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History Worth Preserving - The Quonset Auditorium

By Amber Riddington

When driving past State Street on the 31-W Bypass in Bowling Green the two silver, half moon-shaped Quonset Huts perched on the south bank of the Barren River along the route of the old Dixie Highway are a familiar sight. The larger Quonset Hut now houses the Bale Tire Center, but it was originally constructed as an entertainment venue called the Quonset Auditorium. Between 1946 and 1959 the Quonset Auditorium was known as the “Most Happening Place in Town” to both black and white audiences, and its pink neon sign marked the city’s north entrance for those traveling the Dixie Highway.

The Quonset Auditorium was built in 1946 by three members of the legendary Bowling Green band Joe Marshall and his Rovin’ Ramblers, brothers Joe and Kenny Marshall and Floyd Dunn. It was originally built as an auditorium to house the band’s weekly square dances and concerts that had previously taken place at the Armory on Chestnut Street. Joe Marshall remembers that when the Armory burnt down in 1946 the three Roving Ramblers “bought a Quonset because they were prefab buildings, you could put them up quick” giving them a permanent place to perform. The Marshalls also took over the professional wrestling matches that had been at the Armory. The prime location on the Dixie Highway, at the time the only throughway between Nashville and Louisville, and the large size of the venue contributed to its success. In addition to the Ramblers regular concerts the Quonset was soon booking large acts from out of town and packing the 750-seat auditorium.

The Rovin’ Ramblers named their auditorium after its architectural type known as a “Quonset Hut.” The name Quonset derives from a Navy base in Quonset Point, Rhode Island, where the prefabricated huts were manufactured during WW II. The huts were designed for the military by the George A. Fuller Company to house troops and equipment and to be easily assembled. Quonset Huts have a main frame made of semi-circular steel ribs which are covered with sheets of corrugated steel. They are placed on concrete foundations or simply on the ground and can be easily moved or taken apart. During the war, 170,000 Quonset Huts were produced at the Quonset Point naval station and shipped to U.S. bases all over the world where they endured sand, wind, rain and snow storms alike. Once the war was over, the buildings were sold as surplus and have endured in vernacular use not only as

Continued on Page 2
The Quonset Auditorium

Local radio played a role in the success of the Quonset Auditorium as well. The Rivlin's Ramblers hosted a weekly radio show on Bowling Green's WLBJ while the Quonset Auditorium was in operation. During their broadcast the Ramblers performed live and were able to market their local fan base. They took the opportunity to announce both their performance schedule and the headlining recording artists whom they booked at the Quonset. The Quonset also regularly featured professional wrestling through the National Wrestling Alliance and eventually the Marshalls brothers began promoting wrestling themselves. Legends such as Jackie Fargo, Andre the Giant, Gorgeous George, Farmer Jones, Ada Ash and Bambi were among the top wrestlers of the 1940s and 1950s who competed in matches at the Quonset Auditorium and parked the house. A rectangular addition on the side of the Quonset can still be seen today that was built to accommodate bleachers for viewing the wrestling. Other bookings in the auditorium over its 13 years of operation included roller skating, church revivals, and private parties. University students often booked the auditorium for balls, homecomings and fraternity events. A short-order concession at the front of the Quonset was expanded into a small restaurant that became a popular stop for people traveling the Dixie Highway.

The Quonset closed as a music and wrestling venue in 1959. It was sold by the Marshall brothers who had bought Dunn out early on and was used by its new owners first as a warehouse and later as an automobile service station and tire store. Since 1959 the building has undergone only minor alterations, both externally and internally. It still retains its original false front constructed of both concrete and glass blocks. The recessed double doors at the main entrance are framed by the glass blocks in a curvilinear Art Moderne style popular in the 1940s. The original ticket window is still set in the glass block on the left side of the double doors and serves as a visual reminder of the building's original function. The Quonset operated during a time of racial segregation, and the modest African-American entrance on the side of the building that bypassed the restaurant is also extant and reminds us of how history has changed over the past thirty years.

Today the Quonset building serves as a local landmark because of its distinctive silver color, half-circle shape, longevity in this location and association with famous wrestlers and both local and national music legends. The Quonset Auditorium was important to both the white and black communities of Bowling Green and the building evokes strong memories for those who remember it as the "Most Happening Place In Town." The architectural details of the Quonset can be interpreted and used to remind us of the building's rich history - a history worth preserving.

