

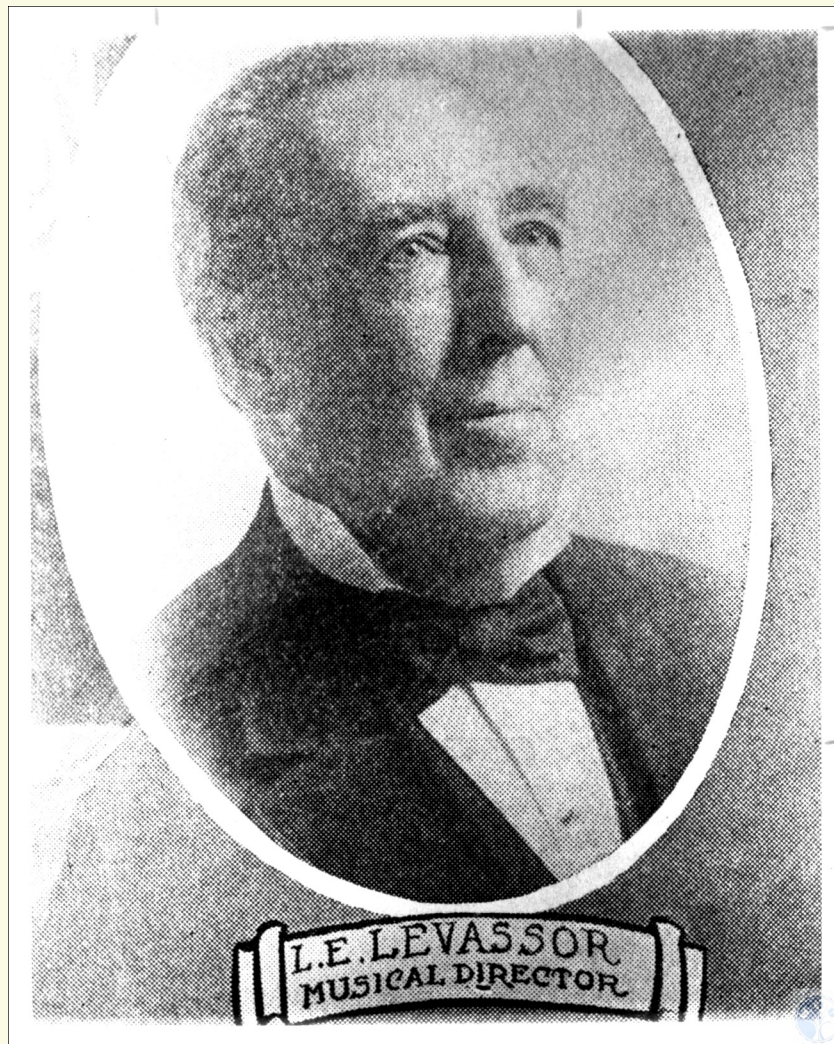


Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society

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An Overview of Kenton County
Covington's First Family of Music
The Levassors of Wallace Woods

An Overview of Kenton County

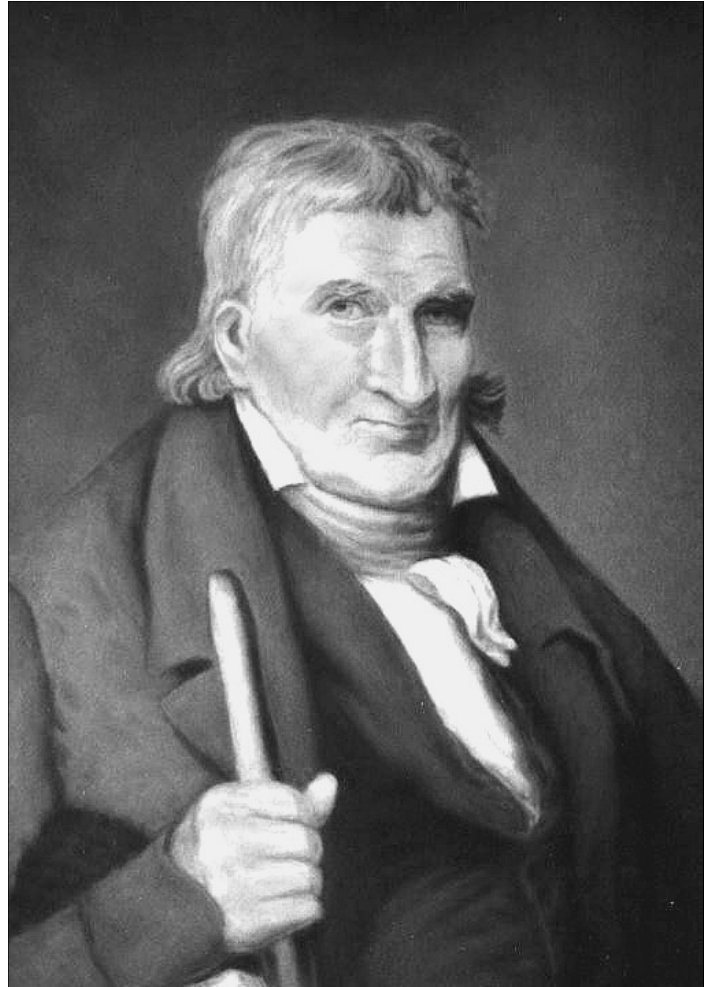
Karl Lietzenmayer

Kenton County is the 90th county in order of formation, established in 1840. Named after Simon Kenton, frontiersman, this northern Kentucky county of 163 square miles lies between Boone on the west and Campbell on the east, where it borders the Licking River. It touches Pendleton and Grant Counties in the south and the Ohio River in the north.¹ It is very appropriate the county lies just east of Boone County, since Kenton and Daniel Boone were companions on many explorations and hunting parties. This area was a vast hunting area to Shawnee, Mingo, Miami, and other tribes for hundreds of years.

