

Harrison Heritage News

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www.harrisoncountyky.us/historical-society

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Last Cumulative Index: See Dec-2005. See Web site for archived newsletters.

No Halloween Tonight: Harrison County and the Spanish Influenza of 1918.

Phillip Naff

Since the eighties and particularly since 2001, Americans seem literally plagued by reports of the lethal potential of new devastating diseases: AIDS, Mad Cow Disease, the Ebola Virus, and the Bird Flu to name a few, as well as a few ancient ones like anthrax and even smallpox. Earlier generations can remember the names of other dangerous epidemics. My mother has often told me of the summer in the early 1950s that she spent many days indoors at her home in Walton, Kentucky as a little girl. That was the year of the Polio. In her mother's generation there was a similar type of scare. It was in the fall of 1918, at the end of World War I. Reports of death in far off places had become commonplace, yet you didn't have to have hindsight to realize the overall political and military condition was improving. An Allied victory seemed assured.

It was a matter of when, not if, however, just as the war on the Western Front was winding down, the war on the home front was just beginning. An attack came silently from behind the lines; the home front and Main Streets everywhere were under siege from a new enemy .

. . . the Spanish Influenza.

The First Warnings

The first outbreak of the influenza had been at present day Fort Riley, Kansas, in March 1918, but it passed quickly and few realized the seriousness of its impact. In the summer soldiers & sailors at military bases in Philadelphia and Boston suddenly came down with the new killer flu. The civilian population then contracted it as servicemen traveled across the country to and from training bases and postings overseas.

The first news of the flu situation in Harrison County came during the first week of October, when the *Democrat* and the *Log Cabin* posted public safety notices warning that "influenza, a highly infectious disease, in a severe and fatal form, is wide spread in the Atlantic Coast States, and . . . has been brought to Kentucky and, not being an officially quarantinable disease, threatens to and is likely to become a wide-spread epidemic in Kentucky unless the prompt and intelligent co-operation of the people can be secured in combating it"

There were no radios and

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President's Corner

Bob Owen

At the May meeting of the Planning and Zoning Committee, Jess Burrier's proposal to set aside a section of land that contains the suspected entrenchments led to the Committee to approve the rezoning request. This approval was with the understanding the subject section of land is made available for purchase by recognized city/county organization if funds could be found. Mr. Burrier was required to submit additional information to the P&Z and the final review/vote will be held at the June meeting of the Committee.

While these are positive results, there is still the necessity of finding necessary funding to acquire the property and funds to develop and maintain it as a park.

The Sarah Morgan Boone Chapter of the Colonial Dames XVII Century dedicated a bronze marker "in honor of the pioneer settlers" at the old Endicott Meeting House, also known as Indian Creek Church, on June 24th. All descendants and interested persons were invited to attend. [Robert Poindexter led the restoration of the historic church and cemetery about fifteen years ago. *Editor.*]

This past week, Vice-President Billy Fowler (and his able assistant, wife Sharon) and I visited the site of the A. Keller Distillery at the request of owner Mike Ammerman. Mike was concerned about the deterioration of the stone barrel warehouses and was looking for advice on how to save it. VP Fowler will call upon his prior experience with the powers in Frankfort and try to arrange for someone from the Kentucky Heritage Council's historic preservation office to visit the site and provide advice. The site is very historical and we will provide additional information in future newsletters.

Harrison County Historical Society

Bob Owen, President
Billy Fowler, Vice President
Janie Whitehead, Secretary
Dorothy Slade, Treasurer

Notes of Meeting May 18, 2006:

Business: President Bob Owen and Billy Fowler presented an update on the Burrier property. P&Z voted to send the zone change request to the city recommending it be accepted after some changes are made to the application. Lindon Smith and Burrier are to get the changes on paper and bring it back at the next P&Z meeting. If the paper work matches the verbal agreement, P&Z will then send it on. This verbal agreement provides for an option to purchase 6.8 acres that includes the entrenchments, for historic preservation.

Program: Janie Whitehead did a presentation on historical houses of Harrison County, giving a brief history of each and showing photos of the properties.

Harrison History Calendar

June 15—Historical society monthly meeting—program: Show and Tell.

June 24—Ruddel's and Martin's Station Historical Association Annual Gathering 2006 Harrison County 4 H Fairgrounds.

June 24—Endicott Church cemetery historical marker dedication at Indian Creek.

July 20—Harrison Co. Historical Society monthly mtg public library 7 pm . New by-laws, constitution and articles of incorporation will be presented and discussed.

July 28-30—Battle of Cynthiana Reenactment at Elk's Club farm, Oddville Pike. Contact: Michael Brown.

