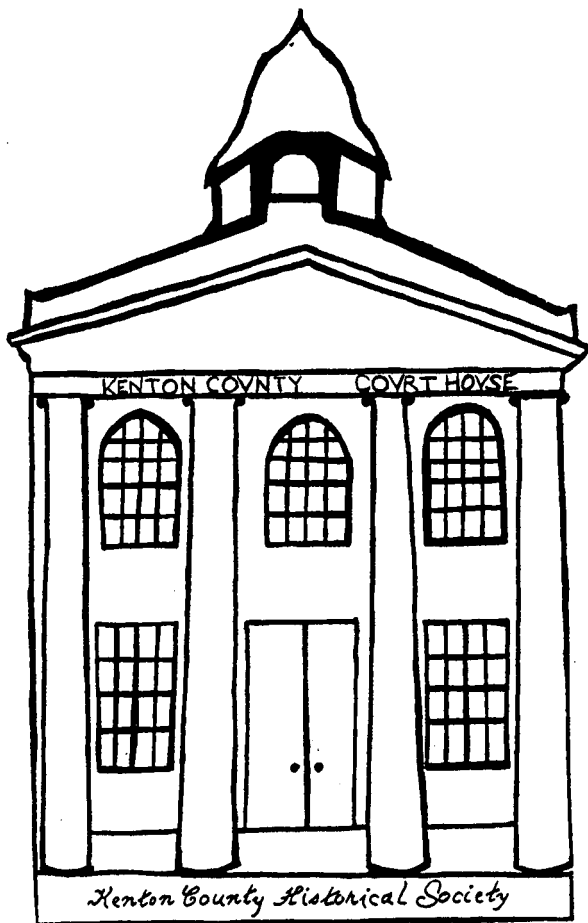


KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
(organized in 1977; non-profit;
member, Historical Confederation
of Kentucky)



February 1993

Kenton County Historical Society

P.O. Box 841
Covington, Kentucky 41011

R E V I E W

February 1993

PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT

On Tuesday, February 9th, 7:00 p. m. at the Kenton County Public Library (Erlanger branch), Mr. Charles Thorp will speak on....

A HISTORY OF DAYTON, KY IN THE STEAMBOAT ERA. The steamboat trade in the last century caused cities and towns to grow in Northern Kentucky along the river. The steamboat not only provided transportation; it gave employment and opportunities to workers and businessmen. And such people and their families resided in such places as Dayton, Ky which was located just across the river from some of the sites of steamboat industry. Mr. Thorp will speak about the city of Dayton and how and where its citizens were employed in the steamboat industry.

The program will be sponsored by the Kenton County Historical Society and will be free and open to the public.

Tuesday evening

February 9th

7:00 p. m.

Kenton County Public Library (Erlanger branch)

3130 Dixie Highway (next to Kroger's)

BEHRINGER CRAWFORD MUSEUM

Congratulations and best wishes to Laurie Risch, the new Executive Director.

THE CAMPBELL COUNTY HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

The society has opened its offices and research library on the second floor of the old Alexandria courthouse, and henceforth will have certain regular hours open for business.

THE RIDDLE-ARNOLD-DAVESAC MANSION--AN ODYSSEY

"The old house...was a home of great interest, the lawns being covered with statuary. It was the meeting place of artists and literary men of the day"

-Mary Laidley, The Kentucky Post, Oct. 27, 1929

On July 10, 1970 the president of a local company notified officials that demolition of a tenement at 653-655 Dalton street, Covington, was finished. In February it had been argued that since the property had deteriorated to "50% of its assessed value," condemnation could be justified. And even already some ten years earlier, the owner had been warned: "this is blight type property--overcrowding in small apartments--mode of living does not meet desired health and welfare needs...this property could be condemned or repaired...."

Then as late as 1974 the city was still wanting to collect from the owner the cost incurred by the city for demolition of private property in the public interest (City of Covington Housing Dept. records, 1959-1974). But even though the site is now a public playground, owned by the city, the public lost more than intended.

The mansion was built on the farm of James Riddle (who died around 1834), when the area was a "forest of large timber," and probably within a decade of the construction of the "Carneal house," East Second street, Covington (ca. 1815); Elmwood Hall, Ludlow (ca. 1820); the Daniel Carter Beard house, East Third street, Covington (ca. 1821); and others. In those times certain men held large land grants, and then men with dreams and with economic motives came, men such as Thomas Carneal, William Bullock, and Thomas Bakewell. Each in his own way viewed the area west of Covington as potentially a pristine retreat for men of culture within commuting distance of cosmopolitan Cincinnati, or, maybe more practically, as land for investment, development, and subdivision (Susan Enzweiler: The Whole Appears But One Town: Covington and Cincinnati, 1815-1834; Paul Tenkotte: Rival Cities to Suburbs: Covington and Newport, Kentucky, 1790-1890. A Dissertation....).

