Daviess County Black History Anthology

By Jerry Long

The following is only a sampling of published sources on the history of Blacks in Daviess County.

Table of Contents

Our Heritage, Daviess County, Kentucky Celebrating 1815-2015, Daviess County Bicentennial Committee, Mt. Publishing Company, Inc., Evansville, IN, 2015:

- "From Field Hands to Federals", by Isaac G. Settle [service in Civil War]
- "The Mary Harding Home", by Wesley Acton & Aloma W. Dew

A History of the Daviess - McLean Baptist Association in Kentucky, 1844-1943, Rev. Wendell H. Rone, 1943:

- "Negro Members"

The Daviess County Historical Quarterly, Daviess County Historical Society, Owensboro, KY:

- "The Civil War's Influence on the Lifestyle of Blacks in Daviess County", by Jeff Lekson
- "Race Relations in Owensboro During the 1960's", by Rob Henry

Owensboro, KY newspapers:

- Celebration of freedom [1876]
- Statistics on Daviess County Blacks [1877]
- First negro jury – First negro witness in Kentucky [1902]
- Marriage license granted under old law [1912]
- "Blacks arrived in city in 1800" [1976]
- "Local blacks' freedom delayed" [1976]
- "Researcher pieces together black history" [1989]
- "Church celebrates 120th anniversary" – St. Paul A.M.E. Church [1993]
- Picture of the Community Drum and Bugle Corps during the 1930s [1997]
- "The Black Middle Class" – Owensboro Black Chautauqua, by Aloma Williams Dew [1998]
- "The Dream Lives On" – Dr. Reginald & Hattie Neblett, by Glenn Hodges [1999]
- "Sleet would be so proud", by Keith Lawrence [2000]
- "Williams' bid opened doors for black leaders", by Joy Campbell [2005]

African American historical markers:

- Uncle Tom Lived Here
- Daviess Co. U.S. Colored Troops In The Civil War
- Fourth Street Baptist Church
- Kendall - Perkins Park
- Moneta Sleet, Jr. (1926-1996)
- Pleasant Point Missionary Baptist Church
- The African American Community In Owensboro
- Two Early Civil Rights Cases In Owensboro
- Born With A Purpose
- Dr. and Mrs. Clay E. Simpson, Sr.

Other articles related to the history of Blacks in Daviess County can be found in the Black Kentucky Pioneers section of the website, West-Central Kentucky History & Genealogy, by Jerry Long (https://wckyhistory-genealogy.org/).

• • • • • • • • • •

In the following listing the page numbers in the left hand column are page numbers where the entry is found in the original source:

• • • • • • • • • •

History of Daviess County, Kentucky, Inter-State Publishing Co., Chicago, IL, 1883:

Chapter I – Early Settlement

p.55 Now, in 1875… Daviess County has 4,800 white voters, and 800 colored voters.

Chapter IV – Political Notes

p.100 At the election of Aug. 6, 1866, the "Southern Rights" party was successful, as also at succeeding elections generally. Negroes were admitted to the franchise in 1867, and although their first vote, April 6, of that year, in Owensboro, was all given, except two, for the Republican ticket, the Democratic success was greater than before for several years… In 1881 the two cents [tax] per $100 was for colored schools.

Chapter VI – The Civil War

p.168 1864. — During the spring of this year negro enrolling commenced, and their freedom from slavery encouraged. Joseph Thomas and several others visited a negro military camp near Indianapolis, for the purpose of obtaining indemnity for citizens of Daviess County for the loss of their servants, but they were treated in a very ruffianly manner. Directly before their eyes, one negro loaded a gun and called upon his fellows to join him, saying, with reference to Mr. Thomas particularly, "There goes the d — d rascal who has the papers! Shoot him! G — d d— n him!" Captain Snow, a white man there, said he could not control the ruffianly conduct of the dark soldiery, and he guessed Mr. T. would have to take care of himself. Colonel Russel, who was not there, afterward said that if he had been present he would have prevented such insolence.

p.169 April 21 [1864], Joseph Thomas received the agency to procure compensation for owners of slaves who had run away and enlisted; but never was a dollar paid for this purpose… April 22-30, negroes running away in great numbers, crossing the river into Indiana… June 1, seventy-eight negro soldiers sent to Louisville. June 5, Captain Howard, with sixty or seventy men arrived. June 6, 165 negroes left on the Grey Eagle… June 13, Prange's company left. Woodward's six-months' men quartered in the court-house. Negroes all left.

p.170 June 18 [1864] – Powers arrived from Hawesville with about a score of negro recruits on board a small steamer, and marched them to the court-house square, intending to quarter them in the court-house with Colonel Woodward's State Guard of white

soldiers; but the latter refused to let them in. Both sides were called to arms, and a light almost ensued. The colored recruits were then quartered in the jail, with nothing to eat, and under locks and bolts for about twenty -four hours.

p.171 July – At this time negro recruiting went on rather slowly, but their crossing over into Indiana progressed briskly. On boarding Captain Coyle's gun-boat, he said he could not permit them to be taken o^ against their will. While the people generally wished there were no negroes in the State, they hated to see them go in this way… Aug. 4 [1864] Colonel Bishop and colored soldiers arrived at 11 p.m. Aug. 6, Circuit Clerk locked up his office, as the colored infantry had the court-house as quarters. Aug. 8, about 200 negro soldiers came up from Henderson. Aug. 23, 165 more arrived from the same place. Aug. 25, they all left at night. Aug. 15, Captain J. C. Cowin, of the One Hundred and Eighth Colored Infantry, after a little lighting, captured nine guerrillas at Yelvington and brought them to Owensboro, where they were confined in jail.

p.172 Aug. 16 [1864], Captain Yarber arrested, under order of Colonel Bishop, his men disarmed, horses taken from them, and they disbanded. The Captain could show no authority for his proceedings. Aug. 18, Benedict D. Mitchell, the jailer, was shot by mistake by one of the guards, who had orders to shoot any one making his appearance in the jail-yard that night. Mr. Mitchell, not knowing that such an order had been given, appeared in the yard about 2 o'-clock in the morning, for the purpose of attending to some necessity.

p.173 Burning of the Wharf-boat. — But by far the worst thing they did was to burn Messrs. Ayers & Elders' wharf-boat, with a number of human beings confined upon it. They mistakenly supposed that considerable Government freight was upon it. The private property consumed was estimated at about $6,000. Nine colored soldiers, said to have been the guard that conducted the Yelvington prisoners to Louisville, were at this boat. They first fired at the guerrillas, and then concealed themselves within, for a time; but it is said that three jumped off, ran up the bank and escaped. Two of them were shot by the murderers and thrown overboard, and the charred remains of one more was found on the boat, the fire being extinguished before the hull was consumed. Three negroes took refuge in the hull, and were cut out by Mr. Ayres after the marauders had left. They pleaded piteously for their lives and declared they were anxious to return to their owners. Lieutenant Walters, previously of the Third Kentucky Cavalry, was killed during the affray. A lot of Government stores on the levee were fired just before they left, but the most of the property was saved afterward by the citizens. These guerrillas were here but one hour, and they left on the Litchfield road.

Aug. 28, the gun-boat Lou Eaves took away many negroes.

During this month, according to the Monitor, the negro soldiery in Owensboro behaved very well.

p.174 Sept. 7 [1864], Colonel Moon and 118 colored troops arrived at the fairground. Sept. 11 [1864], about 200 negro soldiers went to Henderson…

Oct. 10, One Hundred and Eighteenth Colored Regiment left Owensboro.

p.175 Nov. 1, three companies of colored soldiers arrived, and quartered in the court-house. Nov. 2, a colored picket killed. 6, a guerrilla shot J. Taylor's negro, robbed and hung up Mr. Cavin (who lived in the country) two or three times, and robbed others in

the county… 1865, Jan. 4, the court-house burned by Davidson and his men; the records and furniture mostly saved. Davidson had orders to destroy every court-house that had been occupied by negro troops.

p.177 Sept. 6 [1865], a company of negro soldiers arrived. Sept. 25, negro soldiers left; no soldiers of any kind remaining.

Chapter VII – Population of Daviess County, labor

	census	whites	slaves	free colored	total
p.179	1840	6,327	1,960	44	8,331
	1850	9,419	2,889	54	12,362
	1860	11,958	3,515	76	15,549
	1870	17,111		3,603	20,714
	1880	22,008		4,528	26,535

p.180 Census of 1868: Negroes – 1,474; taxable property owned by negroes – $37,110; [p.181] Census of 1869: Negroes between 6 and 20 – 704; taxable property owned by negroes – $52,760

p.185 Jan. 1, 1863, on the emancipation of the slaves of the seceding States, wages for manual labor went up to an intolerable height. Negro farm hands demanded $200 to $250 a year, and cooks $25 to $125. At the close of the war, when greenbacks were more plentiful than specie, and the negroes about all free, the prices of labor rose to an alarming extent.

Chapter XIV – Poor-House, Education, Capital Punishment

p.296 The annual average of paupers is about eight to ten. Colored paupers are kept by private individuals.

p.300 Collins's History of Kentucky says: " But two cases of hanging have occurred in the history of the [Daviess] county, a negro man for rape, in 1838, and Curtis Richardson, Nov. 1, 1854, for murder"… The negro above referred to was a slave belonging to Mr. Shauntee. The scaffold from which he was hung was erected near where St. Stephen's (Catholic) Church now stands. He was executed by R. C. Jett, Sheriff.

p.303 In 1882-'3 there are ninety-three districts for white children and fifteen for colored. The amount of money paid during the year for their maintenance is $11,000. The number of children in attendance, including Owensboro, is 7, 837. Amount of money paid for colored schools is $1,800, from the State fund.

Chapter XV – Owensboro

p.327 Frederica street is said to have been named by Mr. [David] Ross, in honor of a mulatto slave he owned at the time.

p.331 Owensboro in 1882 – The taxable property of Owensboro in 1872 was listed by the city assessor as follows: Within the old city boundary, $2,121,585; within the addition, $181,945; property of negroes, $13,495; total value of property, $2,317,025.

p.357 The Planters' House has had a long and eventful history, and the noteworthy instances occurring in connection with it may be numbered by hundreds. The following comes to hand: In 1875, when the " civil rights " law prominently occupied public attention,

and Mr. Hathaway was conducting the above institution, a negro presented himself one day for accommodations, under the aforesaid law concerning hotels. Mr. H. refused him on the ground that "this was not a 'hotel.' but a private boarding house."

Chapter XVI – Educational, Churches

p.367 Colored School. — This is supported almost exclusively by the State fund, which yields, since August, 1882, $1.30 per child of school age. Previously the per capita had thirty to fifty cents. There are now about 500 colored children of school age (between six and twenty years) in the city of Owensboro. Their school building, on Poplar street, between Third and Fourth, was erected in 1879, is of brick, and 30 x 40 feet in dimensions. Average attendance about 200. The teachers are Lewis Metcalf, Principal, and Mrs. Anna Vairian and Owen Barrett, Assistants.

p.376 Fourth Street Baptist Church (colored). — This society was organized many years ago, when records were not very sacredly kept. They worshiped at first in a log building which stood almost directly in a ravine, since filled up, just below where St. Stephen's Church now stands. Isom Howard was their minister for many years. The present church building, a brick, between Elm and Poplar streets, was built before the war; seating capacity, 500 or more. Since it was first built, twenty feet addition has been made to the rear or north end. It is now eighty feet long by forty wide. As pastors of this church, Mr. Howard has been succeeded by Revs. DuPuy, Caldwell, Edward Newsom and Moses Harding, the present incumbent, who has been here nearly seven years. There are now about 500 members. There have been over 600, but a few years ago i new church was formed from it, who have their headquarters in the eastern part of the city. The Sunday-school has an average attendance of 80 to 100. Nelson Talbutt is the present Superintendent. The principal revivals have occurred under the ministrations of Rev. Newsom, who added over 100 to the church, and Rev. Norris, from Henderson, who conducted a revival here resulting also in the addition of over 100 to the church. Mr. Harding has added about 300 to this church.

p.377 Center Street Baptist Church (colored). — This has also been called " Snow Hill Baptist Church;" the name does not yet seem to be settled. It is comparatively young and weak. A frame church has been commenced on Snow Hill, probably 34 x 50 feet in dimensions, but when the frame was up and roof and siding on work ceased. The society holds regular religious services, however. Rev. A. Merrifield has been pastor here. Rev. Salter is the present minister.

p.384 Third Street Colored (or African) Methodist Episcopal Church. — This church was organized many' years ago, by Rev. Dunahy, with twenty-five or thirty members. Met for worship in Megill's Hall. The pastors since then have been Revs. Yocum, Frost, O.B. Ross, Ferguson, Sherman, and the present one is Rev. Taylor. The membership has increased to 119, and is in a prosperous condition. leaders: Dora Henderson and Mr. Humphrey. The church building was erected in 1873; size, 60x30 feet; cost, $16,000; location, near the corner of Third and St. Elizabeth streets.

Chapter XVII – Benevolent Societies

p.390 The Union Benevolent Society, No. 2, was organized in the winter of 1876-7, with a membership of about twenty-five. The first president was H.C. Helm, and the first

Secretary was A. Berry. The society is not a secret one, and its objects are benevolence and sociability. Colored people between the ages of twelve and forty- five are eligible to membership. The organization has prospered steadily in its membership, gradually increasing from twenty-five to nearly 400. The present officers are as follows: Mr. Pickrum, President; Robert Crump, Secretary; Thomas Crump, Treasurer. The society meets at the public school-house in Owensboro, the second and fourth Mondays of each month. Occasional entertainments have been given by the society since its organization.

p.394 Guiding Star Lodge, No. 14, A. F. & A. M. (colored), was organized in 1879, with about ten members and the following officers: Thomas Tyler, W M. ; O. K. Barrett, S. W. ; Alfred Buckner, J. W; George Alexander, S. D.; Charles Jones, J. D.; Nestor McFarland, Chaplain; Phocion Fields, Secretary; William McFarland, Treasurer; Lewis R. Saulsbury, Tyler. There are now thirty-two members, with the following officers: Alfred Buckner, W. M. ; George Alexander, S. W.; Elder McFarland. J. W.; Phocian Fields, S. D.; Lewis Saulsbury, J. D. ; Wm. Jackson, Secretary; Wm. Bailey, Treasurer. Place of meeting, over the Deposit Bank.

p.395 Grand United Lodge, No. 1, 982, I. O. O. F. (colored), was organized in September, 1878, with about eighty members. Richard Vairian, Noble Father; John Swain, Noble Grand; Charles Jackson. Permanent Secretary. The place of meeting has been uniformly at their lodge room over the Deposit Bank. The present membership numbers 100 or more, and the lodge in every respect is in a very flourishing condition. They have a $30 banner, and their regalia cost $300. Present officers: John Swain, Noble Father; Alfred Woods, Noble Grand; Samuel Curd, Vice Grand; Charles Henderson, Permanent Secretary; Robert Crump, E. S.

p.400 The United Brothers of Friendship, No. 7, was organized in the winter of 1866-'7, with a charter membership of about twenty-five. It is a secret order confined to colored men. Among the first members were William Moreton, Sandy Alexander, Albert Jackson and Wesley Troutman. The object of the order was at first benevolence, but now insurance is combined with the working 0 the lodge. The limit of insurance is $3,000. The society has prospered, owning now $4,000 worth of property, and its membership now amounts to eighty, in good standing. The present officers: H. C. Helm, Master; Terry Howard, Deputy Master; Wm. Griffith, Secretary; Currier Valentine, Assistant Secretary; Albert Jackson, Treasurer; John Garnet, John Nepp, George Alexander, Robert Daws and Pat Taylor. The society meets the first and third Mondays of each month, at their hall.

p.400 The Little United Brothers of Friendship was organized about 1872, with about fifteen members. It is a society composed of colored boys, and is under the control of the United Brothers of Friendship. It has now about sixty members in good standing. Si. Johnson is the President; Levi Bartlett, Vice President; Robert Sherman, Secretary; John Nepp, Treasurer. The society meets twice a month, the second and fourth Mondays.

p.401 The Little United Sisters of Friendship is immediately under the direction of the United Sisters. It was organized in August, 1881, and at the present time has over fifty members. It meets twice a month, at the hall of the United Brothers.

p.401 The United Sisters of Friendship is a secret order among the colored ladies of Owensboro. U. B. F. Temple, No. 8, was organized about 1868, with a membership

of fifteen or twenty. It is under the direction of the United Brothers of Friendship, but holds separate meetings. Its objects are benevolence and sociability, and life insurance, limited to $1,500. The present membership is over 300, and the prospects of the society are very bright. The presiding officer is denominated Princess, and is at present Mrs. Lizzie Daws; the Secretary is Mrs. Annie Yerrin. The society meets at the U. B. F. Hall, the first and third Tuesday night of each month.

p.416 [Diary of Joseph Thomas]: July 3 [1859], Salmon's house robbed and burned by negroes… [p.418] Aug. 18 [1864], Q. D. Mitchell killed by a negro picket…[p.420] May 21 [1866] May 20 [1866] a negro named "Tom" was tried before City Judge Washburn for rape. On his way to the jail an unknown party placed one end of a rope over his head, and threw the other end over a limb of a tree in the courthouse yard, and the father of the injured girl drew the prisoner up, where he was kept suspended twenty or thirty minutes, and until after he was quite dead… [p.421] Jan. 27 [1869] a negro man, committed to jail for rape, was hung in the court-house yard... [p.422] March 28 [1870], death of … Rev. Isham Howard, a colored minister. April 4 [1870] election of mayor, and negroes voted for the first time.

Chapter XXIII – Murray Precinct: Churches

p.713 Green Brier Baptist Church – This church was constituted Oct, 29, 1820… This church ever had a goodly number of colored members until the time of the late war. After they were freed they took letters and went into a separate organization… (p.714) The first Pastor for the colored church was Mac Taylor, who preached about a year. He was very illiterate and could scarcely read. His mistress would read from the Bible and he would commit to memory, and announce his text from memory, then preach a thundering sermon, being well able to hold the attention of his hearers. After his death a white man named Thomas Brooks was called, who preached a little over a year. After awhile the church was discontinued.

Chapter XXVIII – Yelvington Precinct: Churches

p.851 Yelvington Baptist Church was organized in a private house, June 30, 1813, about two miles southwest of its present location, and at what was then known as the "Rock Spring"… [p.852] In 1828 a great revival took place among the colored people, and many of them were added to the church during the year. Several colored men were licensed to preach in 1827. There was a great revival in 1834, among both white and colored… About this time [1840] a new church was built, and the whites and colored people met in separate congregations… [p.853] Since the war the colored members have drawn off and worship alone.