Aug 17—Historical society meeting will be held at the Handy House on Oddville Pike. The program will include a tour of the historic farmhouse.

Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum

112 S. Walnut St., Cynthiana, Ky. 41031
Hrs: 10-5 Fri-Sat
Martha Barnes, President

World War I

When editor Bill Penn told me of Phillip Naff's plans to submit an article for the newsletter relating to World War I and influenza, (My, how fortunate we are to have Bill and Phillip on board to create our newsletter and do all that they do for our community and preserving its history) I decided to write about World War I items in our museum's collection. However before perusing our collection, I already knew that the number was small. I also came to the realization that my knowledge of World War I was limited.

Remember these song lines, "Don't know much about history, don't know much biology, but I do know that I love you....." All that seems to be true - especially regarding history and World War I. I went to the trusty World Book Encyclopedia (and rest assured this retired librarian went to the hardback edition rather than the CD) to learn more. Regarding the beginnings of the war, the second paragraph states "On Sunday, June 28, 1914, crowds gathered in Sarajevo, the capital of the Austrian province of Bosnia to see heir to the throne, Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife. The Archduke and his wife were killed - the assassin was a young Bosnian student." (Haven't we heard about Bosnia and Sarajevo in more recent news reports of troublesome times?)

The shooting marked the outbreak of war - but once again according to World Book, "there were several basic causes of World War I including nationalism, military alliances, the competition for colonies, and the use of secret diplomacy....The news of the outbreak of war surprised most Americans. President Wilson had declared that the United States would be neutral. But as a measure of preparation, military training camps were set up. In June 1916, Congress increased the size of the army and the size of national defense funds....In 1917, the United States entered the war on the Allies' side after German submarines began sinking unarmed ships. American troops gave the Allies the manpower they needed to win the war. On November 11, 1918, Germany signed an armistice ending World War I."

On the lawn of the Harrison County Courthouse is a monument dedicated to Harrison Countians who served their country during World War I. In the museum are several World War I uniforms, including helmets, a G.I. mirror (Do you know for what the letters G.I. stand?), a collapsible canvas bucket or pan, and some wonderful pictures. In the watch pocket of the uniform of Harrison Countian Albert Sageser was a 1919 train ticket - a soldier heading back to his home.

Although I remain uncertain about many factors related to World War I, I know more about the continued dedication and sacrifice of Harrison Countians/Americans. Come visit the museum to learn more and to show your appreciation for these dedicated citizens who have served throughout our history.

(SPANISH INFLUENZA *Continued from page 1*)

phones were rare. The development and widespread use of broadcast television was yet another world war away. Letters to the "home folks" from the "soldier boys" "over there" were one source of news, but they could be censored. It fell to the local boards of health and word of mouth, supplemented by the newsmagazines of Harrison County, *The Cynthiana Democrat* and its Republican cousin, *The Log Cabin*, to keep the citizens of the home front informed about the war abroad, and the soldiers overseas about the folks at home.

On Monday, October 7, 1918 Cynthiana's Board of Health issued an order closing all schools, churches, places of amusement, etc., in Cynthiana until further notice. Placards with the order were issued and posted containing the following cautions:

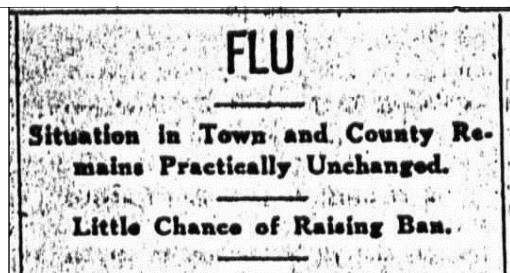
- "Keep in the open air.
- "Keep houses open.
- "Avoid crowds.
- "Don't spit on the sidewalks.
- "Cover the face with a handkerchief when you cough or sneeze.
- "Avoid all unnecessary traveling on railroad trains.
- "Avoid social visits, card parties, etc.
- "Do not burn leaves or straw in the city, as the smoke irritates the mucous membrane of the nose and throat and renders you more liable to disease."

The War Front

One of the first bits of news regarding the flu which had an impact on Harrison County was the news that "the calls for men to go to the various cantonments this month has been cancelled and no new date has been set." *The Log Cabin* of October 4, 1918 reported that "the total number of cases reported at all of the army camps up to Tuesday [October 1] was 88,000, while pneumonia cases since the epidemic began are 1,877." While the October 10th issue of the *Democrat* reported "the situation is well in hand in Cynthiana, and no serious cases of Spanish influenza are reported," it had the potential to put a serious halt to the war effort.

