

The Story Of Stringtown

By Hazel Ogden

Stringtown, a Rural Sociology Neighborhood in name only, is situated on Kentucky State Highway 36, between Cynthiana and Williamstown, on the Harrison-Grant County line. With the Elizabeth Christian Church as the center, the people living within the radius of a mile and a half consider themselves and are thought of as a part of the neighborhood.

The original "center" was not the church but the small area that surrounds the entrance to the Stringtown-Corinth Ridge Road, where long ago a man hanged himself with a string and thereby gave the neighborhood its name.

The little village store that once provided the simple needs, kerosene, lamp chimneys and a place to visit in the evenings, now stands deserted and dilapidated, but many of the older folk still "trade" with the "huckster" or "rolling store" that passes through Stringtown twice each week.

Almost any farm or household need, clothing, or professional service is available at Cynthiana or Williamstown, the county seat towns. For specialized service or a real shopping trip the farmer's wife may go to Cincinnati or Lexington.

The highway and the "ridge" road separate Harrison county and Grant county and divide the peo-

ple as to interest in political issues, civic and welfare organizations, schools, and the county papers. The Grant County News, with a circulation of three thousand and the Harrison County papers (The Log Cabin and The Democrat) are about evenly distributed.

Even the time zone changes nearby so all references to time must be qualified as to whether it is "fast" or "slow." The rural mail carriers from Corinth and Berry cross paths here as do the Harrison and Grant school buses.

Children on either side of the line attended the Corinth Consolidated School until the centralization of the high schools in both counties. Districts were then changed to coincide with county lines, which left Corinth with a fairly modern building and not enough students to use all the rooms. For Renaker, the change created a severe problem of overcrowding. The Renaker school was built for ninety students but at one time in 1953, was overflowing with three hundred and ten. They have no gymnasium nor any place for the children to play in bad weather; programs can be held in the small auditorium only after desks are removed and double doors opened into adjacent classrooms.



Beloved Dr. Limerick, angel of mercy, delivered many blessed events at Stringtown.

Cordova also furnished the doctor, beloved old Dr. Limerick, angel of mercy for many years, delivered all the blessed events at Cordova and most of those at Stringtown if he arrived in time. "Old Sam," the doctor's horse, was well acquainted with the many side roads for which this area is noted. He rode Old Sam where his buggy wouldn't go or walked when necessary. Dr. Limerick served as Elder of the Elizabeth Church before 1900 and after.

A familiar figure at Stringtown is that of "Aunt Sook," who was ninety-nine or a hundred in October, she isn't quite sure which. Her little cottage needs repairs but "Aunt Sook" is an optimist and each year stoutly declares that this year she's "going to die and go to Heaven" so why spend part of the small pension check for repairs?

So this is Stringtown, a rural section with "rolling hill," slowly improving soil fertility, a growing church, new high schools, access to shopping centers, and a people with a history of large families but a "declining birth rate"— but is it a Neighborhood!



Mr. Mulligan is eighty years old and still "tends a crop" with the help of his twenty-five-year-old horse.

Old Fork Lick Baptist Church on the banks of Fork Lick Creek at Cordova. First meeting was held the first Saturday in July 1818. Recorded in the hide-bound minute book are these minutes of the first meeting:

"At a church meeting met ac-

ording to appointment on the first Saturday in July 1818, after divine worship proceeded to business. Bro. Samuel Simpson, chosen moderator and Absalom Skirvin, clerk. A rule of decorum was read and received by the church for their guide."



Old Fork Lick Primitive Baptist Church on the banks of Fork Lick Creek where services were held for the first time in 1818. The log building was dismantled several years ago.



The Elizabeth Christian Church is one organization that is not divided by county lines. Established in 1849, the congregation last year (1954) celebrated its One Hundred and Fifth Anniversary.

The first meetings were held in the log building which was later torn down and a new building constructed (1877) from materials furnished by the members. The land was donated by Benjamin Robinson who specified in the deed, that the name, Elizabeth Christian Church, be retained in memory of his daughter, Elizabeth, the first member.

