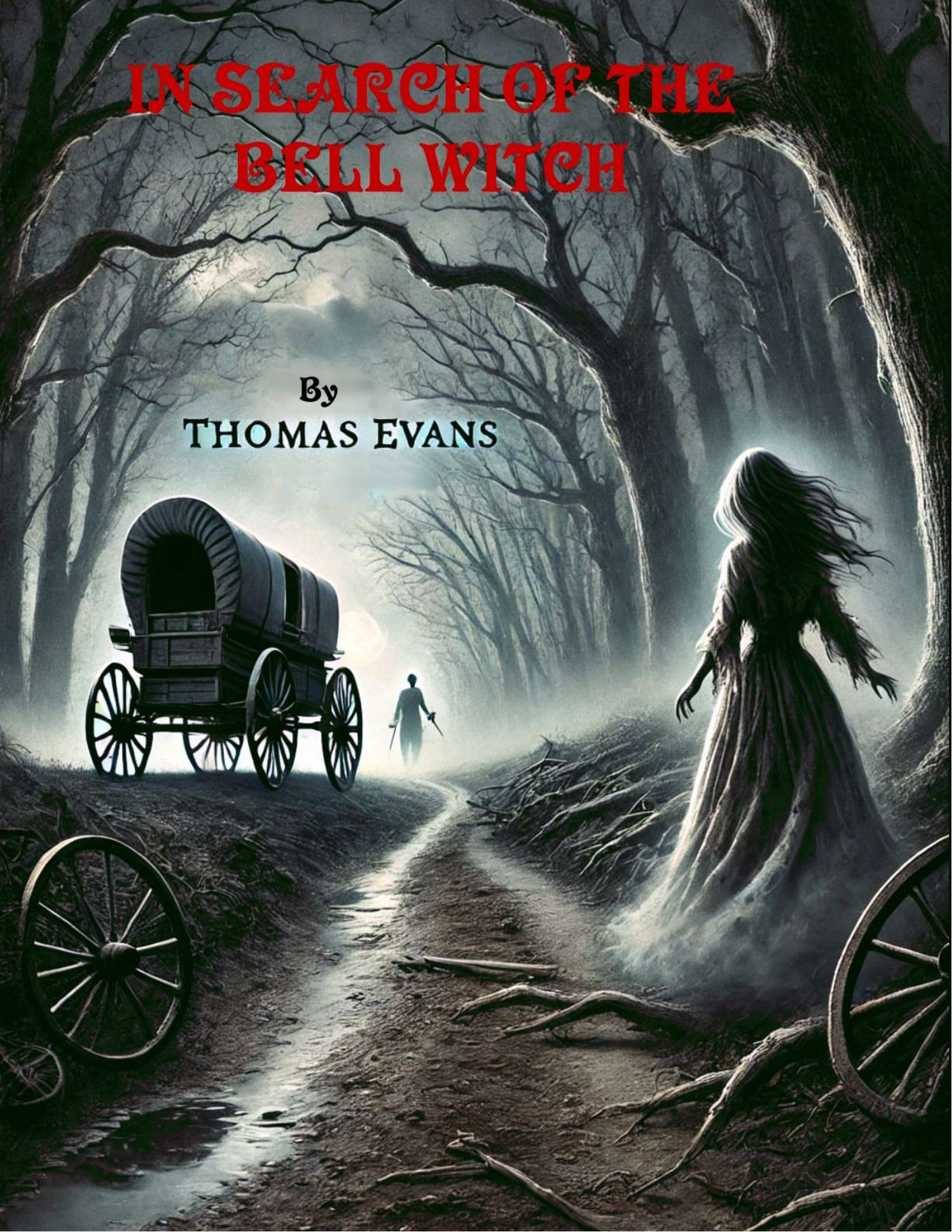


IN SEARCH OF THE BELL WITCH

By
THOMAS EVANS





IN SEARCH OF THE BELL WITCH

A Little Tennessee Pioneer History plus Avery Trace



THOMAS EVANS

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PREFACE

The *Bell Witch* has been described as the scariest and the most documented phenomenon in history. Books have been written about it. Movies have been made about it. **President Andrew Jackson** was reported to have cowered when challenging the witch. The Bell Witch has inspired annual festivals and stage plays in Middle Tennessee. But what is fact, and what is fiction? Most people would be surprised. Answering that question became my challenge two decades ago.

In the fall of 2000, I enjoyed a theatrical presentation by the Hendersonville Performance actors of part of *Ingram's Bell Witch*. They told the story of Betsy's possession and John Bell's presumed murder by "the witch." Hendersonville is only 35 miles from Bell's home in Adams, TN, and the presentation was a popular event around Halloween.

I was also an associate member (by financial donation) of the **International Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP)**. Adams, from Hendersonville, was nearby, so this *Bell Witch Legend* was the perfect opportunity for me to contribute an article to CSICOP's *Skeptical Inquirer*.

My first Bell Witch Website was in 2001



In 2001, I created the **Middle Tennessee Skeptics**, which had a free Home-
stead website. I broadly claimed to be a
skeptical researcher and invited contri-
butions.

My website regularly received several good suggestions and feedback from around a half-dozen researchers, including **Pat Fitzhugh**, who published *The Bell Witch* book.

My website even attracted **Ira Glass**. He was a North Carolina English professor searching for information about the Bell Witch in the **Tennessee State Archives**. I spent an evening with him over dinner as he shared pages of his intriguing, skeptical work about **M.V. Ingram**, the source of the *Bell Witch Legend*. I assumed he was

going to write a book with his findings. Several months later, he offered to sell it to me for \$500. I never found his book or whatever happened to him. I didn't buy his manuscript. I wish I did.

I searched the Internet from 2001 to 2006. I found other websites with family stories related to the Bells. Until a decade later, I found I was the only skeptical published writer. Nevertheless, I shared all my work and was cited on **Wikipedia**.

I visited Adams, Tennessee, in 2000. There wasn't much to explore except a decaying community, a nearly vacant museum, and a cave. I bought a copy of **Pat Fitzhugh's** book ***The Bell Witch*** in the museum and toured the so-called ***Bell Witch Cave***, which formed the basis for my ***Search for the Bell Witch***.

I searched newspaper archives in Nashville, Springfield, and Clarksville for original event documentation during my studies. I also read historical accounts of early history in Middle Tennessee and North Carolina, examined the records of the Baptist church to which **John Bell** belonged, read Springfield court records posted when the Bell family resided in the region, and checked with historical societies in the area. I even examined the notes of the children's family tutor, **Richard Powell**.

On September 16, 2002, I appeared as the local Bell Witch skeptic on **National Geographic's** TV program ***Mystery Hunters***. They found me on my website and Wikipedia.

By 2006, I was finished with the Bell Witch. As hard as I worked, I found nothing new to add to the legend, which occurred over two centuries ago. It was a waste of time. I was sure that Ingram had made it up. I suspected he knew that a century after Bell's experience, nothing or no one could challenge his fabrication. Whatever exists was total in Ingram's creation. It's just a legend and nothing more.

I moved my **Homestead** website to **Google Blogger** to save my findings. It didn't take long for me and my websites to disappear from memories. Even Wikipedia no longer cited me.

As an insult, even **CSICOP** (aka Committee for Skeptical Inquiry) of **Dr. Joe Nickell** didn't cite me in their December 2021 ***Skeptical Inquirer***, *Hyped Hollywood Horrors*.

Of course, by 2021, I was long gone with the Bell Witch and never notified them of my work.

The **first mention** of the event, later known as the Bell Witch, was in a short comment in 1886 by **Albert Goodspeed** in his "**History of Tennessee**" chapter on Robertson County.

<http://www.tngenweb.org/goodspeed/robertson/history.html>

In it, he said

A remarkable occurrence, which attracted widespread interest, was connected with the family of John Bell, who settled near what is now Adams Station about 1804. So great was the excitement that people came from hundreds of miles around to witness the manifestations of what was popularly known as the "Bell Witch."

This witch was supposed to be some spiritual being with the voice and attributes of a woman. It was invisible, yet it would hold conversations and even shake hands with certain individuals.

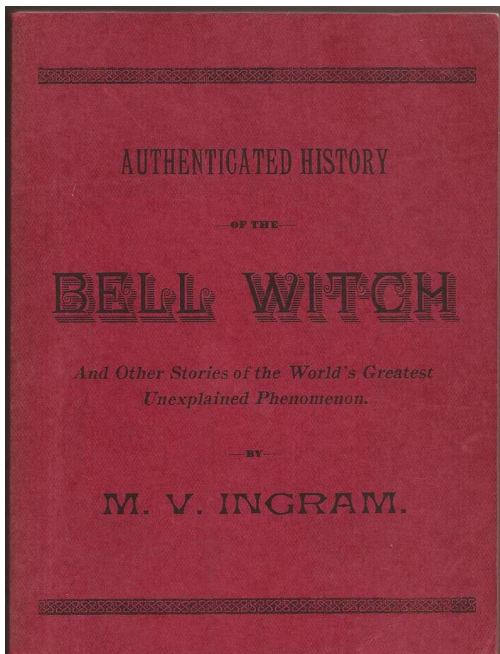
The freaks it performed were wonderful and seemingly designed to annoy the family. It would take the sugar from the bowls, spill the milk, take the quilts from the beds, slap and pinch the children, and then laugh at the discomfiture of its victims.

At first, it was supposed to be a good spirit, but its subsequent acts and curses with which it supplemented its remarks proved the contrary. A volume might be written concerning the performances of this wonderful being, as contemporaries and their descendants now describe them.

In his comment, he added this important statement

That all this occurred will not be disputed, nor will a rational explanation be attempted. It is merely introduced as an example of superstition, strong in the minds of all but a few in those times and not yet wholly extinct.

The **first and only complete account** was documented in 1894 by **M.V. Ingram** - three generations after the claimed haunting occurred.



In his book, Ingram claims **Andrew Jackson** had an encounter with an entity. This President was extensively reported, but somehow, this incident was miraculously overlooked and not mentioned in Jackson's diaries. He invented the whole thing and published "**Authenticated History of The Bell Witch.**" It claims to include a copy of *Richard William Bell's Diary, My Family's Troubles*, which has never been found.

Ingram also states that the ***Saturday Evening Post*** reported on the event around 1849. However, I and other researchers have searched the Post's archives and have never found that report.

Ingram's story was picked up in 1933 by the **Guidebook for Tennessee by the Federal Works Project Administration**. In 1934, Arthur Hudson's 1934 published "**Mississippi Legend.**" In 1934, **Dr. Charles Bailey Bell** published "**The Bell Witch: The Mysterious Spirit,**" followed in 1979 by **H.C. Brehm's "Echoes of the Bell Witch in the Twentieth Century"**. In 1994, **Charles Edwin Price** offered "**The Infamous Bell Witch**". Recently, in 2000, **Brent Monahan** published "**The Bell Witch**" and **Pat Fitzhugh's "The Bell Witch: The Full Account."**

Hudson's **Mississippi Legend** was based on oral tradition. Many of its "facts" were wrong, disqualifying it from serious research. Originating from members of the family who experienced the event, such as **Betsy Bell**, who moved to Mississippi, this version was so different from that told in Tennessee that it demonstrated how memories can change. Nevertheless, the account is fascinating to read.

Phil Norfleet's website, <http://bellwitch02.tripod.com/>, provided extensive documentation of the chronology of the Bell family. He graciously shared his extensive research into the Bell Witch Legend at no charge and without the self-serving hyperbole and creativity of other authors who attempted to derive commercial benefit from M.V. Ingram's century-old fantasy. Norfleet traced Bell's family history through Federal Census Reports, deeds, wills, court minutes, and church records. He attempted to test the validity of Ingram's story by contrasting it against official documents and, in the process, found factual errors in Ingram's account. It's an interesting exercise, but it doesn't prove much.

Many Bell Witch authors quoted references identical to Norfleet. Nevertheless, their documentation did not imply validity or even independent confirmation. In research, all reports must be traced to "sources." Virtually all these writers have rehashed Norfleet's contribution without giving him proper attribution and have complicated legitimate scholarship.

Unfortunately, the great resource provided by **Phil Norfleet** is no longer at his URL. I have yet to find out if it has been relocated or permanently removed.

The story of the Bell Witch has been told in 2005's ***The American Haunting***, 2007's ***Bell Witch — the Movie***, and 2020's ***The Mark of the Bell Witch***. None of them did well.

In 2016, Ingram's creation and others claiming new evidence would be labeled fake news. **Dr. Joe Nickell** of the ***Committee for Skeptical Inquiry*** contended

- 1) The so-called diary of **Richard Bell**, which Ingram claims as the source of his book, was written by Ingram
- 2) Ingram inserted the Goodspeed reference to promote the latter's work.

https://books.google.com/books?id=XZa9CgAAQBAJ&lpg=PA13&ots=zLXpJUf2_6&dq=Goodspeed%20Ingram&pg=PA13#v=onepage&q=Goodspeed%20Ingram&f=false

I have searched dozens of accounts of the Bell Witch, tracing each back to the source when appropriate references and attribution were provided. **Nothing predated M.V. Ingram's book. None provided new verifiable evidence.** Most were

repeats of the Ingram; others were inventions of the author. Some authors were honest about their creativity; many were deceptive.

I posted my online logs to solicit help finding new source material. Many people submitted help, but all reinforced my findings that **there is no evidence other than the Ingram book** and that much cannot be substantiated.

By 2006, I realized no new facts were available. I tried another approach to research life around the time of the Bells to "connect the dots" to the Bell Witch phenomenon.

I enjoyed my new studies, which offered an intriguing story of the first settlers in the Cumberland Region, where the Bell family made their home. These pioneers were isolated from colonial America and in a region that had recently suffered fifteen years of bloody Indian wars. The following record was a trip back into the Bell family's time, not for any skeptical goals but for enjoying middle Tennessee's rich heritage.

That gradually included early Tennessee pioneer history and another Tennessee tourist fabrication—the **Avery Trace**. It did exist, but not where the State's promotion signed it. Surprisingly, the Trace was never documented. Fantastic, I now had a potential thesis for my research. I added that story on my Bell Witch website, which later made it to the Nashville **Tennessean's Nashville Scene**.

By 2017, I was done with the **Bell Witch**, and I found the **Avery Trace**. I enjoyed reliving Tennessee's pioneer history, but the Bell Witch was a waste of time. My remaining life is short. I decided to wrap up my work, shut down my websites, and save my findings in this book.

I will not publish my thesis because I want to include **Ingram's**, **Hudson's**, and **Edward Albright's** books as attachments. Anyone who enjoys reading my book will also like to read these three.

**In 2025, I deleted Bell Witch
From the *Middle Tennessee Skeptics* blog**

BACKGROUND

Norfleet's work is a good starting point. This report summarizes his timeline and adds several significant events to the family (FYI: I have not yet verified Norfleet's references). I restate Norfleet's observations of the errors in Ingram's story.

Ingram's story of the Bell family begins in the late eighteenth century in Edgecombe County in northeastern North Carolina near the Roanoke River, where John Bell, his wife Lucy, and their children have a 323-acre homestead. From there, they emigrated at the turn of the century to Robertson County, Tennessee, in the western part of the Cumberland region near the Cumberland River, and purchased a 220-acre farm. Norfleet's timeline is as follows:

1733: April 28: John Nairne conveyed 100 acres to William Bell of Edgecombe Precinct. [See Edgecombe Precinct NC, Deed Book 1, page 73].

- Ingram: The Book claims William Bell was John's father from Edgecombe Precinct of North Carolina.

- Norfleet: Earliest instance for which he found a record of anyone named William Bell in the Edgecombe area.

1754: May: The 12/01/1752 will of William Bell entered into probate in Edgecombe County. [See North Carolina Secretary of State Wills, Will Book 8, pages 107-108]

- Ingram: Book claims John was born in 1750.

Norfleet: William mentions his sons Arthur and Joshua, his daughters Mary Parent and Ann Bell, but does not mention John. He guesses William is the father of John Bell since William is the only Bell he could find in the official records in the Edgecombe area in the right time frame.

1773: September 01: *William Barnes* conveyed to *John Bell* of Halifax a 323-acre tract of land on the south side of Kehukee Swamp. [See Halifax County NC, Deed Book 13, page 157]

- Ingram: The Book makes no mention of these details
- Norfleet: He assumes John Bell is in Ingram's book.

