



## Bulletin

of the

## Kenton County Historical Society

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May/June

2010

### I Bet You Didn't Know

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

May 4, 1961: Kentucky's famous \$50,000 floral clock behind the capitol building was dedicated by Governor Bert Combs..

May 5, 1951: The burial ground of Isaac Shelby, Kentucky's first governor, was made part of the State Park System. It is located at Traveler's Rest, Owsley County.

May 7, 1777: Kentucky's first census was taken at Harrodsburg.

June 1, 1862: President Lincoln placed Kentucky under martial law.

June 5, 1985: Steve Cauthen, of Walton, became the first U.S. jockey to win the Epson Downs in the 206th running in Great Britain.

*"On This Day In Kentucky" — Robert Powell*

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## Programs and Notices

### 24th Annual Old Time Radio and Nostalgia Convention

This year's event will be held May 7th and 8th at the Crown Plaza, 3901 Pfeiffer Road, Cincinnati 45242. Hours are from 9 to 9 on Friday and 9 to 4 on Sunday. Special guests this year include Bob Hastings, Rosemary Rice, and Ester Geddes. For additional information, please contact Bob Burchett toll free at 1-888-477-9112 or at [haradio@msn.com](mailto:haradio@msn.com)

### 2010 Northern Kentucky History, Art & Culture Lecture Series continues

Several lectures remain in this very popular series, held at Baker Hunt, 620 Greenup Street in Covington. Each lecture begins at 2pm. Price: \$7. For more information, phone (859) 431-0020.

May 16th - *The Ludlow Lagoon Amusement Park*

David Schroeder

June 13th - *The Beard Family — Artists, Writers and Activists*

Mark Hult—Geologist, with wife, Lisa, owns Daniel Carter Beard Home

July 11th - *The Devou Centennial — The Devou Family*

Joshua Byers, NKU Student

### 2010 Roebling Fest

The annual festival celebrating our historic Roebling Suspension Bridge will be Saturday June 12th, from 11am to 10pm. Festivities will be centered around Covington's Court and Park Streets. Tours, booths, and more all day, with fireworks at 10pm. For additional information, please call 513-659-4390.

### James A. Ramage Civil War Museum Events

May: 15-16 — *Public Archeological & Civil War Authors*  
31 — *Memorial Day at the Museum*

June: 25-27 — *Ft. Mitchell Centennial Celebration*

August: 21-22 — *6th Annual Battery Hooper Days*

For additional information, call: 513-659-4390.

**ARTICLES FROM BACK ISSUES ARE INDEXED ON OUR WEBSITE!**

# Origin of the 3-L Highway

Let's Put This Thing to Rest

Robert D. Webster

History is not a perfect science; it is full of errors, omissions, and more often misconceptions. Legends and folklore, from time to time, mysteriously make their way into the official written record of people, places, and events. As an example, one might refer to the midnight ride of Paul Revere and the fact that historians have known for some time that the famed jockey was actually captured by the British and therefore never completed his infamous ride.<sup>1</sup> It is the 1861 poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow where the legend was born. In another example, we now know that the Battle of Bunker Hill was actually fought at Breed's Hill.<sup>2</sup>

Here in Kentucky, a resounding, "Say it ain't so" can still be heard after new research has surfaced suggesting that famed songwriter, Stephen Foster, never actually visited Bardstown, a city who celebrates his life each year with a string of events and who claims it was a beautiful residence there that inspired the state's anthem *My Old Kentucky Home*.<sup>3</sup>

Northern Kentucky has its legends and folklore as well. One of this author's favorites deals with the original castle at Holmes High School and its famous slave tunnels to the Licking River. Every student who has ever walked that school's historic hallways has heard this tale at one time or another. Of course the castle was not even built until after the Civil War and therefore, there were no slaves to free. Another local legend, maybe one we can finally put to rest with this article, refers to one of this area's local roadways.

Historians and residents of the region have questioned for decades, "What do the 3 L's stand for in the 3-L Highway?" There have been a variety of answers over the years, but unfortunately, most are mere folklore. Locals know the 3-L (LLL) Highway as a stretch of Madison Pike from Covington, through Independence and on to Falmouth, and then US 27

to Cynthiana. There are no fewer than five circulating theories as to the origin of the highway's unusual name.

