

The Kenton County Historical Society



March 1992

Kenton County Historical Society

P.O. Box 641
Covington, Kentucky 41012

R E V I E W

March 1992

ANNOUNCEMENT: GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING/PROGRAM
On Tuesday, March 3rd, 7:00 PM, at the Kenton
County Public Library, Covington, Mr Karl Lietzenmayer
will speak on...

THE CHURCH MUSIC AT MOTHER OF GOD CHURCH, COVINGTON

The church's musical history is quite distinguished
due to consistently top quality direction and
expertise. Indeed, at least one leader, Bernard
Heinrich Francis Hellebusch (1835-1885), a German
immigrant, gained some national stature as a teacher
and publisher of church music.

Mr. Lietzenmayer (a long time choir director) will
give his presentation in light of the liturgical
considerations of the time. THE PROGRAM WILL BE
FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

Tuesday evening (MEMBERSHIP--\$5.00 per year)
March 3rd, 7:00 PM
Kenton County Public Library
Covington

Invitation for Submission of Papers

The Dinsmore Homestead Foundation in Burlington, Kentucky (20 miles southwest of Cincinnati, Ohio) invites the submission of 500-word abstracts of papers for its first of a series of annual symposia. The theme of the October 1992 symposium will be The New Abundance: The Agricultural Revolution and the Shrinking World of the Nineteenth Century. The program will be interdisciplinary, bringing together the fields of agricultural, technological, transportation, urban, and women's history, as well as practitioners of the disciplines of Sociology, Geography, Political Science, Art, Architecture, etc.

The Dinsmore Homestead Foundation features a 150-year-old assemblage of family possessions, buildings, grounds, and approximately 250,000 pages of documents on microfilm. The originals are deposited in the Tucson branch of the Arizona Historical Society.

The symposium will begin on Thursday, October 15th and end on Sunday, October 18, 1992, coinciding with Tall Stacks '92 in nearby Cincinnati. Deadline for submission of abstracts is May 29, 1992.

Please respond to: P.O. Box 453, Burlington, Kentucky 41005 or call (606) 586-6127.

NOTES ON COVINGTON'S "WEST END"

"November 1830. At this time all that section west of the town limits [west of Washington street] as far as Willow Run was a forest of large timber, and the same south to the hills, except places owned by Major Sandford, Major Fowler and a few others."

--quoted from Smith, Beginning at the Point....

Then by 1832 the West End was platted by its owner, the Bank of the United States, which plat created such streets as Riddle (now Ninth), Ferry (now Main), Philadelphia, etc. In 1834 the Town of Covington became a city and these blocks were incorporated with original Covington (east of Washington, South ~~to~~ Sixth).

An 1851 city map shows the first "recorded extensive industry," a cotton mill (1828) between Greenup and Scott; also a rolling mill (1831) between Scott and Madison. Near Philadelphia the earliest West End factory (1830s) produced bagging (typically from Kentucky hemp for binding Southern cotton in transport, but one source said that this factory was "innovative").

In 1854 the Kentucky Central began operating with a northern terminus at Pike and Washington; in the 1880s tracks were extended to Cincinnati over the C and O railroad bridge; in the mid 1920s the tracks were elevated more than twenty feet above streets and sidewalks. The tracks thus bordered a distinctive area of (more often) Germans who preferred employment in neighborhood shops and factories.

On March 22, 1873 the Covington Journal reported that John Mitchell, James Tranter, "and others" had purchased the "old bagging mill property on Third street below Philadelphia," extending to the river, in order to operate "one of the biggest rolling mills in the west" and employ "about six hundred men." In an 1875 social note, a publication said that the Mitchell and Tranter Rolling Mill nine would be playing a baseball game in the "Willow Run bottom." But less happier social news in the 1880s saw at least one major strike under the auspices of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (300 men) and a furnace "explosion"

which "horribly " burned one man. In 1898 the Ky Post reported a list of management complaints: taxes are too high and water rates beyond reason; company assessed \$800.00 for a sewer it had yet to tap into; and the city denied a right-of-way for a railroad switch which was requested four years ago.

Before James Tranter died in 1899 he was negotiating the control of his Mill which was then sold to the Republic Iron and Steel concern, part of a Trust headquartered (1900) in Vandergrift, Pennsylvania. In its some seven years of operation Republic (soon headquartered in Chicago) tortured its workers with a repeated series of layoffs, and shutdowns allegedly for "repairs," reorganization, etc., keeping West End families in a state of tension and foreboding. The Trust had the upper hand with its tacit threats of relocation based on complaints of high shipping rates (the city would not grant right of way for a "Johnson street switch"), and of inadequate size and of the aging of the old Mitchell-Tranter facility. On February 12, 1906 The Post reported that many men had already relocated for employment in Sheffield, Alabama. The next week or so the paper recalled that for many years payroll had amounted to some \$12,000-15,000 semi-monthly, and that "almost all of the West End was composed of mill men and their families." But the workers and the city seemed to be making a hopeless effort at the last minute as regards the alleged shipping problem. In September the McDonell Co. of Allegheny, Penn purchased Republic.

1907
In 1914 the old Mitchell-Tranter site was purchased by Houston, Stanwood and Gamble, manufacturers of steam engines and boilers (founded 1891 and already adjoining the site) in order to convert the remnants into a machine shop. In 1905 The Post had reported that Houston, Stanwood, and Gamble was building for its boiler making department "the largest floor space in the city" ~~East~~ of Philadelphia street. Earlier in the same year the social news was that the President, Charles R. Houston was going to see a lot which he owned, along with one owned by the railroad, converted to a public tot playground in order to serve the children of Third District school "where many of the firm's workers' children go." But then in 1910 twenty

men were quickly "discharged" when they chose to strike for a 2½ cent raise. In 1916 machinists walked out for a reduction of hours from sixty to eight hours per day and time-and-a-half for overtime. The Post last reported that the company was offering fifty-two but that the strike will probably soon be over, anyhow.

By 1909 Mr. Houston was advancing plans to get railroad tracks closer to his plant, this time along Willow Run: "the proposed route will leave the railroad shops" (south of Twelfth street), go "northwardly to the run in the rear of the Holman street public school, and then along the valley to the manufacturing plants along the 'river-front.'" The same article (Enquirer, November 17, 1909) happened also to report that park commissioners had purchased from "Mr. Arthur Goebel" grounds in order to open a new park next Spring. Ten years later there was talk of dredging a harbor at the end of Willow Run in a grand scheme for Ohio riverfront development. But World War I era events and soon the advent of over-the-road trucking overwhelmed some of these concepts.

The Post reported on November 27, 1915 that Houston, Stanwood, Gamble did receive a "\$200,000 war order" for 200 lathes in a subcontract with the Cincinnati Iron and Steel Company (which was "making 8, 9, 10, and 12 inch shells" which were shipped from Cincinnati to eastern plants). According to Ralph Robke, Sr. the company's once thriving civilian business included sale domestically of systems for heating large buildings and for commercial laundries, and the exporting of steam engines with boilers for powering saw mills, sugar mills, etc. However, business dwindled with the coming of electrification; the company went into receivership; there was poor management; and then the 1937 flood severely damaged facilities (and washed away the engineering archives).

A few years later the West End received the shelter of a new floodwall. Today the floodwall to the north, the I-75 superhighway (over Willow Run) to the West, and the ever-present elevated railroad tracks to the east, impose remote backdrops on life in the West End (Mainstrasse).

CORRECTION IN THE LAST ARTICLE ON THE LIBERTY BELL
The pharmacist was Joe Michels, employed at Pike and Washington, northwest corner. (John Boh)

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