• • • • • • • • • • •

<u>Sixty Years of Owensboro, 1883-1943</u>, William Foster Hayes, Messenger Job Printing Co., Owensboro, KY, 1943, pp.217, 325:

p.217 – NEGRO CHURCHES

Of these the Fourth Street Baptist Church is by far the largest. Its building is a large brick one on West, Fourth Street and there is a large membership, including many of the most prominent Negroes in the city. For a number of years the Rev. S. E. Smith was its pastor, later the Rev. C. C. Sykes. The present pastor is the Rev. O. M. Locust, who came from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in September 1943.

Other churches of our colored population, with their pastors as of May, 1941, are as follows:

St. Paul A. M. E.—.Corner Seventh and Elm Streets. Rev. L. Harvey, pastor.

Zion Baptist—Mechanicsville Short Ninth Street. Rev. Jeff Dixon, pastor.

Center Street Baptist—Rev. J. W. Wright, pastor.

Tenth Street Baptist—Rev. J. H. Jacobs, pastor.

p.325 PATRIOTIC SOCIETIES – COLORED VETERANS

Entirely separate from the American Legion Post above described is an organization of colored veterans of the First World War who call themselves the Roy Smith Post of the American Legion. Their officers, as of June, 1942, are: George Melvin McHenry, post commander; Morris Jackson, post adjutant; Oscar Long, sergeant-at-arms; John Campbell, finance officer; Oscar Higgs, first vice-commander; Estel Mulligan, second vice-commander; and Morris Jackson, Robert Doss and Paul Moore, members of the executive committee.

• • • • • • • • • •

<u>Owensboro: The City on the Yellow Banks</u>, Lee A. Dew & Aloma W. Dew, Rivendell Publications, Bowling Green, KY, 1988, pp.134-136:

… the twenties had a darker side. Throughout the country, racism and prejudice were rearing their heads anew as evidenced by the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan used its terroristic tactics and anonymity to attack not only Negroes, but Catholics, Jews, and aliens as well. Owensboro's Klan experiences seemed to be mostly aimed at Catholics, who made up a large part of Owensboro's population. In April 1923, the KKK petitioned for permission to hold a meeting at the Courthouse which was denied by a 3-1 vote. Mayor Hickman was steadfastly opposed to allowing the Klan to hold a meeting on public property and appealed to the commissioners to refuse the petition as the people of Owensboro had lived in harmony without serious disturbance for 100 years. He reasoned that this/ organization, which was known to promote strife, could only bring trouble to the community which might take a long time to heal. He admitted that he was opposed to the KKK meeting anywhere in the city.

Klan organizer Clifford Miller argued that in Owensboro there were preachers, bankers, doctors, and businessmen who were members of the KKK and they should be allowed to hold a public meeting. County Judge R. L. McFarland accompanied his dissent with a speech in which he contended the county had been founded as a refuge for religious freedom and he did not feel that the Klan should be allowed to mask their faces and go about intimidating and terrorizing local citizens.

Undeterred by the Commission's steadfast refusal, the Klan moved the rally south of the city to the property of R.E. Massie on the Livermore Road, the present site of Kentucky Wesleyan College. By the time set for the meeting, a crowd of about 350 men had gathered at the Courthouse. The Rev. E.H. Lougher, a Klan spokesman, drove by and announced through a megaphone that

the meeting would take place "at the end of the street car line on Livermore Road." His announcement was met with cheers as the crowd surged toward Frederica Street, joined by hundreds of automobiles which by the time of the speech were lined up for a half mile along the road with many more parked in nearby fields.

The night sky was illuminated by an electric-bulb studded cross. A hum of excitement and anticipation moved through the crowd estimated at 3,000 people Lougher stood inside an open automobile which served as a mobile speaker's platform He began by defending the KKK as unjustly accused of being anti-Catholic, anti-Jew and anti-Negro. He attacked local officials as the true lawbreakers, contended that the Constitutional rights of himself and every Owensboro citizen were violated, and urged the voters to oust the offending officials. One way to protect their rights was suggested to be membership in the Klan, which according to Lougher, was seven million strong. Further, he declared, "… in two and a half years there will be 20 million."

Law enforcement officials and the County Attorney had driven to the meeting to observe, but to take no action unless a riot was started or incendiary remarks made which could lead to trouble. After about 30 minutes Lougher launched into a bitter attack against Catholics; but he received only moderate applause, with many in the audience being only lukewarm and many openly resentful of his remarks. As he began his discussion of the Klan's attitude toward Negroes, the officials felt his remarks inflammatory enough to stop him. Lougher's arrest on the grounds of conspiracy with others to intimidate and alarm resulted in an incident when Massie jumped into the car and demanded, "What right has a sheriff to come on my private land and arrest a man without a warrant? This is my private land, and if he can do that, why he can pay my taxes." As Lougher was being taken to the Courthouse to be charged, a Mrs. J.W. McFerran climbed into the automobile, waved an American flag and shouted, "Let's all sing the Star Spangled Banner." Some in the crowd responded with a partial rendering of "America."

Charges against Lougher were dropped after a civil libertarian plea for free speech declaring that no laws had been broken. Attorney C.W. Wells argued that Lougher had the same rights to free speech as any other citizen.

The Klan returned to Owensboro in August 1924. A crowd estimated at between six and seven thousand was on hand, far short of the expected 20,000. Mayor Hickman denied the use of city parks or other public places for a rally, so the celebration was held at the Daviess County fair grounds. Hickman had, however, granted permission for a parade through the city as long as the Klan did not break the state law forbidding the wearing of masks. Hickman declined an invitation, which must have been facitious considering his outspoken opposition to the KKK, to head the parade. The parade of four floats, four bands, four automobiles, and sixteen horses was led by Constable Harden Brown, acting as parade marshall. 834 persons took part in the parade, more than two-thirds of whom were masked despite the promises that the state law would be honored. The parade wended its way through downtown Owensboro and back to the fairgrounds where "naturalization" ceremonies and a fireworks display followed.

A barbecue dinner was followed by anti-Catholic speeches. One speaker, declared to be an "Imperial representative" whose name and identity were not revealed, asserted that the founders of America had been Protestant and it was therefore the goal of the Klan to keep the nation for Protestants.

Dr. Lougher, who proudly made frequent reference to his record of being arrested and jailed often, was free for the moment, and in his - address claimed that 70,000 Protestant preachers belonged to the Klan and accounted for much of the success of the organization.

Two huge crosses made from telephone poles studded with light bulbs illuminated the scene, symbolic of the small-mindedness and intolerance which were so much a part of the twenties in America. There is no indication that the Klan created any lasting problems among the Catholics and Protestants of Owensboro. Perhaps many of the throng attending the rallies came more from curiosity than hate; but nevertheless it was a shameful episode in Owensboro's history that intolerance and prejudice were given so large an audience.

• • • • • • • • • •

Daviess County, Kentucky Celebrating Our Heritage, 1815-2015, Daviess County Bicentennial Committee, Mt. Publishing Company, Inc., Evansville, IN, 2015, pp.67-72:

Chapter 6: From Field Hands to Federals

By Issac G. Settle

On July 17, 1862 the Federal Government provided the first official authorization for the enlistment of black troops in the Civil War known as the Second Confiscation and Militia Act. Not until the Emancipation Proclamation was signed could black troops participate in combat situations, but the Act allowed newly raised black regiments to build fortifications, guard critical positions such as rail lines or bridges, and provide any type of labor. During the first years of the war, there were only a handful of black regiments, but that number swelled by the summer of 1864.

That same year a fraction of Daviess County's black population enlisted to fight for the Union. According to various articles in the *Owensboro Monitor*, several hundred black recruits were raised in Daviess County. There were also blacks from Hancock, Henderson, McLean, Ohio and Muhlenberg Counties who traveled into Owensboro to enlist since it was the largest city in the area. Not only were many troops raised here, even more troops were stationed in Owensboro and other points in Daviess County. One of the most notable regiments garrisoned in Owensboro was the 108th United States Colored Infantry under the command of Colonel John Bishop. Unknown to many Daviess Countians, many of the county's slaves enlisted to fight for the Union and served some way either in Owensboro, the Petersburg-Richmond and Appomattox Campaigns, or had various duties in other parts of Kentucky and Tennessee.

A few regiments were primarily mustered in Owensboro. One notable recruiter in Owensboro was Lieutenant Colonel John Glenn, who was stationed at Henderson. Glenn was known to physical1y intimidate or nearly torture slaves so that they would enlist. In February 1865, a telegram from Lincoln to Glenn was sent:

> "Complaint is made to me that you are forcing negroes into the Military service, and even torturing them - riding them on rails and the like - to extort their consent. I hope this may be a mistake. The like must not be done by you, or any one under you. You must not force negroes any more than white men. Answer me on this. A. LINCOLN"

Lieutenant Colonel Glenn was of the 120th United States Colored Infantry.

Another notable officer stationed in Owensboro was Provost Marshal, Captain John R. Grissom, who directed a draft which was held at the courthouse. The draft occurred in May 1864, and resulted in 88 men being drafted, 27 of whom were slaves. Many men drafted were of a higher social standing and were eligible to hire a substitute which in most cases was a poor white man or a slave. Throughout the Civil War many Daviess Countians used a slave as a substitute.

One of the regiments almost completely raised in Daviess County was the 118th United States Colored Infantry. The 118th was comprised of blacks from primarily Daviess and Henderson Counties, with others coming from McLean, Ohio and Muhlenberg Counties to enlist. Many units were assembled by Colonel John Moon who came from Henderson with one hundred and ninety-four recruits whose main duty was to recruit black soldiers. When he arrived, he immediately sent recruiting parties throughout Daviess County. The vast majority of the troops that enlisted in the 118th had enlisted in the months of August and September 1864. In September 1864 the *Owensboro Monitor* reported an abundance of black troops in Daviess County. There were so many that Colonel John Moon had to send many of the troops to the Fair Grounds, on the outskirts of town, to set up camp. These soldiers, which would later make up the 118th United States Colored Infantry, left Daviess County on the steamer Morning Star in October 1864, and were sent to Louisville in order to be "hurried on to General Grant to assist in 'taking Richmond". Soon after the regiment reached Baltimore, Maryland, the units raised in Owensboro and elsewhere were officially organized on October 19, 1864 as the 118th United States Colored Infantry and sent south to fight.

On October 26, 1864, the 118th was rapidly transferred to City Point, Virginia, as General U.S. Grant's main body of Union troops marched their way towards the Confederate Capital of Richmond. They took part in the Siege Operation of Petersburg, where they were one of the thirty-three black regiments present.

The Siege of Petersburg was the site of a significant battle for the Unites States Colored Troops—The Petersburg Mine Assault, otherwise known as "The Crater." It was caused by a land mine which was meant to create a gap in the Confederate defenses of Petersburg. The commander, General Ambrose Burnside, ordered troops to move forward, but moving forward meant moving deep into the "crater." Some of the first regiments to enter the "crater" were U.S. Colored Troops. Before the Federal troops could react, the Confederates had recovered, and had, heavily shelled the Federal Troops massacring most of the black troops who were making their assault towards the enemy. Although the 118th was not in the crater, they would have witnessed the massacre and been on site after the event. During the Siege of Petersburg, the 118th was stationed at strongholds surrounding Petersburg and Richmond along the James River. One Daviess Countian, John Jewell, of the 118th was killed in action on January 24th, 1865, in defense of Fort Brady, one of these strongholds.

Months after Jewell's death, the 118th was also involved in the occupation of Richmond on April 3rd, 1865. The black troops used in the siege, and ultimately the capture of Richmond, were the first to march victoriously into the city. Soon after Richmond's capture, the city's occupying forces were mostly comprised of black regiments. After the Confederate surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, the 118th was sent to Brazos Santiago, Texas during the summer, and then to Brownsville, Texas, along with other points on the Rio Grande until February 1866 when the regiment was mustered out.

Members of the 118th Colored Infantry were not only raised in Daviess County, but many are buried here. Two are buried in the Black Cemetery at Yelvington, also known at the Shautnee Cemetery—Richard Nicholas and Randall Yeiser. Randall Yeiser was also known as Randall Hawes and has descendents in the Owensboro and Daviess County area to this day. Another soldier, Andrew Crowe, is buried at Bethlehem Methodist Church Cemetery, also on the east side of the county. Crowe does not have a military marker, or a marker of any sort. Although at Bethlehem Methodist Cemetery in Scythia there is a certain place in the cemetery where African

Americans had been buried and today there is a large marker honoring all of the African Americans buried within the cemetery, It is probable that Crowe rests in this section of the cemetery.

Besides cemeteries in Daviess County, another location many of Daviess County's black soldiers were laid to rest was Eastern Cemetery in Louisville. Jake Johnson and John Crowe, both of Daviess County, died in the military hospital in Louisville from smallpox and were interred in Eastern Cemetery. More of Daviess County's black troops lost their lives to disease or illness than those who died in battle. Even here in Daviess County, disease plagued many black recruits.

On the Ohio River and a mile away from the fairgrounds (where most black troops were encamped) there was a "cabin" for sick recruits—specifically those with smallpox. According to a statement written by Julius Proctor of Daviess County and a member of the 118th, states that he was sent to this "cabin" to help nurse smallpox victims and claimed to have been left behind when the 118th departed from Owensboro to head for Louisville.

Two other interesting members of the 118th include Edmund and Tom Barren, slaves of a well-known Confederate soldier in Daviess County, Eilbeck Barron, who was recently portrayed in the "Voices of Elmwood."

The 118th also included many slaves of the wealthy Hawes, McCreery and Taylor Families of Yelvington. Johnson slaves from Utica and numerous Dixon and Barrett slaves who had enlisted in Owensboro but were from Henderson. The Hawes and Taylor families were arguably the largest slave owners in Daviess County before the Civil War which would explain the large number of slaves with those surnames. Coming from Henderson County, the slaves with the last name of Dixon were the property of Archibald Dixon (Whig), a former U.S. Senator and Lieutenant Governor of Kentucky who was a politician during the slavery debates of the 1840's and 1850's. .

Another regiment present at the Siege of Petersburg was the 8th United States Colored Heavy Artillery. Although recruiting for this regiment was primarily done in Paducah, Kentucky, two of its members are buried in Daviess County—Abe Jackson, who was buried in the Pottersfield at Elmwood, and Jesse Jones, who is buried in Brown's Chapel Cemetery near Whitesville on the Old Leitchfield Road.

The 8th was first named the 1st Regiment Kentucky Heavy Artillery, and then renamed the 7th United States Colored Field Artillery before receiving its final name, the 8th United States Colored Heavy Artillery. While in Paducah, the 8th Heavy Artillery was garrisoned at Fort Anderson. Here, the regiment received its first taste of the war. In March 1864, Confederate Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest and his cavalry made an assault on Fort Anderson. After this, portions of the 8th Heavy Artillery spread out and were stationed at strategic points in Louisiana along the Mississippi River, including some stationed in New Orleans at one time. At one point, the portion of the regiment stationed in Louisiana was under the command of General William T. Sherman. After serving in Louisiana and the lower Mississippi, the Eighth Colored Heavy Artillery, like the 118th Infantry, was sent to Petersburg Virginia. It is probable, as a heavy artillery regiment they may have shelled the stronghold of Petersburg.

The other regiments mostly made up of Daviess Countians who fought in the Richmond-Petersburg and Appomattox Campaigns include the 109th, 114th, and 115th United States Colored Infantry.

The 109th United States Colored Infantry was organized ad Louisville, but did some recruiting in Owensboro. After recruiting in Owensboro, the regiment served in Louisville and as far east as Louisa, Kentucky, and soon the 109th was ordered to join up with the Army of the Potomac. The regiment was entrenched near Richmond on the north side of the James River until March 1865, and participated in the Appomattox Campaign, ultimately ending up at Appomattox

Courthouse during the surrender of Robert E. Lee and his army on April 9th. After Lee's surrender, the regiment was ordered back to Petersburg and City Point, Virginia, until they were sent south to Texas where they were mustered out in 1866.

Members from Daviess County in this regiment included Charles, Alfred and Peyton Leeman. Another veteran of this unit was Robert Woodard who is buried in Greenwood Cemetery. His grave site is marked by a military stone honoring his service.

Two other soldiers, B.J. Johnson of the 114th, buried in South Hampton Baptist Church Cemetery, and Henry Nourse of the 115th, buried in Greenwood Cemetery, took part in the same engagements and served in many of the same places as the 109th did. The only major difference between the two regiment's assignments were that Johnson and the 114th took part in the actual pursuit of General Lee until he surrendered at Appomattox.

There was one soldier who lived in Daviess County and was apart of an Indiana Black Regiment known as the 28th United States Colored Infantry. That soldier was Thurston Cabell who was portrayed in "Voices of Elmwood". During the Siege of Petersburg, the 28th took heavy casualties in "The Crater" and almost half its soldiers were wounded or killed. Before receiving their order to move to Petersburg, the 28th was stationed in Washington D.C.'s as part of the Capitol defenses, a very important duty considering the Capitol's distance from Confederate lines.

Most of the regiments from Daviess County fought in, and around, Richmond in 1864 and 1865, but many of Daviess County's black troops were stationed in Nashville, Tennessee, under command of Major General George H. Thomas and the Army of the Cumberland. The black soldiers of the Western Theater were mostly used to guard railroads, occupy southern cities and take part in many small skirmishes along the rail lines. Oftentimes, these black regiments were not used in large combat situations. Unlike elsewhere, many black soldiers participated in the combat during the Battle of Nashville, and made important contributions to their cause.

Henry M. Taylor was a member of the 100th United States Colored Infantry who operated in Nashville during the war. Taylor is buried in an unmarked grave in Greenwood Cemetery. The 100th was attached to the defenses of the Nashville and North-western Railroad, and fought various skirmishes along the rail lire and participated in the Battle of Nashville. During one of these skirmished along the railroad, two Daviess Countians Peter McCleary and Edmund Tyler—were killed in action by Confederate guerillas. In January 1865, soon after the Battle of Nashville, wounded men and others from the regiment were relocated to the Military Hospital in Huntsville, Alabama. After Nashville, they were assigned to pursue General John Bell Hood to the Tennessee River. Until the end of the war their assignment was to guard railroads throughout Tennessee. Then on December 26th, 1865 the regiment was mustered out.

Another regiment that participated in the Battle of Nashville was the 12th United States Colored Infantry. James F. Long, burled in Elmwood Cemetery, fought in the 12th, which was one of the many regiments that guarded the Nashville and Northwestern Railroad at different stops along rail lines in Alabama and Tennessee. The 12th was involved in other areas of the Franklin-Nashville Campaign and took part in engagements such as the Battle of Johnsonville and the Battle of Nashville in Tennessee, and later the Battle of Decatur in Alabama. After the Union victory at Nashville, the 12th was one of the many regiments in pursuit of General John Bell Hood. Until the close of the war, the regiment was assigned to garrison duty in Tennessee and mustered out January 1866.

