

The Westporter



May 2019

WESTPORT
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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The Westport Historical Society celebrates and commemorates the 19th Century when Americans journeyed West to chase their dreams of greater possibilities.



The 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum and the Westport Historical Society are a §501(c)(3) charitable organization



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Special Quilt Exhibit

The Westport Historical Society and the 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum are pleased to announce a special QUILT EXHIBIT in May and June with beautiful Harris-Kearney House quilts from the 19th century. **The featured exhibitor is Mrs. Tammy Reid**, the wife of Andy Reid, the head coach of the Kansas City Chiefs.

Tammy has been collecting quilts from across the country for many years and will share a sampling of her collected quilts which contain vibrant colors, historic patterns and one-of-a kind designs. This exhibit will be a sneak peek into the extensive exhibit of Tammy's quilts in May and June of 2020. We are grateful to Tammy for sharing her love of unique and dazzling quilts with our members and friends over this two-year period.

The 2019 exhibit begins on Friday, May 3, and runs through Saturday, June 29. Exhibit hours and mansion house tours are Friday and Saturday, 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Private and group tours may also be booked on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. For more information or to book a tour, please call 816-561-1821 or 913-231-6749.



Westport 1927

“Absent is the hitching post where Jesse James tied his gray nag when he came to town, shopping for powder and ball, which was the signal for the town Marshall to withdraw into the depths of a barroom or the tavern. The site of the Tavern still is pointed out with pride by natives who have not forgotten about ‘Up Hays’ and the time he road into town and stripped the Federal Flag from in front of Union headquarters and got away with it. Those were the same days that Major John Campbell, John Calvin McCoy and other lawyers and real estate notables sat at the table in the office of Daniel Yoacham’s place expounding on the merits of the Town of West Port. Oh, the old days

Now, modern Westport hums with the duty of daily supplying the kitchenette apartment homes instead of outfitting wagon trains for the journey across the plains, to the amazement of those who still ‘remember when’ the first apple was sold in a provision store and when potatoes first were offered by the peck. Everyone in the old days had a cellar and ‘laid in’ abundant supplies of this kind in the fall and he whose supply did not last until spring was disgraced. Today, in 1927, we find these changes:

- Six extensive coal yards have supplanted the old-fashioned wood pile.
- Sixteen grocery and provision houses and nine restaurants within a radius of two blocks of Westport Road and Broadway.
- Three large hardware and builders supply establishments.
- The main office and extensive yards of the Badger Lumber Company.
- Westport beltline terminals, new warehouses and repair plant, enlarged trackage yards and many new team tracks.
- Large garages and automobile supply and repair concerns.
- The Manor Bakery, modern and up to date in every respect, employing 125 persons and from whose wagons the entire city is covered door to door.
- A rich and thickly settled community to the south and west, embracing the fertile plains of Johnson County, Kansas and unequalled trade territory.

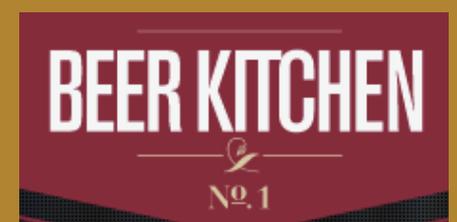
When the saloons were closed, people said Westport was dead and grass would grow on the streets. The town within a city was never so alive as it is today nor so full of promise of better things tomorrow.”

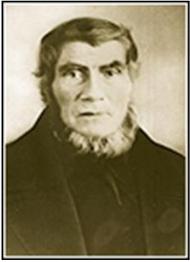
~Albert Doerschuck, druggist, compiled in 1927

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Harris House Hotel



John and Henrietta Harris (pictured above) bought John C. McCoy's trading post, called McGEE'S CATFISH HOUSE, on the northeast corner Main and Main Cross (Westport Road and Pennsylvania) in 1846. Almost immediately, they added four guest rooms and a stable to the structure. The Harris' operated the business, which they renamed The HARRIS INN AND TAVERN, until the log structure burned to the ground in 1851. 1852 saw the rise of a brand-new, 3-story brick hotel. This new business, named THE HARRIS HOUSE HOTEL, was a family-friendly hotel and the most popular in West Port. Patrons entered the hotel through a large front door just steps from Main Street (Westport Road). The check-in desk was on the right with a door leading to the bar, just behind. Across the hall on the left was a storage room which was often filled with guests' luggage. Continue down the center hallway passing a sunny parlor on the left with doors opening onto Main Cross (Pennsylvania). Opposite, on the right, was the large, elegant dining room. At the end of the hall on the right was the staircase leading to the guest rooms on the second and third floors. The hotel office adjoined the parlor at the back of the hotel.

