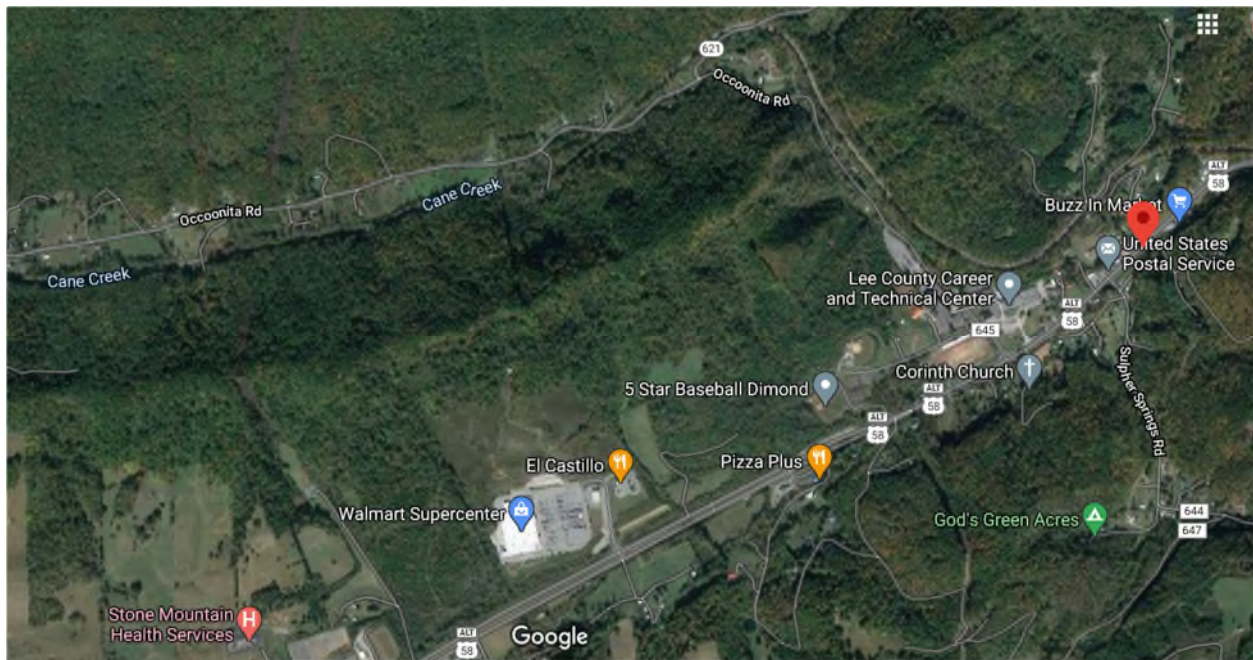


**Original Russell Homestead
Near Cane Creek and Rt. 621 above Ben Hur, Lee County, Virginia**

**Picture and Letter by Frances R. Nelson, Riverside, CA
during a visit to the site in 1976**

**Received in an email from JTL on 4 February 2021
W. Winston Cochran IV**



Winston Cochrane

From: Who Cares <peacock_room@yahoo.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 4, 2021 5:39 PM
To: Winston Cochrane
Subject: Re: Russell Genealogy
Attachments: Ransom R. Russell2.jpg; Nelson ltr 1976.PDF; Russell house, Lee Co VA mod.jpg

Good evening,

In 1995 Margaret Russell Cross bequeathed me all of the research she and several others had done on the Porters, Russells, Helms and Carsons. She did so because she felt my history degree would be used to further the efforts. At the time I had never been involved in genealogy, but now recognize the gift as the best I ever received. In her memory I did a 85-90% tree on the John Russell line through the early 1900's. There's close to 10,000 names on it, but I still have not decided what I want to do with it.

Attached are the cabin photo and accompanying letter from Frances Nelson describing her adventure. Also attached is the Ransom Russell sketch from the Russell Register.

On Thursday, February 4, 2021, 4:26:36 PM EST, Winston Cochrane <wwciv@fuse.net> wrote:

JTL,

I would very much appreciate a copy of the Russell cabin picture. Do you know where it was located? Is this the cabin of Capt. John Russell & Rachel Hobbs?

I found some Russell Registers in the Washington County (VA) Historical Society when I was visiting there a couple of years ago, but I only had time to go through a few of them. I haven't been able to access them online due to copyright restrictions.

