

Meetings of the Jackson Purchase Historical Society, 2017-2018

Members and guests of the Jackson Purchase Historical Society met in Mayfield, Kentucky for their summer quarterly meeting on July 22. In a spacious room at the Purchase Area Development District Office, President Bill Mulligan opened the business meeting at 10:30 a.m.



Guest speaker Bobbie Smith Bryant presented the program on “Farming in the Black Patch.” She noted how important it was to preserve and pass down family stories. Her family has had ten generations of farmers and some of the shared stories from her father provided the information for her first book. Bryant told the audience about the difference between burley tobacco, which is primarily grown for cigarette production, and dark-fired tobacco, which is primarily used for snuff and chewing tobacco. She expanded upon the local Black Patch War, including pictures from the era. Perhaps one of the most interesting points in her talk was the then and now pictures of the farm, her family, and the migrant workers who return each year to help.

A few years ago, a film was produced about “the story of a family farm in Murray, Kentucky that for generations has grown dark-fired tobacco, only common to Western Kentucky and Tennessee.” This film about Bryant’s family is periodically shown on KET stations and is a Michael Breeding MEDIA production.

Bryant had three books available for purchase at the meeting and held an impromptu book signing, including “Farming in the Black Patch,” “Passions of the Black Patch: Cooking and Quilting in Western Kentucky,” and “Forty Acres & A Red Belly Ford: The Smith Family of Calloway County.” Bryant’s books are available at many locations, including Amazon.

The JPHS would like to thank the Kentucky Humanities Council for helping to provide such speakers as Bobbie Smith Bryant to local organizations and educational institutions.



JPHS President Bill Mulligan called the November 4 meeting to order at 10:30 am at the Weldon



Public Library in Martin, Tennessee, bringing together members of the JPHS, the West Tennessee Historical Society, and other guests. After a brief business meeting, JPHS Treasurer Marvin Downing introduced the guest speaker, Judge Tommy Moore, a Dresden, Tennessee native. His talk, entitled “Moore Musings about Local History,” was delightful and very informational. Moore gave his personal history, noting how he became interested in local history and the people of Weakley County. As a real estate and land title research lawyer, Moore learned a great deal about the area over the years. He said he spent many lunch hours reading through deeds and newspapers and learning

about historical times like the garbage workers strike and the Civil Rights era. He mentioned the ongoing project to have portraits of prominent citizens and judges installed in the courthouse. He also talked about the cemetery walks that began in 2000 and continue to this day, highlighting specific themes each year. Perhaps the most interesting story he told was of Lieutenant Herbert L. Jones, a hometown hero of World War I. Jones was part of the Big Red One, First Division, American Expeditionary Force. He was killed on July 4, 1918, saving the life of a comrade. Following his life story, Moore learned of his initial internment in a church in France, but with a “homecoming” of sorts back to Tennessee when his remains were returned in 1921.

Judge Moore also spoke of the Civil War battle of Lochridge Mill in 1862. He told a fascinating story about Major Carl Schaeffer von Boernstein, a German descendant from Dubuque, Iowa, who was part of 130 Union soldiers sent to the area to fight the Confederates. (Note: He is also referred to as Karl Schaefer von Bernstein.) The final battle was a sword fight on horseback on a bridge between von Boernstein and Captain John Goff Ballentine of Pulaski, Tennessee. He ended his talk with other stories about discoveries made during his research and allowed time for the audience to ask questions.



On January 20 we met at the Hotel Metropolitan in Paducah. The weather was dreadful, but “the show” went on.

After a brief business meeting, President Bill Mulligan introduced Nathan Blake Lynn of the McCracken County Library and equally well-known as a musician. Lynn shared his research on Mary Wheeler and African American Folk Songs of the Ohio River Valley. Ms. Wheeler was a pioneering musicologist who saved the folk songs of Ohio River workers, mostly African American, from loss through her work. She collected all these songs before recording devices

were available by meeting with river workers and retired river workers and listening to them sing the songs. She wrote down the words.



the Ohio River workers. This led to several important publications: *Roustabout Songs: A Collection of Ohio River Valley Songs* (1939) and *Steamboatin' Days: Folk Songs of the River Packet Era* (1944).

We ended, appropriately, singing one of the songs Wheeler saved in the call and response style of the music.



JPHS Vice President Richard Parker was the featured speaker at the March 10th meeting of the Jackson Purchase Historical Society at the Benton Branch of the Marshall County Public Library.

