

Philip Burton Thompson (1789-1836)

By Jerry Long



Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1971,
US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1971, p.1811:

Philip Thompson, a Representative from Kentucky; born on Shawnee Run, near Harrodsburg, Mercer County, Ky., August 20, 1789; received a limited education; served as a lieutenant in the War of 1812; held several local offices; studied law; was admitted to the bar and commenced practice in Hartford, Ohio County, Ky.; moved to Owensboro, Daviess County, Ky.; member of the State house of representatives; elected as an Adams-Clay Republican to the Eighteenth Congress (March 4, 1823-March 3, 1825); resumed the practice of law in Owensboro, Ky., where he died November 25, 1836; interment in the Moseley burying ground on Firth Street; re-interment in Rural Hill (later Elmwood) Cemetery in 1856.



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

p.44 – served as a representative in the US Congress 1823-1825

pp.87-91 – Chapter III: Life and Times of Robert Triplett;

Note: This chapter contains Robert Triplett's account of his duel with Philip Thompson in February 1829. The majority of this account is a direct quote from Robert Triplett's autobiography, Roland Trevor or The Pilot of Human Life. Triplett's account from his autobiography is given in full below.

p.147 – Chapter V: Sketches of Public Men

Phil. Thompson, one of the first three lawyers resident in Daviess County, figures very largely in Chapter II of this book. The old portion of the Upper Ward brick school-house was built by him, in consideration of a certain number of land warrants signed over to him. He is principally remembered as one of the parties in the famous duel with Robert Triplett. He himself was afterward killed by Mr. Jeffries in November, 1836, on the left hand side of Frederica street, between Main street and the river. There was a quarrel between them growing out of the burning of some property which the other owned. It is stated that the only living witness of that famous duel is Colonel Jesse L. McRocklin [sic, McCrocklin], now a resident of Blanco County, Texas. He started from Owensboro for that

country during the great star-fall of Nov. 13, 1833, and has never returned to this place but once since then, and that was two or three years ago on a visit to a relative.

p.359 – Chapter XVI: Owensboro, Educational

Daviess County Seminary. — The oldest school building in Owensboro is the southernmost brick structure of what is now the Upper Ward School. It was erected by Philip Thompson, in consideration of which a number of town lots were deeded to him by the trustees. The ground on which this house was built was originally donated to the town for school purposes. The institution was chartered about 1820. The most eminent teacher here in early day was probably George Scarborough, a relative of P. T. Watkins and a native of Massachusetts. He taught school in this place about 1830 to 1840. On leaving here he sold a large collection of geological specimens to parties in this place, for use in the public schools. He went to Kansas, and from there to New Jersey, where he at a recent date was still residing.



Roland Trevor: Or The Pilot of Human Life. Being An Autobiography of the Author. Showing How To Make And Lose A Fortune, And Then To Make Another,
By Robert Triplett, Lippincott, Grand, and Co., Philadelphia, PA, 1853, pp.275-282:

[Note: "Mr. T__" listed in the following account is Philip Thompson]

Chapter LIII

A Duel

In this arbitration, occurred a difficulty which caused me so circumstantially to relate the above affair with the distiller, which otherwise would not have been worth naming. Mr. P. T__ [this is Philip Thompson], the most prominent lawyer in our district, a man of naturally good heart but of most ungovernable passion, was my adversary's lawyer; and in the course of his speech, spoke of the stratagem of Mr. T__. When the argument was over, I remarked to him that he had used an expression which he must withdraw. "What expression?" Said he. I replied he had accused me of stratagem in my dealings with the distiller. "I did not allude to you," he replied; "I meant your brother's stratagem of argument." My brother was my lawyer in the case. "Ah! well," I replied, "I am glad to hear it." "But," he rejoined, "I am always responsible for what I say."

About six months before. this, when T__ and myself were taking some depositions, he had been needlessly harsh, as I thought, on my witness. I took him out to give him a friendly talk about it. His usual mode of proceeding in such cases was harsher than I was disposed to bear with; but he was so accustomed to it that he did not think there was any harm in it. We were neighbors, and I was anxious to keep on friendly terms with him. So told him, and that to this end more courtesy would be necessary on his part. He took this as a threat, and said he would not be threatened by any man. I told him, so far from its being designed as a threat, I designed by it to avoid any cause of quarrel if possible. But, as I had missed my object, and to the public, if we did quarrel, there might be a semblance of my being in the wrong, I did not intend then to let him draw me into a quarrel, but at any other time, when he felt inclined to seek a quarrel with me, he should be gratified. Thus we parted, and we both now were on the look-out for the slightest provocation.

Under other circumstances, I should not have deemed his remark sufficiently offensive to require me to call him to account for it, nor would he have refused to let his explanation stand.

Seeing now that I had mistaken him, and although determined not to take the shadow of an insult from him (especially as he held the whole country in dread, for when in a passion he lost all control of himself), I was still anxious to avoid a quarrel if I could do so with credit. When he said, "I am always responsible for what I say," I looked him earnestly in the face, and replied, "Mr. T___, while I believed you intended to insult me, I intended to call you to account for it. When J perceived my error, I was anxious that the difficulty should go no further. Your explanation was satisfactory, and under that explanation there is no need for you to hold yourself accountable; there is nothing to be accounted for. Let me beg of you now to let this matter stop where it is." He replied, he withdrew his explanation. I walked up to him with a view to make a personal attack upon him, when my brother cried out, 'Good God, R___, you are not going to strike a lame man.' I halted, and looked at him, and said, "I will not strike you, sir, nor will I challenge you, abhorring duelling as I do, but nevertheless I will accept. a challenge from you, and that you may not be without provocation for one., I tell you that I only now spare you in consideration of your lameness. Now challenge me if you dare." Our friends jumped in between us; several taking hold of him, and several hold of me. To those who attempted to hold me, I remarked in the language of a man of whom I had read, who was in a similar predicament, "One man can hold me; the balance of you go and hold Mr. T___."

In due time the challenge came and was accepted to fight as soon as I could provide myself with arms. I sent to Hardinsburg for a pair of pistols, said to be the best known of. But T___ had been before me. One friend then jumped on a steamboat, and went to Louisville, where he obtained a fine pair belonging to Mr. J. D. B___ . Another went to New Madrid, where he knew there was a pair which Burr had had on the field with Hamilton. Both pairs were obtained, and so good were they that I did not regret failing to obtain those in Hardinsburg. I now fixed the day for the fight, accepting at ten paces back to back, whirl and fire between the words fire and three, the seconds to count deliberately one, two, three. T___ objected to standing back to back, as he was lame, and could not turn as quick as I could. I then waived that condition, and agreed to stand face to face. He having the advantage of me in practice, I took time to make myself even with him, and soon found I was a first-rate marksman, and heard that he was the same. The victory, then, would fall to him who could shoot quickest; therefore, my efforts were to learn to shoot quick. During the interim before fighting, I was daily engaged with B___ in settling up our business; and the evening before in making the final arrangements; B___ remarked, it was strange to see a man writing his will, and making such arrangements while yet in good health. A singular occurrence had happened a few nights before; my wife in the middle of the night seemed terribly disturbed in her sleep, and groaned so much that I waked her. "Oh!" said she as she roused up, "I have had such a frightful, terrible dream; I dreamed I was in a room full of black coffins." "Why did you dream so?" I asked. "Oh! I do not know," she replied; "but it makes me feel very unhappy." I remarked, "Dreams, you know, are always to be construed backwards." This incident, I confess, weighed heavily on my spirits; not that I was at all superstitious; but it brought vividly to my view what would be the consequence if I should be shot, and not much better if I should shoot my adversary. A young wife, not yet a year married, and an infant daughter. Oh! If she only knew what was impending, what a premonition there would seem to be in that dream. On the night before our fight, our little daughter was particularly cross, so much so that I said to V___ I felt so much in want of sleep that I must go up stairs and take another bed. This, said V___ afterwards was the first unkind act she had seen on my part, and it cut her to the heart. She had no idea how important sleep was to me at that time.

The next day we were to meet at a designated point on the Indiana shore at eleven o'clock. When about to cross over, Judge H___, one of my seconds (each had two, J. B. A___ my other), asked me how I felt. I replied, "Strangely indifferent; I can hardly realize that I am going to fight a duel." "But", said he "you must realize it, for, there is but little time left now." I then remarked, "Before we go over, hang up a tape against that tree, and let me try my hand." He objected, saying, "If you a a bad shot, it will affect your spirits." "No," I replied, "it will not; hang it up." It was done; at ten steps I took a shot, and cut the tape about half an inch below the black spot. "That will do," said he.

Considering the probable dreadful result, to kill or be killed many would say it argued great want of feeling to go about such a business so calmly. But if the reader has ever been engaged in a duel, has had time for reflection before it occurred, and his conscience is at rest as to having used every effort to avoid it, he will then see that the thing being inevitable, and his own safety depending on his shooting his adversary, no question arises in his mind which of the two to choose. Persons may say, they would as soon be shot as to shoot an adversary. That was not my case; I very much preferred to shoot my adversary. And it was important to my success in doing so that the awful responsibility of the act should be shut out from my mind as much as possible. I would not think of it but in one way, that it was necessary to my own safety. I had no feeling of revenge to gratify, and when I went upon the ground I had no more animosity against T___ than against any other man on the ground. When we took our positions, and were asked if we were ready, I answered, "No." I wished to see if my nerves were steady, and took aim at a lump of snow on a wood pile. Although there was snow upon the ground, and it was dead of winter—February—yet I felt a warm glow and a suppleness of nerve which were extraordinary. If Providence would take part with either party in a matter like this, I should think I had his support, for never was my touch so sensitive, my flesh so pliant, nor my aim so quick and accurate as at this lump of snow. I felt as if I could put my ball just where I pleased; and unfortunately for T___ there was a grease spot very visible just where I wished to aim.

Being satisfied with my aim, I turned to the second who had asked if we were ready, and said, "Now I am ready." T___ was asked if he was ready, and answering yes, the 'word fire was given. Our fires were almost simultaneous, mine a little first. For a moment T___ stood erect, and, although my aim was good, I began to think I must have missed him. But presently a black scowl came over his countenance, he threw his pistol on the ground before him, and said: "I am a dead man!" Now, all the feelings which had been strained up were relaxed, and my first impulse was to go to his aid. But, as I advanced, his second, Mr. G___, called to me to keep my post; that Mr. T___ might wish another fire. I returned; but in a few moments his other second, Judge C___, called out that Mr. T___ was satisfied. He would be unable to take another fire. My ball had entered just under his right nipple, passed through his body, and lodged in his left arm, without breaking the skin except where it entered. It was not supposed he could live twenty-four hours. But he did, and finally recovered; and although at first, for some time, we were-not friendly, yet ultimately we made up and were good friends. And, what was singular, this shot cured him of a chronic rheumatism of ten years' standing, and of his lameness. He said I was a first-rate surgeon, though rather a rough operator. T___ was a singular man, one of violent passions; sorry for it when the passion was over; and used well his friends that he could not control himself, and that he was certain he would some day be killed; a correct prediction, for he was afterwards killed in the streets of Owensboro' by a man whom he had attacked. He was a man of fine talents and fine qualities, away from his ungovernable passions.

