

# Harrison Heritage News

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## Rattling Spurs

Bill Penn, Editor (hmms@att.net)

### Racial Violence in Harrison County

Recounting the history of Old Harrison is usually a pleasant undertaking. However, every county has skeletons in its closet. This is evident when we read the account of Ku Klux Klan activities in this issue and an unpleasant local event in George C. Wright's book, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940: Lynchings, Mob Rule, and "Legal Lynchings."* (LSU Press, 1996).

Wright's book documents about 270 lynching of African Americans in Kentucky, a number conceded as probably being low, for he found it impossible to document hundreds of additional lynchings around the state that are known to have taken place during Reconstruction. Most of the victims had been accused of rape or murder.

One of the documented lynchings took place in Harrison County. In December 1870, a lynch mob murdered "George," a black man from Cynthiana who was accused of rape.

While the article on the Ku Klux Klan in Harrison County in the 1920s (p. 4) revealed no outright violence, it is clear that the mere existence of the Klan had violent undertones. With their twin goals of white supremacy and segregation made known through widely-publicized cross-burnings, speeches and parades, the Klan's warnings were not lost on black folks.

### African American Barbers

A recent *Lexington Herald* article related the historic role of black barbershops in black culture. Black barbers have a long history in our community, too. In a July 13, 1933, *Democrat* column, John M. Cromwell recalled that in the 1870s two of the three Cynthiana "tonsorial parlors," or barber-shops, were black businesses, owned separately by Henry Johnson and James McKinley. Mr. Johnson and a white barber, John Deschler, were the only barbershops serving white customers.

## History Notes

George D. Slade (gslade@setel.com)

### **History of Banneker School (1937-1963)**

[Copied from an undated Banneker School reunion program.]

"The history of Banneker School goes back before the name was ever given to the school. The first school for Negro pupils was opened in 1868 on Water Street where eight grades of education were offered. Some of the principals at this school were Prof. Pitts, Hughes, W. C. Orton and [in 1913] W. E. Newsom.

"In 1921, the school was moved to the old hospital building on Penn and Locust Streets. In 1928, the three-year high school was inaugurated. In 1937, the old building was torn down and a red brick structure was erected at a cost of \$36,000. This was by far the best school building in the city, with five classrooms, office, basement and combination gymnasium-auditorium. Prof. Newsom served as principal. He later completed his B. S. at University of Cincinnati at the age of seventy plus years. Mrs. Fannie Duncan gave the school its name through her essay on Benjamin Banneker.

"In 1937-38, a four year course was established, and Home Economics was taught as well as Physical Education. In 1941, courses in typing and Industrial Arts were added. Mr. E. O. David became principal of Banneker for the 1942-43 school year and he served in this capacity until the school closed in 1963. Music, for the high school, class organization, 4-H program, student council, Boy Scout Troop and a lunch program were also added between 1941 and 1963.

"In 1963, the doors of Banneker High School were closed forever but the memory still remains. All that remains on the spot is a concrete platform where the flag-pole stood for many years. It is located in a park like area behind the Mecca building, where Federal low-rent housing units were constructed."

Banneker school had twelve grades until 1956. After this date, black high school students were transferred to Cynthiana High School, up to 1963, the year all Harrison County schools were integrated, and CHS was merged with Harrison County High School. [See *Cynthiana Democrat*, August 23, 1956].

Earl Pfanstiel, who was Marshall School principal in 1963, said in a recent interview that integration took place that year with no apparent problems, despite concerns from the board of education, and the new era began without incident.

# Historical Society Minutes

Jane Adams Whitehead

The Harrison County Historical Society met at 7 P.M., January 17, 2002, at the Cynthiana Public Library.

The speaker was Alson Cole, news writer for the Cynthiana Democrat, who described his journey to Honolulu, Hawaii, to see Pearl Harbor and the USS Arizona Memorial. Mr. Cole illustrated his talk with photographs of the site of the Arizona, which is the tomb of 1,177 sailors and marines who died during the Japanese attack on December 7, 1941.

