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UNCOVERED — THE FABULOUS SILVER MINES OF SWIFT AND FILSON

BY JOE NICKELL*

Part I: The Legend

For nearly two centuries a legend has persisted in eastern Kentucky concerning the "lost silver mines" of one "Jonathan Swift." In his alleged *Journal*, Swift relates how he and a company of men preceded Daniel Boone into Kentucky, making annual trips from Alexandria, Virginia to mine silver. From June 21, 1760 until late 1769, they "carried in supplies and took out silver bars and minted coins" which Swift used to buy vessels for his "shipping interests." Plagued by Indians, a mutiny of his workmen, and other troubles, and after a pious change of heart, Swift discontinued his venture, walled up his mine and a cave full of treasure, and headed for "England or France" to "get a party interested in . . . working the mines on a large scale." When he returned after a fifteen-year delay (he says he was imprisoned in England), Swift had become blind — unable to find his fabulous treasure!¹

Many have undoubtedly accepted the legend at face value. J. H. Kidwell says: "Men, hoary with age and gray haired, half insane on the subject of the Swift mines ranged the mountains and the likely places, and died in the belief that they were very near the source of the mines as outlined in the Swift *Journal*. . . ."² To some, a treasury warrant of 1788 whereby John Filson (the early Kentucky mapmaker and historian) recorded 1,000 acres alleged to contain Swift's mine, has lent credence to the legend.³ (Part III of this article explores the "Filson connection.")

*JOE NICKELL, free lance writer and investigator, has a B.A. from the University of Kentucky.

¹ Except as otherwise noted, all quotes from Swift's *Journal* are taken from the version reproduced in Michael Paul Henson's *John Swift's Lost Silver Mines* (Louisville: privately printed, 1975), pp. 8-25.

² J. H. Kidwell, *Silver Fleece* (New York: Avondale Press, 1927), vii. (This is a novel based on the Swift legend. The quote is from Kidwell's introduction.)

³ Lincoln County No. 10117, issued May 17, 1788 and filed in the Land Office at Richmond, Va. Copy available from the Land Office in Frankfort, Ky. Reproduced by Henson, p. 37.

Skeptical geologists and historians have advanced quite another theory which has also achieved legendary status.⁴ This theory supposes that Swift concocted the tale of silver mining as a cover for piracy and counterfeiting. Although the theory has persuaded many, it raises more questions than it answers: Why make the arduous and extremely dangerous journey to Kentucky in order to melt silver when the backwoods near Alexandria would do?⁵ For that matter, the coinage could have been minted on board ship. And why go to all the trouble of producing a spurious journal? Such literary ability — employing phrases like “deeming it imprudent” — is indeed remarkable for one who went to sea “when a boy.”

What, then, is the answer? Before attempting to reach a solution it will be necessary for the reader to suspend judgement and begin to focus critically on the details of the evidence.

The scientific evidence seems to preclude fabulous silver treasure being mined in Kentucky. Geologists as well as park naturalists, rangers, and other knowledgeable officials I interviewed expressed skepticism of the Swift bonanza. Mr. Warren H. Anderson of the Kentucky Geological Survey responded in writing to my query:

Silver occurs in a variety of geologic environments, is generally associated with certain minerals and is found throughout the geologic time scale. From a geologic standpoint it is possible for silver to occur in sandstones in eastern Kentucky, but this does not mean that silver actually exists in economic quantities. Some silver has been reported in the western Kentucky fluorspar district (Hall and Heyl, 1968, *Economic Geology*, V. 63, No. 6, p. 655-70) as well as trace amounts in the central Kentucky mineral district (Jolly and Heyl, 1964, Kentucky Geological Survey, Series X, Reprint 15). As these reports indicate silver does occur in small amounts in Kentucky.⁶

Note that the precious metal exists only in trace amounts and in parts of Kentucky beyond the eastern section.

How this contrasts with Swift's purported find! He states he had two “workings,” with his company “divided into two parties . . . My party had four places where we obtained silver ore that were later connected by trails or “Tomohawk’ [sic] paths.” He also alleges that Frenchmen who “worked mines to the south” had no less than two furnaces in operation.⁷

⁴ Thomas S. Watson, “John Swift's Lost Silver Mines—A Joke?”, *The State Journal* [Frankfort, Ky.], Feb. 22, 1976, p. 25.

⁵ *Ibid.*, citing opinion of Dr. Thomas D. Clark, Kentucky historian.

⁶ Letter to author, Sept. 26, 1978.

⁷ *Journal*, pp. 11, 19.



The Author Prospecting In Eastern Kentucky

Swift claims he found several "veins" of silver! Such abundance — when two hundred years of highway construction, excavation, and strip mining, not to mention cave exploration and treasure hunting, have failed to unearth even a single "vein" of silver. Yet Swift alleges a wounded *bear* had led to the discovery of a cave containing "a very rich vein of silver ore."

In researching the Swift story (and doing a little prospecting myself), I came across reports of "silver nuggets" from the Wolfe County area. My cousin, John May, was able to coax one sample from its owner and gave it to me to test. It was pyrite — "fool's gold." Or in this case, fool's silver. (Only afterward did John reveal that he had previously shown the "nugget" to three geologists and obtained the same opinion.)

Similarly a U.S. Forest Service official told me he had tested samples of ore brought in to a Wolfe County ranger station and found them to be "iron sulfides" — that is, pyrite. He stated he also had found samples of lead sulfide (galena), which the lay person could easily mistake for silver.

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alleged to contain Swift's mine — for approximately a million dollars. Another official, he said, agreed to be taken, blindfolded, to a prospector's pit. The "silver" actually glittered: it was mica.

A friend recounted another incident. He was exploring in the rugged Red River Canyon, popularly assumed to be the general location of the mines, with a companion who got excited by a "silver vein" in a rock face along the river. My friend recognized it for what it really was: a scrapping from an aluminum canoe. Sometime later he preyed on his companion's gullibility by "salting" an area with some filings of "silver." And old "John Swift" had — with a wink — claimed another victim.