Although the 12th and 100th Unites States Colored Infantries had both participated in the Battle of Nashville others were used to garrison strongholds such as the important city of Nashville. Sergeant Luther Johnson, buried in Bethlehem Baptist Cemetery in Utica, was a member of the

15th Unites States Colored Infantry. Johnson's unit was on garrison duty in Nashville, Columbia, and Pulaski, Tennessee until attached to the District of Middle Tennessee for similar duties continuing until he was mustered out.

In addition to service in other states, some served closer to Daviess County. George W. Robertson, who is buried in Greenwood Cemetery, served in the 119th United States Colored Infantry. This particular regiment served by garrisoning cities and other strategic points within Kentucky's borders.

One of the larger African American communities in Daviess County was Pleasant Ridge, and more specific to the black community, Pleasant Point Baptist Church. Adjacent to the church, founded in 1871, there is a historically significant cemetery. here are two known Civil War veterans buried there. One is Washington Cooper (otherwise known as Washington French, or even Washington "Frank" French), and the other, Stephen Simmons. Not much is known about Cooper's service in the war since his records are listed under "unassigned troops," but Simmons served in the 6th United States Colored Cavalry. The 6th Cavalry was Organized at Camp Nelson, Kentucky and had several men enlisted in Owensboro and mostly served in Kentucky, Tennessee, Southwestern Virginia and Arkansas. One of their first missions was to destroy Confederate lead mines. After this, the regiment was involved in other locations including a small skirmish near New Haven in Nelson County, Kentucky. Toward the end of their service the 6th Cavalry was transferred to the Department of Arkansas and served there until April 15th, 1866. John Davis whose military marker is one of the few that stand in Pottersfield in Elmwood Cemetery was also a member of the 6th U.S.C.C.

Another member of this same unit from the Pleasant Ridge area was Charles Jackson. Jackson was a son of John Brown Jackson and was born a slave in the Pleasant Ridge area. It was said that before Jackson went off to war he put five hundred dollars in a can and hid it in a tree. He only told one person, his friend Steve Simmons, of its location. Jackson told Simmons that if he did not return, to see that his wife, Judith, received the money, which Steve Simmons did when he learned of his friend's death. Jackson died of pneumonia in a military hospital in DeVall's Bluff, Arkansas on April 10, 1866. Like many soldiers during the Civil War, Jackson died due to an illness he contracted.

Another solider presumably native to the Pleasant Ridge / Ohio County area was Charles Cooper, a member of the 58th United State Colored Infantry raised in Natchez, Mississippi. It is probable that before the war he had been sold south like countless other slaves during the times before the Civil War. It is also plausible that elsewhere in the Deep South, Daviess County natives who had been sold south fought in regiments raised in places such as Natchez, New Orleans or Memphis.

Those mentioned in this essay are just a few individual soldiers but many more are buried in Daviess County, and certainly more enlisted in Daviess County who are not . Some others buried in Daviess County include, Josiah Barnes, said to be buried in Bethlehem Methodist Cemetery; James Haynes, Mount Zion Presbyterian Cemetery; and Marchel McLean, Elmwood Cemetery. Others that died in Daviess County, and presumably were buried in this county, are Henry Webster, a black citizen who was a notary public of Daviess County; George Helm, a member of the Colored Grand Army of the Republic Post; and Moses Harding, a prominent Black Minster in the Colored Baptist Church on Poplar Street. Another was Burr Hudson who lived to be one hundred and five, and took out a Federal Pension before his death in 1908 and had a brother, John Crowe (mentioned above) of the 118th U.S.C.I., die during the war.

Although many black soldiers from Daviess County were admitted into the army they were not as welcome as one might think. An article printed in the *Owensboro Monitor* titled, "Negro Soldiers Gone – What the People Think of Them", examines the thoughts of Daviess County's citizens after black troops had been removed from Owensboro. These black soldiers sometimes saw the ill sentiment and blatant racism from citizens of Owensboro and Daviess County. These feelings were especially strong since some black soldiers were being quartered at the Daviess County Courthouse, which was described during the war as a "formidable fortification." Other black troops were stationed at the Planters Hotel which served as a military hospital and many other men were also quartered at "Mr. Rudd's warehouse" near the courthouse. The presence of black troops in the courthouse was the most enraging to some, and especially to southern guerilla Bill Davidson who burned the courthouse in 1865. Even some white soldiers stationed in Owensboro resented their counterparts. When new black recruits arrived from Hawesville, white soldiers already stationed at the courthouse "refused to let them in." They were then sent to the jail without food and were "under locks and bolts" for about a day. After being introduced into Owensboro as soldiers, they still faced the same discrimination they had as slaves.

Although citizens did not appreciate the utilization of black soldiers in Daviess County, the *Owensboro Monitor* reports that they were "the most quiet and orderly soldiers ever stationed here." These same citizens would also become more apprehensive when they knew more black troops would be entering the city. Unfortunately for the disapproving citizens of Owensboro and Daviess County, the area was a hot spot for the recruitment of black soldiers and also an area where black soldiers were frequently used in garrison and sentry duties.

In August 1864, action began in Daviess County for black troops. First stationed in Henderson, the 108th United States Colored Infantry transferred to Owensboro under the leadership of Colonel John Bishop. The most interesting thing about Colonel Bishop was his request to command a black regiment, whereas many other white officer at the time would have scoffed at the assignment. The 108th was stationed at the courthouse during most of its stay in Owensboro. Soon after it arrived, the regiment fought a group of guerillas in the Yelvington area, known as the "Charleston of Kentucky". This mission to Yelvington was performed by Captain Cowin and his troops. After a small skirmish with the 108th, several guerillas were wounded but none of the black troops were injured. The 108th soon returned successful to Owensboro with a band of captured guerillas. The 108th was raised in Louisville and was primarily comprised of men from that area. The American Civil War Center at historic Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia, houses a cartridge case which belonged to Private Charles English who took part in the skirmish at Yelvington.

One of the better known happenings occurred when Confederate guerilla, Jake Bennett raided Owensboro. During his raid, Bennett and his men traded fire with a group of nine black soldiers at the town wharf. Out of the nine black soldiers on the supply boat, three were found and killed by Bennett and his men.

There was also an occurrence in September 1864, when the Steamer *Tarascon* landed a group of black soldiers in Owensboro to search for guerillas. Many of the black troops who arrived on the ship hailed from Daviess County, enlisted at Owensboro, and later made up the ranks of the 118th United States Colored Infantry. In Owensboro, men were taken to the courthouse square and questioned about guerilla activities in the area. After the men had been questioned, no guerillas were found, and the crowd was told to disperse.

In August 1864, the gunboat, *Lieutenant Eaves*, carried off forty or fifty slaves for service in the Federal Army. John H. McFarland, a very prominent citizen of Owensboro, was away at the

Democratic National Convention in Chicago during this time and lost every one of his slaves. The *Monitor* states that "we were mistaken in supposing the law permitting the African slave trade had been abolished," in turn suggesting that these Daviess County slaves did not leave their homes on their own accord, but were taken by force to enlist in the United States Colored Troops. Julius Proctor suggests he was forced to enlist in the same manner in a statement he wrote during the war.

Unlike most black troops stationed in Daviess County, a few bad apples gave the rest a bad name. In late September 1864, a group of renegade black soldiers and a black officer went to the home of Squire Dugan who lived many miles out of Owensboro. The soldiers knocked on his door saying they were "friends", but when Dugan opened his door, the rogues demanded whiskey, food, and money. They targeted Mr. Dugan because a female slave of Mr. Dugan's accompanied them. They stole four horses, and returned to town. After Dugan's son made it to Owensboro and took back the horses, Mr. Dugan relayed his complaint to Colonel John Moon. When Colonel Moon found the soldier that Dugan had described, the man denied any involvement and knowledge of the event. Soon after, he confessed and gave up his accomplices. He was stripped of his rank and demoted to a private. The rogue soldiers were severely punished by Colonel Moon. The punishment caused physical harm to the black soldiers, and in turn deterred them from committing any more illegal acts. The *Owensboro Monitor* commended Colonel Moon's actions, saying "In strict discipline is the only safety for the citizens against the soldiery."

A similar case to Mr. Dugan's was that of Dr. Alfred. D. Hill, a teacher and landowner in Daviess County. Although a slave owner, Dr. Hill was a staunch Unionist like many in the area. One of his slaves, Aaron Hill, had joined the 118th in Owensboro months before. Soon after Aaron enlisted (which must have been late in the war or soon after since the newspaper article is dated 9 May 1866), he convinced a number of his comrades to return to Dr. Hill's home and kill him. When Dr. Hill heard about Aaron's intentions, he fled. The next day, the two crossed paths and a scuffle broke out between the men. During the fight, a shot was fired from Dr. Hill's pistol inflicting a wound in Aaron's leg. A crowd of citizens soon gathered around Aaron and wanted to hang him on the spot. Dr. Hill intervened and pleaded with them to have mercy on his former slave. Aaron Hill was soon taken into custody and then exiled from Owensboro on the grounds that it "would not be a wholesome spot for him in the future."

It was not only white citizens who should have been on the lookout, it was even black soldiers. Public opinion of their utilization and sentry position in Owensboro fueled a great amount of hate and animosity. In November 1864, a black soldier on picket duty near Owensboro was "accidentally" shot and died the next day. Other cases of violence towards black soldiers were also reported in the *Owensboro Monitor* when many soldiers returned to Daviess County in 1865 and 1866. One recipient of this violence was Andrew Fuqua of the 118th. After returning from Texas, Fuqua stopped in at the grocery of Mr. John Neicam. While in the grocery, Fuqua was reported to have been "impudent" towards Mr. Neicam's wife. After another white man in the grocery asked Fuqua to stop, Fuqua refused, and he was shot dead by the white man.

This was not the only case of mischief caused by black soldiers in the area. Alonzo Calhoun was another resident of Daviess County who was known through the ranks as a "bad apple." The former slave of the Reverend Samuel Calhoun, Alonzo was a member of the 118th. Alonzo deserted from the 118th as quickly as he joined. He was soon captured in Evansville after a $30 reward was on his head.

It seems that throughout 1864 and the early months of 1865, black soldiers were either moving through Owensboro, being recruited here, or even being stationed here. Although some

citizens commented that the black troops' behavior was commendable, former slave holders and those sympathetic to the pro-slavery cause were appalled that their former "property" now had power over them.

During the Civil War, Kentucky was known for its large number of slaves, but also its majority support of the Union, especially in the central part of the state. Many Union men from Daviess County, such as Colonel John H. McHenry and United States Representative George Helm Yeaman, were against secession but saw slavery as morally acceptable. Another prominent figure from Daviess County, who was an opponent of emancipation, was James Weir. They could be described as being Conservative Unionists and, like many Daviess Countians, opposed to the utilization of black troops. These Conservative Unionists, who would have voted for John Bell rather than Abraham Lincoln, wanted to keep slavery, oppose raising black troops and to sustain the Union.

John Hardin McHenry was the Colonel of the 17th Kentucky Regiment which operated throughout Kentucky and fought at the Battle of Perryville. On October 27th, 1862, McHenry issued a special order that stated:

> "No fugitive slave will hereafter be allowed in this regiment, and all officers and soldiers are forbidden from employing any other than slaves or Negroes know to be free. All fugitive slaves are hereby ordered to leave this regiment in two weeks from this date. All fugitive slaves within the limits of this regiment will be delivered to his owner or agent appointed, upon application whether the owner be loyal or rebel."

This special order to expel black soldiers from his regiment was a perfect example of the conservative viewpoint McHenry held on slavery and raising black troops. After issuing this order, he was dismissed by General Order 199 which was made directly by President Lincoln in violation of the Additional Article of War. The Article said,

> "All officers or persons in the military or naval service of the United States are prohibited from employing any of the forces under their respective commands for the purpose of returning fugitives from service or labor, who may have escaped from any persons to whom such service or labor is claimed to be due, and any officer who .hall be found guilty by a court-martial of violating this article shall be, dismissed from the service."

The utter disregard for the order caused McHenry's dismissal from the command of the Seventeenth, and he soon returned to Daviess County.

In the *Owensboro Monitor* on November 26th, 1862, McHenry gives the reasoning for his special order. A Union man from Spencer County lost two slaves who had joined up with an Illinois Regiment. While trying to regain possession of his "property" he was mobbed by other Federal soldiers. In all practical purposes, McHenry believed he was upholding the Constitution and saw his action as just. He was merely returning a fugitive slave. His opinion was that any black man who enlisted was presumably a runaway slave, or a fugitive; and upholding the law, he should be returned to his rightful owner. As McHenry saw it, he was fighting in a war that was not to end slavery, but merely to sustain the Union. In his thinking, blacks did not have a place in fighting a war that had nothing to do with them. The *Owensboro Monitor* stated that "As we are not fighting this war upon the slavery question we will not meddle with it..." McHenry wanted to preserve the Union, but without any assistance from the "property" of his fellow Kentuckians.

McHenry believed that when a slave ran away, the owner lost a valuable piece of property. In mid-1865 after McHenry was dismissed, he printed notices in the *Owensboro Monitor* advertising government compensation to owners for slaves that had joined the Union Army. McHenry was "prepared to arrange the necessary papers" so that slave owners could be reimbursed for the usage of their "property." The idea of slave compensation was generally well received and used by Unionist in Daviess County along with others throughout Kentucky and the other border states. Slave compensation was payment to a slave owner in place of the services of their slave. One such example of this was of Silas Glover. Born in Daviess County and a slave of Walker Glover of McLean County, Silas enlisted in Owensboro where his service in the 118th Unites States Colored Infantry resulted in a profit for his owner.

Another more prominent Conservative Unionist from Daviess County was George Helm Yeaman. He was elected to the United States House representing Daviess County during the Civil War years —Yeaman understood very well the views of his constituents—preserve the Union but sustain slavery. The unlawful emancipation of slaves was especially hard for Kentuckians like Yeaman to swallow. Although loyal to the Union, Yeaman realized quickly that Lincoln's policies would ruin many of his constituents from Daviess County, and they would unnecessarily suffer. Therefore, Yeaman was very ardent opponent of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and other acts passed through Congress that took action against the institution of slavery. When a bill to raise black troops was sent to the House floor during the 3rd Session of the 37th Congress, in February 1863, Yeaman voted against it. He, like McHenry and most of his constituents, believed that raising black troops was the same as seizing private property, and was therefore unconstitutional.

In 1862, James Weir wrote in the *Owensboro Monitor* his opinion on the state of the Union. He was a staunch Union man and an ardent supporter of the Constitution. He also sums up most people's belief of slavery. Like Yeaman and McHenry, Weir was pro-slavery, and disagreed with black troops serving in the Civil War because of their status as mere "property". Examining the beliefs of Weir, McHenry and Yeaman gives a rather accurate depiction of how the residents of Daviess County felt about the war, and shows their conservative attitudes on slavery and the enlistment of black troops.

In 1864, most blacks were still at home on their masters' farms in Daviess County and did not think of enlisting. With the incentive of emancipation, and the thought of fighting for their own freedom, many of these former slaves went to Owensboro, Henderson, or Evansville to enlist. Most of these men would come straight from their masters' fields, and would have never before wielded a gun. The bravery shown by black soldiers during the Civil War was of epic proportions. What they experienced and saw in their service must have been horrific. From black soldiers witnessing; the aftermath of the Battle of the Crater at Petersburg, to the triumph they must have felt when entering the fallen city of Richmond, to have Daviess County blacks fight in some of the most important battles of the Civil War shows what an asset they were to the Federal Army and the preservation of the Union.

• • • • • • • • • • •

Daviess County, Kentucky Celebrating Our Heritage, 1815-2015, Daviess County Bicentennial Committee, Mt. Publishing Company, Inc., Evansville, IN, 2015, p.169:

The Mary Harding Home

By Wesley Acton and Aloma Dew

The Mary Harding Home founded in January 1910, started out as a residence for wayward children and those who were orphaned living on the streets of Owensboro It was started by the civic minded Mary Harding for whom the home was later named After serving many children in the community, Mary Harding saw the need for a facility for the elderly in Owensboro At the time there was nowhere for elderly African Americans without family or money to go The mission of the Mary Harding Home changed course to fill a larger need in the community. She and her forward-thinking friends, Molly Edwards, and her daughter Emma Edwards, Molly Cable, Kelly Barker, Betty Price, Nettie Clark, Mary Jane MacMickens, Elsie Robinson, Nannie Locke, Ella Valentine, Georgia Merriweather, Mary Bell Foster, Hattie Cornelius, S.R. Guthrie, and An-ilia Wheatley became the charter members of the Mary Harding Home which later evolved into a board of directors Those women through their hard work and kind hearts had such a positive effect on the community as they strove to meet the needs of elderly housing in the city.

What started out as a two room house, grew and changed over the years. As needs arose and finances permitted, the home grew into a two-story building occupying two lots on 7th Street. The Mary Harding Home first housed only women, but added space for men when the need arose. Many of the materials such as lumber and brick came from older homes that were torn down in the Owensboro area The home was also financed by contributions from local churches and fund-raisers by the Board. Later, Emma Edwards was able to get financial help from the local and state governments, as well as through United Way which was still the United Fund at the time A local resident, Samuel Rone, left his house on Poplar Street to the Mary Harding Home, That home was rented to tenants and the proceeds were used to help finance the needs of the Mary Harding Home and its residents No resident was ever charged and no one was ever turned away.

One of the volunteers, Mattie Scott, later became the first paid matron of the home doing all the cooking and cleaning for the meager sum of $25 a month. Later, she was given a room at the home as part of her salary. All of the other work was done by volunteers.

With the financial support of many white churches and with most of the volunteers and board members being from the black community, the Mary Harding Home served as one of the early institutions that helped to integrate Owensboro, The Home brought both races together to work for the common good of those in need Because of declining residents, the Mary Harding Home closed its doors in June 1988.

• • • • • • • • • •

A History of the Daviess - McLean Baptist Association in Kentucky, 1844-1943, Rev. Wendell H. Rone, 1943, pp.19-20:

NEGRO MEMBERS

It is a strange hit of information to many that in the days prior to and even after the Civil War the Baptist Churches of this section had many negroes in their membership. These negroes were slaves who belonged to many of the white members of the churches. As late as the year 1875 we note that the churches reported negro members in their membership lists. Even after that many of the older negroes remained members to their death, Many of the older brethren and sisters among our white churches can remember such cases. These old negroes were often referred to as "Uncle" or "Aunt" so and so because of their character and deep toned piety.

