

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 641, Covington, Kentucky 41012

Bulletin

May 1998

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KCHS MEETING

DATE May 17
TIME 2 PM
PROGRAM Walter Langsam
PLACE Behringer
Crawford Museum

Mr. Langsam will do a slide presentation based on his book, co-authored with Alice Weston, *Great Houses of the Queen City*. Both authors will be there for a book signing.

The Museum's exhibition of *Historic Preservation of Northern Kentucky; Homes, Land, and Lost Treasures* will open May 16 at 1 PM.

From the President.....

Our campaign for volunteers has been moderately successful. There are several members who have volunteered to enter papers on computer. Several expressed interest in the photo collection and information was sent to them. No one as yet has accepted the program coordinator's position.

Jo Ann Brown is being assisted in Bulletin mailings but she always needs new material for publication, Kenton stories, announcements, issue discussions, etc..

Enclosed is a copy of the new KCHS brochure, thanks to the work of Board member Lisa Gilham. Illustrations were done by her father Charles Gilham. Your comments regarding the brochure are encouraged. Give your copy to a friend or neighbor; get them interested in our society.

The photocopier obtained with a grant in cooperation with Behringer/Crawford Museum has not been performing to expectations. At the next Board meeting, the future status of the machine will be a topic of discussion. B/C Museum also is very disappointed with its performance. The new 400+ page book on Linden Grove Cemetery, by George Dryer had to be photocopied and bound to make it economically feasible for purchase. It was a nightmare to simply run 25 copies of the book on our equipment. The copier's speed is unnecessarily slow, and jams repeatedly.

Many of the society's other publications are presently either out of print or in minimum supplies. These works will have to be photocopied on something reliable.

On a more positive note, Kenton County Historical Society received an award for Northern Kentucky Heritage Magazine from the Kentucky Historical Society at an awards luncheon last fall. The magazine will be co-sponsored by Northern Kentucky University. Dr. James Ramage, of the University, will be our contact. This sponsorship should add more community interest to the publication when extra funding is requested from benefactors in the future. Also, NKH believes that university sponsorship will encourage more research papers from the campus, students and faculty alike.

Sincerely,

Karl Lietzenmayer

Thomas Woodhouse Bakewell, 1778 - 1874

Bakewell Street in Covington is a familiar street to many Covingtonians. It could be surmised that the street got its name from someone who had done a major feat such as batting a thousand for the Covington Black Stockings. But no, Bakewell Street like so many other streets in Covington was named because Thomas Woodhouse Bakewell, along with a Mr. Johnston, owned and developed the property around the Mainstrasse area in the mid 1830s. He also owned and ran many other enterprises of various types. He was involved in the cotton and hemp industry, steel industry, and shipbuilding. Some of his intellectual efforts can be found in old issues of the *Journal of the Franklin Institute and Scientific American*.¹

Bakewell's family immigrated from England in 1802. His father had befriended Dr. Joseph Priestly and Dr. Erasmus Darwin, grandfather of Charles Darwin, in England. The family eventually settled on a farm near Valley Forge where his father remained a gentleman farmer. At this location, John James Audubon was one of the family's close neighbors. In fact, he married Thomas' sister, Lucy.

Thomas and Audubon went into a business partnership with a New Orleans venture. The War of 1812 finished that business, and they then went into business with a store and steampowered grist mill in Henderson, Kentucky.

Another Bakewell sister, Ann, married Alexander Gordon, well-to-do New Orleans businessman. His father, Major William

Gordon owned a sugar plantation and was involved with a mercantile house at Natchez, Mississippi. He helped Thomas learn the southern cotton business. Thomas also was trained in business by his Uncle Benjamin, an importer in New York. After near financial ruin, Benjamin purchased a glass factory in Pittsburgh, and built it into the "first" prosperous (and prominent) flint glass company in the United States.²

In 1817, Bakewell was in Louisville as a partner in a foundry and shipbuilding concern. Audubon had relocated to Cincinnati in 1819; it was around this time that he was studying Cliff Swallows near the Licking River. In 1824, Bakewell also relocated to Cincinnati where 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. In addition, he ran a shipyard which "constructed three steamboats annually until 1830."³ As a steamboat builder, Bakewell fit the image described by an author on transportation in the Ohio Valley: "the era of the steamboat saw river business taken over by gentlemen of means and culture."⁴

Bakewell also built "a large factory for the manufacture of burlap bagging which reportedly utilized machinery of his own invention."⁵ Such factories made hemp bagging and rope because it seemed necessary to transport southern cotton in 400 pound bales wrapped in "six yards" of hemp burlap and tied with "six ropes."

Bakewell's mechanized innovations were not uncommon, however; other such factories, including the Newport Bagging Factory, earned similar recognition for advances.⁶

Hemp farming and manufacturing in Kentucky was a profitable business, enhanced by U. S. tariff protection. In the mid 1830s, Bakewell's Covington factory produced one-half million yards of bagging.⁷

The 1937 Depression created heavy losses for Bakewell. He had to sell off blocks of his Johnston-Bakewell Subdivision, and sell (or assign) his ownership in the Covington Bagging Factory. After many transactions, the company, by 1848, had become the Globe Mills and Bagging Factory owned by McLean Blair and Enoch Pepper. In 1849, Pepper and Blair's operation rated third in the state with 800 tons out of 16,000 statewide. But after a decline set in around 1854, Pepper and Blair's financial shortfalls resulted in receivership.⁸ Kenton County still processed 60 tons in 1860, but when the Civil War broke out the Union blockade 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.⁹

Bakewell continued in another partnership, the Bakewell-Cartwright Foundry, until 1844. He also had offices on Second Street in Cincinnati listed as a commission merchant.¹⁰

Bakewell took part in many other institutions in the area. He was 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.

