

The Kit Carson–Ben Mills Story: Did Carson Really Buy Guns from Mills in Harrodsburg in 1842?

No, he didn't have time. Besides, Mills did not come to Harrodsburg until 1844.

Lee Burke

In the Blue Grass country of Kentucky, a story is imbedded in the folklore that goes something like this: **After writing ahead to gunsmith Ben Mills in Harrodsburg, Kentucky, to order three guns, Kit Carson arrived there in the first week of April, 1842—some say with two companions. He spent several days testing the guns, paid for them, and departed. The guns were used by Carson and two friends to guide Fremont over the mountains to the Pacific Ocean.**

This story got my attention because it involved Kit Carson, a man I have studied for many years, and because the timing and circumstances of this story were difficult to fit into the known events of Carson's life in 1842. In checking it out, I followed these lines of investigation: 1. What are the roots of The Story, and is there an *original* version? 2. Are there elements in The Story that indicate its time of origin? 3. What was Kit Carson doing in 1842, and could he have made a trip to Harrodsburg? 4. What can be known about Ben Mills,¹ and where was he in 1842? 5. Is there evidence as to who authored The Story? In these discussions, the expression "The Story" always means the Carson–Mills/1842 tale; "Old Timer" refers to the pen name used by the author thereof, and the "Dean File" refers to an extensive compilation of Mills' information assembled by gun enthusiast Herman Dean² in the early 1940s.

My search for the original version of The Story determined that it first appeared in the *Harrodsburg Democrat* newspaper sometime between late 1910 and mid-1921, but the issue that contained it is not preserved among those saved and now available on microfilm. The earliest example of The Story known today is a typed copy in the files of the Montezuma Masonic Lodge, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Before examining that text, this review will cover some of the known references to The Story that have appeared since then (compiled lists excepted), with the goal of explaining how some authors have been led and misled by intervening interpretations. For those who would like to see the earliest known text of The Story right now, jump ahead to Figure 4.

REFERENCES TO THE STORY SINCE 1943

Grouped here as "printed word" are all the references I have been able to find that tell The Story *in print*. All have



appeared since the mid-20th century (1943) and include book entries, magazine articles, and a newspaper article, plus a short note in the files of the Kentucky Historical Society that is related to the newspaper article. I have not found any earlier published versions of The Story, or significant references to it,³ after an extensive search through essentially all the literature of Kentucky. If I have missed something, I would certainly like to know about it. Individual letters in the Dean File will be treated later in the section on *Who was Old Timer?*

The first published reference to The Story that I have found appeared in a short article titled "Kit Carson Guns" by Wm. C. Almquist, in the September, 1943 issue of *Muzzle Blasts* magazine, page 5. Until this appearance, The Story had been dormant and essentially forgotten. Almquist was writing about the Kit Carson Hawken that belongs to the Montezuma Masonic Lodge in Santa Fe, New Mexico, using photographs of that gun and a "clipping" from the *Harrodsburg Democrat* that accompanied it, obtained from Harvey Lutz, Acting Secretary of the Lodge. Since the Hawken was obviously NOT a Mills gun as claimed by The Story, he raised questions about what gun The Story was referring to.

Without regard for the questions raised by Almquist, that information was picked up by Charles E. Hanson, Jr. and used in a very brief entry on page 84 of his 1960 book *The Plains Rifle*. Of these two sources, Almquist and Hanson, Harold Edwards cites only Hanson in his article "Benjamin



Figure 1. Kit Carson's last rifle, the property of the Montezuma Lodge, Santa Fe. It is marked on the top of the barrel S. HAWKEN ST. LOUIS and was the subject of Almquist's article in 1943.

Mills Kentucky Gunmaker," in *Muzzle Blasts*, November, 1988. Both Almquist and Hanson were cited by Glenn Marsh in his "Benjamin Mills, 19th Century Kentucky Gunmaker," published in *The American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin*, Number 68, May 1993. It is important to note that Almquist not only provided the first published reference to The Story to appear in the gun collectors world, it was the first to be found anywhere after its initial appearance in the Harrodsburg Democrat newspaper early in the 20th century.

Almquist, 1943. Using the "clipping" obtained from the Montezuma Lodge, Almquist offered this information from The Story in 1943. "The rifle" referred to in the first line here is Carson's last, marked S. HAWKEN ST. LOUIS. It is a percussion, half-stock rifle, typical of the Hawken plains rifle in every respect, and was probably made in the late 1850s. Almquist wrote:

There is a clipping accompanying the rifle from the Harrodsburg Kentucky "Democrat," stating the rifle was made by Benj. E. Mills of the same place, where Mr. Kit went to get three rifles for himself and two friends, in February 1842. He spent several days there testing the guns to his fullest satisfaction and returned as he came by stage to Cogars Landing and down the Kentucky River to Louisville. It further states the

rifles were used to pilot General John C. Fremont over the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.

It is obvious that the supposed event was set in 1842, and it is clear that Carson was traveling alone. Carson's arrival in February was off by two months, as the clipping used by Almquist (see below) put his arrival in early April.

Hanson, 1960. When Hanson boiled the Almquist version down for use in 1960, The Story got another mix-up with this statement:

Almquist quotes a clipping from the Harrodsburg Democrat telling of a trip through there in 1842 by Kit Carson and two of his friends. All three got rifles by Mills.

This construction by Hanson is the **sole source** of the idea that there were three in Carson's party. He continued by quoting Almquist's last lines without alteration: "He spent several days there testing the guns—" etc.

Caldwell, 1970. A statement attributed to Clements (sic) Caldwell⁴ of Danville, Kentucky, a town some 10 miles south of Harrodsburg, is in the collections of the Kentucky Historical Society, in Frankfort. It is a typed paragraph, with no date, on plain paper, in the file for Historic Marker Number 1335, Early Gun Shop Site. It is listed as a reference on worksheets for that sign dated 1970, so that date is

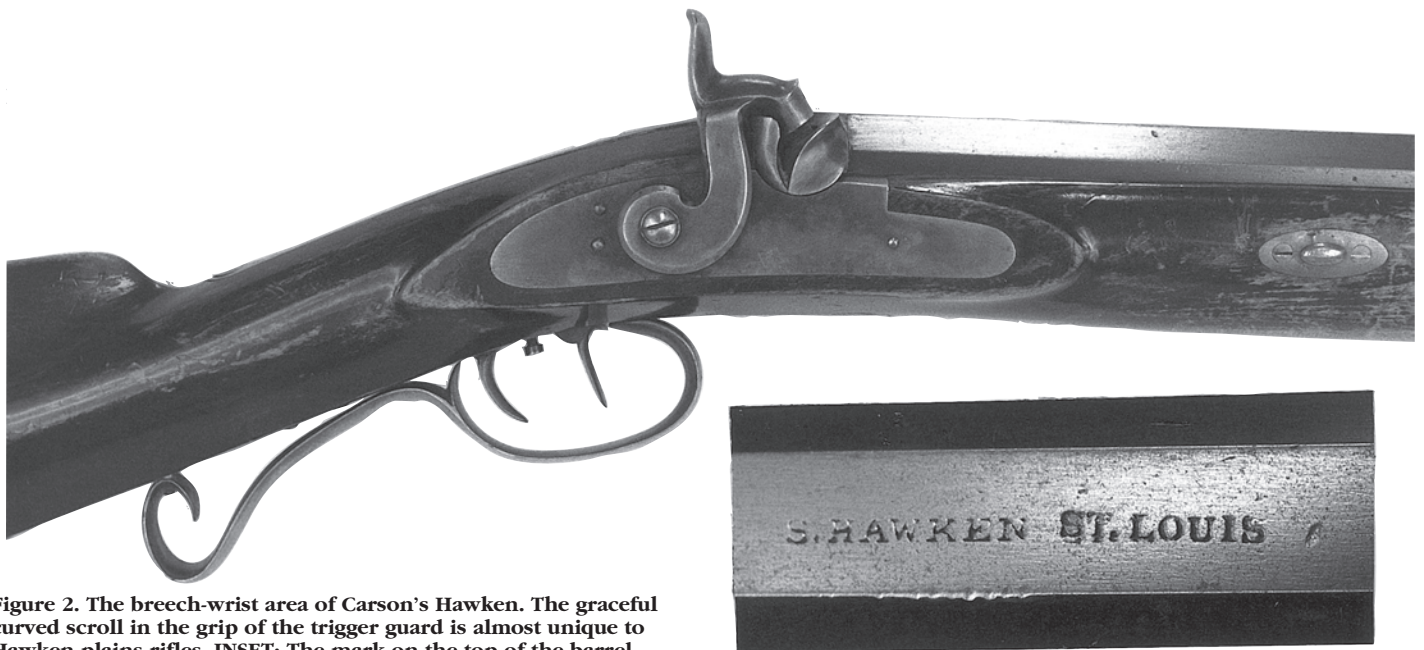


Figure 2. The breech-crest area of Carson's Hawken. The graceful curved scroll in the grip of the trigger guard is almost unique to Hawken plains rifles. INSET: The mark on the top of the barrel.

assigned here, although it may have originated earlier. It is included here due to its relationship with the item following this one titled Crawford/Caldwell, 1981:

Mills was assistant armorer at Harper's Ferry at the time of John Brown's raid. Mills was held hostage by John Brown, was offered the head armorer's position at Springfield if he would remain in service of the US Government. He declined, casting his lot with the Confederacy, working at the Palmetto Arsenal, Columbia, S.C. This rifle found in the area of California made famous by Fremont expedition and was used by one of Fremont's men. One of Kentucky's famous sons, Kit Carson, was a member of this expedition. Carson used Mill's rifles and on at least one occasion visited Mill's gun shop.

From the expression "This rifle" beginning the 4th sentence above, it appears that this statement was originally intended to accompany the display of a specific Mills rifle, that was "found in the area of California made famous by Fremont expedition. . . ." As to specifics in the text, we shall see that Mills was *Master* Armorer at Harper's Ferry at the time of the John Brown raid and spent the years of the Civil War at or near Harrodsburg, in Mercer County, trying to make a living. Identifying the owner or the use of a gun simply because it was "found" in some general area cannot be justified. Only the last sentence relates to *The Story* and may have sprung from either of the two preceding sources listed here, or from the original story itself.

Crawford/Caldwell, 1981. A general article about Kit Carson by columnist Byron Crawford was published in the Louisville Courier Journal on July 20, 1981. A bit of information from an interview with Clemens Caldwell was included. A copy of this article is in the Kentucky Historical Society's file for Historical Marker Number 79: "Christopher (Kit) Carson", to mark his birthplace in Madison County, Kentucky. (Also in this file are three more vintage newspaper articles—one dated 1885—and a list of 17 references. *The Story* is not among them.) Crawford wrote of the Caldwell interview:

There is evidence that the great scout returned to his native Kentucky at least once after he became famous, to buy a rifle from Benjamin Mills, a renowned Mercer County rifle-maker.

Clemens Caldwell of Danville, who has researched the matter, says that there is a letter that supports the belief that Carson and five or six companions came up the Kentucky River to pick up rifles at Harrodsburg before one of their Western expeditions with John Fremont.

None of this Caldwell information was used in the wording on Historical Marker at Kit Carson's birthplace, which had been installed much earlier. (This article does not really belong in this file.) Reference to "a letter" in the second paragraph may indicate that Caldwell knew about *The Story*, with its alleged Carson letter as it originally appeared in the *Harrodsburg*

Democrat. Or possibly he had seen a copy of the full text of the "clipping" used by Almquist. Almquist's retyped copy of *The Story* was available in the 1940s to a number of interested individuals in Kentucky. One copy of it has been on display for some years in the gun room of the Mansion Museum at Old Fort Harrod State Park in Harrodsburg. Caldwell's inflation of the number in the traveling party is remarkable, and Carson was not famous in 1842. Fame would not begin to shine on the man until Fremont's 1845 report was published. It may be that Caldwell's exposure to *The Story* was long since past, and his recollection of it was *bazy*, or perhaps *enhanced* is a better word. I managed to locate Clemens Caldwell in late 2005, but was advised by his caregiver that he would not be able to visit with me, due to serious health problems.

Harold Edwards and Glenn Marsh did much to renew and revive interest in Benjamin Mills, who was an outstanding craftsman and a superb gunmaker. Both went into Mills' history as a gunmaker in depth, and their work brings the quality and extent of his work into sharp focus. I recommend both to those interested in Kentucky gunsmiths, as well as the range and quality of their craftsmanship.

Edwards, 1988. In his 1988 *Muzzle Blasts* article, Harold Edwards recognized Mills' move to Stanford, Kentucky, in 1841, but after a very short stay, he relocates Mills to Harrodsburg. This move to Harrodsburg was vital if Mills was to fulfill the events of 1842 as proposed in *The Story*. Edwards had this to say about those events, with Hanson as the only reference given:

[In] 1842, Kit Carson, one of Kentucky's more famous sons, arrived in Harrodsburg with two friends to purchase Mills rifles. All three bought guns and the records of this transaction appeared in an issue of *The Harrodsburg Democrat* in February, 1842. Carson spent several days there testing the guns to his fullest satisfaction, then returned as he came, by stage to Cogar's Landing and down the Kentucky River to Louisville. The news article further states that the rifles were used by Carson and his friends during the 1842 Fremont Expedition over the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.

Understand that this was not presented as a *quote* from Hanson. Expansions of *The Story* here, beyond anything previously seen, are the appearance of the "transaction" in the newspaper in February, 1842, and the statement that Fremont's 1842 Expedition went to the Pacific Ocean. Originally, *The Story* put the "transaction" in April of 1842, but no contemporary newspaper coverage is mentioned. There is no evidence that a paper concerned with news was being published in Harrodsburg in 1842, certainly not the *Democrat*, although a religious tract and an inspirational bulletin may have been in publication there at that time.⁵ The 1842 Fremont Expedition was charged with going only as far west as South Pass (in western Wyoming). They then returned to St. Louis.⁶

Marsh, 1993. By the time Glenn Marsh was ready to publish his study of Ben Mills in 1993, the subject was littered with variations of The Story. It being the tendency of writers to accommodate earlier authors and their opinions, Marsh offered this statement, and did not stay long on the subject:

Mills was in Harrodsburg by late 1841 or early 1842, as Kit Carson journeyed to Harrodsburg with two friends, all three purchasing guns of Mills in February, 1842.

Marsh cites Almquist as the source of this information, but Hanson's influence is certainly apparent. Following the above statement, Marsh quotes without change the final passage given by both Almquist and Hanson, wherein Carson spent several days testing the guns, with the quoted material attributed to Hanson.

Edwards, 1993. Another statement by Harold Edwards regarding the Carson-Mills affair was presented in the "Benjamin Mills" section of a printed flyer distributed at the 1993 NRA National Convention. In this work, the author used all available information concerning The Story, with no questions asked. Used were the printed word, a typed version of the original, and much from the Dean File, with many points from a letter to Dean from James T. Cooke in 1941, that retells The Story with additional embellishment (to be discussed later). Granted the NRA flyer was only ephemera, but it will probably extend the fiction of the Carson-Mills story for a long time to come.

As the tale continues to evolve today in after-dinner talk, not only were two friends traveling with Carson, but names of mountain men known by Carson have been assigned to them.

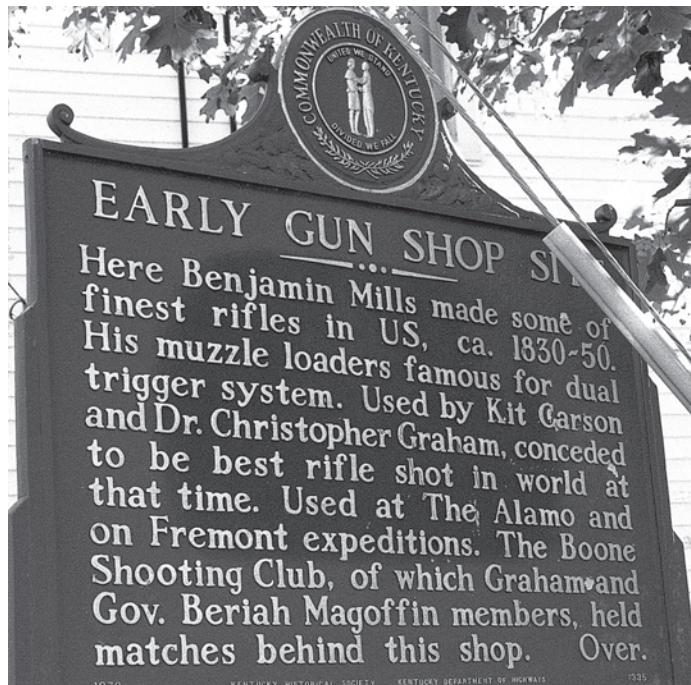


Figure 3. Kentucky Historical Marker signs near the site where Ben Mills' gun shop once stood in Harrodsburg. Both sides are a mix of fact and fiction.

