

“VIEWS ALONG THE OR&W”

A Mule, A Mansion, and A Mother Goose Rhyme

By Bill Logan, OR&W historian: 12-28-2006

What does a mule named Jack, the former Heatherington Mansion of Bellaire, and a still popular Welsh nursery rhyme have to do with the Ohio River and Western Railway? They are all related – hear me out ---.

First the rhyme ---- Do you remember this childhood rhyme? –

“This is the farmer sowing his corn
That kept the cock that crowed in the morn
That walked the priest all shaven and shorn
That married the man all tattered and torn
That kissed the maiden all forlorn
That milked the cow with the crumpled horn
That tossed the dog that worried the cat
That killed the rat that ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built”

This is the last verse of eleven from “The House That Jack Built”, a Welsh nursery rhyme which reflected the everyday characters and lifestyle found in rural England from about 1755. No specific author was ever credited with its origin; therefore, it became a Mother Goose rhyme when it came to America. The Victorian era in America re-popularized this English rhyme around the Civil War. In 1870 it was appropriately borrowed by Jacob Heatherington to describe his new Bellaire Mansion. Who was Jacob Heatherington? We will get to him in a moment.

Now the narrow gauge railway ---- By November of 1877 the first spike had been driven by Colonel John Sullivan and narrow gauge rails were being laid starting at 28th Street in Bellaire, Ohio just south of the B&O standard gauge bridge and stone arcade and precariously parallel to the Ohio River bank. The Bellaire and South-Western (fore runner of the B,Z,&C, then OR&W) needed revenue and could only afford enough light 35 pound iron rail to build near Wegee four miles south. The Wegee Creek area was a large and prosperous farming community located at the mouth of Wegee Creek and the Ohio River. This first destination would afford the narrow gauge access to passengers and freight from this agricultural community – enough to begin paying the debt quickly accumulating from the roadbed construction begun two years earlier all the way to Woodsfield, Ohio.

A single engine named the Woodsfield, an American 4-4-0, four flat cars and one combination baggage/passenger car began to shuttle from Bellaire to the end of track carrying supplies, rail, and passengers and goods. The first goal just south of Bellaire proper was the coal mine and river barge loading facility of the Heatherington Coal Works (later the Belmont Coal Company). This would afford the fledgling railroad an abundant source of quality low cost Pittsburg #8 coal for its engines and some revenue from freight and mine passengers. This coal mine instantly became a saving grace for the B&SW and remained viable through the 1890’s for the B,Z,&C. serving the railroad’s needs from Bellaire.

The Heatherington Coal Works was a 43 year old riverfront mine and coal loading facility owned and operated by Jacob Heatherington. Even though he never learned to read or write, at the age of 61 years Jacob was one of the wealthiest men in eastern Ohio. He owned coal mines, steamboats, 800 acres of prime riverfront re-estate, numerous dwellings, and stock in multiple area glass and manufacturing facilities as well as three standard gauge railroads. When Colonel Sullivan and Colonel Mooney, the railroad’s incorporators, began offering stock in 1875, Jacob Heatherington was one of the first approached for subscriptions. He quickly became a major stock holder and soon by 1878 a director of the B&SW.

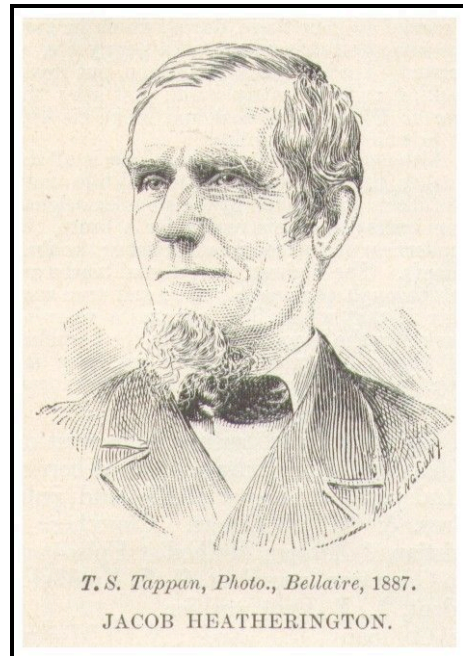
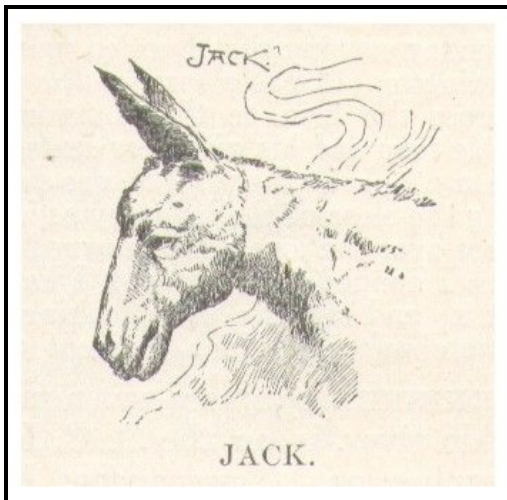