Clearly the geologic evidence demands that we closely scrutinize the Swift *Journal*, or rather, journals, since numerous versions compete in the claim for authenticity.⁸ These differ in varying degrees. One, headed "John Swift's Manuscript Journal," begins, "I was born October 3, 1712, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, my ancestors first came to America in 1637."⁹ Another, from Tennessee, commences: "I, George William Swift, was born at Salisbury, England in the year of 1689, A.D., a son of William Swift, who was a miner of copper, silver, and lead."¹⁰ Even versions with some distinct similarities contain discrepancies in the dates and number of the excursions as well as the directions for finding the mines.

Probably the most detailed version is reproduced in Michael Paul Henson's *John Swift's Lost Silver Mines*.¹¹ But it demands skepticism: A journal which begins, "I was born . . ." is immediately suspect. This version does agree substantially with quoted fragments from Connelley and Coulter's *History of Kentucky*.¹² But portions of the text — wherein Swift is alternately paraphrased and quoted — seem to have been 'lifted' by the unknown compiler of this particular version of the Journal.

Some of the *paraphrased* portions are recorded word for word in the *Journal*. Further, the latter work carelessly preserves one

⁸ In addition to versions cited, there are these: Kidwell, pp. 1-8; Henson, *Lost Silver Mines and Buried Treasure of Kentucky*, privately printed, Louisville, 1972, pp. 6-13; *et al.* There are also numerous unpublished versions.

⁹ Henson, p. 8. Henson believes Swift died in Tennessee in 1800 and that the *Journal* was taken to Pennsylvania and later to Louisville. (See Henson, pp. 7, 40-41.) But if the *Journal* was not circulated until after 1800, how do we explain Filson's treasury warrant of 1788 containing wording which implies Filson possessed a copy?

¹⁰ Arthur Hardie Dougherty, "The Legend of the Swifts' and Monday Mine" [*sic*], undated typescript in the McClung Collection, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville. Unpaginated. (Dougherty says his brother "procured a very old and faded document from an old man in Virginia by the name of Boatwright," from which the text was transcribed.)

¹¹ *Op. cit.*

¹² William Elsey Connelley and E. Merton Coulter, *History of Kentucky* (Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1922), pp. 130-33.

quoted excerpt *in quotation marks* with the untenable result of having Swift begin quoting himself in mid-sentence!¹³ Another discrepancy involves the ending of the *Journal* — allegedly penned by Swift after his return from England, although in it he states that he has become completely blind and therefore would have been unable to write.¹⁴

We might explain that away by suggesting Swift dictated the portion. But what of the statement, “. . . that treasure will lie in that cave for eternity,” written (if the *Journal* can be believed) during 1765?¹⁵ Why would Swift pen such a hopelessly defeatist remark — one anticipating events not to be realized for twenty years — while he was still making excursions to the mines? Other seriously questionable aspects of the *Journal* will be discussed presently (and still others will be treated later).

Was there really a John or Jonathan Swift?

Well, of course, there was the famous English satirist by that name who wrote the allegorical *Travels Into Several Remote Nations of the World* (better known as “Gulliver’s Travels”). Like “Swift,” “Gulliver” was a ship’s captain and the title of “his” work is echoed in a phrase from Swift’s *Journal* stating that the smelting furnace was “in a very remote place in the west.”¹⁶ But that Jonathan Swift died in 1745. It would seem that, at best, he could only have unwittingly inspired the creation of a Swift legend.

At the end of the *Journal* in Henson’s book is added a ‘cut signature’ (as collectors of autograph materials say of “Jonathan Swift.” Henson says he placed it there “to lend a touch of authenticity to the document. This is an exact reproduction of Swift’s signature that appears on an old land grant I obtained from an attorney in Kentucky.”¹⁷ But Mr. Henson is in error.

I researched the matter, finally tracking down the entire deed from which the actual signature in question was reproduced.¹⁸ I carefully compared the signatures and found them to be identical, stroke for stroke. The document does substantiate that there really was a bona-fide Jonathan Swift and that he was from Alexandria, Virginia, as the *Journal* alleges, and further that he was a “merchant” (which at that port could mean that he had shipping interests as claimed).

¹³ *Journal* (Henson), p. 15. (Cf. Connelley and Coulter, p. 132.)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁶ *Journal* (Henson), p. 17. Jonathan Swift, the allegorist, was known to early Kentuckians. A creek named “Lulbegrud” (from “Gulliver’s Travels”) appears on Filson’s 1784 map.

¹⁷ Henson, p. 25.

¹⁸ Court of Appeals Deed Book A, p. 307. August 1, 1795. Kentucky Land Office, Frankfort.

Unfortunately, further research proved Mr. Swift re-acquired the land and deeded it a second time in 1809¹⁹ — nine years after “Swift’s” reputed death.²⁰ The documents also enabled me to establish that the “signature” on the first deed was not actually by Mr. Swift’s own hand but was — like the entire document — in the handwriting of the recorder who had copied it into the deed book!

This real Mr. Jonathan Swift could not have been the Swift of silver-mine mythology as will be clear from his biography. It informs us that he “was born at Milton, near Boston, Mass., and became a resident of Alexandria prior to 1785; was an importing merchant and prominent citizen during the forty years of his residence. . . .” He married and had “several children.” He died in 1824 and “was buried with Masonic honors. . . .”²¹ Clearly Mr. Swift was not the supposed blind pirate, nor is it likely he reached the remarkable age of one hundred and twelve years.

The genealogical data of some versions of the *Journal* must be discounted. Not journals — but brazen attempts to perpetrate fraud — begin so. (Some details even appear to have been copied — usually carelessly and quite late — from Swift genealogies.²²) Indeed the *earliest documented references* to the legend mention only “a Certain man named Swift,”²³ “one Swift,”²⁴ “Swift,”²⁵ and “said Swift.”²⁶ (And the Tennessee version cited previously gives an entirely different first name.)

