

Doins About Town
Odds and Ends of Local History

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William T. Turner

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In the course of human events many activities of pioneer people are lost by the way side but thanks to old newspaper files and human-interest stories, passed down through several generations, a collection of stories revealing current events may survive. This paper attempts to chronicle a few of these events. All in Christian County and Hopkinsville. Many locations reveal a geographical setting while others bare the names of individuals who lived in the area.

Such is the case of the neighborhood of Cave Spring. This one was located about a mile south of Fairview off what is now Kentucky 115. It was the site of many community social events mainly conducted by the young people, but it was also here that a primitive Baptist church was located in the 1880's. A part of the Red River Association, a primitive Baptist group, it was the site of an associational meeting which lasted for three days. Known as "Hardshell" "anti-mission" and "foot-washing Baptist" they conducted their meetings under a large arbor next to the church. The Red River Association comprised eight churches in Southwestern Kentucky and Middle and West Tennessee. The crowd of about 500 people the first day, the group swelled to 2,500 by the third day. The gathering was a social event in addition to a religious one.

Another cave which drew crowds of people was located north of Hopkinsville near the Concord Lane. Williams' Cave had a spring which area residents used to "refrigerate" milk and butter. It was reported to have extended a mile back underground.

Imagine the site of a small horsedrawn cart painted red, white and blue, on the streets of Hopkinsville. The driver, whose name remains unknown, traveled the streets of town cleaning out privies for local residents. The driver wore a tall silk hat adorned with

red, white and blue bands giving rise to the quote, "Straighten up, here comes the president!" This was a regular scene between 1910 and 1920.

Another town character was Aunt Sina Elliott better known as "Railroad Jenny." Aunt Sina, a small black woman, stayed on Second Street but spent her days walking up and down the L & N Railroad tracks principally between 17th and 18th Streets, where she picked up coal which had fallen from the railroad cars and any other things of possible value. For several years she was nurse, cook, and laundress in the family of William H. Faxon on E. 7th. The story is related that she was taken by Mr. Faxon downtown to the local telephone exchange upstairs over what is now Southern Exposure. There a telephone call was put in to her son Zinaphone in Evansville. Unable to believe that she could talk to him over the wires when he exclaimed "Dat you Mammy?" She exclaimed, "Lord a mercy, judgement day done come!"

A cyclone (tornado) which struck this county in March, 1890, saved the man who would become the father of a famous American. A short distance from Caledonia, west of Julien, there is a nine-foot monument marking the grave of Robert Lucas. On that March night in 1890 a tornado destroyed the home of Lucas and cost him his life, but his name was applied to the storm. From Caledonia the storm swept across western Christian County and struck the little settlement of Bellevue and there destroyed the country store of John Q. McGehee. Clerking in that store was young Bob Warren from Cerulean Springs. He would later become the father of American poet laureate Robert Penn Warren.

"Where's the water?" Hopkinsville has had a semblance of a fire department since 1837. Beginning about 1871 the lack of water handicapped local firemen. Consequently, the city dug several street cisterns at the downtown intersections. Water flowed through gutters of downtown buildings to fill these cisterns. They were used with limited success

until the city fire department was established in 1900 with the benefit of a new city water system.

Every town in its early days had a large tree used for executions. Hopkinsville's hanging tree was located just off East 7th Street at Lovier's Spring. It was here on May 1, 1846 that Alonzo Pennington was hanged for the death of Simon Davis. The tree survived until the construction of the Pennyrile Parkway in 1968.

Can one imagine the town of Gracey on the Christian-Trigg line once sported three different railroads? In 1886 the Indiana, Alabama & Texas Railroad was built (later acquired by the L & N Railroad) from Clarksville to Princeton with the establishment of the town of Gracey along the way. In 1892 the Ohio Valley Railroad, later acquired by Illinois Central Railroad, was built from Gracey to Hopkinsville. In 1902 a line was built connecting the railroad town of Gracey with Cadiz, ten miles away. From then until 1933 Gracey had three railroads intersecting.

Ever hear of Durgin? Ever hear of Humdurgin? These two communities, difficult to locate, were in the vicinity of northwest Christian County on the Dawson Springs Road. Durrigan Hollow runs off of Kentucky 109 near Outwood. It appears on an old map from 1953. Durgin got its name from the hollow, but no one knows the origin of the name Durrigan. No one can bring up the name Durgin without its even more mysterious suburb, Humdurgin. Humdurgin was south of Durgin, wherever that is!

