

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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KCHS MEETING

DATE Tuesday July 11

PLACE Trinity Church

4th & Madison

Covington

PROGRAM Early History of

Covington

Karl Lietzenmayer and Dr. Joseph Gastright will present Covington's early history with slides.

Parking available in church lots.

Bulletin

July 2000

From the Editor.....

John Boh went to a very interesting symposium and celebration of the 250th anniversary of the Opening of Kentucky. He took many notes which follow in this issue's Bulletin. He also writes:

On April 15, 2000 the Bell County Historical Society and others celebrated the 250th anniversary of Dr. Thomas Walker's first documented passage and marking of the Cumberland and Pine mountain entrances.

The Bell County Historical Society had just published *Gateway-Dr. Thomas Walker & the Opening of Kentucky* by David M. Burns (photographs by Adam Jones, introduction by Dr. Thomas D. Clark; referenced). The book contains the recent proclamation from Governor Patton, acknowledging Walker's discovery of the Cumberland Gap, the Pine Mountain Narrows, the Cumberland Ford, the naming of the Cumberland River, and building the first cabin at present day Barbourville in Knox County. *Gateway* contains short essays accompanied by spectacular color photographs and maps. The author, David Burns, who resides in Washington, D. C., spent his boyhood in Pineville, and has had a distinguished professional career.

Residents of adjoining Knox County participated. The Thomas Walker State Shrine, containing a replica of the Walker log cabin (1750), is located in Barbourville.

Symposium participants included Thomas D. Clark, Kentucky Historian Laureate; Thomas H. Appleton, Jr., editor and contributor, KHS publications; Neal O. Hammon, architect and an historian of pioneer Kentucky; James C. Klotter, professor Georgetown College and former Executive Director of the KHS; Alexander Canaday McLoed, clinical professor and a Walker specialist; and moderator J.. Kevin Graffignino, Executive Director of the KHS.

From the President.....

At the June Board Meeting, board member George Gressle brought his talented son Nick to present a proposal for a new web page exclusively for *Northern Kentucky Heritage*. Our Society will continue to be linked to the Kenton Public Library site [see below] but because of the regional nature of *NKH*, a separate site, developed in cooperation with all the participating heritage groups, now numbering 20, would serve better.

Each group would have free space on this site to present its profile, activities and publications. In return, we would hope that each group would promote *NKH* more vigorously among its membership.

Other issues: Don't be surprised if a board member contacts some of you to request assistance in the preparation of this *Bulletin*. Printing and mailing each month is a burden on the same folks. If any reader can offer to assist even one month/year, please notify the Society.

WEB SITE <http://www.kenton.lib.ky.us/~histsoc/>

The Opening of Kentucky

by John Boh and Jo Ann Brown

Anyone who reads the biographies of some of our early Kenton County ancestors will notice that many of them migrated from Virginia; the others from Pennsylvania. They owe their new-found land to early explorers, those who made maps and marked the routes. In those days, rivers rather than roads were more essential to early growth.

Buffalo, Indians, and a few pioneers traveled westward on wilderness paths through the Cumberland Mountain "Gap" and the thirteen miles along the Cumberland River into the "Narrows" at Pine Mountain. In the Narrows, passers-by forded the river at "Cumberland Ford." From the Gap and Narrows, buffalo reached such salt licks as those in Boone and Robertson Counties. The old buffalo and Indian trails from the Gap and Narrows swept up, over the Big Sandy, Licking, and Kentucky River watersheds toward the Ohio River. Tribal war and commerce extended north even across the Ohio River.

Thomas Walker and other early explorers initiated one of the major corridors to the west for the colonists of the eastern shore. The other corridor was the Ohio River from Pennsylvania.

The Loyal Company of England wanted to push westward. They employed Thomas Walker and others to open the frontier by mapping and marking paths. Walker, a physician, was a gentleman, speculator and rugged explorer. Like others his perspective eventually changed from English

Colonial to Revolutionary.

He established no settlement, nor participated in Kentucky politics. No county was named for him. However, in April 1750, Dr. Walker was the first to document a white man's passage through the Gap and Narrows. Soon others began passing through the Gap and Narrows from Virginia and North Carolina into Kentucky and then the American West. The trail was traveled on foot and horse before being widened in 1790.

At the Pine Mountain Narrows, an early Kentucky toll gate post witnessed many dramatic pioneer migrations, and here the town of Cumberland Ford grew into the city of Pineville, the seat of Bell County.

In 1753, Walker began exploration to the West Coast, and got as far as the mouth of the Missouri River. He was interrupted by the French and Indian War (1754-63), but Walker's association during these explorations with Peter Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson's father, anticipated Lewis and Clark's expedition fifty years later sponsored by President Thomas Jefferson.

The year after Thomas Walker made his documented exploration at the Gap and Narrows, Christopher Gist and a black companion recorded a scouting trip into the Ohio River Valley. In parallel fashion, the Ohio River became a second corridor for pioneers from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New Jersey.

From the Ohio River, Simon Kenton with a partner was the first to clear land in Mason

County, the Maysville area. He later explored the Kentucky interior, and even helped Boone defend Boonesboro. In the 1790s, he settled Kenton's Station, a small fortification in Mason County.

In 1767, Daniel Boone made his initial expedition west. For that trip and return trips, he chose for convenience the Cumberland over other known mountain "gaps." Under the tenuous protection of the Virginia colony, which was then defending the western territory, Daniel Boone led the settlement of Boonesboro and other penetrations into Kentucky. Daniel Boone blazed the path from Cumberland Gap to the south bank of the Kentucky River.

