Uncle Jim's Green River Diary

Jim R. Dowling

Compiled by
Charles Dowling Williams

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Doris Cloar, Nadine G. Hawkins, Janice and George McCombs, Maryglenn McCombs, Reggie McCubbin, Whitney McCubbin, Paula McGlasson, Vicki Kidd McDaniel, and Betty Ann Russell Morrell for their assistance.

Charles Dowling Williams
14 November 1996
Munfordville, Kentucky

PROLOGUE

The writer of this diary, Jim R. Dowling, was born in 1837 in Washington County, Ohio. He lived in the township of Fearing, near Marietta. When the Civil War broke out, he and his brother, Wesley, enlisted in the Union Army. He fought in the Battle of Gettysburg, but wound up being a prisoner of war at Andersonville. After the War, he and Wesley moved to Kentucky. There, he lived within sight of Kentucky's famous Green River about five hundred yards from his brother's home, which is the Dowling House in Woodsonville, currently owned by Mr. and Mrs. George McCombs. In 1894, Uncle Jim built the boat for this "camping out trip." He was 57 years old. His brother and next door neighbor, Wesley Dowling, had four daughters and a son. Jim's niece, Sarah Elizabeth Dowling, had married Elisha D. Gardner on April 24, 1889, when she was twenty years old. Elisha, whom Uncle Jim refers to as his "brother", and his "nephew", was his camping companion on this trip up, then down, Green River in September, 1894. On this trip, they travelled over 135 miles by river, tallied more than 76 Ginseng roots dug up, some paw paws, 23 squirrels killed and mostly eaten, and a few pints of Kentucky Whiskey, "the renowned beverage of the old state" duly consumed and enjoyed. Uncle Jim must have had the urge to write, because keeping a diary on the river successfully with the real ink he had to use is no small feat. This monograph is a literal transcription from the handwritten diary of Uncle Jim Dowling.

SEPTEMBER 1894

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

"A Camping Out Trip Up Green River"

