



Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society

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Correcting the Record as to
Where the Levassor Family Lived

Northern Kentucky Unearthed:
What Local Hobbyists are Digging Up

New Book to Be Released in July

Correcting the Record as to Where the Levassor Family Lived

Arnold Taylor

More than a few families have legends that were repeated without question over the years, such as “Our 7th Great-grandmother was a Cherokee Princess,” only to be dispelled by a DNA test. Buildings can also acquire a false history over time which can be objectively disproved, as real estate has its own form of DNA test in the form of deed books.

On the cover is a photograph of two houses, identified in the Kenton County Library “Faces and Places” site... and known by neighbors and local historians as the “Levassor House and Dr. Thomas Bird House.”¹ The house on the left is presently known as 33 Levassor Place, hereinafter referred to as “33.” The purpose of this article is to correct the erroneous notion that 33 was ever owned or occupied by Eugene, Armand, or Louis Levassor, and to confirm the location of the house which they in fact occupied.

In my earlier article in the Kenton County Historical Society Bulletin, “*Sunnyside*” A Forgotten Place,² [September/October 2017] I quote extensively from a manuscript by Owen J. Carpenter, in which he described in detail his acquisition of a tract of land adjacent to the Levassor property and his later subdivision of the tract:

“On October 2nd 1895, I conveyed to Laura J. Culbertson, a building lot at the east end of this tract at the Levassor line, now the west line of Greenup Street in the Levassor subdivision, fronting 60 feet on the south side of Levassor road, now Levassor Avenue, and extending back southward 60 feet in width to a line running straight with the north line of Sunnyside Avenue, now 26th Street. The consideration was \$3000.00.³ During the year 1896, Laura J. Culbertson constructed a substantial brick residence on this lot which cost at least \$10,000.00, which she and her family occupied for many years thereafter.

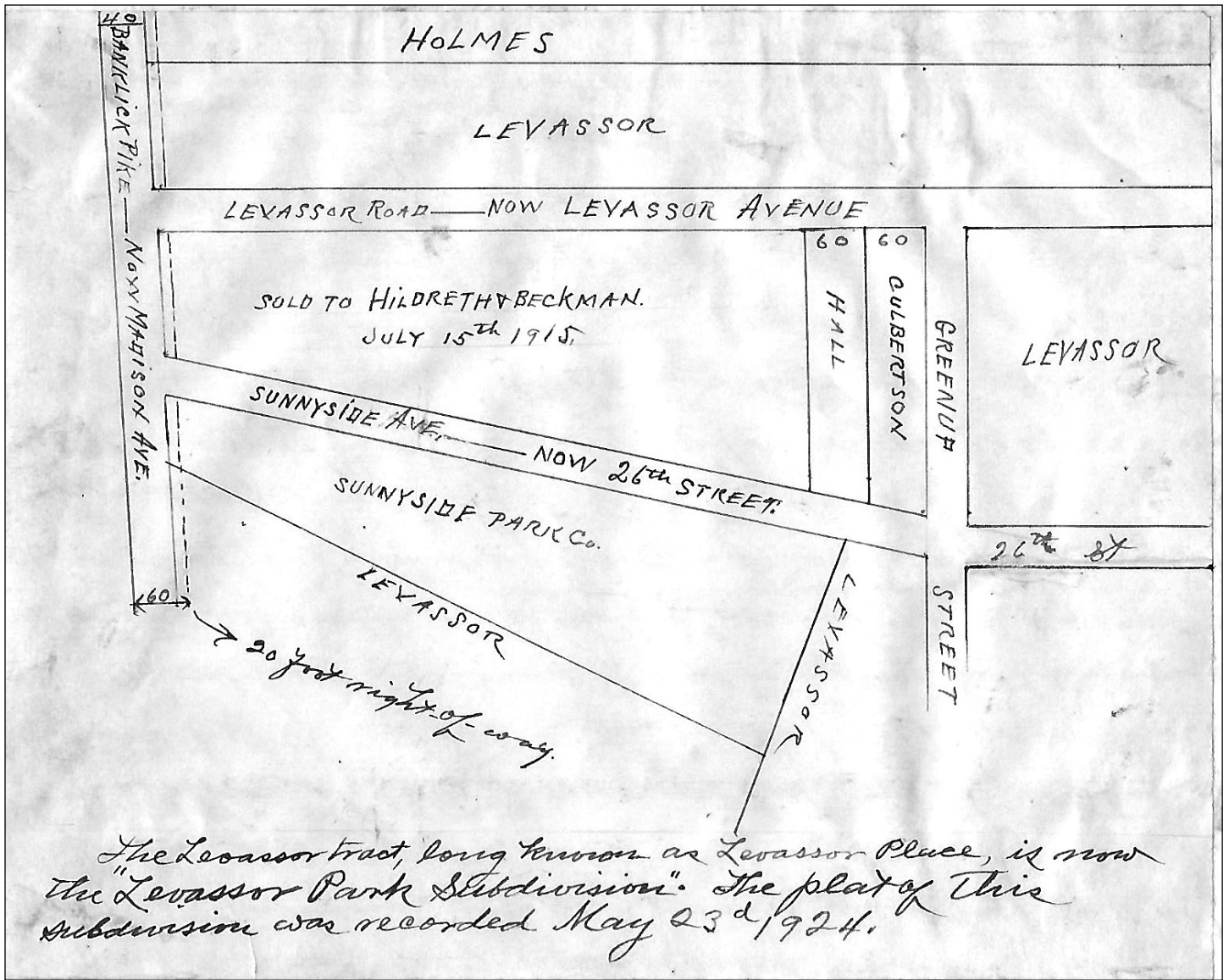
“On November 8th 1895, I conveyed to Walker C. Hall the next lot west of the Culbertson lot mentioned above, fronting 60 feet on Levassor road, and extending back to the north line of Sunnyside Avenue. The consideration was \$3000.00. He constructed a stone residence on this lot during the year 1897, which cost about \$10,000.00, and which was his place of residence for many years following.”

