

# Cecelia M. Laswell

## (1887-1977)

By Jerry Long, Owensboro, Ky., 2013

### **Notes on Cecelia Laswell's book, Daviess, Hancock, Ohio and McLean Counties, Kentucky: Early Settlement, Customs, Superstitions, Sketches, Etc., by Jerry Long**

Cecelia M. Laswell compiled this work during 1935-1936 as an employee of the Federal Writers' Project. This project was part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and was established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on 27 July 1935. It sought to fund written work and support writers during the Great Depression. Writers worked on compiling local histories, oral histories, slave narratives, ethnographies, guides, children's books and other works.

Mrs. Laswell was hired as a field worker, who was to search for and compile data about Daviess County and its neighboring counties of Hancock, McLean and Ohio. She began work on 25 November 1935 and continued on the project until December 1936 (the last entry was dated 7 December 1936). She earned \$24.00 every two weeks. She established an advisory board of four Owensboro residents who were to assist her in searching out sources for data. They were Mrs. Sue McCulloch, librarian at the Carnegie Public Library, Rev. Edward E. Smith, pastor of the Fourth Street Presbyterian Church, Mrs. Ethel Brown, deputy clerk of the US District Court and Abe Baer, president of the Owensboro Ice & Cold Storage Company. The district supervisor sent her weekly topic assignments which she researched, composed an article about and returned the finished project by mail. Her first District Supervisor was Miss Margaret A. McClain of the Kentucky Library at the Western Teachers College in Bowling Green, KY. In August 1936 she addressed her assignments to a different supervisor, Miss Virginia M. Landfear, of Murray, KY.

A bound volume of the articles Mrs. Laswell compiled was placed in the Kentucky Room of the Daviess County Public Library. Over twenty years ago this mimeographed copy had greatly deteriorated. It was difficult to read, and had become unbound and brittle. It was placed in storage. The staff of the Kentucky Room retyped the original manuscript. Recently I reorganized the sections of the work in a more meaningful layout and created a table of contents and index for the volume. The volume has 348 pages. It will shortly be rebound and once again it will be available on the shelves of the Kentucky Room.

During the time Cecelia Laswell compiled this work she was residing at 928 Locust Street in Owensboro, KY. She was a resident of Owensboro from 1909 until about 1940. She was originally Cecelia Moore. The daughter of Hewitt Moore & Clara Kidd, she was born in Wreningham, England on 6 March 1887. In 1907 she married Lucius Freeman Little (1869-1946). Little, a native of Owensboro, KY, was a son of Lucius Powhattan Little (1838-1919), a distinguished lawyer, judge and writer of

Owensboro. L. F. Little became a lawyer but later turned to business interests. He became partners with Nat Alsop in Alsop's patent for the electrical bleaching of flour. In this interest in 1904 he went to London, where he organized a corporate company, the Alsop Flour Process, Limited. He remained in England, building up and broadening the business of his company until 1909 when he returned to Owensboro. On 24 February 1908 the only child of Freeman & Cecelia, was born in London. He, his wife & child arrived back in the US at New York City on 17 December 1909 on the ship Mauretania.

L. Freeman Little, Cecelia & their son, are listed as living with his father, Lucius P. Little, on Frederica Street in Owensboro in the 1910 Federal Census. In that same year L. F. Little established the Anglo-American Mill Company in Owensboro. In June 1917 Freeman & Cecelia were divorced. He died on 27 June 1946 and was buried at Elmwood Cemetery in Owensboro. Littlewood Drive in Owensboro was named for him, which he opened. All of the homes now on that drive are in the area originally contained in his home place. In 1919 he had purchased the property along Griffith Avenue from the family of James Weir.

Mrs. Cecelia Little married Floyd James Laswell in Louisville, KY on 23 July 1918. A native of Taswell, IN he was reared in Owensboro and was a son of a prominent Owensboro businessman, Joseph R. Laswell. Floyd J. Laswell was a member of the Owensboro bar, having been admitted to the practice of law in 1910. At the time of their marriage he was postmaster of Owensboro. He was appointed to that position by President Wilson on 13 June 1914. He was the youngest man to receive an appointment by the president to fill the position of postmaster in a first class city. He resigned the office in April 1920.

Floyd J. & Cecelia Laswell's only child, Floyd James Laswell, Jr. was born in Owensboro on 31 May 1919. Cecelia Laswell, her husband and son are listed in the 1920 and 1930 federal censuses of Owensboro. In 1920 they were living at 419 Allen Street and in 1920 at 406 West Fifteenth Street. She was living at the latter address at the time of the 1940 census. Her husband, Floyd J. Laswell, in the 1940 census was listed as being a patient at the Western Kentucky Asylum at Hopkinsville, KY. He died on 18 November 1973 in Henderson, KY and was buried at Elmwood Cemetery in Owensboro. Cecelia Laswell shortly after 1940 left Owensboro. She and her two sons subsequently resided in the Los Angeles, California area.

Cecelia Laswell died in Los Angeles County, CA on 21 February 1977 and was buried there. Her death notice in the "Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer" reported that she was a former resident of Owensboro and was survived by two sons, James F. Laswell, Jr. and Lucius P. Little, both of California. James died in Riverside County, CA on 1 October 1987 and Lucius died in Los Angeles County, CA on 7 October 1981.

[Notice published in Kentucky Family Records, Vol. 37 (Calhoun, KY: West-Central Kentucky Family Research Association, Summer 2013), 42-43.]

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The Works Progress Administration in Daviess County, Kentucky, 1935-1943: A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Department of History Western Kentucky University – In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts, by Shelia Eileen Brown Heflin, April 1984, copy in Kentucky Room, Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY, pages 60-61:

The federal government sponsored four WPM fine arts programs. The Federal Theatre, Music, and Art programs never developed in Daviess County. However, the Federal Writers' Project did exist in the county. The Federal Writers' Project prepared thousands of publications across the nation. Their American Guide series compiled detailed information on each of the 48 states, WPA writers used material in the Owensboro Carnegie Library to compile information on Owensboro, Daviess County, and surrounding areas for the Kentucky volume of the series (Owensboro Messenger, 12 July 1936). Mrs. McCulloch stated that Cecelia Laswell worked for the WPA and used a great deal of information from library materials in her writings (McCulloch interview). Laswell also gained information through oral interviews. She interviewed a former slave to provide the Daviess County entry in the WPA Slave Narratives (Federal Writers' Project, "Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves," 1936-1938, Manuscript Division, Kentucky Library, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Ky.)

Laswell began work on the writers project November 25, 1935. She earned \$24 every two weeks. A December 2, 1935 letter to her district supervisor listed four Owensboroans who had agreed to serve as her advisory board: Mr. Edward E. Smith, Mr. A. Baer., Mrs. Ethel Brown, and Mrs. Sue McCulloch. Possibly these people suggested contacts for Laswell to interview in order to fulfill her weekly writing assignments. The district supervisor sent Laswell weekly topic assignments which she researched, composed an appropriate article, and returned the finished project by mail. Miss Margaret A. McClain of the Kentucky Library at Western Teachers College in Bowling Green, Kentucky, served as her district supervisor through Spring 1936. In August 1936, Laswell addressed any questions or problems to a different supervisor, Miss Virginia M. Landfear of Murray, Kentucky. A bound compilation of Laswell's writing assignments is located in the Kentucky Room of the Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library. It includes historical tidbits dealing with Daviess, Hancock, McLean, and Ohio Counties in Kentucky (Cecelia Laswell, Daviess, Hancock, Ohio, and McLean Counties, Kentucky: Early Settlement, Customs, Superstitions, Sketches, Etc., 1936, passim).

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The articles of Cecelia Laswell's book, Daviess, Hancock, Ohio and McLean Counties, Kentucky: Early Settlement, Customs, Superstitions, Sketches, Etc , in the Kentucky Room at the Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY, were organized by Jerry Long and rebound into a volume of the same title with the following table of contents and index:

## Contents

### **Daviess County:**

Founding, History, and Historical Personages	1
Historical Data	7
Civil War Skirmishes	13
Old Daviess County History	23

Daviess County Boundary	26
County Government	29
Courthouse	30
Jail	30
Poor Farm	31
Questions and Suggestions Concerning Daviess County	32
Archeology	40
Flora and Fauna	42
Natural Resources	48
Oil	48
Coal	49
Conservation	52
Imports and Exports	54
Products	56
Mineral Deposits	57
Tobacco Markets	59
Industry	61
Growth and Development	64
Inventions and Inventors	66
Mr. Alsop's Flour Bleaching Process	68
Historic Home of Joshua Griffith	70
Towns and Villages	72
Lakes	84
Waterways	87
Old River News	89
Old Church History – Bethabara Baptist Church	91
Peculiar Epitaphs	94
Folklore	96
Old Customs	102
Daviess County Fair	105
Horse Shows	114

### **Owensboro:**

Historical Entrée	116
Population	116
Industry	117
Road and Highways	120
City Administration	123
Federal Building	126
Hospital	128
City Hall	128
Hotels	130
Manufacturers, Products and Produce	134
Department Stores and Shops	136
Statues and Memorials	138

Museums	139
Transportation	141
Airport	147
Laboratories and Institutes	148
Churches	149
Education and Schools	163
Colleges	190
Reserve Officers Training Corps	194
Recreation	195
Country Club	196
Views	196
Parks	198
Annual Events	200
Yule Lights	202
Saturday Auctions	205
Welfare Organizations	206
Newspapers	210
Carnegie Free Public Library	211
Museum at Carnegie Library	220
Books by local authors	222
R. Miller Holland Library	230
Desk & Books of William A. Burwell	232
Art	235
Saturday Musicale Club	237
Clubs and Organizations	241
Local Lore	245
Folklore, Superstitions and Customs	248

### **Hancock County:**

Hawesville	262
Pate House and Abraham Lincoln	270

### **McLean County:**

History	273
Civil War	276
Calhoun	286
Island	289
Livermore	291
Pond Station	294
Sacramento	295

### **Ohio County:**

History	297
---------	-----

Fordsville	301
Hartford	302

**Other Kentucky Counties:**

Muhlenberg County	303
Marshall County	304
Lyon County	304
Crittenden County	305
Caldwell County	305
Fulton County	306
Simpson County	306
Allen County	307
Webster County	308

**Letters of Cecelia Laswell:**

1935-1936	309
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.....

