

THE POST OFFICES OF HARLAN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

Kentucky's sixtieth county was created from a section of Knox County by legislative act on January 28, 1819. It was named for Major Silas Harlan (1752-1782), a pioneer Salt River settler, who served with George Rogers Clark in his Illinois campaign and died in the Battle of Blue Licks. From its original 710 square miles it yielded thirty toward the formation of Letcher County in 1842 and 210 toward (Josh) Bell County in 1867. Its present 468 square mile area was set by March 22, 1873.

The county has Kentucky's most rugged terrain. Part of the 125 mile long Pine Mountain crosses it on the north. The Cumberland Mountain parallels that on the south. Between them, in the northeastern section of the county, lies the Black Mountain on a peak of which, just south of Lynch, is Kentucky's highest elevation, at 4,145 feet. This range was said by an old WPA observer to have been named for its "dark and gloomy appearance."

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That part of the county south of Pine Mountain is drained by the main channel and three head forks of the 700 mile long Cumberland River. The only level land, where nearly all of the county's settlements, post offices, and rail stations have been, is in the narrow bottoms of these streams and their main branches: Straight, Brownies, Puckett, and Wallins Creeks of the Cumberland; Catron, Crummies, and Cranks Creeks of Martins Fork; Yocum Creek of Clover Fork; and Clover Lick and Looney Creeks of Poor Fork. Several streams heading in Pine Mountain: Greasy, Laurel and Big Laurel Creeks and Beech Fork ultimately feed into the Middle Fork of the Kentucky River.

The first permanent white settlers in Harlan County were Virginia-born Samuel (1762-1840) and Chloe Howard (or Hoard) who built a home in

1796 on the Cumberland River just below the forks. Other pioneer families included the Baileys, Brocks, Cawoods, Coldirons, Creeches, Farmers, Joneses, Ledfords, Lees, Lewises, Middletons, Smiths, and Turners.

As with its upper Cumberland valley neighbors, subsistence agriculture and some commercial livestock production were Harlan's economic mainstays till the arrival of the railroads in the early twentieth century brought about the development of the county's timber and coal resources. Rail lines built or subsidized by the L&N were soon extended up the Cumberland's three head forks and other major streams to bring out the coal from area mines. By the 1930s Harlan had become Kentucky's leading coal producer.

Almost from the beginning Harlan's mines attracted one of the most cosmopolitan work forces in the country, leading to the county's population peak of some 75,000 in 1940. After the Second World War, though, declining markets, over regulation of the industry, and environmental concerns led to a number of mine closings, and the mechanization of the remaining mines reduced the need for manual labor resulting in considerable unemployment. Few alternative jobs led to mass outmigration. (By 1980 the county's population had dropped to about 42,000 and by 2002 it had reached only 32,600.) But a search by newly organized county economic development committees for new sources of employment for the remaining population has not been very successful. The hoped for diversification of the county's economy through industrial development has been handicapped by the dearth of level land, distance from interstate highways, and the large amount of county land owned by non residents.

Harlan's 107 operating post offices will be considered below by their location in the principal valleys of the Cumberland watershed--the main channel and several of its branches and the river's three head forks and their principal branches. The offices will be located more precisely by

road miles from downtown Harlan, the county seat, or other offices in the same valley. Harlan Town, formerly known as Mount Pleasant, is 153 road miles southeast of downtown Lexington (via I-75 to Corbin, US 25 to Pineville, and US 119.)

POST OFFICES ON THE MAIN CHANNEL OF THE CUMBERLAND RIVER

The fourth class city of Harlan centers where Clover and Martins Forks join to form the Cumberland River. By 1819, when Samuel and Chloe Howard (Hoard) sold twelve acres for the new county's seat, the site was already called Mount Pleasant for a local Indian mound and the local post office established there on September 20, 1818, with John Pate, postmaster. The town was formally laid out in 1820 but went nowhere. In 1823 the Mount Pleasant post office closed. It was not reopened till May 3, 1824, with John Howard, postmaster, but as Harlan Court House¹. It closed the following year, but was re-established on February 27, 1826 by Samuel Mark (sic) who was succeeded in September 1828 by John P. Martin. From September 14, 1861 through October 1865 the office was called Spurlock, probably for its then postmaster Josiah P. Spurlock. Then it became simply Harlan which it has been ever since. Though incorporated as Mount Pleasant on April 15, 1884 the town was locally called Harlan Town (and sometimes Harlan Court House). With the arrival of the railroad in 1911 the town's trustees felt that a less provincial sounding name than Mount Pleasant would enhance its image as a trade center and timber (and later coal) shipping point and so had it re-incorporated as Harlan on March 13, 1912.

By the 1880s the town had begun to grow. First its limits were extended up Clover Fork. After World War Two its southern limits were extended up Martins Fork, and with a further southward expansion in 1980 it now extends for one mile east and west and nearly two miles north and south, with its

northern limits only half a mile from Poor Fork's confluence with the Cumberland's main channel. But while Harlan Town's area has been enlarged its population, like the county's, has steadily declined, from 4,300 in 1930, through 3,300 in 1970, 2,700 in 1990, to 2,100 in 2000.

On May 22, 1866 John C. Howard established the Wallins Creek post office on the north side of the Cumberland, just opposite the mouth of this 5½ mile long south bank tributary.² The latter is said by some to have been named for a pioneer Virginia surveyor killed by Indians somewhere on its banks. Robert L. Kincaid, in his The Wilderness Road,³ was sure that this and several other area features were named for the Long Hunter Elisha Walden (ne ca. 1830) whose name was variously spelled Walden, Wallin, and Wallins, and who, like Daniel Boone, later moved to Missouri where he died an old man. Shortly after the establishment of the county's first coal mine on Terry's Fork of Wallins Creek and the arrival of the Wasioto and Black Mountain (later L&N) Railroad in 1911, the post office was moved across the river to near the mouth of Terry's, and the town of Wallins grew up around it. Today this sixth class city, as Wallins Creek, with an active post office, 9¼ miles west of Harlan, and a 2000 population of 260, occupies land on both sides of the river and extends half a mile up the creek. Its built up area continues south for another mile and now includes the community of South Wallins.

Just west and south of the Poor Fork-Cumberland confluence is the village of Baxter. Its active post office, established on June 6, 1890, with John J. Hoskins, its first postmaster, has always been on the west side of the confluence, 1¼ miles below (north of) Harlan. Since the railroad didn't arrive till 1911 it's not likely, as has been alleged, that the Baxter name was given by it. But as no Baxters are listed in the county's 1880 and 1900 Censuses, it's just as unlikely to have honored any

local person or family.

The Layman post office was established on February 10, 1896 by Ulysses Simpson Howard on the north side of the Cumberland, opposite the mouth of Foresters Creek, and three miles below Wallins. Neither Layman nor Howard's first name choice Leona have been derived.⁴ In 1911 a Laymans Station was opened by the railroad on the south side of the river, some 300 yards east of Foresters, and to this locality the post office was moved two years later. In 1922 the office was moved east, but across the river, to serve the developing community of Dixietown where it closed in 1933.

Probably south of the river, at or near the mouth of Jesse's Branch, a mile above (southeast of) Layman's Station, Elihue Coldiron established a post office on November 16, 1928 which he named for his family.⁵ His wife Mary Ella (nee Taylor) was appointed its first postmaster. In 1933, when Hisey C. Blanton became postmaster, this office was moved to Dixietown which had just been abandoned by the Layman office, where Elihue was maintaining the local store. The Coldiron office still serves this village, now also called Coldiron, between the river and US 119, and 2¼ miles below Wallins Creek.

Another family to give its name to a Cumberland valley post office were the Days. On August 7, 1897 Milton Hensley established the Day post office on the north side of the river, probably just below the mouth of Harlan County's Four Mile Branch.⁶ In 1907 it was moved three miles down the river to a site just below the mouth of Watts Creek (probably at the mouth of what's now the Rob Blanton Branch.) By 1912, after the arrival of the railroad, the office had been moved to a site just east of Ewings Creek, and three fourths of a mile south of the river to serve the new village of Wilhoit. This name is said to have been suggested by Ray B. Moss for Roy Wilhoit, the president of the Wilhoit Coal Company who, in 1911, had opened the county's second mine. On February 26, 1913, with Fred D. Keithly, postmaster, the post office was

renamed Wilhoit. Shortly thereafter the Wilhoit Company was sold to the Moss and Sons Coal Company. On December 13, 1915 that firm became the White Star Coal Company and the post office became White Star, with Moss as postmaster. Until it closed in mid April 1930 it was one mile up Ewings. Its papers were then sent to the Dayhoit post office which had been established on April 22, 1921 (with Harry C. Valentine, postmaster) at the mouth of Ewings, six miles below Harlan, where the Wilhoit Station on the L&N's Kentucky and Virginia line had been located several years earlier. Dayhoit was undoubtedly a combination of the names Day and Wilhoit, its predecessors. This post office, now on the east side of Ewings, still serves the Wilhoit community and the Fresh Meadows neighborhood on US 119, across the river.

