

The Westporter



May 2020

WESTPORT
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



4000 Baltimore
Kansas City, MO 64111

(816) 561 - 1821

(913) 648 - 0952

westporthistorical@gmail.com

westporthistorical.com



The 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum
and Westport Historical Society are a
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DELAYED OPENING . . . A Moment in Time

Travel restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic may have put your planned visit to the Mansion House on hold, but we eagerly await your visit as we blaze a new path through a monumental time in history. During this pause in welcoming visitors, we are keeping busy taking care of the grounds and the mansion. We are also continuing plans for our programs and exhibits so all will be ready when we next see you.

We are accepting small group tour, meeting, event, and paranormal investigation reservations for future dates. Please call or send an email with a reservation request, fee information, or if you have questions: 816-561-1821 or westporthistorical@gmail.com.

The 1855 Harris-Kearney House is now scheduled to reopen:
June 11, 2020 (hours 1-5 p.m., Thurs-Sat)

In the meantime, you are invited to comment on our Facebook pages, and visit our website at www.westporthistorical.com for news, and updated information. Thank you to all who have reached out with calls and emails of concern, and yes, we are still accepting memberships and donations.

Please keep in touch, stay safe, and we hope to see you very soon!

Sodbusters in the Heartland

Thousands upon thousands of emigrants' wagons had traveled through the great central prairies and plains before pioneers thought of actually settling there. And, indeed, the vast region—stretching from the Missouri [River] to the Rockies and from the Canadian border to the Texas Panhandle—abounded in reasons for pressing on. It was treeless, matted with dense sod in its eastern reaches, arid farther west, and everywhere possessed of climate that ran from brutal extremes of hot and cold. But after the Civil War, pioneers warmed onto this desolate expanse—and stayed. In two decades, more new U.S. terrain was brought under cultivation than in the previous two and a half centuries.

The conquest was spurred by the growing shortage of arable lands elsewhere and partly by intense propagandizing. Newly built railroads, eager for business, wooed settlers with promotional campaigns. They were joined in their hard-sell tactics by transatlantic steamship companies hoping to tap a huge pool of land-hungry foreigners.

For newcomers from abroad, the plains offered the chance to rise from peasantry to proprietorship, and the land was surely no worse than what they left behind on Russia's steppes or in Sweden or Ireland or Germany. However, many an American-born wife from the East wept when she saw her husband's choice of a homestead. In the absence of wood and stone, the only building material was sod stripped from the soil. The only fuel was the dried manure of buffalo or cows. Droughts and grasshopper plagues brought havoc to crops. But, as on earlier frontiers, most pioneers lustily accepted the challenge. As one young Nebraska settler wrote his mom back East: "Ma you can see as far as you please here and almost every foot in sight can be plowed."

~*The Old West: Pioneers* (Time Life Books, p. 189)

Marshal of Westport, Missouri, Murdered—May, 1879

The usual peaceful, quiet of the little village of Westport, was yesterday disturbed and its people thrown into a perfect fever of excitement over one of the most cold-blooded murders it has been the duty of the press to chronicle. An old, gray haired man and official was most brutally shot down in cold blood, by one whose youth should have taught him to venerate rather than destroy. Between two and three in the afternoon, Samuel Bucher, the City Marshall of Westport was . . . at his residence . . . when two men in a buggy drove up to his front gate, and one of them inquired [of son, John S. Bucher] if the city marshal lived there. The son told them he did, that he was asleep and would call him . . . Mr. Bucher, in response to the summons . . . went to the buggy to see what was wanted. After conversing a few minutes with the parties . . . a pistol shot was fired and the death-stricken man tottered and fell to the ground and almost immediately expired . . . The men in the buggy whipped up their horse and endeavored to escape. In turning the corner, however, the buggy was overturned and both men were spilled to the ground. The one who did the shooting [William Gossard] ran towards town [after throwing the gun in the creek at Mill Street]. At the Exchange Saloon, the murderer was captured . . . and turned over to the Mayor, Mr. Booth . . . [Gossard, who had been employed by the Coats House as a telegraph operator, was convicted of murder and served a term in the penitentiary. The second man was not charged]. The deceased was about fifty-five years of age, and was the father of ten children . . . He was an old resident of West Port, and was a man of undoubted courage and bravery, and eminently fitted for the position to which he had been chosen by the people of Westport.

~*Westport Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 5., No. 2

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New Book on Harris Grandson:

Johnny Behan

By Annette Gray

Missourians have always been known to accomplish great things. This is especially true when we examine accounts of pioneer stoicism in the face of adversity.

