

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Some Glimpses of Early Maysville

Alice Taylor Gill
Limestone Chapter, N.S.D.A.R.
Maysville, Kentucky

February 16, 1942

Alice Taylor Gill
Limestone Chapter, N. S. D. A. R.
Maysville, Kentucky.

Feb. 16, 1942

SOME GLIMPSES OF EARLY MAYSVILLE

Human nature being much the same throughout the ages, we can imagine that when friend met friend in early Maysville the question then, as often now, was what's the news? If so the answer did not convey a choice item gleaned from the local newspapers, for, judging from the samples I have seen of the early newspapers of Maysville there is an entire absence of what we know as local news. It may be the editors were like Thomas Fleet of the Boston Post, whatever was published in the Post was sure to be published throughout the country. Fleet published no account of the Battle of Lexington in his next issue, because "the unhappy transactions of last week are so variously related we shall not undertake, at present to give any particular account thereof."

The papers of the day contained much political material, interesting no doubt if it happened to be your politics, otherwise not, as the man they were supporting had all the virtues possible, while his opponents were all villains of the deepest dye.

They always seemed to publish a story on the front page and a poem of which this is a fair sample,

When poor in all but truth and love
I clasped thee to this beating heart
and vowed for wealth and fame to rove,
That we might meet no more to part.

Years have gone by - long weary years -
 Of toil to win the comfort now,
 Of ardent hopes - of sickening fears -
 And wealth is mine! but where art thou?

So much for the literary taste of early Maysville. There were also numerous advertisements. These latter cast an interesting side light on the life of the times. In 1842, the earliest Maysville paper I was able to find, a bear chase near Washington is advertised, " All who wish to participate in this innocent amusement will be welcome, all species of canines except hounds will be excluded. First rate oysters only four days from Baltimore are for sale, among goods listed on the Maysville market in Jan. 1843, were beans 5 cts., coffee 11 cts. and potatoes 12 cts. a bushel. "

A tri-weekly line of stages is announced from Maysville to Mt. Sterling, by Flemingsburg, Sherborne Mills and Sharpsburg. Through in twelve hours. Teams and coaches good, drivers sober careful and skillful. Distance fifty miles. What would they think of modern transportation?

In March 1843 the School Committee gives notice they have divided the city school. One part to be in the Upper Ward and one in the Lower Ward. All children residing above Patton Alley to attend the upper school, children over the age of sixteen are permitted to remain in school, provided, they are willing to assist the principal teacher in the management of the younger children. Some time later we find a Middle Ward referred to. The town was evidently growing. About this time the paper stated, a communication had been received from a citizen of the Lower Ward on the subject of dividing the city. All below Sutton Street to be called Easton, after the owner of a fine row of buildings on the

East side of Fish Street. Evidently the town was becoming too large for some of its citizens. Cards from voters in the Wards asking certain citizens to allow their names to be used as candidates for Council, assuring them of the support of the voters of the Ward. Also that good clean rags will be taken in payment for subscriptions to the paper at current prices.

In reading over these old ads. I was much struck with the picturesque names given some of the business places, names that recall the inns of Old England. For example O. N. Weedon advertises he has bought the Livery Stable at the Sign of the White Horse, M. F. Adamson and L. J. Frazee have bought the Drug Store at the sign of the Golden Mortar, Carr's patent lard lamp is for sale at the sign of The Golden Coffee Pot. In the same paper the editor acknowledges the receipt of two lard lamps. Says they are a great improvement and afford cheaper and better light than anything you have ever used. Maysville was evidently keeping up with the times.

In Feb. 1845, Mrs. Juddith Goddard announces to the public that she has removed to the large and splendid hotel recently erected at the corner of Front and Sutton Streets, which she has fitted up in a style of elegance and comfort unsurpassed by any similar establishment in the state.

