

BROMLEY'S 100th ANNIVERSARY
AS A CORPORATE ENTITY

by
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The year of 1890 was a banner year for Kentucky's General Assembly. The amount of legislation enacted that year was of near record proportion; yet it is one particular act of May 23rd that is of special interest to us in this centennial year of Bromley's incorporation. It was on that date that the General Assembly approved "AN ACT to incorporate the town of Bromley."

The community's history though, dates much further back than the time of its incorporation. Such early-day explorers as Christopher Gist and Simon Kenton trod the very ground upon which the city is built, and Simon Girty and his Indian companions passed here a number of times. George Rogers Clark regularly patrolled along the local riverfront with his heavily-armed galley, while the celebrated Mike Fink poled his fleet of cargo-laden keelboats along the willow-lined shore.

In 1756 23 years-old Mrs. William (nee Mary Draper) Ingles, who is recognized as being the first white woman in Kentucky, traveled the Bromley site as a prisoner of the Shawnee Indians. She and an elderly Dutch woman companion later made their escape while at Big Bone Lick and once again traversed the local site as part of what has been called one of the most remarkable, hazard-filled flights of all time.

In time, large tracts of Kentucky land were awarded to various individuals who, in turn, were encouraged to help see that this western frontier became a settled and prosperous part of the new nation. One of those receiving such a land grant was Prettyman Merry. He was given a tract of some 2,000 acres extending from the west side of modern-day Covington to near the tiny stream of Dry Creek, and encompassing much of the Bromley site

A short time after Merry received his generous grant of land, a small plateau just inside Bromley's present-day western boundry was chosen to be the site of a large brick home, known locally as the "Landmark." Today, the 18th century structure is said to be the oldest home still standing in Kenton County.

During all this time there was a growing number of isolated farms and homes being established on the land west of the Landmark. Finally, in 1846 George Anderson, who lived at the mouth of Dry Creek, called for a meeting to be held at his home for the purpose of organizing a group to build a turnpike from Dry Creek's mouth to the ferry landing at Israel Ludlow's farm (present-day Ludlow.) The eventual outcome of this was construction of the Covington and Dry Creek Turnpike, or Lower River Road as it eventually became known.

Two years after the Anderson meeting another crucial point in Bromley's history was reached. That was in 1848 when a large portion of the original Merry estate was acquired by Charles Collins, a native of Bromley, England. Collins promptly platted a town on the property and announced that he was naming it in honor of his native English borough.

Growth came slowly for the newly-established community, but it did come. Homes and stores were built along Turnpike St., now known simply as Pike St., and ferry service across the Ohio was inaugurated. Within 13 years though, the storm that was America's Civil War broke across the land. Bromley and Ludlow residents promptly called a mass meeting and left no doubt as to where their sentiments lay. They spoke out loudly and clearly in favor of the Union, and called upon their representatives "to vote for the Union first, the Union last, and the Union always."

By the end of 1861 a local training center known as Camp Bromley was receiving scores of recruits, and when a Confederate force under General Henry Heth penetrated the surrounding hilltops swarms of local men rushed to help fill the ranks of the 41st Enrolled Militia. Union gunboats patrolled up and down the river, ever alert to any possible Confederate move down the surrounding hillsides and onto the flat Bromley and Ludlow terrain. So too, were the gun emplacements of the Kirby Smith Battery placed so as to be able to pour a withering volume of fire onto the flat land that would later be covered by the waters of the Lagoon Amusement Park and by modern-day Bromley.

These proved to be wise precautions, for it was later revealed that Bromley lay in the direct path of a proposed Southern attack on Covington and Cincinnati. This fact came to light when General Lew Wallace, commander of the local defense line, wrote that Confederate General Heth told him during a chance post-war meeting that his proposed plan of attack was to strike north toward the Ohio River and then swing eastward through the communities of Bromley, Ludlow and West Covington.

Despite their eventual order to withdraw, one group of mounted rebels were determined to enter Ohio before beginning their southward flight. Accordingly, the small group rode into Bromley and used the local ferry to cross the Ohio. After a brief time on the river's north bank they returned to the hilltops to rejoin their command which was then preparing to begin their retreat. Members of the small band, probably because of their shabby dress, were never recognized as being Confederate soldiers, and it was not until several days later that Union officials learned of their escape.

After the war ended there came a period of modest growth and prosperity for the community. Still, a number of local farmers who had migrated from the Old World still held to the European custom of wearing thrifty, water-resistant wooden shoes when working in their fields--and chances are that their shoes were locally made. Indeed, those wooden shoes made by Bromleyites John Heist and John Dues could easily match or exceed the quality of those of the best of the world's shoe makers.

By the start of the 1890s two of the most popular gathering places for the local men were Bill Weber's saloon and George Hackstadt's blacksmith shop. Here, they swapped fish stories, exchanged the latest gossip and talked politics. One of the most common topics of discussion concerned the benefits and the drawbacks of having their community incorporated. A vast majority seemed to heartily favor incorporation and succeeded in convincing the state legislature of the righteousness of their cause. On May 23, 1890 the General Assembly gave all Bromley reason to celebrate, as it passed "AN ACT to incorporate the town of Bromley, in Kenton county." The act provided for the election of a board of 5 trustees, a police judge and a town marshal, and set the first Monday in June as election day. In

addition, the trustees were given the power to enact laws for the governing of the city, and the power to levy a tax of no more than 12¹/₂ on each \$100 worth of taxable property.

A few days later, on June 9th, the new city's first municipal election was held, and resulted in Frank Balsler, George Buck, Fred Hackstadt, Henry Weber Sr. and Lee Aspey being selected as the 5 trustees. Nicholas Grimmeissen was elected treasurer, George Noelker became city clerk, Fred Kranz was named tax assessor, James Gardner Sr. was selected to be the first city marshal and Seal Richardson was chosen as police judge. A short time later, Mayor Thomas J. McNeal of Ludlow administered the oath of office to the newly-elected officials. Bromley's corporate status was now a fact.