

Owensboro, Kentucky and It's Early Residents

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SCRAPS OF LOCAL HISTORY

Random Recollections of Owensboro and Vicinity.

Running back to the neighborhood of thirty years ago, Owensboro, to the eye of a stranger, was not a very promising place. To a discriminating observer its main hope lay in its being the county seat of a rich body of land, and being on the Ohio river above high water mark. Its situation then was rather sloughy and pondy, and it was hard to get about in wet weather. Frederica street, which is now so finely flanked with handsome and convenient houses, was then, in the winter, from the river to Mr. James Weir's, almost impassable. It was "water, water every where, and not a drop to drink" - that is, not fit to drink. The eye that thirty years ago or less surveyed the points and surroundings out of which Maj. Smith and John H. McFarland have made themselves such handsome and finely improved homes, could hardly believe its own vision had it not seen the vast change gradually spring into existence. The hand of the ditcher and his spade, added to the road-mender, have done wonders in that direction, as well as in others in about Owensboro. From Moreland's corner on Frederica and Fourth streets there were but two houses, one was Barna Tribble's, where Judge Craycroft now lives, and Mr. S. M. Wing's, where Mr. James Rudd now resides, and the ground from Mr. Wing's garden to near where J. H. McFarland now lives and occupied with so fine a row of houses, was a sort of half dry and half wet pond the year round. On the east side of Frederica street the only house from Porter's corner, opposite Moreland's, was Warner Crow's.

A large portion of what is now the town of Owensboro, was then the farm of Mr. Philip Triplett. When the writer first became acquainted with Owensboro, a fine timothy field came up along where Fourth street now is, and embraced the land to Mr. Triplett's garden, now owned by Senator McCreery. The town plot was then small to what it is now. From about the years '48 and '49 till the war, a stream of immigration began and continued from the middle parts of the State, which did much to improve the county and to bring it into notoriety; and as the county improved and prospered, so the town grew and prospered likewise.

Owensboro occupies both a geographical and geological position exceedingly favorable to her future growth and prosperity. Geographically she lies on a line of railroad which will yet be completed from Chicago to the Gulf. That event is about as fixed and certain as the laws of trade and travel can make such things. Our railroad began at a most unpropitious period - a period which has embarrassed the strongest railroad interests in the country, and almost every other interest beside. But in spite of all this, and in spite of drouths, rains and floods, our county has a wonderfully recuperative power in it. It is new, and has more to excite the mind and to draw out the energies of its population than any other nation on earth. What we nationally and locally need beyond all other things of an earthly nature, is a steady and permanently settled state of society, in which men can make reasonable calculations into trade and business from one year to another. We need this immensely more than we need rapid methods of growing rich; and if this condition of society can ever be reached, Owensboro will assume her proper place in thrift, energy and growth.

But fair, promising and inviting as her geographical position is, her geological position, put down side by side with that, gives her a commercial and manufacturing prospect full of the brightest promise. Her connection already by rail puts her in the neighborhood of wood, coal and iron to any amount desirable. In cheapening her coal the railroad has already paid her subscription to it, or soon will.

Random Recollections of Owensboro.

Although we have intimated that thirty years ago or less, Owensboro was not much of a place to visit in winter as to appearances, yet it was distinguished for a more than common proportion of rare and excellent families. Hospitalities to decent strangers was as free, as open and as cordial as could be found any where. And this high and genial characteristic of a people never fails to make a deep and lasting impression upon every stranger upon whom hospitality is not wasted. The old men of that day, living in town, were James M. Rogers, David Morton and Alexander Moreland. All of these men had come to Owensboro at an early period of its history. Mr. Rogers had come first of all, and lived for some years in the country on a farm. He married for his second wife Miss Margaret Muir, a daughter of Dr. Muir, of Nelson county, a gentleman of high standing, both as a man and a physician, and endowed with many Scottish excellencies. He raised a remarkable family of daughters - remarkable for their personal beauty, fine sense, general excellencies and practical household abilities, and there was not one of them that was not worth an immensity to her husband and her children. In her own home Mrs. Rogers was hospitality itself, without any ado about it. She still lives to prove most we have said by her skillful management of the household matters of her son-in-law, W. N. Sweeney. Mr. Rogers himself never seemed happier than in the entertainment of strangers and friends.