Introducing the guest speaker, JPHS President Mulligan noted Parker was the author of *The Wild*



World of the Jackson Purchase, and was a past student of Mulligan's at Murray State University. Parker was born in Murray, Kentucky, but grew up in Paris, Tennessee. He had a Boy Scout background and spent many years exploring the area known as the Jackson Purchase. It was when he was student teaching in Louisville that he realized the Jackson Purchase was not well known across the rest of the state of Kentucky. And so he began researching and

writing about the interesting characters of the area. Parker now works as a teacher for the Forest Service at the Golconda Job Corps in Golconda, Illinois, and he and his family reside in Paducah.

Parker's talk focused on the Kentucky counties of the Jackson Purchase, telling stories about some of the characters found in the pages of his book. Many of the illustrations in the book were drawn by Parker and he has begun putting some of those on t-shirts which are available for purchase, as is the book, *The Wild World of the Jackson Purchase*.

The persons covered during Parker's program and their county connection were:

- Calloway - Dr. Theodore Roosevelt Mason Howard (medicine)
- Carlisle - Martha Stewart (actress; singer)
- Marshall - Dr. Robert Grubbs (chemistry)
- Fulton - Casey Jones (railroad)
- Graves - Ellis Wilson (artist)
- Hickman - Col. E. H. Taylor, Jr. (bourbon)
- Ballard - Kenny Rollins (basketball)
- Graves - Lyons Quintuplets (Oscar & Elizabeth, parents)
- Fulton - Darnell (Darnall)-Lane(Watson) Feud (written about by Mark Twain)
- McCracken - Buckskin Bill's Wild West Show (second in popularity to Buffalo Bill's)

A brief question and answer session was held immediately following Parker's program. It was obvious that all in attendance were very interested in Parker's book and presentation by the caliber of questions and comments made.



The Jackson Purchase Historical Society met on Saturday, April 28th, 2018 in the auditorium of Wrather Museum on the campus of Murray State University. After conducting a short business meeting, JPHS President Bill Mulligan introduced MSU student Matthew Meyer as the guest speaker.

Meyer had gathered artifacts and information, especially from personal letters, about his relative, Sophronia Ann Bruce. Sophronia was a gifted quilter and lace maker, who raised three daughters to adulthood with her husband, William Owens Bruce. Sophronia was a very influential housewife in Henry County, Kentucky, an active member of society, a caring mother, and a pioneer at a time when women were a marginalized group.

The family were farmers and Sophronia learned about the business of a working farm. When her father could no longer sustain the family farm, Sophronia was forced into marriage and in choosing William Bruce, the farms became quite a holding. According to the census of 1850, the Bruce family had an estimated 10,000 acres. Since William was charged with caring for his father's farm at the time, Sophronia basically was in charge of their own farm. She would cook the meals, ensure the family had clothing and other needs met, manage the farm, and care for all the children, in addition to performing roles like lace tatter, quilter, and more. Sophronia

finished a beautiful honeycomb quilt in time for the County Fair in 1857, where she won first prize in the quilt show.

The Civil War affected the Bruce family as it did many families in Kentucky, with some family members sympathizing with the Union and others sympathizing with the Confederates. William helped hide Confederate horsemen when John Hunt Morgan's Raiders came to the area, but the Kentucky 14th Cavalry was soon behind. When the Union Army took over the Bruce home as a headquarters, the family was forced to live in a log cabin for much of the war. Once the war was over, the family experienced the same economic issues as most did.



In 1868, the last daughter was born and Sophronia's health was virtually destroyed. She had already begun to show signs of an illness known as Telogen Effluvium, which caused her to lose her hair. For most of the rest of her life, she was known to wear a curled wig. The three daughters were able to complete one last quilt together, known as The Crazy Quilt. Due to some family issues, Sophronia at one time was forbidden to contact her daughters. Sophronia's health deteriorated. The family never truly reconciled and Sophronia died on the first day of May in 1888.

Meyer also brought many of the family artifacts, including the two quilts for members and guests to see first-hand and discussed them with those interested.



Text: Melissa Webb Earnest and Bill Mulligan. Photos: Bill Mulligan.

President's Remarks

As I write this in late May I am happy to report that the state of the Jackson Purchase Historical Society is good and that we have had a successful year.

We held five meetings as implemented a decision by the board to expand to six meetings for our 60th Anniversary. We will continue with six meetings if attendance and response warrants it. The programs from the meetings are detailed elsewhere. We met in a number of places in the Purchase region as befits a regional organization. We visited Mayfield, Martin, Paducah, Benton, and Murray during the year. I hope we can continue to meet in all parts of the Purchase in the future.