

## Kenton County Historical Society

P. O. Box 841  
Covington, Kentucky 41018

R E V I E W

May 1990

### GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING FOR MEMBERS, FRIENDS, GUESTS, PUBLIC:

Elizabeth Chavez, Programs Committee Chairperson, announces that on Tuesday evening, June 5th, 7:00 PM, Jane White will speak on Great Aunt Polly's Civil War Memorabilia. Polly Bristow (1808-1890) left a diary covering twenty-seven years including those of the Civil War. Ms. White's grandmother, Statira Bristow Coombs (1859-1952), also passed down memorabilia which Ms. White will discuss. Her grandmother was also the granddaughter of Leonard Stephens, first sheriff of Kenton County. There will be a short business meeting before the program. The meeting is free and open to the public.

Tuesday evening  
June 5  
7:00 PM  
Kenton County Public Library  
Fifth and Scott streets  
Covington

### An Ohio River Portrait

Do you have some interesting photographs of everyday life events which you would like to see copied for future generations? People at work? Family get-togethers? Construction projects? Farm life? Buildings? Homes? The Kentucky Historical Society, the Kentucky Oral History Commission, and the Kentucky Folklife Program is sponsoring An Ohio River Portrait in cooperation with local community groups. Do you want to record any personal recollections? You can have your photographs copied and/or arranged for recording your recollections of events and times at the following designated places and dates:

June 22, 1990, 1:00-6:00 PM-Hebron Branch, Boone County Library

June 23, 1990, 10:00 AM-5:00 PM-Kenton County Public Library, Cov.

June 24, 1990, 1:30-6:00 PM-Campbell County Courthouse, Newport

An Ohio River Portrait will benefit the Always A River Project, a traveling display along the Ohio River in six states in 1991. But your pictures and recollections of work, play, anniversaries, births, deaths, pageants, natural disasters, politics, personalities will also be kept as permanent record of your community. Put the above dates on your schedule if you are interested. You might also want to call one of these numbers for more complete details:

Mary Winter, Ky Historical Society (502) 564-3016

Kim Lady Smith, Ky Oral History Commission (502) 564-7644

Bob Gates, Ky Folklife Program (606) 986-9341

### Publications

At the next meeting of the Board of Directors of the Kenton County Historical Society (May 30, 7:00 PM, Kenton County Public Library) the Board will make final arrangements for offering to the public three volumes of collected papers on local history. Except maybe for John Burns' Civil War research, these volumes will constitute mostly original research completed in the last decade or so. This meeting will be open to any interested party.

#### Kenton County Birthday Celebration

Kenton County's 150th Birthday Parade will occur on July 4th and will commence at Piner and proceed through the county to the new River Center complex on the Ohio River in Covington. There will be converging points in the midst of the trek south to north. Deadline for entry is listed as June 1st. Call 491-1990 for signup and details.

On July 15, 1990 a Road Rally/Scavenger Hunt will occur along a marked route which will have the purpose of allowing participants to re-discover local places of interest. The beginning and destination sites will both be the Memorial Building in Devou Park. Entry will be \$100 per car, \$25 per individual, and with business sponsorship also available. \$35 to ride in a vintage car (2 per car). Call 491-1990 for signup and for latest details.

#### 100 Years of Kelley Plumbing

Ed C. Kelley started one of the early plumbing service companies in 1890, according to company sources. Its major projects included St Patrick's Church (on Philadelphia Street, Covington, since demolished), the Coppin Building (which Covington is now renovating for its new City Hall), and the "original" Latonia Race Track. First located at 412 Main (where the railroad trussel now dominates), in 1920 Kelley Plumbing moved to 519 Main. A few years ago it relocated to 1451 Dixie Highway, Park Hills, out of the way of Mainstrasse tourism. Ed Kelley served on the City Commission, on the Board of Directors of Peoples Liberty Bank, and was President of First Federal Savings and Loan. In 1915, according to the company's anniversary statement, Kelley helped establish the first licensing program for plumbers in the area.