David Morton was one of the old and first merchants of the place. He was a little bluff in his manners and rigid in his ways, but it is the belief of the writer from a good deal of knowledge

of Mr. Morton that a truer man never trod the streets of Owensboro. He was a true man for truth's sake. He did not know what policy meant.

Alexander Moreland was one of those steady, quiet men of society, never seen or heard of in the brawls of the street, and never slacking the pace of that steady and effective industry which is the bone and muscle of communities as well as the support of a man's own family. He was a fine example of industry, and a proof that it can hardly be exercised in vain.

Alfred Grissom was also a man of Owensboro at that day - not an old man, but one worth remembering as long as one lives.

Colonel Ewing, below town, on the river, was one of the grand old men of those times. I used to like to see him come into church and walk up toward the pulpit. Although not in his own church, he did it with an air which said "I have a right here and I am going to exercise it." Some people go into other people's churches as if they were out on a general sneak and wanted to hide. Not so with the old Colonel, and ought not to be so with anybody.

The Triplett Brothers.

Robert Triplett, the older of the two brothers, was an extensive land owner in Kentucky. He lived in Frankfort for some years, and afterwards moved to "Haphazard," a farm two miles above Owensboro, on the river, and which he afterward sold to Mr. William Bell, and which is yet owned by Mr. Bell's heirs. Mr. Triplett then moved to town and lived on the river bank in a house since owned by Thomas Pointer and others. Mr. Triplett was a man of large mind, great enterprise, extensive knowledge of men and things, but too far ahead of his time to be extensively successful in a county as new as ours was then. He died of cancer in Philadelphia. His wife was a sister of Mr. William Pegram, of Owensboro. She was a fine, stately, handsome, and dignified looking lady, and highly regarded by those who knew her well. The only man living capable of giving a correct and extensive memoir of Robert Triplett is Mr. Jas. Weir. He was the executor of his estate, and fell into the possession of all business, books and papers. The history of the Barnharbor estate would show how a man of lofty honor who looked upon the mean and despicable with contempt was made the victim of a wealthy sharper. The remaining members of his family are his three daughters, Mrs. White, of Virginia, and Mrs. Yeaman and Virginia Triplett, of New York.

The other brother was Philip Triplett, who, as a lawyer, settled in Owensboro after his brother Robert came West from Virginia. He was the leading lawyer of the place for years. William Anthony was also a lawyer of standing for years in the same place. The visiting lawyers of the Owensboro court were Archibald Dixon and Edmond Hopkins from Henderson; Judge Calhoun from what is now McLean; John McHenry from Ohio, and Judge Kincheloe and Frank Peyton from Breckinridge. This, as a matter of course, made the Bar of Owensboro a very able one. But these men have all passed away except Dixon and Kincheloe. James L. Johnson and James Weir were then a young and promising law firm in the town. Johnson soon afterward ran

for Congress and was elected. Mr. Weir has always kept out of public life. Mr. William R. Griffith, the father of Dan and Clint, did not live in town, but near it. He and William Triplett were in partnership as extensive land owners and sellers. Of this land firm the writer never heard a disrespectful word spoken. They were always generous, forbearing and compensative where that could be done to the slow and incompetent purchaser. This was wholly different from another man in the county of the same business, but of whose business cruelty some men spoke with hated breath. Yet the writer is disposed to think that Mr. Stout was hard and relentless only upon the idle and the thriftless, and that he was forbearing and even kind to those who were doing their industrious best.

But it was the family of Mr. Triplett and Mrs. T. were admirably adapted to each other. They had hearts and purposes alike in the exercise of a generous, easy and polished hospitality. As a specimen of the easy readiness with which they entertained strangers, the following was stated to the writer by Senator McCreery: On a certain occasion several gentlemen left the Beech Woods early, designing to take breakfast in town. But hotels were very poor and slow teams in Owensboro in those days, and after waiting a tedious time one of the gentlemen proposed that they would go to Mr. Triplett's and get breakfast. This was agreed to, and all proceeded to Mr. T.'s house, where they were received and breakfasted most cordially, without any apparent surprise or inconvenience. This was a rare instance of that superior family sense and management that cannot be taken at a disadvantage.

