Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

German Pioneer Society of Covington, Ky. 1877 - 1902

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A HISTORY OF THE CITY OF COVINGTON

For thousands of years the magnificent part of the earth from which the city of Covington arises was covered by the waters of the ocean and the play ground of sea creatures of every kind. Their former existence is evident in the petrified mussles and coral in the stone formations on the surrounding hills of this city. After endless time as a consequence of earth's eternal rebuilding the powerful water masses receded and a luxuriant vegetation took its place. Over perhaps a space of centuries mother earth destroyed through forest fires, floods and hurricanes that which she created following the eternal laws of growth and extinction. In excavating one finds mute witnesses of the vandalism of the elements in the form of inches thick layers of petrified mud and ash sediment. These layers originated in part from floods and extensive forest fires. The Ohio River must once have been a dangerous fellow who did not stop at making wide excursions miles inland from time to time. He spread even to where, in the dawn of primitive times, the giant mastodon drank, the very beast whose bones and jaws were found by the site Big Bone in Boone County. Since the arrival of the first settlers in these parts it seems that the Ohio River has had better consideration, only occasionally does he offend the terrain which lies beyond his bed with his dirty yellow waves.

In 1754 the war between England and France broke out which ended in 1763 with the cessation to England of new France (i.e. Canada and Ohio Valley including this region). The red man dwelled here then and with the arrow hauled game from the primeval forest. The Indians were later pushed west by settlers. The first owner of real estate in Kenton County was a German named Gerhard Muse. He was from Hannover which was then a British Province. Muse and other Germans were recruited for the American campaign under the promise of 200 acres of land each along the river. As an allowance additional to their pay. After war's end in 1763 Muse obtained according to Kingly Proclamation his land-warrant no. 367 for 200 acres of land in Kentucky which was then a distant county of the state of Virginia. Muse located his 200 acres in the southeast angle formed by the fork of the Licking and Ohio Rivers. Before, however, Muse took possession of his land; before he had even laid eyes on it other than looking at a map he disposed of it by bartering the land for a "Keg of Brandy" to another man. This man laid so little worth on it that he sold it to James Taylor of Virginia "for several pounds of buffalo meat". The soldiers at that time seemed to have valued the promises of England little.

They would have otherwise circulated their property more carefully and not have sold it off for a laughable bagatelle or as one says, for "ein Butterbrod". Taylor transferred the warrant to Stephan Trigg who signed it away to John Todd Jr. from whose possession it went over to James Welsh. Muse's patent was designed by Governor Beverly Randolph, in the name of the State of Virginia on February 14, 1780 and Welsh's patent carries the date September 20, 1787. This was still before a land title was developed for the northern bank of the Ohio River. Stephan Trigg, mentioned earlier, who had already come to Kentucky as a surveyor in the fall of 1779 was killed later in the Battle at Blue Licks on August 19, 1782.

The previously mentioned property owners actually never settled the land. It was Thomas Kennedy, one of the first pioneers of Cincinnati, who acquired it in 1792 and settled it. The property stretched from the Liking River to about present day Philadelphia Street. It ran south to just beyond 8th Street. Traffic was constant between Lexington, then the metropolis of the west and Cincinnati. Kennedy established a ferry service over the Ohio River in 1795 so that present day Covington area was known as "Kennedy's Ferry". It kept that name until 1815 when the brothers John S. and Richard M. Gano along with Thomas Carneal purchased 150 acres of the Kennedy farm for $50,000.00 and laid out the City of Covington. As trustees of the city, respectively of the sale of building sites served messers Alfred Sandford, John C. Buckner (a German-Pennsylvanian), Uriel Sebree, John Hudson and Joseph Kennedy. The city laid out by these trustees stretched from the Licking over to near Russell Street and southerly to 8th Street. Construction sites, however, were numbered only to the eastern line of Washing Street and to the northern line of 6th Street.

