

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

A Brief History of the
County of Kenton
and the
City of Covington

Edith Claire George
Covington, Kentucky

Lexington, Kentucky
June 1, 1923

www.nkyviews.com

For the rather scanty information
in these pages thanks are due
Miss Mahala Fugh, Mr. J. P. Powers, Miss
Spears, Mr. Mittendorf, and Mrs. Meahan
of Covington, Kentucky, and also to Mr.
Kerr and to Mr. Collins, authors of
Kentucky Histories.

Kenton County, Kentucky

Early visitors. — Altho Kenton is a comparatively young county, the region was one of the first visited by white men. In 1751 Christopher Gist, agent of the Ohio Company, crossed the Licking river at its mouth and landed where Covington is now located. Mrs. Mary Inglis and her Dutch companion who succeeded in escaping from their Indian captors, 1756, were the first white women in what is now Kenton. In 1756 Colonel George Croghan passed the mouth of the Licking. In 1771 Simon Kenton, with a few other men, went down the Ohio below Cincinnati, and on his return explored the Licking. Altho Kenton did not land he traveled along two sides of the county that was to bear his name. During the Revolutionary war Colonel Bowman of Kentucky county led an expedition against the Shawnee Indians. He notified the people to meet him at the mouth of the Licking where Covington now stands.

George Rogers Clark, on an Indian expedition, also made this a place of rendezvous. Here on one occasion he was met by nearly a thousand volunteers.

Early Settlers. - Among the first settlers of what is now Kenton was one Edmond Rittenhouse from Pennsylvania, who in 1793 came down the Ohio in a flat-boat. Entering the Licking where it empties into the Ohio, he stopped first at Bank Lick, but because of hostile Indians he went on to Ruddle's Station. In 1795, however, he returned and settled on the west bank of the Licking. About the same time John Martin came with his family, also from Pennsylvania. Coming down the Ohio he stopped at Limestone (Mayville). Later he continued down the river, and settled on Bank Lick like William Martin, son of John Martin and Margaret Rittenhouse, daughter of Edmond Rittenhouse, were, perhaps, the first couple married in what is now Kenton County.

About 1810 some of the residents in what is now Kenton were Thomas Kennedy and sons, Thomas Sandford, Robert Kyle, William Mackoy, John Thomas, James Riddle and their families and Patrick Leonard and his wife, Captain Molly Pitcher, a Revolutionary fame ⁽²⁾.

Kenton County. — Kenton county was organized 1840 from the western part of Campbell, and became the ninetieth county of Kentucky. The county is from six to twelve miles wide and twenty-five miles long. It is bound on the north by the Ohio river, on the east by the Licking, on the south by Pendleton and Grant counties, and on the west by Boone. The Lexington pike terminates in Kenton, where in Covington it forms one of the oldest streets of the city, Pike street. In the eastern part of the county is the Kentucky Central

(1) (2) Collin's History of Kentucky

division of the L. & N. railroad. From Covington⁷ thru the central part of the county is the Louisville and Nashville road, and running thru the northwestern corner is the Southern road. The southern part of Kenton is drained by Grassy and Bowman creeks; the northern part by Dry creek, Bullock Pen, and Banklick. All of these except Dry creek empty into the Licking. The bottom land of Kenton, altho narrow, is rich and productive. Much of the county is uplands, best adapted to gardens and dairy farms.

Cities. — Covington, the only large city in Kenton county, was established by an act of the Legislature in 1815. The land, one hundred fifty acres, was purchased from Thomas Kennedy by General Gano, R. M. Gano, and Thomas Davis Carneal for fifty thousand dollars. This land had originally been given by the Governor of Virginia, by permission of King

George III, in return for military services. The soldier sold it for a keg of whisky to a man, who in turn sold it for some buffalo meat. It passed to Stephen Trigg, who surveyed the land 1779. Triggs was killed at the battle of Blue Licks. From one to another the land passed to Mr. Kennedy. The city was named for General Covington. The first streets beginning at the Licking, running north and south, were named for the ex-governors, Shelby, Garrard, Greenup, and Scott. The street next Scott was later named for the next governor, Madison. The most of Shelby street has been washed away.

