
Bits and Pieces

of Hardin County History

A PUBLICATION OF HARDIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

VOL XXIII NO. 1

MARY JO JONES, EDITOR

SPRING 2004

HARDIN COUNTY CYCLONE OF 1890

There has been much in the newspapers recently about the disastrous tornadoes of April 3, 1974. A tornado, probably second only in intensity to the one which struck Hardin County on that date, occurred on March 27, 1890.

It had been a fair day, with just a chance of rain. There had been a prediction via telegraph that there was the possibility of a violent storm, but that news had not reached residents in the rural areas of the county. As night fell, the weather changed. The rain fell, and the wind blew.

A tornado which developed left a track of desolation over fifteen miles long. Houses, barns, fences and trees were swept away in its path like feathers. Happy homes, where the families were gathered around the hearthstone, unconscious of danger, were in a moment torn from their foundations and scattered in fragments along its track. Residents were, in a number of cases, killed by the tumbling walls, or badly hurt as they fled for their lives out into the darkness and rain.

According to the local newspaper, from Dan Shipley's, on Rough Creek, to Bill

Hayden's, on the L. & N. Pike, the course of the storm was marked by a complete destruction of everything in its path. Mr. Shipley's house and barn, together with all his out-buildings, were swept away, and his loss was complete.

Ves Persell's barn was totally destroyed. Isaac Richardson's barn and a part of his house were torn away. Widow Richardson's house and all out-buildings were completely demolished, and she was left in almost a destitute condition.

At Perryville, a settlement with twenty cabins of industrious and deserving black people, some of the houses were demolished, carried in detached portions for miles and the people left homeless. The Colored Methodist church was completely destroyed.

Ridge Spring Methodist Church, comparatively new and one of the best churches in the county, was a complete ruin.

The two-story brick country residence of George W. Taber, described as "elegant," built by Luther Nall at a cost of \$4,800, together with all the barns and out-

buildings, was a mass of ruins, not a wall standing. His furniture was destroyed. The escape of Mr. Taber and his family without serious injuries was miraculous.

The tenant house occupied by Isaac Klinglesmith was destroyed.

The one-story brick house of Mace Pawley was completely demolished and nearly all the occupants of the house were left dead or dying. The list of the killed included Mace Pawley and his little grandchild and Robert Enlow, who was an overnight guest. None of them was killed outright, but died shortly afterwards. Mrs. Hutcherson, a married daughter of Mr. Pawley, was badly hurt, and Marion Thomas was severely bruised.

Bill Hayden's house, on the pike, was lifted from the ground, and the occupants barely escaped with their lives. Hayden's son was badly hurt, and his injuries required the amputation of one of his legs.

Besides these there were a great many lesser damages reported. Roofs were

blown from many houses. There was almost a complete destruction of fencing and a great loss of stock. The damages in the county were roughly estimated to be at least \$25,000. Need was great among many of the sufferers, and considerable distress was reported at several points in the county. A collection was taken up in Elizabethtown at a union meeting at the Presbyterian church, and a private subscription was raised. In all about \$200 was subscribed as a relief fund from Elizabethtown. The County Judge at that time had authority to add as much as \$100, if necessary.

In Louisville one hundred people lost their lives, and 200 were injured. Six hundred buildings, in all, were demolished, among them five churches, 10 tobacco warehouses, and 532 private homes. Estimated property damage there was \$2.15 million, in 1890 dollars.

It was reported that, as the city of Louisville set to work picking up the pieces, an enterprising company ran sightseeing excursions through the devastated area.

(Source: *The Elizabethtown News*, April 4, 1890; *The Courier-Journal*, Louisville, April 3, 2004.

KENTUCKY GOVERNOR KEEN JOHNSON IN HARDIN COUNTY



Keen Johnson

The fact that John L. Helm and John Young Brown were governors of Kentucky with roots in Hardin County is well known. However, it is sometimes overlooked that other governors of the Commonwealth had some connection with the county. For instance, J. Proctor Knott for a time taught school at Big Spring. Keen Johnson once lived in Vine Grove, and he also for a time owned and published a newspaper in Elizabethtown.

Johnson's father, Rev. Robert Johnson, was a Methodist minister. Keen was born in Lyon County in 1896, undoubtedly while his father was pastor of a church there. About 1900 the Rev. Johnson was sent to Hardin County as pastor of a circuit which included Howell's Methodist Church, Ridge Spring Methodist Church, Vine Grove Methodist Church, and probably one other. The Rev. Johnson was also assigned to the Vine Grove church from 1911 to 1913. The Johnsons must have liked Vine Grove, as from the time of his

retirement in 1922 until his death (almost half his career), he made his home in Vine Grove, first as a Supernumerary of the Conference and then as Conference Evangelist. Rev. and Mrs. Johnson are buried in the Vine Grove Cemetery.

