

"Erebus" and "Terror" in watertight tins. Of the brave men lost, I close with the words of modern expedition leader John Harrington: "Nothing can take away from the accomplishments of these men. They endured unbelievable hardships, no one can fault them for making every effort to survive. The weather was too cold, and the rescuers were too late. May they rest in peace."

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THOSE BLACKBURNS!

March 15, 1999

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There is an old thought that you shouldn't look too hard into your family's past you might find a horse thief. Well, I found something that if true would be far worse.

The project began innocently enough. I had the information on my parents, and their parents, so I started on the great grandparents and their families.

Mary Blackburn Caldwell — my great grandmother — was one of thirteen children by Edward (Ned) Blackburn and his wife Lavinia. Ned's father had come to Kentucky about 1784 and built a fort in what was to become Woodford County near Lexington.

Apparently the family did well. Ned was an attorney, but was best known for breeding race horses and raising prize cattle. He built a big brick home near Spring Station, Ky., to house the growing family.

My great grandmother and her husband settled on a farm in Owen County, Ky., and quietly raised a family. There wasn't much quiet about some of her siblings, however.

We'll study two of them, Luke and Jo. It is doubtful if Kentucky ever produced brothers more

dissimilar in style and personality and who cut such wide swatches through the commonwealth over most of their active lives. Luke was born June 16, 1816; Jo 22 years later October 1, 1838. Apparently they had little in common except sharing the same parents and a deep love for the South during the war. Luke is described as portly and looks it in the one photograph I found. Jo sounds like a movie star – superb appearance well over six feet tall with a melodious voice that attracted and held attention.

Luke, fourth of the Ned-Lavinia line, began a two-year apprenticeship in medicine when he was sixteen. He was in that training when a disaster struck that was to guide most of his professional life.

Cholera first hit Kentucky in 1832. The scourge had ravaged India, the Far East, Russia, Germany and the British Isles before coming to these shores.

Rampant on the Eastern seaboard, it made a savage attack on central Kentucky the next summer, but still little was known about it. Some of the medical books reported it was "excited" by eating green fruits and vegetables, by intemperance or by strong emotion. There was no doubt about its viciousness. It struck with purging diarrhea, vomiting, subnormal temperatures, and severe muscle cramps. Death normally came within 36 hours.

Luke seems to have been on the right trail to control it by the time he was graduated from Transylvania Medical School in 1835. His 18-page thesis was about cholera, noting that the dreaded disease "had an affinity for water courses." That proved to be part of the answer – raw sewage leaking into the water supply. He set up practice in Versailles and became a hero to the sick, dying and frightened people; one of only two physicians there.

When cold weather slowed the rampage, he took time off, got married and then opened an office in Lexington. He wasn't doing well, however, so they moved to Natchez, Miss., then a thriving river town of elegance with a fine racetrack.

He prospered and they joined a wide social circle from Jefferson Davis to William Johnson, a freed slave who himself owned slaves. Johnson kept records of just about everything. He wrote that Blackburn charged \$1 for an office call and \$2 for a house call regardless of the illness. There was a post script that he also charged \$1 a mile for house calls. It is remarkable, then, that Luke earned \$10,000 the next year. What hours he must have worked.

He took over management of the city hospital. That led to lobbying for and succeeding in getting government funds to build a string of marine hospitals along the Mississippi to treat river men. He left the city hospital work to manage the new marine hospital built in Natchez and then opened a small infirmary exclusively for blacks where he treated "everything but smallpox" and charged \$1 a day. He was widely praised. Mrs. Blackburn wrote to her mother saying she had never seen Luke "as happy and contented. . . rich, poor, high, low respect him. No one can say a word against him and it is quite a by-word in town to be as temperate as Dr. B."

It was about this time that he ran head-on into another of the world's great plagues - yellow fever. Just as the causes of cholera were unknown, this too was a mystery. In fact, it wasn't until the turn of this century that the killer mosquito was isolated. The mortality rate from yellow fever was 30 to 50 percent and the disease raged during the warm weather, stopping only with cold weather.

Luke was elected health officer and made some headway by demanding residents cleanup and disinfect their property, including the elimination of all standing water and rotting vegetation. Again he was on the path to the solution.

Luke worked ceaselessly, noting that he kept in readiness "two pairs of buggy horses besides a pair of carriage horses and his riding horse." Again he was widely praised.

He observed that people who did not receive the then standard medical treatments were more likely to

survive than those who did. He prescribed ice (then thought to be dangerous) to reduce fever and lemonade to replace body liquids.

With cool weather Luke resigned as health officer saying he would never take such a job again. He took his son Cary, now eighteen, to Philadelphia to enroll in medical school, and answered a call to attend an outbreak of yellow fever raging on Long Island, his fame having spread to the East Coast.

Upon returning home he found his wife very ill and soon she died, throwing him into a deep grief. Friends finally persuaded him to take a trip to Europe to study medicine and hospitals there.