John Harris headed the hotel's management and business, and Henrietta Harris and Aunt Minerva operated the kitchen which supported the most important room in the hotel: the dining room. One of the Harris grandchildren recalls that, by tradition, Grandmother Henrietta sat at the northern end of the main dining table with the hotel's permanent guests around her. Grandfather Harris sat at the opposite end with transient guests around him. Frequent guests at the hotel were explorer and Presidential candidate, John C. Fremont and his wife, Jessie Benton Fremont. All dining guests were attended by three servants, Matthew, Luke, and Peter who were dressed in white dinner jackets. Uncle Mark could usually be found at the sideboard carving turkeys and hams.

Border troubles boiled over in 1854 and the town was full of Union soldiers and Confederate sympathizers. Pro-slavery rallies were held on the Town Square, of which the northeast corner was occupied by the Harris House Hotel. After the shouting and tumult died, thirsty border ruffians would fill the hotel bar and the Harris till. By 1863, the hotel had been commandeered as garrison for the Union Army. In October, 1864, the hotel became the headquarters for General Samuel Curtis, commander of the Union Army during the Battle of Westport. By the end of the three-day battle, the hotel was converted into a field hospital and remained as such for many days. After the war, the hotel did open again and the Harris Family welcomed guests until John Harris' death in 1871. His will left the hotel to his son-in-law, William Bernard, a successful business man and banker. The hotel continued to operate until 1922 when it was razed to make way for a parking lot.

~from the files of the Westport Historical Society

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The Corner Restaurant



Westward Through West Port

“The westward migration beyond the Missouri border to Oregon, California, and Santa Fe was a unique saga in human history. This saga contained, in retrospect, elements of grandeur, pathos, and pageantry rarely observed in human affairs. Never before have so many people, willingly, without coercion or threat, left their homes to seek new lands, fortunes, or better lives at the end of a four to six-month journey of no return. It is estimated that between the initial gold rush to California, in 1848, and the start of the Civil War, in 1861, about 180,000 people ‘went west.’ The journey was often perilous; history records that almost one out of ten perished, primarily from accidents and illnesses, before reaching their destinations.

Emigrants to the west coast states generally traveled in wagons along the California and Oregon trails. In addition, some migration and much trade occurred via the Santa Fe Trail. There, trails were one route along the main street of West Port. The trails divided about thirty miles beyond West Port near present day Garner, Kansas; left the fork going to Santa Fe and the right fork to Oregon and California.

During those 13 vital years, while the western half of this nation was forming, the people of West Port worked at a feverish pace to furnish all the goods and services the migrants needed for the long journeys. Blacksmith’s hammers often clanged though out the warm spring nights. Wagon builders, traders in horses and cattle, merchants in clothing, saddles, harnesses, guns, food and other essential supplies worked hard to keep paces with the demands of migrants, and the demands were many.”

~from the writings of W. A. Strickland, Jr.

An Elegant House

“It was called an ‘Elegant’ House in Westport’s young days. Adjoining a lumber yard at 557 Westport Avenue stands a house that was spoken of as “elegant” in the bygone days when plainsmen and traders flourished. Now it has fallen into such a state of decay that soon it will have become a memory.”

The house was built in 1852 by James Hamilton, a leading merchant and trader of his day. Like a majority of the old Westport Houses, it was constructed of walnut logs covered in weather boarding. The house sat where the Kansas City Orphan Boys home once stood, at the corner of Belleview Avenue and Main Street (Westport Road). The cost to build the house was \$1400.00. The house was sold, for \$1500.00 in 1856, to Dr. J. W. Parker whose dignified dress and deportment were much commented upon in those days. Dr. Parker was a Southern sympathizer, and when the Federals captured Westport, he was forced to leave the state.