There *were* numerous Swifts. Some were actually named John or Jonathan, which is, after all, a common first name. But there is *no proof* that there was an actual person named “Swift” — whether “Jonathan” or not — who early mined silver in Kentucky. To the contrary, there are indications that versions of the *Journal* have been tampered with. And not all such tampering can be explained away simply by copyists’ errors.

We turn now to the seemingly-exact directions for locating the

19 Court of Appeals Deed Book N, p. 142. November 4, 1809. Kentucky Land Office, Frankfort.

20 Henson, pp. 7, 27.

21 Franklin Longdon Brockett, *The Lodge of Washington* (Alexandria, Virginia: 1899), pp. 127-28.

22 e.g., *William Swift of Sandwich and Some of his Descendants, 1637-1899*, compiled by George H. Swift (Millbrook, N.Y.: Round Table Press, 1900).

23 1788. (Filson’s treasury warrant.) See Footnote 3.

24 1823. (Judge John Haywood’s *History of Tennessee*, p. 33, 34. Cited by Connelley and Coulter, p. 115.)

25 1791. (Fayette Co., Va., Entry Book, p. 333, in the Kentucky Land Office. Full text of this document is given below, pp.

26 1791. (*Ibid.*)

mines which make up the latter part of the *Journal* and which have inspired thousands of searches. But just how exact are they? We can take a cue from the coy statement therein that the furnace is "in a very remote place in the west." Landmarks are liberally given together with some directions and distances. Naturally these vary from version to version.

Although Swift maps have been widely reputed to exist, they are scarce in relation to copies of the *Journal*. (A couple of imperfect ones are reproduced in books,²⁷ and I have another in my collection.) So, with the help of my father, Wendell Nickell — who has often acted as a guide in the Red River area and who reads maps at his leisure — I constructed a hypothetical map of the mines and buried treasure. I based it primarily on the rather detailed version of the *Journal* in Henson's book. (See illustration.) It was immediately apparent that great flexibility of interpretation was required, pointing up the true vagueness of the description.

But Swift actually gives the latitude and longitude of the mines:

The richest ore is to be found in Latitude of 37° 56 minutes north [some versions read "57 minutes"]. The ore vein of little value is in Latitude of 38° 2 minutes north. By astronomical observations and calculations, we found both veins to be just a little west of the longitude of 83 degrees.²⁸

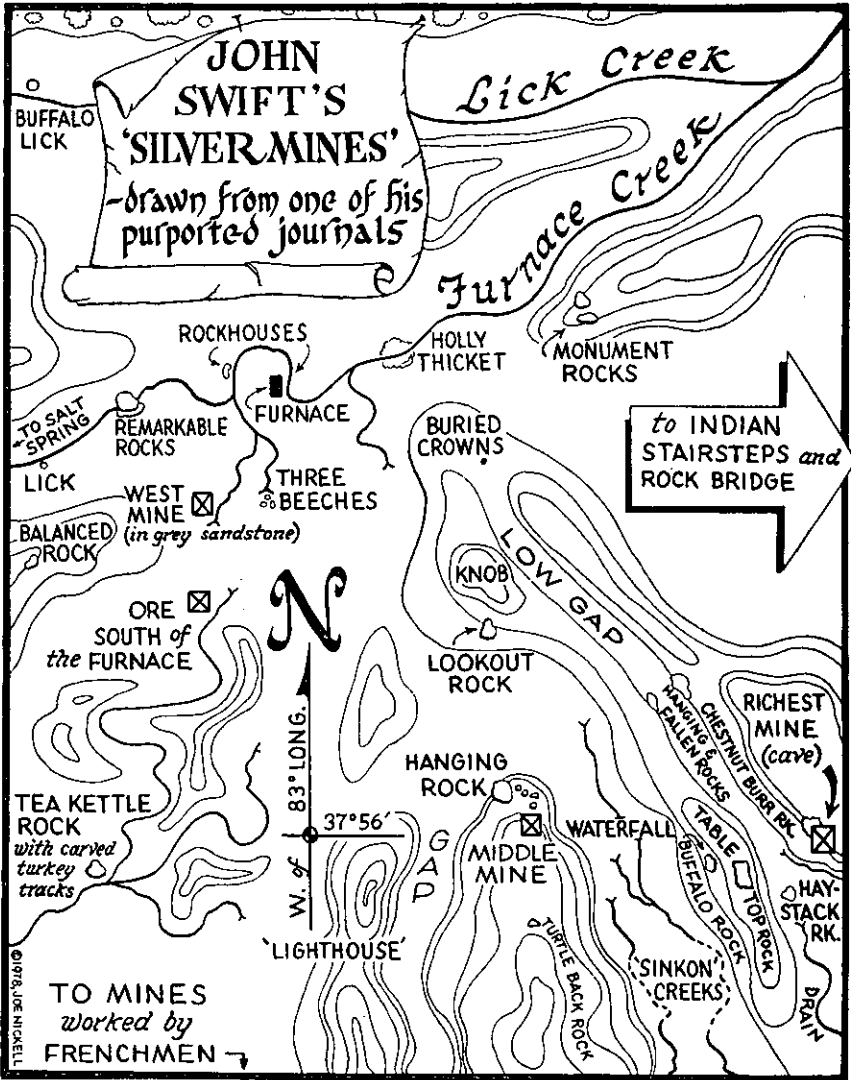
While this is seemingly specific, exactly how far is "just a little" west?

Taken literally, the latitude and longitude of "the richest ore" pinpoint a location in Morgan County (where I am writing from) near Relief, Kentucky. Alas, neither the proper configurations nor the mine is to be found there. Despite all this, several factors conspire to fuel the search: Errors in "Swift's" calculations are reasonably assumed; partial configurations are located or 'interpreted' as necessary; new maps and alleged copies of the *Journal* are drafted; newspaper editors experience weeks in which no man bites a dog; and skeptics are shunned by a public eager to believe.

And so virtually every county in eastern Kentucky lays claim to the silver mines. The legend persists as well in Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina; and presumably it is everywhere good for business. A "Monument Rock" here, a "Balanced Rock" there, is often enough to set metal detectors and spades — even heavy equipment — in motion.