For me, stories which caught and held my attention are those of two teenagers from West Port, Missouri. Their names were Mary (Mamie) Bier-Bernard Aguirre and her cousin, by marriage, John (Johnny) Harris Behan. Both were raised as Southerners in a relatively peaceful environment. Then came 1861 and the Civil War, and everything changed.



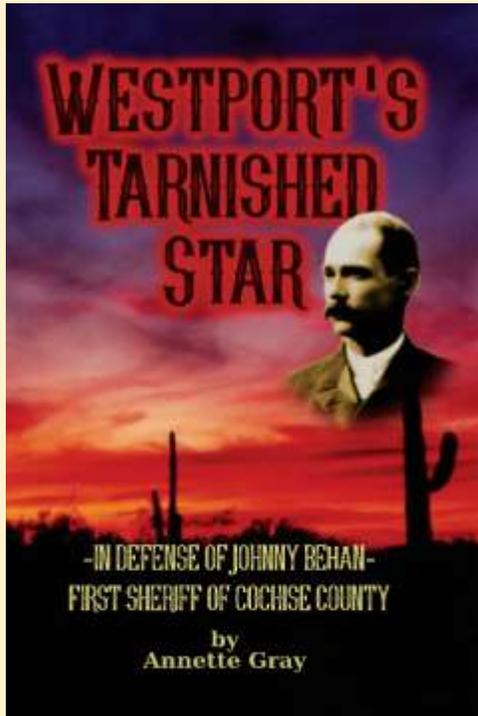
In the autumn of 1863, when these two young people fled south, West Port could well be described as a war zone. Both Mamie and Johnny had seen homes burned and family and friends shot to death. They were more than anxious to leave these terrifying scenes behind them—anxious to hit the Santa Fe Trail.

Nineteen-year-old Mamie was escorted by her freighter husband, Epifanio Aguirre. This was her first of five trips over what was then called *the Road to Santa Fe*. She was a petite young lady with a fair complexion and long, auburn ringlets that fairly bobbed when she walked. She was well educated, for the times. However, when she reached her destination, she was in for the cultural shock of her young life. Her husband's hacienda was very different from her home in West Port, the food was heavily spiced, and Mexican clothing was different from her own. Even the young couple's religious beliefs were at odds; Epifanio was Catholic, while she was Baptist. To top it off, Mamie spoke no Spanish and her husband and in-laws spoke very little English.

By the same token, seventeen-year-old Johnny Behan, was out of his element when he hired on to work with Aguirre's southbound mule trains. Although Mamie rode in an ambulance designed for comfort, Johnny was a jack-of-all-trades: a drover, a teamster, repairing wagon wheels and broken harness. On the trail, hard tack was eaten in the saddle and, at night, he bedded down under a wagon—rain or shine. No glamour for Johnny!

When the Aguirre family dropped off at their Las Cruces rancho, Johnny and his best buddy, Theodore Jones (a sixteen-year-old also from West Port), continued on until they reached Tucson in late December of 1863. Imagine, these two shy Missouri farm boys in a strange country abounding with cacti, rattle snakes and miles of drifting sand. What a transition from their lush green farms on the banks of the Missouri River! However, they were used to hard work, and soon found employment with the California Column, not as recruits, but as civilians.





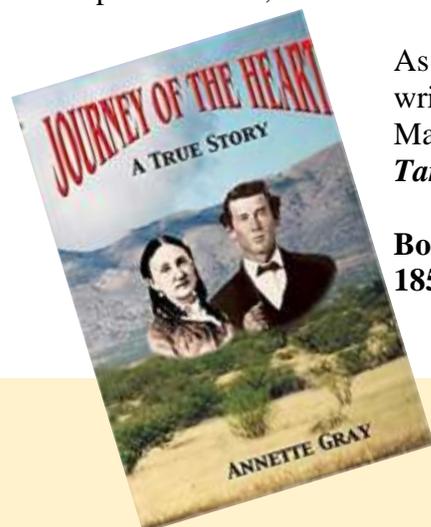
In 1864, Johnny left Tucson and struck out for Fort Whipple. While there, Johnny worked as a common laborer, a bullwhacker and rode pony express riding many miles—alone—through hostile Indian territory. At the time, there was no city of Prescott, just a heavily forested area, infested with bands of thieves and rogue Apaches. It certainly was no place for a young Missourian to cut his teeth, consequently Johnny had many near calls with death. As fate would have it in 1889, he relocated to Tombstone, where he became the first Sheriff of Arizona's newly formed, Cochise County. It was here he witnessed, and tired to stop, the *Gunfight at the OK Corral*, involving Wyatt Earp who in old age attempted to ruin Johnny's first-rate reputation.

