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## Landmark Report (Vol. 20, no. 1)

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*"A future with a past"*

# LANDMARK REPORT

VOLUME XX, NUMBER 1

LANDMARK ASSOCIATION OF BG/WC

MARCH 2001

## Historic Home Transformed into "Destination Restaurant"

BY JONATHAN JEFFREY

Bowling Green has once again witnessed the result of what preservationists called adaptive re-use, a term used for preservation projects that protect a building while using it for something other than its intended purpose. This is a highly regarded and encouraged activity in the preservation arena. Many schools have been re-used as housing, depots transformed into museums and libraries, residences recreated into a wide array of businesses, post offices into shopping areas, etc. Sandwiched between Bowling Green's downtown post office and the behemoth Bowling Green Towers, the Parakeet Restaurant was once a private residence. Several misleading articles have referred to the house as being 175 years old and that Bill and Mildred Fletcher had more than one child. We felt it was time to set the record straight, while also celebrating the adaptive re-use of another Bowling Green landmark.

Dr. Thomas Briggs Wright, II had this home built in 1893 for his wife Harriette (Hattie) A. and their young son Burnett. Thomas was the



The Wright-Fletcher House at 1129 College Street.

son of Dr. Astley Cooper Wright and Mary Loving Wright. Mary hailed from Paris, Tennessee, and was known to have entranced many Bowling Greeners with her nimble-fingered harp recitals. T.B. attended local schools and matriculated in one of Nashville's medical schools prior to establishing a practice in Bowling Green. Less than a decade after building the house at 1129 College Street Dr. Wright died; he is buried

in Fairview Cemetery. He and his wife had five children: Burnett, Mary Loving, Astley Cooper, Daniel Webster, and Thomas Briggs III. Astley and Daniel did not live beyond five years of age and died at 1129 College.

Although the architect and/or builder is not known, the Wright-Fletcher house was well planned and constructed. Its masonry walls sit atop a battered limestone

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**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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# Historic Home Transformed

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foundation which boasts a lovely cut limestone water table. This type of construction can be seen in numerous turn-of-the-century homes in the city. Rock piers are strategically located in the basement to support floor joists. Salient exterior features include gables with fish scale shingles, towering chimneys, a central pyramidal roof, decorative door surrounds, several leaded glass transoms, cut stone lintels and sills, a handsome dormer perched on the steep roof, attractive projecting bays, ornamental vents, and an inviting verandah with a rough ashlar stone balustrade. There is some evidence to suggest that the porch is an addition to the house or a later adaptation of an original porch. Earlier Sanborn maps show a slightly different footprint for the porch area. The house's side entrance is believed to have been constructed to allow Dr. Wright's patients access to an office area on the northeast side of the house.

After Dr. Wright's death, Hattie

lived in the home until 1914 when she sold it to Oscar Carson Fletcher. Interestingly Hattie outlived her husband by forty years. Fletcher, who graduated from the Philadelphia School of Pharmacy in 1885, was the proprietor of the Bowling Green Drug Company. He became associated with that firm in 1909 and owned it by 1911. It was located in the Opera House and was sometimes referred to as the Opera House Drugstore. Eventually he became proprietor of Fletcher's Drugstore in the old Quigley-Younglove Building (900 State Street). Fletcher was a native of Woodburn and was the son of J.M. and Fannie Mason Fletcher. On 21 May 1903 he married Margaret (Maggie) Belle Hardin of Woodburn, and they had one son William (Bill) H. Fletcher. Oscar died 24 December 1930. His wife lived at 1129 College Street until her death on 12 October 1941. Both of the Fetters are buried in Fairview Cemetery. Mr. Fletcher

