Big Bone Lick, the setting of our mystery is located in Boone County, Kentucky. This little town known as “The Lick” is about 18 miles south of Cincinnati, four miles east of Rabbit Hash and about four miles west of Hell, (also called Beaver Lick). Modern history of the Lick begins in the mid 1700’s with the discovery of huge Mastodon animal bones and skeletons in a swampy, boggy area adjacent to a salt deposit. It’s assumed the demise of these animals happened as the unusually large animals were consuming the salt and became trapped in the nearby bog and perished in its mud and quagmire. The area’s water supply came from a nearby sulphur/mineral spring which was soon thought to contain numerous health and healing benefits.

The combination of the mineral springs, the massive bone collection and its notoriety soon led to the building of hotels and resorts at the “Lick” catering to the famous and wealthy tourists. The most famous of these, The Clay Hotel and Resort, was built in 1815 and soon established itself as the place to go and be seen. The “Lick” and the Resort commanded the tourist trade for almost fifty years; then the Civil War began and with it, “the secrets of Big Bone Lick”.

Written by Emmett D. (Don) Mason, Kentucky Colonel
Mason’s Missives, 1 July 2017, Volume 21,” The Secrets of Big Bone Lick”
A Dilemma:

Jewell Scott, born in 1791, and Elizabeth, his wife of forty-six years, were elderly plantation owners near Louisville, Kentucky. The year was 1864 and had it not been for the daily battles of the Civil War near their home, their life would have been almost perfect. The Scotts owned the Jewell Scott Plantation (also known as JSP) one of the largest and most respected cotton and tobacco plantations in central Kentucky. Jewell and Elizabeth had been looking forward to living their golden years in peace, quiet and continued luxury, after all - they had earned it – why shouldn’t they enjoy it as the sands of time were quickly drifting away.

Jewell’s remaining family consisted of his younger brother Moses Scott and his nephew David who had been born in 1820. He and Elizabeth had no children of their own. Therefore David received a major portion of love and generosity from Jewell and Elizabeth (Betty).

As time passed Jewell became depressed and deathly aware of the reality that the South would soon lose the Civil War to the Union. As far as Jewell was concerned the handwriting was on the wall. He felt only a miracle could save the South and as he looked into the heavens he could see no miracles in sight, nothing but the dark clouds moving swiftly overhead.

Jewell knew that the defeat of the South would bring about the certain demise of the beloved JSP. The plantation and all it stood for would be ruined and possibly torn down by the Yankee soldiers as they began their looting and other rampages of victory.

The least that Jewell could expect was that the plantation would be taken over by a well-to-do Northerner with lots of money and continue to operate under their new management. Either way, he and Betty would be displaced and likely destroyed by the events that were yet to come.

Their Scheme

The Scotts quietly began making plans to protect themselves and their fortune as they faced the inevitable. Slowly over time they had converted their material goods, just about everything they owned that was financially liquid, into cash and gold.

Jewell’s plan was to leave the plantation in the hands of his foreman and he and Betty would move north from Kentucky into Ohio or possibly Indiana. There they planned to establish a nice residence and live their remaining lives in peace, quiet and luxury.

With their plans tentatively made all that was necessary was to select the right time for their departure so it didn’t alarm their friends and plantation workers.

The perfect solution to their dilemma came in the way of an envelope delivered by the local postman. Inside the envelope was an engraved invitation that read:
1 July 1864

To: Mr. and Mrs. Jewel Scott

You are cordially invited to attend our “Finale Gala Ball” hosted by the luxurious Clay Hotel and Resort at Big Bone Springs, Kentucky. The Ball will begin at noon on 14 July 1864 and end at midnight on 17 July 1864.

This invitation has been extended to you based upon past visitations and lengthy stays. The Scott Family has been assigned to the prestigious Suite 302, in the East Wing.

This event will mark the end of an era as the hotel will be closing due to the major loss of business resulting from the continuing civil war. We look forward to celebrating our history with you during our Grand Finale.

With Regards,
Brett Spencer
Hotel Manager

Jewell was saddened by the planned closure of the once grand hotel. He could only reflect on the memories of the past. The Big Bone area had once been a flourishing resort community with thousands of high society people coming to visit the Sulphur Springs and Health spas that flourished in the area. He remembered the many sales pamphlets from years ago, indicating many wealthy families, both from the North and South came to Big Bone to socialize and partake of the curative qualities of the springs.

The Clay Hotel, built in 1815 was named after the famous and fiery Henry Clay, a well-known Kentucky statesman. The hotel property was quite large and supported a dance pavilion, fine dining rooms, and rows of bathhouses adjacent to the spring, stables for the horses and a large carriage garage. Famous Kentuckians such as the Breckinridges, Todds, Crittendens, Scotts, Marshalls and McDowells came to Big Bone by way of the Lexington-Covington toll-pike, now known as Dixie Highway. Other visitors came by steamboat on the Ohio River, landing at the docks at Hamilton and Rabbit Hash and then traveled to the springs by local carriages for hire. The location soon became the most popular health resort west of the Allegheny Mountains.

The destinies of many well to do southern families were destroyed by the fortunes of the Civil War. Jewel was fortunate that he had been able to save a portion of his family assets. It was not hard for Jewell to understand the prevailing conditions that led to the demise of the Clay Hotel and Resort. Even though Kentucky started out as a neutral state in the Civil War it soon became a prominent battleground. The Union and the Confederacy both used the neutral ground from which to spring their raids on boats and troops moving up and down the Ohio River.
The first three years of the War resulted in many large plantations being raided for supplies, food, hay and grain to help supply the large needs of the armies, both North and South. Many of these farms did not survive, thus making it worse for those that were still in operation.

Jewell could only thank God that he and Betty had been able to survive the past and hopefully flee to the North and a new life. Accepting the Resort’s invitation to attend the Grand Finale seemed to be a perfect solution and timing to put their plan into motion.

Prior to their leaving, Jewell Scott penned a short but direct letter to his brother, Moses, explaining the reasons for their abrupt departure. He also expressed his love and devotion to his brother and his nephew, David.

The Journey

Jewell completed the few remaining details necessary in advance of their departure and before they knew it the time to leave was upon them.

Their beautiful carriage was loaded to the maximum with keepsakes that Betty didn’t want to leave behind. Hidden underneath the carriage floorboard was the family fortune, or the remains of their fortune. Jewell knew it to be over half a million dollars even in today’s market. He was confident that Betty and he could live out their remaining years in comfort and style to their liking.

As they passed under the large JSP sign at the front gate of the plantation, the loving couple glanced at each other and noted the tears on the face of the other. They remained silent for the first few miles. After that their spirits became livelier as they thought that today was the first day of the rest of their lives.

Their journey was basically uneventful until they approached the small town of Carrollton, situated on the banks of the Ohio River. The road through town was blocked by a small unit of Confederate soldiers stopping the traffic flow. The sentry in charge approached their carriage and gave it a quick visual search. Jewell could feel his pressure of the blood in his veins and his anxiety level began to rise. He hoped he could maintain his composure as he answered the sentry’s question, “What is your destination and what is the nature of the trip?”

After completing some small talk with the sentry and trying to convince him of their loyalty to the south; Jewell told him that they were traveling to a festive event in northern Kentucky. To support this he showed his invitation to the festivities. Not completely satisfied the sentry asked why the carriage carried so many personal possessions. Jewell responded by saying that they would be meeting friends at the event and had planned to trade or possibly sell the items, hoping to help pay for the excursion.