by Jim R. Dowling

Compiled by his great, great nephew
Charles Dowling Williams

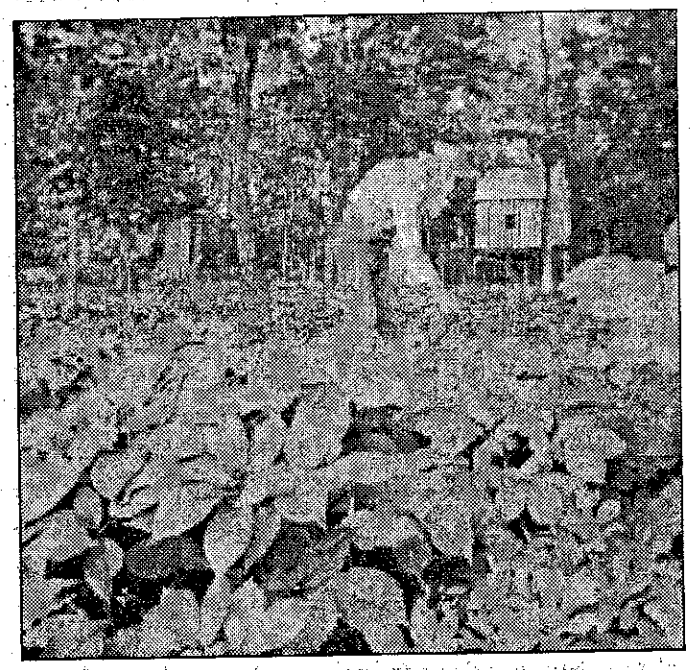
A Camping Out Trip Up Green River, Ky

The Summer of 1894 I was living at Woodsonville, Ky. And my health was poorly that season and concluded to take a trip up Green River and camp out a little while. My Brother Wesley, Elisha Gardner and I made a boat to suit the occation. The boat was 23 ft long and had 4 compartments or boxes to shut our goods up in. Two boxes in each end with locks to them. We fixed two set of oar locks to the boat to row with and I had a tent made to fit the boat so we could sleep in the boat providing we could not put our tent up we had along. We had two cots to sleep on by placeing one in each end of the boat. Green River is a beautiful stream of nice clear water winding in and out through the hills and bluffs of Ky. Sometimes it gets on a big tear and is not so clear and nice. The river is about 500 miles long and when you are standing up on the bluff above it looking down on the water it looks green and probily for that reason it was called green river. The river is mostly fed by springs and little glens that run back into the hills a short distance. The water is generally soft and cool good to drink any time.

Elisha Gardner and Sarah Elizabeth Dowling Gardner

Sep 3rd

My Nephew Elisha Gardner and myself were the ones to go on this trip, and we got busy this day getting things we needed stored in the boat such as blankets and provisions we needed for the trip and by 3 p m We were ready to start from a little village on the bluffs of the river Named after one of the first settlers of the country Woodson with the ville put to it. He settled there in 1795 three hundred miles above the mouth of the river. We went 3 miles the first day to Roaring Spring a spring rushing out from the rocks making a noise similar to a small cataract. We were one houre and 15 minuts getting there and concluded to tie up there get supper and stay the first night. Sleeping in the boat for there was no good place around there to put up our tent. We had plenty grub cooked and made some coffee had our supper and dishes washed up and the weather beeing nice we took our cots out on the shore and layed down on them to rest and talk, look at the stares listen to the music of the night insects until time to go to bed. We took our cots into the boat mine in the stern and Lishes in the bow but we could not sleep much on the account of the noise from the spring and strange beds.



Uncle Jim in his ginseng patch with his cabin on stilts in background. Woodsonville, Hart County, Kentucky around 1894.

Sep 4th

Up Early this morning and breakfast by 6 am Bacon fried potatos cooked with their coats on. Coffee and bread we had a good breakfast with melon to finish off with. After breakfast we started out for a little hunt for squirls and Ginseng. After looking three hours finding no squirls and two dozzen roots Ginseng we returned to the boat and started on up the river 9^{15} a m and pulled in at Savage Mill spring 10 am looked for squirls and Ginseng about one houre got 7 root Ginseng but no squirls came back to the boat made coffee and lunched on biscuit preserves tomatos & at 1 pm we pulled out and coasted along the bluffs looking for ginseng Got 7 roots when we got to Glen Lillie spring 3 pm 5 miles from Roaring Spring. At this place in the 30 and 40's there use to be quite a business carried on in the iron business. Had a furnace there built in 1832. The furnace is still there but considerable used up from age. Large trees have grown on top of it since it has been used. The owners of the place try to keep up its appearence by mending it now and then. If it could talk what grand times it could tell about the Natives around gethering in there drinking old Kentucky whiskey one of the renound beverage of the old state. After a good nights sleep we got up the next morning –

and started on up the river 9 15 am and pulled in at Savage Mill Spring 10 am hobed for squirels and Ginsong about one hours got 7 root Ginseng but no squirels Came back to the boat made coffee and lunched on biscuit Preserves Tomatoes &c at 1 pm we pulled out and coasted along the Bluffs looking for ginseng Got 7 roots when we got to Glen Lillie Spring 3 8 pm 5 miles from Roaring Spring. At this place in the 30 and 40's there use to be quite a business carried on in the iron business. Had a furnace there built in 1832 The furnace is still there but considerable used up from age Large trees have grown on top of it since it has been used. The owners of the place try to keep up its appearence by mending it now and then. If it could talk what grand times it could tell about the Natives around gathering in there drinking old Kentucky whisky, one of the renound beverages of the old State. after a good nights sleep we got up the next Morning — Sep 5th very much refreshed while I was getting breakfast Lish was out in the woods and killed two squirels. after breakfast we went hunting for squirels and Ginseng. I had been bothered with Rheumatis in my left arm all summer and in our travels over the hills and hollows we came to a hollow about ten ft deep with a tree lying across it Lish walked over on it and I followed after him

Sample page of Jim Dowling's diary.

