

The following is an excerpt from an account of Laurel by Nora Stark Kelley, last living child of Joshua Kelley. Laurel the site of the Kelley family home in Greenup County, Kentucky from 1879 until 1912.

Laurel

By Nora Stark Kelley

The nineteenth century was the charcoal era. The vast wooded areas in northern Kentucky and southern Ohio brought the furnace men from Pennsylvania. They built and operated the furnaces – seventeen – in what is now Greenup and Boyd Counties. The tracts were rich in ore and forests covered much of the area. During that period the to-be-called ‘Bessemer process’ was born by accident, by Bessemer in England and William Kelly, at Katawa (sic), in Kentucky in 1849 and the charcoal furnaces were finished. The steel mills took their place.

In Greenup County, land grants and Treasury warrants had been made to many settlers. On January 11, 1786, 16,000 acres were given to Alexander Brown in the area know as Fayette County Virginia. The tract extended to the Ohio River. Smaller tracts were held by H.E. Pogue (Poage), Buckner Wallingford, John Holbrook, Richard Graham and others. From the sale of various areas there was formed one tract to be know as Laurel, so-named because the rock cliffs along the creek were covered with mountain laurel.

In 1847, the Wurtz brothers – William, George, and Samuel G. – came from Wurtenberg, Germany by way of Philadelphia to Greenup County, Kentucky. They built many of the furnaces in the area. Their sister, Anne and her husband Benjamin King, a carpenter accompanied them. In that year they built Pennsylvania Furnace and in 1848 they built Laurel. Mr. King planned the buildings, including the “iron master’s “ house, the manager’s house and other buildings. Later they left Laurel and built a handsome brick home on the Ohio River near Siloam. They lived and worked at Laurel until the tract was bought by Robert Scott of Ironton, Ohio; the land deeded March 16, 1870.

Robert Scott was a wealthy furnace owner whose holdings included the Mt. Vernon, Heola, Etna and Viscuvius (sic) furnaces in Lawrence County Ohio. He acquired Laurel rather late in his career. Scott’s family was a large one. One daughter married Marshall Field I of Chicago.... Admiral Lord Beatty was a grandson. Another daughter, Nora went to England to be Mr. Field’s hostess after Mrs. Field’s death. A third daughter was burned to death. Scott’s one son migrated to the Cleveland area.

The Scott’s appetite for gracious living, together with souring investments appear to have been the reason for his gradual loss of the Ohio properties. During this period he and his

wife came to Laurel to live for a brief period. Within four years after his purchase of Laurel furnace that furnace “blew out” for the last time. The day of the iron furnace was ending. Within another seven years the last furnace in Greenup County, Hunnewell, blew-out (1881) – that day the whistle blew from sunrise to sunset. Scott now nearly penniless, had to submit the Laurel property to commissioners’ sale, then went back to Ohio for good.

Joshua Kelley bought the Laurel tract at the commissioner’s sale, bidding it in at \$17,267.33 in June 1878. The final deed was recorded August 31, 1879. Some 10,000-13,000 acres were in the tract. He set about at once to convert Laurel into a stock farm, which he accomplished with remarkable success.

Kelley was no stranger to Scott, having been employed by him a number of years in connection with the operations of the Ohio furnaces as well as that at Laurel.