

Bits and Pieces

of Hardin County History
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MARY JO JONES, EDITOR

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KATHERINE HELM, ARTIST AND AUTHOR ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S REBEL NIECE



Elodie Helm, age 4 and Katherine Helm, age 6

Following the death of General Ben Hardin Helm at Chickamauga, Emilie Helm started back to Kentucky with her children from the South, where she had been visiting her sisters. She reached Fort Monroe but could go no farther because she refused to take the oath of allegiance to the Union. Perplexed, the officer in charge telegraphed President Lincoln asking for guidance. "Send her to me," replied the President. So Emilie Helm, accompanied by her six-year-old daughter Katherine, arrived at the White House.

One evening as Emilie and Mrs. Lincoln were talking and the President was scanning the evening paper while logs burned merrily in the wide fireplace, ten-year-old Tad Lincoln sat on the thick carpet entertaining his small cousin with a batch of photographs. He showed her several pictures of himself, of the Lincoln home in Springfield, and views of the Capitol. Then he picked up a likeness of his father. "This is the President," he announced proudly. But his little cousin, shaking her long auburn curls with emphasis, replied firmly, "No, that's not the President. Mr. Davis is President." Angry words ensued between the two.

At that point Lincoln, who had watched the gathering storm with quiet chuckles, reached down and scooped the children into his long arms. For a moment he held them in close embrace before placing one on each knee. "Well, Tad, you know who is your President, and anyway I am your little Cousin's Uncle Lincoln," he said with a smile that restored complete harmony.

A few days later Emilie and Katherine returned to Kentucky, bearing a letter from President Lincoln which gave her "protection of person and property, except as to slaves, of which I say nothing." After a time in Lexington, Emilie and her two daughters, Katherine and Elodie, and her son Ben, moved to Madison, Indiana, and later, to Louisville, where Katherine, when in her teens, was a pupil at Miss Noel's School for Girls.

Even as a small child Katherine began to paint and was soon inspired with a noble ambition to paint a portrait of her father. Her talent was encouraged by her mother, who imagined that she would get tired of it in a few years. She painted a large number of scenes of the picturesque region around Elizabethtown. As time went on her genius blossomed, and when in her twenties she spent six years in New York studying with the best artists of that city.



Katherine Helm

She returned to Elizabethtown, where her mother was postmaster, and spent the next two decades in Kentucky, painting many portraits and doing a great deal of sketching in crayons and water colors. In September, 1894, she realized her dream when her father's life-size portrait in his full regimentals was unveiled at Bowling Green at the annual reunion of the Orphan Brigade. The portrait of her grandfather, John L. Helm, twice Governor of Kentucky, Governor J. Proctor Knott, and Governor Joseph Desha, were painted by Katherine on commissions from the Kentucky Historical Society for its Hall of Fame at the State Capitol.

Her portraits of Dr. Robert Burns Pusey and Malvina Warfield Cunningham, painted about 1890, may be seen at the Brown-Pusey House in Elizabethtown.

The *Louisville Courier Journal*, in a December, 1895, article about Miss Helm, makes these observations:

Her great success has been in portraiture. . . . Aside from her portraits, Miss Helm has a large number of pictures of the picturesque region around Elizabethtown. Her trees are not merely dead twigs, but seem to be a live growth. She is justly entitled to be called the female Brenner. "Wash Day"

is the title of another characteristic picture. Last year Miss Helm took up water colors, and in them she has proved herself quite versatile. She also paints animals with a truthful brush.

Following their residence in Elizabethtown, Emilie Helm and her children moved to Louisville. In 1912, Katherine's brother Ben, having made his fortune, carried out a promise made to his mother many years earlier. He purchased a fertile, rolling Bluegrass farm, six miles from Lexington, and his mother, with her two daughters, Katherine and Elodie (now a widow), moved back to the area in which Emilie had spent her carefree, happy childhood. The large, brick Colonial house was built in 1791 on the brow of a hill above Elkhorn Creek, by Col. Abraham Bowman, an officer in the Revolution. At the rear of the house were the remains of a log stockade erected against the Indians by General Levi Todd, Emilie's grandfather, and referred to in early records as "Todd's Station."