Everyone is entitled to their own opinions, but they are not entitled to their own facts.

U.S. Senator Patrick Daniel Moynihan
1927-2003

KENTUCKY HISTORICAL MARKER: EARLY GUN SHOP SITE, 1970

(MARKER NUMBER 1335)

Additional information on Ben Mills was in the public eye, for those who would seek it out. In 1970, a Kentucky Historical Marker was installed near where Mills' gun shop once stood in Harrodsburg, on the south side of Mooreland Avenue near the intersection with Main Street. This sign is actually two cast metal signs, back to back (truly *hardcopy*). The west side says:

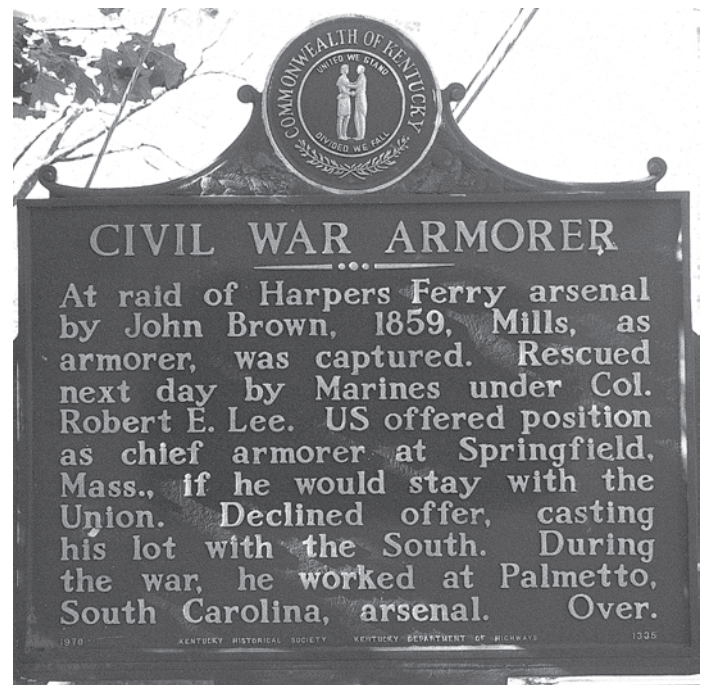
EARLY GUN SHOP SITE

Here Benjamin Mills made some of the finest rifles in US, ca. 1830-50. His muzzle loaders famous for dual trigger system. Used by Kit Carson and Dr. Christopher Graham, conceded to be the best rifle shot in the world at that time. Used at The Alamo and on Fremont expeditions. The Boone Shooting Club, of which Graham and Gov. Beriah Magoffin members, held matches behind this shop. *Over.*

And on the east side

CIVIL WAR ARMORER

At raid of Harpers Ferry arsenal by John Brown, 1859, as armorer, was captured. Rescued next day by Marines under Col. Robert E. Lee. US offered position as chief armorer at



Springfield, Mass., if he would stay with the Union. Declined offer, casting his lot with the South. During the war, he worked at Palmetto, South Carolina, arsenal. *Over.*

Both sides are a mix of fact and fiction. Points needing review on the east side are: 1) the time span of Mills' tenure in Harrodsburg; 2) use by Kit Carson; 3) use at the Alamo; and 4) use on Fremont expeditions. On the other side, the job offer at Springfield, and Mills' casting his lot with the South are undocumented and improbable. Working at Palmetto is completely contrary to the record of Mills' activities during the war years.

I was permitted to examine the file for this sign set (Marker Number 1335) in the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort, and also the files for several other signs in the vicinity. Most of these files are thick with research notes and historical information that support the reasons for the signs and wording of the text. Remarkably, the file for the Mills Gun Shop is quite thin, with nothing resembling significant historical documentation of the text used. When the proposal for this set of signs was marked "OK to order 4/16/70" (a copy is in the file), only three references were listed. One was the statement attributed to Clemens Caldwell discussed above in **Caldwell, 1970**. The other two were "*Civil War Dictionary*, Boatner, p. 91," and "*History of Mercer and Boyle Counties*, Maria Daviess, p. 163."

The Boatner reference is a very short sketch on John Brown (less than a column on half a page), with emphasis on the Harper's Ferry raid. Little detail is given, with no mention of Ben Mills' involvement. Of the extensive literature then available on John Brown and the Harper's Ferry affair, Boatner's offering was only minimal. In fairness to Boatner, he had not intended to give an expanded statement on all of his thousands of entries, and though he was present, Mills was not a prominent player in that episode.

Maria Daviess did a worthy job in her roundup of events and local color in Mercer and Boyle Counties. (Part of Boyle was carved out of Mercer, and Harrodsburg has always been the county seat of Mercer.) Her History originally appeared in installments in the *Harrodsburg Democrat* newspaper starting January 30, 1885, and ran through the rest of the year. After May 15, the issues for the remainder of the year are missing from the microfilm records, but fortunately the History was considered important enough to be reissued in book form in 1924. Comparing the book with the equivalent newspaper sections that are available indicates that the book is an exact copy of the text in the newspaper series. Coverage of Ben Mills, near the end of the book on page 163 (originally appearing in November 1885, approximately) is as follows:

Mr. Ben Mills Gun Shop has been for a long time a noted point in our village. In the old days when Graham Springs brought such crowds to Harrodsburg, his shooting gallery was as attractive to the chevaliers of the South as

ever was a lady's boudoir to a troubadour, and Mr. Mills' guns are doubtless now heirlooms in many houses in the land. His skill had the endorsement, too, of government appreciation. He was appointed to the superintendence of the Harper Ferry Armory. He was amongst the first jostled out of position by the concessions of North and South. He was at Harper's Ferry at the time of the raid of the celebrated John Brown, and being of decided Southern sympathies resigned and returned to his old home in Harrodsburg. Mr. Mills was a Canadian by birth, but is a wholly naturalized Kentuckian and still peerless in his work.

Without repeating some points already made, she should have said that Mills was born in New York, not Canada, and since Mills probably did not work as a gunsmith in Harrodsburg after 1863 (he then went into the whiskey distilling business on Shawnee Run, northeast of town), her statement that "he is still peerless in his work" suggests that this sketch was written some years before it was published. Maria Daviess was a contemporary of Mills, but I wonder if she ever talked with the man directly. She was a lifelong resident of Harrodsburg, but The Story appears nowhere in her history. She offers no Carson visit, no Fremont mention, and especially no Alamo. Evidence will show that The Story, with these fictitious elements, had not been composed when she was working up her history.

Note at this point that George M. Chinn's exhaustive compilation on the history of Harrodsburg, published in 1985, contains only two entries for "Mills, Benjamin." One concerns a Judge by that same name (not our gunsmith), and the other is an appendix entry recording the order by the town's Board of Trustees to allow shooting behind the Mills gun shop in the morning until 8:30 AM. Nothing is said of Kit Carson. Chinn had been an official in the Kentucky Historical Society for some time and worked with Herman Dean gathering information on Mills (notes and letters in the Dean File). I suspect that Chinn knew all about The Story, but decided to ignore it completely.

It appears that local enthusiasts, now unknown, must have had significant input to the wording of the Gun Shop sign when it was being worked up in 1970, but the file has no record of that input now. As for the Alamo mention, there is in the file for the Gun Shop sign, a copy of a letter sent to The Alamo Museum Director, dated March 17, 1970, inquiring about a Mills rifle said to be on display there and asking if it was used in the Battle of The Alamo. If an answer was received, it is not in the file.

ABOUT THE ALAMO

As this tall tale has expanded to entangle the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, a short note concerning it is in order.

The Battle of the Alamo was fought on the morning of March 6th, 1836. It did not last long, and afterward, nothing of value was left behind by the victorious Mexicans. All the defenders were killed, and **everything** belonging to them disappeared. The structure now recognized as "The Alamo" was the church or chapel for the presidio complex (fort) immediately adjacent to the north where most of the fighting took place. This chapel was roofless and in ruins at the time of the battle and continued in that condition for some time. From 1848 to 1879 (with a short absence in the 1860s), the U.S. Army occupied the buildings and grounds as a Quartermaster Depot. They cleaned the place up and put a roof on the chapel building in 1850. The Confederates used the complex in a similar manner during their brief tenure. When the Army moved on to the new and nearby Fort Sam Houston in 1879, the Alamo suffered through another 25 years, housing a succession of retail enterprises that used the chapel as a warehouse for provisions and sides of beef and pork. There had always been concern for the historic importance of the place, but that movement did not start gaining strength until the 1890s. In 1905, when the property was acquired by the State of Texas, custody was granted to The Daughters of the Republic of Texas, who continue in that role today (see web sites: www.thealamo.org and www.drtd.org).

During a visit in early 2006, I called on Mr. Warren Strickler, Archivist of The Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, an independent institution housed on the grounds of the Alamo, and also talked with Dr. Richard Bruce Winders, Historian and Curator of the Alamo and its Museum. From Mr. Strickler I learned that there is no record of any historical artifacts that may have been acquired by the Alamo before the state took over in 1905. An inventory made in 1908 listed 43 items, the only firearms being two pistols. In 1967, after a half century of donations and gifts, a new inventory of all weapons in the collection was made by W.R. Hizar and J.T. Guthrie and compiled into a two-volume illustrated catalog titled *Study of Weapons in the Alamo Collection 1967*. Most of the 19 shoulder arms listed are either military weapons or civilian arms marked with the maker's name. None are marked "Mills". Of those not marked, none bear any resemblance to the typical and very distinctive Mills design. Dr. Winders gave double assurance on this point, stating that he had seen no weapons in the collection with Mills' characteristics. Further, Mr. Strickler's search of the records of both the library and the museum (possible through their internal online catalog system) found no mention of the name Mills, nor the name Carson. There is no probability that a Mills rifle, or a rifle once belonging to Kit Carson, has ever been in the collections or on display at the Alamo.

In the same vein, a call was made on Mr. John M. Manguso, Curator and Director of the Fort Sam Houston

Museum, on the grounds of the Fort in San Antonio. This museum was established in 1967 and is concerned with the development of the Army's presence in the region, and the part it has played in national and world affairs. The only artifacts in this collection that date from the years of Alamo occupancy are a couple of nine-pound cannon balls, thought to be of Mexican origin. No weapons such as may have been made by Mills, or used by Carson, are included.

THE ORIGINAL VERSION OF THE STORY

The search for the original version of The Story was directed by the introductory remarks in Almquist's 1943 article. He said at the outset that he had acquired pictures of the Carson Hawken from Harvey Lutz, Acting Secretary of the Montezuma Lodge in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and that a clipping from the *Harrodsburg Kentucky Democrat* accompanied the rifle. My search for this clipping followed two main paths. First was an examination of the microfilm of the *Harrodsburg Democrat* newspaper, hoping to locate the clipping in its original context, and to establish the date of publication. Second, after corresponding with Montezuma Lodge, I met with Mr. Glen W. Burrtram, Secretary, and with his generous help and guidance, combed their records for the clipping.

The Harrodsburg Democrat. The *Harrodsburg Democrat* commenced regular publication on June 18, 1884. In the microfilm of this newspaper there are gaps large and small in the coverage provided by known surviving issues. Some years are missing entirely; some are represented by very few issues (as a weekly paper, each year should have seen 52 issues), and some years are fairly complete. I have looked at all of it, but did not find The Story. One piece on old-fashioned spring elixirs was found in the March 20, 1908 issue, set up very much like The Story, and signed "Old Timer." That was the only thing that came close, and it may well have been written by the same author. Additional issues of *The Democrat* show up from time to time, so the missing one with The Story may eventually come to light.

Montezuma Lodge. Records kept by the Montezuma Lodge were more rewarding. Efforts directed at the papers of Harvey Lutz found a typescript of The Story, apparently made from the "clipping," that he had prepared for inclusion in his work-in-progress: *History of Montezuma Lodge 1851 to 1944*. This version of The Story (I call it the Lutz Copy) places an alleged meeting with Carson in Point Pleasant, **Maine**, and this version can be recognized by this detail. (We shall see that earlier copies say Point Pleasant, **Missouri**.) Almquist had acquired his Lutz Copy by 1941, as one of Almquist's retyped copies, using Maine, ended up in the hands of Baylss Hardin, of the Kentucky State Historical Society. Hardin apparently

sent it along with a letter to Dr. L.E. Monroe of Washington, Illinois, dated June 26, 1941. This Hardin letter to Monroe, together with the Lutz Copy of The Story, came back to Harrodsburg somehow (the whole thing is a puzzle) and may be seen displayed in a frame on the east wall of the upstairs gun room, in the Mansion Museum, Old Fort Harrod State Park in Harrodsburg. This may be "the letter" mentioned earlier that Clemens Caldwell referred to in 1982.

Almquist also gave a retyped Lutz Copy to Herman Dean with a letter dated December 12, 1942 (Dean File 19421212). However, the Lodge files would show that there were earlier copies that could set the date of origin back by an additional 20 years.

Digging into the Lodge files of correspondence with seekers of information on Kit Carson revealed the earliest example of The Story that I have been able to find. It is a typed copy enclosed with a letter to Mr. J.G. Dillin dated June 7th, 1921. To give it some distinction, I call it the Dillin Copy and offer it here in

Figure 4, with line numbers added along the side for reference. Subsequent typed copies in the Lodge files vary as typos were made, like Lutz's "Maine", and occasionally a name was skipped, but overall, they are the same. The "clipping" itself could not be found anywhere, and photographs (photostats?) made of it had all been dispersed. Other offices within the Mason's organization that might have received a copy were contacted without finding the elusive "clipping", but one may turn up in time.

If the Dillin Copy can be accepted as a reasonable representative of the original clipping from the Harrodsburg Democrat, the next thing to do is to examine it for clues that reflect the historical validity of The Story, and its time of origin.

ANALYSIS OF THE DILLIN COPY

The procedure here for analyzing the Dillin Copy is simple. The number of a particular detail discussed in the following may be located by the same number on a line in Figure 4.

2. The *Harrodsburg Democrat* newspaper commenced regular publication on January 18, 1884. A single experimental issue had been printed earlier, on August 7, 1881.