Landmark Report 3

Otho Dandrit Porter

by Lynn Niedermeier

Otho Dandrit Porter, the son of Robert H. Porter and Amanda Foster, was born shortly after the Civil War and educated in Bowling Green's African-American public school. As a young teacher, he witnessed Warren County's dire need for educated health professionals and consequently enrolled in the preparatory department at Fisk University. On the train to Fisk he met another student, W. E. B. DuBois, who was impressed by Porter's neat appearance and friendly manner. The two became roommates and remained friends after DuBois began his distinguished career as a civil rights leader and editor of the NAACP publication The Crisis.

Despite financial difficulties which required him to continue teaching, Porter received his bachelor's degree from Fisk in 1891. He earned a medical degree from Nashville's Meharry Medical College in 1894 and set up his practice, one of the first by an African-American physician, on State Street near Bowling Green's public square. Porter became active in his state medical association and only a few years after commencing his practice was elected president of the National Association of Colored Physicians, Dentists and Pharmacists (now the National Medical Association).

On 9 April 1895 Porter married Carolyn "Carrie" Bridges, a native of Mississippi who had also attended Fisk University. He established a new office on a lot which he purchased in 1899 on East Main Street between Center and Kentucky Streets. In March 1901 the Porters moved from their frame home on State Street between 4th and 5th Streets to a two-story brick dwelling at the corner of State and 5th (439 State Street). Dr. Porter also achieved greater visibility for his practice in 1906 when, after a fire destroyed his office, he rebuilt it as a fine two-story building which also housed other businesses. Until it was razed in the early 1980s, the Porter Building at 227 East Main Street stood just west of the U.S. Courthouse (William H. Natcher Federal Building).
Landmark Co-sponsors Book Discussions

Landmark and the Kentucky Humanities Council in cooperation with the Kentucky Building are holding a series of book discussions related to the Commonwealth's history and culture. Reading and discussing books bring a community together. Join us at the Kentucky Building for the following discussions:

- February 28 - Robert Penn Warren's "World Enough and Time" (a modern retelling of the famous 1825 murder that involved people from Warren and Ligon county). The discussion will be led by Laura Harper Lee, Kentucky Museum's Education Curator.
- February 25 - James Sherburne's "Harey Miller" (story of emancipationists, the underground railroad and the founding of Berea College). Special Collections Librarian Connie Milles will lead the discussion.
- March 4 - Harriette Arnow's "The Dollmaker" (traces a woman's life from rural Kentucky to Detroit during World War II). Professor of History Carol Crowe Camaco will lead the discussion.
- March 11 - Barbara Kingsolver's "Prodigal Summer" (an ecological novel set in southern Appalachia). The discussion will be led by Special Collections Librarian Jonathan Jeffrey.

All programs begin at 7:00 p.m. Everyone is welcome, even if you haven't had time to read the book.

Important Preservation Legislation Introduced

The governor said he established the state tax credit program to promote "healthy downtowns and strong neighborhoods." The first credits are for certified rehabilitation of property located in a historic district or listed on the National Register. Since owner occupied residential property is currently not eligible for the federal tax credit, Patton is proposing a 30-percent state tax credit for rehabilitation of these residences. Secondly, commercial property would be eligible for a 20-percent credit of one quarter of the vegetation's current market value to supplement the federal credit. Patton said the third credit is a 10-percent credit for qualified new construction in historic districts.

Because affordable housing is key to quality growth, the fourth tax credit adds to Patton's commitment to making homeownership within the reach of all Kentuckians. A tax credit, based upon the market value of appraised value of renovated property, would be available for qualified redevelopment of property in a neighborhood redevelopment zone (a neighborhood consisting of less than or equal to $80,000).

Patton also announced the creation of an advisory group to advise the administration on quality growth strategies and develop private support by the end of his administration so that it can become a freestanding, non-profit entity.

"This committee could become a key pillar for quality growth what the Prichard Committee has been for education reform in Kentucky," Patton said.

In addition to the legislation, Patton will issue an executive order that will further position the state to lead by example by directing the continued next page

Finance and Administration Cabinet to establish location criteria and design guidelines for public facilities with state funding. The order, Patton said, would also direct the Board of Housing, Building and Construction to develop a plan which would promote economical rehabilitation of aging buildings through the use of these "smart codes." Because community schools are key to strong neighborhoods, Patton's order also urges the Board of Education to support the concept of smart growth in school location criteria. "We must have more coordination with local government and a clearer recognition of infrastructure constraints in school facility planning," he said.

Patton said his Smart Growth legislation follows his administration's launch of several initiatives related to quality growth. "Last week we announced legislation, sponsored by Rep. John Draud, that will address those issues related to the location of merchant power plants," he said. "There will also be legislation that revises the Commonwealth's title to the Public Service Commission from the approval process for cell tower locations in areas under the jurisdiction of a planning commission."