Keen Johnson undoubtedly attended several public schools as his family moved about. Following graduation from high school at Valley Station, he attended several institutions of learning before entering the Army during World War I. Following overseas service as a first lieutenant, Keen Johnson returned to Hardin County. He purchased *The Mirror*, an Elizabethtown weekly newspaper, from Milton Yates and immediately took over its publication. According to H. A. Sommers, who was editor of a competing newspaper, *The Elizabethtown News*, Johnson improved *The Mirror* in some ways and very largely increased its business.

Early in 1921, Johnson chose to avail himself of the opportunity to further his education by taking advantage of the vocational educational training act for the benefit of ex-servicemen. He sold *The Mirror* to a newly-formed corporation headed by H. A. Sommers for \$5,000, and its publication was suspended February 6, 1921. Its subscriptions were honored by *The Elizabethtown News*.

Johnson completed a course in journalism at the University of Kentucky, from which he was graduated in 1922. His first love apparently always was newspapering, because, following his graduation, he purchased a weekly in Lawrenceburg. In 1925 he purchased a part interest in the *Richmond Daily Register* and became co-publisher, a position he retained until his death.

Johnson served as governor of Kentucky from 1939 until 1943. He proved to be a frugal governor who paid off the state debt and left \$10 million in surplus. He died February 7, 1970.

M. J. J.

(Sources: Files of *The Elizabethtown News*; *Minutes of the Louisville Conference*, 1922, 1933; Interview with Dr. Richard Weiss, Archivist, Kentucky Wesleyan College; Vine Grove Cemetery records.)

KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL

There is on display at the Hardin County History Museum a silver bowl inscribed “1972 America Beautiful Award - Hardin County Kentucky” which was received by the county as the first-place award in a national “Keep America Beautiful” program.

According to a local newspaper, the summer of 1973 will be remembered by local residents as the period when area attention was focused on the massive removal of abandoned junk cars in Hardin County.

It all began as a project of the Hardin County Environmental Council with William C. Schaffrick as chairman. The council had been contacted by the State Department of Natural Resources for assistance in instituting and implementing this program. The department, in turn, agreed to cooperate in this phase of cleaning up and beautifying Hardin County. It represented a golden opportunity to remove eyesores at no expense to local residents. Consequently, the council contacted Standard Metals in Junction City, Ky., and asked them to bring their compressors to locations where people would have brought abandoned cars.

An organizational meeting was held with representatives from all of the towns in the county, Hardin County auto dealers, and representatives from Fort Knox and the local Chamber of Commerce. General Donn A. Starry of Fort Knox agreed to furnish two wreckers and two “lowboys” to pick up abandoned automobiles and take them to a central location for the compressors. Pick-up assistance was also volunteered by local auto dealers.

Forms were printed in local newspapers and were also made available to everyone at the Elizabethtown-Hardin County Chamber of Commerce in Elizabethtown. Persons with one or more abandoned cars were asked to pick up and fill out a form for each car, and the completed forms were processed through the offices of County Judge R. R. Thomas and Elizabethtown Mayor James R. Pritchard. The response was overwhelming.

As a result, 615 abandoned cars were picked up throughout the county, 325 of these from one local junk dealer. An additional 150 forms were turned over to Denis Wrecking Company in Radcliff, which continued to pick up until all cars were removed.

M. J. J.

(Source: *Hardin County Enterprise*, Elizabethtown, Nov. 5, 1973.)

MOTHER'S STORY

EDITOR'S NOTE: My mother, Susan Margaret Settle (who married Edmund Richerson), was born in Elizabethtown in 1900 and spent her entire life there. She died in 1997. After her death, I found among her papers the story of the early years of her life. I feel it is local history, and I want to share it with others. She wrote:

On August 7, 1900 I made my entry into this world at about 4 AM with Dr. J. W. O'Connor in attendance. My mother said she had quite a hard time but survived the ordeal almost 55 years and two daughters later.

I was born at what would have been numbered 219 West Dixie, had the houses been listed as they are today. My parents moved from the cottage next door where they had started housekeeping after several months at the Lion Hotel where they boarded.

Next door to us lived Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Dyer and their two daughters, Florence (Stuart) and Bess (Alvey). I have no recollection of this time in my life. Mamma told me many times that I was very fond of Mr. Dyer, much to the disgust of my father.

