

# The Westporter



November 2020

WESTPORT  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



4000 Baltimore  
Kansas City, MO 64111  
(816) 561 - 1821  
(913) 648 - 0952  
westporthistorical@gmail.com  
westporthistorical.com



The Westport Historical Society staff, board of directors, and executive officers wish you and your family a Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year.

## NEW DONATIONS

From the descendants of the John Calvin McCoy family the Westport Historical Society and the 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum are proud and thankful to receive the following donations:

A Colt Revolver owned by Dr. William Warren Harris, the husband of Nellie McCoy and the son-in-law of John Calvin McCoy. Dr. Harris served as a physician during the Civil War. While attached to a particular Federal Unit, the soldiers presented Dr. Harris with a Colt Revolver, one of the most famous revolvers in history. Dr. Harris carried the gun during the remainder of the war. Also donated is part of the gun's original holster.

We thank Mr. and Mrs. Martin Warren Krause for the donation of this priceless item. Mr. Krause is a direct descendant of John Calvin McCoy, the Father of Westport and Kansas City.



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

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2020 Marks the Centennial Anniversary  
of Kansas City Jazz Legend Charlie “Bird” Parker, Part 1  
by Ken Shoemaker

So, did you hear the one about the graveside 21-saxophone salute, held to pay tribute to a local jazz musician? Actually, it’s no joke. On his birthday, Kansas City music lovers gather at Charlie “Bird” Parker’s grave to honor him and to remember his legacy.

Charlie Parker rose from very humble beginnings in the Kansas City area to become one of the pioneers of the jazz music style known internationally as bebop. He is widely recognized to be the best alto saxophonist of all time, and his musical impact has been felt on countless musicians. To be sure, Charlie found elevated stardom elsewhere, particularly in New York City. But in this article, we want to focus only on Charlie’s connection with Kansas City and its environs during the early part of his life.

Charles Parker, Jr was born in Kansas City, Kansas on Aug. 29, 1920, the son of Adelaide (Addie) and Charles Parker, Sr. Addie, who was only eighteen at the time, gave birth to Charlie at the family residence (852 Freeman Street). The Parkers lived at that residence until they moved across the river to Kansas City, Missouri a few years later.

Charlie’s early years were filled with chaotic instability, punctuated by feuding parents, chronic poverty, the search for affordable living quarters, and the shuffling from school to school. After he was born, his parents suffered a stormy relationship. They separated in 1924, got back together for a couple of years, and then broke up permanently in 1932 when Charlie was only eleven or twelve. During his childhood years, Charlie is known to have lived at 3527 Wyandotte (1927-30), then at 109 W. 34<sup>th</sup> St. (1930-32).



In the few years after 1932, Charlie lived for a time at 1516 Olive St. and then across the street and down a half-block to 1535 Olive St. (Today this area serves as unused industrial grassland.) The proximity of Olive Street to the Jazz District around 18<sup>th</sup> & Vine is significant: because it was an easy walking distance to the Jazz District, Charlie was able to spend lots of time soaking up the nearby music opportunities.

Of particular interest to us at the Westport Historical Society is Charlie’s specific Westport connections: He lived for a time at 3527 Wyandotte Ave, just on the northern border of Westport. He also attended third grade at a Westport school, Penn School (4237 Pennsylvania Ave).

Continued in February.

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RECLLECTIONS OF SUSANNAH YOACHAM DILLON, part 2

The Indians, like the white man, lived close to streams for the same reason of easier ingress and egress, and because they found food in the fish that were in the Missouri and Kansas rivers. They hunted on the plains where buffalo and other wild animals were in abundance. The soil was productive so that they had plenty to eat.

My parents came here in the 1820's from Tennessee. They lived for a little while after their arrival on the bottom land near the Kaw River known now as the West Bottoms. One day my father strayed over the big bluffs and after a few miles south, found two families who advised him strongly to come out near them. They would help him cut down trees and also help him build a log cabin. Mother agreed and they put their few belongings in their wagon and drove south. They were kindly received by the two families, and the next day set to work cutting timber. Within a week they had their small log house ready for occupation.

The ground, at that time, was no man's land, so they were told. It was in territory ceded some little time before to the United States by the Osage Tribe. Father never gave a thought to ownership nor pre-emption, nor "squatter's rights"—just took possession. (He later took a patent in 1831) Our two neighbors were equally careless about title. Another way to acquire property at that time was by government patent, but they knew nothing about patents from Uncle Sam at that time.

