

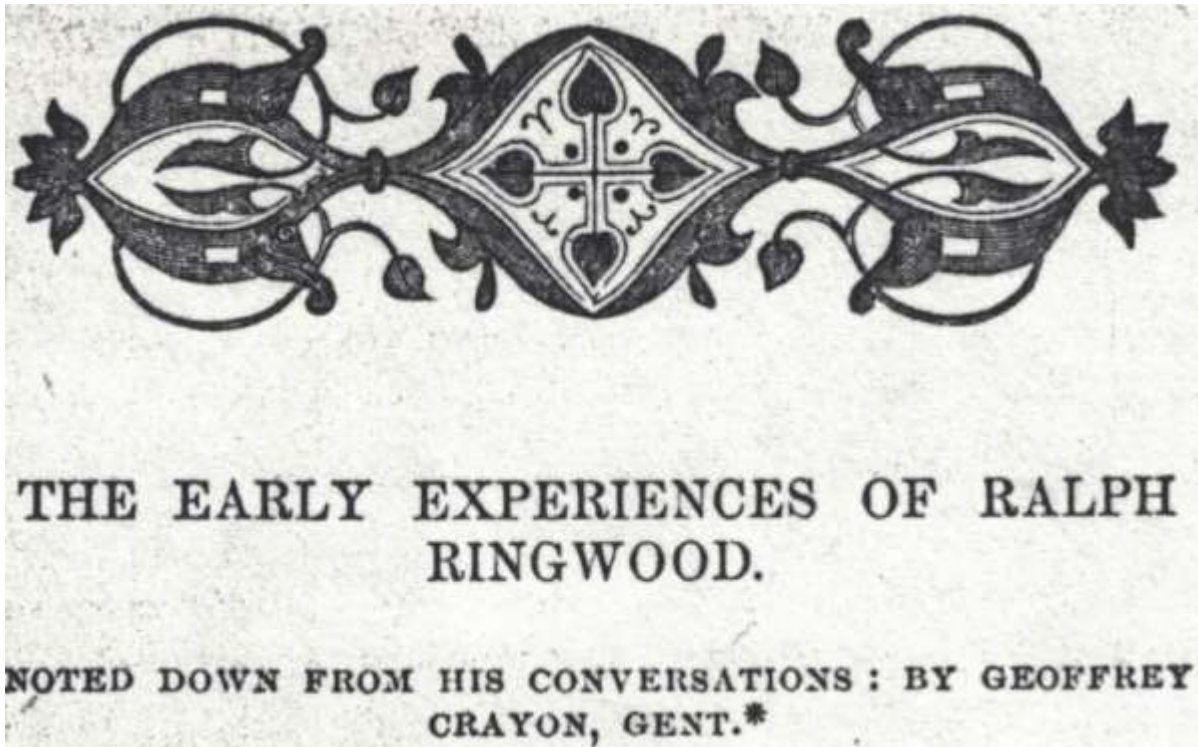
“The Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood”

By Jerry Long
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The short story, “The Early Experience’s of Ralph Ringwood”, was published in the book, Wolfert’s Roost and Other Papers, by Washington Irving (1783-1859) in 1855; it was written in 1840 and appeared in the magazine, Knickerbocker. Irving also wrote the classics, Rip Van Winkle and The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.





THE EARLY EXPERIENCES OF RALPH RINGWOOD

* Ralph Ringwood, though a fictitious name, is a real personage: the worthy original is now living and flourishing in honorable station. I have given some anecdotes of his early and eccentric career in, as nearly as I can recollect, the very words in which he related them. They certainly afforded strong temptations to the embellishments of fiction; but I thought them so strikingly characteristic of the individual, and of the scenes and society into which his peculiar humors carried him, that I preferred giving them in their original simplicity.

"I am a Kentuckian by residence and choice, but a Virginian by birth. The cause of my first leaving the 'Ancient Dominion,' and emigrating to Kentucky was a jackass! You stare, but have a little patience, and I'll soon show you how it came to pass. My father, who was of one of the old Virginian families, resided in Richmond. He was a widower, and his domestic affairs were managed by a housekeeper of the old school, such as used to administer the concerns of opulent Virginian households. She was a dignitary that almost rivaled my father in importance, and seemed to think everything belonged to her; in fact, she was so considerate in her economy, and so careful of expense, as sometimes to vex my father, who would swear she was disgracing him by her meanness. She always appeared with that ancient insignia of housekeeping trust and authority, a great bunch of keys jingling at her girdle. She superintended the arrangement of the table at every meal, and saw that the dishes were all placed according to her primitive notions of symmetry. In the evening she took her stand and served out tea with a mingled respectfulness and pride of station, truly exemplary. Her great ambition was to have everything in order, and that the establishment under her sway should be cited as a model of good housekeeping. If anything went wrong, poor old Barbara would take it to heart, and sit in her room and cry; until a few chapters in the Bible

would quiet her spirits, and make all calm again. The Bible, in fact, was her constant resort in time of trouble. She opened it indiscriminately, and whether she chanced among the Lamentations of Jeremiah, the Canticles of Solomon, or the rough enumeration of the tribes in Deuteronomy, a chapter was a chapter, and operated like balm to her soul. Such was our good old housekeeper Barbara, who was destined, unwittingly, to have a most important effect upon my destiny.

"It came to pass, during the days of my juvenility, while I was yet what is termed 'an unlucky boy,' that a gentleman of our neighborhood, a great advocate for experiments and improvements of all kinds, took it into his head that it would be an immense public advantage to introduce a breed of mules, and accordingly imported three jacks to stock the neighborhood. This in a part of the country where the people cared for nothing but blood horses! Why, sir! they would have considered their mares disgraced and their whole stud dishonored by such a misalliance. The whole matter was a town talk and a town scandal. The worthy amalgamator of quadrupeds found himself in a dismal scrape: so he backed out in time, abjured the whole doctrine of amalgamation, and turned his jacks loose to shift for themselves upon the town common. There they used to run about and lead an idle, good-for-nothing, holiday life, the happiest animals in the country.

"It so happened that my way to school lay across this common. The first time that I saw one of these animals it set up a braying and frightened me confoundedly. However, I soon got over my fright, and seeing that it had something of a horse look, my Virginian love for anything of the equestrian species predominated, and I determined to back it. I accordingly applied at a grocer's shop, procured a cord that had been round a loaf of sugar, and made a kind of halter; then summoning some of my schoolfellows, we drove master Jack about the common until we hemmed him in an angle of a 'worm fence.' After some difficulty, we fixed the halter round his muzzle, and I mounted. Up flew his heels, away I went over his head, and off he scampered. However, I was on my legs in a twinkling, gave chase, caught him and remounted. By dint of repeated tumbles I soon learned to stick to his back, so that he could no more cast me than he could his own skin. From that time, master Jack and his companions had a scampering life of it, for we all rode them between school hours, and on holiday afternoons; and you may be sure schoolboys' nags are never permitted to suffer the grass to grow under their feet. They soon became so knowing that they took to their heels at the very sight of a schoolboy; and we were generally much longer in chasing than we were in riding them.

"Sunday approached, on which I projected an equestrian excursion on one of these long-eared steeds. As I knew the jacks would be in great demand on Sunday morning, I secured one overnight, and conducted him home, to be ready for an early outset. But where was I to quarter him for the night? I could not put him in the stable; our old black groom George was as absolute in that domain as Barbara was within doors, and would have thought his stable, his horses, and himself disgraced, by the introduction of a jackass. I recollected the smoke-house; an out-building appended to all Virginian establishments for the smoking of hams, and other kinds of meat. So I got the key, put master Jack in, locked the door, returned the key to its place, and went to bed, intending to release my prisoner at an early hour, before any of the family were awake. I was so tired, however, by the exertions I had made in catching the donkey, that I fell into a sound sleep, and the morning broke without my waking.

"Not so with dame Barbara, the housekeeper. As usual, to use her own phrase, 'she was up before the crow put his shoes on,' and bustled about to get things in order for breakfast. Her first resort was to the smoke-house. Scarce had she opened the door, when master Jack, tired of his confinement, and glad to be released from darkness, gave a loud bray, and rushed forth. Down dropped old Barbara; the animal trampled over her, and made off for the common. Poor Barbara!

She had never before seen a donkey, and having read in the Bible that the devil went about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he might devour, she took it for granted that this was Beelzebub himself. The kitchen was soon in a hubbub; the servants hurried to the spot. There lay old Barbara in fits; as fast as she got out of one, the thoughts of the devil came over her, and she fell into another, for the good soul was devoutly superstitious.

