

Covington in Retrospect

COVINGTON owes its beginnings, and probably its continued existence to natural causes.

It is situated on land, peninsular between the Ohio, which was La Belle Riviere of the old voyageurs, that great highway of Indians, trappers, traders, and fighting men; and the mouth of that tricky and unreliable stream known to the Indians as the Nepemine, to the early settlers as the Great Salt Creek, and to us as the Licking River.

This ground, called "The Point," was prominent on the charts and in the plans of the pioneers of the Western country. Here, the Indian

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1757. Next, we know of the passage of the first white woman, poor Mary Inglis with the mad Dutch woman in pitiful flight from Indian captivity, in 1756.

In 1765, Col. George Croghan, a British Indian agent was here, and in 1766, Capt. Harry Gordon, making his survey as chief engineer in the Western Department in North America.

In 1771, Simon Kenton made his debut in what was to be his own name county; he and John Strader and George Yeager, a sort of

tant; thence they crossed the Ohio in batteaux and proceeded against the hostile Shawnees and the Chillicothe town; after the fighting, they returned via the site of Covington, pausing there "to dispose of the Indian plunder among themselves by way of vendue," and there were discharged to take their various ways homeward.

Here in 1780 a red-headed general, tall, fierce and leonine, the celebrated George Rogers Clark, with one or two cannon and a thousand men gathered *en route* to the Shawnee towns at Piqua and the Big Miami.

Here again, this same redoubtable officer in 1782, after the tragedy of the Blue Licks, assembled a thousand mounted riflemen to march on the towns of the Miami and the Scioto.

Here met in 1790, under Col. Hardin and Major Hall, the Kentucky militia which was to be almost annihilated in Hammar's defeat.

And in 1792, General Charles Scott's troops came here on their return from the expedition against the Eel Indians, marching thence to Central Kentucky by way of the Dry Ridge Road.

Here in 1813, four thousand Kentucky troops, of whom a contemporary said, "I do not think there was an indifferent horse in the whole outfit. I know there was not an indifferent man," came in response to Governor Shelby's call for troops. Thirty-five years later, one of that company, Col. Micah Taul, wrote his memoirs. Says he, "We were encamped at Newport opposite Cincinnati a few days. Our encampment was on the ground where Covington now stands. It was then a farm and owned and occupied by a man by the name of Kennedy." Governor Shelby himself headed these troops and they were accompanied by their renowned and truculent mascot-pig. That historic animal, having joined the army at Harrodsburg, marched with them to the Point, and, spurning the peaceful plenty of Kennedy's farm, when the men were ferried across, plunged in, swam to the Ohio side and marched to the shores of Lake Erie. Here they left him, but upon their triumphant return, there he met them with squeals of



Market and Square, Covington, Ky. This print was first published in 1856.

tribes were wont to gather, their canoes skimming over the river as they passed and repassed, coming and going from hunting in the forests and cave-brakes of Kentucky.

Here, debouched the great buffalo-traces where the herds that came to lick the salt of the Saline Springs, crystallized along the banks of the creek, lumbered to and fro in their clumsy migrations.

There is a tradition that the Sieur de la Salle on his way to his grave in the Mississippi, landed hereabouts and deposited in the earth one of the leaden plates incised with the fleurs-de-lis of France, by which he claimed this territory as fief to his King. But the first authentic record we have of a white man on the Point is that of Christopher Gist, as agent of the Ohio Company in

American Mowgli, stopped here returning from the Falls of the Ohio. Then came Hinkson and Miller, and their companies of fourteen men each, "which navigated the Licking extensively." Other similar bands followed in 1776.

Here, rendezvoused the Kentuckians when they obeyed the summons of Col. John Bowman, County-lieutenant of Kentucky County, Virginia, (Kentucky did not become a state until 1792), gathering with their rations of "parched corn and public beef" about three hundred strong under Captains Benjamin Logan, Josiah Harlan, Levi Todd and John Holder. They camped one night on Bank Lick Creek and "went down to the mouth of the Licking," where Maj. George Michael Bedinger was appointed adju-

welcome, fell in at the head of the column, and reappeared with them at the Point. The soldiers later presented him to Governor Shelby who retired him to "Traveler's Rest" where the veteran porker lived in pampered ease till he granted his last.

