



**THE KENTON COUNTY SESQUICENTENNIAL YEAR  
1990**

10-90

## Kenton County Historical Society

P. O. Box 641  
Covington, Kentucky 41011

R E V I E W

October 1990

### GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING AND PROGRAM

On Tuesday Evening, November 13, 7:00 PM at the Kenton County Public Library, Fifth and Scott streets, Covington, Dr. Alvin Poweleit will speak on the HISTORY OF NORTHERN KENTUCKY MEDICINE.

Dr. Poweleit has been working on an update of this history. Previously he was involved in the publication of A Medical History of Campbell and Kenton Counties (1970) and the Bicentennial of Physicians of Northern Kentucky Past and Present (1977). There will be a brief business session before the program. The meeting is free and open to the public.

Tuesday Evening

November 13

7:00 PM

Kenton County Public Library

Fifth and Scott streets

Covington

### A CHRISTMAS BANQUET

Elizabeth Chavez, Programs Chairwoman, has made preliminary arrangements for a Christmas celebration at the Coach and Four restaurant on Scott street, Covington, near the new RiverCenter. The Boone County, Campbell County and Bromley-Ludlow historical societies have been invited. Members and friends with interests in activities of historical societies are invited. Mr. Karl Litzenmayer, musician and member of KCHS, may provide Christmas melodies if he can make arrangements including a piano.

### THE BEHRINGER-CRAWFORD MUSEUM

In its galleries the Devou Park museum recently has been featuring an exhibit of paintings by Frank Duveneck and other early Northern Kentucky artists. Entitled KENTON COUNTY--CRADLE OF THE ARTS, this exhibit celebrates Northern Kentucky art including many religious entries. Admission is free to members. Membership rates include \$8.00 for Senior Citizens and students, \$15.00 for individuals, \$20.00 for families. Membership also means that you support Northern Kentucky's distinctive cultural and natural history museum.

### THE HISTORICAL CONFEDERATION OF KENTUCKY

On Saturday, November 3rd, the HCK, an affiliate of the Kentucky Historical Society, will hold its annual meeting at the Seelbach Hotel in Louisville. The theme will be THE MIGHTY OHIO RIVER, PATHWAY TO PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE. Bob Gates, Director of the Kentucky folk-life program will be the featured speaker on river traditions and customs. John Boh (President), Dorothy Wieck (Treasurer), and June Hazlett (Secretary) plan to attend from the Kenton County Historical Society.

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### THE FEDERAL LEAGUE AT COVINGTON



This year's outstanding record of the Cincinnati Reds serves as a reminder of the long-standing love affair we all have had with the game that has been called America's national pastime. Everybody knows that there is no better way to spend a summer day than to take in a baseball game, and during the winter how many fans become avid members of the "hot stove league" as they await another opening day!

In Covington such anticipation of opening day was probably felt strongest in 1913. For some time the public had witnessed the brewing of a revolt in the major leagues. Many managers and players, encouraged by wealthy business people, had openly expressed discontent with their lot, and the moneyed interests, eager to cash in on professional baseball's popularity, began laying plans for formation of a new major league.

In 1913 it was decided that the time was right, and agents began raiding the majors for players and managers. A new league, the Federal, was the outcome. Money proved an irresistible lure as scores of big names left National and American League clubs for those of the Federal, and it was rumored that Covington would be home to one of the new teams.

John T. Powers became the Fed's first president, and soon the new league was ready to play ball. The circuit was composed of six teams that first year. They represented St. Louis, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Chicago--and Covington! Sam Leever, former star pitcher with the Pittsburgh nationals, was named Covington's player-manager after the famed Ty Cobb turned down the job. The local club's board of directors succumbed to a bit of nostalgia when they selected "Blue Sox" as the team name. It was in honor of an older Covington aggregation known as the "Blue Stockings."

Sam K. Long, president of the new Covington outfit, announced in April: "Covington has at long last been placed in a position...to

support a first class big league baseball team. Every detail is now being arranged for the opening of the season...There will be nothing amateurish about it and Manager Leever will have one of the strongest aggregations in the league...Work on the park at Second and Scott streets is progressing rapidly...We will have a seating capacity of 4,500, and several thousand can be accomodated with standing room."

Opening date in Covington was set for May 9th, but there seemed to be some doubt that the new ball park would be ready by that date. Construction crews stepped up their work to 24-hours a day, laboring at nights under scores of electric lights which were strung for that express purpose. Happily, the deadline was met, and on opening day league president John Powers, who was in town for Covington's home debut into Federal League baseball, remarked: "I saw the park several weeks ago when I was in the city, and the work of grading had just been started. You can readily imagine my surprise when I first saw the magnificent plant the local officials have constructed...The stands are perfectly constructed, and but few of the seats are affected by the posts. Several of the latest innovations in ball park construction have been used in Covington, and being the newest, I can truthfully say that it is one of the most up-to-date parks in the country."

