

10 October, 1974
Jackson County, Ky
Isaacs family
Floyds Branch, Red Lick
Owsley County

Dr. Garrett: I spent the night with Martha and Lester and headed out toward Red Lick. I turned right on Floyds Branch, Red Lick. It is a beautiful little creek, beautiful huge valley, and I drove clear to the head of it and I ran into the damnedest log cabin - it's a pretty place. A whole big family living up here. They're making molasses today. They're using a tractor to grind it out, but they've got the crudest evaporating set-up you ever saw. They expect to make about 50 gallons, but it's to serve three families for the winter, so they didn't think that would be too much at all. I've never in years been over a road this bad - sure glad I've got the pick-up truck. It is a huge, but beautiful valley. I highly recommend it.

It's interesting that Old Man Isaacs and two of his boys are living there in a cabin that they built in 1933, in the depth of the Depression. They used the logs and built this cabin. They told me the only thing that they put into it commercially was a \$2.50 keg of nails from Sears-Roebuck. They have some attractive children - some little girls. They're probably 15-16 years old, another little girl probably 6 or 8, and I asked them what time they went to school and the father said that he didn't allow the children to go to school, that it's damn foolishness. Put them in a bus with some dang fool woman just married, driving, expected to have a wreck, and then they drive all the county to end up next-door. So he said he didn't allow sending them to school.

So I'm heading out of here now - it's a gorgeous day, like all the week has been - beautiful forecast for today and tomorrow. I'm heading out of here, back into Jackson, then into Clay County.

I am of a very strong opinion that all this Red Lick country should be bought up by the government and turned into a national preserve of some sort. It's just too pretty to be allowed to be ruined by population - too damn many people. For instance, that Floyds Branch would be a perfect place for game, etc.

Just beyond the little town of Big Hill, I turned to the left up the Owsley fork of Red Lick. I want to see what this country's like. This road is relatively new in here - see where it goes and what it's all about. This is a beautiful valley which I've never seen before. It's wide, gently-rolling lower hills and beautiful bottoms. There's some sort of big construction project going up over here at the Horn Head area - damned if I know what it is. I'll try to find out.

The construction project is turning out to be a huge dam of some sort around here, I imagine for real water supply, because Berea does have a chronic shortage, or maybe a state water supply for the area. I don't know - I'll have to find out.

Talk about isolation! These last two hollers in this Owsley fork, which appears to be being dammed, and at Floyds fork are two really remote areas.

While I'm cruising here through the back woods of Jackson and Madison County, I'm now back north of the Sand Gap, it reminds me that there were no roads anywhere except trails when I was a little boy, and Owsley County, we didn't worry about seeing roads surfaced. We worried about seeing roads built. There were numerous parts of the counties that had no roads. And there was always an effort to elect a County Judge of certain areas so that he would ultimately build a road into that area. However, in those days, the roads were built with a horse and scraper, or a mule and scraper. Later on, the road grader became the style, but the bulldozer and heavy equipment which could build roads are a post-World War-II phenomena, as far as Kentucky was concerned, anyhow. The roads at Booneville were creek-beds. I guess at the head of the creek, somebody had made some sort of a trail across the head of the holler to another creek, and on and on. This is the way it went. And I remember, I was about 10 years old when the first road was completed into Booneville. But the road came into Beattyville, then was gravel by wagon and team with gravel from Buck Creek up near the old Uncle Bill Lee's place, carried about a cubic yard per wagon. This was followed later by loose limestone and this, in turn, was ultimately followed by asphalt. When Dad was in politics back in the 30's, 36 and 37, I would drive him and candidates through this part of the county, and it is unrecognizable due to the new roads. In those days, we were stuck, we had flat tires, we were in dust, absolutely no surface on any of the back roads in Jackson, Clay, Owsley, Lee, Estill, this whole area. And in those days, we would drive up to the various schoolhouses where there would have been a public speaking posted by pictures of the candidates, etc. a few weeks or days earlier, and the candidates would speak on whatever the issues were. And believe you me, you've never heard such oratory as these candidates made! I have actually stood near Sand Gap and heard one candidate accuse his opposing candidate of actually having his brother murdered and of burning his home for the insurance and arson, and all these charges! I stood behind a great big tree one night, thinking that both sides might start shooting - there was a lot of shooting later. And it's phenomenon to see here I'm on asphalt road which used to be just a trail.

