

A BRIEF HISTORY
of
HENSLEY SETTLEMENT

by

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RESOURCE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

I. Background and Land Ownership

Nestled comfortably atop Brush Mountain in the southeast Cumberland range sets Hensley Settlement. The community was located on the R. M. Bales survey of 508 acres which was purchased by Burton Hensley as part of a 2,000 acre parcel of land he purchased in Bell County, Kentucky, May 4, 1903. Mr. Hensley didn't live on Brush Mountain. He sold 100 acres to his son Andrew Jackson Hensley, 5 acres to his son Albert and 38.2 acres to Sherman Hensley and divided the rest of the land among his 16 children, giving each the 16th part or 21 acres apiece.

The people who came to live in Hensley Settlement were of English and Scotch-Irish descent according to J. Emerson Miller, a local genealogist. The first record of a Hensley living in Kentucky was Lewis Hensley who came to Knox County in 1782, soon after the Wilderness Road was widened for wagon traffic. He married Nancy Hoard, September 1, 1803 and apparently Lewis made frequent trips to North Carolina, his former home, because most of his children were born there. Samuel Hensley, Lewis's eldest son was born in 1805. He had a number of children, among them Washington, who was born about 1809 and was the second son. He married Ruth Edwards, born about 1815. Their children were Burton, Wilson, Mary, Washington, Henry, Nicy, James Madison, Josephua. From this family came most of the people who lived at Hensley. James Madison Hensley, born 1849, married Arena Helton, born about 1852. Among other children they had Sherman Hensley and Josephua.

Joesephua leased land in the settlement area in 1901 and farmed there until 1904 or 1905 when Burton's children moved in to occupy the land. He was the first Hensley to live at Hensley Settlement. Other lessees on the land were John Nicols, Bill Satterfield, Frank Hunly, and Jim Nelson who had been living on the land for five years, clearing it and building dwellings.

Sherman was married to Nicey Ann Hensley on March 21, 1901. They lived on Wallins Creek in Harlan County for two years and then moved to Hensley Settlement in 1903. Sherman moved in on 59 acres, the parcel he had purchased and the 21 acres which Nicey Ann had received from her father. Sherman, when he first arrived, moved into the house the Jim Nelson family had vacated when they moved out.

Nancy Hensley, daughter of Andrew Jackson, married Willie Gibbons who purchased 42 acres January 20, 1908 from James and Lucy Gibbons and 50 acres from his father-in-law, Jack Hensley on January 22, 1908. He eventually owned a total of 113 acres.

Sherman Hensley and Willie Gibbons might be referred to as the patriarchs of Hensley Settlement. Sherman moved to the mountain community in 1903 and stayed there until 1951, when he gave title to his land to Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. Willie Gibbons moved on the mountain in 1904 and lived there until 1948 when he moved down to Brownies Creek, Kentucky.

The period of the Hensley community time that will be covered in this report will be 1904 to 1943 when the Settlement was most active. According to Jess Gibbons, the population^{of} the community averaged around 65. Hassie Hensley, daughter of Sherman, remembers 53 people living in the Settlement in 1921 and recalls the following families: Boss Hensley (5) Tom Hensley (3),

Gib (5) Bert (6), Jack (5), Sherman (11) and John Saylor (4), Willie Gibbons (6), Lige Gibbons (5) and Frank Gibbons (3). This number may have varied up and down. Estimates have been given as high as 200 persons living there but the taped interviews obtained from the people who lived there do not bear this out.

The buildings built at Hensley were intended for use and not for show. Every building was built of logs, primarily chestnut. The roofs were covered with boards rived from white oak--which were also used to keep the wind from blowing in through the chinking between the logs. A listing of the buildings at the Settlement shows the Willie Gibbons farm had a woodshed, a hog house, a dwelling, barn, granary, smoke house, hen house, out house, spring house, and apple hole. The Sherman Hensley place had a dwelling, corn crib, hen house, barn and outhouse. Bert Hensley had a dwelling house, smoke house, barn, granary, hog house and outhouse. Lige Gibbons' place had a dwelling, barn, hen house, corn crib and outhouse. These listings are representative of the farms at Hensley.

