

William Thomas Ellis (1845-1925)

By Jerry Long
c.2026



Captain William T. Ellis, Daviess County Attorney, 1870-1878, member of the U.S. Congress, 1889-1895. Picture from book, Daviess County, Kentucky Celebrating Our Heritage, 1815-2015 (Evansville, IN: M. T. Publishing Company, Inc., 2015) p.189.



An Illustrated Historical Atlas Map of Daviess County, KY.
(Edwardsville, IL: Leo McDonough & Co., 1876) pp.29 & 37:

CITY OF OWENSBORO patrons (p.29)

Name	Post-office	Residence	Business	Nativity	When Came to Daviess County
Ellis, W. T.	Owensboro – 2 nd street bet. Daviess & Lewis –		Attorney at Law & County Attorney –		
	Daviess Co., Ky – 1846				

W. T. ELLIS. (p.37)

The Daviess county bar embraces among its young and rising members W. T. Ellis, the present county attorney. Mr. Ellis is a native of Daviess Coon having been born near Knottsville, on the twenty-fourth of July, 1845. His grandfather emigrated to Kentucky from Virginia. He first located Shelby County, and after a residence there of some years came to Daviess County in 1815, the year in which the County was organized. Mr. Ellis' father, Luther R. Ellis, was born in Shelby County, and was a mere boy at the time of the removal of the family to Daviess County. He was subsequently united in marriage to Miss Mary M. Kallan, who was born in the County. There were two children by this marriage, W. T. Ellis, and a younger brother, Dr. J. W. Ellis, a practicing physician of Masonville.

The parents of Mr. Ellis died when he was ten years old. The county schools in the vicinity of his home afforded the means of his early education He was about sixteen on the breaking out of the war of the rebellion. His feelings were warmly interested in the success of the Southern cause, and in the fall of 1861 he enlisted in the Confederate army. He was a member of the First Kentucky cavalry, and he fought with it throughout the entire war. His regiment was attached to Gen. Wheeler's cavalry corps, belonging to the Army of the Tennessee, and took an active part in the various movement which marked the progress of the war in that part of the Confederacy. Mr. Ellis was engaged in numerous battles during his four years' term of service, but happily escaped without receiving any serious injury. At the close of the war, then only twenty years of age, he returned to Daviess County, and attended for two years the Pleasant Valley seminary, then a school of excellent repute in Daviess County. On leaving school he accepted the principalship of the Mt. Etna academy, in Ohio County, a position which he held for eighteen months. While here he began the study of law, a profession which he had early resolved to follow. In the early part of 1868 he obtained license to practice, and in 1869 entered Harvard University, at Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he was admitted to the senior class of the Law School connected with that institution, one of the oldest and most thorough in the United States. Graduating here in the spring of 1870, he came at once to Owensboro, and established himself in practice.

In August of the same year he was elected County attorney of Daviess County, and to this office was re-elected in 1874. In October, 1871, occurred his marriage to Miss Alice Coffey. After a married life of but little more than two years his wife died in January, 1874. In his political opinions Mr. Ellis has been a Democrat, but has confined himself almost exclusively to the legitimate duties of his profession. Although his practice has extended over only a few years, he has already won a high standing at the bar. He has been a close student of the science of law, and with his natural quickness readily commands a comprehensive knowledge of legal points. His style of speaking is pleasing and attractive, marked by a liveliness of description and a graceful flow of rhetoric, as well as energetic and logical, and is calculated to command the attention of his hearers.

He excels rather in criminal than in civil practice, and possesses abilities of a high order as a prosecutor. A fair proportion of the legal business of the County is entrusted to the firm of which he is a member. The frank and genial manners of Mr. Ellis have made him popular with the people, and there are few enemies to envy him his good fortune, while many friends rejoice in his success.



History of Daviess County, Kentucky
(Chicago: Inter-State Publishing Co., 1883, pp.123-124:

William T. Ellis, born in Daviess County, Ky., July 24, 1845, was a son of Luther L. and Mary M. (Kallam) Ellis, natives of Shelby and Daviess counties, Ky. His father died in March, 1855, and his mother in March, 1856, leaving two children – William T. and J.W. Ellis, now of Masonville. William T. was reared and educated in Daviess County. Before he was sixteen years old he enlisted in the Confederate army, in the First Kentucky Cavalry; was mustered in Oct. 5, 1861, and served during the war, surrendering April 21, 1865. At the close of the war he was a non-commissioned officer, in command of scouts. After the war he returned home and attended school the rest of the year 1865 and 1866, working during vacation to pay his board and tuition. The latter part of 1865 and till the spring of 1867 he taught school near Whitesville in connection with his studies. During the years 1867-'69 he read law during his leisure time while engaged in teaching. In the spring of 1869 he received his license to practice law, and entered Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Mass. Returned home in the spring of 1870, and in August of that year was elected County Attorney of Daviess County, and re-elected in 1874. In 1876 he was Democratic elector for this district on the Tilden and Hendricks ticket. Feb. 11, 1871, he formed a partnership with William T. Owen, under the name of Owen & Ellis, which is now one of the prominent law firms of the county. Oct. 20, 1871, Mr. Ellis married Alice, daughter of C.R. Coffey, who died a little more than a year later. Nov. 2, 1876, he married Mattie B., daughter of Dr. W. F. Miller, of Louisville, Ky.

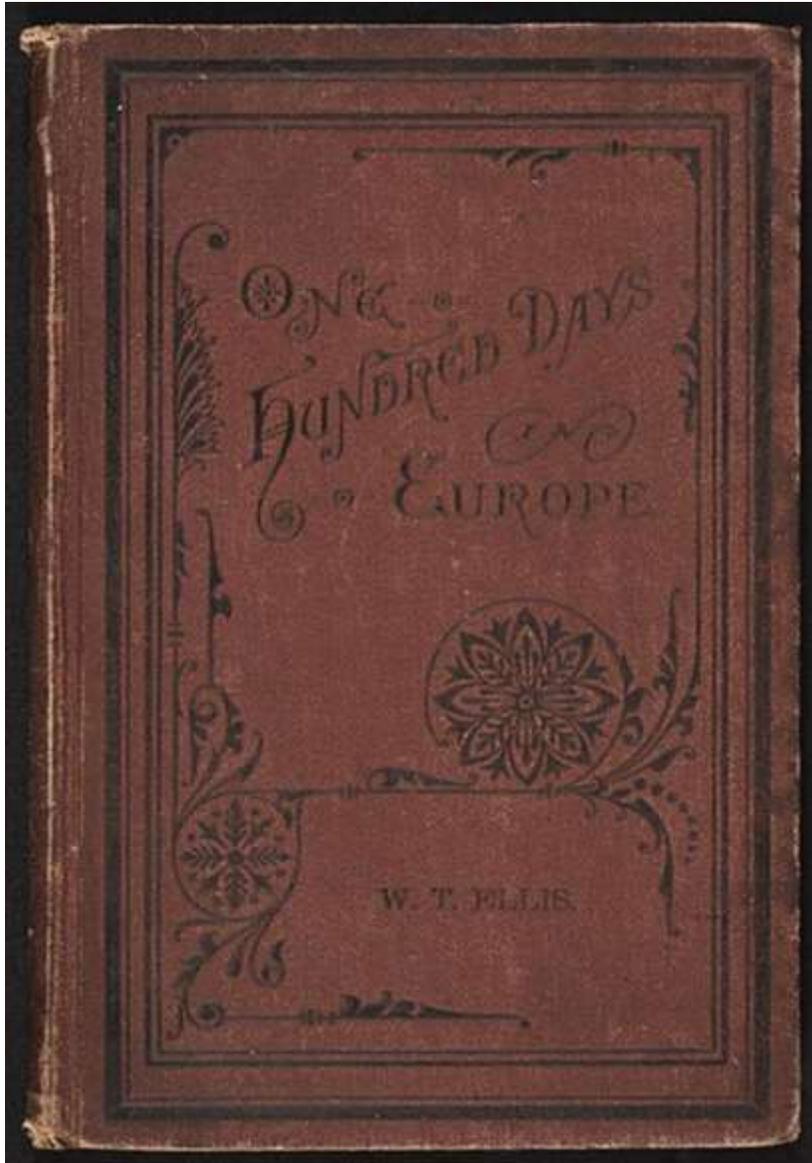


Owensboro Tri-Weekly Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 25 April 1885, p.4:

"One Hundred Days In Europe."

Such is the title of a handsomely bound and well printed volume of 221 pages just issued from the Inquirer office containing the European letters of Capt. W. T. Ellis, a member of the Owensboro bar. To say that the book is exceedingly creditable to both its author and publisher would bestow none but just praise upon it. Every reader of the Inquirer is familiar with Capt. Ellis' letters, and it was in response to a demand for their preservation that they were put in book form. Those who did not read them as originally published can get them now in lasting form at \$1 per copy. The book is well worth every cent that is asked for it. The letters are cleverly and intelligently written, and will repay careful perusal. Copies of the book can be had at the Inquirer office.





A Summer Jaunt of One Hundred Days in Europe: A series of letters written to the Owensboro Inquirer by W. T. Ellis, (Owensboro, KY: Inquirer Publishing Company, 1885, 221 pages).



Owensboro Daily Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 11 October 1888, p.1:

W. T. Ellis.

The career of this distinguished citizen is that of the typical American, reaching as it does – by mere force of individual effort – and through hard struggles from humble beginnings to easy fortune, honorable position and well-earned fame. Born July 25, 1845, near Knottsville, Ky., he

there spent his boyhood, obtaining such mental training and stores of knowledge as neighboring schools offered.

When scarcely old enough to realize a mother's love or a father's affection, and when most in need of both he was doubly orphaned – his father dying in 1855, and his mother following a year later. Prior to the breaking out the civil war his youthful history was uneventful, being that of the farmer boy of the per id and locality, yet notwithstanding a delicate constitution he was the distinguished for persistent energy, quick sprightliness and a hopeful enthusiasm. When the war broke out, though but sixteen years of age, his ardent sympathy for the South caused him to become an exile from home in order to share the hard fortunes of the people that he loved.

