

The Westporter



November 2022

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 §501(c)(3) charitable organization

Thank you to our friends & sponsors for your continued support and generosity



IT'S SUGAR PLUM SUNDAY

A Celebration of the Winter Holidays
AT THE
1855 HARRIS-KEARNEY HOUSE

Please join us for holiday treats, a cup of festive cheer,
Joyful music, and friends from far and near
During a Holiday Open House

Sunday, December 11
2:00 pm to 5:00 pm
4000 Baltimore, Kansas City, MO

RSVP requested, but not mandatory, to
westporthistorical@gmail.com
by Monday, December 4



DID YOU KNOW ...

1. Between 1647 and 1660, Christmas was outlawed by Oliver Cromwell?
2. The first Christmas Card was created in 1843 by Sir Henry Cole?
3. Christmas Pudding used to be a thick soup?
4. The word CHRISTMAS comes from the Old English words "Christ" and "mass"?
5. Santa originally used to wear clothes that were all green?
6. The first recorded date of Christmas was December 25, 336 A.D.?
7. The word HANUKKAH means "dedication"?
8. The "dreidel" is based on a German gambling game?
9. During the 8 nights of Hanukkah, each person exchanges one gift?
10. In 1992, astronaut Jeff Hoffman's mini-Hanukkah celebration in space was broadcast over satellite to people back on earth?

TRADE GOODS FROM SANTA FE

At least three George Caleb Bingham portraits from the 1840s showcase a tortoise shell or bone hair comb that may well have come from Santa Fe trading. Gene Chavez, Ed.D., said, "The peinetones have been used by elite women in Spain for centuries, and came to the Americas including northern reaches of New Spain (now the American Southwest). The sophisticated peinetones (high combs) were of high fashion and common use by wealthy women in cities such as Buenos Aires, Lima, or Rio de Janeiro in the 1820s-1840s. It became an art form," Chavez added. "The fashion of using peinetones comes from Spain. Small versions of peinetas were worn by Catholic women to cover their head with a mantilla to attend mass at a church. **The small peinetas are the ones more commonly seen by Americans**, particularly in the Southwest United States or other regions of dominant Hispanic influence such as Puerto Rico, Mexico, Philippines, and Cuba.



Visit Our Supporting Business Partners

THE KANSAS CITY
PUBLIC LIBRARY

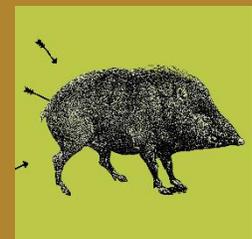
CHAR BAR
★ SMOKED MEATS & AMUSEMENTS ★



Pryde's
KITCHEN & NECESSITIES

Harpo's
WESTPORT
ESTD 1991

SPOOKS
SUPERNATURAL PARANORMAL
ORGANIZATION OF KS



BEER KITCHEN
No. 1

Its Time to Renew Your Membership

As we begin the new year, it is most important that we face the challenge of preserving our area's rich heritage and maintaining the character of the beautiful 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum. The Historical Society is funded entirely by grants and the contributions of its members. To continue our work, the Board of Directors would like to encourage you to join the Westport Historical Society. Your membership dues go a long way toward helping us continue to offer free programs and cover annual operating expenses. If you are not members, we hope you will consider joining. If you are past members, we hope you will consider rejoining. A membership application may be found in this newsletter, on our website westporthistorical.org or at the museum. If you are current members, thank you for viewing the society and museum as worthy of your financial support.

Finally, we hope everyone (including life members, who, of course, owe nothing in annual dues) might consider a contribution to our "2022 Capital Campaign." Although we are aggressively applying for grants, the foundations which help non-profits want to see evidence of successful local fund-raising. In essence, the \$25, \$50 or \$200 you might donate to us can unlock the door to thousands more in grant money. If you wish, please combine your membership dues and any donation on one check and mail it to 4000 Baltimore, KCMO, 64111.

Thank you in advance for your generosity!