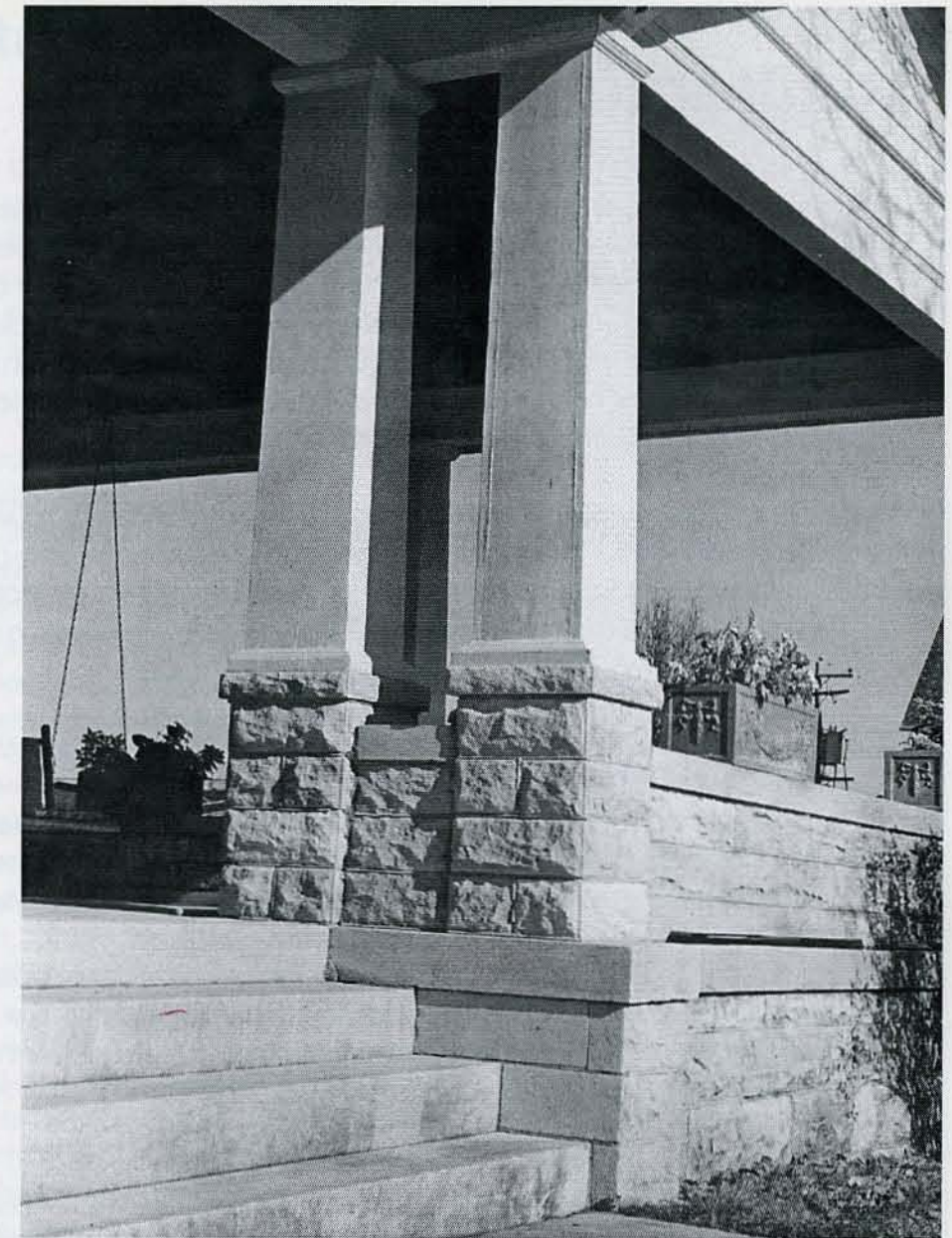
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The backyard stable before its transformation.



was a trusted pharmacist, and despite the teeming number of drugstores in the city, he maintained an enviable trade.

Bill Fletcher lived almost his entire life on this busy downtown street. He saw thousands of Bowling Green Business University (BU) students trudge past his home, he watched funerals leave from the funeral home next door, he noticed car owners filling up their tanks at the Gulf station at Twelfth & College, he heard the chatter of playing children next door at the College Street School or the screaming girls as they slid down the school's dreaded fire escape, he observed many a student wobble out of Reno's across the street, he noted the passing of each boarding house along his block, he saw the old BU's Frisbie Hall disappear, he viewed a fine law firm built at the corner of 12th and College, and he watched—perhaps with disbelief—as a multi-story residence hall loomed right outside his window. His home was a town-house in the truest sense of the word. Stories about Mr. Fletcher's pasimonious tendencies abound, but his house was so well-built that any neglect of it was not reflected on the exterior. Prior to the recent renovations, the home retained many of its original light fixtures, plumbing, and several other decorative features. Fletcher married a nurse, Mildred White, who received part of her training at the old City/County Hospital. She died in 1989. The couple had one daughter, Margaret Fletcher Huff. Bill died in 1996. The house, which had been in the family for 85 years, was auctioned off last year to Brian Springer, operator of the Parakeet



Evidence suggests that this attractive stonework was added later.

Restaurant, who wanted to move that eatery to a larger location. The Fletcher house was inviting. "It's solid, and people like to go to historical houses to eat," Springer said.

Some of the changes to the landscaping may be deemed excessive, but Springer wants his bistro to be a "destination restaurant" for out-of-town guests and a fresh experience for natives. The building, constructed as a single-family residence, can now

seat 400 which necessitated a number of major interior renovations. A deck was added to the rear and the old carriage house has been dramatically transformed. The paint colors enhance the gables; other changes have not significantly altered the overall texture of the facade. The Wright-Fletcher house is one of a growing number of successful adaptive re-use projects in Bowling Green; no doubt there will be more.

