THE KINGDOM

of the

HAPPY LAND

By

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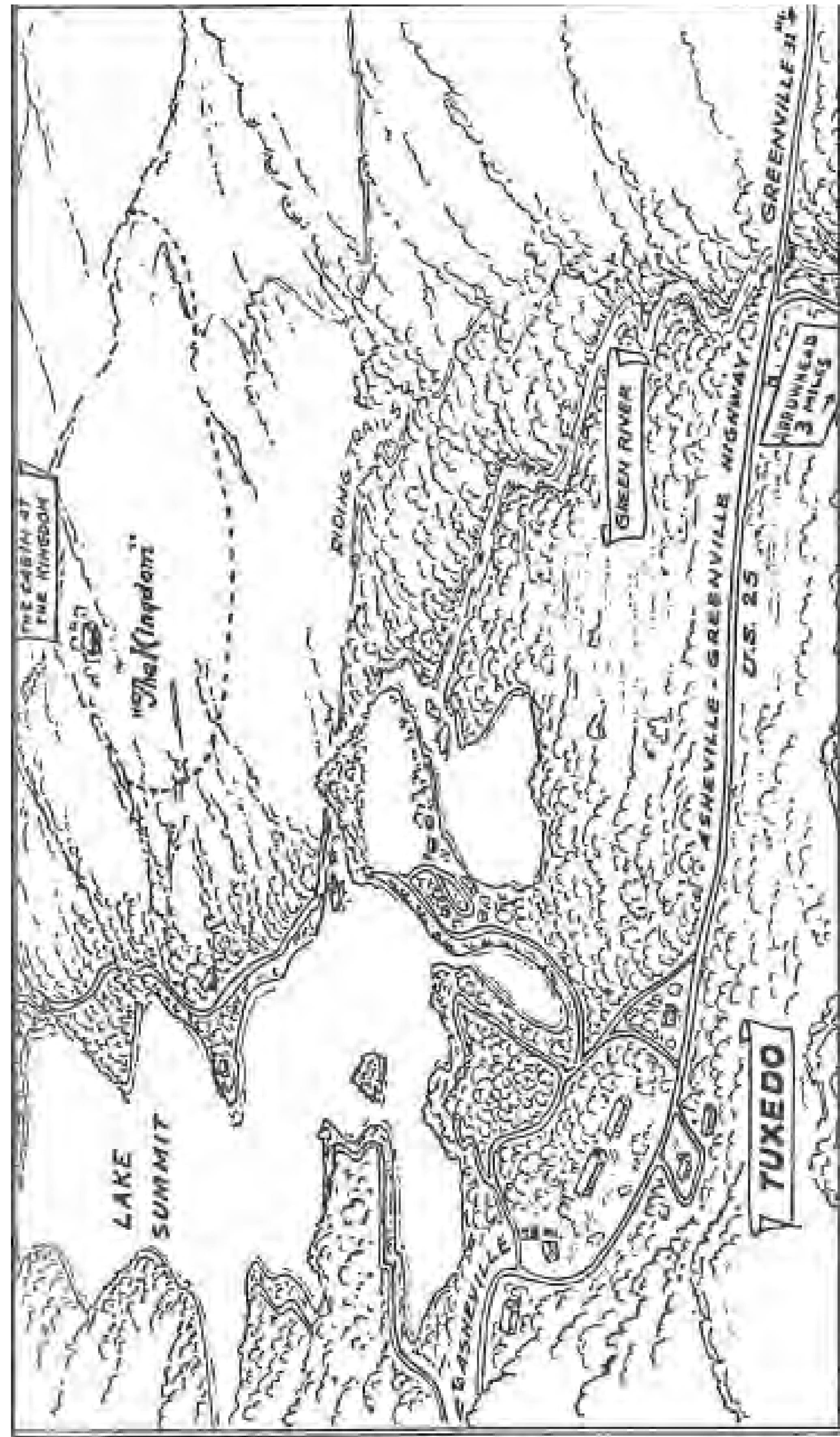


"The Kingdom" from a map courtesy of Camp Arrowhead, Tuxedo, N. C.

The Kingdom of the Happy Land

THIS STORY is from a dim, tattered page of the history of Henderson County.

The Kingdom of The Happy Land, constituted of a band of recently freed Negro slaves, was located on part of a vast boundary owned by Col. John Davis. Its domain lay on both sides of the North-South Carolina State line, partly in Henderson County, and extending over into Greenville County, South Carolina.

Log cabins which once dotted the mountain sides of this strange communal settlement are gone, except for a few rotting logs here and there, an abandoned chimney, an occasional sunken pit to mark the spot once occupied by a primitive cellar. Fields where corn, grain and potatoes flourish for many seasons are now lost in a heavy growth of shrubs, briars and trees grown to large proportions.