One local legend is that the 3 L's represent a gentleman's initials. This man, from Cynthiana, is said to have worked as a weigh-master at the quarry from which stone was taken to build the roadway. If true, what a wonderful story it would make. Research shows that the man in question, Linus Lamb LeBus, truly existed, but little is written about his life. The LeBus family, very well known in the Harrison County area, was actually in the tobacco business in the early 1900s. Only a single article exists which explains this myth, with no documentation to prove it as fact. It is not certain, therefore, whether LeBus ever worked for a quarry at some time in his life, let alone the one that provided the stone for the highway. Based on additional research, however, one thing is very certain. The highway did not get its name from this man.

A less-common tale involves a more tongue-in-cheek scenario, that another individual, supposedly a barkeep in little Sanfordtown, Kentucky, (located along the 3-L) suggested the name to highway commissioners.<sup>4</sup> Maybe his name was comprised of three L's like Mr. LeBus', or could it be that the earliest loves in his life were Lauren, Lisa, and Lana. Either way, he, too, is not the namesake of the highway.

Another favorite: the 3 L's represent the cities of Lexington, Louisville, and Losantiville (Cincinnati was once named Lonsantiville). I like this one, as with it comes a little romance. It's as if the *Lexington, Louisville and Losantiville* was an early railroad line, no different than the *Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe*. I can almost picture smoke pouring from the massive locomotive, followed by a coal car, a single passenger car, and a shiny-red caboose. Maybe an "Uncle Joe" ran the local hotel like on the 1960s television series

*Petticoat Junction* – but No. Once again, there is nothing to prove this theory as correct. Anyway, by the time a bridge spanned the Ohio and the LLL Highway was completed, no one referred to Cincinnati as Losantiville.

### **The Most Common Theories**

The two most common answers to this perplexing question both involve the sport of horse racing. An often related scenario is that the 3 L's are in reference to a "...consortium of horse racing tracks called the 3-L Association."<sup>5</sup> The highway was supposedly named for this famed group who was said to have controlled the state's horseracing tracks at the turn of the century. The problem with this theory is that there seems to be no evidence whatsoever to support the existence of such an organization. Only local writers and historians mention the group and they cite only other local writers as their sources. No one offers documented proof of such an organization and even more damaging, at the state level – the group is unknown.

For this article, seven different organizations were contacted, all experts on the horse racing trade in Kentucky, and not a single person was able to find any documentation in their vast archives about any 3-L Association. Kim Skipton, Curator/Librarian at the American Saddlebred Museum in Lexington states, "There is no record of them in the world of Saddlebreds or any other breed."<sup>6</sup> Shannon K. Luce of the historic Jockey Club (which will be discussed later) says, "I find no record of any 3-L Association or any other group with 3 L's."<sup>7</sup> Charlotte Tevis, still another expert on early horse racing in Kentucky, has "...no knowledge of the group."<sup>8</sup> Even Debra Watkins, Manager of the Lexington History Museum, found no mention of the group in any written histories of the Bluegrass.<sup>9</sup> Researchers at the Kentucky Horse Park also find nothing in their vast files of any such organization, nor does John E. Kleber's *Encyclopedia of Louisville* mention the organization. Finally, experts at the University of Louisville History Department and even archivists at Churchill Downs, one of the tracks supposedly under the 3L Association's rule, drew a blank when questioned by this author. There clearly seems to be no indication anywhere that such an organization existed.

Of course, if there was no such organization in the first place, it would be impossible to name a highway after them. However, since the "3-L Association" is such a popular and heavily-circulated theory, this author felt it imperative to provide even further evidence to prove that theory false. Research shows there certainly was a special consortium controlling the state's horseracing tracks at the turn of the century, but here is that history.

### **Horse Racing in Kentucky**

By the early 1800s, the sport of horse racing was becoming much more popular, not just in Kentucky but throughout the new America. In fact, many cities featured a Race Street, a straight stretch usually just off the main thoroughfare and named for what exactly went on there.<sup>10</sup> In 1797, the Lexington Jockey Club was organized, the first such group in Kentucky.<sup>11</sup> By 1826, the Kentucky Association, also in Lexington, was formed by several Bluegrass area big-shots including famous Kentuckian Henry Clay. Early races by this group were run at Old William Track in Lee's Wood. By 1840 the group had purchased acreage and construction began on the Kentucky Association Track, located just east of the city limits.<sup>12</sup> In Louisville, the Oakland Race Track opened in 1832, becoming one of the first true, oval racecourses in the state. In the 1870s, the Louisville Jockey Club and Driving Park was organized and a new track that would later become Churchill Downs was built. In non-racing seasons, the track was open to drivers of motor carriages – hence the "Driving Park" part of their name. The first Kentucky Derby was run at Churchill Downs in 1875. Several other tracks opened in the state around this time including Lexington's Red Mile (1875) and our own Latonia Racetrack (1883).

