

CHAPTER VII

NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN DAYS IN CAMDEN, 1894-1955

Every town has had days that were hum-drum and monotonous; days that have been the same as the one before; days when life flowed along in the same rut. Camden has had many of these, but, too, she has had days that are memorable and not easily forgotten. Some of these were filled with tragedy and disaster while others brought excitement and pleasure.

One that was filled with both excitement and perhaps disappointment was on September 10, 1894 when the Camden boys played the Cincinnati Reds. It was a gala day. That was the first time in the history of baseball that a National League team had made its appearance in Preble County, but Camden's team had had a very successful season (were county champions) and they felt equal to taking on keener competition. Three years previously the Camden Club had taken the name "Latham" after the great third baseman, Arlie Latham, of the Reds. During the baseball season of 1894 they had defended their name without a defeat until they ran up against the club of which Arlie was a member. In honor of the approaching event with the Reds the town was beautifully decorated. Bunting floated from every business house and thoroughfare in the village. Fifteen hundred people streamed in to see the game. The boys from Porkopolis were too swift for the Lathams, but the home team did their best to please the large audience which had assembled at the fine new ball park just south of town. At the end of the game with a score

of one to sixteen in favor of the Reds the Camden boys realized they had played a team that was too fast for them, and they had better stay in their own class. The gentleman for whom the team was named expressed his pride over the record the Camden boys had made and felt they were capable of playing any amateur he knew.¹

The following year on May 19, another event occurred which brought large crowds to the edge of town. The freight train, No. 82, was south bound about one o'clock. A drawbar pulled out which caused eight cars loaded with live stock to become derailed and completely demolished. The bodies of sixty-two head of hogs, sheep, and calves were strewn along the track. After several hours the wreck was cleared so the train could pass. The only consolation in viewing such a gruesome sight was that no human being's life was lost.²

An event of state-wide attraction was Ohio's Centennial in 1903. All over the state preparations were made for great celebrations. At Chillicothe, Ohio's first capital, and in many other towns and cities celebrations lasted for several days at a time.³ On February 27, Camden, through her schools, celebrated Ohio Day, the one-hundredth anniversary of the state's entry into the Union. On the afternoon of the appointed day, the parents and friends of the pupils gathered at the school to witness the exercises which had been arranged by the teachers and pupils for that occasion. Rooms were handsomely decorated. The history of the state from the time of the Indians to 1903 was related in well delivered essays, readings, declamations, and exercises of various kinds. The drills in calisthenics by the different grades were

1 Camden Gazette, op. cit., September 13, 1894.

2 Ibid., May 23, 1895.

3 Preble County News, op. cit., April 16, 1903.

very interesting features of the program.⁴ Camden's celebration was one of many that went on all over the state.

Only five years after Ohio Day Preble County had a birthday. Camden and Somers Township assumed their share of responsibility in planning and carrying out a very splendid program for three busy days. Committees worked for weeks, night and day, in preparation for the celebration which was held at the county seat, Eaton, Ohio, on July 2, 3, and 4, 1908. It was called Preble County's Centennial and Home Coming. Eaton had on her gayest dress. The business houses were embellished by expert decorators on an elaborate scale. National colors were most prominent among the decorations. There were sessions in the morning, afternoon, and evening filled with speeches, parades, music, and contests. The parade of July 3 was an attractive feature of the Centennial. Generous cash prizes were given to the best floats, to the most artistically decorated carriage or buggy, to the finest decorated auto, to the most attractive bicycle, to the most comical and clownish character, to the most antiquemake-up, and to the township with the largest delegation in proportion to its population. All school children were encouraged to march in the parade and each one who did was given a souvenir. In spite of the attraction to the big parade, the Fourth was the largest day. To get there some walked, some drove, and others rode on the train. The neighboring towns closed their stores and went on special trains. The Pennsylvania Railroad alone carried three-hundred ninety-eight people from Camden to Eaton during the three centennial days. People who arrived on the train on the Fourth were escorted by ten brass bands to the main square of

⁴ Ibid., March 5, 1903.

Eaton where the musicians played Home Sweet Home. About noon everyone hiked to the Fairgrounds where special events were planned by the various committees. One feature was twenty big autos puffing, tooting, and throwing off odors of gasoline while the cars shot around the track smashing records and fence posts with 10,000 people wildly cheering. Motorcycle races, foot races, and sack races were other attractions. At one-thirty Camden and Ingomar⁵ gave a real exhibition with a game of baseball. They planned to play a seven inning game, but since the score was tied one to one they had to play a nerve racking game until the ninth inning when Camden won. Then Camden played Eaton. Everything went lovely until the fourth inning when the unexpected happened. An Eaton boy hit a grounder in front of the catcher who promptly threw him out at first. This being the third out Camden started in from the field and the Eaton players started out. When someone discovered the weak voiced umpire had called him safe, the crowd was dumb-founded and the Camden boys walked off the field with a score of five to four in favor of Camden.

