



## History Of Clayton Community

By Mr. C. H. Graham

1923

In writing a history of our community, we are at somewhat of a loss to know just where the boundary line should be located. In the early settlement of our community, the lines that bounded a given neighborhood were much farther extended than at a later period when settlements and communities became more thickly peopled. In the first instance neighbors were few and far apart and people living eight or ten miles apart, were often considered neighbors and belonging to the same community. As a community becomes more densely populated the boundary lines of that community become shortened, and only include those living in one immediate vicinity.

Therefore, in describing the events that took place in the early settlement of our community, we shall reach out to what was then considered as a community neighborhood and in speaking of more recent events, we shall confine ourselves more particularly to the circle which now composes our local community. Up until less than a half century ago the Clayton and Griffith Creek neighborhoods were considered as one community. We shall, therefore, first speak of the early settlement of this larger circle.

The first grant of land made to any one in this geographical boundary was granted to Colonel James Graham who was a pioneer settler of the Lowell Community which is located about six miles to the south of us. This grant called for two-hundred and eighty- six acres, and included the site of the Clayton post office, and was made in the year 1786, one hundred and thirty-seven years ago. The parchment upon which this grant was written is now in the possession of the writer and is in a good state of preservation. It is signed by Edmond Randolph, Esq. Governor of Virginia.

The first permanent settlers on these lands were, Joseph Graham and his family, who settled here in the year 1813, one hundred and ten years ago. It is true that there were two or three other transitory settlers who had temporarily located here before the coming of Graham, principally for the purpose of hunting the wild game then so plentiful. Instead of locating a permanent home these settlers had no title or claim to the land on which they lived and were termed "squatters".

Among these were one Martin McGraw, who lived about one-half mile north of the present post office, and Bailey Woods whose cabin stood about the same distance westward. These settlers remained but a few short years until they migrated farther west and settled again in Fayette County. Many of their descendants are still to be found, some of whom became prominent men. Among the descendants of Bailey Woods were his son Eli, who became a prominent Baptist preacher in Fayette and adjoining counties; also Dr. M. L. Wood, an able Baptist divine of Huntington is a descendant of the original Bailey Woods.

About one mile southeast of the Graham homestead on the farm now owned by Mr. H. D. Gum, lived one Robert Withrow, who was a shoemaker, or in the vocabulary of that day a "shoe cobbler" and the knob near his old home is to this day known as "Cobbler's Knob".

Soon after the departure of Withrow he was followed by one Peter Eades, who raised a large family and remained on this farm for forty or fifty years. This tract of land on which Eades lived contained one thousand

acres and was owned by a Mr. Forelander, who lived in Union, Monroe County, and who purchased this land at a tax sale, there being two thousand acres in the original tract. Forelander bought the land without any knowledge as to where it was located or its value. Believing that Joseph Graham might aid him in locating this tract he offered him one-half of the land if he would find where it lay. As the land lay contiguous to other lands owned by Graham and near his home he had but little trouble in locating it and thus acquired title to his part, one thousand acres. Soon after purchasing this land Forelander moved to the state of Indiana, leaving his land behind, Eades having soon afterward settled on the land without contract or without Forelander's knowledge paid no rent, except he kept the taxes paid in Forelander's name, thus keeping good his landlord's title.

Forelander lived to a good old age and died supposing his land had long since been sold for taxes and that he had lost title thereto. After Eades vacated the land, Mr. John Hill, father of our Mr. Geo. W. Hill moved on the land and still paid the taxes as they came due, charged to Forelander's heirs, thus for more than fifty years was this title kept good without the knowledge of the real owner. About the year 1875 some of the Forelander's heirs, by mere accident, were informed that back in the mountains of West Virginia they had title to one thousand acres of land. They investigated and found that the report was true, and after giving ample proof that they were the legal heirs of the original owner the land was turned over to them. The land was subdivided and afterwards sold and parceled out to different owners and now furnishes home for at least a dozen families.

We have gone into the details of the history of this tract of land rather largely because of the unique and very rare circumstances surrounding it.