"As ill luck would have it, among those attracted by the noise was a little, cursed, fidgety, crabbed uncle of mine; one of those uneasy spirits that cannot rest quietly in their beds in the morning, but must be up early, to bother the household. He was only a kind of half-uncle, after all, for he had married my father's sister; yet he assumed great authority on the strength of this left-handed relationship, and was a universal intermeddler and family pest. This prying little busybody soon ferreted out the truth of the story, and discovered, by hook and by crook, that I was at the bottom of the affair, and had locked up the donkey in the smoke-house. He stopped to inquire no further, for he was one of those testy curmudgeons with whom unlucky boys are always in the wrong. Leaving old Barbara to wrestle in imagination with the devil, he made for my bedchamber, where I still lay wrapped in rosy slumbers, little dreaming of the mischief I had done, and the storm about to break over me.

"In an instant I was awakened by a shower of thwacks, and started up in wild amazement, I demanded the meaning of this attack, but received no other reply than that I had murdered the housekeeper; while my uncle continued whacking away during my confusion. I seized a poker, and put myself on the defensive. I was a stout boy for my years, while my uncle was a little wiffet of a man; one that in Kentucky we would not call even an 'individual'; nothing more than a 'remote circumstance.' I soon, therefore, brought him to a parley, and learned the whole extent of the charge brought against me. I confessed to the donkey and the smoke-house, but pleaded not guilty of the murder of the housekeeper. I soon found out that old Barbara was still alive. She continued under the doctor's hands, however, for several days; and whenever she had an ill turn my uncle would seek to give me another flogging. I appealed to my father, but got no redress. I was considered an 'unlucky boy,' prone to all kinds of mischief; so that prepossessions were against me in all cases of appeal.

"I felt stung to the soul at all this. I had been beaten, degraded, and treated with slighting when I complained. I lost my usual good spirits and good humor; and, being out of temper with everybody, fancied everybody out of temper with me. A certain wild, roving spirit of freedom, which I believe is as inherent in me as it is in the partridge, was brought into sudden activity by the checks and restraints I suffered. 'I'll go from home,' thought I, 'and shift for myself.' Perhaps this notion was quickened by the rage for emigrating to Kentucky, which was at that time prevalent in Virginia. I had heard such stories of the romantic beauties of the country; of the abundance of game of all kinds, and of the glorious independent life of the hunters who ranged its noble forests, and lived by the rifle; that I was as much agog to get there as boys who live in seaports are to launch themselves among the wonders and adventures of the ocean.

"After a time old Barbara got better in mind and body, and matters were explained to her; and she became gradually convinced that it was not the devil she had encountered. When she heard how harshly I had been treated on her account, the good old soul was extremely grieved, and spoke warmly to my father in my behalf. He had himself remarked the change in my behavior, and thought punishment might have been carried too far. He sought, therefore, to have some conversation with me, and to soothe my feelings; but it was too late. I frankly told him the course of mortification that I had experienced, and the fixed determination I had made to go from home.

"'And where do you mean to go?'"

"To Kentucky.'

"To Kentucky! Why, you know nobody there.'

"No matter: I can soon make acquaintances.'

"And what will you do when you get there?'

"Hunt!'

"My father gave a long, low whistle, and looked in my face with a serio-comic expression. I was not far in my teens, and to talk of setting off alone for Kentucky, to turn hunter, seemed doubtless the idle prattle of a boy. He was little aware of the dogged resolution of my character; and his smile of incredulity but fixed me more obstinately in my purpose. I assured him I was serious in what I said, and would certainly set off for Kentucky in the spring.

"Month after month passed away. My father now and then adverted slightly to what had passed between us; doubtless for the purpose of sounding me. I always expressed the same grave and fixed determination. By degrees he spoke to me more directly on the subject, endeavoring earnestly but kindly to dissuade me. My only reply was, 'I had made up my mind.'

"Accordingly, as soon as the spring had fairly opened, I sought him one day in his study, and informed him I was about to set out for Kentucky, and had come to take my leave. He made no objection, for he had exhausted persuasion and remonstrance, and doubtless thought it best to give way to my humor, trusting that a little rough experience would soon bring me home again. I asked money for my journey. He went to a chest, took out a long green silk purse, well filled, and laid it on the table. I now asked for a horse and servant.

"A horse!' said my father, sneeringly: 'why, you would not go a mile without racing him, and breaking your neck; and, as to a servant, you cannot take care of yourself much less of him.'

"How am I to travel, then?'

"Why, I suppose you are man enough to travel on foot.'

"He spoke jestingly, little thinking I would take him at his word; but I was thoroughly piqued in respect to my enterprise; so I pocketed the purse, went to my room, tied up three or four shirts in a pocket-handkerchief, put a dirk in my bosom, girt a couple of pistols round my waist, and felt like a knight errant armed cap a-pie, and ready to rove the world in quest of adventures.

"My sister (I had but one) hung round me and wept, and entreated me to stay. I felt my heart swell in my throat; but I gulped it back to its place, and straightened myself up; I would not suffer myself to cry. I at length disengaged myself from her, and got to the door.

"When will you come back?' cried she.

"Never, by heavens!' cried I, 'until I come back a member of Congress from Kentucky. I am determined to show that I am not the tail-end of the family.'

"Such was my first outset from home. You may suppose what a greenhorn I was, and how little I knew of the world I was launching into.

"I do not recollect any incident of importance until I reached the borders of Pennsylvania. I had stopped at an inn to get some refreshment; and as I was eating in the back room, I overheard two men in the barroom conjecture who and what I could be. One determined, at length, that I was a runaway apprentice, and ought to be stopped, to which the other assented. When I had finished my meal, and paid for it, I went out at the back door, lest I should be stopped by my supervisors. Scorning, however, to steal off like a culprit, I walked round to the front of the house. One of the men advanced to the front door. He wore his hat on one side, and had a consequential air that nettled me.

"Where are you going, youngster?' demanded he.

"That's none of your business!' replied I, rather pertly.

"Yes, but it is, though! You have run away from home, and must give an account of yourself.'

"He advanced to seize me, when I drew forth a pistol. 'If you advance another step, I'll shoot you!'

"He sprang back as if he had trodden upon a rattlesnake, and his hat fell off in the movement.

"Let him alone!' cried his companion; 'he's a foolish, mad-headed boy, and don't know what he's about. He'll shoot you, you may rely on it.'

"He did not need any caution in the matter; he was afraid even to pick up his hat: so I pushed forward on my way, without molestation. This incident, however, had its effect upon me. I became fearful of sleeping in any house at night, lest I should be stopped. I took my meals in the houses, in the course of the day, but would turn aside at night into some wood or ravine, make a fire, and sleep before it. This I considered was true hunter's style, and I wished to inure myself to it.

"At length I arrived at Brownsville, leg-weary and wayworn, and in a shabby plight, as you may suppose, having been 'camping out' for some nights past. I applied at some of the inferior inns, but could gain no admission. I was regarded for a moment with a dubious eye, and then informed they did not receive foot-passengers. At last I went boldly to the principal inn. The landlord appeared as unwilling as the rest to receive a vagrant boy beneath his roof; but his wife interfered in the midst of his excuses, and half elbowing him aside, –

"Where are you going, my lad?' said she.

"To Kentucky.'

"What are you going there for?'

"To hunt.'

"She looked earnestly at me for a moment or two. 'Have you a mother living?' said she at length.

"No, madam: she has been dead for some time.'

"I thought so!' cried she warmly. 'I knew if you had a mother living you would not be here.' From that moment the good woman treated me with a mother's kindness.

"I remained several days beneath her roof recovering from the fatigue of my journey. While here I purchased a rifle and practiced daily at a mark to prepare myself for a hunter's life. When sufficiently recruited in strength I took leave of my kind host and hostess and resumed my journey.

"At Wheeling I embarked in a flat bottomed family boat, technically called a broad-horn, a prime river conveyance in those days. In this ark for two weeks I floated down the Ohio. The river was as yet in all its wild beauty. Its loftiest trees had not been thinned out. The forest overhung the water's edge and was occasionally skirted by immense cane-brakes. Wild animals of all kinds abounded. We heard them rushing through the thickets and plashing in the water. Deer and bears would frequently swim across the river; others would come down to the bank and gaze at the boat as it passed. I was incessantly on the alert with my rifle; but somehow or other the game was never within shot. Sometimes I got a chance to land and try my skill on shore. I shot squirrels and small birds and even wild turkeys; but though I caught glimpses of deer bounding away through the woods, I never could get a fair shot at them.

