



The Farm Site

Introduction

The history of McConnell Springs closely parallels the history of Lexington. The city came of age in the 20th century, making the transition from a frontier outpost in the wilderness, to "the Athens of the West", and finally to an important urban center serving all of central and eastern Kentucky. At McConnell Springs, land use began with farming, moved through several types of industries ending with the Cahill Dairy in the mid-1900s, and suffered through years as a dumping-ground before it was cleaned up and preserved to take its rightful place as an historical treasure in the 1990s. The establishment of dairies and other commercial enterprises marked the continued progression of Lexington's maturation.

The stone foundation visible here once supported a large dairy barn, constructed during the 1920s to serve the Cahill Dairy Farm. The soils of McConnell Springs are typical of the Central Bluegrass Region, uniquely suited to agricultural uses including horse breeding and tobacco cultivation. These industries continue to this day and contribute significantly to the local thriving farm economy.

Management of the land requires careful stewardship of this fragile resource. McConnell Springs is an object lesson in proper management. At times it was utilized properly; the pasture system is one example. Other times, the uses were improper and damaging, such as when it was used as a landfill. The evidence of human use of the Springs



This old photograph was taken in the 1950s when McConnell Springs was a part of Cahill Farm, operating as a dairy. The stream to the left is looking toward The Boils from the area of the Final Sink; the barn to the right is resting on the cement foundation you can observe here at the Farm Site.

is apparent throughout from the rock fences to the cast-in-place concrete foundations to the occasional huge chunks of concrete which are all that remain of the tons of trash found on the site in 1993. Less obvious signs of human intrusion await the archeologists' skilled techniques of discovery and analysis. Preliminary archeology assessments at the Springs have revealed evidence of prehistoric early settlement and later occupation of the site. This evidence represents a challenge to those who seek a more comprehensive understanding of the history of McConnell Springs.





The Farm Site

Physical Characteristics and Culture History



Greenery and bright pink flowers surround the end of the stone fence at the Farm Site.

Soils of the Bluegrass

Much of the distinctive character of the Bluegrass region can be attributed to its fertile soils, derived from the weathering of the underlying limestone. As the uppermost zone of limestone at the surface is disintegrated by chemical and physical processes, biological processes transform the insoluble residue into soil with the addition of organic material. Since the original rock was highly phosphatic, the resulting soil is rich in phosphates. It is this phosphate-rich soil, derived from 500-million year-old limestone, that is responsible for the horse industry in the Bluegrass. The early inhabitants recognized that horses raised on this phosphatic limestone soil were superior in every way...so today, the Bluegrass is the horse capital of the world.

This phosphate rich soil also contains a hidden iproblemî. The phosphate mineral called apatite can sometimes contain tiny atoms of uranium in its structure. Uranium is widely scattered and only a very minor

element in the limestone. But, as the limestone weathers away the phosphate and uranium can remain behind in the soil. The uranium gradually decays, releasing radon gas which in higher concentrations is thought to cause cancer.

Stone fences and farming

Vines and wildflowers here cluster around the remnants of stone fencing built to partition McConnell Springs when it was used for agricultural purposes; behind the wall is a concrete dairy barn foundation. The stone fences were probably built by one of the owners that farmed the property although it is difficult to date their construction precisely. Rock was quarried nearby to gather the raw materials for building the fences. Old aerial photographs indicate that the fencing partitioned the property into large square or rectangular parcels of pasturage with smaller lots enclosing complexes of buildings, mostly clustered near or at the Blue Hole. These lots would have been suitable for pasturing various types of livestock as well as raising



A cement foundation rises from the vegetation at the Farm Site. A dairy barn once stood on this site.



Dwarf Larkspur - Lush flowers grow in profusion at the Springs, another testimony to the rich, nutritious limestone soils of the Bluegrass.

crops. The Cahills undoubtedly took advantage of the fencing to contain their trotting horses, and their herd of milk cows. The Cahills also built the dairy barn, now only visible by its foundations, where their cows were milked and the milk collected for separation at the creamery.

