

Otto Arthur Rothert (1871-1956)

By Jerry Long
c.2025



Otto A. Rothert



**The Kentucky Encyclopedia, John E. Kleber, editor,
(Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992), pp.782-783:**

ROTHERT, OTTO ARTHUR.

Otto Arthur Rothert, historian, was born in Huntingburg, Indiana, on June 21, 1871. He was the youngest of the five children of Herman Rothert, who came to the United States from Germany in 1844, and Franziska (Weber) Rothert, also born in Germany. The family moved to Louisville in 1889, where his father had a tobacco exporting business. Rothert graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 1892 with a science major; he had written several articles published in the *Notre Dame Scholastic*. After graduation, Rothert worked for his father and later for his brother John at the Falls City Tobacco Works, then became a clerk at the Galt House, where his

genial nature served well. In 1904 and 1905 he made an extended tour of the western states, Hawaii, and Mexico, sending back descriptive articles to the *Huntingburg Independent*. When he returned he wrote articles for the *Muhlenberg Sentinel* and the *Greenville Record* on the history of Muhlenberg County, where his family owned 2,600 acres of land. The result of that work was his classic *History of Muhlenberg County* (1913).

In 1908 Rothert became a member of the Filson Club, where he read several of his papers on historical topics. In 1917 he was elected secretary of the club, serving in that role until his retirement on November 1, 1945. As secretary Rothert edited books in the Filson Club Publication series, arranged the annual lecture series, and, beginning in 1928, edited the *Filson Club History Quarterly*. He set high editorial standards and earned scholarly respect for the journal. His devoted service helped establish the Filson Club as a leader among local history societies in the United States. He gave the club his large library of books and manuscripts.

Rothert's many publications included *The Outlaws of Cave-In-Rock* (1924), *The Story of a Poet: Madison Cawein* (1921), and *The Filson Club and Its Activities, 1884-1922* (1922) [ed. note: copies of the three preceding publications are on the Internet and can be located by a Google search]. He was known as "Uncle Otto" to the emerging historians of Kentucky who profited by his tutelage, among them Holman Hamilton, Hambleton Tapp, Thomas D. Clark, and J. Winston Coleman. Otto A. Rothert died on March 28, 1956, in Greenville, Kentucky, and was buried in Huntingburg, Indiana.

See Hambleton Tapp, "Otto Arthur Rothert, 1871-1956," FCHQ 61 (Jan. 1987): 54-67.

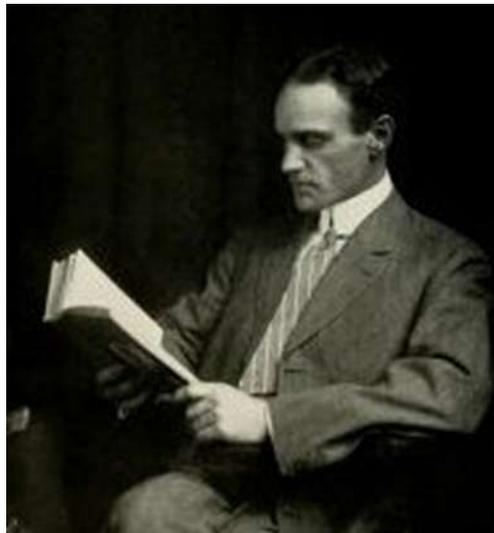
JAMES R. BENTLEY



A History of Muhlenberg County, Otto A. Rothert,
(Louisville, KY: John P. Morton & Company, Inc., 1913, 496 pages)

A copy of the book can be found on the Internet Archive site:

<https://archive.org/details/historyofmuhlenb00roth/page/n23/mode/2up>



Otto A. Rothert.

A HISTORY
OF
MUHLENBERG COUNTY

BY
OTTO A. ROTHERT

*Member of The Filson Club, Kentucky State Historical Society,
American Historical Association, International
Society of Archaeologists, etc.*



*WITH MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED ILLUSTRATIONS
AND A COMPLETE INDEX*



JOHN P. MORTON & COMPANY
INCORPORATED

1913

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Louisville, Kentucky 1964

Preface

The gathering and compiling of the traditions and history of Muhlenberg County has occupied much of my time for some years. These pages have been written solely because of the pleasure and interest I have taken in the work, and are here presented in book form that they may be read not only by those who are now interested in the subject, but that they may be preserved also for future generations. I found Muhlenberg's history a very fascinating subject. All Muhlenbergers, with few exceptions, are interested in the history and traditions of the county, but I dare say the subject appealed to me, a newcomer, more than it would to most of the men and women who were born and reared in the county. To them it had become somewhat familiar and commonplace, while to me it is new and filled with the picturesque. I am, in a sense, a stranger in Muhlenberg. My first trip to the county was made in the fall of 1902, for the purpose of looking after some land my father had bought there a few years before. During that first trip I saw comparatively nothing of Greenville, but passed my time in the country, occupying my leisure hours with hunting, and listening at night to the traditions and reminiscences of old residents. Out of these began to develop a strong desire to call up the stories that would begin with "I've often heard my grandfather say that when he was a boy," etc. I was in the presence, it seemed to me, of pioneers themselves, once or twice removed. Their very words were coming to me through the lips of those that had picked them up from now-silent voices, and who had cherished them through the long years.

One night in the fall of 1905 a number of us were sitting near the old Stack of the long-abandoned Buckner Furnace — in the upper Pond Creek country, in the neighborhood to which my annual visits up to that time had been confined — when the vague traditions of that old landmark again became the subject of discussion. All agreed it was unfortunate that the Story of The Stack had never been written. Alvin L. Taylor, my host, suggested that since the object of my hunting was apparently drifting from "digging out foxes to digging up facts," I spend the remaining half of my visit in gathering the traditions of The Stack. The novelty of the suggestion appealed to me at once. The next day I began a systematic investigation of the subject. In the course of two weeks I spent a day or more with every "oldest citizen" in the neighborhood, and from them and some of their children and grandchildren I gathered the materials from which was written the first version of "The Story of The Stack." This was published in the Greenville Record in the spring of 1906.

In the fall of 1906, shortly after returning to Muhlenberg, I found that there still lingered a longing to hear the horn of the hunter and the trailing of the hounds, for one night the "call of the wild" led me three miles from the Buckner Stack to the Russell Old Field. There, while listening to the musical bark of the running dogs, I began an investigation of the traditions of the Russell Race Track and Muster Field. A few weeks later the results were published in the Greenville Record. And so, fall after fall, I drifted into new fields in the southern part of the county, and submitted various sketches to the local press. In 1910 the pleasure had become a preoccupation of deep interest, and I decided to compile a history of the county and publish it in book form. That fall and the two following I laid aside gun and lantern, took camera and note-book, and spent a total of about six months making pilgrimages, through rain and shine, to every place in the county where there might be gathered facts worth preserving in a printed history. On returning to Louisville I began arranging my notes, and took up the laborious but absorbing task of searching through books for any Muhlenberg history they might contain. The results of these years of earnest effort to produce a volume that would be worthy the memory of the valiant and resolute men and women who settled and established Muhlenberg County are contained in this completed book.

While it is submitted with proper diffidence as to my ability to do the subject full justice, it is nevertheless presented as an honest effort in which no difficulty has been evaded or shunned.

This volume pertains principally to the history of the county from its beginning down to 1875, but is extended more or less briefly in some practical aspects from 1875 to the present day. Much remains for a later historian to write about the wonderful advancements Muhlenberg has made during the past twenty years. The events of general interest during the past quarter of a century are not only fresh in the memory of many of the men and women of to-day, but are likely to be remembered or handed down until a history is written covering that period, whereas much of the material I am here trying to preserve would otherwise, in all probability, soon pass away with the many other local traditions and unrecorded facts that have already disappeared and are forgotten.

The records of the county and circuit courts from the beginning have been preserved in the courthouse at Greenville, and in all probability will always be preserved. I have, therefore, made no attempt to write a history based principally on these ever-available records, but have confined my work as much as possible to collecting the now vanishing traditions and to presenting the less available material. Much of this heretofore unpublished as well as published material is woven into this volume. I found in printed books comparatively little that bore on Muhlenberg's past. Practically all I found in print I quote, and thus give the reader an opportunity to read the statements in the language in which they were originally recorded, preferring this to expressing the facts in my own words.

Of the more than two hundred illustrations here presented, comparatively few are of modern buildings or of active men and women of to-day. Most of the pictures are of some of the old citizens, the old houses, and the old landmarks. More than one fourth are copies of pictures made between 1817 and 1872. All except those taken in 1911 and 1912, which comprise about one half, are dated. It is a well-known fact that the portraits and biographies that appear in many county histories are published in consideration of a stipulated price, and it may therefore not be amiss to state that this absolutely has not been done in this book.

I have, either in the text or in some of the foot-notes, given the names of the children of a number of pioneers, and have thus laid a foundation for those of their descendants who may desire to compile a family tree. I made no attempt, except in a few cases, to procure the names occurring in the third and succeeding generations. I feel that the lists of names for the second generation are in most instances complete, for only such of the many lists as I have been able to verify, to a greater or less extent, are printed in this volume. Very few of these lists were copied from written records; most of them were compiled for me within the past few years by men and women who depended on their memory, family traditions, and tombstones upon the graves of their ancestors for their data. Any one who has given his family tree even comparatively little thought will realize the difficulty of preparing an accurate list from such sources, if he but attempt to recall and record the names of the brothers and sisters of any of his four grandparents, and he will also realize that omissions and other errors are likely to occur in any first-published list.

Many of the local traditions woven into the various chapters of this history are seldom heard beyond the immediate neighborhood to which they belong, while some of the other local stories and incidents are familiar to practically every Muhlenberger. A few of the traditions have almost as many versions as they are years old. Where various versions are in circulation I have accepted the one that, in my opinion, seemed the most authentic.

I here express my thanks to Mr. Richard T. Martin, of Greenville, and to the many other Muhlenbergers whose aid and encouragement in gathering data have made the writing of this

history of Muhlenberg County not only a possibility but a pleasant occupation; also to Mr. George E. Cross, of Louisville, for copying old oil paintings, daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, tintypes, and photographs, and for preparing many photographic views for reproduction; to Mrs. Jennie C. Morton, of Frankfort; to Judge Lucius P. Little, of Owensboro, and Doctor Samuel A. Braun, of Louisville, for material bearing on the subject; to Colonel Reuben T. Durrett, of Louisville, for many suggestions and for the use of his large library on Kentucky history; and last, but by no means least, to Mr. Young E. Allison, of Louisville, for suggestions growing out of his experience as an editor in preparing matter for the press.

Otto A. Rothert.

Louisville, Kentucky, March 15, 1913.



History of Kentucky: The Blue Grass State, Volume III
(Chicago – Louisville: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1928) pp.28-30:

OTTO ARTHUR ROTHERT

Otto Arthur Rothert, of Louisville, historian, and since 1917 secretary of The Filson Club of Kentucky, has won a distinguished place among Kentucky authors by his historical works upon selected subjects that have combined romantic interest with the most thorough and penetrating original research into the facts of pioneer and later times. The most important of these works are: "A History of Muhlenberg County" (1913); "The Story of a Poet," being the life of Madison Cawein (1921); and "The Outlaws of Cave-in-Rock" (1924). While each of these subjects has been treated with scrupulous fidelity to fact, the author has seized upon and suggested the romantic aspect whenever it has presented itself and has written them all in a direct and nervous style that imparts a singular personal interest to the interesting and curious documentary relics he produces.

The Muhlenberg history has been recognized as in the front rank of county histories, priceless in its intimate account of the pioneer occupation and the personalities of those who settled there. The study of Madison Cawein's life, while made almost contemporary with that poet's death, is an invaluable collection of all the material that will some day enable the biographer in the true perspective of time to prepare the proper critical estimate of Cawein's great contributions to American poetry and the influences that moved to their creation.

The history of "The Outlaws of Cave-in-Rock" is one of those extraordinary records of early criminal tragedies in state history which have always challenged human interest and will do so to the end of time. Beginning with the mystery that enveloped that famous "Cave in the Rock" almost opposite the sinister Ford's Ferry Crossing in Crittenden county, the author has collected all the stories that gave its very name a terrible import. He has pursued through scattered court records from Kentucky down along the old Natchez Trace the dreadful story of the Harpes. In the course of it he solved the long closed mystery of Samuel Mason, brave soldier of the Revolution, who fell on evil days, became a notorious river pirate and highwayman and perished miserably. In his research Mr. Rothert unearthed the old French *proces verbal* of the trial and had its creole jargon translated into English. He has lifted those mysterious days into the light of authentic and documented history, related with appreciative spirit.

As by-products of his busy career Mr. Rothert has written the history of Unity Baptist church (1914), Muhlenberg county, and thus preserved records that the future historian and antiquarian will prize above rubies. In "Local History in Kentucky Literature" (1915) he has brought together a thorough handbook of topics and their treatment that will be dear to the hearts of romanticists and novelists. He has placed an unerring guiding finger upon the subjects that can attract and move poets and novelists and cites them to sources of information. He was the first to predict the flood of curiosity about Kentucky that good roads would invite and satisfy. He has also compiled and written "The Filson Club and Its Activities" (1922), a brief biography of that now celebrated historical association and a summary of its publications, papers and original manuscripts. He has, of course, other works in view, which later will speak for themselves, his labors having been interrupted recently by ill health, now happily overcome.

Mr. Rothert is the youngest son and child of Herman and Franziska (Weber) Rothert. Herman Rothert was born in Hanover, Germany, a subject of George IV of England, in 1828, and came to the United States in 1844, two years after his father, Gerhard Rothert, had come to find a suitable location for the family—Huntingburg, Dubois county, Indiana, of which town Gerhard Rothert was one of the founders. Franziska Weber was born in Baden, Germany, in 1835, and came to this country in 1852. The young people were married in Huntingburg in 1854. To them were born five children: Franklin, who died in infancy; Sophia; John H.; Hugo C.; and Otto A., who was born June 21, 1871.