**The next meeting of the Historical Society will be February 21, 2002, at 7 PM in the library.**

He mentioned the two Harrison County men who lost their lives that day: Purdy Renaker Bedford (on the Arizona), and William Clarence Campbell, who was on the the West Virginia, and is buried in Battle Grove Cemetery.

The speaker for the February meeting will be announced in the Cynthiana Democrat.

## Historical Society Dues

The annual dues for membership in the Harrison County Historical Society are due in January. To continue your membership/subscription at the current low rate, please send \$5 check TODAY payable to Harrison County Historical Society to: Harold Slade  
1490 Ammerman Pike  
Cynthiana, KY 41031

## HARRISON CO., KY., HISTORY ON THE WEB:

[www.cynthianaky.com](http://www.cynthianaky.com) (back issues of this newsletter, local history articles).  
[www.battleofcynthiana.org](http://www.battleofcynthiana.org) (description of battles, list of units, and reenactment information.)

# Cynthiana -Harrison County Museum

Martha Barnes

The black heritage in the Cynthiana-Harrison County community is an important part of our history. However, a visitor to the Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum may not receive this impression.

Within the museum section related to education, one area is devoted to black schools in the community, particularly Banneker. The history of Banneker dates back before the name was given to the school. The first school for Negro pupils was opened in 1868 on Water Street where eight grades of education were provided. There is a photograph at the museum of this school in 1908. Following consolidation of Cynthiana City and Harrison County Schools in 1963, Banneker was demolished, but the memories of the school linger.

Alice Allen has provided the museum with a number of photographs related to Banneker, its students and teachers, and other memorabilia including a woodburning of the school. Samples of the school's publication, "The Librarian," dated 1929 are also on display.

Marilyn Wash has loaned a photograph of a road building rock crusher scene. The photo which belonged to Jesse Wash depicts the method used to build county roads in the early 1900's.

The museum volunteers encourage those with photographs, artwork, or items related to our black community to loan them to the museum. This is one area of the museum upon which we need to focus. Here are a few suggestions for black history information that should be preserved at the museum or library:

- copies of church histories; congregation photos.
- black family genealogy files.
- black-owned businesses - history and photos.
- black education histories; copies of newsletters, photos.
- old period photos of black families in Cynthiana.
- race relations - newspaper articles, interviews.
- black cemetery documentation and preservation.

In addition, we should publish an African-American index of county records, as have several Kentucky historical societies, including Bracken County Historical Society (PO Box 307, Brooksville, KY 41004). These important black genealogy source records include everything from slave property transactions, both sales and manumissions (giving freedom, usually in wills) to death and marriage records. There surely are other aspects of our community which need greater representation as well. Ideas and suggestions are encouraged.

## Ku Klux Klan in Harrison County, Kentucky

George D. Slade

The Ku Klux Klan was founded at Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1866, as a social group for veterans of the Civil War. Its purpose soon changed to that of terrorizing freed Negro slaves and carpetbaggers from the north. In 1871 Congress gave the president power to suppress the Klan. The Klan soon disappeared. A new Ku Klux Klan was organized at Atlanta, Georgia, in 1915. It directed its activities against Negroes, Jews, Roman Catholics, and so-called radicals and foreigners. They wore white robes and hoods to hide their identity. Klansmen burned fiery crosses and flogged, lynched and tortured people whose behavior they did not like. By the end of the 1920s the Ku Klux Klan lost headway and for the most part faded away.

My family moved from the farm to Cynthiana in March 1924. We lived in a house on West Pleasant Street, about half way up the Belmont Hill. I recall that soon after we arrived a cross was burned near the top of the hill and was visible for some distance. Adults discussed the meaning of the cross burning. Kids wondered what it was all about. I remember a number of other crosses being burned during the next couple of years. These events always took place at night on high ground where they could be seen from a long distance, such as Belmont, Daniels and Standpipe Hills.