²⁷ Henson, pp. 88-89.

²⁸ *Journal* (Henson), p. 18.



Not long ago Job Corpsmen at the Frenchburg Job Corps Conservation Center located on Tarr Ridge in Menifee County searched (according to the *Menifee County Journal*) "an area from Sky Bridge and Rock Bridge westward along the Red River to Raven Rock, Court House Rock and Indian Creek where they have found several of the landmarks. . . ."29 A "mining and exploring" com-

29 Undated clipping (obtained from Mr. Henson).

pany is searching in Wolfe County. There and elsewhere other groups and individuals are pursuing the myth and finding their treasure in the form of publicity.

Years ago, the Swift mania cost one man his health, and after his death his widow returned to the search, squandering her fortune and her remaining years in futile pursuit of the treasure.³⁰ The legend of "John Swift" had struck again.

Part II: The Treasure of Ophir

If, as the geological evidence indicates, Swift found no great veins of silver, it follows that the *Journal* is a fabrication. Putting aside the 'cover-for-piracy' theory (which is a very leaky boat), we come to another. In *Silver Fleece*, Kidwell states: ". . . thousands of transactions in real estate have hinged around the probability that it abounded with the abundant source of the Swift mines."³¹ Isn't it conceivable the document was created for use in land schemes? It does appear it was later used for such a purpose. But, as I intend to demonstrate, there is a further possibility.

Swift says he marked a tree with "the symbols of a compass [some versions read "compasses"], trowel and square."³² These *symbols* are meaningless in any but a single context: A combined *compass* (a drawing compass, or 'pair of compasses') and *square* compose the emblem of the 'secret' society, Freemasonry. The *trowel* is the symbol of the Freemason's craft.

Freemasonry, or Masonry, is a benevolent society. It is not, Masons state, a 'secret society' but a 'society with secrets.' First carried to America in the early 18th century, it has been defined as "a peculiar system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols."³³

Swift says he marked various trees and rocks with symbols which he referred to as "curious marks" and again as "peculiar marks." He identified one location of buried treasure with "a symbol of a triangle." Not *just* a triangle, but a *symbol* — one important in

³⁰ *Early and Modern History of Wolfe County* (Campton, Ky.: Wolfe County Woman's Club, 1958), pp. 13-14. See also, *Licking Valley Courier* [West Liberty], October 19, 1978.

³¹ *Op. cit.*, p. vii.

³² *Journal* (Henson), p. 16. The version in *Silver Fleece* (Kidwell, p. 4) reads "compass square and trowel" [sic].

³³ *Masonic Heirloom Edition Holy Bible* (Wichita, Kan.: Heirloom Bible Publishers, 1964), p. 26. (Before proceeding further, let me state that I requested no Mason to compromise himself by revealing society secrets. Data on Masonic symbols and other matters revealed in the following pages is found in encyclopedias and books on Masonry sold to the general public. If I have inadvertently revealed any treasured secrets, that has not been my motive, nor do I intend criticism of Freemasonry in any of my statements.)

masonry. Another Masonic symbol is the "Broad Arrow," also represented in the *Journal*; and there are many others.³⁴

In the Masonic ritual of the Entered Apprentice, or First Degree, is the statement that there is "nothing more fervent than heated charcoal, it will melt the most obdurate metals."³⁵ Similarly, in the *Journal* Swift states, "We were able to make charcoal in large quantities, for our use in smelting the ore."³⁶

The *Journal* continues in this vein (no pun intended): As part of the allegory, Swift claims that — when he left the "richest mine" for the last time — he "walled it up with masonry form."³⁷ Otherwise an unlikely expression, we need only capitalize "masonry" to see that this says, in effect, that the meaning has been concealed or 'veiled' in Masonic fashion. It may be read with a knowing wink.

Now, among the essential elements of any true Masonic group are these: "a legend or allegory relating to the building of King Solomon's Temple" and "symbolism based on the stonemason's trade."³⁸ Masonry incorporates many legends of King Solomon, his masons, and the building of the temple. Indeed, the Masonic Lodge is held to represent some part of Solomon's Temple.³⁹ The lodge is oriented east and west, with east regarded as the most sacred of the cardinal points.⁴⁰

Thus it is that our allegorist, "Swift," places his furnace in a "rockhouse that faces the east." From the rock house, he says, "facing the east you can see two monument rocks" (two tall rock pillars).⁴¹ These are coincident with the Masonic/Solomonic "two great pillars" symbolizing Strength and Establishment.⁴²

The remote and fabled mines, the fleet of ships (which supposed-ly bore Swift's silver to the "trade of the seas"), even the corral for horses — all tally with Solomon, his fabled mines (in "Ophir"), his great fleet, trade, and stables. Just as Swift refers to his

³⁴ *Journal* (Henson), pp. 11, 12, 17. Cf. Masonic Bible, pp. 16, 24. Albert G. Mackey, *Symbolism of Freemasonry* (Chicago: Charles T. Pownier Co., 1975), p. 122 states that Freemasonry is "a science of symbolism."

³⁵ *Look to the East!*, revised edition, edited by Ralph P. Lester (Chicago: Ezra A. Cook Publications, 1977), p. 60.

³⁶ *Journal* (Henson), p. 18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁸ *Collier's Encyclopedia* (1978), "Freemasonry." Mackey (p. 315) explains that an allegory is "a discourse or narrative, in which there is a literal and figurative sense, a patent and a concealed meaning; the literal or patent sense being intended by analogy or comparison to indicate the figurative or concealed one." (Curiously, one of Swift's men was named "Gulise.")

³⁹ *Masonic Bible*, p. 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴¹ *Journal* (Henson), p. 17.

⁴² *Look to the East!*, p. 123.

⁴³ I Kings 10:27.

