

# The White Haven Story



By Mrs. Walter Ferguson

## THE WHITE HAVEN STORY

*A paper prepared by Mrs. Walter Ferguson, of Union, Kentucky. Read by her son, Bruce Ferguson, at a meeting of the Boone County Historical Society on November 19, 1954.*

Abraham Lincoln was president of the United States, Beriah Magoffin was governor of Kentucky and John C. Breckenridge had just resigned his seat in the senate at Washington when Ephram and Tom made their way along the gravel road to their new home. The whistle of the steamer, the Telegraph Number Three, still rang in their ears as she blew for the landing at Hamilton, Boone County, Kentucky, depositing these young charges to the fate of a five mile walk.

What was just a giant rumble some fifteen years before when Cassius Marcellus Clay published in Lexington, the paper the True American, advocating freedom of the slaves had now developed into a loud roar and the smell of gunpowder on the south wind was not unfounded. But to these two little darkies this was of small consequence. They had a good master. Mr. George Winn, of Louisville, was loaning them out for they (sic) year from his large holding of slaves.

Glancing up from their childish pleasures of dust kicking and leaf rustling they saw through a cloud of dust a stage coach make the turn off the Union and Beaver Road. The four horses started to slow up, sensing they were nearing a breathing place and the driver pulled them to full stop at White Haven Academy.

Surely the one who designed the Queen of the West loved the river. At first sight one felt a giant steamer was at anchor in a green sea. This was the gingerbread era of design and six square columns that held the double porches were topped with scroll and filigree. This structure was of white clapboard, green shuttered, the wide verandas reaching across the front on both the first and second story. A white railing was around the second floor extension.

From the massive front door, glass paneled on each side, came Mr. Henry Cotton to bid welcome to the students of his academy for the fall term of learning. The first down from the stage was Shelly Moffett, having made the trip from Independence and right behind him was Eph Norman from Walton, The Kendall boys who had taken the Kentucky-Lexington Railroad from Williamstown were much in evidence with their faces grimy from the long journey.

Tom and Eph, quick to remember their training, started toting valises, catch balls and trunks into the wide hall, three being on one side and two on the other. The stairs were broad and of walnut, curving to a landing and on the second floor. On this level were the same number of rooms excepting two small rooms at the rear which were fashioned into a bath room and a primp room. All had their own fireplaces, the windows from ceiling to floor and wide woodwork decorated each.

Mr. Cotton showed the boys into the parlor and with some misgivings told them that due to the large enrollment of young ladies some of them would have to board-out for the term. Mr. Addison Huey had offered to take some of the lads to his farm and home which was about a half mile from the main road. Plans were made for their departure but first Mr. Cotton wanted to give them their numbers. As was the custom each student was known by his number and it is remembered hearing the number 176 being called in the classes of Geometry, Higher Mathematics and Algebra.

By this time Eph and Tom had found the kitchen, by following their noses not doubt, because there old Mammy Mary was boiling up a mess of late beans and hog jowl fresh from the garden and smoke house that very morning. This section of the building was attached to the main part but with a separate entrance. The kitchen went the entire length of the first level, at the far being the narrow stair leading to the second floor where the ceiling was very low, the windows being quarter size, swinging out on hinges. This was the servants' quarters. Mammy Mary showed the boys the corn shuck pallets, patted each on his kinky head as she asked about the folks down at the Falls City. She never gave up hopes of some day finding her loved ones again. The boys wanted to pounce down on the shucks but Mammy Mary said there was no time for such foolishness and shewed them down the steps to go fetch some wood chunks for her cook stove.

They walked out onto the brick court yard which tied the main structure with the quarters in the center of which was the old well head, its windless and rope and wooden bucket. They soon forgot the wood assignment when they saw the perfect place for sliding – the top of the cellar room. At the very top was the air vent which was so important to the potatoes, pumpkins and other root vegetables during the long winters. Eph and Tom were having a merry time, each on a board, sliding down the packed earth mound until they saw some distance away the large white stable. That they must see and racing off in the distance they came within the pungent odors of leathers, horses, and oxen oil. Wooden pegs on a straight line around one wall were heavy with harness, bridles and crop sticks. And then they met Uncle Paul. The grey was just a fringe around his old black head but his voice was cheerful and soft. He was brushing down one of the riding horses, making ready for the boys who would be wanting to see the south forty, or maybe ride to the woods or anywhere that took their fancy as there were eighty acres over which to roam.

