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401 Morgan Avenue, Harriman



# Newsletter

June 2021

*Custodians of the Past. Stewards for the Future*



## The Decade of Challenges That Became Opportunities

The decade of 2010 significantly centered around Covenant's Roane Medical Center pulling out of Historic downtown Harriman. We knew it was coming – **LOTS** of empty buildings. It didn't mean just storefronts, but *empty buildings*. The "public" side of Roane Medical was the emergency room, radiology, surgery, cafeteria, and hospital beds. Those were all contained in the hospital's multi-story wing and original two-story structure, and we knew they would become empty. The "administrative" side of Roane Medical however overflowed into all levels in several buildings on Devonia Street and the 400 block of Roane, not to mention the doctor's offices along the same streets. **Empty. All Empty.**



*Nearly every structure in the West side of 400 block of Roane was owned by the Roane Medical Center, and was vacated along with several other properties on surrounding blocks with the move of the hospital and offices to Midtown.*

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## Plans Begin for 2021 Hauntings of Harriman & Christmas Tour of Homes

It's not too soon to start thinking of shorter days and cooler nights. Besides Friday Night Football and UT Weekends, it means the time for the **Hauntings of historic Harriman** on October 15<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> and **CHRISTMAS TOUR OF HOMES** on December 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup>. This year's Hauntings Tour Chairs are Aaron & Beth Johnson with assistance by Heidi Barton (as they did so well last year!), and the Home Tour Chair is Donna Demyanovich who has been involved in several home tours over the years and is well suited to lead this year's tour. CHHCO is priveledged to have so many talented leaders willing to volunteer their time!

Please contact any of these individuals, or email [cornstalk\\_heights@yahoo.com](mailto:cornstalk_heights@yahoo.com), if you would like to volunteer for either of the these tours in any way, or are considering placing your home on tour. This year people are interested in getting out more than ever!

**CHHCO** Cornstalk Heights Historical Community Organization  
www.CornstalkHeights.org

present's

## Hauntings of Historic Harriman

October 15-16, 2021

Visit us on Facebook @HarrimanCHHCO

Tours depart from the Harriman Carnegie Library @ 601 Walden Ave. in downtown Harriman, TN

Tours start at 7:30 and leave every 15 minutes. Last tour departs at 10pm

\*\* This is a walking tour and due to the nature of the stories it is not recommended for children under the age of 10. No Rain Date. Tours are Rain or Shine.

## Christmas Tour of Homes

December 11 & 12, 2021

This is a self guided walking tour... Contact Gilliana Braxton @ 865-598-3228 for more information.

Visit us Online @ [www.cornstalkheights.org](http://www.cornstalkheights.org)

## **A Decade of Challenges/Opportunities**

Deserted downtown streets nearly always is the “kiss of death” to a small town. Fortunately newly elected Mayor Chris Mason guided the City Council to enact several initiatives to reverse to downward spiral and lift Harriman up by the bootstraps. Here’s just a few of the challenges that the city dealt with at the time:

- In developing a new Roane Medical Center complex, Covenant Health was encouraged to build within the city limits.
- Part of the relocation process included “gifting” the hospital properties back to the City of Harriman who owned them prior to Covenant’s buyout – with the exception of the Roane Medical Complex at the corner of Roane and Walden (now the City Office Complex).
- A disaster that was not mentioned in last month’s Newsletter was the Kingston Steam Plant ash spill in December 2008. This weighed heavily on Roane County as the toxic environmental cleanup began and the public perception on quality of life “tanked” including within the City of Harriman.
- Harriman’s municipal properties are deteriorating and need significant funds to renovate or replace. Examples are the Temperance Building at Roane & Walden, City Office Complex at 609 N. Roane, HUB offices in the 300 block of N. Roane, Police Dept at 130 Pansy Hill Road and the Street Department and HUB warehouse in the floodplain of Paper Maker Ballfield area.

Yet in each instance, the City of Harriman positioned themselves for opportunity:

- The Midtown development was already planned, and a regional hospital was not part of that plan. Therefore when Covenant Health procured the property it now sits on, the development of Harriman was expanded to include it. It’s not a huge increase in Harriman’s footprint, but it is nevertheless annexation of a quality facility with services and businesses serving the community.
- There were a total of 15 properties turned over to the City by Covenant. However the City prepared for this by utilizing the Harriman

Industrial Development Board (IDB) to oversee the sale of these properties back into private ownership with the following 3 priorities:

- Place properties back on tax roles
  - Support businesses that have a plan
  - Draw people downtown for commerce and entertainment
- The IDB established and marketed what was referred to as “Proposition 14,” reflective of the number of properties to be placed back in private hands (the first hospital property was sold to Mountains to Lakes Realty before the marketing of remaining properties by IDB, and therefore numbered 14 opposed to 15). The properties were advertised from East Tennessee to Nashville. Several prospective investors came to Harriman to consider proposing business ventures in these structures, but ultimately it was the local residents who invested in these properties, essentially creating collaboratives between public backing and local private investment.
  - TVA public relations wanted to repair the economic damage to the surrounding municipalities caused by the 2008 ash spill, and Harriman leveraged those TVA grants to further the downtown redevelopment. Partnering with Roane State Community College, the Princess Theatre was renovated as an anchor to Downtown Harriman activity and entertainment (unrelated to RMC properties but nevertheless vacant). Envisioned to provide educational as well as entertainment opportunities, the Princess Theatre has been and remains as important an icon as the Temperance Building to Harriman’s downtown.
  - The City of Harriman once again came out on top through the leadership of Mayor Wayne Best by re-purposing underutilized facilities available in the downtown district. HUB purchased and remodeled the old Regions Bank (aka Bank of Roane County) building at 200 N. Roane – for significantly less than the cost of Rockwood Utilities’ recent facility. The Harriman Housing Authority is currently renovating the old HUB building, after subdividing to provide the Harriman Fire Department greatly needed space for the

crews at the Fire Hall, and to become the anchor for what is envisioned as a Harriman economic development council, modeled after Knoxville's, that envelopes the functions of the current HHA and more. And the crème de la crème, the move of the Harriman City Office Complex from 609 N. Roane to 408 N. Roane St through the purchase of the former Roane Medical Offices (believed intended for RMC storage at the time), which also includes the relocation of the Harriman Police Department into accommodations that far exceed their limited capabilities on Pansy Hill Road.

- There are remaining challenges with relocating HUB and the Street Department out of the Paper Maker floodplain, preferably before the next big flood hits the Emory River. Case in point HUB did have to move some of their equipment and warehousing based on flooding forecasts in the last couple years which ultimately did not materialize as significantly as projected. Nevertheless, this is a risk that HUB and the City are fully aware of and are continuing to attempt to mitigate.

All plans anticipate success, however the results seldom provide the expectations exactly as predicted. As for the plans implemented in the 2010s, it is left to the reader, especially through the eyes of those who lived through Harriman's years of lean or plenty, to decide if the challenges were met with success or failure.

### **Segue into the 2020s ...**

The subject of our last article on Harriman's History by Decade next month will be to look at the decade beginning 2020. Did the 2010s lay the groundwork for the future, or are we again setting ourselves up for disappointment? To decide, we may want to consider the perspective on one who came to Harriman during these times. Joshua Gillespie, who grew up in the hills of Sevier County and is a graduate of Gatlinburg-Pittman HS, has become along with his bride Megan the hope of the future generations in Harriman. Joshua now works at HUB, and is active in CHHCO, the American Legion, Trenton Street Baptist, and local boy's ministry (no longer affiliated with BSA).

It could be simple to suggest that opportunities for younger families in rural towns is declining. However, I believe this is still the Land of Opportunity for those who work at it. I will then let you judge if that is true based on the words from Josh himself:

*I came to Harriman in the winter of 2014. At the time, I was still single and in my mid-30s, looking for a place to "escape" my busy life as a sales executive for a Knoxville engineering company. Harriman was on the "short list" of places I was considering (to include Sweetwater and Strawberry Plains) because I had spent some time here as a Boy Scout (at Camp Buck Toms), and had very fond memories of the area. After attempting, and failing to secure the proper zoning to renovate and repurpose a historic home in Sweetwater as a B&B... I chose three available homes in Cornstalk Heights to view. Ultimately, I chose the former Johnson home at 518 Trenton Street. Prior to moving in, I contacted the Cornstalk Heights Historic Community Organization, and made the acquaintance of the Knoblochs. Within a short time, I was attending church at Harriman United Methodist as well. It wasn't long before I had been introduced to other prominent citizens of Harriman, and soon found myself involved with the CHHCO and the American Legion. I met my wife in 2015, and she fell in love with our little home on Trenton Street too. In a short amount of time, our son, Edmund Michael was born. Eventually, I went to work for HUB, and my wife opened an art gallery downtown. In more recent years, I first took over the Boy Scout Troop at Trenton Street Baptist... and then reformed that ministry as the "Mountains, Lakes, and Trails Team" (MLT-T). Our family currently attends Trenton Street Baptist, and We've seen Harriman make enormous leaps and bounds these last few years... with promises of even more growth to come in the very near future. With a new cadre of younger residents and families becoming involved... that future looks very bright ahead indeed!*

## Next on the Docket

Once our series on Harriman History is complete next month, the CHHCO Newsletter will focus on becoming a source of information for maintaining our historic community. Occasionally conversations have been heard centered around the Historic Zoning Design Guidelines, and what is permitted in the Cornstalk Heights Historic District or Roane Street Commercial Historic District.

