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FARNSWORTH FANTASY

by Stephanie Britt

"Mother said she wanted a pretty house and they made her one."
Louise Farnsworth, March 1998

The residence at the intersection of Chestnut Street and 13th Avenue (1302 Chestnut) has been the home of the Farnsworth family since its completion in 1908, a fact few houses in the area can boast. The current resident of the home, Louise Farnsworth is ninety-eight years old and remembers coming to the house for the first time in late January 1908, only a few days after her eighth birthday. Louise arrived at the house with her grandmother in a horse-drawn taxi during a heavy snowfall. Her grandmother asked her what she thought of her new home and she replied it looked like Cinderella's palace.

The Farnsworth family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph M. Farnsworth and their four children Bland, Corilla, Aubrey and Louise. Mrs. Joseph Farnsworth had the house built from an inheritance she received. Louise recalls her mother being very involved in the construction of the home, traveling to the site almost daily to supervise the progress. Mrs. Farnsworth purchased the land upon which the house was built at a public auction in 1906, the lot being a part of Chestnut Street that was referred to as "The Smallhouse Lawn" after the previous owner. The Farnsworths chose their lot on the east side of Chestnut Street and the southeast corner of Thirteenth Avenue for its vantage point. From the front porch of the home, one can see up and down Chestnut Street and down Thirteenth Avenue. At the time of the home's construction, Thirteenth Avenue connecting Park and Chestnut Streets was not yet cut through. This did not occur until 1913.

When Louise Farnsworth first saw her family's new home in 1908, she said "it looked like Cinderella's palace."

Courtesy of Jonathan Jeffrey

(continued on page 4)
The Landmark Association of Bowling Green - Warren County

A non-profit organization established in 1976 as a community advocate for preservation, protection and maintenance of architectural, cultural and archaeological resources in Bowling Green and Warren County.

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Architectural Details

- Watch your mailbox for information related to a tour of Talbott Tavern in Transition that is being organized by vice-president J. David Bryant, who is the architect for the restoration project.

- Our kudos to David Garvin, Jr. for his preservation work on the Underwood-McElroy house at the corner of 13th and State Streets.

- We appreciate WKU for allowing us to remove some architectural salvage from a property they will be razing soon. Also thanks to board member George Morris for removing the items.

- The Bowling Green Historic Preservation Board is in the final stages of polling citizens in the Magnolia and Nutwood Streets area to see if that neighborhood should be designated as a zoned historic district. Two neighborhood meetings have already been held. Landmark board member and neighborhood resident, Dawn Slaughter, has rallied the preservation forces in the area.

- Mark December 12th on your calendar for Landmark's Christmas Open House Tour. The tour is being referred to as the ABC Tour (for A Bungalow Christmas Tour). This year's tour is being sponsored by our friends at Meyer Mortgage. We will have five homes in the Magnolia and Nutwood Streets area on the tour. Tour hours will be from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m.

- Start saving your fleas now for our fifth bi-annual Flea Market. After the new year rolls around, contact Flea Market chairman, Rick Voakes (843-3433) and George Morris (782-7724), about picking up your fleas for the sale. Remember we do not accept clothing. We have found that the best selling items include toys, small pieces of furniture, collectibles, kitchen ware, utensils, china, glassware, silverware, tools, lawn equipment and Christmas decorations. Still, it never ceases to amaze us what another person will buy.

Terry Leaves Riverview

Sam Terry, director of Historic Riverview at Hobson Grove for nine years and a Landmark member, resigned September 1, 1998. Landmark member Ruth Jerd has accepted the responsibility of interim director. We salute Terry for his important work at Riverview; many of us saw only a glimpse of how hard he worked to improve the property and the interpretation of it. Others know all too well the extent of his labor and how much he will be missed. Arriving on her first day, Jerd found the above poem written by Terry.
Before its demolition in 1936 to make way for Cherry Hall, Western students crowded into Recitation Hall, home to eleven academic departments. Few could have failed to notice that theirs was not the first institution to occupy this location atop the Hill, for on the arched portal above the building's entrance was inscribed its original name: "Pleasant J. Potter College."