"occupation as a silver-smith," Masons extol Solomon's Master Mason (whom they call Hiram Abif) — a smith, a craftsman in precious metals. And, like Swift who supposedly found so much silver he could not transport all of it, Solomon "made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones. . . ."43

The Swift story admirably teaches its moral about the futility of 'laying up treasures.' It is not a true story but a parable in the form of a legend "veiled in allegory." In the *Journal*, Swift states the story's moral in a philosophical monologue: He says, in part, that "the works of man are always unfinished and unsatisfactory" and that "the life of man should be at some period turned about for reflection on God. . . ."44

Let us unveil a bit more. When Swift allegedly returned, years later, his blindness prevented him from re-locating his treasure. This is the punch-line of the allegory. In Masonry — which has been called the "Great Light" — light symbolizes enlightenment. (Swift says that from the "richest mine" you could "see a hole through the cliff and see the sky beyond." He called this formation "The Lighthouse."⁴⁵ In contrast, applicants for the Degrees of Masonry are first required to enter the lodge — like Swift — in *complete blindness*.⁴⁶ The "all-seeing eye" (depicted, for example, on the back of a dollar bill) is a prime Masonic symbol.⁴⁷

Not only Swift's furnace but his "richest mine" was in a cave. He and his men camped in another. And he had rich stores of silver (walled up with "masonry form") "hidden in the great cavern . . . which fact was known to no living soul beyond our company."⁴⁸ (Like Masons, the members of Swift's "company" were "sworn to secrecy.") To this end, we should note that caves or "Clefs of the Rocks" figure prominently in Masonic symbolism. Too, there is the Masonic legend of the "Secret Vault," Solomon's subterranean depository of certain great secrets.⁴⁹

The Masonic rites of the Third Degree feature a quest after such vague secrets (specifically "that which is lost") which, in the end, *remain lost*.⁵⁰ That, precisely, is the simple plot of the Swift legend. A "sea captain" figures in that Degree; and it will come as no surprise to learn that Swift states, "I became captain of a ship."

44 *Journal* (Henson), p. 16.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

46 *Look to the East!* p. 26.

47 Mackey, p. 190ff.

48 *Journal* (Henson), p. 16.

49 *Masonic Bible*, p. 12, 37, 63.

50 *Look to the East!* p. 150 ff.

The parallels go on and on. Swift's landmarks include a "Look-out Rock," "Hanging Rock," "Remarkable Rocks," etc., including the two pillars or "Monument Rocks" previously noted. In Masonry, "Landmarks" — originally stone pillars for boundaries — are symbols distinguishing Masons from others.⁵¹

Various directions from the furnace are given in distances of "three miles." (For example, "We carried the ore three miles to the furnace"; Furnace Creek forks "about three miles below the furnace"; again, "North of the furnace about three miles is a large hill. . ."). In Masonry, *three miles* represents a "Cable Tow's Length" which is "symbolic of the scope of a man's reasonable ability."⁵² Numerous times Swift employs the number three — a number with definite significance in Freemasonry.

The preceding only begins the possibilities. Such Masonic terms as "The Conclusion of the Whole Matter," "The Camp," "The Contention Among Brethren," "The Left Hand," "The Right Hand," "Treasure Room," "Royal Arch," "Cardinal Points" (of the Compass), "The Broken Column," "Degrees," "The Winding Stairs," "Covenant of Masonry," "Circumambulation," "Darkness to Light," "Weary Sojourners," "Foreign Country," "The Lost Word," "Distressed Worthy Brother," "The Rejected Stone," etc., etc., all seem to have definite counterparts in the allegorical Swift *Journal*. So do such symbols as the crescent moon, grapevine, laurel, crown, and others.⁵³

There are historically dubious points in the *Journal* which are probably directly attributable to allegory. Arthur Edward Waite points out that "the significance is in the allegory and not in any point of history which may lie behind it."⁵⁴

At least one dubious historical point is instructive. Swift refers to Indians "called Meccas." (Note the qualification that they were "called" that.) Although there was no such tribe, Henson guesses that "Meccas" or "Maccas" may be a corruption of Mequechakes, a tribe of Shawnees.⁵⁵ On the other hand, in Masonic lore a copyist error appears with reference to "Maacha" (which is part of the Solomonic legend); Masons were referred to in the early charges and laws as "Maccones"; and the heroic Jewish family of Macabees also figures in Masonry.⁵⁶

51 Masonic Bible, p. 48.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

53 Masonic Bible, pp. 1-63. See also Arthur Edward Waite, *A New Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (New York: Weathervane Books, 1970), I, xlii ff; Mackey, p. 313 ff.

54 Waite, I, 367.

55 Henson, *Lost Silver Mines and Buried Treasure of Kentucky*, p. 31.

56 Masonic Bible, p. 50.

I had a hunch that the allegorist might attempt to play games with numbers, especially since Masons make symbolic use of them. Swift's phrase, "reflection on God," suggested a look in the Bible. In four chapters of Isaiah — 37, 56, 38, 2, indicated by the degrees and minutes of latitude — are to be found an amazing number of passages paralleling the Swift story. In Isaiah 2, for example, is this: ". . . Their land also is full of silver and gold [Swift lists both silver and gold as part of his treasure], neither is there any end of their treasures. . . ." (Isa. 2:7) In this one chapter alone are allusions to Solomon, ships, idols cast of silver (Swift cast coins and silver bars), plus a phrase (adopted by Masons!): "Clefts of the Rocks." (Isa. 2:13, 16, 20-21)

In Isaiah 37 the reader will learn why the Swift allegorist created a duel with swords, resulting in the death of one man; why he uses the strange expression, "The Drying Ground"; and why he says that, in searching for the mine, he and his guide "wandered around all day. That night we came back to the place we started from." (Isa. 37: 7, 25, 34)

The following chapter reveals why Swift claims that for *fifteen years* he was prevented from finding his treasure. (Isa. 38:5) Also from this chapter: "Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees. . . ." (Isa. 38:8) Of the few references to "degrees" in the Bible, how very striking it is that we find the phrase in a passage we were directed to by a cryptic reference to degrees! (It is worth noting that in Masonry the various grades are known as "Degrees.")