Herman Rothert proved himself to be a man of vision and indomitable purpose until his death in 1904 at the age of seventy-six. Beginning life in Indiana as a small general merchant, he soon became a large buyer and exporter of tobacco and when he was sixty-one had accumulated a handsome fortune upon which he retired from the labors of routine business, removed with his family to Louisville, Kentucky, and there began with vision investment in forest lands. These are still in the family possession. When the father died his widow, Franziska Rothert, who had proved herself the worthy helpmeet and companion, administered the estate with the same fine judgment and vision that her husband had shown. She died in 1914 at the age of seventy-nine, with mental energy unimpaired to the last and the estate intact. Of her children John, the second son, had been engaged in the tobacco manufacturing business for many years until shortly before his death in 1925, aged sixty-four, unmarried; Hugo, the third son, is a successful banker and outstanding civic leader in his native home in Indiana; Sophia, the only daughter, is an invalid.

From such parents, Otto A. Rothert, the subject of this sketch, had his inheritance of indomitable industry and vision. Before he had completed his public-school course he entered the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, whence he was graduated in 1892 with the degree of Bachelor of Science. He was at once taken into his father's office as private secretary and afterward was accountant and bookkeeper in the Falls City Tobacco Works and the old Galt House. But such employment was not to his taste. He had dipped into the Pierian spring of wider mental interests and was not to be satisfied with routine. After the death of his father in 1904 he set out upon a year's tour of North America, from Alaska to southern Mexico and the Hawaiian islands, to take a wide view and determine his future. He has visited every place of note in North America. In order to give himself occupation he wrote newspaper letters of his travels and observations, began to develop a curiosity concerning the history of places and things he saw, and thus, by the time he had returned, was committed to an interest in history that fortunately for Kentucky he has concentrated upon this state.

Mr. Rothert has never married. His love of history has fully occupied his mind and his time. Having the means to indulge his taste he has expended them upon research and collection

for the enrichment of the public of the future and the encouragement of the studious and ambitious who can hereafter find in his work mines rich in the material of general culture and knowledge.

In all his career he has shown the sacrifice of the true student devoted to his work. Besides being secretary of The Filson Club, he has served on the executive committee of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association from 1924 to 1927. He is an associate editor of "The History Quarterly" of The Filson Club and the University of Louisville. He has written newspaper and magazine articles on history and travel. He has assisted many writers on historical subjects by doing much painstaking research for them. An example of his help to others is Harrison D. Taylor's book, "Ohio County, Kentucky, in the Olden Days," for which he wrote the introduction and supplied the footnotes and appendices. Among the other historical societies of which he is a member are: the Mississippi Valley Historical Association; American Historical Association; Kentucky State Historical Society; Wisconsin State Historical Society; Tennessee State Historical Society; Southwestern Indiana Historical Association. Socially he is a member of the Louisville Lodge of Elks, the Arts Club and the famous Conscience Lunch Club of Louisville, devoted to philosophic discussion.

YOUNG E. ALLISON.



**The Filson Club History Quarterly, Vol. 20, No. 2, April 1946
(Louisville, KY: Filson Club Historical Society) pp.67-96:**

OTTO ARTHUR ROTHERT, 1871-

By Hambleton Tapp

Certainly no pomp and circumstance nor anything of the exotic and bizarre was associated with my meeting Otto A. Rothert, affectionately called "Uncle Otto" and "Colonel" by his proteges. Such is not his way of doing things. That first meeting, nevertheless, is vividly recalled. Perhaps twelve years ago, the writer, being deeply absorbed in certain episodes pertaining to the Civil War, sought this gentleman, whose reputation as counselor, comforter, and inspirer to neophytic Kentucky historians had traveled abroad. The fact that he was associated with The Filson Club lent something of fascination. The proposed visit therefore, as may well be imagined, was anticipated with both thrills and trepidation.

To reach "Uncle Otto's" office, one enters The Filson Club and moves down a narrow hallway. During this journey, he is frowned at by stern-eyed, fiercely bewhiskered portraits of past-great gentlemen until he begins to feel some misgivings. Fortunately, however, toward the end of the corridor his attention is attracted by a pleasant-looking lady, Miss Ludie J. Kinkead, the Curator, whose countenance is genial and reassuring, and the timid stranger is graciously conducted to the foot of a stairway toward the end of the hall, and, amid a profusion of friendly verbiage, bade to ascend to the second floor, and there to bear to the left. Still frowned down upon by fiercely bewhiskered portraits of the Commonwealth's celebrities, and near-celebrities, the stranger again apprehensive peers to the left, surveys the distance to the last door, and hastens to reach that point.

One does not easily forget that small office with its tobacco aroma, its heterogeneous pictorial display, its ponderous volumes, its manuscript-laden desk, no more than he would the master of the place himself. "Mista Rowethut," as Miss Kinkead pronounces his name, was seated

at an old walnut desk facing the door, and though smoke rather clouded the view, the impression was vivid. The face was strong, the jaw somewhat long, the chin firm and manly. The thinning hair gave the forehead a broad appearance. His fine dark eyes gazed over the half-lensed clerical spectacles inquiringly, all the while adjusting themselves from close reading to me. The voice was pleasant and gentle, more or less a baritone. The greeting was not one of excessive warmth, though not repelling, and some preoccupation was. in, the dark eyes. Some mention too was made of excessive work. Nevertheless, the deep kindly eyes, which, could be merry or melancholy, did not convey an aversion to lengthy conversation. An. impression was felt that the man, for fear of being thought, too easy or affable, was attempting to be severe and cold – a ruse which was feebly maintained. In lighting a cigarette and enveloping himself in smoke, Mr. Rothert remarked that he did not inhale and that therefore smoking did not hurt him, It was rather clear that he had convinced himself that this formula was just expiation for habitual use of, tobacco – clear, too that this was a stock-in-trade remark. However, that he received no particular enjoyment from the puffing was obvious. Yet, he seemed to like the habit.

Within a short time, we were deep in conversation about the Civil War. My host was interested but not enthusiastic – seemed at intervals preoccupied and more than once his dark eyes shown rather melancholy. I had no way of knowing that he might have been musing over the shining days when his love for Kentucky history, was developing. Perhaps the deep eyes envisaged again that day long ago when the aging, palsied, bewhiskered Zack F. Smith, placed his hand upon young Otto's strong shoulder and, admonished the enthusiastic youth to follow the star of Kentucky history "to the paths of all the western stars."

Though my stay was not interminable, I learned something of the additional interests of the man. He was master of a large estate, known as Forest Retreat, in the wilds of rustic Muhlenberg County. In the midst of this timbered estate was a cleared space upon which sprawled a low, rambling, centennial log house. Around this quaint structure was a large garden. This garden, strange, exotic and unique, consisted in part of myriads of species of hardy variegated plants. So earnestly and meticulously did "Uncle Otto" explain and describe these odd specimens that I wondered whether he was attempting to rival the magic of the celebrated and eccentric Dr. Rappicini in his strange ventures in horticultural experimentation. He was interested in Kentucky nurserymen and their organizations and work. He delved somewhat into forestry and farming and animal husbandry, also geology. He was intrigued with the idea of drilling for oil and making a bonanza strike. Journalism and art were close interests. The man was amazingly versatile and pursued a plethora of interests.

Though Mr. Rothert had affected some restraint, I enjoyed the visit and made no effort to conceal it. Aside from mutual affinities and his humanness, this unusual fellow could teach and help me a great deal, I mused – besides I liked him. Little time elapsed ere another visit was made, followed by many, until frequent callings became habitual. Soon we were fast friends. As time went on he related bits of family history, parts of which are here recounted.

THE ROTHERT FAMILY: The Rothert family is German. The father, Herman, a blue-eyed, brown-haired North German, was born in Hanover in 1828. While the mother, Franziska Weber, a brown-eyed, brunette South German, was born in Baden in 1835. Herman, an energetic, ambitious youth, eager for success in life, came to America in 1844, remained a few years in Louisville where he met Miss Weber, and ultimately settled at Huntingburg, Indiana, to which his father, Gerard, had migrated earlier as one of the first settlers there. Franziska, a bright, spritely, ambitious girl, with a taste for music, literature, and art, as well as a German appreciation for the things economic, had come with friends from Bruchsal, Baden, in 1852. She had heard much of

America – its freedom, its space, its opportunity. America was to her expansive, liberty-loving soul the golden land where dreams come true. That the tall Herman and the winsome Franziska should fall in love and marry was quite natural. Five children were born to the happy union: Franklin, Sophia, John, Hugo, and Otto, the youngest.

What though a multiplicity of duties beset the plucky, dark-eyed Franziska, she turned them off cheerfully and somehow found time to study and enjoy Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, Hugo, Browning, Tennyson, and Longfellow, and to revel in the strains of many a classic masterpiece. In addition, the versatile woman possessed keen business acumen and was always the confidante and adviser of her husband in all their various commercial ventures. This was no ordinary woman. Nor did Herman ever fail or cease to be proud of her. He worked hard and prospered, projecting the buying of tobacco from farmers and exporting it with marked success. She would have her children industrious and yet she would have them possessed of that "sweetness and light" which is the mark of good training, education, culture, and high thinking. She was strong enough mentally to lead them to the joys of the classics, fine art, and music, and she saw to their entering college – even in a day when few attended. On June 21, 1892, Otto was graduating from the University of Notre Dame.

As the years rolled on Otto's father's hair and short heavy beard turned gray, likewise did his mother's ever-wavy hair.

The Rothert home was a happy one indeed, with a charming mother, a successful father, and healthy, hardy children. Young Otto, a handsome, brown-eyed youth, played with the neighborhood children, fished and swam in the nearby creek and ponds, attended the local school. He recalls tenderly the impish little girls with their tightly-plaited pigtails, and the carefree boys who romped about the village, busy with their sports and pranks – and none too fond of school. He was one of the gang – in the thick of the merriment. What mattered it – roiling hoops or "the ole swimmin' hole" – every childhood sport pleased his gay, affable soul. That youthful love of sports has never quite left him.

It was a happy family indeed, with countless hobbies and interests. The dark-eyed, dark-haired Franziska would have challenged any household to lively activity and joyousness. This amazing woman during the early part of her married life helped keep store. Later, with four children (one having died in infancy) she personally superintended the receiving of tobacco bought, oversaw its rehandling and shipping and attended to the principal clerical work attached to the business. Of this admirable lady, one biographer writes:

"Although many of her hours were spent in their place of business, she, nevertheless, found time for her friends, of whom she had many. As much occupied as she was, she never neglected her books, flowers, bees, and other recreations. She was always a great lover of flowers.... In 1889, she owned what was undoubtedly the largest and best collection of potted plants in the county. The cactus was a special favorite of hers. Her little vegetable garden back of the lawn usually produced the first of the season. Every shrub and plant was set out under her personal instruction. In the early 80's she added bee raising to her hobbies. Her beehives were managed in a most scientific manner and the bees always robbed with good results. Birds going with all these things she kept a number of mocking birds, brown thrushes, red birds, and canaries around their home. She was among the first to encourage the building of the railroad through the town and also among the first to promote the establishment of a bank in Huntingburg, for she realized their commercial necessity." (*The Huntingburg Independent*, Saturday, December 26, 1914.) She was equally at home in encouraging the help at the tobacco warehouse in merry mid-afternoon song, in reading Schiller in the original German; discoursing upon the subject of apiology, advising Herman as to

the wisdom of a business venture, or romping in joyous abandon with the children. Truly a remarkable woman at all times.

Nor was the father, Herman, by any means devoid of imagination. Aside from being an astute and industrious business man, a man of indomitable purpose and vision, Mr. Rothert was fond of bird dogs, hunting, saddle horses, fancy poultry, traveling, and the collection of Indian relics. When wild deer were hunted in the vicinity of Huntingburg, one or more tame deer could be found on his fenced-in lawn. Even a tame coon or caged fox was frequently seen in the old days among the shrubs there. One may rest assured the visitor at the Rothert home was kept fascinated.

But in the well-regulated Rothert household, there was a time for work and a time for play, and the stout-minded Franziska saw that the chores were done – done well – and the lessons conned and conned well.

YEARS AT SCHOOL: In the 80's, good preparatory schools in the Middle-West were scarce, so that in the fall of 1887 Otto was sent to the Notre Dame Preparatory School. The wavy-haired, brown-eyed youth, replete with formal preparatory learning, was ready to enter the University of Notre Dame by the fall of 1888. At the University, though majoring in science, young Rothert developed, among other things, a taste for writing and an interest in poetry. Too, that he had firmly developed a penchant for painstaking thoroughness prior to college graduation may be gained from perusing his articles in the school paper, *The Notre Dame Scholastic* – articles ranging from a disquisition upon the ode in English poetry to a discourse upon the relationship between the Darwinian theory and the Biblical account of the creation. His youthful literary ventures indicate also an active, interested mind ever ready to get at the bottom of things and to reveal its findings to the world. In fact, versatility of interest seemed to characterize his college career, just as during childhood and in maturity.

To the kind, business-minded-Herman, these interests must have seemed in the nature of vagaries. Yet the wise Franziska knew that the polytechnic-minded Otto with his dreamy brown eyes, his fondness for abstractions and his gentleness to all living things would never be able to "turn a shrewd deal." Nor was she displeased. She well understood the young fellow – thought him very handsome in his tight-fitting gay nineties suit, high collar, and low crowned hat. Otto could "dabble" in letters. Besides, Herman, in spite of many heart-breaking reverses, had done well; money would not be a consideration.

VENTURES IN BUSINESS: College days passed, Otto felt that he should pursue some course in the nature of commercial activity. Upon invitation therefore, he concluded to help his father, who, having moved to Louisville in the fall of 1889, was still engaged in the exporting of tobacco. His work became more or less that of private secretary.