Through cooperation with a church in Harrison county, the congregation (with an average attendance in 1955 of almost one hundred) is able to have full-time preaching. Because of the difference in the time zones, a young minister, Wayne B. Smith, graduate of the Cincinnati Bible Seminary, preaches first at Stringtown and then at the Unity Christian Church on Sunday morning. Joe Kearns, minister of the Corinth Church, will hold the services at Stringtown.

The evening services are conducted by the four student ministers of the congregation. These young men are also frequently sent out on Sunday mornings to supply for ministers who are on vacation or in Evangelistic meetings.

Note: Since this was written Anson Dowd has accepted a call to the Robinson Church in Harrison County, Larry Ogden to the Knoxville Church in Pendleton County, and Eddie Ray Rider has been supplying each week for various ministers. The late A. S. Dowd, who had been appointed as their "Spiritual Overseer" would have rejoiced in the progress of his charges had he lived another year. Many readers will recall the sudden death of Mr. Dowd as he prepared to present the young men on the day of the One Hundred Fifth Anniversary of the Elizabeth Church.

In former years the church services were held on Saturday mornings and evenings as well as twice on Sunday. The older women in their aprons and black bonnets came on Saturday mornings, the girls with their beaux on Saturday night, but on Sunday, everyone came.

The grove near the church-yard furnished the hitching posts for those who rode horses or ponies. A few brought their families in buggies or surreys but the majority of the people walked. (Some of those who walked carried their shoes until within sight of the church and then put them on).

Light for the evening service came from the huge brass lamp that hung at the end of a chain suspended from the high ceiling, and supplemented by the chandeliers which held four small lamps.

One of the "housekeepers" who kept the lamps filled with kerosene, passed out fans in summer and tended the fires in winter was Miss Susan Brooks who is still living. She was paid a salary of fifteen dollars a year "provided she also furnished the fuel."

No musical instrument, except the tuning fork, was permitted in the church until about 1900. The songs books, about 3"x5" in size, contained only the words and key.

Many changes have been made in the church during the last century but not in the seating arrangement for as the families enter the door the men still turn to

the right and the women to the left, a custom which has prevailed through the years.

The "leaders" in the church are also the most active workers in other organizations. Mrs. Arnold Faulkner teaches the Young People's Bible Class, sponsors their trips and social affairs and helps them with their weddings. She is also active in the Red Cross and the Crippled Children's Organization and serves as an officer in the Williamstown Garden Club.

Mr. R. N. Barnes, church officer and song leader, is secretary of the Democratic Committee in Grant county, and a leader in the civic affairs at Corinth. The Lions Club in which he has served as president, formed a pressure group to persuade a fine young doctor, O. A. Cull, to open an office at Corinth, thus relieving the heavy burden of the Williamstown physicians.

Mr. Elmer Brooks, elder and teacher, serves as an election officer in the Cordova precinct and often on the jury in Grant county.

A former Bible School secretary and treasurer, Mr. Gayle M. Denny is the president of the Transylvania Printing Co., Lexington, Ky.

The late Dr. William Daugherty, while serving as State Representative from Grant county succeeded in getting a bill passed prohibiting the sale of whiskey within a two mile radius of the church. The law is still in effect.

Although the Elizabeth church by no means supplies all of the social and spiritual needs of the young people nor older members, it is the most important factor that serves to hold the neighborhood together and to give it identity.

Basketball is a popular sport with the young people at the church, as well as at the high schools.

Stringtown farms lie mostly within the Grant County Soil Conservation District but until recent years the farmers have not been financially able to carry out the suggestions made by the conservation office. Though the attitude is improving, this is considered one of "the most reluctant sections" of the county to accept the soil conservation or the "Grant county ABC (Artificial Breeding) programs. Likewise, the women have little interest in the projects of the Homemaker's Organization.

The average farm is about one hundred acres in size (the average size for the county is ninety acres) and is described as "rolling." The native soil was quite fertile but now, most of it requires fertilizer and much is untenable. Reclaiming the land requires more capital than is available, and the amount invested in machinery is not justified by the returns.