Although it is suspected that some French explorers, such as Robert LaSalle, may have touched the Kenton County shore, most surveys about the history of Kenton County begin with a mention of the first European visitor, Christopher Gist. His adventure deserves more than a mention. In 1751, Gist and his companions were hired to survey this wilderness for the Ohio Company – a land development company chartered by the British King George III. Gist is considered the first to survey the lands that would become Kentucky. After Gist completed his mission, he reported to the company as follows:

“It is well watered with a great number of little streams and rivulets and full of beautiful meadows, covered with wild rye, blue grass and clover, and abounds with turkeys, deer, elk, and most sorts of game, particularly buffaloes, thirty or forty of which are frequently seen feeding in one meadow. In short, it wants nothing but cultivation to make it a most delightful country”²

In 1765, after the conclusion of the French and Indian War (1763), another surveyor, deputy Indian agent George Croghan, followed in Gist’s footsteps and visited the mouth of the Licking River. He was well-educated in Dublin and marveled at the bones around Big Bone Lick, and carried away a large number. In 1773, a third party of surveyors from Ft.



Simon Kenton

courtesy: the Kenton County Public Library

Pitt (Pittsburgh), led by Captain Thomas Bullitt and Hancock Taylor, arrived at The Point – the confluence of the Licking with the Ohio River.³

Throughout pioneer times, The Point became a most significant mustering point for pioneer militia since it was a spot easily recognizable through the endless river and forest which comprised everything viewed in the pioneer Ohio Valley. On the western side of the mouth of the Licking, The Point was easily identified as the Licking was the only north-flowing stream in the area.

The Licking River (or as the Shawnee termed it, Nepernine River, while early Europeans simply called it the Great Salt Creek)⁴ is one of three pre-glacial streams flowing north in eastern North America. The New River in West Virginia is dated to be one of the oldest streams in America. In Kentucky, the Licking as well as the Kentucky River at Carrollton are geologically millions of years old.

Kentucky, as the western portion of the Virginia Colony, was organized as part of Fincastle County, Virginia. On December 31, 1776, the Virginia Assembly recognized Kentucky as a separate county.⁵ As Kentucky's population grew, more counties were formed to serve the new citizens and in 1780 Kentucky County was divided into three counties: Fayette, Jefferson and Lincoln. By 1794 – two years after statehood – the area later known as Kenton County was part of Campbell County.

Meanwhile, The Point saw much activity in mustering of troops to respond to Indian attacks. After repeated attempts to subdue the Native Americans, a decisive operation was headed by Major General Anthony Wayne. In 1792, he headed a force that eventually numbered 16,000 Kentucky militia. Wayne was determined his troops were well prepared and drilled them at Fort Washington (located at present Third & Broadway, Cincinnati). However, the area was not suited for training such a large group so he moved the training ground west to Mill Creek and also sent four companies of light dragoons to the southern shore of the Ohio for training. Among the officers was Lt. Leonard W. Covington who trained the cavalry.⁶ The training continued all summer where Covington's Riverside Drive now exists until the force became a true army. It is ironic Leonard Covington operated on the very ground that 23 years later was the beginnings of a town in his memory.

Wayne led this formidable force to northern Ohio to engage the Indians in a final decisive attack known as the "Battle of Fallen Timbers." This was the first time mounted cavalry battled the Indians, and the skill and heroism of Lieutenant Covington was praised by many Kentuckians. As a Major General, he was mourned by many after his fatal wound at the battle of Chrysler's Field in 1813.

By 1801, Thomas Kennedy and his brother Francis operated a ferry across the Ohio and owned the approximate 200 acres known as Kennedy's Farm. They eventually built a stone tavern near the present George Rogers Clark Park which became the terminus of a stage coach route to Lexington, chartered by Abner Gaines.

In 1814, Kennedy sold 150 acres of the property for \$50,000 to investors Thomas Carneal and Richard and John Stites Gano, who established the town of Covington in 1815 and platted the first six numbered streets southward, and named the north-south streets after the first five governors of the Commonwealth.⁷ Kennedy was intent to keep the ferry, his stone tavern, and 50 acres along the Ohio riverbank, however, the developers signed a separate agreement with Kennedy to purchase his remaining property for an additional \$30,000.⁸ Thomas and his wife Dinah moved to their new home at Sixth and Greenup where they lived out their lives, passing away in 1821.⁹

Sales of Covington lots went well until the Panic of 1819, when the land boom collapsed due to an inordinate supply of paper money. Along with the collapse of the land boom, nationally as well, river commerce was hampered by three years (1818-1820) of low water, less than ten years after steamboats began sailing the western waters in 1811.

By 1820, John Gano's son, Aaron, established a fine home at The Point. Today the oldest structure in Covington is known as the Carneal House, but there is little evidence that Thomas Carneal had much to do with it. The palatial home is in Federal style and influenced by the Italian architect Andrea Palladio. Aaron and his family resided in the home until 1825 when William Wright and Adeliza Keen Southgate acquired it. The Southgates built an addition to the rear and entertained many notable guests. Even though the Marquise de Lafayette passed through Kenton County and Covington in 1825, the guest list did not include Lafayette since the Southgates had just attended a reception for him as he passed through Lexington at Adeliza's family home, Keenland.¹⁰ The Marquis was anxious to visit Cincinnati. He disembarked his coach at Kennedy's Tavern

and was immediately rowed across the Ohio by troops from Newport Barracks.