Uncle Paul straightened out the fact that Mammy Mary was his woman. He also straightened them out that they were to help his children brighten the brass on the harness, use the oil to make it soft, curry the horses and carry the water. So many other chores were being mentioned that they thought maybe it would be best to take a look at the building across the path. Which they did. They found this to be the carriage house. Mr. Cotton's surrey, the tongue resting high against the back wall was all black with bright red spokes. The whip holder was a bit worn but the fringe around the top seemed as new as it rippled with the slight gust of wind as they closed the door.

They then thought of the wood. And then they saw a most peculiar octagon shaped building, low and with a cupola on top. They must see. They being city boys as it were, their few years spent with the gentry of Louisville, came colser (sic) to this newest interest. A full sized door reaching from the top of the low roof to the sill was opened and there was a great round hole, all rumbled with straw and just then, swish, went a rabbit right between their little brown legs. Birds were flying around, spider webs hanging from the rafters. Having forgotten the rabbit scare they climbed over the sill and on closer examination saw a dampness down on the straw. Then there was a ladder and a pulley rope. They went down the ladder, the air becoming cool and sweet

smelling and as they pushed aside the straw they was great slabs of cloudy blue ice. But, what was that thing sitting over by the rock wall on it's (sic) two hind legs? The ladder swayed from side to side as they took off from that place, the fresh warm air of that October day bringing the color back to their pale faces. The woodchuck minded not their intrusion. The boys went for the wood.



The White Haven Ice House

Mammy Mary had just opened her mouth to say to Eph and Tom to hie (sic) themselves down to the vegetable garden and pull out those dad-ratted morning glory vines when a great commotion was heard coming from the front way. By this time the boys had circled the canna bods (sic), jumped the flags, gulped a drink from the well, and there coming up the drive at full speed was a phaeton and two. Alfred Edwin Chambers, Jr., [Sr.] of Petersburg, who arranged to carry the local students, collecting each at their home, called a halt to old Mont and Hank.

Mr. Chambers' father, before the turn of the century, had been one of the advocates to have the state capitol permanently located at Petersburg. This little town had grown rapidly, aided by the river traffic. Dry goods stores, drug store, grocery house, and breeders of short horned cattle were just a few of the mercantile assets. But this was not to be and the some seventy odd years

that had passed since the seat of government had been established at Frankfort showed the decline in his beloved burg.

Mr. Cotton, who had been over at the class room building, walked the hundred feet distance in quite a hurry. Four young ladies, all ruffled and furbelowed, were alighting from the phaeton. Delicate squeals, much prancing of high-button shod feet had uprooted the student boys from their game of four-corner-catch. Pandemonium reigned. Trunks and band boxes found willing hands and in their very best manners, helped from the rig the Misses Lee Hughes from Richwood, Laura Smith from Union, and the Gatson girls also from Union. From a crushed position behind the under boxes and trunks emerged the younger host of the journey, Alfred Edwin Chambers, the second.

Eph Norman, looking down the pasture, saw the canes moving in the fishing pole thicket. He said he would just bet that Tom Baker was down there getting himself the fattest and strongest pole in the whole country. And he was. His sister Margaret was right in the thick of the getting too. They were the day students, walking to and from the school, lunch boxes in hand laden with fried eggs between biscuit halves. Tom Baker was glad to be going home at nights as this way, with his pole and a taut honeysuckle vine, he could get in a spot of fishing before night chores. Fowler's creek was loaded.

The pigeons were cooing their evening song as they neared the second veranda railing, (this pigeon pleasure was breaking Mammy Mary's disposition into little pieces) when Shelley and Roy called for Eph and Tom to come play them a tune on Mr. Cotton's banjo. This was just what Eph wanted to do. All summer evenings had been spend down by the river where they learned to sing and play the notes of Stevie Foster. Tom especially liked the one, "Massa's in the Cold, Cold Ground", and too, he liked the one about "Old Uncle Ned". Soon others gathered around and "The Sun Shines Bright on My Old Kentucky Home" was getting a good start when up the drive, bundles dragging, dusty and rumped, came Justice Hudson and Elijah Hudson of Walton, Mose Allen or (sic) Normansville, Allie Corn from Bullittsville (sic), and Jimmy Johnson from Big Bone.

