

Calhoun Described by Jennie Leachman (1860-1946)

By Jerry Long
c.2025



The following article under the title of “Calhoun is a Growing Village of Many New Homes” was originally published in the McLean County News on 4 September 1952. The original copies of the newspaper for 1952 no longer survive. A clipping of the article, however, was preserved in the Capt. William Rowan Chapter D.A.R. 1952 scrapbook. The article with the title of “Calhoun – Early resident recounts memories of bygone era of town”, was reprinted in the Bicentennial Issue of the McLean County News on 1 July 1976. The title and introduction of the 1952 edition were utilized in the following transcription.



Jennie Leachman

The author of the article, Jennie Leachman, was Jennie Catherine Robards, who was born in Calhoun, McLean County, KY on 22 January 1860. Her parents, James Moss Robards (1813-1863) & Bethany Whitescarver (1824-1875) moved to Calhoun in 1855. Her father was murdered by Frank Shrader on the streets of Calhoun on 26 October 1863. Jennie married Abraham Hardy Leachman (1855-1926) in McLean County, KY on 21 December 1882. Jennie Leachman died at Calhoun on 21 October 1946. Jennie was buried with her husband in the Calhoun Cemetery. She was survived by two sons, Guy Forrest Leachman & Lucien Hardy Leachman.

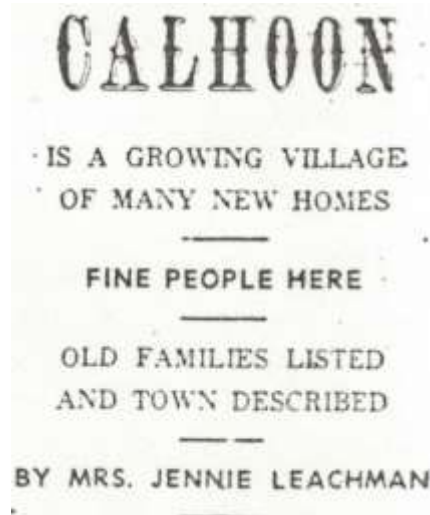


McLean County News, Calhoun, KY, 4 September 1952
and 1 July 1976, Bicentennial Issue, p.4:

The story in the next column was written by Mrs. Jennie Leachman shortly before she died in 1946 at the age of 86.

It is a sincere and thoughtful account of Calhoun as she remembered it down the years. It is the best record we have found of the period 100 years ago.

The NEWS is indebted to her son, L. H. Leachman for permission to use it in this manner. It should be noted that the time she speaks of as "now" was April 1946.



This is written for all who love this little town, on the grand old Green River, noted for its beauty of lovely scenery and the very best fish. This grand old town of Calhoun, my birthplace and a community full of fine people, here many tragedies have taken place and many noble deeds done.

In the year of 1841 my mother was married and came to live in Rumsey. She said that at that time only one house was here, a small house that stood on the river bank by the ferry and the ferry was then where it has always been, at the foot of Main street. Rumsey was then quite a flourishing little village.

Our town of Calhoun was named for Mr. John Calhoun, a farmer with a family of two sons and five daughters. I remember the daughters well and the mother. All were fine women. My mother liked all of them and one daughter who married Mr. Johnson was our closest neighbor for years. He was the owner of the J.W. Johnson and Sons Flouring and Saw Mill. The old mill stood until just a few years ago when it was torn down.

I wish first to tell of the old houses that were here when I was born. I think I know this is true as I was born Jan. 22, 1860 the year before the civil war and no building was done during the years of the war. Twelve of these old houses are still standing and most are good houses and still are lived in.

The house owned by Mrs. Sallie Hickman where she now lives was then lived in and owned by Mr. Henry Williams, a dry goods merchant.

The old two story brick building standing on the north side of the court house known as the Spicer building is the only business house of the old town now standing. I do not know who built this place but it was standing over eighty-six years ago.

The two story house on the corner of second street now the home of Howard Whitaker, was the home of Dr. Rose, a prominent M.D. who lived there for many years. He was living there when I was born and brought me into this world.