Where Day had begun, at the mouth of Four Mile, was the later (1938 through August 1990) post office of Keith. The Four Mile Branch, also roughly four miles long, heads in Pine Mountain and joins the river 1½ miles above (northeast of) Dayhoit. Neither Keith nor the Emerling Station, which it served, has been name derived. Rebecca Ball (Mrs. William) Bailey was its first postmaster.

On January 7, 1914 Grant Saylor, son of local storekeeper Andrew Saylor, established at the mouth of Saylor's Creek, 1½ miles above the Bell County line, a post office to serve the recently opened rail station of Molus [mohl/əs]. Whence Molus has not been learned. One can merely wonder if there's any connection with San Juan County, Colorado's 10,900 foot high Molas Divide (or pass) and the nearby lake said to have been named for the burrowing animals. Harlan's Molus post office closed in 1966.

To serve the Hoyt mining camp on the south side of the river, opposite and just west of the mouth of Watts Creek (2½ miles above Wallins), James F. Henson applied for a post office. His first approved name Hoyt gave way to Cargo, and that office opened on September 28, 1918 with Alfred Caruthers,

its first postmaster. By 1932 it was serving the village and L&N station (established before 1921) of Tremont. The office closed in 1933, but was re-established in 1945, as Tremont with Hazel B. Wilson its first postmaster. Till 1976 it operated on US 119, on the north side of the river in an area earlier called Pine Flat. Neither Cargo nor Tremont have been name derived.

About a mile below Baxter, the L&N acquired land from a local Creech family and, in 1920, built a rail switching yard and maintenance facility. First called Shann (or Shand) it was soon renamed Loyall [law/al]. it's said, for a company official (though no record of such a person has been found). Within a short time a town, also called Loyall, had grown up around the yard which soon developed as a coal shipping point. By the 1930s most of the county's coal was being shipped here by the various L&N spur lines for re-shipment to Corbin and ultimately on the other L&N lines to more distant markets. The local post office, with Mrs. Nancy E. Sergent, the first postmaster, was also to be Loyall but for some reason opened, on September 2, 1922, as Shonn and did not assume the Loyall name till May 1, 1932. Though now a fifth class city with an active post office, Loyall's population has been steadily declining. From a peak of over 1,500, it fell to 1,200 (in 1980), 1,100 (in 1990), and only 766 (in 2000).

THREE POST OFFICES IN HARLAN COUNTY'S STRETCH OF STRAIGHT CREEK OF THE CUMBERLAND RIVER

The aptly named Straight Creek heads in the Kentucky Ridge, a northwest spur of Pine Mountain, 1½ miles south of (the present) Bledsoe and half a mile west of US 421. It extends for eight miles in Harlan County and fourteen miles in Bell County to join the river at Bell's seat Pineville. It parallels Pine Mountain on the north.

Straight's 2.7 mile long Salt Trace Branch, which heads just south of the Leslie County line and joins the creek three miles above Ball County, was early named for its being a major route for southeast Kentuckians to the Clay County salt works. From July 10, 1876 through September 1888 John Forrester (sic) ran the Salt Trace post office about a mile up the branch. From 1896 through September 1911 this office operated as simply Salts.⁷

The rural post office of Gross was established by A.B. Gross on July 21, 1903 in Bell County, some 8½ miles up Straight Creek, and midway between Lock and Pass. In 1916 it was moved up the creek to a site 1½ miles from the Harlan County line. But in 1919 it was moved some four more miles up the creek, to a site, probably on the Salt Trace Branch, two miles within Harlan County. Though, according to Daniel Howard's Site Location Report, the move was for the greater convenience of its patrons, the office closed less than two years later, in August 1921.

FOUR POST OFFICES IN THE HARLAN COUNTY SECTION OF THE CUMBERLAND RIVER'S PUCKETTS CREEK

Pucketts Creek, heading in the Little Black Mountain of Harlan County, extends for 10½ miles to the river in Bell County, just below Hulen (Blackmont). It was paralleled by the L&N's nine mile long Black Mountain Spur (opened in 1915) and (the present) Ky 72.

The Saylor post office, established on November 22, 1897 and named for its postmasters (John M. Saylor was the first), occupied several imprecisely located sites. The first was likely on or near the Harlan County section of the fifteen mile long Brownies Creek which joins the river at Bell County's Miracle. By 1910 it was probably serving Mirl Daniel's store on Brownies, one mile from Bell County. By 1911, the year before it closed, it was on Pucketts, or one of its head forks, six miles from the river.

The aptly named 4½ mile long Path Fork heads in Little Black Mountain and joins Pucketts two miles from Bell County.⁸ At or just below its mouth, Park L. Taylor established the Pathfork post office on May 24, 1916. Over the years, at several proximate locations, it has served several area coal operations including Black Star, Speed and Sackett, Willis-Harlan, and Blue Diamond) and remains active, at the mouth of its name source.

In the early 1920s the Black Star Coal Company, the creek's main employer, built a camp 2½ miles above the mouth of Path Fork and named it Alva. This name, as yet underived, was then given to a station on the Black Mountain Railroad and, on October 11, 1922, to the local post office, established by Teddy D. Hail and first operated by Jesse L. Jones. This office served this area and the local Black Star School, through the demise of the coal operation, till 1974.

Fee, for local families, was the name applied to a village of some 500 residents then served by the new Pucketts Branch (L&N) station of Rocky Branch, just yards from the Bell County line, and 1½ miles west of Pathfork. This name was proposed for its post office but replaced by Insull when Canda (sic) L. Gurley opened it on July 24, 1925. Its name source, Samuel Insull (1859-1938) was the Chicago-based owner of several Harlan and Bell County coal mines.⁹ By 1926 the rail station had also taken the Insull name but, some years later, until it closed, it was also known as Fee. The Insull post office was discontinued in 1955.

← THREE OTHER WALLINS CREEK POST OFFICES

When the L&N's Banner Fork branch reached the mouth of Sycamore Branch, one of Wallin Creek's head forks, five miles up from the river, it opened its terminus as Low. This name was replaced by Twila for the local post office established by Chester C. Mathis on April 6, 1917. In 1930 the

office was moved half a mile down the creek to a site just above Banner Fork where it closed in 1957. The sources of neither name are known.

In 1907 the Kentenia Corporation was organized as a holding company for property acquired in three states by one Edward Mott Davis of Philadelphia and then owned by his heirs. Shortly after some 86,000 acres of this land were surveyed to clear disputed title, the corporation secured the extension of the L&N into the area (mostly in Harlan County) and leased its holdings to several coal and timber developers. Among the several mining towns established by the developers (including the Banner Fork Mining Company) was one some three miles up Wallins Creek that took the Kentenia name. Its post office was established on April 10, 1917, with Lewis Johnson, postmaster, but was discontinued in June 1930 when the local mines had all but fizzled out.

Then there was the shortlived (1936-1939) Lisle post office, with James L. McIntyre, postmaster, which served a small but now extinct mining camp at the mouth of Ginseng Creek, midway between Kentenia and Twila. It was named for its Banner Fork station (identified as such by 1921), but whence the station's name is not known.

POST OFFICES IN THE VALLEYS OF THE MARTINS FORK OF THE CUMBERLAND RIVER

The twenty eight mile long Martins Fork heads in Bell County, just east of the Hensley Flats in Brush Mountain (one fourth of a mile from the Virginia line) and joins Clover Fork at Harlan Town to form the main Cumberland River channel. It is traditionally believed to have been named for the Virginia hunter and fur trader Joseph Martin (1740-1808), among the first to visit the area that became Harlan County. In early settlement times the upper Martins Fork valley was functionally tied to Jonesville in Lee County, Virginia as the latter was more accessible than any Kentucky places

like Mount Pleasant (Harlan Town). The thirty post offices in Martin Fork's Harlan County watershed will be described below.

