it into the larger town have thus far been unsuccessful.

Post Offices in the Valleys of the Kentucky River’s North Fork Above Whitesburg: Crafts Colly Creek

Known first as simply Colly Creek, for reasons as yet unknown, but since the early twentieth century as Crafts Colly Creek, this 4 ½ mile long stream joins the North Fork just below Ermine, some 2 ½ miles above Whitesburg. The still numerous Craft family descend from Archealous [ahr'cheel'a] Craft, a North Carolina-born Revolutionary War veteran, who settled on this stream around 1810.

The earliest of Craft Colly’s six post offices was Colly. This was established on June 17, 1886 by local wagonmaker and cooper James B. Stallard about half a mile up the creek from North Fork. Some time before 1904 it had been moved a mile and a half further up this stream to a site just above Allen Branch where it closed in 1932.

The first of Letcher County’s two Burdine [bird' dan] post offices was operated by Shade R. Combs between January 25, 1898 and September 1902. It was a relatively short but undetermined distance above Colly’s Allen Branch site, and probably served that area before Colly was moved there. Its name source was most likely Burdine Collins (1882-1951), the son of Combs’ neighbors Henry P. and Clary Collins, and a grandson of an earlier Burdine (or Berdine) Collins.

The still active Ermine [er'main] post office at the mouth of Crafts Colly, was established on October 22, 1904 and named for Ermine Hall, the stepson of its first postmaster Sallie Hall. Ermine Hall (ne October 1896) was the son of John A. (Johnny) Hall and his second wife Mollie (nee Wright). Johnny married Sallie Ann Reynolds only months before she opened the post office. Actually Ermine was only one of the two names proposed for her office; the other was Morgan for another prominent Letcher County family. That the office might also have been named for Ermine Webb and/or Ermine Craft, as has also been suggested, is unfounded for no such Letcher Countians have been identified.

Serving the upper end of Crafts Colly between June 1, 1905 and mid-November 1919, at a site some 2 ½ miles above the Colly post office, was Hilliard. First postmaster Samuel Adington’s preferred name Alpha was then in use in Clinton County. Neither name has been explained.

Neither has Dock Adams’ short-lived (August 19, 1907 August 1909) Orilena near the head of what was then the Right Fork of Crafts Colly and is now Company Branch.

Between June 6, 1921 and 1975 the upper end of Crafts Colly was served by the Southdown post office. Probably named for a local herd of this breed of sheep, it was opened by William M. Holbrook just below the head of the creek, a mile or so above the earlier Hilliard. In 1937 it was moved down the creek to the forks (now the mouth of Company Branch), four miles north of North Fork and Ermine. From 1965 to 1975 Southdown was half a mile above Company Branch as a rural branch of the Ermine office.

The Bottom Fork Post Office

The three mile long Bottom Fork, joining the North Fork at Mayking, was named for the large level clearing at or near its mouth that is said to have been the site of one of the earliest settlements in Letcher County. In fact, Adams, one of the earliest offices in the upper North Fork watershed, may have been on its banks between January 4, 1833 and December 26, 1835.

A much later office was established at the head of the Fork on June 4, 1891. According to tradition, it was named for its first postmaster William G. (Bill) Breeding; or rather, it was coined from Bill and the route that nineteenth century travelers followed between Whitesburg (and points west) and Pound Gap (the way into Virginia and points east.) Thus Bilvia [bihl'vee'uh or bihl'vee]”. It closed in 1945.

The community and post office of Mayking, at the mouth of Bottom Fork, five miles above Whitesburg, was on land first settled by Adams’ only postmaster Benjamin Webb, the son of James Webb, a leader of the pioneer Adams colony. Before Mayking was established on January 25, 1894, the community may have been called Bottom Fork. The origin of the
Mayking name has long been debated. Some say that when the first postmaster Isom Gibson failed to win approval of any of the names he had submitted to the Post Office Department, he accepted the name suggested to him, that of a recently deceased friend of a postal official. He is said to have later (January 7, 1906) received a letter from a Leominster, Massachusetts resident stating that she had named the post office for a girl friend. It’s also been said to have been named for the wife or daughter of an early coal operator but nothing is known of them.

