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I have owned a pair of first-printing books, neither of which will ever make the best-seller list. They relate to the history and people of the area of Tennessee famous for the Bell Witch story, and I had them because my mother's ancestors were very early settlers of that area. One of the books is by Ralph Winters of Clarksville, and is entitled "Historical Sketches of Adams and Fort Royal, Tennessee". It is a crudely-written compilation of the history of that area and the people who lived that history. The other is a purely genealogical tome entitled "A Family Called Fort" by Homer T. Fort and Drucilla S. Jones. It is fairly well-written, as genealogical works go, but only those with family connections would have any interest in it. Unless it would be some historian, like William Turner. I had perused them both rather casually when I first bought them, but no more than that. Then when my mother passed away in early December, I was prompted to look more closely into her background and that look gave me the inspiration for this Athenaeum paper. The title I have chosen is "Bell Witch (or whatever) Country".

My mother was born Elizabeth Bell Fort in Springfield, Tennessee, and was descended from Pioneer stock of that area of the Volunteer State. Her middle name, Bell, was from the family supposed to have been tormented by Kate, known as the Bell Witch. Betsy Bell, who bore the brunt of Kate's wrath, was my mother's great-great Aunt. Relax; this is not a story about the Bell Witch. We have heard enough of them in Athenaeum papers. Rather, it is the story of the

area in which it happened, or is supposed to have happened, and the people who played a part in the history of that area. I present the paper against a background of family involvement. This involvement cannot be avoided, but we will try to hold it to a minimum. The area was fascinating to me, and I hope it will be for you. With that, let us look at the Bell Witch country, otherwise known as Adams, Tennessee and outlying areas.

The story begins with the establishment of North Carolina. That state's holding originally extended far to the west of the present state boundary, similar to Virginia's land which is now Kentucky. The area had been explored but not settled and was known as Cumberland County, North Carolina. By 1773, Nashville had been settled and the new County of Davidson was established, still North Carolina.

By 1788, all of the affected area of what is now Tennessee west of Sumner County was designated Tennessee County, North Carolina. Then in 1790, North Carolina ceded all of what is now Tennessee to the United States and it was given the status of Territory. William Blount of Knoxville was appointed Territorial Governor of the new "Territory South of the River Ohio".

The settlement of the Adams area itself was begun in the early 1780's. The first known deed was to 640 acres surrounding the point where Sulphur Fork Creek merges with the Red River. This was where Port Royal, such as it is, is located. It was natural

that settlement should begin on a river, because water offered the best avenue of transportation for the wilderness. The land was deeded to Thomas Fletcher and George Francisco. The Fletcher name is still common in the area. I make no claim to have established family ties, but it is possible that this Fletcher has connections with Sory Fletcher of Hopkinsville. Winters writes of a conversation with a Mrs. Ben Sory of Clarksville, and there are records of several Storys in the Adams area, most of them doctors.

George Francisco did not fare well. By 1794, Thomas Fletcher had died and Francisco could not pay the taxes on the land. Taxes were important then as they are now, and on July 31, 1794, the Sheriff of Tennessee County sold 290 acres of this tract, all lying south of Sulphur Fork Creek, to settle the debt. The proceeds are not known, but the new owner's name was Samuel Wilcox.

The Wilcox family had been engaged in iron-making in Cardiff Wales. They had moved from there to Port Royal France, and from there to Port Royal, North Carolina. When they moved to Tennessee, it was natural to call the settlement Port Royal when it was incorporated on October 25, 1797. Other settlers in the area included William Prince, arriving in 1782,

and the Elias Fort Family in 1791. More on these later; let us return to the evolution of the area from wilderness to civilization.

On July 11, 1795, the United States Congress passed an act calling for an "enumeration" of the people in the Territory South of the River Ohio to determine if it were eligible for statehood. The enumeration showed 77,262 residents, well over the minimum of 60,000.

Governor Blount issued a proclamation recommending that the eleven counties of the Territory, Tennessee County among them, select five men each to meet in Knoxville on January 11, 1796, to draw up a Constitution. He further recommended that the Sheriffs of these counties hold an election on December 18 and 19 to select these delegates. Tennessee County had 1,941 inhabitants at the time, and they duly elected their representatives. They were: Thomas Johnson, William Fort (brother of Elias), William Prince, James Ford, and Robert Prince.

One provision of the Act calling for the convention was that the members of the Convention would receive \$2.50 per day and a travel allowance of \$1.00 for each 30 miles traveled, both to and from the meeting. Obviously, it was not for the money that these five men mounted their horses and rode 240 miles through the wilderness, in winter, to Knoxville.