Grazing management with stone fences

To raise livestock efficiently without abusing the land, now as then, owners must implement some form of grazing management. In a grazing system, groups of stock are placed in separate pastures on a rotating basis. This allows some pastures to rest while others are being grazed. The numerous remnant stone walls on the site indicate that a grazing system of some form was, indeed, used in the past. Although



Wood Poppies

landowners of McConnell Springs' past may not have used some of the advanced systems in use today, a simple rotation grazing system was probably used to limit the abuse of their land.



*Criss-crossing stone fences in the distance behind this stone fence in Boyle County demonstrate how the fences were used for grazing management in the 1800s. (Photo by Ron Garrison, appearing in *Rock Fences of the Bluegrass* by Carolyn Murray-Wooley and Karl Raitz, The University Press of Kentucky, 1992. Used with permission of Murray-Wooley.)*





The Farm Site

Culture History

The Reporter
Lexington, KY
July 29, 1809

Origin of the name of the town of Lexington

The county of Fayette was named in gratitude of the services, and to perpetuate the remembrance of the Marquis de la Fayette of France, who rendered himself so conspicuous by volunteering in defense of American liberty. The names of many towns and counties in the United States, also immortalize other heroes of our revolutionary war.

But in a particular manner was the town of Lexington consecrated. Its beginning was laid in the cradle of Liberty, and its foundation sprinkled and cemented by the blood of our citizens first murdered by the British Tyrant, at the battle of Lexington, in Massachusetts, in 1775.

John Maxwell, Levi Todd, John McCrackin, Hugh S. Kenton Isaac Greer James Dunkin, William McConnell, and a few others of our first settlers, were collected around their fire, seated on logs, and Buffalo hides, supping on their parched corn, in a cabin (at McConnell's station) where the widow Campbell now lives, on the Leestown road, when a conversation commenced respecting what name they should give to the new town they contemplated. York, Lancaster, and a number of other names were mentioned. But recollecting the battle of Lexington, which they had heard of a few days before, it was unanimously resolved to perpetuate the first opposition by arms to British tyranny, by erecting in the then wilderness, a monument more durable than the pyramids of Egypt, to the memory of those citizens murdered, a monument lasting as the foundations of the universe, and also to perpetuate their own devotion to the sacred principles of Liberty. They consecrated the new town by the name of LEXINGTON

Such was the origin of the name of the town of Lexington. And its increase has hitherto been commensurate with the honor of its origin. An origin whose recollection we trust will forever maintain in the breasts of our farmers and mechanics and our fellow citizens universally, that proud pre-eminence which the inhabitants of Fayette have always shown for the pure principles of DEMOCRACY.

Kentucky Gazette
May 19, 1880

The New Distillery

The large distillery of James E. Pepper & Co. is rapidly nearing completion, and it is calculated that the first mash will be made about May 1st. Over fifty hands are at work upon it. Two large engines and boilers have been put in, and when completed, it will be the biggest straight copper whiskey distillery in the world. The capacity will be about 28 barrels per day, all made on the exact plan followed in the manufacture of hand-made sour-mash whisky. The establishment has been named the Henry Clay Distillery.

Observer
March 18, 1835

An unfortunate accident occurred on Saturday last, at Westbrook, the farm of Mr. Thomas Smith near this city, by the explosion of gun-powder, which burnt and maimed very severely two excellent citizens, Mr. Benjamin Bosworth and Mr. James Champlin. They were at work on a mill about to be erected in a house that had been used for drying powder some years ago. Every precaution had been used to prevent such an occurrence. The floor had been taken up, all the loose powder swept out, and the powder machinery

removed; except a bolting chest. Some dust powder remained on the top of the chest, which those at work were admonished to remove also, but the warning was unfortunately neglected. The wounded persons it is hoped will recover. The building was consumed except the wheel and shed. Since the above was in type we learn Mr. Bosworth is dead.

The Daily Transcript
July 15, 1879

Water Works

C.G. Hildreth, Secretary of the Holly Water Works, of New York, and Mr. Cushing, of Chicago, are in the city. This morning they visited Wilson's spring and other points where there is a prospect of getting sufficient water supply. They will make estimates of the cost of testing the supply of water, and will make a proposition to the city, if favorably impressed with the prospect of obtaining water. We will give full particulars to-morrow.