The Mayking post office may first have been a short distance up Bottom Fork, but by 1904 it was on the North Fork, just above the confluence. Ten years later John W. Adams moved it to his store by the new rail station, one four-fifth of a mile below. By 1924 it was back to its site just above the confluence where it remains. For much of the post World War II era, Mayking has been a trade center for area truck mines and the home of some of greater Whitesburg’s more successful business and professional families.

Margaret Webb Killings’ post office, established on March 31, 1898, may have been somewhere on Bottom Fork for this was her first name preference. But instead it was named Margaret, and by 1906 was on what’s now Cram Creek (but was then Mill Creek). By 1911 it had moved down Cram (Mill) to its North Fork confluence, one mile below Mayking, where it closed in November 1912.27

Pine Creek, which joins the Bottom Fork just yards from the North Fork, had one post office, the short lived (February 14, 1906 – mid-July 1910) and unexplained Lima. It was 2 ½ miles south of Bilvia, two miles northeast of Margaret, and 2 ½ miles above Mayking. Bettie Jane Kincer was its only postmaster.

Thornton Creek’s Post Offices

Thornton Creek joins the North Fork 1 ½ miles above Mayking. According to the late Harry Caudill, the first settlers of this four mile long stream found trees along its banks marked with the name “Thornton Crawford,” or simply “T. Crawford” with the date 1772-1774. Nothing is known of this man; he did not settle on the creek nor leave any progeny in the county.

Arch was the earliest of the Thornton valley’s six post offices, and operated from September 22, 1884 - August 1887, some three miles up the creek. It was most likely named for its only postmaster Archibald J.

Jenkins (1844-1908), son of William and Mary (Cornett) Jenkins. Or, as some believe, it could have been named for his father-in-law Archelous Craft.26

One half mile below (south of) Arch was probably the first site of Evans. This office was established on February 19, 1891 by storekeeper Simpson Evans Adams (1857-1934) who undoubtedly gave it his middle name, and was first operated by his wife Sarah (nee Webb). In 1900 it was probably moved to the Arch site, and closed at the end of May 1913.

At the mouth of Thornton Creek, to serve the Webb store and one or more Craft family flour mills, and the community growing up around them, Nehemiah M. Webb, on May 29, 1890, established the Sergent [sir'djuhnt] post office. This was named for a county family descended from the brothers David (1809-1898) and Andrew. Nehemiah, who was later to become a Whitesburg postmaster and then editor of the county’s weekly newspaper, The Mountain Eagle, was succeeded in September 1894 by his brother John S. 28

In 1914 the Sergent post office and town were moved to the mouth of Webb Branch where, three years later, the first of several coal companies opened its area mine. By then the L&N had opened a station at the mouth of Thornton Creek and called it Basin. Though the mines closed in the early 1930s most of the home-owning miners remained to work in other county mines. The town was almost abandoned after mining anywhere in the county became unprofitable in the late 1950s, but was revived by the resettlement of a number of county families coming home from northern sojourns. Since the post office closed in 1985, local people have been served by the Thornton post office which had moved to the mouth of the creek after Sergent’s move to Webbs Branch.

On March 20, 1900 Drucilla J. Webb opened the Ola office to serve a store and school in a highly populated area two miles south of Evans and two miles up the creek from the North Fork. Mrs. Webb was the daughter of Arch and Jane Craft Jenkins and the first wife of John S. Webb who ran the Sergent and later the Thornton post offices. After her untimely death in 1904, one of her successors was Elizabeth (Collins) Webb, John’s second wife. The office closed in January 1908. No one with this obviously female name has been accounted for in the Jenkins or Webb families.
The Thornton name was applied to a valley post office established by Lizzie Holbrook on May 9, 1908, 1 ½ miles up from Sergent on the North Fork. In 1922, after Sergent’s move to Webb Branch, Mrs. Holbrook’s successor, John S. Webb, had it moved to the old Sergent site to serve Bastin Station and the Bastin and Apex coal camps there. It continues at this location.