I have attached (Russell Genealogy) the information I have to date on the Russells. I have found a lot of Russells in northwest Missouri in the 1840s and 1850s via land grants and census records. Although Russell is a fairly common name, I suspect some, but not all, of these are related to Capt. John, but I can't make connections, other than what is in my file. Also can't make a connection to John W. and Milton D. in the attached census when Ransome when to California for gold with his son and nephews. Maybe they are descended from a sibling of Capt. John, siblings who may have immigrated with Capt. John? I would appreciate it if you would look over my file to see anyone in those generations that you have that I don't.

Thanks.

Winston Cochrane

October 30, 1976

Dear Margaret,

Had planned to write the Lee County trip up as kind of a narrative ... and will do so for "the book" ... but am afraid the trail will get cold if I don't get some of it written down right away.

Mildred and I drove up into the mountains from Bristol, Virginia, where we had rented a car. It was a beautiful fall day ... the trees were brilliant as we reached the upper regions of the blue ridge (I think it is part of the Blue Ridge ... or the Smokies ...) . We found a fairly nice motel, scouted around for a place to eat I should have kept a diary ... forget the sequence of events, but found "Cousin Mollie" at home and received instructions as to where we might go for information about our Russells.

"Cousin Mollie" was a charming little birdlike woman in her late eighties ... she collected things ... was active in politics ... never missed a sale and had a lovely home crammed with antiques she either had inherited or purchased from other Lee County homes as they were sold or dismantled. There was a fireplace in every room ... the one in the kitchen, where she said she spent most of her time, was glowing with a slow-burning fire. It was a typical country kitchen part of which was a living room. She entertained us in the "parlor" at first we got to see the other rooms on subsequent visits when she felt she knew us better.

Cousin Mollies' antiques! She loved them dearly. Her family insisted that she stop going to sales ... so she set herself up an antique store in a little house on her property that faced the highway ... this she also crammed with antiques ... any she could bear to spare from her collection at home. ~~But~~ She "lost interest" in her store but it gives her an excuse to attend all the sales, anyway. We were allowed to go into the shop ... but had a feeling she was not too keen to sell anything. I bought a satin-glass vase, but she gave me two other things ... So the "antique store" was kind of a joke ... a charming one! Had I not been overloaded already, I would certainly have loved to try to talk her out of some other goodies from Lee County antiquity.

Enclosed are pictures of some Russell furniture in the home of Mrs. Kelly. Can't for the life of me remember her first name ... but she was a Russell, descended from our Ransom's younger brother Alfred King Russell (I remember the old names better!). Mildred and I commented that she must have been a truly beautiful girl ... she was still lovely, with a clear skin and wide blue eyes. Her father was Harvey Russell and she grew up in the old log homestead.

The Virginia speech was like a foreign language. Mildred's ear was better tuned to it than mine.

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Ben Hur was a little settlement on the highway. I had been told by one of the Lee County historians that Capt. John had operated a little "station" at Ben Hur and had helped Kentucky-bound settlers who traveled with Daniel Boone through the Cumberland Gap. We found the little settlement ... and a lone place of business ... an antique shop. There a little old lady assured us that there were many Russells in the area that we should stop up the road at the "Cayley" house, which was on Russell property. She gave minute instructions as to which house these folks lived in ... most of which I simply could not understand. Mildred seemed to have caught it all she even bought a little empty medicine bottle from the shop, and I took pictures.... then we were off to find "Mrs. Cayley".

"It's 'Kelly', I'm sure", pronounced Mildred. We stopped a couple of places but could find nobody who knew Mrs. Kelly or Mrs. Cayley In each case I was the one who did the asking. The young man at a garage ... another at a warehouse kind of place Still, it did not occur to me that, indeed, mine was the foreign tongue in these parts!

Eventually in a phone booth I found Mrs. Joe Kelly listed in the phone book no Cayley. So I telephoned. I thought I was becoming a native..... "Hello, Mrs. Cayley?"

"No, this isn't Mrs. Cayley."

"Is it Mrs. Kelly?"

"Oh, yes! This is Mrs. Cayley."

Obviously my rendition of "Cayley" wasn't recognizable. I still can't catch the difference!

