

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Some Thoughts on Kenton County
Civil War Fortifications

By

Chester F. Geaslen

March 6, 1967

www.nkyviews.com

111 Ridgemont Avd.,
Fort Wright,
Covington, Ky.

March 6th. 1967.

Mr. George Chinn,
Kentucky Historical Society,
Frankfort, Ky.

Dear George:-

Having indulged in historical writing since my retirement from running an L and N choo-choo, this past July, I have been tormented by the sparse fragments of particulars on our Civil War fortifications in the early autumn of 1862, when Cincinnati was threatened with invasion of Confederate forces of Generals Kirby Smith and Henry Heth.

In several volumes I read where they extended for ten miles from Bromley across the Kentucky hills to the District of the Highlands (Ft. Thomas) in Campbell Co.

With our Historical Markers around the Ft. Mitchel area referring to the "seven little forts" which were established to preserve the security of Cincinnati, it seemed quite odd that all seven were identified ...all in Kenton Co. They were Ft. Rich, Bates, Perry, Kyle, Wright, Mitchel and Henry.

I wrote to the War Department, and they referred me to the Library of Congress, and two months later I received from them an official map of the earthworks constructed here in September 1862, complete with names and locations.

NOW WE ARE IN A MESS...for there were TWENTY THREE of them instead of 7.

I have succeeded in establishing identity of twenty of them so far, but three of them defy discovery of identification, namely Rae Battery, Hooper Battery and Coombs Battery. Since they do not show in military recordings, I feel they must have been 'land owners' of property upon which Batteries were established, such as was the case of farmer Sam Kyle, who also gave his name to Kyles Lane here. Ft. Rich was also on the Rich farm. This map enables one to pin point the exact location of these batteries, and they all are on high overlooking points, and it would be possible to perpetuate the location of these historic instruments of our heritage with a marker of identification. TRUE...there were no battles fought here, BUT, were it not for these breastworks of firing power awaiting the advance of the intruders, there could well have been some 'beauties'.

The two chains of fortifications, Kenton County and Campbell County, were connected with a Pontoon Bridge across the Licking River at about Twenty-sixth St. Covington, the site today of Holmes High School, upon which is identified the Larz Anderson Battery. I have an artists sketch of this pontoon bridge, which I lifted from an old volume of Happer's Weekly 1862.

The Kentucky edition of The Enquirer has been carrying my stories on these century old fortifications, and they are creating considerable interest here.

Starting from the western end of these Batteries there was "J.L.Kirby Smith Battery" overlooking the Ohio River above Ludlow. This installation was not dedicated to the memory of Confederate Kirby Smith naturally, but to Colonel Joseph Lee Kirby Smith, USA, of Ohio Volunteers, killed at Corinth Miss. Just about the time of erection of these fortifications. Next was Coombs Battery (still unknown).

Next Bates Battery, named after General Joshua Bates, graduated 1837 from West Point, During Siege of Cincinnati he and his forces joined General Lew Wallace and Gen. Wright in the defense of this area. Next Fort Rich, located on the Rich farm.

Fort Perry, named after Hon. Aaron F. Perry, prominent Cincinnati financier and member of law firm (Alphonso) Taft, Key, and Perry. He would close his law office and come to Kentucky hilltops to supervise (and personally pay laborers) working on the forts. Ft. Mitchel, named after the famed astronomer and West Point classmate of Robert E. Lee, Major General Ormsby McKnight Mitchel, who also was engaged here in 1862.

Ft. Kyle named after farmer and land owner Sam Kyle. Fort Wright, named after Major General Horatio Gouverneur Wright, who was dispatched here in 1862 to fortify this area. He was a brilliant engineer, and in his latter days, was appointed to supervise the completion of the erection of the famed Washington monument in D.C.

Rae Battery (unknown). Hooper Battery (unknown). Carlisle Battery, named after Covington's illustrious son, John Griffin Carlisle, former Secy of Treasury.

Burbank Battery...Lieut. Col. Burbank, Commandant of Militia forces assigned to Dept. of Cincinnati. Hatch Battery, Cincinnati's Civil War Mayor, George Hatch.

