

James Weir (1821-1906)

By Jerry long, Owensboro, Ky., 1994

William R. Griffith (1920-1992), of Quogue, NY, was a descendant of the Griffith and Weir families of Owensboro and Daviess County, KY. Four prior generations of his family had resided and were prominent in shaping the history of Western Kentucky. Mr. Griffith upon his death left his family library and historical collection to his first cousin, Arria Griffith McGinniss. Miss McGinniss, of Kensington, MD, in 1992, donated the collection to the Daviess County Public Library, in Owensboro, KY. William R. Griffith had inherited most of the collection but had also added to it in his lifetime.

Among the items received by the Daviess County Public Library were: letters, documents, books, periodicals, newspapers, booklets, circulars, maps, prints, engravings, and photographs. The letters and documents of the Griffith and Weir families comprise the largest portion of the collection. All of these were duplicated and compiled by Jerry Long into a series of five bound volumes for the shelves of the Daviess County Public Library. Most of the documents spanning the years of 1810-1848, were the business papers of the donor's great grandfather, William Ridgely Griffith (1793-1848). A public official, land agent and speculator, he owned vast quantities of land in Daviess and surrounding counties. These documents involved many of the region's earliest pioneers and his correspondence included many prominent officials and businessmen. Letters from such famous Kentuckians as Benjamin Logan, Hubbard Taylor and Buckner Thruston are found in the collection. One letter dated 16 August 1829 was signed by James Madison, of Montpelier, VA, who 12 years earlier had served as the 4th President of the United States (a copy can be found in Vol. I, pp. 68-69 & Vol. III, pp.45-46 of the Griffith Family Papers).

The twenty-two books in the Griffith contribution dealt with that families history or with Kentucky history. Fifteen of these titles were pre-1900 publications, eight being prior to 1850, and the oldest bears the date of 1793. Another valuable gem of the collection was a portrait (2 foot 2 inches by 2 foot 7 inches) of Joshua Griffith (1764-1845), painted in 1840 by the noted Kentucky portraitist, Patrick Henry Davenport (a reproduction of this can be found in Vol. I, p.i).

Most of the William R Griffith collection was photocopied and organized into this five volume series, entitled Griffith Family Papers. All items pertaining to the Griffith and Weir families or to the Western Kentucky area were included. Pages from the books in the collection containing references to these families (or their progenitors) were also copied. A few smaller

items in the collection, such as newspapers, circulars, booklets, etc., that had no connection to the Griffith - Weir families or to Western Kentucky were not included in the bound volumes.

The 1350 pages of copies made from the Griffith collection were sorted and organized into five volumes and Volume II is on the Weir family:

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**Griffith - Weir Plot
At Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY**

The following listings were done by Jerry Long on April 24 and May 10, 1994. Members of the family of James & Susan (Green) Weir are buried here, including the family of Dewitt Clinton & Bell (Weir) Griffith Names on same monument are listed here on consecutive lines. Location: On top of ridge in section D, about 5 rows from its west end.

Clinton Griffith	18 Oct 1828	31 Aug 1896
Bell Weir Griffith	1 Sep 1844	3 Apr 1918
Mary Frances Griffith (w/o Clinton)	died 2 May 1885	age 30 yrs. & 9 mos.
Anna Rumsey Griffith	11 Sep 1875	30 Dec 1958
James Weir Griffith	2 Jul 1874	14 Feb 1952
Harry W. McGinniss	15 Jul 1878	23 Jul 1965
Arria Griffith McGinniss	11 Sep 1879	18 Jan 1953
DeWitt Clinton Griffith	6 Aug 1881	4 Jul 1946
Mary Smith Griffith	25 Dec 1888	23 May 1971
James Weir	16 Jun 1821	31 Jan 1906
Susan C. Weir	15 Nov 1823	4 Aug 1903
John G. Weir	28 Sep 1894	30 Sep 1971
Mary E. Weir (w/o John G.)	6 Jan 1903	2 Jul 1985
James Weir, Jr., M.D.	17 Oct 1855	9 Aug 1906
Paul Weir	16 Nov 1863	8 Nov 1925
Robert S. Triplett	9 Sep 1858	30 Jan 1906
Nora W. Triplett	12 Dec 1860	17 Jul 1906
James Weir	1 Aug 1878	16 Oct 1953
Eula Bennett Weir	27 Jun 1891	27 Oct 1918
Elizabeth Griffith Weir (w/o John G.)	14 Oct 1853	9 Nov 1937
John G. Weir	13 Jan 1849	30 Apr 1912
James Weir	(no dates)	aged 4 yrs. & 9 mos.