The three day celebration ended with a lavish thousand dollar pyro-technical display. Among the pieces were an oriental tree, Martha Washington's fan, weeping willow tree, and life sized man doing performances of an acrobat. Many people thought the most interesting feature of the three day centennial was the historical exhibit at the City Hall. The growth and progress of the state could readily be traced by the material evidence. The ladies were especially interested in handsome brocaded dresses over one hundred years old and the wonderfully preserved bonnets. Much interest was shown in the first piano and melodian ever brought to Preble County. This shared interest with the cradles in which the pioneer babies of the county were rocked. The flag of Ohio's early days gave evidence that material of all kinds and quality

⁵ Ingomar was a small village east of Eaton.

were used and it lacked the nice construction which marks flags today. Preble County's Centennial and Home Coming was a great success and long talked about.⁶

The Seven Mile Creek ordinarily was a mild, gently flowing creek which was looked upon as a great asset to the village and the vicinity around. But in a few instances it has become unruly and vent its rage upon the citizens of Camden. In August, 1896 the incessant downpour started on Thursday night and continued until Friday noon which caused Seven Mile to overflow its banks in a most frightful manner. The oldest citizens remarked that they had never seen the stream to be so high since 1885 when the creek went on a rampage and washed out the East Central Avenue bridge. In the 1896 high water many cellars were flooded on Second Street and even on South Liberty and South Lafayette Streets. The water had risen in the creek to within sixteen inches of the 1885 mark.⁷

Again in February, 1908 Camden experienced another flood and the citizens declared this was the worst one since 1885. On February 14, Seven Mile Creek left its banks and caused its backwaters to flood all but the heart of town. All the streets south of West Central Avenue were under from twelve to fifteen inches of water. Even the Marsh house on West Central Avenue was filled with three inches of water. The family was caught unprepared and the carpets were all ruined. Paint Creek was a treacherous torrent, too. A. A. Case was looking after his stock at the slaughter house just south of town when he became hemmed in by a wall of water before he knew it. Bob Marshall,

⁶ Preble County News, *op. cit.*, May 7, 1908; June 11, 1908; June 25, 1908; July 2, 1908; July 9, 1908.

⁷ Camden Gazette, *op. cit.*, August 13, 1896.

risking his own life, rescued Mr. Case in a small boat. Tribbet's Branch⁸ threatened to break through its levee and all the "North Edders" breathed easier when the water started to recede. The greatest damage was that done to the streets which amounted to several hundred dollars.⁹

The flood which has since been spoken of as "the flood" came in 1913. Cries for help and the ringing of the fire bell aroused the entire populace between two and three o'clock Tuesday morning, March 19. The people were warned that the high water had reached a dangerous stage. Residents and people with business interest in the eastern section of town kept a close watch on Seven Mile during the heavy downpour Monday afternoon, but in the early evening the creek had fallen to some extent. Those who had particular interests that were threatened were greatly relieved and retired for the night. Shortly after two o'clock the banks of Beasley's Branch¹⁰ gave way and changed its course entirely until it flowed through the eastern section of town and emptied into Seven Mile at the foot of Second Street. This not only caused a flooded condition but a current that made it extremely dangerous to navigate and impossible to reach many houses. The rise of the river early Tuesday morning was phenomenal and it continued to rise until six-thirty when it slowly receded.

After the general alarm was given it was only by the heroic aid of rescuers that human life was saved in many instances. Some places were surrounded with four to twelve feet of water. It came to within a few feet of the corner of Main and Central Avenue. Sylvester "Swift" Patterson was

⁸ Tribbet's Branch is the small stream which runs through the north end of Camden just south of Amy Danser's and Frank White's.

⁹ Preble County News, op. cit., February 20, 1908.

¹⁰ Beasley's Branch is the small stream just south of the cemetery.

rescued from his home east of the Pennsylvania Depot after he had stood in water shoulder deep for some time and was nearly exhausted. Mr. and Mrs. James Ford were taken from their home which was a one story residence on North Second Street after several feet of water had rushed into their house. Owing to the swiftness of the current it was with difficulty that they were taken to safety. The removing of many others who resided in one story dwellings of where buildings were in danger of being washed away proved very hazardous owing to the darkness and the swift water. The electric plant was flooded and the town was left in darkness which considerably hindered the work of the rescuers during the early hours. Boats, rafts, rinks, and other devices were put in use to help in the rescue work. John C. Snider who assisted in reaching those in distress during the early hours had a narrow escape when the boat he used upset.

Camden was fortunate in not losing any human lives but considerable loss in live stock was suffered. Charles Rabenstein, the local meat man and livestock dealer, was probably the heaviest loser in livestock. He lost thirty head of hogs which averaged two hundred ten pounds each, and fifteen head of sheep which were in the stock yards at that time. In his slaughter house south of town several head of hogs and two cows were lost. J. M. Lefferson lost a horse which was found drowned in the stable on South Second Street. Dr. J. W. Coombs and his family saved their fine Holstein cow which was the pride of their household. As the water came nearer to the Coombs' property and got higher, the cow shared the parlor of the house with the Coombs family.

Thousands of dollars of damage was done to business places, buildings, household goods, streets, and sidewalks. The places that had the greatest losses in a business way were J. C. Snider's cement plant, J. E. Parker's poultry and produce house, Robert Hamilton's sawmill, E. W. Duckwall's tobacco

warehouse, the Edward Slover Fertilizer Company, the Payne and Eikenberry Company, the Farmers' Grain and Supply Company, R. E. Diskey's Hardware Store, George Pollock's Grocery, Harry Bennett's blacksmith shop, and J. T. Gift's harness and shoe repair shop.

The railroad bridge over Seven Mile Creek, located approximately one mile south of town, gave way about nine o'clock on that fateful Tuesday morning. With this bridge and several others out between Camden and Hamilton, as well as several miles of track washed away, trains were unable to give service to Camden for more than two weeks. Train No. 19 arrived from Cincinnati on Saturday, April 11, and that was the first train to pass over this division since service had been stopped the night before the flood.