February 24, 1834 Covington was granted its first charter. Mortimer M. Benton became the first mayor. Benton was born in 1807 in Benton, New York. He went with his father first to Indiana then to Kentucky. In 1850 Benton was vice-president

of the Covington and Lexington railroad. He was state representative from 1863-'65, and senator, 1865-'66. The Senate claimed he was elected by military interference and forced him to vacate his seat. January 4, 1871, the Legislature passed an act to amend the charter of Covington. This gave the president and the council power to assess, levy, and collect taxes on real and personal property in the city limits. They were to have full control over the streets, alleys, and public squares.

The first house in what is now Covington was built of logs in 1791 by Mr. Williams. A few years later the Kennedys came down the Ohio from Pittsburgh. Mr. Kennedy built a handsome stone residence, the first of its kind in this section of Kentucky. This house was standing until quite recently. Mr. Kennedy and his sons operated the ferry, which consisted of skiffs for the

foot passengers, and flats, propelled by hand oars, for wagons, horses, and stock. Later a horse ferry, then a steam ferry boat was used until the suspension bridge was built - 1856 - 1866 at a cost of two million dollars.

The first bank in Covington was established in 1821 by Benjamin Leathers in his store. During the "hard times" Leathers issued the small bank notes. When the time came to redeem the notes, he paid the money and threw the notes into the big open fireplace. A draft of air carried them up the chimney and to the streets outside. Before he knew it he was redeeming the notes a second time. He never forgot his "balloon currency."

Covington grew little until 1828 when the Covington cotton factory was built. This was followed by a rolling mill, and many other factories, the most

of which are now gone. "The Valley Register" July 1841, edited by Richard C. Langdon, says Covington had grown from one thousand people in 1832 to three thousand. This paper adds that the city has fine air, pure water, good society, many flourishing schools, a rolling mill, cotton factory, flour mill, hemp-bagging factory, rope works, brewery, slaughter house, packing house, etc. In 1841 fifteen thousand kegs and boxes of chewing tobacco were manufactured. In spite of the fact that many of the former factories are no longer in existence Covington has continued to grow altho not rapidly. In 1870 the population was 24,506, in 1920 it was 57,121.

Independence, eleven miles south of Covington, the original county seat of Kenton, was established by Act of the Legislature in 1843. Court is still held there as well as in

Covington. A part of the county officials live in Independence. The records and property is kept, however, in Covington, and the United States district court for Kentucky is held in the larger city. An act of the Legislature, 1842, required an additional justice of the peace for Kenton, in whose appointment the county court was to pay respect to the citizens of Independence and vicinity. In 1850 an act was passed by the Legislature providing that three terms of Kenton county circuit court be held annually in Covington, and that jurors for these terms be distinct from those at Independence. Kenton still has the two county courts.

Sudlow is one mile west of Covington on the C. & O. Erieanger, in the best farming part of Kenton, is the highest point between the Great Lakes and Chattanooga. Other towns are Fickburg, Piner, and Ryland.

Fort Mitchell, three miles from Covington and a forty minutes car ride from the Dixie Terminal, is a beautiful residential town of one hundred twenty-five inhabitants. The town has a mayor and a council. It is three blocks wide and eight long. It has no church, no store, no school, no business house of any kind in its limits. There is a country club surrounded by one of the finest golf links in this part of the country. The Beechwood grade school is partly supported by Ft. Mitchell. The land on which the town is located was a revolutionary grant given to a Sandford and a Pugh. In 1871 Mr. Joseph Pugh sold one hundred acres of what is now one of the most valuable sections of Northern Kentucky for twelve hundred dollars. Mahala and Alice Pugh descendants of the first settlers, own a comfortable home in Fort Mitchell. During the civil war

Burnside camped on the land where the town is now located, with Kirby Smith five miles away. Both armies retired without a skirmish.

Roads. - Even before Kenton became a county attention was turned to an improvement of the roads in this region. In 1834 a company was incorporated to construct a road from Corington thru Williams town and Georgetown to Lexington. An act of the Legislature 1839 gave permission for the county of Campbell to appoint commissioners to view and report alterations on the state road from Colemansville, Harrison county to Corington. The same act incorporated the Corington and De Coursey creek Turnpike Road company to build a road from Corington to the home of General Stephens.

February 17, 1842 the Legislature passed an act to amend the road law in Kenton county. By this act the county was divided into suitable districts with a

surveyor for each. The citizens were made subject to a road tax of six cents on each hundred dollars.