After a short conversation with his sergeant the sentry raised the road block and motioned for Jewell to continue on his trip. Betty didn’t say a word for the next two miles as she tried to regain her composure.
The Scott’s carriage trip from Louisville to Big Bone consumed three full days and was dusty, hot and mostly unbearable under the July sun and high temperatures. Their beautiful carriage displayed none of its beautiful exterior and charm when they arrived at the Clay Resort. But Jewell knew when the exterior was washed and cleaned it would be beautiful once again. He made a mental note to have the carriage washed and cleaned before they continued their journey.

**The Gala Finale**

There was some confusion when they checked in at the Clay Hotel and Resort. It seems the invitation contained a small error. Their reservations were for the West Wing, Suite 302 rather than Suite 302 of the East Wing as written on their invitation.

In short order the misunderstanding was solved and their luggage was moved into the West Wing and their carriage stored in the carriage barn until needed. Jewell knew that his secret cargo was well hidden and well protected in the hidden metal compartment under the carriage floor. There was no cause for alarm. They could now relax, enjoy the festivities, and the start of their new lives.

Betty spent the complete day at the bath houses and mineral springs for which the Resort was famous. This included a massage and almost a full day of pampering by the well-trained staff.

Jewell was content to be playing poker with some of his friends that he hadn’t seen in several months. It wasn’t about the high stakes of the game, it was just the comradery and of course the fine whiskey that was served.

The gala parties were perfect during the first two days and were relished by all in attendance. Jewell and Betty had really enjoyed themselves and had almost forgotten the main purpose of their trip, which was to move North.

On their final evening they were packed and ready for the unknown adventures that would face them tomorrow when they departed for Ohio. The maids had turned their beds down earlier in the evening and as the clock chimed ten the couple retired for the evening. The copious amount of cocktails they had consumed during the evening served as a sleeping aid to their tired bodies.

It was after midnight and Betty was dozing to the occasional loud snoring of Jewell; both were oblivious to the smoke that was creeping under the door and filling their room. Jewell continued to snore with an occasional cough mixed in with his breathing. The smoke in their room had reached the point of absorbing all the oxygen in the air and leaving Jewell and Betty beyond help. They soon became asphyxiated and were never aware that the entire West Wing was on fire and burning completely out of control. Thank God they were not awake as the fire began to consume their bed and the people that it held.

The scene at the hotel the following morning was quite different from the night before. The West Wing had been partially destroyed along with some of the outside support buildings and homes that housed the hotel staff.
The death toll was up to thirty two people and could climb even higher. Included on the death list were the names of Jewell and Betty Scott as well as the hotel manager Brett Spencer and his family.

It’s true the luxurious Clay Hotel and Resort had planned to close but to have the end come in such a terrible way was horrific and unbelievable.

Within two weeks of the fire all the living had departed and the dead had been recovered and sent to their resting places. The remaining buildings were closed and boarded up. In its heyday, the Grande Clay Hotel and Resort had over twenty acres of the finest facilities and amenities to serve its VIP guests. The grounds consisted of swimming pools, sulfur spas, mud rooms, riding stables and carriage facilities, the best that money could buy. The hotel also featured the finest dining rooms and nightly entertainment that were available. Those days were gone forever and an unearthly appearance and atmosphere seemed to be hovering over the closed and burned-out hotel.

Eighty years of time have come and gone to the current year of 1945. The remains of the Clay Hotel still sit atop the hill looking down over the rapidly deteriorating town of Big Bone Springs. The hotel’s once grandeur looks had changed to that of an eyesore in the daylight and the scary look of death and unknown secrets haunting the site after the sun sets over the hill tops.

Stories have been told of ghosts of the dead that ramble through the boarded up rooms as they search for their loved ones and friends. Tales of weird sounds of death as the fire consumed the bodies and lives of the people that died there. Some said that you could hear the ghostly wailing of the guests as they tried to escape the blaze as it consumed everything and everyone in its path.

The residents of Big Bone Springs seemed to be content to keep their distance from the boarded up hotel and most townspeople lacked the courage to go forth and search for the origin of the ghostly noises and happenings that haunt the once luxurious Clay Hotel and Resort. Of course there is always someone willing to accept a dare to venture close to the decaying buildings, but most are frightened away by the stories of weird happenings and noises.

Yes, it’s been more than eight decades since fire gutted the West Wing and the hotel was closed and boarded up; those years have not been kind and the resort continues to deteriorate before the very eyes of the few residents of Big Bone Lick. But time has not diminished the reports of ghosts walking among the ruins, in fact, the tales of eerie event and noises has increased in the last three to four years.

This could be the end of our story. The Scott’s are dead, the Civil War is over and was lost by the south as Jewell predicted, and gone forever are the Clay Resort and the JSP – Jewell Scott Plantation. But life continues on and with it the birth of new seedlings and lives.

One such new life is taking place in the spring of 1945 almost one hundred miles to the south of Big Bone Lick.
The Secrets of Big Bone Lick

New Blood with Questions

In Louisville, Kentucky during the spring of 1945 young Todd Scott was going through his father’s personal papers. His father Leon Scott had recently passed away after a long fight with colon cancer, leaving young Todd alone since his mother had already passed. Todd was now 21 years old and attending Simon Kenton College in northern Kentucky.

After devoting several hours to poring over old documents, letters, statements and family pictures he noticed a letter addressed to his great-grandfather Moses Scott. The letter was postmarked 10 July 1864 and had been written with a quill pen. The old letter, written by Jewell Scott, had been passed down from generation to generation, Moses Scott to his son David; David to his son Leon and now it was in the hands of Leon’s son Todd, some eighty years later.

Todd wondered why this letter was so important. Why had it been passed from father to son so many times? Todd’s hands fumbled nervously as he removed the crinkled letter from the soiled envelope. Todd couldn’t help but notice that the stationery was of fine quality and matched the writing skills of its author. The papers and ink had deteriorated over time in spite of its fine quality.

With shaking hands and fingers and a small tear in his eye Todd began to read the faded document.

JSP
Jewell Scott Plantation
Louisville, Kentucky

10 July 1864

Dear Moses and David,

This is a short note to tell you that Betty and I have decided to move to Ohio or Indiana. We realize our decision to do so might seem quick, but we have been thinking about it for a year or so. The current direction of the war seems to indicate that the war is nearing its end with the Yankees being the victors.

We don’t want to face the ravages of war that will surely take place when the South surrenders. We feel the war is lost and with it our lovely home at JSP, our few remaining assets and possibly our lives.

The main problem we face is that our departure from the farm is sure to create interest and cause for alarm and that would possibly prevent our trip north. We believe we have solved this problem by accepting an invitation to the Finale Ball being held at the Clay Hotel and Resort.
We plan to attend this last Gala Ball at the Clay Hotel and Resort in Big Bone Springs on the 14th through the 17th of July 1864. Suite 302 in the East Wing has been reserved for our stay. We will travel by our finest carriage, enjoy the festivities and move onward to Ohio when the Ball has ended. We are taking our more valuable items so that we will not have to return to our home at JSP. We leave the farm in the hands of our hired crew.

We are sorry for any grief this may cause you or our nephew David. You both have our love and we hope to see you again after the war.

You’re Loving Brother, Jewell Scott

Todd’s hands were shaking as he finished reading the letter. His mind was filled with numerous questions. Each question seemed to bring forth another. But among the questions there were no answers.

He ascertained that this Jewell Scott was his great-granduncle but what happened to he and his wife? Did they live a long and satisfactory life in Ohio or Indiana? Were there kinfolks from Jewell’s side of the family? All of these unknowns created a sense of curiosity and interest on Todd’s part.

Reading the letter again brought forth a new question, wealth? One could not read the letter without sensing that wealth, power, land and the things that went with it were hidden somewhere in the words contained within the letter.

