

# “Early Days of Yellow Banks”

By Cora Lee Webb  
(1868-1958)



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 14 August 1927, pp.1B & 12B:**

## Miss Cora Lee Webb Gives Very Interesting Story Of The “Early Days of Yellow Banks” And Settlers

Miss Cora Lee Webb recently gave a very interesting story of the "Early Days of Yellow Banks," before the General Evan Shelby chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, which will be kept among the historical records of the chapter in its library. Among the many first things to be established in Owensboro, then Yellow Banks, and its early history she tells of a visit of Charles Dickens, who was en route by boat to St., Louis, when. the boat was stranded opposite Yellow Banks and he with other passengers came over to the town until the boat was repaired. She also states that in Washington Irving's' book, "Wolfert's Roost," the story, "Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood," is a story of this section. All of the characters in the story, she states, were well known hereat that time. Excerpts from Miss Webb's story follow:

### Early Wilderness

Prior to 1797, the location of Daviess county was a wilderness, made up of hills, valleys, open Spaces. ravines, and creeks. Animals such, as wolves, bear, elk, deer, panther, wildcat, jaguar, wild hog, otter, mink, beaver and others roamed at will through the forest, following the narrow trails made by the Indians or the broader ones by the buffalo herds, or lurked in the cane brake. Wild fowls such as turkeys, geese, duck, were plentiful; and birds of many kinds flashed here, there and everywhere, filling the air with melody and beauty.

It 'was into this region there wandered one day a noted hunter and Indian fighter, William Smothers, familiarly called Bill Smithers." He was born in Virginia, but his parents had emigrated to Kentucky.

One morning his father was killed by the Indians, and though only a child nine years of age, he stood by his dead father's side, and swore to kill every Indian that crossed his path, and he kept his word, though often congratulating himself that he never met a squaw, as he had scruples about killing a woman. After his father's death he was sent back to Virginia to live with, an uncle. When nineteen years old he married his uncle's daughter and came back to Kentucky. His wife dying soon after, the call of the wild became so strong, he started out to explore new regions of Kentucky. He soon landed at the Ohio river and as he stood on its banks looking toward Bon Harbor, he thought he had never seen a more beautiful view or a more desirable location for a home as he decided to remain for a time. He cleared a small tract of land and built a cabin on the ravine; about where the jail now stands. This was built of logs with a stick and clay daub chimney;

it had one room and a small lean-to and two doors, - one looking: towards the river, the other to the south.

Here he lived alone for several years, the only inhabitant from the Ohio river to Panther creek and from "Green river to Yellow creek.

#### Trial at Hartford

He made a trip back home and finding his sister's husband had died, persuaded her to come back and live with him. Bill was intelligent, honest and truthful and noted for his bravery, and while he loved solitude, was. very hospitable. . One day some river men were his guests and one of them made a remark, before his sister which Bill, resented; after they, left he called this man back – no one knows just what happened but in the end, Bill killed, the man. He was horrified at what he had done and hid in the woods but finally decided it was best to give himself up. The trial at Hartford was the most noted ever held there. He was prosecuted by. Gen. John Daviess and defended by his great friend, Col. Joe Daviess. Bill was cleared, and came back home. In 1803, to his horror and disgust, several other hunters wandered in and located about twelve miles from him.

In 1812, there were three cabins very close to him, and in 1815, by an. act of the legislature. Daviess county was formed by taking part from Ohio county and four miles along Green river from Henderson county. It was called Daviess county for Col. Joe Daviess, who with his brother, Gen. John Daviess, had owned practically all of it.

#### Yellow Banks

In 1816, the settlers laid off a small plot of ground extending from the river to Fourth street and from Walnut to Lewis and called it Yellow Banks from a peculiar strata of yellow clay which extended along the river bank for about six miles. Later this name was changed to Owensborough, for Col. Abraham Owen, a noted Kentuckian, lawyer, congressman and a member of the convention that formed the constitution of Kentucky. He and Col. Daviess were both killed at the battle of Tippecanoe and buried there.

The first school taught in Yellow Banks was by Mrs. Tarleton, who came to Yellow Banks in a most unusual way and a very unpleasant one for her. She was on a boat going to Mississippi, when near Cloverport the .boat struck a snag and sank so rapidly that several on board were drowned. She managed to secure a plank and on this floated down the river until she came to Yellow Banks where she was discovered and rescued. She had lost everything and. desiring to teach small children, a public spirited man, Philip Thompson, gave her the use of a cabin. As there was a plentiful supply of children, her school was soon in a flourishing condition. This cabin was on the' ravine and it was thought to be too far out for the children. So the school was moved to another cabin on the southwest corner of Main and Allen. Later she built a cabin on what is now Crittenden street, between, Main and' Third. Here she taught until old age came on.

#### Prof. Scarborough First Teacher.

The first school for older children was built by the same man, Mr. Thompson. This was a brick building of one room on what is now Third street school grounds. It was built on the Hartford road, which ran along the southeast corner' of the Third street school ground, going diagonally across to the northwest corner down to Buzzard Roost road. It was built on a small hill and was entered by eight or ten steps. It had several names, the Daviess County academy, Daviess academy, seminary, Baptist college and others. It had many teachers, among whom were Messrs. Woodruff,

Gray, McIntire and Hart. The first teacher was T. Watkins. He furnished the room with desks, ink wells and shades to keep the boys from looking out of the windows watching for the boats and trying to guess the names as they passed.

