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Bits and Pieces

OF HARDIN COUNTY HISTORY

www.hardinkyhistoricalsociety.org

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The Blacksmith Shop on Ehret Avenue

by Kenneth L. Tabb

The Blacksmith Shop on Ehret Avenue. Many years ago, there existed a blacksmith shop on Ehret Avenue. Both the blacksmith shop and street are no longer in existence. Ehret Avenue ran for a short distance between Helmwood Drive and St. John Road. It had once been a part of the old L&N Pike. You might recall this short street when it ran in front of the Winn-Dixie Supermarket and along the side of 31-W.

Due to the extensive research of Rosa Obryant and John James, I have the privilege of writing about this establishment. You see, when I was a youngster, I would ride my bicycle down to the blacksmith shop and watch the two Ehret Brothers who were the blacksmiths. In the past, I had told Rosa and John about my visits to the Ehret's shop in the mid-1950s.

The area that we are referring to was known as Claysville. In 1900, the city limits of Elizabethtown on the northwest side ended where Mantle Avenue is today. Claysville began at Mantle Avenue and ran out to the Helm Place. I grew up at the corner of West Dixie Avenue and Sunset Road, which at one time was part of Claysville.

Claysville was the birthplace of two former governors of Kentucky, John L. Helm and John Young Brown. In 1993, when I was Principal of Sonora Elementary, I had the opportunity to visit Washington D.C. with some other principals and superintendents from across Kentucky. We were in U. S. Representative William Natcher's Office. He wanted to know everyone's name

and where we were from. He noticed that some of us were from the Elizabethtown area. He asked who knew where Claysville was located. I was the only one to answer. He asked me how I knew, I responded that I used to live there. He proceeded to tell us about John Young Brown, the statesman that he most admired. Keep in mind, this was the John Young Brown of the 1800s, not the one connected to Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Thanks to Rosa and John they were able to identify the first Ehret in Elizabethtown. Charles Ehret was a native of Germany that lived in Elizabethtown for 64 years and established the blacksmith shop. He was 90 years old when he passed away in 1939 leaving the blacksmith shop to his two sons, Charles and Herman. It was Charles and Herman that I remember as being the blacksmiths in the shop that their father had built in the 1800s. Charles died in 1963 at 81 years of age. Herman passed away at the age of 85 in 1973. I am not aware of any descendants of the Ehrets still living in the area.

Once again, many thanks to Rosa Obryant and John James for their extensive research of this family. This writing project brought back many memories of Claysville from my youth.

It is only fitting that we include the article submitted by Mary Jo Jones to "Bits and Pieces" in 2003 about Claysville.

CLAYSVILLE

Claysville was Elizabethtown's first suburb. It was located about a mile north of the courthouse, generally along and to either side of what is now West Dixie Avenue. The southern edge of the hamlet was generally what is now Sycamore Street, and it extended as far north as the Helm mansion and present-day Hardin Memorial Hospital. The community included areas several hundred yards on either side of the highway. The center probably was the bridge over Freeman Creek, popularly known for many years as the "Claysville Bridge," and the location of various places within the area were reckoned in relation to that bridge.

Why the settlement was called "Claysville" was long a subject for conjecture. The most likely explanation is because of the red clay soil which was present in abundance. The clay was raw material for a brick furnace which made bricks for many houses built in the neighborhood. It was operated

for some time by Ben Rohr. Rohr also supplied bricks from this kiln for the Hardin County Courthouse built in 1872, which was destroyed by fire in 1932. The Louisville and Nashville turnpike, a hard-surfaced road opened in the early 1830's, bisected Claysville. A toll-gate was located there, to extract a small sum from those using the road. A number of homes and businesses small sum from those using the road. A number of homes and businesses were located along that thoroughfare. The Thomas H. Duncan home was located just north of Sycamore Street, and the farm land extended back to include the area now known as Houchens Plaza Shopping Center. The Duncan family cemetery, surrounded by a brick wall, is located adjacent to Houchens' grocery.

At one time Claysville was the home of two future governors of Kentucky. John L. Helm who served as the state's chief executive 1850-1851 and 1867 resided with his family in the Helm Mansion which still stands today. John Young Brown, the first of that name to be Governor of Kentucky, was born in Claysville in 1835 in a brick house that stood approximately on the northeast corner of West Dixie and Sunset Drive. He was educated in the schools of Elizabethtown and at Centre College, and began the practice of law in Hardin Court in 1857. He removed to Henderson, Kentucky, at the time of his marriage in 1860 and never returned to live in Elizabethtown. He was elected governor in 1891 and at the expiration of his term of office in 1895 resumed the practice of law. A Kentucky historical marker along West Dixie near Sunset Drive marks the site of his birth.

Charles Ebret, a German immigrant came to Claysville about 1875 and set up a blacksmith shop. He was said to be a fine workman and could fashion almost anything made of metal. He was believed by many to be the best wagon and buggy maker of the town. Many residents of Elizabethtown eschewed a factory-made buggy for one made by Charlie Ehret in his shop at Claysville. Ehret died in 1939 and left his blacksmith shop in the capable hands of his son Herman. Wim-Dixie Market Place now occupies the former Ehret shop. (Now the site of the Southeast Christian Church).