In the autumn of 1861 he enlisted in the First Kentucky Cavalry Regiment with which he served continuously, actively, and arduously until April 21, 1865 – sharing honorably its bloody perils on many a hard-fought field. His regiment was attached to Gen. Wheeler's army corps of the Tennessee and took active part in Confederate movements in that quarter. At the close of his military service he returned home and for a few months attended a most excellent school conducted at Pleasant Valley Seminary, in Daviess county. He next turned preceptor himself and for 18 months was principal of Mt. Etna Academy, in Ohio county, in which position he won golden opinions as a teacher. While so engaged he began his legal studies with designs on the bar.

Although licensed and admitted to practice law in 1868, yet still better to equip himself for his chosen profession, he, in 1869, entered the senior law class at Harvard, where he took his degree in 1870. He came at once to Owensboro and entered active practice. In August of that year he was elected county attorney by a vote almost unanimous, to which position he was re-elected four years later. He has been in full, active and successful practice ever since.

In 1876 he was candidate for and chosen elector for the Tilden and Hendricks ticket, for the Second Congressional district, making an active canvass for his party. Although frequently named in connection with Congress, he never became a candidate for Representative in that body until 1886, when after a gallant contest he was defeated for the nomination. The present year he is a candidate without opposition, an honor rarely conceded in a district overflowing with aspiring talent. He has ever been a Democrat – steadfastly devoted to the principles and success of his party.

In 1884 Mr. Ellis made the tour of the British Isles and Europe. He noted down his observations in a series of graceful and graphic letters, which were first published in a newspaper, and after his return embodied in a neat volume entitled "One Hundred Days in Europe." A sentence or so from one of his Irish letters may be taken as a sample of his style: "To look at Ireland is to look at a Paradise under the sun. On every hand is to be seen the elegant and well kept home of some gentleman or lord. I was so much bewildered by these evidences of elegance, luxury and ease, that I began to doubt the stories I had so often heard of the squalid poverty of Ireland. But alas! these stories are too true; for behind this glittering sheen of wealth and prosperity you find the hut with its thatched roof, the abiding places the 'hewers of wood and drawers of water,' and there you see the grim and ghastly skeleton of abject poverty, which seems the sole heritage of the poor."

Mr. Ellis ranks high in his profession. His characteristics in this respect are untiring energy, pains taking diligence, careful preparation and research; quick perception; readiness in action and forceful, bold and enthusiastic in everything. His oratorical abilities are as varied and exhaustless as the occasions that call them forth. His address to the old soldiers at a reunion at Sugar Grove 1885 has rarely been excelled on like occasions. But, whether addressing a jury in a homicide case, or his fellow-citizens on national politics, or a troop of young sophomores at a school commencement, he has a happy faculty of meeting the emergency, yet it is when at the close of an

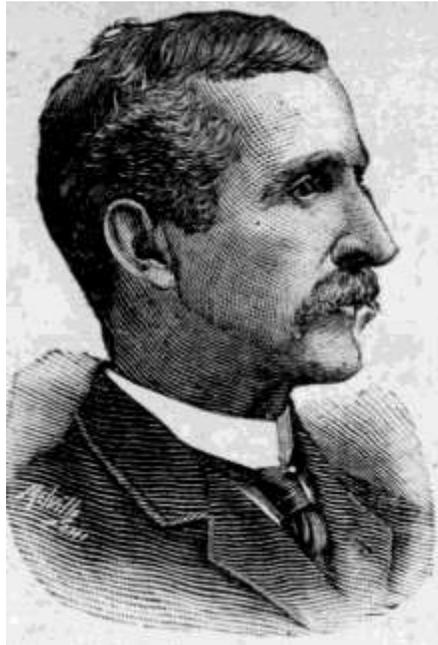
exciting trial he comes to address the jury that he can well exclaim "my foot is on my native heath, and my name is MacGregor!" His talents as an advocate are pre-eminent.

In the social circle Mr. Ellis is genial, and among his friends most companionable. He is a hard student, not only of the law, but has a decided taste for literary themes and pursuits.

He has been twice married; first in 1871, to Miss Alice Coffee, daughter of C. R. Coffee, Esq; of Owensboro. She died in January, 1874. November, 1876, he was married to Miss Mattie B., daughter of Dr. W. F. Miller, of Louisville.



Owensboro Daily Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 3 November 1888, p.4:



W. T. Ellis



Owensboro Daily Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 11 December 1889, p.4:

Our Congressman.

The Congressional directory has the following to say about the new member from the Second district of Kentucky:

"Wm. T. Ellis, of Owensboro, was born near Knottsville, Ky., 1845. His early education was obtained in the common schools. He enlisted in 1864 in the First Kentucky Confederate Cavalry at sixteen, and served until April 21, 1865. At the close of the war he returned home. He was principal of Mount Etna Academy in Ohio county and entered the law class at Harvard in 1869, graduating therefrom in 1870. Entered upon the practice of law at Owensboro immediately after graduating, and has continued in active practice since. Was elected county attorney in 1870,

and was re-elected in 1874. Was Presidential Elector for the Second Congressional district in 1870. Was defeated for Congress in 1886. Is the author of "One Hundred Days in Europe." Was elected to the Fifty-first Congress as a Democrat."



Biographical Cyclopedia of the Commonwealth of Kentucky
(Chicago, & Philadelphia: John M. Gresham Company, 1896) pp.197-199:

William T. Ellis, ex-member of Congress and a leading attorney of Owensboro, was born in Daviess County, July 24, 1845. He received a fine literary education in his native county considering that before he was sixteen years of age he enlisted in the First Regiment Kentucky Cavalry. He was mustered in October 5, 1861, and "followed the varying fortunes of the Confederacy" till the close of the war, as a private and latterly as a non-commissioned officer in command of scouts.

He returned to his home after the surrender, and resumed his studies, working during vacation to obtain means to defray his expenses. For two years he taught school while still pursuing his studies and reading law. He received his license to practice law in the spring of 1869, and after this attended a course of lectures in the Harvard Law School.

Returning to his home in 1870, he was elected county attorney in August of the same year; served four years and was re-elected in 1874; in 1876 he was Democratic elector for his district on the Tilden and Hendricks ticket; in 1888 he was elected a member of the Fifty-first Congress; was re-elected to the Fifty-second and Fifty-third Congresses; declined further service in the National House of Representatives, and returned to the practice of law at the expiration of his third term, March, 1895. At the close of a brilliant career of six years in Congress he was still one of the younger members and had gained a reputation as one of the brightest and ablest members of the Kentucky delegation. His loyalty to the government and his idea of justice to those who fought to preserve the Union was clearly expressed in a speech made in committee of the whole May 5, 1894, from which the following extracts are taken:

"I do not believe, Mr. Chairman, that the matter of pensions is a political question, though the effort in this body since I have been here has constantly been to make it such. If it had been left to the men who fought the battles of the war on both sides, it never would have been a political question. The wonder to me has always been that Democrats have suffered our Republican friends as a political party to masquerade before the country as the only friend of the Union soldier.

"Why, Mr. Chairman, if the Republican party alone had been left to fight the battles of the war Richmond would never have fallen, and Sheridan's cavalry would have halted long before it reached Appomattox.

"Speaking for myself and who as a boy followed the varying fortunes of the Confederacy from the opening to the close of the war, and correctly reflecting as I think the sentiments of every soldier who wore a Confederate uniform and honored it, I am in favor of a liberal pension for every Union soldier who is disabled, whether that disability results from wounds received in battle or from broken down or shattered health consequent upon the exposure and hardship to which he was subjected while engaged in the service of his country.

"I go further, Mr. Chairman, and say I am in favor of pensioning the dependent widows and children of the Union soldiers who fell in battle and whose silent gravestones mark every mile of the way from Shiloh to Gettysburg.

“The Republican party, as such, has no patent or trade mark entitling it to the exclusive confidence, esteem or votes of Federal soldiers, and the time has come when that fact should be thoroughly understood.

“If the Federal soldier owes the scars he wears, his halting step, his rude crutch and his empty coat sleeve to the punishment he received at the hands of his adversaries, he is entitled at least to know that those who fought him so fiercely in war are his friends in peace, and that they stand ready, not only to co-operate with him in defending the integrity of the national flag, but in securing for him a liberal pension for all the injuries they inflicted upon him. The attitude of the ex-Confederate and his section on this subject has been too long misunderstood and his sentiments too often misrepresented.

“Confederates believed when the armies of the South were disbanded that the war was over. Hungry, clad in rags, without money and without price, they followed with unfaltering trust the Confederacy’s altering star of hope, until it sank forever behind the bloody fields on which they won their fame. But when they could no longer contend against fearful odds they saluted the stars and stripes, struck hands with the visitors, and greeted them with the genuine salutation, ‘Henceforth, let us have one flag and one country.’

“The spirit of fairness and conservatism indicated in this speech is a fair index of Mr. Ellis’ public life. Possibly, however, Mr. Ellis’ speech in Congress in opposition to what was known as the Carlisle Bill gave him his widest reputation. Although a member of the Committee on Banking and Currency, which reported the Carlisle Bill, he assailed its provisions furiously. In opposing it he took advanced grounds and predicted that its passage would bring financial ruin upon the whole country. Affirming his allegiance to the Democratic party he assailed the Carlisle Bill as undemocratic and as an unwise and unpatriotic measure. In the course of this speech he denounced the financial policy of Mr. Cleveland’s administration and questioned the soundness of the chief executive’s democracy. The speech was widely quoted throughout the country.

As a lawyer he stands pre-eminently at the front of the Owensboro bar. He has been a close student of the science of law and with a natural aptitude for the discussion of legal questions, pleasing address, a ready flow of language and a graceful delivery he attracts and holds the attention of his hearers. While he manages his civil cases with excellent judgment and marked ability, it is said by his friends that he rather excels in the criminal practice where adroitness in the examination and cross-examination of witnesses and fine rhetoric are essential to success.

During Mr. Ellis’ absence in Congress his law business was conducted by his senior and junior law partners, Hon. W. N. Sweeney and J. J. Sweeney, and it was owing to the fact that the business of the firm had increased to such an extent as to require his whole time, that he declined to remain longer in public life.

William T. Ellis and Alice Coffey, daughter of Colonel C. R. Coffey of Owensboro, Kentucky, were married October 20, 1871. His wife died in 1872, and he was married again November 2, 1876, to Mattie B. Miller, daughter of Dr. W. F. Miller, an eminent physician of Louisville.