The Westporter

THE RAID ON LAWRENCE

Quantrill's famous or infamous raid upon the sleeping town of Lawrence took place in predawn hours of August 21, 1863. By Noon of that fateful day, Lawrence resembled a smoking funeral pyre beside the muddy Kaw. Nearly 150 male inhabitants were dead or dying, a large portion of the town's business and residential districts were in ashes and the faces of those who survived the slaughter bore mute testimony to the tragic scene.

The Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* of August 23, 1863, headline account of the raid as follows: "Total Loss \$2,000,000, Cash Lost \$250,000." The story that followed described the scene along Massachusetts street, the business artery of Lawrence, as "... one mass of smoldering ruins and crumbling walls.... Only two business houses were left upon the street -- one known as the Armory, and the other the old Miller block.... About one hundred and twenty-five houses in all were burned, and only one or two escaped being ransacked, and everything of value carried away or destroyed." The article went on to point out that the offices of the three Lawrence newspapers, the *Journal*, *Tribune*, and *Republican*, were destroyed, and that every safe in the town but two had been robbed.

What happened as related by the Bissell family

Sophia Bissell was born in Suffield, Connecticut, February 9, 1830, where she lived most of her life and died at age eighty-two. The following letter was written by Sophia Bissell to a cousin named Henry Lawrence who lived in Chicago.

Lawrence Sept 8, 1863

Dear Cousin,

We were very happy to receive a letter from you last week and were grateful to think you felt such an interest in our welfare. The twenty first of August (1863), was an awful day in Lawrence and one never to be forgotten by her inhabitants.



I presume you have read most of the mawkish circumstances of the day, and as you requested us to write the part we bore, I will endeavor to give you some idea. You may be aware that ever since this war began, every few weeks, it would be reported about town that Quantrill was coming, that he was so many miles off. Horsemen would come rushing in saying he was coming and sometimes it would be Price that was on the way. Well, we got accustomed to these reports and did not believe them. Last fall however after our return from the East one night the Militia were called out and a great many of the citizens packed their trunks and made various preparations for their coming, but that was a false alarm. Five or six weeks ago Gen. Ewing or one of his Staff sent word to Mayor Collamore, that Quantrill was getting together a force eight hundred strong for some plan and we better be on our guard. The mayor sent to Leavenworth for troops to guard every night for a week or more. A great deal of sport was made of our “big scare” and of our nervous Mayor both here and in Leavenworth, so much in fact that the troops were sent away, and the guard given up. Quantrill had his spies here all the time then it seems and knew just what we were doing— We as a family laid it a little more to heart than most of the others: a great deal more than ever before— We arranged our money and papers and talked over what we should do, putting our papers in a safe place, there they remained several days unharmed, as we all did, and so it went on until the fright was entirely forgotten. Time passed on until that Friday morning Quantrill did indeed come to Lawrence. Henry and Robert, our Black boy rose early that morning, as they were going up to the farm to work. It was between four & five: They were in the yard when Robert looked up on some rising ground just a little way from us & says who are those! They are “Secesh” — They have no flag. Arabella called to me to look out of the window at those men! I ran threw open the blinds & then I saw a large body of horsemen trotting quite briskly along—just then they turned a corner coming nearer us—and we heard them say— Rush on—rush on for the town—and they did rush on but did not stop for us at that time. We hear pistols firing and looking back of us saw the Horsemen running from house to house & we knew who had come. So, we took in a faint sense of what it was to be surrounded by Guerrillas— we immediately buried our papers & money excepting a little which we left out to appease them—put our silver in the cistern & disposed of our watches and jewelry & waited for them to come. And oh, to hear the yells & hear the firing and to see the people running black & white old and young and the Fiends chasing after them firing as fast as they possibly could. Oh, it was perfectly awful! The only wonder is there were not more killed. The first ones that came to us drove up to the back door—two men—asked for the man of the house— Henry went to the door. Said they your name! Bissell! Do you belong to the Service? No Sir! If you had told me you did, I would have shot you dead! Your money. Henry handed them ten dollars. They turned towards the barn. Where are your horses—they looked in and saw but one (we had given the black boy a pistol & sent him to the country with two other horses. He was chased & fired upon was obliged to let one go but escaped with the other) then said they, take everything out of the house! You are not going to burn us, are you? Yes, we are. They then left! We began in good earnest to take the things out. Another came & wanted water & said we were not going to be burned. We took a little courage then & stopped to look towards town. We could see Mass. St. all in flames & the houses of our friends and acquaintances here & there all in a blaze. All the houses of the first settlers were burned & of course the Branscomb place went (our 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 continues to show our nonprofit organization!