To return, now I had to go home and break the matter to my wife. The idea of my having killed a man I knew would almost break her sensitive heart. So I concluded, until he died I would pass it off for a slight wound. I asked her, on arriving at home, to go with me. to her chamber. She looked in my face and said: "Why, Mr. T___, , you look dreadful; what is the matter?" "Nothing," I replied, "as things have turned out, but it might have been dreadful. I have just fought a duel." "Oh," said she "are you hurt?" "Not touched," I replied; "but my adversary is slightly wound." She fell upon my neck and sobbed, as though I had been shot. After a while, rising, she asked where he was shot, and who my adversary was. I replied, Mr. T___, who had received a flesh wound in the side. "Oh, heaven, Mr. T___, suppose he should die?" I believed he would, but still did not wish her to think so then, yet thought it necessary to prepare her for the possibility. So I replied: "Of that there is no danger. But if he should, he has brought the event upon his own head. I did my best to avoid it. He forced me into it;" and I related to her the quarrel as it had occurred; and how I had struggled to avoid the result. She seemed satisfied, and said she hoped T___ would get well. The wound was such an one as I suppose would have killed ninety-nine men out of one hundred, for I am told by physicians that the space for an ounce ball cannot be found between the point of entrance and of rest of this ball without cutting the lungs and causing death, except by supposing that the ball ranged around under the breast bone, pressing it out so as to leave room between it and the lungs for the ball to pass. This the physicians had no idea of, of course concluded he must die, and so informed me. I entertained no hope, and of course, was seeking for consolation in the unavoidable circumstances of the case. But he did not die so soon as was expected, and this gave me some hope. Each day added to this hope, until he was pronounced out of danger. Now I breathed freely, and a load of anxiety was taken from my mind.

But what was my astonishment to learn now that he had sent for his seconds to challenge me again. I had been thanking my God for his recovery, and saving me the responsibility of his death. Now it was all to go over again. I was rendered perfectly desperate; wrote for my seconds, and named the mode in which I would fight if challenged again, rendering the escape of either a very doubtful matter. But my seconds and his both thought another fight "contrary to all precedent," and he was dissuaded from sending the challenge.

The man who finally killed hm was a workman, a carpenter, not particularly sensitive; but the event so preyed upon his conscience that he gradually pined away and died in about a year after, of no complaint but remorse. Would my case have been any better had it been my fate to kill him? Very doubtful. My brother's remark, though designed to prevent a fight, was a most unfortunate one; for, although T___ was a little lame, it did not impair his strength, and he was a full match for me. ut for ray brother's remark we ,would have had a fist fight, the company would probably have parted us and there it would have ended. What he meant for good, therefore, turned out for evil.

Now had such a board of arbitrators existed here as I have designated heretofore in these memoirs, and the steps there suggested been taken, this duel might have been prevented.

So much for that matter.

This put a final close to the distilling business. The curse of God seemed to be upon it, and both distilleries now soon went to wreck. Here was a large sum of money entirely sunk. I felt some consolation in the reflection that, if we had been engaged in the abominable business, we had lost enough to punish us for the sin, and that our account with Heaven was neatly balanced. But, as I before said, at that time it was not considered a discreditable business.



**The Kentucky Explorer, Vol. 13, No. 5, October 1998,
Charles Hayes, Jr., Jackson, KY, pp.23-26:**

Pioneer Duel Fought Near Owensboro Was For Honor:

1829 Duel Was Fought With Pistols At Ten Paces Over Spoken Insult

By George V. Triplett - Ca. 1900

On a crisp, clear morning, in the month of February 1829, on the snow-covered bank of the Ohio River, opposite Owensboro, occurred one of the first and most famous duels between citizens of the young Commonwealth of Kentucky. It was strictly an affaire d'honneur, fought with pistols at ten paces, deliberately planned and executed, with all the elements of romantic courage incident to a faithful observance of the code; and it has passed into history as one of the notable personal encounters of that period which prescribed hair-triggers or Andrew Ferraras as the only palliative for insults, real or imaginary.

The principals were Robert Triplett, a courtly young Virginian by birth, who first journeyed from Richmond to Kentucky, over the old Wilderness Road in 1817; and Phillip Thompson, also of Virginian ancestry, one of the leading lawyers of Western Kentucky.

Both were men of social prominence and unquestioned courage, and fully imbued with the chivalric sentiment of the age in which they lived. Each left the imprint of his strong character and individuality on the community in which he resided, and was a recognized factor in its early development and progress.

Shortly after returning to Virginia from his first visit to Kentucky, Mr. Triplett decided to transfer his allegiance from the mother state to the daughter. After various adventures he reached Owensboro, then known as Yellow Banks, in 1820, bearing patents covering the great May, Bannister and Company survey, extending 31 miles along the Ohio River, and embracing 160,000 acres of land, a large part of which he afterward acquired.

With business ventures extending into almost every field that could enlist capital and energy, Robert Triplett's life was for many years a busy and eventful one. Among other things he was the owner of several distilleries, and it was out of an incident connected with this branch of his business that the duel with Mr. Thompson resulted.

The most graphic account of this meeting is found in the rare old volume, entitled "Roland Trevor," from the pen of Mr. Triplett; in reality his autobiography, abounding in quaint observations and aphorisms, but none the less an interesting and valuable contribution to the history of pioneer life in Kentucky.

The description of the duel with Mr. Thompson, the causes which led to it, and its results are given as follows:

"The vile business seemed to go wrong in every way. I found our distiller had been cheating us, and charged him with it. This brought on a fist fight, the only one I had ever been engaged in since leaving school. He was a powerful man, over six feet high, and might have gotten the better of me if we had not been parted. My brother-in-law, Dr. P., being present, interposed, and I left the distillery, and, with him, went down to our office, pretending to be entirely pacified, and laughing heartily at the occurrence as a good joke. But, as soon as I had thrown the doctor off his guard and got him to leave me, I returned to the distillery with a tomahawk, determined to drive the distiller out. Fortunately for me he had gone, for he was a desperate character, and with his mash-stick would have been an overmatch for me with my tomahawk. I now had the distillery closed, and the business stopped. The distiller threatened to sue me for violation of contract, but

we compromised the matter by agreeing to leave it to arbitration. In this arbitration occurred a difficulty which has caused me to relate the foregoing affair with the distiller, which, otherwise, would not have been worth naming. Mr. Thompson [in the original account "T__" is used in place of the name Thompson when it occurs], the most prominent lawyer in our district, a man of naturally good heart, but of most ungovernable passion, was my adversary's lawyer, and in the course of his speech spoke of the 'stratagem of Mr. Triplett.'" When the argument was over I remarked to him that he had used an expression which he must withdraw. 'What expression?' he said. I replied that he had accused me of stratagem in my dealings with the distiller. 'I did not allude to you,' he replied, 'I meant your brother (Philip Triplett) who was my lawyer in the case. 'Ah, well,' I replied. 'I am glad to hear it.' He rejoined: 'But I am always responsible for what I say.'

"About six months before this, when Thompson and myself had been taking some depositions, he had been needlessly harsh, as I thought, on my witness. I took him out to give him a friendly talk about it. His usual mode of procedure in such cases was harsher than I was disposed to bear with; but he was so accustomed to it that he did not see any harm in it. We neighbors, and I was anxious to keep on friendly terms with him. I told him, to this end, that more courtesy would be necessary on his part. He took this as a threat, and said that he would not be threatened by any man. I told him that so far from its being designed as a threat, I desired by it to avoid any cause of quarrel, if possible, but, as I had missed my object, and to the public, if we did quarrel, there might be a semblance of my being in the wrong, I did not intend to let him draw me into a quarrel; but if at any other time he should seek a quarrel with me, he should be gratified. Thus we parted, and we were both on the lookout for the slightest provocation. Under other circumstances, I should not have deemed his remark sufficiently offensive to call him to account for it, nor would he have refused to have let his explanation stand.

"Seeing now that I had mistaken him, and although determined not to take the shadow of an insult from him (especially as he held the whole country in dread, for when in a passion he lost all control of himself), I was still anxious to avoid a quarrel if I could do so with credit. When he said: 'I am always responsible for what I say,' I looked him earnestly in the face and replied: 'Mr. Thompson, while I believed you intended to insult me, I intended to call you to account for it. When I perceived my error, I was anxious that the difficulty should go no further. Your explanation was satisfactory, and under that explanation there is no need for you to hold yourself accountable; there is nothing to be accounted for. Let me beg of you to now let this matter stop where it is.' He replied that he withdrew his explanation. I walked up to him with a view to make a personal attack upon him, when my brother cried out: 'Good God, Robert, you are not going to strike a lame man!' I halted, looked at Thompson and said: 'I will not strike you, sir, nor will I challenge you, abhorring dueling as I do; but, nevertheless, I will accept a challenge from you, and that you may not be without provocation for one, I tell you that I only spare you now in consideration of your lameness.' In due time the challenge came and was accepted, to fight as soon as I could provide myself with arms. I sent to Hardinsburg for a pair of pistols, said to be the best known. But, Thompson had been there before me. One of my friends jumped on a steamboat and went to Louisville, where he found a fine pair belonging to Mr. J. D. B. Another friend went to New Madrid, where he knew there was a pair which Burr had on the field with Hamilton. Both pairs were obtained, and so well were they that I did not regret failing to obtain those at Hardinsburg. I now fixed the day for the fight, accepting at ten paces, back to back, whirl and fire between the words 'fire' and 'three,' the seconds to count deliberately 'one,' 'two,' 'three.' Thompson objected to standing back to back, as he was lame and could not turn as quickly as I could. I then waived that condition and agreed to stand face to face. The next day we were to meet at a designated spot on the Indiana shore, at 11

o'clock. When about to embark to cross over, Judge H., one of my seconds (each had two), asked me how I felt. I replied: 'Strangely indifferent. I can hardly realize that I am going to fight a duel.' 'But,' said he, 'you must realize it, for there is but a little time left now.' I then remarked: 'Before we go over, hang up a tape against that tree and let me try my hand.' He objected, saying: 'If you make a bad shot it will affect your spirits.' 'No,' I replied, 'it will not; hang it up.' It was done, and at ten steps I took a shot and cut the tape about half an inch below the black spot.

"Considering the probable dreadful result to kill or to be killed, many would say it argued great want of feeling to go about such a business so calmly. But, if the reader has ever been engaged in a duel, if he has had time for reflection before it occurred, and his conscience is at rest as to having used every effort to avoid it, he will then see that the thing is inevitable, and his own safety depending on his shooting his adversary, no question arises in his mind which of the two to choose. Persons may say they would as soon be shot as to shoot an adversary. That was not my case. I very much preferred to shoot my adversary. It was important to my success in doing so that the awful responsibility of the act should be shut out from my mind as much as possible. I would not think of it but in one way, that it was necessary for my own safety. I had no feeling of revenge to gratify, and when I went upon the ground I had no more animosity against Thompson than against any other man on the ground.

"When we took our positions and were asked if we were ready, I answered 'No.' I wished to see if my nerves were steady and took aim at a lump of snow on a woodpile. Although there was snow upon the ground and it was the dead of winter (February), yet I felt a warm glow and suppleness of nerve that was extraordinary. If Providence would take part with either party in a matter like this, I should think I had his support, for never was my touch so sensitive, my flesh so pliable, nor my aim so quick and accurate as at this lump of snow. I felt as though I could put my ball anywhere I pleased, and unfortunately for Thompson there was a grease spot very visible just where I wished to aim.

