Harrison Heritage News

Published monthly by Harrison County Historical Society, PO Box 411, Cynthiana, KY, 41031

Oct. 2002

Vol. 3 No. 10

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History Notes

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MATTIE DEE TODD: Cynthiana Postmaster

Dr. George Rogers Clark Todd (brother of Mary Todd Lincoln) – was born in Lexington, Ky., in 1825. His mother died the day following his birth. In 1850 he graduated from the medical department of Transylvania University at Lexington, and came to Cynthiana, Ky., to practice medicine. The *Cynthiana News* of January 1, 1852, lists as a physician, Dr. Geo. R. C. Todd – Office in Chas. Anderson's Store – to be found at night at the residence of Jas. R. Curry. Esq.

It was probably while living at Major Curry's home that he met and married Anna, the Major's daughter. An item in the November 14, 1851, *Cynthiana News* reads, "Dr. Todd and lady have returned from their visit to Niagara." Records show that they were married October 22, 1851 at the home of the bride's father.

To this marriage was born, September 19, 1853, a daughter, Mattie Dee. Soon afterwards, Anna divorced the doctor on the grounds of cruelty and he left this area, showing up later as a surgeon in the "Army of the Confederacy." He remarried and died in North Carolina, where is buried.

Mattie Dee grew to adulthood in Cynthiana but was never married. She was described as "a woman of fine education, of much culture and of marked business abilities." December 13, 1878, she became Cynthiana's first woman postmaster (or postmistress) John M. Cromwell, in his August 2, 1928 column in the *Cynthiana Democrat*, states, "Miss Mattie Dee Todd, who although of the Democratic antecedents, was appointed to the office by a Republican President, through the influence of her cousin, Robert Lincoln," he further states that when Miss Todd was appointed postmaster the post office was located on the north side of Pike Street, where Gus Palas' restaurant was located at the time. (Smith Insurance 2002). In 1879 Mattie Dee bought a lot on the south side of Pike Street, two doors west of the Opera House, had a new building erected and moved the post office to that location. (Farmer's National Bank Small Loan 2002. The P.O. remained here until 1914 when it was moved to Walnut Street.) Miss Todd held the office until March 1, 1895, a total of 16 years, when she was replaced by another woman postmaster, Bettie S. Moore. Ms. Moore was the last woman postmaster until Jackie Hill, who was appointed to the position January 27, 2001.

Miss Todd owned a number of real estate properties in Cynthiana. Her invalid aunt, Eliza McIntosh, who resided with Mattie Dee for a number of years, deeded some of these to her. I have not determined the location of Mattie Dee's place of residence in Cynthiana but I believe that that it was on the north side of Pike Street, between the railroad and Church Street. Her obituary states that she "died at her home in this city Tuesday morning, January 12, 1909.
A tombstone in Battle Grove Cemetery is engraved:

TODD
MATTIE D. TODD
SEPT. 19,1858 – JAN. 12, 1909
ANNA H. TODD
BORN DEC. 22, 1828
AGED 75 YEARS

The backside of this tombstone can be seen from Pike Street. (Note: An error was made in carving the stone. Battle Grove Cemetery records show that she was 56 years of age at the time of her death in 1909. Dr. Todd left these parts about 1857-58).

Historical Society Minutes

Jane Adams Whitehead

The Harrison County Historical Society met at the Cynthiana library on Thursday, September 19, 2002. Business meeting included the reading of the minutes from the prior meeting and the treasurer's report. Larry Moss, president, presided over the meeting.

There was discussion concerning the need for an adequate public address system at the library meeting room. Neville Haley will check into this and report back at a later meeting.

The main speaker, Charlie Tribble, made an entertaining and informative presentation on his World War Two adventures. Mr. Tribble also writes a weekly column in the Cynthiana Democrat on Harrison Countians in World War Two.

The next meeting of the Historical Society will be October 17th, and the speaker will be Mr. Billy Grayson, who is superintendent of the Battle Grove Cemetery. He will discuss the history of this cemetery, which was established in 1868 on land formerly owned by Henry Williams. This was also the site of the June 12, 1864, Second Battle of Cynthiana between General John Hunt Morgan and General Steven Burbridge. Mr. Grayson will no doubt tell about the Confederate Memorial and plans for a Union Civil War memorial.

Next Meeting of the Harrison County Historical Society will be October 17th, Thursday, 7 p.m., Cynthiana public library. Speaker will be Billy Grayson, who will discuss the history of Battle Grove Cemetery. Be sure to attend this informative meeting.

Harrison County, KY on the Web:

- www.cynthianaky.com *(click on "Historical Society" for Harrison Heritage News)*
- www.battleofcynthiana.org

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Cynthiana -Harrison County Museum

Martha Barnes

Sylvandell Post Office

The Sylvandell (or Sylvan Dell) community is in the eastern part of Harrison County and northeast of Cynthiana. The word Sylvandell means wooded valley. The old Sylvandell store was located near the banks of Beaver Creek at the crossroads of Salem, Buena Vista, Mouth of Cedar, and Judy Ridge Roads. The only known operators of the store in the early 1900's were John Kennedy and Everett Hickman. Everett clerked in the store and was also the postmaster. John did the hauling.

