

THE WITNESS STAND

By John F. Hall

The place in the court room where a witness sits to give testimony is called a “witness stand.” The Trigg County Circuit Court room was filled to capacity with spectators and standing room only. WKDZ radio and the Cadiz Record newspaper reporters were in attendance. I was in the witness stand about to give testimony. I was the Trigg County Historical Society's Historian. I was considered to be an expert in the history of a particular period and geographical region. William Shakespeare wrote, “All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players.”

How I became a historian began in the research section of the Pogue library on Murray State University. It was a Monday morning and I was doing research. Someone left the previous day's Courier Journal newspaper. What caught my attention was an article about the demise of the town of Golden Pond. I was a former resident there. I was forced out, along with everyone else, as the TVA was given Congressional authority to create the Land Between the Lakes (LBL), a national recreational area. At that time, 1969, Trigg County did not have a historical society. So I called the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort. The receptionist informed me that I needed to contact Roy McDonald in Cadiz. He had the required application papers. I called Mr. McDonald. He told me to call George Bleidt, the retired Golden Pond Postmaster. I had given George the front door from Paula's grandmother- old house in Golden Pond. He used it in his new home in Cadiz. I called George and he said, “John, you are wasting your time. There is no way that the TVA will allow the marker because that is the name of their headquarters? I told George that I had to at least try.

I made an appointment to see the LBL Director. I went into his office and told him what I wished to do. He was courteous and polite. He firmly told me that under no circumstances would he allow a historical marker for Golden Pond. I thanked him for seeing me. He was smiling as I left his office. George Bleidt was right, but I had to ask. I was a realistic 24 year old, poor college student at that time. I knew that I had no influence against the mighty and all powerful TVA. This should have been the end of my endeavor to obtain a historical marker for Golden Pond. I started back to Cadiz and stopped in the former site of Golden Pond. I parked by the flower garden. I got out of my car and sat on the hood. I accepted the fact that I had as much influence as a church mouse. It was such a peaceful day with a warm southern breeze. Only the sounds of the birds nesting in the shade tree in the flower garden could be heard. Country singer Alan Jackson is a song writer. He wrote these words, “I know Jesus and I talk to God.” I still remember, after all these years, what I said sitting on my car hood. I said this simple prayer, “Jesus! Please help me.”

I was looking at where the stores, the post office and even a bank once stood. Just down the road, the Golden Pond Baptist Church that Beulah Rayan's dad helped found in in 1905 was gone. At one time the town had a fancy hotel. Twice fire destroyed the town. It rebuilt, but this time, the TVA buried it and no longer will church bells be heard.

Frankly, I did not know what I wanted Jesus to do to help me. In the distance I heard the sound of a truck gearing down. It shattered the serene silence of that moment. The mother bird flew out of the tree when it heard the roar of the truck. Then came the screeching of the brakes of a Kentucky Highway Department dump truck. Dust flew everywhere as it came to a stop behind my car. The two state workers got out with their lunch boxes and walked over to the shade tree. They sat down under the tree to eat their lunch. I did not know the two people sitting under the tree. I was getting hungry watching them eat. I decided to go home in Cadiz and eat my lunch.

I was about to open my car door, when something stopped me. It was like being in a dream when you heard someone telling you to do something. Whatever it was, it said to go over and ask the two people sitting under the tree a question. I walked over and asked, "Is this flower garden on state right of way?" The two men looked at me. I first thought that I asked a stupid question. They both smiled and said, "Yes! It is!" No one can ever convince me that Jesus did not help me that day. I knew nothing about the right of way of the main highway in Golden Pond. I don't know why I even asked that question.

I discovered that the LBL Director controlled all of the 140,000 acres in the Land Between the Lakes. But Kentucky never deeded Highway 68/80 over to the TVA. The highway and its right of way belonged to the state. The answer given to me by the two state workers meant that the LBL Director had no control over what the state of Kentucky put in that flower garden.

I was excited when I called George Bleidt that night. I told him that we did not need TVA's permission to put the historical marker in the Golden Pond flower garden. It was on state right of way. I obtained the application papers from Roy McDonald. I went over to George Bleidt's house. I had to provide evidence, documents, newspaper articles and book references for every line that was to go on the historical marker. Once I completed that task, I took the application to Roy McDonald. He is a retired Trigg County Schools Superintendent. He is also the Chairman of the Trigg County Highway Marker Program. This is just a one person committee. But he had to approve the application and he had to submit it to the Kentucky Historical Society in Frankfort. It was approved, with no changes, and they paid \$2,000 for the marker. The Kentucky Highway Department installed the Historical Marker in the Golden Pond flower garden. George Bleidt and I put together a unique unveiling ceremony. The speeches were covered by WKDZ radio and The Cadiz Record newspaper. Taps were played on a hill over looking Golden Pond after the speeches. My wife, Paula held a miniature wooden coffin that I built. I placed a noose, symbolic of the unjust death of the town, into the coffin and buried it near the marker.