For the next five years Katherine and Elodie, assisted by tenants, operated the farm, and the ladies entertained many friends who came to Helm Place to renew acquaintance with Emilie and her daughters. During that time Katherine found time to paint the poplar panels of the low-ceiling dining room with a panoramic view of Elkhorn Creek, which made it seem as if the beautiful stream ran directly through the old room. In 1917, Ben retired from his career with the railroads, and Emilie's family was united again.

Katherine continued to paint, both portraits and landscapes. In 1925 she painted portraits of her Aunt Mary Lincoln—three of them—one of which now hangs in the White House, one at Helm Place, and the third was a gift to her cousins, Robert and Mary Harlan Lincoln. In 1928 she painted another portrait of her Aunt Mary which hangs today in the Lincoln Room at Lincoln Memorial University, and in 1929 painted a fifth one which she presented to Lincoln historian William H. Townsend.

During the last years of her life, she found that she could paint with her pen as skillfully as she could with a brush. Carefully gathering her materials from intimate family recollections and archives, including her mother's wartime diary, she wrote a vivid and moving story, *The True Story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln*. It was published serially in *McCall's Magazine* during the summer of 1928 and later that year in book form.

On the afternoon of June 18, 1937, Katherine Helm's long and gifted life came to an end. Three days later she was laid to rest with her mother, her uncles who fell in the Confederate service and her grandfather Todd on the Todd family plot in the Lexington Cemetery.

M. J. J.

(Sources: Helm, Katherine, *The True Story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln*; Townsend, William H., *Lincoln and the Bluegrass*; Townsend, *Lincoln's "Rebel" Niece, Katherine Helm, Artist and Author*; *The Elizabethtown News*, December, 1895; Murphy, Mary Genevieve Townsend, *The Story of Helm Place and the People Who Have Called it Home*.)

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S SOLDIER SUBSTITUTE

According to a book of newspaper abstracts recently published by Ancestral Trails Historical Society, the following article appeared in the *Larue County Herald* on October 3, 1895:

From the *Philadelphia Record*, from Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, a correspondent says:

It is not generally known that Abraham Lincoln sent a substitute to the war against the South, but such is a fact. During the earlier days of the war it seems to have been the desire of all prominent men in Washington to have a representative in the ranks, and Lincoln was no exception to the rule. At that time there was a minister named Staples in Washington, one of whose sons, then aged nineteen, had a desire to go to the front. Lincoln heard of him, and after a conference selected him as his representative, and he proved worthy, for he won honor on the field.

He survived the war and finally died in Stroudsburg. The inscription on the stone over his grave reads as follows:

J. Summerfield Staples, a private of company C. 176th
Regiment, P. V. Also member of the second Regiment, D. C.
Vols., as a substitute for Abraham Lincoln.

BOB THOMPSON, ARTIST



The Thompson Family, ca. 1945
L to R Cecil, Cecile, Bob, Bessie, Phyllis

Bob Thompson was born in 1937 and spent his early life in Elizabethtown. His parents were part of a black elite. His mother, Bessie S. Thompson, had earned a degree from Kentucky State Normal School, and his father, Cecil Dewitt Thompson, was a graduate of a vocational school in Paducah. As they were growing up, Bob and his two older sisters, Cecile and Phyllis, had no close friends. Their father wanted them "to be different" and feared they would be contaminated by contact with youngsters from less fortunate backgrounds.

The social aspirations of the parents placed them in the black middle class. Bessie Thompson was a teacher in the Glendale Colored School, and Cecil was in business for himself as a dry cleaner. Eventually he owned two outlets at Fort Knox and a plant in Elizabethtown, the first such operation in the state to be owned by a black person.

On November 13, 1950, when Bob Thompson was thirteen, his father was killed in an automobile accident. The boy was



Bob Thompson

devastated. According to his older sister, "His world fell apart." He was never the same. Eventually, feeling that a change in environment would be beneficial, Bob went to Louisville to live with his sister Cecile and her husband, Robert Holmes, a cartographer at Fort Knox. He graduated from Central High School and, in accordance with his mother's wishes, enrolled in Boston University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the pre-med program. At the end of the first year, his grades were so dismal that he decided to withdraw from the program. At Robert Holmes' suggestion, Thompson returned home and enrolled in the Art Center Association and, in the fall of 1956, at the University of Louisville. He now began to focus on an art-related career.

