



—Staff Photo by Barney Sellers

**Mrs. George Weedman: Band Played All Night**

## Crittenden Courtroom Of Yesterday Was Place For Dancing With Joy

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Staff Reporter

MARION, Ark. — The majesty of the law easily gave way to the gaiety of the dance at the turn of the century when Crittenden County residents held dances in the old courtroom.

"The whole county would come to these nice big balls that were always in the old courthouse," remembers 84-year-old Mrs. George Weedman, a lifelong resident of the Marion area. "They'd move all the benches and everything out of there."

And the Memphis bands they hired would play all night, she recalls, because the next train was in the morning and there wasn't anything else to do.

Mrs. Weedman, who was born and reared in Marion, said she often danced until dawn and ate midnight suppers held for the partygoers at the old Marion Hotel.

"It was kept on a very high plane as far as conduct," she says of the dances. "There was never any drinking or some of the things you hear about now."

After the new courthouse was built in 1905 — with benches that couldn't be

moved — the dances were held in the old hotel.

The hotel — now an apartment house — was a busy place then. When circuit court met, witnesses and jurors would stay there. And the hotel accepted many boarders.

Mrs. Weedman remembers the old courthouse as a two-story brick building with the lawyers' offices in the basement.

"I think about all the lawyers in town had an office in the lower part of the old courthouse," she said.

The area northwest of Marion was a lake. In the spring, when the Mississippi River was high, ferries from Memphis could dock at Marion.

"When I was growing up, Marion Lake had lots of boats and people fished."

But after the levees were built, the ferry could no longer come to Marion, and eventually the lake was drained.

Mrs. Weedman remembers floods in 1897, 1898, 1903 and 1912 that put Marion under water. The 1912 flood began in early April, when she was working in the telephone company office on the second floor of the bank building.

She and her sister stayed there, eating their meals at the hotel, until the river subsided — about three weeks, as Mrs. Weedman recalls.

"My sister and I just put a bed in."

Some of Marion's residents went to Memphis to wait out the flood. Others, mostly blacks, were housed in the courthouse and school.

For those who stayed in Marion, the only transportation was a launch from Mound City because the high waters had washed out the railroad tracks.

"A nice big gasoline launch came through the crevice where the levee had broken," she said. "It would take passengers from Marion — it landed at the hotel — to Mound City, where the ferryboat came from Memphis."

The city's oldest buildings were built on pilings, and they were dry. But the "modern" buildings, with their floors at street level, were full of water.

"We were happy," Mrs. Weedman says of the Marion of her youth. "But it certainly would not be exciting to the young people today who can go from one state to another in a few minutes time."