



# Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society

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November / December

2007

## I Bet You Didn't Know

*Tidbits of Northern Kentucky History*

As dry as our region was this past September, it doesn't measure to the same month in 1908.

At the time, before construction of the present lock and dam system, flood stage on the Ohio River was 45 feet. It is now 52 feet. The river reached flood stage and above three times in the early part of that year, but with no measurable amount of rain recorded from mid August to mid October of 1908, the usually swift Ohio looked more like a dried creek bed.

On September 10th, the river at Covington dropped to 4.7 feet and was only 2.5 feet by October 6th. So dry was the river bed, a group of local businessmen rowed to a sandbar in the middle of the river and played a friendly game of baseball.

*Pieces of the Past Volume III — Jim Reis*

Published bi-monthly by  
**The Kenton County Historical Society**

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## Upcoming Programs

**November 11, 2007      2:00 PM**

The Northern Kentucky History, Art and Culture Lecture Series will present "Museums and Historical Societies of Northern Kentucky" — with representatives from Baker Hunt, Behringer—Crawford Museum, James A. Ramage Civil War Museum and the Kenton County Historical Society. The program will be held at Baker Hunt, 640 Greenup Street, Covington.

**November 30, 2007 — December 1, 2007**

### Grand Opening of the Newly Remodeled Behringer-Crawford Museum

Friday November 30th will be an invitation-only "Gala Preview" and the official grand opening and ribbon cutting will be on December 1st. Several special events are scheduled for the entire day on Saturday. The ribbon cutting will be held at 11:00 a.m., featuring dignitaries and sealing of the BCM time capsule.

For further information, contact the Behringer-Crawford Museum at: (859) 431-4003.

**December 18, 2007      7:00 PM**

The Kenton County Historical Society will hold its annual Christmas Party on December 18, 2007. All Society members are invited to attend. The event will be held at the Amos Shinkle Bed and Breakfast, located at 215 Garrard Street, Covington. Everyone is asked to bring a snack, dessert, or other food item — as well as their best singing voices for Christmas carols. For more information, please contact John Boh at (859) 491-0490 or at [jhboh@juno.com](mailto:jhboh@juno.com)

*ARTICLES FROM BACK ISSUES ARE INDEXED ON OUR WEBSITE!*

# Austinburg

## A Covington Neighborhood

By: Joseph Gastright

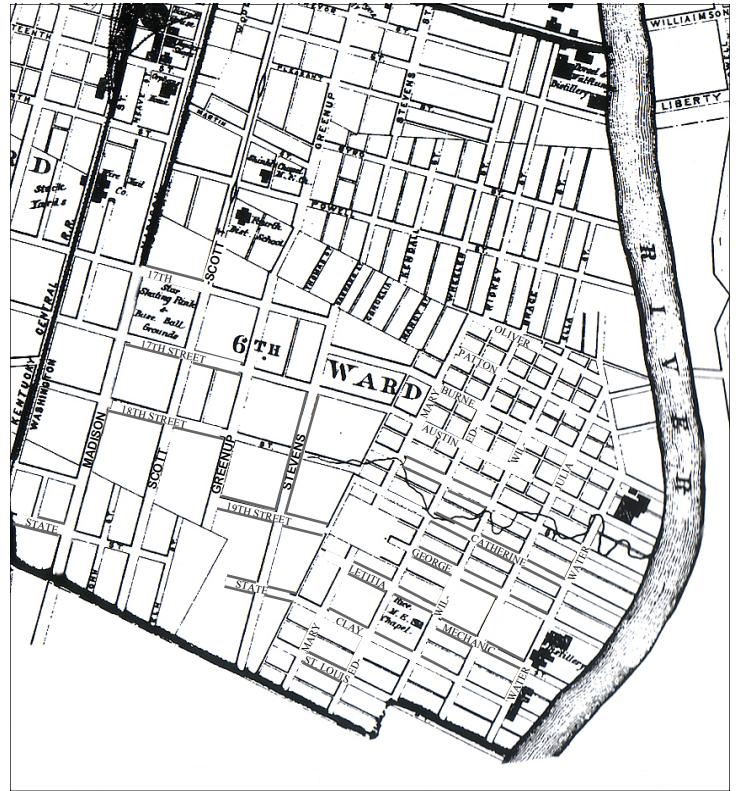
On January 1, 1844, Seneca Austin and his wife, Julia, purchased a sizable tract of land lying along the Licking River from an S. C. Parkhurst for \$3732. Austin set up gardens along the riverbank on which he grew vegetables for sale in Covington and Cincinnati markets. The farm stretched from just south of present-day 16<sup>th</sup> Street to slightly north of Wallace Avenue. To the west, Richard Southgate's land cut across Austin's where the streets currently curve (from 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>). The southern Covington city limit was at 12<sup>th</sup> Street and access to the Austin farm was over the land of Onerias Powell – the surveyor of the original town of Covington in 1815. Present 15<sup>th</sup> Street was known as Powell Street then. The Austin house was set in a bend of a large creek which entered the Licking south of present 17<sup>th</sup> at a point where the flood wall stands today. A map from 1850 shows terraced walks along the riverbank by the side of the elegant house.