Another noted industry in Claysville was a tannery, operated in the 1820's by Washington Whitaker. After the untimely death of Whitaker in 1833, the tannery was operated for some years by men named Howard and Thomas. It was conducted in a large brick building that was some years later used as a brewery. A beer storage cellar was built across the road. The entrance to this cellar looked

much like a cave. I remember it well but never knew until recently what its purpose had been.

Christy Bush, Jr., a son of pioneer Christopher Bush, was a tavern keeper at Claysville during the years 1836 through 1841. The two-story red brick building in which he ran the tavern stood for over a century.

In 1898 John Woelpert bored a well near his home in Claysville. To his dismay, the water from the well, instead of being pure and clear, was dark and brackish, with a very disagreeable water, which became crystal clear when allowed to settle. The water was tested and believed to be very beneficial. Great crowds visited the well. The daily pilgrimage of local residents was a familiar sight in the early 1900's. A group would gather at the courthouse at six o'clock in the morning to walk to the well, with others joining in route, until there were often 100 persons. They returned home for breakfast and got on with the day's work. Whether they benefited more from the walk or the water is debatable, but judging from the number who participated, most seemed to believe it was the water. Its reputation for curative properties spread, and many persons from other parts of Kentucky came to "take the waters." Highway 31-W now covers the well site.

With the coming of the automobile, the character of Claysville changed. The highway was relocated and resurfaced to accommodate the new "horseless carriage." Service stations to serve the traveling public replaced other businesses. The most striking change, however, was made by Hays Burnett a progressive businessman who acquired a large tract of land adjacent to Highway 31-W, extending back from the roadway several hundred feet and abutting a short distance along St. John Road. The first tourist hotel built in this area as such was opened by Burnett on 31-W. It included a very popular restaurant. This building, located at 540 W. Dixie, is now occupied by Duplicator Sales and Service. Because of the success of this endeavor, in 1935 Burnett also built several tourist cottages to the south, between his home and the hotel.

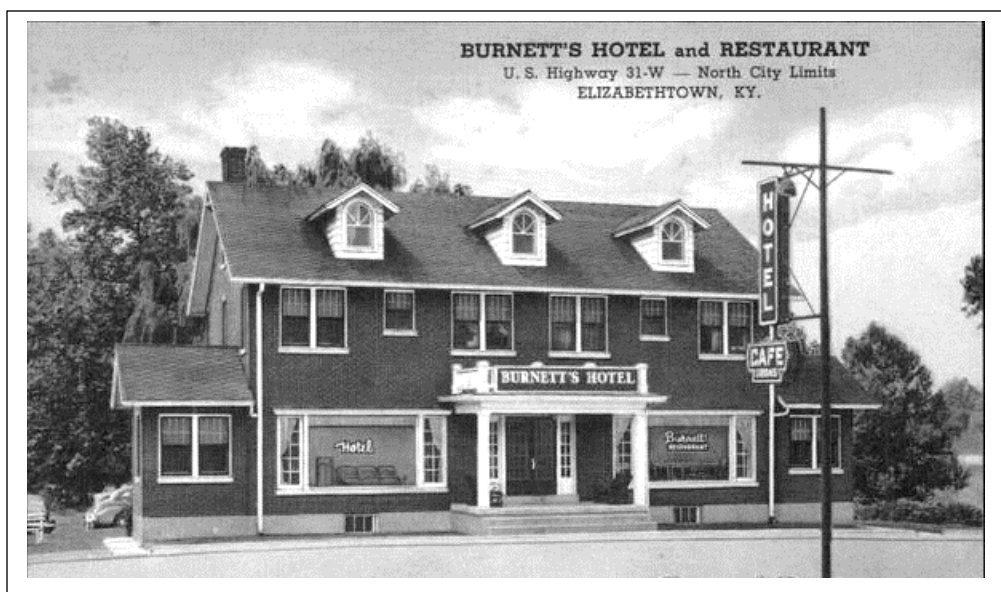
An old post card advertises Burnett's Hotel and Tourist Cottages: "Located at north entrance to Elizabethtown on U. S. Highway 31-W, forty-seven miles south of Louisville. Swimming pool and golf course free to guests. Rates: \$1.00 to \$2.50 room. Free storage. Excellent cafe, featuring fried chicken, country ham and hot biscuits."

The swimming pool near the hotel accommodated not only hotel guests, but also the residents of Elizabethtown. When I was growing up, it was patronized heavily by teen-agers who could manage the few cents' admission during the Great Depression. The golf course Burnett built was the first in this vicinity, the Walnut Hills Golf Course, a nine-hole course, on land across the creek behind the hotel. He later abandoned the golf course and leased the land to the Federal Government Buildings housing a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp were constructed on a portion of the former golf course. During World War II the CCC program was phased out and the buildings were removed. Today, modern homes of the Rolling Acres subdivision, consisting of Pinecrest and Walnut} Hill Road, now fill most of the acres of the former golf course.