# Architectural Details



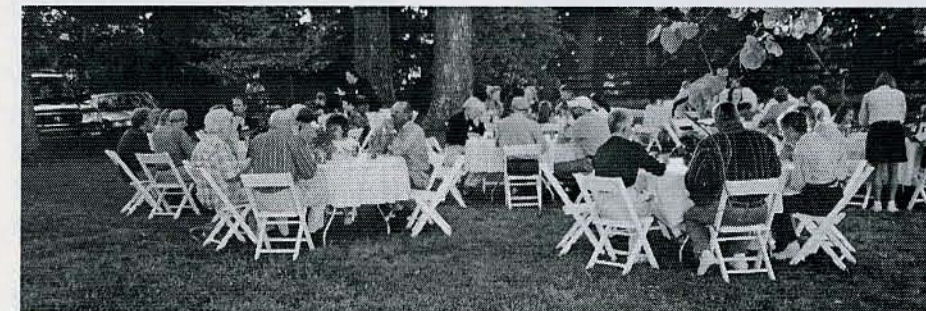
- The Octagon House, recently toured by some of our members on March 17th, is open for tours. Located just across the Simpson County line on 31-W, the house is an excellent example of a fade started by phrenologist Orson Squire Fowler's book *A Home for All; or, the Gravel Wall, and Octagon Mode of Building* published in 1848. There were several other octagonal buildings in the area, including the Octagon Cottage near Beckton in Barren County and the first Allen County courthouse. If you are interested in touring the home, contact the proprietors at (270) 586-9343. The home will house the Kentucky Confederate Studies Archives. The fee collected for the tour allowed the Association to make a donation to this project.
- The Bowling Green Historic Preservation Board's new administrator is Dee McIntire. He was formerly the historic preservation director for Bloomington, Indiana, and established his own consulting firm in 1996. He has a PhD from Indiana University (1986) and has assisted in several restoration projects. McIntire has already approached the Association about assisting with a future architectural survey publication that will also include general information about preservation.
- The Downtown Redevelopment Authority has retained RKG Associates of Alexandria, Virginia, to develop a comprehensive plan for management of growth in the downtown area which was recently dubbed "The District." The plan includes four steps: conducting an inventory of downtown buildings and identifying potential for second and third floor space, delineating the impact of WKU and the Warren County Justice Center on the District, determining the true market of the area, and identifying appropriations and a process for implementing ideas.
- The Association did make a contribution to the Barren River Child Advocacy Center to help in the preservation of its stained glass windows. This organization is housed in the former Kerr Memorial Methodist Church. This congregation merged with Westside Methodist Church to form Faith Methodist Church which has a new facility on Veterans Memorial Boulevard. The original sanctuary was completed in the fall of 1891 and additions were made to the building in 1935 and 1950.
- The Association's Board voted to re-print the 1871 "Birdseye Map of Bowling Green". It is a four-color map that actually has buildings drawn to scale, street names, the railroad, the old covered foot bridge across the Barren River, the new courthouse, Fountain Square, etc. The map extends from what is now Western to the River and from Hospital Hill to the area near Beech Bend. The map should be available at our outlets by April 1. It will make a fantastic gift.
- Some people have called about the work being done on Cherry Hall. The work is being performed by Tradesmen Group of Dublin, Ohio. There have been a number of negative comments made about the window replacements. Although the dark windows disturb the overall feel of the building, the structure's fenestration was not changed. The cupola restoration was declared necessary when workers stripped old pieces of copper from the cupola and found evidence of dry rot. Most of the copper will be cleaned but not replaced, because it contains imprints (designs) that could not be replicated. The copper that was replaced is near the base of the cupola and is not as visible. The cost of the cupola restoration was estimated at \$38,000.
- The City of Bowling Green is now investigating funding for a restoration of the Paxton House on 10th Street. We applaud the city's continued stewardship of this important downtown landmark.

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# Architectural Details

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- Anyone who missed our October program related to Bowling Green minstrel writer Ernest Hogan is invited to hear Ray Buckberry present the program again at the Kentucky Building on April 20th. The presentation will be held in Gallery K&L of the Kentucky Building at 1:30 p.m. Buckberry will be the luncheon speaker for the Kentucky Council on Archives. Lunch is \$10. If you would like to attend the lunch, please contact Jonathan Jeffrey at 745-5083.
- A historical marker will be dedicated to Jonesville on April 10th at 2:00 p.m. Everyone is invited. The marker, which will be located at the intersection of Russellville Road and University Boulevard, was funded by Western Kentucky University. Jonesville encompassed a large area of WKU's western campus. By present day landmarks, the interior of Jonesville was bordered to the west by the railroad track, to the north by Dogwood Drive, to the east by Downing University Center, and to the south by the train trestle which passes over U.S. Highway 68. A reception will follow the dedication.
- New members since our last newsletter include: Karen J. Adams, Mark & Shawn Alcott, Jenna Begley, Robert Collins, Laurie Conley, Jack & Teresa Donelson, Lawrence & Delaire Finley, Virginia Hamilton, Barbara Johnston, Lex & Joanna Lindsey, Pixie Meredith, John Payne, Charles & Linda Pickle, Becky Raymer, James D. Skaggs, Jeff & Margaret Stein, David & Beckie Stobaugh, Earnest & Cynthia Smith, and Chuck & Sharon Rawlings.
- Donors to the Irene Moss Sumpter Historic Preservation Fund since our last newsletter include: Ward & Susan Begley, Hugh & Jean Thomason, David Coffey, Larry & Cheryl Mendenhall, Mrs. J.P. Hines, Mr. & Mrs. Steve Smith, Iris Runner, George & Gretchen Niva, Covella Biggers, Jonathan Jeffrey, Agatha Layson Johnson, Mrs. Ras Jones, Alice Siwert. Memorial donations to the Sumpter Fund were made by the Landmark Board in memory of J. David Bryant, Sr., and by Jonathan Jeffrey in memory of J. David Bryant, Sr. and Sara Tyler.



