

## **THE KANE FAMILY, KANE GAP, THE WILDERNESS ROAD, AND FLAT LICK**

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That greatest of all immigration paths in the United States of America has been variously called many things, including Athawominee, The Great Warrior's Path, the Kentucky Road (Trace), and the Boone Trail. It was defined topographically by the geology of the eastern United States. Philadelphia was the greatest port of entry for immigrants from Europe in the colonial era. There was great pressure for these people to move on into the interior of the continent, but the two chains of mountains in the east stood in their way. In reality, the eastern most of these chains, the Blue Ridge / Smokeys is pierced by the Susquehanna River, providing ready access from Philadelphia into the Great Valley of Virginia that lies between the two great mountain chains. But the Alleghanys to the west are an impenetrable wall blocking access to the interior of the country by all land routes other than the Wilderness Trail. The Great Valley runs to the southwest, and funneled all the immigrants from Philadelphia into western Virginia.

In western Virginia and eastern Kentucky there lies a fortuitous alignment of four passes (Moccasin Gap, Kane Gap, Cumberland Gap, and Pine Mountain Gap) and two fords (Speer's Ferry Ford of the Clinch and the Pine Mountain Gap Ford of the Cumberland River) that make passage possible from the East into the Midwest. This article discusses the peculiar geology, history, and relationship of the Kane Family to Moccasin Gap and to Kane Gap.

Moccasin Gap provides water level passage from the Great Valley of Virginia and the Holston River Valley through Clinch Mountain, the first of the Alleghany chain, into the Clinch Valley. In today's terminology this passage has the City of Kingsport, Tennessee to its south, and Gate City, Virginia to its north.

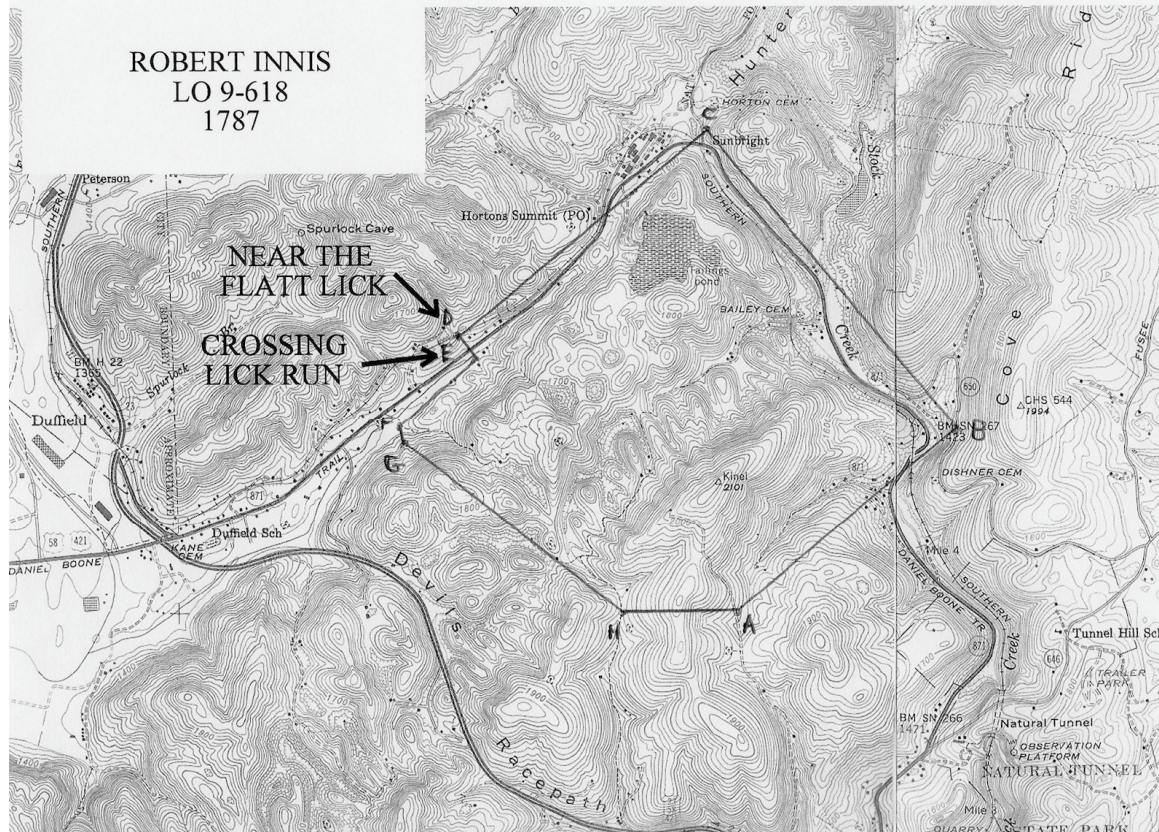
Kane Gap is one of four gaps in Powell Mountain (Hunter's Gap, Eller's Gap, Kane Gap, and Lovelady Gap) that provide passage from Clinch Valley into the Valley of the Powell River. Unfortunately, all these are mountain top passes, and not water level routes. All four gaps saw significant usage. Kane Gap was the gap that was in greatest usage by immigrants on foot in the early days before vehicular use. This gap runs from the present town of Duffield, Virginia into the head of Wallen's Creek Valley.

