

The Reports of the Pending Death of William J. Hon Were Greatly Exaggerated

(Son of Matthew Morgan Hon and Malinda Trowbridge Hon , grandson of John Hon and Ruth Huffstutter Hon)

A fire broke out around midnight November 6, 1890 at the Rudd House Hotel in Owensboro, Kentucky. One of the guests was William J. Hon.

History of the Rudd House Hotel :

James C. Rudd moved to Owensboro, as a very wealthy young man, and in 1854 started the J. C. Rudd Insurance Agency. Later, his son went into the business with him, the name was changed to J. C. Rudd, Son & Co. He invested heavily in trying to bring a railroad through Owensboro, but was not successful in this effort. In 1888 he announced plans to build a 3 story hotel on property he owned on St. Ann Street. It opened in May of 1889. The following year it burned down. He immediately set out to build a bigger and better hotel, so he had a 5 story hotel constructed and it opened April 20, 1892. The Rudd House was an elegant hotel. An article in the Owensboro Messenger, describing the beauty of the new Rudd House, gives this description of the dining room: "It is splendidly frescoed, with 23 foot ceilings, topped by a glass dome of many colors that sheds a subdued light over the whole room, which is located on the fourth floor." Later in the same article, it says: "The Rudd was a popular dining place and it was relatively inexpensive. Dinner tickets sold 10 for \$5.00." (Source: Someone selling a 1909 postcard of the Rudd House Hotel on EBAY said this information was from a Rudd Family genealogy website).

Two newspapers reported the Rudd House Hotel fire in their November 7, 1890 editions ; both declared W.J. Hahn (Hon) as fatally burned. Closer to William J. Hon's Harrison County home, the New Albany, Indiana, Public Press, picked up the story on November 12, 1890. The article has conflicting information, reporting both on his fatal injuries and that he was injured but improving rapidly. The optimistic news comes from a letter to William J. Hon's brother-in-law, David B. Neafus, quoted in the article. Neafus was married to William's sister Kate Hon. The nod goes to the letter over the public press because William appears in the 1891 and 1893 city directories of Owensboro, Kentucky as being a piano dealer and operating a music store, respectively. He was noted as living at the Green Hotel.

The 1910 and 1920 census has William J.Hon living with his wife Hattie Hon (16 years younger) in Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee. The Memphis City Directories for 1920, 1921, 1924, 1926, 1928, 1930 and 1933 lists Hattie Hon as a music teacher. The 1931 Memphis City Directory includes her spouse, W.J. Hon. The 1939 Owensboro City Directory has Hattie Hon as a music teacher. The 1940 U.S. census lists Hattie Hon as a 66 year-old widowed lodger living in Owensboro, Daviess County, Kentucky. The 1952 Owensboro City Directory has her listed as the widow of W.J. Hattie Hon died December 17, 1955 and was buried in the Mater Dolorosa Cemetery in Daviess County, Kentucky.

I have not found William J. or Hattie Hon in the 1930 census. He died sometime between 1931 and 1940. What we do know however is William J. Hon survived the fatal injuries reported by the news sources covering the Rudd House Hotel fire. (RFH)

Owensboro, Kentucky Rudd House Hotel Fire November 7, 1890

Owensbury, [sic] Ky., Nov. 7.--A fire started about midnight last night in the basement of the Rudd house, totally destroying the hotel, **Waddell** building, the *Messenger* newspaper office, and **Evans'** livery stable. Guest of the hotel were aroused by the cry of fire. They rushed to and fro trying to escape from the building. **CHARLES BANFORD**, of New Albany, Ind., was fatally injured by jumping from the fourth story to the pavement below. **CHARLES A. GAMSEY**, of Detroit, was frightfully burned and will die. **CHAS. LIEBRECHT**, of Philadelphia, was burned from the loins to the neck. His death is momentarily expected. **W. J. HAHN**, of Cincinnati, was fatally burned. The Henderson (Ky.) fire department sent relief at 3 o'clock this morning. (*The Fort Wayne Sentinel, Fort Wayne, IN 7 Nov 1890*)

WORK OF THE FLAMES, A Terrible Conflagration in Kentucky, ACCOMPANIED BY LOSS OF LIFE

The Guests in a Hotel Become Panic-Stricken and Leap from the Windows-- One Man Killed and Others Fatally Injured

Owensboro, Ky., Nov. 7. -- A fire broke out about midnight in a basement of the Rudd house, which was totally destroyed. The fire then spread rapidly to The Messenger newspaper and job office, **A.J. Wadley's** fine stone building, and **D. A. Evanss'** livery stable. Guests of the hotel were aroused by the cry of fire. They rushed to and fro trying to escape from the building. **CHARLES BANFORD** of New Albany, Ind., was fatally injured by jumping from the fourth story to the pavement below. **CHARLES A. CAMSEY**, of Detroit, Mich., was frightfully burned and will die: **CHARLES LIEBRECHT**, of Philadelphia was burned from loins to neck. His death is momentarily expected. **W.J. HAHN**, of Cincinnati, was fatally burned. **M. H. HAINES** was killed by jumping from a third story window. The buildings burned were the Rudd house, a four-story hotel; the Bank of Commerce, the board of trade, The *Messenger* newspaper office; **Marks & Dugan's** grocery store, **Smith's** butcher shop, **A. J. Wadley's** saloon, **A. J. Williams'** dry goods store, and **Corley & York's** stove and hardware store. (*Decatur Morning Review, Decatur, IL 8 Nov 1890*)

New Albany Public Press, November 12, 1890, p.2

Accidents.

At the terrible fire at Owensboro, Ky., Thursday night, Mr. Charles Bareford, a well known young man of this city, son of Mr. Louis Bareford, boss carpenter at the glass works, was burned severely and otherwise injured in the burning of the Rudd house. Mr. Charles Bareford was traveling for a Louisville house and was on his regular trip through that section of Kentucky. Just how badly he is injured is not known. His mother, Mrs. Mary Bareford, received a telegram and will left Friday to visit and bring the unfortunate man home if he is able to stand the trip. Charles Bareford was about twenty-five years of age and was very much liked by his employers. He has hundreds of friends in this city who hope he is not as badly injured as reported.

Mr. D. B. Neafus received a letter yesterday from his brother-in-law, Will J. Hohn, who was injured in the Owensboro hotel fire last Thursday night, which contains the information that Mr. Hohn is improving rapidly from his burns. The report that he had jumped from the fourth story of the hotel was incorrect. Mr. Hohn got out easily enough, but went into the fourth story to arouse those who were sleeping in that part of the building and while doing this was surrounded by fire and smoke, and had to grope his way with his hand over his mouth and nose to prevent inhaling the smoke and fire. He had his right hand and one foot severely burned while escaping from the building. His many friends here will be glad to learn of his convalescence.

Mr. Will J. Hahn, who jumped from the third story window of the Rudd House, during the fire at Owensboro, Thursday night, and was fatally injured, is a brother of Mrs. David B. Neafus, of this city. He was in the music business in that city, and was doing a flourishing business. He was formerly a resident of Harrison county.

According to the referenced letter from William to David B. Neafus, his brother in-law (married to Martha Catherine "Kate" Hon), William initially escaped the hotel fire easily but went back into help others.