



# Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society

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**Wilhelm Hildenbrand (1843-1908):  
Chief Engineer for the Reconstruction  
of the Roebling Suspension Bridge**

**Tannery, Saddle, Harness, Associated Enterprises:  
Covington and Vicinity**

# **Wilhelm Hildenbrand (1843-1908):**

## **Chief Engineer for the Reconstruction of the Roebling Suspension Bridge**

Don Heinrich Tolzmann

### **Introduction**

In 1895, Wilhelm Hildenbrand was appointed Chief Engineer for the reconstruction of the Roebling Suspension Bridge on the Ohio River and served in that capacity until the project was completed in 1899. Although this work has been well described and documented by Joseph Gastright, the life story of Hildenbrand has not received the coverage it deserves.<sup>1</sup> A good place to start exploring his life is with his obituary that appeared in the *New York Times* a day after his death on 21 February 1908.<sup>2</sup>

As a rule obituaries are short and Hildenbrand's certainly is no exception, but aside from that, it also contains several inaccuracies. Perhaps as a corrective, Joseph Mayer published a lengthier obituary in the *Proceedings of the American Society of Civil Engineers*. Although informative, its coverage of Hildenbrand's life and work is incomplete. It also appeared several years after Hildenbrand's death and in a journal that did not have the readership of the *New York Times*.<sup>3</sup> A scattered number of references can also be found in works dealing with Roebling, but they are relatively brief.<sup>4</sup> Given the dearth of information about Hildenbrand, I have compiled the following biographical sketch to provide an up-to-date survey of his life and work.

### **Wilhelm Hildenbrand**

Wilhelm Hildenbrand, the son of Stanislaus and Frederike Hildenbrand, was born in Karlsruhe on 1 June 1843, in what is today the southwest German state of Baden-Württemberg.<sup>5</sup> He received a classical education at the Lyceum there and then went on to the Karlsruhe Polytechnic Institute, where he studied with specialists in mechanical engineering and bridge building (professors Redtenbacher and Sternberg). After taking the state exams (Staats-Examen), which were required of government employees, he became an engineer for highway construction and an inspector at the rolling mills in Westphalia and Rhenish-Prussia in 1866. In the following year (1867), he decided to immigrate to the U.S.

At first he found employment as a draftsman in an architectural firm and then as an Assistant Engineer for the New York Central Railroad. John A. Roebling took note of him in his address and memo book as follows: "W. Hildenbrand, 26 years, Germ Eng & well recommended. 213 Bowery & 2 floor, N.Y. might do as draughtsman."<sup>6</sup> Hildenbrand turned 26 on 1 June 1869, so we can assume Roebling met him shortly before his tragic accident on 28 June, which led to his death on 22 July.

Roebling was probably impressed with Hildebrand's educational background, which resembled his own experience of having studied engineering and then working on road construction in Prussia. Additionally, Roebling notes that he was a German/English bilingual, which might have also been a plus factor. Hildenbrand, however, did not begin work on the Brooklyn Bridge project until 1870.

As Assistant Engineer for the New York Central Railroad, which was constructing Grand Central Station, Hildenbrand was engaged with work designing the station's train shed. It was a massive structure (650 feet long, 200 feet wide, and 100 feet high) constructed of glass and steel, and was covered by a huge arched roof. It was a remarkable engineering achievement and remained in use until 1903, when it was demolished as part of the renovation of Grand Central Station.<sup>7</sup>

When Grand Central's train shed was completed in 1870, Hildenbrand began work as Principal Assistant Engineer for Washington Roebling, who had succeeded his father as Chief Engineer for the Brooklyn Bridge. According to Mayer: "During Mr. Roebling's protracted illness, which confined him to bed or room for nearly ten years, Mr. Hildenbrand made all the scientific investigations and mathematical calculations for the structure. He also made the architectural design for the approaches and had charge of the steel superstructure, which was designed, inspected, and erected under his direction."<sup>8</sup>

After the Brooklyn Bridge was completed, Hildenbrand opened up his own office in New York City as a Consulting Engineer and became the Chief Engineer for several bridge and railroad projects, which were listed in his obituary. One of these projects was his appointment as Chief Engineer for the reconstruction of the Covington and Cincinnati Bridge in 1895. Mayer writes of this:

*This was his most important and difficult independent work. The bridge is the third largest suspension bridge in the world, and was built originally by Mr. John A. Roebling in 1867, but had become inadequate for the increased traffic. Mr. Hildenbrand replaced the floor and stiffening trusses with a wider floor and new stiffening trusses without interrupting traffic, and supplemented the old cables and anchorages with new ones. The task of distributing the load between the new and old cables was difficult, and required accurate calculation and delicate adjustment. It was evidently accomplished successfully; the new bridge is not only an adequate but a beautiful structure, and an ornament to the two cities. It was finished in 1899, to the satisfaction of his clients.<sup>9</sup>*



Above: Wilhelm Hildenbrand (left) discussing work on the Brooklyn Bridge with Charles Roebling (1849-1918), the brother of Washington Roebling (1837-1926). *Courtesy: Princeton University Library*

