

Harrison Heritage News

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History Notes

George D. Slade (gslade@setel.com)

ATKINSON'S AUTOMATIC TIMER

During the early 1920's the Model T Ford was the most popular automobile in America. Mechanically minded persons were constantly attempting to improve the "tin lizzie." Charles Atkinson, of Cynthiana, developed a version of the Model T timer that he seriously promoted. Near roadways, throughout this area of the country, could be seen his signs with a bright yellow background and bold black letters, proclaiming "ATKINSONS AUTOMATIC TIMER - Starts Easier And Runs Smoother - Small But Mighty - Every Ford Needs One." Mr. Atkinson's factory for producing the timer was at 118 East Pike Street (north side) west of the railroad, in 2002 a city parking lot.

With the replacement of the Model T in 1928 by the Model A, the timer became obsolete and Atkinson found himself with a large inventory of useless signs on hand. Charles Atkinson and son Fred, in the early 1930's, were very active in the Boy Scout movement. They were successful in obtaining a plot of ground on the south end of the County Farm, bordering the South Licking River. A deep hole of water is located here known as the "cat hole."

The first structure erected by the Atkinsons was, as I describe it, like a large "smoke-house," made of rough lumber. It was here that they found a use for the many timer signs. The building was roofed and the sides weather-boarded with the brilliant yellow and black signs. I am sure that there are yet some former Boy Scouts who remember the first "bunk-house" at Camp Merrimac.

Mole People Invade Cynthiana

William A. Penn, editor (pennwma@aol.com)

Recently, I browsed through several diaries I kept in the late 1950s. I was eleven in 1954, attended Marshall School, and lived at 224 (now 218) Battle Grove Avenue. Boys at that time liked to roll up their sleeves like a famous Cincinnati Reds shortstop who had a sleeveless jersey, and a favorite hair style of the times was the flattop, which I was fond of, courtesy of barber Ollie Turner. From reading my diaries, it is apparent the favorite "shows," as we called movies, of mine were cowboy and science fiction subjects. Commando Cody was a weekly Saturday serial movie I liked. 1950's film effects were crude by today's standards; viewers could almost see the strings holding the scale model rockets featured in the film, and the smoke from the rocket motors unrealistically curled upward soon after it "blasted" out of the rocket motors. Commando Cody would turn the dials on his suit, take a few running steps, and fly away with his rocket backpack. Anyway, here are some events I recorded in my diary, along with some favorite songs and Cynthiana movies I saw.

1954 - Polio Carnival fund raiser in back yard of Connie Wills on Battle Grove Avenue, with fish pond, side show and spook house. A bowl of boiled eggs became "eyeballs." Troop 60 Boy Scouts, First Methodist Church: Wilbur Bell, Scoutmaster, Scouts: Bill McIntire, Jesse Alexander, Jim Collier, Melvin Price, Skipper Manning, and Milton Bell.

1955 - Favorite songs: Mr. Sandman; This Old House; Let Me Go; Unchained Melody.

1957 - Movies: The Creature Walks Among Us; Shepard of the Hills; Away All Boats; Hollywood or Bust; The Rolling Wagons; 7th Cavalry; Haunted House; Daniel Boone; Three Violent Men; The Wars Above Us; Bus Stop; Friendly Persuasion; Threshold of Space; Toward the Unknown; White Squaw; Beast of the Amazon; Mole People; Hellcats of the Navy; Monster from Green Hell; Francis the Talking Mule.

1958 - Movies: Man in Space; The Abdominal Snowman; Jail House Rock; The Land Unknown; The Copper Skies.

1960 - Movies: The Bat; Apache Woman; Tarzan, the Ape Man; Ill Abner; Oklahoma Territory; Beat Generation; The Flesh and the Spur; The Sign of the Gladiators; They Came to Condura; Underwater; Angry Red Planet; Desert Desperado; Solomon and Sheba; Psycho and Hercules Unchained.

The Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum has many 1950s-era items - stop in and ask Harold to point them out.