He taught here until the house was struck by lightning, the roof was burned off. Then he built a palatial mansion, the wonder of all and called it Snowdon castle. It was located on the ravine and in later years was known as the McAlister place. It was a large square brick building. The Buzzard Roost road ran between it and the river; beyond the road, a large grassy plot which was the boys' playground, and here they would watch the boats go down the river carrying Gen. Zachary Taylor's troops to the Mexican war.

Mr. Hart taught in the academy until he built a house of his own on Daviess street just beyond Fifth. Here he taught, assisted by Misses Mattie Stewart and Lizzie Weir and Mrs. Singleton, until his health failed and he had to move to Texas.

Miss Stewart then opened a school for girls in a log house located at the northwest corner of Third and Allen streets.

Another school for girls was taught by a Mrs. Smith for a year in Main street. She was succeeded by Mrs. Raphael and her daughter, Hettie. They taught a very successful school until her daughter married Major Smith.

A boarding school was taught by Rev. Taylor in the Kennedy house, later called the Wandling house, at the corner of Allen street and the river.

A school was taught at what was called Bransford institute at Fourth and St. Ann streets, and Mr. Gray opened a classic school for boys on Bolivar, near Fifth street. Close by was the German-American school.

Mrs. Sue Phillips had a school for young women at Fourth and Walnut streets. It was known as Vaughn seminary. She was succeeded by Messrs. Mitchell, Wines and others, the last of whom were Mrs. Klinger and Mrs. Van Rensselaer.

#### Sermon by Rev. Lowry

Up to 1834, there were no church organizations in Yellow Banks. The first sermon ever preached here was by a Cumberland Presbyterian minister, Rev. David Lowry. The first prayer meeting was held by another Cumberland minister, Rev. Sam Calhoun. Most of the churches were organized and held their first services in the courthouse, which was built of logs, having a sawdust floor and plank seats.

The Baptists organized in 1839, with eight white members and eighteen colored. The colored members soon withdrew and built them a log house, on the ravine where their brick church now stands.

The Methodists and Baptists held a union, meeting, which was very successful; half of the converts joined the Baptist and half the Methodist. The Baptists built a church at the corner of Crittenden street and the river, just opposite where Broeker's mill now stands. They still have on their records where \$2 had been contributed to stop up the holes to keep the hogs out of the church. This church was of brick, a small Colonial building with a porch and, columns, and was entered, by steps at the ends of the porch.

The Methodists did not build as soon as the Baptists as the trustees could not agree as to location, some wishing to build at Fourth and St. Ann streets, where the city hall now stands; others opposed this saying it was entirely too far out of town. They finally agreed on a location and the church was built on Main, street between Daviess and Lewis.

## Presbyterian Churches

Both Presbyterian churches organized in the courthouse, the Cumberland built on St. Ann between Third and Fourth, where the Troy Laundry has been. They had the first pipe organ installed in any church here. The Presbyterians built on Third street' between St. Ann and Allen, the building now occupied by the Central Trust Co. During the war the church divided and the Fourth Street Presbyterian, built at Fourth and Crittenden the small church in the rear of their present church. It is now used as an educational department.

The Catholic organized in the country at a private home. Their first church, St. Stephens, was at the corner of Main and Mulberry, now Cedar street. They had the first music used in any church in Yellow Banks.

The Episcopal church was organized in the Masonic lodge and held their services over Dr. Megill's drug store which was where Bates drug store is now, at Third and St. Ann. Later they bought a carpenter's shop on Frederica, near Sixth and worshipped there until they built on Fifth street near Frederica.

## 200 in 1830

In 1830, there were only about 200 inhabitants, and in 1834, according to Col. Holmes' notes, there were 229. The business part of the town was on the river front and extended out two blocks on Frederica. The first store was run by Mr. Morton. The stores were built of brick, as a kiln had been started, and it was the cheapest material obtainable, plank having to be sawed by hand. They carried most everything, dry goods, groceries, hardware, drugs and even whisky, which sold, at twenty-five cents a gallon. A broad campus extended all along the river front and where the levee is now was the old circus grounds where big, little, old and young were drawn by the glitter and tinsel of the passing show, which came through in wagons or down the river on flat boats.

The best known and most popular woman that ever lived in Owensboro or Yellow Banks was Mrs. Harriet Roberts. She was the daughter of Gen. John Daveiss who lived on a farm just above Owensboro.

The last buffalo in Daviess county was killed on the lot where the public library now stands.

## First Court

The first court was held in a log house that had been a residence and was presided over by Judge Broadnax, of Hartford. He was very popular with the settlers and was rather old-fashioned. He still wore knee pants, with silver buckles at his knees, and his hair plaited and tucked up with a comb. His salary was from \$600 to \$800 a year, payable in corn.

The first will probated was In 1815, that of J. H. McFarland, whose second wife was the first white child born in the county. They were the great-grandparents of Miss Nora Kennedy.

The first newspaper was the "Owensboro Bulletin", started in 1844. It was a Whig paper favoring Henry Clay for president.

The first railroad was built in 1826, by Robert, Triplett. It extended from his coal mine at Bon Harbor hills to the river, a distance of three-quarters of a mile. It was run by mule power. This was not only the first railroad in the county but the first in Kentucky and is thought to be the first in the entire west.

The first passenger railroad was not built until 1871. It was a branch of the L. & N. When the locomotive, which was named Joe Daveiss, arrived by boat, all Owensboro was at the wharf to welcome it, and it was a great day in Owensboro when an excursion on the new road was run in March. It went fourteen miles but in April another one went as far as Livermore.

