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HISTORY
OF
BOWLING GREEN HOTELS

Margie Helm
1959

Warren County was established in 1797 and Bowling Green in 1798. Early settlers moved into the territory in the 1790's and 1800's.

Two of the early settlers, Robert and George Moore, were among the founders of Bowling Green. It was they who gave two acres of land, known later as Fountain Square, which was used for the first public buildings.

Robert Moore's house was on the big spring back of present day CDS #6, and was bordered by Spring Alley.

Moore's double log house became the first overnight lodging for travelers, for it is said that Moore would "put up" travelers who came through the village and needed overnight lodging. Although Moore could be said to have the first tavern, it was probably before an operators license was required.

An added attraction for the travelers was a bowling green on the Moore Property. Mr. John Rodes in his history of Bowling Green says that no doubt the town received its name from Moore's green used for bowling.

The first real tavern established before 1815 was known as McDowell's Tavern. This tavern was on the Public Square on the north side, with the lot running back to Spring Alley near Moore's double log house. McDowell had bought the lot from Charles Ransdell, Dr. Briggs, and Hampton. The lot held a brick stable used for the stage coach horses as well as for horses drawing the covered wagons or ridden by individual travelers.

Benjamin Vance bought McDowell's Tavern in 1816 for \$6,500 to be paid over a period of five years. Possession was given Feb. 1, 1816. It was understood that Mr. McDowell was to complete the stable, except for the floor and was also to furnish the planks and cedar posts to enclose the lot. The Vance-McDowell contract is in the manuscript collection of the Kentucky Library.

A Major Buckner operated the tavern for Vance. Sometime before the Civil War the Rochester family acquired the property.

During the years the Vance Hotel was open, it was the scene of many gala social affairs. One such was a Fourth of July Ball.

The pleasure of your company is respectfully solicited to a Ball at Mr. B. Vance's Hotel, on the 4th of July next at 4 p.m.

J. T. Donaldson,
Zach Smith,
Geo. M. Howorth,
Wm. Cooke,

Henry Shanks,
John M. Briggs,
C.T. Dunavan,
John S. Lucas,

Managers

Bowling Green, June 15, 1832

Just ninety-seven years ago the above invitation was received by Miss Sarah Leat, afterwards wife of Peter Mercer, mother of the late Joe. P. Mercer, and which has been handed down in the family since. The invitation is probaly the oldest in existence here to a 4th of July ball, and is highly prized by Mrs. Fannie Mercer, widow of late Joe P. Mercer. However, on suggestion of a Times-Journal reporter, Mrs. Mercer has decided to turn over the much valued relic to the Kentucky Building after its completion as a reminder of "ye olden days" in Bowling Green.

The Vance Hotel where the ball was given was located at the present corner of Main and College streets on the site of Pushin's Store.

WASHINGTON HALL

In the Backwoodsman newspaper dated November 2, 1822, Washington Hall is listed as a commodious brick building with A.T. Mitchell as proprietor in company with William R. Payne. This location is where Robert Moore's home had been. The date of its founding is before 1822, because in an advertisement, mention is made that "heretofore this site had been occupied by Mr. McDowell and lately by Payne and Curle." The brick building is described as being commodious and being furnished and served by attentive servants.

It was evidently the leading hotel because in 1825 General Andrew Jackson stayed here overnight on his way from Washington to Nashville by stagecoach. In the afternoon of the next day citizens called to see him.

Dr. Crabbe mentions Jackson's visit in Peace At Bowling Green. Andrew Jackson was not president then but he was the popular hero of the War of 1812.

Matthew Henry was owner of the tavern at one time. Henry was also associated with James Rumsey Skiles in the development of navigation on Green and Barren Rivers. Henry died in 1838. His daughter, Lucy, was married to Warner L. Underwood. In his recollection of buildings around the public square in the year 1844, Mr. John Younglove recalled that Mr. Underwood was operating Washington Hall in 1844. The tavern was burned soon afterward.

