

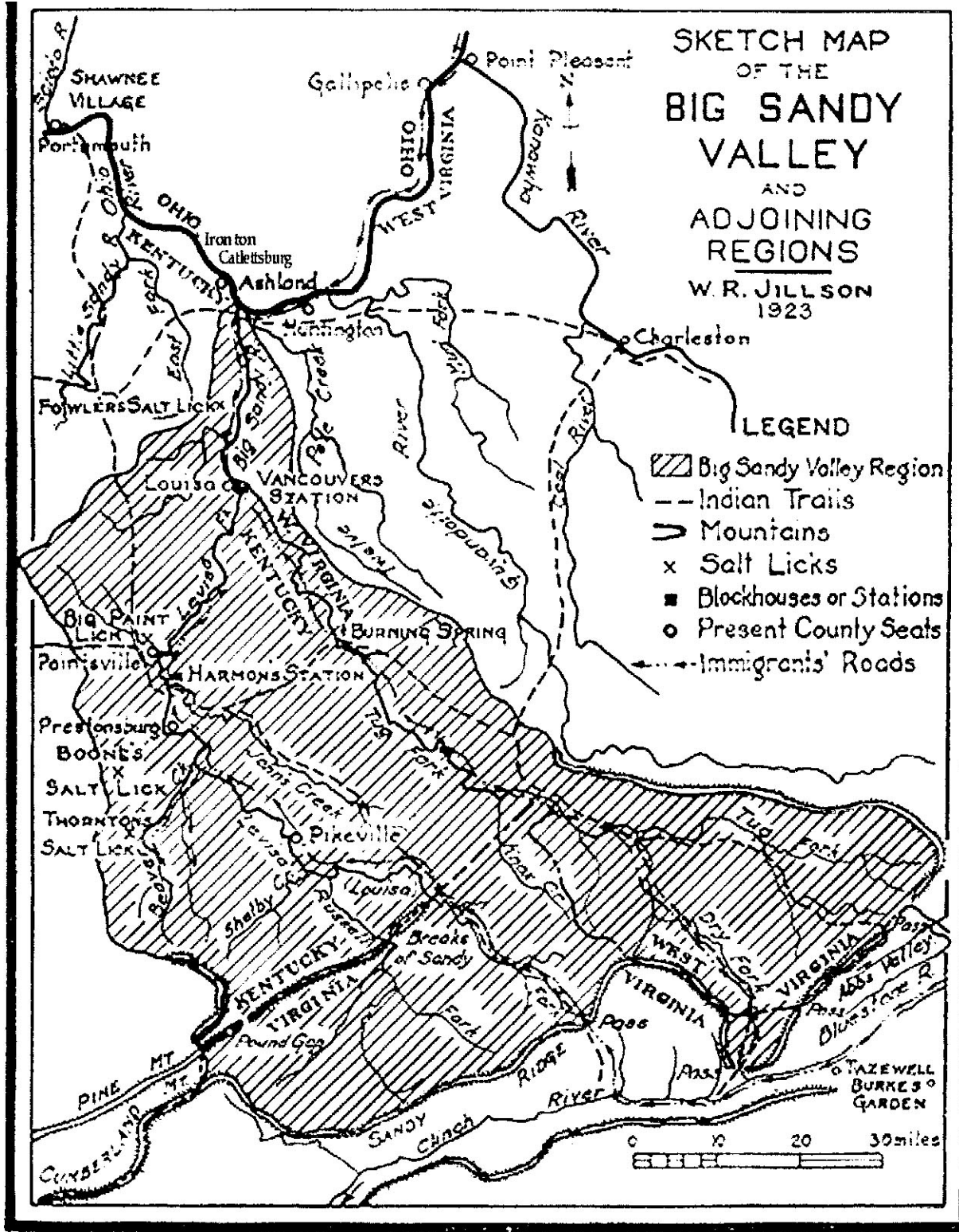
## **The Moores of Route 23**

BY MICHAEL MOORE

When U.S. Route 23 crosses the Virginia border into southeastern Kentucky, it climbs Pine Mountain and cuts through Pound Gap. Even though engineers—in one of the biggest projects ever undertaken in the United States—have lowered the grade and made the road straighter by removing a good portion of the mountain and rerouting a river, it is still easy to view the country side as Christopher Gist did in 1753 when he first surveyed the pass and blazed a trail for westward settlers. (Daniel Boone was to emulate Gist's feat 20 years later through the Cumberland Gap, 100 miles to the southwest.)

The Big Sandy Watershed is the geographical context for Route 23 in Kentucky. It is a triangular-shaped region that embraces 10 counties there, plus three in West Virginia, and four in Virginia. The base lies across the Clinch River in Virginia, which is south of Pound Gap. The sides of the triangle converge at Catlettsburg, Kentucky, where the Big Sandy empties into the Ohio River. Within that triangle, Route 23 runs directly through the region and continues along the Levisa Fork past Pikeville and Prestonburg toward Louisa, where it joins the Tug Fork to form the Big Sandy River. There, both the river and the road abut the West Virginia border, and go past Paintsville toward Catlettsburg and the Ohio River. It was not known as Route 23 until Congress in the 1920's developed a numbered national road system. Before then, "23" was a series of loosely connected two-lane roads, sometimes paved, sometimes not. And before that time, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was not much more than trails and dirt roads that paralleled more or less the Levisa and Big Sandy. Also connected were many creeks and runs that fed into the Levisa or Tug, enabling loggers like my ancestors—who were but a branch on the huge family tree known as the Moores—to float their timber to market.

