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The Editor's Page

The first issue of the Daviess County Historical Quarterly marks the beginning of a new era in preserving the history of the County by making available an instrument for the publication of serious research on the County's history. All contributions are welcome, and all persons interested in the history of the area are invited to submit manuscripts for consideration.

Featured in this issue is a paper written by Shelia E. Brown Heflin, Secretary of the Society and presented at a dinner meeting in 1982. Mrs. Heflin is a graduate of Kentucky Wesleyan College, and is finishing work on her Master's Degree in History at Western Kentucky University.

Short papers on the Whig Party and on the town of Curdsville are by the Editor, Lee A. Dew, Professor of History at Kentucky Wesleyan College. It is hoped that each issue will include an article which will "Focus on" a town, personality, business or other interesting feature of the county's history.

Special thanks for this issue go to Mrs. Brown and to Dr. Richard Weiss for reading proof, and to Andy Dorfman of the KWC Library staff, who did the photography, and to the Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library for making materials available for photographing.



Cover of a Chautauqua program. This program was from one of the later tent chautauquas. From the O-DC Library collection.

OWENSBORO'S CHAUTAUQUA YEARS, 1902-1932

By Shelia E. Brown Heflin

The Chautauqua Movement enlightened and educated thousands of Americans from its humble beginnings in 1874 as a religious institute at Lake Chautauqua, New York, where it still continues today, to the final tent meetings held throughout the United States in 1932. The movement developed from its original religious purpose to become the liberal fine arts college of America's middle class. For the first time in their lives, many Americans experienced and enjoyed great oratorical speeches, renowned religious leaders, classical music, drama, opera, and vaudeville--all under the auspices of the chautauqua. Replicas of the mother chautauqua in New York sprang up around the nation. Owensboro, Kentucky, aided by local developers, boasted its own version, which was called Chautauqua Park. When financial difficulties beset the park owners, local businessmen and civic groups continued the movement by sponsoring traveling tent chautauquas. Area residents participated in chautauquas nearly every year from 1902 through 1932.

James H. Parrish, W. E. Parrish, E. E. Owsley, John G. Delker, and H.L. Koltinsky filed Articles of Incorporation for the Seven Hills Chautauqua Company on December 18, 1901. With \$20,000 as their capital stock, these men launched the Chautauqua Movement in Owensboro. They stated the purpose of their company in the Articles of Incorporation:

...to promote the cause of higher education,
literary and musical culture, social advancement
and such other interests and amusements as they
may deem proper and prudent;...1

Admittedly, these men hoped to realize a profit from developing the Seven Hills area into a new community. In their bid for success, however, they introduced an educational and cultural movement which remained long after their dreams faded.

Thousands of area residents attended the July 3, 1902, grand opening of Chautauqua Park. In only six months the developers converted the land from forest to a beautiful park. The park, patterned after the mother Chautauqua, included a one-third mile lagoon complete with boats, a merry-go-round, a bowling alley, beautifully landscaped walks and drives, statuary, an auditorium with a seating capacity of 12,000, an electric light plant, and many other private and public buildings. After the grand opening, preparations for the first chautauqua ever held in Owensboro (and only the second in the state of Kentucky) continued

at a rapid pace.² The Methodists and Baptists readied their club-houses as the administration building took shape. When completed, the administration building housed the post office, telegraph office, newspaper office, real estate office, and living areas on the second floor for the park superintendent's family.³ The Owensboro Railway Company even extended its street car tracks to the Seven Hills Chautauqua.⁴

At last the anticipated day, July 31, 1902, arrived and the first Owensboro chautauqua commenced. This first, twelve day chautauqua began with a two day reunion of the United Confederate Veterans. Interspersed with the military meetings were band and vocal concerts.⁵ Soon after the veterans departed a routine schedule emerged for chautauqua participants. Rural folk and city dwellers merged together and attended classes during the morning, light concerts or educational lectures in the afternoon, and the main program preceded by a musical presentation each evening. Chautauqua classes included elocution school, chorus class, physical education, cooking school, and the Sunday School classes.⁶

Sundays were kept holy with religious services at the park. The musical talent provided the melodic praise along with a popular or well-known minister delivering the message. The strictly religious program appeased the local population who strongly objected to a full chautauqua program on the Sabbath. Naturally, out-of-town people like the Breckinridge County, Kentucky contingent who traveled via the steamer *Sunshine* to visit the chautauqua felt disappointed. If they had wanted to hear a sermon, they would have stayed home and attended church.⁷

Superintendent W.C. Archer presided over all the chautauqua events and introduced each act on the program. Each program presented new concepts and ideas for the patrons to mull over and discuss. Hardly a day passed without the public enjoying something new, be it music or athletics. The second largest crowd of the season turned out to hear Balmer's African Choir. The choir, five boys from different African tribes, taught the audience about their cultures and the capabilities of people who are different.⁸ Lorado Taft, the sculptor, brought appreciation of good art into the audience's lives.⁹ Great lectures, such as Captain Richmond P. Hobson's talk on Naval history, and why the American Navy should be strengthened, probably stirred up many discussions on the American military.¹⁰ The chautauqua even provided an outstanding event in the athletic area when the instructors introduced a new game called badminton. Owensboroans observed and played this new game before any of their fellow Kentuckians knew it existed.¹¹

According to Mary Conen, who attended several Owensboro chautauquas, the crowd showed their thanks and approval for exceptional acts with a special salute. She recalled that men waved their red and

blue work handkerchiefs, while the women fluttered their white ones.¹² Superintendent Areher taught the August 3, 1902, crowd the salute following an excellent program by impersonators, Willard Gorton and G. Paul Smith. Areher told the crowd that Smith would appreciate the handkerchief waving much more than applause because he was deaf.¹³ The chautauqua salute originated at Lake Chautauqua in answer to the problem of whether to clap at the conclusion of a clergyman's talk. Doctors tried to discourage the handkerchief waving, fearing germs would be spread to innocent people. However, the practice continued until just prior to World War I when a Chicago doctor traveled the chautauqua circuit lecturing on the common cold.¹⁴

When the Chautauqua opened in 1903, there were several new additions to the park: Four Gables, the lodge; a library; a dining hall; bungalows; cottages; and a miniature train which cost five cents per ride. The public filled the new housing accommodations quickly. It cost \$1 per day for a room at Four Gables, \$2 for room and board, or \$12 for a week. Many people preferred to camp out on the park grounds. The new tents, 12 by 14 feet and 14 by 16 feet, rented for \$5 and \$6 respectively.¹⁵ Ethel Ford recalled that one year her mother rented a room in the brick administration building, which faced the lagoon and the bridge. She also remembered simply packing a picnic lunch, loading up the buggy, and spending the day at the chautauqua. It was not necessary to live on the grounds, but it was more fun to be right in the center of all the activities.¹⁶

Over the next few years many musicians, dramatic readers, and vaudeville-type acts graced the local chautauqua stage. The Dunbar Bell Ringers, Jeffries Band, Pamahasika's trained birds and dogs, Frederick Warde - a Shakespearian dramatist, and the acrobatic Zanzale Brothers were just a few of the favorites.¹⁷ But the famous lecturers remained the top drawing card. In 1903, William Jennings Bryan appeared fifteen minutes late and still received a standing ovation with white handkerchiefs aflutter. Nearly 8000 men and women listened 1½ hours to Bryan's speech on "The Value of an Ideal."¹⁸ Kentucky newspaper editor, Henry Watterson, presented his lecture, "Money and Morals," to a large 1904 audience.¹⁹ Reverend Sam Jones, the fiery Methodist evangelist, closed the 1904 assembly and returned to open the 1905 chautauqua. Even though it rained, the crowd still flocked to hear him. Jones expounded upon a variety of topics at the August 4, 1905, meeting included the greatness of the chautauqua:

...he declared that the chautauqua is a compromise between a camp meeting and a country fair, but that it meets the needs of the time and is taking the country. He declared that it cultivated sociability, which is the thing needed. Next to travel, he said, the chautauqua is the greatest vehicle of broader views. "You get more for your money here," he said, "than anywhere else."²⁰

Jones was correct when he said you got more for your money at the chautauqua. During the eight assemblies held at the Seven Hills Chautauqua, the most expensive season pass cost \$3 for 21 days in 1906.²¹ The 1907 program advertised season tickets, which entitled people to enter and leave the park as often as they liked, at \$2.50 for 14 days. A child, 12 years old and under, paid \$1.50 for a season ticket. The chautauqua charged 25 cents per adult and 15 cents per child for daily admissions good for a single entry.²²

Year after year the local paper proclaimed the chautauqua a success, when in actuality it was a financial failure. The six Parrish brothers, who managed the chautauqua for six seasons, gambled and lost. The *Owensboro Daily Messenger* described their management as "a system of betting four aces when a pair of deuces was held."²³ Every assembly simply compounded the initial debt. The stockholders never once received a financial statement, and the financial difficulties surfaced in April 1908 when the Owensboro Savings Bank and Trust Company failed. The Parrish brothers had used it as their cash supply.²⁴

Superintendent W.F. Maylott felt compelled to honor the 1908 contracts and hold the chautauqua despite all the problems. Twenty local citizens agreed to back Maylott's efforts by guaranteeing \$100 apiece. They held the chautauqua and all the engaged talent appeared--only the audience was missing. Prejudice against the institution, in light of the Parrish family's actions, accounted for its failure in 1908.²⁵ The gate receipts for 14 days totaled \$2,356.10, while expenses topped \$5,000. Several times in past years the gate receipts for one day had climbed above the 1908 total receipts.²⁶

In 1909, a new superintendent, E.B. Miller, attempted to revive Owensboro's chautauqua spirit. The public returned to the assemblies, but not in numbers large enough to make the meeting a financial success. At the close of this session the fate of the chautauqua movement in Owensboro seemed dim. Platform manager George H. Cox expected the beautiful chautauqua grounds to be sold soon, but he still hoped that an organization would purchase the grounds and "make the chautauqua perpetual."²⁷ The Business Mens Association discussed the idea, but nothing came of it.²⁸ In July 1910, the local Woodmen of the World chapter seriously considered sponsoring a chautauqua, but abandoned the idea when they realized it was too late to arrange a good program.²⁹ Eventually, on June 15, 1916, at the conclusion of the settlement of the business of the Owensboro Savings Bank and Trust Company, the city acquired the thirty-one acre chautauqua grounds as a public park.³⁰

Two years passed before Owensboroans ventured to support the chautauqua movement again. The chautauqua which opened June 27, 1912, in the grove adjoining Moreland's Addition was a new form--the traveling tent chautauqua.³¹ Keith Vawter, a partner in the Redpath Chautauqua Bureau, designed a plan in 1904 to sell a complete

chautauqua program to all the independent chautauquas across the country. They resisted and the venture failed. In 1907, he tried again and succeeded, although it was 1910 before he fully established the best plan for tent chautauquas. His plan included tight booking and ironclad contracts.³²

Tent chautauquas operated on the circuit method. Only the superintendent, tent crew, and lady in charge of the children's program remained throughout the entire chautauqua. The acts performed and moved on since they were booked in a new town every day.³³ The Redpath Bureau of Chicago, which provided many Owensboro chautauquas, operated a seven day circuit that opened in Jacksonville, Florida, during April and then moved through 120 towns in Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois.³⁴

Tent chautauquas were always financially successful from the management's viewpoint. They held the ironclad contract which was legal and completely one-sided, favoring the management. The manager guaranteed only to provide a chautauqua, while the sponsor guaranteed all the cost in advance. In Owensboro's case, a group of local citizens or an institution acted as sponsor and guaranteed \$2000 to bring a seven day chautauqua to the city. The contract required that every penny of the \$2000 guarantee be in the bank on opening day.³⁵

Local sponsors sold season tickets, at the specified price of \$2.50, to gain the \$2000. If they failed to sell the required 800 tickets to break even, the deficit came directly from their pockets. Each person who signed the contract was liable for the entire amount of the guarantee. Usually the sponsor merely broke even by selling just enough tickets to meet the guarantee.³⁶ If by chance the sponsors managed to sell more tickets than needed to meet the guarantee, the managing bureau made sure they got their portion of that sum, also. In 1922, the Redpath Bureau shared fifty percent of all ticket sales over the guarantee with the Community Service group of Owensboro.³⁷

Despite the ironclad contract, several Owensboro sponsors managed to make small profits. In 1914, the Women of the Anti-Tuberculosis Association realized \$575 for their efforts as chautauqua sponsors.³⁸ The Industrial Club earned approximately \$50, which they donated to the Mary Kendall Home for girls. They cleared a small sum despite the war tax placed on each ticket sold in 1919.³⁹ The community Service group netted at least \$350 as 1924 sponsors and cleared \$200 in 1925.⁴⁰ The Owensboro Women's Club sponsored the chautauqua in 1930, clearing at least \$100 which they added to their clubhouse fund.⁴¹

In order to insure a return engagement, the local sponsors asked audiences for season ticket pledges at the close of each chautauqua. Enthusiasm for the tremendous lectures, music, and drama exper-

ience over the past week spurred men and women to pledge to buy a season ticket for next year. The get-a-bargain-while-you-can idea led many thrifty people to make pledges. In 1925, people who had pledged in 1924, purchased their season ticket for \$3, while it cost a person \$10.50 total if they bought single admission tickets to every performance.⁴² When the sponsor received enough ticket pledges to meet the guarantee, he signed a contract with the manager and insured the return of the chautauqua to Owensboro.⁴³

Area residents adjusted rapidly to holding the chautauqua in a tent. These were square brown tents with a forty foot center section to give length. It required two center poles thirty feet tall, eight quarter-poles, and quite a few shorter poles along the sides to support the tent.⁴⁴ The tent erected in 1912 at Moreland's Park could seat 3000 people, so there was no problem seating all the people attending Owensboro's first tent chautauqua.⁴⁵ If the crowds overflowed, the superintendent solved the problem by rolling up the tent sides.

Raising the tents probably provided as much excitement for the local children as the chautauqua did for their parents. College students earned tuition money working on chautauqua tent crews during the summer. On June 20, 1914, crew number four, comprised of only four college boys, unloaded the tent and equipment from the Louisville and Nashville train, transported it to the Third Street School lot, and erected the heavy canvas tent all in one afternoon.⁴⁶ In 1921, the crews raised the tent in an area filled with memories of another form of chautauqua--the beautiful city owned Chautauqua Park.⁴⁷ From this time on the tents sprang up annually at the park; the chautauqua movement in Owensboro had returned to its birthplace.

On at least two occasions Owensboroans probably longed to have an auditorium rather than a tent for their chautauqua. Rainstorms presented quite a problem for the tent crew and the audience. Rain often kept the less hardy and least adventurous people at home wishing for better weather. At times, those who came could not hear the speaker above the wind and rain. Crew boys used a long pole with a cross board to push against the water pockets. During a July rainstorm one year in Owensboro, the water pocket appeared just in front of the stage. The crew boy proceeded with the normal routine, however just before the board jammed the pocket, it came loose causing the pole to rip the canvas. Water flooded the stage, soaking the musician and his instrument.⁴⁸ A missing tent, lost by the railroad, kept the chautauqua from appearing in 1916. The Women's Club sponsored the 1916 chautauqua in conjunction with the Alkahest Company of Atlanta, Georgia. They sold over \$1000 worth of tickets and eagerly awaited the opening day. The tent failed to arrive and all their plans disintegrated.⁴⁹ The Executive Committee met and decided a postponed chautauqua would not be appropriate, so they refunded all the money

to their disappointed patrons.⁵⁰

The Redpath Bureau of Chicago provided all the Owensboro tent chautauquas, with the exception of two in 1915 and 1916 which the Alkahest Company arranged. Year after year Redpath sent programs which interested all segments of Owensboro's population--even the children rated special programs. The Junior Chautauqua, as the Bureau called it, kept the children entertained during the morning hours. In 1912, the chautauqua cooperated with the national Boy Scout movement and introduced youngsters to scouting. A trained scoutmaster utilized the large field adjoining the chautauqua tent in Moreland's Park for teaching Owensboro children the basics of scouting.⁵¹

The ever-popular story hours met each morning at ten o'clock. Competent women, trained to work with children, conducted the sessions which included stories, songs, and dances, often presented in costume.⁵² The city arranged for all interested children to attend the 1921 Junior Chautauqua for free. Kathlyn Dishman recalls that big trucks collected the children at specified points around the city and delivered them to Chautauqua Park. That year the story hour lady failed to arrive on time and Miss Sallie Morton, a beloved local teacher, filled in.⁵³ The parade through downtown on Friday, June 29, highlighted the 1921 Junior Chautauqua. The 500 to 600 children who attended story hour that week filled the parade trucks which doubled as their daily transportation. As they paraded through the city they blew horns and sang, displaying to the town the value of coordinated children's programs.⁵⁴

The Redpath Bureau also recognized the value of organized children's programs to increase the chautauqua's profits. For many years the Junior Chautauqua prepared a pageant, which the Bureau scheduled for performance on the final meeting day. Relatives who failed to buy a season ticket then bought the more expensive single admission ticket to see little Johnnie and Susie perform. One hundred children participated in the 1920 pageant "The Good Fairy Thrift," in which thrift defeats wastefulness. Each day the children spent half of their story hour learning their parts and trying on costumes which the chautauqua supplied.⁵⁵ While the management counted the extra dollars on closing night, parents proudly watched their child's acting debut.

In programming the adult sessions, the Bureau carefully considered the outlook of small town America. In the early years of the tent chautauqua theatrical performances on the program constituted a serious sin. The chautauqua eliminated this prejudice a step at a time. The impersonators and dramatic readers came first, paving the way for the lecturers who read extracts from the great plays. The public liked the vocal excerpts so well that the Bureau introduced short, well acted excerpts from these same plays. Soon, audiences demanded full

theatrical plays ranging from comedy to drama.⁵⁶ One of the first full length plays to grace the Owensboro chautauqua stage was an American comedy entitled "It Pays to Advertise." The audience thoroughly enjoyed the fine performance of the cast of eight.⁵⁷ In 1924, they booked two plays and in 1931 they proudly advertised three plays on the bill for a five day chautauqua.⁵⁸

Chautauqua lecturers often introduced thought-provoking topics. Their topics reflected the changing America. "Mother, Home, and Heaven" lectures satisfied patrons for years. However, when managers noticed audiences growing tired of them, they quickly engaged speakers to discuss the social problems facing all Americans. Lecture topics included women's rights, the ways of juveniles, prohibition, and divorce--naturally speakers at this time were anti-divorce.⁵⁹ The muckrakers brought their campaign for better local and national government to the chautauqua stage. They often attacked the evils of big business from the platform.⁶⁰ World War I established world news as a prime subject for chautauqua lectures. An American ambulance driver, Robert Bowman, told about life on the French front and illustrated his talk with photographs in June 1917.⁶¹ Nearly every session of the 1919 chautauqua contained a presentation concerning the war. Miss Ada Ward, who had recently returned from France and Germany, lectured on understanding our allies.⁶² The following day R.E.P. Kline discussed the League of Nations in his talk, "The New Competition."⁶³ Later that week even the local residents received an opportunity to make a statement on the war as they participated in a musical pageant entitled "War, Victory and Peace."⁶⁴

As the world continued to change, the chautauquas attempted to keep their programs up to date and applicable. Travel talks, illustrated with slides and motion pictures, proved popular.⁶⁵ World War I opened the eyes of many Americans who previously believed they needed no knowledge of foreign nations. The world's emphasis on technology led the management to include scientific programs. In June 1927, R.B. Ambrose presented a lecture-demonstration entitled, "The Science Story." An *Owensboro Messenger* reporter dubbed Ambrose an electrical wizard after observing his experiments in high voltage and frequency currents.⁶⁶

Chautauqua ticket holders surely never regretted their purchase. If the speakers disappointed them, the musical programs made up for it. Every year the chautauqua presented a variety of music ranging from opera to popular tunes. Bands appealed to many patrons. Bohumir Kyril, the famous cornet player, appeared with his band and delighted the Owensboro audience three successive years.⁶⁷ At times the management seized the opportunity to book unusual musical acts for a change of pace. The Croatian orchestra was just such an act. The native Croatians performed on their odd musical instruments for the opening day of the 1918 chautauqua.⁶⁸

During the 1920 chautauqua, the patrons witnessed both unusual and classical music. Grobecker's Swiss Singers and Yodlers appeared just a few days before an opera company presented Gilbert and Sullivan's opera "H.M.S. Pinafore."⁶⁹ Opera fans thoroughly enjoyed hearing Tamaki Miura, the world's greatest Madame Butterfly, at the closing program in 1926. In costume the Japanese prima dona performed some of the arias from the operas which made her famous.⁷⁰ Country music appeared on the Owensboro chautauqua stage for the first time in 1928, when Charles Ross Taggart and his old-time fiddlers performed.⁷¹ The closing program of 1930 ranked high on the list of unusual musical presentations. Hawaiians performed native songs and dances to the accompaniment of steel guitars and ukeleles. Magnificent scenery--a tropical sea, palms, thatched houses, the moon, and a spark-throwing, smoke-belching volcano--helped the audience picture the Hawaiian Islands.⁷²

The Chautauqua Movement offered something for everyone. Why did it nearly die in 1932? Radio, motion pictures, and the Great Depression are a few of the reasons. Radio and the new talking pictures presented information much more rapidly than the chautauqua. People no longer needed to wait for that special summer week when the chautauqua came to educate and entertain them. Now they simply turned on the radio or attended the movies for instant education and entertainment. Money remained the major reason the chautauquas ceased to exist. Poor crops, government taxation, and bank failures accounted for farmers and small town people not having even \$3 for a season ticket.⁷³ By 1933, the depression had suffocated the tent chautauqua movement.

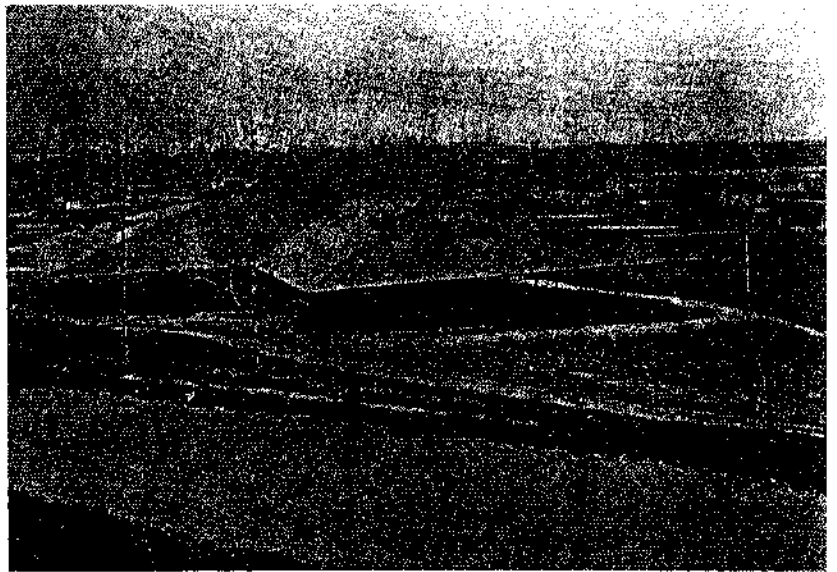
The Chautauqua Movement did not die totally, since the mother chautauqua in New York still exists and functions as an educational center. Regrettably, Owensboro experienced its last chautauqua in June 1932. Gone, but not forgotten aptly applies to the Owensboro chautauqua movement. Many area residents fondly recall the fellowship and spirit of adventure that the sessions provided in their quest for knowledge. A city park bearing the name Chautauqua Park reminds the community of the great educational movement that brought joy, excitement, and knowledge to Owensboro between 1902 and 1932.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Daviess County, Ky., Office of County Clerk, *Corporation Book* (Owensboro, Ky., 1901), Vol. 1, p.511.
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- 3 "Like Magic," *ODI*, July 10, 1902.
- 4 "Putting In A Y," *ODI*, July 9, 1902.
- 5 "Chautauqua: Today's Program," *Owensboro Daily Messenger*, Aug. 1, 1902. Hereafter cited as *ODM*.
- 6 "Chautauqua At Night," *ODM*, Aug. 2, 1902.
- 7 "Sunday's Sermon at the Chautauqua Grounds," *ODM*, Aug. 2, 1902; "Several Attractions," *ODM*, Aug. 5, 1902.
- 8 "African Choir," *ODM*, Aug. 5, 1902.
- 9 "Chautauqua At Night," *ODM*, Aug. 2, 1902.
- 10 "Chautauqua Ended," *ODM*, Aug. 2, 1902.
- 11 "The Chautauqua," *ODI*, July 20, 1902.
- 12 Mary Conen, speaker Chautauqua Renaissance, Gentryville, Ind., June 7, 1980.
- 13 "Splendid Entertainment," *ODM*, Aug. 3, 1902.
- 14 Harry P. Harrison, *Culture Under Canvas* (New York, 1958), 46-48.
- 15 "All Is In Readiness," *ODM*, Aug. 2, 1903; Four Gables Advertisement, *ibid.*
- 16 Interview with Ethel Ford, Oct. 9, 1980.
- 17 "Today Is The Last," *ODM*, Aug. 19, 1903; "Proved A Great Day," *ODM*, Aug. 12, 1904; "Law Enforcement Was Folk's Theme," *ODM*, Aug. 11, 1907; *Seven Hills Chautauqua Program* (Owensboro, Ky., 1907), 14.
- 18 "William J. Bryan Heard By Great Throng," *ODM*, Aug. 8, 1903.
- 19 "Very Large Crowd," *ODM*, Aug. 16, 1904.
- 20 "Auspicious Opening of the Chautauqua," *ODM*, Aug. 4, 1905.
- 21 "Chautauqua Tn Open Today Rain Or Shine," *ODM*, Aug. 1, 1906.
- 22 *Seven Hills Chautauqua Program*, 4.
- 23 "Chautauqua Fails Tn Make Expenses," *ODM*, Aug. 13, 1908.
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- 27 "The Chautauqua Has Closed," *ODM*, Sept. 1, 1901.
- 28 "B.M.A. Meeting Was Busy One," *ODM*, Sept. 17, 1909.
- 29 "Woodmen," *ODM*, July 15, 1910; "Give Up The Idea Of Holding Chautauqua," *ODM*, July 31, 1910.
- 30 William Foster Hayes, *Sixty Years of Owensboro, 1883-1943*.