Lifetime Members

- BEER KC Restaurants:
Char Bar, Beer Kitchen,
Mickey’s Hiway,
Port Fonda
- Mayor & Mrs. Richard Berkley
- Collins, Westphal & Kelpie, Inc.
- Ann Creveling
- Ann Duer
- Jim & Caren Hall
- Harpo’s
- Cynthia Higgins
- Marty Wiedenmann Jarvis
- Kelly’s Westport Inn
- Crosby Kemper, III (Honorary)
- Dorine Lowell
- Olga Marr (Honorary)
- Patricia Cleary Miller
- Jude Montassir
- Steve and Marianne Noll
- Allin & Donna Phister
- L. Thorton & Erin Phister
- Stephen Platt
- Thomas Platt
- Roger and Ann Robertson
- Beverly Shaw
- Torosian Fndn. / Jean Kiene
- Cooper Weeks
- Doris Yonker

Sponsor Member

- Westport Land & Mgt, LLC

on Kentucky St). Then another came & wanted Henry—he went out to him. He wanted money—H gave him five dollars & he left. Then we saw the bands collecting as if to move off & soon they did—passing directly in front of our enclosure. We could hear them ask from time to time if they should come up. Something would be said & they would pass on. We began to take long breaths and think we were going to escape—when looking towards town we saw five coming rushing & yelling directly for us. Then we knew our time had come. In they came on horseback right up to the front door. The leader forcing his horse up on to the Piazza. Matches, matches said one & upstairs—The others ransacking the house upstairs & down. The leader called for the man of the house. Henry went out to him. Your name? Bissell? You from New York! So said I, from Ct. Worse yet. Worse yet. Our trunks we had gotten into the yard although they forbid our doing it. Then they began breaking these open, throwing them into the air & letting them come down & stomping on them but they did come open. I ran to the leader & begged him to spare the house, pleading and telling him we were just peaceable people! Will you not spare the house? At last, he said he would for my sake. Said I it is now on fire. Oh, then I can't save it. But I took courage & ran upstairs & found they had torn open a husk mattress & it was all in a blaze. I got a feather bed & put out the blaze but not the fire. Up came one of them to see how the fire was progressing. He said to me did you put out that fire! To be sure I did. He gave me a horrid look & said I shall set it on fire again! Said I the leader said he would spare the house. He ran downstairs (I am following him) and asked him if he said so. I caught him by the arm and held him while I plead with the leader— He did not go up again. While I was upstairs the most fiendish one attacked Henry, telling him he wanted more money. "They told him uptown we had money." He knocked him down with his pistol, pulled him up again striking him several times on the head—the blood running down his face. Then he fired or snapped his pistol all the rounds, but it was empty. He took his other & said—"Now I will fix you." Arabella was pleading all this time with him to spare her only brother, running from him to the leader & back again in agony. The leader relented & spoke to the man. He let go his hold & Henry ran for the corn. Then this fiendish one ran into the house set it on fire downstairs—turned us all out of the house shut the door & told us not to go in again. The leader relented again, ordered them all on their horses & be off. They tipped their hats and bid us good morning. We returned the salutation, trying all the time they were here not to irritate them at all. We rushed into the house put out the fire downstairs & carried water upstairs time & time again, tried to throw the things out of the windows—nearly suffocated—left it to burn. We found the barn all on fire, got the carriage & harness out & sat down on the Piazza in despair—not saying a word— or shedding a tear. Just then a man from Franklin rushed into the house upstairs by a good deal of exertion put out the fire. So, we have a house to live in. Henry was not seriously injured. Mother had been sick all the week, sat up day before for the first time but she worked like a trojan. Mother lost about a thousand dollars by that raid. Arabella the next worse. They are taking a good many things from her trunks, among other things her best silk dress. Henry next & I least. I cannot begin to tell you all that was said and done. Oh, we fared so much better than a great many others. Some had their houses and stores burned & men killed leaving their poor wives as widows & penniless. We thought there were between seventy and eighty widows—& between two & three hundred made orphans that terrible day. Nearly