At Churchill Downs, financial problems plagued the race track by the turn of the century and in 1902, a group headed by former Louisville Mayor Charles Grainger, Matt J. Winn and others agreed to takeover all operations under a partnership known as the New Louisville Jockey Club. As the Kentucky Derby grew in popularity so did the track. In 1907, the New Louisville Jockey Club joined forces with nearby Douglas Park owners to form a new organization known as the Louisville Racing Association.

In 1919, the Louisville Racing Association and Lexington's Kentucky Association dissolved and a new organization was formed. The Kentucky Jockey Club became the holding company for the state's four tracks: Latonia in the north, the Association Track in Lexington, and Douglas Park and Churchill Downs in Louisville.<sup>13</sup> Under the powerful Kentucky Jockey Club, the track's domain grew during the next decade as it acquired possession of the newly built Fairmount Park and Lincoln Fields in Illinois.<sup>14</sup> It appears that at no time were the Kentucky tracks governed by a group known as the 3-L Association.

So where does that leave us? By far the most popular theory as to the origin of the LLL Highway's name is that the 3 L's are simply in reference to the cities of Louisville, Lexington, and Latonia, and the fact that the original highway simply connected those three cities. However, knowing that the three cities are positioned in the form of a large triangle, this theory simply makes no sense to many researchers. Also, as with the other so-called theories, other writers on the subject have provided little in the way of any documentation to prove this theory as fact.

### Early Roads

By the mid 1800s, several main arteries allowed horse and wagon travel through the Northern Kentucky region. These early roads, simple dirt paths by today's standards, were vital to the movement of nearly every commodity as well as the occasional traveler. The Covington—Lexington Turnpike, like so many of this region's early roads, was originally cut through by herds of bison. Native Indians termed this road Warrior Trail.<sup>15</sup> The Banklick Turnpike was another major avenue in the early days of Kenton County, as was Bird's War Road, later known as DeCoursey Pike.

By the early 1900s, major roads across the nation were being transformed from dirt to paved concrete and in 1915, at a convention of governors, Carl Fisher used his political connections to pitch the idea of the Dixie Highway System. Fisher was the earlier creator of the Lincoln Highway, which connected San Francisco and New York City, and more importantly allowed better access to Fisher's Indianapolis 500 raceway. One of Fisher's other projects at the time

was the development of a vacant sandbar he had just purchased named Miami Beach. Fisher knew a paved road linking the Great Lake states to Florida was imperative for the success of this soon-to-be resort area.<sup>16</sup>

Usually, existing roadbeds were widened and paved and only small sections of new highway were built from scratch to connect the already existing sections. In towns all along the many proposed routes, citizens and mayors vied for inclusion in what they knew would be sure prosperity for their small cities. In Northern Kentucky, two main routes were mentioned for the new highway and folks in Pendleton, Harrison, and Campbell Counties petitioned the Dixie Highway Association to name what is now US 27 as part of the Dixie. Citizens of Covington, Erlanger, and Florence argued for what seemed to be the more obvious choice, the Covington—Lexington Turnpike.<sup>17</sup>

The Covington—Lexington Turnpike won the battle and the section of roadway from Covington to Erlanger was completed in 1916. The section from there to Florence was not finished until 1924.<sup>18</sup> It would be several years later before the entire highway was completed to Kentucky's southern border. The Dixie eventually ran from Michigan to Florida.

Citizens along the Banklick Turnpike and what is now US 27 in Campbell County did not give up. They petitioned the Dixie Highway Association, to no avail, to give *their* road the "Dixie" distinction as well, even suggesting the very-appropriate "Eastern Dixie Highway" in 1923. At the state level, various roadways were being widened, paved, renamed and given new route numbers in the 1920s and early 1930s. In fact, the old Banklick Turnpike was widened and paved before the new Dixie was completed. New signage, often color-coded, was being installed on telephone poles throughout the state to aid motorists as they traveled. As with many roadways even now, several route numbers often shared the same highway making things somewhat confusing. For instance, in Covington today, Routes 25, 42, and 127 use the same roadway from the Ohio River south to Florence before splitting in different directions. Even our first major Interstate, I-75, now shares lanes with I-71 through much of Northern Kentucky.