The Big Sandy was the major route in and out of Kentucky, but it was more than just a transportation corridor. It defined the economic and social possibilities for settlers like my forbears who traveled along the Levisa and Big Sandy, opening up what Henry Scalf has called Kentucky's Last Frontier. Here, Isaac Moore and his descendants cut timber and rafted the logs down river and either took the trails back or, after 1837, rode a steamboat as far as Piketon (as it was then known). They also mined lead and salt, ran hotels and general stores, and traded goods and services in the manner of small-scale businessmen. They dealt in real estate and acquired land.



from Willard R. Jillson, "The Big Sandy Valley" (Louisville: Morton, 1923), p. 116 ff

MAP OF THE BIG SANDY VALLEY

The Big Sandy and its trails, furthermore, shaped the way the Moores saw the world and by extension, themselves. John Fox, Jr. who lived near Route 23 in Big Stone Gap, Virginia, wrote about that frame of mind in *Trail of the Lonesome Pine*. Although the book is nearly a century old, it remains powerful in its description of the beauty, tragedy, and mystery of the mountains:

You see, mountains isolate people and the effect of isolation on human life is to crystallize it. Those people over the line have had no navigable rivers, no lakes, no wagon roads, except often the beds of streams. They have been cut off from all communication with the outside world. They . . . are the closest link we have with the Old World. . . . They live like the pioneers; the axe and the rifle are still their weapons and they still have the same fight with nature. [Their feuds are] a matter of clan-loyalty that goes back to Scotland. They argue this way: You are my friend or my kinsman, your quarrel is my quarrel, and whoever hits you hits me. If you are in trouble, I must not testify against you. If you are an officer, you must not arrest me; you must send me a kindly request to come into court. If I'm innocent and it's perfectly convenient – why, maybe I'll come.<sup>1</sup>

Fox also described the conflict that the mountaineers had with the miners and industrialists who came into their valleys to dig coal and iron and introduce urban values and ways of thinking. It was a clash of two different ways of life and perception and although better roads, modern schools, K-Mart, McDonalds, and Lowe's have softened the differences, the older memories and values are still close to the surface. Self-sufficiency is important since medical, police, or emergency assistance may not be nearby; hospitality and kindness toward strangers are still graciously extended; and an occasional shooting recalls the old ways of settling feuds. The relative isolation and distance from help are compelling arguments even today to keep a loaded .38 by one's bedside at night.

When and from where did the Moores emigrate? Most likely, it was from Scotland through Northern Ireland<sup>2</sup>. The family surname is one of the most common in County Antrim, next to the Giants Causeway and only 12 miles from the Scottish coast. They probably were Scotch-Irish and Presbyterian—a hellish breed of rebellious, stubborn, fiercely independent, and dour folk, who were extremely suspicious of any kind of authority, be it King or Established Church. They weren't too fond of the Catholics either, particularly after James II laid siege to Londonderry in 1689. Above everything, they cherished their freedom and were ready to fight for it.

James Leyburn<sup>3</sup> observed that the Scotch-Irish came to America during the 18<sup>th</sup> century in five great waves, roughly corresponding to the degree of suffering at the hands of their British landlords, who, with the Church of England, stifled revolt for over 700 years. The Scotch-Irish wanted the freedom to be married and buried by their own ministers and to have those ceremonies legally recognized. They were tired of the “rack rents” that jacked up their taxes to astronomic heights and impoverished them. They suffered when the linen and lace mills shut down, throwing them out of work. But most of all, they wanted land of their own. Land was everything, it was income and security; it was status and respectability; it was a clear sign of a

---

<sup>1</sup>*Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, 97-98.

<sup>2</sup> Preliminary results of DNA ancestry testing are beginning to provide some support to this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> *The Scotch-Irish – A Social History* (Univ. of North Carolina Press) 1961), 171-176.

man's moral worth and of his favor in God's sight. It gave concrete form to the idea of freedom. There was much land in America, just over the horizon.

Many Scotch-Irish landed in the Philadelphia area. Although there had been Moores in New England and the South, they found good, cheap land as well as a tolerant Quaker government in Pennsylvania. But by the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, land prices were skyrocketing and Pennsylvania was filling up fast, thanks largely to German immigrants, whose sober, industrious, law-abiding, and docile ways were undoubtedly more attractive to colonial authorities than were the hard-drinking and combative Scotch-Irish. Consequently, settlers who arrived later took the Great Wagon Road<sup>4</sup> stretching for 700 miles from Philadelphia southwestward to the Potomac, then down the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, through the western Carolinas, terminating in Savannah. Up and down its length, from northeast to southwest and back again, settlers made their way to the frontier, seeking cheap land.

The governors of Virginia welcomed these people because they made good Indian fighters and protected the Shenandoah boundary. Accordingly, the authorities granted religious freedom and legalized Dissenting ministers and marriages. They were also generous with land grants which enticed later settlers like my great-great-great (or 3g) grandfather Isaac Moore to head toward Pound Gap. The governors of North Carolina also welcomed the Scotch-Irish, but later turned authoritarian when the settlers decried the governors' neglect of the frontier and their practice of taxation without representation. The quarrel escalated into armed conflict and became a dress rehearsal for the Revolutionary War.