The gentlemen believe the Wilson spring will supply plenty of water, and they will submit an estimate of the cost of testing it. The spring is about one mile from the city, and and Leestown turnpikes. It is a basin of water about one hundred feet in depth, and containing a great quantity of water, while a continual stream wells up. Some hundreds of large and beautiful fish may be seen in it, and then they disappear again for weeks. The water is pure and clear, and just such as the citizens of Lexington would delight to have in their homes, and places of business. It is as cold as ice. After rising to the surface, it flows a few hundred yards, and then disappears under a ledge of rock. In 1812 a large powder mill was located on the stream, and supplied a great deal of the powder used in the memorable war of that period. The remains of the old mill may yet be seen.

The center of the spring has been sounded for hundreds of feet, and no bottom ever reached. Sometimes the spring overflows the basin, and covers, in a few hours, six or seven acres with water to the depth of eight or ten feet. All who have seen this wonderful spring agree that it is the outlet of a subterranean lake or river, and that an inexhaustible supply of water may be obtained from it. The distance from the city and the location are favorable, and the cost of pipes, etc., would not be very great. The property can be bought cheap.

It is believed that the artesian well on the old McMurtry lot, which was so well known a few years ago, has communication also with a very large stream of water, and that from it might be obtained a sufficient water supply. But the test alone can determine it. Few people who know any thing of the wonderful cavernous streams under, and in the vicinity of, Lexington, doubt the feasibility of supplying the city with good clear water, without great expense. The gentlemen, who are now in the city, will make satisfactory test of the matter if encouraged.

Lexington Herald Leader
February 20, 1972
Front Page

Existence of Historic Find Is Threatened

By Juliet Galloway

Nothing is more traumatic to a history buff than to make what may turn out to be a "find" only to have its very existence threatened.

That is happening to Mrs. Robert Wooley.

More than a year ago Mrs. Wooley read a reprint of G.W. Ranck's 1872 "History of Lexington, Ky.; It's Early Annals and Recent Progress."

Fired by the book-inspired curiosity and enthusiasm, she set forth to search out "sinking springs", particularly William McConnell's springs.

Mrs. Wooley especially desired to locate these springs because, she said, "All the historians say the town of Lexington was named at William McConnell's springs."

Finally she found what she was looking for. At least she's satisfied. She found part of a 400-acre tract which had been granted to William McConnell by the Commonwealth of Virginia in the first land Court of Kentucky in 1779-1780.

To establish his claim, in accordance with Virginia law, Mr. McConnell had built a rude house there and had raised a crop of corn in 1776.

"Wild River Terrain"

The land has sinking springs, creeks, trees. In fact, it's a bit of "wild river" terrain tucked behind a row of tobacco warehouse on Forbes Road and within a stone's throw of Old Frankfort Pike and the rear of houses fronting on Delmont Drive. Imagine Mrs. Wooley's delight.

"A wonderful natural phenomenon," she exclaimed.

Surely, it would be a fine thing if it could be determined that Lexington was named by pioneers on that spot; but better than that, "Here is a chance to show people what the pioneers were talking about when they mentioned the wonderful springs," she added.

This historic find wasn't publicized until after Central Rock Co. appealed last spring to the Board of Adjustment for permission to operate a landfill on a 61-acre tract it owns.

It was soon determined the land was part of the old McConnell grant, and several other "preservationists" joined Mrs. Wooley in protests against destruction of the site.

Central Rock Co. won Board of Adjustment permission to operate the landfill provided the Lexington-Fayette County Board of Health and the Kentucky Water Pollution Control Commission approved.

Meantime the protest ranks swelled, but not because of any threat to natural beauty or to loss of an alleged historic site. More important, the protest has become an anti-pollution movement.

Point To Sinkholes

Protectors point to the sinkholes, the "sinking springs" with water disappearing abruptly into the ground and reappearing abruptly out of the ground.