The first bank was the National bank, established in 1850, as a branch of the Louisville bank.

### Planters Hotel

The first hotel of any importance was the Planters house, built in 1846 of logs. It was heated by wood stoves, lighted with kerosene lamps and had a wash room containing a basin and roller towel. It opened with a great ball, to which tobacco buyers from Louisville, St. Louis and Cincinnati came. The guests named the hotel that night. It has entertained a number of notables in its time, among whom was Jenny Lind, who was on a boat going to St. Louis to give a concert. While the boat was here she came up to the hotel and was entertained.

Charles Dickens also visited Yellow Banks. He too was on a boat going to St. Louis to give a lecture. The boat was stranded opposite Yellow Banks and he with several other passengers came over to Yellow Banks and stayed while the boat was being repaired.

In Washington Irving's book, "Wolfert's Roost" the story "Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood", is a story of this section. All the characters in the story were well known here at that time. Bill Smothers, John Miller, a noted hunter, friend, a neighbor of Bill's, Judge Broadnax, Peggy and Polly Schultz and others. The only fictitious names used was Ralph Ringwood, who was in reality William Duval. He was a personal friend of Washington Irving; and told him many times of his experiences as a young hunter in this district, living for a time with Bill Smothers and John Miller. Later he studied law, became a noted lawyer, member of congress, member of the convention that formed the constitution of Kentucky, and was appointed by the president as governor of the territory of Florida. He often returned to Kentucky and visited here and at Hartford, where he owned property.

Daviess county has added its quota of men to serve the government, among whom are Hon. T. C. McCreery, U. S. senator; Col. Charles Todd, minister to Columbia, S. A., and later minister to Russia; George Yeaman, minister to Denmark, and Ed. Rumsey Wing, minister to Ecuador.

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.

Industries started in the early days of Yellow Banks continue to be some of the leading industries of today. A brick kiln started in 1820, located at what is now Fifth and Seventh, St. Ann and Allen streets. This industry still continues although differently located.

Coal has been successfully mined from the earliest days and is still a thriving industry.

### Tobacco a "First Crop."

Tobacco was one of the first crops raised in the county. The first factory was built in 1830, by Major Smith.

Whisky had always been made, more or less, but it was not until 1850 a distillery was built.

The Daviess county fair was first organized in 1850, as the Daviess county agricultural and Mechanical association. It held its meeting on Mr. Triplett's farm. An amphitheatre was built in

1853, about where Walnut street school now stands. Later it was moved to what was known as Paradise Gardens, on lower Main street. During the war these grounds were seized by the government for camping grounds. After the war it was reorganized under the name of Daviess County Fair Co., and grew in importance until it became the greatest fair in Kentucky and was looked forward to from year to year as the greatest event of the year.

In 112 years this wilderness settlement has grown into a thriving city of 25,000. It has not reached its present size and influence by any sky-rocket flashes but it has been a steady growth based on a firm foundation.



**Extended Version of Article,  
“Early Days of Yellow Banks”**

**By Cora Lee Webb, written in 1927 and  
delivered to the General Evan Shelby chapter  
of the Daughters of the American Revolution**

Madam Regent and Ladies:

Since it was left to me as to what I should give, I thought, that, as your work this season had been along the lines of Kentucky history and a study of some of the characters, who by the use of their special talents, helped to make that history worth while, it might not be out of order to tell something of the early days of Owensboro.

Though more than a century has past since Daviess County was formed the old stories and traditions still linger and fascinate and we sometimes find ourselves wishing that we might roll back the scroll of time for a short while at least, that we might see and know for ourselves some of the experiences of the pioneers. Their simple pleasures such as log-rollings, chopping matches, quilting bees, corn huskings, the old dances, and the wild exciting times they must have had in transforming this wilderness into peaceful homes.

In this day of safety, conveniences, and luxuries one can scarcely imagine the hardships those path-finders must have endured. The constant menace from Indian attacks, the dangers from wild animals, and the never ending work. The women cooking, washing, ironing, sewing, spinning, weaving, knitting, to any nothing of rearing large families of children. The men equally busy clearing the forest, building homes, farming on a small scale, hunting for game and furs, and attending to public affairs.

These early settlers, in their forest homes, often awakened at night by the howling of wolves, the child-like cries of the panther, and the squawking of wild cats, were for the most part brave and honest, possessing many excellent traits of character, though many were unlettered; but it is due to their faithfulness and stability that we owe our present state of civilization.

Prior to 1797 the location of Davies County was a wilderness, made up of hills, valleys, open spaces, ravines, and creeks. The hills and valleys covered with beautiful forest trees whose branches were interlaced with a labyrinth of wild vines – the ground carpeted with dainty wild flowers, soft mosses, and grasses. The open spaces covered with a thick growth of cane brake, while here and there were other open spaces where the wild strawberries grew rank. Animals such as wolves, boar, elk, deer, panther, wildcat, jaguar, wild hog, otter, mink, beaver and others roamed

at will through the forest, following the narrow trails made by the Indians or the broader ones by the buffalo herds, or lurked in the cane brake.

Wild fowls, such as turkeys, goose, duck, wore plentiful; and birds of many kind flashed here, there and everywhere filling the air with melody and beauty.