As I have said before there were no locals in the papers. If you were prominent enough to have your death, mentioned at all, it was a bare mention, just two or three lines and yet we know funerals were the occasion of great gatherings and there is a story I have often heard of an old lady, a member of a prominent Mason County family, who directed in her will that a large cake was to be made and the slices wrapped in black bordered paper

and served with a glass of wine to those who came to her funeral. Weddings received the same brief notice, just the date, names of the couple and the officiating clergyman, no description of the bride's costume, the attendants, or any of the details that are so much written up today. In one copy of the Western Star is the notice of the marriage of the editor of the paper, just the usual three line notice and in another column this statement, " The absence of editorials today will be explained by an item in another part of this paper."

If you want to find the age of any citizen of that day you will not find it by referring to the papers, for births were not thought worthy of mention.

Early in 1839 the more serious minded citizens of Maysville began talking of a public reading room, which would also be a meeting place for discussion and exchange of views. The Maysville Lyceum was approved by an act of Assembly Feb. 14, 1839 and began its career with its immediate object the creation of a "Public Reading Room and Literary Circle", Maysville was now nearing the mark set by Washington which for years had been the unquestioned center of Mason County culture. It was not however until 1879 Maysville's dream of a Public Library was realized.

While Maysville for a long time did not enjoy the prosperity of Washington yet hers was the honor of welcoming many distinguished visitors. In 1785 we are told Limestone had a visitor destined to become famous in later years, in the person of Col. James Monroe, then a member of Congress and not so many years later President of the United States. He entered the mouth of Limestone Creek and returned to Virginia by way of Lexington and the wilderness. In June 1817 a famous English traveler, John Palmer

arrived in Maysville. He wrote an account of his visit, and tells of seeing a large boat arrive from New Orleans with West India produce. This boat, which he describes as something like a river barge, had two masts and fourteen or sixteen hands. They had been three months ascending the river having had to propel the boat by oars most of the way. It was received with much excitement and firing of guns from the boat and from the shore and the banks lined with people to see it land. From 1818 on a number of foreign visitors came whose journals afford practically the only authentic account of the county from 1818 to 1830. One Esturck Evans who made what he calls a "pedestrious tour" of the Western States in 1818 said "Maysville is a pretty considerable place but the river has so far encroached on the bank that it probably will fall in in the course of a few years." In 1824 a visitor to Maysville met a tragic end. He was Mingo Puckshunube an Indian chief, 80 years old, a noted warrior in his time and had been a worthy foe of the men he visited in Maysville. He was on his way to Washington with a band of Choctaw braves, and was killed when he accidentally slipped and fell from the twenty-four foot river wall. The place of his burial is not definitely known, having been said by some to be at the foot of Market Street and by others in the old cemetery back of the Washington Theatre. I am inclined to think the first is correct as I have been told there was once a Grave Yard at the corner of Market and Front Streets. Chief Puckshunube was given a grand military funeral and the largest concourse of people ever to assemble in this little Kentucky town came from all around to pay tribute to their former foe. Such was the spirit of the pioneer.

In May 1825 Maysville was granted the privilege of entertaining two of the most outstanding figures of the day, Gen. Lafayette and his son Col. George Washington Lafayette. The reception tendered them is said to have been one of the most colorful ever held on Mason County soil. They were met by a reception committee at the foot of Fish Street. The address of welcome was made by Maj. Charles Pelliam, a Revolutionary soldier. They landed on a decorated wharf and were greeted by a wildly cheering throng. The grade up which they walked to Front Street was covered with carpets given by a wealthy merchant of Maysville, another prominent citizen laid his best carpet on the hotel steps for the General to walk on. A feast was served at Maj. Langhorne's Hotel after which the procession escorted them to the boat and watched it bear their friend and hero up the river. The next day Henry Clay at that time Secretary of State arrived on one of his numerous visits, he was back again that summer, and on each visit was assured of our unabated regard for him as citizen, statesman and friend.

In May 1837, Hon. Daniel Webster and family spent a day and night in Maysville going from here to Lexington.