The descriptions of the two houses perfectly fit the structures shown in the aforementioned photograph: brick on the left, stone on the right. The location of each in respect to the other is also confirmed by Carpenter’s sketch on page 5 of the Bulletin Article, a copy of which is provided on the opposite page for convenience of the reader.

Promptly after construction of her house, Laura Culbertson’s husband, Xerxes Willoughby Culbertson, appears in the 1897 Covington city directory, residing on “Levassor Place Sunnyside,” (Wives never seem to be listed as residents in this time period.) Laura owned the house on the left until April 26, 1905, when she and Xerxes conveyed it to Barbara Hooler.⁴ In the 1920 Covington city directory, Barbara’s husband, Jacob F. Hooler, is shown as residing at 33 Levassor “Avenue.” Thus, the brick house built by Laura Culbertson is now clearly identified as 33 Levassor.

It will be recalled that Louis, the last of the male Levassors, died in 1930. The widowed Barbara Hooler owned 33 until her death in 1944, after which her Executor sold it.⁵ So, it is conclusive that 33 was never owned or occupied by any member of the Levassor family.

On the subject of attribution, 33 should properly be identified as “the Laura Culbertson



Above: Diagram of the Levassor park Subdivision, indicating the original Culbertson and Hall property
courtesy of the author

On the cover: What is erroneously known as the Levassor Castle (left) and the Dr. Thomas Bird Home (right) —
what should actually be identified as the “Laura Culbertson House (left) and the Walker Hall House” (right)
Courtesy of the Kenton county Public Library

house,” or “the Culbertson/Hooler house.” Likewise, the adjacent house should not be called the Bird house; rather, it should be “the Walker C. Hall house.”

So where did the Levassors live? Owen J. Carpenter left plenty of information about their presence on their eponymous street. A second photograph of a single house, found in Faces and Places and shown on the following page, is called “Levassor Home,” and based on the following facts, it does portray the Levassor mansion. Its address is 213 Levassor. The

chain of title for that property begins, for our purposes, with the death of Eugene Levassor and the probate of his Last Will and Testament on November 16, 1881.⁶ The Will refers to the family “mansion” and its future occupation by Eugene’s widow (although Sophie was already dead by time of the probate), then its occupancy by Armand. Eugene made disposition of various assets, including residual properties that were to go to his grandsons, Louis E. Levassor and Joseph Diss DeBar, Jr.⁷ The deeds following show a resolution of any controversy between them as on January 30, 1909, the mansion and tracts of land



The Levassor Home
Courtesy of the Kenton county Public Library

were conveyed from Louis and Joseph to Hall, and then to Louis by Hall, acting as “strawman.”⁸

The actual occupancy of the mansion by succeeding generations of Levassors is shown by census records. In 1880, Eugene, Armand, and Louis were shown as all living in the same household. In 1900, Armand and Louis were in the same household. In the City directories before 1928, the address of the house was always given as “e of Madison” or once, “end of Levassor,” but in 1928, Louis’ address is for the first time stated to be 213 Levassor Avenue. Thus, the house named in *Faces and Places* as “Levassor Home” is indeed the home at which the well-known family of Levassors resided.

