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## A SHORT HISTORY OF CARROLL COUNTY

ANNA V. PARKER, GHENT, KY.

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In the year 1838, the eighty-seventh county was formed in Kentucky. The largest part of this new county was taken from Gallatin, which had been organized into a county in 1799. In order to straighten the lines of the new county, a corner was cut from Henry and a slice taken from Trimble. The new county was named in honor of Charles Carroll of Maryland, who had been one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. The town of Port William, the earliest settlement in this section, had been the county seat of Gallatin County. The name was now changed to Carrollton, and the town was made the county seat of Carroll County.<sup>1)</sup>

Carroll County is situated in a very delightful part of Kentucky. The northern boundary is formed by the beautiful Ohio River, and much of the farm land under cultivation is in the fertile valleys of the Ohio and Kentucky rivers. The hills in the background form a most interesting contrast. In the spring of the year when the wild plum, dogwood, redbud, and other flowering trees are in bloom, a drive through the country is most delightful. In the fall when the trees on the hills are a mass of color, it is equally beautiful and interesting. Many lovely views of the Ohio and Kentucky rivers can be seen when one is driving along the river roads. Perhaps the most lasting memory is the reflection of the sun on the water before it sets behind the Indiana hills.

Carroll County is also well located, in that it is midway between Louisville and Cincinnati, and nearly the same distance from Lexington as it is from Indianapolis. It has always enjoyed the advantage of river transportation on both the Ohio and the Kentucky. Now, as 1959 begins, traffic on the Ohio is still extremely active, though it will probably never again be so important to Kentuckians as it was during the days of the early settlements. Then, their very lives depended on travel by water.

In 1867 the Louisville & Nashville Railroad built a line from LaGrange to Covington known as the Short Line, which passes through the southern part of the county. Early in the 1930's, Federal Highway 42 was run through the county, lying parallel to the Ohio for several miles and giving the tourist many lovely views of the river. It has been of inestimable help to the county in a commercial way, even as it has afforded residents and visitors much pleasure.

Carrollton was settled in 1792<sup>2)</sup> some seven years before Gallatin County's organization became effective, and was the county seat of that county until Carroll County was formed. As said, it was known at first

Across the river from Carrollton was Prestonville, named for General Preston of Revolutionary War fame.<sup>7</sup> In the early days, even when Carroll was a part of Gallatin County, it was the most important settlement. Because the town was at the mouth of the Kentucky River and also on the Ohio, much of the freight sent to Central Kentucky passed through it. One of the earliest roads led to New Castle in Henry County. This was the main way of getting needed supplies in and farm products to the market. As early as 1795, Elijah Craig, Jr., placed a notice in the Cincinnati *Sentinel of the North-Western Territory* stating that he would make trips up the Kentucky River on the first day of February with sufficient number of boats to transport all goods left with him, and adding that he had a storehouse large enough to take care of all shipments waiting delivery. His charge per hundred to Frankfort was 50¢ and to Dick's River, \$1.25.<sup>8</sup>

The first dam on the Kentucky River was built in 1839 about two miles from its mouth.<sup>9</sup> The contract was awarded to A. W. Darling and Brothers. After its completion Darling made Carrollton his home and built a large flour mill and distillery in Prestonville. He owned a general store there and was quite successful in all of his business undertakings. He is said to have shipped many barrels of flour to New Orleans by flatboat. When he retired in 1860 he sold his distillery to a corporation called the Whiskey Trust, and, as his product had become so famous over a very large territory, he is said to have received quite a large sum of money for the name of his brand, "Old Darling." Business in Prestonville began to decline after the Kentucky Central Railroad was built in 1854. At the present time, only a skeleton of the original settlement remains.

Among the early industries in Carrollton was a distillery started by Richard Jett in 1845 or 1846. Jett had moved to Kentucky from Virginia with his family. After his death in 1881, his sons, James and his three brothers, built a much larger distillery with a capacity of 326 bushels of corn a day. They manufactured a sour-mash whiskey which was sold mainly in Cincinnati. Estimates have placed their sales at 2000 barrels a year.<sup>10</sup>

In 1863, John Glauber, a recent arrival from Germany, started the Glauber Shoe Company. He employed five workers, for at that time all shoes were made by hand. The business is now owned by his grandson, John Glauber III, and is operating in the original building. Another old business that remained in the same family for three generations was sold only recently. It is the City Meat Market, founded by Herman Seppenfelt in 1866. He was the first Carrollton merchant to deliver purchases to the homes of his customers. The first dry goods store was on the corner of Main and Fifth streets, owned by Hamilton Lathrope. His wife was

nually, it employs some ninety men and women, residents of the county or of Carrollton.

