
Bits and Pieces

of Hardin County History

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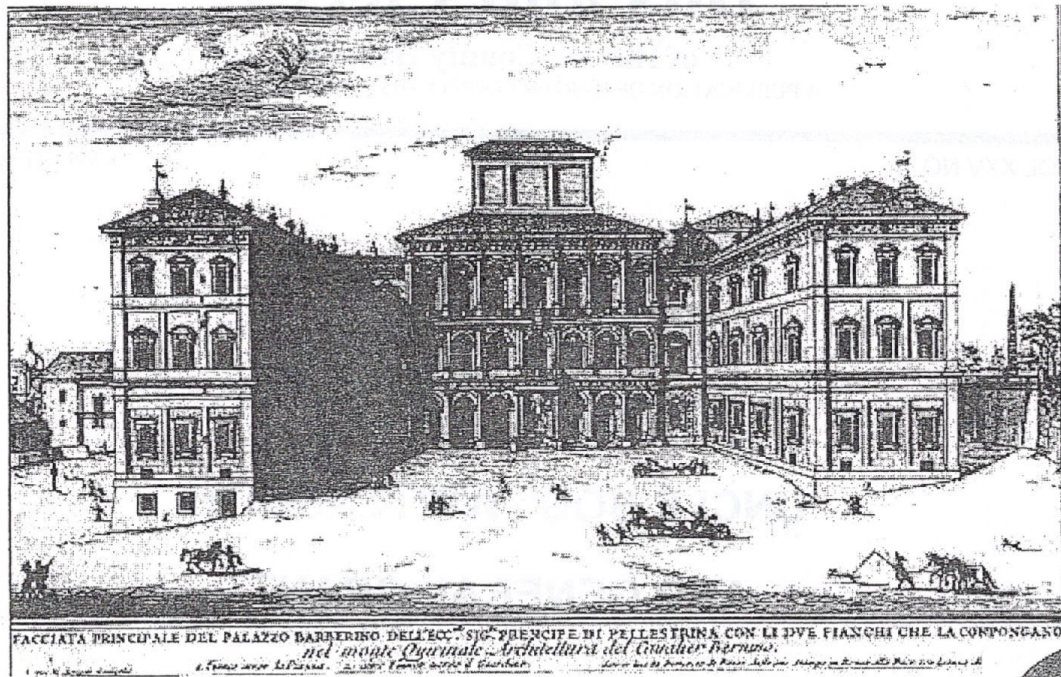
“UNCLE BOB” WINTERSMITH AND GENERAL GRANT

R. L. Wintersmith, Sr., was one of the four men in Elizabethtown who voted for Lincoln for President in 1860. Shortly after Mr. Lincoln's inauguration, Mr. Wintersmith, who sold goods to the President's father and knew Abe when he was a little boy, went to Washington and secured the appointment of his son, Swan Wintersmith, as postmaster at Elizabethtown. After Gen. U. S. Grant was elected President, a movement was started among the Elizabethtown Republicans to get Swan Wintersmith out of the postoffice. "Uncle Bob" again made a pilgrimage to Washington and went to the White House to see President Grant. He was told that THE President was engaged. He sat in the anteroom for several hours, seeing Congressmen and Senators going in to see the President. Finally he got a little wrathful, and he told the attendant to go in and tell Grant that he was "as good as any damn Congressman. The message was delivered and it so amused the President that "Uncle Bob" was given an immediate audience. He told the President his name and what he came for. Gen. Grant said, "Go home, Mr. Wintersmith, and don't bother about the matter any more. Your son will be reappointed." And of course he was.

Many years after that when Grant made his wonderful tour of the world, he was in Louisville on one occasion. Mr. Wintersmith was on the reception committee. He was standing way down the line, but the General spied him and, walking up to him, indicated his remarkable memory by repeating the message Mr. Wintersmith had sent in to him at the White House, "I am as good as any damn Congressman." It was a most remarkable evidence of Grant's memory of people, and it tickled Uncle Bob greatly.