Dick and Annie Wathen converted the old Duncan house into a large tourist home to accommodate the traveling public. They enlarged the house and also added other overnight accommodations in a large building behind the house. It was interesting to note that overnight accommodations for tourists, in addition to a bed and a bath, likely down the hall, sometimes included a garage or carport for the car .As so many other land marks of Elizabethtown, Claysville remains only in history books and in the memory of a few older residents.

(Source: Notes of Lila Dykes and Margaret S. Richerson: personal recollections)

M.J.J



Hardin County Historical Society

The quarterly meeting on the last Monday in October included a tour of the **Dr. Mark and Cindy Lynn Kentucky High School Basketball Hall of Fame**.



(Left to right) Larry and Alice Crews, Stephen Wade, Ella Mae Wade, Carol Dupin, Mary Ann and Sam Alexander, Josh and Amanda Cooper ([Josh Cooper](#) is the new [2020 President of Hardin County Historical Society](#)), Charlie Skees, William Blair, Helen Glasgow, Meranda Caswell, Kenneth L. Tabb (Retired Hardin County Clerk), and [KHSBHF Community Director Ken Henderson](#). *(Photo taken by Rick Walters.)*

The Hall of Fame is located at 212 W. Dixie, Elizabethtown, KY. (270) 234-8354 <https://khsbhf.com/> The old Presbyterian Church building has been renovated to showcase the Hall of Fame, as well as to emphasize the historic structure. Experience the rich history and cultural ties of Kentucky high school basketball at the Kentucky High School Basketball Hall of Fame. Explore the great coaches, players and moments in the 100 years of high school basketball in the Bluegrass. Stroll through the state-of-the-art gallery and recall the sights and sounds of the game. Open Wednesday thru Saturday from 11 am to 6 pm. The shared parking lot of the Elizabethtown City Hall and the Kentucky High School Basketball Hall of Fame is amazing, too. When traveling on the Dixie Highway across from the Historic State Theatre and the Hardin County History Museum, you can see the Paintings on the wall panels near the sidewalk. On the reverse side, you can read about the Hall of Fame.

Miranda Caswell

JANUARY 27TH MEETING
OF THE HARDIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



SPEAKER: PAUL URBAHNS. Paul W. Urbahns has been a student of popular culture and local history for most of his life. Paul considers himself a “Professional Communicator” and has shared his historical research through photography, writing, and public speaking. In addition to numerous published local history newspaper articles, he has been interviewed as a subject matter expert on television documentaries appearing on the Travel Channel; History Channel; Discovery Channel and the American Heroes Channel.

TOPIC: The Theaters of Hardin County - Past and Present." featuring the history and some stories of the various theaters that have delighted Hardin Countians throughout the years. Mr. Urbahns has held an interest in motion picture theater history and operation, since his high school days when he worked for a theater company operating three downtown theaters in his hometown. The material presented will encompass quite a few years of informal research.

Bring your memories to share.

MENU: Chicken Pot Pie
Winter greens salad
Green Beans
Buttered Smashed Potatoes
Cranberry Celebration
Rolls, Coffee, Tea, Hot Apple Cider

Dessert: Grandma’s Bread Pudding with rum sauce
Chocolate Texas Sheet Cake

<p>JESSICA JONES “LOVE AT FIRST BITE CATERING” Provides our meals</p>

Call (270) 765-7515 to make reservations before January 23rd.

Dinner begins at 6:30 Meeting to follow.

DUES: \$15.00 individual or \$25.00 per couple for the calendar year

TERRIBLE AFFRAY.—We learn from Mr. Chas. W. Mumford, of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, that a terrible and perhaps fatal affray occurred near Elizabethtown, Ky., on Saturday. Mr. Thomas H. Duncan, a merchant of Elizabethtown, paid a visit to his brother, Hewson Duncan, who resides near Stephensburg, with the view of seeing his mother, who had been an invalid for a number of years. While there an altercation occurred between the brothers in reference to the treatment which Mrs. Duncan had received, in the midst of which Hewson ordered Thomas away, at the same time presenting a shot-gun. Thomas drew a revolver and shot Hewson through the neck, inflicting in all probability a fatal wound. Hewson's son then caught up the gun, and beat his uncle Thomas most shockingly over the head with the weapon, whereupon Thomas fired upon the youth, the ball taking effect in the abdomen. None of the party were killed although it is feared they are all fatally wounded.

Courier Journal Mar. 4, 1861

PRESIDENTS CORNER

Dear Fellow Members:

As my first official President's Letter, I have no amazing insights. My hope is that as President our group will continue with the fellowship and common interest in history that we have always shared.

I would like to thank Twylane for her years of work and leadership. She has been a wonderful President and working with her not only with this group but others has given me a great appreciation for the time, dedication, and love she has for this group, and the enrichment of the community.

I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday and am excited for our meeting January 27th.

Sincerely,

Josh Cooper

Hardin County Historical Society

P O Box 381

Elizabethtown, Kentucky 42702

Meeting: January 27

Brown Pusey House

Call (270) 765-2515 to RSVP

Before: 1/24

