

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

---

# Mayslick Once Was Emporium, History Shows

Edith Davis

from the Rotary Club Edition of  
the *Daily Independent*  
October 31, 1962

---

# Mayslick Once Was Emporium, History Shows

By Edith Davis

The people of New Jersey suffered greatly during the Revolutionary war as much fighting occurred there. Those who passed through that conflict found themselves in desperate circumstances at its close. Some who had bought cattle and food for the army were paid in Continental Currency which depreciated in value, even becoming completely worthless. Many talked of emigrating Westward where much new and good land could be had for a small price.

Rev. William Wood, a Baptist preacher from Washington, Kentucky, came to New Jersey on a visit. His stories of the rich and beautiful land of Kentucky proved so alluring that a band of five related families — Abraham, Cornelius and Isaac Drake (brothers), David Morris, and John Shotwell, with all their earthly possessions crowded into one "Jersey Wagon", began the 400 mile journey across the mountains to Red Stone on the Ohio River. There they joined a flotilla of several boats and set out for Limestone. The river trip was not marred by accident or great excitement and they landed at Limestone, June 10, 1788.

They did not tarry at the "Point" where the danger from the Indians was great, as quickly as possible made way to Washington, their resting place. Their first residence there was in a covered pen or shed for sheep, adjoining the cabin of the owner. More comfortable quarters must have been found because

the families remained in Washington until December. Dr. Goforth who had been on one of the boats in the flotilla, decided to stay in Washington. Having fallen in love with the daughter of Rev. Wood, almost at first sight, he made her his wife and they made Washington their home for several years before going to Cincinnati to live.

The men of the Drake and Shotwell and Morris colony began looking about at once for land which they might purchase and divide among themselves. At length they fixed upon a "settlement and preemption" eight miles from Washington on the Lexington road. Nearby was a salt spring, where the deer and buffalo were in the habit of coming to "lick" the surrounding earth.

## May's Lick Moved

This tract of 1400 acres, they purchased from a man named William May, and decided to call their new home May's Lick. The name may not have been indicative of a cultivated taste, but at least it was distinctive and it remains so today. So much so, that a letter bearing a person's name and the word May's Lick on the envelope, dropped into a small box any place in the United States would eventually find its way to our May's Lick. It is the only post office in the U. S. A. bearing that name.

The 1400 acre tract of land was divided among the five men in proportion to the amount each invested; each was to have a corner in the



Miss Edith Davis

salt lick. A small creek ran west to east through the new purchase, and men started immediately to build their cabins on the north side of the stream. Each cabin was a crude log affair about 16 feet by 20 feet with wooden chimney and no windows, but it was a shelter, and when the families came from Washington in December it took on the aspect of a home. The tall straight trees which grew all about made wonderful logs for building and they must have had powerful resistance to weather conditions, for some of the timber in one of the original cabins forms a part of the frame work of

James Rolfe's home today.

Isaac Drake was the youngest of the three brothers and received the smallest portion of land, as he had the least amount of money. In fact when he landed at Limestone he had one dollar in his pocket — just enough to buy a bushel of corn at that time. Thirty-eight and one quarter acres was the size of the "farm" he bought, and of course it would have to be cleared of the big trees before a crop could be raised. Isaac Drake's family consisted of his wife, Elizabeth Shotwell Drake, and two children — a boy about 3½ and a girl one year old. It was the 3½ year old boy whose name was to become known and honored in the medical world throughout the length and breadth of the United States. May's Lick, Kentucky became an important place as the home of the famous Dr. Daniel Drake. When Dr. Drake was 62 years old, at the insistence of his children, he wrote the story of his early life in a series of letters which he called *Pioneer Life in Kentucky*. Because he has given such graphic descriptions typifying the life of the average pioneer, it is used as a basis to describe the early history of May's Lick.

At the time the Drakes took possession of their land there was not another cabin or settlement closer than Washington. Being religious people and strong adherents of the Baptist faith, besides their own family worship, they felt the need of community worship where they might seek God's protection



and guidance. They carried letters of dismission from the Baptist church of Scotch Plains, Essex County, East New Jersey, dated April 12, 1788. They met at first in one of the cabins for Sunday worship, but as more settlers came in, they met in the barn of David Morris until a church was built a quarter of a mile south of the "lick". More about the church later.