Camden was not alone in this tragedy. Many of the towns in the Miami Valley were flood victims. No lives were lost in Preble County but property damage and loss were heavy in West Alexandria. Camdenites felt very fortunate after they heard of the deaths and damage in towns and cities such as Mansburg, Franklin, Middletown, Hamilton, Dayton, Piqua, Troy and Columbus. Hardly had Camden flood victims begun to help themselves when calls were received from Dayton for help for flood sufferers, and later from Hamilton. A relief committee canvassed the town for provisions and clothing which were dispatched to Dayton and Hamilton where property loss and suffering were beyond estimation. In one day's time H. C. Fvinger, the local baker, delivered four hundred loaves of bread to relieve hunger in Hamilton. All communications with that city were cut off and those who had loved ones in Dayton or Hamilton anxiously awaited news. Many journeyed to Dayton and were relieved to find former Camdenites in that city had escaped with only slight property loss. Those from Camden who had moved to Hamilton fared far worse. Many lost their

George Hollock's Grocery, Harry Bennett's Blacksmith shop, and J. E. White's
 The railroad bridge over Lewis Hill Creek, located approximately one
 mile south of town, have very good views of the town from the
 top of the hill. The bridge and several other bridges are located
 as well as several miles of track running north and south of town
 to Camden. The bridge over Lewis Hill Creek is one of the best
 of Camden for views of the town.

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" Frank White brought basket-ball to Camden. He went to
 Liberty, Ind. in the fall of 1904 to play in the band at the Fair.
 The Liberty boys asked him to stay for the evening, saying they
 were having a basket ball game. The game was new to Frank and
 being a lover of sports, he decided to stay. The next day he
 contacted fifteen Camden men who were willing to pool their
 money for uniforms and equipment. They played among themselves
 for a year and then selected a regular team composed of Henry
 Boomershine, Will Sebert, Murray Wall, Charles Neff, John White
 and Frank White with Merrril Fry as referee."

From Anna Homsher White, July 15, 1956.

received from Dayton for help for food and other supplies and later from Hamilton.
 A relief committee organized the town for provisions and clothing which
 were distributed to Dayton and Hamilton and helped some property loss and suffering were
 beyond estimation. In one day in the fall of 1918, the local banks delivered
 four hundred boxes of food to relieve hunger in Hamilton. All communications
 to the city were cut off and the town was isolated. The town of Hamilton
 was completely isolated from the rest of the world and were relieved to find
 former students in that city had engaged with only slight property loss.
 There from Camden and the town of Hamilton found the town very poor.

entire possessions but none of the former Camden residents had lost their lives. Mrs. Will Worth and little son who lived on Vine Street in Hamilton were forced to the attic of their home and remained without food from Tuesday until late Thursday when they were rescued. In the same neighborhood lived Mr. and Mrs. Will Sebert. Mrs. Sebert and baby sons were alone when the water rose so rapidly. They were forced to seek refuge in a three story building which was occupied by a saloon. Here they remained over fifty hours without aid. Hamilton alone had more than four hundred houses destroyed and two thousand damaged.¹¹

Camden's first basketball game caused much excitement in the town. On December 14, 1904 Camden sport fans witnessed the town's initial game. This sport was a relatively new one at this time, having started in the East in 189 . The first game in Camden made a popular hit and has remained a favorite sport of the town ever since. The stage and entrance ways of the Opera House were packed to watch the playing of two local teams, the Stars and the Stripes. The audience manifested much enthusiasm and the game proved both strenuous and interesting. The critics praised John White for his exceptional good playing. "He placed some apparently impossible goals; some plays that the professional players of the East would hardly expect to make." Frank White, Glenn Fernshell, Will Sebert, John White, Murray Wall, E. C. Barnett, Charles Neff, Ed McGriff, Clarence Davis, Clay Klepp, Byron Landis and George Sizelove were those who played. They all played quite well considering they had just taken up the game.¹²

By February Camden's boys were feeling very confident about their ability as basketball players because they were able to defeat the Miami University

¹¹ Preble County News, op. cit., March 21, 1913; April 3, 1913; April 10, 1913; April 17, 1913.

¹² Ibid., December 15, 1904.

basketball team by a score of 24 - 9. At this game the audience was the largest and most appreciative of any that had attended that winter. The game was a very clean one with only five fouls called, two against Miami and three against Camden. The result of the game was more of a surprise to the collegians than to the Camden team. Really the success of the local team was quite phenomenal considering the short time they had played.¹³ Camden players overrated themselves and their conceit was knocked out the following week when they scheduled a game with Hamilton High School who had twice been state champions. The local players "were obliged to draw in their chests after an awful harruping administered by Hamilton." The visitors piled up 31 against 7. The game was a "beaut". The "yelling crowd had the rare pleasure of witnessing both a football game and a prize fight, all for one admission." The boys from Butler started to play a nice clean game, but some of the members of the Camden team wanted a "rough house" so they had it, to their sorrow. The height of rowdiness was revealed in the second half when one of the Camden players deliberately threw the ball into the face of one of the Hamiltonians. The most redeeming features of the game was the large crowd present.¹⁴ Basketball throughout the year had followed much of the same pattern. Just when a team has become very egotistical and has the feeling there is none better their ego is deflated by falling to defeat. Also tempers stay even when a good team is winning, but it has often seemed hard to lose gracefully.

The following winter after the boys introduced the game of basketball into Camden, the girls made their initial venture into the sport. The first game was played in February, 1905 between two local teams. The Reds were

13 Ibid., February 9, 1905.

14 Ibid., February 16, 1905.

composed of Mame Loop, Edna Bertsch, Grace McChristie, Kathryn Perkins, and Gertie Fisher; the Whites, Edna McChristie, Ella Gillman, Sade White, Blanche White, and Maude Barnett. The opening game was well attended and proved quite interesting to all the onlookers.¹⁵ Their first public appearance against an out-of-town team was in March when Liberty, Indiana and Camden measured strength. "It was a beautiful contest with many exciting climaxes which kept the nervous tension of the spectators keyed up to a high pitch throughout the game". The Hoosier Villagers went home with the laurels, but Camden's girls, Ella Gillman, Gertie Fisher, Grace McChristie, Edna McChristie, and Arlie Morton, made a fine showing in spite of the fact that Liberty had the advantage of two years experience.¹⁶

"Landis Day" or "Kenesaw Mountain Landis Day" which was observed in Camden on September 19, 1907 was a real Red Letter Day for the village. The monumental assessment of \$29,000,000 against the Standard Oil Company had caused Judge Kenesaw Landis to become notoriously well known. The Judge was invited to Camden as the guest of honor of the 35th C.V.I. Regimental Association which held its annual reunion in the village in this particular year. This regiment was a famous one which had been organized in Hamilton on August 20, 1861 by General Fred Vanderveer. The father of the great jurist, Dr. Abraham M. Landis was the regimental surgeon.¹⁷ At the battle of Kenesaw Mountain the surgeon had his leg shattered by a twelve pound cannon ball. That was how the Judge received his peculiar name.