He had his own studio, good teachers and eventually became involved with an intellectual art circle on St. James Court where artists would meet and exchange ideas. During his junior year he was working under Mary Spencer Nay, who suggested that he spend the summer in an art community in Provincetown, Massachusetts. During that summer, he became involved with other artists and widened the scope of his subject matter.

In the fall he returned to the University and continued his studies. However, recalling the experiences he had had at Provincetown, he felt that remaining in Louisville could no longer satisfy his artistic needs. He saw no need to finish his final year at the University, so in the winter of 1958, at the age of twenty-one, Bob Thompson moved to New York. He became involved there with other artists, joined a gallery, and went to work. He explored the Renaissance art technique, and began to create his own interpretation of some of those paintings.



Bob and Carol Thompson

In 1960, Bob Thompson married Carol Penda, whom he had met in Provincetown. They socialized in circles with young musicians, writers and artists. He and Carol went to Europe, where they moved about from place to place, and Bob continued to paint. In 1963, they returned to New York with a large collection of

exciting new paintings. A friend arranged for him a meeting with Martha Jackson, whose gallery was one of the most influential in New York. His paintings began to appear in her gallery, and others throughout the country.

Bob Thompson was not satisfied—he wanted more. He wanted to go back to Europe, this time to Rome. He had earned enough money from his exhibitions, and in 1965 Bob and Carol went to Rome. He was only 28 years old, but he was beginning to look worn and tired. His body was showing signs of his extravagant life style. Alcohol, drugs and lack of proper rest had begun to take their toll. In March, 1966, he was rushed to the hospital for a gall bladder operation. The doctors noted his weakened condition and suggested a long period of rest, but Thompson did not heed their advice. He resumed his hectic pace. On May 30, 1966, Bob Thompson died in his bed, just one month before his 29th birthday.

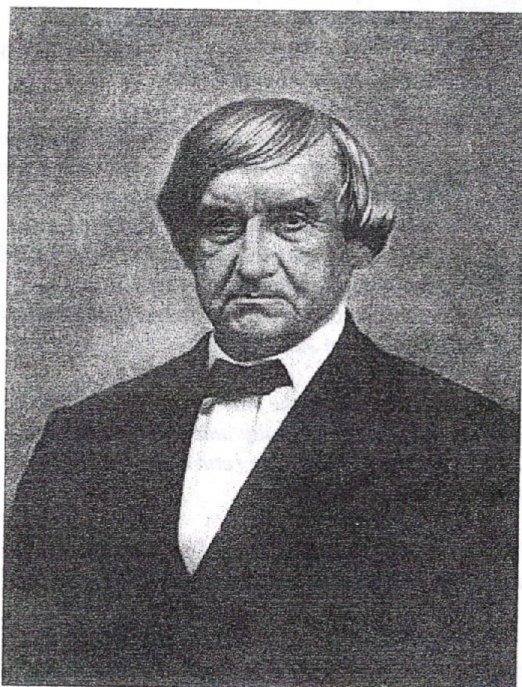


Last Painting, 1966
Ink and Oil on Canvas (88 x 63 in.)

In accordance with his wishes, his body was cremated. His remains were returned to Elizabethtown, where they were interred at the foot of his father's grave in the Elizabethtown City Cemetery, as he had requested.

M. J. J

Former Elizabethtown Attorney PRESIDES AT FAMOUS TRIAL



John W. Holt

John W. Holt was admitted to the bar in Hardin County at the March term, 1802 and was at one time attorney for the commonwealth for Hardin County. He removed to Breckinridge County about 1805, where he served in various county offices.

