

GREATER JEFFERSONTOWN
HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

April 2016

Vol. 14 Number 2

April 2016 Meeting

Special Meeting Site - Nunnlea – 1940 South Hurstbourne Parkway

The April meeting will be held **Monday, April 4, 2016**. We will meet at 7:00 P.M at the Nunnlea House, light refreshments will be available.

The speakers will be Martha Elson, a reporter for *The Courier-Journal*, who has a weekly history column in the Sunday edition, and Kathleen Owen, Nunnlea curator. They will present the history of the house and show Funk family artifacts.



Nunnlea, owned by the Beautification League of Louisville and Jefferson County, and one of three houses built by the Funk Family on 300 acres in the area of the intersection of Taylorsville Road and Hurstbourne Parkway, was built by Peter Funk for his daughter, Harriet Funk Hite (also spelled Hise in some documents). The beautiful one-story, ten-room house was probably constructed around 1854, and still remains intact along with its smokehouse and slave quarters.

The Greater Jeffersontown Historical Society meetings are now held on the first Monday of the even numbered months of the year. Everyone is encouraged to attend to help guide and grow the Society.

June Meeting

In June we will return to the Jeffersontown Library at 10635 Watterson Trail. In association with the Jeffersontown Branch Library and the Filson Historical Society the program will be “To The Polls! Political Campaigns Through the Years,” presented by Jim Homberg.

Program Description: Americans have been holding presidential elections for well over 200 years; and except for George Washington, as the nation’s first chief executive, there have always been contenders for the office. Some campaigns for the White House have been rather calm affairs, while others have been vigorously and bitterly contested. Through the years, The Filson has acquired a large collection of campaign related material that gives both voice and vision to this important process in our country’s political life. In this illustrated presentation, Curator of Special Collections Jim Holmberg will show a sampling of The Filson’s presidential campaign and election material and discuss their use in the race for the White House.

Jim Holmberg is a native of Louisville and holds a BA and MA from the University of Louisville in History. He joined the staff of The Filson in 1982 and currently serves as the Curator of Collections.

February Meeting

As part of Black History Month along with the Jeffersontown Branch Library we presented a program by local author, Carridder Jones, who spoke about her book "Voices, From Historical African American Communities Near Louisville, Kentucky." Linda Wilson, niece of James Wilson, the founder of Skyview Park, and a contributor to the book, was also going to speak about Jeffersontown. Ms. Wilson was unable to attend.

Carridder started on the book after she received a call from Judy Miller, Deputy Director of Education, Programming, and Public Relations with the Filson Society, about a project they were working on to collect information on the African American community in and around Louisville that would help to fill in many blanks in their files. After attending a meeting on the project Carridder accepted the invitation to assist by going out to communities such as Berrytown, Harrods Creek, Griffytown, Taylor Subdivision, and Jeffersontown and interviewing residents in those areas about their family histories and experiences.

Almost everyone she spoke with talked about the "Day Law" and how it affected them in their everyday lives. The Day Law, "An Act to Prohibit White and Colored Persons from Attending the Same School," was signed into law in the Commonwealth of Kentucky by Governor J. C. Beckham March 1904. The Day Law, named after Carl Day of Breathitt County who introduced the bill in the Kentucky House of Representatives, prohibited students of color from attending the same school as white students. Also, they could not attend schools less than twenty-five miles from a whites-only school. This last sentence caused huge problems. Blacks only schools had to be set up and built, but many whites didn't want the schools close by, so many times schools were far from where the black students lived and they had to be bussed, as we know it today to school. But the students were needed to help on farms or in houses and travelling for long periods would pull them away from these needs. Consequently, many did not attend school.

The Day Law originated in Kentucky but went nationwide and was finally put to rest with the Supreme Court ruling in the Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka in 1954.

At the time Berea College was the only school for higher education open to all African Americans. After passage of the Day Law, Berea College was criminally convicted and fined \$1,000. The Court of Appeals of Kentucky denied Berea College's appeal, agreeing with the Kentucky General Assembly on the law's purpose, that of preventing racial violence and interracial marriage. By the fall of 1912 Berea had opened the Lincoln Institute for black students seeking a higher education. It later became the Kentucky State University.

Carridder spoke to William and Mary Keller living in Harrods Creek. Mary's parents owned a home built in the shape of a river boat. When she married William, Mary was excited to be leaving her parents' home, but her mother just couldn't understand why she would want to leave since the house was so large and could easily accommodate both families. So Mary never had her own home.

