



# Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society

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MARCH/APRIL

2022



A "PENNY FARTHING" BICYCLE

IN THIS ISSUE:  
  
AN IMPORTANT DOCUMENT IN KENTON COUNTY  
HISTORY  
  
and  
  
BICYCLES: FROM STREETS TO TRAILS

## A FOUNDING DOCUMENT OF KENTON COUNTY

The Editor

After homes and businesses developed on the western side of the confluence of the Ohio and Licking Rivers, the city of Covington was incorporated by the State Legislature on February 8, 1815. The population of the area grew to the point that residents asked that a new county be created, so the Legislature carved Kenton County out of Campbell County on January 29, 1840.<sup>1</sup>

We are truly indebted to Kenton County Historical Society Board Member Pam Marcum and her cousin for allowing us to include in this issue a document important in the history of Kenton County. Accompanying this article is the April 4, 1840 Report of the Commissioners designated by the Kentucky Legislature to determine the proper location of the seat of government for the new county.

In its Act of January, 1840, three Commissioners were appointed to locate the “Seats of Justice” in what remained of Campbell County and what consisted of Kenton County. The Commissioners were Samuel F. Swope, Charles Ruddell and David Brooks.

Samuel Franklin Swope (1809-1865) attended Georgetown College and began practicing law in Georgetown in 1830, but moved to Falmouth in 1832 and continued his practice there. He served in the Kentucky House of Representatives and Senate, and in the United States House of Representatives.<sup>2</sup> Charles Ruddell is probably the Ruddell (1791-1886) who held many offices in Grant County.<sup>3</sup> David Brooks was possibly the David Brooks residing in Bracken County at the time, but efforts to identify him have not succeeded.

As will be seen from a review of the Report, the Commissioners could not find a suitable location at the precise center of the county and settled on a point 250 yards away, in the meadow of Charles McCollum, who donated the land to the county. The determined location of the Kenton County Seat of Justice was known as Crewitts Creek, but when the split from Campbell County was effected the city now called Independence was officially named on October 7, 1840.<sup>4</sup>

1. <https://www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy/regional-history/history-of-kenton-county/>

2. [https://completely-kentucky.fandom.com/wiki/Samuel\\_F.\\_Swope](https://completely-kentucky.fandom.com/wiki/Samuel_F._Swope)

3. <http://www.walthertree.com/CharlesRuddell.html>

4. <https://www.cityofindependence.org/EconomicDevelopment/?action=history#::~~>



The undersigned Commissioners appointed by an Act of the Legislature of Ky. Approved the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1840, to locate the seats of justice in the Counties of Campbell & Kenton, would respectfully submit the following Report, to the Court of Kenton County. To wit, That they met, at the house of Elijah Williams, on Wednesday, the first day of April 1840, and after being first duly sworn by H. E. Spilman Esq. a justice of the peace in and for Campbell <sup>County</sup>, well and truly without partiality or favour to any one to discharge the duties imposed upon them by said Act of Assembly, and to locate said County seats, as near the center of said Counties, as the face of the Country thereof would admit, proceeded, to ascertain, the center of said County of Kenton by actual survey ~~which~~ a plat of which is here referred to and made, a part of this report, that they ascertained the center of said County, by, running a line from a corner on the Boone County line, a half a mile east of Gainses & Roads North 31° East five miles, and one hundred poles, to two large white Oaks, and sugar tree, on the Land of John McCollum and after <sup>having</sup> ascertained the center of said County, they examined the different sites, proposed, and heard such propositions as were made by the proprietors, in relation thereto, and finding no site, immediately at the center, suitable for the seat of justice, they selected from those examined, one on the Land of the said John McCollum immediately on the Bank Dick Road, about 2½ miles North of Elijah Williams, and in the meadow of said McCollum, as the nearest, and most eligible site for said seat of justice, being about 250 yards, from the center of said County of Kenton. They therefore by virtue of their Appointment, as Commissioners, to locate the seats of justice for Campbell and Kenton Counties, locate the seat of justice for Kenton County, at the point above designated, and in the center of five acres of Land proposed by the said McCollum to be donated, and conveyed, by him to the County Court of Kenton County, upon which to erect a Court house, and other necessary <sup>public</sup> buildings, and for such other public use or purpose, as said County Court, may deem proper. All of which is submitted, to the County Court of Kenton County