On the cover: Postcard of the Suspension Bridge on the Ohio River. *Courtesy: From the author's collection*

During his time in Covington Hildenbrand lived at 318 Garrard Street, which was not far from the home of the Amos Shinkle, President of the Covington and Cincinnati Bridge Company, at 215 Garrard St. It was also right across the street from Ball's Row, a boarding house at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Garrard Street, where Washington Roebling stayed while he worked on the bridge. While in Covington, Hildenbrand met and later married Florence M. Hubbard, daughter of a prominent judge in Covington. At the time of the wedding (21 June 1900), Hildebrand was 57 and his wife was 28.<sup>10</sup>

After completing work on the Ohio bridge, Hildenbrand was supposed to complete a report on the project, as Roebling had done when he completed work on it. But another project came up, taking him to Malpima, Mexico, leaving the report undone. In Mexico he completed work on the construction of a suspension bridge built by the John A. Roebling's Sons Company. And after this project, he continued working for the company as Chief Engineer for the construction of cables for another suspension bridge in New York, the Williamsburg Bridge, which was completed in 1903.

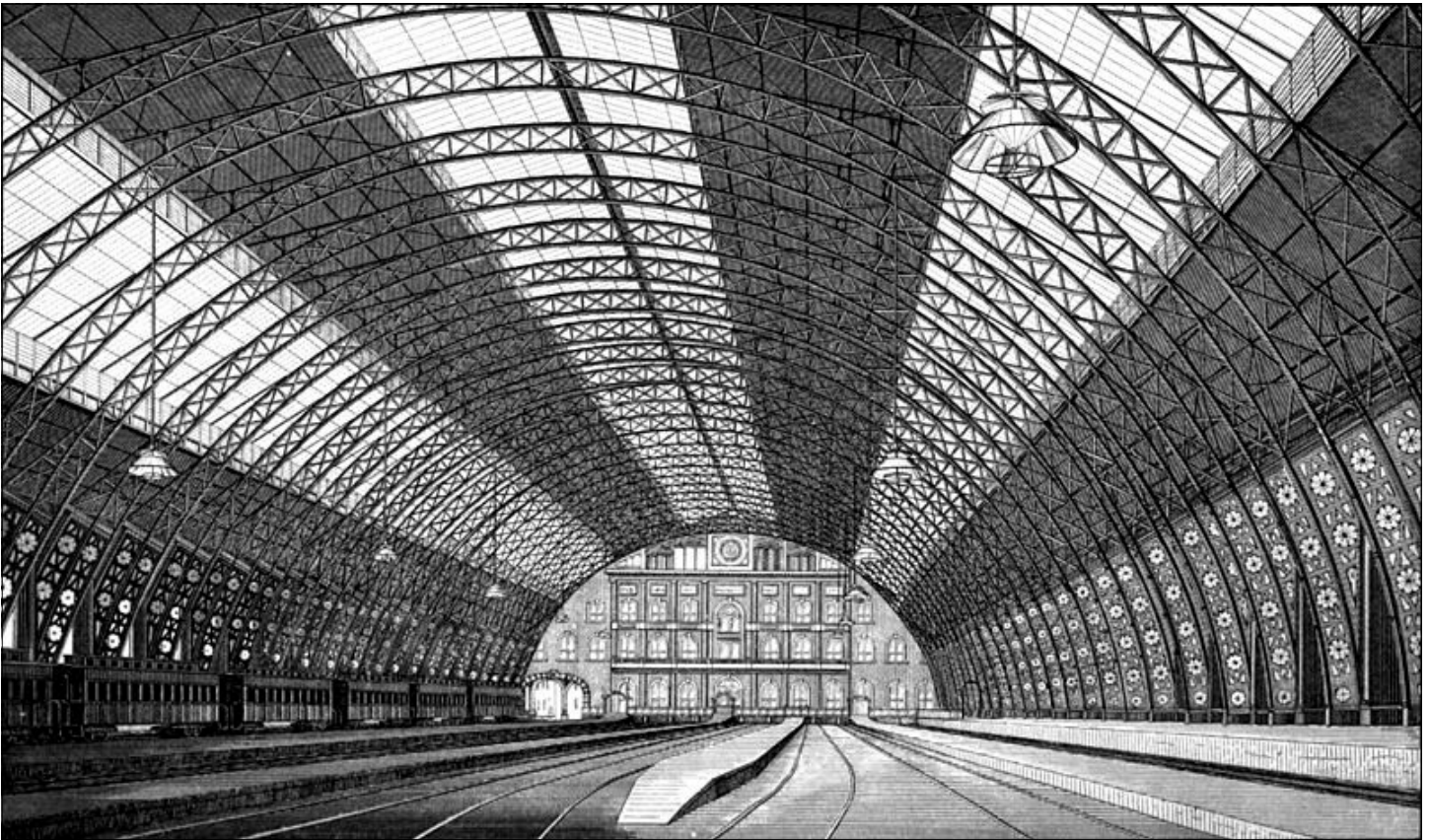
In the meantime, he was selected in 1901 to serve as Chief Engineer for a proposed reconstruction of the Brooklyn Bridge, but nothing came of the plan. The idea apparently came

about due to critical comments that had been made about the bridge's safety. The debate caused Hildenbrand to publish an article, which also appeared separately as a booklet, decisively refuting those who questioned its safety, thus bringing to a close any discussion of the bridge being reconstructed.<sup>11</sup>