## Index

Acre, John C.	7, 288
Adams, Sec. of State	112
Alexander	286
Elizabeth	22
Joseph W.	23
M.	260
Mrs. R. E.	9
Richard	286
Allen	318
A. M.	77
Col. John	307
Col. John H.	175
Mr.	174
Rev. Iven	152
Alsop, J. N.	68
James Nathaniel	68
James Nathaniel, Jr.	68
Jennie May Black	68
Mr.	68, 69
Nat	68, 112
Alvey, Otis	50
Anderson, Major	16

Mary	133
Anthony, William	179
Archer, W. C.	211
Armstrong, Prof.	177
Ashby, Rev. Elmer	152
Atchinson, J. D.	30
Aull, Guy	22
Bacon, Francis	214
Baer, A.	312
Baker, Alice	20
Mrs. W. P.	22
Ball, Rev.	174
Bamberger, Arch	243
Bandy, Rev. T. B.	149
Barnhill, Mr.	147
Barron, E.	12
Eilbeck	8, 9
Lucy	9, 10, 12
Mr.	9
Bassett	72
Baughn, Rev. I. L.	151
Rev. Ivan L.	151
Beckman, Rev. Harry	151
Bell, William	105
Belloch, Mr.	55
Bennett, Capt. Jacob	15
Mr.	55
Berry	106
Mrs. Henry	209
Mrs. Henry S.	207
Bibbs, George M.	3
Billeck, Fielding	223
Birk, Jonas A.	72
Bishop, H. A.	127
Black, Jennie May	68
Boarman, James	33
Joseph	225
Martin H.	225
Blocker, J. J.	112
Joseph C.	33
Boats – Steamboats	
Buckeye State	142
Carrier	90
Grey Eagle	17, 143
Guiding Star	142
John Hopkins	143

Mountain Boy	89, 90
Robert E. Lee	266
The Peanut John	143
Bolger, John	84
Bolling, Douglas	123
Boswell, R. J.	29
Bovier, Robert S.	223
Bow, Rev. R. H.	152
Bowles, Rev. A. C.	152
Bowling, Charles B.	151
Boyd, Captain	16
Captain R. L.	15
Captain Robert L.	18
Branham, J. H.	175
Brannon, John H.	18
Mrs. W. H., Jr.	286
W. H.	22, 207
Bransford, B.	175
Benjamin	177
C. W.	4, 13, 34, 217
W. C.	20, 22
Broadnax, Judge	5
Brodie, Margaret	207
Bromlett, Thomas E.	7
Brown	269
Anne Taylor	139
C. G.	268
John	22
Mr.	269
Orville	77
Walter	89
Bryan, William Jennings	133
Bryant, Ed C.	288
Rev. Wylie R.	149
Buckner, Gov.	112
Buffalo	46, 73
Buildings – Houses	
Ames Building	49
Cary Bennett Building	49
Cornland	2
Federal Building	126, 155
Frederica Flats	4
IOOF Building	242
Joshua Griffith house	70
K. C. Hall	241
Kenyon Building	305, 306



Masonic Building	69, 241, 244
Burbridge, General	16
Burger, Captain	16
Burgess, Timothy	132
Burke, Prof.	175
Burnett, A. C.	328
Arthur C.	327
Burr, Aaron	3
Burton	326
Basset	75
Sam	94
Burwell, Rosa	235
Rose	232
William A.	232, 233
William Armistead	232
Businesses – Companies	
Alsop Process Ltd.	69
American Crayon Co.	66
Anglo-American Mill Co.	54, 55, 62, 118
Anderson Auction Co.	232, 233
Ayers & Elders wharf boat	15
Bell Hotel	131
Bernard’s Store	136
Bowling Green-Hopkinsville Bus Co.	144
Brooks Bottling Co.	134
Bryan, R. E. & P. C. Co.	134
C. E. Newbold Truck Line	145
Calhoun Citizen’s Deposit Bank	288
Central Trust Company	156, 185, 186
Charles Broekers & Co.	134
Citizens State Bank	172
City Produce Co.	135
Clark Manufacturing Co.	62
Clark Tile & Brick Co.	77
Cole Bros. Circus	200
Consolidated Coach Corp.	144
Cornelia Murphy	136
Dahl & Groezinger	60
Daman-Bryant Grocery	184
Daviess County Distillery Co.	61, 119
Daviess County Planing Mill Co.	134
Deposit Bank	224
Ditcher & Grader Co.	54, 55, 119
Drs. Hoover, Hoover & Dodson	148
Eagle Broom Co.	135
Eagle Whiskies	142

Eck Miller Transfer Co.	146
Electric Street Car Co.	141
Ellis & Smethers Co.	145
F. A. Ames Co.	62, 119
F. W. Woolworth Co.	136
Falls City Beverage Co.	134
Farmers & Merchants Bank	293
Field Packing Co.	32, 60, 62, 63, 120
First Owensboro Bank & Trust Co.	205
Forging Plant	119
Frank Gabbert Lumber Mill	134
Frank Royster Co.	134
Fuqua Bus Line	144
Gas Company	49, 63
General Light & Power Co.	287
Geo. G. Fetter Co.	276
George Mischel & Son	134
George Steitler Jewelry	205
Gilmour Hogshead Machine Co.	66
Glenmore Distilleries Co.	61, 63, 84, 119
Grand Central Hotel	131
Green & Company	146
Green River Chair Co.	275, 291, 292
Green River Distillery	72
Green River Hatchery	134
Green River Whiskey	69, 142
Grey Goose Buses	287
Greyhound Buses	144
H. & P. V. Railway Co.	145
Hayden Planing Mill Co.	134
Hotel Owensboro	121, 130, 132, 196, 241, 242, 243, 244
Ice Cream & Dairy Products	58
Ideal Pure Milk Co.	58
Illinois Pipe Line Co.	48, 49
Inquirer Publishing Co.	223, 227
Interstate Publishing Co.	6, 28, 81, 223
Island Coal & Mining Co.	289
Island Deposit Bank	290
J. C. Penny Co.	136
J. J. Newberry Co.	136
John P. Morton Co.	223, 297
Johnson House Hotel	287
Ken-Rad Tube & Lamp Corp.	54, 55, 62, 63, 118
Kentucky Electric Lamp Co.	62, 63
Kentucky Natural Gas Co.	49, 135
Key Bros. Construction Co.	127, 167

Kleenway Corp. Bag Manufacturers	135
Leo McDonough & Co.	34, 76, 136
Levy Co.	136
Livermore Bank	294
Livermore Chair Co.	275, 291, 292
Livermore Timber Co.	275, 293
Lyons Bros.	135
M. K. Rice	136
McAtte, Lydanne & Ray	136
Merrit's Shoe Store	103
Miller Navigation Co.	145
Millers Poultry Co.	135
Mischel Bros.	134
Model Bakery	135
Moseley Willis Broom Co.	135
Murphy Chair Co.	62, 118
Natural Publishing Co.	198
Nehi Co. of Owensboro	134
New Rudd Hotel	130, 133, 242
O'Bryan Laboratory	148
Ogilvie Flour Mills Co.	69
Ohio Valley Sign & Advertising Co.	134
Oriental Club	131, 242
Owensboro Bacteriological Laboratory	148
Owensboro-Beech Grove Bus Line	190
Owensboro Clay Products Co.	62
Owensboro Coca-Cola Bottling Co.	134
Owensboro Conserve Co.	120
Owensboro Cooperage Co.	135
Owensboro Ferry Co.	145
Owensboro Forging C.	134
Owensboro Foundry Co.	62, 119, 134
Owensboro Gas Co.	135
Owensboro Grain Co.	134
Owensboro Ice & Cold Storage Co.	134
Owensboro Milling Co.	134
Owensboro Planing Mill Co.	134
Owensboro Publishing Co.	63, 126, 210
Owensboro-Russellville Bus	274, 293
Owensboro Sewer & Pipe Co.	134, 310
Owensboro Wagon Co.	62
Parish Realty Co.	198
Pick Hotels Corporation	130
Planters Hotel	130, 132, 133
Postal Telegraph-Cable Co.	135
Preserve & Canning Co.	32, 57, 60, 62

Printz Bakery Co.	135
Producers Pipe Line Co.	48, 49
R. & M. Canning Co.	32, 57, 60, 62, 120
R. A. Kirk and Son	134
Race Track night club	121, 130, 132, 242
Radio Cabinet Manufacturing Co.	119
Ratican - Medley Co.	134
Rio Vister	242
River Sand & Gravel Co.	135
Ross Tobacco Co.	183
S. S. Kresge Co.	136
S. W. Anderson Co.	136
Sacramento Deposit Bank	295
Schenks Hatcheries Inc.	134
Sears & Roebuck Co.	136
Smith & Morton	216
Smith Hager Ice Co.	134
Smith Stemmerly	174
Snyder's Awning Co.	135
Southeastern Greyhound	146
Southern Bell Telephone & Telegraph	135
Stimson Lumber Co.	134
The Toggery	136
Tile Factory Co.	294
Troy Laundry	155, 176
Union Bus Station	146, 190
Union Stock Market	60
Utica Bank	81
V. S. Steele	135
W. G. Barrett & Co.	135
Warner Brothers	196
Weir & Morgan	136
Westehester Coal & Mining Co.	289
Western Union Telegraph	75, 135
Westerfield's Snappy Sign Service	134
Whitesville Bank	75
Whitney Transfer Co.	145
Wilson Ferry Co.	145
Wire Hoop & Crating Machine	66
Wright Machine Co.	62, 119, 134
Buster, Henry T.	94
Butler, Col.	10
Cagle, Rev. A. F.	159
Caldwell, Gen. John	305
Calhoun, Judge John C.	288
Rev. Samuel	155