Probably at the old Ola site, to serve an Elkhorn Collieries Coal Company camp, was the first location of a post office established on March 30, 1923 as Farraday. The first name proposed for it was Hattie for the fifteen year old daughter of its first postmaster Liza Bates and her husband Rob. Whence Farraday is not known. There is no evidence that it was named for the English scientist Michael Faraday (1791-1867) or for an Allalur Day, as has been suggested, and the county has had no Farraday families.

In 1930 the office was moved one mile south to a site one mile up the creek from the North Fork to serve an Elkhorn Collieries camp called Winters. Here it closed in 1957.

Post Offices on Millstone Creek

A millstone at an unlocated site somewhere in its valley undoubtedly gave this 4 ½ mile long creek its name long before the post offices bearing it began their operation. The second of these offices, the still active Millstone, serves its North Fork confluence, 1 ½ miles above the mouth of Thornton Creek. On December 17, 1878 Jason Craft established that office in his home just above the mouth of Millstone and named it Craftsville for his large family that had earlier settled several of the North Fork tributaries. On June 19, 1918 Jason’s son Nelson R. renamed it Millstone, and shortly thereafter a camp was built there by the South East Coal Company. This is the Millstone we know today.

On October 7, 1890 the first of the two Millstone post offices was established, with Joseph Hall, its first postmaster, some 2 ½ miles up the creek. Within a few years it was serving Arch C. Craft’s store and several flour mills. Then, on the very same day Craftsville on the North Fork became Millstone, this Millstone, with Sarah J. Franklin, postmaster, became Craftsville. Some ten years later, Arch Craft, who had become postmaster in 1892, and for whom the office had probably been named, moved it half a mile up the creek where it closed in 1922.

From 1934 to 1939 the area that had been that had been served by Arch Craft’s post office was again served by an office called Holbrook. It was at the forks of Millstone, a mile up the creek from the North Fork. Enoch Arden Franklin undoubtedly named it for the descendants of Randolph Holbrook who had early settled at the mouth of Millstone.

Two miles up the creek from what had been the Millstone and later the Craftsville and Holbrook offices was Lick Fork where a family of Horns is said to have lived. A half mile up this fork was the Horn post office, established on April 12, 1892 by Theophilis Garrett Bates. After an intermittent operation, it closed for good on July 31, 1918.

Near the head of Millstone Creek, 1 ½ miles above the mouth of Lick Fork, was the Meade post office, named for one or more area families (probably Albert and Mary Meade’s). Sampson H. Tolliver was its only postmaster, from May 13, 1911 through October 1914.

To be continued . . .
The Post Offices of Letcher County, Kentucky: Part III

by Robert M. Rennick
(Continued from Volume 33, No. 2)

Post Offices on Boone Fork and its Branches

Boone Fork, which joins the North Fork at Kona, 1 ½ miles above the mouth of Millstone, may have been named for the so-called Boone Settlement there where Daniel Boone allegedly camped on his last visit to eastern Kentucky in 1780. Several of the region’s major coal towns, with their post offices, were located in the Boone valley or on its Potter, Wright, and Yonts Ford tributaries.

Baker, the earliest post office in the valley, was half a mile up Little Creek which joins Yonts Fork at the head of Boone. It was named for the family of L.B. Baker, its first postmaster, and operated between September 22, 1884 and mid-November 1918.

The four mile long Potters Fork, which heads below Potters Gap, now in the Dunham section of Jenkins, had two post offices. The first, like the creek itself, was named for the Potter family, among the valley’s earliest and most distinguished residents. The Potters Fork post office was established on December 23, 1891 with Mary Potter, the first of her family to serve as postmaster. Within a few years the community growing up around it had at least two flour mills, a distillery, a wagonworks, stores, and other businesses also run by Potters. When the office closed in mid-September 1913 it was just below the mouth of Grays Branch, three miles up the Fork from Boone.

But it was only after the closing of the post office that the community became a trading center for area coal camps.