There have been several excessively dry years but perhaps the worst since 1900 occurred in 1930, shortly before the beginning of the "great depression." The cattle suffered so much from the lack of water and green pastures, the farmer even cut green branches from the trees for the bellowing animals that followed him whenever he went toward the grove with axe in hand.

(This was the period when money was so scarce the young man of the family had to surrender the car battery on Saturday nights so the family could listen to the favorite Grand Old Opry radio program).

The old Leesburg Pike was replaced by the state highway in

1938 and shortly afterward, the REA brought electricity to the farms, and the telephone lines followed.

The next major change was due to the Sealtest milk route which was started in 1941 and paid a much better price for Grade "A" milk than the Cardinal Dairy at Cynthiana was paying for Grade "B".

For those who agreed to furnish whole milk for the Sealtest Dairy the change in farming methods has been both good and bad. Perhaps with more careful planning and better bookkeeping, and better prices the farmer could have avoided the financial merry-go-round which at the present he can hardly afford to stay on nor get off.

First he was required to build a milk house and a "milking par-

lor" and install equipment that would meet the inspection of the health department. To keep the cooler filled, the cans and electric milkers clean, running water, wash tanks and a hot water heater were added. This was only the beginning.

For better returns on the amount of capital invested, the dairy farmer needed more cows, which meant more feed; more feed required additional acres bought or rented on which to grow corn and alfalfa; then a silo to hold the green corn, a baler for the hay, a mill for grinding, a truck for hauling, a tractor for power, a spraying outfit to kill weeds in the corn and the grasshoppers in the meadows, and everything on the farm seems to need fuel, feed or fertilizer, or has to be insured.



Just a dim view of the "sacred" cows.

The farmer looks at his herd and equipment and then at the milk check . . . hardly more than twenty-five cents per gallon for the milk, while the consumer looks at his milk bill . . . almost twenty-five cents for a quart, and both complain.



The mechanical setter is quite an improvement over the old "down on the knees" method.

Tobacco is still an important crop in spite of the steadily decreasing allotments or "base." The tractor-drawn mechanical setter can also be used in the transplanting of strawberry plants or tomato and cabbage plants.

The mechanical setter is quite an improvement over the old down-on-the-knees method.

Work is often shared during the rush of tobacco setting or silo filling, but at tobacco cutting time, with a hint of frost in the air, it is every man for himself.

A good example of the way the farm families enjoyed life at Stringtown a hundred years ago would be that of the Wheat family. Hezekiah Wheat died of cholera in 1834 and his twelve year old son, Commodore Perry, lived up to his famous name by helping his mother support the younger members of the family.

He was not able to attend school but at the age of twenty he married the neighborhood school teacher who taught him to read and write.

When the Elizabeth Church was organized "Uncle Perry," as he came to be called, was ordained

as an elder, and led such an exemplary life that on recommendation of the church he was given a written permit by the Grant County court to perform marriages and funerals. The list of marriages which he performed includes many of the grandparents of Grant and Harrison families.

The Wheat family raised sheep and cows, and the corn to feed them. The corn was planted by the women who dropped the grain from their huge aprons and then covered it with a hoe. The women also knitted socks, quilted, plucked the flock of geese at six or eight week intervals to fill the feather beds and pillows. There was always wool to card, to spin into thread and weave into garments, carpets and coverlets. All wearing apparel was made and dyed in the home with blue and yellow as the predominant colors since the two available dying agents were indigo and copperas.

Surplus articles and wearing apparel were taken to Covington and traded for items to be sold in the small store which Mr. Wheat operated in part of the home.

In the Spring the "sugar camp" was opened, the sugar water was collected in buckets and sometimes boiled down in a makeshift furnace at the camp, but more often hauled to the house where the mother and daughters boiled the water into syrup, then the syrup into sugar. Never an idle moment for that family.

Farm women no longer have to plant corn, make their own sugar and weave their materials for clothing as those of the preceding century, and also have many more conveniences. Now a good wife enjoys her husband and children, does the housework, the sewing and mending, tends the garden and chickens, cooks for the work hands, runs errands (to town for binder twine, baling wire and tractor parts) helps with the farm work during the rush season and

tries to use her leisure time wisely.