Callas, Mike	209
Cannon, Allie	176, 180
Capt. John	266
Mary A. 'Mollie'	180
Mrs. Frank	22
Carden, Alvey	50
Carlin, Pete	95
Carlton, Kate	68
Carnegie, Andrew	211
Carpenter, C. E.	37, 85
Dr.	148
Carroll, Charles Chauncey	223
Carum, Thomas	50
Cary, Glover G.	287, 293
Castlen, Mr.	55
Cemeteries	
Burton	94
Cundiff Farm	94
Elmwood	95
Grand View	82
Hawes	84
Moseley	138
Pate	270, 272
South Carrollton	303
Chapman, Rev. J. H.	160
Chastain, Rev. T. M.	151
Churches	149-162
Apath Israel Synagogue	149
Asbury Methodist	149
Basin Baptist	151
Beaver Dam Station Methodist	152
Beech Grove Methodist	152
Bethabara Baptist	74, 91, 93, 151, 153
Bethel Baptist	151
Bethlehem Methodist	159
Breckenridge Street Methodist	149
Brushy Fork Baptist	151
Buck Creek Baptist	151
Buena Vista Baptist	149
Byers Chapel Presbyterian	149
Calhoun Baptist	151
Calhoun Methodist	152
Center Street Baptist	149
Centertown Methodist	152
Central Presbyterian	149, 154, 155
Christian	159

Church of the First Born	150
Church of the Living God	149
Church of the Nazarene	149
Cloverport Methodist	152
Cumberland Presbyterian	149, 176
Curdsville Baptist	151
Dawson Baptist	151
Delaware Creek Baptist	151
Drakesboro Methodist	152
Dundee Methodist	152
Eaton Memorial Baptist	149
First Baptist	157, 158
First Church of Christ	149
First Presbyterian	149
Fordsville Methodist	152
Fourth Street Baptist	149
Fourth Street Presbyterian	155
Friendship Baptist	151
Glenville Baptist	151
Gospel Center Mission	150
Gospel Mission	150, 188, 238
Greenbriar Baptist	81, 152
Green River Baptist	151
Greenville Circuit Methodist	152
Greenville Station Methodist	152
Griffith-Laketown Road Baptist	151
Hall Street Baptist	149
Hartford Station Methodist	152
Hopewell Baptist	151
Island Baptist	151
Karn's Grove Baptist	151
Lewisport Methodist	152
Livermore Baptist	151
Livermore Methodist	152
Macedonia Baptist	151
Maceo Baptist	151
Maceo Methodist	152
Masonville Methodist	152, 153
Mt. Liberty Baptist	151
Mt. Vernon Baptist	151
Nazarene Congregation	184
Newman Baptist	151
Owensboro Methodist	18, 154
Panther Creek Baptist	91, 151
Phillips Chapel	150
Pleasant Grove Baptist	151

Pleasant Grove Methodist	152
Pleasant Ridge Baptist	151
Providence Methodist	152, 159
Red Hill Baptist	72, 151
Richland Baptist	151
Rumsey Baptist	151
Rushing Chapel Methodist	152
Sacramento Baptist	151
Sacramento Methodist	152
St. Alphonsus Catholic	79, 151, 153
St. Anthony's Catholic	77, 151
St. Elizabeth Catholic	151
St. Joseph Catholic	150, 162
St. Lawrence Catholic	153
St. Magdalene Catholic	150
St. Martin's Catholic	151
St. Mary of the Woods Catholic	75
St. Paul A. E. Methodist	149
St. Paul's Catholic	150, 161
St. Peter of Alcanuana Catholic	151, 162
St. Raphael Catholic	151
St. Stephen's Catholic	37, 150, 160, 161, 180
St. William's Catholic	151
Salvation Army Hall	150
Second Baptist	252
Settle Memorial Methodist	160
Seven Hills Baptist	100, 149
Sorgho Baptist	151
South Hampton Baptist	151
Stanley Baptist	151
Station Baptist	152
Sugar Grove Baptist	152
Third Baptist	158, 252
Third Street Methodist	149
Trinity Episcopal	160
Trinity Holiness	149
Union Mission Baptist	149
Ursuline Sisters	80, 190
Utica Baptist	152
Walnut Baptist	149
Whitesville Baptist	152, 153
Whitesville Christian	153
Woodlawn Methodist	149
Yellow Creek Baptist	152
Yelvington Baptist	153
Yelvington Methodist	153

Zion Evangelical Lutheran	149
Cissel, John	17
Cities - Places (Kentucky)	
Adairville	274
Alexander Farm	40
Allen County	306, 307
Andersonville	48, 72
Ashbridge	285, 320
Ashbyburg	283, 284, 285
Auburn	260
Barnett Station	320
Barren County	307
Beaver Dam	144, 300
Beech Grove	145, 190, 273, 275
Benton	304
Birk City	72
Bon Harbor	1, 43, 51, 58, 72, 116, 122, 143, 196, 197
Bowling Green	120, 144, 145, 151, 190, 274, 309-324
Breckenridge County	19, 27
Bremen	151, 152
Browns Valley	51, 77, 151
Butler County	289
C. C. C. Camp	52, 53
Cadiz	327, 328
Caldwell County	304, 305
Calhoun	26, 151, 190, 273, 274, 275, 286, 287, 288, 293
Calloway County	304
Camp Owen	52
Canton	8, 9, 327, 328
Carpenter's Lake	39, 85, 122, 195
Central City	144, 145, 190, 290
Christian County	305
Cloverport	263
College Heights	309, 310, 311, 313-322, 324
College Station	325, 326, 328
Crittenden County	304, 305, 308
Curdsville	4, 27, 73, 151
Danville	224
Delaware	28, 77
Dermont	73
Dixon	308
Dogwalk	79
Dublin	217
Dundee	151
Eddyville	304
Ensor	5, 73



Ewing's Island	90
Far Rockway	266
Fayette County	110
Fordsville	145, 301, 302
Fort Hartford	300
Fort Vienna	26, 286, 294
Frankfort	218, 271
Franklin	307
Fulton	306
Fulton County	306
Gatewood	5, 73
Giegers Lake	281, 283, 319
Glenville	98
Graham	293
Graves County	304
Grayson County	321
Green River Flats	274
Greenbrier Game Preserve	37
Greenup County	318
Greenville	145, 274, 276, 287
Griffith	73
Habit	37, 58, 74, 91
Habit Game Preserve	37
Hancock County	26, 27, 48, 73, 84, 152, 197, 262-272, 317, 319
Hartford	1, 70, 151, 285, 293, 300, 302, 320
Hawesville	19, 20, 21, 68, 84, 196, 262- 269, 321, 323, 324
Haynes	74
Henderson	16, 22, 68, 100, 144, 151, 190, 283
Henderson County	2, 26, 283, 308
Henry County	155
Hickman	306
Hickman County	306
Hopkins County	305, 308
Hopkinsville	144, 190, 280, 284, 285
Indian Lake	196, 197, 262
Island	273, 274, 275, 289, 290
Jackson Purchase	304
James Bethel Gresham Memorial Bridge	287
Jefferies Cliff	197, 263
Jewell City	294
King Fisher Lake	84, 86, 122, 195, 321
Knottsville	5, 43, 46, 74, 151, 153, 227
Lafayette Spring	262
Lake Rabbit	306
Lewis Station	70, 81
Lewisport	270, 272

Lexington	218, 224
Livermore	144, 151, 273, 274, 275, 287, 289, 291- 293
Livingston County	304, 305
Logan County	260, 305, 306, 307
Louisville	4, 112, 144, 145, 151, 152, 190, 196, 198, 216, 218, 220, 222, 223, 235, 283, 297, 305, 306
Lovers Leap	264, 266, 323
Lyon County	304, 305
Maceo	5, 36, 58, 84, 225, 321
Madisonville	145, 151, 260, 285
Mammoth Cave	224
Maple Hill	68
Maple Mount	190
Marion	305
Marshall County	304
Masonville	5, 94, 153
Maxwell	48
McLean County	26, 28, 48, 81, 88, 151, 152, 273-296, 317, 319, 320
Monroe County	307
Moseleyville	4, 50, 58, 62, 77, 98
Muhlenberg County	13, 26, 273, 293
Murray	167, 325, 326, 328
Ohio County	2, 17, 26, 27, 48, 81, 91, 152, 273, 285, 297-302, 320
Oldham County	159
Owensborough	2, 4, 7, 222
Owenton	218
Newman	4
Paducah	145, 190
Pennyroyal District	305
Petitt	79
Philpot	5, 163
Pleasant Ridge	4
Pond Station	294, 320
Princeton	284, 285, 306
Rock Island	262
Rome	79, 151
Roost Hills	28
Rossboro	27, 78
Rumsey	274, 276, 287
Russellville	144, 190, 260, 274
Sacramento	274, 275, 276, 295, 296
St. Joseph	4, 73, 79, 151
Scottsville	307
Semiway	290
Seven Hills	40, 198, 199
Shaw Hills	58

Simpson County	306, 307
Slaughterville	283
Sorgho	4, 79, 81, 151, 163, 190
Sorghotown	79
South Carrollton	303
Stamping Ground	218
Stanley	4, 36, 74, 151, 162
State Penitentiary	304
Sutherland	36, 80
Thruston	5, 36, 74
Trigg County	304, 305, 327, 328
Trigg Furnace	327, 328
Tuck	74
Union County	305, 308
Uniontown	281
Utica	4, 36, 70, 81, 152, 163
Utility	268
Warren County	306, 307, 317
Webster County	283, 305, 308, 318, 319
West Louisville	4, 36, 39, 50, 81, 151, 163, 190
Whitesville	5, 36, 38, 75, 145, 151, 152, 153, 163, 180
Yellow Banks	2, 4, 7, 40, 77, 116, 155, 172, 217
Yelvington	5, 42, 75, 76, 82, 83, 84, 114, 153, 159, 164, 321
Yelvington Camp Ground	42, 82, 83 114
Yewell Game Preserve	37
Civil War	5-25, 106, 217, 221, 276-285
Battle of Owensboro	14
Camp Silas F. Miller	14, 15
Dixie Guards	13
Eleventh Kentucky	284
First Indiana Cavalry	15
First Kentucky Cavalry	8, 10, 16, 22
First Kentucky Infantry	13
Forrest's Cavalry	15
Johnson's Island	284
Johnsonville	284
Morgan's Raid	8, 9
Ninth Pennsylvania Cavalry	284
Orphan Brigade	8, 22, 227
Partisan Rangers	24, 276, 281, 302, 320
Seventeenth Kentucky Infantry	19
Slate Ripple, Battle of	17
Sue Monday	301
Sutherland Hill, Battle of	5, 6, 15
Twelfth Kentucky Cavalry	17