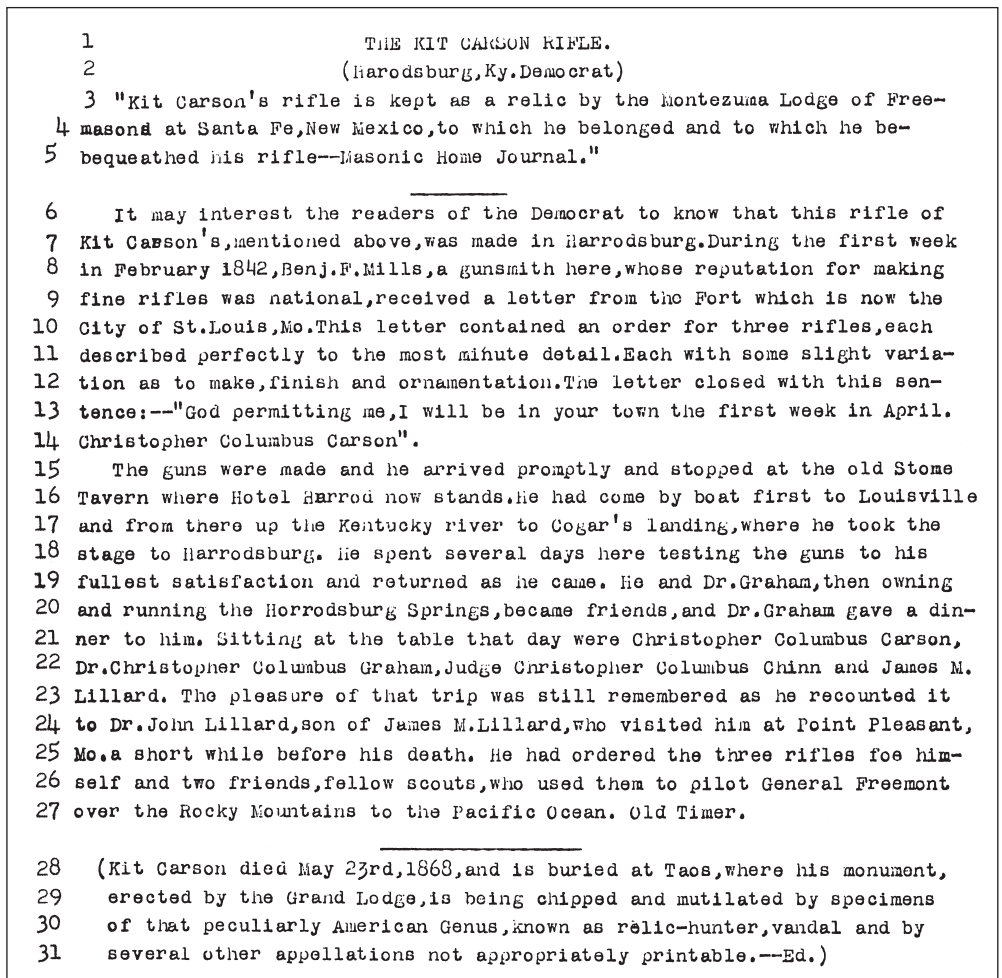


Figure 4. The Dillin Copy of The Story. It accompanied a letter dated June 7th, 1921 from the Montezuma Lodge to J.G. Dillin concerning Carson's Hawken and is the earliest version of The Story currently known. Line numbers have been added for reference.

3. Receipt of the Hawken rifle owned by Kit Carson was acknowledged by the Montezuma Lodge on August 1, 1868, as was noted in *The Daily New Mexican* newspaper, January 12, 1869. This Hawken rifle is a unique memorial to Carson, still held and treasured by the Lodge today.

5. *The Masonic Home Journal*, a monthly publication, printed its first issue June 14, 1883 and has continued to the present. There is no index for the publication, and this note about the Kit Carson rifle has not yet been located.

8-9. Note that Carson's letter was supposedly received in February, 1842. Carson did not "arrive" until later.

8-9. Mills is a gunsmith and receiving his mail "here" in Harrodsburg, in February 1842.

9-10. "The Fort which is now the City of St. Louis, Mo." has no rational explanation. According to the 1840 Directory for St. Louis, it was a bustling commercial town of 22,640 souls and many businesses.

11. If each gun was described to "the most minute detail" etc, it is implied that making them would require considerable individual time and attention.

13 and 15. Carson was to arrive the first week in April, and according to this, he did so, and "promptly."

14. Carson's middle name was "Houston," not "Columbus." Further, I have never seen a single instance in his entire lifetime when he used his middle name. Also, Carson did not learn to sign his name until 1847, when he received a commission as 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army from President Polk. Of course, someone else could have written the letter and signed it for him.

15. Three custom-made rifles were turned out in about seven or eight weeks. That's fast work. Notice that he (singular pronoun) arrived promptly.

15-16. The Old Stone Tavern was a well-known watering place in old Harrodsburg.

16. Mention of "Hotel Harrod" is a key piece of information, as it is the latest datable point in The Story. In the pamphlet *Old Taverns*, prepared by Grace Hutton in 1929, it is stated on page 7 that the structure in Harrodsburg known as **Hotel Harrod was so named in November, 1910**. Any reference to it must postdate that event.

17. Cogar's Landing, on the Kentucky River, was about halfway between Lexington and Harrodsburg. Stagecoach connections could be made going either way, but there may have been a wait involved.

18. "He spent several days here" is supposed to mean, time wise, more than 2 or 3 days, but not many. Testing one gun a day would take three days. "Here" means in Harrodsburg.

20. Harrodsburg Springs was an elegant resort that attracted a genteel crowd, and Graham had a reputation of shunning those not patronizing his establishment (Chinn, p. 95). Carson was shy and retiring, and not inclined to socialize, especially with those who appeared to be high on the social scale. His becoming friends with Graham is problematical, as Carson was a nobody at the time and staying at the Old Stone Tavern according to The Story.

21. Again Columbus was not part of Carson's name, and further, it does not appear that Columbus was Judge Chinn's middle name either.⁸ "Christopher Columbus Graham" is correct for that individual.

24-25. According to the *1895 Atlas for Missouri*, Point Pleasant, Missouri was a small village about 6 miles south of New Madrid, Missouri, on the Mississippi River; population 137. It is still there and can be found on Missouri maps today. There is nothing in Carson's history to provide a reason for his being there "a short while before his death." He was fully occupied elsewhere.

26. Carson met Fremont for the first time in early June, 1842, on the steamboat ROWENA, en route up the Missouri River between St. Louis and Westport. Prior to that meeting, Carson knew nothing of Fremont and had no knowledge of his plans.

27. As mentioned before, I found another nostalgic story signed the same way, "Old Timer," in the *Harrodsburg Democrat* of March 20, 1908.

28-31. [these lines are comments from the Editor of *The Harrodsburg Democrat*] Carson's "monument" (gravestone) was not erected by the (Masonic) Grand Lodge, but by the Grand Army of the Republic in 1890. Taking chips from Carson's gravestone started in earnest after the turn of the century, and soon gave the edge of the stone a scalloped appearance (picture postcards show this progression nicely). The Grand Lodge of New Mexico placed an iron fence around the grave site in 1908 and also placed a headstone for Carson's wife, Josefa Jaramillo, who is buried next to him in the cemetery there in Taos.⁹ If the editor of the *Democrat* was aware of the Grand Lodge's involvement with the grave site, but mixed up about what they had done, it would be the second-most recent detail here.

Specific Points concerning The Story

- A. At present, two dates limit the first appearance of The Story to the 1910-1921 period. First, "Hotel Harrod," so named in November, 1910, could not have been mentioned before it existed. Second, the Dillon Copy of The Story accompanied a letter dated June 7th, 1921, so The Story was known and in circulation at that time.
- B. The Carson rifle kept by the Montezuma Lodge was made by Sam Hawken of St. Louis. Old Timer did not know what he was talking about when he wrote that it was made by Ben Mills.
- C. The Story was set in the town of Harrodsburg, Kentucky, with the main events being the arrival of a letter ordering guns addressed to Mills there during the first week of February, 1842, followed by the arrival of Carson himself in the first week of April, 1842.
- E. Old Timer was acquainted with people and places in Harrodsburg's history, but speaks with considerably more detailed knowledge of a remote event (time wise) than would be expected.
- F. Nothing is mentioned about The Alamo in this composition, so that element came along later.

I have searched far and wide for *earlier* references or mentions of Carson coming to Harrodsburg but have found absolutely nothing. Conversely, the mundane event of the Carson family leaving Madison County, Kentucky in 1811 on their way to Missouri, with young Kit in tow, is documented (Collins and Collins, 1878, Vol. II, p. 534) and has been repeated over and over in Kentucky publications.

Could Carson have made the trip to Harrodsburg as stated? And just where was Ben Mills at the time? These are subjects worth looking in to.

THE CARSON TIME LINE FOR 1842

Traveling with Bent and St. Vrain. As the sun rose on the first day of 1842, Kit Carson was working as a hunter

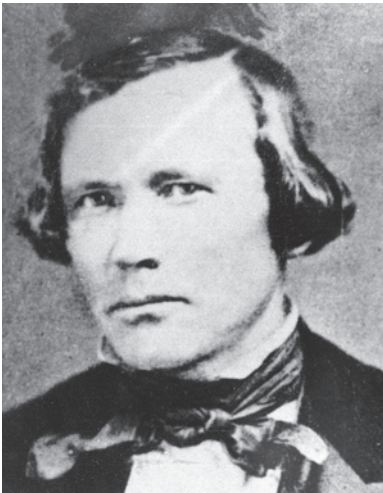


Figure 5. Kit Carson in 1847, from a Daguerreotype formerly owned by the Society of California Pioneers, San Francisco, since destroyed in the earthquake and fire of 1906.

at Bent's Fort, on the north bank of the Arkansas River in what is now south central Colorado (Carter, 79).¹⁰ His hunting obligations were not so confining that he was prevented from tending to some personal affairs, however, for on January 28th, 1842, he was in Taos, New Mexico (then still a part of Mexico) where he was baptized a convert to the Catholic Church (Antony, 1935). Back on the job at Bent's Fort, he decided to make a trip back East, according to this statement in his memoirs, dictated in 1856 (Carter, 81):

"In April 1842, the train of wagons of Bent and St.

Vrain was going to the states. I concluded to go with them."

So he was NOT in Harrodsburg in April, 1842.

Of Carson's reasons for going back "to the states," a primary one (and I believe the central one) was to make arrangements for his daughter's future. Carson's first wife, an Arapaho woman named Waa-nibe, had died, leaving him with a small daughter, named Adaline, some five or six years old.¹¹ She should soon need a woman's supervision and schooling, so Carson had decided to try to find one of his many relatives in Howard County, Missouri who would take her in. As Carson was young and able, 32 at the time, and had experience as a teamster,¹² it is my guess that he signed on to manage one of the wagons, thereby staying on the payroll while providing a rolling home for little Adaline at the same time.

The ox-drawn wagons made the trip in a little more than a month, arriving about mid-May at Westport, Missouri (now within the limits of Kansas City, Missouri), where the Bent-St. Vrain farm and warehousing facility was located. After taking care of arrival chores, the party went on to St. Louis on the steamboat COL. WOODS. A note in the St. Louis *Missouri Republican* newspaper,¹³ on May 19, 1842 (p. 2, col. 1) reported:

Santa Fe Traders.—Yesterday morning a part of Messrs.

Bent & St. Vrain's company of Santa Fe Traders, arrived here; bringing as part of the proceeds of their labors and the reward of their toils and privations, 263 packs of buffalo robes, 30 packs beaver, 12 sacks tongues, and 1 pack deer skins.

And on the same page, in column 4:

PORT OF ST. LOUIS

ARRIVED

Steamer Col. Woods, from Mo. River;

CONSIGNEES

Per Col. Woods:—Bent and St. Vrain—

Note that the announced arrival occurred "yesterday" or May 18th. On the 19th, when the hands gathered for payday at the offices of P. Chouteau Jr., a partner with Bent and St Vrain and defacto keeper of the books, Carson was at the head of the line and was first paid, and in full. The process may have taken a while, adding up days worked as hunter and days worked as teamster, and subtracting charges made at the company store. The details are not given, but his final sum is given on page 306 in Chouteau Ledger Book CC,¹⁴ and looks something like this:

Bent St Vrain & Co.

1842

May 19 359 To Cash paid \$495.02

Mr Carson in full

Following this are the names and amounts paid that day to others in the party. The same information is given again on page 359 under CASH, apparently a double-entry bookkeeping requirement. Carson may have asked to be paid early on, as he had left Adaline back in Westport and needed to get on with finding a place in the family for her.

Getting Adaline settled with the Amick family. Mrs. Susannah Yoacham Dillon wrote of her early days in Westport in 1906, when she was 76 years old. She was the daughter of the keeper of the Yoacham tavern and hotel in Westport, where Adaline was a temporary guest, and had this to say:

"I remember Kit Carson very well indeed. He came East and stopped at my father's hotel for several weeks. He had married a squaw of the Rooteater tribe of Indians and they had a little girl called Terasina. He brought this little girl here with him to be educated." (Dillon, p. 11)

Mrs. Dillon goes on with a couple of stories about Adaline not pertinent to this study that sound outlandish to me, but memories of times long past frequently suffer that way. Considering that she used the wrong tribal name (Adaline's Indian blood was Arapaho; the Root Eaters were a band of the Comanche people), and did not remember Adaline's name correctly, perhaps it is fortunate that she recorded the event at all. It is my interpretation that her "several weeks" covered the time from the arrival of the Bent-St. Vrain wagon train, to the day Carson returned to take Adaline on to Howard County.

It is my assumption that Carson delayed taking up personal affairs until after he was paid on May 19th. Thereafter, two events define and limit the time available to take care of his business. First, on May 31, 1842, 12 days after being paid, he appeared before a notary in Howard County to give his brother a power of attorney to sell some land (14a). Second, he caught a steamboat just a day or two later—one

that was heading upriver past Howard County with the 1842 Fremont Expedition on board. Carson had a lot to do in the 12 days between payday and giving the power of attorney.

That Carson was successful in finding a place for Adaline is substantiated by Mary Amick Slaughter (Mrs. L.P. Slaughter), then a girl in the family home of Eliza and Leander Amick. Mary's mother, Eliza Amick, was Carson's niece, the daughter of Carson's older sister Elizabeth Carson Cooper. Mary recalled¹⁵:

"When I was a child, Kit Carson's daughter Adeline (sic), the daughter by his first wife, lived for several years with my parents on a farm between Fayette and Glasgow, in Howard county, in this state.—As my mother refused to accept any money for caring for his daughter, he purchased many presents for her, among which was a mahogany rocking chair which I still have."

And further:

"She [Adaline] stayed with us until about eleven years old.—She was dark complexioned, black hair and dark eyes. Kit visited her several times while she was with us."¹⁶

The only way Carson could have accomplished his mission for Adaline within the time available was to join the jet-set of the day and travel by steamer on the Missouri River. A round trip from St. Louis to Westport, and back, averaged 10 days for most boats.¹⁷ The upriver leg probably took six days, and downriver about four days. Since Howard County is a little past halfway from St. Louis to Westport, travel times need to be adjusted accordingly.

Starting late on the 19th, or early on the 20th of May, Carson had to:

1. Steam upriver to Howard County (via Boonville?)—needed: 3 or 4 days
2. Locate relatives, explain needs, get acceptance—estimated: 3(?) days.
3. Back to the River and to Westport for Adaline—needed: 2 or 3 days
4. Bring Adaline to Howard Co. (to Glasgow?)—needed 1 or 2 days
5. Travel overland with Adaline to the Amick's—needed 1 day

These estimates indicate that about 10 days were needed to get it all done, if close connections were made and everything worked out perfectly. Allowing for a visit with a lawyer to draw up the power of attorney for Lindsay and the 12 days available after payday are about used up.

Boarding the Steamboat ROWENA. One more point in time is necessary to sew up Carson's activities "in the settlements" in 1842. John Charles Fremont had arrived in St. Louis on May 22nd (three days after Carson's payday and unrelated to that event), to make final preparations for his impending expedition. Fremont had come over land for most of his trip from Washington, DC, as shown by the paper trail of his vouchers given to suppliers along the way. From Washington he had gone north to New York City in early May, and then on west to

Chicago by mid month, picking up purchased instruments along the way. In Chicago, he hired a coach to carry two persons and 14 cases of instruments to Peru, Illinois, and then the head of navigation on the Illinois River, where he took a steamer to St. Louis (Jackson and Spence, pp. 140-142).

Fremont topped off supplies, tested instruments, and recruited frontiersmen for a week in St. Louis, then contracted with the agents for the steamer ROWENA to take him and his outfit up the Missouri River to Westport.¹⁸ The boat did depart, and an announcement in the Missouri Republican on May 30th said:

FOR MISSOURI RIVER

The new and double engine steamer **ROWENA**,

Capt. J.W. Goslee, will leave for Weston¹⁹, on

This Day, the 30th inst. at 10 o'clock.

