

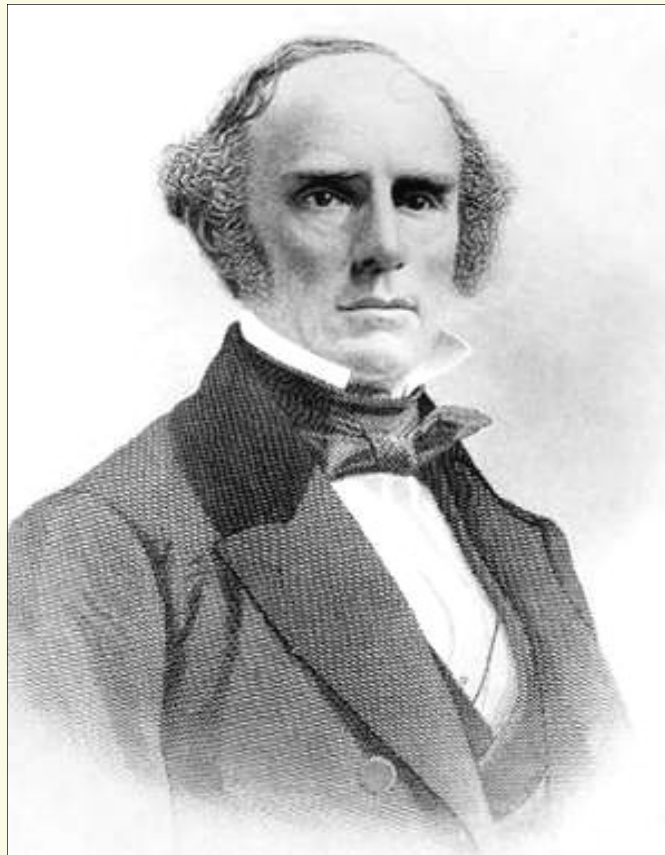


# Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society

Website: [www.kentoncountyhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.kentoncountyhistoricalsociety.org) Email: [info@kentoncountyhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@kentoncountyhistoricalsociety.org)  
P.O. Box 641, Covington, Kentucky 41012-0641 (859) 491-4003

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M.M. Benton: Covington's First Mayor

Ruth Heubach Best:  
Mistress of Ceremonies Extraordinaire

The Mendelssohn Singing Society

# M.M. Benton: Covington's First Mayor

Jamie Crouch

Strolling the busy avenues of Covington, one passes many familiar streets named after Kentucky's most well known citizens and leaders, including George Madison, fifth governor of Kentucky, and Thomas Sanford, the first representative in Congress from the Sixth District, just to name a few. One must travel away from the downtown region to the old Peaselburg neighborhood of Covington, however to find a road named for Mortimer Murray Benton, one of Covington's most overlooked and underrated leaders. Not only was Benton a prominent attorney, businessman, state legislator, and philanthropist, he was Covington's first mayor, a pioneer of the community and a "distinguished townsman."<sup>1</sup>

On February 14, 1780 this land was granted to George Muse for his services during the French and Indian War and was eventually passed along to Thomas Kennedy in 1791, who built the first cabin that same year. Kennedy established a ferry, tavern, and prominent farm, and later sold 150 acres of his property for the purposes of establishing a city. By February 8, 1815 an Act of the Legislature officially established Covington, which comprised the 150 acres sold by Kennedy. At the time, Covington encompassed only the five-block radius between Madison and Garrard right on the river. These streets were simply paths during this period and it is estimated that the area's population in 1830 was only 715 people. After 1830, the city grew quickly and the first steam-powered ferry between Cincinnati and Covington began operation in 1833. In 1834 the city charter was officially established and Mortimer Murray Benton was chosen the first mayor.<sup>2</sup>

## Early Life

M.M. Benton was born on January 21, 1807 in Benton, Ontario Co, New York. The town was named after an ancestor of his grandfather, Levi Ben-

ton. The family members were of English ancestry and were natives of Litchfield, Connecticut. His family was very much involved in the western expansion of the United States as his father was a surveyor whose work brought the family to Franklin County, Indiana, when Benton was just seven years old. In contrast to many of his peers at the time, Benton was well-educated, attending some of the best private schools in the country, indicative of his family's social and economic status. In New York, he studied under Simeon H. Goss, a noted schoolteacher who coined the popular phrase of the period "Give Him Goss." Benton first began his study of law in Indiana under Andrew Wallace and continued his studies in Cincinnati with Caswell and Starr. He eventually moved to Covington and finished his studies with Jefferson Phelps, who at the time was one of the most prominent lawyers in Kentucky. Benton finally completed his studies in 1831 and became a partner of Phelps.<sup>3</sup>

