

Website: [www.cornstalkheights.org](http://www.cornstalkheights.org)

Like Us on Facebook!  
@HarrimanCHHCO



# Newsletter

July 2020

*Custodians of the Past. Stewards for the Future*



## It Was a Dark and Stormy Night ...

Talk to anyone knowledgeable about the history of Harriman, and The Great Flood undoubtedly will be brought up. It was a defining moment in time, much like people talk of major hurricanes, earthquakes, or massive tornadoes as “before” and “after.” “Before” the Great Flood, life was good. “After” the Great Flood, no one had any idea what the future held.

The Spring weather pattern in 1929 seems relatively consistent with other years in this region. The Great Land Sale in late February of 1890 was conducted in nearly constant rainfall and muddy fields. Knoxville averages over 5 inches of rain across 23 days in March, and the Chattanooga Times Free Press recently reported that 2020 had the wettest first three months of the year, surpassing the previous record set in 1891.

It is difficult to visualize the Emory River basin that existed prior to the establishment of the Watts Bar reservoir. The Cherokee Indians called

it “Babahatchie,” or babbling water. Except in Spring, the Emory river was shallow and generally unnavigable. As early as 1827, the Emory River, along with Whites Creek separating Roane and Rhea counties, were investigated by the US War Department for a military arsenal similar to Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia. The Emory River site was approximately ¼ mile downstream of Riggs Chapel Baptist Church. However, after 2 years of study by Captain Smith of the Army Corps, the report to Congress stated both the Emory River and Whites Creek sites were unfavorable. No reason was given in the report to Congress, but a personal letter from Captain Smith to some locals implied the sites were generally low water prone to flash flooding, sometimes with the velocity “of a torrent.”



*Flood photos taken by C. W. Adkisson, Sr. in this Newsletter are part of a photo album in Walter Pulliam’s Harriman: The Town That Temperance Built*

At noon on Friday, March 22, 1929, the Emory River at Harriman seemed to be flowing peacefully approximately 35 feet below the level of the river banks. The ground was already saturated by previous rains in the area. A light rain with occasional heavy showers began around 2 pm and continued until midnight. Almost as if using a clock timer, the rain stopped briefly then began again accompanied by hail, wind, violent thunder and lightning until about 2:30 am early Saturday. That wasn’t the end of the storm – instead it turned into a full

cloudburst hugging the ridge along Oakdale to Wartburg, then heading towards Clinton.

The river level in Harriman rose approximately 6 feet prior to midnight of March 22<sup>nd</sup> before the violence of the storm caused the river to additionally rise as much as 9 feet per hour. As the river banks overflowed in the early hours of March 23<sup>rd</sup>, there were heroes who sounded the alarm and conducted water rescue missions. Some of these heroes died, like Bob Underwood, trying to save another family after evacuating his own on his team of mules and wagon. Another hero was the Rev. W. T. Aikens, riverman and pastor of the Church of God on Clifty St, who set out in a small boat shouting “the Lord is with me and He will take care of me.” Aikens maneuvered his boat with finesse through the rushing current and massive debris piles on his way to saving 1 adult and 4 children in 3 separate boat rescue missions. Yes, the Lord was with him.



Knory Street with Sowers Lumber Company on right.

The most publicized account of persons in the flood waters is from Amos Stuehser, who at the time was Assistant Superintendent of the water plant. The water Superintendent, Lon Branam, monitored the water plant through the night and phoned Amos around 3 AM when the flood waters began to encroach on the water plant. Amos ran ½ mile to the Branam cottage which was nearby the water plant, then the two of them headed to the water plant. Quickly realizing the effort to save the plant would be futile, Lon and Amos returned to the Branam cottage and prepared to take Lon’s wife and 8 year old boy, Gene, to safety in town, though the river was not yet out of its banks when they

reached the house. Water began rising fast as they left, and what started out as ankle deep water became waist deep just 100 yards away. Amos was carrying Gene, and Lon and his wife were a few steps behind Amos. Caught up in the current, Lon called to Amos to turn back, which Amos said they couldn’t. Within seconds, the Branam couple were swept into the darkness and Amos was left alone carrying Gene.

Promising to a scared Gene to take care of him, Amos did his best to keep little Gene above water and maintain his balance. Debris eventually caused Amos and Gene to go under water, and Amos fought with all his might to return to the surface and grab something stable. In doing so, Amos lost his grip of Gene. The Branam family of 3 were among twenty souls that drowned that night – eleven adults and nine children.

There was no FEMA in those days – no government agencies to assist in the cleanup and rebuilding. The American Red Cross however was mobilizing and assisting as quickly as Sunday afternoon. Harriman Mayor Baker appointed a Flood Relief Committee of 8 city leaders, who within minutes of formation had raised \$3,000 for immediate emergency use.



VIEW OF HARRIMAN & NORTHEASTERN RAILWAY YARDS AFTER THE FLOOD  
NOTE: Overturned cars, collapsed American Park & Hoe Company's Building

Seven months after the flood came the Great Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the beginning of the economic depression of the 1930’s. While textile mills were humming in Harriman, no new industry came to Harriman. It was not until the beginning of World War II and the construction of the Secret City [aka Oak Ridge] that Harriman regained the economic strength it had prior to the 1929 Great Flood.