Judge Landis arrived in Camden for the reunion on the ten-thirty train from Cincinnati accompanied by a brother, Dr. Frank Landis. A little later

¹⁵ Ibid., February 23, 1905.

¹⁶ Ibid., March 16, 1905.

¹⁷ Ibid., August 29, 1907.

another brother, Congressman Charles Landis, from Delphi, Indiana, arrived on the next train from the West. Judge Landis, unmindful of the throng at the depot, gave his Hoosier brother a big hug of welcome. Headed by the Eaton Band, a Hamilton Drum Corp, and the latter's regimental colors, the crowd of veterans which had arrived on the two trains marched to the Town Hall where the reunion opened at eleven o'clock.

The town was gaily decorated, school was dismissed, and hundreds of people turned out to do honor to the town's distinguished visitors. Just as Judge Landis started to speak some over enthusiastic admirer in the audience babbled something about Standard Oil. Immediately a frown spread over the countenance of the man who had handed out the fine which showed the displeasure at the reference. Not only the jurist but also Congressman Landis spoke to the surviving members of his father's old regiment. It was certainly a gala day for the veterans of Camden and southwestern Ohio not only to be able to share and relate their old experiences but also to listen to the son of the doctor who had meant so much to their regiment. The towns people thoroughly enjoyed seeing a fragment of a Civil War Regiment besides having the opportunity of meeting the Landis brothers who had become so well known.¹⁸

Another exciting day but not a pleasant one occurred in July, 1909. On Monday afternoon, July 13, about three o'clock Camden was visited by a tornado which destroyed hundreds of valuable shade trees, removing many by the roots. On Main Street it destroyed the frame work of the Fry residence. Upon reaching the edge of town it completely demolished a tobacco shed and two barns on the Coon place. At the E. J. Phares farm it removed two barns from their foundations. As it went over Fairmount Cemetery it tossed large tombstones from

¹⁸ Ibid., September 26, 1907.

their foundation as though they were egg shells. On David Pierce's farm a tobacco shed was destroyed but here the force of the wind seemed to break. There the tornado appeared to vent its rage on E. J. Phares. Aside from the damage to his farm it broke a large plate glass window in his Department Store. It also overtook Mr. Phares and his son Bruce on the road near the Pierce farm. The storm carried the horse, buggy, and occupants several yards and landed them safely in a corn field.

After the storm several streets were impassable. The people of town spent the next day in removing trees and limbs which had blocked streets. Damage done in Somerville and Seven Mile was equally as great. A Camden man, Richard Parker, had a very unusual but unpleasant experience near Seven Mile during the tornado. He was three miles north of that town in a rig in a funeral procession when the tornado struck. Horses, rigs, and occupants were hurled against the fences. The rigs were totally demolished, the horses injured, but the twenty or more persons all escaped uninjured. The hearse and immediate family escaped the tornado path but when they reached the cemetery a ball of lightning struck a large walnut tree and knocked the horses to the ground. Aside from the shock they were uninjured.¹⁹

Another very severe storm struck the Camden area on Sunday, February 22, 1914. This time it was not a tornado but a blizzard that was unequalled to any that the older citizens could recall. Sunday morning opened with spring-like weather but by noon there came a sudden drop in the temperature. By late afternoon it was bitterly cold and by night there came quite unexpectedly a genuine northern blizzard. By Monday morning many places along the roads snow was twelve to fifteen feet high. For a few days business, school, and work,

¹⁹ Ibid., July 15, 1909.

except the shoveling of snow, was abandoned because the streets of the town and the roads leading into Camden were impassable.²⁰

This 1941 blizzard was very similar to one experienced on Saturday night after Thanksgiving in 1950. Saturday morning was a typical November day but by evening a heavy snow had started to fall which was driven by a terrifically strong and biting wind. The weather was so severe that one prominent local man was frozen on the steps of his place of business. Within a few hours the highways were impassable and motorists were forced to stay in their cars on highways for several hours until highway machinery could get traffic moving. On Sunday morning the people of Camden were virtually snow-bound. Not even pedestrians could get out until snow was removed from doorways. Electric service was disrupted when the weight of the snow pulled down power lines. Country roads were so drifted that school buses were unable to run for over a week.²¹

One of the most horrifying experiences in the history of Camden was the murder of Franklin Bourne. He was an eccentric old bachelor who was quite a genius with machinery. It was generally conceded that he had considerable money most of which he was supposed to have carried with him. He lived alone on a hundred acre farm at Back Bone²² west of Camden, and Elwood

²⁰ Ibid., February 26, 1914.

²¹ This blizzard was experienced by the author.

²² It is said, according to the tales that are discussed in front of fireplaces on frosty fall nights, that the Devil's Back Bone at one time was the stronghold of Red Turtle, a chief of the Miami Indians. When the Miamis, driven westward by the white men, were forced to leave their homes they left a solemn warning to their pale faced successors that the burial mound in what is now Back Bone, was not to be touched on pain of death. In this mound, it is whispered, repose the decaying bones of the tribe's royalty and all their equipment that they are supposed to take with them to the Happy Hunting Grounds. The legend tells that every year the Indians send back a scout who goes over the ground to see if the desecrating touch of the white man has disturbed the age-old sleepers who lie in the hills. Should they ever find that a bone has been removed or a grave bothered, retribution will be swift and merciless. When several years ago, an old hermit, living on the edge of Back Bone, was murdered at about the time of year the Indian scouts are supposed to appear, it was told that he had plowed up an Indian grave and this was his punishment. This was written by Clayton Pryor in an article which appeared in the Dayton Daily News, October 3, 1920.