One of these camps was Haymond, founded by the Elkhorn Coal Company around 1916 and named for its general manager (and later vice president) Thomas S. Haymond. Since his name was too close to Hammond, in use in Knox County, the local post office opened on December 14, 1916, with Samuel N. Hall, postmaster, as Cromona [kuh/mohn/uh] for reasons still unknown. For years this coal town has extended for nearly three miles along the Fork and Ky 805 (old US 119) and up its several branches from a point about a mile east of Boone Fork to the mouth of Ramey Fork. Its post office has always been at the mouth of Bear Branch, one mile below the old Potters Fork post office. While the post office remains Cromona, the community has always been Haymond.

The Chip post office was the forerunner of Neon. From December 11, 1902, with Ibby V. (Mrs. Wilson) Holbrook, the first postmaster, to April 1915, it was on Boone Fork, half a mile above (north of) the mouth of Potter Fork. It was either named for a big local hog or had some connection with the early area timbering, or both.

In 1912 the L&N Railroad came through this vicinity on its way to McRoberts, and a station called Neon [nee/ahn] was established at the mouth of Potter. This is what was later called Neon Junction.

Also in 1912, at the mouth of Wright Fork, half a mile above Chip, land was purchased by Leon Hogg and the Frazier Land Company. Here a town was surveyed and platted in 1913 and incorporated as Neon in 1917. After Chip’s closing in 1915 the area was served by the Fleming post office (see below). By 1924 Neon had become the trade center for the recently established coal towns of Fleming, Hemphill, and McRoberts.

The city of Neon was not to get its own post office till May 5, 1926 when Willie M. Quillen opened it as Neon. In 1978 the town merged with its neighbor Fleming to form a fifth class city with a (2000) population of 840 extending for more than two miles along Wright Fork and Boone Fork past the site of old Chip. The Neon post office became a CPO on March 30, 1996.

What seems like a classic folk etymology may actually have been Neon’s name source. At least an acceptable alternative has not been found. The story goes that the only way to board a train at this newly opened rail stop was to first step up on an old tree stump. Local conductors, instead of the more conventional “all aboard!” would say “put your knee on and get up, knee on, knee on.” So the place soon became known as “the knee-on place.” Less likely, though seemingly more plausible, is that some early merchant had placed a rare neon light or sign on the front of his building. But this kind of lighting had only been developed, in France, the year before the name was given to this place.
At the mouth of Boone Fork, the L&N opened a station in 1912 and called it Kona. No one really knows why. Some county historians have thought the name was taken from an old Norwegian expression “kona mi” (my old lady). But, according to Charles Hewitt, and officer of the Clinchfield Railroad Company of Erwin, Tennessee, it could have been named for a station on his railroad in Mitchell County, North Carolina whose name may have been an acronym of the symbols for potassium and sodium (K) and (Na), the major components of feldspar, a local product. Of course, there’s also the Kona District on Hawaii’s Big Island.

In any case, Kona may not have been the first choice for the station’s name. Landowner William H. Potter is said to have deeded the right-of-way to the railroad on condition that its local station be built near his home. According to tradition, his first name preference was Mater, suggested by his children who were studying Latin at the time. (Weren’t mothers then occasionally referred to as “my old lady”?) The railroad, however, rejected that name for Lula, one of Potter’s daughters (later Mrs. Jesse S. Holbrook of Mayking), but this lasted only till someone recalled another Lula in Russell County. Then the station became Kona. On May 24, 1913 the local post office was established as Mater, and Martha Ann Potter, William H.’s other daughter, (for whom the local school was later named), became the first postmaster. This it continued to be called till November 1925 when William H., then postmaster, had the name changed to Kona to be consistent with the station’s. In 1915 the Elkhorn Coal Company established in that vicinity the first of several coal camps that have since been abandoned. The Kona post office was suspended on September 18, 1992.

Wright Fork, which heads almost at the Pike County line, west of Beekhise, extends for five miles south-west to Boone Fork at Neon. It was named for the large and powerful Letcher family of Wrights. Its two post offices served coal camps founded shortly after the arrival of the L&N in 1912.

The first, McRoberts, was founded by the Consolidation Coal Company in 1912 and named for Samuel McRoberts ('{1869), a Missouri-born New York City hanker and later (1918-1928) a company director. It soon became the northern terminus of the L&N’s Eastern Kentucky line that extended Boone Fork and Wright Forks. The McRoberts post office was established on March 30, 1912 with Daniel P. Looney, postmaster, at the mouth of Chopping Branch, 2.6 miles up the Fork, then as now the center of the community.