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Out of sequence ... before we met Mrs. "Cailey" we had been told that the old Russell place was still standing and that we might be able to see it from the top of the hill at the Graham's home. Accordingly, we started up this "hill" ... it was just a little dirt road, but in spite of the rain wasn't very muddy (their drainage must be far better than in Missouri or California lands). We climbed through kind of a tunnel of trees and brush and finally emerged at the top of the hill at the loveliest home we had ~~ever~~ seen yet a modern home guarded by two friendly watch dogs with muddy paws Here lived the Graham family. They are related, too just how I'm not yet sure but they are Russells originally. The old Russell place was visible from their yard.

Mildred & I wondered if my camera would catch the view. It was magnificent and the two-story log house snuggled into the opposite hillside as though it had been there forever. There was a very light rain ... but we were yearning for a closer look, knowing full well that the mud just must be ankle deep over there!

Mrs. Graham came out ... dropped her busy household schedule to take us across the pasture for a closer look! We were delighted, of course I know we must have been a nuisance ... she said she served lunch in three shifts to her family who ^{had} ~~were on~~ varying lunch hours. And, of course, it was lunch-time! But she gamely helped us to pick our way through barb-wire fences and across the pasture. Southern Hospitality!!! She was charming.

Approaching the house, we passed the family cemetery ... you can see it in the picture. Captain John must be buried on the premises but if his grave is marked the stone has long since disappeared. There are many half-submerged stones with names on them eroded away. Cousin Mollie says they would have a Rev. War marker provided by the government if they could locate his grave and are trying to find it. My pictures of the gravestones did not come out well I used chalky powder to make the lettering stand out, but to no avail. Fortunately, all Lee County gravestones have been recorded and published so we have the information all but Capt. John's and his wife Rachel Hobbs Russell.

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THE OLD LOG HOUSE Another season and this lovely old place will be gone beyond recognition. It has been occupied by tenants until just a year or two ago. Wired for electricity (crudely I didn't see any light-switches or other such conveniences in the house just the meter-box on the front porch wall) there was no plumbing Nothing to spoil what it had actually been originally. The big chimney in the kitchen had collapsed and lay just a pile of bricks (which doubtless had been fired on the premises and made right there of native clay I think). I was sorry it did not still stand, for it was in this fire-place that all the cooking & heat had been provided for the family of Capt. John, himself. This was the oldest section of the house there was a stairway to a bedroom in the attic, and a porch off the back. Evidently, this was the extent of the original home we could see the heavy log partition that separated it from the larger portion of the home.

The larger section was two-story ... also of logs, chinked with pebbles, slivers of wood and evidently some kind of mortar which had fallen away. I was able to get detailed pictures of this construction. The logs were fitted together at the corners dove-tailed, is that the word? ... also pictured. This section had been added ... perhaps by Capt. John as his family grew, or Capt. John's son, John Jr. who lived there subsequently. (I think) ... have to get this occupancy-sequence from Cousin Mollie, yet.

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Sizes of houses in the old days was limited by the length of available logs empty, these rooms appeared enormous. But I think I've about guessed the proportions in the rough drawing enclosed. Originally, there was a wide verandah across the front of the house adding considerably to its outer dimensions there was a large back porch, now fallen in.

The porches did not give a very stable approach ... and we were timid about risking broken bones to climb into the place but tempted beyond caution, we managed to scramble into the front hall. Once inside the house was solid those log walls could stand forever! The floors were also wide boards (possibly puncheon floors split logs seated in dirt with the split-side up). We even climbed the stairs and found our fears of falling through the floor were groundless. It was SOLID !! One side of the big bedroom upstairs was damaged ... looked as though there had been a fire at some time ... (or struck by lightning?) but otherwise it was safe enough that we could gaze and speculate about how it might have been furnished a hundred years ago.

There was a large fireplace in the big living-room downstairs, and a smaller one off the same chimney in the big bedroom above ... There was a brick hearth the mantle wasn't elegant, but if cleaned ... might have been of some kind of decorated metal I don't know this department, but might it have been copper sheeting decorated with nail-holes? (We saw this kind of metal used as panes in cupboards in the antique shops there also.) This metal-work framed the fire-place opening ... then there was a facing outside of that of wood-work ... not rustic ... so I'm guessing the trim was a later addition.

