



Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society

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2023



Students Receiving Their Prizes in Our First High School Student Writing Contest.
From left to right: President Joe Weber, Katrina Rolfsen (1st Prize), Stella Holtz (3rd Prize), Ryan Brogan (2d Prize) and Kim Gehring-Cook, Behringer-Crawford Museum Education Director

IN THIS ISSUE:

THE WINNING ARTICLES IN OUR FIRST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT
WRITING CONTEST

AND

THE CRAIG STREET CEMETERY MONUMENT IS INSTALLED!

In this issue of the *Bulletin* your Society is pleased to present the articles by the winners of our First Annual High School Student Writing Competition. The Behringer-Crawford Museum joined us in in this program by publicizing the contest to students and receiving the submitted articles. The Museum was also involved in the selection of the winners. Our thanks to the Museum, and in particular to Behringer-Crawford Education Director **Kim Gehring-Cook**, for facilitating the contest. Likewise, credit must be given to Society Member **Carol Kirkwood**, whose generous contribution to the prize money enabled us to increase the amounts awarded.

The goal of your Society in creating this contest was to encourage young people to think about the rich history of Kenton County and to develop writing skills that preserve that history. We expect to have a second Annual competition, to continue to promote the interest in Kenton County history by young people .

The winner of the first place prize of \$500 is **Katrina Rolfsen**, for her article, *The History of Ludlow's Long-Gone Amusement Park*. Katrina is 18 years of age and a 2023 graduate of Dixie Heights High School. She resides in Edgewood, with her parents, Mark and Kimi Rolfsen.

The winner of the second place prize of \$300 is **Ryan Brogan**, for his article, *General Ormsby Mitchel*. Ryan is 18 years of age and a 2023 graduate of Covington Catholic High School. He resides in Hebron with his parents, Jeff and Katie Brogan.

The winner of the third place prize of \$100 is **Stella Holtz**, for her article, *Johann Schmitt*. Stella is now 13, but was 12 years of age and a 7th grade student at St. Pius X at the time she submitted her article. She resides in Erlanger with her mother, Jessica Holtz.

Congratulations to all these future historians!

The History of Ludlow's Long-Gone Amusement Park

by

Katrina Rolfsen

Long before Walt Disney revolutionized experiential entertainment with his wildly immersive theme parks, and even before Kings Island first opened its gates to thrill-seekers in Mason, Ohio, Kenton County was home to the second-largest amusement park in the world, at least when it was built in 1894: Ludlow Lagoon, a menagerie of manmade islands floating atop an artificial lagoon that rivaled Coney Island and Chester Park. Surprisingly enough, this locally renowned amusement park was not meant to change the entertainment landscape but to increase weekend streetcar traffic. The company's investment paid well; countless Cincinnati residents traveled from Fountain Square to Ludlow to experience the Lagoon's mystical wonders.

Modeled after the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, Ludlow Lagoon boasted many traditional, yet at the time innovative, attractions and unique exhibits. Likely the most well-

known of these innovations was LaMarcus Thompson's scenic railway, what modern park-goers would call a roller coaster. While many coasters at the time employed a second lift to take riders back to the attraction's start, Thompson designed the ride with a curving corkscrew over the lake, allowing the ride vehicles to easily return to the loading dock.

As well as the Scenic Railway, Ludlow Lagoon boasted elevated car rides. A raised track allowed guests to drive through forested areas of Ludlow Lagoon's artificial islands, an attraction that not only amused guests with the whimsical joy of "autoing through the tree tops" but afforded women the opportunity to drive a real car (while the cars were affixed to a track, they were indeed full-size Buicks), a pleasure few married women experienced because husbands typically assumed the responsibility of driving.

Alongside other attractions, such as a Ferris Wheel, replica gold mine, and merry-go-round, carnival games, whose prizes included knives and guns, and a boathouse equipped with electric vessels, Ludlow Lagoon's amenities included dining options for upper- and lower-class guests alike. The Clubhouse, one of the only remnants of this amusement park, served wealthier guests fine cuisine upon pristine white tablecloths, while average park-goers could enjoy casual fare at the Midway over a bottle of beer and a game of ring toss.