The records of most of the churches organized prior to the Civil War contain the names of these negro members. They are referred to in the following manner ... Charles, the property of Will

Jones, etc. On many occasions the negro members were permitted to organize churches of their own under the supervision of the white brethren. As they very often had members 'of their own race who were called to preach the white brethren would ordain them to serve the colored congregations. When this was not possible the white pastors often served and directed them in their worship service. It is an admirable thing that the white brethren were concerned about the negroes and saw to it that they had the Gospel preached to them. Many of the revivals in the white churches saw numbers of the colored people make professions of faith in Christ and their consequent baptism into the fellowship of the white churches.

The negroes were given all the privileges of church membership with white brethren but that of voting in the business meetings. This was not allowed because their masters might influence their vote to the detriment of the church. They generally sat in a special section, of the church reserved for them. When the time came for them to observe the Lord's Supper one of the white brethren would superintend the service if one of their own preachers was not present. Records show that on many occasions the white brethren would secure a white pastor to minister to their spiritual needs. After the Emancipation Proclamation was set forth in 1863 the white brethren began to assist the colored members in organizing churches of their own. For that reason the majority of the Negro Baptist Churches in the Green River Country were organized after that date.

The Negro members were subject to the disciplinary action of the church the same as the white members. Records are plentiful to show that they were dealt with for stealing from one another and their masters, fighting among themselves, immoralities, non-attendance, contempt of the church, and many other things. Generally after such disciplinary action became necessary they were later restored by repentance and acknowledgment to the church. What was true of them was also true of the, white—members.

No record of the number of colored members is given in the minutes of the Association until the year 1851. From then on to the year 1877 a column is given each year to the numbers in each church. To give you some conception of their large number we include a few of those lists:

1851	337 colored	1829 whites
1856	339 colored	1735 whites
1865	675 colored	2525 whites
1866	377 colored	2873 whites
1871.....	58 colored	3622 whites
1876	5 colored	4254 whites

For many years the First Baptist Church, of Owensboro, Kentucky, had more colored members than white. In 1854 there were 184 colored, and only 80 whites; in 1857 it was 213 to 87; in 1860 it was 215 to 110, etc. The church at Pellville reported 2 colored members in 1877. This was the last report by any of, the churches of the number of colored members in their membership.

The Daviess County Historical Quarterly, Daviess County Historical Society, Owensboro, KY, Vol. I, No. 2, April 1983, pp.39-45:

THE CIVIL WAR'S INFLUENCE ON THE LIFESTYLE
OF BLACKS IN DAVIESS COUNTY

By Jeff Lekson

Daviess County's Black population underwent dramatic changes in lifestyle during the nineteenth century, changes principally induced by the circumstances surrounding the Civil War. From the slave days through their legal recognition as citizens, the Daviess County Negroes sustained many varied experiences-- both positive and negative.

Looking back at Daviess County's early development, one becomes aware of the Negro's role. In 1815 the state of Kentucky established Daviess County as a legal entity of the state. At that time its inhabitants cultivated about 500 out of a possible 280,000 acres, and only a few large plantations existed. Family farms engaged in most agriculture, often sharing common ownership of one or two slaves with a neighboring farm along with performing much of the labor themselves. (1) Tobacco soon established itself as the primary crop, often acting as a cash substitute and a high-class loan security in the early days.(2) Along with tobaccos' continued growth came the need for a larger labor supply. By 1820 the census reported 852 slaves out of a total county population of 3,876. The following table lists that and subsequent years' numerical composition for the county through 1880. The category "free black" appeared as "free colored" in the original context.(3)

DAVIESS COUNTY CENSUS

Year	Whites	Slaves	Free Black	Total
1820	3,017	852	7	3,876
1840	6,327	1,960	44	8,331
1850	9,419	2,889	54	12,362
1860	11,958	3,515	76	15,549
1870	17,111		3,603	20,714
1880	22,008		4,528	26,535

Josiah Henson, a Daviess County slave in the 1820's, wrote of those days in his memoirs He said upon arriving at Amos Riley's plantation five miles south of the Ohio river in 1825 he joined eighty to 100 other slaves, a substantial sized plantation for the time.(4)

Thereafter, agriculture and slavery grew proportionately in the county, fostering an increasingly vested interest in the Negro laborer. Meanwhile, pro-slavery and anti- slavery opinions grew strong throughout the country, and the slavery institution's merits opened themselves to public debate. Compromising on the issue, the U.S. Congress enacted issues such as the Compromise of 1850.(5) However, polarization continued and on the local level manifested itself in the 1860 election. Abraham Lincoln, the abolitionist Republican candidate, received only seven out of 2,265 votes cast in Daviess County, displaying the overall pro-slavery stand in the county.(6)

In April, 1861, civil war commenced in the United States, forcing Kentucky to take a stand. The state chose to remain neutral but after a year formally declared its Union loyalty. Subsequently, a secessionist minority called a convention, passed an ordinance of secession, and "joined" the Confederacy.(7) Thus real loyalty remained a question in Kentucky. Military records listed 50,000 whites and 24,000 blacks from Kentucky serving in the Union army, while 35,000 state residents served in the Confederate ranks, compounding the loyalty problem.(8)

Next, President Lincoln's proposed Emancipation Proclamation raised havoc locally. On September 22, 1862, Lincoln declared that all slaves in states still in rebellion on January 1, 1863, "shall be thenceforward, and forever free."(9) By remaining loyal to the Union Kentucky was not affected by this declaration; however, Kentucky perceived the Proclamation as Lincoln's request

for gradual emancipation in the loyal slave states. Revealing sentiment in the county, the *Owensboro Monitor* wrote in October, 1862, "Nothing seems to stir up the blood of our poor laboring white men like the prospects of being supplanted in their employment by negro labor from the South." Continuing, the paper added that the white labor force just now realized the implications of Republican "free labor, or the right of a black to work by the side of a white, in other Words free negro labor against white labor."(10) Clearly, local interest did not lie with Negro freedom.

Later that year, Daviess County slave owners, fearing slave insurrection, arranged a purchase policy with county tobacconists. Devised to prevent Negroes from accumulating money for possible escape under Lincoln's act, the tobacconists agreed not to purchase tobacco from any Negroes unless the owner's written permission accompanied the merchandise.(11) Through this agreement owners showed their intent to sustain possession of their Negro property.

January 1, 1863 passed without major incidents in Daviess County. However, that month, the *Monitor* ran a segment criticising the U.S. government's policy toward runaway slaves. By the end of January 1863, the Union government was supporting about 100,000 runaway Negroes from the South. Blasting this policy, the paper declared that the government, in the interest of humanity, should distribute the slaves' rations to bereaved white widows instead. The article closed with the challenging discourse:

> ...or have we reached that point inhuman progress where the black has become superior to the white race? How can the brave fellows have the heart to fight when they think that the bread withheld from their mouths is fed to a lazy worthless set of negroes!(12)

Seeking to clarify Kentucky's nebulous position on emancipation, the General Assembly enacted an attempted solution. In January, 1863, it passed an act which in effect said Kentucky would deal with any Negroes or mulattoes claiming freedom under Lincoln's Proclamation the same way it currently dealt with runaways.(13)

Meanwhile, though, some Negro laborers had gained freedom in other seceeded states, asking unfamiliarly high wages. Contemporaries reported manual labor wages at intolerable heights with Negro farm hands demanding 200 to 250 dollars per year and cooks correspondingly demanding twenty-five to 125 dollars per year.(14) Locally this aggravated white paranoia; the Negro, they attested, must remain in his subservient position.

Also, Divinity played a role in determining local opinion toward slavery. The *Monitor* argued that the Deity sanctioned slavery; "God's own appointment to elevate a degraded race" was held as a moral obligation to the white race.(15) Viewed in the religious context of the day, this posed a binding Divine obligation.

Eventually, despite pro-slavery sentiment, Kentuckians faced the imminent loss of their labor institution. The Civil War had ended, and with the purpose of abolishing slavery, the states proceeded to vote on ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment Upon Georgia's ratification in December 1865, the United States formally abolished slavery.(16)

Despite the Thirteenth Amendment's overall acceptance, Kentucky had refused, along with Delaware, to ratify. Many Kentuckians remained loyal to the Confederate cause after the Civil War. The resounding defeat, holds one writer in respect to the amendment's failure, displayed the postwar opinion of most Kentuckians. They did not want a free Negro labor force.(18)

Freedom resulted in a totally alien situation for the Negro. Excited by its appeal, yet ignorant to its implications, liberty exposed the blacks to new forms of white manipulation. A

contemporary Northern reporter wrote of the South: "the whites seem wholly unable to comprehend that freedom for the negro means the same as freedom for them."(19)

Consequently, Kentucky passed their version of the black codes in 1886 and granted Negroes most basic legal privileges aside from the right to testify in court concerning whites.(20)

One right which appealed to Negroes concerned property ownership. Many blacks believed that only land ownership could make their freedom real. Unfortunately, most ex-slaves found this impossible for two main reasons: they had virtually no money, and whites often refused to sell to blacks for fear of losing a cheap labor source.(21) Records for this period quantify the fact In 1868, the first statewide data were collected and showed that Negroes possessed 0.42% of total taxable property while comprising about 16% of the population. By 1871 property ownership rose to 0.74% of the aggregate.(22) In comparison, Daviess County Negroes possessed 0.48% of the total while making up about 17% of the population that year. County Negroes achieved a 42% increase in ownership between 1868 and 1869, but they still owned just 0.67% of the total.(23) While making some progress, Negroes acquired almost negligible holdings in the years after the war.

In addition, occupations posed another vital concern to the freedmen. Upon slavery abolition many Negroes set out for other jobs and higher wages, encountering a generally unsympathetic attitude. Between 1860 and 1870, as the table on page 39 shows, white population increased in the county by about 5,000 while the black population increased by only twenty-two. This comparison indicated, according to Hugh Potter, "During and after the war the number of emancipated slaves who went north was considerable."(24) Of the remaining Negroes, many chose the only alternative--work for their former masters at subsistance wages. The 1870 census listed the majority of the county's black residents as "laborers", indicating their apparent peonage.

Surprisingly, contemporary blacks and whites shared a common denominator--religion. Lucius P. Little reported, "In that day, as in subsequent years of freedom, the Negro in Kentucky seemed to have a natural leaning for the faith and practice of the Baptists."25 Furthermore, the *Monitor* recorded part of one Negro preacher's sermon supporting the Bible's validity and commented, "There was more good theology in that darkey's sentence than in all those new-fangled theories."(26) Congregations, on the other hand, remained segregated through the century's end. Record in 1883 listed, a total of sixteen churches in the city of Owensboro, thirteen white and three "colored". Of the black churches the statistics described two Baptist churches and one Methodist Episcopal church.(27) Along with this religious interest went the desire to personally read the Bible, but illiteracy prevented almost all Negroes from realizing this ambition. Thus education, too, gained immediate attention.

Perhaps no social institution's development more thoroughly recounts the Negro transition than that of education. As previously mentioned, Negroes desired education, and that concurred with their aspirations toward freedom.(28) The General Assembly passed an act in 1871 granting Owensboro a school system; however, section thirteen conceded only white children the right to attend these schools. The act made some provision for Negro education, basically that they must fund their own schools.(29) Finally, two years later the state established a colored school system in the city; and in 1879 statistics contained information about the Negro school erected that year on Poplar street. At that time about 500 school-aged Negroes lived in the city, 200 of which attended on a daily basis.(30)

Established as a Negro priority, literacy continued to pose a major obstacle for Kentucky's blacks. In 1880, 22.8% of the native Kentucky whites remained illiterate while 70.4% of the blacks held the same status.(31) Seeking to combine both systems, chapter 312, section 3 of the 1884 act amended the 1871 legislature, omitting the word "white" wherever it occured in context In

addition, chapter 419, section 1 repealed the 1873 act that had established the separate Negro system.(32)

In retrospect, the new system employed black teachers in the Negro schools from 1884 to 1887. Then, from 1888 to 1896 the system employed white teachers in the same schools, spurring several uprisings. As a result, the system once again hired black instructors in 1896. In 1897 Superintendent James McGinnis observed:

> For the first time in the history of these schools there was graduated a class of colored pupils, seven in number. This is a noteworthy event J am satisfied that the change from the employment of white teachers in the colored schools, while at the time viewed with some well founded distrust, was a wise step ... (33)

Concerning the white teachers, one writer said that some Owensboro residents exhibited "reprehensible snobbishness" toward those people because of their employment in the black schools. Evidently, as this segregation continued into the twentieth century, Owensboro and Daviess County still required many modifications to establish educational parity for their Negro residents.(34)

Looking back at the events that brought about transitions in the Negro lifestyle, one becomes aware of the slow progress enjoyed by individuals. From their introduction as slaves through their freedom after the Civil War, Daviess County's blacks underwent various changes affecting their personal lives, changes that gradually led to their social amalgamation. Freedom altered Negro occupations, residence, education, and legal status; and in the early days of liberty these alterations often fell within the control of the larger, more dominant white population. As a result, a group accustomed to a dominant position over the Negro race had to thus establish parity for the newly-legalized citizens, a process initiated in the 1800's and still continuing today.

This paper has recounted the major transitions in Negro lifestyle affected by the American Civil War. Although freedom's virtues bestowed little upon the newly freed slaves, their descendants have reaped the progress made since slavery's abolishment in 1865.

FOOTNOTES

1 Hugh O. Potter, *History of Owensboro and Daviess County Kentucky* (Montgomery, 1974), p.178.
2 William Foster Hayes, *Sixty Years of Owensboro: 1883-1943* (Owensboro, 1943) p. 121.
3 *History of Daviess County* (Chicago, 1883), p.179.
4 Potter, pp 68-69.
5 James M. McPherson, *Ordeal By Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, 1982), p.64.
6 Potter, p.112.
7 McPherson, p.154.
8 *Ibid*., p.154.
9 *Ibid*., p.293.
10 "Excitement in Quincy about Negro Immigrants," *Owensboro Monitor*, 22 Oct 1862, p.2.
11 *Owensboro Monitor*, 12 Dec. 1862, p.3.
12 *Owensboro Monitor*, 28 Jan. 1863, p.2.
13 *Acts of Kentucky: 1863*, chapt. 983, p.366.
14 *History of Daviess County*, pp.185-186.
15 "Negro Soldiers Gone--What the People Think of Them," *Owensboro Monitor*, 31 Aug. 1864, p.2.
16 Francis Newton Thorpe, *A Short Constitutional History of the United States (Boston, 1904)*, p.257.
17 *Ibid*., p.257.

18 Bill Weaver, "That Brief but Pleasant Kentucky Interlude: Andrew Johnson's 'Swing around the Circle'," *Filson Club History Quarterly*, 53 (1979), p.242.
19 McPherson, p. 509.
20 Philip Clyde Kimball, "Freedom's Harvest Freedmen's Schools in Kentucky," Filson's Club History Quarterly. 54 (1980), 272-288.
21 McPherson, p.509.
22 Kimball, p.272-288.
23 *History of Daviess County*, p.179.
24 Potter, p.112.
25 Lucius P. Little, *Local Preachers in Old Times in Kentucky*, (Nashville, 1905), p.25.
26 *Owensboro Monitor*, July 1865, p.3.
27 *History of Daviess County*, p.376.
28 Kimball, p.277.
29 Hayes, p.247.
30 *Ibid*., p.247.
31 *History of Daviess County*, p.48.
32 *Acts of Kentucky: 1884* pp.570, 742.
33 Hayes, p.248.
34 *Ibid*., p.249.

The Daviess County Historical Quarterly, Daviess County Historical Society, Owensboro, KY, Vol. XI, No. 3, July 1993, pp.60-68:

Race Relations in Owensboro During the 1960's

By Rob Henry

The 1960's was a period that was filled with turmoil and change in American history. The Vietnam War, popular music, economics, foreign relations, the struggle against growing poverty, and the fight for equal rights by women all brought change to society that is still being felt today. However, the fight by blacks to earn their civil rights may have most changed the face of American society. Desegregation in education public housing, public institutions, employment and government has forever altered the course of American history. These changes were felt in Owensboro, but not to the radical or violent extent that people generally expect when considering the struggle for civil rights.

As America entered the 1960's, blacks and whites held strictly defined roles in society, but progress had been made in several key areas This was evidenced with the Supreme Court's rulings on segregation in schools with ***Brown vs Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*** in 1954-55, the Interstate Commerce Commission's banning of segregation on interstate travel in November, 1955, and the Supreme Court's subsequent affirmation of the ICC's ban on bus segregation in November, 1956.(1) Many northern areas were desegregated or working towards it, but in the South, segregation was still common practice.

Owensboro, with its central location geographically, possessed aspects of both the North and the South in its race relations as the 1960's opened. Similar to the North, blacks and whites were able to live and work in close proximity so far as certain common courtesies were observed. In the South, there was little mingling of blacks and whites. However, like the South, certain jobs were held by whites only, many schools were still segregated, certain housing areas were

segregated, as were several public institutions, and local government was slow to accept blacks within its ranks. This ambiguity is reflected in the ambivalent attitude observed in Owensboro regarding the move towards integration.

Owensboro experienced a smooth transition to integration when compared to other cities and counties across the country. Following the ***Brown*** decision, Owensboro schools moved to integrate. A biracial task force was formed in 1955 in order to determine the course of action to be followed regarding-integration.(2) High schools began to integrate in 1956, while junior high and elementary schools began the following year.

In 1955, Owensboro had three high schools: Owensboro Senior High and Owensboro Technical High was an all-black school. A "Reconciliation of Integration" was passed unanimously on August 29, 1955 by the Owensboro Board of Education. This allowed tenth through twelfth graders at Western High School to attend any other class at either of the two high schools that wasn't offered at Western. By 1960, a handful of black students had attended foreign language or R.O.T.C. classes offered at Senior High School.(3)

Owensboro took a more tolerant stance towards integration than many American cities. In 1957, black high school students had to be protected by the National Guard when attending all-white Central High School. The first black student at the University of Alabama was confronted directly by Alabama Governor George Wallace in 1963.(4) In Owensboro, little protest was made to the idea of desegregating schools. The most violent incident occurred when a cross was burned in an Owensboro school yard in 1960.(5) Some prejudice was encountered among the students, but curiosity and distrust was more prevalent. Many of the students had never interacted with students of another race before and were uneasy due to the lack of experience.(6)

Following the integration of the high schools, the junior high schools and elementary schools soon followed suit. By 1962, two of the previously all-white junior high schools had been integrated, and five of the nine previously segregated grade schools had been desegregated.(7) The next step towards integration involved the discontinuation of Western as a high school and downgrading it to an elementary school.