For freight or passage apply to

SIMONDS & MORRISON,

KENNETT, WHITE & Co., or

N. RANNEY, agents.

Sure enough, on the 31st, the *Missouri Republican's* coverage of the PORT OF ST. LOUIS listed under Departed: "Steamer ROWENA for Mo. River." Fremont was on his way. Carson, meanwhile, had completed his task regarding Adaline and was ready to get back to his own country. He had money in his belt and was probably thinking about going into ranching. In his memoirs he said:

"[I] went and saw my friends and acquaintances, then took a trip to St. Louis, remained there a few days and was tired of remaining in the settlements, took a steamer for the Upper Missouri and, as luck would have it, Colonel Fremont, then a Lieutenant, was aboard the same boat."²⁰

That boat was the ROWENA. After departing St. Louis on the morning of May 30th, it was passing Howard County, probably at Glasgow, three or four days later, on the 1st or 2nd of June. This coincidence was a perfect fit for Carson's schedule. He had time to say his good-byes and then get back to the river to talk to the agents about boats heading west. From the notices in the newspapers of the day, boat traffic on the Missouri was not crowded, but there were one or two a day, and boarding the ROWENA was truly a stroke of luck. When Fremont offered Carson the job of party guide, it was the beginning of a long relationship that would change the fortunes of both men and would also change the face of the west.

On the 4th of June in Westport, Fremont wrote up the voucher that identified the steamboat and the schedule that brought these men together²¹:

Voucher No. 34, Westport, Mo., 4 June 1842

U.S. to the Steamboat Rowena

3 June

passage for 17 men 114.75

from St. Louis to Westport

freight on 468 lbs. 17.50

freight on 3 kegs powder	1.50
freight on 8 French carts	<u>24.00</u>
	157.75

This 1842 expedition was charged with investigating and mapping the road to South Pass, in western Wyoming, which was done in a few months. Carson did not come back to St. Louis with the group, but stayed in the west.²² He would not be back to Missouri and St. Louis until 1847, when he passed through carrying reports of the California phase of the Mexican War back to Washington.

In 1842 the English author Charles Dickens was touring the United States. In one of his sorties, he traveled on steamboats down the Ohio River and then up the Mississippi to St. Louis, and back. His diary of the trip is recounted in his book *American Notes* (1842), giving us a fair basis for estimating how much time would have been required to travel from St. Louis to Harrodsburg. Dickens' voyage from Louisville, Kentucky to St. Louis (569 river miles²³) took four days, after spending a day waiting to get through the canal at the Falls of the Ohio. That makes about 5 days one-way, from above the falls at Louisville to St. Louis. His return trip required the same number of days, so a round trip between those two points would have required about 10 days. Allowing an estimated two more days, one-way, between Louisville and Cogar's Landing (173 river miles but on a smaller boat for the Kentucky River), plus stagecoach connections into Harrodsburg, makes about 7 days one-way between St. Louis and Harrodsburg, or 14 days for a round trip, just traveling. Adding "several days" for Carson's supposed visit while in Harrodsburg boosts the total to 17 or 18 days minimum needed to complete the trip described in *The Story*. Add another three or four days to get from St. Louis back up river to Howard County, and it becomes obvious that Carson could not have made a trip to Harrodsburg in the 12 days between his getting paid and signing the Power of Attorney. Without the payday, he could not have bought guns from anyone.

If there had been no time constraints, would Carson have found Ben Mills in Harrodsburg like *The Story* said? Let's look for Ben Mills and see what he was doing.

THE BENJAMIN MILLS PAPER TRAIL

IN THE RECORDS OF MASON, LINCOLN AND MERCER COUNTIES, KENTUCKY FROM 1839 TO HIS DEPARTURE FROM HARRODSBURG IN 1869

Guidance in this phase was provided by the earlier work of Harold Edwards and Glenn Marsh. Edwards had tracked Ben Mills from the village of Mayslick in Mason County to Stanford in Lincoln County for a brief stay and then on to Harrodsburg. The superb Stanford-marked Mills rifle illustrated in Edwards'



Figure 6. A promotional advertisement for THE ROWENA, one among many such ads for river boats that appeared in the *Missouri Republican*. This particular ad is from April 12, 1842.

paper suggested to me that Mills must have been in that location for more than just a short time. Marsh dug deeper into the records, confirming and extending what was known of Ben Mills, and through his liberal sharing of references and sources, directed a bright light into the records of Mercer County, particularly the Circuit Court Case Files that contain so much information on Mills' later problems. These two Mills pioneers deserve our sincere thanks.

In this study, some 35 years of tax lists were examined, all of which were ostensibly available on microfilm, and that is what I used.²⁴ Some years are available only in the negative form, which can be difficult to read, and sometimes the information recorded is so illegible that nothing can be deciphered from it. The rewards do outweigh the problems though, and in the end, a fairly complete outline of an individual's property ownership can be reconstructed. Also examined were all "Mills" deeds in the counties where the tax records indicated that Benjamin Mills owned some real estate. The most important things to remember about Tax Lists are 1) in the time span studied in this paper, the tax information lists property owned on the 10th of January of the given year, and 2) the owner was to be at his principal residence ready to submit his tax information to the tax commissioner when he called shortly after January 10th.²⁵ Deeds may be written and signed at any time, but the date and location of appearance before some Civil Authority to be certified or attested (notarized today) is a certain indicator of "where and when" for the signer.



Figure 7. Benjamin Mills, date unknown but est. 1859. Compliments of Glenn and Judy Marsh. The original, a life-sized portrait, hangs in the Harrodsburg Historical Society.

In the following, significant information from tax lists, deeds, census records, and court case files are given generally in chronological sequence, with the information briefed down to a manageable degree. Runs of years in which little change was recorded are summarized. I have not tried to shape this information into a narrative story, as the unfolding events speak for themselves. Abbreviations for Book and page numbers for Tax Lists and Deeds will appear in this manner: B4 p23 means Book 4, page 23. I have carried the Ben Mills search well past anything remotely connected to the alleged Kit Carson affair, because the later years are important in considering who the author of The Story might be.

MASON COUNTY DOCUMENTS

(REMEMBER ALL TAX LIST ENTRIES ARE EFFECTIVE
JANUARY 10TH)

1839 Tax List, B1 p28 (by my count): "Mills Benj." (No profession given) is listed as a voter with no taxable property. Just before the Ben Mills listing is one for "Mills A H" (no profession given), also with no taxable property. After books 1, 2, 3, and 4, there is another book, which appears to be a recompilation of the same data, as the two Mills are listed again, together with others who were also previously listed. Ben Mills does not appear in the tax books for earlier years.

Deed: August 16, 1839, B 47 p. 429-430. James McGuire sold to "George Carter and Benjamin Mills," both of Mason County, a town lot with all appurtenances, in the village of Mayslick, for \$350.

1840 Tax List, B2 p. 10: "Mills and Carter," white males over 21 years old, own a town lot in the village of Mayslick valued at \$250. No values are entered under "Equalization Law" (see note below).

Census of 1840, September 29, p. 56. "Mayslick" [written vertically at extreme left edge of page]. Under "Head of Family," Benjamin Mills has a household composed of two males, one under 5, and one between 30 and 40; with two females, one under 5, and one between 30 and 40. One male was engaged in Manufacturing and Trades, which must have been Ben Mills himself. Immediately following is "Head of Family" George Carter, with a household of seven individuals, composed of two males between 20 and 30, one male between 30 and 40, one female between 20 and 30, two females between 30 and 40, and one between 60 and 70. All three males in this household were engaged in Manufacturing and Trades; it could be assumed that these three Carter men were all gunsmiths, but there is no assurance of that.

1841 Tax List: Neither Mills nor Carter are listed, although technically they still own the town lot in Mayslick. In the same Tax List, B3 p. 1, "Baltzell, Thomas" declared

one town lot in Mayslick worth \$125, and nothing more. It is pertinent that the year before, in the 1840 Tax List, B2 p. 2, "Baltzell, Thomas" is listed as having no real estate, one horse worth \$35, and "stores" worth \$800. See the following entry for more on Baltzell.

Deed August 20, 1841, B50 p. 374-377: "George Carter of Montgomery County and **Benjamin Mills, of Lincoln County**" sold to Thomas W. Baltzell their Mayslick town lot for \$175, "**there being on the same a small brick building . . . lately occupied by the said Carter and Mills as a gunsmith shop.**" Certified for George Carter and wife in Montgomery County on September 15th, **for Ben Mills and wife in Lincoln County by the County Clerk on Sept 21st**, and recorded in Mason County on Sept 27th, 1841. My interpretation of this deed is that Carter and Mills had an agreement with Baltzell to buy the property over time, with Baltzell taking possession before January 10, 1841 as he had declared possession on that date for tax purposes. When paid off, this deed was issued. A similar interpretation may be applicable to the Mills-Magoffin real-estate transaction in Harrodsburg in 1852.

NOTE: The **Kentucky Equalization Law** went into effect in 1838,²⁶ to cover any sort of property of worth that was not already specifically cited as taxable. The tools of a gunsmith would fall into this category. From its inception through 1844, a deductible of \$300 was applied to this class of property. Thereafter, the deduction was reduced to \$100. For the first few years, there was some difficulty getting this type of property listed. During their Mason County stay, Carter and Mills either did not declare their tools, or their value did not exceed the \$300 deduction.

LINCOLN COUNTY DOCUMENTS

The finely finished B. Mills rifle marked "**STANFORD KY**" illustrated in Harold Edwards' 1988 *Muzzle Blasts* article vouches for the high quality and care Mills put into his work while at this location.

1841 Tax List, B2 p37: "Mills Benj" lists no real estate, but has property valued at \$100 under the Equalization Law (after the \$300 exemption).

[Deed: August 20, 1841]: The Mason County Deed for the sale of the Mayslick property (see above) shows that on the date the deed was drawn up, August 20th, Benjamin Mills was "of Lincoln County," and the Lincoln County Clerk (in Stanford) certified the deed on September 21st for subsequent recording in Mason County.

1842 Tax List, B1 p. 14: "Mills Benjamin" listed no real estate or other property except \$500 under the Equalization Law. Considering the \$300 deduction, Mills must have had \$800 worth of equipment in his shop. In 1842, Ben Mills was obviously pursuing his profession in Stanford, not in Harrodsburg.

1843 Tax List, B2 p. 15: "Mills Benjamin" listed only property valued at \$700 under the Equalization Law.

1844 Tax List, B2 p. 12: "Mills Benjamin" listed \$800 under the Equalization Law. This is the last record concerning Ben Mills in Lincoln County. During his stay in Stanford, Mills avoided owning real estate and expanded his shop equipment. His next appearance is in Harrodsburg, later this same year.

MERCER COUNTY DOCUMENTS

Order by Harrodsburg Board of Trustees, April 20th, 1844. *Trustee's Book 2 (1836-1860)*, p. 145:

"Ordered by the board that Benjamin Mills be and he is hereby allowed the privilege of trying his guns & firearms by firing at a mark etc in the back-yard of his gun smith's shop until half past eight oclock A.M., during the year."²⁷

This is the first mention of Ben Mills in the records of Mercer County. The elder Beriah Magoffin, from whom Mills was buying his Harrodsburg property (next item), was a member of the Harrodsburg Board of Trustees.

1845 Tax List, B2 p. 17: "Mills Benjamin" listed one town lot \$500, one slave \$400, Equalization Law property \$400, Total \$1300. Note that Mills here declares ownership of a town lot for tax purposes, and the preceding entry (above) from the Board of Trustees indicates he has a gunsmith's shop. A map of this property (Figure 9), shows that

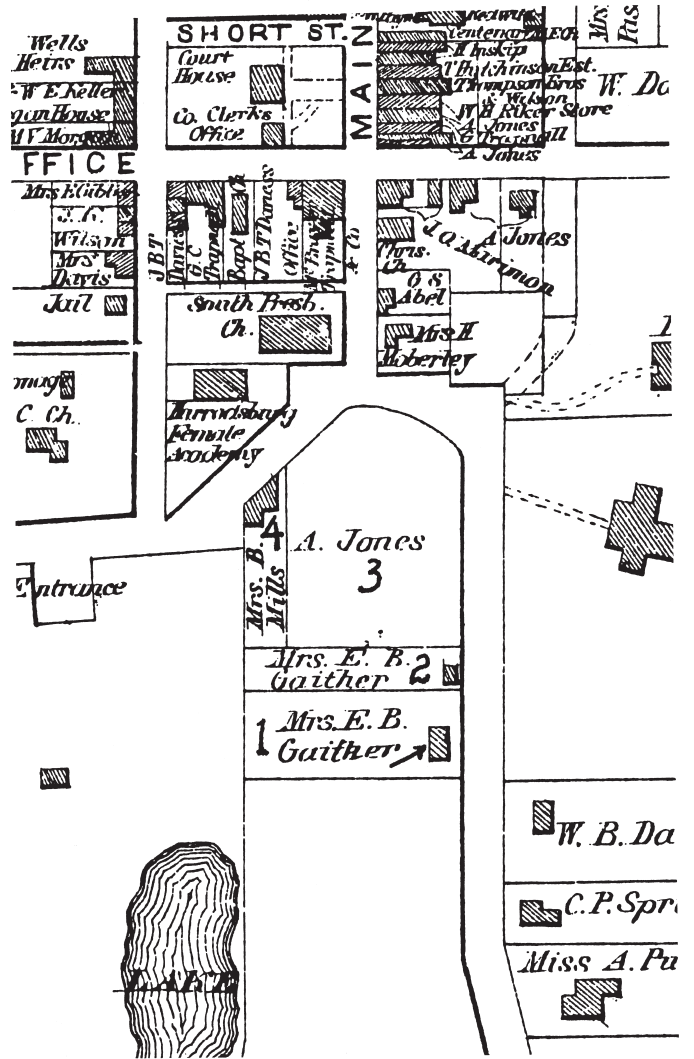


Figure 9. Ben Mills' Harrodsburg property occupied the north end of the long north-south block centered on this map (from a map of Harrodsburg prepared in 1876 and republished in Chinn, 1985.) The Mills family home, still standing, is marked with an arrow. The gun shop, later the property and home of Jane Mills, was in the northwest corner. During Mills' occupancy from 1844 to 1869, the property was not subdivided and there was no house in the lot numbered 2 here. Harrodsburg Springs was immediately to the west (left), the only significant traces here being "Entrance" and the lake that was on that property, not on Mills'. Clay Hill, the home of the elder Beriah Magoffin, is the large house immediately east and still stands. I have added lot numbers matching those used in the Trustee's liquidation sale in July, 1869.

the shop was located next door to Harrodsburg Springs, with the Gun Shop in the northwest corner right on the property line, not far from the drive going into the main building of the Springs. Mills must have assumed a mortgage on this property, to be conveyed when paid off (see Deed of October 21, 1852 below).

From 1846 through 1850, Ben Mills' taxable property increased from \$1600 to \$3450, as his "town lot" (with a large house and the gun shop) crept up in value. In years 1846, 1847, 1848, and 1849, he was a slave holder. His property under the Equalization Law bounced around, but the Tax Commissioners managed to keep increasing his overall total. In 1851 Mills' property was assessed at \$3870 and

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Town of Harrodsburg at the law office of Lewis and Taylor in the town of Harrodsburg on the 20th day of April 1844 - Present James Morgan, M. S. Alexander, A. L. Hayes, Beriah Magoffin, A. Probstown and James Taylor all of whom having been first duly sworn according to law to be their oath in the Board as Trustees -

Ordered by the Board that James Taylor be and he is hereby appointed the Chairman of the Board for the present year -

Ordered by the board that Benjamin Mills be and he is hereby allowed the privilege of trying his guns & firearms by firing at a mark etc in the back-yard of his gun smith's shop, until half past eight oclock A.M. during the year -

Figure 8. Part of page 145 from *Trustee's Book 2 (1836-1860)* that records the Harrodsburg Board of Trustee's order on April 20, 1844 (in the upper paragraph), allowing Ben Mills to test guns behind his shop until 8:30 AM (the lower paragraph). This is the first mention of Ben Mills in any record concerning Harrodsburg and Mercer County and marks his arrival there.

bumped up to \$4025 in 1852, with no slaves held in either year.

Census of 1850, October 17. Harrodsburg, Dist. No. 2,
Mercer County, Kentucky. (Dwelling #1165, Family #1165):

	Age	Gunsmith	Place of birth	Value of real Estate
Benjamin Mills	40		NY	\$ 5000.
Jane	31		Ireland	
Elizabeth	10		Ky	
Charles	5		Ky	
Mary	1		Ky	
Lucien Love	21		Ky	
Andrew Brass	18	Gunsmith	Ky	
Henry Stone	17	Gunsmith	Ky	

This was the first year that personal details were collected for each member of a household. Mills here declares his birthplace to be New York, which he would reconfirm throughout his life. As Marsh pointed out, there is some discrepancy in the ages of the Mills children here compared with the 1840 census. A little work is needed on the Mills family, as ages progress normally in future census listings. The last three men listed are presumed to be apprentices or journeymen in the gun trade.

