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HISTORIC KENTUCKY

Photo and Text by J. Winston Coleman Jr.

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WERNWAG HOUSE, MASON COUNTY—On the west side of Pike Street in Mays Lick is this fine old brick house built in 1835 by Lewis V. Wernwag, famous builder of covered bridges in Kentucky and elsewhere. The house, recently painted white, was built of red brick, with five rooms, two halls, attic and basement. Two rooms were added later. In the front hall is a graceful stairway with cherry rail and newel posts, all put together with cherry pegs. On the side of each step is a scroll design and on the landing is a diamond and oval shape design, all-hand-carved. In the front room downstairs is an exquisitely hand-carved mantelpiece. Lewis V. Wernwag, architect and builder, was born in Wurttemberg, Germany, on Dec. 4, 1769. When just past 17 he emigrated to America and settled in Philadelphia, where he served several apprenticeships to wheelwrights and practical builders. In 1810, Wernwag built his first bridge—a small, uncovered, but radically

designed drawbridge over Neshaminy Creek on the road between Philadelphia and Briston, Pa. A year later he erected a wooden covered bridge over Frankfort Creek near Bridgeburg, Pa. Wernwag built his famous two-lane bridge in 1815 across the Delaware River at New Hope, Penn., with six arch spans of 175 feet resting on top of the abutments and piers. In 1824, he located at Harper's Ferry, Va., and purchased the Isle of Virginus where he cut and prepared his bridge timbers. Using his Virginia home as a base, the talented architect-builder traveled over the country erecting waterworks, churches, houses and covered bridges. At Camp Nelson in Jessamine County, Wernwag built an architectural marvel of its day, a long covered bridge, 240 feet long on a single span, over the Kentucky River. He furnished plans for several other bridges in Kentucky. Wernwag died on April 12, 1843, at Harper's Ferry and is buried in that vicinity.