(Adapted from *The Elizabethtown News*, July 24, 1923)

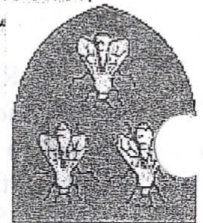
Mary Jo and World War II



The Facade of the Barberini Palace

THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS IN ROME

THANKSGIVING



"I've been to parties before, but never one like that" was my reaction to Thanksgiving dinner at the home of Ambassador Kirk in the Barberini Palace in Rome. Guests included the staffs of both the American Embassy in Rome and the Political Adviser's office in Caserta.

When Maffei Barberini became Pope Urban in 1623, he decided to build a grand family *palazzo*, the Barberini Palace. It now overlooks Piazza Barberini and Bernini's Triton fountain but was designed by Carlo Maderno as a typical country villa on the fringes of the city. Maderno died shortly after the foundations had been laid, and Bernini and Borromini took over.

As we arrived for Thanksgiving dinner, we walked through a set of gates held by huge columns which are a nineteenth century addition. We climbed up stairs and were greeted by an old marble lion, which came from the nearby village of Tivoli.

Mr. Kirk's living quarters were referred to as an "apartment" on the second floor of the lovely palace. Guests were met at the door, coats were taken, and we were invited into the *Gran Salone*. We were greeted by Mr. Kirk and his secretary, Mr. Horn. Mr. Horn performed duties for Mr. Kirk such as those which would be performed for a general in the Army by both his aide-de-camp and his chief of staff—in other words, both socially and officially.

Mr. Kirk made a few remarks to each of us, and then we were free to wander about the huge room. I have no idea what period the furnishings were. I'm sure they were appropriate for the room. I'd only seen things like that in picture books. They were delicate and mostly gold and had a great deal of gold floral

decoration. There was indirect lighting in the room. The only flowers were three orchids in a low vase directly in front of a portrait (about 4 by 10 feet) of Mr. Kirk's mother seated in a chair.

The entire ceiling was one huge painting, with, among other figures, a coat of arms (a wreath with three bees). It was done, I was told, by Cortona in about six years during the seventeenth century. The ceiling was so high (75 feet) that the bees, which are six feet long, look scarcely more than a few inches. I'd guess the room to be about 75 feet wide and at least twice that long. The 75 guests seemed almost lost in that big room.

We were served cocktails (tomato juice or something stronger) and tiny round sandwiches on toothpicks, which looked like pictures in a magazine. About 8:15 we went into the dining room. In the center of the room was a long table with candles and two huge (1 x 3 feet each) piles of fruit, with not even one grape out of place. The guests were seated at small tables around three sides of the room. (I say "small"—the smallest was for six, but they seemed so small in comparison with the large table in the middle of the room.) While we were eating what I thought were crab cakes and potato chips, the feast was assembled on the center table.

The food was the same at each end of the large table: two turkeys, two bowls of salad, a ring of cranberry jelly, and small baked apples. Then in the middle was a roast pig, complete with head, even to the apple in his mouth. Mr. Kirk jokingly told us later that the pig was his favorite, named Muriel, and that he had it killed "just for us." I'd never seen a whole roast pig on a table before, and could scarcely believe it was there to be eaten. But it was carved and eaten, along with other traditional dishes.

White wine was served throughout the meal. For dessert we had individual pies—hot, hot mince pies and pumpkin pies. After that, fruit and coffee.

After dinner Mr. Horn came to our table and asked if we'd seen the palace, and since we hadn't, asked if we'd like to. Foolish question! I was simply itching to get a look at some of the other rooms. Mr. Horn personally conducted a tour for Martha, me, Mr. Huddleston (the Consul General in Rome) and two others.

We walked through three or four other rooms like the large reception room, except smaller, without the painting on the ceiling, and with chandeliers instead of indirect lighting. The furniture was the same type, only perhaps a little more uncomfortable looking. We also saw the guest bedroom, which didn't look at all like a bedroom to me. In fact, I had to hunt for the bed and finally discovered that the thing which looked like a couch was really the bed. Extremely uncomfortable looking!