By 1810 James Riddle and his son John were residing on the western outskirts of Covington (Collins: History of Ky). But Riddle was also a prominent "Cincinnati" merchant who was appointed in 1817 a Director of the Cincinnati Branch of the Bank of the United States (Larew). However, in 1826 he forfeited his 580 acre farm, buildings and improvements, including ferry rights which had been granted

by the state legislature, to the Bank, for "\$26,000" (Deedbook G, p. 207, November 23, 1825, Campbell county). And then after his death, his wife Esther, in settling his estate, gave her residence as Alexandria county, Illinois (Deedbook L, p. 216, March 8, 1834, Campbell county, Ky). But in these years after the economic crash of 1819, Riddle's situation was not untypical. Another former Bank Director, merchant Thomas Sloo, Jr., approached bankruptcy, then had his burden assumed by Nicholas Longworth, another pillar of the community. Longworth wanted or needed to procrastinate in paying portions which were due. But Bank officials did much extended negotiating, anyhow, trying to adjudicate the financial pressure on men whose fortunes also affected the general economy. After a period of refusal, the Bank finally capitulated and began accepting land as a matter of course, even from resourceful debtors (Marilyn Melton Larew: The Cincinnati Branch of the Second Bank of the United States and Its Effects on the Local Economy 1817-1835. A Dissertation....).

Riddle's ferry connected present-day Main street in Covington with Western Row (now Central Avenue), located then at the western limits of Cincinnati. In his later years A. W. Gilbert, former Cincinnati civil engineer, recalled that about 1830 his father had rented "25 acres of land over the river in Ky," which had been "a portion of a large estate belonging to a gentleman by the name of Riddle" whose farm the Bank had taken. "The large mansion was built in southern style, with a piazza, or galleries...It stood in an orchard about a quarter of a mile back from the river & a road leading from from the ferry landing...passed a little east of the mansion." Mr. Cope, the bank official, had known Gilbert's father in Philadelphia and let the Gilbert family occupy the mansion "rent free...until a sale could be effected, so that we had a delightful cool & shady summer Home," and a couple of his father's Cincinnati friends would visit there (A. W. Gilbert: Colonel A. W. Gilbert, Citizen Soldier of Cincinnati, memoirs).

But while the Gilberts removed shortly to another location on the Riddle farm, the mansion property and some 95 acres were not sold, it seems, until Herman Cope himself and two other officials acquired it from the Bank of the United States which was winding down its recent operations. The property was described as surrounded by property owned by William Bullock, Mansfield and Chester, Osgood and Plymton, William S. Johnson, E. Tichenor, and E. S. Bush. Also sold was another three acre parcel left from the Riddle farm and miscellaneous other titles in Campbell and Boone counties.

The deed was signed by the bank president, then Mathew Bevan, and witnessed by Thomas B. Taylor and by Herman Cope, who had been in Philadelphia a protégé of Nicholas Biddle (Deedbook N, pp. 483-484, February 20, 1838, Campbell co.). According to a city map of the time, William Scholes of Covington (who may have been a partner with James G. Arnold) soon acquired title from Cope and partners (also Deedbook 2, p. 554, September 14, 1838, Kenton county, for 6 1/4 acres only of this property). Typically, as in much of its history, fee simple ownership of the mansion seemed to exist in a state of limbo, due to its distinctive location and/or architecture, and being made for wealthy aristocratic men of pleasure, or for men prone to land speculation, and debt.

According to Mrs. Stephens Blakely, family members of her great-great grandfather, Thomas Woodhouse Bakewell (1778-1874), lived in the mansion; it is reported at least that Bakewell girls attended from there a fashionable female academy located east on Montgomery street, Covington. According to Mrs. Blakely, Bakewell "built" the mansion (Christopher Gist Papers, vol. I, 1950). However, there is no record to indicate that Bakewell ever owned this mansion property. Of course he did develop a nearby subdivision, and he was himself appointed in 1834 a Director of the Cincinnati Branch of the Bank of the United States, just as Riddle had been (Bruce Sinclair, ed. Thomas Woodhouse Bakewell....Filson Club, vol. 40).