Mr. Triplett was a gentleman of extensive reading and varied information. He was a fine talker and always ready to communicate. He was liberal and generous toward all good objects that demanded his aid. It was those who knew Mr. Triplett best that honored and respected him most highly. They saw and felt what the stranger did not see and feel. Though dying comparatively young, he had provided well for his family.

The winter of 1851-2 was a sad, gloomy and memorable winter to Owensboro. It was the time of the visitation of the deadly erysipelas. And among its death's doings was the extinction of the light of the Triplett family. The united head passed away by the same fell destroyer's blow. It was a loss which Owensboro could but poorly and mournfully afford. Mrs. Triplett had for years spent much of her time and care at the sick bed of the afflicted in the town, and yet when she came to die herself the hands were few that were stretched out for her relief. The phantom of contagion stalked abroad everywhere and frightened away even the best and most tenderhearted of the people. The most affecting scene we ever saw was when Mr. Triplett, lying upon his own deathbed, had the corpse of his daughter Laura brought into his room, laid on his bed and then taken out for the grave. It was a picture which the eye that saw it and the heart that felt it could alone receive and retain. It was such a scene which no poetry could describe and no canvas represent. The mother was gone - the providing hand in household affairs and the tender and beloved partner of years had recently entered upon her long sleep in her long home, and now here was the daughter just turning the point of womanhood as the last vision of departing joys presented to the devouring eye of paternal grief. The children left were two daughters, Mrs.

James L. Johnson, then not long married, and her younger sister Illa, who died after marriage some years ago. "What shadows we are!"

Another valuable man lost by the erysipelas was John Bowles, the blacksmith. He and John Brotherton carried on for several years together the blacksmithing and woodwork business of wagons and plows, and the public was never better served than by that firm. Mr. B. was not a man of much education, but was always on the lookout for information. He was quite a reader and not destitute of books. He was a man of public spirit both as to church and State. He was the leader in building the Methodist church and had it not been for him it would not have been built as soon as it was. He was a man of strong prejudices and of strong friendships, and take him all in all he was one of those braces in society which it cannot do well without. The day before his death, understanding that it was sacramental Sabbath in the Presbyterian church, he sent for the pastor of that church and said that if it was agreeable he would like after services were closed at the church that the pastor and elders would meet at his room and let him have the opportunity of partaking of the Lord's supper. This request was pleasantly complied with, but during the interval his mind wandered and he was no longer fit for such a service.

Other valuable lives that fell before the destroyer were, first, a Miss Abbott, a teacher, and not long a resident of Owensboro, but very highly esteemed by those who knew her, Miss Mary Triplett, daughter of Judge George Triplett; Miss Mayo, sister of Captain Sandy Mayo; Mr. Robert Triplett, son of Robert Triplett, and a young Mr. Pegram from Virginia. These young people were all in the very vigor of life, and promised as much for the future as most young people of their ages and circumstances can well do.

Of the men of thirty years ago, Judge Morrison was one. He was the father of Mrs. Chambers. He was a fine old gentleman, of pleasant manners and instructive conversation. He knew a great deal of early times, and was a pleasant companion and a Christian man.

Dr. Murray was also a man of that day. He was the father of Mrs. Will Stone and Mrs. Dr. Luckett, and the step-father of the three Tyler brothers. He was not only a fine physician, but naturally and by practice he was a gentleman, not near so much in outward appearances as in the nobler man of the heart. He was a thousand miles above the low envies of the profession. He had a fine basis of common sense, a clear judgment, large practice in life, much experience and could hardly therefore fail to be among the best of physicians. He was six feet high, well and stoutly formed, and would probably have figured more advantageously at the head of a regiment of grenadiers than with the pestle and mortar.

George Triplett was then, as now, among the conspicuous notabilities of Daviess county. He was county surveyor, county road master, and for most anything that nobody else could do, he was regarded as the right man in the right place. He has been all over the county nobody can tell how many times, and he can trace old lines like Daniel Boone could trace an Indian trail. The

value of such a man, at times, may amount to the extent of a farm. But our friend George still lives and we must'nt praise him to his face.