Bakewell was appointed to a special three-man committee seeking a way to build a railroad from Cincinnati to Charleston, South Carolina.¹¹ The failure of this project was symbolic, for during his time in Cincinnati, the city saw its glory days as "Queen City of the West." When Louisville built the first direct railroad connection to the south in the 1850s, Cincinnati's glory days ended.¹²

The Depression of 1857 finally ruined Thomas Woodhouse Bakewell. But he was content to work as a "clerk" until retirement in 1867 at age 80. He then moved to Pittsburgh to live with one of his twelve children until his death. He was buried in Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati.¹³

The "old bagging mill propertybelow Philadelphia....fronting 455 feet on Third Street....to the low water mark of the river being about four acres in all,"¹⁴ was owned by several different people, especially John Mitchell and James Tranter in 1873. They developed an extensive rolling mill. Shortly before his death in 1899, Tranter sold out to "the steel trust."¹⁵ His successor Republic Iron and Steel, of the U. S. Steel Trust, operated it before also selling out there.¹⁶ By 1914 Houston-Stanford-Gamble, builders of steam engines and boilers (founded in 1891) had purchased "the old Mitchell Tranter mill site and remodeled into a machine shop for expansion of its existing facility."¹⁷ This company (which also

exported) lasted until after the 1937 flood.¹⁸

Thus, the property on the west side of Philadelphia Street retained for over a century the spirit of Thomas Woodhouse Bakewell, Ohio River steamboat builder, factory operator, merchant, and developer.

NOTES

1. *Journal of the Franklin Institute; Scientific American.*

2. The Family Book of Bakewell-Page-Campbell....compiled by B. G. Bakewell, Pittsburgh, 1896.

3. Bruce Sinclair, editor, "Thomas Woodhouse Bakewell's Autobiographical Sketch and Its Relation to Early Steamboat Engineering on the Ohio", *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, volume 40, 1966.

4. Charles H. Ambler, *A History of Transportation in the Ohio Valley*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1931.

5. Sinclair.

6. James F. Hopkins, *A History of the Hemp Industry in Kentucky*, U. K. Press, 1951.

7. Hopkins.

8. Deed book 24, p. 220, Independence courthouse.

9. Hopkins.

10. Cincinnati street directory, 1844; "The City of Cincinnati and its Resources", *The Cincinnati Times-Star Company*, 1891; *The Kentucky Post*, November 11,

1915; interview Harold Krantz, July 11, 1990, by John Boh.

11. Sinclair.

12. Amber.

13. Sinclair.

14. *The Covington Journal*, March 22, 1873.

15. *The Kentucky Post*, August 17, 1899; *The Kentucky Post*, August 29, 1900.

16. *The Kentucky Post*, September 21, 1906; *The Kentucky Post*, July 29, 1910.

17. *The Kentucky Post*, December 8, 1914.

18. *The Covington Journal*, March 22, 1973; Sanborn maps; interview, Ralph Robke, Sr., January 28, 1992, by John Boh.

Kenton County Historical Society membership dues are \$10 per year, \$5 for students and Senior Citizens.

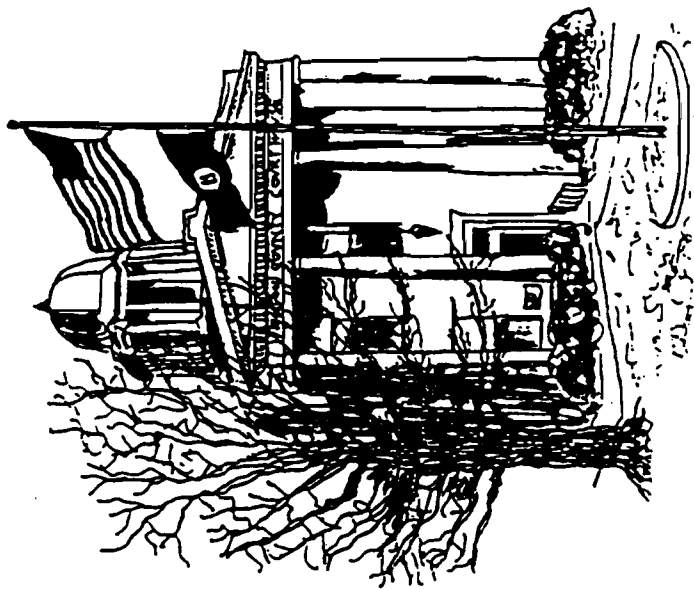
Subscribers to Northern Kentucky Heritage Magazine, a semi-annual magazine of regional history covering ten counties, are \$12 a year for members, \$15 a year for non-members.

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