In 1902, Hildenbrand was elected as a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers, which reflected the high regard members of his profession had for him. In 1904, he became Consulting Engineer for the Westinghouse Electric Company of Pittsburgh and "designed the overhead structures for the electrification of the passenger traffic of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railway, near New York city."<sup>12</sup> Until his death in 1908, he remained in the employ of Westinghouse, designing similar structures elsewhere for the company.

In 1904, Hildenbrand came to Cincinnati for a visit, apparently having been brought back to the area by the Covington and Cincinnati Bridge Company for the purpose of completing a report on the reconstruction of the bridge. Unfortunately, the report was never completed, perhaps because Hildenbrand was much too busy with projects he had in the works elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> There is no question that he was in great demand and could hardly keep up with the many projects that were offered to him.





The Train Shed at Grand Central Station designed by Hildenbrand *Courtesy: Wikipedia*

In addition to his various projects, Hildenbrand often spoke at engineering and scientific meetings and also wrote a number of articles. He published two books reflecting his expertise in bridge building and the use of wire rope: *Cable-Making for Suspension Bridges*. (New York: Van Nostrand, 1877, 121 pp.) and *The Underground Haulage of Coal by Wire Rope*. (Trenton, NJ: W.S. Sharpe Printing Co., 1884, 120 pp.).

His obituary in the *New York Times* notes that he was careful and conscientious in his work and “firm and lasting in his friendships.” Mayer voices similar comments: “As an engineer and architect, Mr. Hildenbrand always showed good taste, and gave close and painstaking attention to all details. His extreme conscientiousness, which made him hesitate to delegate minor parts of his work to subordinates, was the only obstacle to his attaining a still more brilliant success than he achieved.”<sup>14</sup> Here we might not a slight critique with regard to his administrative style, but it also underscores the meticulous nature of his *modus operandi*.

Commenting further on Hildenbrand, Mayer notes: “He had a very interesting and original personality, and was a true friend to many who were fortunate enough to make his acquaintance. He was liberal to a fault in his assistance to many who needed it. He was an enthusiastic admirer of Wagner, played his operas on the flute, and never missed attending their performance when opportunity offered.”<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

One of the plaques on the Brooklyn Bridge bears Hildenbrand’s name together with the names of other engineers who worked on it, so passers-by may take note of this. It apparently is the only plaque with his name on it. In Covington his place of residence on Garrard Street is no longer there, but the best monument to him in the area is the Roebling Suspension Bridge, which he reconstructed in the 1890s, making it safe, reliable, and usable for generations to come.<sup>16</sup>

## Endnotes

1. See: Joseph E. Gastright, “Wilhelm Hildenbrand and the 1895 Reconstruction of the Roebling Suspension Bridge,” *Northern Kentucky Heritage*. 8:1 (2000): 1-14. Also, see: Ralph Wolff, “John A. Roebling Suspension Bridge,” in: Paul A. Tenkotte and James C. Claypoole, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), pp. 490-93.
2. See: *New York Times*. (22 February 1908).
3. Joseph Mayer, “Wilhelm Hildenbrand, M.A.S.C.E. Died February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1908, Memoir,” *Proceedings of the American Society of Civil Engineers*. 40 (1914): 249-51.
4. For references to biographical sources on Roebling, see my biography of Roebling: *John A. Roebling and His Suspension Bridge on the Ohio River*. (Milford, Ohio: Little Miami Publishing Co., 2007).
5. Regarding Hildenbrand’s parents, see: Werner Hentz, “145 Years Roebling Suspension Bridge in Cincinnati: The Wonderful Bridge Building Designer John Roebling,” Internet source at: <http://www.lifework-in-bridge-building.com/seite14.html>.

6. John A. Roebling, *Directory – Cov. & Cin. Bridge Co. – 1864*. Roebling Collection, Folsom Library, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Series 1, C. Bridge Projects, Box 7, f. 133. The author currently has an article in preparation on this item: “Roebling’s Address and Memo Book: The Directory of the Covington & Cincinnati Bridge Co.”

7. Regarding Grand Central Station, see: Kurt C. Schlichting, *Grand Central Terminal: Railroads, Engineering, and Architecture in New York City*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2001).

8. Mayer, pp. 249-50.

9. Mayer, p. 250. With regard to the reconstruction work Hildenbrand stated: “It was my belief, based on a thorough examination of all parts of the old bridge, that the structure was in a state of excellent preservation and just as serviceable as when new, and, if the traffic conditions had not been changed, that no repairs, or only immaterial ones, would have been necessary.” See: Gastright, p. 5.