The city received its name after General Leonard Covington (actually Kursingthan). He was born on October 30, 1768 at Aquasco in Prince George County Maryland where his father had settled around the middle of the previous century. Covington stemmed from a knightly family, from the Department of Oberelsass (upper Alsace) in the area of Neu-Breisach. The family signature was Korsingthan or Kursingthan. The father came to America with French soldiers as an officer, was imprisoned and came to Maryland where he married and settled. Here he anglicized his name to the more palatable "Covington" while at the same time in Alsace the name "Kursingthan" was gradually changed to the French "Cocqfontaine". Covington was appointed by Washington as Lieutenant of Dragoons where upon he took part in General Wayne's expedition to the Maumee. In the battles at Fort Recovery and

Fallen Timbers along the Maumee he so distinguished himself through his bravery that Wayne gave him special mention in his report. He was thereupon promoted to Captain and held the position until he left the service at the end of the war. He then withdrew to his farm which combined with a mill was called French Mills. He was elected repeatedly to the Maryland Legislature and in 1805 was elected to Congress. In 1809 he was appointed as Lieutenant Colonel to a Cavalry regiment. Later, in August, 1813 he was promoted to Brigadier General and sent to the Canadian Border. He was wounded in the Battle of Chrystler's Field on November 18, 1813 and he died from the wounds 2 days later. Covington was valued as one of the Ablest officers of the Army.

The streets are named after the Governors of Kentucky: Isaac Shelby, James Garrard, Christopher Greenup (Groenup, a German-Virginian), Charles Scott, and George Madison; as well as the former owner of the gound, Thomas Kennedy and after General Thomas Sandford. Sandford was the first delegate from this part of Kentucky in Congress.

The city grew up very slowly and the 1830 census shows a population figure of only 715 inhabitants. The speculators who laid out the original city did poor business. Had they not sold a large part of the building sites during the first intoxicating days they would have had to declare bankruptcy. Fifteen years later most of the building sites sold for less than half of what they originally costed. The property owners strove in vain to increase the growth of the city. All sorts of plans were concocted toward this end. Already in 1828 a company came to life for the construction of a bridge over the Ohio River. It was incorporated by the Kentucky Legislature in January 29, 1829. Likewise on January 27, 1830 a society with legislated corporate rights was formed for the construction of a railroad from Covington to Lexington. A lack of the necessary pittance seems to have postponed both projects. On February 24, 1834 the city was incorporated. Also at this time the German emigration to this area increased and Covington began to grow overall and spread out.

The first Germans to visit the Kenton County area were George Jaeger and Johannes Strader or Straeter. They explored the Licking River with Simon Kenton in the fall of 1771. Only a few years later in May 1774 the German-Virginians, Captain Jacob Harrod, Abraham Hite (Heit), Jacob and Joseph Godowsky (2 German-Poles from Bosen) and 38 others descended the Ohio River. They landed across the mouth of the Licking by the outlet of Deer Creek. They felled the first trees and camped there for a while.

The first whites who traveled the Licking River to Cynthiana were among the so-called Hinkson Society. It included Johannes Hinkson, Johann Hagen (Haggin), Johann Mueller and twelve others. In March and April of 1771 they descended the Ohio and travelled up the Licking to look around the passing land for a settlement. One of the first settlers of Kenton County was also Edmund Rittenhaus (Rittenhouse), a relative of the famous German-American Astronomer David Rittenhaus. In March 1793 he travelled down the Ohio in a flatboat, landed by Cincinnati and then steered up the Licking to the mouth of the Banklick Brook where he settled. The hostility of the Indians, however drove him away whereupon he dwelled for a while in Ruddel's Station between Paris and Cynthiana. He returned in 1795 to the Licking settling on the west bank about a mile below Three Mile Ripples. About this time Johannes Martin also settled about a quarter mile from here. (approximately in the area of present day Buena Vista). He came from Beesontown, Pennsylvania and was a Quaker. Martin's son, Wilhelm Martin married Margaretha Rittenhaus in 1797. It is generally accepted that this was the first marriage in Kenton County, Kentucky. This young pair had a son on May 4th, 1798. The child Isaac Martin was the first white child born in Kenton County.

George Michael Bedinger accompanied the expedition of Colonel Johann Baumann in April 1779 as adjutant against the Shawnee near Chillocothe, Ohio. He settled later in Kenton County and his descendents still live in Covington and the vicinity. Also Johannes Piper from Wilke's County, Georgia, a northern German, settled around this time in Kenton County, Kentucky. His parents had settled near Savannah, Georgia in 1742.