Davis frequently worked for him. Davis claimed he leased the farm for 1912 and 1913 when Bourne supposedly left for the South. Mr. Davis reported that Bourne returned in the fall on a visit and stated that he was employed as an engineer with a southern lumber company. He had no close friends and little was known of his personal affairs. David said that he never disclosed the name of the company with whom he was employed, nor the location excepting that it was in Mississippi. He had few confidential friends and nothing strange had been thought of the fact that he had not been heard of for fourteen months. His continued absence finally caused the neighbors to fear that some accident might have befallen him and the matter was talked about a great deal, especially after Elwood Davis received the following letter postmarked at Hamilton:

Hamilton, Ohio

Wee found name on letter. we bin Hamilton three weeks. So we going back. Frank Bourn is dead. he bin dead for three months about. he was rob of what he had. wee going back Itily. dont look for him. wee buried him. Name I dont send.

When Davis received the above letter he forwarded it to John Bourne, a cousin of the missing man. About the same time Davis got his letter Mr. John Bourne also received the following letter:

Hamilton, Butler County, O.

John Bourn,
Wee thought, wee thought, wuld let you that, Frank Bourn is dead. Wee a note in his cloes said Somerville, Butler County. he was rob of what he had. So dont look for him. That is enough so we going back to Itily. That is all. You dont look for him. Frank Bourn is dead so I not you my name.

Both of these letters were postmarked at Hamilton and were enclosed in Government stamped envelopes purchased in Hamilton, May 23, 1913, at 7:30 a.m. It was afterward learned that Davis was in Hamilton on this date, having left Camden on an early train and returned at noon. He was then suspected of writing the letters. John Bourne filed an affidavit against him charging him with murder. He was promptly arrested by Sheriff Ed Wertz and placed in the county jail. David professed his innocence and denied

having written the letters. He was asked to address an envelope to himself and to John Bourne which he did. The style and handwriting compared so closely with that of the two letters that the authorities felt sure of their authorship.

When asked as to the whereabouts of Mr. Bourne, Davis said he left April 7, 1912 and he had only seen him once, about the latter part of last October. He said that Bourne came to the place in an automobile with a man from Cincinnati and that they stayed one night, leaving early the next morning for the same city, where Bourne was to catch a river boat and return to Mississippi. At one time he said he had not heard from him since, and at another time he said he had received a letter or two. He claimed to have had letters from Bourne soon after he left in April, 1912, dated at Jackson, Mississippi, in which he said he was running an engine in a lumber camp. The police authorities at Jackson were communicated with but they could not locate him there.

With these conflicting stories Bourne's friends became more certain that foul play had befallen him in some manner because he would not deliberately leave his home for such a great length of time. It was the opinion of Bourne's acquaintances that owing to his nature he would have returned to take care of his business and personal affairs. Sheriff Vertz planned a searching party to try to find Bourne's dead body. He and the Prosecuting Attorney Gilmore issued posters calling for volunteers to present themselves on the Bourne farm. As a result two or three hundred people gathered and under direction of the above officials a systematic and thorough search was instigated. During the search two young men, C. W. Kenworthy and Stanley McDonald, who were neighbors of Bourne's, by the aid of probes, found a loose spot in the garden only about fifty feet from the house. A husky farmer then took a shovel and made the dirt fly. It appeared to be loose and all stood around in gruesome expectancy. Persistency finally brought its reward. When a depth of three feet was reached a human form lying face downward was revealed. It was lifted out and carried

to the open porch on the west side of the house where it was identified by scores of people as the remains of Frank Bourne. It was evident from the state of deterioration, and the fact that stalks from last year's crop of corn were directly over the body, that it had been buried there some time previous to corn planting in the spring of 1912.

Sheriff Wertz immediately went for Davis and when shown the dead body and asked if that were Bourne, he never flinched but replied that it looked like Frank to him. After the coroner arrived in conjunction with Drs. McQueen²³ and Homsher of Camden, an examination of the body was made. The post mortem revealed a fracture of the skull in the back part of the head. The piece of indented skull, which was removed, would indicate from the shape and size that Bourne had been struck a terrific blow in the back of the head with the butt of an axe while lying upon his face. Neighbors said that he almost always slept on the floor, without removing his clothing except his shoes. Bourne's body was clothed, with the exception of his shoes, and had been dropped into the hole which was about three feet deep, and covered over with dirt, no box being used. A peculiar thing about the spot was that anyone passing along the road, driving east would, if he had looked straight ahead, have had his eyes focused directly upon it. This indicated that the digging of the grave and the interment took place after night.

²³ Dr. D. W. McQueen came from Dayton to Camden to practice medicine in 1892 after the death of Dr. Charles C. Jones. He started his practice in Dr. Jones's office which was located on the site now occupied by the Mobil Gas Station. Later he bought Dr. Lorton Dunham's house (now known as the Dr. McKinley house) and there he lived until his death in 1930. Dr. McQueen was a partner with Dr. Ferguson until the latter's death in 1912. Dr. McQueen was a very fine physician and he served the community well and willingly until multiple sclerosis almost totally incapacitated him a few years before his death. Freble County News, op. cit., August 16, 1933.