In 1832, Benton married Angelina Clemmons, also native to his home state of New York. Over the years the two had many children and even adopted their niece. Sadly, three of their seven children died at very early ages. Their surviving children, Mortimer, Jr., John, William and Cordelia, all led eventful and successful lives. Both John and William became attorneys in the Kenton County area who practiced under the name Benton & Benton. Mortimer Jr. became an Episcopalian priest after first serving in the Civil War. A graduate of the US Naval Academy, Mortimer Jr. joined the Confederate Navy when the Civil War broke out. Shortly after the war ended he joined the General Theological Seminary in New York and went on to be the founder of the Church of the Advent in Louisville. He eventually became the Archdeacon of the Kentucky Diocese, a position he held until 1925. Very little is mentioned of Cordelia besides local newspaper "personal mentions" of she and Mortimer vacationing together.<sup>4</sup>

## Covington's First Mayor

It was early in Benton's career that he became the first elected mayor of Covington. When Covington was granted its city charter, February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1834, and he became mayor, Benton was just 27 years of age. Although his position as Covington's first mayor was Benton's most well known position, it was just the beginning of his career. An ardent Democratic-Republican, his politics were not clear during his time as mayor, but he developed more progressive politics later in his life. For reasons unknown, Benton only served as mayor for one year when he resigned, to be succeeded by William Wright Southgate. Benton was still active in Covington politics, however, as he assumed the position of city clerk shortly after resigning. Based on Benton's later business and political endeavors, it was most likely that the position of mayor was a stepping-stone for Benton. In the years after his resignation, Covington experienced rapid industrial growth and was home to an influx of German and Irish immigrants who were attracted to the area. Benton remained pivotal in the city's urban growth.<sup>5</sup>

For years after his stint as mayor, Benton pursued his career as a businessman and still dabbled in local politics. News bulletins indicate that Benton was listed as one of the directors of the Covington Insurance Company with his law partner Jefferson Phelps - both elected to City Council in 1839. Benton was elected again to city council, served as council president in 1849, and was re-elected in 1851. In 1840, he also is listed as an attendee of a meeting under the headline "Large and Respectable Meeting (Concerning the Creation of Kenton County). Newspaper advertisements in the '40s indicate Benton was also involved in real estate, where he bought and sold property in the downtown area of Covington. In 1844, Benton practiced law in partnership with a Daniel Mooar under the name Benton and Mooar, where they worked in Kenton, Boone, Campbell, and Grant Counties. Their law office was located on Scott Street, west end of Market Place. At some point, his law practice dissolved and he began working with a Nixon under the name Benton and Nixon until 1861. A local history biography from 1878 describes Benton charismatically as "one of the most

accomplished, able, widely known, influential, and upright lawyers in the country" and as "a leading member of his profession in Covington."<sup>6</sup>

## Education and Covington and Lexington Railroad Company

Benton was also an active participant in local parochial and public schools, and churches. He was listed as a board member for an academy for girls in 1842, founded by Reverend William Orr and his wife. In 1843 a headline for a parade for local churches listed Benton as the marshal for a local Sabbath School, and in 1844 Benton was the president of the Covington Bible Society. In 1850, \$7,000 was distributed to "common schools," or public schools in Covington, either personally or from the city of which he was the president of city council. Benton also lectured on English grammar in the area and was the president of the Covington Literary Association.<sup>7</sup>

Benton is recognized as the key figure in establishing a state charter to build a railroad line from Covington to Lexington in 1849. During this time period, the steamboat era had reached its peak and railroads were becoming a major business venture. Lexington was hungry for railroad lines because they needed to keep up with cities like Cincinnati and Louisville, which benefitted economically from their geography as river towns. Right around 1850, the Lexington-Louisville line was completed and Kentucky's most successful railroad, the Louisville and Nashville or L&N, received its state charter. By 1860 Kentucky had 597 miles of working track as railroads were a booming industry during the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Benton's unmistakable political and business prowess led him to be the key figure in establishing a line between Lexington and Covington. After establishing the Covington and Lexington Railroad Company in 1850, he acted as a director and its attorney, and finally was elected President of the company in 1853 where he played a major role until 1856. A freight engine made locally was named in his honor in 1857, called the *M. M. Benton*. Unfortunately, he was in competition with the Kentucky Central Railroad, which looked to establish a connection from Lexington to the Cincinnati area as well. Financial instabilities of the Covington and Lexington Railroad led to

the KCR eventually taking over, which was finally absorbed by the L&N. C&L never made it to Lexington under Benton, but he established the foundation for its later success as a railroad line.<sup>8</sup>

### State Politics and Senate Race

During the 1860s, Benton moved away from small-town politics and became involved in the Commonwealth's political arena, running for different positions as a Lincoln Republican. With the Civil War looming, Kentucky was so divided by Union and Confederate support that the state declared neutrality for a short time in 1861. All local and state political races were hotly contested as emotions raged. Urban areas of Louisville, Covington, and Newport were more influenced by the Union as they sat so close to bordering Union states. Across from Covington was Camp Clay in Ohio and Camp Jo Holt in Indiana. The hills above Covington and Newport eventually became home to several fortifications, including Battery Hooper, by the Union Army that fought off a threat by the Confederacy in 1862. With the state divided, it is not clear why Benton's political views were Republican and favored the Union, especially as his son served in the Confederate Navy.<sup>9</sup>