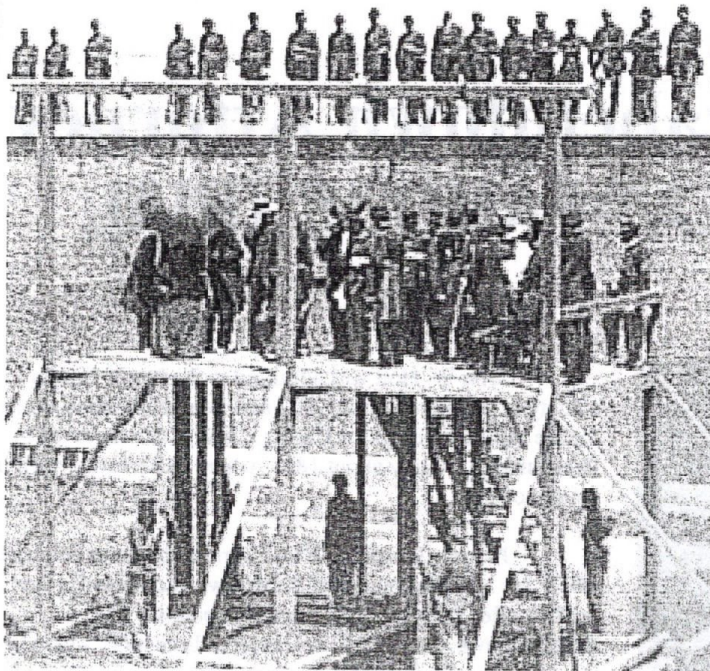
His son Joseph Holt was born in the latter county in 1807. He attended school in Bardstown and Danville, and in 1828, after studying law, began his practice in Elizabethtown. In 1832 he removed to Louisville where he served as commonwealth's attorney from 1833 to 1836 and relocated to Mississippi briefly before returning to Kentucky in 1842. He went to Washington City, where he served as Commissioner of Patents for two years, 1857-1859, and was appointed Postmaster General by President Buchanan, serving from 1859 until 1861.

Although Holt was a southern sympathizer when he joined Buchanan's cabinet in 1859, he had changed his views by the end of his time there. When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Holt, being a friend of Lincoln, visited Kentucky to endeavor to ensure that the state did not side with the South. In 1862 President Lincoln appointed Holt as Judge Advocate General of the Army, and Holt used his position to limit the activities of southern sympathizers.

While the name of Joseph Holt might not mean much to the casual observer, the names John Wilkes Booth, Mary Surratt, and Dr. Samuel Mudd should be very familiar. The one thing these people have in common is Abraham Lincoln's assassination. Booth planned to assassinate Lincoln, Vice President Andrew Johnson, Secretary of State William Seward, and General Ulysses S. Grant. Booth was out for revenge, and he thought creating chaos in the federal government might lead to a comeback for the Confederacy. The Grants declined the Lincolns' theater invitation; thus Ulysses's life was spared. No attempt was made on Johnson's life. Seward was brutally attacked in his home, but he survived. Only Lincoln died. Booth himself never went to trial because he was killed while being captured.

The trial of the conspirators was conducted by a nine-man military commission, presided over by Judge Joseph Holt. The defendants, the charges, and their punishments were:

1. *Lewis Paine: Charged with conspiracy and the attempted assassination of Secretary of State William Seward. Paine entered Seward's home the night of Lincoln's assassination. He knifed and pistol-whipped five people in the house, but all survived his brutality. Paine was found guilty by the court and was hanged on July 7, 1865.*



The Scene, July 7, 1865

2. *David Herold: Charged with conspiracy, guiding Paine to Seward's home, and assisting Booth during his twelve days on the run after the assassination. When Booth and Herold were surrounded in a barn at Garrett's farm in Virginia, Herold gave up. He was found guilty and hanged on July 7, 1865.*

3. *George Atzerodt: Charged with conspiring with Booth; his assignment was to kill Vice President Andrew Johnson. He rented a room in the Kirkwood House, the Vice President's hotel, and directed a series of "suspicious" questions to the hotel's bartender. He made no attempt to kill Johnson; nevertheless, he was found guilty and hanged on July 7, 1865.*

4. *Mary Surratt: Boarding-house owner, charged with conspiring with Booth, "keeping the nest that hatched the egg," and running errands for Booth that facilitated his escape. It was alleged that Booth used her boarding house to meet with his co-conspirators. She was found guilty and was hanged on July 7, 1865.*

5. *Dr. Samuel Mudd: Charged with conspiring with Booth and with aiding the semi-crippled assassin during his escape by sheltering him and setting his broken left leg. Mudd was found guilty and sentenced to life in prison. However, he received a pardon from President Johnson in February of 1869. He returned to his home in Maryland and lived there until his death from pneumonia in January, 1883.*

6. *Samuel Arnold: Charged with being part of Booth's earlier plot to kidnap President Lincoln. He was found guilty and sentenced to life. Like Dr. Mudd, he was pardoned by President Johnson early in 1869. He died in 1906.*

7. *Michael O'Laughlen: Like Arnold, charged with conspiracy to kidnap the President. He was found guilty and sentenced to life. He died of yellow fever in prison at Fort Jefferson on Sept. 23, 1867.*

8. *Edman "Ned" Spangler: Charged with helping booth escape from Ford's Theater immediately after the assassination. He was found guilty and sentenced to six years. He was pardoned by President Johnson in 1869. He worked for John Ford in Baltimore until 1873 and then traveled to Dr. Mudd's home and lived on some land the doctor gave him until his death on February 7, 1875.*

Mrs. Surratt, who was expected to be reprieved, was the first woman in American history to be executed. The military commission had recommended that she be shown mercy "due to her sex and age." President Johnson said he was never told this. Holt later testified that he had drawn Johnson's attention to the feelings of the commission.