The first post office in this watershed was Cranks Creek somewhere on this fourteen mile long Martins Fork branch which heads in Little Black Mountain and joins the main stream just below Smith. The name is believed to be a corruption of Thranks, the name of a pioneer area surveyor. A number of nineteenth century Cranks were living in several eastern Kentucky counties but no evidence of any direct connection with a Thranks has been found. Anyway, this post office operated from May 27, 1848 to September 8, 1849, with Henry Skidmore, postmaster, at an unknown site on the creek, and then, from October 25, 1871 to January 8, 1874, with Albert Skidmore, postmaster, at a site (according to Albert's Site Location Report) three miles east of Martins Fork and thirteen miles southeast of Mount Pleasant. This may have been near the later (and extant) Cranks post office first established on April 9, 1908 with Harvey L. Ledford. This was four miles southeast of Cawood. It closed in November 1910 but was re-established in the same vicinity by Peter Oay on December 26, 1913. It now serves scattered area homes from a site just west of the junction of US 421 and Ky 568, fourteen miles southeast of Harlan.

The post office of Ledford, some two miles up the creek and (the present) Ky 568 from US 421, was named for the family of Aley Ledford's emancipated slaves who had been given several thousand acres in that valley which they farmed and timbered. James H. (called Jeemes), the son of the family's patriarch Sinclair (Sinkler) Ledford, established the post office on May 15, 1890. It was first called Leadford, a misinterpretation by postal clerks of Ledford's illegible handwriting, but it closed in November 1893.¹⁰ Ledford had the office reopened on January 11, 1898 as Ledford but it closed again, for good, in January 1913. After most of the creek's black population had

died or moved away, the land was acquired by the Peabody Coal Company and today almost nothing remains.¹¹

The little recalled, shortlived (September 9, 1898 through August 1901) and name-derived Glass post office may have been at two sites on Cranks Creek, two or three miles below Ledford. In fact, its first Site Location Report had been submitted by James H. Ledford whose first proposed name was Hurst for a Harlan County family. Glass's first postmaster, though, was Leander S. Farmer.

The first of the two Martins Fork post offices actually named Martins Fork was established on August 21, 1854 with Thomas M. Harris, postmaster. But less than a month later, on September 12, Harris had it renamed Friendship. He was succeeded in 1856 by Washington (Wash) Smith and in 1860 by Leander Skidmore, suggesting that the office was in the vicinity of the Cranks Creek-Martins Fork confluence where it closed in June 1867.

In the mid 1880s Creed Smith, Washington's brother, and a son of Noble, the area's biggest landowner, opened a store and sawmill at the mouth of Harris Branch of Martins, just above the Cranks confluence. On June 2, 1897 Noble Lincoln Smith established there the Smith post office. In 1976 this area, some fifteen miles sse of Harlan and one air mile from the Virginia line, was acquired by eminent domain for the Martins Fork Flood Control Lake. The post office was rerouted, and when it was suspended on October 1, 1991 it was on Ky 987, just south of the impoundment.

The pioneer family of Berry Cawood [kā/wood] (1758-1848), a Revolutionary War veteran, through his son John, were the first settlers (ca. 1814) of that section of Martins Fork that centers at the mouth of its Crummies Creek branch. Here Wilson S. Hensley received authorization for a Cawood post office on April 4, 1890. But it's not likely that the office actually

operated until January 27, 1896 with storekeeper Steven Moses Cawood, son of John, and a succession of other Cawoods, as its earliest postmasters. In 1924 the office and store were moved to the west side of the Fork to serve a mining camp and the L&N's Lick Branch spur station of Cawood. In 1931 they were back on the east side of the Fork serving a station called Cato at the junction of two new lines--one extending up the Fork to Smith and the other extending up the Long Fork of Crummies. Since the 1930s the Cawood post office has been on US 421, at the mouth of the Stillhouse Branch of Crummies, still serving the village of Cawood, nine miles southeast of Harlan.

Martin's Fork's Crummies Creek tributary extends for about 6½ miles from Little Black Mountain. At the head of the 1.7 mile long Long Fork, which joins Crummies two thirds of a mile from Martins, lay the hamlet, rail station, and post office of Crummies. It's said that some early settlers on the creek had once observed a large herd of buffalo with crumpled horns. (Such an animal is still called a crummie or crummy.) The post office operated from August 11, 1928, with Thurman Clifford Chappell, its first postmaster, till ^{1983.} ~~1985.~~

A post office inexplicably named George operated from June 15, 1897 through November 1909 at the mouth of Martins Fork's Turtle Creek branch, three miles below the Cawood and six miles above (southeast of) Harlan. Benjamin H. Mitchell was its first postmaster.

Just after the First World War Frank F. Cawood's newly organized Lena Rue Coal Company (named for his daughter, nee 1915) opened a mine on Turtle Creek and established the coal town and post office of Lenarue [leen/ə/rū] just above its Martins Fork confluence. His office was established on May 29, 1919 and closed in 1965, long after his coal operation had ceased. The local station on the L&N's Martins Fork branch was called Glidden.

A mile up Turtle Creek (and Ky 990) is the coal town of Mary Helen, founded in 1917 by the Mary Helen Coal Corporation that's said to have been named for either two local women or the daughter of the coal company's owner. Within a year the L&N's Martins Fork branch had reached this site and situated its terminus called Merna (source unknown). Though the station's name was first proposed for Superintendent Silas J. Dickenson's post office, established on November 1, 1919, it opened as Coalgood, a transposition of the words aptly describing the quality of the coal being mined there. But only the ~~still active~~ ^{suspended on 8/31/2011} post office, has borne this name. By the early 1980s it was serving ten operating mines, three preparation plants, a coal analysis plant, and the loading facilities for the Bow Valley Coal Resources Corporation.¹²

On September 14, 1897 William Lee established the Avondale post office, half a mile up Rough Branch of Martins Fork, nine miles above (wsw of) Smith. It closed on October 31, 1907, but was re-established on August 10, 1912 by Enos J. Howard, lasting only till the following April. Its name source has not been determined; perhaps, like many other such names in the United States, it refers to the river flowing past William Shakespeare's birthplace in England.

Some four miles up Martins Fork from Smith was the Hurst post office. Established on May 14, 1900 by Felix P. Fee, it was named for a family that included Elijah (who represented the county in the Kentucky Legislature ca. 1870) and M.B., a Harlan postmaster in the late 1890s. It closed in June 1910, but was re-established on January 21, 1922 by Walter Middleton, not as Hurst, his preference, but as Martins Fork. Delora Middleton was its first postmaster. It closed again in 1935.

The Fulkerson post office, established by and named for Clarence Fulkerson, operated from January 25, 1903 through May 1905. It served a

village of some 200 residents on the Fork, four miles above (west of) Hurst. Fulkerson's first name preference was Morley.

At several sites on Martins Fork, roughly four miles above Harlan, C.E. Wilson and T.C. Berger, dba the Wilson-Berger Coal Mining Company, operated mines and founded a coal camp at the mouth of Mill Craek. At first called The Wilsonberger Camp, a name also given to the L&N's Martins Fork station there, it was shortly renamed Grays Knob for the 3,162 foot elevation overlooking the camp from the south that's said to have been named for a pioneer settler. On January 13, 1916 Paul Berger established the Grays Knob post office. Years later the local community and station were also known as Charlotte for the second wife of an area mine owner C.R. Bennett. After occupying several sites on both sides of the Fork, the post office, now serving area homes, a nearby school, and a hospital, is on US 421.

Two miles above (east of) Grays Knob, centering at the mouth of Martins Fork's Enoch Branch, was the coal town and L&N station of Chevrolet. The first local mine was opened in 1917-18 by the Williams ByProduct Coal Company owned by John and Dover Williams of Knoxville, Tennessee, which was soon acquired by the larger Blue Diamond Coal Company. On June 15, 1918 a post office called BeePee (source unknown) was established by Frank C. Eaton, the mine company's commissary manager. On December 17 of that year it was renamed for the model 490 Chevrolet said to have been driven by another Williams brother Tom that had broken down on the local road. The Blue Diamond mine closed in 1957 but the post office survived till March 1988.

Sometime before 1921 the Lick Branch Spur of the L&N's Martins Fork line reached the head of this 1.2 mile long west side tributary and opened a station aptly named Coalville. Here, 2¼ miles above (south-

west of) Cawood, the Three Point Coal Corporation opened its mine, camp, and, on August 29, 1927 (with Louis J. Hampton, postmaster), a post office called Three Point. The company's name is said to have denoted the three virtues: service, quality, and dependability claimed for its local operation. The company permanently shut down in April 1954, and the office closed in 1965.