Johnny was highly respected by his contemporaries. Twice Johnny was an undersheriff, twice a sheriff, three times a state legislator, a County Recorder, and the Superintendent of Yuma Prison. He served with Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders in Cuba, held a government posting in China during the Boxer Revolution, was Arizona's superintendent of transport, and headed the Commissary Department at Empalme, Sinaloa.

And what about Mamie Aguirre? She raised her family and taught in school. She learned Spanish to such a degree that she became the first head of the University of Arizona's Spanish department.

Later, both some of Mamie's and Johnny's siblings left West Port and settled in Arizona. Bringing with them much needed talents: they would become government officials, ranchers, teachers, and lawmen.

Who could have imagined that when John Harris Behan and Mamie Bernard Aguirre left Westport in 1863, they would have such a positive effect on the development of law, order, and education in Arizona?



As a tribute to these Missourians, I have written *Journey of the Heart—a true story*, for Mamie Aguirre, and the just released *Westport's Tarnished Star* for Johnny Behan.

Both books are available for purchase at the 1855 Harris-Kearney House.

THANK YOU TO OUR BUSINESS SPONSORS

The Westport Historical Society would like to say “thank you” to our business partners for being a part of our family. We are truly grateful for the support and commitment each has shown to us in the last 12 months.

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House Opens June 11, 2020

The 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum opens for tours & programs. We will reopen on June 11, 2020.

The House Museum is available for group tours, events, and meetings year-round in most times.



Meetings at the Harris House Hotel

In this building [the Harris House Hotel] Senators John Sherman [Ohio], Mordecai Oliver [Missouri] and William O. Howard [Ohio] met as a Senate committee to investigate the Kansas troubles in 1858. It had been claimed that in 1854, a Colonel Buford had taken a lot of arms from the arsenal at Liberty in Clay county, unlawfully, and had used them to make pro-slavery votes in Kansas. According to the records, a Col. Reed succeeded Buford as commander of this army of invasion. It all depended on whom you talked to, some years ago, to get a yarn about pre-civil war days. If he happened to be a Yankee, you got a Yankee yarn, and vice-versa.

In October 1864, Generals Pleasanton, Plumb, and Curtis were holding a council of war at the Harris House [Hotel]. Suddenly, a man, a courier, burst into the room, shouting excitedly, “the rebels are coming, the rebels are coming, what shall we do”? “Fight ‘em, damn ‘em, fight ‘em,” said Curtis. With that announcement, the three-day Battle of Westport began. Major David R. Anthony was an officer in the Union Army and was engaged in the battle. He and a number of others went over the ground from where Forty-ninth Street is now, to Wornall Road, to what is now Seventy-fifth and Troost. This was pivotal ground in the battle. The Battle of Westport’s eastern hostilities were near the Blue River from where the Confederate soldiers came and also at Byram’s Ford.

General Curtis and the Union Army used the Harris House Hotel as their headquarters during the three-day Battle of Westport. Following the battle, the hotel was used as a field hospital for both wounded Union and Confederate soldiers.

~from the writings of Emil C. Rodert

Harris and Kearney Descendants

The Westport Historical Society is seeking descendants of the John Harris and Charles E. Kearney families. We would like to obtain copies of photos and family stories. If you or someone you know is a descendant, please contact us at westporthistorial@gmail.com or call 816-561-1821. We hope to hear from you soon.

Descendants of Early West Port Families

We are also seeking descendants of early West Port residents who would provide the society with photos and stories of their pioneer families. Some names of these pioneer families are: McCoy, Hornig, Wiedenmann, Sutter, Volker, Mastin, Bernard, Eichert, Morris, Little, Boone, Bridger, Kearney, Harris, Simpson, Chick, and Campbell, Yoacham, Eisele. Call the museum or send an email for information and questions.

THANK YOU TO OUR CORPORATE SPONSORS and LIFETIME MEMBERS

Your continued support of the Westport Historical Society and the 1855 Harris-Kearney House is greatly appreciated. Thank you for believing in our mission to preserve, protect and promote the history of Westport, the Town of Kansas and early Kansas City.

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



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

INDIVIDUAL	\$40
FAMILY	\$50
PATRON	\$125
BUSINESS	\$150
SPONSOR	\$300
LIFETIME	\$800

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.



19th Century Photo—What's the Difference?