Duffield is a recent name for the settlement in the Valley of the lower North Fork of the Clinch River. During the pioneer period it was called "Flat Lick" or "Little Flat Lick" in contradistinction to "Big Flat Lick" located at Fraleytown just to the west of Duffield, and part of the same geologic zone. The documentation of the usage of this name is informative. While it is the most frequently mentioned

location noted in the diaries kept by travellers on the Wilderness Trail, it is not noted at all in the index of land grants kept by the Library of Virginia. Within the explanation for this curious set of facts lies the theme of this article.

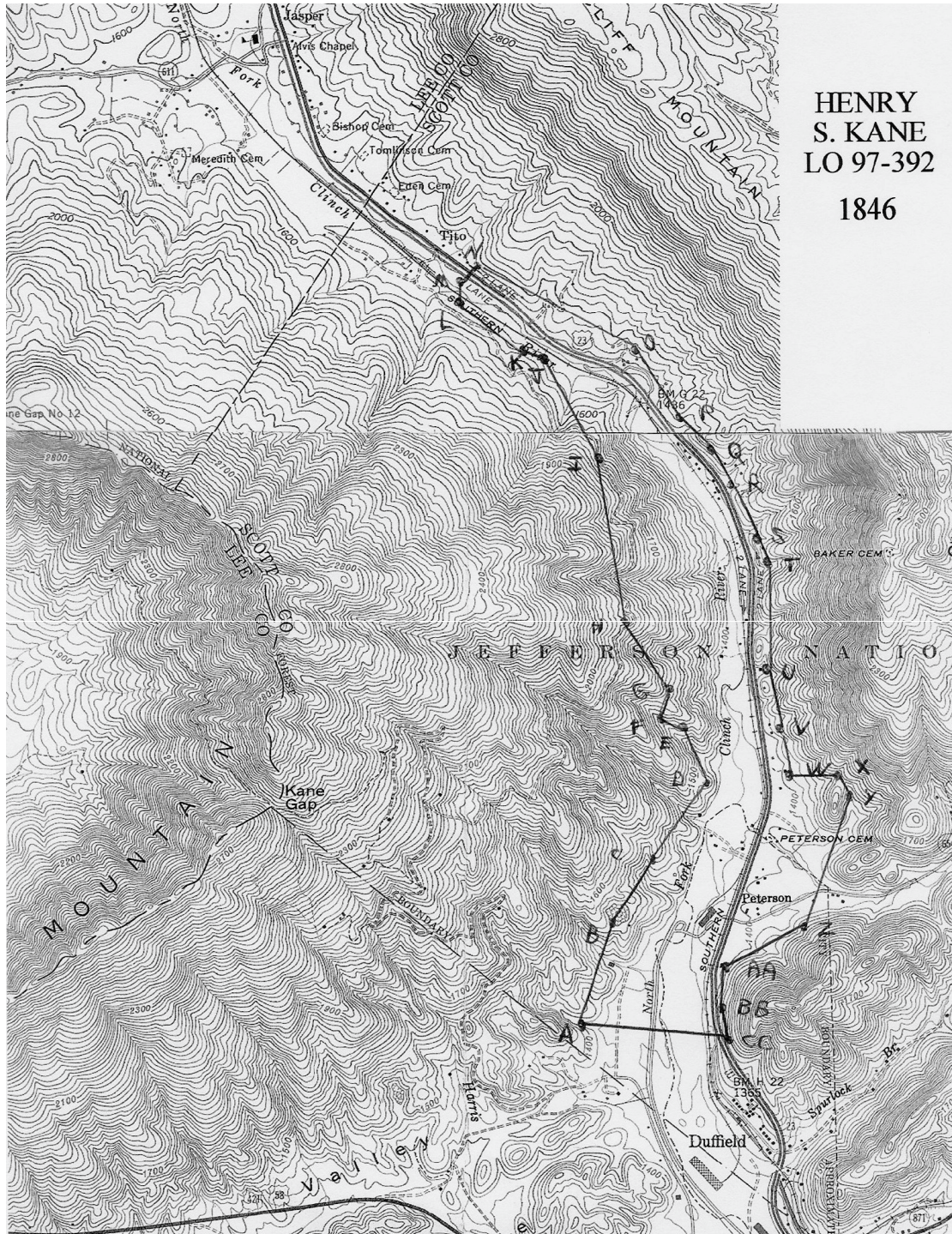
Shale is rock formed from clay mud deposited in the deltas of inland seas 350 million years ago. Trapped within the rock is lots of salt left over from these seas. The Big Stone Gap Shale formation begins locally at the head of Powell Valley between Big Stone Gap and Norton Virginia. In actuality, it is part of the tremendous Chattanooga Shale formation. In the upper reaches of the Valley of the Lower North Fork of the Clinch the Big Stone Gap Shale Formation is covered with earth and limestone. As the river erodes away these upper layers as it coarses to the southwest, it exposes for the first time the layer of salt bearing shale in the outer limits of Duffield. Here, for the first time, water within the Big Stone Gap Shale Formation is free to flow out onto the ground around it. With it, it brings both salt and other minerals, and a blue clay of peculiar characteristics. It is mucky, plastic, sterile, universally hated by farmers, who refer to it as “that ole blue clay”. Its only usages are for making pottery, and as underlayment for garbage dumps. It is the home of crayfish and horse’s tail grass. Cattle will starve on it.

There were several of these salt springs at Greater Duffield. Robert Innis’s 1787 grant (LO 9-618), which documents “Flatt Lick” and “Lick Run”, lays beside the Wilderness Trail at the eastern edge of the Duffield plain.





