

Harrison Heritage News

Published monthly by Harrison County Historical Society, PO Box 411, Cynthiana, KY, 40341

April - 2000



Vol.1, No.2

Rattling Spurs

Bill Penn, Editor

Harrison County Attorney Was Wanted In Connection with Lincoln's Murder

April 14, 2000, was the 135th anniversary of Lincoln's assassination. William W. Cleary, Harrison County Attorney 1858-1862, was for several months implicated in the plot to assassinate President Lincoln. This is an interesting and little-known story.

In April 1864, Cleary accompanied an official Confederate commission to Canada, serving as their secretary, to negotiate the return of prisoners. The delegation was still there when Lincoln was shot. The Washington police received false information that someone overheard Booth wiring a message to the commission shortly before the murder.

Because of Cleary's association with this group, Federal authorities implicated him in the conspiracy and offered a reward for his arrest, along with others in Canada. On November 26, 1865, President Johnson revoked the rewards but Cleary remained in Canada until 1868. Returning home, he became Cynthiana City Attorney 1870-1873.

Read more about this and other CSA conspiracy stories in James D. Horan, *Confederate Agent* (Crown Publishing, 1954).

History Notes

George Slade

In 1921, Col. W. M. Moore wrote in the *Cynthiana Democrat* his memories of Harrison Co. from 1849-50.

[Editorial comments are in brackets].

(1849) - The Harrison County Jail was located on the present site [where the existing old stone jail was later erected], built of large hewn timbers, well notched down, two stories high, stairs on the outside; trap door to let the prisoners down into the dungeon by ladder, the ladder to be drawn up and the trap door battened down. So a prisoner was about as secure then as now. At about four feet of the ground was an opening between the logs of about 6 inches for light and air.

(1849) - Well, 1848 [really 1847] a man by the name of Sealey [Sheely] was sentenced and hanged on Flat Run [Betsy's Creek], just above the concrete bridge and across from the rock quarry. The scaffold, a pole against a tree, with forks at opposite end for support, was still standing when I came here [1849] and stories were told about spooks, ghosts and night lights, until, when I passed, the creeps ran up and down my spinal column. I tread the ground lightly and also swiftly. They told for years that the wrong man was hanged, or in other words, an innocent man. I never knew and to my knowledge, it was never ascertained.

[Note: This narrows the much-discussed location of the hanging, since both the concrete bridge and abandoned rock quarry still stand.]

What Happened To...

...the watering trough which stood at the west end of the Pleasant Street bridge?
...the pre-1859 minute book of the City trustees?

...the Rohs' Jewelry Store thermometer and chronometer?

...the town's many old hitching posts?

...the Court House clock weights? (Ans. Now at the museum.)

...the brass key and hoe imbedded in sidewalk in front of Kehoe Building on Main St?

...1925 CSA memorial half-dollars issued to 11 local veterans?

...Bova Cola bottles?

...Hometown minstrel star, Norman Brow?

(Ans. He became "Singing Sam the Barbasol Man.")

...the monument, near the banks of Indian Creek, near Haviland's Lane, to a Revolutionary War veteran: "To the memory of Col. John Stephenson, Who Departed This Life, Oct. 27, 1801...?"

...the 1862 diary of Jeff W. Oxley, quoted in the May 14, 1925, *Democrat*, and owned then by his children, Lawson Oxley and Mrs. Chas. A. Cooper?

Book Notes

These important studies should be read by anyone wanting a better understanding of slavery and slave life. Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, covers the Atlantic slave trade from 1440-1870. It answers the questions: Who were the slavers? How profitable was the business? Why did many African rulers and peoples collaborate?

Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860*, is a comprehensive review with many KY references. Topics include: The sources of Southern slave law, slaves as property, trials of slaves, laws protecting the abuse of slaves, masters and the criminal offenses of their slaves, and the complicated laws on voluntary emancipation or freeing of slaves (manumission) by masters. Both books are now available in paperback editions.

The best accounts of slavery in KY are: Lucas and Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky* (1992), and J. Winston Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky*, (1940).

Historical Society Minutes

New officers were elected at the March 16, 2000, Harrison County Historical Society meeting:

President: Robbie Toomey
Vice-President: Tonya Coleman
Secretary: Jane Adams Whitehead
Treasurer: Hallie Martin

Committees were formed for Public Relations, Programs Ideas and Trips, and Projects-Subcommittee.

Tonya Coleman discussed the Civil War Driving Tour being created by

The next meeting of the Historical Society will be Thursday, April 20, 7 PM at the library.

a committee of the Cynthiana-Harrison Co. Chamber of Commerce. She also told about the City of Cynthiana participating in the Kentucky Renaissance program.

Members approved having the Historical Society sponsor a fund drive to purchase a new microfilm reader for the library and donated \$500 to the new fund.

The April Harrison County Historical Society program will feature discussions on genealogy led by Jane Whitehead.

(Excerpted from minutes taken by Jane Adams Whitehead)

If you are not a member we invite you to join. We need your support. Dues are \$5 per calendar year. Make checks to the Harrison County Historical Society and mail to the address on top of page one. Meetings are the third Thursday of each month 7 PM in the library's community room.

Cynthiana -Harrison County Museum

Martha Barnes

Since its beginnings in July 1994, the museum at 13 S. Walnut Street has been the recipient of much media support. The local radio station, WCYN, continues to host a monthly museum talk show. (The original control board of WCYN is on display at the museum.) The *Cynthiana Democrat* publishes George Slade's popular column, "Museum Musings," and promotes museum activities, displays, and special events. Harrison County High School media classes, who provide local cable programming, conduct a program weekly from the museum.

Several Lexington television stations have featured the museum. One faithful supporter has been Dick Burdette, a columnist with the Lexington *Herald-Leader*. In July 1999, he wrote an article about our museum entitled, "Museum Mirrors the Images of Community." In a recent article on Richmond's museum, he once again mentioned our local museum, and after listing some items in our collection stated, "it's all as down-to-earth as it is representative of the people who wore or used them."

In 1999, besides local citizenry, visitors came from 44 KY cities, 27 states, D.C., and 3 foreign countries. The staff and directors are grateful for the community and media support. The museum is open Fri-Sat., 10 AM-5 PM.