Always meticulously conscientious, young Otto probably did his work well, although it is indeed a far cry from disquisitions upon the English ode and adventures in Darwinianism to correspondence and calculations in the loose-leaf tobacco trade. However, this job did not require much time; moreover, it was gradually liquidated as his father approached the age of retirement. A year or two after he returned from college he accepted a position in the office of the Falls City Tobacco Works, which was operated by his brother John. This type of activity, though all in the congenial family, did not suit his inclinations.

LIFE AT THE GALT HOUSE: One day Herman Rothert accosted his old friend John White on the street, grabbed his shoulder and said, "John, the boy Otto doesn't have enough work to keep him busy. Do you know of anything for him?" "Sure," spoke forthright John White. "Send

him to the Galt House. We'll make a clerk out of him during his spare time." Mr. White, a hide and leather dealer, was a stockholder in this hotel. Thus gradually Otto's career in the tobacco business ended. Otto actually did not need the money obtained from his jobs; however, he and his family had too much of downright German thrift to think of a life of leisure. Galt House (located North East corner of First and Main streets) was then indeed a name to conjure with. It had truly entertained the famous and celebrated of this earth: presidents, princes, lords, and ladies; generals, admirals, and statesmen; actors and actresses, debutantes, and chorines; divines, barristers, and gamblers.

This venture was indeed fortunate because one learned life at the old Galt House. And, Otto at that time had not quite found himself – his life's vocation. Favoring his success, he liked people, was a vivacious conversationalist, possessed an innate liking for humor and enjoyed both male and female companionship. He liked the racy conversation of the Galt House crowd, was charmed with the company of reporters, fascinated with the visiting actors and actresses, delighted with the gay sportsmen and showy "drummers," amused at the escapades of the "men-about-town." He learned from and liked the Galt House staff – the barbers, tobacconists, porters, bellboys, chefs. They liked him too. All seemed to confide in him – and the vicissitudes of bellboys were as amusing as predicaments of guests. He developed confidence rapidly. After a while the young hosteler could even hazard a bit of nonchalant banter with visiting chorines without being abashed by their ready, bold, and scintillating repartee.

Upon one occasion young Otto, mustering arch confidence, came forth with a most impertinent query. A bevy of shapely chorines having entered the hotel and inquired concerning the rates of room, had moved to the side to deliberate the matter. After a time the clerk leaned over the desk and asked, "Do you take baths?" Although near getting his "ears pinned back" for the sally, the gay fellow grinned broadly at the affectation of indignation exhibited by the outraged choristers as they archly switched by the desk, leaving rhetoric to the leading lady, who, in a few piquant retorts, brought new meaning and luster to the time-honored Philippic. The incident got into print. (*Louisville Times*, October 8, 1903.)

One incident at the Galt House "Uncle Otto" recalls with many a puff and cackle. He protests that he had the "very devil of a time" one morning of July, 1904. A Mr. and Mrs. James Jones had been registered in room 819 for two days. During the morning a very pulchritudinous young lady appearing at the desk asked if Jim Jones were registered there. Assured and given the room number, the young lady proceeded to room 819. A knock at the door elicited a "come in" from "a sweet female voice." Somewhat shaken, the lady entered and faced another handsome young woman. Asking whether or not Mr. James Jones occupied that room, she was told by the second female that he did, who pleasantly announced at the same time that she was Mrs. James Jones. This pronouncement immediately infuriated the caller, who screamed that she was Mrs. James Jones. The second declaration brought Mrs. Jones No. 2 into spirited action. The altercation produced such din and clamor that the clerk hurried to the scene. It appears that the second Mr. Jones, approaching Louisville on a southbound train, had wired his wife to meet him at the Galt House. The train unfortunately very late, Mr. Jones had not registered at the Galt House when his wife called. When all had arrived, the two Messrs. Jones, amused at the incident, persuaded their wives to "shake hands." Actually the two couples became good friends. (*Louisville Herald*, August 1, 1904.)

Practically every little incident at the magnificent old hostelry pleased and amused the impressionable Otto. He liked the life, and he made literally thousands of friends from all over the continent, all of whom, it seems, invited him to visit. Yet soon after the turn of the century, he

realized that other interests were pressing hard for supremacy and that incumbency at the gay old place could not be longer enjoyed. Actually, he was already doing journalistic writing, busy with amateur photography, keeping up with scientific and botanical developments, and nurturing an interest in a tract of timber land which his father had acquired in Muhlenberg County. Although, he still manifested an active interest in the latest sartorial creations, parted his wavy hair in the middle, kept up with baseball and football and showed a fondness for the belles, Mr. Rothert was thinking more seriously about a life's work and more seriously about life itself, in spite of habitual jocularity. His reporter friends noted that he seldom missed a good stage show, that he would sit enrapt and entranced for hours under the spell of great artists, and they joked at his lively, multiplicity of interests and hobbies. Young Otto's manifold interests came to public light in a *Louisville Times* article of August 6, 1904:

THE MANY-SIDED OTTO ROTHERT: Thus is captioned the story, which reveals a versatility both rare and racy. It carries a picture of the wavy-haired, wing-collared, elaborately cravated, nattily-savored, debonairly handsome young prodigy, with chin resting on hand and deep brown eyes in ponderous reflection. Introducing him as a "genial, competent man in his position" the article declares that few know him as he really is, "the many-sided man, who, though he busies himself intelligently and thoughtfully with his daily tasks, yet finds time to be a student of, with an intense love for original research in, science, and a collector of things rare from all parts of the world... a musician and in a way an artist of no mean ability."

The young man's interests are depicted as ranging from college pennants to Angora goats. In fact, the downright, meticulous fellow collected college banderole with purpose and sentiment as highly serious a Darwin seeking the answer to the origin of the species or Garrison fighting to free the slaves. He never goes at things tepidly – not even in puffing cigarettes. His spacious residence then at the southwest corner of Brook and Gray streets must have presented a bizarre sight indeed – what with the compelling hobbies of the aging Franziska and the inexorable predilections of the impressionable Otto.

After describing the artistically arranged banderole, *The Times* article proceeds to depict a few of the versatile young man's interests. "He has "seven cabinets of fossils," declares the reporter, "gathered within a radius of forty miles 'of Louisville and a herbarium containing a collection of 300 native plants mounted by himself." So abrupt is the jump to the next item that it is thought advisable to use the writers own depiction: "He is an amateur photographer of great ability and untiring enthusiasm. His collection contains about 600 pictures of historic places, gathered in his travels, and of all of the local places of interest. His enthusiasm for photography led him to prepare A PICTUROGRAPHY OF FRANCES ROTHERT. She is a niece and the Picturography includes photographs of the attractive child from her infancy to her sixth birthday."

The room of the Proteus-minded Otto on Gray Street was marvelous. It was replete with curios – swords, canes, muskets, skates, tennis rackets, antlers, and foils, all with histories attached. Tastefully arranged about the walls were "hands" of poker, whist, and hearts. "One shows how a pair of deuces won a pot," declares the amazed reporter, "and another how a royal flush was just missed. These, too, have histories, but of their life stories Mr. Rothert says little. 'These things were all of my college days,' said he, 'and have no part in the active life of 'today, save as memories, pleasant and – well, not so pleasant 'sometimes.'"

Nor was working in the "good earth" neglected by the many-sided man. He is reported to have spent an hour each day in his mother's flower garden, cultivating all kinds of blossoming plants. So habituated did he become to this diversion that neighbors called him "The man with the hoe." Continues *The Times* article: "He is enthusiastic about Angora goats, and contemplates

placing a herd on a large tract of unimproved land owned by his family in Muhlenberg County. He is a horseman . . . He rides as well as he works and collects, and enjoys the exhilaration of a run across country or on the boulevard every afternoon."

The picture, "Otto Rothert Practices Riding Pedigreed Steed," carried in *The Louisville Herald* of September 11, 1904, is, for all the world, as heroic as the equestrian statue of General John Hunt Morgan, in Lexington.

In addition to his many other accomplishments, Otto "Angora" Rothert was a member of the Louisville Lodge of Elks, the Y.M.C.A., the Louisville Boat Club and various other social organizations. He did all of them with a thoroughness and meticulousness calculated for success. One of the local papers of the day – *Louisville Post*, October 24, 1903 – expressed great interest, in "his house boat under, construction" for a leisurely expedition down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and speculated rather pointedly as to the possibility of a honeymoon down "La Belle Riviere."

TOURS MEXICO AND THE WEST: Following the death of his beloved, father in February of 1904, Otto, with the encouragement of his mother, arranged to make an extended trip through the West, Mexico, Alaska, and Hawaii. He had toured all states east of the Mississippi. He had long dreamed of enhancing his education by more travel, felt that he should not settle down to his life's vocation until some first-hand knowledge of lauds and peoples of other parts should have been gained.

The Louisville papers of October 15, 1904, carried announcements of the proposed nine months trip. *The Huntingburg Independent*, edited: by Ed: H. Dufendach, announcing that Mr. Rothert had agreed to write articles for it during the trip, stated that the young traveler would make a study of sociology in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, California, Utah and Mexico, visit the principal cities in the territory described studying and photographing "every spot which he can find that throws any light, upon the progress of civilization among the aborigines, and also the immigrants who have since settled in the country which they gained:" He was also expected to study the botanical specimens, as well as the minerals, trees, and wild animals of that section of the continent. It appears that the long-awaited journey got under way early in December.

The first point of interest was New Orleans, whose old Creole lore and antique beauty thrilled the sentimental young man tremendously. There he dined *a la Creole* and danced with sparkling belles whose brunette beauty intrigued and exhilarated uncommonly. At practically every stop throughout the long tour, he met some old friend who was delighted to entertain. From the Crescent City, he moved across the vast Lone Star State, studying its antiquities, and from thence leisurely journeyed into Old Mexico. Some one suggested that he must have first registered at the newspaper offices in each city and town visited, because his presence was everywhere as lavishly hailed as a tour of "Jersey Lily" Langtry. Actually, his experience at the Galt House had made him acquainted as far as Old Mexico.

Throughout the meanderings, the eager voyager gormandized all the country had to offer, eye and brain. At the ruins of Mitla, some four hundred miles south of Mexico City, though standing awed and enrapt at the majestic beauty and grandeur of Aztec culture, he could not forget his perennial sense of humor. He paid an Indian maid there the "fabulous sum of two cents" to stand with him in the picture. Here he assumed a dramatic pose calculated to put to shame the puerile efforts of Cortez, the Conquistador.

In Mexico City, entering the spirit of the bullfight, he concluded to have his likeness struck as *Matador*, with all the trappings. The picture is a masterpiece in audacity. Donned in ponderous sombrero, short jacket, small clothes of satin richly embroidered in gold, tight velvet trousers, huge

flaming mantle slung over a shoulder and stanced heroically, "Don Otto," with cool, deft precision draws the deadly estoque as though to put an end to Andalusia's most ferocious and furious *toro*.

Mexico delighted "Uncle Otto" immeasurably. In *The Huntingburg Independent* (January 21, 1905) writing to friends in Huntingburg, Indiana, he exuberantly declared: "I cannot tell you how much I enjoyed my six weeks' trip through Mexico. When I think of all the grand scenery, the many Jerusalem-like cities, the hundreds of quaint corners, the queer architecture, and the strange customs and costumes, I had the good fortune to see in Mexico, I sometimes imagine it was all a dream. I anticipated a novel trip but everything far surpassed my expectations." Actually he studied everything Mexican from the reign of Montezuma to homeless canines. The romantic history of the warm-blooded country, he devoured in gulps.

Leaving Old Mexico he moved into New Mexico for a hunting excursion of two weeks with an old friend, Dr. Will J. Schlosser, of Silver City, after which he journeyed by easy stages into Arizona, whose Tucson and Grand Canyon excited his highest poetic imagination. His twenty long letters to *The Huntingburg Independent* are rich, colorful, and humorous reading even today, and they reveal an unusual power of observation and analyzation. No less interesting than the Mexican venture were his travels to Hawaii, Alaska, and the Northwest, where everything from Hula girls to Eskimos and Mormons amused and interested. Through all the experiences, he seemed to be more and more impressed with the "eternal verities" – the truth, exactness, and beauty of nature. All seemed to him to be a part of a universal pattern (incoherent and exotic though the particular might seem) and this pattern was exactness and truth. Here is one explanation for his driving determination to achieve thoroughness, accuracy, truth in all his research and writing.

After having traveled thirty thousand miles over a period of nine months, Otto A. Rothert, cosmopolite and scholar, reached Louisville, August 21, 1905, where family, friends, reporters, and clubmen welcomed him with outstretched arms. He was strong in body, enlarged in vision, laden with curios, and eager to serve his fellowmen.

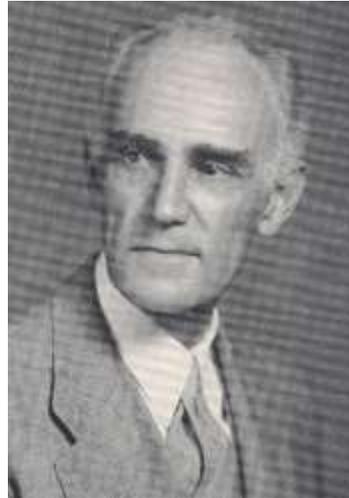
ADVENTURES IN MUHLENBERG COUNTY: In perusing the newspaper clippings of the day concerning Otto A. Rothert, the reader gains the impression that the erstwhile "globe-trotter" was rather restless. He continued to travel, making short trips to points in Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. During the fall of 1905, he visited the recently purchased landed estate of the family in Muhlenberg County. There the wild, rough topography with its heavily timbered surface appealed to him, and the friendly rural folk were interesting. More and more fascinated with the land and people, he decided to remodel the old rambling log house on the place and use a part of it as domicile during his visits to the country.

This piece of landed property consisted of approximately 2600 acres, then mostly timbered. The soil was not particularly fertile, and only a few acres had been cleared and put into agricultural production. The timber was valuable, and the soil, if cleared, could be made to produce some profits from tillage. Brush and undergrowth, in places almost as dense and tangled as a jungle, presented a problem. The knotty point of clearing this undergrowth resulted, in the profuse talk about the introduction of the Angora goats, concerning which reporters joked in the newspapers. The land was known to contain some thin strata of coal and a possibility of oil and gas also existed. Such is yet the case – and thereby hangs a tale – but this presently.