As a nod to the Chicago World's Fair, Ludlow Lagoon featured many exhibits, among them a museum of Thomas Edison's newest technological wonders. Not only could visitors admire brilliant Edison prototypes in constantly adapting exhibitions, but in later years the park became a living exposition of innovation as they upgraded from gas to electric lighting. Additionally, Ludlow Lagoon strived to reflect current events in its attractions to entice more visitors. Some such attractions included a Cuban village exhibit during the Spanish-American War. Here, visitors could gaze upon the daily lives of a Cuban refugee family; although this display would provoke concern today, this display delighted many guests in the late 1800s.

Ludlow Lagoon's Motordome, a wooden racetrack, also attracted many visitors with exciting races and cheap beer. Since spectator stands stood near the track itself, builders had erected iron mesh fencing to prevent injury in case a vehicle veered from the track. In 1913, Odin Johnson would test this theory. The iron fencing indeed kept his motorcycle from barreling into a crowd of onlookers; however, the motorcycle collided with a gas lamp, igniting an inferno that roared through the stands, killing at least eight people, possibly more (many others were transported to St. Elizabeth for treatment).

This tragedy heralded the park's decline, as Ludlow Lagoon suffered both wind and water damage from a destructive flood (1913) and a violent tornado (1915). The death knell for the park was the United States' entry into World War I in 1917. The war effort required much wheat, which led the federal government to pause beer production. Beer sales had provided a great source of revenue for Ludlow Lagoon, so this was a striking blow to the park. After an unsuccessful season in 1919, the park officially closed its gates. Since then, the land has been developed into a subdivision, but several buildings still remain, reminding visitors and residents of the magical haven that once graced humble Ludlow, Kentucky.



Photo Courtesy of Kenton County Library Faces and Places

Footnotes

Kenton County Library, 2017

[Ludlow Lagoon History Kenton County Public Library Faces and Places](#)

Link NKY, “A Look Back at Ludlow’s ‘big days’: a circus, a streetcar, and motorcycle racing” by Haley Parnell; June, 30, 2022

<https://linknky.com/culture/2022/06/30/a-look-back-at-ludlows-big-days-a-circus-a-streetcar-and-motorcycle-racing/>

NKY Tribune, “Our Rich History: The Ludlow Lagoon was once a Recreational Center for Greater Cincinnati”; January 25, 2016

<https://www.nkytribune.com/2016/01/our-rich-history-the-ludlow-lagoon-was-once-a-major-recreational-center-for-greater-cincinnati/>

The Unspoken “Star” of Kenton County: General Ormsby Mitchel
by
Ryan Brogan



Gen. Ormsby Mitchel

When most people think of Kenton County, they likely picture the tight-knit neighborhood communities in Edgewood, the bustling urban environment in Covington, the small-town feel of Bromley, or even the counties' namesake, Simon Kenton. While Kenton County is widely regarded as one of the most diverse counties in Kentucky, it is not Edgewood, Covington, Bromley, or even Simon Kenton, that birthed the counties' richest piece of history. Rather, the most interesting piece of history comes from a small town of just 8,000 citizens in the heart of Kenton County: Fort Mitchell. While many citizens know that Kenton County is named after one of the most famous Frontiersmen of all time, very few know that Fort Mitchell was named after one of the greatest Civil War generals and astronomers of all time!

Ormsby M. Mitchel was born on August 28, 1810, in Union County, Kentucky. Mitchel spent his adolescence growing up in Lebanon, Ohio, before attending the United States Military Academy at West Point. While at West Point, Mitchel was classmates with Robert E. Lee, General of the Confederate Army during the Civil War. Coincidentally, the two classmates would go on to be two of the most prominent generals on opposing sides of the Civil War. Before the Civil War, though, Mitchel worked as a West Point assistant mathematics professor, an attorney, and a Chief Engineer of the Little Miami Railroad in Cincinnati. (Mitchel, F.A.)