The afore-mentioned stage coach route required adequate roads on which to travel. The Covington-Lexington Turnpike underwent limited improvements throughout this early period. The road, one of the earliest into central Kentucky, was approximately the route of present-day Dixie Highway (US 25). Beginning piece-meal as sections of macadamized [crushed stone] road privately maintained as toll turnpikes, the resultant connected road called the Covington-Lexington Turnpike was re-designated the Dixie Highway in 1915. At that time the roads were assigned number designations and were paved with concrete.¹¹ This route was the main road from southern Kenton County along with KY 17 (3-L Highway). The origin of the term “3L” for KY Route 17, originally known as Banklick Pike, is somewhat of an enigma. The term first appeared in the 1920s. Local historian Robert Webster’s research has determined the “Ls” stand for Louisville, Lexington, and Latonia. However, he found that no one outside of Kenton County – except for a small section of US 27 in Pendleton County – ever used that term. The term for the triangular route was used by those in the horse racing circuit to designate the three main tracks visited by traveling equestrians.¹²

The Latonia track (1883- 1940) was one of the nation’s premier race courses and during the 1920s the Latonia Derby paid more than the more famous derby at Churchill Downs.¹³ The track was named after a health spa that opened in the 1830s at the intersection of Highland and Banklick Pikes. Up through the Civil War it was a popular place to “take the waters” for Southern plantation owners, as they could bring their house slaves without much risk of their running away to Ohio. In those days, this was a remote location.¹⁴

With improvement of roads and development of more reliable steamboats, Kenton (Campbell) County residents established several industries. The first appeared in 1828 when the Covington Cotton Mill was opened. Soon afterward, a rolling mill, a pottery factory, and tobacco warehouses sprang up. One of the frequent cholera epidemics slowed growth

in 1832, the same year as the 50-year reunion at The Point for of pioneer militia who fought with George Rogers Clark at Blue Licks. Fear of cholera was so great that few attended.¹⁵

The population of the western area of Campbell County grew in numbers and influence. By 1840, there was increasing political pressures for the establishment of a new county west of the Licking River. The river, while providing a water route for easy access into Kentucky, also acted as a barrier from Newport, where the courthouse stood. Opposition, primarily from the Whigs, to this division centered in the urban areas – Covington, in particular. The proponents, mostly Democrats, of a new county concentrated their petition efforts to the rural sections and soon presented 1,304 signatures to a sympathetic Frankfort legislature on August 23, 1839.¹⁶ The urban Whig opponents viewed this as an attempt by Democrats to split the urban vote and strengthen their rural base. Opponents to the new county included many well-known prominent citizens of Covington: Bushrod Foley, John Finley, Mortimer M. Benton, James Clarkson, William Wright Southgate, P. S. Bush, Herman Groesbeck, Jefferson Phelps, James Arnold and the present mayor Moses Grant.¹⁷ These gentlemen criticized the legislature in accepting the petition rather than conducting a referendum. Nevertheless, in spite of a Whig governor, the overwhelmingly Democratic legislature was happy to accept the petition and Kenton County was formed – the only county in America named for this intrepid pioneer.

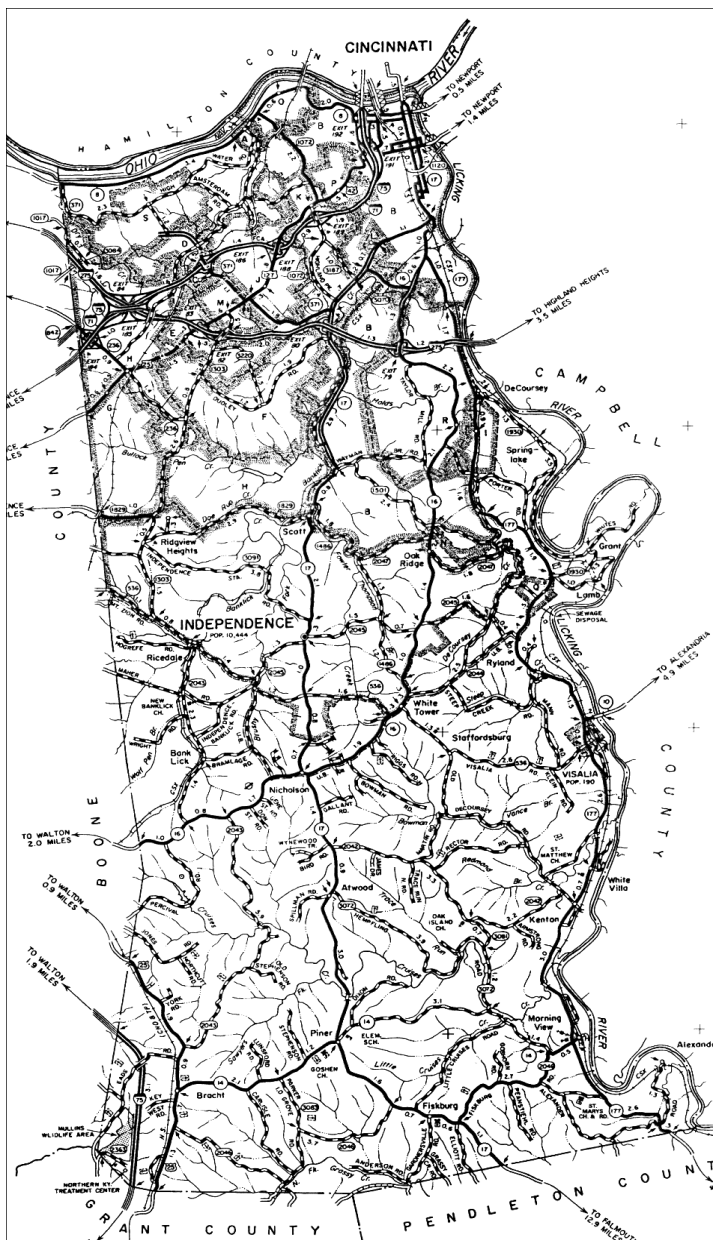
Shortly after formation, a Kenton County commission was appointed by the legislature to establish a new county seat. John McCollum signed over five acres of his land, located in a small, centrally located hamlet within the new region. The Democratically controlled commission quickly accepted and named the village Independence, to celebrate the new county’s separation from Campbell.¹⁸ A courthouse was erected that stood until replaced by the present structure in 1911.