Mr. Ellis’ father, Luther R. Ellis, was born in Shelby County, Kentucky, November 18, 1818. He was married to Mary M. Kellum of Daviess County and died when he was less than thirty-seven years of age. He left two sons: William T. and Dr. J. W. Ellis.

The Ellis family were natives of Culpeper County, Virginia, and came to Kentucky in 1804. The grandfather of Mr. Ellis first located in Shelby County, but subsequently removed to Daviess County, where he was a large and prosperous farmer.



**History of the Orphan Brigade, Edwin Porter Thompson
(Louisville, KY: Lewis N. Thompson publisher, 1898) pp.973- 977:**

HON. WILLIAM T. ELLIS.



Born in 1845, he was but sixteen years old at the beginning of the war, but was among the first in his section of the State to volunteer in defense of the South. Enlisting with the Hancock company (I of the First Cavalry), he soon sought transfer to Co. C to be more closely identified with the men of his own county. He was second corporal of Co. D; was made fourth corporal of Co. C; but before the war closed was promoted to second sergeant. From the date of his enlistment to the close of the war he was continuously and actively engaged; was zealous, enterprising, and ambitious to do well whatever there was for him to do; was dashing as a fighter, trustworthy as picket and scout, manly in bearing privation, and undismayed by disaster, — in short, the stripling farmer boy seemed fashioned by nature and unpretentious Kentucky home life into that stern stuff which the Spartan law-giver deemed so essential to his country's defenders as to justify him in subjecting them as boys to long and painful training that they might not fail as men.

To recount the affairs in which he took part would simply be to name in detail the scouts, skirmishes, and pitched battles in which Co. C (after the reorganization Co. A), was engaged. At Hewey's bridge; in Sweeden's Cove; at Murfreesboro' with Forrest; in the charge on the stockade at Tullahoma; with the company when, alone on outpost, it was thrown back by a regiment of mounted infantry, but rallied, counter charged, and kept the ground till reinforced ; at Perryville, and during those trying days in Bragg's rear, from Crab Orchard to Cumberland Gap; at Chickamauga, Mission Ridge, and Ringgold Gap; in Sequatchie Valley, and at Charleston; at Dug and Snake Creek Gaps; around Atlanta; in the chasing and taking of Stoneman's main force; then at Jug Tavern, as one of the eighty who took many times their own number of men and horses and arms; at Saltville, — and so on to the end. The list is too long; where his command was there he was, unless on detached and important duty, and the history of the regiment furnishes details.

During the fight in Sequatchie Valley his horse was shot under him; at Jug Tavern, Col. Breckinridge says that he particularly distinguished himself; and Gen. Wheeler wrote as follows of the desperate affair when the bridge over Broad River 'at Columbia, S. C. , was crossed, Feb. 16, 1865: "I remember well an episode in which the Hon. Wm. T. Ellis was prominent. A large force, probably half of Sherman's army, were engaged with my cavalry command, driving us rapidly back to the only bridge which there crossed the river. When I had been driven to near the head of the bridge, I sent most of the command across and remained with a small force endeavoring to keep back the enemy, while a detail was engaged in preparing the structure for burning. We fought most desperately in order to prevent being cut off from it ; and when near it were compelled to charge an advancing line. While this charge was being made, the bridge, through accident or design, was fired. All the horses, except my own, had previously been sent across, and when we reached the mouth of the bridge we were confronted by an almost solid flame of fire. The men, Ellis among the number, beat my horse with their guns and compelled him to spring through the flame, and they ran through it, all of them being more or less burned. When we got to the end of the bridge, I noticed Ellis, who was still only a boy, with his hair and hat singed, and his hat torn by a bullet which had furrowed along the top of it. No men ever acted with more true courage than this gallant body of fifteen."

After he was promoted to sergeant he was repeatedly sent in charge of scouting parties on expeditions that were regarded as important. One of these is noted as an indication of the confidence reposed in him by his superiors and the manner in which he executed his trust. An order of Col. Griffith's, dated April 4, 1865, directs that :

"Sergt. Ellis, in charge of ten men, is ordered to proceed to the rear or to the vicinity of the enemy, for the purpose of getting such information as he can concerning his movements."

Pursuant to this he selected ten men whom he regarded as being the very best in the regiment, and made a complete circuit of Sherman's army. He collected information for which he was complimented not only by Col. Griffith but by Gen. Joe Johnston, to whom Griffith ordered him to report in person. The expedition lasted ten days, and his little party brought in, besides reliable intelligence, about thirty prisoners, among them a colonel and his staff, taken in their own quarters.

He was, so to speak, "in at the death," as he was one of the remnant of the First Cavalry that formed part of President Davis' escort and which did not abandon him till Gen. Wilson had effected his capture.

At the close of the war he attended school in his native county ; studied law — completing his preliminary course as a member of the Senior Class of 1869, Harvard University; and he has

had an extensive practice from the beginning. He has been engaged on one side or the other of many important law suits.

In 1870 he was elected County Attorney of Daviess; was re-elected, 1874; was Presidential Elector in 1876; and was three times elected to represent the Second District in Congress, serving in the Fifty-first, Fifty-second, and Fifty-third sessions of that body. He declined the nomination for a fourth term, which he could have had without opposition from his own party. Of the various committees on which he served, perhaps the most important was that on Banking and Currency, Fifty-third Congress — the most important of that session, at any rate and one of the conspicuous features of his career in the House was his opposition to the Carlisle currency bill. His strictures on this and on Mr. Cleveland's financial policy created a sensation in Congress, and the speech was widely commented on by the press throughout the country. A speech made on the 25th of May, 1894, in favor of increasing the pension of Mrs. Susie Conway, the widow of a naval officer, won applause from the Republican side of the House as well as the commendation of his Democratic colleagues, as indicating the attitude of a man without a superior in his devotion to the Confederacy until its flag was furled forever, on a question affecting Federal soldiers and sailors, it is worthy to be quoted here. He said :

"During the five years I have been a member of this body, while I have all the time had clearly defined views on the subject, I have taken no part in the numerous and sometimes acrimonious debates which have taken place here relative to pensioning Union veterans. Having been a Confederate soldier myself, I have thought that perhaps the proprieties required that I remain silent, and I have sometimes wondered whether it did not occur to certain of my Democratic colleagues from the South that silence was the true policy; lest the attitude we appeared to assume with respect to pensions might furnish a pretext to those seeking to make political capital out of small things, to say that we of the South were not as loyal as we profess to be Speaking for myself, who as a boy followed the varying fortunes of the Confederacy from the opening to the close of the war, and correctly reflecting, as I think, the sentiments of every soldier who wore a Confederate uniform and honored it, I am in favor of a liberal pension for every Union soldier who is disabled, whether that disability results from wounds received in battle, or from broken down or shattered health consequent upon the exposure to which he was subjected while engaged in the service of his country.

"I go further, Mr. Chairman, and say I am in favor of pensioning the dependent widows and dependent children of the Union soldiers who fell in battle and whose silent gravestones mark every mile of the way from Shiloh to Gettysburg.....

"If the Federal soldier owes the scars he wears, his halting step, his rude crutch, his empty coat sleeve, to the punishment he received at the hands of his adversaries, he is entitled at least to know that those who fought him so fiercely in war are his friends in peace, and that they stand ready to cooperate with him not only in defending the integrity of the national flag, but in securing for him a liberal pension for all the injuries they inflicted upon him. The attitude of the ex-Confederate and his section has been too long misunderstood, and his sentiments too often misrepresented. Confederates believed when the armies of the South were disbanded that the war was over. Hungry, clad in rags, without money and without price, they followed with unfaltering trust the Confederacy's alternating star of hope until it sank forever behind the bloody fields on which they won their fame. When they could no longer contend against fearful odds they stacked their muskets, took off their faded grey uniforms, saluted the stars and stripes, struck hands with the victors, and greeted them with the genuine salutation, 'Henceforth let us have one flag and one

country.' If it had been left to the men who fought the battles of the war on both sides, this matter of pensions would never have become a political question.

"All this was in good faith, and by it Confederates committed themselves to the payment of pensions to all who, on account of services rendered in the struggle to preserve the Union, were entitled to receive them; and whoever undertakes, here or elsewhere, to make the impression that ex-Confederates are hostile to a system that provides for pensioning the Federal soldier, not only misrepresents the living, but slanders the memory of the dead. While demanding pensions for those against whom he fought, the ex-Confederate neither asks nor desires a pension for himself. It is enough for him and his descendants to know that impartial history will record the fact that he contributed his full share in the great tragedy which made the fame of American arms immortal, and that his deeds of valor will be remembered as long as the nation keeps a record of its heroes."

His congressional career was honorable to himself and gratifying to his fellow-soldiers, who feel a personal interest in a comrade, and admire to see him acquit himself like a man, whether in public or private station; and it was useful and satisfactory to his constituents. Having convictions on all important questions he never quibbles and never temporizes, and neither friend nor foe is ever at a loss to know where he stands.

He was born in Daveiss County, July 24, 1845 was orphaned at eight years of age by the death of both parents; was brought up on a farm by his maternal grandfather, H. Kullom, who gave him some educational advantages before and after the war. His ancestors on both sides were Virginians — one of his grandfathers, William Ellis, coming to Kentucky from Culpeper County, Va., soon after the Revolution, and settling in Shelby County. He afterward removed to Daveiss, where he became the owner of large bodies of land in that and in Ohio County.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 19 April 1904, p.7:

FINE ADDRESS

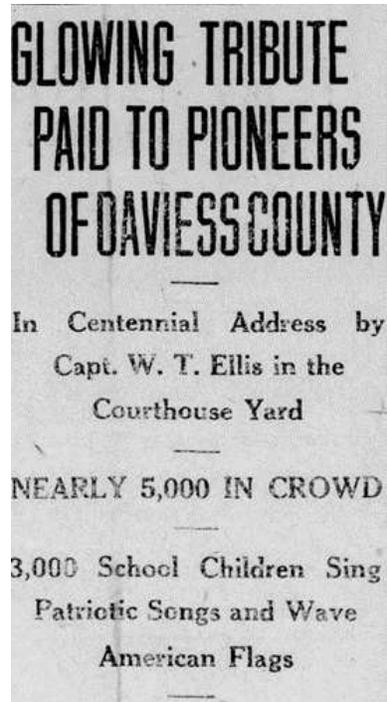
Delivered at Whitesville Training School

By Captain Ellis.