Other German settlers who moved to Kenton County before 1810 were: Stephan Reich, Franz Kreilich, Jacob Kraut, Abraham Rockenfeld, Jakob Holmann and from Holland, Jan Von Hook.

Between 1810 and 1825 more German settlers came here including Peter Schinkel, the father of Vincent and Amos Schinkel (the President of the Cincinnati and Covington Bridge Co.)

Also around this time Philipp Busch from Mannheim settled in Covington. His son Eduard S. Busch still kept a tavern in 1840 on 4th Street near Willow Run.

Johann Mardis must have also settled in Covington around this time because when he died in 1825 he left to his 3 sons Wilhelm, Johannes and Joseph a farm of 45 acres. Johann sold his share to his brother Wilhelm for 25 dollars. A bill of sale was not, however drawn up and when Johann Mardis died in 1840 leaving four infant children Wilhelm had to go to court to establish his legal title. He let it be known that

he was a German and did not know the laws of the land. The court therefore named a commissioner to legally transfer the title. The legal expenses that he had to pay were twice as much as what he had originally paid for the 15 acres. Johannes Kern, a Revolutionary War soldier settled in 1823 in Kenton County. He died on October 5, 1840.

The brothers Jacob and Karl Wolf from Mannheim in Baden belong likewise to the period. Karl had a tinsmith business for many years on 5th Street between Scott and Madison Streets. The Wolfs were prosperous and owned a large piece of land in the southeast part of Covington which they laid out in building sites and which today is known as Central Covington.

In 1834 Covington was raised to the rank of a city and Mortimer M. Benton was elected as its first Mayor. Now the city began to rise and in 1840 it counted 2,026 souls already.

In the same year (1840) Kenton County was separated from Campbell County and raised to a self sufficient jurisdiction with Independence as the County Seat.

The first judges or rather, arbitrators in this county were Jakob G. Arnold, Joseph Winston, Thomas G. Tupman, Louis Klette, Jakob Dedmann, Johann Byland, Robert Carlisle, Hamilton Martin, Waller S. Herndon, Wilhelm M. Rispass and D.G. Fisk. The first court proceedings were carried on by these same officials and the following sworn individuals: Leonard Steffens as sheriff, William A. Pendleton as court reporter and Wilhelm Hoffman as commissioner of streets. Their first action was to grant a saloon license to Eduard Buss who kept a tavern then in Covington on Lexington Pike. Buss was a German and father to the later notorious Clinton Butts. (Clinton Butts was the know-nothing marshall of Covington whose arm was smashed in the so-called Turner Rebellion on Whitmonday, 1856). Louis Klette was named by the court to county treasurer and held this office until November 20, 1834 when Robert Carlisle was elected as his successor. In 1848 he became sheriff.

In those days the Germans Karl Brosemer, Michael Lingers, Friederich Perdeszet, Michael Ufheil and Oscar H. Conrad ran taverns and groceries for the physical well being of their fellow men. So that the taverns were not short of beer, Karl Geisbauer was constantly active in his brewery preparing for thirsty throats that beverage which King Cambrinus discovered.

Karl Brosemers grocery or tavern was formerly across from the courthouse. Broesemer had come to Covington in the twenties. He was also a baker and moved on later to Ludlow. He worked at gardening there and died in the 1850's. Brosemer's tavern was the gathering place of German Catholics in the early forties and it was here where Pastor Kuehr first organized for the establishment of the first parish of Covington.

Michael Linger's tavern, the Covington Exchange, was on Greenup between Second and Third Streets. Linger was a Bavarian and kept the most fashionable saloon of the city.

Friedrich Perdeszet, a Lothringian, had a tavern on Greenup between Third Street and the lower market.

Michael Ufheil was the first German Hotel keeper here. He was a Badener and came to Cincinnati in the 1830's. He was employed as porter in the Broadway Hotel there. Then he was waiter in George Selve's Bank Exchange on 3rd Street in Covington and later he was also waiter in Michael Linger's saloon on Greenup Street near the court house in Covington. In 1841 or 1842 he built the Rising Sun Tavern on Lexington Pike between Riddle and Kydd Streets. It was the first house built on the Pike. Ufheil later died in Newport, Kentucky. In the court and land register books his name is entered in may forms; first Uffal, the Offal and in the bail bond register Oaffel.