In Testimony whereof Saml H. Swope Charles Ruddell and David Brooks three of the Commissioners, Appointed by said Act of Assembly for the purposes aforesaid have hereunto set their hands this 4<sup>th</sup> day of April 1840.

Saml H. Swope

Charles Ruddell

David Brooks

Com.<sup>s</sup>



THE COURT HOUSE IN INDEPENDENCE, KENTUCKY

Courtesy of Kenton County Library

## Bicycles: From Streets to Trails

By John Boh

### Early Bicycle History

The modern bicycle evolved in the nineteenth century, and its early popularity peaked in an 1890s frenzy. In an era of many innovations, it fulfilled Europe and America's readiness for new technology, curiosities, and new forms of leisure. The bicycle helped free women from the confines of the home and Victorian fashion. In street parades the bicycle in urban settings allowed people to show off civic participation in organizations and promote political causes (like improved streets and roads), social improvements and charities. In parades riders could display new fashion and middle- and upper-class social status.

"Bicycles" may date back to the German *Draisine* of 1817, named for Baron Karl von Drais and patented in 1818. It weighed 48 pounds and was constructed of wood, but with "brass bushings within the wheel bearings, iron shod wheels, a rear-wheel brake with six inches of trail from the front-wheel." A new "serpentine" shaped wooden frame, allowing larger wheels without elevating the rider's seat, soon became fashionable in London society. A variety of tricycles and quadracycles were also developed and sold. Various treadle-operated four-wheel vehicles were exported worldwide in the 1850s. A French manufacturer about 1866 produced the first mass-produced bicycle – one with pedals. A New York company produced a pedal-bicycle for women in 1869.

### The High Wheel and other Innovations

British and French designers contributed to gradual improvements. The picturesque high-wheel bicycle (introduced by a Frenchman in 1869) enabled higher speeds with both pedals and handlebar awkwardly attached to a wire-spoke tension front wheel. With a front wheel diameter up to 60 inches the high wheelers were faster, but the rider was also sitting higher and could accidentally be flipped over the front wheel. Improvements included solid rubber tires, ball bearings, tangent spokes, a mounting step and the all-important hollow-section steel frames. New macadam Paris boulevards provided smoother riding. Unimproved American roads were worse than those in Europe.

### Safety Bicycle

Probably the most important change ever in bicycle history was the first successful "safety bicycle" in 1885 featuring a front wheel with steering bar but detached from the chain drive powering the equally sized rear wheel. The era of the high wheel bicycle gradually faded. The safety bicycle became an everyday tool for men and women. The pneumatic tire was in use by 1888. A "golden age" occurred as bicycling clubs for men and women spread across the U.S. and Europe. Cycling became important for both transportation and recreation. The bicycle manufactures and promoters were likely to espouse improved roads that would become a pet cause for advocates of motor vehicle travel and tourism. The bicycle helped evolve women's fashion. "Athletic bloomers" were worn for sporting activities outside the home.<sup>1</sup>

## Local Wheel Clubs

Newspaper articles indexed at the Covington library indicate that the local “craze” for bicycling paralleled a temporary national obsession. The Kenton (high) Wheel Club held its “annual meeting and run” on a “night” in October 1884. They bicycled to the Latonia Springs resort and on return also enjoyed refreshments. Officers for the coming year were Henry Nepper, President; Robson C. Greer, “Captain”; T. J. Wilson, Secretary and Treasurer; and H. S. Rodgers “Bugler.”<sup>2</sup> It might seem that there were holdouts riding the older type “*velocipedes*,”<sup>3</sup> but obviously even the “safety bicycle” did not guarantee safety. In 1895 Covington passed an ordinance regulating “bicycles, velocipedes and tricycles.” They were banned from sunset to sunrise from “streets, alleys, lanes or highways. During the day the rider had to sound an alarm. Bicycling on sidewalks was prohibited at all hours and the universal speed limit was eight miles per hour. All violations were subject to police court fines up to \$50.”<sup>4</sup>