- 31 "Judge Blair On The Opening Day," *ODM*, June 27, 1912.
- 32 Theodore Morrisun, *Chautauqua: A Center for Education, Religion, and the Arts in America* (Chicago, 1974), 178.
- 33 Victoria Case and Robert Ormond Case, *We Called It Culture: The Story of Chautauqua* (Freeport, N.Y., 1970; first published 1948), 137.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 196.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 172-174.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 "_____Attractions Being Offered For Chautauqua," *Owensboro Messenger*, June 25, 1922. Hereafter cited as *OM*.
- 38 "Closing Day of the Chautauqua," *ODM*, June 28, 1914.
- 39 "Chautauqua Is Again Assured," *ODM*, July 5, 1919.
- 40 "700 Tickets For Chautauqua In 1925 Are Pledged," *OM*, July 9, 1924; "_____Concerts _____Chautauqua," *OM*, July 3, 1925.
- 41 "Closing Program Redpath Chautauqua Proves To Be One Of Best Offered," *OM*, June 6, 1930.
- 42 "Chautauqua To Start With Good First Day Program," *OM*, June 24, 1925.
- 43 "Heard About Tawn," *OM*, July 7, 1926.
- 44 Harrison, 95
- 45 "Initial Program of Chautauqua," *ODM*, June 29, 1912.
- 46 "Chautauqua Will Open On Monday; Fine Program," *ODM*, June 21, 1914.
- 47 "Concert To Open Chautauqua At 7 Hills Park," *OM*, June 22, 1921.
- 48 Harrison, 95-96.
- 49 "Chautauqua Has Been Postponed," *ODM*, June 15, 1916.
- 50 "No Chautauqua For This Summer," *ODM*, June 20, 1916.
- 51 Harrison, 94; "Judge Blair On The Opening Day," *ODM*, June 27, 1912.
- 52 "Large Crowds At The Chautauqua," *ODM*, June 28, 1919.
- 53 "Concert To Open Chautauqua At 7 Hills Park," *OM*, June 22, 1921; Interview with Kathlyn Dishman, Nov. 1, 1980.
- 54 "Chautauqua To Close Tonight," *OM*, June 29, 1921.
- 55 "100 Children In Good Fairy Thrift," *OM*, June 30, 1920.
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- 57 "Fine Program At Chautauqua," *ODM*, July 3, 1919.
- 58 "Good Features Are On Program For Chautauqua," *OM*, June 22, 1924; "Chautauqua Program This Year Will Include Many Outstanding Numbers," *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer*, May 3, 1931.
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- 61 "Fine Attractions On Opening Day Of Chautauqua," *ODM*, June 24, 1917.
- 62 "In Readiness For Chautauqua This Afternoon," *ODM*, June 27, 1919.

- 63 "Large Crowds At The Chautauqua," *ODM*, June 28, 1919.
- 64 "Fine Debate At Chautauqua," *ODM*, July 2, 1919.
- 65 "Chautauqua Will Open Big 7 Day Program June 29," *OM*, June 20, 1926.
- 66 "Chautauqua Will Open For Week's Series Tuesday," *OM*, June 26, 1927.
- "Chautauqua Off On Big 7 Days' Entertainment," *OM*, June 29, 1927.
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- "Tamaki Miura Is Closing Number," *OM*, June 21, 1928.
- 71 "Chautauqua Tent To Arrive Today," *OM*, June 21, 1928.
- 72 "Closing Program Redpath Chautauqua Proves To Be One Of Best Offered," *OM*, June 6, 1930.
- 73 Harrison, 261.



The auditorium building at Chautauqua Park, used until the collapse of the first chautauqua movement in Owensboro. From the O-DC Library collection.

THE WHIG PARTY IN DAVIESS COUNTY

By Lee A. Dew

The Whig Party in Daviess County began in the turmoil of the 1820's. Kentucky was beset with the problem of the Old Court - New Court struggle growing out of the chaos in the banking system on the one hand and the determination to elect Henry Clay to the Presidency on the other.

The struggle over banking revolved around the attempt by many Kentuckians to charter state banks for the purpose of issuing cheap paper money as a means of striking back at the Bank of the United States and the Bank of Kentucky, which many Kentuckians felt were responsible for widespread indebtedness and financial insolvency. With the election of Joseph Desha as Governor in 1825 on the platform of debt relief and his subsequent replacement of the judges on the Court of Appeals who had voted to uphold the charters of the banks, many Owensboroans were alarmed. Desha's "New Court" party was defeated in the legislative elections the following year, and the "Old Court" reinstated.¹

Henry Clay, who had been nominated by the Kentucky legislature for the Presidency in the election campaign of 1824, strongly supported the national banks against such schemes as Desha's to weaken the monetary system, and for many in Daviess Clay's position was considered gospel. The only other candidate on the ballot that year was Andrew Jackson of Tennessee, although nationally John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts and William Crawford of Georgia were also candidates, all on the Democratic Republican ticket. Clay swept to victory in Daviess, getting 101 votes to Jackson's 11.²

By the election of 1828, however, the old Democratic Republican party was disintegrating, with one faction favoring Adams and the other faction rallying around Jackson. The Adams forces called themselves National Republicans, while the Jacksonians took the name Democrats. Clay, who served as Adams' Secretary of State, supported Adams for re-election, but Daviess Countians would have little of the man from Massachusetts, giving Jackson 284 votes to 161 for Adams.³

The election of Jackson and his Democrats brought the political pot to a boil, as Clay became the recognized leader of opposition forces in the Congress. Jackson made many enemies through what were called "high-handed usurpations of power" in withdrawing federal deposits from the United States bank and assuming "dictatorial" powers over the cabinet. Jackson's enemies, banding together, took the name "Whig" for their organization, as this was the name of the British party of the day which was dismissed by William IV for opposing his attempt to take over legislative power. Thus, in the conflicts swirling around Andrew Jackson, the Whig party was born.⁴

Although Jackson was re-elected in 1832, Daviess County went for his Whig opponent, Henry Clay, 340 votes to 291. Clay carried Kentucky in his losing cause, beginning a tradition in Kentucky and Daviess County of voting for Whigs for President; a tradition which would last as long as the Whigs nominated candidates. In 1836 Kentucky went for General William Henry Harrison, the hero of the battle of Tippecanoe, over Jackson's hand-picked successor, Martin Van Buren. Harrison carried Daviess 445 to 344. In 1840 Daviess Countians rejoiced at Harrison's victory over Van Buren, aided by the 690 Daviess County votes he received to Van Buren's 428.⁵

The Whig victory was short-lived. Harrison died in office and was succeeded by his vice-president, John Tyler of Virginia, a states-rights Democrat added to the ticket to gain votes in the South. On the national level the Whigs were outraged by this turn of events, and Clay and his followers began a campaign to return the White House to Whig control in 1844.

On the local level, Whigs were more successful. The first Daviess Countian elected to Congress was Philip Thompson, who served from 1823-25 as a Democratic Republican. He was succeeded by William Young of Elizabethtown, who served from 1825 to 1827, when he died shortly after being re-elected. In a special election to fill his vacancy both candidates were later actively identified with the Whig party. Thomas Chilton of Elizabethtown was the victor over John Calhoun of Hardinsburg, Chilton serving until 1831. His seat was then filled, for three terms, by Albert Gallatin Hawes, as Jacksonian Democrat from Hawesville.⁶

The district returned to Whig control with the election, in 1837, of Edward Rumsey of Greenville, an attorney. Active in Whig politics from the formation of the party, Rumsey had been a member of the state legislature in 1822 and a presidential elector in 1836. In 1839 he was succeeded by Philip Triplett of Owensboro, who served two terms. Triplett, also a lawyer, was a member of the 1824 legislature and, like Rumsey, has been a Whig elector in 1836.⁷ When Triplett declined to run again in 1843, a power struggle developed within the Whig party, with three different Whigs seeking the office.

In an attempt to unify their party, Whigs from throughout the second district held county conventions to elect delegates to a district convention, to be held at Hartford. One of the few surviving issues of the *Owensboro Bulletin*, a Whig newspaper, carries an account of the Whig rally in Owensboro, and reprints a story from the *Hopkinsville Gazette* on the Whig meeting in Christian county. The Christian county Whigs, correctly perceiving that the disunion within their party could spell ruin in the upcoming election, passed a resolution citing their fears that "the division that now exist(s) in our ranks, by having such a number of candidates, that the Democratic candidate will be elected, and the will of the majority of the people of this district be defeated..."⁸

At the Owensboro meeting the Whigs named delegates to the convention at Hartford, and also to the state convention in Louisville. Included in the list of delegates were names of leading Whigs of Daviess County, including many officeholders, indicating the strength of the party on the local level. Among the delegates were Warner Crow, who served as state representative in 1820, 1839, and 1841-42; Philip Triplett, state representative in 1824; William R. Griffith, representative in 1829, state senator 1831-1835; John B. Hinton, representative, 1833; William Anthony, representative 1837, state senator, 1861-65; William Newton, representative, 1838; George W. Triplett, representative 1840-41, senator, 1849; James L. Johnson, representative, 1844; Camden Riley, representative, 1845, senator, 1850; John P. Devercaux, representative, 1846; Finley W. Wall, representative, 1847; John H. McFarland, representative, 1848, senator, 1853-57; and John S. McFarland, representative, 1850-51, and 1862-65, senator, 1853-57.⁹

The fears of the Whigs were justified, for in the congressional election the district was carried by the Democrats, who elected George A. Caldwell of Adair county. Caldwell served only one term, resigning to accept a commission in the army for the war with Mexico, a war precipitated by the policies of the incumbent president, Tyler.

The Whigs were convinced that Tyler, "His Accidency" as he was popularly known in Whig circles, could be beaten. Clay was their candidate. As early as February 22, 1844, Daviess County Whigs formed a "Daviess County Clay Club" to boost the candidacy of Kentucky's favorite son. Dr. R.W. Murray was elected president, and following speeches by James Weir, Philip Triplett, James L. Johnson and John S. McFarland, the group enjoyed an "oyster feast."¹¹

The Democrats, it was assumed, would nominate one of four candidates, all of whom the Whigs felt they could beat - Van Buren, James Buchanan of Pennsylvania, Tyler or Lewis Cass of Michigan. They applauded the poem by Lexingtonian Josiah Dunham which characterized the prospective Democratic candidates:¹²

"Van Buren, Buchanan, or Tyler, or Cass,
The Fox or the Mastiff, the Mule, or the Ass"

But the Democrats pulled a fast one on the Whigs by nominating a "dark horse" candidate, James K. Polk of Tennessee, and, although Clay carried Daviess County by a vote of 808 to 622 and swept to victory in the state with 54 per cent of the vote, it was Polk who packed his bags for the trip to the White House.¹³

The Congressional election was more satisfying for the Whigs, who elected their candidate, John Hardin McHenry of Hartford. McHenry, had been an unsuccessful candidate for Congress in 1840 against Triplett. He was Commonwealth Attorney for Ohio County and a Colonel in the militia.¹⁴

Two years later McHenry was one of a number of Whig candidates, but withdrew his name from consideration, and the Whig convention nominated R.H. Waddell of Christian County, who lost to Samuel Peyton of Hartford. Peyton was a "Polk Democrat" and a defender of the Mexican War. In Daviess County Finley W. Wall, age 26, was elected to the state legislature as a Whig, in a campaign which featured a unique campaign vehicle. The *Daviess County History* describes the event: "From Bon Harbor about forty voters for Wall came up in a very large cart, with wheels about twelve feet high, and drawn by nine yoke of oxen, and with banners streaming for Wall..."¹⁵

The Whigs got their act together two years later, and Peyton was replaced in Congress with James Leeper Johnson, a leading Owensboro Whig. Johnson, who was born near Smithland, had moved to Owensboro in 1836, where he studied law in the offices of Philip Triplett. In 1841 he was admitted to the bar and opened a law partnership with James Weir. Johnson was a member of the legislature in 1844 and in 1848 he was a presidential elector as well as candidate for Congress.¹⁶

The election which put Johnson into the congress picked General Zachary Taylor as President over the Democratic nominee, Lewis Cass. Taylor, the hero of the battle of Buena Vista in the Mexican War, received 986 votes in Daviess to 605 for Cass.¹⁷

Johnson's term in Congress was distinguished by two events. This was the Congress which was called upon to debate the series of resolutions, introduced by Henry Clay, which came to be called the "Compromise of 1850" and which historians credit with postponing the ultimate decision over slavery in the territories for another ten years. At this time, too, Congressman Johnson took a wife, marrying Miss Harriette N. Triplett, the daughter of Philip Triplett, his mentor in the law.¹⁸

Benjamin E. Grey of Hopkinsville replaced Johnson in the Congress when Johnson decided not to seek re-election. Grey, born near Bardstown, was a former state representative and senator, and was acting Lieutenant Governor in 1850. He served for two terms in Congress from 1851 to 1855, and had the distinction of being the last man from the Second District elected to Congress on the Whig ticket. During Grey's tenure the Congress debated and passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which opened these territories to settlement by slave-owners. The Whig party dissolved in the dispute over this bill, with Northern Whigs opposing it and Southern Whigs siding with Southern Democrats in support of expanding slave territory.¹⁹

The last Whig candidate for President, General Winfield Scott, carried Daviess County in 1852 against the Democratic nominee Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire by a vote of 1,027 to 711. Statewide Scott was victorious, but polled only 51.4 per cent of the vote, the smallest percentage gained in the Bluegrass state by any Whig

candidate since the formation of the party. By this time Henry Clay was dead, and Kentucky voters were searching for new leadership and new issues to divert them from the seemingly insoluble controversy over slavery.²⁰

This was a time of considerable immigration into the Ohio river valley, and Daviess County attracted large numbers of these immigrants, principally Irish and German. With the potato famine in Ireland and the collapse of the Revolution of 1848 in Germany, immigration reached record numbers. Many people reacted negatively to this flood of newcomers, with the result that there was a brief emergence of a nativist party, the American Party, in Daviess county. Originally a secret organization known as the Order of the Star Spangled Banner, the American Party was popularly known as the Know-Nothings from their practice of responding "I know nothing" to questions about their organization. Many Whigs, now without a political party, flocked to the Know-Nothing cause, and in 1854 the party elected John P. Campbell of Hopkinsville to Congress.²¹

The Know-Nothings staged a massive rally in Owensboro on the Fourth of July, 1855, and the following year their cause received a boost with the beginnings of a newspaper, the *National American*, published by Joshua G. Ford, with George H. Yeaman as Editor, to be succeeded by A.G. Betts and John H. McHenry. Both Yeaman and McHenry were former Whigs, active in the party for several years.²²

The Know-Nothings offered a Presidential candidate in 1856, Millard Fillmore, a former Whig, but he was rejected by Kentuckians in favor of the Democratic candidates, James Buchanan and Kentuckian John C. Breckenridge. The newly-formed Republican party also offered a candidate nationally, John C. Fremont, but he was not on the ballot in Kentucky. In Daviess, the Democrats got 50.3 per cent of the vote, 965 to 954 for Fillmore. Samuel O. Peyton, who had formerly served a term in Congress as a Democrat in 1847-49, was elected again, and would serve two terms.²³

The election of 1860 offered Kentucky voters four candidates for President. The Democrats were divided, with Stephen A. Douglass of Illinois representing the National Democrats and John C. Breckenridge the Southern or Independent Democrats. The Republicans nominated Abraham Lincoln and the remnants of the old Whig party offered John Bell of Tennessee on the Constitutional Unionist ticket. In Daviess County Bell polled 1,074 votes, or 47.4 per cent of the vote cast, while Douglass received 654 votes and Breckenridge 530. Lincoln polled only 6 votes.²⁴

The last Whig to be elected to office in Daviess was George Helm Yeaman, who began his political career as a "Clay Whig of the protective tariff school". In a closely-contested election Yeaman was elected to the state legislature in 1860 on the Unionist ticket, and, upon the

death of the elected congressman, James S. Jackson, Yeaman was elected to fill the vacancy. He was subsequently returned to office in 1862 and defeated in 1864.²⁵

The Whig party was no more. Born in the struggle for nationalism in the turbulent years of the 1820's, and nurtured by Henry Clay's dream of a strong central government, it had fallen victim to sectionalism and the struggle over the question of westward expansion. And with the evils of Civil War and the harsh days of the 1860's Daviess Countians turned to the party which had stood against the excesses of Republican rule in Washington and Frankfort. Henceforth Daviess was to be Democratic in its allegiance, with its loyalties turned Southward in sympathy with the ex-Confederacy rather than, as Clay would have preferred, to the Northern business-oriented Republican Party which had claimed the loyalty of Whigs north of the Ohio River and Mason and Dixon's line. Sectionalism, rather than political philosophy, was to shape Daviess County's political future after 1860.

FOOTNOTES

¹ For a discussion of the Old Court-New Court struggle see Thomas D. Clark, *A History of Kentucky*. (New York, 1937), 198-210.

² Presidential election returns for Kentucky counties can be found in Jasper B. Shannon and Ruth McQuown, *Presidential Politics in Kentucky, 1824-1948...* (Lexington, 1950). See page 2 for the 1824 returns.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ For the naming of the Whig party see George Rawling Poage, *Henry Clay and the Whig Party*. (Chapel Hill, 1936), 10-11.

⁵ Shannon & McQuown, *Presidential Politics*, 8, 11, 14.

⁶ For biographies of the members of Congress, see *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1949...* (Washington, 1950). For Thompson, see p. 181; Young, 2056; Calhoun, 937; Chilton, 972; Hawes, 1284.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1764-64; 1831.

⁸ *Owensboro Bulletin*, May 12, 1843.

⁹ *Ibid.*; *History of Daviess County, Kentucky...* (Chicago, 1883), 106-107.

¹⁰ *Biographical Directory*, 935.

¹¹ *History of Daviess County*, 98.

¹² Printed in the *Lexington Inquirer* and reprinted in *The Journal*, Evansville, Ind., March 21, 1844. I am indebted to Dr. Richard Weiss for a copy of this poem.

¹³ *Presidential Politics*, 18-19.

¹⁴ *Biographical Directory*, 1337.

15 *Ibid.*, 1537; *History of Daviess County*, 99.

16 *Ibid.*, 1033.

17 *Presidential Politics*, 21.

18 *History of Daviess County*, 128.

19 *Biographical Directory*, 1033.

20 *Presidential Politics*, 23, 27.

21 *Biographical Directory*, 942.

22 *History of Daviess County*, 197. The paper later was known as *The Shield*, and later, *Ford's Southern Shield*, and continued to be published until 1875.

23 *Presidential Politics*, 28-31.

24 *Ibid.*, 35-36.

25 *Biographical Directory*, 2051; *History of Daviess County*, 149-151.

LOOKING AHEAD -

The Spring issue of the *Daviess County Historical Quarterly* will feature articles of the Civil War. Jeff Lekson writes on "The Civil War's Influence on the lifestyle of Blacks in Daviess County" and Mike Hudson has studied "The Civil War Adventures of Rice E. Grave of Daviess county and Graves' Battery, C.S.A." In addition, "Focus on" will feature a visit to a U.S. Gunboat by Tom Pettit, editor of the Owensboro *Monitor*, in 1864.



"Crossing the Ohio, Mid-Winter, Owensboro, Kentucky," from the collection in the Kentucky Room, Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library.

The first settler at what is now the town of Curdsville was a pinneeer named George Husk, who built a cabin there in 1818. Four years later John Eads and his wife arrived, built a cabin and cleared four acres of land, Mrs. Eads dying soon after. Eads then sold out to John Traverse, who died there in 1833.

Aquilla Spray settled there in 1842 and built a cabin and became the town's first businessman, opening a "dram shop" or saloon and a general store. A second store was opened by Brown & Allen in the 1850's, but soon went bankrupt. Calvin Bennett built a blacksmith shop in 1852.

By about 1860 the first post office was established, and Aquilla Spray became postmaster, although prior to 1871 the mail was carried by private individuals and the postmaster received no pay. Spray also, it is said, had the honor of naming the town of Curdsville, which was named after H.T. Curd of the firm of H.T. Curd & Co. of Louisville. According to the story printed in the 1883 *Daviess County History*, Curd gave Spray a barrel of rectified whiskey to name the town and voting precinct in honor of himself.

Although not listed as a town in the 1870 census, by 1880 Curdsville boasted a population of 197, and the precinct counted 2,559 persons, up from 2, 154 in 1870. The 1883 *History* describes the town as follows:

Curdsville now contains one general store, one grocery, glass, queen's-ware, and hardware store, one drug store, two whiskey shops, one blacksmith shop, two livery stables, three tobacco factories, one mill, one physician, one shoe shop, one lawyer, one undertaker, one police judge, one town marshall, five trustees and a calaboose.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was nrganized in Curds-ville in 1859 by the Rev. Mr. Reed. They began building a church, but the coming of the Civil War interrupted this project. Eventually the church was completed as a "union" church. The Southern Methodists held services every fourth Saturday and Sunday, while the Curdsville Methodist Episcopal Church, organized in 1865, held services every third week-end. The Green River Baptist Church, organized in 1870, also worshipped in the "union" building.

W.P. Greene, in his book *The Green River Country*, published in 1898, describes Curdsville as "having a large trade with surrounding country, and is an important shipping point for live stock and general

products." The town, 42 miles from Evansville by water, was served by the boats of the Evansville, Ohio & Green River Transportation Co. "A large tobacco stemmery is located here," Green continued, "handling a great deal of this staple. The merchants are W.T. Tilford, J.B. Morse, G.W. Weldon, R.H. Layson, H.H. McCain, grain and stock dealer; Y.D. Ervin and F.S. Shockley, liverymen. W.T. Galloway, saw mill. There are two hotels, one blacksmith shop and three churches. The physicians are: J.E. Payne and J.H. McCain."

Perhaps the best description of Curdsville was by a Chicago railroad promoter, A.L. Funk, who was trying to drum up interest in building an interurban line from Owensboro to Calhoun early in the century. He described Curdsville, in 1907, as having a population of 275, with a rural population in the area of 2,835. The town, he reported, "has 3 general stores, one drug and book store, two stock buyers, one livery barn, post office, hotel, two physicians, two churches, two story school house, ferry across Green River, branch of State Bank of Kentucky of Owensboro and Tobacco factory." The businesses were supplied "about evenly" between the Green River packets and hacks and wagons from Owensboro. Although the total volume of business at Curdsville "is practically impossible to get as no records are kept," Funk reported that the town was an important shipping point. One stock buyer reported that between May 1 and October 7, 1905, he had shipped 1,260 hogs and 248 sheep to Evansville by packet. Two sets of wagon and stock scales were available at the buyers' yards.

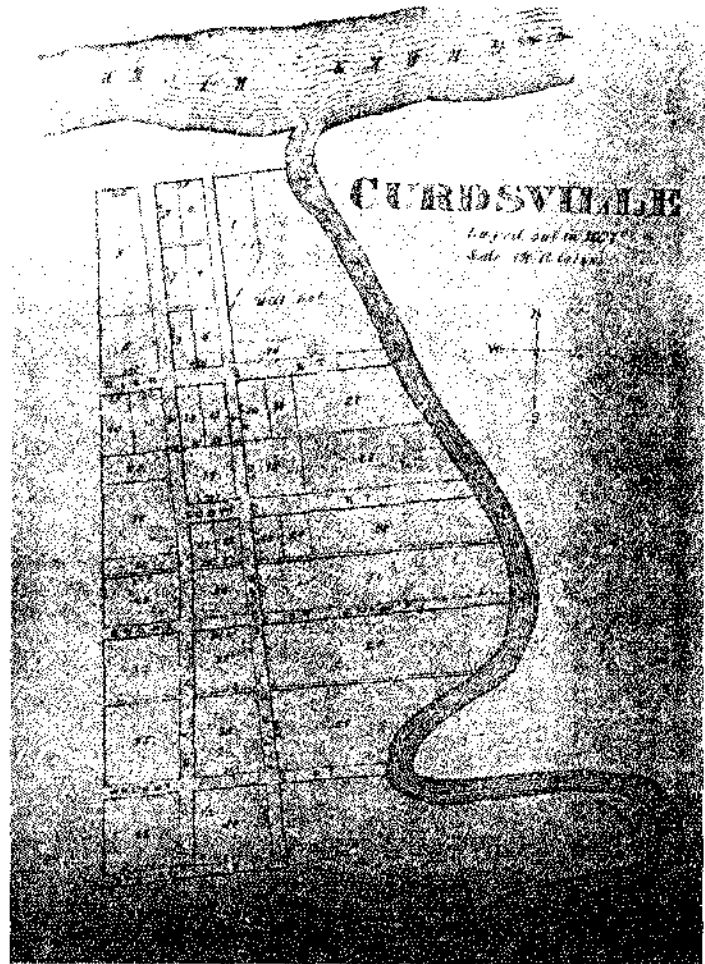
Timber was also an important export, Funk noted. He counted 262 logs, 12 feet to 16 feet in length and ranging from 18 inches to three feet in diameter, waiting on the river bank for sale and transporting to market. Across Panther creek was located about 30 acres of fire clay which would be interesting to tile and brick makers, he observed, while two miles from the town the Utopia Coal mine furnished coal to the town and business for local merchants. The town, he concluded, was surrounded by "an exceptionally fertile and desirable agricultural section,...even more productive than the \$100 to \$200 per acre land between Owensboro and Sorgho."