Although the evidence was only circumstantial, the fifty-two year old Davis was charged with the murder of Frank Bourne. He stoutly declared his innocence, and clung to the story that he saw Bourne in October. He also insisted that he had corresponded with this man at Jackson, Mississippi, after Easter, 1913, although authorities were unable to locate any evidence of Bourne ever having been in the Southern state. He also denied the authorship of the letters, one of which he received and the other which was mailed to John Bourne. Sheriff Wertz searched the house and premises and found a piece of rag carpet in the kitchen, where it was alleged Bourne always slept. Upon it was a red spot which had the appearance of blood and underneath it on the floor was a similar stain.

After nearly five months of confinement in the County Jail Elwood Davis went on trial for the slaying of Franklin Bourne. Practically six days' time was consumed in completing the jury. As the trial progressed interest increased. Each day the court room was crowded with spectators. Every seat was occupied and many lined along the wall at the rear of the room. Submission of evidence and arguments took about two weeks. After the jury deliberated three hours and forty minutes they reached the verdict of "guilty of murder in the first degree as charged in the indictment with recommendation for mercy." Davis received the verdict with stoic unconcern, just the same as he did the three weeks' proceedings of the trial. There was not a quiver or betraying evidence of any kind about his face or body that would indicate a particle of nervousness when Deputy Clerk Jones read aloud the jury's verdict. After hearing his fate of spending the remainder of his life in the penitentiary, the prisoner snook the hands of his council, members of the jury and several other persons near at hand.²⁴

²⁴ The Preble County News, op. cit., May 29, 1913; June 5, 1913; June 12, 1913; June 19, 1913; July 3, 1913; October 23, 1913; October 30, 1913; November 6, 1913; and November 13, 1913.

Another distressing event in the lives of the Camdenites was in February, 1922 when a prominent citizen, Robert H. Marshall, State Game Warden, was shot from ambush. Mr. Marshall accompanied Frank Roberts, the village marshal, to a farm three miles south of Camden to arrest Ernest Line, the owner of the farm, on a robbery charge. The farm had been rented to Eli Benton and his family and Line resided with them.

Marshall and Roberts went to the farm in question and called at the house but found no one at home except Mrs. Benton and the five children. Feeling positive that Line and Benton were about, they searched the buildings on the premises and then continued into the nearby woods. The men preceded until out of view, though scarcely four hundred feet apart, when Roberts heard a shot fired and hurried in that direction where he found the lifeless body of Mr. Marshall. In the distance he saw a man running with a shot gun and opened fire upon him, but he was too far distant to prove effective. In a direction north of the spot where the murder was committed he saw another man fleeing whom he identified as Line, the man sought.

Robert Marshall had been killed instantly because the cigar which he had been smoking was firmly in his mouth. Indications were that the slayer had concealed himself in the hollow of a tree root nearby. Apparently Mr. Marshall had followed the tracks of the fleeing man and the other one lay in wait for the officer.

After closely examining the lifeless body of his fellow officer, Marshall Roberts hurried to the home of Oscar Keller and notified Mayor Shuey who immediately gave a general alarm. Soon there was a large gathering of people on the scene. With the assistance of Marshall Roberts they checked the escape of Mrs. Benton and the children. Mrs. Benton stated that her husband had killed Mr. Marshall mistaking him for Marshall Roberts and that he and another man immediately left in an automobile. The crime created, among

those early on the scene, the most bitter feeling, and there was little doubt expressed that a lynching would have stained the history of Preble County had the slayer been captured that afternoon or evening. They expressed their feelings by demolishing the windows in the house.

A few months previous to the murder, a raid on the farm disclosed a still and a few weeks later another still was found. After the death of Mr. Marshall the farm was searched and another still was discovered in addition to a quantity of mash and the finished product. It is presumed that Benton was under the impression that the officers were searching for this still when they visited the farm to arrest Line.

Benton was a native of Estell County, Kentucky, and had moved to the Line farm only about eight months before the brutal murder. He was reported to have been one of the leaders of an organized gang which had planned to "get" Marshal Roberts because of his activities in farm raids after prohibition became a law.

The untimely death of Robert Marshall cast a gloom over the entire community and was a terrible shock to his wife and three sisters. He was distinctly an outdoor man and was recognized as an authority on animal life and a lover of all outdoor sports. He was an expert marksman and it was freely remarked that had he had the slightest chance the story would have ended differently. The County Commissioners offered a reward of \$500 for the capture, dead or alive, of Benton and \$800 for his arrest and conviction. \$300 was offered for the arrest of Ernest Line. The two scoundrels escaped, probably to the hills of Kentucky, and were never apprehended.

The Line farm was in an out-of-way place and rather difficult to reach. It was possibly a half-mile west of the Camden-Hamilton pike. The place is

said to have quite a history for tragedies. A man named Beatty killed himself there following the Civil War while brooding over the death of his son in the war. In 1887 Herbert Howard was found murdered on the farm, a tragedy which to this day has remained a mystery.²⁵

Blizzards and tornadoes and murders are quite memorable but many of the memories are most unpleasant ones. But in 1933 Camden had a week filled with pleasant experiences and associations. This was the week of the greatest celebration every witnessed in Camden. It was the town's centennial known as Camden's Centennial and Home Coming. This was sponsored by the Camden Progressive Club, a local service organization. The big celebration commemorated the hundredth anniversary of incorporation of the town which was then known as Newcomb.

With the explosion of bombs Camden's big Centennial and Home Coming was opened on Monday, August 14, 1933, with hundreds of people on the Grade School grounds. Mayor O. Taylor delivered the address of welcome following the presentation speech by Attorney John Kiracone. Congressman Byron Harlan of the Third Ohio Congressional District came from Dayton and gave a very interesting talk. He was scheduled to speak on Thursday night but he had received an unexpected call to Washington which compelled him to speak earlier in the week. Congressman Harlan paid tribute to former well known Camden citizens with special mention of the late Gilbert Cox, father of former Governor James M. Cox, and also of the late O. T. Corson, nationally known educator.²⁶

During the six days of celebrating there was every conceivable kind of entertainment on the Midway including various rides, shows and booths for

²⁵ Preble County News, op. cit., February 2, 1922.