Clarke, W. W.	156
Clay, General Cassius M.	3
General Green	3
Thomas	3
Clayton, J. B.	260
Clements	269
Elmer	267
Mr.	268, 269
Cloud, Professor	180
Clubs - Organizations	
American Legion	29, 39, 114, 201, 241, 244, 287
Associated Charities	208, 209
Bar Association	244
Boat club	195
Boy Scouts	47, 195
Business & Professional Womens	241
Civic Clubs	201, 217
D. A. R.	138, 184, 212, 217, 233, 241, 266, 286, 300
Daughters of Isabel	241
Daviess County Medical Society	244
Delphian	241
Eastern Star	241
Elks	243
F. E. R. A.	189, 195
Filson Club	226
Garden Club	43, 241
Girl Scouts	195
Goodfellows Club	200, 243, 257, 258
Green River Historical Society	139
Historical Records Survey	215
I. O. O. F	244
Investigator's Club	40, 184, 217, 226, 244
James L. Yates Post	39, 114
K. E. R. A.	288
Kiwanis Club	39
Knight Templar	243
Knights of Columbus	100, 243
Knights of Pythias	242
Lions	243
Married Ladies Reading Club	212, 241
Mary Kendall Home	29, 206
Masons	75, 243
Modern Woodman	244
Moose	244
Municipal Band	238
Owensboro Business Men's Assoc.	211

Owensboro District Dental Assoc.	244
Owensboro Symphony Orchestra	238, 239
Queens Daughters	29
Piano Club	237
Rebakah Lodge	242
Red Cross	29
Rice E. Graves Camp	138
Rotary	243
Saturday Musicale	237-241
Shakespeare	241
Shrine	243
Spanish American War Veterans	244
U. D. C.	138, 241
Vulture	244
W. C. A.	29, 206
W. P. A.	185
Welfare League	29, 128, 206, 207, 209, 243
Western KY Men's Association	244
White Shrine	241
Woman's Club	196, 211, 212
Women's Current Events	241, 244
Womens Democratic	242
Womens Republican	242
Y. M. C. A.	36, 138, 178, 192, 195, 241
Young Mens Democratic	242
Coakley, Mrs.	252
Rev. W. S.	149
Coal Fields & Mines	49, 50, 63, 119
Alvey Carden	50
Bon Harbor	72
Dan Griffith	50
George Rudy	50
H. C. Stallings	50
Harry Woods	50
I. P. O'Bryan	50
J. M. O'Bryan	50
John Nation	50
Kurz	50
George Rudy	50
Lee J. Rudy	50
Miller & Overstreet	50
Nathan Scott	50
O'Bryan & Drury	50
O'Bryan & Lily Mead	50
Otis Alvey	50
Thomas Carum	50

Tom Miller	50
West Louisville	50
Cockrill, Rev. B. D.	178
Coffman, Dr.	148
Coleman, Robert H.	260
Collins History	13, 33, 88, 212, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308
W. G.	287
Combs, Courtney	49
Conway, Rev. Marshall	151
Coomes, Courtney	48
Cornell, Ezra M.	127
Cottrell, Brother	93
J. C.	244
J. S.	54
Mr.	55
Rev. Reuben	157
Winnie D.	148
Crabtree, Eldred	110
Cravens, Lee Belle	22
Creeks	
Blackford	27, 42, 75, 76, 84
Delaware	28, 77
Panther	1, 6, 15, 27, 28, 42, 43, 46, 48, 52, 73, 77, 79, 99, 153
Pup	27, 28
Rhodes	28
Rough	17
Yellow	1, 28, 45
Criley, C. F.	169, 243
Supt. C. F.	35, 36
Crisman, Rev. E. B.	177
Crittenden, John J.	304
Crossfield, Rev. R. H.	222
Curd, Captain	73
Currens, Rev. D. Lauck	155
Dailey, Rev. D. Arthur	151
Davenport, Prof.	181
Daveiss,	3
Col. Joe	2
Col. Joseph Hamilton	2
Gen. John	1
Nanny Marshall	2
Davidson, Capt.	19
Dr. H. A.	19
Capt. William	18
Daviess County	
Atlas of (1876)	34, 76, 136

	222
Confederate Association	138
Confederate statue	138
County Fair	35, 103, 105-114
Courthouse	18, 19, 20, 21, 30, 31, 33, 130, 131, 138, 155, 196, 197 198, 199, 205, 221, 239
History of (1883)	6, 28, 31, 70, 223, 224, 321
Jail	30
Poor Farm	31
Public Square	30
Daviess, Col.	139
Col. Joe Hamilton	139
Jo.	26
Joe	78
Davis, William J.	276
Davison, Dr. H. A.	20, 21
H. A.	22
Captain William	20, 21
Dawson, Beth	222
J. M.	175
James M.	222
Rev. W. H.	222
Dell, Frank	243
Deusner, Rev. E. E.	151
Dickens	225
Charles	225
Dodd, Cecil	55, 244
Dodson, Dr.	148
Downs, Rev. Thomas	81
Rev. William	222
Drury	50
Dudley, T. U.	160
Durbin, Father E. J.	161
Durrett, Col. R. T.	222
Duval, William	5
Edwiston, Capt.	17
Ellis, Captain William	227
J. Tandy	7
Luther L.	227
Mary M. Kallam	227
Tandy	218, 219
W. T.	223, 227
Embler, Eliza	181
Excell, E. O.	260, 261
Faith, Captain Lewis	89, 90
Lewis	22

Mrs. George	22
Farmer, Rev. Frank	151
Farming	56, 57, 102, 117, 251, 253, 259
Farrow, Col.	281
Fentriss, Elza	321
Fitts, John	99
Fitzgerald, Father	161
Flahery, Lillian May	239
Fletch, Smeathers	82, 83
Floersh, Bishop John J.	161
Fogle, Frank	29
Folklore	96-113, 245-261, 325
Customs	97, 251-253
Dances	96
Games	96
Parties	250
Superstitions	101, 253-256
Foor, Junius	123
Forbes, Col. Ed	301
Ford, Elisha	301
Eliza	181
Eliza Embler	181
Joshua G.	181
Formahlen, Rev. R. T.	149
Forrest	278, 279, 280
Col.	277, 280
Colonel	276
General Nathan B.	295
Foster	281
Foust, J. L.	185
Mr.	184, 312
Professor	40, 217
Superintendent	36
Fowler, O. L.	123
Fox, John, Jr.	133
Frankenberger, Rev. M.	150
Franklin, Benjamin	213
Fulton, Robert	306
Fuqua	9
Futrell, J.	328
J. G.	8
John G.	9
Gabriel, Charles H.	260, 261
Gilbert, Mr.	159
Albert N.	159
Gillette, Rev. N. S.	152



Gillim, Abigail Rowan	138
Gillson, W. R.	302
Gilmour, Allen	66
John	66
Mary	218
Sue	218
Susan Blair	66
Girty, Simon	224
Glenn, Rev. J. J.	151
Rev. John J.	151
Glover, R. I.	269
Goldsmith, Oliver	213
Goode, Mrs.	99
Sarah	98
Gould, Captain	278
Grant, President	23
Graves, Rice E.	22, 175
Gray, Prof. J. H.	176, 177, 182
Green, John	224
Susan	224
Greer, Onis	131
Gresham, James Bethel	287
Griffin, Elijah	91
Griffith, Col. Alonzo W.	16
Clinton	15, 106
D. M.	175
D. W.	16
Dan	50
Dr. Dan M.	183
Josh	114
Joshua	70, 81
Ridgeley	15
W. R.	112
Weir	43, 245, 247
Grop, Ed	147
Guichard, Mrs. Leo	266
Gunston Hall	8
Hagan, T. J.	22
Hager	112
Lawrence W.	210
W. Bruce	210
Halbey, Prof.	175
Hale, Dr. Fred D.	158
Hall, B. W.	290
Capt. Frank L.	18
G. W.	288

Nancy	268
Hardin	222
Ben	33, 222, 225, 226
Jack	222
Harpe, Big	308, 318
Harris, Abner	7
Harrison, General	3
Mame	103
Hart, Ernest N.	149
Prof. H. P.	174, 184
Professor	175, 180
Susie	175
Harvey, John H.	7
Hathaway, Mr.	133
R. M.	175
Hawes, Mrs. Bright	84, 225
Richard	75, 84
Samuel	84
Hayes, Miss	207
Rev. G. H.	222
Haynes, George F.	22
Joe	74
Mrs. George	22
Hays, Mrs. J. D.	207
Head, Ben	114
J. Frank	22
Henry, Rev. J. W.	149
Herr, Hugh	248
Herter, Albert	235
Heston, Hugh	147
Hewitt	112
Hinchman, Professor	239
Hickman, J. H.	208
Mayor	198
Hicks	54, 55, 61
Higdon, Mrs.	271
Mrs. Robert G.	271
Higgins, Pauline	36
Hill, Mrs.	99, 108, 109
Rev. Clement	151
Hinton, John	17
Holbrook, McHenry	301
Holland, Miller	230
R. M.	209, 214
R. Miller	231
Hollis, Co. William	284

Holman	283
Holmes, James M.	5
Lt. Col. James M.	15
Hoover, Dr.	148
Horn, Mr.	31
Horseman, George	14
Horses	82, 110, 113, 114, 259
Baron Dare	115
Beau Chief	115
Chester Harrison	115
Dark Laughter	115
Darling Denmark	115
Davy Crockett	8
Delmonte	115
Diana Dare	115
Douglas Chief	115
Emmett Chief	115
Gallant Chief	115
Gayland	115
Highland Dare Chief	115
Kenton	115
Little Boy	115
Lyon Artist	115
Major Black	115
Rising Sun	115
Shenandoah	115
Silver Gale	115
Spotlight	115
Starlight	115
Walnut Grove Chief	115
Warren Chief	115
Wild Rex	115
Howard	81
Mrs. John	138
Mrs. John D.	22
Hugger, C. H.	90, 143
Humphreys, Dr. Robert	158
Dr. Robert E.	157
Hunter, Rev. H. A.	174
Husk, Felty	26
Iglehart, Louis I.	37
Indians	40, 41, 75, 84, 139, 155, 220, 263, 264, 301
Inmon, James	294
Irving, Washington	5, 213
Itner, W. B.	167
Jackson	276