"Being satisfied with my aim, I turned to the second and said: 'Now I am ready.' Thompson was asked if he was ready, and answering yes, the word 'fire' was given. Our fires were almost simultaneous, mine a little first. For a moment Thompson stood erect, and, although my aim was good, I began to think I must have missed him. But presently a black scowl came over his countenance; he threw his pistol on the ground before him and said: 'I am a dead man.' Now all the feelings which had been strained up were relaxed, and my first impulse was to go to his aid. But, as I advanced his second, Mr. G., called to me to keep my post; that Mr. Thompson might wish another fire. I returned to my post, but in a few moments Thompson's other second, Judge C., called out that Mr. Thompson was satisfied and would be unable to make another fire. My ball had entered just under his right nipple, passed through his body, and lodged in his left arm, without breaking the skin except where it entered. It was supposed he could not live 24 hours. But, he finally recovered, and although at first for some time we were not friendly, yet ultimately we made up and were good friends. And, what was singular, the shot cured him of a chronic rheumatism often years' standing and of his lameness. He said I was a first-rate surgeon, though rather a rough operator."

Robert Triplett resided in Owensboro for 24 years after his duel with Mr. Thompson, being identified with many important public and private enterprises. He owned Bon Harbor, three miles from Owensboro, with its mines, cotton mills, and town-site, and was the first operator to induce southern steamboat owners to use coal for fuel instead of wood. In 1826 he built a raftway from the Ohio River to his mines, thus antedating any similar undertaking in the west. His plantation "Haphazard," two miles above Owensboro, was noted for its lavish, though refined, hospitality, a

reputation it still enjoys as the residence of Mr. J. Hunter Bell, whose family has occupied it for the last 50 years.

Mr. Triplett died in Philadelphia in 1854. He was a brother of Hon. Philip Triplett, member of the Kentucky Constitutional Convention of 1850; also a member of congress. One of Robert Triplett's daughters, Mrs. J. Andrew White, is still living at Petersburg, Virginia. Another daughter married Hon. George H. Yeaman, member of congress and minister to Denmark. He is also known as an author and professor of law at Columbia College, New York.

Philip Thompson was a member of the well-known Mercer County family of his own name, of which Hon. Philip Thompson, Sr., has long been the most conspicuous representative. He lost his life in a tragic street duel in Owensboro in 1836, being stabbed to death by a contractor named Jeffries. He was a lawyer of great ability and would have been a man of prominence in any community. The late Maj. "Jack" Thompson was his son. Philip T. Watkins, cashier of the First National Bank of Owensboro, is his grandson. Mrs. Howard Bowman, of Louisville, is his granddaughter, and Dr. Redin Kirk is his great-grandson.

"Judge H.," referred to by Mr. Triplett as one of his seconds, was Judge Eli Huston, of Hardinsburg. "Judge C." was Circuit Judge John Calhoun, afterward a member of congress. "Mr. G." was one of the Griffiths, a pioneer Daviess County family. Tradition has, of course, embellished many of the facts of the duel with romantic coloring, but has not exaggerated the main incidents which made it a typical old-time meeting on the field of honor. Old residents of Owensboro say it was a much discussed theme for many years after it occurred, and its scene is a spot often visited by sight-seers. Mr. S. D. Kennady, the oldest native resident of Owensboro, remembers distinctly seeing the principals practicing with their dueling pistols prior to the meeting, and the morning of the duel stood on the river bank and heard the shots. The Triplett party crossed the Ohio about two miles above the city, while the Thompson party crossed about a mile below. Mr. Thompson was conveyed back to the Kentucky shore in the ferry boat, sitting in a chair. Although the customary secrecy had been observed in the preliminary arrangements, yet it became known in Owensboro that a personal meeting was imminent, and many thronged the river bank while the duel was in progress. One of the attending surgeons was Dr. John Roberts, for 40 years the leading physician of the Green River country. He was an uncle of Mr. F. H. Roberts, private secretary to Gov. Bradley. Young Dr. Pegram, of Virginia, a brother-in-law of Mr. Triplett, was doubtless also present on the field in professional capacity, or as a second. Mr. Albert Burnley, of Frankfort, was one of Mr. Triplett's confidential advisers, while it is known that several other distinguished citizens of Kentucky and other states, who were recognized authorities in matters relating to the code, were in the conference held by the principals and their friends before the formal meeting. With that high sense of honor, however, that obtained in such affairs, they left to the principals such disclosures as were ever made.

Mr. Thompson was a marksman of exceptional skill. Mr. Triplett, although he refers with becoming modesty to his own accomplishments in that line, was also a crack shot. In support of this Mr. Joseph Thompson, of Owensboro, gives the following incident: On a visit to one of the large cities, when a young man, Mr. Thompson purchased a case of fine dueling pistols, and with an ambition then more common among young gentleman of Kentucky than now, he had gone one morning after his return home to a point under the river bank, and was shooting at a target with several companions. Mr. Triplett, who happened to ride up, became interested in the proceeding and dismounted. He examined the pistols, approved their make and workmanship, and requested the privilege of shooting them. The tape was hung up, and stepping off ten yards he neatly clipped

it in two just below the black spot. He repeated the feat with the other pistol, and with the remark: "Boys, I believe I can shoot some yet," he mounted his horse and rode on to town.

[Note by Jerry Long – The majority of the preceding article was published under the title “Famous Duel Between Pioneers of Kentucky” in the newspaper, Courier-Journal (Louisville, KY, 7 November 1897, p.2D). The article was preceded by “Written for the Courier-Journal”. The article was signed by George V. Triplett. This was Judge George Vest Triplett (1856-1931), of Owensboro, KY.]



**Ohio County, Kentucky, in the Olden Days, Harrison D. Taylor,
John P. Morton & Co., Louisville, KY, 1926, pp.83-84 & 121:**

Chapter XVIII: Ten Well-Known Lawyers

Philip Thompson, the next resident lawyer at the Hartford bar, was a striking contrast to the foregoing. Thompson was by no means the superior of Cummins—not even his equal in intellect. He was of small stature and had a stammering impediment in his speech; yet by force of an indomitable will and untiring industry he rose to wealth and distinction.

He came to Hartford, when quite a youth, with his license signed. He was ever a close student and was seldom seen on the street. He soon acquired the reputation of being a safe and capable legal adviser. His devotion to his client's interest was untiring, as he was ever ready to fight to the bitter end, either intellectually or physically. Even the stammering or halting speech that sometimes occurred in his delivery he seemed to have turned to his advantage. Like the pause between the vivid lightning flash and the thunder clap, his manner of hesitating seemed but the gathering of his forces for the impassioned burst of eloquence which followed. He was remarkably acute in his judgment of human character, and during the days of early practice, when jurors were summoned indiscriminately from the crowd, he was noted for his knack in selecting men. His selection of jurors and his eloquence gave him fame as a criminal lawyer. It was not many years until he had acquired a lucrative practice.

He took an active part in the War of 1812; besides volunteering in several cavalry excursions into the Indian territory, he went with Governor Isaac Shelby's forces to Canada. He was elected to the legislature and served the session of 1815, when Daviess County was formed, and shortly afterwards moved to Owensboro. The county was named after Joseph Hamilton Daveiss and the town after Abraham Owen, both of whom fell in the Battle of Tippecanoe in November, 1811, fighting for their country. Philip Thompson was by no means an office seeker. He was elected only once to Congress, and was present when John Quincy Adams was elected president of that body.

It is the duty of the biographer to record the failings as well as the virtues of our distinguished men, in order that their failings may be shunned and their virtues followed. Although the subject of this sketch had most of the qualities that should exalt men in society, he was extremely high tempered, hasty, and excitable. When he conceived the idea that he had been insulted or injured, his temper was ungovernable. This failing led to several personal difficulties: first, the almost fatal duel between himself and Robert Triplett, and finally the encounter which resulted in his lamentable death in 1836."

The details of the duel between Philip Thompson and Robert Triplett are given in the History of Daviess County, also in Robert Triplett's autobiography entitled *Roland Trevor or The Pilot of Human Life*, published in 1853. It is now a very rare volume.

Page 121: Philip Thompson represented Ohio County in the Kentucky House of Representatives in 1814.



A History of Owensboro and Daviess County, Kentucky, Hugh O. Potter, Herff Jones-Paragon Publishing, Montgomery, AL, 1974, pp.10-12 & 88:

Chapter III – Early Settlers and Leaders, pp.10-12

Little has been written, but much could have been of one of Owensboro's pioneers—a lawyer, soldier, wealthy landowner and politician. His small place in Kentucky history was won when he lost a duel to Robert Triplett, across the Ohio river from Owensboro on February 10, 1829. He achieved much of a materialistic and public nature during his relatively short life to recommend him to posterity as one of Owensboro's leading citizens. Yet, the name of Philip Thompson, Daviess county's first member of Congress, has been largely obscured by the passing of time.

Thompson was a small man with a big limp which, miraculously, was said to have been cured by the bullet that entered his body during his famous duel. His foe on the field of honor described him as "the most prominent lawyer in our district, a man of naturally good heart, but of most ungovernable passion."

It was this big temper that got him into numerous physical encounters and ultimately caused his untimely death.

In his autobiography, *Roland Trevor*, Robert Triplett elaborated on Thompson's "passion", writing that he "had the whole country in dread, for when in a passion he lost all control of himself." However, Thompson was "sorry for it when the passion was over. . ." and was a man "of fine talents and fine qualities away from his ungovernable passions."

Following the duel Thompson recovered from the bullet wound inflicted by Triplett, but his ungovernable temper was still beyond control. The man who finally killed him was a carpenter, who "pined away and died in about a year after, of no complaint but remorse," according to Triplett. The 1883 *History of Daviess County* added that the fatal encounter occurred "in November 1836 on the left-hand side of Frederica street, between Main street and the river." While either side of the street could be the "left-hand side", the fatal spot was not far from the south-west corner of Second and Frederica where Thompson built a "white frame dwelling" with a meat house, ice house and garden soon after his marriage twenty years earlier.

Philip Thompson was born on Shawnee Run, near Harrodsburg, Ky., on August 20, 1789. His family moved to Hartford when he was a young man. There he became a student of law. In Ohio County, Kentucky, in the Olden Days, Harrison D. Taylor characterized Thompson as a man "of small stature" who had "a stammering impediment in his speech He was ever a close student and was seldom seen on the street. He soon acquired the reputation of being a safe and capable legal advisor. His devotion to his client's interest was untiring, as he was ever ready to fight to the bitter end, either intellectually or physically."

Thompson was in his twenty-third year when the War of 1812 caused Ohio county to raise a company of volunteers, among whom was the young lawyer. His reputation as a fighter and his

personal popularity resulted in him being elected by the pioneer citizen-soldiers as their lieutenant, making him second in command.

"When Isaac Shelby's army reached the Lakes, it was necessary to leave most of the horses behind A large peninsula afforded them range and pasture by the placing of sentinels across a narrow neck of land. It was necessary to detail men for this duty." Thompson's "company was detailed for this purpose. But Lieutenant Philip Thompson was indignant at the order, and resolved to join the main army as a 'high private'. Jumping into a baggage transport he crossed to the Canada shore, followed the main army on foot, and was the only soldier from Ohio county who participated in the glory of the battle of the Thames on October 5, 1813." In these words the early Ohio county history tells of Thompson's flair for the heroic and dramatic, which started him on a short but interesting political career.