Endnotes

1. All photos accompanying this Article are used by courtesy of the Kenton County Public Library. According to a descendent the house on the right, called the “Bird” house, should have been called the Dr. Robert Lee Bird house, but that is not entirely accurate, *see infra*.
2. Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society, September/October 2017, p.2
3. Kenton County Clerk’s Records, Deed Book 92, p.252
4. *Supra*, Deed Book 120, p.229
5. *Supra*, Deed Book 316, p.215
6. *Supra*, Will Book 3, p.250
7. An Article about the Levassors in the Bulletin refers to DeBar as the nephew of Clara Levassor DeBar, but that is incorrect. Jones, Allison. *The Levassors of Wallace Woods*. Bulletin, July-August 2012, p.9. Any doubt about that is resolved by Eugene referring to Louis and Joseph as his grandsons in his Will.
8. Kenton County Clerk’s records, Deed Book 134, pp.67-69

Northern Kentucky Unearthed: What Local Hobbyists are Digging Up

Travis Brown

Northern Kentucky's history embodies pioneers' westward exploration, Civil War influences, and the transformation from the bucolic to a more suburban culture. Thankfully, local historians (including members of our society) preserve our past by safeguarding volumes of print material, old photographs, and other artifacts. However, some clues from the past remain concealed. Some local hobbyists, known as metal "detectorists," enjoy uncovering these buried secrets.

Historically speaking, metal detection began as an advancement in medicine. French inventor Gustave Trouvé's "Electric Explorer-Extractor" aided surgeons during the Franco-Prussian War of the early 1870s by locating metallic fragments in soldiers' wounds.¹ Soon after, Alexander Graham Bell developed the "Induction Balance" device, designed to detect the presence of metal. In 1881, Bell used his device to scan President James Garfield's wounded body after Garfield suffered a gunshot wound. Bell failed to find the bullet, as his device was alerted by the springs in Garfield's deathbed.²

In 1933, Dr. Gerhard Fisher developed the "Metalloscope" at his laboratory in Palo Alto, California. This device, the forerunner of the modern hand-held metal detector used by hobbyists today, received a U.S. patent in 1937. The Metalloscope detected metal by, "...generating electrical waves in balanced relation to a receiver, whereby the balanced relation is upset when the apparatus is brought into the vicinity of a metallic body, this unbalanced condition arising from the fact that the field is generated in such a way that the metallic body affects one portion of the field more than it does the other."³

Reducing the size of the detector, Charles Garrett patented a hand-held instrument in 1972. Garrett's device condensed the two oscillating coils

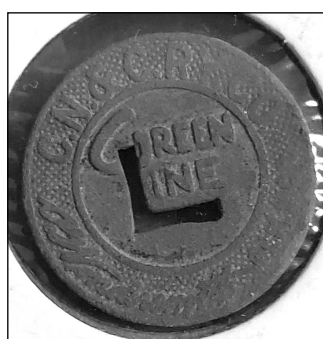
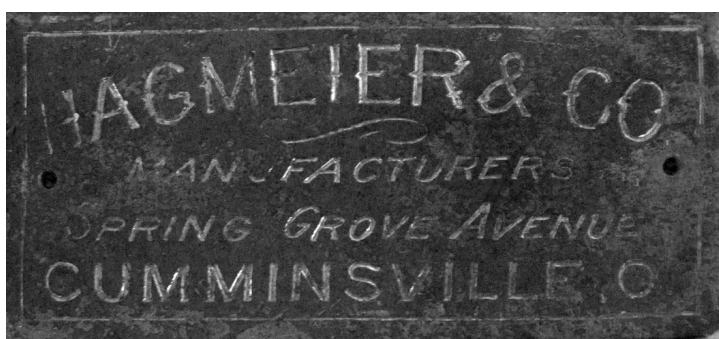
and receiver into an easily-portable device closely resembling today's models. Garrett's patent stated the device contained, "...a probe assembly which is movable parallel to the surface of the earth or such structure and whose inductance varies as the inductor assembly is moved into the proximity of such concealed object, the detector providing an output signal whose frequency varies in accordance with the inductance of the probe assembly."⁴ This meant that the device would either emit a noise or flash of light when it detected a buried metallic object.

