

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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KCHS MEETING

DATE Saturday
May 12, 2001

PLACE Chapel
Highland Cemetery
Dixie Highway
(across from Kroger Supermarket)
Ft. Mitchell, KY

Mr. Tom Honeybrink will discuss the history of Highland Cemetery and the many interesting people buried there.

Bulletin

May 2001

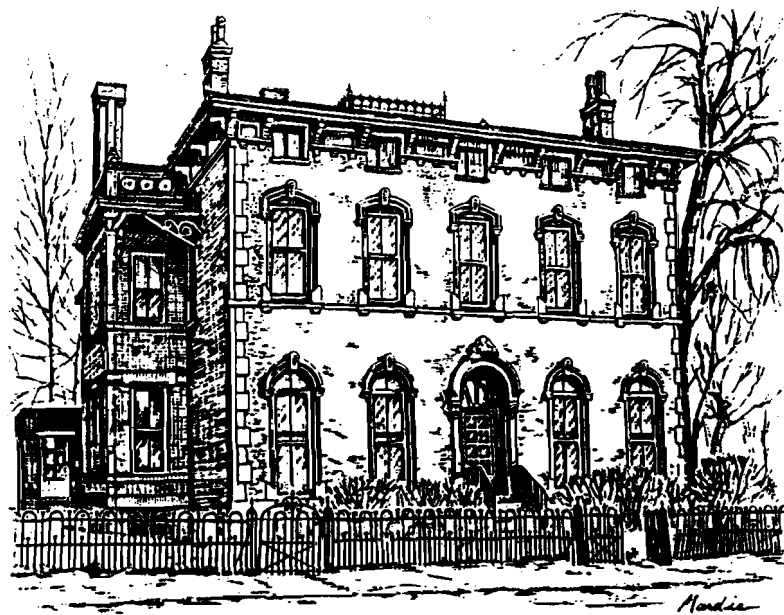
From the President.....

The Hearne House story in this month's Bulletin is indicative of many such proposals which threaten historic properties. One current project is the 12th Street widening in Covington. It is curious that some of the same arguments used to justify razing the Hearne House have been applied to the 12th Street project.

Much of the housing on 12th Street needs renovation and some is no doubt not worthy of rescuing, but the taking of over 50 structures and businesses is, in the final analysis, questionable. Is this more an "urban renewal" project that highway improvement?

The May program will be a tour of Highland Cemetery on Saturday, May 12. Members and friends are to meet at the cemetery chapel at 11 a.m. for a tour and history of one of Northern Kentucky's finest and most beautiful cemeteries.

Two items added to our published list are copies of pre-Civil War maps: one is dated 1842, the other is dated 1851. This is the first time these items have been available. A 3-year agreement has been signed with Cincinnati Historical Society, owner of the only remaining copies. The Kenton Society may produce copies as needed to satisfy orders. Write for prices and mailing requirements, as suitable mailing tubes have not yet been purchased.



The Hearne House
from *Historical Sketches of Northern Kentucky*
by Linda Mardis-Smith

Hearne House, Covington: A Treasure Repeatedly Threatened

by Leah Koniki

"Debate continues on Fifth Street Bridge Issue." "Plans Continue to Build Fifth Street Bridge."
"Hearing Must be Held on Fifth Street Bridge."

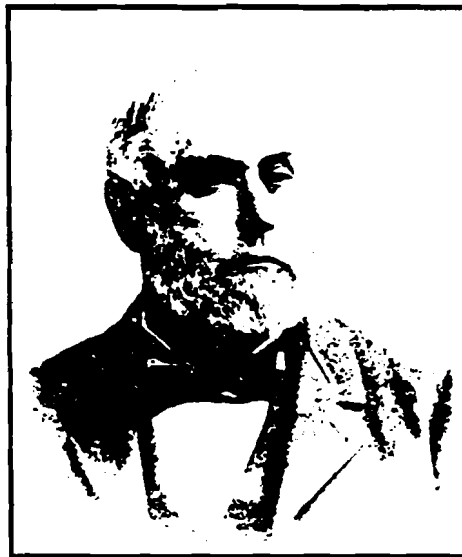
These headlines concerning a proposed bridge across the Licking River from Fifth Street in Covington to Fifth Street in Newport, requiring the demolition or relocation of Covington's historic Hearne House, are as fresh as yesterday, but are in fact from local papers in late 1977 and early 1978.