Robert D. Weir	(no dates)	aged 14 yrs. & 12 days
William L. Weir	3 Apr 1862	20 Feb 1877
Arthur W. Weir	15 Aug 1853	15 Nov 1894
Griffith Weir	23 Feb 1875	7 Jun 1903
George Raymond Millican	19 Sep 1886	17 Jun 1930
Nora Weir Millican	11 Oct 1886	15 Mar 1961
Elizabeth Griffith Millican	16 Apr 1921	16 May 1975
Raymond Weir Millican (Colonel US Army)	7 Jan 19181	8 Aug 1980
Penelope Young Millican (w/o Raymond W.)	5 Oct 1920	
Penelope Griffith Millican (d/o R.W. & P.Y.)	25 May 1946	29 May 1946
Infant son of Raymond W. & Penelope Millican		27 Aug 1942

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Biographies of James Weir (1821-1906)

HISTORY OF KENTUCKY, Lewis Collins, revised and enlarged by Richard H. Collins, Collins & Co., Covington, Ky., c1874, p154:

James Weir was born at Greenville, Ky., June 21, 1821; graduated at Centre College, Danville, 1840, and at the Transylvania law school, Lexington; entered upon a successful practice of the law, at Owensboro, where he still lives (1873); has never engaged in politics, and never ran for office. About 1849-50, he wrote three novels ("Lonz Powers, or the Regulators," "Simon Kenton," and "Winter Lodge,") which, abounding in beautiful and thrilling passages, attracted considerable attention in their day; they were published in Philadelphia, and the scenes located in the early West. In 1869, at its organization, Mr. Weir was elected president of the Owensboro and Russellville railroad which – (in March, 1873) was running regular trains to Stroud City, Muhlenburg co., 36 miles; had the grading nearly completed to the Tennessee state line, at Adairville, Logan co., 86 miles; and was confident of extension, in 1874, to Nashville, Tenn., 120 miles – forming part of a great through route from that city to St. Louis, Chicago, and Cincinnati.

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORICAL ATLAS MAP OF DAVIESS COUNTY, KY., Leo McDonough & Co., c1876, p.33:

James Weir, now one of the oldest members of the Daviess County bar and a prominent business man of Owensboro was born at Greenville, Kentucky, on the sixteenth of June, 1821. His father was James Weir, and his mother's name before marriage was Annie Ramsey. His father was born near Charleston, South Carolina, and belonged to a Presbyterian family of Scotch-Irish descent, which emigrated to America from the north of Ireland. His mother was a member of a family tracing its descent back to the Ramseys of Scotland. She was born in Virginia and was the niece of James Ramsey, who is justly entitled to the claim of being the first to apply steam as a means of propulsion to boats.

Mr. Weir's father came to Kentucky toward the close of the last century when very young. On reaching manhood he first adopted the business of a surveyor, and afterward exchanged this for a mercantile career. He became a noted and successful merchant, and his business scattered over a wide extent of territory. He carried on, and managed under his own personal supervision, at the same time, stores at Equality and Shawneetown, in Illinois; at Henderson. Morganfield. Madisonville. Greenville, Lewisburg, Hopkinsville, and Russellville, in Kentucky; and at Gallatin, Tennessee. Although a large amount of capital was necessarily involved in this extensive and widespread business, it was his boast that he never borrowed a dollar, nor ever failed to meet a debt at its maturity.

James Weir, the subject of this sketch, was educated at Centre College, at Danville, Kentucky, one of the olden educational institutions of the State. Graduating here, he entered the law school of Transylvania University, at Lexington. where he prepared for the legal profession. On the first of March. 1842 he was married to Mint Susan C. Green, the daughter of Judge John Green, of Danville. Mr. Weir first became a resident of Owensboro in the month of August, 1843, and devoted himself to the practice of law, gaining a high standing at the bar as a chancery lawyer. He found time, however, to give to literary pursuits, and in 1849 and 50 three novels appeared of which he was the author. These were "Lonz Powers, or the Regulators," "Simon Kenton" and the "Winter Lodge." These books were published in Philadelphia. The scenes were located in Kentucky, and the stories founded on incidents which transpired in the early history of the State. During his residence in Owensboro, Mr. Weir had developed business qualities of no ordinary character, and when the Deposit Bank was organized in 1859, he was chosen its President, and still continues in that position. To his management is chiefly due its present high standing among the banking institutions of Kentucky. He was the first president of the Owensboro and Russellville, now the Evansville, Owensboro and Nashville railroad. This office he retained from 1869 till the latter part of the year 1873. It is not a little complimentary to Mr. Weir, that though not one of those enthusiastic about building the road, nevertheless after its construction was definitely decided upon, he was selected as President by the friends of the enterprise.