*~taken in part from the **Notebook of James Gillespie Hamilton***

Historical Resource Library

The library at the 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum contains many books and files which may be used as reference material for those seeking information on early Westport, the Town of Kansas, and many of the residents who lived and worked in early Kansas and Missouri. If you would like to do research using our sources, please call the museum staff to make an appointment: 816-561-1821.



Looking for the Perfect Gift?

If someone you know is not a member, please consider a membership in the Westport Historical Society for that special gift!

Memberships are \$15.00 for students, \$40.00 for individuals, and \$50.00 for a family.

The membership includes invitations to special events, the society's quarterly newsletter, free guided tour of the museum house, and a 10% discount on gift shop items





Charles Esmonde Kearney

Born to nobility in County Galway, Ireland on March 8, Charles Esmonde Kearney had the customary schooling of those times, but in addition took a classical course at St. Jarlath in Tuam. With the death of his parents and upon graduation, he migrated to America the day after Queen Victoria was crowned. After arriving New York, he obtained a job in a dry goods store as a clerk. In 1842, he traveled to Mobile, Alabama, where he clerked in a mercantile house for a short time. He moved on to New Orleans, Louisiana, and then at the outbreak of the Mexican War, he joined Captain Samuel H. Walker's Company of Texas Rangers.

During the war, he saw service at Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, Monterey, and Saltillo. During the battle of Resaca de la Palma, he carried dispatches to Major Brown who was besieged in Brownsville, Texas (Fort Brown). The contingent of Texas Rangers was mustered out after Saltillo and Kearney started a dry goods business in Camargo (Mexico) on the Rio Grande. He then came to Independence, Missouri in 1847 and got into the Santa Fe trade, making that place his headquarters. In 1852, he married Josephine Harris of West Port, Missouri, and in January, 1854, entered into a partnership with one of his brothers-in-law, William R. Bernard, and the two established headquarters in a building next door east of the Harris House Hotel.

By 1856, he had prospered to the point that he retired from the Santa Fe trade and took his family on a six-month tour of Europe. Upon his return to this area, he bought two buildings on the Missouri River Levee and re-entered the field of commerce. He dealt in the Mexican trade exclusively.

Just before the outbreak of the Civil War he bought all the wool obtainable at his sources for 15 to 19 cents per pound, and in 1861 sold it for 65 cents per pound. This move netted him \$1,250,000 in one year. Guerrilla activities practically isolated Kansas City and West Port during the war and Kearney moved the business to Leavenworth, Kansas. Worsening conditions in this area caused him to move with his family to New York City where he entered the field of stocks and bonds, or, as one source states, groceries.

Kearney did not tarry long in the east: 1866 found him back in this area as President of the Kansas City and Cameron Rail Road. Along with several other businessmen, he purchased 269 acres of land in what is now the heart of Kansas City for \$100.00 per acre.

In 1867, he secured the rights to erect a bridge across the Missouri River. The Hannibal Bridge was a railroad bridge and was completed in 1869, {Kearney is known as the Father of the Railroad in Kansas City.}

In 1885, he got into the real estate business In 1888, Kearney retired from business and lived in the Harris home until 1897. He passed away in 1898.

~taken from *Charles Esmonde Kearney* by William A, Goff. **The Westport Historical Quarterly, Volume X, Number 2, September, 1974, page 52.**

Lifetime Members of The Westport Historical Society

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On the Edge of Civilization

Main Street, (Westport Road) and what a great main street it was. It was sixty feet wide just west of Mill Street. On Main Street, East to West and civilization rubbed elbows with primitive Indians and plainsmen only a trifle less primitive. There, well-greased gentlemen from the East looked with amazement on the sons of the West in wide-brimmed hats, or coonskin caps, in garments of homespun cloth or of buckskin. It was the jumping-off place for the far West, for California, Oregon, New Mexico, and Arizona. It sold a bewildering variety of strange and fascinating wares—saddles, bridles, revolvers, rifles, wagons, salt pork, buffalo skins, and Spanish silver and gold bars brought from the Southwest.

Men came to West Port (WestPort pictured above) on their way to make their fortunes, with hope surging high and grandiose, rosy dreams of gold and a new world. Some of them came back to West Port with such fortunes jingling in their pockets, with gold dust in their luggage and perhaps with a letter of credit from some far-off California bank. All spent freely, those who hoped to make their fortunes and those who already had done so.