Some of Kentucky's "new" roads included the Dixie Bee Line, which ran from Henderson to Nashville, Tennessee, and the Cincinnati-Lookout Mountain Air Line, which followed what is now Dixie Highway from Covington to Lexington, then US 27 from there to Whitley City and the Tennessee state line. Kentucky actually had two "Dixie" Highways, the one from Covington to Jellico, Tennessee, and one from Louisville to Nashville.

Many times, these new roads were given names indicating their starting or stopping point, such as Boone Way and Midland Trail. Boone Way ran east/west and connected Louisville to Winchester and Boonesborough, hence the Boone Way name, before continuing southeast to Corbin and the Cumberland Gap area. Midland Trail cut across the state's mid-section, connecting Louisville with Ashland.<sup>19</sup> For much of their duration, Boone Way and Midland Trail shared their highway with another new route, one far more important to our readers.

While there was no "3-L Association" there were a great number of spectators, racehorse owners, jockeys and others involved in the sport of horseracing in Kentucky by the early 1920s. This large group of people traveled between Oakland Park, Churchill Downs, Red Mile, Association Track, and Latonia frequently, and apparently some, especially newcomers would become lost on the confusing system of highways. Many of these motorists were also interested in the various breeding farms of the Bluegrass, many of which were located along this same route. By 1924, another new roadway was renamed and signed, specifically to aid those thousands of motorists who were following the sport of horseracing. Suddenly the "Louisville-Lexington-Latonia Highway," simply called the LLL (or 3-L), was born. Signage was a white rectangle laid vertically with three blue L's positioned horizontally.<sup>20</sup>

Locally, there is no mention of a 3-L Highway before the early 1920s, when construction began to widen the road. Small articles appeared in the *Kentucky Post* at that time, the first to refer to the highway by that name. In May 1925, the LLL Highway was "...crowded with cars and it was noticeable that there were hundreds bearing the license plates of other

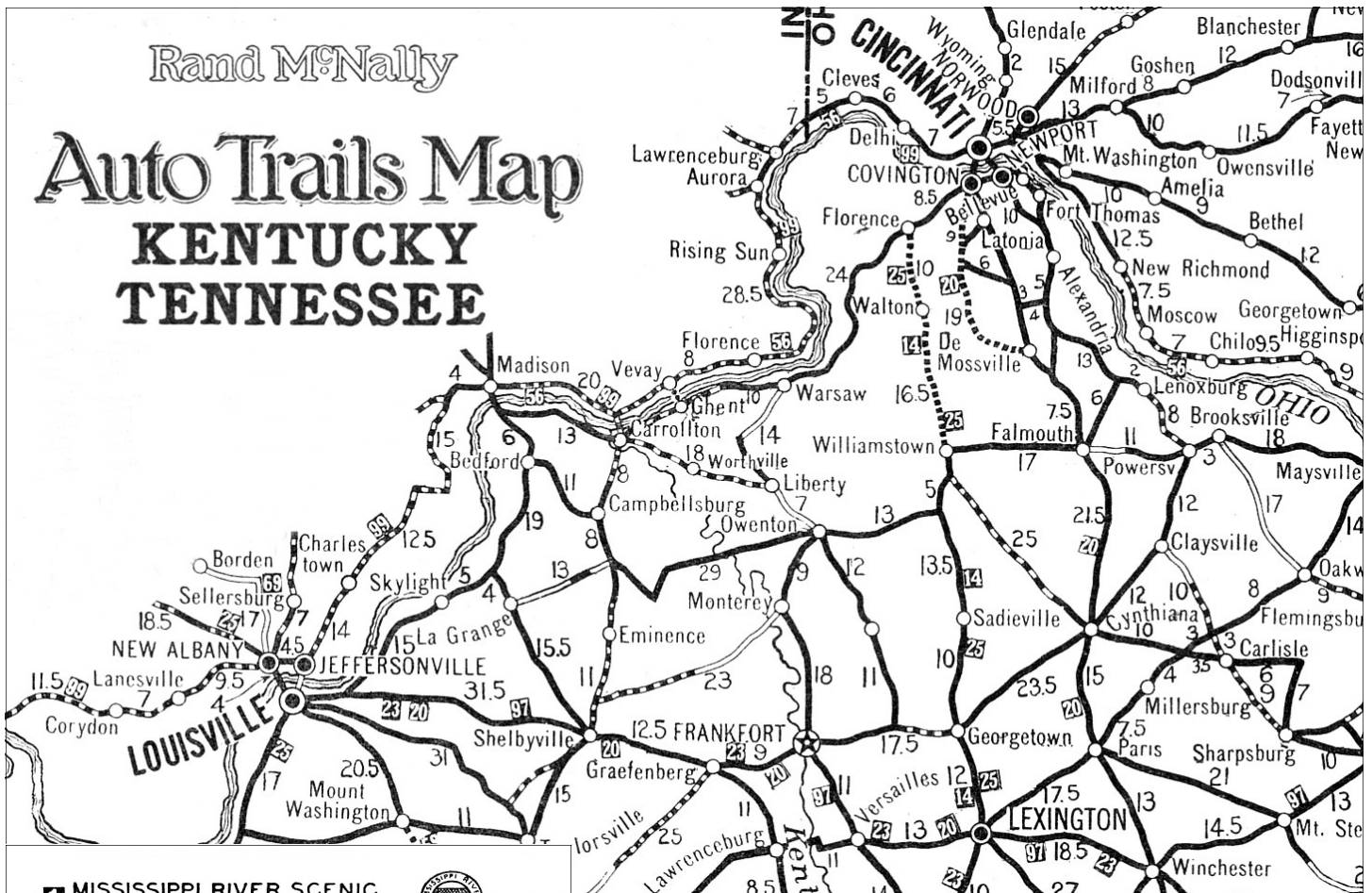
states."<sup>21</sup> By mid summer, ice cream stands, barbecues and restaurants, as well as modern gas stations were being erected along the entire span. Towns along the route "...were alive with activity."<sup>22</sup> By late 1925, the new highway was said to be completed with the exception of a small section between Latonia Avenue at the Covington city limits and the Banklick Creek bridge.<sup>23</sup> Another article in November 1925 called the new LLL Highway "one of the best in the country."<sup>24</sup> Small towns along the LLL thrived with tourist trade, and even the lonely farmer was able to increase his revenue by placing signs stating "rooms for tourists." The more ambitious ones served "old Kentucky chicken dinners" to the hungry passers-by.<sup>25</sup>