During this time, one observes, the Point was but a *poste-restante*. All these brave folk who came to it were, so to speak, on their way. But now wandering feet began to linger. The land was fertile, the situation beautiful and it promised much as a possible trading center.

Already in 1780, Thomas Kennedy, of the Revolution, a campy Scot, with a numerous guard of stalwart sons, had built a home here and established his clan in the first business venture of this community, the monopoly of ferriage, forerunner of all our public carrier service. Other homesteaders began to scatter about; Edmond Rittenhouse, a relative of David Rittenhouse, the astronomer and mathematician of Philadelphia; John Martin, a Quaker, one of whose nine sons married Margaret Rittenhouse in 1797, the first wedding in what is now Kenton County; Robert Kyle and his five sons; John Gamble and his four, Patrick Leonard, who had married that renowned widow, Sergeant Molly Pitcher, Judge James Robertson; Samuel Swing and his six sons; Col. Thomas Sandford and his three; William Mackoy and three, and many other families began to settle.

The land, which is now Covington had been issued by a patent from the state of Virginia by its lieutenant governor, Beverly Randolph, on February 14, 1780, in consideration of military warrant 367 under King George III to one George Muse, a soldier of His Majesty in his wars with France. Muse jovially traded it to a man for a keg of whiskey, and he, in turn, to James Taylor, for a few pounds of buffalo beef. The latter assigned to Stephen Trigg, who came to Kentucky in 1779 as a member of a court of land commissioners and was killed in the battle of the Blue Licks. The first survey was made in his name and embraced the Ohio River front from the mouth of Licking to Philadelphia Street. He then assigned to John Todd, Jr., and he to James Welch, whose patent is dated September, 1787.

Later, other patents were incorporated. Those of Col. Peachy, Col. Raleigh Colston, Samuel Beall, Robert Todd and Prettyman Merry.

As we have seen, the place had no name of its own, having been called indiscriminately The Point, mouth of Licking, Newport, being considered as part of that town on the eastern bank which was founded in 1795, or Kennely's Ferry.

On February 8, 1815, when this town was established by Act of Legislature on 150 acres of Thomas Kennedy's farm, purchased of him in 1814 by General John Gano, Richard M. Gano and Thomas Davis Carneal for \$50,000.00 these distinguished men named it, not for any of the gallant Kentuckians who had bivouacked there, but for a

inn established; in 1821 there was a bank with John Leathers for president; a fire brigade with Mr. Mackoy for chief.

In 1825 the town turned out its best and homiest in gala array to welcome General Lafayette, who with a son and an *en tourage* of "most respectable gentlemen," one being Governor Desha, had driven up from Frankfort with a mounted escort, was here met by the chief men of the town and much be- garlanded, conducted to the gay barge in which he and his suite were rowed across to Cincinnati.

In 1830 the population of Covington was but 715, but it soon began to profit by its situation. Then, as now, gateway to Dixie, it was a natural outlet for the markets of Kentucky, its garden truck, its seed



Suspension Bridge over the Licking River.

Maryländer, a lamented fellow-officer who had died in battle sixteen months before the new town's incorporation. News travelled slowly westward in those days and no doubt their grief was still fresh when they christened the place COVINGTON.

Having bestowed his name upon their infant town, the fathers proceeded to call the streets running North and South after the governors of Kentucky; the farthest east, (most of which has been consumed by the gnawing, shifty Licking) after Isaac Shelby, Shelby Street. The others for James Garrard, Christopher Greenup, Charles Scott and George Madison.

A log church was built, several

corn and bread corn, its Kentucky salt, its cotton, hemp, tobacco, its cattle and its horses. And a natural inlet for the manufactures of the Northern and Eastern cities. A cotton factory was established, a rolling mill, shops; with a consequent increase of population.

In 1834 a city charter was granted Covington, and under the first election, Mortimer M. Benton, a native of Benton, Oneida Co., New York, was elected Mayor.