Public Buildings. — February 17, 1841 the legislature passed an act permitting the Kenton county court to levy and collect from the tithables of the county to defray the expenses of public buildings for the county provided that not more than five dollars and fifty cents each was assessed in one year.

Libraries. — In 1839 the Legislature passed an act to create a Covington Social Library. In 1849 A. B. Laird started a circulating library and arranged to establish a public library. Covington now has one of the best libraries for the size of the city in the state.

Schools. — In Kenton as elsewhere in the state the first schools were private or church schools. In 1836 A Young Ladies' Seminary was opened by a Mrs. De Har. There was

advertised at that time at Beesgrave academy the teaching of the Carstarian System of Writing. From 1840 to 1850 the Corvington Commercial College, Mrs. Snipe's School, the Corvington Female Seminary, and several others were thriving. In 1849 the "Corvington Journal" advertised the Corvington Literary Institute with a Primary, a Junior, and a Senior department. T. A. Goodhue was principal of the Institute.

In 1834 the Western Baptist Theological Institute, formed under the patronage of the Western Baptist Education Society, bought land south of Corvington for the school. In 1840 an act was passed by the Legislature to incorporate the Western Baptist Theological Institute at or near Corvington. Every member of the Board of Trustees and faculty were & he members of some regular Baptist church. In 1854 the College was removed to Georgetown.

The building was used as a Federal hospital during the civil war. It is now the Saint Elizabeth Hospital.

The public schools of Kenton county, like those of the state, have grown slowly. About 1872 the county had thirty-three rural schools, six graded, and three independent high schools, with 3047 pupils and seventy-five teachers. Kenton now has over eleven thousand pupils between the ages of seven and twenty attending school. Altho Kenton has a larger per cent of foreign born white citizens than any other counties in Kentucky except Jefferson and Campbell⁽³⁾ the per cent illiteracy is less than that of any other county except Campbell. In 1900 the illiteracy in Kenton was 2.7 per cent; in 1920 it was 1.6 per cent. This includes all citizens over ten years of age.

(3) U. S. Census Report 1920

In 1872 there was a twenty-five cent school tax. At present the tax is only seventy-five cents, ~~not~~ because the city is not willing to pay more but because an obsolete law forbids cities of the second class to pay more. In 1872 Covington had 164 pupils in the high schools, 2863 in five district schools, with forty-seven teachers. In 1920 the city had fourteen public schools, seven thousand pupils, and over two hundred teachers.

Kenton with a population of 73,453 (1920) has 97 percent of the children between the ages of seven and thirteen in school.

Newspapers. - One of the earliest newspapers in Covington was the "North Kentuckian" edited by J. Phelps. A copy of this paper, 1836, shows the trend of public opinion. In this issue the advantages of a railroad are discussed, a report is made of a Tobacco Planter's convention, and a

Democratic meeting at a methodist church is reported, giving the resolutions passed at the meeting. these resolutions accept and endorse the policy of Andrew Jackson ^{and} disavow the Whig party. The resolutions are signed by John A. Goodson, Chairman and B. S. Leathers, Secretary.

The "North Kentuckian" of September 22, 1836 shows an interesting market report:

Brimstone, roll. lb.	6 ¢ & 8 ¢
Candles, sperm, lb.	38 ¢
Whiskey gal.	36 - 37 ¢
Peach Brandy gal.	\$1.00 - \$1.25
Sugar lb.	12 - 13 ¢
Feathers lb.	40 - 45 ¢

"The Covington Journal," devoted to Politics, Literature, Agriculture, Education, and news of the Day, in an 1849 issue, reports a public health meeting to discuss means of preventing a spread of the cholera epidemic of 1832-1833. Among the doctors present at the

meeting were Holt, Evans, Cooper, Caldwell, and Chambers. They advocated clean streets, alleys, and gutters. These were to be purified with lime, nitrate of lead or chloride of lime. As a preventive of the disease the people were advised to take calomel, opium, and camphor.

"The Journal" advertises in several places as follows:

"Burning fluid always on hand, for sale by Fleet and Sample."

Other newspapers of the last century were "The Covington Free Press", "The Daily Commonwealth", and "The Ticket," and the "Saturday Advertiser."

