



Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society

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“Sunnyside” — A Forgotten Place

**1980 Explosion at Simon Kenton High School:
A Brief Summary**

“Sunnyside” A Forgotten Place

Arnold Taylor

While some residents of Levassor Avenue in Covington may know the origins of their street's name, it is not likely that anyone living on the adjacent 26th Street knows that its original name was Sunnyside Avenue, or that there was an Italianate mansion located near it, known as “Sunnyside.”

John - Baptiste Eugene Levasseur/Levassor came to the United States from France and arrived in the Greater Cincinnati area in 1820, became a merchant in Cincinnati and amassed a considerable fortune. His property included what is now known as Levassor Avenue, on which he built a residence described as being east of the Independence Pike, at the toll gate. Levassor subdivided some of his land and part of that property was purchased by Rensselaer Wilson Lee in 1859. Lee and his wife sold the property to George Phillips on October 19, 1869. It is unknown when the house known as “Sunnyside” was built, or by whom, but the deed to Phillips states that the property was “known as ‘Sunnyside’” and the Italianate style was popular in the mid-1800s.

When Phillips died in 1873, he was described as “a wealthy citizen, long connected with the Licking Iron Works.” While Phillips may have been a substantial landowner, by 1875 his Executrix petitioned for a sale of real property, the personal property in the estate being insufficient to pay his debts. Accordingly, in 1877 “the George Phillips Homestead near the first toll gate on the Independence Pike was sold by the Master Commissioner to Capt. John A. Robinson, of Cincinnati, for \$9,300; less than one-half its real value.”

Robinson appears in the 1876 Covington city directory as the President of the Blick & Phillips Coal Company. The “Phillips” involved in that company was George Phillips and the United States Census for 1870 lists him as a coal dealer.

The next person involved in this story was Owen J. Carpenter, who was described in the 1890 Covington city directory as a wholesaler of whiskey and the owner of the “Old Dexter” distillery in Pendleton County. However, Carpenter also played a large role in the development of land in the Northern Kentucky area, one such development being the Sunnyside Park Company. A manuscript, handwritten by him circa 1937, tells the rest of the story of Sunnyside.

“Early in the month of June 1890, A. G. Simrall obtained from John A. Robinson, an option to purchase the old George Phillips homestead place containing 3.45 acres adjoining Levassor place, then known as “Sunnyside.” After obtaining this option, A. G. Simrall organized the Sunnyside Park Company with the understanding that it would purchase the property mentioned at the price stated in the option. The following were subscribers for the stock of the company: O. J. Carpenter, A. G. Simrall, D. L. Carpenter and Charles Hair, who were the signers of the Articles of Incorporation of the company. The Articles of Incorporation of the Sunnyside Park Co. are dated June 24th 1890, and were recorded in Book 3, page 183. On June 28th 1890, John A. Robinson conveyed the above mentioned property to the Sunnyside Park Co. by deed dated June 28th 1890, recorded in Deed Book 67 page 168. The deed shows that the consideration was \$16,000. The plat of this subdivision is in Original Plat Book page 103, and is dated May 21st 1891. During the month of May, 1891, A. G. Simrall held an auction sale of lots in this subdivision. A short time prior to this sale, I arranged with George W. Howell to bid for me on lots 1,

2, 3, and 4 at this auction, and the result was, that he was the best bidder, and became the purchaser of those lots, and at my request the Sunnyside Park Company conveyed these lots to George W. Howell and a short time thereafter, he conveyed these same lots to me by deed recorded in Deed Book 72 page 326; the consideration was the same as the price he bid them in for me at the auction sale. At this same auction sale I bought lots 5, 6, 7, and 8; lot 5 is 100 feet front, depth 175 feet, on which stood the Phillips residence. The Sunnyside Park Co. conveyed these four lots to me by deed dated May 18th 1891, which is recorded in Deed Book 71 page 450. My purchase of lots 3, 4, and 5 gave me title to Sunnyside Place, a private street laid out for the exclusive use and benefit of the owner or owners of these 3 lots, which street as shown by the plat, is 50 feet wide, length 100 feet, between Sunnyside Avenue and the Levassor line, where it comes to a dead end. On July 15th 1891, I purchased from Armand P. Levassor, Executor and Trustee under the Will of Eugene Levassor, deceased, the two lots or parcels shown by the plat or sketch at the top of the attached contract, being the parts colored red.” [Author’s note; see illustration on following page]