The Covington wheelmen in July 1896 set July 24<sup>th</sup> at “night” as the time and hour “for a big bicycle parade.” The “demonstration” would be restricted to “Kentucky wheelman” with “1000 wheels” expected. Elected grand marshal was John T. Underwood and for Secretary Horace Williams.<sup>5</sup>

An article in July 1896 indicated that despite lingering concerns about improper women’s outfits and women’s propriety, “wheelmen and women” were in the final stages of organizing a Dayton and Bellevue bicycle club. Mrs. Ella Greenameyer of Dayton, Kentucky hosted the meeting with fifteen men and ten “misses” in attendance. The next meeting would occasion an election of officers.<sup>6</sup>

## A Big Multi-State Parade in Cincinnati

A parade in 1896, might have signified a highpoint in the “craze.” A huge bicycle parade was planned for Saturday August 8th in Cincinnati. “Thousands” of entry blanks and buttons were distributed during an earlier parade on July 4, 1896 at the segregated Fountain Ferry Amusement Park” (a site of bitter racial conflict in the Civil Rights era<sup>7</sup>) in Louisville. “At a meeting of the American Bicycle Club and the Weir Frog (sic) Wheel Club of Covington, a resolution was passed “that they all enter the parade” in August. Parade marshals were to have a planning meeting at the Grand Marshal’s office at Fifth and Race streets.<sup>8</sup> Everybody was invited to the next organizing meeting. “A special request has been sent out to the ladies that they also be present.”<sup>9</sup> An article noted that compared to some other cities Cincinnati had been slower to get on the bicycle bandwagon but now the city is planning for a “monster parade.”<sup>10</sup>

The parade was a success. The judges awarded a nice chair valued at \$50 dollars to the Kenton Wheel Club for a third-place prize in the “Handsomest Uniformed Club” category; and in another category, as the only entry, the Ludlow Bicycle Club would “probably” be awarded \$25 in gold for the “largest and uniformed mixed club.” A “permanent” Ohio Valley Good Roads Association was organized with Samuel Knopf elected president and Charles Furber of Covington Secretary Treasurer.<sup>11</sup>

The bicycle parades craze continued. Announced July 23, 1896, the Covington Wheelman would proudly host the first regional “bicycle lantern parade.” On Covington city streets over “1000 wheels” should be in line in addition to possible entries from across the river. City officials were invited to view it from the balcony of the Latonia Hotel (518 Madison). Decorated lanterns would spotlight citizen complaints, “the principal one being streetsprinkling (sic) in the

streets.”<sup>12</sup> On July 26 a successful parade was reported with a political “demonstration in favor of clean streets.” The parade route had been changed due to the poor condition of some macadamized streets. Houses along the route were nicely decorated. Another “cycle parade” was planned to happen along the principal streets of Cincinnati, Newport, and Covington on Saturday October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1896.<sup>13</sup>

As with automobiles, the newspapers reported accidents. One bicyclist knocked down a woman with a child at Fifth and Madison.<sup>14</sup> Months later in another accident at Madison and Pike, a bicyclist on the slippery asphalt quickly turning away to avoid both a woman who “got in the way” and an electric streetcar approaching on Madison, slid under the hooves of mules pulling J. T. Tanner’s milk wagon on Pike Street. Employees from the Meis clothing store picked up the young rider who was uninjured. The mules had reared just missing the rider but mangling “the wheel.” It was delivered to a store on Pike Street presumably to be repaired. A responding police officer returned the rider to his home. The Covington streets and sidewalks in those days were very busy.