Sometime before the period of which we are writing, Mr. S. M. Wing had moved into his new and handsome home on Frederica street. The brick were new and bright, and better than most brick that Mr. James Wilhite has ever since put in the many houses he has since built. Mr. Wing was a conspicuous man and merchant in Owensboro for many years. He was the son of noble parents. His father and mother were among the grandest specimens of old-time people. Genuine and honest, cordial and hospitable, true to the core and Christians without guile, were Charles F. Wing and his wife. They raised a family of daughters equally true to truth and to all the high virtues of womanhood. One of them was the wife of the Hon. Edward Rumsey, one of the best, most honorable and most eloquent men the Green river country ever produced, and, withal, the most modest and retiring. He might have been anything he chose to be within the gift of the people, had not his noble and retiring spirit shrank from the rough dash and bustle of politics.

Another sister married Mr. Jonathan Short, of Greenville, a gentleman of intelligence and success in business. A third married James K. Patterson, one of the most accomplished scholars and ablest writers in the western country. He resides in Lexington, Kentucky, and has recently been appointed by the Governor of the State as a delegate to Paris, France, to attend a meeting of the General Geographical Society, to meet shortly in that city. The other three sisters still reside in their father's old home in Greenville, Ky.

Mr. Wing's family in Owensboro was always a delightful place to visit. His wife was the daughter of James Weir, of Greenville, a gentleman of great business capacity and success, and the sister of James Weir, Jr., of our own place. She had her peculiarities, but she was accomplished, polished, entertaining and exceedingly kind. Her death left a vacancy among her friends which was sorely felt and hard to fill. Mr. Wing, as is well known here now, resides in Louisville, and married a second time to a lady of many and superior virtues.

About the same time of which we are now speaking, James Weir, Jr., began housekeeping, first in and then outside the town. Of this, family delicacy forbids us to say anything, as all are still living, except to say that the mother of Mrs. Weir was among the best women of her day, or any day, and that her father was among the grandest men upon whom Christianity ever put her shining crown. There was an air of personal independence about Judge John Green that was attractive and not offensive - an air of truth, honor, rectitude and resolution which at once struck the eye of the discriminating stranger.

Another man deserving the notice of the reminiscents was Barna Tribble. For many years Barna was the main figure among the builders of Owensboro, and had he been as good at overseeing and keeping his hands at work as he was capable as a carpenter and an architect, he would have been a rich man. The main buildings of his day, both in town and outside its limits,

were put up by him, as to the woodwork and architectural devisings. The brick work was mostly done by Mr. James Wilhite for a long time. Afterwards Mr. John Long and then James and John together divided the business. Putting up a fine house in those days was a slow business. Mr. Tribble was slow, very slow, but did his work well, especially what he did himself, and he mostly kept good workmen. A few of the specimens of the work which he did may be seen in the houses of John H. McFarland, James Weir, Dan Griffith and James L. Johnson. And these will stand as monuments to his memory for years and years to come. Probably most of the products of human hands pass away before the death of the executor, but the builder writes his name high up upon the walls and amid the comforts of human habitations. We are all writing our names somewhere. How will they read on the other side of the Great Line?

The Men of The Country of Those Days,
Some of Whom are Still Living.

The two Leaman's, John and David, were old men then, and are since dead. The two Bosley's and John Lancaster are living, and like living - John especially - good and desirable citizens are they. The Hawes family, thirty years ago, was we believe, an unbroken whole. Mr. Hawes, the father of the family that lived in the Beech Woods, first moved from Virginia to Jefferson county, Kentucky, and afterwards to Daviess, where he bought and settled a very large and fine body of land. At the period of which we speak, the brothers and their brother-in-law, Taylor, were the patriarchs and princes of their little kingdom. Their lands, their servants and themselves all united to form the Patriarchal idea. Kindness, hospitality and attention to strangers were as natural and unnoted by them as getting up in the morning. Abner Hawes was hardly known to us, as he died shortly after we came to the county, and Walker Hawes soon afterwards sold out and went to Texas, and William also left the county. Samuel Hawes, Ben and Edmond Hawes, and Gibson Taylor, who married a Miss Hawes, we have known best. Of the living we say nothing. They speak for themselves. Samuel Hawes was as fine a specimen as could be found of a country gentleman. The gentleman was in his heart and not in his coat, though he was far from being a sloven. He was a man of refined feeling, with a delicate respect for the feelings of others. He did not either religiously or politically obtrude his opinions upon others, though he had his own opinions and held them as strongly and independently as any one. In the attributes of good neighborhood and hospitality to decent strangers, he was like all the Hawes family. His face and form, always and everywhere, betrayed the decent, respectable and gentlemanly man.