Friday night at the Manual Training School at Whitesville Capt. W. T. Ellis, of Owensboro, delivered a splendid lecture, his subject being, "Why the Southern Confederacy Failed. The audience was the largest that has attended the series of Friday night lectures at the school, despite the inclement weather, and the was well received. It was a thoughtful, forceful analysis of the reasons for the ultimate defeat of the Southern armies, and showed with succinct clearness that the reverses suffered by Southern armies was not due to lack of courage in the ranks, a paucity of generalship among officers nor failure of money and other resources. The speaker said the greatest factor in the downfall of the Southern Confederacy was that the Southern generals failed to follow the notable victories of the South by crushing up, blows while the enemy was still disconcerted and confused by defeat.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 22 September 1915, pp.1 & 2:



Excellent weather conditions contributed largely to a great outpouring of Owensboro and Daviess county citizens on Tuesday morning in celebration of the centennial of the county. Assembled in the court house yard and St. Ann facing an improvised speaker's stand, street, the crowd listened for some time to stirring patriotic songs, swelling from the throats of nearly 3,000 school children carrying flags, and as many citizens. The Third Regiment band played an accompaniment to the songs. It was a most impressive scene.

For the information of a great many who have inquired as to the correct date of the creation of Daviess county, an act of the legislature passed January 14, 1815, in which the county of Daviess was brought into existence. This act specified that the county should not become a county until June 1 following. On the records of the circuit court order books the first court was held in October of that year, Judge Broadnax presiding.

During the ceremonies on Tuesday morning, after the songs America, Old Kentucky Home, and Home, Sweet Home had been sung by the school children and audience, E. W. Smith, chairman of the committee which so successfully held the celebration, displayed the two ancient weapons, a rifle known to be a half century older than Daviess county, and with which an Indian chief was slain by a woman, and a shotgun almost as ancient. The exhibits were viewed with a great deal of interest by the audience.

Glowing Tribute

Capt. W. T. Ellis, in a deeply impressive address paid to the pioneers of Daviess county, as well as those who have so largely contributed to the upbuilding of both city and county in the hundred years following its birth, a glowing tribute. Conversant with much of the county's history from his many years residence in it, and having been intimately acquainted with the descendants of many of the original settlers, Capt. Ellis was well prepared to interest the large audience. His remarks were enthusiastically applauded, especially in his peroration when he seized and waved the American flag.

Mr. Clements was prevented from delivering an address, for which he was on the program, because of his connection with an important law suit on trial in circuit court. Following the

ceremonies the school children were dismissed for the day to become guests of the Owensboro Elks at the fair grounds.

Capt. Ellis' Address

Capt. Ellis' address was in full as follows:

The capital significance of these ceremonies, if they are to serve any useful or lasting purpose, or result in permanent benefit to our enterprising and rapidly multiplying population, is to securely link the record of the past century of our county's history with the yet unwritten pages of its second century, on which are to be recorded our future progress and achievements.

Today we stand at "dress parade" on the invisible line that divides the first century of Daviess county's history from that of the new century, which now opens full and fair in front of us its unwritten pages, inviting us to record thereon more progress and greater achievements during the second century of our history than our brave pioneer ancestors and their immediate descendants were able to record in the one hundred years of our history which has just now gone to join the procession of dead centuries.

Record of Past

It is not true that the dead past should bury its dead; on the contrary, the past and its history ought not to be buried at all, for it is not only "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness," but for all that serves to promote the material progress and social advancement of a community or a state. That we profit by preserving and keeping accurately in mind the record of the past, is the unchallenged verdict of history.

I would, therefore, impress upon you the importance of preserving the records of the events of the first century of Daviess county's history. do not doubt that a knowledge of the stirring events and the checkered scenes that measure the full period of our first century will prove valuable to those who must solve the problems and record the progress which we are to make in the second century of our history.

But, without pausing now to deal in dry figures set forth in tables of statistics, let us go back over the cycle of years that have just closed upon us and glance at the social, material and intellectual condition of our pioneer ancestors, who settled and first inhabited this great county, which is now as fair a spot as will | be found in the commonwealth of which it forms so important a part.

We should remember and never forget that those pioneers, whose ringing axes first broke the silence of our virgin forests and converted that oppressive stillness into busy scenes and happy homes, were patriots and heroes, whose memories ought not to be forgotten.

Record Left Behind

The record they made and left behind is sufficient to stir us with that patriotic sentiment expressed by Sir Walter Scott:

"Breathes there a man with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land?"

The 14th day of January, 1815, is to us a memorable day; on that day the general assembly of the commonwealth of Kentucky carved out of the shaggy sides of Ohio county the territory which we now proudly call the great county of Daviess.

The territory marked by the legislature as the present boundary of Daviess county, contains 422 square miles and represents 280,000 acres of fertile land.

Then the great area of untamed lands now composing the county of Daviess was an unbroken forest; its productive acres were yet to be developed by the enterprise, skill, industry and integrity of our pioneer ancestors.

If it were permissible to indulge a little fancy, I could, without the aid of a calendar, imagine that January 14, 1815, a date to us so historic, and which succeeding generations ought not to forget, was a day when winter clouds o'er cast the sky. and the snow was pouring down; that when the presiding officers of the general assembly of the commonwealth signed the act that made the county of Daviess a political municipality and gave it a place among the sisterhood of counties composing the commonwealth, every acre of its undeveloped soil was wrapped in a mantle of snow.

The 14th day of January, 1815. was just three days after General Jackson had achieved his great victory over the English army at New Orleans, which brought to a successful close our second war for independence and firmly anchored the United States on the map of the Western hemisphere as a land of liberty and law.

Celebrating Great Victory

On that day the people of our infant republic, in so far as they had learned the fact, were celebrating that great victory and making new resolves that representative government should not perish from the face of the earth.

Governor Shelby, the first governor of the commonwealth, during his second administration, affixed his signature to the act of the general assembly which finally crystallized the county of Daviess and gave it a place on the map as a separate county of the commonwealth.

One hundred years have come and gone since that memorable day; the representatives and senators who created the county of Daviess have passed away; who they were or where they sleep, I frankly confess I do not know. But. if I could, I would commission another "Old Mortality" to search out their last resting places and retrace their names on their crumbling tombstones, so that future generations might not forget them.

A century, has turned upon its silent hinge since Daviess county was created, and now we are celebrating our natal day, and I trust the events of this day will reinspire our citizenship with greater love for their native county and a stronger adherence to the great commonwealth of which county forms so important a part.

One hundred years ago! Who of us here today can make an accurate| inventory of what the infant county of Daviess was then? Who of us can draw even a rude pen portrait of the virgin territory which the legislature of this state then marked out as a county which was to become one of the leading counties of the commonwealth?

Then the seat of population embraced in the new county of Daviess, which at that time included a very large part of the present county of McLean, did not have in all its great boundary 1,500 people.

Some Statistics

In all the 422 square miles composing the present county of Daviess there were under cultivation 500 acres of 280,000 acres of land embraced within our county's territory. Today Ellis Whitely, Martin Wilson, Bob Massie, William Calhoun and others of our farmers, each cultivate annually more acres than were then in cultivation in the entire county.

Then there was not a public school building in the county; private schools we had scarcely any. Today we have enrolled in our public schools in the city of Owensboro 4,317 pupils. We have enrolled in our public schools in the county, outside of the city, 8,000 pupils. In addition to this. we have enrolled in our private and parochial schools more than 1,500 pupils.

One hundred years ago there was| scarcely a boy or girl of school age within the limits of the county attending a school; today we have more than 15,000 boys and girls enrolled in our public and private schools.

This is an encouraging feature of the advancement we have made during our first century's history, because the progress, the happiness, the development and the glory of a state rests largely upon the intelligence and culture of its citizenship; and with the splendid showing our county is making in the matter of education, we have much to hope for in the future.

More Interesting Facts

One hundred years ago the husbandmen had hardly tickled our untamed soil with their plowshares; today the farmers of Daviess county produce annually 2,250,000 bushels of corn: 500,000 bushels of wheat and 20,000,000 pounds of tobacco. while herds of cattle graze on all our hills. Whoever will consider the magnitude of our agricultural products will know that our population is on the "Appian Way" to great prosperity and increased wealth.

One hundred years ago, as we were recording the first page of our county's history, there were but a few acres of land prepared for cultivation; today the area of our county which is under cultivation is more than 200,000 acres.

No county in the commonwealth has made greater progress in the matter of developing its fine lands, or in increasing its material wealth, or greater progress in the matter of education.

We ought not to lightly pass over the matter of education; the attention of these young boys and girls should be specially called to the wide contrast between today and one hundred years ago.

One hundred years ago, as I have already observed, there was not a public school in the county, and scarcely a private school; then the meagre provisions made for educating a youth were scanty in the extreme; then the best that could be said of the school house was that it was a log cabin with a puncheon floor. But as the years have come and gone the old log cabin with its puncheon floor has passed away and today it is a relic of the past; in its stead our patriotic and liberty loving citizenship has, by liberal and unstinted taxation, and individual contributions, erected modern school houses on nearly every hill and in nearly every valley of the county of Daviess and provided competent teachers with better salaries to instruct the youth.

Every day the cheerful notes of school bells are heard in every community of our county, and if the boys and girls of the present fail in securing a fairly good education the fault rests with themselves and not with their ancestors and friends.

Postoffices of County

One hundred years ago there were but two postoffices in the county; one at "Yellow Banks" (now Owensboro) and one about a mile and a half east of Knottsville. These two postoffices furnished the only mail facilities our pioneer ancestors enjoyed. But, today our 40,000 population in large part has the morning mail furnished at their doors. Newspapers, magazines, books, letters and all conveyed in the parcel post is delivered daily.

If those rugged pioneer ancestors of ours could wake up from the pulseless dust today and discover the many advantages we enjoy as compared with the stern conditions which surrounded them, they would certainly declare we had made progress.

Professional Men

In the one hundred years of our history our county has furnished some distinguished professional men; to the medical profession it has given some brilliant talent which has added largely to the advancement of that profession. I need not mention the names of those pioneer doctors, who, in the unbroken wilds of this county, rode many miles through the forests to see a patient. But, whoever examines the record made by that profession will discover that no county in

the state, in proportion to population, has contributed more able, skillful or successful men to the medical profession than the county of Daviess.