1793: August: The March 14, 1792 will of **John Williams, Sr.** [entered into probate in Edgecombe]

- Norfleet: Will mentions his wife Mourning and five daughters: Betsy, Mary (wife of Robert Lancaster), Mulberry, Nancy, and Lucy (wife of John Bell, per Ingram); and four sons: Benjamin, Jesse, Drury and John, Jr. Lucy received one Negro woman and her increase - presumably this is Cloe.

1795: Treaty of Holston. The Great Indian Wars ceased in the Cumberland region, and one year later, Tennessee became a state.

1801 to 1802: Cumberland Road (a.k.a. Great Stage Road) opened to provide wagon passage as a turnpike from Fort Southwest Point on the confluence of Cinch and Tennessee rivers near Knoxville to Nashville.

1803: January 23: **John Bell** conveyed 376 acres on the south side of Kehukee Swamp to William Rawls. [See Halifax County NC, Deed Book 19, page 164]. In September, John Bell receives a letter of dismissal from the **Kehukee Baptist Association**. [See church minutes]

Our Note: We have not seen confirmation of the date in the letter. No author has verified when Bell left NC. We estimate that the Bell family relocated to Tennessee in late 1803, most likely in October (that time of year was preferred for travel through Tennessee to Cumberland Counties), traveling the Cumberland Road and leaving from Fort Southwest Point. We estimate that the leg of the trip took about four days.

1805: April 20: **John Bell** was enrolled in Red River Baptist Church by letter from Kehukee Baptist Association, NC. [See Church Minutes, page 61]

1807: August 27: **William Crawford** of Louisiana Territory conveys a 220-acre tract of land on the south side of Red River to John Bell. [See Robertson County Deed Book E, page 126, April 1808 Term of Court]

1812: December: Over 2000 earthquake shocks in five months, five of which were 8.0 or more in magnitude, commenced. Eighteen of these rang church bells on the

Eastern seaboard. Land was destroyed in the Missouri Bootheel, making it unfit even for farmers for many years. It was the most enormous burst of seismic energy east of the Rocky Mountains in the history of the United States and was several times larger than the San Francisco quake of 1906.

1815: **John Bell** patents an additional 100 acres in Robertson County. [See TN Grant Book K, page 403, grant #7376].

1816: Late Autumn: Ingram claims an unusual phenomenon occurred in the Bell household.

1818: January 13: **John Bell** is excommunicated from the Red River Baptist Church for taking usury. [See Church Minutes, page 148]

1820: December 20: **John Bell, Sr.** dies intestate, and Ingram says unusual events cease shortly thereafter.

1821: February 12: **John Bell, Jr.** appointed John Bell, Sr.'s estate administrator. [See Robertson County Court Minutes, Volume 6, pages 193-196]

1821: February 27: **Lucy Bell's** dower portion of John Bell's real estate is 106 and 2/3 acres. [See Robertson County TN, Will Book 3, page 268]

- Ingram: Book claims John Bell owned 1000 acres.

- Norfleet: All official records (including this one) show John Bell owned only 320 acres.

1821: March 8: **Lucy Bell's** dower portion of the personal estate includes one enslaved Negro named "Dean." [See Robertson County TN, Will Book 3, page 267] The sale of the personal estate of **John Bell, Sr.** is held. [See Robertson County TN, Will Book 3, pages 269-277]

1822: October: The nine (9) remaining enslaved people, Harry (19), Anica (25), Fanny (23), Phillis (21), Cloe (60), Peggy (4), Dolly (3), Judy (1-1/2), Frank (3) are valued and divided. [See Robertson County TN, Will Book 3, page 503]

1823: February: The Final division of the enslaved people is returned and recorded. [See Robertson County TN, Will Book 3, page 504]

1824: March 21: *Betsy Bell* marries *Richard Powell*, her tutor. [See Richard Powell Cipher Book, page 222 in Tennessee State Archives in Nashville under Manuscript Accession Number 75-260]

My first task was to sketch the route the Bells most likely took from Edgecombe, backtracking from the known location of their Tennessee farm on the Red River to the most likely location of their North Carolina farm. We aimed to relive that experience as they most likely knew it.

However, in the process, **we uncovered our first controversy—the Avery Trace.** That name appears on maps and road signs throughout Tennessee between Nashville and Knoxville, but some **historians say it never existed.**

In 1803, the Bell family left 376 acres in Northeast North Carolina. In 1807, they settled on 220 acres (from actual land records) on fertile, gently rolling land in the upper northwest corner of Robertson County, which by any measure was relatively small. Here, the typical land grants were at least 640 acres. The 1783 Military Reservation Act offered privates who served in the American Revolution 640 acres and other participants more outstanding parcels [Alice Barnwell Keith, ed. *The John Gray Blount Papers, Vol II* (Raleigh, North Carolina: State Department of Archives and History, 1952), p.486].

The "Land Grab" Act of 1783 offered for sale almost all the western lands not included in the Cherokee country and Mero District at the price of ten pounds per hundred acres. [**Lucille Deaderick**, ed. *Heart of the Valley, A History of Knoxville, Tennessee* (Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1976) p.2].

Settlers in the area before these grants were offered "preemption" (a.k.a. Corn Law) grants, which allowed settlers to claim parcels of 640 acres if they proved they had cultivated the land.

These circumstances suggest that Bell was ineligible for a Military Grant and short on wealth. Bell purchased their Robertson County homestead on Red River from William Crawford of Louisiana Territory [See Robertson County Deed Book E, page 126, April 1808 Term of Court].

Three dates are essential for researching the emigration of the Bell family to their new homestead in Tennessee: January 1803, when John Bell conveyed his North Carolina property; April 1805, when John Bell joined the **Red River Baptist Church**; and August 1807, when he received the **Red River** farm. Four years, a lot of time, was unaccounted for.

This period would not be an issue for a single man who could easily live off the land. However, for a family of six or more, at least a couple of enslaved people were required for more formal accommodations and a source of income. Legal records confirmed this big gap.

The solution could be as simple as the household staying behind until John Bell established a new place for them to relocate. It could be they "squatted" on the Tennessee property, and the recording of the legal transfer was delayed or recorded late. It could be that the John Bell of Tennessee was not the John Bell in the North Carolina records. The more significant question was, "Did any of this matter to the credibility of the Legend?"

Ingram's description of the Bell homestead deviates from historical records in other aspects.

Along with this tide of immigration came John Bell and his amiable wife Lucy and family of promising children, also several likely Negroes, then slaves. They landed with their train of wagons and splendid teams in the west end of Robertson County, Tennessee, near where Adams Station is now located. . . , in the year 1804, and met with a hearty reception by old friends who had preceded them. Mr. Bell purchased a home partially improved, with good houses, barns, and a fine young orchard, surrounding himself with about one thousand acres of the best land on Red River, and settled down for life, clearing more land and opening a large and fertile farm. His commanding appearance, steadfast qualities, and force of character gave him rank and influence in the community.

John Bell commenced to have a happy and prosperous career in his new home on the south bank of Red River in Robertson County. . . He became

one of the wealthiest and most influential men in the community. His house became the home of every passing stranger, and neighbors delighted in frequent calls and visits. Many were the pleasant social gatherings at the Bell Place.



M.V. Ingram provided an artist sketch in his 1984 book, "Authenticated History of The Bell Witch."

According to Ingram, the old Bell farm was about one mile from Adams Station on the south side of Red River, bordering some distance on that stream and stretching back nearly one mile. The public highway, known as the Brown's Ford and Springfield Road, ran through the place within one hundred yards of the house.

The residence was a double log house, one and a half stories high, with a wide passage or hallway between and an ell-room with the passage. The building was weather-boarded on the outside, furnished with six large comfortable rooms and two halls, and was one of the best residences in the country at that time.

It was located at a slight elevation in the plane, nearly a half-mile back from the river. In the rear was a large orchard, and the lawn was well set in pear trees.

On the opposite side of the river from the Bell place was the William La Prade farm, and just below, all between the river and Elk Fork Creek, was the Fort settlement. The Fort was a large and influential family distinguished among the pioneers whose descendants still maintain the honored name. On the east were the Gunns and Johnsons, all having good farms. James Johnson and two sons, John and Calvin, were Bell's nearest neighbors, and next were the Gunn families.

One mile above Bell's, the Clark brothers had a mill to which the early settlers carried their grain and grist. Fort's mill was built below.

Ingram claimed that John Bell was one of the community's wealthiest and most influential men and had one of the best residences in the country. The historical record does not support that conjecture.

On December 20, 1820, John Bell, Sr. died intestate. Lucy Bell's dower portion of John Bell's real estate is 106 and 2/3 acres. [See Robertson County TN, Will Book 3, page 268], which implied John Bell owned 320 acres, not 1000. Records of the sale of the personal estate of John Bell, Sr. [See Robertson County TN, Will Book 3, pages 269-277] show modest value and not the property of a wealthy man.

Most land grants were at least 640 acres, and with Ingram's erroneous 1000 acres, Bell would have been one of the largest landowners in the area, but with his actual ownership of 320 acres, his farm was relatively small. Furthermore, Goodspeed's history of Robertson County gave several long lists of dignitaries, politicians, and officials. John Bell was not mentioned anywhere. Had it not been for the alleged Bell Witch incident, John Bell would have been forgotten and lost peacefully with time.

Ingram may have gotten his dates a little wrong, but claiming John Bell was a wealthy and influential man was a serious error that a good newspaperman like Ingram would not have overlooked, assuming he was reporting fact and not fiction.

We also noticed a strange coincidence when we re-examined the 1793 will of John Williams, Sr., noted by Norfleet. These family names were almost identical to Ingram's claims to John Bell's family: Betsy, Mary, Mulberry, Nancy, Lucy, Benjamin, Jesse, Drury, and John, Jr. We conjectured that Ingram fabricated this entire story. But why did Ingram choose the Bell family for his hoax?

It might have been just a matter of documentation convenience rather than malice. He just happened to have the records for some other newspaper story or research and conveniently used them.

The legend concerns John Bell's life and his family in Adams, Tennessee. I used data from Fitzhugh's book "***The Bell Witch: The Full Account***" and tweaked it with Ingram's and Hudson's reports.

BELL FAMILY

- John Bell, Sr, (1750 - 1820)
- Mary (Mississippi Legend)*
- Lucy (Williams) Bell (1770 - 1836)
- Jesse Bell (1790 - 1843) , (40) MS
- John Bell, Jr (1793 - 1862) TN
- Joel Thomas Bell
- Charles Bailey Bell
- Drewey Bell (1796 - 1865) TN
- Benjamin unknown, died in childhood
- Ester (Bell) Porter (1800 - 1859), (38) MS
- Zadok Bell (1803 - 1826) 23 yr AL
- Eliz. Lucy Bell (1806 - 1888) 72 yr TN, (74) MS
- **Richard Wm Bell**** (1811 – 1857)
- **Joel Egbert Bell***** (1813 – 1890)

***Mary Bell, supposedly** the daughter of **John Bell, Sr.**, appears in Mississippi folklore but is not mentioned in the TN account. Marries and leaves home before 1800. I found no record of her mother.

****Richard Wm. Bell** supposedly wrote the Bell Witch story in his diary in 1846, when he was six to nine.

*****Joel Egbert Bell** supposedly worked with Ingram starting in 1880.

Using the details in Fitzhugh's book, I have constructed the chronology of the Bell Witch and attempted to cross-check it with the public record when available.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1782 Marriage ¹
- 1800 (est) John Bell kills John Black ²
- 1803-04 Moved to Tennessee
- 1817-22 Haunting
- 1818 J. Bell was excommunicated (reported for usury)
- 1819 Reported Andrew Jackson's visit
- 1828 Entity visits J. Bell, Jr (reported by Bell, no witnesses)
- 1846 RW Bell writes account (claims from the diary as 6-9 yr old) ³
- 1849 Saturday Evening Post ⁴
- 1880 MV Ingram starts researching his book
- 1886 AV Goodpasture Account ⁵
- 1896 MV Ingram Book ⁶
- 1930 Harriet Parks Miller Book ⁷
- 1934 Charles Bell Book ⁸
- 1934 Arthur Hudson account ⁹
- 1935 Entity promises a return (Never Happened) ¹⁰
- 1937 H.C. Brehm Book ¹¹

Notes:

1) **Lucy**, reported from a wealthy **Williams** family, marries at age 12 but doesn't have her first child until age 18. This doesn't seem logical.

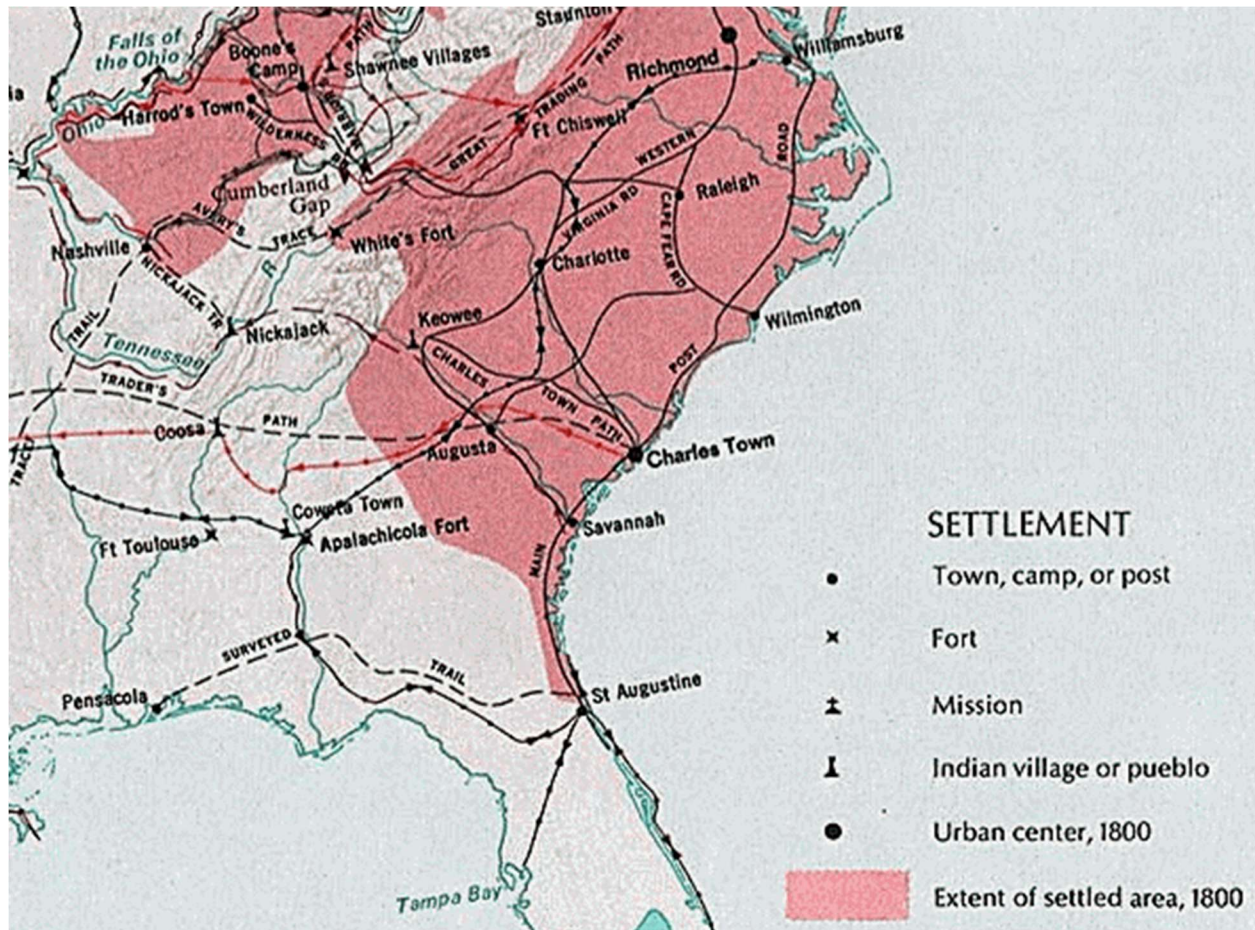
2) **John Black** was overseer on Bell farm. **John Bell** kills him after hearing him brag luridly about **Mary Bell**. No witnesses and it was not in the public record, but Bell was acquitted based on self-defense. Mississippi tale suggests the entity was the ghost of Black.

Although the Black episode significantly contrasts with "facts," Fitzhugh includes it in his book as a "fact," but the source wishes to remain anonymous. Fitzhugh seems to ignore that there are no public records of Mary!