On the North flowed the Ohio in all its original wild beauty unmarred by civilization; its banks rimmed by forest trees whose branches cast fringy shadows on its waters. It was lovely whether seen through the purple mists of the early dawn, the rosy glow of the rising sun, or in the evening when the sun setting behind Bon Harbor hills cast all its brilliant reflexions on its glassy surface.

It was into this region there wandered one day a noted hunter and Indian fighter, William Smothers, familiarly called "Bill Smithers". He was born in Virginia but his parents had emigrated to Kentucky. One morning his father was killed by the Indians, and though only a child 9 years of age, he stood by his dead father's side and swore to kill every Indian that crossed his path and he kept his word, though often congratulating himself that he never met a squaw, as he had scruples about killing a woman. After his father's death he was sent back to Virginia to live with an uncle. When 19 years old he married his uncle a daughter and came back to Kentucky. His wife dying soon after, the call of the wild became so strong he started out to explore now regions of Kentucky. He soon landed at the Ohio river, and as he stood on its banks looking toward Bon Harbor he thought he had never seen a more beautiful view or a more desirable location for a home so he decided to remain for a time, he cleared a small tract of land and built a cabin on the ravine about where the jail now stands. This was built of logs with a stick and clay daub chimney; it had one room and a small lean-to and two doors - one looking towards the river the other to the south.

On the cleared ground he raised a small crop of corn and potatoes, his hunting supplied him with meat, the wild bees with honeys the woods with nuts and berries. When the river men came down and stopped at his landing to wood-up he exchanged some of his meat and fur for coffee and sugar. And here he lived alone for several years the only inhabitant from the Ohio river to Panther Creek and from Green river to Yellow Creek,

He made a trip back home and finding his sister's husband had died persuaded her to come back and live with him. Bill was intelligent, honest and truthful and noted for his bravery and while he loved solitude was very hospitable. One day some river men were his guests and one of them made a remark before his sister which Bill resented; after they left he called this man hack - No one knows just what happened but in the end Bill killed the man, he was horrified at what he had done and hid in the woods but finally decided it was best to give himself up. The trial at Hartford was the most noted ever held there, He was prosecuted by Gen. John Daveiss and defended by his great friend, Col., Joe Daveiss. The Daveiss' were brothers and very brilliant men with many peculiarities. Col. Daveiss when making his speech instead of calling for a drink, as did the others, called for a plate of ham and would occasionally stop and eat a slice with great pleasure. Bill was cleared and came back home. In 1803 to his horror and disgust several other hunters wandered in and located about 12 miles from him. This was entirely too close neighbors for Bill and he thought he would go further westward. But he had become so attached to his home he decided to remain.

In 1812 there were three cabins very close to him and in 1815 by an act of the legislature Daviess County was formed by taking part from Ohio County and four miles along Green river from Henderson County,

It was called Daviess County for Col. Joe Daveiss, who with his brother, Gen. John Daveiss, had owned practically all of it.

In 1816 the settlers laid off a small plot of ground extending from the river to Fourth Street and from Walnut to Lewis and called it Yellow Banks from a peculiar strata of yellow clay which extended along the river bank for about six miles. Later this name was changed to Owensborough, for Col. Abraham Owen, a noted Kentuckian, lawyer, congressman and a member of the convention that formed the constitution of Kentucky. H and Co1. Daveiss were both killed at the battle of Tippecanoe and buried there.

The early settlers buried their dead in a plot of ground extending from Third to Fourth Streets and St. Ann to St. Elizabeth. Those buried here have never been disturbed and are still peacefully resting there unmindful of the thousands of feet passing over them daily. The second burying ground was on 9th Street and many of these were moved when a third burying ground was located on 5th Street just beyond Triplett. When the L. St.L. and T. road was built it passed through the 9th Street burying ground much to the indignation of some of the older inhabitants who resented this desecration of the dead. The authorities claimed that most of these buried there had been moved. However, this was not true. Many were left, among them Gen. John Daveiss and several. members of his family.

Soon a larger burying ground was necessary and some of the citizens formed a company and bought 9 acres of ground from Mr. Pearl and Mr. Hathaway. This extended. from Pearl and Hathaway Streets through the wagon factory section and was called Rural Cemetery. Later these men bought 40 acres 1 ½ miles from town and called it Rural Hill Cemetery, later changed to Elmwood. Those owning lots in Rural were given a lot in Elmwood and the bodies removed at the expense of the company. Of course many who were buried here were not disturbed as their relatives and friends had died or moved away and in building in this part of the city human bones are often found in the excavating.

When a child I heard many stories about removing bodies from the 5th Street burying ground. In one instance they were not sure they had secured the right party so the casket was opened. They found it was the one sought and that his whiskers had grown three feet. Another body they found had turned to stone. In another casket the body had turned over on her face with the hands clutched in her hair.

It was nothing unusual in those days for people to believe in ghosts, spirits and supernatural beings, arid those cases caused much excitement. They were not always careful to refill the graves and one day a gentleman who had been in the country and was a little late in returning, took a short cut through the cemetery and accidentally slipped into one of these open graves. He was short in statue and lame so could not get out. The first person to pass was a colored man and on hearing the call for help started towards the sound but on seeing the white face over the top of the grave he gave a yell and ran as though a thousand fiends were at his heels. This occurred three or four times before any one came who was brave enough to give assistance.