Buffalo and deer had beaten a path through the cane brake, which grew luxuriantly here, on the way to the licks. This path made a sort of highway for the settlers. Immigrants seemed to pour through May's Lick on their way to central Kentucky, many of them riding horse back. Sometimes men and women rode side by side which the May's Lick people thought was a wonderful sight. Even though the road was bad, wagon loads of merchandise passed on the way from the river to the interior. Abraham Drake kept a store and tavern, and evidently had a thriving business.

### Nothing Forgotten

To provide for the education of the children, a long cabin was built for a school house. It was up the stream a little way, but close enough for the mothers to look right into the door. The first teacher was a Scotchman named McQuitty. His successor was Master Wallace who was considered a somewhat better teacher. "Dannel" Drake said his first text books were Dilworth's spelling book and the New Testament the reading text. The seats in the school house were logs, hewed on one side and without backs. The pupils all brought their lunch and water was toted from a spring. The privilege of going after the water was eagerly sought. Two pupils, usually boys, would go. The water was passed around to all the pupils, each one dipping the gourd in the bucket, and putting back in the bucket what they didn't want. The pupils all studied and recited aloud. The next teacher was Hiram Miram Curry, who had been a Baptist preacher, and he made them "get by heart" the catechism. He taught farther up the road where hickory

switches were abundant. The school term was short, lasting during the winter months. In good weather there was work for all, both young and old.

Isaac Drake found that his thirty-eight acres was not enough, and his brother Abraham, the prosperous store keeper and tavern keeper, had bought 200 acres west of May's Lick from a man named Shannon. This land he traded to Isaac for his thirty-eight acres which joined that of Abraham.

Then Isaac moved his family into the dense but beautiful woodland, where they again

started from scratch to make home. By now, the 3½ year old boy was nine years old and a valuable helper to both father and mother. He was given first hand information of what it means to make a good life, even in the wilderness. How self-sufficient they were! Corn — Indian corn — they call it was the principal crop and the main article of food. When just passed the roasting ear stage it was grated and made into a delicious food, which must have resembled our corn pudding. After the corn was dry it was

pounded into meal which was made into bread. Wheat did not grow well in the rich, moist "new" land. Sugar maple trees were not so plentiful as the walnut, poplars, butternut, and buckeye, but each maple was carefully saved as a source for sugar. February was usually the time for collecting the sap and letting it down. Soap was made by putting ashes into a hopper, pouring water in and catching the lye which ran out at the bottom and mixing it with the grease. Meat they had in abundance because of the game which was so easy to get. Wild turkeys were plentiful and so fat but when brought down their skins would burst with the fat. Sheep were raised mainly for the wool to make the clothing. The sheep were driven into the water and the wool washed thoroughly before they were sheared. Then it was a difficult job to comb the knots and tangles out so the mother could make the yarn which she must weave into cloth. The crop which entailed the hardest work was fine flax crop. The pulling, threshing, spreading out to rot, taking up, and stacking were works not to be coveted. But, with skillful manipulation of the "little wheel" the mother was able to convert the fiber into beautiful cloth. Up to this

time cotton was not used for cloth in the United States or in Europe.

A craft which was surely a work of art, was dyeing. Beautiful colors were made from the inside of the bark of the white walnut, a peculiar and permanent shade of yellow. The hulls of the black walnut gave a rusty black. Oak bark with copperas gave a better shade of black and supplied the ink with which they did their writing. Brooms were made from hickory saplings with the aid of a sharp knife. Scrub brushes were not seen or heard of.

### Social Life Full

Social life was not altogether neglected! Quilting parties, husking bees and log-rollings brought the friends together. The quart green glass bottle with the corn cob stopper in it which stood on the mantel was kept full of whiskey. It was always passed around before any work began. If by any chance a caller was not offered a drink from the green bottle, he was sure to go away disappointed, and say that So-and-So was a mean man. Whiskey must have been easy to get as distilleries were numerous and the price cheap. The fact that corn was the main crop, and markets too far away to send live stock, probably had something to do with converting it into a commodity for which they had a market at home. Isaac Drake wanted to raise horses to sell. He had one which he thought was so fine that he ought to take it to a foreign market. So, he took it to the adjoining county of Bourbon, there he sold him to a son of old Gov. Garrard.