I recall going with my parents one night to the Court House Square. Assembled there was a large group of people dressed in white robes and white pointed hoods that covered their heads and faces. This group surrounded a man on a platform making a speech. A large crowd of onlookers witnessed the proceedings and upstairs windows across Main Street were filled to capacity with spectators. Following the speech the white robed people, referred to as "The Ku Klux Klan," formed a parade. The parade was led by a robed one, carrying an American flag, followed by other Klansmen, a large musical band, a float bearing an electric lighted fiery red cross, other floats and automobiles carrying Klansmen. As I recall there were no disturbances.

Newspapers of the time often printed stories about the Klan. The *Cynthiana Democrat*, dated May 24, 1923, reads, "FIERY CROSS BLAZES ON MONTICELLO HILL SATURDAY NIGHT. – Spectacle Watched By A Number Of Persons. Supposed Signal That Ku Klux Klan Is Organized." – A flaming red cross, Saturday night about nine o'clock, stood out against the sky on Monticello hill overlooking Cynthiana on the southeast and attracted the attention of a large number of people. A party of young men made their way to the spot soon after the flames were observed, but by the time they arrived the cross was about burned down. Soon after it toppled over. It was about 12 feet high."

The February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1924 *Democrat* says, "KU KLUX KLAN OBSERVED AT BURIAL FIRST TIME IN HARRISON COUNTY." – For the first time in Harrison County, so far as this paper is informed, the Ku Klux Klan participated in burial rites Saturday afternoon. When the funeral services were over, the body of R. M. Doan, at Beaver Baptist church, was concluded and as the casket was being borne to the grave, a group of thirty-one Klansmen in full regalia of hoods and gowns appeared marching up the pike. They filed into the yard in cross formation and accompanied the body to the grave, where they knelt for a few minutes. Then they arose and silently marched away. Not a word was spoken. Where the Klansmen came from is not known. It is said they came in cars and donned their robes in a barn not far from the church. Among the floral offerings was a handsome design bearing the initials K.K.K. It represented a fiery cross."

During the time that the Ku Klux Klan was active in the county there was also segregation. I do not, however, recall animosity between the black and white citizens. Our family had many good friends in the black community. I played with their children the same as with my white friends. I recall that many of the "burning of the cross" events were said not related to the Klan but by mischievous boys intending to create excitement. I realize that segregation caused many hardships for the black people. At the time I did not understand why it existed and I don't believe that others can explain or justify it.

### Editor's Suggested Reading List on Kentucky Black History:

- Wright, George C., *A History of Blacks in Kentucky* (2 vol., KY Historical Society, 1992); and, *Racial Violence in Kentucky*.
- Howard, Victor B., *Black Liberation in Kentucky: Emancipation and Freedom, 1862-1864* (U. Press of KY, 1983).
- Turner, William H., and Cabbell, Edward J., Editors, *Blacks in Appalachia* (U. Press of KY, 1985).
- Coleman, J. Winston, *Slavery Times in Kentucky* (U. North Carolina Press, 1940).
- Hotaling, Edward, *The Great Black Jockeys* (Prima Publishing, 1999).

### African Methodist Episcopal in Cynthiana, Ky.: By John M. Cromwell

*Cromwell's Comments, Cynthiana Democrat, December 22, 1938. Footnotes by George Slade.*

...Coming now to Cynthiana, we find that the Negro Methodists built a church in 1853, two years before the conference was organized in Louisville. ...[T]his building cost \$1,000.00, ...[seated] 300 people and was located on East Pleasant street. Here the congregation met for a quarter of a century. But in the early 1870's the trustees sold the old church building to the Colored United Brethren of Friendship Society for \$300.