The leader and executive head of the original group, as well as his followers whom he brought here to the Blue Ridge from 'Down South' passed from the earthly Kingdom on Green River so many years ago that all names have been forgotten. The story covering the first decade of the band living there under a strange and primitive form of collectivism, therefore, can only be pieced together from scraps of old traditions.

Within recent years, boys from nearby Camp Arrowhead have found adventure in exploring the site of the old Kingdom; worn logs of an aging barn on the place have afforded shelter for them on over-night trips. There, gathered around flickering camp fires, relics have been shown, traces of early house places described and tales told to keep alive interest in the colony that one time lived here in the Happy Land.

It is said that the first small group — the vanguard of a growing colony — came here to the Green River Valley in the Blue Ridge of Henderson County shortly after the War Between the States was over — some fix the date as early as 1864. Within a short time after reaching North Carolina, it appears that they were well settled into their mode of communal living which was to endure until shortly before 1900.

Whether the leader who had brought his own people from far away had, from the start of their journey, assumed sole control and direction of all affairs for members of the colony during the earliest period of their residence at the Kingdom has not been determined.

There seems little doubt, however, that after the first years, those who lived in the settlement were governed by rulers known as the King and Queen.

According to information about the earlier period which can be garnered from recollections of Negroes whose forebears had known something of the first comers, the number of those who started from a plantation in Mississippi were few.

The leader, pictured as a man of light color — who might have passed as a white man — was believed to have been born there before any threat of war was heard. His father, according to tales of old people, had been a white plantation owner, his mother a young Negro woman, freed from slavery before his birth. The little boy, under direction of the white man, was given an education far beyond that of his fellow associates on the plantation, with training in religious matters which continued to dominate his course of action during all his life. As he grew to maturity, he became the proprietor of a farm, and eventually of slaves, members of his mother's race.

When the War was at its end, devastation and ruin faced the Negro, as it also did his white father — his farm wasted and neglected, the value of the slaves he once owned not only wiped out, but the newly freed men and women had themselves become his liability. Without knowing which way to turn, these humble ones stood waiting, waiting for their former master to again assume charge and direct their future course.

The Emancipation Proclamation had freed the Negroes — they were no longer slaves to any man — but it left them to a worse fate, homeless, without property or training, ignorant of which way to turn, and in bondage to want and fear.

The dream of a communal village for them, where the rule should be "One for All, All for One", was a great dream — a dream far beyond the scope of any experience or thought the former Negro master had known.

Was it born in the mind of his white father? Did that man know what lay beyond the Blue Ridge foothills where the road crossed from South Carolina? Had the father himself once lived in the Carolinas and been caught up in the great tide of migration to Alabama and Mississippi a generation earlier?

Perhaps the itinerant preacher, making the round of his circuit to visit the stricken people knew of a place where others of his little flocks had found new promise.

All these are questions for which the present offers no answer.

But far off across now lifeless cotton fields, in a different country, the Negroes were told, there might be a place for them to start life as members of a newly independent race.

The one-time master and his former slaves, now a poverty-stricken man striving to measure up as captain of a great adventure, and his followers who asked only that their steps be directed from day to day, cast their lot together and left plantation scenes of their old Mississippi home.

As they made their slow way northward, and news of their crusading plan spread, their number grew.

Through bare cotton fields of Alabama, stops were made beside some stream, or under shelter of trees, where the little caravan would find a night's rest, and often a new recruit. Neglected red lands of Georgia, the life blood draining from them with every rain, and still marked with dark clots where homes had been burned, tossed other ship-wrecked souls into the tide bearing the Negroes on toward the land of their dreams.

South Carolina — here their visions were brightened with a new focus — here they were given hope that their journey was nearing its goal. The pilgrims now met many Negroes who remembered that in the days before the War they had heard their white folks talk of annual trips from the Low Country to the mountains — mountains that stretched for miles without habitation, where newly freed slaves might find a small piece of land for a home.

Yonder, these black people said, there ran the great Main Street of South Carolina, by which Low Country people had travelled, and over which there had plodded the great endless droves of cattle and other stock — one following fast on the tracks of another — on to markets further south. Wagon trains, too, had passed, loaded with goods, meat, molasses and other produce brought from farms somewhere beyond the mountains outlining the distant horizon. To the plodding, shuffling Negroes, weary from their long journey, all these stories conjured up pictures of their dream land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Perhaps there was a joyous rush as many who had made the trip with their white folks during slavery, gathered their pitifully few worldly goods to join those travelling on toward a better land. Their supplies added little, a small side of fatback, a few cowpeas, corn meal and that staple food of South Carolina Negro farmers — the golden yam — enough for a bare subsistence until better times came.

