

A CAMPUS--AND ITS GHOSTS OF THE PAST

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Blue bricks and biology labs, coeds and college professors, hickories and hibiscus, crocus and chrysanthemums, each adds its bit of color to the picture of a community college campus in the year 1981. Growing and busily intent on the task of meeting higher education needs of a prospering and supporting community, seldom has faculty, staff or students taken the occasion to glance back to a most colorful past. Those who have paused for a time on these acres in the misty years of past generations add, however, an interesting dimension to today's campus picture. This paper represents an attempt to trace the record of the ownership of the lands presently comprising the campus of the Hopkinsville Community College. Few could make such a title search, however, without pausing from time to time to read history as it unfolds and to listen to these ghostly sounds of the past. One would wonder what echoes still reverberate across the gentle slopes, wooded areas and flower beds of the campus today.

The present campus of the University of Kentucky's "Corner in the Penny-rile," the Hopkinsville Community College, may be traced in a direct line to a Revolutionary War land warrant awarded to Joshua Cates for service in the line with Captain Bacon's Company of the State Troops of Georgia. Congressional legislation of October 1787 provided for grants of 140 acres of land to be awarded for such war service and Cates had so qualified and his warrant was certified in April 1791.<sup>1</sup> Cates had moved from his native Georgia to Henderson County, Kentucky where in February 1800 he took title to lands "situated, lying and being on the waters of Little River in the County of Christian, a part of the

surveys of Micajah Reveill and Anthony Sharp..."<sup>2</sup> Christian County tax lists indicate his living on the land in July 1800.

Cates was a most unusual man as Perrin notes, "...no common man in anything not even in his eccentricities and peculiarities."<sup>3</sup> Uncaring of the opinion of others, rough hewn in manner, speech and dress, quite willing to lie down and sleep on the trail wherever night found him, Cates was to prosper hugely in the frontier of his pioneer era. He was to become owner of untold thousands of acres of Christian County land, seeming to have an almost uncontrollable desire for property. Jillson's Land Grants contains dozens of notations of purchases of this new and cheap land made by Cates, much of it on the waters of Little River and Dry Branch. A second interest centered on the trade of an essential of the time, horses. Perhaps an even greater fortune was to be made by Cates in his third occupation--the purchase, trade and sale of slaves to the southern market. Deeds of record in the Christian County Court number, again, in the dozens of purchases of these wretched human chattels.

Cates profession cost the life of one of his slaves and nearly his own when one of his slaves, Kemp, shot his master. The old slave trader lay at the point of death for many days while the courts of Christian County were gradually moving toward a verdict in the trial of Kemp. Slowly recovering from his wound, Cates attempted to defend his property but to no avail. Kemp was sentenced in early 1820 and subsequently was publicly hanged.<sup>4</sup> The slave was buried beside the gallows in a shallow grave alongside the road, the site marked but by a large fieldstone. The winds whistling through the trees towering and interlaced over the grave site would strike terror into generations

of Hopkinsville travelers who were well acquainted with the story of "Old Kemp." There were many who would swear that muffled screams from the slave were still to be heard generations later. The exact location of the grave has now been long forgotten but perhaps on some moonlit night when the winds have risen there are those who might like to continue the search...

Joshua Cates and Eustatia, his wife, sold this property to Claiborne West in March 1814,<sup>5</sup> along with three other tracts over the next several years. Little is known of Claiborne West except the deeds of record of his being a large land and slave holder.

Claiborne West, too, was to profit from the misery of human bondage. Christian County deeds record, for example, in 1836 the sale to "...William Radford for and in consideration of two slaves, to wit, Mariah and her daughter Agnes, valued at Eight Hundred Dollars...from Claiborne West in exchange for a tract of two hundred and thirty three acres in the south part of the county.<sup>6</sup>

Crossing the farm was the Saline Road which led in a general northwesterly direction from Hopkinsville to Princeton thence by way of Livingston to the Saline Springs in Illinois following an earlier Indian trail. The road forked about a mile west of town with a smaller branch leading to Cadiz and Canton and the rugged lands between the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. The Saline Road was ordered by the Fiscal Court upon formation of the county in 1797, but, other than clearing, little of a permanent nature was to be done for the next century or more. It was through this trail of dust and mud dividing the farm that Hopkinsville history was to pass chapter by chapter.