In Sept. 1842 The Western Star prints an invitation from the Whigs of Ohio to the Whigs of Kentucky to a meeting at Dayton, "Come for the unwavering champion of all our dearest rights and highest hopes, Henry Clay will be there." Members of the Clay for President Club were called on to meet at four o'clock on the "turnpike road" two miles beyond Washington, for the purpose of informally welcoming Mr. Clay and accompanying to Maysville on his way to Dayton. The paper of Sept. 29, 1842 describes his reception in the following words, "Mr. Clay arrived in the city Monday evening escorted by a large number of persons from the city and county.

On reaching the Eagle Hotel, Mr. Clay addressed the large crowd assembled to greet him, expressing his gratitude and thanks for the attention paid him. During the movement of the procession of carriages and horses that accompanied Mr. Clay from Washington the streets were lined with anxious spectators. Just as he turned the corner from Sutton Street up Front Street, the steamboat Ashland kindly tendered by Capt. Tinker to bear him to Cincinnati in sight, flags flying and decks crowded with passengers. At nine o'clock he embarked for Cincinnati. Today the voice of patriotism will be heard and what Kentuckian could ask to be more nobly represented than we will be on this occasion. The Whig party of Ohio invites us to the promised feast and we have gone. We sent from our city a banner made of Kentucky bagging, we inscribed upon it in large letters, A Protective Tariff, United States Bank and the Land Bill. The tassels of the banner were composed of water rotted hemp. We say to the American people, when we give you Henry Clay for President, we give you also, all these great elements inscribed upon our banner, and more than that, than these, than all we give you an honest man." Maysville was certainly standing by Kentucky's native son. All of this seems to show how large a part politics played in the life of the times, or maybe the people turned out in crowds for these occasions because they were practically the only shows they had. Who knows?

The early winter of 1843 brought another celebrity to Maysville in the person of Ex-President John Quincy Adams. He was escorted through the streets to the Presbyterian Church where he made an address and proclaimed the innocence of Henry Clay from "bargain and intrigue". This was in the old blue church often referred to. It stood in front of the old cemetery, where the

Washington Theatre now stands. It is said to have been an imposing structure with two entrances from the street and a tall cupola and belfry visible from boats passing on the river. It was painted a deep blue and is said to have been a miniature of St. Clements Danes in London. There is one story of old Maysville that interested me much as a child. The story of Old Tip the cannon. This cannon was said to have been at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811. I do not know when it was brought to Maysville, but we can imagine it was received with much ceremony only to meet an ignominious end. On occasions it was taken to the grade and fired, but alas! Old Tip had one greivous fault, she kicked, and more than one citizen of the old town lost an arm or even his life from assisting at the firings. At last Old Tip was tried, convicted and sentenced to be buried in the ground and used for a hitching post. To this day I never go up Second Street without looking to see if Old Tip is still there.

Some years later Maysville had another visitor in the person of Gen. Ulysses Grant, in July 1868 when he was a candidate for President. My attention was called to this by a letter from the only eye witness of his arrival in Washington at this time. This gentleman asked for some data in regard to that visit. I went to the files of newspapers of that date but found nothing. In despair I searched farther and found The Maysville Republican of the same date with a full account. The first paper was of the wrong politics. There were no preperations for a public demonstration, but a large crowd gathered at the hotel to see the next President. The gentleman who was present writes, " I can see just as vividly as if it was yesterday, in my mind's eye, the equipage from Mose Daulton's Stable vearing Gen. Grant up the Lexington Pike to old Washington. All the gentlemen of the town and surrounding

county had gathered on that momentous occasion. I can see the two darkies who proudly sat on the box. Of course they had been told it was the man inside who made possible for Lincoln to set them free. When the carriage ^{turned} in to the corner where the crowd was assembled, the gentlemen all rushed forward to see who could open the door for the General and the General fell out on his head."

The history of Old Maysville is replete with interest, I have tried to give you a few brief glimpses of life here a century or more ago. The years have brought many changes but the setting is the same. The prediction of Esturck Evans 124 years ago that the town would soon fall into the river has not been fulfilled, although there have been times when the river has seemed about to claim us as its own, I am sure every true son and daughter of old Maysville will say with the poet:

What if the bridge men built goes down,

What if the torrent sweeps the town,

The hills are safe, the hills remain

The hills are happy in the rain.