With the development of a portable and affordable device, the number of metal detectorists increased. The hobby grew in popularity and professional archeologists questioned the integrity of these amateurs, as detectorists began excavating historically important sites. Relics removed became pieces in private collections rather than detailing artifacts. Although these two groups sometimes represent different interests, contemporary professionals and honest hobbyists agree to the importance of observing laws and codes of ethics pertaining to amateur archeology. For instance, federal law prohibits removing items, including buried artifacts, from government-owned property for the purposes of profit.⁵ Most national parks prohibit any type of amateur archaeology, including metal detecting. Kentucky law also prevents excavations and removal of artifacts on public lands without a permit.⁶ Furthermore, detecting on private property, without permission from the landowner, is both unethical and unlawful.

The past tensions between professionals and amateurs inspired changes aimed at bringing the groups closer together. The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) published recommendations for amateur archaeologists, or who the organization refers to as "responsible and responsive stewards" of the past. These recommendations include: observing all appli-

cable laws, avoiding the disruption of any human remains, and reporting significant findings to the state archaeologist or State Historic Preservation Office.⁷ Through this mutual agreement, professionals and amateurs formed a partnership in 1984 at Little Big Horn, Montana. As a result, participants unearthed the remains of a few fallen soldiers and other significant remnants of the 1876 battle.⁸

Aside from the law, reputable detectorists also adhere to a strict code of ethics. Locally, detectorists belonging the *Northern Kentucky Treasure Hunters Club* endorse these tenants in the club code of ethics: respect private property, always get permission to hunt,



fill and cover all holes made, remove and properly dispose of any trash (including trash you discover on the grounds), protect the woods, forest, and wildlife, and always use thoughtfulness, courtesy, and consideration.⁹

Ed Morris, a local detectorist and club member, located many interesting artifacts throughout Northern Kentucky. Some of his best finds come from areas around the old Lexington Pike (Dixie Highway), Civil War batteries, and early pioneer settlements. For instance, he unearthed several Spanish silver coins dating from the late 18th century. Morris explains, during the 1800s, people traded silver for goods based on the coin's weight, not face value.¹⁰ Other detectorists in the club located a few pie-shaped pieces cut from silver coins. It was common practice at that time to divide a coin into pieces, based on weight of silver needed to complete a purchase.

Civil War relics unearthed locally indicate not only the presence of Union, but also Confederate troops. Bullets (both unused and fragmented) found in Crestview Hills include some well-preserved two-ringed .58 caliber "Gardner" type slugs, possibly dropped by Confederate troops who were encamped in the area. Union-style three-ringed rifle bullets and round pistol balls surfaced near the original site of Fort Mitchel.

Non-militaristic artifacts found in the region include an admission token to the Ludlow Lagoon, several Green Line bus and trolley tokens, and a uniform button from Indiana's Culver Military Academy. Located too was a brass plate circa 1890s from Hagmeier and Company, manufacturers of bar fixtures on Spring Grove Avenue in Cumminsville, Ohio.¹¹ Older relics include a cap-and-ball rifle side

Images of some of the items unearthed in the region

Opposite page (top to bottom/left to right):

1/8th U.S. silver dollar, circa 1798;
Brass plate from Hagmeier and company, Cumminsville, Ohio;
Green Line token; Culver Military Academy Button;
Union three-ringed bullets and fragments

courtesy the author

plate, "Colonial" style shoe buckles, and trouser suspender buckles all of which from the early 1800s according to Morris.¹²

What do these amateur archeological finds tell us? Some of these finds pinpoint activities and sites of early settlers in our area. The military artifacts document troop movement, encampment areas, and the materials used. Metal detecting proves rewarding to hobbyists while also contributing to our knowledge of local history. All of us gain historical knowledge, providing the detectorists abide by laws and ethical considerations.

About the Author

Travis Brown retired from the Fort Mitchell Police Department in 2014 after serving also with the Kentucky State Police and Fort Wright Police. He currently serves as a school resource officer with the Boone County Sheriff's Department. He is a faculty member at Xavier University where he is an adjunct professor in the criminal justice department. He was recently elected to the Kenton County Historical Society Board.