"Potter College for Young Ladies" educated the better-off daughters of Bowling Green and the South from 1889 to 1909. It attracted sentimental praise long after its relatively short life. As Recitation Hall was being razed, Western English professor Dr. Gordon Wilson eulogized a landmark which, though less than fifty years old, always had "something of the long ago about it."

Wilson was right. Even when it was new, Potter College was old. Some observations about its founding and design help to explain why.

The purchase in March 1889 of a four-acre site at the crest of a rugged, cedar-covered rise known as "Vinegar Hill" or "Copley Knob" culminated more than a year's planning by a committee of Bowling Green businessmen. One of them also provided its founding legend. Public stock subscriptions had initiated the project, but when money ran low, Pleasant J. Potter contributed five thousand dollars to insure completion of the building. Not only was a stock company incorporated and the school chartered with the name of the sixty-eight-year-old banker, but young ladies in attendance soon began referring to their alma mater as "old Potter."

Although an elevated, well-drained site was planned for health reasons, the school's location on high ground at what was then the edge of town had its characteristic of women's colleges, particularly in the South, since the early nineteenth century. Ideally, wrote one educator, such schools were "a little retired from busy marts of commerce . . . embosomed in Sylvan Bowers, protected by Shady Avenues," and thereby "in harmony with the modesty and delicacy which are always associated with the gentler sex." Building design was meant to convey a similar message. After 1837, when Mary Lyon founded Mount Holyoke Seminary in Massachusetts, many female colleges adopted her "seminary" or "congregate" system in which classrooms, living and eating quarters, library and public rooms were under one roof. This home-like arrangement ensured constant protection, supervision, and the development of a girl's intellect in the context of enhancing her fitness in the domestic sphere.

Prominent Louisville architect Harry R. McDonald (who, with his two brothers, designed numerous university buildings, asylums and jails) accordingly conceived a structure that projected both the delicacy of its occupants and the physical mass necessary to control them. An asymmetrical three-story façade with tall, narrow windows, a square, four-story tower, and a low-pitched, hipped roof followed the Italianate style familiar to Kentuckians for almost forty years. Modest detailing substituted decorative brickwork under the eaves for the usual wide roof...
October 1998

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1998-1999

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This list was compiled on October 12, 1998. Any questions about your membership may be directed to the landmark office, 789-0037.

Membrship Matters!

New members since June 19, include:

Frieda Friedli
Ann Huksey
Susie Likes
Meyer Mortgage Corporation
Linda Todd

Sumpter Fund donations since June 19, include:

John & Jerre Fitts
Jonathan Jeffrey
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Mr & Mrs Michael Owslay
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PICNIC PAPARAZZI

Dorian and Elaine Walker (foreground) receive a framed invitation from the movie "200" in appreciation for their efforts in preserving a glimpse of Warren County's 200 years of history.

Landmark members Steve and Jeannie Snodgrass hosted the Landmark picnic on a sultry Sunday in August. As Romanza Johnson would say a good time was had by all. "We appreciate everyone's participation, particularly the Picnic Committee: Dawn Slaughter, Ward Begley, Jean Thomason, Jonathan Jeffrey and the Snodgrasses. All photos are courtesy of Ward and Susan Begley.

President Ward Begley and immediate-past president Dawn Slaughter present to Jim Meyer (right) of Meyer Mortgage a framed invitation to the movie "200" in appreciation for his underwriting the premier night reception.

A high-stepping Elvis enlivened the affair.

The next generation of Landmark members enjoy the picnic also.

Steve Snodgrass (left) accepts a home plaque for his home which served as the site for the picnic.