We have given to the bar some brilliant lawyers; some wise and able judges. An examination of the records and decisions of our courts will disclose that some of the ablest lawyers of the state have been Daviess county men.

In this connection I mention the fact that the great patriot for whom this county was named, was himself an able lawyer. His defense of an early pioneer of Daviess county on a charge of murder is one of the most thrilling chapters of our local legal literature.

Bill Smeathers, a pioneer of this county, who was charged with homicide, was defended by his friend Jo Daveiss at Hartford, this county at that time being a part of Ohio county. The story is, that Daveiss walked from Frankfort to Hartford to defend his friend. The prosecution was conducted by a brother of General Daveiss, and the account of that legal contest between those two brothers in the Ohio circuit court is a thrilling chapter in our legal history. He was the first lawyer living west of the Alleghany mountains to argue a case in the supreme court at Washington.

But Jo Daveiss was not only a great lawyer; he was a great soldier. Answering the call of his country he offered his life, a willing sacrifice, in defense of its security and honor. Leading his command at Tippecanoe with a fearlessness that has found few parallels in history, he dashed upon the enemy like an irresistible tornado; but in the midst of his triumphs he lost his life. While he laid down his life upon the field of battle in defense of his native commonwealth, his name and his fame live in history, and as long as the great county of Daviess maintains its place on the map the name of General Jo Daveiss cannot be forgotten by the succeeding generations of our citizenship.

This is an appropriate occasion on which to mention another historic fact in connection with our local history, which is: That the city of Owensboro bears the name of another great soldier who lost his life in the battle of Tippecanoe, namely, Colonel Abraham Owen. He was a brave soldier, a model citizen and left behind a name which will live in the history of the state for all future time.

Our Clergy

Our county has made liberal contributions to the clergy; the pioneer preachers of the Protestant church made marked impressions upon our pioneer population, and by their eloquence, zeal and piety laid deep and well the foundations of their religious faith, evidences of which are manifest at the close of our first century's history.

The Catholic church began its history in this county in the Knottsville precinct with only a few pious and devout women, who assisted in its organization, and that church has witnessed a remarkable growth in its membership.

Daviess county has given to the Catholic church some of the most exemplary, pious and eloquent men; but above and beyond all, it has contributed, not to the county, but to the nation, an archbishop, whose name and fame will live in the history of his church for all future time.

Archbishop Montgomery was born in the Knottsville precinct; he rose to distinction in the clergy in the state of California and when he died, though then a young man, he enjoyed a national reputation. For piety, for loyalty to his country and to his native state, he had no superior.

But the crowning feature of our religious advancements has been this: Protestants and Catholics alike have advanced along friendly lines, each pursuing their own course without friction and without strife.

All these religious organizations apparently have sought to impress our local community not only with the fact that when a man dies he will live again, but to impress our whole population

with the fact that the atoning blood of the Man of Galilee, is essential to the salvation of the human race.

Let us hope that these religious organizations will proceed in the next century in that earnest, consistent Christian spirit which is calculated to convert even a skeptic to the faith that it is essential that every man should "seek first the Kingdom of Heaven," and that whatever else is essential will necessarily be his inheritance.

Navigation and Transportation

One hundred years ago no scream of a steamboat's whistle had been heard at our wharf; no water craft, save only some fugitive flatboat, had ever paused to take our scanty products or to deliver merchandise to our people.

Owensboro, then "Yellow Banks," was an insignificant village with only a few log cabins and less than 100 inhabitants; was not a church edifice or organization within its corporate limits. Today we have attractive church edifices on many squares, with congregations so large that they stamp this as a religious community.

During the first century of our county's history fine fleets of steamers have made their appearance at our wharf laden with merchandise from abroad and to carry to foreign markets the products produced by our fellow citizens.

Steamers the Ohio river have become familiar objects to our people: the great service they render in aiding us in advancing along lines of material wealth is well understood and appreciated by all.

One hundred years ago the ringing of a locomotive bell had never been heard in Daviess county; no train of cars, with its cargo of freight, had ever broken the stillness which prevailed here. But today, at the close of our first century's history, we have three railroads which carry our commerce to the sea and transport our people to the Atlantic and to the Pacific.

What will another century bring us? When we have a nine-foot stage of water in the Ohio the year round, how many great steamers will whistle at our wharf? When we have another century of prosperity, how many additional railroads will have thrust their iron noses into this rapidly growing and prosperous community, and how many railroad bridges will span the Ohio?

The Daviess County Farmer

I have spoken of our material progress; of the achievements of those whom this county had committed to the professions, but behind that valuable and highly respected class I see standing on the background a great army that challenges my admiration and evokes my applause, and that is the Daviess county farmer.

These men and their fathers, who have subdued our unbroken forests and converted our wild lands into fertile agricultural fields, are the men who challenge my admiration. I see them standing today in overalls, muddy boots and slouch hats, as boldly as the Highlander who treads with fearless step the heather of his "Grampion Hills," and to that class of men I take off my hat in reverence; I salute them and bid them a God speed for the future.

Whatever our county is to be in the future; whatever great achievements it is to attain; whatever material wealth it is to have set down to its credit, will come in large part from that great array of our population, who, through all the past century of our history, have been our chief producers of wealth. They are la glorious body of men, going forth in the morning to sow and reap and assist in feeding the world. Whatever we are today, and whatever we shall be in the future, must be largely set down to their integrity, intelligence, enterprise and industry.

A republic like ours essentially upon the home; a free nation cannot long exist in the absence of individual homes; it is to the farmer, therefore, that we must look to lay the foundation and to maintain the integrity of our homes.

We should understand distinctly that whoever sets his face away from the farm; whoever makes up his mind to abandon field and flood in order to tread the macadam or concrete pavement of the town, is on the fair road to lose his identity, his independence and his patriotism..

But we should not overlook those daring and independent spirits, who, by their intelligence and enterprise, have made so splendid a record in developing our manufacturing enterprises.

Pride of People

Beginning with no more than two country blacksmith shops, equipped with little more than an anvil and a forge, they have developed a system of manufacturing in our county which is the pride of all of our people. From so uninviting a beginning those engaged in manufacturing enterprises in this county have built up great industries and today the manufactured products of our county amount annually to many million dollars and find a ready market, not only throughout the South, but in many Northern and Western states.

These energetic, industrious and enterprising men have done their full part in making a glorious record for Daviess county and setting it in the forefront among the counties of the commonwealth.

But we need not draw comparisons, because all our people in every walk of life, if we are to judge by our past history, have done their duty, and done it well. No man has been a laggard; no man has been a pessimist; no man has been in dread of evils that never occur, but with faces set courageously to the front, our farmers, our mechanics, our manufacturers and our professional men have sought to acquit themselves with credit and to contribute their full shares to the honor, the prosperity and the progress of our great county.

I conclude this brief and imperfect sketch by declaring to you that all of our people, to whatever occupation, profession or trade they may belong, can rightfully join in the sentiment:

"Hail brightest banner that floats on the gale,
Flag of the land of Washington, hail.
Red are thy stripes as the blood of the grave,
And bright are thy stars as the sun on the wave.
Wrapped in thy folds are the hopes of the free.
Banner of Washington and Wilson, blessings on thee!"



**History of Kentucky, Vol. III, Judge Charles Kerr, Editor;
William Elsey Connelley & E. M. Coulter (Chicago & New York:
The American Historical Society, 1922) pp.316-317:**

HON. WILLIAM THOMAS ELLIS. It would be difficult to summarize briefly the long and varied experiences, achievements and distinctions of this veteran lawyer of Owensboro. In a life that covers three-quarters of a century he has been in active contact with its serious responsibilities since early boyhood. He is an honored veteran of the tremendous struggle between the North and the South, and as a lawyer his name has been an honored one in the bar of Western Kentucky for fully half a century.

He was born near Knottsville in Daviess County, Kentucky, July 24, 1845, son of Luther L. and Mary M. (Kallam) Ellis. His father was born in Shelby County, Kentucky, son of William and Hannah (Burks) Ellis, who came to Kentucky from their native State of Virginia, first locating in Shelby County but in 1814 moving to Daviess County, where they spent the rest of their lives. William Ellis was of a Revolutionary family, and in the early years of the nineteenth century achieved prominence among the citizens of Daviess County. Luther L. Ellis was a mere boy when his parents moved to Daviess County, and he achieved an honored name though he died comparatively early in life, in 1855. He was survived by two sons, William T. and James W. Ellis. After his death his wife, also a native of Kentucky, took her young sons to the home of her father, Rev. Hiram Kallam, a Methodist minister, but she did not survive long and died about a year later.

William T. Ellis was left an orphan when about eleven years of age. He did not long remain with his maternal grandfather, but soon after his mother's death started out to achieve his own destiny as best he could in view of circumstances, his opportunities and talents. Wherever he could find someone to give him a home and let him work to pay his keep there he abode. In short winter terms he attended country schools and laid the foundation of his education. He was not quite sixteen when the union of the states was ruptured by war. A loyal southerner, he entered the Confederate army, and on October 5, 1861, was mustered in as a private in the First Kentucky Cavalry, his regiment becoming part of the celebrated Orphan Brigade. It was attached to General Wheeler's Cavalry Corps, in the Army of the Tennessee. William T. Ellis performed all the arduous duties of a southern cavalryman and was in the war until the final surrender, April 28, 1865, 3 ½ years after his first enlistment. He shared the fortunes and misfortunes of his regiment, participating in many battles, but escaped without serious injury. At the close he was a non-commissioned officer in command of a detachment of scouts.

Coming out of the army when not quite twenty years of age, Captain Ellis returned to Daviess County, and was soon working as a means, of support while studying in Pleasant Valley Seminary, one of the best schools of Western Kentucky at that time. He was in the seminary for two years, then taught, and while teaching eagerly read law and was licensed to practice in 1868. Not satisfied with such equipment as he had largely supplied through his own energies and diligence, he entered the law school of Harvard University at Cambridge, Massachusetts, with the senior class of 1869.