10. Thanks to Bill Stolz, Kentucky History Librarian, Kenton County Public Library, for finding information on Hildenbrand’s wife and their wedding date. There were no children from the marriage. Regarding Hildenbrand’s place of residence, see my article: “Roebling Heritage Tour: A Guide to Sites Related to John A. Roebling (1806-69) and His Bridge on the Ohio River,” *Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society*. (November/December 2013): 5-8, 11.

11. In 1902, Hildenbrand published a booklet responding to a critical review of the Brooklyn Bridge, which had appeared in an engineering journal, and raised concerns about its safety. See his: *The Safety of the Brooklyn Bridge: A Review of the Report of Messrs. Duryea and Mayer on the Condition of the Brooklyn Bridge*. (New York: n.p. 1902). Shortly after its publication, the *American Machinist* published an article entitled “The Safety of The Brooklyn Bridge,” commenting: “We are in receipt of a pamphlet bearing the above title, which is a reprint of an article by Wilhelm Hildenbrand, C. E., which was published originally in *Engineering News*. Mr. Hildenbrand was Col. Roebling’s assistant in the construction of the bridge and as such made the detail calculations for it. The pamphlet is a review of and answer to the report of Messrs. Duryea and Mayer on the condition of the bridge.... This report was a disquieting one and the answer to it is intended to show that its arguments and conclusions are unfounded. The report did not condemn the supervision of the structure in any important respect, as it stated that “no important deterioration exists,” but it did condemn the original design by claiming that certain secondary stresses were not provided for in it and in consequence of this the assertion was made that the bridge has never been safe.... Mr. Hildenbrand takes direct issue with these statements and condemns the recommendations made in the report by saying that “to carry out these two alterations would in my opinion be the most fatal error that could be made.” The argument is backed up by calculations and the conclusion is that “The Brooklyn Bridge is Safe!”.... Mr. Hildenbrand doubtless knows more about the bridge than any other living man and his conclusions will doubtless be accepted by the public, as they should be. It is proper to add that our statements above regarding the conclusions drawn by Messrs. Duryea and Mayer are based upon Mr. Hildenbrand’s pamphlet.” See: *American Machinist*. 25 (February 20, 1902): 279.

12. Mayer, p. 251.

13. Gastright writes that: “an incomplete report copy of his report surfaced in 1972.” See: Gastright, p. 13. I have tried to locate a copy of this report, but thus far have not been able to find one. Please contact the author, if you have information as to its whereabouts.

14. Mayer, p. 251. It is interesting to note that Roebling also greatly enjoyed music and took pleasure in playing the flute and the piano. See: Tolzmann, *John A. Roebling and His Suspension Bridge on the Ohio River*, p. 33-34.

15. Mayer, p. 251.

16. Although the lion’s share of credit for the Ohio and the Brooklyn Bridge justifiably goes to John A. Roebling, both Washington Roebling and Wilhelm Hildenbrand also deserve to be mentioned for the important role they played in working on both bridges, as without them neither bridge would be what they are today. Regarding Washington Roebling, see my article: “Washington Roebling (1837-1926): Man and Myth,” *Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society* (November/December 2014): 6-10.

## Past Board Member San Juan Romero Passes

From 1999 to 2005, San Juan Romero was a dedicated board member of the Kenton Society. He was excited about our regional magazine *Northern Kentucky Heritage* and began the concern the Society now has about publication storage. Back issues are now residing in their third location since inception in 1992! At the time, it was easily handled in the de-humidified basements of the board members, but as time and products



moved on, storage space has become a prominent concern – one that San Juan saw early on. San Juan passed away January 24th, age 83, at his home in Fort Wright.

He was a veteran of the U.S. Air Force where he began his career as an air traffic controller, becoming Chief Controller at the Greater-Cincinnati (CVG) Airport, retiring in 1990. He often related that his roots were in the Southwest United States, where his family pioneered several centuries ago. He traced his family to early Spanish settlers in “El Norte” (American southwest) and his family still maintains ownership of some of their original Spanish land grant.

A multi-talented man involved in various endeavors and volunteer positions, he loved sports; life-long member of the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and chairman of the GI Forum. He served as a Spanish interpreter for local and state courts for 20 years and served on the Northern Kentucky Medical Board, the Northern Kentucky Education Board and Fort Wright Ethics Committee. He leaves his wife Kathleen “Kathy” of 33 years, who is herself active in local history and community affairs, as well as his children and step-children, and their families.

# **Tannery, Saddle, Harness, Associated Enterprises: Covington and Vicinity**

John Boh

Tanneries and manufacturers of saddles and harness were like slaughterhouses, flour mills, saw mills, weavers and spinners of cloth — carriage and wagon makers. They provided necessities for 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans. Like breweries and slaughterhouses, early tanneries were located on hollows, creeks and rivers used also for disposal of refuse.