FARNSWORTH

(Continued from page 4)

Woolworth's located downtown on the square. The elevator works with a series of weights and ropes. Woolworth's was replacing the elevator with a more modern electric model. Louise's mother, suffering from an advanced heart condition and unable to climb the staircase to the second floor, bought the elevator for $148, including installation.

The light fixtures in the house are all original 1908 models with the exception of two chandeliers and a hanging glass fixture over the dining room table. The two chandeliers, one in the living room and the other in the library, were removed from the previous Farnsworth home at 713 State Street. These chandeliers originally contained gas jets but were converted to electric for the new home. Louise Farnsworth estimates the chandeliers are roughly 145 years old, as the previous house from which they were removed was built prior to the Civil War. The hanging glass fixture, purchased from Farnsworth Electrical, was added to the house about 1911.

The Farnsworth residence, built in 1908, is an important component of the College Hill Historic District. Architecturally this structure represents the period and character of the houses found in the district. Historically, the residents of the house reflect the background of the property owners once living in the area. The house's history also forms a link between the College Hill Historic District and the Downtown Commercial Historic District.

Residents of the house were associated with various businesses and occupations in and around the downtown area. Joseph M. Farnsworth, husband to the builder of the home and father to the current resident, owned a prosperous drugstore on the corner of Main and Adams Streets. A city directory of Bowling Green from 1905-6 lists the drugstore as Farnsworth and Stout Drugs, dealing in drugs, paints, oils, sundries, etc. Aubrey Farnsworth, son of Joseph, was a dentist whose offices were located on State Street across from the Woolworth's building. Blind Farnsworth, also the son of Joseph, was an electrician and proprietor of Farnsworth Electrical. Herschel Mitchell, husband to Corilla, daughter of Joseph, owned a music shop located on Eighth Street just off the square, dealing primarily in the sale of pianos. The store was an early competitor of Royal Music company on State Street.

Louise Farnsworth spent her career teaching 4th, 5th, and 6th grades at the Bowling Green public school system. Upon retirement in 1970, she had taught for 43 years in the Bowling Green public school system. Two of Joseph Farnsworth's children, Louise and Corilla, attended school on College Hill. When Louise attended WKU, it was known as Western Kentucky State Normal College. Her sister Corilla attended Potter College. Louise recalls in the late 1920s and 1930s before WKU had dormitories, local Bowling Green residents rented rooms to college students. The Farnsworth family took two boarders each semester, alternating from girls one semester to boys the next. Louise remembers the girls fondly, spending evenings after homework was completed chatting in the older girls rooms. Louise didn't enjoy the male boarders as much, her mother being strict about her steering clear of them.

The Farnsworth home is a significant structure in the College Hill Historic District. Few homes can boast single family ownership for over 90 years. On a pleasant day you can still catch a glimpse of Louise keeping vigil on the porch at 1300 Chestnut.
OLD POTTER (Continued from page 5)

overhang and bracketing, and a prominent string course offset the verticality of the tower and windows. Two large wings extended back 104 feet (a third wing was added to the west side in 1890), but flanked another home-like feature: a massive, three-tiered porch with spindlework supports adorning the rear facade.

Although Otis Wood, a master builder from Evansville, is said to have supervised the construction, much labor and material was provided locally, sometimes in exchange for stock. Owing possibly to a dispute with tradesman George Collett over the speed and quality of his brickwork, the one-hundred-room building was not opened until December 1889 but was, insisted the college catalog, "constructed after the most improved and modern methods of architecture." Following the mandatory Victorian separation of public and private spheres, elegant reception rooms, a dining room, kitchen, library and classrooms occupied the first floor, while two-occupant dormitory rooms shared the second and third floors with a music room, gymnasium and nine bathrooms. After "room bell" sent the girls upstairs to bed, locked lattice gates closed off access to the first floor. Potter College's president, Benjamin F. Cabell, his wife, and a watchful cadre of female teachers also resided in the building.