Jago, Mr.	143
James, Captain John	89
Jarboe, Rev. W. B.	151
Jefferson, President	3, 311
Thomas	214, 232, 234
Jett, Richard C.	76
Johnson	277, 280, 283, 284
Andrew	23
Colonel	283
Captain	16
Gen. Adam R.	22, 276
General	284
Misses	287
Mrs. F. J.	287
Myra	294, 320
President	3
Samuel	213
Siania	247
Sinia	245
Johnston, Cap. James W.	78
Jones	17
A. H. N.	127
John	16
Jordan, Adam	73
Justice, Miss	128
Kallam, Mary M.	227
Karn, Dr.	148
Robert	139
Keeler, Rev. E. M.	152
Kennedy	183
Sgt. Charles, Jr.	194
Kenton, Edna	229
Simon	33, 34, 222, 224, 229
Keown, Mr.	323, 324
Kerr, Charles	226
Kimberlin, C. C.	130
Kimbley, Dr. J. F.	175
Kincheloe, David H.	287
Kinmerly, Mrs. Hugh	228
Kirkham, Samuel	215
Kittinger, Rev. S. A.	151, 152
Klinger, Mrs. M. E.	178
Knott, Leonard	74
Kortz	210
Kummer, Clara	208
Kurz	50

Lafayette	262
Lancaster, Mrs. J. R.	207
Landfear, Virginia	326, 328
Virginia M.	325
Landrum, Judge Ben F.	286
W. L.	30
Lane, Lieutenant	279
Lanier, Sidney	223
LaRue, J. B.	166
Lashbrook, Allen	29, 114
Rev. Norris	151
Laswell, Cecelia	310-328
Cecelia M.	309
Mrs.	194, 206, 230
Lathrop, Elsie	232
Leach, Leslie	66
Mr.	66
Mrs. Leslie	67
Samuel L.	66
Leavell, Rev. J. B.	151, 152
Rev. James	151
Lee	17
O. T.	152
Rev. R. E.	151
Rev. Robert E.	151, 152
V. T.	293
Leeper, Mrs.	218
Leet, George	106
Levin, J. J.	53
Levy, Sam	242
T. J.	208
Theodore J.	207
Lewis, Rev. Donald	152
Robert M.	81
Likens, W. M.	210
Lincoln	271, 272
Abe	10
Abraham	270, 271
Lind, Jenny	133
Linsey, D. W.	7
Little, Captain	16
L. F.	69
L. Freeman	69, 112, 208
Lucius P.	33, 222, 223, 225, 226
Mr.	69
Wesley	303

Locke, Rev. Schipee	149
Logan, Mary Taylor	297, 298
Mrs.	299
Lovan, Rev. George C.	152
Love, S. B.	303
Lovelady, Miss	194
Lyon, Chittenden	304
Gen.	284, 302
Madison	27
Gabriel	300
Maloney, Rev. Richard	161
Maple, Rev. J. C.	175
Marchal, Nicili	218
Marks, Eli	13
Marriner, Prof. William	177
Marshall	213
John	2, 304
Nanny	2
Martin	276, 281, 282, 283
Col.	15
Lt. Col.	282
Lt. Col. Robert M.	13
Mansfield	91
Mason, George	8
Sam A.	131
Matthews, Mr.	174
Mattingly, Mrs. M. S.	22
McAdams, Mrs. Charles	266
McAllister	179
McClain, Margaret	310, 313-322, 324
Margaret A.	309, 311, 312
Miss	323, 325
McClure, County Agent	32
J. E. McClure	60
Mr.	32, 38, 58
McConnell, Father	161
McCray, Mr.	49
McCreary, James B.	7
McCreery, Robert	3
Senator	3, 34
Thomas C.	222
Thomas Clay	3, 217
McCuen	295
McCulloch	69
J. W.	72
Mrs.	43, 218

Sue Keith	312
McElroy, Rev. E. H.	149
McElwain, H. G.	110
McFee, Mrs.	315, 318
McHenry, Col. J. H.	106
Col. John H.	19
Estill	175
Lemuel	175
McIntyre, F. F.	82, 83
Malcolm	174
McKee, Prof.	180
McKeneey, B. V.	289
McLean, Alney	273
McLoyd, W.	30
McMurtrie, Douglas C.	215
Mensa, Rev. Guido	151, 153
Meredith, Logan	123
Meriwether, Captain	15
H. Clay	14
Messenger, Emily	181
Mexican War	179
Meyer	293
K. J.	292, 293
Mill, James	213
Miller, Fleming	91
Joe	288
John	5
Mrs. Phil J.	208
Rev. A. B.	177
Tom	50
Wilbur K.	213
Mills, W. L.	207
Milne, Thomas C.	156
Mitchell, A. J.	18
Benedict I.	18
Captain Frank	301
James T.	15
Prof. Thomas W.	177
Mobberly, Gene	243
J. W.	208
Moffett, Lee	196
Monticello Museum	233
Moore, Rev. E. S.	208
Moorman, C. R.	175
Moreland	54, 55, 61
Mr.	55

Thomas A.	13
Morris, Rev. J. R.	149
Rev. W. Alton	151
Morrison, Mr.	49
Mrs. Dr.	139
Morton, David	155
Henry P.	261
Henry Pryor	260
Samuel	175
Morvills, Mr.	178
Moseley, Thomas	138
Munday, James	21
Martha Hamilton	20, 21
Senator James A.	20, 21
Murphy, M. J.	118
Mr.	110
Murray, Professor	180
Myers, A. A.	198
Nanz, Katie	242
Napier, Rev. T. W.	149
Nation, John	50
Neal, Sidney B.	29
Negro - Colored	10, 16, 18, 23, 36, 74, 133, 149, 164, 166, 185, 187, 242 245, 246, 248
Netter, Colonel	14, 15, 106
Newman, Judge	262, 264, 265, 266, 321, 323
Judge G. W.	262
Mrs.	263
Newspapers	
American Independent	210
Hartford Herald	298
Louisville Courier Journal	222
McLean County News	287
Messenger & Inquirer	20, 53, 141, 202, 203, 217, 257
Owensboro Examiner	101
Owensboro Inquirer	63, 155, 210, 222, 223, 227
Owensboro Messenger	4, 9, 34, 43, 63, 64, 126, 132, 147, 154, 157, 158, 163, 165 167, 169, 198, 200, 202, 203, 210, 218, 219, 225, 237, 270 289, 291, 295, 299
Owensboro Monitor	16, 52, 174 217, 222
Shopping News	210
Southern Kentucky Shield	181, 298, 299
Tri-Weekly Messenger	30, 31
Nichols, W. S.	110
Nicholson, Rev. J. H.	152



Noe, A. D., Jr.	130
Norman, Rev. J. F.	150, 162
Norris, Rev. J. Alton	151
Nunn, Mrs.	7
Oberst, Albert B.	207
O'Bryan, I. P.	50
J. M.	50
Margaret	148
Odom, Edwine W.	148
Ohio County Fair	300
Oil Fields	48, 49, 51, 75, 273
Barrett Hill	273
Bates Knob	273
Cane Run Pool	48
Collier Pool	48
Hayden Pool	48
Jennie Wilson lease	51
Jones Pool	48
Livermore	273
McManan	273
Owensboro	49, 51
Pellville Pool	48
Red Hill Pool	48
Utica Pool	51
Orr, Rev. B. F.	222
O'Sullivan, Rev. Hugh	151
Otis, Dr. Joseph	176, 183
Fannie	183
Lillie	183
Owen	283, 284
Col. Abraham	2
Judge W. W.	9
Mrs. L. A.	207
Owensboro	
Airport	146, 147
Carnegie Library	7, 84, 124, 136, 139, 183, 184, 199, 211, 212, 215, 217 218, 220, 227, 229, 241, 297, 312, 318
Chamber of Commerce	34, 64, 65, 85, 137, 147, 148, 242, 320
Circus Day	200
City Beautiful Contest	203, 204
City Hall	128, 129, 209
City Stables	128, 129
Country Club	35, 100, 196, 244
Christmas lights	202, 244
Dam No. 46	196
Electric Light Plant	128, 129

Ferry	39, 78
Fire Station	128
Green River Museum	139
Halloween Parade	201
Hospital	124, 128, 148, 182
Illustrated Souvenir	198
Kentucky Room of Library	218
Map of (1881)	220
May Day Pageant	200
Post Office	138
Power & Water Plant	119
Rapid Transit Service	141, 146
Sassafras Tree	43
School board	185, 186, 187
Sheehan Field	147
Street cars	141, 142
Taxes	124, 125
The Iris City	44
Union Station	78, 131, 146
Water Works	128, 129
Wharf	143
World War I memorial	138
Page	232
Palmer, Mr.	174
Parker, Guy E.	52
Parks	196-199, 241
Chautauqua	100, 196, 198, 199
Glenmore	114
Hickman	198
Paradise Garden	106
River Park	196, 197
Rube's Pool	199
Parrish, Newton	195, 200
Partridge,	17
William	16
Pate, Esquire	271
Esquire Sam	270
Sam	271
Squire	271
Payne, C. A.	113
Charles	205
Peay, H. N.	175
Pendleton, James M.	210
Pendley, Rev. E. L.	151
Petit, Mrs. Henry	239
Pettit, Mrs. Henry	208

Phelps, C. V.	131
Mr.	174
Phillips, E. Sue	177
Rev. Lloyd	222
Piercy, Rev. L. F.	152
Pointer, Prof.	176
Polk, Rev. V. A.	151
Rev. V. F.	151
Polkington, John W.	49
Poole, Rev. Carlos	151
Pope, Alexander	213
Potter	213
Potts, Rev. W. G.	152
Powers, Lonz	33, 34, 222, 224, 229
Mr.	265, 321
Tom	228
Practice Act	226
Prange, Capt.	18
Quick, Herbert	88
Quinenbury, E. E.	293
Railroads	120
Evansville, Owensboro & Nashville	224
Illinois Central	78, 144, 190, 306
L. H. & St. L.	78
Louisville & Nashville	32, 80, 81, 144, 262, 274, 275, 293
Owensboro & Nashville	108, 293
Owensboro & Russellville	224
Raphael, Hettie	182, 183
Mrs.	182
Rash, Dr.	188
Dr. O.	168
Dr. O. W.	43
Rawings	210
Reeves, Mrs. J. D.	208
Reid, Allen	44, 57, 58
Lawrence	175
Robert	58
Reinhardt, George L.	175
John	95
Lily Green	95
Render	293
W. E.	291
Reyneirson, Mr.	290
Reynolds, Mr.	139
Mrs. J. L.	220
Rhoads, Solomon	286