During its heyday, this multi-ethnic coal town extended for nearly three miles along the Fork and up several of its branches and had a peak population of nearly 2,200 in 1930. With coal depletion and mechanization after the Second World War, the company ended its town ownership, selling the homes to their miner-occupants. The main part of town, with its business buildings, is pretty much gone, though the post office remains active.

The Wright Fork town of Fleming was built in 1913-14 as a camp for the employees of the Elkhorn Coal Corporation on land said to have been owned by the Wrights. It was named for the company’s first president George W. Fleming. To serve the new camp, by then as later, extending for a mile along Wright Fork, the Fleming post office was established on March 16, 1914 one mile up the Fork, with John D. Hartman, postmaster. By 1923 the camp, by now a town of over 3,000 residents, had become the headquarters for seven Elkhorn Coal Corporation operations in the Boone valley. By the end of the 1940s Fleming too had experienced a marked decline; the company had pulled out of the area by 1950 and the town’s 940 residents, now in their own homes, were commuting to other area mines. Since its merger with Neon, the community has continued to lose population. The Fleming post office had closed by 1986.

In 1914 a third major eastern Kentucky coal operator, the South East Coal Company, acquired the old W.S. Wright farm 1 ¾ miles up Boone Fork and founded the coal camp it called Seco [see-koh]. By October 2, 1915, when the Seco post office was established, the camp already had some 250 residents and the mines, under the management of Henry Laviers, were already in operation. The first postmaster was landowner Wright’s son Benjamin Franklin Wright, the company’s resident physician and later a Letcher County political leader. Almost from its inception this camp was considered one of the cleanest in eastern Kentucky. Over 1,100 residents were counted by the 1930 Census. By the late 1950s this company too had given up its local interests. The post office still serves the residential community that survives, two miles below (south of) downtown Neon.
The third of the Elkhorn Coal Corporation’s Boone Fork coal towns has always been called Hemphill. But like its sister town Hamond its post office has always had another name, Jackhorn. This office was established on November 17, 1916 where it still is, at the mouth of Quillen Fork of Yonts, 1 ½ miles north of Neon. Samuel J. Hornsby was its first postmaster. The name Jackhorn is inexplicable in more ways than one. No one seems to know why it was chosen for the post office, for Hemphill, honoring Alexander Julian Hemphill (1856-1920), Elkhorn’s Wall Street banker, was the preferred name of the official’s who applied for it. Nor do we know where Jackhorn came from or what it means, nor why it continues as the post office name. The town too experienced a marked economic decline, and little but its post office remains.15

From August 21, 1901 through May 1906, Kentucky (Mrs. Joel) Johnson ran the Leland post office that may have been in one of the Boone Fork valleys, but its precise location is not known. According to her preliminary Site Location Report, it would be eight miles north of Boone Fork, six miles northeast of Baker, and seven miles northwest of the Potters Fork post office. Neither do we know why it was called Leland. Mrs. Johnson’s first name choices were Chip, Essel, Kite, (not yet applied to the Knott County office, see below), and Novice. A not very helpful clue is that Leland was the first name suggested for the future Vilas post office (see below).

A final note on the Boone Fork coal towns: A countywide development plan that would have involved the incorporation of Neon, Hemphill, Hamond, and McRoberts as one city was withdrawn from Fiscal Court consideration in July 1972.36

Upper North Fork Post Offices

Half a mile up the North Fork from the mouth of Boone were the two post offices established by Cora Lee (Mrs. George) Venter. The first, named Coralee, may have operated between July 21 and mid-October 1893 if, indeed, it operated at all.17 On February 23, 1901 Mrs. Venter established the Vilas [valius] post office which continued through 1911. A mere guess is that Mrs. Venter's second office was named for William Freeman Vilas (1840-1908), Grover Cleveland’s first Postmaster-General (1885-1888), and then Interior Secretary (1888-1889), who later (1891-1897) represented Wisconsin in the U.S. Senate.

