

# Clouds in my Crystal Ball

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The Athenaeum Society  
04 November 1999

What a year '99 was for Hopkinsville!

New roads under construction. Impressive brick buildings going up. The latest in telecommunications reaching the most remote parts of the county. Medical procedures unthinkable a generation before being practiced without a second thought and prosperity cutting across most economic lines.

But brewing clouds of war overseas are being mentioned every day and local military units share in those headlines.

But wait. Wait.

I'm not talking about 1999. The Hopkinsville I'm talking about is in 1899 as this community faced another new century.

This project began in the pursuit of predictions made at the turn of the last century with the hope of testing their ultimate validity. Unfortunately, that pursuit of local predictions came up empty through a review of the three dominant newspapers of that era.

What did begin to emerge was a very vivid snapshot of a period of our common history that probably has been portrayed inaccurately and underplayed.

And time after time after time, uncanny and almost chilling parallels between 1899 and 1999 caused the old saw to ring true that "the more things change, the more things stay the same."

### WHAT WE READ

If there was a single theme that dominated -- really dominated -- the news that year, it was war. The Spanish-American War technically was over, but the Philippine Insurrection and the contested occupation of Cuba and Puerto Rico involved military units large and small from across the country, Hopkinsville certainly being no exception. England's Boer War provided lurid copy and headlines when our own troops had an idle day.

Few issues of the Daily Kentucky New Era, the Weekly Kentucky New Era and the Hopkinsville Kentuckian that year failed to offer news, sketches and maps of unfolding operations across the seas. In many of the stories or letters from the front, local names were plentiful and the hometowns of Elkton, Guthrie, Cadiz and Hopkinsville were prominent.

On Jan. 30, word was received of Hopkinsville's Lt. Col. Jouette Henry being placed in charge of the Cuban city of Colon, 35 miles from Matanzas. Henry's career was gilded in 1899.

Hopkinsville by far was not alone in its keen interest in the wars overseas -- and remember that the city was not then the "military town" it is now as Camp Campbell was 43 years from breaking ground here.

A poll reprinted by the New Era listed the greatest living Americans, as voted upon by more than 20,000 citizens: Admiral George Dewey won hands-down with 9,500 votes; William Jennings Bryan, 7,866; President William McKinley, 7,758; Admiral William Schley 5,580; R.P. Hobson 4,674; Admiral William Sampson, 3,534; Theodore Roosevelt, 3,342; and Clara Barton, 206. (Jan. 10) Plainly, six of the eight "greatest living Americans" were unknowns except for their prominence during the war.

### EDUCATION

For a county which the tax assessor valued at nearly \$500,000, education was held in high regard in both the white and the black community.

"Tuesday is payday for the common school teacher of Kentucky," an article on Jan. 14 reported. "The state has paid each installment promptly this year."

Read what you wish into that quote, but I detect that promptness in payment on the state level wasn't necessarily a foregone conclusion for the 91 teachers employed in the county.

In an era rightly stereotyped as being male-dominated, the very able county school superintendent here was a lady, Miss Katy McDaniel, an individual ahead of her gender's time and an attractive topic for a paper in her own right.

Education on all fronts sought improvement. On Oct. 2, Pembroke formally filed for the location of a grade school and beloved South Kentucky College advertised a year's tuition for a young lady at \$160 and for a young man at \$145.

Though immersed in the practice of "separate but equal" systems of education, the July 26 incorporation and Aug. 14 cornerstone dedication of M&F College put Hopkinsville on the map arguably ahead of its time.

An editorial aside stated that "It occurred to me that if each college in the United States would consent to give one Cuban free tuition, it would be beneficial in many ways."

### **EVERYBODY TALKS ABOUT IT, NOBODY DOES ANYTHING ABOUT IT...**

Don't think for a moment that the lack of a Weather Channel or USA Today invented our fascination with the weather. In a community dependent on agriculture, the weather was important; more important, I might argue, then than it is now.