Mr. Weir has never mingled in politics, nor has ever been a candidate for any public office. He has attended strictly to his professional business, and since 1850 has had little time to indulge his inclination for light literature, or at least to no greater extent than to be the author of some fugitive pieces which have appeared from time to time in the popular magazines of the day. Mr. Weir's ample means have not had the effect of making him selfish or illiberal. He is a man of public spirit, and has taken a leading part in every public enterprise which promised to be of benefit to the community at large. His charities have been wide, but unostentatious. While his abilities as a financier have been of service in building up his own fortune, they have also been exerted for the promotion of the interests of the city and county of which he is a resident.

HISTORY OF DAVIESS COUNTY, KENTUCKY, Chicago, Inter-State Publishing Co., c1883, pp207-209:

Authors and Artists - James Weir.

One of the oldest members of the Daviess County bar, and a prominent business man of Owensboro, was born in Greenville, Ky., June 16, 1821. His father, James Weir, was born near Charleston, S.C., and belonged to a Presbyterian family of Scotch-Irish descent, that emigrated to America from the north of Ireland. His mother, Anna Ramsey, was born in Virginia, and was a niece of James Ramsey, who is justly entitled to the claim of being the first to apply steam as a means of propelling boats. His father came to Kentucky toward the close of the last century. He first adopted the business of surveyor, and afterward exchanged this for a mercantile career, and his business extended over a wide extent of territory. He carried on, and managed, under his own supervision at the same time, stores at Equality and Shawneetown in Illinois; at Henderson, Morganfield, Madisonville, Greenville, Lewisburg, Hopkinsville and Russellville, in Kentucky, and at Gallatin, in Tennessee. Although a large amount of capital was necessarily involved in this extensive and wide-spread business, it was his boast that he never borrowed a dollar, nor failed to meet a debt at its maturity.

James Weir, the subject of this sketch, was educated at Centre College, at Danville, Ky., one of the oldest institutions of the State. After graduating here he entered the law school of Transylvania University, in Lexington, where he prepared for the legal profession. March 1, 1842, he married Miss Susan C. Green, daughter of Judge John Green, of Danville. Mr. Weir settled in Owensboro in 1848, and devoted himself to the practice of law, gaining a high standing at the bar as a chancery lawyer. He found time, however, to give to literary pursuits, and in 1849-'50 three novels appeared, of which he was the author.

During his residence in Owensboro, Mr. Weir developed business qualities of no ordinary character, and when the Deposit Bank was organized in 1859, he was chosen its President, and still continues in that position. To his management is chiefly due its present high standing among the banking institutions of Kentucky. He was the first President of the Owensboro & Russellville (now the Evansville, Owensboro & Nashville) Railroad. This office he retained from 1869 till the latter part of 1878.

Mr. Weir has never mingled in politics, nor has he ever been a candidate for any public office. He has attended strictly to his professional business, and since 1850 has had little time to indulge his inclination for light literature, or at least to no greater extent than to be the author of some fugitive pieces which have appeared from time to time in the popular magazines of the day. His ample means have not had the effect of making him selfish or illiberal. He has taken part in every public enterprise which promised to be of benefit to the community. In 1880 he opened a large factory for the manufacture of carriage material, a more full account of which is given in the history of Owensboro. Mr. Weir's charities have been wide, but unostentatious. While his abilities as a financier have been of service in building up his own fortune, they have also exerted for the promotion of the interests of the city and county of which he is a resident.

Mr. Weir's residence is one of the most magnificently frescoed buildings in this part of the world. The work cost over \$12,000, and was done by an ex-officer of the Confederate army, of foreign birth and education. The elegant historic paintings on the ceiling of the library, in the groupings and combinations, are a constant source of study and pleasure.

Mr. Weir demonstrated his capacity as a literateur when comparatively young. Before he was thirty years of age he wrote and published three stories, which were bound in book form and

supplied to the regular trade by the chief publishing house of Philadelphia, Lippincott, Grambo & Co. The works are the following.

