

# Harrison Heritage News

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## Rattling Spurs

Bill Penn, Editor (hmms@att.net)

"Progress" was the title of John M. Cromwell's Oct. 3, 1929, column in the *Cynthiana Democrat*. In it he lamented the destruction of a number of Cynthiana's landmarks at that time in the name of "progress," in particular the old Wall School House his father had attended. Smith-Rees Funeral Home was building over the old frame building on the northwest corner of Pike and Court Streets for the site of their new brick business. The county has recently demolished this 1929 structure (recently the county clerk's and sheriff's offices) to make room for the proposed court house annex.

Cromwell noted the original building on the lot was built in 1852 by William K. Wall for Mrs. C. T. Delling to use as a school house. A former student recalled that in the late 1860s there was an orchard in the rear, and the boys would "...play shinny games around the old school house, sometimes extending clear up on Pike street."

An historic door saved from the 1830s first Christian Church on Mill St. was used in the Wall School House. Cromwell wrote: "This door, Mr. D. R. Rees informs me, will be done over and presented to the Christian Church..."

Cromwell, in reflecting on the loss of "our old land mark," wrote in 1929: "Oh, Well! Clay [Smith] has promised to frame the 'hole' that the cannon ball went thru, and present it to the ladies for their new Club House; so we shouldn't worry, and we still have the 'old bridge' left."

It must have hurt Cromwell considerably to have seen the venerable covered bridge pulled down a few years before he died. Ironically, even his stately brick residence on N. Main street has lately fallen to "progress."

The framed cannon ball hole is now in our museum. Does anyone know the location of the Christian Church door from the 1830s?

## History Notes

George D. Slade

Copied from *Kentucky Encyclopedia* (University Press of Kentucky, 1992), p. 411.

**HARRISON, BENJAMIN.** Benjamin Harrison, soldier and pioneer, was born most probably in Westmoreland County Pennsylvania, around 1745, and first came to Kentucky in 1776. With the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, the record seems to indicate, he returned to his home state and served as the colonel of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Westmoreland County militia. Before 1785, probably in 1783, Harrison returned to Kentucky and settled in what is now Harrison County, on a five-hundred land grant about three miles south of present-day Cynthiana.

Harrison became the first sheriff and justice of the peace of Bourbon County on May 16, 1786, and represented that county in the conventions that met in Danville in 1787 and 1788. He also participated in the Danville assembly that created Kentucky's first state constitution, which gathered on April 2, 1792. In 1793 he was elected to the General Assembly as a representative of Bourbon County. He was also a general in the Kentucky militia.

In 1793, while Harrison was a member of the legislature, Kentucky formed its seventeenth county out of parts of Bourbon and Scott counties and named it in his honor. In February 1794 he was sworn in as a justice of the peace of the new county.

In 1800 Harrison migrated to New Madrid, Missouri and claimed approximately four thousand acres of land. He married Mary Newel around 1784; they had eight children, Harrison died in Missouri 1808.

See Isabelle Giu Ivezan, *Some Reports of Benjamin Harrison: A Revolutionary War Soldier* (Ashton, Mo., 1973)

Following notes by George D. Slade:

The town of Cynthiana was laid out on the lands of Robert Harrison (relation to Benjamin, if any, unknown). Tradition has it that the town was named for Robert's daughters, Cynthia and Anna. I have no idea of the source that states that Benjamin Harrison was the father of President Benjamin Harrison. Maybe a Benjamin, but I think not our Harrison County Ben.

## Historical Society Minutes

Jane Adams Whitehead

The Harrison County Historical Society meeting was held November 16, 2000, at the library. The minutes were read by Janie Whitehead and approved. The treasurer's report was read and approved. The members approved a subscription of the Northern Kentucky Historical magazine as a donation to the library. An update on the Civil War Driving tour brochure being published by the Harrison Co. Chamber of Commerce was presented by Tonya Coleman. A plaque was

**The next meeting of  
the Historical Society  
will be Thursday,  
December 21, 2000,  
7 PM at the library.**

presented to Bill Penn recognizing his published research on the Civil War in Harrison County and other contributions to the historical society. (Due to problems with the library's projector, a planned showing of selected videos from the Channel 6 Museum show was postponed until a later date.)