The LLL had opened a couple of years before the Dixie and was a very popular route immediately. When the Dixie opened in December 1928, however, the once busy flow of traffic along the LLL slacked-off tremendously and restaurant and business owners felt the change quickly. While the LLL route had its many advantages over the Dixie route, it also had a few drawbacks. Certainly by far the more picturesque of the two, the LLL also had many more curves. Both could get a person from Covington to Lexington, but the LLL route was a full fifteen miles longer.

While today, road repairs and upgrades are a near constant occurrence in the Commonwealth, in the 1920s, workers and highway commissioners expected newly built roadways to last for many decades. It wasn't long after the LLL opened, however, that one short stretch was being scrutinized for such a high number of auto deaths. "Attention of the Kentucky Motor Club, Kenton County Commissioners, and the State Highway Department is called to the menace to autoists existing at Chisel Bridge on the LLL Highway out of Covington. Years ago at this spot, with its curve at almost right angles, was a death trap. Later the underpass was cut through at an angle that made it considerably safer. But on dark nights a danger to life and limb still exists. Autoists coming upon the underpass suddenly are in peril of crashing into the concrete wall. Beacon lights on each side of the overpass are badly needed. If these can not be provided, a simple and inexpensive substitute could be made by placing red glass reflectors to catch the beams of headlights."<sup>26</sup>

Rand McNally

# Auto Trails Map KENTUCKY TENNESSEE



Above: section of the Rand-McNally Atlas for Kentucky, dated 1925.

Left: legend for same, showing route numbers and highway names.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>1</b> MISSISSIPPI RIVER SCENIC HIGHWAY<br><small>BLUE WHITE, WHITE LETTERS</small> |  |
| <b>4</b> DIXIE BEE LINE<br><small>BLUE LETTERS ON WHITE</small>                       |  |
| <b>10</b> SOUTHERN NATIONAL HY.<br><small>RED WHITE BLUE</small>                      |  |
| <b>13</b> MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HY.<br><small>WHITE ORANGE WHITE, BLACK LETTERS</small>  |  |
| <b>14</b> CINN.-LOOKOUT MTN. AIR LINE   |  |
| <b>15</b> MEMPHIS-BRISTOL HY.<br><small>BLACK ON WHITE</small>                        |  |
| <b>20</b> LOUISVILLE-LEXINGTON-LATONIA<br><small>BLUE ON WHITE</small>                |  |
| <b>23</b> BOONE WAY<br><small>BLACK ON WHITE</small>                                  |  |
| <b>25</b> DIXIE HIGHWAY<br><small>WHITE RED WHITE</small>                             |  |
| <b>30</b> FLORIDA SHORT ROUTE<br><small>BLACK ON ORANGE</small>                       |  |
| <b>31</b> BEE LINE HIGHWAY<br><small>BLACK BANDS BLACK LETTERS ON YELLOW</small>      |  |
| <b>51</b> LEE HIGHWAY<br><small>BLUE &amp; GRAY</small>                               |  |
| <b>56</b> ATLANTIC-PACIFIC HY.<br><small>YELLOW, BLACK, YELLOW YELLOW LETTERS</small> |  |
| <b>69</b> JACKSON HIGHWAY<br><small>BLACK ON WHITE</small>                            |  |
| <b>97</b> MIDLAND TRAIL<br><small>ORANGE, BLACK, ORANGE</small>                       |  |
| <b>99</b> WONDERLAND WAY<br><small>YELLOW, RED, YELLOW</small>                        |  |