In the same chapter is the question, "What is the sign . . .?" (Isa. 38:22) We may ask another: Is the sign in the Swift allegory? Well, Swift refers to "myrtle" which is a biblical tree. *One* of the very few biblical passages mentioning it has special meaning; and it *immediately prefaces* the designated chapter 56. It reads: ". . . and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the LORD for a name, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off." (Isa. 55:13) Here is how this "myrtle," this "*sign* that shall not be cut off," is represented by "Swift"; "Munday [his guide] said, 'I see the myrtle thicket. I know the way from here!'"⁵⁷

Chapter 56 refers again to this sign, as well as to "the sons of the stranger," to greed, and blindness. (Isa. 56:6, 10-11) Chapter 38 elaborates on the latter point: "Mine age is departed . . . mine eyes fail . . . [remember Swift became blind in his later years]

⁵⁷ *Journal* (Henson), p. 19; Mackey, p. 260, 347.

O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me [blind, Swift became "dependent upon others"] . . . they that go down into the pit [the mine] cannot hope for thy truth. . . ." (Isa. 38:12, 14, 18)

So many parallels with the Swift allegory! Reading and understanding these passages from Isaiah (containing symbolism adopted by Freemasonry) help us to understand the moral of the Swift allegory. After almost two hundred years, the key to the 'cipher' has been broken.

One of the problems allegories present is that of interpretation. It has not been my intent to twist facts to fit a theory. I can only repeat that the *Journal* itself *demand*s comparison with Freemasonry since so many Masonic symbols are expressly given therein. Clearly these elements — compasses, square, and trowel — refer to Masonry *to the exclusion of any other meaning*.

This does not mean "Swift" was a Mason, of course, since his very existence is doubtful. Nor does it *necessarily* mean that the original version of the *Journal* (long lost!) contained such symbolism — although every indication is that it did. In the forthcoming section I will detail evidence which strongly suggests the author's intent as well as indications of who he was and when the allegory was drafted. As we shall see, John Filson is conspicuously present in the Swift affair.

Part III: John Filson, John Swift

The earliest documented reference to Swift's silver mines is this land record of May 17, 1788:

Robert Breckinridge and John Filson as Tenants in Common Enters [*sic*] 1000 acres of land upon the balance of a Treasury Warrant No. 10,117 about sixty or seventy miles North Eastwardly from Martins Cabbins in Powells Valley to Include a silver mine which was Improved about 17 years ago by a Certain man named Swift at said mine, wherein the said Swift Reports he has extracted from the oar [*sic*] a Considerable quantity of Silver some of which he made into Dollars and left at or near the mine, together with the apparatus for making the same, the Land to be in a Square and the lines to run at the Cardinal Points of the Compass including the mine in the Centre as near as may be.⁵⁸

Filson is of course the famous Kentuckian who produced the first map of the state together with the first history, *The Discovery, Settlement and Present State of Kentucke* (1784) in which he wrote: "Iron ore and lead are found in abundance, but we do not hear of any silver or gold mines as yet discovered."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ See note 3.

⁵⁹ Revised edition, New York: Corinth Books, 1962, p. 25.

Now Filson's book, and the statements in it, contained endorsement by "Daniel Boon, Levi Todd, James Harrod." The opinions of these exceedingly knowledgeable men should have been the best obtainable; and they hadn't even *heard*, in all their travels, an allegation of silver mines. Yet in four years the name "Swift" had come to light; his mine had been located; and it was Filson who had gotten lucky. Weigh the odds.

There is, in fact, *absolutely no evidence of the "Swift Mines" legend prior to the 1788 Filson document.* It would be interesting if we could ask John Filson how he had located the mine. But since we cannot, we *can* look at the man and his activities in hopes of clues. They are forthcoming.

Consider this portrait of Filson by William Masterson of Rice University:

His was a strange personality. Fiercely acquisitive, he secured, on paper at least, over 12,000 acres of land. For gain he plunged into arduous schemes, sued and was sued, and endured all the hardships of an incredibly savage frontier. For gain, despite pious explanations to the contrary, he wrote his book and drew his map, the products of hours and days of interviews, travel, and technical skill. He was not friendly and was possessed of a deadly quality of impatience and pompousness. Like his map he lacked perspective — the map at the eastern and western ends, the man in any direction that touched upon personal standing and relationships. Except for the map and book he was in all his endeavors, including his one known courtship, almost ludicrously unsuccessful. He died penniless. . . .⁶⁰

Masterson adds: "Yet Filson's very energy attracts." His frontier travels were extensive. He taught at Transylvania, studied medicine and untold other subjects, conducted countless interviews, surveyed roads, wrote poetry and created sundry documents at the request of others, helped to found a city, and attempted to found a seminary (tuition: "one half cash the other property"⁶¹).

If the reader suspects I am about to 'accuse' Filson of perpetrating the Swift hoax, he is partly right: I wish to suggest that there are numerous *indications* — if not conclusive evidence — that he did so. Let us examine the indications.

First, there are Masonic symbols and allusions in the text of Filson's land record; but we cannot be certain they are not purely coincidental. For example, "Cardinal Points of the Compass" is a definite Masonic term, while on the other hand nothing precludes a non-Mason's innocent use of the expression in a deed. Too, the

⁶⁰ From Masterson's introduction to *Kentucke*, 1962 Corinth edition, vi.

⁶¹ *Kentucky Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1787; John Walton, *John Filson of Kentucke* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1956), p. 100.

"Square" may just be meant literally. In Masonry it can refer either to the four-sided figure which symbolizes morality (or duty), or to the trying square, which, with the compass, composes the Masonic emblem. (The serious student may wish to look up in Masonic texts and glossaries the following: "North-East Corner," "Working Tools," "Legend," "The Lost Word," "Circumambulation," "Quest," and even "Alchemy.") But I belabor my point: presently we shall look at Filson's Masonic ties; first, let us consider other evidence.

In that pioneer era of Kentucky, Filson was one of the very, very few who could have met *all* the necessary requirements for drafting the *Journal*. His scholarship, his ability to write and to create maps would obviously have been necessary talents together with his excellent knowledge of Kentucky. There was nothing in his mixed character to preclude a motive — and several motives present themselves.