An important event in Curdsville's history was the completion, in 1887, of an iron bridge over Panther Creek on the Curdsville-Owensboro road. This bridge made possible land travel between the two towns, although the road was frequently impassable during wet and muddy weather. With the gravelling of county roads, beginning about 1907, reliable all-weather transportation between the two towns increased, and gradually Owensboro became more important in the economic life of the community.

Curdsville's population peaked in 1907 at 275, and by the census of 1910 had dropped to 235. Later census reports do not even list the town, but include it in the West Louisville precinct, which by 1930 totalled 2,219 persons, of which 1,727 were listed as rural. By 1940 the

total number of residents remained almost constant at 2,242, but the number of "rural" listings dropped dramatically to only 1,298, reflecting the changes taking place with the mechanization of agriculture, commercial grain farming, paved roads and automobiles.

Today Curdsville remains as a small residential town, with three churches, a general store and a post office. Few indications remain of its commercial past. Gardens and lawns now flourish where business houses stood a century ago, and crops now grow on the site of the old tobacco factory. Yet today's Curdsville stands as a reminder of the town that once was - one of the first settlements in Daviess County and an important commercial center in the days when the river packets steamed majestically down the Green river.



Original Plat of the Town of Curdsville, "laid out in 1867," taken from *An Illustrated Historical Atlas Map of Daviess County, Kentucky*, published in 1876.

THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The Daviess County Historical Society is open to all who have an interest in the history of Daviess County, the Green River Valley, or Kentucky. The Society meets on the Fourth Friday of each month from September through May. Most meetings are held at the Owensboro Area Museum on South Griffith Avenue.

Monthly programs of the Daviess County Historical Society are open to all, and non-members are encouraged to attend and participate.

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Ky. Wesleyan College
Owensboro, Ky.

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Correspondence concerning contributions and other editorial matters relating to the QUARTERLY should be addressed to the Editor. The editors and the Society assume no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Addresses of the authors will be supplied upon request to the Editor.

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The Editor's Page

This issue of the Daviess County Historical Quarterly is devoted to the Civil War, one of the most important events in shaping the character and politics of the county. Mike Hudson, a sophomore history student at Kentucky Wesleyan College writes about Rice E. Graves, a genuine hero of the Confederate cause, whose family has lived in Daviess County since the 1840's. Mrs. Daisy Graves Elliott, a great-niece of Major Graves, has contributed a brief sketch of this family. Jeff Lekson, a junior majoring in Business Administration at Kentucky Wesleyan College, has researched the impact of the war on the black residents of the County, and particularly how the war brought about dramatic changes in the life of the freed slaves. Finally, an informative glimpse at Owensboro during the War is offered by Tom Pettit's observations during the period when trade and travel with the outside world was subject to Union naval blockade on the river, and travelers and merchants had to have a "pass" to enter or leave the community.

We are especially indebted to the staff of the Ft. Donelson National Military Park for their cooperation in locating the various positions occupied by Graves' Battery during the battle of Ft. Donelson, as shown on the map on pages 36 and 37.



MAJ. RICE E. GRAVES.

Reprinted from Edward Porter Thompson, HISTORY OF THE ORPHAN
BRIGADE. (Louisville, 1898).

THE CIVIL WAR ADVENTURES OF RICE E. GRAVES
OF DAVIESS COUNTY, AND GRAVES' BATTERY, C.S.A.
by Mike Hudson

Perhaps more than any other units in the Confederate Army during the Civil War, Kentucky units suffered many hardships. Cut off from their homes and natural sources of supply, these units were forced to obtain their provisions from uncertain areas and were often passed over for promotions by officials from other states. They could have little hope for the liberation of Kentucky by Southern troops. Once most units left the state in late 1861, they never returned until the end of the war.

Despite these conditions, Kentucky units comprised an excellent fighting force. One such unit, Graves' Kentucky Battery of light artillery, exhibits the problems and valor prevalent in the Kentucky contingent present in the Confederate Army.

The unit was officially created on November 7, 1861, when Colonel Hanson of First Kentucky Brigade wrote General S.B. Buckner noting the availability of an understrength battery known as Spencer's Battery, commanded by Lieutenant Selden Spencer.¹ Hanson indicated the willingness of the five regiments of his command to fill the battery if it could be attached to his brigade. General Buckner, who commanded the Confederate forces in Central Kentucky, procured the guns and assigned them to Hanson's brigade.²

By November 16, the original Spencer's battery travelled to Bowling Green, Kentucky, and there Hanson added 66 volunteers from his brigade. Feeling the battery still understrength, he detailed the entire Company B, Fourth Kentucky Infantry to the unit. These men were a motley group. Many came from Henderson and Union counties in Kentucky, others came from Kentucky counties in the southwest portion of the state. In addition, a large number of Tennesseans and Mississippians joined at Camp Boone, Tennessee, and even several Irish, German, and French immigrants enlisted.³

To command this new battery, Rice E. Graves was selected. Graves, described by William C. Davis as a "popular young man," was twenty-three. He had left West Point at the outbreak of war, "leaving behind an almost spotless scholastic record."⁴

Rice E. Graves constituted everything with which the South could hope to win the war - youth, intelligence, superior military training, a fiery martial spirit, and a strong desire to defend his principles at any cost. Graves spent most of his early years on his father's farm in Daviess

County, Kentucky. He possessed a thirst for knowledge and attended Owensboro Academy at the age of seventeen. During 1858 he managed to obtain a scholarship to West Point, with the help of Congressman H.O. Peyton from the Second Congressional District of Kentucky.⁵

After two years of almost flawless performance at the Academy, the war broke out, and Graves returned home to fulfill what he considered his duty. He travelled to the training camps of the Kentucky State Guard, and accompanied them to the Southern recruiting base at Camp Boone. Upon the creation of the Second Kentucky Regiment, he was appointed adjutant, with the rank of First Lieutenant. Later he was promoted to Captain, and given command of a battery which became known as Graves' Battery of Kentucky Artillery.⁶

Graves assumed command of his battery in Bowling Green during the middle of November, joining two other batteries, Cobb's and Byrne's, and five regiments of infantry under Hanson.⁷ This force represented General Albert Sidney Johnston's strongest threat to Northern domination of Kentucky. Union General Ulysses Grant, however, saw the weakness in Johnston's western defense line and moved to take advantage of it.

Grant noticed that if Fort Henry on the Tennessee River and Fort Donelson on the Cumberland fell, his gunboats could travel into Tennessee and across the southern border of Kentucky, forcing Johnston's men to withdraw from Kentucky and Western Tennessee. His operations immediately centered around this goal. Seeing a threat to his command, Buckner ordered Graves' Battery and the Second Kentucky down to Fort Donelson on January 20, 1862. Colonel Hanson held them in Russellville, Kentucky until February 8, when they boarded trains to Clarksville, Tennessee. From there, they embarked on a steamer to Dover, Tennessee, directly upstream from the threatened fort. Camping for the night at Dover, they crossed the river the next day and moved into their lines.⁸

Fort Henry having fallen on the sixth of February, the garrison at Donelson numbered close to eighteen thousand, including its original garrison, reinforcements such as Graves' Battery and refugees from Henry.⁹ The walls and outer defenses were not completed, but still it represented a major thorn in the side of the Federal army. Graves' Battery moved into the center of the line commanded by Pillow, "near the extreme left of the entrenchments on the declivity of the hill, whence it swept the valley with its fire," as General Buckner's report noted.¹⁰

The battle began for the battery on February 12th, when Union batteries opened fire on the entrenching Confederates. Graves and

Maney's battery returned fire, but the duel did little except interrupt work on the trenches.¹¹ On the 13th, the firing commenced early as the "battle of the trenches" threw the Federals against the Confederate works. At twelve-thirty, the 12th Iowa made a reconnaissance-in-force against the center, but "retired before a few well directed shots from Graves' Battery," according to William Preston Johnson.¹² Later in the day, the battery aided in the repulse of three Union assaults, the last almost reaching the Confederate breastworks. In this action, Maney's Battery, in a more exposed position, lost both lieutenants and many men. Luckily Graves' Battery was yet unharmed.¹³

Even during the lulls of the battle, the artillery firing continued without pause and sporadically during the night.¹⁴ The following day proved much less active than the bloody day before. The Federal Army stepped back to lick its wounds and the Confederates, realizing their predicament, planned an escape. They had to catch Grant by surprise and push his men far enough back to allow their forces to escape by Wynn's ferry.

Early the morning of the 15th, the Confederates made their move. Graves found himself in a duel with a Union battery across a hill where he could not effectively reach it. Buckner ordered the enemy battery silenced by Tennessee and Mississippi regiments and Graves began the task of advancing his battery over the hill. As he reached the top, however, he encountered the infantry, repulsed by the enemy fire. Exposed to a direct enemy shot on his still-limbered cannon, Graves reportedly cried, "Where is the Second Kentucky? Come to the aid of my battery." Two companies of this regiment charged forward, and Hanson quickly followed with the rest. Facing a bayonet charge, the Union gunners fled.¹⁵

Graves then advanced down Wynn's Ferry Road, cooperating with Maney and Porter to cripple another Union battery caught in a crossfire. He continued his advance, opening up with cannister shots on the fleeing Union soldiers.¹⁶ In the middle of the afternoon, just as the path to the ferry seemed open, General Pillow ordered a retreat back to the trenches, feeling that Buckner advanced too slowly and the evacuation too risky. The morale of the troops in the trenches sagged. The effects of bad weather, poor shelter and inadequate clothing rose to the surface.

Sometime during the retreat, Captain Graves discovered a badly wounded federal soldier, "suffering greatly." He learned that the young man was the brother of the battery bugler Ollie Steele. "Graves had him removed and placed under the shelter of the rifle pits," records Ed Thompson, "but his wound was mortal and he died there."¹⁷

Although driven back, the Federals regrouped, and discovering no enemy before them they cautiously proceeded to their original lines of the morning. Catching the Confederates in some disarray, they launched an attack, driving three regiments from their trenches. Graves, from his position down the line, heard the activity and rushed Sergeants Bell and Colston with their guns to the aid of his companions. He stabilized the line but could not regain the trenches before evening came.¹⁸

During that night, Generals Floyd and Pillow escaped, leaving Buckner to arrange a surrender.¹⁹ The following morning Buckner arranged surrender terms with an unrelenting Grant and Donelson surrendered. The artillery assembled and were relieved of their guns.

At this point a discrepancy occurs in the records of the Battery. Historian William C. Davis claims the Battery entered Federal hands with 113 men, 5 wounded.²⁰ The U.S. Surgeon General reports 70 men engaged, fifty men surrendered, 4 wounded, and 16 missing or escaped.²¹ The *Kentucky Adjutant General's Report on Kentucky Confederate Volunteers* records two men, Eli Bohannon and Thomas Olvey, as killed at Donelson.²² What seems most likely is that one report combined Co. B, 4th Ky., with Graves Battery and one did not. Regardless of the killed and wounded, however, the losses appear light compared to other units.

Even though they surrendered, the battery earned for itself a reputation for "gallantry and efficiency."²³ Buckner himself praised Graves' efforts in his advance on the night during the 15th.²⁴ Nevertheless, the battery boarded steamers on Monday the 17th, and traveled North to a variety of destinations. Graves, S.M. Marshall, and the other line officers entered prison quarters in Camp Chase and later Johnston's Island. The enlisted men and non-commissioned officers traveled to Camp Morton.²⁵

A variety of things happened to these men in prison. Of the 61 men of rank corporal or lower listed in the *Adjutant General's Report*, five escaped from Camp Morton and one died as a result of disease. Of the five who escaped, one, Pvt. Owens Glass returned to his home county of Henderson, where he was murdered by Indiana home guard units who learned of his presence. Another, Jerome Clarke, joined a band of guerrillas after his escape and rose to their command. He disguised himself as a woman, adopted the name "Sue Monday" and performed countless deeds of outlawry and violent crime until he was captured by federal officials and executed in Louisville in 1865.²⁶

Eventually, difficulties surrounding prisoner exchanges between the two opposing governments dissolved; the remaining men of the battery

left Camp Morton on August 26th. They rejoined their officers at Vicksburg where the majority of exchanges occurred.

Travelling to Jackson, Mississippi, they reorganized and received new equipment, boarded trains to Chattanooga, and from there crossed to Knoxville, reporting to General John Breckinridge on October 3, 1862.²⁷ Graves immediately resumed his old duties. Breckinridge's division set out on October 15th, for Cumberland Gap to support Bragg in his invasion of Kentucky. Unfortunately, two days later Breckinridge heard of Bragg's withdrawal at Perryville and the division returned to Knoxville. Disappointed and discouraged with Bragg, the force moved to Murfreesboro on Stone's River to prepare for the defense of middle Tennessee.²⁸

Marching for 18 miles through a terrible snowstorm and spending the first night in four inches of snow, Graves' battery arrived in Murfreesboro on the 23rd of October, 1862. Here, Captain Rice E. Graves received his promotion to Major and Breckenridge appointed him chief of artillery for the division. In Graves' wake, Captain Ingram, as the highest ranking officer in the battery, assumed command. The battery, however, continued to be called by Graves' name.²⁹

In his report to Breckenridge on the condition of the artillery of the division, three problems became immediately evident. First, the guns which Graves' Battery obtained after reporting for duty in Jackson failed to meet ordinary standards, as Graves put it, "being of iron and very indifferent." Although he detailed a lieutenant to acquire four bronze cannons, no record of new cannons remains. Second, "the greater portion of the men are very poorly and thinly clad, and much in need of blankets." Finally Graves comments on the scarcity of men in the artillery branch and suggests its immediate correction.³⁰

During December encampment in Murfreesboro, Pvt. Viginus Hutchen denounced the officers as cowards, threatened to kill the officer of the day, and cursed his guards. For such a blatant offense, Graves sentenced him to three months solitary confinement. Surprisingly he went on to become one of the battery's best men when channeled against the enemy instead of his officers.³¹

Eventually, the battle of Stone's River, or Murfreesboro, began. General Williams S. Rosecrans advanced his Federal forces close to Bragg's Confederates and waited for morning. Bragg struck Rosecrans at dawn and rolled him back. Probably due to faulty guns, Graves' Battery watched the battle from a reserve position on Wayne's Hill.³² Graves, however, saw heavy action in Breckinridge's attack on the massed Union troops to the east of the Stone's River on January 2,

1863. He led Byrne's battery and a portion of Washington artillery against the Union skirmish line, driving them back. The infantry then pushed the Federals back across the river, but before Graves could assemble more than Cobb's and portions of Lt. Vaught's artillery against the enemy, fifty-two enemy guns began blasting from across the river, shattering Breckenridge's advancing troops and forcing a retreat.³³ Ingram apparently advanced the battery to assist Graves as the battery lost two men during this action.³⁴

Sometime during this advance and retreat, two bullets struck Graves and he fell beside his mortally-wounded horse. An ambulance carried him to the rear where General Breckenridge found him. "Breckenridge always had a special fondness for youth and strong bonds of friendship arose between him and Riee Graves," says Breckenridge's biographer William C. Davis.³⁴ Breckenridge turned over the care of his friend to his own wife, Mary Breckenridge, who often cared for injured officers. She nursed Graves all through the perilous voyage through the mountains to Chattanooga. After she left him in expert care, Graves would write, "the trip across the mountains has inflamed my wound very much and I am proportionally suffering. Mrs. Breckenridge is very much missed; the establishment is not near so pleasant since her departure."³⁵

As he waited for the trip to Chattanooga, Graves prepared charges against General Pillow for hiding behind a tree as Pillow's brigade advanced on January 2. Later Breckenridge would convince him not to press them, for he felt it unbecoming of an officer's dignity to correct others at fault.³⁶ While Graves recovered, Breckenridge wrote Richmond, recommending Graves be promoted to Colonel and given command of a North Carolina unit in need of one. The promotion never passed through the War Department.³⁷ By late summer 1863, Graves once again resumed command as chief-of-artillery under Breckenridge. After the defeat at Murfreesboro, Ingram resigned and Seldon Spencer assumed command of the battery, still in need of new guns. By this time the men of Co. B, 4th Kentucky, returned to their old unit, in which they would see the end of the war.

From this point on, the path of Graves' Battery becomes difficult to trace. While surely listed by Braxton Bragg as present for duty on September 19, 1863, the day the battle of Chickamauga began,³⁸ Northern interrogation of prisoners indicates no trace of the unit.³⁹ According to the *Adjutant General's Report*, the battery merged with Cobb's in October 1863, so apparently the battery played no role in the battle but certainly still existed.

Graves himself stands out clearly in the history of the Battle of Chickamauga, however. On the morning of September 19, eight guns from two batteries under his command commenced fire with two enemy batteries in a celebrated duel on the road to Chattanooga, until another enemy battery advanced and Graves withdrew his units.⁴⁰ On the twentieth he led the artillery in barrage after barrage until, accompanying elements of Colonel Gibson's forces in their advance against Thomas, he received a mortal wound and fell into the arms of Captain Charles Slocumb.⁴¹ Appropriately, the wound resulted from enemy artillery fire.⁴²

As General Breckenridge followed his men he discovered Graves, whose last words to his friend were that if Mary could nurse him again he would surely recover.⁴³ With that, Breckenridge ordered him carried to the rear. Once in the hospital, Graves was placed near a man half mad with pain, but when the nurses proposed moving the man, Graves rebuked them for offering to cause him more pain.⁴⁴ With death inevitable, the orderlies left Graves and the other man together in one room that night and both died in great pain.

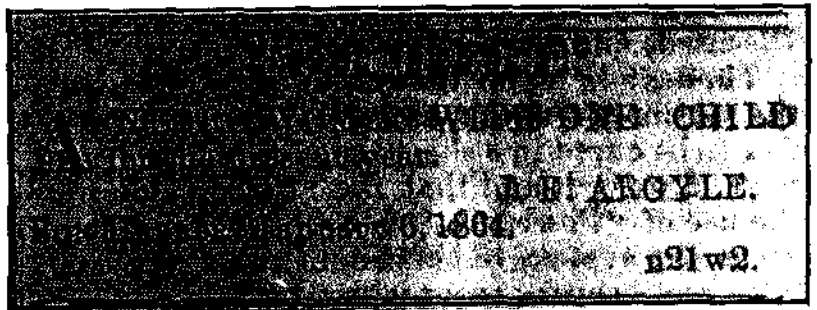
With Graves' death, the battery named for him disappears into history. Of the men formerly comprising it, fifteen were combined into Cobb's battery, others deserted, even more joined other units.⁴⁵ Robert Cobb assumed the duties of Graves and the rank accompanying them. While the writers of the time tended toward verbose eulogies of dead comrades, two express the feelings of most men who knew Graves. L. D. Young, an officer in Helm's brigade wrote, "I must here do Rice Graves the honor to say that he was the most perfect military man I ever saw."⁴⁶

And Breckenridge, in his report on Chickamauga, concludes, "One member of my staff I can not thank. Major Rice E. Graves, chief of artillery, received a mortal wound in the action of Sunday the 20th. Although a very young man, he had won eminence in arms and gave promise of the highest distinction. A truer friend, a purer patriot, a better soldier, never lived."⁴⁷

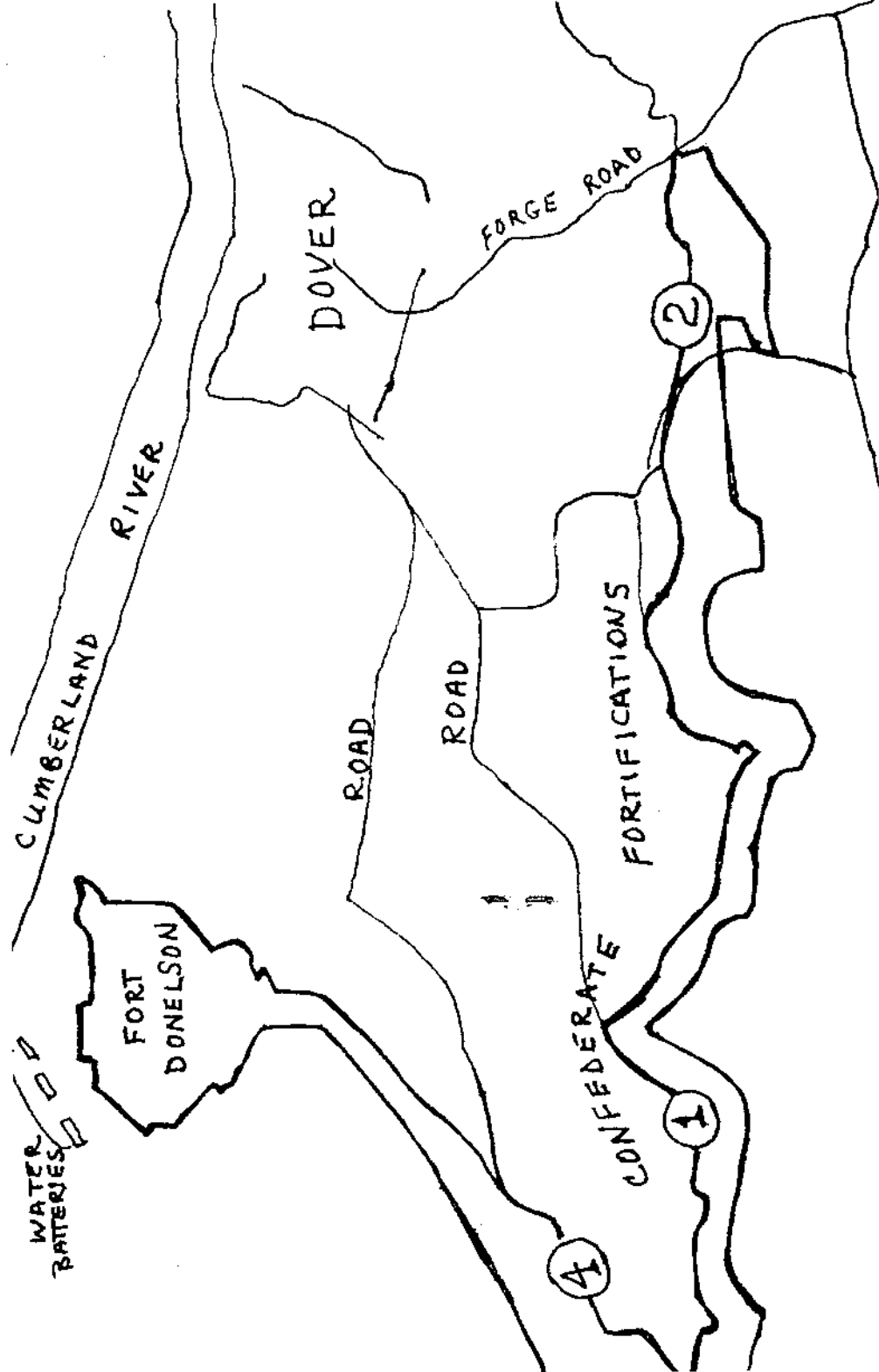
FOOTNOTES

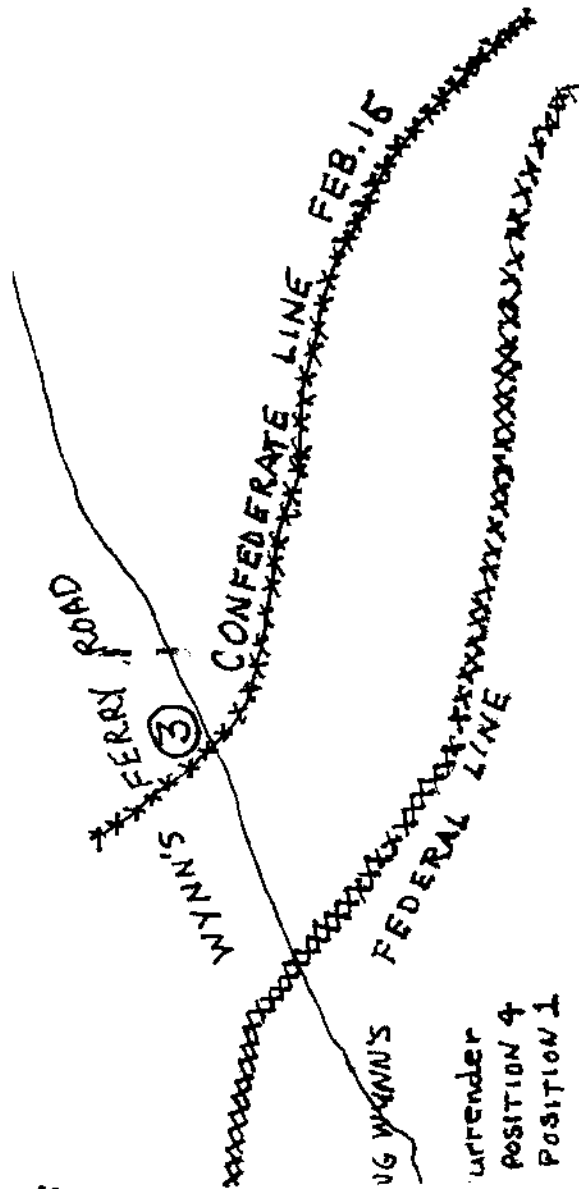
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- 8 Davis, pp. 61-65.
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- 11 Johnson, p. 446.
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- 13 Johnson, pp. 447-448.
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- 27 John Williams Green, *Johnny Green of the Orphan Brigade* (Lexington, 1956), p. 49.
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- 29 *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), Series 1, Vol. XX, pt. 2, p. 431.