On May 6, 1913 the Covington team opened play in a 4-game series at Cleveland. A large delegation of fans followed the team on its road trip, only to see the first game result in a 10-inning 6-6 tie when it was called because of darkness. Local fans and sportswriters alike, were certain that the Blue Sox had outplayed the Clevelanders. When the series was resumed the next day though, the Blue Sox still managed to come out on the short end of a 4-1 score. The remaining 2 games of the series were taken by Covington, 5-3 and 2-1, and helped vindicate the local fans' belief that the Kentucky nine had been out-playing their hosts all along.

Now it was time for opening day in Covington, and the event was greeted with unbridled enthusiasm. The entire town was decorated with flags and bunting, and even the visiting team from St. Louis was given what was called "a rousing welcome." A gigantic parade,

complete with a host of floats and bands, wound its way through the streets. The parade was accompanied by the pealing of fire bells and the shrill blasts of every factory and steamboat whistle in the Covington Area. Indeed, it was a parade that probably has never been equalled in any other city on its opening day.

Every box seat had been grabbed-up early as the event promised to rank right along with the Latonia Derby as one of the year's leading social events. Pre-game ceremonies at the park included the release of homing pigeons carrying word of Covington's new pride to the mayors of each city represented in the new league, as well as to the governors of each state in which the cities were located. For good measure an additional pigeon was released carrying a message to President Woodrow Wilson at the White House. Minutes before Mayor George Philipps threw out the first ball hundreds of small American flags were thrown into the air by an ingenious motor embedded in the ball park grounds.

The Blue Sox did not let the opening day crowd of over 6,000 fans go away disappointed. Player-manager Sam Leever allowed but six scattered hits as the locals shut out a good St. Louis team 4-0. The hometown fans were wild with joy.

At this point, and for a short time afterward, the outlook was very encouraging. Covington had a winning team and some of the greatest names in professional baseball displayed their talents before the local fans. Eventually however, the novelty wore off and local attendance began to drop. Some claimed that the playing field was too small, while others said there was too much competition from other forms of amusements, but whatever the reason the profits were going down. The promoters tried many ways to encourage larger turnouts, and even lowered admission rates. For a time, it was hoped Saturday and Sunday crowds would help, but adverse weather forced an unusual number of cancellations of week-end games.

On June 24, 1913 the Covington Federal League baseball team passed into history. The Covington Amusement Company, which operated the team, had voted to give up the franchise.

Several cities immediately announced intentions of bidding for Covington's franchise, including Kansas City, Mo., Toledo, Ohio, Milwaukee and Detroit. Kansas City made the strongest bid, and the entire Covington team was transferred to that city.

A shake-up took place in league management after the Blue Sox moved, and in September Powers was replaced as circuit president by wealthy James A. Gilmore. Gilmore often expressed open contempt for the big leagues' monopoly, and promised to hire players from any American or National League club he could. He was determined to raise the Federals to the status of a third major league, and during the upcoming 1914 and 1915 seasons waged unrelenting warfare against the two older circuits.

On one occasion the Feds threatened to break baseball wide open when they brought suit in the U. S. District Court at Chicago, claiming organized baseball was in violation of the Sherman Anti-trust Act. They demanded that all acts of the National Commission be declared void, and that all player contracts of the American and National Leagues be adjudged unenforceable.

Worried National League officials hastily called for a secret meeting to discuss peace terms with the Federal League. It was to be held at New York in December of 1915, and led to the Federals insisting on a handsome pay-off for cancelling their war. The Nationals reluctantly agreed, and then communicated the terms to American League officials who, after some delay, finally gave in. The internecine struggle which had cost organized baseball approximately \$10,000,000 came to an end when the Federal League finally passed from existence in 1916. The two older leagues breathed sighs of relief, for they were now spared a possible adverse court ruling.

The Federal League never achieved its goal of reaching major league status, and local baseball in Covington returned to its former amateur and semi-professional ranks. (John Burns, Director)

ST PAUL'S PROTESTANT EVANGELICAL CHURCH

On September 22 a raging fire all but leveled a vacant church building at Eleventh and Banklick, Covington, which was being used for storage. Built in the 1860s for a German Congregation of the Protestant Evangelical Church, its affiliation by the 1960s gave it the name St Paul's United Church of Christ. But over twenty years ago the congregation moved to Ft Henry drive in Ft Wright. One note: according to John Burns, the family of William Goebel, Kentucky's "assassinated Governor," held membership in this old church at the corner of Eleventh and Banklick.

Please support your historical society.

Membership in the Kenton County Historical Society for 1991 will be \$5.00 per person. Programs, publications, activities. Please inquire, address above.



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

Kenton County Birthday, April 30, 1990 (150th)  
Covington Birthday, February 8, 1990 (175th)  
Bromley Birthday, May 23, 1990 (100th)

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