"All legislation supporting Rep. Stumbo's bill that addresses many of our concerns about solid waste," he said, adding that Pine Mountain Trail Act will further protect some of the Commonwealth's unique natural areas and provide opportunities for the public to enjoy the region's beauty. "This planing committee will also recommend more than 50 national nonprofit organizations. "The smart-growth movement may well be the first significant effort for quality growth which the Prichard Committee has been for education reform in Kentucky," Patton said.

In addition to the legislation, Patton will issue an executive order that will further position the state to lead by example by directing the continued next page
Important Preservation Legislation Introduced (continued)

state infrastructure and capital development plans for their long term impact on growth and land use.

The bill will also establish a State Planning Assistance Office attached to the Governor's Office. This office will serve as a one-stop resource site for local communities in their planning efforts by providing technical assistance to local communities; ensuring coordinated training and education efforts for local leaders; and developing a public awareness campaign on the value to economic development of managed growth.

The bill will also create four state tax credits that will preserve neighborhoods, encourage retention of historic tax credits, and promote downtown revitalization. For certified rehabilitation of property located in a historic district on the National Register, it creates: 1) 30% credits for owner-occupied residential property (maximum credit $60,000), and 2) 20% credit on one quarter of the qualified rehabilitation cost to supplement the federal credit. For qualified new construction in historic districts, the bill creates a 10% credit not to exceed $20,000.

For qualified redevelopment of property in a neighborhood redevelopment zone (with a post-renovation value of less than or equal to $80,000), it creates a tax credit not to exceed 10% of appraised value of renovated property ($2 million annual cap).

This is an important piece of preservation legislation. We strongly urge you contact your state representative and senator about your position on this matter.

Reuben Crowdus, a.k.a. Ernest Hogan
by Ray Buckberry

Reuben Crowdus was born 17 April 1865, in Bowling Green, Kentucky. Not much is known about his early life, although indications are that he left home at an early age, joining a traveling minstrel show. One of his first jobs is said to have been as a plantation singer in a low-rent, tent-show version of Uncle Tom's Cabin, a show that launched the careers of many black entertainers.

In 1891, Crowdus adopted his state name "Ernest Hogan" and later began referring to himself as "The Unbleached American," utilizing both references throughout his career in show business. He wrote the lyrics, music or both for approximately 35 published songs. The 1896 sheet music for a song written by Hogan contained a notation that the music is to be performed "with Negro rag." This was the first use of the word "rag" on a song sheet and many thereby credited Hogan as writer of the first piece of ragtime music.

His first big solo starring role in New York City came in 1898, with the show "Clorindy, or the Origin of the Cakewalk." This was the first black show to play in a first class theater on Broadway. A Chicago paper reported that Hogan "is firmly established as the greatest colored comedian of the age."

Hogan organized a group of about 20 experienced entertainers in 1905, and called them "The Memphis Students." Their opening show in New York was so successful it was held over for 5 months. This show has been referred to as the first folk concert of syncopated music in history.

A long-cherished dream was realized when he mounted his own musical comedy "Rufus Rastus," opening on Broadway in 1906. A critic commented that the depth Hogan brought to his new role took him out of the ranks of "dizzy comedian" forever in that he had learned to "touch the heart as well as the funnybone."

In like fashion, she often took charge of preparing the patient's meals. During the typhoid fever epidemic in 1922, Porter enhanced her reputation, earning an additional title as an "expert typhoid nurse." She retired in 1960.

Moving to 715 College Street around 1921, she enjoyed her yard garden and fruit trees. Her skills in handwork led her to teach her craft to a local ladies club. Active in the Taylor Chapel United Methodist Church and Church and Church Women United, Porter also took on interest in inter-racial and civic activities. As an organizer of the Inter-racial Commission in 1949, she served as a member of its board of directors for the three years the commission existed.

Not only did Miss Porter participate as one of the organizers of the George Washington Carver Youth Center located at 201 Center Street, she remained an active member of it Board of Directors for many years. At the age of 90, Miss Porter died on 4 February 1970 at City County Hospital. She was buried in Mount Moriah Cemetery.