The new ground - I'll explain what new ground is - you used to hire a family or take a family or do it yourself, into an area which was timbered. You would chop the timber down, you would burn it, destroy it, you would then take a mule and a hillside plow and you would plow the field up, you would plant a crop, usually of tobacco, and the first year the crop was great, tobacco was light in color, light in weight, but of high quality, and brought one hell of a price. And for the second or third year, after corn, the topsoil washed off and the field was allowed to return to sprouts. And later on, these fields might have been sprouted again, again you can hire a family to take axes, scrubbing hoes, etc. in and chop this out and turn them into pasture. But it's now apparent that nobody wants to work that way any more, doesn't have to work that way any more. And all the hillsides which used to be tended are now back to grass or going back to timber. It's also interesting to see the very few log structures remaining. Now 25 or 30 years ago, hell, half these people lived in log buildings. And now you see an occasional log barn or an occasional cabin, but not on the main route. You almost have to get up into a hillside holler somewhere, a back route. Now there's a beautiful log building - I'm going to get a picture of it.

While talking about the new ground, somebody, somewhere, some day, should emphasize the brutal, back-breaking work clearing a new ground and then tending it was, because the poor old mule was half-hungry, worked his heart out from one end of the field to another, pulling up loose roots, cutting roots in two, working around stumps, then the fields were usually not more than an acre or two or three - a five-acre or four-acre new ground would have been a monstrous-sized field. The planting that was done by hand. Corn was hoed in or dropped in occasionally with the old hand planter, and then all the hoeing and tending, of course, following plowing was done with a chopping hoe and this was done usually with the person working almost at waist to shoulder height above him, standing below the row of corn and chopping above him, because the fields were steep. This was really hard work. The yields were usually very poor - there was no hybrid in those days. Each winter, you'd lay out a few ears, or an adequate number of ears, of the bigger, better flint corn, I guess it was we called it, because it was harder than hell. And in the Spring, that's the corn you'd use to plant.

Now something not done any more is gathering fodder. The leaves of the corn were taken off individually and bundled and tied into a bundle with a leaf. The bundles were big enough that a leaf would fit around it and tie, and then these bundles were stored indoors, and it's a pretty sight, retrospectively, and I enjoyed it then, surely, to see an old log barn full of bundles of fodder, which represented a good part of winter feed for cows or horses, mules and the cattle. Very few cattle were raised as such in those days. The people had a milk cow and maybe raised a calf or two, and, well, this brings up the matter of shocking corn. Corn is 14 or 16 rows or hills square. It's usually turned into a shock, the central four are pulled together at the top, and then for 14 or 16 hills of corn around, the corn is shocked, brought in, and then again is tied around the center, with a full stalk of corn. And this then is gathered later and the corn is harvested from the stalk at the time the corn is gathered some time during the winter. Corn cribs, in the earlier days, when I can remember, were made out of logs or slats. A lot of people split what we called palings - I guess it comes from the old Spanish word *palace*, which means stake. I mentioned paling fences somewhere not long ago to people, but flat boards were split and nailed onto uprights, usually saplings, to frame a crib. This brings up the matter of paling fences. Actually, by putting up a wooden structure and covering it with palings 4-6' tall and maybe 1" separated, nailed on that closely, never painted, usually split out of oak, that the fence would actually be chicken-proof, hawk-proof, etc, as long as kept in repair. And most of the garden plots - the fact is that if you went along the creeks in those days, you could see the entire front yard and maybe cut off by palings because of the chickens, etc. in the yard, the garden would be separated by palings. The house would be log and all of the outbuildings would be log. And like a damn fool, before the war, I didn't have a camera, and if I had had a camera, I wouldn't have had any idea that this scene would ever, ever pass. Otherwise, I could have had just the world's greatest collection of mountain photographs of this way that they lived.

