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Newsletter

October 2020

Custodians of the Past. Stewards for the Future



Editor's Note: This is the third in a series of Harriman's History as prepared by CHHCO Historian W. Tom Scandlyn.

The Fabulous Fifties

The **1950s** were great years in many ways for America and for the City of Harriman. The town enjoyed the most excitement it had seen since its initial launch. Men returning from World War II led to a renewed emphasis on the family, faith, and children. Consequently, new wealth and the baby boom brought a need for larger churches, more schools, more and modern housing. Likewise, there was an increased need for stores for children and for the emerging and growing affluent middle and upper classes.

Harriman was always a conservative faith-oriented town. And in those years, it was the established old-line churches that benefited from the new growth and affluence of the town. At least five new church buildings were constructed for historic congregations. Trenton Street Baptist Church was the first. It built a new sanctuary early in the decade. (cont'd on Page 2)

Hauntings of Historic Harriman is Supernatural Success!



Who could have imagined that in an environment of social distancing that mortals and spirits alike would show up for this year's *Hauntings of Historic Harriman* walking tours? Thanks to all that participated as story tellers, "spirits" and other volunteers under the leadership of Aaron & Beth Johnson, creativity of Heidi Barton, media contacts by Dick McPherson and marketing skills of Christina Branham, revenues for this year's tours, t-shirts and concessions was \$6,236 (and counting!), more than double compared to 2019! This tour solidly puts us over the top for funding exterior renovations prior to the Christmas Celebration Tour on December 11th & 12th (see Article, Pg 4).



What I have learned from this year's experience is we are Ambassador's for the City of Harriman, and the positive experience by our tour guests speaks volumes about our community. These types of events display people who come together for a common cause, and enjoy what they are doing. Thank you all for making our guests feel comfortable and welcomed. It is these types of enjoyable experience that have our guests coming again and again.

The Fabulous Fifties (Continued from Pg 1)



Interior of Trenton St. Baptist Church, 1958

In 1956, First Presbyterian Church, First Christian Church, and the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church all moved into new homes. At the end of the decade, the largest sanctuary in town was rising - the Walnut Hill Baptist Church.

Business was on the increase. The hosiery and paper mills, gasoline distributors, lumber and concrete, Union Carbide [in Oak Ridge], and TVA were at full capacity. Downtown merchants flourished. Harriman Hospital brought new physicians combined with new dental practices that made the town a strong medical community. Doctors Jones, Killeffer, Sisk, and Bowman as well as dentists R. Schubert, Joseph Williams, Jay Sadler and Bill Wimmer were core to this circle. A young Julian Ahler graduated at UT-Memphis and soon joined them. Other new names such as Bryson (Bryson Oil Co.) and Lueking (Lueking Coal Company) entered the sphere of influence. The completion of the Kingston Steam Plant in 1954 sent demand for coal to a record level. In addition to a crowded downtown, several businesses in Walnut Hill such as Austin's IGA Foodliner and Bowers Brothers Furniture prospered.

More children brought need for newer and larger schools. Central Elementary downtown had 600 students. A new elementary school was built at Walnut Hill to replace a small one. Cumberland Jr. High School was built in 1956 (now called Harriman Middle School). Harriman schools were highly rated and the town was rightly proud of them. The location of Central

Elementary, Cumberland Jr. High, and Harriman High School together made Cornstalk Heights a desirable community for families with children. Students were in walking distance of school from grades K through 12 and the teachers were considered top notch.



First Presbyterian, First Christian, and Blessed Sacrament Churches (top-bottom) were all constructed during 1950s

More affluence brought demand for more upper bracket homes. Early in the 1950s the Webster Pike and Woods Chapel areas were the place to build. No house better exemplifies this more than the Bryson house. It was the picture of a dream house of post-war America. It was professionally decorated inside and out, sporting murals brought from Europe by a Nashville decorator. Frank Qualls and M. F. McDavid also built new homes in that area as well as 3 of the Rivers family. Communities nearer to town such as Meadowview Gardens and Browder Addition showcased more modest homes but still high quality.



Aerial photo of the John H. Bryson home (1951) near Woods Chapel, who owned Bryson Oil Company



Interior of Bryson home, with professionally decorated dining room & wall mural

A few wealthy families built new homes downtown. The Tom Tarwater house at 709 Cumberland Street would be an example here. The Howard Lueking family bought the R. B. Cassell house (Monte Vista) and were to call it home the next four decades.



The home of Tom Tarwater Jr was constructed in 1950-51. The Tarwaters were part of the family that owned Roane Hosiery, and lived there until 1992 when the home was sold to Bruce & Diana Knobloch

The new William Hamilton Browder Bridge and widening of Roane Street in 1957 began to reorient the town. In 1958, the first and finest of houses in West Hills were built. The first three were those of E. C. Browder, pharmacist Bob Margrave, and physician Fred Hooper. In addition, Dr. John R. Sisk built a fine house on Walker Hill in 1959 and attorney Leonard Ladd on Walden Ridge.

The common thread of all the finer homes of that era - the builders of choice - were Bill Rice and his brother, Jack Rice. Bill Rice was a grandfather of Blake Rice Kirkland. An earlier generation, Bill Rice's father had been the builder of the Yeargan, Bowman, and Waterhouse homes at the corner of Virginia and Cumberland Streets.