Architectural Details

- Keep in tune with current preservation issues and tools by attending the 2002 Statewide Preservation Conference, "In Tune with Preservation," August 1 through August 3 in Danville. Coordinated by the Kentucky Heritage Council with the support of Heart of Danville and Danville College, this three-day conference will focus on historic preservation, downtown revitalization, smart growth, community development, historic military sites, heritage education, preservation law, heritage tourism, and historic rehabilitation. This year's program includes: opening keynote speaker, Joseph Riley, Mayor of Charleston, South Carolina; opening night reception featuring Downtown Danville's Great American Main Street, McDowell House, and Constitution Square with terrific food and music; exhibit area and preservation bookstore; Preservation Kentucky's Advocacy Breakfast, silent/ live auction, and special event; three-day conference registration.
- In January the Bowling Green-Warren County Convention Center was renamed for former Bowling Green mayor and former Landmark Association board member Patsy Sloan. The Center's board noted: "We felt strongly that the convention center should bear the name of someone who was instrumental in the development of this venture."

- Nominations for Landmarks' awards are due by February 28. Please send those to Landmark at PO Box 1812, Bowling Green, KY 42103.
- The Association sends kudos to the Downtown Redevelopment Authority for the recently unveiled masterplan for "The District", which includes a great deal of the downtown area from the Barren River to WKU. In addition the loan pool of $5 million created by area banks will be a boon to restorations in this area. The banks participating are: South Central Bank, American Bank & Trust Co., Farmers National Bank, and Monticello Banking Co. For more information on this program, contact Cheryl Blaine at 783-0222.
Landmark Releases Mt. Moriah Cemetery Book

The Landmark Association is pleased to announce the publication of Mt. Moriah Cemetery: A History and Census of Bowling Green’s African-American Cemetery compiled by Jonathan Jeffrey and Mike Wilson. The 247-page book is the first comprehensive look at this venerable cemetery.

Before 1865, African-Americans were often buried outside the boundaries of white family cemeteries in unmarked graves. In Bowling Green blacks were buried in Pioneer Cemetery on College Street. On older maps this burying ground was known as Repose Park on Summer Street. Unfortunately the interment records for Pioneer Cemetery are non-existent, except for a three year period between December 1860 and December 1863. This record contains ten pages of white deaths (many of these soldiers who died from disease during the Civil War) and four pages of burial records for “Black Persons” and “Negros”. Because most of the blacks listed were slaves, their owners names are recorded rather than the servant’s. The owners’ name was recorded for posterity, but the slave was often only listed as “woman child”, “Negro child”, or “black man”. The records note date of death, sex, age (when known), and remarks. The majority of the 80 names listed were adults. African-Americans died from the same causes as whites, but some of the comments beg for explication: “blind negro”, “died jail (runaway)”, “scoaled”, and “shot”. Five bear the proud title “free negro”. African-American burials were relegated to a segregated section of the cemetery.

Pioneer Cemetery filled up during the Civil War. The city at Bowling Green purchased property, northeast of town “near the river”, from Thomas C. Colvert in 1862. The land was suitable, because of its location outside the city and because the selection committee “found no rock within five feet of the surface.” The land for St. Joseph Cemetery property was purchased in 1868. It is believed that a portion of the St. Joseph Cemetery property, purchased from Warner L. Underwood, was intended to be used for an African-American cemetery. It appears that the area outside the Catholic Cemetery was used for African-American burials as early as 1870, and perhaps earlier.

Mt. Moriah was incorporated in 1878 and run by an independent board of directors; the city operated Fairview Cemetery. The compilers transcribed the stones in the cemetery, the city’s burial certificates from 1877 to 1913, the cemetery’s old sexton’s book, and various funeral home records. The majority of the entries are for men, but women were also buried. The cemetery was used for African-American burials until as late as 1938, and perhaps earlier.

DOOMED WOOD

Damaged windows can usually be repaired using simple processes. Partially decayed wood can be waterproofed, patched, built-up, or consolidated and then painted to achieve a sound condition, good appearance, and greatly extended life. One established technique for repairing wood that is split, checked, or shows signs of rot, is to:
- dry the wood,
- treat decayed areas with a fungicide,
- waterproof with two or three applications of boiled linseed oil (applications every 24 hours),
- repair decayed areas with putty, and
- after a “skin” forms on the putty, paint the surface.

When using any technique of building up or patching a flat surface, the finished surface should be sloped slightly to carry water away from the window. Caulking the joints between the sill and jamb will help reduce further water penetration.

When sills or other members exhibit surface weathering they may also be built-up with successive layers of wood putties or homemade mixtures such as sawdust and resorcinol glue, or whiting and varnish. Then sand, prime, and paint the surface.

Wood may also be strengthened and stabilized by consolidating, using suitable sealants, the porous decayed wood, and then filled with a semi-rigid epoxy patching compound, sanded and painted. Epoxy patching compounds can be used to build-up missing sections or decayed ends of members. Profiles can be duplicated using hand molds, which are created by pressing a ball of patching compound over a sound section of the profile that has been rubbed with butcher’s wax.