Now, after this discussion, let us return to the further history of Peter Eades. After the death of his wife in 1866, he moved to Union and made his home with his daughter, Mrs. Lucy Keadle, where he spent the remainder of his life, living to a good old age. He was an expert fiddler, and when ninety years old played the fiddle while Wm. Bowlinger a toll gate keeper of Union danced to the music on his one hundred birthday. The writer chanced to be in Union on that day and while he did not see the dancing or hear the music, he did see Mr. Bowlinger go to the spring and carry a bucket of water back to his house a distance of forty or fifty yards and his step was as supple as that of most men at sixty.

Mr. Eades left behind him a large list of descendants, many of whom became prominent men. Professor Keadle, who was lately county superintendent of schools of our county and who is yet very prominent and active in educational matters is a descendant of our Eades as is also Mr. J. D. Cary, who is superintendent of one of the divisions of the C. & O. R. R.

Not long after the coming of Graham, there settled a man by the name of Enos Ellis at the mouth of Griffith's Creek, which is some three miles east of Clayton. Mr. Ellis was very fond of hunting and trapping and chose the lands whereon he settled in preference to the more valuable lands on the opposite side of the river that he might be near the mountains with free access to hunt the wild game that was so plentiful. Ellis was a firm believer that Keeney's Knob was under-laid with beds and mines of valuable ore and mineral, and tradition tells us to this day that somewhere and in some place unknown to any human being save himself, that this old hunter went back into this unknown somewhere and dug from its original bed all the lead needed for the bullets of his famous hunting rifle. The knowledge of this lead mine died with the passing of this grand old hunter, and no trace of it has since been discovered. There was a settler at the Ellis place previous to the coming of Ellis of whom we will speak later.

The first death to occur in our community was that of a Revolutionary soldier whose name was Sheppard. He died at the home of Bailey Woods and was buried on top of the hill east of the post office in what was then a dense forest in a lonely grave with no sleeping dead near him. His name is still perpetuated to this day in that his last resting place is called Sheppard's Hill. Tradition tells us that he took great pride in showing his army coat whose skirts had been torn by British balls. He seems to have been a homeless way-faring old soldier without a permanent place of abode and in his passing to the great beyond, also passed out all history of his family and his life.

Another fact worthy of mention, is that the last white man killed by Indians, east of the Ohio river was killed in our community about the year 1780. This man whose name was Thomas Griffith was killed at the mouth of the Creek, bearing his name on the same place later occupied by Ena Ellis. Tradition tells us that early one morning about the peep of day, when Griffith stepped from his cabin door that a single shot fired from a gun of a small band of marauding Indians, who lay in ambush, rang out on the still quiet morning air, and snapped the life of this poor innocent, unsuspecting man. Why a small band of Indians would leave their native clan across the Ohio river and travel a distance of nearly two hundred miles through a dense forest and shoot down one lone victim and then retrace their steps recrossing the river never to return again is one of the mysteries that belong alone to Indian mythology.

The first corn grist mill built in the near surrounding country was built in our community by Joseph Graham soon after he settled here. It was located just under the bluff where the Clayton church now stands, and did service for some twenty or thirty years. It was what is known as the tub wheel water power pattern. The old race that conveyed the water from the dam to the mill is still visible.

The first church built in the community was erected about 3/4 of a century ago and was built of hewn logs and was very large and roomy for a log structure. It was built on the same site now occupied by the present church, and before the Civil War, was used for a school as well as church purposes. The first school taught in this house was presided over by a Mr. Peter Rookstool about the year 1856. Prior to that time there were schools taught on Griffith's Creek in different houses, for in that day there were scarcely any school buildings and school was taught wherever an empty house could be procured. Also to the southeast near what is now Valley Heights, there were one or more schools being taught, one of these schools was being taught by a lady by the name of Betsy Ann Brooks.

One school was taught in the year 1857 in the basement of the old log house on the farm now owned by W. P. Ailiff. This school was taught by David Graham, the writer's father.

In the old log church in the years 1858-59 and 60, there were three schools taught by Mr. Anderson Wheeler. Wheeler while limited in his educational facilities was a good teacher.

The schools in those days were known as subscription schools, that is each parent or guardian signed an article of agreement binding himself to send so many children to school for a certain period usually three months and to pay the teacher a certain stipulated sum for each scholar per month and in turn the teacher, or according to the phraseology of the day the "School master", bound himself to teach spelling, reading, writing, and arithmetic as far as the single rule of three, and to keep good order. If he fell short in teaching some of the branches, he was usually excused provided he kept good order.

