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PILOT ROCK

The title of this paper is Pilot Rock.

Pilot Rock is located about thirteen (13) miles northeast of Hopkinsville on the line between Christian and Todd Counties. The rock rests upon elevated ground and is approximately two hundred feet (200') in height. I always thought Pilot Rock was owned by some governmental entity, but actually it is on a farm owned by George Schlegel, his sister, Marby Schlegel, and their uncle, Morgan Boyd, of North Carolina. They inherited Pilot Rock from Clarence Boyd, the grandfather of George and Marby, and the father of Morgan. George and Marby currently own and operate Farmers Loose Floor and own a large farm on the Pembroke Road. Clarence Boyd was a power in Democratic politics in Christian County for many years. While growing up, I

spent the night with George Schlegel at Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Boyd's home. Mrs. Boyd made the best pancakes I have ever eaten.

During my adolescent and teenage years, I probably climbed to the top of Pilot Rock twelve (12) to fifteen (15) times. Dr. Robert Coleman's farm was located nearby, which I visited with his sons on numerous occasions; and boys being boys we would get someone to take us over to Pilot Rock so we could climb to the top and act mischievously. Later on in my teenage years, boys and girls from Hopkinsville High School would climb to the top of Pilot Rock in an effort to create as romantic a setting as possible. Enough said about that.

Meacham's and Perrin's histories of Christian County both have sections describing Pilot Rock. Meacham's *History of Christian County Kentucky*, written in 1930, describes Pilot Rock as follows:

One of the natural curiosities of Kentucky, is located in the eastern part of the county, near the Todd County line. It is referred to in Collins' History of Kentucky, but not accurately described. Its summit is not level and its area is not as much as half an acre, but it is an elevated crag that towers high above the surrounding landscape. It is approached by an unimproved country road through the woods and for this reason is not accessible at all times. However, the road program of the county provided for in 1929 is expected to improve the road leading to it.

From out of a wooded plain, the rock rises high above the tree tops surrounding it. The road by which it is approached, after a gentle ascent to higher ground in the woods, suddenly comes within the shadow of the great pile of stone rising a hundred feet or more. On the side first seen the rock seems

solid; passing around it on the east, crevices and ledge formations appear. The ground about the base of the rock is a steep incline. On one side we find a rugged pathway by which its summit may be reached and after a toilsome climb, clinging to the ledges and shrubbery on its side, the almost flat, but irregular, top is gained. From this top one looks down on forest trees that reach only half way to where he stands. There is still a higher part than the first broad landing. Climbing over rugged rocks, the very pinnacle is finally reached from which the view is magnificent. The elevation including the hill upon which it stands, a silent sentinel of the passing centuries, is 200 feet above the wooded landscape and one can almost imagine that he can see the spires of Hopkinsville, thirteen miles away. The towering Jefferson Davis shaft, 351 feet high, is easily discernible several miles southward. The soul of the

spectator is filled with the grandeur of the scene. Tradition says the Indians in the old days used the mighty rock as a camping place in their hunt for game and from its top viewed the landscape for miles around. In the crannies and crevices of the rock are found a variety of wild ferns, flowers and shrubbery. Contrary to expectation, the rock's top is not a perfect flat and even surface. It is rough and uneven. There is no place larger than fifteen feet square that can be used for dancing or for dining in the skies. There is, however, a small, flat rock, as large as an ordinary table, that has often been used by picnic parties, with other boulders supplying seats around it. Eighty years ago a work of fiction in which the Pilot Rock played a part described a cave in the rock which was purely imaginary. Aside from its rugged exterior, it is a solid boulder, thrown up by some prehistoric convulsion of nature, unlike any

other feature of the country around it. There are caves in that part of the country, but not under the rock itself.

Near the city of Hopkinsville are two caves important enough to have been explored. One a mile to the east is known as Fleming's Cave. Its entrance is a deep sinkhole and it can be penetrated for hundreds of yards. The other known as Campbell's Cave is about the same distance northeast of the city. Its entrance is on a steep hillside under a great shelving rock, making a chamber fifty feet deep and one hundred feet wide, from which two passages branch in opposite directions that have been explored for considerable distances. It is the belief that there is an underground passage between these caves, too small for explorers to enter. Both of them have been used for pleasure resorts, as springs of cool water are near them. Dances were often held in

**Campbell's Cave and in a pavilion near
Fleming's Cave.**

**Everyone likes a good story even though the truthfulness of
the story cannot always be verified. One such story concerning
Pilot Rock was recently conveyed to me by John P. "Sonny"
Thompson, the owner of Thompson & Perkins Service Station at
4th and Main Streets. Sonny is an avid coin collector and over the
years has gone over a lot of ground in Christian County looking for
coins with a metal detector.**

**My father first started trading with Thompson & Perkins
Service Station in 1946 when he arrived in Hopkinsville to work
with U.S. Tobacco Co. Dad did not have his own car, but he had
the use of the U.S. Tobacco Co. car at that time. I started trading
with Thompson & Perkins in the 1960s when I got my driver's
license and I have continued doing business with Sonny up to the
present date. Thompson & Perkins Service Station has been**

operated at 4th and Main Streets since 1929. Johnnie Thompson and W. T. "Perk" Perkins were the owners. Mr. Perkins died in 1953 and Johnnie Thompson purchased his half of the business, and continued to operate the service station until his retirement in 1968, when he sold it to his son, Sonny Thompson, the present owner and manager. Two of Sonny's sons, Bill and Larry, currently work in the business and represent the third generation of the family to be associated with the station. Past employees include Jesse Vernon Keith, Denton Foster, Tommy Morris, George Grace, Doris Kirkman, Wesley Mabry and Barry Clark.