. . . Fine houses grew in West Port as the result of that Santa Fe trade. Roomy old brick or frame houses they were, with low gables and wide yards around them, gardens and living quarters for the slaves. Col. A. G. Boone lived in such a house on Main Cross (Pennsylvania) south of Thirty-ninth Street Terrace, just north of William Bernard's house.

Colonel Boone ran a store in Westport that dealt in everything from groceries to slaves. . . Colonel John Harris was proprietor of the gracious Harris House Hotel. . . William Bernard, with his partner Colonel Charles Kearney, was in the Santa Fe Trail trade himself. . . The bustling town was the edge of civilization and entry to the West.

~taken in part from the *Notebook of James Gillespie Hamilton*

Museum Exhibits

The museum staff is planning some exciting new exhibits for the 2019 season at the 1855 Harris-Kearney House.

Please check our website, Facebook, and the *Mansion House News* for announcements, dates, and times.



Did You Know?

1. In 1923 a movie entitled *THE COVERED WAGON* featured Westport as a prominent location?
2. In 1951 a novel was published entitled *WESTPORT LANDNG*?
3. High stakes poker was played at the Harris House Hotel?
4. Until the Civil War, herds of buffalo roamed south and west of West Port?
5. *I Wish I Was in Dixie's Land*, published in 1860, was the most popular song during the Civil War?
6. In 1860, Charles E. Kearney was the richest man in West Port?
7. The *West Port Border Star* was published from 1857 through 1862?
8. In 1870, Maude Adams and Jenny Lind were featured performers at the Coates Opera House?
9. The Easter Egg Hunt idea from Germany was introduced in England in 1892?
10. In 1986, the Rose was designated as the official flower of the United States?

1860s Traveling Etiquette



Img Source: Wikimedia

When traveling on the train, always remember decency and propriety. A rush and scramble at the railway ticket office is always unnecessary. The cars will not leave until every passenger is aboard, and if you have ladies with you, you can easily secure your seats and afterward procure the tickets at leisure. But if you lose a favorite seat, do not despair. You may find a suitable seat nearby, and next time, go to the cars one half hour early and you may procure that favorite seat.

When seated, or about to seat yourself in the cars, never allow considerations of personal comfort or convenience to cause you to forget the respectful courtesy due to women. The pleasant or most comfortable seats belong to the ladies and one must never refuse to resign such seats to them with a cheerful politeness. If you see a lady alone, do not hesitate to offer your seat. However, if a lady is accompanied by another gentleman, there is no need to rise and offer your seat.

Making acquaintances in the cars, although correct, is a measure of which travelers generally appear to be very shy. There is no reason for this as acquaintances thus picked up need never be recognized again, unless you please. If a stranger speaks to you, always answer in a most polite manner, and if the conversation proves disagreeable, there is no alternative but to change seats.

In the cars, you have no right to keep a window open for your accommodation if the air produced annoys or endangers the health of another. Common courtesies indicate that the wishes of fellow passengers should be looked after with all due respect.

There are a sufficient number of discomforts in traveling, at best, and it should be the aim of each passenger to lessen them as much as possible and to cheerfully bear his own part. Life is a journey, and we are all fellow travelers.

-Taken in part from L. Martine's *Handbook of Etiquette*

WHS Membership Levels

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Membership \$300

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Membership \$800*

*May be paid over two years



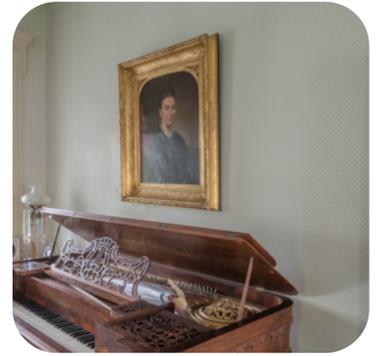
WHS Needs Volunteers!

Do you have a few hours to spare? Do you enjoy learning about history and sharing what you know? Would you like to be a part of an Historic House Museum and Historical Society?

Whether you would like to be a docent giving tours or if you would just like to help out at special events such as field trips, ice cream socials, or Christmas Candlelight Tours — we always welcome folks who would like to volunteer!

Whatever your skills or talents, we have a place for you!

Call Alana Smith for more Information about volunteering at (816)561-1821 or (913)648-0952.



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