Officers of the Harrison County Historical Society:

President: Robbie Toomey

Vice-President: Tonya Coleman

Secretary: Jane Adams Whitehead

Treasurer: Hallie Martin

**If you are not a member we invite you to join. We need your support.** Membership is only \$5.00 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

Happy Holidays from all of us at the Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum! The museum is a great place to bring holiday visitors - both local and out of town. It's also a great place for a family outing. Remember, too, that there are several publications for sale at the museum - a great gift shopping place. Located at 13 S. Walnut, the museum is open on Fridays and Saturdays, 10 A.M. - 5 P.M. The phone number is 859.234-7179. For special tours or appointments, call 859. 234-3147, 234-5835, or 234-1053.

When you visit the museum, be sure to see the old Christmas ornaments and the toys. Many of those toys in the museum collection were special Christmas gifts to small Harrison Countians years ago. A large block of coal is also in the museum - just a reminder to be good. Our museum staff have all been not just good - but great this year! We are truly a volunteer staff. Special thanks to all those who give so much of their time and talent to make the museum and its operation possible. Thanks, too, to Bill Penn for this marvelous newsletter and all that he does for Harrison County and the preservation of its history.

If Santa were to ask the museum staff what they wanted for Christmas, I believe most would say a larger building and more volunteers. I am certain that they would join in this wish for everyone (in the words of writer George Eliot) - "I earnestly wish that every good brought into life by Christmas be yours, that you may have a heart of cheer, a spirit of hope, a life of love for everyday in all the year."

Love and blessings to all of you.

### Christmas Superstitions

Editor's note: These are some of nearly 4,000 superstitions collected by Daniel Thomas for *Kentucky Superstitions* (Princeton U. Press, 1920).

-You will have good luck if you are the first to say "Merry Christmas." -A child born on Christmas Day can understand the speech of animals. -Never take up ashes from the fireplace during the Christmas season. -At Christmas Eve, spirits walk. -A rooster's crowing at night, except at Christmas time, is a sign of bad luck. -It brings bad luck to leave up the Xmas greens after New Year's Day.

## Harrison County Historians: Part II

### John Morgan Cromwell (1862-1951)

George D. Slade

John M. Cromwell (1862-1951), banker and Mayor of Cynthiana, Kentucky, was a local history buff. He was the son of James W. Cromwell, owner of "Locust Grove" stock farm on the Old Lair Pike, which produced a number of famous horses including Abdallah Mambrino. His grandfather, R. T. Cromwell, manufactured the famous Cromwell wagon at the corner of Walnut and Pleasant Streets in Cynthiana.

Mr. Cromwell's popular articles in the *Cynthiana Democrat* relating to local history and a variety of other subjects, first appeared in the January 26, 1928 issue. He continued writing these articles, sometimes intermittently, until early 1940. His first article was titled "Additional Church History." The January 5, 1928, *Democrat* carried an article by Hubert Hutton concerning local church histories. Mr. Cromwell, fearful that Mr. Hutton was not going to complete the church histories, took on the job. A couple of weeks later his subject was early schools, then newspapers, then fraternal organizations, and so on. His comments were appearing quite frequently in the *Democrat*.

For the first seventeen months Mr. Cromwell's column had no name. Beginning with the May 30, 1929, issue of the *Democrat* it was headed "Cromwell's Comments, By John M. Cromwell." This particular column related mostly to the Confederate Memorial Monument Fund.

Being a City Commissioner and later mayor, he was very interested in city government and city properties. Many of his writings related to elections, city council, fire department, schools and city records. In the oldest council meeting records at the city clerk's office there are notes left between the pages relating to his research there. The first minute book is missing and in the oldest book there now (dating from 1859) is a hand-written page, signed by John M. Cromwell, lamenting as to how much he could learn if he could find the "old book."