### Settlers Arrive

In the late 1840s, German Catholics were settling on the land just outside the city of Covington to avoid city taxes. In October 1850, Austin subdivided the land north of his home to take advantage of this new interest. The subdivision included Austin Street (17<sup>th</sup>) and Burnett Street (16<sup>th</sup>) as well as five short north-south cross streets: Mary (Maryland), Edward (Eastern), William (Oakland), Julia (Glenway), and Water (now the floodwall).

### Annexation & Development

Covington annexed all the land from 12<sup>th</sup> Street to the Wallace Farm in 1851. Lot sales remained modest in the Austin Subdivision through the 1850s. Robert Patton developed a subdivision just north and west of Austin's and built a fine home on Garrard Street north of 16<sup>th</sup> Street, which still stands. Before financial problems chased him away, Patton was a member of the Covington City Council and served as mayor. During the late 1860s, famed



1850 map of Covington showing Austinburg area.

congressman and speaker of the house, John G. Carlisle lived in the Patton House.

Recession of the late 1850s turned into Civil War boom years. The Covington and Lexington Railroad, which ran at the edge of Austinburg, prospered with war traffic. The Welsh and Craig Packing House developed on the river just north of the Licking Iron Works. Lots in Austinburg and in the subdivisions to the north sold steadily through the period. Development would have been even greater if Southgate's property had been on the market. However, his will wasn't settled until 1867 and even afterward sale of Southgate property was hindered by stipulations on it.

In the early 1870s, Jasper's Distillery and Benzinger's Slaughterhouse were located on lower

Burnett at Water Street and the first saloons were built along Edward Street. Disaster struck in 1875 when both the distillery and the adjacent meat packer were destroyed by fire.

Even though a public school had been open for a number of years, Austinburgers were not happy in the 1880s. There were few public improvements or city services. Locals began being involved in politics and were quite successful in electing neighborhood politicians to represent their concerns. By 1880, well over half of the 150 or so lots in the Austin Subdivision were developed and construction was prospering in the newly available Southgate land south of 15<sup>th</sup> Street.

### **St. Benedict Church**

By 1883, eighty or ninety families from overcrowded St. Joseph Catholic Church at 12<sup>th</sup> and Greenup Streets in Helentown, lived south of Powell Street in Austinburg. That year, a large lot of Southgate's Tract was purchased for a new parish dedicated to St. Benedict. Within two years a combination church and school was opened on 16<sup>th</sup> Street on the site of the present school building. This was replaced in 1927. A solid majority of new residents were German-speakers but they did not turn the neighborhood into a German ghetto. The first few social meetings at the new St. Benedict were in German but they quickly shifted to English, even though the worship services remained in the mother tongue.

Trinity Episcopal Church opened St. John's mission in 1892 at 18<sup>th</sup> & Scott. In 1914 it became its own parish but was later sold to the Methodists.

### **Railroad**

During the mid-1880s, the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad pushed its tracks through the neighborhood all the way from the Atlantic. The Kentucky Central Junction at 17<sup>th</sup> and Madison connected the C&O with both the northern and southern markets over the Kentucky Central Railroad. With completion of the railroad bridge over the Ohio River in 1888, the lines here were heralded as the busiest track in the country and remained one for over 50 years. Railroad jobs were, for many years, the best jobs available to Austinburg residents.



*Sixth District School, circa 1913*

### **City Services**

Water pipes delivered city water to residents of Austinburg in 1887 along with sewer lines, while the wide streets began to be paved. Brick sidewalks followed in the early 1890s, along with the addition of natural gas.

With civilization came entrepreneurs: Charles Schneider's drugs at Patton and Mary; groceries were available from Henry Gosekamp or George Hincken (both at Burnett and Edward). The neighborhood had a bakery at 17<sup>th</sup> and Garrard and there were a couple of places to get a hair cut or shoe your horse. New jobs were available at Charles Bogenschutz Foundry & Stove Plant at the end of Burnett. The area's largest industry, Stewart Iron Works, was completed on Madison Avenue and remains today. The Burnett Perpetual Building and Loan Association was founded in 1892 and this local *Bau Verein* met in the same spot until recently purchased by the Bank of Kentucky.

By 1905, Austinburg and areas south were the fastest growing portions of Covington. St. Benedict parish was overcrowded and a much larger church — designed by Charles Hannaford and Sons, Cincinnati's most respected architectural firm, was completed on 17<sup>th</sup> Street by 1908.