In 1964 Western ninth graders were assigned to Foust or Eastern Junior Highs, and the next year, seventh and eighth graders were assigned to other junior high schools. Beginning with the 1965-66 school year, Western had become an integrated elementary school. An interesting note to the Western story is that while it was a combination junior high/elementary school, the 1963 mixed chorus sang "We Are Climbin' Jacob's Ladder," "Ezekiel Saw the Wheel," and "No Man is an Island" at the graduation ceremony. In 1964, the Western mixed chorus sang "We Are Americans Too," an oration was given by Ernest Emery titled "Optimism—Formula for Freedom," and Edna Duneghy sang a solo titled "Song of the Soul" at the 1964 graduation ceremony.(8) With Western becoming a grade school, integration in Owensboro was complete.

Once integrated, students were put in the situation of daily interacting with students of another race It was obvious at first that fear of the unknown caused black and white students to stay away from each other. One teacher mentioned that most black students tended to shy away from joining social clubs and were somewhat intimidated because they felt like invaders.(9) This unease and distrust was reflected when black students did run for elective offices; black students tended to vote for other black students while white students voted primarily for other white students. In the first few years of desegregation black students were unable to elect one of their own to an office because they were a minority.(10)

One area in which black students immediately made an impact was athletics Blacks and whites who played together on athletic teams shared common experiences on the field that helped

them learn to accept each other off the field and in the classroom. Depending on each other in such team sports as basketball and football enabled black and white students to slowly break down prejudice and develop trust.

Owensboro Senior High fielded championship teams in basketball, football, and track, due in large part to the larger talent pool to select from following integration. In the first year of integration, the Owensboro Senior High basketball team posted sixteen wins against only one loss. In fact, it has been suggested that one of the reasons Senior High absorbed grades nine through twelve of Western High is because Western had beaten Senior High in basketball.(11) Regardless, integration helped bring black and white students closer together.

Another aspect of integration in public schools that is often overlooked is the situation facing black teachers. Even though black teachers were certified to teach and were guaranteed their jobs, most of them renamed insecure regarding the much larger number of white teachers and staff members. Principal Joe Brown helped ease the way for black teachers to be accepted by their white counterparts by not tolerating any animosity and encouraging acceptance.(12) With the passage of time and strong leadership, integration enjoyed a fairly smooth transition in Owensboro schools.

With the integration of schools the quality of education for blacks increased. "Separate but equal" had been applied as separate, but not equal. Textbooks were second-hand and outdated, materials such as paper, desks, and athletic uniforms were either inadequate or nonexistent and lack of funding to alleviate these problems hindered black teachers' efforts to teach their black students.(13) When public schools became integrated in Owensboro, increased funding and materials gave black students the same educational opportunities as white students. Integration was important in public schools because for the first time, black and white students could interact on a large scale instead of being sheltered.

Public housing in Owensboro in the 1960's was extremely segregated. Many sections of town were completely segregated, including some sections of town that blacks didn't go after dark and some that whites didn't go to after dark.(14)

Much of Owensboro was segregated as evidenced by these numbers: (15)

Nannie Locke	50 units/50 blacks
P.G.Walker	50 units/50 blacks
Harry C. Smith	123 units/98% white
Rolling Heights	274 units/97% white
Rolling Heights Addition	30 units/30 whites

There were sections of town in which poor blacks and whites lived together such as Mechanicsville and Baptist Town but most blacks and whites lived in segregated sections of the city if at all possible. In fact, the 1979 Kentucky State Commission on Housing ruled that Owensboro was the third most segregated city in Kentucky. behind Murray and Hazard.(16) Segregation. in Owensboro rarely translated into violence, but it was readily apparent in public housing. Steps have been taken towards Affirmative Action in public housing, but the numbers have been slow to reflect those efforts.

No written documentation indicates that Owensboro differed from many other comparable American cities regarding racial segregation. Kentucky passed a state Civil Rights Act on January 27, 1966, which took effect on July 1st, 1966. Under the leadership of Governor Edward T. Breathitt, Kentucky became the first southern state to pass a statewide Civil Rights bill. This Civil Rights bill applied to non-discriminatory practices in employment public housing, public

institutions., and education.(17) The state government issued pamphlets to city governments to assist them in dealing with the issue of desegregation. These policies extended to public institutions including schools and recreation facilities such as swimming pools and parks, but they also carried over into private facilities. For example, theatres were opened to blacks in the late 1950's. Soon after, restaurants, stores, barber shops, and churches opened their doors to members of both races. Despite legal implementation of civil rights legislation, an unspoken policy of segregation was continued by many institutions.(18) Overcoming these prejudices required time and patience of those struggling against them.

Employment, practices followed a set standard in Owensboro. The number of jobs available to blacks was comparable to that of whites, but blacks were relegated to holding certain jobs . with little promise of upward mobility. Jobs open to blacks were 'limited to areas subservient to whites including serving as cooks, house servants, and the all-encompassing field of janitorial services. One of the few institutions in which blacks worked side by side with whites was at the local steel mill, integrated in 1953.(19) With the national Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Kentucky Civil Rights Act of 1966, employment opportunities slowly become comparable to those of whites. State and local commissions on human rights were formed to ensure that fair employment practices were followed.

Blacks encountered difficulties gaining acceptance into local government. The first black to run for an elective office was John Williams, who ran for Owensboro city commissioner in 1965. Williams earned enough votes to make it through the primary and run for election. In the election, Williams finished last with 2,296 votes. Future Mayor Irvin Terrill finished first with 6,971 votes.(20) It wasn't until 1985 that Owensboro elected its first (And only) black city commissioner, Reverend R.L. McFarland. The growing influence of blacks in community affairs has been slow regarding local government positions.

Racial superiority groups such as the Klu Klux Klan and Black Panthers never gained a solid foothold in Owensboro Any violence or demonstrations that occurred in Owensboro were limited to personal grievances instead of random acts taken against other groups. When Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968, the reaction in Owensboro was much calmer than in many cities. Riots that took place in such cities as Cincinnati and Pittsburgh never, materialized in Owensboro Instead, a "Day of Prayer" was called for.

The largest outbreak of racial violence occurred in August 1968. The incident began with the shooting death of twenty-nine year old Henderson resident Jerry Brown. Mr. Brown was shot at the Formal Club at about 12:15 A.M. Saturday, August 17, by twenty-eight year old Monroe Griffith of Owensboro, his business associate, during an argument. Disorders arose when witnesses felt police, who had arrived quickly, were slow to call for an ambulance.(21)

During the time lag, blacks in attendance became restless and angry. The group of blacks, which eventually had grown to over 200 people, began to throw rocks, taunt police officers at the scene, and rock cars nearby. When Mayor Irvin Terrill arrived on the scene shortly thereafter in an attempt to restore order, his car was rocked and pelted with objects, one of which broke his window, resulting in a slight cut over his left eye. The demonstration took place in the areas between 4th and 5th streets, extending to Elm and Walnut Streets. The crowd did not disperse until about 5:30 that morning. Police reported that nineteen cars were damaged by foreign objects and that several shots were fired, but there were no major fires or acts of vandalism. Two men were arrested for violating a state law against inciting a riot: twenty-six year old Lorenzo Williams and eighteen year old Charles Howell, both of Owensboro.(22)

In the early morning hours of Saturday, August 17, Mayor Terrill and County Judge Pat Tanner called for a city-wide curfew going into effect
at 8:00 P.M. and extending until 6:00 A.M. Sunday morning. The curfew extended to closing businesses on Saturday in an effort to keep people off the streets. A seventeen block area was also cordoned off from 3rd and 7th Streets to Walnut and Frayser Streets to deter the curious, but complaints of white sightseers were still voiced by residents of the area. Reverend John Dunaway called for a "Day of Prayer" in trying to help cool tensions, and he also announced that a meeting would be held that Monday afternoon at 2:00 P.M. for residents to voice their opinions regarding the incident.(23)

The next day, Sunday, August 18th, twenty-one people were arrested for violating and continuing curfew. John Debow, Bill T. Miller, Geraldine Riley, and James Lorenzo Williams were arrested on charges of disorderly conduct. Williams had been released that morning on $5,000 bond, after being charged with inciting a riot on Saturday. Three people were arrested for carrying concealed weapons and eleven others were arrested in violation of curfew. Mayor Terrill called for the curfew to be extended for Sunday night, with the sale of all alcoholic beverages prohibited. (24)

The Sunday issue of the ***Messenger-Inquirer*** included an Associated Press on the front page titled: "Police Say Curfew Best Riot Control." This article dealt with a sturdy of eight American cities placed under curfew to combat race riots following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4th 1968. Cincinnati, Ohio; Greensboro, N.C.; Kansas City, Mo.; Trenton, J.H.; Pittsburgh, Pa.; Wilmington, Del.; Richmond, Va.; and Memphis, Tenn. (Where King was killed) here the cities studied This article was most likely issued by the paper in another attempt to defuse tension.

On Monday, August 19, charges of police brutality were brought against five officers following the public hearing that afternoon. Thirty-five officers came to the meeting in protest and defense of the charges brought against the five officers. An affidavit was filed by Carolyn McNary, Edna Valentine, George Bond Jr., and Charles Howell. The affidavit charged Detectives Fred Hall and Jack Braden, Patrolmen Henry Roach Jr., David Rose, and David Glass with use of excessive force in handling the riot situation. The charge against Glass was that he entered the house at 914 West 4th Street without a search warrant. Radio Dispatcher Richard McDaniel and fellow officers stated that Glass was not in that part of town at the time of the alleged incident. The Board of Commissioners ruled that the charges against all of the officers were being questioned in light of the discrepancies involving the Glass incident. None of the officers were suspended or punished for the charges brought against them.(25)

At the Monday afternoon meeting, the Human Relations panel came up with four conclusions, regarding the situation. It encouraged the mayor to go on the radio to review "current community conditions," hoping that Monday night's curfew would be the last for the city (The county-wide curfew had been lifted the night before); the panel found that all officers in the area had been going about their normal duties; a request was put in for an information center to be opened, for this disturbance and future incidents, where facts and information would be given to the public in order to dispel rumors; and the panel called for mutual respect to be extended by both the .police and the public. The committee also announced plans to hold another public meeting on Monday, August 26, at 2:00 P.M.(26)

The curfew was extended to Monday night, but following the calm Monday, Mayor Irvin Terrill announced that the curfew would be lifted for Tuesday night. During the time the curfew was imposed, fifty-one people were arrested for curfew violations ranging from inciting a riot to

violating curfew, restrictions. On Tuesday afternoon, County Judge Pat Tanner also criticized the ***Messenger-Inquirer*** for "constantly stirring up sectionalism" between the city and county. But due to the calm, rational efforts of Owensboro's leaders and police officers, a dangerous situation was controlled with a minimum of disruption-and violence.(27)

Later that week, disturbance broke out in Evansville after three white men were arrested and charged with assault and battery after a black woman was grazed by an arrow and a window had been broken out in a black family's home. The unrest escalated into rioting later that night after officers stopped two carloads of blacks in stolen cars. Other blacks maintained that the violence erupted as a reaction to officers fighting with a black youth who had been running through the area.(28)

The Evansville City Council imposed a curfew on the city that extended from 8:00 P.M.to 5:00 A.M. and banned the sale of liquor, firearms, and ammunition The disorder continued through Friday night with four people injured as a direct result. Carolyn Gold was struck by a ricocheting bullet, Patrolman Leonard Stilwell suffered a bullet wound in his right shoulder while he was guarding a fire hose, and two firemen were injured while fighting the resulting fires. The two nights of rioting, which included shooting, vandalizing, looting, and firebombing, resulted in property damage estimated at $275,000. The worst damage was caused by a $250,000 fire at Cottage Building Products Co., a lumber yard in the middle of Evansville's black neighborhood. Five other businesses suffered damage as a result of the rioting.(29) The violence and chaos experienced in Evansville illustrate the underlying tensions still existing between blacks and whites, as well as how fortunate residents of Owensboro were that the disturbances there were moderate in comparison to those suffered in other communities.

On Wednesday, September 4, charges were heard against five officers charged with brutality during Owensboro's racial disturbances. Two of the officers, Detective Fred W. Hall and Patrolman Henry Roach Jr. had been charged before. The other three officers charged were Patrolmen William N. Estes, Bill Pyland Jr., and James Yeckering. The charges were heard and dismissed by the board of commissioners, headed by Mayor Irvin Terrill.(30)

After the riots, a group was formed by Mayor Terrill's Human Relations Committee to uncover the basic problems within Owensboro's black community., The chairman of this committee was Reverend John Dunaway. Wednesday, September 11, the Committee outlined a set of main problems facing Owensboro. According to the committee, housing, streets, sidewalks, street lighting, employment practices, and representation of minority groups on government committees and boards were causing problems for blacks. Five subcommittees were organized to address these issues: Housing, Streets, Sidewalks, and Lighting; Employment Practices; Employment Communications; and Minority Representation on Government Commissions and Boards.(31) These committees represent an effort put forth by Owensboro in race relations that was not found in many areas.

In summary, relations between blacks and whites in Owensboro during the 1960's involved an initial distrust that, while occasionally marred by strife, slowly developed into a growing sense of respect and acceptance. One story I came across in conducting interviews effectively illustrates the pride and independence of blacks seeking equality in society. The story comes from Donald Owsley (President of Owensboro Chapter of NAACP from 1965-75) when he was a young boy in his father's (C.T. Owsley) barber shop. According to Donald, several wealthy white men received haircuts in his father's barber shop. One day, while Donald was receiving a haircut from his father, he asked his father, why he didn't ask his wealthy white customers for financial assistance. Donald said his father stopped cutting his hair, slowly swiveled the chair around, looked him in the eye,

and said: "Son, those men don't owe me anything but their business and the respect they give me. It's up to me to better my life." According to Mr. Owsley, this story reflects the attitude of independence that was a tremendous asset to blacks during the turmoil of the 1960's.

Great strides were made in Owensboro regarding race relations in the 1960's. Desegregation in education, public housing, public institutions, employment, and government was mandated in the 1960's, but its effects weren't completely felt until the 1970's.(32) With integration, many myths and prejudices on both sides were shattered. Blacks and whites in Owensboro have been able to interact on a much larger scale that has increased understanding through the sharing of common experiences.

End Notes

1. Juan Williams, ***Eyes On the Prize*** (Minneapolis, 1988), 312.
2. Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, May 10, 1984.
3. Bell, Lisa, "Achieving Equality: Desegregation of the Owensboro Schools, 1955-1969," ***The Daviess County Historical Quarterly***, April 1989, 26.
4. Williams, ***Eyes On the Prize***, 173.
5. Henderson, Danny, Editorial to Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, May 14 1984.
6. Interview with Bob Kunkle, April 18, 1993.
7. Bell, "Achieving Equality", 30.
8. ***Western Hi-Lites***, Western Junior High School Yearbook, 1963-64.
9. Bell, "Achieving Equality," 31.
10. Interview with Donald Owsley, April 27, 1993.
11. Interview with Donald Owsley.
12. Bell, "Achieving Equality," 31.
13. Interview with Bob Kunkle.
14. Interview with Donald Owsley.
15. Kentucky State Housing Commission Report-1979, and interview with Donald Owsley.
16. Kentucky State Housing Commission Report-1979.
17. Kentucky State Commission on Human Rights–Fifth Report, 1966.
18. Interview with Bob Kunkle.
19. Interview with Donald Owsley.
20. Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, July 21, 1965.
21. Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, August 18, 1968.
22. Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, August 18, 1968.
23. Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, August 18, 1968.
24. Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, August 19, 1968.
25. Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, August 20, 1968.
26. Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, August 21, 1968.
27. Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, August 22, 1968.
28. Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, August 25, 1968.
29. Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, August 25, 1968.
30. Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, September 5, 1968.
31. Owensboro ***Messenger-Inquirer***, September 11, 1968.
32. Interview with Donald Owsley.

• • • • • • • • • •

<u>Owensboro Examiner</u>, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 21 July 1876, p.5:

The colored people of this city and vicinity will celebrate the anniversary of their freedom at the grounds of the Daviess County Agricultural Association on Thursday, August 4. They have engaged an Evansville band to furnish the music, and propose doing the day in extravagant style. They will parade the principal streets before repairing to the grounds.

• • • • • • • • • •

Owensboro Examiner, Owensboro, KY, 6 April 1877, p.5:

OUR COLORED POPULATION
Their Numerical Strength, and Other Facts and Figures.

Last week we gave some figures concerning the whites of Daviess county, and this week we propose to bring the colored population to the front. We take the figures from the Auditor's Re- could port of Kentucky, for the year ending October 10, 1876:

The negroes in Daviess county own 3,614 acres of land, valued at $37,965. Of town lots they are put down for 66, valued at $18,275.

They own 283 head of hors2s and mares, estimated to be worth $18,530.

Eight thousand three hundred and thirty-seven dollars have they invested in carriages.

Their gold and silver watches, gold and silver plate, pianos, &c., are worth only $483.

Black males in 'the county over 21 years of age, 1,054; children between 6 and 20 years of age, 965. Increase in children over previous year 343.

There are but 3 blacks in the county who are deaf and dumb.

Their grain products panned out thusly: Corn, 25,395 bushels; wheat, 620 bushels, or 18,350 bushels of corn and 555 bushels of wheat less than preceding year.

• • • • • • • • • •

Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 17 August 1902, p.3A:

NEGRO JURIES
THAT OF THURSDAY WAS NOT FIRST IN DAVIESS COUNTY.
A Notable Case in Which the First Negro Testimony in Kentucky Was Given Recalled.

When William Bibbs was called for trial in the police court Thursday, for slapping a girl, and a jury of negroes was demanded, (the defendant being a negro), it was supposed by many that this was a radical departure from anything that had ever transpired in the courts of Daviess county. But those who are willing to delve a little in the musty pages of the legal history of Daviess county will find that in about 1872 or 1873, when W. T. Ellis was serving his first term as county attorney, a lot of negroes at Lewis station were arrested under a charge of having disturbed religious worship at the colored church near Pleasant Ridge.

The defendants in that case all being negroes the young county attorney believed that the surest and safest way to mete out justice to them was by having a jury of their own race to try the question. He accordingly demanded a negro jury. The presiding justice doubted the right of the commonwealth to a jury composed wholly of negroes, but the county attorney insisted and his importunities were heeded by the court.

A negro jury was impaneled, heard the evidence and arguments and returned a verdict fining the defendants to the extent of the law.

From that day to this there has never been a disturbance at the colored church near Pleasant Ridge, or if there has been the fact has never been brought to the attention of a negro jury.

First Negro Witness in Kentucky.