### *Isaac Moore's Legacy*

Isaac Moore was born in Virginia in 1789 and lived in Russell County. Around 1811, he took his family across Shelby Gap into Letcher County, Kentucky, and built a cabin along Elkhorn Creek. He had 11 children by his first wife and seven more by his second. He began to make money in the timber trade from land he owned both in Kentucky and Wise County, Virginia.

By 1830, Isaac was living in Pike County, adjacent to Letcher. In 1832, the court of Wise County, Virginia, appointed him as a land evaluator, putting him in an advantageous to acquire still more land. He and his sons (including Aaron, my 2g grandfather) cut trees and floated the logs down Elkhorn Creek along the Kentucky-Virginia border to where it flows into Russell Fork and then into the Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River. They then rafted the logs downstream to Catlettsburg, where they sold them for about a dollar a piece. They would return home along the waterways or Indian trails.

Running logs was dangerous business. To ensure enough depth on shallower streams, the men built splash dams at various places that could be collapsed by pulling out a key log when the water was deep enough. As a contemporary observer wrote:

The huge logs rearing on end as they took the plunge, then reappearing in the boiling cauldron below to be sucked back to the fall, again to be sent under, and again to emerge. To see fifteen or twenty great saw-logs of different lengths and girth going this endless round until the ends were worn into points by the terrific abrasion, rolling helpless, broadside under the fall, surging, leaping, writhing in every imaginable contortion, while now and then one more fortunate than the rest is butted out so far as to

---

<sup>4</sup> It roughly corresponds to present-day Interstate 81.

escape the back tow and goes placidly off floating down the river—it is all a novel and wonderful thing to look at.<sup>5</sup>

In 1837, steamboats appeared for the first time in Louisa and eventually penetrated as far upstream as Pikeville. By 1880, the Big Sandy was “filled with loggers and steamboat men” and timber was the region’s most plentiful commodity. There were also lead, coal, and iron mines plus salt licks, all contributing to a lively trade in commerce in a form of rudimentary capitalism that Robert Weise has labeled “household localism”<sup>6</sup>.

The Moores played a prominent role in this modest commercial activity. In 1830, Isaac was worth \$3,000, making him one of the richest 25 men in a county of 2700.<sup>7</sup> His son-in-law, Jeremiah “Jerry” Osborn, became a judge, an innkeeper and a general store manager. His hotel was considered one of the most important along the river. He also hauled salt in large wagons from Washington County, Virginia, to boats on the Levisa Fork that took the cargo to Pike, Letcher, Floyd, and Perry Counties. On the return trip, he transported iron from the Bath County mines to his wagons and then back to Virginia. A steamboat named after him hauled passengers and goods up and down the river. (Later, another boat, the *Jerry Osborne II* was launched.)<sup>8</sup> In 1860, his real estate was valued at \$1800 and his personal property at \$1,000, but he lost it all in the Civil War.

Isaac’s son Aaron married well. He was as industrious as his father and equally eager to obtain land. Although his farm was worth only \$400 in 1850, he had earlier posted a marriage bond of 50 pounds for the hand of Lydia Elswick<sup>9</sup> whose ancestors were wealthy enough to have hired George Washington to survey land for them. Aaron ran logs and farmed until the 1880’s when he moved from Pike County further downstream to Kanahwa County, West Virginia. Finally, a great-grandson, James Monroe Moore, was a farmer and cattle dealer during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Johnson County, down the river from Pikeville.

Isaac Moore’s wife Mary Polly (or Priscilla)<sup>10</sup> died around 1835 and was buried on a mountain above Elkhorn Creek. Hers is, however, a strange grave. According to family legend, Isaac had quarried and cut stones to make a sarcophagus over it, ostensibly to prevent her Cherokee kin from retrieving her remains for reburial in North Carolina. The angry tribesmen burnt Isaac’s beehives in retaliation, but to no avail; she remained in Kentucky.<sup>11</sup> Her sarcophagus is the centerpiece in a family graveyard whose other headstones are slabs of slate or sandstone carved by Isaac in the shape of heads and shoulders that seemed to rise out of the ground, ghostly sentinels warding off evil spirits.

In March 1862, on the Virginia side of the border, Isaac ambushed a squad of Union soldiers who had shot one of his grandsons, (whose name also was Aaron). When Isaac either ran out of ammunition or did not have time to reload, he tried to escape through Osborne Pass

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Henry Scalf, *Kentucky’s Last Frontier* (Pikeville, KY: Pikeville College, 1972), 267-268.

<sup>6</sup> Weise argues that household localism existed long before the incursion of large-scale commercial mining in the 1880’s. Because of their business activities, he concludes the people were neither the “yeoman farmers” nor the “noble savages” depicted by New Deal and Great Society advocates or by historians like Harry Caudill in *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*. See Robert Weise, *Grasping at Independence: Debt, Male Authority, and Mineral Rights in Appalachian Kentucky, 1850-1915*, (2001), 55-57.

<sup>7</sup> U. S. Census, 1830; Pike County Probate Court.