- 3) Source material for MV Ingram's book - memories of a 6 to 9-year-old child reconstructed 20 years after the fact and released by a third party 40 years later.
- 4) HEARSAY: ***Saturday Evening Post*** claimed ***the Witch*** was a hoax contrived by **Elizabeth Bell** and **Powell** (a suitor). The Post was forced to retract that statement after E. Bell threatened to sue.
- 5) HEARSAY
- 6) Ingram claims RW & Joel Bell as the source of his book.
- 7) **Miller's** book is just a rehash of **Ingram's Book**
- 8) **Charles Bell's** book, a redo of **JT Bell's** notes from John Jr Ingram's Account plus **John Jr's** supposed 1828 discussions with the entity (generally assumed as fabricated.)
- 9) *Mississippi Oral tradition* assumed from **Ester & Jesse's** stories.
- 10) After a supposed 1828 meeting with **John Jr.**, ***the Witch*** promised to return after 107 years had lapsed. In that meeting, ***the Witch*** was supposed to have made numerous predictions, which came true and were included in the book as additions to the Ingram story. Naturally, ALL these predictions were reported after the event occurred.
- 11) Derived from Ingram's book.

PASSAGE TO THE CUMBERLAND REGION

The following map shows the settlement patterns and routes around 1800.



The National Atlas of the United States of America (Arch C. Gerlach, editor). Washington, D.C.:
U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Geological Survey, 1970

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/united_states/exploration_1675.jpg

Settlement in upper Middle Tennessee commenced with the Transylvania Purchase of Cherokee Indian lands. The passage was facilitated through exploration by Daniel Boone around 1775 into Virginia lands to become Kentucky and James Robertson in 1780 into the Cumberland Region of North Carolina lands to become Tennessee. North Carolina advanced settlement by Military Grants into its Mero District, which comprised a significant portion of the Cumberland Region.

An act of the North Carolina Legislature in 1786 and a subsequent Act in 1787 authorized the construction of a road to facilitate migration to the Mero

District. Most historians identify Peter Avery as blazing a trail known as the Avery Trace from Knoxville to Nashville due to these acts. However, the above map is one of the few that identify a route between Knoxville and Nashville as the Avery Trace and has resulted in quite a controversy.

There is much confusion about linking Peter Avery with North Carolina legislation in 1786 and later building a road to the Cumberland River region. We have not seen a North Carolina reference to Peter Avery, nor are we aware of any.

- Bill Puryear, Jack Masters, & Doug Drake

[See <http://www.cumberlandpioneers.com/averytrace.html>]

These historians, like us, had what we thought would be a simple goal – create a modern map showing the route of the Avery Trace. We never expected such erroneous references and misinformation.

According to Ms. Jane Buchanan, who has done more research on Peter Avery than anyone else, North Carolina never mentioned Peter Avery having anything to do with any road. She suggests, and we agree with her, that the legend of Avery's Trace likely came from stories of Captain McElwee, an early historian of Roane County, Tennessee.

- Bill Puryear, Jack Masters & Doug Drake [See *ibid*]

Puryear et al. were referring to a 1903 article by Captain McElwee in the American Historical Magazine entitled "The Old Road." Snyder and Pauline Roberts [<http://www.roanetn.com/peter.htm>] provided a few excerpts from the article:

A company of men was organized in Washington District as provided for in the Act and with Peter Avery, a hunter well-skilled in woodcraft, as a guide, a blazed trace was marked through the wilderness between the two designated points (Clinch Mountain and Bean's Lick).

"One of the items specified was "the most level and most direct way having regard to the most convenient passage of mountains, fords, and rivers."

The road from South West Point to post Oak to Kimbrough's Gap to Crab Orchard laid out later (about 1800) "was called the Walton Road, distinguishing it from the old NC Road, sometimes called the Avery trace. The Walton Road intersected the old NC Road.

Snyder then suggested that McElwee didn't have his facts accurately stated with [I have summarized]

John H. Avery of Colorado Springs, CO, has researched the early Peter Avery family line since 1914. Peter Avery was born May 26, 1739 . . . He died in Roane County in 1816. He enlisted in Capt. Isaac Terbush's company in Dutchess County, NY on June 21, 1761. . . McElwee lists Peter Avery as a non-pensioner Rev. War soldier. No record of his Rev. War service has been found.

The State of Tennessee has confounded the confusion in its attempt to identify this route.

The Tennessee State Road markers that identify the route of the Avery Trace are positively incorrect. They show the Avery Trace going through Gainesboro, which it did not!!!! I don't know what the State of Tennessee officials who set up this historic route were smoking when they created this bogus historical route.

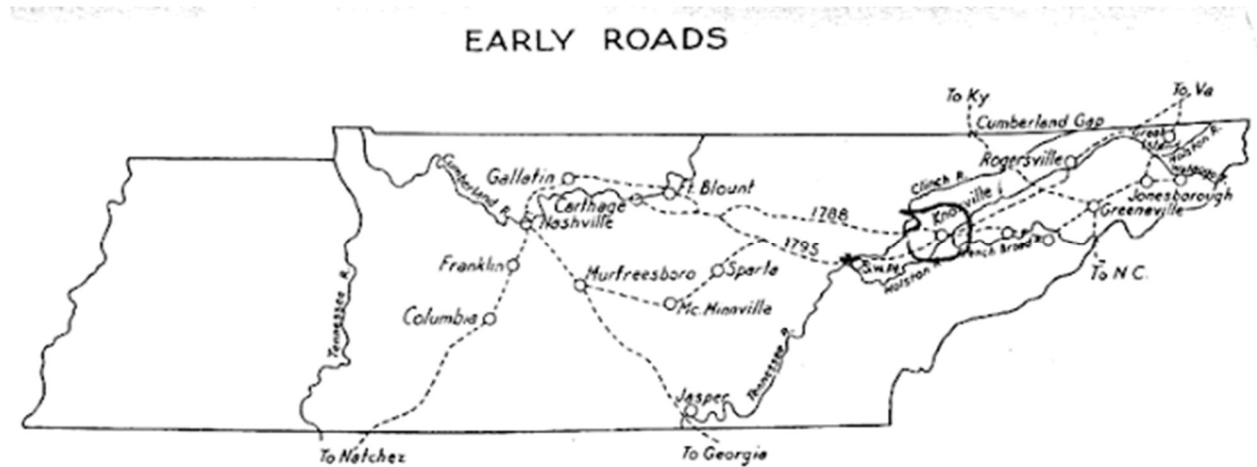
- Steve Denney

[See <http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/TNSMITH/2002-12/1039233697>]

Denney is referring to the section of the road that passes through Smith County, but the job did not get any easier or less confusing as we tried to map other sections, especially around Knoxville. The references from Puryear et al. and Denney are insightful and should be read.

I have searched for Tennessee maps showing the roads' location circa 1800, especially anything labeled "Avery Trace." We found historically inaccurate trash, including the map that Denney must be lambasting in his comment above. That's when we decided to draw this map from a consensus of the scholarship of this period.

We started with the following sketch as a zeroth order approximation of where the historical record says the route was that early travelers used from North Carolina to the Cumberland Region.



Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee by Thomas P. Abernethy

The 1788 route from Knoxville, crossing the Clinch River, over to Standing Stone (now known as Monterey), crossing the Cumberland River near Fort Blount, continuing onto Dixon Springs, Hartsville, Gallatin, and Nashville comes the closest to Avery’s Trace. It is frequently called Emery Road.

The lower 1795 route from Knoxville, crossing the rivers at Fort South West, rejoining the north section near Standing Stone, then separating to cross the Cumberland River near Carthage, is best known as Walton Road. In 1801, this road became the Cumberland Turnpike and was the primary passage to the Cumberland Region.

With its 15-foot-wide clearing, markers every three miles, and frequent wayside inns, it was most likely the way the Bell family took in 1803. They most likely traveled to Fort Southwest Point via Knoxville, Greeneville, crossing the Appalachian Mountains from North Carolina.

It was not until 1795 that the Walton Road was cut and cleared to a wagon road, which later became the Cumberland Road and the Tennessee Central Railroad track bed. The road was cut from the junction of the Clinch River

and the Tennessee River across from Fort Southwest Point to join the Emery Road near Standing Stone and proceed to Nashville. This road soon became the primary route, replacing the Emery Road section from Clinch Mountain to Standing Stone, which was used by settlers going to the Cumberland settlements near Nashville. Travel on any unescorted route, such as the old Emery Road section, was likely to result in death from Indians.

[See Smith, DR. Earliest Settlement Routes to Tennessee 9/2/2000.

<http://smithdray.tripod.com/trailsearly-index-11-1.html>]

However, the confusion regarding **Avery's Trace** and its prominence in upper Middle Tennessee History requires that I give it special attention in the next chapter: **The Illusive Avery Trace.**

By 1803, the roads in North Carolina were better developed than Tennessee's, making it impossible to identify the route family Bell might have taken. Roads in 1794 are shown as trace lines on the following map from Halifax to the western border of North Carolina.



Nevertheless, picking a particular route across the state will likely have minimal effect on the Bell family's experience. Click on the above link to the source to expand and zero in on the roads.

Returning to the Nashville terminus of the family journey, the absence of trails to the western side of the Mero District or Robertson County means that the Bell family loaded themselves and their belongings onto flatboats and floated down the Cumberland River to the Red River and disembarked to their homestead on the north shore of the Red River near Port Royal and central trading station at the confluence of the Red River and Sulfur Fork Creek.

Incorporated in 1797 and a thriving commerce center for upper Middle Tennessee and South-Central Kentucky, Port Royal was one of the earliest and most populous settlements outside of Nashville. The town no longer exists. It was also the location of the **Red River Baptist Church**, which figured prominently for the Bell family. Founded in 1791, it was the only church for nearly 200 miles during this period and is still active today in Adams, Tennessee.

According to M. V. Ingram's ***Authenticated History of the Bell Witch***, Chapter 1 - Early Settlers ...

Along with this tide of immigration came John Bell and his amiable wife Lucy and family of promising children, also several likely Negroes, then slaves. They landed with their train of wagons and splendid teams in the west end of Robertson County, Tennessee, near where Adams Station is now located. . .

THE ILLUSIVE AVERY TRACE

In 1786, an act of the North Carolina Legislation established a direct route between its western districts along the Appalachian Mountain (now eastern Tennessee) and its **Military Land Grant District** or **Mero District** in the Cumberland Region. Then, in November 1787, when little progress had been made, the Legislators issued a second act:

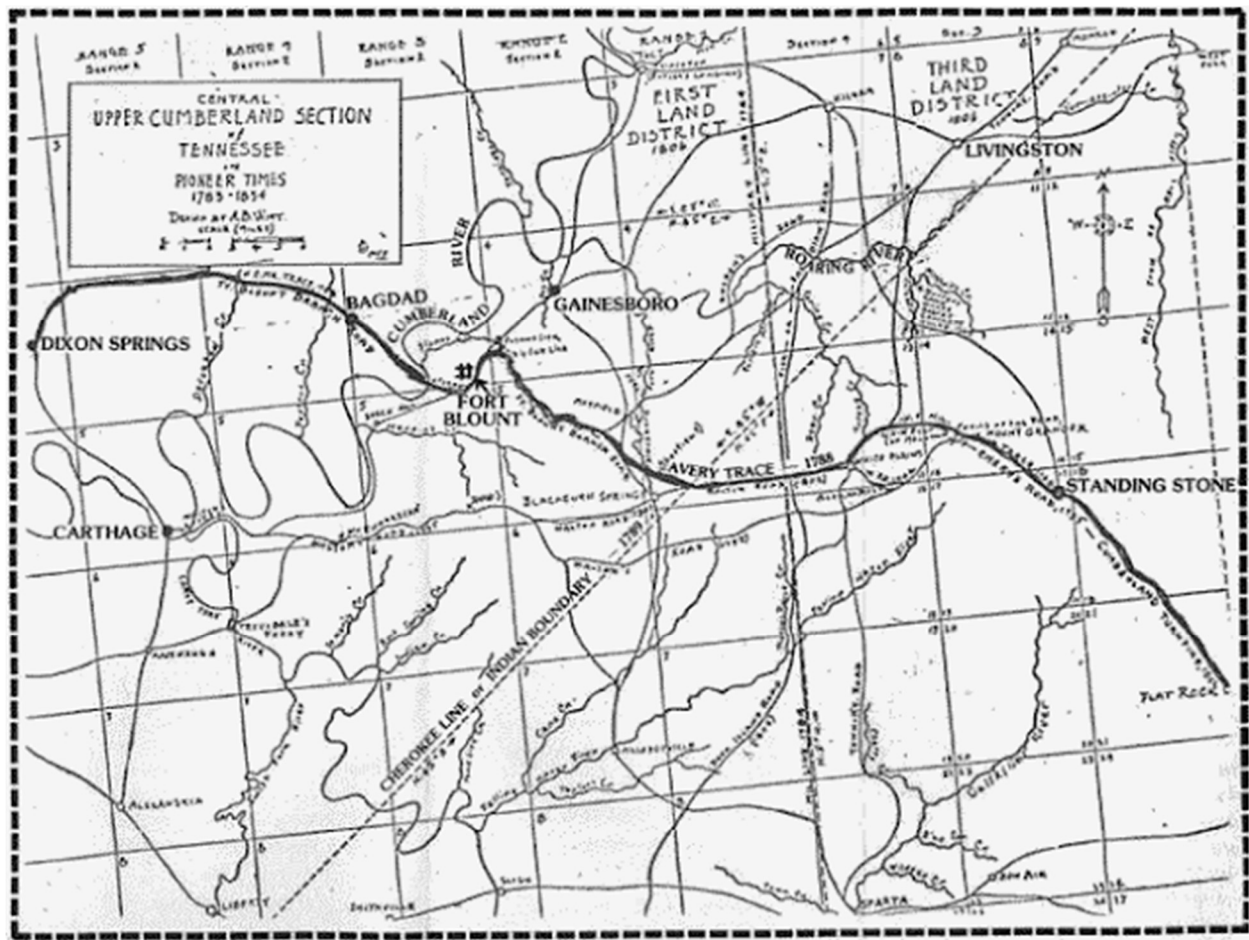
Be it Enacted by the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina. The authority of the same hereby enacts That it shall and may be lawful for the commanding officers [of Sumner and Davidson Cos. Militia] to appoint two or more persons to examine, survey, and mark out the best and most convenient way from the lower end of Clinch Mountain to the settlements of Cumberland as aforesaid. The said commanding officers are hereby vested with full power and authority to order out the militia of the counties of Davidson and Sumner to cut and clear the road so marked as aforesaid, under the direction of themselves or either of them or any of the field officers by them appointed to superintend the same.

[<http://www.cumberlandpioneers.com/averytrace.html>]

Many pioneer maps roughly sketch the proximity of this passage, but **none delineate the actual route**. Furthermore, as the previous chapter notes in comments by **Steven Denny** and **Bill Puryear** et al., many "official" attempts to mark and name this route are erroneous.

My challenge became to fill in this missing information and to provide the first map of the trail established by this Act, which we continued to call **Avery's Trace**, so as not to contribute to the confusion.

My criterion was not to get hung up (as some historians have) about what this route was called. Anyone who has traveled Tennessee roads using the "official" maps knows the same road often goes by various names. State maps call it one thing, county maps another, city maps a third, and the "locals" several other names. Historians have often worsened the confusion by referring to roads built between 1787 and 1802 as the ones created by this Legislative Act.



Sketch of Avery Trace that appears with several historical accounts. The source is unknown, and accuracy is questionable.

The North Carolina Act initiated not a road but a roughly marked blazoned path that followed Indian and game trails and tracked to salt licks.

This trail was adequate only for foot and horseback travel in many sections. Eventually, it was widened to permit limited wagon traffic. On September 25, 1795, a second route south of this trail, leaving Fort Southwest Point, was opened for wagon traffic with military escorts. This second route joined with the first one in several locations, such as near Standing Stone and within the Cumberland region, adding to the name confusion.

During the great Indian Wars between 1780 and 1795, the trail traveled the most direct route between forts and stations established to protect against Indian attack.

The route attempted to facilitate wagon traffic by following the terrain hollows, hugging the valleys and river bottoms. Roads noted as "Old" were probably built on or very close to this trail, while modern roads, frequently cutting through sides of hills, are not.

Western End of Avery's Trace

The trail ended at Fort Nashborough, near historic French Lick and present-day Nashville. The best estimates were that the structure was located near the reconstructed fort on First Avenue and the banks of the Cumberland River. Travelers came down Mansker's Fort twelve miles to the north using a buffalo trail between the salt licks near each fort.