The summer picnic was held at the home of Matthew and Margaret Baker which was recently renovated. The Ennis-Donnelly home was the recipient of the Jane Morningstar Award of Merit at our Annual Dinner Meeting. Over 60 attended the picnic and enjoyed the scrumptious fare prepared by our members. Thank you to our hosts!

## Landmark Association's 7th Bi-Annual Flea Market

Former Kelley's  
Printing Building  
538 State Street  
Corner of State  
and Sixth Streets

Friday April 13  
(Members Only  
Preview Party)  
7:00 p.m.

Saturday April 14  
7:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

### Collectibles

#### Pottery

#### Costume Jewelry

#### Decorating Items

#### Christmas Decorations

#### Books

#### Cookware

#### Frames

#### Bath Items

#### Tools

#### Small Appliances

#### Lamps

#### Lawn Care Items

#### Glassware

#### Pictures

#### Furniture

#### Hardware

Drop off dates will be announced in an upcoming flier. We solicit your tax deductible gifts for this major Landmark fundraiser.

# Vestel Blankenship

BY JERRY BLANKENSHIP

(Editor's note: *Landmark Report* will begin to feature a person in each issue that holds a particular or peculiar place in our county's history or that represents the universal themes so important to our society. Vestel Blankenship's work ethic and love of family will become evident as you read his son's touching eulogy)

When we first realized that Dad was not going to be with us much longer my thoughts turned to him often, first in sadness that we would no longer have him, but more and more often in wonder at how much he had given me. I would like to share with you a few of my gifts from Dad.

My first memories of Dad's presence are, as Judy told you, of the wonderful sense of security which he gave us. From our earliest childhood, being held in Dad's arms guaranteed that everything was all right. As Judy told you we used to steal an occasional extra "Dad carry" by pretending to be asleep when we arrived home after an evening out. Of course, I was not as perceptive as my sister. I never had any idea that he was on to us. But just a few years ago, while talking about those times with Dad, he gave me one of his lopsided grins (a not always appreciated inheritance) and assured me that he had known it.

Perhaps no better illustration of the security I felt in Dad's arms was an incident that occurred when I was about eight. We had gone swimming in a creek in Warren County with Dad's brother and his family. Mom, Judy, my aunt, cousins and I were wading in the shallow water on one side of the creek while Dad and my uncle



Vestel with some of his radio equipment in 1992. Courtesy of Judy McCoy.

were swimming in the deep water on the other side. At some point I apparently thought it would be a good idea to see how far I could wade toward the deeper water. Before I realized what was happening, the water swept me off my feet and I was tumbling head over heels in ten feet or so of rapid current. Almost immediately Dad had caught me and he and my uncle were passing me back and forth as we were swept down stream, the current too strong for them to hold on to me and make headway toward the shore for more than a few seconds at a time. All the while, I was having a grand adventure, with no idea whatsoever that I was in any danger; after all, I was in Dad's arms. The notion of God's protection might be a little abstract for an eight year old, but there was no ambiguity about what Dad's protection meant. It meant that nothing bad could happen to me

while I was in his arms...period.

The next gift from Dad that occurred to me surprised me when I thought of it. Everyone who has ever known Dad knows what an almost uncanny ability he had to fix anything, whether an automobile or a CB radio. It was always a source of wonder to me and of some despair as the knack seemed to have skipped me completely. While Dad was a master mechanic, I was content when I could remember which end of the car the gasoline went in. But, when I thought about it, Dad did give me the most important part of his ability. I don't know how many of you ever heard him use a certain expression, but there is one which I remember from my earliest childhood, and must have heard a hundred times while growing up. If Dad was faced with the puzzle of something needing fixing he would turn it over in his hands, stare at it a bit and say, "It's meant

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# Vestel Blankenship

*Continued from Page 6*

to work." While I didn't inherit his mechanical ability, the philosophy that lay behind it has been as important as any other influence on my life. That is, that the world is not a mysterious, unknowable place, that it is rational and understandable, that whether it is a '54 Ford, a child's toy, a business enterprise or the relationship between a man and wife, "It's meant to work."