From the Enoree River through upper South Carolina, the road Joel Roberts Poinsett had built, the route travelled by stage coaches, crossed Old Indian, Callahan Mountain and the Winding Stairs to where it reached the State line — and North Carolina lay just ahead.

It had been a long, long journey, afoot, with ox wagon, or perhaps a weary work-worn mule bearing a pack containing the few worldly goods of its owner. Many carried all their belongings in a small bundle, or "budget" on their own weary shoulders. It was a motley, tattered crowd, weather-beaten and worn from many nights spent before campfires along the weary road, travelling in rain and under hot sun. From early spring until the first days of Autumn the band had pushed on, spirits stout, sustained by hope and a trust in their leader — tho food was scanty and poor.

At the state line, crumbling breastworks still remained as a grim reminder that dangers of the War had touched even this remote area; there were stories of the stagecoach, on one of its trips from Asheville to Greenville being waylaid and captured by the Yankees.

Men could point out the spot on the State line where they had been told a duel was fought, many years before, between Senator Vance and Samuel Carson. Just over there in the grove, a short distance away, was the great house, Oakland, where Col. John Davis, after he sold his home place at Flat Rock to Judge King, had lived with his family for a generation or more. Mrs. Davis, his wife — "Miss Serepta" — was a kindly mistress; she had opened her doors for the dying Vance, and might look with pity on the wandering ex-slaves, searching for a place where there was room for them and work to provide a living.

The travellers, now grown beyond the original few, had members who had known the road from Greenville to the State line: perhaps some of them had made over-night stops at the old stagecoach tavern, Merrittsville, half way up the mountain. That was the home place where "Miss Serepta Merritt Davis" had been born and reared. Some of them had even known of her in bygone times when their white folks, en route to summer homes in Western North Carolina, had stopped with her family a few miles below the State line.

North Carolina — could this be the end of their questing pilgrimage?

Life at Oakland, the Davis plantation, when the wandering Negroes reached there, was still a struggle with conditions which followed the war. Col. Davis had been dead several years, but his widow, 'Miss Serepta' had gone on living there with her son, Mr. Tom,

and life on the great farm — not acres but miles of land — was directed by her.

Broad fields where rows of waving corn should have spread beyond the range of eye now stood untilled — former work hands had gone to seek their fortunes in other places, and there was no money to hire laborers to take over their jobs. Much of the stock — horses, cattle, sheep and hogs which had one time roamed grass covered hills or filled pens and stables had disappeared — either carried off by passing troops, used to provide food for servants on the plantation, or bartered in markets further south for a scant supply of necessities which could not be made or grown on the place.

Sarah Goodwin, the young wife whom William Thomas Davis had married during the war, survived but a short time; the husband and his aging mother, 'Miss Serepta' needed help with work about the house, on the farm, and to provide food and lodging for travellers now venturing to resume their trips from South Carolina to Tennessee and on further west by way of the old State Road.

On the plantation at Oakland, the Davis home, the wandering Negroes found rest, shelter and a place where their leader made arrangements that they could earn their keep while, under his guidance, they began to lay the foundation for their long sought home here in the Blue Ridge.

Cabins along the path through the grove which had once housed happy throngs of slaves had been standing empty since the War; shelter was at hand for the few weary animals which had been able to survive the long trip by the newcomers. Every mountainside would supply wood for fires. Across the river, on the hills, land could be cleared for tilling, timber for log houses and great blocks of native granite for chimneys waited to be utilized.

There is no way of knowing how many souls comprised the first group which arrived, tho it has been variously estimated that there were from fifty to two hundred. It may well be imagined that the band of former slaves, large or small, must have felt that here at last they had reached the Promised Land — here they could establish their Kingdom of The Happy Land, with their leader to manage all arrangements and transact all business, while each man and woman filled every daylight hour with the common task of developing a new world for all.

The winter, its days filled with the work of building and clearing, came to Spring, and a new phase of life opened at Oakland.

Along the State road leading down south, stockdrovers were once again appearing, driving their animals to market — there was feeding to be done, shelter and food provided for the drivers up at the big house. New fields must be broken and crops planted to grow corn and provender for the next season. The stagecoach, now making regular trips, brought travellers seeking food and lodging. Soon a scattered few summer visitors would be arriving. Gardens must be made and tended, eggs gathered, chickens rounded up and hens set to raise broilers and fryers; cows were to milk and butter to churn. Some of the Negro women were busied with house work, cooking, baking and caring for the laundry.

