

The Cox Hotel

Author: Collins F. Kindred

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The Cox Hotel was owned and operated by several families after it was built in 1892 by Kemp Woods, Jr., son of Captain Kemp M. Woods, a prominent settler who came to this area with his mother and numerous slaves in 1835. He owned over 3000 acres southwest of Smithville at one time.

During this early period the operation of the hotel was not a success. During 1901 Professor Aul rented three rooms and started the Aul Academy, which was later moved south to the top of the hill where Everett James now lives.

A.J. Cox, a local successful businessman, purchased the hotel from Mr. Woods. He was the grandfather of Jackson Devers and Louise Pherigo of Smithville. On February 16, 1919, their 1 1/2 year old sister fell from the second story window over the front door and died as a result. Cox also operated a livery stable and was mayor.

After Frank James was pardoned he was a frequent visitor to the annual Smithville Horse Show, and he stayed at the Cox Hotel. My grandparents, the C.W. Kindreds, lived across the street in the two-story house, which is still there, less two porches. My grandfather bet on horses with Frank James. Their youngest son, Forrest Kindred and his friend, Clifford Deffries, both around five years old decided they would like to cross the street and see Frank James. They entered the lobby and asked the clerk where he was and when the clerk replied, "He's right there." Frank James lowered the paper he was reading and both boys ran for the exit.

An article in the 1913 paper states, "Frank James (past seventy) who was farming the James place northeast of Kearney attended Carl Aker's sale and told tales of his experiences at the Cox Hotel." In 1922 Cox sold the Hotel to Whitaker and Featherstone of Warsaw, Missouri.

We have a good description of the hotel from an article written by Marion Stephens in his book "Down Stream." He arrived in Smithville in April of 1932 with his father in a Model-T Ford Coupe. My father discovered them when he went out to pick up the paper around 4:30 a.m. The road ended at our house with a fenced pasture next to us. After fixing them breakfast and hearing their plight of no gas, no money, and no place to stay, my father put them in the stripping room of a tobacco barn. Marion states as follows: "The barn had a room built inside which was snug and well built with the Kindred's supplying the things we needed. We fixed up the room into a very nice living area." They remained there for about a year until he secured steady employment and eventually got a job on a WPA project. They then moved into the downtown "hotel made of stone."

It was two stories with a huge ballroom on the first floor that was used by a church group (Assembly of God). The Christian Church also used this room when they tore down their church in order to erect a new church in 1926. The Methodists used it while erecting their church in 1924. Marion notes "they and Mr. Warren were the only permanent tenants and the dining room served meals to one tenant, Mr. Warren." There was no running water in the rooms. The shower room and the toilets were on the ground floor. The Stephens had the only room with cooking facilities. A coiled rope was under each bed, one end secured to the windowsill with a large staple for a fire escape. The grounds back of the hotel had been very beautifully landscaped with an arbor and a fishpond.

The old Baptist Church was immediately south of the hotel and they purchased the hotel in 1960 and started their present building in 1965.

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