The road between Mansker's Fort and Fort Nashborough followed buffalo trails near present-day Dickerson Road.

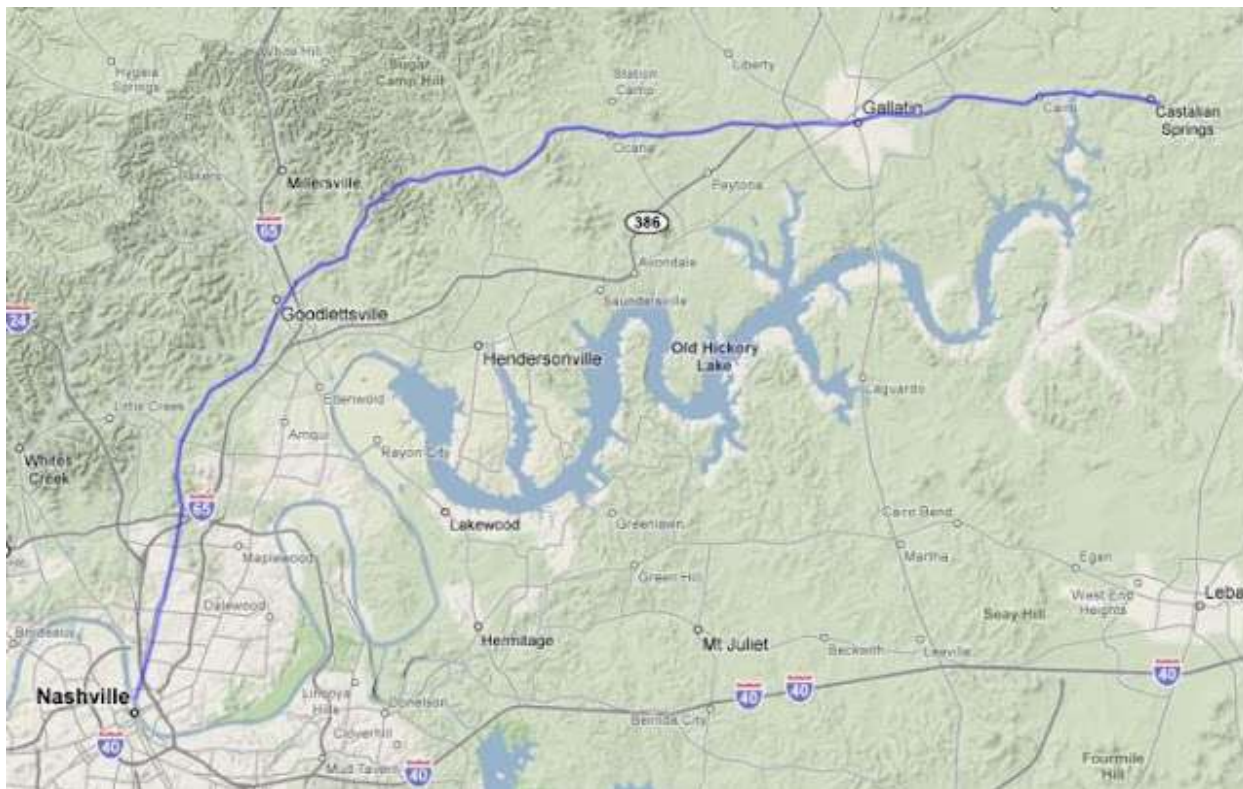
[L.C. Bell, History of Dickerson Road, (Nashville: E Stevenson and F. Owen, 1857), p.7]

*In 1783, **Kasper Mansker** had built his second fort on **Mansker's Creek**, about a half mile from the junction of **Long Hollow Pike** and **Dickerson Road**. It became the center of activities for settlements north of Nashville.*

[John Carr, Early Times in Middle Tennessee (Nashville: E Stevenson and F Owen, 1857), pp 55-56].

Virtually every traveler on **Avery's Trace** would have stayed or been reprovisioned at **Mansker's Fort**.

From here, the trail ran twenty-two miles east to **Bledsoe's Fort** near Bledsoe's Lick and Creek, most likely following the most direct route along Long **Hollow Pike** and **Hartsville Pike**. The current name for **Bledsoe's Lick** is **Castalian Springs**.



The approximate location of the western end of the Avery Trace follows the terrain near Dickerson Pike, Long Hollow Pike, and Hartsville Pike, connecting Fort Nashborough, Fort Mansker, and Bledsoe's Lick. [Google Map Link](#)

Center of Avery's Trace

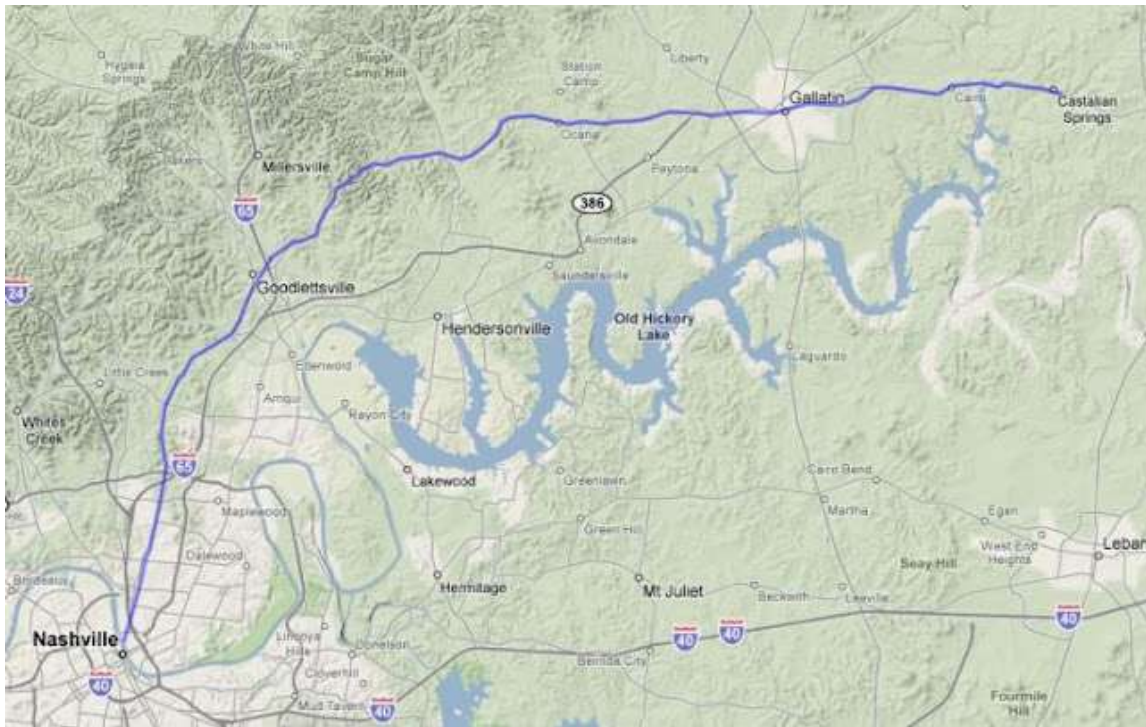
I relied on Ms. Laura Gaston Young's 1930 award-winning essay to the Middle Tennessee DAR as a guideline for locating the central section of Avery's Trace.

Denney, in his note *Roads of Smith County*, quotes Ms. Young as follows:

<http://archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com/th/read/TNSMITH/2002-12/1039233697>].

She stated that the Road crossed the Cumberland at Fort Blount (now in Jackson County at an established location where you can still see the ruts of the old wagon path as it approaches the river. "The road crossed Salt lick Creek a short distance below the old Woodfork place; crossed Defeated Creek at the site of the Cross Roads Church, at William's Cross Roads; down the Sloan Branch where, in 1799 the "Widow Young" [widow of William Young and soon to be married to Michael Murphy] [lived]....thence across Peyton's Creek below old Herod's Cross Roads, at Pleasant Shade; up the Porter Branch of Peyton's, across Tow Town Branch and to the top of

Mace's Hill; down the Mace's Hill Road, leaving the road near the house on the place sold by Sam M. Young about 1920 to Jim Phillips...and passing through his lower field ...across Dixon's Creek about three hundred yards below the church [Dixon Creek Baptist] and about one-half mile to the north of the northern boundary of Tilman Dixon's tract [his house, built between 1787 and 1795 still stands]; across Lick Creek just south of the old Gillespie tract ... [and on into Trousdale County]. If one drives past Dixon on Highway 25, traveling west from Carthage to Hartsville, one can see a road on the right side bearing the name Fort Blount Road, the name of the military trace road. (I am indebted to the Smith County History Book from 86 for this excerpt of the Young Essay)



Approximate location of the central section of the Avery Trace following the terrain and using the description of Young & Denney [Google Map Link](#). Currently, the route between Cookeville and Monterey is a SWAG without supporting documentation.

Eastern End of Avery's Trace

For the eastern section of **Avery's Trace**, I used Ray D. Smith's essay description of Emery Road.

<http://www.smithdray1.net/history/emeryroad.htm>].

In 1787, North Carolina legislators approved a second road act, which ordered a road cut and cleared from the south end of Clinch Mountain to Fort Nashborough (Nashville). Peter Avery blazed a trail beginning at the south end of the Clinch Mountain at present-day Blaine.

The Avery Trace, as it was later known, marked the route that closely followed where the present route of Emory Road in Knox County is now located. The original route crossed the Clinch River at Lea's Ford near present-day Oak Ridge at the marina. It continued through the middle of present-day Oak Ridge, passing near the Oak Ridge High School, where an existing rock bridge constructed just after 1900 was on the old route.

The road then passed through Winter's Gap (Oliver Springs) and crossed the Emory River near present-day Wartburg. It passed through present-day Lansing to Johnson's Stand, followed a ridge to Standing Stone (Monterey), and then went to the Cumberland settlements (Nashville).

Major George Walton directed the soldiers working on this earliest road. This route was known at various times as Avery's Trace, the old North Carolina Road, and Emory Road.



Approximate location of the Eastern end of the Avery Trace following the terrain and using the description of Smith [Google Map Link](#)

A Road Trip the REAL Avery Trace

The next step is a "road trip" along my proposed route for a photo session and fact-gathering. [Adapted from <http://www.hartsvilletrousdale.com/at.html>]

As rough and rugged as the road was, lone travelers or pioneer families would load their possessions onto their wagons and meet at the Clinch River. They talked excitedly about what they would find at the trail's end. When the militia detail joined them, they climbed into their wagons, waved goodbye, and drove their horses into the Clinch River. They started a journey into the unknown wilderness and left behind family, friends, and ties to civilization.

For whatever reason, they came and faced a long, challenging ride along a long, winding, and tortuous trail with hazards at every turn and almost no accommodations for the weary. They camped, cooked over campfires, and slept under the stars.

Occasionally, they were fortunate to find families living along the Trace who would give them shelter and food, but these were few and far between and often cost hefty prices.

The land was rich and beautiful—hills and valleys full of canebrakes, giant trees, and tangled vines, rolling into the distance in every direction. But it was 300 miles of wilderness inhabited by many wolves, mountain lions, coyotes, deer, buffalo herds, and murderous Indians.

Sharing my love of Tennessee history, **Bruce Day** joined me on this adventure to validate my documentation of the **REAL Avery Trace**. In October 2008, he and I traveled by bicycle (our horse of choice) to the section of trail between **Hartsville** and **Fort Blount** and found it an excellent candidate. It was relatively flat and remained mainly in the valleys and along streams, as we suspected game and Indian trails would have been.

Our route is very isolated, and sections are unsuitable for cars. We made one revision to our initial proposal: We replaced Kempville Hwy with Little Salt Lick Road. (The Google map on the link has been revised.)

In November 2008, we again traveled between **Cookeville** and **Monterey** on bicycles, confirming our initial route over **Brotherton Mtn.**

In May 2013, we finished our **Avery Trace** on bicycle from **Monterey** to **Blaine**.

On March 10, 2016, Bruce and my search for the REAL Avery Trace were published by Betsy Phillips in the Nashville Scene: The ***Skeptics Take on the Western Road***.

<http://www.nashvillescene.com/pitw/archives/2016/03/10/the-skeptics-take-on-the-western-road>

Unfortunately, the article is no longer available online, and I didn't save it. But here is enough of Ms. Phillips's discussion to get the gist of her publication.

On 02/28/2016 B. Phillips wrote to me:

Hi,

*I'm a blogger for the Nashville Scene and write a lot about Middle Tennessee history. I stumbled on your efforts to discern where the western road was when I was trying to figure out the same thing. Biking possible routes to **determine which path is the most likely is genius!***

So, I was wondering if I could email you some questions about that and share your responses with my readers.

I'm curious about how you decided to investigate by biking and if you learned anything that surprised you. I'm also curious if any historians have contacted you about your adventure. (I'm repeatedly noticing that various disparate groups hold a lot of information about Nashville and Middle Tennessee, but there are not many good ways for those groups to learn about what the others have been up to and what they've learned.)

On Mar 3, 2016, I responded to Ms. Phillips:

Good morning, Betsy,

*I am glad Bruce shared his thoughts on his interest in the Avery Trace. My interest was initiated through my research into the **Bell Witch legend**. When I found **virtually no records** of this event that predated the 1894 book by*

Marvin Ingram, I decided to examine how people came to settle in Middle Tennessee, which led me to the Avery Trace. That was a real mystery.

Confusing references to it appeared in the historical record, but no documented route existed. Unlike Bruce, I paid very little attention to road signs.

*In my research, I came upon Doug Drake, Jack Masters, and Bill Puryear through a personal friend, **Shirley Wilson**, a genealogist who had also researched early Middle Tennessee. Shirley told me that Drake, Masters, and Puryear were also on a quest to map the Avery Trace route.*

*Bruce and I met them at a lecture on **Buffalo Trails in Middle Tennessee**, and an idea was born. We were going to follow, most likely, buffalo trails. Almost all early routes into the MERO District (as Middle Tennessee was initially identified) were blazed from animal trails, especially buffalo.*

*I got my topographical maps and told myself, "**If I were a buffalo, where would I go.**" I combined that with anecdotal references in old letters to where the Avery Trace ran. Once mapped, the bicycle was the best way to follow the route.*

*Some of what I assumed was a route could not be traveled by car, and sometimes, it was even difficult for a bicycle. In this manner, I mapped what I considered to be the most likely Avery Trace, a route from **Fort Nashborough** to **Fort Blount**. Bruce and I then rode the entire Trace by bicycle from Fort Nashborough (also the REAL location) to Fort Blount to confirm my hypothesis.*

Later, I met Drake, Masters, and Puryear at a book signing for their exquisitely illustrated "Founding of the Cumberland Settlements" and compared Avery Trace's notes. Our routes were remarkably similar.

***Tennessee has such a rich pioneer history, which, in my opinion, can only be experienced by bicycle. Bruce and I have considered setting up bicycle tours of early Tennessee History.** We even subjected our bicycle club to a few excursions.*

Unfortunately, they didn't share our enthusiasm. Tennessee has so much to see. Many places we visit by bicycle seem frozen in the past. With just a little knowledge about those times, we can transport our imaginations back to those periods and vicariously experience much more than what may be evident to the casual visitor.

*I sometimes tell my companions of the salt licks or pioneer encampments that were once along some remote back route we many pedaling. **Touring Tennessee by bicycle can't be beat.***

*By the way, most **Avery Trace Road signs incorrectly state the location.** They were created by Tennessee Tourism, which is less concerned about historical accuracy.*

On March 8, 2016, I added:

Let me add another note to this discussion that everyone may or may not know. Avery Trace is a blazoned trail. It never existed as an actual trail and did not have the name Avery, a surveyor in east Tennessee. It was "posterity," which dumped a name on the trail. It only passed through the now long-gone Fort Blount for a few years, around 1790. Even the Fort has been on both sides of the Cumberland River. It never went through Gainesboro as the Tennessee Tourism signs claim. The Great West route from East Tennessee dropped south from Fort Blount to Carthage and became the primary route to Nashborough.

My Internet reports are probably the most complete discussions of the Trace that are readily available. Since my websites were posted, Bruce and I have ridden the Trace from Monterey to its eastern terminus near Oak Ridge and up the Great Wagon Trail to Virginia.

Drake et al. also discussed their experiences trying to find the Trace in their books. Although we pursued this adventure independently, our conclusions are nearly identical.

THIS WITCH'S BROOM DOESN'T FLY

Although no researcher has validated any report of the Bell Witch Legend that pre-dates **M. V. Ingram's** influence – no newspaper articles, no church records, no wills, no personal journals, absolutely nothing - many still conclude that something unusual occurred. The absence of those records should seriously suggest that maybe Ingram invented the whole thing to sell books – certainly a rational consideration for a sensible person.