Returning from college, Captain Ellis located at Owensboro, and recently rounded out half a century of residence and professional relations with that city. The honors and responsibilities of public office did not hesitate to crowd upon him, and in 1870, the first year of his career, he was elected county attorney for Daviess County and re-elected in 1874. In 1876 he was democratic presidential elector for his district on the Tilden and Hendricks ticket. While he was an unsuccessful candidate for Congress in 1886, he was chosen by his district in 1888, entering the Fifty-first Congress on the democratic side. He was re-elected in 1890 and again in 1892 and served for three terms, from March 4, 1889, to March 3, 1895, throughout the Harrison administration and the early part of the second Cleveland administration. He was one of the leading members of the Kentucky delegation in Congress.

For a quarter of a century since his retirement from Congress Captain Ellis has given practically his undivided attention to his duties as a lawyer. His legal scholarship has long been recognized, and his resourcefulness and eloquence have made him a formidable trial lawyer. He has appeared in many noted civil and criminal cases, and for years important cases before the Daviess County Circuit Court and other courts seldom went to trial without Captain Ellis as counsel on one side or the other. In manner of deportment he is dignified, without austerity or

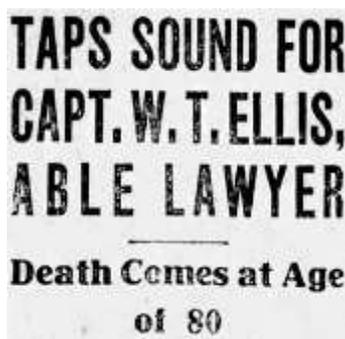
autocratic bearing, and through all the varied relations of life he has maintained a strict regard for integrity, fairness and justice. He has been equally moved with the spirit of progress in public interests in community undertakings. He is a student and close observer, and has traveled much in this country and abroad, so that his opinions upon important issues are by no means due to "closet speculations." Besides his gifts as a speaker he possesses a ready pen, and his contributions to the press have always elicited interest.

While he has been able to achieve so much, Captain Ellis deserves all the credit of having made his own career, since he started a poor orphan boy, educated himself, served as a brave and dutiful soldier, represented his district three terms in Congress, and has achieved nearly all the other substantial rewards and honors of a highly successful career.

In 1871 Captain Ellis married Miss Alice Coffey who died in 1874. He married Miss Mattie B. Miller, of Louisville, Kentucky, in 1876.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 9 January 1925, pp.1 & 2:



Peacefully slipping the fetters of this world, Capt. William T. Ellis. passed into eternity at 6:50 o'clock Thursday night. As a tired child, weary of a long struggle, self imposed, this brilliant mind faded out.

Funeral Services Saturday

Funeral services will be held at the residence, 525 Frederica street, at 2:30 o'clock Saturday afternoon, Dr. M. G. Buckner, former pastor of the First Christian church, and an intimate friend of Capt. Ellis, and Rev. N. K. MacGowan, pastor, in charge. Burial will be in Elmwood cemetery, with the following serving as active pallbearers: R. P. Cashen, Eli Cox, George F. Haynes, J. R. Laswell, W. L. Monarch and Urey Woodson.

Honorary pallbearers will be members of Rice E. Graves camp. United Confederate Veterans, as follows: James Bowlds, C. T. Carico, Miss Lida Carico, J. F. Hite, Robert Jackson, W. G. Kimberlin, Dr. E. R. Pennington, Enoch Ray, J. Y. Small, John Watkins, G. P. C. Baker, Truman Bivens, R. W. Colman, John G. Ford, F. M. Griffin, J. F. Head, Dr. S. J. Harris, William W. Jones, John L. Livingston, I. S. Mullican; also the W. T. Ellis camp Sons of Confederate Veterans.

John C. Breckenridge camp, Daughters of the Confederacy, will attend the funeral in a body, and the members of this organization will meet at the Chamber of Commerce at 2 o'clock tomorrow afternoon and go from there to the residence.

Gallant Confederate soldier, a member of the famous Orphan Brigade, the First Kentucky cavalry, representative in congress, dean of the Owensboro bar, his name blazoned in the halls of fame in every respect, and best of all loved and respected by his home folks even to the extent of hero-worship, thus epitomizes Capt. Ellis.

About three weeks ago Capt. Ellis was forced to his bed, and his strength gradually failed him. On December 26 his lifelong friend and colleague, Judge R. W. Slack, died, and Capt. Ellis, from his bed, dictated a beautiful tribute to his memory, referring to Judge Slack as one who had "preceded him just a little while to the other shore."

His Eventful Career

It would be difficult to summarize briefly the long and varied experiences, achievements and distinctions of this veteran lawyer of Owensboro. In a life that covers more than three-quarters of a century he has been in active contact with its serious responsibilities since early boyhood. He was an honored veteran of the tremendous struggle between the North and South, and as a lawyer his name has been an honored one in the bar of Western Kentucky for fully half a century.

William Thomas Ellis was born near Knottsville, in this county, July 24, 1845, a son of Luther' M. and Mary Kallam Ellis, who came from old Virginia stock, coming to Daviess county in 1814. Capt. Ellis was left an orphan at eleven years of age. Having been left with his maternal grandmother, he soon tired of this and struck out for himself while yet a mere boy, staying wherever he could find some place whereon to lay his head and earn a meagre existence.

In short winter terms Capt. Ellis attended the then crude county schools, and thus laid the foundation for his limited education. He was but sixteen when the Civil war broke out, and being always intensive in his feelings and a staunch Southern supporter, he joined the Confederate army October 5, 1861, being scarcely able to shoulder the heavy muskets which the soldier of the Lost Cause used.

Capt. Ellis became a member of the First Kentucky, Cavalry, later becoming the Orphan Brigade. It was attached to Gen. Wheeler's Cavalry corps, in the army of the Tennessee. Capt Ellis remained with the colors until the surrender of Lee at Appomattox, three and one-half years later. At the close he was a non-commissioned officer in command of a detachment of scouts.

At 21. Resumes Studies

Coming out of the army when not quite twenty years of age, Captain Ellis returned to Daviess county and again began laboring to sustain himself and entered the Pleasant Valley seminary, one of the best schools of Western Kentucky at that time. While teaching in the county schools he read law assiduously and was admitted to the bar in 1868. Not satisfied with his legal learning in the following year he entered the senior class of Harvard where he completed his studies.

Returning to his old home in Owensboro Captain Ellis took up the practice of law and but a short time ago rounded out his half century of work in his chosen profession at the bar, in the meantime having practiced before all the courts of the land.

In 1870, the first year of his career, he was elected county attorney for Daviess county, and reelected in 1874. In 1876 he was Democratic presidential elector for his district on the Tilden and Hendricks ticket. While he was an unsuccessful candidate for congress in 1886, he was chosen by his district in 1888, entering the Fifty-first congress on the Democratic side. He was reelected in 1890 and again in 1892 and served for three terms, from March 4, 1889, to March 3, 1895, throughout the Harrison administration and the early part of the second Cleveland administration. He was one of the leading members of the Kentucky delegation while in congress, one of the closest friends of Speaker Crisp.

Devoted To His Profession

For thirty years since his retirement from congress Captain Ellis had given practically his undivided attention to his duties as a lawyer. His legal scholarship had long been recognized and resourcefulness and eloquence made him a formidable trial lawyer. He appeared in many noted civil and criminal cases and for years important cases before the Daviess county circuit court and other courts seldom went to trial without Captain Ellis as counsel on one side or the other. In manner of deportment he was dignified, without austerity or autocratic bearing, and through all the varied relations of life he maintained a strict regard for integrity, fairness and justice. He was equally moved with the spirit of progress in public interests in community undertakings. He was a student and close observer and traveled much in this country and abroad, so that his opinions upon important issues were by no means due to "closet speculations." Besides his gifts as a speaker he possessed a ready pen, and his contribution to the press have always elicited interest.

While he was able to achieve much, Captain Ellis deserves all the credit of having his own career, since he started a poor orphan boy, educated himself, served as a brave and dutiful soldier, represented his district three terms in congress, and achieved nearly all the other substantial rewards and honors of a highly successful career. He accumulated a considerable fortune in the practice of his profession and by wise and conservative investments.

In 1871 Captain Ellis married Miss Alice Coffey, Niles died in 1874. He married Mattie B. Miller, daughter of Dr. W. P. Miller, of Louisville, in 1876, and she survives him. He was never blessed with children. He is also survived by his brother, Dr. J. W. Ellis, 618 St. Ann street, two years his junior, and his constant and devoted companion all their lives; also by a nephew, Dr. W. T. Ellis, of Philadelphia, and a niece Mrs. Barr, wife of Dr. Edward Barr, 107 " W. Seventh street.

Capt. Ellis after his voluntary retirement from congress was often importuned to become a candidate for governor, United States senator and judge of the court of appeals, but he, had a settled distaste for office-holding, and would never be tempted to be a candidate again. His practice frequently took him before the court of appeals at Frankfort and the supreme court of the United States. His one great passion was for the practice of law. He did consent in 1899 to accept for a brief time a place on the state election commission and with his colleague, Judge William S. Pryor, also a staunch Democrat, decided that the board could not "go behind the returns" and much against his personal desire being a great friend of William Goebel, signed the certificate of election as governor of W. S. Taylor, the Republican candidate. On the face of the returns Taylor had 2,300 majority. Later the Kentucky legislature in trying a contest instituted by Goebel, decided that because of certain irregularities in the voting the count Goebel actually had a majority and declared him governor. About this time Goebel was shot and killed from ambush on the statehouse grounds at Frankfort.

Capt. Ellis was at all times an active member of the United Confederate Veterans and was also an honorary member of the W.T. Ellis Camp of Sons of the Confederate Veterans.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 9 January 1925, p.1:

CAPT. WILLIAM T. ELLIS

Eloquent Voice Is Stilled

Owensboro's first citizen, William T. Ellis, is dead. His was a long, useful and eventful career. No boy ever started in life in an humbler way, nor with greater handicaps, but none in this community ever ended his days with more brilliant achievements than William T. Ellis.

An orphan at eleven years without a home except as he made one for himself, he secured a scant education before going into the Confederate army at sixteen. Returning unscathed after nearly four years of gallant fighting, a member of the celebrated Orphan Brigade, this ragged, hungry soldier boy, with a heart brave in defeat and a will unbroken, then worked out his own destiny. Going to Harvard college on his own earnings, he returned to practice law in his home town, speedily advancing to one of the highest places in his profession. He was honored by a seat in congress for three terms, voluntarily quitting to return to his beloved profession when he could have remained indefinitely in the house or gone to the United States senate, to the governor's chair or a seat on the appellate court bench. These honors were repeatedly proposed to him by a wonderfully enthusiastic constituency, but always firmly declined.