<sup>8</sup> Ely, quoted in Scalf, 530-531.

<sup>9</sup> Pike Co., KY, Probate Court Records, 16 Apr 1840, File 646.

<sup>10</sup> She had been known as Mary Polly for years, but recently-discovered court documents name her as Priscilla (or Sillar)

<sup>11</sup> Pikeville, KY, *Appalachian News-Express*, 15 Nov 2002.

back into Kentucky but was killed. The same day (or nearly so) a few miles west, Isaac's son Ananias also sought revenge for Aaron, who was his nephew. A private in the Kentucky Partisan Rangers, Ananias fought in a skirmish near Elkhorn Creek that the locals call the Battle of Cool Springs. It was a costly battle for the Moores because not only was Ananias killed (and buried next to Mary Polly), but also so was Alexander, another nephew. Four of Ananias' sons, furthermore, were taken prisoner and two of them later died in POW camps.<sup>12</sup> After the war, Ananias' property was seized by the Pike County sheriff for non-payment of taxes; his wife Susannah and their remaining children were evicted and forced to scatter to various relatives for shelter<sup>13</sup>.

In these mountains, the war was as much as (if not more than) an excuse for clans or gangs to settle family feuds or to plunder from one another than it was to settle issues like slavery or unionism. It was events like these that gave rise to the Hatfield-McCoy conflict, which occurred just a few miles down the Levisa Fork in Pikeville.

Yet another Civil War combatant was my great-grandfather, John Wesley Moore, nicknamed "Pike" after the Kentucky county in which he was born and one of Isaac's many grandsons. Whether he was a Methodist like his namesake or not, he married a Primitive Baptist Church preacher's daughter, Martha "Patsy" Mullins in August 1863<sup>14</sup>. Her father, the Rev. Booker Mullins, had assets of only \$300 in 1850 (compared to \$400 for John Wesley's father), but ten years later, Booker's wealth grew to \$1100 in real estate and another \$1100 in personal property.<sup>15</sup>

About a year after he married Patsy, John Wesley enlisted in the Confederate Seventh Battalion. It was listed as a regular unit, but seemed more like a guerilla outfit in the way it operated. According to one account:

Prentice's men (7th Conf. Batt'n) have the reputation of stealing everything they get their hands on: & by association the others . . . have become somewhat corrupted.

That was a Southern, not a Northern, assessment. Another officer added:

We are all very much pleased with our brigade with the exception of Prentice's (7<sup>h</sup>) Battalion, who are represented as a band of thieves & c. – Therefore, I made application to have them transferred to Gen. Wm. E. Jones. We don't want them.

John Wesley Moore, his Uncle Moses, and some other Moores were members of this elite band. John had previously served in the Virginia State Line but enlisted in the 7<sup>th</sup> on April 30, 1864, in Louisa, Kentucky, a Confederate recruiting post in an ostensibly Yankee state<sup>16</sup>. "Pike" was 20 years old, newly married, 5'5" tall, with dark hair, a dark complexion, and "yellow eyes." His enlistment record also said of him: "Young, ignorant, was deceived, served 3 months and then Dstd." The "Dstd" did not stand for "discharged." Great grandfather went over the hill. It

---

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence E. Cook, in an email to the author, 16 Nov 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Joyce Wallace, "Eulogy for Ananias Moore," unpublished ms, Burdine, KY, 15 Oct 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Wise Co., VA Probate Court Records

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Census, Pike County, KY, 1850 and 1860.

<sup>16</sup> The Union recruiters were just 40 miles up the road in Prestonburg

would be comforting to imagine that his disgust and moral outrage at the conduct of his unsavory messmates occasioned his French leave, but it is more likely that he wanted to get back to his bride and the farm.

Revenge is a recurrent theme. A man named Hall shot the Rev. Mullins in 1865. Booker's two older sons—both of whom were married to granddaughters of Isaac Moore—"took revenge" by shooting Hall then fleeing from Kentucky to West Virginia to escape the law.<sup>17</sup>

There were moments of civility and moderation, however. When General James A. Garfield was moving up the Levisa Fork toward Pound Gap in 1861, several of his soldiers confiscated a cow from Zarilda Osborn Francisco, one of Isaac's granddaughters (and a daughter to Jerry Osborn). Undaunted, she rode down the Gap from her farm on Elkhorn Creek to Pikeville (or Piketon) where Garfield had his headquarters, and demanded its return. According to one of Zarilda's descendants, "Gen. Garfield (being the Christian gentleman that he was and having been reared by a widowed mother) did the right thing and returned Zarilda's cow to her which she made tracks back to Marion's branch with."<sup>18</sup>

### *The Family Disperses*

After Isaac, Sr. died, the family scattered, some moving towards West Virginia while others returned to Virginia. Still others, suffering from tuberculosis, moved away to Arizona and other hot, dry states, trying to overcome that disease.<sup>19</sup> It appears that "the family curse" had gotten an early start. Their houses were small and crowded—ideal breeding places. Between the end of the Civil War and the Great Influenza epidemic of 1918, "dozens of them [the Moores] died of TB", or TB-induced diseases. In one case, it was the body of either Eura Moore or her sister-in-law Verna Phipps that was laid outside the house overnight after she died in the hopes of reducing exposure to the rest of the family. It did not work.

