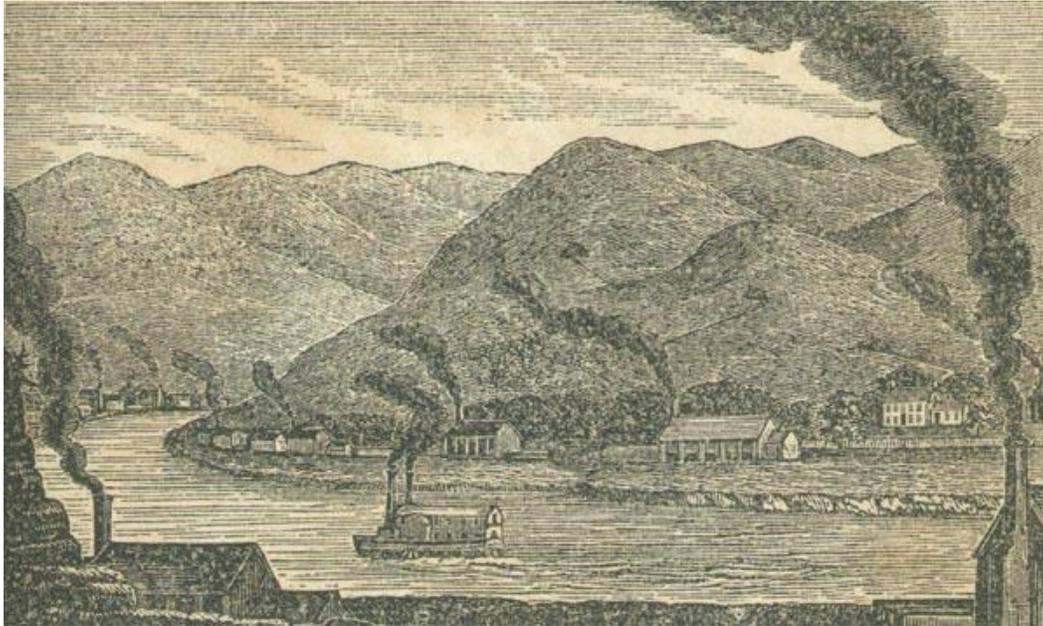


**ON THIS DAY
IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY
NOVEMBER 10**



Kanawha Salt Works

Kanawha Valley salt manufacturers formed the Kanawha Salt Company, the nation's first business trust, on November 10, 1817.

CSO: SS.8.9, ELA.8.1

Investigate the Document: (*Sketches of history, life, and manners in the United States. RB 917.3 R888s*)

1. What is a "gum?"
2. Who was the first man to establish salt-works in the Kanawha Valley?
3. The salt in the Kanawha Valley was useful for the preservation of _____.

Think Critically: What did early pioneer salt makers use as a furnace fuel in the manufacturing process? What led to demise of the Kanawha salines in the 1850s? What major industry has found other uses for salt in the Kanawha Valley?

means become heated or confined. No opinion has been expressed respecting this phenomenon, or any pains taken to ascertain the nature or cause of its existence.

Salt-works.—The salt-works in this county are another natural curiosity; they abound on both sides of the river, for the distance of twelve miles. This is another evidence of the providential care of the Deity. Here is a spot, that were it not for this article of commerce, and the facility with which it can be sent to market, would be destitute of almost every comfort and convenience of life. Immense quantities of salt are made here annually; upon an average about one million of bushels, which employ one thousand hands. This salt is sent down Kenhawa river in boats to every part of the western country, and exchanged for articles of consumption. It appears, however, notwithstanding this great bounty of nature, that very few of the proprietors have realized any solid advantage from it; owing, perhaps, to want of capital in the commencement, want of skill, or want of commercial integrity, or perhaps to all three.