"In this way we glided in our broad-horn past Cincinnati, the 'Queen of the West' as she is now called, then a mere group of log cabins; and the site of the bustling city of Louisville, then designated by a solitary house. As I said before, the Ohio was as yet a wild river; all was forest, forest, forest! Near the confluence of Green River with the Ohio, I landed, bade adieu to the broad-

horn, and struck for the interior of Kentucky. I had no precise plan; my only idea was to make for one of the wildest parts of the country. I had relatives in Lexington and other settled places, to whom I thought it probable my father would write concerning me: so as I was full of manhood and independence, and resolutely bent on making my way in the world without assistance or control, I resolved to keep clear of them all.

"In the course of my first day's trudge, I shot a wild turkey, and slung it on my back for provisions. The forest was open and clear from underwood. I saw deer in abundance, but always running, running. It seemed to me as if these animals never stood still.

"At length I came to where a gang of half-starved wolves were feasting on the carcass of a deer which they had run down; and snarling and snapping and fighting like so many dogs. They were all so ravenous and intent upon their prey that they did not notice me, and I had time to make my observations. One, larger and fiercer than the rest, seemed to claim the larger share, and to keep the others in awe. If any one came too near him while eating, he would fly off, seize and shake him, and then return to his repast. 'This,' thought I, 'must be the captain; if I can kill him, I shall defeat the whole army.' I accordingly took aim, fired, and down dropped the old fellow. He might be only shamming dead; so I loaded and put a second ball through him. He never budged; all the rest ran off, and my victory was complete.

"It would not be easy to describe my triumphant feelings on this great achievement. I marched on with renovated spirit, regarding myself as absolute lord of the forest. As night drew near, I prepared for camping. My first care was to collect dry wood and make a roaring fire to cook and sleep by, and to frighten off wolves, and bears, and panthers. I then began to pluck my turkey for supper. I had camped out several times in the early part of my expedition; but that was in comparatively more settled and civilized regions, where there were no wild animals of consequence in the forest. This was my first camping out in the real wilderness; and I was soon made sensible of the loneliness and wildness of my situation.

"In a little while a concert of wolves commenced: there might have been a dozen or two, but it seemed to me as if there were thousands. I never heard such howling and whining. Having prepared my turkey, I divided it into two parts, thrust two sticks into one of the halves, and planted them on end before the fire, the hunter's mode of roasting. The smell of roast meat quickened the appetites of the wolves, and their concert became truly infernal. They seemed to be all around me, but I could only now and then get a glimpse of one of them, as he came within the glare of the light.

"I did not much care for the wolves, who I knew to be a cowardly race, but I had heard terrible stories of panthers, and began to fear their stealthy prowlings in the surrounding darkness. I was thirsty, and heard a brook bubbling and tinkling along at no great distance, but absolutely dared not go there, lest some panther might lie in wait, and spring upon me. By-and-by a deer whistled. I had never heard one before, and thought it must be a panther. I now felt uneasy lest he might climb the trees, crawl along the branches overhead, and plump down upon me; so I kept my eyes fixed on the branches, until my head ached. I more than once thought I saw fiery eyes glaring down from--among the leaves. At length I thought of my supper and turned to see if my half-turkey was cooked. In crowding so near the fire I had pressed the meat into the flames, and it was consumed. I had nothing to do but toast the other half, and take better care of it. On that half I made my supper, without salt or bread. I was still so possessed with the dread of panthers that I could not close my eyes all night, but lay watching the trees until daybreak, when all my fears were dispelled with the darkness; and as I saw the morning sun sparkling down through the

branches of the trees, I smiled to think how I had suffered myself to be dismayed by sounds and shadows; but I was a young woodsman, and a stranger in Kentucky.

"Having breakfasted on the remainder of my turkey, and slaked my thirst at the bubbling stream, without further dread of panthers, I resumed my wayfaring with buoyant feelings. I again saw deer, but as usual running, running! I tried in vain to get a shot at them, and began to fear I never should. I was gazing with vexation after a herd in full scamper, when I was startled by a human voice. Turning round, I saw a man at a short distance from me in a hunting dress.

"What are you after, my lad?' cried he.

"Those deer,' replied I, pettishly: 'but it seems as if they never stand still.'

"Upon that he burst out laughing. 'Where are you from?' said he.

"From Richmond.'

"What! In old Virginny?'

"The same.'

"And how on earth did you get here?'

"I landed at Green River from a broad-horn.

"And where are your companions?'

"I have none.'

"What?--all alone!'"

"Yes.'

"Where are you going?'

"Anywhere.'

"And what have you come here for?'

"To hunt.'

"Well,' said he, laughingly, 'you'll make a real hunter; there's no mistaking that! Have you killed anything?'

"Nothing but a turkey; I can't get within shot of a deer: they are always running.'

"Oh, I'll tell you the secret of that. You're always pushing forward, and starting the deer at a distance, and gazing at those that are scampering; but you must step as slow, and silent, and cautious as a cat, and keep your eyes close around you, and lurk from tree to tree, if you wish to get a chance at deer. But come, go home with me. My name is Bill Smithers; I live not far off: stay with me a little while, and I'll teach you how to hunt.'

"I gladly accepted the invitation of honest Bill Smithers. We soon reached his habitation; a mere log hut, with a square hole for a window and a chimney made of sticks and clay. Here he lived with a wife and child. He had 'girdled' the trees for an acre or two around, preparatory to clearing a space for corn and potatoes. In the meantime he maintained his family entirely by his rifle, and I soon found him to be a first-rate huntsman. Under his tutelage I received my first effective lessons in 'woodcraft.'

"The more I knew of a hunter's life, the more I relished it. The country, too, which had been the promised land of my boyhood, did not, like most promised lands, disappoint me. No wilderness could be more beautiful than this part of Kentucky in those times. The forests were open and spacious, with noble trees, some of which looked as if they had stood for centuries. There were beautiful prairies, too, diversified with groves and clumps of trees, which looked like vast parks, and in which you could see the deer running, at a great distance. In the proper season these prairies would be covered in many places with wild strawberries, where your horses' hoofs would be dyed to the fetlock. I thought there could not be another place in the world equal to Kentucky – and I think so still.

"After I had passed ten or twelve days with Bill Smithers, I thought it time to shift my quarters, for his house was scarce large enough for his own family, and I had no idea of being an encumbrance to any one. I accordingly made up my bundle, shouldered my rifle, took a friendly leave of Smithers and his wife, and set out in quest of a Nimrod of the wilderness, one John Miller, who lived alone, nearly forty miles off, and who I hoped would be well pleased to have a hunting companion.

"I soon found out that one of the most important items in woodcraft in a new country was the skill to find one's way in the wilderness. There were no regular roads in the forests, but they were cut up and perplexed by paths leading in all directions. Some of these were made by the cattle of the settlers, and were called 'stock-tracks,' but others had been made by the immense droves of buffaloes which roamed about the country, from the flood until recent times. These were called buffalo-tracks, and traversed Kentucky from end to end, like highways. Traces of them may still be seen in uncultivated parts, or deeply worn in the rocks where they crossed the mountains. I was a young woodman, and sorely puzzled to distinguish one kind of track from the other, or to make out my course through this tangled labyrinth. While thus perplexed, I heard a distant roaring and rushing sound; a gloom stole over the forest: on looking up, when I could catch a stray glimpse of the sky, I beheld the clouds rolled up like balls, the lower parts as black as ink. There was now and then an explosion, like a burst of cannonry afar off, and the crash of a falling tree. I had heard of hurricanes in the woods, and surmised that one was at hand. It soon came crashing its way; the forest writhing, and twisting, and groaning before it. The hurricane did not extend far on either side, but in a manner plowed a furrow through the woodland; snapping off or uprooting trees that had stood for centuries, and filling the air with whirling branches. I was directly in its course, and took my stand behind an immense poplar, six feet in diameter. It bore for a time the full fury of the blast, but at length began to yield. Seeing it falling, I scrambled nimbly round the trunk like a squirrel. Down it went, bearing down another tree with it. I crept under the trunk as a shelter, and was protected from other trees which fell around me, but was sore all over from the twigs and branches driven against me by the blast.