Of all his success at the bar – and he made a large fortune practicing law in Owensboro – of all the political honors that were tendered him, Capt. Ellis thought little as compared with his service in the Confederate army. This was the one epoch in his life that was dearest in his memory, and he lived and fought over that war in his dreams by day and by night for sixty years after Appomattox.

He was a good fighter in the 60's, but just as good a fighter for his clients and his friends until the end of his days. He would desert valuable work in his office or the higher courts any day, to go into the police court or a magistrate's court to espouse the cause of an old friend, or the son of an old friend, without fee or other reward than the mere love of doing a needed service.

He looked after the affairs of his old army comrades less fortunate in life than himself as an elder brother. He cared for them in sickness and death and their families after them. Frailest apparently of this entire noble band from the time of their return, he singularly lived to utter orations at the graves of nearly all of them, and likewise of every member of the local bar who practiced with him in his earliest days.

He was a veritable human dynamo. His work was his recreation. He entered with enthusiasm and confidence into every case. His clients' affairs were his affairs. He never seemed to tire in his devotion to them. He had a singular style of eloquence that was most attractive, impelling. His influence over juries was almost hypnotic. He won many a case that in other hands would have been hopeless. All over the Green River district his services were often in demand. Indeed he not infrequently was called to practice in other states. One of his most celebrated victories was in Brooklyn, N. Y. He went there to defend a Daviess county, Ky., boy in a bad murder case. It looked hopeless. But he fought for that boy's life and liberty before a strange court and strange jury, opposing the ablest of prosecutors, with such ability, determination and eloquence that he secured the boy's acquittal and brought him home.

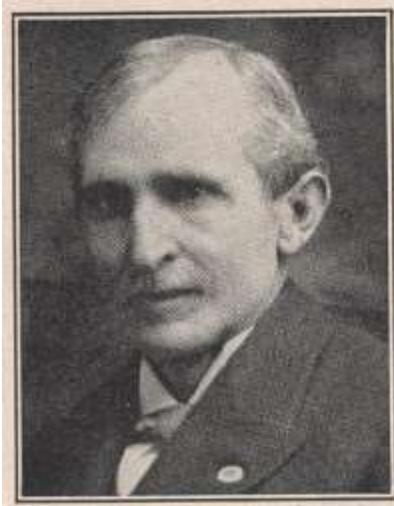
This was but one of the incidents of his career as a lawyer. In civil practice he made his greatest successes, but was reasonable in his fees and invested his earnings in his profession judiciously. From every standpoint his life was a notable success and Owensboro and Daviess county have just cause to be proud of this notable citizen.



Sixty Years of Owensboro, 1883-1943, William Foster Hayes,
(Owensboro, KY: Messenger Job Printing Co., 1944) pp.15-18:

WILLIAM T. ELLIS

For many years not only one of the most prominent of Owensboro citizens but one of the most brilliant and colorful was our Captain Ellis, mentioned in several connections in these pages. Although he served in the Confederate Army nearly four years, enlisting when he was sixteen, it is said that he was never really a captain but received that designation only by popular acclaim because of its compelling appropriateness.



Capt. William T. Ellis

He was born near Knottsville, July 24, 1845. His educational advantages must have been extremely meager, and as we have seen from sixteen to twenty he was in the army, the First Kentucky Cavalry, under General Joe Wheeler. Small prospect that he should become, as he did, not only a leader at the bar but a highly cultured speaker and writer. Working, going to school when he could and "reading law" as time permitted, he was admitted to the bar in 1868, and after that he entered the Harvard Law School, from which he graduated in June, 1870. He then located in Owensboro and began his distinguished career.

For a time he was associated with William T. Owen, another fine lawyer, later Judge of the Circuit Court, in the firm of Owen and Ellis. After that came his partnership with Wm. N. Sweeney, and later with the latter's son, James J. Sweeney, in the great firm of Sweeney, Ellis & Sweeney, in which he continued until his death, January 8, 1925. In the meantime, however, the elder Sweeney, dating from a still earlier day had died, after a long and most distinguished professional life. After Mr. Sweeney's death (I think I had this from Captain Ellis himself) Mr. James J. Sweeney modestly suggested to Captain Ellis that perhaps he (Ellis) would not care to continue the partnership, but he replied that the arrangement would continue upon the condition that the firm name should remain unchanged.

Always actively interested in political life, ever ready to do battle in behalf of the "unterrified" Democracy, he sought office but rarely. He served two terms as county attorney in his early professional life, and he represented this district in Congress from 1889 to 1895.

These prosaic facts of his career are easy to set down, but to convey any adequate idea of the unique charm of his personality is a thing impossible. His keen sense of literary values, his clear and beautiful speaking voice, and his ready and genial humor combined to make him one of the most delightful and effective speakers the Owensboro Bar has produced. In 1884 his gift of literary expression found vent in a series of letters to the Owensboro Inquirer (then just beginning

publication) during a European tour. These were published in book form as *One Hundred Days in Europe*. Looking into this volume again after many years the present writer finds renewed pleasure, not unmixed with wonder, in the wealth of information it contains about the Europe of thirty years before the first World War, and the breadth of the author's literary culture, which it so charmingly discloses. It is a work of permanent value and one of the finest fruits of the higher life of Owensboro.

One of the strongest of Owensboro's legal firms at the time of which I am speaking was Sweeney, Ellis & Sweeney; and if any one lawyer could be called the leader of the able bar of that day, it was doubtless the senior member of that firm, Mr. William N. Sweeney. He was then considerably advanced in years and I think not so active as he had been. Aside from his personal appearance I remember chiefly his energetic and strikingly individual manner of speaking.

In 1904, Capt. W. T. Ellis introduced to a Chautauqua audience General Z. T. Sweeney, a lecturer of that year and a relative of Mr. William N. Sweeney, Captain Ellis's longtime partner. He said in part: "If you were to ask me who was the most erudite lawyer that has practiced at the Owensboro bar in the last third of a century, I would say without hesitation, W. N. Sweeney." "If you were to ask me who could most effectually and completely influence the juries of this county by the irresistible force of his prosy logic, I would say W. N. Sweeney."



Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1971
(Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971) p.910:

ELLIS, William Thomas, a Representative from Kentucky; born near Knottsville, Daviess County, Ky., on July 24, 1845; attended the common schools; enlisted in 1861, at the age of sixteen, in the First Kentucky Confederate Cavalry, which became a part of the celebrated Orphan Brigade, and served with his regiment continuously until April 21, 1865; attended Pleasant Valley Seminary, Daviess County; principal of Mount Etna Academy, Ohio County, in 1867 and 1868; studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1868; was graduated from the Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Mass., in 1870 and commenced practice in Owensboro, Ky., the same year; elected county attorney in 1870 and 1874; presidential elector on the Democratic ticket of Tilden and Hendricks in 1876; unsuccessful candidate for election in 1886 to the Fiftieth Congress; elected as a Democrat to the Fifty-first, Fifty-second, and Fifty-third Congresses (March 4, 1889—March 3, 1895); declined to be a candidate for renomination in 1894; delegate to the Democratic National Convention at Chicago in 1896 which nominated Bryan and Sewall; resumed the practice of law; also engaged in literary pursuits; died in Owensboro, Ky., January 8, 1925; interment in Elmwood Cemetery.

[note by Jerry Long: In the book, A Biographical Congressional Directory, 1774-1911 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913) p.628), William T. Ellis' name is entered as "William Tecumseh Ellis"; the same also appears in a death notice in Louisville's Courier Journal (10 January 1925, p.2.) In 39 family trees on Ancestry.com 39 list his name as "William Thomas Ellis" and none record it as "William Tecumseh Ellis".]



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 28 June 1987, p.1C:

**Local attorney's book details visit
to great cities of Europe in 1884**

By Karen Owen, Messenger-Inquirer

He loved Paris. was fascinated by Pompeii and never seemed to feel quite comfortable in London.

Owensboro lawyer W.T. Ellis found much to admire and to disdain about Europe during his tour there in 1884.

While writing letters to the readers of the Owensboro Inquirer, he survived bedbugs, bad food, alien cultures and 16 days at sea. The newspaper later compiled his letters into a book called "A Summer Jaunt of 100 Days in Europe."

Ellis, then 41, was Daviess County attorney from 1870 to 1878 and United States representative for this area from 1889 to 1895. He was among the thousands of well-to-do Americans who visited the great cities of Europe during the mid- and late 1800s.

No one was really part of the upper class until he went to Europe, said Wayne Metz, a retired history professor at Kentucky Wesleyan College.

When Ellis made his journey, Owensboro probably had 10,000 to 12,000 people, Metz said. He estimated about six people might have traveled from here each year. Accounts of their travels probably would have been popular reading, he said.

The Owensboro-Daviess County Library does not have a copy of Ellis' book, but Tom Blue Jr., a local antiques dealer who collects old books, does.

Blue said he isn't sure where he got the book but said it is one of his favorites.

The author was orphaned at age 11, and at age 16 he joined the Orphan Brigade of the 1st Kentucky Cavalry to fight for the Confederacy.

In his letters to the paper from Europe, Ellis frequently mentioned sights that reminded him of Kentucky. In Verona, Ellis wrote, he was struck by the similarity of statues of Nero to the paintings he had seen in Kentucky of Henry Clay.

After touring the ruins of the Temple of Isis at Pompeii and seeing the spot where the collection box once stood, he remarked, "My conclusion was the plan of salvation may change, but the plan of supporting the churches never does."

His trip occurred while Grover Cleveland was campaigning for his first term as president. The Brooklyn Bridge had recently been opened to traffic and the world's first skyscraper – a 10-story building – had recently been built in Chicago.

Despite such technical achievements, Ellis found plenty to impress him in the cultural centers of Europe.

When writing about Paris, Ellis gushed, "The most eloquent pen cannot do justice to the city of Paris; its unsurpassed beauty cannot be described."

But he also seemed determined to show where the Europeans fell short compared to Americans.

The Italians, he wrote, "seem to have no idea how a civilized man should have his food cooked. At all events, their style of cooking is not American."

He also seemed to have been touched by the poverty and political oppression he saw in Ireland, and he predicted the Irish would one day rebel.