Prominent Citizens. - General Leonard Stephens was given a revolutionary land grant on the Turkey Foot Road. He came from Virginia to Kentucky in 1807, and built the oldest house now standing in Kenton. In this house General Stephens entertained Lafayette in 1825. General Stephens

was the first high sheriff in Kenton county. He died 1870.

One of Kenton county's most famous citizens was John G. Carlisle born in Kenton county, 1835. He taught school at the age of fifteen. Later he studied law with ex-governor J. W. Stevenson and Judge William B. Kinkead. He served as state representative 1859-1861, senator 1866-1876, and lieutenant-governor 1871, 1875. He was for a short time editor of the Louisville "Daily Ledger." Carlisle was secretary of state during Cleveland's second administration. He afterward moved to New York where he practiced law. He died in 1880 and was buried in Linden Grove cemetery in Covington.

Cox. — Harry Seymour Cox was born in Columbus, Ohio, 1867. His grandfather John Cox, moved from Pennsylvania to Franklin county, Ohio; his father went from Columbus, Ohio to Kansas, then back to Richmond, Indiana. The Cox family was originally

English, some of its members were followers of William Penn to Pennsylvania. Mr. Cox came to Covington in 1904. Here he served as teacher and principal in the city schools until 1917, when he was elected city superintendent of the Covington schools. He is still serving in this capacity.

Donnelly. — Thomas T. Donnelly, mayor of Covington, was born October 27, 1870. His father, Laurence Donnelly, was a native of County Cavan, Ireland, but came to Covington in his youth. The mayor as a boy worked in a glass factory and a tobacco factory. At the age of fourteen he became an apprentice in a book-binding establishment in Cincinnati. He worked in this factory eighteen years. In 1902 he was a Pullman conductor on the Lucien and Crescent railroad. From 1905 to 1907 Donnelly served as city commissioner. In 1917 he was elected mayor. He has been especially interested in the new Union Depot which

was completed December 1922. The mayor takes an active part in the community service work of Covington.

Dunkie.-- Joseph B. Dunkie was born in Covington, 1865. His father and mother, Benjamin and Elizabeth Evans Dunkie, were natives of Shropshire, England. Both came to Covington in their youth, and here they were married. Joseph Dunkie was in the grocery business as clerk and proprietor, Pike street, Covington for forty years. He was a member of the Covington School Board from 1908 to 1921, when he resigned to become city commissioner. Mr. Dunkie is a deacon in the Madison Avenue Christian Church, a republican, and a prominent Mason.

Ernst.-- Richard P. Ernst, son of William and Sarah Ernst, was born in Covington 1858. He attended school in this city and at the Chickering Academy in Cincinnati, where he graduated 1874. He attended Center College 1874-1878. Afterward he studied law at the Univ-

sity of Cincinnati. He was elected United States Senator 1920.

Mackoy. — William H. Mackoy, member of the bar in Covington and Cincinnati since 1866, was born in Covington, November 20, 1839. His first American ancestor was James Mackoy from Scotland, who before 1718 settled in King William county, Virginia. John Mackoy, grandson of James Mackoy, and grandfather of W. H. Mackoy, came to Kentucky and bought land in Greenup county. John Mackoy, Jr. left the farm and came to Covington, where he engaged in the wholesale business. He married Elizabeth Hardia, the daughter of William Hardia of Fredericksburg, Virginia. Their son, William H. Mackoy, is a graduate of the University of Virginia. He was the first president of the Kentucky State Bar Association (1901-1902). In 1890 he was a member of the Kentucky Constitutional convention. He married Margaret Chambers Brent of Paris, Kentucky. Harry Brent Mackoy, the son of William and Margaret Mackoy, is the

active member of the law firm of Mackoy and Mackoy. He is a graduate of Yale. He was an active Red Cross worker during the war. Mr. Mackoy was former president of the Ohio Valley Historical Association, and a former member of the Kentucky State Historical Association. He is a director of the Kentucky Independent Oil company, a director of the Central Savings Bank and Trust company, a member of the Hamilton county, Ohio, and the American Bar Associations, and an elder in the First Presbyterian church of Covington. In this position both his father and grandfather served.

Mills. - John Clifford Mills is the present county Superintendent of schools. His great-grandfather was a native of Scotland; his father was a teacher, civil engineer, and farmer. Numerous ^{other} members of the Mills family are prominent in Kenton county as farmers and teachers.