"This was the only incident of consequence that occurred on my way to John Miller's, where I arrived on the following day, and was received by the veteran with the rough kindness of a backwoodsman. He was a gray-haired man, hardy and weather-beaten, with a blue wart, like a great beard, over one eye, whence he was nicknamed by the hunters 'Bluebeard Miller.' He had been in these parts from the earliest settlements, and had signalized himself in the hard conflicts with the Indians, which gained Kentucky the appellation of 'the Bloody Ground.' In one of these fights he had had an arm broken; in another he had narrowly escaped, when hotly pursued, by jumping from a precipice thirty feet high into a river.

"Miller willingly received me into his house as an inmate, and seemed pleased with the idea of making a hunter of me. His dwelling was a small log-house, with a loft or garret of boards, so that there was ample room for both of us. Under his instruction I soon made a tolerable proficiency in hunting. My first exploit, of any consequence, was killing a bear. I was hunting in company with two brothers, when we came upon the track of bruin, in a wood where there was an undergrowth of canes and grapevines. He was scrambling up a tree, when I shot him through the breast: he fell to the ground and lay motionless. The brothers sent in their dog, who seized the bear by the throat. Bruin raised one arm and gave the dog a hug that crushed his ribs. One yell, and all was over. I don't know which was first dead, the dog or the bear. The two brothers sat down and cried like children over their unfortunate dog. Yet they were mere rough huntsmen, almost as wild and untamable as Indians; but they were fine fellows.

"By degrees I became known, and somewhat of a favorite among the hunters of the neighborhood; that is to say, men who lived within a circle of thirty or forty miles, and came occasionally to see John Miller, who was a patriarch among them. They lived widely apart, in log huts and wigwams, almost with the simplicity of Indians, and wellnigh as destitute of the comforts and inventions of civilized life. They seldom saw each other; weeks, and even months, would elapse, without their visiting. When they did meet, it was very much after the manner of Indians; loitering about all day, without having much to say, but becoming communicative as evening advanced, and sitting up half the night before the fire, telling hunting stories, and terrible tales of the fights of the Bloody Ground.

"Sometimes several would join in a distant hunting expedition, or rather campaign. Expeditions of this kind lasted from November until April; during which we laid up our stock of summer provisions. We shifted our hunting camps from place to place, according as we found the game. They were generally pitched near a run of water, and close by a cane-brake, to screen us from the wind. One side of our lodge was open toward the fire. Our horses were hobbled and turned loose in the cane-brakes, with bells round their necks. One of the party stayed at home to watch the camp, prepare the meals and keep off the wolves; the others hunted. When a hunter killed a deer at a distance from the camp, he would open it and take out the entrails; then climbing a sapling he would bend it down, tie the deer to the top, and let it spring up again, so as to suspend the carcass out of reach of the wolves. At night he would return to the camp and give an account of his luck. The next morning early he would get a horse out of the canebrake and bring home his game. That day he would stay at home to cut up the carcass, while the others hunted.

"Our days were thus spent in silent and lonely occupations. It was only at night that we would gather together before the fire and be sociable. I was a novice, and used to listen with open eyes and ears to the strange and wild stories told by the old hunters, and believed everything I heard. Some of their stories bordered upon the supernatural. They believed that their rifles might be spellbound, so as not to be able to kill a buffalo, even at arms-length. This superstition they had derived from the Indians, who often think the white hunters have laid a spell upon their rifles. Miller partook of this superstition, and used to tell of his rifle's having a spell upon it; but it often seemed to me to be a shuffling way of accounting for a bad shot. If a hunter grossly missed his aim he would ask, 'Who shot last with this rifle?' – and hint that he must have charmed it. The sure mode to disenchant the gun was to shoot a silver bullet out of it.

"By the opening of spring we would generally have quantities of bears'-meat and venison salted, dried, and smoked, and numerous packs of skins. We would then make the best of our way home from our distant hunting-grounds; transporting our spoils, sometimes in canoes along the rivers, sometimes on horseback over land, and our return would often be celebrated by feasting and dancing, in true backwoods style. I have given you some idea of our hunting; let me now give you a sketch of our frolicking.

"It was on our return from a winter's hunting in the neighborhood of Green River, when we received notice that there was to be a grand frolic at Bob Mosely's, to greet the hunters. This Bob Mosely was a prime fellow throughout the country. He was an indifferent hunter, it is true, and rather lazy to boot; but then he could play the fiddle, and that was enough to make him of consequence. There was no other man within a hundred miles that could play the fiddle, so there was no having a regular frolic without Bob Mosely. The hunters, therefore, were always ready to give him a share of their game in exchange for his music, and Bob was always ready to get up a carousal, whenever there was a party returning from a hunting expedition. The present frolic was

to take place at Bob Mosely's own house, which was on the Pigeon Roost Fork of the Muddy, which is a branch of Rough Creek, which is a branch of Green River.

"Everybody was agog for the revel at Bob Mosely's; and as all the fashion of the neighborhood was to be there, I thought I must brush up for the occasion. My leathern hunting-dress, which was the only one I had, was somewhat the worse for wear, it is true, and considerably japanned with blood and grease; but I was up to hunting expedients. Getting into a periogue, I paddled off to a part of the Green River where there was sand and clay, that might serve for soap; then taking off my dress, I scrubbed and scoured it, until I thought it looked very well. I then put it on the end of a stick, and hung it out of the periogue to dry, while I stretched myself very comfortably on the green bank of the river. Unluckily a flaw struck the periogue, and tipped over the stick: down went my dress to the bottom of the river, and I never saw it more. Here was I, left almost in a state of nature. I managed to make a kind of Robinson Crusoe garb of undressed skins, with the hair on, which enabled me to get home with decency; but my dream of gayety and fashion was at an end; for how could I think of figuring in high life at the Pigeon Roost, equipped like a mere Orson?

"Old Miller, who really began to take some pride in me, was confounded when he understood that I did not intend to go to Bob Mosely's; but when I told him my misfortune, and that I had no dress: 'By the powers,' cried he, 'but you shall go, and you shall be the best dressed and the best mounted lad there!'

"He immediately set to work to cut out and make up a hunting-shirt of dressed deer-skin, gayly fringed at the shoulders, with leggings of the same, fringed from hip to heel. He then made me a rakish raccoon-cap, with a flaunting tail to it; mounted me on his best horse; and I may say, without vanity, that I was one of the smartest fellows that figured on that occasion at the Pigeon Roost Fork of the Muddy.

"It was no small occasion, either, let me tell you. Bob Mosely's house was a tolerably large bark shanty, with a clap-board roof; and there were assembled all the young hunters and pretty girls of the country, for many a mile round. The young men were in their best hunting-dresses, but not one could compare with mine; and my raccoon-cap, with its flowing tail, was the admiration of everybody. The girls were mostly in doe-skin dresses; for there was no spinning and weaving as yet in the woods; nor any need of it. I never saw girls that seemed to me better dressed; and I was somewhat of a judge, having seen fashions at Richmond. We had a hearty dinner, and a merry one; for there was Jemmy Kiel, famous for raccoon-hunting, and Bob Tarleton, and Wesley Pigman, and Joe Taylor, and several other prime fellows for a frolic, that made all ring again, and laughed that you might have heard them a mile.

"After dinner we began dancing, and were hard at it, when, about three o'clock in the afternoon, there was a new arrival – the two daughters of old Simon Schultz; two young ladies that affected fashion and late hours. Their arrival had nearly put an end to all our merriment. I must go a little roundabout in my story to explain to you how that happened.

"As old Schultz, the father, was one day looking in the cane-brakes for his cattle, he came upon the track of horses. He knew they were none of his, and that none of his neighbors had horses about that place. They must be stray horses; or must belong to some traveler who had lost his way, as the track led nowhere. He accordingly followed it up, until he came to an unlucky peddler, with two or three pack-horses, who had been bewildered among the cattle-tracks, and had wandered for two or three days among woods and cane-brakes, until he was almost famished.

"Old Schultz brought him to his house; fed him on venison, bear's-meat, and hominy, and at the end of a week put him in prime condition. The peddler could not sufficiently express his

thankfulness; and when about to depart inquired what he had to pay? Old Schultz stepped back with surprise. 'Stranger,' said he, 'you have been welcome under my roof. I've given you nothing but wild meat and hominy, because I had no better, but have been glad of your company. You are welcome to stay as long as you please; but, by Zounds! if any one offers to pay Simon Schultz for food he affronts him!' So saying, he walked out in a huff.