Mary told of the time on a Sunday morning, when her mother was elderly and wasn't able to attend church services. Her mother called out to Mary, "He's a coming, He's a coming and I've got to get ready." "Who's coming," Mary asked. Her mother replied, "I don't know, but I've got to get dressed. Mary got a pan of water to wash her mother, but when she started, her mother just sidled down and Mary wasn't able to pull her back up. Mary called to a neighbor who came over and realized Mary's mother was gone.

Carridder interviewed William and he a was a real rascal she said. They went outside and William pointed that all the open land around them was called The Neck, and at one time eight families lived in The Neck, but then only the Kellers remained. He showed Carridder what remained of the foundation

of the old school their kids attended. They returned to the house and William had pictures on the walls and on chairs. They were pictures other family members had given him and he had no clue as to who they were, but he told Carridder she could take any she wanted to make copies. But she had better return them or he would come back and haunt her.

William grew up with two brothers and when their mother had to go out and work, their mother's sister would watch them. One time the boys were out on the porch with their aunt who was in a rocking chair and the boys were on the rockers in back. William was to play a part in the school play and the aunt asked him about it. William replied with I don't want to be some damned so-and-so. His aunt grabbed him, spun him around, and told his two bothers to go get a pan of water, a T-towel, and the lye soap, with which she washed out his mouth. William told Carridder if such discipline was used today, we wouldn't have as big a problem with kids as we do today.

Carridder interviewed Rev. Thurmond Coleman, retired pastor of the First Baptist Church in Jeffersontown. He was not born in this area and his dad was a miner who didn't like to be underground, so became a barber. Thurmond didn't want to be a miner, either. Thurmond met a man whose son had come to J'Town to go to school and Thurmond begged the boy's father to help him to get into school in J'Town.

Thurmond was successful in getting into school here and he was put in charge of getting and keeping all the pots and pans clean and ready to go. He met his wife to be at school and they married. To support his family Thurmond had to drop out of school and went to work at a bookstore in Louisville where he became very efficient at placing the books on the shelves faster than anyone had seen. Getting to work at the bookstore sometimes was a challenge. One day a man stopped to give Thurmond a lift into town and told Thurmond that he came that way often since he was going to medical school in Louisville and if Thurmond was there he would give him a ride.

The two became good friends and the man told Thurmond that if any of his family needed medical attention they could come to the clinic where he worked, but they would have to come in the backdoor in the alley. But when he got his own clinic they could enter through the front. This doctor attained a high office in Louisville, working with the police department investigating accidents, murders and suicides, and then delivering reports on them. She did not identify this doctor. After questioning from the audience if the doctor was Dr. Greathouse, Jefferson County Coroner for many years and a Jeffersontown resident, Carridder said it was.

Thurmond went to work and lived on a large farm in this area, where there was so much to be done, he had to be a cook first, then change clothes to be a chauffeur, then change again to be a stable hand or painter, and then maybe had to be a driver again. He also had other jobs in order to take care of his family.

That life became too difficult and Thurmond decided to return to school, but he still worked as a school bus driver and in a restaurant to survive. The family with the farm went to Florida every winter and they would leave a list of jobs that needed to be finished before their return in the spring – polishing all the silver and brass, buffing the floors and such, because they held a big derby party every year.

Carridder said she was telling this story to a ladies quilting group and one of the ladies said she knew where this farm was, because her husband had also worked there. Carridder asked the lady to wait for her after the meeting so Carridder could find where the farm was located. Carridder went to the farm and found things just as Rev. Coleman had described and it was still as well kept and functioning. She wouldn't tell us which farm it was or where it was located???

There was a community where the residents didn't have a lot to eat, but they didn't go hungry. Different ones knew about edible plants in the farm fields and would collect them and show others how to fix them. If the men went fishing and did well, a fish fry would be held for everyone. The same with killing a pig or bagging meat from a hunt, everyone got a piece. There was a small group of men who would go to various houses about meal time and stand around. The family would usually invite them in for the meal. Some people if they knew someone was fixing something they liked, they would stand around to get a portion. No one really went hungry.

Carridder wondered why Monday was always laundry day. In stories she read, Monday was always wash day. After she thought about it, she realized it was after Sunday when most people were off and help was available to get water up to the house and kids could help getting things together.

Saturday was always bath day, even though everyone may have to use the same water, reheating it in a tea kettle. Then everyone would be ready for church on Sunday.

One lady had a grandmother who was a real worker, but her husband was a slacker. The grandmother had to walk to where she worked and in the winter by the time she reached her job site her dress would be frozen and before she started work her dress would have to thaw out and she would have to wash up. And going home after work her dress would again freeze as she walked home. She did this until she couldn't continue, but she saved up enough to buy an acre and a half from someone in the community. She bought a tent and she and her seven kids lived in it until she could build a small house without electricity or running water, but they were inside something solid.