Many who chance to read this will recall the old U. B. F. [United Brethren of Friendship] Hall. It stood on the site now occupied by the brick bungalow erected recently by J. W. "Buddy" Plummer, which is occupied at present by Mrs. Edith Button and her mother.<sup>(1)</sup> The church then purchased from W. L. Northcutt, for \$700, a plot of ground on West Pleasant street, a few hundred yards east from the new bridge which is now in process of construction. On this lot a new brick house of worship was erected, being completed in 1871. The building cost, including a good bell, was \$5,000, and a home for the pastor, adjoining, cost \$250. [Perrin]...commenting on this edifice, writing in 1882, said, "It will easily seat 500 people; it is nicely furnished, has windows of stained glass, carpeted aisles, and is giving general satisfaction." "The brick work was done by the late J. J. Parish, of our city." "The colored Methodists now have a membership of 260."

The congregation is still occupying the house of worship as above described, which is being redecorated at this time. ...Rev. Edward Arthur Simmons...kindly placed at my disposal, a handsomely bound little volume, "The Book of Redemption and of Perpetuity of the Church..." He also informed us that they contemplate the erection of a new parsonage in the near future, and that the present membership of the church is 134.

In 1857, the Colored Baptists of Cynthiana bought of W. J. Parish a lot on the bank of the river, about four hundred yards south of the railroad depot, and thereon built a small brick church, costing about \$700. In a few years the house was enlarged at an expense of \$2,500, and then had a seating capacity of 250. (2) The situation, however, was not satisfactory, as the trains passed too close to the windows. In 18[80], the property was sold to W. H. Wilson, for \$275. Certainly a very low price," says our historian, and we are inclined to agree with him. During this same year the trustees purchased of Henry Palmer, colored, for \$300, a building lot on the corner of Bridge and Church streets, present site of the church. In 1881, a new brick edifice was erected on this lot, by Ed Clark, colored, of Lexington. Our historian says here, "It is a large and spacious building, capable of seating when finished, 500 people." At that writing, 1882, the building had not been completed, but services were being held in the basement every Sunday. It is estimated that the church, when completed, will have cost about \$4,000. The membership, 300.

Interviewing the Rev. W. D. Mason, who has had charge of the Macedonian church for about sixteen years, we were informed that the congregation numbers 275, also that he has charge, in addition to his duties in Cynthiana, of a little church at Shady Nook of forty odd members. In connection with the church building is a handsome brick bungalow parsonage, located on Poplar street, between Mill and Pleasant.

No account of the Colored Baptist church in Cynthiana would be completed without mention of Elder John Johnson, its faithful Shepherd for a quarter of a century. He was a familiar figure on our streets in the seventies, esteemed alike by whites and blacks. Many who chance to read this will recall his baptismal services, held in South Licking, usually on Sunday afternoons in the presence of large crowds lining both banks of the stream. He was proud of the number of his converts, kept an accurate account of his baptisms in a little book which he carried with him, and it is our recollection that they ran well into the eight hundreds at the time of his passing.

The Ebenezer Episcopal Methodist Church, established in Cynthiana in 1892, under the administration of the Rev. J. H. Ross, who served it as pastor for two years, this little congregation of 65 members is in a flourishing condition. The building was erected in 1892 by the late A. T. Rees. It is of frame, very commodious and stands on Locust street about midway between Penn and Mill. The little congregation had a hard time financially for a number of years, but we were informed, in a recent interview, by its pastor, the Rev. E. E. Hamblen, who is entering upon his seventh year of service with the congregation, that they are now entirely out of debt... We were also informed by Bro. Hamblen that there is a body of Christians of the same persuasion located at Leesburg, who have a house of worship, with a part time preacher.<sup>(3)</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The U.B.F. Hall stood on the north side of East Pleasant Street, about midway between Church and Miller. In the early 1950s, Mr. Plumer took this house down and built a frame house. It is first house east of brick house occupied by Esther Ammerman in 2001.

<sup>2</sup> South end of the present Southern States Coop property. The 1881 church, corner of Church and Bridge, was destroyed a few years ago and is now the site of a gasloine station, next to Ken's grocery store.

<sup>3</sup> St. John Methodist Church, just west of Leesburg, no longer exists but many of its members are buried there.