

WHIPPOORWILL E-COMMENT

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LEXINGTON, On The Rocks

OUR colleagues in the NAPA will hold their annual convention in Lexington, Kentucky, in July. I hosted two AAPA conventions there in the 1970's and 1980's. Lexington is located in the north central area of the state in an area called *The Bluegrass*, a distinct, beautiful region of rolling verdant country that is particularly attractive. Is bluegrass blue? No, it's green, but in early spring the rapidly growing plants have a bluish sheen that can be seen when the light is at the right angle. There are more horse farms and distilleries here than any other place in the world. The major legal crop is burley tobacco. I read that illegally grown hemp rivals if not exceeds tobacco, though you won't see fields of it as you will the burley.

Lexington sits exactly at the apex of the Cincinnati Arch, and is underlain by ancient rocks that formed the bottom of a vast inland sea. The limestone is over 500,000,000 years old, dating to the early to middle Ordovician geological period. The Cincinnati Arch lies between the northern Tennessee areas of Knoxville and Nashville and extends northward to Cincinnati where limestone beds give way to older Cambrian deposits which lie on the surface there. I often took my geology students on fossil collecting field trips to Cincinnati where Cambrian limestone-dolomite outcrops were extremely fossiliferous. On practically any street one could, in a few minutes, collect a cigar box full of trilobites, horn coral, brachiopods, crinoids, and bryozoa, long extinct animals.

The flat Ordovician sea bed was warped upward into an immense anticline with its highest point precisely where Lexington was founded. Younger sediments – Silurian and Devonian rocks lie in narrow arcs around the Bluegrass region, and broader, thicker deposits of Carboniferous sediments formed the foothills of the Appalachian mountains eastward. Because of its arch-top location, Lexington has a higher elevation than almost all of the rest of the state, including the eastern mountains. One drives downhill in all directions from Lexington. Black Mountain, the highest mountain in the state at 4,129 feet, lies on the southeastern border of Kentucky and Virginia. Lexington's elevation is 980 feet, and the eastern mountains rarely rise above 685 feet. Westward, Frankfort's elevation is 735 feet, and Louisville, not in the Bluegrass, lies at 330 feet.

The Bluegrass region is a karst area – a limestone plain riddled with caves and sinkholes, -- a vast aquifer of subterranean canals bearing water which emerges from numerous springs. The mineral-rich water is said to build strong bones in horses, and is especially good-tasting and prized for use in making bourbon whisky.

Lexington has been particularly successful in attracting private press printers. To name a few – Victor and Carolyn Hammer (the Stamperia del Santuccio, the Anvil Press), Amelia Buckley (the Bur Press), Gay Reading (the Reading Press), Jim and Martha Birchfield (the Fonthill Press), Paul Holbrook (the King Library Press), Arthur Graham (the Polyglot Press), Joseph Graves (the Gravesend Press), James Foose (the Buttonwood Press), Debbie Kessler (the October Press), Gray Zeitz (the Larkspur Press), -- an impressive list of book printing artists and artisans! You can see their books if you attend the NAPA convention because a trip is scheduled to the King Library Press where Jim Birchfield has arranged a special display of books, binding and Kentucky ephemera. #