The Robert E. Florence family lived on Beaver Creek and around a few curves down stream from Sylvandell. Ezra Florence (Dorothy Slade's father) remembered selling rabbits at the store. He also remembers when his dad would send him to the store to get the mail. When a visitor comes in the museum door, one of the first things he sees is the Sylvandell Post Office.

The post office was rescued by Vinson Palmer from an old garage building which was about to be demolished. This building was near the site of the old store, but even closer to Beaver Creek. Therefore, the old post office was caked with Beaver mud from high water times and had begun to decay. One glass was broken and most of the pigeon hole numbers had faded away. The top was oil soaked from stored oil cans. Mr. Palmer brought the old post office to the museum during its first year of operation. Restoration was delayed, but faithfully and expertly completed in November, 1997 by Harold Slade.

Truly, it is a special Harrison County relic so typical of the post offices that were scattered throughout the county's country stores. Old postcards are displayed in some of the pigeon holes. Mr. Palmer gave the museum four postcards which were mailed to Amanda Palmer and Edgar Palmer, Sylvandell P.O. The 1910 cards have one cent stamps, the 1903 card has two cents postage.(Did postage ever decrease?) Also on display are several photographs of the Florence family who were faithful customers of the old Sylvandell store as well as a picture of the store with patrons standing out front. Jack and Nora McCauley contributed to the Sylvandell display a hand fan with the following advertising - "Kennedy and Hickman Store, Sylvan Dell, Kentucky, Dealer in General Merchandise, Wrigley's Spearmint Pepsin Gum."

The Cynthiana-Harrison County Museum and its annex are open on Fridays and Saturdays, 10 A.M. - 5 P.M. We continue our search for volunteers, model builders, and old photographs.

859.234-1053, 234-5835, 234-3147.

Black Soldiers from Harrison County in the Civil War

William A. Penn

Although Lincoln authorized the use of African American troops in December 1862, the president did not permit recruiting within Kentucky's borders until 1864. By August 1862 Union soldiers were using slaves for military labor. The local Harrison County commander issued orders in early September 1862 for the impressment of about 150 slaves from owners considered "secesh" to build fortifications at Camp Frazer. By late October Federal troops had even seized slaves of Union supporters for military labor. When Union soldiers left the county in 1862 during the Confederate invasion of Kentucky, they took many blacks along, leaving displeased slaveowners complaining about non-compensation.[1] A notice appeared in the Paris *Western Citizen* on October 30 that ordered all free Negro men between the ages of fifteen and fifty in Bourbon County to report to the teamsters at Camp Nelson. Those refusing faced the threat of impressment to work on military fortifications and railroads. Most likely, similar notices appeared in public places around Harrison County.[2]

Many slaves left their homes, but a few remained for various reasons. The Lafferty family recalled that, "after the first two years [of the war] had passed, slaves did very much as they pleased; some left and joined the Union army, while others came and left as they chose." However, their only slave, Will Johnson, stayed with the family as he promised he would after John Lafferty joined the Confederate army. "Federal soldiers and slaves also urged him to leave and many inducements were held out to him, but he remained at his post."[3]

By 1864, many other Harrison County blacks, feeling no allegiance to their "post," ran away after the announcement of a series of new laws and military orders which allowed their enlistment. On April 18, 1864, General Stephen Gano Burbridge issued General Orders No. 34, following War Department orders which permitted for the first time the recruitment of blacks in Kentucky, but only if their owners consented. These soldiers became free persons upon enlisting, and a later provision freed their families too. Despite general hostility to these orders, including protests of the governor and numerous attacks on slaves attempting to join the Union army, 25,438 black Kentuckians between the ages of twenty and forty-five joined by the end of the war, with most recruited in 1864.[4]

Even though many blacks volunteered, others were apparently taken without their consent, usually to meet recruitment quotas. In time, blacks could join without the approval of their owners and enlistments increased. By July 4, 1864, Federal recruiters assembled a regiment in Louisville, the destination of most of the first Kentucky black recruits. Central Kentucky blacks also traveled to Camp Nelson in Jessamine County, but many others sought the safety of Kentucky's northern border, such as the volunteers from Harrison County who enlisted in Covington.[5]

