

THE COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY'S 200TH BIRTHDAY  
JUNE 1, 1992



The Kenton County Historical Society

*1792*  
*the Celebration*  
*1992*  
*Kentucky*

June 1992

## Kenton County Historical Society

P.O. Box 641  
Covington, Kentucky 41011

R E V I E W

June 1992

### ANNOUNCEMENT: PROGRAM

On Tuesday evening, June 2nd, 7:00 PM, at the Kenton County Public Library, ERLANGER BRANCH, Ms. Patsy Gaines will give a portrayal of...

JENNY WILEY, PIONEER AND VIRGINIA FRONTIER HEROINE Captured by the Indians, Jenny saw all five of her children and a brother killed and scalped by these natives. During this ordeal she found her strength through prayer. After serving eleven months as a slave to the Indians she made her daring escape.

The Jenny Wiley State Park in Kentucky is named for her. Ms. Gaines, from Wyoming, regularly portrays such legend There will be a brief business meeting before the program. This presentation will be sponsored by the Kenton County Historical Society and will be FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

Tuesday evening

June 2nd, 7:00 PM

Kenton County Public Library, Erlanger Branch  
(next to Krogers, across from Van Leunen's)

### THE HISTORICAL CONFEDERATION OF KENTUCKY (HCK)

All historical organizations are invited to attend a meeting of the eight county NORTHERN REGION which will be held Saturday, June 20th, at 9:00 PM at the Boone County Public Library 7425 Highway 42, Florence, (adjacent to the Municipal building). Agenda will include a review of the past year and a discussion of upcoming events, including the summer and autumn Bicentennial festivities. Lunch will be had at a nearby restaurant.

### CORRECTION (see article on Old Colored Church)

First Christian Church is located on ~~West~~ East Fifth street, Covington. The old colored church property was sold to Mr. and Mrs. White of Paris, Kentucky in 1893.

THOMAS WOODHOUSE BAKEWELL, A COVINGTON DEVELOPER .

"Hemp in Kentucky. First crop grown 1774. From 1840 to 1860, Ky production largest in U. S. Peak in 1850 was 40,000 tons, value of \$5,000,000. Scores of factories made twine, rope, gunny sacks, bags for cotton picking and marketing...."

--Historic Highway Marker near Maysville

At Second street between Main and Sycamore, Cincinnati, in 1844, Robert Buchanan was dealing in "Covington iron, nails, and cotton yarns" for the Covington Rolling Mill and Nail Factory and for the Covington Cotton Factory. Also listed as another commission merchant was B. T. Stone. In 1867 Stone would turn his business over to his employees, Benjamin W. Putnam and Joseph J. Hooker, whose partnership, Putnam-Hooker, specialized in "southern cotton goods" and who operated in Covington the Argonaut Cotton Mill (1892-1915) and the Reliance Textile and Dye Works (which lasted under succeeding owners on Madison ave. into the 1980s). Likewise on Second street in 1844, Thomas Woodhouse Bakewell (1778-1874) was a commission merchant. But by then he had to sell out in Covington.

Having sustained heavy losses from the 1837 depression, Bakewell had to sell off blocks of the Johnston-Bakewell subdivision (laid out by the mid 1830s; in today's Mainstrasse). And Bakewell had to sell (or assign) his ownership in the Covington Bagging Factory. After many transactions, in 1845, McLean Blair acquired interest from the Northern Bank of Kentucky, and by 1848 Blair, and partner Enoch Pepper also, in what became the "Globe Mills and Bagging Factory" (deedbook 4, pp. 179, 205; deedbook 9, p. 542, Independence court records).

Thus Bakewell once had owned "extensive real estate... in Covington...where he also built a large factory for the manufacture of burlap bagging which reportedly utilized machinery of his own invention" (Sinclair, Filson Club, vol. 40). Such factories made hemp bagging and rope because it seemed necessary to transport southern cotton in 400 lb. bales wrapped in "six yards" of hemp burlap and tied with "6 ropes" (Hopkins, A History of the Hemp Industry in Kentucky). However, Bakewell's mechanized innovations were not uncommon; other such factories, including the Newport Bagging Factory, earned similar recognition for advances.