#### Continued Evolution of Cycling

As bicycles became safer and cheaper, more women enjoyed them. Feminists and suffragists, including Susan B. Anthony, recognized their transformative power. Specially made bicycles for children appeared before 1916. According to this source, heading toward World War II, “most” bicycles in the United States were made as toys for children. Four wheeled motor vehicles and just walking met most needs.

After World War II bicycling gradually re-emerged with some measure of popularity. American manufacturers sold bicycles with balloon tires, brakes applied by pedals, but only one gear. They gave bicycle owners durability, comfort, streamlined appearance, and accessories including lights, bells, and speedometers, all features offered on the popular American heavyweight “cruiser” bicycles. They provided an alternative making the automobile not so indispensable whether for school, work or recreation.

By the “late” 1950s lighter bicycles, with hand brakes, narrower tires, and a three-speed hub gearing system became popular in the United States. Features could include “generator-powered” headlamps, safety reflectors, kickstands, and frame-mounted tire pumps. Inspired by the popularity of motocross, specially designed bicycles with 16 to 24-inch wheels (the norm being the 20-inch wheel) came out in California in the early 1970s.

Greater interest in physical exercise and the advantages of energy efficient transportation, led to another American bike boom in the 1970s. Many serious cyclists by 1980 preferred “sports models,” with dropped handlebars, derailleur-equipped<sup>15</sup> five to fifteen speeds, narrow tires, and a narrow 'racing' saddle. Another development was the mass-produced mountain bike available by 1981, for off-pavement riding over a variety of surfaces. They allowed city people an escape to the real outdoors. These bikes had strong frames, wider large, knobbed tires for increased traction, and state-of-the-art front and rear suspension designs.

Bicycles have become lighter and more aerodynamic without sacrificing strength in the 21st century. They feature both sophisticated and practical computer aided design, a drop handlebar style, and now narrow tires and wheels. “Hybrid bicycles” combine road racing and mountain bike features, though the term is applied to a wide variety of bicycle types.

### Automobiles Rather Than Bicycles

After 1900-1910 horse-drawn transportation gradually began disappearing from streets and roads. Automobiles replaced bicycles as the popular mode of transportation and as a symbol of leisurely prosperity for adults. Bicycles became more like playthings for children and school-aged youngsters but with still some practicality for the young and old.

The 1890-91 Covington directory shows in the business section under "bicycles" Charles Hanauer at Tenth and Madison. Charles was residing at 163 West Fourth along with A. H. and Andrew Hanauer. The 1895 Covington business directory showed Ramsey & Connors at 422 Main Street. Two bicycle businesses were listed in 1900-1901, the Covington Cycle Works at 406 Madison operated by Charles Hanauer and at 902 Madison another operated by J. B. Coombs.<sup>16</sup>

After the robust and crazy 1890s bicycles fell under the shadow of the automobile. In the 1904-1905 business directory under bicycles there was only one entry, that of John Hanauer at 406 Madison. A bicycle shop still did operate on Canal Street.

### Larry Blank's Cycle Shop

First appearing in connection with bicycles in the 1936-37 street directory was the name Lawrence F. Blank. He apparently was repairing bicycles in his home at 1124 Holman Street. In those years only Joseph H. Nagle had a bicycle business in the commercial district at 31 East Fifth. The 1940-41 directory listed two bicycle dealers, Dixie Cycle at 16 E. Fifth and Larry F. Blank at 31 East Fifth. Covington on the other hand had ten dealers in auto retail accessories and parts; eight passenger car dealers; and four businesses listed under used cars.

Lawrence Blank's bicycle business would grow and last into the 1980s. By 1957 Blank's "Covington Cycle" shop had relocated from its first site in the commercial district at 31 East Fifth Street to 417 Madison. Lawrence, Jr., who in 1960 was listed serving in the United States Marines, was working in the shop by 1970. In 1980 Lawrence F. Blank Jr. had taken over and his dad by then was calling himself "retired." The son was married and living in Florence in Boone County. Then by 1991 Charles Wright, a Cincinnati resident, had taken over the business at 417 Madison. The business was renamed the Wright Brothers Bicycle Shop. In 2000 Lawrence Blank Sr. still resided in Covington.