Nevertheless, regardless of the proof, conspiracy theorists, believers in the absurd, and fans of the Easter Bunny cannot be convinced of reality by any amount of common sense, logic, or evidence. Where facts don't exist, others invent them. Recording visions of fantasy hundreds of times may not convert creative fabrications into truth, but it can create a legend.

The facts weren't too difficult to decipher in an examination of the Bell Witch. The story was a novel by Ingram and nothing more. Most twentieth-century people who bothered to read Ingram's book would quickly find it a laughable fairy tale. Nevertheless, the story persists and is kept alive through imagination and the Internet by those who like a good scary story.

Pat Fitzhugh's 2000 book "***The Bell Witch: The Full Account***" was how I began my ***Search for the Bell Witch***. He claims his <http://www.bellwitch.org/> as the official source for the Bell Witch.

I read Fitzhugh's claims and similar comments by other active researchers—the ***most documented manifestation***—and expected to find a lot. That was a huge exaggeration!

For nearly two centuries, this authentic haunting has been considered the most extraordinary supernatural phenomenon in humanity's history. The people, places, and dates are real, and Tennessee farmer John Bell is the only man in history whose death was directly attributed to a Spirit.

As the gossip spread, the problems of this prominent family in Red River Station, as Adams was known then, became so sensationalized with actual details becoming so obscured that in a matter of a couple generations, they

grew into a legend. Even in recent years, as writers researched the Bell Witch haunting, they contributed to the mysticism by claiming it was the most documented manifestation in American history.

Likewise, the **State of Tennessee** boasted in a gray metal roadside plaque on Route 41 in Adams, Tennessee.



The events reported at Adams Station between 1817 and 1820 are far more dramatic than any comparable haunting. An entity identified as **Kate** is said to have freely spoken with numerous people and to have killed **John Bell**. US President **Andrew Jackson** is also reported to have challenged Kate and retreated out of fear.

According to legend, the famous Bell Witch harried his family during the early 19th century. She kept the household in turmoil, assaulted Bell, and drove off Betsy Bell's suitor. Even Andrew Jackson, who came to investigate, retreated to Nashville after his coach wheels stopped mysteriously.

Recent authors have attributed the Bell Witch haunting to mysticism and claimed it is the most documented manifestation in American history. What I found was quite the contrary.

The most documented manifestation of its kind is a lie. What I found was quite to the contrary. After searching archives for source records, I located only one report from someone who claimed to have witnessed the incident. All other documentation has been derived from Ingram's narrative or questionable and often fictionalized hearsay.

The only eyewitness was **Richard Bell**, John Bell's second youngest son. Ingram claimed he had Richard's 1846 diary, "**Our Family Trouble**." This diary was the central portion of Ingram's 1894 book. Nobody else has seen or found it.

Born in 1811, Richard was only six years old when the bizarre events of 1817 to 1820 began. Over a quarter of a century later, in 1846, he wrote of his experiences in his diary.

In 1857, Richard gave his diary to his son **Allen Bell**, who, in turn, entrusted it to his personal friend, **Martin Ingram**, with the proviso that nothing could be made public until after the deaths of the immediate family.

Finally, in 1880, nearly two generations after the bizarre event, Ingram began researching and documenting the incident. In the preface of his 1894 book, he rationalized this interim as concern for the privacy of a deeply religious family that this unholy occurrence had seriously maligned. Although a reasonable and sympathetic consideration, that passage of time also made it nearly impossible for others to formulate and validate any counterpoint.

Writing paper was scarce in frontier Tennessee. The absence of written records may not have unequivocally discredited the legend. There should be researchable documents. No matter how primitive Adams was, there were newspapers in an area that included Nashville. Nothing exists.

There were written records about **John Bell**: notes in the minutes of the **Red River Baptist Church**, where he was an elder, and records in a court trial in nearby Springfield, where he was successfully sued for usury. These events led to Bell's excommunication from the Baptist Church in January 1818. Neither record hinted at the Bell Witch affair.

Lastly, we doubted the comment on the Tennessee road plaque about the involvement of the 7th President of the United States. **Andrew Jackson** was a household name because of his spectacular victory in the **Battle of New Orleans** in 1815. Why would the newspapers ignore his visit to Adams with a large entourage to challenge the Witch? Why was there no record in Jackson's journals?

Similarly, we can't imagine how there would not have been derisive comments about his reported retreat from the *Witch* in his 1824 and 1828 presidential campaigns that were so vicious that Jackson believed scandalous accusations made during them led to the death of his beloved wife, **Rachel**.

The 1934 book *The Bell Witch: A Mysterious Spirit* was written by great-grandson Dr. Charles Bell, who obtained notes of private conversations John Bell, Jr. claimed to have had with the Witch in 1828. He dictated them to his son, **Dr. Joel Thomas Bell**. There have been no other first-hand records to substantiate or refute the legend. It seemed just too self-serving not to be questioned.

In 2000, another Bell Witch author, **Brent Monahan**, used the term "faction" to describe his book as a fictional work based on facts. Like Ingram, he claimed to base his story on a significant diary—that of **Richard Powell**, the school teacher for the Bell children and the husband of **Betsy**, the psychotic sister.

Even though Monahan was more honest than Ingram about his tale's veracity, he took his liberties. He fabricated the Powell diary, which never existed. The only document with Powell's handwriting was his *Cipher* book, which is now in the **Tennessee State Archives**. Powell did comment on the Bells in his extensive scribbling in its margins, but he noted nothing unusual.

However, in 2005, Monahan's book was released as the movie, "*The American Haunting*," which continued the standard ploy of claiming the movie was based on a "true" story, its ultimate lie. Nothing in this movie tells a little history about John Bell and his family.

The half-dozen other major books or articles on the Bell Witch have added no significant information. Everything in this so-called "most documented" case had the one fundamental reference exploited repeatedly—the book of Ingram.

DISSECTING INGRAM'S STORY

Ingram owned and operated the newspaper **Clarksville Tobacco Leaf**. His bibliography specifically stated that he was not a trained journalist and that his partners had primary responsibility for that function. His job was to print and "sell" newspapers. Nevertheless, Ingram wove his tale using strands of oral tradition and excerpts from the diary. With supposedly actual conversations and quotations by witnesses, his rendition read like a first-hand account. By 1880, no one who was directly involved was still alive.

According to Ingram, as the gossip spread, the problems of this prominent family in **Red River Station**, as Adams was known then, became so sensationalized, with actual details becoming so obscured that in a matter of a couple of generations, they grew into a legend.

In the appendix, he contrived to substantiate its authenticity with a list of testimonials from a dozen notable and credible local citizens. It was a valueless gimmick in that they could not testify to the credulity of his anecdotal evidence. They were character witnesses for his interviewees. By 1880, no one was directly involved.

Although nobody has found evidence that this chronology is more than a total fabrication, common sense challenges it. The English professor who visited me in 2001 had another more probable theory. Here is what he told me.

At the time Ingram published his account, he was a member of a **Liars Club**. The goal of each member was to fashion a tale that would convince all readers of its veracity. Certainly, Ingram's book had the makings of a great invention.

Ingram claims that the **Saturday Evening Post** reported occult activities in Adams in an 1849 article that the magazine blamed Betsy for the entire phenomenon, that she threatened to sue, and that they issued a public retraction. Indeed, if true, that interaction would have created at least one record for posterity. No modern researcher has found the story in the POST.

A brief paragraph in 1886 by historian **Albert Goodpasture** in his "***Goodspeed History of Tennessee.***"

A remarkable occurrence, which attracted widespread interest, was connected with the family of John Bell, who settled in what is now known as Adams Station about 1804. So great was the excitement that people came from hundreds of miles around to witness the manifestations of what was popularly known as the 'Bell Witch.'

Nickel of CSICOP believes that Ingram wrote and added the paragraph.

Ingram's most bizarre claim was that **Andrew Jackson** visited the family in Adams and talked with the *Witch* in his carriage outside the Bell house. The hero of the Battle of New Orleans was so disturbed by the interaction that he raced away.

Others and I have scanned Jackson's dairies and found no mention of this incident.

Lastly, **Richard Bell's** 1846 diary, a significant portion of Ingram's 1894 book, has never been seen or found.

Until recently, most books about the Bell Witch were motivated in some manner by a member of the Bell family. The 1894 Ingram book supposedly solicited by Joel, the son of Richard Bell, mainly contained hearsay of the descendants of Bell's closest friends.

The 1934 book, "***The Bell Witch: A Mysterious Spirit,***" was written by great-grandson Dr Charles Bell, who obtained notes of private conversations John Bell, Jr claimed to have had with the Witch in 1828. He had dictated them to his son, Dr. Joel Thomas Bell. There have been no other first-hand records to substantiate or refute this exchange. It's just too self-serving.

In the appendix, he contrived to substantiate its authenticity with a list of testimonials from a dozen notable and credible local citizens. This was a valueless gimmick because they could not testify to the credibility of his anecdotal evidence. They were character witnesses for his interviewees.

Nevertheless, Ingram's work was accepted as factual. Numerous authors used his book as the primary reference for dozens of subsequent publications.

Ingram's book includes a long list of credible witnesses who seem to attest to the occurrence of many of the reported events. Ingram *appears* to present an overwhelming case. However, no one on his list observed any aspect of the legend. They are only character witnesses for the people who Ingram claims saw the *haunting*. We already know President Jackson was a no-show.

Ingram's witnesses, in order of significance, are:

- **General Andrew Jackson**, 7'th President of the US
- **Joel Thomas Bell**, son of John Bell, Jr., the primary source of the Ingram account
- **Rev. Joshua Featheton**, a personal friend of Baptist ministers mentioned in the legend
- **Dr. J.T. Mathews**, personal friend of Miles & Porter, intimately involved in the story
- **Mr. E. Newton**, a personal friend of Baptist ministers mentioned in legend
- **R.H. Pickering**, son of Major G. Pickering, who personally kicked the *witch* out of bed
- **J. Gunn**, son of Rev. Alex Gunn, who was prominent in the legend
- **D. T. Porter**, son of Porter, who was prominent in the story
- **J. I Holman**, a friend of Polk who was a neighbor to the Bells
- **Wm Wall** attests to Uncle Billy Wall's experience with the witch
- **W.H. Gardner** verifies Uncle Joshua Gardner's experience

I even examined the notes of the family tutor, Richard Powell, for the children. None of these writings mentioned the 1816 to 1820 Bell Witch event.

Was it based on three generations of campfire stories and the fantasies of a child, or was it the ultimate liar's club con?

We guess that **Ingram deserves the Liar's Club prize**. He continues to deceive today, with a whole cadre of disciples anxious to cash in on his tale.

ADAMS

10/20/01

On Saturday, 10/20/01, I made my first visit to Adams, TN. It was not like I expected. Except for a post office and a few clustered buildings between the "Entering Adams" and "Leaving Adams" signs, I would have never known there was a town. Located on US 41, ten miles northwest of Springfield, TN, a few farms, churches, and long-abandoned business establishments were all that there was to see.



Auction in business district

I drove around and around on every road that appeared to pass through it, such as US 41, TN 76, and TN 256. A century ago, I would have expected to see a significant plantation town, but now, all that seemed to be left was a decaying memory. Entering Adams from the east, I passed the Adams Museum—the old, red brick junior high school building. Due to the trash piled around its small entrance, I was a little leery about entering it.

What I saw on the outside was duplicated many times inside the building. Except here, each item had a small white adhesive label with an inventory number and price printed on it. Not seeing anyone, I roamed through three or four rooms with mountains of old and dusty collectibles.

Eventually, I made my way to the Museum section of the building. In a space about the size of your average 12x16-foot residential living room, there were a couple of display cases in the center, and a dozen exhibits next to and attached to the walls.



Abandoned School Building
now Museum

About half the items related to the Bell family and the haunting that made them famous. Old photographs and documents about the Bell property were interesting and provided more information. I later gathered while searching the Internet. The museum also had a collection of books written about the Bell Witch for sale. I think there were about five on display. I purchased the most recent one by **Pat Fitzhugh**.



House

Behind the museum, about half a dozen outdoor exhibits of antique tractors and farm equipment spread across several acres, marking the site of the annual Tennessee-Kentucky Threshermen's Show. Almost adjacent to the museum stands a log cabin, built between 1810 and 1820, which was once on the land inherited by **Joel Bell** after his parents' deaths.

THE CAVE

10/20/01

About 1/2 mile north of the Adams Museum, on Keysburg Road, was the cave claimed to be still inhabited by the Bell Witch. Its entrance was 75 feet up a limestone cliff bordering the Red River.

Once owned by **Bims Eden** and later purchased in 1993 by the present owners, **Walter and Chris Kirby**, it is on the opposite side of the river from the original Bell plantation.



Cave Entrance

Only 160 acres remain in the Bell family, forced to sell most of the original thousand acres during the last hundred years. Eden purchased the cave in 1964, ran the lighting systems, and conducted the first tours. He died in 1980, and the property stood vacant until Kirby's purchase.



Farm at Cave Entrance

Besides conducting cave tours, the Kirbies offer "haunted hayrides" and psychic readings on their property, which is surrounded by lovely rolling Tennessee hills. Their home (shown in the background of the picture) is directly above the second room of the cave.

Geologists have estimated that the cave extends for fifteen miles, with very little of it ever being explored. In our tour, we got to see, at best, a thousand feet of it: the entrance, about a hundred feet of passage, room number one, about two hundred and fifty more feet of passage, and room number two. At that point, the cave narrows to a small, three-foot opening above the small stream that flows through the cave and 75 feet down the side of a cliff into the Red River.



Ticket Booth

For a fee of five dollars, a member of the Kirby family or staff will give you an escorted tour through Kate's final haunt.



Walkway to Cave Entrance

Ancient Indian burial grounds were reported to be above the cave. Bims even found a 300-year-old Indian skeleton buried in the cave. Many psychics who visited the cave claimed these graves were the source of the energy that created a paranormal vortex at this location. The Bells once used the cave for cold storage. Kate, the more familiar name of the witch, had been seen in it numerous times.



Cave Entrance

The entrance was a hole about ten feet tall and five feet wide. A small stream ran out the bottom. The passageway, which was lit by a small string of lights, narrowed down to less than six feet high and three feet across.



Narrow passage to the first room

Walking on loose rock for about one hundred and twenty-five feet, we moved into the first room. It was about a hundred feet wide on each side, and the ceiling was about twenty feet above us. Chris showed us the now-empty tomb of the Indian. Vandals stole it many years ago.

There was another narrow passageway leading about two hundred and fifty feet farther back to a second room. As we walked, we could tell this cave hadn't seen a lot of recent traffic. A small bat was hanging from a shoulder-level rock next to our path. We carefully avoided disturbing it as we walked within inches of its perch.



Chris explains the second room.

The second room had been the source of all the unusual phenomena. The Bims used to let people attempt to spend the night in it. Chris claimed that in twenty-eight years, nobody ever stayed through the night. She described an incident where a TV camera crew swore they could make it. Confidently, they set up all their equipment and settled for what they were sure would be a *cakewalk*. However, they left in a rush shortly after midnight. They said a screaming woman drove them out.

Chris said she had experienced many strange occurrences in the cave, such as a screaming woman, orbs, corpuscular mists, and icy spots. She couldn't explain what they were and did not attempt to suggest anything supernatural. But she said that she would never enter it alone. On her walk with us, she had her black Labrador retriever with her.

Fitzhugh, in his book "*The Bell Witch: The Full Account*," reports dozens of strange and unexplainable (his claim, not mine) occurrences in the cave, witnessed both by its past owners and by visitors. Walking in that dark, damp hole, with noises channeled through fifteen miles of the tunnel like a waveguide while anticipating ghostly apparitions, I could easily understand how a susceptible person might imagine anything.

THEORIES

Since I began this search, I have heard many theories about the Bell Witch. I, too, have explored several possibilities, such as poltergeist manifestation or schizophrenia. I have heard a theory that Betsy's brother learned ventriloquism while in New Orleans and that he used it to entertain and scare his neighbors back in Adams. However, before getting caught up in these other theories, remember that **nobody can prove that the events in the Bell Witch Legend happened.**

I have recently found a 2008 addition to the list of "self-proclaimed" experts on the Bell Witch, **Debbie Dunn** and her book, ***The Bell Witch Unveiled***. She explains that the Bell Witch was a poltergeist manifestation. The only problem is that all poltergeist events explored by qualified researchers have been proven to be hoaxes, and that almost always resulted from psychologically disturbed teenagers seeking attention. Does this describe Betsy?