A few miles away, across the State line in South Carolina, Mr. Ben Posey, who had married a daughter of the Davis family, was living at the great house with its famous Basin Spring, which had been the home of Joel Roberts Poinsett for much of the time he was building the State Road. Many travellers made stops there and visitors came with the early summer — some stayed until late Fall.

Men and women of the Kingdom, under management of their leader or King, found work with the Poseys or at other places, which yielded small cash returns, for hard money was still scarce, and Confederate paper money had long been valueless. Old stories have been told about some of the Negroes being hired to white people for as little as ten cents a day, with board and keep furnished, all money going into a common treasury, to be dispensed by the King, in his discretion.

This communal type of management, established in the first days at the Kingdom, was never changed, and continued until the group disbanded, shortly before 1900.

Other means of providing income were soon found. Surplus food stuffs raised on the new farms were carried to available markets, women not engaged for housework, cooking and serving meals found employment in caring for the sick or for young children; spinning, weaving and knitting proved profitable.

An outstanding product of the colony was a remedy for rheumatism, aching muscles and bones, or other bodily ailments — an unguent known as the Happy Land Liniment. This was kept for sale in the Kingdom, and was also distributed at places where its members worked. Other and less popular medicinal potions, as well as herbs with curative properties were kept in stock by the King and Queen for any who came to buy. One plant which provided a Balm in Gilead

was catnip, still to be found growing around some of the old house places.

Time slipped along until almost a decade had gone by, the older members died, and much of the story they could have told about this idyllic chapter in the history of the Negro colony was forgotten for want of some one to pass it on.

It is said that when the first King, the man who had led them from far away to this peaceful place grew old, and began to drop the reins of government, another leader was raised up, and the wail which echoed through the mountains —

"The King is Dead"

was soon drowned out in the surging shout,

"Long Live the King."

The colony living in the Kingdom of the Happy Land, early after 1872, entered a new era, with new faces, new names, new leaders, and with this more of the history of this picturesque settlement on Green River can be learned.

Two old people, whose family came and lived there until, as they say, "The Kingdom broke up", relate hazy memories of life in the settlement of community interests, on what was one time a part of the Col. John Davis home place, Oakland.

These, added to scattering items found in county records, piece out a more definite picture, with much still lacking, of the novel and colorful communal living at the collectivist farm situated on the State line, in North and South Carolina.

Beyond his name, nothing can be established about Rev. Ezel, an itinerant Negro preacher or missionary who must have traveled far and wide throughout South Carolina, perhaps extending his field into Georgia and further on to the South. This modern Moses, though he stayed at no place for more than limited periods, seems to have had many and faithful followers in the vicinity of Newberry, Union, Cross Anchor, and Enoree, as well as other nearby settlements in the State. Ezel Couch, now past eighty-five years old, says he has always been told that when he was born in 1872, he was named for this travelling evangelist, his parents being two of Rev. Ezel's faithful followers.

Ezel was the child of former slaves, the father owned in the latter period of his bondage by a family named Hill, though after he was freed, he resumed the name of an earlier owner, and called himself Couch. He had married the maidservant of a nearby family, one Margaret Elizabeth Rampley.

The old man was born, he says, in Union, S. C., and brought to the Kingdom when one year of age, under conditions which he remembers hearing described in later years.

As he was always informed, the traveling preacher, Rev. Ezel, on his journeys through the area in and near Newberry, Union, Enoree, Cross Anchor, Spartanburg and other places in South Carolina, either organized groups, or influenced the people of his congregations to band themselves together and leave such homes as they had there, with the purpose of joining the colony then established in The Happy Land.

There seems little or no impression in the elderly Negro's mind that the evangelist himself ever came to the Kingdom — "he went on to his other places and to get his other groups ready", according to the recollection of his namesake.

Nothing is known, nor can any data be found to indicate the denomination to which the Rev. Ezel and his followers in his several fields in the south belonged. Today, some are known to have been Baptist, some Methodist, and a few indications have been found that tenets held by other members of the Kingdom could be classified as a "cult". That they were a peaceable, truth-loving, religious and faithful people seems established by what has been learned of them.

There were among those who came from South Carolina about 1873 Harold Whitmire and his wife, Hannah, with their family, from Enoree. Two of their daughters married men named Green and lived many years in Hendersonville. Here, Aunt Chaney and Mary were faithful, respected servants, devoted to their Church and leaders among the young people of their race.

Wiley and Rachel Bennett were from Cross Anchor, and lived where the old chimney of their house in the Kingdom is still standing.

William Montgomery and his wife, Louella had with them two of her brothers, Ambrose and Henry Bobo, all of whom had probably been living in Spartanburg County, S. C. Jerry Casey was another member of the colony who was held in high esteem, and might have succeeded to the position of King had the Kingdom endured.