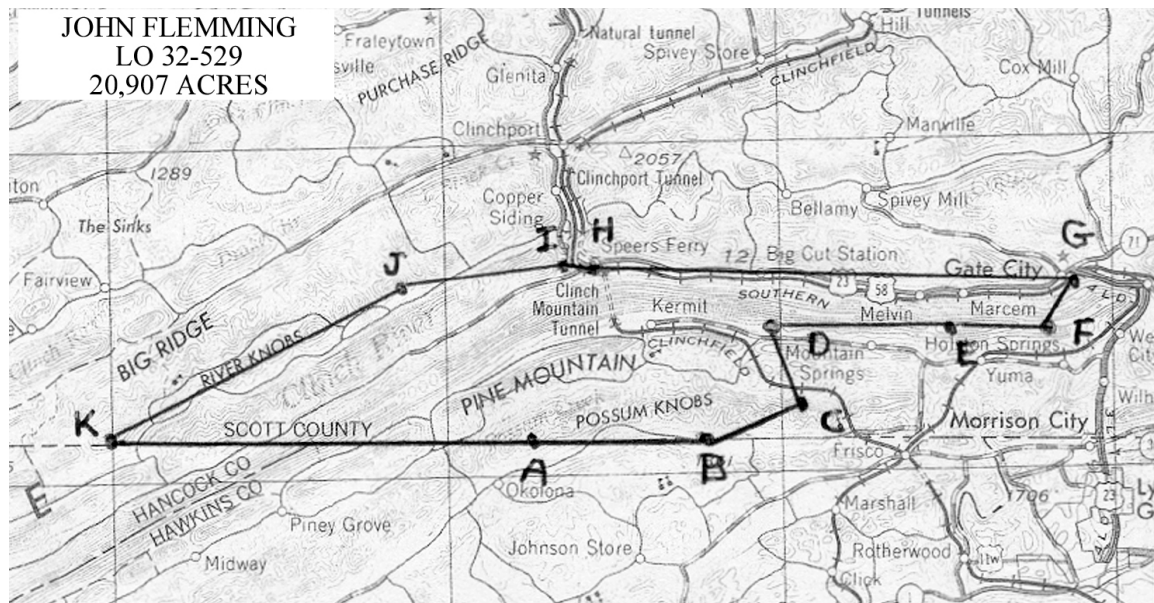
Henry S. Kane's 1846 grant's (LO 97-392) survey starts at a "large Spring", which is known locally as a salt lick, located near the northern extent of Duffield. Local traditionalists say that the main salt lick spring lay under the road fill of US 23 behind the site of the old Duffield School. Continuing the same elevation relationships to the river and to Powell Mountain as one proceeds further west one comes to Big Flat Lick at Fraleytown, and the Buffalo Lick at Blackwater.





The big game animals, such as deer, buffalo, and elk would come to these 'licks' and eat the blue clay with its salt. It was for this reason that the migrants to the west made note of Little Flat Lick in their diaries. It was here that they reprovisioned themselves with fresh meat.

On the other hand, aspiring farmers forsook Little Flat Lick. The first land grant in Duffield was not made until 1846. Grants within the upper end of the Valley of the lower North Fork of the Clinch were made late, and tended to be very small, about 40 acres being typical. On the other hand, the grant covering the route of the Wilderness Trail from Moccasin Gap to Speer's Ferry was for 23,755 acres (Flemming LO 32-553).



A grant for the sweet karst along Stock Creek and at Sunbright east of Duffield, the Innis grant mentioned above, was for 1000 acres, and was made in 1787. The grant for the land at Jasper, which lies just north of Duffield, still in the Valley of the North Fork, but above the layer of shale, was granted in 1791 for 200 acres (LO 24-63 to Breckenridge and Preston). This grant lay on the Lovelady Gap variant of the Wilderness Trail. Archibald Scott got three grants (LO P-709, Q-336, R-99) of contiguous land totaling 1132 acres in Wallen's Creek just to the north of Kane Gap in 1785. It was located on sweet karst land.

The earliest person to have left evidence of having settled at Little Flat Lick was Patrick Kane. He was born in Ireland in 1777, moved first to New York, and then to Norfolk, Virginia. From there he moved to Sullivan County, Tennessee. This is the county Kingsport is in, and which contains the Reedy Creek segment of the Wilderness Road from Bristol leading to East Carter's Valley and the Anderson Block House in Virginia. Patrick is noted in the 1820 census of Scott County, without giving the exact location. He is noted as having been "the largest merchant in the county", and as having been "a prominent lawyer". He died in 1827, and is buried in



the Kane Cemetery at the southeast corner of the main Duffield intersection. This land, along with all the land on the other three corners of the intersection, plus that running up the river to the northern end of the bottomlands, was sold at public auction after the death of one Patrick Kane.



