

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bulletin

July/August 1997



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BULLETIN ARTICLES WELCOME

Many of the KCHS members do research and write papers on local history. We would like to publish in the Bulletin any papers which could be of interest to KCHS members.

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.

KENTUCKY HISTORICAL SOCIETY SEEKS VOLUNTEERS

The Kentucky History Center is under construction in downtown Frankfort. Before long they will be moving their library and museum, as well as some other programs, into the new building.

They need volunteers over the next year to assist in preparing collections for the move. Hours of work can be flexible, but volunteers must be able to commit to a definite schedule. The work will involve such tasks as filing, labeling, reboxing, and data entry and will deal primarily with family files, microfilm, and books. For those interested, please call Ron Bryant at (502) 564-3016 for details.

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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KCHS MEETING

The next meeting will be held in September, date to be announced. Dr. James Claypool will speak about the Latonia Springs Racetrack. An election will also be held. Outgoing Directors are John Boh, Mike Flannery, Ruth Eubank, Karl Lietzenmayer, Joe Gastright, and Shawn Ryan. Remaining Directors are Mike Averdick, 1998, Lisa Gillham, 1998, Charles King, 1999, and Jim Kelly, 1999.

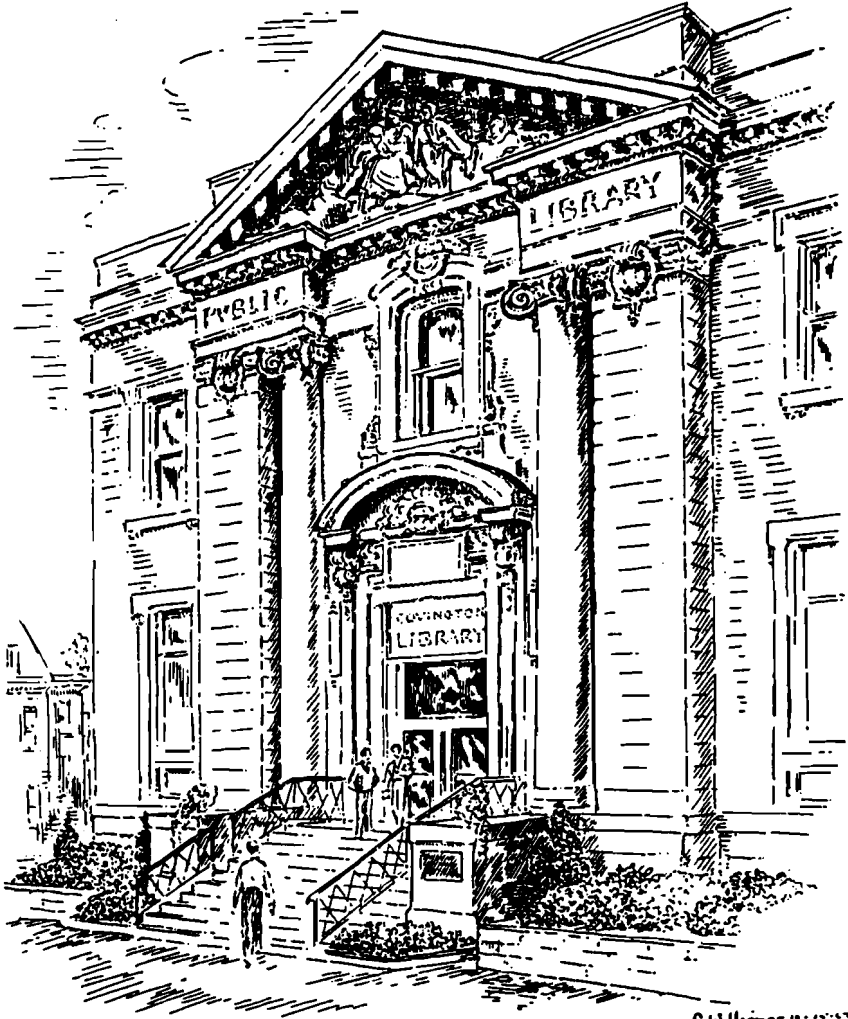
A Monument to Arts and Education At Scott and Robbins

Andrew Carnegie would be proud to see the library building as it stands today on Scott and Robbins Streets, now the Carnegie Arts Center. It is a monument to the best in human character. Nineteenth Century community leaders saw the need for an educated citizenry. Andrew Carnegie, self made man, had the same vision and donated the money for construction of this and other libraries all over the world. This ninety-three year old building was saved from destruction by the courage and dedication of late Twentieth Century art and restoration enthusiasts.