The salt water is obtained from the bottom of the river by means of a gum,* which is from eighteen to twenty feet in length, and from four to five feet wide; these gums are from the sycamore tree. They are prepared by making a crow at one end, and a head to fit it tight. This being done, about twenty hands repair to the place where it is to be sunk, which is at the edge of low water, on the river; not any where, for the salt water is only found within certain limits. But to return, all hands proceed with provisions, and plenty to drink, to the place. The gum is first placed in the water on one end, (the one with the crow,) a man is then let down into it by a windlass, and digs round the edge with an instrument suited to the purpose; when he fills a bucket with the sand, gravel, or earth, which he meets in succession; the bucket is immediately drawn up, emptied, and let

*An American term for a hollow tree, after it is taken from the forest.

down again, and so on till the gum descends to a rock, which is uniformly at the same distance. As the man digs, the gum sinks; but no man can remain in it longer than twenty or thirty minutes, owing to the excessive cold that exists at the bottom; and another one is let down, and so on in rotation, till their task is performed. In the mean time a pump is placed in the gum to pump out the water as the men work, which otherwise would not only hinder, but drown them. This pump is kept continually at work; about eight or ten days and nights are consumed in this operation; the head is then put in, which effectually excludes the fresh water; and a man from a lofty scaffold commences boring through the rock, which takes some time, as the best hands will not bore more than two feet per day, and the depth is from one to two hundred and fifty, and in some instances three hundred feet, through a solid rock! The moment he is through, the salt water spouts up to a great height, and of stronger or weaker quality as it is near or remote from a certain point on the river, which is the place where salt water was first discovered. Their manner of boring is nothing more than an iron of great strength, and of considerable length, made very sharp at one end, while the other end is fixed into a shaft of wood, and a heavy lever fixed to this; the performer stands still on the scaffold and continues to ply the augur (as it is called) in a perpendicular direction. This part of the business is not so laborious as the other; nor does the performer require that relief which is indispensable in sinking the gum; but he must have some dozens of augurs continually going to and from the smith's shop. I saw several of these at work, and likewise those at the gum; it is impossible for any one to guess what a wretched appearance those poor creatures make when they are drawn out of this gum. They are unable to stand, and shiver as if they would shake to pieces; it can hardly be told whether they are black or white, their blood being so completely chilled. The trouble of making salt, after salt water is obtained, is trifling. When the man finishes boring, a tin tube is placed in the rock, and by means of a machine, which is worked by a horse, the

water is thrown into cisterns, from which it is committed to the boilers. This water is so strong that they make it into salt twice in twenty four hours! All their wood being consumed, they are now boiling with coal, which abounds in their mountains.

These salt-works have very recently been established. Some few years since, in the latter part of a very dry summer, the river being lower than it was ever known since it was settled by white people, the top of an old gum was discovered at the edge of low water, and salt water issuing out of it. In many places, where the fresh water had left it, it was incrustated into salt by the heat of the sun. It is supposed that the Indians, when they were in possession of the country, sunk the gum, and perhaps made some attempts at making salt. Col. David Ruffner, a very enterprising man, was the first that established salt-works in Kenhawa, at the place just mentioned; after him several others; but the old well, as it is called, that is, where the gum was discovered, is by far the strongest water, and it is weaker in proportion as it is distant from it, either up or down the river. Col. Ruffner invented a machine which forces the water up hill, to the distance of three miles, for which I understand he obtained a patent. The salt made here is not so fair as that made at King's works, in Washington county, but it is much stronger, and better for preserving meat. I saw this proved in Alabama; the meat (that is, bacon,) that was cured with the salt from King's works, spoiled, while that which was salted with the Kenhawa salt, did not. Great quantities of it is consumed in Alabama; they take it in boats down the Ohio and up the Tennessee river. A great quantity is likewise taken up the Cumberland to Nashville. But what astonishes me, is, that they have to bore double the depth now to what they did at first; even at the old well, the water sunk, and they were compelled to pursue it by boring; this is the case with all of them.