In 1832 there was a virulent epidemic of cholera, a visitation which prevented the successful re-union here of ancient Simon Kenton with the rest of Gen. Clarke's veterans of 1782.

However, in spite of that scourge

the population in 1840 was 2,026. The years from 1820 to 1840 were, on the whole, good years for the little Western town. The people relieved from constant Indian fighting, had time to grow and prosper and educate their children. Merchants, lawyers, doctors, began to settle here; churches and clergymen to appear; jewellers, miniaturists, portrait painters, professors of languages began to advertise in the newspapers which began to be published; inns and gardens and resorts for amusements were numerous; many schools were set up, and a college. The history of the rise and fall of that college is one in which sounds the first note of a dreadful tocsin, and one which epitomizes the thwarting of a hoped-for evolution of Covington along certain lines.

In the year 1833, a convention met in Cincinnati to consider the es-

elevation and commanding an unobstructed view of the city of Cincinnati."

A college building four stories high and one hundred and fifty feet front, a white-pillared and galleried president's house and one for a theological professor were built and set in shady, flowery gardens. A department of theology and a classical school were established. Substantial suburban homes began to build in the vicinity, people coming up from the South with their families and servants to frolic and drink the mild blue sulphur waters at the Latonian Springs a few miles further on, tarried to put their sons to school here.

Covington bade fair to become a pleasant, well-off university town, with a well-bred, well-educated people, affectionately bound together in a community of interests.

low-trustees, procured the passage of a bill, which added sixteen members to the board, these members being designated by name; and which provided that in the future all persons appointed to it should be citizens of Kentucky, and that no sale of lands could be made except by order of the whole board at a regular meeting. This was manifestly outrageous. The college had been built almost entirely with Northern money; the board and teachers, with the exception of one, a Scotchman, were Northern men, and the purpose of the institution was to educate men from the whole Western country with all of the Western states represented on the board.

Naturally, pandemonium broke. Long quarrels and notorious litigation served effectually to wreck the spirit in which the college had been founded, to defeat its ends and to absolutely disqualify Covington as a place for their development.

The property was sold at a ruinous sacrifice and its founder withdrew.

The college building was used for a federal hospital during the Civil War and later acquired for a hospital conducted by the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis. All of us remember the old gray building on Eleventh Street in the pretty yard with its aged sycamores and rose-embowered shrines; now even that has been demolished; a huge factory crowds the square to the curb, and the dell where the rivulets purled, is a deep cut, reeking and roaring with a maze of tracks belonging to two trunk-line railroads.

Meantime, the town had been improving its means of communication and travel.

There was an old covered "kissing bridge" of wood between the Point and the Newport Barracks; and in 1854 a suspension bridge was built to take its place, which fell with a crash two weeks after it was opened and was not rebuilt till sometime later.

In 1856, the suspension bridge, engineered by Roebling, was begun and finished ten years later; the same structure which, lengthened and strengthened, still flings its delicate web between Covington and Cincinnati.

The old Kennedy flat-boat and skiff-ferry had been superseded by



City Hall and Court House, Covington, Ky., in the Fifties.

establishment of a Baptist Theological and Collegiate Institution in the Mississippi Valley. It resulted in the formation of the Western Baptist Education Society, which purchased for the proposed institution 350 acres of land outside the corporation limits of Covington (which was then bounded on the South by Sixth Street).

It was a beautiful tract of gently undulating blue grass, upon which trees of the primeval forest were standing, watered by spring-fed rivulets. At its highest point the trustees laid off twelve acres for the college grounds and buildings and sold off the rest in building lots, advertised as being of "salubrious

But alas, ere the new institution well started on its way, the Abolition societies and the *agents provocateurs* of the underground railway, (which had its pious stations on the river bank), had begun to set old neighbors by the ears; and we find under these aggravations, one of the trustees in a college board meeting arising to move that a resolution be introduced, declaring it to be the sense of the board that slavery had been divinely instituted.