Although Independence was chosen as the seat of government, most of the county’s population resided in the northern portion and found access to

their courthouse difficult. Throughout the next decade, complaints about the remoteness of the Independence location and petitions to correct the situation were sent to Frankfort. The most radical proposal was a petition to redraw the boundaries of Kenton and Campbell, to divide the urban areas from the rural sections and lay out the county boundary with an east-west line, cutting the land horizontally rather than vertically at the Licking River.¹⁹ Nothing came of this petition but by 1860, it was announced that the Kenton Circuit Court would begin meeting in Covington, followed by the establishment of an office to record deeds and mortgages.²⁰ This, in effect, established two locations for the seat of government. Kenton is today one of only two Kentucky counties with such an arrangement – the other is Campbell.

During the Civil War, U. S. Grant's parents resided in Covington and during the Andrew Johnson and Grant administrations, Jesse Grant was Covington Postmaster. During this time, the county's prominent families were split between support of the Confederacy and the Union – as were many Kentucky families. For example, Amos Shinkle, the county's richest man, was a strong Union man and raised a regiment for the war effort while Henry Bruce, equally wealthy, supported the Confederacy with significant funds and sent money to the Columbus, Ohio penitentiary to bribe the jailer into releasing John Hunt Morgan after his capture.²¹

Transportation improved with river traffic and better roads, as well as with the construction of the Covington and Lexington Railroad. Chartered in 1834, the C&L was completed to Covington by 1854.²² Known as the Kentucky Central Railroad, this line was crucial in supplying the Cincinnati area's meatpacking industry with hogs for the slaughterhouses. Even though Cincinnati acquired the nickname "Porkopolis" because of the prevalent meatpacking industry, in the 1850s the largest meatpacking plant was actually in Kenton County with the Milward and Oldershaw Company on the Licking River shore.²³ The Kentucky Central rail line terminated at Pike and Washington Streets in Covington, and goods were ferried across the Ohio River until the completion of the Roebling Suspension Bridge in



1914 Map of Kenton County

Note: This map (20"x32") is available for purchase from the Society

1867.²⁴ Since the Roebling Bridge was not a railroad bridge, cargo still had to be transferred by wagon from the Washington Street terminus until the line was purchased by the Louisville & Nashville Railroad and a rail bridge spanned the Ohio River in 1872. Other lines such as the Southern Railroad crossed from Ludlow in 1877. The Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad bridge added service from western Covington in 1888.

With railroad development, industries of all sort established themselves in Kenton County and its eastern neighbor, Campbell. Such nationally recog-

nized firms as Hemingray Glass, manufacturers of bottles, jars and telephone insulators [since re-located to Indiana]; R. A. Jones Company, developer of automatic filling equipment for various uses; and Stewart Iron Works, maker of decorative iron fencing, found a home in Kenton County. Added to these were various breweries and distilleries, iron mills (on both sides of the Licking River), art-bronze, stained glass, bag makers, rope manufacturers and brick and lumber yards.²⁵

During the nineteenth century, Kenton County was home to its share of immigrants – mostly German and Irish. These families, as well as their descendants, were largely responsible for the commercial growth of the county and the entire region as a whole.

After World War II, even though the county prospered, Covington experienced an economic decline as the population shifted to new suburbs southward. Today, most of Covington is experiencing a renaissance, whereby most of the neighborhoods are now on the National Registry. Interstate 75 runs through Kenton County, adding an enormous attraction for business location. The county now owns the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport [CVG], even though it is located in Boone County. At the time of its development, Boone County lacked the resources and Kenton County stepped up to provide funding to develop the former World War II air training base.²⁶

Two of the largest employers in the county today are the Internal Revenue Center and Fidelity Investments. Congressman Brent Spence (1874-1967), as chairman of the House Banking Committee, was influential in acquiring the IRS Center. Fidelity established themselves in Covington in 1994 after receiving generous tax relief from local and state government.²⁷ Although Independence is no longer a hamlet, there are still a number of small towns in the southern portion of the county. Communities such as Morning View, Piner, Fiskburg, Bracht and Benton Station still retain their small town charm. At the same time, Covington, and to a lesser extent, Ludlow, have retained much of their nineteenth century housing and commercial structures as well.