After 1840 James G. Arnold (1792-1876), a wealthy real estate man, who had always been either a county or city official, acquired the mansion and surrounding property (Deedbook 3, p. 7, 1843, Kenton county courthouse and other sources). Mary Laidley and others have recalled that Arnold had been a school teacher in Mason county, as well as in the earliest Covington school, and was, therefore, a cultural leader, as well as an economic force (John E. Burns: History of Covington Through 1865).

After Arnold's death the property was surveyed and laid out as the Arnold Homestead property (recorded May 19, 1886 in Covington courthouse). Arnold's estate conveyed the mansion and 70 by 181 feet of surrounding lot to Charles McDonald and M. T. Shine for \$3,570 (Deedbook 68, p. 95, May 17, 1888). Later McDonald sold it to Alex Davesac for \$7500 (Deedbook 70, p. 155, February 9, 1991).

In 1882 Davesac was a liquor dealer with business and residence at 37 Riddle (now West Ninth street). In 1892 he was described as an importer of wines, liquors, cognacs, clarets, champaign, etc., with place of business then at

223-235 Court street (directly across the street from City Hall), residence at Seventh and Dalton streets (city street directories).

Alex. Davesac was born in France in 1847, came to America and eventually settled in Covington with his family by 1860. Beginning about 1872 he got into the wholesale liquor business which earned him a fortune. He was able to utilize experience gained with his father and from his formal schooling which had begun in France. He became popular in local Democratic politics, was elected to the state legislature. Later his "friend," President Grover Cleveland appointed him Consul to France and later Collector of Internal Revenue in the Covington district (George Mortimer Roe, Cincinnati—the Queen City of the West).

But the Davesac family possibly lost its fortune because of risky ventures including gambling. Ralph Heile of Ft Mitchell, who grew up on Dalton street, recalled that his mother remembered when the mansion looked out from the hill on which it was built, and (before Dalton street and surrounding buildings) was approached in horse and buggy over a beautiful promenade. The Davesacs held fancy society parties; talk was that the dungeon below had years ago been used to incarcerate slaves. Heile attended St Aloysius school with Bob Davesac.

Eventually the mansion saw new owners who exploited it as rental property. Thus some ten years before it was wrecked, a city inspector reported that the three stories plus basement was occupied by 48 persons (including 29 children) in a total of 28 rooms (including two in the basement). The exterior looked bad because trash was scattered including in the rear yard over the bank into Willow run hollow; sidewalk sections were broken up; and then there was a "mudhole" in the front yard where children were playing.

(John Boh)



QUERIES

-Searching for any and all data from anyone with knowledge of Rosemary Riedlin and Murray Voorhees of Lakeside Park, Kenton county, Kentucky, 1930-1941.

-Searching for any and all data on the following surnames: Clark/Clarke; Benge; Frank/Franks; and Crouch. In relation to Charles Robert Martin (b. 1864) and his daughters Blanche, Bessie, Pearl.

-Searching for any and all data on the Hambrick family and how they tied into my Gr-gr grandfather's family. Abiel A, Martin (b. October 7, 1807 Onondaga Co., New York; d. February 3, 1885 Campbell county, Kentucky); and Nancy Simons/Simmons (b. circa. 1825? Died Kenton County?). A child by the name of Martha Hambrick, resided with this family 1878- ? Who were her parents?

REPLY TO: Joyce M. Riedlin

RD 3, Box 150

Stewartstown, Pa 17363

NEW KCHS MAGAZINE TO BE LAUNCHED IN 1993 !

Beginning in April, the Society will begin a new bi-annual publication, making available to the public worthy historical papers of local and regional interest.

The KCHS is running a contest to name this publication. It will be computer prepared in magazine format. The publication will be sold by subscription. Some examples of forthcoming subject matter: "James T. Earle, Last Mayor of Latonia", "B.H.F. Hellebusch (1825-1885)", "Life of John Uri Lloyd" and many more. There will be three to five major papers in each issue. The material will be chosen from any a number of sources, not only the members' own work. Footnotes, references and photos and illustrations are to be encouraged. The prize for the winning title will be one year's subscription free. To enter, merely tear off at the dotted line below and fill in your suggestion and address and mail.

MY TITLE SUGGESTION: _____

NAME _____

STREET _____ CITY _____

STATE _____ ZIP _____ PHONE _____

Mail to: KCHS, P.O.Box 641, Covington, KY 41012

Kenton County Historical Society
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