Todd realized that he was now the patriarch of his family. It was his responsibility to care for his elderly mother and continue the family name. As a student at Simon Kenton he had no finances of his own. The estate of his father while not large might be considered adequate by most standards. But Todd had lofty goals for him and his family. Surely he would marry, have children and carry on the family name and tradition in a style of luxury.

As he read the letter for the third time he convinced himself that there was a mystery associated with this letter and he was going to solve it. If it led to wealth and power so be it.

The Hunt

Todd developed a list of things that he knew as a result of reading the old letter and talking to his mother Julia about the Jewell Scott family. Scratching his head he realized that he didn’t have much to go on. His list included the Jewell Scott Plantation (JSP) located near Louisville, the invitation to the Ball and reservation for suite 302 in the East Wing at the Clay Hotel in 1864 in Big Bone, and their plan to move to Ohio or Indiana. He also was aware that they carried everything they considered of ‘value’ with them on their trip to the North. It seemed like a nice starting point – until you realize that it all centered around 80 year old information.
Todd finally decided he would begin his search by digging into the land records for the JSP farm nearby since he was currently living in Louisville. Todd made a visit to the Jefferson County Clerk’s office to view old land records and deeds hoping to trace the history of the property.

His initial search located the property that was deeded to Jewell Scott in 1821. Over time the size of the plantation had grown as Jewell acquired more of the acreage that surrounded his property. The final tally of the plantation was five sections equaling a total of 3,200 acres.

Records revealed the property was sold by the Jewell Scott estate in 1865 to Dr. Steven Ryle, a resident in Louisville. When Todd read this entry he couldn’t believe his eyes. Sold in 1865, why that’s only one year after they moved north. What could have possibly happened? Retracing their steps in his mind he started believing that they might have been caught in a Civil War conflict and lost their lives. That was certainly a possibility.

Before he departed the courthouse, Todd noted the property was still deeded to someone named Ryle, the same last name as the purchaser in 1865. However, the whole name was William Edward Ryle and the size of the plat was now 1,920 acres, suggesting the Ryle’s had sold off about two sections of the original property. Records reflect that the property was last titled in 1924.

Before returning home Todd stopped at the city library and did some research in the 1944 Louisville City directory for the name of William Edward Ryle and the address he had obtained for the property. To his astonishment the Ryle name and address were still current.

At least Todd knew who currently owned the property and where it was located; however the events surrounding the death of his aunt and uncle were still unknown. Todd believed it was time to make a trip to northern Kentucky and learn the history of the Clay Hotel and Resort. As a student at Simon Kenton College he was familiar with the nearby small town called Big Bone Lick, the home of the once luxurious Clay Hotel and Resort. Even though the town was known to him, he had never visited the place.

During the last two years Todd had made the trip from Louisville many times to attend classes at Simon Kenton College in Covington. As a result he was familiar with the directions to Big Bone. Highway 42 was the only main highway for travel to the north and Todd followed his usual route through Carrollton and Warsaw. From Warsaw it was only twenty miles till he arrived at Beaver Lick where he needed to turn on the small side road leading to his destination of Big Bone and its mineral springs.

Todd’s 1938 Chevrolet seemed to be running a little hot as he exited the main highway. He noticed a small road sign indicating that it was three miles to Big Bone. His stomach felt full of butterflies or maybe, just plain anxiety. Torn between the possibilities of his car overheating and the unknowns of what he would find during his search; the tension was really beginning to bother him.

As the Chevy rounded a turn in the old side road Todd thought to himself, there must be a God because right in front of his vehicle was a small creek that he had to cross. It must be divine intervention Todd thought as he filled the Chevy’s radiator with the cool clear water from the creek that he was standing in.
As the butterflies left his stomach he was on the road again to the Clay Hotel or at least the remains of the hotel. As he topped the next hill he realized that he had arrived. Stretched out before him he saw a small valley community and a road sign indicating he was in Big Bone.

**The Search Continues**

Todd’s enthusiasm seemed to ebb from his body as he slowly cruised through the small town. He really didn’t know what he was expecting to see, but he was very disappointed with the sights he was witnessing.

As he entered town he noticed an aged sign that said “Mineral Springs” with a small arrow pointing to the left. Also on the left was a small white church with a Methodist sign above the door. A small white house sits on the right. Also on the right is a small building labeled Post Office and Miller’s Country Store. Another small white house, probably Miller’s home sits behind the store. Next to Miller’s is a vacant plot of ground that is overgrown with brush, small trees and grass that consumes the entire acreage and the hill that it forms. There are no other signs of life on the right side of the small town.

On the left just past the country store are two rundown dirty-white buildings. The first displays a Bavarian Beer sign in neon lights that also spells out “Miller’s Place”. Next door, according to the printed sign, is Shorty’s Tavern featuring Falstaff beer. As Todd looked between the two beer joints he noticed a baseball diamond behind the buildings. He couldn’t help but wonder who plays baseball here, considering there were only two homes visible.

After passing the two taverns there were no other buildings in sight on either side of the country road. There was a nice wooded site just past Shorty’s Tavern that looked like a local picnic area. The end of the town seemed to be designated by an old iron bridge crossing Divine Intervention Creek that had been meandering through the nearby hills.

Todd was disappointed with what the small town had to offer in his quest for answers to the disappearance and death of his ancestors. His venture into Big Bone had yielded two homes, a Methodist church, a country store and post office combined, and two beer joints. Then he remembered the “Mineral Springs” sign and the baseball diamond; he noted that every building in town needed a paint job.

After crossing the iron bridge he turned the Chevy around and headed off to explore the mineral springs. A grass-covered parking area was near the actual springs itself. Todd was once again discouraged with what he saw.

The mineral springs, simply a pipe extending from the ground with a shut off valve that continually allowed the sulphur water to drip was a complete let down to Todd. And he was not overly impressed when he tasted the foul smelling liquid.

He could only think of years gone by when people came by the thousands from faraway places to enjoy the virtues of the springs. It was his opinion that someone had created a sales and propaganda program that was very clever. Very clever indeed. Todd was sorry that his ancestors
had fallen for what he considered was a Ponzi scheme. Of course that was almost a hundred years ago and times have changed drastically. Who knows? There may have been some real healing benefits from the foul smelling springs.

Realizing that the springs were a dead end, Todd decided to visit the owners of the country store. There he met Russell Miller and his wife. They had two children, a girl named Wanda about seven years of age and a son named Wink that was Todd’s age. Before he asked the question of whether Wink played baseball or not, he knew the response would be yes.

Finally Todd mentioned the real reason for his visit to their small community. The couple eagerly listened to Todd as he told of his quest for answers. They had plenty of time since they had no other customers.

The Millers explained that their family had lived in Big Bone for almost sixty years although no one was still living that was familiar with the day to day operation of the Clay Resort. They did confirm that the resort included the vacant overgrown property that was next to their store and post office.

They also confirmed that the resort was partially destroyed by fire near the end of the Civil War. This information led Todd to believe that Jewell Scott and his wife may have perished in the fire, although there was no known proof of that.

The Millers also explained that the old and decaying remains of the resort were still visible at the top of the property overlooking Big Bone. An old path on the back of the property leads to the top of the hill and whatever was left of the once famous Clay resort. Before Todd left the Millers they suggested that he visit the office of the Boone County Recorder, the local long-standing newspaper. They mentioned the possibility of a news story that may be hidden in the newspapers archives. Todd thanked the Miller’s for their hospitality and assistance then departed in search of the old path leading to the hill top.

He finally found the path as they described, but it was overgrown to the point that he had to park the Chevy and continue on foot. Todd noticed the property had been posted against trespassing and other signs saying “Private Property”. Facing possible arrest he decided to continue his search now and face the consequences later.

