

## J. F. Harlan's Unusual Professions

*Editor's Note: The following is a compilation of information from two biographical sketches written by John B. Harlan, subject of the story titled "John Bailey Harlan Was Shrewd Detective" on page 8 of the Spring 2004 Harlan Record. Juanita Creighton, of Richmond, Va., submitted the detective piece and the two sketches compiled here. John B. Harlan was the brother of her grandfather, Howard Hinton Harlan (7956iii).*

One of our Harlan cousins, James Forbes Harlan (#7956i), had some unusual professions. His brother, L&N Railroad detective John B. Harlan (#7956v), provided the following information.

Born in Albemarle County, Va., on July 12, 1851, James moved with his family shortly after the Civil War to Mountain Grove, Bath County, Va., where they resided in a cabin on property owned by Colonel A.C.L. Gatewood, of Confederate fame. The farm was situated at the fork of Little Back Creek and Big Back Creek.

"Mountain Grove was a little scattering village consisting of a Post Office, Blacksmith and Wheelwright shop, and a Manufacturing Mill belonging to old Colonel Gatewood," brother John recalled. It was located with Warm Spring Mountain to the east and the Allegheny Mountains to the west. "The little valley stretched up Big Back Creek perhaps eight or ten miles and ranged from two hundred and fifty feet to half a mile in width. In that section at that time, the mountains abounded with game, bear, deer, wolves, wild cats, panthers, catamount, wild turkey, pheasants, and in fact all manner of game, and our chief occupation

### Any Changes???

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The Harlan Family in America  
P. O. Box 1654  
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or e-mail to: Ruth Harlan Lamb  
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- Send e-mail addresses and changes to: Junior Harlan  
<harlanjay@cox.net>  
who maintains a confidential file for the Cousins link.
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while in that section was hunting, trapping, and fishing," John wrote.

In 1873 or '74, the family moved to Greenbrier County, crossing the Allegheny Mountains in ox carts. They lived for about a year on Captain William Reed's farm, about a mile and a half northwest of Frankfort. They then lived for three years on the Lewis Creigh farm, then moved to Monroe County, to a section known as Swopes Knobs in the mountains near Johnson's Cross Roads, about 15 miles from Union. Later the family moved to Henry County, Ky.

During the years that James lived in Greenbrier and Monroe counties, he worked most of the time as a "professional hacker of brush" on the mountains near Cranberry Glades in Pocahontas County, according to his brother.

"While so engaged he came in contact with a Professor of Music from Richmond, Va., L.J. Whitt, who was also a Professor of Penmanship," John continued, "and the two became very much interested in each other, and Professor Whitt induced Mr. Harlan to travel with him and give music lessons and also take lessons in penmanship from him. They traveled together for two years or more, making quite a success in their profession. After Professor Whitt had returned to

Richmond from West Virginia, Mr. Harlan took up his profession of teaching penmanship as well as giving music lessons on banjo and violin, more especially on the banjo." James became well known by traveling around to the cross-roads school houses and teaching music and penmanship.

James Harlan's first banjo was a large gourd strung with horse hair, made for him by his grandfather's servant, known as Uncle Lewis, who drove the family carriage.

"After young Harlan got so he could strike a few tunes, there was a young lady in the neighborhood, Miss Mollie Clark, who took an interest in him, and being a good performer on the banjo herself, she taught him all the fundamental principles that she knew concerning banjo picking," John wrote.

He was considered a "very great entertainer," according to his brother, who added, "Young Harlan was always ready to play for the old fashion dances or help entertain the youngsters in the several communities in which he lived, but never charged anything for this service. It was always rendered cheerfully. However, he made a nominal charge for lessons in penmanship and music."

The family moved to Henry County, Ky, near New Castle, in 1881. In Kentucky, James Harlan continued to teach music and penmanship for a number of years, teaching in Indiana, Ohio, Arkansas, and Tennessee as well.

Around 1915, he began to work for the railroad in Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky. In 1927, the year John Harlan wrote his sketch, his brother was located in Covington, Ky., and had been working for the Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company for three years. He was planning to travel back to Virginia to participate in the Old Fiddler's Contest at Ronceverte.