"The peddler admired the hospitality of his host, but could not reconcile it to his conscience to go away without making some recompense. There were honest Simon's two daughters, two strapping, red-haired girls. He opened his packs and displayed riches before them of which they had no conception; for in those days there were no country stores in those parts, with their artificial finery and trinketry; and this was the first peddler that had wandered into that part of the wilderness. The girls were for a time completely dazzled, and knew not what to choose: but what caught their eyes most were two looking-glasses, about the size of a dollar, set in gilt tin. They had never seen the like before, having used no other mirror than a pail of water. The peddler presented them these jewels, without the least hesitation; nay, he gallantly hung them round their necks by red ribbons, almost as fine as the glasses themselves. This done, he took his departure, leaving them as much astonished as two princesses in a fairy tale that have received a magic gift from an enchanter.

"It was with these looking-glasses, hung round their necks as locketts, by red ribbons, that old Schultz's daughters made their appearance at three o'clock in the afternoon, at the frolic at Bob Mosely's, on the Pigeon Roost Fork of the Muddy.

"By the powers, but it was an event! Such a thing had never before been seen in Kentucky. Bob Tarleton, a strapping fellow, with a head like a chestnut-burr and a look like a boar in an apple orchard, stepped up, caught hold of the looking-glass of one of the girls, and gazing at it for a moment, cried out: 'Joe Taylor, come here! come here! I'll be darn'd if Patty Schultz ain't got a locket that you can see your face in, as clear as in a spring of water!'

"In a twinkling all the young hunters gathered round old Schultz's daughters. I, who knew what looking-glasses were, did not budge. Some of the girls who sat near me were excessively mortified at finding themselves thus deserted. I heard Peggy Pugh say to Sally Pigman, 'Goodness knows, it's well Schultz's daughters is got them things round their necks, for it's the first time the young men crowded round them!'

"I saw immediately the danger of the case. We were a small community, and could not afford to be split up by feuds. So I stepped up to the girls, and whispered to them: 'Polly,' said I, 'those locketts are powerful fine, and become you amazingly; but you don't consider that the country is not advanced enough in these parts for such things. You and I understand these matters, but these people don't. Fine things like these may do very well in the old settlements, but they won't answer at the Pigeon Roost Fork of the Muddy. You had better lay them aside for the present, or we shall have no peace.'

"Polly and her sister luckily saw their error; they took off the locketts, laid them aside, and harmony was restored: otherwise, I verily believe there would have been an end of our community. Indeed, notwithstanding the great sacrifice they made on this occasion, I do not think old Schultz's daughters were ever much liked afterward among the young women.

"This was the first time that looking-glasses were ever seen in the Green River part of Kentucky.

"I had now lived some time with old Miller, and had become a tolerably expert hunter. Game, however, began to grow scarce. The buffalo had gathered together, as if by universal understanding, and had crossed the Mississippi, never to return. Strangers kept pouring into the

country, clearing away the forests and building in all directions. The hunters began to grow restive. Jemmy Kiel, the same of whom I have already spoken for his skill in raccoon catching, came to me one day: 'I can't stand this any longer,' said he; 'we're getting too thick here. Simon Schultz crowds me so that I have no comfort of my life.'

"'Why, how you talk!' said I; 'Simon Schultz lives twelve miles off.'

"'No matter; his cattle run with mine, and I've no idea of living where another man's cattle can run with mine. That's too close neighborhood; I want elbow-room. This country, too, is growing too poor to live in; there's no game; so two or three of us have made up our minds to follow the buffalo to the Missouri, and we should like to have you of the party.' Other hunters of my acquaintance talked in the same manner. This set me thinking; but the more I thought the more I was perplexed. I had no one to advise with; old Miller and his associates knew but of one mode of life, and I had had no experience in any other; but I had a wide scope of thought. When out hunting alone I used to forget the sport, and sit for hours together on the trunk of a tree, with rifle in hand, buried in thought, and debating with myself: 'Shall I go with Jemmy Kiel and his company, or shall I remain here? If I remain here there will soon be nothing left to hunt; but am I to be a hunter all my life? Have not I something more in me than to be carrying a rifle on my shoulder, day after day, and dodging about after bears, and deer, and other brute beasts?' My vanity told me I had; and I called to mind my boyish boast to my sister, that I would never return home until I returned a member of Congress from Kentucky; but was this the way to fit myself for such a station?

"Various plans passed through my mind, but they were abandoned almost as soon as formed. At length I determined on becoming a lawyer. True it is, I knew almost nothing. I had left school before I had learned beyond the 'rule of three.' 'Never mind,' said I to myself, resolutely; 'I am a terrible fellow for hanging on to anything when I've once made up my mind; and if a man has but ordinary capacity, and will set to work with heart and soul, and stick to it, he can do almost anything.' With this maxim, which has been pretty much my mainstay throughout life, I fortified myself in my determination to attempt the law. But how was I to set about it? I must quit this forest life, and go to one or other of the towns, where I might be able to study, and to attend the courts. This too required funds. I examined into the state of my finances. The purse given me by my father had remained untouched, in the bottom of an old chest up in the loft, for money was scarcely needed in these parts. I had bargained away the skins acquired in hunting for a horse and various other matters, on which in case of need I could raise funds. I therefore thought I could make shift to maintain myself until I was fitted for the bar.

"I informed my worthy host and patron, old Miller, of my plan. He shook his head at my turning my back upon the woods, when I was in a fair way of making a first-rate hunter; but he made no effort to dissuade me. I accordingly set off in September, on horseback, intending to visit Lexington, Frankfort, and other of the principal towns, in search of a favorable place to prosecute my studies. My choice was made sooner than I expected. I had put up one night at Bardstown, and found, on inquiry, that I could get comfortable board and accommodation in a private family for a dollar and a half a week. I liked the place, and resolved to look no further. So the next morning I prepared to turn my face homeward, and take my final leave of forest life.

"I had taken my breakfast, and was waiting for my horse, when, in pacing up and down the piazza, I saw a young girl seated near a window, evidently a visitor. She was very pretty; with auburn hair and blue eyes, and was dressed in white. I had seen nothing of the kind since I had left Richmond; and at that time I was too much of a boy to be much struck by female charms. She was so delicate and dainty-looking, so different from the hale, buxom, brown girls of the woods; and

then her white dress! – it was perfectly dazzling! Never was poor youth more taken by surprise, and suddenly bewitched. My heart yearned to know her; but how was I to accost her? I had grown wild in the woods, and had none of the habitudes of polite life. Had she been like Peggy Pugh or Sally Pigman, or any other of my leathern-dressed belles of the Pigeon Roost, I should have approached her without dread; nay, had she been as fair as Schultz's daughters, with their looking-glass lockets, I should not have hesitated; but that white dress, and those auburn ringlets, and blue eyes, and delicate looks, quite daunted, while they fascinated me. I don't know what put it into my head, but I thought, all at once, that I would kiss her! It would take a long acquaintance to arrive at such a boon, but I might seize upon it by sheer robbery. Nobody knew me here. I would just step in, snatch a kiss, mount my horse, and ride off. She would not be the worse for it; and that kiss – oh! I should die if I did not get it!

"I gave no time for the thought to cool, but entered the house, and stepped lightly into the room. She was seated with her back to the door, looking out at the window, and did not hear my approach. I tapped her chair, and as she turned and looked up, I snatched as sweet a kiss as ever was stolen, and vanished in a twinkling. The next moment I was on horseback, galloping homeward; my very ears tingling at what I had done.

"On my return home I sold my horse, and turned everything to cash; and found, with the remains of the paternal purse, that I had nearly four hundred dollars, – a little capital which I resolved to manage with the strictest economy.

"It was hard parting with old Miller, who had been like a father to me; it cost me, too, something of a struggle to give up the free, independent wild-wood life I had hitherto led; but I had marked out my course, and had never been one to flinch or turn back.

"I footed it sturdily to Bardstown; took possession of the quarters for which I had bargained, shut myself up, and set to work with might and main to study.

[The remaining part of the short story, "The Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood," pages 311-324, are about William Pope Duvall's experiences after leaving Ohio County, KY and returning to his home in Elizabethtown, Hardin County, KY.]



Owensboro Monitor, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 13 June 1866, p.3:

As the sketch of "Bill Smothers," which we published some time ago written by an intelligent gentleman of this city was received so well and elicited so much interest we will begin shortly the story of "RALPH RINGWOOD," by Washington Irving, in which many truthful incidents of interest in the history of "Bill Smothers" as delineated by the immortal pen of America's greatest writer, Irving, will appear The Mosleys, and other familiar names, occur It is, in short, a magnificent story of truth, fun, love, and calamities, and it deserves to be a taking card; and we would modestly add that now is a good time to subscribe for that incomparable newspaper — the Owensboro Monitor.



