

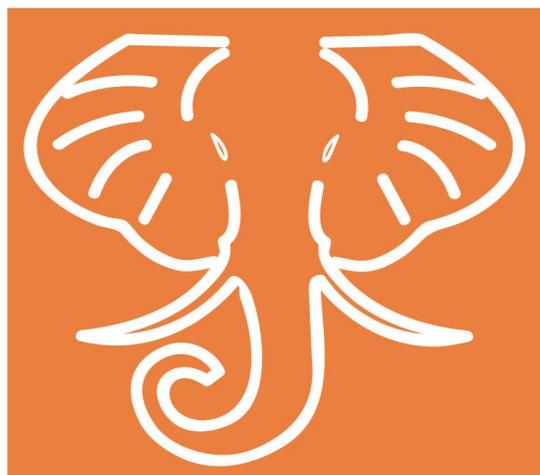
A history of Jessamine County, Kentucky, from its earliest settlement to 1898. By Bennett H. Young. S. M. Duncan associate author.

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remained after the terrible fatality of Ruddell's and Martin's stations in June, 1780.

The land law enacted by the Virginia Legislature, in the settling of land made location easy and popular. The wonderful accounts of the fertility, beauty and salubrity of Kentucky turned an immense tide of immigration to the state. In 1782, the population did not exceed 1500; in 1790, it had grown to 61,133 white people; 114 colored free people, and 12,340 slaves; a total of 73,677, while ten years later, in 1800, it had 179,873 white, 739 free colored, and 40,343 slaves; a total of 220,995, an increase in ten years of 224 1-2 per cent.

Of this extraordinary improvement, Jessamine county received a full share. In 1782, it had not a single settler, and yet in 1800, eighteen years thereafter, it had 5,461 inhabitants. This was the first decade in which a census could be taken. Fayette, from which Jessamine was entirely taken, had, in 1800, 18,410 inhabitants, or one-fourth of the entire population of the state. As a part of Clark was included in this enumeration, and assuming that Jessamine had grown in proportion as other parts of Fayette, the county in 1790 had about 2,000 inhabitants.

A great proportion of Jessamine immigration, came from Virginia. The Revolutionary soldiers were pouring into all parts of the state, and Jessamine received her full share, and more than one hundred of these brave and sturdy settlers found homes within her borders.

No state could secure nobler treasure than were these Revolutionary soldiers. Their splendid courage, exalted patriotism, hardy natures, and noble characters, made them a worthy addition to any community. The self-reliance, tact and enterprise engendered by Revolutionary service, rendered them citizens of great and unusual worth. Of the rich store given by Virginia, Pennsylvania, North and South Carolina, Jessamine received an extraordinary proportion.

The most distinguished men of Revolutionary fame who came to Jessamine, were George Walker, Joseph Crockett, Benjamin Netherland, William Price, Percival Butler, William McKinney and John Price.

These were not more patriotic or more loyal to the American cause than the others, but they had in the war obtained positions

which made them more prominent than their associates in the early history of the county. A brief sketch of each is properly a part of the history of Jessamine county.

Benjamin Netherland.

One of the most unique and extraordinary characters in the history of Jessamine county in its early days was Maj. Benjamin Netherland. He was born in Powhattan county, Virginia, in 1755. He went to Cuba as the agent of his father, to dispose of his tobacco crop. There learning that Sir Peter Parker was to make an attack on Charleston, he left his cargo and ran the blockade into Charleston and helped to defend Fort Moultrie against British assault. He accompanied La Fayette on his journey from Charleston in 1777 as far as Mecklenburg county, North Carolina, when the distinguished Frenchman was on his way to Philadelphia, to tender his services to Washington in behalf of American liberty. He remained at Charlotte, North Carolina until 1781, took part in the battle of Guilford Courthouse, and shortly after this he drifted into Kentucky. In May, 1782, he was at Estill station, and was with the Kentucky troops in the Estill defeat. He took part in nearly all the Indian battles from 1781 to 1784. He went with George Rogers Clark on his expedition in 1782 to punish the Indians for the wrongs of Blue Licks.