Without fanfare, Otto A. Rothert set about his real business in the county in earnest, namely, that of collecting and writing Muhlenberg history. The Western trip had made clear the thing he liked best. Otto A. Rothert's real love was history. Affable and likeable, he had little difficulty in winning the friendship and confidence of Muhlenbergers, and one of the first cultivations was with Orien L. Roark, the editor of *The Greenville Record*, which publication

served as the medium of presenting his early ventures in local history. Be it understood that he was fairly well-known over Kentucky by that time. Well-to-do, well educated, widely traveled, extensively and intensively publicized, and in addition was genial and interesting, young and prepossessing.

One of his first Muhlenberg friends was Alvin L. Taylor, who was popular throughout the county. Another was Richard T. Martin of Greenville. Among other helpful friends were Miss Amy M. Longest, Harry M. Dean, and Marvin A. Wells, also of Greenville. Gayle R. Carver, who was born about the time *A History of Muhlenberg County* was printed, is now regarded by Mr. Rothert as his successor as the historian of the County.



Otto A. Rothert, 1894 and 1939

Little difficulty was encountered in meeting the hoary sages of the district who had either seen or heard their fathers and grandfathers say thus and so regarding this or that incident in the county's history and traditions. Soon the bright-eyed, enthusiastic young man was in knowledge of a vast amount of local lore, running the entire gamut of truth, verisimilitude, yarn, fiction claptrap, subterfuge, falsehood, and plain lies.

In time the tireless, insatiable novice and slave of Clio had tramped the county from end to end, wayfared from cabin to mansion and had interviewed concerning Muhlenberg's past all the way from diaper-clad speechless babes cooing and prattling in rustic cradles to venerable bards with horns in their ears, snowy whiskers sweeping the floor and glassy glittering eyes as bright as those of the Ancient Mariner. And he conned the local *litterateur* and *illuminati* past and present as assiduously and alacrity as Gargantua at a dish of pheasant. He read in moldy, dusty, family Bibles, enucleated yellowing official documents, pursued secreted old love letters, ferreted out shattered age-crusted newspapers, prodded local yokels and coaxed coy coquettes. Otto A. Rothert did not go at things tepidly. Every labor was the most important on earth. He was searching for truth! He must get at the bottom of things! He was about his Master's business.

In order to learn firsthand the home spun, on the soil lore, the debonair young cosmopolite decided to work with the hired hands. He took service therefore in the summer of 1907 with Alvin Taylor's thresher crew, which went through the county with traction engine and thrasher from farm to farm threshing wheat. This work is exacting, hot, sweaty, the sun usually is bearing down with terrific heat and the wheat beards stick, causing irritation and itching. It is a dirty job, and the men after a few days of such labor without bath or change of raiment stink violently and volatily. But

the most powerful contingency of this work is the titanic appetites of the workmen, who during one noon hour can pretty well clean out the farmer's larder, the contents of which is stacked and spread on long tables in the open. They devour sides of fat country bacon and jowl, fried chicken, huge pots of beans, peas, and potatoes, mounds of corn bread, gallons of buttermilk, and stacks of pies with an avidity and earnestness little short of legerdemain. Actually Alvin assigned Otto to the task of driving the water wagon, which entailed the task of driving the team to the creek, helping fill the barrels and returning to the engine – this perhaps four times a day. In addition, the men had to be kept in drinking water.

These experiences thrilled and exhilarated the vivacious young Otto, particularly those associated with the threshing crew. He came to know each "hand" personally, called them collectively "the boys," gleaned valuable knowledge in humanity, sociology, and history. "The boys" liked him and, although probably having little interest in history and antiquity, condescended to scratch their heads in perplexity to recollect bits of lore and to aid in the search for precious modicums of history, contributing unconsciously through their own manners, customs, and personalities a full store of colloquial knowledge to the meticulous searcher. The largest amount of local lore gleaned at the threshings, however, came from the garrulous old folks, who trudged from miles around to see the engine and the thresher. These mechanical contraptions in those days were exciting innovations, and the oldsters stimulated by the black monster, the noise, and the novel scene were quite ready to talk.

Otto A. Rothert will never forget those summers in Muhlenberg County. Fondly and vividly does he recall that season with the harvest crew. The days were magic, the nights exhilarating. Those summer nights! The crew would turn-in early. Perhaps, if the moon was full-mellow, he might sit on a log and just dream. Those enchanting nights! The soft, sweet breeze, scented with the aroma of new-mown hay and ripened grain, the fresh, fragrant vapor rising from the cooling earth, the teeming quietude broken at intervals by the distant bark of a running hound, a low-moaning cow or soft-baaing lamb, and the myriad undertones of a summer night; the soft golden light showing from the windows of the neighborhood's rambling old farm houses and, beyond, the dark impenetrable woods and rising hills, seeming to hold deep mystery in its Stygian cloak! Often in reverie his imagination re-peopled those ancient homes with folks of earlier days: Sturdy-bodied landlords seated in easy chairs on the wide verandas, contentedly puffing their pipes at twilight of a summer's day; the busy housewives getting to bed the children or preparing for a ride by horseback or buckboard to a neighbor's home or to a meeting at the Church. What was in the mind of the tall young swain who, dressed in his best, mounted his horse at eventide and rode rapidly into the darkness? What beauteous maidens in years gone by had leaned by moonlight at those windows, peered into the star-lit heaven, dreamed and sighed, crooned soft music sweet as love? What manner of faces at the church on Sunday had gazed intently at the somber-clad minister or sat enrapt by religious eloquence? What incidents in days of long ago had occurred at the old schoolhouse down the Road? What secrets did the quiet ancient land withhold from the seeker for the truth? And golden musing and exquisite reverie occupied the poetic young man until the moon had swung beyond the zenith and the lights of all the farm houses were out and all the solemn countryside was hushed in darkness. Few knew the possibilities, the greatness and beauty of rugged old Muhlenberg County as did Otto A. Rothert.

The studies in Muhlenberg County resulted in notable literary contributions, most of which were published serially in *The Greenville Record*. Included among the pieces are "Raked-up Recollections of the Russell Race Track" (in four weekly installments, May, June, 1907) and "The Story of the Stack" (in three installments, March, April, 1906). These stories are newsy, chatty,

informal, and engaging. They introduce items pertaining to county history, family affairs, personal matters, business conditions, social and religious moods and aspects, and community temperament.

Included in Otto A. Rothert's saga of Muhlenberg are: (1) "Story of the Stack" (1906); (2) "Kentucky Cave" (1907); (3) "Russell Race Track" (1907); (4) "Lonz Powers, by James Weir" (1908); (5) "Annals of Airdrie" (1908); (6) "Some Sights Worth Seeing" (1909); (7) "Murphy's Lake and Its Traditions" (1909); (8) "Tobacco in Muhlenberg" (1909); (9) "Some Old Dates in Muhlenberg's Past" (1910); (10) "Buzzard Ball Yard" (1910); (11) "Sketches Published Sixty Years Ago, Written by Edward R. Web, Sr., and Now Retold" (1910); (12) "Muhlenberg County's Coal and Iron Ore" (1910); (13) "Greenville During the Civil War" (1910); (14) "The Johnsons of South Muhlenberg" (1910); (15) "The Jenkinsons of Muhlenberg" (1910); (16) "The Weirs of Greenville" (1910); (17) "A Ledger of Long Ago (1813-1815)" (1910); (18) "Sketch of the Wright Family" (1910); (19) "The Russell Family" (1910); (20) "Ephraim M. Brank (1791-1875)" (1910); (21) "Some Sidelights on the Old Railroad Bonds" (1911); (22) "Descendants of Burt H. Johnston" (1911); (23) "Henry Rhoads, the Godfather of Muhlenberg County" (1911); (24) "General Muhlenberg 1746-1807, After Whom This County Was Named" (1911). Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 16, 19, 20, 22 were published serially in *The Greenville Record*; Nos. 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 21, 23, 24 were published serially in *The Muhlenberg Sentinel*. These twenty-four sketches served, to a great extent, as forerunners of his *History of Muhlenberg County* (1913) and *History of Unity Baptist Church* (1914).

In all of these sketches is a deft weaving of history, connecting every circumstance, person, and occasion and developing a unity almost as pronounced as a short story. One is reminded of Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*, although the "Raked-Up Recollections" of "Uncle Otto" are not dominated by the Hawthornesque spirit of repose and mild melancholy. The "Recollections" are characterized by a faithfulness to realism and therefore do not have a singleness of mood.

"The Story of the Stack" depicts the early venture in developing the iron ore deposits and iron industry of Muhlenberg County by members of the Buckner and Churchill families. A part of the old Stack, or furnace, was still intact at the time of "Uncle Otto's" first visits to the county. Seeing the ghost-like relic of former industry, his curiosity was perceptibly excited, and he determined to run down its history to incipiency. A romantic narrative of bold business venture, harsh slave-driving, dwindling capital, prodigious labor, hard-liquor drinking episodes, negro lynchings, dazzling social functions, and heartbreaking failures, with ramifications touching the state government, the Bank of Kentucky and many of the leading families and figures of the state were uncovered. The Stack was built in 1838 by Aylette H. Buckner (father of General Simon Bolivar Buckner I) and Cadwalader Churchill and abandoned in the early 1840's. Naturally, the fact that Simon Bolivar Buckner, who came to Muhlenberg County and worked with the enterprise stimulated the determination upon "Uncle Otto's" part to learn something of the Buckner family history. Assiduous research and meticulous scrutiny, coupled with his accustomed seeking and sifting, elicited a considerable mass of valuable material. In fact, historians and biographers today are indebted to the tireless, unassuming chronicler of old Muhlenberg for perhaps most of the facts extant concerning the life of the indomitable Aylette and many of the facts relating to the early life of the redoubtable and picturesque Simon Bolivar Buckner, his son.

The most ambitious writing of the young historian associated with his researches in Muhlenberg County, perhaps his most ambitious writing, is his *History of Muhlenberg County*. This work – a labor of love – is not only a monumental contribution to Kentucky history but to county histories of the nation. It ranks with the finest, most accurate, works of this type yet

published. It is a model of scientific historical research, a paragon of objectivity and, withal, a fair exemplification of the postulation that history can be interesting though accurate. *The History* is known among history writers throughout the nation; it has been referred to by other writers almost as frequently as old standards like *Winning of the West*, *The Mississippi Valley in British Politics*, *Annals of the West*, *Kentucky In The Nation's History*, and other stand-bys. The superb work was not produced without strenuous and assiduous effort, magnificent patience and notable financial expenditure, as well as a steadfast determination to relate only the truth. Thucydides and Buckle, could they have known, would have been as proud of the noble Otto as were his friends, Young E. Allison, J. Christian Bay, Milo M. Quaffe, and R. C. Ballard Thruston.

"Uncle Otto" has declared many times that his *History of Muhlenberg County*, was "a labor of love." He will invariably continue with the remark "I had money in those days." The reader quickly realizes that he had more than, money, for certainly neither Conrad's *Youth* nor Hugo's *Toilers of the Sea* could have shown superior spirit and character. It is perhaps not extravagant to state that the same person expending the same resources upon the history of the entire State would have produced a work as monumental as that of the two Collins combined. How fortunate are the citizens of Muhlenberg County that Otto A. Rothert has lived. Surely they appreciate adequately his herculean services to their county.

EARLY MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS: The August 1, 1908, number of *The Huntingburg Independent* carried a short story bearing upon "Uncle Otto," captioned "A Case of All Smoke and No Fire." *The Independent* purporting to quote from The Kentucky Elk, fraternal journal, carries this borrowed paragraph: "Bro. Otto A. Rothert, who is reputed to be one of the wealthiest of those brothers of No. 8 who are reaching that age that man should lose no time in taking a partner for life, was seen last month with a charming young lady. Bro. Rothert has only recently returned from an extended trip in Texas and will remain home until fall."

The reporter remarks thus: "To a representative of *The Independent* who happened to be in Louisville this week and who called Mr. Rothert's attention to the above item, Otto said: 'Not on your tintype. Otto Angora – that's my name all right, but I am further from matrimonial busses, and kisses and distresses than ever.' Perhaps Otto tried to be and got left? We have been informed that 'rejected' men always talk like that."

The Independent, issue of February 16, 1907, carried this informative item: "Charles Dagenhart, Mike Steinhart, Will Schlegel, and Otto Rothert attended a dance at Jasper [Indiana] Tuesday. The boys made the trip on horseback, and since their return home the drugstores have had to order an extra supply of liniments and balsams."

These items – a few of many – are introduced to indicate again "Uncle Otto's" many-sidedness and human-ness. He "got around"; he lived and enjoyed "like people do." Then, as now, he was always broad-minded and cosmopolitan in his moral outlook. Neither Procrustes nor Carry Nation would have liked Otto Rothert; yet, it is believed that the "Master of all good works" probably would defend him.

In 1911, three years after its formation, Mr. Rothert became a member of the Louisville Literary Club, and he continued as a member until it disbanded in 1917. He served as its treasurer for a few years. He read a number of papers before the Club, the one on September 27, 1915, *Local History in Kentucky Literature*, was published as a brochure. The Club's first president was Edward J. McDermott, and first secretary was Camden R. McAtee. Among its members were Bert Finck, Dr. Henry A. Cottell, Madison Cawein, Charles H. Musgrove, Charles B. Seymour, William W. Thum, Edward A. Jonas, and Tom Wallace. The Arts Club of Louisville was organized in 1920. Cale Young Rice, first president, and Richard G. Knott, first secretary. Rothert was a

charter member. Among other charter members were Mrs. J. B. Speed, Mrs. Atwood R. Martin, Tom Wallace, Charles Sneed Williams.