If the last gift from Dad which I told you about surprised me, then the next one would have surprised Dad. It would have surprised him, given how difficult it was for him to get me to do chores around the house. That gift had to do with an attitude about work. Of course Mom and Dad had an incredible work ethic, taking pride in their ability to support themselves and take care of Judy and me, but the attitude I'm talking about was something else. Mom would always sit us down at the table for supper when Judy and I were growing up, and while I don't remember much else of what we talked about, I do remember one thing. Often Dad would get into an animated discussion of some problem which he had addressed and solved at work. I rarely had much of an idea what he was talking about, but his pride at applying his abilities and intelligence to a difficult task was obvious. So, while that part of Dad's attitude about his work that rubbed off on me may not have gotten his lawn mowed, it did result in my own working life being an experience of joy and challenge. And, as I hear my son

describe how the most rewarding aspect of his work is the pleasure of problem solving, I am certain that Mark inherited more from his Granddaddy than his nose and mouth.

A final gift from Dad is one which he started giving to me as a small child and has come to have, in recent years, a value which I would never have anticipated. I do not remember a time when our home did not have at least a dog in residence, and quite often one or more other critters from guinea pigs, hamsters, goats, or groundhogs, to doves, pigeons or crows. Dad's delight in the outdoors and its creatures was always obvious to me whether we were watching a flock of geese fly over or I was tagging along on hunting trips with Dad and my uncles when I was barely old enough to reach his coattails. I

always enjoyed listening to Dad tell of his times in the woods and fields when he was a boy, of his experiences at raising baby squirrels or rabbits and of his adventures with his collie, Pal, or an assortment of other dog companions. Now as I spend more and more time in the woods and fields, whether by myself, with my bird dogs or with like-minded friends, few days pass in which I do not see something, a deer fawn, a flock of cranes or a fox pup and think "Dad will love to hear about that." I don't know just what Dad's views of the hereafter were, but unless I miss my guess, he has been planning on checking in with Granpaw, Grandma, his brother and maybe a couple of CB buddies and has, by now, whistled up old Pal and headed out across the field to see what they can find.



Connie Mills, Kentucky Library Coordinator, discusses some of the sheet music on display with speaker Ray Buckberry. Ernest Hogan, a minstrel composer from Bowling Green was the topic at Landmark's fall meeting in October at the Kentucky Building. Special thanks also to member Rick Voakes for recording some of the music for our enjoyment.

# Preservation Pearls

BY RICK VOAKES

Period moldings help us to "date" a building to a particular time frame, but they also add character to a room. We see the moldings at every glance, so they define the appearance of a room without us being aware of them. Hence, the importance of saving the original moldings whenever possible.

"Whenever possible" turns out to be "almost always possible" because moldings are relatively easy to get of, and readily recyclable! The slight damage done by removing can easily be fixed with spackling or wood filler, which you will be using to fill nail holes anyway when you nail them back on.

When removing, use a 12-inch sharp-ended pry bar, and pry as close to nails as possible, so you don't split the wood. A little splintering around nails is expected, and will be easily covered by spackling. If you are working with stained oak or walnut, you will probably want to use the Pull-Through Method to remove nails from the back, as discussed in a previous "Preservation Pearls." Don't give up if you break a few pieces, since you can use surplus salvage to fill in, or make a few new pieces to fill in.

Even saving the quarter-round molding around the baseboards can be rewarding and save time and money. After you put them back on, first spackle and sand, then add a bead of paintable silicone caulking above and below

(if the floor is painted), and push fully into the space with a finger. If your floor is left natural or varnished, seal the bottom of the baseboard before you put back the quarter-round. Be sure that you don't leave your caulking too thick making the quarter-round difficult to fit.

Sealing your baseboards will keep your rooms toasty warm in the winter (no drafts!) and will make your home look historic yet brand new!

You will be amazed at how great your rejuvenated moldings look. You will also enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that your historic home has retained its original character through preserving the actual structural materials.



Secretary Dawn Slaughter displays her loyalty at the picnic.

## Excellent Quote

This wonderful quote is from a biography of John Calvin Stevens (1855-1940), an accomplished architect from Maine, who is best known for his Shingle-style beach cottages. Although a first-rate architect of new buildings, he had a genuine appreciation for old structures. This is taken from a speech he gave shortly after World War I:

"When the architect is confronted with the problem of revising and altering an old house, he is facing a responsibility of wider import than when called upon to design a new house. In solving the latter problem he must consider the owner and his manner of living, his family needs and possibilities, with the always present problems of comfort, convenience, sanitation and cost.

In remodeling the old house all these must be considered, but in addition, there must be a careful study given to preserving the atmosphere of the old work, for old houses often have a character and charm not to be fully expressed in words, especially if the house is old enough to have been constructed when our forefathers were exercising good taste and restraint, characteristics lacking at a later period."

From: *John Calvin Stevens: Domestic Architecture, 1890-1930* (Scarborough, Maine: Harp Publications, 1990)

# Work Underway on William Natcher Collection

BY SANDY STAEBELL

During his forty-one years representing the second Kentucky Congressional district, William H. Natcher assembled a fascinating array of papers, photographs, and memorabilia, including 103 boxes that were shipped to the Kentucky Building after his death. Before the public has access to the material in these boxes, it must first be processed. A major step towards this began last summer with the hiring of two individuals who are physically handling every item, placing them in logical order, storing them under archival conditions and preparing detailed inventories.