Politicians in those days had to have the guts of iron to eat some of the food they ate. Now, there were wonderful country homes, wonderful farm homes where you ate and had great meals, they were clean. They were what you were used to. But many, many meals were eaten

in little old filthy places where the food was so damn dirty that you wouldn't touch it. But the politicians would still have to eat, afraid of alienating a voter. So I learned that just before a meal, to hop into the car and go to a store somewhere. Most of these stores are 10 ~~x~~ 12' square with tables, floor and stuff, a few canned goods, and I would buy a can of salmon for 10¢ or sardines for a nickel or a can of oysters or a couple of bars of candy or one of these Moon Pies, drink a soft drink with it and get back when the candidates were ready to eat lunch, and say, "Oh, I was so hungry, I've already eaten". This way, I avoided eating at a lot of these places. The water bothered me and the cleanliness of dishes, the cooking and everything was pretty disturbing sometimes.

I was talking about this area. The folks in here had to be very self-sufficient. Most of them did a great deal of their own black-smithing, and they raised and processed their food, as you know. They dried, they canned, they raised hogs, they rarely killed a calf, occasionally they killed sheep for meat, but a lot of people in here actually supplemented their meals by hunting. For instance, just this morning, up on the head of Floyd Fork of Red Lick, one man was going out hunting squirrels and groundhogs, he says for food. And that was very common in those days.

Before cornmeal became commercial, which was generally in the late 20's and into the 30's, most of these people took corn, shelled corn, to a mill and had it ground. This was great-flavored stuff. It did have a nutty flavor when it was warm. When it came out between the stones, it was hot, almost uncomfortable to handle. The taste was great! You could stand where it comes spewing out and every seventh measure went to the miller for the milling. And he would grind, and then every seventh one, he would throw into his bin, and I guess he sold it or used it, whatever he wanted to do with it, but that was his take. There was no cash transaction involved. When I was in my teens, I used to do this quite a bit, because Mother preferred home-ground meal to the commercially-ground meal. And this way, you got the whole grain of corn, too, instead of being degerminated.

It has probably not occurred to many people today that water was always a problem. In many places, springs ran dry following the deforestation and the answer was wells. Now in the old days, they had dug wells. They were dug by hand, lined with rock, and used as a source of water. Later on, the drilled well came in and, of course, the bore of the well was much smaller. The well was used as a source of refrigeration, as well as for water. Now in the dug wells, you used any sort of a bucket. Wooden buckets were very common, metal buckets later. In the drilled well, the bucket was approximately 4' long, about 4" in diameter, with a valve in the bottom which opened and allowed it to be filled with water, then when the bucket was brought up and set into your water bucket, the pressure pushed the bottom valve open and allowed the water to spill out and fill the bucket. Sinking the bucket in the dug well was always a problem, because sometimes, you just couldn't get the dang bucket to turn over properly and sink, so you stirred up some waves. This caused a complication if you were cooling milk. Back in those days, they had milk coolers for hanging into wells. These were long buckets, probably 20" long, 6 or 8" in diameter, with a long lid we used to put over it, and you tied a rope onto the bale and hung this down into the water of the well to keep the milk cool, so that when you went to draw water, you either pulled

the bucket up or you were darn careful, because if you turned the bucket of milk over and polluted the well, then the well had to be baled dry several times, and this was one hell of a piece of work, and everybody was mad about it.

Since many of the wells were filled with run-off water, not recognized too much in those days, there was a lot of contamination, and the typhoid rate became very high, and in rural Kentucky, whole families had typhoid. In fact, Mother had typhoid, Leslie had typhoid, lots of people died of typhoid in the area, but these were from nothing more, in my opinion, than polluted water, which started in the 30's, the state giving typhoid shots. And this was the thing that really stopped endemic typhoid in the rural areas.