In part pay he took a hundred gallons of whiskey. When it arrived the family felt quite rich, a barrel was immediately tapped, and the quart cup scoured as bright as possible, put into service. The neighbors were the customers, and they considered it their duty to their families and their visitors as well as to themselves to keep the bottle well replenished. Some of the families in the neighborhood did not keep or drink whiskey. They were Methodist, and it was a rule in the Methodist church at that time that its members should not drink ardent spirits. They were reproached for their total abstinence, and some said, "No doubt they drank behind the door".

Dannel managed the business of the whiskey. His mother had a little black book in which he carefully recorded his sales. At a very early age he was a sort of bar-tender retailing whiskey. A fact he took pains to conceal when in later years he was lecturing to his classes at the university on the diseases produced by habitual and excessive drinking. But, he remembered the early days when he was glad to see a boy coming with a bottle or a half gallon jug. The price was twenty-five cents a quart.

At the time Isaac Drake moved to the Shannon land, a new Era was dawning. Six years had elapsed since the beginning of May's Lick, new settlers had flocked in, and many new homes were built. In any direction one need not go more than a mile to find other habitations. The new Drake home was an improvement over the first. Dannel went to a new school which was in the neighborhood later known as "Desha Valley".

There he had for school mates, among others, the family of Gen. Joseph Desha, who afterward became Governor of Kentucky. His son, who murdered Baker in 1823, between Blue Licks and May's Lick in

order that he might get his horse and saddle, (and likely his bank roll, too) was one of them. Most Mason-Countians are familiar with the tragic story. Also, with the story that the Governor pardoned his son and resigned his office. That part of the story is not substantiated by the record of history. The old brick house, which was later the home of the Desha family, is still standing in the valley but in a sad state of decay.

Time passed on rather rapidly, the size of the families increased, many new settlers had come, and the character of the community life was changed. Saturdays were no longer days to labor. Practically everyone from the outlying area went to the "lick" on that day. Two or three Justices of the peace, held court there on certain days. That brought litigants and their witnesses into town. Women, as well as the men, saved that day as the day to do their shopping, and a day to meet friends. Sometimes the crowd grew quite rowdy after indulging too freely in the ardent spirits. Horse



... wrestling matches, and fighting afforded amusement. Occasionally two bullies would engage in a fight to show which was the better man. They would roll upon the ground, kick, scratch and try to gouge eyes out with their thumbs and even bite off a nose. When the time came to go home, two often rode the same horse so intoxicated that they were reeling and leaning, Indian fashion. Others were not able to ride at all and were obliged to wait until Sunday morning to take their departure.

Such exhibitions were not pleasing to the first and real May's Lick fathers. Concern was felt for the future of their children as well as the future of May's Lick. Abraham Drake, the tavern-keeper, merchant, and rich man of the settlement, patronized the school at Washington where his children could be brought under the influence of a good scholar. John Drake, the younger son of Abraham, had a brilliant mind and varied talents. He went to Washington to study medicine in the office of Dr. Goforth about the year 1795 or '6. His progress was rapid.

He distinguished himself in the Thespian corps, and in the debating society his eloquence was remarkable. He later went to Philadelphia to attend lectures, after which he returned to May's Lick to establish himself as a physician. Dannel was to be his pupil. But, unfortunately Dr. John fell a victim to a slow fever of the typhus kind. The Washington physicians, Drs. Johnson and Duke, attended him. But he gradually grew worse, and his father dispatched Jacob Drake to bring Dr. Goforth, who then was practicing in Cincinnati. Dr. Goforth could not come, but sent advice by the messenger who rode all night through a tremendous and awful thunder storm. In spite of all efforts, John died, and his remains now rest in the village church yard.