The *Democrat* brought the news of the deaths of the first from Harrison County to succumb to the new type of flu; they were three men already serving and training at military camps around the country. The paper reported that "Stephen Woodward, adopted son of Mr. and Mrs. Hoyle Kearns, died at Camp Logan,

(right) Newspapers posted influenza warnings.
Democrat, Nov. 28, 1918.



III. Lonnie Mullen, grandson of J.N. Mullen, died at Camp Meade, Md. Howard Cooper, son of Mr. and Mrs. W.R. Cooper, of Claysville, died at Indianapolis, Ind., where he was at the school of mechanics." Their names are but three of the twenty-one soldiers who were from Harrison County and whose deaths were attributable to the war effort. A week later notice was published that "James Cloe, formerly of Berry, died a few days ago at Camp Jefferson, Mo., from pneumonia and influenza."

The Home Front

Perhaps unlike at any other time during the war, even with the small but necessary sacrifices of "Wheatless Mondays," "Meatless Tuesdays," the rationing of basic food staples and other supplies, as well as supporting Liberty or War Bond Drives and Red Cross Drives, everyone in the county was enlisted to become a soldier in the war on this front. The training was basic, stay healthy by just staying at home. On the long list of precautions to take, that was the most effective.

The officers in the field were the doctors, led by Dr. William B. Moore (1868-1955), the county's health officer, and Dr. H. Tod Smiser, Sr. (1877-1922), city health officer for Cynthiana, and all of the county's doctors who could be mustered for the effort, if they hadn't joined the services of their country. They had at their command a lifetime of knowledge built up from experience at their command, but it often wasn't enough and they weren't immune. The October 24, 1918 *Democrat* reported the death of Dr. George William Booher (1892-1918) the previous Friday, from "influenza, with other complications." The twenty-six-year-old had volunteered for the army, but only served two months at Fort Oglethorpe, Ga. before he was released with an honorable discharge because of diabetes. He had returned two months prior to his death to fill the void left by Dr. Lawrence Newton Todd (1890-1955) when that doctor enlisted, leaving his practice behind.

Generally speaking, reports were that the soldier-citizens were fairly cooperative in following

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(SPANISH INFLUENZA *Continued from page 3*)

the guidelines set out by the boards of health. But Halloween, Thanksgiving, and other holidays and events, such as the arrival of the War Trophy Train in Cynthiana and the annual tobacco auctions were drawing nearer and anticipation of the war's end was running very high. Although the report was expected, no one knew when the first word of the armistice would come.

The October 31st *Democrat* noted that all business houses in Cynthiana were required to close at 7 p.m., with the exception of drug stores and hotels. No lights were allowed in the stores or in front of them after 7 p.m. Business men, salespeople, clerks in banks, and barbers were asked to wear masks when on duty, and most complied, even though compliance was not mandatory. The health officer encouraged that, if there was business to be transacted, there was not reason why people should not come to town, but that they should complete their business and go home as soon as possible. The *Democrat* noted that with the 7 p.m. closings "the business part of Cynthiana [was] as quiet as a cemetery." Adding to the seriousness of the effort to save peoples lives, all Halloween festivities were forbidden, the police having been ordered "to arrest any parties attempting to 'celebrate.'"

With anticipation of the war's end in early November 1918, it was hard to resist the temptation to celebrate, and so they did . . . several times! False reports brought about sudden eruptions of joy in the streets, but often prematurely. On November 11th, despite an order that the celebration of Germany's surrender would not be allowed and the streets cleared at 9 o'clock, the "crowd was not to be denied, and the streets were filled with people, while crowds of boys paraded, blowing tin horns, burning red fire and in various other ways giving vent to their enthusiasm."

Headlines in the *Democrat* and *Log Cabin* throughout the months of the influenza served as a thermometer measuring the weekly health of the county: "Influenza Situation and Harrison County Well in Hand" (Oct. 31), "Flu Situation in Cynthiana and Harrison County All to the Good" (Nov. 7), "Not Alarming is Flu Situation in Cynthiana, Though Not So Good as Last Week" (Nov. 21), "Flu Situation in Town and County Remains Unchanged" (Nov. 28). The headlines of Dec. 12 ("Ban Lifted Partially at Cynthiana Following Improvement in Flu Situation") and Dec. 19 ("On the Wane is the Flu in Cynthiana and Harrison County") marked the be-

ginning of the end.