During the bitter cold of the winter months of 1838-39 detachment after detachment of the 13,000 Cherokees camped at Wood's Mill on the outskirts of Hopkinsville near the banks of the East Fork of Little River. The pitiful and bewildered group would lose their leader, Chief Whitepath and Council leader, Fly Smith, along with hundreds of other who were to die from sickness and exposure in the camp on Little River. Slowly, group by group they began their terrible journey through Hopkinsville on the old trail to Princeton and northwest, herded along step by weary step, by the troops and bayonets of General Winfield Scott.<sup>7</sup>

Forrest and his gray-clad troops would move out toward Fort Donaldson over this same turnpike during the winter of 1861-62. Quantrill and his notorious guerilla raiders would fight their way into town four years later.<sup>8</sup> Frank and Jesse James and their outlaw band would gallop through following their Russellville bank robbery in 1875<sup>9</sup> and masked riders in 1907 would ride slowly eastward over the old turnpike to place a torch to tobacco interests and to place the town under siege. For all its winter mud and summer dust, the country road through the farm, the Old Saline Trail, had indeed, witnessed the events of history that had shaped Hopkinsville--and southwestern Kentucky.

Upon Claiborne West's death in the early 1830's a large portion of the property passed to his daughter, Elvira Crawford. Shortly thereafter, Elvira and her husband Erasmus joined the throng of adventurous and land hungry Southern Kentuckians moving south and west to Mississippi, Arkansas and Texas. From Warren County, Mississippi, in July 1846 a deed for 134 acres of the farm was conveyed from Erasmus and Elvira Crawford to Zachariah

Glass.<sup>10</sup> At the same time an adjoining 84 acres was sold by the Crawfords to James M. Foard.<sup>11</sup> Glass, in turn, purchased the northwest 25 acres of this tract from Foard three months later.<sup>12</sup>

Zachariah Glass, a native Virginian, had moved to Franklin County, Kentucky with his parents in the late 1790's, later removing to Christian County. Married to Mary Jane Clark, daughter of one of Hopkinsville's pioneers, he was one of the county's largest slaveholders. Additionally, he became one of Hopkinsville's largest mercantile dealers, was a bank director and a saddle maker.

It was during Glass' ownership of the property that the fury of the War Between the States struck home to Hopkinsville and Christian County. Sectional sentiment in the area was divided in general along the Cadiz-Hopkinsville-Russellville Pike. The large tobacco plantation slaveholders to the south of the line tended to support the Confederacy while the small subsistence farmers to the north cast their lot with the Union forces. Many exceptions were, of course, noted in the County records, frequently splitting families. Area young men flocked to the colors of both sides and preparations for the War soon engulfed Hopkinsville. Sentiment statewide in Kentucky was about as equally divided as it was in Hopkinsville and both forces were to attempt quickly to gain control of this key state. During the late summer and early fall months of 1861 the Confederate lines of defense extended from Columbus on the Mississippi River through Hopkinsville and Bowling Green to the Central Kentucky area. Quartered in Hopkinsville during the fall and winter months of 1861-62 were a number of Confederate units including the 1st and 3rd Mississippi Regiments, the 7th