Mrs. Graham had invited us to pick up any souvenirs we might want about the place ... she suggested a brick ... and now I wish I had a chip off one of those bricks for verifying whether or not it had been home-made! but we found some pieces of log off the back of the house to bring home. One of my log-pieces still has sap oozing from it, though it appears to be completely a dried chunk of wood. The sap smells of turpentine must it then be pine wood? ... I was so sure it had to be oak! I've had numerous suggestions of how it should be preserved polished & hung on the wall sprayed to preserve the pattern of a few snippets of hay imbedded in resin which still cling to it (barely visible, I'm not sure it would be worth that much attention but it is fun to have!) I'll share a sliver with anyone who would like to have it unless, of course, you plan to go there yourself in which case you can pick up your own sliver if it hadn't been raining we might have taken the time to search for a more interesting remnant We peeled off a few samples of the wall paper which was still clinging here & there in the house ... not very exciting patterns, we imagined this was applied rather recently. I doubt that the house boasted wall paper originally, though perhaps it might have.....

Across what probably had been a road into the house-yard was a ramshackle barn. We had been told that there was a small log house inside the barn as best I could understand and that this was the first Russell house. Others told us there was no house inside the barn, but there were some logs ... Guessing again, I rather imagine it was the log structure that was the original barn... and that the present barn had been built around it. We had spent a long time in the house and were indeed intimidated by the expanse of wet-looking terrain between us and that barn so didn't venture over there. Next time! We just must check on this!

Mr. Kelly told us that during the Civil War the Russell horses were in that barn guarded by some of the Russell boys who slept in the logged section. They took off their boots to sleep..... morning came to find not only the horses stolen but the boy's boots as well! They had to launch a search party of barefoot Russells to try retrieving their mounts.

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LEE COUNTY COURTHOUSE Here everyone was polite we were shown the vault where all the old records were kept and we spent a whole day shuffling through many heavy dusty volumes. I'm not very adept at researching, but it did seem that MOST counties keep index volumes ... which are a guide to the contents of the vault. We found these index volumes ... but only to more recent records. By "recent", we mean since 1850. Looking for Ransom and Capt. John these weren't very useful to us Capt. John died about 1838 and Ransom left the county about 1842.

There was a young, fresh college professor researcher?... anyhow he had a doctorate, apparently. He was microfilming all the Lee County records for posterity I inquired if his film would be available to the public since it was to be stored in the Virginia State Archives I wanted to be able to have access to it when we want it. He was vague ... barely polite But quite high-handedly said there was a book of Church Records we could look at. We searched. No such book! Finally, very abjectly, I told him we just couldn't find it having spent a goodly hour in the search (That would keep us out of mischief, I presume he thought) He barely concealed his disgust at our stupidity, looked around briefly, then handed us a book. "There!" says he. Thanking him gratefully, we sat down to examine the precious church book while he made his escape.

The "Church book" was just a copy of the 1860 census a book that I have at home, and totally useless to us!!!! Couldn't find that fellow again all day! And no church book!

That evening we met Mrs. Lanningham. What a delightful lady! She asked if we had been in the basement of the vault. BASEMENT!!!!!! She has written up all the old records and the records will be available to everyone, eventually, soon as the publishers have the book printed meanwhile, says she ALL the older records are in the basement vault.

The next morning Mrs. Lanningham met us at the courthouse stepped into the clerk's office and spoke a few quiet words to a young man in there and LO!!! The basement was revealed to us. We were cautioned not to disturb the location of the books or the markers which had been placed in them by his holiness the bright young professor.

With great glee, Mildred & I "discovered" a gold-mine of data! We had time to only make a few notes, but most important here were the index volumes to the first documents exactly what we needed.

We were busily writing notes from the index volumes when we heard a loud grunt and there on the winding staircase stood the professor he grunted as though he had been jabbed in the solar-plexus! But he did muster his Virginia manners enough to be polite. PLEASE, says he, don't disturb my markers!!! We already had known about this but we were insulted that he didn't trust us!! Of course he was anxious that two fussy old biddies shouldn't foul up weeks of his microfilm work. If he'd just been honest with us in the first place, I'd have not been tempted to gloat but tax-paying citizens, we legally have every right to examine all the records we choose, and he, with dismay ... knew it! Poor fellow! We really didn't disturb any of his markers, so he had no grounds for distress and he really should have been more cooperative. After all, we had travelled a long way to be there and it was inconsiderate of him ~~not~~ to try to brush us off! Bet he had nightmares about our scattering his notes I can just imagine!