Sep 5th

Very much refreshed while I was getting breakfast Lish was out in the woods and killed two squirls. after breakfast we went hunting for squirls and Ginseng. I had been bothered with Rheumatis in my left arm all summer and in our travels over the hills and hollows we came to a hollow about ten ft deep with a tree laying acrost it Lish walked over on it and I followed after him when I got out in the middle of it the log broke with me and down I went through the trash and rocks making quite a racket the way I went down I knowed I was hurt Lish looked around and seen where I was and said Uncle Jim are you hurt I said no but I spoke to quick. The pain in that arm was something terable I was groaning as if I was mashed all to pieces Lish got hold of me and helped me out and for about five minutes I sure was in pain Then it eased up all gone the Rheumaties with it. That was the end of the Rheumaties in that arm. We got a dozen root of Ginseng came back to the boat cooked the squirls for dinner and after dinner went to see General Buckners pleasure boat he had fixed up a small Engine to run it on the river. We put in the afternoon looking around and hunting Lish killed an other squirl which we dressed for breakfast. We were getting down to regular camp life now. We fished a while in Eving but got no fish. We got our sleep went to bed again in the boat and had a good night sleep.

Sep 6th

After breakfast we packed up for a short run up the river landed and took a hunt through a large tract of woods seen plenty signs of wild turkeys and found 19 roots of Ginseng. 11^{30} am we pulled out again up the river looking along for a spring where we could have dinner while going along the shore a 2 lb white perch jump into the boat a big surprise to me. We came to a spring about two miles and called it good luck spring made coffee had dinner cleaned our fish for supper when we pulled out for Lanes Mill getting there 3 pm. Went up to see the mill. It is run by an overshot wheele from a large spring high up the bank. I got a pail of water went back to the boat to make some lemonade but could not get into the box where the lemons were. Had to wait until Lish came back with the keys. There was a high Rail Road bridge at this place and Lish was on that when he came back and I called to him to drop me the keys. They were on a ring and it was very stoney at this place where he droped them and the result was two of them broke and bounced away found part of one the other could find no where had to break the lock and trow away but hapened to have a spare lock for its place. We had our lemonade and I wrote a card to Brother Wesley at Woodsonville. Then we run up the river one mile to Wyatts crossing went to his house got some biscuit came

back and had supper and camped there for the night. We took a strole along the bluff killed a squirl went into a tobacco patch got some tobacco wormes and baited the trot line with the worms and bird flesh and stretched it across the river. After spending the night there thinking we would have a lot of fish in the morning. But alass when we looked the line over not a fish did we have.

Sep 7th

Got up early this morning got breakfast and ate it with a relish for our appitites were getting into good working order now. After breakfast we started out on another hunt for that was what we were out for. After climbing over the hills two or three hours getting 7 roots of Ginseng we came back to Wyatts and the lady wanted to know if we liked Buttermilk - of course we did - after drinking about one gallon we went back to the boat had our dinner and moved up the river one mile to Smiths Saw Mill. He had just set up his mill in a heavey beach wood to saw it up into all kinds of lumber. After seeing what we could there we moved up the river one mile more and camped at trolley Spring. We gave it that name by there beeing a wire going from the spring up the bluff 3 or 4 hundred yards to a house and they had a pail hitched to a roller on the wire and let it run down to the spirng under a spout.

Sep 8th

After breakfast we pulled out at 6^{40} for better fishing water than that. We run up to 300 Mill Springs. Here was another mill run with an overshot wheele a very large wheel. The water had 60 ft. fall and coldest and clearest water I most ever saw in hot weather like we were having then. We weighed ourselves here and found we were not getting to fat then we run on up to Linn Camp getting there 11^{30} am. Made coffee and had a lunch then started out with our shoes off and pulling the boat over six riffles getting to Little Barren River 3^{00} pm. Elisha went to a small town there and got some biscuit eggs and some daylie papers sent to us there and by 5 pm we were on our way up the river looking for good place to camp over Sunday. But finding no spring we camped the night at a sand bar and used river water for our supper and breakfast.