George Couch and his wife, Maggie, after they came to The Kingdom of The Happy Land with their son, Ezel, had two other children — Anderson, now deceased, and Mary, who married a Russell, and lives with Ezel.

Another member of the colony, who became recognized as the King, while his sister-in-law, Louella was known as the Queen, was

Robert Montgomery, a brother of William. There is no evidence to show that Robert Montgomery had a wife or children with him at any time while he lived in the Kingdom, though later developments established that he had a young son and two young daughters in Spartanburg at the time of his death. There also seems good reason for believing that Elmira Montgomery was his daughter, though she was a much older woman who had been born at Cross Anchor, S. C., and that her mother may have been another wife.

Those who remember him describe Robert Montgomery as a black man, apparently of full Negro ancestry, tho his brother William was classed as an octoroon. William and his wife, Louella Bobo Williams, had at least three children, a daughter Lily who died early, and two sons, Waties and Joshua.

The Kingdom had its center in a small valley, with the people of The Happy Land living on surrounding hills and mountain sides. It seems generally accepted that the house of Robert Montgomery, who probably had assumed the position and exercised authority as King from the time the contingent of 1873 arrived, was situated almost on the State line in North Carolina. The house occupied by Louella and her family was located in South Carolina, the two being separated by only a few feet. An old granite stepping stone marks the site of a building which either adjoined or was very close to these two structures, that served as a chapel for religious services. In it were held classes where the children were trained in a primitive type of Sunday School. Much of the teaching, preaching and other training was given by Louella Montgomery, who appears to have been the dominant and moving spirit in the little communal settlement of this period.

Mary Couch Russell and her brother Ezel recall that their family, after having been there a few years, built a house of hewn logs on a hill overlooking the Kingdom. The old stone chimney of this house, with evidence of its log mantle, and the gaping hole in the hillside which served as its cellar remain today. Aunt Mary remembers that as a small child, playing in the yard about this house on the hill, she could see when Louella began assembling the children for their lessons, so she would run down the slope to take her place as one of them. After religious instructions and teaching, Louella then trained them in singing hymns, spirituals and other songs. White people living in the surrounding community long remembered the pleasure the Kingdom singers provided, as they went from one home to another, in the dusk of summer evenings, where they were always welcomed for their songs.

When the Couch children had reached the proper age, they and others from the Happy Land attended a school some distance from their home, at a place called Possum Hollow, taught by a Negro preacher, Rev. Walter Allen.

This teacher, whose home was on the Allen branch, at Ebenezer, near Hendersonville, had been born in slavery, and was owned by a man named Maxwell. He was sold to John Allen, and his family name changed, only two weeks before the Emancipation Proclamation was issued. This ex-slave in later life preached and taught at many places in Henderson County, where evidences of his work are to be found today.

It has been said that the first enterprise established by any pioneering group coming to a new frontier was a grist mill, for the grinding of meal and grits. Col. John Davis, from records of his time, had followed this course even when he was living on other of his lands at Flat Rock. When he sold his home place there to Judge Mitchell King in 1830, there is evidence that he had a mill in operation on the land. No one today remembers the site where he set up a new mill at Oakland, but Ezel Couch tells of the many trips he and his brother Anderson, as well as others from the Kingdom, made across the hills to carry their grain there to be ground.

Farms tilled by people of the Happy Land produced an abundance and to spare. Each year, in the later period, loaded wagons were sent back to South Carolina, where dried fruit, meat, lard and other produce was sold, and a few necessary commodities brought on the return trips. Any surplus money realized from sales by the wagoners, after their scant purchases were made, was paid over to the King and deposited in the common treasury.

Ezel and Mary Couch have a positive recollection that their father, George Couch, said when he came from Union to the Happy Land, he had paid money to the then managers or governors, with the understanding that he was to have a deed for land in the Kingdom. However, a search of the records does not indicate that he or any other of the members ever had title for anything there, though Elmira Montgomery did convey to Louella Montgomery for a consideration of $25 'her interest in the land Robert Montgomery had bought from John H. Goodwin.'

A few years after the group led by Robert Montgomery came, a new development in Western North Carolina materialized, which in time was to greatly affect the Kingdom of the Happy Land.

Completion of the railroad from Spartanburg to Hendersonville, and a few years later on to Asheville was a project which had been hoped for since before 1836. It was while C. G. Memminger, a summer resident of Flat Rock, who had been the first Secretary of the Treasury of the Confederacy, was its president, that the railroad line, passing near the Kingdom, was finally completed and put into operation in 1878. The president of what later became the Southern Railroad wrote that this line was the first which ever crossed the Appalachian range from the South, a feat accomplished only by employment of extraordinary methods. When funds were low, the road had to be rerouted and the line shortened; the great problem of labor to build it was met, in part, by State convicts being brought from Raleigh and stationed in what was commonly known as "The Stockade", near the present town of Tryon. Ezel Couch recalls that as a child he heard much of the hard lot of these men, their suffering and the death of many before they were eventually removed to their former prison at Raleigh.