Anticipating a station on the L&N extension to its main line at Hagan, Virginia, Mrs. Emily Langford, on May 1, 1928, opened a post office on Martins Fork, about 2½ miles above (southwest of) Smith. It was named Sampson. Could it have been named for the Harlan lawyer J.E. Sampson (ne ca. 1886) or for Kentucky's Governor, the Laurel County-born Flem D. Sampson (1875-1967).¹³ It closed in 1950.

From 1938 to 1951 Benjamin Franklin Lankford and others operated the Sunshine post office at the mouth of Coldiron Branch of Martins, just south of Harlan's present southern city limits. According to Lankford's Site Location Report it would serve the village of Comet (with some 1,500 residents) and the L&N's Dressen Station, half a mile above (just north of the mouth of Catron Creek). Coal mining in this vicinity began just before the First World War with the establishment of the Martins Fork and Catrons Creek Coal Companies. Whence Sunshine and Comet are not known. Dressen was probably named for the German city and district of Dresden but it's not known why. Railroaders used to tell how they would spy on a young lady who was always "dressin' before an unshaded window."¹⁴

The county's shortest lived post office Bobs Creek was established by Mrs. H.C. Hensley and operated only from June 2 through December 1947. William M. Pope was its only postmaster. It was on the Martins Fork Railroad, just below its later Popeville Station and was named for the three mile long stream that joins the Fork there, one mile below (northwest of) Cawood.

By 1913, a mile or so above Harlan, R.W. Creech's Pineville Coal Mining Company had opened a mine. In 1914 it was acquired by R.C. Tway's Coal Company which shortly built its camp at the mouth of the Dave Smith Branch of Martins and called it Tway. But this place didn't have its post office till 1949 when Mrs. W.F. Hall applied for it as Hallwood. Because of her age and failing health, however, she turned over its operation to Mrs. Hazel C. Miller and the office opened as Tway. But it closed after only eight years.¹⁵

POST OFFICES ON CATRONS CREEK(OF MARTINS FORK)

Seven post offices served coal operations on this nine mile long stream which heads at the Catron Gap of the Little Black Mountain and joins Martins Fork just above Dressen. The creek, whose name is locally pronounced kaet/ərnz (but identified on some Civil War era maps as Catherines) was undoubtedly named for another early Virginia surveyor and was first settled before 1820. Its course has been followed by the L&N's Catron Branch and (the present) Ky 72.

To serve the Turner locality at the mouth of Slater's Fork, four miles up Catrons, Carlisle B. Pope, on November 28, 1892, established the Pansy post office. This he's believed to have named for the flower. It closed at the end of 1918. On June 27, 1927 it was re-established by John McHenry Riddle, but instead of his proposed Pansy, it was called Gulston for the local rail station. Mary E. Vaughn was its first post-master. According to local tradition, the name is a shortening of Gull's Town attributed to an L&N engineer named Gull. Though the station remained Gulston, as did the post office till it was suspended on March 23, 2001, the village they served has always been Pansy.

The 3½ mile long Slater's Fork (said to have been corrupted from Slaughters, an old Culpeper County, Virginia family name) heads in the Little Black Mountain. Less than a mile up from Catrons, about the mouth of Pounding Mill Branch, Elbert O. Guthrie established a mine ca. 1919-20 and named it and the newly opened station on the L&N's Slaters Fork Spur for either a race horse or Yancey Gross, a civil engineer. The town was first called Slaters Fork but also became Yancey when Guthrie opened the Yancey post office on January 12, 1924. Until the re-establishment of Pansy's post office as Gulston, this office served that vicinity, less than a mile down the Fork. The coal operations on Slaters are gone, as are the local store and church, and most of the homes. The Yancey post office closed in 1966.

A mile up Catrons was the McComb Coal Company camp of Wheeler and the L&N's Catrons Branch station of Keeman. As McComb was already in use by a Pike County post office, Squire M. Wheeler opened his local office on May 2, 1918 as Elcomb. By the 1920 Census, however, the McComb name had been applied to the local precinct.

To serve the McCombs Precinct and its Black Bottom and Little Creek communities after Elcomb closed in 1935, the Teetersville post office, named for local storekeepers, operated between 1938 and 1955 less than a mile up Catrons. Mrs. Jennie Teeters was its first postmaster.

Just after World War One Floran D. Perkins, dba the Perkins-Harlan Coal Company, opened a mine about two miles below the head of Catrons, at the mouth of its Double Branches. The L&N's Catron Branch line was extended to this site, 7½ miles above Harlan, and its station, like Perkins coal camp, would be called Catron. But the station, community, and post office (established by Perkins on February 16, 1920)

were, instead, named Liggett for Perkins' wife Mattie's Ohio family. The office closed in 1975.

The Catrons Creek Branch's Bardo Station (established by 1920-21) and the coal town of Bardo, at the mouth of Jones Branch, half a mile below (north of) Liggett, gave their name to the Bardo post office operating between March 12, 1928 and 1963. The name is said to have been corrupted from Bordeaux, the French city, and was suggested by James Bowling, the superintendent of a nearby mine, who had served in France in World War One. Peter Howard Bean, the first postmaster, was succeeded in the late 1930s by Bowling.

A mile below Pansy (Gulston), at the mouth of Halls Branch, is the coal town, Catrons Creek Branch station, and active post office of Mary Alice. They were named by the owner of the Mary Alice Coal Company, Dr. Harry K. Buttermore, for his two daughters Mary Jane and Ruth Alice. The post office was established in 1947, with Willard Martin Buttermore, the first postmaster.

POST OFFICES IN THE CLOVER FORK VALLEYS OF THE CUMBERLAND RIVER

The thirty three mile long Clover Fork heads just north of the Harlan-Wise-Lee Counties convergence between the Black and Little Black Mountain ranges and joins Martins Fork at Harlan to form the main Cumberland River channel. It's said to have been named by Joseph Martin for the wild clover growing along its banks. Twenty six post offices served its watershed.

The first Clover Fork post office was actually established as Clover Fork by Isaac W. Huff on July 28, 1857. Its precise location at the upper end of the stream is not known. It lasted only till August 1859, but was re-established by Huff on August 22, 1872, probably at the mouth of Louder Creek, 18½ stream miles above Harlan. In February 1894 the two parts of the name were combined, and as Cloverfork it was moved around 1906 about a

mile up the Fork to the mouth of Razors Creek where by 1912 it was serving the Clover Fork Coal Company camp. The post office closed at the end of 1934. At this site, now called Glenbrook, another mine was opened in 1946 by the Stonego Coal and Coke Company (later called Westmoreland) and to this site the L&N's Clover Fork line was soon extended.

Nine miles up Clover Fork is the 2½ mile long Bailey Creek. It's said to have been named for one Carr Bailey, a Revolutionary War veteran and the leader of a group of pioneer visitors who had camped at its mouth sometime before 1800 and was one of Harlan County's first settlers. Probably at the creek's mouth, on July 28, 1857 (the very day the Clover Fork post office was established), Hugh Smith opened the Smithville post office but it, too, closed after only two years. It was re-opened on August 22, 1872 by storekeeper Wright Kelly, but according to his and subsequent Site Location Reports, it was twelve miles above Harlan and thus at or near the mouth of (the present) Bailey Branch (earlier in the twentieth century called Mill Branch). It was renamed Bayly's Creek (sic) on July 1, 1875 and became simply Bailey in September 1880. (Sometime in the mid 1870s, though, it may have been moved back to the mouth of Bailey Creek, the site of William B. Kelly's store, nine miles above Harlan, for by then cannel coal had been discovered on Kelly's land and this post office may have been serving a community called Clover Bottom with several stores and one or two mills.) Wherever the post office was in September 1900 it closed. With the coming of the L&N's Clover Fork line a station called Pillsbury was established at the mouth of Baileys Creek, and sometime later the one mile long Bailey Creek Spur was built with four stations: Pillsbury, Springton, Galindo, and Lupton. By 1960 Pillsbury and Lupton were still serving that valley and the Bailey Creek community.

Equally elusive were the sites of Clover Fork's Leonard post office. It was established at some unknown location on September 28, 1860 with storekeeper Jonathan K. Bailey, postmaster. It closed after only one year but was re-established on August 22, 1872 by Jonathan's brother William R. eighteen miles above Harlan, and six miles above Bailey, at the mouth of Fugitt Creek (near the site of the future Lovellen), to serve his brother's and several other stores. By 1886 the post office was at or near the mouth of Child's Creek, 2½ miles above, where it remained till it closed in 1911. Whence Leonard has not been determined; was it named for Leonard Farmer, son of Lewis and Anna, who, in 1860, was a twenty three year old Harlan County lawyer? No Leonard families have been found in the county at that time.