He was with General Harmar in his defeat, and with General Wayne in his victory at Fallen Timbers in 1794 and was instrumental in punishing the men who had perpetrated the slaughter at Blue Licks. After seven years' absence in Kentucky, he returned to North Carolina in 1788 and married his boyish sweetheart, Miss Theodosia Bramlette, who was a daughter of the distinguished Revolutionary fighter Col. Bramlette. He had lived in Fayette and Madison counties prior to his coming to Jessamine. After his marriage he settled on a farm five miles east of Nicholasville, and in 1793 he removed to where Nicholasville now stands, and built a hotel and called it Mingo Tavern—this house he kept until his death in 1838. The house was torn down in 1864. The author has often seen it when a boy, and the picture of it in this history is from a drawing made in 1820. He

deep and was bored by John W. Charlotter, a blind man. The well was put down in the year 1846, and after blasting down to the unusual depth of 180 feet a stream of water was struck. It gushed up ten feet high and from that time to this has furnished all who demanded of it, clear, cool, refreshing drink. No drouth and no call upon its resources has ever lessened its flow, and after more than half a century of usefulness it is yet the pride and comfort of the citizens of the town.

Bethel Academy.

The Legislature of Virginia in 1780 set apart 8,000 acres of land for the establishment of schools in Kentucky. The Kentucky Methodists early took measures to secure part of the land appropriated to this purpose. Bishops Coke and Asbury attended a conference held at McKnight's, on the Yadkin river, North Carolina, in 1789. Here the Kentucky Methodists, by letter and messenger, requested direction. The response to this petition was that during the next year Bishop Asbury would visit Kentucky, and if the petitioners could secure a grant of 5,000 acres of land from the state or individuals, a college should be completed within ten years. Early the next spring Bishop Asbury, accompanied by his friend, Richard Whatcoat, who was himself afterwards made a Bishop, came through from Virginia on horseback to Kentucky. They stopped on their way in Southwestern Virginia, and there waited for an escort from the friends in Kentucky. The Kentucky guards did not appear as soon as had been expected, but on a certain Monday morning Bishop Asbury related to Mr. Whatcoat that the night before in a dream he had seen the friends for whom they had been waiting. After breakfast they retired to the banks of a small stream nearby for prayer and meditation. While engaged in these services he saw approaching over the hills two men. He felt at once that these were the Kentuckians coming for him. This proved to be the fact. These men were Peter Massie, afterwards known in Kentucky as the "Weeping Prophet," and John Clark. They delivered the Bishops their credentials and told them that they had left a guard of eight men in the valley below, ready to start for Kentucky, as

soon as was his pleasure to begin the journey. The following is the entry that Bishop Asbury made in his journal:

“After reading the letters and asking counsel of God, I concluded to go with them.”

They left Southwestern Virginia early in May, 1790, with sixteen men and thirteen guns. They were to make a journey of more than 200 miles through a wilderness constantly waylaid with savages. Three times a day they halted to feed and refresh themselves, and each time they sought God’s protection and guidance in prayer. The first day they rode 35 miles, the second 45 and the third 50. This rapid travel proved a little inconvenient to the Bishop, who complained that he could neither sleep nor eat. He says: “While in camp some were on guard, while others rested.” They frequently passed the graves of those who had been slain by the savages. In one camp he saw 24 graves.

They arrived in Lexington on the 12th of May. On that day the Bishop preached and then held a conference in the house of Richard Masterson. Constant services were held; ministers were ordained. Francis Poythress, the Bishop declared, was much alive to God, and they arranged for a school to be known as Bethel Academy.

They rode to the land of Thomas Lewis, at the bend of the Kentucky river, near High Bridge, and Mr. Lewis there offered the Bishop a hundred acres of land as a site for Bethel Academy. The Bishop remained in the vicinity nearly two weeks, preaching every day, making acquaintances and many friends for the projected scheme.