Sep 9th

Sunday morning after breakfast we started on up the river looking for a spring after pulling our boat over a long and hard riffle for near a mile we came to a spring and tied up for the day read the papers and intertained some visitors that came around to see us.

Sep 10th

Monday morning. We pulled out and soon came to another riffle full of snags logs and had to saw some of them out of the way so we could get our boat by and soon after it began to rain and we had to get the cover of the boat on to keep dry. We could not row the boat much with the cover on so made slow headway. We got to Dobsons spring branch 11 am when it rained very hard about one hour. Near the end of the shower while we

were in the boat I heard a great roaring and I thought a tornado was coming. I was looking out to see where it was. Elisha knew what it was and had a good laugh at me. There was a cave up the bluff about 75 yards and the rain had started so that the gulleys back in the country took an under ground course to this cave and came out rushing down the hill through the rocks which made a big nois a great portain of this part of Ky had sink holes and the surface water runs into them is why there is so many springs. There is hills and valleys but no stream running through the valley to some other stream. After the rain was over we went to the cave to find a dry place to make a fire to get our dinner with. This cave was open in front and run back quite a distance with a big rock over head for a roof. After dinner Elisha went to some of the neighbors to get some provisions for us. This place beeing his childhood home he was pretty well intertained after he came back got his gun to shoot some squirls and I proceeded to get some supper for our hungry selves. Elisha killed one squirl while he was out. We ate our supper washed the dishes then had a camp chat then prepared for a night sleep. The air was chilly and our blankets wet or damp and we could not keep warm and did not sleep much. We were up by daylight had a big fire to warm by.

Sep 11th

We put out two fish hooks last night near the boat and in the night a three lb catfish got on one of the hooks and it made so much racket Lish had to get out of bed and get it off the hook. While I was getting breakfast this morning Elisha went out in the woods and killed 2 squirls. After Breakfast we cleaned the catfish for dinner and got all our blankets out on the brush and rocks to dry out. Then I took a stroll through the woods to look for Ginseng and Lish stayed home to keep house and while doing so a squirl came to camp to see him and he shot it. When I got back he went to one of the neighbors and exchanged it for some milk. Then we got our dinner ready. I had to eat most of the fish myself for Elisha did not like catfish very much. After dinner we took a hunt through the woods for Ginseng found a few roots. We went to Elisha's old home got a good drink of water from the old spring he use to carry water from when he was a boy. No one living there now. The house burned down some years ago. When we got back to the boat concluded to have mush and milk for supper for we had corn meal with us. We enjoyed the supper fine thought it a rare treat and while we were sitting around the fire this evening we caught another fish on the hook and line.

Sep 12th

After breakfast we went to Mr. Fishers and got 4 melons one Water melon and three mush melons went back to the boat and pulled out 10 am for Steep Hollow there we took a little walk came back and eat lunch. Then we commenced our trip up river wadeing and pulling our boat over Riffle after Riffle and stoped at a place called Cain Bottom using river water once more for our coffee and cooking. The country around here was some on the wild order. The owls were making all kind of noises. When we were lounging on our cots under the trees after dark one big owl got on a limb over our heads and squalled out Who Who are you. Elisha got his gun saying I will show you who we are but the old Owl did not stay for the answer. We missed getting our biscuits this day and had to make some kind of cakes out of Gray ham flour and corn meal we had with us for our supper and breakfast.

