

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bulletin

April 1997



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THANKS THANKS THANKS

Many thanks to the anonymous donor of a Gestetner copy machine to the Beringer-Crawford Museum and Kenton County Historical Society. And many thanks to the grant writers, Laurie Risch and Carol Wenger.

COMPUTER AVAILABLE

For those of you who need a computer to record your papers, the Society now has the an IBM compatible computer with Microsoft Word which can be lent out for that purpose.

Volunteers Needed

For help stapling and labeling the bulletin, approximately 2 hours each month. Please call Jo Ann Brown 341-1085.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

To KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY in its 20th year celebration the month of April.

Kenton County Historical Society membership dues are \$10 per year, \$5 for students and Senior Citizens.

Subscribers to Northern Kentucky Heritage Magazine, a semi-annual magazine of regional history covering ten counties, are \$12 a year for members, \$15 a year for non-members.

To subscribe to the magazine or become a member of KCHS, please mail check to KCHS, P. O. Box 641, Covington, KY 41012.

Editor of KCHS bulletin: Jo Ann Brown

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Publisher of award-winning
Northern Kentucky Heritage Magazine

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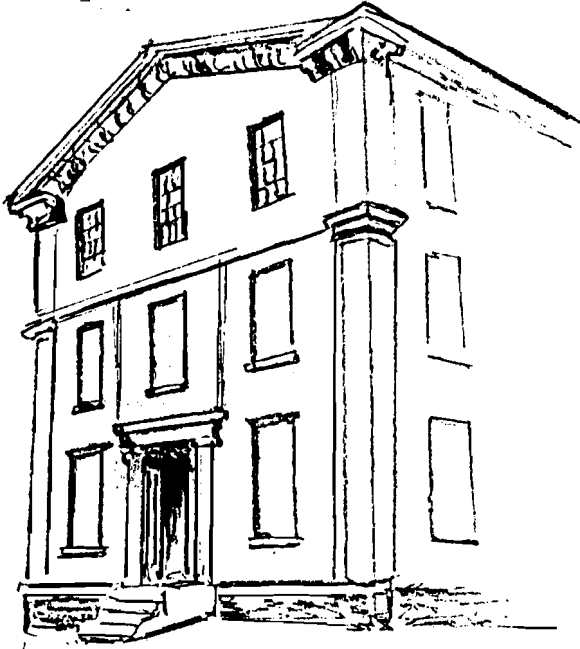
DATE April 22
TIME 6 PM
PLACE Stewart Ironworks
20 West 18th Street
Covington

The Stewart Ironworks is the original factory. The early hour is planned so that we can tour the factory while it is still running. After the tour, we can browse in the museum which is on the site.

The Mosler Safe and Lock Building

One of the first buildings you see after driving over the historic Roebling Suspension Bridge is the Mosler Safe and Lock Building, more recently used as a warehouse for auto parts. At Third and Scott Streets, across the street from the modern steel-grey and glass IRS building, it stands alone, surrounded by parking lots, graying white paint peeling from its brick and wood, windows boarded up. Built in 1836 by Northern Bank of Kentucky, this building is the last Greek revival style building remaining in the area, and the last of Covington's first business center. Owned by Kenton County, it is in danger of being demolished to make way for a 1500-car garage for the new Northern Kentucky Convention Center.¹

The Covington branch of the Northern Bank of Kentucky was organized in 1835.² It was the first depository in the City of Covington. The bank's home base was Lexington, with branches in Paris, Louisville, and Richmond.³



For more than 50 years, William Ernst was president, succeeded by his son John P. Ernst who retired in 1895. The building was also used as the family's residence; son Richard was born there, and became a U.S. Senator from Kentucky.⁴ William Ernst was quite active in community affairs, philanthropic and political. He was elected to Covington City Council several times, was a director of several railroads, director of the Literary and Library Association, and served as treasurer of the Bounty Fund during the Civil War.⁵

The Greek Revival building was built at the center of Covington's early business district, but in later years the city's business and retail center gravitated toward the Pike and Madison area. According the The Kentucky Post, April 3, 1897, the bank determined to vacate "its antiquated building" in 1896 and move to more suitable quarters to

the business center of town at Sixth and Madison Avenue. The building on this corner was remodeled and elegantly furnished and equipped with safety deposit vaults.⁶

Then the decision was made to close the bank on April 20, 1897. The Kentucky Post goes on to say:

Business was improved by the move, but not sufficiently to offset the general depression existing in mercantile circles. Then came the recent decision of the Court of Appeals of Kentucky, making it compulsory for all banks to pay \$1.75 per \$100 as taxation on their capital stock. This was a direct blow at the business, which was being conducted upon a narrow margin. The capital stock was reduced, it being unnecessarily large, but the percentage of profit still remained too small to make it worth whole [while] to continue business.⁷

By this period of time, the Ernst family had centered its interests in German National Bank, but still knew many of Northern's depositors. They "got a line" on the proposed liquidation of the bank and began "laying plans to capture as much business as possible." However, by Friday before the closing, "the fact leaked out," and First National Bank (connected with Amos Shinkle) promptly held a director's meeting at which time they decided to hire Mr. E. S. Lee, the "popular cashier of Northern." He would bring with him "considerable business from Northern." The other banks of Covington banks "were not slow" to court Northern's prominent depositors.⁸

Since the bank vacated it in 1897, the building at Third and Scott has passed through many hands: a distillery, the Mosler Safe Company, Wadsworth Electric Company, and even a necktie company.

At present, much interest surrounds the building. It is an obstruction, according to developers, to the planned parking lot for the Northern Kentucky Convention Center. However, there is interest in saving the building. The Cincinnati Preservation Association testified before the Kenton County Board of Commissioners on November 28, 1995 to spare this building which has "historic and architectural significance." The commissioners at that time expressed willingness to consider alternate plans.⁹

Several proposals for productive use of the building have been recommended. The most noteworthy is a proposal by two Northern Kentuckians whose organizations want to buy the building and renovate it. The building would house The Bank of Kentucky, a new bank formed in 1989, together with a CPA firm, Munninghoff, Lange, & Company. These two organizations are offering to purchase the building from the County for a price higher than the County's purchase price.¹⁰

This former bank is a "Greek Revival gem in a prominent location."¹¹ Structurally sound, it is the oldest commercial building standing in downtown Covington. As a significant part of our Northern Kentucky heritage, its restoration will strengthen the identity and character of Covington's uniqueness.

If you are interested in saving this historic building, write to Judge Clyde Middleton and the Kenton County Commissioners at Kenton County Building, Room 205, 303 Court Street, Covington, Kentucky 41011.

Research by Pam Boyle and Karl Lietzenmeyer.

1. *The Kentucky Post*, November 28, 1995.
2. *The North Kentuckian*, April 12, 1837.
3. *The Kentucky Post*, April 3, 1997.
4. Interview, Charles King, Kenton County Library.
5. *Commonwealth Daily Enterprise*, January 8, 1867, January 8, 1868, January 30, 1867, September 9, 1864.
6. *The Kentucky Post*, *op. Cit.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Cincinnati Preservation Association*, Vol 11, Issue 1, January/February 1996.
10. Open letter to Kenton County Commissioners and County Judge Clyde Middleton by Bernie Beck, Attorney, The Woodford Building, Covington, Kentucky.
11. *Cincinnati Preservation Association*, *Op. Cit.*

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

Celebrating the Society's Twentieth Year

Dedicated to preserving our heritage as the "Gateway to the South"

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