Benton served in the House of Representatives between 1863 and 1865 as a Union representative and won a Kentucky State Senate seat in 1865 as a Republican. In 1864, Benton also ran for Court of Appeals judge but eventually lost. During the election, the military interfered because of his opponent's southern political leanings. Judge Alvin Duvall was considered a traitor by General Stephen G. Burbridge and disqualified him from running. Benton then ran against a new opponent George Robertson, former Chief Justice, and also lost.<sup>10</sup>

In 1863 when Benton was running for several key positions in the state, he was publicly accused of being a radical and abolitionist by John W. Menzies, a fellow attorney and member of the Kentucky House of Representatives. The terms held negative connotations during the time because an abolitionist supported the Underground Railroad and opposed the federal law of institutionalized slavery. Kentucky was a state divided by political ideologies, but it still main-

tained a strong position for slavery during the Civil War, an institution many across the state supported. Menzies claims said that Benton was against the "good government of the United States" and accused him of "abolitionizing" the state of Kentucky. Menzies went on to call Benton "disloyal" to Kentucky for protesting against Kentucky resolutions that still supported slavery and favoring Lincoln's actions against state sovereignty. Benton's reply the next day in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* was deemed "weak and inconclusive" by the newspaper. He accused Menzies of smearing his image and blinding people to the truth, and stated that he was adamantly opposed to any invasion into Kentucky. He also said Menzies "fased away from the Union Party" and could not follow during their time shared in the House.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly after losing the Court of Appeals judge position, Benton saw more controversy in his life as many thought he had improperly won the Senate seat race in 1865. After winning against local Democrat John G. Carlisle, his opponent fervently contested the election. During the senate race, Carlisle, also a native of Kenton County, ran on the Democratic ticket with a position of neutrality. Benton was ejected from State Senate on January 30<sup>th</sup> 1866, which prompted a special election between the two again. The "radicals" re-nominated Benton and on February 12<sup>th</sup> he was soundly defeated by Carlisle. This was essentially the end of politics for Benton, as he didn't enter the political arena again in his life.<sup>12</sup>

### Later Life

Benton maintained a low-key life after his State Senate run; he resided on Garrard Street in Covington and spent many years with his close family until he died in 1885. In 1880, he was listed as a member of the board of directors for Covington City National Bank and the Covington and Cincinnati Bridge Company. He also organized a rally protesting violence against immigrants in 1880 where he advocated tolerance of all people regardless of religion or nationality. On May 5, 1885, Benton died at the age of 78. He was regarded as a pioneer of the state and a man of "strong and vigorous intellect." Today his politics would be regarded as liberal and they were especially progressive for Kentucky during that time.

Benton was “broad and liberal in his views” and of “indefatigable industry and great integrity.” His funeral attracted Northern Kentucky’s most prominent citizens and he was laid to rest at Highland Cemetery in Fort Mitchell. Benton had a large impact on the Northern Kentucky area, as he was a pivotal figure in local and state politics, local business, and philanthropy.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A personal mention of MM Benton was made in the *Covington Journal*, September 19, 1874.

<sup>2</sup> John Kleber, editor, *Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1992) 236; Richard Udry, “History of Covington”, *Kentucky Post*, April 26, 1940, 21.

<sup>3</sup> J.M. Armstrong, *Biographical Encyclopedia of Kentucky of the Dead and Living Men of the Nineteenth Century* (Cincinnati, OH, 1878); Lewis Collins, *History of Kentucky* (Covington: Collins and Company: 1882) Vol. 11, 439;

<sup>4</sup> Acquired by the Northern Kentucky Family Archives in the Kenton County Library local history files compiled by William R. Stevens; Armstrong, *Biographical Encyclopedia of Kentucky*, 52 and newspaper article from the *Covington Journal*, April 27, 1849; Obituary of Benton’s son Rev. M.M. Benton Jr. from the *Kentucky Post*, December 19, 1932; Benton and Cordelia vacationing in Europe together in *The Daily Commonwealth*, October 1, 1877.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Reis, “First Mayor a Union Man”, *Kentucky Enquirer*, August 10, 2009; History of Kenton County Early Settlement by the Kenton County Library.

<sup>6</sup> Jim Reis, “Covington’s First Mayor was Man of Solid Values,” *Kentucky Post*, June 24, 2002; Record of election to City Council taken from *Covington Free Press*, January 5, 1839; Elected to City Council *Covington Journal*, January 12, 1849; Meeting from *The Western Globe*, January 22, 1840; Quote taken from Armstrong, *Biographical Encyclopedia of Kentucky*, 53; location of law office from *Licking Valley Register*, September 21, 1844.