A 1957 article entitled "Larry Blank Designs New Type of Bike" accompanies a photo of Larry Jr. standing with the innovation. The article said that "in a short time, Larry took a standard Schwinn Racer and added a mechanical system that permitted it to move by arm power transmitted from the handlebars." The Arnold Schwinn & Co. of Chicago had a representative come by to request that Blank send "a demonstration model" to the Schwinn factory.

Beside Blank's the directories after World War II do also list other bicycle shops including Elmer's Bike shop, 208 Elm Street in Ludlow (1958); Miller's Bicycle shop, 208 Elm Street, and Ray's Cycle Co. at 619 Main, Covington (1960); New Ray's Cycle Co. 619 Main (1970); Wm. H. Martin (residence and business at 3719 De-



courtesy Covington (1980); and Johnny's Bicycle Repair Shop 3719 Decoursey, 1991. No bicycle shop was listed as operating in Covington for the year 2000.

### Bicycle-Related Projects in Covington

The city of Covington has made advances in providing for modern, popular bicycle and other leisure and educational activities. Started in 2003 the Devou Park Backcountry Trail Expansion Project has been an effort in phases to build, expand, and constantly maintain miles of "natural surface" trails through the western half of Devou Park. Devou Park now has off-road cyclist trails along with its paved walking and biking paths. Another project started in 2011 was the Licking River Greenway and Trails project that would link Covington, Taylor Mill, Wilder and Newport with over twelve miles of trails. It now claims "nature" trail, paved trail, and "trail" that utilizes sidewalk and street lanes connecting five neighborhoods along the Licking River. The project includes seventeen educational murals with themes about the Licking River ecosystem, appreciation of the natural environment, maintaining mental and physical health, recreation, community togetherness - a better quality of life seen in this urban setting.<sup>17</sup>