Note: Mrs. J. C. Cooke of Crittenden, the granddaughter of Elder Perry Wheat, furnished the information about the Wheat family.



The last of the sugar camps at Stringtown (1945).

In 1935, the late Thomas Milford Readnower compiled the genealogies, wills and deeds, as well as some of the history of the Thomas-Robinson family of whom it is estimated that seventy-five per cent of Stringtown's families are related "by blood or by marriage." A family reunion is held each year on the fourth Sunday in August.

The Thompsons were traced to Orange county, Virginia, but the Robinsons all the way back to the Robinsons of Crostwick, England, (1520)—about ten generations.

Francis Robinson, a grandson of

Colonel John Robinson, who was governor of the Virginia Colony (1759) came to Harrison County in 1818 by oxcart. He was accompanied by his wife, Polly Terrill, their fourteen children and twenty-five slaves. Evidently the descendants of these slaves migrated years ago as there are no Negro families living in this vicinity.

The family built a huge log house and cabins for the slaves near Raven's Creek, not far from the Grant County line. Like most of Kentucky, this area was a wilderness with very few people, no roads and no towns.

Francis Robinson was considered a wealthy man with his many slaves and several hundred acres of land. Money was of little value and families were self-sufficient by necessity. One old Negro mammy was kept busy gathering and brewing herbs for medicinal purposes. On Sunday morning a worship service was held which the family and slaves attended together. For his family, Francis Robinson was the "preacher, the doctor and the law."

When a son or daughter of the Robinsons married he or she was given a tract of land until the ori-

ginal homestead was completely encircled by the homes of the children. Each son was given a "buck" slave and the daughters were given a "wench" which according to the deed could not be sold for any debt of her husband whether the debt was made before or after her marriage.

When a member of the family or a slave died, the grave was made in the front yard of the home, with no markers to distinguish slave from master. Eventually a new "burial ground" was marked off near the Grant County line on the Stringtown-Weber road, (1862).

On July 17, 1862, William Benjamin Robinson, a grandson of Francis and Polly, went to Cynthia on business. The town was in a state of excitement over the impending "John Morgan's Raid." The women and children were hidden but every man in Cynthia was deputized to resist the Confederate invaders, including the visitor from Stringtown. When the battle was over, young William Benjamin (aged 26) was brought home to occupy the first grave in the new cemetery. Each Memorial Day a flag is still placed on his grave.



Miss Susan Brooks, "Aunt Sook" who will be 99 or 100 in October, she isn't sure which.

The best known son-in-law of Francis Robinson was Thomas T. Thompson, who came from Virginia and purchased several hundred acres of land on the Grant County side of the line at twenty-five cents an acre.

One of the interesting little stories recorded by Mr. Readnow is that of the return of Thomas T. Thompson to Virginia to bring his widowed sister and her three children to Kentucky. The entire trip was made by horseback with the two little girls riding in little boxes or baskets that were fastened in pack saddle fashion.

One night when the travelers camped, the little flock of sheep which "Aunt Patsy Bell" brought along from Virginia strayed away and mingled with those of another traveler. The man did not want to give up the addition to his flock but Aunt Patsy quoted the verse of scripture concerning the sheep that know their Master's voice and will follow, so the man consented

to the test and soon Aunt Patsy was on her way with her flock, for as she called them one by one by name, they came out from among the stranger's flock.

Cordova, a small neighborhood nearby, is closely interrelated with this one, for Stringtown has the church and Cordova has the voting precinct, (Republican).

There are only two stores at Cordova (and a bridge across Crooked Creek) but there was a time (the folk like to boast) when Cordova was a thriving cross-roads hamlet with three stores, where the Stringtown folk came on Saturday afternoons for everything from hair pins to horse shoes.

On the same trip, the horses could be shod at one of the blacksmith shops, harness repaired at the harness shop, ice bought for the regular Saturday night ice cream suppers served by the Stringtown Ladies Aid. Even a barber did a rushing business on the front porch of one of the stores at fifteen cents a head.