In those primeval days order was the first consideration, and filling the minds of the scholars with useful knowledge was a second consideration. The close of this last named school brought us up to the outbreak of the Civil War, when all schools or hope of schools for the long period of four years had to be abandoned.

As we today look back and take a retrospective view of the hardships and privations caused by that cruel war and consider that many bright boys and girls were deprived of all educational advantages, we can but think, that if the youth of our land had been trained, mentally, morally and scientifically along the common school branches for those four years, instead of filling their youthful minds with political hatred, malice, and all kinds of immorality incident to war, that our country would have gone forward with untold strides of mental, moral, and financial prosperity. The war came and went, leaving our community like most others in the section to a certain extent divided on the great issues which brought about that dreadful conflict.

Some contending at the out break of the war that the seceding of the state (this community was then in Virginia.) from the Union was the only way to correct the wrongs, our imaginary wrongs, that we had been subjugated to, while others believed that the Union should remain one and inseparable. These opinions of either side having been promulgated and aggravated by the poisoning malice of four years of war, left neighbor arrayed against neighbor and even kinsman against kinsman. But when the black smoke of battle had drifted



away and the white winged dove of peace again spread her sails over the land and the minds of the people of our community became centered on peace instead of war, then we soon learned to forget the difference that separated us during those never-to-be-forgotten four years and all again joined hands and hearts in the upbuilding of our wrecked community. One of the first steps in this direction was the establishing of a school in the fall of 1865. This was a subscription school, taught by David Graham in an upstairs room of the old home of Joseph Graham, the settler, then occupied by his widow and two bachelor sons, John and James. The old log church was in a state of bad repair and could not then be used for school purposes. This brought us up to the present free system of schools of our state, a system of education then entirely new and untried by our people.

We mention with a feeling, we trust of pardonable pride, that the first free school under the laws of West Virginia, taught in Monroe County, (this community was then in Monroe County) or so far as we know the first free school taught in southern West Virginia was taught in our community in an old log house formerly used as a dwelling on the farm now owned and occupied by Mr. J. T. Canterberry, beginning in the fall of 1866. Mr. William Dempsey a native who lived in the community, was the teacher and the term was three months. The circumstances under which this school was established as we recall them are as follows:

While the new state of West Virginia was established in 1863 and as every one knows was stricken off from the old mother state of Virginia, but for the reason that the whole country was then in a state of war, the southern counties of the new state were controlled by the old state until after the declaration of peace while the more northern counties were operated as part of the new state from its organization. Thus the process of the southern counties relinquishing their ties from the mother state, and adopting themselves to the new order of things, under the laws of the new state was slow and tedious, and it was not till the fall of 1866 that school officers were elected to try out the new system of education.

The first Board of Education of Wolf Creek district was composed of John Miller, Wm. Dempsey and David Graham, the two last named belonging to our community, and as there was no local funds on hand and the time of the year for laying levies was past there was little hope of starting schools that year. Under the school law, it was, however, discovered that by certain compliance therewith the state furnished a certain fund to help defray the school expenses, consequently a hasty application was made and sufficient funds guaranteed to justify a short term of school. Why other schools were not established at the same time in the same way we do not recall, but probably from the fact that teachers and vacant houses were scarce and the season too far spent. We give the circumstances of the first school as we remember them and they may be subject to some correction, but at any rate we know that this school was about one year in advance of any other free school within our knowledge.

The second free school in our community was taught the following year by J. A. Graham in an old log house, the former home of Peter Eades. The first free school building erected in this community was built in 1868 on Griffiths Creek at a cost of \$444.00 and is still standing in a fair state of preservation, though not now used for school purposes. The first teacher who taught in this house was Professor J. G. Dunnsmore, who has since made his name famous by establishing and maintaining Dunnsmore Business and Commercial College at Staunton, Virginia.

