

FLORENCE AND CHARLOTTE THOMAS

Florence Thomas was born in Lucasville on January 20, 1873; her sister, Charlotte, was born in Lucasville on March 19, 1879. They were the daughters of William J. and Mary Magdalene Warwick Thomas. They grew up in & spent their entire lives in Lucasville, where their father ran a dry goods store, livery stable, and boarding house known as "The Thomas House".

In 1874, William J. Thomas purchased two lots from Ramsey & Fisher, partners who came to Lucasville and opened a general store. They were beckoned to Lucasville by a man who sought two persons "of Christian tendencies" to open an establishment to serve the village.

Twice, the store was the village post office during the life of Mr. Thomas. Salesmen stopped at the store to peddle their wares. Mr. Thomas stabled & fed their horses, and when the salesmen were hungry, Mr. Thomas asked them to dinner. They had dinner & then became sleepy. Mr. Thomas asked them to stay the night, and the hotel business began.

The few rooms adjoining the original store room served as the Thomas family residence. But with the need for a boarding house in Lucasville, the structure was expanded, eventually becoming 15 rooms, six downstairs and fifteen upstairs. In modern equivalency, this would be a 20-room house.

Mrs. Thomas charged 35 cents for dinner and 23 cents for a room or lodging for the night. Food was served "family style", with trays and platters of meats & bowls of vegetables. On special occasions, as many as 300 persons were served in one day.

The Thomases raised the food that went onto their tables. There were berry bushes & fruit trees in the yard, a garden where vegetables were grown, and a farm yard where chickens & pigs were raised. But most meats came to the Thomas House from butcher wagons from Portsmouth, until the town eventually had its own meat market.

Mr. Thomas died in 1906, and the management of the Thomas House fell to his widow and to his daughters, Florence & Charlotte. As Mrs. Thomas's health declined, the boarding house was completely ran by the sisters, making them pioneering women in business. Charlotte was also a single mother, and she and Florence successfully ran the business while raising Charlotte's daughter, Mary.

In later years, the Thomas House became a rendezvous for dinner parties for industrial executives and their employees from Portsmouth, mainly the Selby Shoe Company. And it was Mark W. Selby, executive of the shoe company, who convinced the sisters to sell the land to the Security Central Bank of Portsmouth.

Florence & Charlotte Thomas, as far as possible, tossed aside sentiment & stayed atuned to today's progress. They established themselves in a five-room cottage built in 1953 on the rear of the Thomas property lot. They managed to squeeze much of the 15 rooms of furniture into their home. Quoting a 1953 newspaper article, "but there's nothing stuffy about their house. Neither is there anything stuffy about Florence or Charlotte Thomas. They are real people."

Florence Thomas died on October 14, 1961. She was 88 years old. Charlotte Thomas survived until

March 5, 1975. She was 95 years old. Both are buried, along with their family members, in Lucasville Cemetery.