1. John E. Kleber, editor, *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*, (University Press of Kentucky, 1992) "Kenton County," page 488.
2. Stoddard J. Johnson, *First Explorations of Kentucky*, (Filson Club, 1898). Quoted in John Burns *History of Covington to 1865- Volume I* (unpublished manuscript, edited by Kenton County Historical Society) Chapter 2, page 2.
3. John Burns, *A History of Covington to 1865- Volume I*, (unpublished manuscript, edited by Kenton County Historical Society, 1986) Chapter 2, page 2.
4. Burns, Chapter 2, page 1.
5. Thomas D. Clark, *A History of Kentucky* (The Jesse Stuart Foundation, Ashland, KY, 1992) 46. Also: Kleber, "Kentucky County," page 495.
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7. Paul Tenkotte & James Claypool, editors, *The Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*, (University Press of Kentucky, 2009) "Covington," page 233.
8. Deed Book D-1, Campbell County Courthouse, Alexandria, pages 303 & 305. Also: Burns, page 259.
9. Tenkotte & Claypool, "Kennedy, Thomas," page 502.
10. Tenkotte & Claypool, "Gano-Southgate House," page 386. Also: Karl Lietzenmayer, "Lafayette Urban Legends," (*Northern Kentucky Heritage*, XVI, #2) page 24.
11. Tenkotte & Claypool, "Dixie Highway," page 274.
12. Robert D. Webster, "Origin of the 3-L Highway," *The Bulletin* (Kenton County Historical Society, May/June 2010) pages 4 & 5.
13. James C. Claypool, "Old Latonia Race Track – 1883-1939," (*Northern Kentucky Heritage*, VI, #1) page 3.
14. Dr. Joseph Gastright, "Latonia Springs," (*Kenton County Historical Society Quarterly Review*, April 1981) page 2.
15. Tenkotte & Claypool, "Covington," page 233.
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17. *The Western Globe*, Covington, 20 Jan 1840; 4 Mar 1840.
18. *Kenton County Centennial Souvenir Program*, 14-23 June 1940.
19. Burns, "A New County," page 362.
20. Burns, "A New County," page 363.
21. Stephen McMurtry, "Henry Bruce & Gen. John Hunt Morgan," (*Northern Kentucky Heritage*, XII, #2) page 8.
22. Tenkotte & Claypool, "Railroads," page 745.
23. Kenton County Historical Society, *The Bulletin*, November 2002, page 3.
24. Tenkotte & Claypool, "Kentucky Central Railroad," page 511.
25. Tenkotte & Claypool, "Kenton County," page 507.
26. Tenkotte & Claypool, "Airports," page 15. Also: www.cvgairport.com/about/history/index.html
27. Tenkotte & Claypool, "Internal Revenue Service Center," page 478; and "Fidelity Investments," pages 325 & 326.

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Covington's First Family of Music

The Levassors of Wallace Woods

Allison Jones

Other than residents of Wallace Woods, few Northern Kentuckians are aware that Covington's founding fathers included French immigrant, Eugene Levassor. During the French Revolution and following Napoleon Bonaparte's defeat in 1815, a large wave of French immigrants left France for America. Many of these immigrants traveled to America by way of French colonies in the Caribbean. Eugene Levassor was one of these immigrants. Born in Rouen France in 1789, Eugene Levassor was reputed to have served as a captain under Bonaparte. After Bonaparte's downfall, Levassor fled France, first arriving in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean, and finally to America in the early 1820s. His wife, Sofia, son, Armand, and daughter, Clara accompanied him on his journey.¹

Before making his way to Northern Kentucky, Levassor settled for a short time in Virginia (presently West Virginia). He remained there long enough to purchase large tracts of land that were rich in minerals. He retained ownership of this land when he moved to Cincinnati, becoming what was referred to at the time as a land baron. As an absentee land owner, Levassor hoarded land for several years preventing settlement, only to sell the land to coal companies for a great profit. While in Cincinnati, Levassor relied on agents to maintain his West Virginia property in the counties of Kanawha, Lincoln, Jackson, Wood, Wirt, and Monongalia. At the time of his death, Levassor owned nearly 5,000 acres of land in the state.²

Clara Levassor also tied her father to West Virginia. While still in France, Clara was courted by Joseph H. Debar. Although sources point to the downfall of Bonaparte as the reason for the Levassor migration, others suggest that Debar's intense pursuit of Clara was reason for the move! In any case, Debar followed the Levassors to America and reconnected with Clara in Cincinnati. The two married and

moved to Parkersburg, West Virginia, where Debar made a living advertising the land he dubbed "the Switzerland of America" throughout Europe. Debar was such a prominent figure in the development of West Virginia that when it officially became a state in 1863, he was commissioned to design the state's coat of arms and seal. Clara and Debar had one child, Joseph, but Clara died during the birth and he was sent to Cincinnati to be raised by her family.³

The Levassor family lived in Columbia, Ohio, just east of Cincinnati (present day Eastern Avenue and Columbia Parkway). Levassor bought and sold land in Ohio and Northern Kentucky. In Kentucky, he owned land around Latonia Springs, Banklick Pike, and in 1833, purchased sixty-one acres of land in Covington, including the land where he would eventually build Levassor Place (in present day Wallace Woods). Levassor Place was originally known as Eugene Street. Levassor ran a grocery and dry goods store at 74 Lower Market Street in Cincinnati from 1829 to 1845.⁴

It was in Columbia where Eugene Levassor would meet fellow Wallace Woods founder, Daniel Holmes. Holmes came to the area in 1818. Both of his parents had died and the boy, who was 2 years old at the time, had been sent to live with his uncle, Samuel Holmes. Samuel and Eugene Levassor were neighbors in Columbia, and Daniel Holmes became a playmate of the Levassor children. From the Levassors, Holmes learned French, an attribute that would later significantly help in his career as a businessman in New Orleans, and Levassor taught Holmes how to play the flute. As a young man, Daniel Holmes worked as a clerk in Levassor's dry goods store. Levassor mentored Holmes, who grew up to be a prominent businessman in his own right.⁵