### Daniel Starts Studies

Isaac Drake had admired Dr. Goforth since their companionship on the flotilla. Dr. Goforth had such courtly manners and neat personal appearance, always wearing a white shirt, coat and vest, powdered hair, silk hat, and carrying a bold-headed cane which never left

his hand except when he was taking his turn at the oars. Perhaps even at that early time, Isaac Drake wished that his son might be like him. That wish he seemed never to forget. When Dannel was fifteen years old, Isaac made known his wish and ambition. Accordingly he rode to Cincinnati and arranged for his son to live in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Goforth, and study medicine in his office for four years, for which Isaac was to pay \$400. Both Daniel and his father knew that he was about to begin the study of medicine without proper scholastic preparation, as he had not studied Latin, but it was stipulated that Dr. Goforth should send him to school six months to learn Latin, which he did. When the plans for Daniel's future were known, he became the topic of neighborhood talk. He was to be a gentleman, and lead a life of ease and gentility. Some already called him "doctor". The venerable old uncle Cornelius cautioned him to beware of bad young men and evil companions, of which he had understood there were a great many about Fort Washington or "Cin" as it was sometimes called.

A man who wished to see the country and be a companion for Isaac on the return trip, joined the little party as they set forth December 16th 1801. The roads were nothing more than bridle-paths, and as there were no taverns along the way, they carried a supply of provisions with them. At the end of the first day they reached the place where there was a small ferry boat. The river was at flood stage and filled with large cakes of floating ice. They made the perilous crossing and continued on their way reaching Dr. Goforth's the third morning after leaving home. Thus Daniel Drake became the first student of medicine in Cincinnati on August 1, 1805 and later received a Diploma from Dr. Goforth.

In October 1805, he went on horseback, a journey of 18 days to Philadelphia to take a formal course of lectures. In April 1806, he returned to May's Lick where he practiced for a year. At the suggestion of Dr. Goforth he decided to locate in Cincinnati. He quickly acquired a large practice and became Cincinnati's No. 1 citizen. As a

good citizen, among many other things, he helped to finance John James Audubon, the great naturalist, who was broke at that time and teaching ball room dancing. Dr. Drake staked him, thus permitting him to finish his immortal work. In Cincinnati, Dr. Drake is known as the Father of Medicine and many memorials bear witness to his work, not the least of which was The Medical College of Ohio. In his Profession he was second to none west of the Alleghenies. As an educator he held important posts at Transylvania University, University of Louisville, and in The Medical College of Ohio.

In later life Dr. Drake gave full credit to the background which he had received at May's Lick as the key to his success.

### Church Is Founded

All of the first settlers of May's Lick were Baptists by inclination or profession. Before leaving New Jersey David Morris, Cornelius Drake and Lydia, his wife, John Shotwell with his mother, Ann Shotwell and his wife, Abigail, received letters of dismission from their church. John Shotwell and wife united, during their temporary stay, with the church at Washington. The others did not enter that relation but waited and were organized into a Particular Baptist Church at May's Lick, November 28, 1789. William Wood, of the Washington Baptist Church and James Gerard were the officiating ministers on that occasion. Only four members went into the organization, constituting the church, and subscribed to The Articles of Faith.

The minutes of that first meeting and subsequent ones are beautifully recorded in the precious old books which are in the vault of the May's Bank for safe keeping. Among the vows of those early church members took, they said: "We promise to strive together for the faith of the Gospel agreeable to the rule of God's word, and in every point of doctrine and discipline we do accord with the particular Baptists.

We do promise to watch over each other's conversation and not to suffer sin upon one another, etc, etc.

We do promise in a particular manner to pray for one another, etc. and to constantly keep up public prayer and in our families from day to day.

We promise to bear with one another's weakness had infirmities with much tenderness, etc.

We promise to bear one another's burdens and to cleave to one another in all conditions." To these earnest, sincere people it was a solemn Reality. They labored to fulfill their vows, and many who have wondered at this intense loyalty of May's Lick people to each other, to their church, to their school, and to everything that is May's Lick, may find the answer in these

vows. The early church Fathers though dead, yet speak by their holy example and influence.

From 1789 till 1797 — 8 years, the church was without a preacher but they held services every Sunday, often visiting ministers came, and they were received into the South Elkhorn Association in 1791. Later they joined the Bracken Association in 1799.