It was easy to keep the home warm, for the wood was plentiful. But the larder had to be provided for. In the West Bottoms the Astor Fur Company (American Fur Company) needed food and lodging for their employees. The Canadian French were making more than a living feeding and rooming hunters and trappers and selling garden products to the fur boats and to men passing in skiffs north and south. Nature had made a good landing place or levee between the West Bottoms and the East Bottoms, and soldiers on their way to Fort Leavenworth would go to the Canadian squatters for chickens and prairie birds; sometimes making contracts for a regular supply for the army. Money changing hands, and a few stores doing a good business. There was some stir in the Bottoms and my parents were soon forced by the constant thinning of the purses to leave their new home in the woods and go back to the sandy soil they had so recently left. Our Canadian friends welcomed us back. They told my parents that a Catholic priest from Florissant (Missouri) had promised to visit them and administer the consolation of religion. They said that while he was here many children would be baptized. It was in 1821 that Father LeCroix arrived. . . .

When I married Mr. Dillon in 1845, I soon found myself back on my native heath. All during the days of the Santa Fe, (California and Oregon) Trails, and when hundreds of people were traveling to California and Pike's Peak, Westport was a lively village. It was all tents and looked like the resting place of an army. Few buildings went up. Nearly all the arrivals came with tents and lived in them while waiting for a cavalcade of soldiers for safety going through the plains and over the mountains. It seems only yesterday that newly appointed bishops and their priests would pitch their tents in and around town. They said Mass in the tents every morning. Occasionally, on a Sunday, I would request a Bishop or priest to say his Mass in my parlor.

Continued on the next page.



**Books with a Westport Connection:**

*Journey of the Heart: A True Story*

*Westport's Tarnished Star: In Defense of Johnny Behan-First Sheriff of Cochise County*

**DILLON, CONTINUED**

At least three times, Father Donnelly . . . favored us with Devine Services. I recall that he always brought one of his nephews to serve his Mass. He was quick in picking up a language and was here only a short time when his knowledge of French justified his delivering a short sermon in that language. I know that when he came here, he could not converse in French.

He gave us all a surprise one Sunday by saluting in their own tongue, a number of Osage Indians who had stopped over on their way to Washington. Several weeks before their arrival, Father Donnelly had learned from his friends, the Jesuit Fathers at Osage, of their coming. He promptly called on the Professor of Indian Language at the Shawnee Mission for instruction in the Indian dialect, repeating his visits and remaining for hours until he was able to address the delegates in their own language. Following a sermon in English, he spoke to the Indians in Osage. They listened attentively and seemed not at all surprised. After Mass we gathered around the Natives and inquired if they understood Father Donnelly. They said, "Yes, he speak Indian." The same Indians, on their return home, were here on Sunday and were again addressed by Father Donnelly. He continued with his lessons in Indian dialects for a long period of time. ~ Susan Yoacham Dillon, 1878.

*Westport Historical Society Quarterly, Vol VI-X*



SUSANNAH (SUSAN) YOACHAM

**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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**DID YOU KNOW . . .**

- *Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson was published in 1883?
- In 1883 a patent for the first cash register was granted?
- Richard Wagner, German Composer, died in February of 1883?
- Buffalo Bill Cody put on his first Wild West Show in 1883?
- The first baseball game to be played under electric lights happened in June of 1883 in Fort Wayne, Indiana?
- In September of 1883, the Northern Pacific Railroad completed the east-west line with a Golden Stake in Gold Creek, Montana?
- In September of 1883, the first direct United States to Brazil telegraph connection was made?
- Long distance telephone service between Chicago and New York was established in 1883?
- In 1883, Charles Bender, the only Native American to be elected to Baseball's Hall of Fame, was born?
- The Brooklyn Bridge which connected Brooklyn with New York City opened in 1883?