His principal assistants in establishing Bethel Academy were Rev. Francis Poythress and Rev. John Metcalf. A brief sketch of Mr. Poythress will not be out of place.

He belonged to an old and distinguished family of Virginia. He sought the instructions of a minister of the church of England, and in 1773 he was led to the Saviour and connected himself with the Methodist church.

In North Carolina, Maryland, Tennessee and Virginia he did splendid work for the church to which he had made his allegiance. Whenever there was danger he was always ready to go where duty called. Whenever there was a difficult commission he would say: “Here am I, send me.” He traveled over a large

part of these states, preaching under the trees and in cabins, enduring all the hardships of the settlers in their wilderness homes. A man of some scholarship, he was easily enlisted in the work of building Bethel Academy, in which he was not altogether successful and was unjustly censured. His health failed and his mind gave way. He removed from Kentucky afterwards to North Carolina. He never entirely recovered either his spirits or his health or his energy. He returned to Kentucky in 1801, but no work was assigned to him. He made his home in Nicholasville. In 1810 Bishop Asbury saw him and was deeply distressed at his condition.

In 1792 Bishop Asbury made his second visit to Kentucky and he entered in his journal: "I wrote an address on behalf of Bethel School," and later on he says, "I find it necessary to change the plan of the house to make it more comfortable for the scholars." Rev. Thomas Hinde, a contemporary of Bishop Asbury, makes this entry: "Bethel Academy. Our conference for 1797 was held at Bethel School, a large three-story building erected by Mr. Poythress on the bank of the Kentucky river, in Jessamine county."

The work of building had progressed so that in the year 1794 a school was opened. The following letter from Rev. Jno. Metcalf, will be interesting:

Nicholasville, Jessamine Co., Ky.

June 13, 1794.

Hon. George Nicholas:

I have lately received from you two of your kind letters and would have answered them before now, but I have taken charge of Bethel Academy and I have been so confined for the last two weeks in fitting up suitable places of abode for some of my pupils that I have greatly neglected my private affairs, especially that portion of it which you are attending to in Lexington.

Your friend,

JOHN METCALF.

The Kentucky conference of the Methodist church in 1797 met in Bethel Academy. The Rev. Mr. Metcalf was principal until 1803. For a while Bethel School was a competitor of

Transylvania Academy, at Lexington, then under control of Presbyterians. The original site of Bethel Academy was chosen for its wonderful beauty and for its adaptability for a village. The lines of travel and lines of settlement could not then be determined. It ought naturally to have been the county seat of the county.

In 1799 Rev. Valentine Cook took charge of the literary department with Rev. Francis Poythress as assistant. Mr. Cook was a man of scholarly attainments and was a distinguished graduate of Cokesburg College, at Abbingdon, Md. He remained with the school one year. His anti-slavery views induced his removal.

In 1803 Rev. John Metcalf moved to Nicholasville and opened in his own house a school which he called Bethel Academy, Mr. Harris maintaining Bethel School on the Kentucky river as a neighborhood school until 1805. In 1798 Mr. Metcalf purchased several lots in the village of Nicholasville and erected a good log house, which still stands and is the property of his grandson, John Metcalf. At this house Bethel Academy was continued until 1820, when a new brick building was built and the school was continued in it under the name of Bethel Academy.

About this time Mr. Metcalf died, in the sixty-third year of his age.

In 1798 the Legislature of Kentucky passed an act incorporating Bethel Academy. The first section of the act is as follows:

CHAP. XXXI.

An Act Establishing Bethel Academy, and Incorporating the Trustees Thereof.

Approved Feb. 10, 1798.

1. Be it enacted by the General Assembly, that the Reverend Francis Poythress, John Knobler, Nathaniel Harris, John Metcalf, Barnabas McHenry, James Crutcher, James Hord and Richard Masterson, shall be, and they are hereby, constituted a body politic and corporate, to be known by the name of trustees of Bethel Academy, and by that name shall have perpetual succession, and a common seal, with power to change the same at

pleasure; and as such shall be authorized to execute all powers and privileges that are enjoyed by trustees, governors or visitors of any college or university within this state, not herein limited or otherwise directed.