After bouncing from job to job, Mitchel went on to become an assistant professor of mathematics, philosophy, and astronomy at Cincinnati College. It was through this position that Mitchel went on to become a nationally recognized astronomy lecturer. Upon his national prosperity in astronomy lectures, Mitchel went on to both found and build the Cincinnati Observatory. Mitchel also founded the Cincinnati Astronomical Society (Chisholm). Mitchel's progress set him on course to be one of the most famous and successful astronomers of all time. However, upon the breakout of the American Civil War, the native Cincinnati dropped his passion for astronomy to enlist in the Union Army.

President Abraham Lincoln swiftly appointed Mitchel to Brigadier General where he was assigned to organize the Northern Kentucky defenses around Cincinnati. Mitchel's organizational role in Northern Kentucky was a key aspect of winning the Civil War as the Ohio River was the stark line of separation between the Union and the Confederates. Along with his role in protecting the forts of Northern Kentucky, Mitchel also commanded the Department of Ohio from September to November of 1861. In addition to commanding the Department of Ohio, Mitchell also commanded the defense of Nashville, Tennessee. Mitchel's most notable accomplishment in the Civil War was when he seized the city of Huntsville, Alabama, without firing a single shot. Upon his vast success as a Brigadier General in Northern Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee, Mitchel was promoted to Major General in April of 1862 (Civil War Reference).

In September of 1862, Mitchel was assigned to command the Union Army's "X" corps in South Carolina. Unfortunately, Mitchel met his untimely death just a month later on October 31 after contracting yellow fever (Chisholm). Despite his untimely death, Ormsby Mitchel's legacy lives on not only in Kenton County, but America, forever.

The site of Mitchel's seven war fortifications in Northern Kentucky was awarded the nickname "Fort Mitchell." Named in honor of the man who gave up his passion to protect his homeland of Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati. In 1909, the town that surrounded Fort

Mitchell was incorporated with the fort to create a city. Just a year later in 1910, Fort Mitchell was officially chartered as a city in the United States of America (Sanders).

Simon Kenton's military contributions that helped the United States gain independence from Britain surely earn him the honor of being Kenton County's namesake. However, the story of General Ormsby Mitchel and Fort Mitchell is historically comparable to the likes of Simon Kenton. While receiving very little local recognition, Ormsby Mitchel was a man who gave so much back to the community of Kenton County and the Cincinnati Tri-State area as a whole. Ormsby educated our youth as a professor, defended our citizens as an attorney, and made the Little Miami railroads safer as an engineer. Additionally, Ormsby's accomplishments in astronomy affected not only the greater Cincinnati area but America as a whole. Ormsby's lectures furthered scientific advances, and his inception of the astrological society and observatory inspired greater construction throughout America. Yet, Ormsby gave it all up; his many jobs, fame, his passion for astrology, and even his life, to defend his hometown. The next time you take a drive through Fort Mitchell, just for one moment, remember Ormsby Mitchel's legacy, as he gave not only his life but his passions to provide Fort Mitchell and Kenton County with a brighter future.

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Johann Schmitt

By Stella Holtz

Johann Schmitt was an amazing man, but unfortunately, not many people have heard of him. I decided to write about him after seeing his impressive murals in the Mother of God Church in Covington, Kentucky. (Which was also the home parish of my great grandfather and great, great grandparents.) Schmitt's artwork was intricate and detailed; it really inspired me. He also has paintings at St. Joseph in Camp Springs, Kentucky and St. John in Covington, Kentucky. Following is a brief summary of his life, his passion, and what he left behind for us to enjoy.



Johann Schmitt was born November 17, 1825 at Heinstadt, Baden in Germany, to poor, but very loving parents. As a teen, he was taught at Munich in the fine arts. His artistic talents were immediately recognized by the other religious painters in his area. He was not only an amazing painter, he had many other interests. He was also a musician and played the cornet in the Bavarian Regimental Band during the German revolution of 1848. After the end of the revolution, Schmitt was advised to leave his home of Germany and travel to the United States, to seek a larger field for his artistic talents. When he arrived in New York City, he settled in the parish of the Most Holy Redeemer. A little later he married Margaret Dorothy Reichert, who had also come to the states from Germany. After they were wed, they settled down together in Melrose, a suburb in New York City.