Sep 13th

After breakfast this morning we went to look for Ginseng found a few roots and a land turtle which we took along for a relick. Got back to the boat and pulled out 10 am and the riffles were coming thick and fast. The water was very low this part of the river. After working along for 5 miles we pulled up at Willis Gardners, Elisha's uncle. Here we concluded we had enough of that kind of traveling. Were intending to go to Greensburg 25 miles further but the river was to low for us. So we tied up and fixed ourselves the best we could and went to his house spent the afternoon and night with him and the next morning we took a hunt after looking around over the place.

Sep 14th

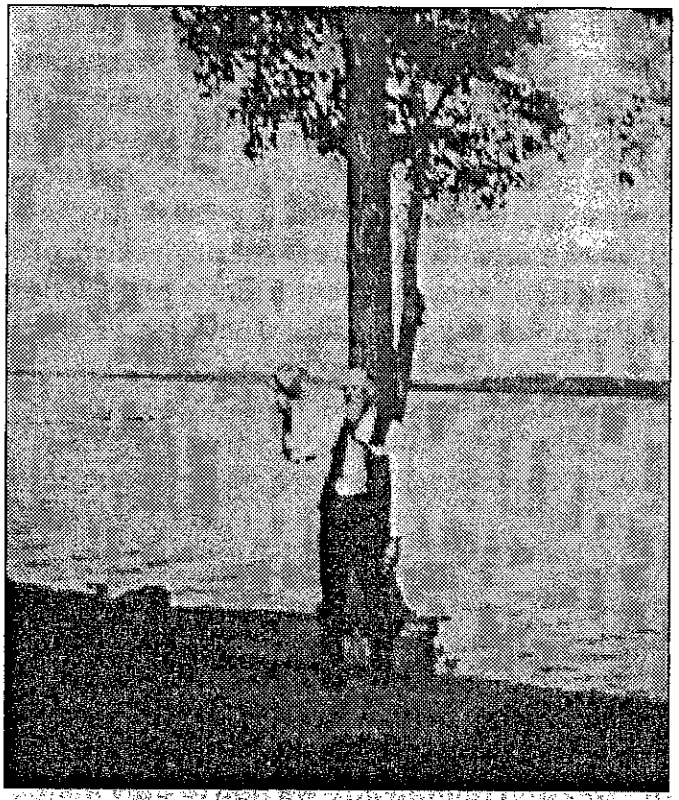
This morning Mr. Gardners his wife two children and ourselves went down to the boat got in took a ride down the river one mile to see three persons Baptized then came back to our landing and went home with them for dinner after dinner we went out to look for Ginseng found a few roots killed one squirl and watched for another one in the tops of them tall trees most all afternoon and had to go away without it .

Sep 15th

We stayed at Mr. Gardners over night and in the morning Him and Elisha went to Greensburg a horse back and I went into the woods to look for Ginseng as I was interested in the Ginseng business I got 7 roots that forenoon and some Pawpaws. Elisha and his Uncle getting back about one o'clock. After dinner we went down to the boat got our bottle out and had a treat all around of old Kentuck whiskey with 4 or 5 kinds of herb put into it to make a new kind of bitters.

Sep 16th

Sunday and raining and we had to stay inside until after dinner. It stoped raining and we went down to the boat and found things in a mess, the rain had leaked through the boxes we had the things in disolbed our sugar and salt made dough of our meal and flour and wet our blankets and clothes –



Uncle Jim at Lake Minnetonka, Minnesota where he and other Civil War veterans gathered in the summers to fish and relax.

Sep 17th

This morning we bid Mr. Gardner and his family good by for his kindness to us went to our boat and found the river had rised about 4 inches so we turned the bow of our boat down stream for home sweet home after running until 10 am. We stoped at a spring to get a drink of water and Elisha went out with his gun to shoot a pheasent we heard druming in the woods but could not find the bird but saw a squirl and shot it. After running down some farther we stoped made coffee had a lunch. Looked a short time for Ginseng got a handfull. Then we pulled out with all speed for Dobsons spring branch getting there 4^{30} pm we knocked around a little while got supper and sat around a little spell then went to bed and had a good nights sleep.