Stuart at one time had asked me to put a few things down about the family. On the other side, I was talking about politics, being by myself today, just cruising and enjoying the weather, gives me a chance to think of things. Dad was in politics speaking for the Republican Party to a great extent. He used to have to ride horses everywhere, and one time, which would have been in the 1930's, on Upper Buffalo in Owsley County, he stopped his horse and 18 wild turkeys crossed in front of him, just walked across the road. Now this was in the days when about 25,000 acres of Upper Buffalo, before World War II was virgin timber, never an ax stuck in it. There were wild hogs, deer, everything. Dad said that probably the most wonderful evening he had spent in many, many a year was spent on Upper Buffalo, where he stopped and met a family so poor, to spend the night with, that they had to take the lid off the stove and heat firewood in to allow the flames to come up to light the cabin while he ate supper. This was really rural America. Dad ran into lots of villification and all in Clay County. There were lots of killings at the time he was running for the legislature, and there, at one time, they attempted to connect him with the murder of Bobby Baker, involving one of the big feuds, and it was a bad situation to be in, because the Garretts in Clay County were involved in killing the Bakers, the Bengles, the Allens, the Whites and the others, and I remember one time when Dad went into a house and announced he was Mr. Garrett and the man walked straight over to the mantle and picked up a pistol, thinking that Dad was one of the outfit and went after him. And Dad rode horseback day after day after day through this country. He told me a story which has always intrigued me, that somewhere on the edge of Clay and Owsley County, there was a long-bearded, white-bearded old man who stayed in a corner room of a log cabin and never came out. And the story goes that when he was a little boy, he had some oxen he was working and the father wanted to sell them, and the boy said, "If you sell them, I'll never come^{out}". The father sold the oxen and the boy lived in that corner room. People would stop, they finally lowered the window and all, and he stayed in this room and never left it. His mother and family took care of him, fed him, but he never did leave the room the rest of his life. He died as an old man. This is just an example of how stubborn people can be, but apparently, he had huge numbers of visitors who dropped by to see him. This is in the neighborhood of where Martha taught school, up on Island Creek, where it was a habit for every child to take the schoolteacher home at least once during the year, and this one time, Martha stayed at the place where a peddler had disappeared. He spent the night with the people, and the next day, he disappeared, therefore, the people

inherited his horse, pack, and Martha was just sure this peddler was buried under the floor of that house she was sleeping in. I don't think she slept a wink all night.

This is also in the vicinity of the famous ghost story of the men who went into the house on the Owsley-Clay line and found so many dead people who couldn't escape. All of them became mad and were written up in famous ghost stories of America - you're familiar with that.

Seale Dad - I'm sorry I can't remember the stories that he told - ghost stories. These were unbelievable! Old Man Sherman Rowland and Charlie Steele, who was well-educated - he was a lawyer, County Judge, Circuit Judge and all, and Dad would sit at night at Booneville at dusk and they would tell about the ghosts and this, that and the other, all the things that happened. And they had great numbers of stories. I can't help but believe that they have to be equated with the lack of light and the superstition engendered by this, but I have forgotten most of the stories, most of the supernatural happenings. They spoke of rapping spirits and actual ghosts. Now, the famous ghost story that you'll hear in many of my tapes here comes back to the Yearly family. Dad was born on Buck Creek, and across the hill from the creek he was born on was White Oak Creek, where Sherman Roland was raised. And on the divide between these was the home of a Yearly family. The two daughters had gone away with salesmen, and when they came home, the mother saw them enter the house, went to the house, called the children ~~ren~~ to the top of the narrow steps up to the small second story of this house, and shot the two girls dead. They rolled down the steps dead. It was interesting when the trial was held that the husband said it looked like parents ought to have a right to kill their own children. Following this, this was the most famous haunted house, certainly, in our part of Kentucky.