Joseph A. Craft and his wife Martha operated the Rosedale post office from December 10, 1872 to October 1881 on Laurel Fork, some 250 yards from its North Fork confluence, and 1 ½ miles above the site of the later Vilas. At a site slightly further up Laurel, storekeeper Albritton Potter operated the Tonny post office between May 13, 1907 and mid-December 1911. His first name choice was Rose. The names of Rosedale and Tonny have not been derived.

By the 1880s some members of the Wright family of Boone Fork had moved to sections of the upper North Fork. One of them, Samuel Wright, operated the Wright post office, from June 13, 1882 through September 1884, probably at the mouth of Holbrook Branch (now Cook Hollow), one mile above Rosedale. On January 4, 1889 Abraham Potter re-established it, also as Wright, and it served one or more local stores till January 1911. It was re-established again on March 10, 1915 by Martha J. Wright, Samuel’s widow, at the mouth of Holbrook, were it closed for good in December 1916.

Curiously, somewhere between the mouth of Laurel and the Wright post office Martha Jane Wright had another office called Cummings (source unknown). Or at least records show that she established this office on July 15, 1889. But on November 13 of that year its papers were sent to Wright. Martha Jane’s preferred names were Ben and Wright, the latter making sense since her preliminary Site Location Report was submitted on October 29, 1888 during Wright’s hiatus. But why the Cummings post office was allowed to operate at all only yards below Wright after the latter’s re-establishment remains a mystery.

Bula and Cella were the first names proposed for Joel M. and Lloyd Potter’s short-lived (June 10, 1924 to January 15, 1931) Fishpond post office at two sites near the mouth of Fishpond Branch, a mile above Wright. The mile long branch, the office’s name source, may have been named for a natural water hole with many fish that is now a part of the recently created thirty-two acre Fishpond Lake.

The Bentley post office, which operated from May 22, 1900 through May 1912, was established by and named for the family of its first postmaster Monroe Bentley. It was on the road, then as now, between the head of the Fork and a branch of Little Elkhorn Creek in the Big Sandy watershed. Bentley’s first name
choice was Ota for his four year old son. This area has long been called Payne Gap for a nineteenth century man of whom nothing is recalled.

The Payne Gap area had two other post offices. An early office (October 27, 1881 through February 1884) called Pound for another area gap, was described in first postmaster R.A. Whitaker's Site Location Report as “on the Kentucky River and Elkorn Creek.” Nothing else seems to be known about it. Between 1935 and 1989 the Payne Gap post office, with Ida Bates, its first postmaster, was just below the head of the North Fork, on the main road (now US 119) between Whitesburg and Jenkins, 1 ½ miles southwest of the latter’s downtown.

On the Virginia line, overlooking Jenkins, is the 2,380 foot high Pound Gap. This gap in Pine Mountain was one of the earliest means of entry to Kentucky for travelers from the eastern settlements. Several accounts of its name can be offered. The Shawnee Indians who first visited this feature are said to have called it “the Hollow Mountain” for the underground caves that amplified the sound their horses’ hooves made going through the gap. The gap was first officially identified as “the Sounding Gap” on the earliest regional road surveys, but gave way to “Pound” sometime in the early nineteenth century. Perhaps this was for the horse pounds or enclosures along the Pound River, a stream on the Virginia side of the gap, or it could have been for a pound (or pounding) mill for the making of gunpowder that may have been at the base of the mountain, on the Virginia side, at the present Almira turnoff. Another Pound post office is still in operation at the head forks of Virginia’s Pound River, four miles south of the gap.

Post Offices in the Letcher County Section of the Big Sandy Valley:

Beefhide Creek

Beefhide Creek heads at its three head forks one mile within Letcher County and extends for 4 ½ miles to Shelby Creek at Myra in Pike County. Its name may refer to an early slaughterhouse somewhere on its Pike County banks, one or more local tanning operations, or, as some say, to the observations of early travelers of slaughtered beeves hanging in local barnyards.