Back at the turn of the 20th century Hopkinsville had three cigar-making plants. One would think that the operations were close to a source of the basic material for production i.e., tobacco. Wrong. At least one of the three upstairs factories used imported tobacco. The Jocko Brand used tobacco from Havana Cuba and the leaf for the wrappers was from the far away island of Sumatra. The cigars sold for six cents each. Inflated times. Cigars were hand rolled in those days. A wrapper could hand roll 5,000 cigars in a day.

Did you know that Hopkinsville High School football had two coaches at one time? Coach Ralph McRight was joined by John Henry "Hogjaw" Suther. Both men had starred on the football field for Tuscaloosa High and the University of Alabama when it beat Washington State 24 to nothing in the 1931 Rose Bowl. Both men were lured to Hopkinsville as coaches by a couple of sports minded bankers at Planters Bank & Trust Company. A. H. Eckles, president, and W. E. Keith, vice president were the motivators. Suther was a stocky fellow with a combination of speed and strength. He had some qualities of a human tank. When the Hoptown Hoppers were reformed in the spring of 1935 Suther was everybody's choice for manager of the professional baseball club. About mid-season an Italian with a wrestling bear came to the party. No one wanted to wrestle the bear. Suther wrestled the four-hundred-pound bear at home plate. The bear wearing mittens to cover its claws laid a right to Suthers head that would have ended any other man vs. bear battle. Suther went sprawling but he bounced right back to his feet and charged the bear. Down went the surprised bear with Suther on top of the animal. They rolled and tumbled in the dust around home plate. The owner of the bear was worried about the safety of his animal. He kept running around the struggling duo yelling at Suther "Turn a loosa you man, you killa my bear!" Adoring fans didn't call him "Hogjaw" for nothing.

One afternoon in 1981 a man pulled into a service station and asked the attendant, "What kind of town is this?" "They made me detour from off your main street while they dedicated a manhole cover to a feller who writes about privy's." The visitor continued "Wackiest thing I ever heard of. I'm getting the heck out of this town as fast as I can." The next day's paper featured a front-page picture of Mayor Wally Bryan leading the dedication.

The manhole cover features a picture of the "Privy Editor" of the New Era, Joe Dorris. His many articles in his Watching The Parade column of the Kentucky New Era featured a voluminous account of the use of "Thunder Mugs" among people from the past in our community. The brainchild of Clarence "Red" Fleming, a fun loving native and friend of Joe Dorris brought this event to reality.

Long before Stephen King wrote his horror story known as Pet Cemetery, Christian County had its own tombstone erected to a pet. In 1930 a beloved horse named Happy Hooligan was buried beside the road leading to the Boddie farm in south Christian. His owner, Dr. J. W. F. Williams, a revered bank cashier, dentist and mortician at LaFayette, bestowed the honor of burial on his horse. Happy Hooligan lived to be thirty years old, and Dr. Williams was prouder of that horse than any automobile he ever drove. The horse's name came from an old comic strip in which the cartoon Happy wore what looked like a tin can on his head. After many years of faithful service, the horse quit eating and was obviously in a dying condition. The humane thing to do was to put Happy Hooligan out of his misery. Unable to perform the task himself Dr. Williams hired another man to do it. Happy Hooligan fell dead right into the grave that had been dug for him. A monument bearing his name and dates of his life still stands today as a testament to their friendship.

Yes, it's true. A monument was erected to a horse at LaFayette but what about the rabbit that is buried in Riverside Cemetery? It was in October, 1933 that E. T. Faulkner buried the body of his beloved pet rabbit on the family lot at Riverside. The event was not discovered until several days later. Nothing was ever done about the hare's burial in the cemetery. The cemetery's caretaker did not report the incident at the time because he thought the order to dig a rabbit's grave was someone's idea of a joke. In recent years a friend, the late Wallace Henderson, buried his favorite cat on their family lot in Riverside.

The deed was accomplished after dark and remained an unknown fact.