A bridge over the Licking River at Fifth Street was originally proposed by the Northern Kentucky Area Planning Commission in the mid-1960s.¹ By 1973, the Highway Department was on record with plans to build the bridge,² although they were at that time considering alternative alignments for the bridge, as well as relocating the house. A final option under consideration in 1973 was not building a bridge.

The Hearne House was listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.³ The individual listing of the Hearne House was done in part to recognize the importance of the building. Located on property that nineteenth century Covington businessman-banker Jonathan David Hearne bought from the Grosbeck estate, the house is believed to have been built in 1874. Politically a Whig, during the Civil War he was a Union man and a Republican. He was elected to the Covington City Council in 1872.

Jonathan D. Hearne was born in August 1829 in Bourbon County, Kentucky. After engaging in the dry-goods trade in Paris,

Kentucky for several years, he moved to Covington in 1863 and began manufacturing boots and shoes. In 1870, he became president of the Farmers' Bank of Covington; afterwards he helped re-organize the bank into the Covington City National Bank. J. D. Hearne died in 1905 and is buried in Highland Cemetery, Ft. Mitchell.



Jonathan David Hearne

The Hearne House is an excellent example of Italianate architecture, and is highlighted by round arched window openings and a bracketed cornice. Situated at the east end of Fifth Street, the house is a prominent marker of the Historic Licking Riverside Neighborhood. The listing of the property was also undertaken to ensure that federal historic preservation laws, which require that historic properties be taken into account when federal projects are planned, would be enforced.

In 1975, the Licking Riverside Historic District was listed in the National Register. Previously, in 1971, the Ohio Riverside District, beginning at the Ohio River to Fourth Street, had been listed. The Licking Riverside District, beginning at Fourth Street and extending south to Eighth Street, from the Licking River to the west side of Scott Boulevard, includes the Hearne House. Residents of this historic neighborhood were concerned that if the bridge were built, even if it spared the Hearne House, would have a negative impact on the historic character of the neighborhood. It was hoped that the listing would "throw a wrench in the works" of the Highway Department's plans for a bridge.⁴ Despite this listing, the highway Department continued its plans to build the bridge, which was at that time endorsed by the City of Covington.⁵

A few years later, in October 1977, Covington's non-profit business group then known as CURE (Covington Urban Renewal Effort) went on record endorsing the bridge, stating the "the vitality of the downtown is threatened now, without the bridge, because it's hard for patrons to enter the downtown business area."⁶ Neighborhood supporters argued that the "traffic statistics don't support the need for a new Fifth Street Bridge."⁷

Within a month, the owners of the house had reportedly re-

ceived a letter from the Transportation Department stating that the house would be taken. By that time, the Covington City Commission was on record opposing the bridge.⁸ According to newspaper reports at the time, the Highway Department had studied seven alternatives and concluded that a route continuing Fifth Street east was the most appropriate, and that this route would require the Hearne House to be either relocated or demolished. The bridge itself was projected to cost \$4.5 million. The cost of demolition to the house was estimated at \$12,000 while the cost of relocating the structure was estimated between \$257,000 and \$325,000.

A controversial meeting was held at the Highway Department's district headquarters, which resulted in plans for a public hearing. The hearing was held in mid-March 1978. Representatives from Newport, including then Mayor Johnny Peluso, went on record in support of the bridge, stating that "This bridge will make it easier for people to enter Newport: to support local business, and "this must be foremost in our minds and not one run-down house in Covington."⁹ Covington City Commission remained firm in its opposition to the bridge.¹⁰

During the summer of 1978, a representative of the federal Heritage Conservation Recreation Service, Chris Delaporte, toured Covington's historic neighborhoods and especially the Hearne House. At the end of his visit, he promised "to make a personal inquiry into the situation....when he returned to Washington."¹¹ Exactly what impact his visit and any follow up

may have had on the outcome of the proposal is not known at this time.

And then, the issue just seems to have disappeared. Recollections as to how a decision was made not to build a bridge across the Licking River at Fifth Street vary. According to Terry Hughes, City Engineer for the City of Covington, the issue just went away. Former Mayor Bernie Moorman believes that it was the historic importance of the house that prevented the bridge from being built. Whatever official decision was made at whatever level, the conventional wisdom in Covington for the past 20 years has it that historic preservation in general, and particular the designation of the house and the district, stopped the bridge.