When Daviess county was created by an act of the Kentucky general assembly, Thompson was a member of that body, representing Ohio county. Shortly afterward he moved to the Yellow Banks where on December 10, 1816 he was married in a double ceremony to Sally Moseley. John Davis, the attorney-minister-politician brother of Joseph Hamilton Daviess, for whom the new county had been named, conducted the service. The other couple joined in wedlock at the same time was Dr. John Roberts and Mary Moseley.

Fourteen months before his marriage Thompson was one of five attorneys "admitted to practice" at the first session of Daviess circuit court.

In 1823 he was elected to the Eighteenth congress and represented this district at Washington for two years, being the first resident of future Owensboro to become a member of this national legislative body.

Before that the small, lame lawyer was selected a member of the first board of trustees of Owensboro. Along with other pioneer Daviess countians, he was appointed a member of the board of trustees of the first institution of learning here, the Daviess Academy. The heirs of David Ross and John May deeded to the trustees one acre of ground on January 2, 1822, "in consideration of \$5 to them in hand paid and the erection of a seminary on the premises."

This one-acre lot, on "the East side of said town, beginning 198 feet from the center of lot number 40 where Lewis street intersects Second," was to become in 1871 the site of Owensboro's first free public school. The 1883 *History of Daviess County* says that Thompson built the academy "in consideration of a certain number of land warrants (being) signed over to him." These warrants apparently accounted for part of his \$25,855.00 tax assessment in 1831 in which he reported ownership of 400 acres on the Ohio river in Daviess county; 1,200 acres on the Ohio river in Union county; 40 acres in Daviess county on Panther creek; eight lots in Francisburg and nine in Owensboro; 3,000 acres in Caldwell county; 294 acres in Ohio county and 700 acres in Muhlenberg county. The Caldwell, Ohio and Muhlenberg county acreage was listed as originally being "Davis Seminary" land.

By 1834, the year before his death, Thompson was revealed by his state tax assessment records to have been Daviess county's largest taxpayer. His estate was valued at \$52,770.00. Next to him was Robert Triplett whose assessment was \$47,920.00, followed by Clary Hawes, \$37,017.00; William R. Griffith, \$31,991.00; George W. Mason, \$27,312.00; J.F. Kennedy, \$21,465.00, and Amos Riley, \$18,095.00.

In 1837, after Thompson's death, his estate was assessed at \$82,770.00, an increase of \$30,000.00 in three years.

In addition to being a lawyer, politician and extensive land owner, Thompson was one of Owensboro's first tobacco brokers. In 1822 he and a relative by marriage, Daniel Moseley,

contracted to deliver to Robert Kelly, John Morrison and Lorin Clauson, at the port of New Orleans, 35,379 ½ pounds of tobacco on May 1, 1823; 37,693 pounds on May 1, 1824; 40,065 pounds on May 1, 1825 and 42,379 pounds on May 1, 1826. As a guarantee of delivery, Thompson executed a mortgage to the other parties on lot number 18 in Owensboro, "and five slaves, one negro man, one negro woman and her two children."

The former congressman was buried in the Moseley cemetery, a portion of which remains in East Fifth street, between Triplett and Center. When Elmwood cemetery was opened Thompson's body was moved there where a stone marker reveals that he lived for 47 years, two months and 25 days. His "consort", Sally, who followed him in death by four and a half years, and their children are buried in the family plot. One daughter, Emily, was married to George Scarborough, pioneer Owensborough schoolmaster. Another, Susan, married Thomas W. Watkins and was the mother of P. T. Watkins, a prominent Owensboro banker during the latter part of the nineteenth century, whose initials, "P. T." were for "Philip Thompson."

[Note: Most of the preceding article was also published in the booklet, "In The Beginning... Historical Facts About the Earliest Days of Present Owensboro and Daviess County, Kentucky", by Hugh O. Potter, Radio Station WOMI, Owensboro, KY, 1968, pp.20-21.]

Chapter XIV – Early Culture and Education, p.88

Among the early residents of the Owensboro area were men who realized the value of an education and things of a cultural nature to the family, the home and the community.

One of these was a small-built lawyer-soldier with a big temper, Philip Thompson, who became the first congressman from Daviess county (from 1823 to 1824), fought a duel across the river from Owensboro, in which he was wounded, and later was killed in a fight with a carpenter. Thompson provided a cabin for a school on West Second street, near the Ravine (Walnut Street). Mrs. Susan Tarleton who was boat-wrecked near Cloverport and, according to tradition, floated to Owensboro on a plank, was the teacher.

In 1820, about 22 years after Bill Smothers settled here, the first school building was erected on the lot bounded by Second, Third, Lewis and Crittenden streets and for years occupied by Sears, Roebuck and Company. It was named the Daviess County Seminary. Again, it was Philip Thompson who provided the school property.

How well the Seminary did during its first 17 years is not a matter of recorded history, but in 1837 a Harvard alumnus, George Scarborough, who was to become Phil Thompson's son-in-law, arrived in Owensboro by boat and pumped new life into it. Among the subjects he offered were chemistry, astronomy and natural philosophy.



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

Chapter 14 – Arts & Culture in Daviess County, by Tracey McQueen, p.145:

... Today, Daviess County is a cultural hub, home to established institutions as well as volunteer groups. Arts and culture are at the center of a downtown revitalization that includes a new International Bluegrass Music Center.

With so much to offer – whether it's art, drama or music – it's hard to imagine Daviess County without these cultural amenities.

One of the first attempts at cultural enlightenment, or perhaps just plain entertainment, came in 1835 when Philip Thompson converted the third floor of a riverbank grocery and shipping office into a theater. A local thespian society performed there for 11 before the stage was swallowed by the Ohio River...



Ohio County, KY Tax Lists

Philip Thompson is listed in the annual tax lists of Ohio County during the years of 1811-1816. On 14 January 1815 Daviess County, KY was created out of Ohio County, KY.

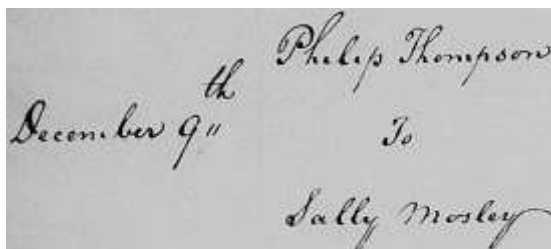


Daviess County, KY Circuit Court Order Book A:

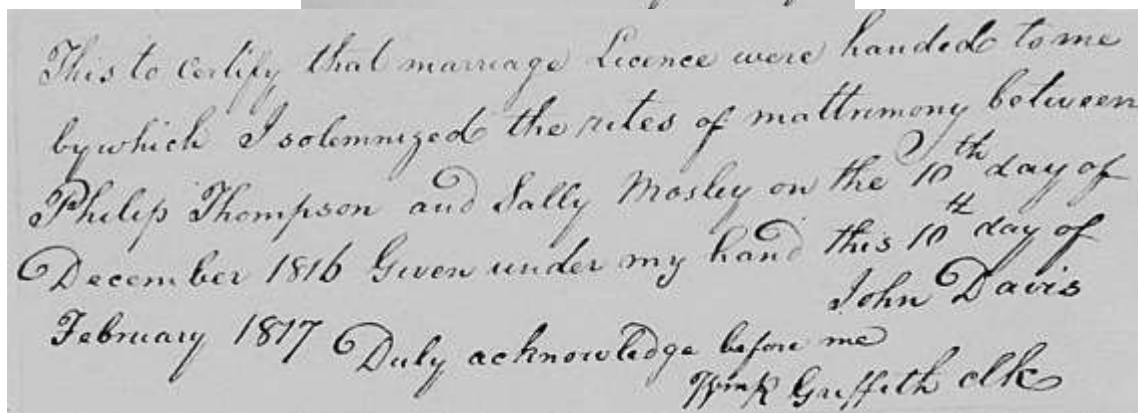
Daviess County's first session of court was held on Monday, 9 October 1815. Five men, Joseph Allen, Moses Cummins, Phillip Thompson, William R. Griffith and Arch Wilson, were sworn in and "admitted to practice as attorneys and councils in law."



Daviess County, KY Marriage Book A, p.4:



December 9th Philip Thompson
To
Sally Mosley



This to certify that marriage licence were handed to me
by which I solemnized the rites of matrimony between
Philip Thompson and Sally Mosley on the 10th day of
December 1816 Given under my hand this 10th day of
February 1817 John Davis
Duly acknowledge before me
Wm R Griffith clk



Daviess County, KY 1820 Federal Census, p.20:

Phillip Thompson	1 male	26-145	1 female	0-10
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5 slaves	2 females	10-16
	1 female	26-45



Daviess County, KY 1830 Federal Census, p.210:

Philip Thompson	2 males	5-10	2 females	0-5
	1 male	20-30	1 female	5-10
	1 male	40-50	1 female	10-15
	1 slave		1 female	20-30
			1 female	30-40



Observer & Reporter, Lexington, KY, 7 December 1836:

Phil. Thompson killed in Owensboro in November by a Mr. Jefford.



Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY, 29 November 1836, p.2:

It is our painful duty to announce, that PHILIP THOMPSON Esq., of the Yellow Banks, Ky., a distinguished lawyer and politician, was killed, a few days ago, near his own place of residence. A mortal wound was inflicted on him by an Irishman with a Bowie knife, and the unfortunate man fell dead on the spot. Of the circumstances of the affair we are ignorant. The death of Mr. T. must be deeply and extensively regretted. He was talented, generous, and chivalrous, the pride of his personal and his political friends, and his loss is indeed a public calamity.



Daviess County, Administrator Bond Book 1-A, p.31:

On 12 December 1836 Sally Thompson was appointed administratrix of the estate of Philip Thompson, deceased. Securities on the bond were – Sally Thompson, George W. Moseley, John Roberts, Thomas W. Watkins, William R. Griffith, Thomas G. Coale, Ralph C. Calhoun, Joseph Weaver, Warner Crow and John S. McFarland. [Note: George W. Moseley, was a brother of Philip

Thompson's wife, Sally Moseley Thompson, and Roberts, Griffith and McFarland all married sisters of Sally Moseley Thompson.]



Kentucky Gazette, Lexington, KY, 27 February 1841, p.1:

Kentucky Legislature. Acts Passed and Approved.

... 70. An act to enlarge the town of Owensboro' and for other purposes. Extends the limits so as to include forty-seven acres belonging to the heirs of Philip Thompson – directs a plan of the addition to be laid before the circuit court in a suit pending amongst said heirs for a division, &c. and directs what proceedings are to be had thereon.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 30 October 1879, p.4:

“RURAL CEMETERY.”
A Deserted City of the Dead.

On yesterday Mr. C. R. Milne, assisted by a corps of workmen, was busy removing the remains of the following "persons from the old cemetery, corner Fourth and Triplett streets, to "Elmwood," viz: Phil. B. Thompson, wife and two children; first wife of Robt. Craig; the wife of Dr. F. M. Pearl and infant son. But one grave that can be identified yet remains, that of Matthew Kirkpatrick, who died in 1852 at the age of twenty-four years. This grave is on the old Mosley lot, which was deeded to be used for a grave-yard only, the property reverting to the heirs whenever used for other purposes...