The next few years saw a fine new Sixth District School at 19<sup>th</sup> and Maryland; a new Christian Church was erected on Madison as well as an impressive Immanuel Baptist Church at 20<sup>th</sup> and Greenup (just sold).

For a number of years in the 1870s, the Star baseball field and skating rink operated at 17<sup>th</sup> & Madison. The Star Team even gave the Cincinnati Redlegs serious challenge. Beginning about 1910, three outdoor movie theatres operated on corner lots during the summers. *The Kentuckian* (nec 18<sup>th</sup> & Garrard), *DeMilo* (swc 17<sup>th</sup> & Eastern), and the *Fairyland Theatre* (nec Eastern & Patton) provided benches, a tent, a screen and silent movies with piano accompaniments.

### Twentieth Century

By mid 1920s, Austinburg was virtually completely developed. The churches and schools were full and prospering and the area was counted as one of the last desirable places to live in all of Covington. Then came the Great Depression. Church revenue was cut in half and one in five wage earners was out of work. In the early thirties, St. Benedict Church was feeding up to 35 itinerants a day, as were all the area churches. Church doors were locked because of pilferage. The *coup de gras* came in 1937 with an 80-foot flood sent water from the nearby Licking River into valleys far from where it belonged.

World War II alone broke the Depression and prosperity resembling that of the mid-1920s returned after 1942 and remained through the 1950s. The flood wall project gobbled up Water Street and sent a number of houses rolling from the riverbank down city streets to new lots on Maryland Avenue. A pleasant old park at 15<sup>th</sup> and Eastern was all but swallowed up in the process and other informal playgrounds disappeared under the necessary floodwall project.

Since 1960, Austinburg has had to confront its most serious challenge. The families who created the neighborhood, built its homes, churches and institutions began to leave. The expressway suburbs suddenly attracted the sons and daughters and grandchildren of the area – as happened all over post-war America. Too often the old family place was rented or sold to absentee owners. Many fine people moved in but not enough to preserve the old way of life. In recent years, Austinburg, like most inner-city communities, is experiencing a modest renaissance.

## Rev. Joseph Goebel and Wire Nails

By: Karl Lietzenmayer

Until the post-Civil War, carpenter nails were all cut from sheets of heavy gauge iron. This variety of nail known as “cut nails” were somewhat expensive and hence, used sparingly. The finished nail was therefore flat on two sides and cut to the desired length to a point. Because of the cost and finished look, many carpenters continued to use glued joints with mortise and tenons or wooden pegs. When the drawn wire process was invented in Germany, it revolutionized the accessibility of nails, greatly reducing their cost.

Father Goebel, a German-born pastor of Covington’s St. Augustine Church, brought the first wire nail machine to America from Germany in the 1870s.<sup>1</sup> In December 1875, the American Wire and Screw Nail Company was incorporated “...for the manufacture of all kinds of wire goods.”<sup>2</sup> They displayed samples of their products [made in Covington] at the Philadelphia Exposition, after which they were forwarded to the Smithsonian.<sup>3</sup>

The plant was located on the southwest corner of Madison and State [today’s East 20<sup>th</sup> Street]. For a brief time, the machine was set up in a room in the rear of a saloon on the southwest corner of Madison and Willow [now 19th] while a new building was being erected on Washington Street. Two additional machines were brought from Europe in 1875 and the company was renamed Kentucky Wire Nail Works. By 1876 the company was operating 10 machines, including several designed by the company itself.<sup>4</sup> In 1877, they were shipping their “celebrated wire nails” as far as San Francisco.<sup>5</sup> Rev. Goebel died in St. Elizabeth Hospital, then on West 11<sup>th</sup> Street, in 1885.

1. *Kentucky State Journal*, 13 Oct 1885.

2. *The Ticket*, 16, Dec 1875.

3. *Cinti Enquirer*, 26 Nov. 1876.

4. *The Ticket*, 19 Feb. 1877.