#### Kentucky Veterans Bicentennial (1992) Oral History Project

On October 4, 1989 the Joint Council of Veterans Organizations initiated the Kentucky Veterans Bicentennial Oral History Project with the purpose of recording on tape the personal recollections of those who did military service in any of America's wars in living memory. But the project needs volunteers to conduct interviews (free training will be provided). It needs to find more veterans with interesting stories. But presently the project would like persons to step forward and serve as county coordinators. The UK Library has volunteered to participate by making copies available to participants and providing a depository for the permanent copies of recordings. The county coordinator will be in contact with the state-wide project team. This project is supported by the Ky Bicentennial celebration committee. If you are interested in being a county coordinator please write to: President, Kenton County Historical Society, P. O. Box 641, Covington, Ky 41012

#### Historic Sites Committee

The following three Historic Highway Markers will be unveiled in the near future (dates have not yet been set): Una Merkel (Covington-born actress), Covington's First City Hall, and the Slave Escape Across the Ohio River from the Foot of Main Street. Regarding the Slave Escape Marker, read the enclosed article by John Burns, Kenton County Historical Society, who helped prepare the marker text. Mr. Burns provided this condensed version entitled, MARGARET GARNER, MURDERESS OR HEROINE?

## Kenton County Historical Society

P. O. Box 541  
Covington, Kentucky 40119

### MARGARET GARNER, MURDERESS OR HEROINE?

by  
John Burns

One of Kentucky's most startling slave-connected tragedies to occur during the immediate pre-Civil War days took place after 17 blacks escaped from Covington homes and neighboring farms late on a Sunday night in the latter part of January, 1856. There was a light snow on the ground, so the group stole a pair of horses and a large sled for their flight. They drove the horses at full speed into Covington and through the quiet city streets. Dawn was breaking when they reached the foot of Main Street and near the edge of the Ohio River. There they abandoned the sled and dashed on foot across the frozen river.

When the group reached the Ohio side its members split into smaller segments so as not to attract attention, now that the sun was up. One segment was comprised of a single family, consisting of a young married couple named Simon and Margaret Garner, their four children, and Simon's two parents. They found shelter at the home of Elijah Kite, a sympathetic freedman who lived at the foot of Cincinnati's West 5th Street near Mill Creek. Elijah was also a cousin to Margaret.

The other runaways successfully contacted Ohio's Underground Railroad which safely conducted them to freedom.

The Garners were not so fortunate. Officials quickly learned of their whereabouts, and obtained a warrant for their arrest. Then, under provisions of the Fugitive Slave Law, the Negroes would be returned to Covington where they could be claimed by their owner.

When arresting officers arrived at the cabin where the runaways were hiding, they found it locked and barricaded. The blacks, armed with "cudgels and pistols," put up a brief resistance, and managed to inflict a gun wound on one of the officers, causing him the loss of a finger and several teeth.

When the officials finally managed to break into the cabin and over-power the fugitives, they found Margaret had cut the throat of her three-year-old child and injured two of her other children. The young mother had acted out of a sense of desperation, and declared she had intended to kill all her children and herself rather than be returned to Covington and slavery.

A large number of people, many of whom showed sympathy for the slaves, quickly gathered at the scene, and "it was with no inconsiderable difficulty" that the Garners were placed in carriages and taken to the Cincinnati jail.

The body of the 3-year old was claimed by its slave-master and returned to Covington for burial. Here, it was said, the child could "rest in ground consecrated to slavery."

On February 8th a grand jury returned a murder indictment against the parents and grandparents for the young child's death. This indictment placed the four adults under control of state authorities. The Probate Judge then issued a writ of habeas corpus for the three surviving children, and ordered that they should not be removed from the court's jurisdiction pending a decision in their case.

Meanwhile, a federal marshal applied to the U. S. District Court for a habeas corpus against the sheriff of Hamilton County, Ohio, but not for the purpose of determining if the four black adults were unlawfully deprived of liberty. Instead, it concerned whether the sheriff was entitled to their custody under Ohio law, or whether they should be in the marshal's custody under the Fugitive Slave Act.

Eventually, on February 28th, a U. S. District Court upheld the federal marshal's contention that the four adult blacks be brought before him, and ordered the marshal be given custody of not only the adults, but of the children as well. Instead of that happening though, the fugitives were hurried into an omnibus, and driven under heavy guard to the ferryboat Kentucky, and brought to Covington. Hardly

an hour had elapsed after the court's decision than all the Garners, except Margaret, were returned to their slavemaster. Margaret was locked in the Covington jail pending further developments in the charges against her.

No one was more shocked at the turn of events than was Ohio's Governor Salmon Portland Chase. On the other hand, jubilant advocates of states' rights declared the law had been vindicated, and some, like the Garners' owner and his attorney, held happy celebrations during which, according to one observer, the whisky "flowed freely."

The whole weight of Governor Chase's influence was now used to induce Kentucky officials to return Margaret to the Ohio courts. Eventually Kentucky's Governor Charles S. Morehead agreed to the request, but when Ohio officials came to Covington with the necessary legal papers, they found she had been released several days earlier to her owner's agent.