**PAVED ROADS** —————  
**IMPROVED ROADS** - - - - -  
**UNREPORTED OR DIRT ROADS** = = = = =  
**ROADS UNDER CONSTR.** .....  
**MILEAGE DISTANCES BETWEEN POINTS ARE INDICATED BY FIGURES**

On the cover: artist's rendering of what typical signage would have looked like in the late 1920s, in particular on the road between Louisville and Lexington. Shown are the Midland Trail/Boone Way/LLL Highways.

Below: one of many businesses that opened in the 1920s and 1930s along the LLL. Hopkins Garage was located at LLL and Gardnersville Rd. The structure still stands today. (photo courtesy Nicholson Automotive Repair)





### What exactly was the LLL Highway?

From Louisville, the LLL Highway ran directly past Churchill Downs, then joined Boone Way and Midland Trail, running due east through Shelbyville and Frankfort, before heading southeast to Versailles. Today, a stretch of US 60 through Shelbyville is still signed Midland Trail. From Versailles, the road turned east again on its way to Lexington. There, the original highway ran right past the Red Mile track before reaching the Association Track, which was located at what is now the area between East 3<sup>rd</sup> and East 7<sup>th</sup> Streets, and from Midland Avenue to Limestone. From Lexington, the LLL separated and ran independently northeast to Paris, then due north to Cynthiana and Falmouth.

Through much of Pendleton County, the original route of the LLL can easily be traced as what are now small side roads that weave back and forth over the newer US 27. Starting at the Pendleton/Harrison County line, the original route incorporated parts of Rankin Mill Spur, Old 31 Highway Loop #2, Old US 27 Loop #6, and the Bethel Loop as it connected with what is now KY 17 just north about seven miles north of Falmouth.

The LLL continued to a fork near the small town of Greenwood. The right road led to Butler and on to Alexandria, while the LLL veered to the left and continued northwest, running parallel to the South Fork of Grassy Creek toward the small city of DeMossville. From there, the LLL ran in a more western direction as it followed the North Fork of Grassy Creek before reaching the town of Fiskburg in Kenton County. From there, the highway continued to Piner, and then Nicholson (previously named California). A major intersection was located at Nicholson. Turning west would lead one to Walton along the Dixie Highway and turning east provided access to old Taylor's Mill Road, and eventually into Latonia and Covington. The LLL, however, continued north into the county seat of Independence where it ran directly in front of the courthouse.

North of Independence, the original LLL ran the course of today's Old Madison Pike, to the west of present-day Summit Elementary and Middle Schools. In 2010, a new, four-lane highway between



*Pleasure Isle was located about six miles south of Latonia, near today's Hands Pike. Note: the structure at right still stands, known as the Log Cabin Restaurant. The LLL Highway is shown in front of the cabin, (R to L would be south to north).*

*Photo courtesy NKYViews.com*

Nicholson and Latonia has taken the place of the old LLL Highway. The original LLL followed a downhill grade into the tiny village of Scott, where it met Banklick Creek for the first time – an area where today Old Madison Pike intersects with Richardson Road and Fowler Creek. The highway ran parallel to the creek another mile or so before reaching the Island Lodge, later known as the Pleasure Isle Swim Club, a major recreational spot after WWII. As a reference, in 2010 the Log Cabin Restaurant sits on the old LLL and a new sports facility, named Pleasure Isle, sits upon the old swim club property.