The two story house on second street now the home of Mrs. Leslie Moore was owned and lived in by two of our early lawyers. First by Bill Owens and later by George Prentiss. Both of these lawyers had fine families.

The house known as the Judge Stevens house was owned in my childhood days by Dr. Watkins M.D.

The house on the corner by the old parsonage, known as the Charlie Cox house was lived in for many years by Mr. Will Nolin.

The old parsonage is now lived in by Joe Cary. This old house then had only two rooms in front and a shed kitchen and back porch. The two story now owned by Mrs. Julia Landrum was built by the father of Mrs. Rea Cary, Mr. Rit Allen.

The house now known as the Seabald house was owned by a Mr. Louis Moore who was County clerk for years. He married a daughter of Mr. Jimmie Landrum. He and his brother Guss built the Catholic Church, both were members of that faith.

The home of the late Dr. Spicer and family was for many years the home of Mr. Harve Tanner. He married a sister of Mrs.. John Muster Sr. I remember a wedding supper there when I could not have been more than four years old. It was for a Mr. Mil Tanner and they served pigs feet jelly for desert. Jello was unknown then and this dessert was the same as our gelatine is now. And we children ran round the table to see the gelatine shake.

The old two story house where Prentiss Smith now lives was moved to its present location from the lot where the Court house now stands. It was moved along main street by oxen. I saw it moved and it was the home of Mr. Loyd Gates, one of our early lawyers, and the father of Dr. Hugh Gates, whose mother was Irene Calhoun Gates, the daughter of John Calhoun.

The old house still standing out by the Charley Locket house was built and lived in by C. P. Hale. He owned several acres of ground and had a big glass house, a tree nursery, flowers, grapes, etc., and raised apple trees from seeds planted in glass covered pits. He also made coffins in a shop that stood where the Lockett house now stands.

The house now known as the old Ballard House and owned by the Wiel brothers was a tavern in my childhood, owned by a Mr. Hicks, and had many more rooms in the back.

Ten or 12 Date From 1871

There are ten or twelve houses built before I was ten years old and still good houses. Some 75 years old and older. The Miss Nellie Gates house was built by one of our early lawyers Mr. Alford Tanner and lived in by him for many years. On this lot stood a little one room log cabin built by Mr. Phillip Wright for old aunt Mary Wright, then a slave. Aunt Mary lived to be more than a hundred years old. After the war this house was used for a school house and I went to my first school here when I was five years old. This same Spring of 1865. While I was going to school there Mr. Ree Glover built the house where Mrs. Lucy McEwen now lives. Mr. Glover lived there for several years then sold it to Mr. Arch Ayer. The same year, 1865, Mr. Bill King built the house now owned by James Epley.

At the time the west side of main street from the Baptist Church (the old church stood on the same location the Church now occupies) was a grove of beech trees out to where the Joe Miller residence now stands. Water stood under these trees and we children would skate where the Swint house now stands. There were no houses on the West side of the street from the Baptist church to where the Joe Miller house now stands.

Mr. Rea Glover bought the lot, cleared away the trees and built the house that is now the Methodist parsonage where he lived for several years then sold to Mr. Henry Griffith and built the house now known as the Weil House.

The next house built on this side of main street was the house now owned by Mrs. Clifton Stiles. The big trees were cut and this house built by Mr. Wall the Grandfather of Mrs. Ada Morgan, Mr. Wall built the house for Mr. Calvert who lived here for several years before selling to Mr. Wall the builder. This house had two front rooms with a kitchen connected to the house by an open porch.

At that time there were no Houses on the East side of main St. from the Epley House to the corner.

A little white cottage stood where the Gurden Shutt house now stands and was the home of Mr. Thornton Atchison the Grandfather of Mrs. Minnie Shackleford. Where the Joe Miller House now stands was an old two story house with many big trees in the yard and was for many years the home of Steven Baughn and family.

Calhoon House On Hill

I will begin now to tell of the old houses that stood oh Water street and who lived in them. Where the Richard Alexander house now stands, stood the home of Mr. John Calhoun for whom the town of Calhoun was named. This house did not face the river as other houses did on the street, but faced as the Alexander house now faces. This old house was torn down to build the present Alexander house, it was built by Mr. Woodford Hobson who married the granddaughter of John Calhoun, Mary Houston Hobson Ramsey.