**Register of Interments
Elmwood Cemetery, 1877-1885 & 1900-1902, pp.5a & 5b:**

Removed from Old Rural Cemetery – buried section A of Elmwood Cemetery in 1879:

	Born	Died
Phillip Thompson	1789	killed 25 Nov 1836
Sallie Clay Thompson	1795	9 Apr 1841
Martha Thompson	1827	4 Sep 1846
	parents – Philip & S. C. Thompson	
Wm. B. Thompson	1824	20 Mar 1841
	parents – Philip & S. C. Thompson	
Mary A. Thompson	1819	22 Nov 1828
	parents – Philip & S. C. Thompson	
Mrs. Kate M. Craig	17 Oct 1834	27 Oct 1856
	parents – Philip & S. C. Thompson	
Mrs. Sarah C. Pearl	19 Jul 1829	6 Sep 1852

	parents – Philip & S. C. Thompson	
Infant	30 Aug ?	30 Aug ?
	parents – Philip & S. C. Thompson	
Mrs. Emily Scarborough	7 Dec 1817	10 Mar 1846
	parents – Philip & S. C. Thompson	
Infant	3 Sep 1842	3 Sep 1842
	parents – Geo. & Emily Scarborough	



**Semi-Weekly Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 1 August 1882, p.4
& Messenger & Examiner, Owensboro, KY, 2 August 1882, p.3:**

The Frankfort Yeoman, referring to the death of Mrs. Harriett Johnson, of this city, says: "She was the daughter of Hon. Philip Triplett, formerly a member of Congress, and one of the first settlers of Owensboro, and was a cousin to Mrs. A. T. Burnley and Capt. W. S. Stone, of this city. Her uncle was Robert Triplett, who fought it duel with Phil. Thompson on an island near Owensboro about the year 1830. Triplett told his second on the day of the duel that he would strike Thompson on a greasy spot on his coat, and sure enough at the first fire the ball struck the exact spot, although Triplett was uninjured. Thompson was suffering with consumption at the time, and the wound he received, which was in the lungs, was the means of curing him of the disease. They made friends afterward, and Thompson said to Triplett that he was the best surgeon that ever practiced on him, but ail exceedingly rough one. Thompson was afterwards killed by a man named Jeffers with a bowie-knife.



Messenger & Examiner, Owensboro, , 29 August 1883, p.3:

Mrs. Rosa Tanner, of this city, has a cradle made by Jeffries, the carpenter, who killed Phil. Thompson in 1836. The cradle has passed through several generations, and on account of its historic interest it is proposed to put it on exhibition at the fair



**Semi-Weekly Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 26 February 1884, p.4
& Messenger & Examiner, Owensboro, KY, 27 February 1884, p.3:**

The Milton (Ky.) Free Press says: "Mr. C. Deweese, of Hunter's Bottom, has in his possession the bullet with which Triplett shot Phil B. Thompson through the body, in a duel, about the year 1827. Thompson, who was an uncle of Phil. B. Thompson, father of the present Congressman by that name, had represented the Owensboro district in Congress, and was a candidate for re-election. Triplett was his opponent, and the duel grew out of the canvass. Mr. Deweese was a boy and lived with the wounded man's father at the time. The bullet is considerably larger than a minnie ball." Many of our older citizens will doubtless remember Mr. Deweese. He was a poor boy, however, when he lived here but he is now said to be worth over a million dollars.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 26 May 1890, p.1:

Decoration Day.

Graves of Federal and Confederate Soldiers at Elmwood to Be Decorated
Friday, May 30, the Day Set Apart For this Labor of Love.

On Friday, the 30th the G. A. R. Post at Owensboro will decorate the graves of the Federal soldiers who are buried at Elmwood cemetery and will also strew flowers on the graves of Confederate soldiers who are buried there. The 30th is memorial day all over the United States, recognized so by both State and Federal authority.

An effort has been made to ascertain the names and the locations of the graves of all ex-soldiers at Elmwood. The following are the names of those known, by the committee who are interred there:

- Col. Chas. S. Todd, war of 1812.
- Phil Thompson, war of 1812.
- Col. W. B. Wall, war of rebellion.
- E. Rumsey Wing, war of rebellion.
- T. Weir Wing, war of rebellion.
- Capt J. C. Bacon, war of rebellion.
- Lieut. I. P. Washburn, Mexican war.
- Lieut Wm. Briston, Mexican war.
- John Phillips, Mexican war.
- C. H. Markin, war of rebellion.
- Wm. Rinebolt, war of rebellion.
- H. C. Johnson, war of rebellion.

Confederates – Geo. W. Triplet, John Thompson, W. J. Lucas, A. Kyle.

Should any one know the name and location of the grave of any other soldier buried at Elmwood they will confer favor by leaving the name with W. C. Morton or John Bonhomme. Every one invited to attend at 4 p. m. Friday and to make this the occasion of decorating the graves of their relatives and friends who may sleep at Elmwood.

[Note: John Thompson, Confederate veteran, is the son of Philip Thompson & Sally Clay Moseley.]



Daily Tribune, Owensboro, KY, 20 June 1896, p.1:

ANCIENT HISTORY.

The Oldest Inhabitant Talks About the Good Old Days.
The Tragic Death of Phil Thompson at the Hands of Tom Jefferds in 1833.
The Days Before Owensboro Possessed a City Government, and When Police,

Though Necessary, Were Unknown.
AN INTERESTING BIT OF HISTORY.

The following facts were given to the writer by an eye-witness of the affair:

In the year 1833, on the streets of Owensboro, Phil Thompson was stabbed to death by Tom Jefferds. The remembrance of the difficulty now lingers only in the minds of the oldest inhabitants, but at that time it attracted widespread attention and caused universal grief, owing to the prominence of Phil Thompson and the sad circumstances surrounding his death.

Phil Thompson was the son of a very wealthy slave-owner, who owned nearly the entire southern and western end of the city of Owensboro. The family was well connected and stood high in the community. Phil was given the advantage of a fine education, and after his matriculation entered the practice of law. He was an intelligent, well versed scholar, a fluent, splendid speaker, and rose rapidly in his profession, until he became one of the most prominent lawyers in the State. He was sober, hardworking, and applied himself closely to his profession; but, unfortunately, he was of a sensitive, quick-tempered, passionate disposition - consequently always in some kind of trouble. He could never bear to see two men in a difficulty without himself engaging in it, or standing by excitedly crying: "Fair play - fair play!" He hardly ever was employed in a law suit of any kind without having a row with the opposite side. Yet, withal, he was a brilliant lawyer, and was always in demand. He married the daughter of old Captain Tom Mosely, a beautiful, refined, elegant woman, and a large family of children was born to them. He erected a large, handsome residence where the business house of W. A. Guenther Sons now stands, and which was the scene of many a brilliant reception in those days.

There also lived in the city, at that time, a quiet, inoffensive, sober, industrious carpenter, of the name of Tom Jefferds. He was never known to have been in a quarrel before; but had always attended to his own affairs, and let others do likewise. Phillip Thompson was known to go armed at all times, owing to numerous squabbles, and on the day of this tragedy left his general storehouse on the river front (for he was a merchant), and started home for dinner. Tom Jefferds laid down his hammer and saw, and did the same. They met at the corner of Main and Allen, and speaking pleasantly, walked down Main together. It was drizzling rain, and Phil Thompson had a long cloak on with a cape attached.

When they reached Main and Frederica, they saw a large crowd gathered about two men who were fighting furiously, a scene quite common on the streets of Owensboro in those days, as there was no municipal government, no police, and no one to prevent men giving vent to their evil passions. Saloons were plentiful, and riot ran wild, and frequently, owing to the interest the people took in such things, a single difficulty between two men would lead to a general street fight of the friends gathered about.

Thompson and Jefferds hurried to the scene, and were soon intently watching the affray which happened to be between a friend of each; so of course their interest was intensified.

During the difficulty the friend of Thompson secured the advantage of the other man and was about to kill him, which delighted and excited Thompson, but enraged Jefferds, who cried "foul play," and attempted to separate the parties, when Thompson interposed. This brought hot words between Thompson and Jefferds, which quickly changed to blows. Instantly the scene changed; and the two first contending parties ceased their quarrel and watched with interest this new one. Thompson struck Jefferds a severe blow in the face, and motioned as if to draw a pistol, and thinking him armed, Jefferds broke through the circle of men about them and darted into a store near by, and slammed the heavy doors in the face of Thompson, who had pursued him. Thompson ran quickly to his home near by and secured two large horse pistols, which were

commonly used in those days. He then hastily started out again in pursuit of Jefferds, was in the meantime, had escaped from the store by the back entrance, and was trying to reach his home.

On the back street he met a friend of his named Sam Moorman, a Tavern keeper, whom he asked for a pistol, telling him of the difficulty he had. Moorman carried him into his tavern and placed in his hands, a long, slender glittering bowie knife, double edged and as sharp as a razor. With a new strange gleam in his eyes, and a nervous little laugh, he hid the murderous thing beneath his coat, and hurried out to hunt Thompson, who was also hunting him. They spied each other when some distance apart, and hastily approached.

Thompson walked boldly down the middle of the pavement, a pistol in each hand, altogether hid beneath his long cape. Jefferds, on the contrary, fearing the pistols, clutched the bowie knife tightly in his hand, and wriggled and twisted like a serpent behind boxes and trees. In this manner they approached within a few feet of each other, when suddenly Jefferds sprang forward with the quickness of lightning, and leaped like a panther upon his victim.

Phil Thompson threw up both pistols to fire, but before he could discharge them Jefferds was upon him and, sweeping them from his hands, buried the cruel blade in his heart. He drew it forth and again and again buried it in the heart of his victim until he lay dead at his feet, weltering in blood. Friendly hands tore the enraged man from him, and bore the murdered man to his heartbroken widow and orphan children.

Jefferds was tried and cleared at the next term of court, but died of remorse just one year to a day from the time he killed Thompson, saying that the face of his murdered friend was ever before him.

Keene Ryan



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 7 February 1898, p.1:

LANDMARK GONE.

W. H. Hunter's Riverside Hotel Burned Sunday Night.

The Fire Was in the Third Story and Gave the Firemen Trouble.



Has Been a Hotel Site for Seventy-five Years and Has Many Historic Associations.

W. H. Hunter's hotel, on the river front, took fire Sunday night at 10 o'clock, and was so badly damaged as to probably necessitate its destruction by pulling down the remaining walls...

... The building was one of the old landmarks, and occupied the spot where Owensboro's first hotel stood. This primitive building was succeeded by a frame structure, which was occupied by Rev. Isham Allen as far back as 1830. It was in this house that Wm. Jeffreys procured the bowie knife with which he stabbed Phil Thompson to death in 1836. This house stood for many years until some time in the '50's Wm. Reinhardt, father of Louis and W. F. Reinhardt, put up a four-story brick building. It was reckoned one of the finest buildings in the city and enjoyed a good patronage for number of years, but finally fell into decay, and was bought by W. H. Hunter a few years ago. He remodeled it to three stories, and has since occupied it. If it is replaced it will be by a structure of a different character.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 17 April 1904, p.15A:

HISTORIC WEAPON NOW 
 **OWNED IN OWENSBORO**

PISTOL USED BY PHIL THOMPSON, A LAWYER, IN THE ONLY DUEL EVER FOUGHT BY OWENSBORO PARTIES NOW IN POSSESSION OF GEORGE GRAVES AT THE CITY PARK—HISTORY OF THE ALMOST FATAL ENCOUNTER IN WHICH IT FIGURED.