NOBODY knows since no intimate information exists about her.

Since we started our search in 2002, we have met several serious researchers who have examined this legend in great detail and found a far richer history than the fictitious yarn spun in the thousands of "spooky" web pages.

The bottom line is that **M.V. Ingram made up the story**. Just like authors of horror stories do today, nothing sells better than to claim the "story is based on fact." However, being "based on fact" does not prove the story is factual.

**Maybe John Bell and his family can finally rest in peace.
Without unwelcome intruders continually trespassing on their privacy.**

DISCOVERY CHANNEL - THE MYSTERY HUNTER'S TV

It was Monday, September 16, 2002, and I was driving down Rt 41 from Nashville to Adams, Tennessee. The year before, I made a similar trip almost to the day. Then, I began researching the Bell Witch Legend. Today, I was to appear as the local skeptic in the TV program *Mystery Hunters*.

As I drove, I asked myself, "Who would have thought?"

However, neither activity has been very satisfying.

In my one year of research, I found no corroborating evidence to substantiate the locally popular legend—just one primary account authored from the memories of a six-year-old boy and a lot of secondary storytelling based on it.

The legend's claim to fame, a visit by **Andrew Jackson**, almost certainly was a total fabrication. The Bell Witch legend endures because no evidence exists to discredit it, but no evidence exists to verify it.

I wasn't sure what to expect in the case of the TV shoot. I liked the theme and format of the pilot video, which they sent me to review. The young actors were charming. Having never done anything like it, I thought participating would be fun.

I assumed I would receive a copy of the script in advance so I would have a chance to be sure I said something meaningful and not just mumbled (as my wife tells me I am somewhat prone to do). I also knew this show had children in the audience, so I wanted to be sure I did not use words like dysfunction, manifestation, schizophrenia, etc.

Christina, the young star of the show, was indeed a pleasure. Attractive and exceptionally pleasant, she was very easy to talk with. The director, however, disoriented me when he said as we started the shoot, "Don't worry what you say. We dub it over! Just carry on a conversation." What!

I looked at the script. Sure enough, Christina's words were detailed. My section stated, "Tom says something about this or about that."

I was now sure that Mr. Mumbles was going to make a debut.

Nevertheless, I suspect the video may not come out that way. Somebody looking just like me and maybe even sounding like me would say something erudite. I hoped it was something I would have said.

I kept telling myself not to worry. This show will only be seen by kids munching on Pop-Tarts, with one eye on the TV screen and the other watching a dozen activities.

Christina's last question was, "**What do you think happened?**"

I am not sure what the video will have me say, but my conclusion is that this is the **Final Chapter of my work on the Bell Witch**. Unless something unusual is discovered, I plan no more trips to Adams, Tennessee, or additions to my Bell Witch website. It's time to move on to another paranormal event for research.

While shooting the ***Mystery Hunters*** video, I was asked if Kate Batts might have murdered **John Bell**. I was caught by surprise. I had never heard that theory, and I didn't think anyone but the scriptwriter believed that possibility.

Nevertheless, it did identify a significant problem with this entire legend. Before offering theories about a particular event, one must prove that the event happened. No facts substantiate that anyone, corporeal or spiritual, murdered John Bell.

The next question was, "How do I explain away the details in Richard Bell's diary, *My Family's Troubles?*"

The answer was straightforward. While many people, including myself, accept that something unusual might have happened in the Bell household, we have found no records to corroborate the extraordinary occurrence in this diary.

No one has been able to prove that this diary ever existed. It was very likely just part of Ingram's grand prize lie.

Fitzhugh says he has researched the history of the Bell Witch for over twenty years, while I have done so for less than ten years. I trusted his ability to seek facts to support his desire to promote the legend.

With no success, I searched his book for references to corroborating evidence to the extraordinary reports made by anyone. I saw little benefit in walking on the ground already trodden by hundreds before us. The total absence of corroboration for the extraordinary speaks volumes.

My simple, ordinary explanations of **Betsy Bell's** psychological dysfunction associated with the hysteria of family and friends, along with the imaginative dramatizations of the memories of six-year-old **Richard Bell** re-created by **M.V. Ingram** to sell his book, are without question the most likely common-sense explanations.

I suspect few people can appreciate this directly logical statement. If **simple explanations can be made based on established science, then those theories must be vastly more probable than others based on extraordinary claims without evidence.**

FINAL

Ingram's book, Goodspeed's note in his history of Robertson County, and the Tennessee road sign in Adams claim widespread attention. Still, no researcher has found any written accounts outside Ingram's reach. As M.V. Ingram describes them, the remarkable absence of independent corroboration of these events almost justifies that his work was likely a fabrication.

The most note-worthy event in the Tennessee Legend was the supposed visit by President-to-be **Andrew Jackson**. Considering Jackson's tempestuous history, this incident, without any doubt, would have been documented. Again, the lack of any mention by the media or inclusion in his diaries proves that Ingram took dramatic liberties in exaggerating the truth.

I have received many e-mail letters in response to our brief examination of the Bell Witch Legend. Virtually all supported our theories about this phenomenon. I appreciated the comments (and they helped to correct many typos on the website). I thought of including them on this page, but I can't post them since I never asked the writers' permission before sending their messages.

I have received a copy of the TV episode showing my brief appearance on the *Mystery Hunters* on *Discovery Kids*. They did a nice job. Watch your TV. *Mystery Hunters* is on Cable and Satellite.

The first rule of critical thinking is: don't consider extraordinary causes until you eliminate the ordinary causes. No evidence exists for paranormal events like those described in Ingram's book, either in centuries pre-dating it or the subsequent century.

It is not unreasonable to conclude that something unusual enough to spark the imagination of a minor, closely knit, superstitious community in 1817 to 1820 might have occurred outside the ken of the primitive Adams residents.

Many fall into the trap of trying to explain an event for which no verification needs to exist. Because hundreds of stories about Santa Claus are told, it doesn't prove that Santa Claus exists, and it is absurd to explain what some people may think they know. The explanations are likely to be as ludicrous as the claim.

Nevertheless, let's still consider possible ordinary causes. History is replete with stories of bizarre behavior elicited by hallucinogens, hysteria, and the like. Consider the story of the Salem Witches.

Everyone now accepts that no witchcraft was involved, but no one knows what caused the bizarre behavior of the girls. Because it is common, ergot poisoning is suspected.

For those who want to believe something like Ingram claims happened, some have argued the events in Adams could have also been a **poltergeist manifestation**, not the paranormal type, but the psychological dysfunction type, similar to **schizophrenia**.

Following this line, consider:

- 1) Hundreds of poltergeists have been reported over two millennia. Science accepts an often incomplete and inaccurate report. The primary disagreement is that science does not accept claims of psychokinesis; it accepts psychosis.
- 2) Some Bell family members, including Betsy Bell, relocated to Mississippi several years after John Bell's death. Their book described a classic poltergeist, a phenomenon accepted by believers in the paranormal but ultimately rejected by qualified scientists.
- 3) Some thought the situation in the Bell household could have been made a **Folie a Deux**, a certain hysteria for the people closest to the Bell family. Scientists report community hysteria countless times throughout history, especially in intensely religious and superstitious circumstances.

Like in most poltergeist incidents, the manifestations ceased when the cause of the stress ceased—Betsy's relationship with her father, John.

Supposedly, similar Witch incidents occurred several years later, but these accounts were most likely imaginative. The Witch also promised to return around 1930, which also never happened.

I have not returned to Adams since the TV shoot and have nothing further planned. The Bell Witch Legend is a grand old story that is kept alive not by any facts but by people who want to believe. Nothing more is to be found in a myth that has been retold and reexamined for over a century.

Something unusual for that time and place could have happened to the Bell family, and reports are exaggerated beyond reality. Nobody has been able to validate anything of a paranormal nature regarding this tale.

Most researchers I have communicated with abandoned the Bell Witch Legend around 2008. I did the same.

MORE WEIRD STUFF

More than two decades after I picked up the Bell Witch Story, no investigator has found what happened. I am confident the Bell Witch Legend is fictitious. Can I convince the "true believer?"

There is no chance of that. To a person, they tell me how they can sense the presence of the Bell Witch in one form or another, although they do not know what that means.

Getting caught up in the hysteria that surrounds this legend is easy. Reports of the Bell Witch are evidence of one's suggestibility. The love for a good scare has created the billion-dollar spook industry. But **Kate** does not reside in the **Bell Witch Cave**, and all reports to the contrary are nothing more than attempts by a few enterprising people to capitalize on the gullibility of the general public.

Around my home, I swear I hear noises I have never heard. I see images from the corner of my eyes that I never experienced before. Has the Witch come to seek her revenge on me for claiming she is fake?

While researching the Internet for information on poltergeists, I stumbled across **Melissa Sanders's** self-interview for her book **All That Lives**. In it, she discusses her experience with the legend. Her grandma, who lived near Adams, TN, told her the story of the Bell Witch when she was five years old.

That night, I woke up screaming, sitting up in bed. Instead of seeing my grandma switching on the light, leaning over me, trying to shake me awake, saying, "Child, child, wake up!" I thought I saw the Bell Witch possessing her, manipulating the features of her face into something unrecognizable. I was sure the witch had stolen her soul and was coming for me next. As soon as I could stop screaming, I managed to tell my grandma what I'd seen.

She held me and laughed a little, saying I wasn't the first or the last person to have bad dreams about the Bell Witch.

Grandma was right. In Ingram's story, the first person to have that nightmare was **Richard William Bell**, who, as a six-year-old boy, wrote about it twenty years later in his diary, **My Families Troubles**.

In 1999, as an adult, Ms. Sanders decided to write a novel about the Bell Witch. She had a publisher and was working on the ending when she experienced some strange happenings again. She decides that Betsy should burn in the final scene when she and the Spirit have their final confrontation. Just before she starts work, she notices the smell of smoke in her house. Going to the fireplace in the living room, she saw an old, charred log, but it was spring, and her family hadn't used it since winter.

She ignored it and went to work on her manuscript. Deep in thought, she heard a crackle and a rustle in the living room. She stopped to listen. Maybe her cat was tearing some paper, or maybe there was a fire!

I forced myself to get up and open the door. I walked down the hall and into our living room, where I immediately saw the source of the noise: there was a roaring fire in our fireplace, and the old dead log I'd noticed earlier was hissing, sending flames up into the chimney. I got down on my knees in front of the fire and raised my eyes to the ceiling, afraid I was being visited by the Spirit. "It's a sign, isn't it?" I roared into the empty room. "I am doing my best to tell this story; please let me do it well."

That night, she told the story to her husband. He said he had been burning junk mail in the morning, explaining why the house smelled and how the log could have caught on fire.

The 2005 movie *The **American Haunting*** starring Donald Sutherland and Sissy Spacek is based on Brent Monahan's 2000 fantasy "***The Bell Witch***." It received terrible reviews. Consequently, I chose not to see it. However, I succumbed to my curiosity when it appeared on my Netflix list. Not only did the movie live up to its horrible reviews, but it misrepresented Ingram's story.

The opening scene has explicitly John Bell in front of the First Baptist Church elders, for which they excommunicate John Bell, arguing a case of usury against Kate Batts. The usury case against Bell, unlike many other reports of the legend, is well documented both in the church minutes and the Springfield Circuit Court.

Nevertheless, the usury incident was not with Kate Batts but with Benjamin Batts, the brother of Kate's husband. No evidence exists that Kate harbored any unusual ill will regarding Benjamin's affair. From this point, the movie went downhill fast.

The movie attempted to create suspense by inventing horrible concoctions of events in a disjointed fashion that often confused the audience.

Those familiar with the Bell Witch found it challenging to identify the legend in this cinema. It scrambled what little they thought they knew so severely that it left them more in the dark than the tenebrous scenes in the movie.

Read ***The Little Ghost on the Prairie*** by **Grady Hendrix** for an additional review of this movie.

The Bell Witch Legend by Jack Cook

The following analysis of the Bell Witch Legend was provided by **Jack Cook** of Nashville, TN, in October 2006 and updated in January 2008. His entire report is at <http://bellwitchlegend.blogspot.com/>

"It is not the purpose of this writer to present a romance for the entertainment of lovers of fiction, nor to establish a theory to please the fancy of adherents of so-called theosophy, but simply to record events of historical fact, sustained by a powerful array of incontrovertible evidence, as it comes to hand, testifying to the most wonderful phenomenon the world has any account of: a visitation known as the "Bell Witch"

Thus begins the novel by **Martin Van Buren Ingram** in the preface of the "Authenticated History of the Bell Witch," published in 1894. Yet, in all those years since Mr. Ingram released his publication, the story has generated mainly the opposite appeal, namely that of being a "romance for entertainment." Despite earnest attempts at explaining the story at hand, most of the published attempts at analyzing the story's content have ended up without a complete or scholarly basis. I also admitted that I presented some data in my original paper as if it were self-evident facts. Let's face it: historical facts are not self-evident. They have to be backed up.

Before it can be taught as history, there must be some actual historical or documented basis by which an event can be traced to its origins. In the academic world, this rule has given us much of the truth behind history, which was either wrongly publicized or misreported by newspapers or magazines. The purpose of popular media is to report, but it is also to sell papers and advertisements and to support the mandates of a community. Unfortunately, the truth is not always forthcoming, but when events happen that sell papers, you can generally find mention of the event during the period in which it occurred.

For this notation on The Spirit of Red River, it has been over twenty-five years since I decided to tackle the formidable job of researching the objective and verifiable history of the legend of the "Bell Witch." After collecting thousands of

documents and visiting all of the known locations where the family and supposedly the story happened, my research slowed significantly.

As of this date, I have enough data to draw many reasonable conclusions about the Bell Witch story's reality (or unreality, as it were). Generally, people do not want to hear about the issues that scholarly research leads to. That's OK. The details are exhausting, and even the most serious researchers cannot access the data to make this legend a reality. At this point, I seriously doubt that they ever will. However, in the spirit of serious research, I continue to keep an open mind. In the face of so many more critical distractions of the world, legends are intellectual entertainment that is fun to play with but rarely significant in a broader sense. So, occasionally, I put some time into the Bell Spirit project to see what new information comes up.

At this point in our research, the facts have often spoken for themselves. Several university researchers have contacted me with well-thought-out and professionally researched data. They were incredibly kind in sharing their insights and tremendously familiar with newspapers and journalism of the 1800s. We traded information that significantly filled in the history of **Martin Van Buren Ingram** and thus gave us some perfect ideas concerning his reasons for writing the "Authenticated History of the Bell Witch."

So, for those who remain interested, here are some facts you may or may not want to hear from me. Due to the nature of distortion on the Internet, I will not include a bibliography here.

The information on **Andrew Jackson** in "Authenticated History" is incorrect. In 1819, Major General Andrew Jackson accompanied President James Monroe on a tour of the Western Armies of the United States that ended in Lexington, Kentucky. This tour occurred during the period in which Ingram tells of Jackson's encounter with the Bell Witch. (Ingram never revealed the date, but we must assume by real history that it was in 1819). Despite his public popularity, Major Jackson almost failed to make the tour due to a significant illness and declining health. He had recently escaped official censure by the United States Congress for unauthorized actions he had taken on a military campaign. He was advised not to accompany the President through the state of Georgia, where he was not welcome. Jackson had

also admonished the President to allow him a peaceful retirement. Monroe declined. Upon returning home, he remained bedridden for some time in recovery. At no other documented time from 1814 to 1820 was Jackson in the Springfield area for any reason (even though records from the clerk reveal that he indeed owned tracts of land in Robertson County, as did many absentee speculators of the period). Actual letters and documentation freely available from the Library of Congress and several published histories, especially those of Congressional Historian Dr. Robert Remini, verify these events. The only major event in Robertson County during Jackson's return to Nashville was the dedication of the new courthouse in Springfield. There were no newspaper accounts that Jackson was present for that event.

Based on all of my research into so many aspects of the story, and based upon who M. V. Ingram represented to the area of Robertson and Montgomery County, I must conclude that there is robust evidence that Ingram (and possibly other uncredited authors) put together a very believable set of characters, and events that were engineered to attract a specific audience around Middle Tennessee and perhaps beyond. After in-depth discussions with several serious academic historians, it became apparent to me that the burden of proof for the haunting of the family of John Bell, Sr. now resides with any person who is holding actual written proof concerning para-psychological events in Red River legitimately recorded before 1886.