The calling of a negro jury in the city court Thursday revives a little more interesting legal history. In 1872 young Mr. Nat Davidson, who was born and raised in Hawesville, was here, an apprentice with Dr. J. H. Taylor, learning the profession of dentistry.

On a Saturday night in the year above mentioned, young Davidson became involved with the police force of this town and was killed in the rear of what was then known as the old Rogers house, on Third street. Young Davidson was a bright and popular young man. His death created a genuine sensation and the police who were charged with having killed him were roundly denounced in the press and by the public generally.

Mr. Ellis, who was then serving his first, term as county attorney, procured warrants for the arrest of the entire police force. The whole town was excited, and many clamored for vengeance against the police. The police were defended by the ablest lawyers at the bar. Among their attorneys were Sweeney & Stewart, Thomas B. Hardin, W. T. Owen, Judge Alex. Craycroft and R. H. Taylor.

The examining trial was had before two justices of the peace, John W. Wandling and William H. Monarch. Mr. Wandling was afterwards cashier of the Deposit bank and at the time of his death cashier of the Owensboro Banking company. Mr. Wandling was a New Jerseyan by birth and a man of fine intelligence and high character. The other member of the examining court, Mr. William H. Monarch, was the only son of the late Thomas Monarch, a man of spotless character and many virtues.

Robert Crump as a Witness.

In the course of the evidence in that case it resulted that a negro named Robert Crump, who was then in the employ of Reinhardt brothers and who still lives in this city, was the only eye witness to the homicide. The struggle with the commonwealth was to fix upon the police the responsibility for the death of young Davidson and this could be done only through the testimony of the witness, Robert Crump.

This negro was offered as a witness in favor of the commonwealth, his evidence was objected to by the counsel representing the defendant and thereupon a spirited and protracted debate was had before the examining court as to the competency of this negro's testimony.

It was contended by the lawyers who represented the defendants that the negro was not a competent witness under the laws of the state of Kentucky; on the other hand it was contended by the representatives of the commonwealth that he was a competent witness, because under the laws of the United States he had not only been made a citizen, but moreover could not be discriminated against on account of his race or color. When the argument was concluded the court retired to consider the question, announced it had disagreed, that one member of the court believed the was competent and the other believed he was not, but that being unable to agree the court had concluded to hear his evidence. The negro's testimony was straightforward, very material and important. The defendants were all held for further trial.

Judge Coffer's Decision.

A little later, Judge Coffer, who was then judge of this judicial district. held at a term of the court in Brandenburg, that though under the laws of the state of Kentucky a negro was not a competent witness, still under the laws of the United States he was competent and that where the laws of the United States and the laws of Kentucky conflicted on such a subject the law of the United States must govern. That case was carried to the court of appeals which affirmed the decision of Judge Coffer, since which time the right of a negro to testify in all the courts has not been questioned.

[Note: Robert T. Crump (c1860 – 1903), of Owensboro, KY, was a son of Giles & Maria Crump.]

• • • • • • • • • •

Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 14 May 1912, p.7:

AGED NEGRO COUPLE
GRANTED MARRIAGE LICENSE UNDER OLD LAW
Had Keen Living for the Past Fifty-two Years – Law for Former Slaves.

Charles Anderson Posey and Lethie Hancock, or Lethie Posey, two very old negroes appeared in the office of the county clerk on Monday and stated that they wanted a marriage license. Deputy Clerk McCormick questioned the old couple and ascertained that they desired to be declared husband and wife under a law that was enacted immediately after the war between the states and which became effective on February 14, 1866.

The law provided that where colored people had been living and cohabiting together before the slaves were freed, but where there had been no legal marriage performed, the parties could, by appearing before the county officials be declared husband and wife, should both of them desire that such a declaration should be made.

The negroes in telling of the case, stated that they had been living together for about fifty-two years, the man claiming that it had been even longer than that and said that they wanted to be married. The order was entered by the clerk.

It is a coincidence that the last time the clerk was called upon to issue such an order was on May 13, 1904, or exactly eight years, prior to the entering of the order Monday. The order eight years ago was entered by Jamie Weir, who was at that time deputy county clerk. In the history of the county and since the passage of the law, there have been eleven negro couples who have been declared husband and wife, under the law.

[Note: Charles Posey (30, born KY) and Lethy (33, born KY) are listed in the 1870 census of Daviess County, KY. The 1910 census of Daviess County reported that they had been married 51 years and Lethia was the mother of 15 children, 9 of whom were then living. Charles Posey died during 1912-1913. His wife, Alethia A. Posey died on 19 March 1920 in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY. Her death certificate recorded that she was the daughter of Jerry Hancock, who was born in Virginia. She was buried at Greenwood Cemetery in Owensboro.]

• • • • • • • • • •

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 4 July 1976,
Bicentennial Section, Part III, p.13:

Blacks arrived in city in 1800

"We were not in complete agreement with our coming (to the United States), nevertheless, we are here and we have shared in the pioneering of this country and we have a great deal to be proud of in the past 200 years" The Rev. Herman E. Floyd, pastor of Tenth Street Baptist Church.

The first blacks arrived in the Owensboro area soon after 1800. Bill Smothers, the original Owensboroan, is reported to have used a slave named Dave (one of the first blacks in Owensboro, brought here by Cit Dicken on his way to what is now Calhoun) to play a practical joke on a man from the Rockport, Ind., area.

When the Civil War ended some 65 years later, black Daviess Countians, many of whom had fought in the Union army, began making new lives for themselves outside the bonds of slavery.

It wasn't easy though. Andrew Fuqua, a black veteran, was shot to death by a white man for alleged impudence to Mrs. John Neicam in John Neicam's grocery downtown in March 1866, shortly after his return from the war. The murderer escaped.

At the beginning of the Civil War, the county's population had shown 11,958 whites, 3,515 slaves and 76 free blacks. The county's population has mushroomed in the past 116 years but the black population has declined. In 1970, census figures showed 75,935 whites and 3,449 blacks here. The newly freed blacks began to exercise their rights, casting their first votes on April 6, 1867.

Aided by the Freedmen's Bureau of A.M. Mayo, at least 301 blacks voted. The Monitor listed the black vote on the question of public bonds for building a railroad as 300 to 1 in favor.

Blacks were voting for mayor here in 1870 – the city's second mayoral contest.

The civil rights struggle began here in March 1875 when "a lady of color" attempted to get a room for the night at the Planters House at Third and Frederica streets. She was refused lodging.

Later that month, H. Clay Helm became the first black man to seek public office in Owensboro, announcing for city councilman. He received 96 votes.

In June, the steamer Morning Star was bound from Evansville to Owensboro when an Owensboro man and an Evansville man, both black "so far forgot their place as to go to the table with the white people," the Examiner reported.

They refused to take another table but were eventually forced to. The Owensboro man was fired from his job in a black barber shop as a result of his actions.

It was also in 1875 that black laborers organized the first labor union and staged the first strike in Owensboro.

During the 1880s, black parents began the struggle for equal education for their children. A federal court decision ordered "separate but equal" schools for blacks.

Major efforts at segregation didn't arrive until the 1890s, but segregation prevailed after the end of the Civil War.

In April 1888, Daviess County sent a black delegate, Cal Thomas, to the Kentucky Democratic Convention in Lexington.

Four blacks were empaneled on a federal jury here in February 1889, during the first session of U.S. District Court in Owensboro.

Marshall McClain in January 1891 became the first local black man to serve on a federal grand jury.

That month, J.B. Howard, a Fordsville hotel owner, caused an uproar when he allowed a black man from Breckinridge County to stay in his hotel and eat in the dining room.

That October, a white woman named Christine McEwan was shot and critically wounded on an L&N train near Louisville by a drunken black man being ejected from the car.

That bullet spurred a wave of segregationalist bills in the Kentucky General Assembly which took years to erase.

Attorney John Feland of Owensboro was hired to represent blacks fighting the new law in court. In November 1893, he filed suit against the state.

His clients, the Rev. and Mrs. W.H. Anderson of Evansville, had bought first-class tickets on the L&N railroad in Evansville, but were put off the train in Henderson when they refused to change cars upon entering Kentucky.

The next month, the Louisville, Henderson and St. Louis Railroad began putting separate coaches on its trains for black passengers.

That June, U.S. District Judge Barr ruled here that the separate coach law was unconstitutional.

The following January, the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ordered a hearing on Barr's ruling in the separate coach case.

A week later, a jury of 12 white Democrats in federal court here awarded a black minister a penny damages as a result of the separate coach law, but blacks had won. They had heard a jury of 12 whites say the law was wrong.

The next day, the Rev. W.H. Anderson bought a ticket at Henderson for Evansville and took his seat in the white car. Whites, aware of the decision at Owensboro, got up and gave him the car.

In July 1895, W.H. Hunter, a local black leader, renounced the Republican Party and founded the Colored Democratic League of Owensboro. As a result, his Hunter Park was boycotted by black Republicans.

In July 1898, Dr. J.M. Peters, a local black politician, was running for city councilman on the Republican ticket. He was persuaded to give up the race, however, and was rewarded by the local Republican Party by being named jail physician for federal prisoners in February 1899.

A grand jury in Daviess Circuit Court in September 1899 returned indictments against the Louisville and Nashville, Illinois Central and Louisville, Henderson and St. Louis railroads charging them with failure to provide "separate but equal" rail facilities.

In March 1900, Albert Young became the first black man to be appointed to a city position keeper of the pest house.

Civil rights for blacks continued to advance in 1905 under the mayorship of Republican Martin Yewell. That May he created an uproar by allowing black schools to hold a picnic in previously all-white Hickman (Legion) Park.

Each change brought segregation in Owensboro that much closer to an end.

• • • • • • • • • • •

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 4 July 1976,
Bicentennial Section, Part III, p.13:

Local blacks' freedom delayed

When the Civil War broke out in April 1861, there were 3,515 blacks in slavery in Daviess County and 76 free blacks. While the Emancipation Proclamation would free Southern blacks in 1863, Daviess Countians would have to wait until April 1865.

In November 1862, a few months before the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, a black man was sold on the streets of Owensboro for $815.

Willis Field of Daviess County was found dead on a country road in early December 1862. A runaway slave named Elliott was blamed and a $1,000 reward was posted for his arrest.

Advertisements like the following from the Monitor of Sept. 9, 1863, were common:

"Committed to jail: Taken up and lodged in the jail of Hancock County, a Negro woman claiming to be free, but supposed to be a slave, age 16 or 18 years, calling herself Julia Hoskins. The owner is requested to appear, prove property, pay charges and take her away. Otherwise she will be sold as the law directs. William Cook, jailer."

Even if she were free, she had no chance when picked up during the hectic war years.

Slave sales were still going strong in 1863. In March, seven blacks, ages 9 to 55, were advertised for sale here.

More auctions were forthcoming as Southern blacks arriving in Kentucky were being declared captives of war by the Union army and many were subsequently sold in the state.

Money might have been scarce in October as Winnie Ann Morris, 26; Fannie, 22, and her 2-year-old son; and a 22-year-old man named Jo were sold on six-months credit.

In December, the Ohio River was becoming truly a gateway to freedom. One Saturday night, 14 blacks escaped from Owensboro in a rowboat.

Twelve to 15 others ran away during one week of April 1864, and in May, two soldiers were jailed for helping slaves escape.

But that month, local blacks were allowed into the Union army for the first time. The first Union draft here saw 59 men including 17 slaves conscripted. Some 300 slaves also volunteered in May.

In mid-June, a Union man named Powers and some friends recruited some 20 blacks in Hancock County.

With black troops in charge of the city, dozens of slaves were fleeing the city almost daily.

In August, black soldiers patrolled the streets of Owensboro arresting whites caught out after curfew without a pass.

Also that month, Capt. J.C. Cowin's 108th Colored Infantry took 10 prisoners after a skirmish near Yelvington and a black picket was fatally wounded in Owensboro in an accident.

Later that month, the federal gunboat, Leu. Eaves, made a raid on Daviess County and carried off 40 to 50 slaves. John H. McFarland, a delegate to the Democratic convention in Chicago, lost all of his slaves in the raid.

By September, blacks were in full command of the courthouse.

Later in September, a band of black soldiers marching to Owensboro captured all the farmers and travelers they passed in eastern Daviess County and marched them along with all whites found on the streets to the courthouse to be inspected for guerrilla activity.

By then, escaping slaves, with almost nothing but the clothes they wore, crowded Evansville to the point of discomfort.

In October, Charles Lusk of Indiana was acquitted of a charge of stealing slaves in a trial before the local military commander.

The draft continued, but not all blacks were anxious for a chance to wear a uniform. One slave owner paid a substitute $900 to take the place of a slave who was drafted.

When black troops were transferred from Owensboro to another city, they bore the prejudice of riverboat captains who often quartered them with the mules.

Guerrilla activity in the county that fall and winter made it rough to have black skin. A black picket was shot to death "by accident" and a slave was murdered by two guerrillas.

The occupation of Owensboro ended in the summer of 1865 as Confederate veterans began returning home. Former slaveholders were offered pay for their slaves who had served in the Union army.

Despite discrimination in the Union army, Daviess County blacks had had some part in securing freedom for themselves and their families.

• • • • • • • • • •

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 22 February 1989, p.1C:

Researcher pieces together black history

By Steve Thomas, Messenger-Inquirer

Owensboro's black history begins in 1800, but trying to recall that storied past is difficult, according to Olive Burroughs, who has been researching the topic.

"Black history was not recorded," she said during a speech Tuesday night before the Daviess County Historical Society.

No books exist on the subject, no photos of early blacks exist and few references to early blacks in Daviess County are written anywhere, she said.

But through newspaper obituaries and interviews with elderly blacks in the area, Mrs. Burroughs said she has been able to begin putting the pieces together to form an outline of what happened.

The first piece in the picture begins in 1800, when Bill Smothers of Owensboro brought the first black man to the city. It was part of a joke he was playing on a friend in Ohio County by bringing him a slave, said Mrs. Burroughs, an operator at South Central Bell Telephone Co.

Other pieces in black history include the arrival of Josiah Henson, the original Uncle Tom, and a group of slaves in 1827 after being sent here to work on a plantation by their master.

The next recorded history of blacks comes in 1861 at the beginning of the Civil War, with the population data showing 11,958 whites in the county, 3,515 slaves and about 75 free blacks.

Mrs. Burroughs said the Emancipation Proclamation freed Southern blacks in 1863, but for a reason she hasn't been able to determine, Daviess County blacks weren't freed until 1865.

On April 6, 1867, blacks in Daviess County were first allowed to vote.

Then in March 1875, civil rights protests officially began in Owensboro as a black woman attempted to get a room at the Planters House, a hotel at the intersection of Third and Frederica streets. "She was refused," Mrs. Burroughs said.

In that same month, H. Clay Helm became the first black man to seek public office in Owensboro. He received 96 votes for city council.

Also in 1875, black labor formed its first union and began a strike. Mrs.

Burroughs said she hasn't been able to get any other details about this.

In 1884, federal courts ordered separate but equal schools for black and white children. In Owensboro that same year, the black school was burned along with its equipment before it could be opened.

White teachers were hired to teach the black children, but after objections by the black community, the first black teacher was hired in 1896.

In 1898, Dr. J.M. Peters, a local black politician, ran for city councilman on the Republican ticket but was persuaded to back out. As a reward, he was appointed jail physician for federal prisoners in Daviess County in 1899.

The second century of Owensboro's black community begin in March 1900 with the first black man to be named to a city position. Albert Young was named as keeper of the pest house, a place for housing people stricken with contagious diseases, such as smallpox.

Around the turn of the century, Owensboro had a strong and vibrant black community with black doctors, black lawyers and many other professionals.

Several black-owned businesses also existed.

Today, there are no black lawyers or doctors in Owensboro and few black-owned businesses, Mrs. Burroughs said.

"Anything that was needed could be found in the black community," she said. "The thing I wonder is why so much then and not so much now." Several blacks in Owensboro during the 20th century have helped shape the city's future and have parks or buildings named after them.

Among them are Mary Harding of the Mary Harding Home, Dr. P.G. Walker of the P.G. Walker Apartments, Dr. Reginald and Hattie Neblett of the Neblett Center, and Joe Kendall and Joseph Perkins of Kendall-Perkins Park.

Mrs. Burroughs said she plans to continue her research and hopes to put it in written form.

"I know there's so much there, and if it's not recorded it will be lost," she said.

• • • • • • • • • •

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 12 June 1993, p.5B:

Church celebrates 120th anniversary

St. Paul A.M.E. Church in Owensboro is celebrating its 120th anniversary today with a program and dinner at 6:30 p.m. at the H.L. Neblett Center. The theme will be "From Then Until Now."

Richard McFarland Jr. of Henderson, a member and steward of St. Paul A.M.E., will be the principal speaker at the banquet Cost for dinner is an $8 donation. The program will include observations from the Rev. Howard S. Clark, pastor, a skit by the St. Paul youth, a gospel rap by Reuben Winstead and a historical summary of the church by Nena Lewis. Chairwoman Janice Watkins will recognize special guests.

St. Paul A.M.E. was founded in 1873 and met in a blacksmith shop near the corner of Third and Locust streets in Owensboro. The first church building was constructed in late 1873 at the corner of Third and St. Elizabeth streets on a lot donated by Clay Helm, a trustee. The cause is not known, but that structure was lost in 1893, and, while looking for a new location, the congregation worshipped at buildings on Frederica Street between Front and Main streets, and at the corner of Lewis and McFarland.

Under the leadership of the Rev. Lewis Hamilton, St Paul's present site at 624 Elm Street was purchased in 1900. The frame church at that location was destroyed by a storm. It was later rebuilt with brick, and a cornerstone was placed by Mount Pisgah Lodge No. 20 AM during the pastorate of Rev. William Ward in 1911.

• • • • • • • • • •

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 9 November 1997, p.1G:

The Community Drum and Bugle Corps was sponsored by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. Moneta Sleet, Jr., at far right, went on to become the only Pulitzer Prize winner from the Daviess County area.

• • • • • • • • • •

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 11 October 1998, p.3E:

The Black Middle Class

Owensboro's black community had its own
Chautauqua at turn of the century

By Aloma Williams Dew

When the 20th century was still young, segregation and racism held the American South, including Owensboro, in an iron grip.

Many African Americans struggled to earn a living as domestics, porters, tobacco stemmers, servants and sharecroppers. But Owensboro had an energetic and vibrant black middle class, although historians and newspapers have largely ignored this important group and their accomplishments. There were shop owners, teachers and professional men who wanted to provide the best education and entertainment for their race. Education was critical to the dreams of blacks, including many of the 5,554 who lived in Daviess County at the turn of the century.