THE GREEN RIVER TAVERN

The Green River Tavern was built in 1833 by Mr. James Rumsey Skiles. Mr. Skiles lived in a beautiful house called Kimloch, which stood near the boatlanding. Known for his civic and progressive enterprises, Mr. Skiles gave the lot for the Presbyterian Church. He also built the portage railroad which ran from his office on Tenth Street to the boatlanding.

The Green River Tavern was built of brick and it was the town's first three-story building. The proprietors of the tavern in 1844 were Mr. Harley Smith and Captain Warrener who plied boats in Louisville. An advertisement in the newspaper Southern Kentucky Argus on August 31, 1847, notes that Asa B. Gardner was the proprietor. Notice the wording of his advertisement:

The undersigned having taken charge of the well known tavern house in the town of Bowling Green, and procured the services of a very experienced and business young man, flatters himself that he is fully prepared to render satisfactory accomodation to all who may be pleased to favor him with their patronage.

Asa B. Gardner

In Perrin's History of Kentucky, it is stated that Mr. John Hess in 1857 rented the Green River Hotel. Mr. Hess died soon after this and his wife kept a boarding house there until in 1862, when the building was converted into a Confederate Hospital. In the same year Mrs. Hess purchased of James K. Goodwin the Moreheard House.

The next record we have of the Green River Tavern after

its use as a Confederate hospital is that Golliday's Monthly Visitor in 1874 printed an advertisement of the Commercial Hotel managed by James K. Clarke on the South Side of the Public Square. James K. Clarke was Bena Farnsworth's grandfather. Mrs. Farnsworth says that she remembers being told that her grandfather's hotel was where Woolworth's is now. Miss Annie Barclay corroborated Bena's memory because as a child she remembers that Mr. Clarke's hotel was on that corner of Park Row. So evidently after the Civil War when the building had been used as a Confederate hospital, Mr. Clarke became the proprietor and changed the name to the Commercial Hotel.

He evidently did not manage the hotel long. Mr. Ryan Monroe Robertson bought it sometime after this. He made it into an office building with stores below. Mr. Robertson's granddaughter, Miss Elizabeth Combs, was librarian at the Kentucky Library for a number of years. Mr. W. L. Yarbrough later bought it and it was as the Yarbrough Building that most of us remember it. Now, of course, it is the Woolworth Building.

THE MOREHEAD HOUSE

The Morehead House was established in 1847. According to Warren County Deed Book 15, the first owners of the lot where the Morehead House was built and where the Helm Hotel was later built, were Elizabeth and Samuel Moore. In 1817, The Moores sold the lot to Samuel Work, who sold it to Charles Weller in 1833.

In 1836 Charles Weller and wife conveyed the lot to James K. McGoodwin, formerly of Russellville. McGoodwin's son, Ike, became a well-known citizen and grocerman of Bowling Green. Mr. James K. McGoodwin operated a general store in Bowling Green under the firm name of McGoodwin, Baker, and Hodge.

In 1847 Mr. McGoodwin built a tavern similar in architecture to the Younglove Drug Store which was directly across the street. The tavern however was only two stories tall whereas the Drug Store with the owner's apartment above was three stories. Mr. McGoodwin leased his tavern to Charles D. Morehead and his wife. Mr. Morehead had also come to Bowling Green from Russellville. The tavern was given the name of the Morehead House.

The Southern Kentucky Argus of July 31 to August 31, 1847, carried the following advertisement:

This new and extensive establishment, erected on the east corner of the public square (the corner lately occupied by Jas. K. McGoodwin, Esq.) is now open for the reception of travellers. For comfort and extent in its internal arrangement, it is unsurpassed by any other house South of Green River; having taken it for a term of years and fitted it up at a considerable expense, the proprietor intends to spare neither moeney nor exertions to render satisfaction in every department of his business.

C.D. Morehead

The Morehead Family Bible records a tragic end to most of this Morehead family. Charles D. Morehead married Eliza Loving here in 1829. They had three children who survived infancy. Sarah, who married Joseph Younglove in 1847, and two younger children, Edwin and Emma. In August, 1853. Mr. and Mrs. Morehead took a trip to New Orleans taking with them their son and daughter who were then about fourteen and eighteen. They were caught in a yellow fever epidemic and all four died within six days. The only child to survive was the older daughter who married Joseph Younglove, and had not gone on the trip.