Texas, 8th Kentucky, Forrest's Cavalry Regiment, Woodward's Kentucky Cavalry Regiment and Green's Kentucky Artillery Regiment. As many as 4,000 men of these units under the leadership of General Nathaniel Bedford Forrest were to find their tent grounds in Glass' Woods and pasture lands.<sup>13</sup> As was noted previously, Glass was one of the area's largest slaveholders, an ardent Southern sympathizer, and a ready host to the gray-clad forces of Forrest. Campfires curling smoke upwards through the trees and over the gently rolling hills north of town extended from the present cemetery northward to the quarry and westward nearly to Dry Branch. The extreme conditions of the winter took their toll. Hundreds of the troops were to succumb to the fevers, disease and austere conditions of the primitive military life. More than 100 of these young Confederates were to be placed in a hastily opened mass grave at the eastern edge of the campgrounds. The Western State Lunatic Asylum, South Kentucky and Bethel Female College, the Presbyterian Church--all were pressed into service as hospitals for the Confederate sick. During late January and early February, Union forces began their advance southward from their newly captured base at Paducah toward the Confederate bastions guarding the nearby Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers at Fort Henry and Fort Donaldson. A new Union military leader, Ulysses S. Grant, was to gain fame in the weeks to come. The Confederate units quartered in Hopkinsville were hurriedly pulled out and sent westward to assist in the defense of Fort Donaldson. Forrest and his Cavalry units escaped following the siege and just before the surrender of Fort Donaldson. With the surrender of this key defense post most of its defenders were taken prisoners to Camp Anderson near Indianapolis. The entire river basin, including

Nashville, with this blow fell to the Union. The Kentucky defense line collapsed, Hopkinsville and Bowling Green were quickly evacuated. Union forces moved promptly to occupy Hopkinsville. Bitterness toward an occupying army and the brief but vicious skirmishing between small opposing units were to hold the attention of the town as news of sons and husbands filtered back from bloody battlefields of the larger arenas of the War.

It might be noted that when the City of Hopkinsville was chartered in March 1870 its boundaries were stated as follows: "Beginning at a stake on the west edge of the Madisonville Road, northeast corner of a small tract of land on which Samuel A. Mercer now resides, and southeast corner to a tract of land formerly owned by Zachariah Glass, decd., thence south..."<sup>14</sup>

Upon Glass' death the property passed to his daughter, Jennie, who had married Samuel C. Mercer. Mercer was the feature writer and editor of the Hopkinsville Mercury, a weekly newspaper affiliated with the Know-Nothing or American party. This paper and the political party with which it was affiliated were casualties of the War Between the States, at that, the last of their kind in Western Kentucky.<sup>15</sup> Glass had specified that the property remain the possession of his daughter for her lifetime. It should be noted that the City of Hopkinsville did not extend its boundaries of settlement west of Little River until this period of the 1880's. Except for the one brick house formerly belonging to Glass and a few log farm houses and rail fences the area north and west of the River was open farmland. With Jennie Mercer's death in 1902 the property was divided among her heirs: J.M. and Jennie Mercer Starling, J.O. and Patti Littlehales, F.P. and Lizzie Thomas, Prentice Mercer and S.C. Mercer, Jr.

Subdividing for building lots had now become a reality and much of the property was sold for this purpose. Eighteen acres on the north side were, however, sold to George D. and T.M. Dalton who were to establish a brickyard. Of interest, too, another 15 acre tract became Mercer Park, home later of the Hopkinsville Hoppers of the famed Class D professional Kitty League.<sup>16</sup>

Jennie Mercer's daughter and namesake, Jennie, and her husband J.M. Starling, were also to retain a portion of the farm and to make it their family home. The Starling family was well-known in Kentucky military circles; a brother, Edward W. Starling had commanded the First Battalion of the Eighth Kentucky Cavalry which had pursued General John Hunt Morgan on his raids through Indiana and Ohio and whose units had participated in Morgan's capture.<sup>17</sup> A nephew was later to gain fame as the security officer in charge of the White House during the terms of five presidents.<sup>18</sup>

George D. and T.M. Dalton shortly thereafter organized the Dalton Brothers Brick Company and in April 1911 their properties were incorporated into this company.<sup>19</sup> One of the Mercer heirs, Prentice, also sold a 52 acre portion of his property to the Dalton Brothers Brick Company in September, 1915.<sup>20</sup>