The railroad, when in operation, provided other means of transportation, so the stagecoach gradually ceased to travel the old State Road; stock once driven over the long, hard trip down country, was now shipped by freight. Accommodation for such travelers had created a need for over night stopping places, and a flourishing business had continued for years.

Ben F. Posey, who had married Julia, a daughter of Col. John and Miss Serepta Davis, lived for years at the famous old Basin Spring, with its widely known stoup basin built there by the wife and sister of Joel Roberts Poinsett, as a tribute to his many contributions to development of his State and country. As conditions changed, and there were fewer guests seeking overnight lodging, the Poseys moved to Hendersonville, taking with them more than one member of the Kingdom who had been servants on their place.

There was still passing over the State Road — many of the mountain people continued to make their annual trips to transport their produce by wagon. Two members of the Happy Land colony, Perry Williams and his wife, after the Poseys left, moved to a place two miles south of Basin Spring. There on property owned by Laurence Potts, they established a business of providing meals and lodging for men 'wagoning' down country. The Negroes served only white people, and a reputation for cleanliness, good and well prepared food and other comforts made this, for years an outstanding overnight camping place.

Another couple, Alvin and his wife moved to Hendersonville about the time Ben Posey came, perhaps as part of his household, and lived at a place just south of the town which they owned for years. Nothing is known of the Normans, Griffins and many others.

The statement of Ezel Couch and his sister Mary that each head of a family had paid money into the common treasury, controlled by the King, for the purchase of a home in the Happy Land is in some measure borne out by records of Henderson County.

Robert Montgomery and his sister-in-law, Louella Montgomery, according to a deed recorded in Book 15, page 37 of Henderson County records, took title in 1882, for a tract of land lying in both Henderson County and Greenville County, S. C., from John H. Goodwin, whose wife, Sarah, was a daughter of Col. John and Serepta Merritt Davis. It seems conclusive that this deed covered the land where the Kingdom of the Happy Land was located.

Robert Montgomery, (with no mention of Louella or her joint ownership) executed a mortgage to Levi Jones in 1886. This instrument, recorded in Book 21, at page 525 of Henderson County records, does not bear any notation that it was ever satisfied and cancelled.

Elmira Montgomery, (whose death certificate signed in 1943, says she was born in Cross Anchor, S. C., and died at the age of 95) made a deed to Louella Montgomery in 1887, which is recorded in Book 22, at page 306 of Henderson County Records. By this Elmira, for the sum of $25, conveyed to Louella a part of the land which Robert Montgomery had gotten from John H. Goodwin, though there is no mention of how she acquired any interest in same.

Ezel remembers being present at the time when Robert Montgomery died, after a long illness, but he does not recall the exact date. However a proceeding was brought in the Courts of Henderson County in 1889, wherein R. I. Barnwell, Administrator of Robert Montgomery, sought authority to sell certain property of the deceased to provide funds with which to pay debts in the amount of $500. In this it is set forth that the lands of Robert Montgomery were worth $2 per acre; that the deceased left surviving him four children:

Robert S. Montgomery, Jr., age 15
Cornelia Montgomery, age 17
Julia Ann Montgomery, age 19,
all residents of Spartanburg, S. C., and
Elmira Montgomery of Henderson County.

Another entry in this case recites that

R. I. Barnwell, administrator of Robert Montgomery,
vs.
Robert Montgomery et al,

sold the land therein described on the 4th day of November, 1889, at which time Wiley Bennett became the last and highest bidder in the sum of $140.

The land thus sold was on the waters of Green River, County of Henderson, described in a deed from John H. Goodwin to Robert Montgomery; excepting any part of said tract theretofore sold by Barnwell to P. J. Hart.

It is interesting to note, in this connection, that R. I. Barnwell, named as administrator in this suit, was the husband of Hendersonville's beloved Mrs. Lila Ripley Barnwell; and that Wiley Bennett about that time or shortly after was working at the grist mill of H. G. Ewart, a brother-in-law of Mr. Barnwell. This old mill was located on Judge Ewart's property, near Fifth Avenue West.

There is nothing to indicate whether Wiley Bennett lived on the Kingdom property after he obtained this deed from R. I. Barnwell, or when he died. However, after his death, his body was taken to South Carolina, and there interred in a Negro graveyard on property owned by Laurence Potts.