Figure 1 – Jack the mule drawn by Henry Howe in 1886 and Jacob Heatherington drawn from a photo in 1887

Jacob's rise to success ----- Jacob was born near Durham, England in 1814. His father, John an accomplished coal miner, immigrated to America in 1830, bringing his mining skills and his four sons – Jacob, John Jr., Ralph, and Edward to live and work with him. They settled in the Bellaire area in the McMahan Creek Valley by 1832 working for Captain John Fink, a wealthy local Ohio River steamboat captain, land owner, and coal mine operator. By 1837 at age 23 Jacob struck out on his own renting a coal bank along the river south of town and buying 8 acres of surrounding land on credit from Captain Fink. He first mined alone using only a wooden wheelbarrow to haul the coal out of the mine and over to the river to fuel hungry steamboats plying the Ohio. Later in about 1842, Jacob took on a four legged business partner to haul cartloads of coal from the mine, a three and half foot tall black mule he named Jack. For many years he continued to mine his coal alone, but for his mule Jack. They worked long hard hours together, ate together, and slept in the same log cabin. Therefore, a strong bond of affection developed between the two. Later when additional manpower was hired Jack the mule would only work for Jacob no others. Remember “stubborn as a mule” only Jacob could get Jack to move. Jack worked the mine for 23 years. Eventually Jack was retired from the coal mine and a new fine barn was built for him.

The riverboat coal trade before and during the Civil War brought great wealth to Jacob Heatherington with the rewards already noted above. So much wealth that by 1870 Jacob saw fit to build a large three story sixteen room Victorian mansion in which to live out his old age. With the help of Jack, the mansion was built for \$35,000 (\$3.5 million in today's dollars) and was dedicated by Jacob as THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT in honor of his mule, Jack, and the notoriety of the mother goose nursery rhyme mixed in. The house, one of the fanciest in town, contained marble imported from Italy, Persian carpets, Venetian crystal for the chandeliers and the finest mahogany woodwork available. But the pride of the house was a keystone carved in the image of Jack (his head) prominently placed over the front door entrance for all to see as they entered. When the mansion was completed and well-to-do guests present, Jacob introduced to the crowd his business partner Jack and took the then 28 year old mule up the entrance, under his carved likeness and thru each room of the mansion contributing everything observed in a grateful manner to Jack's labor.