- 30 *O.R.*, Vol. XX, pt. 2, pp. 399-400.
31 Davis, p. 141.
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33 *Adjutant General's Report*, pp. 477-478.
34 William C. Davis, *Breckinridge* (Baton Rouge: 1974), p. 46.
35 Davis, p. 163.
36 Davis, p. 163.
37 Davis, p. 163.
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41 *O.R.* Vol. XXX, pt. 2, p. 218.
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43 Davis, p. 188.
44 Davis, p. 188.
45 *Adjutant General's Report*, pp. 477-478.
46 Young, p. 61.
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An advertisement in the Owensboro MONITOR, January, 1864.





Drawn By: Dr. G. Tangi
from map supplied by
National Park Service.

THE GRAVES FAMILY IN DAVIESS COUNTY

By Daisy Graves Elliott

Rice Evan Graves, Jr., was born June 23, 1838, in Rockbridge County, Virginia, the third son of Rice E. Graves and Mrs. Amelia Richeson Gregory Graves. Rice Graves, Senior, was born in 1809 in Goochland County, Va., while Mrs. Graves was from Amherst County, Va. They had eight children, while Mrs. Graves had three children by her previous marriage to John L. Gregory, of whom Jesse Gregory is a descendant.

Varland R. Graves, born in 1834 was the eldest child of Rice E. and Amelia Graves. He was married in 1861, but died in 1865 without children.

Francis James Graves, 1836-1910, was the father of Sarah Graves Smeathers, the mother of Virginius Smeathers Feiser and H.D. Smeathers. Pauline Baker Smith is a descendant of Francis James Graves.

Rice E. Graves, Jr., 1838-1863

Thomas J. Graves, 1840-1894.

Peticus "Pet" Samuel Graves, 1843-1910. Descendants include Paul Sauer, W.S. Clements and Laura Emily (Harn) LeDu.

Richeson Brown Graves, born 1845. Four children, no known descendants.

Taylor Houston Graves, born 1847, died 1831. Married to Nancy Catherine Shadwick. Eight children. Descendants include Archie Richardson Beloit, Melvil Lambert Chappel, Catherine Lambert, Houston Lambert, Pierce Lambert Nash, Ruth Lambert, Nancy Lambert Jones, Shirley Lambert Dodge, Daisy Graves Elliott, Louella Graves Lancaster, Violet Graves Brown, Marjory Graves Chapman, Houston Edge Graves, Norine Graves James, Wanda Graves Cooper, Roland H. Graves, Bonnie Graves Smith, Rice E. Graves, Chester L. Shepherd, Joe Taylor Shepherd, Helen Brock Hicks, Allen Houston Brock and Juanita Brock Overfield.

Virginia Amelia Graves, 1852-1901. Married, 1881 to Willie Anderson. Four children. Descendants include Beverly Gregory, Margaret Virginia, Gregory McNew, Elizabeth Anderson Rowland, William Anderson and Marvin Anderson.

THE CIVIL WAR'S INFLUENCE ON THE LIFESTYLE OF BLACKS IN DAVIESS COUNTY

By Jeff Lekson

Daviess County's Black population underwent dramatic changes in lifestyle during the nineteenth century, changes principally induced by the circumstances surrounding the Civil War. From the slave days through their legal recognition as citizens, the Daviess County Negroes sustained many varied experiences--both positive and negative.

Looking back at Daviess County's early development, one becomes aware of the Negro's role. In 1815 the state of Kentucky established Daviess County as a legal entity of the state. At that time its inhabitants cultivated about 500 out of a possible 280,000 acres, and only a few large plantations existed. Family farms engaged in most agriculture, often sharing common ownership of one or two slaves with a neighboring farm along with performing much of the labor themselves.¹ Tobacco soon established itself as the primary crop, often acting as a cash substitute and a high-class loan security in the early days.² Along with tobaccos' continued growth came the need for a larger labor supply. By 1820 the census reported 852 slaves out of a total county population of 3,876. The following table lists that and subsequent years' numerical composition for the county through 1880. The category "free black" appeared as "free colored" in the original context.³

DAVIESS COUNTY CENSUS

Year	Whites	Slaves	Free Black	Total
1820	3,017	852	7	3,876
1840	6,327	1,960	44	8,331
1850	9,419	2,889	54	12,362
1860	11,958	3,515	76	15,549
1870	17,111		3,603	20,714
1880	22,008		4,528	26,535

Josiah Henson, a Daviess County slave in the 1820's, wrote of those days in his memoirs. He said upon arriving at Amos Riley's plantation five miles south of the Ohio river in 1825 he joined eighty to 100 other slaves, a substantial sized plantation for the time.⁴

Thereafter, agriculture and slavery grew proportionately in the county, fostering an increasingly vested interest in the Negro laborer. Meanwhile, pro-slavery and anti-slavery opinions grew strong throughout the country, and the slavery institution's merits opened themselves to public debate. Compromising on the issue, the U.S. Congress enacted issues such as the Compromise of 1850.⁵ However, polarization continued and on the local level manifested itself in the 1860 election. Abraham Lincoln, the abolitionist Republican candidate, received only seven out of 2,265 votes cast in Daviess County, displaying the overall pro-slavery stand in the county.⁶

In April, 1861, civil war commenced in the United States, forcing Kentucky to take a stand. The state chose to remain neutral but after a year formally declared its Union loyalty. Subsequently, a secessionist minority called a convention, passed an ordinance of secession, and "joined" the Confederacy.⁷ Thus real loyalty remained a question in Kentucky. Military records listed 50,000 whites and 24,000 blacks from Kentucky serving in the Union army, while 35,000 state residents served in the Confederate ranks, compounding the loyalty problem.⁸

Next, President Lincoln's proposed Emancipation Proclamation raised havoc locally. On September 22, 1862, Lincoln declared that all slaves in states still in rebellion on January 1, 1863, "shall be thenceforward, and forever free."⁹ By remaining loyal to the Union Kentucky was not affected by this declaration; however, Kentucky perceived the Proclamation as Lincoln's request for gradual emancipation in the loyal slave states. Revealing sentiment in the county, the *Owensboro Monitor* wrote in October, 1862, "Nothing seems to stir up the blood of our poor laboring white men like the prospects of being supplanted in their employment by negro labor from the South." Continuing, the paper added that the white labor force just now realized the implications of Republican "free labor, or the right of a black to work by the side of a white, in other words free negro labor against white labor."¹⁰ Clearly, local interest did not lie with Negro freedom.

Later that year, Daviess County slave owners, fearing slave insurrection, arranged a purchase policy with county tobaccoists. Devised to prevent Negroes from accumulating money for possible escape under Lincoln's act, the tobaccoists agreed not to purchase tobacco from any Negroes unless the owner's written permission accompanied the merchandise.¹¹ Through this agreement owners showed their intent to sustain possession of their Negro property.

January 1, 1863 passed without major incidents in Daviess County. However, that month, the *Monitor* ran a segment criticising the U.S.

government's policy toward runaway slaves. By the end of January 1863, the Union government was supporting about 100,000 runaway Negroes from the South. Blasting this policy, the paper declared that the government, in the interest of humanity, should distribute the slaves' rations to bereaved white widows instead. The article closed with the challenging discourse:

...or have we reached that point in human progress where the black has become superior to the white race? How can the brave fellows have the heart to fight when they think that the bread withheld from their mouths is fed to a lazy worthless set of negroes!¹²

Seeking to clarify Kentucky's nebulous position on emancipation, the General Assembly enacted an attempted solution. In January, 1863, it passed an act which in effect said Kentucky would deal with any Negroes or mulattoes claiming freedom under Lincoln's Proclamation the same way it currently dealt with runaways.¹³

Meanwhile, though, some Negro laborers had gained freedom in other seceded states, asking unfamiliarly high wages. Contemporaries reported manual labor wages at intolerable heights with Negro farm hands demanding 200 to 250 dollars per year and cooks correspondingly demanding twenty-five to 125 dollars per year.¹⁴ Locally this aggravated white paranoia; the Negro, they attested, must remain in his subservient position.

Also, Divinity played a role in determining local opinion toward slavery. The *Monitor* argued that the Deity sanctioned slavery; "God's own appointment to elevate a degraded race" was held as a moral obligation to the white race.¹⁵ Viewed in the religious context of the day, this posed a binding Divine obligation.

Eventually, despite pro-slavery sentiment, Kentuckians faced the imminent loss of their labor institution. The Civil War had ended, and with the purpose of abolishing slavery, the states proceeded to vote on ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment. Upon Georgia's ratification in December 1865, the United States formally abolished slavery.¹⁶

Despite the Thirteenth Amendment's overall acceptance, Kentucky had refused, along with Delaware, to ratify. Many Kentuckians remained loyal to the Confederate cause after the Civil War. The resounding defeat, holds one writer in respect to the amendment's failure, displayed the postwar opinion of most Kentuckians. They did not want a free Negro labor force.¹⁸

Freedom resulted in a totally alien situation for the Negro. Excited by its appeal, yet ignorant to its implications, liberty exposed the blacks to

new forms of white manipulation. A contemporary Northern reporter wrote of the South: "the whites seem wholly unable to comprehend that freedom for the negro means the same as freedom for them."¹⁹

Consequently, Kentucky passed their version of the black codes in 1886 and granted Negroes most basic legal privileges aside from the right to testify in court concerning whites.²⁰

One right which appealed to Negroes concerned property ownership. Many blacks believed that only land ownership could make their freedom real. Unfortunately, most ex-slaves found this impossible for two main reasons: they had virtually no money, and whites often refused to sell to blacks for fear of losing a cheap labor source.²¹ Records for this period quantify the fact. In 1868, the first statewide data were collected and showed that Negroes possessed 0.42% of total taxable property while comprising about 16% of the population. By 1871 property ownership rose to 0.74% of the aggregate.²² In comparison, Daviess County Negroes possessed 0.48% of the total while making up about 17% of the population that year. County Negroes achieved a 42% increase in ownership between 1868 and 1869, but they still owned just 0.67% of the total.²³ While making some progress, Negroes acquired almost negligible holdings in the years after the war.

In addition, occupations posed another vital concern to the freedmen. Upon slavery abolition many Negroes set out for other jobs and higher wages, encountering a generally unsympathetic attitude. Between 1860 and 1870, as the table on page 39 shows, white population increased in the county by about 5,000 while the black population increased by only twenty-two. This comparison indicated, according to Hugh Potter, "During and after the war the number of emancipated slaves who went north was considerable."²⁴ Of the remaining Negroes, many chose the only alternative--work for their former masters at subsistence wages. The 1870 census listed the majority of the county's black residents as "laborers", indicating their apparent peonage.

Surprisingly, contemporary blacks and whites shared a common denominator--religion. Lucius P. Little reported, "In that day, as in subsequent years of freedom, the Negro in Kentucky seemed to have a natural leaning for the faith and practice of the Baptists."²⁵ Furthermore, the *Monitor* recorded part of one Negro preacher's sermon supporting the Bible's validity and commented, "There was more good theology in that darkey's sentence than in all those new-fangled theories."²⁶ Congregations, on the other hand, remained segregated through the century's end. Record in 1883 listed a total of sixteen churches in the city of Owensboro, thirteen white and three "colored". Of the black churches the statistics described two Baptist churches and

one Methodist Episcopal church.²⁷ Along with this religious interest went the desire to personally read the Bible, but illiteracy prevented almost all Negroes from realizing this ambition. Thus education, too, gained immediate attention.

Perhaps no social institution's development more thoroughly recounts the Negro transition than that of education. As previously mentioned, Negroes desired education, and that concurred with their aspirations toward freedom.²⁸ The General Assembly passed an act in 1871 granting Owensboro a school system; however, section thirteen conceded only white children the right to attend these schools. The act made some provision for Negro education, basically that they must fund their own schools.²⁹ Finally, two years later the state established a colored school system in the city; and in 1879 statistics contained information about the Negro school erected that year on Poplar street. At that time about 500 school-aged Negroes lived in the city, 200 of which attended on a daily basis.³⁰

Established as a Negro priority, literacy continued to pose a major obstacle for Kentucky's blacks. In 1880, 22.8% of the native Kentucky whites remained illiterate while 70.4% of the blacks held the same status.³¹ Seeking to combine both systems, chapter 312, section 3 of the 1884 act amended the 1871 legislature, omitting the word "white" wherever it occurred in context. In addition, chapter 419, section 1 repealed the 1873 act that had established the separate Negro system.³²

In retrospect, the new system employed black teachers in the Negro schools from 1884 to 1887. Then, from 1888 to 1896 the system employed white teachers in the same schools, spurring several uprisings. As a result, the system once again hired black instructors in 1896. In 1897 Superintendent James McGinnis observed:

For the first time in the history of these schools there was graduated a class of colored pupils, seven in number. This is a noteworthy event. I am satisfied that the change from the employment of white teachers in the colored schools, while at the time viewed with some well founded distrust, was a wise step...³³

Concerning the white teachers, one writer said that some Owensboro residents exhibited "reprehensible snobbishness" toward those people because of their employment in the black schools. Evidently, as this segregation continued into the twentieth century, Owensboro and Daviess County still required many modifications to establish educational parity for their Negro residents.³⁴

Looking back at the events that brought about transitions in the

Negro lifestyle, one becomes aware of the slow progress enjoyed by individuals. From their introduction as slaves through their freedom after the Civil War, Daviess County's blacks underwent various changes affecting their personal lives, changes that gradually led to their social amalgamation. Freedom altered Negro occupations, residence, education, and legal status; and in the early days of liberty these alterations often fell within the control of the larger, more dominant white population. As a result, a group accustomed to a dominant position over the Negro race had to thus establish parity for the newly-legalized citizens, a process initiated in the 1800's and still continuing today.

This paper has recounted the major transitions in Negro lifestyle affected by the American Civil War. Although freedom's virtues bestowed little upon the newly freed slaves, their descendants have reaped the progress made since slavery's abolishment in 1865.

FOOTNOTES

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- 2 William Foster Hayes, *Sixty Years of Owensboro: 1183-1943* (Owensboro, 1943) p. 121.
- 3 *History of Daviess County* (Chicago, 1883), p. 179.
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- 5 James M. McPherson, *Ordeal By Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 1982), p. 64.
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- 7 McPherson, p. 154.
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- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 293.
- 10 "Excitement in Quincy about Negro Immigrants," *Owensboro Monitor*, 22 Oct. 1862, p. 2.
- 11 *Owensboro Monitor*, 12 Dec. 1862, p. 3.
- 12 *Owensboro Monitor*, 28 Jan. 1863, p. 2.
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- 14 *History of Daviess County*, pp. 185-186.
- 15 "Negro Soldiers Gone--What the People Think of Them," *Owensboro Monitor*, 31 Aug. 1864, p. 2.
- 16 Francis Newton Thorpe, *A Short Constitutional History of the United States* (Boston, 1904), p. 257.

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¹⁸ Bill Weaver, "That Brief but Pleasant Kentucky Interlude: Andrew Johnson's 'Swing around the Circle'," *Filson Club History Quarterly*, 53 (1979), 242.

¹⁹ McPherson, p. 509.

²⁰ Philip Clyde Kimball, "Freedom's Harvest: Freedmen's Schools in Kentucky," *Filson's Club History Quarterly*, 54 (1980), 272-288.

²¹ McPherson, p. 509.

²² Kimball, p. 272-288.

²³ *History of Daviess County*, P. 179.

²⁴ Potter, p. 112.

²⁵ Lucius P. Little, *Local Preachers in Old Times in Kentucky*, (Nashville, 1905), p. 25.

²⁶ *Owensboro Monitor*, July 1865, p. 3.

²⁷ *History of Daviess County*, p. 376.

²⁸ Kimball, p. 277.

²⁹ Hayes, p. 247.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

³¹ *History of Daviess County*, p. 48.

³² *Acts of Kentucky: 1884* pp. 570, 742.

³³ Hayes, p. 248.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

Call for Papers

We want your papers! Long papers! Short papers! Papers about Owensboro, and papers about Daviess County and Daviess Countians. We want pictures, and can copy and return them safely in a day or two. We want remembrances of the "old days". You don't have to be a historian or writer, all that's required is that you have a story to tell or a memory to share. Call or write the Editor.

FOCUS ON - OWENSBORO'S RIVER DURING THE CIVIL WAR

The Ohio River was a vital element in the Civil War in the West. Not only did it mark the division between free and slave states, it was a symbol in the minds of all Americans of this division. For many, their main image of the river was one gotten from Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* - that of Little Eva fleeing across the ice ahead of the evil slavers.

The river, too, was a major obstacle in the way of slaves seeking to escape to the free states to the northward, and knowledge of fords and other crossing points was spread among the slaves by abolitionists anxious to aid their escape.

But most importantly the river became the supply line for the Union armies - a critical element in Union logistics and planning, and a highway for the movement of troops and supplies. Owensboro, a town with many Confederate sympathizers, was a critical point in the Union's determination to protect traffic on the river at all costs. As early as September 24, 1861, the Union Army occupied Owensboro with a force of men under the command of J.H. McHenry of Hartford. The following day, September 25, the gunboat *Lexington* arrived to add the strength of its artillery to the Union presence. Two days later the *Lexington* departed, replaced by the *Conestoga*.

Domestic trade embargoes, confiscation of packet boats by the federal government, and frequent military convoys characterized the history of Owensboro's river during the war years. Guerrillas often threatened the town and the river, and gunboats were stationed here with regularity throughout the war.

One such gunboat was Number 23, the *Silver Lake*, which was anchored opposite the town during the summer of 1864. Packet boats, before landing in Owensboro, had to first tie up at the side of the *Silver Lake* and discharge the mail, which was then taken into town under naval escort. The Commander, Captain Joseph C. Coyle, also granted permits for personal travel or the shipment of goods into or out of the town as a means of preventing Confederate sympathizers from shipping or receiving goods, or guerrillas using the river for transportation or communication.

The *Silver Lake*, in other words, held the key to Owensboro's economic life during this period, as the river was the sole reliable and safe means of transporting goods or travelling. Editor Thomas Pettit of the Owensboro *Monitor* visited the *Silver Lake* at her station opposite the city, and on July 13, 1864, published an account of his visit to the gunboat.

We made a hasty visit to the United States gunboat, now lying opposite our city, on Saturday last, and were politely welcomed aboard by its gallant commander, Acting Master Jos. C. Coyle, who we found, and where we soon ourselves felt, at home. From the commander we learned many matters of interest to our citizens, relative to his mission amongst us. The gunboat is stationed here by order of Lt. Commander Leroy Fitch, commanding the Tenth River District, and whose jurisdiction extends from Paducah to Pittsburg, and the orders to be enforced are near the same as applied to the West Tennessee District - the purpose of which is to suppress illicit traffic in goods to Dixie, and to prohibit the passage across the river of improper persons who generate mischief by acting as spies, smuggling goods, etc; and to more effectually prevent the raids of guerrilla bands upon the river border towns, and whose missions are invariable that of mischief - by smuggling stores, taking horses, and perpetrating other outrages, with which our readers are familiar. While the commander's orders are stringent and positive, he is not disposed to exercise his authority harshly, but will "temper justice with mercy," and all proper persons and citizens will not be interfered with or their liberty restricted. They will only have to see the commander in person, who will promptly grant them passports and permits. This may seem harsh to some, who will, on reflection, we feel assured, see the manifest justice to all concerned - themselves and the Government agents. The many depredations committed at towns below and above us, by bands of guerrillas; and for which the penalty of non-intercourse with the "outer world" - either in persons leaving home and the prohibition of all imports of goods and other necessities of life - *is the consequence*. The Master has positive orders, *which will be enforced to the letter, to shell any town where he may be on the very appearance of guerrillas*. This fact, if no other should stimulate all good citizens here to combine and concert to obey and be submissive to the "powers that be," and do all in their power to keep away guerrilla bands; otherwise, all trade or passage will be interdicted, (as is now the case in other river towns,) and the destruction of our city will in all probability be the result. Acting Master Coyle will cheerfully grant permits, for any reasonable supply of merchandise, and other articles for the local consumption of the people here, but will not allow

any *large amounts* to come to excite the cupidity of the gangs of prowlers who enter towns and plunder indiscriminately. For the commander's kind feeling for the good people of our city, and polite treatment received by us, we, in their and on our own behalf, tender him our profoundest *salaam*.

Fortunately for Owensboro the *Silver Lake* and its conscientious commander had been assigned elsewhere when, on August 27, Guerrillas occupied the town and burned the wharf-boat during a raid lasting only one hour. The following day the gunboat *Lou Eaves* arrived, but the guerrillas had already departed in the direction of Leitchfield. Later, in October, 1864, Confederate soldiers occupied the town for about two weeks, again during the absence of a gunboat.

Tom Pettit, who so earnestly encouraged his fellow-citizens to obey the orders of the gunboat commander and the federal officials, was himself arrested on November 17, charged with disloyalty, and exiled to the Confederacy, being taken to Memphis and then passed through to the Confederate lines. He remained in exile until the end of the war, even though President Lincoln declared the action unjust.

LOOKING AHEAD -

In July the *Quarterly* will return to the Civil War with an article by Dwayne Cox entitled "Civil War Steam Navigation in Owensboro," which deals with the packet boats and other civilian craft as well as gunboats such as the *Silver Lake*. "Picket by Day, Pray by Night: The Story of the 40-Day Peace Committee," by Ruthe Pfisterer Holmberg, will focus on an anti-war group of the early 1970's, and highlight some events of Owensboro's more recent past. Both Cox and Mrs. Holmberg are graduates of Kentucky Wesleyan College. Cox is an archivist at the University of Louisville and is finishing a Doctoral program in history at the University of Kentucky. Mrs. Holmberg is completing a Master's degree in history at the University of Louisville and is director of public relations for the Interior Design Institute of Louisville.

Finally, Aloma Dew will take a fond look at Utica School.

THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The Daviess County Historical Society is open to all who have an interest in the history of Daviess County, the Green River Valley, or Kentucky. The Society meets on the Fourth Friday of each month from September through May. Most meetings are held at the Owensboro Area Museum on South Griffith Avenue.

Monthly programs of the Daviess County Historical Society are open to all, and non-members are encouraged to attend and participate.

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Correspondence concerning contributions and other editorial matters relating to the QUARTERLY should be addressed to the Editor. The editors and the Society assume no responsibility for statements made by contributors. Addresses of the authors will be supplied upon request to the Editor.

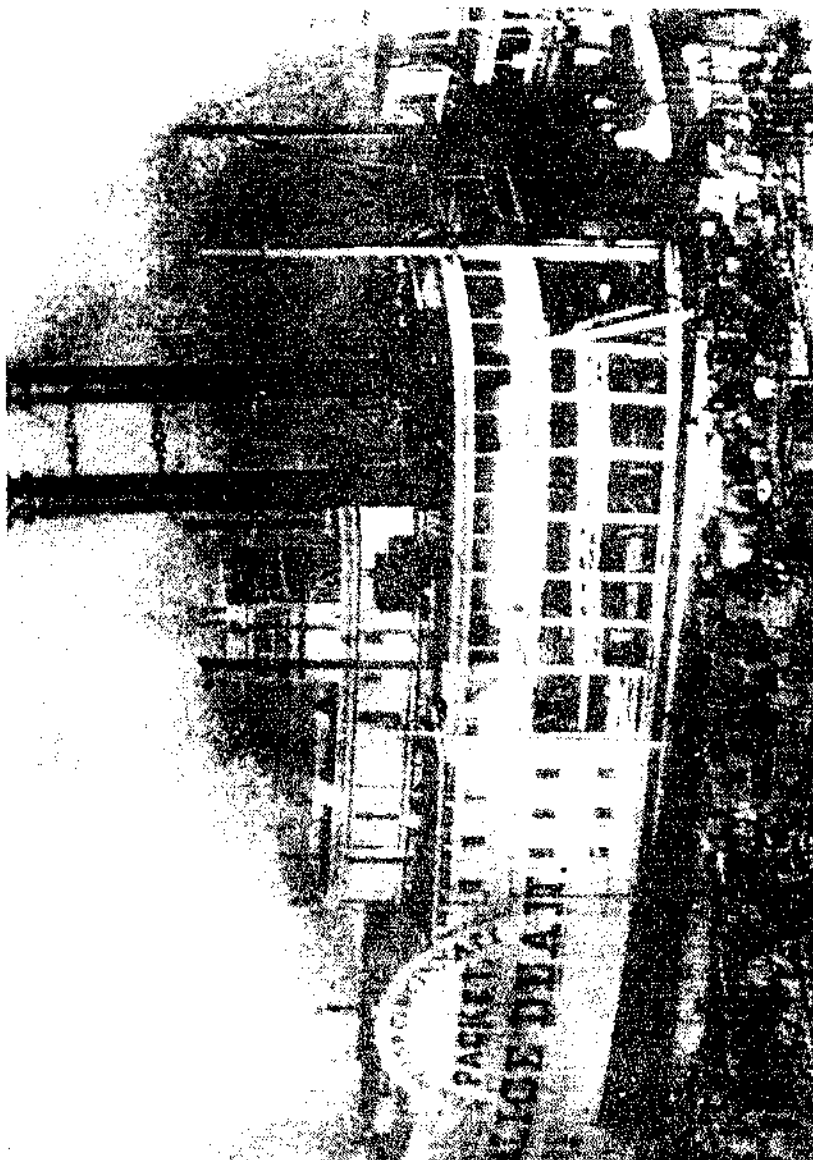
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The Editor's Page

In this issue the Quarterly deals with three important periods in the history of Daviess County. Dwayne Cox's article on steam navigation in Owensboro deals with the vital role played by the Ohio River in Owensboro's (and the nation's) history during this crucial era. Stephanie Dew, who will be a Junior at Owensboro High School next year, looks at entertainment in Owensboro at the turn of the century, focusing on vaudeville and other types of "variety" entertainment. Ruthe Pfisterer Holmberg deals with events of the early 1970's, a time when citizens of Owensboro and the nation were deeply and bitterly divided over the role this country should play in Southeast Asia.