EARLY ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE FILSON CLUB: Following an extended visit in Texas, "Uncle Otto" became increasingly interested in The Filson Club which had been organized in Louisville, May 15, 1884, by Colonel Reuben T. Durrett, and nine other prominent and able men: Richard H. Collins, John Mason Brown, Alexander P. Humphrey, General Basil W. Duke, William Chenault, George M. Davie, Judge James S. Pirtle, Colonel Thomas W. Bullitt and Captain Thomas Speed. That Mr. Rothert would become interested in this organization was inevitable, because it was devoted chiefly to collecting, presenting, and publishing Kentucky history. Moreover, its membership was of such intellectual and cultural calibre as to provide an engaging mutuality. From October 5, 1908, when elected to membership, he became gradually more attached to this organization until he was at length a large part of it, and it perhaps the principal part of him.

Although invitations to read papers before The Filson Club were coveted marks of distinction, Otto A. Rothert's researches and writings in Muhlenberg County history had, by early 1909, become so notable that this rising historian was invited to read his paper, "The Story of The Stack," before the Club at its March 1, 1909, meeting. The paper engagingly indited and tracing, as it does, the development of the iron smelting industry in Muhlenberg County, as well as depicting the notable activities of the Buckner family, was received with uncommon interest and at its close was animatedly commented upon by the members and guests present. The venerable Colonel Durrett listened intently, the quiet Basil Duke was impressed, R. C. Ballard Thruston and Alfred Pirtle were pleased, while noble old "Zack" Smith sat captivated and delighted. Mr. Smith at last had found a developing young Kentucky historian – someone who could be counted upon to carry on the work which he and others were now becoming too old and feeble long to continue. On the other hand, the quiet acclaim somewhat flattered the reader. It is safe to assume that this approval by the custodians and sages of Kentucky history in no wise diminished the interest of the chronicler of Muhlenberg.

The leaders of The Filson Club at that time were markedly distinguished, practically each one picturesque in personality, lofty in rank and eminent in worthy achievement. Sometime ago I described some of these men. Perhaps one of these descriptions will serve to show the type of most of the personages Rothert encountered upon introduction to The Filson Club. This portrait is of Colonel Durrett:

"A countenance so impressive that perhaps not even the noble venerability of the patriarch Abraham, or the stately dignity of Moses, not even the felicity, serenity, and repose in the kindly visage of Longfellow or Henry Ward Beecher are more remarkable than those of the distinguished Reuben Thomas Durrett, father of The Filson Club. Not even the venerable Herodotus or the scholarly Thucydides looked more the personification of history than did he. Colonel Durrett was a magnificent and striking figure: His more than six feet of patrician stature, two hundred pounds of manly strength; his long flowing, silken white hair, as thick as a horse's mane, and long patriarchal white beard; his ruddy, healthy complexion, sharp bright grayish eyes, intellectual brow, strong nose and mouth; the kindly twinkle in his eye, the cultured, graceful manners, the scholarly mien, the genial, sympathetic approach, the mellow baritone voice with its musical tones; the kindly interest in everyone who needed encouragement in literary or historical pursuits. His appearance is magnificent in the portrait painted by his friend and admirer, the distinguished Aurelius C. Revenaugh; he was just that magnificent in life. His characteristic pose – comfortably ensconced in the big, easy chair in his library, his long, graceful limbs crossed, his venerable head

back – will remain indelibly fixed in the memories of those yet living who knew him." (*The Filson Club History Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 3, July, 1944.)

Practically everything about Colonel Durrett was calculated to fascinate young Otto – the Durrett personality, appearance, matchless collection, including relics, paintings, curios, manuscripts, documents, letters, newspapers, books, practically everything being rare and original, so rare indeed that in Durrett's senility, representatives of the University of Chicago secretly purchased most of it and spirited it out of Kentucky. Too, the venerable man welcomed young historians to the spacious library and study (by then become nationally famous), even patted shy fellows on the back reassuringly, fished out rare documents for their consideration and then would sit in his easy chair hour upon hour discussing Kentucky and Mid-Western history or relating in his mellow, golden tones romantic tales associated with the making of Kentucky. Young Otto A. Rothert was not the first to be charmed and captivated; young Theodore Roosevelt years previous had been equally fascinated.

Following presentation of "The Story of the Stack," Rothert read other papers, included among which were "A Review of James Weir's *Lonz Powers, A Romance of Western Kentucky*" (before the Club, June 5, 1911), "The Old Militia Muster" (before the Club, February 5, 1912), *The Story of A Poet: Madison Cawein* (read in part before the Club, printed in 1921 as Filson Club Publications No. 30), *The Filson Club and Its Activities, 1884-1922* (read in part before the Club, April 8, 1922, printed in 1922 as Filson Club Publications No. 32).

The Filson Club following Colonel Durrett's death in September, 1913, entered a period of vicissitude, during which some even despaired of its survival: Durrett, the patriarch of the organization, was gone, the priceless Durrett collection no longer rested in Kentucky and some thought that a part of the Club's library went with the collection to Chicago. Moreover, most of the founding fathers were deceased, and few came forward able to take their places. During the trying time, stalwart R. C. Ballard Thruston volunteered to move the remaining portion of the Club's library to his spacious office in the Columbia Building (N.W. corner Fourth and Main streets) giving much of his time and that of his capable secretary, Miss Ludie J. Kinkead, to the care of the collection, as well as service to researchers and browsers. No longer could the monthly meetings be held in Durrett's spacious and magnificent library, with the Colonel brilliantly presiding and his daughter-in-law charmingly acting as hostess and where, after delightful discussion luscious cider and delicious cake followed by aromatic Filson Club cigars were served. The old grace, ease, magnificence and charm were gone. Arrangement was made for monthly meetings in the Assembly Room of the Louisville Free Public Library, and efforts were made to enhance the library, take in more members and build up an endowment fund, the problem being one of survival and expansion from an organization of a few charming, congenial friends and kindred spirits, aristocratic and cultural in bearing, to a self-supporting history society serving the state. In this task, Otto A. Rothert gave a large amount of his time, contributed some books and manuscripts, money, in those days, being no great problem with him.

ELECTED SECRETARY OF THE FILSON CLUB: Keeping afloat during those transition years following the death of Colonel Durrett was not an easy matter. In fact, except for the philanthropy and indefatigable work of R. C. Ballard Thruston, the organization probably would have failed, in spite of the work of Rothert, Alfred and James Pirtle and others. Portentous, however, of success and expansion was the election in October, 1917 of "Uncle Otto" as Secretary of the Club. This action followed the resignation of Captain Alfred Pirtle, who was elevated to the Presidency. The appointment, which carried no salary (nor was one desired) too, was a sound business venture. The duties of the position at that time required only part time; however, an office

was rather essential. "Uncle Otto" maintained a commodious office, in the Starks Building (Fourth and Walnut streets) for use as a study and library, the Rothert home on Gray Street having been sold two years after the death (in 1914) of the aged and inimitable Franziska. The Filson Club activities therefore were carried on in the Columbia and the Starks buildings, and the Public Library, which, although not an ideal arrangement, was quite fortunate at the time.

At the time of Rothert's election to the secretariat, the Club did not publish a quarterly magazine. The practice had developed of publishing monographs in book form – designated Publications – bearing upon some worthy and rather undeveloped subject in Kentucky. These Publications, exemplary pieces of research, as well as notable contributions to historical scholarship and to the state's history, began in 1884, when John Filson, by Colonel Reuben T. Durrett, appeared. Capable Kentucky historians, including Captain Thomas Speed, William H. Perrin, William H. Whitsitt, John Mason Brown, J. Stoddard Johnston, Alfred Pirtle, George W. Ranck, Bennett H. Young, Mary Verhoeff, Zachary F. Smith and Temple Bodley, wrote monographs upon important subjects. In fact, so important are these Filson Club Publications that few, if any, scholars would attempt a history of the Early West and none a history of Kentucky without some knowledge of some of them. Twenty-eight were issued before he became secretary and eight thereafter.

The publication of the Publications therefore took much of the time of the secretary, which is ordinarily expected to be devoted to getting out a history quarterly. Added to this were duties in attending the meetings of the officers and recording minutes of these meetings, arranging the monthly programs and preparing minutes of the membership meetings. It should be observed that the task of "wading through" material submitted for publication, selecting and correcting it, as well as returning unsatisfactory matter sent in by local historians who felt the inspiration of Herodotus upon them is both exacting and trying. Otto had plenty to do, it is thought; however, he was doing research and writing a great deal, including two Filson Club Publications, looking after much of the correspondence, attending some of the annual meetings of The Kentucky State Historical Society, The American Historical Society, The Mississippi Valley Historical Association (where he was making a host of long-time friends) and others, representing the Club at Kentucky historical gatherings, as well as pursuing numerous hobbies and managing the Muhlenberg estate.

As The Filson Club slowly and dangerously crawled through the trying years, certain officials of the organization, particularly Mr. Thruston and Mr. Rothert, realizing the necessity, succeeded in organizing a quarterly magazine late in 1926, not however, without the collaboration of the University of Louisville's History Department. The agreement was that the University contribute \$500.00 annually, also provide the editor, Dr. Robert S. Cotterill, and that the name of the magazine be *The History Quarterly*. The joint publication scheme did not prove satisfactory, for the reasons that much material other than pertaining to Kentucky was introduced and the financial arrangement was not met. Under the circumstances therefore, the Club, in 1928, took over sole publication, named "Uncle Otto" editor, and changed the name to *The History Quarterly of The Filson Club*; however, in January, 1930, the title became *The Filson Club History Quarterly*.

In May, 1929, the Club moved into its own building – a fireproof building – at 118 West Breckinridge Street. That same year Mr. Thruston presented his large, magnificent library. Mr. Rothert did likewise, and although his library of about one thousand books and pamphlets was very small compared to Mr. Thruston's it stands today as the second largest collection given to the Club. (It may be well to state here that among other things Mr. Rothert gave later were two portraits of himself: one by J. Bernhard Alberts, 1916, and one by John T. Bauscher, 1933.) The acquiring of the building and Mr. Thruston's library are the two outstanding features that make 1929 the most

significant year in its history. The Club was organized in 1884 and incorporated in 1891. On May 6, 1929, amended Articles of Incorporation, amended Constitution and amended Bylaws were adopted. The Club's period of vicissitude and transition came to a close and its second golden era began. This, however, was not achieved without titanic efforts upon the part of certain champions and guardians, who freely gave energy, time, money, and influence to the beloved old institution. Among those able, active, consecrated altruists were R. C. Ballard Thruston, Emmet O'Neal, Allen M. Reager, Philip S. Tuley, Harry L. Smyser, Lucien Beckner, Davis W. Edwards, John Stites, Frank Coyle, Ludie J. Kinkead, Mary Verhoeff, J. Adger Stewart, and Otto A. Rothert.

In 1929, the year the Club moved into its own building, he withdrew from all social, civic, fraternal, and other clubs so he could devote his time better to The Filson Club.

WORK OF THE SECRETARY: The routine duties, such as keeping minutes of the Board of Directors and of the general meetings, soon became so well mastered that they were second nature to "Uncle Otto." His minutes were always concise, brief, lucid, accurate, and rather interesting for official minutes. Many have paid tribute to his deft ability in this art.

Year in and year out at the regular monthly meetings he would sit at the right of the table facing the audience and take mental account of the proceedings. Sometimes when an auto-animated and loquacious speaker would move out upon an interminable side-road detour to champion this or that party, such as one favoring or opposing the assertion that the slaves carried in the water before the attack on Bryan's Station, or that Betsy Galloway was forced by the Indians to march before and not after Jemima Boone into captivity, his countenance would seem more of a mask and his eyes appear to be looking more and more at nothing. Not even would he for relief take the trouble to pick out a spritely female's winsome visage to enjoy, or even indulge in diverting and pleasurable reverie. Yet he always seemed to know exactly what was transpiring.

As the years went by, he became more a part of The Filson Club. He sat at the meetings with countenance inscrutable, singular, inimitable. The whole represented the whole name – Otto A. Rothert, Secretary of The Filson Club. The countenance, pose, voice, minutes, the occasional humorous remarks intended, usually as unbarbed and jocular ridicule, were a part of the institution, just as was his accustomed position at his desk, stubby pencil in hand intently scrutinizing through comical half-lensed clericals, a recently submitted manuscript, or even the rapid walking down Breckinridge – observed in loose, perhaps illy-fitting suit, battered hat thrown on carelessly, the inevitable cigarette and, tightly tucked under the left arm, the precious material for the *Quarterly* – happy on his way to the printer – and he was eagerly about his Master's business.

Mr. Rothert usually reached the Club around 7:30 in the morning and left at 5:00 or later. He took about fifteen or twenty minutes for lunch – generally a bowl of soup – when eating alone. (He never seemed to know or care what he ate – Miss Kinkead and Miss Dale of the Staff kept admonishing him about eating a well-balanced diet, but all to no avail.) If spare time existed, he spent it arranging his papers in an orderly manner. The thought that he might die suddenly, somehow as the years crept passed, kept troubling his mind. He must leave his papers in such condition that the Club could move on smoothly; he even kept enough manuscripts on hand and easily accessible to enable the *Quarterly* to appear for about two issues without additional material. He reasoned that his successor could thus be carried along until familiar with the work and in receipt of ample material, so that his beloved child, the *Quarterly*, would not have to suffer. And so, too, were his program preparations for future monthly meetings. The Filson Club had become a big part of Otto A. Rothert.

Through all the years, life was very pleasant for "Uncle Otto" at 118 West Breckinridge. The people there, kindly, cultured, self-sacrificing, were drawn together by a strong mutual

affinity, The Filson Club, and, as time elapsed, these became more and more like members of an affectionate family – the vivacious, warm-hearted Miss Kinkead, the devoted, generous Miss Evelyn R. Dale, the self-effacing, stoical Cordie Cooper, the magnanimous, benevolent wand old man of Kentucky history, Mr. Thruston. These were and are "Uncle Otto's" good friends and fellow workers.