Historical Society Minutes

Jane Adams Whitehead

News and Meetings:

February Meeting: *The next meeting of the Harrison County Historical Society will be Thursday, February 20, 2003. There will be a showing of Confederate paper money, large-size U.S. paper money from 1862, and paper fraction U.S. currency 1863-1873. This should be a very interesting presentation, so be sure to attend. The meeting will be in the Cynthiana-Harrison County Library's meeting room, starting at 7 p.m.*

Dues: *2003 membership dues of \$5 should be paid this month. Please mail a check to the address on page one, or bring to the next meeting. Members of the historical society receive the Harrison Heritage News, a monthly newsletter containing new material on Harrison County history, reprints from old Cynthiana newspapers, local heritage news, Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum news, genealogy articles, and periodic listing of publications for sale at the museum about Harrison County history. To encourage saving each issue, an annual article index and cumulative name/subject index is provided.*

January 2003 meeting *was cancelled due to weather. The last meeting was in November 2002; there was no December meeting due to its proximity to the Christmas holidays.*

Cynthiana - Harrison County Museum

Martha Barnes

Cynthiana - A Model City

Our unabridged Random House Dictionary at the school where I am librarian, there are twenty-five definitions for the word "model." Definition number two is the one which we most frequently use in connection with the Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum. This definition states that a model is a representation generally in miniature to show the construction or appearance of something.

Since the opening of the museum eight years ago, we have been blessed with marvelous models. Two of the first acquisitions were models of Benson United Methodist Church and the old log cabin behind the courthouse. The replica of Benson Church (the church is located on U.S. 27 North) was created by Carl Blackburn. This model is the focal point of our church and religious display. The old log cabin (which now houses WCYN-AM radio) is one of many creations by Neville Haley. The log cabin replica is furnished with miniatures by Mr. Haley. Through the years he has been most generous to the museum both in time and talent. In addition to the log cabin, his models of Harrison County High School, a lighthouse, one-room schoolhouse, Nevilleville (a small city), and so forth, are favorites of museum visitors. Mr. Haley also crafted a number of models of covered bridges and fireplaces which were sold with profits going to the museum.

How we regret the destruction of the old covered bridge! The museum has a number of items related to the former bridge. Among those items are the blueprints for the original. After Donald Hill created a replica of the bridge, it was suggested that he create a model more to scale using the drawings. His second wonderful bridge model even has removable sides.

With the opening of our museum annex in the front of the old Rohs Theatre building on Walnut Street, more space became available. On April 13, 2002, our model city was unveiled - a replica of Cynthiana as it would have appeared in the mid- 1800s to the turn of the century. Donald Hill, our resident bridge builder, built the covered bridge model out of a piece of wood from the actual bridge. Hallie Martin graciously donated the wood. Mr. Haley and Harold Slade stay busy making stores, livery stables, houses, the courthouse, outhouses, log buildings, mills, and so forth. The display, carefully built to scale, is most interesting, but far from completion.

Models seem to appeal to folks of all ages. A trip to just see the models makes a museum trip worthwhile. Much has been accomplished at the museum, but much remains to be done. The museum staff is always searching for additional volunteers and model builders. Come join us as we start another year striving to preserve and share the history of Cynthiana and Harrison County. Our history. Our history belongs to all of us. Best wishes to you and yours for a healthy, happy new year!

THE SMITH HOUSE

(Rankin Hotel, Commercial Hotel, Hamon Apts.)
George D. Slade (Harrison Heritage News, Feb. 2003)

Perrin's *History of Bourbon, Scott, Harrison, and Nicholas Co., Ky.*, published in 1882, states, "In 1812, the old brick house at the entrance of the bridge was built by Robert Patterson. In this house was born the jolly, good-hearted Bob Rankin, well known a few years ago to the traveling public as the popular 'host' of the Rankin House, now the Smith House."

The Rankin House, later known as the Smith House and then the Commercial Hotel and still later the Hamon Apartments, as I write this, still stands at the southwest corner of Pike Street and the railroad. It was in the process of being constructed when the Second Battle of Cynthiana occurred, June 11-12, 1864.