Ben Hawes was less noticeable in a crowd than his brother Sam, but in everything that is good and true, noble and hospitable, he and his family could hardly be surpassed. The memory of such men is pleasant, and their loss is great, and it takes an age or two to supply their place, if ever.

Another gentleman of the Beech Woods was Mr. James B. Anderson. He had been brought, up to mercantile business, but quit it, left Louisville, bought a farm and settled in Daviess county. He afterwards moved to town, was appointed cashier of the Planters' Bank, and

continued in that office until his death. Mr. Anderson was all his life, we think, subject to a kind of health which was a feed to the genus irritable. That he was sometimes irritable and would say sharp things could not be denied by his best friends, but the general tone and tenor of his life was the kind, genial and upright Christian gentleman. If he was intolerant of anything it was the mean, the low, the false and the dishonest. Truth in religion, truth in business and truth in everything was the intense characteristic of his life. We knew him long; we knew him well; we knew him in church matters, in business affairs and under a great variety of circumstances, and never knew him to flinch from duty. In matters of business he was punctiliously exact, not only in the affairs of the Bank, but in everything pertaining to himself. He scarcely made a mistake in his Bank, but when he did, though it might be to the amount of the most insignificant sum, yet he would neither spare time nor labor till it was rectified. He could not bear that a mistake should occur in his business acts or records. He was an enlightened citizen and a generous supporter of all good institutions and proper exercises.

The merchants of Owensboro, whom we have already mentioned, were Harvey Blair, Mercer and Robert Moorman and Mortimer Athy. These men all died young and left good and respectable families behind them.

The Churches.

In 1847 the only two church buildings in Owensboro were those of the Cumberland Presbyterian and the Baptist people. The Baptist church then stood on the river bank and now forms a part of the Barret tobacco stemmery, the denomination having built themselves a fine church in a more advantageous position. Since that time the Presbyterians, at that time being but few and feeble, have built two houses of worship, and both bodies are in a fair degree of thrift and promise. The Methodists next put up a good church, then the Catholics next and later the Reformers and Lutherans. The Episcopalians are preparing to put up a house for themselves. It will be seen from this that the churches have kept pace with the increase of population. Churches are always motives and invitations to settlers, for who could buy real estate or settle in Sodom? Beside where there are churches there will be schools.

The tobacco interest in Owensboro was small in those days to what it has grown and is still growing to be. The prospect is simply prodigious when we look at the vast stemmeries up and still going up.

Since those early times many people and families have moved into town and county, but this does not fall within the design of these Recollections.

Owensboro Authors.

Robert Triplett wrote a book entitled "Roland Trevor." It was an expose of his own life, and was written with spirit and with far higher literary abilities and qualifications than we could expect from one whose life was so strictly devoted to business.

James Weir wrote two novels, one styled "Lonz Powers" and the other "Simon Kenton; or, the Winter Lodge". These works were rather the literary pranks of a young man than the intended steady work of life. But they were always a proof to the present writer that if Mr. Weir had pursued the line of literary fiction he would have ranked with the best novelists of the age. But happily with better means of life he had better sense.

Bench and Bar.

It may well be believed that there was great and varied abilities in any court where John Calhoon presided, what where Triplett and Dixon, Kincheloe and Peyton, McHenry and Hopkins practiced. Our Bench at present is not, only sustained but adorned by Judge Stewart. The Bar is braced with strength and competence by Williams, Weir, Sweeney and May, and stoutly brought up in the rear by a promising body of young lawyers.

Our Medical Profession.