Section 6 provides as follows:

“The President of said academy shall be a man of most approved ability in literature.”

For five years from 1841 Professor A. R. Northup, A. M., a graduate of the Wesleyan University, was at its head. He was succeeded by Charles F. Smith. In the early part of the century a grant of 6,000 acres of land was made by the state of Kentucky to Bethel Academy. In 1876 Professor A. M. Gordon was elected principal. He was the ablest teacher ever in charge of the school. In 1877 the property of the academy was leased to Professor Gordon for ten years, Professor Gordon introducing the condition that five indigent, sprightly boys should attend the academy each year free of charge for tuition.

Under the direction of Professor Gordon Bethel Academy attained high rank as a school. The buildings as modernized are in the middle of five acres of ground, and they are large and elegant, and were erected in 1878 at a cost of \$7,000. After the abandonment of the site on the Kentucky river the one hundred acres of land given by Mr. Lewis reverted to his estate, but portions of the material of the building were taken to Nicholasville and used in erecting a school building there. At the end of 105 years Bethel Academy has been turned over to Nicholasville, and is now a graded school. It is used for the public benefit. It has lost its denominational control, and is part of the great system of the general education of the masses in the State of Kentucky.

The first site of Bethel Academy is still easily found. On the splendid eminence overlooking the mighty banks of the Kentucky, one can stand on the ruins of the ancient building, in which was begun the life of this school, and for miles around can see what a hundred years of cultivation and growth have wrought. The school is gone. The structure, then palatial as an educational home, has crumbled and decayed, but as the eye takes in the picturesque and charming landscape, covering parts of Garrard, Jessamine, Woodford and Mercer counties, with fertile farms, happy homes, large families, loyal and true citizens, all

contented in their abiding places and all busy and satisfied with their places in life, the saddening memories of the old school, are hushed by admiration for the prosperity, peace and industry which rise up to tell that the work of a century is not lost, but that the grandsons and great-grandsons of these educational pioneers are not unworthy of the founders of this ancient school, in which were centered the hopes and aims of the brave and liberal men who gave it a name and being in the wilds of a wilderness.

Jessamine Female Institute.

One of the most important and successful of all the enterprises in the county has been Jessamine Female Institute. In 1854 an act of the Legislature was passed allowing the organization of a company for the purpose of conducting a female school of a high character; such as would attract patronage from abroad, as well as give the highest facility for education in the town. The capital stock was fixed at \$2,500 in shares of \$100 each. The articles of incorporation under this act were signed by Alexander Lyle, Thos. E. West, L. H. Chrisman, J. D. Hill, R. E. Woodson, Hervey Scott, Robt. Young, D. B. Price, J. A. Scrogin, J. P. Letcher, W. C. Letcher, M. T. Lowry, G. M. Barkley, Isaac Barkley, J. F. Barkley, C. F. Smith, A. L. McAfee, M. T. Young, Samuel McDowell, Wm. McDowell, Jas. H. McCampbell.

After this, in 1855, the school was reorganized, and Rev. M. Branch Price, a Presbyterian minister, was elected principal. After some years of successful administration he was removed by death, and was succeeded by Mrs. Jacob Price, wife of the Rev. Jacob Price, a Presbyterian minister. In 1857 she was succeeded by Rev. Mr. Frazee, a Presbyterian divine, and he in turn, by Mrs. Browning, who presided one year.

In 1860 Rev. Joseph McDowell Matthews, of Hillsboro, Ohio, rented the ground and building and conducted the school under the name of the Jessamine Female College. The incorporators of this college were J. C. Wilmore, Henry M. Chrisman, J. B. Cook, T. J. Cassell, Moreau Brown, S. S. Mizner, J. S. Bronaugh, J. W. Olds, R. M. Messick, John McMurtry, P. H. Smith, W. R. Welch, Wm. Brown, Thos. B. Crutcher and J. S. Mitchell.

At the end of the term of 1862 Dr. Matthews returned to Ohio.