Though a source of pride to its alumnae and their parents, Potter College was born too late, for it was soon overtaken by new attitudes toward women's higher education. Students wrote of their dreams of being teachers, doctors, writers and artists while chafing at a succession of rules, bells, and institutional constraints. In their 1898 yearbook, one called herself a "Potter Prisoner." Some of the faculty light-heartedly "petitioned for relief" from the burden of their roles as chaperones and surrogate mothers. As early as 1875, in fact, planners of new women's colleges regarded the seminary style as out of date, favoring instead smaller, more specialized structures that gave students greater freedom to regulate their own conduct. More liberal views were not confined to larger colleges or cities. In 1901, after a sensational midnight episode during which President Cabell exchanged gunfire with local swains spiriting five students down a ladder from their second-story rooms, the Bowling Green News mocked the double standard that prompted Cabell to expel the girls while seeking leniency for the boys.

In 1907, Cabell built his own home next to the college. Whether or not he too had tired of the congregate life, his health began to fail and in May 1909 he closed Potter College and sold its hilltop campus to the Western Kentucky State Normal School. Potter's last graduates seemed less stricken than many of their elders, who protested the "destruction" of lic school invasion from (little the hill. In an affectionate memoir, "the Class of 1909 bid buildings a no, mice, "cell and hot water shortages. Grise was not so good-Hu the Normal School threat overcrowded Recitation Company," he grumbled, the highest type material. years, "Old Potter" was near

Potter College ladies in the gym. Calisthenics and creative movement were considered important parts of the curriculum. Courtesy of University Archives, WKU.

The Kentucky Building

[Editor's note: We give dozens of tours of the Kentucky Building every year for students. One insightful student wrote these cogent remarks. I can only add, "Preach it brother!"

I completely enjoyed my trip to the Kentucky Building. It was the first time I have ever been there and I was very impressed with their exhibits. In particular, I enjoyed the section on historic downtown Bowling Green. Before I started (at) Western I was a manager for a local heating and air conditioning company, and had the opportunity to work on several of these old buildings. Looking back I remember admiring the architecture of these buildings, the tall ceilings with stamped metal panels, the oak tongue and groove floors, the solid brick walls, all traits of an old building. Unfortunately I viewed the work on these buildings from a contractor's perspective and didn't give much thought to preserving the historic aspects. To me these jobs were always the hardest to do, because of the solid brick walls two feet thick and the oak flooring which required a chain saw to cut through. I really dreaded doing work on these buildings because of the difficulties involved, it was almost like the buildings were trying to say, "If you're going to change me, then you are in for a fight." But if these buildings are to survive I believe they must remain occupied by a business, which means modernized electrical, HVAC and data systems, something the buildings were not originally designed for. Hopefully in the future more thought will go into preserving the historic aspects of these buildings compared to today. Once these buildings are lost they can never be brought back.

Snell Hall

We also have good news about Snell Hall on WKU's campus. At this year's Opening Faculty and Staff Meeting held on August 18th, President Gary Ransdell listed roof replacement for Snell Hall as the number four item on his "Deferred Maintenance and Campus Improvements List." He had the renovation of Snell Hall, the Hardin Planetarium, and the Thompson Science Complex listed as his number one priority under "Building Renovations Priorities." This is good news! Snell Hall is Bowling Green's only Italian Renaissance structure that is a public building, the others are residences. It is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places under the Brinton B. Davis Thematic Scheme at WKU. Davis was a fine Louisville architect who designed a number of Western's buildings, including Van Meter, Gordon Wilson, Cherry Hall, the Old Stadium, Helm Library, the Kentucky Building, the Heating Plant, and the Industrial Arts Building.
Perhaps you could pass this newsletter along to someone you think would be interested in supporting Landmark's efforts in historic preservation advocacy.

I (we) want to support the Historic Preservation efforts in Bowling Green and Warren County.

Name

Mailing Address

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I have enclosed $________________ to support the Irene Moss Sumpter Preservation Endowment Fund.

Checks should be payable to: Landmark Association

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