Year in and year out, "Uncle Otto" once or twice a week would chat pleasantly at lunch with his old friends Lucien Beckner and Lucien V. Rule. Year in and year out, he would dine Thursday evenings with the Bruno W. Alberts and Saturday evenings – for more than twenty-five years – with the Gisbert B. Alberts (always calling to mind the sweet memory of the beloved brother friend Ben – J. Bernhard Alberts, the artist) and Sunday dinner with the Young E. Allison, Sr. (beginning twenty years before Mr. Allison died and since then with Mrs. Allison). And he frequently managed to meet his old friend Paul A. Plaschke, the cartoonist, and John T. Bauscher, the artist, as well as Rudy L. Haag, Theodore J. Zollinger, Edward A. Kraft and other local nurserymen who were constantly sending rare horticultural specimens for the lovely garden at Forest Retreat, the estate in Muhlenberg County. Life indeed, in spite of ups and downs, personal losses and financial reverses, was pleasant and worth-while throughout the years.

The Outlaws of Cave-In-Rock: At the risk of imposing upon the generosity of my good friend Colonel Beckner, now secretary of The Filson Club and editor of the *Quarterly*, I shall make brief mention of *The Outlaws of Cave-In-Rock*, a monumental work, considered by many critics to be "Uncle Otto's" finest volume, although *The History of Muhlenberg County* and *The Story of A Poet: Madison Cawein* are masterly works. *The Outlaws* published in 1924, has much of its setting in and around the notorious Cave-In-Rock, located on the Illinois bank of the Ohio River twenty miles below the mouth of the Wabash and opposite Crittenden County, Kentucky. Toward the turn of the eighteenth century, outlaws, who preyed upon heavily laden flatboats down the Ohio, often made the Cave their hideout and base of operations.

"Uncle Otto" became interested in its history when, in his researches in Muhlenberg County, he chanced upon an account of the capture and decapitation of "Big" Harpe, a ruthless, bloodthirsty outlaw and killer, who had even murdered his own infant son. His brother "Little" Harpe escaped this pursuing party and fled South. This was the beginning of a fascinating piece of research, which led Mr. Rothert into the lives of Samuel Mason and other outlaws of that early day. He traveled far and wide. He spared no expense, time, or energy. He must run the thing down, every thread of it – and he did. He found much on the two diabolical, fiendish Harpes, the cunning Sam Mason and his followers, likewise on other outlaws preying upon hapless settlers floating down the Ohio and Mississippi and traveling over the old Natchez Trace in search of new homes. It forms a chapter in the pioneer history of the development of the entire valley of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. This story of the Early West has few rivals in its field in American literature.

"UNCLE OTTO" RESIGNS AS SECRETARY OF THE FILSON CLUB: When one has passed the Biblical "three score years and ten," the old machine generally needs to slow down, and, iron man though he is, "Uncle Otto" was told by his physicians that he must begin giving up his work. He had helped The Filson Club reorganize and grow from a weak historical society with a handful of members, with no home, few manuscripts and books, to a thriving society, now numbering 800 in membership, with a fine fireproof building, celebrated library and a notable endowment fund. He had been a part of this phenomenal growth and could take consolation in the knowledge that he had given himself without stint – given his magnificent strength and fine ability without stint to the Club.

Giving up the beloved old job as Secretary was one of the most difficult decisions of Mr. Rothert's life. Yet, after several years of struggle, he, with the help of anxious members of his family and his kindly physician, reached the decision and sent in his resignation to take effect April 1, 1945. The Board of Directors, reluctant to accept, requested him to continue for a few months. Finally, however failing strength forced the old bachelor to retire on November 1st

The Filson Club was reluctant to give up the fine old trooper. He, it was felt, was a part of the Club and should go on forever. Yet the passage of time is inexorable, and "Uncle Otto" had to quit. The Officers and Directors and their wives held a brilliant testimonial dinner at The Arts Club in his honor May 15, 1945, at which many kindly remarks were made commendatory of his distinguished and faithful services. All the guests tried to make their remarks light and amusing, as "Uncle Otto" wished it; yet we felt underneath it all a sense of sorrow and loss. But the old fellow carried off his part like the highborn gentleman he is – "Uncle Otto" actually "stole the show."

Life has not been unkind to our good friend, because he has not been unkind to life. His mind has ever been broad and open; his philosophy is mellow, kindly, tolerant, and even optimistic, and he has never lost that inimitable sense of humor. He has worked well and contributed abundantly; he has ever had many close friends, ever encouraged youth to do things worth while. He has contributed greatly, not only to The Filson Club, but to Kentucky and the nation as well. As long as books are kept, the name Otto A. Rothert will live. As long as research in Kentucky history is projected, the notable example and contributions of Otto A. Rothert will be remembered. He has never laid claim to fame; he is devoid of sham and pretense – a plain, modest man who avoided the tumult and the shouting. Yet, for all that, when the great critics come to judge, I am one of those little partisans who believes that plain, friendly, industrious "Uncle Otto" Rothert will be listed as one of Kentucky's finest benefactors.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 29 August 1948, p.7B:

**Otto Rothert's Forest Retreat In Muhlenberg
County Is Picturesque, Rustic Log Dwelling**



Forest Retreat

By W. E. DANIEL, Owensboro Messenger Staff Writer

Greenville, Ky. – About five miles south on Highway 181 – the road to Elkton – is a country store, and near that country store is a narrow road leading off the main highway to the right. By following the bends in that narrow road for another mile one comes to a farmstead at the top of a hill with a dwelling to the left and on the right a large frame barn and a smaller building of logs. There the stranger, if wise in the ways of strangers, inquires the direction and condition of the road through the scattered timber to the Forest Retreat rural home of Otto A. Rothert, of Louisville. And a few minutes later, unless in the winter season when water collects and pools along the roadway, when the going is bad, there is a glimpse down the slope to an opening, and in that opening is a log house, and around it and on both sides of the approach are flowers and shrubbery, planted by direction of a lover of the outdoors.

Forty-eight years ago Herman Rothert bought the tract of more than 2,000 acres as an investment in timber. For more than years the property has been owned by Otto A. Rothert, former secretary of the Filson Club in Louisville, a student of history and the author of several books who finds the log house at Forest Retreat to his liking when in the mood to get away from the city for a while. He is a son of the first Rothert who bought the land. Reared at Huntingburg, Ind., Louisville has been Otto A. Rothert's home from his young days. He has no schedule for dividing his living between the country estate in Muhlenberg county and in the city of Louisville. Friends after his fashion sometimes accompany Mr. Rothert to Forest Retreat, and there, shut away from the city, and with not even a village close by, they tramp over the fields of tillable land and through the garden of shrubs and flowers.

There is a rock garden hidden away at the edge of the forest, and steps and a walkway from the higher land at the side of the old log house – too much to see in a day. Facing the wide log house the visitor sees little difference in the left and right hand rooms, with a lean-to of frame at the left and a partly closed in dog-walk between. But there is a difference, a very marked difference as an inspection proves. To the left is the big log room and frame rooms that make up the living quarters of Gabe Aders, caretaker of the estate. That to the right is the main log room and Mr. Rothert's home when in the country. Over the mantel above the wide fireplace is a long-barreled rifle and pistols of ancient make at either end. There are pictures of several friends, and drawings by old friend, Paul Plaschke, and two beds and other furniture in keeping with the house.

Was Buckner Place

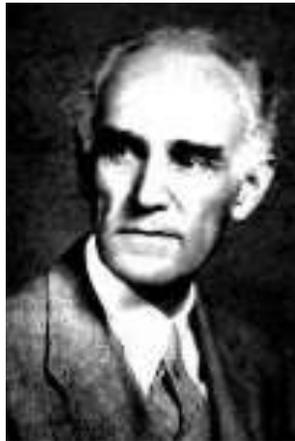
To digress from this story of Forest Retreat in its 1948 garb of green and go back into Kentucky history is interesting. When Simon Bolivar Buckner, lieutenant general in the Confederate army and later Governor of Kentucky, was a young boy of 14, his father, Aylette| Buckner, left their Hart county home on Green river a few miles out of Munfordville, and with Cadwaller Churchill, of Elizabethtown, formed the Green River Manufacturing Co., to develop what they had reason to believe was valuable iron ore in Muhlenberg county. The business venture was abandoned after a few years, and the Aylette Buckner family moved to their Beachland Plantation near Mount Holly, in southern Arkansas. Previous to that, in 1837 and 1838, the young Simon Bolivar Buckner, lived with his parents on the Muhlenberg county place, now Otto A. Rothert's Forest Retreat, and did clerical work and other tasks. Part of that time he was in school at Hopkinsville.

In 1840 when young Buckner was 17 years old he learned of a vacancy to the United States military academy at West Point, New York, and applied for and obtained an appointment from Congressman Philip Triplett, of Owensboro. With that the first Simon Bolivar Buckner's life in Kentucky was over until after the War Between the States and he a former lieutenant general in

the Southern army returned to the old home in Hart county and established his permanent home there, calling it Glen Lily, and there he died in 1914 when 91 years old, in the two-story log house where he was born in April 1823. father died on his southern Arkansas plantation in December 1851. And the ten-room log house he built near the iron furnace on the Muhlenberg county holdings, vacated in 1842 and left unused, was torn down many years later. And the big room at Forest Retreat in which Mr. Rothert lives during his stays in the country was built with some of the logs salvaged in 1880 from the wreckage of the large house of the Aylette Buckner days. The location of Forest Retreat is about a mile from the site of the furnace or Stack as some call it, but the Stack is there no more. In 1885 the other log part of Forest Retreat was built, and the frame rooms later. As a historian Mr. Rothert has spent considerable time in gathering facts associated with the Buckner angle of the story to which the Rothert's ownership and personal connection make more interesting. He will be at Forest Retreat along in September with some literary friends, men who write books as Mr. Rothert expresses it. The old log house and its environment are worth visiting, not once but again and again.



**The Filson Club History Quarterly, Vol. 30, No. 2, April 1956
(Louisville, KY: Filson Club Historical Society) pp.101-102:**



Otto Arthur Rothert
1871-1956
Secretary of the Filson Club
1917-1945

In Memoriam

RESOLUTION BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
The Filson Club

Ott Arthur Rothert, former secretary of The Filson Club and Kentucky historian, died March 28, 1956, at Greenville, Muhlenberg County, Kentucky.

Mr. Rothert was a native of Huntingburg, Indiana born June 21, 1871. He graduated from the University of Notre Dame after which he entered the tobacco business with his father, the family having moved to Louisville in the fall of 1889. Later he became a clerk at the Galt House.

Following the death of his father in 1904, Mr. Rothert made an extended trip through the West, Mexico and Hawaii. Upon his return, he became interested in Muhlenberg County, where the family had recently purchased a large estate, and there began his real interest, namely, that of collecting and writing Muhlenberg County history. Mr. Rothert never lost his love of Muhlenberg County.

Mr. Rothert was elected to membership in The Filson Club on October 5, 1908 and became gradually more attached to the Club until he was at length a large part of it, being elected secretary. in October of 1917. Among his duties as secretary, Mr. Rothert was editor of *The Filson Club History Quarterly* and contributed many articles to the magazine throughout the years, and presented his library to the Club as a gift.

He continued as secretary until he resigned on April 1, 1945. On May 15, 1945, a testimonial dinner in honor of Mr. Rothert at The Arts Club by the officers and directors of The Filson Club, at which many kindly remarks were made commendatory of his distinguished and faithful services.

In addition to Mr. Rothert's *History of Muhlenberg County* he was author of *The Story of A Poet (Biography of Madison Cawein)*, *The Outlaws of Cave-in-Rock*, and other works.

In the death of Mr. Rothert we have all lost a friend and worthy citizen.

Now Therefore Be It Resolved: That the members of the Board of Directors of The Filson Club, through this resolution manifest their sense of loss at the death of Mr. Otto Arthur Rothert and express their deep appreciation of his devotion and generosity to the Club throughout his life.

Be It Further Resolved: That this resolution be spread upon the minutes of the Board and copies thereof be sent the family of Mr. Rothert, *Adopted March 29, 1956*



Articles by Otto A. Rothert published in The Filson Club History Quarterly.

(Louisville, KY: Filson Club Historical Society)

The following 36 articles can be found on the Internet site:

<https://filsonhistorical.org/publications/filson-club-history-quarterly/>

Browsing in our Archives Two Letters 1828 Johnsons Choctaw Indian School
Edition: October 1935

Browsing our Archives Letter by William J. Davis 1863
Edition: July 1935

Browsing in our Archives Bible Records
Edition: April 1935

Browsing in our Archives Three Letters by Henry Clay
Edition: January 1935

Browsing in our Archives Zachary Taylor Monument 1883
Edition: October 1934

The Daniel Boone Bicentennial Commission
Edition: October 1934

The Filson Club 1884 1934
Edition: July 1934

Browsing in our Archives J. Cleves Short Letter 1829
Edition: April 1934

In Our Archives Thomas J. Churchill Letter 1845
Edition: January 1934

Young E. Allison Memorial Meeting Henderson 1933
Edition: October 1933

In Our Archives Three Letters 1838 By Dr. L. P. Yandell
Edition: July 1933

Fincastle County Virginia and Old Kentucky
Edition: January 1932

The Grave of Joseph Hamilton Daveiss
Edition: October 1931

The Filson Club
Edition: October 1930

Shane The Western Collector
Edition: January 1930

Henderson Kentucky And The Society of the Transylvanians
Edition: October 1929

The Filson Clubs New Home
Edition: October 1929

Josephine McGill Pioneer in Kentucky Ballad Field
Edition: October 1928

Book Reviews
Edition: April 1946

John Floyd Pioneer and Hero
Edition: July 1928

Origin of the Names Beargrass Creek The Point and Thruston Square
Edition: October 1927

Supplementary List of Members Acquired from November 1944 to June 1945
Edition: July 1945

List of Members of The Filson Club October 1944
Edition: October 1944

Filson Club Publications and History Quarterly.