Pioneer “tanners” practiced an odorous and hazardous occupation. They soaked hides in vats and added lime to speed the treating and softening. The “currier” created uniform suppleness and thickness by stretching, smoothing and polishing. Photos show workers scraping hides stretched over wood platforms. Caustic solutions, fat, hair and other leftovers were discarded if not recycled.<sup>1</sup>

In her book of reminiscences about “Old Covington,” Eleanor Childs Meehan remembered: “On the southeast corner of Sixth and Scott streets, in a large hollow, stood the open vats of the Lemaire tannery.” At this corner by the middle of 1818, Pennsylvanian-born Nicholas Lemaire and Ohio-born Jacob Lemaire were tanners and curriers. By 1856, the Lemaire business was gone, and the hollow there eventually was filled in. In 1866, H. J. Deglow operated a tannery on the south side of the Lexington Pike in Lewisburg, near Willow Run Creek.<sup>2</sup>

## **Samuel Devou (Tanner) & His Family**

In 1910, the grandsons of Samuel Devou (1792-1853) donated around 500 acres to the city of Covington for a public park. Samuel was a tanner and currier in Cincinnati. He was a native of Delaware, his wife Alice Paul a native of Pennsylvania. In the War of 1812, Private Samuel Devou (prone to be misspelled as “Devon”) apparently served in the Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry under Captain William Mitchell in the First (Biddle’s) Regiment. In 1863, Samuel’s widow, Alice, sold or traded the bounty land in Michigan granted to Samuel for his military service.<sup>3</sup>

Samuel appears in the Cincinnati street directories as early as 1819 as a “currier” and later as a “tanner and currier” up to at least to 1844. As of 1850 he was without occupation, certainly retired. According to one researcher, he had also been a Democratic 5<sup>th</sup> Ward politician. His widow, Alice, was listed as late as 1875 living with offspring. In 1842 and 1844, one Edward Devou was also a tanner and currier, residing in a boarding house, but his exact relationship to Samuel has not been determined.<sup>4</sup>

One of Samuel’s two sons, James A. Devou (1818-1892), was a steamboat clerk, pilot, before a substantial career in the insurance business as attorney, agent, collector and briefly, President of the Ohio Valley Insurance Co. in 1870.<sup>5</sup>

## **William P. Devou & Co.**

If hides are involved in making hats and other articles, Samuel’s other son, William P. Devou, engaged in an associated enterprise. Devou & Rockwood (Wm. P. Devou & Charles A. Rockwood) were listed in the Cincinnati directory in 1855 shortly after Samuel’s death. It marketed “Silks and Fancy Dry Goods,” on Pearl Street, Cincinnati; in 1859 it was Devou & Rockwood, “Silk, Straw and Millinery Goods”; by 1863 the partnership had ceased. It was Wm. P. Devou & Co., “Wholesale Millinery Goods, Shawls, Cloaks, etc.,” 83, 85 West Pearl; in 1865 Devou & Co. were “Wholesale Dealers in Millinery Goods, Manufacturers of Cloaks and Mantillas.

In 1866, the *Louisville Courier Journal* carried a fairly prominent ad in the classified section: Devou & Co., 83 and 85 Pearl Street (“upstairs”), Cincinnati, wholesale Dealers in Millenary Goods, Mantillas, Ornaments, Trimmings, etc.; Company offers “to *Milliners, Curriers and Merchants* an unusually rich assortment of Millinery Goods, at least at New York Prices. We also manufacture cloaks, in all the new patterns. Special attention will be given to fulfilling orders for persons who cannot visit the city. Any



Old southwest corner of Pike and Madison where Perkins and Company operated

*Photo courtesy: Kenton County Public Library*

goods sent on order may be returned if not satisfactory to the buyer.”

Devou & Co. marketed to hat makers for the better classes locally and in the Ohio Valley during the Civil War and early Victorian era.<sup>6</sup> Samuel’s grandsons William P. and Charles P. Devou worked in the late 1870s for Devou & Co. as bookkeeper and clerk. In 1880, Devou & Co. were “Importers and Manufacturers of Millinery Goods,” 137-139 Race, but around 1882 Devou & Co ceased being listed. Apparently, John A. Pitts & Co., “Importers and Jobbers of Straw, Silk and Millinery Goods, 136 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Cincinnati succeeded Devou & Co. William’s son, Charles P. Devou, was a salesman for Pitts in 1880 and 1882.<sup>7</sup>

William P. Devou Sr. and his siblings most likely shared some significant proceeds from Samuel’s estate in the tanning trade and his widow’s sale of the Michigan bounty land.