The relief above the noble entrance is suitable for the timelessness of this fine piece of architecture. A figure of Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom and skill shelters youths on either side of her. One symbolizes the fine arts; the other symbolizes the useful arts. The relief was the work of sculptor J. C. Meyerberg of Covington.

The Carnegie building is itself a work of art. It is one of the finest examples of Neo-French architecture (Beaux Arts) in the area. Designed by Boll and Taylor of Cincinnati, the building is constructed of white stone. Framing the entrance are two plain columns with Ionic capitals which support the frieze. Inside the building, the visitor finds elaborately carved woodwork, ornate plaster and a golden dome over the rotunda, a replica of the one in the Library of Congress. According to the Kentucky Post just prior to opening day, "This dome is the chief beauty of the library. It allows a mellow stream of light into the room that falls strongly upon the rows of books which line the walls." ¹ Today it is the ideal space and light for exhibiting art.

One of the unusual features of the Carnegie library building is its 700-seat auditorium. Many towns and cities wanted to take advantage of this philanthropic opportunity to include a hall or theater for community events. Only about twenty Carnegie libraries include an auditorium, and Carnegie was adamant about its use for educational purposes only. As a matter of fact, William Jennings Bryan lectured at Covington's library auditorium on January 22, 1909. A "colored" high school held its commence-



ment there in June 1908. The restrictions, however, were difficult to control. Some cities wrote to James Bertram, Carnegie's private secretary who took care of all of Carnegie's philanthropies, for approval for some purposes. Many were refused. Others did as they pleased. By 1914 in Covington, a movie firm offered to remodel the auditorium in exchange for the right to rent it. This would be too lucrative to pass up. The Trustees gave their approval.²

To Covingtonians on the day of the opening of the library, it was perfect just the way it was. The Kentucky Post described it as: "The little gem of an auditorium with its red-tinted walls and myriads of sparkling electric lights will indeed sparkle like some radiant jewel, and those who have not had an opportunity to view the interior of this, Covington's newest building, will be dumb-founded at its tastefulness and beauty." ³

So how did this beautiful edifice come about? For most of the 19th century, only the wealthy had access to books. In 1824, The Covington Social Library opened but lasted only a few years. In 1846, a Licking Valley Register editorial made a plea to community leaders to open a public library. "Nothing adds more to the intellectual and moral improvement of society than public libraries, so organized as to place good and useful books in the hands of all." ⁴ Leaders organized for this purpose but opposing views said that the availability of books would lead to a proliferation of "wrong Ideas." ⁵

A few public libraries were organized and disbanded during the next fifty or so years. A fireman's library with two-thousand books was opened in 1852 and closed in 1871 when the status of the organization changed from social club to more serious business when steam engines came into use. ⁶ The last library was condemned as a fire trap in 1901.⁷

Funds for the libraries were collected from poolrooms. In 1897, it is reported that the funds were decreasing causing financial problems for the library. According to the article written about opening day, half of the Police Court fines had been laid aside for "library purposes." But this method of funding was so slow that citizens feared of ever having a library. The Board of Trustees

were determined "to do some hustling and rush things through." ⁷

About this time, people became aware of the philanthropic ventures of Andrew Carnegie. Newport was already celebrating its \$26,500 Carnegie grant received in October 1899.

This was the year that Mayor Joseph Rhinock wrote to Carnegie asking for a grant for Covington, but was turned down. ⁹ In the meantime, plans continued to move forward. In fact, Rhinock made a trip to New York to lay out Covington's plan for a new library. Carnegie and Bertram insisted that all business concerning the donation of libraries be carried out by mail. "Personal interviews although requested by many, were granted to few. Now and then there was an exception." ¹⁰ Rhinock was one exception.