This old house had the kitchen and servant quarters built in the back yard as so many of the old houses in slavery days had. All the cooking was done here and carried, winter and summer, rain or shine to the big house by the slaves.

The house of Dr. Gates (Nellie Gates' father) was on this same hill just in front of the Calhoun house. This house was much finer than the other houses, being a beautiful two story house with large bay windows made of small diamond shaped glass. The house was painted white and stood on the tip of the hill facing the river.

Where the Ed Bryant warehouse now stands was the first Court House, a square brick building facing the River , having a good view of Green river and the little town of Rumsey.

The two story brick jail stood back of the Court house. There was some trouble over the building of the Court House. I do not remember just what the trouble was but to settle the matter a committee of men were sent to select a site for the court house and they left a letter in the post office directing that the Court House be bunt on this hill.

Tragedies At Jail

I remember one of the tragedies that was connected with the old Jail. During the war a man whose name I do not remember had said something about the northern soldiers and the town was full of them, and he was put in jail. One night he was taken out of jail and hanged on an old thorn tree that stood for many years on the river bank in front of the Court House.

Then I was four or possibly five years old as I was born in January 1860. The war closed in 1865 and this took place during the war. One of Calhoun's foremost business men, a hot headed Southerner, Mr. Marshall McManama a dry goods merchant and a neighbor of my mother said something about the North he shouldn't have said and he was put in jail. The part I remember was a negro woman with a feather bed tied up. She was carrying the bed on her head and had her arms full of bedclothes. Mrs. McManama with George in her arms as he was only a crawling baby and Rena, Marchel and me running with them to the jail. I do not know why I was with them, but Rena

and I are the same age and played together but I remember the Negro woman making down the pallets on which we children slept together and Mr. and Mrs. McManama on the feather bed. I don't remember a thing about the next morning or how long Mr. McManama stayed in jail or if his wife stayed with him. His grandfather told me later that he was taken to the Louisville Jail and remained there for some time. The granddaughter having letters received by Mr. and Mrs. McManama while he was there in jail.

Then there was another man hanged from this old jail and I remember seeing the scaffold after he was taken down. It was piled in a corner of the big hall in the Court House for many years. This hanging took place sometime in the late sixties. This hanging was near the old tree where another hanging took place. My mother told me about it. A negro woman and her son set fire to buildings on the East side of Main St. about where the Hayden barber shop now stands. The man was taken out main street then only a tree lined road to Owensboro and hanged to a big sycamore where the Joe Miller residence now stands. I remember how afraid I was when I had to pass under this tree on my way to C. P. Hale's daily for milk and how I wondered from which limb he had been hanged.

Other houses still lived in and built, before I was ten years old. The Howden house as built on the lot where the first Methodist church stood, a big brick church, and the soldiers camped in it two winters during the war. In 1867 the year , of one of the biggest high waters some of the ground was washed from beneath the church and the west corner fell into the ravine, the ravine being much deeper at that time.

A Mr. Norris Foster built a house with two front rooms and a kitchen and porch. He lived here many years and sold to Mr. Luke Waltrip, he and his wife were old and died there. It was bought by Mr. Giles, a prominent business man and brother-in-law of Mr. W. H. Howden who later bought the home and business from Mr. Giles.

Watson House First School

The house where Clay Watson lives was the first public school building built here. One big room on the lower floor. The upper floor was built by the Masons and used as lodge room many years. The stairway ran up outside on the west end of the building. I think it was built in 1867.

The house on the hill known as the Shutt Home was built by Mr. John W. Johnson. He came from Virginia and married a daughter of John Calhoun. Mr. Johnson was a "gentleman of the old school" and how well I remember him. The Johnsons and the McManamas were my mother's neighbors for years and there were never finer people.

Mr. Johnson owned the flour and saw mill and they were a big business here for years. Mr. William Shutt another big business man here for years bought the business from Mr. Johnson also the home. I remember well when this house was built, it took a year to build it as all lumber was well seasoned and all the building and flooring was planed by hand. I don't remember who the carpenter was but I remember the man who plastered it – a Mr. Chandler, and the House was built in 1866 or 67. The house now owned by Will and Neader Short was built by William Noe in 1871.