As he neared the apex of the hill the brush and trees became heavier and obscured his vision. Then as if by more Divine Intervention the vegetation thinned out and Todd had his first view of the Clay Hotel and Resort.

The west wing of the building was almost completely charred and burnt with only a few supports still erect. Seeing this, Todd believed it would have been almost impossible for anyone to escape the burning inferno. Then Todd remembered reading Jewell’s letter stating they had been assigned to suite 302 of the East Wing.

To his left the remains of the East Wing, although not burnt, were in a sad state of affairs. The many years of decline and decay had eaten away much of the building and its support structure. The third floor was now resting on top of the second floor which was only a few feet above the first level. Todd was elated knowing that the East Wing was not damaged by the fire. While
observing this he mentally formed a picture of his aunt and uncle escaping when the alarm was
sounded from the West Wing. Then a sobering thought brought forth more questions such as,
what happened after the fire and where did they go and why did the plantation change owners in
1865.

Todd decided to explore the portions of the third floor that he could identify and were still capable
of supporting his weight. He started at the end of the building near the stairwell and began his
exploration. The room numbers were long-gone, leaving him to assume that the rooms closest to
the stairwell would be the low suite numbers. Using this system he believed the numbers would
get higher as he traveled the length of the hallway.

Todd’s first two attempts to climb from the ground onto the third floor were failures because the
wooden surfaces were too weak to support his climbing efforts. He was rewarded when he
changed his plan of attack and soon found himself on the third floor veranda. Third floor or not,
he was only about ten or twelve feet off the ground. At least if he fell down it wouldn’t be the fall
that killed him but the debris that he fell into.

Being off the ground by ten feet gave Todd a clearer picture of the hotel grounds and its outdoor
facilities and buildings. He believed some of the outbuildings might be worth exploring. However, right now he needed to move closer to the third floor stairwell. He had only moved
about twenty feet when he noticed one of the suites was open enough to see inside. As he moved
about he had to test the floor at his every step to see if it would support his weight. When
rewarded he could move forward and when not he searched for a new direction.

Finally he entered the room enough to form an impression that the resident should have been able
to escape without a problem. Following his one pattern of success he visited the rooms nearest the
stairwell, feeling confident that one of them was the suite occupied by his aunt and uncle when
they last visited the Clay Hotel. It was impossible to know the exact location of suite 302 but he
was sure it was one of the few that he had examined. He had not seen any human remains in any
of the rooms so he felt confident that they could not have died in their rooms. There must be
another explanation.

As Todd finally stepped down on the ground he felt somewhat relieved and decided to explore the
grounds and other outbuildings that seemed to be in better condition than the actual hotel itself.
He first noted the many bath houses all lined in a row. These units had survived the years much
better because they were made of stucco and insulated to help maintain the properties of the
sulphur mineral water.

One end of the property held what looked like the stable while the opposite end contained the
carriage house or garage. Considering both options he decided to temporarily forgo the stable and
concentrate on the other outbuildings including the carriage house.

The carriage house and garage seemed to be in better shape than most of the hotel’s outbuildings.
The roof had collapsed allowing the weather to do its damage to the interior of the building but the
walls were still somewhat intact and offering some protection to its contents. The building’s huge
double doors were still on their hinges and locked with an antique padlock. As Todd tried to peek
through the cracks he could see that something was stored inside but was unable to identify the
The roof of the building was lying on the top of its contents making it much harder to identify the objects.

Todd’s anxiety and blood pressure were rising the more he thought about Jewell Scott’s letter stating that they were taking their finest carriage for the trip to the Clay Hotel, and then on to Ohio. His pulse was beating furiously as he tried to find a bigger crack hoping to get a better view of the building’s contents. He finally came to the conclusion that the large objects in the building were covered with tarpaulins.

“No-Trespassing, we will prosecute violators” and then, “Private Property”, that’s what Todd remembered reading on the signs at the path leading to the property. His search seemed to be at an impasse. Should he break the lock and search the carriage house? Should he reach out to someone for access and permission? And if so, just who could authorize access?

The Hunter is bagged

Todd’s problem was compounded by the rapidly approaching darkness. His choices were soon put on hold when he heard someone say to him, “Put your hands up mister”. The man’s voice startled Todd, but he responded immediately with both arms raised. When he turned Todd saw two Boone County Sheriff’s deputies staring at him. The one with two stripes on his arm had his weapon pointed at the visibly shaken college student.

For the next fifteen minutes Todd tried to answer the gambit of questions fired at him by the two deputies. He gave them all the answers explaining why he was on the property. In spite of his cooperation the dispatcher at the Sheriff’s office directed the deputies to bring Todd into the office which was located in Burlington, about twelve miles away. Todd, with handcuffs on, couldn’t understand what the big deal was; but didn’t have much choice in the matter. The trio followed the pathway down the hillside to where their patrol car was parked next to Todd’s Chevy.

The deputies placed Todd in the patrol car and began the trip to their office. Thirty minutes later Todd was ushered into the office of the ranking sergeant. According to the nameplate on his desk Todd was being interviewed by Sgt. Bill Crouch. During the next hour Todd explained in great detail how and why he came to be on the posted property. Considering that he had not stolen or damaged anything Todd couldn’t understand why his actions were such a big deal. After all he was just trying to find out what happened to his kin folk when they visited Big Bone years ago.

Sgt. Crouch’s demeanor toward Todd began to change from one of suspicion to an appearance of helpfulness as the dialogue continued. He even offered to locate the current property owners so Todd could seek their assistance. He also suggested the possibility that his office might have some old reports in the archives that would be helpful. The sergeant said he would have his staff research the archives for any details they might have concerning the demise of the old Hotel and invited Todd to check back for the results if any.

The Sheriff’s office being in the Boone County Court House meant that other resources such as the local newspaper and libraries were close at hand. The sergeant mentioned that it was late and all the possible leads were closed for the evening. However, before they took Todd back to his car he was told the current property owners were the Clay Family Trust with their home office in Louisville.
On the return trip to Big Bone the deputies bought some White Castle hamburgers to help ease their hunger pains. Todd’s stomach appreciated the nourishment since he hadn’t eaten since an early breakfast. As Todd exited the patrol car he thanked the two deputies for their help. As they prepared to leave he told them he would sleep in his car tonight and go to Burlington in the morning to resume his search. As they left, the officers warned him against any further exploration of the property without permission from the Clay Family Trust.

**Free to Hunt again**

As he watched their tail lights disappear into the darkness Todd got into the back seat, rolled the windows down, and made a makeshift bed in the cramped quarters of his car. In a matter of minutes he was dead to the world and mumbling in his sleep.

It was about midnight when he awoke to the strange and peculiar sounds coming through the back windows of the car. Now fully awake, Todd realized that the weird spine-chilling noises were coming from the top of the hill and probably from the charred remains of the Clay Hotel. He knew he had a first-hand opportunity to find out what was causing these unnerving sounds. He also realized that he must trespass again if he wanted to learn the deepest secrets of the Clay.

Armed with only a small flashlight he left the car and began his trek up the hill toward the spine-tingling noises. To him the choice was simple – as long as he didn’t get caught again. Thinking of getting caught made him wonder just how the deputies knew that he was on the property earlier in the day. Todd put these thoughts out of his mind as he was nearing the summit of the hill.

After pausing to collect his thoughts, and pinpoint the direction the sounds seemed to be coming from, he believed they were emanating from the area of the old bath houses. Some of the odd noises reminded him of music or sounds like he may have heard in a movie like “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves”. One thing for certain, the sounds were not being made by ghosts or other phenomena associated with the burning of the hotel. As he crept closer to the bath houses he was certain he could hear voices mixed among the other peculiar sounds.