They say a subterranean formation of caverns and streams may actually be an "underground system" of some magnitude.

They say the leachate (drainage) through a landfill would pollute Wolf Run Creek and possibly other water.

They fear the soil is of such composition it would crack, releasing methane gas.

They ask about all this and other facets, such as "will the ground, the roof of the cavernous area, support the weight of a landfill" and "can the area be properly drained of surface water?"

They cry out against the location of a landfill so close to a residential area.

The voices which protested on grounds the land should be a park have grown faint amid the questions involving public welfare and safety.

Harry Marsh, environmental health director with the Lexington-Fayette County Health Department, has recommended against use of the south half of the track for a landfill.

The south half is the one with the sinkholes, the streams, the valley.

Dye In Stream

Mr. Marsh put dye in one of the small streams which disappear into the ground.

The dye reappeared one hour and 45 minutes later from under a rock ledge some 2,500 to 3,000 feet away. That water forms a tributary of Wolf Run Creek, he said.

Protesting residents of the area point to the time it took this dye to reappear as reason for investigating the underground structure.

Mr. Marsh commended the Board of Health for postponing its

decision until further investigation brings answers to many questions which are, to date, unanswered.

Central Rock Co. says its engineers have advised a landfill could be operated there satisfactorily after \$25,000-\$40,000 worth of improvements (mainly drainage structure) were made.

The Water Pollution Control Commission has disapproved the proposed use.

A number of organizations, including the Thoroughbred Breeders of Kentucky, have lodged protests.

In view of the unpopularity of landfills, it would seem the main thing this tract of land has in its favor is that it already is zoned for landfill use.

The Board of Health took the matter under advisement last Tuesday after a public hearing and is expected to make its decision at its March 14 meeting.

Meantime city officials, who have been interested in the possibility of city use of the landfill if it became a reality, are reportedly investigating other possible landfill sites.

And Mrs. Wooley? Well, she's slightly "shook up" but she plans to continue her journey into Lexington's past no matter what happens to the William McConnell sinking springs.



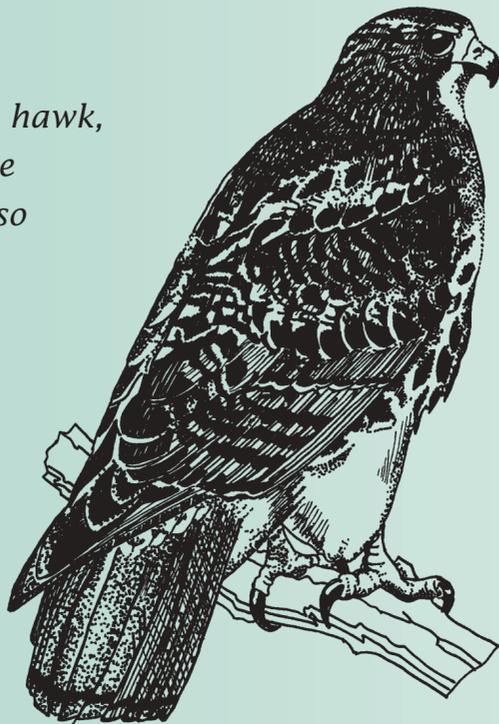


The Farm Site

Field Guide

Red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

- Most common American hawk, often seen soaring above farms and fields, but also seen perching in branches of trees that line such fields
- Large bird (18-25") with heavy beak and strong talons, in typical bird-of-prey style.
- Identified in flight by its rust colored tail, though young hawks lack this coloration.
- Feeds primarily on rodents which it searches for in flight or perched.
- Call is a high-pitched scream.



Eastern cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

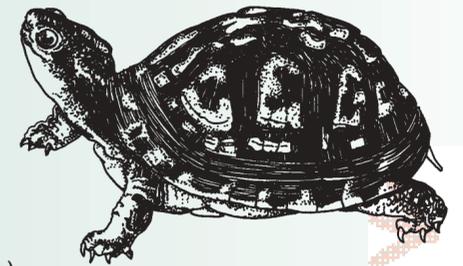
- Found in thickets, heavy brush, and woodlands near open areas
- Small rabbit (14-17") with white cottony tail.
- Only common rabbit in Kentucky.
- Feeds on green vegetation in summer, twigs and bark in the winter.
- Important small game animal.