The first school as well as several subsequent schools taught in this house were attended by people living two and one-half to three miles on either side. The children of Clayton neighborhood attended the school for about sixteen years, when in 1884 a school building was erected on the opposite side of the Creek from the post office. After a period of about ten years the location was changed and another house built on the hill on the site of the present school building. This single room school has grown now to a three room graded school, not with any consolidation with other schools but from the natural increase of the population of our school district. We have had many very earnest and influential teachers in these schools, among whom we might mention, O.C. Carter, Joseph Zicafoose, S.E.Sims, Mr. Sayre, C. M. Nelson, and others, as well as our present trio of teachers, consisting of Professor. Geo. Hill principal, Glenna Lacy, and Evelyn Uterback assistants, who are second to none in the district, all being energetic, and having the work assigned them well in hand, laboring not for the dollars and cents alone but for the good of the school and the upbuilding of our community in general. All these are native teachers and graduates of high school.

At Griffiths Creek we have Mr. Paul Harris, principal and Miss Omar Lacy assistant, both high school graduates and native teachers. We have a number of high school graduates, former pupils of these elementary schools, and several others who are now attending high school. We also have in the state university at Morgantown two former pupils of our schools, Joseph and Harry Hill. We have dwelt on this subject of schools and education rather largely and at considerable length because we think it is the real index to the intelligence and progress of our community. We probably have omitted many things that might have been said concerning those who have taken prominent action toward the upbuilding and maintaining the high efficiency of our schools, but in the limited time, we had to prepare this sketch, as well as the limited space, to which we must confine our remarks, we hope to be pardoned for any oversight.

The first county road constructed into and through our community was built from Johnson's Cross roads at the head of Wolf Creek in Monroe County, leading past what is now Creamery post office, thence on by way of Haynes' Ferry (Now Riffe's Crossing), and passing Buffalo Lick, (now the famous Pence Springs), thence up Cobbler's Knob, passing Joseph Graham's, (now Clayton post office) and continuing up and over Keeney's Knob to Lick Creek and down the same to Green Sulphur Springs, a distance of more than twenty miles. This road was not built from the proceeds of any bond issue, but by volunteer labor contributed by those living along and near the road. While this road was built almost regardless of grade, it filled its purpose in that day and time. Many immigrants and travelers passed over this road going westward. It was customary for those traveling by wagon to secure the service of an extra team to help pull up the mountain, and usually received this assistance from the family of Joseph Graham. A mail route was early established over this road, having Union as the starting point and ending at Gauley Bridge, a distance of some eighty miles. The mail was carried on horse back, and one week was consumed in making the round trip. The nearest post office to this community on the mail route was called Egypt, and was located some seven or eight miles away near where Creamery post office is now located.

Our people as a rule have followed agriculture for a living, a few of the earlier settlers hunting, fishing and trapping. Deer was mostly sought by the hunter, while occasionally a bear was slain. Previous to the time of which we write, elk and buffalo were to be found, and traces of the old buffalo path leading across Keeney's Knob from Green Sulphur Springs to Buffalo Springs, are still to be seen. A few miles to our west a prominent peak on the mountain is called Elk Knob in honor of the animal that once made his home there.

Our forests were heavily timbered with oak, ash, hickory, poplar, walnut chestnut and all other varieties adapted to this locality. To the earlier settler this timber was a nuisance and except what was used for fencing and building houses only served as a drawback against clearing up the land.

After the completion of the C. & O. Railway which opened up a market for this hitherto worthless product, our people turned their attention to marketing their timber. Many of our people engaged in the saw-mill business, others in getting out ties, staves, tan-bark and other forest products, while still others engaged in teaming and hauling logs lumber and other various forest products to market, thus a very large per cent of our people were engaged in this new industry, which operated very materially against agriculture, many claiming that they could buy the products of the farm and pay for them out of their lumber operations cheaper than they could produce them, hence farming lagged, fencing went down and brush grew up. At the end of a quarter of a century when the timber was largely removed and it became necessary for our citizens to return to farming many found themselves handicapped for the reason that their farms were in a terrible condition.

On the other hand during this period of lumbering, people built better and more commodious houses and barns and many laid by a surplus from their timber operations that put them in better financial circumstances than before.

We have some insignificant seams of coal cropping out on our mountain sides, but it has never been discovered in sufficient quantities to be of commercial value. Prior to the Civil War some of these veins were opened and used for blacksmith purposes, the coal being carried from the mines to the forge on pack-horses. Since commercial coal has reached us by railroad our native mines have been abandoned.