The hotel keepers at this time seem to have taken great pleasure in the ascending sun because already in 1839 Rudolph Menke and Co. had established a hotel by the same name in Covington. This Rising Sun Hotel was on the corner of "F" and Greenup Streets.

Karl Geisbauer is well known as the remaining pioneer beer brewer of the Ohio Valley. Geisbauer was born in Lorenzen in the District Zagern, Department Niederrhein, Elass (Alsace). He immigrated to Germantown, Ohio in early 1830. His cousin, Philipp Schleich, had come to Germantown by way of Philadelphia. Having built a small brewery in Philadelphia he established another similar one in the year 1828 in Germantown, Montogmery County, Ohio, the German village laid out by Philipp Gunkel. Schleich here brewed the first "Sommerbier" in the United States.

From Germant here he stayed seven years Geisbauer went to Cinc. nati where he was foreman in the Brewery of Mr. Conrad Schultz. He was there until 1842. In the meantime M sers Jonte and Walker had erected a brewery in Covington that had not proven itself as profitable. They quit the business whereupon Geisbauer leased it from them. Later it became Beisbauer's property and he significantly enlarged it.

According to Geisbauer the e are very few houses and people here then but more virgin forest. His brewery (on the corner of Madis and Fifth Streets) is said to have stood in the middle of a beech forest. Though Covington had fewer Germans at that time they were all the more united in their social, religious and political relationships.

According to the address book of 1839-40 only 46 Germans were residents in Covington. Their names are:

Michael Allgaier	(Jaco & Allgaier) livery owner 3rd Street between Greenup & Garrard
Bernhard Behle	(Bailey) beer brewer
Georg Borel	grocer, on Greenup between 2nd & 3rd St.
Michael Brentle	from Bavaria, laborer
Adam Engert	and his brother
Gustab Engert	from Bavaria, laborer
Paul Endress	from Bavaria, cooper
Jakob Frank	laborer
Peter Gaubert	from Alsace, tinsmith
Bernhard Gensvittle	waggoner
Jakob Hanhauser	from Bavaria, laborer
Heinrich Huber	(Hoover), carpenter
Peter N. Jonte	from France, beer brewer
Primus Keiffer	(Kueffer), from Alsace, laborer
Xavier Kophela	cooper
Michael Linger	from Bavaria, inn keeper, Greenup between 2nd & 3rd Streets
Joseph Lipfret	laborer
Rudolph Menke	hotel keeper
Jacob Menss	laborer
Friedrich Meyer	from Alsace, shoemaker
Joseph Neuport	furniture maker
Georg Niemann	from Bavaria, cooper
Alexander Norwaskt	from Poland, school master
C.H. Obermann	boatman

Friederich Perdeszet	from Lothringia, inn keeper
Johann Dietrich Pernet	from Switzerland, carpenter
Christian Reichert	laborer
Peter Ruckle	gardener, (½ mile south from Covington).
Ullrich Schafter	laborer
Franz Terbacher	(called Derbacher) from Bavaria, furniture maker
Ingatz Warth	(ward), laborer
Joseph Weinhage	cooper
George Zell	butcher
Wilhelm Zumwalde	school teacher

To this must be added the following pioneers whose names were not entered in the previously mentioned directory:

Georg Bernhardt, 1830

Heinrich Berte, 1837

Bernard and Heinrich Dressmann, 1839

Victory Kaspar Engert, 1834,

Fried. Goess, 1833

Bernard Hewing, 1833

Clemens Koebbe, 1840

Johann Heinrich Meyer, 1838

Hermann Henrich Joseph Puthoff, 1839

Franz Heinrich Rotert, 1838

Wilhelm Willen, 1835

The Germans of Covington flourished not only in the restaurant and hotel business but were active in all trades. The people of our land nonetheless have the special reputation overall as competent craftsmen and mechanics. Actually, at the beginning, few of them were self employed with most serving as associates of Americans. Gradually, however, they raised themselves and presently the great majority of all the trades within Covington are well in the hands of the Germans. Incidentally, in earlier times as a Cincinnati suburb Covington was not very rich in independent businesses but served the businessmen of Porkopolis as a pleasant dwelling place.