Eastern box turtle

(*Terrepenne carolina*)

- Land turtle found in woodlands and a variety of other habitats.
- Identified by high dome shell, and hinged plastron (belly) that allows the turtle to close up very tightly if threatened.
- Males can be differentiated from females by noting the curvature of the scutes (plates) of the plastron; the male scutes have a concave appearance, while the female scutes are flat.
- Often kept as a pet.



Kentucky coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioicus*)

- Found in rich bottomlands and old fields.
- Alternately arranged, bipinately compound leaves usually have 25-100 leaflets on a single leaf 12-36" long.
- Member of the legume family.
- Produces large, elongate, leathery pod-like fruit with seeds that were brewed to make a coffee-like drink.
- Sexes are on different tree (dioecious); female trees bear the fruits in late autumn.
- Former state tree of Kentucky, replaced by the yellow-poplar.



Box elder (*Acer negundo*)

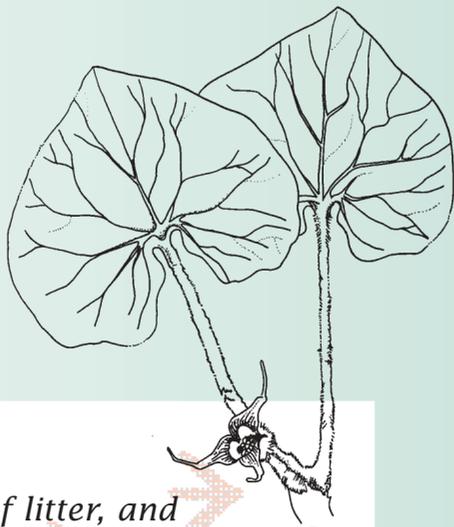
- Common in moist sites, particularly along stream and river banks.
- Technically a maple, this species has oppositely arranged compound leaves,



- with 3-7 leaflets, which resemble leaves of poison ivy.
- Flowers are long, yellowish clusters and fruit is a cluster of samaras.
- Is dioecious.

Wild ginger (*Prunus serotina*)

- Found in rich woods.
- Heart-shaped leaves cover a solitary flower between two petioles (leaf stems).
- Flower grows along the ground, often covered by leaf litter, and has enlarged calyx with three-pointed lobes but no petals. Inside the flower cup is a beautiful maroon pattern.
- Appears in April.
- Named for its aromatic root.



(*Actinomeris alterniflora*)

- Common tall weed of thickets and other open areas.
- Tall plant (3-7i) with numerous yellow flowers in an open inflorescence (cluster of flowers).
- Leaves continue as wing-like structures after meeting the stem.
- Member of the large composite family, which has characteristic compound flowers, as in a sunflower. • The head of these flowers is actually composed of numerous small flowers grouped together; in some species (as in this one) these small flowers are differentiated into ray flowers, composing the “petals”, and disk flowers, composing the “head”.



Dutchman's breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*)

- Grows on well-drained slopes of rich woods.
- Unusual flower shaped like a pair of upside-down pants actually is a two-spurred white and yellow flower with two sepals and 4 petals.
- Appears in April.
- Leaves very deeply divided, and many are lobed.
- Similar to squirrel-corn, but the flower is slightly different.



White snakeroot (*Lonicera maniculata*)

- Tall (2-4") plant is commonly found in woods and thickets.
- Identified by fluffy, white, flat-topped inflorescence which appears in September.
- Leaves are opposite, oval shaped, and sharply toothed with long petioles.
- Member of the composite family.
- Leaves are poisonous to cattle. If the milk from a poisoned cow is drunk by man, it too can be poisonous, causing a disease known as “milk sickness”. Nancy Hanks Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's mother, died from this disease.
- An extract of this plant was used by the Shawnee to cure snakebites.