KANE CEMETERY



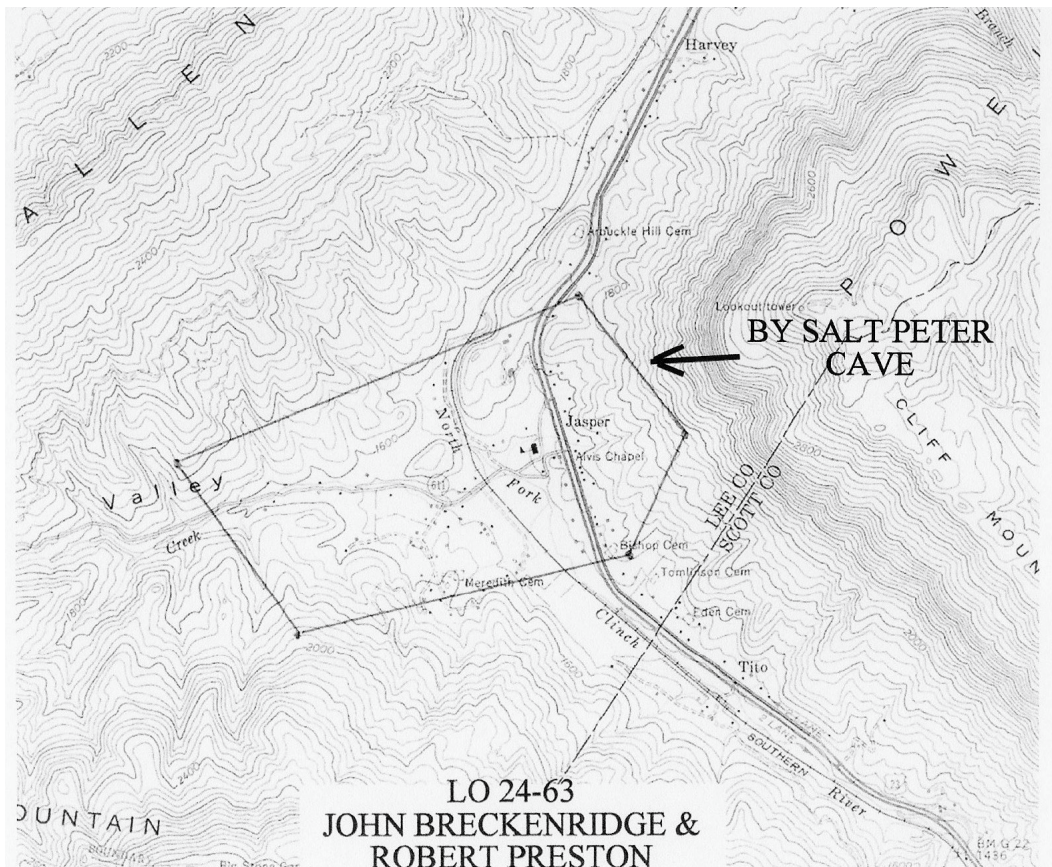
TOMBSTONE  
PATRICK  
KANE



Neither the Land Grants of Virginia, nor the Scott County Land Records, nor the Washington Co. Records (Scott County was part of Washington Co. until 1817) document that Kane owned any land in Virginia. The Sullivan County records for this period are missing. All this would suggest that Patrick Kane was a squatter. This was common in that period.

Let us document two incidences of land occupancy, and even of land sale, of ungranted (squatted) land in the area. In 1780 James Thompson bought land on the western side of Lovelady Gap, and which was already known at “the Lovelady Place” from James Lovelady, for whom the Gap is named. Lovelady did not have legal title to this land. In another sale, the same year, and also from Lovelady to Thompson, was a tract that Lovelady sold to Thompson (Lovelady had no legal title), and which he had bought from “one Gatlif”. Gatlif did not have legal title, and sold ‘his’ land and moved to Kentucky.