Joseph Holt resigned as Judge Advocate General in 1875, and in his later years he began to increasingly lead the life of a recluse. Newspaper articles from that period say he withdrew into the privacy of his home. He died in Washington on August 1, 1894. His body was returned to his childhood home in Breckinridge County, which, although in need of repair, is still standing. His remains were interred in the family cemetery, where a large brass eagle rests atop his stately headstone.

M. J. J.

(Source: *Turret*, May 19, 2005; the internet.)



(Photo courtesy Kenny Tabb, Jack Kunnecke)
The Samuel B. Thomas Home, ca. 1890

SAMUEL BEAL THOMAS

Samuel Beal Thomas, who at the time of his death, December 3, 1874, was possibly the most prominent citizen of the state and its leading businessman, was born August 4, 1811, in Montgomery County, Maryland.

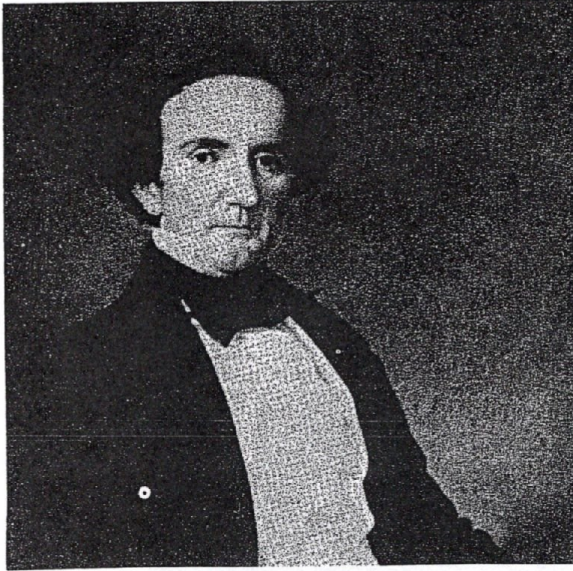
He started at an early age to make his way in the world, working as a youth on one of the mail routes leading to Washington, D. C. Employed by a mail contractor, he came to Kentucky in 1828, locating first at West Point, then a busy commercial point rivaling Louisville, with the river business offering great opportunities for energetic and ambitious young men such as Thomas. He is said to have accumulated a fortune at West Point.

His employer owned a line of stage coaches, which carried passengers as well as the mail. About 1830 Thomas and others bought out the stage line and operated it under the name of Hough, Carter and Thomas. Headquarters of the stage lines was at the

Galt House in Louisville. The stage line, running from Louisville to Nashville (and later extended to other points) was a prosperous operation for years until the completion of the L & N Railroad.

In 1833 Thomas married Zoraydo Young of West Point, a daughter of James Young. They made their home in West Point until 1844 when they moved to Elizabethtown. They resided in the large home at 337 West Poplar Street for the next thirty years, until their deaths. Their "front yard" extended to present day West Dixie Avenue and from Poplar Drive to North Maple Street.¹

Mr. Thomas was involved in numerous business enterprises. He owned a warehouse business and a grocery business at West Point in the days before the railroads, during the time when steamboats moved much of the products of farm and factory. The big warehouses built to help accommodate the huge amounts of shipped goods that



Samuel Beal Thomas

moved through the river town brought large financial gains for their owners.

When the L & N railroad project was developing, Thomas, then living in Elizabethtown, played an important role in helping move it to completion. He had much influence in state political and financial circles. He served as one of the first directors of the L & N, and was an associate of his fellow townsman, John L. Helm, the first president of the railroad, in their efforts to bring that early rail system to reality. He and Helm were later to suffer a breach in their friendship. Both were favorable to the Union prior to the outbreak of the Civil War; both were slave owners, and both suffered heavy losses when the slaves were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863.

