

Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society

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November/December

2003

PROGRAMS

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11; 7:00 P.M.
TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH HALL
4TH & MADISON, COVINGTON

- **The Story of the Bison**

Dr. Joseph Gastright will discuss the varieties, habitat and ultimate fate of the Bison. He will answer why we call them Buffalo and other curiosities about our national beast. Bring a snack of your choice if you wish. Coffee & drinks provided.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9; 7:00 P.M.
THE EARLE HOUSE
501 EAST SOUTHERN AVENUE
COVINGTON (LATONIA)

- **A Christmas Party & House Tour**

Board member Karl Lietzenmayer & his wife Peggy will host the Society Christmas Party at their home – the James T. Earle House, Last Mayor of Latonia. Karl interviewed the last surviving child of Mayor Earle before her passing and can relate some of the family stories as well as discuss the home of the Earles from 1897 – 1918. Bring a snack of your choice if you wish. Refreshments provided.

KCHS Board Election Brings New Faces

The September Annual election results were as follows: Dr. Joseph Gastright, president, Ronnin Einhaus, vice-president; W. Terry Averbeck, treasurer, John Boh, secretary. New to the Board are: Robert Webster and Richard Johanneman. Other members are Karl Lietzenmayer, George Gressle, San Juan Romero, and Emily Bailey.

The new treasurer, Terry Averbeck was born in Covington – a life-long resident of Northern Kentucky. Thirty-four years in financial positions at General Electric. Terry is a graduate of St. Xavier High School, University of Cincinnati and Xavier University. He has been treasurer of several other non-profit groups and a history buff for more than 40 years. Married with 5 grown children.

Robert Webster was born & raised in Covington (Peaselburg), attended Covington Public Schools and graduated from Morehead State University. He is associated with Custom Photo Inc., Covington. Bob stated he was “turned on” to local history by a Holmes High history teacher John Burns. The late John Burns was a founding member of KCHS and a long-time researcher and writer of Northern Kentucky history.

Board Increases Rates

At the October KCHS Board meeting, the newly installed members faced serious issues. *Cost overruns!* The 2002 Board discontinued the Senior Membership rate to halt the financial hemorrhaging. The exsanguination continued. The 2003 Board voted to increase KCHS dues to \$20 annually (Life Membership is now \$200) and to cancel the \$3 discount on all member NKH subscriptions (Remember \$10 dues have been in place for almost a decade!).

This bi-monthly *Bulletin* has even become a victim of cost overrun! During fiscal year November 2002 – October 2003, dues amounted to \$2,760 while the *Bulletin* costs were \$2,953, putting this publication in the red by \$193.

Since the Kenton Society is the publisher/mentor of the *Northern Kentucky Heritage Magazine*, its costs were also scrutinized. For the November 2002 – October 2003 period, *NKH* costs were \$10,797, roughly twice what it was during its inception ten years ago. No one expected the costs to remain as they were, but the inevitable increase in printing and set-up should have been offset by a steady increase in subscribers, however the subscriptions have remained flat for the past two years at slightly less than 800. The editors and staff do not fully understand why. With minimal marketing research, no answers are forthcoming.

The original concept of *NKH* was to network the publication to regional heritage groups – historical societies and regional museums. This has been minimally successful. The staff estimated the participant groups to include approximately 4,000 individuals, a far cry from the 800 *NKH* subscribers! The magazine simply has to capture the imagination of more people in the 13 county region. To pay bills, an increase in subscribers is essential. A readership of 4000 would fulfill *NKH*'s mission, which is to share information of our past.

Dr. Paul Tenkotte of the Thomas More College History Department pointed out it was normal for “scholarly” publications to suffer financial anemia. Scant consolation for the future. The magazine will be mailing the expiration notices to subscribers during November. If most readers renew, the magazine will survive this storm.

Hooper Battery Becomes Park

The City of Fort Wright has officially designated the Hooper Battery as a city park. Hopes of developing the site into a Civil War education site as well as a park will continue. Effort of Society member Kathy Romero and the city officials have resulted in a happy conclusion.

Covington History Photo Book

The Arcadia Publishing Company has produced numerous photo histories of American communities, under the series *Images of America*. The company produces the books in cooperation with historical agencies or groups within each community.

The Kenton County Public Library under the direction of librarian Dave Schroeder produced a very impressive photo history of Covington. The local committee consisted of Kate Carothers (Covington Historic Preservation Office), Judy Boyers-Gee, Charles King and Alex Weldon.

Drawing mainly from the library's extensive photo collection, the work includes 225 photos of the city's past. *Images of America* is available at \$19.99 at the Library, Barnes & Noble, Blank's Pharmacy, John R. Green Company and elsewhere.

**MARGARET GARNER -
WHY DID SHE DO THAT?
AN UNDERGROUND WORKSHOP
BY EILEEN GASTON**

The historic marker at 6th & Main Streets, Covington commemorates Margaret Garner's escape with her family from Richwood, Kentucky to the Bucktown area (east side community of free blacks) of Cincinnati, January 27, 1856.

On that night, the Ohio River was frozen solid. Margaret and her children, her husband Robert and his parents, and eight other slaves took two horses and a sleigh and headed north from Richwood. The Garners crossed the frozen river and made their way to the house of Elijah Kite, a former slave whose home served as a station on the Underground Railroad.

The next morning, the two slave owners (Mr. Gaines and Mr. Marshall) came to seek their "property." Under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, federal marshals were obliged to assist slave owners to recapture their slaves, even on free soil. A posse from both states approached the Kite house. Robert Garner fired several shots at the entering white men, injuring two slightly.

When the group burst through the door, they found Margaret in a back room. Her young daughter Mary was dead at her feet, her throat cut. The older children had been cut also but not seriously.

The other slaves in the fugitive group were not recaptured and eventually found safety on the Underground Railroad path north.

The Trial

The Garners' trial began January 30, 1856. The conflict centered on whether she was merely a fugitive or a murderer. The Kentucky slave owners felt the crime of stealing their property was most important. Meanwhile, a crowd of abolitionists gathered in the Cincinnati streets. The debate was hotly debated on both sides of the river.

John Jolliffe, the Garners' attorney (assigned by Levi Coffin's abolitionists) spoke eloquently on the larger issues of human bondage. He described the child's murder as a sacrifice and wanted Margaret charged for that crime rather than the crime of property theft. He felt Margaret's act demonstrated how anguished

she must have been at returning to slavery with her children.

Part of the legal strategy for Margaret's defense involved the fact the Garners had previously accompanied their owners to Cincinnati. Therefore having been on free soil, they could technically claim to have been freed by those visits. However, it was ruled that upon returning to a slave state with their owners, their bondage was reinstated. This principle came to the forefront again in the 1857 Dred Scott case in St. Louis.

Margaret's trial lasted four weeks and brought national attention. Abolitionists beseeched Governor Salmon P. Chase to intervene but he chose not to get involved. Four hundred deputies were called in to control the crowds around the courthouse.

On February 26, 1856, Commissioner John Pendery gave his interpretation of the Fugitive Slave Act: "The question is not one of humanity that I am called upon to decide. The laws of Kentucky and the United States make it a question of property. It is not a question of feeling, to be decided by the chance currents of my sympathies.... We shall therefore order that the parties named: Peggy [Margaret], Tom [6], Sam [5] and Cilla [9 months], be delivered into the custody of the claimant, Archibald K. Gaines.

Return to Slavery

The Gaines & Marshall families chose to "sell down the river" rather than have famous fugitives return to their former places of bondage. [*This was the ordinary custom, dealing with re-captured runaways - editor*] On March 7, 1856, the Garners were put on the steamboat *Henry Lewis* headed for New Orleans. Two days later, the boat collided with another vessel during the night. Fire broke out. As the boat began to sink, one of the passengers used an ax to break through the locked compartments where the slaves were kept. In the confusion, Margaret and little Cilla either fell, jumped, or were pushed overboard. Margaret was rescued by the black cook from the *Henry Lewis*.

According to the *Cincinnati Commercial*, March 11, 1856, Margaret "displayed frantic joy when told her child was drowned, and said she would never reach alive Gaines' Landing in Arkansas, the point for which she was shipped, thus intimating a desire to drown herself." Cilla's body was never found.

After the Shipwreck

The remaining Garners (Robert, his parents, Margaret, Sam and Tom) were put on another boat to take them to Gaines' Landing, a 300 acre plantation on the Mississippi River in Arkansas. From there, they were hired out for work in New Orleans. Eventually they ended up at Willow Grove Plantation in Mississippi.

During the next few months, Margaret must have given birth to her fifth child, but only brief records from the plantation indicate a child was born. Only a few sources tell the rest of her story.

Margaret contracted typhoid fever just two years after the infamous case in Cincinnati. She died on the Mississippi plantation. Years later (1870) Robert was interviewed about her final weeks. He said her last words to him were: "Never marry again in slavery. Live in hope of freedom!"

Robert left Willow Grove to join the Union Army in 1863. He did remarry, but not "in slavery." After the war, he moved to Cincinnati and was listed in the city directory as a laborer. Tom and Sam chose to stay in the South. Records indicate they lived on a small farm near Vicksburg, Mississippi.

The National Response

The question – Why did she do that? – occupied much of the nation during the weeks of the Garner trial and immediate years afterward. Several poets wrote lines about her – Mary A. Livermore and William Wallace Hebbard to mention a few.

During the Civil War, references to Margaret's crime died away but in 1867, the Kentucky painter Thomas Satterwhite Noble painted the scene of the child-murder. After that Margaret's story faded away as larger issues of Reconstruction obscured this family's tragedy.

Slave Owner as Father?

There is evidence that, of her 5 pregnancies, her husband Robert may have been the father of only the two older boys. Mary, the murdered girl was said to be "almost white." Steven Weisenburger in *Modern Medea* gives more evidence of Archibald Gaines' paternity. Records from Maplewood, the Gaines farm, show that Mrs. Gaines' own children were born a couple of

months before Margaret's. Margaret would have been sexually available when Gaines' own wife was not. Archibald was the only adult white male on the premises. In addition, Robert (who never lived at Maplewood but on a neighboring farm) was often hired out for months to work other farms. He had just returned to his farm a few weeks before their escape in January 1856. At the time Margaret was already several months pregnant.

A final chilling detail is the attention Archibald Gaines paid to the body of the dead slave child. When the coroner released the body (both parents & grandparents were in jail) Gaines claimed the child. The child was buried on the grounds of Maplewood Farm.

Margaret Garner's Legacy

Nationwide attention to the Garner tragedy disappeared after the Civil War. The historic marker in Covington and brief passages in some history texts were all that remained. Then in 1987, Toni Morrison wrote the novel *Beloved*, inspired by Margaret's story. The novel won the Nobel Prize for Literature and a Pulitzer for fiction. It too tells of a slave mother, escaping from Kentucky to Cincinnati, who kills her child when she is pursued. The parallels end there. Morrison said she read only one 19th century source before writing and did not try to use all the details. The novel led to the movie in 1998 and prompted many Americans to ask – Why did she do that?

Two buildings on Maplewood Farm – a smoke house and part of what may have been an overseers dwelling – have been dated to Margaret's time. Archaeology continues there.

Why Did She Do It?

The answer to this troubling question will never be known. But the conflict which the trial caused in 1856 was a contributing factor to the tensions leading to the Civil War – just as Harriet Beecher Stowe's book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became a sensation. When we see the historic marker, read Morrison's or Weisenburger's books, we continue to wonder why she did it. The question alone is an extremely powerful indictment of the horrors of slavery.



PICTORIAL AND INDUSTRIAL REVIEW

OF

Northern Kentucky

HISTORICAL SOUVENIR

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND TWENTY-THREE

KENTON AND CAMPBELL COUNTIES



PUBLISHED BY THE NORTHERN KENTUCKY REVIEW
FENNELL BUILDING, NEWPORT, KY.



The City of Covington

Dixie's Gateway to the South. Second Largest City in Kentucky.
Population 65,000



COVINGTON, KENTUCKY, is situated on the Ohio River, directly across from Cincinnati, Ohio, being connected with Cincinnati by the Suspension and Chesapeake & Ohio bridges. The City of Covington was established in 1815 by an Act of the Legislature. It was named in honor of General Covington. The streets of Covington were named for eminent Kentuckians. Governor Shelby, Governor Garrard, Governor Greenup, Governor Scott, Thomas Kennedy, who originally owned the land on which the town was laid out and General Sanford, who was the first representative in Congress from this part of the State. Madison Avenue was named in honor of George Madison, who was elected Governor. The original site of Covington comprised one hundred and fifty acres of land purchased in 1814 from Thomas Kennedy by General John S. Gano, Richard M. Gano and Thomas D. Carneal for \$50,000 and was designed for a town.

Covington, Kentucky, the gateway to the South, offers you among other advantages, exemption from taxes on raw materials, improved and unimproved factory sites, ample skilled and unskilled labor, good railroad facilities, direct railroad to Panama Canal ports, miles of river front, eleven Banks and Trust Companies, with a reputation for stability and progressiveness. Covington bears distinction for being a city where no bank has ever failed. A market of ten millions of people is within two days delivery and shipping radius.

AS A MANUFACTURING CITY

It Has—

- "Largest exclusive X-Ray Machine Mfg. Company in the United States."
- "Largest Iron Fence Works in the world."
- "Largest Tile Works in the South."
- "Largest Wood Carving Plant in the South."
- "Finest Inlaid Furniture Factory in the United States."
- "One of the largest Automobile Truck Manufacturing Plants in the United States."
- "Largest Manufacturing External Electric Operating Switches in United States."
- "Largest Sheet Metal Corrugating Plant in the South."
- "Largest Shoe Factory in Northern Kentucky."
- "Third largest Engine and Boiler Plant."
- "One of the largest Art Bronze and Brass Companies."
- "Center of Tobacco Market."

OTHER MANUFACTURING PRODUCTS

Lithographing, Shoes, Electro Plating, Cigar Box, Ice, Rosin, Maraschino Cherries, Bottles, Machine Tools, Safes, Architectural Iron, Brass and Bronze, Glass, Flour, Cordage, Textile and Dye Mills, Candied Fruits, Cigars, Toys, Piano Players and Films, Overalls, Clothing, Jails, Stoves, Locks, Wagons, Portable Garages, Soap Machinery, Sporting Goods and Boats. The annual value of the manufacturing products is estimated at \$30,000,000.00.

Monument to Adj. General John Finnell

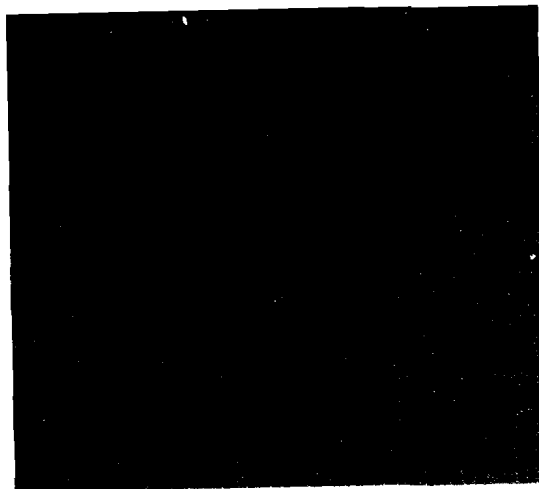
Last August, a monument was dedicated at Linden Grove Cemetery to the memory of John W. Finnell, Adjutant General of Kentucky (1861-1863). The monument was sponsored by the Nelson-Garfield Memorial Camp 3, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

John Finnell was born on Christmas Eve, 1821 in Winchester, Kentucky. He graduated from Transylvania University at age 17, then worked in the newspaper business (his father was a printer and publisher). Bright and hard working, he completed his law degree from Transylvania, then practiced law before being elected as State Representative. At age 27, John was appointed Kentucky Secretary of State. Later he resolved a bank crisis and actively campaigned for John F. Bell in the 1860 presidential election.

In October, 1861, the Governor appointed Finnell Adjutant General for all of Kentucky's troops. A newspaper article said that Finnell had assumed a very difficult task and proved himself to be very capable.

After the war, he returned to his law practice, was active in the temperance movement, served in several government positions, edited newspapers and even spoke at a memorial service for Robert E. Lee. His daughter Nellie married Charles W. Cambron and his son, Joseph C. was also a lawyer and longtime United States Clerk.

John Finnell died four years after his wife Elizabeth (Tureman) in 1888. Both are buried at Linden Grove in Covington.



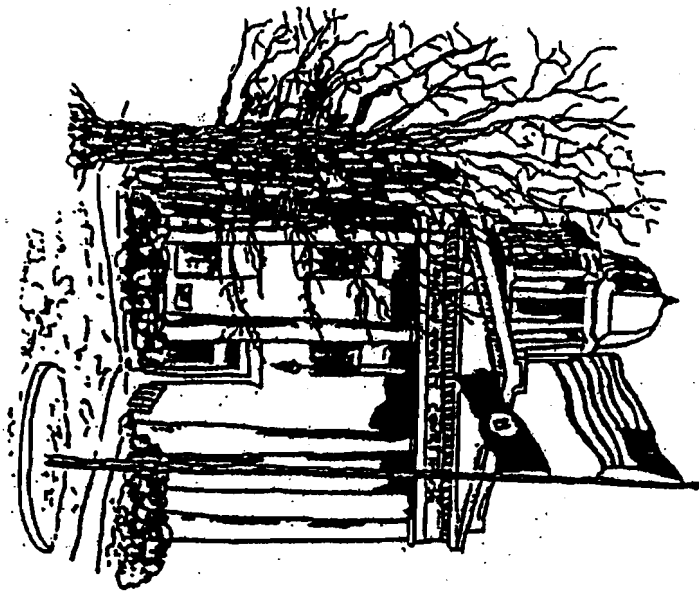
Mystery Photo

This month's Mystery Photo is on a structure in Kenton County that most of us are familiar with, just look up. There will be two photo prizes at the November Meeting for those that think they know what the photo is of.

Good Luck!

KENTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

November/December 2003



INSIDE:

Margaret Garner Story

Dedicated to preserving our heritage as the "Gateway to the South"

Kenton County Historical Society
P. O. Box 641
Covington, Kentucky 41012

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