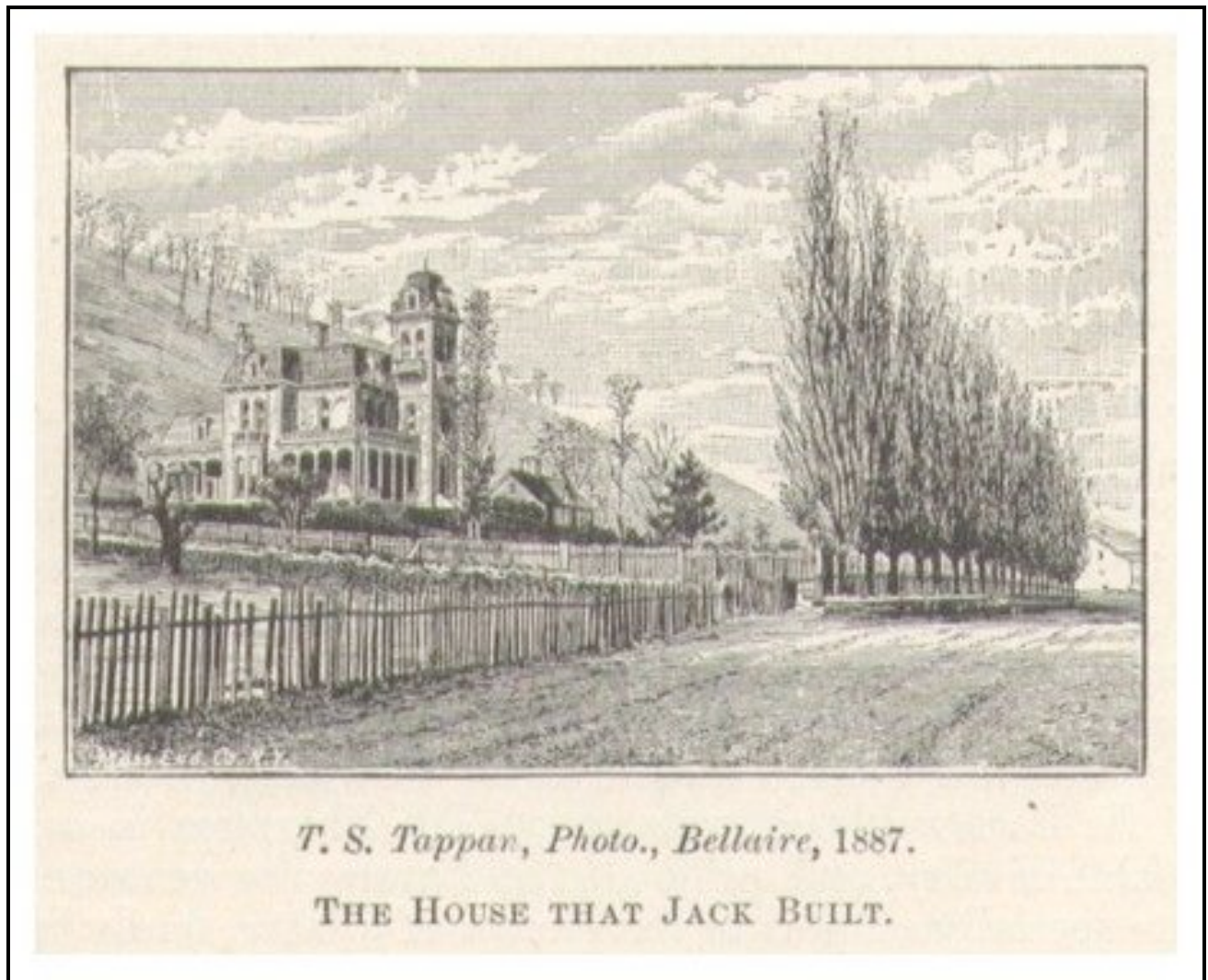


Figure 2 – Here is the Heatherington Mansion in 1887 as seen from near the B,Z,&C tracks heading north to Bellaire Station.

The mansion sat on a rise north of the coal mine and located just west of Wegee Pike (now Belmont Street in South Bellaire). From this bluff above the road the house afforded Jacob the opportunity to view Bellaire, the coal works, and the Ohio River with its many steamboats now owned or fueled by Jacob. From 1877 on the B&SW, then the B,Z,&C, and finally the OR&W narrow gauge also past in front of the mansion – another reminder of success. Throughout the life of the narrow gauge passengers arriving and departing Bellaire could gaze upon the beautiful mansion and would be reminded of “The House That Jack Built”.

Alas --- all things come to their end. Jack was the first to go. He died at the age of forty years in 1882. Jacob buried him on the property under an apple tree near the mansion. The grief of Jacob at Jack’s demise was heartbreaking. Jacob would always point out the grave to visitors and talk of the many virtues of his departed friend. Jacob himself died after 1890. The coal works past into the hands of investors and functioned only as a coal loading facility after 1900. The narrow gauge passed into history in 1931. The mansion outlasted them all. After passing out of the Heatherington family, it functioned as an apartment, an Italian restaurant, and finally a night club. It was torn down only in 1959 to make way for a motel after existing for 89 years.



Figure 3 – The Keystone of Jack the mule from above the entrance of the Heatherington Mansion. Now it resides in the Bellaire Public Library, Bellaire, Ohio.

Still to this day Bellaire citizens recall the house and as children how their parents told them it was “The House That Jack Built”. The house has past into legend, but the nursery rhyme lives to this day educating children. Jack the mule, he is not forgotten either. In the wall of the Bellaire Public Library is displayed the keystone marker of Jack from the mansion. Viewing the keystone, you are reminded of Jack, his owner Jacob, the mansion they built, the nursery rhyme, and maybe even the little narrow gauge OR&W that Jack and Jacob helped in its beginning.

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