

Roebing Murals at the Covington Floodwall

Since 2002, LEGACY, a young professionals group, has been creating one of the largest permanent displays of public art in the region—the Roebing Murals. Using the Covington floodwall as a canvas, Legacy has commissioned internationally renowned artist Robert Dafford to paint a series of murals that will depict the rich history of Covington, Northern Kentucky and the Suspension Bridge. The Roebing Murals dramatically enhance a major entryway into Covington. In addition to the aesthetic and educational benefits to the community at large, the murals encourage tourism and economic returns for the City. Legacy has funded this project through private donations from individuals and corporations.

Artist Robert Dafford:

Robert Dafford, who has been the artist leading this project since its inception is one of the foremost mural artists in the United States, with over twenty-five years of experience and over 350 large-scale public works in the U.S., Canada, Belgium, England and France. More information about Robert and his projects is available at www.daffordmurals.com.

The Murals:

The Great Buffalo Road

Before flood control measures were put in place during the 20th century, the water level of the Ohio River at the mouth of the Licking River would drop to less than two feet each fall. Great herds of bison, which roamed the plains of central Ohio, long ago discovered a natural limestone ford that existed here, which they used during their annual migration into Kentucky. Over time the repeated passage of these large animals resulted in trails with compacted soil that stayed dry and free of underbrush. Because of this, the buffalo trails eventually became the main travel routes for man as well. Several major state highways in southern Ohio and northern Kentucky have their origin as buffalo trails. Today Madison Pike (KY 17) follows one of these trails. Another trail that traveled from the dry ridge north of Walton and south toward Lexington became US 25. These early trails all converged from the north and south at the mouth of the Licking River, and the Native Americans and early pioneers called this route the "Great Buffalo Road".

The Meeting at the Point

During the Revolutionary War, the British Army enlisted the help of the Ohio Indian Tribes to fight against the colonists. These efforts continued in the western territory even after the British surrender at Yorktown. In the fall of 1782, British forces joined with warriors from the Ohio Indian Tribes to attack settlers near Bryan Station, and then ambushed responding Kentucky militia at Blue Licks, a settlement on the banks of the Licking River, which was northeast of Lexington. As a result of the ambush, seventy-seven militiamen, including Daniel Boone's son Israel Boone, were killed. The British Army and Ohio Indian fighters then withdrew into southern Ohio. On November 1, 1782, Brigadier General George Rogers Clark, Simon Kenton, Daniel Boone, and Benjamin Logan assembled forces at the point overlooking the mouth of the Licking River, to plan an attack on the Shawnee villages along the Little Miami River in retaliation for the massacre at Blue Licks.

Kennedy's Ferry

Covington and Cincinnati provided a vital link between Southern materials and Northern production facilities and markets. Although river crossings could be hazardous, the location of transportation links and population growth on both sides of the river made this crossing essential. Thomas Kennedy (1741-1821) opened a ferry service in 1790 with his brother Robert who reportedly owned land on the Ohio side of the crossing. Kennedy owned and operated the ferry until his death. Some of his descendants included a grandson Thomas Kennedy, who served as a Covington city engineer and a great granddaughter, Dr. Louise Southgate, a woman's suffrage leader.

The Flight of the Garner Family

Under the cover of darkness on January 28, 1856, Margaret Garner and her husband Simon, his parents, and Margaret's four children, fled across the frozen Ohio River into Cincinnati. Their freedom was short-lived due to the ability of slave owners to pursue their slaves into free states and compel their return under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Faced with recapture, Margaret declared she would kill herself and her children before she would return to slavery. Margaret killed her 3 year old daughter Mary, but was subdued before she could turn the knife on her other children or herself. This story was the inspiration for Toni Morrison's award winning book, *Beloved*, and more recently was retold in the opera *Margaret Garner*, which was co-commissioned by the Michigan Opera Theatre, Cincinnati Opera and Opera Company of Philadelphia and premiered on May 7, 2005.

Crossing the Pontoon Bridge

In the summer of 1862, Confederate troops advanced toward Northern Kentucky. In response, over 60,000 Union troops needed to move from Cincinnati across the Ohio River to fortify the hilltops in Northern Kentucky. A national bank panic in 1859 had halted construction on the suspension bridge, so a pontoon bridge was built to allow rapid troop movements across the river. This bridge was made from a series of wooden barges that were lashed together, but could also be dismantled temporarily to allow river traffic to pass.