Soon a letter arrived stating that \$40,000 had been granted for Covington's new library. There is speculation that what made the change was not only that Rhinock was a terrific salesman, but that Covington had a good track record for library funding through city government and that a site was already being considered. Carnegie libraries stipulated that 10 percent of the grant had to be spent annually by the city for maintenance of the building. Endowments for maintenance were not acceptable. It was Carnegie's philosophy that the distribution of wealth for the benefit of society should never be in the form of charity but that all persons must support the community for its own welfare.

Legal difficulties stood in the way of some communities' ability to accede to the 10 percent clause. "In Kentucky an enabling act had to be passed before Louisville could tax itself for the Carnegie library. This delayed the acceptance of the gift for about two years." ¹¹

Another stipulation was that the site had to be chosen before a gift was granted. He left the location up to the community. In many towns, bitter political battles ensued. Towns with rivers bisecting them were particularly prone to controversy. "In Waterloo, Iowa, the new library was to be located on an island in the river dividing the town into two factions. Then Carnegie raised his gift from \$30,000 to \$40,000 and finally up to \$45,000 so that

two libraries could be built, one on each side of the river. ¹²

After the announcement of the \$40,000 grant, the property at Scott and Robbins was immediately purchased from the Covington School Board for \$12,000. Although it was the site of the Engler School,* it was called the Crigler property because the property had been given to the school board by Llewellyn N. Crigler, a millionaire whisky wholesaler. He had purchased the property from William Burnet Robbins who needed to recoup some of his losses after the Civil War. At some time, Crigler had tried to purchase the dower rights but without success. Dower rights are a portion of the sale of real estate which, if both husband and wife do not sign the transferring deed, belongs to the surviving spouse. In 1907, long after the property was transferred and the library had been built, the widow of Mr. Robbins sued the Public Library for her portion of the sale.¹³ However, the Trustees held an indemnifying bond which protected the Library's Funds. ¹⁴

Libraries and books were important to Carnegie because he saw how they could improve the lot of an individual such as himself. His father was a great influence. He had led his fellow weavers in Dunfermline, Scotland, to pool their contributions for the purchase of books and delegated persons to read aloud while the others worked. Their collection became the first circulating library in the town. Carnegie chose Dunfermline as the first benefactor of his library gifts. ¹⁵

Andrew Carnegie was born in November 25, 1835. Rapid industrialization of the textile trade forced his father out of the weaving business and Carnegie's formal education ended. In 1846, the family moved to the United States settling in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. Carnegie's first job was as a bobbin boy for \$1.20 per week. After one year he became a messenger boy for a local telegraph company. "He taught himself the art of telegraphy and met important people. Thomas Scott, superintendent of the Pittsburgh division of the Pennsylvania Railroad hired him as a private secretary and personal telegrapher." ¹⁶ Carnegie was on his way to becoming a successful, innovative leader in the railroad business and steel industry. For 36 years he built up the Carnegie Steel Company which he sold to J. P. Morgan for \$500,000,000 in 1901.

"Then at the age of sixty-six, healthy, alert, and keenly interested in politics and literature, Carnegie retired and devoted the rest of his life to philanthropy and the securing of international peace." Bronchial pneumonia brought about his death in 1919.¹⁷

After his death, it was discovered through a memorandum to himself at the age of thirty-three that he had already made plans to use his disposable income to benefit others. More than \$333,000,000 or 90 percent of his fortune was spent for what he termed "the improvement of mankind."¹⁸ The benefactors ranged from the Simplified Spelling Board to more than 7,000 church organs, the Carnegie Hero Fund and several institutes and foundations as well as the Endowment for International Peace. Although the Carnegie libraries were only a small part of his philanthropic ventures, they stand out as the most dramatic and influential to millions of people. His name is still synonymous with libraries.¹⁹