Endnotes

1. *Found . . . in France*. Desmond, K. 11, 2007, History Today, Vol. 57, pp. 5-7.
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7. Society for American Archaeology. SAA Statement on Collaboration with Responsible and Responsive Stewards of the Past. [Online] [Cited: January 4, 2019.] <https://www.saa.org/career-practice/saa-statements-guidelines/statement-details/2018/08/01/statement-on-collaboration-with-responsible-and-responsive-stewards-of-the-past>.
8. *Metal Detector Use in Archaeology: An Introduction*. Connor, Melissa, and Douglas D. Scott. 4, Historical Archaeology, Vol. 32, pp. 76-85.
9. Northern Kentucky Treasure Hunters. Hunters Code Of Ethics. [Online] <http://www.nkthc.com/coe>.
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11. Illustrated business directory and picturesque Cincinnati 1890. *The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County*. [Online] 1890. [Cited: January 8, 2019.] <http://classic.cincinnati-library.org/record=b2923470~S1>.
12. *Found . . . in France*. Desmond, K. 11, 2007, History Today, Vol. 57, pp. 5-7.

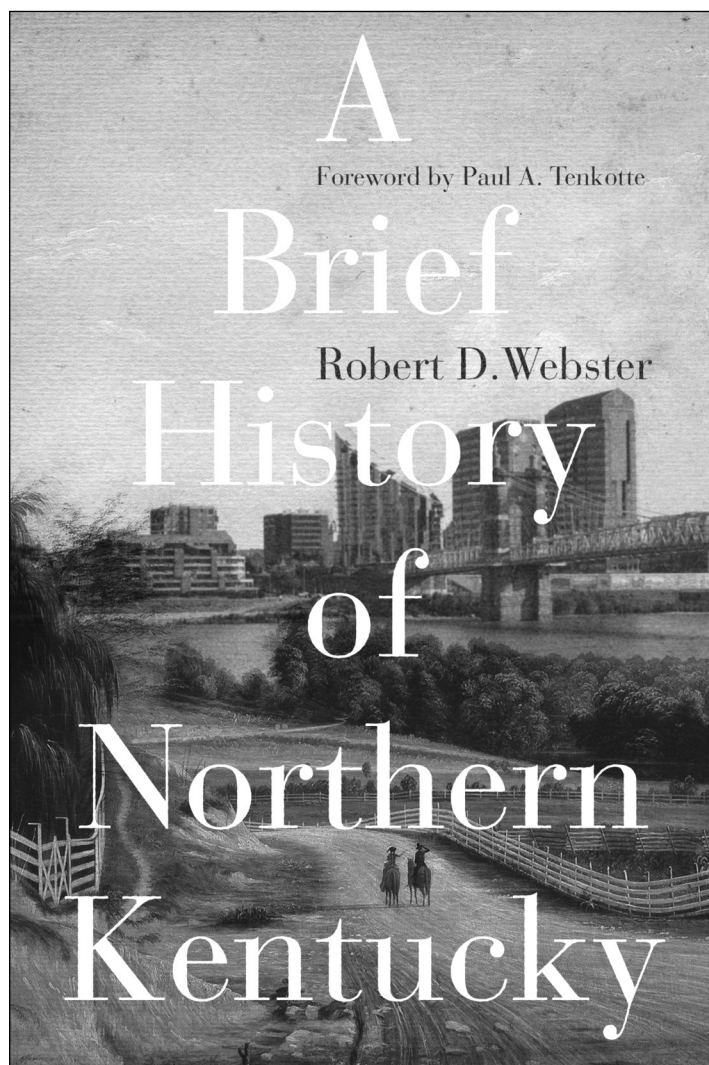
New Book to Be Released in July

There is a new book scheduled to hit the shelves in July that will certainly pique the curiosity of our subscribers, and anyone else interested in the history of this region. Published by South Limestone Press, a title under University Press of Kentucky, *A Brief History of Northern Kentucky* is something new, something we've never had before!

Robert "Bob" Webster, current president of the Kenton County Historical Society, spent nearly four years compiling information from numerous sources, such as the *Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*, and personally conducted a tremendous amount of new research for a book that covers the region – as he describes it, "...from before the Ohio River existed to the building of the ark at Williamstown..."