The mercury hit -19 degrees on Feb. 10, the coldest reported since 1875 and the scarcity of coal began to worry city officials.

"This two-week bout of weather caused horses to sink knee-deep in the roadbeds where there is no macadam," the Jan. 18 edition reported. A week earlier the mayor had ordered three train carloads of coal for distribution to the poor.

Brutal cold was one thing, but sweltering humidity was another observation made when it was reported on Aug. 17 that Black Horseflies had become so bothersome that some plowing was being done at night near Elkton.

### **IMPROVEMENTS**

At that turn of the century, every community was being judged by its pace at implementing new physical improvements.

The city's representatives in Washington, Rep. William Clardy, presented a petition to the Postmaster General advocating free city delivery of the mail.

Telephones were not the sensation they were a decade before, but new lines were being put in to Caledonia, Pee Dee, LaFayette, Roaring Springs and Long Hollow, the Feb. 11 paper reported.

Local phone companies were advocating telephone fire alarms and the New Era already had two phone lines -- phone numbers 14-3 and 14-2.

Concerned about the condition of some downtown sidewalks today? Here is the Feb. 3 description of a century ago, bringing to the readers' attention "the horrible and dangerous condition of the sidewalks. It is a sham and disgrace."

Likewise, electric lights were no novelty here by 1899. Lighting additions, though, merited attention and the Feb. 22 installation of lights at the L&N freight and passenger depots were noted.

Street fairs were all the rage that year and Hopkinsville's September fling was widely supported and widely copied.

Somewhere between the trendy "Elkton Echoes," "Guthrie Gossip," "Cadiz Cullings" and "Herndon Happenings" was an item on Feb. 7 that individuals in Trigg County were preparing to engage in Maple sugar production.

Sports were well in their prime with several leagues offering America's pastime and even news of a new sport of bowling at an alley established in the Holland block downtown.

"Hopkinsville is taken to the popular amusement and several have developed high skills," said the Feb. 14 New Era.

The community's trains connected Hopkinsville with the world and brief notes detail the excursions of the Kildee Hunting Club and its expedition to Homasassa, Fla., for

two weeks of hunting and fishing (Jan. 9) and of local groups traveling by train to New Orleans' Mardi Gras (Jan. 24).

### **TO YOUR HEALTH**

The city was not to be denied the latest in the medical science although the reader is struck by the harshness of life at the turn of the century.

On March 1, it was reported that the new X-ray equipment was demonstrated at the office of Dr. T.W. Blakey.

But medical science wasn't yet ready to lay low the annual curses of fever -- typhoid fever, scarlet fever, small pox or the "grip."

With warming weather, the effect of a nationwide epidemic of small pox was felt here.

In late July, a small pox epidemic was largely contained, but not before portions of the Schitt farm on Cox Mill Road were placed under quarantine with the city allocating funds for three tents to be used at the detention camp or "pest" camp. The then-massive expenses of \$4,332 were shared with Christian Fiscal Court and the state for its operation (Dec. 2).

Local treatment of rabies often still called for application of a "mad stone," said a July 20 story. While a hometown boy, the son of Judge Joe McCarroll, was taken to Chicago by train after for treatment using the Pasteur system after he was bitten by a mad dog (June 3).

During the bitter months of winter, scarcely a week went by without reports of someone burning themselves to death when their clothes caught fire or a house and its young occupants being claimed by fire.

### **SMOKE-FILLED ROOMS**

With larger numbers of news outlets available at the turn of the century, they invariably were less reserved about their political affiliation and leanings.

Beneath the nameplate of the New Era was the legend "A Democratic Newspaper." Likewise, the Hopkinsville Messenger of the same period was known for its Republican leanings.

Coverage, consequently, often would have a "we" and a "they" perspective. Try these front-page headlines on for size that described a near Republican sweep of the city commission seats on Dec. 7: "Demo heads fall in basket," "We are swept out; they are swept in;" "So and so held in enemy camp."