The convention opened January 11 on schedule and the 55 members got down to the business at hand. On January 12, they adopted the

5

following Resolution: Resolved: That \$1.50 per day to every member is a sufficient compensation for his services in the convention, and that \$1.00 for every 30 miles they travel in coming to and returning from the convention, and that the members pledge themselves each one to the other that they will not draw a greater sum out of the public treasury.

According to my figures, the five representatives from Tennessee County were paid a total of \$55.00 each for their part in creating the State of Tennessee. The State certainly got a bargain, if you compare that to the pay of legislators today.

Also on January 12, the convention decided that each county should select two of its members to actually draft the Constitution. Tennessee County selected William Fort and Thomas Johnson. The group set to work and on February 6, 1796, the Constitution was signed by each person attending the Convention.

What kind of people were those who gave so much in return for so little? Some things are known about the men who served from Tennessee County. Their lives had no small impact on the area and the county.

Thomas Johnson was a surveyor who lived at Springfield. He was the first Clerk of the Robertson County Court. Robertson County was carved from the old Tennessee County. Thomas was an unsuccessful candidate for Governor of Tennessee in 1819. His son, Cave Johnson,

6

was Postmaster General under President James K. Polk. It was during his tenure as Postmaster General that the use of postage stamps was begun.

William Fort came from Edgecombe County, North Carolina to Nashville in 1790 as a part of the Fort family migration. In Knoxville, the party employed General Andrew Jackson to guard their passage over the Cumberland Mountains. The family moved to the Port Royal area in 1792. William was Chairman of the first Robertson County Court and served in the Tennessee legislature. Family tradition has it that he actually penned the first Constitution. His will mentions "my friend Andrew Jackson". His nephew, twice removed, married John Bell's grand-daughter.

William Prince moved to Port Royal from Spartanburg, South Carolina in 1782. He was a charter member of the Red River Baptist Church and it met for a time in his meeting house. In 1797, he moved to Caldwell County, Kentucky, where Princeton was named for him. He was a founder of Eddy Grove Baptist Church in Caldwell County, thereby having a part in forming two churches, one town, and one state.

James Ford came from South Carolina and served in the Territorial Legislature prior to statehood. He was apparently a wealthy man, as a \$20,000 bond was required of his estate administrator when he died in 1808.

Robert Prince was perhaps a brother of William. He was a

sheriff of Tennessee County and held other offices in Tennessee and Montgomery Counties.

The settlement of the area came about because of the river for transportation of goods to market. Let us now trace the transportation system as it developed. Flatboats, actually log rafts, were built during summer and fall. Goods, including tobacco and other products, were loaded to wait for high water. When it came, two men would board each raft and they would head south via the Cumberland, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers. Barring accident and Indian raids, they would wind up in New Orleans ^{where} ~~were~~ the goods would be sold. The raft would also be sold for lumber, horses bought and the long trek back through the wilderness would be made.

In 1818, the first steamboat came to Clarksville on the Cumberland River. This opened a new avenue for commerce from the Adams-Port Royal area, as the goods had only to get to Clarksville via the Red River.

The Red River was declared by Congress to be a navigable stream and it was cleaned up to allow passage of steamboats. In the 1840's, stock was sold to build a silk mill in Port Royal. Clarksville was jealous of this and got Congress to repeal the Act, meaning that the Red River was no longer officially navigable and therefore, unsuitable for use by steamboats. For this reason, and others, the silk mill bubble burst and the mill was not built. Clarksville did help

8

to get the Red River Act re-enacted, and it became officially navigable again.

After the Civil War, the people thought that the railroads were charging too much, so a move was made to clear Red River again. Citizens of the area worked through the winter of 1878 to get the job done. On March 4, 1879, the entire population of Port Royal gathered to meet the Steamboat Matt Gracey. It finally arrived at 9:00 PM, after having had trouble navigating some bends and sandbars in the Red River.

A front page ad in the Clarksville Chronicle of the time touted a trip on the Matt Gracey. It left Clarksville at 9:00 AM on Tuesday and left Port Royal at 7:00 AM on Wednesday for the return trip. We do not know how long the steamer plied the Red River.

At one time, there was a stagecoach route through Port Royal. It was the main route from Nashville to the Ohio River, and we know little else about it.

As roads were built in the area, it became necessary to cross the rivers by some easier method than fording. Ferries sprang up, but bridges needed to be built. Sulphur Creek was spanned in 1842 at a cost of \$3,000. This bridge was washed away during the flood of 1847. It was replaced in 1859, by a bridge costing \$4,000. This sum was raised partly by public subscription. This bridge was washed away in 1866, to be replaced by the present bridge in 1888.