## CHRISTMAS IN THE OLD WEST

## HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS!

The gift shop at the museum has books on the Battle of Westport that make great Christmas gifts for those who want to learn more about the famous 1864 Battle of Westport. Stop by the mansion house and pick out the perfect gift, order by phone 816-561-1821, or email

[westporthistorical@gmail.com](mailto:westporthistorical@gmail.com)

*The Battle of Westport, October 21-23, 1864. A Driving Tour of the Battle Sites in Kansas City, Independence, and Northeastern Jackson County*

*Battle of the Big Blue, October 23, 1864. A Walking Tour of the Big Blue Battlefield in Kansas City, Missouri*

*Battle of Westport, October 23, 1864. A Walking Tour of the Battlefield South of Brush Creek in Kansas City, Missouri*

*The Story of A Cavalryman. The Civil War Memoirs of Bvt. Gen. Edward F. Winslow, 4th Iowa Cavalry*

**Correction:** In the August issue of the WESTPORTER it was incorrectly stated that Thomas Jefferson established the Methodist Mission for the Shawnee Indians in 1838. Thomas Johnson was the person who established the Methodist Mission for the Shawnee Indians in 1838.

Have you ever wondered how people celebrated the Christmas holidays during the days of the Old West?

In the mid-1800s, cowboys, mountain men, pioneers, and explorers, held modest but merry Christmas celebrations. Usually, Christmas was celebrated in keeping with the customs a particular group brought westward with them from their native European countries or lives back east. Soldiers at far away outposts sang Christmas carols and roasted holiday dinners of venison over open fires. Communities held carry-in Christmas dinners, providing a smorgasbord of food for all to enjoy. Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote of her families' Christmas dinner in their log cabin on the Kansas prairie: "Ma was busy all day long, cooking good things for Christmas. She baked salt-rising bread and r'n'Injun bread, and Swedish crackers, and huge pan of baked beans, with salt pork and molasses. She baked vinegar pies and dried-apple pies and filled a big jar with cookies." People enjoyed holiday decorations, Christmas trees, religious services, and Santa Claus. Santa was a known figure in the Old West coming from English and German traditions. Elizabeth Custer, wife of George Armstrong Custer, wrote that "We had a lovely Christmas . . . We had a large Christmas tree, and Autie was Santa Claus, and handed down the presents, making side-splitting remarks as each person walked up to receive his gift. The tree was well lighted. I don't know how so many tapers were gotten together." Most had some sort of Christmas tree, gaily decorated with bits of ribbon, yarn, berries, popcorn or paper strings, cookies, homemade decorations, and candles.

In the Old West, the giving and receiving of presents always played an important role in Christmas celebrations. Frances M. A. Roe, wife of Army Lieutenant Colonel Fayette Washington Roe, tells of their first Christmas in the Colorado Territory in 1871. She says that one of the real hardships the frontier soldiers and their spouses faced was the lack of presents to exchange. "Our first Christmas on the frontier was ever so pleasant, but it certainly was most vexatious not to have the box from home . . . however . . . several women of the garrison sent pretty little gifts to me. It was so kind and thoughtful of them to remember that I might be a bit homesick just now. All the little presents were spread out on a table in a way to make them present as fine an appearance as possible."

Many gifts were homemade and might have been corn husk dolls, sachets, carved wooden toys, pillows, small pieces of furniture, and embroidered hankies. Other gifts included the practical: knitted scarves, hats, mitts, and socks. If the family had had a good year, the children might find candies, small gifts, and fruit in their stockings. Many churches passed out small gifts and candy after the Christmas Eve, or Christmas Morning services.

Of course, there was no set way to celebrate Christmas. There were common cultural patterns that early fur traders, explorers, cowboys, sod busters, cavalry troops, country and town folk held, and all were happy to share when they celebrated Christmas.



### 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.



## Two Former Cemeteries Tell a Story of the Past, Part 1

By Diane Euston

Cemeteries tell a story of the past. Their peaceful final resting place of men and women is marked simply in carved memorials, but these people saw this land before a city blossomed and lived life on the ground we travel each day.

Two cemeteries in what is now Kansas City once acted as public burial grounds for the area's first residents, and both have been erased from history. The Westport Cemetery and City Cemetery once held some of Jackson County's most celebrated pioneers, and only some of their graves were saved from the bulldozers.

### Old Westport Cemetery

Also called Indian Cemetery or Yoacham Cemetery, the Old Westport Cemetery was established as a public burial ground on land once owned by Westport pioneer Daniel Yoacham and donated by merchant Edgar Price in 1835. Leading citizens, Native Americans, victims of the cholera outbreak and those who did not make it to their final destination while traveling on the Santa Fe Trail were all interred inside its one acre plot of land between current-day Mill St. and Bridger Rd just south of Westport Rd..