<sup>7</sup> Jim Reis, “First Mayor”, 2002; Donation fact taken from *Covington Journal*, May 4, 1850.

<sup>8</sup> Railroad history compiled from Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 312-314; Collins, *History of Kentucky*, 439; Reis, “First Mayor,” 2002; Covington and Lexington Railroad history taken from online source from “Abandoned: Covington and Lexington Railroad”.

<sup>9</sup> Civil War history taken from Kleber, *Kentucky Encyclopedia*, 193.

<sup>10</sup> Collins, *History of Kentucky*, 439.

<sup>11</sup> Entire paragraph, quotes and facts, taken from 2 sources from the *Cincinnati Enquirer* on July 29 and 31, 1863.

<sup>12</sup> Reis, “Union Man”, 2009; quote taken from *Cincinnati Enquirer*, February 1, 1866.

<sup>13</sup> Conclusion compiled from Reis, “Covington’s First Mayor a Man of Solid Values”, 2002; Amrstrong, *Biographical Encyclopedia of Kentucky*, 53.

### About the Author

Jamie Crouch is currently a graduate student at Northern Kentucky University. He received his BA in Philosophy from the University of Kentucky, Lexington. Jamie enjoys spending his free time with his son Ollie Morris. He resides in Covington.

## PLEASE HELP Volunteers Needed

The Kenton County Historical Society is currently working on the massive project of re-publishing the historic Christopher Gist Papers.

The originals are in 12 volumes of approximately 100 pages each.

We need volunteers to type them into the computer so we can edit them, and reprint them so more can enjoy them.

Christopher Gist, known as the first European explorer in what is now Northern Kentucky, documented well his travels in the early 1750s, and his papers were first made public in the 1940s.

Nearly all copies have since been lost and it is time to have these valuable and historic papers available to the public once again.

If you would like to help, please contact Karl Lietzenmayer (859) 261-2807 as soon as possible.

If we can get 12 volunteers, we can get this important task finished in no time!

Thank you!

# **Ruth Huebach Best:**

## **Mistress of Ceremonies Extraordinaire**

Karl Lietzenmayer

Many Northern Kentuckians still look forward to summer concerts in Devou Park. Today programs involving the likes of the Kentucky Symphony highlight the programs. Those aware of their surroundings in the late 1930s and during the War years will remember the weekly entertainment of summer concerts in the park MC'd by Ruth Best.

Ruth was born on March 6, 1900 in Cincinnati to German immigrants Valentine and Ella Huebach. Her brother, Paul W. was fourteen years her junior. Valentine is listed as a retail hardware merchant in the 1920 census; she a clerk in training in a railroad office.<sup>1</sup>

Ruth indicated she loved singing at a young age. "At three, I gave up crying and began to sing and I've been at it ever since," she told a Kentucky Post reporter in 1935. At that time, she was the most popular soloist in the Greater Cincinnati area and had been chosen to sing the soprano solos in Mendelssohn's "Elijah" on the opening night of the Cincinnati May Festival at Music Hall.<sup>2</sup>

She met and married August E. Best October 29, 1928, however by 1940 they were divorced, according to the 1940 National Census. No children resulted from this union. He was born in 1893, making him seven years Ruth's senior. He was employed as a linotype operator for a Cincinnati newspaper.

However, Ruth's passion was singing. By 1929, she is already well known enough locally to be featured in a newspaper article publicizing her as lead soloist in a concert of Haydn's "The Creation" to be presented at St. Paul's Evangelical Church, 11th and Bakewell Streets, Covington. Other soloists listed were Herbert N. West, tenor and Herbert O. Schatz, bass. The director and organist were also listed but only Ruth Best's photo appeared in the article.<sup>3</sup> This



Ruth Best with Ruth Hildebrand

*Courtesy: Kentucky Post*

seems to indicate she was the main attraction for this church concert.

In a 1932 newspaper article, she is found as soloist for a Covington Art Club program, accompanied by J. Walter De Vaux on piano. A water-color artist and caricaturist was also to appear to sketch and speak to the club. Again, only Ruth's photo appears with the article, indicating she was the draw.<sup>4</sup>