Ages and Brookside, two almost contiguous coal towns, are now served by a single post office on Ky 38 and Clover Fork, 4½ miles above (east of) Harlan. In February 1975 the separate fourth class post offices of Ages and Brookside, then only 400 yards apart (the closest in the U.S.), were combined into one called Ages-Brookside. With Rufus Hendricks, its postmaster, the new office was in the Eastover Mining Company offices at Brookside.

The Ages post office had been established on June 8, 1892 with Lloyd Ball, postmaster, and named for its site at the mouth of the 2.4 mile long Ages Creek, 4 and 3/4 miles up Clover. (The creek is said to have been named for an early Mr. Ages of whom nothing is known.) The office closed in June 1896. It was re-opened on December 10, 1912 with Dezzier Turner, postmaster, who then had it moved 300 yards to serve the new Ages Station on the L&N's recently arrived Clover Fork branch.

In 1917 the brothers August F. and Bryan W. Whitfield from Alabama established the Harlan Collieries, and within two years had opened a mine at a site just below Ages.¹⁶ This site was called Brookside for

its location between two brooks. Shortly thereafter the L&N opened its Brookside Station. By the early 1920s Brookside had become a model coal town, and Harlan Collieries a model coal operation with the county's first mechanized loading facility. To serve the latter more directly than the Ages post office apparently could, the Brookside post office was established on March 24, 1930 with John H. McKinley, postmaster. It was 200 yards east of Laurel Creek and three-eighths of a mile west of Ages. Over the years site changes brought the office even closer to Ages.

In 1970 the Duke Power Company of Charlotte, North Carolina acquired the Harlan Collieries and several other mining operations in the county and established the Eastover Mining Company to run them. After a crippling 1974 strike at Brookside, many of the company's employees moved to Ages leaving nothing at the Brookside site but the company's offices. In 1980 Eastover was sold to Duane Bennett.

On September 16, 1899, after the first closing of the Ages post office, Moses B. Smith established a post office on the east side of Ages Creek and called it Coxton for one or more area Cox families. Carlo B. Crider was its first postmaster. Here, in 1912, K.W. McGuire developed the Harlan Coal Mining Company. In 1913 the office was moved about a mile down the Fork, and by 1920 it, the rail station, and the community they served were one mile below Brookside. From 1952 to 1980 the post office operated as a CPO for Harlan, four miles below.

In 1896 the discovery of gold on a ninety mile branch of the Yukon River in northwestern Canada gave a name in the next few years to a number of places in the U.S. One was a Harlan County post office at the mouth of Rockhouse Branch of Clover Fork, twenty five miles above Harlan. On February 15, 1898 William H. Short established Harlan County's Klondike post

office. By 1909 it had been moved down the Fork to a site just below the mouth of Breeding Creek (given as Breedens Creek on current published maps), still serving a scattered rural population. By October 1915 it had been moved another 1½ miles downstream to the mouth of Mary Wynn Branch, one mile above Childs Creek. The following month it was moved again, another mile down Clover, to what's shown on current maps as Georgetown. Here it closed in October 1918.

From February 23, 1911 through January 1913 John H. Blair ran the inexplicably named Delvale post office, probably at the mouth of Clover Fork's Mill Branch (earlier called Joes Branch).¹⁷

Also in 1911 the Whitfield Brothers invested in the Clover Fork Coal Company and located their mining operation on the Fork just above the mouth of the 1.3 mile long Kitts Creek, two miles above Harlan. Some say the town, rail station, stream, and post office of Kitts were named for a family but others maintain it was named for someone's mule. Anyway, by the mid 1920s the post office, established on January 4, 1913, with George P. Fitz, postmaster, and the station were serving several other area coal operations, including those of the Rex and Gold Ash Coal Companies. The office was suspended on October 1, 1982.

Then there was the Blackjoe post office, established on January 19, 1915 by Leander Bowling to serve the Wood (rail) Station, midway between Kitts and Coxton. Neither this name, Wood, nor Bowling's first preference Ada have been derived. The office closed in mid September 1935.

In 1916 Mssrs. Killebrew and Davis of Nashville, Tennessee, dba the King Harlan Coal Company, opened a mine on Ewell Van King's land about a mile up Clover from the mouth of Jones Creek (seven miles above Harlan). In March the L&N's Clover Fork line was completed from Ages, three miles below, and a station was opened here called Kildav. On March 17 the

Kildav post office was established with Squire Merwin Wheeler, postmaster. By the mid 1920s the post office and station were serving other area coal operations--noteably those of the J.L. Smith and the George R. Neal Coal Companies. The office closed in 1952.

A Harlan family of Drapers from Tennessee may have been the source of the name applied to another station and post office half a mile above (northeast of) Kildav, which also served J.L. Smith's mining camp and the Middleton Addition of Evarts, just above it. The office established by Franz Sigle Newport operated between June 4, 1924 and 1952. Sometime after 1947 the station's name was changed to Harcrow.

The coal town of Verda (with a population of 950 in 1970), its station and post office were at the mouth of Jones Creek, six miles above Harlan. It's said to have been named for Verda Middleton, an early resident. The post office, established on April 24, 1917 with Chad Middleton, postmaster, became a rural branch in 1964 and closed for good in 1973.

Fifteen miles up Clover, at the mouth of Seagraves Creek, the aptly named High Splint Coal Company¹⁸ opened a mine and, on February 7, 1918, established the Highsplint post office to serve its developing coal town. John C. Casey was its first postmaster. In June of the following year the railroad reached this site and established its Seagraves Station (which later also took the Highsplint name). This company and its mine were also acquired in 1970 by Eastover (Duke Power) and later by the Manalpan Mining Company. The Highsplint office was discontinued in 1974.

Less than a mile below Highsplint, in the commissary of the Harlan Coal and Coke Company's mining camp, James A. Evans opened the Ridgeway post office on October 6, 1925. It's said to have been named for the Ridgeway Coal Company that had opened a mine there several years before. Soon the office and the local Ridgeway Station were serving several other coal operations and a population of close to 2,000. But the office closed in 1932.

On December 14, 1918, to serve the operations and camps of the Bowling Mining, Clover Coal, Upper Herlan Coal, and W.E. Garrett Coal Companies, two miles below Highsplint, Leander Bowling, Sr. opened the Lejunior post office which he named for his son. Kenes Bowling was its first postmaster.¹⁹ Two months before, a rail station was opened at this site and called Shields, perhaps for Tennessee-born (ca. 1865) Robert Shields, an area resident.

One half mile above Lejunior the two coal camps and L&N stations of Benito and Gano were served, from September 17, 1929 to 1940, by James Bennett's Benito post office.

By 1921 the L&N had opened a station at what was the end of its Clover Fork line, 2¼ miles above Highsplint and just below the mouth of Fugitt Creek. As Lisbon it would serve the newly established coal camp and mining operation of the Cornett and Lewis Coal Company. Lisbon gave way to Louellen for the daughter of the company president Denver B. Cornett when the local post office was opened on December 3, 1921, with Arthur B. Babbage, its first postmaster. The station was later renamed Closplint Number Two. When the mine closed in 1958 the camp was abandoned and few of its once peak of 900 residents (ca. 1930) remain in the vicinity. The post office, though, continued till April 1985.

The coal town, L&N station, and still active post office of Closplint, 1½ miles above (southeast of) Louellen, was named for and by the Clover Splint Company which opened its local mine in 1926. The post office was established on February 16, 1928 with James Roy Parsons, postmaster.²⁰

Holmes Mill, a still active post office, was established on March 24, 1926 by Wiley Holmes (ne ca. 1883-84), a local mill owner and coal mine engineer, just above the mouth of Rockhouse, a little over five miles above Closplint, and near the first site of the Klondike post office.

From 1942 to 1950 the Short Town post office, established by John William Short and named for his family, served the Cote (or Dark Bottom) Station on the L&N, across the creek, and the nearby Short Town community midway between Evarts and Lejunior.²¹

POST OFFICES ON YOCUM CREEK OF CLOVER FORK

Yocum Creek heads in Little Black Mountain, one fourth of a mile from the Lee County (Virginia) line, and extends for 7½ miles to Clover Fork at Evarts, eight miles above Harlan and 8½ miles up the Fork. The creek was named for a pioneer settler near its mouth who, according to legend, had evaded an Indian scalping by impressing his captors with his sense of humor.²² Other early settlers on the creek and at its Clover confluence were families of Turners, Kellys, Paces, Middletowns, Kings, Smiths, and Creeches.