### ENDNOTES

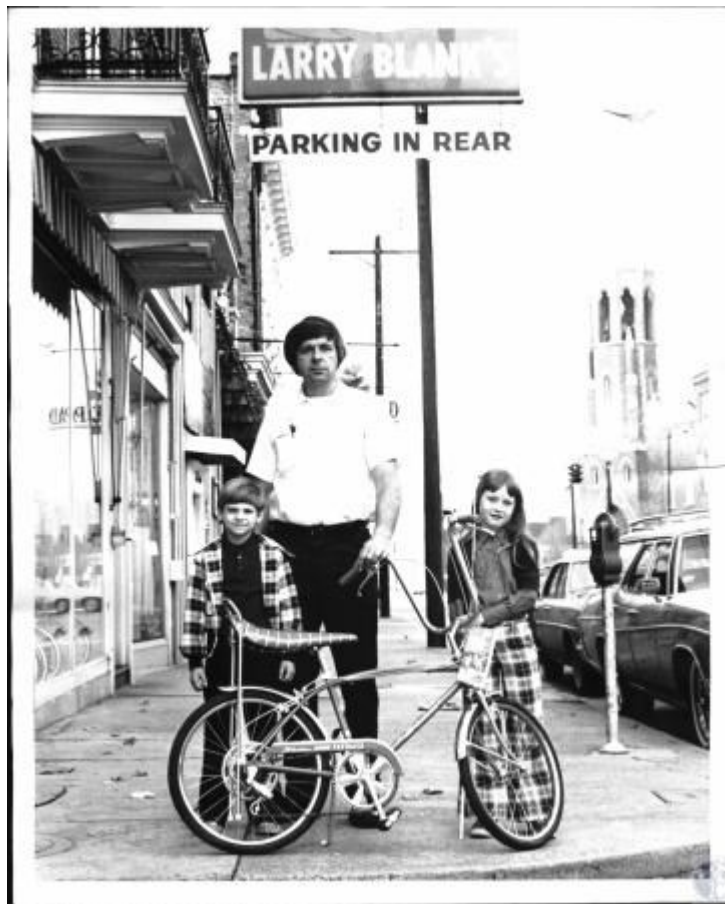
1. The term "bicycle" was coined in France in the 1860s – "History of the Bicycle" – Wikipedia
2. "History of the Bicycle" ; the new Bloomers fashion became a "craze" around 1851 - "Bloomers," Wikipedia
3. Dailey Commonwealth, Oct. 17, 1884, p. 4
4. A *Velocipede* was an early human powered version of the bicycle
5. "Covington Ordinance," [Kentucky Post](#), Jan. 25, 1895, p. 2
6. "Wheel Parade," Cincinnati Enquirer, July 7, 1896, p. 5
7. "Bicycle Club," [Cincinnati Post](#), July 8, 1896, p. 7
8. "Fountain Ferry Park," Wikipedia
9. "The Parade," Cincinnati Enquirer, July 6, 1896, p. 3
10. "Judges' Names Soon to be Announced for the Bicycle Parade," Cincinnati Enquirer, July 8, 1896, p. 7
11. "Grows Larger, the Entry List for the Mammoth Bicycle Parade," C. P., July 13, 1896, p. 6
12. "Prizewinner, List of the Lucky Ones in the Bicycle Parade," [Cincinnati Post](#), Aug. 10, 1896, p. 2
13. "Lantern Parade, Covington Cyclists Will Demonstrate their Strength," Cincinnati Enquirer, July 23, 1896, p. 1
14. "Cycle Parade is Being Arranged by Political Wheelman," Cincinnati Post, Oct. 17, 1896, p. 1
15. "Bicycle Accident," Cincinnati Post, April 20, 1897, p. 4
16. A bicycle mechanism that moves the chain out and up to different cogs - Google dictionary
17. History of the Bicycle, cited above
18. Covington street directories 1890-1891, 1895, 1900-1901
19. recreation@covingtonky.gov

# VELOCIPED.



Neudruck des Conversations-Lexikon. 12. Aufl.

Zu Artikel: Velociped.



From Left: Mark Pauley, Larry Blank and Elizabeth England



From Left: Joe Brennan, Larry Blank, Ralph Meenach and Gary Dirr

Photos above, courtesy of Kenton County Library

# Kenton County Historical Society

January/February 2022

ARTICLES FROM BACK ISSUES ARE INDEXED ON OUR WEBSITE!

*Published bi-monthly by*

**The Kenton County Historical Society**  
Yearly membership, including the Bulletin, \$20.00

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Ex-officio

## I Bet You Didn't Know

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

March 1, 1933 Governor Ruby Laffoon declared a 4 day bank holiday.

March 16, 1963 Seventeen year old Diane Sawyer of Louisville was crowned as America's Junior Miss.

March 18, 1925 A series of tornados swept across the State, killing 17 people.

April 7, 1802 Transylvania awarded its first degree to Robert R. Barr

April 21, 1964 Governor Edward Breathitt ordered the retirement of all State employees age 65 and over.

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

## Programs and Notices

### Kenton County Historical Society

Work continues on our engagement with the Highland Cemetery on the subject of installing an appropriate marker honoring Covington Pioneers; our Board approved the draft content and that was submitted to the cemetery Board. We were recently advised that the Highland Board approved the text and the cemetery manager will obtain a proposed layout and submit that to us.

Look for a Zoom link coming soon for Karl Lietzenmayer's Ghost Houses talk.

### Behringer Crawford Museum

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

#### NORTHERN KENTUCKY HERITAGE MAGAZINE UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

*Northern Kentucky Heritage*, the biannual magazine long published by the Kenton County Historical Society, is now being published by the Local History and Genealogy department of the Kenton County Public Library. The Magazine will keep its focus on all things historical in the Northern Kentucky region and will look for new trends in record gathering and record keeping, and digital collections. *Northern Kentucky Heritage* also has a new 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!