Rachel Bennett and her daughters came to Hendersonville and worked for a number of years, where they are remembered as good and faithful servants.

Rachel, who was said to have been born at Enoree, S. C., made her home on Sixth Avenue, W., near Oakdale Cemetery for a long time after the death of her husband Wiley. According to information given on her death record, she was 100 years old when she died June 28, 1936.

John Bennett, who died in Hendersonville, was born in Enoree in 1887, and there is some reason for thinking he had married Nancy Bennett there before coming to North Carolina. According to information given at the time of his death by Bessie Bennett, he was her son, his father being John Montgomery, both of the Enoree settlement. No record has been found to indicate that the parents were ever married, or that the father ever came to this section. Neither has any one been found to say just what his relation, or that of Bessie, was to Wiley and Rachel Bennett.

Ezel and Mary speak of this sale by Mr. Barnwell to Wiley Ben-

nett as being the 'time when the Kingdom broke up'. William Montgomery and others of the male members of the Kingdom went further west, probably to Sylva, Macon County, and nearby sites, where they worked in the mica mines. Louella came to Hendersonville to make her home, and here, after some time, her husband William returned, a blind man who was fairly helpless for the rest of his life.

An associate of Louella Montgomery in Hendersonville, living either close to her or in the same house as Aunt Canzadia Martin, known to many of the white residents. She always said she was half Indian, and observed many customs she said had been handed down to her from these ancestors. She had a knowledge of medicinal herbs and kept a supply which she used for doctoring ailing Negroes in the vicinity of her home. She claimed to possess some power of taming wild song birds, and reared many of their young in her handmade cages. Nothing further has been learned of her history.

Jerry Casey, the last member of the colony remaining at the Happy Land, died in 1918, at an old house which was said to have been the former Robert Montgomery home. All information which can be had concerning him indicates that he was a reliable and respected Negro, with many qualities of leadership which would have fitted him to be ruler or King of the colony, had the communal life at the Kingdom endured.

Mr. Lon Morgan, whose family had lived near Col. John Davis for more than two generations and whose lands adjoin the old Kingdom is authority for the statement that when Jerry Casey became feeble and in poor health, Elmira Montgomery returned to her old home in the Happy Land and cared for him until his death in 1918, at the age of sixty. He was buried at Mt. Page, near Saluda.

Later, Elmira worked for families in Hendersonville, whose members remember her faithfulness, though as time settled its burden heavier on her shoulders she became almost a recluse. Carrying her lumpy, bulky black bag on her arm, her head swathed in such a turban as might have come from Dark Africa, she embodied all the brooding withdrawn mystery of centuries of living in darkness. For years, she went her uncomplaining, uncommunicative way, from her home on Sixth Avenue to market, and to her daily chores of serving her white folks, then back, so long as her strength permitted.

When, as they say, "the Kingdom broke up", Ezel and Mary, with their brother Anderson, were brought to Hendersonville by their parents. The mother became a servant in the family of Dr. W. D.

Whitted, a prominent physician who lived on Main street, and her little daughter Mary did chores about the place, bringing in stove wood, picking up chips and similar little tasks.

Ezel worked at the old tanyard, now almost forgotten, which was located at the foot of Toms Hill, not a great distance from the lily ponds at Toms Park. He continued there for years with Mr. L. T. Williams, who operated the business, and Mr. Tom, Mr. Turner and perhaps others of the family.

Many legends have grown up about The Happy Land — among them the general one that members of the Kingdom had brought wealth, silverware and jewelry with them to this home in the mountains. It has been said that a number of the sunken, now almost indistinguishable old graves near some of the houses have been opened by vandals in search of any hidden treasures.

Several years ago, the owner of Camp Mondamin decided to remove stones from an old chimney at the Kingdom, to be rebuilt for a log cabin he was having erected there. The man who went down, taking a wagon and a young boy as helper, found it necessary to use dynamite to dislodge the stones, so firmly did the old masonry hold them in place.

Next day after the workers had returned to the camp with their load of stone, the helper hesitantly inquired of his employer if the man who had been in charge of the project had told him what he found when the stones were blown apart. Receiving a negative answer, he said:

"Why, when he shot off his blast and the dust had settled, gold coins, a lot of them had just poured out of the old chimney."

The man, being asked, of course replied that no such thing had happened. After a short time had passed, however, he resigned his work on Green River and went to one of the large northern cities. Word drifting back from time to time indicated that the North Carolina man was not working, but rather was living a life of ease and indulgence. A year or two later, he returned to his old home here, and went over to apply for a job with his former employer.

"If he ever found money in the old chimney, he certainly had spent every cent of it, because he did not have any when he came back here", his old acquaintances said.