His column appeared in more than 350 issues of the *Democrat*. I will mention a few that were of particular interest to me. Some of his articles related to early fire protection and some to the fires they fought. About fifteen fire cisterns were located at the center of the various street intersections. A pump was installed atop a stone foundation, located near the street, midway between the old jail and Bridge Street. Water was pumped from the river to fill the fire cisterns. At first, equipment was pulled to the scene of the fire by manpower. Later one horse was used, then a team of horses. When summoned to fight a fire on a hill they would stop by the livery stable at the corner of Pike and Walnut Streets and hitch an additional team to the heavy pumper to aid in getting it up the hill.

In 1930, upon witnessing the removal of the fire alarm bell from atop the old firehouse on Walnut Street and its re-installation above the new municipal building on Pleasant Street, he wrote its history titled, "The Old Bell." The bell today is displayed just outside the city clerk's office near Pleasant Street. The inscription thereon reads, "Buckeye Bell Foundry 1889 - Vanduzen Tift, Cincinnati."

An avid reader, Mr. Cromwell wrote a number of columns relating to newspapers. The titles of some were: "Two Old Newspapers," "An Old Cynthiana Times," "Newspapers," "Making A Newspaper," "Newspaper-Claysville News," "Another Old Paper," "It Sometimes Happens - Printing Errors," "Ancient Advertisements," Illustrated Edition - The *Cynthiana Democrat*, "Cynthiana Newspapers," "Old Newspapers," and "My Scrapbook." The South Licking River was a favorite subject. His early years were spent on his father's farm, which bordered the river south of town. Stories about the river were headed; "South Licking" (1929), "Bridges Etc.," "Ice Skating," "Betsy's Creek or Flat Run," "The Cat Hole," "Cynthiana Bridges, Past and Present," "South Licking" (1938).

Among the many other subjects of which he wrote, were schools, post offices, Civil War, railroad, county fair, the Graveyard, early merchants and tradesmen, old citizens, weather, Battle Grove Cemetery, elections, antiques, the cholera in Cynthiana, court day, distilleries, horses, hotels, the Bible, hospital, tobacco and baseball. Some titles which interest me are, "Some Dogs I've Known," "The Old Corner," "Coon Huntin'," "Senator Vast's Dog Speech," "Chestnut Hall," "Gaiety At Cynthiana," "Death of Old Nell" (a horse) and "Sallies In Our Allies."

My search revealed only four articles by Mr. Cromwell in the *Democrat* from June 29, 1939, to March, 1940. The last was titled "Going Back," a story mostly about the rise and fall of the Cynthiana Businessmen's Club. He was treasurer of the club when it folded. There was about ten dollars in the treasury at the time. The money was donated to

the Marshall School Penny Lunch Fund.

John M. Cromwell was proud of the fact that he was named for the famous Confederate General John Hunt Morgan. In his *Cynthiana Democrat* column dated May 30, 1929, he relates this story:

"It so happened that the writer was christened John "Morgan" Cromwell, being, as he was, born in the second year of the war between the States, and having for a father one who was nothing if not Confederate....Speaking of names, I am reminded that at the unveiling of the equestrian statue of Gen. John H. Morgan, in Lexington, some years ago, my father in presenting me to Gen. Basil W. Duke said, "To the best of my knowledge and belief this boy was the first child to be named for your illustrious brother-in-law." Whereupon Gen. Duke very graciously opined the official badge of the day from his coat and handed it to me. Needless to say the badge is still one of my treasured possessions."

John M. Cromwell died January 30, 1951. His wife Eva Berry Cromwell preceded him in death July 11, 1929. Their graves are in the Battle Grove Cemetery. I have inquired as to the whereabouts of Mr. Cromwell's library, mementos and such, and have been told that these were donated to the University of Kentucky Library. It would be of great interest to browse through these records of our historian.

(This article first appeared in a supplement to the *Cynthiana Democrat* December 30, 1999, "The Way We Were," about Harrison County history. Mr. Slade has researched, written, and lectured on Harrison County history for many years. His column, "Museum Musings," appears weekly in the *Cynthiana Democrat*)

**Publications available from Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum, 13 South Walnut Street, Cynthiana, KY 41031 (859-234-7179); open Friday and Saturday 10 AM - 5 PM:**

Boyd, Lucinda, *Chronicles of Cynthiana*. This is a reprint of the rare 1894 edition, which includes family histories, the famous account of David Sheely and his ghost, and other historical sketches and scattered accounts of persons and events connected with Cynthiana and Harrison County. 262 pp. Hardbound. \$20.00.