In 1845, Eugene Levassor retired from active work as a merchant and in 1850, the family moved

to Covington. By this time, Robert Wallace, for whom the subdivision of Wallace Woods is named, had settled his land at Longwood, the Wallace Estate. In April 1855, Daniel Holmes, who had gone to work for the Lord and Taylor Department Store and had made his fortune in New Orleans by opening his own business – Holmes Department Stores – had returned to Northern Kentucky to build his home. He bought land adjacent to Levassor's in Wallace Woods. Together, these three men would establish Wallace Woods and become prominent figures in Northern Kentucky.⁶

The families of Wallace Woods shared an active social life and an appreciation for the arts, especially music. The families enjoyed private musical performances, and several members of the families were accomplished musicians: Robert Wallace was a violinist; Daniel Holmes played the flute; and his daughter, Georgine, played the piano. Each of the Wallace Woods families had an elaborate music room built in their homes, and because of their prominence in the community, it was not out of the ordinary for the families to entertain famous friends. Musicians, like Professor Tosso, [see NKH, XVI, No. 2, page 23 for a discussion of Joseph Tosso] often stopped by to entertain or be entertained.⁷

The Levassors, however, were the most musically inclined. Eugene Levassor played the piano and the flute. Eugene's son, a pianist, owned a piano manufacturing business. Eugene's grandsons were truly the prominent musicians of the family. Charles Levassor, the youngest son of Armand, was a flutist and organist. One of his most notable performances came at the Covington Odd Fellows Hall in 1866. A newspaper review of the performance noted that, "he showed a knowledge of music and of the instrument which promised to produce him a performer of first class abilities." Charles also received attention from music critics when he accompanied Tosso, the famous violinist and classical music composer, at a concert in Latonia Springs.⁸

In addition to rubbing elbows with famous musicians in his social network, Charles Levassor was for a long time connected to the music publishers and dealers of Dobmeyer & Newhall, a well estab-

lished music store in Cincinnati. The store was established in 1838 by William C. Peters, a pioneer in the music industry in Cincinnati. At this time, Cincinnati was recognized as a leader in the arts, and Dobmeyer & Newhall served as a common center for exchange of views and musical discussions for musicians in the area. Later, Charles's older brother, Louis, worked at this influential music store as well.⁹

Charles Levassor, an accomplished musician with superior ability, never had the opportunity to achieve the renown enjoyed by his older brother, Louis. Charles died on October 26, 1875, aged 24 years. Approximately 10 years prior to his death, during a Fourth of July visit to extended family in the Walnut Hills area of Cincinnati, young Charles was accidentally shot in the eye by a playmate. The ball was never extracted and its presence, coupled with a severe cold settling on his lungs, was the reported cause of death.¹⁰

Louis Levassor became a nationally renowned organist. The brothers had grown up surrounded by professional and amateur musicians, getting the opportunity to learn from them, play with them, and perform for them. Like Charles, Louis Levassor played accompaniments for Professor Tosso as a child. Additionally, Louis was the organizer of the Concert at Odd Fellows Hall where Charles gave his most acclaimed performance. At Odd Fellows Hall, Louis performed solos, played in several duets, and accompanied almost every vocalist at the event.¹¹

In April 1867, Louis co-founded the Harmonic Society of Covington. Because of his stature in the Greater Cincinnati music scene, Louis was selected to serve as the Society's first president. The purpose of the Society was to promote the spread of music in the city, however, Levassor's musical reach extended much farther than the city of Covington. Levassor, who at this time was recognized nationally as an accomplished organist, was recruited to participate in the nation's Centennial celebration in 1876.¹² The national Centennial celebration was held in Philadelphia, but was eagerly covered in the Covington newspapers. As *The Ticket* proudly proclaimed, Louis Levassor was giving pianoforte performances daily at the exposition. His recitals were reputed to

be among the best attended of any show given at the celebration. Moreover, *The Ticket* shared the notice Levassor received in other papers noting that the Philadelphia press paid Levassor a high compliment on his “exquisite piano playing”. . . mentioning among other pieces, the new Bijou Champagne Gallop, a “different and brilliant composition.”¹³

After the Centennial celebration in Philadelphia, Levassor returned home to Covington. He began working in the piano and organ department of Dobmeyer & Newhall, where Charles had previously worked. Later, he went into business for himself, opening a piano store, L. E. Levassor Piano and Organ Company in Cincinnati. Louis Levassor continued performing around the city. In October 1880, he gave a piano recital at the Lindeman Brothers’ Exhibit at an Exposition in Covington. As with his performance at the Centennial, the Lindeman Brothers’ Exhibit was well attended and Levassor intrigued the audience with his ability to play challenging pieces.¹⁴

Eugene Levassor died on May 22, 1880 at the age of 92, and Levassor Place was left to Armand, who continued to reside in the home until his passing in 1906. Upon his father’s death, Louis Levassor inherited ownership of Levassor Place, however, the estate was divided after long legal matters between he and his cousin, Clara’s nephew, Joseph Debar.

Expanding on the music room built by his grandfather, Louis Levassor added a \$20,000 pipe organ; the pipes were mounted on the walls of the room! Louis continued to host galas and perform musical pieces for audiences.¹⁵

Aside from his acknowledgment in the music world, Levassor also had a reputation as a magician; his collection included some 5,000 items from all over the world. Among his most noted possessions was a skull with a hinged jaw that would speak “spirit” messages seemingly beyond the control of any mortal hand. He demonstrated his talents as a magician, and exhibited his fascinating props to some of the most famous magicians of the time, including Houdini and Thurston.¹⁶ In addition to the elaborate music room, the third floor of Levassor Place also contained a theater where Louis performed his won-

derful magic shows for local children. The stage of the theater was covered with wires that Levassor used to create his illusions.