Bob has been published often in the *Bulletin* and *Northern Kentucky Heritage Magazine*, but he may be best known for his 2012 epic work, *The Beverly Hills Supper Club: The Untold Story Behind Kentucky's Worst Tragedy*. With regard to his latest book, Bob explains that, in his opinion and that of many other Northern Kentuckians, this region has been slighted for decades with regard to its inclusion in other books about Kentucky's incredible history.

"While in the beginning stages of this project, I compiled a long list of about twenty names, places, and events – things that are important in the region. I grabbed more than a dozen books on Kentucky history, and then checked my list against the index in each one. I was flabbergasted. Out of all those books, each marketed as a history of Kentucky – the entire state – there was only one entry for James Taylor, the founder of Newport; and no mention at all about Thomas Kennedy, whose property became the city of Covington. Even James C. Klotter's *A Concise History of Kentucky* fails to mention Bullittsburg Baptist Church, established near the time Kentucky was admitted into the Union and still in existence today; or the Rabbit Hash General Store, a Boone County



business in operation since 1831. Incredibly, even the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire, which killed 169 people and still ranks as one of the worst fires in U.S. history, is not mentioned at all! For the most part, I had already decided to do the book, but the whole Beverly Hills thing – that really sealed it for me. How in the world can you leave that out?"

"Every single book I researched," Bob continued, "those about Kentucky in general, seemed to leave off the upper ten counties, as if we seceded from the rest of the state years ago and are now just 'South Cincinnati' or something. Clearly, Northern Kentucky needed its own history book. And, I was so

pleased — so honored — when I presented the idea to the University Press and they agreed.”

The book will be approximately 6”x9” in size and contain over 300 pages. Over 50 photographs are included, as well as maps, charts, and more. It is fully indexed, of course, with endnotes and references. Bob even helped design the cover, which carries a “from olden-days to the present” theme. The foreground shows two riders on horseback along a winding dirt road circa 1850, while the background shows a present-day view of a section of the Covington skyline, including the world-famous Roebling Suspension Bridge. The olden-day picture comes from a Godfrey Frankenstein oil painting of the Covington-Lexington Turnpike (LLL Highway) done in 1853.

Paul Tenkotte wrote the Forward, included here:

A History of Northern Kentucky, by Robert D. Webster, fills an important need in providing an historical overview of Kentucky’s third-largest metropolitan region. Webster has clearly spent countless hours documenting this history. The book benefits from the research of various previous authors, as well as many recent works, including *The Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky* (2009). In addition, Webster’s previous books, *The Beverly Hills Supper Club: The Untold Story behind Kentucky’s Worst Tragedy* (2012), *Northern Kentucky Fires* (2006), and *The Balcony is Closed: A History of Northern Kentucky’s Long Forgotten Neighborhood Movie Theaters* (2007), help to round out this overview. So, too, do many articles from *Northern Kentucky Heritage*, the longtime and award-winning journal dedicated to the region’s history. Edited by Karl Lietzenmayer, *Northern Kentucky Heritage* has encouraged the study of the area’s history and provided a forum for scholars to exchange new ideas and research.

Webster’s analysis of Northern Kentucky’s prehistory, as well as his coverage of early pioneers, is superb. For too long, historians have repeated errors and myths dealing with explorers like Christopher Gist. Webster boldly explains, in detail, how some of these inaccuracies and myths occurred, and diplomatically corrects them.

Likewise, he succinctly captures and vividly recounts for readers important points from John Burns’ unpublished and somewhat tedious, multi-volume manuscript of Covington, Kentucky.

Readers will enjoy Webster’s overview of the Civil War period, as it reflects current scholarship. The nineteenth and twentieth century sections of the book are seasoned with stories relating to Northern Kentucky’s businesses and entertainment venues, including its notorious gambling establishments. The tragedies of the Flood of 1937, of World War II, and of the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire also rightly take their place in this history of Northern Kentucky.

Webster has a gift for making history come alive. Further, he appreciates the value of illustrations in elaborating important points. This overview of Northern Kentucky history will contribute greatly to what residents of the region already appreciate. As one of the points of Kentucky’s prosperous Golden Triangle, Northern Kentucky will continue to grow, occupying an increasingly significant position in the chronicles of Kentucky history.

There is no denying that the people, places, and events within Northern Kentucky differ greatly from those in the rest of the state and, therefore, their history is equally unique. Even novice historians and scholars are aware of Daniel Boone’s epic adventures through the Cumberland Gap. Few know, however, that the early settlement of *Northern* Kentucky had far more to do with the Ohio River than the Wilderness Road and that Boone actually roamed Northern Kentucky *before* he founded his namesake fort.