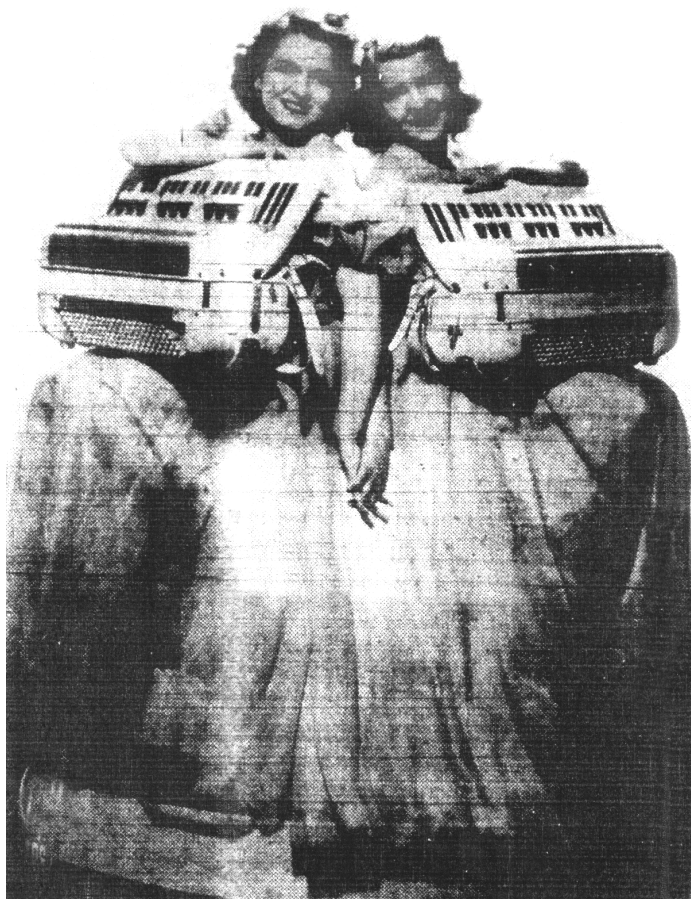
In 1938, she started the Ruth Best Entertainment Agency and continued it throughout her life, booking theatrical performers and musical programs throughout the Cincinnati area. As a child, she had begun singing publicly at church and school entertainments. Often she had to be boosted onto a box so she could be seen and heard.

After voice training in New York, she returned to become a regular singer on radio programs in Cincinnati. Later she said, "I never liked radio. I was like a fish out of water. I always needed to see my audience and watch people's reactions. I knew music and people and quit when I could still sing. That's when I started the agency."<sup>5</sup>

By 1936, Ruth Best was a fixture at the Devou Park summer concerts begun that year, sometimes as a singer on the program but always as the mistress of ceremonies as well. The newspapers lauded the new \$20,000 band shell, completed in time for the opening concert, June 28, 1939, with Ruth Best announcing the program. The 12-piece orchestra of Covington's own Wally Johnson was featured at every show that summer.<sup>6</sup> The concerts were sponsored by the Devou Community Sing Association, incorporated earlier that year. Members of the association included The Kentucky Post, the City of Covington, Union Light, Heat & Power [today's Duke Energy], Louis Marx & Bros., Eilerman & Sons, Liberty Bank & Trust, John R. Coppin Company and the Hatfield Coal Company. Most of the years, John R. Walsh, Covington Police Court clerk was chairman.

Ruth made a practice of featuring promising new, young, and unusual talent. For example, at the opening summer concert for June 1940, the Parrish sisters were scheduled. They presented a novelty musical act for opening night playing duel violins or accordions while doing high kick waltzes.<sup>7</sup> Wally Johnson's Orchestra again played for that season. The program most times was a home-grown vaudeville show. On the list with the Parrish sisters, was "Hank the Mule" comedy act (Lord knows what that was!), soloist Betty McMahill (a Zoo Opera singer) and a "hand balance comedy act" of Novak and Fay. At the conclusion of the performances, a community sing usually wrapped things up, led by Ruth Best.

By 1938, crowds of 20,000 people attended the park events; by 1941, the crowd had swelled to 30,000. The Green Line provided extra transportation and Covington police were on hand to handle parking for the influx of automobiles. The 1941 concerts featured accordionist Harvey Brownfield, a name "synonymous with entertainment in northern



Publicity photo of the Parrish sisters.  
These twins performed double violin and accordion routines

*Courtesy: Kentucky Post*

Kentucky" according to the newspaper. He seems to have been a favorite performer with repeat performances throughout the season. The paper reported he had just returned from a long engagement in Hollywood at Barney Oldfield's Night Club and several others. Acrobats Roberts and Roberta were on the bill with Brownfield. In 1941, Carl Portune's Orchestra was engaged.<sup>8</sup> The vaudevillian atmosphere was still in vogue and the community sings continued at the conclusion of each concert. Ruth would also book national talent for a Devou Park show through her agency when they were playing at local clubs, such as Beverly Hills or Lookout House.

By the early 1950s, Ruth Best was still pitching as mistress of ceremonies for the summer Devou concerts. By now Clyde Trask was her orchestra. WCPO was the official voice of the concerts for a place to tune in if there was any chance the show may be postponed due to showers. Ruth was still promot-

ing new talent: a photo in the summer 1953 promotion shows Ms. Best with a very young accordionist Ruth Hildebrand. [Apparently accordionists were very popular with audiences of the time!] The vaudeville approach was still a winning combination yet by 1953, the shows were beginning to face a challenge from another corner - movie theaters.<sup>9</sup>

Most homes were not air conditioned but theaters were, presenting a cool respite from summer heat. There were indoor theaters such as the Liberty, Madison, Kentucky, State, Marianne, Ludlow, Hiland Gayety and Hipp to compete with Devou events. Drive-ins like Dixie Gardens, the Florence and River-view were also providing convenience especially for families with children.