To date, more than 2200 photographs and 63 scrapbooks are at least partially processed. The oldest item discovered to date is a letter the congressman's grandfather and namesake, William H. Natcher, wrote to the clerk of the Allen Circuit Court on February 16, 1881. This letter is of particular interest to locals, because Mr. Natcher's grandfather was a tinsmith. He was writing the Allen County Circuit Court Clerk to solicit an order for tin boxes which were produced for holding records. He wrote: "We are making File Boxes for Clerk's use which we think for cheapness and durability and duplicity cannot be excelled. They are made of best Tin 9 1/2 x 4 1/2. We make them \$3 per doz. Should you need anything in that line we

would be pleased to send you samples for inspection. We refer you to James D. Hines, Clk. Warren Ct. and C.A. Carson, Clk. Butler Court for both of whom have put up a large number of boxes. They are nicely painted."

These boxes were well-constructed. We know this, because when many of Warren County's court records were brought to the Kentucky Building in the middle part of the last century they came in these tin boxes. The records were eventually transferred to acid-free boxes by dozens of volunteers who spent hundreds of hours processing the records. Mr. Natcher's mention of the boxes being "nicely painted" is a reference to a shellacking or japanning of the boxes to make them more attractive.

The Natcher firm was noted for its "stoves, tinware, mantles, grates, castings, [and] kitchen articles" and was located on Bowling Green's Fountain Square. An ad for the operation noted: "Their motto is quick sales and short returns."

Some of the more recent items in the Natcher Collection include numerous greeting cards sent to Natcher by federal, state and local politicians, his constituents and several presidents. One fascinating set of materials relates to the 1949 Kilgore/Daggit/Martin murder trial,

a rather sensational case that brought them Warren County District Attorney William Natcher great public recognition. By the middle of February, the processors had located at least one manuscript item representing every presidential administration from Eisenhower to Clinton, including a special January 1961 inaugural edition of Life magazine autographed by President John F. Kennedy.

The staff hopes to make parts of the Natcher Collection accessible to the public in 2001.



Mary Lou Parrish enjoys her pie at the picnic.

# Association to Hold Annual Meeting at the Historic L&N Depot

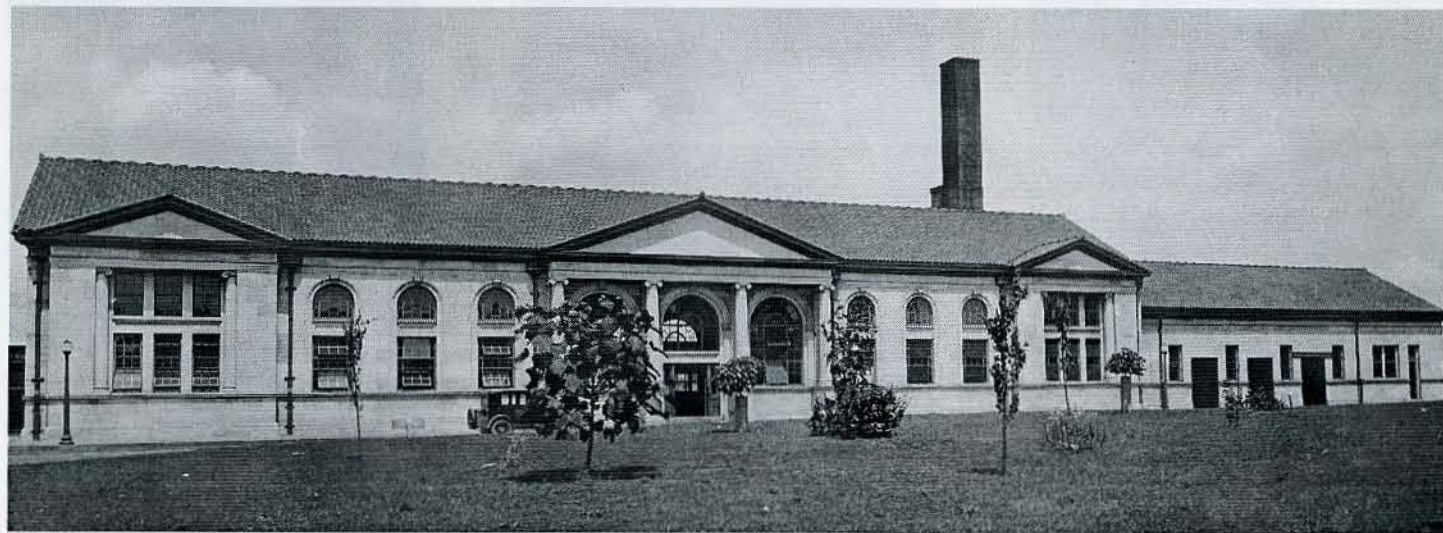
Some of you may have attended our 1995 annual meeting which was held in Bowling Green's deteriorating L&N depot. This May 19th we will again hold our annual meeting there and we anticipate reveling in the newly restored building. The Bowling Green Public Library's Digital Branch will open there with a ribbon cutting and grand opening on April 27th. In anticipation of this event, the Landmark Association will publish a history of railroading in Warren County from the 1830s through the completion of the depot in 1925. The new work is entitled *Bittersweet: Warren County and the L&N Railroad*. Here is an excerpt from the publication.