June 1896 *Cynthiana Democrat* reprint. This was a special edition with biographical sketches and photographs of prominent men and women; many photographs of buildings; city/county government, church and school information is included. 24 pp. Paperback, 12"x18". \$5.00

*Cynthiana Since 1790*. Virgil Peddicord (1986). Mr. Peddicord attempted to list the owners/businesses located on each lot from the founding of the city through the mid-1980s, including subdivisions added through 1923. 171 pp. (See separate index below). Paperback. \$20.00

*Index - Cynthiana Since 1790*. Mr. Peddicord did not prepare a comprehensive index for his book. This supplemental index prepared for the Museum contains about 3,500 names and a city street map. 30 pp. Paperback. \$3.00

Please include a handling and shipping fee of \$4.00 for first book, \$2.50 for each additional book; you will be notified if special shipping fees apply. No shipping fee on *Index - Cynthiana Since 1790*, if ordered with the book. Make checks payable to "Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum." No credit cards. Prices/fees subject to change.

## INDEX - HARRISON HERITAGE NEWS

- Abdallah Park Fire, 1-6  
 Alfaro, Al, 1-5  
 Ashbrook Distiller, 2-1  
 Baseball pitcher (Strother), 1-6  
 Battle Grove Cemetery, 1-3, 1-6, 2-11  
 Berry, Col. George, 2-9  
 Berry, Ky., 1-4, 1-5  
 Biancke's Restaurant, 1-5  
 Bibliography of Harrison Co. history, 1-8  
 Book Reviews: *Kentucky History* (Bryant), 1-8; *Bluegrass Confederate* (Guerrant), 1-1; *The Slave Trade: Southern Slavery and the Law*, 1-2  
 Boyd, Lucinda, 1-8, 2-4, 2-5  
 Brow, Norman, 2-2  
 Buffalo trace, 1-5  
 Cason, Jack, 2-2  
*Chronicles of Cynthiana*, 1-8  
 Civil War Reenactment, 1-6, 2-9  
 Civil War: Col. Berry's home, 2-9, courthouse, 2-12, driving tour, 1-1, 2-6; Battle of Keller's Bridge journal, 1-6; mural of Morgan's Raid, 1-8; W. W. Cleary and Lincoln's assassination, 1-2  
 Coleman, William Tell, 2-2  
 Colemansville, Ky., 1884 Cyclone, 1-5  
 Courthouse, 1-6, 2-6, 2-12  
 Covered bridge dam, 1-5  
 Covered bridge, 1-1, 2-4  
 Crofford, J. J., 2-1  
 Cromwell, Henry, 2-4  
 Cromwell, John M., 1-9  
 Cromwell's Comments, 1-9  
 Cynthiana Electric Light Co., 2-7  
 Cynthiana named, 1-9  
 Cynthiana Overall Co., 2-4  
 Cynthiana-Harrison Trust, 1-6  
 Cynthiana-Paris RR, 2-2  
 Dailey, John, 2-1  
 Dam, 1-5  
 Dates, historic, 1793-1998, 2-3, 2-7  
 Death Valley Scotty, 1-3  
 Desha farm, 2-9  
 Distilleries, 2-1, 2-4  
 Edgewater Distillery, 2-1  
 Excelsior Distillery, 2-1  
 Faulconer genealogy, 2-1  
 Faulconer, Bailey Petty, 2-1  
 Faulconer, J. B., 2-1  
 Feedback, Strother, 1-6  
 Fennel, Joe, 2-4  
*Filson Club Quarterly* collecting, 1-5  
 Fire dept. items in museum, 2-10  
 Fires in Harrison Co. listed, 2-10  
