

# KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## MEETING

**DATE** Tuesday, May 14

**TIME** 7 PM

**PLACE** Trinity Church  
4th and Madison  
Covington

**PROGRAM** Architecture of  
Covington before WW I

A slide Lecture by Walter E. Langsam. Long time friend  
Walter is an architectural historian and historic preservation consultant.

## Bulletin

May 2002

May's Program - The Architecture of Covington, Kentucky Before WW I

Covington architecture since its founding in 1815 has both paralleled and complemented the architecture of Cincinnati and its environs. Both exceptional and vernacular buildings from several periods have survived in Covington and other Northern Kentucky towns that have virtually disappeared across the Ohio River. The "Point" at the Ohio and Licking Rivers is one such group of houses, and Wallace Woods another. Many fine Covington historic residences and other buildings will be presented at our meeting this month at our Trinity Church location. Trinity, by the way, is a compendium of additions by prominent Cincinnati Architects with superb art-carving by the women of the church.

Covington has also drawn prominent Cincinnati architects, both as residents and as practitioners, since at least the Civil War. These include William Stewart, who designed four Covington churches including Mother of God. The first architect primarily identified with Covington, however, was Daniel Seger, who designed the former Main Firehouse at 6th and Washington Street and other late Victorian buildings here. Dittoe & Wisenall, based in West Covington designed the handsome City Hall formerly near the end of the Suspension Bridge, whose designers, the Roebblings, also stayed here. Lyman Walker and George W. Schofield together designed elegant Beaux-Arts-style banks and school buildings in the early 20th century. The Early Modern Arts and Crafts Movements will also be represented.

Walter E. Langsam, an architectural historian and historic preservation consultant, was Covington's Historic Preservation Officer in the early 1980s, when he was primarily responsible for placing many of the city's neighborhoods on the National Register of Historic Places, as well as creating local districts. A popular teacher and lecturer, he has taught art and architectural history at the University of Cincinnati for more than fifteen years. Langsam is the author of the award-winning, best selling book, *Great Houses of the Queen City: 200 Years of Historic and Contemporary Architecture and Interiors in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky* (1997) and of the brochure "Architecture Cincinnati: A Guide to Nationally Significant Buildings and Their Architects in the Great Cincinnati Area" (1999), both with superb color photographs by environmental artist Alice Weston. Her color slides and historic images will be juxtaposed used to illustrate Walter Langsam's stimulating and informative lecture.

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# Ninth Street United Methodist Church, Covington, Kentucky

by John Boh, A Heritage of Covington Churches\*

As both a congregation and a place of worship, Ninth Street United Methodist Church is a historic landmark. Like many urban churches, the church's membership has dwindled and aged. However, with new leadership at both the church and the district levels, it now has the potential of becoming a vital part of the renaissance of historic downtown Covington. The rich history of the church and its location render it capable of becoming one of the major tourist attractions of Northern Kentucky. \*

While the present church at 14 East Ninth has been attended by African American Methodist Congregations since the 1880s, it's original occupancy for over twenty years by Presbyterians should not be overlooked, including the interesting historical connections in the person of Jonathan Edwards Spilman (1812-1896).

## Presbyterian Occupancy

In 1853, Minister John Clark Bayless of First Presbyterian on Fourth Street organized a mission to the southern part of Covington at that time. In February, 1855 twenty-eight members formally met in a business building on Madison near East Ninth. By December, 1855, the Second Presbyterian congregation had purchased the lot and built the present rear Lecture Room or "Old Church." But the front edifice facing directly on East Ninth with "1869" implanted in the facade, was completed during the pastorate of Spilman, a man of English descent, born in Kentucky who had spent his boyhood years in Kentucky.

