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Co.

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FACTS AND FOLK TALES ABOUT TUCKAHOE

✓ The term, Tuckahoe, was applied to a crescent shaped ridge lying about half-way between Maysville and Dover. It was named Tuckahoe "because it was first settled entirely by Eastern Virginians. Anyone living near the tidewater was called a Tuckahoe by the jocular pioneers living in what subsequently became West Virginia and Kentucky. The word, Tuckahoe, was of Indian origin and was used to designate the tubers which grew on the roots of aged oak trees. The Indians ground them into meal and ate them as they did chinquapin cakes. Even in Charlotte Co. to be called a Tuckahoe was similar to being described as a Mossback." (Elizabeth Pickett, Drivin' Woman pp. 107-8.) Such a term, however, was not applicable to either the land or the cultured people who made Tuckahoe famous in Kentucky! The father of one of the members of the Washington Study Club used to tell this story, a favorite along the Ridge. A little colored boy stole a hoe and when he was called up for questioning, he was asked: "Sambo, why did you steal that hoe?" He replied: "Boss, I never stole no hoe. I jest Tuckahoe."

The surface of the crescent was generally uneven; part hilly and broken, part gently undulating. From many sections of the ridge magnificent views of the Ohio valley could be seen, and cutting through the ridge, the waters of Beasley, Lee and Lawrence Creeks raced down to pour into the Ohio River. The soil based upon limestone was deep, rich and highly productive. In the ages long before man appeared, the very first form of life swam and crawled around in the brackish water that covered the land. The fossil shells and sediment left when the seas dried up gave the area hard water and soft lime rock. Then, glaciers came down from the North bringing gifts. Inching along in their slow advance, they gathered up all sorts of things, carrying them along embedded in the ice and dropping them wherever the ice melted. Chunks of quartz which furnished raw material for the weapons of Indians when they hunted or went on the warpath. Gravel deposits from beds of far away rivers, handy for building roads, mixing into cement, and for human burial. Both Indians and white settlers placed their dead in gravel beds. Also many springs were formed. Multitudes of animals came to drink from them or made paths from springs to streams. Buffalo, with their sure instinct for traveling up the easiest slopes, roamed up and down leaving "traces" that later became roads. Their hides made carriage robes. There were deer, elk, turkeys, ducks and the small game we know today and bear and wolves and panthers to prey upon the others. Indian Tribes followed the animals into this rich hunting ground. Although, the first people were nameless, they left pottery, baskets and mounds, and buried their dead with ritual and ceremony.

When the first white men came, probably Christopher Gist and a boy who on March 16, 1751 traveled through the north border of Mason and nearly through what is now Bracken County, they found the ridge interlaced with paths of Indians and game 'neath a covering of mighty forests. By 1760, many hardy souls were beginning to roam the wilderness, exploring it and selecting lands for themselves, but by 1776, the Indians aroused by the invasions of the white men went on the warpath. Pioneers, faced by mass acres, ambushes, kidnapings, raids, battles were more hesitant to explore and settle until 1784 when the Indians were subdued.

A number of the pioneer families received land grants signed by Patrick Henry since Kentucky was at that time still a part of Virginia. For example, Thomas Collier was given 3,000 acres for his "valiant services in the Revolutionary War." The deed on parchment was signed by the thumb print of Patrick Henry in blood. Colonel Collier preferred to remain in Virginia, according to Elizabeth Pickett, but he built a palatial home "to which his younger sons and daughters with their wives and husbands migrated with slaves, live stock and domestic gear to claim the crescent shaped plateau of cane and forest which the patent located for them on the Southern shore of the Ohio River between Lawrence and Lee Creeks." (Elizabeth Pickett, Drivin' Woman p. 108.)