We also have in our community a very fine grade of brown building stone. The value of this stone was discovered about the year 1886 and a company composed of Richmond capitalists was formed in 1887 which opened up a quarry on the farm now owned by Mr. W. P. Ailiff. This company built a tram road, from their quarries to the railroad at Glenray and for several years did a very large and lucrative business. At the time of their greater activity some forty or fifty men were employed. This stone is said by experts to possess very high building qualities, being of a very close texture and susceptible of a smooth and glossy polish as well as being unaffected by fire or freeze. The Masonic temple in Richmond, one of the finest buildings in the city is built of this stone.

The introduction of concrete as a building material has practically superseded stone and for this and other reasons this quarry has been abandoned.

Another matter which we think worthy of mention is the fact that we have had living in our midst an unusual number of long lived people and we beg to give some of their names as follows: Joseph Graham, the pioneer settler lived to enter his 92nd year. His wife Rebecca was 90 years old at the time of her death. Peter Eades lived for more than 90 years. Mrs. Eula Bowden whose exact age we cannot give was reputed to be more than one hundred years old at her death. John Ellis, son of Enos Ellis lived to the age of 87, and his maiden sister Miss Nancy passed away at the age of 105 years. We are indebted to Mr. Enos Flint who is a nephew of the Ellises for the age of these two people. William Still who lived most of his life on Griffith's Creek passed away but a few years ago at 90 years. Barney Pollins who resided in our vicinity for a number of years died on Griffith's Creek many years ago in his 92nd year. Mrs. Nancy Alderson widow of Major Jack Alderson died in her 91st year. David Graham who died in 1914 was in his 94th year. Mrs. Nancy Ayres widow of John Ayres spent the first one hundred years of her life in our midst and about the year 1900 moved to Ohio to enter on the second century of her existence in the home of her 80 year old son who had preceded her to that state many years before. Aunt Diana, a negress owned before her freedom by Joseph Graham lived to be between 90 and 100, her exact age not having been known. Newman Graham a grand-son of the settler, who was reared among us, but who now lives in Huntington is nearing his 90th year. Others we might mention are Levi Alderson, Betsy Flint, Malinda Lacy, Joseph Alderson, John Nolan, Samuel Ayres and John Graham all of whom lived to be 85 years and up and all lived in our community.

The only slave-holders among us were Enos Ellis and Joseph Graham. Enos Ellis owned a number of slaves and strange to say they were all stricken with some fatal malady when in the prime of life and some seven or eight of them died within a short time, leaving but one negro man who recovered from the malady and whose name was Anderson and who after his freedom adopted the name Anderson Bundy and who is still remembered by many of our people. Of the Graham slaves there were three, Diana the mother and two sons, Ira and Stuart. After the death of their master which was in 1857 the two negro men became obstinate and hard to control and for this reason they were sold about 1859 to a southern slave dealer and were driven south and probably placed upon the auction block and sold like cattle. They were never heard from after starting to the south. The price realized for them was one thousand dollars each. Diana remained in the family till after the freedom. There were many other slave holders in nearby communities but these were all in the section of which we write.

The old log church was burned in 1882 or 1883 during a term of school, there being taught in it by one professor Smith of Washington D. C. It was not until 1902 that the present church was built and a few years thereafter a Baptist Church was organized. Our first church pastor was William Miller a young graduate of Alderson Academy and later a graduate of the Southern Theological Seminary of Louisville, Ky. and who is now at the head of a Christian Missionary school in Cuba.

Our people as a rule have always been patriotic and law abiding and have always been ready to respect the country's call. No red flag has ever been hoisted or advocated in our midst. We believe in a government for the people and by the people and believe that the people have a right to support the government in order that the government may be strong and be able to protect its people in time of need. Our community has enjoyed the unique distinction of having been under the jurisdiction of two states and seven counties since the organization of our government.



In 1743 the county of Augusta was formed and included all the territory of the state of Virginia west of the Blue Ridge to the Ohio River. This continued till 1770 when the county of Botetourt was formed and included our section till 1772 when Fincastle County was laid off and embraced this territory till 1776 when Fincastle County was abolished and its territory divided into three counties of Montgomery, Washington and Kentucky. Our community was included in the county of Montgomery.