Carnegie donated \$56,162,622 for the construction of 2,509 library buildings throughout the English speaking world. In the United States, more than \$40,000,000 of this amount was given for 1,697 public library buildings in 1,412 communities.²⁰ Locally, Carnegie libraries were given to Cincinnati, Lorain, Wilmington, Lebanon, Mansfield, Washington Court House, Zanesville, Youngstown, Columbus, and Dayton, Ohio. In Kentucky, towns close to this region are Newport, Lexington, Louisville, Owensboro, Shelbyville, Somerset, and in Indiana, Greencastle and Lawrenceburg.²¹

After the purchase of the property at Scott and Robbins, the architects went to work and came up with a beautiful building but if it was to have auditorium, which city leaders insisted upon, they would have to have an additional \$35,000.

"A council of war was held, and it was decided that the best thing under the circumstances was for Rhinock to make a trip to New York, see Carnegie and lay the matter before him. It looked like a hopeless plan, for it was not thought the capitalist would feel like favoring Covington a second time, when he had already been so generous. But Rhinock again turned the trick and made such a favorable impression upon the Scotsman that the latter increased his original donation by \$35,000 making a total of

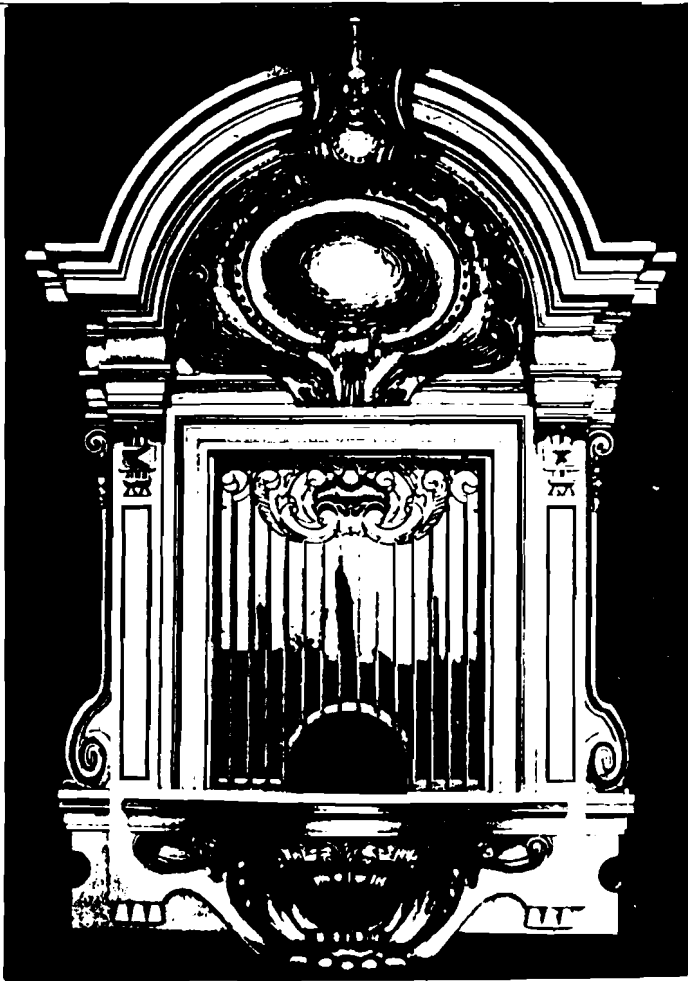
\$75,000. This together with the \$26,000 which the city had in bank, made a grand total of \$101,000, and the library a certainty.²² About a year later Carnegie donated another \$10,000.