These salt-works are dismal looking places; the sameness of the long low sheds; smoking boilers; men, the roughest that can be seen, half naked; hundreds of

boat-men; horses and oxen, ill-used and beat by their drivers; the mournful screaming of the machinery, day and night; the bare, rugged, inhospitable looking mountain, from which all the timber has been cut, give to it a gloomy appearance.* Add to this the character of the inhabitants, which, from what I have seen myself, and heard from others, lack nothing to render them any thing but a respectable people. Here have settled people from the north, the east, and the west of the United States, and some from the nether end of the world.— However refined, however upright, however enlightened, crafty and wicked they might have been previous to their emigration, they have become assimilated, and mutually stand by each other, no matter what the case is, and wo be to the unwary stranger who happens to fall into their hands. I never saw or heard of any people but these, who gloried in a total disregard of shame, honour and justice, and an open avowal of their superlative skill in petty fraud; and yet they are hospitable to a fault, and many of them are genteel. I see men here whose manners and abilities would do honour to any community, and whilst I admired, I was equally surprised that people of their appearance should be content to live in a place which has become a by-word. But their females in a great measure extenuate this hasty sketch. As nature compensates us in many respects for those advantages she denies us in others, and in all her works has mingled good with evil, you have a striking instance of this in the female part of the society of this place. In no part of the United States, at least where I have visited, are to be found females who surpass them in those virtues that adorn the sex. They possess the domestic virtues in an exemplary degree; they are modest, discreet, industrious and benevolent, and with all, they are fair and beautiful; albeit, I would be sorry to see one of those amiable females become a widow in this iron country, in which, however, for the honour of human nature be it remembered, there are a few noble exceptions amongst the other sex, which

*The river, which is extremely beautiful, is the only relief to the scenery.

may justly be compared to diamonds shining in the dark.

As this famous county is to be a link in the chain which is to connect that part of Virginia east of the mountains with the whole of the western country, I have been at some pains to pick up every thing respecting it. As curiosity leads one to trace things to their origin, such as the history of countries, and remarkable events, I have traced this part of Virginia as far back as the year seventeen hundred and seventy-four, to the memorable battle of the Point, fought between the whites and the Indians, at the mouth of this river. I have seen several men who were in that bloody and hard fought battle, and have just returned from viewing the ground on which it was fought. I have seen that part occupied by the "Augusta militia," commanded by Gen. Lewis, and that by the Indians. I have seen the bones of the latter sticking in the bank of the Ohio river; part of the bank having fallen in where the battle was fought discloses their bones sticking out in a horizontal position: the engagement lasted from sunrise till dark; the victory was claimed by the whites. From this bank, which is a hundred feet, or thereabouts, in height, I had a view of the beautiful river Ohio: at this place it is said to be five hundred yards wide.

This river, which is justly celebrated for its beauty and utility, flows in a smooth current as silent as night; not the least noise can be heard from it; not the smallest ripple is seen. This, and its limpid appearance, the rich foliage which decorates its banks and looks as though it were growing in the water, by reason of its luxuriance, completely conceals the earth, and constitutes its beauty. If the reader can imagine a vast mirror of endless dimension, he will have an idea of this beautiful river. It is so transparent that you may see pebbles at the bottom; not a rock or stone of any size, has a place in the Ohio. Kenhawa is a very handsome river, being generally as smooth as the Ohio, but by no means so limpid; it has a greenish appearance; you cannot see the bottom, except at the shoals. And more than all this, I have seen the celebrated heroine, Ann Bailey, who

richly deserves more of her country, than a name in its history.

This female is a Welch woman, and is now very old. At the time Gen. Lewis's army lay at the Point, a station on Kenhawa river, Ann would shoulder her rifle, hang her shot-pouch over her shoulder, and lead a horse laden with ammunition to the army, two hundred miles distant, when not a man could be found to undertake the perilous task—the way thither being a perfect wilderness, and infested with Indians. I asked her if she was not afraid—she replied, "No, she was not; she trusted in the Almighty—she knew she could only be killed, and she had to die some time." I asked her if she never met with the Indians in her various journies, (for she went several times.) "Yes, she once met with two, and one of them said to the other let us kill her, (as she supposed, from the answer of the other,) no, said his companion, God dam, too good a soger, and let her pass;" but how, said I, did you find the way,—"Steered by the trace of Lewis's army, and I had a pocket compass too." "Well, but how did you get over the water courses?"—Some she forded, and some she swam, on others she made a raft: she "halways carried a hax and a hauger, and she could chop as well has hany man;" such was her dialect. This is a fact that hundreds can attest. A gentleman informed, that while the army was stationed near the mouth of Elk, he walked down that river to where it intersects with Kenhawa, for the purpose of fishing; he had not remained long there before he heard a plunge in the water, and upon looking up, he discovered Ann on horseback swimming toward him; when the horse gained the landing, she observed, "cod, I'd like to a swum." She was quite a low woman in height, but very strongly made, and had the most pleasing countenance I ever saw, and for her, very affable. "And what would the General say to you, when you used to get safe to camp with your ammunition?" "Why he'd say, you're a brave soldier, Ann, and tell some of the men to give me a dram." She was fond of a dram. When I saw the poor creature, she was almost naked; she begged a dram, which I gave to