The resolution received only four votes. Nothing daunted, its advocates betook themselves to the General Assembly of Kentucky and without the knowledge of their fel-

a horse-ferry, and in 1833 by steam ferries, which gave ingress and egress to visitors travelling by their own coaches and saddle horses, or by way of the stage-coach lines with their spanking four-in-hands.

The decade of the fifties saw the great railway awakening of the state.

In 1851 the Covington and Lexington Railroad was in process of organization, but it was only a paper railroad, evolved from the old Licking and Lexington, which was the earliest chartered road in the state,



1791—KENNEDY MANSION.

A stone farm house "with wide porches" overlooking the Ohio River and Kennedy's Ferry, situated at the foot of Garrard Street, on a farm of 200 acres.

and was the result of Lexington's efforts to get railroad communication with Cincinnati. It was completed as far as Cynthia where a great barbecue was held in celebration. It was later called the Kentucky Central and became a line of strategic importance during the Civil War. In 1886 it was absorbed by the Louisville and Nashville, which Louisville had begun to construct in 1850, and around which Western Kentucky centered for years. It was finished on the eve of the Civil War.

In 1854 the Louisville and Covington Railroad was established, second only to the L. & N. in importance. The city of Covington voted \$500,000.00 to it, but it was not finished till after the Civil War.

By the year 1857, a panic, resulting from boom-times, occurred. One after another of the railroads went to the wall, including the old Covington and Lexington. A conspicuous exception to the general depression, however, was the Louisville &

Nashville; in 1859, James Guthrie sold over a million dollars worth of its bonds at par, and later there are tales of visits by the city council of Louisville to that of Cincinnati, and of its being banquetted at Covington on its return trip by way of a new short line.

1860 to 1875 were the dark years of Civil War and Reconstruction. Covington was full of the perils, heart-burnings and distress, which are the inevitable lot of the border town. Though there was very little fighting here or hereabouts, the place was alive with spies, dissension, betrayal and the tragedy of divided homes. Several times the inhabitants were petrified with terror at reported advances of the dashing General Morgan, who feinted an attack upon Cincinnati. Later, after his escape from imprisonment in Columbus penitentiary, it was the wine-cellars of a Ludlow mansion which gave him friendly shelter while the hue-and-cry swept by.

News of the advance of General Kirby Smith upon Cincinnati created such a panic that the authorities were able to dig out from cover 50,000 "Squirrel Hunters." Their peaceful seclusion, only threatened invasion was able to disturb; it was this episode concerning which General Lew Wallace waxed so eloquent. Fort Mitchell and the other fortifications on the Kenton hills were thrown up and manned and armed to repel the invaders. Federal troops for Kentucky were landed by a pontoon bridge, and the old Point was put to martial uses once more.

After those years of conflict and the worse ones of martial law under General Burbridge, the soul of the

city was changed. Many of its people were dead, many were in mourning; many were broken in health from confinement in Federal penitentiaries and Confederate prison-camps. Some were ruined financially, some were rich from profiteering, some were proscribed as traitors, some were proud, prosperous and victorious; all were embittered.

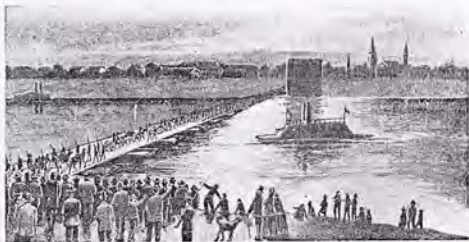
Many people moved away; many others came to live here. There was an inundation of foreigners; German and Irish, valuable and useful people; and Americans from both the North and South.

The city began to be metamorphosed into a busy, sooty manufacturing town, near-terminus of railroads, and sleeping place for Cincinnati business and laboring men.

The little drowsy river town, with its shade trees and posy plots, its market square and courthouse with the painted statue of General Washington, was gone forever. The people no longer "felt the life of their neighbors and dwelt in their hearts." The Civil War had put a period to the Ancient History of Covington.

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KIRBY SMITH'S RAID, 1862.

Troops crossing to Covington, Ky., on pontoon bridge at the foot of Walnut Street.