



Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society

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November / December

2015



**Tidbits of History Surrounding
the Piner/Fiskburg/Morning View Region
of Southern Kenton County**

**The Morning View Heritage Area:
Where Rural History and Natural History Meet**

Tidbits of History Surrounding the Piner/Fiskburg/Morning View Region of Southern Kenton County

Robert D. Webster

While our staff continues to strive to include articles on the entire county in the "Bulletin," it seems, for whatever reason, Southern Kenton County is often overlooked. Numerous pieces have been written about the people, places and things found within the Covington city limits, and articles on the earliest settlers of Bromley, Ludlow, Erlanger and the like, have been printed time and time again. This short piece, in no way a concise history, will focus on the people and places within the southernmost region of this fine county. Most readers are aware that we encourage anyone to write articles and, maybe this short story will spark the interest of someone to author a more elaborate piece on a topic of interest in Southern Kenton County.

Atwood was apparently named for Atwood Bird, a bank president in Independence whose grandfather had come to the area in 1813.

Robert Bagby and his family arrived in the region around 1839, settling just west of present-day Piner. Bagby Road is named for this early pioneer family.

Bracht Station was called Key West until about 1840, and was the childhood home of Kentucky statesman, John G. Carlisle. By about 1884, the railroad depot there was quite busy with travelers, and the nearby Covington-Lexington Turnpike (Dixie Highway) saw drovers guiding cattle, hogs, and even turkeys up from the south, eventually to slaughterhouses and processing centers at Covington. Named for Maj. F. B. Bracht of Grant County, the area soon boasted a post office, general store, trotting course, several taverns, and two schools.

Four **Culbertson** brothers; James, William, Allen, and Robert; traveled down the Ohio River and then up the Licking River, where they settled a homestead about five miles south of Banklick Creek in 1813.

Four sisters accompanied the boys and they married into well-known Kyle, Taylor, and Youtsey families.

DeCoursey Pike is named for Revolutionary War veteran, **William DeCoursey** (1756-1841). In 1794, DeCoursey ascended the Licking River by canoe and settled on its western shore, about two miles south of the mouth of Banklick Creek. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Mouth of the Licking Baptist Church in 1794 (this congregation is now Cold Spring Baptist Church). Several famous surnames exist within the DeCoursey descendants. William DeCoursey, Jr. married Martha Spillman, whose family had settled at Atwood; Francis DeCoursey married Mary Ann Holmes, sister to **Daniel Henry Holmes** of Holmes High School fame; Oliver DeCoursey married Elizabeth Shaw, daughter of **Robert Shaw**, whose family helped incorporate the city of Independence; and Joel DeCoursey married Mary Ann Pierce, whose family was also well-established in the area.

Decoursey Pike is one of several roads in Northern Kentucky which grew from mastodon and buffalo trails. Indians also utilized these trails as they entered the region from the Ohio Country during hunting expeditions. During the Revolutionary War, Capt. Henry Bird commanded a force of several hundred British soldiers and Indians against settlements in Kentucky including Ruddle's Station and Martin's Station. They traveled along this same trail, just west of the Licking River, and that road was known as "Bird's War Road" before becoming Decoursey Pike.

DeMossville was first established as the town of Grassy Creek and had a post office under that name as early as 1830. The post office was moved closer to the railroad in 1854 and the town was renamed in honor of Thomas DeMoss, an important resident. At one time, Demossville included several businesses, a bank, school, Masonic Lodge, and several saloons.



Above: Bracht Station Depot, located along what is now Dixie Highway just south of Green Road. Photo is dated 1911.

On the Cover: The Morning View Hotel which once stood on the east side of the railroad tracks near the intersection of Decoursey Pike and Rich Road.

Isaac Everett came to the area in about 1805, settling along what he called Everett's Creek. By the 1830s, this waterway was renamed Crew's Creek, but it is now called **Cruise Creek**.

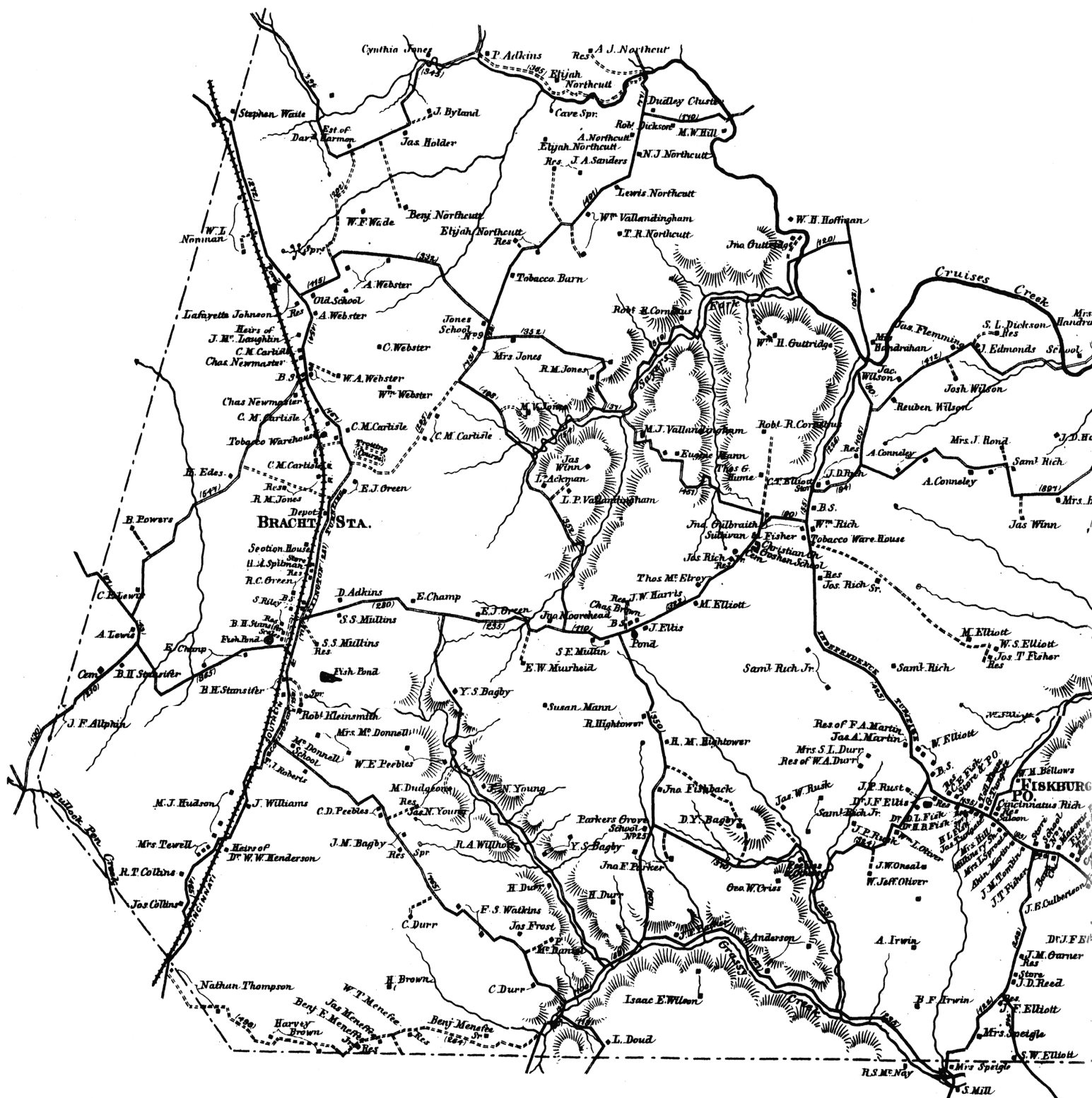
Fiskburg (also seen as Fiskburgh) was named for various members of the Fisk family who resided in the area from as early as the 1830s. The two most prominent men were likely John F. Fisk and his son, Charles H. Fisk, both of whom were well-known attorneys and politicians. In its heyday, Fiskburg had a post office, school, church, blacksmith shop, general store, cigar factory, toll gate, and Masonic hall.

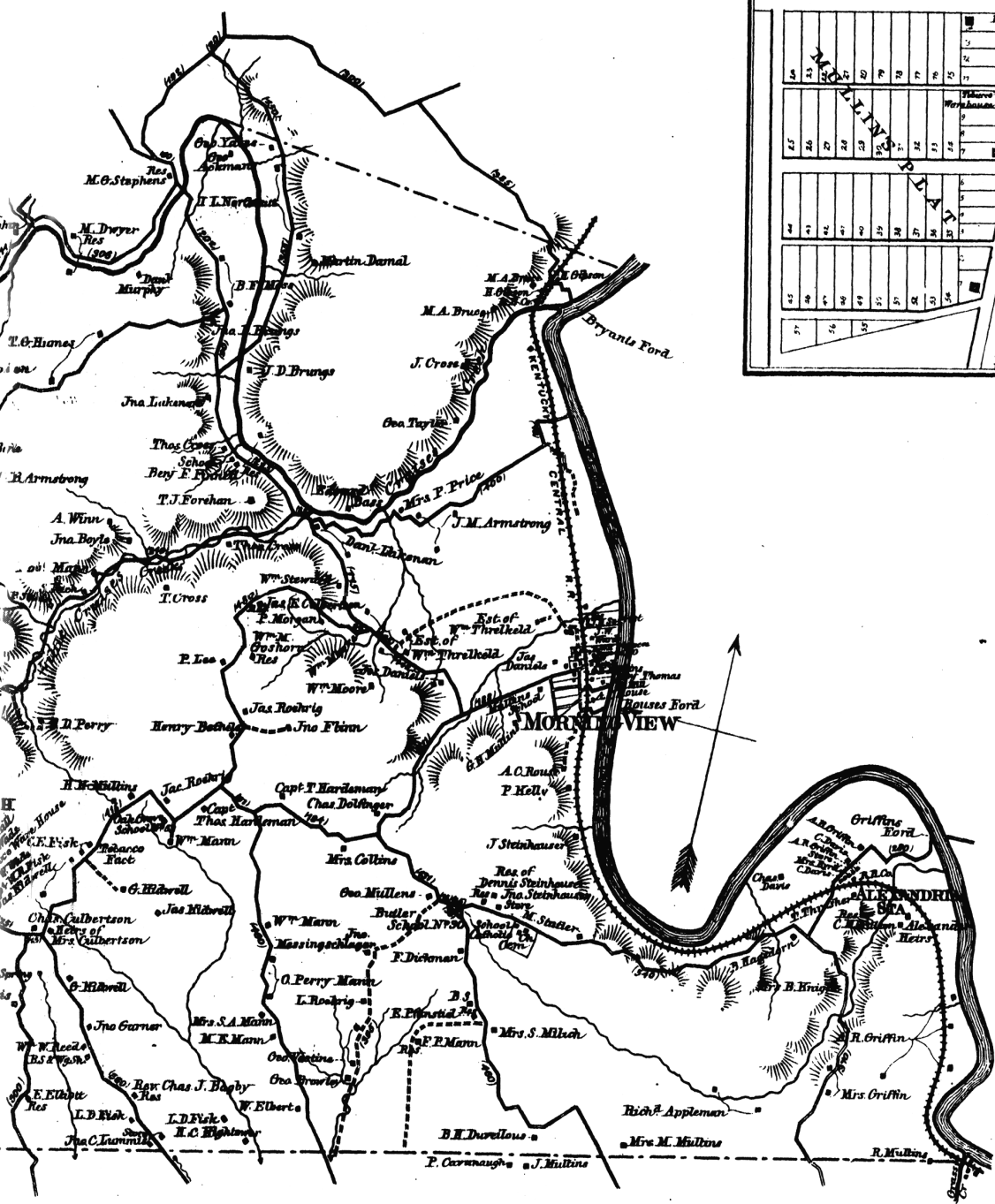
Fowler Creek is named for **Jacob Fowler**, an early pioneer in the region and most likely the first Euro-

pean to reside in what is now Kenton County. Fowler was here as early as 1789 and at one time owned much of what is now southern Kenton and southern Boone counties. While credited as one of the first to settle Kentucky, he is equally known by historians in Colorado, as he led the first expedition there in 1821, helping to found present-day Pueblo. In fact, a suburb, the city of Fowler, Colorado, as well as Fowler Junior High School are named in his honor. His son, Benjamin Piatt Fowler, built a stone home which still stands along Old US 42 in Union.

The **LLL (3-L Highway)** is a name many local residents still give to what is now Madison Pike or KY 17. From the early 1920s, the highway was one of the main routes for travelers going from Covington to Lexington.

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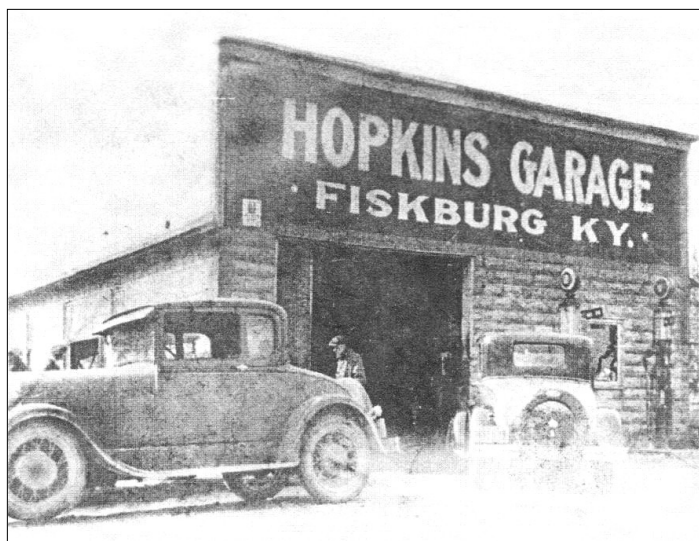
It was officially called the LLL Highway only from about 1922 to 1930, referencing the fact that the complete route connected popular horseracing tracks in Louisville, Lexington, and Latonia.

Morning View: A post office was established along the railroad at what was Mullins Station in 1855, named for George H. Mullins. However, when a town was later established, a new name was required. When two railroad officials rode through on a hand car, they exclaimed what a wonderful morning view the area offered as the sun rose from the east. The town has gone by the name Morning View ever since. The original railroad depot was situated on the western side of the tracks, just south of Rich Road, while a fine hotel was established on the eastern side of the tracks just a hundred yards to the north.

Nicholson was originally known as California but, as there was already a town named California in Campbell County, the name was later changed. Nicholson was named for Maysville-born **Henry C. Nicholson**, Civil War surgeon, local physician, and inventor. In 1879, he lost a patent dispute with Thomas Edison over his quadruplex telegraph, a device enabling multiple messages to be sent simultaneously over a single telegraph wire.

The town of **Piner** was originally known as Piner Crossroads and was named for Brack Piner, who operated the first general store in the area. A corner grocery existed at that site until early 2015. The first school there was a one-room log structure built in 1849, situated where the Goshen Christian Church now stands. Called **Goshen Grammar School**, it included grades one through eight and also served as a church on Sundays. Around 1870, a new school was built on the site of the present Piner Elementary School.

In 1912, the Kenton County School Board authorized construction of **Piner High School**, which was completed at a cost of \$6,983. The two-story brick building eventually housed grades one through twelve. The first graduating class from the high school was in 1917, with Elma Taylor as principal. When Simon Kenton High School opened, the school at Piner reverted back to elementary grades.



Hopkin's Garage, located at the corner of KY 17 (LLL Highway) and Gardnersville Road

Courtesy: www.nkyviews.com

The most famous graduate from Piner High School was likely **Brig. General Jesse Auton**, a WWII Army Air Force pilot who died in an aviation accident at Omaha, NE in the early 1950s. Auton was on the debate team and played basketball for Piner before graduating in 1923 as class valedictorian.

Quakers from Maryland, brothers **Stephen and Thomas Rich**, came to Northern Kentucky by flatboat around 1795. Thomas and his descendants settled mainly in Boone County, while Stephen and his children chose Kenton County for their new homesteads. **Stephen Rich, Jr.** married Nancy Drucker and this particular family settled east of present-day Piner. Rich Road is named for Stephen Rich and his many descendants.

The **Senour** family (originally spelled Seignour) also arrived in the area in 1795. The Senour brothers soon married into two land-wealthy families: John Senour married Rhonda Wayman and Bryan Senour married Ann McCollum (now spelled McCullum). Rhonda was the daughter of **William Wayman** who owned vast acreage in the area and operated one of the first taverns. Ann was the daughter of **John McCollum**, who owned much of the land in the central part of the county and, when Kenton County split from Campbell County in 1840, the McCollum family donated land at what was near the center of the new county for the courthouse.



Restored "Gaines House" in Walton

Courtesy: Googleimages.com

Staffordsburg, like many communities with roots in the 1800s, grew from the need of area residents for a place to worship. In 1877, Rev. J.W. Hughes, later instrumental in the forming of Asbury College, held services in a small schoolroom in the area. A year later, land was donated by W.W. Coleman as a site for Ebenezer Methodist Church. The town once had a blacksmith's shop and general store. While those are long gone, the Staffordsburg United Methodist Church remains the center of the rural community.

Nathaniel Vice, Jr. settled along the Licking River around 1799, and the small hamlet of **Visalia** was later named for him.

The city of **Walton** was first known as Gaines Fork Roads and then simply Gaines Crossing, as from there travelers coming from Covington could either continue to Lexington or turn to Warsaw. The Gaines Tavern was the prominent feature in the area for years. Recently refurbished, it still stands today.

In the mid 1800s, a large white tower was constructed on a farm located at what is today the intersection of KY 16, Marshall Road, and KY 536. It was used as a spot to observe and detail the topography of the area, as it was built at what was believed to be the highest point in the county. While the tower was torn down in the 1920s, the area is still referred to today as **White's Tower**.

Wilmington was the name of a small community on the western side of the Licking River, near the confluence with Cruise Creek. It was first established on

December 7, 1792. When Campbell County was established in 1794 (from parts of Harrison, Madison and Scott counties), Wilmington was named as the new county seat. Early residents included **Col. John Grant** and, with no courthouse in the early years, the first official sessions were held at his home. Col. John Grant was the son of William Grant and Elizabeth Boone, sister of **Daniel Boone**. He married Mary Mosby in Virginia and, in 1779 this family followed Daniel Boone into the new Kentucky. They first resided at Boonesborough, then Bryan Station before establishing **Grant's Lick** along the Licking River in western Campbell County.

The **Wilmington Baptist Church** was organized on June 2, 1804, with just six members. The congregation first met in a log structure in the small village of Wilmington, at the confluence of Cruise Creek and the Licking River – near Washboard Road. That building also served as a school and post office. In 1842, members of the church sold their flood-prone property along the Licking River and, along with a donation from Col. Grant, purchased acreage high on the hill at Fiskburg, where the church is presently located. The present brick structure is actually the third church at the Fiskburg site. The first was a log building 30x60 feet and the second was a one-room frame meetinghouse which was completed in 1875. A new brick church was dedicated on August 30, 1953. The cemetery there contains graves from the early 1840s to the present. Many are dated during the winter of 1917-1918, when an influenza outbreak devastated the community. The Wilmington Baptist Church was organized, in part, through the help of what was known as the **Traveling Church**. A large group of Baptists came from Virginia in the late 1700s, forming churches throughout the new Kentucky. In similar fashion, members of the Wilmington Church left to help form other churches in the region. In 1820, members helped organize the Crittenden Baptist Church and in 1858, the Oak Island Baptist Church was formed. Baptist churches at Gardnersville, DeMossville, and Piner soon followed.

Resources:

www.nkyviews.com www.kentoncountyhistoricalsociety.org
 Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky
 Christopher Gist Papers

The Morning View Heritage Area: Where Rural History and Natural History Meet

Lorna Petty Harrell

Tucked into the southeastern corner of Kenton County near the Licking River in Morning View is a recently dedicated conservation area consisting of approximately 213 acres. Kenton County's rural and natural heritage meet in this hilly property sloping down to a bend in the Licking River and including several hundred feet of frontage on the river. It is presently called the Morning View Heritage Area, although many decisions concerning its future are yet to be made.

The project got underway in 2010 when the Kenton County Conservation District (KCCD) was awarded a grant from the Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund (KHLCF) to purchase approximately 203 acres of the historic Steinhauser Farm. The KHLCF is administered by a 12-person board whose mission is to award funding for preserving and conserving unique natural areas. Monies for the fund are generated by the \$10 additional fees collected for each Kentucky nature license plate, as well as from environmental fines, the state portion of unmined mineral taxes, and interest on the fund's assets. The Morning View Heritage Area is the first such project awarded in Kenton County. In 2012, the KCCD was awarded an additional grant from the KHLCF and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to acquire an adjacent 9.8 acres along the Licking River, thus bringing the total land conserved to almost 213 acres.

A recent KCCD brochure states that habitat restoration and protection are the primary goals of the project. The area is currently closed to the public, but when it is opened at some future time its uses may include hiking, bird watching, and educational programs. Vehicle use will be restricted to designated areas and some parts of the property may be restricted to protect sensitive animals or plants. The acreage along the Licking River may eventually provide access for canoes and kayaks.

Morning View is a small rural community, which according to local history, was named by rail-roaders who admired the river view as they passed through the area in the early morning light en route to other destinations. The KCCD brochure mentioned above includes excerpts from a history of the Steinhauser Farm, written by Kaitlin Mullikin of Northern Kentucky University. Ms. Mullikin writes that in 1858, a young man named John Steinhauser (born in Germany in 1829) settled in Morning View. That same year, sixteen year old Matilda Feier, who also emigrated from Germany, married John and the farm in Morning View became home to them and to six generations of their descendants.

The Steinhausers made many contributions to the local community during more the 154 years they lived in Morning View. Members of the family included dairy farmers, a Union soldier, a beloved Visalia Elementary principal, and the operator of a garage specializing in John Deere tractors. The latter business was located on the farm itself. The Steinhausers also joined with another local family, the Jennings, in donating the land to build the nearby Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church. Unfortunately, the church was destroyed by a tornado that swept through southern Kenton County on March 2, 2012. The church cemetery where several Steinhausers are buried still remains. The last Steinhauser to live on the property, Beatrice, died in 2007 and the farm was left to her son Aldin, a traveling photographer who was living in Atlanta, Georgia, at that time. It was from Aldin that the KCCD bought the land. The policy of the KHLCF is that land can be acquired only from willing sellers.

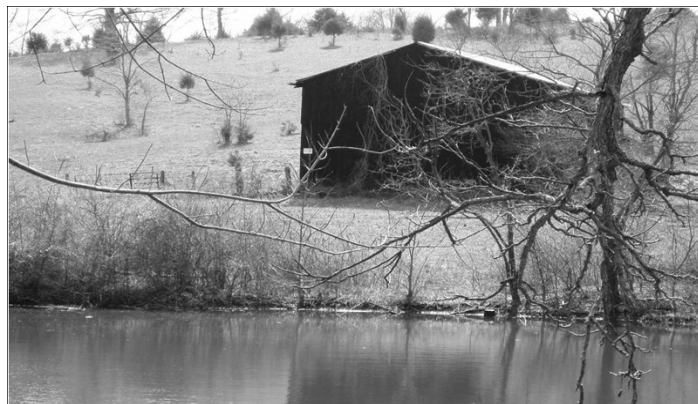
Upon acquisition of the property, the KCCD conducted intensive clean-up activities and the removal of invasive plant species. A biological assessment, an archaeological assessment, and an assess-

ment of historic resources also were conducted. Such assessments can enhance understanding of a property while also stimulating ideas for its future use.

The historic resources assessment, conducted by K&V Cultural Resources Management during 2013, focused on structures on the site that were thought to be more than 50 years old. The family farmhouse and some related outbuildings were already removed prior to the KCCD's acquisition of the property. K & V's assessment examined the structures that remained in 2013 including: 1) a metal-sided wood frame shed that appeared to be less than 50 years old, 2) a three-sided pole barn framed at least partially with railroad ties that possibly was more than 50 years old and 3) a large English-style barn at least 50 years old and possibly more than 75 years old.

Of these structures, K&V determined the English-style barn to be of the greatest historic interest not only because its style is less common in Northern Kentucky than other types of barns, but also because of the mixture of techniques used to construct it. The barn measures approximately 48 feet north-south and 30 feet east-west and is 18-20 feet in height. The barn's siding includes planks of rough sawn lumber, as well as tongue and groove planks that may have been salvaged from floor planks. K&V's assessment noted that the "the interior framing timbers include an interesting variety of wood and techniques". Woods included oak, walnut, and whole locust poles, with some of the smaller "poles" still retaining their bark. Most of the framing timbers were hand sawn while others were milled. Many central joints are mortise and tenon, with some joints also are pinned with wood pegs. A cylindrical foundation marks the location of a former silo. The barn appears to be as old as 75 years and was most likely built in its present location.

On May 9, 2015, the English barn was named the Mary Kathryn Dickerson Learning Center. The late Ms. Dickerson, who died in June 2015, was the Coordinator of the Boone, Campbell and Kenton Conservation Districts for more than 25 years. She was widely respected as an outstanding advocate of environmental education both regionally and state-



Top: The old English-style barn. Bottom: Kenton County Judge-Executive Kris Knochelmann dedicates the barn as a learning center in honor of Mary Kathryn Dickerson, who is pictured here with him.

courtesy: the author

wide. Kenton County Judge-Executive Kris Knochelmann and County Commissioner Beth Sewell joined past and present KCCD board members and friends at the naming ceremony which Ms. Dickerson also attended.

Members of the KCCD are still determining the best uses of the Morning View Heritage Area among the potential options permitted by the state's KHCLF. The future history of the old farm is yet to be written, but one thing is certain: some type of environmental education will occur there, giving the farm new life while remembering a life well lived.

On a pretty day during any season, take a drive south on KY 177 along the Licking River, past Ryland Heights, Ryland Lakes Country Club, and the old community of Visalia heading toward Morning View. The Morning View Heritage Center is at 15168 Decoursey Pike. Pull into the small gravel

parking area and admire the old barn and rolling landscape so typical of Kenton County's agricultural heritage. Afterwards, continue a short distance and turn right onto St. Mary's Road the old church cemetery. From the hilltop, take time to overlook the old Steinhauser farm and take in one of Northern Kentucky's best views as the Licking River threads its way north towards the Ohio River. Sometimes you need not travel far to discover and explore a quiet retreat removed from everyday cares.

Lorna Petty Harrell is a retired biologist, who served on the Board of Supervisors of the Kenton County Conservation District from 1998-2004. She lives on a farm in southern Kenton County.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to Chris Kaeff, who serves on the Kenton County Conservation District (KCCD) Board

of Supervisors, for his interest in this article and review of the final draft. I also appreciate the assistance of the KCCD staff and K&V Cultural Resources Management in providing access to the historic resources survey and other documents. Finally, my gratitude to the late Mary Kathryn Dickerson for her inspiration in preserving special places.

References

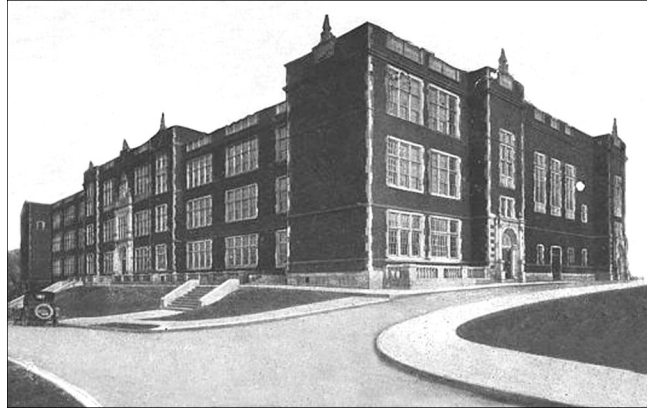
- Kaeff, C. 2014. Kenton County Soil and Water Conservation District – Morning View Heritage Area. A PowerPoint presentation providing an overview of the project, progress to date, and future plans. 17 slides.
- Kaeff, C. personal communication. Email to the author dated August 6th, 2015.
- K&V Cultural Resources Management, LLC (K&V). 2013. Historic Resources Documentation Project Kenton County Conservation District: Morning View Heritage Area, Kenton County, Kentucky. 12 p.
- Kenton County Conservation District (KCCD). 2015. Morning View Heritage Area. Online brochure at: www.kentoncounty.org/document_center/MorningViewHeritageArea_Brochure_Feb2015.pdf



Aerial view of the Morning View Heritage Area comprising the old Steinhauser Farm and parcels along a curve in the Licking River in southern Kenton County .

courtesy: Chris Kaeff from the Conservation District

Then and Now



Left: Covington High School, circa 1890 – located at 12th and Russell Streets. Right: Covington High School, circa 1920, located on the estate of Daniel Henry Holmes (now Covington Holmes High School).

Photos courtesy Kenton County Public Library

Mystery Photo

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



ANSWER:

Portrait of Haven Gillespie, Covington-born songwriter whose career spanned six decades.
His most famous work was *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*.

Kenton County Historical Society

November-December 2015

ARTICLES FROM BACK ISSUES ARE INDEXED ON OUR WEBSITE!

Published bi-monthly by
The Kenton County Historical Society
Membership, which includes the Bulletin,
\$20.00 per year

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I Bet You Didn't Know

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

November 3, 1806: Aaron Burr was charged with treason and tried in Frankfort. He was defended by Henry Clay and acquitted.

November 6, 1900: In a special election to replace assassinated governor Goebel, J.C.W. Beckham became the youngest person to ever be elected governor of Kentucky.

November 14, 1780: The "jog" in the state line for the Kentucky and Tennessee border was created when a survey party wandered off course on the banks of Drakes Creek. They chose to reset their compass rather than backtrack to correct the error.

December 7, 1980: Latonia (now Turfway Park) became the first race-track in Kentucky to offer Sunday thoroughbred racing.

"On This Day In Kentucky" — Robert Powell

Programs and Notices

Annual KCHS Membership Christmas Party December 22nd

The Kenton County Historical Society will hold its annual Christmas party – this year **at the home of Terry and Theresa Averbeck, 3040 Vincent Court, Edgewood**, Tuesday evening, December 22nd, starting at 6:30. Food and beverages will be served. Guests are welcome to bring a small dish. The party will include sing-along Christmas carols. Welcome members, spouses and companions.

Directions - Going South on the Dixie Highway, Dudley Road is just before Dixie Heights High School and just past I-275. Go east on Dudley - through 3 traffic lights to the 2nd street on right - turn right on Lindsey, then left on Kinsella and an immediate left on Vincent to first house on left - 3040 Vincent Ct, Edgewood. From Madison Pike (3L): Go west on Dudley - through 1 traffic light to 2nd street on left - left on Lindsey, then left on Kinsella and immediate left on Vincent to first house on left.

Annual Behringer Crawford Museum Holiday Toy Trains November 21, 2015 to January 17, 2016

Children and adults this year will enjoy special exhibits, a "Charles Dickens Village Christmas in Victorian England"; a Miniatures exhibit; a Wood Carving exhibit; and not the least the fabulous annual interactive Toy Trains running during the holiday season. The National Association of Miniature Enthusiasts, local chapter, will show tiny replicas of room scenes and furniture done quarter-inch to one-inch scales. The River Valley Wood Carvers will exhibit carvings and burnings in three-dimension.

For special program dates - see flyers and the website calendar: A magic show; a miniatures presentation; an ornament-making workshop; Polar Express readings (four dates); a play about "The Grinch" performed by "Dramakinetics"; a Dickens tea; a Christmas concert played by the Hills of Kentucky Dulcimers; "members-only" events with games, crafts and other activities; and also a program with woodcarvers demonstrating their art. Reservations are required for certain programs (859-491-4003 OR education@bcmuseum.org). Admission is free for old or brand new members.

Kentucky Historical Society Annual Meeting/History Awards

Editors, writers and others from the area will attend the KCHS Annual Meeting and History Awards ceremony in Frankfort. They will accept an award for **Gateway City Covington Kentucky 1815-2015**, published for Covington's Bicentennial Celebration - and written for posterity! The KCHS has a presence in **Gateway City**: some of its members contributed to specific chapters for which they are credited. Several books and publications edited or written by members are listed in the text; some of these and articles in *Northern Kentucky Heritage* magazine are cited for source material in the endnotes.