The Westporter

every house has a story to tell, although some were not molested in the least. We have packed a trunk of linen which I think we shall send to you tomorrow for safekeeping. We do not feel secure yet. May God in his mercy spare us from again being invaded is the constant prayer that ascends from this poor afflicted people. Have just heard Charley Lawrence is in Prairie City, as it is very painful to think over & especially to write what occurred that dreadful day—will you please send him this letter. Send to Chas H. Lawrence Prairie City. We have some troops here but not enough, I think. Four days will decide whether we remain in this country or not. Yours affectionately,

Sophia L. Bissell



Early Westport History

"A Woman's First Impression."

Julia Gaugh, wife of early Kansas City architect Percival Gaugh, gave her first impression of Kansas City, as she saw it in 1857— "Well, when I landed from the boat and gazed at the frowning bluffs, I thought it was the most forlorn and uninviting spot I had ever seen. The levee was crowded with white covered wagons, to which were harnessed the most diminutive mules, while the hideous faces of the Mexican 'greasers' made me shudder. There was only one road that led up to the top of the bluff. The first house that I lived in was on the bluff overlooking the river, and we climbed up there on long steps. My only neighbor was Mrs. Chouteau, who had lived on the frontier all her life and seemed quite contented. I wondered what Mr. Gaugh would ever accomplish in his profession here. It surely would be many years before a building of any size would be built. But it was not long before I was surrounded with neighbors, avenues were opened, stores began to multiply, churches were erected, and the dream of the Kansas City enthusiast seemed a fixed fact. Then the war came on and there was a gloomy outlook for a few years, but when it ended houses sprang up as if by magic, hills and hollows began to disappear and the whole contour of the city soon changed."

WESTPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY EVENTS FOR 2023

- Mansion House opens for the 2023 season on Friday, March 3
- Civil War Wednesday: once a month presentations March through November
- Myrtle Hardcastle doll exhibit—throughout the year
- 4th Annual Doll Exhibit WOMEN OF THE PAST WHO INFLUENCED THE WOMEN OF TODAY--April, May, and June
- Myrtle Hardcastle Day: Ladies Tea and Pall Mall on the Lawn—May 6
- Music Concerts and Events throughout the year
- New Exhibit: Etchings by Gregg Summer—July and August
- Inaugural exhibit TBA —September and October
- Fundraiser BBQ, Bourbon, and Beer--October
- Paranormal Tours—October
- Mansion House Decorated for Christmas—November and December
- Annual Meeting (dessert bar and speaker)—November 12, 2 pm
- Christmas Open House—December 11, 2 pm to 5 pm
- Mansion House closes for the winter season on December 20
- Mansion House opens for 2024 on March 8



Thank You!

WHS Invites 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, talents, and interests, we have a place for you!

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



The 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum welcomes your participation in the 2022 season. We are available for group tours, events and meetings, too. Please call 913-231-6749 for reservations and information, or send an email to westporthistorical@gmail.com.

**HAPPY THANKSGIVING and MERRY CHRISTMAS
HAPPY CHANUKAH and HAPPY NEW YEAR, 2023**

**Westport Historical Society
4000 Baltimore
Kansas City, MO 64111**