Owensboro Monitor, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 18 July 1866, p.3:

We begin this morning on our first page "Ralph Ringwood," an interesting story from the pen of the illustrious Washington Irving, which our readers will see at a glance was not written "expressly for the Owensboro Monitor," which will be continued for two or three weeks. It is replete with incidents and characters in the Green river section of Kentucky, and its appearance will be hailed with joy by our intelligent readers. The papers containing "Bill Smothers" and "Ralph Ringwood" may well be prized by our subscribers. Alone they are worth ten times the subscription price of the "Monitor."

[“The “Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood” was published in the Owensboro Monitor – 18 July 1866 p.1, 25 July 1866, p.1 and 1 August 1866 p.1.]



Washington Irving (1783-1859)



William Pope Duvall (1784-1854)



The following article was repeated in the Owensboro Daily Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 12 January 1890, p.4 and Twice-A-Week Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 16 January 1890, p.4. The first edition has part of the article torn away. The second edition had the article in full:

A few days ago the MESSENGER published an account of the death of Jacob Miller, of Ohio county, at an extreme old age. He was the last of the children of the hardy pioneers of the days of Boone and his followers. His father is familiar, at least, in name, to every reader of Washington Irving's delightful sketch of Ralph Ringwood, who was Judge Duvall, an eminent lawyer and judge in the early half of the century, came to Kentucky from Virginia when a mere boy and landed alone in the wilderness near the mouth of Green River. He wandered in the woods two days and was finally found by Bill Smithers and was cared for in his cabin, which stood within the present limits of Owensboro. Duvall remained two weeks with Smithers and struck out again

for the interior. Two days of tramping brought him to the hospitable cabin of Miller, who was known as "Bluebeard" Miller, from a large, blue, bead-like wart over one of his eyes. He made the wandering boy stop with him, imparted to him a thorough training in woodcraft and gave him a start in the world. "Bluebeard" Miller was a rough, untutored son of the wilderness, but was a man for all that with a head and heart that would have done credit to any civilization. These qualities he transmitted in their full force to the younger son who has just died at an age beyond the hope of those whose lives are wholly this side of the glorious old pioneer days.



Ohio County, Kentucky in the Olden Days,
A series of old newspaper sketches of fragmentary history,
by Harrison D. Taylor, prepared for publication by his
granddaughter, Mary Taylor Logan, Louisville, KY, 1926, pp.33-34:

"RALPH RINGWOOD"

Before writing of the manners and customs of our early settlers and contrasting some of them with those of the present day, we will give the story of "The Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood"—a sketch by Washington Irving. Mr. Irving appends to this story of the Green River country the following explanation in the form of a footnote:

"Ralph Ringwood, though a fictitious name, is a real personage—the late Governor William P. Duvall of Florida. I have given some anecdotes of his early and eccentric career in, as near as I can recollect, the very words in which he related them. They certainly afford strong temptations to the embellishment of fiction; but I thought them so strikingly characteristic of the individual, and of the scenes and society into which his peculiar humors carried him, that I preferred giving them in their original simplicity."

In addition to quoting these remarks by Mr. Irving we would premise that in his sketch there are some inaccuracies in dates, names, and places, and in attributing some wrong qualities to certain individuals. For instance, he describes Bob Moseley as a great fiddler, but it is asserted by those who knew him well that he never played a fiddle in his life. Yet there were other persons answering to the character given Bob Moseley. His Bill Smithers is intended for Bill Smothers. John Miller, whom Irving also calls "Bluebeard Miller," was John Miller and is the same John Miller mentioned in our narrative of Stephen Statler as having his arm shivered by a bullet. It might be well to add that since publishing that narrative in the first issue of this fragmentary history, the writer has had an interview with his son Jacob Miller, now an old man, who says that his father was shot while on the Fork of White River, in what is now the state of Indiana, and he fully corroborated the statement as to the entire bone coming away and his still having his usual strength and use of his arm.

William P. Duvall, the "Ralph Ringwood" of Mr. Irving's narrative, was the owner of lands lying in Ohio County and frequently visited Hartford. He was a member of Congress from 1813 to 1815, residing at that time somewhere in Nelson County; and was appointed governor of Florida Territory in 1822, which office he held ten or twelve years. His visits to Hartford were perfect ovations. Crowds would gather around him, for his conversation abounded in wit, humor, and anecdotes. Some of the older citizens still recollect hearing him relate most of the incidents which are given in "The Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood."

Upon the whole the individuals named by Mr. Irving were well-known among our early settlers, there being errors in the giving of the names of only two or three. Notwithstanding some small inaccuracies it is a very good description of early backwoods life. One of the principal scenes takes place at "Bob Mosely's own house, which was on the Pigeon Roost Fork of the Muddy, which is a branch of Rough Creek, which is a branch of Green River."

Mr. Taylor quotes the greater part of "The Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood." The story is not reprinted in this volume for lack of space; furthermore, it can be found in full—about forty pages—in Washington Irving's *Wolfert's Roost and Other Papers*, or the *Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon*, or in some of his other books of *Sketches*. Mr. Taylor's introductory remarks are republished in full, for they will always be of interest to readers of the early history of Ohio County and of the Green River country. Besides Bob Moseley, Bill Smithers, or Bill Smothers, and John Miller mentioned by Mr. Taylor, the Green River characters, as named by Irving, in "Ralph Ringwood," are Simon Schultz, Patty and Polly Schultz, Jemmy Kiel, Bob Tarleton, Joe Taylor, Wesley Pigman, Sally Pigman, Peggy Pugh, Sukey Thomas, and Judge Broadnax. There is also an unnamed peddler.



Fogle's Papers: A History of Ohio County, Kentucky,
McDowell A. Fogle, Ohio County Historical Society, Inc.,
Hartford, KY, 1981, pp.7-12:

Ohio County is indeed fortunate in having had as a chronicler of its pioneer days, one of the greatest of American authors, in the person of the immortal Washington Irving, Thus we have available a contemporary, authentic and withal, absorbing account of a frontier party which took place only a few years before the incorporation which Hartford is commemorating, at "Bob Moseley's own house, which was on the Pigeon Roost Fork of the Muddy, which is a branch of Rough Creek, which is a branch of Green River."

Irving called his story of the Green River country "The Early, Experiences of Ralph Ringwood. " Some thirty-odd pages in length, it may he found in the author's "Crayon Papers." Irving, during some of his travels, had, it seems met the real "Ralph", heard the story of his exploits from his own lips and, to the best of his recollection, related them in the very words of the original narrator.

In a footnote by Irving and a chapter of Harrison D. Taylor's "Fragments of the Early History of Ohio County" it is revealed that "Ralph Ringwood, though a fictitious name, was a real personage", Governor William P. Duvall, of Florida. After leaving Ohio county, following his youthful hunting experiences, as chronicled by Washington Irving, Duvall went to Bardstown, studied law, married, became a successful lawyer and was a member of Congress from 1813 to 1815. He was appointed by the President the first territorial governor of Florida in 1822, serving some eleven years. His tenure was quite successful, resulting in the settlement of a number of controversies with the Indians, Gov, Duvall owned land in Ohio county and often, in his latter years, returned here to the scene of his exploits as a lad and always received an ovation, as many of his old pioneer friends were then still living.

"Ralph Ringwood", when still a stripling, ran away from the opulent home of his father in Richmond, Virginia and made his way, by "broad-horn" down the Ohio to near the mouth of Green River, where he left the boat and proceeded, alone and on foot, in to the trackless wilderness of

the Green River valley, arriving eventually in the area which is now the heart of the present Ohio county.

