

Say It Ain't So!

Paper Presented

To

The Athenaeum Society

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Most members of the Athenaeum Society have approached the mailbox at least once a year across the past 108 years with the dreaded anxiety of receiving a schedule of the annual program. Will I "be on" for the open session? If so, what in this world can be written that will be both informative and entertaining to this august body?

Well, for forty-six years this member has been on the firing line a few times. The conclusion has been reached that whether the subject is heavy or light, long or short, inspirational or down right boring, the choice lies within the speaker to write and to speak about whatever he pleases.

Across the decades we have been served up with a complete history of the worlds religion within the span of one hour to a murder mystery composed in the mind of a lunatic sitting at a typewriter.

This speaker has long believed that most people grow weary of endless discourses on economics, physics, moon walks and salt. Light hearted humor and human interest stories perk folks attention and tend to keep them awake and from sending and receiving text messages. Therefore, Mr. President, fellow members of the Athenaeum Society, distinguished and honored guests, this presentation will explore, "Say It Ain't So" in local history.

Gleaning the newspapers files of the Hopkinsville-Kentuckian for over forty years brings together this collection of oft unexplained and unbelievable stories of events in our home community.

The brief articles are quoted exactly as they appeared in the paper with little to no editorializing. So join this speaker in a journey on the local scene between 1878 and 1894, from Jackson's walking cane to the Bell Witch.

Beware to whom you give a gift!

An Historical Cane.

March 16, 1878 In 1844 William M. Shipp, of Hopkinsville, in this state, made a visit to his friend Gen. Jackson, and, upon taking his departure from the Hermitage, was presented by the old hero with a silver headed hickory cane. Mr. Shipp brought it home, and had engraved upon it, "Presented to Wm. M. Shipp by Andrew Jackson, April 16, 1844." After keeping it many years, he determined that it should be perpetually preserved in this State, and to that end presented it to "the Governors of Kentucky." Shortly after the inauguration of Gov. McCreary, the Governor received a letter from a friend in Woodford, who was related to Mr. Shipp, inquiring if the cane had been turned over to him. The Governor made diligent inquiry, but failed to hear of it either in the

administration of Gov. Leslie or that of Gov. Stevenson, and had to respond that he did not have it in his possession, and could learn nothing of it. A short time ago, however, the cane was found in possession of Rev. F. H. Hodges, of this county, it having been given to him by a negro some eighteen months or two years back. Mr. Hodges, having no knowledge that it belonged to the "Governors of Kentucky" – there being no inscription upon it to that effect – was glad to find an owner and restore it to the State. There is one knot for each letter of Andrew Jackson's name, and no more, upon the stick.

What Is The World Coming To!

The Pioneer Telephone.

May 17, 1878 Mr. C. S. Lyon has constructed and put into operation a telephone at the Western Lunatic Asylum, near this city, the first one we have heard of in the county. The line extends from Capt. Mallory's office, in the western end of the Asylum building, to Capt. Mallory's residence, a distance of about five hundred yards. We had the pleasure of testing it a few evenings since and can bare testimony to the wonderful powers of this very wonderful invention. We were in the office at the Asylum and carried on a conversation with Capt. Mallory who was more than a quarter of a mile

away, at his home. We talked in an ordinary conversational tone, taking care to utter the words distinctly, and the Captain responded promptly and audibly to every inquiry or remark. Indeed, a conversation can be kept up over it as regularly and with as little effort as if all the parties were in the same room. Miss Mallory's music could also be heard distinctly, each note sounding as sweet and full as if we had been in her own parlor. Mr. Lyon, who is an inventive genius himself, displayed a good deal of skill in the construction of the apparatus.

What The Underground May Reveal!

Foundation Unearthed!

July 29, 1879 M. W. Grissam, proprietor of the Phoenix Hotel, at Ninth and Main, is having a cistern dug in the rear of that building. At about 8 feet below the surface a brick wall, 3 feet thick was found. The foundation found was nearly 15 feet down. The part exhumed was an angle, how far back sides extended is not known. The present building erected on the site in 1814, and when the town was first settled that area was a low flat, with a large portion of it covered with water. This area was used by the town as a dump for many years and gradually filled up. Finally streets were laid off and

piked and this building erected. Six to eight feet of earth was deposited on top of the wall before this and it must have been underground at this time. No one remembers another building on that site and its is speculated to have been built more than 100 years ago and probably built around a spring there before Hopkinsville was even a good sized village.

Who Fired That Shot?

Old Town Cannon

Aug. 10, 1880 In 1876 the Republicans spiked the old town cannon to keep the Democrats from "raising cain," when Tilden was elected. It was taken from the wheels and rolled away to some out of the way place where it has lain ever since. In anticipation of a win this election, the Republicans cleaned it up but the Democrats were to win and fire it off. Amongst the bon fires going, the cannon was planted on the back end of a wagon in front of the court house. She was heavily loaded. The report startled people in the suburbs two miles away. People five miles out heard it just as they had heard Fort Donelson. When the smoke cleared, the wagon was 50 yards in one direction and the cannon an equal distance from there in the opposite direction. The windows for a square around were shattered.

She Got The Last Word!

114 Years Old.

Sept. 20, 1887 Hannah Scott, colored, of the Gainesville area says she was 10 years old when General Washington's army "marched" through Virginia. This would make her 114 years of age. She was formally a servant of the Leavell family and was brought from Charlottesville, Virginia to Christian County by that family. She now lives with her daughter, Eliza Stegar and only in the past year has she become at all feeble. She raised 15 children, only four now survive. Her grandchildren and great grandchildren number about 126 persons. She was married three times and has outlived all of her husbands.