“These two parcels were conveyed to me by deed dated July 18th 1891, recorded in Deed Book 72, page 306. The old George Phillips mansion, containing 15 rooms, became my place of residence on August 1st 1891, where I continued to reside until the fall of 1914. The three photographs of this old residence and grounds, filed with this paper, show the appearance of the place during all of the summers of the 23 years we resided there. The Sunnyside Park Co. conveyed to me lots 9 and 10 in the Sunnyside subdivision by deed dated July 10th 1892, recorded in Deed Book 71 page 562. The last mentioned conveyance completed my title to the tract within the boundary lines of the plat or

sketch at the top of the Levassor contract hereto attached, containing about 3 acres, on which the old Phillips residents stood.”

“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. 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.”

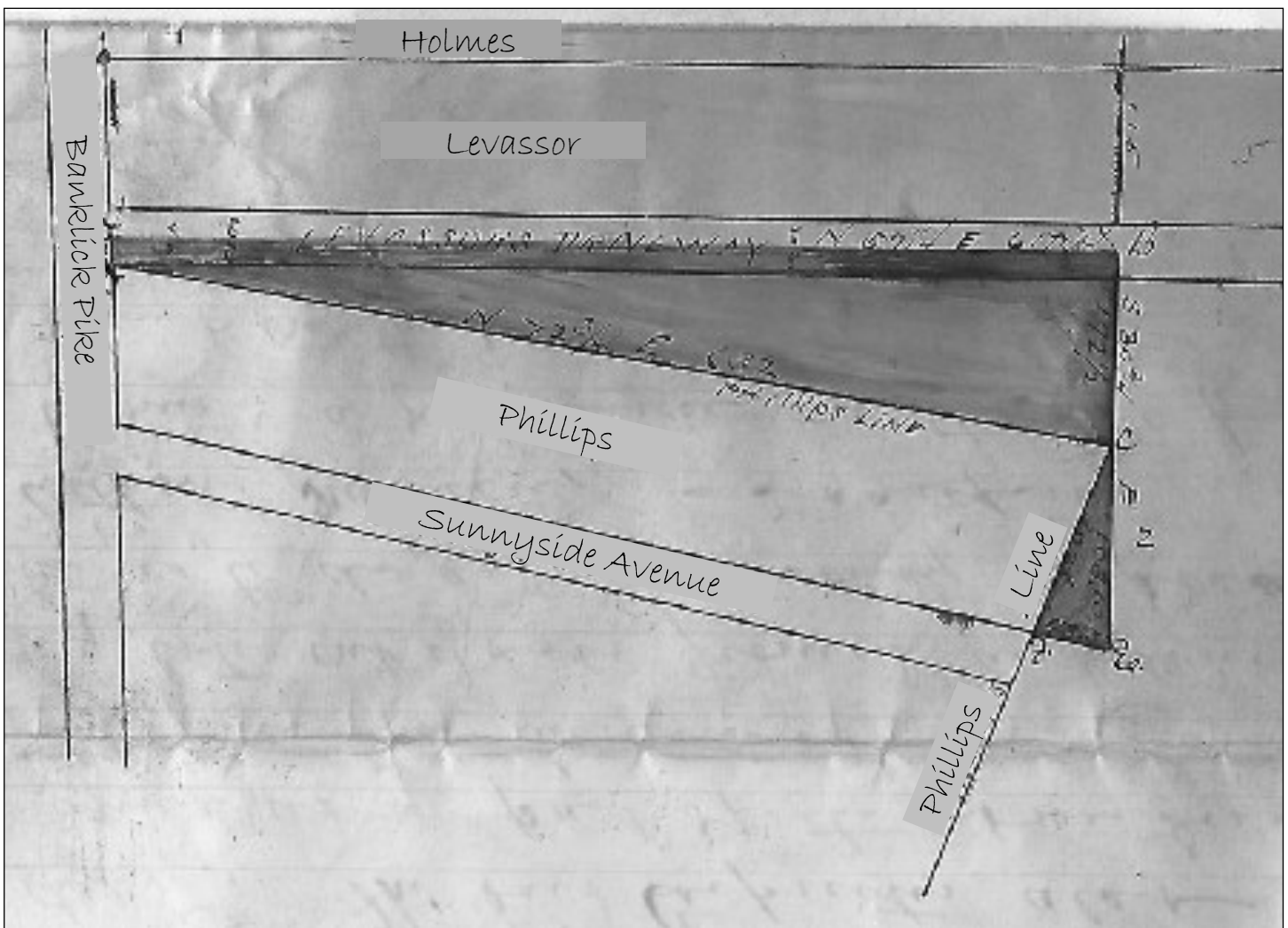
“On November 8th 1895, I conveyed to Walker C. Hall the next lot west of the Culbertson lot mentioned above, fronting 60 feet on Levassor road, and extending back to the north line of Sunnyside Avenue. The consideration was \$3000.00. He constructed a stone residence on this lot during the year 1897, which cost about \$10,000.00, and which was his place of residence for many years following. The construction of the two residences mentioned more than doubly fulfilled my obligation to construct a residence at the east end of the tract, to cost not less than \$7000.00.”