Now, Dad's sister, Rose Jackson, who married Smith Jackson, and I have a great tape of Dorothy Jackson telling about Smith, he left Virginia - I think he killed a man - and married Dad's sister. And the children didn't know this until they were grown. Well, that's beside the point. Aunt Rose and Smith lived in this house. Smith was considered one of the bravest men alive. They had two children, and the stories that Aunt Rose would tell Erma and me about this house, how there would be noises start in the attic and then grow and get louder and louder, and terrifying noises, then come crashing down the steps against the door that was customarily at the foot of the steps in those little old houses in those days. And yet they stayed there! Now she told me this, and it is true as far as she is concerned - one morning before daylight when Uncle Smith had taken a turn of corn to a mill, she was lying in bed nursing a baby and then a dead bony hand reached through the window and touched her on the breast where the baby was nursing, and the next day, the baby died, and she was never to be convinced that this was not the cause of the death of that baby - Prentice, I believe was his name - Prentice Jackson.

And anyhow, they lived there longer than anyone. All other people who lived there, Sherman Roland, rather Ray Roland, a relative of A.T and Ed Campbell, tried to live there and I think they lasted

one night. Most people moved in thinking, "Ah, nothing to it!" and the next day, the moved out. And there's never been any explanation for this. I guess keying the mind up to expecting this.

Dad was full of stories, most of which, unfortunately, I've forgotten. I'm just trying to remember to write down. I do know that Dad once took a job to work, he tried to make some money, \$2, I think, to pay for an examination to take his teaching certificate, so he took a job at 25¢ a day and he had to walk to work about eight miles each way, so he bought a \$2 pair of shoes and he worked eight days and had exactly enough to pay for the shoes, and the shoes wore out by the end of the thing, so he worked for a pair of shoes which he wore out and then ended up with absolutely nothing at the end of the eight-day period. This brings up a matter of what was G.W.'s education. He attended, insofar as I know, all the local grade schools, and eventually, some time before the turn of the century, went to Sue Bennett College in London, attended one year. He left with a trunk. We still have the trunk in the family somewhere, and in that trunk, one pair of socks. This is all the clothes he had. And Dad was always embittered at his father that he spent this year in Sue Bennett College and finally had to work and starve to get through because he got absolutely no money from home. This brings up a point that within the past 10-12 years, well, since Dad's death, I ran into a member of a family of an old traveling salesman who used to travel through Booneville, and they told me that he wanted to confess on his death bed that periodically, Dad's father, Lafayette McMullen Garrett, had sent money by him to George, my dad, at Sue Bennett, but that he had spent it rather than giving it to him. I do think that at one time out of this, Dad told me he got one \$20 gold piece, maybe that much, but I thought it was interesting that the old man had gotten away with it, never been caught, just wanted to confess it on his death bed.

One of the funny stories about Dad is the fact that in one October, he killed hogs early, the weather turned warm and, of course, the meat won't keep in warm weather, so Dad put on an overcoat trying to psyche himself out to the fact that it was turning cold. He'd go around, "Don't you think it's gettin' cold?" Everyone was laughing at him and thought he was trying his damnest to convince himself. I think he lost most of the meat.

Mother went to the so-called Green Hills School at Milltown, Kentucky, and had a limited education, several grades, possibly as far as the eighth grade, I'm not sure, but had a brilliant mind. She had a great vocabulary. You could never fool Lucy on vocabulary spelling or usage and grammar. And she was a voracious reader. Her favorite reading happened to be Hardy, all the Hardy novels. Periodically, she reread all of these. Her favorite piece of music was the old song, Maggie. I wandered today through the hills, Maggie, and all that sort of stuff. And she sang a lot around the house, the old hymns, and some that have come back into popularity that she used to sing, learned at the Methodist Church in Milltown.