The post office of Evarts was established on February 9, 1885, with Jane Kelly, its first postmaster, at a site on the north side of Clover Fork and just above the mouth of Yocum. It's said to have been named for an early Harlan Countian of whom there seems no record, but we can't rule out the possibility of its having honored Boston-born William Maxwell Evarts (1818-1901), a director of the Consolidation Coal Company (1872-1877), but better known nationally as a U.S. Secretary of State (1877-1881) and senator from New York (1885-1891). By 1900 a town with several stores, two sawmills, and other businesses had grown up south of the Fork and east of Yocum, and to this site the post office moved in 1907. The town soon became the main trading center for coal camps along both streams. Evarts is now a fifth class city with an active post office and a 2000 population of 1,100 (a loss of 400 since 1970).

On January 15, 1898 John G. Farley established a post office just below the mouth of Reds Creek, about four miles up Yocum. It was probably named for Elijah Franklin Disney, the first principal of the Black Mountain Academy founded in 1893 by the Congregational Church at Evarts. In 1908 the Dizney post office was moved one mile down Yocum to the mouth of Schoolhouse Branch (then called Howards Cove) where Black Mountain is shown on contemporary maps. In 1914 it was moved back to its original site. In 1916 it was moved 1½ miles further up Yocum, probably to the site of John Pace's store at the mouth of Turner Creek. In 1918 it was one mile down the creek at the mouth of Bills Creek.

In January 1921 the office was moved two more miles down Yocum to serve the coal town of Kenvir (founded in 1919 by the Peabody Coal Company's Black Mountain subsidiary) and its Yocum Creek (L&N) branch station, and was renamed Kenvir. It's said that this name was derived from an ownership dispute by companies in the two states. For years the vicinity was locally called Black Mountain and focused on a company town with a peak population of 5,000. The mine ceased operations in March 1958 though the company retained its property title. By 1980 some 2,000 persons still occupied homes on a two mile stretch of Ky 215 between Pounding Mill Branch and Britton Creek, some three miles or so above Evarts. The Kenvir post office continues to serve this area.

The Dizney post office was re-established as such on December 13, 1922 by Henry Surgener at its 1918 site, 2½ miles above the present Kenvir post office site. After his death in 1939 it was moved a short distance to Pace's store, with Lucy Pace as postmaster. It was moved again in 1951 to the Jones Brothers store, just above Pace's, with Milton Jones, postmaster, but was suspended on May 18, 1993.²³ For some years the local community has been referred to as Punkin Center.

A locality early called Woods (for the trees), the community of Griffithsville (for a family), the Yocum Creek branch station of Sikes, and the Darby Coal Mining Camp were served, from September 1929 to 1942, by Sally Mae and William M. Stewart's aptly named Redbud post office just below the mouth of Pounding Mill Branch, midway between Evarts and Kenvir.

POST OFFICES ON THE POOR FORK OF THE CUMBERLAND RIVER

The Poor Fork heads just short of the Wise County, Virginia line and extends for fifty two miles wsw through Letcher and Harlan Counties to join the main Cumberland River at Baxter, one mile below (north of) Harlan (Town) and the Clover-Martin Forks confluence. It's said to have been named for the relative unproductivity of its soil. Twenty post offices served its Harlan County watershed.

Harlan County's largest community, the fourth class city of Cumberland, is centered at the junction of US 119 and Ky 160, at the mouth of the Poor Fork's Looney Creek, 22½ miles ene of Harlan. Its site was first settled in the 1820s, and with Creech, Smith, Huff, Lewis, Nolen, Cornett, and Blair families had become, by the mid nineteenth century, the trade center of the upper Poor Fork watershed. Its post office was established as Poor Fork on February 11, 1837, with Hezekiah Branson, postmaster. By this name it and the town itself, just below the mouth of Cloverlick Creek, were known till they were renamed in June 1926 by local businessmen seeking a more propitious name for their growing community. Since 1960, however, this community has hardly been growing. Since 1960 the town with an active post office and the main campus of Southeast Community College (until recently a part of the University of Kentucky system) has lost some forty per cent of its population to reach its present level of only 2,600.

The aptly named Big Rock post office operated intermittently at (perhaps) several sites on Poor Fork, in the vicinity of its two mile long English Creek confluence, from its first establishment on October 20, 1857 by Samuel Powell. It closed on July 31, 1863 but was re-established on June 2, 1865 by John Lewis, but closed again that November. Calvin Coldiron reopened it on August 2, 1866 but it closed again on January 8, 1873. It was re-established for another stretch on June 22, 1876 but lasted this time only till July 1877. From August 1897 to September 1898 William D. Lewis maintained another Big Rock post office one mile up English, 5½ miles above Baxter.

Serving the same vicinity just below English Creek for fifty seven years were three post offices. The first, Gap Ridge, was operated on the north side of Poor Fork, opposite the mouth of Gap Branch, by storekeeper Henry L. Howard and Eli Lewis between May 4, 1876 and October 6, 1880. It was re-established on October 2, 1886 by John L. Jones, another storekeeper and the local constable, as Jonesburgh (Jonesburg in 1894) and closed in May 1896.

On May 31, 1901 Benjamin W. Sergent opened the Rosspoint post office, named allegedly for a man who, during the Civil War, was stationed on top of a nearby hill to spy out a Rebel advance and warn the people in the valley. This office began about 1 3/4 miles below the mouth of English. By 1912 it had been moved about one fourth of a mile up the Fork to the mouth of Yearly Branch to which it returned after several more moves and where it closed in 1933.

One of the largest and most influential families in Harlan County history were the descendants of John Creech (ne early 1790s) and his wife Sally (nee Smith) who lived at the mouth of Clover Lick Creek of Poor Fork. On June 15, 1881 John W. Creech established the Creech post office at a site some six miles below Clover Fork Creek and the town of Poor Fork,

perhaps at or near the mouth of Big Jonathan.²⁴ By 1907, according to Kentucky and U.S. Geological Survey maps, it was at the mouth of Eastep Branch, about a mile above (east). On the 1919 topographic map it was shown at the mouth of Chad Branch (now the Hi Lewis Branch), 1.7 miles further east. On May 13, 1924 it was moved by postmaster Edward W. Creech another mile east to serve a larger population at the Chad Station on the L&N's Poor Fork line, two miles below Poor Fork-Cumberland. Its name was then changed to Chad. The station may have been named for Chadwell Nolan, a local man then serving as railroad agent.²⁵ Here it closed in 1932.

In 1920, a mile below (west of) the site of Chad Station, the L&N opened the Hiram Station it had named for landowner Hiram Lewis. In 1943 Frances E. Creech established the Hiram post office to serve this station and the village of Chad which, by then, had some 500 residents. In 1964 the post office became a Cumberland rural branch and closed for good the following year.

At or near the mouth of Poor Fork's Coldiron Branch, half a mile below the Letcher County line, and five miles above Poor Fork (town), was the Est post office, established on March 30, 1898, with John L. Blair, postmaster. Was it named for Miss Ester Blair (nee ca. 1830), an area resident? It closed in June 1912.

Another notable Poor Fork family, the Nolans (whose name was also spelled Nolen, Nolin, and even Nowlin), gave its name to the Nolansburg post office, established on April 26, 1899 by John G. McKnight.²⁶ Until 1920 it was at the mouth of Holcomb Branch of Poor Fork, some 11½ miles above Harlan. In September 1920 the office was moved a mile or so up the Fork and, on November 1, 1936, its name was changed to Splint for a coal seam. In 1949 it was moved to a site just below the mouth of Station

Branch where it served the towns of Nolansburg and Kellioka and the Poor Fork (L&N) line's Splint Station till it closed in 1957.

The Kellioka post office occupied several sites on the north side of Poor Fork. It was first established at the mouth of Jones Branch (now Deep Branch), the site of the later Rhea Station, on August 26, 1901 by John P. Kelly for whom (or his family) it was probably named (though it's not known why it appeared in this form). By 1912 it was at the mouth of Turkey Branch (now Ball Branch), half a mile east, where it closed in 1914. It was re-established on June 12, 1920 with George D. Batcheler, postmaster, some 5½ miles up the Fork, to serve the L&N's Kellioka Station, then 1½ miles above (northeast of) Nolansburg, where it closed for good the following February.