We are indebted to the Filson Club for permitting the use of the photograph on page 50.

The Society is pleased to report that there are now more than 125 members of the Daviess County Historical Society, an increase of more than 100 per cent from this time last year.



Packets such as the *Alice Dean* of the Memphis & Cincinnati Packet company were familiar sights along Owensboro's waterfront during the Civil War era. The *Alice Dean* was 120 feet in length, weighed 411 tons, and sailed under the command of Captain James H. Pepper. It was taken over by the U.S. Sanitary Commission at the outbreak of the Civil War and was used by that agency until destroyed in July 1863. Photo courtesy The Filson Club.

CIVIL WAR STEAM NAVIGATION IN OWENSBORO
by Dwayne Cox

With the outbreak of the Civil War, the United States took immediate steps to insure dominance of the western rivers. The Ohio provided not only a vital line of supply, but formed the traditional boundary between North and South. It also flowed into the Mississippi, an artery that would be used to strike at the heart of the Confederacy.

Sparked by the war, the construction of civilian and military craft boomed. Steam power ushered in ironclad vessels, which in naval blockades could ram enemy craft with devastating force. The warships that passed Owensboro's riverfront also provided supporting fire for ground operations.

United States forces could not protect every hamlet along the Ohio River, but possible Confederate occupation of a town the size of Owensboro could threaten navigation. A strong disunion sentiment existed in the city and Union soldiers appeared in town shortly after hostilities began. By Christmas, 1861, embargoes and other hindrances to navigation threatened the city's livelihood.¹

Owensboro's northern neighbors focused a suspicious eye on the Ohio River town from the early days of the war. On September 22, 1861, Indiana Governor Oliver P. Morton reported that southern troops held the Kentucky city. Captain Andrew H. Foote of the United States Navy steamed upriver from Cairo to "dislodge the rebels" and keep the Ohio open. Foote arrived in Evansville on September 24 and in Owensboro the next day. While he found numerous southern sympathizers in the Kentucky city and recommended the deployment of 500 soldiers to hold the area, Foote encountered no resistance in Owensboro. Later, however, one of his ships steamed upriver to quell "disturbances at Hawesville." Naval reports of the Foote expedition indicated an intent to capture prisoners, recruit volunteers, and halt smuggling, which one officer thought was carried on "chiefly by Jews."²

The city's weekly newspaper, the Owensboro *Monitor*, provided eloquent testimony of the importance of river traffic to the daily lives of local residents. Edited by Henry M. Woodruff, this sheet sold for two dollars per year, "invariably in advance." Woodruff was apparently not enthusiastic about the Confederate cause. At one point, he complained that the only rights guaranteed in the southern states were funeral rights. In April, 1863, the editor was joined by Henry Gentry, who remained with the paper until June. Early in 1864, Woodruff reported that he intended to leave the city and offered the newspaper for sale. Later that year, Thomas Pettit purchased part interest in the *Monitor*. In November, however, Pettit was arrested for "disloyalty to the government," removed to Memphis aboard the side-wheeler *Darling*,

and exiled to the Confederacy. The masthead of the newspaper continued to advertise it under the editorship of Woodruff and Pettit.³

Steamboat traffic was Owensboro's most reliable source of contact with the outside world. With the opening of hostilities, residents faced isolation not only on account of the familiar obstacle of low water, but also due to naval blockades, embargoes, and other restrictions. Conditions permitting, however, the city enjoyed regular packet service. In addition to delivering correspondence from friends, families, and business associates, boat crews provided word-of-mouth news and passed along out-of-town newspapers to the editors of the *Monitor*. When packets failed to run, Woodruff issued skeleton editions of the newspaper, enlarged with extensive quotations from the works of popular authors. Of course, without the river trade local merchants could not replenish their shelves. Today's elaborate system of locks and dams remained a distant possibility, but in 1864 the *Monitor* reported that a Louisville convention had resolved that the Ohio should be opened for year around navigation to the extent that "the engineering skill of the present age" allowed. Conventioneers considered this undertaking the responsibility of the federal government and recommended the appropriation of \$10 million for this purpose.⁴

The river also provided a vital avenue for the exportation of local farm produce, the value of which increased during the war. In August, 1862, R. A. Bradshaw announced the construction of a windlass at the Owensboro wharf. The owner advertised fair rates and proposed to use this device for hoisting hogsheads from wagon to boat. Later the same year, local officials discovered a large supply of contraband whiskey at the riverfront. Shortly thereafter, a regiment of Indiana volunteers arrived to "look after the contraband trade." By early 1864, Daviess County produce brought good returns in the Memphis market. Hay sold for \$60.00 per ton, bran for \$50.00 per ton, corn for \$1.75 per bushel, and the price of beef and pork was also high. Around the same time, a New Orleans packet passed Owensboro with nine hundred hogsheads of sugar, a commodity that had been rare while military activities hampered commercial navigation. When Daviess County farmers loaded their 1864 tobacco crops on board river steamers they paid a \$2.50 to \$4.00 per hogshead freight charge.⁵

Along with freight, the river carried troops, prisoners of war, and black refugees. On August 12, 1862, three Confederate prisoners left for Louisville on the *John T. McCombs*. Almost a year later, rumors from the *Little Grey Eagle* had it that four Confederate enlistees from Owensboro were serving time in Henderson as prisoners of war. During December, 1863, the *Monitor* reported fourteen blacks who escaped from the city via river. Local newspaper coverage of troop movements by river, while not especially revealing, would surely have been of some interest to the guerrilla bands that roamed the countryside, if not the

Confederate high command. On June 6, 1864, for example, 160 black soldiers shipped out aboard the *Star Grey Eagle*. The *Monitor* reported that the ship's captain "received his ebony freight in a somewhat ungracious manner."⁶

Owensboro residents with the means, desire, or need to travel could pick from among several steamers that docked at their wharf. During much of 1862, accommodations included the *Big Grey Eagle*, which left Louisville on Monday and Friday at 5 p.m., arrived in Owensboro on Tuesday and Saturday at 6 a.m., proceeded to Henderson, and returned to Owensboro at six o'clock the same evening. The *Star Grey Eagle* made the same run from Louisville on Wednesdays and Saturdays, giving Owensboro regular packet service every day except one. In September, 1863, low water forced the replacement of these heavy vessels with lighter craft. Late in the next summer, the *Monitor* complained that, it being the low water season, "steamers the size of chicken coops" arrived "semi-occasionally."⁷

In addition to news, merchandise, and visitors, steamers also brought culture to Owensboro's patrons of the arts. On August 3, 1864, for example, Ward's Floating Theater opened its doors to Owensboro residents. The boat carried seating for 500 guests and included a cast of Cincinnati and Louisville players who presented "The Maid and the Milking Pail," a light comedy. Wood Benson and George B. Hudson starred in the performance, which broke the summer's monotony. Two weeks later the floating theater was stranded at the wharf, the victim of low water. The troupe, however, had left "sans everything."⁸

For over a month during the summer of 1864, Owensboro enjoyed the protection of the *Silver Lake* (Gunboat 23), a vessel that patrolled from Cannelton to Evansville. This timberclad steamer carried six 24-pound guns and was under orders to halt smuggling, block illegal passage across the river, and check guerrilla operations. Joseph C. Coyle, who commanded the *Silver Lake*, promised not to hinder legitimate trade and travel, but would bombard any town suspected of harboring guerrillas. His crew shelled Owensboro twice, apparently by accident, and one of the ship's engineers was involved in a drunken shooting in town. Thomas S. Pettit, the Confederate sympathizer who owned part interest in the *Monitor*, visited the *Silver Lake* on one occasion and wisely advised his readers to cooperate with "the powers that be."⁹

Owensboro residents had excellent reasons to fear the guerrilla bands and Confederate raiders who terrorized towns along the river. In July, 1863, southern partisans invaded Brandenburg, seized the *Alice Dean* and the *John T. McCombs*, robbed the passengers, and set fire to the former boat. Later that year the *Ruth* was "fired by an incendiary." In November, 1863, the *Monitor* reported that the *Allen Collier* had been captured, the passengers robbed, and the ship burned. Four

months later, southern soldiers set fire to the *Idahoa* when they captured Paducah. In August, 1864, guerrillas invaded Owensboro, burned the wharf boat, destroyed some government supplies, and killed one civilian and three soldiers. The next month, "roving greybacks" intercepted the Owensboro to Henderson mail. Later that year, black troops that had been stationed in Owensboro withdrew and around the same time the *Silver Lake* abandoned her off-shore post. Left unprotected, Owensboro was captured and held by southern forces for two weeks during October, 1864. Toward the end of the occupation, the *Monitor* claimed that the town's regular packet service had not been interrupted.¹⁰

Steam navigation touched nearly every aspect of life in Owensboro from 1861 to 1865. The river remained a key to the town's economy, social life, and contact with the world beyond Daviess County. Whatever strategic value Owensboro had rested in large part on its location at the banks of the Ohio River. Military restrictions upon navigation placed an unusual burden upon the town. To folks on the local home front, the clash between North and South was as much a naval as a land war.

Following the war, the railroad gradually replaced the river as Owensboro's primary means of contact with the outside world. The town's fathers had discussed building a line before the war, but no construction began until 1869. Naturally, the vested interest in river traffic opposed the railroad, but eventually the iron horse carried the day. Despite perpetual setbacks, financial backers maintained their faith in the railroad's capacity to insure their future prosperity. Interestingly enough, Owensboro's first locomotive arrived from Philadelphia via river, which provided a taste of irony in the city's transition from steamboat to railroad.¹¹

ENDNOTES

¹See Harpur Allen Gosnell, *Guns on the Western Waters: The Story of River Gunboats in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 1949); Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (Cambridge, 1949), pp. 547-584; Hugh O. Potter, *A History of Owensboro and Daviess County, Kentucky* (Montgomery, 1974), pp. 81-84; *History of Daviess County, Kentucky* (Chicago, 1883), pp. 158-178.

²*Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of Rebellion* (Washington, 1894-1927), 1st ser., vol. XXII, pp. 304, 344-348, 351-352, 356, 364, 479, 2nd ser. vol. I, pp. 65, 126; *The War of Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880-1901), 1st ser., vol. IV, pp. 177, 215-218, 266, 273, 279.

³*Owensboro Monitor*, August 13, 20, 1862, February 17, November 23, December 7, 1864.

⁴*Owensboro Monitor*, June 10, August 13, October 8, December 3, 1862, June 3, 1863, January 6, March 2, June 29, 1864; *Louisville Daily Journal*, February 26, 1864.

⁵*Owensboro Monitor*, February 25, August 20, November 19, 1862, January 13, 1863, January 6, 27, February 10, 1864.

⁶*Owensboro Monitor*, August 13, 20, 1862, May 27, December 2, 1863, March 3, May 18, June 8, 1864.

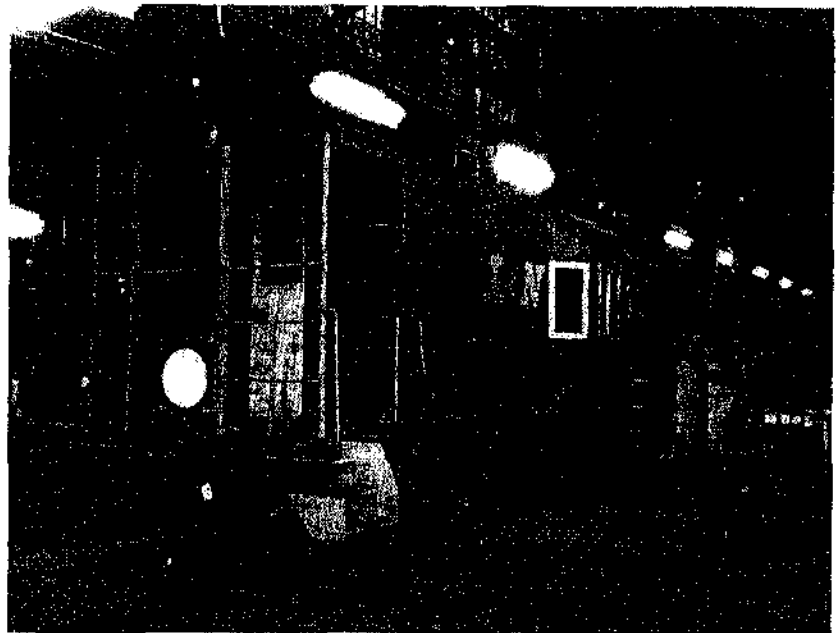
⁷*Owensboro Monitor*, August 13, 1862, January 17, 21, June 6, August 20, September 16, December 2, 9, 1863, February 3, August 10, 17, September 28, 1864.

⁸*Owensboro Monitor*, August 3, 10, 17, 1864.

⁹*Owensboro Monitor*, July 13, 27, 30, August 17, 31, 1864; *Official Records* (Navy), 1st ser., vol. XII, pp. 318-319, 2nd ser., vol. I, p. 209; Lee A. Dew, "Focus On - Owensboro During the Civil War," *Daviess County Historical Quarterly*, 1:2, (April 1983), 46-48.

¹⁰*Owensboro Monitor*, July 15, November 11, 18, 1863, March 30, June 22, August 10, 31, November 2, 1864; *Official Records* (Army), 1st ser., vol. XVI, p. 3; *Official Records* (Navy), 1st ser., vol. XXVI, pp. 532-533.

¹¹Lee A. Dew, "Owensboro's Dream of Glory: A Railroad to Russellville," *Filson Club History Quarterly*, 52 (January 1978), 26-45.



The Society's caboose, L & N No. 6123, sits in the South Louisville car shops waiting for site preparations to be completed at the Owensboro Area Museum.

VAUDEVILLE IN OWENSBORO: 1900-1910

by Stephanie Dew

To most people, the word vaudeville brings to mind silly little musicals or skits. Actually, vaudeville was a conglomerate of many types and styles of entertainment. Vaudeville was usually a generic term covering entertainment of all sorts from true vaudeville to burlesque, the circus, and showboats. Perhaps a better word would be variety, though vaudeville and variety are the same, being French and English respectively.¹

Owensboro at the turn of the century welcomed all the various facets of vaudeville with open arms. Vaudeville shows were the popular form of afternoon entertainment, and one certainly got one's money's worth:

On the standard eight-bill there was something to please almost every type of patron. The entertainment ran the gamut from animal acts (trained seals, trick dogs, etc.) and "dumb" acts (acrobats and trapeze artists) to high-brow dramatic sketches presented by stars of the legitimate stage. In between came tap-dancers, monologists, magicians, ballad- and blues-singers, European clowns, Oriental ballet troupes, black-face comedians, tabloid musical comedies, mind-readers, movie newsreels, and various other novelties, naive or sophisticated. Vaudeville built itself into American life. Women shoppers used it for relaxation in the mid-afternoon; teenagers swarmed to the Saturday matinees; entire families booked regular seats for a specific night of the week throughout the season.²

The popularity of vaudeville grew rapidly during the first decade of this century. In 1907, there were two theaters, *The Grand* and *Temple* theaters, but by 1909 that number had doubled. The *Grand*, at First and St. Ann Streets; the *Majestic*, at 219 West Second Street; the *Wonderland*, at 207 West Second; and the *Luna Airdome*, an open-air theater at 318 Frederica.³

A typical play, *Wang*, was playing at *The Grand Theater* on Friday, May 7, 1905. The advertisement for *Wang* in the *Owensboro Daily Messenger* read as follows:⁴

De Wolf Hopper
 In the New York
 Lyric Theatre
 Spectacular Revival
 of Merry
 WANG
 with a company of
 Seventy Artists,
 Including Margret Clark,
 Ada Deaves, Frank Blecher,
 and the famous original
 40-Lyric Theatre Chorus Line Beauties-40
 Magnificent scenery, gorgeous costuming,
 augmented orchestra.

One received all of this for a cost ranging from 50 cents to 5 dollars. Don Costello's circus was entertaining for a cheaper price: 50 cents for adults and half-price for children. But even this was "too steep for many citizens."⁵

Early vaudeville was on the rough side, and the audience was mostly male. This type of entertainment later developed into what was known as burlesque.

Originally, burlesque was simply a parody of any serious subject: classic plays and political, social, or religious issues. It wasn't until the late nineteenth century that "legs began to replace wit."⁶

Burlesque was considered:⁷

... almost as popular as melodrama, especially for the lone male in the city, and the reason could be found in the advertising: "50-Pairs of Rounded Limbs, Ruby Lips, Tantalizing Torsos-50" . . . burlesque dominated many theaters and road companies.

Melodramas were another flourishing entertainment form. Melodramas dwelt heavily on the "Wild West" theme. There were extravagant props, and the plays featured train wrecks, horse races, stage holdups, Indian attacks and even sinking ships.

The adventure and excitement of these plays were re-enforced by the real-life appearances of such "real cowboys" as Wild Bill Hickock, Buffalo Bill Cody, and others. Their re-enacting of their adventures and a few more besides, brought an aura of the romance of the western states to Owensboro.⁸

Other programs in the vaudeville houses were on a much grander and more sophisticated scale. Broadway plays and musicals offered Owensboroans the same type of entertainment available in New York, as, for example, when George M. Cohan's "Fifty Miles from Boston" played at the *Grand* in 1909. The show, which featured the song "Harrigan," was offered at prices ranging from 25 cents to \$1.50. A few weeks later

the *Grand* offered serious music-lovers an elaborate production of Wagner's "Parsifal," sung in English, with a large cast and complete orchestra.⁹

The most popular form of family entertainment was the minstrel show. The minstrel show was

... in two parts, with an intermediate 'olio' consisting of acts played well downstage before a drop curtain during the changing of the set. Part one followed a rigid pattern of dialogue and interspersed songs, with the blackface chorus seated in a semi-circle (the band behind them on a raised platform), and the dialogue being carried on by the Interlocutor and the two end men, Mr. Tambo and Mr. Bones; part two offered the troupe complete freedom and consisted of either variety acts, extravaganzas, or parodies of straight plays.¹⁰

Mr. Bones and Mr. Tambo got their names from their instruments. Mr. Bones, the right end man, had sticks of any hard material (usually wood) to make noise. The name came from the legend that the first of these noise-makers was made from the ribs of a horse.

Mr. Tambo's instrument was the tambourine. In some troupes, the whole group would carry tambourines to make noise at climactic moments.

The Interlocutor was the "'straight man,' impressive of manner and grandiloquent of speech, who served as a foil for the irreverent jibes of the clowning end men."

The minstrel show's distinguishing mark was the black faces of its performers. The actors were usually white, but they colored their faces with burnt cork. This tradition was so strong that Negro actors blackened their faces also.¹¹

At the turn of the century, there was one sawdust comedian who regularly drew a full house in Owensboro. Al G. Field had lived for a while in Owensboro, and considered it a second home. He had many friends here and, though he became famous enough to not need Owensboro as a regular booking, he came every summer.

At one point in his career, Field was billed as "one of the best talking and singing sawdust comedians on the road." Al G. Field's United Operatic Minstrels had 10 comedians, 10 dancers, 20 musicians, and 10 singers for 50 and 75 cents a show.¹²

Field's shows used typical minstrel gag lines like:

"Brother Juhnsing," said Mr. Bones with a wink at the other

end man, "here is a conundrum for you. What is the difference, sah, between an oyster and an elephant?"

"Hmmm," said the middleman thoughtfully. "The difference between an oyster and an elephant? Well, well, Mr. Bones, I must confess I do not know."

"Then I should not advise you to go into the oyster business," returned Mr. Bones.

or

"Brother Bones will now give us his pathetic little ballad, 'Sister's Buzzsaw Hat Blew Off and Landed in the Sea,' " said Mr. Johnson. "The orchestra will now play 'Ta-ra-ra Rooney.' "

In 1905, the *Messenger* "noted that Field's show was doing capacity business in all the major cities on its circuit. Although not a major city, Owensboro gave him a full house that year too." There were shows by Field at the old *Grand Theatre* where all 1,800 seats were jammed. The following year,

. . . a synopsis of the program showed a burlesque of the Washington Gridiron Club where politicians and newspapermen meet to roast each other and crack many jokes about Congress.

Field, though getting up in years, still played the role of the interlocutor for a while during each performance.¹³

Another popular troupe was the "Dandy Dixie Minstrels" which attracted large crowds to the *Grand* in 1909. "The entire balcony will be reserved for Colored people," the theater advertised. Prices were within the reach of nearly everyone, being 15 cents for children and 25 cents for adults for matinees, and 25 and 35 cents for children and 50 and 75 cents for adults for the night performances.¹⁴

Families also turned out in large numbers for the "comic" shows, similar to the minstrel show in that they had great popular appeal. Usually these shows visited the second-class theaters, such as Owensboro's *Wonderland*, where "The Merry Maes Comedy Co. and Acting Dog Topsy" were featured for an admission price of 10 cents.¹⁵

Almost as popular as the minstrel show and twice as exciting was the circus. "Circus day" was a day long anticipated and planned for. Whole families would come to town (a major event) just to see the circus.¹⁶

Owensboro, like other small towns, felt that

... the circus with its fantastic assortment of uniformed bands, calliopes, gilded chariots, prancing horses, ferocious animals, cavorting clowns, daring trapezists, bedizened ballerinas, and whooping Wild Westerners, brought color, romance, and such thrills as eclipsed even the Fourth of July.

The reason for all the excitement could be found in the advertisement for the Gentry Brothers Shows:¹⁷

THE NAMBAS
Best Performers in All Japan
6-FUNNY CLOWNS-6
DON JUAN-Looping the Loop
6-ELEPHANT ACTORS-6
Big Double FREE STREET PARADE
day of Exhibition

P. T. Barnum's circus was recognized as the largest and most magnificent. When he merged with James A. Bailey's circus in 1881, the combined circus (later including the Ringling Bros.) became "The Greatest Show on Earth."¹⁸

P. T. Barnum's menagerie and circus got its start on a floating theater playing the Ohio. These floating theaters were "towed from town to town by chartered steamboats, each of which, as a rule, carried a steam calliope whose 'soul-stirring' music could be heard for miles inland."

The calliope's return was the official opener of spring. Everyone went down to the wharf to hear its music. Some of the showboats would go to a new town every night; others, if trade was good, might stay a week, returning year after year.

Many people came from as far away as Europe to see the showboats. Many circuses traveled by boat and some of the menageries were considered a necessary part of a child's education by church elders.¹⁹

Some of these showboats were quite large. One of them, *Ward's*, could seat 500 people.²⁰

In April, 1905, the "Great Excursion Steamer *Island Queen*," advertised its show with the emphatic warning: "No Improper Characters Allowed!"²¹

Another type of entertainment boat, the so-called "pleasure boat" had no such restrictions on "Improper Characters." Pleasure boats had to be towed from town to town, "The space generally used for boilers and engines being needed for other purposes." The boats had "barrooms, dancing halls, staterooms, and kitchens." These boats were usually run entirely by women.²²

The pleasure boats were allowed on the river because

To all external appearances pleasure boats were innocent, and, as they were generally owned by or operated in the interest of persons of means and influence, they did not come under the ban of the law, except in response to intermittent local demands which could be avoided by moving.²³

The first decade of the twentieth century marked the arrival of a new type of entertainment, the motion picture. From the peepshows of the 1890's, where one inserted a nickel and with an eye on the peephole saw tiny figures moving, new ways were quickly found to show moving pictures on a large screen. The first large-screen motion picture was unveiled in 1903 in *The Great Train Robbery* and soon theaters were opening all across the country. In these nickelodeons as they were called, one could see a twenty-minute show for a nickel.²⁴

The movie's conquest was swift. In 1900,

... scarcely a showman took the motion picture seriously, for it was still a cheap novelty, a rather contemptible side-show. Ten years later suspicions were growing that this up-start of the entertainment world bore watching; another five years and many a managerial brow broke out in sweat.²⁵

The movies went on to capture the entertainment world. Vaudeville, the minstrel show, and showboats disappeared virtually overnight. The circus survived the first onslaught, and today is bigger than ever. The services performed by pleasure boats and burlesque shows have come ashore into bars, strip-tease acts, X-rated movies, and "nude girl" shows.

One thing is certain: Family entertainment, be it vaudeville, minstrel shows, movies, or television, will always be a part of American popular culture.