Another important plant, that of the Metal and Thermit Corporation, was dedicated as recently as April, 1958. It is on Highway 42 about two miles east of Carrollton. Here we have a plant built at a cost of \$3,500,000, said to be one of the most modern organic chemical plants in the world, and belonging to an industry that promises to give employment to twenty-five local workers.<sup>12</sup>

There are many smaller businesses, each engaging a sizable group of employees. Among these are the Rich Ladder Company, the Kraft Cheese Company, the Coca-Cola Bottling Company, the Martin Nursery, and three modern motels on Highway 42 east of Carrollton. The Carrollton Canning Company employs around eighty-five persons during the canning season. The two county papers were combined around 1930 and are now published weekly as the *News-Democrat*. It is owned by the estate of the late John N. Perry; N. A. Perry, Jr., is its publisher.

Carroll is principally an agricultural county. In 1957 there were 1,689.77 acres of tobacco raised in the county and around 5,000 acres of corn.<sup>13</sup> Other crops are wheat, oats, barley, sorghum, and several types of grasses for hay. Many acres of tomatoes are grown, and for the past few years a large acreage has been devoted to strawberries, which thrive in the sandy soil along the rivers. Recently several farmers have supplemented their income by adding raspberries to their small fruit crop.

In addition to tobacco, the dairy herds hold a most important place in the farmers' income. There are several herds of registered Jerseys that are nationally known, having won ribbons and trophies at exhibitions in a number of states. There are also some sheep in the county, which have been a good source of income to their owners over the years. Many more farmers are raising sheep since the important dog law was passed in 1956.

Although the season lasts only a short time, perhaps the largest industry in the county is the Carrollton Loose Leaf Tobacco Market. It has often ranked as the third largest tobacco market in the world and has never been lower than fourth. There are nine warehouses with a floor space of approximately seventeen acres. During the 1957-58 season, 20,875,754 pounds of Burley were sold on the Carrollton floor, at an average price of \$61.94 and totaling in sales \$12,930,192.58.<sup>14</sup> It goes without saying that many men and women are given work during the marketing season. Carrollton has also a large redrying plant with some three hundred employees.

turn in a westwardly direction to a mineral spring at Drennon, in Henry County. The Big Bone Spring in Boone County, east of Carroll, was a favorite haunt of the buffalo and all kinds of wild life. So roads ran from Carroll in all directions, a great advantage to the first settlers.

As early as 1823, plans were laid for establishing a road from Ghent to Lexington. Then in 1833 George N. Sanders wrote to Joseph LeCompt in regard to improving the road to New Liberty and re-working the road on to Lexington.<sup>17</sup> It was not until 1872 that several private road companies were organized to lay down the main roads through the county known as turnpikes. Toll houses were built, usually a mile or so from a town, where the tollkeeper lived. Here he collected a small fee for the use of the road, usually three cents per mile for a one-horse vehicle, more for two horses or for wagons. These roads served more than one good purpose. They paid the stockholder a very acceptable interest on his investment, and they were a great help to the residents of the county. In 1898 the local government began to buy the roads and make them toll free. Part of the purchase price was paid in cash, the rest in bonds bearing 6% interest.<sup>18</sup>

By 1900, bridges had been built over Eagle Creek at Sanders, Eagle Station, and Worthville. All three were the old-type covered bridge, but in recent years they have been replaced with concrete spans. Most of the dirt roads of the early days have been made into modern roads, and bridges of sturdier construction have taken the place of the original wooden ones.

The first bridge over the Kentucky River between Carrollton and Prestonville was built in 1898. At that time a project was in the "talking stage" of extending an interurban line from Covington to Louisville, and this bridge had sufficient re-enforcement to carry the load. Like many worth-while projects, "the interurban" only reached the planning stage. The present bridge, a very beautiful and graceful span, was opened to traffic in 1952. As travel on Highway 42 has grown at a startling rate during the past ten years, this larger bridge is needed to care for it.

The first few public schools were started in Carroll County around 1838, as soon as the law was passed by the Kentucky Legislature to establish public schools in the state for a three-month term and to levy a tax of five cents per hundred to pay for the cost of them.<sup>19</sup> There had been private schools in the county, and they continued until the War Between the States, when public and private schools alike had to close. In 1870, after another bill had passed the Legislature extending the term to five months and raising the tax to twenty cents per hundred dollars, new schools were established throughout the county. J. J. Orr was in charge

students. It was well known throughout northern Kentucky and southern Indiana as Ghent College,<sup>20</sup> and at its height is said to have ranked with the college at Georgetown. Besides the regular curriculum, it had a very fine music department. Some of the well-known educators who served as president of the college were Professor Crowe, Professor Reubelt, and Dr. Barbee. The building was taken over as part of the county school system around 1890, and was used until it burned in January, 1941.

In the early thirties the high school students were moved to Carrollton High School due to the small number in attendance. A new modern school building was dedicated on the site of the college in 1945. Four years later, a consolidated school was built in Ghent for all the Negro children in the county, except those in Carrollton proper. The children are furnished free transportation to the school.

At the turn of the century, there were twenty-five rural schools.<sup>21</sup> These have now been consolidated into five: Sanders, Ghent, Worthville, Locust, and English. All high school children in the county are sent to Carrollton, except the Negro students, who attend Lincoln Institute.