Thomas was a shrewd businessman. He saw the potential for great change in the economic system of the county with the building of railroads. He was



Zoraydo Young Thomas

the foremost promoter of the Elizabethtown and Paducah Railroad (the forerunner of the present Illinois Central system across Kentucky) and was the first president of the E & P. He was instrumental in having its headquarters office and shops located in Elizabethtown. They were later moved to other points.

He was involved in banking in the days before a state or national chartered bank was established in Elizabethtown. The Thomas, Polk & Co. was a private bank for a time after the Civil War.

Samuel Beal Thomas is said to have been the county's first millionaire. Both he and his wife died in 1874 and are buried in the Elizabethtown City Cemetery.

M. J. J.

1. In 1842 Archibald Chalfin bought 7 acres from Sanders Eliot and Thomas Miller and his wife for \$400. Oct. 28, 1844, Chalfin sold this 7 acres to Thomas for \$2000. It is not known for sure whether "the house" mentioned in the deed to Thomas was the large house or a brick two-room house, detached and in the back of the present residence, yet standing as servants' quarters. In 1874 Thomas sold his home to Luther Longshaw. The consideration was \$6000, including 6+ acres of land.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Since the last *Bits and Pieces*, there have been two new publications released. One is Meranda Caswell's *Elizabethtown*, and the other is Matthew Rector's *Fort Knox*. Both of these pictorial descriptions of the two communities can be purchased at the Hardin County History Museum.

Meranda and Matthew are to be commended for taking the time and effort to compile the information and pictures found in these books. Congratulations to both of you on a job well done!

Speaking of books, I recently encountered a young lady and her mother from Indiana visiting the museum. Come to find out, the young lady has been working on a novel the past nine years with Elizabethtown in the 1920s as the setting. This should be interesting when this comes out. She was surprised to learn about the Elizabethtown Movie.

The History Museum continues to grow and receive recognition. Recently, as most of you know, the museum was the recipient of the Big E Award from the Elizabethtown/Hardin County Chamber of Commerce.

It never ceases to amaze me at to what has been accomplished at the museum in less than two years of being open to the public. We are attracting more and more visitors, and it is surprising from how many states and countries these visitors come.

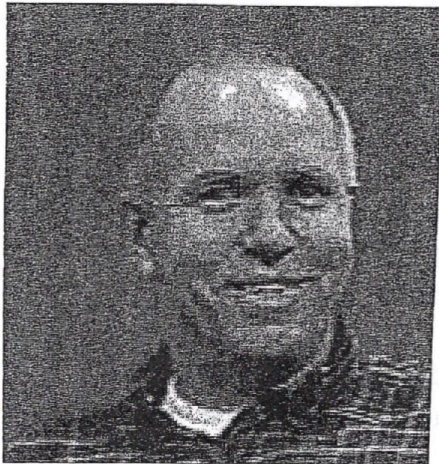
As I have said before, the doors could not stay open without all of the volunteers. Thanks again to everyone who is making the museum a reality.

I look forward to seeing everyone at our next meeting on July 25th.

Kenneth L. Tabb

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEXT MEETING

The Hardin County Historical Society will meet Monday evening, July 25, 2005, at the STATE THEATER GALLERY, 209 West Dixie Avenue, in downtown Elizabethtown. The buffet dinner, catered by BACK HOME, will be served at 6:30 PM. The price is \$7.50 per person.



Berry Craig

The program will be presented by Berry Craig of Mayfield, an associate professor of history at the Western Kentucky Community and Technical College. His subject is "Civil War Bluffs and Bluster."

Craig will relate the details of "Stovepipe" Johnson and the Great Newburgh Raid of 1862. It probably was the Civil War's biggest bluff. Confederate raider Adam Rankin Johnson, of Henderson, Kentucky, had his heart set on a big cache of Yankee rifles. Problem was, they were across the Ohio River in Newburgh, Indiana. Craig tells the tale of how the ingenious Johnson, using a stovepipe and other props, hoodwinked Newburgh's defenders into surrendering the rifles, and the town, without firing a shot.

This program is funded in part by the Kentucky Humanities Council, Inc., and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

For dinner reservations, telephone Meranda Caswell at 765-2515 by NOON, Saturday, July 23. If you find later that you can attend, phone Meranda, as we occasionally have cancellations.



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