The medical profession in Owensboro has been from the beginning among the ablest of the State. This is the simple, unvarnished opinion of all competent judges, and one which we have heard over and over again. Our physicians are not the mental fossils of other days, set, fixed and unchangeable, nor are they fools enough to be bewitched by a thing simply because it is new. They have their regular meetings for discussions, essays and inquiries. They thus keep themselves abreast with the advance of medical science everywhere. These meetings become not only schools of knowledge, but great stimulants upwards and in the direction of medical elevation.

In the early times of which we speak, William Bell, an old merchant of Louisville, bought the Haphazard farm of Robert Triplett, two miles above Owensboro, on the river. Mr. Bell was a gentleman whose air and port indicated an equality and familiarity with the best ranks of society. He and his admirable wife and other branches of his family would have been a fine addition to any society. He was a man of general reading and fine information - a pleasant companion and an instructive talker. He could tell an Irish story on his own countrymen with great naturalness and with most amusing and admirable style.

He was a man of public spirit, and was the first to move in the getting up of an Agricultural Society of the county. Its only object was to improve stock and elevate the style and increase the products of agriculture in quality and quantity, and neither to generate nor support gambling horse rings. It was also through his suggestions and personal labors that the first Bank - the Planters - was originated and established. He was its first President.

He and James B. Anderson were admirable instances of the increased values of men by moving to a new place. Here they were prime elements both in church and society. Everything was new and needed the help of such men. In most things and in most instances they worked admirably together. In church matters they were the supplements of each other - what one lacked

the other made up, and when they differed - which was rare - a generous mind could readily appologize for the difference. They were honored and valuable men, especially in the church, and the loss of them is felt to this day.

William A. Bradshaw also in those early times lived in the vicinity of Owensboro. He and his family still live in the county. Both in church and society he has always ranked among good, loved and honored men. His wife was a refined, Christian lady.

Among the noted families of the town in those times was that of Mr. Edward T. White. This family still among us in unbroken numbers and increased in the way of sons-in-law and some admirable grand children.

Ben. Bransford was then a young man and in the employ, I think, of Mr. Dunlop in the tobacco business. Since then he has by wisdom, great energy and close attention to business become quite a rich man. And where is there a man anywhere that deserves prosperity better than Ben. Bransford? If an open heart and an open hand and a broad, liberal soul be the indications of a true man and good, then is our friend Ben. worthy of such commendation.

Major Hamden Smith has also since then, by great industry and popularity with the tobacco men of the county, become one of the substantial forces in the prosperity of Owensboro. A fine home, a kind, genial and hospitable family are a worthy and ample reward in this life for many a year of anxious toil.

Since those early days no man in this town has done more work of head and hand than Captain Frank Hall. When we first knew the place he was a moving power in Owensboro, and from that day till this, except the short time he lived in Louisville, he has been a moving power in it, one way or another. Failures that would have killed some men seemed only to inspire the Captain with new additions of energy and to put him in new paths of effort. And he is to-day as full of energy, hope and work as ever, and probably more popular than ever. His capacity to turn his hand to anything almost has been unique and noticeable. The Captain is a man of taste and likes to have things in tasty plight. He was always good-looking, but as he has grown older he has grown still better looking. He has recently married, a lady said to be both admirable and charming. God speed them in all that's good.

Among these recollections some names have been overlooked, as William Pegram, William Mason and Mr. ___ Chambers. These gentlemen know more of those early times than the writer.

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"A List of the white males over 21 in Owensborough" from the 1821 Daviess County, Ky. tax list (transcribed by Jerry Long): George Handley, Daniel Moseley, Brice P. Duncan, David Morton, Wm. W. Franklin, Christo. Jones, Isaac Kennady, James Kennady, Phillip Triplett, P. Simpson, Ira Hathaway, Elisha Adams, J. M. Rogers, Alexander Moreland, J. McHendle, James W. Johnston, John Roberts, Wm. R. Griffith, P. Thompson, James Talbot, Samuel Smith, Thos.

Potts, Willis M. Pickett, William Adams, John Parks, Thomas Moseley Senr., J. G. Livers, Jesse Kincaid, James Hiatt, James Sands, William Lampton, John Churchill Jr., James Higgins, John Proctor, J. J. Amos, A. Legrand, Sacket Harbez.

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