There were four school houses at Hensley which were used during the time Hensley was occupied--Chimney Rock School, Chadwell's Gap School, Brush Mountain School Number One and Brush Mountain Number Two.

Campbell Gibbons, brother of Lige, operated a grist mill which was located 300 yards due northeast of Tom Cupp's cabin on Martins Fork. Another mill was built by the men at Hensley for common use, which was built on Shillalagh Creek in 1908.

II. Mountain Culture

The home life of the mountain people was simple, in keeping with the rugged life they led. Their houses were generally one or two room buildings, composed of a kitchen and bedroom, or combined sitting room and bedroom.

The furniture would be straight or ladder backed chairs, possibly home made with the tables generally having shaped boards for tops and the benches being rounded boards flattened or hewed with a broad axe. A step stove, if owned, would be used for cooking and a fire place for heat in the kitchen. Generally there would be two all purpose cabinets, one to hold dishes and one for canned goods. There would be no refrigeration or ice box in the house so in the wintertime foods which needed preserving would be kept in the food cabinet. In the spring or summertime, these foods would be kept in the spring house or down at the spring. The kitchen table would be a utility board, used for everything from ironing to rolling out biscuits.

The sitting room would have a fireplace and depending on the size of the family, an iron bed or day bed sitting in the corner, little if any decoration on the walls. Straight backed rockers and chairs would be placed in front of the fireplace for visiting in the wintertime, and on the porch or around the front door for summer socializing. There would be a small table or two to hold the hand cranked Victrola or battery radio, if owned, and possibly a book or two. The Bible and a clock might be placed on the mantle. There would probably be a gun rack over the door for holding the family arsenal or maybe the guns would simply be stacked in a corner. The floor, invariably of puncheon construction, would always be clean with no covering.

Beds would make up the entire furniture of the bedroom with the exception of a dresser. These beds would probably be of iron, or of wood if homemade, with straw tick mattresses. Heavy covers such as quilts would be used to cover the beds because mountain cabins were not insulated or heated.

Farming would be the major function of the family, with most of the food being consumed by the family, with none to be wasted. Any surplus of vegetable or fruit was canned or otherwise preserved for a later time. The main crop raised on the place would be corn because it was the best of all-purpose grain. It could be served as a vegetable, ground to make corn meal, used for moonshine or corn liquor if the maker had the taste or inclination, and made good feed for the stock. Other grains raised would be oats and millet, both of them cut like hay and stored in the barn. The grasses raised for hay would be Timothy, Lespedeza, Red Top, and Orchard grass. Cane would be raised to make sorghum molasses for sweetening. Soybeans were also a minor crop. One of the most important parts of the farm was the vegetable garden because the food grown in the summer would have to last them through the winter season until the garden could be made to produce again. The main vegetables which were grown were potatoes--both sweet and Irish--onions (Lige Gibbons said his soil grew particularly good onions), peppers, turnips, rutabagas, peas, beans of all types (old time Fall, Northern, Pinto, Yellow-eyed and greasy), cabbages, tomatoes, rhubarb. Strawberries and gooseberries were raised in some gardens. Along with the garden they would also raise an orchard.

This orchard would have apple trees of the following hardy varieties: black Ben Davis, red Ben Davis, lock apple, and a paw paw apple. Some peaches

would be raised also in the mountain farmers grove, also some plum trees.

Animals used and kept on the place would be a mule because mules worked the best and did not require the pampering a horse did. The mule would be friend, transportation, and all purpose tool for clearing, plowing and cultivating the ground. The livestock would be a cow for milk and hogs for fattening. Cows would seldom be butchered because beef was hard to preserve. Pork could be smoked, sugar cured, or salted so more hogs were kept on mountain farms than cows. Depending on the size of the place, a certain number of sheep would be raised because they required care and money could be made from the wool. A few chickens would be kept on the place, just enough to keep the family in eggs and meat. There wasn't always room to keep any extra animals on a small mountain farm.