The properties of the two Dalton brothers, George D. and T.M., founders of the Dalton Brick Company, were divided and bequeathed to their widows upon their deaths.<sup>21</sup> Carrie H. Dalton, widow of T.M. Dalton,<sup>22</sup> retained possession of the properties of her husband from February 1937 until August 1960, when possession passed to her two daughters, Margaret Dalton Haydon and Sarah Dalton Todd.<sup>23</sup> Margaret and her husband Emmett Haydon, well-known Hopkinsville lumber dealer, farmed their tract, described from an

earlier deed as "beginning at a driven buggy axle stake on the north west corner of fences enclosing the Means' Pasture..." until late 1963.

Community interest in the establishment of a publicly supported community college in Hopkinsville had grown following the enactment of enabling legislation by the Kentucky Legislature in 1962. This interest coincided, too, with continued financial difficulties being experienced by Bethel College, a local two-year denominational college. Discussion began in 1958 and an ad hoc committee was formed under the general auspices of the Chamber of Commerce to explore possibilities of locating such a community institution. The group was encouraged by Governor Edward T. Breathitt and plans were approved by the State Legislature in early 1964.

On December 23, 1963 Emmett and Margaret Dalton Haydon sold the property to this citizen's committee which was comprised of George Street Boone, Elkton Attorney; Smith Broadbent, III, Trigg County farm leader; W.W. Bryan, Secretary of the Hopkinsville - Christian County Chamber of Commerce; William G. Deatherage, President of the Planters Bank and Trust Co.; Frank B. Lacy, partner in the Munday, Lacy & Peden Insurance Company; Louise P. Langhi, President of Mid Continent Spring Co.; and William D. Talbert, President of the First City Bank & Trust Company.<sup>24</sup> At the same time the committee was given a narrow sliver of three acres along the north side of the Haydon property by Waldo E. and Lyda Marie Adams.<sup>25</sup> A successful community-wide fund raising effort under the leadership of John O. Metcalfe and W.W. Bryan was conducted with some \$72,000 being subscribed for the purpose. Talbert, serving as chairman of the group, in turn, transferred the 70 acre

parcel the following February to the Commonwealth of Kentucky for use of the University of Kentucky.<sup>26</sup> This seven member group was shortly thereafter appointed by Governor Breathitt as the initial Advisory Board of the new institution. A groundbreaking ceremony was held and construction work began during the spring of 1964 and thus began the Hopkinsville Community College. A newly developed street bounding the property on the north was formally designated as Talbert Drive following Talbert's untimely death in March, 1965. William G. Deatherage succeeded Talbert as Advisory Board chairman in June of that year.

It may be appropriate at this point to stray for a moment from this train of events to mention several additional individuals who have given much of their time and means for the College. The creation, certainly the legal status, of an Advisory Board is most unusual in higher education. Clearly, all policy making for Colleges, divisions and programs encompassed within the University of Kentucky - whether in Lexington or out in the state - rests with the University's Board of Trustees. What then is the role of a citizen advisory group? To provide liaison and support from the community at large, to be a sounding board for new programs and activities, to spearhead efforts to secure scholarship or other needed funds, to assist when needed in the solution of problems that impact on the College, in a word, to help and to advise College leadership. Members serve without compensation. Appointees to the Board are named by the Governor of the Commonwealth. Somewhat surprisingly however, for Kentucky, over the years most appointees have been top community civic, business and professional leaders from the area. The institution has, in fact, been remarkably free from political interference. The roll call of members, present and past, in addition to those mentioned previously includes from Caldwell County, Judge Ed Johnstone, John L. Williams and Sam Ruth; from Todd County, Dr. Henry Bell,

Dr. Aubrey Campbell, Richard Dickinson and Eston Glover, Jr.; from Trigg County, George Bleidt, Mrs. William Richardson and Mrs. William Burke; and from Hopkinsville and Christian County, Mrs. W.D. Talbert, John Kirkham, Mrs. Frank Lacy, Mrs. John O. Hill, Milburn Keith, Dr. William C. Young, and Elizabeth Kirkpatrick.