Deed: October 17, 1852, B 29 p. 84-85: Executors and Executrix of the Estate of Beriah Magoffin conveyed to "B Mills" for \$1400, a certain lot and parcel of ground in Harrodsburg with all building appurtenances and improvements erected thereon. Acknowledged by Executors (one of whom was the younger Beriah Magoffin) on October 20 and November 29, 1852, and by the Executrix on April 7, 1854. Mills had been paying the taxes on this property since 1845.

From 1853 through 1855, Mills' property valuations held steady just over \$5000 and then jumped to nearly \$5500 in 1856, for no obvious reason other than his Equalization Law property, which had not been listed for a while, reappeared. The tax list for 1857 was illegible. For 1858, his total settled back down to \$4570, including \$500 under the Equalization Law. No slaves were listed in this interval.

In 1852, Dr. Christopher Columbus Graham sold the Harrodsburg Springs resort to the U.S. Government for use as a military asylum.²⁸ He had been running the place since

1828. The sudden substitution of the U.S. Army in place of the well-heeled visitors formerly attracted by the Springs must have been a jolt to the economics of the town, but that was followed by a more serious blow in 1856, when the main buildings burned to the ground. The Government decided not to rebuild in Harrodsburg and moved their operation to Washington.²⁹

The Mercer County tax list microfilm for 1859 was illegible. Mills was in Harper's Ferry through 1859, but probably left his Mercer County tax declaration with son Charles for submission, or mailed it directly to the County Clerk. It would be interesting to look at the 1859 tax list for Jefferson County, Virginia (location of Harper's Ferry) to see if Mills had been checked off there.

THE HARPER'S FERRY INTERLUDE

This summary of Ben Mills' short stay in Harper's Ferry is included for its value in the coming discussion of who the author of *The Story* might be.

Ben Mills arrived in Harper's Ferry in late 1958 (Josephus Junior, p. 28), having been appointed Master Armorer at the Arsenal by John B. Floyd, Secretary of War under President Buchanan.³⁰ This we know, because when Mills submitted his letter of resignation on October 8th, 1859, it was addressed to Floyd, and in it he said, "When **you** offered the situation [at Harper's Ferry] to me, I considered it an honour (sic). . . ." Mills went on to give notice of his planned departure on the first of November due to a personal conflict with the Superintendent of the Armory, Alfred M. Barbour (Dean File 18591008). Mills was still serving at Harper's Ferry when John Brown made his raid on Harper's Ferry about a week later.

The Brown raid commenced about 11 PM Sunday the 16th of October, lasted through Monday the 17th, and was over just after daylight on Tuesday, the 18th. The weather was overcast, cold, and damp, with drizzling rain on Monday. No one mentioned stormy conditions, or thunder and lightning. Mills was taken hostage sometime Monday morning (Mills himself did not say), probably while coming to work. Josephus Junior states (p. 31) that several officers of the



Figure 10. A Ben Mills rifle, typical in design and style of the guns he made in Harrodsburg. It is a double-barreled rifle of .43 caliber. Both locks are marked MILLS/HARRODSBURG/KY.

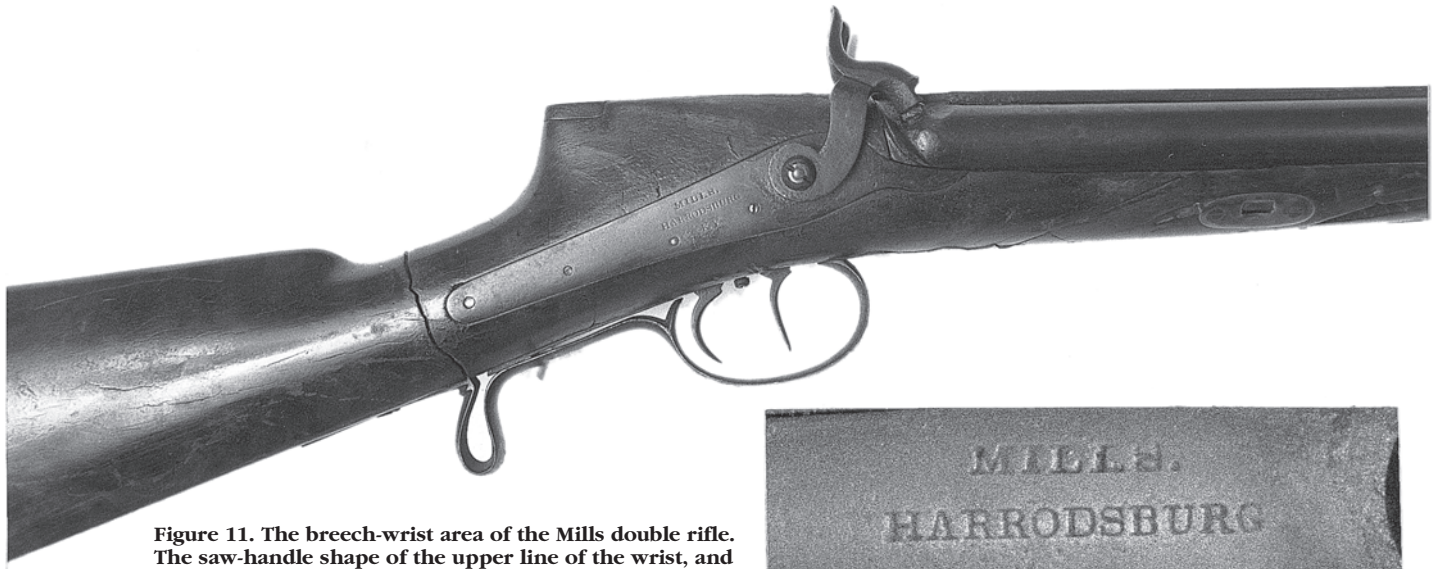
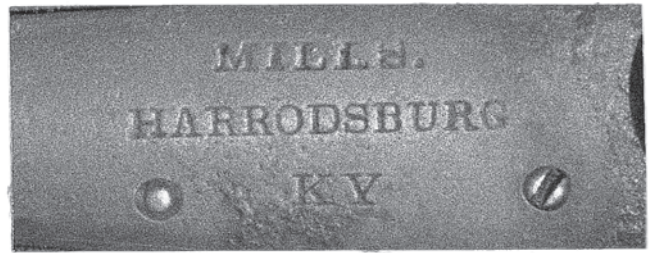


Figure 11. The breech-wrist area of the Mills double rifle. The saw-handle shape of the upper line of the wrist, and flat trigger guard grip with a pinched loop at the back, are diagnostic of Mills muzzle-loading guns made in Harrodsburg. INSET: The mark found on both locks of this gun.



armory were captured at this time but does not name them. Mills was held in the Fire Engine House on the Armory grounds for about 24 hours, together with other men of some standing. During this time, Brown treated the hostages with kindness, conversed with them openly, and saw to it that they were fed and allowed contact with their families. It was especially noted that Brown was composed, “calm and cool” (DeWitt, p. 14), and made no abolition speeches (DeWitt, p. 36). When Colonel Robert E. Lee and a detachment of Marines under Lieutenant Israel Green ended the raid early Tuesday morning,³¹ all hostages were unharmed and in good condition, aside from the stress of being held captive for a while.

At Brown’s trial, Mills was called as a witness by the defense. Sworn in as “Major Mills” on October 29th, the 4th

day of the trial, Mills’ testimony was generally quite sympathetic toward Brown.³² Mills’ wife and a daughter were still in Harper’s Ferry at the time, but shortly afterward they all returned to Harrodsburg.

Press coverage of the entire John Brown/Harper’s Ferry event was quite thorough. Not only were conversations and exchanges recorded, but astute sketch artists composed illustrations of major events. Ben Mills got his picture in the paper, along with other hostages (Figures 12 and 13), when an artist reconstructed the scene inside the Fire Engine House just before the Marines broke in (DeWitt, p. 20). Although Brown had cut his beard down to just an inch or two before coming to Harper’s Ferry, illustrations in the books that followed always portrayed him as a kindly old



Figure 12. John Brown and some of the hostages in the Fire Engine House, Harper’s Ferry Armory, at sunrise on Oct. 18, 1859, just before the Marines broke in. This is a detail from an artist’s conceptual view that appeared in DeWitt, 1859, opposite p. 20. The hostage second from left bears a strong resemblance to Ben Mills.



Figure 13. A closer look at hostage Ben Mills (second from left). What do you think? Sketch artists were the “press photographers” of the day, and the good ones had plenty of work.

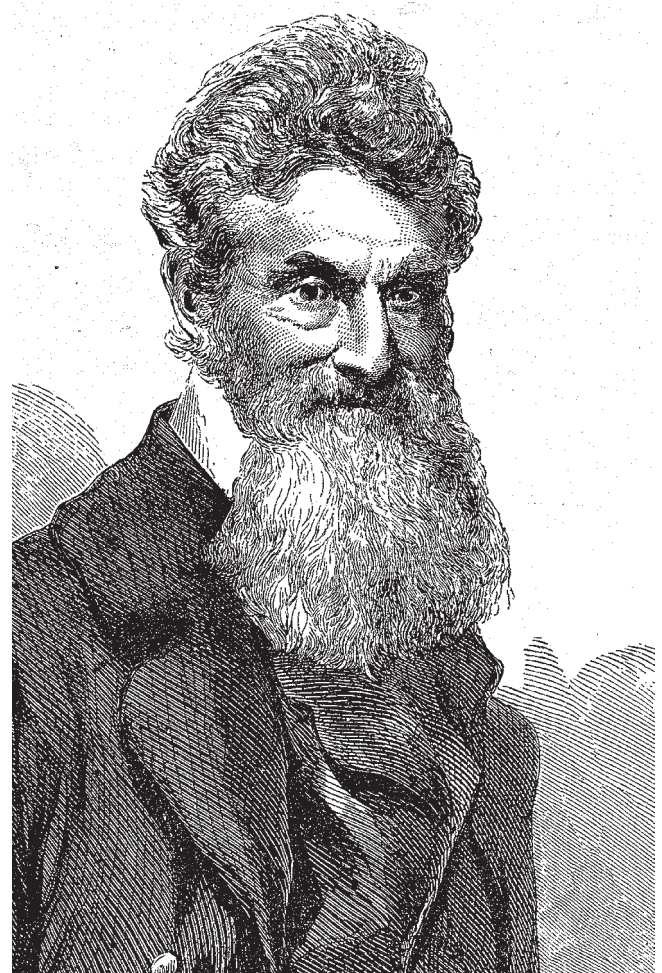


Figure 14. Two images of John Brown used widely through the remainder of the 19th Century. The engraving was obviously taken from the photo, original attributed to photographer J.W. Black of Boston, and now in the collections of The Library of Congress. The engraving is from Charlotte Yonge, 1882, *A Pictorial History of the World's Great Nations*, p. 574.

man with a long white beard, looking much like someone's grandfather. This image was copied directly from a photograph taken earlier in the year before the raid.³⁵

Popular prints by Currier and Ives in 1863 and 1870 used this same image of Brown, looking compassionately upon a Negro woman and her infant child. A third widely distributed print was issued in 1881, taken from a painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in which Brown leans over to kiss the infant (Malin, 1938). To my knowledge, at no time prior to Mills' death in 1888 was Brown characterized or portrayed as a wild man in a religious frenzy, and there was nothing in the record that might have caused Ben Mills to think of him that way.

BACK TO MERCER COUNTY AND HARRODSBURG

The 1860 tax list microfilm was illegible, as was 1861.

Census: 1860, June 23. Harrodsburg. (Dwelling #163, Family #163).

Benjamin Mills	Age 50	Gun Maker	Born	NY
		Value of Real Estate	\$5000, Personal Estate \$2000	
Jane	41		Ireland	
Lizzie	20		Kentucky	

Charles	15		
Jennie(Mary)	11		
Lucy	7		
Edward Kline	24	Gun Maker	PA
Thos. J. Haden	30	" "	Eng.
Margaret "	25		NY
Geo. Giles	24	Carriage Trimmer	Eng.
Virgil Brickey	22	Gun Maker	Ky.
Henry Junius	17	" "	Holland

The Kentucky Press newspaper (of Harrodsburg) carried an advertisement on September 20, 1860, signed in type "Benj. Mills, Harrodsburg, Ky.," offering all sorts of guns, including a three-barreled gun and "the most accurate shooting cast steel pat muzzle Target Gun." (quoted in Dean File 19410909).

On March 13, 1861, Mills placed his last order with his longtime supplier of gun-making materials, John P. Moore's Sons in New York City. Business must have been drying up. He did continue to make payments for a while, but stopped doing that in May of 1862, leaving a balance of several hundred dollars due. Moore's Sons would join other creditors seeking some equity from Mills after his financial collapse in 1867.

On April 12, 1861, Civil War hostilities started when Confederate batteries began the bombardment of Fort Sumpter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina. Alfred M. Barbour, the Superintendent of Harper's Ferry with whom Mills had a personal conflict in 1859, went with the Confederacy and lectured the Harper's Ferry citizenry, urging them to stand with Virginia and the South (Josephus p. 61). Some joined him but Ben Mills, long gone from Harper's Ferry, was not among them.

1862 Tax List, B2 p. 18: "Mills Benj": town lot \$4000, horse \$50, Total \$4050. Plus Carriage \$100, watch or clock \$50, silver plate \$20, piano \$100. Total at higher tax rate \$270. The Mills family appears to be living well, but there may be trouble afoot if the luxuries are increasing while bills are going unpaid.

March 22, 1862: U.S. Government payment approved. The Commission on Ordnance and Ordnance Stores approved payment of \$151.70 to Ben Mills, Louisville (sic), Kentucky, for work done inspecting and repairing arms in the hands of the 19th Regiment of Kentucky Volunteers while at Camp Harrod, in Harrodsburg (37th Congress, 2d Session, Senate Ex. Doc. No. 72 p. 51—[in the Serial Set #1123]—: Letter of The secretary of War, Case 8). This work must have been done late in 1861, as the 19th Regiment was mustered into service at Harrodsburg on January 2, 1862, and shortly thereafter departed for southeastern Kentucky.³⁴ Obviously, Mills was not at the Palmetto Arsenal in Columbia, South Carolina. A printer's error in the document (above) reporting this payment makes it look like Mills was working with Ainslee and Cochran of Louisville, but he was not.³⁵

President Lincoln's *Emancipation Proclamation* became effective on January 1, 1863. In those states involved in armed rebellion against the Union, all slaves were declared free. Although Kentucky was a Slave State, it did not secede and had not been officially hostile toward the U.S. Government, so the proclamation did not apply. Maintaining that Kentucky was a neutral state, the governor, the younger Beriah Magoffin, had refused to raise troops for the Union, but others did so independently, for both the North and the South.

1863 Tax List, B2 p. 12: "Mills Benjamin": town lot: "1 Har[rodsburg] \$2500", horse \$50, Total \$2550. Plus carriage \$100, watch or clock \$50, silver plate \$30, piano \$100. Total at higher rate \$280. Note that the valuation of the town property fell sharply. For much of Kentucky and the South, this was a time of deep financial depression. Payment of taxes must have been difficult, and the gun trade probably decreased to near nothing.

BEN MILLS ENTERS THE WHISKEY TRADE IN 1863 AND HIS FINANCIAL COLLAPSE IN 1867

In this phase of Mills' history, the County Deed records and the Case Files of the Mercer County Circuit Court con-

tribute much information regarding events in his life during the later war years and a few years following. Mills abandoned the gunsmithing business (his shop was let out as a rental house and he had already quit paying for supplies for that kind of work) and immersed himself in setting up and running a distillery on land purchased on Shawnee Run in eastern Mercer County. His efforts as a distiller could have been a success, but the apparent lack of financial discipline led to his failure instead. Mills already had some money problems, all having to do with unpaid bills and debts. Then he failed to pay federal taxes due on his whiskey, even though his cash flow was substantial. Claims against him began to stack up. Eventually the lawyers, bankers, schoolteachers, and U.S. tax collectors were all left in the lurch, and made up a considerable crowd waiting for some relief after the Mercer County Circuit Court shut him down. Of the many Mills Case Files available, Case File M-113 offers an interesting window into his whiskey business, and Case File M-122, a thick one, covers his court-ordered property liquidation that started in 1867 under the supervision of Trustee R.A. Grimes. As Mills' whiskey venture and his financial collapse are closely linked, they are covered here together.