ENDNOTES

- ¹Glenn Hughes, *A History of the American Theater: 1700-1950*. (New York, 1959), 304.
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- ³*Owensboro City Directory for 1907*. (Owensboro, Ky., 1904), 276; *Owensboro City Directory for 1909*. (Owensboro, Ky., 1909), 297.
- ⁴Advertisements for the Grand Theatre and for the Gentry Brothers Shows, *Owensboro Daily Messenger*, 25 April, 1905.
- ⁵Aloma Dew, "Owensboro, Kentucky, During the Civil War - A Woman's Perspective," Master's Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1978, 60.
- ⁶Hughes, *American Theater*, 304, 307.
- ⁷G. D. Lillibridge, *Images of American Society: A History of the United States*, Vol. II. (Boston, 1976), 133.
- ⁸*Ibid.*, 132-133.
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- ¹⁰Hughes, *American Theater*, 311.
- ¹¹*Ibid.*, 132-133.
- ¹²"Al Field Packed 'em in at Local Minstrel Shows," *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer*, 4 July, 1976, Bicentennial Section.
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- ¹⁴*Owensboro Daily Messenger*, January 1989, various dates.
- ¹⁵*Ibid.*
- ¹⁶Hughes, *American Theater*, 312-313.
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- ¹⁸Charles Ambler, *A History of Transportation in the Ohio Valley*. (Glendale, CA., 1932), 312-313.
- ¹⁹*Ibid.*, 183, 324-325.
- ²⁰Dew, "Owensboro During the Civil War," 39.
- ²¹Advertisement for the steamboat *Island Queen*, *Owensboro Daily Messenger*, 23 April 1905.
- ²⁴Lillibridge, *Images of American Society*, 134.
- ²⁵Hughes, *American Theater*, 321.

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PICKET BY DAY, PRAY BY NIGHT
The Story of the 40 Day Peace Committee
by Ruthe Pfisterer Holmberg

On a Sunday evening in March of 1972, a small group gathered at the parish of Father Phillip Field in Owensboro, Kentucky. Housewives, parents, nuns, professors, high school and college students; they ranged in age from 16 to 50. Their reasons for joining varied. "I had two kids in school, no job, I had the time." "I joined it because I like the people." "Joining the Peace Committee seemed like the 'in thing to do'." No matter what their initial reasoning was, these men and women soon became bound by a fierce dedication to end the United States' involvement in Vietnam.

They look back on themselves in a variety of perspectives. "We were naive and idealistic," Tommy Westerfield, a college-age youth at the time, recalled. Sister Caroline Field remembered the 'true sense of dedication' in each member. "They were professional picketers," recalled Sister Michele Morek, a Biology professor at Brescia College. Sister Michele was not a member of the Committee, but assisted at many of their workshops. "The Committee was a group of kids and misfits, with the exception of Louella Farmer. They were a group of people who had to have a cause. If it hadn't been the war it would have been something else." "They had nothing to contribute to society," added Gene Bowlds, who claimed to be a member in 'name only'. Their leaders, Father Phillip Field and his brother, Father Clark Field, saw the Committee differently: "The group was a commitment of life, time, and money."¹

Most of the members of the 40 Day Peace Committee became involved through their friendship with the Field brothers. Father Phillip Field was undoubtedly the 40 Day Peace Committee's Pied Piper. Phillip dominated center stage while Clark remained in the wings. Art Kaul, then a reporter for the *Messenger and Inquirer*, described the two as "the new breed of socially conscious, activist priest. Phillip, 33, curly hair, had a boyish handsomeness that made him look younger than his years. He had a rugged, athletic quality about him. Clark, 35, wore sideburns and glasses. He appeared thin and scholarly."²

A parallel can be drawn between Phillip and Clark and the Biblical brothers Aaron and Moses. Moses was the brain behind Aaron's words and, as every member of the 40 Day Peace Committee agreed, it was Clark's intellect behind Phillip's public statements. Sharon Benner, a

tall, lanky co-ed at the time of her involvement with the committee put it this way: "Phillip was in front, while Clark stood in the background. Phillip became the central figure within the Committee as well as in the eye of Owensboro, despite the fact that Clark was the chairman." "People either loved him or hated him," Tommy Westerfield added.³

When speaking of Phillip and Clark, former Committee members referred to Clark with respect, while a God-like awe was aroused when speaking of Phillip. "There was a great value on whether or not Phillip praised you or gave you attention," Tommy remembered. Sharon agreed. "We all wanted Phillip's attention at one time or another. He would listen to us and seem to really become involved only to drop you to go to someone else leaving Clark to pick up the pieces." "I would have done anything they asked to help end the war," boasted Patty Ling Dickens, the youngest member of the Committee. "I was only leery of one idea - it was Clark's. He wanted to pour human blood on the Federal Building steps. I really had to think about it. We never did it but I think if they'd decided to do it, I would have been there with them."⁴

Phillip - sincere, honest, charismatic, attractive, forceful, dedicated, intense, sensitive - was not beyond fault. Five years later, as the members reflected, there were times when Phillip tended to be hypocritical, undiplomatic, ill-tempered, self-righteous, and strong-willed. Yet, the fabled Pied Piper has continued to retain the image of the "fairhaired boy" of the Committee.

The 40 Day Peace Committee's initial purpose was not peace in Vietnam. Their primary goal was to lend support to the Harrisburg 7 who, coincidentally, was led by two brothers, Fathers Daniel and Philip Berrigan.

On November 27, 1970, F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover, before a Senate appropriations sub-committee, announced that the "East Coast Company to Save Lives", led by Philip and Daniel Berrigan, planned to blow up underground electrical conduits and steam pipes serving the Washington, D.C. area in order to disrupt Federal Government operations and to kidnap a highly placed Government official in protest of the United States' involvement in Vietnam. On December 1, 1970, a Grand Jury was convened in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to investigate. The first indictment was handed down a month later against six conspirators and six co-conspirators on charges of "conspiring to kidnap Henry Kissinger and blow up heating systems of the Federal Building." The defendants faced sentences from five years and a \$10,000 fine to life imprisonment. They were arrested and jailed.⁵

A second indictment, naming eight conspirators and four co-conspirators was handed down on February 2, 1971. This indictment contained eight more charges in addition to the two previously

mentioned. These new charges included conspiring to destroy titles and property of the Federal Government and the Selective Service System and to possess illegal explosives. The eight conspirators, later to be known as the Harrisburg 7 in one of the most famous conspiracy trials in the United States, were Dr. Eqbal Ahmad, Father Philip Berrigan, Ted Glick (later to be tried separately), Sister Elizabeth McAlister, Father Neil McLaughlin, Anthony Scoblic, Mary Scoblic, and Father Joseph Wendroth.

Phillip, Clark and their older brother, Bill (also a Catholic Priest), attended the jury selection at Harrisburg. The Field brothers were moved by the emotions, the activities, the people encompassing the jury selection and upon returning home, began organizing.

A handful came together to form the Owensboro branch of the 40 Day Peace Committee. The first officers were Clark Field- chairman, Sharon Benner-co-chairman, Barbara Bowlds (Oehmler)-secretary, and Doris Benner-treasurer. The committee offered panels of speakers who would be available to speak on such social issues as busing, child welfare, and the war. The Committee's activities began with weekly meetings and peace vigils on Sundays.

The By-laws stated the purpose of the 40 Day Peace Committee was "to use all available resources in furthering the cause of peace on every level of society, local, national, and international." Their first newsletter stated the purpose as being "to focus attention on the issues at stake in the trial of the Harrisburg 7, to create a forum for local discussion of domestic problems, to lend a helping hand where needed to worthwhile community projects, and to travel to Harrisburg during Holy Week."⁶

The Committee went through many phases. Clark summarized the continual purpose of the Committee saying, "We were promoting the values of life and peace and the teachings of Christ. To be a Christian means you have to be involved. A Christian must fight evil wherever he finds it and that means involvement." Sister Caroline stated the purpose of the Committee simply and sincerely when she asked, "Well, someone had to stop the war, didn't they?"⁷

When asked if the Committee had a positive or negative effect on Owensboro, the members were split. "Well. . .," began Kathy Walker, "we were there, and week after week we were still there. Owensboro, in general, would have preferred not to hear what we were saying but hear us they did. We must have made some people think again about what their government did in their name. I think we gave moral courage to some people." "We kept down violent protest and did make the community more aware of the war," added Sharon Benner.⁸

"We were more a threat to the Church than to the community," explained Louella Farmer. Owensboro, as well as being politically conservative, is a strong Catholic community. All but one or two of the Committee's members were Catholic. It was led by two Catholic priests

and many of the Committee's members were nuns: Sister Susan Kerr, Sister Judy Kapelsohn, Sister Caroline Field, Sister Linda Bruce. Phillip, Linda, and Judy were to suffer many consequences from their participation with the Committee.

On the evening of the McGovern victory at the Owensboro Democratic Convention, several persons gathered at the Smoke House restaurant to celebrate. The celebration turned into a rally of Catholic lay persons to lend support to Phillip. That afternoon Phillip received a letter from Bishop Soenneker transferring him from the Blessed Mother Parish in Owensboro to a parish in Sunfish, Kentucky. Phillip's parishoners, as well as the members of the Committee, were outraged. Clark picketed the chancellorry. Sharon went to the Bishop's house only to be thrown out by the maid. Phillip told the Bishop he would go to Sunfish but he would never take another parish again. For two years he commuted back and forth from Sunfish to Owensboro in order to work with the Committee.⁹

Shortly following the Sunfish incident, Linda Bruce and Judy Kapulsohn also received orders from the Bishop. Judy and Linda were a part of the Lamb of God Order founded in France. "Linda and I joined the peace movement. We were never directly told not to be in it. The Sunday we went to Harrisburg the chancellorry came out with a letter saying, 'don't go to Harrisburg, the courts are just.' Despite the letter Linda and I continued to go to the 7:00 p.m. prayer vigils. It was very dark and very few people passed by. We always tried to go unnoticed. We knew if our names came up we would be in trouble. We had an all night prayer vigil. I signed Linda and I up for the 2:00 a.m. to 4:00 a.m. shift. Linda later informed me she had also signed us up for the 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. shift. I had the wildest feeling something was going to happen. A Father passed by and saw us. We didn't receive any repercussions for a long time. Then we received a letter from Bishop Soenneker saying if we didn't go back to France he would shut down the order in Owensboro. Linda and I did not want to go to France, so we left the order. Linda and I called the Bishop and asked if we could see him and he said, 'I have nothing to say to you.' I really don't think he thought we would leave."¹⁰

Holy Week was approaching quickly. The Committee worked hard circulating newsletters and pamphlets to tell of the pilgrimage to Harrisburg "to express solidarity with the defendants and the issues they represent." In a newsletter to Owensboro, the Committee explained:¹¹

The pilgrimage to and from Harrisburg will also be a journey of recommitment and renewal. Participants will bring energy,

ideas, vitality to be shared; they will return to their communities with new strength and confidence to confront war and injustice. Because the Harrisburg trial illuminates the conflict between religious conscience and the amoral use of state power, because of the timing of the pilgrimage with the Lenten/Passover season, it will be possible to make use of the rich symbolism of the religious tradition.

Phillip and Clark were able to sit in on the hearings, and later commented on them for the *Messenger and Inquirer*. "I am not optimistic. The whole tone of the place is heavy. You get the feeling it's all a facade and that they are just going through the ritual of courtroom justice and had a guilty verdict before the trial started." The only two to receive guilty verdicts were Phillip Berrigan and Sister Elizabeth McAlister for smuggling letters while Phillip was in prison.¹²

The Committee arrived back from Harrisburg totally committed to the peace movement sweeping across the United States. It was at this time that the 40 Day Peace Committee began to become recognized in Owensboro. The most outstanding activity of the Committee was their weekly Sunday prayer vigils on the Federal Building steps. At 7:00 p.m. every Sunday, the members gathered to pray for peace. Tommy remembered, "The prayer vigils - the candle, lonely, single, flickering light, the soft, deeply felt hymns we sang, and our urgent prayers of petition and hope - were the times we were closest to each other and felt that there was a possibility of peace." Kathy Walker elaborated further. "Praying for peace was as important to us as lobbying. Praying publicly at the building which represented the United States government in Owensboro, was making a statement about Christian social responsibility." Wayne Howard, a member during the later years, disagreed. "Praying in public - or at least out in the open - was merely distracting to me and I would have preferred a more private prayer before the meeting."¹³

"After the Christmas bombings the praying became futile," commented Sister Caroline. It was at this point that the committee decided to "picket by day, and pray by night." Sister Caroline was the first person to demonstrate against the Vietnam War in Owensboro. One afternoon, she picked up her picket sign and, alone, marched in front of the Federal Building. "At first I felt very alone - very frightened. But as I marched longer I began to realize that this was the true meaning of freedom in the United States." Caroline's brother Clark also had some reservations about picketing. "I was embarrassed at first, but then I began noticing Louella. She gave me courage. She'd look the people right in the eye and shake her sign at them." Louella remembered her picketing experience. "The first time I carried a picket sign, I was surprised that I

could do it. You were the object of ridicule - we were often spit upon. You can not believe the venom that people put upon you as you carried your innocent little picket sign. The people seemed to be thinking 'How dare you be against killing'."14

"The picketing and praying as I look back on it now," explained Sharon, "really got us nowhere. At the time I felt it was a really good idea, but now I realize its only purpose served was maybe reaching one or two people. People are scared of large groups. We got caught up in the emotions of the war and we felt picketing was the only way to express our feelings." "The Sunday night prayer vigils were good at one time," continued Sister Susan Kerr, "but lost meaning after the end of the war. They probably could have been stopped sooner then they were."15

Along with picketing and praying, the Committee became involved with the McGovern campaign. "We WERE the McGovern support in Owensboro." Ray Clark remembered going door to door urging people to vote for McGovern. "Everybody felt that the best way we could contribute to end the war was to support McGovern." "Sharon and I organized college students in a voter registration drive," continued Kathy. "We got the local Democratic Party to provide the fees for us to become Notaries Public. Registration laws had changed state-wide allowing for citizens to be registered anywhere as long as a notary public was there to witness the registration. We went door to door hoping to round up votes for McGovern." "When I went to the McGovern headquarters," recalls Tommy, "I was immediately put on the telephone canvass. Besides telephone work, I did door-to-door canvassing, and campaigning, helped mail newsletters, participated in the motorcade on the Saturday before the election, and worked at the polling booths on election day."16

It wasn't long before McGovern's primary active support in Owensboro was the 40 Day Peace Committee. Sharon was head of the McGovern Campaign in Owensboro, Gene Bowlds was a delegate to the National Convention and Elaine and Kenny Williams were delegates to the State Convention. Soon after the primary, two factions emerged in the Owensboro Democratic Party: Huddleston vs. McGovern. Sharon gave an example. "On the sign in front of the headquarters it had DEMOCRATIC HEADQUARTERS FOR HUDDLESTON. It said nothing about McGovern. When Senator Ford visited the office, I kept trying to give him a McGovern button but he wouldn't take it. Finally he took it, put it on his coat, then took his coat off." "The Committee was the main cause of the division," Gene Bowlds explained. "The committee members antagonized the people in the campaign. However, I will admit, the Committee gave politically strong support to the McGovern campaign."17

The Committee's support was to no avail in the election. It wasn't long into the evening of election day before the Committee realized McGovern had lost. "I felt dull," recalled Clark. Patty and Barbara agreed that after the McGovern loss "everything was really down." "I was realistic about it," Louella remembered. "I wasn't too surprised. I was very disappointed." "Only twice, one after the Eagleton affair and in early October when I realized how soon the election was coming did I feel that McGovern would lose," said Tommy. "Both times served to convince me to redouble my own personal resolve to campaign. Like most of the McGovern supporters, I had absolute faith in the man and the anti-war cause and refused to give up. It wasn't until Monday evening before election day, while watching the news, that I admitted to myself that we would lose. The next 24 hours and the immense amount of work we did was totally an act of great faith and pleading hope."¹⁸

Following McGovern's defeat the Committee realized they could not let this keep them down. With much enthusiasm, and little time, the 40 Day Peace Committee constructed a float to enter into the Owensboro 1972 Christmas Parade. Kathy Walker described the float:¹⁹

On one end of the float were people dressed as Vietnamese. Charred baby dolls lay around the charred remains of a hut. "Vietnamese peasants" obviously suffering stood and lay around. At the other end of the float were Americans making merry the Christmas season- drinking, dressed up, partying, celebrating the holidays. Phillip dressed in white robe with whited skin and hair ran from one end of the float to the other, seeing the horror of the Vietnamese, and then voicelessly trying to communicate to the Americans the suffering on the other end. He would frantically gesture and point, but the partying Americans acted oblivious.

On Nixon's second inauguration day, the Committee sponsored a "March Against Death." It began at Frederica and 12th Street at 2:00 p.m. It proceeded to the Federal Building and ended at Smothers Park along the Ohio River. Rev. David Banks, an episcopal priest from Louisville, spoke to the approximately 100 participants. He explained that the March was held to "express very human concern for all those who have suffered as a result of this war." Throughout the March the Committee circulated canisters for cash donations to provide medical aide to hospitals in Vietnam. This march stood out in Tommy's mind "because it made me realize how serious and deeply moral the anti-war movement was, and also how isolated we (the Committee) was as a group. The hate, the stares, the jeers, the spitting- I'll never forget it."²⁰

Two months later, March 20, 1973, the Committee sponsored

another march "We were expecting a large turnout of about 2000," Clark recalled, "unfortunately it rained and only 500 turned out. We walked in silence, wearing black arm bands."21

Also, during January 1973, a protest against the Hanoi Christmas Bombings was held in Washington, D.C. just as Congress was about to convene. Several of the Committee members attended. Kathy described the events surrounding the protest. "Phillip Berrigan, fresh out of jail, spoke to the group of anti-war people, which consisted mostly of middle aged, middle class type people, nuns, priests, and a minority of college age people. I was encouraged. Joan Baez was there and her sister, Mimi Faring. We saw Bella Abzug and McGovern. The part of the trip that moved me the most is when we - members of the Peace Committee - formed a circle underneath the dome of the capitol, knelt and prayed for peace, then sang 'We Shall Overcome' and ended with a spontaneous cry of 'power to the people'."22

Patty, only a high school senior, ran into trouble before and after she arrived in Washington. "My principal called me into his office the day I was sure of what I was doing. He never told me not to go. I had support from some teachers but the kids didn't understand my involvement. We were standing in a circle in front of the rotunda - singing and praying. After a while the police came up and led me away. I was the first to be arrested. They were real nice. . . it was like they felt sorry for me because I didn't know what I was involved in. I was scared to death - mostly because I was being separated from Phillip and Clark. There were five women in this awful cell. They were friendly and we spent most of our time praying. I was advised to plead NO LO CONTENDORE and was fined \$20."23

This was also Phillip's first time in prison. He recalled the event. "In Washington, when they shut the door on me, it was like claustrophobia. I was up a tree."24

In April of 1973 a Peace Conference was held in Lexington to establish the Kentucky Peace Network. This served as a bond for all the peace organizations in the state. A follow-up was held in Sunfish the 17th and 18th of May. This time would be used to "get better acquainted so as to have more than an organization but some knowledge of and growing toward love/concern for one another."25

The largest project of the short lived Kentuckians for Peace occurred in August of 1973. A pilgrimage of peace and protest to the state capitol, Frankfort, was sponsored by the 40 Day Peace Committee. Clark Field and Ray Clark left on bicycles for Frankfort hoping to solicit support for the pilgrimage, enroute. Others were encouraged to "bike-it" and meet on Saturday. According to an invitation sent to the citizens of Kentucky, the participants would "pray, talk, non-violent protest."26

By Christmas of 1974 the majority of United States troops had left Vietnam. The group had long since begun to shrink. However, a few faithful members and new recruits attempted to hold the 40 Day Peace Committee together. The Committee had a workshop on world hunger that was unsuccessful. They participated in two more parades. They sponsored a telephone campaign for judicial reform for the state. They sponsored a series of seminars in the spring of 1975 on various topics such as aging, prison reform, and world hunger.²⁷

The only successful action the Committee did following the end of the war was the distribution of books at the Daviess County Jail. Even then, the Committee still had to fight. Louella Farmer and Sister Susan Kerr attended a meeting of the County Fiscal Court and answered questions as to the type of reading material, and the possibility of the inmates using the hardback books to pry open the bars. After much discussion and perseverance, the 40 Day Peace Committee was given permission to bring paperback books.²⁸

By the Spring of 1975, the 40 Day Peace Committee had dissolved. "The lack of participation was due to a lack of an emotional issue," suggested Nnrah Kute, a member during 1974-1975. Many of the students transferred to other colleges or got married. Elaine and Kenny Williams quit because "it was difficult to work with a group committed to peace when hostile currents pervaded underneath." Tommy and Ray left to work in Los Angeles at a free kitchen on Skid Row as a part of the Catholic Workers movement. Phillip and Clark moved to Evansville. The movement was finished.²⁹

ENDNOTES

¹Author's interviews with Barbara Oehmler, Sr. Caroline Field, Sr. Michele Morek, Gene Bowlds, Fr. Clark Field; Letter to author from Tommy Westerfield, in author's possession.

²Art Kaul, "Owensboro's Field Brothers Represent New Breed of Socially Concerned Priests," *Messenger-Inquirer*, March 16, 1972.

³Author's interview with Sharon Benner; Westerfield letter.

⁴Westerfield letter; Benner interview; interview with Patty Ling Dickens.

⁵Harrisburg Defense Committee. "The Unlikely Story of: Harrisburg Eight," Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1972.

⁶40 Day Peace Committee, "By-Laws," Owensboro, Ky. 1972.

- 7Clark Field interview; Carline Field interview.
- 8Letter to author from Kathy Walker, Nov. 3, 1978, in author's possession; Benner interview.
- 9Author's interview with Fr. Phillip Field; Benner interview.
- 10Author's interview with Judy Kapelsohn.
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- 12"Local People not Optimistic about Trial," *Messenger-Inquirer*, April 1, 1972.
- 13Phillip Field interview; Walker letter; Westerfield letter; letter to author from Wayne Howard, Nov. 3, 1978, in author's possession.
- 14Caroline Field interview; Phillip Field interview; Clark Field interview; author's interview with Louella Farmer, Sept. 26, 1978.
- 15Benner interview; letter to author from Susan Kerr, Nov. 16, 1978.
- 16Farmer interview; letter to author from Ray Clark; Walker letter; Westerfield letter.
- 17Phillip Field interview; Benner interview; Bnswds interview.
- 18Phillip Field interview; Clark Field interview; Ochmter interview; Farmer interview; Westerfield letter, interview with Elaine Williams.
- 19Walker letter.
- 20Art Kauk "March Against Death," *Messenger-Inquirer*, January 20, 1973; Westerfield letter.
- 21Clark Field interview.
- 22Walker letter.
- 23Interview with Patty Dickens.
- 24"The Priest Who Slept in Jail," Evansville *Sunday Courier and Press*, November 5, 1978.
- 25Kentuckians for Peace, "Kentucky Peace Network for the Long Haul," Frankfort Ky., 1973.
- 26Clark Field interview; 40 Day Peace Committee, "Open Letter," Calhoun, Ky., 1973.
- 27Author's interview with Norah Kute; Howard letter.
- 28Howard letter; Farmer interview.
- 29Kute interview; Author's interview with Elaine Williams; letter to author from Ray Clark; Westerfield letter.

FALL MEETINGS

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September 23

October 28

November 18

A full schedule of interesting programs is planned for next year!

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Monthly programs of the Daviess County Historical Society are open to all, and non-members are encouraged to attend and participate.

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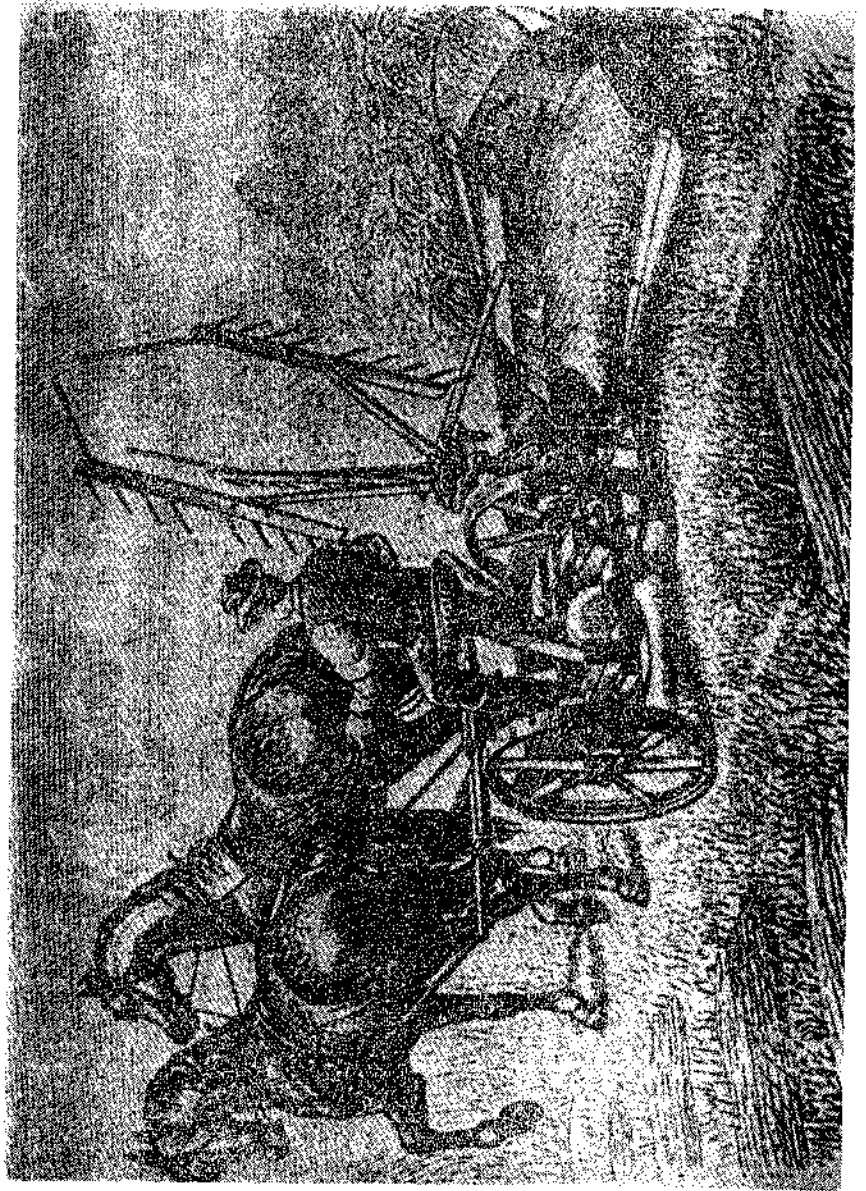
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The Editor's Page

The infinite variety of Daviess County's historical experience is represented in this issue of the *Quarterly*. The Owensboro Oilers, once the city's pride, are featured in an article by Mitchell Corbin, a 1983 graduate of Kentucky Wesleyan College. Jim Parr's discovery of the career of Alice Allison Dunnigan and the Owensboro *Enterprise* gives us a fleeting glance at a forgotten element of the history of journalism in Owensboro, as well as an introduction to an important and fascinating woman. Perhaps this article will result in more information being discovered about the Owensboro *Enterprise* and the career of Mrs. Dunnigan.