Edition: July 1944

Historic Excursion July 1883 One of the Forerunner of the Founding of The C...
Edition: July 1944

Report of the Dedication of the Inscriptions on the Thomas Jefferson Statue...
Edition: October 1943

Kentucky Sesquicentennial Data in The Filson Club
Edition: January 1943

Shanes Interview in 1841 with Mrs. Wilson
Edition: October 1942

Thirteen Letters by Samuel McDowell
Edition: July 1942

John D. Shanes Interview with John Graves of Fayette County 1845
Edition: October 1941

John D. Shanes Interview with Pioneer John Hedge Bourbon County
Edition: July 1940

John D. Shanes Interview with Mrs. John McKinley
Edition: July 1939

Browsing our Archives Two Letters by Cassius M. Clay
Edition: July 1938

Browsing in our Archives A Glimpse of Alfred Pirtle
Edition: July 1937

The Harpes Two Outlaws of Pioneer Times
Edition: July 1927

Scholar
Edition: April 1947



Fairmount Cemetery, Huntingburg, Dubois County, IN



**The Filson Club History Quarterly, Vol. 61, No. 1, January 1987
(Louisville, KY: Filson Club Historical Society) pp.54-67:**

OTTO ARTHUR ROTHERT, 1871-1956

By Hambleton Tapp, Ph.D., editor emeritus at the Kentucky Historical Society
Paper Presented Before The Filson Club, 5 November 1984

Certainly no pomp and circumstance or anything of the exotic or bizarre was associated with my first meeting with Otto A. Rothert, affectionately called "Uncle Otto" and "Colonel" by his special coterie, persons designated by him as his "illegitimate nephews." Nevertheless, that first meeting is vividly recalled.

It was, I believe, in 1934 that I became acquainted with him. Teaching at Male High School at the time, I became interested in certain episodes of the Civil War in Kentucky. Seeking an authority, I was advised to call at The Filson Club upon this gentleman, whose reputation as counselor, comforter, and inspirer of neophytes in Kentucky history had traveled abroad. The fact that he was associated with the distinguished Filson Club lent something of fascination. The proposed visit, therefore, was viewed with both pleasing anticipation – and some trepidation.



Otto A. Rothert in 1944

I could not easily forget his small office on the second floor back: its hazy atmosphere, its pungent tobacco aroma, its heterogeneous pictorial display, the ponderous volumes, the manuscript-laden desk. He sat facing the door, and, though smoke was evident, the view was fairly clear. The visage was strong, the jaw somewhat long, the chin firm and manly. The thinning hair gave the forehead a broad appearance. He stared over half-lensed clerical spectacles inquiringly,

all the while adjusting from close reading to me. The voice was gentle and pleasant, more or less a baritone. The greeting was not one of excessive warmth, though not repelling, and some preoccupation was noted in the kindly brown eyes which I soon learned could be merry or melancholy. An impression was felt that the man, for fear of being thought too easy or affable, was attempting to be cool – a ruse which was feebly maintained. In lighting a cigarette and enveloping himself in smoke, he remarked that he did not inhale and that therefore smoking did not injure his health. It was rather clear that he had convinced himself that this formula was just expiation for habitual use of tobacco – clear, too, that this was a stock-in-trade offering. It was, however, obvious that he received no particular enjoyment from his incessant puffing. Within a brief time, we were conversing about the Civil War in Kentucky, particularly the Battle of Perryville, and several other subjects.

Though my stay was not interminable, it was sufficiently extended for me to learn that the man was unusually versatile. He was, I learned, master of a large estate, known as "Forest Retreat," in the wilds of Muhlenberg County, was interested in horticulture, farming, geology, journalism, photography – and in striking oil. Little time elapsed ere another visit was made, followed by many more. Soon we were fast friends. As time passed, he related bits of his family's history.

The Rothert family was German. The father, Herman, a blue-eyed, brown-haired North German, was born in Hanover in 1828. The mother, Franziska Weber, a brown-eyed, brunette South German, was born in Baden in 1835. Herman, an energetic, ambitious youth, eager for success in life, came to America in 1844, remained a few years in Louisville, where he met and married Franziska Weber, and eventually settled in Huntingburg, Indiana, to which his father, Gerard, had migrated earlier as one of the first settlers there. Franziska was a bright, spirited, ambitious girl, with a taste for music, literature, and art as well as a German appreciation for things economic. America was to her expansive, liberty-loving soul the golden land where dreams came true. To the happy union were born five children; Otto was the Youngest.

The Rotherts determined that their children would be given college educations. On 21 June 1892 Otto graduated from the University of Notre Dame. There, though majoring in science, he developed a taste for writing and an interest in poetry; he also acquired a penchant for painstaking thoroughness as revealed in his articles in the school paper, *The Notre Dame Scholastic*.

While "finding himself" Otto worked for his father, who had moved back to Louisville in the fall of 1889, in the tobacco business. A bit later, he was engaged for a time in the office of the Falls City Tobacco Works operated by his brother John. Clearly he was not suited for this kind of work. Then his father obtained a job for him as clerk at the Galt House on the northeast corner of First and Main streets. Though not needing the salary, he was fortunate in taking the job. At the time, Galt House was a name to conjure with. It had entertained the famous and the colorful of this earth: royalty, statesmen, high military figures, actors, publishers, chorus girls, divines, and gamblers. The atmosphere delighted the young clerk. He liked the racy conversations, became chummy with the knowing reporters, was charmed by the visiting show people, sportsmen, drummers, and he was amused at the escapades of the men-about-town. He also liked the friendly and confiding staff.

Upon one occasion young Otto came forth with a very impertinent query. A bevy of shapely chorus girls, having entered the hotel and inquired concerning the rates of rooms, had moved to the side to deliberate the matter. After a time the clerk leaned over the desk and asked, "Do you take baths?" Although nearly getting his "ears pinned back" for the sally, the mischievous fellow grinned broadly at the affectation of indignation exhibited by the outraged show girls. The incident got into the newspapers.

Soon after the turn of the century, Otto realized that the time had arrived to quit hotel clerking. Already he was doing journalistic writing, keeping up with scientific and botanical developments, and nurturing an interest in the 2,600-acre timber tract in Muhlenberg County which his father had acquired. His varied interests came to public attention through a 6 August 1904 *Louisville Times* article. This story reported his interests as ranging from research in science and the pursuit of art and music to Angora goats and college pennants:

He never goes at things tepidly – not even in puffing cigarettes. He is enthusiastic about Angora goats, and contemplates placing a herd on the tract of unimproved land owned by his family in Muhlenberg County. . . . He rides as well as he works and collects, and enjoys the exhilaration of a run across the country or on the boulevard every afternoon.

A picture captioned, "Otto Rothert Rides Pedigreed Steed," carried in *The Louisville Herald* 11 September 1904 is in pose as heroic as the equestrian statue of General John Hunt Morgan in Lexington. A previous story in the *Louisville Post* of 24 October 1903 had indicated that Rothert expressed great interest in "his house boat under construction" for a leisurely expedition down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers and speculated rather pointedly as to the possibility of a honeymoon down "La Belle Riviere."

Following the death of his father in February 1904, Otto, with the encouragement of his mother, arranged to make an extended trip through the West, Mexico, Alaska, and Hawaii. The Louisville papers of 15 October 1904 carried announcements of the proposed nine-month trip. *The Huntingburg Independent*, edited by Ed H. Dufendach, announced that Rothert had agreed to write articles for it during the trip, stated that the young traveler would make a study of sociology in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, California, Utah, and Mexico, visit the principal cities in the territory described, study and photograph "every spot which he can find that throws any light upon the progress of civilization among the aborigines, and also the immigrants who have since settled in the country which they gained." He was also expected to study the botanical specimens as well as the minerals, trees, and wild animals of that section of the continent. It appears that the long-awaited journey got under way in early December 1904.

The first point of interest was New Orleans whose old Creole lore and ancient beauty greatly enthralled the sentimental young Don Juan. From the Crescent City, he moved across the vast Lone Star State, enjoying its natural attributes and studying its antiquities, and from thence he leisurely journeyed into Old Mexico. Someone suggested that he must have first registered at the newspaper offices in each town and city visited because his presence was everywhere as lavishly made known as a tour of "Jersey Lily" Langtry.

At the ruins of Mitla, some four hundred miles south of Mexico City, though standing awed at the grandeur of Mixte-Zapotec and Aztec culture, he could not forget his perennial sense of humor. He paid an Indian maid there the "fabulous sum of two cents" to stand with him in the picture. In it, he assumed a dramatically grandiose pose calculated to put to shame the efforts of even Cortez, the conquistador. In Mexico City, adopting the spirit of the *tonero*, he concluded to have his likeness struck as matador, with all the trappings. Under the picture this sentence is found: "Don Otto, with cool, deft precision draws the deadly *estoque*."

Leaving Old Mexico, he moved into New Mexico for a hunting excursion, after which he journeyed into Arizona. His twenty long letters to *The Huntingburg Independent* are rich, colorful, and humorous, revealing an unusual power of observation and analysis. After having traveled thirty thousand miles over a period of nine months, Otto A. Rothert, cosmopolite and scholar, reached Louisville, 21 August 1905 where family, friends, reporters, and clubmen welcomed him

with outstretched arms. He was strong in body, enlarged in vision, laden with curios, and eager to serve his fellowmen.

During the autumn of 1905, Rotherth visited the recently purchased landed estate in Muhlenberg County. There the wild, rough, heavily timbered terrain appealed to him, and both town and rural folk were friendly and interesting. He decided to remodel the rambling old log house on the land and use it as domicile during his stays in the country. The soil was not fertile, and only a few acres had been cleared for agriculture. However, the timber was valuable, and the soil, if cleared, could be made to produce some profits. The land was known to contain some thin strata of coal, and a possibility of oil and gas also existed.

After a time Rotherth realized that the relatively unheralded county held possibilities for literary exposure. He therefore set about the work of collecting and writing Muhlenberg history. The western trip had somehow made clear that his true vocation was history. Affable and likeable, he had little difficulty in winning the friendship and confidence of Muhlenbergers. One of his first friends was Orien L. Roarke, editor of *The Greenville Record*, which served as the medium for presenting his early ventures in local history. Another friend was Alvin L. Taylor, well-known, prominent citizen of Greenville.

Little difficulty was encountered in meeting the hoary sages and garrulous gabblers of the district. Soon the enthusiastic young man was in possession of a vast amount of local lore, running the gamut of truth, yarn, fiction, claptrap, subterfuge, falsehood, and plain lies. In order to learn first hand more about the county and its people, the debonair researcher even took service, in the summer of 1907, with Alvin Taylor's thresher crew, which went through the county with traction engine and thrasher or separator from farm to farm threshing wheat. Otto drove the water wagon.

The studies in Muhlenberg County resulted in notable literary contributions, most of which were published serially in *The Greenville Record*. Included among the pieces are "Rakedup Recollections of the Russell Race Track," and "The Story of the Stack." These stories are newsy, chatty, informal, and engaging. There were in all twenty-four – fifteen published in *The Greenville Record* and nine in *The Muhlenberg Sentinel*. These were forerunners of Rotherth's *History of Muhlenberg County* which appeared in 1913. "The Story of the Stack" depicts an early venture in developing the iron ore deposits and iron industry of Muhlenberg County by members of the Buckner and Churchill families. A part of the old stack (furnace) was still intact at the time of Rotherth's first visits to the county. Seeing the ghost-like relic of former industry, his curiosity was stimulated, and he determined to run down its history. Out of it, he developed a romantic narrative involving bold business ventures, slave-driving, dwindling capital, prodigious labor, hard-liquor drinking episodes, negro lynchings, dazzling social functions, and heartbreaking failures, with ramifications touching the state government, the Bank of Kentucky, and some of the leading families and figures of the state. The stack was built in 1838 by Aylette Hartswen Buckner (father of Simon Bolivar Buckner, Sr.) and Cadwalader Churchill, then of Elizabethtown. It was abandoned in the early 1840s. Naturally, the fact that Simon Bolivar Buckner came to Muhlenberg County and worked with the enterprise stimulated the determination upon Rotherth's part to learn something of the Buckner family history. Assiduous investigation elicited a considerable mass of material.

Rotherth's most ambitious writing was his *History of Muhlenberg County*. This work is not only a significant contribution to Kentucky history, but to county history writing in the nation as well. It is a model of scientific historical research, a prototype of objectivity, and proof that history can be interesting and accurate. Obviously, the superb work was not produced without much effort,

persistence, patience, and financial loss. It was truly, as Rothert many times remarked, a "labor of love," and he would invariably add, "I had money in those days."

Following an extended visit in Texas in 1908, Rothert became increasingly interested in The Filson Club, which had been organized in Louisville on 15 May 1884 by Colonel Reuben T. Durrett and nine other prominent and able men. That Rothert would become interested in The Filson Club was inevitable because it was devoted to collecting, researching, writing, publishing, and preserving Kentucky history. Moreover, its membership was of such an intellectual and cultural caliber as to provide pride in belonging. From 5 October 1908 when elected to membership, he became gradually more devoted to the organization until he became an important part of it, and the Club became an absorbing part of his life.

Although invitations to read papers before the Club were coveted marks of distinction, Rothert's researches and writings in Muhlenberg County history had by early 1909 become so notable that this rising historian was invited to read his paper, "The Story of the Stack," before the Club at its 1 March 1909 meeting. The presentation was a success. The venerable Colonel Durrett listened intently; the quiet General Basil Duke was impressed; R. C. Ballard Thruston and Major Alfred Pirtle were pleased, and noble old Zachariah Frederick Smith sat captivated and delighted. This aging, bewhiskered, and palsied Kentucky historian placed a hand on Otto's shoulder and admonished the young man to pursue Kentucky history "to the baths of all the western stars" until he died. At last Smith had found a promising young man who might be counted upon to carry on the work which he and others had become too old and infirm to continue.