To honor himself and his wife, Bird Hensley sought to establish the Alice and Bird post office on Poor Fork roughly midway between the mouth of English Creek and the then site of Nolansburg. The non-acceptability of a multi-word name led him to suggest Lewis for his neighbor James M. Lewis (na ca. 1867). However, the office operated only between July 26, 1909 and mid August 1910.

By 1920, the Intermountain Coal and Lumber Company had acquired the Lewis site, 1.3 miles above the Rhea Station and some nine miles above Harlan, for a sawmill to process nearby Pine Mountain timber. To serve it they opened a Poor Fork (L&N) line station called Putney and, on June 17, 1925 (with Loree D. Smith, postmaster), the still active Putney post office.

At the mouth of Poor Fork's Spruce Ridge Branch, one mile above Lewis-Putney, was Dillon. This office, whose name source is not known, was operated by William D. and Mattie Lewis from November 4, 1915 through May 1927.

Another inexplicably named Poor Fork post office Dione operated between May 14, 1912 and 1957. It was established by Robert W. Cornett probably at the mouth of Banks Branch. In early 1919 he had it moved three fourths of a mile up the Fork, two miles above (east of) the newly established Totz (Colton and later Pine Mountain) Station and six miles below Poor Fork (Cumberland) town.

In late 1920 Edgar L. Bradley applied for the Totz post office to serve the recently opened Colton Station and the Harlan Cumberland Coal Company mine begun there by Harry Totz of West Virginia. The active post office, now on Ky 522 (old US 119) was officially established on April 18, 1921. Some years ago Colton gave way to Pine Mountain Station for the ridge overlooking Poor Fork on the north.

From February 18, 1925 to 1936 another inexplicably named post office Laden served a Poor Fork station of that name two miles above Dillon.²⁷ Chad Lewis was its first postmaster.

Descendants of Enoch and Nancy (Jenkins) Blair, a large upper Poor Fork family, gave their name to a post office at two sites roughly 2½ miles above Cumberland (town). It was established in 1941, with Rebecca Jane Lane, its first postmaster, and became a Cumberland rural branch in 1964, closing for good eight years later.

THE CLOVER POST OFFICE ON CLOVER LICK CREEK

This stream, not to be confused with Clover Fork, extends from Black Mountain for 6 3/4 miles to join Poor Fork at Cumberland (town). Deer would lick salt from the rocks under a red clover cover. For years this valley was considered "the ultimate sticks" and young people hesitated to reveal to their Cumberland Schools' classmates that they lived there.

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The stream's sole post office, five miles up, was established on June 18, 1901 by William M. Cornett. His proposed Clover Lick was replaced by simply Clover, and John M. Huff became postmaster. It closed in December 1902, was re-established on March 12, 1909, with Rena Hall, postmaster, and closed for good in 1934.

THREE POST OFFICES ON THE POOR FORK'S LOONEY CREEK

Looney Creek, named for an early settler who's said to have fled from Indians by running up and down its course, heads in Black Mountain, half a mile from the Wise County, Virginia line and extends for 8½ miles to Poor Fork, just above the mouth of Clover Lick. Its entire length is paralleled by Ky 160.

The fifth class city of Benham, with an active post office and a 2000 population of ca. 600, extends for two miles along Ky 160 from a point two miles above Cumberland (town). Its post office was established on September 1, 1900 to serve a locality then called Finley, five miles above the Poor Fork post office, but was named Yowell as Finley was then in use by a Taylor County office. It initially operated out of its first postmaster Henry Blair's home. By 1907 it was serving a village of some 300 residents, four miles above Poor Fork. In 1910 Leander C. McKnight, who had become postmaster in the winter of 1907-08, moved the office two miles down the creek (west) to serve an as yet unnamed coal mining camp that was expected to have over a thousand residents within a few months. The Yowell and Finley names, though, have not been derived.

The coal camp was being built to house the miners and workers of the Wisconsin Steel Corporation, a subsidiary of International Harvester, which was to furnish coke for the furnaces of I.H.'s South Chicago steel works. In 1905 the company had acquired 3,000 coal producing acres from G.A. Eversole. The new village was called Benham for the Benham Spur, a long ridge bordering Looney on the south. According to tradition, the spur

had been named for either John Benham, an eighteenth century hunter, or a Civil War deserter whose body had been found there torn to pieces by wild animals. On July 23, 1911 McKnight's post office took the Benham name. By 1915, with the arrival of the Poor Fork (railroad) branch, Benham had become a model mining town. In 1960 International Harvester sold the homes and local businesses and services to its employee residents who arranged for the town's incorporation in March 1961.

Benham is now home to the Kentucky Coal Mining Museum in the International Harvester's three story brick commissary as a tourist attraction and to provide area jobs to those laid off by I.H. successor Arch Mineral Corporation in the early 1990s.²⁸

R.W., P.V., and Charles Cole were officials of the Looney Creek Coal Company that began operations in 1914 at a site just west of the newly established Benham. By 1915 they were shipping their products from a Poor Fork branch station called Clutts. On November 11, 1915 a post office that would have been called Coles was established here, two miles up the creek, as Peevee, probably for Perry V. Cole, then the company's general manager. Charles D. Cole, Perry's son, was the first postmaster. The office was discontinued on July 31, 1933 and contemporary maps still show the vicinity as Clutts. The station may have been named for George Clutts, a Looney Creek Coal Company foreman who had come from the Pittsburgh area, north of London in Laurel County, around the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1917 the U.S. Coal and Coke Company, a subsidiary of U.S. Steel, asked the L&N to extend its Poor Fork branch beyond Benham to serve a coal mine that was to open further up Looney. Since wartime demand for coal was great, the railroad agreed. A five mile long mining town was developed with all the modern facilities of a model coal operation. The

mine and town, named Lynch for the late Thomas Lynch (1854-1914), the company's first president, had by the mid nineteen twenties the most cosmopolitan work force in Kentucky's coal country (thirty eight different nationalities were represented). The town reached a population of nearly 10,000 by the Second World War, probably making it then the largest coal town in the country. Its post office, established on January 19, 1918, with Frank A. Kearns, postmaster, as Lynch Mines became simply Lynch on October 1, 1922. By the early 1960s the town had been abandoned by its U.S. Steel owners. Their homes were also sold to former employees and the town became a fifth class city in 1963. Its still active post office, two miles above Benham's, has served a steadily declining population (from ca. 5,000 in 1960 through 1,600 in 1980, to 900 in 2000). Like Benham it has become largely dependent on tourism. Its mine was reopened for visitors in the summer of 2003.

HARLAN COUNTY'S POST OFFICES ON THE KENTUCKY RIVER'S MIDDLE FORK BRANCHES

Pine Mountain was the earliest of the six post offices serving the several Harlan County branches of Middle Fork. It was operated between May 4, 1876 and January 20, 1881 by Jonathan Cornett somewhere at the upper end of the twenty eight mile long Greasy Creek. This stream heads in Pine Mountain and extends along its northern flank to the site of the Pine Mountain Settlement School where it veers to the northwest to join the Middle Fork at Hoskinston in Leslie County. This stream is said to have been named for the greasy cooking utensils of the pioneer settlers who homesteaded along its banks.

On October 24, 1899 Elhanan M. Nolan established another Greasy Creek post office, perhaps at the site of the earlier Pine Mountain post office, about three fourths of a mile above (southwest of) the famed Pine Mountain Settlement School. He called it Jane, probably for his aunt (1842-1919), the wife of William Nolan and daughter of Samuel and Sarah Howard. After one or more moves along Greasy, Elhanan, on October 20,

1919, had it renamed Pine Mountain. The office moved at least half a dozen more times in the 1930s and 40s, to sites both above the school and at least half a mile up Isaacs Creek, a recent name for the left hand head fork of Greasy (which heads just short of the Letcher County line.) When it closed in 1975 it was near the school, at the mouth of Isaacs.²⁹

Since May 25, 1925 the Big Laurel post office has occupied several sites at the mouth of Big Laurel Creek, a Greasy Creek branch 1½ miles from the Leslie County line and three miles below (northwest of) the Pine Mountain School. Alice E. Soggs was its first postmaster. The six mile long Big Laurel Creek heads just short of the Letcher County line.