"Article of Agreement," September 23, 1863: Samuel W. Jones agreed to convey to "Ben Mills" 100 acres on the "waters of the Kentucky river," when the sum of \$3000 had been paid. This agreement is cited in the deed dated June 12, 1866, given below, when Jones conveyed title to the property to Mills. The deed gives the location of this land in sketchy terms, referring only to the neighbor's boundaries, and little else. Nothing in the deed indicates that the land was actually on the Kentucky River, or that there were any improvements on this land. Some later documents refer to the property as the "Dean Mill" land, so there may have been a mill of some sort on it at the time of Ben Mills' purchase.

Five years later, in December 1868, when the Shawnee Run property was advertised for sale (see Figure 15), a fairly specific land description was given, and the property included a complete distillery, equipped to produce all kinds of spirits, with a saw mill, cooper's shop (for barrel-making), outbuildings, and a "comfortable dwelling." It is probable that Mills installed these improvements, and that is where his money was going. The "comfortable dwelling" would allow long stays to work the stills, or Mills may have moved himself in more or less permanently, while his wife and daughters remained in the big house in Harrodsburg.

1864 Tax List, B1 p. 17: "Mills Benjamin": 100 acres on Shawnee Run \$2000, town lot "1 H[arrodsburg] 3500", one slave over 16 \$200, three horses or mares \$150. Total \$5850. Plus carriage \$150, watch or clock \$50, silver plate \$20, piano \$100. Total at higher rate \$320. Originally assessed at \$2500 for this year, the Harrodsburg town lot, with the large house and former gun shop on it, was increased in valuation to \$3000 by

the “Supervisors of Tax,” and by some higher authority to \$3500 (KY Historical Society microfilm 76-84-613).

1865 Tax List, B 1, p. 19: “Mills Benjamin”: 100 acres on “Ky River” \$2000, town lot \$3500, (no slaves), two horses or mares \$150, twenty cattle \$350, carriage \$100, watch or clock \$75, silver plate \$20, (no piano). Total (all at higher rate) \$6195. Plus twenty-three hogs over six months old—value not assigned. This year saw the highest valuation ever placed on Mills’ property. The next entry is for “Mills Charles” with no property, but checked as a white male over 21 years of age and enrolled in the Militia. Charles, now home from the war, was probably helping at Shawnee Run. The hogs were a side business, consumers of the spent mash from the distillery. There were probably some pretty happy porkers around the place.

In early 1865, the Civil War was beginning to wind down. On April 9th, North and South met at the Appomattox Court House for the beginning of the end.

August 1865: First U.S. Warrant issued against Ben Mills for unpaid tax on distilled spirits. This was the first of two warrants issued by J.E. Hoskins, Deputy Collector, 7th District, KY, noted in Trustees Receipt Book on February 5, 1869, Case File M-122.

The 13th Amendment to the Constitution had been working its way through the States since January, 1865. With final ratification in December of 1865, slavery was abolished and forever prohibited in the United States.

1866 Tax List, B1, p16. “Mills, Benjamin”. 100 acres on Shawnee Run \$2000, town lot “HB[Harrodsburg] \$2500,” three horses or mares \$200, four cattle \$50, carriage \$100, watch or clock \$50, silver plate \$20, piano \$100. Total \$5020. Plus five hogs over six months old and one free Negro. Again the next entry is “Mills Charles” with no property, checked as before, and with one free Negro. I wonder how and why a “free Negro” can be listed on a property declaration.

May 1866: The second U.S. Warrant against Ben Mills was issued for unpaid tax on distilled spirits. At this point, Mills was about \$2200 in arrears on his tax payments. A year later, some time in 1867, Agent Hoskins had seized the distillery and land on Shawnee Run and was preparing to sell it when Trustee Grimes came on the scene.³⁶

Deed: June 12, 1866, B36 p. 246-247: Samuel W. Jones conveyed to Ben Mills for \$3000, 100 acres “on the waters of the Kentucky river.” Acknowledged and recorded June 12, 1866. This deed gave Mills title to the property and refers to the “Article of Agreement” mentioned in 1863. Mills managed to secure this transaction by issuing a promissory note for \$1500 to cover the balance due. Jones passed the note on (sold it), and after being passed on by others, it ended up in banker Hutchison’s hands.

July 31, 1866: Cancellation of Whiskey Trade agreement (Mercer Circuit Court Case file M-113.) Having ended their whiskey trade agreement, Mills and one John Neil were at odds

cleaning up rights and responsibilities for insurance, transportation, and products still in a fire-damaged warehouse in Danville. In his rambling plea, Mills states that at one time he had sold to Neil seventy-five barrels of whiskey, in 40 gallon barrels, for \$2.35 per gallon. A quick calculation says that was about \$7000 worth of whiskey and should have paid off some of the debts. It is not clear who won the case, but some whiskey was still in Danville when Grimes was trying to clean up Mills’ affairs.

1867 Tax List, B2 p. 17 (Ky Hist Soc microfilm 73-0284): “Mills, Benj”. 100 acres on Shawnee Run \$2500, 1 [town lot] H[arrodsburg] \$2500, 5 horses \$250, no cattle, carriage \$150, watch or clock \$100, piano \$100, Total \$5600. Checked as being a white male over 21, with two children between 6 and 20 years old. Followed immediately by son Charles with no property, checked as being over 21 and enrolled in the militia. State property taxes ultimately due for 1867, and for 1868 and 1869 as well, were paid by Trustee Grimes, as the Deed of Trust dated October 16, 1867 (below) officially transferred title to all of Mills’ property to him. Receipts for these taxes are in Grimes’ Receipt Book, Case File M-122.

September 9th, 1867: Just a month before the Court-ordered takeover of his property, Mills mortgaged the distillery and land on Shawnee Run, together with his gun shop building and two adjoining acres in Harrodsburg, for \$1972.95, with banker E. Hutchison & Co. holding the mortgage and the note. The \$1500 note given to finalize the Shawnee Run deal with Jones was also written to this mortgage, since banker Hutchison was holding it as well (Case File M-122). In this mortgage, it is stated that **the gun shop in Harrodsburg is “now occupied as a dwelling house.”** There is no clue as to how long this had been the case, possibly since 1863, but the gunsmith’s tools had to be somewhere else if the place was rented out as a residence. In the Trustee’s final report dated July 26th, 1870, the second item on the list of funds collected is **“For rent of the shop \$219.00”**—no time span given. From the Deed of Trust (below) to the sale of the property in early September, 1869, the gun shop building had been under the trustee’s control about 22 months. Rent at \$10 per month could account for the \$219 taken in.

Banker Hutchison had a lot to lose in the failure of Ben Mills, and I suspect that Hutchison was instrumental in bringing the case before the Circuit Court. There are no documents in Case File 122 that explain the beginnings of the case, but the Deed of Trust from Mills to Grimes dated October 16, 1867, was an early step that required orders from the court. J.L.B. Daviess was the appointed “Master in Chancery” and Commissioner, with power to actually convey real estate, when the time came to do so. Robert A. Grimes was the appointed Trustee, charged with performing the mechanics of liquidating all of Mills’ assets, distributing the funds received, and keeping the Commissioner and the Court informed. The

files once included a specially surveyed map of Mills' Harrodsburg property, but it is now missing. A close approximation can be seen in Figure 9.

Deed of Trust: October 16, 1867: Mercer Circuit Court Case File 122. From "Benjamin Mills" to Robert A. Grimes, Trustee, for the benefit of Mills creditors covering all real estate, including the dwelling house and gunsmith's shop on 4 8/10 acres in Harrodsburg, and the 100 acres of land bought of S.W. Jones [Shawnee Run], **also all the personal property of said Mills now in the County of Mercer.** (This document is also filed in Mercer County Deed Book 41, pages 192-193). With some forewarning, Mills could have taken the movable personal property to some other county and may have already moved his gun-making tools to Lexington.

After advertising the Shawnee Run property in Harrodsburg and Lexington newspapers in December, 1867 (receipt in Trustees Receipt Book, Case File 122), Trustee Grimes actually sold the property, including land, mill, and distillery, on January 6, 1868. On that day, Grimes had Ben Mills sign another deed of trust specifically covering this property and had Jane Mills relinquish all right and title (her document is also on file in Mercer County Deed Book 38, p. 107). With these papers in hand, Grimes held his sale, recognized Elijah Hutchison as the highest bidder at \$2500.00, and made arrangements for payment over time. Banker Hutchison did not live to see the actual conveyance of title, made on September 28th, 1871, but Mrs. Hutchison received it in his place (Mercer County Deed B41 p. 192-193).

In August of 1868, four barrels of whiskey belonging to Mills were still in storage in Danville, county seat of Boyle County, the next county to the south. This whiskey was probably part of the dispute between Mills and Neal in Case 113. \$91.00 was due in U.S. taxes, and \$4 storage charges. Trustee Grimes recovered this whiskey, after paying all charges, and sold it for \$327.66. (Trustees Receipt Book for tax and storage, and Trustee's (final) Report filed July 26, 1870 for funds received).

After two years of contacting creditors, gathering claims, and locating assets, the Court on July 29, 1869, ordered that Mills' Harrodsburg property be partitioned and sold. A survey was made dividing the 4.8 acres into four lots. On **September 6, 1869**, the sale was conducted "before the Court House door in Harrodsburg" (Commissioner's Report filed November 9, 1869, Case File M-122), with results as follow:

Lot 1, the southernmost lot with the house "on the Danville Turnpike being the same formerly occupied by said Mills as a dwelling," was bought by Elijah Hutchison for \$2000. Shortly thereafter, Hutchison paid \$300 for Jane Mills' contingent right to dower in the property, should she survive Ben Mills (Deed B39 p. 156-157). Clear title to this property was conveyed to Hutchison on July 8, 1870 (Mercer Deed B40, p. 90-92). The house had been the Mills family home since

Mill, Distillery, AND 100 ACRES OF LAND FOR SALE.

A S Trustee for Benjamin Mills, I will expose to public sale, on **Friday, the 20th of December**, a tract of land lying on both sides of Shawnee Run, one mile from the mouth and half a mile from the pike leading from Monday's Landing to Eldorado.—Said tract of land contains about

100 ACRES,

About one-half of which is covered with cedar timber, which is valuable for fence post. On the tract is a MILL, in good running order; it has an 18 foot overshot wheel, and will run more days in a year than any water mill in the country. There is a Still House only 30 feet from the mill, in good order for stilling. It has four fermenting iron-bound Cisterns, that hold 1500 gallons each, and a lot of fine Mash Tubs. A new copper Beer Pump, and new Force Pump to fill the boilers; a double still for boiling beer. The double still, boiler, and all fixtures are in good order and of the best quality. There is a comfortable Dwelling, a new Bonded Warehouse, a new stable and cooper's shop, and plenty of wood convenient. Taking it altogether, it is perhaps the best site for a distillery in the country. There is also plenty of pure fresh water.

Mr. Mills or I will take pleasure in showing the above property to any one desirous of purchasing. Possession given immediately.

TERMS OF SALE—One-third cash, the balance in six and twelve months.

R. A. GRIMES, Trustee.

Observer copy ids and send bill to this office for collection.—*Harrodsburg Signal*:
Harrodsburg, Ky., dec 4 28-tdw

Figure 15. The ad for the sale of Ben Mills' whiskey distillery on Shawnee Run, in eastern Mercer County. It appeared in the *Lexington Observer and Reporter* on December 4, 11, and 18, 1867, and from the note at the bottom of the ad, also in the *Harrodsburg Signal*. The property was sold on January 6, 1868.

1844. If I am not mistaken, it still stands at 464 Beaumont Avenue and is now known as the Magoffin-Gaither House.

Lots 2 and 3, with no improvements at that time, were bought by Augustus Jones for \$255 and \$250, respectively. He paid back \$50 on each lot for release of dower, so a total of \$400 was regained from the release of Jane's dower rights. Title was conveyed to Jones on 15 July 1970 (Deed Book 40, pages 98-100 and 100-102).

Lot 4, tucked in the northwest corner of the property where the Gun Shop still stood, was bought for \$500 by Phil. B. Thompson, who immediately transferred his "certifi-

cate of purchase” to Jane Mills. (Thompson may have been Mills’ attorney through this whole affair.) Jane paid off the note—her dower payments would have taken care of most of it—and received clear title in her own name on June 4, 1870 (Deed Book 40 pages 23–25).

Immediately after disposing of the real estate, “the Trustee and Commissioner demanded the personal property but none was found in the house” (Commissioners Report filed November 9, 1869, Case File M-122). It looks like Ben was able to cart off everything moveable. Since the gun shop was a rent house at the time, occupant not named, no mention was made of examining it for Mills’ property.

Mercer County tax lists through this period show that Ben Mills disappeared from the scene before 1869. In 1868 (B2, p. 17) he is listed with NO property, but checked as a white male over 21. Son Charles follows, checked the same. Since the tax rolls were also used as a voter count, all adult males were listed whether they owned property or not. In 1869, Ben Mills is not listed at all, while son Charles appears in book 1 with no property and checked as a voter. Ben is also missing from the 1870 tax list, but Charles is again present, with no property, over 21, and enrolled in the militia. I did not examine the tax rolls after 1870. Bayless Hardin, of the Kentucky Historical Society, confirmed for Herman Dean that Ben Mills did not appear on the Mercer County tax rolls after 1868, but found Mrs. Jane Mills listed from 1870 (her first year as an owner on January 10th) through 1878, with one town lot that increased in valuation from \$350 to \$600. According to Hardin, 1878 is the last of the archived Tax Lists for Mercer County held by the Kentucky Historical Society (Dean file 19410725). Jane Mills moved from the big house on Lot 1 into the old Gun Shop after the sale of September 6th, 1869, with son Charles there to help out. Ben Mills had

gone on, probably to Lexington, where it is known that he resumed the gunsmithing business with all his old mechanical genius and superb craftsmanship. (See Marsh, and Edwards 1988 for some details on Mills in Lexington.)

Census 1870, June 2. Harrodsburg. Page 6. Dwelling #32, Family #36:

Mills Benj	Age	Gun	NO	NO	Born
	60	Maker	Real Estate	Personal Estate	New York
—Charles	25	Gun Maker			Kentucky
—Jane	50	Keeping House	Real Estate \$500	Personal Estate \$100	Ireland
—Jennie (Mary)	21	at Home			Kentucky
—Lucy	16	at School			Kentucky

It is puzzling that Ben Mills is listed by the census taker, but not recorded as a voter on the tax rolls. Either Ben just happened to be in town at census time, or the census taker interviewed Jane alone, and she simply named Ben as one of the family. Daughter Lizzie (Elizabeth), 30 years old in 1870, had married Dr. Henry Plummer on October 3rd, 1867. With the exception of a three-year residence in Poplar Plains, Fleming County, from 1870 to 1873, the Plummers were at home in Harrodsburg (Perrin, Battle, and Kniffin, 1887, p. 974).

In the Trustees final report filed July 26, 1870, Grimes reported \$6156.96 received from all sources (most of it from the sale of the real estate) and listed 67 disbursements of those funds The U.S. Government was paid in full, as were all state and local taxing authorities. The courthouse crowd came out pretty well too. The other creditors came out short. J.J. Cooke, head of the Harrodsburg Female College, received \$6.60 on his outstanding bill of \$30.00 for Lucy Mills’ tuition. Suppliers John P. Moore’s Sons of New York got \$220.77 on their claim of \$571.69. Banker Hutchison was holding a mortgage and note with \$2951.95 due, but received only \$1440.08. He had hedged his bets by buying the Shawnee Run distillery for \$2500, and Lot 1 with the big house in Harrodsburg for \$2000, so he must have seen value in these properties beyond his losses. Others on the creditors list had similar experiences. This was the end of it for Ben Mills in Harrodsburg. There is no indication that he did any significant business in Mercer County again.