There were others who died of TB: Isaac, Sr.'s second wife Rebecca and their son Levi Moore; Isaac, Jr.'s son, John C. Breckenridge Moore; Cora Wright Moore and two of her three children. The list goes on, down to Bill and Beulah Moore (my father and his sister) in the 1930's. The family was able to stay ahead of TB only by having many children.

The 1880 census shows that John Wesley and Patsy Moore had moved one county beyond Pike to a farm in Johnson County, Kentucky, where they started their family of eight, including my grandfather Booker, named after his maternal grandfather Mullins who had been shot by Hall five years earlier. By 1900, the family had moved yet one more county north down the Big Sandy, to Lawrence County, where "Pike" eventually died in 1923. Most of the children moved there as well, except for Aaron, who returned to claim his grandfather's farm upriver in Johnson County, and my grandfather, who went the other way, toward Boyd County<sup>20</sup>.

What were the Moores *like*? While there are few descriptions or written records of personality traits or interpersonal relationships, they suggest hard-working, proud kinfolk of strong feelings, but reluctant to express those feelings:

Our bunch of Moores have no problem with the printed word [a cousin wrote], but we do have problems admitting to chinks in the armor. I

---

<sup>17</sup> Gary Mullins, in an email to the author, 29 Nov 1999. Also see Henry P. Scalf, *Four Men of the Cumberlands* (Prestonburg, Kentucky, 1958) for an account of some of the more colorful outlaws and feudists of Pound Gap. The Mullins' appear prominently in the narrative.

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence Emory Cook, in an email to the author, 22 Jan 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Joyce Wallace, in an email to the author, 10 Nov 2001.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Census of Lawrence Co, KY 1880 and Johnson Co., KY, 1900.

imagine that is why we have a tendency to be here in the protection of these hills, streams, and morning mists<sup>21</sup>.

A photo of my grandfather, taken around 1890, with some of his siblings and uncles shows Booker, his sister, and two of his brothers standing behind another brother and two uncles. Booker, Nancy, and Harrison have their hands resting affectionately on the shoulders of Paris and Uncle Booker W. Mullins, but no one is touching the shoulders of Uncle Marion Moore (a brother to John Wes). Indeed, Monroe has his arms resolutely folded behind Marion. When asked about the poses, Paris' daughter laughed and said that Marion "was so durn mean, no one wanted to go near him!"

Equally formidable was the man sitting next to Marion, Booker W. Mullins, Jr. He owned a large tract of property in Jenkins, Kentucky, that the land speculator, John C. C. Mayo badly needed. Mayo, who grew up in nearby Paintsville, was making a great deal of money buying up land or the mineral rights for resale to major coal mining companies that had begun in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to penetrate the area. Mullins' land lay on top of a choice coalfield, but he had threatened to shoot anyone who tried to "beat him out of his minerals."

Mayo . . . rode to Mullins' house and found his quarry glaring at him from a rocking chair on the front porch. Mayo introduced himself and immediately produced a roll of two hundred new five-dollar bills. He told Mullins they would be his if he agreed to hear him for a mere ten minutes. The offer proved irresistible and at the end of their conversation, Mullins sold. He used the \$10,000 to buy a Bluegrass farm, but he was so dissatisfied in the "lowlands" that he later returned to the hills, passionately hating Mayo for having talked him out of his beloved land. The town of Jenkins now sprawls across his late and lamented acres.<sup>22</sup>

Mullins was lucky compared to the many farmers who got far less than \$10,000 and wound up as tenants on the land they had once owned. Once the mineral rights were bargained away, the property became worthless, farmers lost their livelihood, and went to work in the mines. In 1910-1911, Mayo sold the land he had purchased from Booker and other owners—about 100,000 acres of coal—for \$4,500,000<sup>23</sup>. It was one of the richest seams in the entire region and it made C. C. the wealthiest man in eastern Kentucky. He took to consorting with major capitalists in the East, and in his home town of Paintsville, he built elegant mansion and a Methodist church named in his honor while Booker Mullins remained bitter.

### ***Flat Gap, Kentucky***

The Moores had their share of a hard life in the mountains and took a matter-of-fact view toward it. A relative, showing me a family album, pointed to a picture of Mort Moore, and remembered:

See, his arm's gone. He fell off a horse and it was such a break, and grass and dirt – no, not a horse – a mule. Someone slapped it on the rear and it bucked

---

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence E. Cook, in an email to the author, 6 June 2003.

<sup>22</sup> John E. Buckingham, "Sketch of the Live of John C. C. Mayo," a memoir. Mayo Family Papers, Public Library, Ashland, KY., Quoted in Harry Caudill, *Theirs be the Power: The Moguls of Eastern Kentucky*

<sup>23</sup> Scalf, 332.



and threw him off. He was seven. So, they came to the house and amputated his arm. My mom said they did it on the table. The arm is buried in Lawrence County, in the old Moore cemetery. Then the rest of him when he was, uh, 18 or 17, he got killed – got shot and his body is over in the other county, close to the creek<sup>24</sup>.

Issues of life and death were handled not without humor, however. On more than one occasion, family members requested that when they died, the lids to their coffins were not to be nailed shut.