A bridge was built over the Red River in the 1850's. It too

9

was destroyed by the flood of 1866. The river remained unspanned for 37 years, with crossings made by fording or ferrying. In 1903, the County Court awarded a contract to J.C. McMillan to build a new bridge. The contract was for \$5000.

The bridge was nearly 200 feet long and about 40 feet high. The structure was supported on two stone pillars, one on each side of the river. The finished bridge was to have no support between these pillars, but during construction wooden poles and bracework was used to support the structure.

The basic construction work had been completed, and finish work was in progress when Mr. McMillan ordered the temporary supports taken out. Before this job was fully completed, he decided that in the interest of safety, the workmen should not be on the bridge when it assumed the total support of its weight. He ordered his men off of the bridge. Mr. Walter Jolly, one of the workmen, had more faith and he continued to work on the structure. The biggest news story ever to come out of Port Royal, Tennessee, was about to happen.

On December 7, 1903, shortly before 2:30 PM, the bridge fell without warning. Four men were on the bridge at the time. They were: the confident foreman Walter Jolly; one very unlucky Will

Wooldridge, a teen-aged sidewalk superintendent; John Henry Farmer, and Les Bird. Wooldridge was badly injured and died at about 4:30 that day. Jolly's thigh was broken. Farmer sustained a badly broken right leg and was badly bruised, so much so that the doctors did not set his leg because they thought he was going to die. After a few days he was still alive, but he would not permit the doctors to set the leg because it was so painful. As a result, the leg healed, but it was three or four inches shorter than the left leg. Farmer lived another 55 years, walking on the short leg.

Mr. McMillan determined that two cast iron plates holding the vertical bolts in place had broken, allowing the bridge to fall. He also declared that the bridge would be rebuilt. It was rebuilt as a covered bridge, being completed in 1904. It is not known if McMillan built that bridge, or if he was paid for the one that fell. The new bridge was much more successful, for it still stands today. It is not in use today, but is an historical site preserved by the Tennessee Heritage Commission. The concrete bridge in use today was built in 1955.

This paper was conceived as a story of the Adams-Port Royal area of Tennessee. So far, we have slighted Adams, albeit unintentionally. Adams is the largest town in the area. Its first name was Red River Station because of the railway station there. When a post office was located there, the name was changed to Adams Station, after the Adams family who owned land in the area. I am prepared to trace the

history of the post office in Adams from day one until now, but that will be the subject of another paper. If it is ever written, I would not have the gall to read it. Following George Boon's lead, I would let someone else read it.

Adams was first incorporated on November 10, 1869, by the Tennessee Legislature. The corporation limits were established as 120 rods in each direction from the center of the depot. Whether this describes a circular limit or a square one is not clear. The first charter was later repealed. A second charter was obtained, but it was "surrendered". The present charter was issued in 1909. Adams is a young town, compared to Port Royal. But the town kept up with the times, at least better than did Port Royal. One of the first acts passed in 1909 was a revenue bill establishing privilege license fees, some of which were:

Wild West Shows	\$10.00
Moving Picture Shows	20.00
Flying Jennies	2.50
Hotels and taverns	.50 per room
Livery Stables	.50 per stall
Lightning Rod Agents	10.00
Undertakers	5.00
Soda fountains	2.50
Feather renovators	300.00

We were unable to determine what a feather renovator was. From the fees charged, the value of the horse in 1909 was obvious; the per stall charge was the same as the per room charge for hotels and taverns.

One of the oldest organizations in Adams is the Red River Baptist Church. We believe that its history is worthy of note, as opposed to that of the Post Office.

On July 25, 1791, twelve people of the area along with missionaries John Taylor and Ambrose Dudley organized the "Red River Baptist Church of Christ." The meeting was held at the mouth of Sulphur Fork Creek in the settlement of Port Royal. On July 27, six more people joined and in this meeting it was agreed that "Moses Winters and his wife should be given the opportunity to offer themselves to this church." They rose to the opportunity and became members on August 25.

In 1793, Elias Fort moved to Port Royal from North Carolina, after a brief stay in Nashville. He had been clerk of the church in North Carolina, and for some reason brought the record book of that church with him to Tennessee. He became clerk of the Red River church, probably because he had (1) experience and (2) a record book. This was a wilderness and there were no bookstores from which to purchase a new book. So, Elias turned the other record book over and wrote from the back. Thirty-five years of records are in this book, which is in the vault of the Baptist Historical Commission in Nashville. I am a direct descendant of Elias Fort.