Rice, Alice Hagan	99
Cale Young	308
Richmond, Albert W.	36
Riley, Cam	198
Wade H.	29
Ringgolds	108
Ringwood, Ralph	5
Risley, Supt. James	166
Rivers	87, 88
Barren River	292, 293
Clark's River	304
Cumberland River	284, 305
Green River	1, 2, 6, 26, 27, 28, 35, 46, 52, 72, 73, 77, 88, 122, 195, 273 275, 283, 285-290, 292- 295, 308
Mississippi River	306
Ohio River	1, 2, 4, 26, 28, 30, 35, 39, 46, 72, 74, 75, 77, 78, 84, 87, 89 116, 119, 122, 143, 146, 147, 155, 173, 195, 196, 217, 262 291, 305
Pond River	274
Rough River	292, 293, 300, 320
Tennessee River	304
Tradewater River	305, 308
Roads & Highways	
Camp Ground	82
Central City Owensboro Highway	290, 295
Curdsville County	73
Daniels Lane	147
Greenbrair	72
Fifth Street	72
Hardinsburg	44, 57, 73, 74, 85, 86, 129, 153
Hartford	42, 95, 153
Hawesville	4, 153
Haynes Country	74
Hills Bridge	94
Joe King	74
KY 54	36, 37, 38, 41, 59, 73, 75, 78, 79, 91, 120, 146, 151, 152 154, 190, 199
KY 56	36, 50, 73, 78, 80, 151, 153, 190, 322
KY 61	50
KY 71	37, 41, 42, 78, 94, 120, 146, 151, 153
KY 74	31
KY 75	36, 37, 48, 51, 75, 77, 79, 80, 120, 126, 139, 146, 151, 152 198, 274, 293, 322
KY 78	78
KY 81	36, 37, 58, 59, 77, 78, 79, 120, 146, 151, 274, 287, 322
Laketown	73

Leitchfield	55, 61, 134, 153
Livermore	15, 198
Louisville Highway	267
Millers Mill	31, 74, 91
Old Yelvington	73, 76
Pellville	267
River	2, 3, 4, 61, 62, 179, 180, 181, 184, 217
Smith Country	74
Sutherland	80
US 60	36, 37, 42, 44, 49, 50, 51, 52, 55, 57, 58, 60, 61, 72, 74, 78 114, 120, 131, 145, 146, 147, 151, 159, 162, 195, 196, 197 199, 242, 262, 267
US 66	39
Veatch	37, 196
Roberts, Mrs.	139
Robertson, Dr. O. C.	184
William	213
Robinson, Zack	248
Roby, F. A.	123
Rodeheaver, Homer	260
Rosenblat, Mr.	269
Ross, Mr.	27
Roth, Mrs.	115
Rothert	320
Otto A.	297, 299
Rowan, Andrew	40
Rudd, J. C.	133
Mrs. Vine	8, 98
Vine Alexander	25, 40
Rudy, George	50
George H.	37
Lee J.	50
Sarah Gray	50
Salms, Ed	267
Scarborough, George	173
Mr.	174, 179, 180
Prof. George	178
Schools – Education	163-194
Abraham Lincoln	36, 166
American German Association	181, 182
Beechmont High	269
Benjamin Franklin	36, 166
Bowling Green State Normal	296
Bransford Institute	177
Central Baptist College	175, 182
Cloud	180

Davenport	181
Daviess County High	36, 163, 240
Daviess County Seminary	172, 173, 174
Daviess County Trade	35, 36
Emerson	36, 166
George Washington	36
Hart	180, 184
Junior High	36, 121, 165, 186, 195, 213
Livermore High	275
Longfellow	36, 166, 248
Maceo	36
Mount St. Joseph Academy	34, 36, 37, 39, 80, 190, 191, 201, 213
Murray	180
Ohio County High	300
Owensboro Academy	174, 175, 184
Owensboro Business College	36, 188, 192
Owensboro Classical	182
Owensboro Trade	166, 169, 188
Parents Teachers Association	170, 188, 189, 241
Paul Dunbar	36, 166
Rash Stadium	188, 200
Reserve Officers Training Corp (ROTC)	194
Robert E. Lee	36, 166
Sacramento High	296
St. Frances Academy	36, 178, 238
St. Martin's	79
St. Mary of the Woods	36
Scarborough	174, 180
Senior High	36, 40, 100, 101, 121, 165, 166, 167, 186, 194, 200, 213 239
Seven Hills	166
Sisters	178
Snowdon Castle	178, 179, 180
Snyder	36, 77
Stanley	36, 74
Sutherland	36
Third Street	172
Thruston	36, 74
Tarleton	172
Transylvania University	224
Tribbel	91
Utica	36
Vaughan Female Institute	177, 183
Walker	176
Walnut Street	105, 165
Washington	165, 172

West Louisville	36
Western Colored	36, 238
Western Teachers College	312, 321
Whitesville High	36, 75
Woodrow Wilson	36, 165, 166
Schults, Peggy	5
Polly	5
Schwall, Mr.	181
Scobee, Major	13, 15
Joseph S.	13
Scott, Nathan	50
Rev. Robert	149
Walter	288
Sears, Philip H.	179
Seibric, Mrs. George	242
Shackleford	281
Sharp	112
Shaver, C. A.	275, 293
Shepherd, G. W.	95
Minnie Crabtree Carlin	95
Sherard, Rev. G. H.	149
Sherman, Dr.	148
Shiarella, Nick	49, 51
Shutt, J. L.	288
Simmons, A. H.	293
Simpson, Capt. John	307
Singleton, Lillian	184
Lillie	175
Sisters (Catholic nuns)	
Constantia	178
Genrose	178
Mecretia	178
Skaggs, Rev. S. T.	151
Slaughter, Mrs.	315, 317, 318
Small, Jerry T.	22
Smeathers, Bill	116
Smith	301
E. W.	207
Edward E.	312
Edward H.	149
George	15
Gipsy Rodney	260
Hettie Raphael	183
John	302
John T.	301
Major Hamilton	183

Mr.	301
Mrs. E. Dargan	22
Mrs. E. W.	175
Peter	182, 183
Raphael F., Sr.	183
Rev. Benjamin Bosworth	160
Rev. E. E.	156, 157
Rev. G. A.	151
Susie Hart	175
Smithers, William	1
Smothers, Bill	1, 2, 5, 26, 78, 172, 217, 222
Snell, Henry B.	235
Snowball, Ruth Ann	36
Snyder, J. W.	163
Spaulding, Lt. William	18
Speaks, Rev. H. T.	152
Speed, Capt. Horace, Jr.	194
Stanley, Mike	289
Nat	74
Stallings, H. C.	50
Stebbins, George C.	260
Steel, Mr.	55
Steele, Mrs. W. A.	208
Steitley, Rev. George	149
Stephenson, Rev. Howard S.	159
Sterrett, Bill	20, 21
Mr.	19
Stewart, Mattie	184
Stiles, Rev. Joseph	151
Stout, Tinson	17
Strawberry Festival	300
Streets	
Alexander Ave.	40
Allen	36, 61, 63, 89, 134, 138, 145, 148, 149, 156, 158, 159, 172 178, 184, 192, 195, 232, 243
Bolivar	54, 62, 161 162, 182
Breckenridge	149, 150, 242
Cedar	58, 134, 149 161, 181
Center	149
Cherokee	149
Clay	181, 183, 303
Crittenden	62, 134, 155, 156, 158, 172, 183
Daviess	105, 129, 147, 149, 157, 159, 160, 184, 312
Dublin Lane	32, 60, 62



Eighteenth	167, 194, 199
Eleventh	36, 134
Elm	149, 247
Fifteenth	35, 139, 149
Fifth	36, 49, 61, 126, 129, 134, 138, 149, 150, 155, 158, 160 180, 181, 184, 196
First	134, 145, 184
Fourth	2, 62, 78, 130, 135, 138, 148, 149, 150, 155, 156, 160, 161 162, 172, 177, 182, 183, 196, 209, 241, 243, 244, 260, 261
Frayser	135
Frederica	35, 36, 43, 100, 103, 126, 130, 135, 136, 139, 142, 145 146, 148, 149, 160, 166, 167, 183, 194, 196, 205, 210, 235 243, 244, 312
Freeman Ave.	114, 147
George	32, 57, 60, 62
Gilmour Court	66
Griffith Ave.	43, 183, 214, 230, 245, 247
Hall	149, 150
Hamilton Ave.	134
Independence	135
Jackson	36
Kennady Ave.	62
Legion Boulevard	198
Lewis	2, 62, 78, 134, 157, 158, 159, 180, 181, 184
Locust	8, 62, 147, 150, 161, 213, 309-314, 316-328
Main	18, 103, 172, 180, 183, 201, 247, 257
Maple	248
McGill Ave.	32, 57, 60, 62
Moreland Ave.	134
Moseley	54, 134
Ninth	54, 59, 60, 61, 62, 90, 105, 134, 139, 143, 183, 312
Parrish	20
Pearl	61, 128, 135, 148
Poplar	183
Price Ave.	36
St. Ann	18, 129, 134, 135, 148, 149, 155, 176, 177, 196, 205, 209 241, 243, 244
St. Elizabeth	145
Second	36, 59, 60, 61, 62, 131, 134, 135, 136, 149, 150, 161, 172 174, 183, 210, 241
Seventh	8, 25, 36, 66, 98, 99, 114, 135, 138, 158, 159, 161, 165 166
Sweeney	149
Sycamore	89
Tenth	58, 149
Third	36, 48, 49, 59, 62, 63, 134, 135, 136, 140, 149, 155, 157