This site was selected because of its proximity to the railroad passenger depot, one block south. In parallel with the railroad on the west side of the building was a walkway side of the tracks. This made it very convenient for the many people who traveled in the "cars" (passenger train tions by Perrin, was having the Civil War. The hotel stable for horses site side of Pike Street from the hotel. Morgan's troops, in an attempt to stable. The fire spread rapidly west-37 buildings, which was most of the



This view of the Commercial Hotel, on E. Pike St. by the railroad, is reprinted from the L&N Headlight, dated April 1898. The Civil War landmark, where Union soldiers fired from the windows at Morgan's Raiders, is still standing.

A copy of an old photo [see seen at the Cynthiana-Harrison having a wood stave fence along the Street side of the building, at the doors on either side, Above this en-

are doors that open onto iron balcony was from the porch on the west side. The sidewalk on Pike Street is paved with brick. The street is not paved. When the building became an apartment house the ground floor was converted to store rooms. The balconies, that I thought made the building unique, were removed several years ago.

The Rankin House became the Smith House in 1868. W. W. Smith and wife, Elizabeth Remington Smith operated the business together for something over thirty years until his death and she continued its operation for a few years. "Aunt Liz," as she was called, was the daughter of Green Remington, builder of the wooden covered bridge at Cynthiana. During research, I have noted numerous mentions of the building. I will list some of these:

Cynthiana News, May 30, 1867. (A.J. Morey, Editor). – Yesterday evening at the Rankin House we received a large supply of drinkables as well as eatables. There were eight glasses of drinkables, as follows: Cognac, Brandy, Old Bourbon, Port Wine, Apple Brandy, Holland Gin, Sherry Wine, Native Wine, and Old Heidsick. We consider ourselves entitled to long black mark on all the old printing establishments in the State, for this temperance movement on our part Besides the drinks, we received two plates of strawberries and one currant pie. These we honored to their entire extent and feel like returning our most heartfelt blessing on the Rankin House, and its very popular clerk, Mr. W. J. Burns. With the drinks came the following "Friend of my soul, this goblet sip – T'will chase the passive tear – T'is not so sweet as a woman's lips, But ah! T'is more sincere."

Cynthiana News, June 20, 1867, - Speaking of the monumental festival, which by the way, was an affair long to be remembered, reminds us that Mrs. Elza Rankin, of the Rankin House, presented to the association, a beautiful hair necklace which was disposed of for the round sum of thirty six dollars. That, as an appreciative said, "was not so rough."

Cynthiana News, June 27, 1867. – Rankin House – Pike Street within 200 feet of the depot, Cynthiana, Ky. Accommodations first class. Cars (railroad) stop half hour for breakfast. Large Livery and Sale Stable attached. General Stage office. Agent, Addams Express Company, T. R. Rankin, Proprietor.

Cynthiana News, Aug. 8, 1867. Robert T. Rankin, express agent at this place, has [continued on page 4]

[*The Smith House, continued*] furnished himself with a new express wagon with a cover. It reminds us much of an ambulance.

Cynthiana News, Jan. 9, 1868. The Rankin House has been renovated and refitted since the fire. [Not the Civil War fire].

Cynthiana News, Dec. 24, 1868. – Masque Ball – Tonight the youth and beauty of the Maiden City turn out in masque to dance the fleeting hours away. The proprietor of the Smith House, in this city, has given them free use of his house for this occasion, and with Claxton's Band which has been engaged to make music, we doubt not that the party will be one of the gayest if not the most brilliant that has ever been given. Hacks have been engaged to convey the ladies to and from the hotel on the night of the ball. (Note: The name has been changed from Rankin House to Smith House since January of this year).

Cynthiana News, Jan. 14, 1869. – Mr. J. R. Rankin sold five lots last Monday, situated in front of the Smith House, in the city, at prices ranging from \$20 to \$23.40 per front foot. (Location where big fire of June 11, 1864 started).

Cynthiana News, Feb. 18, 1869. – A Social Party will be given on Tuesday evening, February 22, at the Smith House by the proprietor, W. W. Smith. It will be the grandest affair of the kind held this season, and all who wish to have a good time ought to attend.