“The stone pillars and gates referred to in the attached Levassor contract were not removed accordingly, because it was afterward concluded by all parties concerned, that if they were removed and placed as specified in the said contract, their existence at the place mentioned would be detrimental to the surrounding property instead of a benefit. On May 2nd 1913, I conveyed to the City of Covington a strip of ground along the east side of Madison Avenue 20 feet in width, between the Levassor road,

now Levassor Avenue, and Sunnyside Avenue, now 26th street, in exchange for an exemption from assessment for the improvement of Madison Avenue 60 feet in width, with cement sidewalks, cement curbs and gutters, and paved with granite blocks; with the agreement that when work was begun on those improvements, I would pay the city of Covington \$200.00 for the stone pillars and gates, which stood on the strip of ground mentioned. I think this improvement of Madison Avenue was made during 1915, when the stone pillars and gates which for so many years had stood on the en-

trance to the old George Phillips homestead Place, were removed and placed at the Eastern Avenue entrance to the St. Elizabeth Hospital, a very appropriate place for them and for their preservation. After we moved away from the old Phillips mansion, "Sunnyside," in the fall of 1914, it was never again occupied by anyone as a place of residence."

"On July 12 1915, I sold to Hildreth & Beckman, contractors and builders, the property within the boundary lines as follows; the south line of the Levassor Road, now Levassor Ave-



Above: Drawing showing two parcels (shaded) purchased on July 15th 1891 from Levassor estate.

On the cover: photograph of the front, westerly side of "Sunnyside" taken shortly after its purchase by Owen J. Carpenter, as the reverse bears a handwritten note stating it is a photo of the "Phillips Place" taken in 1891.

The persons in the photograph are not identified, although it can be assumed that they are Carpenter family members, and the woman in the white apron is certainly the servant, "Mammy Sue."