One of the celebrities who visited the Morehead House was Jenny Lind. A letter, to be found in the D. Owen Helm papers, tells of the singer's visit.

Bowling Green, Ky.
April 7, 1857

Sis:

I rec'd your kind and welcome letter of the thirty first of March... I think as much of you as if you were my own sister. Jenny Lind stopped and took tea as she passed through our town. I got to see her as she passed from the stage to the tavern. I took her to be a very homely woman she may sing well but she is not pretty. I am told that she did not get out of the stage at Franklin that was too bad she ought to have gotten out and let the natives have 'a peek at her...

from a sincear friend,

Will

Ruth Hines Temple, whose family have been long-time residents of Bowling Green, recalls hearing her grandmother say that she saw Jennie Lind as she passed from the stage coach to the Morehead House. A boy who was in the crowd said he wished he could see the famous singer. Miss Lind is reported to have turned and smiled at the boy when she heard his remark.

In 1862, when the Confederate soldiers took over the Green River Tavern for a hospital, Mrs. John Hess, the owner, bought the Morehead House from Mr. James McGoodwin. Mrs. Hess died in 1876 and willed the hotel to her three daughters, Mrs. Sarah Armitage, Mrs. Camilla Herdman, and Mrs. Julie Dewey. The daughters had families of small children and evidently did not begin immediate operation of the hotel according to the following advertisement which appeared in the Bowling Green Democrat on March 4, 1876. They evidently leased the hotel to Mr. C. C. Kiger.

MOREHEAD HOUSE

C. C. Kiger-----Proprietor
W. H. Garing-----Clerk

I desire to announce to the public that I have lately taken charge of the above House and shall endeavor to make it a neat and pleasant place of entertainment. The Morehead House is located on the public square and is...convenient to the business part of the city. The house contains excellent sample rooms for Drummers. Regular boarders are offered extra inducements and given the best accomodations the city affords.

Perrin's History of Kentucky, 1885, states that the sisters Mrs. Armitage and Mrs. Herdmen were then in charge and that the hotel had been remodeled in 1883, with a third story being added. The Morehead House had become the leading hotel in Bowling Green. Later, Mrs. Dewey, another sister, became one of the active managers of the Morehead.

It was said by Mr. Carl Herdman that when he was Prince of Wales and a gay young man travelling in the U.S., that Edward VII spent one night in the hotel. It is too bad that the old registers were not kept, for they probably held many names of famous people.

The management of the Morehead House established the tradition of giving a dinner to celebrate the various anniversaries of the hotel. Such a dinner was given in 1891 according to a Times-Gazette story.

"AN ELEGANT DINNER"

Yesterday the Morehead House was 47 years old, and as was its custom gave a big dinner to which a number of friends were invited. Said to have been the most elaborate dinner ever sat down to in this city....."

Ten of the city's oldest citizens were listed as guests:

Mrs. Nancy Dunaven	86
Mrs. Jane Wilking	81
Mrs. Sarah Anne Jones	79
Mrs. Hiram Collett	74
Mrs. Nancy Herdman	72
Mrs. Kate Cooke	71
Mrs. Narcissa Aden	69
Mr. Henry Fox	80
Mrs. Stubbins	81

Another of the Morehead House traditions was that no travelling man or boarder was charged for dinner on Thanksgiving Day.

Many of the dinners were prepared by Aunt Minerva Pollard, who was the first cook at the Morehead House and who served until she was past eighty. Uncle Andrew Walker was meat cook for forty years. Two other employees were Jake Stewart and George Vicks, porter.

In addition to the proprietors mentioned above the Morehead House was operated from time to time by Messers Shirley McFerran, Delong, Col. T. W. Campbell, and Lud Cook.

The Morehead House under new Management

In 1915, Dr. T.O. Helm bought the Morehead House from Mrs. Carl Herdman. The next year the name was changed to Morehead Hotel. Dr. Helm, who had already sold his private hospital, St. Joseph, on Twelfth Street, gave up medical practice and became the active manager of the hotel. He was assisted by his youngest son, Harold, a student at Ogden College. The older sons, Blakey and Tom, were in service. In 1918, Dr. Helm was called to Ft. Benjamin for three months training in the medical corps.