By the end of the decade the Devou concerts dwindled to occasional special events, which is still the case today. Ruth Heubach Best died September 9, 1978 at Christ Hospital. Her ex-husband passed away on January 9, 1964.<sup>10</sup> She resided on Boudinot Avenue, Cincinnati at the time of her death, her parents' home.

1. Fourteenth census of the United States: 1920, Hamilton County, Ohio. The Heubachs, both born in 1871, immigrated from Bavaria. Their home was 2880 Boudinot Avenue, Cincinnati.

2. *Kentucky Post*, "Ruth Best Founded Theatrical Agency," 11 September 1978, page 10.

3. *Kentucky Post*, 5 April 1929, page 7.

4. *Kentucky Post*, 10 March 1932, page 4.

5. *Kentucky Post*, 11 September 1978, page 10.

6. *Kentucky Post*, "Devou's Prettiest Up - the Stage is Set for First Concert of the Summer Season," 23 June 1939, page 1.

7. *Kentucky Post*, "Devou Park Stage Set For Opening Concert," 26 June 1940, page 1.

8. *Kentucky Post*, "Accordionist Harvey Brownfield Will Be Heard in Featured Spot at Devou Park Concert Tonight," 16 July 1941, page 1.

9. *Kentucky Post*, Jim Reis, "Pieces of the Past," 11 August 2003, page 5K.

10. Ohio deaths, AncestryLibrary.com. Also: *Cincinnati Enquirer*, BEST obituary, 9 January 1964, page 23.

## Letter to the Editor

Karl,

I just read your wonderful article on the Covington Protestant Children's Home in the January/February 2014 issue of the Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society. Well done!

I am particularly interested in the original site, built in 1881 according to your article, and in use until 1926. The facility was cited many times in the "Seckatary Hawkins" books from 1918 to 1926. I saw in some old maps of Covington where it was located at 14th and Madison, and went there last year with camera in hand only to be disappointed to find a medical clinic there. So, I was delighted to see the c. 1905 photo that you included.

I was wondering if you could send me some of the reference material you list. I would be particularly interested in reference #5, the Caywood "history". Any others that you think would be pertinent I would also be interested in, such as reference #15, the Plummer and Henley "Report" if it contains any material on the older site.

I would of course be willing to pay any costs associated with this, including copying and postage.

Best regards,

Gregg Bogosian  
Vice-president – Historical Research  
The Seckatary Hawkins Club

## Want to be Published?

The Kenton County Historical Society is always looking for new authors for article submissions to their two publications, the *Bulletin*, and *Northern Kentucky Heritage* magazine. *Bulletin* articles should be about a Kenton County topic, 2-6 pages of typed text, and have at least two references. Magazine submissions should be at least 8 pages in length with footnotes, and should cover a topic within the 10-county region.

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



# The Mendelssohn Singing Society

Karl Lietzenmayer

Along with the settlement in Greater Cincinnati of the large number of Germans, came their love of singing. Unlike today, where mixed choruses [soprano; alto; tenor and bass] are the norm, in the late nineteenth century (all that have left any record) were all-male [tenor I & II; bass I & II]. One of the most active directors of these groups, called Saengerbunden [Singing Societies], was Eduard Strubel.

Strubel's life was sketched out in the very first edition of Northern Kentucky Heritage, published in the fall of 1993. He was a talented young [age 20] organist, arriving in Covington in 1895, and accepted a position as music director at Mutter Gottes Kirche, 6th and Washington streets.

During the first several decades of the 20th century, Strubel directed several Saengerbunden in Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati. These groups tended to sing popular music and drinking song arrangements but Strubel was also interested in producing classical music and found significant support for that.

In 1908, Professor Strubel and several prominent Northern Kentuckians met to form such a group and called it the Mendelssohn Singing Society.<sup>1</sup> If newspaper reviews are to be believed, the Mendelssohn Society concerts of the 1911-1912 season scored high marks with music critics. One example is typical:

"The Chorus of 20 male voices, under the direction of Professor Edward Strubel showed careful training. It was not only well balanced, but uniformly expressed the leader's interpretations attacking at all times with vigor and precision and shading with finished tones."<sup>2</sup>

Another review likened the Mendelssohn Club to Cincinnati's feeling about the Symphony Orchestra.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the Saengerbunden, the group integrated small orchestras, chamber groups and

guest instrumentalists into their programs. At the December 1910 concert, Adolph H. Borjes, a promising violinist was featured and received rave reviews. The spring 1911 concert featured Clarence Adler, a rising Cincinnati artist, listed as "one of the foremost pianists in America."<sup>4</sup>

After presenting three or four outstanding concerts each year since 1909, leadership of the Society passed to Sylvester V. Eifert by December 1911. Eifert was organist at neighboring St. Aloysius Church, 7th and Philadelphia streets.<sup>5</sup> There are no clues why Strubel stepped down at this time. Besides his position as organist at Mother of God, he continued to direct several of the German singing groups, the Saengerbunden, into the 1920s.