The house where Mary Taylor lives, was built the same year by Billy Richmond another fine man. How I loved him and his wife and Mr. and Mrs. Noe our neighbors for years. How sad to think of all the wonderful fine people and good friends gone. Oh, Will I meet them all sometime soon on the other shore?

The Johnsons, Shutts, Richmonds, McManamas and Noes and Hales and so many more but these are the dearest.

West Side Of Main Street

Now I will begin on the corner of the West side of main street. The old house that was torn down to build the Turnstile Restaurant was one of the Hotels for years. This corner hotel was called the Grigsby House and it had a bar, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Lucas. Mrs. Lucas was said to be the best cook on Green River. Many people came from Owensboro to eat her chicken and fish, splendid white cake and biscuits. She went barefooted the year round. Not much to look at, but a fine woman.

Where the Holder Garage now stands was the two story brick dry goods store, built by Mr. Billy Richmond right after the war. He burned the brick near where the Blancett saw mill now stands. I remember the burning of the brick and building well.

Mr. Richmond had just come out of the army and married Miss Nannie King of Hartford. Two fine young people and our neighbors for years.

Next to this brick building was a small frame store used for the Postoffice. I believe this was the Henry Williams store before he built the brick. I remember well going there for the mail and one time Mr. Alfred Tanner was in there and asked me did I want a new dress and sat me on the counter and had the clerk to lay down several pieces of dress goods for me to pick out a dress. It was a late fall day and I picked out white calico with pink rosebuds and little black dots. How I cried when my mother told me I would have to wait till spring for my new dress. This was in 1866 or 67.

The next building on main street was a grocery and bar and furniture store run by Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham who were Germans.

Next to the grocery store was the Jimmie Landrum Hotel with bar. Every business then had a bar. This was the leading hotel for years. Jimmie Landrum had a big family and was a brother of Thomas Landrum a well to do farmer and the grandfather of Dyer and Bessie Landrum.

Then on this corner of west main street was a two story building. When I first remember it was a grocery and bar room run by a Mr. McDowell. They lived upstairs over the bar, they had no children. I remember when I was about five years old Mrs. McDowell came to my mother saying as it was election day and so many drunken in the bar room that she would not work in the grocery and she took me home with her up stairs. No woman or child ever went on the street of Calhoun on election day and I remember on this day a Mr. Dick Fitts was stabbed down in the street and they brought him up in Mrs. McDowell's room and put him to bed. He was stabbed in the back.

Now on the corner where the Citizens Bank was for years was a two story two room store built by my father. He came to Calhoun in 1855, bought a big seven room house and a square of ground of several lots. The square began on west main street where he built his store on the corner. At that time there were no buildings on the west side of main street. About one half way between the corner and where the Weil store now stands, my father built a two story two room saddle shop. Right where the Weil store now stands was my father's blacksmith shop and his wood workshop.

Took In Whole Square

The square ran back to where the John Cary home now is. That is where my father's stable and corn crib stood. These lots ran through to where the Editor Collins home stood that burned a few years ago, then straight on to the corner store buildings.

Our house was nearly in the center on this square – a 7 room two story house with a long front porch the whole length of the front two rooms and a wide hall. This porch was bannistered with a wide doorway opening on the brick pavement. A long front yard ran down to the bannistered foot bridge that ended on main street by the side of the saddle shop. The wide pavement went to the entrance to the foot bridge with a summer house in each corner covered with vines and many flowers in our yard. This is my first home as I remember it.

Over where the editor's house stands, at this time stood a little three room log house built for one of my older sisters by my father.

After my father's death my mother sold the store and grocery to Mr. McManama and rented and then sold our big house to him. His family lived in it for many years. Mr. McManama then built a new house on the Editor Collings lot that burned and our house has been gone for years.