Incidentally, Hopkinsville has had telephone service for 138 years. Subscribers must not have been frustrated by a "Sorry the line is busy" reply from the operator in the early days. When S. H. Turner, no kin, first offered phone service here in 1887 almost no one was interested. Turner went into business with crude equipment and just 31 subscribers willing to pay for the service. The phones at that time and those in several succeeding years could only be used during the day time. The operator went off duty at dark. Persons who now get calls at all hours of the night, often for a wrong number, may be excused for wishing sometimes the daytime only service could be reinstated. The 1887 phones were strictly local. It was in April, 1895 that the first long distance lines were run out of Hopkinsville and residents could call Nashville and Henderson.

The first movie house. Robert Montgomery operated this city's first movie house in 1907. Montgomery, briefly employed by General Electric, installed wiring in the theaters location on Main now the site of old First City Bank & Trust Company. The Theatorium was opened in March, 1907, admission was 10 cents. The movies were silent, but the theater offered special piano music by Montgomery's bride. The couple left Hopkinsville later that year.

Our new entry. The quarter horse was very new in Kentucky in the late 1960's. The late Ben Wood, father of the pair operated the only quarter horse track in Kentucky on his U. S. Highway 68 home a mile and a half west of town. Quarter horse racing became a natural for the parimutuel and for the better. They run faster and the wager knows much more rapidly whether he has won or lost. The action is brief but intense. There is far less opportunity for human shenanigans in quarter horse races. The quarter horse brought Mr. Wood an entry once in the Kentucky Derby. "Bob Murphy," foaled on Blue Lantern Farm, ran 7th in a field of seventeen in the 1946 derby. Wood Downs, the

quarter horse track on Blue Lantern Farm, was established in 1967.

Did you know there was once a buggy factory at Herndon? They were Mitchell Brothers Buggies made by John and Bill and were hand made. They made two or three buggies at a time and they also made a few wagons and harrows. The old Clarksville to Gracey railroad ran right by the Mitchell shop in Herndon.

Trouble with it. In May, 1967 Hopkinsville got its first taste of daylight savings time since the end of World War II and some people who had looked forward to it, confessed they weren't enjoying "fast time." The clocks were moved up on April 30, 1967. It had been the legal custom through the years of World War II.

Sometime late in 1965 a short item appeared in an English newspaper. It said, "When I was admitted to Jennie Stuart Hospital, Kentucky U.S. A., desperately lonely and miles from home and friends, I received a surprise on my breakfast tray. There stood a tall crystal vase with one beautiful red rose and a card baring my name with the message "Get Well Soon." It came from a florist, and the florist sent a balloon to each new patient regardless of wealth, status or nationality. Now a woman in South Hampton England saw this article and was much impressed. So much so in fact that when she was making out her Christmas card list, she decided to send one to whomever was responsible for sending the flower to the lonely English ladies' room in an American hospital. The would-be card sender had very little on which to go but, showing the old British determination, she was not deterred by lack of an address. The woman mailed the card with this address, "To the florist, flower store or shop close to Jennie Stuart Hospital, Kentucky, U.S.A." One would probably think that this card with the wacky address would never find its way to the right place. Wrong. Since the envelope carried the name of no town it was sent to the Cincinnati post office, then to Louisville. There somebody took the trouble to find out where Jennie Stuart Hospital was located so the card was forwarded to Hopkinsville. The card was

delivered to Metcalfe's Florist. The person responsible for the daily roses was Kenny Wood of Woods Drug Store. And what did Mr. Wood say when he finally got the card? "Beatinist thing I ever heard of. I have been sending flowers to the hospital for about 20 years. This is the most tangible evidence I've ever had that it was appreciated. And it came all the way from England."

P. S. The next time you are asked from whence did you come be proud to tell them Hopkinsville, Christian County, Kentucky and your darn proud of it!

Just one more story. Did you ever wonder why two vital north-south arteries near downtown Hopkinsville in today's traffic scramble ends so suddenly? Liberty ends at 14th. Clay almost ends at 16th and does dead end at 18th.

This is as far as the city went toward the south before 1880 and owners of the property at the end of the street never dreamed Hopkinsville would ever extend any farther. Dr. L. B. Hickman, who resided at Lone Oak on 16th Street, kept Clay Street from ending where the present zigzag is. The physician owned the property blocking Clay at this point. As an accommodation he opened a drive between his home at 317 E. 16th and his stables to the east. The drive became the street extension.

Liberty Street ended at East 14th Street. It would have surely extended farther south were it not for the request before City Council. Judge Polk Cansler requested that he be allowed to build his new home on 14th directly in the path of Liberty Street. The judge's request was granted.

Did you ever hear of Licksillet?