5. *Cinti Enquirer*, *op. cit.*

# The City With A Number of Birthdays

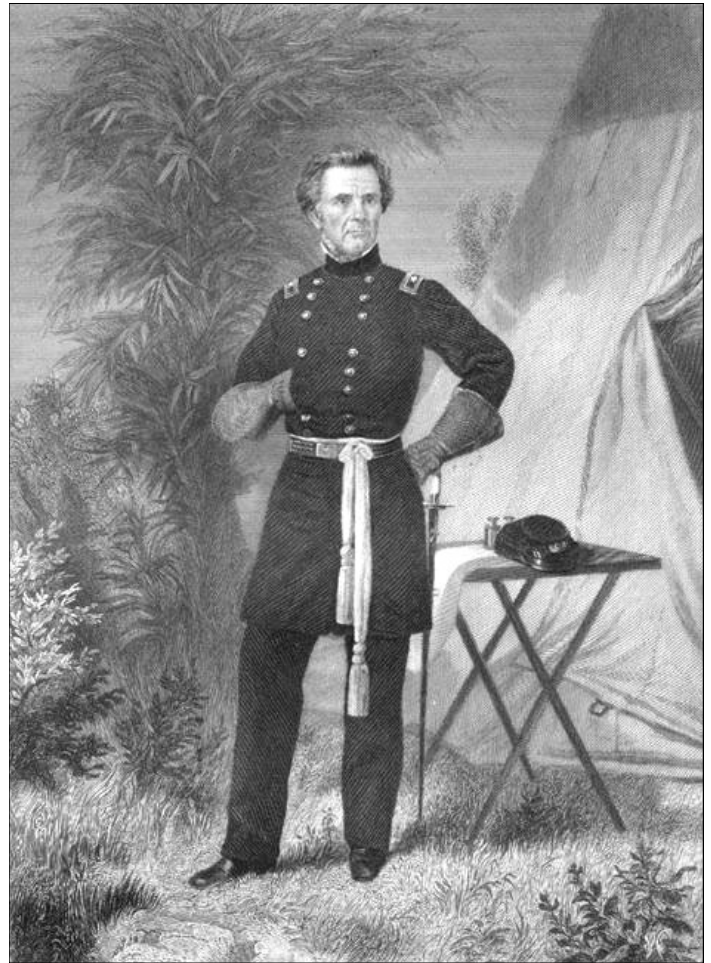
Reprinted From: Pieces of the Past, Volume III, Jim Reis

The history of the city of Fort Mitchell dates from 1861 — And from 1909 or 1910 — And from 1927 and from 1967. Each of those “birth days” represents a significant story in the history of one of Kenton County’s oldest suburban communities.

## 1861

The year 1861 marked the construction of the Civil War fort from which the city gets its name. The fort was erected in October. Eleven months later it was one of the anchors of a series of forts and batteries erected on the ridge tops in Kenton and Campbell counties. The fortifications were to protect Covington, Newport and Cincinnati from Confederate troops under the command of General Henry Heth. For the most part, the fortifications were never really tested in battle. Even so, on September 10, 1962, a centennial celebration was held at the Fort Mitchell Country Club to mark the “Battle of Fort Mitchell.” In reality, however, that battle was by all accounts little more than a skirmish between scouting parties near what is now the country club.

The fortification bequeathed its name, but that did not occur immediately. Stories about the creation of Highland Cemetery in 1869, for example, made no mention of Fort Mitchell. The stories simply identify the cemetery location as 3.5 miles outside the city of Covington on the Lexington Turnpike (now Dixie Highway). The dedication of the cemetery took place on June 22, 1869. Rev. P.B. Miles of the Christian Church and Rev. D.H. Greer of Trinity Episcopal Church were the main speakers. Rev. J.M. Worrall of the Presbyterian Church delivered the benediction. The account said about 2,000 people attended the ceremonies; the name Highland Cemetery came from the high ground and beautiful view of the surrounding countryside. Basically a protestant cemetery, it soon had a neighbor, St. Mary’s Catholic Cemetery. A Covington Journal account on July 2, 1870, noted that Bishop A.M. Toebbe had purchased 43 acres adjacent to Highland Cemetery for \$9,500.



*Gen. Ormsby Mitchell*

## 1909 or 1910

A birth date in 1909 for Fort Mitchell stems from efforts that year to incorporate the section now known as old Fort Mitchell into a sixth class city. Old Fort Mitchell grew around the Fort Mitchell Country Club, which was founded in December 1904, before the city came into being. A.G. Simrall, local real estate dealer, negotiated the purchase of 71 acres for the club and Bradford Shinkle, son of Covington businessman and community leader Amos Shinkle, was the first president. A village called Fort Mitchell was then platted around the new country club. The spelling of Mitchell with two “l’s” instead of one occurred during that time frame. The Civil

War fort was named after Union General Ormsby Mitchel, who had only one “l” in his name. Ormsby Mitchel Park on Grandview Road reflects the correct spelling of the general’s name.

The incorporation of the original Fort Mitchell came about on June 21, 1909, with the signing of the incorporation papers by Kenton County Circuit Court Judge Matt L. Harbeson. The small community operated as a city for about six months, until city leaders discovered that the incorporation wasn’t legal. A farmer named Foltz had hired a title expert, Harry Theissen, to research exactly how much of his land was to be incorporated into the city limits. He discovered that the area the city was administering did not match the boundary in the legal description of the city. As a result, the city was incorporated all over again. February 14, 1910, is the date the Secretary of State’s office lists as the official incorporation date for old Fort Mitchell. The original city included the portion of the current Fort Mitchell that is north of Maple Avenue and west of Interstate 71-75.