Weapon used by Phil Thompson in only duel ever fought by Owensboro residents, Photo by Messenger Staff Photographer.

Out at the home of Mr. George Graves, in the city park, is one of the most historic weapons in Owensboro. It is a large single-barreled dueling pistol used by Mr. Phil Thompson about seventy-five years ago in the only actual meeting of Owensboro people on the "field of honor." In the duel Thompson was shot through and it was believed that he would die, but he lived to become a firm friend of his antagonist, who was Mr. Robert Triplet died many years ago in Philadelphia.

The weapon is a curiosity in these days of automatic revolvers, firing several shots a second from the recoil of a previous discharge, but at the time of the encounter it was one of the finest creations of the art of making fire arms. The bore of the pistol is about seven sixteenths of an inch, the barrel about eight inches in length, the stock of polished red oak trimmed with silver mountings. Evidently it was made by a New Orleans firm, for the upper sides of the hexagonal barrel contains this inscription in old style text letter: "London Fine Wire and Damascus Twisted – Campbell Striker & Co., New Orleans." On a silver plate inlaid into the stock just beneath the firing lock is engraved in olden script, "W. Jacet, 1864." This date is years after the fighting of the duel in which this weapon figured, and the present owner does not know when or how or why it appears thereon. Just behind the rear sight is inlaid into the steel of the barrel two thin plates of brass. Doubtless these were used for ornamentation only. The stock was once broken it is believed in another tragic occurrence in the streets of Owensboro, which resulted in the violent death of Thompson. It was repaired by the splicing of the parts of the stock by using brass plates on each side.

Despite its antiquity and old style construction, Mr. Graves, the present owner, has the weapon loaded in anticipation of a possible visit from burglars, as it is still serviceable. It shoots a ball that would tear out the side of a barn and it would be troublesome for the one who chanced to get it in the path of a bullet from its muzzle. However, Mr. Graves does not anticipate using it for the purpose for which it was designed. The duelling days are happily gone and besides, Mr. Graves is not a fighting man.

The duel in which the pistol served took place in 1829, but the exact date is unknown. Mr. Robert Triplett became involved in a dispute with his distiller, and this was the real beginning of the quarrel that led to the encounter. Mr. Triplet! accused his distiller of cheating and a personal encounter was barely avoided between the men. Finally it was agreed to leave the matter to arbitration.

Thompson was one of the attorneys for the contesting parties before the arbitrators. Triplett describes him as one of "most ungovernable passion. Thompson was attorney for the distiller. A brother of Triplett acted for him. In the argument Thompson referred to Triplett's "strategem."

This was deemed sufficient ground upon which to demand an explanation and Thompson explained his statement after a fashion, but later withdrew his apology. Triplett rushed upon Thompson, but was restrained by his brother, who called his attention to Thompson's lameness.

In that earliest of books by an Owensboro author, "Roland Trover," which is an excellent biography of Robert Triplett, the duel that followed is graphically described. Triplett is quoted as saying: "I will not strike you, sir, nor will I challenge you, abhorring duelling as I do, but nevertheless I will accept a challenge from you, and that you may not be without provocation for one, I tell you that I only spare you in consideration of your lameness. Now challenge me, if you dare."

Thompson was a splendid shot and as game as the gamest, and the challenge quickly came and was quickly accepted. Pistols were named as the weapons and the distance ten paces. The principals were to stand with their backs toward each other and at the word "fire" were to turn and shoot. Thompson objected to standing back to back, as his lameness prevented his turning as quickly as Triplett. His antagonist recognized the justness of this claim and this provision was waived.

One of the most famous brace of duelling pistols in the state was then owned by a man at Hardinsburg and there followed a race between the duellists to secure them. Thompson's messenger won. Triplett then sent one friend to Louisville for a noted selection of weapons and another to New Madrid, Mo., where the historic weapons used; by Aaron Burr in his fatal duel with Alexander Hamilton were owned. Both were secured and both were satisfactory. It is not known whether Triplett used one of Burr's pistols or not, but it is believed he did.

Triplett at once began practice in order to gain something of an equality with his antagonist in the encounter. In this he was successful and it was predicted that victory would fall to him who could shoot the quicker.

The business affairs of each were gotten in shape and their wills, written and signed the day before the date set for the encounter.

The duel was timed to take place at 11 o'clock a. m. on the Indiana shore opposite Owensboro. The principals and their seconds met and the former asked if they were ready. Triplett replied in the negative and stepped aside to try his weapon. He fired at and hit a lump of snow on a log near by and immediately announced his readiness to proceed to business.

Taking their places, the principals awaited the word to fire. When it came Triplett fired a fraction of a second before Thompson. Both stood erect it was believed both had missed. Then Thompson's countenance paled and throwing his pistol to the ground said: "I am a dead man."

Triplett rushed forward to render aid, but his seconds called him back, saying Thompson might desire a second shot. In a few moments the second of Thompson announced that his principal was satisfied.

The ball had entered just under the right nipple, passed through the body and lodged in his arm. It was thought, he would die in a few hours, but he did not and finally recovered.

Later the duellists became good friends and it is said the experience and wound cured Thompson of his lameness and a case of rheumatism of ten years' standing. He is reported to have said to Triplett: "You are a first-class surgeon, but a very rough operator."

The duel was the end of the distilling business of that period.

In 1865 Thompson was killed in the streets of Owensboro by John Jefford. Jefford was acting as sheriff at the time. Thompson attacked him at Main and Frederica streets and struck him over the head with his pistol, breaking the stock. Jefford ran into a nearby store owned by Isom Allen, who later became a Baptist preacher, and obtained a large knife. He ran out and approached Thompson, who snapped his pistol in his face. The weapon missed fire. The next instant Jefford's knife went plunging into Thompson's body and he died within a few moments, Jefford never became reconciled to the thought of having killed Thompson and he died of remorse in less than a year. Jefford was an uncle of Mr. Almarion May, who is now in charge of the city park. Mr. May is familiar with the facts in the killing of Thompson and also with the details of the duel.

The only other duel ever arranged in Owensboro by residents did not take place. This projected encounter was between Dr. J. Hale, now of Owensboro, Ky and Col. Thomas L. Jones, now United States Consul at Funchal, in the Canary Islands. This meeting was arranged to take place on the same spot as the Triplet-Thompson affair, but the parties were arrested as they prepared to cross the river to the duelling ground. The duel was never fought. This was in 1869.

[Note by Jerry Long: The engraving "W. Jacet, 1864" on the pistol makes it highly improbable that it is the gun that was used in the 1829 duel.]



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 17 July 1904, p.9:

Noted Theatres and Theatricals of Owensboro's
Dramatic History are filled With Interest

... The first dramatic home was operated from about 1835 to 1846, or eleven years. It stood on the river bank, then about 100 yards from the water, and was designed as a grocery store and freight receiving and shipping enterprise. It was three stories in height. The business of the firm was such that the third floor could be utilized for other purposes, and about 1835 Phil Thompson, grandfather of Phil T. Watkins, fitted it up as a theatre. Simultaneously there was organized a Thespian society here and many of uncertain and varying merit were the productions staged by this coterie of amateurs...



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 3 December 1904, p.4:

Is Sixty-Four Years That Capt. Frank L. Hall Has Resided In Owensboro

[Note Capt. Hall gives his recollections of Owensboro when he came 64 years ago] ...

"Owensboro was confined within quite limited boundaries sixty-four years ago. All or most of the business houses on Frederica street between Main and the river. Between Main and Fourth streets was the residence portion of the town. Philip Thompson lived on the corner of Main and Frederica, where the National Deposit bank and adjacent buildings now stand." ...



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 19 November 1905, p.9:

Dropped Stitches in Owensboro History: George Scarborough

... George Scarborough "schoolmaster married Miss Emily Thompson, a daughter of Philip Thompson, one of the pioneer merchants of the town." ...



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 24 August 1924, p.1B:

PISTOL USED BY TRIPLETT IN DUEL THAT WITH
WHICH AARON BURR KILLED HAMILTON

Bits of History Related to the Head of Island Incident Told to Readers of the Inquirer.

EDITOR'S NOTE. – The Robert Triplett who fought the duel with Philip B. Thompson was not a lineal ancestor of Judge George V. Triplett, of Owensboro, as is often thought, but a cousin of Judge Triplett's grandfather; George V. Triplett, members of, the same Virginia family, from which state they came at the same time.

(Written Especially for The Inquirer)

By Thomas James de la Hunt

By no means the least interesting detail connected with the duel fought ninety-five years ago, across the river in I opposite the head of the island just above Owensboro, between two prominent Daviess county citizens – Robert Triplett and Philip B. Thompson – was the circumstance that Triplett used the selfsame pistol with which Aaron Burr had shot Alexander Hamilton, a quarter-century earlier, at daybreak of one July morn on the New Jersey heights of Weehawken, just opposite that part of Manhattan Island which New Yorkers now call the "Upper West Side."

The story of the local duel has always been handed down by word of mouth among the older Owensboro families, both combatants having left collateral or direct relatives in the city, and it is told that the very tree under which the affray took place was standing until comparatively recent years, and was often pointed out as the "Duel Tree."

Triplett's autobiography "Roland Trevor," or The Pilot of Human Life," was published anonymously in 1853 by the same Philadelphia printing firm who had issued James Weir's all but forgotten romance "Lonz Powers, or The Regulators," and Triplett told in his pages of having sent for dueling pistols to Hardinsburg and to Louisville after Thompson's challenge had been accepted; and how at length one of his friends "went to New Madrid where he knew there was a pair which Burr had had on the field with Hamilton. These were obtained and so good were they that he did not regret failing to obtain those at Hardinsburg.

Some evidence incidentally corroborating this paragraph has come to light in the shape of an article written by the late George Yenowine, of Louisville, for the Courier-Journal, printed in the Sunday issue for September 8, 1901, with an editorial note that it had been Mr. Yenowine's last contribution to the paper and was sent to the office only a few weeks before his death. Yenowine, who had been editor of the short-lived "Illustrated South", was one of Louisville's best cultured journalists, a close friend to many literary men of his day, and this sketch from his pen found in an old clipping-book kept by a feminine reader whose choice of topics for preservation showed wide range of taste...

... From the winter of 1813-14 to the present day the dueling pistols of Colonel Burr have remained, by inheritance, in one family, their subsequent history a matter of authentic record and the pistol which sent death to Hamilton identified beyond doubt by a mark placed thereon by Burr himself.

"Among the officers of the Forty-second Regiment of United States Dragoons some ninety years ago (said Mr. Yenowine in 1901) was one distinguished for his personal bravery in action, and as the possessor of those special gifts which constitute the gallant officer and the polished gentleman. Captain Samuel Goode Hopkins was a fine type of the soldier of his day. He took an active part in the War of 1812-15 and lost his holsters in a bloody fight in Canada when his horse was shot under him. Learning that Burr was to be in Washington, he went thither in the winter of 1813-14 expressly to buy the pistols, and called on Colonel Burr in company with his father, Major General Samuel Hopkins, at that time a member of Congress from the Henderson, Kentucky, district.