A continued search for references to additional concerts of the Mendelssohn Club under Eifert produced none and it is assumed the organization faded and disbanded. Eifert evidently found talent in his own parish since by 1917-8 he had formed a 12-piece orchestra made of parish members. There is no way to judge the competence of the players, since no recordings exist and no critics wrote reviews of his group.

## Reformed

Fast forward to 1932. There must have been a lingering longing to resurrect the Society. In early 1932, no less than thirty-four former members met at the Covington YMCA for the second time to discuss reorganizing the old Mendelssohn Society. By the February 19th meeting, music was selected and a board of directors elected.

The club set a goal of recruitment of 75 singers.<sup>6</sup> Even though Eduard Strubel was still organist and choir director at Mother of God Church, he had ceased directing any outside singing groups and his name does not appear in the list of participants of the resurrected Mendelssohn So-

*Continued on page 10*

## A Look Back at The Headlines

An on-going feature reliving local headlines.  
This issue: *The Ticket* – September 16, 1876.

St. Waldburg's Academy, Twelfth Street, Covington, has opened for the fall session.

The Centennial Dancing Club will give a grand ball at Centennial Hall, West Covington, next Monday, and the youth and beauty of West Covington, Economy, and Ludlow will dance all night till broad day light.

A miserable old reprobate, apparently over sixty years of age, has been in the habit for some weeks past, of making the most disgusting exposures of his person on the lot where Thomas' tobacco warehouse once stood, between Greenup and Stephens, and Powell and Martin streets. He is said to do this about every three or four days, when the male population are away from home. It would not be well for the dastardly old hulk should he happen to fall into the hands of the fathers or brothers residing in that neighborhood.

The new schoolhouse at Peaselburg will be dedicated to-morrow, and its fall session will begin on next Monday. This little burg feels proud over her favorable prospects for education, and have engaged a competent teacher, and will leave nothing undone to make the school comfortable for scholars.

### Advertisement

Howell and Clendening  
painters and dealers in paints  
608 Madison Street, Covington, KY

### Reminder

Please check out our new website  
if you have not done so already!  
[www.kentoncountyhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.kentoncountyhistoricalsociety.org)

ciety. Although unclear, it appears that Daniel Fries, Jr, Covington steel entrepreneur, was the director of their initial concert.

In February 1933, the Society presented a concert at Holmes High auditorium featuring member J. Lincoln Newhall's composition entitled "Rose." Newhall was the supervisor of music education for the Covington School System and was elected to Congress as a Republican for one term with the Hoover landslide in 1928.<sup>7</sup>

Approximately parallel with the re-birth of the Mendelssohn Society was the establishment of an amateur symphony orchestra for Northern Kentucky. Plans to form an orchestra were formulated by Fritz Bruch, a cellist with the Cincinnati Symphony and Nita Milstead, prominent in musical circles in Covington. Mrs. Milstead, a Park Hills resident, requested all interested musicians to contact her. Mr. Bruch had been associated with the New York Philharmonic and Berlin (Germany) Orchestras and taught at the Sterns Conservatory of Berlin. Mrs. Milstead was an accomplished pianist. She announced rehearsals would begin as soon as sufficient musicians were gathered.<sup>8</sup> The orchestra was prominently supported by several Northern Kentucky women's clubs.

By November 1934, Mr. Bruch was selected to direct the Mendelssohn Society as well as the Northern Kentucky Symphony. The group soon faded from the newspapers and it is probable that the Mendelssohn chorus became an "as needed" group absorbed for the Kentucky symphony similar to the adjunct chorus developed by J. R. Cassidy for the current Kentucky Symphony Orchestra.

1. Northern Kentucky Heritage, I, #1, fall/winter 1993, page 28

2. "Mendelssohn Society gives Fine Concert," Kentucky Post, 1 Dec 1910, page 2.

3. "Mendelssohn Club Gives Successful Open Air Concert," Kentucky Post, 10 Aug 1911, page 3.

4. "Adler Will Play at Mendelssohn Spring Concert," Kentucky Post, 10 Apr 1911, page 2.

5. See Northern Kentucky Heritage, XIX, #1 pages 21-28 for a complete story of Sylvester Eifert.

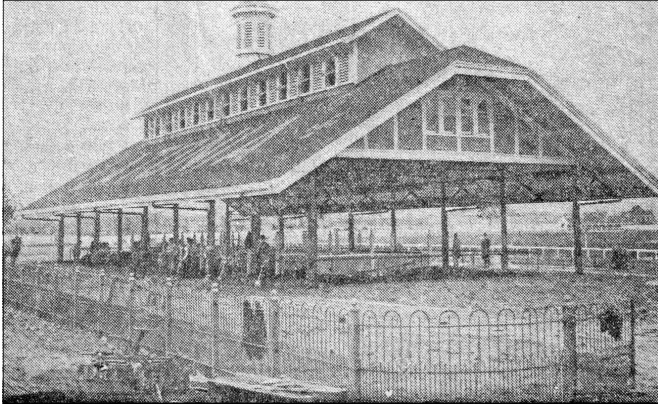
6. "Singing Society is Being Reorganized," Kentucky Post, 14 February 1932, page 10.