As in any story based on ONE inclusive work, such as the "Authenticated History of the Bell Witch," I have attempted to discover newspaper stories or written documents that date before 1893 (the year of the book's printing) to find an angle of thought beyond that of Ingram, perhaps acting as a possible verification of the incident. Discounting the advertisements announcing the publication of the book just before its release, as of this update, I have only found one printed reference to the Bell Witch from the year 1886 (and I very strongly suspect that it was written or dictated by Ingram, though the source is not listed in Goodspeed's History).

Most of the later related newspaper articles I have seen between 1886 and shortly after the "Authenticated History" publication were composed to incite interest in Ingram's novel.

Searching microfilmed newspapers is very, very time-consuming. One generally has to know the year an article appeared to prevent an endless search. Pages or even whole issues may be missing or unrecoverable from the file. Sections may also be in such poor condition that they are unreadable. One instance of this difficulty was a reference made twice in the "Authenticated History" to an article written in the ***Saturday Evening Post*** in 1849. This article supposedly made specific accusations of such a nature that ***Elizabeth Bell*** threatened to sue the publication. No evidence is available in the official record because Ingram states that the Post was never brought to court. Despite a comprehensive search of rare microfilmed copies of the Post for that and many years on both sides of 1849, I have not been able to find that article. The search is made particularly difficult due to the destruction by an accidental fire of all known archival copies of the ***Saturday Evening Post*** for all the years in question. The only remaining microfilmed copies were made from poor and sometimes almost unreadable copies of the publication. Despite some researchers' claims about a published date, no one has found its location. I am nearly certain the Post article does not exist.

The other researchers I spoke with verified that they had discovered no articles on the Bell Witch before 1886 in any newspapers they had studied. This is despite Ingram's assurance in his novel that short newspaper articles had been written and published in past years. I have personally never come across those articles either.

Another example of Ingram's literary stealth is his mention in the "Authenticated History" of a court case involving ***Thomas Clinard*** and ***Richard Burgess*** in the alleged murder of a Mr. Smith near Cedar Hill (just down the road from Adams). Smith, a strange and bothersome person, was supposed to have claimed some rapport with the Bell Witch that gave him power over other people (i.e., mesmerism) that he used without permission on Clinard and Burgess. Playing for sympathy with the jury, the defense attorney managed to get the case dismissed against both men.

Although it was supposed to have been such a highly publicized case, there are no mentions of the case at all in local newspapers, and court records in the Robertsons County Archives shed no light on the case except for the presence of sketchy notes left there concerning the defendants and their attorney.

I must also point out that much information about individuals considered central to the story has been erroneously attributed to them throughout Ingram's book.

Finally, one must consider the inaccuracies of the description of **John Bell** in the so-called "diary" of **Richard Williams Bell**. Some of Richard Bell's authoritative comments about his father can be reasonably refuted by checking official records and the detailed accounts in the Minutes of the Red River Baptist Church. Did John Bell's son intentionally lie or color the truth about his father? Did Ingram pen the diary? Did someone other than a Bell family relative submit the diary? The obvious and truthful answer is that Ingram was responsible for whether the diary was authentic.

So, we are left with this thought: When one approaches such a challenge with the intent of proof, historians must follow a specific set of rules to verify the details of our past.

We must, for the present, conclude that there is robust evidence to indicate that the Legend of the Bell Witch is just that... a legend. And an influential legend at that! Like the best of writers, the story fashioned by Ingram contains most of the elements of life that tug at the emotional heartstrings of the masses. Ingram and his collaborators have played our tune for more than one hundred years, and a book that could have easily been forgotten after its introduction has spawned a modern haunting that continues to intrigue and mystify us today. Similarly, the broadcast media will continue molding the legend to fit the evening news. Though it makes poor journalism, a legend makes terrific entertainment. Even one that has so few visible remnants

Items on this page are excerpted from **Jack Cook's** web page and contain materials Mr. Cook has provided. Please consider them copyrighted materials, which you should not reproduce without written authorization from **Jack Cook**.

Subject: Change of address Date: 1 October 2008

Hi Folks!

As you know, I have published my paper concerning the Bell Witch Legend, "***The Spirit of Red River***," on the AOL Hometown network system for many years. Yesterday, I was notified that the AOL Hometown network would be deleted and discontinued by the end of October.

Since my paper and network will be deleted, I have moved the paper to "eBlog" and changed its appearance slightly. I believe it looks better than the AOL version. I'll tweak the appearance and add photos or graphics as I have time.

Therefore, I am requesting that you change my link on your web pages to this new link address:

<http://bellwitchlegend.blogspot.com/>

Sorry for the inconvenience. However, I'm sure I can make the reader's experience a bit more pleasurable with the formatting tools on the "blog," it's unlikely that the blog will be dropping its service for many years to come.

Many of you have written to tell me that you found the information on my web page interesting and useful. I have received many e-mails from folks who saw my web page through your sites. Thank you so much for continuing to carry my link. If you have any problems or suggestions, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Best regards and Happy Halloween,

Jack Cook, Nashville, TN.

BETSY

by Tom Evans

The official biographer of the incidents surrounding the Bell Witch Legend was a SIX-YEAR-OLD boy. As the following story depicts, imagine his perspective of his eleven-year-old sister's peculiar actions. Why have so many people been willing to give his imagination so much credibility? Are YOU one of them? Was this story the most accurate explanation in the lost 1846 *Saturday Evening Post* article?

Betsy lay motionless in a bed she shared with her six-year-old brother, Richie. She felt embarrassed—an eleven-year-old woman still having to share a bed with her baby brother. However, the family home, a log cabin on their thousand-acre farm in 1817 in north central Tennessee, had few rooms. So, all her brothers and sisters, the six of the eight who still lived at home, had to share beds.

As she lay awake, staring upward into the darkness at the hewn log in the ceiling, painful images kept flashing in her mind. She couldn't forget them, no matter how desperately she tried. Over and over, they reappeared, torturing her and depriving her of sleep.

The memory of Papa's face was stuck in her mind. She remembered sitting on the floor in the main room of their cabin with her brothers and sisters earlier that evening and listening to Papa read passages from the ***Book of Truth***. Every Saturday evening, after she had completed her chores, Papa, known in the community as John Bell, a man in his mid-sixties and an elder of prominence in the Red River Baptist Church, preached to the family.

She could still see the light from Mama's old oil wick lantern illuminating the room in a soft reddish-yellow glow and Papa reading from the tattered pages of his Bible. Like giving a sermon from the pulpit, Papa spoke slowly and sternly. She thought she was scolding them for some yet unrealized mischief. She could remember him stopping, looking up with his brow contorted, and demanding her brother explain the passage he'd just read and share the lesson Papa said was hidden in words.

She knew he liked to select his topic based on a recent misdeed by someone in the family and use this opportunity to lecture them. Their punishment, she thought, was public humiliation.

She couldn't remember Mama ever joining the discussion. While they sat in front of Papa's chair, Luci Bell, a small woman in her forties, stayed at the other side of the room and quietly worked near the fireplace. Using the light from the flickering flames, mama always tended to domestic tasks, such as mending their clothes. Although they had a half dozen slaves to do this kind of work, mama chose to do it herself. She said she found Papa's sessions too stressful and didn't want to participate.

Betsy kept seeing Papa's face from that evening. The pale-yellow glow from the lantern light cast an ominous shadow on the bridge of his nose and cheek. She imagined Papa looking only at her for the entire evening. Papa knows, she feared. He always seemed to know when she was hiding something. She had sinned, and Papa was planning her punishment.

She rolled her head side to side on her pillow, hoping to shake his face from her mind. It seemed to work for a while, but as soon as more pleasant thoughts took form, her fear of Papa's anticipated judgment drove them away. Tearfully, she pleaded for his specter to depart. As she searched her subconscious for someplace to hide, the quiet of the night was unexpectedly interrupted.

What was that noise? she thought.

There! Did she hear it again?

She stopped shaking her head, held her breath, and strained to hear any sound. She heard the squeaking of the crickets and the stirring of the horses in the nearby barn, but they were familiar sounds and were outside. But she was sure that what she had heard came from inside her bedroom. A new fear had replaced Papa's face when she started breathing again.

Glancing from side to side into the darkness, she slowly pulled up the bed covers until the hemline was even with her eyes. Clutching onto the blanket so hard her fingernails painfully dug into her palms, she jabbed her left elbow into Richie's ribs.

"Wake up, Richie! Please, please wake up," she pleaded.

"Quit it, Betsy. I'm tryin' ta sleep," he eventually murmured.

"Richie, somethun's in the room. I heard it."

"You're nutso! Papa sed mice are in da wall, tryin' ta git in, cuz it's cold."

"Mice don't talk."

"Betsy, pleez lemme be. Gota sleep."

She was sure she heard someone speak but could not make out the words. For what seemed to be hours, Betsy remained motionless. Then, frozen in horror, she watched the blankets slide down toward the foot of the bed, gather up, and, as if propelled by some mysterious force, fly back toward her head. It happened a second time. This time, they flew off the bed and landed on the floor on the right side.

Startled, Betsy sat straight up in bed, clutching her pillow as a shield against this unknown presence.

All the commotion had Richie wide-eyed awake. Upset, he complained, "I'm gettin' papa. He'll fix ya good."

His threat shocked Betsy back to those earlier awful images. With her heart pounding in her chest, she felt an instant pain in her temples.

"Please, Richie," she pleaded, "I didn't do it. The thing in here did it."

"An it likes ta pull bedcovers," he retorted.

Just then, Betsy thought she heard that voice again. Nervously, she turned and stared across the bed into the darkness of the room's far corner. With the light from the full moon shining through a tiny window high in the wall, she could see the

covers crumbled in a pile on the floor, but nothing else. The sound repeated. What was it? she thought.

While staring intently as if in a trance, she subconsciously reached over and squeezed Richie's arm just above his elbow, digging her fingernails into his flesh.

Before he could jerk away in pain, she said, "Did you hear it?"

Richie had heard nothing, but his sister's peculiar actions worried him. Betsy was scaring him when he wanted to run, get Papa, and be done with it. Some- things could be in the room. It could have hidden under the bed, and it would surely grab him if he jumped out of bed. Was it those hideous evil spirits that the blackies told him stole away children in the dark of the night? He decided the top of the bed, next to Betsy, was safe. Maybe Betsy's noise would go away.

As if to protect herself against the unseen entity, Betsy curled up in a ball on the bed, tightly clutching her pillow. Richie pulled close to her. With the blankets now on the floor, she welcomed the warmth of his body, and his nearness made her feel safer.

As they lay listening, Betsy could only hear the familiar noises of the night. The mysterious sound was gone. But she was no longer thinking of Papa and took comfort in Richie's closeness. Strange, she thought, her horrible little brother was her protector. Eventually, they fall asleep.

Since Richie and Betsy were awake for much of the night, they slept late into the morning. Upon awakening, they ran to the kitchen to tell Mama of the strange happenings. Luci listened quietly as she boiled water for their breakfast in an old kettle on the black cast-iron stove.

"Betsy hear'd talkin' in our room," Richie exclaimed.

His eyes were as wide as saucers, and he stabbed his finger into the air toward their bedroom.

"Somethen was unda da bed en pulled da covers off. Betsy made it go away."

Luci remained silent as Richie continued to tell of their encounter. When he finished, she said, "Betsy's a good sister. I'm glad she made it go away, but I'm sure you were dreaming."

"No mama, ah really hear'd it!" Richie protested.

Betsy sat quietly at the table. She was satisfied to let Richie tell their story. Mama's praise made her feel good about herself. Most importantly, while she thought about this strange sound, she forgot about her fear of Papa. But where was Papa?

Due to the lateness of the day, John Bell had already gone to the Red River Baptist Church to assist in the service. Mama said he was not expected to return until the evening. Betsy was relieved she didn't have to worry about his judgment, at least for that day. Well, that was her hope.

"I am taking that old sickly mare into Royal," a voice from just outside the door proclaimed.

Papa! Betsy thought.

Instantly, she turned toward the door to confirm the source of her anxiety. Her sudden motion propelled a plate on the table across the kitchen, striking Luci in the back.

"Betsy!" Mama exclaimed as the plate fell to the floor.

Betsy was terrified. She remembered nothing about that plate. The words - oh my, oh my, it's Papa - kept echoing in her head. The seconds she waited for the voice to enter the kitchen seemed like an eternity. Finally, Jesse, her twenty-seven-year-old brother, stepped into the doorway. His voice always reminded Betsy of Papa.

"What's going on?" Jesse asked as he walked into the kitchen and saw the broken plate on the floor.

"We got spooks," Richie replied excitedly, "day juss flung da plate at Mama."

"Sure, and I reckon you're going to tell me it's ole Kate's witch," Jesse said with a laugh.

John Bell had a troubled history with Kate Bates. Due to personal problems, she was forced to sell her farm to him and felt cheated. She swore that someday she would even score.

The threat became a family joke. Someone would say that Kate Bates had let her witch loose when something unexpected happened.

"Ya, it's da witch! She pull'd our blankets lass night," Richie added.

Surprisingly, comments about ole Kate's witch relaxed Betsy. She forgot about Papa and the broken plate. Furthermore, Mama and Jesse seemed more interested in what to do with the mare than determining how the plate ended on the floor.

A week later, the bedroom episode repeated on Saturday night. Although Richie saw nothing, Betsy told him what she thought she saw and heard. As he listened intently, Betsy found that Richie, with all the innocence of a six-year-old child, never doubted anything she said. He was her confidant. She always felt good whenever Richie shared his experience with anyone who was patient enough to listen.

The incidents repeated week after week. Although nobody ever saw or heard anything, Richie's rendition of Betsy's story gained credibility over time. When the furniture was found disturbed, and kitchen utensils were misplaced, like that morning after that first occurrence, the explanation became that it was Betsy's witch or ole Kate's witch.

A couple of months later, Betsy had her dreaded confrontation with Papa, and the visitation in the bedroom that night reached a more ominous level.

"Betsy! Betsy!" the sound finally spoke words.

Startled, Betsy sat straight up in bed. That had become the signal to Richie that Betsy had heard something.

He said nervously, "Wadya hear? Wadya hear?"

"Nothing! Go to sleep."

Before she heard her name called out, she had her face buried in her pillow, trying to hide from Richie that she was crying after her humiliation by Papa that evening.

"I am not a scourge. I am not a vessel for sin," she had been telling herself over and over again between sobs.

Instinctively, she cried out to the voice, "What do you want?"

Betsy heard nothing.

She repeated, "What do you want? Why are you here?"

A RED RIVER LEGEND

By Tom Evans

Port Royal was a small settlement in the western North Carolina territory at the Red River and Sulfur Creek confluence. It was a popular trading post for long hunters in the late eighteenth century. This cadre of adventurers would spend months at a time, either alone or in small groups, trapping, hunting, fishing, skinning, and exploring the wilderness in the North Carolina and Virginia territories.

It was a tough life that demanded exceptional survival skills and the psychological challenges of spending an inordinate amount of time alone. It suited Jacob McCord.

Despite his small stature, Jacob's stocky size made him stand out among the lean, long hunters. He was new to this lifestyle, having only embarked on it a couple of years ago after his family was tragically murdered in the Revolutionary War.

Previously, he was a farmer in eastern North Carolina. But he chose to leave to build a new life, to escape the emotional trauma of the memories of his wife Sarah and daughter Katherine. His resilience was evident, but it would take more than the backwoods to escape the haunting flashbacks to that time in his life.

Jacob's appearance was difficult to recognize after a couple of months on one of his hunts. With his round dimensions wrapped in deerskin from head to toe and sporting a ragged black beard, he took on the appearance and smell of a grizzly bear. Only his five-foot musket strapped crisscross to his back and the three or four traps attached by a rope around his waist identified him from the game he typically pursued.

The Red River drained the region, which would become southern Kentucky and northern Tennessee about a decade later, and was his preferred countryside. With its multitude of interconnecting streams and abundant game, it was popular among long hunters and the Creeks, Shawnee, and

Chickamauga. These tribes had been warring with these new invaders. The Red River and its surroundings were not just a hunting ground but a significant part of the ancestral tribal region for these tribes. They were not about to share this territory with invaders who showed so little respect for a land that sustained them for centuries.

It was mid-October 1790, and Jacob was returning to Port Royal after a two-month sojourn on the river. It was cold, unusually cold, Jacob thought. As he let the current propel his canoe, he guided it to the center of the river by dipping his paddle into the water.

