

A whole lot of shakin' went on in Lebanon nightspots

LEBANON, Ky. — If Hyleme George and Obie Slater wanted to, they could fill a wing at Cleveland's new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame with their recollections of legendary rockers.

Back in the 1960s, when George owned Lebanon's Club 68 and the Club Cherry a few blocks away, he and Slater, who managed the Club Cherry and handled all the bookings, brushed shoulders with many of those now enshrined in the hall.

Although George and Slater have forgotten several names, they reminisced recently and counted 86 famous bands or entertainers who passed through the doors of the two Marion County clubs during their heyday.

The Club 68, which catered to a predominantly white clientele, opened in 1964 with Lloyd Price, of

the "Stagger Lee" fame; Nat King Cole, Ike and Tina Turner, the Kingsmen, Sir Douglas Quintet, Jerry Lee

Levy, the Ventures, Creedence Clearwater Revival, The Tommy James Orchestra, Steppenwolf, the Platters, the Amazing Rhythm Aces and many other stars played there.

But it was the Club Cherry, a nightspot for African Americans, on Water Street in Lebanon, that was to become the most popular stopover for dozens of musicians en route to the Hall of Fame.

Obie Slater remembers Otis Redding, Jimi Hendrix, Little Richard, Clyde McPhatter, Bo Diddley, Jackie Wilson, the

Supremes, James Brown, Ray Charles, Fats Domino and Chuck Berry. He can tell you stories about Ike and Tina Turner, Sam and Dave, Wilson Pickett, B.B. King, Percy Sledge, Eddie Floyd, Hank Ballard and the Midnights, Junior Parker, Joe Tex, Lavern Baker, the Coasters, the Shirelles, Bobby Blue Bland and more than 30 other big-name rock, blues and jazz entertainers, including Dinah

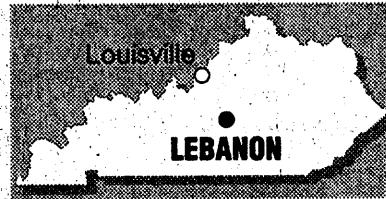
Washington and Count Basie, who appeared at the Club Cherry.

"The night Count Basie was there, my audience was all white," Slater said. "The first time I had Otis Redding, I got him and his band for three nights for \$500. Jimi Hendrix played for me when he was nobody. He was a beautiful person. He played guitar behind his head, played it with his teeth, with his toes. Plus, he was a pretty good little singer then. A fella called Johnny Jones, a house painter, taught him how to play. I assume Johnny Jones is still painting."

Then there was Little Richard, who George and Slater say titled his song "Lucille" after the girlfriend of a former manager of the Club Cherry.

Things did not always go smoothly at the clubs in Lebanon when big-name talent was in town. Slater recalls that Otis Redding hit one of his band members in the mouth one night for missing one note during a song.

"He said, 'Don't mess up my music,'" Slater said. "James Brown



cut one of his fellas for missing a note. James was a pain. He was a mean little rascal."

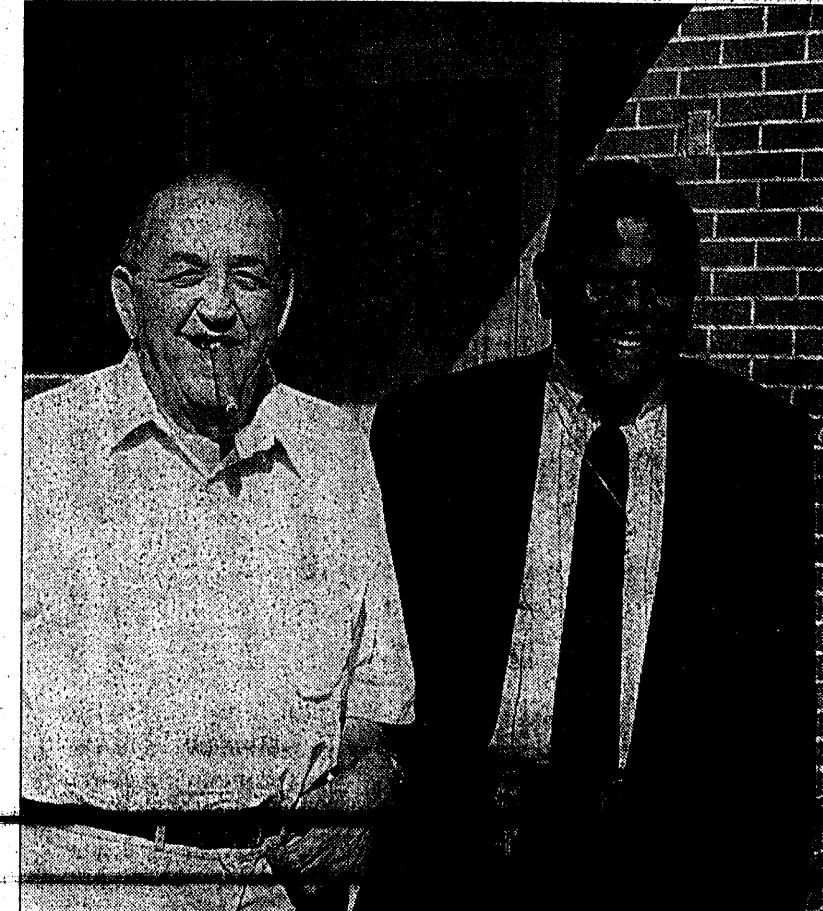
Slater lost \$1,500 when he booked the great Jackie Wilson and the crowd he expected didn't show. When his banker asked what was wrong a few days later, Slater used Wilson's smash hit single to answer — "Jackie Wilson left me with 'Lonely Teardrops.'"

Slater, 66, who now operates Obie's Record Shop in Danville, and George, 83, a former mayor of Lebanon who is retired and still lives there, can regale listeners for hours with stories from the other side of rock 'n' roll.

Hyleme George recalls that Nat King Cole came to the Club 68 for \$500; that the Kingsmen, of "Louie Louie" fame, came for \$750; and that 1,500 people showed up. He remembers when he had to lend Ike and Tina money for gas.

And he remembers that when he booked Jerry Lee Lewis at the Club 68, the singer arrived in pajamas and, in George's words, "about four-fifths drunk." Despite an earlier contract agreement, George said, Lewis tried to double his price after the concert had sold out. When George refused to pay, word came that "Jerry Lee's not going to play."

Then word reached Lewis that maybe he wouldn't play in Lebanon, or anywhere else, if he happened to get all his fingers broken before he



STAFF PHOTO BY BYRON CRAWFORD
Hyleme George, left, and Obie Slater stood outside the old Club 68 building in Lebanon. In the 1960s, George owned Club 68 and the Club Cherry, a few blocks away, which Slater managed.

left town. Those who were at his concert that night said "The Killer" played "Great Balls of Fire" as it had never been played before.

The Club Cherry burned many

years ago, and the Club 68 closed several years back. Someone stole all of Obie Slater's pictures, and Hyleme George never kept any of his contracts with famous rockers. But they sure can tell some stories.