In the Civil War, Confederates and then Union forces occupied the strategic Cumberland Gap area. A series of maneuvers there linked Confederate Kirby Smith's advanced strike toward Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati in 1862. In 1864 General Grant scouted the corridor but found it too narrow or forbidding as a significant military supply route toward Tennessee.

In the 1830s a railroad from Cincinnati to Charleston was proposed to pass through the Gap, but it was never built. However, the Covington and Lexington railroad opened in 1855. It became known as the "Kentucky Central," eventually extending to Danville and to the Tennessee border. In the 1890s the Louisville & Nashville Railroad consolidated its system to connect Northern Kentucky with a track laid for coal transport through Cumberland Mountain. Today, like the new vehicular tunnel, a

century old railroad tunnel links Kentucky to the other side of Cumberland Mountain.

In the 1890s, the city of Middlesboro, Kentucky was founded at Cumberland Gap where, it is theorized, a meteorite made a flat impression of land 300 million years ago. Alexander Arthur, a Scotsman with the English company, American Associations Limited, saw potential in the resources of the area. The English developers spent millions to develop railroad, coal, lumber and other resources in the area. They established the city of Middlesboro, after Middlesboro, England, and envisioned a second "Pittsburgh." But financial crises soon dried up English capital. Nevertheless, Middlesboro retained a certain English heritage with wider avenues and streets named Cumberland, Winchester, and Dorchester.

After the boom and bust of the English entrepreneurs, the area, like Northern Kentucky, endured vice and gambling. These conditions were cleaned up after World War II. But unlike Northern Kentucky, the traveler finds Bell County to be "dry," with the exception of its waterways, panoramic mountains, and other recreational advantages.

After World War I, the Dixie Highway (25E) opened facilitating motor travel through the Narrows at Pineville and the Gap at Middlesboro but it was treacherous. After World War II, the new I-75 simply bypassed this corridor.

The 1990s saw the construction of a four lane tunnel under the Cumberland Mountain allowing Highway 25 (Dixie Highway) to provide a less treacherous route for modern traffic. At

Cumberland Gap, the construction of the state-of-the-art tunnel provides wider access.

Now the old pavement of Highway 25E at the Gap has been abandoned. It will be removed, and a wilderness foot path through the Gap will be "restored" once more. Like Northern Kentucky, southeastern Kentucky perceives more "growth" especially through tourism.

References

Gateway--Dr. Thomas Walker and the Opening of Kentucky. David M. Burns. Bell County Historical Society, 2000

Comments by Dr. Thomas Clark and others, Symposium, Middlesboro, Kentucky, April 15, 2000

The Kentucky Encyclopedia. John E. Kleber, Editor-in-Chief. The University Press of Kentucky, 1992

Note

It wasn't until 1817 that the first turnpike charter was established, and the 1830s saw the building of macadamized turnpikes which were simply gravel roads. Of course, travel was by horse and wagon, many of them toll roads.

In 1927, Kentucky joined 3,700 surfaced roads to the National Highway system including those connecting Cincinnati to Cumberland Gap.

Obituary

Frank R. Levstik, 57, passed away Sunday, May 28, after a stroke believed to be caused by a virus. Mr. Levstik had been on the Historical Confederation Board for 15 years. He also had been regional administrator of the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives.

New Book Published

Home Sweet Kentucky, Plum Lick Publishing, Inc. c. 1999, 244 ppgs

Home Sweet Kentucky, by David and Lalie Dick, takes you on a journey through the backroads of the Commonwealth. Reviewers say it is "a book to slow you down, warm your heart, and lift you up. It'll take you to many forgotten places, introduce you to people who generally don't make headlines, and give you a taste of the essence of Kentuckians--the good people who make the Commonwealth unique."

\$18.75 plus KY sales tax (\$1.14) = \$20.09

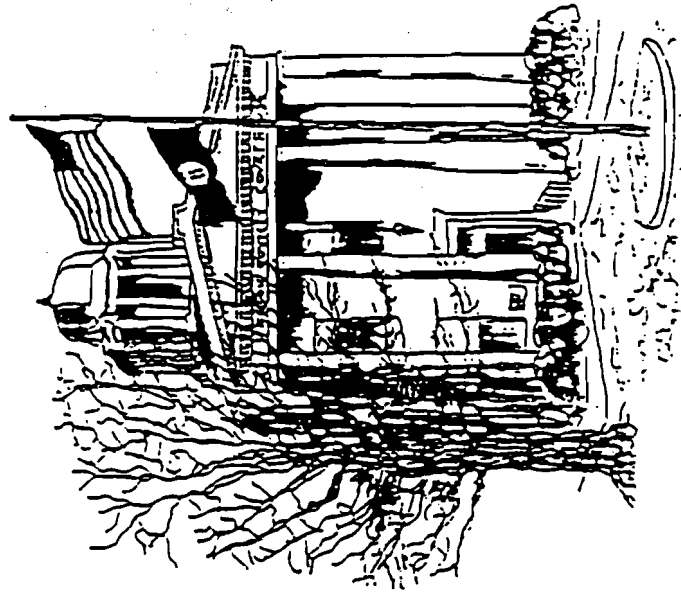
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Dedicated to preserving our heritage as the "Gateway to the South"