No single newspaper article ever listed all of those who were ill with the flu or who had died from it, partly due to the seemingly poor reporting from the rural parts of the county. If you read the obituary columns, however, you could see the toll pretty clearly; the November 29th issue of *The Log Cabin* featured a three-column obituary section on the front page. Of the fourteen deaths listed, seven were attributed to bouts with the flu and the resulting pneumonia.

By the end of January, 1919, despite a spike in the number of infections and deaths that month from the month before, the epidemic was largely considered to be over, *The Log Cabin* reporting in the first week of February that "the flu appears to be very much in decline in town this week" and that "most of the cases are in a mild form."

Final Death Toll in the County

An examination of death certificates for all of those who died in Harrison County in September, 1918 revealed no cases of the influenza had proven fatal to that point. Beginning with the first week in October the mortality rate began to rise. The following lists were derived from an examination of death certificates and record the names of those whose deaths were directly caused by influenza or where influenza was a contributing factor: October 1918 -12 deaths; November 1918—15 deaths; December 1918—6 deaths; January 1919—15 deaths. (The full list of flu victims will be available at the WWI pages under "History" at www.harrisoncountyky.us.)

Deaths attributable to the influenza continued into February and subsequent months. When it was all over, Harrison County had actually lost more of its citizens to the flu than soldiers to the war effort. So the next time you pass by a tombstone with a death date of 1918, think not only of the possibility that you are looking at the grave of a WWI veteran, but perhaps that of a veteran of the war on the home front, when

Harrison County's citizens became unwitting soldiers in the fight against the Spanish Influenza of 1918.



(left) Misses Florence Elmore and Edith Stone of Berry, Ky., holding the issue of *The Cincinnati Enquirer* that announces the end of World War I. ("It was a happy time.") Harrison County Historical Society.

KENTUCKY'S COVERED BRIDGES SUBJECT OF BOOK PROJECT

Bill Penn

Melissa Jurgensen is co-authoring a new book on Kentucky's covered bridges. She recently contacted our historical society president, Bob Owen, with a description of the book project and a request for information on Harrison County's bridges:

"The book will contain photos and information about the thirteen bridges that still remain in the state, as well as many RARE photos of bridges that are no longer standing. A comprehensive book of this kind has never been before been written about the covered bridges of Kentucky and in my opinion, is long overdue. I, personally, have been researching Kentucky's covered bridges for about 15 years. I wanted to ask if the society would be interested in mentioning it in an upcoming newsletter in case there were any members who had photographs they might like to share or other personal stories/ remembrances about the bridges that once stood in the county."

If anyone has photos or other information about Harrison County's covered bridges, please contact Melissa Jurgensen at Melissa@melissajurgensen.com. Besides the Cynthiana covered bridge, I have seen photos of the Claysville and Lair covered bridges, and I believe there are photos of a little covered bridge over Gray's Run just south of Cynthiana (where Sheeley's ghost was last seen). It seems like George Slade said there was a covered bridge over Indian Creek north of town, where he once lived. The Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum probably has the most complete Harrison County photo collection, either on display or in publications on Harrison County history.

ARTICLE BY HARRISON HERITAGE NEWS EDITOR IN NORTHERN KENTUCKY HERITAGE

"Lurking Rebels: Civilian Arrests in Harrison County During the Civil War" by William A. Penn, was recently reprinted in the Northern Kentucky Heritage quarterly magazine of regional history and genealogy of Northern Kentucky, issue Vol. XIII, No. 2 (Spring-Summer 2006). This article was first printed in the Harrison County Historical Society newsletter Vol. 5 No. 9, September 2004. Copies should be available at the Cynthiana-Harrison County Public Library and the Museum. The source of the original article was Penn's *Rattling Spurs and Broad-Brimmed Hats* (1995).

FRIENDS OF GRIFFITH WOODS

The Friends of Griffith Woods has been formed as a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to bring together the vision and funding needed to ensure a beautiful future for the 746-acre savanna woodland and its 19th century buildings, and to help it become a vibrant community centerpiece for the Cynthiana area. The Griffith Woods property, also known as Silver Lake Farm, is co-owned and jointly managed by the University of Kentucky, The Nature Conservancy, and the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission. The Friends expect to greatly enhance the overall effort by increasing local involvement, educational experiences and raising funds.

Melinda Boyer is President of the Friends of Griffith Woods; she can be reached at 319-2910. The organization is quite young and has not, at this date, set membership dues. The group usually meets every few weeks, usually on Tuesday evenings in Cynthiana. Anyone who would like to receive announcements of meetings and other information can contact Pamla Wood at pamlaw@iglou.com or 859-351-3142 (a Lexington cell number). (Submitted by Pamla Wood).