*“Not nail the lids shut? You’re pullin’ my leg,” I said.*

*“No sir-ee! Cross my heart and hope to die, Mike! Why, din’t you’uns know that in the Middle Ages, people was so scared of bein’ buried alive, they’d have a cord tied ‘round their wrists when they was put in their coffins, and that cord would go through a hole in the lid and the other end would be tied to a bell on top of the grave. Then, someone would sit all night by the grave— that’s why they call it the graveyard shift—and listen. If that bell rang, they’d dig him up in a hurry ‘n say he was ‘saved by the bell’.”*

*“Uh-huh. And if they didn’t get to him in time, you’re gonna sit there with a straight face and tell me he was a ‘dead ringer,’ right?”*

Flat Gap and the adjacent village of Blaine can claim to be the Mecca or Jerusalem of the Moores. Many members, including my grandfather, are buried there and several still live there. Booker’s grave marker is a small, simple granite stone bearing his name and dates of birth and death. His brother’s tombstone nearby is much taller and ornate, complete with a Mason’s compass. The difference in tombstones reflects the degree of progress each man made in his life. Aaron had put down roots; Booker did not.

The county-by-county migration pattern that had characterized the migration of the Moores from Isaac through John Wesley accelerated with Booker. Born in Johnson County in 1870, he married Stella Gambill in 1897, and they had the first of six children—Bonnie, Bruce, Bill (my father), Bernard (Dude), Beulah, and Booker, Jr. (June). Stella’s lineage extended back six generations to Martin Davenport, born in 1690 in Virginia. Her family had moved from North Carolina to Lawrence County, Kentucky, and appeared to be a family of some substance. According to Booker Moore’s niece, the Gambills disapproved of the marriage, possibly because Booker had fathered three children by a common-law wife a few years before he married Stella<sup>25</sup>.

Booker and his family moved to Greenup County, Kentucky, by 1910 and to Scioto County, Ohio, by 1913 where he stayed until 1924—about 110 years after Isaac crossed the Virginia border into Kentucky.<sup>26</sup> In 1917, the Moores moved to Portsmouth, the county seat, where Booker continued to work in the rail yards for the Norfolk and Western Railroad. He

---

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Imogene Baughman, Columbus, OH, 12 Nov 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Maggie Moore West, Wakefield, OH, 11 Nov 1999.

<sup>26</sup> By contrast, my mother’s ancestors, the Slimps, made essentially the same trip in something like 20 years. Iron makers who had emigrated from Bavaria in 1767, they emigrated to Carter County, Tennessee, where my great-great grandmother Cecelia Slimp was born in 1833. By 1855, she had married and was living in Hanging Rock, Ohio, in the midst of the second largest pig iron producing area in the United States at the time. It illustrates the difference between the pace of agricultural and industrial change.

took out a mortgage on a house, suggesting an attempt to end their constant migration and build a stable family life, but it lasted only a year. After selling the house, the family returned to renting their houses and changed addresses almost every year.

In high school, Bill, Dude, and June played football. Since there were only about 15 men on the squad, players played both offense and defense for 12- or 15-minute quarters. For someone as small as Bill Moore (5'7", 140 pounds), it meant tackling people who were several inches taller and 50 or 60 pounds heavier. Although he was fast and "brimful of nerve", according to one sports columnist<sup>27</sup>, he could not avoid his share of tackles, blocks, and hard knocks from bigger and heavier opponents.

It was though he had something to prove. In the final game of the 1923 season against Columbus North, Bill started at right half and made "big gains, one of which was a 37-yarder after intercepting a pass." It was the longest run of the game. He caught another that got the ball to North's 35-yard line, and he slid off-tackle for a yard. Then, he "was laid out for a few moments as a result of the play, but continued in the game."<sup>28</sup> Such scrappiness promised a bright future on the team the following year.

But Booker walked out on his family in 1924, and for some reason Bill abandoned his teammates and went with him. They moved 30 miles up the Ohio River to Ashland, KY, where Booker worked with his brother Paris in the Kentucky-West Virginia oilfields driving oxen teams<sup>29</sup> and Bill enrolled at Ashland High School—Portsmouth's archenemy—for his senior year.<sup>30</sup> Booker never returned to Portsmouth; by 1930, Stella was listing herself as "widowed" in the city directory.

In 1945, Booker died in Mingo County, West Virginia. His brother Aaron brought him back to Flat Gap and completed the death certificate, stating that Stella was deceased—even though she lived until 1949. The obituary, dated two days earlier, had said that "he left a wife and a number of children"<sup>31</sup> but mentioned no names. These contradictory and incomplete statements were a testimony to a family that had been dysfunctional for several years. Booker and Stella had been dead to each other for a long time.

In 1926, Bill returned to Portsmouth and lived with his mother, two brothers and a sister. The oldest brother, Bruce, had left to work in the steel mills outside Pittsburgh. Bill also was courting Helen Smith who was a year behind him in high school, but dropped out her senior year to work as a bookkeeper and secretary at a local furniture store. He played semi-pro football with the Portsmouth Presidents but spent most of his time on the bench. His small size had finally caught up with him, and no amount of competitive spirit could overcome it.<sup>32</sup>

In 1929, Bill and Helen were married and settled in an apartment in Portsmouth; Dude moved in with them and both men worked at the local steel mill. During this time, my father purchased a small pocket dictionary in which he recorded his weight, height, shoe size, collar size, and hat size. He also itemized his car, watch, physician, and hospital. Such careful, almost

---

<sup>27</sup> *Portsmouth Times*, 19 Oct 1922.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 Nov 1923.