Cynthiana News, Feb. 23, 1869. – On last Sunday night, Mr. Frank McMillan, late a gallant Confederate soldier, was married to Miss Belle Cooper both of this county, in the parlor of the Smith House. It seemed to be a runaway match, so popular in Kentucky. From the appearance of the parties, and the number of the friends who accompanied them, we have no doubt it will be as happy a one as the bride was pretty and the groom gallant.

Cynthiana News, Feb. 25, 1869. – We have learned from Colonel Keith, president of the Covington and Lexington Railroad, that he will build a boardwalk from Pike Street, next to the Smith House, to the depot. A good proposition and a good improvement.

Cynthiana News, Sept. 8, 1870, - During the coming week, while our fair is on the tapis (under consideration), Mr. Smith will give Two Hops at his hotel on Wednesday and Thursday evenings. Our young friends, who love to dance the flying hours away to superb music, will find the Smith House the very place. There the beauty and chivalry will gather (Last mention that I found of the Smith House. I am sure that there are others but this was the end of my source).

The Headlight (L&N RR publication), April 1898, (First mention that I found of Commercial Hotel) - Good hotels are important factors in advancing the welfare of any city and in this respect, Cynthiana is represented as she should be by a first class hostelry, which is a credit to its management and a favored retreat of the boys on the road. The Commercial Hotel is a substantial brick building, and since coming under the management of James S. Huff and Company in September 1896, it has been completely refitted and newly furnished throughout, and today there is not a better two dollar house in this part of the state, and it is the best by far in this city.

Cynthiana Democrat, Dec. 27, 1917. – "Aunt Liz" Smith, 91, died December 20, 1917. Elizabeth Remington Smith was a daughter of Greenup and Sallie Remington. (Greenup Remington, builder of the "Old Covered Bridge") "Aunt Liz" was married to W. W. Smith. Together, they operated the Smith House for more than thirty years. He died September 28, 1897. They are buried at Battle Grove Cemetery.

Cynthiana Democrat, Oct. 16, 1919. – W. T. Hamon on Monday closed his option on the Commercial Hotel (Smith House) property at the corner of Pike Street and the railroad. The deal includes the hotel building and a 43-foot lot fronting on Pike Street all running back to an alley. The option price, it has been understood was \$13,000.

Cynthiana Democrat, Sept. 6, 1956. Reminiscences 1885-1925 by W. A. Armstrong Bishop. – No history of Cynthiana would be complete without mention of the old Commercial Hotel at the southwest corner of Pike and the railroad. This was a large three-story brick building run by Aunt Liz Smith and her husband. The main entrance to the hotel lobby was through a door leading from a portico on the west side of the building. From the lobby you would go through convenient swinging doors to the bar in the rear. Mr. Smith died while I was a young child but one incident of his life will bear repeating. One evening he noticed that the waddling walk of their fat colored cook was more pronounced than usual, so dashing out he headed her off, lifted her skirt and cut the string around her waist on which she had hung a large ham that dangled between her legs. I don't know what happened to the cook but he returned the ham to the kitchen. [*Continued on p. 5*].

[*The Smith House, continued*] *Rattling Spurs and Broad-Brimmed Hats* (William A. Penn) states – "Another post war incident that received much publicity, was the duel on March 26, 1866, between a former Union

oldier, Alexander Kimbrough and a former Confederate soldier, Jo Desha. Desha chanced to meet Kimbrough at the Rankin House on Pike Street in Cynthiana. Kimbrough had been a sergeant of Company K fourth Kentucky Volunteer Infantry. The two veterans had an argument in the lobby that resulted in a scuffle. Later in the day, Kimbrough challenged Desha to a duel. Desha accepted and they fought in a grove of trees behind the James K. Duke farm on the Fayette-Scott county line, which was also the childhood home of Basil Duke. Desha was unharmed; Kimbrough, however, received a pistol ball in his hip." During the Civil War, the Rankin House was near the center of the fighting during both of John Hunt Morgan's Cynthiana raids. On July 17, 1862, Colonel Landram attempted to reach this building from the depot to view Morgan's deployment and gain a defensive position, but Rebel soldiers cut off his approach before they could enter the building. The building played a larger role in the Second Battle of Cynthiana, June 11, 1864. Union soldiers fired from the windows at the Confederates, who soon surrounded the building, forcing a surrender. After the war, a former Union soldier, in town for a reunion, pointed out the marks on the exterior of the old building made by bullets. Today, the historic building remains in use with retail space on the first floor and rental housing above, a survivor of nearly 140 years. The Rankin House's role in the Civil War was recognized when the local Chamber of Commerce placed it on the Cynthiana Civil War Driving Tour.