1. Simon Kenton. This is a novel in which it is designed to give a sketch of the habits and striking characteristics of the population of the western portion of North Carolina immediately following the war for independence, and in it to introduce Simon Kenton, the great scout and Indian fighter, and also his constant opponent and enemy, Simon Girty, the tory and renegade. In this volume the character in which Kenton was interested and connected came off victorious.

2. The Winter Lodge is a sequel to Simon Kenton, and transports all the characters to Kentucky in an early day when first settled; and in it are introduced many of the most striking characters of that period, and many incidents in the early history of Kentucky, with sketches of scenery, the Mammoth Cave, etc., and also the battles in which Simon Kenton and Simon Girty were engaged, and the habits and marked characters of the early pioneers. The name "Winter Lodge" is derived from the name of a cabin erected by Kenton for the hero and heroine of these two volumes, and ornamented with carpets of buffalo hides, lined with fur. Mr. Weir intended in his younger days to write a sequel to this volume, running down to the War of 1812, and the death of Kenton and Girty, but increasing business on his hands prevented him. In Collins' History of Kentucky there is a sketch of the life and times of Kenton, and Girty was a desperado who figured largely among the pioneers of Kentucky and Indiana.

3. Lonz Powers; or, the Regulators: A romance of Kentucky, based on scenes and incidents in this State. This interesting story was published in two duodecimo volumes, 319 and 364 pages, in the year 1850, by Lippincott, Grambo & Co., Philadelphia.

BIOGRAPHICAL CYCLOPEDIA OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY, John M. Gresham Company, Chicago, Philadelphia, c1896, pp230-232:

James Weir, lawyer, author and banker and pre-eminently one of the first citizens of Owensboro, is a son of James and Anna (Rumsey) Weir, and was born in Greenville, Kentucky, June 16, 1821.

His father, James Weir, was of Scotch-Irish parentage and was born near Charleston, South Carolina. He came to Kentucky about the close of the last century, or one hundred years ago.

He was a man of excellent education, and was employed as a surveyor or civil engineer for some time, but eventually engaged quite extensively in mercantile pursuits, his business extending over a vast territory. He owned stores in Shawneetown and Equality in Illinois, Henderson, Morganfield, Madisonville, Greenville, Lewisburg, Hopkinsville and Russellville in Kentucky, and Gallatin, Tennessee. He had a very large and profitable trade with the Spaniards in New Orleans and in Cuba, and this at a time when all freight between New Orleans and Kentucky was carried on flatboats. Mr. Weir's business, being scattered over so much territory, required him to travel extensively, as an instance of which he often told his son that he had made the journey from New Orleans to Philadelphia and return on horseback not less than twenty-five times, with no other companion but Titus, his faithful old negro servant. He was eminently successful in his many business ventures and left a valuable estate.

James Weir's paternal grandfather was a resident of Charleston, South Carolina, and a soldier in the Revolutionary war, serving from the beginning to the end of the war under General Sumter. The only compensation he received for his faithful and patriotic service was a little

negro girl who had been confiscated from the estate of a Tory. His son David, also a soldier, was killed at Sumter's defeat.

Anna Rumsey Weir (mother) was a lineal descendant of Charles Rumsey, who came to the United States from Wales in 1665 and settled in Maryland. Her uncle, James Rumsey, was the inventor of the application of steam to boats and other vessels, whose son, James, upon proof that his father had run the first vessel by steam in the United States, received a gold medal from Congress as an appreciation of his father's valuable invention. The inventor, James Rumsey, dropped dead while delivering a lecture before the Philosophical Society in London.

James Weir received a collegiate education in Centre College, Danville, Kentucky, from which he graduated in the class of 1840. Very few, if any, of his classmates are now as actively engaged in business as is Mr. Weir. He studied law at the Lexington law school when Judges Robinson, Wooley and Marshall were professors in that grand old institution, and graduated in the winter of 1841. In the following year he began the practice of his profession in Owensboro, where he was a leading member of the bar for over forty years. At the time of his coming Owensboro was a village of two hundred and fifty inhabitants. In 1860 he was made president of the Deposit Bank of Owensboro, which position he has held for thirty-five years. In 1869 he was elected president of the Owensboro & Nashville Railroad Company, and held that position for three years.