Moving forward he neared a partially open door which allowed the candle light inside to highlight the doorway, as well as allowed the sounds to penetrate the hillside. When he heard the voice of a woman speaking he knew he would be confronting humans and not some supernatural being looking to consume the earth and its inhabitants, at least he hoped that was the case.

When Todd entered the doorway he was shocked as well as pleasantly surprised. Seated on the bath house floor in make shift seats were five young people about Todd’s age, three girls and two guys. Each of them had a strange looking instrument that they were trying to play but obviously didn’t know how. It didn’t take Todd long to realize the nasty sounds coming from the instruments were the source of the haunted hotel claims.

In the slightly darkened room Todd was able to make out the facial features of Wink Miller, the son of the country store proprietor that he had met earlier in the day.
Wink looked at Todd and with a sly grin on his face he said, “You caught me”. He said, “You know for three years now we have been coming up here to have a small party, drink a few beers and try to teach ourselves to play these instruments. As you can tell we haven’t had much luck. We still sound as bad as that first night some years ago. We bought these old instruments from a gypsy family that passed through Big Bone. We didn’t even know what a Zither, Lute, Reed Flute or Saza was when we paid our money. But since then we have tried everything to generate something musical that doesn’t sound like an alien folk song. We even trade back and forth but nothing we do seems to work. I suppose we could take lessons but that would screw up the fun of learning by ourselves.

“Our sounds are so bad that the neighborhood is convinced that the property is haunted with the ghosts of those that perished in the hotel fire a hundred years ago. We just let them go on thinking the place is haunted so we can have a place to party. So far it has worked.”

Wink handed Todd a bottle of Bavarian beer which wasn’t very cold but still tasted good. While looking at the bottle Todd assumed Wink had gotten the brew from his dad’s tavern. As he took a big swig of beer he heard Wink say, “Oh by the way, it was me that called the Sheriff’s office to report you as a trespasser”.

Todd laughingly said, “Oh thanks a lot that was just what I needed this afternoon… By the way, just how do you get away with your parties and trespassing?” There was no response to his query but he did hear a few snickers coming from the party goers, so he let the matter drop.

Wink said, “Why don’t you join our party, as you can see Belinda needs a friend to make it a sixsome”. Todd said, “I’ll join you as long as you don’t try to make music”. And with that Todd grabbed another beer and moved over into the corner next to Belinda, his new friend.

**Another Day, Same Old Questions**

Todd and the other party goers were starting to stir and realized that a new day was upon them. As he looked around the room he couldn’t recognize anyone. An arm here, a leg there, a head belonging to someone else, the room barely had room for the six sleepy headed young adults and their hangovers. Todd tried to get up but realized that he was being held in place by Belinda’s body. Slowly the memories of last night flashed through his mind causing him to smile a little. Then he saw Belinda’s face and she too had a smile.

When everyone was awake and ready to head home Todd invited Belinda to breakfast and to spend some time with him as he checked out some of his possible leads in Burlington. Todd thanked Wink for the party invite and then remarked that Wink owed him one for the trespassing phone call to the Sheriff.

Todd and Belinda made their way down through the brush toward his car. Belinda said there weren’t many café places nearby so they decided to go to Burlington for breakfast. During the trip Belinda told him that she was a sophomore at the University of Northern Kentucky in Covington with a possible major in Geology. As she mentioned her parents living in nearby Walton, Todd told her that his father had recently passed and that his mom was still living in Louisville.
The sun shining thru the Chevy’s windshield made it hard to see outside, but it gave him an opportunity to see just how pretty she really was with her face highlighted by the sun’s rays. He guessed she was about five feet five, maybe 115 pounds with hair that was a mixture of blonde and brown. She was nice to look at and remembering the feel of her skin from the night before brought a sense of pleasure to him.

They stopped at McBee’s café when they arrived at the county seat. While Todd was ordering coffee and breakfast, Belinda called her family to check in and ease their minds. During their morning meal they discussed some of the possibilities for today’s search. Without actually saying so, it was assumed that they would be together as a team today. Both seemed to be happy with that arrangement.

Their first stop of the morning was to visit his new friend, Sgt. Crouch. The sergeant was reading the morning newspaper when the couple interrupted him. He was surprised to see Todd again so soon but even more stunned to see the cute young lady with him. He could tell that the sergeant was curious but Todd didn’t offer any explanations. He did however provide introductions.

The deputy said that today was Todd’s lucky day because they had found some information in the office archives concerning the Clay Resort. He opened his desk drawer and retrieved a manila folder that he gave to Todd saying, “This is a copy of our reports and a few related newspaper stories. I’m sure these will shed at least some light on the disappearance of your kin folks.”

He gave the young couple the use of an empty office to look at the documents in the folder. Belinda spread the papers on the desk as Todd gave them a quick scan. He couldn’t believe that he was seeing the actual Sheriff’s incident report and its follow-up from over eighty years ago. It was handwritten and quite worn and faded but if you took your time you could decipher enough to piece together the main story.

The incident report was dated 17 July 1864 at 1:30 a.m. and completed by Captain Brook (or possibly Book) of the Sheriff’s office. According to the report, when he responded the entire three floors of the West Wing of the Clay Hotel and Resort were ablaze and many people were trapped and screaming. Local volunteer firemen and many from surrounding towns were attempting to extinguish the blaze, but their efforts were in vain. He noted there were about thirty suites on each floor. According to the hotel administrative staff there were about 180 guests in each wing of the hotel. At the time of this report he could only state that there were many that died at the scene. Nearly all the dead were clustered on the second and third floors of the West Wing. This gave Todd some relief as he knew his people were assigned a suite in the East Wing.

Cause of the fire was not determined in time to be included in this report, but there were rumors of guests smoking in bed as being the possible source. Mr. Abernathy, a member of the Clay Hotel Corporation at Louisville, Ky. arrived on the scene at 5:10 a.m. He asked that all official correspondence be routed through either him or his office. To honor his request he was given a carbon copy of the report.

Captain Brook had closed his initial report at 8 a.m. after almost eight hours at the scene. At that time there were about 88 people either known dead or unaccounted for. Numerous injured and
burn victims had been transported to hospitals in Covington, Florence and Walton. Their identities were unknown at that time.

As the young couple read the report some of their questions were answered while more questions came to mind.

Belinda noted a clipping from the Boone County Recorder dated 19 July of 1864. It listed casualty figures at 79 with an additional five seriously injured still cared for at local hospitals. At that time about forty percent of the dead had been identified. The article included the names of the known dead. As Todd perused the list he gave a sigh of relief when he didn’t see the names of Jewell and Betty Scott.

Todd’s luck changed when they found a later clipping from the Recorder that summed up the story. It contained a complete list of the dead which included the Scott’s as victims 57 and 58. Belinda sensed Todd’s sorrow and put her arms around him hoping to ease his pain. The article went on to say that the Clay Hotel Corporation was offering a $5,000 dollar settlement to the families of those killed or injured during the Big Bone disaster. Included in the article was the name and address of the office responsible for dispersing the funds. Todd wondered who represented the Scott’s in behalf of their claim.

The couple read and reread all the documents and articles in the folder. Todd felt that he knew most all the facts surrounding the death of his family members. The only remaining bits of the puzzle lie at the Clay Corporation in Louisville.

Belinda was keyed up and wanted to accompany Todd to Louisville as he sought to tie up the last of the loose ends. She wanted to drive past her parents place in Walton, visit with them, pack up a few clothes and head out to Louisville. Todd was happy with her decision. The couple conveyed their thanks and good-byes to Sgt. Crouch and within an hour they were entering Belinda’s home in Walton.