To this day its trail bisects Bowling Green and Warren County. People, hampered by its crossing, stop their cars and jeer or settle in to count its component parts as it passes at what appears to be a snail's pace. It emits a sonorous wail that penetrates the most

insulated houses for miles, and its rumble and consistent clacking beat out a pure, hypnotic rhythm. Despite the best efforts of winged transports and eighteen-wheeled chariots, the train has not been defeated. Behemoth engines still pull freight cars through Bowling Green and Warren County on a regular basis. The railroad's rich history, particularly passenger service, eludes most people born after 1960. To others its image is fading, but to those who lived intimately with the pervasive railroad its memories are as lucid as the next whistle and as vibrant as the rail crossing's flashing rubies.

Warren County's lengthy rail heritage dates from the chartering of a small tramway from the boat landing to central Bowling Green in 1836, to the construction of a magnificent rail station in 1925, to the lonely passage of the last passenger train through the city in 1979. When private and federal monies enabled the Bowling

Green depot's restoration in the mid-1990s, many citizens professed a renewed interest in Warren County's railroad history. This enthusiasm heightened with the production of "Beauty of the Southland", a thirty-minute documentary about the county's rail heritage. The Landmark Association publishes this history in hopes that the interest in Bowling Green's Louisville and Nashville (L&N) depot will generate further interest in our county's history and in other area historic preservation projects. *Bittersweet* briefly examines rail development in the United States and then explores the love-hate relationship that Bowling Green experienced with the L&N. Of particular significance was the city's twenty-four year battle for construction of the 1925 depot. It is a story of intrigue, chicanery, boosterism, and triumph; it is a great story!



The Louisville and Nashville Railroad Depot soon after completion in 1925. Courtesy of the Kentucky Library, WKU.

# The Woman's Library

BY LYNN NIEDERMEIER



The first public location for the library was the old McCormack Building across the street from the Presbyterian Church. This postcard was taken prior to the big fire of 1911. The building was subsequently rebuilt as a three-story building. The Bowling Green Business University occupied a good portion of this building when this photo was made. Courtesy of the Kentucky Library, WKU.

On January 21, 1901 the Times-Journal ran a front-page story about a sensational breach of promise suit filed by 23-year-old Julia Hill Willis against a prominent lawyer, 61-year-old Daniel Webster "Webb" Wright. In his lengthy answer to her petition, Wright denied Miss Willis' claims that he had sent her flowers, sung love songs under her window and pledged to marry her, lamenting the fact that his "great personal beauty" made him the target of "artful and designing women" seeking to end his lifelong bachelorhood.

Fortunately, the high-society scandal was not genuine. The moot, or staged, trial was a fundraising event for the Woman's Library, a fifteen-year-long enterprise that put books into the hands of Bowling Green citizens long before the establishment of a public library.

As its name suggested, local women were leaders in the library's creation. Late nineteenth-century progress had given them greater access to higher education but still shut them out of most professions, particularly after marriage. Unwilling to abandon their love of learning, they formed 15- or 20-member clubs to study literature, history, art and contemporary issues. First to meet were the Ladies' Literary Club, established in 1880, and the Current Topic Club, founded in 1895. Every two weeks the members, usually unmarried teachers or the wives of prominent local doctors, lawyers, bankers and businessmen, took turns reading papers or speaking extemporaneously on topics as diverse as Roman aqueducts, modern opera, the Franco-Prussian War, Shakespeare and wireless telegraphy. Presenters often found,

however, that sources of information were not easy to obtain. One recalled that the encyclopedia became "an old and tried friend" as the women made "repeated raids" on its pages for the bibliographies of their essays.

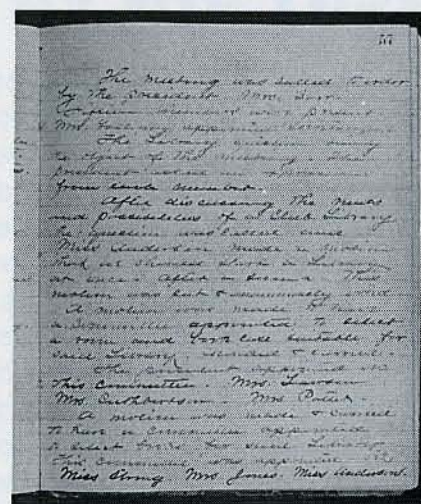
The Current Topic Club consequently began a library fund in 1897. Each member contributed \$1.00 per year (equal to approximately \$20.00 today) for room rental and the purchase of books and magazines for study. The Ladies' Literary Club quickly offered to join the project by housing its own books at the common location. Like many reform-minded groups across the country, the women's broader objective was the establishment of a permanent, public library with books of general interest as well as reference works. "It would be our wish," wrote the Ladies' Literary Club secretary, "to add to the books as rapidly as possible, and with one library it is probable that the public might feel inclined to assist looking to a future general benefit."