In 1867 and 1868, real estate in Northern Kentucky was deeded shortly before her death to Louisa Devou (1824-1871), daughter of Samuel and Alice. Between 1868 and the time of his death, her brother, William Sr. (1826-1897), owner of Devou & Co., acquired adjoining parcels. Likewise, the widowed Sarah Ogden Devou (1828-1909) acquired parcels up to about the time of her passing. So her sons, William Jr. (1855-1937) and Charles (1858-1922), inherited much acreage through their sister and parents. In 1910, a year after Sarah’s death, Samuel’s grandsons, William Jr., Charles, and his spouse donated some 500 acres to Covington for a park.<sup>8</sup>

### **Jesse Grant, Father of Ulysses**

Orphaned by the death of his mother at age 11, and by his father’s other family responsibilities, Jesse started early as a hired hand. Later, George Tod, a Youngstown Judge and father of the Civil War Ohio Governor David Tod, took Jesse in. Under Tod, Jesse advanced his learning and was exposed to

cultural tastes and the joys of financial security. For two years he apprenticed as a tanner in Deerfield, Ohio. Jesse then moved to Maysville, Kentucky, to complete his training in the tanning trade, working with his half brother, Peter Grant.

At age 26, Jesse became a partner in a tannery in Point Pleasant, Ohio, where his son, Ulysses was born. In 1823 he moved to Georgetown, Ohio, where Jessie worked as a tanner, butcher, hauler and builder, and owned a carriage service and two small farms. He built the Georgetown jail. In 1841 he moved to Bethel, Ohio, and then briefly in Galena, Illinois. Jesse cut back on his business enterprises before moving to Covington in 1854-1855.<sup>9</sup> By then he had become wealthy for his time. Covington was more substantially a cultural and commercial center than those smaller rural towns in Ohio and elsewhere. He was ambitious, shrewd in business, and known to be tight fisted with money.

According to local historian John Burns, in 1854 he owned a tannery in Portsmouth, and "harness factories and leather goods stores" in locations including LaCross, Wisconsin, and Galena, Illinois, where Ulysses had been storekeeping before resuming his military career.<sup>10</sup> In 1856, Jesse was a Covington "leather merchant" on the south side of 3rd Street between Russell and Johnston streets.<sup>11</sup>

Retired Judge George Perkins recalled that later, Jesse Grant was a "vendor of leather" nearby on Madison at Pike Street while his father was a manufacturer of saddles, harness and other leather goods on Pike Street.<sup>12</sup>

### **John H. Perkins & Co.**

Eleanor Childs Meehan recalled images of the southeast corner of Pike and Madison. On (or near) the site of today's Mutual Insurance Building, "Uncle" Billy Wasson was selling dry goods and groceries; John White had a grocery; Mr. McKoy, James Spilman, Robert Howe and the Timberlakes also had other similar stores nearby. Then there was Perkins and Co., makers of saddles, harness and trunks.<sup>13</sup> At this time W.R. Gurley also had business involving leather at the northeast corner of Washington Street and the Lexington Pike.<sup>14</sup>

Meehan recalled that her brother-in-law, Jeremiah Merring, was a "saddler" for Perkins & Co. So was fellow Presbyterian J. E. Clendenning. Later, Clendenning and partners, J. O. Goshorn, and George W. Howell (after whom Howell Street, Covington is named) signed incorporation papers in 1871 for the Eastern Kentucky Hide & Leather Co. of Covington, with fully paid in stock of \$150,000. Its main office was at 817 Madison Avenue under president Goshorn and Secretary Clendenning.<sup>15</sup>

John H. Perkins had retired to his farm on the Lexington Pike, but he died in 1894 at his daughter's residence on West 12<sup>th</sup> Street. The city of Ft. Mitchell, including the Ft. Mitchell County Club, is located on the old Perkins farm. Of the surviving children of John and his late wife Mariah Stansifer Perkins, three stayed in the business, but it was located Cincinnati.<sup>16</sup>

In 1879 brothers, H. A. Perkins, W. S. Perkins, and B. W. Campbell had organized the Perkins, Campbell & Co., saddle and harness manufacturers.<sup>17</sup> In 1918-19 Perkins, Campbell & Co. of Cincinnati, operated at "622 Broadway."<sup>18</sup> The company building at "626 Broadway" was erected in 1898.<sup>19</sup>

In 1901, a "contract for ambulance harness" was awarded to Perkins, Campbell & Co., one of the largest government orders since the Spanish American War. It kept the company's Cincinnati workers busy most of the summer. Leather was "Cincinnati tanned" for the best oak leather from the American Oak Leather Co.<sup>20</sup>

### **Other Tanning and Leather Manufacturing**

A "big tannery in Covington" at 416 Pike operated by the Ohio & Kentucky Leather Co. was totally destroyed in April 1894 by a fire that was incendiary in origin. The rear of the property adjoined the Bavarian Brewery. The loss estimated at \$7,000 to \$10,000 was suffered by stockholders, including some prominent Cincinnati businessmen. The company office was in Cincinnati.<sup>21</sup>

Incorporated in 1909, the Kentucky Hide & Leather Co. claimed \$30,000 in capital. This "new industry" as described by boosters would operate on