Todd felt uncomfortable telling Belinda’s parents that he wanted to take their daughter to Louisville on a witch hunt. And to make matters worse, he realized that he didn’t even know her last name. So to ease the situation he decided to let Belinda do most of the talking. She began by introducing Todd as a new friend to her parents Nathan and Faye Clements. Todd was even less comfortable when he learned that her father was a Baptist preacher. As he gave Mr. Clements a firm handshake he couldn’t help but wonder what other secrets his new lady friend was keeping from him.

While Belinda was upstairs cleaning up and gathering a few things Todd explained his mystery to her parents. Surprisingly the family seemed to be ok with Belinda helping with his search. He outlined his next step which was to visit with the trustee of the Clay Family Trust and tell his story and ask for his help. Mr. Clements suggested that Todd use their phone to make an appointment for later in the day. He said it would be much better to have an appointment rather than cold calling. Todd agreed with his assessment. With the operators assistance he located the Trust, told them what the meeting would be about and was given a three o’clock appointment with the Trustee. When Belinda came down with a small suitcase he briefed her on the recent events and said it was necessary to leave now if they wanted to make the scheduled appointment. After hurried thanks and good-byes the young couple was on their way south to Louisville.
The couple was sitting in the Trust waiting room when the hallway clock chimed three. On the chair between them was the manila folder from the Sheriff’s office, filled with numerous notes, clippings and comments compiled by Todd. After waiting ten minutes the couple began to think the trip was a waste of their time.

Then a secretary opened the door and asked that they follow her as she led them to the office of the Trustee, Alex Clay. Todd smiled a little knowing it was only fitting that the Trustee of the Clay Family Trust was a Clay ancestor. He figured the old guy would be heavy set with a small mustache, while chain smoking a Cuban cigar and most likely sipping from a crystal glass of Kentucky bourbon. That was Todd’s personal description of a man with a family history that helped frame politics in Kentucky. He thought, probably a Kentucky Colonel, too.

The secretary introduced the couple to Alex Clay, a handsome person of good stature about five feet ten inches with about a 38 inch bust. Todd almost swallowed his tongue when he realized Alex Clay was a good looking woman in her early forties and probably didn’t smoke Cuban cigars. After all the introductions and pleasantries were over Alex spoke, “Why don’t you have a seat and tell me your story. Before we get started would either of you like some refreshment, iced-tea, coke or even an afternoon toddy?”

Declining the offer, Todd began to explain his problem, mystery or whatever you might call it. When he finished fifteen minutes had passed and Ms. Clay said, “I can see your dilemma, but, how can I be of assistance”?

Todd said, “According to local records in Boone County your company made arrangements to compensate the injured and dead in the hotel fire. I would like you to search your records, if any, and tell me who represented my family and received their compensation. Secondly I would like your permission to search the old Clay Hotel site and specifically the carriage barn or garage. I believe the carriage belonging to my kinfolk is still in the garage on the Clay site in Big Bone”.

Todd listened as Ms. Clay told of sending her staff to search the records from that time period in preparation for this meeting. She also said, “Well, based on our archives I can tell you that no one from your family came forward to initiate a claim or represent them during the compensation hearings. And according to the presiding judges’ instructions, their claim for two deaths equaling ten thousand dollars was approved and the funds were placed into an interest bearing escrow account in the Scott name with the Kentucky State Bank, our bank of record here in Louisville.” She went on to say, “I am sure the escrow balance should be a tidy sum by now. Are you the only
heir Todd”? He replied that he was the remaining Scott heir since his father had passed a few months ago. He mentioned his ailing mother but noted that she was only a Scott by marriage.

Alex said, “Well young man it looks like you are going to be coming in to a sizeable sum of money. Now, what is this about the carriage house”?

“Well,” Todd said, “the property is posted, and the barn is locked even though it is barely standing. But looking through the cracks you can see several large items, possibly carriages, still in the garage. I believe one of them belongs to my family and would be a real keepsake for me. I have correspondence stating their intent to use their best one for the trip to the hotel.”

Alex responded by saying, “Even though the property was posted you visited and searched the property illegally, what a naughty young man you are”. She continued, “Well Todd I’m glad that you brought this problem to my attention. If there are other people’s properties on our land we should try to identify the owners and return it to them.” If I send a Trust staff member to meet you tomorrow at the Clay property in Big Bone will you be able to meet them?” Todd nodded his head and Alex said, “Fine let’s make it at eleven a.m. and our representative Mr. Bill Allen will have my full authority to release any property that may belong to your family.”

As the meeting was winding down Todd confided that there was still one detail that kept bugging him, “My information indicates that the Scott’s were assigned to the East Wing, but the fire and deaths were associated with the West Wing…” Ms. Clay responded by telling him the archives showed that a clerical error occurred when the original invitations were sent out. When the Scott’s checked in the error was discovered and corrected. Todd thought to himself that it was ridiculous to believe that his kinfolk had died due to a clerical error, but in reality that’s what happened. With this last detail cleared up Todd and Belinda thanked Alex for her help and compassion. As they rose to leave she also said she would call the bank to alert the manager about the Scott account.

**The Ryle Farm**

With time on their hands Todd decided he would show Belinda the piece of property that was at the root of his search. The old JSP farm and plantation was situated about five miles to the north of Louisville. With the Chevy headed in that direction the couple chatted about the escrow account and what value it had for the family. With the bank closed for the day all they could do was speculate about the account value. At that point Todd realized just how important it was that the Union won the Civil War. If the South won the war the escrow account may have been funded with Confederate dollars, making it worthless in today’s market.

Todd looked at Belinda and realized that he had known her for less than thirty-six hours and already had developed a fond attachment to her and her delightful smile. This whole matter was moving at a pace far faster than Todd was able to comprehend. The bottom line was that he liked Belinda Clements and wanted to spend more time with her and her lovely family.

As they topped the crest of the hill he pointed to the left and indicating the old Scott homestead. The entrance displayed a sign saying welcome to the Ryle farm. But even more important was the small adjacent sign indicating that the property was for sale. Seeing the For Sale sign emboldened Todd and he steered the Chevy down the long lane leading to the ‘master’s’ home. Belinda noted
The Secrets of Big Bone Lick

the whitewashed fences protecting the pastures and the horses on one side of the road and white faced cattle on the other. She looked at Todd and said, “It’s lovely, don’t you just love it, I do. Before Todd could answer she added, “Who wouldn’t want to live here?”

Todd parked the car under a tall shade tree and was surprised to see a gentleman about fifty approaching the car. The man introduced himself as Gerald Ryle, a son of William Ryle the farms owner. Todd began to ask question after question about the property until Gerald said, “Obviously you have some attachment to this property, do you mind telling me what it is.” This opened Pandora’s Box and Todd explained that the farm was once owned by his ancestors and had a lot of sentimental value to his family.

They spent the next hour sitting on the Ryle front porch drinking ice cold lemonade and talking with Gerald about the place. Their asking price was $120,000 for the 1,920 acres. Gerald said “That includes the whole ball of wax, the animals, farm equipment, and crops in the field”. Todd did a quick calculation in his mind and determined the price was about 62 dollars an acre. He considered the amount to be a fair price in the 1945 market place especially with the animals, equipment and crops included. Gerald did explain that the original home had been remodeled in the early 1900’s which included more modern plumbing, appliances, etc.

As the hour was growing late Todd asked Gerald, “If he would accept a fifty dollar deposit to hold the property for Todd giving him some time to put their family affairs in order”. With Gerald’s agreement in writing the excited couple once again began the return trip north hoping to explore the contents of the carriage house in Big Bone.

