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# LIFESTYLE

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## HULL’S TRACE

A fragment of  
Kentucky history  
found in Michigan

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In the spring of 2012, construction workers discovered a section of an old road, built of logs, that ran through Brownstown in southeast Michigan. Soon, it was revealed that the road was about 200 years old, and ran from a spot along the Detroit River to Urbana, Ohio. Its discovery created a stir not only in Michigan, but also in Kentucky. What possible significance could an old road hold for a state that it doesn't even pass through?

**JANUARY 18, 1813,  
AMHERSTBURG,  
ONTARIO, CANADA**

It was bitterly cold and the men were well into the evening's revelry when British Col. Thomas St. George entered Mrs. Draper's Tavern and announced, "My boys, you must prepare to dance a different tune; the enemy is upon us, and we are going to surprise them. We shall take the route about four in the morning, so get ready at once." — Jon Latimer's 1812: War with America

That night, the Brits crossed the frozen Detroit River and marched southward along the "route", which was the same the log road that passed through Brownstown down through Frenchtown (present day Monroe, Michigan). Named Hull's Trace after General William Hull, it was originally built to supply the American forces with the men, horses and cannons vital to the northern front of the war effort. Now it was being used to the advantage of the enemy.

### SUPPLIES AND SCALPS

The War of 1812 was especially important to families along the Kentucky frontier, who depended on the Port of New Orleans for many of their supplies. Further, Kentucky was strategically located at the edge of the Old Northwest Territory and overlapped the southern boundary of the Shawnee. In an effort to discourage American settlement in the area, British authorities offered Chief Tecumseh and his Shawnee warriors a price for the scalp of every Kentuckian they collected. For better or worse, Kentucky found itself in the middle of a fight for survival.

In anticipation of a second war with the British, Kentuckians joined up in large numbers. Among those sent north were several Kentucky regiments commanded by Brig. Gen. James Winchester. Earlier on the very day that St. George mustered his British troops in Amherstbrug, Winchester sent 667 of the 990 total Kentuckians to Frenchtown under command of Lt. Col. William Lewis. In what became known as the First Battle of the River Raisin, the Kentuckians took Frenchtown from the British, Canadians and several Potawatomi warriors.

### A CRITICAL ERROR

Afterward, Winchester was under orders from Gen. William Henry Harrison to remain in Frenchtown until reinforcements under Harrison arrived, whereupon they would march further up the road and take Fort Detroit. However, two days later, St. George's troops arrived and set up camp about five miles from Frenchtown. Winchester received warning that St. George's men were there, but



An example of various foods and utensils that would have been used in Julia Chinn Johnson's kitchen at Blue Spring.



in an episode eerily similar to the fall of Hessian Commander Rall during the Revolutionary Battle of Trenton, Winchester ignored the warning and was quite literally caught sleeping when the Brits attacked early on January 22. He was quickly captured.

Notified of their general's capture, the Kentuckians were ordered to surrender but instead offered up a mighty resistance. Eventually, though, they began to run short of ammunition, and unaware that Harrison's troops were shortly to arrive, they had no choice but to surrender. The Brits left the wounded Kentuckians alongside the log road and marched the rest back toward Amherstburg.

Under the terms of surrender, the British were to post guards to protect the wounded Kentuckians remaining behind from Indian attack, but they failed to do so. That evening, several Native tribesmen attacked, robbing and killing the wounded men in an event that became known as the River Raisin Massacre. A survivor later recounted that the road was "strewn" with the

mangled bodies of the brave Kentuckians.

Richard Mentor Johnson, then Senator from Kentucky, took leave from Congress

**Under the battle cry, "Remember the Raisin" Richard Mentor Johnson, then Senator from Kentucky, marched his troops up to Ontario and to victory at the Battle of the Thames on Oct. 5, 1813.**

and mustered up a regiment of Kentucky riflemen. Under the battle cry, "Remember the Raisin" he marched his troops up to Ontario and to victory at the Battle of the Thames on Oct. 5, 1813. The battle placed Frenchtown back in American hands, and Johnson himself claimed to have killed Chief Tecumseh. It effectively ended British aggression in the old Northwest Territory. On Jan. 8, 1814, Gen. Andrew Jackson completed the victory in the forty-five minute Battle of New Orleans.

Of the 1876 Americans killed during the war, Kentucky lost some 1,200 men, more than the rest of states on the Union combined. It was along this old log road in Michigan that many of them died.

### THE UNCONVENTIONAL MR. JOHNSON

Richard Mentor Johnson, a hero of the War of 1812, was born in 1780 at Beargrass,

**Left: A portion of Hull's Trace, revealed under melting snow.**  
Andrew Jameson photo

**Below: An assortment of meats doused with pungent Old Dominion Barbecue Sauce.**  
Laura Hunt Angel photo



Virginia (now an area near Louisville, Kentucky). The entire Johnson family was politically ambitious, and Johnson's father, Robert Johnson, was one of the largest landholders in Kentucky.

After the war, Richard Mentor Johnson went on from the Senate to the House of Representatives. In the 1837 presidential election, which lacked a clear majority for vice president, Johnson became the only person to ever be elected by the Senate as prescribed by the Twelfth Amendment.

Johnson's claim as the man who killed Tecumseh and the unprecedented vice presidential vote were not the only things that set Johnson apart from the men of his day. Upon his father's death in 1815, Johnson inherited a large amount of land as well as several slaves. One of them, Julia Chinn, had been raised by his Johnson's mother, Jemima Suggett Johnson. Chinn was of mixed blood, what was at the time referred to as an "octoroon." It is a term similar "maroon," which we here in western Kentucky proudly acknowledge and have even bestowed on one of our High School's sports teams.

By the start of the war, Chinn had become Johnson's mistress, and though legally he was constrained to refer to himself as a bachelor, he openly referred to Chinn as his wife. It is believed that the two were wed by their Baptist minister in a private ceremony, illegal at the time.

Johnson went so far as to give their two daughters, Adeline and Imogene, his surname name and he saw to it that they received exceptional educations and both girls married wealthy white men. His behavior was considered scandalous by many in Washington, D.C.

While Johnson was away at Congress and at war, Julia Chinn Johnson ran the family household at Blue Spring Farm. In his absence, she also oversaw Johnson's business interactions, including those at Choctaw Academy, a native school Johnson founded. When the Marquis de LaFayette visited Blue Spring in 1825, the Johnson's held a barbecue in his honor which included 5,000 guests. Chinn, though technically a slave, was the official hostess.

During the 1828 presidential campaign Johnson withdrew from politics under pressure that his relationship with Chinn would harm the newly founded Democratic Party. He continued to live with Chinn as her husband until Chinn died in 1833. He was nominated for the vice presidency in the 1836 campaign, and faced strong criticism over his relationship with Chinn, now deceased. The attacks included several derogatory political cartoons. Such was the severity of the attacks that his body servant, Daniel Chinn, brother of Julia Chinn Johnson, fled the country.