Many other early settlers built houses from logs felled and smoothed by slave labor. Clay taken out of excavations for a cellar was made into bricks and fired on the place as larger, more imposing edifices were erected. Spring houses were constructed close by each home in order to assure an adequate supply of cold, pure water. Furniture poured out from the East in covered wagons, on horse back, in flat boats, or "broad-horns." As many as 30 such boats landed at the foot of Limestone Creek, the present site of Maysville, shortly after 1775, according to Collins. (Lewis Collins, History of Kentucky, p. 23). On Nov. 16, 1793, the first line of "Ohio Packet Boats" (Keel or flat boats) was established at Cincinnati to make trips to Pittsburgh and return monthly. At Limestone was an office for insuring goods to be shipped, and Tuckahoe and other sections of Mason County began to take advantage of the opportunity offered to trade with the outside world.

In 1797, a man by the name of Nathan Sidwell migrated to Kentucky and purchased a large tract of land in the Tuckahoe community on Lee's Creek where in 1813, he erected a large corn and flour mill. The basement and lower stories were of stone and the upper stories of wood. He did all the work of building including the making of the machinery. He raised his wheat, ground it into flour, hauled it to the river, and shipped it to New Orleans, where it was regarded as the best flour that came to that market. These shipments lasted from 1814 to 1831. After Sidwell's death, the mill passed into the hands of an old bachelor, named Robert McCaughlin, and was called "Old Bob's Mill." Later, passing into the hands of Nick Wolf, it was called "Wolf's Mill," until he disposed of it. Finally it was used as a tobacco barn.

Inside the mill was a deep well which supplied water for a tenant house, located across the creek. Eventually this house burned, and since the mill was in an isolated spot off the highway, it came to be used illegally; and unknown to the owner, gambling, crap games and chicken fights were carried on there. Vandals began to use the walls, rails and any part of it they could pry loose for fire wood and lest it be further demolished, the owner tore down this old landmark of yester year.

Young people living in relative ease in this day of modern machinery have slight comprehension of the hardships faced by their pioneer ancestors on Tuckahoe Ridge.

"In these early days, many hands were needed to accomplish the simplest thing. One fifth of a farmer's acreage often was required to feed his horse power. Corn was planted with a hoe. Wheat, broadcast by hand, was harvested with a scythe or sickle, threshed with flails, or by men on horse back riding round and round on the barn floor over the sheaves. Then, it was tossed in a sheet to clear it of chaff. Girls brought cool water from a spring to thirsty men in fields, who drank it from a gourd dipper. Soap was made from grease and lye, leached from a barrel of wood ashes. The smoke house processed quantities of ham, bacon and sausage. Its great iron kettles were often found by the fireplace, holding kindling at a later day." (Virginia Hunt, What Went On Around Here. p. 3)

Considering the endless toil involved in production, the price of some of the out put was ridiculously low. On Feb. 1, 1827, bacon sold at from 3 to 3½¢ a lb., butter at from 9 to 12¢. Feathers brought from 20 to 25¢, tallow 6 to 7¢. Corn sold for 14 to 16¢ a bushel, corn meal for 17-20¢, potatoes 25-30¢, flour \$3 to \$3.60 a barrel, hemp \$6.50 to 7.00 a ton, new whiskey 16 to 18¢ a gallon, old whiskey 27 to 30¢ gallon.

With the coming of more and more settlers to Tuckahoe, the old trails left by Indians and buffaloes grew into roads, and while mud frequently made them unpassable, the people from the Ridge journeyed back and forth on many missions to Limestone and Dover, places of considerable importance in the early days. Then, on Feb. 4, 1818, the Lexington and Maysville Turnpike Road Company was chartered. On April 17, 1824, a line of stages was established from Maysville through Lexington to Frankfort and Louisville. That the trip could be made in two days seemed progress indeed and the ever alert families on Tuckahoe Ridge were ready to take advantage of it to pursue business and pleasure. The fact that only six days were required to travel to Washington City and an average of two steamers daily stopped in Maysville by 1824, brought many relatives and famous men to visit in Mason County. Certainly the people from the Ridge were among the first to mount their horses, or climb in their buggies, and join the throngs who gathered in Maysville to welcome General LaFayette, his son, Col. George Washington LaFayette, and the Governor of Ohio who arrived on the Steamer "Herald" on May 21, 1825, and received an enthusiastic reception and ovation. Without doubt, the "first families" of Tuckahoe participated in the public dinner honoring Henry Clay as he stopped in Maysville enroute home from Washington May 24, 1825. It inaugurated a series of public dinners and receptions in the major cities in Central Kentucky which were outpourings of the public confidence and sympathy during this year because of the slanderous "bargain and intrigue" accusations. Daniel Webster and his family received a perfect ovation in Maysville, where a public dinner was given for them on May 18, 1837.

