

Northern Kentucky Views Presents

Samuel Bigstaff



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SAMUEL BIGSTAFF

Mr. Samuel Bigstaff was born at Flat Creek, Bath county, Kentucky on the first day of December 1845. He was the son of Dr. O. S. And Fenton (Beam) Bigstaff. Samuel Bigstaff spent his boyhood and youth in his native county, Bath, attended the common schools, and was preparing for college under the tutelage of Judge Thomas Gordon when the Civil war cloud broke in all its fury. With the air so full of excitement, books were out of the question for this high-spirited boy and he ran away from school and enlisted in the Confederate army, becoming a member of the Second Kentucky Cavalry under General Duke. He followed Bragg's retreat and at Versailles was captured and finally was to be exchanged for Union prisoners at camp in Chattanooga. Before the exchange, however, he made his escape and rejoined his regiment at Liberty, Tennessee. It was his to know in fullest measure all the fortunes of war and he was again captured at the battle of Snow Hill, having been crippled by a ball and left upon the field. He was sent to the Federal hospital at Nashville and was after transferred to Louisville. By special order of the war department he was placed in the Newport, Kentucky, barracks, and was one of the few political prisoners of Kentucky. Here he remained until the close of the war, supporting himself on crutches, and having the liberty of the post, not to speak of membership in the officers' club.

After the war Mr. Bigstaff remained for a time at Newport and married during his residence there. He later engaged in business in Cincinnati, Ohio, and studied law as a side issue, being admitted to the bar at Newport in 1875. He became a partner of the late Judge Charles J. Helm, this association continuing for several years. He afterward retired from the active practice of law and engaged in promoting, for which he was particularly fitted by his far-sightedness executive ability, and personality. However, after abandoning his active practice he once engaged in an important legal work, acting for the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway in the examination of its titles.

One of Mr. Bigstaff's great negotiations was the promotion of Kentucky's street railways, changing from horse to electric all lines out of Cincinnati on the Kentucky side of the Ohio river, this being about 1893. He continued the office of general manager and vice-president of this system for about four years. Another highly important act was his securing of the site of Fort Thomas, for which he made a personal pilgrimage to Washington, D. C. After the examination of the same by General Schofield Mr. Bigstaff sold to the government one hundred and twelve acres. The transfer was made by General Sheridan after a personal visit and inspection. The only drawback was the lack of transportation facilities and these Mr. Bigstaff guaranteed to supply, to this end building the Fort Thomas electric line. Previously he had built upon his own initiative the Grand Avenue Pike from Newport to Fort Thomas, a distance of three miles, which is still his property (1912).

Mr Bigstaff agitated the idea in the east, raised the money and promoted generally the building of the Central Bridge across the Ohio river from Newport to Cincinnati, which has proved of inestimable convenience to street car, wagon and foot passengers. He was instrumental in having the upper bridge rebuilt between Newport and Cincinnati by offering in his capacity as chief officer of the street railroad a sum of money sufficient to pay the interest on the investment. This is at present (1912) one of the finest

bridges which spans the Ohio. It was also his distinction to have built the Eleventh street bridge across the Licking river between Newport and Covington, which has proved immensely advantageous to these cities, giving a belt line street railway between Cincinnati, Newport and Covington. It was he who organized the Inverness Syndicate among fourteen prominent Cincinnati capitalists. They bought two hundred and fifty acres of land in the lower part of the Highland district, which has since been developed into one of the finest suburbs of the three cities. It was this Napoleon of promoters who organized the Cote Brilliante Syndicate, which acquired thirty-eight acres of land near Newport, built streets, laid out, and made improvements. He bought this land, built ten houses, and established "Bonnie Lesley," later selling this addition advantageously. He also bought eighteen acres in eastern Newport and as an individual laid out Second, Third and Lexington streets, after their completion dedicating them to Newport, and improving and disposing of all the property.

The Altamont and Shelby Arms hotels situated in the Highlands were promoted and built by Mr. Bigstaff, the two hostelrys having since been consolidated as the Altamont. His activities in the Highlands have included the platting of many acres of land, which has been improved and developed.

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