

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Dr. Joseph Gastright

Editor of Bulletin

Jo Ann C. Brown

KCHS MEETING

DATE Tuesday April 10

TIME 7 PM

PLACE Trinity Church

4th & Madison
Covington

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"Things As They Are in America" Excerpts of a 19th Century Scot's Memories of America in 1854

Editors Note: *Joe Gastright tells me that whenever he goes to another city, he loves to rummage around bookstores for old books. He buys some unique books to add to his extensive library which he frequently uses in his studies as an historian.*

William and Robert Chambers, of Glenormiston, Scotland, published many tracts, books on travel, as well as educational books.

This book, Things As They Are in America, was written by William Chambers after his trip in 1853 to North America. He travelled by ship to Nova Scotia, on to Canada, including Quebec. Among the large northern U. S. cities he visited was Cincinnati. Richmond, Virginia, is the only southern state that he visited where he observed with alarm and distaste the auctioning of Negro slaves.

In Chapter 9, page 155, he was quite impressed with bustling Cincinnati: its art as well as manufacturing, especially furniture factories. He includes some comments about Covington. Then he turns to the pork trade:

In some of the wholesale stores of Cincinnati, articles of English manufacture are kept; and the imports of foreign liquors and luxuries of the table seemed to be considerable. On the whole, however, it was pretty evident here, as at other places, that the Americans aim at independence in every branch of trade.....

The most curious thing of all about Cincinnati is its system of pig-killing and pork-pickling.

The place is known as the principal hog-market in the United States. The hogs are reared in the country on the refuse of the corn-fields after harvest, and among the extensive forests, where they pick up food at little or no cost to their owners. Brought in steamers from a great distance, they are seen marching and grunting in large herds through the streets to the slaughtering establishments in the neighborhood. The season in which they begin to make their appearance is the fall, when they are in prime condition, and when, from the state of the temperature, their carcasses can soon be cooled by the air, and rendered fit for pickling. The greater number of the hog slaughter-houses are behind the town, on the road towards the higher grounds, and are generally wooden structures of a very plain description. Each is provided with a series of pens, whence the animals walk in single file along an enclosed gallery towards the apartment where they meet their doom.

When a pig is killed in England, the sufferer usually takes care to let the whole neighborhood hear of the transaction. On such occasions, it is the prescriptive right of the pig to squeak, and he is allowed to squeak accordingly. In Cincinnati, there is no time for this. Impelled along the passage from the exterior pen, each hog on entering the chamber of death receives a blow with a mallet on the forehead, which deprives him of consciousness and motion. The next instant he is bled to death; and by means of a system of caldrons

and other requisites, the carcass is speedily cleaned, dressed, and hung up to undergo the proper cooling, previous to being cut in pieces and pickled.

The largest of these establishments is situated in Covington, on the opposite side of the Ohio, and consists of a series of brick buildings, which cover nearly two acres. Here an inclined plane leads from the ground to the top of a house four stories high, and along this the hogs are driven to an upper floor to be slaughtered, and where as many as 4000 can be accommodated at a time. The processes of cleansing, making lard, and so forth, need no description. In most cases, the business of curing pork is separate from that of slaughtering; but here they are united; and the arrangements for cutting up, pickling, barreling, and branding, are all on a vast scale. An idea of the work gone through is obtained from the single fact, that the pickling takes place by steeping in nine brick-built tanks, each of which holds 400 barrels of pork. Upwards of 12,000 hogs and 3000 oxen are killed, pickled, and packed here in a season. Altogether, about half a million of hogs are so disposed of per annum in Cincinnati; but the number varies according to circumstances; and questions as to the extent of the 'hog crop,' are as gravely discussed as the crop of wheat or Indian corn. Much of the export of pork is to the European markets.

From Chapter 10, page 158, Chambers writes of his fascination with the steam boats, and would have taken one down to New

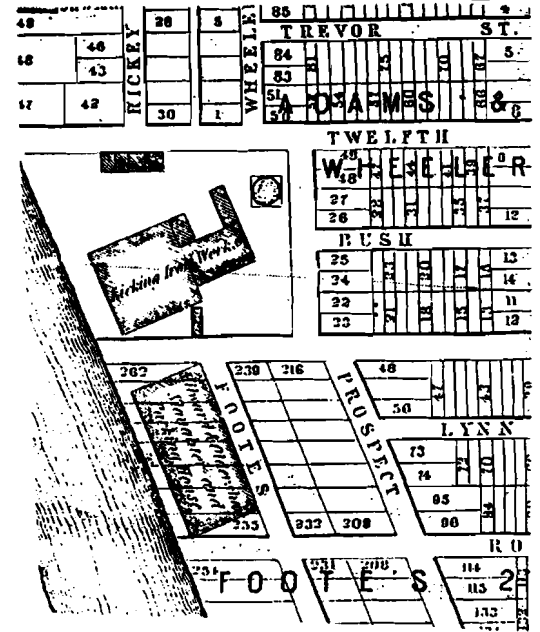
Orleans, but for fear of yellow fever.

From the centre of the long quay where the steamers draw up at Cincinnati, a large and commodious ferry-boat crosses the Ohio at short intervals to Covington, a town still in a rudimental state, but becoming a place of residence for persons whose business connects them with Cincinnati. There are a few manufactories in the place, but with these exceptions, Covington does not shew any marked signs of activity, and the contrast with the bustle of business on the Ohio side is somewhat striking. The comparative dullness is ascribed to the disinclination of free emigrants and workmen to settle in Kentucky, where they would be brought in contact with slavery.

To say nothing of slavery abstractedly, anything calculated to retard the development of industrial occupation in this fine part of the country is much to be lamented. The Americans themselves are scarcely aware of the productive powers of the sunny banks and fertile and far-spending valleys adjoining the Ohio. The grape, which is grown with advantage in various parts of the States, here attains that peculiar perfection which adapts it for the manufacture of wine. Several enthusiasts in horticulture, among whom may be mentioned, Mr. Longworth, have, for the last twenty years, in the neighborhoods of Cincinnati, devoted much attention to the grape; and now, within a circle of twenty miles, there are upwards of 300 vineyards, which lately produced in one year 120,000 gallons of wine. I had the curiosity to taste two of the best kinds of this native product, made from the Catawba

grape: one resembled a dry hock, and the other was an effervescing champagne, light and agreeable to the palate. So popular have these become, that at no distant day foreign wines of a similar class will cease to be imported.

I found, likewise, that under the encouraging auspices of a horticultural society, the strawberry is brought to great perfection on the banks of the Ohio, and that, during the season, as many as 200 bushels of this fruit are brought every day into the market of Cincinnati. Not satisfied, however, with this large local sale, the producers, I was told, are opening a trade with New Orleans, to which the strawberries are sent packed in ice. Sixteen hundred miles seemed to me rather a long way to send strawberries to market; but when did an American think of distance?



Milward & Oldershaw shown on the 1851 Covington map on the Licking River shore between Robbins and 11th Streets. The plant burned about 1857 and was never rebuilt. Henry Milward died 1873.



Although Cincinnati gained the nickname "Porkopolis" the largest pork processing plant in America was in Covington. By 1850, Milward & Oldershaw Company was slaughtering 3000 hogs a day [Covington Journal 19 Oct. 1850]. Notice the packet *Mary Cole* in this picture, probably taking revelers to *Cole's Licking Gardens* amusement park (on today's Meinken Field, Latonia).

*Two pre-Civil War Covington maps now available!
Write us for details!*

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