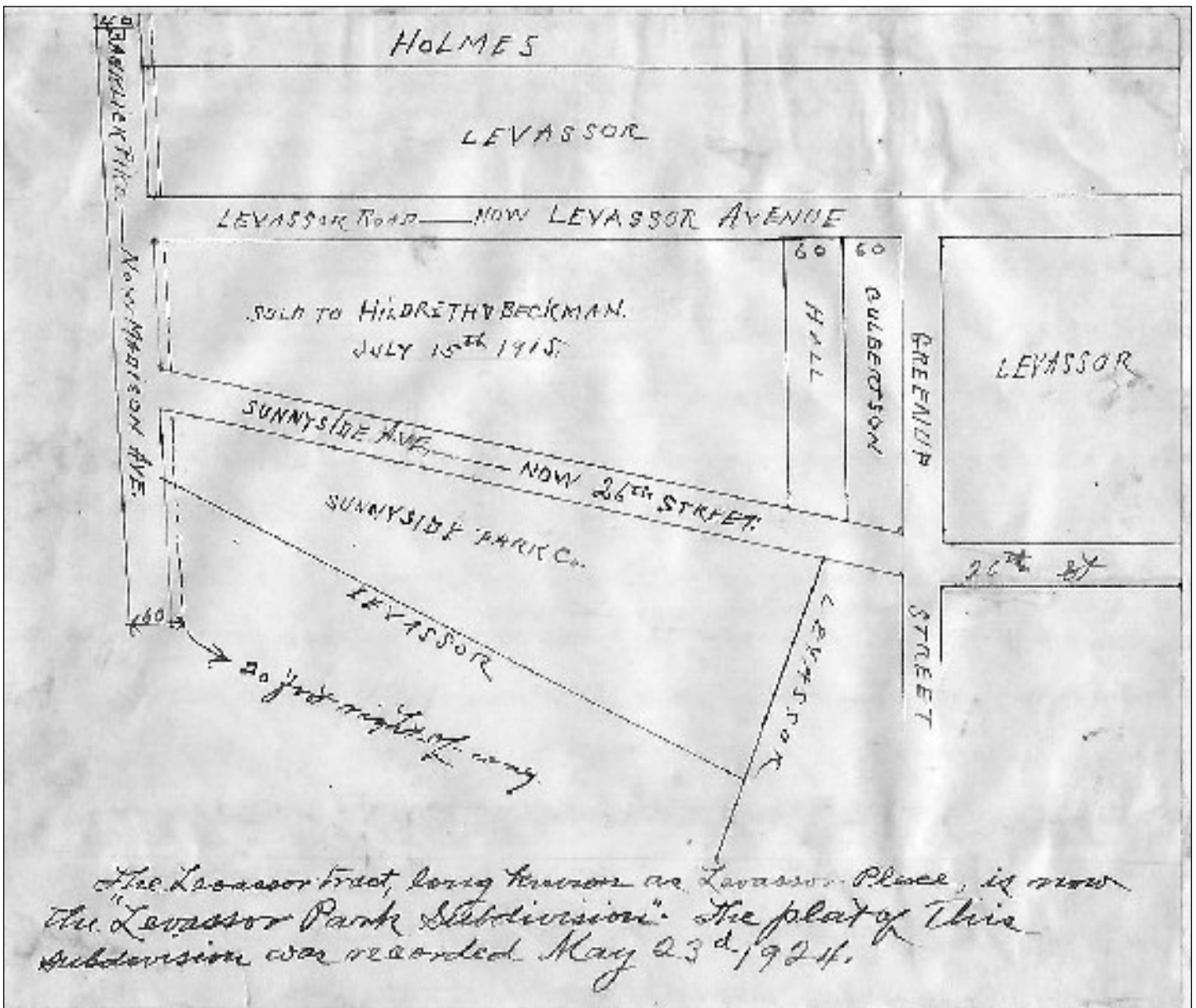
All images/illustrations in this article are courtesy the author

nue; the West line of the Walker C. Hall lot; the north line of Sunnyside Avenue, now 26th street; and the east line of Madison Avenue." [Author's note: see Illustration below]

"The consideration was \$13,000.00. The old Phillips mansion stood on this property. Soon thereafter they subdivided this property in building lots, and began the construction of houses thereon, using in their construction a considerable part of the material obtained from the old George Phillips residence, which was torn down by them in 1915 or 1916."

Along with other items received by the author is a large scale drawing of the first floor of Sunnyside done by Carpenter's son, William A. Carpenter, in July of 1915, and rough notes about the second and third floors. The drawing is too large and the paper too fragile to copy for attachment to this article, but the following might serve as an imaginary trip through the house.

After ascending a short flight of stairs to a 10' by 37' porch on the Westerly side of the house, the visitor passed through a four-foot-wide door and entered a hallway, nine feet wide by 33' in length; to his immediate left was the doorway to a 14' x 19' library,