Descendents of several pioneer families at Tuckahoe make special mention of the fine libraries they possessed so it is fair to suppose that they were well represented in the throng on the river bank when Charles Dickens paused at Maysville for a few hours on April 6, 1842.

The Ohio River brought not only notable visitors but appalling floods and solid ice. Secure on their heights, the people of the Ridge looked down on the swollen waters as they swept higher in April 1815 than they had been since 1793. Again when the river reached its greatest height on Feb. 17th in the greatest flood ever known in the Ohio Valley in 1832, many people on Tuckahoe gazed down in amazement and with sympathy on the dwelling houses, stables, outhouses, fencing saw logs

grain stacks, horses and cattle being swept by in the turbulent waters far beneath them.

Many a gay young lad and lassie went coasting or sleighriding in the snowfall of Nov. 13, 1833 which reached the depth of twelve inches, or enjoyed the novel experience of walking across the Ohio River when in January 1841, it remained frozen over for five days.

The people on Tuckahoe suffered with those of neighboring sections from inroads of Asiatic Cholera which history records as having visited Mason County in a light form in Oct. 1832. From May 30th to Aug. 1st., 1833, it returned in a more virulent form, spread rapidly and brought consternation and mourning everywhere. On July 2, 1835, fewer deaths occurred from another less severe epidemic. About the only remedy available for contagious diseases in those early days of few physicians and limited roads was isolating the afflicted. A room in one of the old homes on the Ridge is still pointed out as the one in which a daughter of the house was confined when she developed smallpox and her sister climbed up and down a ladder daily to minister to her needs.

✓ In its heyday, the village of Tuckahoe consisted of a combined store and post-office, a blacksmith shop, a toll gate, and two residences. At one period the post office was in the hands of W. L. Holton for 28 years. He was succeeded by Jim Haggerty, a cripple. He ran the store and lived across the road from the store with his wife and several children. He collected taxes at the toll gate, an important institution in the early days before roads were built and maintained by the state and federal government. Those who used the roads paid tolls at gates so many miles apart and the proceeds were used to keep the roads in passable condition. Elizabeth Pickett tells: "Forming the spinal column of Tuckahoe was the Limestone toll pike. Tired of being mudbound eight months of the year, Charles Moncure in 1845 built four miles of it from Sharon's Crossing on the river, past his Children's Chance to the Macgower post office and smithy at Tuckahoe's mid point. He then presented his bill for \$2800 to the Mason County fiscal court which tabled it indefinitely, but conferred a unanimous vote of thanks on the builder, and decreed that he and his might use the new road without toll for all time to come." (Elizabeth Pickett, Drivin' Woman, p. 108)

The combined tollgate, post office and store served as a community center for young and old. No matter what Jim Haggerty's customers asked him for, nine times out of ten his reply would be the same; "No, I haven't any today, but I'll have it tomorrow." And he would! He always had red and white striped cocoanut candy, five thin strips for five cents, and nothing ever tasted better to his young customers with insatiable appetites, who rode up daily on horseback to wait for Bill Hawes and his two-horse covered wagon which brought the mail from Maysville, merchandise for the store, and often a passenger or two on their way to Minerva. These boys and girls who came regularly were called the "Mail Getters" and seldom would one of them miss this opportunity to socialize, to exchange news of happenings along the Ridge, and to make plans for dates in the evening. Not only was there a strong community spirit in Tuckahoe but there was a deep family spirit as well for the descendents of the early settlers were constantly intermarrying, and nearly every one was kin to nearly everyone else there. When one young woman from Fayette County married into one of the first Tuckahoe families, her husband's aunt put her in her buggy and took her all along the Ridge to call, saying, "Now, honey, just call everybody cousin."