Exploring the Carriage House

After spending last night in the Florence, Holiday Inn the young couple renewed their passion from the previous night. Belinda thought it was even better this time. Todd would probably agree if he knew what she was thinking. The lovers were up early, had their breakfast and coffee, ready for the events of the day, especially their meeting with Mr. Bill Allen.

At ten thirty a.m. they were parked at the path leading to the remains of the Clay Resort, almost at the very spot Todd was parked when he was taken into custody by the deputies. Todd wasn’t sure he had ever mentioned that fact to Belinda. Best to keep that to himself he thought.

A very shiny chauffeur-driven Lincoln pulled into the grassy area next to Todd’s Chevy and the couple got out to meet Mr. Bill Allen, the Trust agent. Mr. Allen asked Belinda and Todd to call him Bill and thus the formal meeting turned into one of casual cooperation. Bill asked the chauffeur to remain with the vehicles and then began to lead the couple to the Carriage House, the object of the day’s search. Arriving there he displayed a ring of keys, selected one that looked like an antique and unlocked the padlock on the dilapidated doors.

As Bill struggled to open at least one of the double doors Todd could feel the anxiety rising in the pit of his stomach and reached for Belinda’s hand and support. With the door now opened Bill led the young couple into the throngs of yesteryear. He himself didn’t know when the house was last opened but he did know the carriages and contents inside had been there for at least 81 years.
The Secrets of Big Bone Lick

The first carriage carried the name of Bedford Farms from Bardstown, Ky. Removing the tarpaulin from the second hidden item the group saw the emblem of the Kingsbury plantation from Berea, Ky.

Todd was getting very anxious now because it looked like only two covered objects remained. As Bill removed the cover from the next carriage Todd’s adrenalin level peaked out and his heart seemed to be trying to escape from its confinement. There on the side door was the JSP logo representing the Jewell Scott Plantation from Louisville, Ky. Todd was heard to loudly exclaim, “This is it, and I know this is it”. The black carriage trimmed in gold looked to be in perfect condition with the exception of the dust, dirt and grime collected over the years. Todd gave Belinda a kiss then opened the door and helped her climb inside. The couple gave the carriage a complete inspection but didn’t find anything unusual except some well-packed family mementos that were stuffed into all the nooks and crannies.

Bill Allen was happy with himself for being able to help Todd as he tried to solve the family mystery. He knew this wasn’t the final piece of the family puzzle but it represented a huge find for the Scott family.

Mr. Allen told Todd that he would be happy to make arrangements for the carriage to be shipped to the place of his choice in Louisville. Todd relaxed a little with the carriage transportation solved; he had been wondering how he was going to move the carriage to his home. Todd couldn’t help but wonder just what part (if any) the beautiful carriage played in the overall mystery of the Scott family disappearance.

Escrowed

Belinda and Todd went directly to the Clements home in Walton after ending their search of the Carriage House. While there Todd contacted the Kentucky State Bank in Louisville and made an appointment to visit with the manager at three thirty that afternoon. While Todd was busy on the phone Belinda updated her family on the latest developments concerning his search for answers.

Belinda was somewhat surprised when her mother Faye asked her if she was falling in love with ‘that young man’. Although she knew she liked Todd she had never thought of it as love. But when asked directly about her feelings she replied, “Yes mother I believe I’d like to spend my life with him. I guess you would call it love. He is so nice and pleasant to be around. In a studious way I’d say he has all the good traits to be a wonderful husband, although we have never broached the subject, after all it’s only been a few days.” Faye responded by saying, “Well your father and I will respect and support your decision when the time comes, regardless of what it might be”.

Returning to the living room Todd told the family of his afternoon bank appointment and the need to be in Louisville shortly after three p.m. As Todd was shaking hands with Nathan he quietly whispered into his ear, “Don’t worry sir, I’ll take good care of your little girl.” Hearing this Nathan smiled and applied a little more pressure into his hand shake.
Once the engine started the Chevy almost by instinct headed south towards Louisville pausing in Carrollton for a pit stop, plus gas and oil. On schedule they were seated in the Kentucky Bank VIP waiting area at three-fifteen. A well-dressed lady introduced herself as Ms. Kirby saying that she would lead the couple into the office of Mr. E. Dorman, the bank manager.

The ornate office was well adorned with small statues, figurines and art of western motif. The walls, cabinets and book shelves were made of deep mahogany that gave the room an air of money, big money. The overstuffed leather furniture blended in nicely with the mahogany background. Todd believed he was sinking into the floor as they walked through the deep pile of the high dollar carpet.

Seated behind the huge dark mahogany desk was Mr. E. Dorman who rose to greet the youthful couple that had invaded his territory. As Todd shook hands with Mr. Dorman he couldn’t help but remember his expected description of Alex from the Clay Family Trust. He thought Mr. E. Dorman was the exact twin of the man he expected to meet yesterday. He remembered his description as robust with a small mustache, a Cuban cigar smoker with a glass of Kentucky bourbon in his hand. His description seemed right on except that he had changed the words, heavyset to robust. In spite of the description, this man whom he called Mr. Dorman seemed very knowledgeable and up to speed on Todd’s problem or dilemma. Todd was sure Alex Clay had given him a thorough briefing. While listening to the drone of Dorman’s voice Todd noticed behind the manager’s desk was a silver serving dish that contained several crystal glasses and a decanter of whiskey which he believed contained Kentucky bourbon.

At this point the manager rested for a moment which gave Todd the opportunity to ask about the current day balance in his family’s account. Mr. Dorman quickly responded that the account held nearly $1,200,000 million dollars and went on to explain that luck had been on Todd’s side since the deposit was made with Union funds in a bank that survived the war, the depression, and was still doing business. Todd and Belinda had spoken of the possible amounts but both were amazed that the amount would be so high.

Todd’s next question involved the method to transfer the account into his family name which is also Scott, the same name of the account in question. Dorman replied, “Since the account was initially funded by the Clay Trust and without the original owner being present he would need documentation from the Trust stating their belief that you are the rightful heir and certain documents proving your identity. It shouldn’t take more than an hour to complete the necessary documents once we have everything in hand; I suggest we shoot for Friday of this week to settle this matter once and for all.”

Todd said, “Does this mean that the bank would lend me $130,000 dollars right now using the account balance as my collateral.” Dorman said, “Of course my boy, you have my word on it.” He hastily told his secretary to quickly process the loan request.

With those questions answered everyone in the room became more relaxed and at ease. Dorman even asked Todd and Belinda if they would like to join him in a celebratory glass (or two) of Kentucky Bourbon. As the couple relaxed and sipped Dorman’s favorite drink, they realized they could easily come to enjoy this life style.
Even though it was late in the day, the Chevy carrying the two lovebirds was on its way to the Ryle Farm. In Todd’s pocket was a cashier’s check for $120,000 with which he hoped to purchase the farm. Along with it he had about five hundred in cash and a bank account with a balance of $9,500. He and of course Belinda were sitting on top of the world.

After reaching a sales agreement he told the Ryle’s that he was having a horse drawn carriage delivered to the farm and asked that they store it someplace out of the weather elements. Almost as an afterthought he mentioned a maintenance man would come by to install a new sign at the farm entrance near the highway. He also assured Gerald, he would have plenty of time to plan their pending move.

The last week had been hectic with the farm purchase and closing of the documents making the transaction legal. The meeting at the bank had taken almost four hours longer than Mr. Dorman had originally stated but in the end the Scott Escrow account and balance was transferred into Todd’s name. Then he was hit with bad news, Mr. D. told him he had a new problem, namely Uncle Sam, the IRS or tax payment on his newfound money. Todd’s response was, “You can’t win them all”.

The Carriage was soon delivered and at Todd’s request it was cleaned up and looked like a million dollars. It still contained the family’s miscellaneous mementos but he and Belinda hoped to unpack it soon, even if they had to leave the goodies in the barn until they were able to move into the main house.