her, and also some other trifle. I never shall forget Ann Bailey. The people here repeat many sayings of hers, such as "the howl upon the helm on the bank of the helk"—that is, an owl on an elm upon the bank of Elk river.

History.—Kenhawa county consists of two strings of inhabitants, upon Kenhawa and Elk rivers. It was reclaimed from the Indians and the buffaloes, by degrees, with the loss of many lives by the former, until Gen. Wayne subdued them. The buffaloes were so numerous on this river, that they made large roads through the bottoms. Elks, deer and bears were likewise numerous. None of the buffaloes are to be seen now, but bear and deer are still numerous, and elks are often seen on the head of Elk river, which empties into Kenhawa river at a little town called Charleston, the seat of justice for this county.* It is navigable its whole length, two hundred miles. In this town are four stores, two taverns, a court-house, a jail, and an academy; the three last are of brick; and a post-office, a printing press, and some very handsome buildings. The first permanent settlement was made in 1786, though they had to defend themselves with forts, or at least one, which was built near where a Mr. Jones now lives, called Jones's ferry. Mr. Morrice, a Mr. Cea, this Jones, and Col. Donnally, the hero of Donnally's fort, were the first; others soon followed, but M. was the head man; he had a boat-yard, built boats, and sold them to people who emigrated to the west. He had money at interest, and was the successful rival of Col. D. They never agreed; M. carried every point, he was looked up to by the people, and what he said was the law, let that be what it might. Courts of justice were established, magistrates appointed, and all as this lord of the land dictated. Some person, however, who had a bond on M., had the audacity to sue him. The court sat in an old house, or cabin rather, as the story goes. Some

* I saw one which was caught when it was young on Elk river. It was quite gentle, and went at large, though nearly grown; it belonged to Col. Ruffner.

MICHAEL
SEE

suits were disposed of, before M.'s suit was called. At length the suit was called, and one of the magistrates came down, or rather got up, went out behind the house, and awaked a brother chip, who was lying on the ground drunk, saying "get up! M.'s suit is coming on." Another magistrate was lying drunk on the floor; he was roused by the sheriff; at length they have a court, and proceed to business. The case was argued on both sides by their respective attornies, and the jury was sent out to a blacksmith's shop. You have seen these shops; they generally have a log cut out of some length, on the opposite side from the door; at least they have in the western country, but what the use of it is, I never learned, unless it be to hang their work on; or, perhaps, let in the air in warm weather; but to the purpose. After the Jury were fastened in, M. gets a three gallon keg full of whisky, and thrusts it in through this window, saying to the Jury, "now do your best." They were not long, we may suppose, in agreeing; when they came into the court, their verdict was, "we, the jury, find for the defendant!" The lawyer for the plaintiff was thunderstruck; nothing was clearer, a plain bond! He grated his teeth, and cursed them all to himself; returned the plaintiff (which was equally extraordinary,) his fee, jumped on his horse, and was never seen there afterwards. Thus was Kenhawa settled, and thus was justice administered, and with little variation continues the same. Many suits have been eight, ten, and some fifteen years on the docket. The new modelling of the judiciary, has, however, of late, measureably relieved the people.

Climate.—The climate on Kenhawa river is very hot in summer; the thermometer rising from ninety to a hundred; not a breeze relieves you from suffocating heat; when it does, it uniformly brows up the river from the north west; these breezes, however, seldom prevail except in the fall and winter months. This great difference between the climate and that of Greenbriar and Monroe, of which it is several miles north, must be attributed to that of its being much lower, and hemmed in