Legislation was approved in 1968 to place an elected faculty member on each such Advisory Board, subsequently, Dr. Clyde Lewis and Mrs. Frances Thomas have served. Further legislation in 1970 placed the president of the local student governing group on this Board and since that date nine Student Council Presidents have served one year terms. That the group has served the College faithfully and well might be reflected in the fact that in meeting regularly now for a period of more than 17 years, the group has never failed to have a quorum present for its sessions. The names of this leadership, like the echos, will be remembered as historians in future years chronicle the story of the College.

The seventy acre campus is quiet today, gently changing from the autumn colors of the oaks and chrysanthemums to the daffodils, tulips, and velvety swaying of the grass of a spring season. The serenity broken but by a comely and chattering group of coeds on their way to tennis practice or a crowded auto loaded with young couples headed for the spring formal. The echos of the past nevertheless, vibrate back across the acres comprising the campus: the clatter of the chains and the roar of the old Revolutionary War veteran Joshua Cates as he gathered his human train for the journey south, the screams of Old Kemp as he reached the top step of his death gallows, the moans of the heavily laden Cherokee aged as they slowly plodded the Trail of Tears from the only home they had known for centuries, the military commands and pomp of Forrest as his young Confederate troops passed in review--giving way to the dull thud of the cannons as these gallant men attempted to relieve their embattled comrades at nearby Donaldson and the tattoo of the drums as another hundred of their gray-clad



number were placed in a mass grave at the edge of the farm, the hoofbeats of masked riders of the night moving in to place the torch to tobacco warehouses and to terrorize a town. The College, its faculty, staff and students, is firmly committed to a strong focus on the opportunities of the present and the future as it approaches the end of another year of service to the citizens of the Pennyrile but it would seem fitting and appropriate, nevertheless, to glance back and to listen for a moment to the echos of these ghostly sounds of the past.

### References Cited

- <sup>1</sup>Christian County, Kentucky, Deed Book A, p. 85.
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 182.
- <sup>3</sup>Perrin, Wm H., History of Christian County, Kentucky, Chicago, F. A. Battey Publishing Co., 1884, p. 67.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 79.
- <sup>5</sup>Christian County, Kentucky, Deed Book G, p. 182.
- <sup>6</sup>Christian County, Kentucky, Deed Book W, p. 70.
- <sup>7</sup>Meacham, Charles M., A History of Christian County, Kentucky, Nashville, Tennessee., Marshall & Bruce Co., 1930, p. 65.
- <sup>8</sup>Dacus, Joseph A., Illustrated Lives and Adventures of Frank and Jesse James, St. Louis, M.D. Thompson & Co., 1881, p. 70.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 94.
- <sup>10</sup>Christian County, Kentucky, Deed Book 29, p. 592.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 589.
- <sup>12</sup>Christian County, Kentucky, Deed Book 30, p. 48.
- <sup>13</sup>The original notation: "4,000 Confederate troops now stationed at Hopkinsville" is to be found in Christian County Marriage Bond Book 5, page 75 (Entries made during the month of December 1861).
- <sup>14</sup>Perrin, p. 213.
- <sup>15</sup>Perrin, p. 164.
- <sup>16</sup>Christian County, Kentucky, Deed Book 85, p. 404.
- <sup>17</sup>Perrin, p. 416.
- <sup>18</sup>Starling, Edmund W., Starling of the White House, New York, Simon N. Schuster, 1946
- <sup>19</sup>Christian County, Kentucky, Deed Book 124, p. 464.
- <sup>20</sup>Christian County, Kentucky, Deed Book 137, p. 142.

<sup>21</sup>Will Book 2, p. 72; see also Will Book 3, p. 215.

<sup>22</sup>Will Book 3, p. 333.

<sup>23</sup>Will Book 7, p. 271. Deed Book 185, p. 142.

<sup>24</sup>Deed Book 298, p. 78.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 80.