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## Art in the Abandoned: Local photographer takes part in new book about 'old, forgotten' places in Kentucky

By Freddie Bourne Messenger-Inquirer  
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Adam Paris points Thursday to a photo of the rickhouse at the former J.W.M. Field Distillery that was built in 1873 near Owensboro that closed in 1929-1930 inside the book “Abandoned Kentucky.”

Freddie Bourne | Messenger-Inquirer

A popular Facebook group dedicated to “fun, reminiscence, reflection and education about the old, forgotten and abandoned things and places in Kentucky” has now become a new book.

“Abandoned Kentucky,” a book by photographers Sherman Cahal, Adam Paris and Michael Maes, was released Sept. 1 — featuring about 130 images of deserted, empty and uninhabited locations throughout the commonwealth that showcases “beauty in decay.”

The book was published by MacIntyre Purcell Publishing, Inc.

Some of the places featured have known histories and stories, such as the Columbia Theatre in downtown Paducah and the Old Crow Distillery in Frankfort, while others have little known information, like homes in Oldham County with a retro kitchen, and one situated in a corn field in Nelson County that typically stay hidden throughout the year until harvest season.

Paris, owner of AP Imagery in Owensboro, is one of the administrators for the Facebook group of the same namesake along with Cahal and the group’s founder Steve McManus, which has more than 400,000 members.

Paris has a personal fascination with this type of material. He said he’s always taken snapshots of random abandoned objects on the side of the road.

“I consider myself a local historian and pretty well-versed on locations of things, schools, cemeteries ...,” he said, “and being a photographer, I’m a visual person. History and photographs just match very well.”

Growing up, Paris said he became more engaged with history when he started losing his grandparents.

“I realized the stories and the history that was leaving that I would never know,” he said. “... The older I got, I realized there’s a lot of stuff that I wish I knew that I might not be able to find out.”

And he believes he knows why many people may feel the same.

“Being a photographer, I think there’s just some attraction that I feel like everyone has — young and old,” he said. “I feel like it’s one of those things (where) you don’t have to be a historian to care about the history of something.

“I just think (when) people just sit and look at a photograph, I think people ... think about what used to be there, what’s the history of the place, what was this building for ....”

Over a year ago, the publishing company reached out to McManus about creating a book before contacting Cahal, who then reached out to Paris and Maes about their interests in collaborating on this venture.

“I’ve covered western Kentucky, Michael’s from Louisville, so he covers that area, and Sherman (covers) eastern Kentucky and the Appalachian area — so we had pretty good coverage there,” Paris said.

After getting the thumbs up from the publishing company, the three began to work throughout the year traveling to a number of different places in the state to capture images.

At first, Paris said they decided to take about 50 photos each before putting them in a shared Dropbox file to observe each other’s work before taking some out and suggesting to add more variety.

“We kind of voted amongst ourselves like, ‘Let’s leave that one out’ and then we kind of got to where we were like, ‘We need more of a mix. We got a lot of houses and stuff. Let’s get some industrial things in there — some schools, hospitals ...,’ ” he said. “...We tried to get a good selection of photos.”

The publishing company also helped with the process to make sure it was a diverse collection.

Paris said having three photographers on board allowed each of them to showcase what they felt was attractive to include while also getting a glimpse of each of them individually — such as Paris and Cahal electing to shoot with a tripod and natural light while Maes went handheld without tripod or flash.

“It’s really cool. I guess we have a little bit of a different technique,” Paris said. “I would consider myself an architectural photographer above anything else.”

Paris said one of the more challenging and time consuming aspects of the project was doing research on each of the locations, while figuring out how to best caption some of the photos proved difficult at times.

“A lot of these shots are just drive-by shots,” he said. “I don’t know any specific history or even an address ....”

And while Paris said having to make cuts as a group wasn't problematic, he said it was tough when selecting his own photos to present to the group.

"I guess there was a little bit of a personal struggle of like, 'How do I whittle down thousands of photos that I think are the best 50 or 100?' " he said.

The book is available for purchase on Amazon, while Paris said he is looking to find local entities that may be interested in selling the book.

For Paris, his goal with his photos is to help encourage other people to appreciate what he is trying to bring back to life.

"I want people to appreciate and think a little bit more — like a building getting knocked down, most people don't think twice about it; but for me it's like, 'Man, that chapter is done. What all used to be there?' " he said. "(I like) getting people interested in preserving the past, really."

For more information on the book, visit [amazon.com/Abandoned-Kentucky-Sherman-Cahal/dp/1772761710](https://amazon.com/Abandoned-Kentucky-Sherman-Cahal/dp/1772761710).

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