By this time it was Friday ... no possibility of getting into the courthouse again so the material we were able to get was incomplete, but we did get a few Capt. John deeds. His bounty-land warrant was not to be found perhaps it is kept in State Archives this would describe the original acreage he was awarded for Revolutionary War service. Captains got a goodly number of acres.... and we discovered his was on both sides of Cane Creek, but can't describe it further. (The deeds we got were from books his nibs had finished with it was just the index downstairs we had needed to locate the documents!)

Jonesville was the county seat. In the pouring rain we did our best to authenticate the fact that our Stephen Jones was one of the Jonesville Jones'. There was a tiny little cemetery in the village park commemorating the worthy Jones who had been the founding father no sign of Stephen! A cemetery book had indicated that this cemetery was in Turkey Cove (we assumed that was the park).

Later we learned that Turkey Cove was a district in the upper reaches of Lee County a different area entirely. So, Saturday our last day we set out to explore the homeland of our Elizabeth Jones Russell Ransom's wife.

TURKEY COVE - STEVIE JONES' VALLEY

yes!
37 1/2 \$!!
The land records ... on just the brief chance we had to look at them ... did not indicate that Stephen Jones had a large acreage. The index was peppered with small purchases by Stephen Jones mostly small parcels he had picked up from the sheriff for 37 1/2¢ or so for back taxes, parcels whose owners had perhaps moved away. So, it would seem that Stephen arrived in Lee County later than had Capt. John he was born in 1787, so was quite a young man when he first appears on the records in 1810 with his first small purchase of Lee County land in Turkey Cove. Elizabeth must have been one of the oldest of his children Ransom was one of the youngest of Capt. John's family. Obviously, Stephen had not been a Rev. War veteran but Samuel, his father, very likely was there are two or three Samuel Jones from Grayson County at this time in the Rev. War records. I hope to sort them out eventually. The Grayson County Jones's were some of them descendants of John Paul Jones' neices & nephews John Paul was a bachelor, but brother William Paul (who also adopted the Jones name) had a large brood. — Perhaps some are ours.

We had been told that there was a Seminary Church in Turkey Cove a school for Methodist ministers. We found it ... though it had been built around 1850 after our Ransom had left the country he WAS a Methodist circuit-rider ... and Mildred & I surmised he had attended this seminary (probably in a makeshift building ... for the school had been operated before the church building had been constructed more about this when we find the Seminary Church records MUST be filed somewhere in either the Methodist Archives or the Virginia State Library). These records should tell us when Ransom was ordained and probably will show their marriage. Lee County court records do not have marriage records for this period. We have the date anyway ... by other documents written by Ransom, himself.

The church was a forlorn looking place on the outside ... but the nice lady next door took us in, and it was truly a fine example of early Methodist Church interior Dark woodwork, very plain slippery hard-backed benches some dingy religious photographs in heavy frames hung on the plaster walls. But the windows! If the sermons were dull, as they must have been, the children must have taken some comfort in admiring those leaded glass windows. Of colored glass in stylized geometric patterns in brilliant hues ... the sunlight (even on this dull day) made these windows glow watching the shadows of surrounding tree foliage dance across these colors must have provided the hypnotic state necessary to live through those awful sermons! Each window bore a pane stating names of families who had donated the memorial all names were familiar also well known in Andrew County, Missouri. Joseph B. Collier the Flanarys the Cox's ... the Borons not any Russells (for of course Ransom had left when the church was built John Collier must have sent his donation back, however ... for his name was there).

The nice lady next door directed us to descendants of Jones' who lived up the road on the Stephen Jones property ... and to the family cemetery.

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Speaking in that foreign language Virginiese I had difficulty finding the places, but eventually ... there we were ... on Steven Jones' land. We stopped at a nice little modern home and were greeted by a Jones decendant who introduced me to her uncle. Mildred stayed in the car ... it was pouring rain! "Uncle" was elderly, had had a stroke and was unable to speak clearly plus the Virginia accent I had great difficulty understanding him. Hope he lasts until I can return for another interview he had a storehouse of information!

STEVIE JONES, he said, owned all this valley at one time his house (next door) stood right there for many years and has only recently been torn down. It was a log house and there is a depression where it once stood a few snaggles of wood still stick up out of the ground, and if it weren't raining we might have been able to pick out the outlines of the outer walls.