The grant at the eastern end of Lovelady Gap, Jasper, in its 1782 survey notes that one of its lines “passes the Salt Peter Cave”. Saltpeter is used in making black gunpowder, and requires a lengthy process of mining cave soil, followed by extraction. This implies the existence of a significant, at least semipermanent, local population that had worked this cave before the land on which it existed, was sold.





The first land grant (LO 97-392) that can be tied to Duffield is that of Henry Solon Kane in 1846. It was for 520 1/4<sup>th</sup> acres. It is noteworthy for two reasons. Its southernmost corner lay at one of those salt lick springs that defined Little Flat Lick. Therefore, all its extent lay above the worthless blue clay. The other thing of note is that it touched the tip of the point that the Wilderness Trail used to begin its ascent to Kane Gap.

In later years the Kane family acquired legal title to all the land between LO 97-392 and the southern side of the intersection in the center of Duffield, and which sold in 1947.

None of this proves that Kane Gap was named after either Patrick or Henry Kane. There is an oral tradition that Kane Gap was named after the common river cane that grows in the deep spring fed ravine on the eastern side of the gap. On the other hand, it could suggest that at one point in time, Little Flat Lick became known for its association with the Kanes.

Henry Solon Kane was the son of Patrick, and was born in Scott County. He lived his adult life in Gate City, and was the builder of the Kane Mansion that stood above Kane Street in that town. The family owned several slaves. He was a distinguished lawyer, a Presidential Elector in 1844, and a member of a committee assigned to meet the needs of Confederate recruits in Scott County. He is buried in the Estill Cemetery in Gate City. Rufus Ayers, who was to become Attorney General of Virginia, and a wealthy industrialist of Southwest Virginia and of East Tennessee, read law under Henry. Rufus is also buried in the Estill Cemetery.

Henry bought property in various places in Scott County, probably as investments. He also bought property on Black Mountain in what is now Lee and Wise County. The case had a very convoluted history, and wound up in the Virginia Court of Appeals. The Kane family is perhaps best known for this situation.

On January 30, 1796 Virginia granted to Nathaniel Taylor, Nathan Fields, and John Johnson 62,000 acres (LO 35-291) on Black Mountain. They were land speculators. Almost immediately Fields sold his share (4,000 acres) to Taylor, which Taylor sold to John Crabtree, who sold to John C. Olinger II of Olinger, Virginia, leaving the residual 49,200 acres to the remaining owners. On October 21, 1834 the Lee County Court sold 48,000 acres to John C. Olinger II for back taxes ie. \$4.92. On November 20, 1842 Lee County put back on their land books 1,000 acres that they had removed from their records, and sold them to Henry S. Kane, Sr. In a separate deal on May 12, 1853 Olinger sold to Henry S. Kane Sr. one half interest in the 48,200 acres bought by him in 1834 at the delinquent tax sale. Olinger willed his half to his son John C. Olinger III.

Former Confederate General John D. Imboden and Rufus Ayers served as intermediaries between John C. Olinger III and C. S. O. Tintsman. Olinger III sold to Tintsman. Almost immediately Henry Kane II and relatives sued Tintsman over this

land sale. The case was tried first in the Scott County Court, which in 1880 decreed that this land belonged to C. S. O. Tintsman. In 1882 Tintsman, who had moved ownership to the Tinsalia Co., and which in 1882 sold it to E. K. Hyndman, who that year sold it to Virginia Coal and Iron Company.

VCI later split into the corporate entities known through the years as Stonega Coke and Coal Company, Westmoreland Coal Company, and Penn-Virginia Corporation. These entities were to become the dominant coal companies of Lee and Wise Counties. The outcome on this court case was so uncertain that the company delayed development of their industrial empire until The Virginia Court of Appeals ruled that the Johnson heirs had abandoned their claim to the land for fifty years, and awarded it to VCI.

In one way or another, Kane Gap encompasses history all the way from Indian times to the Twenty First Century. It still sits there, unchanged since the days of Chief Benge and of Daniel Boone. It is a rare gem in American history, pristine yet still in its quite grandeur.

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