In 1907, there were two black schools, Eastern School on Jackson Street and Western School on West Third Street, The principals and teachers provided much of the leadership – men such as A.O. Guthrie and Professor Samuel Barker. Also conspicuous and active were five churches – Center Street, Fourth Street and Sweeney Street Baptist churches and Asbury and St. Paul AME congregations.

Although most blacks were employed in low-paying labor, there were seven black barbers, a brick manufacturing firm (McCullough's in Mechanicsville); a shoemaker, Givens Crump; druggist R.F. White; at least four grocers and three physicians - Dr. R. Moreland, Dr. J.M Peters

and Dr. P.G. Walker. Three men ran saloons, and John Abner Agnew had an undertaking parlor and livery stable Fourth and Elm streets.

Agnew was educated as a dentist and was the first African American to practice dentistry in Kentucky. He gave up dentistry when he moved to Owensboro and took up embalming.

There was a black newspaper, the Kentucky Reporter, on West Second Street, which provided news and community support. The educated, community-minded middle class black men formed the Owensboro Negro Chautauqua in 1907. It was modeled after the Mother Chautauqua in New York and imitators throughout the country. It provided religious education and well-known speakers, as well as entertainment and enlightenment to the city's black population.

The site for the annual sessions was the fairgrounds on East 18th Street. Activities included dances, concerts, cake-baking contests and oratorical contests, as well as baseball games and other athletic events.

According to the memoirs of Marvalene Jackson, affluent blacks would rent rooms and live at the fairgrounds for the entire week of the chautauqua. Gustava Hayden remembers attending chautauquas as a girl with her mother. She often wished they could stay in the lodgings at the fairgrounds, with their holiday atmosphere. It was exciting to a child to greet friends dressed in their Sunday best, to listen to inspiring speakers and rousing bands and to savor the mingling fragrances of food from the many vendors.

The inaugural season began July 26, 1907, with a band concert and a welcome by Owensboro Mayor William O'Bryan. One day was devoted to labor, with discussions led by representative farmers, miners, barbers, waiters, blacksmiths and mechanics. The principal speaker was the superintendent of the black schools in Covington, Frank L. Williams, who spoke on "Making Men" and "Making a Home."

Women's Day featured a floral parade with nearly 400 children and adults wearing and carrying wreaths and bouquets as they marched behind the brass band from Louisville. This was touted as a "red letter" day with nearly 300 present to hear Vera Lee Moore, a teacher at Walden University in Nashville, Tenn. Her subject was "The Inherent Power of Influence," and it was aimed at mothers on how to raise children. The Inquirer's reporter reflected: "Would that we had many such women to go forth throughout the length and breadth of our land to help us solve the so called race problem."

Organizers of the chautauqua were praised for their enterprise and its reflection on the city. Officers were William Allen, president; the Rev. Green Price, general manager; Dr. P.G. Walker, assistant manager; and Professor William C. Orton, recording secretary. The Rev. B.F. Stone, the Rev. F.P. Fielding, Professor Samuel L. Barker, attorney E.A. Watts, J.E. Weaver and Dr. J.M. Peters served as directors.

The second year the summer events ran for 10 days and boasted a 20-page program. The Rev. A.D. Hurt was added to the list of officers. More than 500 season tickets were sold, which, according to the Inquirer, was perhaps "the only colored chautauqua in the United States." Richmond began a negro chautauqua in 1916, and there was a national colored chautauqua organization formed by that time.

Each year seemed better than the one prior, with larger crowds and more exciting programs. Noted educators from Wilberforce University and other black institutions spoke on black progress and advancement and encouraged industrial and vocational training based on the philosophy of Booker T. Washington. Much emphasis was placed on moral and mental improvement but within the accepted parameters of the segregation system.

Most of the speakers urged advancement it in character, education, property ownership and church life. Amanda Cabell urged: "Don't meditate over things that hinder us but rather the things that help us. A good character, a practical education a love for honest work, as Dr. Booker T. Washington says, will win for us."

She described Owensboro's black community when she praised the strong models found in "church, schools, drugstore, doctor, lawyer, teacher and preacher…."

Speaker H.M. Mickens pointed out that although blacks had not accomplished all they might, "history does not give an account of a people under similar conditions who have done so much in so short a time."

Noted journalist and anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells spoke to an audience of 1,200, which listened "with great interest and patience." Her topic was "The Second Emancipation," which she said was from ignorance, sin, and moral weakness." She referred to as the "most eminent negro woman in the country."

By 1910, the newspaper had nothing praise for the Owensboro Negro Chautauqua, calling it a great success. Local black physician A.B. Bell gave an illustrated lecture on "The Tendency to Consumption," which was so well received that it reprinted in its entirety in the Inquirer. Bell stressed the danger of overcrowded and poorly ventilated houses, poor nutrition, and the danger of the common housefly. Like wellness authorities today, he urged more pure air and pure water.

Without explanation, a passing reference in the newspapers in 1913 noted that the chautauqua was prospering as never before, "in spite of some feeble opposition." A fake telegram was sent to a speaker from Louisville that prevented his arrival on schedule. Although no real indicator of problems seemed apparent, there was obviously a change in management.

The Owensboro Negro Chautauqua and Amusement Co. filed articles of incorporation with a capital stock of $500 at $2 per share in 1914. Stock owners were P.G. Walker, John Abner Agnew, Samuel L. Barker, E. Clements, Marietta J. Wheatley, J.P. Martin and T.E. Barrett. But new directors did not stop problems when the lights at the fairgrounds were cut off for nonpayment of $55.75 for the previous year's electrical work. The wires were disconnected just before dark, disrupting the evening's activities. Agnew maintained that he and the other directors were not liable for debts of the former management. Meanwhile, a group of women paid the bill, and the programs went on as scheduled.

By the 1920s, champion baseball teams played exhibition games at the event, drawing large and enthusiastic crowds. Another favorite was the cake-baking contest sponsored by Owensboro Milling Co. The winners in 1922 were Lummie Glenn, Emma Edwards, Janie Slaughter and Elizabeth George.

Groups came from as far away as Louisville to hear Roscoe Simmons, a frequent favorite, and to enjoy concerts, dramatic recitals, athletic events and a drama, "Beyond Pardon," presented in 1925. Although the lights went out again in 1925, this time from an electrical storm, causing the evening program to be canceled, it was heralded as one of the most successful seasons ever. Much of the credit was given to the untiring efforts of Agnew and Barker.

A day was dedicated to Dr. P.G. Walker in 1925, one of the founding members and greatest supporters of the chautauqua. He died of a heart attack in May 1924. Other days were designated as Health Day, Business and Child's Day, Cake Contest and Education Day, Farmers and Fair Day. Sunday was Banner Day, which marked the close of the event. The 1925 season was called one of the most successful ever, but this seems to be the last year for the Owensboro Negro Chautauqua. No further mention has been found in the newspapers.

What happened? We know that a vital and active black middle class continued for many years. By 1928, there were four physicians, and churches and benevolent lodges continued in strength and popularity. Perhaps it was the loss of Walker and the aging of many of the early supporters. Perhaps renewed Ku Klux Klan activity across the nation was a factor. In the post-World War I era, many blacks were leaving towns such as Owensboro for better jobs in northern cities; and new forms of entertainment were becoming more common.

Unfortunately, too much of Owensboro's black history is one-dimensional, without the rich details to fill in what must have been a strong, well-led society within the strict rules and limitations of segregated America. Where are the Agnews, Barkers, Walkers, Willinghams and Guthries today?

It was a strong sense of community and a desire to achieve status and education that made the Owensboro Negro Chautauqua possible in the early 20th century. Perhaps the solidarity of Owensboro's black community went the way of the front porch swing and the corner grocery, but the history of this great cultural experiment tantalizes and entices the reader and the researcher to know more; to really know what life was like in Owensboro a century ago. Perhaps when we know, we will have a better grasp of the future of our community.

• • • • • • • • • •

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 29 August 1999, p.3E:

The Dream Lives On

Neblett's 'did pretty good for a small town'
in aiding children, founding center

By Glenn Hodges, Messenger-Inquirer

After Dr. Reginald and Hattie Neblett came to Owensboro in 1930, they lived at 626 Elm St. for the rest of their lives. When the street was quiet, Mrs. Neblett said she missed the sound of children playing. "My sons and daughters, I call them," she used to say.

The children of the black community in the near west end of Owensboro meant the world to the Nebletts, and they resolved to give them something to do that would keep them off the streets and out of trouble.

It was this concern for those children that compelled the Nebletts to lead the effort in 1936 to establish what became H.L Neblett Community Center, an indoor recreation center for black children, only a three-minute walk from the Nebletts' home.

The community center at 801 W. Fifth St became the Nebletts' legacy. It was their way of showing how individuals, through hard work and determination, can make a difference in the life of their community. Their efforts earned them a prominent place in the history of Owensboro during the 20th century.

Dr. Neblett was born in Clarksville, Tenn., and grew up there. His grandfather was a slave on a Tennessee farm before he ran away and joined the Union Army during the Civil War. Dr. Neblett received a bachelor of science degree from Tennessee State Normal College (now Tennessee State University) and earned his medical degree at Meharry Medical College, both in Nashville. A strong believer in self-help, he paid his way through school working as a waiter on a railroad dining car. He served his internship at a hospital in Baltimore.

Neblett considered becoming a surgeon in Baltimore but decided to go to a smaller community and be a general practitioner. When he and Mrs. Neblett moved to Owensboro, he set up his practice in Porter's Hall at Ninth and Breckenridge streets. A few years later, he moved his office to his home on Elm Street, where it remained.

He became the first black member of the Daviess County Medical Society and the second to join the state medical society. He was a member of the staff of both Owensboro-Daviess County and Our Lady of Mercy hospitals. In 1953, he was named Owensboro's Outstanding Negro Man.

His wife, Hattie, was born in Georgia and also graduated from Tennessee State University with a degree in elementary education. She became a home economics and music teacher. After she moved to Owensboro, she taught piano lessons in her home, organized a community chorus, was pianist at Fourth Street Baptist Church and started a youth choir at the church.

She also threw all of her energy into starting the recreation center, and was the driving force in its establishment The Nebletts were both very caring about other people," said Wesley Acton, who served on the Neblett Center board for 19 years and was its chairman for three years.

Her contemporaries described Mrs. Neblett as a "straight lady, good, loyal, honest and upright" who always emphasized good citizenship and was good at inspiring and motivating young people to achieve their full potential.

"She was very compassionate, deeply concerned about the fact there was no indoor center for children to play," Acton said. "Many of the kids did not have a warm home to go to after school in those early days. She wanted a warm facility where they could go."

In 1936, a field representative of the National Recreational Association provided Mrs. Neblett and other local residents counseling in the formation of a temporary organization and long-range planning. A permanent organization was established in March 1936 and was named the Community Recreation Council.

From 1936 until 1942, the council met in various churches and schools to plan youth activities and rehearse for its annual music recital while cooperating with the statewide recreation project.

A fund-raising campaign to purchase a building for the recreation program was launched in December 1940. "When we came out with $1,400, we thought we were rich," Hattie Neblett said in an interview with the Messenger-Inquirer in 1978.

With the help of another donation, the present site, a former tobacco warehouse, was purchased in 1942 for $3,200 and renovated. Two wooden stories of the building were razed and other improvements were made.

"It was a terrible looking place," Mrs. Neblett said. "People were saying 'Why did you all buy that? You can't do anything with it' But we were just so pleased. We thought we had something and of course, the kids did, too. It was the only place they could go in and dance and party and skate."

During World War II, the center furnished sleeping quarters and a USO for visiting soldiers from nearby camps. Classes were held in the center during the construction of Western School (later Goodloe Elementary School) and at one time the congregation of St Paul A.M.E. Church worshiped there after its church building burned.

"The Nebletts used their own money in many cases in the early stages of organization," Acton said. "Dr. Neblett pitched in and saw that there was enough money to get through a crisis. He was her greatest supporter. This was what she wanted to do and he helped her in any way he could."

Mrs. Neblett served as president of the center from 1936 to 1973. She was undaunted in her support for the facility, serving as fund-raiser, organizer and even janitor.

Dr. Reginald & Hattie Neblett

In May 1978, the community center received the prestigious Jane Addams Medal from the National Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers. Dr. and Mrs. Neblett, as the founders of the center, won the award over nominees from 30 other states, and they were honored as "outstanding leaders in the service of humanity."

For Hattie Neblett, the medal was a reward for more than 40 years of tireless struggle to keep one small neighborhood center alive.

"Who would have thought that little raggedy center would get so much recognition," she said after receiving word about the award. But typically she downplayed her own role in the achievement and gave credit to other residents in the community who played a vital part "I thought we did pretty good for a little town," she said.

Dr. Neblett died only a few months after he and his wife received the award. He suffered a stroke July 5, 1978, just hours after making rounds at Owensboro-Daviess County Hospital to check on his patients. He was hospitalized there, suffered a second stroke and died July 17, 1978. He was 79.

After her husband's death, Hattie Neblett continued her work with the center as president emeritus. After major renovations to the center in the late 1970s, the facility was renamed H.L Neblett Center in her honor in June 1979.

She died Aug. 26, 1993.

"We've lost a great person and a great leader," Acton said after Hattie Neblett's death. Recently, Acton said he was always impressed with her deep concern for people and her leadership skills. "She was good at motivating children to do the best they could do and be the best person they could be and get an education. The kids respected her and went to her with their problems."

The Nebletts had no children of their own, but raised a foster son, the late James Curry. Dr. Neblett delivered all eight of his foster grandchildren.

"They loved children and devoted their lives to them," said Betty McCreary, Mrs. Neblett's foster daughter-in-law.

As years passed and times changed, the Neblett Center expanded its role, reaching out to people of all races and ages with a wide variety of necessary services. The emphasis remained on helping children.

Today, the Neblett Center has an enrollment of 200, serving an average of 75 children daily. It provides lunch, snacks and evening meals for kids up to 12 years old, tutoring, computer lessons, and, of course, indoor recreation. Young girls can learn leadership in the Sister-Sister program. The Success Seekers program for 11- to 18-year-olds helps motivate them, teaches them self-esteem and encourages them to stay in school.

The children can take piano lessons at the center and sing in the choir. They go on field trips to businesses to learn about career opportunities. They also learn about politics as they prepare themselves for lives as adults.

"Their dream was to have a community center to get kids off the streets and give them something to do. That dream is more alive than ever and the center is continuing to grow and offer more programs to help kids develop social skills.

"When I look at the Nebletts' picture here in the center and see where we are as a center, I think they would be very proud," she said.

Their dream does live on.

• • • • • • • • • •

<u>Messenger-Inquirer</u>, Owensboro, KY, 25 February 2000, p.1A:

'Sleet would be so proud'

City dedicates marker to 1969 Pulitzer winner

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

Sonny Sleet's spirit came home to Owensboro on Thursday. You could see it in the smiles and teardrops of his family and friends.

The world knew him as Moneta Sleet Jr., the first African American to win a Pulitzer Prize for photojournalism. And that's what the new bronze historical marker across from his childhood home on Seventh Street calls him.

But in Owensboro's Baptisttown neighborhood, the college professor's son was always known as Sonny.

Emily Holloway graduated from Western High School in 1941, one year ahead of Sleet.

As she watched her friend's widow and oldest son unveil the marker at Seventh and Walnut streets, Holloway remembered a summer day long ago when the young basketball player was in her backyard, his shirt full of apples and a smile on his face.

"That's my favorite memory of Sonny," she said.

Thursday was "Moneta J. Sleet Jr. Day" in Owensboro. And St. Paul AME Church, 624 Elm St., was filled to capacity and beyond by those who came to honor the man Mayor Waymond Morris called "one of Owensboro's most famous citizens."

Sleet was a photographer for Ebony and Jet magazines from 1955 until his death in 1996 at age 70. His photographs, which have been displayed in museums across the country, chronicled the civil-rights movement, beginning in the 1950s.

He won his Pulitzer in 1969 for his photograph of Coretta Scott King and her daughter, Bernice, at the funeral of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Those achievements are documented on Kentucky Historical Highway Marker No. 2036. But only a few of those who stood in what is now Max Rhoads Park on Thursday afternoon for the ceremony realized the irony of the location.

This was Walnut Street Elementary School when Sonny Sleet was a boy - a white school that denied him admittance.

And now, his marker stands on the corner. Times have changed in Owensboro.

St. Paul AME Church was overflowing with people - black and white, young and old - by the time the ceremonies began with hand-clapping gospel music by the Owensboro Mercy Health System Choir.

Morris told the crowd that Sleet "left us and made us proud."

"We are so grateful for the privilege of knowing him when he was here," the Rev. R.L. McFarland, a former Owensboro mayor pro tem, said in his invocation. "He walked among those who were great, but he never lost the human touch."

McFarland, who knew Sonny Sleet as a child, said because of the marker, Sleet "though he be dead, yet he speaketh."

Sleet was a member of Fourth Street Baptist Church, McFarland said, but St. Paul was used for the ceremony because it was closer to the new marker.

City Commissioner Olive Burroughs told the crowd, "We are here today to make sure Owensboro never forgets Moneta Sleet."

When his widow, Juanita Sleet, rose to speak, the crowd stood in a prolonged ovation.

"As you may know, I'm overwhelmed," she said, trying to keep her voice from breaking. "Sleet loved growing up in this town. He talked about playing tennis all day long."

Memories played across her face.

"What a wonderful husband," she said. "We were married 46 years, had three children and three grandchildren. Owensboro will stay in my memory forever."

Later, as she stood beside her late husband's marker, Juanita Sleet said, "Sleet would be so proud. He should be living to see it himself."

U.S. District Judge Gregory Sleet of Delaware said his father could travel the world taking pictures but still find time to give his children the guidance that "continues to lead us today."

As he stood by the marker, Judge Sleet said, "It's important to let our children know our history."

After the ceremony, Holloway walked back to the church and picked up a copy of the 1940 Western High yearbook.

There, on the page for the sophomore class, she pointed to Sonny Sleet's picture - and then to the text that predicted that someone in the class would win a Pulitzer Prize.

And a smile spread across her face.

Sonny Sleet fulfilled the prophecy.

• • • • • • • • • •

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 28 October 2005, Decades section, p.19:

Williams' bid opened doors for black leaders

He earned spot on fall ballot

By Joy Campbell, Messenger-Inquirer

In the summer of 1965, John E. Williams made local history when he filed his petition to seek the office of Owensboro city commissioner. He was the first black in modern times to make a run for any city elective office.

Early newspaper reports show that in 1875, former slave H. Clay Helm was the first black man to run for public office in Owensboro, getting 56 votes in an unsuccessful race for city councilman.

Williams, 59, owned and operated a plaster contracting business. He came to Owensboro in 1927 from his native state of Georgia as an apprentice plasterer and six years later started his own business.