Seventh Street Market House

*courtesy: Kenton County Public Library*

the “Jenkins Property” and would employ 50 to 75 men from Ludlow and Covington. In 1913, a man claiming to own fifteen shares filed suit in the Kentucky Circuit Court requesting that a receiver be appointed for the Kentucky Hide & Leather Co. He claimed poor management and bookkeeping and excessive indebtedness, with property and machinery valued at \$10,000. In June 1914, when the building was sold, it was “known as the “Ludlow Tannery” recently operated by the Kentucky Hide & Leather Co.”<sup>21</sup>

In 1914-15, Samuel Renz had a tannery at the northwest corner of 13<sup>th</sup> Street and the Licking River. In 1918-19 Covington had no tanneries.<sup>23</sup> In 1920, the E. W. Corcoran Co. was incorporated to operate another tanning business in Ludlow at 38 Kenner Street, with capitalization of \$200,000, for the “buying, selling, storing, manufacturing, tanning and general dealing in leather.”<sup>24</sup> After WWI, leather factory manufacturing seems to have faded

from the local scene. Harness and saddle making was not an enterprise with great promise entering the motor vehicle age.

1. Online information
2. Eleanor Childs Meehan, “An Octogenarian’s Personal Recollections of a Beloved Old Kentucky Town ‘Old Covington’ (revised),” copyright by author, 1924 (a booklet), including “General Lafayette’s Visit; 1839-40, 1856, 1866-67 directories
3. Kenton County Public Library vertical files; online details courtesy of Elaine Kuhn, KCPL
4. 1819 Farnsworth Directory publ. by Oliver Farnsworth - Samuel Devou, currier, corner of New Market and Broadway; 1842, Cist directory; 1844 business directory and residential directory; 1850-51 Cincinnati directory - Samuel no longer listed as tanner and currier but lives at north side of 7<sup>th</sup> between John and Mound streets; KCPL vertical files
5. 1842 to 1890, Cincinnati city directories
6. Millinery is the designing and manufacture of hats. A milliner or hatter designs, makes, trims, or sells hats for women and even men. A mantilla is a scarf worn over the head and shoulders by women in Spain and Latin America; or it is also defined as a short cloak or cape
7. 1855 to 1882, Cincinnati city directories; *Louisville Courier Journal*, Feb. 22, April 14, 1866
8. Kenton County Public Library vertical files; online details courtesy of Elaine Kuhn, KCPL; William P. Devou Jr; in Will Book 7, p. 161, recorded, Covington courthouse, March 22, 1897; Sarah O. Devou died in 1909 leaving a will dated April 26, 1893; around 500 acres

# A Look Back at The Headlines

*An on-going feature reliving local headlines.*

*This issue features:*

*The Daily Commonwealth – April 1, 1879.*

## Local Headlines

The City of Covington was established on February 8, 1815 with the following Trustees: Uriel Sebree, Alfred Sebree, Joseph Kennedy, William Hubble, and John Buckner, all of whom are now dead.

On the 24th of February, 1834, the city was incorporated, and the first list of officers were:

Mayor – M. M. Benton

City Attorney – W. W. Southgate

Treasurer – George B. Marshall

Clerk – Hamilton Martin

Assessor – Isaac Cooper

Marshal and Collector – E. G. Bladen

Councilmen – William Hopkins,

John Lewis,

William Elliott,

W. W. Southgate,

John Casey,

John Goodson,

John Mackay,

James Arnold

## These Are the Facts (advertisement)

We carry the largest stock; we sell at the lowest prices;  
our styles are the most select and always wear well.

You can always find what you want at our store.

Our stock of

**Ladies' Fine Kid Strap Sandals in all Designs**

and Patterns, for parties and evening wear,

just received and very desirable.

We make to measure for ladies,  
gentlemen, and children

**Hickey's Shoe Store**

606 & 608 Madison St., Covington, Ky

donated to city of Covington, Deed Book 140, p. 150, Nov. 3, 1910, with 41 back references to previous land transaction

9. Wikipedia and Ulysses S. Grant website; Paul L. Whalen, "Grant, Jesse Root," *The Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*, edited by Paul A. Tenkotte and James C. Claypool, Lexington, KY: the University Press of Kentucky, 2009, pp. 412, 413

10. John E. Burns, *A History of Covington, Kentucky Through 1865*, edited by Karl J. Lietzenmayer, Covington, Kentucky: the Kenton County Historical Society, 2012, pp. 198, 199

11. 1856 street directory, J. R. Grant, leather merchant south side of 3rd between Russell and Johnston; 1860 (residence) Jessie R. Grant east side Greenup between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>; NOTE: by 1869 Jessie R. Grant had been appointed Covington Postmaster by President Andrew Johnson; Jessie Grant, Postmaster, NWC 6<sup>th</sup> and Madison

12. Perkins, p. 133

13. Eleanor Childs Meehan; John Mackoy, dry goods, groceries, produce, merchandise, south side of Lexington Pike between Washington & Madison; John White, grocery, southwest corner Madison & Pike streets (1856 directory); J. F. B. Timberlake, grocer, and W. D. F. Timberlake, merchant, west side of Lexington Pike between Washington & Madison streets (1856 directory); John H. Perkins & Company, Saddles & Harness & Trunks mfg., west side Lexington Pike between Washington & Madison, 1856 directory