Dad's father was known as one of the strongest men in Owsley County physically. He was also one of the better-educated men in the county, and apparently, was a rather modest income-producer, however, although just like everybody else, they had plenty to eat and wear, and had shelter. I guess that was the main thing that was important in those days.

When Dad was a youngster, he was thrown from a mule and was unconscious for about a half-day, and all they could do for him was to bring him and lay him on a palette in front of the hearth in the little house on the head of Buck Creek. And I've often thought what a terrible feeling that must be, to have a child badly injured, and yet totally unable to do anything for him - no help available! I guess it was just their way of life. They always expected to lose some, but I wonder just what terror this must have struck into the family!

Mother didn't have huge numbers of stories to tell as compared to others, as I can recall, but one of the funny things that occurred to her, that she always enjoyed telling was that shortly after she and Dad were married, they lived near the Rollie Combs graveyard, where her mother and father are now buried, above Booneville, in a place called a parsonage. And one day at church, they said to the minister, come and have lunch with us, and he said, "I believe I will". Well, this threw Mother into a panic because at the house, she had one-half of a peach in a can for dessert. So she said to Dad, she said, "Now George, when I ask, instead of putting dessert on the table, I'll just say, 'Would you like dessert?' and you say, 'I don't care for any', and we'll serve him that half-peach" And this occurred, and as soon as he'd eaten his half-peach, he said, "Well, that was so good, I'd like to have some more peaches". And then she had to tell him the story. Then later on, this fellow became the high mucketty-muck of one of the churches in Nashville, Tennessee, and he never failed to tell the story, apparently, he communicated with Mother, and it was one of his favorite stories to tell in Nashville.

I can't remember much detail, but there were several feuds in Owsley County, and when Dad was a young man and first had his story, he saved one man from getting killed, knowing this fellow intended to stab a fellow to death with a big knife he had, and Dad told me he came to the store and he knew his plans, that when he saw the man, he was going to stab him, and to save this fellow, he made him such a good trade, he traded him a knife with a short, 1-2" blade, and when this man ran into him, he thought he was going to kill, he didn't damage him too badly. Dad always felt real good about having saved this man's life.

This reminds me of the one story which Dad told me that when he taught his first school, somewhere out in the Sturgeon Country, that he got into the class and a great big, gangly boy walked up to him and said, "Mr. Garrett, I almost killed you this morning". And Dad said, "What are you talking about". He said, "Well, you walked up the creek to school and I have my rifle, sitting up above me, and I was debating whether I wanted to come to school or kill you and get rid of you and noth bother". And he said, "I'm kind of glad I didn't kill you". And Dad said they grew up to be really good friends all the rest of their life. But this story he always enjoyed telling. Schools got to be pretty rough in those days. You had to be big enough to handle the members of your class or you just couldn't teach.

I'm now over on the Sexton Creek part of , northern part of Jackson County, over toward Owsley County. The country is getting rough physically. It's still absolutely beautiful - the farms are smaller, the fields are smaller, and I'm going to cruise back through here,

I'll end up back at Uncle Tom's farm, and I suspect I may go on home this evening.

I crossed the South Fork of the Kentucky River on a wooden bridge almost at river level, several miles below the ^{Narrow} ~~Norris~~ of the South Fork. I'm now cruising up through Clay County on an old dirt road, heading for Newfound Gap and then into - there's the old Newfound School, right there, by golly - and then back into Oneida. Newfound Creek heads up near Buffalo and runs into the South Fork of the Kentucky River. I went on around, headed to Oneida, now I'm heading back down the river, back to the ~~Norris~~ ^{Narrow}, and from there, I'm going to go back up the river. Now from ~~Norris~~ ^{Narrow}, I want to stop and interview Old Man Allen, etc, so I'll discontinue this tape now - it's about over anyhow.

This is the ninth of October, 1974 - tenth of October, I guess, 1974.

There's a lot of coal mining going on here, a lot of strip mining, and roads are being torn down. You can just hear that rattle!