"Of all the governments of Europe, I think that of England is the worst," Ellis wrote.

And although he loved the scenery and the people of Switzerland; he was unimpressed by at least one city there.

In Bern, "I asked the guide to show us the sights," Ellis wrote. The guide complied by taking them to see a famous clock, where a rooster came out every hour and crowed.

"We got there a half hour too soon and so had to stand in the street and wait," Ellis wrote.

"Finally the clock began to strike, everybody was on tiptoe looking for the wonderful rooster, expecting him to crow so loud he would shake the foundation stones of the building. Imagine our disappointment when the old Swiss rooster came out and crowed so feebly that you could not hear him 50 feet away."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 1 May 1990, p.1C:

**Lost portrait is recovered,
returned to public display**

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

A portrait of Congressman William Thomas Ellis, believed to have been lost more than 25 years ago, returned to public display Monday.

Kentucky Supreme Court Justice William M. Gant and his wife, Mary Ellen, donated the portrait by Kentucky artist Aurelius O. Revenaugh to the Owensboro Museum of Fine Art in memory of their son, Walter Sloane Gant, who died in a traffic accident two years ago.



Kentucky Supreme Court Justice William M. Gant and his wife Mary Ellen donated the portrait of Congressman William Thomas Ellis to the Owensboro Museum of Fine Art Monday.

Mary Bryan Hood, director of the art museum, said the 1898 painting "enhances the museum's collection" of Kentucky art works.

Robert E. Humphreys, vice president of the museum's board of directors, said the painting will be displayed in the new Kentucky Wing, which will open in 1993 as part of a \$2.5 million expansion.

The Owensboro museum will be the only one in the state with a wing devoted to Kentucky artists, he said.

Gant, Ellis' great-great-nephew, said the portrait hung in the old Daviess County Courthouse for years along with those of Daviess circuit judges. When the new courthouse was built in 1964, most of the portraits disappeared.

The Ellis portrait resurfaced recently. The Gants acquired it and sent it to Nashville for restoration before presenting it to the museum.

Ellis, who was known as "Cap'n Ellis," was born near Knottsville in 1845. He was orphaned at 11 and joined the First Kentucky Cavalry – a Confederate regiment – in 1861. He was 15 at the time.

He was a non-commissioned officer, in charge of scouts, when the war ended four years later. After completing his education and studying law on his own, Ellis completed Harvard Law School in a year.

Ellis, who lived on Frederica Street next to the Campbell Club, served as Daviess County attorney from 1870 to 1878. He later served three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives – from 1889 to 1895.

Ellis practiced law in Owensboro from 1871 until his death in 1925.

Gant said the portrait is a "little large to hang over your mantle at home." It measures 50 inches by 39 inches.

Two photographs of Gant, as a 4-year-old, and Ellis, a year before his death, hang beside the portrait.

The museum said the artist became widely known after establishing a studio in Louisville in 1886. For the next 22 years until his death, Revenaugh was associated with Kentucky Tonalist painters Harvey Joiner and Carl C. Brenner, according to a news release.

Gant joked, "I still think Revenaugh sounds like a riverboat gambler." Revenaugh was chosen to paint portraits of governors, judges, college presidents and community leaders throughout the East and Midwest. He also painted several images of Andrew Carnegie for Carnegie libraries across the country, the news release said.

His works are found in many private and public collections including those of the J.B. Speed Art Museum and The Filson Club, both in Louisville.

Waitman Taylor, chairman of the museum's fund drive, said \$1.05 million has been raised. Other major gifts are expected soon, he said.

Work is scheduled to begin in 1992 on renovations of the current museum and the Major John Hampden Smith House next door as well as construction of two new wings on the property.

The Kentucky Wing, 2,600 square feet of new construction, will be built behind the Smith House.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 2 May 1990, editorial, p.7A:

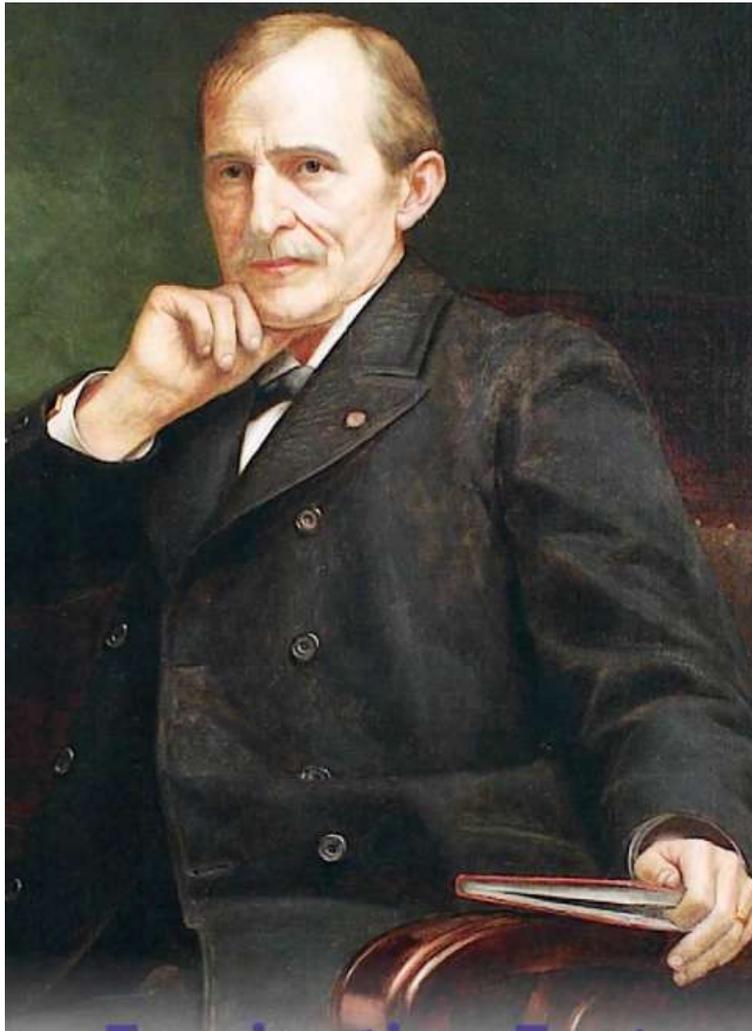
**Ellis portrait is a gift
of recovered history**

The gift of a portrait of Congressman William Thomas Ellis to the Owensboro Museum of Fine Art is more than a gift of art. Encompassed in the painting - a gift from Kentucky Supreme Court Justice William M. Gant and his wife, Mary Ellen - is an interesting part of Daviess County and Kentucky history.

Ellis, who lived on Frederica Street next to the Campbell Club, practiced law in Owensboro, served as Daviess County attorney and represented this district in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1889 to 1895.

The artist, Aurelius O. Revenaugh, established a studio in Louisville in 1886 and was commissioned to paint portraits of governors, judges, college presidents and community leaders throughout the East and Midwest. His works are included in private and public collections, including those of the J.B. Speed Art Museum in Louisville.

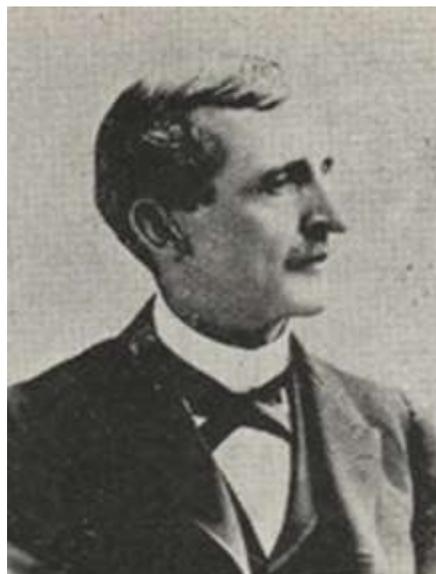
The gift is an important addition to the museum's permanent collection. Appropriately, it will be displayed in the Kentucky Wing, set to open in 1993.



Painting of William T. Ellis by celebrated portrait artist, Aurelius O. Revenaugh



Elmwood Cemetery, section D, lot 102;
Birth year was 1845



See also:

- Semi-Weekly Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 22 September 1882, p.4, residence on Frederica Street is nearing completion
- Messenger & Examiner, Owensboro, KY, 3 October 1883, p.2, address at Confederate reunion
- Tri-Weekly Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 24 October 1885 p.4, text of speech by W. T. Ellis at Blue & Gray reunion
- “A Splendid Speech”, Daily Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 3 November 1888, p.3
- Daily Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 4 November 1888, p.4, gives speech at Knottsville his place of birth
- Weekly Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 3 July 1890, p.2, text of speech about silver bill he delivered in the US House of Representatives on June 7
- Daily Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 10 September 1891, p.1, address given at Orphan Brigade reunion
- Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 27 March 1898, p.8, to deliver his lecture on "Why the Confederacy Failed" at the high school
- Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 29 January 1899, p.11B , biographical notes
- Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 22 September 1900, pp.1 & 3, gives address upon the dedication of the Confederate statue on the Daviess County courthouse grounds
- Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 1 June 1902, p.1 & 3 June 1902, p.4, text of his speech on Confederate Decoration Day at Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville
- Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 23 November 1902, p.4 & 24 November 1902, p.4, gives address at the dedication of the Knottsville Public Library on 23 November 1902, he was born in the Kottsville Precinct and donated to the library 750 volumes of the great authors
- Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 20 January 1903, p.5, presented the Southern Cross of Honor last night for his service in the Confederate Army
- Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 20 December 1904, p.3, portraits of Rev. Hiram Kellam and grandson, Captain W. T. Ellis, given to Knottsville Library Association
- Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 1 December 1905, p.1, purchased 26-acre farm of R. L. Lancaster on the Hardinsburg Road, east of Owensboro, for \$5,500, he will make a summer home of it
- “Death Comes To Captain William T. Ellis, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 9 January 1925, pp.1 &5, part of right side of article is missing
- “Home of Late Capt. W. T. Ellis, Confederate”, Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 4 September 1938, p.3B, home at 525 Frederica St. built by him in 1882, now owned by A. J. Reynolds
- “News And Views”, Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 18 October 1946, p.8, tales about William T. Ellis
- “UDC Presents Partial List of Daviess Civil War Vets”, Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 17 September 1962, p.3A