After settling in New York, Schmitt began to create murals for the church of St. Alphonse. His murals were praised by many. In 1862, Schmitt came to the Cincinnati area because it had become a center for German American art and culture. He began working at the Covington Altar Building Stock Company at St. Joseph Church. Schmitt became the principal altar painter, and a few years later the company had developed a reputation for

their beautiful works. Schmitt also adopted one daughter named Mary, before his wife Margaret passed away in 1891. He later remarried to Elizabeth Scheper Meyer Rache, who brought six children into their family. During this time, Schmitt was also mentoring Frank Duveneck, an artist who would later become one of Covington's most renowned painters.



Johann Schmitt spent the following decades creating masterpieces for churches throughout the midwest. He produced two murals for St. Joseph in Covington, Kentucky, which were some of his lesser known works, due to the fact that the church was closed and torn down in 1970. He also created five pieces for the old St. John Church in Covington. Some of his most magnificent works are located in Mother of God Church. In 1890, Schmitt was requested to paint five large murals of the Joyful Mysteries, which you can still see at the Mother of God church today. He painted for many other churches throughout the area. Schmitt died on June 10, 1898 at 72 years old. At this time, he and his family were living on Greenup Street. His funeral took place in St. Joseph Church, and he was buried in Covington at the Mother of God Cemetery.

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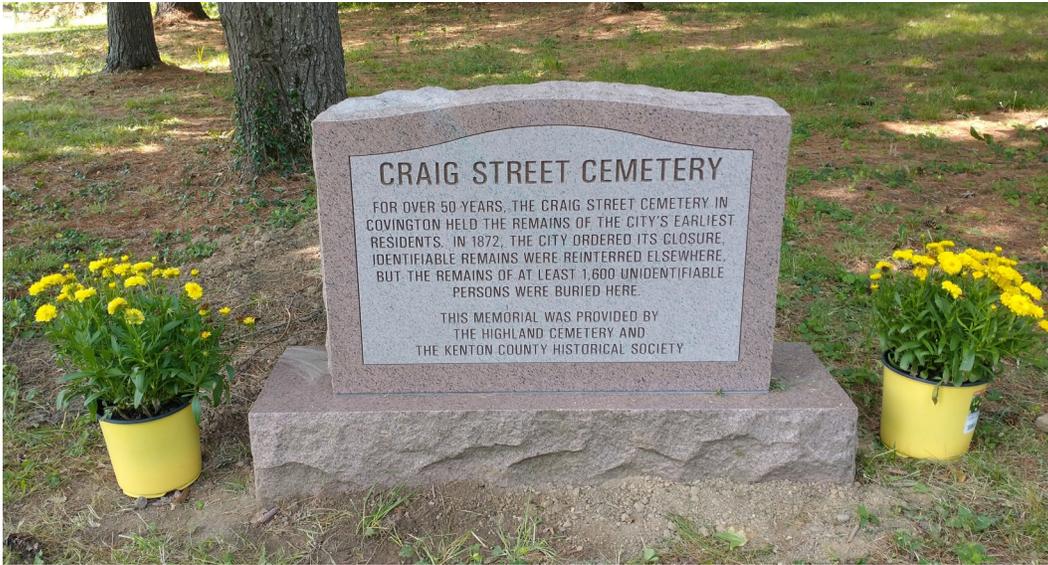
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COMPLETION OF THE MEMORIAL FOR THE UNKNOWN PERSONS REMOVED FROM THE CRAIG STREET CEMETERY IN COVINGTON, AND REINTERRED AT HIGHLAND CEMETERY

Your Society is pleased to announce the completed installation of the Memorial to the 1,600 or more unidentified persons who were removed from the closed Craig Street Cemetery in 1872 and reburied in a mass grave at the Highland Cemetery in Ft. Mitchell. The steps toward the creation of the Memorial began at the meeting of the Society's Board on October 26, 2021, when an article about the closure of the Craig Street cemetery was mentioned. This prompted a visit to the Highland Cemetery and a meeting with the Manager, Mr. **Tom Honebrink**. Tom was kind enough to identify the location of the reburials, but we were surprised to see that the only identification for the burials was a small white marker, simply reading "Craig Street".