The year 1919 brought not only the end of the war but it also brought a neighboring oil boom into Warren County. All hotels and private homes were taxed to capacity.

Since the Morehead was not a modern hotel, plans were made to remodel it as quickly as possible. All rooms lacking running water and telephone connection were now equipped with them. The parlor was made into a bedroom. Rooms were repapered. New furniture was bought for the lobby, desks, and chairs were added to the downstairs hall for a writing room.

The Helm Hotel

When the boom had somewhat subsided in 1923, my father tried to organize a company to build a new hotel. He could find no one sufficiently interested, so he ventured into the enterprise alone. My brother, Tom, gave up the position he had taken in New Jersey after his graduation from Princeton and helped with the hotel. The old Morehead Hotel was torn down except for the Annex, and a new hotel, the Helm, was erected, and finished in the summer of 1924.

The new hotel was a four-story structure with 123 rooms in all including 110 bedrooms, a mezzanine, lobby, a sun parlor, a ball room, large dining room, coffee shop, private dining room, a sample room, etc..

THE RITTER HOUSE

The Ritter House was constructed after the Civil War by the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. The hotel was a gift from the railroad company to Mrs. Mary Strange Ritter (b.Hillsboro, N.C. 1808) for her services in warning the company of impending destruction of railway bridges.

Mrs. Ritter often heard the Union soldiers discussing planned attacks on the L. & N. property. So using various pretexts she would secure a pass through the lines to visit a nephew in Monroe County, thus having opportunity to send her warnings. The Ritter House stood on the site later used for the L. & N. freight depot.

Before the L. & N. instituted dining car services, the trains took meal stops in Bowling Green when the crew as well as the passengers would go to the Ritter House to eat.

The hotel had large double parlors in which were crystal chandeliers and pier mirrors.

Mrs. Ritter died November 11, 1881, in the Ritter House. Her funeral held on Sunday afternoon at the Methodist Church was attended by all classes. Her old servants were provided with hacks and "assigned a near position to the hearse in the procession". They were also assigned an "eligible seat in the church. The immense throng that followed her to the grave- many on foot because all vehicles were in requisition" - revealed the respect and love in which she was held.

W.B. Winans, son-in-law of Mrs. Ritter, leased the hotel and remained its manager until 1890. At that time the hotel was razed, and four cottages on Clay Street near Eleventh were built of the materials. Mr. Winan's daughter, Fannie, lived out her life in

one of the cottages.

Oil portraits of Mrs. Ritter and her daughter and son-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Winans, have been placed in the Kentucky Building.

THE RAUSCHER HOUSE

The Rauscher House was a rival of the Ritter House. Built on Adams Street across from the Ritter, it, too, had its crystal chandeliers and its many mirrors. The Rauscher House was a three story building and its name was plainly inscribed on the building.

The old German proprietor, Dominix Rauscher, who died in 1885, is buried in the St. Joseph Catholic Cemetery. His wife is also buried there.

After Mr. Rauscher's death, his daughter and her husband, Captain James H. Webb assumed management of the Rauscher House. In time the house became the Webb Hotel. It was at this period that the word house was being replace by the word hotel.

In the Times-Journal, July 8, 1902, the following description was given:

WEBB'S HOTEL

One of the most famous hostelries on the whole L. & N. railroad system is Webb's Hotel, this city. It is one of the largest and most modernly conducted establishments of its kind in Southern Kentucky and rightfully enjoys a liberal patronage.

Captain James H. Webb and his hotel are both popular with the travelling public and many friends of the house travel miles frequently in order to have the pleasure of remaining there over Sunday.

The hotel is perfectly appointed throughout and is equipped with all modern improvements. It has forty-five elegantly furnished and well ventilated bedrooms; attractive parlors; polite and courteous servants; large sample rooms; a a handsome office; one of the handsomest

and most commodious dining rooms in the state, and in addition has hot and cold baths on each floor. The tables abound with all the delicacies the market affords...The cuisine in unexcelled and is in charge of leading exponents of the culinary art.