The first school taught in Yellow Banks was by Mrs. Tarleton who came to Yellow Banks in a most unusual way and a very unpleasant one for her. She was on a boat going to Mississippi, when near Cloverport the boat struck a snag and sank so rapidly that several on board were drowned. She managed to secure a plank and on this floated down the river until she came to Yellow Banks where she was discovered and rescued. She had lost everything and desiring to teach small children, a public spirited man, Mr. Philip Thompson, gave her the use of a cabin and as there was a plentiful supply of children, her school was soon in a flourishing condition. This cabin was on the ravine and it was thought to be too far out for the children. So the school was moved to another cabin on the South-west corner of Main and Allen. Later she built a cabin on what is now Crittenden Street between Main and Third. Here she taught until old age came on.



The first school for older children was built by the same man, Mr. Thompson. This was a brick building of one room on what is now Third Street School grounds. It was built on the Hartford road which ran along the southeast corner of Third Street School ground, going diagonally across to the northwest corner on down to Buzzard Roost Road. It was built on a small hill and was entered by eight or ten steps. It had several names. The Daviess County Academy, Daviess Academy, Seminary, Baptist College and others. It had many teachers among whom were Messrs. Woodruff, Gray, McIntire and Hart.

The first teacher was Mr. Scarborough, a young man from the East, a relative of Mr. Phil Watkins. He furnished the room with desks, ink wells and shades to keep the boys from looking out of the windows watching for the boats and trying to guess the names as they passed. He taught here until the house being struck by lightning, the roof was burned off. Then he built a palatial mansion, the wonder of all, and called it Snowdon Castle. It was located on the Ravine and in later years was known as the McAlister place. It was a large square brick building. The Buzzard Roost road ran between it and the river; beyond the road was a large grassy plot which was the boys play ground and here they would watch the boats go down the river carrying General Zachary Taylor's troops to the Mexican War.

Mr. Scarborough was an exemplary young man. He did not use tobacco in any form, drink or bet on horse races - so was a real curiosity to the young men of the time.

Mr. Hart taught in the Academy until he built a house of his own on Daviess Street just beyond Fifth. Here he taught, assisted by Misses Mattie Stewart and Lizzie Weir and Mrs. Singleton, until his health failed and he had to move to Texas.

Miss Stewart then opened a school for girls in a log house located at the northwest corner of Third and Allen.

Another school for girls was taught by a Mrs. Smith for a year, on Main Street. She was succeeded by Mrs. Raphael and her daughter Hettie. They taught a very successful school until her daughter married Major Smith.

A boarding school was taught by Rev. Taylor in the Kennedy house (later called the Wandling house) at the corner of Allen and the river. The class room was the large front room upstairs. It had had an open fire place but this had been closed with a piece of tin and a flue hole cut so as to heat it with a stove. One day a boy secured a false face, and when the children were out at recess put it in the flue hole and got in behind the tin. When the children came in he began to moan and groan and beat on the tin making as ghostly noise as possible. The children were frightened most to death - screaming - falling down stairs, and running, never stopping until they reached their own home.

A school was taught at what was called Bransford Institute; at Fourth and St. Ann, and Mr. Gray opened a classic school for boys on Bolivar near Fifth. Close by was the German American School,

Mrs. Sue Philips had a school for young ladies at Fourth and Walnut. It was known as Vaughn Seminary. She was succeeded by Messrs. Mitchel, Wines and others, the last of whom were Mrs. Klinger and Mrs. Van Renselear.

My uncle told me of a school taught by Mr. Davenport, on Lewis Street near Fifth. He was a cripple and very high tempered. One day one of the boys from the country brought him a fine turkey for Thanksgiving. Mr. Davenport thought the boy was trying to buy him and flew into a great rage, thrashing the boy soundly with his cane and breaking it in the melee.

Up to 1834 there were no church organizations in Yellow Banks. The first sermon ever preached here was by a Cumberland Presbyterian Minister, Rev. David Lowry. The first prayer

meeting was held by another Cumberland. Minister, Rev. Sam Calhoun. Most of the churches were organized and held their first services in the Court House, which was built of logs, having a sawdust floor and plank seats.

The Baptist organized in 1839 with eight white members and 18 colored. The colored members soon withdrew and built them a log house on the ravine where their brick church now stands.

The Methodist and Baptist held a union meeting which was very successful; half of the converts joined the Baptist and half the Methodist. The Baptist built a church at the corner of Crittenden and the river, just opposite where Broeker's mill now stands. They still have on their records where \$2.00 had been contributed to stop up the holes to keep the hogs out of the church. This church was of brick, a small Colonial building with a porch and columns, and was entered by steps at the ends of the porch.

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All the Baptist children were enrolled on the Methodist Sunday School roll and all the Methodist in the Baptist Sunday School; as one held their Sunday School in the morning and the other in the afternoon.

When the Methodist bought an organ some of the dear good bretheren and sisters objected thinking it was the instrument of his Satanic Majesty, and one Aunt Polly Copeland left the church because of it. But being a Methodist she practised her belief and fell from grace but she soon came back.

Both Presbyterian Churches organized in the Court House - The Cumberlands built on St Ann between Third and Fourth, where the Troy Laundry has been. They had the first pipe organ installed in any church here. The Presbyterians built on Third Street between St. Ann and Allen, the building now occupied by the Central Trust Company. During the war the church divided and the Fourth Street Presbyterians built at Fourth and Crittenden the small church in the rear of their present church. It is now used as an Educational department.