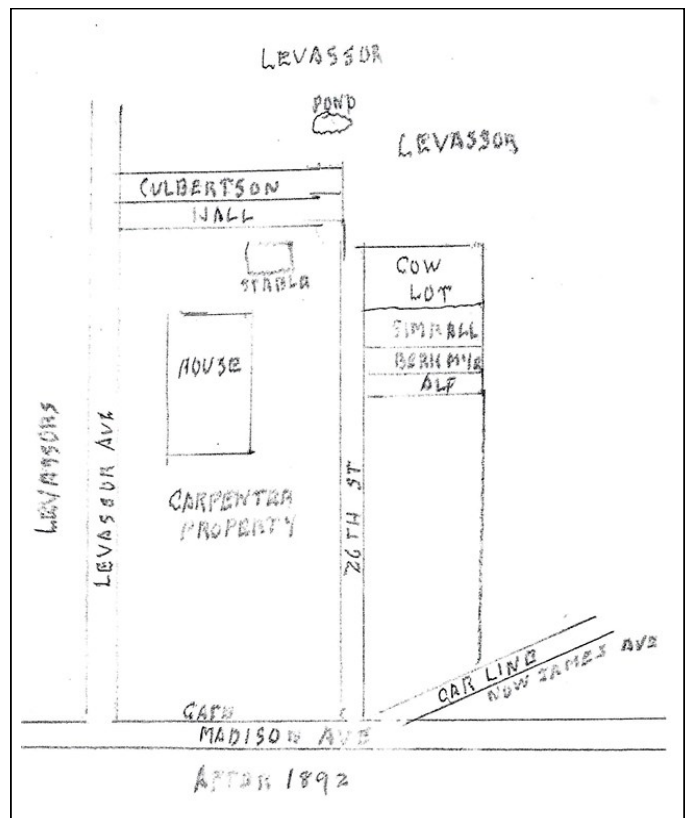
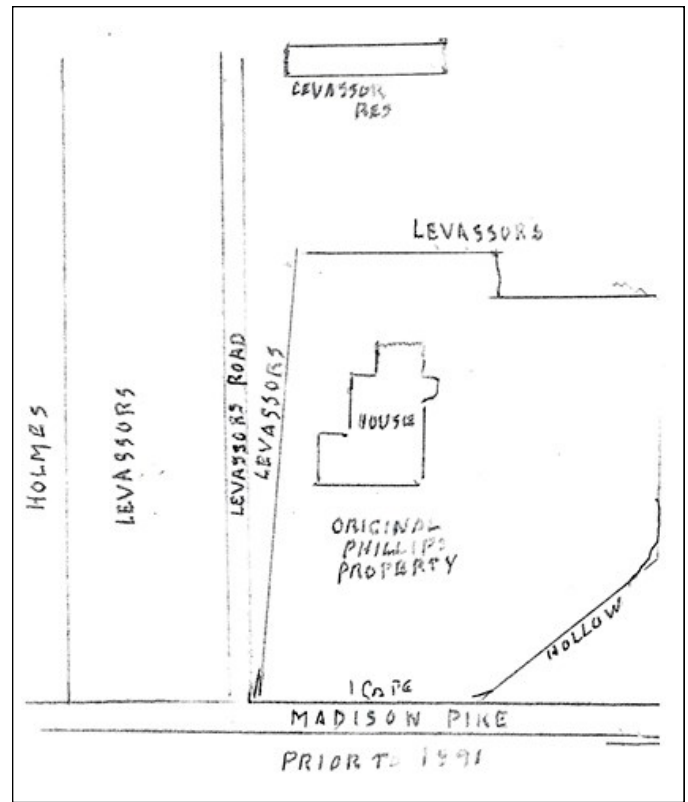
Drawing showing area sold by Carpenter to developers in 1915

and to his immediate right was an entrance to the parlor, which was 14' wide and 33' in length. Continuing down the hallway he could observe, at the left end of the hall, the grand staircase leading to the second floor. At the end of the hall was a doorway leading to a two-story porch, 9.5' in width and 22' in length. The visitor could continue through the porch to a storeroom. However, on first entering the porch he would have seen a doorway to his right leading to a small hallway, which was also accessible from the parlor through a door on its easterly wall. Doors from the small hallway and from the far end of the porch gave the visitor access to the dining room on the south side of the building. The dining room was 15'6" by 23'8" and had three bay windows facing south. A door on the easterly side of the dining room led to a hallway giving access to the pantry and storage facilities and then to the kitchen, which was 14' by 16.5'.

Handwritten notes regarding the layout of the second floor reveal the following: Above the library was a 14' by 19' bedroom and over the front of the parlor was another bedroom measuring 14' by 16'. The two bedrooms were separated by a hallway of the same dimensions as the first floor hallway. Over the rear of the parlor was a 14' by 16' bedroom, across the hall from which was the grand staircase. Above the dining room was a bedroom measuring 15.5 x 23'. Nearby was a linen room measuring 8' by 14', with doors leading to the bathroom and the large bedroom. The bath itself was 9' x 12.5'. Above the kitchen was a servants room, measuring 14' by 16.5' near the second set of stairs.

On the third floor was a 14' by 19' bedroom above the library and across the hall was another bedroom, 14 x 15'. A set of steps led up to the tower. Over the rear of the parlor was a bedroom measuring 14' by 15'. Above the bath was a large iron tank. Near the water tank was a small bedroom over part of the bay windows.

The illustrations at right are sketches of how Sunnyside was situated and its relationship to landmarks before and after Carpenter acquired the property. On the following pages are photographs of Sunnyside and its surrounds, taken in 1891 and later.



Top: As noted on the drawing, this illustration by Carpenter shows the configuration of "Sunnyside" and its surroundings before he subdivided the property. Above the words "Madison Pike" is seen "Gate," indicating the location of the stone pillars and gate marking the entrance to "Sunnyside."