We find here repeated examples of the commercial enterprising spirit of the people of our land. Henrich Edler as early as 1842 founded a wallpaper printing shop. In the same year the Gedge brothers founded a tobacco factory. They were German-Pennsylvanians (or immigrant Germans) and are supposed to have originally been named Goetsch. Covington's first steam driven furniture factory was built by Henrich Schottler in 1861.

Eduard Thoss was the pioneer beer garden keeper of Covington. As early as 1843 he had a beer garden along the Licking River near 14th Street, the so-called Licking Garden. It was a much visited entertainment spot until late in the 1850's.

The Germans did not seek public office and aside from the previously mentioned arbitrators there were few Germans who have served as public officials. Later Germans sought public office on a couple of occasions but they fell victims to the disunity among the Germans. Had the Germans acted together as the Americans always do they would have been successful as soon as an election occurred between an American and a German because the Germans have, if not a majority, certainly more votes than the Anglo-Americans. Several times they were opportunely allowed a share in the subordinate posts in order to shackle them to the respective party. So already in 1844 as policemen and the next year (1845) Louis Ries was elected as tax collector for the City of Covington. City council, school board and other posts have stood and are now standing open to the Germans of Covington. Mr. Joseph Hermes successfully represented the county as representative in the State Legislature.

Mr. Heinrich Horstmann founded the suburb of Buena Vista (now a part of South-Covington) in 1846. He gave it this name in honor of the American victory by General Taylor a Buena Vista, Mexico.

Mr. Eilhelm Ernest, President of the Northern Bank of Kentucky, also is among the older Germans of Covington. He arrived in Lexington in 1834 and here in 1838. Mr. Ernst was born in Bucks County, Pennsylvania where his forefathers from Strassburg (in Alsace) had settled. His father was a Presbyterian preacher who could speak no English. His mother was born in Dresden (Germany) and died here. Ernst was one of the most prosperous citizens and extensive landowners of the city.

Aside from those already mentioned, the following Germans were property owners in Kenton County before 1840:

Henrich Ackermann
Benjamin F. Bedinger
Ernst Busch
Eduard Busch
Bernard Bertlinger
Johann Ballinger
Joseph Bach
Peter Habig
Samuel Hammel
Jakob Hoffmann
Elias Hoffmann
Wilhelm Uttenbusch
Mathias Inse
Henrich Horstmann
Hermann Feldhaus
Johann Peter Rust
Sebastian Stoehr
Clemens Hembrock
Simon Jaeger
Johann Winter

The later bought a 1¼ acre lot on September 11, 1832 on the corner of 4th and Gano Streets for $87.50.

From 1840 until 1845 the following made further land purchases here:

Henrich Felthous
Karl Sonntag
Doris Frey
Henrich Huntsmann
Arnold Benike
Franz Kunz
Ferdinand Kuehr (for the Catholic Church of 6th Street)
Joseph Faber
Friedrich Hammann
Franz Decker
Jakob Metz
Simon Knaebel

Jakob Harding

Johann Mathias Welling

Friedrich Moehring

B.H. Wellmann

Johannes Kupferle

Johann Adam Kratzer

Johann Rothhoefer

Mathias Bueckle (Birkle)

Wilhelm Wendell

Laetitia Herbst

Bernard Marschall

Heinrich Kurre

German churches and parishes were only later organized here. They were unnecessary at the beginning due to our nearness to Cincinnati were German churches of different denominations had already been founded. Gradually, however, the number of Germans here grew so greatly that they longed for their own churches and parishes. The German Protestants probably had the first preacher here, the father of Mr. W. Ernst who occasionally preached in German in the English Presbyterian churches. There was no organized parish and Ernst's followers were mostly limited to the Pennsylvania-German inhabitants. The immigrant Germans were not Presbyterians. Almost all held fast to Lutheran, Protestant or Reformationist teachings and so the Presbyterians were little able to propagate their faith. Only the Methodists were able to found a small organization and maintain it. Their preacher, Heinrich Ernst Pilcher came here in 1840 and stayed several years. Pilcher was granted a license from the county court to perform priestly functions and marriages. The first marriage that Pilcher completed was that of Abraham B. Heimer with Maria Goetz on July 15, 1840. Another German preacher of the Methodist community was Joseph A. Brunner. B'Hymer