On Oct. 16 of that year, William Jennings Bryan, three times a Democratic presidential candidate, spoke here at Ninth and Main streets on behalf of William Goebel, candidate for governor. Goebel, of course, carried that election but his subsequent assassination and death in office brought the state and its political system a measure of shame that has dogged it to this day.

### **ON THE CRIME BEAT**

Early in the year (Jan. 7), Hopkinsville's chief of police issued his report on criminal activity in the city, in which he broke down the 660 arrests made the previous year. The top 10 crimes that year were drunkenness, 247 arrests; breach of peace, 107; vagrancy, 43; disorderly conduct, 40; petit larceny, 40; gambling, 22; fornication, 19; using profane language, 17; jumping on a moving train, 15, and carrying a concealed weapon, 11. Although it didn't make the top 10, three arrests were made that year for violating the Sabbath.

Writers' perspectives on the city's state of affairs differed considerably. On Jan. 20, the Owensboro Observer penned this statement that was reprinted locally: "We venture the statement that Hopkinsville is the most moral city of its size in Kentucky. There is less drinking and loafing around saloons than ever before."

Now where did we go wrong during the course of the year that on Dec. 22, this was noted during a council meeting: "On motion of Councilman Glass, the chief of police and his staff were instructed to enforce to the letter the ordinance against loafing and loitering on the streets and particularly against women of ill repute."

Ordinances alone were only part of law enforcement during that period. When three men were apprehended prowling near the train depot on Jan. 18, "they were locked up and this morning escorted by an officer to the city limits." Decisions in city court frequently were accompanied by the provision that the defendant was to leave town.

### OFFBEAT OBSERVATIONS

At times, the reserved prudence of the Victorian era showed itself in 1899 Hopkinsville and at other times, prudence was nowhere to be found.

A seemingly endless stream of citizens were declared or adjudged insane and taken to the asylum, with local journals printing the particulars in each and every case. The population there must have soared, since it was a rare story that noted a release.

No one of note fell sick without a paragraph in the paper describing their condition and the invariably grim forecast and if you were in town visiting, that fact was duly noted in the daily personal column.

If you believe today's headlines and styles of writing have crossed the bounds of decency, you haven't read small-town newspapers of 1899.

No suicide escaped without a 2-inch headline and the more details that could be included, the better.

But in all honesty, there must have been some unemployed poets behind the typewriters and copy desks of the period. When was the last time a obituary began like this: "After a lingering illness, called to the world beyond."

Advocates of stricter handgun controls would do well to read these issues as well. I recall few copies of the paper during that year that lacked a shooting, wounding, killing or maiming -- although, with few exceptions, they occurred outside the city limits in the relative lawlessness of the county.

This was a year of wonder, excitement and of discovery, too.

On March 7, there was the report of people being "momentarily blinded" by a bright meteor. Likewise a partial eclipse of the sun rated front-page coverage that fall.

On March 4, the chance discovery of a small memorandum book at the Bank of Hopkinsville unraveled the identities of the 101 unknown Confederate soldiers buried at Hopewell cemetery. They had died here 37 years before during the fall and winter of 1861-62 and were members of the 1st and 3rd Mississippi, the 7th Texas, 8th Kentucky Cavalry and Forrest's Cavalry.

Patent medicines ruled the drug counters, promising iron-clad solutions to everything from lazy livers to female regulation. Far fewer of these ads were to appear with the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in the coming decades.

In conclusion, I'd have to say that the century ended with a feeling of optimism, as according to the pages of the New Era, "The farms of the South are in a better state of improvement and our Southern cities and towns are more prosperous and thrifty than they have ever been. Our railroads are busy, our stores are thriving, our farmers are hopeful." (Dec. 28, 1900)

And then there was the matter of that escaped kangaroo that reportedly was seen in Trigg County (Jan. 26).