Stevie Jones had a still and a kind of trading center no special business, but he died (according to legend) a rich man. He was said to have buried a pot of silver and a pot of gold on his land every school-child has spent many hours digging for this treasure. There are lots of stories about Stevie Jones "Uncle" obviously wanted to tell me many, many more ... but was having too much difficulty with his speech. Given time I think we might have been able to communicate once I was able to adjust to the accent and the stroke damage. But, alas, we didn't have the time it truly grieves me, for the poor old soul did so want to talk, and we so wanted to hear! I'm already thinking about maybe next year? Could they stand us again, so soon?

Upon my return to California, I called Jack Stacy (Mollie Stacy's son) to report on our trip ... it was he who directed us to Mollie. In passing, I mentioned Stephen Jones ... hadn't said anything previously because he was a Russell, no reason to know anything about Jones!..... STEVIE JONES!!!!, he said he's a Lee County legend! But when I pinned him down he vaguely referred me to his sister, Ida and I could never get Ida to write, she'll talk, but I don't think anyone in Lee County ever writes! Another assignment for the next trip.

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The Ben Hur Russells ... a suburb of Pennington Gap, Virginia ... are truly charming educated people ... gracious, well-groomed, and though quite a bit away from any metropolitan areas, they are quite sophisticated folk ... and if you are kin-folk, and they generously accepted our claim to be they are fantastically hospitable.

The Turkey Cove folk were rather shy ... There is no actual town there (we didn't go up the road ... there might have been a small store or garage on further), the people were pleasant but they didn't have the worldly polish or social grace of their Pennington Gap neighbors. The lady to whom we were directed as a Jones' descendant was a quiet little woman who promptly ushered me into the living room to meet "Uncle" ... I think she didn't know quite

how to deal with me ... a stranger. These were more nearly the Appalachian hill-billy sort ... and that's a title not the least bit to be ashamed of in these parts. The natives proudly declare themselves to be "hill-billies" ... it is said they are the purest Anglo-Saxon group in America. But they are not the cartoon version (newspapered walls, tumble-down homes and pigs under the porch) ... still they differ markedly from Ransom's people. How then, did Ransom happen to marry Elizabeth Jones? Stevie Jones' daughter ... Stevie with his still and his legendary tavern ("Uncle" told me with glee about at least one memorable brawl) ... as opposed to the Capt. John and his rather more genteel environment. It seemed an unlikely match.

Eventually, we think we have surmised the probable truth.

With true Methodist fervor ... the Seminary was located adjacent to Stevie Jones' land (if not right on it!) ... probably suffered to be on his land by Stevie Jones, himself, as a possible passport to divine grace & heavenly reward ... (or maybe Stevie, himself, was a religious man). The church probably picked the roughest area on purpose, so that they might have a fertile field for their endeavors. As the church prospered and the folk in the area joined ... the seminary was advertised, and Ransom undoubtedly enrolled there as a student. There it must have been that he met Stevie Jones' fair daughter ... and to judge by pictures of her daughters who resemble her, she had a wispy kind of beauty as a girl.

She must have been used to a good deal of visiting and probably pleasant social life of a busy little community. This was a quite different life than that to which she must move in Andrew County, Missouri. In Andrew County she was doomed to months of loneliness ... hubby being out circuit-riding ... and a large brood of children. She probably had to do all the farm chores herself, or possibly with the help of young Stephen ... (for older son, John Elbert Sevier Russell, was gone also) ... and the little girls.... probably she had to grow the food for their table, only staples were bought in stores.

In fairness, Ransom's life was possibly not exactly easy ... if he did his circuit-riding seriously they slept where they could ... ate when they could, usually only when invited to share a meal with a poor homesteader. Many a circuit-rider suffered great privations and illness from exposure to Missouri winters... and their families, too, suffered from being deprived of their father.

Rather stupidly ... I have this inane urge to sympathize with Elizabeth.... probably kind of a female chauvinism, if such a thing there be!

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So ... briefly, this was Lee County! Mildred and I both had heard our whole childhood about this miraculous place ... we felt we had completed the circle ... visited Mecca ... the first of our Russells to touch home base. The miracle is that anyone should ever want to leave it in the first place ... it was truly a lovely place.