²⁶ Ibid., August 15, 1933.

young and old. The merchants' exhibit tent was a very attractive feature on the grounds and the band concert given each evening by Lou Stenzenbach's Camden Band attracted many people.²⁷ Perhaps the one feature that drew the most attention all week was the Rocking Chair Marathon which started Monday night with fourteen entries. People came to town and flocked around the Marathon platform all times of the day and night to see who was still rocking. In addition to an attractive prize, the contestants were all interested in remaining in the contest because they were all boarded at the expense of the Progressive Club. All fourteen endured the tiresome hours and the chilly night air of Monday but by late Tuesday three had dropped out. Early Wednesday morning James Schull fell sound asleep and stopped rocking so he was no longer a contestant.²⁸ By Friday only four of the original contestants were still in the Marathon. However, early Saturday morning Bernice Dearth of Camden and Lillian Myers of Winchester, Indiana, withdrew which left Mrs. Mary Root and her brother, Chester Price. The two arranged a compromise in the division of the prize money and Price dropped out of the contest between six and seven o'clock Saturday evening. Mrs. Root continued on to break the record by rocking one hundred twenty-two hours and fifteen minutes. The world's record at that time was one hundred twenty-one hours. Mrs. Root was glad to be the winner as she was a widow with seven children.²⁹

Each evening there was a planned contest or two to give added zest to the celebration. Tuesday's special night features were the soap box race and the pie eating contest. Jacqueline Overholzer,³⁰ won first prize in the pie

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., August 16, 1933.

29 Ibid., August 24, 1933.

30 Jacqueline Overholzer, the daughter of H. Q. Overholzer, was a local school girl.

eating contest in entrees under twelve years of age. Jac was a sight after the contest for it was blackberry pie which she ate, but she won a fine scooter. Bob Hein³¹ was also covered with pie when the contest was over but he received a fine baseball for taking part in the contest. The soap box race was the "scream" of the evening. There were three entries and each driver had an assistant. The cash prize was won by Elbert Doty with Charles Flowers³² as helper. The tragedy of the event was faced by Robert Fouts with Robert Heim as helper when their car wrecked.³³

Wednesday night's attraction was the Mardi Gras. One of the largest crowds ever seen in Camden joined in the spirit of the Mardi Gras and made merry until a late hour. Scores of people appeared masked on the centennial grounds. Costumes of every imaginary style could be seen as individuals and groups competed for the various prizes. The members of the Delta Theta Tau Sorority appeared as one large family and was the most amusing group on the grounds. They won a prize for the largest family in addition to several individual prizes by their members.³⁴ As a success the Mardi Gras was far beyond expectation, and New Orleans "had nothing" on Camden and its centennial visitors. Besides the Mardi Gras other attractions for Wednesday night were the nail driving contest for ladies, the sack race and the bicycle race.³⁵

Other highlights for the remainder of the week included a farm and home produce exhibit, a chicken chase for ladies, a greased pole climbing

³¹ Bob Heim was a local school boy.

³² Elbert Doty and Charles Flowers were Camden boys.

³³ Preble County News, op. cit., August 16, 1933.

³⁴ Velma McClellan, a local school teacher, a member of Delta Theta Tau, won two prizes for her costuming--the most comic and the fattest lady.

³⁵ Preble County News, op. cit., August 17, 1933.

contest, and a grease pig contest. The pig apparently was a pet and Earl Dillon³⁶ experienced but little trouble in capturing the "porker". The pet and antique parade was probably one of the most interesting and amusing features of the centennial celebration, the parade formed at 3:00 o'clock, headed by Mayor O. W. Taylor and Lou Sterzenbach's band. In the parade were ancient buggies, old covered wagons, attractive floats, dogs of many kinds, fine ponies, a pair of zebras, a goat and cart, and many other animal attractions.

People attended the Centennial from all the neighboring towns in the county, as well as other nearby cities such as Richmond, Dayton, Hamilton, Oxford and Middletown. Each evening the crowds seemed to increase. Saturday night's attendance was the largest of the week, estimated at ten thousand. It was believed by many that there were between thirty and forty thousand people that visited Camden during the anniversary week.³⁷

The Preble County News was very instrumental in helping to attract many people to town. Each day of the Centennial a paper was published giving historical sketches of Camden's various business, industrial plants and institutions, as well as telling of events of the previous day and the coming attractions. Every resident of Camden received by carrier a daily copy of the Centennial Edition. Since this gala affairs the Club has held an annual Home Coming Celebration but none has ever had such elaborate plans nor has any ever attracted such wide attention.

Throughout the nineteenth century Camden was very fortunate in having but very few serious fires and the fire loss was always kept at a low mark.

36 Earl Dillon was a local carpenter and contractor in Camden.

37 The Preble County News, op. cit., August 24, 1933.

Two of the most disastrous fires of that century occurred in the late eighties and the late nineties. In the fall of 1888 fire broke out in a barn in the rear of Joshua Howard's saloon.³⁸ Flames consumed the building occupied by Howard, a saloon on the south, and a section of the Arlington Hotel. In the late nineties, the Preble House,³⁹ one of the largest buildings in Camden, was destroyed by fire.