The early church was very strict. To be absent from a meeting one time was cause to be cited for non-attendance. One person, sister Lettuce Pope, was finally turned out of the church after being cited

13 times. From the records, member Hugh Lewis had expressed "some very liberal views", and on March 17, 1798, Moses Winters was appointed to talk to Lewis and cite him to the next meeting. Moses, unfortunately, got sick and died before he could accomplish this charge. Lewis' case came up on several occasions and he was finally excommunicated.'

The church's early meetings were held at Brother William Prince's meeting house. This was the William Prince mentioned earlier. By 1800, the Fort family had acquired most of the land on both sides of the Red River between Sulphur Fork Creek and Elk Fork Creek. Travel was difficult then, and in order to make the church more accessible to non-Forts, it was decided to move the meetings closer to Adams, where there were more possible candidates for membership. And who were not necessarily named Fort.

The first meetings were held at Forts Meeting House on May 30, 1801. The house was located just north of what is now Tennessee 76, southwest of Adams. The building was referred to in the records as the "New Meeting House". It was apparently lacking in some amenities, for several winter meetings were "adjourned to the home of E. (for Epaphroditus, known as Eppa) Lawson."

The church prospered, to the extent that the church agreed on June 17, 1814 "that the White Male Members pay the treasurer 50¢ per year for defraying church expenses."

With growth came the desire for a building of its own and in 1816, the church appointed a committee to investigate the costs of

various types of buildings. The committee acted, and on May 17, 1817, the record reads "The Commission reported the building ready. The church agreed that the commissioners go on and have a low division made in the southeast corner which is allotted to the Negroes. Also to have the house filled with new benches and a new pulpit. One door with lock and key, the other bolted inside."

In 1869, it was decided to move the meeting place still closer to the population center, to Adams, thinking that the church would do better. The first service was held in the new building in Adams in June 1872. Note that with more sophistication came a longer time between decision and completion. The new church was of frame construction.

In 1893, a brick building was constructed, again in Adams. It was remodeled in 1928, and an educational plant was added. The church still meets in that building. It is interesting to note that there was a person named Fort in the charter group, and there has been a Fort on each committee which moved, built, or remodeled the church.

Wouldn't it be interesting to know the reactions of the 12 people who gathered in 1791 to form the church if they were to be told that the church would still be in existence 189 years later?

It is now time to draw this paper to a close. I alluded earlier to the Bell Witch who tormented the John Bell family. I will take the liberty of tracing this family in the area, and will close with

that.

John Bell was born in Halifax County, North Carolina in 1750 and married Lucy Williams. In 1804, the family moved to the Adams area and bought land north of Adams. Tradition has it that John Bell died practically destitute, after having been tormented and after having served as gracious host to hundreds of people who attempted to see, hear, or do away with Kate. This tradition is apparently not so, for records of the estate settlement indicate that 4,000 pounds of bacon were sold as part of the settlement.

John and Lucy had 9 children, some of them born in North Carolina and some in Tennessee. Three of them complicated the family tree. The oldest child, Jesse, married Martha Gunn, daughter of Rev. Thomas Gunn, a Methodist minister. John Bell, Jr., the third child, married Elizabeth Gunn, also a daughter of Rev. Thomas Gunn, but a half-sister to Martha. Richard Williams Bell, the eighth child, really loused things up. He first married Sallie Gunn, a full sister to Martha. His second wife was Susan Gunn, daughter of Rev. James Gunn, brother of Thomas. Susan was therefore a first cousin to his first wife. Richard was, remarkably, the only person to write down the alleged happenings related to the Bell Witch story, and then after years had passed. He referred to them as "Our Family's Trouble".

Elizabeth "Betsy Bell" was born seventh. It was her love for Joshua Gardner that supposedly enraged Kate, the Bell Witch, and led to the Family Troubles. Betsy eventually married Professor Richard Powell, who kept a large school in the settlement and a large eye on Betsy, whom he had taught. They moved to Mississippi after they married, thereby dropping from the narrative.

The ninth child of John and Lucy Bell was Joel Egbert. He married Wilmoth Edwards and they had three children. One of these, Miranda, married a James K. Polk, not the president. President Polk was related to the story as he came from the Fort lineage, but not through direct descendancy. Miranda and James K. produced a daughter, Belle Virginia Polk (Belle spelled with an extra E), who married Eppa Lawson Fort, a descendant of the Eppa Lawson mentioned in the church narrative. Gratefully, by this time the Epaphroditus had been cut to Eppa. Eppa Lawson Fort was my maternal great-grandfather, which makes John Bell my great-great-great-great grandfather.

The story of the Bell Witch, true or not, came from the Adams-Port Royal area of Tennessee. We have tried to describe the background against the Trouble happened. We found the area history fascinating, and hope that the Society has found this rendition of the history as interesting as the author found the study of a fascinating part of American folklore.