By 1921 Miss Ruth Webb had become the manager. The oil boom, which brought its pressure for rooms, caused Miss Webb to make additional bedrooms out of the dining room space, thus bringing the rooms to 52. Telephone connections were added and hot and cold water became a feature of each room.

In 1923 the railroad station was moved from Main and Adams to Kentucky and Fourth. This change along with the end of the oil boom, caused the Webb Hotel to go out of business. Later the old Rauscher-Webb building was occupied by J. T. Patterson and Son Wholesale Grocers.

MANSARD HOTEL

When the Ritter House was torn down in 1891, Mr. Winans, the manager, bought a building on the corner of Main and Center and remodeled it from a rooming house into a modern hostelry for those times.

In 1894 Mr. Winans sold the Mansard Hotel to a Mr. Owens. The hotel became popular with the travelling salesmen or drummers as they were once called.

One of the guests was Mr. George M. Williamson, a graduate of Carleton College in Minnesota. Mr. Williamson traveled for the Federal Pension Department. In 1897 Williamson, Tom McGinnis, and James H. Tucker bought the hotel from Mr. Owens. McGinnis managed the hotel until 1903 when Williamson gave up his work with the Federal Pension Department and became the manager. Three years later the other two owners sold their interest to J. W. Montgomery of New Orleans. In 1920 George Williamson became the sole owner.

Soon after Williamson had become the manager, the hotel was remodeled. Running water and telephone connections were placed in every room.

Comfortable parlors were provided on the second floor for the assembling of guests and to be used for banquets and smaller private parties. The Mansard became well known for its good food. A ladies entrance with a stairway led from the street at the eastern end of the building to the parlor on the second floor.

The official name Mansard had been chosen because of a mansard gable on the roof. The hotel did a fine business during the 1918 oil boom.

George Williamson who married one of Bowling Green's finest young ladies, became an excellent citizen of the community.

By 1929 Mr. Williamson's health was not too good. At that time he leased the Mansard to Mr. C. W. Lampkin, who managed the Mansard along with the Helm. The Park City Daily for June 3, 1931, carried a story relative to extensive remodeling of the Mansard. An old balcony was removed and a new marquee was installed. In 1932 A. D. Noe of the Noe hotel family of Hopkinsville leased both the Mansard and the Helm, which at this time had seventy-five bedrooms.

In 1940, Mr. Williamson resumed management of the Mansard. When his son George M, Williamson, Jr, returned from service in the air force, he took training in hotel management, working in various hotels including the Brown in Louisville. In 1946 he assumed management of the Mansard. The father died in 1948.

R. F. Osteen became the manager with a ten-year lease in 1953. At the end of the lease George Jr. again became manager. In 1955 a new front was added to the Mansard.

The nearby Avalon Hotel on Main Street came under the operation of the Mansard.

PARK CITY HOTEL

When the Y.M.C.A. building ceased to be used as a community center in 1931, Mr. Owens, of the Horse Cave hotel family, bought the building and began operating the Park City Hotel.

In 1933 the Park City was sold to Mr. W. G. Thomas. The following year Mr. Thomas sold an interest to Mr. C. W. Lampkin. For five years Mr. Lampkin retained his interest in the Park City and held leases on both the Helm and the Mansard, thus controlling the hotel business during this period.

The Park City hotel was remodeled, with thirty rooms being cut from the two Y.M.C.A. gymnasium floors.

Eventually several small apartments were arranged. Mr. and Mrs. Roy Gott became managers of the hotel.

EARLE HOTEL

The Earle Hotel, established in 1945, was a medium-sized hotel located at 1148 Center Street. The Earle catered to motor tourists. Its forty-five rooms ranged in price from \$1.50 - \$3.00 per day. The Earle, was rented by the Earle chain of hotels, from Francis Gonce, owner of the building. Manager of the hotel was L. H. Prichard.

A few other hotels have operated in Bowling Green, but they were small and more in the nature of a boarding house. The new chapter, of course, is the Motor Court or Motel.