Even when parts of the frame or sash are so badly deteriorated that they cannot be stabilized, you may be able to retain some of the window’s existing or original fabric. Techniques include replacing deteriorated parts with new matching pieces, or splicing new wood into existing members. These jobs require more skill and are more expensive than the routine maintenance and stabilization work.

Remove the sash and affected parts of the frame and have a carpenter or woodworking mill reproduce the damaged or missing parts. Most millwork firms can duplicate parts, such as muntins, bottoms rails, or sills, but you may have to shop around. Some woodworking mills do not like to repair old sash because the nails or other foreign objects in the sash can damage expensive keyways. Sash that is built-up must be oversized to make up for the loss of strength; and lack of keyways. Sash that is built-up must be oversized to make up for the loss of strength; and lack of keyways.

If you need to replace or repair the window frame itself, you may be able to buy a new unit. Models are available to fit many older windows, and are usually sold complete with muntins, muntin bars, and a sash. Materials are usually sold separately. Some material dealers have a craftsman who can duplicate the missing parts.

Wooden Windows Are Rarely Beyond Repair

Do not let energy efficiency dominate the issue. Historic windows can be made thermally efficient by historically accurate and aesthetically acceptable means. In fact, a historic wooden window with a high quality storm window added should thermally outperform a new double-glazed metal window which does not have thermal breaks (insulation between the inner and outer frames intended to break the path of heat flow).
Irish Author & Journalist to Speak to Association

Northern Ireland journalist and author Billy Kennedy will speak on the Scots-Irish diaspora in America on Sunday, March 10th, at 2:30 at the Kentucky Building. The presentation is being made possible by the Landmark Association, the Southern Kentucky Genealogical Society, and the Kentucky Library. Kennedy has written six books on the topic, and his seventh The Making of America: How the Scots-Irish Shaped a Nation has just been released. In it he charts the Ulster Presbyterian influences in the series of historic, mold-breaking events which resulted in the creation of the United States.

The Scots-Irish were in the vanguard of American patriot involvement on all fronts of the Revolution, but it was on the frontier that they made their most significant contributions. Quite uniquely, as a people, they rose to the awesome challenge of the American frontier—its danger, its inaccessibility and its sheer enormity. Bitter experience of religious discrimination and economic deprivation in their native Ulster homelands gave impetus to the Scots-Irish people throwing off the shackles of the old order when they moved to the American colonies and opened up the frontier.

Kennedy’s highly popular series of books considerably widens the inspiring story of a highly determined and very courageous God-fearing people from the north of Ireland who settled the distinctive Presbyterian character on the various facets of American life. It is a distinct characteristic of the Scots-Irish immigrants who settled on the American frontier during the 18th century and the raw courage shown by these dogged, determined people under very difficult circumstances tell a great story.


Billy Kennedy has practiced journalism in Northern Ireland for the last 30 years. With the Ulster/Belfast News Letter, a newspaper founded in 1737, he was a news editor for 18 years and assistant editor and lead writer for five. He now operates as a full-time freelance journalist, public relations consultant, author and lecturer. His abiding interest is in the history of the Scots-Irish settlements on the American frontier, and through his authorship, Kennedy has lectured on the Scots-Irish diaspora in America in major cities and towns in the southeastern United States.

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Emile & Cynthia Smith

Mr & Mrs Steve Smith

Cooper & Belle Smith

David & Dabbe Spence

Corie Jane Spiller

Tim Evans & Eileen Starr

Frank & Peggy Steele

Bobby & Sid Steen

Jeff & Margaret Stein

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David & Nancy Henn

Virginia S Hamilton

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Bobby & Sid Steen

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Bobby & Sid Steen

Jeff & Margaret Stein

Jeff & Susan Stevens Family

Mr & Mrs Charles Stewart

Reg Howard & Linda Surface

Pearl M Taylor

Carroll & Doris Tichenor

Becky & Opons Tomlinson

Michael Trappose

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Bowling Green Chamber of Commerce

Bowling Green Warren County Convention Commission

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Daily News

Deemer Floral Co.

Landmark Report 10

February 2002

February 2002
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 __________________________________________________________________________________________

City __________________________ State ___________ Zip ______________

Telephone __________________________ E-mail __________________________

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<th>Corporate</th>
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<td>[ ] Individual $15</td>
<td>[ ] Active $100</td>
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<td>[ ] Supporting $50</td>
<td>[ ] Patron $250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Family $25</td>
<td>[ ] Donor $500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] Sustaining $100</td>
<td>[ ] Benefactor $1,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Checks should be payable to: Landmark Association

P.O. Box 1812

Bowling Green, KY 42102-1812