A bridge over Banklick Creek about a mile north of Pleasure Isle, near today's Bullock Pen Road, brought the highway to the west side of the creek, where it would remain until reaching Latonia. It is also here that the Louisville-Cincinnati-and Lexington Railroad met the LLL Highway. Both would run somewhat parallel into Latonia. It was about two miles north of Scott, at what was once Maurice Station, that the so-called "death trap at the underpass" was – and is still located. Another mile north brought travelers to the small town of Sanfordtown (where I-275, Wal-Mart, and Dudley Road is today). North of Sanfordtown, the LLL Highway continued toward its final destination, still running just west of the creek. About halfway between Sanfordtown and Latonia, where the Hitching Post Restaurant sits to-

day, Banklick Creek turned east toward the Licking River while the LLL Highway continued north another mile or so to the city limits of Latonia.

### Maybe It's Just a Kenton County Thing

Strangely, while quizzing various historical organizations with regard to the existence of a "3-L Association" this author also questioned the existence of a LLL Highway. Once again, the University of Louisville History Department, as well as historical societies in Shelby, Franklin, Fayette, and Bourbon Counties were each queried. The LLL Highway clearly ran directly through each of those counties! However, not a single person was able to provide any documentation that any road in their county was ever referred to as the LLL Highway. James Bruce, Lori Sullivan, and Carol Brent, with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, confirmed that the highway was in existence only from about 1924 to 1932. With the exception of many Kenton County residents and a few in Pendleton County, no one else in the state seems to remember this very important roadway.

### Extinction of the LLL

By the early 1930s and into the 1950s, major highways in Kentucky were changing once again, as many had become part of the United States Highway System – signed as numbers within a red or black shield on a white background. In an effort to have some sense of uniformity, State highways were also renamed – assigned numerical names only – black numbers inside a white circle on a black background. The old Dixie Bee Line simply became US 41, and Covington's Dixie Highway became US 25. The Midland Trail took the name US 60 and what was once sections of the Cincinnati-Lookout Mountain Air Line became US 27. New State Routes in Kenton County included #177 (DeCoursey Pike), #16 (Taylor Mill Road), and #14 (Bracht/Piner/Morning View Road).

By 1932, Kenton County's portion of the LLL Highway had become State Route #17 and much of Pendleton County's part had become US 27. Suddenly the ever-popular LLL Highway was gone forever. Today, only a short stretch of roadway running parallel to US 27 in Pendleton County, just south of Falmouth is still officially signed "Old LLL Highway."



*One of two signs remaining in all of Kenton County designating Madison Pike (Route 17) as the "3L Highway."*

*This decorative sign stands at the bottom of Dudley Road in Edgewood, on the western side of Madison Pike.*

*The other sign is located in Covington, standing at the intersection of Madison and Latonia Avenues.*

photo courtesy the author

In Kenton County, the LLL Highway no longer "officially" exists at all, even though tens of thousands of citizens continue to refer to the 20-mile stretch of Madison Pike as the "3-L." While omitted from official road maps of the area for more than 70 years, the cities of Covington and Edgewood each keep a 3-L sign on poles, maybe just for fun or maybe just to confuse any out-of-town motorists. For many in this region, the LLL Highway will never go away.

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# Willow Run

An Excerpt from the recently published *Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*

Once located along what is now Covington's western border, Willow Run Creek was an important source of water for early settlers of the region and was just as important to the abundant wildlife drawn to it.

Flowing north into the Ohio River, Willow Run and its many branches stretched through the naturally-formed valley. One of the first owners of the land area known as Willow Run was Jacob Fowler, followed by Thomas D. Carneal. In 1827, William Bullock purchased 710 acres from Carneal including Willow Run Creek. Also included in the purchase was as an enormous estate named Elmwood Hall located in present day Ludlow. Bullock had planned to build a dream city named Hygeia around Elmwood Hall, but with lack of financing, reluctantly sold the property to Israel Ludlow and the small town west of Willow Run now bears Ludlow's name.

On the east side of the creek, in 1872, Father James W. Smith organized the St. Patrick Catholic Church for English-speaking residents living near Willow Run. The church was designed by Louis Piket and built by John G. Martin. The magnificent structure stood along Philadelphia Street at Elm Street, which was located between present day 4th and 5th Streets. The church served its congregation well — for more than a century — before falling to a wrecking ball after the opening of Interstate 75. St. Patrick's congregation then integrated with that of St. Aloysius Church nearby.

By the late 1800s, several commercial developments occurred, including the Bavarian Brewery. Residential housing also exploded in the area, along newer streets such as Western Row (now Western Avenue), Bullock (Crescent Avenue), and Shawk, Horton, and Arnold Streets (all razed for I-75).