Few facts of the trip are known except that in Paris he was introduced to 25-year old Julia Churchill, a member of the Churchill Downs family. They soon cut short the tour, returning to Louisville so Luke, now 41, could talk to her parents. They were married a year later and decided to move to New Orleans where soon Cary joined in the medical practice. The Blackburns had a baby girl, but there is no record of either her birth or death dates.

The Civil War flamed and the plot to this story - if there was one - thickens.

Before we get into the serious stuff, I just have to pause here to pass along a way some Southerners harassed Yankee troops. A man dressed as an undertaker would stop a soldier, pull out a measuring tape and say he wanted to note the Yankee's height. The man explained the army had ordered 10,000 caskets and he wanted to be sure he had all the right sizes.

The day President Lincoln was assassinated, the governor of Bermuda announced they had uncovered a plot to infect northern cities with yellow fever. Bloodied and soiled clothes from the hospital were packed in trunks and were to be shipped north and sold in used clothing stores. Blackburn was implicated.

Why that was germ warfare!

Could this devoted and brave physician – probably one of the forgotten heroes in public health and prison reform – have been responsible for one of the most sinister schemes of the war? The question, now almost forgotten, remains unanswered still today. I've read many Civil War era books which do not mention it. Many things can't be tied down. All of his personal papers were lost and the one book I could find obviously is unreliable. Sometimes the author says exact information is missing and, then, a paragraph of two later produces a direct quote. So some of these contents are about as trustworthy as an Oliver Stone movie. Two recent books, The Kentucky Encyclopedia and A New History of Kentucky, tie Luke into the plot, but Dr. Thomas Clark doesn't mention it all in his new book.

Perhaps because of his age, Luke hadn't signed for active military duty, instead becoming a civilian agent to obtain supplies for Mississippi.

We know he went to Canada and purchased 3,000 rifles one time and another time sent a boat load of ice to Mobile.

One report has it that Blackburn and close associates would entertain themselves by planning novel ways to defeat the enemy. Luke once said "jokingly," some people claimed, that yellow fever could kill more Yankees than Confederate rifles could.

Luke had worked the outbreak in Bermuda. When the crises was over it was said he shipped eight trunks to Halifax, five of them said to contain soiled gear from the beds of his hospital patients. Apparently one went to New Bern, North Carolina, and soon there was a devastating outbreak. An estimated 2,500 people died.

Luke made a second trip to Bermuda and it is said he shipped back even more trunks. Meanwhile, the British government awarded him 100 pounds in appreciation for his work.

Other trunks were discovered. Upon seeing the bloody and soiled contents a health officer saturated them with sulfuric acid and buried them. The man who

had stored them was found guilty of being a nuisance and sentenced to four months in jail. He related Blackburn to the trunks.

Some American papers carried these stories, but the news was drowned out by President Lincoln's death and all that followed in Washington.

Canadian authorities arrested Blackburn, charging him with conspiracy to commit murder. A man testified that Blackburn had said he had a plan "that would do more good than bringing 100,000 soldiers to General Lee." He quoted Blackburn as saying one of the trunks which was shipped to Washington had enough poison to "kill at 60 yards."

Newspaper writing at the time was much more colorful than it is today. It was "one of the most fiendish plots ever concocted by the wickedness of man." Luke was labeled a "hideous devil." He didn't like too many newspapers or editors.

The charge was lowered. Blackburn was acquitted in the trial because it was circumstantial evidence, the witnesses were not reliable and for several technical legal reasons. Apparently court records are no longer available. Canadian authorities lost interest and American authorities soon did too because they could not tie Jefferson Davis into the plot. So the Blackburns, though he now had little money and his reputation was smeared, stayed in Canada for about a year until he went to New Orleans to treat victims of another outbreak. They later lived in Arkansas for six years where Julia owned a small plantation. Then back to Louisville.

Blackburn's only known public quote about the whole affair is the accusation was "too preposterous for intelligent gentlemen to believe."

One account says modern knowledge knows it is impossible to spread yellow fever by soiled clothing. "Only a mosquito can be held responsible." Another argument was that, if Luke did it, it was no worse than a general sending troops behind enemy lines.

The Blackburns settled quickly into life in Louisville, living in an apartment in the Galt House near where he opened an office. He volunteered at several other outbreaks, being treated as a hero each time.

Then February, 1878.

The Louisville Courier-Journal announced he was a candidate for governor. The family, including his brother Jo, who then was a strong candidate for Speaker of the House in Washington, had been politically active. Now 63, Luke was a novice and had no public speaking experience. But he said this was the most important event in his life.

The campaign was wondrous. He did travel and speak, but dropped out for weeks to work a yellow fever outbreak.

Upon nomination Luke retreated to a resort at Crab Orchard and had the candidate for attorney general, who was recognized as a spell binding orator, out on the campaign trail.

Stories about his alleged wartime activities raged through the newspapers, but mostly out-of-state ones. The Courier-Journal, strongest and biggest in the state, carried only favorable stories. Remember there still was strong support for the confederacy among the dominate Democrats and the Republicans were very weak. Luke was immensely popular for his outstanding medical work.