No dates appear in the "Ralph Ringwood" story, but the period during which he or rather Gov. Duvall was in Ohio county during pioneer days can be rather accurately ascertained from various statements in the narrative itself, in connection with dates known or available from other sources. For instance, public records show that Gov. Duvall was a member of Congress from Kentucky from 1813 to 1815. As a congressman must be 25 years old to be eligible, our hero must have been born not later than 1788. He himself states that he was a schoolboy when he ran away from home and came to Kentucky, the expression "not far in my teens" being used. Ralph's account of hunting expeditions during the "winters" indicates that he was in the Green River country for at least the better part of two years. It would appear that the party at Bob Moseley's home, which Irving describes occurred shortly after the hunters had returned from the second winter's hunt and that Ralph decided to abandon the life of a hunter for a career at the bar not long thereafter, his final departure for Bardstown, where he had decided to locate and study law, probably occurring the same fall,

The account of Ringwood's experiences at Bardstown contains the statement that he had been there over a year when he again met the girl who was destined to become his wife and apparently it was not very long afterward when they became engaged, "before I was nineteen years of age", he stated. These statements of his and the known date of his first election to Congress are practically conclusive that Gov. Duvall was born around 1785 and that he was a huntsman in the area of the present Ohio County from the spring or summer of 1799 until the fall of 1801 and that the famous "revel" at Bob Moseley's took place in the spring of 1801. But the facts which clinch this hypothesis is that Jemmy Keel and Peggy Pugh, two of the youngsters who, Irving's account states, were present at the Pigeon Roost party, were then unmarried and that their marriage did not take place until Sept. 14, 1801.

Though a "greenhorn" in woodcraft when he came to Kentucky, Ralph Ringwood was a personable youth and soon won the friendship and help of old John Miller, whom Irving calls "Blueveard Miller", but who was known to his frontier associates as "Tick-eyed John." This doughty old pioneer leader, who was then a bachelor, took Ralph to live with him, in a comparatively short time, made a skilled woodsman of his young protege. Many interesting things happened to Ringwood in Ohio county, but perhaps the most interesting was his attendance at the party held in 1801 at "Bob Moseley's own house", on the Pigeon Roost Fork of Muddy." The pigeons commemorated by Ohio County's Pigeon Roost Fork were the fabulous passenger pigeons, of which The News some months ago, wrote editorially as follows: "About 150 years ago, John James Audubon, the painter of the monumental, "Birds of America", estimated that he saw two billion passenger pigeons at one time. They darkened the sky and whitened the earth as they passed. The last passenger pigeon died in a mid-western zoo early in this century and the species is now extinct. It might also be added that, according to Audubon and other pioneer observers, when these colossal flocks of passenger pigeons settled on the timber at their "roosts", such as the one at old Bob Moseley's, the forest would as devastated as if it had been raked by an artillery, bombardment, limbs being broken and covering the ground. In fact, some roosts were often practically skeleton forests, after the passage of the mighty winged host.

The late Judge John B. Wilson, premier Ohio county historian of his day, speaking of the location of Pigeon Roost Fork of Muddy Creek, said: "The stream referred to has its source just south of Rosine Tunnel and runs parallel with the railroad until it gets to Sandefur's Crossing, just below Horton, where it unites with Muddy Creek proper. From the best I can learn Old Bob

Moseley's house was at or near what is now (1926) Excelsior School House, which is on Muddy Creek proper and about one mile south of Pigeon Roost Fork."

Quoting Irving's narrative: "Everybody was agog for the revel at Bob Moseley's and, as all the fashion of the neighborhood was to be there, I thought I must brush up for the occasion. My leathern hunting dress, which was the only one I had, was somewhat the worse for wear, it is true, and considerably japanned with blood and grease; but I was up to hunting expedients. Getting into a pirogue, I paddled off to a part of Green River, where there was sand and clay that might serve for soap, then taking off my clothes, I scrubbed and scoured (the hunting garb) until I thought it looked very well. I then put in on the end of a stick and hung it out over the pirogue to dry while I stretched myself very comfortably on the grassy bank of the river. Unluckily a flow struck the pirogue and tripped over the stick; down went my dress to the bottom of the river and I never say it more. Here was I left in a state of nature."

"I managed, however to make a kind of Robinson Crusoe garb of undressed skins," Irving's Ralph Ringwood story continues, after the misfortune of losing his hunting garb, when it fell, while drying, into Green River, had been recounted, "which enabled me to get home with decency, but my dream of gayety and fashion was at an end, for how could I think of figuring in high life at the Pigeon Roost, equipped like a mere Orson?"

"Old Miller, who really began to take some pride in me, was confounded when he understood that I did not intend to go to Bob Moseley's; but when I told him my misfortune and that I had no dress: 'By the powers', cried he, 'hut you shall go and you shall be the best dressed and the best mounted lad there.' He immediately set to work to cut out and make up a hunting shirt of dressed deer-skin, gayly fringed at the shoulders, with legging of the same, fringed from hip to heel. He then made me a rakish raccoon-cap, with a flaunting tail to it; mounted me on his best horse, and I may say, without vanity, that I was one of the smartest fellows that figured on that occasion at the Pigeon Roost Fork of the Muddy.

"It was no small occasion, either, let me tell you. Bob Moseley's house was a tolerably large bark shanty, with a clapboard roof and there were assembled all the young hunters and pretty girls of the country, for many a mile round. The young men were in their best hunting-dresses, but not one could compare with mine; and my raccoon-cap, with its flowing tail, was the admiration of everybody. The girls were mostly in doe-skin dresses, for there was no spinning and weaving as yet in the woods, nor any need of it I never saw girls that seemed to me better dressed, and I was somewhat of a judge having seen fashions at Richmond. We had a hearty dinner and a merry one, for there was Jemmy Kiel, famous for raccoon-hunting, and Bob Tarleton, and Wesley Pigman and Joe Taylor, and several other prime fellows for a frolic, that made all ring again, and laughed that you might have heard them a mile.

"After dinner we began dancing and were hard at it when, about three o'clock in the afternoon, there was a new arrival – the two daughters of old Simon Shultz, two young ladies that affected fashion and late hours. Their arrival had nearly put an end to all our merriment, I must go a little roundabout in my story to explain to you how it happened."

Completed herein today is Washington Irving's account of the 1801 "frolic" of Ohio county pioneers held at "Bob Moseley's own home on the Pigeon Roost Fork of Muddy", which is an authentic picture of such social events of our forebears. It is especially interesting to us because every person mentioned in "Ralph Ringwood", from which this sketch is taken except the peddler and Judge Broadnax, was a real flesh-and-blood Ohio countian. "Ralph Ringwood", the narrator, was really Judge William P. Duvall, later to be a congressman from Kentucky and governor of

Florida Territory. Most of the dramatis personae of this literary and historical playlet have descendants or collateral kin living in this county today.

To explain why the arrival of the Schultz sisters at the pioneer party, held at the home of "old Bob Moseley" on the Pigeon Roost of Muddy, so "nearly, put an end to our merriment", as Washington Irving's "Ralph Ringwood" relates, it was necessary for our hero to make use of what we would today call a "flashback", as follows:

"As old Schultz, the father, was one day looking in the cane-brakes for his cattle, he came upon the tracks of horses. He knew they were none of his and that none of his neighbors had horses about that place. They must be stray horses or belong to some traveler who had lost his way, as the tracks led nowhere. He accordingly followed it up until he came to an unlucky peddler, with two or three pack-horses, who had been bewildered among the cattle tracks and had wandered for two or three days among woods and cane-brakes until he was almost famished.

"Old Schultz brought the peddler to his house, fed him on venison, bear's-meat and hominy and, at the end of a week, put him in prime condition. The peddler could not sufficiently express his thankfulness and, when about to depart, inquired what he had to pay. Old Schultz stepped back with surprise. "Stranger", said he you have been welcome under my roof. I've given you nothing but wild meat and hominy, because I had no better, but have been glad of your company. You are welcome to stay as long as you please, but, but by Zounds, if any one offers to pay Simon Schultz for food, he affronts him!" So saying, he walked out in a huff.

"The peddler admired the hospitality of his host, but could not reconcile it to his conscience to go away without making some recompense. There were honest Simon's two daughters, both strapping, red-haired girls. He opened his packs and displayed riches before them, of which they had no conception, for, in those days, there were no country stores in those parts, with their artificial finery and trinketry, and this was the first peddler that had wandered into that part of the wilderness. The girls were, for a time, completely dazzled and knew not what to choose. But what caught their eyes most were two looking glasses, about the size of a dollar, set in gilt tin. They had never seen the like before, having used no other mirror than a pail of water. The peddler presented them these jewels, without the least hesitation, nay, he gallantly hung them around their necks by red ribbons almost as fine as the glasses themselves, This done, he took his departure, leaving them as much astonished as two princesses in a fairy tale that have received a magic gift from an enchanter."

"It was with these looking-glasses, hung around their necks as locket, by red ribbons, that old Schultz's daughters made their appearance at three o'clock in the afternoon, at the frolic at Bob Moseley's on the Pigeon Roast Fork of the Muddy.