The first of the valley’s two Beefhide post offices was established by Dr. William Johnson on May 18, 1881 at the mouth of the creek (in Pike County) whence it traveled down Shelby to Beatrice and ultimately to Jonancy.38

Letcher County’s Beefhide office opened on April 17, 1901 with Mardella Potter, postmaster, probably close to the county line. After several early moves, it settled on a site half a mile within Letcher County, six miles north of downtown Jenkins (via the new US 23).

Post Offices in the Letcher County Section of the Big Sandy Valley:

Elkhorn Creek

The upper Elkhorn Creek valley, whose stream joins the Russell Fork of the Big Sandy’s Levisa Fork at Elkhorn City in Pike County, did not become a part of Letcher County till 1884. It was served by five (possibly six) post offices.

The earliest of Letcher’s Elkhorn Creek offices was Freemont, somewhere on the stream’s Cane Branch, and thus the forerunner of Jenkins. John M. Mullins established it on June 29, 1897, but his proposed name Cane Branch Valley, too long for the Post Office Department’s now one word preferences, was replaced by the unexplained Freemont. It closed at the end of 1902.

The next was Moss, somewhere on Little Elkhorn Creek, which joins the main stream just west of downtown Jenkins. Since Albritton B. Potter, its only postmaster (who was later to operate the Tonny post office) located it in his Site Location Report three miles above Freemont, it may have been on, at the mouth of, or just below Child’s Branch of Little Elkhorn. One can only assume it was named for M.J. Moss whose circuit judgeship from 1898 to 1906 included Letcher County. The office operated from March 31, 1898 through the following year.

The next was Moss, somewhere on Little Elkhorn Creek, which joins the main stream just west of downtown Jenkins. Since Albritton B. Potter, its only postmaster (who was later to operate the Tonny post office) located it in his Site Location Report three miles above Freemont, it may have been on, at the mouth of, or just below Child’s Branch of Little Elkhorn. One can only assume it was named for M.J. Moss whose circuit judgeship from 1898 to 1906 included Letcher County. The office operated from March 31, 1898 through the following year.

The county’s second Burdine [bird/a:n] post office still serves the lower (eastern) end of the city of Jenkins. It was established on March 26, 1907, with Mary Ison, postmaster, and may have been named for William Burdine Webb (ne September 1873), son of Jason and Leudemia Webb (and thus a brother to Nehemiah and John S.) It closed September 1911. It was re-established on March 30, 1912 with Melvin M. Martin, postmaster, to serve the new coal town on Elkhorn, at the mouth of Bens Branch, two miles from
the Pike County line. Though now a part of Jenkins, Burdine's residents consider it a separate town, justified by its own post office.

Near the head of the narrow Elkhorn Creek valley and just below Pound Gap, Richard M. Broas discovered one of the richest coal seams in the world. From John C.C. Mayo, to whom he had conveyed it for a nominal sum, the land was later acquired, along with property owned by the Wrights, by the Consolidation Coal Company. Since this was such an inaccessible place, the company had to import its workers from elsewhere, and to house them they started a town in 1911. Centered about where Little Elkhorn joins the main stream, it was named for George Carroll Jenkins, a Baltimore financier and company director, who was bankrolling the operation. It soon became a model coal town with modern homes, an office building, a post office (established on April 25, 1911, with John D. Campbell, postmaster), hospital, hotel, schools, stores, and recreational centers, and was, over the next thirty years, one of the fastest growing coal towns in eastern Kentucky. From 300 residents in May 1911 it grew to over 2,000 by 1915, 4,500 by 1920, and 8,500 only ten years later. Then and now it is the county's largest community.

By the end of the Second World War, however, the coal business in the upper Elkhorn valley, as elsewhere in the region, had begun to go downhill, the victim of decreased demand for coal and mechanized production, reducing the need for miners and the towns and services to support them. In 1946 the company sold its coal rights to the Bethlehem Steel Company and area homes to their miner-occupants. By the end of the 1940s several of the neighboring coal towns, from Burdine, two miles east, to Dunham, at the head of the main stream, two miles north, had been incorporated into the one town of Jenkins, making this a fourth class city, then as now some 7 1/2 miles long, with downtown Jenkins, 13 1/4 miles east-northeast of Whitesburg (by Ky 15 and US 119), in the middle. Yet, even with its expanded territory, its population continued to decline, from some 3,300 in 1980, to 2,750 in 1990, and 2,400 in (the year) 2000.