The church progressed in harmony many years: the membership grew, and as one time it was the largest Baptist church in the West. The first meeting house was a log structure built on the John Shotwell land in what is now the cemetery. Two acres had been designated as a burial ground. After the congregation had grown considerably, a brick building was constructed on the opposite side of the Great Road. The logs of the first church formed the central part of a barn which is still in use on Mrs. Anna Looney's farm today.

Dr. Drake in his book *Pioneer Life In Kentucky* pictures a Sunday in May's Lick, and adds: "The scene around this village temple can never fade from my memory or my heart. Horses hitched along the fence, and men and women on foot or horseback arriving from all quarters; within the inclosure neighbors shaking hands and inquiring after each other's families; a little group leaning against the fence in conversation; another seated on a bench "talking it over"; another little party strolling among the graves; and squads of children sitting or lying on the grass to rest themselves. The hour for worship arrived, the congregation were seated within and around the cabin-church on benches without backs, and there stood Deacon Morris, a short, broad, grave, and fleshy man of fifty, beneath



the pulpit, giving out the hymn, while Old Hundred, by twice as many voices, was mingled with the notes of the birds in the surrounding trees. It was the custom of those who came from a distance to bring with them some kind of food, and in the hour of intermission they might be seen in scattered groups engaged in loquacious. Sometimes we returned home to dinner, and did not go again; at other times we dined at Uncle Cornelius Drake's. How impressively all this contrasts with the revolting scenes of Saturday's sin and shame. The village church and the village tavern did in fact represent the two great opposing principles: good and evil, the spirit and the flesh. One might have been taken as a symbol of heaven — the other of hell."

There came a time when the church was plagued by many new schisms. One had to do with slavery, another and far more disturbing one, was the strange new doctrine being propounded by the great orator — Alexander Campbell. He came to May's Lick and by his matchless oratory swayed many of the church members, although they did think his doctrine rather vague. It was not Campbell's idea to form a new denomination, but rather to reform the existing one. It is not the purpose of this article to dwell on church history, but suffice it to say, feeling ran high, friends took opposite sides, families were divided in opinions and a split in the church was inevitable.

In June 1830, agreement was made for a friendly separation of that group who believes in whether contributing towards defraying its expense or not." The course of instruction was to "qualify young men and young ladies to enter our best colleges." Preachers served as teachers in the Academy.

After three changes in location and as many changes of name, the May's Lick Presbyterian Church, previously called The Smyrna Presbyterian was moved to May's Lick in 1850. A devastating fire destroyed the church in 1876. The next year the present church building was erected on the same foundation. The membership is small but they are zealous, devoted Presbyterians.

The first Catholic Church in the May's Lick area was the little chapel which Father Hickey built on his land at Mill Creek. That building with its

Gothic windows and small panes of glass is still standing. The next Catholic Church was in May's Lick, in the corner of the present church yard, and Father Mackey was the priest. The present St. Rose of Lima the principles set forth by Alexander Campbell. Thus, a new church — the Christian Church — Disciples of Christ, was

formed. At the time of the division, the two factions were about equal in culture, intelligence and piety. Distinguished preachers have filled both pulpits through the years and both have contributed much that was enriching to the spiritual life of May's Lick.

### Academy Opens

In 1856 The May's Lick Male and Female Academy opened. It was, "to receive its share of the Common School Funds from the State, provided that every free white child in the district have the privilege of attending. Church was remodeled from the second church. Father Hickey served as priest in the May's Lick area for 39 years. He never had any other appointment. He died in 1902.

Dr. Daniel Drake was the first resident physician of May's Lick. After graduating, he practiced one year in his home community, then, at the insistence of Dr. Goforth, he went to Cincinnati where greater opportunity awaited him.

Basil C. Duke, physician and surgeon, was born March 31, 1815 near Orangeburg, Kentucky. He was the son of Dr. Alexander and Mary Broome Duke, natives of Maryland, who came to Kentucky and settled in Mason county in 1810. Basil went to Baltimore to study medicine and graduated from the University of Maryland in 1834. The same year he located in May's Lick, and remained there the rest of his life, with the exception of the four years he spent in the Confederate Army during the War Between the States. He stood in the front rank of the medical profession.