With the passing of time Belinda and Todd had grown much closer and their relationship had matured. It wasn’t just about their physical wants and desires but also their lives in general were nurtured by their companionship. They had discussed the subject of marriage and starting a family but on each occasion they decided to delay their decision. Belinda had said, “Why don’t we wait till the Ryle’s have fully moved and we are living in our own home”.

Well that time had come. They were now living in the new Scott home. The new large sign at the front gate identified the property as the JSP, Jewell Scott Plantation. The sign also said Todd Scott, Owner & Proprietor. Todd believed it was time to broach the subject again.

After their evening meal Todd mentioned his plan for tomorrow was to hitch a team to the carriage and explore the almost two thousand acres that made up the JSP. Belinda thought that would be a beautiful idea as she was really a nature person at heart.

Just the romantic idea of being out in nature’s domain led her to explore new fantasies as the couple retired for the night. She was sure Todd would never forget the things she had planned for their evening’s pleasure.
The Scott family Legacy

Almost as quickly as it was planned, it was over and the morning sun was shining through the window blinds almost directly into Todd’s eyes. The time was at least an hour later than their normal time of awakening. After a quick breakfast, they had the team hitched; a picnic lunch packed and were headed west hoping to see the world.

Driving the team and the carriage almost made Todd believe it was eighty years ago and he envisioned his aunt and uncle sitting in the same seats now occupied by Belinda and himself. Belinda marveled at the skyline, the far off trees and hills, not to mention the cool spring fed creeks that meandered over the property. It was the perfect atmosphere as they shared their picnic lunch.

With the Carriage parked near the rippling waters of what Todd called Scott Creek, the couple ate lunch and started talking possible marriage. Todd was elated that Belinda seemed to have a change of heart. She asked Todd to shut up for a minute so she could talk. In a matter of minutes she told him that he was going to be a father. That news was exciting and it seemed only fitting that Todd remove the ring from his pocket and offer it once again to his love and companion. She was in tears as she said yes and Todd almost dropped the ring as he was placing it on her finger. After a long kiss Todd said why we don’t open some of the mementos from the carriage. Possibly we can find one that will serve as a reminder of this special day.

Todd selected five of the wrapped packages and laid them on the picnic table cloth. Then the couple began to open the packages. The first two were items not considered as worthy of the occasion but the third spiked some interest. It was a fancy cup with the JSP logo on the side of the cup and inside was another small wrapped package that contained a small ceramic baby doll painted in blue. Surely this was an omen; it seemed like a perfect memento to honor this special occasion. When the doll was removed Belinda noticed a small key sliding around in the bottom of the cup. They both had the same idea about the baby being painted in blue, suggesting that their child would be a boy. But the key, that was another mystery of its own.

They both figured the key went to a lock somewhere, but where? Surely they wouldn’t keep a key to something here on the plantation. The obvious possibility was in or on the carriage some place. The obvious possibility was in or on the carriage some place. Once again the couple was faced with a mystery.

A quick search of the packages did not reveal anything locked or large enough to be of value. Both were in agreement that whatever they were looking for was hidden on or a part of the Carriage itself.

Todd assumed that Jewell would probably keep his secret stuff close by so that he could keep watch on it. Using this logic they began their search at the front of the carriage. Their search included the undercarriage as well as the passenger compartment.

A small compartment under the coachman’s foot rest was discovered by Todd as he was searching the underbelly of the carriage. The couple was really excited as they sought to remove the piece of leather serving as a mat over the foot rest. As Belinda lifted the leather mat away Todd saw the small key hole, sitting there for the whole world to see. The couple was excited and anxious but they tried to control their emotions as Todd inserted the small key and twisted it. The lid of the
The Secrets of Big Bone Lick

compartment was now free to be opened. They both paused a second almost as if asking themselves if they were ready to unveil a secret hidden over eighty years ago.

Nodding in agreement the couple still holding hands used their free hand to slowly raise the lid. Much of the contents were still hidden within their own wrappers but the sight of the glistening gold ingots spoke volumes, without ever saying a word. Todd took two of the ingots, gave one to Belinda and then inspected the one he held.

The ingots were rough made indicating they had been poured and specially made; the name of Kentucky State Bank of Louisville and 10 troy ounces was stamped on each ingot indicating the bank had measured and made the gold ingots, but the owner was whoever possessed the ingots.

Todd and Belinda, his new fiancée, replaced the items and locked the compartment. Their trip home seemed much shorter than the trip earlier this morning. Arriving home the couple removed everything except the gold and took it inside where they could fully examine its contents.

They were sitting at the kitchen table with numerous small bundles of goodies spread out before them. Their mood was almost festive, comparable to that of Christmastime with the opening of presents. They decided to open them individually to allow time for appreciation of the contents.

Belinda chose the first package which was wrapped with newsprint dated 1864. Closer inspection revealed the words Louisville Courier Journal. With care she removed the rest of the wrapper and saw a stack of money that was blue on the back side. Todd’s joy seemed to disappear when he quickly realized the money was that of a Southern Blueback 20 dollar bill and therefore basically worthless. He knew that after the war the North refused to redeem the Confederate money. Somewhat dejected he pushed the stack aside and chose another package.

With the wrapping removed the couple was looking at a stack of bills about eight inches tall. Todd selected one of the bills for closer scrutiny and determined that it was a Federal U. S. Note of fifty dollar denomination. The reverse side of the bill was green in color indicating the bill was a Federal “Greenback” and sometimes called “Legal Tender Notes. He recognized the picture on the front of the bill as that of Alexander Hamilton. Belinda counted the stack and told Todd that he was looking at ten thousand dollars from 1864. Its true value in current day banking markets was another mystery.

Todd decided it was best to remove the Confederate money and take the remaining stacks of Federal Greenbacks to Mr. Dorman at the bank for his advice and valuation. Belinda did a quick count of the money at original value and realized their new find was worth almost a hundred grand.

The following morning, still reeling with the joys of their treasure, plus the carry-over from their night of pleasure, the newly engaged couple prepared to visit their new friend at the bank. As an afterthought Todd carried two of the 10 troy ounces gold ingots with him hoping to ascertain their values. He believed the gold was probably the most valuable part of their cache.

Mr. E. Dorman, normally a calm and relaxed man became very excited when Todd’s new found treasure was laid out on his perfectly shined mahogany desk. After carefully scrutinizing the items he said, “Todd I believe the Federal Notes will be worth at least their face value and may have
other intrinsic value to money collectors. You may have struck a mother lode with the gold ingots as the price of gold has risen steadily during the last eighty years.

The young couple tried to hide their enthusiasm based on his comments, but they weren’t successful. Belinda interjected, “We’re getting married and having a baby”. At this announcement Mr. Dorman suggested another toast from his crystal decanter newly filled with Woodford Reserve Bourbon, would definitely be in order.

As he was slowly sipping Dorman’s best bourbon from Woodford, Todd realized that he and Belinda had finally solved the many mysteries surrounding the disappearance of Jewell and Betty Scott and as well, the secrets of Big Bone Lick.

And in doing so they had created a Scott Legacy, not just a legacy for himself and Belinda but for Jewell and Betty Scott and the dreams and ambitions they had envisioned so many years ago. But this new legacy served the four generations of Moses, David, and Leo Scott and all the generations that had come before them.

Todd believed with their impending wedding and the birth of their son, the old JSP farm, the Scott family name and its Legacy would live on for generations to come.

The End

Written by Emmett D. (Don) Mason, Kentucky Colonel
Mason’s Missives, 1 July 2017, volume 21, “The Secrets of Big Bone Lick”