Then we went through the reception room to the other side of the apartment, where the rooms looked almost as if they were lived in. Furniture was much more comfortable looking; there were pipes in some of the ashtrays. This side of the apartment was heated, whereas only the reception and dining rooms on the other side had heat. The four smaller reception rooms and the guest bedroom were cold. As I have mentioned before, fuel for heating was in extremely short supply in Italy that winter.

Shortly after the tour, which lasted almost our "hour after dinner," Martha and I left, to be taken to our hotel by one of the Embassy cars waiting below.

CHRISTMAS

By Christmas, I had moved to Caserta. So the afternoon of the day before Christmas Eve (Friday) I went to Rome to spend the week-end with Martha. She had dates arranged for us for that night. We went dancing and took along the piece of country ham and the beaten biscuits which Martha's mother had sent, and the men provided a fruit cake. Quite a party!

Christmas Eve I slept all morning and we spent the afternoon doing nothing. Mr. Kirk had another lovely party that night, quite like the Thanksgiving party, except there were more people. Privates, major generals, a commodore, and everything in between, in addition to the Embassy and POLAD staff. Martha and I met Brigadier General Hume, formerly of Frankfort, now of Fifth Army Headquarters. He wasn't particularly interesting—just that he was from Kentucky.

After dinner we all went to midnight mass at St. Peter's Cathedral. For the first time in history, a Pope celebrated Christmas Mass in St. Peter's. Pope Pius XII set the precedent by celebrating Low Mass twice. It was estimated that about 50,000 people, including about 15,000 Allied soldiers, attended the ceremony. The Pope's break with tradition was believed to be, in part, an act of rejoicing that Rome, the Eternal City, had been liberated from Nazi rule.

We sat in seats reserved for the diplomatic corps. That was an experience that I'll never forget. There were so many people there. Once when I stood up during the service, someone swiped the chair I had been sitting in and removed it completely. It was immediately replaced by the Vatican aide-usher in the diplomatic section.

I had always been accustomed to rather reserved behavior during church and was somewhat taken aback by the actions of the Italians. They cheered loudly when the pope was carried in, screaming and whistling and applauding. Some even tried to kiss him. I had not been used to such a show of emotion in church, especially the Catholic church.

But when I forgot about the crowd and looked around me at that beautiful building—the only time I'd ever seen the lights on inside—that was different. It was absolutely breath-taking.

We got back to the hotel about three AM. I didn't get up until noon. We went to a mess hall a little ways outside the city for turkey dinner on Christmas Day. We started back south about four in the afternoon. I went on to Naples for dinner before returning to Caserta.

Those who dance must pay the fiddler. I discovered when I arrived at work the next morning that the place was swamped, so we all had to work both day and into the evening. I left about 8:30 PM to meet G. W. Woodard, a lieutenant from Elizabethtown, whom I had known all my life. I took along all the Elizabethtown newspapers I had saved. I think he enjoyed looking at those.

THE MATRIX

AN HISTORICAL NOVEL OF THE LINCOLNS AND ELIZABETHTOWN

All of you are familiar with the movie *Elizabethtown* which was released in 2005, but how many of you are familiar with the historical novel published in 1920 which also prominently features Elizabethtown? The following article, written about 75 years ago by R. Gerald McMurtry, is a review of *The Matrix*:

"An historical novel was published in 1920 by the Century Company of New York, entitled *The Matrix*. This 260-page publication, written by Maria Thompson Daviess, attempts to reconstruct the romance of Nancy Hanks and Thomas Lincoln, the parents of Abraham Lincoln. This publication is considered an item of Lincolniana, and is to be found in practically every important Lincoln library in the country. As the setting of the major part of the story is laid in Elizabethtown, the book naturally is of interest to Hardin county citizens.