<sup>29</sup> Booker also shoed them, requiring a large sling to restrain the beasts since they were touchy about having nails driven into their hooves.

<sup>30</sup> In the game against Portsmouth that year, Bill failed to gain as much as a yard against his old teammates. They evidently remembered all his moves.

<sup>31</sup> Paintsville, KY, *Herald*, 8 Feb 1945.

<sup>32</sup> *Portsmouth Times*, 23 Oct, 30 Oct, and 22 Nov 1926. The Presidents became the Spartans in 1931 and joined the National Football League, nearly winning the championship against the Chicago Bears in 1933. The team was losing money, however, and moved to Detroit in 1934 to become the present-day Lions.

minute, tabulation, along with a precise writing styles and clear penmanship reveals something about Bill Moore's values and ambitions. He had an orderly mind and paid attention to details<sup>33</sup>.

His dictionary contained much more than the definitions of 40,000 words. It laid out rules for proper conduct, manners, and etiquette that epitomized the self-improvement ethos of the 1920's: "Every day in every way, I am getting better and better." It also was a means to acculturation—in his case, moving from a rural, mountain mind-set to a new and market-driven environment where the rules of socialization were different from what he had been raised in. Here, in one slim volume that could easily fit into a vest pocket, was all the information that an ambitious young man needed to succeed. in the new world of the '20's. It showed how to calculate numbers rapidly, drive a car properly, and chair a meeting. There were rules on how to pay a social call:

Remove your overcoat and overshoes upon entering the drawing room, but retain your hat and cane if making only a short call. . . . Always let ladies, seniors, and superiors be the first to offer the hand. Do not lounge, tip back in your chair, or sit cross-legged. Do not use the piano or organ without being invited to play.

There were rules for the dining room:

Eat with the fork or spoon, not with the knife. Eat soup from the side of the spoon, not from the end. Keep the elbows close to the side and off from the table. Give to the lady at your side your first attention, whether you have been introduced to her or not. Address servants quietly. Eat slowly and with no unnecessary noise, as sipping, smacking, snuffing, coughing, or sneezing. Keep the feet quiet, and from coming in contact with others.

This was a far cry from the Big Sandy. As for proper conduct on the street:

A gentleman walks at the left of a lady companion except when walking at her right would shield her from crowding; and when passing through a crowd, he should precede and open the way for her. In changing sides, the gentleman should pass behind the lady. No lady should take the arm of two men at the same time, but a gentlemen may take a lady on each arm. Two gentlemen accompanying a lady should allow her to walk between them. Keep step. . . . Do not ask questions of non-officials or transients.

There was a specific rule of behavior for almost any occasion, but for anyone who missed the point, there was this final admonition:

There is no great, no small, in right and wrong. Whatever is wrong if done to a thousand men, is wrong if done to one; and whatever is wrong when carried to its ultimate end is no less wrong in its inception.

---

<sup>33</sup> Several family members said that he would study his dictionary several minutes each day.

There is no injustice in respecting the rights of the few, though it displeases the many; but to please the many at the expense of the few, is a great injustice to the few . . . 'It is better to be beaten in right than to succeed in wrong.' Have principles of right and then live by them. 'Do right though the heavens fall'.

This pocket-sized *vade mecum* was an important moderating influence on Bill Moore's life<sup>34</sup>. It proclaimed the older virtues of constancy, civility, and respect for others in such a way that he could combine them with the ones that he learned on the gridiron: determination to succeed despite his small size and taking his share of hard knocks without complaint. But that combination could now occur within a new framework that might allow him to move from his mountainous, rural, Appalachian background into the broader, urban, commercial stream of American life.<sup>35</sup> Hopefully, there was life beyond the Big Sandy.

In 1933, Bill and Helen Moore moved to California, where he worked as an oil company salesman in Long Beach. Whether he knew he had tuberculosis before he left Ohio, he was an invalid by 1936, and he had to quit his job that August. Whatever plans they might have had were put on indefinite hold. In a letter that he wrote to Helen's mother in November that year, he described his "pet ailment" but hoped that he might be admitted to Olive View Sanitarium if his X-rays showed enough improvement to warrant treatment. His sister Beulah had died of it in 1930, and now it was his turn to confront the family curse. In late January 1937, Bill entered Olive View, but not before Helen and he ensured continuation of the family name. After seven years of marriage, she became pregnant.

After fourteen painful months of treatment and isolation, he only got worse. In a letter back east, he asserted that "I have great faith in my recovery," but he knew otherwise. It was the Columbus North game all over again when he was knocked out that afternoon a decade and a half earlier but had gotten back up and carried the ball some more. Still "small, but brimful of nerve," he simply would not quit. He thanked his mother-in-law in Portsmouth for offering shelter to Helen and "the Baby". Then he concluded: "Tell all the folks hello and maybe some day I can come back home." It was his farewell.

