

Kenton County Historical Society

P. O. Box 444
Covington, Kentucky 40303

R E V I E W

August 1990

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING AND PROGRAM FOR
MEMBERS, FRIENDS, GUESTS, AND THE PUBLIC

On Tuesday evening, September 11, 7:00 PM,
at the Kenton County Public Library,*
Covington, Father Anthony Deye will speak
on the history of St Henry's Church,
Elsemere, Kentucky. This year the church
has been celebrating its centennial anni-
versary.

There will be a short business meeting
before the program including the election
of officers for 1990-1991.

The meeting and program is free and open to
the public.

*Fifth and Scott streets, Covington

ELECTION

Members are asked to nominate persons to
run for these offices in the Kenton County
Historical Society.

President _____

Vice president _____

Secretary _____

Treasurer _____

Director _____

The Kenton County Historical Society was
originally sponsored by the Kenton County
Library and other civic organizations and
persons. Any citizen in good standing has
a right to participate in the local history
activities. As with many such organizations
this one needs more participation and input
from interested parties.

HISTORIC SITES

On August 23rd about twenty-five people attended the unveiling of a new historic highway marker in Mainstrasse commemorating the Slave Escape from Main street across the Ohio river in 1856. Mr. Ted Harris, Covington resident and Afro-American historian, spoke briefly. City Commissioner Callery also commented regarding the significance of this marker--one of a series financed by the city which identifies people or events of national significance. John Burns from the Kenton County Historical Society helped the Kentucky Historical Society prepare the text. You may recall his condensed essay entitled, "Margaret Garner, Murderess or Heroine?" which portrayed the Slave Escape in a previous issue of the R E V I E W.

A CRESCENT SPRINGS-VILLA HILLS GRAVE YARD

we have recently received a letter which expresses concern about the security of a pioneer grave yard in the midst of residential development in Villa Hills. Although the developer acknowledges awareness of the graves, and of plans to build around them, the writer nevertheless is concerned because the markers are already overgrown with weeds, signifying lack of attention. The "Ria Vista Subdivision" has ongoing activities very close by which might pose the threat. The writer could decipher names on only two markers in the family--Captain Levi Cleveland (1762-1813) and his wife Rachel (McKay) Cleveland (?? -1822). The family has been described in a recent Cr scent Springs-Villa Hills centennial edition. Perhaps some local volunteers or officials will be alerted to insure protection from damage, whether accidental or not, to these remains of Kenton County pioneers and to a Villa Hills landmark as well.

EARLY LUDLOW PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Ludlow gave strong support to its first public schools during the years between the end of the Civil War and 1869. The school was in the Christian Church building at the southeast corner of Elm and Locust streets-- a structure that has since been demolished. In 1868 the city decided it was unable to continue its financial support, and, as one person noted, "to the disgrace of the little village" there were no classes conducted that year."

In early 1869 an aroused populace was moved to approve a \$3,000 bond issue for the purpose of helping finance construction of a schoolhouse on Linden street, between Davis and Kenner streets. C. W. Harwood, who was a member of the Board of Education, was also serving as acting superintendent at the time.

It was interesting to note that work on the Linden Street building began in May of 1869 on what was the nation's first official Declaration Day. It was also during that same year of 1869 that Ludlow was made a separate school district.

The new schoolhouse was enlarged in 1879, and in 1887 its ever-increasing enrollment made it necessary to acquire what was known as a colony. The colony consisted of a small cottage and lot on the building's east side. To help finance continued operation of the school, the board frequently rented-out the building for various purposes, and sponsored numerous public entertainments in the structure.

It should be noted that William Allen served as the first principal of the Ludlow Public School.

Enrollment numbers continued their climb, and in 1890 prompted a loud outcry for an even larger school building. The city charter at that time empowered the city council to erect such a structure. So, on August 4, 1890 councilmen placed the question of approving

a \$25,000 bond issue before the voters. They gave it their approval.

From that date until ground was broken on July 10, 1895 and the laying of the building's cornerstone on October 26th, there was a continuous outpouring of criticism from a number of influential citizens who opposed the building of the new school. They claimed that money was recklessly being spent and, at one point, succeeded in obtaining a court injunction preventing the start of work on the structure.