14. 1849-50, 1866-67 street directories

15. *Covington Journal*, Nov. 4, 1871; Nov. 11, 1871, p. 2

16. "A Pioneer Gone," K. P., Dec. 31, 1894, p. 3; "John H. Perkins Funeral," KP, January 2, 1895, p. 4; Doris Riley, "Perkins George G.," *The Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*, pp. 710, 711; NOTE: one other son, John E. Perkins & Co., 184 Pike Street, manufacturer of plug tobacco; later in the 1894 a partnership of Perkins & James C. Ernst; 1882 and 1894 street directories

17. C. E., Aug. 21, 2010, p. D6

18. 1894, 1914-15 and 1918-19 Covington street directories; 1918-19 Cincinnati street directory

19. C. E., April 10, 1970, p. 13

20. C. E., May 30, 1901, p. 8

21. "An Incendiary Fires a Big Tannery in Covington," K. P., April 2, 1894, p. 1

22. K. P., Feb. 23, 1909, p. 1; "Receiver is Sought for Ludlow Co.," Sept. 20, 1913, p.3; "Tannery in Ludlow Sold," June 11, 1914, p. 1

23. Street directories, 1914-15, 1918-19

24. "New Kenton-Co Firm," K. P., July 2, 1920, p. 1

## Want to be Published?

We are always looking for authors for submissions to the *Bulletin* and *Northern Kentucky Heritage*.

*Bulletin* articles should be about a Kenton County topic, 2-6 pages of typed text, and should have at least two references.

Magazine submissions should be at least eight pages in length with footnotes, and should cover a topic within the 10-county Northern Kentucky region.

Submit articles to:

Kenton County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 641 Covington, KY 41011  
or [nkyhist@zoomtown.com](mailto:nkyhist@zoomtown.com)

## Then and Now



Monte Casino Chapel at its original location in Covington, circa 1920,  
and at its present location on the campus of Thomas More College

Left photo courtesy Kenton County Public Library. Right photo courtesy Bob Webster.

## Mystery Photo

Can you identify the mystery photo below? The answer can be found at the bottom of the page.



ANSWER:

Carpenter's Shop at the Garden of Hope, Covington.

# Kenton County Historical Society

March/April 2015

ARTICLES FROM BACK ISSUES ARE INDEXED ON OUR WEBSITE!

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## I Bet You Didn't Know

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

March 20, 1944: Blue Licks  
Battlefield State Park property was  
conveyed to the United States  
government for a national shrine.

March 22, 1782: Capt. James  
Estill was killed by Indians at little  
Mountain (near Mt. Sterling).

March 27, 1798: Frontiersman  
Simon Kenton married Elizabeth  
Jarboe.

April 21, 1816: A small steam-  
boat left Hickman Creek in Jessa-  
mine County with cargo headed for  
New Orleans – recorded as the first  
commercial steamboat on the Ken-  
tucky River.

April 30, 1789: George Washing-  
ton was inaugurated in New York as  
the first president of the United  
States.

*"On This Day In Kentucky" — Robert Powell*

## Programs and Notices

### 22nd Annual Northern Kentucky Regional History Day March 28, 2015 – 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Northern Kentucky University

In celebration of the 200th anniversary of Covington, Kentucky, Dr. Paul Tenkotte, Professor of History at NKU and co-editor of the new Cov200 History of Covington, will be the guest speaker for this year's opening presentation. As in years previous, a variety of breakout sessions follow the opening presentation. Workshop topics include:

**Virginia's Western War: Kentucky's Revolutionary War Experience**

By: Don Rightmyer

**Celebrating 25 Years: Campbell County Historical and Genealogy Society**

By: Ken Reis

**Our fellow Kentuckians: Rascals, Heroes, and Just Plain Folk**

By: James C. Claypool

**Railroads and the Making of Boone County**

By: Stephen D. Conrad

**Cousins, Contracts, and Copyrights, Oh My...:History and Genealogy**

By: John Schlipp

**Historical Battles: The Place of American History in Education**

By: Burke Miller

**Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky in World War I**

By: Patricia Van Skaik

**1997 Falmouth Flood: Our Experience**

By: Russ Conrad and Penny Conrad

**Did He Say Regiment, Squadron, Destroyer or Attack Transport?**

By: William T. Stolz

**Devou Park Beginning and early History**

By: Jeannine Kreinbrink and Doug VonStrohe

**Northern Kentucky Heritage Magazine: Its History and Impact on the Region**

By: Eric R. Jackson and Karl Lietzenmayer

Local history enthusiasts do NOT want to miss this incredible event.  
Cost: \$8.00 in advance / \$10.00 at the door. For additional information  
and to register, contact John Boh (859) 491-0490.

### Covington Bicentennial Events

For additional information on the numerous events  
to be held this year celebrating Covington's Bicentennial,  
please visit: [www.cov200.com](http://www.cov200.com)