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For a long time the house located at 405 East Second Street has been believed to have been the home of Thomas Carneal. However, there exists no known city records to support that belief. According to courthouse records, lot number 69, on which the structure was eventually built, was originally purchased at the first sale of lots on March 20, 1815 by Joseph Warner for \$385. Warner then sold the land to Aaron G. Gano on October 25, 1820.

Two years later, Aaron Gano sold the property to his brother Daniel for \$8,000. The mark up in price and the will of John Stites Gano (December 31, 1821) both attest to the fact that the house was built sometime between 1820 and 1822. Aaron, though no longer the owner, continued to live in the house while his brother took up residence in Cincinnati, Ohio.

In February of 1825 the Gano house fell into the possession of William Wright Southgate. Southgate was born in Newport, Kentucky in 1800, and as a young man moved to Covington where he became interested in law. In 1821 he was admitted to the Covington Bar and became the law partner of Mortimer M. Benton. Soon thereafter, Southgate began a political career which involved him in both local and state government.

His first position in political office was that of Covington City Attorney. In 1826 he was elected Town Trustee, and a year later he was voted to the office of State Representative. At the conclusion of his term, in 1836, Southgate was elected Mayor of Covington, defeating both John Bryer and George Buckner by a large margin.

He was then elected to the Twenty-Fifth Congress as a Whig, representing the Thirteenth District for the 1837-39 term. In 1843 he was voted a member of Covington's city council, and later that same year, was appointed Attorney for the Commonwealth in the Second Judicial District. Also in 1843, Southgate was an unsuccessful candidate for governor at the Whig Convention in Louisville.

On December 26, 1844, William Southgate died at his Covington residence. Throughout his political career William was well-known for his strong declamatory speeches. He stood pre-eminent as a political orator. So popular and well-respected was he, that resolutions of sympathy were passed by Covington's city council, both the Covington and Cincinnati Bar Associations, and the mayor of Covington. Moses V. Grant, then the city's mayor, even went as far as to proclaim that all places of business and employment close on the day of Southgate's funeral. He is buried in Linden Grove Cemetery.

The Gano-Southgate home is considered to be the oldest brick structure in the city (circa 1820-1822). It was fashioned in the Georgian style with arched topped windows. Although the house was primarily Georgian, there are strong traces of influence by the sixteenth century Italian architect, Andrea Palladio. Everything inside the house was handmade and much of its hardware was silver plated.

Another outstanding feature of the building is the stone tunnel which leads to the bank of the Licking River. This passageway is believed to have been used in the underground railroad system, although it has never been proved.