This book, long overdue, focuses on the upper twelve counties of the state. Bob explains, “It is in no way being submitted as a concise history and is not meant to be a replacement for other works on the state, but rather a companion to them. Kentucky is a magnificent and extremely beautiful state with a long and interesting history, and I offer no disrespect toward other authors or other regions. It is simply time that the early explorers, settlers, businesses, and families now connected to Northern Kentucky finally get

Kentucky Trivia

A new, ongoing feature from Michael Crisp's
"The Best Kentucky Trivia Book Ever," available at
bookstores or at michaelcrisponline.com

This issue features

Famous Quotes

Questions

1. Who said, "I never met a Kentuckian who wasn't either thinking about going home or was actually going home?"
2. Who said "Heaven must be a Kentucky kind of place?"
3. Who said, "I hope to have God on my side, but I must have Kentucky?"
4. Who wrote, "If the United States can be called a body, Kentucky can be called its heart?"
5. Who penned, "My friend, you're in trouble. This town is flat full, always is for the Derby?"
6. Who said, "I have never in my life seen a Kentuckian who didn't have a gun, a pack of cards, and a jug of whiskey?"
7. Who said, "I've only had two rules: do all you can and do it the best you can?"
8. Who said, "Tough girls come from New York. Sweet girls, they're from Georgia. Kentucky girls, we can ride horses, be a debutante, throw left hooks, and drink with the boys...?"
9. Who said, "Of all the properties which belong to honorable men, not one is so highly prized as that of character?"
10. A Kentucky proverb states you should keep your friends close, and what closer?

Answers

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. A.B. "Happy" Chandler | 6. Andrew Jackson |
| 2. Daniel Boone | 7. Col. Harlan Sanders |
| 3. Abraham Lincoln | 8. Ashley Judd |
| 4. Jesse Stuart | 9. Henry Clay |
| 5. Hunter S. Thompson | 10. Bourbon |

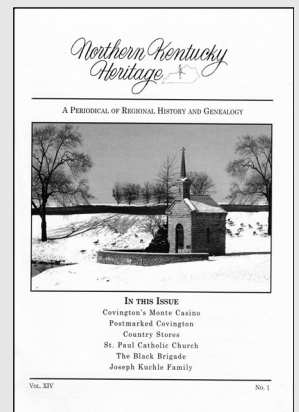
their well-deserved place upon the written pages in the history of this fine Commonwealth."

As Nick Clooney, well-loved celebrity from this region; former news anchor; brother to famous singer and early film starlet, Rosemary Clooney; and father to actor George Clooney, so eloquently stated in the Kentucky Educational Television (KET) documentary *Where the River Bends*, "Northern Kentucky is a place like many others, and yet, there is really no other place just like it."

The Society will be offering the book for sale on our website (kentoncountyhistoricalsociety.org), under "Newest Additions" on the "Online Store" link. Until the books arrive from the publisher, we will even accept pre-orders. Reserve your copy today.

Do you subscribe?

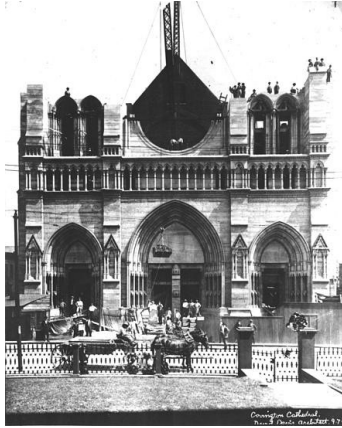
Northern Kentucky Heritage Magazine



It's the only periodical
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Then and Now