A curious sidelight on the affairs and citizens of this communal settlement of Negroes on Green River is contained in a paper recorded in Book 65, page 70 of the Records of Deeds of Henderson County,

This was an instrument executed in 1909 by John and Wade Montgomery, in which they conveyed land on Green River, in Henderson County, N. C., to W. G. Colson and John H. Hurst of Bell County Ky. This paper recites that the consideration for this conveyance was "services performed in the defence of John Montgomery, charged with murder. The property is now in charge of Jerry Casey as tenant for the first parties hereto."

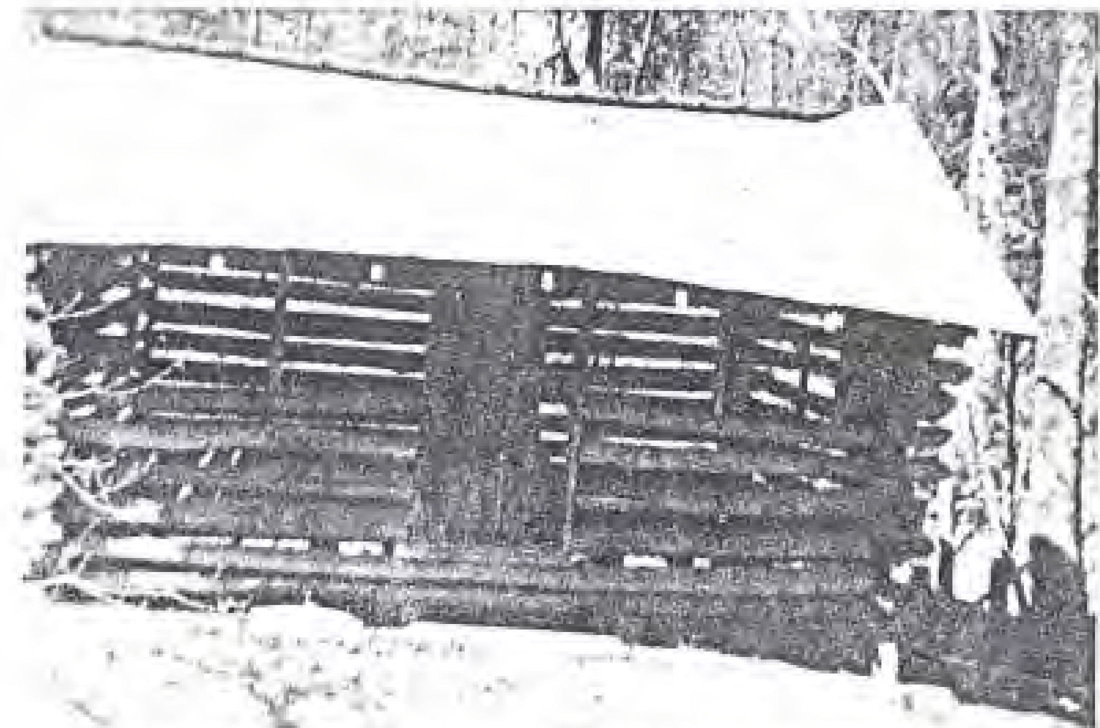
Some of the old roads leading into the Kingdom can still be travelled by car, and in some places new ones have been graded out. As one after another the old house places are reached, there is evidence that in the Long Ago, some one with a loving hand had lived there. Old rose bushes, and their offspring, grown into hedges, are yearly crowned with their rich crimson flowers. Syringa and other flowering shrubs lighten the dense growth with their graceful white sprays. Around the stone which once served as an entrance step to the chapel where Louella had held her services, Iris, the 'flag lilies' of early days, violets and the homey blue flowers of myrtle, the 'graveyard vine' are thickly matted into the coarse grass. A cherry tree, towering high into the sky, sheds perfume from its flowers through the valley in springtime; plants, growing from rich crops of its fruit, have now spread over several hills.

On the road passing the house where the King and Queen had their headquarters, several old chimneys are still standing. As one ascends a hill, remains of the old George Couch house, with its great stone chimney and what must have been a sizeable cellar are reached. There, a turn-around has been graded out, for the convenience of the hardy who venture to make a trip to the Kingdom of the Happy Land.

Further development and improvements for use of that part of the Kingdom lands lying in North Carolina are planned by the owner, in connection with Camp Arrowhead.

That portion of the land in South Carolina lies within the newly developed watershed of Greenville, in that state.

Serepta Merritt, wife of
Col. John Davis



Robert Montgomery's house —last building in The Kingdom.

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Ezel Couch, who was brought to The Kingdom in 1873, one year old.

Remains of old chimney at George Couch's house in The Kingdom.