On March 15, 1864, Provost Marshal Colonel Berry wrote to Major W. H. Sidell, Assistant Provost Marshal for Kentucky in Louisville: "Although in several portions of my district opposition to the enrollment is threatened...in several other parts, my Deputies inform me that the blacks are anxious to enlist."[6] On June 20, 1864, William K. Griffith, whose home Silver Lake was on the Leesburg Pike at Broadwell, personally enlisted his twenty-three year old slave, Harrison Griffith, in the Union army at the sixth district provost marshal headquarters in Covington. Although William Griffith condoned the enlistment of this slave, in July 1864 he requested the 6th district provost marshal to return two Negro children whom he believed Union soldiers "induced" to go to Covington. Harrison later wrote letters from his camp near Nashville to Mr. Griffith inquiring about the welfare of the family he had left behind.[7]

With the presence of Union soldiers in Harrison County during much of the war and the gradual disintegration of slavery at hand, owners had limited control over their slaves. Slaveowners were subject to arrest if they discouraged or punished blacks attempting to enlist in the Union army. Two Harrison County men, Felix Ashbrook and I. T. Martin, risked arrest when they allegedly prevented their slaves from enlisting in 1864 and Ashbrook had his slave whipped.[8] Some owners talked their runaway slaves into returning. Thirteen slaves, including George Conrad and his father, ran away to the Cynthiana recruiting office in 1864, but one slave returned to help with the crops after his owner appealed to him. Of those who enlisted, only the elder Conrad returned home after the war. A Paris slaveowner who had six slaves escape to Cynthiana persuaded one of them to return, "apparently to assure food for his family."[9]

[*Continued on page 4*]

[*Black Soldiers from Harrison County, continued from page 3*]

Some Harrison County slaveowners could foresee slavery's eventual end. On July 6, 1864, a few weeks after Morgan's second Cynthiana raid, F. C. Smith wrote to his son that seventy-five slaves had left their owners, this number probably including men, women and children: "There has been and still is a great stampede going on amongst the Negroes. They start and go when they please and it is treason to say to them stop and think. Ours seem satisfied but I look out every morning expecting to find them all gone, your Mother getting breakfast - a thing, by the way, she never did all her life. Whilst they stay I will be boss. If they want their freedom, they must leave. I treat them kindly and right and will do so as they stay but freedom is a sweet sound in their ears and my opinion is that they will go."[10]

At least twenty-eight Harrison County black men joined the 117th United States Colored Infantry, and were mustered in July 13, 1864, at Covington, Kentucky. A few others joined the 118th U. S. Colored Infantry, also probably in Covington.[11] Thomas Hinkson of Shawhan Station, Bourbon County (also a Harrison County property owner), had a slave named Richard who enlisted in the 117th Regiment at Covington on August 6, 1864.[12]

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1. Eliza Jean Desha to Lucius Desha, September 2, 5, 23, October 28, 1862, Desha Papers. Division of Special Collections and Archives, Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky (hereafter cited Desha Papers - UK) The papers include Lucius Desha's diary, with no page numbers or entry dates, and thirty-one family letters; Impressed slaves performed most of the Union military labor in Kentucky, according to Marion B. Lucas, *A History of Blacks In Kentucky*, (Kentucky Historical Society, 1992), 1:148-151.
2. H. E. Everman, *The History of Bourbon County* 1785-1865, (Paris, Ky., 1977), 108.
3. Lafferty, "Civil War Reminiscences," 27.
4. Victor B. Howard, *Black Liberation in Kentucky*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983), chapters five and six.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Stuart Seely Sprague, "Slavery's Death Knell: Mourners and Revelers," *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, 65 (October, 1991), 452-453.
7. Harrison Griffith to William K. Griffith, January 8, 1865 (entire letter is quoted in chapter ten); Robert Jones to Capt. E. H. Samuel, July 26, 1864; Enlistment papers dated June 20, 1864 (photocopies); William Griffith Papers, Division of Special Collections and Archives, Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky.
8. *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, June 18, 1864. No arrest record was found.
9. Lucas, *A History of Blacks In Kentucky*, I:155, 157.
10. Francis Chinn Smith, "Battle of Cynthiana, Ky., June 1864," *Register* 50 (1952) 80-83. Smith lived in Harrison County near the Bourbon line on the Russell Cave Road on Silas Creek.
11. *Adjutant General - Union*, 1:77-92, lists the unit rosters. Soldiers from Harrison County were identified by using 1890 and 1910 census records; Feix, "Harrison County Civil War Soldiers."
12. "Claim for Compensation for Enlisted Slave," Thomas Hinkson papers, property of Bill Hinkson, Georgetown, Kentucky.

[Note: This article was originally published in : Penn, William A., *Rattling Spurs and Broad-Brimmed Hats*, (Midway, Ky., 1995), pp. 9-11.]

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.

- *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 contains about 3,500 names and a reference city street map. 30 pp. Paperback. $3.00

NEW -This Old House by Katherine Wilson. Now back in print, this book tells the stories of twenty-six early Harrison Co. houses and the families who have occupied them. Much material on Harrison Co. history. Exterior and interior b & w photos of each house. Originally printed 1956-1957. 70 pp., new index, paperback. $15.00

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.
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