

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

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## Washington Celebrates Its Sesquicentennial

By

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# Washington Celebrates

By FRANCES GOGGIN MALTBY

**I**F ALL the people in the state of Kentucky who have some tie with the early history of the little old town of Washington, in Mason County, would assemble on the fifth of June to celebrate Washington's sesquicentennial, what a concourse of persons would gather; what a success this celebration would be!

We read in Collins' History of Kentucky that at one time, early in the nineteenth century, Washington was "the principal place of trade for a very large area." Also that it was "the center of fashion and education." We read of the Franklin Academy up on the Duke of York Street established shortly after Transylvania College. And who could fail to be impressed by the school for "young ladies" where they were taught "all the arts suited to their sex" conducted by the distinguished Carolyn Warburton Fitz-Herbert Keats whose husband was a cousin of the English poet, John Keats. And then the McMurdy school was at Washington. The head of this school was an Episcopal clergyman, the Rev. Robert McMurdy. Many a Ken-

tuckian's grandmother was educated at the McMurdy School. Not only was it patronized widely by Kentuckians, but on the rolls of the school were pupils from many other states. In that early day Washington was frequently referred to as "the Athens of the West."

When we read in Kentucky history the names of the early settlers of Washington, we can well understand why it became an educational center. There was Dr. John Johnston of Connecticut, the first physician in the town, who came about 1785. His wife, Abigail Harris, was the daughter of Washington's first postmaster, Edward Harris of Newbury, Conn. And so it came about that the son of Dr. John Johnston and his wife Abigail, the beloved Confederate General, Albert Sidney Johnston, was born in Washington, and it is in the little old cemetery at Washington that Dr. John Johnston and his wife, Abigail, are buried and beside them are five other members of that distinguished Johnston family. Could Washington claim no other glory than the fact that it was the birthplace of the hero of Shiloh, it would be enough.

But to return to the distinguished early settlers, there was another physician, Dr. Thomas Nelson. His son, born at Washington, was also a general and fought at Shiloh—General William Nelson of the Federal Army. Strange that these two who had played marbles together should have fought on opposite sides, but that is civil war.

It was also in 1785 that Colonel Thomas Marshall, "with a numerous family," as Collins expresses it, arrived, via the Ohio River and a flatboat and established himself on the cane lands of Washington. The Marshall home, stately brick, built in 1800, is standing today and owned by the courageous Colonel's great-great-great granddaughter. This Colonel Thomas Marshall was a brother of Chief Justice John Marshall. In the family burying ground on "The Hill" the father and mother of Chief Justice Marshall, who came to Kentucky to make their home with their son, Thomas, are buried.

General Henry Lee of Virginia settled in the Washington community the same year that Dr. Johnston arrived from Connecticut (1785), and became the president of the Branch Bank of Kentucky, the first bank in northern



These photographs of the front and rear of "The Hill," the Marshall house in Washington, were made before its restoration. Here the parents of Chief Justice Marshall are buried



# Its Sesquicentennial

Kentucky. The old building in which this bank did business is still standing and has been marked by the Washington Study Club, the enterprising organization that is sponsoring the sesquicentennial.

Then there was that distinguished family, the McClungs. The Rev. John A. McClung was author, lawyer and preacher. There was Alexander Keith McClung, whose mother was a Marshall, one of the most famous duellists of his generation, and there was the Duke family that also intermarried with the Marshalls; there was Captain Ward whose romantic adventures with the Indians would be material for a volume in itself; there were the Hunters, the Curtisses, the Downings, the Woods, the Taylors, the Formans, and many others who were identified with the early history of the Washington community. Coming down to a later date, there was Governor John Chambers, who was appointed territorial Governor of Iowa by President William Henry Harrison. The attractive home he built in 1807 on a commanding hill overlooking Washington is still standing, as is the old Marshall home on an opposite hill. The Chambers family intermarried with the Formans, that distinguished family that has given the Presbyterian Church so many missionaries to India.

No sketch of Washington, no matter how brief, would be possible without mentioning the man who made Washington habitable, and the two men who planned and laid out the town.

It was Simon Kenton's dream of rich cane lands that first attracted the adventurer into Mason County and brought about the establishment of a settlement in the midst of the canebrake that later became the town of Washington. Of Simon Kenton it has been said: "It is not enough that a man should be great, but that he should also come at the proper time." Certainly, Simon Kenton landing at Limestone (now Maysville) in 1775 and building a block-house at Kenton's Station, a few miles north of Washington, safeguarded the town laid out in 1785 by William Wood, a Baptist preacher, and Arthur Fox, a surveyor from

Virginia, was responsible, more than any other one person for the early prosperity and success of Washington. Simon Kenton had "come at the proper time."

Whether the seven hundred acres on which the town of Washington is situated was bought from Simon Kenton, or was given by Simon Kenton to the Messrs. Wood and Fox seems to be a disputed point between historians. However, we do know that in 1785 they laid off the town on a well selected section of the Simon Kenton tract of rolling uplands, and the following year, 1786, the town was granted a charter by the Virginia Legislature. From 1784 to 1793 Washington was a rendezvous for troops which were led by Simon Kenton against the Indians who would cross the Ohio and fall upon the various settlements. It was in the year 1793 that these invasions finally ceased and the "Happy Hunting Ground" of the Indians definitely passed into the hands of the settlers.

Washington grew very rapidly during the first twenty-five years of its existence. When the first census was taken in 1790 there were five chartered towns in Kentucky—Louisville with a population of 200; Lexington, 834; Washington, 492; Bardstown, 215; Danville, 150. So we see that at that date Washington was the second largest town in the state.

In the early history of Kentucky, Mason County comprised all the territory later subdivided into Bracken, Campbell, Carter, Fleming, Greenup, Johnson, Lawrence and Lewis Counties and parts of Floyd, Morgan, Nicholas, Pendleton and Pike. At the time that Mason County had this broad acreage, Washington was the county seat. The first court house was built in 1794 by Louis Craig of Virginia who was both a conscientious Baptist preacher and an excellent stone mason. For a hundred and fifteen years

This portion of the McMurdy School is still standing in Washington





this massive old stone building stood until an unlucky Friday the thirteenth in 1909 it was destroyed by fire. This building, however, had not been used as a court house since 1848 when the county seat was moved to Maysville, a death blow to the historic old town of Washington.

Among the unique features of old Washington are the remnants of "the first waterworks west of the Alleghenies." Early in the history of the town, the Legislature voted the sum of one thousand dollars (\$1,000) for "adequate water protection" for the growing city of Washington, so twenty-two wells were dug in the center of the sidewalks at uniform intervals over the town, giving the place something of an Eastern effect. Traces of all of these wells are still to be seen, and some of them have been restored by the Washington Study Club.

When we see that the Washington of today has but two general stores, we can hardly visualize the place when it was a business center with sixteen mercantile establish-

ments. There are now three churches, and the Post Office that was for a number of years the distributing office for the seven states of the Northwest Territory, remains with us and has been marked.

One of the earliest papers in the state was published in Washington. The *Kentucky Palladium* appeared in 1797 edited by Hunter and Beaumont, who later removed their paper to Frankfort.

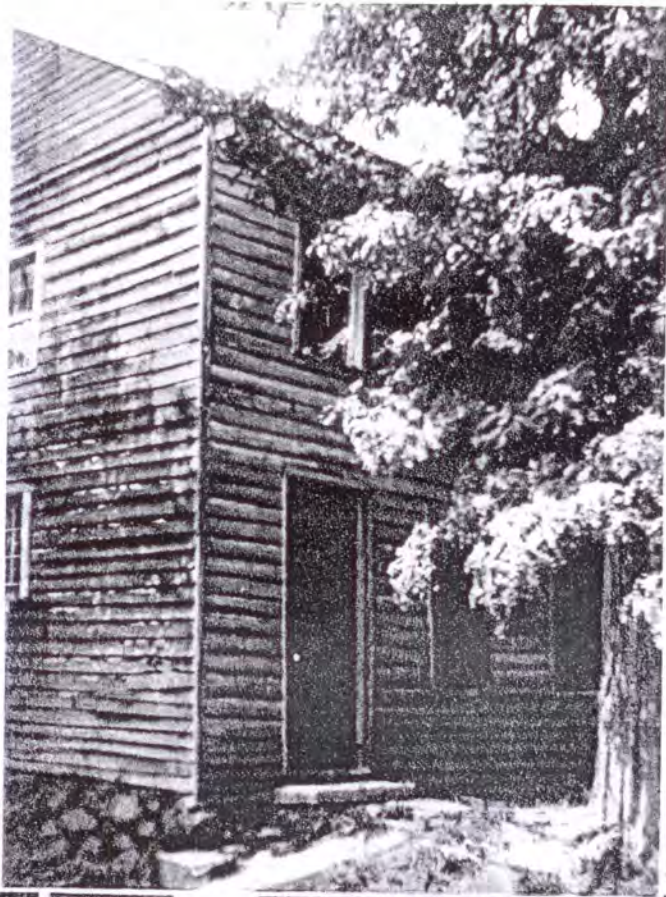
The Washington bar was famous for its brilliant lawyers. The lawyers faded away with the passing of the old court house and many active and influential citizens followed the lawyers and the court house. However, we still have many of the old homes, and enough of the old families to make it a pleasant and congenial abiding place, for

"Give me a land with a grave in each spot,  
And a name in that grave that will not be forgot."

Yes, we still have the graves, with many honorable and distinguished names written thereon—a heritage of which Washington is proud—a heritage no one can take away.

Among the interesting landmarks of which Washington can still boast is the old Bank Building that housed the first bank in Northern Kentucky, the Marshall Key place with its beautiful old stairway, where Harriet Beecher Stowe visited when she witnessed the sale of "Uncle Tom" on the courthouse green; the first Post Office building where mail was distributed for the Northwest Territory (now the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Kentucky). This old building is of logs, but has been weatherboarded, protecting the logs from decay, but marring its appearance. The Washington Study Club marked this building a few years ago. There is the Marshall home, "The Hill," built in 1800; there is the old Forman home of massive stone out on old York Street, and there is the substantial brick house still owned by a Forman. Then, too, there is the beautiful old brick residence of the Woods, English in effect with its high brick wall and flower-bordered garden, sweet with hyacinths in the early spring; and there is "Cedar Hill" with its scores of cedars surrounding a four acre lawn. Cedar Hill was built in 1807 by Governor Chambers, as already mentioned. It was bought about 1842 by Colonel Lucien Goggin of Virginia and is now owned by his descendants, the Maltbys. Lucien Goggin Maltby had the place restored in 1906 and it remains one of the attractive and historic homes of the county.

It is the ambition of the Washington Study Club to conserve as much of the individualism of the town, and restore



Above is the birthplace of General Albert Sidney Johnston. Left, the old postoffice, Washington



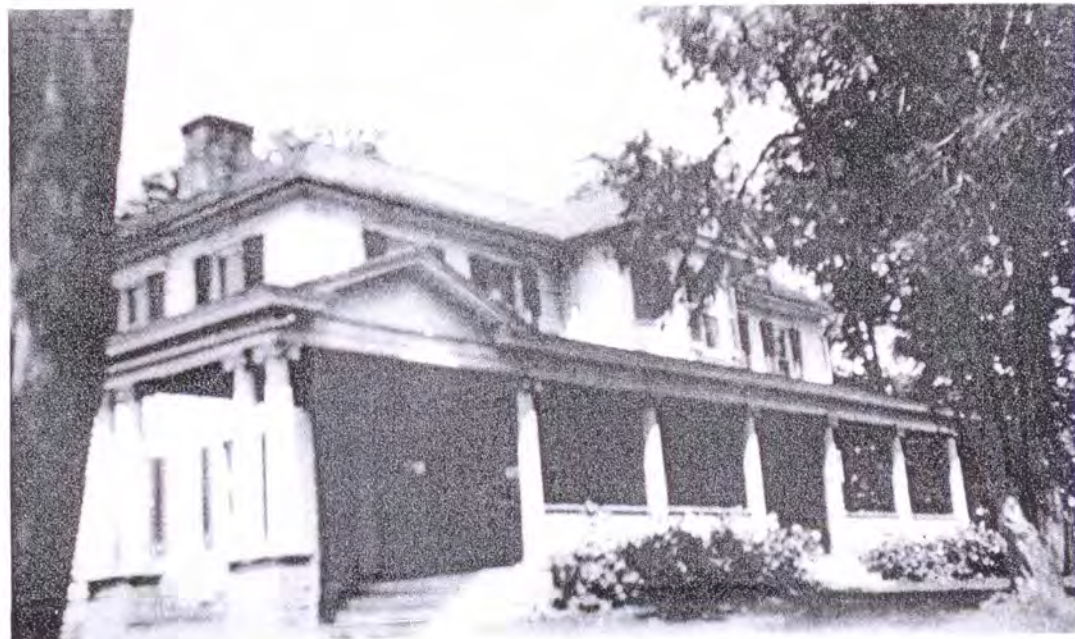
as many of the old landmarks as is possible. They have already done quite a good deal in this direction. Some years ago they placed a massive stone marker at Warren's Run on the historic old Maysville and Lexington Road (Route 68) to point the way to Simon Kenton's Station, a mile over the hill. This Simon Kenton Marker was the first memorial erected in Mason County to that dauntless pioneer to whom Northern Kentucky owes so much. It was fitting that a Washington club should have given him the first recognition, for he, more than any other man, gave Washington her history, a heritage of which she can well be proud.

Besides the Simon Kenton boulder, the Washington Study Club has marked the old Bank Building, the Marshall Key place, the Post Office, and has restored several of the old wells and reset some of the flagstone pavements of ancient vintage, and the end is not yet.

It is the hope of the members of the Washington Study Club that when we gather together on the fifth of June of the present year to celebrate the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the chartering of what was in 1786 a little western town, to welcome to Washington's modern school building, standing on the street that once held the Franklin Academy, a great many men and women whose ancestors had known Washington when it was the abiding place, if for a few brief years, of outstanding men and women who helped to leaven the loaf of Kentucky.

We are told to "Look not back upon the past—it comes not again . . ." However, we believe that it sometimes does us good to look back upon the past, if it is an honorable past. A revival of many of the old standards would be a healthy revival. And so we hope that many persons will journey along the old Buffalo Trace road, prosaically known today as Route 68, on June 6, 1936, to the little old town of Washington in Mason County and look back upon the past for one brief day, and celebrate with us Washington's Sesquicentennial.

Two days later, on Sunday, June 7, the Washington Presbyterian Church will gather together the many distinguished ministers and laymen who have through the years served this old church, to celebrate the one hundred and fortieth anniversary of the establishment of this church in Washington. This celebration will consummate a gala season for the old town—a season rife with reminiscence and delightful reunion.



Right, "Cedar Hill," built in 1807. Ulysses S. Grant was a guest here. Above it, the Marshall Key house where Harriet Beecher Stowe was a guest. At the top is "Buffalo Trace" in Mason County