Virginia bluebell (*Mertensia virginica*)

- Frequently found on shady, rocky hillsides.
- Trumpet-shaped blue flowers hang like a cluster of bells.
- Appears in April.
- Long oval leaves grow from a succulent stem.
- This flower, along with wild ginger and Dutchman's breeches, were transplanted to McConnell Springs from Matthew's Garden on the University of Kentucky campus.



Yellow ironweed





The Farm Site

The Rescue of McConnell Springs



A human chain of people moves rocks down into the springs to fill a sinkhole to help preserve it from erosion.

In the fall of 1993, The Friends of McConnell Springs formed to take advantage of a long-awaited opportunity to save the site where Lexington was named - McConnell Springs. Bank One, the owner of the property, offered to donate 22 acres around two natural springs if the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government purchased an adjacent parcel of land for \$130,000. By fall of 1994, the money was raised and donated to the LFUCG, and the entire 26-acre property became a nature preserve.

The story of the rescue of McConnell Springs is one of individual dedication and community support. Jim Rebmann, an environmental planner with the LFUCG Division of Planning, began visiting and photographing the Springs in the early 1970s, and urged the LFUCG to purchase it. Carolyn Murray-Wooley, a local historian and expert on rock fences, wrote a book identifying the Springs as the naming site of Lexington, and later worked to preserve rock fences on the site through her Dry Stone Wall Association. Isabel Yates, community activist, councilmember and later Vice Mayor of Lexington, gave her considerable expertise, charm and drive to the effort of the Friends, serving as both leader and catalyst in raising the funds and spearheading the planning for construction and educational programs at the Springs. Elaine Faithful, executive director of the Friends, brought her experience with organization and working with



People from all over the Bluegrass gather to rebuild a stone fence at McConnell Springs as a part of a training session directed by master stonemason Richard Tufnell (third from right, in plaid shirt).



Members of the Lexington Homebuilders Association work on the boardwalk near the Blue Hole. Help from such community groups was essential in the rescue efforts.



Scrap metal and other debris were the norm at the Springs before the restoration began.



Mayor Pam Miller, Friends chair Isabel Yates and Bank One President pose at a celebration of Bank One's contribution to the rescue of the Springs.

volunteer groups to coalesce the efforts into focused initiatives. Lee Bagley, a local architect, contributed his professional knowledge and can-do personality to overseeing development of the site and later took on the intimidating task of following Ms. Yates as chair of the Friends of McConnell Springs.

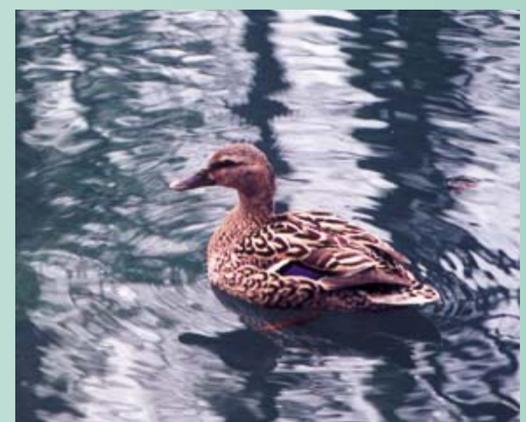
With the leadership of these people, and many others who have dedicated time and sweat to the Springs, more than a thousand volunteers worked at the Springs over the course of four years to remove debris and unwanted vegetation from the site; to landscape and improve the site by building bridges or installing benches; and to plan, design and implement projects ranging from the pivotal design charette to the comprehensive educational guide that will direct the educational efforts at the Springs for many years to come. The business community stepped up with donations of both money and products or professional assistance to bring many goals to fruition. The saving of McConnell Springs has truly been a community-wide effort.



A member of the archaeological team from the University of Kentucky carefully dusts dirt from a find near the Blue Hole.



Members of an Army reservist unit and friends took a day to build steps on the trail near the Final Sink. Eagle Scouts built the bridge (background).



One of a pair of ducks that make their home in the Blue Hole floats serenely on the rippling waters, a symbol of the return to nature that marks the successful rescue of the naming site of Lexington.