 Fray, Spencer, Civil War journal, Keller's Bridge Battle, 1864, 1-6  
 Genealogy, Family Files at Cynthiana public library, list of surnames, 2-2  
 Grater, Fritz, 2-10  
 Grist Mill Day (museum), 1-3, 2-5  
 Gruell, Dan, 1-4  
 Harrison Co. RECC, 2-7, 2-11  
 Harrison County courthouse, 1-6, 1-8, 1-9  
 Harrison family genealogy, 2-10  
 Harrison, Anna, 2-10  
 Harrison, Benjamin, 1-9  
 Harrison, Cynthia, 2-10  
 Harrison, Robert, 1-5; 1-9, 2-10  
 Herrington, Ed, 2-1  
 Hill, Jackie, 2-4  
 Hinkson, Bill, and farm, 1-4  
 Hinkston's Addition, 1-5  
 Hinkston's Station, 1-4  
     Hist. Soc., 2-6  
 Historians biographies, 1-8, 1-9  
 Hodson, James M., 1-3  
 Horse racing, Abdallah Park track, 1-6  
 Ice tools, businesses, in museum, 2-1  
 Index, *HHNewsletter*, 2-1, 3-1  
 Indian Creek bridge, 2-9  
 Jail, 1-2, 1-3  
 January (Cromwell), 2-1  
 Judy, Chuck, 2-10  
 Kawneer in museum, 2-8  
 Keller, A., Distillery, 2-1  
 Keller's Bridge, 2-2  
 Keller's Dam, 2-12  
 Kendall Flour Mill, 1-5  
 Kentucky Utilities, 2-7  
 Klotter, James C., 2-4  
 Ku Klux Klan, 2-7  
 KY Bicentennial Bookshelf collecting, 1-5  
 Lail, Miller, 2-2  
 Lee, Don, 2-6  
 Louderback, Elizabeth, 2-5  
 Lynching, 1-4  
 Manufacturing, 2-4  
 Market Place (Joe B. Hall Ct), 2-7  
 Massey, Harvey Joe, 2-3  
 Miller, John, 2-1  
 Moore, Bettie S., 2-4  
 Morgan, Garret, 2-4  
 Mundy, Sue, 2-12  
 Museum organization, 1-6;  
 Museum Trust, 2-7  
 Museum, Church items, 1-6; Civil War items, 2-9.  
 Museum: (funeral 2-11); agricultural displays, 2-3  
*Notes on History of Renaker-Rutland-Pleasant Green*, 2-1  
 Oddville, Ky., 1-3, 1-4  
 Oil, 2-2  
 Old Cemetery, 1-6  
 Patterson, James L., 2-2  
 Penn, Byrd, 2-1  
 Penn, James Samuel, 1-3  
 Peter, Frances, diary, 2-7  
 Pfanstiel, Earl, 2-4  
 Physician, 1818 adv., 1-1  
 Pioneer routes, 1-5  
 Post office, 2-3, 2-4, 2-5  
 Powell, John, 2-5  
 Prohibition, 2-1  
 Railroad depot, 2-10  
 Railroad, 2-2, 2-5, 2-8  
 Redmon Distilling Co., 1-4  
*Register of the KY Hist. Society*, collecting, 1-5  
 River landmarks, 2-8  
 Rope walk, 2-4  
 Ruddell and Martin Stations Assoc., 2-6  
 Ruddell's Station, 2-6  
 Rutland, Ky., 2-1  
 School memorabilia in museum, 1-4  
 Schools, 1-9  
 Scott, Walter E., 1-3  
 Shanties, railroad, 2-5  
 Sheely, David, hanging, 1-2  
 Sheely, Nancy, 2-3  
 Sheely's ghost, 2-5  
 Superstitions, New Year, 2-1  
 Tanneries, 2-4  
 Tobacco displays in museum, 2-6  
 Todd, Mattie D., 2-4  
 Valentine cards in museum, 2-2  
 Vault, Battle Grove Cemetery, 2-11  
 Wall school house, 1-9  
 Whitaker, B. B., 1-4  
 Winter of 1917, 2-3

## Notes to index:

"2-1" is volume 2, number 1.  
 Save your copies of the Harrison Heritage News for reference. We will prepare an updated index annually.