In 1981, Roy McDonald decided to establish a Trigg County Historical and Preservation Society. It was incorporated. In 1983, the Society decided to publish a history book because it was almost 100 years since William Henry Perrin published his Trigg County history book.

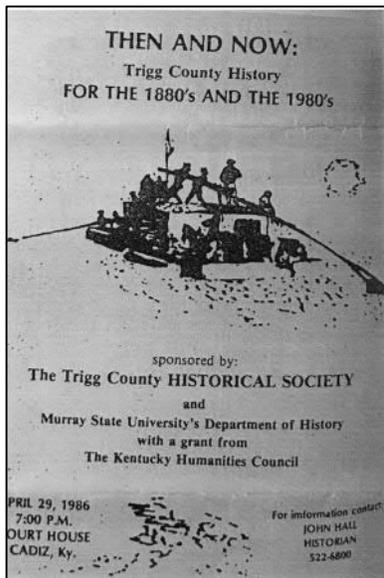
Roy McDonald was the President of the Society. He asked Tom Vinson, also a retired Trigg County Schools Superintendent, to be the Chairman of the Committee to publish



the new history book. I was appointed the Society's first Historian. From 1983 to 1985, Tom Vinson and I worked together to insure that as much county and family histories as possible could be put in the book. We agreed to have a limited edition of 1,500 books. The finished product has 580 pages. It has three columns per page and it is the equivalent of 10,000 double spaced typed pages.

(Pictured: John Hall sitting on the right and Tom Vinson standing on the far left).

As the Society's Historian, I felt that a summary of William Henry Perrin's 1885 history of Trigg County needed to be incorporated into the 1985 history book. I contacted Murray State University's History Department. I asked for their help with the summary of Perrin's history. I was told to apply for a grant from the Kentucky Humanities Council to pay for a graduate student to work with us on the summary. One requirement for the grant called for holding a public hearing to talk about how the summary was incorporated into the new history book. So on April 29, 1986, at 7:00 PM, in the old Court House, I sat in the Witness stand, in the circuit court room to answer the public's questions.



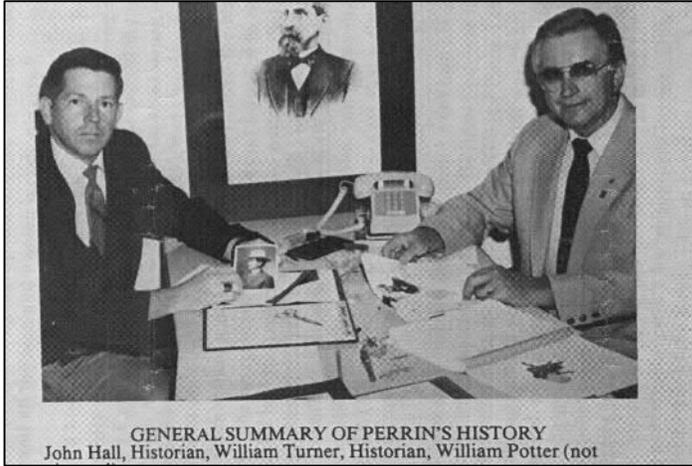
The Murray State University's History Department put a campus flag over the Judge's bench. The Kentucky Humanities Council (KHC) put their banner on the wall behind the Judge's bench. I Had a large poster made to advertise the event. The poster was attached to the

witness stand. An enlarged portrait of William Henry Perrin was also mounted behind the Judge's bench. William Shakespeare would have been impressed by this stage. The players from Murray State and the KHC took their places behind the Judge's bench. The court room was filled to capacity with standing room only. Question after question came, as the Cadiz Record newspaper and WKDZ radio reporters got involved. This Historian uttered a sound of relief as the event ended.

Christian County Historian William Turner donated all of his Trigg County pioneer history research for the new history book. We worked with William Potter, the graduate history student from Murray State, to complete the summary of Perrin's 1885 history. I gave William Turner the enlarged portrait of Perrin for his help and for his donated research. We had the portrait on a desk. Turner was sitting on one side of the desk and I

was sitting on the other side as someone on the Committee took our picture for the book. Thirty Society members worked tirelessly to have the Volume 1 Trigg County history book published. Only two members of that group are still alive in Kentucky: Tom Vinson is 93 and I am 75. The Trigg County Historical And Preservation Society will publish

Volume III in the fall of 2020 to coincide with the county's bicentennial.



As I reminisce about sitting in the witness stand, in the old Court House, before a packed house, on April 29, 1986, it made me realize a truth. God does not speak to us directly. He speaks to us in what happens to us in our lives and with people that He puts in our path. Our Nation is on its knees due to the

pandemic. Remember what I prayed sitting on the hood of my Chevy 11 back in 1969: "Jesus! Please help me."

Jesus can do the same for you and for our Nation. Continue to pray each day. Keep your faith and hope in Christ. Help your family and your neighbor. Be kind and compassionate. This will all pass and some other historian will write about it. It was truly an honor to sit in the witness stand and testify about the county I cherish.

John F. Hall, Trigg County Historian (Retired)

*Read other stories by John F. Hall and others at:
<http://www.ajlambert.com>