

head of the United States Geographical Survey in later years. His name was John Wesley Powell.

At the time the Powell family moved to Jackson in 1838, social unrest existed in the community regarding the question of slavery. Big George was a very vocal abolitionist and was active in the Underground Railroad. To be both a temperance and anti-slavery man in those days required an unusual amount of courage. Likewise, it brought with it persecution, denunciation, and social ostracis by a large number of the surrounding population.

However, Joseph Wesley was a lay minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, a tailor, farmer, and strong abolitionist as well. Because of his political views, when his son, John Wesley, began attending school in about 1840 he became a victim of stoning and verbal abuse. It became apparent he could no longer attend common school and so he was placed under the tutelage of George Crookham.

Teacher Crookham found a youth who was gifted and inquisitive. He recognized his capabilities and limitless interest and began to nurture these traits. Crookham and his student Powell made numerous field trips along Salt Lick Creek where the cliffs revealed, through exposure, rock layers and their material makeup; the large amount of flora to study made the areas around Jackson their classroom. Crookham helped instill a love for the study of geology in Powell. He would later put this knowledge to use when he became the first man to travel the length of the dangerous and unconquerable Colorado River. There he studied the incredible geologic history stored in the rocks of the Grand Canyon through which the river flows.

By 1846 the political situation in Jackson was becoming dangerous. On one occasion Crookham, Rev. Powell, and others were attacked by a mob and forced to seek refuge in a nearby home. Later that year the Powells

moved to Wisconsin and would never return to Jackson

It was also in this period that an event occurred which would rob future generations of valuable knowledge about the Jackson area. At his school Crookham collected a large number of fossils, curiosities, and relics, as well as keeping a large journal about the history of the Scioto Salt Licks. One night political activists broke into the school setting it on fire. In one instant the most illuminating history written about the days of the salt olers was destroyed.

By this time Big George was getting on in years. It appears that a decline in his health was also beginning to affect him. On January 09, 1853 his beloved wife Sarah died. No doubt his physical condition dictated that he move where some assistance could be given in his care. He moved in with his daughter, Mrs. J. W. Hanna. During this time he continued to amaze his friends with his discussions and remarks. He told how his death would occur, including how he would suffer from the paralysis of a stroke.

He died on February 28, 1857 at the age of seventy-seven years, three months, and ten days. This man's life, helping to settle a wilderness, at the same time providing an education to those who braved unknown conditions in the Ohio Country, is remarkable. Even more so was the influence he had in shaping one young man, leading him to become one of the most important persons in the history of the United States, making the legend of "Big" George Crookham a fascinating and enduring one in the history of Jackson, Ohio.

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GEORGE L. "BIG GEORGE" CROOKHAM

Early Jackson Pioneer
Salt Boiler
Scientist - Mathematician
Geologist
School Teacher

It is hard to believe that a rugged salt making camp carved out of the wilderness could attract and become home to one of the most fascinating individuals ever to live in southern Ohio.

George Lennox Crookham, later known as "Big George", was born of English parents, James Crookham and Hannah Perry. James fought in the Revolutionary War as a Gunner in Col. Flowers Regiment of Artillery Officers. George was born during the war on November 18, 1779 in Carlisle, Cumberland Co., PA.



George Lennox Crookham

Very little is known about his early life except that he qualified himself as a teacher. By the end of the eighteenth century he was ready to make his mark on the world and decided to go west to make his fortune. As fate had it he moved to a promising new settlement in the Ohio Territory called Salt Lick Town. It was located in the southeast corner of what was then Ross County. Later the town would become Jackson and a county would be carved out from surrounding counties, Ross, Galia and Scioto. This county would be named Jackson.

He was the first teacher in the area. He hoped to make teaching his full time vocation. However, he had to work at the salt furnaces to supplement his income. It was hard work, and the only time he had to study were in the evenings, reading by the light of the furnace fires.

On January 19, 1808 he married Sarah Ann Lake who was from Boone's Lick, Ky. Her father, Asa, owned a salt furnace here. In the years to follow, the Crookhams would have a total of sixteen children. George's school teaching became his full time vocation in order to feed his ever increasing family.

It is uncertain where the first school in which he taught was located. However, it is believed he taught in his home, though that location is also uncertain because at that time all the land in Salt Lick Town was not for sale. The reason for this was that the U.S. Congress had reserved an area six miles square to protect the valuable salt licks. Therefore, almost all of the dwellings were not of the best quality. All living here were simply squatters.

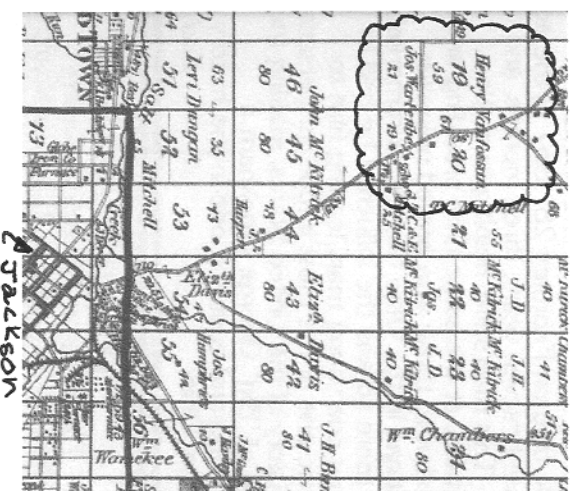
George became recognized as the best educated individual in the county, and this encouraged him to become a greater student. He possessed abilities to qualify him for great things.

The discovery of fossils of long extinct

fauna when digging salt wells, as well as the ditches which held the piping to carry salt water to the furnaces, helped fasten his attention on geology; the numerous mounds fixed his mind on archaeology. His daily contact with flowers and birds led him to study them minutely.

His great interest in learning soon led him to acquire a collection of some of the greatest scientific works of that time. His enthusiasm for learning was picked up by his students.

When he first arrived at the furnaces he was a man of average height (5'-8") and weight. However, as time passed his appetite increased and so did his waistline. This led to his weight tipping over 350 pounds. It is said his waist was as large around as his height. It is also said he ate only one meal a day, at lunchtime. This meal would have fed six normal men: three whole chickens plus side dishes were common. Thus, George L. Crookham became known as "Big" George Crookham for the rest of his life.



The Farm lands of George Crookham (Circled)

George also took interest in things of a philosophical nature. When first arriving at the licks he became a heavy drinker. However, by the 1820s he recognized the damage it was doing to himself and the misery it caused to other families. From this experience he became a leading member of the temperance movement in the county and remained so for the rest of his life.

By 1826 the State of Ohio decided to allow the sale of the lands around the Scioto Salt Licks due to the unprofitability of the salt industry. The land was divided into 80 acre tracts and put up for sale. George bought two of these salt reserve lots, Nos 19 and 20, in Lick Township. Here he built his home and a school as well. Built of Jack Oak he named his school "The Jack Oak College." So well known was this place of learning that well after his death it continued to operate and the area which it served was known for years as the Crookham School District.

Because of the incredibly rich natural resources here, the first geological survey in Ohio was conducted in this area. Crookham assisted in that survey. His abilities began to be known both far and wide. He solved the most difficult problems in math with ease and rapidly. His memory was equally as great as his reasoning powers. An algebra problem which had proved too hard for a senior class in college was solved by him in five minutes while sitting on a wood pile.

Teaching examiners in Chillicothe handed him a newspaper upside down which he read in that position with ease. His dedication and brilliance would be soon poured forth teaching a lad whose family moved to Jackson from New York State. This boy would later become the second most famous explorer in the history of the United States as well as