Fort Henry, Named after the immortal Henry Clay, by General Lew Wallace when he established his headquarters on Buena Vista hill close by the Pontoon bridge across the Licking. (In 1877, this same site became the Monte Casino Monestary and the home of the famed Smallest Church in the World, which the monks created out of field stones quarried on the premises.)

Larz Anderson Battery, named after prominent Cincinnati financier who married the daughter of Nicholas Longworth, first millionaire of the West. He was also brother of the famed Major Bob Anderson of Fort Sumpter, and when Fighting Bob was paroled by the Confederates he convalesced at the home of brother Larz on Pike St. Cinti.

Across the pontoon bridge was the Holt Battery, named after Hon. Joseph Holt, native born Kentuckian (Breckenridge Co.) who was a Postmaster General, Secy. of War under Lincoln, and Judge Advocate of the U.S. When Lincoln was assassinated Holt participated in the prosecution.

(ATTENTION...I JUST LEFT OUT ONE IN KENTON COUNTY between Ft. Henry and Anderson Batt)
It was the Burnet Battery, named after Robert W. Burnet, West Point graduate, who formed the Burnet Rifles here, made up of members of Cincinnati Literary Club. His family name is associated with Cincinnati's Burnet House as well as Burnet Woods.

JOHNS HILL BATTERY, an old landmark along east bank of Licking River, and the old church and cemetery still in use.

McLean Battery named after N. H. Mc Lean, Asst. Adjutant General and Chief of Staff of the Department of Ohio.

HARRISON BATTERY named after that illustrious family from which came two Presidents of the United States, a Member of Congress, and a Governor of Colonial Virginia.

SHALER BATTERY erected on Shaler winery grounds, old Doctor Shaler (Nathaniel) was surgeon of U. S. forces at the old Newport Barracks at the confluence of Ohio and Licking. His son Nathaniel was also Captain of this Battery.

PHIL KEARNY BATTERY, named after General 'Fighting Phil' Kearny, the one armed cavalry leader, who one more than one occasion held his bridle reins in his teeth, as he led his forces in a charge.

FORT WHITTLESEY (now Fort Thomas). Whittlesey was a famed engineer and anthropologist, who was sent here to assist Generals Mitchel, Wright, and Wallace in the construction of these fortifications. He was a Colonel of Engineers.

QUITE THE EXTREME OF " THE SEVEN LITTLE FORTS" are they not ?

Would like to have occasion to set down with your historical committee sometime with one of these beautifully informative maps before us...and re-fight some of these engagements, and should we grow tired on this theme, you and I could always rehash the mud around Verdun, the stink of Belleau, and the pretty gals along the Place de Concorde. Oui ?

Will try to sketch you a facimile so that you will be able to follow these identifications,

Sincerely yours,

Chester F. Geaslen.



MT. ADAMS
U U U U U U U

Pentoon Bridge

PRICE HILL
U U U U U U U

SEPT
1862

FT. WHITTESEY
⊗

PHIL KEARNEY
⊗

ALEXANDRIA TURNPIKE

NEWPORT

SHALER
⊗

HARRISON
⊗

MCLEAN
⊗

HOLT
⊗

JOHN'S HILL
⊗

26th St. Cav.

LICKING RIVER

MADISON AVE

CONINGTON

Pentoon Bridge

WOSLER
⊗

LARZ
⊗

LANDER
⊗

BURNET
⊗

FT HENRY
⊗

LONDON

DEWOL

(DINE)

KYLE
⊗

RAE
⊗

HOOPER
⊗

CARLISLE
⊗

DOUB BARK
⊗

HATCH
⊗

PERRY
⊗

FT MITCHEL
⊗

KYLE
⊗

RAE
⊗

HOOPER
⊗

CARLISLE
⊗

DOUB BARK
⊗

HATCH
⊗

BROMLEY
⊗

COOMBS
⊗

BATES
⊗

RICH
⊗

PERRY
⊗

FT MITCHEL
⊗

FT. WRIGHT
⊗

KYLES LANE

INDEPENDENCE TURNPIKE
LATVIA SPRING