Wild game was a small part of the mountain people's diet. Rabbit, coon, some wild turkey, and squirrels would be the major small animals taken. Deer would be shot if possible, but there were never that many deer around.

Besides the game taken from the forest, the woodlands furnished the mountaineer with his medicines: ginseng, pennyroyal, catnip, etc.; his desserts in season: blackberries, huckleberries, and wild strawberries; and his building materials. The mountaineer lived in close relationship to his natural surroundings.

III. Farming Methods

Corn, oats, millet, hay, cane, sorghum, and soybeans were the major crops planted on the mountain farms. The corn was tended in the following way:

"Well, when you are going to tend a field of corn you first take your team and a turning plow and plow it. Then you take a drag harrow, we didn't have no disk harrow, we would take an old drag harrow and harrow it up good and work your ground up good. Then you would take your single plow and lay it off, drop your corn in there and cover it and if you wanted to use fertilize you put your fertilize in with your corn when you planted it. Well, when it got up, say three or four inches high, and you'd plow your corn, you go twice to the row a plowin' it. We would always plow it about three times, then you was done with it till your fodder got ripe, ready to take care of."

The rows of corn and the hills of corn would be planted about 38 inches apart.

The corn would be planted around the first of May and harvested in October or November. After the fodder was cut they would let it stay in the field till the ears dried out good and then gather it and put it in a crib.

Hay was tended in the following way:

"You just have to plow your ground up and fix it good and if it was grass, you sowed your grass, you'd take a harrow and harrow it in and take a drag or we had a roller, roll over it and level it down till you could mow over it good. If it was in pretty good shape, a drag would fix it but if it was pretty soddy you would put the roller to it and roll it back down tight. We could get a mowing machine over it then."

They would harvest the hay in June or July and put it up in the barn loft. Anything that wouldn't fit in the loft was stacked.

The cattle fed from this feed would be two to three milk cows, five or six head of dry cattle or yearlings, a team of mules and a horse. The milk cows would be Jersey or Guernsey and the beef cattle would be Herefords and Aberdeen Angus. There would be a service bull kept there on the mountain

by Sherman or Bert Hensley or Willie Gibbons. Sherman Hensley had a Red Poll, Bert Hensley had a Hereford, and Willie Gibbons, an Aberdeen Angus. The older stock would be traded off for younger animals. The milk cows received better feed than the dry cows. They would be fed corn while the dry cows would be fed hay. Fifteen or twenty acres were set aside for pasture for the cattle. The fields were divided in seven, eight or nine acres and the cattle would be moved from one field to another. The cattle would be kept in the barn in the wintertime and taken to water once or twice a day. The months they would be kept in the barn were December through April. There would most generally be three milk cows, a yearling or two, and mules and horses. Salt would be kept in boxes in the barn and rocks of salt would be kept in the pasture for the stock. The cows would be milked at 5:00 o'clock in the evening and 6:30 in the morning. Enough milk was provided for ten people in the family and any extra was fed to the hogs.

Hogs were let free to run on the mountain. Willie Gibbons would sometimes have as many as eighty hogs. The breeds he kept were mostly Duroc and Poland China. The Duroc was a red color while the Poland China would be black and white. The hogs would stay close to the farm during the winter because of the feed thrown to them, but the rest of the year they would run the mountain. Each farmer on the mountain would have his own mark to distinguish hogs from others. The hogs to be fattened would be kept up about the first of November and fattened till about Christmas. About six hogs would be slaughtered every year, butchered and hung in the slaughter house. When the hogs contracted hog cholera they would be vaccinated by Ben Risner, Page, Kentucky till some one at the settlement learned the process. The hogs were allowed

to run loose on the mountain and so were the sheep.

Southdown sheep was the common brand kept on the mountain. They would be allowed to run free except in the wintertime when they would be kept in a sheep barn. The Gibbons most generally kept thirty or thirty-five head of sheep. They would shear them in the spring of the year about May, and in the fall, about September. Some wool would be used to make clothes but most would be sold at Cumberland Gap. Hogs took care of themselves on the mountain very well but sheep were in danger from dogs.