Article Index - Vol. 3 - 2003

(For Vol. 1 and 2 article and subject index, see Vol. 3 No. 1 Jan-02)

Vol.3 No. 1 (Jan-02) - Penn, Historic Preservation; Slade, Perrin's History; county poor house, trial of Curtis Jett; article: Index to Vol 1 and 2; Barnes, Museum is Tourist Destination

Vol. 3 No. 2 (Feb-02) - Penn, Racial Violence in Harrison County; Slade, Banneker School history; Barnes: Black Heritage in Museum; Article: African Methodist Episcopal Church in Cynthiana, KY, by John M. Cromwell

Vol. 3 No. 3 (Mar-02) - Penn, Northern Kentucky History Day; Slade, Cynthiana Officials Celebrate Surrender of Ft. Sumter; Barnes, Building a Museum Collection; Slade, Floods At Cynthiana.

Vol. 3 No. 4(Apr-02) - Slade, Ropewalk and Hemp; Barnes, Fennell Horse Boots at Museum; Genealogy: Cynthia and Anna Harrison.

Vol. 3 No. 5 (May-02) - Penn, Some Old Rutland One-Room Schools; Slade: Moy Foo "Two O'Clock"; Genealogy: Faulconer Family: From Virginia to Kentucky; Barnes: Museum Annex-Model of Cynthiana on Display.

Vol 3 No. 6 (June-02) - Slade: Maple Sugar; Barnes: James L. Patterson Saddlebags in Museum; Penn: 35th Ohio and Cmp Frazer (Civil War).

Vol 3 No. 7 (Jul-02) - Slade: Great Drought of 1930; Barnes: Talking Machines in Museum; Genealogy: Blackburn Family in Harrison County, KY.

Vol. 3 No. 8 (Aug-02) - Penn: Civil War Marker Dedication; Slade: City Lot Battle Grove Cemetery; Graveyard; Barnes: Tobaccometer in Museum; Penn: Perry Wherritt: 19th Century Harrison County Official.

Vol. 3 No. 9 (Sep-02) - Penn: Morgan's Men Association Tour; Slade: The Old Log House [on Court St.]; Barnes: Moonshine Still in Museum Window; Genealogy: Hunter Family in Harrison County.

Vol. 3 No. 10 (Oct-02) - Slade: Mattie Dee Todd Cynthiana Postmaster; Barnes: Sylvandell Post Office in Museum; Penn: Black Soldiers From Harrison County in the Civil War.

Vol. 3 No. 11 (Nov-02) - Cromwell: "Der Tag" [Thanksgiving Day]; Slade: Cynthiana Overall Factory; Barnes: Burma Shave Jingles; Slade: Methodist Church in Harrison County - Part I. *MEMO: Vol. 3 No. 12 (Dec-02) - No newsletter published this month.*

New Cynthiana History Book Now Available. *Cromwell's Comments* by John M. Cromwell, has been jointly published by the Cynthiana Democrat and the Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum. The book contains newspaper columns on the history of Cynthiana from the pages of the Cynthiana Democrat, 1928-1940, and was edited by George D. Slade and William A. Penn. Topics include churches, schools, businesses, fairs, fires, cemeteries, newspapers and much more. His colorful personal reminiscences add much interest to his writings. (Review in the Democrat, January 23, 2003). This 200 page paperback book, which has an introduction, index, 24 photos and two maps, is available for \$10 (\$3 shipping) from the Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum, 112 S. Walnut St., Cynthiana, KY 41031, open Fridays and Saturdays. Also available at: Black Swan Books and Joseph-Beth Booksellers (Lexington), Poor Richard's Books (Frankfort), and Historic Midway Museum Store.

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