Thirty-three days and three thousand miles after Bill's death and cremation in April 1938, my mother brought me to Portsmouth and resumed her old job at Lewis Furniture Co. That job lasted only until June of 1940, when lack of business forced her boss to let her go; the Depression still lingered. Like the Moores before her, she took Route 23 north to look for work, this time to Detroit in a factory that was gearing up for the war to come. She left me with her mother who wound up raising me. Helen remarried and moved back to California where she divorced and eventually disappeared in the 1950's. She was not to be found until the facts of her death were discovered in the Social Security Death Index in 1999.

The admixture of Route 23 and the Moores continued, however. When the time came for me to leave home, I traveled north to college and then to Bowling Green, Ohio, where I have taught and lived for the past 40 years—only 12 miles from "23".

---

<sup>34</sup> Several family members recalled that he studied it several minutes each day.

<sup>35</sup> See David H. Fischer and James C. Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement*, (2000), 3-6 for an overview of the problem of reconciling culture and continuity with environment and change as factors in understanding migration and mobility: "For America's cultural history, some of the most important choice were about what to take along or leave behind." (p. 6)

***Epilog: What is a family?***

In 2006, several of the Moores, including this author, had their DNA tested under the Family Tree DNA WorldWide project. It was the only way we were going to be able to trace our ancestry beyond Isaac Moore and to establish from where we had migrated. The test was based on the y chromosome, found only in males, in which 37 alleles or “markers” were identified. Descendancy was indicated if nearly all markers of the earliest known Moore markers were matched by later generations of males. If all 37 matched, it was a certainty. Those results then were then checked against a worldwide database to determine which “haplogroup” we belonged to and where we might have lived several generations ago.

When my DNA results came back in 2007, I was surprised—to put it mildly—to learn that my markers did not match any of the 143 Moores in the Family Tree. My haplogroup—or migration group—appeared in southern Europe, near Spain, about the end of the last Ice Age, approximately 10,000 years ago. This was nowhere near where the other Moores were located. Genetically, I was not a Moore, at least not of this clan of Moores. Indeed, my DNA did not match any of the entire spectrum of samples in the WorldWide database, regardless of surname. As the late Huey Long might have said, I was *sui generis*.

It was not the first surprise I had encountered in my research, but it certainly was the biggest. What, then, was I to make of my interviews, of my travels up and down Route 23, of the hours spent in courthouses and libraries, of my breaking bread with people for five years who turned out not to have been blood relation? Was it for naught? Indeed, where or who *was* my father’s family? He had died when I was six months old; his obituary and my birth certificate listed me as his son. There was no mention of an adoption. My mother had left us when I was too young to ask the kinds of questions that children normally ask parents about their background; and no other adult was forthcoming with information. My grandmother attempted to track her down through a county welfare agency, but to no avail.

Families have traditionally been defined in terms of “blood [being] thicker than water.” (We now say “DNA” instead of “blood.”) And it does play a major role, not only in matters of law and inheritance claims, but also in deep-seated matters of identity, union, and trust. But is that the only way to define a family? Did not memories, shared experiences and values, stories, legends, myths, and relationships—even dysfunctional ones—play a role?

Route 23 and the Big Sandy are no less an influence in shaping the context in which we saw ourselves and one another regardless of genetics. We create our own history to some extent in terms of where we live and how we earn our living and raise our families and how we think and feel toward one another. We shape our experiences and perceptions to create a personal and family narrative that gives us identity, coherence, and context. Kinship is more than blood kin—important though that be. For the Moores, it was the experience, in part, of coping with what Route 23 meant as a metaphor.

In 1989, country music singer Dwight Yoakam wrote:

They learned readin’, writin’, Route 23  
 To the jobs that lay waiting in those cities’ factories  
 They learned readin’, writin’, roads to the north  
 To the luxury and comfort a coal miner can’t afford  
 They thought readin’, writin’, Route 23  
 Would take them to the good life they had never seen  
 They didn’t know that old highway  
 Could lead them to a world of misery.

To be sure, my branch of the Moores had, by and large, left Kentucky before the coal mines became predominant. They were farmers, small businessmen, steel workers, cattlemen, railroaders, clerks, and teachers. And yet, Yoakam was singing to them as surely as he sang to the coal miners. There might not have been much Black Lung in the family, but it had its share of TB, and not all were able to escape the poverty that gripped the area. The Moores became splintered by time, illness, and distance as they sought a good life—at least a better one—that lay somewhere down that road. Yoakam sang of the risks they had to take to achieve it—and of the tragedy that it might entail. To the extent that I shared in that quest, that history, those memories, those values, and those relationships, I was, and am, a Moore. And so are my children and grandchildren.

Recently, I learned that my father's ashes had been interred in a potter's field in Los Angeles. I also learned that my mother had died in 1984 in Los Angeles and that her ashes were scattered at her request in the Pacific Ocean. My wife and I went to California and located the approximate spot in the cemetery where Bill Moore's ashes would have been scattered. We filled a container with earth and sealed it. As for Helen, we found a quiet beach and filled a container with water from the ocean.

We returned to Ohio and buried the containers in a country cemetery across the river from Route 23. It is a few miles down stream from Catlettsburg, where Isaac Moore had sold his logs 180 years earlier. It was in the same Appalachian hills that had defined the Big Sandy Valley and had linked us all together.