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The Episcopal Church was organized in the Masonic lodge and held their services over Dr. McGill's drug store which was where Mr. Bates is now, corner Third and St. Ann. Later they bought a carpenter's shop on Frederica near Sixth and worshiped there until they built on Fifth Street near Frederica.

A few Sundays ago Dr. Hodge in his sermon, brought out the fact that no settlement or town ever grew or improved until it had churches in its midst. This is true of Yellow Banks. In 1830 there were only about 200 inhabitants, and in 1834, according to Col. Holmes' notes, there were 229. The business part of the town was on the river front and extended out two blocks on Frederica. The first store was run by Mr. Morton. The stores were built of brick, as a Kiln had been started, and it was the cheapest material obtainable, plank having to be sawed by hand. They carried most everything, dry goods, groceries, hardware, drugs and even whisky which sold at 25 cents a gallon. A broad campus extended all along the river front and where the levee is now was the old circus grounds where big, little, old and young were drawn by the glitter and tinsel of the passing show, which came through in wagons or down the river on flat boats.

The best known and most popular woman that ever lived in Owensboro or Yellow Banks was Mrs. Harriet Roberts, She was the daughter of Gen. John Daveiss who lived on a farm just above Owensboro. This home was called Laurel Lodge but she and her sisters called it Lonesome Ledge because in the winter, owing to the bad roads, sometimes they would not see any one for weeks except the family.

When a young girl her father sent her to Yellow Banks to school, she lived with her sister Mrs. Ogden, whose home was on Federica Street between Main and Third, The most beautiful home in Yellow Banks, at this time, was that of Dr. John Roberts. It was located on the square that is now between Main and Third and Lewis and Daviess It was it large brick house with a wide spacious hall. The rooms on each side were 24 feet square. With its lovely doorway and windows it was a beautiful and perfect example of Colonial architecture. It faced Main Street and as the house was close to what is now Third Street there was a large space in front. This space was made into a wonderful flower garden. This garden was laid off in squares. At the corner of each were large clumps of shrubbery and inside the squares were different shaped flower beds containing all kind of old fashioned flowers, some of which were always in bloom. This home was the pride and wonder of Yellow Banks and every one in passing stopped to admire the lovely flower garden and the beautiful home in the rear, Little Harriet Daveiss and her school girl friends were no exception to this rule, and every day as they passed on their way to the Seminary they would always stop to enjoy its beauty,

One day as they were going by they had been talking, as girls will, of what they would do when they were grown and had finished school, and as they were passing this home and as usual had stopped to admire it, little Harriet said, "I am going to come back to Yellow Banks and live in this house". One of her friends said "You will do nothing of the kind, that is my Aunt Mary's home". Little Harriet insisted that it made no difference whose home it was, she was going to live there. And when she found that it teased her friend she kept it up, little thinking that it would come true.

One day she happened to look out of the window into the window of a store close by and saw some one rolling pills. She could only see his hands and thought she had never seen such beautiful shaped hands, so small or so white. She asked her sister who it was and was told it was Dr. Henry Roberts of Frankfort and he had come to go in partnership with his brother Dr. John Roberts. (Dr. John Roberts was the first doctor in Daviess County, coming here from Frankfort in 1811. He married Miss Mary Moseley, whose father was the last Revolutionary soldier to die in Daviess County. Mr. Moseley is buried on the little elevation in the Fifth Street Cemetery, in a brick vault. His body has never been moved).

In a short time Dr. Roberts asked Dr. Ogden who that pretty little black haired girl was and that, he would like to meet her. He meet little Harriet and when her school days were over, she returned to Laurel Lodge, Dr. Roberts soon followed and in a short time they were married. She was not quite seventeen. Dr. Roberts brought her to Yellow Banks and as his brother's wife had died, Dr. John invited him to bring, his bride and live with him and when he died he left the home to his sister-in-law.

I do not know how much land went with the home but the Roberts' were great fox hunters and kept many dogs. Their kennels were scattered around everywhere. The largest kennel was at the corner of Fourth and Lewis just where Mr. Ray's home is now.

The last buffalo in Daviess County was killed on the lot where the Public Library now stand.

The first court was held in a log house that had been a residence and was presided over by Judge Broadnax of Hartford. He was very popular with the settlers and was rather old fashioned. He still wore knee pants, with silver buckle at his knees, and his hair plaited and tucked up with a comb. His salary was from \$600 to \$800 a year, payable in corn.

The first will probated was in 1815 that of Mr. J. H. McFarland whose second wife was the first white child born in County. They were the great grand parents of Miss Nora Kennedy.

The first newspaper was the "Owensboro Bulletin" started In 1844. It was a Whig paper favoring Henry Clay as President.

The first railroad was built in 1826 by Mr. Robert Triplett. It extended from his coal mine at Bon Harbor Hills to the river a distance of three quarters of a mile. It was run by mule power. This was not only the first railroad in the county but also first in Kentucky and is thought to be the first in the entire west.

The first passenger railroad was not built until 1871. It was a branch of the L. & N. When the locomotive, which was named Joe Daveiss, arrived by boat, all Owensboro were at the wharf to welcome it, and it was a great day in Owensboro when an excursion on the new road, was run in March. It went 14 miles but in April another one went as far as Livermore.

The first bank was the National Bank established in 1850 as a branch of the Louisville bank. It is still in a flourishing condition.