"I am indebted to Mr. Innis Hopkins, of St. Louis, for the subsequent history of these weapons. The family papers and manuscripts of the Hopkins family in his possession furnish, among other valuable data, everything relating to these pistols and their necessarily sanguinary history. Captain Samuel Goode Hopkins used them effectively in the War of 1812-15, killing many Indians and shooting down a chief at the battle of Massaineway. When Captain Hopkins died in 1834 he left the pistols by will to his nephews, Innis Brent Hopkins, then a lad of eleven years; but before the Captain's decease these pistols had figured with fatal effect in eleven duels.

"The weapons have surely a bloodstained history," wrote to me a short time since their present possessor, Innis Hopkins, who received them from his father, Innis Brent Hopkins. 'Among the sanguinary combats, I might mention Pettis, of Virginia, killed Biddle, on Bloody Isle, near St. Louis, Edward Towns, of Virginia, killed a Frenchman near New Orleans; Captain Samuel Goode Hopkins killed a Spanish count, near New Madrid, Missouri, while Hugh Brent killed a man from Georgia, on Diamond Island below Henderson, Kentucky. They were used several times in Virginia; twice in South Carolina; and more than once in Kentucky with deadly effect. In an affair of honor at Owensboro, Kentucky. Robert Triplett shot, but not fatally a lawyer named Thompson. Henry Clay and Captain Hopkins were fast friends and the former was to have had the pistols in one of his duels, But they arrived too late.'

These pistols are, perhaps the most famous and fatal fire-arms of their character on the American continent, and are a bone-breaking brace of the first calibre. The barrels are thirteen inches long and carry an once ball. They are flintlocks and the pans of the priming are lined with gold, and the touch-holes are lined with the same metal. They are hair-triggers, and shoot with great force and accuracy. The locks are very superior and of exquisite workmanship.

"It seems but appropriate that the famous heirloom should be that of a family whose name was prominent in Burr's time, and who numbered him and many of his friends as theirs. Major-General Samuel Hopkins, after whom Hopkins county and Hopkinsville, Kentucky were named, (also "General Hopkins Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution," at Henderson,) was Congressman, from the Henderson district from 1798 until 1815. He had been a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Continental Line of Virginia during the American Revolution, and was commissioned Major-General by President Madison, who was his second cousin. He was likewise a double second cousin to Patrick Henry, their mothers being double first cousins, and Stephen Hopkins of Rhode Island, the Signer of the Declaration of Independence, was also a second cousin."... [several paragraphs that discussed Burr and Hamilton were not reprinted here]



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 29 May 1927, p.1B:

Daniel Grissom, 97, Recalls His Early Days Here

... Two tragic events are the vivid in my recollection of Owensboro – the killing of Philip Thompson and the drowning of little John Triplett.

“I was a child when the former event occurred, but I knew Mr. Thompson well. I was going to school to Mrs. Tarlton, in a cabin on the ravine below the town, and Mr. Thompson was in the habit of riding down to his farm, which lay between the river and the ravine. On one of these trips, he saw a book lying on the ground, and dismounted from his horse and picked it up. It proved to be my spelling book, which I had lost, and which he sent to my father. My father was county jailer, and the county jail at that time was a brick building on the courthouse square.

Thompson Killed

"One day in the afternoon my mother sent a colored servant girl down town, that is, in the section of Frederica street where the stores were, on an errand, and a few minutes after, the girl came running back crying out ‘Mr. Thompson is killed. Mr. Thompson is killed,’ and while my mother was asking her what she meant, I slipped out and ran down between the courthouse into clerk’s office to Frederica street, and found the whole town was wild with excitement. Mr. Thompson had been slain in a street combat with an Irish carpenter named Frederick, and his friends were hunting for Frederick to slay him.

Mr. Thompson's butchered body was being carried into Isler's store on the west side of Frederica street, and I followed the crowd into that store. The body had been taken into the back room and laid on the coverlet – an old-fashioned blue homespun woolen bed garment common in those days – and four men carried it out the back door of the family dwelling, back from the corner now enclosed between Main and Frederica streets. I followed it all the way, and then went home. This tragic event occurred some ninety years ago – and I presume I am the only living person who witnessed the part recorded.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 14 August 1927, p.12:

Miss Cora Lee Webb Gives Interesting Account of Owensboro’s Early History

... Col. Joe Daveiss peculiarly was shown one cold day which -was known as Cold Friday, because it was the coldest day Kentucky has ever known, by surveying a pond on his farm, Cornland, a few miles above Owensboro. This pond was afterwards drained and the first crop of corn raised on it caused a law suit which resulted in a duel between Phillip Thompson and Robert Triplett. This did not end fatally, however, and the men afterwards became great friends...



Owensboro Star, Owensboro, KY, 7 August 1969, p.1:

Triplett – Thompson One Shot Cure-all

by Ralph Lewis

Many of the duels fought in Kentucky found former friends facing one another. Differences of opinions, a loose word or a choice of one's friends, could hair-trigger a 'face-off' often resulting in the death of one or both participants.

In checking back on the story of prominent duellists, one finds an alarming list of lawyers and newspapermen, challenged to arm and defend themselves on the field of honor.

On February 10th, 1829, at eleven o'clock in the morning, two Owensboro attorneys faced one another on the Indiana side of the Ohio River. One of these men was Robert Triplett, a bright and upstanding young lawyer who had come to Daviess County from Frankfort. His opponent, Philip Thompson, hailed originally from Shawnee Run, near Harrodsburg. Thompson was a lawyer and is described by historians as "small of stature, walked with a limp and had a stammering impediment in his speech."

Robert Triplett was one of the most prominent lawyers and business men of early Owensboro and his legal practice and other enterprises soon made him a rich man. Triplett, in February of 1829, had fired an employee whom he charged with cheating and dishonesty, which resulted in a law suit to be settled by arbitration. Philip Thompson was the employee's lawyer.

The two attorneys had tangled six months earlier in a case and had come to near-blows, and during the present meeting, words and threats were exchanged between the two, which resulted in Thompson's challenging Triplett.

Both parties, to avoid public curiosity and the danger of arrest, decided to meet across the river from Owensboro.

On the date of the duel, Thompson and his party arrived an hour late. The pistols were checked and tested. For his pistols, Triplett had chosen the same guns used by Aaron Burr in his famous duel in which Alexander Hamilton was killed. The two men faced each other and the word "Fire" given, and Thompson toppled over, dropping his pistol. The stricken man's surgeon gave the opinion that the wounded duellist would not live twenty-four hours. He administered first-aid and Thompson was placed in a skiff and rowed back across the river. He lingered between life and death for days with a wound that would have killed ninety-nine men out of a hundred and to the surprise of everyone, recovered.

Several months later he remarked that Robert Triplett's ball had "completely cured him of a chronic rheumatism of ten years' standing, and his lameness." And speaking of the duel later, said: "Triplett was a good surgeon but severe in remedy."

Philip Thompson was slain on the streets of Owensboro on November 26, 1836.

Robert Triplett survived his adversary by nearly twenty years. He thrived and despite the perfidy of a partner who nearly ruined him financially, managed to recover some of his fortune. During the Mexican War, he not only volunteered his services, but loaned the State one hundred thousand dollars to further the war effort.

Triplett died in Philadelphia in 1853 at the age of fifty six years.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 26 July 2012, p.1C:

First list of Owensboro residents appeared in 1821

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

You'd think it would be easy to find the names of Owensboro's first settlers, wouldn't you? After all, the settlement at the Big Yellow Banks on the Ohio River apparently began sometime in the 1790s.

So, you should be able to just turn to the 1790 census and see if anybody was listed as living at Yellow Banks that year.

And then look at 1800 and see who was here then.

But that would be too easy.

"The first two censuses of Kentucky, in 1790 and 1800, were destroyed," Jerry Long, a researcher in the Kentucky Room at the Daviess County Public Library, said Monday.

Early tax records "have been put together in order to create a substitute for the lost censuses," he said.

But Yellow Banks isn't broken out as a separate community.

"The tax lists for this period make no designation of towns or neighborhoods," Long said, "only nearest water courses of any land holdings is given."

Daviess County was part of Ohio County back then. And Long said the only town with a separate listing in Ohio County as late as 1810 was Hartford.

The first official list of people living in "Owensborough," as it was then spelled, appears in an 1821 tax book for Daviess County, Long said.

And that list only shows "white males over 21."

Long said that list of early Owensboroans includes George Hanley, Daniel Moseley, Brice P. Duncan, David Morton, Wm. W. Franklin, Christo. Jones, Isaac Kennady, Phillip Triplett, P. Simpson, Ira Hathaway, Elisha Adams, J. M. Rogers, Alexander Moreland, J. McHendle, James W. Johnston, John Roberts, Wm. R. Griffith, Phillip Thompson, James Talbot, Samuel Smith, Thos. Potts, Willis M. Pickett, William Adams, John Parks, Thomas Moseley Senr., J. G. Livers, Jesse Kincaid, James Hiatt, James Sands, William Lampton, John Churchill Jr., James Higgins, John Proctor, J. J. Amos, A. Legrand and Samuel Harbez.

William Smeathers, who legend says was the first settler here, had moved to Texas before the 1821 tally.

Long recently helped producers of "History Detectives" trace the life and times of John Phillip Thompson, a former Confederate officer and Daviess County circuit clerk, whose pistols recently turned up on "Antiques Roadshow."

Thompson's father and grandfather appear in that list of early Owensboro residents, Long said.

"His parents, Phillip Thompson (1789-1836) and Sallie Clay Moseley, were one of the most prominent families of the early history of Owensboro," Long said. "His grandfather, Thomas Moseley, a Revolutionary War veteran, is buried in Owensboro. At his home, the first court of the newly formed county of Daviess was held in 1815."

Phillip Thompson, he said, "was the first resident lawyer of Owensboro and one of the county's first representatives in the U.S. Congress."

Phillip Thompson, Long said, "was also celebrated because of his participation in a famous duel with Robert Triplett. He was severely wounded in his meeting with Triplett on an island opposite Owensboro in 1829. It is claimed that the pistol used by Triplett was the same one by which Aaron Burr killed Alexander Hamilton."

And, he said, "Phillip Thompson's notoriety was added to because he owned an extensive part of the western half of Owensboro, he erected the first school in Owensboro about 1820 and because he was stabbed to death in a fight on the Owensboro streets in 1836."