One thing the grandmother would do was on Sunday she would cook a large meal and bake a lard cake that the granddaughter loved. Carridder said she always wanted to bake a lard cake and told her daughter about her desire. But the daughter asked Carridder if she had a recipe, which she didn't, but Carridder said she knew there was one somewhere. With that the daughter opened her cell phone and pulled a lard cake recipe for her mother. But she also reminded Carridder people don't bake with lard anymore, so Carridder figures that idea is down the drain.

Back in the day these people were proud of what they accomplished with the small resources they had. They were able to get houses that they proudly and caringly took care of, they provided each other help and support, but not all stayed in the community, some moved north to places like Detroit. Some of those when they got older returned back here and some sent their kids back to live with their grandparents.

A story was related to Carridder about such an incident. The grandson was sent back and told his grandmother in his school he was not dressed as well as the other kids. He asked if he got a job cutting grass or doing other things would he be able to dress better. She agreed. He worked, got his first pay and brought it to show his grandmother - \$3.00! He was on his way. But the grandmother told him half of that was hers for raising, housing and feeding him. He had to think hard about that, but he figured he still had quite a bit. From then on the grandmother got half of all he earned, she dressed him well, and he was never again embarrassed of the way he looked. That was a very good lesson for the boy to learn.

The boy later joined the military and told the story that so many men were being killed that he attained rank quickly and he was made a sergeant. One day his commanding officer called him in and told him that things were not being done as well and quickly as they should. The officer told him if things didn't change quickly they could be done as well by a PFC as well as by a sergeant. Things quickly changed he said, he got his men under control because he knew the sergeant stripes would be ripped off.

Many young black men in the 1960s and on ended up in the military and received a good education. One of these men was hired by the Louisville Housing Authority after discharge and after thirty years there, close to retirement, learned that Kentucky Fried Chicken was going to hire their first African American manager. He went to KFC headquarters to get an application and at the desk was a friend. His friend asked him if he really wanted to apply for the job with thirty years with the housing authority and when he was so close to retirement. His friend also pointed out a container that held a mound of envelopes. Those his friend told him represented what he was up against – his competition. That was OK the man said, he still wanted to do it if KFC would hire him. Every month he would check with his friend about that stack. Finally a few months later he was called in for an interview. He saw his friend again and his friend asked him if he was really going to give up his job with the housing authority? You bet the man said.

In the interview he was asked the same question. Why would you give up thirty years to restart, even for a manager's job? The interviewing went on for a few months, but perseverance won out and he became KFC's first minority manger and franchisee owner.

Carridder said most of the people she interview for the project came out fairly well and were eager and proud to tell their stories. It was after six or so passed away before she realized she had to get their stories out and not have the stories placed in a folder somewhere waiting for someone to search them out. She feels her book to be honest to their memories.

In the Q and A Carridder was again asked about where the farm was, but she would not tell us where??

She was asked about a black land owner in the southwest part of the county that supposedly had white tenet farmers. She didn't know anything about the person, but said it wasn't unusual for a free black man to own land and also have a few slaves or whites working for him. It occurred in the Newburg area.

Carridder interviewed Dr. Greathouse and talked at length about his friendship with Rev. Coleman. Dr. Greathouse said Rev. Coleman was of great help to him in dealing with incidents, especially in the west end of Louisville, giving of his time and compassion at all times of day and night.

The question was asked if the land that many of the people had bought was still in their families. Some of it still is, especially if the older people are still with us. In many instances the kids sold the land after they inherited it because they didn't want to have to care for a large plot.

Carridder started talking about James Taylor of the Taylor Subdivision she mentioned at the beginning of her talk. He owned a large plot of land out in the Prospect area which is now one of the priceiest areas of the county. Taylor's idea she said, was for the people who came from downtown to work out there would not have the long trek back and forth each day and would have a nice home in the area to return to at the end of the workday. Anyway, he would show them parcels of land, some up to a few acres, and sell it to them. He would show each of them a little black book in which he kept their payment record, and when they paid off their debt, he would give them the book. But apparently some of the purchasers didn't enjoy the land as Taylor did, for shortly after he died, the owners started selling off their land, and now the area is close to a 50/50 mix of white and black. The big lots he wanted them to have to raise chickens, maybe a few cattle, and have a garden so they could provide for themselves, were sold off for good money. The lots were subdivided for other houses and condos. This was especially true if the kids ended up with the land.

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