It was said that Margaret, along with one of her infant children and the two senior Garners, were then spirited away and placed aboard a steamboat bound for Arkansas. They were in custody of Covington's Marshal Putta for the journey, which, one report said, was abruptly interrupted when the vessel sunk after colliding with another boat below Louisville. The child, according to this report, drowned during the tragedy.

Yet another report claimed Margaret clutched the baby in her arms when first put aboard the craft, and leaped into the river. The deck hands managed to drag her back onto the boat, but the infant was lost to the swirling waters.

Regardless of which version of the tragedy is correct, Margaret was never heard from again.

The Garner case shocked the entire nation. Northern newspapers stressed its minutest details, while even the staunchest pro-slavery journals of the South found it impossible to ignore. It was even a topic in the floor debates of the Democratic Party's 1856 national convention.

The local community's conscience was severely jolted, and slavery was placed on the defensive to a degree

that it had never been before, as more and more townspeople began divesting themselves of their human chattel. The number of runaways increased, and even Margaret's owner was said to have lost four more slaves just four days after the Garners first fled. Within a year the number of slaves held in Covington dramatically dropped to but 101.



#### The Ludlow-Bromley Historical Society

Members are working on festivities celebrating Bromley's 100th anniversary. The fledgling society seeks to expand membership and participation. Some people would be inclined to enjoy collecting (and copying) old photographs, documents, artifacts, genealogy, oral history. Persons can recapture their past and preserve their family and community records through the organized efforts of the Ludlow-Bromley Historical Society. We know that many old families still reside in Ludlow and Bromley. But many have also moved out to such places as Villa Hills, Erlanger, and Boone County. We think that residents both past and present would like to preserve their memories for their children and grandchildren. Membership is \$5.00 per person. Send to President Mark Mitchell, 446 Oak Street, Ludlow, Ky 41016.

#### The Historical Confederation of Kentucky

The HCK was organized over a decade ago in order to support local heritage and history groups throughout the state. It is directly affiliated with the Kentucky Historical Society which is state supported. Therefore, through the HCK the government can indirectly support most local volunteer (or otherwise) activities in Kentucky. All such organizations are encouraged to join at \$15.00 per year. With membership a group receives the bimonthly Circuit Rider, a survey of heritage publications, a speakers bureau list, and much other technical and organizational information. The Historical Confederation of Kentucky. P. O. Box H. Frankfort, Kentucky 40602. (502) 564-2662. Note that Kenton County is one of eight counties in the Northern Region. A regional meeting is tentatively planned for this fall. The annual meeting of HCK will be in Louisville this November, and will have a river theme.

#### Some State Agencies Programs (Source: The Circuit Rider)

The Kentucky Historical Society. P. O. Box H. Frankfort, Kentucky 40602. (502) 564-3016. State supported. Also supported by membership. Founded in 1836, to collect, preserve, and display the heritage and genealogy of the Commonwealth.

Kentucky Oral History Commission. 300 Coffee Tree Road, Frankfort, Kentucky 40602. (502) 564-7644. Founded in 1976. Provides grants for projects, orientation and transcription. Goal is to preserve Kentucky history through collection of oral history interviews.

Kentucky Folklife Program. Bob Gates. Kentucky Folklife Program. CPO 760, Berea, Kentucky. (606) 986-9341, ext. 5139.

The Kenton County Historical Society

Organized in 1977. Dues \$5.00 per person per annum. Lifetime membership \$100.00. Please send your check to the Treasurer, P. O. Box 641, Covington, Ky 41012. Monthly membership meetings. Monthly communications to all members. Affiliated with the Kenton County Public Library, the Historical Confederation of Kentucky and/or associated with other organizations with similar interests. Committees include: Historic Sites, Library, membership, publications, and programs. People with appropriate interests are invited to participate. Genealogical advice from Dorothy Wieck, RSCVP, or other members.

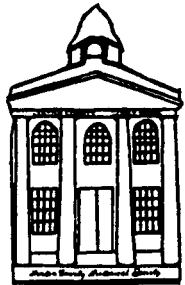
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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to Treasurer; make check payable to the Kenton County Historical Society, P. O. Box 641, Covington, Ky 41012. Tax deductible.





THE KENTON COUNTY SESQUICENTENNIAL YEAR  
1990

May is "Bromley Month"

5-90

Kenton County Historical Society  
P. O. Box 641  
Covington, Ky 41012

Kenton County Birthday, April 30, 1990 (150th)  
Covington Birthday, February 8, 1990 (175th)

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