Bottom: As noted, this illustration shows the configuration of "Sunnyside" after Carpenter's acquisition.



Top Left: South side of Sunnyside. The first set of double windows opened into the parlor and the next set of windows, barely discernible as bay windows, lighted the dining room. Note the light post, probably gas, behind the half-barrel planter.

Top Right: This photo contains on the reverse the following: *“These stone pillars and gates were removed from the entrance to the old George Phillips homestead place about 23 years ago and placed at the Eastern Avenue entrance to the Saint Elizabeth Hospital, where they still remain; a very appropriate place for them and their preservation. November 11th, 1937. [Signed] O J Carpenter”*
No evidence of them is found today.

Bottom: North side of Sunnyside. The reverse of the photograph contains the following about the people on the lawn: *“Mammy Sue, Sarah, Pa, Aunt Lib, Gee Gee, WAC in white collar, Alys to far right, 2 small kids probably Luther and Elizabeth.”*



Top: This picture contains the following on the reverse: *“Front yard of Phillips Place. Taken 1891. Pa in foreground.”* “Pa” is undoubtedly Owen J. Carpenter. Note the stone pillars along now Madison Avenue, also shown in photo on previous page.

Bottom: This photograph is identified on the reverse as *“Levassor Avenue looking West”*, presumably taken in 1891.

1980 Explosion at Simon Kenton High School: A Brief Summary

Robert D. Webster

On Thursday, October 9, 1980 at about 11:50 in the morning, 1,125 students at Simon Kenton High School were either in their classrooms or in the cafeteria having lunch when a hissing sound was heard coming from the boiler room in the basement at the front of the building. A crew from UHL&P was servicing a natural gas line out front, gradually increasing the volume going into the school building. They were unaware it was the wrong feeder line; one which could not stand the additional pressure. Less than five seconds notice was given by the unusual hissing before a tremendous explosion sent walls crashing and flames rolling into the adjoining classrooms, stairwells and hallways.

Directly next to the boiler room was an art room filled with students working on decorations for Halloween. Standing nearest the wall was 16-year-old junior, Robert Williams, who was killed in the initial explosion. Classmate Scott Wallin said "The whole wall came at me." Another classmate said "It was nothing like our fire drills; everyone just started running." Teacher Linda Whitenburg, who was in the art room with her students, said the blast "...knocked us all down and a whole wall of nothing but flames rolled toward us. I never saw kids move so fast in my life."

The explosion set off fire alarms in all four sections of the school and calls began hitting the Kenton County dispatch switchboard by the dozens. With previous fire drills, staff and students were able to clear the entire building in about two minutes. Science and mathematics classes, who were in the front wing, were at lunch at the time, helping with the overall evacuation process and drastically decreasing the number of injuries. Mrs. Lonneman's chemistry class quickly made their way down the stairs and had just a short distance to go before hot steam and billowing smoke met them in the stairway. Her instructions to "...hold your breath and continue toward the open doors..." likely saved all their lives.



Within minutes, fire crews from the entire county were at the scene and additional firefighters were in transit from as far away as Hebron. In all, 14 fire departments responded. About 25 minutes after the first explosion, as first responders were entering the building in search of those injured, a second blast 10 times bigger than the first rocked the school sending debris everywhere. It knocked the emergency personnel off their feet and scattered them like bowling pins. The second blast injured more than two dozen firefighters and utility workers, some critically. The single student was the only fatality, however. Damage estimates were set at \$1.5 million.

In the many months of repairs and major reconstruction, Simon Kenton students were sent to the newly-opened Scott High School, attending classes after Scott's students were dismissed; from 1:30 in the afternoon to 7:10 in the evening.

Like the phoenix, however, Simon Kenton's boys basketball team somehow rallied to win the regional tournament and went on to win the state championship that school year, defeating Mason County. They were the first team from Northern Kentucky to ever win the state basketball championship.

Noble, Greg, WCPO News, 10-09-1980, retrieved 08-08-2017
Webster, Robert, *Northern Kentucky Fires*, Kenton County Historical Society, 2006

A Look Back at The Headlines

An on-going feature reliving local headlines.