In 1780 Greenbrier County was organized and included our territory until 1799, when we were included in Monroe County. In 1863 the state of West Virginia was formed and we were made a part of the new state. In 1872 Summers County was formed, taking into its territory that part of Monroe to which we belonged. The first sheriff to whom we paid taxes in the new county was Evan Hinton, after whose family the town of Hinton was named and who also was the chief promoter in having the new county formed.

As to our prominent citizens, while we have never had the honor of furnishing a president of the United States or a state governor, yet we believe that the natural intelligence of our community will compare favorably with that of other rural communities. Believing that school teachers form the basic foundation of knowledge and intelligence in any community, we beg to submit some of the names of those who have either been native born or who have either been native born of who have adopted our section and taught in the larger community of Clayton and Griffith's Creek or who have gone from among us and taught in other sections. John and David sons of the old settler, Enos Flint, T. M. Reynolds, J. U. Graham, W. H. Lacy, O. C. Carter, Minnie Blake, Harry Hill, Joseph Hill, C. H. and L. P. Graham, Aaron Kincaid, Glenna Lacy, Omar Lacy, Geo. Hill, Paul Harris, Other Graham, Evelyn Utterback, Birl Fink, and G. W. Hill and perhaps others whose names we do not know or recall. Our community has furnished the three counties of Greenbrier, Monroe, and Summers with county surveyors, John Graham while temporarily located in Greenbrier County prior to the Civil War acted as county surveyor of that county. Just after the Civil War he was elected county surveyor of Monroe County. At the present writing we have Mr. George Ballangee as county surveyor of Summers County.

Our community has furnished a representative quota of the local officers of the county, including members of county court, sheriff, justice of the peace, members of school boards etc. As to those of our citizens who have gone out from among us and established themselves in other communities with a reasonable degree of success in various occupations we might mention the following: William Eades, son of Peter Eades, went, what was then called, "west", probably about the year 1840, and became first a pilot and later captain of some of the numerous steamboats that plied and waters of the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi rivers. Steamboat navigation in those days by reason of the unknown sand bars and snags caused by sunken timbers was a hazardous business, and the pilot and captain who successfully steered clear of these obstructions were looked upon as men well skilled in their profession. It has been held by many citizens of our community that this Captain Eades was the same man who built the famous bridge across the Mississippi at St. Louis and also dredged out the mouth of that river so as to admit heavy sea-going vessels but recent investigation made for the purpose of this sketch reveals the fact that such a conclusion is incorrect. That honor belongs to Captain James B. Eades, who is believed to have been a cousin to Captain William Eades. James Newman Graham who migrated west about the year 1855 also became a famous steamboat pilot and followed that calling for quite a while and in later years settled in Huntington, W. Va., when that town was but a mere village and still resides there at a very advanced age. He was the eldest son of Lanty Graham. Others we might mention are O. T. Honaker, successful merchant and business man at Hinton and Sandstone, J. A. Graham business man of Hinton; John O. Ballangee progressive manufacturer of Huntington, John Burdette successful farmer of Red House, Putnam County; Frank Mann with the Kanawha Valley Bank at Charleston, J. U. Graham engaged in the real estate business at Charleston; Walter Honaker, car conductor, Huntington; L. H. Mann, merchant, Alderson; L. P. Graham, postmaster, Hinton; John W. Wallace, C. & O. carpenter, Hinton, A.B.C. and G. W. Graham, lumber manufacturers, Sandstone; Dewey and Hobart Ballangee, Charleston; John W. Graham, real estate, Hinton; O. H. Mann, Agent for Southern News Co., Bluefield; and O. R. Graham, Charleston.

Another honor of which the Clayton people feel proud is the fact that we have the oldest postmaster in point of service in the state of West Virginia if not in the entire United States, who is Mr. David G. Ballangee. Mr. Ballangee received his post office commission from Postmaster General Keys under the administration of President Hayes in 1878 forty six years ago, and has satisfactorily discharged the duties of the office from that

day to this, and it is the hope and wish of the patrons of the office that he may continue for many years yet to come.