Jane Mills lived most of the rest of her life keeping house in the building that had been Ben Mills’ Harrodsburg gun shop. She sold a small piece off the southern-most end of her lot in 1889 (Deed B56, p. 418–419) and finally let it all go in 1892 (Deed B60, p. 253–254), with arrangements for payment over time. A Trustee did assist her in receiving the final payments and releasing the deed from mortgage restrictions. Ben got rid of his gun tools in 1883 (Marsh, p. 64) and may



Figure 16. Mrs. Jane Mills, date unknown. The gun shop property was conveyed to her with clear title on June 4, 1870, and she lived there for most of her remaining life. (The blemes are in the photo, not on Mrs. Mills.)

have come back to Harrodsburg from Lexington at that time. Whether Jane took him in we do not know. He died in Harrodsburg in 1888; son Charles died in 1895, and Jane died in 1896. All three are buried in Charles' lot in Harrodsburg's Springhill Cemetery, in unmarked graves.

WHO WAS OLD TIMER?

In trying to identify the author of *The Story*, the search worked on the premise that the person had to be someone familiar with Harrodsburg and its history, with a flair for writing well enough developed to compose the piece when it appeared in the early 20th century. I found three individuals who met these requirements. They were Thomas Mitchell Farnsworth, Henry Cleveland Wood, and James Taylor Cooke. All were lifelong residents of Harrodsburg; each was interested in the history of the town and active in the local Historical Society, and each had a flair for writing. Also, each one was in his 50s or 60s when *The Story* appeared in the *Harrodsburg Democrat*, between 1910 and 1921, and all three worked together as volunteer guides at the Old Fort Harrod State Park, showing visitors around and explaining the exhibits.

Tom Farnsworth (born March, 1858, died June 30, 1936),³⁷ had been a newspaper man during some part of his life. He was the "City Man" for the *Harrodsburg Democrat* for a while, and as he said himself, "A printer or reporter once [he] gets ink on his fingers,—it is there for life."³⁸ A column he wrote in the 1930s for the *Harrodsburg Herald*, titled, "Do You Recall?" was reprinted in the *Herald's Mercer's Magazine* in 1996 and 1997. His experience as a writer shows in his controlled writing style, sound sentence structure, and rational composition. His words flow smoothly and are well organized. One of his columns was headed, "Recalling Past With Old Timer." It was a single passing case, but it sure rang a bell. He was not inclined to use flashbacks to times not his own and was not adverse to saying 'I don't recall the details.' He stuck to his own experiences and knowledge, without venturing into the sort of fabrication seen in *The Story*. In the 14 or so installments of his recollections that I examined, no mention was made of Ben Mills, nor of Kit Carson. Had he lived a few more years, he probably would have corresponded with Herman Dean, but that did not happen.

Henry Cleveland Wood (born in 1855, died February 19, 1943),³⁹ was recognized as the "Poet Laureate" of Harrodsburg. He too had been in the newspaper business and was a prolific writer, with many published pieces to his credit in well-known magazines with nationwide circulation.⁴⁰ His writing tended to the Victorian romantic style, with polished phrases and sophisticated turns of meaning. Wood was involved in Herman Dean's gathering of information on Ben Mills. In his reply to a Bayless Hardin inquiry about Ben Mills (that ended up in the Herman Dean File), Wood said:

As a child, I remember seeing Mr. Mills work in his gun-shop here, and his telling me that during the John Brown insurrection, he was held as one of the hostages in the Engine House there by Brown. [Wood goes on to name the members of the Mills family—all of them—and a grand daughter who might be found in a nearby town.] I have been told Mr. Mills was a Canadian, but do not know that to be a fact. (Dean File 19410908)

There is no embellishment here, just straight answers with nothing resembling the fictionalization seen in *The Story*. Considering that Wood was eight years old before Mills embarked on his Shawnee Run whiskey venture, it is entirely plausible that he did visit in Mills' shop while a boy.

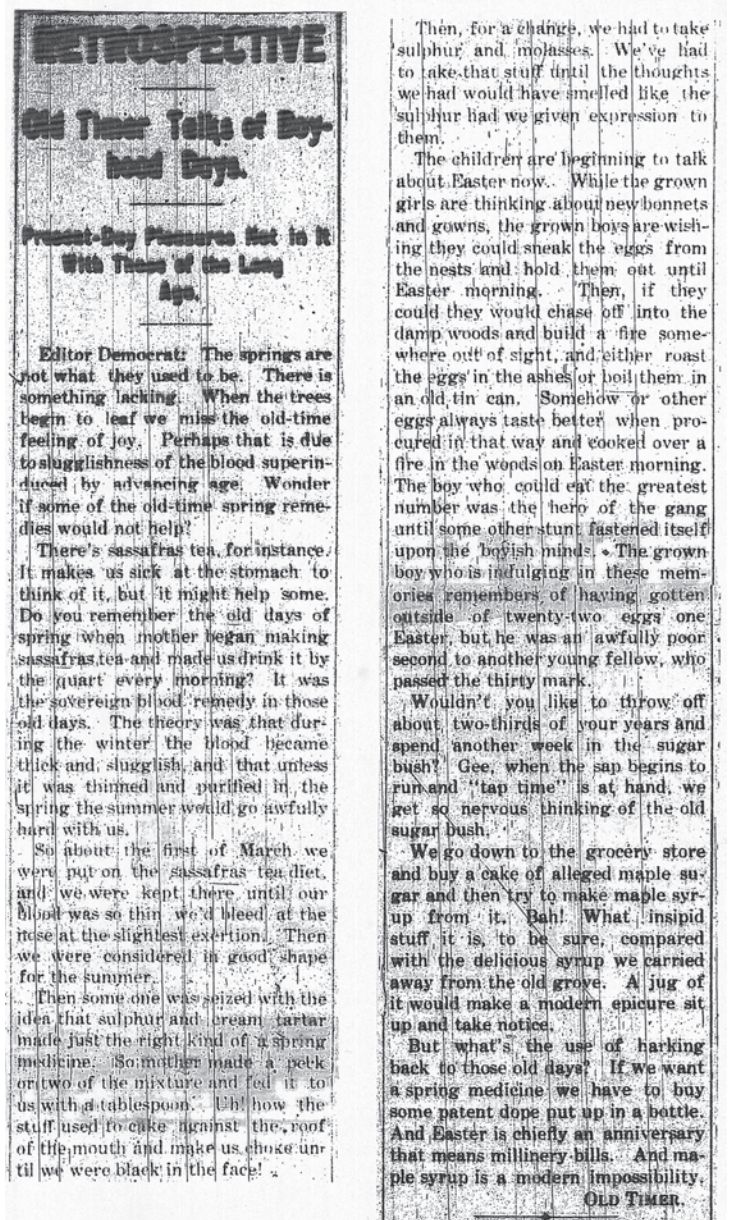


Figure 17. The OLD TIMER article that appeared in the *Harrodsburg Democrat* on March 20, 1908. The lead subject is springtime elixirs forced on boys by their Mothers in the old days, and some of the names recited ("sulphur and cream tartar") suggest pharmaceutical experience. The style of writing is similar to that in *The Story*, and the time frame is close.

James Taylor Cooke (born May 17, 1861, died December 13, 1944),⁴¹ was a professional druggist who ran his own store in Harrodsburg. In many ways he was a self-made man. He was only 17 months old when his father died, but his mother held the family together, raising James T. and his two sisters as a single parent. He went on to acquire an education and become a registered pharmacist at the age of 21.⁴² Examples of his known compositions from the family file indicate that, as a writer, Cooke liked historical events, some well before his time. His style was clipped and earthy, with a tendency to use long-past conversations as quotes in his compositions. A line in his obituary stated, "Having a retentive memory, his mind was a veritable storehouse of anecdotes and facts."

The nostalgic article signed "Old Timer" found in the *Harrodsburg Democrat* of March 20, 1908, mentioned earlier, was a sketch about springtime elixirs forced on boys in the author's youth (see Figure 17). He speaks about sassafras tea consumed by the quart, sulphur and cream tartar by the tablespoon, and sulphur and molasses and then ends with a rant about Easter and maple syrup not being what it used to be, all with considerable exaggeration. Could this composition be that of a pharmacist waiting for business on a slow day?

Cooke was a participant in Herman Dean's search for Ben Mills information. It seems that Bayless Hardin not only questioned Henry Wood, but also asked Cooke about Ben Mills, since Hardin wrote to Dean:

"There is a Mr, Jim Cook, who lives in Harrodsburg, Ky., who could tell you more about Ben Mills than Mr. Hutton, I think. This Mr. Cook is quite an old man, and quite a historian, and very much interested in local history. When you go through Harrodsburg, if you have a chance, look up Mr. Cook. I feel sure he can and will give you more information than Mr. Hutton." (Dean File 19410725)

Hardin did not give a reason for this strong endorsement. If there was a letter from Cooke to Hardin that demonstrated Cooke's grasp of Mills' history, Hardin did not pass it on to Dean. (I should say that no such letter is in the Dean File now.)

Dean did write to Cooke a short time later, as he got a long rambling reply dated August 29, 1941, that filled just over three typewritten pages when transcribed by Dean (Dean File 19410829). In it, Cooke asserted that he was with Mills a great deal and had been in his shop many times. He stated twice that Mills was born in Canada. Cooke said there were two daughters in the Mills family, when there were three. He asserts that Mills' appointment at Harper's Ferry was given by President Pierce, when it came from Secretary of War Floyd, under President Buchanan. He also said that Mills was held prisoner by Brown for three days, when the whole affair from beginning to end lasted little more than 36 hours. It makes one wonder if Cooke really knew Mills very well at all. Mills went into the whiskey



Figure 18. Herman P. Dean in the spring of 1964, from a picture in A.S. of A.C. Bulletin Number Nine, p. 1. Dean conducted a serious campaign to gather information on Mills in the early 1940s, and his results are the basis for much of what we know about Ben Mills today.

business with the purchase of the Shawnee Run property in 1863, when Cooke was a two-year-old toddler. The gun shop had been let out as a rental house before September 1867 (Cooke was then six years old), and probably had been for several years, so Cooke's exposure to Mills there is unlikely. Cooke offers so

much about Mills that is erroneous, one must wonder where he got it, or if he just made it up.

In his letter to Dean, Cooke has Mills saying that as Brown approached Harper's Ferry a fierce thunderstorm was in progress, and Brown "looked like a god as he crossed the Bridge. His eyes did not look human." and "mention negro to him [Brown] and at once he was wild." Ben Mills did not see Brown cross the bridge. The bridge watchman may have, and if he did, he saw a quiet old man, roughly dressed for the cold, driving a small one-horse farm wagon.⁴³ It was reported by the hostages in the Fire Engine House, where Mills did see Brown and talk with him, that Brown was composed throughout the affair and made no abolitionist speeches. Cooke's description of Brown fits well with an interpretation of Brown that surfaced in the 1930s (Ehrlich, 1932) and was put into visual perspective by a painting by John Steuart Curry that appeared in *Life Magazine* on December 25th, 1939 (Figure 20).⁴⁴ This portrait rocked the art world, as well as those interested in social history, and led to renewed interest in Brown, with titles such as *Man on Fire* and *John Brown The Thundering Voice of Jehovah* eventually springing from it. It looks to me like Cooke was putting words in Mill's mouth, and those words were foreign to what Mills might have said, given the opportunity.

Of all the strange statements in Cooke's letter to Dean, the one most pertinent to this study is a paragraph that retells The Story again, with alterations. Here it is, quoted in its entirety:

One morning, latter part of February, he [Mills] received a letter, post marked from a fort which afterwards became St. Louis, ordering three guns, giving minute description of each one, and telling him I will be there the first week in April, God permitting me. Signed, Christopher Columbus Carson (Kit

Carson). He came and was entertained by Dr. Graham at the Graham Springs. He received and paid for the guns. A number of years afterwards a son of James Lillard, one of the party who dined at Graham Springs, was in Kansas City, when he picked up the morning paper and saw where Kit Carson was visiting his son in Independence about eighteen miles away. He ordered a team at once and drove out there and had a talk with Kit Carson. He told Mr. Lillard that he remembered very well his trip to get the guns from Benjamin Mills and that these were the guns that he and two other scouts used to pilot Fremont over the mountains. He did not know what became of the other two guns but his gun was now at the Alamo in Texas.

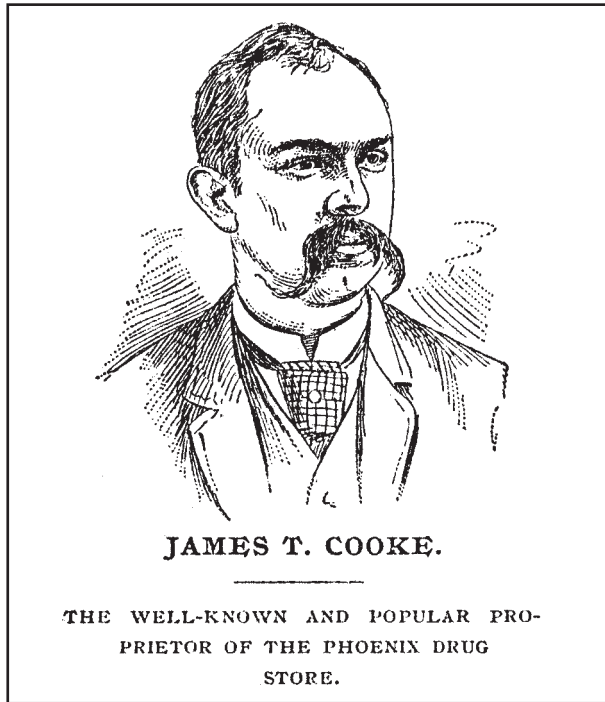


Figure 19. James T. Cooke, in 1890. From an engraving used in *The Harrodsburg Democrat, Souvenir Edition*, June 20, 1890. Cooke was a self-made man, a successful pharmacist, and among the most enthusiastic boosters of Harrodsburg and its history. He is the best candidate I know of to be identified as OLD TIMER, the author of the Kit Carson—Ben Mills story.

The points that match those in the Dillin Copy of The Story are numerous (compare this paragraph and the text in Figure 4). “Columbus” is still offered as part of Carson’s name, and Fremont’s name is still misspelled, for example, but the changes are what make it look like it came from the same hand that wrote The Story in the first place:

1. Without regard for the time required to build custom rifles, the letter is now received in the “latter part of February,” assuming the guns could be assembled in very little time. He forgot or simply omitted the mention of the year 1842, and the time of Carson’s arrival.
2. The meeting with Mr. Lillard (originally Dr. John Lillard) is moved to Independence (Missouri), “where

Carson was visiting his son.” This is impossible. Carson’s oldest boy William, born in October 1852,⁴⁵ was 15 years old when Carson died in the spring of 1868, and was then still at home with the rest of the Carson children in Colorado. Carson did not have a son living anywhere in Missouri prior to his death.

3. Most improbable is the last sentence, where Carson said “his gun was now at the Alamo in Texas.” By mentioning the Alamo, the story teller tries to pull another icon of mythic proportions into his composition, directing even more honor on the Gunsmith of Harrodsburg. I suspect Ben Mills was himself a hero in Cooke’s eyes. His telling of the tale in this form over the years must have been the source of the Alamo statement on the Old Gun Shop sign erected in 1970.

It seems to me that the paragraph quoted above and The Story have so much in common, and the same disregard for historical reality, that the author of one must have been the author of the other. In my opinion, James T. Cooke is the most likely candidate for Author of the Old Timer stories. This is an opinion, of course, but time and further research my eventually prove the case, one way or another.

All the world loves a good story, but the audience must be able to tell the difference between fact and fiction, and the storyteller is at least partly responsible for making the difference clear. It was not too difficult in this case, and we must salute Old Timer for a great piece of fictional folklore, even if it did trample on a bit of history. Of all the Kentucky people contacted by Dean in his quest for Mills information, James T. Cooke was the only one to bring up The Story. He must have felt a certain pride in it, had a habit of telling it, and did not at all mind telling it one more time. The issue



Figure 20. A detail from a portrait of John Brown created by John Steuart Curry in 1939 that appeared as a full-page spread in the *Life Magazine* issue of December 25th of that year. This image may well have been the inspiration for Cooke’s rendition of the scene when Brown crossed the bridge into Harper’s Ferry, as described in his letter to Herman Dean in August 1941.

was not so clouded that most of those who doubtless knew all about it decided not to mention it as historical material and avoided it entirely. At the same time, there were always a few who wanted it to be true, and took it on faith that it was—and some still do.