The Incline post office was established on June 21, 1905 by Harrison Cornett to serve a locality called McKnight for a local family. This, according to a 1907 Kentucky Geological Survey map, was at the mouth of Wolf Pen Branch of the 11½ mile long Laurel Fork of Greasy, some six miles southwest of Jane (later the Pine Mountain) post office. This fork which heads just below the site of the old Laurel School at Oivide extends along the north flank of Pine Mountain, then turns ninety degrees north and joins Greasy one mile below Leslie County's Della post office site. Sometime after its establishment the post office was moved three fourths of a mile up Laurel Fork but, in 1918, it was moved back to a site 200 yards up Wolf Pen. Another move, in 1922, brought it back to Laurel where it closed in 1951.

One of Kentucky's several two county post offices was Imlay. This was established on June 1, 1893 by Richard L. Wilson some ten miles up the seventeen mile long Middle Fork tributary of Beech Fork, probably at or just above the mouth of Big Branch, four miles within Leslie County.

Beech Fork heads in Pine Mountain and joins the Middle Fork at Leslie County's Asher.³⁰ On January 21, 1904 John J.C. Napier had the office moved up the fork to a site one fourth of a mile within Harlan County. In 1911 it was moved another mile east (to an unknown site) where it closed in July 1913. Could this post office have been named for the early American writer Gilbert Imlay? Little is known of his life. He may have been born in New Jersey about 1754. After service in the Revolutionary War he arrived in Kentucky in 1783 as a surveyor with John May at the Falls of the Ohio. After acquiring land grants to over 28,000 Kentucky acres, he penned a "Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America" and a novel "The Emigrants" (both published in 1793 and said to have encouraged early Kentucky settlement). Land speculations led to the loss of his claims and a hasty departure from Kentucky and America by 1785.³¹

Several related Bledsoe families (e.g. James C., Dale H., and George H.) had acquired land in the Beech Fork valleys when a neighbor and fellow land owner William H. Toliver/established the Bledsoe post office on December 10, 1900 at the head of the fork and eight miles (via the present US 421) north of Harlan. In the winter of 1917-18 Chester A. Nolan had the office moved nearly 2½ miles down Beech (northwest) to a site half a mile from the Leslie line, about where Imlay had been when it closed 3½ years before. The office continues to serve the two county Beech Fork Neighborhood.

ONE AS YET UNLOCATED POST OFFICE

James H. Greene operated the Belknap post office between April 28, 1848 and June 2, 1849. It most likely honored either Massachusetts-born Morris Burke Belknap, a Cumberland valley businessman, or his son

William Burke Belknap (1811-1889). The latter helped survey coal and iron deposits in the valley until, in 1839, he moved to Louisville where he became an iron and hardware goods dealer.³¹

Twenty ~~five~~^{four} of the 107 post offices that have operated in Harlan County are still active (Harlan, Cumberland, Evarts, Lynch, Loyall, Benham, Wallins Creek, Ages-Brookside, Baxter, Big Laurel, Bledsoe, Cawood, Closplint, ~~Good~~, Coldiron, Cranks, Dayhoit, Grays Knob, Holmes Mill, Kenvir, Lejunior, Mary Alice, Pathfork, Putney and Totz). The first seven, whose residents collectively comprise over a fourth of the county's population, serve its currently incorporated towns. At least thirty four offices are (or were) the center of viable communities with population concentrations. Most of the rest served a store, school, one or more churches, and/or a rail station.

Local or area persons/families accounted for forty office names, while three offices were named for well known non-local persons. Two offices were named for distant places, while twenty one were given the names of local or nearby features (fourteen streams, three elevations, three rail stations, and a predecessor office). Nine names were geographically descriptive. Seven offices were named for local or area coal companies or their operations. Three office names may have had two derivations apiece, while two offices had other name sources (the county and the make/^{of} a local automobile). Twenty names are still unaccounted for, and three offices (Saylor, Cranks Creek, and Belknap) have not been even approximately located.

Nineteen post office names were not those first proposed for them; forty offices served communities, neighborhoods, rail stations, or mining camps with other names; and thirteen offices had name changes during the course of their operation.

FOOTNOTES

1. I erred in Kentucky Place Names (1984, P. 131) that the name Harlan was chosen for the re-established post office (in 1828) because Mt. Pleasant was then in use elsewhere. Mount Pleasant was not to identify another post office till 1832, in Ohio County.
2. Mabel Green Condon, A History of Harlan County, Nashville, Tenn: Parthenon Press, 1962, P. 49
3. Harrogate, Tenn: Lincoln Memorial Press, 1955, Pp. 67-72, 80
4. No listings for any Layman family are found in late nineteenth century censuses.
5. Elihue Coldiron (1879-1942) was a son of Jesse Coldiron and a descendant of a German immigrant Johan Georg Kalteisen (1730-1805). Jesse and his father Conrad (ne ca. 1760) were early nineteenth century settlers of the Cumberland valley between Wallins and Foresters Creeks. (According to Otto Green Coliron, Jr., compiler, "Descendants of George Coldiron", 1997)
6. Said to be four road miles below Harlan Court House.
7. John B. Forester, Salts' first postmaster, had first proposed the name Brock for a local family. An attempt to re-establish this post office in 1915 was unsuccessful.
8. Like Kentucky's ubiquitous Trace and Road Forks, this was an early settler's route through the mountains.
9. The London, England-born Samuel Insull, who arrived in the U.S. in 1881, became Thomas Edison's private secretary and the manager of his industrial enterprises. He later created a public utilities empire of his own, operating plants in several states till 1932 when he fled the country to avoid prosecution for fraud and embezzlement for which he was later acquitted.

10. Actually, Ledford's first proposed name was Leadford Store (sic.)
11. cf John Egerton, Generations: An American Family, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983, Pp. 105-07
12. Elizabeth L. Bengé, Coalgood Post Office, in a letter to the author, May 17, 1980
13. Flem O. Sampson practiced law in Barbourville, his longtime home. He served as Knox County judge (1906-1910), judge of the Kentucky's 34th Judicial District (1911-1916), judge of the Kentucky Court of Appeals from 1916, of which he was Chief Justice from 1923-1924, and Kentucky's governor from 1927-1931.
14. R.R. South, L&N Employees Magazine, May 1949, P. 18
15. R.C. Tway is best known to Harlan historians as a founder, in 1916, of the Harlan Coal Operators Association of which he served as president from 1917 to 1926. By the 1930s Tway and his business interests were located in Louisville.
16. The brothers Bryan W., Sr. and August F., Jr. Whitfield came from Alabama in 1911 and invested in the Clover Fork Coal Company at Kitts and the Harlan Collieries at Brookside where they built their offices, store, and tipples, and the homes for their newly recruited work forces. In 1919 August F. remained at Kitts and Bryan took over at Brookside.
17. In Blair's November 1910 Site Location Report, Delvale's proposed post office was located 4½ miles west of Leonard which is known to then have been at the mouth of Childs Branch.
18. The company was named for an important coal seam.
19. Clover Gap, for the Black Mountain gap 1½ miles north, had been Bowling's first name choice for his Lejunior post office.
20. According to The Annual Report of the Inspector of Mines of the State of Kentucky for the Year 1900, Louisville, 1901, P. 213, splint coal

is "a hard coal that will not break into small pieces when handled or shipped....It makes a good coal for domestic use and for locomotives and hard-stoked steam boilers. It ships well and stocks well...."

21. The Short family's Harlan County progenitor was probably James Short, ne 1804, in Washington County, Virginia
22. Anna Mae Chivers, a Pack Horse Library carrier, in her WPA manuscript, ca. late 1930s.
23. Chris W. Jones of Evarts, Ky., letter to the author, January 5, 2004
24. Creech had first proposed the name Pine Mountain for the post office that was to bear his family's name.
25. Some say the station and post office were named for Chad Buford, the titular hero of John Fox, Jr's. famous novel "The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come" (1903)
26. Some have pinned this name down to one of the three late nineteenth century Chadwell Nolans of the Poor Fork valley.
27. Laden Station may earlier have been called Zande, equally inexplicable.
28. A.P. release, May 22, 1994
29. The Pine Mountain Settlement School was established in 1913 by Katharine Pettit and Ethel DeLong on a 136 acre site deeded to them by local resident William Creech. Its school, sixteen bed hospital, poultry and dairy farm, community center, and social agency made it one of the country's largest and most influential rural service institutions.
30. Leslie's Imlay site was later served by the transfer of its Helton post office.
31. See James C. Klotter's entry on Imlay in The Kentucky Encyclopedia, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992, P. 451
32. The Kentucky Encyclopedia, 1992, P. 67

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