

## Local Trivia

### Early Shoe Sales

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SECTION C

# History

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## About the Author



Dr. Jack Ellis is a retired Morehead State University Library director and a retired minister.

# Morehead Memories:

## People & Places

## *There's no business like 'shoe' business*

By Jack D. Ellis  
Special to The Morehead News

"How beautiful are the feet with shoes" Song of Solomon 7:1).

Most Morehead Main Street Mom and Pop shops have faded into oblivion. They were just unable to compete with the large commercial chains who purchased in volume and sold at discounts. Although customers may save money, much has been lost in quality and personal service. That is especially true of the family owned shoe store.

One of the early shoe stores in Morehead was located at the corner of Carey Avenue and Main Street. It was an old frame building that was dimly lit inside. The floors were oiled and squeaked at your every step. Very few shoes were displayed for selection and customers just about had to know what style and size they wanted. In the 1930s and 1940s, that store was operated by Mr. Shouse. In the 1950s it was purchased by Fred Caudill who ran the store for several years before moving to Florida. In 1956 Charles Chumley opened Chumley's Shoe Center on Main Street in Morehead next door to the Midland Trail Hotel.

Charles Chumley was born in Harlan County in 1909 and dropped out of high school to work in the coal mines. He later lost two fingers in a mining accident and the coal company paid his way to finish high school. Following

his high school graduation, Charles enrolled at Union (KY) College, where he met Opal Ball. They were married in 1936, and have two children, Larry and Mary Gay.

After finishing college Charles and Opal returned to Harlan County where he began a teaching career. He was soon promoted to Principal of Coywood High School and things seemed to be going well.

But a new Superintendent of Schools was appointed in that county and the job was very political. Unfortunately Charles was of the wrong political party and was soon fired by the new Superintendent.

Mr. Chumley, the positive person that he was, told this writer many times "that was the best thing that ever happened to me." He later returned to thank that man for firing him because it opened up many golden opportunities for him in the world of business and brought him to Morehead.

Following his sudden departure from the field of education, Mr. Chumley became a sales representative for the King Shoe Company out of Kingsport, Tenn. There he learned every aspect of the shoe business.

His territory was Eastern Kentucky and Southern Ohio, and that brought him to Morehead by way of West Liberty. In 1951, Charles left the traveling shoe business and he and Opal opened a shoe store in West Liberty. However in 1956 they moved

to Morehead not only because of a better business climate but because they believed it offered a better educational opportunity for their children. Opal began teaching in the Rowan County Schools and Charles opened Chumley Shoe Store on Morehead's Main Street between the Eagle's Nest Restaurant and the Midland Trail Hotel.

Charles Chumley was a friendly, outgoing person with a pleasant personality. He also had a keen sense of humor which he used when he talked about the shoe business. That sense of humor came through in a talk he gave to the Morehead Men's Club Oct. 8, 1959. The following is adapted from his notes:

"There's no business like (shoe) business"

When man first emerged from the fig leaf and tiger skin stage of development, his first requirement was a covering for his feet. (In those days, people had poor circulation and their feet were always cold). Additional clothing such as socks, shirts, slippers, ties and hats took a long time to catch on. Maybe that's why you find people today going without ties, hats or jackets and still being socially acceptable. But nobody goes without shoes...no shoes, no service!

Even hermits and monks wear sandals. Beach people wear some form of footwear. Only dedicated nudists wear nothing on their feet (so I've been told). Therefore, the shoe salesman write off the nudist business. But everyone else wears shoes, which makes it a massive potential market.

Shoes make a statement about a person's psychological, social and economic well



Mr. Chumley was always ready to welcome you to his Shoe Center - and to properly fit you with a pair of shoes. The business closed in 1976.

kid, elk, pig, buffalo, alligator, lizard, shark and sheep skins.

Mr. Chumley pointed out that in 1957, 80 percent of all shoes sold in the U.S. were priced under \$10 retail. The cheaper shoes cost \$2.99 to \$3.99 but Chumley Shoe Center did not sell cheap shoes. Mr. Chumley reported that women purchased 60

percent of the shoes sold in his store, men bought 15 percent and children 25 percent.

With over 300 separate sizes and widths of shoes manufactured in the United States it was important to the shoe retailer that customers were properly fitted. The slogan of Chumley's Shoe Center was "Fitting Shoes is

Our Business". Fitting people properly required the patience of Job, the knowledge of a professional psychologist and the skill of a carnival juggler. Most people did not know their shoe size and those that did were usually wrong.

See SHOE on C-2



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Shoes make a statement about a person's psychological, social and economic well being. A man can wear battered up old hat and is a "character". But let him wear a shabby pair of shoes and he is called a "bum" and is "run down at the heels" or "down on his rubbers". Shoes are tied up with peoples lives on many levels.

In 1959, shoe manufacturing was a four billion dollar a year business. There were 600 million pairs of shoes manufactured that year, and if they were all placed heel to toe they would reach around the world seven times.