War Time Tragedy

Now I have one more tragedy to tell that happened here on the street October 26, 1863. The war was about the worst on this October. My father, James Robards, ran his dry goods store, saddle shop and grocery store, blacksmith and wood work shop. His man who did the blacksmith work had to leave for war and my father went up to the house of Frank Shrader to hire a negro man who was a good blacksmith and belonged to Shrader's wife. He hired him but on coming back to town he learned that the negro had run away the day before – so many negroes were running away across the Ohio hoping to find freedom. On Saturday evening my father was trying to fix something at the anvil in the shop and Shrader came in drunk and said he had come to collect Bill's month's pay. My father said "Now Frank, you are drunk and when you are sober you will not want me to pay for something I never got. I am busy so go on off and I will talk to you later. Mr. Thornton Atchison was the only one in the shop. He said that Shrader, with an oath, said "Pay me now or I will get a gun and kill you." He said my father just worked on and Shrader walked out of the shop and Mr. Atchison went into the next room to work. On hearing a gun fire he ran to see my father fall backwards on the pavement on the street right where Sam Brenner's door opens on the street. Shrader had walked up and shot him in the back through the heart and father never spoke. Shrader began to wring his hands and say, "Oh why did I kill the best friend I ever had, I was crazy drunk, why didn't someone keep me from killing him. It was said that Shrader came to town often and got drunk and was mean and quarrelsome. When he did, my father would go and get him and put him in his buggy and send the negro man to take him home.

That was Saturday evening and I was three years old but I remember it. I was standing in the door across the street, heard the gun, saw an old aunt run to my father, saw my mother drop in a faint, saw them carry my father on a plank over the little foot bridge, saw them lay him out at the front hall at home. I was born January 22, 1860 this was October 26, 1863.

Tom Shackleford was sheriff at the time and he arrested Shrader but instead of taking him to jail he took him over to Rumsey to Shackleford's home. Old Mr. William A. Johnson went on his bond. Monday morning Shackleford took Shrader up to his home, he claimed, to get Shrader a clean shirt. Shrader left Shackleford in the family room while Shrader went in the kitchen to change his shirt. When Shrader didn't come back Shackleford went to find him and found Shrader had gone through a window and up in a field. A negro had his horse ready.

Shackleford got in his buggy to go for help but found the bridge torn away by Shrader's negroes, so he was gone. There were no railroads in the country, no telegraph lines nearer than Louisville and they were all cut by the army. Father's brothers offered three thousand dollars reward, the State two thousand but Shrader was never found. About eight or ten years later he cut his own throat from ear to ear in Texas.

Doctors & Preachers

I remember well the prominent men of our town, the Drs., Lawyers, Circuit and County Clerks and Preachers and will name them as they come to my mind. The doctors here through the 60's and later were: Dr. Rose, Dr. Watkins, Dr. Jim Cosby, Dr. Ab Cosby, Dr. Jackson, Dr. Jones.

The Drs. through the 70's and 80's and later were: Dr. Dillons Robertson, Dr. Elbridge Foulks, Dr. Howard, Dr. Linthicum. Later years: Dr. Spicer, Haynes, Cates and Miller. All these good men are dead. Doctors don't live long.

Early day preachers that I recall:

Baptist: Jim Coleman, Kenchen Hay, John Peay.

Methodist: Hunter, Edennigton, Bogous.

Presbyterian: Casky, a fine old man.

Rev. Coleman was the biggest of the Baptist Church and he and the Presbyterian, a big man too, Rev. Casky, had a big debate in the Baptist Church. The subject was Predestination.

The only church was the Baptist Church at that time. The Presbyterians preached in the court house and the Methodists used the Baptist Church. I can't remember the County Judges, only one, Douglas Little. For many years the same person was circuit and county clerk. Those who held these offices were: Henry Overstreet, Louis Moore, George Priest, Matelus Cravens, Mat Nickols, Remus Cary, Walter Raferty.

Our lawyers were many, as so many trials made long weeks of court – two or three weeks of court with many smart men, lawyers and Judges from Daviess, Muhlenburg Henderson County. Our lawyers at an early date were: Jep Johnson, W.B. Noe, G.D. Prentice, Joe Miller, Joe Noe, G. W. Hickman, Bill Owens, Lloyd Gates, W. Boston, Dave Kincheloe, Glover Cary, Lawrence Tanner, Lee Gibson. Only three of these men are living now, L.W. Tanner, Lee Gibson and Dave Kincheloe.