## 2020 Hauntings and Christmas Tours Updates

The CHHCO Board discussed at their July meeting the active Covid-19 cases and social distancing protocol that could impact the tours in October and December.



The **Hauntings of Harriman** tours are scheduled for October 16 & 17. This event will continue to be planned as an outdoor walking tour, creating social distancing by limiting tour group sizes and remaining outdoors at all times (no paranormal presentation).



The **Christmas Tour of Homes** is scheduled for the weekend of December 12 & 13. Due to ongoing and increasing COVID cases that are not expected to instantly disappear, the Board has agreed no family should be asked to open their homes to unknown guests. Therefore, the 2020 Tour of Homes will take on an outdoor Christmas Celebration of Lights and Activities where the entire Historic Community is encouraged to participate.

Do you remember the “Bear Hunt” in our community earlier this Spring? This year’s Christmas Celebration can bring a similar joy to others through the preparation by as many residents as possible. We would like residents to

decorate their homes and yards this Christmas season in a Historic theme when possible. Then during the weekend of December 12 & 13 using modified tour hours to be determined, the CHHCO Tour of Homes will become a driving/walking tour featuring the outside of our Historic homes with vignettes of entertainment and holiday activities. Downtown stores can set their own protocols (masks, occupancy limits, etc) and consider remaining open during these hours as well.



This is a very recent change in planning, and your ideas are welcome to improve this event. Ideas that have been suggested so far include food and Christmas craft vendors (conveniently located by the CHHCO renovation project at Morgan & Cumberland Streets), Christmas Carolers and Instrumentalists (either stationary or roaming), and even the possibility of a live nativity. The area for this Christmas Celebration is also unlimited within the historic neighborhoods of Harriman. Tour maps will be provided – printed and/or electronic – to guide visitors to the homes “on tour.” As there will not be ticket sales for this event, we will instead have multiple opportunities for attendees to donate towards the CHHCO restoration project. Stay tuned, and let us know of your ideas. Later, we will obtain the list of participants to publicize our event and to prepare the maps.

### **CHHCO August Activities**

Thursday, August 20, 7 pm CHHCO Board Meeting 709 Cumberland St (All Invited)

Saturday, August 22, 9 am – 1 pm Workday at Old Christian Church (401 Morgan Ave) Lunch Provided

The community yard sale to coincide with sales at local churches is being considered, however social distancing protocol is causing most organizations to defer such type of events. Should enough neighbors inform us that they are wanting to conduct a yard sale this year regardless, please let us know and we can consider publicizing it a neighborhood event featuring certain residences and locations.

## **What's in a Name? – Part 2**

Last month's Newsletter suggested that name branding is used to reflect the mission and values of an organization. As leaders of CHHCO, the Board is in the dilemma of how to refer to the old Christian Church, also at times referred to as the CHHCO Headquarters or facility, Historical Community Center, the "Reno Property," etc.



CHHCO's mission is to respect the past while honoring the future of Harriman as a historic community. We have come to recognize the history of this property is not limited as the "old" Christian Church, but that the property has had 4 unique congregations and a non-profit organization over its lifetime before being gifted to CHHCO. Therefore, any permanent naming of the facility should be reflective of its historic nature, yet be recognizable as a place where modern-day public and private events are welcomed including but not limited to CHHCO events, chapel weddings, civic club meetings, class reunions, or graduation parties.

Therefore, the CHHCO Board is asking the historic community to help establish an appropriate name for the facility. It does not have to include "CHHCO" in the name, however

this is not ruled out either. Ideas thrown out so far include referring to it as the Historic Harriman Community Center (HHCC) or Historic Harriman Hall (HHH). Perhaps "historic" is implied, and could honor the town namesake as Walter C. Harriman Hall (WCHH or Harriman Hall for short).

Do you have a suggestion? Please let us know about it!

## **Next Renovation Workday/Time**



The June workday unfortunately had to be cancelled on short notice due to possible exposure to an active COVID-19 case. No additional COVID cases have been identified, and we are therefore proceeding with plans for the next workday on Saturday, August 22, from 9 AM to 1 PM. Lunch, drinks, snacks, etc. will be provided for those that help. The focus of this workday will be:

- Front Exterior Siding & Trim Repairs/Replacement
- Front Brick & Siding Cleaning
- Grounds Cleaning & Vegetation Trimming
- "Light" Interior Clean-out

A rain date has not been selected, and a decision would be made that morning if work can continue or if an alternate date is necessary.

## **Renovation Status**

While we could not work together on a workday as planned in June, some have performed individual tasks to keep progress moving. The contractor has also made progress in closing up

the exposed [now exterior] walls where the collapsed section was demolished. In addition, the Renovation Committee met recently with an individual capable of performing the window restorations (glass replacement, sash repairs and painting).

In order to authorize work to be performed by experienced individuals, we need additional donations and/or pledges which will cover the cost of the work. If you have not donated yet, please consider doing so as soon as possible. Again, our goal is to complete the Morgan Avenue exterior renovations/painting prior to the December Tour of Homes. While 2020 contributions to date have not achieved the funds necessary to authorize the work needed between now and December, we are close and your commitment will make a difference! Please send your donations to:

CHHCO  
 PO Box 611  
 Harriman, TN 37748

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 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.