The first hotel of any importance was the Planters House, built in 1846 of logs. It was heated by wood stoves, lighted with kerosene lamps and had a wash room containing a basin and roller towel. It opened with a great ball to which tobacco buyers from Louisville, St. Louis and Cincinnati came. The guests named the hotel that night. It has entertained a number of notables in its time, among whom was Jennie Lind who was on a boat going to St. Louis to give a concert. While the boat was here she came up to the hotel and was entertained. The Planters House has been rebuilt and remodeled several times and today has all the modern improvements.

Charles Dickens also visited Yellow Banks. He too was on a boat going to St. Louis to give a lecture. The boat was stranded opposite Yellow Banks and he with several other passengers came over to Yellow Banks and stayed while the boat was being repaired.

In Washington Irving's book Wolfert's Roost, the story "Early Experiences of Ralph Ringwood" is a story of this section. All the characters in the story were well known here at that time. Bill Smothers, John Miller (a noted hunter, friend, a neighbor of Bill's) Judge Broadnax, Peggy and Polly Schultz and others. The only fictitious name used was Ralph Ringwood, who was in reality William Duval. He was a personal friend of Washington Irving and told him many times of his experiences as a young hunter in this district, living for a time with Bill Smothers, and John Miller. Later he studied law, became a noted lawyer, member of Congress, member of the Convention that formed the Constitution of Kentucky and was appointed by the President as Governor of the Territory of Florida. He often returned to Kentucky and visited here and at Hartford where he owned property. Being quite popular he was always warmly welcomed.

Daviess County has added its quota of men to serve the Government, among whom Hon. T. C. McCreary, United States Senator, Col. Charles Todd, Minister to Columbia S. A. and later minister to Russia; Mr. George Yeaman, Minister to Denmark and Mr. Ed Rumsey Wing, Minister to Ecuador.

Col. Joe Daveiss' peculiarity 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 Philip Thompson and Robert Triplett. This did not end fatally however, and the men afterwards became great friends.

The Industries started in the early days of Yellow Banks continue to be some of the leading industries of today. A brick kiln started in 1820 located, at what is now 5th and 7th, St. Ann and Allen Streets. This industry still continues although differently located.

Coal has been successfully mined from the earliest days and is still a thriving industry.

Tobacco was one of the first crops raised in the county. The first factory built in 1830 by Major Smith. In these days there were few wagons in the county; the farmers had to make their own hogsheads. They pieced a pole in the center, letting it extend out about six inches at either end. The tobacco was then carefully packed, the head put in, shafts fastened to the end of the poles, and when a horse was hitched to the shaft the tobacco was rolled to town and then shipped on flat boats to New Orleans.

Whisky had always been made, more or less, but it was not until 1850 a distillery was built. From that time on this business grew rapidly until stopped by prohibition.

The Daviess County fair was first organized in 1850 as The Daviess County Agricultural and Mechanical Association. It held its meeting on Mr. Triplett's farm. An amphitheatre was built in 1853 about where Walnut Street School now stands. Later it was moved to what was known as Paradise Gardens, on lower Main Street. During the war these grounds were seized by the Government for Camping grounds. After the war it was reorganized under the name of Daviess County Fair Company and grew in importance until it became the greatest fair in Kentucky and was looked forward to from year to year as the greatest event of the year.

In 112 years this wilderness settlement has grown into a thriving city of 25000. It has not reached its present size and influence by any sky-rocket flashes but it has been a steady growth based on a firm foundation. The men at the helm have almost always been men of character and ability. They loved their home and looked to its future, meeting the many problems and perplexities of their time with bravery unequalled and a spirit undaunted by hardships doing what they thought was just and right for the good of all as they saw it.

Soon this generation will be numbered with the past. Other generations taking our place, they too, no doubt, will be looking back, as we are now, discussing the past and what we accomplished or failed to accomplish. That will be their criticism of us? Let us hope they may be able to truthfully say of us as we of our predecessors "Well done thou good and faithful servant".



## **Notes about the author – Cora Lee Webb**

**By Jerry Long**

Cora Lee Webb, daughter of David Webb (1825-1878) & Sarah Jane Ellis (1843-1870), was born 4 December 1868 in Daviess County, KY and died 27 February 1958 in Owensboro, Daviess County, KY. She was teacher in the Owensboro and Daviess County schools for over 50 years. She served as art supervisor in the Owensboro city schools.

Miss Webb was a prominent member of numerous Owensboro social clubs, including the Owensboro Woman's Club, Reading Club, Garden Club, Shakespeare Club and Art Club. She delivered many lectures on various topics and published several articles, including "Early Days of Yellow Banks" (1927) and a history of the Settle Memorial Methodist Church (1935).



Cora Lee Webb – In 1927 she was a member of the faculty of Owensboro High School

Lee A. & Aloma W. Dew in their book, Owensboro: The City on the Yellow Banks (Rivendell Publications, Bowling Green, KY, 1988, p.209) reported that:

For many years some citizens of Owensboro had recognized the need for a museum. In 1923 Miss Cora Lee Webb, a teacher in the Owensboro public schools, founded an organization called the Green River Museum and Art Society. Several exhibits were displayed in the Carnegie Library, but financial support was not forthcoming and gradually the project was abandoned except for a few cases of exhibits which remained at the library. An effort was made to resurrect the project in 1955, but it failed for lack of adequate financing.

The Owensboro Messenger announced Cora Lee Webb's retirement in its edition of 6 August 1937 (p.6):

#### Miss Webb Resigns

The resignation of Miss Cora Webb, who has been connected with the city schools thirty-five years, was accepted with regret. Miss Webb for several years taught in the elementary schools before being made teacher of art at the Senior high school and supervisor of art in the city schools, which she has held for many years.

Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 28 February 1958, p.1:

#### Miss Cora Webb Dies; Taught For Over Half Century

Miss Cora Lee Webb, 89, who taught school for more than half a century, died at 8:35 p. m. Thurs day at her home at 322 E. 3rd St., after an illness of several months. She had been bedfast with a stroke since May.

The daughter of pioneer Kentucky residents, she began teaching in the county schools when she was 17. She moved to the city system in 1893 where she taught until she retired in 1937.

She was the first supervisor of art in the city school system and was a member of the Settle Memorial Methodist Church. Surviving are cousins, Mrs. Nester Howard, Owensboro; Mrs. Mildred Cronise, Montclair, N. J.; Rowland P. Ellis, Clearwater, Fla.; Mrs. Muriel Billings, Thruston; Louis Ellis, Owensboro, and several second cousins.

The body is at the Owensboro Funeral Home where services will be held at 2:30 p. m. Saturday with the Rev. Bedford Turner, assistant pastor of Settle Memorial Methodist Church, officiating. Burial will be in Elmwood Cemetery.

Shortly after her death Owensboro High School instituted the Cora Lee Webb Art Award that is granted at their annual honor's day ceremony.



Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY,  
section C – Webb family lot

FORM V. S. NO. 1-6 REV. 1-58 FEDERAL SECURITY AGENCY U. S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE NATIONAL OFFICE VITAL STATISTICS		COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS CERTIFICATE OF DEATH		FILE NO. 116 58- 7506	REGISTRAR'S NO. 105
Registration District No. 410		Primary Registration District No. 2145			
1. PLACE OF DEATH a. COUNTY <u>Daviess</u>		2. USUAL RESIDENCE a. STATE <u>Ky.</u> b. COUNTY <u>Daviess</u>			
b. CITY (or include corporate limits, with street and give block(s)) <u>Owensboro</u>		c. LENGTH OF STAY (in last place)		c. CITY OR TOWN <u>Owensboro</u> IS RESIDENCE ON A FARM? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
d. FULL NAME OF HOSPITAL OR INSTITUTION <u>322 E. 3rd St.</u>		e. STREET ADDRESS <u>322 E. 3rd St.</u>		f. RESIDENCE UNDER CITY LIMITS? YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	
3. NAME OF DECEASED (Name or friend) <u>CORA LEE WEBB</u>		4. DATE OF DEATH <u>2 27 58</u>			
5. SEX <u>FM</u>	6. COLOR OR RACE <u>W</u>	7. MARRIED, NEVER MARRIED, WIDOWED, DIVORCED (Date) <u>Never Married</u>	8. DATE OF BIRTH <u>Dec. 4, 1868</u>	9. AGE (in years, months and days) <u>89</u>	
10a. USUAL OCCUPATION (Give kind of work done for most of time last year) <u>School Teacher Teaching</u>		10b. KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY <u>Teaching</u>		11. BIRTHPLACE (Name or address of county) <u>Kentucky</u>	
12. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY? <u>U.S.A.</u>		13. FATHER'S NAME <u>David Webb</u>		14. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME <u>Sally Ellis</u>	
15. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U. S. ARMED FORCES? (If yes, give year of entry or dates of service)		16. SOCIAL SECURITY NO. <u>331X - 070-14</u>		17. INFORMANT <u>Mrs. Ester Howard</u>	
18. CAUSE OF DEATH PART I. DEATH WAS CAUSED BY: IMMEDIATE CAUSE (a) <u>Cerebral hemorrhage</u> DUE TO (b) <u>arterio-sclerosis</u> DUE TO (c) <u>331X - 070-14</u> PART II. OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS CONTRIBUTING TO DEATH BUT NOT RELATED TO THE TERMINAL DISEASE CONDITION GIVEN IN PART I (a)		MEDICAL CERTIFICATION		INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET AND DEATH <u>10 mos</u>	
19. ACCIDENT SURFACE (Underneath)		20. DESCRIBE HOW INJURY OCCURRED (State nature of injury in Part I or Part II of item 18.)			
21a. TIME OF DEATH Hour <u>11</u> Month <u>2</u> Day <u>27</u> Year <u>1958</u>					
21c. INJURY OCCURRED WHILE AT WORK <input type="checkbox"/> AT HOME <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		21d. PLACE OF INJURY (e. g., in or about home, farm, factory, street, office bldg., etc.)		21e. CITY, TOWN, OR LOCATION COUNTY STATE	
22. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from <u>Jan 14, 1958</u> to <u>2 27, 1958</u> that I last saw the deceased alive on <u>2 27, 1958</u> and that death occurred at <u>8:30 PM</u> from causes and on the date stated above.					
23a. DATE SIGNED <u>4-5-58</u>		23b. ADDRESS <u>Owensboro</u>		23c. SIGNATURE <u>Leo Tyler M.D.</u>	
24a. BURIAL CEMETERY (Or REMOVAL) (Name) <u>Burial</u>		24b. DATE <u>3/1/58</u>		24c. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY <u>Elmwood Cemetery Owensboro Ky</u>	
24d. DATE REC'D BY <u>2/7/58</u>		24e. REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE <u>E. F. BROWN M.D.</u>		24f. FUNERAL DIRECTOR <u>Owensboro Funeral Home Owensboro, Ky.</u>	