When the reporters entered the city of Owensboro to obtain information for the compiling of this volume, they called on a number of the best citizens and asked for a list of the prominent men in the city, and every one of the lists thus given was headed with the name of James Weir. It is hardly necessary to add that among his fellow citizens he stands pre-eminently as the first citizen of Owensboro. A lawyer of the highest rank, a banker whose judgment and ability are recognized in financial and business circles, and a citizen of great purity of character, he is known of all men as a man of generous nature, kindness of spirit, and of the highest scholarly attainments. Dignified and withal courteous and obliging, unostentatious in his bearing and unconscious of his superiority, he is greatly loved and respected by everyone in the large circle of his acquaintance.

He is, moreover, a man of letters and an author of celebrity, although he has not recently aspired to literary fame. In 1850 he wrote "Lonz Powers," and in 1852-53 "Simon Kenton" and "Winter Lodge," which novels were published by Lippincott of Philadelphia, and gave promise of a brilliant future, but since that time he has been too much engrossed in his profession and other business matters to devote much time to literature, and his work in that direction has been limited to an occasional sketch for the newspapers and magazines.

He has never posed as an active politician, having never sought or held any political office. He was a Whig in his younger days, and has voted with the Democratic party since the war.

Mr. Weir was married March 1, 1842, to Susan C. Green, daughter of Judge John Green of Danville, Kentucky. Her maternal great-grandfather was Joshua Fry, who was a commander of the Virginia troops under General Braddock in his unfortunate campaign, and was taken sick and died before the battle. Joshua Fry, her grandfather, the son of General Joshua Fry, married Peachey Walker, a member of a distinguished Virginia family.

Mr. and Mrs. Weir have six children, three sons and three daughters: John E. Weir; Dr. James Weir; Paul Weir; Anna Belle, wife of Clinton Griffith; Susan, wife of James L. Maxwell, now residing in Knoxville, Tennessee; and Nora, wife of R. S. Triplett, Jr., now a resident of Waco,

The stories referred to were written before Mr. Weir was thirty years of age. They were published in book form and supplied to the trade by the Philadelphia house of Lippincott, Gambo & Co. The first of these (1850) was "Lonz Powers, or the Regulators"; 'a romance of Kentucky, based on actual scenes and incidents of the early days of the "Dark and Bloody Ground."

The second novel, "Simon Kenton," was designed to give a sketch of the habits and striking characteristics of the people of Western North Carolina, immediately following the Revolutionary times, and to introduce Simon Kenton, the scout and Indian fighter, and also his opponent and enemy, Simon Girty, the Tory and renegade. In this volume the character which Kenton represented came off victorious.

"Winter Lodge" is a sequel to "Simon Kenton," in which the author introduces many of the most striking characters who were prominent in the early history of Kentucky, with numerous incidents of the times, descriptions of scenery. Mammoth cave ; the battles in which Kenton and Girty were engaged and the habits and marked characteristics of the pioneers. The name "Winter Lodge", is derived from a cabin erected by Kenton, for the hero and heroine, which was ornamented with carpets of buffalo hides and lined with furs. Mr. Weir intended in his younger days to write a third volume of this series, coming down to the War of 1812 and the death of Kenton and Girty, but his increasing business prevented him from accomplishing this, and his literary work of late years has been undertaken as a pastime and recreation rather than a matter of business.

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James Weir (1821-1906) residence, Waveland, Frederica Street, Owensboro, KY

Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, Ky., Sunday, 2 August 1908, p.1:

OLD WEIR HOME THING OF PAST

The Once Beautiful Residence of Waveland
Has Been Torn Down By New Owners.

MAKES WAY FOR MODERN HOMES

Was Most Handsomely Frescoed Residence In State,
the Frescoing Costing \$12,000.

The old Weir homestead is no more. The old landmark which stood for half a century has-been torn asunder, and only a heap or ruins are left where once stood this stately old home. The brick are being cleaned and sold for building material.

The property, which originally consisted of 400 acres, was bought by James Weir from John D. Howard. The tract extended from where now lays McFarland street, south to the old McHenry farm about one mile out Frederic' street. It extended west about one-half mile. The tract has since been broken up and many of the principal residences of Owensboro are standing on it. Portions of it were sold until the Weir homestead, Waveland, contained about 20 acres.

The old residence was built by the late James Weir in 1858. It was unpretentious square brick house, which originally cost less than \$20,000. The brick work was done by a contractor named James Wilhite, and the carpenter work by Bonnie Tribble, both of whom have been dead for many years. All the lumber used was yellow poplar, then plentiful, but now so rare and valuable.