African American Community Leader – Jacob Price

Jacob Price (1839-1923) was born in Woodford County, Kentucky. His name first appears in the 1860 census as a 22-year old freedman living in Covington, Kentucky, who was able to read and write. During his lifetime he used his skills and energy to advance the religious, educational and economic growth of the African American community in Covington. In 1884, at the age of 26, Jacob Price was named pastor of the First (African American) Baptist Church, which later relocated to E. Ninth Street. Two years later, in 1866, he started one of the first schools for African American children in his home. And he worked diligently with William Grant for several years to establish the first high school for African Americans in Covington, which opened its doors in 1886. Jacob Price was also an entrepreneur, operating a lumber business with great success for over 30 years. He was married to local educator Mary Singer Price for over 55 years, and they had four children. At his death, his obituary in the Kentucky Post stated, "He was held in high esteem by both races."

Vision and Ingenuity

The two most influential figures in the construction of the suspension bridge were John August Roebling (1806-1869) and Amos Shinkle (1818-1892). Roebling, one of the most noted bridge builders of the age, was a German immigrant who had made his reputation revolutionizing the fabrication of metal wire ropes. His innovative techniques resulted in his selection for this project, which also served as the prototype for the Brooklyn Bridge. Shinkle was born in humble beginnings in Brown County, Ohio. Originally a cook on an Ohio River flatboat, he made his fortune selling coal to a growing steamboat industry. By the time of his appointment to the board of the Cincinnati and Covington Bridge Company, he was one of the richest men in Covington. Although financing of a bridge at this location had been attempted in the past without success, with Shinkle's efforts, the bridge became a reality.

Artists in Residence: Henry Farny and Frank Duveneck

French born Henry Farny came to this area in 1859, and began a career as an illustrator for publications such as Harpers Weekly and the McGuffey's Readers. On a trip west in 1881, he became fascinated by the Native Americans he encountered, and upon his return he began the work for which he is most famous: paintings depicting the daily lives of Native Americans. Frank Duveneck was born in Covington on October 9, 1848. His early art training came from the Benedictine brothers who ran the local Institute of Catholic Art. At age 21, he went abroad and studied art in Munich and Italy. He returned to this area in 1889 and during the 1890s he taught classes at the Art Academy of Cincinnati and later became its director. From his studio in Covington he instructed many future artists, including Covington artist Dixie Selden.

The Latonia Racetrack

From 1883-1939 the Latonia Racetrack was known as one of country's foremost race tracks. Located in south Covington, it extended west from Winston Avenue, with its main entrance at the head of Latonia Avenue. The track hosted two yearly meets, in late spring/early summer and in late fall. The track's most popular annual event was the Latonia Derby, a 1½ mile race. Winners of this derby included Broadway Jones, Gallant Knight, and Upset. In 1927, Handy Mandy beat Man o' War's speed record for the 1-1/2 mile here. For more than 20 years the Latonia track drew larger crowds and better horses than what became Churchill Downs, even after the Kentucky Derby was born. However, after amassing substantial debts in the 1930s, Latonia Racetrack closed after its last race on July 29, 1939.

German Heritage

The large influx of German immigrants to Covington in the 1840s-60s created a core culture that can still be seen today. Mutter-Gottes-Kirche (Mother of God Church), built by Covington's German Catholics is one of many stunning examples of German craftsmanship. Goebel Park, named after William Goebel, a German-American elected Governor of Kentucky in 1900, contains a German-Gothic Glockenspiel with a carillon and mechanical figurines that enact the German folk tale "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" on the hour. In addition to the area's German-influenced structures, the impact of German culture is also evident. The close bond between family members, and a strong work ethic can still be seen in thriving local businesses. Although the breweries, such as Bavarian Brewing Co., which in 1896 produced 32,000 barrels of beer annually, are no longer in operation, German butcher shops are still popular, and the majority of the area's current building companies were started by German immigrants or their offspring. The German tradition of enjoying life with family and friends also continues in the local German restaurants, including the Hofbrauhaus, in Newport, and in Covington's annual Maifest and Oktoberfest celebrations. Today, over 30 percent of Northern Kentucky's population identify their ancestry as German.