	158, 172, 177, 178, 183, 184, 195, 196, 205, 210, 217, 242 244
Triplett	59, 61, 128, 134, 149
Twelfth	134
Twentieth	194
Twenty-first	66
Twenty-third	149
Vine	150
Walnut	2, 30, 36, 61, 78, 149, 165, 177, 178, 180, 183
Willis Ave.	149
Wing Ave.	62
Stroud, Rev. M. H.	152
Stuart, Gamble	218, 219
Mattie	184
Stum, Harry	295
Sunday, Billy	260
Sutherland, Frances Livingston	139
Rev. W. E.	152
Sutton, Mrs. Con	17
Sam	248
Tarleton, Aunt Sukey	172
Susan	172
Taylor	298
Amos R.	175
Captain J. N.	14
Dr. John H.	139
Gen. Zachary	179
Harrison	297
Harrison D.	297
J. Gibson	84
Major Walker	16
Mr.	297, 298
Rev.	183
W. H.	53
Walker	17
Terrell, Zack	200
Terry, Mr.	180
Theatres	
Bleich	35, 196, 258
Empress	35, 196
Grand	103
Hall's Opera House	103
Seville	35, 196
Temple	103
Thomas, Joseph	18
Lotta	296

Mrs.	295
Mrs. W. A.	295
Prof. A. P.	158
Thompson	178
Captain Jack	13
Jack	105
John 'Jack' P	13
Mr.	159
Philip	172, 173
Rev. Albert	150
Thomson	213
Tindall, T. B.	156
Tippicanoe, Battle of	3, 78
Tobacco	54, 56, 59, 61, 102, 117, 118, 259
Tobacco Companies	54, 55
American Tobacco	61
Birk Holman	61
Daviess County	59, 61
Equity House	61
Farmers House	59, 61
Green River Tobacco	32, 61
Hodge Tobacco	55, 61
Imperial Tobacco Co.	61
J. C. Cottrell	54
Jacks Tobacco	61
Kentucky & Virginia Leaf	54, 55
Lancaster House	59, 61
Leaf Tobacco Co.	61
Owensboro House	61
Owensboro Loose Leaf	59, 61
Sawyer Tobacco Co.	61
Southwestern Tobacco	54, 55, 61
Stemming District Cooperative Ass.	60
Wilson House	59, 61
Withers, Moreland & Hicks	54, 55, 61
Todd, C. Stewart	235
Charles S.	3
Col. Charles S.	212
Dr. C. H.	106, 112, 235
Fannie	232
Miss	233
Rosa	112
Rosa Burwell	235
Rose Burwell	232
Stewart	232
Tompkins, Rev. A. J.	151

Toner, Raymond	53
Towery, Mrs. Fred	148
Trevor, Roland	222
Tribble, Barney	30
Triplett	105
George V.	211, 212
George W.	31
H.	13
Robert	72
Tucker, Mr.	234
Turner, Rev. Bedford	160
Tyler, President	3
W. B.	175
Valentine, T. H.	288
Van Hooser, Rev. B.	152
Van Ransselawr, Mrs.	178
Vanada, Rev. J. S.	152
Vance, Rev. D. L.	152
Venable, Drew	183
Vestal, George R.	239, 240
Mr.	239
Vickers, Capt.	15
Ike	295
Vincent, R. L.	130
Vittotow, Joe V., Jr.	242
Volk, Rev. P. J.	80
Wade, Anderson	130
Waite, Rev. B. T.	149
Walker, Prof.	177
Prof. W. G.	176
Rev. F. L.	151
Rev. Russell	149
Wandling	183
Ward, Col.	17
Washington	262
Wathen, Rev. J. C.	161
Watkins, Mrs.	99
Mrs. Phil	22
Mrs. S. S.	22, 138
P. T.	106
Phil T.	173
Rose G.	207
Watterson, Henry	133
Webb, Cora	34, 140, 184, 217
Webster, Daniel	308
Weikel, Robert	30

Weill, Gertrude	207, 209
Weir, County Clerk	9
Dr. James, Jr.	225
James	9, 34, 222
James, Jr.	223
James, Sr.	33, 224, 229
Lizzie	183, 184
Mayor Fred	123, 200
Mrs. John G.	22
Susan Green	224
Wells, Judge	321
White, Dr.	38
William Lee	75
Whiteley, Mr.	313
Whitmer, Mrs. M. D.	303
Whittle, Rev. F. M.	160
Wiggs, Mrs.	99
Wilderness Trail	87
Wilhoit, Mary	180
Williams, Judge G. W.	20, 21
Mr.	269
Rev. Leslie	149
Viola	183
Wilson, Captain	16, 17
Capt. Jim	17
James R.	29
Jennie	51
Professor	321
Wines, Prof. William	177
Wing, E. Rumsey	175
S. M.	175
Weir	175
Winstead, Rev. L. M.	151
Winters, Earl S.	123
Withers	54, 55, 61
Wood, Col.	5, 14, 15
Ed	174, 181, 183
Rev. George S.	152
Woodcock, C. E.	160
Woodford, Mary Blair	217, 218
William H.	218
Woodruff, H. M.	174
Professor	175
Woods, Harry	50
Woolfolk, Mrs. John	22
Wooten, William	17

Wright, John S.	208
Yarber, Captain	16
Yates, Capt.	17
James L.	114
Yeaman, G. A.	175
George H.	2, 25, 222
Yelvington, Overly	75, 82
Yewell, John	220
Taylor	130
Zaulauf, Phil R.	15
Zolnay, Abigail Rowan Gillim	138
George Julian	138

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**THE COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY**  
**JEFFERSON COUNTY COURT**

BE IT KNOWN, That Floyd J. Laswell  
as principal, and Henry Thomas as surety,  
are jointly and severally bound to the Commonwealth of Kentucky, in the sum of ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS.

THE CONDITION OF THIS BOND IS AS FOLLOWS:

That, whereas Marriage is intended to be solemnized between the above bound  
Floyd J. Laswell and Ms. Beulah M. Little

Now, if there is no lawful cause to obstruct said Marriage, this Bond shall be void, otherwise it shall remain in full force and effect.

Dated at Jefferson County, Kentucky, this 23 day of July 1918

Attest:

Fred Wright  
Clerk.

By Fred L. Roof D. C.  
Minister Dr. Meleh

Name Floyd J. Laswell  
Address Owensboro, Ky.  
Name Henry Thomas  
Address Louisville, Ky.

**MARRIAGE AFFIDAVIT**  
IN THE CLERK'S OFFICE OF THE JEFFERSON COUNTY COURT

Date of Marriage July 23-1918 Place of Marriage Lou, Ky.  
Full names of parties Floyd J. Laswell  
and Ms. Beulah M. Little

Age of Husband 29 years; Condition (single, widowed, divorced)  
Age of Wife 29 years; Condition (single, widowed, divorced)

Husband's Place of Birth Laswell, Ind. Residence Owensboro, Ky.  
Wife's Place of Birth Birmingham, England Residence Owensboro, Ky.

Name of Father of Husband J. R. Laswell  
Maiden Name of Mother of Husband Mattie P. Larkin  
Name of Father of Wife Hewitt Moore  
Maiden Name of Mother of Wife Elara Kidd  
Occupation of Husband Postmaster Owensboro, Ky.

I swear that the above is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Floyd J. Laswell Signature of Husband  
Henry Thomas Signature of Surety

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 23 day of July 1918

.....

#### OWENSBORO AIRPORT – DAVIESS COUNTY, by Cecelia Laswell, 2 April 1936:

Owensboro Airport is on U.S. #60 and Daniels Lane, two miles south of the city, one mile south of the Ohio River; south of railroad on U.S. #60 one-half mile on Daniels Lane. Altitude – 479 ft. L. Shaped; 54 acres, sod, level, both natural and artificial drainage, east-west runway 177 x 800 ft. North; South runway 2000 x 400 to 500 ft. Marker around edge of field one Hanger. Capacity 8 planes. Days only; not directly connected with bus lines.

The Owensboro Airport, municipally owned, was made possible with \$5,000 from Civil Works Administration, supplemented by funds from the City of Owensboro. The airport was originally Sheehan Field, but additional land was purchased by the city of Owensboro at the end of which the government may purchase it. The airport was sponsored by the Owensboro Chamber of Commerce. It has the only hanger in Kentucky.

In June 17, 1935 three privately owned airplanes were kept at this airfield. Mr. & Mrs. Barnhill, both pilots, 1914 Freeman Ave. and Mr. Hugh Heston, 311 Locust St., and Mr. Ed. Grop, 1833 Daviess St., Owensboro, Ky.

There are exhibitions given occasionally on Sundays and Holidays.

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#### REMINISCENSES OF THE DAVIESS COUNTY FAIR, by Cecelia Laswell, 10 October 1936:

When I decided to write of the Daviess County Fair the outstanding affair of Daviess County for so many years, I thought it would be very easy to get all the necessary data from people who had enjoyed the privilege of attending the Daviess County Fair from year to year. Alas: I was doomed to disappointment but the pleasant memories my appeal for information has afforded the many different ones, have more than compensated me. It has been interesting to watch the expressions on the faces of friends and acquaintances when I would say, “I am going to write a paper on the Old Daviess County Fair, tell me what you remember about it.”

An expression of pleasure would flit across the face, and they said, without one exception, “I have spent some of the happiest days of my life right there, but I’m afraid I can’t tell you anything definite.” So I will try to write the bits I have gathered here and there, from friends, papers and old newspaper articles writing up the affair at the time.

The Daviess County Fair was originated in 1853 with William Bell president. The first meeting was in the nature of a stock show held on the Triplett Farm, which occupied a large part of what is now Owensboro city. The barn was located in the vicinity of Daviess & Ninth Sts. Back of this a show ring was roped off and the farmers of Daviess Co. exhibited their best specimens of live stock. One of the leading men in this enterprise was Mr. Jack Thompson who afterwards served as Secretary of the Fair Company.

Later, a small grandstand in the shape of a half circle was erected in a grove where Walnut St. School now stands. When the crowd outgrew this location they purchased some property in the western part of the city later known as “Paradise Garden.” Here they erected an amphitheatre almost as large as the one recently wrecked on the present fair-grounds. There was no floral hall nor agricultural building; but there was a very comfortable building used as a ladies rest room. Can’t you imagine what this annual event meant to the people of this community. Here friend met friend, and hospitality was dispensed as only the people of that day knew how to do it.

During the time of the “War Between States” this ground was taken over by the U. S. Government for the quartering of soldiers, the few remaining old people remember Colonel Nettor who was in command of these troops.