#### 1927

South of Fort Mitchell, the area that included Highland and St. Mary’s cemeteries was just beginning to develop in 1910. A Catholic parish in the area was approved in April 1908. On December 26, 1916, Rev. William Blees became the first pastor of Blessed Sacrament parish. Less than three months later, three acres along Dixie Highway were purchased for a church building. The cornerstone was laid on December 24, 1924. Fort Mitchell Baptist Church opened on May 24, 1924.

In 1925, Fort Mitchell attempted to annex the area, then known as Fort Mitchell Heights. The trustees met, in those days, at the home of the city clerk, John Menzies, at Orchard and Iris Streets. In Fort Mitchell Heights, John List, Ben List, Frank List, Herman List, and Elizabeth Chalfant hired an attorney to fight the annexation. The move forced Fort Mitchell trustees to back off their plans. Within two years, more talk between the two groups led to even more meetings of residents located south of the city.

On March 1, 1927, about 100 people gathered at Blessed Sacrament Church to discuss the op-

tions of joining the city to the north of them or becoming their own city. The efforts resulted in the formation of the city of South Fort Mitchell. The new city extended southward along Dixie Highway from the border with Fort Mitchell to beyond Stevie’s roadhouse, which was on the present site of Remke’s market at Dixie Highway and Orphanage Road. The building now housing the Fort Mitchell city offices and fire department was built in 1938.

#### 1967

The city of South Fort Mitchell grew larger than its neighbor to the north, but what played a major role in the merger of the two communities also divided them. That was the construction of Interstate 75. The stretch of I-75 through Fort Mitchell opened in September 1962 — that being the section between Fifth Street in Covington and Route 42 in Florence. The construction and opening brought immediate change as plans were unveiled for a shopping center and large hotel. The hotel was the Holiday Inn—South at I-75 and Dixie Highway and the shopping center was the Expressway Plaza, on the other side of the Interstate, across from Highland Cemetery.

By 1966, officials in Fort Mitchell and South Fort Mitchell were giving serious consideration to merging. Fort Mitchell Mayor, E.J. Legg, however, told a Kentucky Post reporter in September 1966 that South Fort Mitchell was not the city’s first choice. Legg said his trustees first looked at merging with Fort Wright — feeling that those two cities were better suited geographically. The biggest problem was that Fort Mitchell wanted a police department that it didn’t have. Neither did Fort Wright. South Fort Mitchell, on the other hand, had four policemen and a volunteer fire department.

In September 1966, both cities agreed to put a merger on the ballot for November. A potential stumbling block would be the name of the new city. South Fort Mitchell officials agreed to adopt the Fort Mitchell name when their Mayor remarked that it didn’t make much sense to have a “south” if there was nothing by the same name to the north. Voters that approved the merger by a vote of 1,540 to 423 in South Fort Mitchell and 247 to 53 in old Fort Mitchell.

# Early Steamboat Travel A Dangerous Means

Taken From: Pieces of the Past, Volume I, Jim Reis

Steamboat travel in the 1800s could be dangerous, even deadly, and the history of this form of travel along the Ohio River is dotted with steamboat explosions. The laws, safety procedures and improved equipment that make river traffic safer today are the result of these past tragedies. The following is a look at some of the horrific steamboat accidents along the Northern Kentucky shoreline, as told through the newspaper accounts of the time.

## Moselle

Between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m. on April 25, 1838, the steamer Moselle, with Captain Perin on the bridge, left Cincinnati for St. Louis. Between 150 and 200 people were on board.

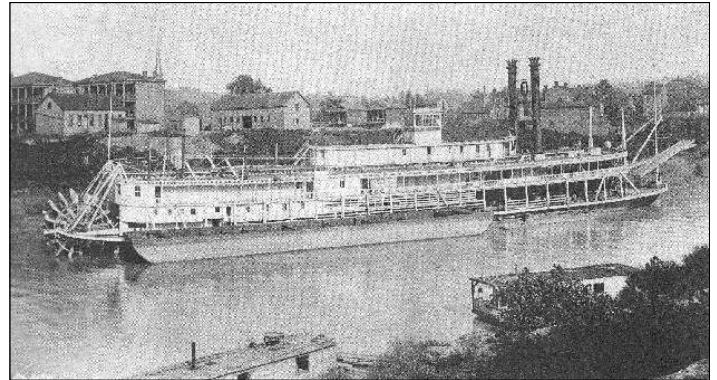
According to the Cincinnati Daily Evening Post, "The rafts and neighboring shores and streets were covered with people, many of whom were drawn by curiosity, others to take farewell of their departing friends and relatives." The steamer was still in view of the spectators when it was rocked by a tremendous blast.

"We never saw such an illustration of the power of steam. A part of one of the boilers was thrown more than 1,000 feet and crushed the pavement where it fell," the reporter wrote. The Kentucky and Ohio Journal said numerous people drowned. Two weeks later, the casualty list indicated 62 dead, 16 seriously injured, 52 still missing and more than 90 people uninjured. The same article stated the tragedy was, "another accident of but too frequent occurrence."

## Redstone

Rev. P.C. Scott boarded the Redstone about 2:30 p.m. on April 3, 1852. He had been visiting his father near Carrollton and was on his way to preach the next day at a church in Warsaw.

"Mr. Scott was in the act of waving his hand in adieu to his mother and sisters, who were standing



*Steamboat Golden Rule*

on the bank, when the explosion occurred. Spectators on the shore saw him and the others, along with fragments of the boat, actually blow up in the air," a witness was quoted in the next day's newspaper.

The Redstone was a packet, operating between Cincinnati and Madison, Indiana. On the day of the accident, it carried between 80 and 100 passengers. A report in the Mirror reported the Redstone, "was backing away from the Kentucky shoreline, her boilers exploded with a tremendous noise, tearing the boat to atoms and causing her to sink in less than three minutes, in 20 feet of water. Her chimneys were blown halfway across the river." Witnesses said torn clothing and other items littered nearby trees. The Redstone's clerk, O.M. Soper, was blown into the middle of the river, but was unhurt. Estimated placed the dead at 35.

## Pine Bluff

The Pine Bluff caught fire and sank in the Ohio River near the mouth of the Licking in December 1866. Loaded with iron ore, the Pine Bluff burned and sank in the early hours of a Sunday morning. No one was injured. Arson was suspected.

## America and United States

On December 4, 1868, the mail line steamer America was headed up the Ohio River toward Cincinnati and the mail line steamer United States was

headed down river toward Louisville. Between 11:00 p.m. and midnight, they collided about a half mile from Warsaw.

A witness later said, "At the moment of the collision, both steamers took fire on their bows, from the bursting of some barrels of combustible fluid — coal oil and whiskey — which was instantly ignited in some way. The flames spread rapidly till the conflagration could be seen for many miles around. In the meantime, both steamers made for the Indiana shore, which was successfully reached by the *America*, but not by the *United States*."

"The latter sunk to the depth of about 10 feet, at a distance of about 100 feet from land. Both steamers were burned to the water's edge, all freight being lost. The river seemed to be on fire for many hundred feet around, the oil thrown upon the water having taken fire, perhaps preventing many of the passengers and crew from jumping overboard and making their way to the shore. Thus, doubtless, a greater number of lives were lost on the burning boats than otherwise would have been." The dead toll from this accident was 162.

#### **Pat Rogers**

A mail line steamer that operated between Louisville and Cincinnati, the *Pat Rogers* caught fire and sank off the Boone County shore in August 1874. A *Covington Journal* account said the accident happened about 5:00 a.m. after a fire started in some cotton bales. The fire quickly raced throughout the entire boat. Nearly a dozen passengers were killed. Damage was placed at \$60,000.

#### **General Lytle**

Struck by an ice floe on the Ohio on January 8, 1881, the steamer sank along the Covington shoreline. No lives were lost.

#### **Golden Rule**

A first-class passenger and cargo carrier, the *Golden Rule* was built in 1877 for operation on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.

A story on April 1, 1892, said it all began about 4:15 p.m. when a man ran up to Captain O.P.

Shinkle and reported a fire on the steamer. Docked at Cincinnati, the boat was carrying about 80 passengers and 10 crew members.

"Smoke was pouring from the hold and flames could be seen licking and twining themselves around the light woodwork of the cabin. The alarm was given and not a moment too soon, for with a sudden fury, the flames burst out with a roar, enveloping the entire center and rear of the boat."

As the crew tried to fight the blaze and passengers scrambled for safety, the flames jumped across to two nearby boats, damaging the *Memphis* and *Fleetwood*. Passengers were told to leap over to the *Keystone*, another boat tied nearby. That avenue of escape was soon cut off, however, as the *Keystone* quickly pulled away from shore. It left apparently out of fear of fire damage, but that action was later determined to be the cause of additional deaths upon the *Golden Rule*. After two weeks of searching, the death toll reached twelve.

#### **Longfellow**

Described at the time as "one of the largest, best-known and handsomest packets on the Ohio River," the *Longfellow* had more than 110 people on board when it left the Cincinnati wharf on March 8, 1895. It was also carrying 300 reaping and mowing machines, "the largest shipment of harvesting equipment ever made from Cincinnati."

The steamer was already a day behind schedule for New Orleans, so company officials ordered its captain to leave despite heavy morning fog. Secured to the towboat *Hercules Carrel*, the *Longfellow* set out but ran into immediate problems. The steamer turned sideways and the towboat couldn't turn it around. Sleeping passengers were awakened by a blast of whistles from the *Hercules Carrel*. Seconds later, the *Longfellow* struck the C&O Railroad piers.

"She literally crumbled to pieces immediately following the collision and the bow of the boat sank while the cabin and stern floated away," witnesses later said. Eleven people were killed while dozens were injured and taken to local hospitals. Salvage operations went on for several weeks.

# Ludlow's Alexander B. Latta

By: John Burns

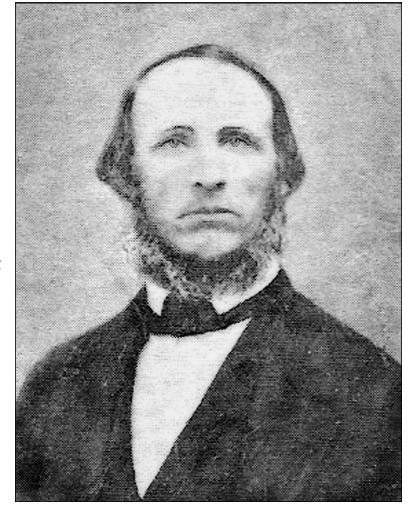
Alexander Bonner Latta was born on July 11, 1821, in Ross County, Ohio.<sup>1</sup> Like so many others who were unfortunately born north of the Ohio River, Alexander Latta preferred Kentucky as his home. His father, John Latta, died in 1826 and in 1827 the remaining family members, including Alexander's mother, Rebecca Bonner Latta, moved to Cincinnati.<sup>2</sup>

Alexander dropped out of school at about age 13. Over the following seven years he took several short-lived jobs at the Bradford Woolen Mills, the William Byland Company, and Samuel Cumming's Brass Foundry.<sup>3</sup> In 1841, Latta landed the position of Superintendent of the Harkness Machine Works in Cincinnati. There, he constructed for the Little Miami Railroad, the first locomotive that was ever built west of the Allegheny Mountains.<sup>4</sup> He also served as the engineer on its trial run to Columbus and back to Cincinnati. Latta invented and patented a series of improvements in railroad appliances. He also designed and built a locomotive for the Boston and Maine Railroad that was probably the world's most advanced steam engine of the day.

At age 26, on October 21, 1847, Alexander Latta married Cincinnati Elizabeth A. Pawson. The newlyweds immediately made plans to settle on the south side of the Ohio, in the newly formed village of Ludlow.<sup>5</sup> They moved to Ludlow in about 1849 and built a home on what is now Latta Avenue, between Butler and Euclid streets. The two would eventually become parents to two children, G. Taylor Latta and Luella Latta. Though semi-retired and making a handsome living from his previous inventions and designs, Latta insisted on having a small workshop and laboratory in his new Ludlow home.

Without a doubt, Latta's greatest work was done over a nine-month period in 1852 when he built the world's first practical steam-powered fire engine. The new machine was first tried on January 1, 1853, in the city of Cincinnati, and after the fine

demonstration, that department immediately purchased the apparatus. It should be noted that a steam-powered engine had been developed for the New York Volunteer Fire Department in 1841, but it "...proved to be such a clumsy affair and was plagued by so many difficulties and imperfections that it was taken out of service after but a few months of ineffective use." <sup>6</sup> The demonstration of the new machine, named the *Uncle Joe Ross* in honor of a Cincinnati Councilman, took place at the corner of Second and Broadway. The horses pulled the engine over several streets, including one that presented a steep downward hill. Once the hill was safely descended and the engine reached the designated cistern, the horses were detached and the engine's pumps began what turned out to be an unbelievable performance. Among those on hand for the test was a company of the city's most experienced volunteer firemen with one of their highly prized hand-powered engines. The volunteers were confident that they could easily out-perform the newly built steam engine as they chose their strongest and most experienced men to work the hand-powered pump. When the contest began, the volunteers strained every nerve and every muscle as they worked their pump. Then, Latta's steam-powered engine went to work. Soon, the steam engine was throwing water much farther and in larger amounts and in little time, the men working the hand pump collapsed from exhaustion. Latta, who was managing the steam engine, delighted the crowd of spectators by continuing the exhibition. He turned on more steam, and the stream of water went higher and further. The crowd cheered and applauded their approval during the fine exhibition that lasted nearly half an hour.



*Ludlow's Alexander Latta*

# A Look Back at The Headlines

*An on-going feature reliving local headlines  
from the Covington Journal.*

*This issue features: July 17, 1869.*

## Notices

"A large gray horse, quite thin, large feet, heavy winding tread, sore shoulders. Bought one year ago by the Covington Fire Department. A handsome reward will be offered for his safe return or information leading to his recovery."

"At the recent election of teachers at the Public Schools of Covington, forty out of forty-four were reelected. One declined a reelection and another was left out on account of being too free to use the rod. Of the four new ones, two have had great experience as teachers."

"A coffee-house keeper in this city has sued a well-known citizen recently for a whiskey bill of seventy-two dollars, contracted in three months at his bar."

"The morning train on the Louisville and Cincinnati Railroad has made a run from Louisville to Covington, a distance of 107 miles, in four hours and thirteen minutes. The railroad is emphatically a fast line."

## NEW PUBLICATION AVAILABLE

Arthur Pranger, long time Covingtonian and member of our Society, has just finished a book reminiscing his WWII days with A Co. 86th Chemical Mortar Battalion. The publication is available for purchase, cost \$14.99, by contacting him personally.

### ***"TRAVELING THROUGH WORLD WAR II 2 YEARS - 2 MONTHS - 29 DAYS"***

is very unique, as it portrays a personal spin on the day-by-day chronicle of a Private in the Army and contains many surprising humorous stories of Army life during a very serious time in History.

**Arthur Pranger (859) 291-9543**

*Alexander Latta — Continued from page 9*

In October 1853, Latta constructed a second engine, which contained several improvements, and received a gold medal at the Ohio Mechanics' Institute Fair in 1854. Within five years, the inventor had sold more than 30 of his steam-powered fire engines to departments all across the country.

Alexander retired from the fire engine designing business in 1862, but it is said that the light in his Ludlow workshop burned long on many nights after his retirement. He spent several years working on improvements in oil-well machinery and in 1863, introduced a new process in the manufacture of bread that incorporated aeration into the dough. In March 1864, he was elected to the first city council in Ludlow.<sup>7</sup>

Alexander Latta died at his Ludlow home on April 28, 1865, at the young age of 45. Elizabeth died on October 2, 1917. She and her husband were buried at Cincinnati's Spring Grove Cemetery. Their only son, G. Taylor Latta, inherited a large fortune after Alexander's death. G. Taylor Latta eventually developed the four-acre tract of property around the original family home.<sup>8</sup> In about 1900, he razed the old residence and began construction on the current house. The present Latta House is built in the form of a duo-decagon (12 equal sides). The house is 55' in diameter and sits on a lot measuring 246' x 115'.

G. Taylor Latta died in 1930 in Cincinnati Ohio. His wife, Louise B. Angus Latta, had died in 1907. He was 75 years of age and was survived by his two daughters. Services were held in the chapel of Spring Grove Cemetery.

1. *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. VI, pp. 28-29.

2. *A Kentucky Inventor*, John Burns, Kenton County Historical Society, 1986.

3. Research at [www.famousamericans.com/alexanderlatta](http://www.famousamericans.com/alexanderlatta).

4. *A Kentucky Inventor*, John Burns, Kenton County Historical Society, 1986.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. VI, pp. 28-29.

8 *Ibid.*

Additional References:

*Kentucky Post*, September 16, 1907, p. 2, September 6, 1925, p. 9, June 27, 1930, p. 9

## Then and Now



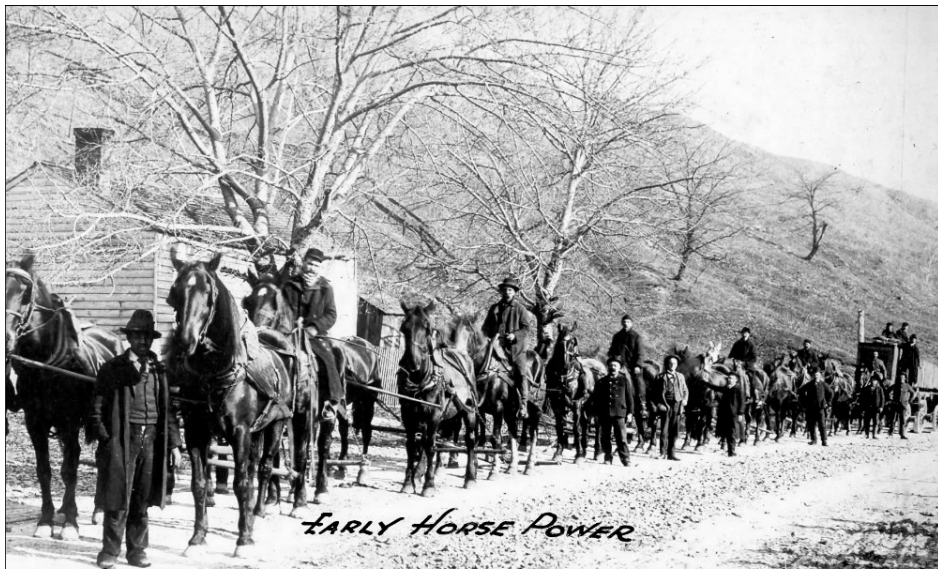
Mother of God School, which was located on Covington's West Sixth Street opposite the church.

"Then" photo is courtesy of the Kenton County Public Library Archives.

"Now" photo of the existing parking lot is courtesy of Bob Webster.

## Mystery Photo

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



### ANSWER:

Team of horses transporting a monument to Highland Cemetery, along the Covington--Lexington Turnpike (now Dixie Highway). Dated 1893.

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November/December 2007



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