Camden, during the twentieth century, has had several very destructive fires. A very distressing event occurred on December 6, 1930 when a Camden boy, Lester Gardner, lost his life in a costly fire and the entire northeast section of town was threatened. Three oil tanks of the F. M. Wood and Son Bulk Stations near the Pennsylvania Railroad Station were destroyed by fire. In addition to the loss of a life, Wood and Son suffered a property loss of approximately eight thousand dollars. The fire is alleged to have started from the result of leaving a pump in operating while filling one of the bulk station tanks from a car on the Pennsylvania siding. John Wilson, a Camden citizen, noticed the tank was overflowing and was pondering whether or not to shut it off when Lester Gardner, an employee, arrived. Lester hastened in and shut off the motor. It is believed that this caused a spark for in an instant the pit surrounding the tanks was in a mass of flames and Gardner's wearing apparel was on fire. Help soon came to the unfortunate man's rescue but Gardner's body was terribly burned before he was removed from the pit. He was rushed to the Fort Hamilton hospital but was so badly burned that he died the next day.

³⁸ Howard's saloon was located where the Brown and McKee Furniture Store is now located.

³⁹ The Preble House was a hotel located where the Masonic Temple now stands. The building had been erected in 1846 by Payne and Pottenger. It 1870 it was sold to S. J. Danser and afterward known as the Danser House.

The fire which destroyed the three tanks at the bulk station started shortly before 8:00 o'clock in the morning and it was noon before the flames were extinguished. Approximately thirty-five thousand gallons of gasoline and ten thousand gallons of coal oil were consumed in the fire. As the oil tanks ignited and burst into flames, there was no general explosion. This was believed to have been prevented by the tanks being filled to their capacity. Only minor explosions were noticeable. Had the large tanks exploded, as people thought would happen, gasoline would probably have been sprayed to all nearby buildings causing a much more costly fire. A retaining wall just completed around the tanks also played a prominent part in preventing the flaming gas from spreading to other buildings. The community fire trucks from Gratis and Eaton were early on the scene and rendered wonderful assistance to the local fire department in preventing a serious spread of the fire.⁴⁰

Twenty-one years later on August 8, 1951, the Wood Oil Company suffered another severe loss on the same premises when their entire bulk plant was destroyed by fire. A fire in the pump station, believed to have started from lightning during an electrical storm, spread to a tank of Ethyl gasoline which exploded and turned the bulk plant into a blazing inferno. Five tanks, containing over thirty thousand gallons of gasoline and between twelve and fifteen thousand gallons of kerosene, blazed into the air for over eight hours as firemen from Camden, Eaton, and Gratis fought courageously to confine the fire to the bulk plant. Losses were estimated by the owner to be in excess of fifty thousand dollars. Fifty men from the three fire companies did a grand job in confining the fire to the oil company property. The resident properties

⁴⁰ The Freble County News, op. cit., December 11, 1930.

of Mrs. James Grinstead, Mr. & Mrs. James Lackey, the office of the Wood Oil Company, Pennsylvania Depot, and buildings of the former stock yards were all threatened but were saved by the fine work of the firemen.⁴¹

The following year Camden was the scene of another large fire which destroyed a 90 ft. grain elevator.⁴² The loss was reported to have exceeded a hundred thousand dollars. The friction from a belt was believed to have been the cause of the fire that started in the elevator about 2:30 a.m. on the morning of September 23, 1952. The fire was discovered by two employees who were unloading corn cobs at the elevator. They immediately summoned the Camden and Somers Township Fire Department which battled the fire until the following noon. The local firemen were assisted by the Eaton Fire Department. For nearly an hour the fire seemed to smolder in the upper tower of the mill. Firemen threw several streams of water to the upper part of the structure, but were handicapped by its height and its construction. At about 3:30 flames burst through the roof of the 90 ft. tower and soon spread to other parts of the building by a strong draft. By 6:30 a.m. the mill was completely destroyed. Around five o'clock the heat was so intense that it ignited nearby railroad ties, telegraph poles, and scorched the front of a residence across the street. Pennsylvania trains were re-routed over the D. & C. railroad track for several hours Tuesday morning as the signal system was knocked out by the blaze.⁴³

Camden, in 1955, had another costly fire when the South Side Lumber Company was partially destroyed. March 22, about 11:15 p.m., Wilbur Townsley,

⁴¹ Ibid., August 16, 1951.

⁴² The elevator was located on South Main Street near the Pennsylvania crossing. It was built in the early 1900's by a group of local farmers and was known for many years as the Farmers' Elevator. In later years it became known as the Camden Flour Mill and was operated by Ed Lynch. At the time of the fire the elevator was owned by Wm. & Michael Karr of Columbus and was used to manufacture products made from corn cobs. Preble County News, op. cit., September 25, 1952.

⁴³ Preble County News, op. cit., September 25, 1952.

who resided on South Lafayette Street near the Lumber Company, first noted the blaze and turned in the alarm. The fire had broken out in the front office and by the time it was first seen it had gained considerable headway. A high wind fanned the flame and it appeared as if the entire building and all its contents would be destroyed. In addition to the Camden and Somers Township Fire Department, trucks from Eaton, College Corner, Somerville and Cratis were called to the scene to aid the Camden firemen although the local fire company had the blaze under control before the neighboring trucks arrived. Two offices rooms were heavily damaged and the contents, including tools, machinery, paint, doors, and roofing were a complete loss. Fortunately the lumber and rear buildings were all saved but nevertheless damage was estimated to be between twenty-five thousand and thirty thousand dollars.^{hh}

The above incidents have been narrated to show that even though the life of the average Camden citizen might seem very humdrum to an outsider, there were exciting and happy events, as well as disturbing and upsetting ones over the years. Many of the cheerful and pleasant happenings have been similar to those which brought joy to people in other communities, large or small, in all parts of our land. Too, the disturbing incidents are of the nature that made for similar headline material in the local and city papers. The people of the town were never happy about such happenings nor proud of them because neighborliness and friendly relations with fellowmen always have been a guiding force in the village. May this same spirit continue to live in the hearts of the Camdenites.

^{hh} Ibid., March 24, 1955.