

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Samuel Bigstaff

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Samuel Bigstaff

1845 - 1912

Businessman, Developer and Lawyer

When Samuel Bigstaff first came to northern Kentucky, he was a 17 year old prisoner of war. When he died some 50 years later, he was one of the most well-respected men in northern Kentucky.

Without a lot of formal education, he still showed so much drive and ability to learn that Campbell County Judge Charles Helm took him under his wing and taught him the law business.

Bigstaff also became active in business affairs and would later develop much of Newport and Fort Thomas. As a manager of the street car company, he helped plan and develop the street car system throughout northern Kentucky. The development of this system was an important factor in allowing people to move out of the downtown areas and yet still work in Covington, Newport and surrounding communities.

When a flood caused the closing of the Newport Military Barracks, which was a key economic factor in northern Kentucky, Bigstaff led a team that talked federal officials into keeping a fort here and Bigstaff played a key role in picking the Fort Thomas site.

Bigstaff was of Scottish descent and encouraged the development of golf courses in northern Kentucky to include Iverness Country Club in Fort Thomas and what we know today as Highlands Country Club. Another one of his developments included the Altamont Hotel in Fort Thomas.

He was instrumental in developing Grand Avenue and the Memorial Parkway section in Fort Thomas, East Fourth Street in Newport, Bonnie Leslie Subdivision in Bellevue and Cote Brilliant Subdivision in Newport.

Through his actions, northern Kentuckians not only found affordable housing, but easy transportation to those houses. A banquet held in his honor in July 1892 called him one of the most important men in northern Kentucky. Long-time Fort Thomas historian Vinton Stegeman, said in 1987, that "Bigstaff's greatest ability was to see the future and plan for it." Stegeman also said, "I can't think of anyone who was a greater mover and shaker in Campbell County."

Ken Reis, Campbell County Historical and Genealogical Society Chairman, said, "Too often I believe we fall into a trap of honoring people simply because they have familiar names. People like Bigstaff have contributed a great deal, but have basically been forgotten by time. This is an opportunity for us to correct that oversight."

No one in Campbell County has contributed more in the business field through housing, transportation and jobs than Samuel Bigstaff. And considering his humble background, Bigstaff epitomizes the American dream and is a good example of community service and leadership.

Samuel Bigstaff was born December 1, 1845 and died August 18, 1912. He and his wife Alice Webster had two children Frank and Nazzie. While living, he resided in Fort Thomas and Newport.

Nominated by James W. Reis, Vice President of the Campbell County Historical Society and historical columnist for The Kentucky Post.