The Orchard.

Very little care was given to the orchard except for trimming. The trees would be trimmed in March. If an old tree was not producing it would be taken out and a young one would be used to replace it. The trees were planted forty feet apart. No special care was given to the trees except trimming or replacement.

The garden was put in what was considered to be a good spot. Barn litter was used to fertilize it. This would be spread on the ground in February and March. If potatoes were grown in one spot one year, they would be rotated the next. The garden would be hoed and cultivated every week or two until you had worked it three times. Seeds for the garden would be mostly kept through the winter. P otato bugs and bean bugs were the only notable pests to bother the garden but apparently there were no other special types of diseases.

Paling fences were used to keep larger animals and chickens out of the garden. Rail fences/^{were} used to fence pasture and fields because they were easily moved and set in place again. Stone fences were erected where they were apt to need permanent fencing such as boundaries. Hog wire was used to fence in pigs which were being fed but no barbed wire was used at Hensley.

IV. Description of Willie Gibbons and Lige Gibbons Farm.

Willie Gibbons born _____ 19, 1871, son of Joseph and Nancy Hensley, daughter of Andrew Jackson Hensley, Burton's son. Willie Gibbons purchased 92 acres January 20 and 22, 1908. From the time he moved up on the mountain he raised 7 sons and 3 daughters who helped him on the farm. The Willie Gibbons' farm was composed of 92 acres of rolling terrain. His son, Lige Gibbons farmed with his father but did not own any land. The farm was composed of two large fields located west of the cemetery, two fields south of the schoolhouse, a field in back of the present house, one north of the barn and some acreage on the west side of Shillalagh Branch. The Willie Gibbons place was the largest farm at Hensley Settlement. Willie was the blacksmith and the carpenter for the settlement. It is thought that he assisted in building most of the sizeable dwellings and barns at Hensley.

The buildings that Willie Gibbons put on his place were the house which was built once in an L-shape, was then torn down, and rebuilt in its present location. The outbuildings included the barn, granary, smoke house, hen house, outhouse, spring house, woodshed, blacksmith shop, and sheep barn. The barn was also torn down, moved to its present location, and enlarged.

Lige Gibbons had a house, barn, hen house, corn crib, hog pen, and outhouse built around his farm.

Grant Hensley, son of Bert Hensley, a son of Andrew Jackson Hensley, married Josie Gibbons, Willie's daughter and lived on Willie's place also.

In a community where everyone worked together it was recognized that Willie Gibbons and his family were hardworking, honest people.

The Gibbons' homelife was built largely around the farm and the work that needed to be done. There were 113 acres to be tilled and cared for and the chores for a farm that size kept Willie and Nancy Gibbons and their ten children busy. The boys worked the fields, did the chores and the heavy work while the daughters helped in the home, worked the garden, and did the light work around the place. Mr. Gibbons ran his farm, did blacksmith work as needed, and carpentry work.

The amount of crops produced on the place were plentiful considering the primitive conditions under which they were farming. According to Jess Gibbons, they would farm 15 or 16 acres of corn and raise 200 to 300 bushels. Eight or nine acres in hay, millet and soy beans would net them two ton and a half of feed or a hundred or two hundred bales of hay. Twenty or twenty-five bushel of potatoes, five to seven bushel of onions and thirty or forty gallon of strawberries would be grown in the garden for notable amounts produced. The garden also produced sweet potatoes, peppers, turnips, rutabagas, peas, beans of all types, cabbages, tomatoes, rhubarb, cushaw, squash and parsnips. Every person who lived on the mountain said it was a fine place to grow vegetables. The vegetables from the garden and fruit from the orchard suitable for canning would be preserved.

The orchard produced 75 or 80 bushels of apples in a good year and one exceptional year the peach orchard produced 200 bushel.

There would be fifteen or twenty stands of bees on the place but they didn't have good success with their bees.

The hogs furnished the Gibbons' with most of their meat. Five or six would be fattened and slaughtered each year, salted, cured and left to hang in

the smokehouse. An occasional sheep would be killed for the mutton but very seldom. Very few beef cattle were ever butchered at Hensley because beef would not keep well for long periods of time. Three milk cows would keep the family supplied with milk and there would still be some left to slop the "feeder" hogs.