The election was overwhelming, the largest Democratic victory in years.

One of his first acts as governor was traveling to Cincinnati to attend the Industrial Exposition and meet President Rutherford B. Hayes and take him back on a brief tour of Kentucky.

As many of you know Kentucky politics are one of the wonders of the world and that was especially so in those days. The 100-year-old mansion was rotting and was across the street from the vile penitentiary. An

open sewer carried waste to the nearby river. Two men were jammed into a 7x4 foot unheated cell. A builder offered to trade a modern 19-room house located in a fashionable section of Frankfort for \$15,000 and the old real estate. But a newspaper campaigned against the state providing a home for the governor and a legislator proposed that all state property be sold including the State House.

Luke will always be remembered for a story that apparently is untrue. Fable has it he demanded a new prison, but when the legislature would not give the funds he pardoned all the prisoners. Instead, it was 850 inmates, the new Kentucky Encyclopedia reports. I can't find the total number of prisoners so I can't give a percentage. However, he earned the nickname "Lenient Luke" for the number of prisoners he did release and that caused a tremendous loss of popularity during his term despite worthwhile accomplishments in public health, prison reform and the judicial system. When he made one of his last addresses as governor, the Democrats booed.

The Blackburns traveled some and then returned to the apartment in the Galt House. He went into a physical decline and died in September, 1887, age 71.

Meanwhile, brother Jo was at the peak of his career although he had ups and downs also.

While Luke was sometimes given to temper — he once caned a house physician for not following directions exactly — Jo was noted as a public speaker and charmer.

After graduation from Center College he read law with the famed George B. Kincaid and practiced until joining the Confederate Army. He distinguished himself at the bloody battle of Chickamauga then soon found a way to organize an independent cavalry unit, patrolling near the Mississippi throughout the war. There is conflict in available information, but one reference says it was a pain to both the Blue and the Gray because he took no orders.

He quickly realized the popularity former Confederate soldiers had with the majority Democrat



party and so went into the state legislature for two terms before going to the House of Representatives in 1875, then two terms as senator. His strong support for Bryan and the Free Silver issue caused his only defeat in an election, but he came back and won handily in 1901.

Jo never ran for public office again, instead serving in appointive offices which do not sound too strenuous. President Roosevelt made him governor of the Canal Zone and later President Wilson made him commissioner of the Lincoln Memorial.

Jo's strongest legislative work must be his digging into the scandals of the Grant administration, a job any former Confederate officer would relish, of course. His limited biographies glow with his skill as a powerful speaker and vigorous debater which kept him in the forefront of Senate action. It is claimed he could call by name the majority of voters in Kentucky. Apparently he did have a fiery side. One tiny note which I wish had been expanded said his "powers of vituperation often provoked opponents to physical violence."

In his declining years he seems to have enjoyed regular sessions with a group of noted friends in which he was the center of lively debates, vibrant conversation and brilliant story telling. One note says he was in a class by himself. He died at 80 in 1918.

Both fast paced and long careers ended quietly in the historic Frankfort Cemetery. Both men had served the state and country nearly all their working lives.

Their names are in only two public places. The famed High Bridge of the Kentucky River was dedicated to Jo and a 400 acre minimum-security prison was dedicated as the Blackburn Correctional Complex 85 years after Luke's death.

Needless to say I can only hope the possible dark side of Luke is not true. And I'm not sure I will do any more family research.

Thank you.

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HIS ENCHANTRESS OF NUMBERS

March 22, 1999

Ethan B. Stanley

During two weeks in September, 1996, my wife Barbara and I traveled to England. The purpose of our journey was to discover more about the Babbages, my wife's maiden name. As a family genealogist once said, "Somewhere around the fourteenth century the Babbages rose out of the mists of Devon," so we made our headquarters in Exeter. Soon after settling into the hotel where Oliver Cromwell once kept his horses, we drove to a small town called Ashreigney, a short distance north of Exeter, where Barbara's family trace their lineage. We were especially interested in discovering more information about Charles Babbage, the great nineteenth-century mathematician and inventor, the "father of the computer," and Barbara's exact relation to him. On our travels through Devonshire, we stopped at the ancient town of Totnes, where Charles spent his early schooldays and where there is the Totnes Museum, with one room dedicated to the achievements of the town's most famous son.

A week later, while in London, we visited the Science Museum located in Kensington. Inside the Museum are two large rooms dedicated to Babbage's achievements. In one room is Babbage's Difference Engine no. 2, which was built at the Science Museum based on his original designs and completed by two engineers to celebrate the bicentenary of the inventor's birth in 1791. Despite his original concept and meticulous design, this is the first of his calculating engines to be completed. In an adjacent room are large-size photographs and drawings of him, in addition to numerous references to his many other inventions. In the same room there is also a portrait of a beautiful young woman with aristocratic features,