The idea of a bridge across the Licking River at Fifth Street was revived in late 2000, with a recommendation from consultant Parsons Brincherhoff, working with a committee studying a "traffic loop" through Covington, Newport and Cincinnati.¹² "A new bridge would improve the flow [of traffic from Covington to Newport], and the logical place to put it would be at the end of Fifth Street in Covington," was the recommendation of the consultant at a December meeting of the committee.¹³ According to statistics, traffic between Newport and Covington has actually not grown much in the past 35 years. The purpose of the proposed bridge between Covington and Newport is to handle light rail, which, in turn, will hopefully reduce automobile traffic.

As of February, there were four possibilities for the location of the bridge, not much different from

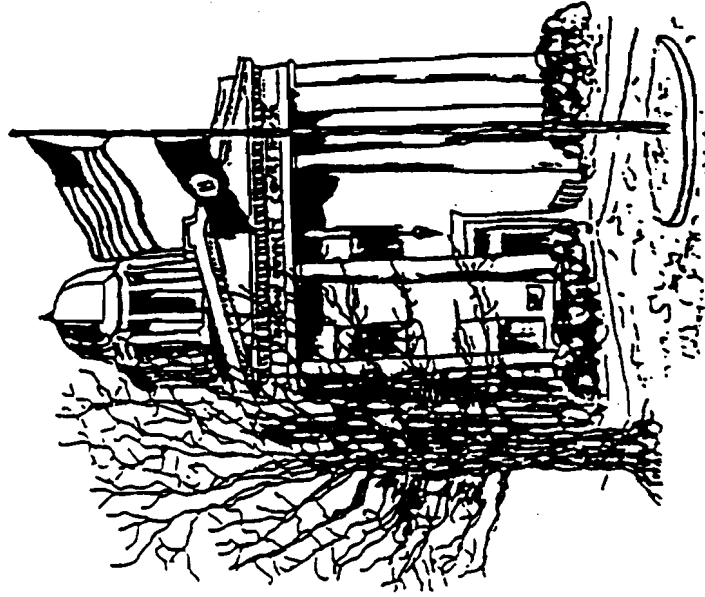
those discussed over 20 years ago. First is the diagonal bridge from Fifth Street to Fifth Street, which would result in the demolition of the Hearne House. Second, the bridge would come in north of the Hearne House and take part of the Garrard Convalescent Home at Fifth and Garrard. The third option would be to reroute Route 8 north on Greenup and east on Fourth, utilizing the existing bridge. The fourth option would be the same as above, with a new bridge built parallel to the existing Fourth Street bridge.¹⁴ Ironically, the neighborhood has been asking for traffic to be routed off of Garrard Street for the last 15 years.

Notes

1. *Colonel Covington's Chronicle*. "Bridge Hearing March 16," March 1, 1978, p. 1.
2. *Kentucky Post*, Conley, Joe, "Pleas May Save Old Hearne House," July 12, 1973, p. 1.
3. *Kentucky Enquirer*, January 1, 1975, p. 4C.
4. *Kentucky Enquirer*, Schoolmeister, Ron, "Bite in Covington Bulldozer Losing," March 9, 1975, p. 1.
5. Ibid.
6. *Colonel Covington's Chronicle*. "CURE Plans Bridge," October 1, 1977, P. 5.
7. Ibid.
8. *Colonel Covington's Chronicle*, "Plans continue to build Fifth Street Bridge," December 1, 1977, p. 8.
9. *Colonel Covington's Chronicle*, "Debate continues on 5th Street Bridge Issue," April 1, 1978, p. 1.
10. Ibid.
11. *Colonel Covington's Chronicle*. "Delaporte tours city, visits Hearne House," July 1, 1978, p. 1.
12. *Kentucky Post* online edition, Dias, Monica, "5th Street Bridge Over Licking Revived," December 29, 2000, www.kypost.com/2000/fourth122900.html.
13. Ibid.
14. *Kentucky Post* online edition, Dias, Monica, "Two transit options dropped," February 21, 2001, www.kypost.com/2001/loop022101.html.

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Bulletin May 2001



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Hearne House: A Treasure
Repeatedly Threatened

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