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William E. Ashbrook was born in Clarke County, Kentucky on October 13, 1820. He received an ordinary education and, at a very early age, took a strong interest in his father's stockyard business. In 1853 William went to New Orleans where he was engaged in the buying and selling of stock.

In 1858 he won the Democratic nomination for Sheriff of Kenton County and was elected to that office by an overwhelming margin. Two years later, he won again unopposed. On November 20, 1860 William married Mrs. Mary Owen and had five children.

When the Civil War broke out, he was put in charge of the stockyards in Covington and spent the rest of his life in that city. He served ten years on the city council, four years as the waterworks commissioner and, on January 10, 1882, was elected Director of the City National Bank.

On June 10, 1882, at the age of sixty-one, William Ashbrook died while visiting his brother-in-law, W.G. Larimore, in St. Louis. His body was returned to Covington for the funeral which was conducted by Rev. Mr. Felix of the First Baptist Church at the Ashbrook residence. Ashbrook's will bequeathed all of his property to his widow until his youngest son became of age when it was to be divided equally among his children.

The Ashbrook home, located at 1010 Russell Street, was built in the late 1860's. Years after his death, the house was used as a lodge meeting place for the Prince Hall Masons.