Covington's Religious Heritage

This mural illustrates the diversity of religious institutions established in Covington over the past two centuries. These institutions have enriched both the spiritual lives of the community, and have added to the architectural beauty of the city as well. **The First United Methodist Church**, an 1867 Gothic Revival structure at Fifth and Greenup Street in Covington was built by former members of a Methodist Episcopal congregation who left it in the 1840's due to their opposition to slavery. The two congregations reunited in the early 1900's, and continue to meet in this structure today. Two Catholic Churches are included in this mural. Construction of **The Cathedral Basilica of the Assumption**, formerly St. Mary's Parish (est. 1834), began in 1895. Its facade is modeled after Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, and contains one of the largest stain glass windows in the world. The German Catholic congregation of Covington established **Mother of God Parish** in 1842. The current structure, an example of the Italian Renaissance Revival style of architecture, was dedicated in 1871. **Trinity Episcopal Church** was also established in 1842, and the building where services are held today was constructed in 1859, and remodeled to enlarge the seating area in 1871. Portions of Trinity Church had to be rebuilt after a fire in 1872 caused serious damage to the church. **The Western Baptist Theological Seminary**, the first seminary in the west, was founded by the Kentucky Baptist Convention in 1845 on land just south of Covington, for the purpose of training ministers needed for churches throughout the western frontier. The community's first African American church, **First Baptist Church**, was established in 1864. A second African American congregation was established shortly after the Civil War ended, and in 1921, it relocated to a newly constructed Gothic Revival building, and became known as **Ninth Street Baptist Church**. **Temple Israel**, was a Jewish congregation established in Covington in the early 1900's for the large population of Jewish immigrants the lived in Northern Kentucky at the turn of the century. The Classic Revival style synagogue, built in 1939, still stands at 1040 Scott Street.

Play Ball!

Covington's riverfront was the first location to host to professional baseball in Greater Cincinnati. The Covington Blue Socks, a Federal League professional baseball team played at Federal Field from 1913 through 1919. This mural depicts a Covington Blue Socks game. Insets show Kentucky's first world championship softball team, the 1939 Nick Carr's Boosters, a Blue Socks team picture from opening day in 1913, and a picture of the Old Covington Ballpark taken in 1926.

Covington's Covington Centennial Celebration – 1914

This mural shows a parade up Madison Avenue during Covington's Centennial, celebrated the week of September 13 – 19, 1914. Due to a research error, the Centennial was held one year too soon. Although one of Covington's founding fathers, Thomas Carneal, purchased land in 1814 on which his home, the Carneal House, was constructed, the city itself was not actually laid out until 1815. The city was named Covington in honor of General Leonard Covington of Maryland, who died in the War of 1812. Covington received its city charter from the Kentucky Legislature 20 years later in 1834.

Daniel Carter Beard – Founder of the Boys Scouts of America

Daniel Carter Beard (1850 – 1941) was born in Cincinnati, Ohio. His family soon moved to Covington, where as a growing boy he learned the stories of Daniel Boone and other famous frontiersmen. After studying to become a civil engineer and surveyor, he had a short tenure as a mapmaker, and then began to study art in New York. His best-known book, *The American Boys' Handy Book*, was published in 1882, and in 1889, he was chosen to illustrate Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. In 1905 Beard established the "The Society of the Sons of Daniel Boone" an organization which promoted outdoor recreation. In 1909 he founded the "Boy Pioneers of America." It was during this same period that Sir Robert Baden-Powell established the Boy Scouts movement in England. Daniel Carter Beard admired both Baden-Powell and his movement. In 1910, he joined his organization with several other boys' organizations to co-found the "Boy Scouts of America".

The Flood of 1937

In 1937, the phenomenon of spring flooding was well known along the Ohio River. Although President Franklin D. Roosevelt had signed legislation in 1936 ordering the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to begin constructing flood protection for the Ohio and other major rivers, work had not yet begun on this massive project. In January of 1937, heavy rains began to fall for nearly two weeks. The river finally crested on January 26th at 79.99 feet. As a result of this flood, one-third of the river communities of Kenton and Campbell counties were under water. Thousands of sand bags were used at the Covington approach to the Roebling Suspension Bridge to keep the flood waters from blocking access to the bridge. During the 1937 flood, the Roebling Suspension Bridge was the only bridge across the Ohio River that remained open that remained open within the 800 mile stretch of river between Steubenville, Ohio and Cairo, Illinois.

Present Day Riverfront – Blending History with Development

The scene presented to end this chronology pays tribute to the river's history, which played an important role in the establishment of the area as a center of commerce, and the economic development that continues to occur here. Pictured in the background is the skyline of the City of Covington, showing the blending of historic homes, as well as modern office and commercial developments, and a new 22-story curved glass tower, The Ascent at Roebling's Bridge, a condominium project built by Corporex and designed by award winning architect Daniel Libeskind.

An endowment for maintenance of the murals has been established. If you wish to contribute to this fund, you may mail your tax deductible donation to:

The Roebling Mural Fund
50 E. RiverCenter Blvd., Suite 434
Covington, KY 41011.

For more information, please contact Julie Hopkins at (859) 380-0353.

2000

- 6 -