This issue features:

The Daily Ticket – August 15, 1877

Blue Lick Springs, Aug. 14, 1877

To the Editor of The Ticket

Nature has intended that the Blue Licks should become a resort of those seeking pleasure and health. No water is superior in medicinal qualities. Every drug store in the country has it upon draught, but the water is not comparable to that drank fresh from the Springs full of its natural gasses. My opinion is that if physic were “thrown to the dogs” and the proper regime of diet systematically followed, the drinking and bathing in the water would cure many of the diseases which afflict suffering humanity. The surrounding, everlasting hills, crowded with aged and picturesque cedars, the winding in and out of the limpid Licking River, the historical battlefield of Blue Licks, fought on the 19th of August, 1782, in which the American troops were overpowered and mercilessly slaughtered by a superior force of Indians; and the wavering fields of corn all form a scene that appeals to the sense of beauty and relieves the eyes wearied by the dry and dusty glare of the town.

Every summer, and intelligent, cultured and social class of people meet here for health and recreation. Before the war, it was one of the most popular and best patronized watering places in the South. But some years ago, the large hotel was burned. The people here do not indulge in fashionable dissipation, but croquet, billiards, ten-pins and quiet flirtation on the part of the young folks are the amusements, while the sportsman finds good hunting and fishing near at hand.

I understand that Capt. Dan Turney, of the Bourbon House, Paris, is making plans to take charge of the new hotel now being completed. I am glad of this, and so are many others who are attached to this place.

New Items Available For Purchase

In our continuing effort to provide various publications, maps, and other items on the history of Northern Kentucky, we have added several items to our “online store” in recent weeks. You can find these items on our website under “Online Store” and then under “New Items.”

Now available for purchase are coffee mugs with images of Kenton County historical sites; books on several topics of local interest, and a new digitized map of the Civil War forts and batteries built to protect Cincinnati, Covington, and Newport from Rebel invaders.

We sincerely appreciate your support of the Society, and hope you enjoy our website. Please check out all the other items we have available for purchase as well.

www.kentoncountyhistoricalsociety.org

Want to be Published?

The Kenton County Historical Society is always looking for material for their Bulletin, as well as Northern Kentucky Heritage magazine

To submit an article for the Bulletin, send a paper copy by mail, or email it as a Word document attachment to the address below. Articles should be no longer than 500 words and should have at least two references.

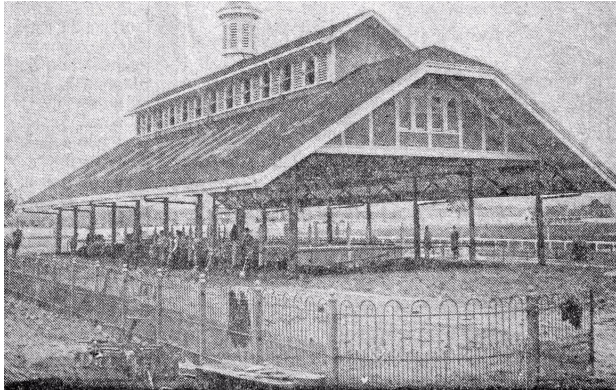
To submit an article for the magazine, submit a paper copy by mail, or as a Word document attachment to the address below. Articles should have references and endnotes, as well as images or graphics.

Email us if you have any questions.