It was mid-afternoon, and the sight of ice along the shoreline caused him to shiver. Although his deerskin jacket usually kept him warm, this unexpected early winter weather made him uncomfortable. The chill of the air seemed to seep into his bones, a stark reminder of the harshness of the wilderness. He was looking forward to staying back at Port Royal.

He had planned to trade the skins he obtained on this excursion for warm lodging and then canoe up the Cumberland River to Nashborough for the winter. He expected to spend time with several other long hunters he had met on previous excursions. However, he, like them, wasn't much for conversation.

Being alone in the woods for several months established a skill of maintaining one's sanity during extreme isolation. He was interested in reports he had heard about Indian attacks along the river and what his peers were doing to stay alive and get the profits of their hunts.

The terrain along the river varied, from heavily forested areas with bluffs on one or both sides to borders lined with dense shrubs and flat savannahs. The float was tranquil, the sound of waters against rocks and distant crows creating a serene backdrop.

But it was a cold mid-afternoon with an overcast sky, a sight that even Jacob found a bit depressing. Yet, he didn't take issue with it, for the beauty of the landscape was undeniable.

Jacob was pleased with this hunt. Strapped to the front half of his sixteen-foot-long canoe were skins from his hunting and trapping. The skins stacked chest high as he kneeled mid-way in the back half of the canoe. He expected a good reward when he got to Port Royal. In late summer and early fall, the river usually smelled severely. Jacob wasn't about to notice. His prize had its rich foulness.

Some long hunters would entertain themselves by singing to pass the lonely times. Not Jacob; he liked it quiet. He frequently confessed he didn't want to scare away the game. His horrible voice was more like the grunt of the bear he resembled than melodious.

"Best to listen to the wildlife," he thought.

Plus, he wanted to keep his ears tuned to any unusual sounds that might signal approaching trouble – either the rare thieves for his cargo or the more frequent Indians scouting for his life.

The weather had been dry, and the river level was lower than usual. Jacob steered his canoe around frequent rocks. The current was slow. He was glad this section of the river was straight. He could gaze several hundred yards downstream and see the stones, the fallen trees, and the occasional island. At least the action helped keep him alert. Up ahead and to the right, he saw another creek joining up. The river widened at that point.

From past trips, Jacob knew that he should be about a day's float from Port Royal. He also knew he would be near the homestead of Marvin McClean on the right, a few hundred yards past the joining creek.

Marvin had been a soldier in the Revolutionary War. As repayment for his service, North Carolina offered him a land grant of six hundred and forty acres in the western territory. He had heard about the rich lands and abundant game in the region just north of the Nashborough settlement and decided to stake his claim.

In the past five years, with the settlement on the Cumberland River at Fort Nashborough, several overland trails had been blazed from the Cherokee River

on the North Carolina state border to this new community. Fort Blount, Fort Bledsoe, and Fort Mansker were established to assist with settlement.

From Nashborough, McClean navigated the Cumberland River upstream to Port Royal and then upstream on the Red River to a section of land he had learned from the title office in Halifax County back in North Carolina had not yet been claimed. Finding the property suitable, he built a small cabin and returned to North Carolina to stake his claim. The following year, he brought his wife Ruth and six-year-old daughter Sarah to their new home.

Jacob and Marvin were members of the same Presbyterian Church in Edgecombe, North Carolina. Before each took off on their new life's journey, they exchanged stories of opportunities in this distant territory-rich land and abundant game available.

Both men were in their late twenties and had grown up hunting and trapping around the Kehukee Swamp. They had tried to make a living at farming, but recently, the weather had been dry, and they were barely surviving,

The risks were huge with the Indian attacks about which they were also hearing, but neither man worried about that. Life was entirely of risks -- probably not any more dangerous in the western territory than in the so-called civilized community of Edgecombe. After all, Jacob's family was recently murdered by the "civilized" British.

Jacob guided his canoe close to the river bank, away from the confluence on the joining creek. The water was shallow. He could see the bottom as he navigated past several boulders that extended about a foot above the surface. Several times, he dropped his paddle down and pushed off from the bottom or pushed off from these boulders.

As the canoe rocked with the turbulence, Jacob kept one eye on the obstacles blocking his wet route and the other eye on his booty of skins tied firmly in the bow. He had often experienced this churn on the river, so he wasn't overly concerned.

The river calmed down after about a hundred yards of rocking and splashing.

“Good job; all is well,” Jacob congratulated himself.

He then placed the paddle against the back right side and directed it toward a flat landing on the other river bank.

It was about mid-afternoon, and the sky was still overcast. The wind had picked up and blew a little harder upstream in his face. It was working against progress using the river current. The temperature hadn't got much warmer. To make matters worse, his beard and face had gotten wet from the splashing. He decided to visit McClean and maybe camp for the evening and dry out his damp clothes.

With the aid of the current and several deep backward strokes of the paddle, he launched his canoe onto the shore. He hopped out into about a foot-deep of water and tugged the boat firmly onto dry land. Removing a rope from the pile of his gear in the stern, he tied one end to the bow and dragged the canoe further ashore before tying the other end to the trunk of willow saplings growing about six feet from the water's edge.

He then sat on his trophy of skins to relax from the strain of beaching his cargo and examined it. Everything was in good shape and, most importantly, still dry.

He stared upstream at the churning waters he successfully navigated for several minutes. The trees lining the bank shadowed the route he had just taken. Except for a random splash, everything was quiet.

“Too quiet,” Jacob thought. Something felt different.

He had been here before, not just his heart pounding in his chest due to his recent physical exertion. He wasn't sure what was unnerving him, but it was causing an unusual tingling along his back and neck, signaling a bit of caution.

Jacob always bragged that he stayed out of trouble by trusting his senses. When something didn't feel right, it often wasn't right.

Maybe it was the unusual quiet. Perhaps it was the distinctive odor. Nothing definite, but a long hunter survives by learning to depend on his senses. Different sounds, unusual smells, and unexpected movements are all critical

signals when stalking a game or avoiding becoming someone's or something's game.

While continuing his respite, he carefully scanned the line of trees across the river, upstream and downstream, for anything that seemed out of place or for any movement. Nothing.

He finally thought, "My nerves are raw from this long hunting trip. I am tired and wet. Time to hike up to McClean's cabin. Strange though, I normally hear his dogs yapping."

He felt a shiver with that revelation.

It was a ten-minute walk along a deer trail to his friend Marvin's homestead. Jacob reached into his canoe and pulled out his musket. He had it loaded and carefully wrapped to keep it dry. He wanted it to be ready, just in case. Plus, the more he listened, the more it was too quiet.

"Better move carefully and quietly myself," he warned.

The trail was a narrow path formed in the tall weeds and bushes by various animals coming down to this landing to drink. It went up and over a twenty-foot-high bank before entering a forest leading to the moderately sized prairie where McClean chose to set up his homestead.

Jacob raved to his friend, "In such a short time, you've done wonders with the place."

He had built a one-room cabin, an animal shelter, and corals and planted a garden large enough to feed his family. All of this was just temporary. With his wife's help, McClean planned to expand it as time would allow. Jacob was anxious to see what improvements had been made since his late spring.

Jacob also liked playing around and teasing McClean's young daughter, Sarah, who reminded him of his daughter.

"You'll never make a farmer," he would tease her.

Sarah took her chores very seriously. "So, how's your farm," she would quickly respond.

Jacob briskly made his way to the farm with his musket ready in his right hand. He stayed alert. Still, no sounds as he approached the homestead.

“That was not good,” he grimaced.

He did not leave the cover of the forest trail but stopped, crouched down, and stayed hidden behind bushes at the edge of a line of trees bordering the prairie. The cabin was only a couple of hundred yards from where he kneeled. He watched for any movement, any sign of activity. Nothing.

Again, “That’s not good.”

That’s when he saw what gripped his stomach so hard that he nearly vomited. Ruth and Sarah were lying face down in the tall grass fifty feet before the cabin door. They weren’t moving. Jacob saw why.

Arrows were protruding from their backs. The shock of what Jacob was witnessing had him paralyzed. Visions of a similar event, when Jacob found his own family murdered by British troops, flashed in his mind. He trembled as he stayed hidden.

He looked around for Marvin but did not see him. Jacob did not doubt that he had met the same fate.

Scavengers had not yet ravaged the bodies of the two women, so it could not have happened more than a few hours ago. Jacob felt obligated to bury his friends but knew the Indians were probably not too far away. He was not willing to join his friends in their fate.

Remaining low, he backed up and quietly headed to his canoe. These words repeatedly echoed in his mind,

“This is not good.”

His heart raced as he retreated. All his senses were on high alert.

“Be careful; don’t do something stupid.”

At the top of the river bank, he stopped and gazed in all directions, looking for movement, again looking for anything that seemed out of place. Nothing.

“I gotta get out of here!”

This wasn't the first time Jacob faced Indian danger. The settlers and hunters were constantly under the threat of attack. Led by the Cherokee warrior chief Dragging Canoe, this war had been going on ever since Donelson and Robertson opened the area. Every settlement had been attacked, and many had died.

The risks in his profession were high, but the region's rich bounty could not be ignored. However, as Jacob knew, a long hunter floating down the Red River in a canoe would be an easy and inviting target, especially with his load of pelts,

Jacob moved down the river bank and untied the rope from the willow tree and the bow of his boat. He quietly placed the rope and his musket at the bottom of the canoe and slid them into the water. His anxiety seemed to have given him super strength. The boat moved much easier into the water than it had come out.

Without a sound, he eased himself into the canoe and pushed it into the current. He took long, easy strokes with the paddle and moved as close as possible to the opposite shore. He wanted to be as far from McClean's homestead if he had to dodge arrows.

Before advancing, he stared intently back at the trail on the bank to McClean's homestead. He gradually turned his gaze along the shoreline downstream in front of him as far as he could see before the river drifted to the left.

He wanted to be prepared for any trouble ahead of him. He was an easy target, but his only chance to escape an ambush would be to anticipate where it most likely would happen.

Then it happened!

He saw some movement in the bushes -- right where the river bent out of sight. Oh hell, his heart started racing again. What should he do? Going back upstream made no sense. He was most likely delaying the inevitable.

Jacob had heard of the ambush and Indian attacks on the Fort Mansker, which had been built near the salt lick, about a couple hours' ride north of the Nashborough Fort. Mansker and his company had to flee to Nashborough for safety.

Red River was about a day's ride north of Nashborough and in the higher elevation of a steep ridge. It was also a sparsely settled area. Jacob calculated all the places in the westernmost region of the Cumberland River. He was the safest from Indian harassment if he hunted along the Red River. Usually, the southern tribes of the Chickamauga, Creek, and Cherokee hunted in the lower lands. The northern Shawnee usually stayed around the Ohio River.

Unfortunately, with McClean and his family's demise, Jacob realized the Indian problem had become personal. He couldn't rely on his earlier tactic of drifting down the river with the current.

He paddled cautiously and silently.

He approached the corner where he saw the movement. Jacob took several deep breaths and readied himself for the most likely sprint to get out of range of a shower of arrows. The bushes moved again!

However, he surmised the cause. It was nearly dusk, and the wind had picked up.

A slight drizzle began to fall. He had to get moving with fewer delays. His situation was now both an advantage and a disadvantage. He anticipated the Indians wouldn't be hunting then, but the darkness made his travel more treacherous.

It was getting hard to see where he was floating, and with tree branches extending over the river as he hugged the shoreline, he didn't want to take the chance of capsizing.

He had to get off the river and find shelter.

He remembered seeing a cave about twenty feet above the river in a bluff. It was on the same riverbank he navigated and not too far ahead. It should be a

dry retreat where he could build a hidden fire to avoid Indian detection, warm up from the chill now making him feel miserable, and dry his clothing.

It would not be easy to spot the entrance in the dimming light. However, he remembered a large boulder on the shore below the cave. That was not likely to be missed. It wasn't more than a couple of dozen paddle strokes before he spotted the boulder, several canoe-lengths ahead of him on his left.

"Just in time," he breathed; it was beginning to get dark.

With the canoe parallel to the shore, he wedged the bow against the boulder and roped the stern to a nearby tree. He couldn't pull the boat ashore, and the bank was too steep. However, he was confident his rigging would hold until morning. Most importantly, the canoe and its cargo were not easily seen.

His first task would be to verify that the cave was unoccupied by an Indian or a large animal. He would then start a fire at a safe place inside the cave.

The most critical need for a long hunter was being able to start a fire when settling in for the evening. Jacob left little to chance. He kept a stash of kindling and his fire-starting tools wrapped in skins and slid in among his pelts.

He drew out just enough dry twigs to initiate a small flame on the dry land behind the boulder. He kept the fire and light hidden from the shore across the river. He removed a small oil lantern from his gear in the canoe, which he carried with him for use on such occasions. He lit it and climbed twenty feet up the bluff to the cave entrance.

The loose gravel in front of the opening was undisturbed. He slid in through the narrow passageway. After about a dozen steps, he was in a spacious room—twice his height and twenty or thirty paces around him in all directions. A slight breeze was exhausting somewhere from the cave.

"Perfect," he exclaimed. His campfire smoke won't choke him.

He laid the lantern on the floor of this room and returned to the canoe to fetch his musket, jerky for the evening meal, and a handful of pelts to spread out on the cave floor for a bed. The small fire he built behind the boulder had been extinguished. Outside the cave, he looked for stuff for his campfire.

Fortunately, the weather had been arid. His current drizzle of rain hadn't made the fallen twigs unusable.

An ominous dark grey sky hung across the bluff ridge above the cave, giving him the shivers. Quickly, his armful became adequate. Carrying his lantern, he crouched back rapidly into the cave, pulling a small fallen tree to block the entrance.

With his additional branches, he hung his damp coat and pants to dry and blocked the light from shining out of the entrance. He congratulated himself on his handy work.

"All the comforts of home," he joked.

His campfire crackled brightly and slowly warmed his room. With his pelts piled nearby, he laid back and ate his jerky. He scanned around his space. Another opening opposite the entrance led to someplace.

"Let it be," he warned. He had no interest in exploring. "Best to stay put."

He saw a six-foot-long stack of rocks in the far corner, about ten yards from him. He hadn't noticed them before. Some Indian artifacts were on them.

"My god!" he shivered. "This is a Cherokee burial chamber."

Not good for Jacob! He was hugely superstitious about death.

However, what is done is done. It was too late to search for another shelter.

"Just ignore it; put it out of your mind," he counseled himself.

He laid back on the pelts and stared up at the ceiling.

Dark gray forms danced randomly about in the red illumination projected from the flames. The non-descript images were hypnotic. He became catatonic. As he watched, he couldn't move. He could only stare upward.

The forms twirled and danced faster and faster. He saw Sarah, McClean's young daughter, spinning with her arms spread out. He felt so pained for not adequately taking care of them.

Sarah transformed into the image of Katherine, Jacob's daughter. She was no longer dancing but reaching and screaming for help.

Although Jacob never witnessed his wife and daughter dying by the murderous British animals, he imagined over and over what must have happened. This nightmare frequently haunted him. Finally, as relief, Jacob fell asleep.

Late in the night, when the campfire was nothing more than a glowing pile of embers, Jacob was awakened by the sounds of moaning.

The cave was almost dark. Half asleep and unable to fully wake, he could not pinpoint the direction of the source. From the grave? Or maybe from more profound into the cave. It echoed and got louder and louder. He covered his ears with his hands, but they didn't help.

The flickering images on the ceiling were barely visible. A dark silhouette floated across the amber background, from his left to the right and out of sight. Then it disappeared.

A new specter appeared and floated back in the opposite direction. He watched. A second phantom joined the image, and then a third. They paraded back and forth.

Entranced by the motion, left to right and then right to left, over and over, Jacob watched the whispery forms take on recognizable faces.

The moaning changed to a repeating thumping as if someone was drumming in synchronicity to the dancers. Thump, thump, thump. His temples throbbed with each pounding.

A young Indian squaw appeared. Her hair whipped behind her head as if blowing in the breeze. She seemed to be crying. Others resembled Katherine, Jacob's daughter. He felt himself rising and running toward her. But she always seemed to be out of his reach.

His heart beat faster and faster as he tried to reach her. His chest ached; his head ached.

Then! All was quiet; all was dark.

Jacob's fate was never learned. A couple of weeks after he was supposed to finish his hunting trip, around the end of October, his canoe appeared in Port Royal - without Jacob, his musket, and most of his pelts.

It was just another mystery for Red River legends. Some assumed Jacob fell victim to marauding bands of Indians in the area. It was not unusual for long hunters to disappear. Their life was dangerous and uncertain.

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