The early settlers in the county were churchgoing people. Many of them had left Virginia because of religious difficulties. Some of these had entered Kentucky with the Traveling Church in 1781. Before 1800 the Methodists and Baptists in the county held services together, but finally, after a day of prayer and fasting, the Baptists decided to organize their own church. Their first meetinghouse was built of logs near the mouth of McCools Creek, and a few years later another was built near the first one for \$173. This was known as the Port William Baptist Church, and Reverend Joshua Morris was its first pastor. Eight years later the name was changed to McCools Creek Church, and in a year or so, owing to a disagreement, part of the membership withdrew and built a Baptist church at the mouth of Four Mile Creek, some two miles closer to Carrollton.

In 1815 Samuel Sanders gave the Baptists a tract of land across the road from the Ghent Cemetery, where they built a brick church for \$700. The present structure was started in 1845 and, at a cost of \$1,250, was completed the following year. The money was made up among the members. The greatest amount was paid in cash, but various commodities, such as hay, sheepskins, wool, and several barrels of whiskey, constituted the remainder. The church was built at the lower end of an apple orchard which belonged to Reverend John Scott, a native of Ireland. He was pastor for many years.

The present Baptist Church in Carrollton was built in 1845. Several additions have been made over the years. Besides the Baptist churches

After a few years, he made the race for county judge and was elected. A Carrollton man overheard a Republican friend asking him one day how he happened to make the race on the Democratic ticket. The Judge answered: "I have found it does not pay to be a Republican in Carroll County." An interest in politics runs deep and strong in the county. In a local paper published August 12, 1876, the following item appeared: "Only one man was killed in Carroll County last Saturday, election day." George Washington Sanders of Sanders was quite a politician, and it is said that, owing to the huge burgoo and barbecue gatherings he sponsored, he was well known over a large part of the state. In 1856 he entertained a very large crowd, and the guest of honor was John C. Breckinridge. After the feast, the crowd gathered beneath a large elm tree for the speaking. James Tandy Ellis wrote a delightful poem describing this meeting, which he entitled "Whar John C. Spoke."

Two very interesting political meetings were held in Ghent, in the same building, a tailor shop. One of these had an important effect on the history of our nation. In November, 1843, a meeting was called by George N. Sanders for the purpose of considering the annexation of Texas. It was attended by thirteen men. As it was many years before their names were made known to the public, they were commonly referred to as the "Mystic Thirteen." Texas had recently become independent of Mexico. With her five million acres of cotton and countless herds of cattle, she was a most desirable acquisition to the United States. A resolution was offered and adopted by acclamation, recommending the annexation of Texas to the United States. It was also voted that letters containing the resolution be sent to each of the prospective candidates for the Presidency. There were several prominent candidates: Henry Clay, Martin Van Buren, James K. Polk, Lewis Cass, and W. O. Butler, a citizen of Carroll County. Polk is said to have been the only one of the prospective candidates who answered the letter. He favored the annexation of Texas and campaigned on that issue. Although he was little known out of his home state of Tennessee, his views in favor of the annexation helped to win him public favor and the White House.

The other meeting was held on November 5, 1859. George N. Sanders called a mass meeting to take measures to prepare for the conflict that he saw was gathering and to assert the principle of state rights. W. B. Lindsay was appointed chairman, and the meeting was addressed by Dr. S. S. Scott, Captain Jack Leathers, and Lewis Sanders. Resolutions asserting the principles of state rights, free trade, low taxes, and hard money were adopted and published. This became known as the "New Mississippi

There are many lovely homes in the county. Owing to limited space, it will be impossible to mention more than a few of the oldest. One of the most attractive is the home of the late Perry Gaines, overlooking the Ohio River. It was built by Benjamin Craig in 1805. He was the son of the Benjamin Craig who gave the land for the Carroll County courthouse and for the Carrollton school. What is said to have been the first brick house along the river from Cincinnati to Louisville was the home of Benjamin Craig, Sr. When it was necessary to take it down some years ago, a small house was built from these same brick in the side yard of Rebel's Landing, the beautiful residence of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Grohmyer.

Among the many other interesting houses in Carrollton, two are outstanding. One was the home of General W. O. Butler of Mexican War fame. The other, the home of the late Miss Jenn Winslow Howe, was built by Montgomery Blair around 1800. At one time it was the home of the John Van Pelt family. It was bought by Miss Howe's great-grandfather, William Winslow, in 1828 and has been in the Winslow and Howe families ever since. The Butler mansion in the park is another interesting old home. The best example of an early log house is on Grass Hills, the farm now owned by Curtis Montgomery. The house was built by Lewis Sanders between 1819 and 1821. It is two stories in height, with very large rooms. It had, when built, some fourteen rooms, besides a basement under the entire house that contained the kitchen and wine cellars. The house is still in good condition.

Such are the highlights of Carroll County, its beginnings, its growth, and its pleasant prospects. Space will not permit a further discussion at this time of its story. A subject which deserves special recognition, though not explored in this paper, is that of the famous personages of Carroll County, but no history is ever complete. Their treatment must await another time.