I am indebted to Sonny for the following story. This story concerns two tobacco farmers, Josh Tucker and Sam Henderson, whose farms were located in the northeast section of Christian County. Just south of the Tucker and Henderson farms was Pilot Rock. According to Sonny, this huge sandstone rock juts upward over one hundred feet (100') above a high ridge and is

approximately two hundred feet (200') in diameter. Access to the top of Pilot Rock is by a narrow rubble-filled crevice.

The year is 1888. Two young brothers, Coy and Clyde Fields, came to that area seeking farm work. Coy Fields was employed by old Josh Tucker. Clyde was hired by Sam Henderson. These two young men lived in the homes of their employers, were quickly accepted by them and came to be treated as members of the two families. The Fields brothers soon learned that Mr. Henderson and Mr. Tucker distrusted banks (obviously they were misguided souls) and kept their money at their homes.

After the Henderson and Tucker tobacco crops were sold, both bringing good prices, Coy Fields overheard Mr. Tucker tell his wife that he was putting the money in a flour barrel with the rest of his life savings. Coy and Clyde Fields immediately concocted a plan to steal Tucker's and Henderson's money and head west with it.

It also seems Clyde Fields had already begun making advances toward Mrs. Henderson, and one day she told him they should run away together to St. Louis. She told Clyde she would give him half of Sam's money if he would take her. The story goes that Mrs. Henderson had tired of farm life and being a farm wife and she longed for the big city lights.

Plans were then completed for the theft and the departure to St. Louis. At midnight, Clyde would meet the faithless Mrs. Henderson at the stable with horses saddled and ready to go. She would bring the money and they would meet Coy at Pilot Rock with Josh Tucker's money from the flour barrel. The time arrived for the meeting at the stable, and Mrs. Henderson showed up with the gold coins in a leather bag. But Clyde Fields, with no idea of taking Mrs. Henderson to St. Louis or anywhere else, took the gold coins, gagged and tied Mrs. Henderson and rode off to Pilot Rock to meet his brother, Coy. However, Mrs. Henderson soon slipped

off the gag on her mouth and screamed like a hyena. During this, big Sam Henderson erupted from the house with his rifle, leaped on his horse and dashed off in hot pursuit of Clyde Fields.

Meanwhile, at Sam Tucker's home, Coy Fields emptied a barrel of flour on the kitchen floor, ran his hands through the flour . . . and found nothing. He poured the contents of the second barrel on the floor and found a sack of gold coins this time. As he got up to depart the house, the bedroom door flew open and old Josh Tucker hollered out, "Who's there?" Absolutely paralyzed with fright, Coy dropped into the mound of flour to try to hide himself. As Josh Tucker turned to light the lamp, Coy broke for the back door with the bundle of coins under his arm. Coy had just turned the corner and disappeared when Josh Tucker fired both barrels of the shotgun at him.

Although it was dark, Coy left a trail of flour as he ran toward Pilot Rock. He had planned to steal a horse, but now there

was no time for that. He found Clyde at Pilot Rock when he arrived. However, there was only one horse and the Fields brothers knew they were in big trouble. They could hear Sam Henderson riding toward them from the north and Josh Tucker coming from the east. They quickly decided to hide the horse in the brush and climb on top of Pilot Rock, hoping that their pursuers would think they had gone toward Hopkinsville. Like most plans of this sort, it didn't work. By the light of the moon, Josh Tucker could see something that looked like flour on the rock sides of the crevice leading up to the top of Pilot Rock. Deducing just what had happened, Henderson and Tucker decided to wait for daylight to nab the two thieves.

They didn't have to wait long before they heard scuffling sounds in the area of the crevice . . . Coy and Clyde had chosen to try to escape under the cover of darkness. Two guns fired point blank at the noise in the crevice, and two bodies tumbled to their

feet. Striking a light, Sam and Josh found both Coy and Clyde stone dead . . . but they did not find their gold coins. When daylight came, they searched everywhere. They searched the top and base of Pilot Rock and back tracked all the way back to their homes. There was still no trace of their gold coins . . . which represented their life savings. There have been reports that old Josh Tucker, after losing over Three Thousand Dollars (\$3,000.00) in gold coins, eventually lost his mind through worry of the mystery of his lost savings.

Near Pilot Rock at this time in 1988 was the site of an old one room school called Flat Rock School. Over the years in this area gold coins have occasionally been found. In the early 1900s, school boy Henry Rager found two gold coins on the school yard. Back in the 1960s, Beatrice Oatts found a Twenty Dollar (\$20.00) gold piece in a ditch while picking dewberries. It has been reported that in 1968 a gold coin was found by picnickers at the base of Pilot

Rock. Were these gold coins a part of the stolen gold, or were they simply coins that were lost by persons attending school functions or by those who went to Pilot Rock on social outings? Sonny Thompson has said he has searched the area around Pilot Rock many times over the years, but he has never found any gold coins.

One has to think that perhaps the gold coins were found by someone, but they never reported the finding publicly. One name has been mentioned to me, a prominent Christian County citizen, now deceased, who allegedly found the coins. However, not knowing the truth for sure, this person will remain unnamed.