The German Catholic parish was the next to form. The German patriarch, Father Ferdinand Kuehr, wrote about its founding in a letter to the Prince Archibishopric Professorship and Chair of the Leopold Foundation in Vienna, Austria. The letter dated November 19, 1844 reads as follows:

"At my arrival in Covington two years ago I met with about forty families who possessed so little knowledge of churchly matters that one could not attribute a name to them. I, myself, carpented an alter that at the present time serves as high alter in the new church. I made the remaining objects necessary for spiritual service or sought to borrow them. I then held mass for several months in a hall that I rented from the Americans. Here the most Reverend "Domcapitular" Salzbacher held mass once (note "Domcapitular" is latin meaning "Head of Cathedral"). I strove now to buy a construction site as soon as possible for the new church. Although I borrowed money for it I began immediately to build it and within six months stood a new brick church under roof. It is a hundred feet long, fifty feet wide and decorated within by columns. At the same time I built a schoolhouse. I myself had to be construction chief, supply all materials and seek the necessary money from all sides. ---- Since my parish grows from day to day I see that the church will soon not be able to seat all of the faithful".

Father Kuehr had come to America in 1840 and arrived in this city in 1842. It was here that he finished his long and blessed pioneer life on November 29, 1870.

The hall that Father Kuehr spoke of above was the upper story of a two story house on the lower market. Its inner dividing walls had been removed. There was a procession out from this hall towards 6th Street on March 25, 1843 for the laying of the cornerstone to Covington's first German Catholic Church. Father Kuehr praised that first church which costed the then considerable sum of $7,597.51 (the building site inclusive). It was the first parish church in the west but stands no more. In 1870, in its place was built the magnificently large Mother of God Church at a cost of more than $100,000.00. Unfortunately, like a second Moses, the honorable patriarch was not to see the completed church for which he had struggled nearly thirty years. The first church-wardens of the parish were Franz Derbacher, Michael Scheinhof, Gerhard Guenter, Herman Feldhaus and Heinrich Kurre.

The first marriage in the parish was between Simon Jakob and Christiana Eisenmann. Father Kuehr married the pair on April 28, 1842. The next German Catholic clergy who came to aid Father Kuehr in this city were Father Michael Heiss (February 1843) and Father Karl Boeswald (January 1844).

The German Protestants founded their first congregation later. Their first preacher was Pastor Goebel of Cincinnati who only came over from time to time. The congregation then held their prayer services in the city school house. In 1847 they organized their own church, the "German Protestant, Evangelical Saint Paul Congregation" in which Pastor Doelle served at length as preacher. Father Decker, Karl Geisbauer and others belonged to this congregation.

In the year 1862 a number of German residents founded the "German Evangelical Reformed Church" on Willard and Lockwood Streets.

That is in short the old history of Covington which we owe in large measure to the historical records of pioneer H.A. Rattermann. Every pioneer can see with his own eyes just how the City of Covington has grown up. The last census (1900) revealed a population here of 45,000. This count would be considerable higher if the entrance of new industry into the area had not been hindered by the narrow mindedness of the city government because this city has the best thinkable transportation facilities.

The Germans have taken part in the development of the city in an outstanding manner. They stand today as well at the peaks of large business enterprises. They were the most ardent advocates of new monumental buildings which embellish the city; the Justice Building, for example. They are not to be underestimated in politics because they will not be carried away with every current even if others become weak-kneed. As holders of public office the Germans also have the trust of their fellow citizens. German honesty and uprightness is still the rule today.

All in all the German pioneers can be proud of their work because they are the ones who contributed to the possibility of the betterment of the commonwealth and they are the ones who educate the present generation in the German "Geist" (Spirit). Today on the Foundation's 25th Anniversary the German pioneer can look back in satisfaction. The seed which he has sown has risen.