Putting words into "Swift's" mouth would have been child's play for Filson; for after all, he had given these words to Daniel Boone in a ghostwritten account of the hero's exploits:

The aspect of these cliffs is so wild and horrid, that it is impossible to behold them without terror. The spectator is apt to imagine that nature had formerly suffered some violent convulsion; and that these are the dismembered remains of the dreadful shock: the ruins, not of Persepolis or Palmyra, but of the world!⁶²

Exclamation mark indeed! Anyone who could bestow upon a backwoodsman such an instant education would have no trouble saddling an untutored "sea captain" with a phrase like "deeming it imprudent."

Filson occasionally sounds like the surveyor he was, with a string of "thences": ". . . thence down the same to the mouth; thence up the Ohio. . ."⁶³ as if he were drafting a deed of land. Swift writes: "We . . . came to Leesburg, thence to Winchester, thence to Littles, thence to Fort Pitt. . ."⁶⁴

"Swift's" division of his manuscript into sections — "Description of the Mines and Country," "Ore South of the Furnace," etc. — parallels Filson's treatment of his book: "Situation and Boundaries," "Soil and Produce," etc. Filson evidently patterned his miscellany after Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, manu-

⁶² *Kentucke*, 1962 Corinth edition, p. 58.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶⁴ *Journal* (Henson), p. 11.

script copies of which were in circulation *after 1781*.⁶⁵ (Let us hope no one suggests Jefferson copied "Swift!")

After relating some of the early history of exproation, Filson (following Jefferson's approach) described the boundaries. He began: "Kentucke is situated, in its central part, near the latitude of 38° north, and 85° west longitude, and lying within the fifth climate. . . . It is bounded on the north by great Sandy-creek. . . ." ⁶⁶ And "Swift," after recounting his comings and goings, gives his "Description of the Mines and Country," including, as previously noted, the latitude and longitude. He says the furnace is on "a long rocky branch."⁶⁷

Let us compare style. In Filson's little book we find this:

The lands below the mouth of Elkhorn, up Eagle Creek, and towards the Ohio, are hilly and poor, except those contained in a great bend of the Ohio, opposite Great Miami, cut off, as appears in the map, by the Big-bone and Bank-lick creeks, interlocking and running separate courses. Here we find a great deal of good land, but something hilly.⁶⁸

And here for comparison is "Swift":

Most of the mountains have but little timber and are poor and barren. North of the furnace about three miles is a large hill, seven or eight miles long, upon which there is good timber of different kinds, where we were able to make charcoal in large quantities for use in smelting the ore. South of the furnace there is little timber worth notice.⁶⁹

In such passages there is a similarity of both style and outlook.

But did Filson have the particularly literary (and not just journalistic) turn of mind necessary to contrive a complex allegory replete with clever symbolism? The answer is emphatically yes. He was, for one thing, a poet. But an example of his genius for cleverness is found in the name he proposed for the city he helped to found. He called it "Losantiville." As he explained: "L for Licking River; os, Latin for mouth; anti, Greek for opposite; and ville, French for city." Read *backward*, it translates as 'city opposite the mouth of the Licking'! Although later the name was changed to Cincinnati, some Filson notes have survived to reveal his pedantic virtuosity.⁷⁰

Filson may well have been a Freemason; certainly some of his closest associates and contemporaries were. One was Levi Todd,

⁶⁵ Walton, p. 31.

⁶⁶ *Kentucke*, 1962 Corinth edition, p. 11.

⁶⁷ *Journal* (Henson), p. 17.

⁶⁸ *Kentucke*, 1962 Corinth edition, p. 18.

⁶⁹ *Journal* (Henson), p. 18.

⁷⁰ Walton, p. 113.

an endorser of his book.⁷¹ Humphrey Marshall — controversial Tory, historian, surveyor, and Mason⁷² — is presumed a Filson friend; although speculation that Marshall wrote, or helped write, *Kentucke* is based on too-meager evidence.⁷³ Filson almost surely came in contact with such Freemasons as Samuel January, an early settler of Lexington, who later opened an establishment at Limestone (Maysville) with the Masonic name "Sign of the Square and Compass." (Two taverns in Lexington also bore Masonic names — "Sheaf of Wheat" and "Sign of Cross-Keys.")⁷⁴ Insofar as is known Filson never met George Washington (America's most famous Freemason), but it was to him that Filson publicly dedicated his map.

In 1788 (the year in which the *Journal* was probably created, or at least finished), *Filson was actually living in the home of a prominent Mason, Colonel Robert Patterson*⁷⁵ — soon to be a Filson partner in founding "Losantiville." It was in this significant year of 1788, on November 17, that the "first lodge west of the Alleghanies," Masonic Lodge No. 25 at Lexington, was issued a charter.⁷⁶ The date of the application for the charter is unknown, but surely it was some time (weeks or even months) before. (Prior to that time, Kentucky's Freemasons had to make the difficult, dangerous trip to the Grand Lodge in Richmond, Virginia.) Unfortunately, the names of the charter members of Lodge No. 25 are irretrievably lost;⁷⁷ but it does seem that while plans were being made to establish the lodge, Filson — living in Patterson's home — was close at hand. And it is very likely that, with his extraordinary curiosity and his admiration for Masons, he sought membership in the society.

While there is no direct proof the "Swift Silver Mines" allegory was adopted for actual use by Masons, Freemasonry is, after all, a "society with secrets." Further, many appendant orders of the brotherhood have flourished briefly before passing into obscurity. If Filson had written the allegory (say at the request of Patterson),

⁷¹ J. Winston Coleman, *Masonry in the Bluegrass* (Lexington: Transylvania Press, 1933), p. 31.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁷³ Walton, p. 48.

⁷⁴ Coleman, *Masonry*, p. 28; Coleman, *Stage-Coach Days in the Bluegrass* (Louisville: Standard Press, 1935), p. 54; Chas. R. Staples, *The History of Pioneer Lexington (Ky.): 1779-1806* (Lexington: Transylvania Press, 1939), pp. 11-12. Masonry was obviously in a vigorous phase.

