



Fairfield Historical Society



Spring 2017

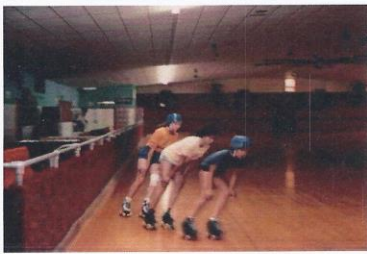
The official publication of the Fairfield Historical Society

Cornerstones

Building on the Past, Present and Future of the City of Fairfield and Fairfield Township



FHS Snapshots



The days of heading to the **Tri-Skateland roller rink** are over. The center was known for the last few years as Skate America, closed its doors February 25, 2017. Tri-Skateland was originally opened by Elmer and Kay Hammet in 1965. In 1990 the Hammets retired and sold the facility to their daughter, Joleen Harris, who continued operating it until 2015 under the name "The Rink." Alan Leonard, the owner of a chain of regional skating rinks, purchased Tri-Skateland in 2015 and changed the name to Skate America.



FHS Programs Brings the City's Past Alive

Former City Leaders On Tap For One-on-one Talks

A reunion of some of Fairfield's former leaders will enable the public to learn more about past city projects and a "behind-the-scenes" look at how the city operates. Art Pizzano, Tim Bachman and Dave Crouch are scheduled to share their insights and experiences running the city. Pizzano is a long-time former city manager while Bachman served as the city's development services director and Crouch served as the public utilities director.

Last fall, Pete Groh hosted a sell-out crowd with part 1 of his presentation of life as a Fairfield School student starting when the district consolidated into a formal school district in 1929. He continues his look at what became Central Elementary and the school system at the first meeting of the year on Tuesday, March 7. Central Elementary and the Freshman School are scheduled to be torn down this May.

Please do your neighbor, co-worker or friend a favor - bring them along to a FHS meeting and enable them to share in the experience of life in Fairfield. Our programs are especially interesting to newer residents who may not appreciate the colorful history that the rest of us have enjoyed over the years.

All meetings begin at 7:00 p.m. at the Elisha Morgan Mansion at Gilbert Park, 6131 Ross Road in Fairfield. Meetings are free and open to the public and light refreshments and snacks are available.

Here is a list of upcoming speakers through July:

March 7 - Pete Groh, Fairfield Schools

April 4 - Art Pizzano, former Fairfield City Manager

May 2 - Dave Crouch, former Public Utilities Director

June 6 - Tim Bachman, former Economic Development Director

July 5 (NOTE THE DATE CHANGE) - We will be hosting our annual "Show 'n Tell" series so please bring in your interesting memorabilia to share!

Our Feature Story >>> Last Reflections on Central Elementary and the Freshman School

Our friends over at the Fairfield High School Alumni Association hosted a public open house last fall of the soon to be demolished Central Elementary and Freshman School. The turnout exceeded expectations and the event was planned to be the last opportunity for the public to tour the schools one last time. After some discussion with school district officials and the demolition contractor, it was decided to host another public open house.

Saturday, May 6 from 9am-1pm, the public is invited to take the last tour of the schools before they are torn down. Admission is free and all visitors are asked to enter through the main doors of the Freshman School Gym entrance.

Our own Bob Pendergrass will also feature a special exhibit of school memorabilia in the Freshman School cafeteria.

Central Elementary was constructed in 1929 after the Fairfield School District was formed and consolidated 13 independent schools located throughout the city of Fairfield and Fairfield Township. Many of the independent school buildings are still standing today, including a private business on Erie Highway, a private home on River Road at Nilles and two serving as storage buildings on River Road near Marsh Park and on River Road near Magie Ave.



Central Elementary Gym (above)
Freshman School Auditorium (below)



Thank you for your support >>>



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Village Green Park

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Ercel Speaks

with former Journal-News Columnist Ercel Eaton



Accidental Connection

Some years ago when I was deep into my work for a local newspaper and tracking an assignment from a city editor who was interested in the large numbers of Butler County area residential transplants from Kentucky.

Calling at the home of Don and Grace Sturgill, I was stunned at the first words of Mr. Sturgill: "I've spent many, many hours with your dad," he said with a smile.

Well, I was trying to begin what I had hoped would be a feature story about the Sturgills, but first and most, I wanted to hear about my father, who had been deceased about a dozen years and who was called "Poppy" by myself and my 11 brothers and sisters.