Active in several organizations in Covington, Louis Levassor used his musical gifts and music room to support and delight his fellow members. He was a fourth-degree Knight of Columbus and a former grand navigator of the Covington Lodge. He was also a member of the Holy Name Society of the Cathedral, and a member of St. Mary Cathedral, then located at 8th Street in Covington. He belonged to the ELKS Benevolent and Protective Order of Covington. He served terms as the ELKS vice president and as president. Many of the ELKS social gatherings were held at the Levassor family home. He hosted a grand gala for the ELKS statewide convention in 1913. Other performers were mentioned in the press coverage of the event, but the real entertainment was provided by Levassor. He performed a recital on the pipe organ and, according to the *Kentucky Post*, “nothing was left undone for the entertainment of hundreds of guests.”¹⁷ Given the history of the musical exhibitions he had hosted and the reputation he had earned as one of the nation’s top organists, it is not surprising that Louis Levassor was asked to serve as the musical director for Covington’s Centennial Celebration in 1914. The celebration ran from September 13 to 19. As the grandson of one of the city’s early families and a life-long citizen of Covington, Louis Levassor represented the city well, performing his beautiful score, *Covingtonia* at the Lyric Theater each night during the event.¹⁸

Louis Levassor died after a short illness on February 5, 1930 at his Victorian home at Greenup and Levassor Place. The magnificent house still stands today. His passing marked the death of the last descendants of the Eugene Levassor family and the original residents and founders of Wallace Woods. Because of his continuous involvement in the music industry, Levassor’s influence continued on after his death. At the Levassor estate auction in April 1946, a collection of sheet music belonging to Levassor was sold to a musician. This collection comprised thousands of operatic scores and songs, some pieces of which were in French and Latin. Throughout his musical career, Levassor served as a mentor to many young musicians, as noted in the number of

A Look Back at The Headlines

An on-going feature reliving local headlines

This issue features:

The Ticket – November 20, 1875.

Local Matters

“A fair for the benefit of St. Aloysius Church at the corner of 8th and Bakewell Streets commenced Thursday night at the Odd Fellows Hall and will continue for two weeks.”

“From fifteen to twenty citizens enrolled their names as volunteer firemen in each of the fire districts Wednesday night.”

“Parties holding keys to this city’s fire boxes are requested not to allow alarms to be turned in unless there is good cause for it.”

“The reflection of the light from the Licking Rolling Mill upon Wilson’s Pork House last evening about 6 o’clock caused some men to think the latter building was on fire, and an alarm was turned in from box 42 corner of Twelfth and Stevens Streets.”

“The Cynthiana News says that coal has been discovered in Harrison County, in the neighborhood of Antioch, ten miles out of Cynthiana. The extent of the mine is not yet known. The Falmouth Independent also makes mention of the discovery and the partial working of another coal mine in Pendleton County.”

“We learn with pleasure that O. B. Hallam, Esq., has assumed editorial control of the Newport Free Press. Mr. Hallam is not without experience as a newspaper writer and we anticipate for him a successful career as a journalist. Our best wishes attend him.”

“Small Pox is reported as prevailing in Louisville to an alarming extent, while Georgetown states a limited spread of the disease.”

Levassor — continued

works that were dedicated to him during this time. Lastly, in his letter book, Levassor described a device which he designed and sold in his music store, referred to as the dactylion. The dactylion was a finger-exercising device for pianists, which was worn to strengthen hands and fingers. Levassor sold his dactylion to musicians throughout the country. In addition, the dactylion was also sold to and used by many churches and schools of music.

The Levassor family’s influence on Northern Kentucky is much more than Eugene Levassor’s role in founding Wallace Woods. For three generations, the Levassors helped shape the enjoyment of music in Covington and beyond. They touched the hearts of many and inspired future generations of musicians.