Sometime in 1902 we moved to 209 South Miles Street into a house my parents had purchased. At 207 was a cottage also bought by my father with a "lane" fenced by a picket fence on both sides between the two properties. This lane led to our barn situated at the back of the lot. Alongside this driveway, on our side, was a large shed of two rooms, one for coal and the other for kindling to be used for fuel during the winter and cooking during the entire year. There was an outlet and sink for water in the kitchen with a hydrant near the back porch and in the front yard. A deep well was about half way to the barn near the lane, but I do not remember that we used the water except for the horse, cow, chickens and garden, as city water had been piped to our street.

Almost opposite the well but entirely across the garden at the end of the grape arbor was the necessary small out house, later moved to the extreme back of the lot. At the southwest corner of the kitchen was a detached smoke house, very necessary because hogs were killed at the farm and brought in to be processed and cured with lard, sausage, scrapple and souse made. The lard was rendered in a large black iron kettle over a fire outdoors in the back yard and attended by Abe Helm, Crip Strickler, Charley Callaway or some other black man thoroughly trained in this art. Meat for the sausage was ground in the kitchen by Mamma with the help of Aunt Mimmie Callaway, Ida Gaither, or some other black woman. I have sat for many hours on one end of the plank onto which the sausage grinder was clamped so that it would not move off the chairs when in use.

The ground meat was seasoned, fried and put into large stone jars and covered with grease to be taken out and recooked during the ensuing months. The hams and shoulders were cured by being smoked with burning hickory wood in the smoke house. All this took several days of extremely hard work.

The house at 209 South Miles had seven rooms with a large pantry and two halls, the hall downstairs running the length of the house from the front to the long back porch. There were three stairways, one in the front hall making accessible two rooms upstairs; another winding stairway from the dining room to the room above, which had no door to any other room,

and a stairway from the back porch leading to a hall and room over the kitchen. It was said that the kitchen and room above were originally detached and later joined to the larger house. The house was heated by two grates and two stoves, one the cooking stove in the kitchen. The upstairs rooms had no winter heat.

Dad always had a big garden which he tended himself. He never had the ground plowed—it was “forked up” in the spring by some black man employed for that purpose. On the place were several plum trees, raspberry and gooseberry vines and a large arbor of several varieties of grapes. In the early spring we would put paper bags on many of the green bunches to protect them from insects and the burning sun. Mamma never worked in the garden but tended her many flower beds and pots. She had a real “green thumb.” We had a large ginkgo tree in our yard which was sent to Dad by J. C. W. Beckham. Mamma rooted cuttings from that and when they were small trees moved them and put them out in my yard on Elizabeth Street which are now huge trees.

Dad always looked after the horse, did the milking, gathered eggs and fed the chickens. Our only vehicle, before an automobile, was a buggy. Only one time did I drive alone. That was once when I rode to town with Dad for him to go to work and I drove the rig back home. Mamma one time took us in that buggy and drove “Old Jake” to Grandma’s house at Vertrees. She and all three of us kids were very nervous the whole trip there and back.

Our chickens were barred Plymouth rocks. One rooster was very belligerent and caused me to run and climb on the fence many times.

In the very early years on Miles Street, Dad had a bird dog which roamed the grounds with a long chain on which was a block of wood so if he jumped the paling fence he could not get

(To be continued)

away. Finally this dog was stolen and it was many years before we had another dog. This second dog was a small white poodle named Tad given to us girls one Christmas by Uncle Bob Holbert. Tad was run over by a grocery wagon and killed when only a few months old. Years later a small black and white terrier was given to Mary Belle by the Jenkins family who lived down the street. This dog, Jenks, lived to be 21 years old despite the fact that he roamed all about town and often rode on the running board of our car.

The first thing I can recall with certainty is the birth of my second sister, Mary Belle, who was born on August 25, 1906 in the early morning hours. I do not remember anything about the birth of sister Elizabeth Holbert Settle, who arrived August 8, 1902. Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Nall lived in our cottage, and I remember going to the end of the porch to call to them that I had a new sister, Mary Belle.

Our playmates were children of the neighborhood, including the Faurests, Jenkinsons, Morrisons, and the Robertsons who came over from what is now called the Dixie. At one time the Browns lived in our cottage with two children, one of whom, Otto, was drowned in Valley Creek when he fell off a log over the swollen stream. Another family who lived in the same house later was the Howells with several children. After the first month of their marriage, Uncle George [Holbert] and Aunt Josephine lived in this cottage, and Howard was born there. When the John Goodin family moved to Elizabethtown, they lived at 211 South Miles. Mary John was very young at this time and I remember my sister Elizabeth feeding her mud after telling her it was chocolate.

After we started to school, our circle of friends widened.