"Loose Floor or Church Floor!"

The Floor Gave Way.

May 24, 1889 The floor of South Union Church, at Church Hill, gave down from the weight of the crowd at a school exhibition given by Prof. J. B. Fitzhugh's School Wednesday night. The house was packed to its utmost capacity, the aisles and all other

available space being filled by persons unable to obtain seats. Suddenly without warning the entire floor gave way and fell to the ground, a distance of two feet. The building was violently shaken, the windows rattled, stove pipes fell, benches were overturned, the women screamed, children cried and a general pandemonium ensued, but nobody was hurt, and, after a good deal of confusion, quiet was restored and the exercises went ahead. At the time the accident occurred Maj. John Blankenship was enjoying a nap against the wall and woke up yelling "earthquake!" The band composed of Messrs. Arthur Henry, Dick Peace, Dr. Anderson and Dr. Burgess was playing at the time. The reporter was unable to learn what piece the musicians were rendering. But for the fact that the music was in a church, the supposition would be that they were entrancing the audience with an exciting "break down." The damage to the church was about \$100 or more.

Let My Bones Rest!

A Grave Desecrated.

July 9 & 12 1889

Just outside the city limits on the Palmyra Road, is a graveyard in which was buried in a vault many years ago the remains of the first wife of Dr. Charles Shackelford, formerly of this city but now of Memphis. The stone vault has

recently been broken open and the skeleton of the departed lady exposed to full view. The skull and other bones can be plainly seen and are rooted about by hogs and handled by children every day. It is said a number of boys at one time amused themselves by placing the skull on the end of a pole and carrying it around the neighborhood. It ought to be somebody's business to look into this matter and have the bones re-interred.

After an interment of 36 years, the remains of Mrs. Jane Catherine Worthington Shackelford, first wife of Dr Charles Shackelford, were re-interred in the City Cemetery July 5, from her former residence near this city. She died in the 32nd year of her age and was the mother of five children. She was the daughter of Judge Worthington, of Mercer County, Ky. Her progenitors emigrated from Baltimore County, Md., in 1795.

She was married to Dr. Charles Shackelford Jan. 21, 1843. Judge Edward Worthington was a son of Judge Samuel Worthington, a Colonial Judge, holding a commission from Charles I, King of England. The mother of Mrs. Dr. Shackelford was a daughter of Capt. Rowland Madison, of revolutionary fame and a brother of President James Madison.

The grandmother of Mrs. Jane C. Worthington Shackelford was the only daughter

of Gen. Andrew Lewis, of "Point Pleasant" memory. She was a lady of great personal beauty and was of the first order of intellect. She inherited from her ancestors all the endowments which a renowned and illustrious parentage could give, together with a Christian character that marked her whole life.

Five years ago Dr. Charles Shackelford removed from this city to Memphis, Tenn.

Note: He died in 1904 and is buried in Riverside Cemetery.

Stranger Than Fiction!

Lightning's Freak

April 21, 1893 A bit of news was sent out from Trenton giving the details of a queer accident which occurred there during the storm last week. It goes as follows:

"A tree had grown out of the grave of a negro soldier who was buried just within the corporate limits of Trenton, and who was killed by the noted guerrilla, Bill McCall, while standing picket twenty-eight years ago, during the war. This tree was struck by the lightning, which, running down made a hole, leaving bare the box in which the negro was buried. The body was in a perfect state of preservation when discovered, but later on

crumbled at the touch. The hair or wool had grown enormously, being a perfect mat from the waist to the upper end of the coffin and completely covering the upper end of the body and face. The soldier had been buried with the honors of war, and his pistol and carbine lay beside him."

The First Paid Vacation!

Generous Charlie Latham.

June 22, 1894 Mr. Charles M. Latham has shown his appreciation of the faithful service of his corps of salesmen by giving them all a week's vacation on full pay. They will alternate in the enjoyment of the holiday given them by their generous employer, one each week until all have taken vacation. The example set by Mr. Latham in this matter, will doubtless be followed by other merchants in the city. Mr. Latham's generosity towards his employees is frequently manifested in a substantial way. Some months ago his colored porter died while Mr. Latham was in New York and he at once wired his clerks to take charge of all preparations for the interment and give the dead man a decent funeral and burial, which was done at his expense.

A Legend, or was it a Fact?

The Bell Witch

July 3, 1894 The most remarkable book of the day is "The Bell Witch," just issued. It is an intensely fascinating history of the great mystery which startled the world. "The Bell Witch," or whatever it was, operated in Montgomery and Robertson Counties, Tenn., and the manifestations have never been explained nor the mystery solved. The scene of "its" appearance was fixated by thousands of people, including scientists from London. It was emphatically the sensation of the world in those days. President Andrew Jackson sought to solve the riddle, but was unable to explain it save on supernatural grounds. The older people of that section still retain vivid recollections of the "Witch," and a mass of testimony as to its reality has been preserved for years and is now compiled in an attractive form. The work has been done by Mr. M. V. Ingram, a veteran newspaper editor of Clarksville, Tenn. The book is evidently the production of a careful, conscientious writer, and the reader soon understands how it is that the "Bell Witch" attracted such universal attention. If you are fond of the truly wonderful, not in fiction, but in fact, buy a copy of the book.

And so this trail of research, with its bizarre events, strange happenings and unavoidable conclusions has come to its end.

Do you care or dare to believe? Stranger events may have occurred in your life and who knows – someday, someone may read about you in the paper, or better still, on e-bay, face-book or I-pod. And you may respond, “Say It Ain’t So.”