See also:

Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY, 14 April 1883, p9 (“Aaron Burr’s Celebrated Dueling Pistols the Property of a Gentleman In This City”)

Daily Democrat, Natchez, MS, 3 May 1883, p.1 (“Aaron Burr’s Pistols”)

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 5 October 1965, p.6C (“Duel Fought By Prominent Settler – No Death: Daviess County’s Initial Bid For Industrial Prominence Came In The Early 1800’s, Pioneer Entrepreneur Built, In Bon Harbor, The First Railroad In Kentucky”)

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 4 July 1976, Bicentennial Edition Part 3 p.12 (“1829 duel avenges prominent insult”)

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 30 May 1992, Kentucky Portrait, 1792-1992 special edition, p.71 (“After surviving duel, opponents became friends”, by Keith Lawrence)

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 16 November 1995, p.1C (“Political careers die when you fight a duel”, by Keith Lawrence)

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 4 October 2009, p.1E (“Should we remove dueling pledge?”, by Keith Lawrence)

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 21 July 2016, p.1B (“Duel between Thompson, Triplett area's most famous”, by Keith Lawrence)

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 9 July 2020, p.1B (“There' a local connection to 'Hamilton’”, by Keith Lawrence)

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 25 September 2020, p.1B (“Fourth Street Baptist unveils state historical marker”, by Renee Beasley Jones)



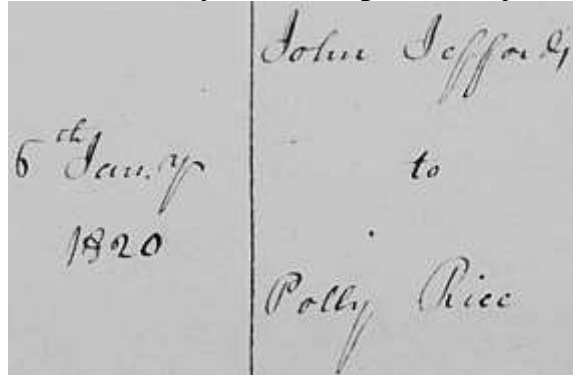
Philip Thompson’s Opponent – John Jeffords

By Jerry Long

Accounts on the death of Philip Thompson in 1836 vary greatly on the name of the man who gave the blow that killed him. His opponent’s name in different retellings is given as Jeffries, Jeffreys, Jeffers, Jefferds and Jefford. Beyond word of mouth accounts more official county records prove that Thompson’s adversary was John Jeffords.

In the annual tax lists of Daviess County, KY during the years of 1821 thru 1837 “John Jeffords” is listed as being assessed on the county’s levy. In one of these lists his last name appears as “Jefford” and in the others as “Jeffords”. The 1830 list gives his name as “John G. Jeffords”. In these lists he is the only Jeffords that appears. In Daviess County, KY marriage book A (p.14) it is recorded that John Jeffords married Polly Rice on 6 January 1820. Polly Rice, daughter of Ezekiel Rice & Ann Watkins, was born 25 May 1806.

Daviess County, KY Marriage Book A, p.14:



Census records suggest that John Jeffords was born during 1794-1800. John Jeffords is enumerated in the 1820 and 1830 federal censuses of Daviess County. In the 1820 census his surname is spelled as Jefford and in 1830 as Jeffords.

Daviess County, KY 1820 Federal Census, p.18:

John Jefford	1 male 16-26	1 female 16-26
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Daviess County, KY 1830 Federal Census, p.191:

John Jeffords	1 male 0-5	1 female 0-5
	1 male 30-40	1 female 5-10
		1 female 15-20
		1 female 30-40
		1 female 60-70

Several of the accounts on Philip Thompson’s death state that the man who delivered his fatal blow died about a year later. This seems to also be suggested by county records. John Jeffords was last found in the 1837 tax list of Daviess County. Jeffords name could not be found in the Daviess County estate or administrator records. He is never taxed on any land holdings and probably left little to settle up. In the 1840 census of Daviess County John Jefford’s widow, “Polly Jeffords” is listed as a household head.

Daviess County, KY 1840 Federal Census, p.39:

Polly Jeffords	1 male 0-5	1 female 0-5
	1 male 5-10	1 female 5-10
	1 male 10-15	1 female 10-15
		1 female 30-40

monument. The side with the inscription on this monument is face down. It is very large and heavy and I could not roll it over. I suspect this is the gravestone of Major John Philip Thompson (c1831-1872).

Several of the monuments in the Thompson family lot are so badly faded that they are impossible to read.



“Philip Thompson died Nov. 25, 1836 aged 47 ys, 2 ms & 25 ds”



“Sally Clay consort of Philip Triplett died April 9, 1841 aged 45 yrs, 9 mos & 15 ds”

The children of Philip Burton Thompson & Sally Clay Mosley were:

1. Emily Thompson, born 7 December 1817; married George Scarborough, 4 December Daviess County, KY. She died 10 March 1846. Her birth and death dates are recorded in

the book, The Genealogy of the Cleveland and Cleaveland Families (Volume I, by Edmund Janes Cleveland, Hartford, Conn., 1899, pages 387 & 896) and in the Register of Interments Elmwood Cemetery, 1877-1885, pp.5a & 5b. George Scarborough (28 July 1806 – 8 March 1890) was buried in the South Cemetery at Brooklyn, Windham County, CT. The following memorial for his wife and infant daughter was engraved on his monument:



“Emily Thompson wife of Geo. Scarborough died in Owensboro, KY. March 10, 1846, aged 28 years, also an infant daughter born and died Sept. 30, 1842.”

2. Mary A. Thompson, born 19 August 1819 and died 22 November 1828. Her name is on the same monument with her parents. It has she died 22 November 1828 at the age of 9 years, 3 months & 3 days. These dates indicate a birth of 19 August 1819. The Register of Interments Elmwood Cemetery, 1877-1885, pp.5a & 5b records that she was born in 1819 and died on 22 November 1828.



“Mary daughter of P. & S. C. Thompson died Nov. 22, 1828 aged 9 yrs. 3 mos. 3 ds”

3. Daniel M. Thompson, born 20 March 1821? and died 22 September 1839 Lexington, Fayette County, KY. Kentucky Gazette, Lexington , KY, Thursday, 26 September 1839, p.3: Died – “On Sunday morning, at 6 o’clock at the Lunatic Asylum, in this city, Dan’l M. Thompson, son of Philip Thompson, of Owensborough, Ky., an inmate of the Asylum, aged about 18 years.” His name is on the same monument with his sister, Susan B. Watkins, in his parent’s lot at Elmwood Cemetery in Owensboro, KY.



Daniel son of Philip & S. C. Thompson died Sept. 22, 1839
in Lexington, Ky., aged 18 ys ? mo ?ds

4. Susan Burton Thompson, born 14 November 1822 Owensboro, Daviess County, KY. Her age on her gravestone, 30 years, 1 month & 12 days, when interpreted with her death date indicates a birth date of 14 November 1822. She married Thomas Worthington Watkins, 26 June 1845 Daviess County, KY. He was the son of Nicholas Watkins & Patience Barnes and was born 20 May 1818 Maryland. Thomas Watkins died 29 July 1855 Owensboro, KY and his wife, Susan, died 26 December 1852. They were buried at Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY. Their children were: Philip Thompson Watkins (1846-1921, married Ann Cecelia Woolfolk), Mary B. Watkins (1848-1887, married Nicholas Kirk), Kate T. Watkins (1850-1944, married Howard Mitchum Bowman) and John Thompson Watkins (1853-1853).



“Susan B. consort of Thos. W. Watkins, daughter of Philip & S. C. Thompson
died Dec. 26, 1852 aged 30 yr’s 1 mo.12 (?) ds”

5. William B. Thompson, born 2 June 1824 and died 20 March 1841. His name is on the monument with his parents. The Register of Interments Elmwood Cemetery, 1877-1885, pp.5a & 5b records that he was born 1824 and died 20 March 1841.



“William B. son of P. & S. C. Thompson died Mar. 20, 1841 aged 16 yrs, 9 (?) mo. 18 ds”

6. Martha M. Thompson, born 1827 and died single 4 September 1846. These dates were recorded in the Register of Interments Elmwood Cemetery, 1877-1885, pp.5a & 5b. In her parent’s family lot her monument is lying flat on the ground and is difficult to read – it has the death date of 4 September 1846 but her age cannot be read.
7. Sarah Claiborne Thompson, born 19 July 1829; married Dr. Francis M. Pearl (1824-), 3 June 1851 Daviess County, KY. She died 6 September 1852. On the same monument at Elmwood Cemetery is “infant son of Dr. F. M. & S. C. Pearl born 30 August 1852 died same day.” Her husband was a dentist and Pearl St. in Owensboro was named in his honor.



“Sarah Claiborne consort of Dr. F. M. Pearl & daughter of Hon. P. Thompson
born July 19, 1829 married June 3, 1851 died Sept. 6, 1852”

8. John Philip Thompson, born 1831-1832. His marriage license records that he was born Owensboro, Daviess County, KY and lists his parents as Philip Thompson & Sarah C. Moseley. He is listed in the 1860 & 1870 censuses of Daviess County, KY. There were many deeds recorded in the Daviess County deed books by John P. Thompson and his sisters whereby they were transferring land that they had inherited from their father, Philip Thompson. He served as a major in the Confederate army during the Civil War and was a prisoner of war. He organized the unit Dixie Guards in Owensboro a few days following the first shots of the war. This was the first company of soldiers raised in Kentucky for the Confederate Army. This statement is made in Collins' reputable History of Kentucky (Vol.1, p228). In the second year of the war Thompson was promoted from Captain to the rank of Major and was sent back to Kentucky to recruit others for the Confederate cause. In this very dangerous endeavor he was captured near Henderson, KY in 1863. At first it was ordered that he be shot as a spy but mercifully his sentence was changed to imprisonment. John P. Thompson spent the final two years of the Civil War imprisoned at Fort Delaware and Johnson's Island. He served as Circuit Court Clerk of Daviess County (1856-1862 & 1868-1872). He died in Owensboro on 3 April 1872. The History of Daviess County, Kentucky (1883, p.424) notes that he died of brain fever on this date. John P. Thompson married Maria Cornelia Cave, 19 December 1865 Orange County, VA. The daughter of William Porter Cave & Isabella DeLacy, she was born 4 July 1842 New York City, NY. John P. died 3 April 1872 Daviess County, KY and was buried Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY. After his death his wife lived in Orange County, VA, where she is listed in the 1880 & 1900 censuses. The 1900 census records that she was the mother of three children, one of whom was then deceased. Cornelia Cave Thompson died 9 April 1903 Manhattan, NY. She was buried Cave (Monticello) Cemetery, Orange County, VA. They had three children - John Philip Thompson (1867-1945, married Florence Belfield Kemper), William Cave Thompson (1868-1871) and Isabella Delacy Cave Thompson (1871-1962, married Leslie Higgins Gray).



Major John Philip Thompson (c1831-1872)

9. Catherine ('Kate') M. Thompson, born 17 October 1834; married Robert Craig (1830-1912), 9 January 1855 Daviess County, KY. She died 27 October 1856. Her birth and death dates were recorded in the Register of Interments Elmwood Cemetery, 1877-1885, pp.5a & 5b. She left no children.



Thompson family lot at Elmwood Cemetery (section A) – The four sides of the tall obelisk monument under the tree has the names of Philip Thompson (1789-1836), his wife, Sally Clay Moseley Thompson (1795-1841) and their children, Mary (1819-1828) and William B. ((1824-1841). To the left are the gravestones of several other children of Philip & Sally – Emily Scarborough (1817-1846), Daniel Thompson (1821-1839), Susan B. Watkins (1822-1852), Martha Thompson (1827-1846), Sarah Claiborne Pearl (1829-1852) and Kate M. Craig (1834-1856). Under the bush on the left is a large toppled obelisk monument. The inscribed side of this monument is face down and cannot be read. This may be the monument of Philip & Sally's son, Major John Philip Thompson (c1831-1872).



See also articles

“Report on Thomas Moseley (c1765-1841) & His Family: by Jerry Long, Website: West-Central Kentucky History & Genealogy, 2023.

“George Scarborough (1806-1890): Prominent Teacher & Scholar”, by Jerry Long, Website: West-Central Kentucky History & Genealogy, 2023.

“Major John Philip Thompson (c1831-1872)”, by Jerry Long, Website: West-Central Kentucky History & Genealogy, 2012.