A grand opening of the Covington Public Library was held on Wednesday, March 17, 1904. Doors were opened at 1 O'clock in the afternoon with a formal ceremony at 8 in the evening. Flowers and potted plants added to the celebratory mood. Col. W. C. P. Breckenridge was the "star speaker" described as "he of the silver tongue and persuasive eloquence." Ex-Mayor Rhinock and Mayor Beach also spoke in behalf of the Trustees. In the days following the opening, Mr. Carnegie made a personal gift to the library, a "rare" book, *The Rights of War and Peace or The Law of Nature and of Nations* by Hugh Grotius. It was the only book at the time that was ever officially honored by the U. S. Government.²³

In the years that followed, World Wars I and II broke out at which time all German books were banned.²⁴ On a more humorous note, newspapers report a woman sent to jail for clipping a death notice from a library newspaper.²⁵ In 1928, the library was robbed of rugs and draperies.²⁶ As the years went by, library science increased efficiency and more and more books crowded the shelves. On January 1, 1974, a Closing Party was held to commemorate its splendid past and the move to a more efficient and streamlined Kenton County Library Building at Fifth and Scott Streets. There were no immediate plans for the Carnegie library building.²⁷

*Because of overcrowded schools, the Engler School held classes in a mansion known as the Sinclair House. I could find no census listing of a Sinclair family at that address. A photograph of this house hangs in the Carnegie Arts Center.

Next month: Minerva is Rescued, The Covington Public Library Becomes the Carnegie Art Center



The Box Office Window at the Theater

NOTES

- ¹ Kentucky Post, 12 March 1904, p.7
- ² Kentucky Post, 6 March 1915, p. 2
- ³ Kentucky Post, 12 March, 1904, p. 7
- ⁴ Licking Valley Register, 17 January, 1846, p. 3
- ⁵ Kentucky Post, 8 June, 1987, p.4K
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Kentucky Post, 18 February, 1904, p. 7
- ⁸ Kentucky Post, 12 March, 1904, p. 7
- ⁹ Kentucky Post, 15 November, 1899, p. 1
- ¹⁰ Bobinski, George S., Carnegie Libraries, (Chicago 1969, American Library Association), 35.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 44.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 42
- ¹³ Kentucky Post, 29 April, 1907.
- ¹⁴ Kentucky Post., 30 April, 1907.
- ¹⁵ Bobinski, Carnegie Libraries, p. 11.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 9.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p.10

Notes (Continued)

18 *Ibid* p. 10.

19 *Ibid* , p. 3.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

21 *Ibid* p. 207.

22 *Kentucky Post*, 12, March, 1904, p. 7.

23 *Kentucky Post* , 20 April, 1904, p.1

24 *Kentucky Post* , 20 March, 1918 , p. 1.

25 *Kentucky Post* , 7 April, 1909, p. 1

26 *Kentucky Post* , 28 April, 1928, p. 1.

27 *Kentucky Post* , 1 January, 1974, p. 2K.

SPECIAL PRE-PUBLICATION OFFER FOR GENERAL AND HISTORICAL ORGANIZATIONS

Jeremiah and Alexander Clark of North Carolina, by Robert Bradley Clark, is due to be released in the fall of 1997. It begins with two brothers and a colonial America coming of age. This book contains 400 pages packed full of information about the Clark family as well as several related families.

This chronicle of the Clark family is a researcher's goldmine. Many family stories passed down from generation to generation are woven together into a compelling tale of the pioneer spirit. In addition, the family directory includes extensive descendant listings for over 5,700 Clark descendants along with approximately 5,000 allied family members, in easy-to-read descendant charts for these two Clark brothers. Detailed birth, death and marriage data appear for many of the family members. Other early Clark families of the region are also documented.

Many families have ties with these old Clark families. This book includes substantial information from the 1700s and early 1800s on the following related families: Aldridge, Beach, Berry, Boone, Braswell, Byrd, Blontz, Cochran, Coffey, Franklin, Gragg, Guinn, Gwyn, Hartly, Honeycutt, Lusk, McCall, McClird, McClurd, McKinney, Meade, Miller, Moody, Prestwood, Presswood, Stokes, Taylor, Vance and Watson.

Learn of the early days in Orange County, North Carolina. The turmoil of the Regulator Movement pushed these families west to Burke County in the early 1770s. Read of the colonial life and the coming revolution - choosing sides was more than just politics back then! Get a taste for the great contributions made by ordinary women.

Reserved your copy by sending a check for \$44.00 (\$40 + \$4 shipping) by September 30, 1997. Send check to:

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After the expiration date, a price of \$49.00 will be charged.

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