**“There is a condition worse than blindness,
and that is seeing something that isn’t there.**

Thomas Hardy
1840-1928

GENERAL NOTES

After a single experimental issue printed on August 7, 1881, the *Harrodsburg Democrat* newspaper commenced regular weekly publication on January 18, 1884 and ran to August 1909. For about two and a half years, the name *The Kentucky Republican* was used (August 1909–December 1911) and was then changed to *Harrodsburg Leader*. Sometime in 1916, the name was changed back to *The Harrodsburg Democrat* and continued as such into 1935. The 1916 date is from a clipping in the Henry Cleveland Wood Scrapbook, Harrodsburg Historical Society. This clipping is docketed “Harrodsburg Democrat, Sept 5, 1916” with mention in the printed text of the Democrat’s extension of congratulations. No complete issues from the 1916–1917 period are currently known. The microfilm available by loan from the University of Kentucky covers from 1884 to 1909 with some huge gaps. Somewhat better coverage of this same period, still with huge gaps, plus issues from 1918 into 1935 can be examined, but not borrowed, at the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort.

A few words regarding **TAX LISTS**: Through the period of concern here, from about 1835 through the Civil War years, statements of property taxable by the State of Kentucky were gathered each year by “Commissioners of Tax” (they would be called Assessors today) from the property owners living within the Commissioner’s assigned district. A district could have been a whole county, or a part of a county, depending on the number of owners to be called on and the distances to be traveled. The procedure required individual property owners to prepare a written statement of all their property within the state of Kentucky as of January 10th of that year, and the value placed on that property. When called upon by the Commissioner shortly thereafter, at the owner’s principle place of residence, each was required to sign their statement and swear an oath that it was complete and true. Each Commissioner compiled this information into a district book of some 20 to 40 ledger pages, in which the property owners were grouped by the initial of their surname, but not alphabetized within that group. In other words, all with last names starting with A would be together but in no particular order; the same with B’s, and so

on. The gathered district books made up the county tax list for the year. When completed, the list went on to other offices for checking and review and were occasionally “adjusted.” Copies of the final version were prepared for the County Sheriff, whose duty it was to actually collect the taxes due.

Surviving tax books are preserved in The Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort, identified by county and year. For some years the books appear to be the ones originally submitted by the Commissioners, and sometimes as books subsequently reconstructed by the County Clerk. Rarely some of both sets are preserved together, giving the appearance of double listings. In some years, the district books are identified as “Book 1,” “Book 2,” etc. In others, the books for a given year run together one after another, with no clue about the change, except that the name groups start over again with the A’s, B’s, and C’s, signaling the beginning of a new “book.” In looking for Ben Mills, for example, each M group must be examined until he is either found, or a decision is made that he was not included in that county on January 10th.

DEEDS can give a quick start to any search, as County Clerk’s offices have DEED INDEX BOOKS arranged alphabetically by seller–buyer (grantor–grantee), and also buyer–seller (grantee–grantor). These are easy to use and give the exact pages in the DEED BOOKS for the deeds that involve the individual of interest. There can be tricky instances where the listings are subdivided further, according to local geographic criteria (I ran into this in Mason County), but it is not difficult to spot these and check them out. Deed information can act as a guide to the years of tax lists to be examined, but if the individual owned no real estate, other indicators must be used. **Census** rolls can be helpful in the same manner, as the individual is located at a particular time and place, which may be the starting point for a search.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Ben Mills, or Benjamin Mills, was a popular name in the several Mills clans in Kentucky. In the records I have seen, gunsmith Ben Mills did not use a middle initial, though was inserted by others from time to time, as in line 8 of *The Story*. A Judge Benjamin Mills preceded gunsmith Mills by several decades and lived in Frankfort, so there should not be a problem there. A family of Kentucky church men also had a Benjamin Mills, but they never lived in the vicinity of the gunsmith. Another Ben Mills, a black man, lived in Harrodsburg, but I did not find any problems separating his activities from those of gunsmith Mills. A further challenge concerns a Ben Mills who is said to have been a gunsmith in North Carolina and Kentucky in the 1700s. A MILLS genealogy project might straighten out the possible interrelations.

2. Herman P. Dean (1897–1978) was a charter member of the A.S. of A.C. (1953) and served as President 1958–1959.

In 1953, he began giving his collection of guns to the Huntington Galleries in Huntington, West Virginia, which he helped found (now the Huntington Museum of Art). His last gift was in 1978, apparently a bequest made in his will. Almost all of his guns are on view in the Dean display (telephone communication, 29 June 2006, Jenine Culligan, Senior Curator, Huntington Museum of Art). Only one Mills piece, a pistol, was included in his gift. Some eleven other Mills guns he once owned (Dean File 19440401, a letter from Dean to Lutz) were apparently let go elsewhere.

3. Mentions-in-passing excepted, such as Peterson's blurb on page 172 in *The Great Guns*.

4. Clemens Caldwell was a member of A.S. of A.C. from 1964 to 1972. No explanation recorded for his departure.

5. See "Bicentennial Edition" of *The Harrodsburg Herald*, June 1974, Section HH, page 3 for a listing of Harrodsburg papers from 1814 to 1860.

6. Jackson and Spence, p. 169.

7. Author of *The Kentucky Rifle*.

8. A search for "Christopher Columbus Chinn" in Kentucky genealogy records turned up one, born in 1854 and died in 1938, obviously not a participant in the 1842 Carson event. "C.C. Chinn" was mentioned on page 937 of Perrin, Battle, and Kniffin (1887), as being a merchant in Harrodsburg in 1820, but that is all I found about him. Another "Christopher C. Chinn" is noted (Collins and Collins, 1878, Volume II, page 300), as having been a member of the Legislature from Greenup County from 1853 to 1855. Greenup County is the far northeastern corner of the state, on the Ohio River, and some 150 miles from Harrodsburg. Judge Christopher Chinn, an office holder and civil servant in Mercer County and Harrodsburg in the middle decades of the 19th century, was probably the target of Old Timer's "Christopher Columbus Chinn" trick. Judge Chinn did not use a middle name and does not appear in any record with one.

9. New Mexico Freemason, Volume 22, Number 1, March 1957.

10. Harvey Carter's 'Dear Old Kit' (1968) is the most accurate transcription of Carson's memoirs, which were dictated in 1856. The original manuscript, marked up for subsequent publication by DeWitt Peters, is in the Newberry Library in Chicago. Two previous transcriptions, Blanch Grant's *Kit Carson's Own Story of His Life* (1926) and Milo Quail's *Kit Carson's Autobiography* (1935), both took some liberties in editing, which Carter made special efforts to avoid. Peters' *Life and Adventures of Kit Carson*, first published in 1858, contained much of the text from Carson's memoirs, but was so expanded and padded with extraneous material, it was difficult to sort out what Carson had said in the first place.

11. Carson's memoirs contain precious little about his family, or other matters that he considered strictly personal.

What is known about Waa-nibe and Adaline has been gleaned from statements by friends and relatives.

12. Carter p. 42.

13. The microfilm of the *Missouri Republican* newspaper was available in the Library of the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas.

14. These ledgers are in the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis and are available for research there on microfilm. Referred to variously as the Chouteau Collection, the Chouteau-Moffitt Collection, and the Fur Trade collection, the film boxes are labeled "American Fur Co. Ledger." A printed index for these ledgers has been prepared that greatly facilitates a search for individual entries.

14a. Howard County (Missouri) Deed Book U, p. 244-245. Signed and attested 31 May 1842.

15. Mary Amick's recollections are quoted in Sabin, 1914, pp. 202-203, having been transmitted to him in her letters. I have searched the Sabin collection in the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, but found nothing of her or her letters.

16. There is a popular misconception that Adaline stayed for some time with Kit's younger sister, Mary Ann Carson Ruby. McClung (1973, p. 43) points out that Mary Ann married Henry M. Ruby of Pettis County, MO in 1839. The census for 1840 lists her there in Bowling Green township near Sedalia (across the river and some 50 miles southwest of Howard County) with her husband and three older Ruby daughters, apparently from a previous marriage. By 1842, Mary Ann had borne two more children and would have three more (McClung, 1962, p. 35). Mary Ann's recollections of Kit, offered by those who would quote her, always dwell on his young years in Franklin, and do not mention Adaline at all. The Nutmeg article in particular requires careful reading, as the author mixes quotes, and the last paragraph does not belong with the Mary Ann statement. It is unlikely that Carson saw Mary Ann in 1842.

17. This estimate was compiled from announcements of departures and arrivals of steamboats in the Missouri Republican newspaper in 1842.

18. Westport was not only an arrival point for east-bound travelers, but also the jumping off point for the far west, with merchants there ready to supply the needs of the frontier.

19. Weston was and is a town on the Missouri River past Westport and Kansas City, opposite the site of Fort Leavenworth.

20. Carter p. 81. In typical Carson fashion, he says absolutely nothing about Adaline, his family contacts, or Lindsay's power of attorney, and he has reversed events for no reason other than to reduce the whole episode to as near

to nothing as possible in the public eye.

21. Jackson and Spence, pp. 143-144.

22. There is no question that Fremont had a voucher showing that Carson was paid at the end of this expedition, but just when, where, and by whom it was made out is something else. Chouteau Ledger GG (Missouri Historical Society), page 200, is the Fremont account for the expedition (Yes, the Chouteau offices handled Fremont's accounts too, and charged him for it) where there is entered:

“1842
Nov 1 203 To C. Carson amt due
him 318.00”

Not PAID him but DUE him.

The C. Carson account is on p. 203, which says:

“1842
Nov 1 200 By C. Fremont amt due
him 318.00
Nov 31 8 To Office this item
transferred to
Bent St Vrain
318.00

318.00 318.00”

It looks to me like it was arranged for Carson to pick up his pay at Bent's Fort, and the voucher was a filler that Fremont had to have to get credit for paying the \$318.00 when he turned in his accounts in Washington, D.C. Such things still happen today.

23. River miles all from Collins and Collins, Volume I, pp. 628-630.

24. The Genealogical Department of the Dallas Public Library holds all County Tax Lists for Kentucky that have been microfilmed. Better copies are available in the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort, and those were examined for information thought possibly important but not legible on the Dallas microfilm.

25. This routine and date January 10th was first spelled out in “An Act to Amend the Revenue Laws,” Chapter [law number] DCCXXVI, page 173+, passed at The First Session of the Fortieth Assembly for the Commonwealth of Kentucky, begun 7 November 1831. This act was approved December 23, 1831 and was to take effect after December 1, 1832, making year 1833 the first year to be handled in this particular manner.

26. See *Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky*, December Session, 1836, Chapter 437 (p. 313), “An Act to Equalize Taxation.” This act also reconfirms the 10th of January as the day of reference for tax declarations. Microfiche of all acts passed by the General Assembly, from the first session to the present, are available in the Underwood Law Library at Southern Methodist University here in the Dallas area.

27. This order has been quoted and misquoted in the past. The original was located and a copy obtained through

the kind assistance of the Harrodsburg Historical Society.

28. Allen, 1872, p. 314; Chinn, p. 306.

29. Chinn, p. 94 & 109.

30. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1944, Volume 9, p. 421.

31. National Park Service, *John Brown's Raid*, pp. 46-48.

32. See DeWitt, p. 80 for the record of Mills' testimony at the trial.

33. Photo is attributed to photographer J.W. Black, Boston, May 1859. (Cohen, 1999, p. 7). Before coming back east and getting involved with planning the Harper's Ferry raid, John Brown had always been cleanshaven. The long beard was a disguise to hide from anyone from Kansas that might be looking for him.

34. See *The Union Regiments of Kentucky* by Captain Thomas Speed, 1897.

35. Careful reading of the payment notice will show that the Mills approval is short and does not go beyond the single page, where it is first mentioned as “Case 8.” “Case 9,” involving Ainslee and Cochran, should have started on that same page, right after “General J.W. Ripley, Chief of Ordnance” and before “Camp Wood, Kentucky.” Ainslee and Cochran, at Louisville, worked for 23 hours on a walk-in job “sighting” four cannon for Captain Cotter of the 1st Ohio Artillery (Heitman Vol II, p. 166), and also had, at some time, made projectiles for those guns. (Paperwork for the projectiles was not included in the Case 9 correspondence, but Ainslee and Cochran got paid for it anyway.) Captain Cotter was then stationed at Camp Wood, near Mumfordsville, some 70 miles southwest of Harrodsburg, as the crow flies. The “sighting” work done in Louisville was completed in less time than would have been necessary to travel there from Harrodsburg.

36. This warrant is noted in the Trustee's Receipt book with the first one. The difficulties with Agent Hoskins were alluded to in Grimes' Claims Affidavit submitted to the Court and recorded May 24, 1870. Both in Case File M-122.

37. Farnsworth's obituary was reprinted in *Mercer's Magazine* (of *The Harrodsburg Herald*), September 4, 1997, p. 24.

38. *Mercer's Magazine*, January 2, 1996, p. 19, reprinted from earlier article.

39. Wood's obituary appeared in the *Harrodsburg Herald*, February 26, 1943.

40. Poetry and articles by Henry Cleveland Wood were published in *New England Magazine*, *Frank Leslie's Magazine*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Munsey's*, and the *New York Ledger*; to name just a few. He also had one book, *The Night Riders*, and a couple of stage plays to his credit.

41. Cooke's obituary appeared in the *Harrodsburg Herald*, December 15, 1944.

42. *The Harrodsburg Democrat*, Souvenir Edition, June 20, 1890.

43. As described by Anderson, 1861, p. 31, and DuBose, 1962, p. 155.

44. The Curry portrait became the center piece of a grand mural installed in the Kansas State Capital, Topeka, titled *The Tragic Prelude*, alluding to the buildup that led from Bleeding Kansas to Harper's Ferry to Civil War.

45. McClung, 1962, p. 75.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many years ago, Chuck Hanson gave me a copy of the Almquist article, which started an open debate about the Carson-Mills story. Those discussions were the beginnings of this study and led to a more expanded investigation.

Glen W. Burttram, Secretary of the Montezuma Lodge in Santa Fe, New Mexico, has been a key participant in putting this story together, with his assistance and guidance in the records of the Lodge. Without his help, many questions would remain unanswered, and we would have only a fragmentary understanding of the Carson-Mills tale.

Herman Dean at one time wanted to do a book about Benjamin Mills and invested a great deal of time and effort gathering information about him. His file is a primary and vital block of knowledge on Ben Mills that contributed much to understanding of the man and the origin of The Story.

Sam C. Reynolds of Carlisle, grandson of James T. Cooke, contributed much on the background and writing efforts of his grandfather. The Reynolds family was most cordial and supportive of my program, and great granddaughter Lisa Reynolds, now of Phoenix and an accomplished history buff, continues to send information along. The family's participation has given James T. real substance, and it has been a pleasure to work with them.

Marc Simmons, of Cerrillos, New Mexico, has always been a mentor and sounding board on Kit Carson matters. His observations and advice over the years have been invaluable.

Special recognition goes to Ann Hardin Howell, Peggy Edgington, Lynn Taylor, and Amalie Preston, volunteers at the Harrodsburg Historical Society, who helped solve the many puzzles that cropped up along the way. Joan Huffman at Fort Harrod State Park most graciously supplied a copy of the 1941 Bayless Hardin letter with its enclosure of The Story that has been on display in the Mansion House Museum for some time. Walter Crutcher (current keeper of the Dean File) and Glenn Marsh were generous in sharing their knowledge of Ben Mills and the examples of his work that have passed through their hands. Harold Edwards did not hesitate in sharing his viewpoints as well. In the many court houses and libraries visited, there were always willing assistants who made the search pleasant and rewarding. To one and all, I extend my thanks for your contributions to this study.

In the years that have passed since beginning this project, I have become quite attached to Harrodsburg and

Benjamin Mills and James T. Cook. As more information is found and the opportunity comes around, a further look would be both interesting and enjoyable. I would gladly return to extend this study.

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