So the visit turned into a delightful hour and a half of reminiscing, remembering and visits to our former homes in the slopes of Appalachia. Poppy, was a minister, coal miner, farmer, stone mason, and gristmill operator among other things.

I felt as though a crystal thread and slipped into the room to connect me with these folks who knew poppy. Born in Leslie County, Ky., I spent the first 15 years of my life there graduated, along with my older sister, from Leslie County High School, just as my family moved to another farm on "level land" in Laurel County.

Friendly and gracious, Don and Grace welcomed me into their pleasant home. I loved every minute of our interview.

"You know," Don said, "our central activities in that community were in the church; and your Dad would preach in different areas. We'd go along with him to sing at the services." "My father, Sturgill recalled, "preached with Bil Pennington and was always surrounded by a quartet of local singers."

At the time of our meeting Don Sturgill, still centered his life in the church serving as an elder of The Fairfield Church of Christ where he was active in many areas of the church.



Leslie County homestead (c) 1949 Life magazine

Another thread-like connection was that the Sturgills had resided in the mountainous area of Leslie County, Ky., where my family had lived. He talked about walking to school on the ice in Polls Creek (so did I). Also, I could remember too as he talked about digging ginseng and may apple root in the spring and gathering chestnuts "before the blight killed most of the chestnut trees in the late 20s."

It was across the creek that my father, Dewey Stidham constructed a stone dam that interrupted the center of the water with a gate that opened by way of a contraption across the top. In addition to grinding our farm-raised corn into meal for cooking, he opened the mill to neighbors who brought their crops to the mill.

Once in a while I would meet other Butler County residents who had known my father back in the mountains. "He was the kindest, most generous person I've ever known," said another former Kentucky WPA worker who knew Poppy. It was said the builders of roads and other projects made a dollar a day.

My siblings and I grew up in those mountains and learned from our parents about caring for others and helping the needy. To this day we keep those lessons.

And what was a wonderful surprise is was to make the accidental connection to my father through the Sturgills. I hope to run into them again someday.



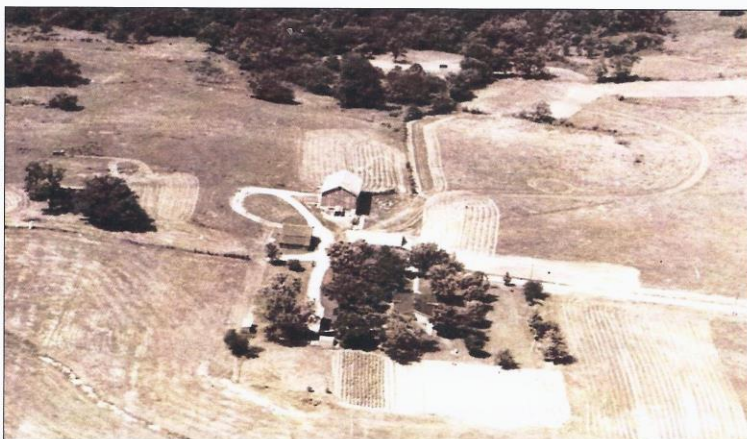
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Reflections



Fairfield's William Harbin Park was originally deeded in 1797 by Judge John Cleves Symmes to James Henry. Between 1802 and 1902, the property transferred fourteen times with the McDonald family farming it the longest. A nearby barn was built in 1880 by Ed Jessup as part of his adjacent property. This barn was recently torn down as part of a major park upgrade. It can be seen in the upper middle of this 1960's photograph. The homestead was located where the picnic shelters are located today. A very small section of the home's foundation can be seen next to one of the shelters. The park's namesake, William Harbin, served as mayor from 1972-1975 and spearheaded efforts to for its purchase in 1973.



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Check out our
library of photos
from the past 50
years on our
Facebook page!



Scan to view our Website!



Future meeting topics >>>

March 7 - Pete Groh - "The Early Days of the Fairfield City Schools"

April 4 - Art Pizzano, former city manager from 1998-2015.

May 2 - Dave Crouch, former public utilities director 1985-2015

June 6 - Tim Bachman, former development services director 1985-2016.

Have an idea for a meeting topic?
Send your ideas to
ffhistoricalsociety@gmail.com