

CARTER COUNTY SETTLERS

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In the long, long ago, how many years I do not know, there came to the hills of Eastern Kentucky an officer of the Army that fought for the freedom of the United States. He was a man of the rugged type of the pioneer days. He had been a Colonel or some like officer in the Revolutionary war and was accompanied by his family, including his son-in law, who had also been an officer in the army. They selected a likely location in the valley of the Little Sandy River, built homes and thus laid the foundation for a town and what would later become a county of the Bluegrass State. The town, Grayson, took its name from the son-in-law, and the county, Carter, was called after the older gentleman, Col. Carter.

Other settlers came, the town became the center of trade and the hunters, traders and farmers soon began to make their homes near it. Originally the territorial borders of Carter county were dim and undefined but as more folks came to the state it became necessary to make other divisions and Kentucky from being one single county of Virginia was divided, first into three counties and later on, as it became necessary, into other divisions until now there are 120 counties. Carter as it is today has an area of 514 square miles and the population has grown from the Carter and Grayson families to a population of more than thirty thousand people.

After the Carters and Graysons came the Armstrongs, Nethercutts, Hords, Bays, Burchetts, Underwoods, Maggards, Pattons, Kibbeys, McGlones, Keatons, Huffmans, McGinnis, Warnocks, Rameys, Yates and hundreds of other names that are still familiar in the county but strange to say there are no Graysons, and but very few, if any, Carters in the county. In fact, the descendants of the first settlers seem to have disappeared entirely. One of the oldest, if not the oldest of settlers in that county passed to her reward a little more than a year ago. She was familiarly called "Granny" Armstrong. She lived to reach the century mark and was hale for all of her years until the last few months of her life. She came to Kentucky from Virginia. The family, consisting of several boys and girls aside from the parents, came in wagons over the Cumberland's bringing all their household effects with them. The livestock was driven or tied behind the wagons. They traveled all day and at night formed the vehicles into a stockade to guard against prowling Indians and kindled a camp fire to prevent wild animals from coming too near. They made the trip without peril except for one attack by the Indians which they were able to repulse. On reaching Carter County they established their home and quite a number of the family are there yet. A few are scattered over the states.

Another numerous family is the Huffmans. They have been in the county as far back as any of those now living can remember. They married into the Kibby family, which is also an old family there, and through marriage are distantly related to a majority of the native folks of the county.

McGlone is also a familiar name there and McGlone Creek is practically owned and controlled by families of this name. There are many neighborhoods in which all the folks are related by blood or marriage.

Several years ago a number of immigrants from the central part of the state came to Carter County and introduced tobacco. They bought farms and began raising it on a small scale at first and it was shipped to Louisville for sale, that being the nearest market. Later buyers began coming to the farmers and buying and then came the loose leaf houses which handle most of the crop now. Carter and some parts of adjoining counties raise about two million pounds of the weed now and a part of it is sold over the floor of the loose leaf house in Grayson, some in Huntington, some in Vanceburg and Lexington. The second loose leaf house for Grayson is now under way and will perhaps be ready for the winter markets.

The timbered lands of this county have about disappeared. At one time, Carter county had much of its territory covered with giant oaks, poplars, and other valuable trees but clearing of the land and the small saw mills have disposed of most of it.

As for minerals, Carter has coal, iron, fireclay and oil in more or less paying quantities. It is on the edge of the eastern coal fields and nearly all of its coal is in the eastern part of the county. It seems that near the western part of the county the vein run down to nothing. The fireclay, however, is famous. It is said that the finest beds of clay in the world are located in this county and it would seem to be so from the number of brick plants in the county. Olive Hill, largest town in the county, is the center of the brick making industry. One of the largest firebrick plants in the world was erected a few years ago at Hitchins and is now in operation. The output of this plant runs into the millions of bricks each month and the quality of clay seems to be peculiarly adapted for making brick for lining furnace stacks and for other things where resistance to intense heat is necessary.

For years local men have been trying to make a fortune in oil and several companies have been formed to which leased farms far and wide over the county. Test wells have been sunk and oil has been found in nearly every one of them but the quantity was so small that nothing came of it. However, geologists claim that there is oil in paying quantities to be found there but it seems that the capital of the company always gives out at 1300 feet and the oil question remains a thing to be hoped for.

Iron ore is found in paying quantities in some parts of the county but on account of the inconvenience for shipping, it has not been developed. Shortly after the civil war a number of charcoal furnaces were erected in the county but they have not been in operation for more than thirty years. There remains but little to mark the places where once hundreds of men, horses and cattle were employed to keep the furnaces supplied with the raw material and to haul the finished product away. Charlotte Furnace was one of the last of these old stacks to be operated. A pole of masonry remains to mark the place with a few old furnace houses and the old store room still standing.

Three railroad lines enter the county. The Eastern Kentucky running north and south through the northeastern part, the C. and O., Ashland-Louisville line running east and west through the eastern part and the K and F branch of the C and O entering the western edge to a depth of about five miles. These lines furnish fairly good transportation facilities for the county.

The natural scenery in parts of the country is noted far beyond the borders. The old Carter caves are the one most noted and second only in natural formations, it is said, to the Mammoth cave in Edmondson County. Whether this be true or not, there are certainly some very wonderful formations in the caverns and the lover of nature is amply repaid for a visit there. The caves are named from some formation or tradition connected with

them. The “X” cave has two long subterranean caverns crossing and forming an “X”. In this cave, which is reached by a ladder some ten or fifteen long, is to be found what they call the natural piano, a formation of stalactites and stalagmites joined together and resembling icicles. By striking these with a knife or other hard substances, they give forth various sounds resembling in some measure the notes of a piano. Many other formations of interest are to be found in this cavern – The Saltpetre or Swindler’s cave is another of these caverns and taking in all the various rooms it is more than a mile in length and has many interesting traditions. It gets the name “saltpetre” from the fact that early settlers made hoppers in the cave filling them with dirt from the bottom and pouring on water from a spring in the cave. When this water drained through the dirt it was put in large kettles and boiled, the water evaporating leaving saltpetre in the kettle. From this they made gunpowder. Some of the remains of these old hoppers are to be seen in the cave yet.

It is claimed that at one time a criminal entered the cave from the only known entrance. In order that he might not evade escape a guard was placed near the entrance and for sometime it was thought the man would come out but he failed to return and search was made. No man could be found nor could any other entrance be located. From these traditions it came to known as “Swindler’s cave.”

Another of the caverns is the “Bat” cave, so called from the immense numbers of bats that congregate in it for the winter months. Immense patches of these animals or birds or whatever they are may are to be seen in this cave after the autumn comes. One young man who had made his first visit to this cave, excitedly told his mother there were bats in there twenty feet square. However, from reports, they are just ordinary bats but plenty of them. The Laurel cave gets its name from its situation among the laurel bushes. It is the least of the caverns but contains some things of interest. These caves are located some three or four miles from the railroad which makes it rather inconvenient to reach them and accounts in a great measure, for the fact that they have not become famous as a summer resort.

There are other caverns located at Carter City but their beauty and natural scenery are not so great as that of the old Carter Caves. They were famous for a few seasons from some years ago and were called “Oligonank”. Lack of care has caused them to attract but little attention in recent years.

The greater part of drainage of Carter County is carried to the Ohio through Tygart which reaches the river, after a torturous course, only a short distance from Portsmouth.