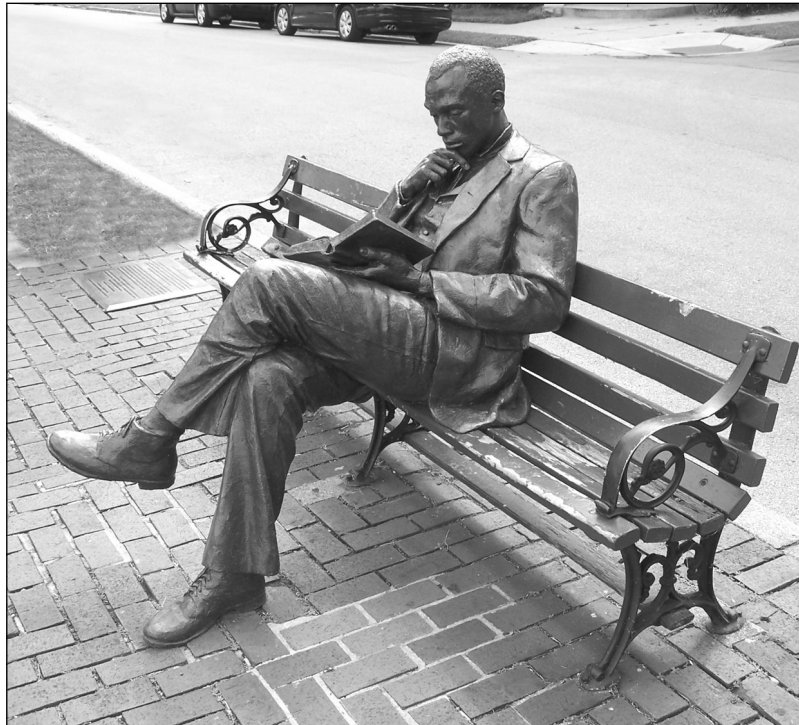


Two views of the Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption, Covington. Left during construction, right image today.

Left image courtesy Kenton County Public Library / right image courtesy Robert Webster

Mystery Photo

Can you identify the Mystery Photo?



Answer:

Statue of former slave James Bradley, located along Riverside Drive in Covington, Kentucky.

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Yearly membership, which includes
six issues of the Bulletin, \$20.00

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I Bet You Didn't Know

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

May 3, 1986: Karen Easterday, music education major at the University of Louisville, became the first female to sound the bugle for the "Call to the Post" for the Kentucky Derby. Bill Shoemaker became the oldest jockey to win the race. It was his fourth Kentucky Derby victory.

May 7, 1972: Kentucky couple, Ed and Margaret Hollen, celebrated their 83rd wedding anniversary. Ed was 105 and Margaret was 99. It was a record as the world's longest marriage at the time.

June 1, 1792: Kentucky was admitted as the 15th state of the United States of America. Population at the time was 100,000.

From: *On This Day In Kentucky*, by Robert Powell

Programs and Notices

Kenton County Historical Society

The KCHS will host a program presented by Karl Lietzenmayer on General Lafayette, the French aristocrat who was an officer in the American Revolutionary War. He later made a return trip to America going on an extended tour. Approaching Cincinnati, General Lafayette and company, on May 19, 1825, stopped in Covington for refreshments, at the city's "the first house of public entertainment" which Alexander Connelly had opened in 1817. The presentation will be at the Kenton County Public Library, September 21.

Behringer Crawford Museum

Northern Kentucky Sports Legends - Exhibit

Final days: The Behringer Crawford Museum has on display a very extensive collection of "Northern Kentucky Sports Legends" and memorabilia: male and female; high school, college and pro; baseball, softball, football, swimming, horseracing, boxing; players, referees, umpires, broadcasters; players' jackets, trophies, baseball and other sports players' cards; signed bats and balls; special exhibits on the 1919 Reds; on Jackie Robinson; and listed on a banner over 1000 local players given special recognition by the Northern Kentucky Sports Hall of Fame. Only 12 days left for the exhibit (ending May 12th).

Thursday Evening Music Concert Series (May and June Portion)

On May 16th - New York City's Grammy-nominated vocalist,
keyboardist and composer Nicole Zuraitis

On May 30 - Phil Degreg & Brubeck Tribute - Jazz

On June 6: - Leroy Ellington's Sacred Hearts - Roots

On June 13 - Mt. Auburn Brass - Brass

On June 20 - Mambo Combo - Latin

On June 27 - Comet Bluegrass All Stars - Bluegrass

From May 30th through August 15th, the Behringer Crawford Museum Concert Series runs weekly (except Thursday July 4th) on Thursday evenings. Concerts are held outside in the Museum's amphitheater, when weather permits. Doors open at 6:00. Food can be purchased again from Colonial Cottage, as well as adult beverages and other drinks. Admission is \$5.00 plus tax for adults; \$3.00 plus tax for children 6-12.

(Call 859-491-4003, email info@bcmuseum.org or go to www.bcmuseum.org for more details.)