Perhaps nothing contributed more to this close-knit community than the Beasley Church which stood eight miles north west of Maysville at the intersection of the Big Pond Pike and the Dover Road. "It like many another early church derived its name from the creek that ran in the vicinity of the site chosen; thus the new church was called Beasley. The name occurs frequently in the environs of Plugtown, the old name for the West end of Maysville. Here one finds the old deserted graveyard of the Beasley family, which lies close to the little Beasley Creek which directs one to the hollow of the same name leading to the Lexington Road. The name of John Beasley, one of the early citizens of the district, appears on petitions asking for the establishment of Mason County." (Alberta Brand, Place Names of Mason County.) The church was formed from the small membership of the pioneer Baptist Church, known as Lee's Creek Church, which was admitted as a member of the Elkhorn Association in 1798. Soon after the debate of Alexander Campbell of Bethany, Va., and Wm. L. Macalla of Augusta on baptism which was held in Durrett's Woods at Washington on Oct. 15, 1823, the majority of the members of the Lee's Creek Church followed the lead of their pastor, Blackstone L. Abernethy, and adopted the views of Alexander Campbell. So great was his eloquence that people from the Baptist, Presbyterian and other communions joined the group and formed the Disciples, later known as Christians. (At the conclusion of this paper will be found a description of "The Reformation" which resulted in the forming of this new denomination.) As they were looking around for at least an upper room, as had the twelve, James Speed gave a nine acre triangular piece of land for a church and a school. Under the leadership of William Callender Holton and others the new building was begun in 1832, and completed three years later. It was of brick and stone, with double doors in the front and rear walls, a raised pulpit, and a balcony for colored people. Every distinguished professor at Transylvania University, at one time or other, came to Old Beasley as a visiting minister. Many outstanding men held pastorates there. Some of the families who were regular members of its congregation were the Holtons, Picketts, Osbornes, Donovans, Perrines, Smoots, Balls, Bouldins and Kirks. To it on Sunday hastened long lines of people, on foot, on horseback, in luggies. Ladies in long, full skirts, hatted and gloved, alighted on the wooden stile at the side of the church and bowing to their friends proceeded with dignity to their family pews. After church, the congregation lingered to visit with each other often times until two o'clock. The starving young folks stood restless by waiting eagerly for signs that the group would disperse and go home to dinner.

The elderly residents of the Ridge well remember the tables extended to seat fourteen or more relatives or friends. The head of the family, distinguished by a long white beard, like a patriarch of old returned a prolonged grace. Then he served the hot meat at one end of the table while his wife presided over the old Kentucky ham at the other. The largesse of the land and the fat of the dairy were passed many times around the table by the negro servants.

By each home of any consequence were the slave cabins. The men worked on the farm, the women in the house, and the children were called from their play to churn, bring in the wood, clean the lamps and perform similar helpful chores. Today where the old quarters remain, too frequently their roofs have been carried away by high winds and the walls are crumbling.

The Old Beasley Church has suffered a similar fate. Larger churches nearby, good roads, automobiles, the restlessness of young people and other influences reduced the congregation until in 1935 it ceased to be a place of worship. A few

descendents of the old church leaders tried in vain to rescue the church, but finally discouraged by the apathy they encountered, they dismantled the interior of the building. The pulpit chairs are being used at the present time by the Christian Church in Germantown. Neglected, unrepaired, and vandalized, the building rapidly deteriorated, and collapsed on Sept. 21, 1950 after a hard rain. Today only a few scattered stones mark where its foundation stood, a short distance from the graves of its deceased members whose markers and monuments bear the names of both the honored and the unsung who worshipped their Maker there long ago. Among them was buried Dr. Joseph Desha Pickett, a grandson of Gov. Joseph Desha, who was president of the University of Kentucky 1868-69, and state superintendent of public instruction. The church fathers insisted from the first that the Beasley burying ground should be for anybody in the community regardless of rank or station. Those who could not afford to buy a lot could go down in the North corner and get a grave free of any cost.