It is great to hear people are sensitive to maintaining the historical character of our community in compliance with the US National Register of Historic Places. The simple answer is to refer to the Historic Design Guidelines, available online at [Harriman Historic Design Guidelines effective 2015.pdf](http://Harriman_Historic_Design_Guidelines_effective_2015.pdf) ([cityofharriman.net](http://cityofharriman.net)). Applications for Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) are also being submitted regularly to the Historic Zoning Commission for review. However, active discussions suggest a need to conduct a training class or other means of distributing the information.

## The Joy of Fellowship at CHHCO Picnic



Dozens of friends and neighbors – estimated around 40-50 total people – came together at the CHHCO June Picnic to enjoy the outdoor weather and share chicken, hot dogs and snow cones along with a full spread of side dishes and desserts brought to share with others.

No “agenda” was intended for the gathering, and so it offered a fantastic opportunity to simply socialize in a way we longed to enjoy. New neighbors also came out and had a chance



to meet other residents in the community. Some even tried out new recipes with great “reviews.”

The Picnic was so successful that the CHHCO Board has already scheduled another picnic for Sunday, September 19<sup>th</sup>, from 1-3 pm. The



format will again be to meet and greet neighbors. More information and

reminders will be forthcoming as the date approaches.



## *Historic* Harriman Hall Renovation Work Day 9 AM – 1 PM July 24<sup>th</sup>

The next Harriman Hall workday is scheduled for 9 AM to 1 PM on Saturday, July 24<sup>th</sup>. We are maintaining a regular schedule now of the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of each month. Additional renovation activities are periodically taking place by individuals or contract, and other times may be announced in case you are interested in joining in on further work. Keep an eye on our Facebook page and other media outlets for information in the upcoming days.

## Historic Harriman Hall Fundraising

We've got momentum now, but more funds are needed for contract work on high places and important elements such as the entrance tower. You will be seeing more dramatic progress on exterior work during these next few months, but also interior work will begin which you won't see from the street but we will share in this Newsletter.

Please consider giving to what matters most to you – the exterior renovation, interior improvements, or where there is the most need. We also encourage you to consider sponsoring the renovation of a sanctuary window at the donation level of \$1,500. The windows will have special nameplates to honor or memorialize of the donor's choosing. Would you please consider responding with your pledge, one time gift, or designated gift now? ***We do need your help!***

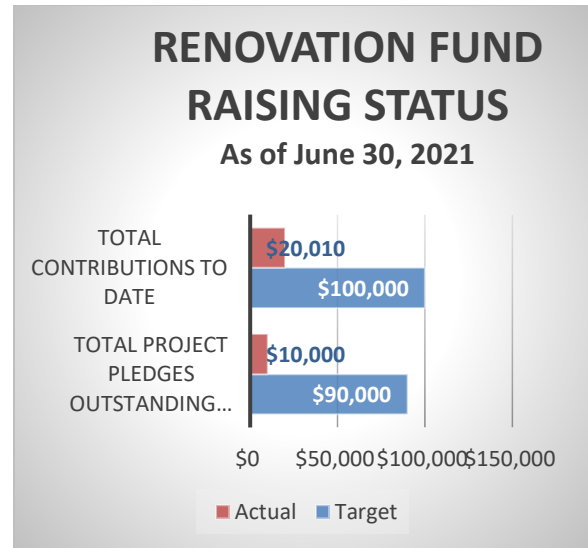
All donors contributing towards the cost of renovation and equipment will be recognized according to their cumulative level of giving noted below, on a permanent plaque to be placed at the completion of renovations.

Donation Levels	Cumulative Level of Donations
Preservation Leader	\$25,000 or Greater
Preservation Guardian	\$10,000 - \$24,999
Preservation Steward	\$5,000 - \$9,999
Sustaining Donor	\$1,000 - \$4,999
Supporting Donor	\$500 - \$999
Contributing Donor	\$100 - \$499

All donations go directly to the renovation of Harriman Hall, and are not used for any of the organization's operating expenses.

Cornstalk Heights Historical Community Organization is a 501(c)(3) organization, and donations are therefore eligible as a tax-deductible charitable contribution to the full extent of the law.

Donations can be sent to:  
 CHCO  
 401 Morgan Ave  
 Harriman, TN 37748



# CHHCO Community Calendar

## July 2021

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4 Independence Day	5	6	7 11-2 Lunchtime Food Truck @ old Hosp Parking	8	9 5 - 8 Merchant's Friday Nights on Roane & Food/Dessert Trucks	10
11	12	13	14 11-2 Lunchtime Food Truck @ old Hosp Parking	15 7:00 CHHCO Board Meeting 503 Roane, Visitors Welcome	16	17 10 - 5 Out of the Attic Antique's Birthday Celebration
18	19	20	21 11-2 Lunchtime Food Truck @ old Hosp Parking	22	23	24 9 - 1 Harriman Hall Workday 6 - 8 Harriman Rotary Family Luau Riverfront Park
25	26	27	28 11-2 Lunchtime Food Truck @ old Hosp Parking	29	30	31