Board included Maurice Thompson, Daniel Fries, Sr., L. H. Crisler (librarian) and Frank Anthe (concert aide).

7. "Hoover's Majority in State 165,000; Newhall is Winner," Kentucky Post, 7 Nov 1928, page 1; "Society to Sing Creation of Former Congressman," Kentucky Post, 21 Feb 1933, page 1. Newhall defeated Democrat Brent Spence in 1928 but Spence won in 1930, with the onset of the Great Depression.

8. "Amateur Symphony Orchestra Planned for Northern Kentucky," Times-Star, 6 Feb 1934, page 6.

## Then and Now



Left photo: Paddock of the original Latonia Racecourse, Latonia, Kentucky.

Right photo shows the same structure as it appeared a few years ago.

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:

Madison Avenue side of the Odd Fellows Hall, Covington.

# Kenton County Historical Society

March/April 2014

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## I Bet You Didn't Know

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

May 4, 1961: Kentucky's \$50,000 Floral Clock was dedicated behind the capitol in Frankfort by Governor Bert Combs.

May 13, 1846: Three Kentucky generals, Zachary Taylor, W.O. Butler, and Thomas Marshall, were sent into action in the war with Mexico. While Kentucky's quota was for 2,400 troops, 10,000 volunteered.

May 15, 1900: The USS Kentucky, an 11,520-ton battleship, was commissioned for service. It was scrapped in 1924.

June 3, 1808: Jefferson Davis, the only president of the Confederate States of America, was born near Fairview, Kentucky.

June 7, 1769: Daniel Boone first saw the Bluegrass area of Kentucky from Pilot Knob.

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

## Programs and Notices

### Ludlow, Kentucky (Sesquicentennial Year, 2014)

#### Ludlow Heritage Museum Unveils Ludlow's 1st Historical Marker

Saturday, May 17, 2013, 3 p.m. The marker celebrates Somerset Hall, the beautiful antebellum home of Steve & Paula Chapman. Built by a wealthy Louisiana plantation owner as his summer residence; it was a stop on the Underground Railroad; once the family home of the Closson family, owners of Closson's fine art business in Cincinnati; and once a Masonic lodge, before becoming again a private residence. It is a centerpiece of Ludlow historical and architectural heritage. Guest speaker: Mr. Kent Whitworth, President of the Kentucky Historical Society. Also, please visit the Ludlow Heritage Museum, 227 Elm Street between 11:00 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. that day. See: ([www.ludlowmuseum.org](http://www.ludlowmuseum.org) and Facebook)

### Covington Bicentennial Celebration Kickoff

Thursday, May 22, 6:00-8:30 p.m., Drees Pavilion, Devou Park, FREE admission, **but register online**. The Covington Bicentennial Committee is thrilled to kick off the Cov200 celebration with you! An exciting, family-friendly event to commence the City's 200th birthday party. The Cov200 team will premiere never before seen footage from the Bicentennial Documentary and the Promotional Video! Attendees will have the chance to take advantage of unique photo opportunities, meet the Bicentennial Ambassadors, get involved, and experience all things Cov200. Food, fun, games and a cash bar will be available. Attendees under the age of 16 will enter in a raffle for a chance to win an Ipod Touch or an Ipad.

### Roebblingfest 2014

Saturday, June 21, 2014, all day, near the John A. Roebling Bridge, a National Historic Landmark in Covington, Kentucky; also near Riverside Drive architecture and statues, Covington floodwall murals and the Daniel Carter Beard House; browse historic photographs, maps, documents and artifacts from local heritage organizations; and crafts, art and artists; enjoy music, food and drink booths; also restaurants nearby.

### "Vietnam: Our Story," Behringer Crawford Museum

The exhibit is based on stories told by local veterans, about their military service and the medical and social after-effects returning to civilian life. BCM curator, Tiffany Hoppenjans, interviewed dozens of veterans. On display are uniforms, communications apparatus, artifacts, photos and memorabilia with local and personal-story connections. The Museum is open six days a week (closed Monday). In addition there are upcoming Vietnam programs including:

May 15 @ 7:00 p. m.: "How to Find Military Service Records,"  
by Bridget Striker (Boone County Library);

May 20 @ 7:00 p. m. "Evolving Historical Interpretations of the Vietnam War,"  
by Dr. Jeffrey Williams (NKU);

June 8 @ 2:00 p. m. "The African-American Experience in Vietnam,"  
by Dr. James Westheider (Clermont College)