When the war was over and people could again turn their attention to amusements, the fair company was reorganized, bought the present grounds and improved them. Mr. Clint Griffith was made president and Mr. P. T. Watkins, secretary. This was succeeded by another reorganization in 1874 with Mr. George Leet as President. Dr. C. H. Todd was elected president in 1875 and served for many years. Col. J. H. McHenry was secretary until 1886. I cannot here mention the names of all the other good citizens who helped to make this enterprise a success. Throughout the policy of the company was liberal towards all and especially towards its exhibitions.

In 1879 at the close of a very successful week the company presented Dr. Todd with a gold headed cane at the court-house. Col. McHenry and vice-president Berry did the honors. In Dr. Todd’s response he gave these figures to illustrate the success of the undertaking. – “The Daviess Co. Fair Company was reorganized 5 yrs. ago with a debt of \$9300. Today the company is free of debt, has expended some \$2000 on repairs and improvements, declared a dividend of \$750 and our people after the years work look to the fair week as a season of social enjoyment and recreation.”

Nobody will say it did not fulfill its mission. The surroundings were ideal – a 30 acre tract of land, an amphitheater enclosing a circle for exhibition of ring horses and cattle, a floral and agricultural hall, a grandstand and a half mile tract. A shady grove, fine music, side shows of all kinds, small admission fee, all vehicles and horses free, and everything done for the comfort and pleasure of the crowd.

In the good old days there were two things to look forward to in this community – Christmas and the Daviess Co. Fair. I believe the latter event should take precedence as it lasted longer. It was usually held in Oct. Everyone must have a new outfit for the occasion. This was customary from its earliest beginning. I heard of one belle who wore a mercerized calico dress buttoned down the front with a train a yard long trailing on the ground behind her. She was the envy of all, when she was invited to come to the judges stand in the ring and help decide a knotty problem. This style was later followed by velvets, silks, and satins. No matter how handsome the dress and hat, they were none too good for the fair. Everyone usually started on the first day which was free to women and children and finished at the end of the week. On the last two days the servants were allowed to go and it was a cruel mistress indeed, who would deprive them of this pleasure.

In spite of the fact there was no committee on transportation, the crowds reached the grounds. The country people came in carriages and whole families of them in two horse wagons. There were parked (shall I say the jolt wagons were parked?) to the right of the west gate. Young men and their sweethearts came in natty buggies and the lone bachelors on horseback. The people from town went in private carriages or public hacks. Many went on the O & N train a local which stopped opposite the fair ground and the passengers walked across. Then there was the little dinky mule cars which stopped at the northeast corner of the fair grounds and the crowd walked down to the north gate. Later, we rose to the dignity of electric cars. Will you ever forget the way they used to jump the track. I remember distinctly one day when we were returning from the fair that we had to get off five times and assist the car back onto the tracts. It was dark and after 7:00 o’clock when we reached home, but what did we care hadn’t we been to the fair? This is enough about the crowds we must look to the things which attracted the people.

First there was the band. What would a fair be without a band? All remember “Ringgolds.” This aggregation of music used to arrive by steamboat. The officials of the fair company would meet them at the wharf. With these august personages in the lead, the procession would start toward the business



section of the town. When we heard the first strain of music, we felt that our festival week had really begun. Don't you think they played longer and better pieces than they do now? This band was succeeded by Wheu's band of Indianapolis, First Regiment band of Louisville, and others but none of them made such a lasting impression as Ringgold's.

The floral hall was an enclosed space in the amphitheater. It was filled with patchwork quilts, homespun counterpanes, embroidery, knitted and crocheted laces and old fashioned hair wreathes, etc. There were a number of pieces which were exhibited from year to year. One was a silk & velvet quilt made by Mrs. Hill. The patchwork center was finished with a deep border of pink satin, quilted in bunches of grapes. To add to its splendor the designer had sewed a white silk fringe around it. It was fearfully and wonderfully made. The Judges awarded it the blue ribbon time and time again. In fact, the fair would not have been the fair without it. It is told by one that heard it that the proud possessor was one day standing before it admiring the wonder she had wrought, when a jealous stranger accosted her saying, "I wish they would stop entering that quilt every year." Recognizing the fact that envy had prompted the speech, Mrs. Hill replied "Madam, when you can make one to beat it, I'll gladly relinquish the first place in your favor."

The lovers of flowers were stimulated to compete for a premium for the most artistically arranged bunch of flowers. Some of the more ambitious ones were arranged in this manner. A large tray was filled with wet sand and into this were stuck short stemmed flowers to work out a most intricate design.

Then the gems of the kitchen were displayed there, canned fruits, preserves, jelly, cakes, bread and pies. These were carefully inspected and generously tasted before the premiums were awarded. Far be it from me to say that the judges were greedy, but I was told a story that one of our good cooks entered a 12 lb fruit cake. She was awarded a prize of \$2.00 on it and when she went to take the cake home, she found that it had been necessary to consume the whole of it before rendering the decision. She promptly presented a bill for it and I am glad to say that the claim was satisfactorily adjusted.

When the grand stand was built this department was enlarged by an addition of various booths which were rented to merchants and used to display their most attractive goods. There was a display of poultry and farm products. One lady says there was a pair of fan tailed pigeons enlisted year after year. I never saw but this one pair. I don't know if there was ever more than one pair in Daviess County.

The old stalls which were still standing until quite recently had given shelter to valuable stock which was shown in the ring in the morning and afternoon. This part of the program was always interesting. Cattle and hogs were shown in the morning and many old families still prize the silver cups which were awarded in these rings. It is told that some imported cattle were sent from Fayette County in padded cars and entered one year, but in the judgment of our judges the Daviess Co. breeds were better, and Mr. Eldred Crabtree was awarded nearly all the premiums. Shall we say they were prejudiced?

In the afternoon immediately following the races, the harness and saddle rings were shown. There were many entries and in many cases hotly contested. When the decision had been made Mr. Murphy mounted on a spirited white horse would ride around the ring and announce in stentorian tones. Mr. H. G. McElwain the premium and W. S. Nichols the certificate.

The gentlemen and ladies riding rings were another feature. The ladies were very lovely clad in tight-fitting long flowing riding habits and silk hats. This was followed by a varied program of baby shows and other novelties. I recall the excitement which prevailed when it was announced that a premium would be awarded to the most beautiful young lady present. This decision was most difficult as there was beauty in abundance to choose from.

After the races were over the crowds would mix together in the most delightful jam. Here you heard friends and neighbor greet each other, exchange news sad and cheerful; wags would get off stald

jokes, and everybody would shout and laugh. After a while the crowd would go to the side shows. Punch and Judy, the Fat Women, Snake Charmers and dancing platforms. In the good old days the shimmy would not have been tolerated even at the fair. Then the funny little merry-go-round was well patronized.

The concession stands were a constant delight to the children and the grown people as well. Lemonade-striped candy, and sarsaparilla pop. But what would the fair have been without some of that hot taffy which they used to sell. I suspect we could find it if we looked on the few remaining trees, the hook where they pulled it. Can't you see them now with a roll as large as a child's body swinging it over the hook and pulling it while we stood anxiously waiting for the batch to be ready to serve.

After eating sweets we would want water and would hie ourselves to the spot where a half of a hogshead stood with high cake of ice in it covered with water for the convenience of thirst, nails were driven close together around the top to which strings were tied to hold brand new tin cups in place. These unsanitary drinking places were well patronized and here microbes wiggled their heads and switched their tales in our unsuspecting and unenlightened faces. However, what we didn't know didn't hurt us.

But it was at the noon hour when Kentucky hospitality truly came into its own. There were a number of booths under the amphitheater which were retained from year to year by certain families. These were the scenes of feasting and joy was unconfined. I will not attempt to enumerate the good things to eat, for it would be too tantalizing, but there were orders placed with certain bakers all over town for whole roast pigs, quarter and legs of mutton, old hams that melted in your mouth & many other delicious meats. Other people spread their lunches in the shady grove; here there were gorgeous old country things to eat.

All during the mornings guests were being constantly invited to eat. They considered themselves slighted, who didn't have guests for dinner. Huge lunches were brought in old clothes baskets one a small trunk of the old paper type and everyone feasted until they could eat no more. This custom gradually gave way to lunches served by various Churches and barbecued dinners.

Then there were special days when notables were invited to the fair. In 1888 Gov. & Mrs. Buckner, Sec. of State Adams & Mrs. Adams, auditor of State Hewitt, Treasurer Sharp, R. R. Com. Hager, and the Governors private secretary W. R. Griffith. These were all entertained by Dr. Ch. Todd & Mrs. Rosa Todd. There was a ball given in honor of these out of town visitors. One lady says she remembers distinctly one occasion and wonders what she must have looked like in a Nile green albatross dress trimmed in watered silk of the same shade. Then there was the innovation of Louisville Day & other towns special days. These were all added attractions and the more the merrier.

The fair company was dissolved in 1902-or 3. Then the owners of the fair grounds conducted a fair for one or two years with Mr. J. J. Blocker at the head of it.

Then L. Freeman Little leased the grounds for a couple of years. Mr. Little was a progressive young man and in the effort to put some pep into it and to make it snappy advertised a bullfight of the pure Mexican type. Large and glaring posters were exhibited for miles around advertising Nuremis – a mighty Matador; to add to the effect an arena was erected on the south side of the grounds. In order to secure a bull vicious enough to satisfy the indomitable Nuremis, he appealed to his friend Nat Alsop for help. From Mr. Nat Alsop's herd they selected one to meet his death at the hands of this Matador. When Nuremis arrived he resembled a common mulatto more than a Spaniard and I believe when I have finished my story you will agree with me that he had striking characteristics of the former.

At the appointed time the spectators were assembled and anxiously awaiting the deadly combat. There was a doubt as to whether the bull would be vicious enough to interest the mighty Matador. When the time arrived the beast proved vicious beyond their wildest expectations, with head down and tail up

he charged at that nigger. With one terrified look at his pursuer Nuremis made for the fence with a firm determination to escape. He was not quick enough, and the bull proceeded to tear the seat out of his pants with his horns. For all I can gather he is still going for he has not been heard of since.

After this Mr. C. A. Payne conducted the fair for a while. The old merry-go-round which was kept in motion by a pony hitched to an iron brace and trotting round & round in a circle passed away giving place to the ocean waves, the balloon and other motor contrivances. A good part of the program was taken up with automobile and motor-cycle races. Somehow this all lacked the thrill of the old horse races. It is not because all these things were not interesting, it is only because it was not the Daviess County Fair of yesterday.