⁷⁵ Walton, p. 109; Coleman, *Masonry*, p. 31.

⁷⁶ Coleman, *Masonry*, p. 30.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

it might simply have suffered the same fate as "Losantiville." Or possibly another fate, which I will touch on presently.

Filson's talents frequently earned him requests to write documents for others. For example, it was he who drafted the petition to Congress on behalf of the families at Post St. Vincent pleading for military protection (and for the establishment of a "permanent land office here, for the purpose of obtaining valid rights to lands. . . .")⁷⁸ Land was a Filson obsession, and he dwells on explaining how to acquire it in his book.) He also wrote the announcement for a proposed Lexington seminary (a "bizarre" document, as his biographer admits)⁷⁹ as well as the prospectus for the proposed settlement of "Losantiville." It was *at the request of Colonel Patterson* that Filson set to the task of conjuring up that 'veiled' name.⁸⁰

In mid-1788 Filson wrote to his brother — who was being harassed by Filson's creditors — a letter most revealing of his character. He said, in part:

I have supported a good credit here [Lexington], and have enough to support me. I resumed my studies last winter . . . and this spring have begun to study Physic with Doctor Slater . . . two years I study, as soon as my study is finished I am to be married, which will be greatly to our advantage. Stand it out 2 years my dear brother, you shall have negroes to wait of you.⁸¹

The letter was written just ten days after Filson recorded his supposed discovery of the silver mine, yet he makes no reference to it! Did he *know* the mine was only legendary?

He did not travel to the mine. Instead he headed in the opposite direction. A month later, at Beargrass (near Louisville), he composed a poem, indicating he had been spurned in love and threatening suicide.⁸²

By September 23, Filson had arrived at "Losantiville" with his two partners: Colonel Patterson, and Matthias Denman of New Jersey (who had obtained the land). After a preliminary survey, Filson disappeared. He was rumored killed by Indians, although his body was never found; and another surveyor, Israel Ludlow, took his place in the partnership. John Walton, Filson's biographer, states: "Years later, sworn testimony was given that these men ransacked Filson's trunk and destroyed his papers in order to de-

78 Walton, pp. 85-86.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

80 John Bach McMaster, *A History of the People of the United States* (8 vols.; New York: D. Appleton, 1883-1913), I, 516.

81 Walton, pp. 105-106. The letter was written May 27, 1788.

82 *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

fraud his heirs."⁸³ Could the Swift allegory have been among the papers in the ransacked trunk?

A great deal of circumstantial evidence connects Filson with the "Swift" manuscript. *Someone* certainly contrived it, and at every turn, Filson is suspiciously present.

Wherever we find Filson in the Swift matter, Colonel Robert Patterson is not far behind. After Filson's death, the records are silent as to "Swift's Mine" for more than two years. Then there is this entry:

April 1791. Eli Cleveland withdraws his entry of 200 acres made January 5, 1791 on Warrent No. 15132. Eli Cleveland and John Morton enters [*sic*] 1483 acres of land on two Treasury Warrants No. 15132 and 12128 on a branch of Red River to Include an Old Camp in the Center where there is some old troughs at said Camp by the branch side. The said Camp is a place difficult of access Supposed to be Swift's Old Camp and others including a mine said to be occupied formerly by said Swift and others.⁸⁴

John Morton (who later became a banker) was a Mason,⁸⁵ and his partner, Eli Cleveland, may have been. Cleveland was closely linked with Colonel Patterson since they were (at roughly this time) fellow magistrates of Fayette County.⁸⁶

In two more years these county lawmen were to learn of a bizarre and tragic episode in the "Swift" saga. Colonel James Harrod, prominent as the founder of Harrodsburg, was reported murdered after being lured on a search for the mines⁸⁷ by a man named Bridges — a man with whom Harrod "had a lawsuit about property."⁸⁸ In his little book, Filson had called Colonel Harrod "a gentleman of veracity."⁸⁹

Several years later, in 1815, Colonel Wm. McMillan of Clark County, with eleven other men, formed a "company"⁹⁰ to search for the Swift mines. McMillan possessed, at least according to later legend, the "original" *Journal* and map. As to the latter: "From notes relating to it, it must have been in cipher, for finding the place appeared to depend upon the phases of the moon or signs of the zodiac or some mysterious combination of circumstances, per-

83 Walton, pp. 119-20.

84 Fayette Co., Va., Entry Book, p. 333, in the Kentucky Land Office, Frankfort.

85 Coleman, *Masonry*, p. 82.

86 Staples, *Pioneer Lexington*, p. 78.

87 Conneley and Coulter, p. 113.

88 *Ibid.*

89 *Kentucke*, 1962 Corinth edition, p. 24.

90 "Swift" also termed his group a "company." In the *Journal* (see Henson, p. 10) he actually places the word in quotation marks. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1960: "Freemasonry"): the Freemason was "understood to be a mason who was free in the sense of being a member of a guild or *company*" (my italics).

haps never revealed."⁹¹ Had the map survived, only then might we do more than guess that the "cipher" was composed of Masonic symbols.

I did succeed in establishing that "William McMillin" [*sic*] was active in Clark County,⁹² and that a "Wm. McMillan" was at "Losantiville" in 1788! He arrived with a party brought by Colonel Patterson shortly after Filson's reported death. . . .⁹³ This much is clear: Any further clues concerning "Swift's Mines" will be unearthed — not in the soil of Kentucky — but in the neglected dust of archives.

⁹¹ From a typescript, "Clark County Chronicles," in the files of the Kentucky Historical Society.

⁹² Williard Rouse Jillson, *Early Clark County Kentucky: A History (1674-1824)* (Frankfort: Roberts Printing Company, 1966), p. 65.

⁹³ Beverly W. Bond, Jr. (ed), "Dr. Daniel Drake's Memoir of the Miami Country, 1779-1794," *Quarterly Publication of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio*, XVIII (1923), p. 57.