

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bulletin

May 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 papers which could be of interest to KCHS members.

COMPUTER AVAILABLE

2001

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.

THANKS, DOTTIE, FOR VOLUNTEERING

A big thank you to Dottie for volunteering to help staple and label the monthly bulletins. Her generous help will be a big help. It takes approximately 15 minutes each month. Please call Jo Ann Brown 341-1085.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

To KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY in its 20th year celebration the month of April.

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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K. C. H. S. 20TH ANIVERSERY CELEBRATION!

DATE	Tuesday May 13
TIME	7 PM
PLACE	Brew Works, 3rd Floor 12th Street Covington

The historic old Bravarian Brewery building is the location for our anniversary celebration. A room which holds about 35 people has been reserved. BYOM (Bring your own money) for food and beer tastings.

Latonia Springs
by Joseph Gasright, April 1981
from KCHS collected Papers

In the summer of 1829, Ralph Letton told his contractor to hurry the work on the hotel at Latonia Springs [at Highland and Madison Pike]. Letton had families at Cincinnati waiting to occupy the rooms and begin to "take the waters." Letton was proprietor of the Western Museum in Cincinnati. He had purchased the land on the 4th of July from William Curry who had inherited rights to the parcel of land on his father's death in 1811.

However, the division of the family's 424 acres was not completed until 6 April 1826. The land was part of a 600 acre parcel made to Joseph Davis in 1785.

Hydrotherapy or "taking the waters" was widely prescribed medical treatment in 1829. Daniel Drake, Cincinnati's most respected physician, had published a review of Kentucky's mineral water spas in 1828. He described the medical benefits of the springs, but warned that the gambling and profligate living at some springs were liable to be more dangerous than the water was beneficial. He mentioned a newly discovered spring "only four miles from Cincinnati," which was located in a healthy place and which "had attracted considerable attention."

On 30 July 1830, Ralph Letton sold his 57 acres with the hotel to Elisha Morgan to \$8,000. Morgan, who realized the importance of high quality appurtenances, constructed a 50 room hotel, three stories high with 100 feet piazzas running the full length of the building. In back, he constructed a "large and splendid ballroom...for the person whose mind is tingled with romance." In 1833, the dreaded cholera epidemic made the spas of Kentucky financial as well as social successes.

Rich Southerners fled the heat, yellow fever, malaria, and worst of all cholera, for the dozens of Kentucky spas. The spas north of the Mason-Dixon Line could not accept the required domestic slave, and Kentucky blossomed as the social center of the South. Trading horses, political opinions, and marriageable daugh-

ters was significant business at the Latonia Springs, with a side trip to Cincinnati to buy manufactured goods.

The Latonia Springs was probably named after the goddess Leto, or in her Roman guise, Latonia. She was the mother of Apollo and Diana, and in Greek mythology, she was associated with a famous incident involving water, "Latonia and Rustics."

In the early 1840s, Doctor Stephen Mosher, an Eastern physician, purchased the springs from Morgan's heirs. The springs thrived in the period prior to the Civil War under Mosher's direction. In 1866, the springs were sold to Messrs, Walker and Gibson of Cincinnati's Gibson Hotel, who set up daily omnibus transportation to the springs.

For a time, Latonia Springs thrived without the Southern trade, but during the 1870s the old magic waned, and the owners installed "amusement devices" to attract business. A murder near the springs in 1879 roused the memory that the site was "at one time, one of the most popular summer resorts in the state" but also the reality of "a dilapidated wreck of its former prosperity."

Frank Northcutt, a local resident, attempted a revival of the springs in 1880. In 1882, the Latonia Agricultural Association developed a fairgrounds in the Milldale section of South Covington [presently Latonia Shopping Center]. The fairgrounds, named after the springs, developed into a nationally famous race track [Latonia Race Track]. In 1893, a small six block section in the Milldale [named after Charles Mills] incorporated as a sixth class city known as Latonia. By 1899, it had become a fifth class city.

The Latonia Springs did not thrive and 1891, Frank Wolfang leased the acreage to two former Cincinnati residents as the site of a dairy farm. Herman Summe and August Ratterman later purchased the land and used the spring water to cool their milk. Sometime about 1910, the springs ceased to flow and Summe and Ratterman built a modern milk processing plant on 20th Street in Covington. [One of the Rattermans began a salvage yard on some of the property.] For many years a picnic ground and later a tavern [Dickman's] survived on the site of the old hotel at the corner of Highland and Madison Pike. [Today a UDF store graces the site.]



dedicated to preserving our heritage as the "gateway to the south."
celebrating the society's twentieth year.

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P. O. Box 641
Covington, Kentucky 41012**

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