

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Samuel Bigstaff

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SAMUEL BIGSTAFF, popularly known as Major Bigstaff, is a representative citizen of Ft. Thomas, and is known over a wide territory, by no means limited to the boundaries of his native state. He belongs to a fine Southern family; has a thrilling and adventurous war record to look back upon, whose recital has roused many a slumbering youthful patriotism; made a name for himself in his chosen profession, the law; and has fathered scores of enterprises, some of them of proportions vast indeed, which have contributed materially to the development not only of Ft. Thomas but of the entire state. He is now practically retired and enjoys in leisure the honors and emoluments well earned in the days of his activity.

Mr. Bigstaff was born at Flat Creek, Bath county, Kentucky, on the first day of December, 1845. He was the son of Dr. O. S. and Fenton (Beam) Bigstaff, the former a physician and native of Madison county, who later moved to Mason county. The Bigstaffs may be numbered among Kentucky's prominent old families, and were part of a Virginia colony which settled in Madison county at an early day, doubtless when Kentucky was still a part of Virginia. Dr. Bigstaff was left an orphan at an early age. He studied medicine at Transylvania University, received his degree, and was fortunate enough to begin his practice with Dr. White of Madison, an old and representative physician of high professional standing. While yet a young man he removed to Bath county and located there permanently, practicing there until his demise. He was the father of five children, all of whom are well known. Sarah Fenton became the wife of John D. Hinde, a St. Louis merchant; Richard lives on the old family homestead; Benjamin died in Lexington in 1908, he being a Confederate army veteran and later in life a missionary; James M. is a banker and farmer located at Mt. Sterling; and the fifth and youngest is Mr. Bigstaff.

Samuel Bigstaff spent his boyhood and youth in his native county, Bath, attended the common schools, and was preparing for college under the tutelage of Judge Thomas Gordon when the Civil war cloud broke in all its fury. With the air so full of excitement, books were out of the question for this high-spirited boy and he ran away from school and enlisted in the Confederate army, becoming a member of the Second Kentucky Cavalry under General Duke. He followed Bragg's retreat and at Versailles was captured and finally

was to be exchanged for Union prisoners at camp in Chattanooga. Before the exchange, however, he made his escape and rejoined his regiment at Liberty, Tennessee. It was his to know in fullest measure all the fortunes of war and he was again captured at the battle of Snow Hill, having been crippled by a ball and left upon the field. He was sent to the Federal hospital at Nashville and was after transferred to Louisville. By special order of the war department he was placed in the Newport, Kentucky, barracks, and was one of the few political prisoners of Kentucky. Here he remained until the close of the war, supporting himself on crutches, and having the liberty of the post, not to speak of membership in the officers' club.

After the war Mr. Bigstaff remained for a time at Newport and married during his residence there. He later engaged in business in Cincinnati, Ohio, and studied law as a side issue, being admitted to the bar at Newport in 1875. He became a partner of the late Judge Charles J. Helm, this association continuing for several years. He afterward retired from the active practice of law and engaged in promoting, for which he was particularly fitted by his far-sightedness, executive ability, and personality. However, after abandoning his active practice he once engaged in an important legal work, acting for the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway in the examination of its titles.

One of Mr. Bigstaff's great negotiations was the promotion of Kentucky's street railways, changing from horse to electric all lines out of Cincinnati on the Kentucky side of the Ohio river, this being about 1893. He continued the office of general manager and vice-president of this system for about four years. Another highly important act was his securing of the site of Fort Thomas, for which he made a personal pilgrimage to Washington, D. C. After the examination of the same by General Schofield Mr. Bigstaff sold to the government one hundred and twelve acres. The transfer was made by General Sheridan after a personal visit and inspection. The only drawback was the lack of transportation facilities and these Mr. Bigstaff guaranteed to supply, to this end building the Fort Thomas electric line. Previously he had built upon his own initiative the Grand Avenue Pike from Newport to Fort Thomas, a distance of three miles, which is still his property.