"In the foreword of the book, the novelist states that the romance of Lincoln's parents was one of the foundation stones of our democracy, and for that reason she has built her story around the traditions of the event that still remain. She further states that she 'has dug deep into all legends and collected as much as possible of documentary evidence.' Her inspiration for the story is based on the fact that 'she was born and reared in the same little Bluegrass Valley which was the cradle of the great romance.' In building up a documentary background for her work she cites the fact that her story agrees with the findings of the genealogists, Hannah Daviess Pittman and Caroline Hanks Hitchcock.

"After reading the foreword of *The Matrix*, one, historically inclined, would naturally expect a most interesting story of the Lincolns and old Elizabethtown, but such expectations quickly fade. While it is true that an author may use 'Poetic License' in a sense, nevertheless, the main theme of this story does not coincide with the historic facts that are so well established by all Lincoln biographers of importance.

"The most outstanding error in the book is that of the slavery question which the novelist injects into the story. There was no intensive slavery issue during the childhood of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks, and the father of the 16th President was never so zealous an advocate of emancipation, or the first Kentucky abolitionist as he is pictured by the novelist.

"The writer of this book appears to have little knowledge of pioneer life, and in many instances she puts the theme of the story a generation removed from the period of courtship of Lincoln's parents. In numerous cases she mentions cotton patches as being cultivated in Hardin county, and she has pioneer citizens gathering sassafras roots for cattle. Mole skin robes appear to have been an important item in every household, and no pioneer home was without a water

pump. Elizabethtown is incorrectly described as being located at what was originally called Pleasant Grove, and according to the novelist the town boasted of a bank (first Elizabethtown bank was founded in 1818) before the marriage of Lincoln's parents in the year 1806.

"In summing up the motivating theme of the story it is readily noticeable that the novelist attempted to make Nancy Hanks a young idealist, and a moving force of Abraham Lincoln's personality. Nancy Hanks is described as being the most popular citizen of Elizabethtown. She could break spirited Kentucky horses, weave superb cloth, and twist the hearts of the Elizabethtown swains around her finger at will. Thomas Lincoln is described as being an awkward, ignorant 'scion of the Lincolns, gone to seed.'

"While this novel may be of interest to many who wish to read a simple pioneer story, it can never be of any importance to historians who attempt to glean the true facts of history and biography. It is, however, an interesting fact that Elizabethtown was used as a setting for a novel, and this publication adds a link in the chain of the importance of Elizabethtown in the early history of our state and nation."

M. J. J.

(McMurtry, R. Gerald, *A Series of Monographs Concerning the Lincolns and Hardin County, Kentucky*, The Enterprise Press, Elizabethtown, Ky., 1938, reprint 1999, pp. 64-65.)

HARDIN COUNTIANS IN THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

Altogether Hardin County had eighty-three men in the Army in the Spanish-American War, according to an article in *The Elizabethtown News* of July 1, 1898. The paper lists the "most prominent" of these: Major James M. Lancaster, commanding the First Brigade of the United States light artillery at Santiago, Cuba; Charles and Eugene Carter, in Company H, Fourth Infantry, and Bethel Kinkead, Company F, Second United States infantry; in the third Kentucky volunteers, Fletcher Irwin, Sam Bush and Charles Bell are in Company G at Chickamagua; Kennedy Warren and Will Bush are with the regulars at Camp Merritt, California, along with John Martin, who went there with the Second Tennessee volunteers. None of these gentlemen, except Mr. Lancaster, is over twenty years of age, and all of them represent the best families in this section. Those in California will go to the Philippines, if they have not already started for those islands.

Others listed elsewhere include Ensign Will Slack Montgomery who was with Admiral Dewey at the battle of Manila, and Pvt. Harry McDermott, brother of Mrs. J. R. Neighbors, at Chickamagua Park.

M. J. J.

HILL CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION AT BLUE BALL CHURCH

On June 30, 1887, there was celebrated at Blue Ball Church such an anniversary as never occurred before, and probably not since, in the history of the county. Mrs. Fannie Hill was 100 years old that day, and John N. Hill, her husband, was in his one hundredth year. A large concourse of people, including numerous kinsfolk and descendants, assembled to witness the ceremonies of the remarkable centennial anniversary. The spectacle of an aged couple who had journeyed along through seventy-five years of happy wedded life, may never be repeated in Hardin County.