Dunham [duhn/uhm] was named for A.S. Dunham, Consolidation's auditor. Its post office, with Joel Harden Roach, its first postmaster, operated between June 23, 1913 and 1960. This town was also the home of a million dollar coal preparation plant built in the late 1940s and what was then the country's second largest tipple.

A post office called McConnel that may have been in the Elkhorn valley, near the Pike County line, operated from June 30, 1890 through October 1893 when its papers were sent to Wright, then the closest or most accessible office. Ira Mullins and John W. Wright were its only postmasters. Its name source is not known.

**Conclusion**

Twenty-three of Letcher's 128 operating post offices survive. Five – Whitesburg, Jenkins, Burdine, Neon (though as a CPO) and Blackey – serve the county's only incorporated places. (Jenkins and Burdine together serve the city of Jenkins.) At least forty, including most of the current offices, were the foci of active villages (coal camps or area trade centers). The rest were centered around a single store, mine, school, or church.

Local or area persons or families accounted for forty-five post office names, while nine other offices were named for famous or at least important non-local persons (like coal company executives or bankers). Five offices had geographic or descriptive name derivations. One was named for the county, and four had names of local or nearby features (sixteen streams and two gaps). Six were named for local activities, industries, or products or the companies involved with these. Two had literary or scriptural name origins. One was named for evidence of earlier inhabitants; another for the postmaster's political affiliation; yet another possibly for a railroad conductor's verbal instructions; and four had several likely explanations. Thirty-one names have not yet been derived, while seven offices have not been precisely located.

The names of thirty-two post offices were not those originally proposed for them. Twenty-one served communities, rural neighborhoods, mines, or rail stations with other names. The names of fifteen offices were changed one or more times during their operation. At least two offices were established but may never have operated under the names authorized for them.

**Footnotes**

1. The act to establish Whitesburg as the new county's seat was approved by the Kentucky General Assembly on January 27, 1843. Incidentally, a folk account of Whitesburg's name, now hardly taken seriously, refers to an early snowstorm that had blanketed the area for days.

2. At the time of this writing, the Whitesburg post office had just been moved to a new building less than half a mile from Ermine, three miles up the North Fork. But, according to Tim Reynolds, Whitesburg's postmaster, in letters to the author, December 7 and 12, 2000, the Ermine post office will remain active for the foreseeable future.

3. Colliers Creek may earlier have been called Morgan Creek.
Lake Elk was not Hazard, August 4, 1974.

After decline, from 1,200 dates as I have in the op.cit. Bi/via Letcher Heritage

Steel, La Posta (nc 1849) and Elizabeth (Logan) 011 contemporary published maps.

1934, passim.


At least three other Dongola post offices - in Arkansas, Illinois, and Missouri - were established around the same time.

N. M. Webb, in his letter to William G. Steel, op.cit Blivia was not named, as some modern historians have suggested, for Blivia, the daughter of Sam and Lizzie Webb, who was not born till February 1893.

Margaret Webb, its name source, was the daughter of Benjamin and Eleander Webb and was born in 1878. In 1898, shortly after the establishment of her office, she married Columbus Killings.

Jenkins married Letha Jane (or Jennie) Craft, daughter of Archelous and Lettie (Webb) Craft.

Nehemiah M. and John S. were the sons of Jason Webb, one of the area's storekeepers, and his second wife Leudemia (nee Hubbard), who lived on Webb Branch, half a mile below Sargent's original site. Jason was one of the sons of Letcher pioneer Benjamin Webb.

According to old land records, Isaac Potter, Sr. had taxable property in the area's storekeepers, and his second wife Leudemia (nee Hubbard), who lived on Webb Branch, half a mile below Sargent's original site. Jason was one of the sons of Letcher pioneer Benjamin Webb.

Potter families gave it the nickname "Pottertown.


While the Post Office Register gives Colly's dates as I have in the text, it does not indicate to which post office its papers were sent in October 1922, likely evidence of the office's non-operation.


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