

# Highland County Historical Society celebrates 50th anniversary, Part XXXVIII

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By the time you read this, you will have had the opportunity to see and hear HCHS Board Member Kati Burwinkel's presentation on the "Elected Sheriffs of Highland County."



Kati has spent literally months researching her topic. The results are fascinating and worthy of publishing. We will preserve it by video and text, but in order to give everyone a chance to view it in person, as there are dozens of items from the sheriffs on loan for the exhibit and must be returned when the exhibit closes, there will be a second presentation by Kati, the display will be up for one month, and the museum will be open extra hours to accommodate more visitors.

Barrere Tavern, pictured here courtesy of the vast collection of photographs owned by the Highland County Historical Society, was a stop for harried and weary folks traveling on mud-wagons from Cincinnati. These conveyances preceded stagecoaches and carried four-six people over the mud and corduroy roads. The crude but hospitable tavern was a welcome sight. The food was wild game and home-grown vegetables.

Whiskey was always available. Heat came from a fireplace and blankets were provided in winter.

For a number of years, Barrere Tavern provided a supply of bearskins for added warmth. (Information from 'Hills of Highland' by Elsie Johnson Ayres c. 1971.)

One of Kati's many, many interesting stories and bits of information is that connected with Barrere Tavern owned by G.W. Barrere. G.W. Barrere is recorded as being the fourth elected member (1806) of the Highland County Board of Commissioners. He also fought in the War of 1812 among many other services to his county and country. In 1807, his tavern property became the site of the first jail in Highland County.

Specifically, the as yet dry well he was having dug in front of the tavern, in spite of the superstitions of the day against dug wells. With no other way to hold them securely, three prisoners: one had 'borrowed' a saddle and two were "riotous and disorderly," simply exited the cabin in which they were first retained.

"The sheriff retook them immediately and by happy presence of mind marched them to Barrere's new well, into which he thrust the whole three, covering the mouth closely with heavy fence rails. In this new species of "Black Hole," they remained in perfect safety till court ordered them out for trial, when an Indian ladder, i.e. a pole full of

stubby limbs which have been cut off about a foot from the trunk – was let down into the well, by which the prisoners easily climbed to the surface, sad and sober. This was the first punishment by imprisonment in the county of Highland.” (Information and quote from ‘History of Highland County’ by Daniel Scott c. 1860.) Not quite the ‘Highland County Bed and Breakfast’ depicted on a T-shirt during Sheriff Tom Horst’s tenure!

A personal query on Mr. Black’s quote that the prisoners “remained in perfect safety....”! Really? Three men in a narrow and deep space, below ground, without light for however long? Safe? They came out only “sad and sober?” They were even able to climb out? One might have gone completely crazy in just an hour, surely. That should have eliminated all future crime in Highland County without need for sheriffs ever again.

But then there is Kati’s research proving otherwise. Don’t miss the display at the Highland House through Oct. 2. Weekends 1-5 p.m. And 5-8 p.m. Sept. 28-Oct. 2. Look for the second presentation if you missed the first. Let’s all keep on preserving and sharing.