Following the reading of "The Story of the Stack," Rothert presented other papers, such as "A Review of James Weir's *Lonz Powers, A Romance of Western Kentucky*" followed by "The Story of A Poet: Madison Cawein," condensed from his book-length biography of Cawein, and later, "The Filson Club and Its Activities, 1884-1922," printed in 1922 as Filson Club publication number 32.

In 1924 Rothert published his most exciting book, *The Outlaws of Cave-In-Rock*. The story has its setting in and around the notorious Cave-in-Rock, located on the Illinois bank of the Ohio River twenty miles below the mouth of the Wabash River opposite Crittenden County. In the late eighteenth century, outlaws, who preyed upon laden flatboats moving down the Ohio, frequently made the cave their hideout and base of operations. Rothert became interested in the history of Cave-in-Rock when, in his researches in Muhlenberg County, he chanced upon accounts of the capture and decapitation in 1799 of Big Harpe, a bloodthirsty killer, who had for a time occupied the cave, and his brother, Little Harpe, also a ruthless killer, who was hanged in 1804. Fascinated, Rothert began an exciting, though rather tedious piece of research. He traveled far and wide, sparing neither energy, time, nor expense. The book constitutes a fascinating chapter in the history of the early West, and it has the ingredients for a Hollywood thriller.

The Filson Club, following Colonel Durrett's death in September 1913, entered a period of decline during which some even despaired of its survival. In fact, except for the dedicated work and philanthropy of Mr. Thruston, the organization might have failed. However, the election of Rothert as secretary of the Club in October 1917 was a harbinger of progress. This action followed the resignation of Major Alfred Pirtle, who was elevated to the presidency. The appointment, which carried no salary (nor was one desired), proved to be a wise decision.

At the time of Rothert's appointment, the Club did not publish a quarterly magazine. Since 1884 the Club had published monographs in book form, designated as Filson Club Publications, and bearing upon some worthy and undeveloped subject in Kentucky history. These publications

were exemplary pieces of research as well as notable contributions to historical scholarship and to the state's history.

Late in 1926, Rothert, with the support of Mr. Thruston, succeeded in launching a quarterly magazine with the collaboration of the University of Louisville's history department. The joint publication scheme, however, did not prove satisfactory. The Club in 1928 took over sole publication, made Rothert editor, and changed the name to *The History Quarterly of The Filson Club*; in January 1930, the title became *The Filson Club History Quarterly*. It is a matter of record that Rothert was an able and efficient editor. He maintained high standards and an article had to meet those standards to be accepted. His editorial suggestions improved even some of the best manuscripts, and his thoroughness and exactness were notable. During the early years, his services were free. He also gave to the Club his excellent library of about one thousand books and pamphlets.

As the years passed, Rothert became an important figure in the development of what may be termed The Filson Club personality. His visage, pose, voice, and style of humor became a part of the institution's image as did his accustomed position at his desk, stubby pencil in hand, intently scrutinizing, through half-lensed clericals, a recently submitted manuscript. He was often observed walking rapidly along Breckinridge Street in an ill-fitting suit with a battered hat thrown on carelessly. Tightly tucked under his left arm was the precious material for the *Quarterly* as he made his way to the printer.

At 118 West Breckinridge Street, life was very pleasant for Rothert. The staff, kindly, cultured, dedicated, were drawn together by a strong mutual affinity for The Filson Club. As time passed, these people became more and more like members of an affectionate family – the vivacious, warm-hearted Miss Ludie Kinhead, the gracious Miss Evelyn R. Dale, the self-effacing, stoical, and gentlemanly Cordie Cooper, and the benevolent, grand old man of Kentucky history, R. C. Ballard Thruston.

When one has passed the Biblical three score years and ten, the old machine generally needs to slow down; strong man though he had been, Rothert was told by his physicians that he must begin giving up his work. He had helped The Filson Club grow from a weak historical society with a handful of members, no home, and a few books and manuscripts to a thriving society of eight hundred members with a large fireproof building, a celebrated library, and a notable endowment fund. He retired on 1 November 1945.

The officers and directors and their wives gave a brilliant testimonial dinner in his honor at The Arts Club on 15 May 1945 at which Rothert's many services to the Club were eloquently praised. The guests tried to make their remarks light and amusing, but all present felt, underneath it all, a sense of sorrow and loss. But Rothert carried off his part in great style.

When he retired as secretary, Rothert had little in the way of financial support. During the depression, he had made a heroic sacrifice for his brother Hugo, who controlled the bank at Huntingburg, Indiana. The hard times had so strained the resources of the institution that it was near the point of failing. Hoping to save it, Rothert put up all he had, thought to have been seventy or eighty thousand dollars, a fair sum in those days. The noble deed was of no avail; the bank went under anyway, and all was lost. The small salary then paid him by The Filson Club little more than provided subsistence. The Muhlenberg property brought in little, if anything, and there was no sale for the poor land.

Rothert resided for thirty years in a tiny room at the old Coker Hotel at Seventh and Chestnut streets. It became badly out of date and run down, and some of its tenants looked badly run down too; indeed, some looked "weird." During the later years when he was virtually

bedridden, his warm and admiring friend Holman Hamilton and I would frequently visit and minister somewhat. He wanted no charity but liked for his friends to call. A few others did, and his two nieces and nephew were concerned. He never ceased hoping that oil, a gusher, would be struck on his Muhlenberg land and that he would have money again, but it came too late.

Rothert ever looked forward to his annual visits to Lexington, often in June. He would be the guest of J. Winston Coleman, Jr., and his gracious wife Burnetta at Winburn farm. There on the first day would be an enjoyable get-together. The next day, beginning late afternoon, the gang would party at the Lafayette Hotel. Otto would be with warm friends, genial spirits all, members of the "Book Thieves Club." Among them were Coleman, Hamilton, Tom Clark, William H. Townsend, Dr. Frank L. McVey, Charles R. Staples, Willard Rouse Jillson, and Hambleton Tapp. There would be stimulating libations, delectable food, scintillating discourse, rare tales, and spicy jocularly.

Feeling a bit uncertain regarding his allotted time, Rothert, perhaps in 1948, announced that the visit to Lexington that year would be his last, so the word went out announcing the last "pow wow." The following year invitations went out to attend "Uncle Otto's" Second Farewell Visit. Prior to the fourth last farewell in 1952, Rothert remarked, "They're persistent cusses, but so am I. If they insist on keeping up the custom, I'll insist on going." He was always delighted by the sparkling occasions, was almost as articulate and clever as mellifluous-voiced, famed raconteur, William H. ("Bill") Townsend.

Though no fifth farewell affair was held, Rothert did move to Greenville, which was a wise change. There, he was well known, held in high esteem, and genuinely liked. The entire community appeared to be aware of his presence. A kindly matron provided quarters in her home, and he was accorded every attention and called Greenville's most famous citizen. In October 1954, the Greenville Woman's Club paid tribute to him by holding a special meeting in his honor. I had the good fortune of being chosen the speaker for the well-attended and enthusiastic assemblage. In February 1955, at Central City, he was elected honorary president of the Muhlenberg County Historical Society.

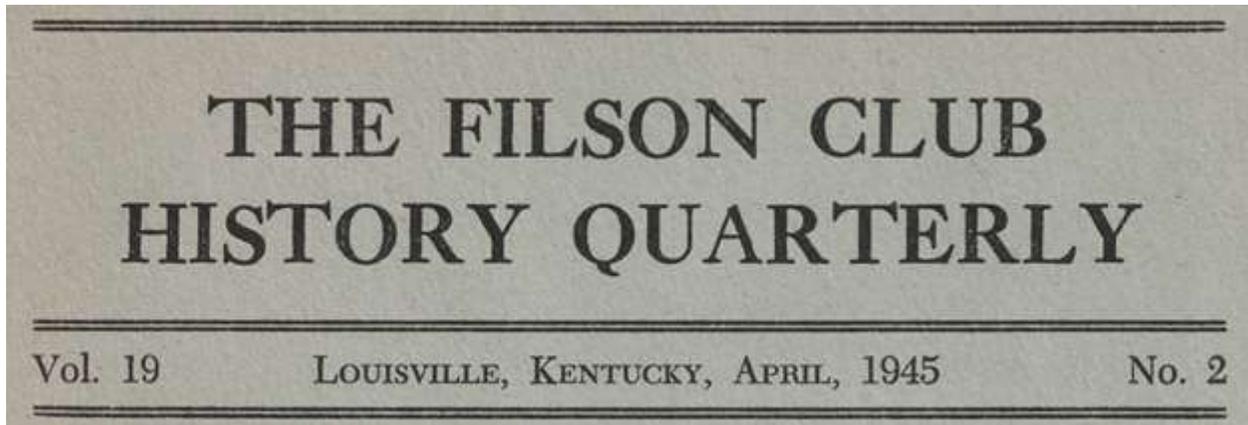
Otto Arthur Rothert died, peacefully, at age eighty-four, in Greenville on 28 March 1956. The funeral was conducted at the First Presbyterian Church there, and burial was in the family lot at Huntingburg, Indiana.

Life may not have been too unkind to our good friend and benefactor, Otto Rothert, and he was certainly not unkind to life. He was warm and generous, his mind was ever broad, liberal, and open. His philosophy was mellow, kindly, tolerant, and he never lost a sustaining sense of humor, even in suffering. He was a modest man, somewhat removed from the "tumult and the shouting." Yet, he made lasting contributions, not only to The Filson Club, but to Kentucky as well. We feel perhaps that our lives may have been enriched somewhat by his having lived. In this, the centennial of The Filson Club, it is, of course, appropriate that special tribute be accorded Colonel Durrett, R. C. Ballard Thruston, and Otto A. Rothert. These names symbolize the founding, the noble purposes, the progress, and the inspiration which this worthy institution has sustained. They and other dedicated leaders and scholars have richly contributed to the prestige, respect, and honor the Club enjoys both at home and abroad. And this enviable position is not a zenith. A fine heritage of challenging personalities and eminent attainments should inspire fresh new talent to greater heights of achievement. The future holds enticing promise for The Filson Club.

As the exigencies of time run their inexorable course, in all probability this will be my last appearance before the Club. The many happy times such has been my privilege, I cherish as conspicuous honors. They are among my most gratifying memories. Again, I hope for the Club

and its associates a brilliant future, and Godspeed. And now in the words of the Old Irish benediction:

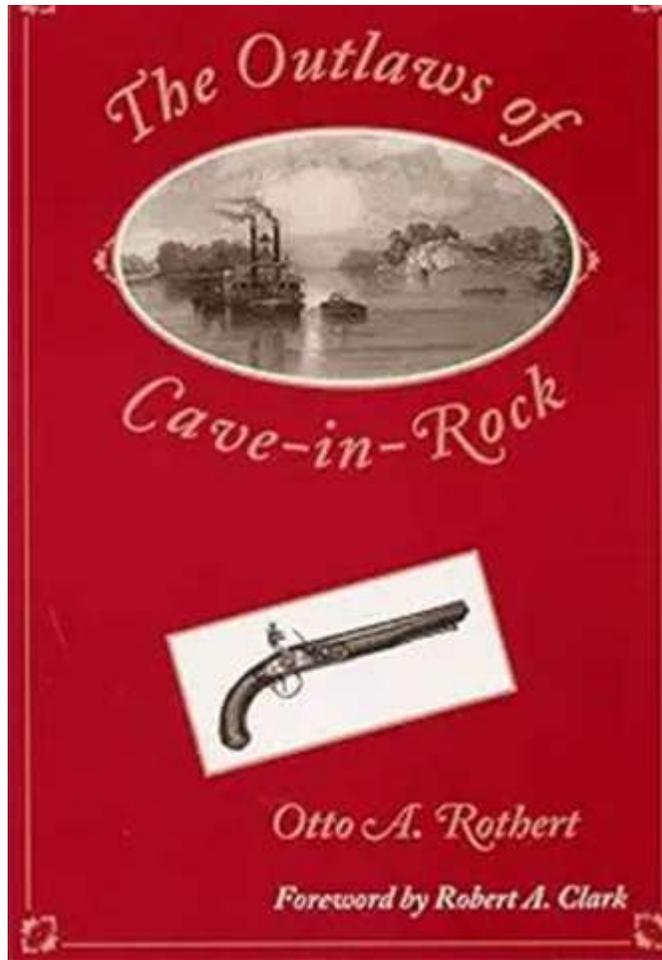
May the road rise to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face.
And may God hold you in the hollow of His hand.



Page 124: NEWS AND COMMENT

Ye Ole Secretary of The Filson Club handed in his resignation a few months ago to take effect April 1st. His name, in case the general reader has forgotten, is Otto A. Rothert. In recognition of his long services the Board of Directors presented him with an Endowment Membership. He became a member October 5, 1908, and on October 1, 1917, was elected Secretary, an office he has held ever since. His twenty-eight years of service as Secretary were spent very pleasantly, amid books and treasures of Kentucky's past and present, in close contact with a group of people with whom association was a privilege and a pleasure. Among his various duties was the arranging for speakers for the nine Monthly Meetings that take place every first Monday night of the month, except the sum-er months. He edited THE FILSON CLUB HISTORY QUARTERLY and wrote its News and Comment pages. In addition to his assigned duties he carried on his history hobby to the extent of writing several books and a number of newspaper and magazine articles bearing on Kentucky. He now contemplates—after a prolonged vacation—preparing a volume on The Filson Club, including his affiliations with the organization. In the meantime he will be seventy-four in June and will no longer act in any official capacity. Nevertheless, as an emeritus, he hopes to be helpfully identified with the Club "till death do us part." Up to the time of going to press with this issue of the HISTORY QUARTERLY a new Secretary had not been selected. And so Ye Ole Secretary, retiring, says: "Au revoir but not goodbye."





Page 39: The Filson Club's first permanent home 118 West Breckinridge Street, Louisville, KY. In 1986 the Filson Club Historical Society and library moved to the former Ferguson Mansion, 1310 South Third Street, Louisville, KY.



The Filson Club

118 West Breckinridge Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40203