John N. Hill was a remarkable man in many respects. He was born near Washington, Pennsylvania, May 28, 1788, near which place both his maternal grandparents were killed in an attack by the Indians. He remembered the demonstrations on the death of George Washington and the popular esteem in which that great man as held at the time. He was on the first steamboat that ever came up the Mississippi river, and perhaps no other man who ever lived in the county was permitted to see such great advancement on things as they were in his boyhood.

When he was a small boy his parents moved to Kentucky, and he had an indistinct remembrance of having played around some rough log huts where the city of Louisville now stands. His people lived in Nelson and Washington counties, and some of them engaged in milling and flour business. At the age of twenty, Hill took charge of the flatboat interests for the mill, taking loads to New Orleans and walking back home through the forests, and in four years cleared the nice little sum of \$30,000. On one occasion he started back up the river on a steamboat, which got along so slowly that he decided to get out and take it afoot. After walking all day he stayed over night at Natchez, and when he got up and started next morning, he saw the boat just coming in sight after having puffed away all night. He walked on home, but the boat never got in sight of him any more. In 1829 he moved to Hardin county and engaged in farming and milling. His father, Frederick Hill, was a soldier in the Revolutionary War and was wounded at the battle of Brandywine.

Scarcely less remarkable is the story of the life of his faithful wife. She was the daughter of James and Elizabeth (Kelly) Nall and was born at Culpepper Court House, Virginia, June 20, 1777. Besides being one of fourteen children she was one of triplets. All of the seven boys and seven girls lived to be married and reared families, and three of them lived to be over ninety years

of age. Both of her parents and two slaves, husband and wife, died in the same week in 1814 of a malady known as "cold plague."

"Uncle Johnie," as he was generally called in the community, died on September 29 after the centennial, and "Aunt Fanny" on January 25 following. They were married in Nelson county on September 7, 1813.

This aged couple were the parents of ten children, three of whom, James F. Hill and John W. Hill, of this county, and Mrs. Matilda Slack, of Texas, were living and attended the centennial celebration. Several grandchildren and a very large number of great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren now live in this county, and fourteen of their lineal descendants reside in Elizabethtown.

(Source: *The Elizabethtown News*, June 28, 1907.)

Woman Whipped by Whitecaps.

Louisville, Ky., July 6.—A special to the Times from Elizabethtown, Ky., says: Mrs. Sallie Scott, a white woman, was taken from her home in the East View section of this county at midnight by a gang of whitecaps and whipped with hickory switches until the blood trickled from her feet and she was rendered unconscious. Mrs. Scott swore out warrants against her husband and his brothers, charging them with assault.

(*The Marble Rock Weekly*, Marble Rock, Iowa, Thursday, July 12, 1900, p. 6, col. 2, <http://www.abrahamlincolnarchive.com/>)

(Courtesy of Matthew Rector)

WONDER CAVE DISCOVERED IN HARDIN COUNTY

White Mills, Ky., July 23.(1923)-- Kentucky is noted as the cave state of the world. Not only does it derive its prestige from the great number of caverns found in the State, but also from the fact that it overlies the greatest strata of sub-carboniferous limestone known.

The immense deposit begins in Northern Indiana and extends on down through the State and into Tennessee. In its course through Kentucky it assumes the shape of an inverted mountain of stone and probably reaches its deepest or peak edge point near White Mills, Hardin County.

The section around White Mills is literally honeycombed with caves--subterranean streams and sinkholes. Many of the smaller caverns have been investigated by geologists and students of nature and much rich scientific data regarding the action of water in forming these underground passages have been obtained.

It is only in the last few months, however, that any systematic effort has been made to search out and acquire a knowledge of many hidden wonders stored away in these treasure houses of eternal stone-silence and darkness.

