

JUNE/JULY 2025

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By Our
Readers

Summer in the Black Patch

By Bobbie Bryant, Jefferson County

Sultry, hot and sun-baked, summer bustles with activity in the Black Patch. The pastures are filled with timothy and fescue waving in the breeze, ready for harvesting. Beginning each day at sunup, the farmer uses a combine to harvest wheat, followed by the planting of no-till soybeans—getting two crops in one year. The corn crop is side-dressed. Stalks fill out with tasseled ears, eagerly reaching toward the sun.

As each day swelters, warmer than the last, the workers plow the bright green tobacco plants, now almost a foot high. They carefully spray chemicals on the rows of tobacco, targeting insects and tobacco worms. In the intense heat of the afternoon, occasional thunderstorms may emerge. Every drop of rain is a welcome relief as tender shoots become hardy plants. The tobacco and other crops are susceptible to the elements, particularly strong winds.

School is out, and children dash to the swimming hole behind the house. They splash, lie in the sun, and go frog gigging as favorite pastimes. Little boys dip an old blue mason jar into the muddy water, finding tadpoles for afternoon fishing. The girls weave chain necklaces out of stems of clover and bake mud pies, whiling away the days in lazy fun.

Farmland paints its finest portrait during this bountiful growing season. Fencerows and ditches are vibrant with luscious blackberries, clustered in the overgrown brush, awaiting a crusty homemade cobbler. Green beans cling to stick trellises in the gardens. Vines are laden with squash and melon. Fresh zucchini, cabbage and hearty carrots supply the supper table with delicious favorites.

Tiger lilies display their spectacular orange blooms. At the back of the tobacco barn, a row of red, pink and yellow hollyhocks stands at attention. The pathways to the fields are filled with the sweet fragrance of wild honeysuckle.

An iron dinner bell clangs across the fields, calling in the workers for the noontime meal. A frosty glass of sweetened iced tea is welcome refreshment, served alongside ham sandwiches. A cold salad of cucumbers, onions and tomatoes marinated in vinaigrette dressing completes the meal.

Thousands of cicadas create a unique backdrop of noise on these sizzling hot days. As the tobacco grows taller, it is topped and suckered at least once and sometimes twice. Spraying continues over the bean crop with insecticide, fungicide and liquid fertilizer. On the days when outdoor work is caught up, the workers clean and repair equipment, preparing for the next round of plowing and harvesting.

For a taste of good old-fashioned political debate, the Fancy Farm Picnic provides an opportunity to catch up with friends and neighbors and hear the rhetoric of the day. The daylong event features activities for all ages, and there is always enough barbecue to feed an army.

On most evenings, when the farm is at rest and the dark of night arrives, the sound of nature erupts. The pond is alive with the croaking of bullfrogs. Crickets rub their wings together, singing a love song to their mates. Lightning bugs sparkle against the black sky as the stars illuminate the heavens.

Author's Note: This article previously was published in Passions of the Black Patch: Cooking and Quilting in Western Kentucky in 2012.

Without a Hitch

By Edwin P. Hall Jr., Kennesaw, Georgia

As told by my father, Edwin P. Hall Sr., who passed in July 1992

I recall a "Hobo Trip" that my cousin, Mark, and I made in 1936, when we were both 16. We wanted to visit Mark's brother, Corbin Hall, in Middlesboro, and we planned to hop on a coal train, hobo-style, at Cumberland and ride 56 miles to the Pineville Bridge, where the train stopped to

take on water. Once there, we hopped off and hitchhiked the remaining 10 miles or so into Middlesboro. It all sounded pretty simple.

A friendly railroad repairman at Cumberland helped us select the line of boxcars scheduled for Pineville, and two young hoboes were soon inside a boxcar bound for adventure. After a few hours of riding in clouds of coal dust, we saw the Pineville Bridge up ahead, and the train stopped right on schedule. We hopped off the train and