Farming Methods. When Willie Gibbons moved on the land he had to clear vegetation away before he could put in a crop. He would clear 3 or 4 acres at a time and plant it in corn or whatever he needed. In this manner by the time he left Hensley he had cleared seventy-five acres. Also, as livestock was increased, more land would be cleared or if land were worn out and more was needed.

In clearing the land, cross cut saw and mattox were used on small vegetation. Big trees were usually deadened by banding. If they couldn't kill them they would have to cut them down. After the trees had been brushed, the brush would be burned and the trees if they were not of use.

The size of the fields as they were usually, would be 15 acres in corn, 30 acres in pasture field. These fields would be separated by fence. These would be divided again into plots of eight, nine, ten acres. The field up by the cemetery was said to be the best field they had for growing corn. This field laying south of the cemetery had 16 acres in it. When a field was cleaned up for a special purpose, 7 or 8 acres would be cleaned and then a rail fence would be put up to serve as a divider. The field across from the house was always sowed in grass to mow into hay. The orchard would be one-half acre and lay in back of the house.

The fencing used on the Gibbons farm was rail fencing, mostly chestnut rails and some oak rails. There were some stone fences built on the back side of the farm, around the fields in back of the cemetery. These fences would be trimmed in the fall of the year, the grass and small stuff would be cleaned with a brier scythe and mattock. The big stuff would be cut with an axe. No barbed wire alone was used on the Gibbons' place but some web wire was used with a strand of barbed wire set on top of it all. The web wire would be about thirty-eight or forty inches tall with locust posts used to stretch it.

The type of crops raised on the Gibbons place reflect accurately the same crops grown by others on the land. The types of hay grown were red clover, orchard grass, timothy and Korenna clover. The corn was described as a small grained corn, similar to today's hybrid. It was a white corn with blue speckled grains around through it, with an occasionally completely blue ear. Soy beans, millet, cane and oats were grown but oats were too much trouble so they were not a regular crop. Willie Gibbons planted a small patch of tobacco for his own use, 25 feet wide and 200 feet long. The methods of harvesting and cultivating these crops is described in Section 2 - Farming methods.

The care of livestock is described in Section 3 - Farming methods.

Twenty-five or thirty chickens would be kept. These would be Dominoes, Wyandottes, Rhode Island Reds, and Leghorns. Mrs. Gibbons kept some geese, a few domestic turkey and some ducks.

Three dogs were kept on the place, two coon dogs and a squirrel dog. These dogs would be trained to hunt and catch hogs but they would chase horses or cattle if needed. The dogs were no distinguishable breed, half beagle and half cur. The dogs were called feists and curs.

There would be three or four cats around the place, no special type, an old gray cat or maybe a black and white one. The cats were used for catching rats and mice in the barn. Milk would be left in a pan for them at the barn and the dogs would be fed scraps from the table.

Orchard and vegetable garden care are covered in Section III.

V. OTHER

Forest uses were many at Hensley because they relied so heavily on the woods around them. Chestnut was used for constructing buildings because it grew straighter and it was easy to work. Locust was used for fence posts because of its sturdiness. Anything would be used for fire wood.

Black walnuts, chestnuts, huckleberries, blackberries and hickory nuts would be used for food supplements.

Oak, white oak, red oak, or chestnut oak would be used to make palings.

Wildlife in Area. Raccoons, skunks, ground hogs and rabbits were prevalent small animals there around the farm. There were bob cats around but seldom proved to be a problem. There were no deer but there were some wild turkey.

Predatory birds were the "squirrel hawk" and black hawk that would get after the chickens.

Jess kept a coon as a pet for some time.

Coons, squirrels, rabbits, and wild turkey were the game most hunted.

Apparently the wildlife at Hensley would be a nuisance but necessarily a threat.

Exotic plants. Exotic plants brought to Hensley were mainly flowers, roses, snow ball bushes and different types of other flowers.