A new feature, entitled "Correspondence," is added to this issue of the *Quarterly*. In this case, we are happy to make a correction to an article appearing in the April issue, and regret the error. Letters and comments from readers are solicited for this feature of the *Quarterly*.

Finally, the "Focus On" section illuminates (pardon the pun) the coming of the first electric lights to Owensboro, and points up the very progressive nature of the city during the early 1880's.



This illustration of the new "Buckeye" reaper is a most of the new types of farm equipment appearing in Daviess County by 1860. Once as it appears today, this instrument revolutionized the harvesting of wheat and other small grains, permitting one man to do the work of countless harvesters cutting grain by hand with scythes or cradles, and helped turn Daviess into one of the main grain-growing counties of the Commonwealth. (21)

PLAY BALL: A BRIEF HISTORY OF OWENSBORO OILER BASEBALL

by Mitchell Corbin

Baseball: America's national pastime. It dominates our nation's sports scene and there is no wonder why when one considers baseball's deep roots in American life and the tremendous excitement that develops in every community during spring and summer months. Fans in major league cities fill the ball parks; they shout with joy, and express agony. They laugh, swear, and weep. In small American towns the same emotions exist. The home team is either cheered or jeered. It's a disease called baseball fever. In the mid-twentieth century this fever spread throughout many Kentucky towns. Professional baseball prospered in the state as many young talented men were molded into major league ball players. One Kentucky town which held baseball in high esteem was Owensboro. From the late 1930's until the mid 50's, Owensboro's ball team, the "Oilers" provided the area with professional baseball.

In the early 1900's professional baseball was played in Owensboro. But with World War I came the decline and the ultimate folding of Owensboro's professional team; ball players were going into the service and the team could not operate because of inadequate financial support. However, Owensboro wasn't the only Kentucky team that felt the effects of World War I. By 1920, Louisville was the state's sole professional team.

In 1936, after a twenty year absence, professional baseball once again arrived on the scene in Owensboro. Julius C. Miller, pioneer Daviess County oilman, was responsible for this return of organized baseball. Miller, a Carthage, Missouri native, came to Owensboro in 1923 and began drilling oil wells that netted his estate almost two million dollars. However, he is best remembered in the community as a baseball promoter rather than an oilman. In the summer of 1936, Miller persuaded Hugh Wise to bring his Class D Kitty League team to Owensboro from the small Missouri town of Portageville. In dedication to Miller the new team became known as the Oilers. Wise gladly accepted the offer to move to Owensboro, because in Portageville there existed a lack of fan support and community backing.¹ He had heard about Owensboro's great baseball tradition and he wanted to be a part of it. Wise, knew that it would be a challenge to provide the community with a professional style of play, but with community backing he felt the challenge would be lessened.

The initial edition of the Oilers became a testing ground for baseball's future expansion and improvement in Owensboro. The team played

their games at old Southside Park, located at the northwest corner of Legion Avenue and the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. The playing conditions at Southside Park were atrocious. The infield consisted of peaks and valleys while the outfield was hard as asphalt. During the previous winter a windstorm had razed the grandstand roofing, which exposed fans to nature's elements. In other words, Southside Park was a rundown dive. This left a bad impression in the minds of area fans as well as fans from other Kitty League towns. It was then that Miller decided Owensboro needed a modern ball park.²

Miller and other local businessmen took steps to assure that the city would build a modern ball park which might put Owensboro on the baseball map. On April 9, 1937, Miller gave a luncheon at Hotel Owensboro for thirty influential community leaders.³ He presented a plan which called for subscriptions for stock in a proposed Owensboro Recreation Corporation. The corporation would own a five year lease on ten acres of ground at the intersection of Triplett and Eighteenth Streets, the league franchise and all improvements on the park.⁴

For the project to be successful the shares had to be sold as soon as possible. Owensboro sportsmen quickly began selling stock in the corporation. By 7 p.m. on that day more than \$15,000 was raised for the project, thus the fund drive developed into an enormous success.

On April 10, the Owensboro Recreation Corporation (O.R.C.) was founded with J. C. Miller as president and Hugh Wise as general manager. The corporation agreed to buy the ten acre Eighteenth and Triplett lot as the site for the new park. Work began immediately on the field because the Kitty League opener was only forty-one days away. With Hugh Wise's engineering experience ORC Field (named for Owensboro Recreation Corporation) came into being in only twenty-eight short days, a truly remarkable feat when one considered it rained twenty of those days.⁵

Although built quickly, ORC Field displayed all the modern conveniences of a major league park. A beautiful grass infield became the facility's most distinctive feature. Formed by a mixture of bluegrass, rye, and bermuda the infield remained green throughout the year. Hugh McFarland states, "The grass was green in the winter, which became a valuable weapon to help the team sell season tickets."⁶ Behind home plate a covered grandstand housed the press area and box seats for season ticketholders. Bleacher seats along each foul line added to the total seating capacity which numbered about five thousand.⁷ An eight foot high cement wall formed the outfield fence on which local merchants rented spaces for advertisements. On top of the right field fence the scoreboard towered majestically into the sky. Behind it stood two apartments which were rented out as living quarters.⁸ With

such luxuries, ORC Field became a great credit to Owensboro. It was acknowledged in future years by Joe DiMaggio, famous New York Yankee star, as the best minor league park in the United States.⁹

May 20, 1937 became a day to remember in Oiler history. Three thousand screaming fans packed ORC Field for its dedication. The crowd assembled at the park early for the flag raising ceremony which officially opened the new park as well as the Kitty League season. Earlier in the day hundreds participated in a parade which honored the Oilers. Manager Hugh Wise and his Oiler players applied the finishing touches to a successful day with a thrilling ninth inning rally to defeat Union City, Tennessee, 4-3.

The 1937 season had its ups and downs. Even though the Oilers finished a dismal seventh place in the Kitty League standings, they led all teams in attendance. For George Binks, a future major leaguer, the '37 Oilers represented his first taste of professional ball. Binks, a speedy outfielder, led the Oilers in several hitting and fielding categories. On the season's last day ORC Field was changed to Miller Field. Before the start of the game Hugh Wise announced the change was a show of appreciation to Mr. Miller, the main figure in establishing the park.¹⁰

In only two short years fierce rivalries had formed between Owensboro and neighboring towns. The Oiler's engaged in many heated battles, especially with Hopkinsville and Mayfield, two nearby towns. As years went by rivalries also were formed with Paducah, Madisonville, and Bowling Green, which caused great excitement throughout Western Kentucky.

With two shaky seasons behind them the 1938 Oilers implanted excitement in the area. All season long the Oilers battled the Mayfield Clotheirs for the league's top spot, with the men from Owensboro ultimately losing by two games. Eddie O'Connel, a hard hitting first baseman, and Johnny Dudra, a slick fielding shortstop, were the two stars which solidified the team.

In the same season the first-ever major league exhibition game in Owensboro was held at Miller Field. Owensboro for twenty-five years for some reason or another had been a jinx to major league exhibitions.¹¹ On April 12, 1938, this jinx was finally washed away as the Cleveland Indians and the New York Giants played nine electrified innings. Over five thousand fans, a new Owensboro attendance record, watched as Cleveland pitcher Mel Harder handcuffed the Giants by a 6 to 2 score. Sportswriters from these two towns wrote lavish stories about Owensboro's fine baseball plant, which soon spread to other major league cities.

With all the positive reports and success of the Cleveland-New York affair, exhibition games became a yearly tradition in Owensboro. Each

year following spring training two major league teams agreed to play at Miller Field. Thousands of fans packed the park to see many baseball greats. Jack Hicks, local baseball authority states, "Exhibition games were by far the most looked forward to by local fans, because it was a chance to see the great players up close."¹² Players like Joe DiMaggio, Bob Feller, Mel Ott, and "Pee Wee" Reese are only a few who displayed their extraordinary talents in Owensboro.

On August 19, 1939, the community's ambition to fill Miller Field was achieved as 5,932 screaming fans paid admission to honor J. C. Miller with a "Miller Night." Fans from every walk of life, crowded every nook and cranny to make the celebration one great success. The event became a success in more ways than one. The Oilers beat the Bowling Green Barons, 8 to 3, to keep their one game lead over the Mayfield club. But the game became secondary as it was announced that the capacity crowd had broken the existing attendance record for Class D baseball.¹³ With this announcement, J.C. Miller became the proudest man in the world because he knew through dedication and hard work a dream had become a reality. To cap the night off, Kenesaw Mountain Landis, High Commissioner of Baseball, sent a wire to the Oiler clubhouse stating: "Congratulations on breaking the record."¹⁴

According to Oilers' manager Hugh Wise the 1940 Kitty League season displayed more excitement than any of his previous years in organized ball. All year long the Oilers were engaged in a nip-and-tuck battle with the Bowling Green Barons. Going into a season-ending series with the Barons, Owensboro trailed by a meager two games. This exciting five-game series would determine the Kitty League Pennant winner.¹⁵ Local fans watched as the Oilers lost four out of five games, which dampened an otherwise successful season. This team was paced by three outstanding players; Eddie Urbon, Jimmy Wallace, and Clarence Heffelfinger. Urbon stroked thirty-four home runs which formed a new Kitty League record. To break the record he hit two round trippers in the season finale.¹⁶ Wallace and Heffelfinger, the two pitching stars, combined to win a total of thirty-two games between them.

If Oiler fans were granted one wish it would possibly be to wipe out the whole 1941 Kitty League season. This season became the worst year in Oiler history. They finished a whopping twenty-four games behind front running Jackson, Tennessee. More agonizing than the teams finish was Hugh Wise's resignation as Oiler manager. In only five short years Wise had become a legend to local sports fans, who would never forget his major role in bringing professional baseball to Owensboro. Many people felt that without Wise's future guidance the Oilers would falter.

With World War II tensions increasing, the possibility of a 1942 campaign appeared quite dismal. Shelby Peace, Kitty League Commissioner, urged all teams to pay their league fees and play as many games as possible. The season began in mid-May with a full schedule of games, but in early June Union City and Bowling Green withdrew from the league because of financial reasons. The remaining Kitty League teams, Owensboro, Jackson, Fulton, and Hopkinsville, decided not to continue the league with only a four team circuit.¹⁷ On June 19, the Owensboro fans saw their final organized baseball game until after the war.

Organized baseball in Owensboro and other Kitty League towns was put on the shelf for long years until its revision in the spring of 1946. During these years baseball parks turned into ghost-towns, consisting only of past memories. The nightmare finally came to an end in the winter of '45 as Shelby Peace reorganized the Kitty League, declaring that it would be better than before. Seven teams from small Tennessee, Kentucky, and Illinois towns formed the new circuit.

The Oilers dominated the first two years of the newly reorganized Kitty League. In 1946 the Oilers won the pennant by a whopping twelve game margin. Led by the hitting of Manager Earl Browne and Raymond Fletcher the Oilers became unstoppable. Browne not only outhit everyone in the Kitty League, his .429 batting average gave him the batting title for all organized baseball. Jack Hicks states, "Of all the players I saw at Miller Field, Earl Browne had to be my favorite, because he was such a great hitter."¹⁸ Fletcher, another excellent hitter, broke the Kitty League home run record held by former Oiler Eddie Urbon. During the season Fletcher terrorized opposing pitchers with thirty-six home runs.

The next year Owensboro once again crushed every Kitty League opponent on the way to their second consecutive pennant. Shelby Peace stated, "There's no doubt in my mind if there will ever be a better Class D baseball club than the 1947 Oilers."¹⁹ The team once again was headed by Earl Browne, who led the Kitty League hitting for the second year in a row.

In the future years these two championship campaigns became known as "The years Chuck Tanner played in Owensboro." Chuck Tanner reported to Owensboro in 1946 after his graduation from high school in New Castle, Pennsylvania. During the season Tanner batted a meager .250 while playing as a utility outfielder. The next year Tanner started the season in Owensboro, but after twenty-five games he moved up to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, in Class B ball.²⁰ He finally made it to the major leagues in 1955 with the Milwaukee Braves, the parent club of the Oilers. Never known as a star, Tanner made it big in the managerial

ranks. In 1971, he made his first major league managerial debut with the Chicago White Sox. His biggest thrill came in 1979 as he managed the Pittsburgh Pirates to a world championship.

The Oilers last pennant-winning team came in 1949. The 25 to 4 trouncing of Madisonville on opening day served as a notice of what was to come. Manager "Bill" Adair's team won the regular season championship by 9 games. In the play-off series Madisonville revenged the early season embarrassment by trouncing the Oilers in three straight games.

In the early fifties baseball began to hit the skids in Owensboro. The 1950 season developed into a successful year as the Oilers made the playoffs, eventually losing to Mayfield. Travis Jackson, a slugger for the New York Giants in the 20's and 30's guided the Oilers to a third-place finish. Recently Jackson became an inductee into Baseball's Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. The next two seasons' turmoil began as financial problems arose due to the failure of support from the New York Yankees, their parent club. However, the team still managed to keep its head above water.

The 1953 season in many ways became the strangest in Oiler history. It was April 1, before the city definitely knew that it was to have a ball club. In one of Owensboro's greatest community efforts almost \$30,000.00 was raised for the Oilers preservation.²¹ A new organization came into existence with Mayor Lee Roy Woodward as President and Harold Mischel and Lawrence McGinnis as Vice-Presidents. This committee's responsibilities lay in areas of planning and financial management.

Except for one to two days the club was never out of eighth place all season, yet it was one of the most popular clubs ever to represent Owensboro from the attendance standpoint. The club attracted a total home attendance of 67,711 in 59 games—an average of 1,164 a game—the best draw of any Class D team in the country.²² The previous year's fifth place team attracted only 40,000.

The answer to the paradox of a last team outdrawing one that finished fifth is simple because the 1953 Oilers became a "community effort," as loyal Oiler fans financed and supported the team. The fans who jammed the park knew that their work was responsible for Miller Field's beauty and the red, white, and blue uniforms which the players wore.

The next year a future major league star arrived in Owensboro. The player was a boyish, awkward-looking string bean, with a flattop crewcut; his name, Tony Kubek. During the 1954 season Kubek had a batting average of .344. Manager Marv Crater stated, "Kubek by far is

one the best hitters I've ever seen."23 Tony also was no weak sister with the glove. He had range to either side as well as an accurate cannon arm. He remained with the Oilers for only one full year. Three years later he became the American League Rookie of the Year in his debut with the New York Yankees. Kubek played either at shortstop or in the outfield with the Yankees until his retirement in 1965. In his nine seasons as a major leaguer, he played in six World Series and two All-Star Games.24 Currently Kubek is a baseball commentator for the NBC television network. Tony has many memories of his short stay in Owensboro. He stated. . .

I was seventeen years old when I arrived in Owensboro. . . Me and five other guys stayed at a private home where we lived on cots in an attic. . . My monthly salary was a meager 150 dollars. . . We would play three games at home and we would jump on a bus and travel all night to the next city. . . We were given \$1.00 a day for meal money and a couple of local restaurants would punch out your dollars. . . The fields were rough and lights were bad, but at 17 who knew it, who cared, we were pros.25

As Kubek noted life in Class D ball became rough on youngsters who came right out of high school. They had to adjust to homesickness, to short order meals, and travelling around on worn out buses.26 But as Kubek stated they were pros and who cared.

The Oilers last hurrah came in 1955. The team faced massive financial troubles as the crowds averaged only around five hundred, which was far below what was needed to break even. Television and radio broadcast of major league games seemed to please area fans more than watching the Oilers. Also, a large portion of the blame should be placed on the New York Yankees organization, which practically cut off all funds. Shelby Peace stated, "It only takes a small amount of money for a minor league team to go, but the cold blooded major leagues wnn't help."27

With the lease expiring on Miller Field and the league being on shaky ground the Oiler organization decided to fold at season's end in 1955. On August 23, the final game was played at Miller Field as the Oilers defeated Union City by a score of 4 to 3. One month later wrecking crews began tearing down the 18-year-old ball park.28 Today Gabe's restaurant and a shopping center stands where fans once cheered the Oilers to three pennants.

The people of Owensboro can look back at the Oilers and hold their

heads high. For almost twenty years the local area was entertained by one of the nations best Class D organizations. Today it seems sad that one of the finest cities, containing some of the finest people on earth does not have organized baseball.

ENDNOTES

¹Personal interview with Hubert McFarland, Owner, McFarland Photography Co., Owensboro, Ky., 31 March 1983.

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³"Miller Helped," p. 6.

⁴"Fifteen-Thousand Dollars Is Being Raised Through Sale of Shares," *Owensboro Messenger*, 10 April 1937, p. 6.

Personal interview with Hubert McFarland, Owner, McFarland Photography Co., Owensboro, Ky., 31 March 1983.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷William Foster Hayes, *Sixty Years of Owensboro: 1883-1943* (Owensboro, Ky.: Messenger Job Printing Co., Inc., 1943), p. 314.

⁸Personal interview with Jack Hicks, Athletic Director, Owensboro High School, Owensboro, Ky., 8 April 1983.

⁹Hayes, p. 314.

¹⁰"Home of Oilers Named in Honor of J. C. Miller," *Owensboro Messenger*, 7 Sept. 1937, p. 1, col. 2.

¹¹L. D. "Birdie" Gasser, "Mel Harder Gets Best of Contest With Shumacher," *Owensboro Messenger*, 13 April 1938, p. 6, col. 1.

¹²Personal interview with Jack Hicks, Athletic director, Owensboro High School, Owensboro, Ky., 8 April 1983.

¹³L. D. "Birdie" Gasser, "5,932 Fans Pay To See Ball Game Beauty Contest," *Owensboro Messenger*, 19 April 1939, p. 1, col. 2.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵L. D. "Birdie" Gasser, "Here And There In the Field of Sports," Editorial, *Owensboro Messenger*, 5 Sept. 1940, p. 8.

¹⁶L. D. "Birdie" Gasser, "Here And There In The Field of Sports," Editorial, *Owensboro Messenger*, 10 Sept., 1940, p. 8.

¹⁷L. D. "Birdie" Gasser, "Curtain To Fall on Kitty Tilts Tonight," *Owensboro Messenger*, 19 June 1942, p. 6.

¹⁸Personal Interview with Jack Hicks, Athletic Director, Owensboro High School, Owensboro, Ky., 8 April 1983.

¹⁹Russ Melvin, "In This Corner," Editorial, *Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer*, 13 Sept. 1955, p. 14.

²⁰Hugh Potter, *History of Owensboro and Daviess County Kentucky* (Louisville, Ky.: Herf-Jones Paragon Publishing, 1974), p. 250.

²¹Charles Harbin, Jr., "Dietrich or Sellen to Hurl; Second Baseman Arrives," *Owensboro Messenger*, 1 May 1953, Sec. B, p. 19.

²²Charles Harbin, Jr., "Now Hear This," Editorial, *Owensboro Messenger*, 4 Sept. 1953, Sec. B, p. 14.

²³Russ Melvin, "In This Corner," Editorial, *Owensboro Messenger*, 4 May 1954, p. 14.

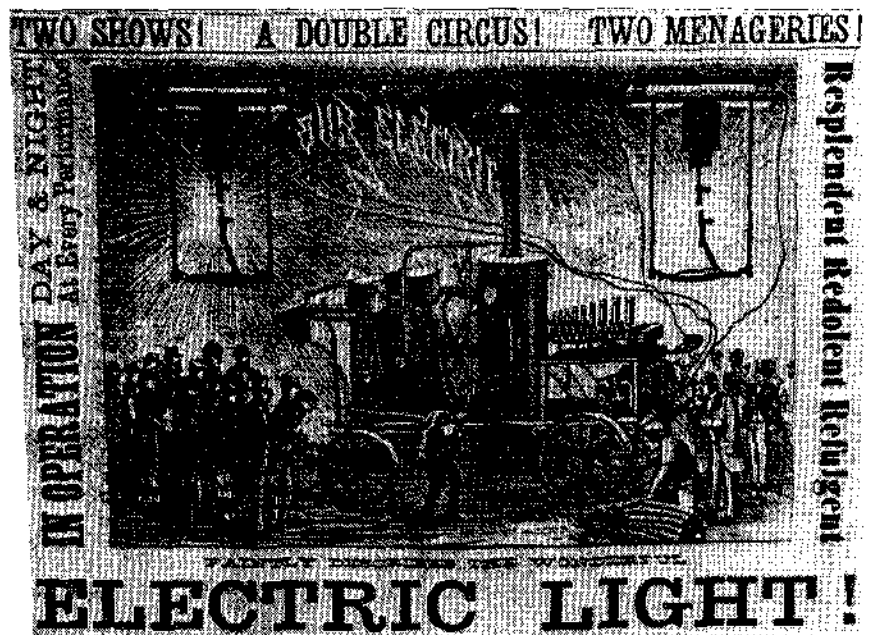
²⁴Potter, p. 250.

²⁵Letter received from Tony Kubek, Oshkosh, Wis., 5 March 1983.

²⁶Ronnie Peach, "Kentucky Diamonds Produced Major League Gems," *Back Home In Kentucky*, July/Aug. 1981, p. 14.

²⁷Kyle Vanc, "Head of Folded Kitty League Tells of Collapse," *Owensboro Messenger and Inquirer*, 1 May 1956, Sec. A, p. 6.

²⁸"Miller Helped," p. 6.



This illustration, taken from a circus advertisement, shows the Brush system generator in operation. It was an apparatus such as this one that first brought the magic of electricity to Owensboro in 1880.

AGRICULTURE IN DAVIESS COUNTY IN 1880

by Lee A. Dew

A century ago not only was Daviess County predominately rural, the farmers of Daviess were responsible for the overwhelming majority of the economic life of the county; yet, in the historical studies of Daviess County, agriculture and the life of the farmers and their families is virutally ignored.

According to the 1880 United States census, Daviess had a population of 27,730 persons, of whom 6,231 lived in the city of Owensboro, 197 lived in Curdsville town, and 309 in Whitesville. The rest were listed in rural magistrates' districts, which included such towns as Yelvington, Knotsville, Masonville and Sorghotown, yet most of these populations were farmers.

The county's population has risen steadily from the first enumeration in 1820, when 3,876 persons were counted. By 1830 the population had grown to 5,209; 1840, 8,331; and in 1850 12,362. The county had counted 15,549 persons in 1860, and by the end of the war decade, the population had risen to 20,714. Thus the 1880 count showed an increase in the population of the county of 7,016 persons. Of these, 22,876 were white, and 4,854 were black. The white population had risen steadily from 11,958 in 1860 to 17,111 in 1870, so that by 1880 the white population had increased 5,765 during the decade. The black population had risen to 4,854, an increase of 1,251. Only 1,564 blacks lived in the city of Owensboro, while 3,290 were listed as residents of the county, indicating the widespread employment of the blacks as agricultural laborers. The movement of the county's black population into the city of Owensboro would not come for many years.

Of the white population, the overwhelming number, 26,991 to be exact, were native born, while 739 listed their birthplace as some other country. Of these 24,442 were born in Kentucky, indicating a very stable population pattern for the county. Other states contributing natives to Daviess County were Indiana with 792; Tennessee, 347; Virginia, 338; Ohio, 189; Missouri, 94; Illinois, 92; Pennsylvania, 83; North Carolina, 73; and New York, 55. Germany led the list of foreign nations claimed as birthplaces by Daviess Countians, with 394 of its citizens having migrated here. Ireland was second, with 137; followed by France with 49; England and Wales, 36; Scotland, 30; Switzerland, 61; Italy, 3; British America, 8; Great Britain, 1; and Sweden and Norway, 1.

Thus Daviess County had a stable, primarily native-born population

which was primarily rural, with a leavening of foreign-born immigrants which gave to the town of Owensboro in particular a cosmopolitan flavor with its groups of German and Irish settlers, and merchants and professional men from a variety of backgrounds. Although the Census does not break down the foreign-born by residence, it is probably safe to assume that most of the immigrants lived in Owensboro while very few settled in the rural areas of the county. The rural population of Daviess in 1880, both black and white, was overwhelmingly native-born, and probably a very high percentage was born within the county itself, although no statistics exist to validate this.