Not far away in the valley of Lees' Creek there stood a huge sycamore tree, which old "Uncle Andy Bartlett," a former slave of the Osborne family, used as his home after he was given his freedom prior to the Civil War. He refused to leave the place and lived on in this tree, doing his cooking and sleeping there until he died.

The school building also of brick stood a short distance in the rear of the church beyond the cemetery. The regard the early Virginian settlers held for "learning" was reflected in the patronage the school received. The young people of Tuckahoe were well educated for their day and time and to the Ridge came others seeking the best in education. In The Lawyers & Lawmakers of Kentucky, edited by H. Levin, one finds in a biographical sketch written by Dr. Thos. Pickett, that the honorable William Henry Wadsworth, born July 4, 1821, boarded after the early death of his mother, with the family of David Smith on the present side of Buffalo Trace until he reached school age. "Then he was put under the charge of an excellent scholar who taught a classical school in the Western part of the county on a beautiful blue-grass upland-Known as Tuckahoe. Here he had as his daily associates the children of the Virginia tobacco-planters who owned and occupied the land for many miles around-"then, as now, an uncommonly fine rural population." Mr. Wadsworth, who served as state senator, U. S. Congressman and Commissioner to Mexico under President U. S. Grant, was only one of the large number of distinguished young men whose minds were trained in that school. Many of them continued their education in universities and colleges, among which Transylvania was highly favored because of its connection with the Christian Church.

Tuckahoe naturally shared in catastrophes that affected neighboring communities. One occurred on Sunday, April 13th, 1854, when at 2 A. M. when a magazine containing 1,100 kegs, or 27,500 lbs. of gunpowder on the hillside in the edge of Maysville, fired by incendiaries, exploded with terrific effect. Among 4,000 people living within a mile, there were many hair breadth escapes. A few people were injured, one dangerously but none fatally. One woman ill at the time died of fright; thirteen houses were demolished and all other houses within two miles or less were damaged, brick walls were badly sprung, windows and doors were blown in and shattered, with the loss and damage amounting to over \$50,000. Residents in Tuckahoe shaken violently in their beds feared that the end of the world had come. The explosion was heard at Poplar Plains over 22 miles away; on a steam boat 42 miles up the Ohio River; at Hillsboro, Ohio, forty miles distant. At Orangeburg, 7 miles away, china ware was shaken off tables and windows were broken. Near Helena, 12 miles distant, negroes were thrown out of their beds. The water in the Ohio River was

urged toward the Ohio shore and rose suddenly on that shore several feet. In the Maysville Cotton Mill, 1,600 lights of glass were broken; stones weighing 102 pounds and less were thrown across the river into Aberdeen, over a mile distant from the magazine. Eight churches were damaged from \$100 to \$1,100 each, and to this day the imprint of a huge stone can be seen on the side wall of the Presbyterian Church. Many people from the Ridge journeyed to Maysville to view the damage and offered assistance to those in need.

When all the efforts made by the great compromiser, Henry Clay, to avert armed conflict over slaves and state's rights failed, the sons marched away from Tuckahoe Ridge to die in the Civil War, while its daughters took over their work on the farms and cut their food and clothing to meet the shortages that prevailed during the years of conflict. While their land was not the center of any battle and their homes were not revengefully burned by an invading army, scarcely a family escaped hardship and tragedy. Unfortunately, records could not be found of the soldiers from Tuckahoe who distinguished themselves by gallantry under fire.

Time does not permit this overview of Tuckahoe to evaluate the part played by the citizens of that section in the forming of the tobacco pool to break the power of the trusts, and in its efforts to obtain a fair price for the farmers who were producing by hard and prolonged labor the leaf that represented their main cash income for the year. Dover had the largest tobacco prizing and shipping point in that section. Collins' History noted that on March 16th, 1844, tobacco grown in Mason County, which enjoyed a fine reputation in the New Orleans market, was quoted separately at high figures. Tuckahoe's tobacco was second to none!