Prosperity often bears a high price tag and this was certainly true in Harriman. The widened Roane Street and 4 lane bridge destroyed much of the charm of its downtown business district. The narrowed sidewalks and parallel parking made the town less desirable for shopping. Some families that bought historic homes made undesirable modernistic changes to them. Porches were removed and modern facades replaced them. Downtown tile fronts gave a new plastic look to historic brick structures. Some of this has been reversed, but the practice has to some degree continued today unabated.

Perhaps the greatest loss to historic Harriman was the demolition of the Frederick Gates Mansion at Cumberland and Union Streets. It was called "Cornstalk Heights," and it was this house that later was the basis of the name of the neighborhood.



Frederick Gates "Cornstalk Heights" estate (Source: Images of America Harriman, John Norris Brown)

But in 1958 and 1959, Harriman was at the pinnacle of its success and a great place to live.

Plans for Outdoors Christmas Celebration Are Being Finalized

Meet 6:30 pm Friday, Nov 6th at HUB Meeting Room (enter from Carter St Side)



Scheduling indoor events has not been reasonable at a time when COVID is a possibility, and therefore this year's Christmas Tour of Homes is taking a different approach. A driving tour of the neighborhood is planned with several of our homes having specific themes. As everyone is part of the community, all are encouraged to add a little something special to the outdoor decorations so that the tour guests can appreciate everyone's historic homes.

We had an initial planning meeting a month ago and received very good input from those that attended. If you were unable to attend the first meeting and would like to participate or hear more about what is being planned, **you are invited** to attend this follow-up meeting at 6:30 pm Friday, November 6th, at the Harriman Utility Board (HUB) Meeting Room. It is not too late to participate and get in on the planning.

Our vision is to make this a community celebration to include our downtown merchants, city churches, and any other groups interested in participating. Time of the driving tour is 6:00-9:00. We intend to market the East Tennessee and Middle Tennessee regions so we can showcase our historic community to as many as possible. This is a fund raiser, and we intend to charge \$20/vehicle towards the restoration of the Historic Harriman Hall (formerly known as the Harriman Christian Church) for the driving tour.

Also being promoted will be the Riverfront and downtown light displays. Special Christmas presentations are being coordinated with the Riverfront decorations to be part of the total Celebration experience for our visitors. The Downtown Harriman Businesses are being invited to remain open those the afternoon and evenings to welcome out of town guests to our community.

Historic Harriman Hall Renovation

The CHHCO Board approved at their October board meeting the naming of the structure, formerly known as the Christian Church, as the Historic Harriman Hall. This name was chosen over all other considerations based on inclusion of all of the city's history, and it also recognizes both General Harriman, and his son Walter C., similar to the Carnegie Library. In discussions, we will likely refer to the facility as "Harriman Hall" or if casually, "the Hall."

As reported in this Newsletter over the last year, we have successfully executed work days and individual tasks, and secured all the funds necessary to accomplish the renovation goals of 2020! This includes:

Completed to date:

- Repaired/replaced roof structure and decking repairs as necessary
- Installed Architectural grade (30 year) asphalt shingles
- Demolished porch roof structure
- Demolished collapsed SW corner room
- Removed sanctuary carpeting and began clean out of interior spaces
- Trimmed and maintained vegetation along Morgan Ave & Cumberland St

In Process/Planned in 2020:

- Prep & paint façade along Morgan Ave & raised porch landing, including brick
- Replace broken stain glass in windows along Morgan Ave & raised porch landing
- Repair and paint windows, add protect plexiglass covers along Morgan Ave & raised porch landing
- Hand-craft and install new signage
- Strip paint off primary church doors

Thank you to all who contributed to accomplishing these goals, both voluntarily and monetarily! Who would have thought this would be possible in a year where social distancing, material shortages, and financial uncertainty existed!? CHHCO is blessed beyond all measure! We hope you that you feel blessed by this, too!

But of course, we are not finished. As we celebrate our accomplishments, we are also preparing for our next phase - the 2021 renovation goals. The Renovation Committee has not met to set specific goals; however, this is where the greatest needs are expected to be chosen for 2021:

- Secure all access openings/entry points into structure by pigeons or persons
- Complete interior clean-out
- Sanitize interior spaces
- Establish electrical service
- Install functional toilets and hand sinks
- Repair interior surfaces
- Create office space
- Prep & paint Cumberland St façade
- Replace broken glass and repair/paint Cumberland St windows

Those interested in end of year gifts are encouraged to consider the donation levels listed below. All donations by donors will be recognized on a cumulative level for the entire renovation project. Therefore, your end of year gift can increase the recognition of your total donations, and also benefits the project by providing seed funds for the next phase of work.

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

In addition, designated gifts can be given in honor/memory of individuals of your choice. Specific project needs can be discussed; however

it is suggested to support the continuing window restoration at a donation level of \$1,500 per Sanctuary window. There are several windows on the Cumberland Street façade, and therefore several opportunities for designated giving. The funds will go directly to replacing any broken glass, repairs to the sashes, repainting of sashes and trim, and installation of protective plexiglass to the exterior. To recognize those that fund the window restoration, a nameplate will be added to the inside of the window using wording chosen by the donor. Won't you commit to restoring an original window?

This month's Renovation Fund Raising Status is significantly increased by the revenue from the Hauntings of Historic Harriman weekend. Thank you all again who participated as volunteers and attendees!



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

Please send your donations to:

CHHCO
PO Box 611
Harriman, TN 37748