Once construction began, the project underwent even more setbacks, including the discovery of serious defects in the corner towers which caused the walls to separate when construction work reached the second floor. Consequently, the four corner towers had to be demolished and rebuilt. Indeed, the structure's final cost of some \$33,000 was considerably above the original contract price of \$19,594, a fact which made its critics feel justified in their hostility toward the project.

Once completed, however, the new structure became the envy of virtually every educational system in the region. One Cincinnati newsman was moved to comment: "The new building has no equal in the State of Kentucky in point of comfort, beauty and general utility for educational purposes."

The building, located on a large plot of ground at Oak and Adelia streets, certainly was of striking appearance. It measured some 90 by 120 feet, stood three stories tall, and was constructed of pressed red brick and faced with outstanding freestone trimmings. On the afternoon of June 12, 1897 what was often "accepted as the finest, largest and most modern school building in Northern Kentucky" was formally dedicated.

The dedication ceremonies, which followed what was called a "monster parade," was characterized by a decided patriotic theme. The State Councilor of the Jr. O. U. A. M. and

representatives of the local Blue Grass Council made a presentation of a large American flag, after which the commander of Cincinnati's George H. Thomas Post of the G. A. R. delivered the day's major address entitled "The Grand Army."

Yet another highlight of the day was a spectacular display of military drill by the Boys' Brigade which came from Newport for the occasion.

A number of G. A. R. posts from throughout Ohio and Kentucky had converged on Ludlow for the ceremonies, and the management of the Lagoon Amusement Park took the occasion to announce that all of the participating posts would be admitted to the park that day free-of-charge. The G. A. R., of course, was a nation-wide organization of Union veterans of the Civil War.

A youthful Mary Goetz was one of the faculty members scheduled to conduct classes in the new building. What's so unusual about that, you ask? Well, nothing really except that after years of dedicated service the school was renamed in her honor.

The substantial building continued serving the community until 1957 when it was demolished and replaced by a smaller, more compact building of glass, brick and plastic. (John Burns, Director)



A NEAR DISASTER

"CHILDREN SHUT IN BY FLAMES," screamed newspaper headlines, as they heralded what could have been a disaster of gigantic pro-

portions. It was on the morning of November 15, 1901 that fire struck Ludlow's St. James school, threatening the lives of more than 100 children. It was about 9:00 A. M. that Sister Mary Sumpter heard what proved to be the ominous crackling sound of flames coming from below the stairway connecting the school's first and second floors. The Sister was teaching her 2nd floor class of some 40 pupils, and, according to one news report, "without wishing to alarm the pupils, started to investigate."

What she found was that a portion of the stairs was already engulfed in flames and sending up thick clouds of smoke. Then, according to the same report, "Realizing that the children could not cross the pit of fire, she ran to the fire alarm across the street."

Ludlow's volunteer fire department was on the scene within about five minutes after the alarm was sounded. By then, the fire, which was later determined to have been caused by an overheated furnace, was said to have gained a frightful headway.

In the meantime, Sister Mary Vincent dismissed her 80 pupils from their first floor classroom, and frantically hurried up the burning stairway to the now teacher-less children on the second floor level.

The dense clouds of smoke prevented all hope of descending the stairway to safety, so in desperation the children began smashing the windows with their books. Terrified spectators who were gathered in the street below, watched in horror as a number of panic-stricken children climbed onto the window sills. Other pupils behind them were urging them to jump and threatening to push them if they didn't. It was said that the pleadings of Sister Mary herself, succeeded in preventing any such deadly leaps until firemen could raise ladders to each of the windows.

(John Burns, Director)

KENTON COUNTY SESQUICENTENNIAL TIME CAPSULE

On September 30, 1990 2:00 PM at the
Kenton County Courthouse in Independence,
a time capsule will be buried with instruc-
tions that it be opened in 2040, the County's
200th birthday. We wish to thank the
Kenton County 150th Birthday Office for
inviting the Kenton County Historical
Society to send a letter of identification
for inclusion with other burial items,
other acknowledgements, other artifacts.



**THE KENTON COUNTY SESQUICENTENNIAL YEAR
1990**

J-90

Kenton County Historical Society
P. O. Box 641
Covington, Ky 41012

Kenton County Birthday, April 30, 1990 (150th)
Covington Birthday, February 8, 1990 (175th)
Bromley Birthday, May 23, 1990 (100th)

Non-Profit
U. S. Postage
PAID
Cov., Ky 41011
Permit # 297