One of Tuckahoe's daughters with her facile pen described the care taken in raising tobacco: "Under the canvas at the edge of the walnut grove, the tobacco seedlings showed first as pin points of green, then as dimes, quarters and fifty cent pieces strewn thickly over the ashy plant bed. Wire worms crawling under the sun warmed cotton at night menaced the plants. America brought arsenic, mixed it in corn meal and gave it to weed to cust over the four precious plant beds. Like gorillas squatting on a plank above the green mosaic, the black men weeded the beds with the patience good farmers muster for every phase of this finger crop. A dry spell followed. On afternoons, America scanned the heavens for rain clouds. Shadrack hauled out pond water in two barrels mounted on the farm sled, and Weed sprinkled the growing plants. Dry weather was what they needed now, if it did not last too long. Dry weather makes good root systems.-----When the heave of tobacco setting was over, Tuckahoe farmers settled back to catch their breath. Wheat began to yellow, the corn was thinned and plowed for the third time. In the tobacco patch, the transplanted seedlings showed their ears like inquisitive rabbits." (Elizabeth Pickett, *Drivin' Woman*, p. 270). From the same writer came this idyllic description of Tuckahoe in the Springtime: "It was late afternoon and the boisterous March wind had blown itself out before sunset. From the wagon tracks curving along the crest of the river rim, Tuckahoe dropped away on all sides. Below to the East lay the wide Ohio Valley with the great river spreading in flood like a yellow lake across its rich bottom lands. To the West across the Tuckahoe Turnpike, one could see the hillsides

covered with blossoming patches of dogwood and redbud, as if Cousin Theresa had laid out her pastel quilts to sun. The air was full of the melody of running water. Treble notes sounded close at hand where the busy little rivulets dropped over limestone ledges, deep-throated thunder boomed from the far side of the Drake hills where Lee's Creek rushed riverward. From thicket and meadow arose the lush, sweet smell of burgeoning life, the smell that makes the farmers' palms itch for the jerk of plow handles between them. On a warm slope, lambs had lined up to play leap-the-hollow. When they stood almost nose to nose, as on a starter's signal, they sprang high into the air, raced down the slope, soared across a hill and landed on the green sod opposite, shook themselves, flung their legs in all directions and bounced up the other grade to repeat the gay maneuver coming back." (Opus cited, pp.268-9)

The seasons continue to bring their changes to Tuckahoe. Young lambs dot its meadows in the spring. Tobacco ripens on its rich soil in the fall. But hard surfaced roads bearing automobiles have covered the white limestone and gravel ones over which the buggies travelled back and forth, binding together its interrelated people, building a sense of community that is seldom met in the world today. It fostered a unity and a pride in Tuckahoe that made its people a distinguished race, a pride in its pioneer ancestors from Virginia, a pride in the quality of its land and in its superior crops, a pride in its church through which its men and women dedicated their lives to building God's Kingdom on the Ridge, a pride in everything and every person on that beautiful crescent high above the river and the surrounding country. The spirit that prevailed there in its heyday well may be expressed by paraphrasing a well known poem by Ben L. Cox:

The sun never shone on a country more fair
Than beautiful, peerless Tuckahoe;
There's life in a kiss of her rarified air,
Tuckahoe, prolific Tuckahoe.

Her sons are valiant and noble and bright,
Her beautiful daughters are just about right;
And the babies-God bless them-are clear out of sight;
That crop never fails in Tuckahoe.

Our homes are alight with the halo of love,
Tuckahoe, contented Tuckahoe;
We bask in the smiles of the heavens above--
No clouds ever darken Tuckahoe.

Our grain waves in billows of gold in the sun,
The fruits of our orchards are equaled by none,
And our pumpkins- some of them- weigh almost a ton;
We challenge the world in Tuckahoe!

Prepared for Ida Allison and The Washington
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