A man of many talents, Spilman had once been a "prominent

Kentucky Lawyer" who had practiced with Judge Samuel Moore and with future Congressman John Menzies. But his greatest claim to fame may be this: it seems that while a Law Graduate at Transylvania College in Lexington he had composed the melody to "Flow Softly Sweet Afton," lyrics by poet Robert Burns. This melody is also hummed to "Away in a Manager," lyrics commonly attributed to Martin Luther, a very popular Christmas rendition. A man generally lost to history, he also is credited with eight other musical renditions, but this most popular tune has seen his name placed on the music sheets and listed in historical archives since his time. This later pastor of First Presbyterian in Maysville married twice and his second wife was Eliz Taylor, niece of President Zachary Taylor and cousin of Mrs. Jefferson Davis. Before attending Transylvania he had graduated from Illinois College, Jacksonville, Illinois, whose President at the time of his entry was the Rev. Edward Beecher, brother of Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

According the Covington Journal (2-2-61):

The edifice, recently erected by the Second Presbyterian Church of the city, of which Rev. J. E. Spilman is pastor, is nearly completed and furnished...the length of the building is 88 1/2 feet, width 49 feet; height of ceiling 30 feet, number of pews 102, and will seat about 650 persons. The Lecture Room is 60 X 58

feet. The house is lighted with gas, the brackets at the sides. Architect, J. W. McLaughlin, Cincinnati, Contractor, J. A. Walthall, Covington.

In 1875 there was the first of two serious fires at the new church. But with the help from Newport and Cincinnati, the fire was contained and loss was estimated at about \$2,000. The same year it was reported that "Major Henry Stanton, the celebrated Kentucky poet," from Frankfort, would give a reading from his poems in order to help raise money for a new organ. In 1876 the new organ, built in Boston, was installed.

Although the Presbyterians were considering another new church as early as 1875, the second fire in September, 1880 was the last straw. The fire was started by "sparks from the planning mill" located behind the church on the corner of Madison and the alley. The "entire roof of the building was found to be in flames." Volunteers and an engine from Cincinnati again helped douse the fire which also damaged other buildings including "the residence immediately east of the church," which was the property of Dr. Charles Taylor, pastor of Scott Street Methodist Church." Loss to this parsonage was "about \$1,000 and to the church was "over \$5,000." However, the Lecture room in the rear was only "lightly damage," and services were held there immediately after the fire.

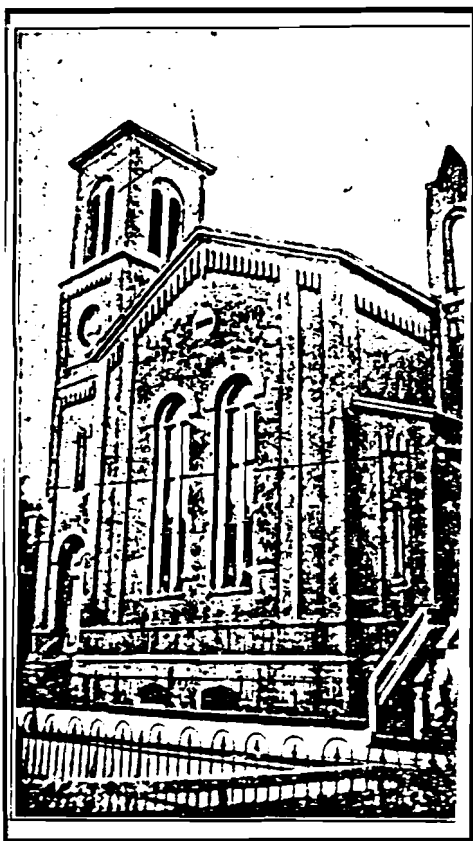
On March, 1881. the Second Presbyterian congregation purchased new property on the west side of Madison between Robbins and

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Eleventh and the new Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church building was dedicated on March, 1883.

The following Presbyterian ministers had completed assignments on Ninth Street: Rev. Albert Shotwell, May 1856-November 1857, Rev. J. E. Spilman, D. D., June 1858-May 1861, Rev. John Hendy, November 1864-November 1865, Rev. William C. Young, D. D., April 1866-February 1870, Rev. Francis P. Mullally, October 1870-December 1874, and George Summey, June 1875-1880.



### Methodist Occupancy

In 1869, in the Covington Directory, the "Colored M. E. Methodist Church" is listed as being on the south side of Third Between Scott and Madison. According to a recent history, the location was a rented building at Second and Scott, Rev. Andrew Byant, pastor, Rev. Charles W. Miller, Presiding Elder. Rev. Miller's residence was given as

633 Scott, approximately across the street from the M. E. Church South. In the 1876-77 Directory, the Fourth M. E. Church (Colored)" is listed on the west side of Madison between Second and Third and the Pastor, the Rev. Samuel G. Griffin, with residence listed at 233 Madison. And the colored congregation's former Elder is listed as Pastor of the M. E. Church South, which indicates the background of Ninth Street M. E. Church. More detail will be given in the next bulletin.