nkyhist@zoomtown.com

P.O. Box 641, Covington, KY 41012

Then and Now

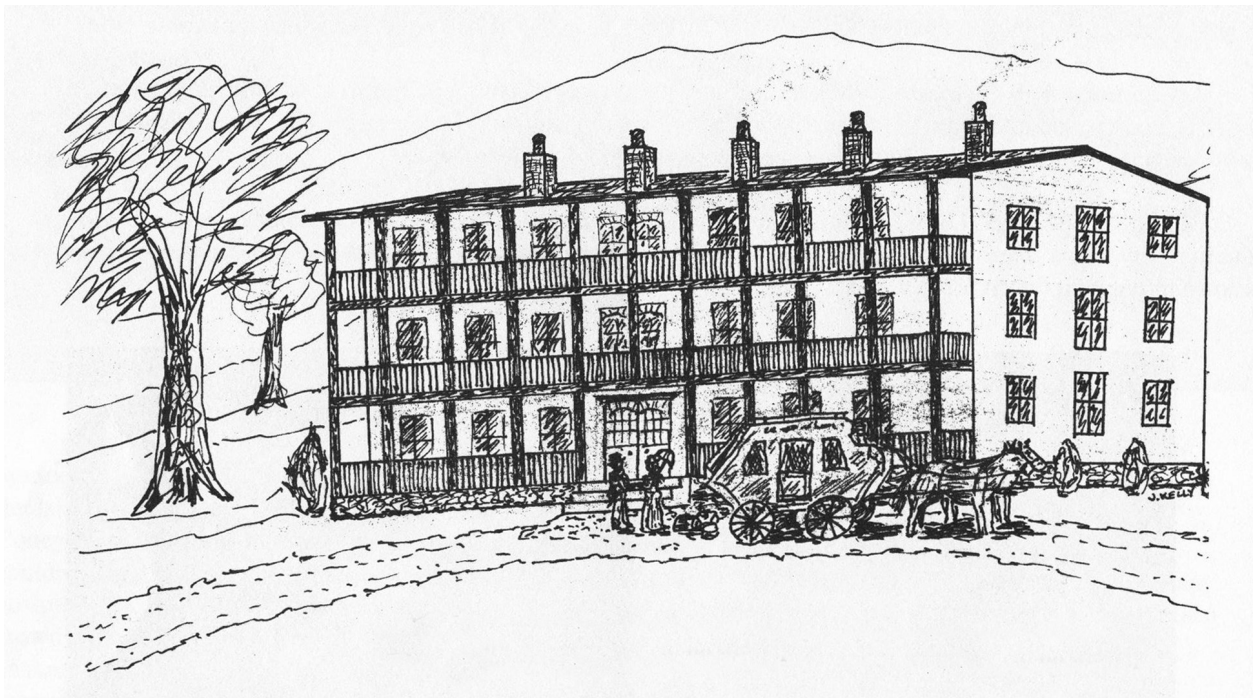


Left: Paddock at the Old Latonia Racecourse, circa 1900. Right: present-day image of the repurposed structure along Covington's Boron Drive.

Left photo courtesy Kenton County Public Library, right courtesy Ronin Einhaus

Mystery Photo

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



ANSWER:

A sketch by Jim Kelly (based on various descriptions) of the hotel at Latonia Springs, a mineral water health spa located where the United Dairy Farmers sits today, along Madison Pike at Highland Avenue, Ft. Wright. The resort was in existence from around 1829 to about 1900.

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I Bet You Didn't Know

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

September 11, 1751: Christopher Gist came to explore Kentucky, traveling through at least parts of Lewis, Mason, Bracken, Grant, and Owen counties before heading through the southeastern part of the state. Contrary to local legend, Gist was never in Kenton or Boone counties.

September 13, 1845: The bodies of Daniel Boone and his wife Rebecca were brought from Missouri and reinterred in Frankfort cemetery. Early Northern Kentucky pioneer Ellison Williams, Sr. served as one of the pallbearers.

October, 1862: The bloody Civil War battle at Perryville pitted 16,000 Confederates against 58,000 Federals. Casualties were astounding and neither side declared victory but soon after, the Confederate forces withdrew from the state.

"On This Day In Kentucky" — Robert Powell

Programs and Notices

Kenton County Historical Society

On Saturday morning, September 30th, in the Independence Cemetery, located on Highway 17 just west of the county courthouse, please join in a **cemetery tour** starting at 9:00 and ending around 11:00. Kenton County Library staff will conduct the tour with commentary taken from historical records and remembered in life and legend about Kenton County's deceased politicians, business people, civic and religious leaders and other personalities interred there. The event is free and open to the public.

After the cemetery tour, KCHS members are asked to stay for the KCHS **annual election meeting** starting at around 11:00. Nominations will be taken up to the time of voting. It will be a short meeting including comments about the state of the Society, including that of the treasury.

On Saturday, October 14, 2017, the Kenton County Historical Society and the Kenton County Public Library will hold the 2nd Annual Free **Antiques Fair** at the library's Main Branch in Covington in the BB&T meeting room. Qualified appraisers will be available from 11:00 a. m. until 2:00 p. m. for appraisal of jewelry, clocks and watches, paintings, objet 'art and just plain "old stuff." No large furniture may be brought to the Fair, but photographs of furniture will allow the appraisers to give their opinions. This event is entirely free of charge and is open to the public. Always wondered what that old vase was worth?

Behringer Crawford Museum

"**Korea the Forgotten War**" is the newest exhibit with a chronology of events; with numerous photos and commentary on military operations; with military and personal artifacts on display; with maps and locations; with a look at a few Northern Kentucky people and how Korea fit into their personal lives. It is a dense overview of the Korean War. A video will be playing nearby as requested of episodes from MASH, the TV comedy series about military personnel during the War. A life-sized cutout of Elvis Presley will also greet visitors, befitting the times.