Sep 18th

Up this morning a little after 4 o'clock looked like a hard storm coming so we moved our kitchen to the cave I spoke of heretofore made our breakfast there. Our stove was one of the old or New Pattern I don't know which. Anyway we started from home with a heavy piece of sheet iron 2 1/2 ft long and 18 inches wide in the bottom of our boat. When we wanted to do any cooking we would build up two walls with stone 14 or 15 inches apart long enough for our top and flue and plaster it all over with mud then we had a camp stove right to cook several dishes of things at the same time without any black soot on them. After breakfast Elish went out and got some milk and Potatos then we went to look for some Ginseng got a few roots killed a quail got back to cave had dinner on quail squirl bacon potatoes milk and coffee. After dinner Elisha went to Mr. Sidebottoms funeral an old Preacher he was acquainted with. While he was gone moved the kitchen back to the boat landing. Elisha coming back quite late in the evening and I had supper ready waiting for him.

Sep 19th

This morning while I was getting Breakfast Elisha killed another squirl and after breakfast he went after our washing we had sent out the day before and getting the same time some Biscuit and sweet potatos of Mr. Williams who came back with him and two little girls wanting to see the boat and as we were all ready to start on our journey they got in and road a short distance with us. After going 2 miles we landed where there was a distillery nearby. Elisha went there and had a 2 qt. Bottle filled with white whiskey to take home to my Bro. Wesley for he liked that kind of whiskey. Then we run down to cold spring getting there 12^{30} pm. We got our dinner there Elisha killed two young squirls in the morning and while he was out looking for more I made them into soup with potatos onions and tomatos. I made two good bowles of fine soup. After dinner we concluded to camp there until next morning. We went hunting a little while and found nothing. We came in and had supper on sweet potatos Bread and coffee.

Sep 20th

Last night we did not sleep warm the night was quite cold and sleeping on cots are not very good in cold weather for you need as much under you as over you to keep warm. After breakfast we made some lemonade to take along with us. We pulled out 8 am and went down the river flying I was in the bow of the boat with a long pike pole stearing and pushing the boat and Elish rowing. We heard a squirl barking on a dead tree. We stoped and killed it and dressed it and run on down to Trolly Spring. There we lunched on biscuit Preserves, Sweet Potatos, and lemonade. Then we floated along looking for squirls saw one but did not get to shoot it. We run on down to Knoxes Creek where we saw two squirles. Elish got after them and shot them or two others I don't know which. We dressed them and started on and by 3 pm was at Lanes Mill and by 4 was at Clay furnace tied up there to camp over night. Elisha went after some bread and on the way killed three squilres as we were getting more squirles than we could use we salted them down to take home. While he was gone I got supper had a regular squirl stew after supper we sat around a little whil then went to bed. The night was cold and we could not keep warm got up 4^{30} am made a fire to warm up by then Elish went after some bread not gettting any the night before.

Sep 21st

While he was gone I got Breakfast had squirl stewed again got to like them better that way than fried. After Breakfast Elisha went out and killed 3 more squirls and as we were getting more salted them down to take home. We packed up and started from Clay furnace 10^{30} am. After Breakfast I took a bad pain in my side and it kept getting worse. Got so bad I could not do anything, just had to sit down and let Elisha do all the work. Finely I went to drinking that white whiskey. I would take one or two swallows about ever half hour and by one o'clock I was getting easier. I must drank near a pint, and it never intoxicated me on the account of the pain beeing so great. We got to Roaring Spring at noon made dinner used up the last of our Bacon we started with 5 1/4 pounds. After dinner Elisha went out and killed another squirl making 23 in all on the trip. While I was fixing up the dishes. Then we pulled out for Woodsonville getting in there 3 pm feeling like we had been around the world on that trip my Rhewmaties gone and appitite good.

J. R. Dowling

Index of River Sites

Green River 1894