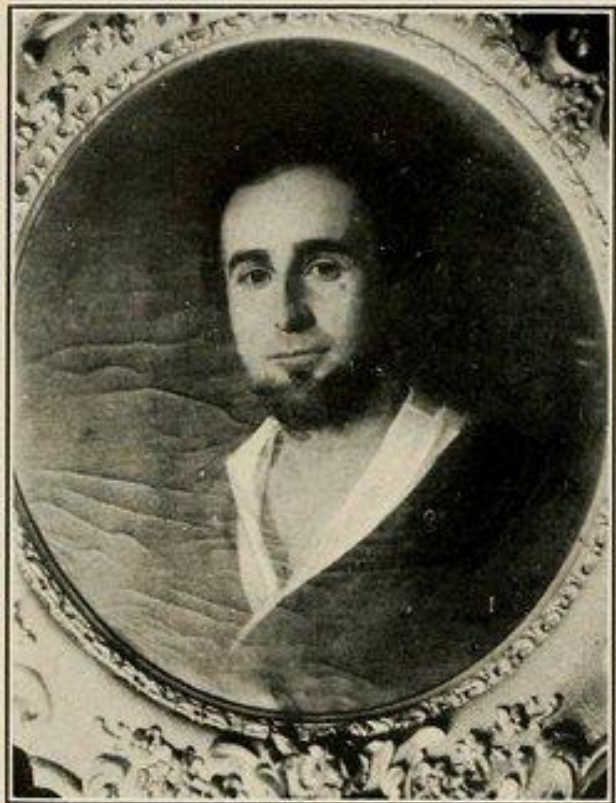
The, house was out of the ordinary for architecture. Several years ago when a representative was looking for a site for the Carnegie library, he was taken through the house and he remarked that he had been through many a house but none had come up to this one for completeness in every way.

The frescoing of this house, which was considered the finest in this part of the country, was done in 1870, by Captain Buler, a Prussian army officer, who had fought through the civil war as a Confederate officer. The cost of frescoing was \$12,000, and the designs were magnificent, such as are now rarely seen.'

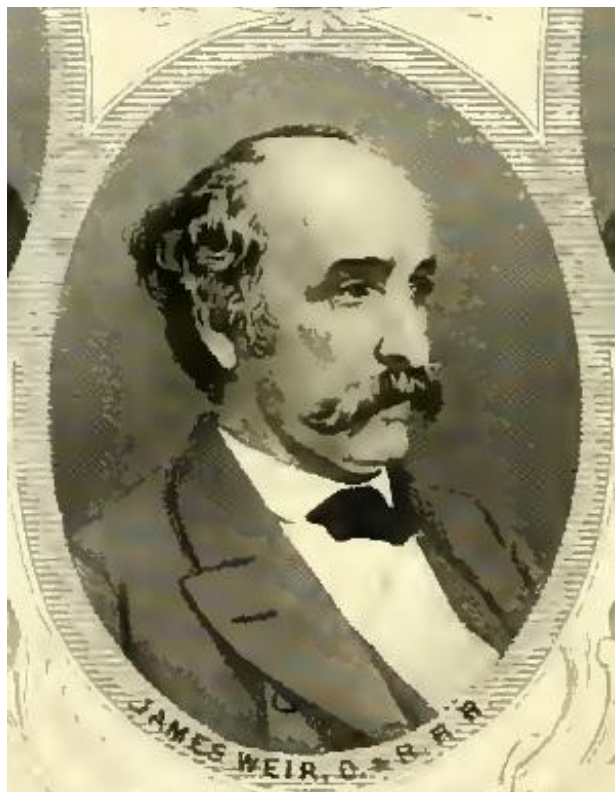
The house contained 12 rooms, besides the servants' rooms. There were also a string of brick and log buildings used as houses for the slaves. Mr. Welt owned about 20 slaves, all of whom are now dead. After the emancipation many of them remained with him on account of his kindness towards them. After the death of Dr. James Weir in January, 1906, the property was sold to the Homestead Land company, which has run streets through the place and is now selling the lots as sites for residences.

There was much debate as to what was to be done with the old house and it was at last decided to tear it down. In a few years all traces of this once beautiful place will be destroyed.

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JAMES WEIR, THE AUTHOR, IN 1850





Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY