

GREATER JEFFERSONTOWN

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

October 2015

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October 2015 Meeting

The October meeting will be held **Monday, October 5, 2015**. We will meet at 7:00 P.M. in the meeting room of the Jeffersontown Library at 10635 Watterson Trail. The speaker will be Kadie Engstrom, Education Coordinator for the *Belle of Louisville*. Kadie's presentation will include historic connections to the steamboat era, general information about the Ohio River and the steamboat industry, and the overall history of the *Belle of Louisville* and her equally historic wharfboat, Life-Saving Station #10.

Kadie has worked with the historic steamboat *Belle of Louisville* in several capacities since 1972, and has been Education Coordinator since 1992. She has written books, articles, and other resources concerning community history, steamboats, Ohio River history, the *Belle's* history, and the history of Life-Saving Station #10. She is the author of *Pathway Through the Past, a Timeline of the Development of History in the Metropolitan Area*. In addition, Kadie has developed and facilitated educational experiences for children and adults, including community presentations and exhibits, classroom and on-board programs for students, and workshops for teachers.

The Greater Jeffersontown Historical Society meetings are now held on the first Monday of the even numbered months of the year. Everyone is encouraged to attend to help guide and grow the Society.

December Meeting

In December Robert Prather is going to tell us about *The Strange Case of Jonathan Swift and the Real Long John Silver*. Swift was a miner in the 1700s and is said to have owned the largest mansion in Alexandria, Virginia. Was the mine in Kentucky? Some traditions says it is/was?

Do we want to have a members lunch this year or maybe supper? Please give me your vote at the meeting or call me -491-6463.

Past History

In last Sunday's (9/20), *Courier-Journal*, Bullitt County historian, Charles Hartley, wrote about what was to be Louisville's oldest brick house. Interesting, yes, but it was where the house was located that may be of interest, and Steve Wiser has told us about it.

Hartley wrote that Fredrick William Spence Grayson lived in Bullitt County by 1803, became a lawyer, was appointed county clerk, and invested in a land deal from which he profited handsomely. He met a Bullitt County businessman, David Ward, who was operator of the Mann's Lick saltworks. (We learned about that operation from Bob Dawson). Ward had a daughter, Sarah, whom Grayson married in 1814, and it is believed the new couple lived in Sheperdsville.

In 1816 Ward bought his daughter a present, a house. The house had been built on one of the best locations in swampy Louisville on top of an old Indian mound surrounded by forest, with a large pond close by. The property ran from Center Street (Armory Street), west to half way between Sixth and Seventh Streets and from Walnut (Mohammad Ali Boulevard) to Grayson (Cedar Street). The mound

on which the house was built was fifteen feet above street level and more than 100 feet across at the base. Sarah Grayson said living in the house was some of her happiest times, especially before the pond was filled in to reduce the possibility of disease. As servants dug into the mound to fill the pond many Indian artifacts were unearthed.

Fred Grayson died in 1827 and the couple had no children. Sarah lived in the house until she passed in 1880, selling off various parts of the original five acres, part for the first site of St. Paul Episcopal Church. Later the house belonged to the Swiss Consul for this region with some of that family still living in the house in the 1940 census.

What is there now? The old State Employment Office that some say is haunted. But what we didn't know was "the rest of the story." Go to the *C-J* website to find the story.

GJHS Put in for Award

Pat Archer, a GJHS member is also a member of The Daughters of the American Revolution. She is going to place the GJHS in for a DAR Community Service award through the John Marshall Chapter. We will be one of maybe four organizations being reviewed.

August Meeting

Chuck Parrish, United States Army Corps of Engineers historian, talked about "The United States Life Saving Service at Louisville, 1881-1915." This presentation and the accompanying book "Heroes At the Falls – Louisville's Lifesavers" written by LeLand R. Johnson, Ph.D. and edited by Chuck are a culmination of about fifty years of research by the two longtime friends. The book was written in conjunction with the River Institute at Hanover College in Madison, Indiana, and the bicentennial of the first steamboat down the Ohio River in 1811. Chuck was the chairman of the Steamboat Bicentennial Commission.

The story of the men who became the heroes of the Falls saving people, boats, and cargo as they encountered the Falls of the Ohio is a unique story as is how it all came about. People were rescued from rafts, fishing boats while they were out having a good time fishing or just enjoying time on the river, all the way to cargo boats that were caught up in the turbulent currents of the Falls. The men who answered the call when others were at peril on the river were the first, first responders in the region.

The Falls was the most dangerous place on the 981 miles of the Ohio River from Pittsburgh to where it joins the Mississippi at Cairo, Illinois. In about two and a half miles it dropped twenty six feet in a series of rapids that contained small islands, some with trees, and various outcroppings that made navigation treacherous. At times of high water, usually in the winter it was possible to navigate over the Falls, or "shooting the Falls."

When the water was high enough the Falls were navigated through three routes, known as chutes. The first chute to open was along the Indiana bank, called the Indian Chute, that remains today along the fossils beds in the Falls of the Ohio State Park. As the water level rose the Middle Chute could be used, and as water level got even higher the south chute, the Kentucky Chute, could be navigated. When the water level was down southern travel was unloaded at the levee located between about First to Seventh Streets and reloaded on boats in Portland below Sand Island. North travelling cargo and passengers did the reverse. The Falls remained a very dangerous place until the first 50-foot wide lock was completed in 1830 along side of the Kentucky Chute. Captains then had the choice of using the canal or going through the Falls as many did. Boats coming upriver would usually use the canal.

The newspapers of the day were full of stories on the loss of boats and people being lost while trying to navigate the Falls. Chuck showed an old photo of a drop of maybe six feet that looked like a small waterfall.

The first heroes, who volunteered their services, were Jack Gillooy, John Tully, and William Devan, true “river rats” who knew the river and were sons of Irish immigrants who came to Louisville in the mid-1800s. Gillooy and Devan worked for Bower’s floating coal dock on the river unloading coal boats, Tully had a bait shop on the levee. They would go out whenever they saw people or boats in trouble, or heard their cries for help.

The three men would also assist the Falls pilots, a group of men who piloted boats through the Falls when water levels would permit. There was a Falls Pilots Association authorized by the State in 1880. One of the better known pilots was Pinkney Varble, known as Captain Pink. He and his two brothers and a nephew had secured a lock on the pilot trade.

In 1874, the government built a low dam across the head of the Falls to increase the water flow in the Indian Chute and the canal at low water levels. The dam partially blocked the Middle and Kentucky Chutes and it was where Gillooy, Devan and Tully would earn the title of Falls Heroes for voluntarily risking their lives to save lives.

William Shakespeare Hays, a reporter who wrote a column on all things river and steamboats for the *Courier-Journal*, gave them the title because by 1879 the three men, by Hays’s accounts, had saved more than forty five people from losing their lives. Hays was also a composer of note, who is thought to have composed the song *Dixie*. He was a steamboat captain and a manager of a resort in French Lick, Indiana.

In the 1880s Paul Boyton, the Amphibious Captain and Man Fish came to Louisville. He had developed a rubber suit as an experiment where he would float down the river on his back using an oar. One time he decided to go through the Falls. He was advised not to try it because all of the currents and the rocks would tear his suit to shreds. He went anyway followed by boats of reporters, surely with Will Hayes in one and a boat with the Heroes of the Falls aboard. Sure enough Boyton’s rubber suit started to fill with water as he was tossed about and capsized and he almost drowned before he was saved by the Heroes.

As reports of their feats were reported in papers across the country, the nation, the state and others presented awards to the trio. In 1879 as reports reached Washington, the Secretary of the Treasury presented each man the Gold Life Saving Metal authorized by Congress, the nation’s highest award for exceptional bravery in saving lives. This metal, usually was awarded to military personnel, was given to the men even though they were volunteers. Not to be out done, Governor Blackburn and the Kentucky legislature appropriated \$150 in 1880 for metals for each man. A cameo ring was presented to Gillooy by actor Oliver Doud Byron, a member of the group that followed Boyton through the Falls. The ring is still in the family and a photo of it was taken for the book.

At the time while all of this was going on there was a push mainly started in 1878 by Will Hays to create a U.S. Life Saving Station in Louisville. With the exposure of the awards presented to the men, Blackburn and the Kentucky legislature sent a resolution to the Life Saving Service Superintendent, Sumner Kimball, pushing for the establishment of a station at Louisville through Congressman Albert Willis. Sumner questioned the real need for inland stations, specifically at Louisville.

After all the awards and notoriety Gillooy, Devan, and Tully went back to continuing to rescue people and boats in peril going through the Falls. In 1881 after much politicking, and petitions from rescued Democratic Convention delegates returning from Cincinnati on the 185-foot *Virgie Lee* that wrecked

going through the Falls, and others, Sumner realized he had better get on the bandwagon and he astutely agreed. Both Houses of Congress passed a bill establishing inland stations and it became law in March 1881. Prior to this time all the life saving stations were on the blue waters of the Nation's coasts and the Great Lakes. This would be the first station on the brown water of the inland rivers.

In May Sumner came to Louisville to inspect the area. He was given a ride through the Falls in one of the small life saving boats with the Falls Heroes. He was duly impressed, and after his hands were pried off the gunwales of the boat he admitted a station was needed and their metals were truly earned. He also admitted that before the ride he thought the request for the station was folly and now wondered why it had not been done earlier.

Hay and Willis pushed for the three heroes to be appointed as the station's crew. Kimball agreed and U. S. Life Saving Station No. 10 was activated in November, 1881, as the only U. S. Life Saving Station on inland waters.

The station boat was built by the Howard Shipyard and Dock Company in Jeffersonville, and is pictured on the front cover of the book. It was a rectangle with the bottom deck for equipment and the lifesaving skiffs; the second deck was crew quarters, and on top was an hexagonal tower that was occupied 24-7. The station was a boat but had no propulsion so was always stationary. Station No. 10 has always been located on the Louisville water front somewhere between Second and Fifth Streets.

The Station No. 10 fell under the jurisdiction of the Ninth District located in Buffalo, New York, and as such, routinely inspected and trained by the officers of that headquarters. The men were trained in first aid and resuscitation techniques and continually worked on their boat handling skills. They had two rescuing skiffs they named the Reckless and the Ready that could be launched within 30-seconds after receiving an alarm. Besides responding to problems on the river, the crews also responded to incidents during floods. In 1882, 1883, and 1884 the river flooded Louisville and there are records showing crews rescued not only people in boats but people stranded on their roof tops on Shippingport Island and other places in the city by the flood waters.

As responsibilities expanded, so did the crew numbers. Coast Guard records from the Life Saving Service at the station show that fathers, sons, and grandsons followed one another in the service at the station. Their uniforms in the beginning were the heavy wool ones worn by the coastal crews. The men of Station No. 10 soon learned these were much too heavy for the Kentucky climate. It took a while but wool was replaced by lighter cotton for uniforms. All of the uniforms were embroidered with USLSS across the front with the number "10" under the letters.

One of the most dreaded and unrewarding duties of the service was dragging the river bottom after drownings. The equipment consisted of a bar with large hooks hanging off it to snag the victims of drowning. One of the crew would row the boat and the other would be at the stern holding the rope with the drag at the end. It was exhausting work and they were not always successful. The Courier-Journal in an article on the operation called them "the fisher of men."

In 1886 Congressman Asher Caruth, Louisville's new U.S. representative lost a fight to get the crew of six a wage increase of \$10, from \$50 to \$60 and the chief, called the Keeper, from \$66 to \$75 per month. He was also defeated on trying to obtain a pension for them like the navy and army had. Remember they were federal employees.

The book is full of stories about these Heroes of the Falls risking their lives to save hapless people who were not knowledgeable of the river and its currents and got swept into the chutes of the Falls. Others were just too drunk. Even with the canal in service, steamers still used the chutes, especially when the water was up and even with the Falls pilots at the helm Old Man River did his thing. To the men of

Station No.10 it made no difference, fishing skiff or steamboat, if they saw trouble they leaped into action. Many were saved, some not so lucky.

Chuck told of the steamer *John K. Speed*. It had come up from New Orleans through the Louisville & Portland Canal heavily loaded. Its cargo was unloaded onto the Louisville levee and was backing away into the river when it got hit by the strong blowing wind and was blown over the dam. The life savers leaped into action, caught up with the *John K. Speed* and reassured all the passengers. Captain Varable joined the chase with two harbor boats. They tied off the *Speed* onto the two harbor boats, and with all three engines and the *Speed* taking on water, they were able to maneuver back up the Indian Chute to safety, and the *John K. Speed* continued its trip to Cincinnati.

In 1895 the Ohio froze over with a huge back up of ice some fifteen feet tall, and as it thawed and broke up, steamboats and barges were put asunder with the life savers in hot pursuit.

The year 1900 saw the first Station No. 10 boat worn out. The 20-foot by 10-foot station was replaced in 1902 by a 70-foot by 30-foot boat. It had a much taller eight sided watch tower on top of two decks.

In May of 1911, Captain William Devan died and Jack Gillooy replaced him as Keeper on USLS Station 10. Gillooy had spent thirty years as Boatman No.1, second in command to Devan. Since 1881 Gillooy guessed they had rescued more than 6,000 persons and had saved more than \$5 million in property. That did not count the years before 1881 that they served in volunteer status.

March 1913 saw another great flood on the Ohio, with the worst being up in the Cincinnati area and into the Miami River in Dayton. With no life saving station in that area members of the Louisville crew were sent up to assist in rescues and food distribution there and in the Cincinnati area.

In February of 1914 the luxurious steamboat *Queen City* arrived in Louisville in the early morning hours before dawn. The river level was high, full of ice and the current fast. Wind and current caught the *Queen* broadside trying to dock and drove it down onto the dam opening its hull. The collision awoke the passengers and sent them scrambling onto the decks. Captain Gillooy saw the steamer going down river and launched his crews. Knowing the boat could go over the dam at any moment he ordered his men to evacuate the women and children first. In twenty five icy and cold trips in four hours, they rescued more than 200 people and then went back for all the luggage. While checking the boat Ed Farrell came upon an Argus ware water pitcher that he salvaged. It is still in the family.

In January 1915 the Life Saving Service was folded into the U.S. Coast Guard and the men received a military rank with increased pay and military pension rights. It rightly pleased new Warrant Officer Gillooy, the father of ten children. Also that year a Louisville film company filmed *Miss Lou* starring Jessie Stinson and using the new Coast Guardsmen in the film. The *Louisville Herald* did a story on the film and printed a picture with a rescue boat going with three men at the oars, over the dam in swift water. In the foreground is Gillooy with Jessie Stinson. The caption above the picture reads "Ohio's Mighty Death Trap Has No Terrors for Uncle Sam's Life-Savers."

In the thirty three years since the Station had been formed the Life-Savers motto, "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back", was never fulfilled - not one crew member had ever been lost, even after saving 6,000+ lives. In June, 1916, that motto came to fruition. Two fishermen in a small boat were headed for the dam. The alarm was sounded and a rescue boat manned by Ed Farrell, Ed Long, and John Munz went chasing after it. A second boat went out. The fishing boat went over the dam followed first by Farrell's boat, then by the second rescue team. All boats capsized in the turbulence nine feet below. The fishermen were able to grab onto one of their oars. All struggled ashore except one, John Munz. His body was found a few days later snagged on a trotline. Munz was just twenty-seven years old and left a wife and three children.

Keeper John Gillooy retired in August, 1917, at 62 years of age. His retirement was written up in the *Courier-Journal* and his retirement papers were signed by Theodore Roosevelt, then acting Secretary of the Navy. He retired to his home on Bank Street in Portland and continued to work for the city. Chuck commented they were all “river rats”, as most of them were from the Portland neighborhood.

Ed Farrell retired in 1917 after thirty-seven years of service. His son, Walter, and grandson, Walter, Jr. served in the Coast Guard as lifesavers at the Falls.

The third Station No. 10 boat was put in service in 1929. It was the steel hulled vessel that Captain Gillooy had said was needed in 1915. The 90-foot by 38-foot boat was built by a Dubuque, Iowa firm and floated down to Louisville. It stayed in service until 1972, when the Coast Guard closed the station after 89 years.

The boat was sold to the City of Louisville for one dollar and renamed after a past mayor, Andrew Broaddus, and it has served as the offices for the *Belle of Louisville* ever since. An interesting piece of information is that a few of the *Belle of Louisville* crew are Portland residents.

Ghost Stories At the Senior Center

Friday, October 9th from 6-8 pm, Thomas Freese will entertain with ghost stories at the Senior Center. There will be free refreshments provided. He will be selling his books.

Louisville Orchestra

Friday, November 20, from 6:30-9:30pm. Mayor Dieruf and the City Council will present the Louisville Orchestra's program *Music Without Borders*, along with an art exhibit including wine and cheese. The event will be held at the Jeffersontown Community Center. Tickets are available for \$20.00 on the Louisville Orchestra website (<https://www.louisvilleorchestra.org/music-without-borders-2/>)

Contact Us

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Gold Life Saving Medal presented to Devan, Gilooly and Tully in 1880 by Kentucky Governor Luke P. Blackburn
MIKE MALONEY



No. 10, 1881, with crew on upper deck. Note bow of rescue boat in open launchway.

LOUISVILLE HERALD

Kentucky's Greatest Newspaper

LOUISVILLE, KY., SATURDAY MORNING, APRIL 17, 1915.

Ohio's Mighty Death Trap Has No Terrors For Uncle Sam's Life-Savers



The picturesque Falls of the Ohio River, the most beautiful and the most treacherous place on any navigable river in the United States, is a "snare" for the members of the United States Life-Saving Crew of this city, stationed at the foot of Laurel Street. At the call of duty, these men heave their boats into the rapids on their life-saving missions.

Toward, at the direction of Capt. John F. Gilooly, one of

the crew shot the rapids, while a motion picture camera clicked off the scene. At the same time, The Herald Staff Photographer snapped just at the moment the boat made its first plunge into the dizzy whirl.

The men in the row are veterans and schooled in the white and black of the life. They are Ed Ford, William Deibel and Owen Carter. Note the crew of the boat, a small boat, shot the rapids of the falls.

The picture gives a fairly good idea of the ferocity of the falls, the tremendous current and waves. After battling with such a foe, the Louisville crew of life-savers who were sent in Dayton to give relief in the flood there, found the current of the flood there "easy picking."

The inset pictures below are those of Miss Jessie Stinson, who is "Miss Lou" in the Louisville movie, and Capt. John F. Gilooly, of the United States Life-Saving Crew.

The Louisville Herald, April 17, 1915, printed this story of the film *Miss Lou*, starring Jessie Stinson, on left with Captain Jack Gilooly. In the background are three lifesavers rowing over a section of the dam and into the falls.
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