His first political race put him in the running with 10 candidates, including incumbents and a former city commissioner.

Brown, a retired firefighter, recalls that Williams entered local politics at a time of national unrest also felt in Owensboro.

"Busing, integration of schools and integration of lunch counters were still taking place nationally," Brown said. "A lot of black people were apathetic at that time. ... The system was so tainted; they didn't think it would do any good."

Locally, blacks were concerned about jobs, being treated fairly, integration and the attitudes that went along with those issues, Brown said.

Williams collected 367 names on his candidate petition.

The businessman was a member of National Home Builders, a deacon and chairman of the board of trustees at Fourth Street Baptist Church. He was on the board of directors of the American Red Cross, serving as co-chairman of the business division.

Williams was a Mason and served on the Mayor's Human Rights Committee.

"His chances hinged on black people getting out to vote," Charles Brown said.

Voter registration drives were held to help Williams, Brown said. The candidate made it through the September primary as voters trimmed the field to eight. He finished eighth.

The other seven candidates, in order of their primary finish, were: George H. Greer, Tom Sweat, Irvin Terrill, Doug Williams, Edward C. Akin, Joseph L. Hagan and George P. Ellison.

John Williams bested Bruce Kenney and William A. Smith for a spot on the ballot in November, when voters would choose four. He lost in the general election.

"He definitely opened the door for other blacks and stirred some interest in political involvement," Brown said.

Brown ran for the City Commission in 1969, and his brother Richard Brown made three attempts to gain a seat. Neither was successful, but they paved the way for other African-American candidates.

"My enthusiasm for running developed behind my brother Charles," Richard Brown said.

Both Richard and Charles Brown said Williams and his wife, the former Sue Rigley, were well-respected.

Sue Williams was an administrator for the local housing authority. In that role, she knew a lot of people, according to both Browns. The Williamses' church affiliation and leadership, plus John Williams' business and civic connections, positioned the candidate well for a campaign, they said.

It would be 1985 before a black resident was elected to the Owensboro City Commission. The Rev. R.L. McFarland took office in January 1986 and went on to serve six terms before his death in September 2002. He also was top vote-getter in 1989, earning him the job as mayor pro tem.

Ten years after McFarland won his seat on the commission, Olive Burroughs blazed a new trail and became the first black woman to serve, after being appointed. She was elected in 1996 and spent almost seven years on the commission. She lost her last bid for re-election in November 2002.

Burroughs died of complications from cancer in June 2003.

John Williams paved the way for Olive Burroughs and the Rev. Richard L. McFarland to become city leaders.

Kentucky Historical Highway Marker erected in 1970 by the Kentucky Historical Society and Kentucky Department of Highways. Marker is located near Maceo in Daviess County, KY. Marker is on U.S. 60, 1.2 miles east of Kelly Cemetery Road, on the right when traveling east.

Inscription: Uncle Tom Lived Here – Site of Riley family homeplace, owners of Josiah Henson, one of the characters on which Harriet Beecher Stowe based her 1852 novel Uncle Tom's Cabin. Henson served as overseer of Amos Riley's farms, 1825-29. On learning owner planned to sell him "down the river," he escaped to Canada, living there rest of life. Invited to visit Mrs. Stowe in Andover, Mass., 1849.

Kentucky Historical Highway marker erected in 2015 by the Kentucky Historical Society & Kentucky Department of Highways. Marker is located on the north side of the Daviess County Courthouse grounds in Owensboro, KY on West 2nd Street east of Frederica Street, on the left when traveling west.

Inscription: Daviess Co. U.S. Colored Troops In The Civil War –

Side 1 – In 1864, several hundred enslaved African American men joined the Union army here. Enlisting in the army meant eventual freedom for the men and their families. Units raised in Daviess Co. took part in important operations at Richmond, Petersburg, and Lee's surrender at Appomattox, as well as campaigns in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Louisiana.

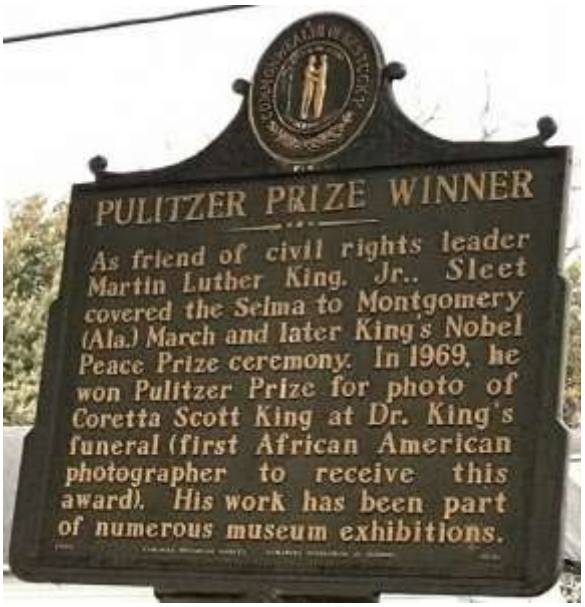
Side 2 – Recruits served in the 100th, 109th, and 118th U.S. Colored Infantry and the 5th and 6th U.S. Colored Cavalry. There was much opposition among pro-slavery Kentucky Unionists to the recruitment of slaves. Therefore, black men in Daviess Co. took great risks to themselves and their families by enlisting in the army.

Kentucky Historical Highway Marker erected in 2020 by the Kentucky Historical Society and Kentucky Department of Highways. Marker is located in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY on West 4th Street east of Poplar Street, on the left when traveling east.

Inscription: Fourth Street Baptist Church – In 1830, a Baptist church began in a log cabin-house, which was provided for Black worshipers by Philip Thompson. The congregation was first led by Black Baptist Minister Oliver Potts. The Black Baptist Church was founded after the Civil War & in 1866 was named Fourth Street Baptist Church. It is the oldest African American church in Daviess County.

Kentucky Historical Highway Marker erected by the Kentucky Historical Society and Kentucky Department of Highways. Marker is located in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY at the intersection of West 5th Street and Cs-1186-30, on the right when traveling west on West 5th Street.

Inscription: Kendall - Perkins Park – This park was formerly known as Douglas Park in honor of Frederick Douglas, slave abolitionist. In 1973, renamed in memory of Joe N. Kendall and Joseph P. Perkins, two contemporary citizens of this community. These men gave many years of unselfish and tireless devotion to growth and development of children in this community. Those who benefited say thanks.

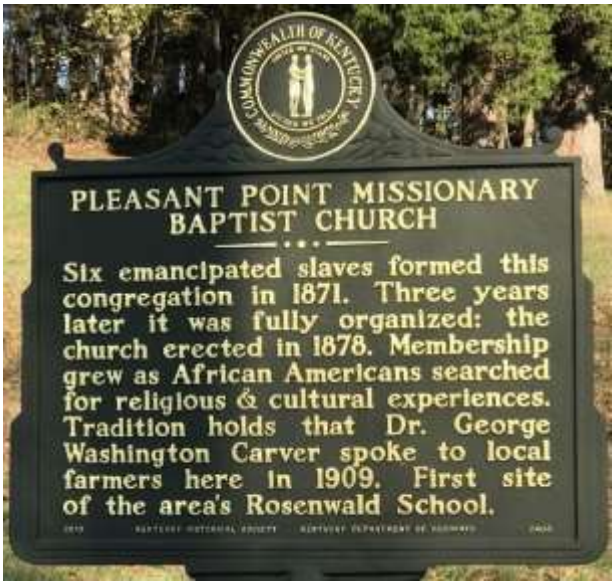


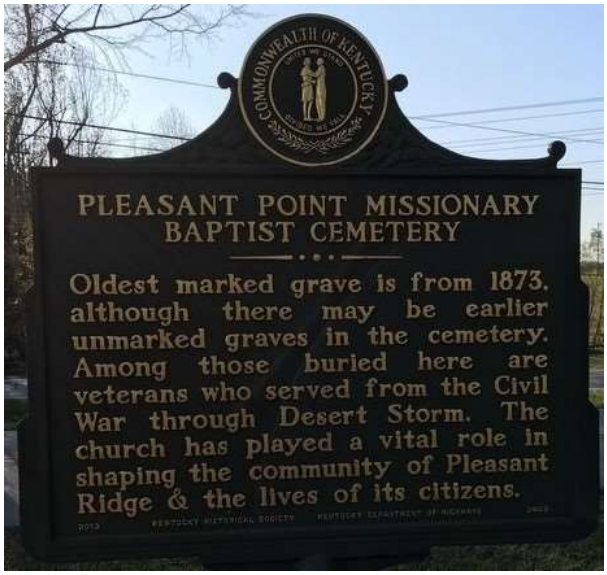
Kentucky Historical Highway Marker erected in 2000 by the Kentucky Historical Society and Kentucky Department of Highways. Marker is located in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY at the intersection of West 7th Street and Walnut Street, on the right when traveling west on West 7th Street. Marker is located in Max Rhoads Park.

Inscription:

Side 1: Moneta J. Sleet, Jr. (1926-1996) – Born in Owensboro. Sleet was a graduate of Ky. State College and New York Univ. Beginning in 1955, he worked as photojournalist for Jet and Ebony magazines for 41 yrs. During the 1950s-60s, his photos documented the African struggle for independence and the American civil rights movement. He inspired a generation of photographers.

Side 2: Pulitzer Prize Winner – As friend of civil rights leader Martin Luther King. Jr.. Sleet covered the Selma to Montgomery (Ala.) March and later King's Nobel Peace Prize ceremony. In 1969, he won Pulitzer Prize for photo of Coretta Scott King at Dr. King's funeral (first African American photographer to receive this award). His work has been part of numerous museum exhibitions.





Kentucky Historical Highway Marker erected in 2013 by the Kentucky Historical Society and Kentucky Department of Highways. Marker is located near Pleasant Ridge in Daviess County, KY on Kentucky Route 764 just south of U.S. 231, on the right when traveling north.

Inscription:

Side 1: Pleasant Point Missionary Baptist Church – Six emancipated slaves formed this congregation in 1871. Three years later it was fully organized: the church erected in 1878. Membership grew as African Americans searched for religious & cultural experiences. Tradition holds that Dr. George Washington Carver spoke to local farmers here in 1909. First site of the area's Rosenwald School.

Side 2: Pleasant Point Missionary Baptist Cemetery – Oldest marked grave is from 1873, although there may be earlier unmarked graves in the cemetery. Among those buried here are veterans who served from the Civil War through Desert Storm. The church has played a vital role in shaping the community of Pleasant Ridge & the lives of its citizens.

Historical marker erected by city of Owensboro and the Owensboro Settlement Bicentennial Committee. Marker is in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY at the intersection of West 5th Street and Cs-1186-30, on the right when traveling west. Marker is in Kendall-Perkins Park.

Inscription:

The African American Community In Owensboro

The years after the Civil War saw Owensboro's African-American community grow. The more than 3,000 blacks in Daviess County dwelt mostly in the rural areas in 1860, but by 1900 most lived in Owensboro. The lure of jobs, changes in agriculture, and the attractions of a thriving black community led to the concentration of the African-American population in the city.

Many found jobs in the booming industries such as distilling, tobacco warehousing and stripping, and wood products; while others worked as teamsters or on the steamboats and railroads. Others were employed in service industries such as hotels and restaurants.

Segregation laws restricted blacks in this era, and forced African-Americans to look to themselves for their progress and happiness. There were many black-owned businesses, some of which served the black community and others, downtown, which catered to both races. There were three black physicians practicing in Owensboro in 1900.

Black schools, churches, social clubs and fraternal organizations formed the nucleus of a thriving black cultural life which included black chautauquas, theater performances and athletic and musical organizations. Black children were educated at Dunbar School on the city's east side, and at Western School, which included both elementary and high school departments.

The end of segregation brought new challenges to African-Americans in Owensboro. Under the leadership of Prof. H. E. Goodloe and others the way was paved for the integration of the schools in the early 1960's.

With the closing of Western High School on West Third Street (now the H. E. Goodloe Center) and the end of the system of segregation, Owensboro's African-American population entered a new era, complete with new challenges and opportunities.

Captions [to pictures]:

Top: The Western High School Band was a symbol of pride for Owensboro's African-American community. The 1960 band, under the direction of H. A. Deering, posed for this yearbook photo. Majorettes are Basty Glover, Sue Owen and LaVerne Moorman. Photo from Western Echoes, 1960.

Bottom: H.E. Goodloe personified the leadership in Owensboro's African-American community. As principal of Western High School and a founder of the Owensboro Human Relations Commission, he provided guidance and stability during the turbulent years of the 1960's. Photo courtesy of Harry Fields.

Historical marker erected by city of Owensboro and the Owensboro Settlement Bicentennial Committee. Marker is in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY at the intersection of West 5th Street and Cs-1186-30, on the right when traveling west. Marker is in Kendall-Perkins Park.

Inscription:

Two Early Civil Rights Cases In Owensboro

The end of slavery in 1865 brought many challenges to Owensboro's African-American population. They struggled to find jobs, establish homes, educate their children, and find their place in the post-war world.

In 1880 a system of schools for black children was established in Owensboro based upon a Kentucky law which provided such schools, to be funded by taxes paid by black citizens. The two schools were housed in inadequate buildings and operated only 3 or 4 months per year, while the white schools were in good buildings and had a 10-month year.

A group of black men — Edward Claybrook, Rev. C. Dabney, Rev. M. Harding, William Hunter, Giles Crump, Charles T. Jackson, Marshall "Chess" McLean, Henry Johnson, Walter Whitenhill and O.G.K, Barrett — formed a committee, raised $250 and filed a suit challenging the Kentucky law on the constitutional grounds that it denied their children "equal protection of the laws" as guaranteed by the 14th Amendment. The Federal District court agreed, and in 1883 declared the Kentucky law unconstitutional.

The following year Kentucky abolished the "colored school" law and passed a new law, which funded black and white schools from a common fund. The brave men who stood up for their children's rights triumphed. It would be 75 years before segregated schools ended, but Claybrook v. Owensboro was an important first step on the road to equality.

In 1892 the legislature passed a law segregating railroad passenger cars. The following year Rev. W. H. Anderson sued the L&N R.R. after being thrown off a train for refusing to leave a white-only car.

In Anderson v. L&N the Federal District court in Owensboro held the Kentucky law to be unconstitutional. Unfortunately three years later it was overruled by the Supreme Court in Plessy v. Ferguson, and segregation became law in Kentucky until the 1960's.

Captions [to pictures]:

Center: Edward Claybrook, a former slave, led African-American parents in filing the lawsuit in 1882 which overturned Kentucky law limiting funding for schools for black children. Photo courtesy of Claybrook's great-granddaughter, Mrs. Emily Holloway of Owensboro.

Right: Thanks to the Claybrook case conditions improved for black children in the Owensboro Public Schools, such as these in Miss Leona West's sixth grade class at Western School in 1960. Photo from Western Echoes, 1960, courtesy of Mr. Harry Fields.

Historical marker erected by city of Owensboro and the Owensboro Settlement Bicentennial Committee. Marker is in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY at the intersection of West 5th Street and Cs-1186-30, on the right when traveling west. Marker is in Kendall-Perkins Park.

Inscription:

Born With A Purpose

Every African-American family holds in high esteem women whose strength in the face of overwhelming odds provided hope and encouragement. Women have worked to strengthen their communities of family, neighborhood, school and church.

Teaching was one career open to women, providing discipline, hope and liberation to young people. Teachers were a strong and positive role model in the community. Between Emma Edwards, the first black female principal, appointed to Dunbar School in 1938, to Antoinette (Toni) Talbott, who in 1992 became the first since integration, were many teachers whose names have become legend, such as Jessie Howard, who started the first black Girl Scout troop and took the first girls to Girl Scout camp.

Nanny Locke, a missionary who served in Kentucky, Virginia and Georgia, provided an example of church leadership, and was an inspiration for many. The Nanny Locke Housing Project on the city's east side was named in her honor.

The late 20th century saw the beginnings of African-American political acceptance. Daisy James ran for city commissioner in 1981. Although unsuccessful, she opened the door for others and went on to serve in senior citizen causes, on the Human Relations Commission, and on

numerous city boards, including a 13-year term as the first black on the OMU board. She was also the first Owensboroan to serve on the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights.

Jean Higgs became the first African-American member of the Owensboro Board of Education in 1979. Olive Burroughs became the first black woman, and only the third female ever, to serve on the Owensboro City Commission, elected in 1995.

Ruby Taylor McFarland earned her place in history as the city's first African-American woman licensed embalmer and funeral director.

Fannie Dorsey, known throughout the state as an outspoken champion of the elderly, served as a member of the Federal Council on Aging in the 1970's. She served as state director of the Division for Aging Services and was honored in 1982 as one of only six women in the nation chosen as role models by the Older Women's League.

Former schoolteacher Hattie Neblett was the driving force behind the indoor recreation center in 1936. The H. L. Neblett Center continues to be a focal point of the community.

In 1960 Estelle Moss, a retired University of Kentucky home extension agent and seamstress, founded the West End Day Care Center, continuing the tradition of caring and nurturing.

Many other African-American women deserve to be recognized. They have made great contributions in traditional roles such as education and church work, and in newer areas such as politics and human relations. These women take to heart Fannie Dorsey's affirmation, "...we are born with a purpose."

Captions [to pictures]:

Left: The 1870 Census lists only one female teacher, but there would be many more such as Mary Fisher Morris who taught English and French at Western High School. Her students were so inspired and motivated that they dedicated the 1960 Western Echoes to her for "unequalled devotion and interest."

Right: Hattie (H.L.) Neblett moved to Owensboro with her husband in 1930. Six years later they founded the Community Recreation Center where she served as President until 1973. It was renamed the H.L. Neblett Center in her honor.

Historical marker erected by city of Owensboro and the Owensboro Settlement Bicentennial Committee. Marker is in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY at the intersection of West 4th Street and Poplar Street, on the right when traveling east on West 4th Street.

Inscription:

Dr. and Mrs. Clay E. Simpson, Sr.
Owensboro Outstanding Community Service

Dr. Clay E. Simpson, Sr., native of Notasulga, Alabama and his wife Mary E. Simpson, native of Fayette County, Kentucky, served the Owensboro community for many years. As a Family Physician, Dr. Simpson made numerous house calls and delivered hundreds of babies in Owensboro from 1920 until he died in 1951. His service was often given without pay. Mrs. Simpson taught school in Owensboro and Breckinridge County and was local manager for Mammoth Life Insurance Company.

Dr. Clay and Mary Simpson also supported promising young people of the community in their pursuit of an education for the establishment and advancement of families.