By 1881 the congregation was known as the Fourth Methodist Episcopal Church. They purchased the Presbyterian property, heavily damaged from the September 1880 fire, with \$4,000 cash. The church was restored with help from Union Methodist and Amos Shinkle, a member of the Freedman's Committee who was also a Covington business leader and contributor to the Roebling Suspension Bridge. At the opening of the church in May 1881, it was to be known as the Ninth Street Methodist Episcopal Church, now known as Ninth Street United Methodist Church. It grew to be one of the the largest congregations in Covington.

The rich history of the church and its location render it capable of becoming one of the major tourist attractions of Northern Kentucky. The worthiness of this building for restoration was attested to when the Kentucky Heritage Council awarded funds for the stabilization of the structure several years ago, and when the Kentucky African American Heritage Commission awarded funds which helped save one of the smaller stained glass windows.\*

**Editor's Note** A committee of a cross section of community residents is in the process of incorporating a

foundation to preserve and restore the building. In the meantime, funding is most welcome for planning and research. If you would be interested in contributing to this project, make out a check to Friends of Covington, Box 2614, Covington, Kentucky 41012. Notate it for "Ninth Street United Methodist Church Restoration."

In the next issue of the Bulletin, you will find more of the history of this 142-year-old church.

### Sources

Hoover, Earl R. "J.E. Spilman, Kentucky's Long Lost Composer of World-Famous Melody Rediscovered." *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, Vol. 66, July, 1968, pp. 222-241.

Richardson, Harry V. *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as it Developed Among Blacks in America*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1976.

Short, Roy Hunter, *Methodism in Kentucky*. The United Methodist Church, 1979.

Local and church newspapers, church histories, miscellaneous.

Special thanks to Mrs. Katherine Harrison and Mrs. Anna Scruggs.

\*Editor updated John's article from Alex Welden's application for a grant.

### Geneological Inquirers

"Is anyone researching Billiter, Robinson names?"

Joan E. Billiter  
21 Newton Street  
Fitchburg, MA 01420-6425

"Do you have information on the Searcys? Robert R., Robert P., Arthur, and William Searcy living in Covington from 1900 to 1930."

Larry Searcy #125091  
K.S.R. 3001 W. Hwy. 146  
La Grange, KY 40032

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**Civil War Lecture**  
**Saturday May 11**  
**2 :00 PM**  
**Lecture by Lester Horowitz**  
**Author of**  
**The Longest Raid of the Civil War**  
**at**  
**Behringer-Crawford Museum**  
**Devou Park**  
**Free**  
**Reservations requested**  
**859-491-4003**

**Book Signing and Reception**

**Friday May 17**  
**3:30 PM to 5:00 PM**

**Echoes of the Past: The History of**  
**Public Education in Covington**

**By Betty Lee Nordheim**

**Nordheim Gallery**  
**Holmes High School**  
**25th & Madison**

**Enter for parking off Madison or Eastern Avenue.**  
**Park in lot near building closest to Eastern Avenue**

A Letter of interest from Karl  
Lietzenmayer.....

Paul E. Walter  
2409 Manchester Rd.  
Louisville, KY 40205-3047

Dear Mr. Walter,

We have received your letter and sample photocopy of 1937 flood pictures. Part of our mission is to archive photos at the Kenton County Library, one of the Commonwealth's finest. There are presently over 6,000 photos in the collection, among those a number of '37 flood scenes of most Northern Kentucky communities.

The Society certainly has no budget to purchase your family collection, but we are extremely interested in your photos. We receive photo donations frequently and have no expertise in evaluating their value. We have always been grateful to those who realize the importance of this preservation effort.

It would be helpful if a local expert could appraise your photos and set a value. We could solicit contributions from our members and readers of our Bulletin to finance the cost. We would like to review your collection to determine the number and particular views to see whether it fills in any voids in the Library's flood photos.

I will pass on your letter to our board to solicit their input and we will communicate with you in the near future.

Sincerely, Karl Lietzenmayer

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**Ninth Street United Methodist  
Church**

Kenton County Historical Society  
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Alma Boh  
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