We would not think this sketch complete without mentioning the name of Volney Rollins who flourished as a music teacher, or in the language of that day, a "singing master", just after the close of the Civil War. Volney was a son of Barney Rollins and was reared among us and mastered the art of music and singing without a teacher. In addition to teaching singing schools in various communities he also held free singing entertainments somewhere in the neighborhood almost every Sunday, wherever a vacant house could be had and often times in the dwelling house of some home. Entering upon his useful career at a time when the young men and even those who were older had been separated from their families and friends for four long years, those who wore the blue as well as those who wore the gray, and who were now permitted to return and mingle with loved ones and help to re-establish and re-build the social fabric of a life, these singing entertainments were a God send to our community. Men and women came for miles to mingle their musical voices together singing the song of Zion and in doing so they forgot who wore the blue and who wore the gray and all stood on the same social ground. Never before or since within the recollection of the writer was there a time when the gaiety and the joy of the young people of our land rose to a higher plane than that period following the close of the war, and those singings conducted by Volney Rollins intensified that joyous feeling to that extent that it practically drowned out the bitter animosities of by gone days. Mr. Rollins left our community about the year 1870, settling on lower Loup Creek in Fayette County. He married, reared a family and became a preacher of the gospel. Whether at this time dead or living we do not know, but this we know that among the older portion of our community his name will ever be revered and honored.

We cannot close this sketch without referring briefly to the origin of the name of our post office and community. In the year 1836, eighty-seven years ago a man of the name of Richard Clayton sailed from Cincinnati, Ohio in a balloon and landed on a sport of Keeney's Knob over looking our settlement. The anchor of his balloon was loosed in the Queen City at five o'clock p.m. and at 2:00 o'clock the same night his balloon caught in a tree on his descent after crossing the main top of the mountain. Mr. Clayton climbed down the tree and lay at its roots till morning. When morning dawned he climbed back up the mountain, so as to get a more commanding view of the surrounding country and to his surprise he discovered a river in the valley below and while he saw nothing but unbroken forest he reasoned that possibly there was a settlement along the river valley, so he made his way in that direction. After traveling some two miles he came to a cabin occupied by the name of Gill, they being very poor seemed to be unable or unwilling to give him any assistance so they conducted him northward about two miles to the home of Joseph Graham. With the assistance of the Graham family and perhaps others including the Gills they started in search of the balloon. The first days search was without success. On the second day the balloon was located in the tree (the writer has it from the mouth of John Gill when he was a very old man that some of his family found the balloon the first day but did not reveal it. When asked why he kept it a secret he replied that they wanted to see what "the result would be". It looks as if graft were at least thought of in those days). After climbing the tree and releasing the balloon it was let down by ropes and carried to the home of the Grahams. It is said the news of the balloonist spread rapidly and for the next day or two people came for miles to view this strange unheard of monster of the air. Many thought it impossible to make the trip from Cincinnati in nine hours, and condemned the whole story as a fake. A portion of the balloon was torn by being caught in the tree, and the excited populace who had gathered insisted that this be cut in to small pieces so that each might have a souvenir to carry home. Mr. Clayton soon secured the service of a wagon and team and hauled his balloon to Charleston, when he secured a steamboat passage to Cincinnati arriving safely at home after an absence of some ten days, his family and friends having no information about his whereabouts during his absence. Mr. Clayton on his balloon trip reported having crossed over the Kanawha Salt works, that being at the time the only industry that kept fires and lights by night. Soon after passing those lights he discovered that his craft was sinking and he consequently threw overboard some ballast he had for that purpose in order to lighten his load, and he also let down by a rope a dog he had with him, the balloon being thus lightened, rose far above the earth. Many years afterwards a rope was found in the forest of Cotton Mountain in Fayette County, supposed to be the rope by which the dog was let down from mid air to earth. As to what became of poor Fido tradition is silent. Mr. Clayton wrote an article in one of the Cincinnati papers giving a very minute description of his balloon trip, a copy of which he sent to Joseph Graham, and it was long kept as a memento in the family.



Many years after this balloon incident John Graham while on a trip to the western states stopped at Cincinnati hunted up Mr. Clayton and was royally entertained in his home. We have been recently informed that a Mrs. McClung now living in Nicholas County has in her possession a piece of this ancient balloon which was cut from it while in the home of Graham. This cloth was silk and of course, a very strong texture. As previously stated our post office was established forty six years ago and was named Clayton in honor of the ancient balloonist.

---

[Community Histories Index](#)

[West Virginia Archives and History](#)