It takes four months to prepare leather for shoes, and a whole calfskin would yield only four pairs of shoes. Before shoes were made with man-made material, they were made from many types of leather, including: kangaroo,

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Morehead firemen survey devastation caused by fire that destroyed Chumley's Shoe Center and the Lewis Building December 1975.



Chumley's Shoe Center was in Morehead for 20 years. This location was in the Lev Building on Main Street before the fire that destroyed the building. There were always attractive window displays prepared by Opal Chumley.



## Shoe From C-1

(Chumley's Shoe Center used the Brannack device for shoe sizing people's feet).

Mr. Chumley said he had the following types of customers come into his store. (Some of us today may fit into one of the following categories).

1.) The one who knows his size and won't let you check his foot. If he says he wears a size nine, that's what he gets.

2.) The woman who comes in and says "Lordy, I never wore shoes larger than a size seven in my life". (Even if it's obvious she should wear a size eight). But Mr. Chumley could usually squeeze her foot size eight into a shoe size seven.

3.) There are some who will let you check their foot size. (Especially growing boys whose foot may grow one size in three months).

4.) The whole family comes in to to be fitted - that requires the patience of Job.

5.) The woman who comes in and tries on every shoe in the store and says, "Well, I didn't want any shoes anyway - what am I doing in here?"

In 1965, C. Roger Lewis

built a new building at their present Main Street site once Charles Chumley moved his shoe business into that building. It was in that building the Chumley Shoe Center became an important part of Morehead business community. But sadly, that building burned in December 1975. In 1976 following that devastating fire, Mr. Chumley sold his shoe business to Keith Johnson who eventually went out of business. When Chumley's Shoe Center closed it left many Morehead ladies in shock because they thought they had lost their best friend and one who could fit them properly with a pair of shoes.

Charles Chumley's contribution to Morehead included much more than his 20 years in the shoe business. He served on the Morehead City Council and was a former president of the Chamber of Commerce. He was one of the local leaders who established the Harvest Festival. He was a member of the Men's Club and a Mason, as well as a strong supporter of the local Boy Scouts.

Mr. Chumley was widely

known throughout the state for his work with the Methodist Church. He was appointed to many state and local offices in the church. Also he was a lifelong member of the Gideon's International. His greatest joy was speaking in churches to raise money to purchase Bibles. He was also active in placing those Bibles in hospitals, hotels, and in the hands of young people. (This writer was a Gideon for several years and Charles Chumley was my mentor and I still miss him).

One of Mr. Chumley's most lasting contributions was one program every year that provides free shoes for needy children. Donations are provided every year from churches, civic organizations and individuals to support that program.

Even today it is still going strong! Mr. Chumley with his knowledge of the shoe business began that worthwhile program and it serves as a memorial to Charles Chumley who died in 1988. He was one of Morehead's main business men.

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## Rowan County to observe National Day of Prayer

Elected officials will join millions of Americans and over 40,000 volunteers at an estimated 20,000 events to intercede on behalf of the nation on May 3 - the Fiftieth Anniversary of the National Day of Prayer (NDP).

This year's theme is "One Nation Under God", based on Psalm 33:12, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord". Participants in all fifty states will gather to read Dr. Graham's prayer in unison at 12:30 p.m. the national celebration will be held in the Cannon House Office Building in Washington, D.C. on May 3 beginning at 9:30 a.m. Representatives from the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government are scheduled to speak and lead participants in prayer.

It would be impossible to measure the impact Dr. Graham has made on this world for the sake of God's Kingdom".

At age 82, Dr. Graham has preached the Gospel to more people in live audiences than anyone else in history - over 210 million people in more than 185 countries and territories - from remote African villages to the heart of New York City. He has served as a counselor and friend to 10 United States' Presidents, and has been recognized by the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai B'rith and the National Conference of Christians and Jews for his efforts to foster a better understanding among all faiths.

The National Day of Prayer

## Mt. Sterling junior wins contest

Christopher Conley, Mt. Sterling junior, is this year's winner of Morehead State University's A. Frank and Bethel C. Gallaher Memorial Music Performance Competition.

The Gallahers' children, including Dr. Christopher Gallaher, chair of the Department of Music, named the award in honor of them because they believed in education and competition. A vocalist, Conley will receive a \$1,000 scholarship for his first place ranking.

He will perform during the university's Academic Awards Convocation which begins at 2 p.m. on Sunday, April 29 in Button Auditorium.

"It is really exciting," Conley said of his win. "It gave me a boost and let me know I had a chance to do this as a career."

Last month, he placed among the top 10 finalists in the Mid-South Vocal Competitions of the National Association of Teachers of Singing. The competition was held at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

A tenor, Conley is a student of Dr. Roma Prindle, associate professor of music. The son of Susan and Dane Conley, he

began singing in choirs in fifth grade.

This summer, he plans to study music for five weeks under a voice teacher in Salzburg, Austria. The trip will be his second.

In the future, Conley would like to pursue graduate study in music and sing professionally.



Christopher Conley

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# Drive away the blues.







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