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2. Wilma A. Dunaway, *The First American Frontier: Transition to Capitalism in Southern Appalachia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 65.; Information on the names of the counties where Eugene Levassor owned land came from an abstract of the Eugene Levassor Papers held in the West Virginia and Regional History Collection at West Virginia University in Morgantown, West Virginia, call number A & M No. 1363.
3. West Virginia Department of Archives and History, “West Virginia History Volume 28,” State Department of Archives and History, 228-9.; Ken Sullivan, *The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, 1st ed (Charleston: The West Virginia Humanities Council, 2006), 197-8.
4. Gastright, 13.; “Cincinnati Directory for the Year 1829,” Cincinnati: Robinson and Fairbank, 1829.
5. Paul A. Tenkotte and James C. Claypool, *The Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*, 1st ed (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 544-5.
6. Gastright, 27.
7. Gastright, 31-2.; “Old House is Filled with Glorious Memories,” *Kentucky Post* (Covington, KY), Sept. 15, 1929.
8. Jim Reis, “Levassor’s Grandfather Knew Mozart,” *Kentucky Post* (Covington, KY), Dec. 13, 1999.; “Concert at Odd Fellows Hall,” *Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, OH), May 21, 1866.
9. Kenny Daniel, *Cincinnati Illustrated* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke and Company, 1879), 128.; “On Sunday Evening, Mr. Charles Levassor Second Son of Armand and Grandson of Eugene Died,” *Ticket* (Covington, KY), Oct. 26, 1875.
10. “On Sunday Evening, Mr. Charles Levassor Second Son of Armand and Grandson of Eugene Died,” *Ticket* (Covington, KY), Oct. 26, 1875.
11. “Concert at Odd Fellows Hall,” *Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, OH), May 21, 1866.; “Old House is Filled with Glorious Memories,” *Kentucky Post* (Covington, KY), Sept. 15, 1929.
12. “Elected President of the Harmonic Society,” *Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, OH), Apr. 4, 1867.; “Louis Levassor Leaves for Philadelphia,” *Ticket* (Covington, KY), Apr. 20, 1876.
13. “Centennial Music Notes (Recital at Exposition Daily),” *Ticket* (Covington, KY), Aug. 12, 1876.; “Philadelphia Paper Praised Mr. Levassor,” *Ticket* (Covington, KY), Sept. 7, 1876.
14. “Louis Levassor Returned,” *Ticket* (Covington, KY), Dec. 22, 1876.; “Concert at Exposition,” *Daily Commonwealth* (Covington, KY), Oct. 2, 1880.
15. Gastright, 41.; “Levassor Place has Interesting History,” *Kentucky Post* (Covington, KY), May 15, 1927.
16. Gastright, 61.; Charles McLendon, “Old Time Magic: Huge Collection Shows Conjuring Devices Used by Stage Magicians of Yesteryear,” *Popular Science* 145, no. 4 (1944): 196-7.
17. “Death Calls Covington Pioneer,” *Kentucky Post* (Covington, KY), Feb. 6, 1930.; “Tipped as ELKS Head,” *Kentucky Post* (Covington, KY), June 23, 1915.; “ELKS Prepare to Close Big Convention,” *Kentucky Post* (Covington, KY), Aug. 21, 1913.
18. “Covington Resident is Musical Director of Centennial Exposition,” *Kentucky Post* (Covington, KY), Aug. 11, 1914.; “Covington Centennial in 1914 Was Notable Event in History,” *Kentucky Post* (Covington, KY), Apr. 13, 1934.
19. “Death Calls Covington Pioneer,” *Kentucky Post* (Covington, KY), Feb. 6, 1930.; Information on Louis Levassor’s dactylion came from the Louis Levassor Letterbook housed at the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus Ohio.

Then and Now



Similar views looking north from the intersection of Court Street and Park Place in Covington.
The left image circa 1920, right image 2012.

Left photo courtesy Kenton County Public Library. Right photo courtesy Bob Webster.

Mystery Photo

Can you identify the mystery photo below? The answer can be found at the bottom of the page.



ANSWER:

Once the historic Park Hotel, now the office of the Lawrence Firm, 6th and Philadelphia Sts..

photo courtesy Bob Webster

Kenton County Historical Society

July-August - 2012

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I Bet You Didn't Know

*Tidbits from Kentucky's heritage
for every day of the calendar year*

July 23, 1966: The Cumberland National Forest was renamed in honor of Kentucky's most famous trailblazer, Daniel Boone.

August 4, 1984: Elmer Smith died in a nursing home in Columbia, Kentucky. He was the first baseball player in history to hit a grand slam home run during a world series game (1920).

August 11, 1787: The first issue of the *Kentucky Gazette* was printed in Lexington. Published and edited by John Bradford, it was the first newspaper in Kentucky.

August 13, 1919: Famous race-horse Man O' War met his only defeat. It came at the Sanford Stakes race at Saratoga and the horse's name was Upset.

"On This Day In Kentucky" — Robert Powell

Programs and Notices

Behringer-Crawford Museum Events

To August 12: **Wolfgang Ritschel Exhibit.** Visitors to the museum may have seen a few of his paintings noted for deep colors. Stop by and enjoy a wonderfully-colorful display of his talent.

September 8 to January 20, 2013: **The Battle that Never Occurred: The Civil War in Northern Kentucky.** Relive September of 1862, when Confederate forces approached Cincinnati but fortifications from Ludlow to Fort Thomas helped turn them back.

Kenton County Fair — July 16th to the 21st

The Society will once again participate in the Kenton County Fair with an exhibition booth. Please make plans to stop by sometime through the week and see our display on local history and look through our maps and publications.

Muster on the Kentucky

The Kentucky National Guard and various organizations in Frankfort are teaming up to put on a commemorative event to bring Kentucky's part in the War of 1812 back into the eyes of the public. Events include an official wreath laying, artillery battery salute with reenactors with Kentucky Rifles, trail naming ceremony, and gala dinner. The Muster on Kentucky will be held June 22-24. For more information, phone Nicky Hughes at 502-229-9064 or email the coordinators at: frankforthisory@yahoo.com.

Music at the Museum

Great entertainment is once again available at the Behringer-Crawford Museum. \$5.00 admission fee. Visit www.bcmuseum.org for more information.

July 5: The Comet Bluegrass All-stars (bluegrass in the Bluegrass)

July 12: Roger Drawdy and the Firestarters (like a high-energy Belfast band)

July 19: The Sweet Beats (not John, Paul, George and Ringo — but the next best)

July 26: Son del Caribe (salsa and all Latin flavor)

Battery Hooper Days

The 8th annual Battery Hooper Days will be held August 18th and 19th. Located in Ft. Wright, Hooper Battery is one of the only remaining Civil War fortifications in the entire region. See (and hear) live canon demonstrations, period crafts, authentic soldier encampments, and much more during this wonderful event. Living history presenters include Abe Lincoln, Harriet Tubman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Generals Lew Wallace and Horatio Wright. Hours: Saturday 12 to 6; Sunday 12 to 5