Cries of “What Happened” and “You look like a hurrah’s nest” were explained by all talking at once. It was gathered that their horse had run off, dragging the buggy with him, after first throwing them out. And it was all caused by Fielding Dickey’s father’s threshing machine. When they were riding past the Dickey farm Fielding was chunking the boiler, it let out a blast and the crazy old horse, not used to this new fangled contraption, took off. Plans were being made what to do to Fielding on his arrival for classes.

Darkness had set in now, Mammy Mary was touching the lamp wicks with her own specially made lighters, when a scream was heard from the side yard. They all ran to the door and there running as fast as his legs would carry him was Jimmy (sic) Huey. He was so out of breath he could hardly speak, but they did understand enough to know that the Federals were tearing up his hobby horse and chopping up Mose Allen’s trunk, and . . . Mr. Cotton interrupted and told the boys to come as he ran down the yord (sic) and took the short cut through the fields.

Mr. Joseph Addison Huey and his spouse, Amanda Gaines Huey, were pleading with the Union Army Home Guards to spare the belongings of the White Haven boys; to do whatever they wanted to do to their things. With this the guards became more enraged and with axes chopped open the last trunk, taking clothing regardless of size, and on their way out of the house, snatched up a broach on the mantle shelf. Years later this same piece of jewelry was seen on the dress of a local citizen.

The seriousness of the conflict was reaching home now. Mr. Cotton could no longer put to the back of his mind decisions that had to be made. Colonel J. J. Landrum’s Federal forces of six hundred men were nearing to cross the river.

It was in 1867 that Frances Miles Finch wrote:

Under the sod and the dew,  
Waiting the judgement (sic) day,  
Love and tears for the Blue,  
Tears and love for the Grey.

Once more lilacs in the door yard bloomed and life began anew as brother embraced brother. A Mr. Tandy came to the academy to be followed by Thomas Stevenson and his brother Nate with his wife.

Mr. Nate was quite a favorite with the students; he teaching the younger boys and his wife taught the girl students. Mr. Tom, who taught the older boys, was a rather nervous gentlemen (sic), quick tempered and hasty in his decisions. It was during one of his classes that one of the boys disobeyed his orders. He picked up a chair and struck the boy over the head. Hard feelings between the boy's family and the professor followed. The boy's father was influential in the community and the academy was closed soon after this incident.

A Professor Daughters, on one of his journeys to the Salt Lick at Big Bone, decided this area needed the chance for an education. The public school system had not yet reached this section of Kentucky. He opened Daughters' Academy at the Town Tavern, which is now the home of the Leslie Barlow family.

Professor Daughters did not gain the respect of the student body. Some of the boys thought they knew more than (sic) the professor. They would misconceive his assignments and when instructed to draw two parallel lines, would draw them to meet at the ends. It was not long before Professor Daughters decided that folks at Harrodsburg needed an education. It is believed that he may have located at the spot now occupied by the famous Beaumont Inn.



The White Haven house after restoration work by the Fries family. Hazel Fries (left) and her sister, Frieda Berndt, stand on the front walk.

A new way of life was now come to White Haven. She was to become the hearthstone in the lives of many, to be loved and to return this affection.

Families who crossed her threshold were the Hon. Leonard and Jennie Kennedy Lassing. In 1872 Mr. Lassing represented Boone County at Frankfort. Mrs. Lassing was the great-granddaughter of Thomas Kennedy who operated the ferry in Covington on the spot where the suspension bridge was erected. Their daughter, Miss Threse Lassing, was an accomplished artist.

Dr. Sam C. Hicks and his wife Sally Kennedy Hicks and their family of four lived there. Mr. Hicks was a merchant and farmer. The Abernathy family, followed by the partnership of Dugan and Coates sold to Mr. J. Lynn Frazier cashier of the local bank of Union. Daniel G. Fries, senior and junior, bought from Mr. Frazier. They were industrialists in Covington.

Civil strife, two global wars, the oriental incident, a restless peace, and the vapor from a fleeting jet bring us a long way from a dusty "stage and four". But White Haven lives on. More strong

than ever under the tutorship of Mr. S. D. Edwards, more affectionately known as “Doc”. Where in years past, nature had been most unkind, grasses now grow in lush abundance. Herds of cows and their young browse where Eph and Tom learned the meaning of freedom and equality.

The slate with the “Love you Joe”  
Has long been laid away.

The hickory stick and arithmetic,  
Symbols of another day.

Silent are the lark and raven,  
God speed! Dear White Haven.

The author is indebted to Mr. James Addison Huey, who remembered “way back when”.