Once a clear, quickly-flowing waterway, parts of Willow Run ran dry by the early 1900s, mostly due to neighboring development, and many sections, in-



*Covington Ballpark circa 1950. This baseball arena and grandstand stood in the Willow Run valley near today's 9th and Philadelphia Streets, Covington.*

Photo courtesy the Kenton County Public Library

cluding those on the outskirts of Peasleburg near today's newly-built St. Elizabeth Hospital were used as a garbage dump.

In 1914, after a long legal battle, the City of Covington acquired rights to build a major sewer line through the valley. Several ballparks were built on the landfills, including the lower sections of Goebel Park at 6th and Philadelphia and the Covington Ballpark near 9th and Philadelphia.

Over the years the Willow Run area was used for picnics, baseball and football games, and also performances by various circuses. New subdivisions along Jefferson, Euclid, and Monroe Streets followed in the late 1940s and beyond.

In 1957, the federal government purchased the land along Willow Run for construction of I-75 and the once beautiful Willow Run Creek and the parks were gone forever. The new interstate now runs its course almost directly over the old creek bed.

## A Look Back at The Headlines

*An on-going feature reliving local headlines*

*This issue features:  
The Covington Journal*

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**May 14, 1870**

Our Catholic fellow-citizens had quite a demonstration Monday on the occasion of breaking ground for the new church of the Mother of God on Sixth Street between Washington and Russell. At half past 2 in the afternoon, a large concourse of men, women and children belonging to the congregation assembled on the grounds, each of the men carrying a shovel. At 3 p.m., the venerable Father Kuhr raised the first shovelful of dirt, and was then followed by the others present in their turn.

**June 4, 1870**

### **Decoration of Confederate Graves**

Solemnly, silently, and quietly, without blast of trumpet or flaunt of flags, the Southern people of Covington collected Wednesday, to the number of 200, at Linden Grove Cemetery, and paid their annual tribute to their soldier dead. Many of the graves were those of families now resident of the city, and hence were abundantly decorated with wreaths and scattered flowers. The Confederate Square, where lies the bodies of the stranger-dead, was the most conspicuously decorated. A large cross, emblematical of the Southern Cross, covered with evergreen and hung with floral wreaths, marked the center grave, while each individual headstone had its own display. Peace to their ashes! If their cause was wrong, they have atoned for it with their lives; if right, the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

### **Advertisement**

**Hickey's Shoe Store**  
**616 Madison Avenue — Covington**

Ladies good-lasting Gaiters \$1.00  
Splendid Calf-boots for Gents, warranted for \$3.50

## Reminder

### **NKH Society now on Facebook and Twitter**

Hey history fans, you can now check us out on both Twitter and Facebook. On Twitter, search for "kntncohistory" and on Facebook, friend us at "Kenton County History." You'll find various links, photos and videos of fun history stuff. You can join in discussions, pose a question, or post your own photos and videos. We thank board member Dr. Richard Cardosi for helping to bring the Kenton County Historical Society into the 21st century.

### **Correction**

In the "I Bet You Didn't Know" section of the last Bulletin, it was stated that Latonia Racetrack became the first thoroughbred track in the state to offer night racing. The date listed was March 29, 1869 and should have been 1969.

## Would You Like To Be Published?

The Kenton County Historical Society is always looking for stories for its award-winning *Bulletin* and *Northern Kentucky Heritage Magazine*.

To submit an article, send a paper copy by mail, or email it as a Word document attachment. Articles for the *Bulletin* should be no longer than 500 words and must have at least two references. Stories for the magazine should be at least 5,000 words and have endnotes. Related photos would help greatly.

nkyheritage.kchs@juno.com. P.O. Box 641,  
Covington, KY 41012 (859) 431-2666

Feel free to contact us with any questions you may have about submitting an article.

## Then and Now



Left: Covington fire house located at Main and Emma Streets. Building was built in 1888.  
Right: Same building in 2010 after recent renovations. The structure is now a private residence.

Left photo courtesy the Kenton Co. Library. Right photo courtesy Ron Einhaus

## Mystery Photo

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



**ANSWER:**

Decorative work on front of old firehouse mentioned above.

Photo courtesy Ron Einhaus

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Covington, Kentucky 41012-0641

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## KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

May / June 2010



**Feature Story:**

Origin of the 3-L Highway

**Other Stories Inside:**

Willow Run