Now I hope I have written this plain enough so you can read it. I am only an old woman 86 years old who loves her native town. I am blessed with a good memory and I wanted to leave a record of the friends of long ago that this and other generations that read it will know names of the houses of some of the finest people. Oh, that I could tell you many grand and good deeds done by them but as I am no writer I can only ask you to remember this town has always been blessed with good people just as it is today.

Please remember me as a very happy old woman who has made many mistakes of the head, had many trials, but many years ago I took as my creed and tried hard to live up to it.

"Accept each day cheerfully as it comes. Perform each daily task as though I were fulfilling my heart's desire.

Think only good of myself and my neighbor, see the spirit of love in all things and the day shall be filled with sunshine and the heart shall be glad, and I will give the gladness of a song in the night.

I failed to give the names of the first Jury in McLean County. This was published many years ago in a McLean County paper.

Grand Jury, William T. Short, Foreman, Benjamin Coffman, Wm. H. Crabtree, John W. Brown, James Robards, George W. Allen, Wm. Galloway, George Dame, Isaac B. Riggs, James D. Shackleford, , Jake M. Shutt, George Leachman, Sr., James Little, P.F. Lockett, T.W. Shackleford, W.N. Nall. R.A. Hunt,

Petit Jury, Wm. Gibson, Thomas Hay, Wm. A. Johnson, E. Flemming, John A. Payne, W.L. Whitaker, Tom Tanner, Jr., J.M. Tanner, R. Tanner, R. Harris, D. Baker, R. Stroud, Thom. Dame, H. Jett, R.C. Mosely, W.H. Brown, T.C. Christy, W. Waltrip, J.D. Glover, Bales Whayne, P.W. Wright, Wm. Sellers and W.N. Townsend.

Some of the descendants of these men are still in the County and many are living in Calhoun.



McLean County News, Calhoun, KY, Thursday 4 September 1952:

Too Many Calhoons:

We've never found the whole story of the spelling of the name of Cahoon – Calhoun. In many old books, newspapers and letters, it is spelled Calhoon. This spelling continued until up in the eighties. One of the four old cemeteries on top of Fort Vienna hill is traditionally the burying place of some of the Calhoons for which the town is named. There is a monument there to “John Calhoon, born April 13, 1793, died Oct. 15, 1852.”

Was this the man named in the act organizing Calhoun?

And if so, is he the one the town was named after?”

Rothert’s History of Muhlenberg County says the town was named for Judge John Calhoon. who was born in Henry county in 1797. Shortly thereafter he came to the Green River country with his father. In 1820 and 21 he represented Ohio county in the legislature. In 1825 he moved to Breckinridge county and went to the legislature there several times. From 1835 to 1839 he was a member of Congress. In 1841 he was appointed Circuit Judge.

Now, is this a different man from the one whose monument stands on Fort Vienna hill? If so, what is the connection? Which one was the organizer of Calhoun? For which one was it named?

How To Spell It?

Why the Spelling was changed to Calhoun, we don't know. We have heard that there was a dispute within the family and one faction, to show that they had no connection with the other, changed the spelling to Calhoun. If that is so, apparently the town decided to follow the new-school faction, for it is now Calhoun.

Still others say Calhoon was named for John C. Calhoun, the South Carolina statesman. If so, how did it come 'to be spelled double-o when he spelled his name o-u. Or was it just poor spelling?

We needn't feel so bad though because our county seat has a confused spelling, and has had two other names (Rhoadsville and Fort Vienna). Owensboro used to be Yellow banks, then Owensborough. And Daviess county is a complete error. It was named for Joseph Hamilton Daveiss, a famous lawyer. But through an error in the bill establishing the county, it was spelled Daviess, Either one is hard to spell or pronounce correctly.



U.S., Appointments of U. S. Postmasters, Volume 14 – ca 1842-1858,:

Wm. H. Williams was appointed postmaster of the **Calhoun** post office in Daviess County, KY on 23 February 1849

Calhoun (Ky.) William H. Williams 23 Feb. 1849