Mr. Bigstaff agitated the idea in the east, raised the money and promoted generally the building of the Central Bridge across the Ohio river from Newport to Cincinnati, which has proved of inestimable convenience to street car, wagon and foot passengers. He was instrumental in having the upper bridge rebuilt

between Newport and Cincinnati by offering in his capacity as chief officer of the street railroad a sum of money sufficient to pay the interest on the investment. This is at present one of the finest bridges which spans the Ohio. It was also his distinction to have built the Eleventh street bridge across the Licking river between Newport and Covington, which has proved immensely advantageous to these cities, giving a belt line street railway between Cincinnati, Newport and Covington. It was he who organized the Inverness Syndicate among fourteen prominent Cincinnati capitalists. They bought two hundred and fifty acres of land in the lower part of the Highland district, which has since been developed into one of the finest suburbs of the three cities. It was this Napoleon of promoters who organized the Cote Brillante Syndicate, which acquired thirty-eight acres of land near Newport, built streets, laid out lots, and made improvements. He bought this land, built ten houses, and established "Bonnie Lesley," later selling this addition advantageously. He also bought eighteen acres in eastern Newport and as an individual laid out Second, Third and Lexington streets, after their completion dedicating them to Newport, and improving and disposing of all the property.

The Altamont and Shelby Arms hotels situated in the Highlands were promoted and built by Mr. Bigstaff, the two hostelrys having since been consolidated as the Altamont. His activities in the Highlands have included the platting of many acres of land, which has been improved and developed. About this time he with a number of others bought the Favorite Stove Works of Cincinnati, which had assigned, reorganized the company, and moved the plant to Piqua, Ohio, where it is now one of the largest industries of its kind in the United States. He likewise bought with others and promoted the Anniston Cast Iron Pipe Company at Anniston, Alabama, the same having failed. This he reorganized and put upon a substantial and paying basis.

When the Dueber Watch Company decided to leave Newport, Mr. Bigstaff, at the solicitation of Mr. Dueber, went to various cities in Ohio and Indiana and finally acquired in Canton, Ohio, a gift of fifteen acres of land within the city limits, together with \$105,000 in cash. At the same time that the plant moved to its new home the Springfield (Massachusetts) Movement Company was purchased by Mr. Dueber and consolidated with the watch case company at Canton. Mr. Bigstaff had the captaincy of many real estate and business enterprises and developments besides the ones mentioned.

In 1866 Mr. Bigstaff was united in marriage with Miss Alice Webster, a native of Bath county, Kentucky, and the daughter of Francis M. Webster, for many years a prominent Newport attorney. Two children have been born to them, Nazzie Webster and Frank Webster, both of whom have been liberally educated, the daughter at Louisville and the son at the University of Virginia. Frank Webster Bigstaff was admitted to the bar, but abandoned his profession to devote his entire time to literary pursuits, being an author of promise.

Mr. Bigstaff was originally Democratic in politics, but in later years it has seemed to him that the support of men and measures was of greater weight than partisanship. He has never aspired to or held office. He is a Mason, belonging to the Knights Templars, and also holds membership in the John C. Breckinridge Camp of Confederate Veterans at Lexington, Kentucky, being among the early members of that society. He enjoys prestige in every walk of life and is a prominent factor in the affairs of the community in which he has for so many years made his home.

JUDGE BETH A. FUSON.—The present able incumbent of the office of judge of Bell county, Kentucky, is B. A. Fuson, whose public-spirited interest in all that pertains to the well being of this section of the fine old Blue Grass commonwealth has ever been of the most insistent character and whose various business enterprises have been an important element in general progress and development.

Judge Fuson was born in that part of Knox county which now forms a portion of Bell county, Kentucky, the date of his nativity being the 14th of December, 1858. He is a son of James R. and Lucinda (Evans) Fuson, the former of whom was born in the state of Tennessee, in 1822, and the latter of whom was born on the same old homestead farm as was the Judge, her birth having occurred on the 15th of February, 1819. Mr. and Mrs. James R. Fuson became the parents of six children, and of the number five are living at the present time, namely,—James A., Mrs. Letitia Smith, J. T., B. A. and H. J., all of Bell county, Kentucky. The paternal grandfather of the Judge came from his native state of Tennessee to the head of Bear creek, Bell county, Kentucky, at an early day on a hunting expedition. He was lost from his family for a period of two years and was then recognized by some hunters; his family was notified and he was looked up. He then removed his family to Kentucky and there resided during the residue of his life. James R. Fuson was a farmer by vocation and at the time of

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