"By the powers, but it was an event! Such a thing had never before been seen in Kentucky. Bob Tarleton, a strapping fellow, with a head like a chestnut-burr, and a look like a boar in an apple orchard, stepped up, caught hold of the looking glass of one of the girls and, gazing at it for a moment, cried out: "Joe Taylor, come here! Come here! I'll be darned if Patty Schultz ain't got a locket that you can see your face in as clear as in a spring of water."

"In a twinkling all the young hunters gathered round old Schultz's daughters. I, who knew what looking-glasses were, did not budge. Some of the girls who sat near me were excessively mortified at finding themselves thus deserted. I heard Peggy Pugh say to Sally Pigman: 'Goodness knows, it's well Schultz's daughters is got them things round their necks, for it's the first time the young men crowded round them.'"

"I saw immediately the danger of the case. We were a small community and could not afford to be split up by feuds. So I stepped up to the girls and whispered to them: 'Polly', said I,

"those lockets are powerful fine and become you amazingly; but you don't consider that the country is not advanced enough in these parts for such things. You and I understand these matters, but these people don't. Fine things like these may do very well in the old settlements, but they won't answer at the Pigeon Roost Fork of the Muddy. You had better lay them aside for the present, or we shall have no peace.

"Polly and her sister luckily saw their error; they took off the lockets, laid them aside and harmony was restored; otherwise, I verily believe there would have been an end of our community. Indeed, notwithstanding the great sacrifice they made on this occasion, I do not think old Schultz's daughters were ever much liked afterward among the young women . . . This was the first time that looking-glasses were ever seen in the Green River part of Kentucky."

The characters who figure in Washington Irving's "Ralph Ringwood" narrative were real persons and a list of them reads like an Ohio County pioneer F. F. V. roster in miniature, comprising a sort of cross-section of pioneer society in the Green River country in the first decade of the last century.

Besides Robert "Old Bob" Moseley, "Ralph", really Gov. W. P. Duvall, mentions in his sketch of olden times in Ohio County the following pioneer folks:

Bill Smithers or Smothers, who first gave shelter and guidance to the neophyte hunter; John "Bluebeard" Miller, who later took Ralph to his bachelor home to live and became his "guide, philosopher and friend" as long as he remained in Ohio County; Patty and Polly Schultz, whose looking-glasses, given them by the peddler, almost broke up the party at Bob Moseley's, and their father, Simon; Sally and Wesley Pigman, Peggy Pugh, Jemmy Kiel, Joe Taylor and Bab Tarleton, all of whom were at the party; and last but not least, Sukey Thomas, "who lived at the White Oak Run.'" and whom old John Miller took to wife after Ralph had left him for the "upper counties" a step which his former protege seemed not to regard as a "good end" after his former carefree life as a hunter.

Among the young people at the Pigeon Roost party perhaps those of most distinguished lineage were the Pigmans, brother and sister, Joe Taylor and his niece, Peggy Pugh.

Sally and Wesley Pigman were children of the famous Ohio County pioneer Methodist minister, Ignatius Pigman, who founded Old Bethel, near Horton, in 1804, it being the second or third congregation of that denomination, following the premier Goshen flock, to be organized in this county. Rev. Pigman was also prominent as a dealer in Ohio county land, having brought a number of colonies of settlers from his old home in Maryland. Unfortunately, the bad judgment as to land values of some of these early investors as well as of their sponsor, coupled with the blight of conflicting title claims, caused great loss and, in some cases hard feeling toward the enterprising clergyman. But Harrison D. Taylor, premier county historian, concludes that "on a review of the whole case, we may, perhaps, justly record Ignatius Pigman as a public benefactor. Nearly all of the early settlers he brought from Maryland were peaceable, industrious and moral citizens. Many of them were strictly pious . . . and we now number among our most peaceable, orderly and prosperous citizens many of the descendants of those early Marylanders . . . That he stood high in the estimation of many is evident from the numerous children that were named after him. Ignatius, Ignatius Pigman and Pigman still, (1877) being the given names of many of the men and boys of the county." A case in point was Ignatius Pigman Barnard, one of the leading organizers and first president of The Beaver Dam Deposit Bank.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 9 August 2012, pp.1C & 3C:

Washington Irving wrote
about Green River country

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

One of the great things about the Internet is all the early American literature that's now available for free.

Things like Washington Irving's short story, "The Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood," from 1819-20, which is partly set in this area.

Ringwood was based on the life of William Pope Duval, who later served as territorial governor of Florida from 1822 to 1834.

Irving tells the tale in the first person.

How much of it is fiction and how much is real has never really been established.

But it is an interesting story, especially the part about the Green River country.

Irving tells how Duval rode a boat, called a broad-horn, down the Ohio from Wheeling, W.Va.,

"The forest overhung the water's edge and was occasionally skirted by immense canebrakes," he wrote. "Wild animals of all kinds abounded. We heard them rushing through the thickets and plashing in the water. Deer and bears would frequently swim across the river; others would come down to the bank and gaze at the boat as it passed."

Irving, writing as Duval, says, "Near the confluence of Green River with the Ohio, I landed, bade adieu to the broad-horn, and struck for the interior of Kentucky. I had no precise plan; my only idea was to make for one of the wildest parts of the country.

"In the course of my first day's trudge, I shot a wild turkey, and slung it on my back for provisions. The forest was open and clear from underwood ... At length I came to where a gang of half-starved wolves were feasting on the carcass of a deer which they had run down; and snarling and snapping and fighting like so many dogs."

The next day, Duval saw "a man at a short distance from me in a hunting dress."

The man tells him, "My name is Bill Smithers; I live not far off: stay with me a little while, and I'll teach you how to hunt."

Duval agreed and says, "We soon reached his habitation; a mere log hut, with a square hole for a window and a chimney made of sticks and clay. Here he lived with a wife and child. He had 'girdled' the trees for an acre or two around, preparatory to clearing a space for corn and potatoes. In the meantime, he maintained his family entirely by his rifle, and I soon found him to be a first-rate huntsman."

That's the earliest description on record of William Smeathers, who was said to be the first person to build a cabin in what is now Owensboro in the 1790s.

"No wilderness could be more beautiful than this part of Kentucky in those times," Irving writes. "The forests were open and spacious, with noble trees, some of which looked as if they had stood for centuries. There were beautiful prairies, too, diversified with groves and clumps of trees, which looked like vast parks, and in which you could see the deer running, at a great distance.

"In the proper season these prairies would be covered in many places with wild strawberries, where your horses' hoofs would be dyed to the fetlock. I thought there could not be another place in the world equal to Kentucky — and I think so still."

Then Duval says, "After I had passed ten or twelve days with Bill Smithers, I thought it time to shift my quarters, for his house was scarce large enough for his own family, and I had no idea of being an encumbrance to any one. I accordingly made up my bundle, shouldered my rifle, took a friendly leave of Smithers and his wife, and set out in quest of a Nimrod of the wilderness, one John Miller, who lived alone, nearly forty miles off, and who I hoped would be well pleased to have a hunting companion."

He adds, "I soon found out that one of the most important items in woodcraft in a new country was the skill to find one's way in the wilderness. There were no regular roads in the forests, but they were cut up and perplexed by paths leading in all directions. Some of these were made by the cattle of the settlers, and were called 'stock-tracks,' but others had been made by the immense droves of buffaloes which roamed about the country, from the flood until recent times.

"These were called buffalo-tracks, and traversed Kentucky from end to end, like highways. Traces of them may still be seen in uncultivated parts, or deeply worn in the rocks where they crossed the mountains."

The full story can be found at <http://www.online-literature.com/irving/crayon-papers/8/> .



See also

- [A History of Elizabethtown, Kentucky and It's Surroundings](#), by Samuel Haycraft, Hardin County Historical Society, 1975 (written in 1869), pp.53, 59, 111,142 & 184-186.
- [DuVals of Kentucky From Virginia, 1794-1935: Descendants and Allied Families](#), Margaret Gwin Buchanan, Lynchburg, VA: J. B. Bell Company, Inc., 1937, Chapter XIII (Gov. William Pope DuVal), pp.85-100.
- "Teacher Learns Illustrious Ancestor Once Visited Here", [Messenger-Inquirer](#), 1815-1965 Daviess County Sesquicentennial Edition, Owensboro, KY, 5 October 1965, p.9F.



Daniel Boone leading settlers into the west in 1775