A **daguerreotype** (duh-GARE-oh-type) (1839-1860) process was the first widespread photographic process. It was developed by [Louis Daguerre](#) in 1839. A piece of silver-plated copper was coated in light-sensitive chemicals, which created the photographic image when exposed to light in the camera. This piece of metal held the original image, which was very delicate and placed under glass for protection when viewing. In order to both protect the image and to add rich decoration to this precious object, the photograph was usually put into miniature hinged decorative cases made of wood covered with leather, paper, cloth, or mother-of-pearl. This case could be closed and carried around, or propped open on a shelf. But each image was unique, and couldn't be reproduced without being photographed again.

Ambrotypes (1854-1880) were created through a similar process as daguerreotypes using glass coated in certain chemicals, then placed into decorative cases. The difference is that while a daguerreotype produced a positive image seen under glass, ambrotypes produced a negative image that became visible when the glass was backed by black material. In fact, this main difference is also the most reliable way to tell ambrotypes and daguerreotypes apart: daguerreotypes are backed by shiny silver, while ambrotypes are backed by a piece of glass painted black. The daguerreotype appears to be on a mirror, so when viewing it at an angle the dark areas are silver. For an ambrotype, the dark areas remain dark even at an angle.

A **tintype** (1853-1930) is a direct positive with a lacquered iron support, collodion binder layer, and silver image layer. Tintypes are most commonly found in the carte-de-visite size (approx. 2 1/2" x 4" to 4 1/4"), although they were also produced in smaller sizes. Most tintypes can be thought of as an underexposed image having low contrast and limited tonal range. The varnished (with black/brown paint, lacquer, or enamel) iron support shows through in dark areas, where silver image particles are few. The image is basically a silver negative set against this background, bringing out highlights comprised of silver particle concentrations that appear milky-white. Tintypes were occasionally placed in small hinged cases but were more typically inserted into folding cards or envelopes/window mats made of paper or metal; today they will mostly be loose. Cased tintypes may be difficult to distinguish from cased ambrotypes. Weight can help to differentiate, but a magnet may be used to conclusively identify the tintype's iron support.

~Photographs: Daguerreotypes and Ambrotypes
by Tracy Jackson

~Preservation Self-Assessment Program by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

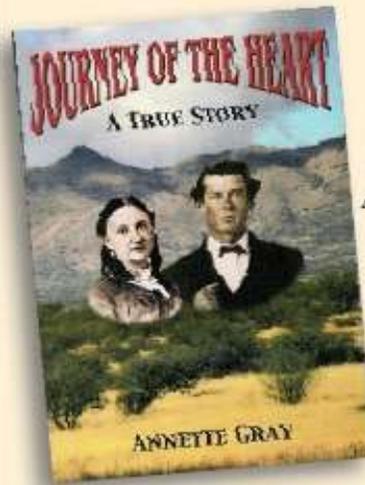


DID YOU KNOW . . .

1. The United States declared war on Spain on April 25, 1898?
2. On December 10, 1898, the Treaty of Paris was signed ending the Spanish-American War?
3. On January 6, 1898, the first telephone message was sent from a submerged submarine?
4. In May of 1898, Louisiana adopted a new constitution with a "grandfather clause" designed to eliminate black voters?
5. William Rockhill Nelson purchased the Harris-Kearney House from Charles Kearney in 1898?
6. In June of 1898, the United States House of Representatives voted to annex Hawaii?
7. Will Kellogg invented CORN FLAKES in 1898?
8. In the fall of 1898, the roller coaster received a patent.
9. Machine guns were used in battle for the first time in the year 1898?
10. A snow and ice storm in the United States on November 26 and 27, 1898 killed 455 people?



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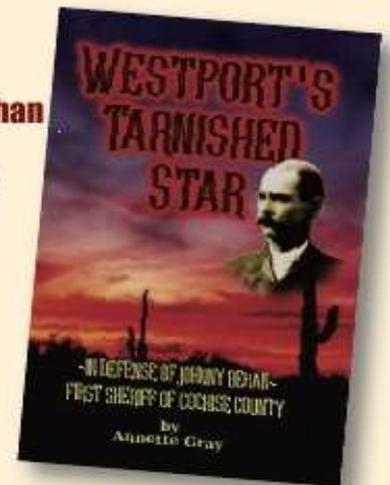


Mary Aguirre

Arizona Women's
Hall of Fame

Sherriff John Behan

Wyatt Earps'
Nemesis



Annette Gray

Our Education Partner in our Time Traveler Program



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Thank You!

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 at (816) 561-1821 or (913) 648-0952



The Board of Directors and Staff of the Westport Historical Society and the 1855 Harris-Kearney House send you well wishes that you, your family, and friends remain healthy and safe through these uncertain times.

Thank you for your continued, generous support!

Westport Historical Society
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Kansas City, MO 64111