One of only 13 known Revolutionary War patriots in the area was also buried in Westport Cemetery. Lt. Joseph Boggs was born in 1749 and served in the Pennsylvania militia during the Revolutionary War. He lost his wife, Sarah in 1810 and by 1828, he had settled on a forty-acre farm near Westport, Mo. He died in 1843 at the ripe old age of 93 and was interred in the cemetery. A son of Joseph's may have operated a ferry crossing in Clay Co. across the Missouri River, and he likely was the uncle of Lillburn W. Boggs, the sixth governor of Missouri.

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Old Westport Cemetery was being encroached upon by new roads and homes. The cemetery had gone into disrepair, a common problem for older cemeteries. Residents with friends and family buried at the cemetery could see that its demise was on the horizon, thus many families, including the Wornall's, began to move their families' remains to other cemeteries. Unfortunately, many bodies and headstones were left behind to erode away.

In 1915, Badger Lumber Company bought the old cemetery land and began construction of their new administrative building at 559 Westport Rd. They erased away the remaining graves and graded the bones deep into the earth. According to the *Kansas City Times*, colorful descriptions graced the headstones of some of those interred at Westport Cemetery, including one headstone for a Jerome H. Glanville whose stone said he was "murdered by Four Yankee Abolitionists at Bull Creek." These stones quickly disappeared from the land as their three-story building was erected. They have not been located.

One headstone miraculously did survive the destruction of Westport Cemetery. The *Kansas City Times* reported, "When the ground was being cleared, [Badger Lumber] company officials decided to utilize one of the oldest gravestones in the cemetery as a cornerstone of the building."

As morbid as this is, Lt. Joseph Boggs' partial headstone, worn away and only bearing his name and "Died Jan. 22, 1843" was embedded high up in the brick plaster of the building. One year later, a local DAR chapter put an additional marker below Joseph Boggs' headstone locked into the building to commemorate the Old Westport Cemetery.

In 1965, the Badger Lumber building was razed, but not before the DAR ensured that Lt. Joseph Boggs' headstone wasn't lost once again amongst the demolition of the past. They removed his partial headstone and erected a new one at Union Cemetery.

What happened to the other bodies and headstones not moved by family members is unknown due to no index of graves at this place, but they were likely erased by the bulldozers hired by Badger Lumber.



## DONATIONS, CONTINUED from page 1

Man's parlor chair and baby bed/cradle are donated by Lifetime Members Allin and Donna Phister. Allin is a direct descendant of John Calvin McCoy, the Father of Westport and Kansas City.

The Victorian, solid mahogany, oval curved back, gentleman's armchair belonged to John Calvin McCoy. It features hand-carved knuckled arms that go down into the cabriole legs. The chair has been reupholstered in light green fabric, an exceeding popular color choice during the 1800's. The material is interwoven with gold thread bee design.

The ornate baby bed belonged to Eleanor (Nellie) McCoy Harris, daughter of John Calvin McCoy. The bed is unusual in that it is also a rocking cradle with a hand pull locking and unlocking mechanism. The beautifully detailed bed showcases amazing craftsmanship. The elegantly carved wood is rich walnut. Many of McCoy's grandchildren, great grandchildren and great-great grandchildren were rocked to sleep in this marvelous, historical, family piece.



## MEMBERSHIP FOR 2021

Each year we are pleased to welcome new members and support our current members as they continue to share their wealth of knowledge and expertise with the society. Membership dues are a primary source of funding for the operation of the museum and our educational programs. In addition to membership dues, we are continually inspired by the tax-deductible gifts to our Endowment Fund which strengthen the society and the future of the museum. We look forward to the continued generosity of our members and donors.

Whether you are renewing or a first-time member, I urge you to join us this coming year as we present some new exhibits, exciting events, and outstanding programs. We've done everything we can to make it easy, and affordable, to become an historical society member. You may send a check and your membership form in the mail, or you can visit our website [www.wesporthistorical.com](http://www.wesporthistorical.com) and fill out the membership form and pay your dues online.

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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 1855 Harris-Kearney House Museum will close for the 2020 season on Saturday, December 19. **The Annual Luncheon and Open House are cancelled due to COVID.** We will reopen on Friday, March 5, 2021. We are available for group tours, events and meetings in January and February 2021. Please call 913-231-6749 or for reservations and information, or send an email to [westporthistorical@gmail.com](mailto:westporthistorical@gmail.com).**

*Thank you for your continued, generous support!*

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Kansas City, MO 64111