The Current Topic Club purchased a bookshelf and began the library in a room at the State Street home of member Mary Anderson Barr, the wife of dentist Edward T. Barr. A committee composed of members from the two clubs set borrowing rules and hours of operation, and levied fines not only for overdue books but for the failure of any member to serve her turn as librarian. By February 1899 the "Woman's Library" had its name, and that

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# The Woman's Library

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A page from the Current Topic Club minutes, stating a Miss Anderson "made a motion that we start a library at once." Courtesy of the Kentucky Library, WKU.

spring moved one block farther south on State Street to the home of Litie McElroy, the wife of lawyer Clarence Underwood McElroy.

In January 1900 the clubs opened the library to the public on payment of a \$2.00 annual fee. The library committee used the extra money to buy books of general interest, enlarging the treasury with fundraising events like the moot court and an "Old Fiddler's Contest" which raised \$65.00 (today worth over \$1,200). In contrast to these lighthearted promotions was the committee's grudging purchase of novels to satisfy the public appetite for leisure reading rather than serious study. The Ladies' Literary Club was encouraged in 1902 when, of the 1,447 books circulated in the first 6 months, only 600 were novels. A few years later, however, the committee decried the taste for fiction of a majority of patrons as "having a very bad effect on the morals of this library...as the baser

elements of its composition are being cultivated to the exclusion of the standard and classic virtues."

Early in 1902 the growing collection was moved again to the McCormack Building at 10th and State Streets. With almost 200 fee-paying members that year and a new state law authorizing cities to levy taxes for free public libraries, the women dared to hope that the city might take over the library. They were soon disappointed. A proposal to seek funds for a Carnegie Library building failed when the City Council balked at future maintenance costs. The women nevertheless continued to raise money and buy books, and by early 1908 had succeeded in moving the library a third time to rooms reserved in the new City Hall at 10th and College Streets.

By 1909, the women seemed more anxious than ever to return to the study, rather than the management, of books. The library

"as conducted at present is burdensome," observed one member, but discussions about its future dragged on until 1913 when the committee proposed to give the collection to the Western Kentucky State Normal School. The Current Topic Club, however, opposed the plan. Fortunately, offers to give the library a home soon came from both the YMCA and the Bowling Green High School. On April 9, 1913 the clubs finally donated their collection of some 2,500 volumes, together with bookcases, furniture and cash on hand to the Board of Education on behalf of the High School, but reserved continued access to each member. The Woman's Library was now history-Current Topic Club member Carrie Mitchell prepared a written account to be sent to the State Commission-but, as the women feared, their fellow citizens would wait another 25 years for a true public library.



The library was later moved to the new City Hall when it was completed in 1907. This building was designed by Brinton B. Davis, who later designed many of the buildings on Western's campus and the Denhardt Armory. Courtesy of the Kentucky Library, WKU.

# Annual Meeting Scrapbook



John and Roiann Ridley received a General House Award for their work on Boxwood at 1234 State Street.



Mark Hood and Cathleen Munsteri display their Landmark General Home Award on their front porch at 633 East Main. If you have gone by this property and admired the subtle but outstanding use of exterior color, it should come as no surprise that Mark is a professional painter.



J. David Bryant, Jr. proudly shows off his president's gift, a framed stock certificate for the Home Telephone Co. David stands on the stoop of the Home Telephone Co., which now houses his architectural firm. Bryant also received a Landmark Building for this restoration project at 810 College Street.



Damage to the State Street Baptist Church after the May 2000 fire. You may have seen the Landmark ads applauding the church's decision to restore their historic building. Architect David Bryant will be at the Preview Party for the Flea Market and make a brief presentation about the progress of the work. Photo courtesy of Jonathan Jeffrey.





Laura Harper Lee (center) receives the prestigious Heritage Award from past year's honoree, Dawn Slaughter.



April and D.A. Pearson receive a General House Award for their work on the Gaines house at 1327 State Street.



Robin Collins, Lillian Kyle, and Charles Collins accept a Landmark Building Award for their work on the Morris Jewelry Building at 408 East Main.



Dorian and Elaine Walker receive a General House Award for the restoration of the Potter Home at 1267 State Street.



Matthew and Margaret Baker receive the Jane Morningstar Merit Award for their preservation work on the Ennis-Donnelly House at 1545 Beech Bend Road.



Our hosts, Gary and Margaret Huff, receive the Jean Thomason Historic Home Award for the restoration of the Merritt-Hardin farmstead at 9888 Nashville Road.



Jean Thomason gleefully receives the Lamplighter Award for her service as emeritus board member.



Vice-president Matt Baker sings with the band, Arthur Hatfield and Buck Creek.