U. S. tariff protection increased the profitability of hemp farming and manufacturing in Kentucky. In the mid 1830s the Covington factory produced \$25,000 worth of finished hemp per year. In 1836 Covington and Newport produced one-half million yards of bagging. In 1849 Pepper and Blair of Covington rated third in the state with 800 tons out of 16,000 statewide (Hopkins). But after 1850 a decline set in and by 1854 Pepper and Blair's financial shortfalls resulted in receivership (deedbook 24, p. 220, Independence courthouse). While Kenton county still processed 60 tons in 1860, the Union blockade later cut off the cotton trade, and, of course, the demand for hemp bagging. After the war jute bagging and iron ties replaced hemp. Bakewell's old factory was history.

However, this factory played but a small part in his career. Some of Bakewell's intellectual efforts can be found in old issues of the Journal of the Franklin Institute and in Scientific American. As a steamboat builder Bakewell maybe fit the image described by Charles Ambler in his volume on transportation in the Ohio valley: "the era of the steamboat saw river business taken over by "gentlemen of means and culture." His father William in England had befriended Dr. Joseph Priestly and Dr. Erasmus Darwin, grandfather of Charles. After the family immigrated to America (1802) they eventually settled on a farm near Valley Forge (where william remained a gentleman farmer). Here one of the Bakewell's neighbors was the young John James Audubon, who later married Thomas' sister, Lucy. Bakewell and Audubon went into business partnership with a New Orleans venture, terminated by the War of 1812, and then with a store and a steam-powered grist mill at Henderson, Kentucky, where they settled. Another, sister, Ann, married Alexander Gordon, well-to-do New Orleans businessman. His father, Major William Gordan owned a sugar plantation and was involved with a mercantile house at Natchez, Mississippi where he helped Thomas learn the southern cotton business.

Thomas began his training working for his uncle Benjamin an importer in New York. After near financial ruin Benjamin purchased a glass factory in Pittsburg, and built it into the "first" prosperous (and prominent) flint glass company in the United States.

While Audubon relocated to Cincinnati in 1819 (at this

time he investigated Cliff Swallows near the Licking river), Bakewell was in Louisville where he was a partner in a foundry and shipbuilding concern (as early as 1817). In 1824 he relocated to Cincinnati. There he set up the Aetna foundry (\$35,000 annual production in castings), and the Fayette factory which built "steam engines, sugar mills" and other large equipment. Plus, he ran a shipyard which "constructed three steamboats annually until 1830" (Sinclair). He also became a director of the Mechanics Institute, a director of the Cincinnati Branch of the Bank of the United States, and a director and later President of the Ohio Insurance Company. He was also appointed to a special three-man committee seeking a way possibly to build a railroad from Cincinnati to Charleston, South Carolina. The failure of the project was symbolic, for during his time in Cincinnati, the city saw its glory days as "Queen City of the West." But this ended when Louisville, before Cincinnati, achieved the first direct railroad connection to the South in the 1850s (Amler).

Bakewell continued in another partnership, the Bakewell-Cartwright foundry, until 1844. The 1857 depression finally ruined him. But he was content to work as a "clerk" until retirement in 1867 at age 80. He then lived with one of his twelve children near Pittsburg until his death (he is buried in Spring Grove, Cincinnati).

In 1873 Mitchell-Tranter purchased the bagging factory site in Covington, and developed an extensive rolling mill. Later ownership eventually terminated the rolling mill there. In 1914 Houston-Stanwood-Gamble, builders of steam engines and boilers (founded in 1891) purchased on the site for an addition to its existing facility on the other side of the street. This company (which also exported) lasted until after the 1937 flood. Thus the property on Philadelphia street (west side between Second and Third streets) retained for over a century the spirit of Thomas Bakewell, Ohio River Valley steamboat builder, foundryman, factory operator, merchant, and developer. (John Boh)

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