A party of geologists and members of the Cave Men's Club of America (a national organization of nature-lovers who developed the cavernous district of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia), while investigating some of the depressions and sinks between Stephensburg and White Mills, ran across an immense "pot" hole that from its tremendous proportions promised to lead down to subterranean passages of more than ordinary interest.

Risking both life and limb, the hardy explorers entered the hole and, clinging like rats to roots of trees, shrubbery and projecting rocks, reached the bottom from which a huge passage led off under the hillside. Following this passage for about a half mile, the party came to what they believe is the main or largest part of the cave.

How far the main channel extends is unknown, but, from the numerous side paths leading both to the right and left and up and down, the explorers realized they had discovered an underground world that will take months, perhaps years, to investigate fully.

In some sections of the cave the rooms are more than 100 feet wide and so lofty that powerful spot lights were needed to reach the ceiling. The floor as a rule is an indescribable mass of rocks scattered about in utmost confusion, many so large as to cause the beholders to stand in wonder and amazement.

As far as explored, the cave is bone dry with dust (the accumulation, probably, of thousands of years) an inch deep on the floors. Geologists claim for this reason and from the condition of many of the formations the cave is probably the most antique ever entered by human beings.

Three levels or stories have been entered, one of which extends upward to very near the surface of the ground and from which a crevice high up on a balcony allows daylight to creep in--making the outdoor natural lighting of this room one of the grandest sights imaginable.

Geologists believe on account of the great dryness of the cavern and that every cave must have a drainage level, there must yet be

President's Message

Welcome to the seventy-sixth year of the Hardin County Historical Society.

To start the new year, our first presenter for our meeting on January 22nd will be Mr. Gary West. Gary grew up in Elizabethtown and is a 1961 E'town High Graduate. For many years Gary has been a resident of Bowling Green, where he has been associated with Western Kentucky University and the Bowling Green Tourism.

Gary's latest claim to fame is that he is the author of *Eating your way Across Kentucky: 101 Must Places to Eat*. Prior to this book he wrote a book about King Kelly Coleman who is considered to be the greatest Kentucky High School Basketball player of all time. If you have his book(s) bring them along to the meeting, he will be more than glad to autograph them. I am sure he will have some copies for sale if you want to purchase one.

Speaking of books, Mary Jo allowed me the opportunity to read her copy of *The Matrix*. It was rather interesting to read a novel where the setting was Elizabethtown and Hardin County. I had never heard of this book, but what really amazed me was that Mary Jo only recently learned about this book.

As we start the new year, I want to remind you that our dues (\$10.00 per person) are now due. If you don't want to mail them in, just bring them to the meeting and our Treasurer Ben Humphries will accept them when you pay for your meal.

I look forward to seeing everyone on January 22nd.

Kenneth L. Tabb

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEXT MEETING

The Hardin County Historical Society will meet Monday evening, January 22, 2007, at the State Theatre Gallery, 209 West Dixie Avenue, in downtown Elizabethtown. The buffet dinner will be served at 6:30 P.M.

The program will be presented by Gary West of Bowling Green, a former resident of Elizabethtown and a graduate of Elizabethtown High School. He has resided in Bowling Green for a number of years, where he had been associated with Western Kentucky University and the Bowling Green Tourism Commission.

He will speak about his latest book, *Eating Your Way across Kentucky: 101 "Must Places" to Eat*. This book was released in October, and includes restaurants in many Kentucky counties, including three in Hardin County. Many of you visited with Gary several months ago when he introduced his book about King Kelly Coleman at an autograph party at the Hardin County History Museum.

If you have not already done so, please be prepared to pay your dues (\$10 per person) at this meeting. If you prefer, you may mail your check to the Treasurer, Ben Humphries, at the address below.

For dinner reservations, telephone Mary Jo Jones, 270.765.593, not later than NOON, FRIDAY, January 19. If you find later that you can attend, phone Mary Jo, as there are occasional cancellations. On the other hand, if you make a reservation and DO NOT ATTEND OR CANCEL, you will be billed for the cost of the meal unless it is taken by a late-comer as indicated above.

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