The farmers of Daviess County produced a great wealth and variety of produce. Tobacco was the main crop, some 9,523,451 pounds of which were produced in 1879, and was the main source of income for farmers. Corn, however, was a close second, with 1,392,559 bushels grown in that year, which at an average price of 42 cents per bushel meant a value of nearly \$600,000 for the year. Tobacco, at an average price of three cents per pound meant a cash income of some \$285,000, for the 1880 crop. Top prices for leaf tobacco reached \$5.50 per hundred on the 1880 market, while lug tobacco sold for around \$3.50 and trash bought \$1 per hundred pounds. Although the total value of the corn crop was more than twice that of tobacco, virtually all tobacco produced in the county was sold while much of the corn was "book value" only, being consumed on the farm rather than turned into "cash money."

Small grains were another major factor in the county's agricultural picture in 1880. Wheat, much of which was ground into flour in the several flour mills in the county, totalled 147,303 bushels, which at a market price of 80 cents per bushel, brought in an additional \$118,000 to the pockets of farmers. Oats, most of which were raised for horse feed, totalled 79,946 bushels, while 10,694 bushels of rye, 3,535 bushels of barley and 67 bushels of buckwheat were also produced.

Other field crops included cotton, nine bales of which were produced in 1879 on eight acres, a respectable yield for the climate. Hay totaling 5,569 tons was grown, as well as three bushels of grass seed and nine bushels of clover seed. Four tons of straw were marketed, and 48,854 gallons of sorghum produced.

Barnyard poultry numbered more than 60,000 and "other poultry" was nearly 52,000, and together they produced 271,288 eggs for sale, while bees turned out 35,722 pounds of honey and 722 pounds of wax. More than 52,000 bushels of Irish potatoes were grown in 1879, and 4,810 bushels of sweet potatoes. Orchard produce worth \$18,057 was offered on the market, while \$7,270 in assorted garden produce was

sold. Daviess County sheep, totalling 8,412 head, produced 46,817 pounds of wool, and woodlots furnished 33,628 cords of firewood. Dried peas totalling 35 bushels were sold, as well as 295 bushels of dried beans.

All of this meant money for farmers. On the Owensboro wholesale market dried beans brought \$1.50 per bushel, and chickens \$1.25 each. Goose down feathers sold for 41 cents per pound and beeswax for 20 cents per pound. Eggs were worth five cents per dozen, while turkeys and geese for slaughtering brought \$6.50 per dozen. Dried apples sold for six cents per pound, and dried peaches for nine cents.

Livestock played an important role in the farm economy of the county during this period. There were 6,538 work horses in the county in 1879, as well as 1,552 mules and 122 work oxen. Many farmers kept milk cows, some 4,815 of which were enumerated in the Census, and butter was an important source of money for farm wives, selling for seven to eight cents per pound on the Owensboro wholesale market. Even more important were beef cattle, which totalled 7,275 head, and which were worth between two and two and one-half cents per pound on the hoof.

The most important animal of Daviess County farms, however, was the hog. There were 37,699 head of swine counted in 1879, most of which were destined for farmer's smokehouses, although some were sold "down the river" to commercial abattoirs in Evansville. The farm smokehouse was not only the source of meat for the farm family, but a valuable source of revenue. Bacons and shoulders were in constant demand in "town" where they brought an average of six cents per pound. Plain hams sold for 10 cents, while "clear sides" brought 8½ cents. Even more important was lard, which sold for 8½ cents per pound in Owensboro, and was used, in these days before cholesterol consciousness, for everything from frying to pie crusts to poultices.

Most farms in Daviess were larger than the average for the time. In an age when 40 acres was considered adequate to support a family in some comfort, most farms in Daviess were more than 100 acres, although the Census listed 12 farms as less than three acres, 60 with from three to 10 acres, and 199 farms of 10 to 20 acres in size. A total 531 farms were between 20 and 50 acres, but in the next category, 50 to 100 acres, the number of farms increased to 531. There were 747 farms of 50 to 100 acres, and 959 farms of 100 to 500 acres, indicating that Daviess was an area of big-time farming operations. In addition there were several farmers who fit the old-fashioned category of Planter. There were 30 farms which counted between 500 and 1,000 acres and four which numbered more than 1,000 acres in extent.

Of these farms the overwhelming majority were worked by their owners. There were only 336 farms rented out on shares, and 421

farmed by tenants who paid cash rent. The rest, 1,815, were cultivated by their owners. This is an important statistic, for by 1880 tenantry was becoming a major factor in agriculture, as large numbers of farms in the South and the plains states especially were operated by tenants and owned by absentee landlords or financial institutions.

These farms represented a considerable financial investment. The total value of farms in the county in 1879 was listed by the Census at \$4,974,797, and the value of all farm products sold, consumed on the farm, or on hand in storage was given at \$1,345,622. These figures gain meaning when compared to similar statistics for manufacturing in the county at the same period. Total invested capital in manufacturing in 1879 was only \$1,350,113, invested in a total of 132 establishments, which produced total products valued at \$1,915,132, and paying wages totalling \$258,258, or less than 20 percent of the value of farm produce.

Further, most manufacturing in Daviess involved the products of agriculture. There were 18 tobacco stemmeries in the county, employing 111 men over 16, 71 women over 15, and 80 children, with a total payroll of \$62,156 annually. Eleven distillers employed 108 men at wages of \$46,175 per year, while eight cooperage plants supplied barrels to the distillers and jobs for 36 men at wages of \$25,865 per year. Eight mills ground flour and corn meal from Daviess County grain, employing a tax total of 25 men and one child, at wages of \$9,508 per year, while five saddlery and harness shops, employing 6 men at wages of \$3,006 per year, met the needs of county farmers for leather goods for their horses and mules. These figures indicate that the average factory wage for workers in these plants in Owensboro in 1879 was \$335 per year, and ranged from a high of nearly \$428 per year for the all-male full-time workers in the distilleries to less than \$233 per year for the workers in the stemmeries, many of whom worked part-time, and most of whom were black males, women and children. This makes total farm product values of an average of \$524 per year per farm look quite prosperous when compared to factory wages. This type of comparison is, of course, very misleading, as all farms did not produce the same amount and wages of farm workers were quite low, yet it does indicate that the average Daviess County farmer probably had a life-style and standard of living at least as good and probably better than the average wage-worker in the city of Owensboro.

Farming, of course, cost money, and required a capital investment just as did manufacturing, although with farming the return on the investment was often much slower in coming. Land was expensive in Daviess in the late 1870's and early 1880's, and it took a lot of capital to become a farmer. Few real estate advertisements quoted prices for land,

but those offerings of land for which prices were quoted averaged about \$13 per acre for tillable land. This would mean that any person wanting to become a farmer would have to have an investment of approximately \$650 for a 50-acre farm, or approximately two years average wages for a factory worker.

In addition to land, farming took equipment, and agriculture in Daviess County in the late 1870's was becoming more mechanized, and therefore more expensive. While many small farmers still walked behind a breaking plow, more and more larger farmers were buying the new steel sulky plows, such as the Furst & Bradley models advertized by Troutman & Rarick, the implement dealers "on the East end of Fourth Street." They also sold Studebaker wagons, and Oliver chilled plows and Blount "True Blue" plows, but for the farmer with big acreage to plow the sulky, which carried two or even three "bottoms" and allowed the plowman to ride rather than walk, guaranteed quicker and more efficient ground breaking.

Bozarth & Hussey, agricultural implement dealers located on Main street between Lewis and Daviess streets, also offered riding plows, as well as walking cultivators and double-shovels, used in cultivating corn and tobacco crops. Horse collars, hames, traces, bridles, check lines and other "horse gear" could be bought at J. J. Hill, "The Hard Pan in Hardware," who also offered felloes, plow handles, clevises, axes, buggy wheels, hubs and spokes, guns, pistols and anvils; while such necessities as barbed wire and other types of fencing, horseshoes, nails, and wagon and carriage hardware could be bought from McPherson & Company.

For farmers growing wheat, oats and other small grains a harvester was a necessity, and J. W. McJohnson "The Main Street Grocer," proclaimed himself the sole agent for the Buck Eye Reaper and Mower Company. This firm produced a complete line of reaping machines, from the simple Buck Eye Dropper which cut the grain and dropped it in piles where it could be gathered and bound into sheaves to the Buck Eye Table Rake Reaper which stacked the cut grain on a platform where it could be gathered and tied by hand. The top of the line was the Buck Eye Reaper & Binder, which not only cut the grain but automatically tied the bundles of cut stalks into sheaves, ready for the shockers to stack it for drying.

Once the grain was thoroughly dried, it was ready to be threshed, which could be done by the Massillon Threshing Machine, offered by Bozarth & Hussey. This machine, which was powered by a steam traction engine, separated the grain from the straw, blowing the latter into a pile, and delivering the grain through a pipe, where it could be

loaded into wagons or bagged in gunny sacks for shipment. Bozarth & Hussey also sold Russel traction engines to furnish power for the threshers, while J. B. Griffin & Company of Masonville offered "Cooper's improved traction or self-propelling farm engine" which would also operate a portable sawmill. In any case, the expenses of buying major equipment such as threshing machines and traction engines was such that only big-scale operators could afford them, and then usually helped pay for them by doing custom threshing for their neighbors.

For tobacco growers Bozarth & Hussey also offered "National Bone Dust Fertilizer, the Famous Anchor Brand tobacco grower," while F. T. Gunther's wholesale grocery offered "The Best Tobacco Fertilizer Made," and also wheat and corn fertilizers, "for sale low." "We guarantee these Fertilizers to kill the Flies and Worms," Gunther's advertisements continued. The use of commercial fertilizers such as bone meal was just beginning in Daviess County during this period, with county farmers spending a total of only \$4,766 on such materials during 1879, but this ranked Daviess in third place in fertilizer usage in the commonwealth behind Jefferson County with its many market gardens and Oldham County, which also grew vast amounts of garden produce for the Louisville market.

Garden produce was important to Daviess farmers also, not only as a means of feeding their families, but as a source for ready cash. "Country pay" was still accepted by some town merchants, which meant that they would swap merchandise for whatever farmers had to offer—hams, bacon, potatoes, garden vegetables, firewood or whatever, and several merchants featured "country produce" in their advertisements. W. F. Reinhardt & Bro., "The old Reliable grocers," consistently proclaimed "Country produce wanted" in their newspaper advertisements, while Werner & Leaman advertised "Fresh provisions and country produce" for their customers. Tobacco warehouses also handled the products of their customers gardens. The Tobacco Exchange, operated by F. J. Clarke and T. S. Venable at the corner of St. Ann and Water streets offered "all kinds of Produce" with "liberal cash advances made on all consignments."

With roughly three-fourths of the county's population living outside of the city of Owensboro, it was obvious that farmers made up a substantial share of the market for city merchants, and these same farmers were becoming increasingly dependent upon "town" for essentials and luxuries - the old frontier days of agricultural self-sufficiency had given way to a more interdependent economic system and a higher life-style for rural families.

Getting to town was not easy. Although roads led to Owensboro from

every part of the county, they were dirt, which meant that they were dusty and uncomfortable in dry weather, but seas of mud in wet seasons. The only comfortable way to get to "town" was by train; but Owensboro in 1880 was served by only one rail line, the Owensboro and Nashville Railroad which ran between Owensboro and Russellville, with connections at Central City with the Illinois Central Railroad running between Louisville and Paducah.

Farmers who lived near the O & N tracks could drive their buggies or wagons to the stations along the line, such as Livia, Lewis, Hickman, Sutherland or Panther Creek, load their family and produce on the train, and travel to Owensboro in some style and comfort. When they arrived at the depot at Second and Lewis streets they might walk down to Miller & Coffey's livery stable between Daviess and Allen streets to rent a buggy or hire a hack and driver to visit friends in town. "We respectfully ask our country friends to stop with us when they come to the city," their advertisements stated. They might, particularly at tobacco-selling time, spend several days in town, perhaps staying at the Palmer House, on Frederica between First and Second Streets. This establishment offered "First-class Fare and Accomodations," with rates of 25 cents per meal, and \$1 per day or \$4 per week for a room. The Palmer House was the Owensboro hotel located "nearest to the landing, nearest to the depot."

While the farmer transacted business or looked over new models of farm equipment, his wife and daughters might visit the dry goods emporiums of Sol Wile and Sons, T. Moise, A. J. Mitchell, or the Baltimore Clothing House, or examine the newest in cookstoves and tinware at W. A. Guenther, Wm. Lossie & Co. or A. Eger and Co. Perhaps they might also visit Martin H. Weber's "Carpet Emporium" to look at the latest in carpets, oil cloth, rugs, and window shades, or visit Mrs. J. Rothchild & Co. to examine the new season's line of millinery goods, bonnets, and laces, or Mrs. C. Naunheim's stock of dry goods, ladies' shoes, millinery goods and notions.

Not all visits to town were happy occasions. Death sometimes called country people into the city to make arrangements for the last rites for loved ones. One of the oldest traditions in rural life, the family cemetery, was slowly giving way to the newer fashion of large cemeteries offering perpetual care. Such an institution was Elmwood Cemetery, located "about one mile south-east of Owensboro on the Hartford road." Elmwood made a special appeal to rural families to buy plots for their families. "Persons living in the country who have not already done so, will find it to their interest to buy a family lot in Elmwood rather than to bury their dead on farms, or in neglected country graveyards, where, in a few years at most, their graves will be desecrated and trodden upon by

man and beast." Bereaved families might take advantage of the services of Harrison & Todd or Miller & Milne, undertakers, or buy a memorial stone from the Mischel Brothers, Nicholas, John and George.

Coming to town also might offer an escape from the daily drudgery of the farm into the fantasy world of the circus, as when "Jun. Robinson's Great World's Exposition, New Electric Light Show, Animal Conscratory, Aquairum and Strictly Moral Circus" arrived in Owensboro for a show on Tuesday, June 15, 1880. Farmers and their wives packed lunchboxes, bedrolls and children into wagons and headed for town to see the "herd of monster elephants," the "100 star artists," the "curious and rare lions of the sea," and other exotic curiosities such as the "immense Sumatran Rhinoceros, living Hippopotamus, Crested Stemmatopus, African Nylghau, and living Egyptian Crocodile, 20 feet long."

If cash was short for farm families and they were lucky enough to own some woodland, they might be able to cut some railroad ties to raise enough money for the trip to the circus. The L & N Railroad advertised for 10,000 cross ties to be delivered along the line between Owensboro and Central City in lots of between 500 and 5,000. The ties had to be of white oak, six inches thick, nine inches wide, 8½ feet long, "with two sides hewed to parallel faces, bark removed from the edges and ends cut or sawed squared." Or perhaps, if strapped for cash, a farmer might sell a mule of two to S. H. and J. T. Harrison, mule buyers, who constantly advertised that they wanted "100 mules, from 4 to 8 years old."

An even more important event for farm families was the county fair, held at the fair grounds south of the city. The O & N Railroad ran special trains every thirty minutes from the depot to the fair grounds, located in what is now Legion Park, which featured horse races and "a Fine Band of Music." Contests for Poultry, Dairy and Pantry Products, grain, tobacco, garden and orchard products, flowers, needle work, harness and saddle horses, sheep and hogs gave the farmer and his family the opportunity to show off their skills at animal husbandry and crop production, while the "womenfolk" competed in household industries.

Home canning of fruits and vegetables using mason jars had been introduced into Daviess County as early as 1860, and by 1880 most housewives, especially on the farm, put up fruits and vegetables for winter use. F. W. Reinhart & Bro. advertised a full line of mason jars, wax-top jars, large-mouth fruit jars and preserving sugars for the convenience of housewives. Meat, too, was preserved at home, with the hams, loins, bacons and jowls smoked in the smokehouse, lard rendered and stored in cans or jars, and sausage ground, seasoned, cooked and preserved in mason jars. To win a prize for home canning or preserving certainly must have helped made the long hours over a wood-burning

stove more worthwhile for a farm woman or girl, while the fellowship and social events of the fair were a welcome change from the day-to-day monotony and isolation of the farm.

Another "new-fangled" invention which helped lessen the toil of farm woman and city girl alike was the sewing machine, which by 1880 was inexpensive and commonplace. While the rich might buy "tailor-made" clothes, and while men and boys generally bought work clothing and boots, most womens' and children's clothing and mens' shirts were made at home. Bleached cotton sheeting could be had for 8¼ to 9 cents per yard, standard prints at 6½ cents, paper "cambries" at 7½ cents, and ticking at 17 to 18 cents, while Cannelton brown sheeting was available at 7½ cents, and quilt linings at 6 cents per yard. And homemade dresses could always be brightened with a ribbon of bit of lace from Mrs. Rothchild's store on Main Street in Owensboro.

As farmers and their families rode homeward from the fair on a crisp October evening in 1880 they might reflect on how much their lives were changing. Sulky plows, mechanical binders, riding mowers and cultivators and steam engines made it possible for them to cultivate more land and increase their potential income, while sewing machines and the mason jar made possible a more comfortable wardrobe and a better diet. True, farming was still hard work, dependent upon human muscle and sweat as much as upon animal power and machines for the production of crops and care of animals, but most Daviess County farmers could take pride that they were prosperous and productive, and the major factor in the economy of one of Kentucky's most important counties.

For citizens of Owensboro there was the very conscious realization that the prosperity of their town depended upon the prosperity of the agricultural community which surrounded it—that Owensboro was then, as it still remains today to a lesser extent, the creation of the great wealth of agricultural resources with which God endowed Daviess County.

—DON'T FORGET—

Subscriptions to the Daviess County
Historical Quarterly make great Christmas
Gifts.



AN OWENSBORO BLACK WOMAN JOURNALIST

by Jim Parr

The first black woman to be admitted to the press galleries of the U.S. House and Senate, Alice Allison Dunnigan, got her first newspaper job as "hometown correspondent" for the Owensboro *Enterprise*. She worked in this capacity during her final two years of high school, ending in 1923.

Mrs. Dunnigan attended high school in her hometown of Russellville. She says in her 1974 book *A Black Woman's Experience—From Schoolhouse to White House*:

There was no Negro Newspaper published in my town, nor did any circulate there. Negro newspapers were practically unheard-of and unthought-of by most people in my community. . .

I expressed my desire (to be a newspaper reporter) to a cousin, Virginia Herald, who taught school in Owensboro. She put me in touch with a friend, who was editor of the Owensboro *Enterprise*.

What is known about this black Owensboro newspaper, the *Enterprise*? The 1922-23 *Owensboro City Directory* lists the Enterprise Publishing Company as publishers of the weekly *Enterprise*. The office address is listed as 805 West Fifth street. The editor is identified as S. L. Barker, who was also listed as the principal of Eastern school. The manager of Enterprise Publishing was S. L. Powell who was also listed as manager of Mammouth Life and Accident Insurance Company, a black owned and operated company, with offices at the same address as the publishing firm.

The 1925-26 city director lists only S. L. Powell with the *Enterprise*, listing him also with Mammouth Life. S. L. Barker, no longer associated with the paper as editor, is now listed as principal of Dunbar school.

By 1928 the city director identifies Mr. Powell as manager of Mammouth Life and Mr. Barker as Principal of Dunbar. There is no mention of the *Enterprise*, so by then it was apparently out of business.

In her book, Mrs. Dunnigan mentions a Mr. R. L. Berry as once editor of the *Enterprise*. She says Berry later became editor of the *Kentucky Reporter* in Louisville.

Mrs. Dunnigan described her contributions to the *Enterprise* as "one-sentence stories on the happenings of our little city."

The column carried such insignificant items as: Born to Mr. and Mrs. So-and-So, a baby girl. Mrs. Jane Doe was Thursday dinner guest of Mr. and Mrs. Hands First. Rev. Holier than Thou filled the pulpit at the First Baptist Church Sunday. . .etc.

"There was no cash payment attached to such writings," she remembered. A number of papers would be sent to her each week, which she was to sell at five cents each. "I was allowed to keep three cents out of each sale and return the two cents to the company. The more papers I sold, the more space would be allotted my column. The more space I had the more names could be included. The more names used the more papers I could sell."

While Mrs. Dunnigan was not a resident of Owensboro, her connections with the *Enterprise*, for the two years she was a student at Knob city high school in Russellville, ties her to this unique and little-known part of Owensboro's history.

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor:

After reading the April 1983 edition of the *Quarterly* I found the following faults with your article on the Graves family in Daviess County written by Daisey Graves Elliot which can be found on page 38. Paragraph 3 should be corrected as follows:

Francis James Graves, 1836-1910, was the father of Sarah Elizabeth Graves Smeathers, 1886-1978, who was the wife of Harmon Fletcher Smeathers, 1872-1956. They had three children, Albert Newton Smeathers, 1908-1972; Virginus Smeathers Reizer, now residing in Daytona, Fla.; and Harmon Dudley Smeathers, Yelvington, Ky.

Bryan K. Smeathers

FOCUS ON—OWENSBORO'S FIRST ELECTRIC LIGHTS

To bring light to the darkness has been a goal of mankind since earliest times—fire, the torch, candles, oil lamps and kerosene lights all evolved in their turn to turn night into day. Owensboroans in the 1870's were justly proud of their city's gas light system, which provided lights

for downtown street corners and illumination for stores by means of gas generated from coal at the city's gas plant.

But the gas lights were expensive, hot, and dirty, and the invention of a new kind of light, from electricity, was rumored to be much superior to gas and much safer. For some time the people of Owensboro had heard about the new electric lights, but few had seen them, except those lucky souls who had travelled to some city where they were installed, or who had seen steamboats equipped with the new lights. Steamboats were quick to adopt the new means of illumination, as electric lights eliminated the open flame of gas jets or "coal-oil" lights, always a hazard on wooden vessels.

Thus there was great excitement in Owensboro when in the summer of 1880 a circus came to town, advertising, in addition to the usual freaks, animals, acrobats and music, that the entire show would be illuminated by electricity. "The entire Series of Vast Pavillions" will be "brilliantly illuminated with the new Brush Electric Light," the advertisements promised, calling the Brush system "in many respects preferable to the Edison Electric light."

The Brush system, named after its inventor, Charles Francis Brush, involved the use of direct current from a dynamo. In 1878 Brush invented an improved arc light in which the electrodes were brought together by electromagnets when voltage was applied, thus permitting lamps to be lit by remote control. The following year he installed a street lighting system in Cleveland, Ohio—the first of many cities to adopt the Brush process. In 1891 the Brush company merged with the Edison Electric Light Company to form the General Electric Company.

The circus's lights received power from a dynamo generator, powered by a steam engine, both of which would be "on exhibition day and nights," the circus promised. The area of the show would be illuminated "with a soft, mellow, but surprisingly brilliant light, equalling in intensity the noonday sun," and requiring "many miles of insulated Wire."

The possibility of electric lights intrigued J. W. Porter, operator of the Owensboro Telephone Exchange. Porter was instrumental in persuading several Owensboro businessmen that an electric light company would be both feasible and profitable for the city. The result was the Brush Electric Light and Power Company, organized in October, 1882. W. F. Reinhardt was President of the new concern, with Joseph Lee treasurer, and Porter secretary and manager. A total of \$5,000 was raised in shares of \$100 each.

On November 24, 1892 the *Owensboro Semi-Weekly Messenger* reported that the machinery was in place and nearing completion for the first test of the new plant. The *Messenger* described the apparatus in detail:

Their dynamo machine is a beautiful and intricate piece of mechanism, which it is hard for an inexperienced pen to describe. It is of sixteen light capacity, each light having a power of 2,000 candles, which is equal to about eighty ordinary gas jets. It has four stationary magnets and an armature that revolves at the rate of 750 revolutions a minute. These generate the electricity, which passes out through a commutator in the four brushes and through them to the binding posts which lead to the wires. The current of electricity is regulated by a governor for each lamp which makes the light steady and uniform.

Excitement throughout the community reached a pitch as workmen attached the first lights to the top of a tower erected on the courthouse cupola, the site of the first test of the new plant. Four lamps were to be utilized for this test, which was scheduled for Saturday night, December 9, 1882.

As night fell, crowds gathered to watch the test, which the newspaper called "quite satisfactory to the company and to the public. . .," the lights being visible not only throughout the entire public square but also "from the suburbs of the city." Three men, traveling to Whitesville reported their pathway "was well lighted as far as Philpott's station, a distance of twelve miles," and that they had to light their lanterns "only when it was turned off at midnight."

The *Messenger* praised the "wide-awake company" and manager Porter for establishing the system, involving "one of the most intricate and wonderful machines known to the inventive world."

The following Monday, December 11, the lights were again illuminated, and, in addition, two lights were burning in George & Walter Parrish's book store, the first commercial application of the new system. It was also announced that Scott's jewelry emporium would install the new lights.

Perhaps, most importantly, the new lights were a source of intense civic pride for the citizens of Owensboro. "Owensboro has beaten Evansville in getting the electric light on the tower system, and is second only to Louisville in establishing it in Kentucky," the *Messenger* crowed.

There was little doubt that the electric company would be a success. By the time of the printing of the *History of Daviess County* the following year the new company counted thirteen subscribers, and had spent a total of \$4,000 of their capitalization of \$5,000. Owensboro was now firmly launched into the Electric Age.

THE DAVIESS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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The Daviess County Historical Society is open to all who have an interest in the history of Daviess County, the Green River Valley, or Kentucky. The Society meets on the Fourth Friday of each month from September through May. Most meetings are held at the Owensboro Area Museum on South Griffith Avenue.

Monthly programs of the Daviess County Historical Society are open to all, and non-members are encouraged to attend and participate.