Over the next months, Tom brought the attention of the Cemetery Board to this insignificant remembrance. Due in part to his efforts, The Board decided that the cemetery would pay the entire cost of a monument. Your Society began preparing suitable content for the monument, ultimately submitting the words shown in the following photographs. The efforts by Tom, the Highland Cemetery Board (to which we give our thanks) and Your Society were finally brought to fruition on the morning of Saturday, June 17, 2023, when the Memorial was unveiled.

The Editor



From left to right: Arnold Taylor, Andy Brown, Karl Leitzenmayer, Don Lubbers, John Boh, Bob Webster, Dennis Harrell and President Joe Weber

Kenton County Historical Society

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ARTICLES FROM BACK ISSUES ARE INDEXED ON OUR WEBSITE!

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The Kenton County Historical Society
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President..... Joe Weber
Vice-President..... Karl Lietzenmayer
Treasurer..... W. Terry Averbeck
Secretary..... John H. Boh

Board Members: Travis Brown, Elaine Kuhn, Pam Marcum, Ken Roenker, Arnold Taylor and Ray Hebert

Robert Webster, Robert Rich, and Dennis Harrell
Ex-officio

I Bet You Didn't Know

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

July 1, 1960 Kentucky's sales tax of 3% went into effect. [Got worse, and even more regressive. *Ed.*]

July 4, 1794 The first Independence Day celebration in Kentucky was held at the plantation of Col. William Price, in Jessamine County.

July 10, 1852 Henry Clay was buried in the Lexington cemetery. More than 30,000 people attended.

July 21, 1845 Cassius Clay, sick with typhoid fever, got up from his sickbed to defend himself in court, for his right to publish his abolitionist newspaper.

July 22, 1903 Cassius Clay died at White Hall.

August 3, 1984 Kentuckian Diane Sawyer became the 1st female reporter on the acclaimed "60 Minutes" television show.

From *On This Day in Kentucky*, by Robert A. Powell.

Programs and Notices

The **KENTON COUNTY LIBRARY** will conduct a tour of the St. Mary Cemetery in **Morning View**, Kentucky at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, October 7, 2023. Obtain directions by Google or some other program by searching for the cemetery **but be sure to specify the one at Morning View**, as there are others.

SOCIETY ELECTION: Following the cemetery tour, our annual election will occur. More news regarding open positions and the nomination process will be sent *via* email blasts as time draws nearer.

The **BEHRINGER CRAWFORD MUSEUM HISTORY HOUR** CONTINUES, although it is now every other Wednesday at 6:30pm.

NORTHERN KENTUCKY HERITAGE MAGAZINE

A new issue of *Northern Kentucky Heritage* is imminent, according to its editor, Elaine Kuhn, to whom all submissions of Magazine articles should be made. Elaine is the Local History & Genealogy Services Coordinator for the Kenton County Public Library. The former Magazine editor, Karl Lietzenmayer, will stay on as Editor Emeritus.

Subscriptions to the magazine will continue at \$20.00 per year. Renewals of membership in the Kenton County Historical Society that include subscription to the Magazine in 2022 will be fulfilled by the Library. From then on out, subscriptions will be payable to the KCPL Foundation. Look for digital subscriptions to be offered in the coming months. PLEASE SIGN UP FOR A SUBSCRIPTION!

BULLETIN ARTICLES

WE WANT ARTICLES FOR THE BULLETIN! TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILIES, YOUR HISTORICAL HOUSE, ANYTHING ABOUT KENTON COUNTY. EMAIL THEM, IN WORD, TO THE EDITOR, ARNOLD TAYLOR, at astay1965@gmail.com