His great success and skill drew much recognition. November 13, 1835 he married Miss Lemira Mitchell, the granddaughter of Sanford Mitchell. Dr. Duke was the great-grandfather of Mrs. Anna Looney. Other names on the Honor Roll of County Doctors who served May's Lick with distinction are: Dr. Parry, Dr. Wheatly, Dr. Browning, Dr. Kelley, Dr. Thompson, Dr. Davis, and Dr. Yancey. All of them labored long and faithfully in the com-

munity they loved and where they were loved by all. They knew the trials and tribulations of their patients. It was not just "a patient" they went to see, but a friend. Their sympathetic interest and words of encouragement healed the spirit as much as the pills and potions healed the body. They have all gone to join the ranks of the immortals but their memory is still treasured in many hearts. The streamlined clinics and starchy nurses, shaking their thermometers can not take the place of the beloved Country Doctor.

### Emporium Too

May's Lick was quite an emporium in its day. stores and shops of all kinds met the needs of the public, and Taverns were numerous. The Herndon House was on the northwest corner at the intersection of the Raymond and Lexington roads. John Shotwell lived and had a Tavern where Jolly's garage is. His daughter, Lydia, had some girls spending the night with her, so the old story goes, and they heard that if a girl ate hard-boiled eggs with salt before going to bed, she would dream of her future husband. In a spirit of fun the girls decided to try it. The next morning Ann startled the girls by declaring she really had had a dream. She dreamed she saw a stranger — an unusual looking young man ride up. He wore a broad brimmed hat, knee britches, and silver buckles on his shoes. Of course she was voted the best Dreamer, but, not too long after that a very unusual appearing young man did ride up. He was wearing knee britches and silver buckles on his shoes. His name was Sanford Mitchell — the first Mitchell to become a part of the May's Lick community. He married quite a while and became the husband of Lydia Shotwell, and the progenitor of many of the May's Lick Mitchells. Miss Elizabeth Mitchell and her sister, Mrs. Gray, are great-granddaughters.

Between 1790 and 1795, John Shotwell built a fine brick house for his daughter Priscilla when she married Warner Wilson. The same house with added improvements is today the home of Mrs. Anna Looney, a descendant.

As May's Lick grew and prospered many lovely homes were built, and like the cabins in the woods — the latch string was always out. Hospitality has always been an outstanding characteristic of

May's Lick people, and guests from near and far hastened to come when bidden to an "in-fare", dining or luncheon. If houses could speak, the Wilsons, Peeds, Dyes, Rileys, Longnecker, Yanceys, Parrys, Pogues, and the numerous Mitchell families would give testimony today of the gracious living of yesteryears.

May's Lick was incorporated as a Trustee Town of the sixth class February 1, 1837. They had a Board of Trustees, a chairman of the board, a Town Marshall, and a Jailer. There were coal-oil street lamps on posts, and the Marshall was the lamp lighter. The lamps were lighted at dark and put out at ten o'clock — that was the custom. A board walk led from the center of the town to the school house. The main thoroughfare was Pike street; Nicholas street passed the Catholic Church, and the Raymond road was Sherman street.

The town surrendered their Articles of Incorporation in order to get road maintenance when the road was built through the town.

Twice in its long history May's Lick has gained both statewide and national recognition. First, as the home of the famous Dr. Daniel Drake, and second in the educational field. Always zealous for the welfare of its youth, May's Lick led the way in consolidation of schools. Due to the vision of one man — Supt. C. D. Wells, and the executive ability of another man — Mr. W. E. Pyles, who made a reality of the vision, the first consolidated school with pupil transportation in the state of Kentucky began operation in the fall of 1909. It has served as a model for other schools both in and out of the state, and is a source of pride to May's Lick and Mason County.

Looking back to the Jersey emigrants it must be said they were a religious people with

moral refinement and a knowledge of the useful domestic arts of civilized life. They were a superior people, who have left a godly heritage which has enabled May's Lick to stand "four square to all the winds that blow."

With deep appreciation of the many fine citizens of May's Lick — both living and dead — this bit of history is dedicated.