

OHIO VALLEY HISTORY

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Cover: Faculty
and students of
Transylvania
University, ca. 1871.
The Filson Historical
Society

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Collections Essays

Kenyon Barr Collection

Cincinnati Historical Society Library

I think urban renewal was the greatest thing ever to happen to this city.

Charles H. Stamm, 1973
Director of Urban Renewal

The West End was the hub of the universe.

Paul Henry
Former resident quoted in 1973

“Progress” swept through Cincinnati’s West End in the 1950s and early 1960s.

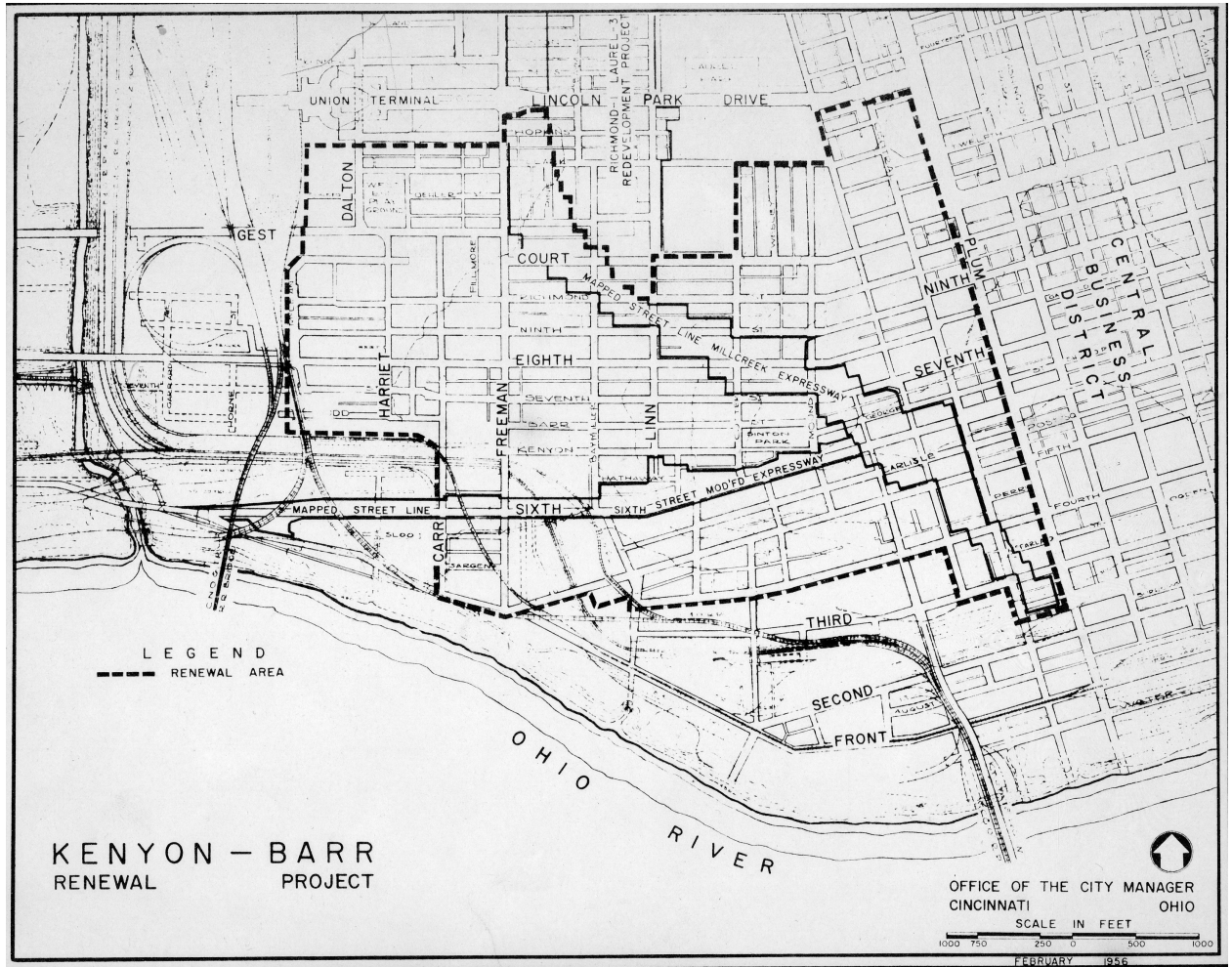
In the eyes of urban planners, the West End was a “complete slum.” Charles H. Stamm, Cincinnati’s first urban renewal director, commented fifteen years later, “all you had to do was drive through it to know that.” For the more than 40,000 people who lived in the West End, 97 percent of whom were African American, it was home, and it was a vital community with an infrastructure of businesses, stores, schools, churches and social agencies.

Stamm and the planners had plenty of hard data to back up their view. They focused on a section of the West End that contained nearly 2,800 residential, commercial and retail structures built in the late-nineteenth century. Slum landlords had subdivided the residential structures into almost 10,300 dwelling units, and only four of those residential buildings did not have pending building code violations. From the planners’ perspective, the best renewal strategy was to “treat the area as ‘raw’ land, clearing everything,” including the historic street grid.



In the 1930s the Sterling Hotel at Sixth and Mound was the social center of the West End. The Cotton Club on the first floor drew some of the biggest names in music and provided one of the few places whites and blacks socialized together. By 1959, the Cotton Club was closed and the hotel’s glory days were long over. The owners had converted the hotel into eighty-five apartments.

The redevelopment plan envisioned three uses for the cleared land. First, the Mill Creek Expressway, which later took the federal designation Interstate 75, would bisect the area. Thomas McDonald, U.S. Commissioner of Public Roads, expressed the fundamental assumption of the time: “Cities need expressways so badly that they are worth almost any cost.” Northeast of the expressway a “relatively small” area was designated for new residential housing. The larger area southwest of the expressway was projected as a light industrial park, which was dubbed “Queensgate” by a public relations firm hired by the city. Given the fact that it bordered the Central Business District and had unparalleled access to rail and truck transportation,



In 1956, the City Planning Commission published its map of the Kenyon Barr Redevelopment area, along with its redevelopment plan.

the hope was that Queensgate could compete with the industrial parks beginning to pop up beyond the boundaries of the city. City officials named the clearance effort the “Kenyon Barr Project” after two streets in the area. To anyone who lived there, it was simply the West End.

In the spring and summer of 1959, before the wrecking balls arrived, the city systematically photographed every structure and empty lot in the redevelopment zone. The resulting 2,700 photos now reside in the Cincinnati Historical Society Library as the Kenyon Barr Collection. The photographs are not particularly artistic. This was a project designed

and carried out by bureaucrats. However, it is a rich collection that can help historians reconstruct the fabric of the old West End, giving glimpses not only of the Italianate and vernacular architecture, but also at how life was lived in a neighborhood now gone. The collection can also reconnect former residents with the community that was swept away by “progress.”

Dan Hurley
Assistant Vice President for History and Research
Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal



Edward Johnson's Grocery occupied the ground level of 774 West Fifth Street. Gene Vinegar, who still lived in the West End and now works for the Cincinnati Museum Center, grew up in a cold-water flat on the third floor of this building. "We had a pot bellied stove in the living room and we had the regular kitchen stove in the kitchen that heated the house. We would take a little bucket and get the coal you need and bring it back up to the third floor."



In April 1959, a city employee holds the documentation sign in front of an open lot at 920 Barr Street while a resident looks on warily.



The photographic team documents the Harlem Café at 700 Barr Street.

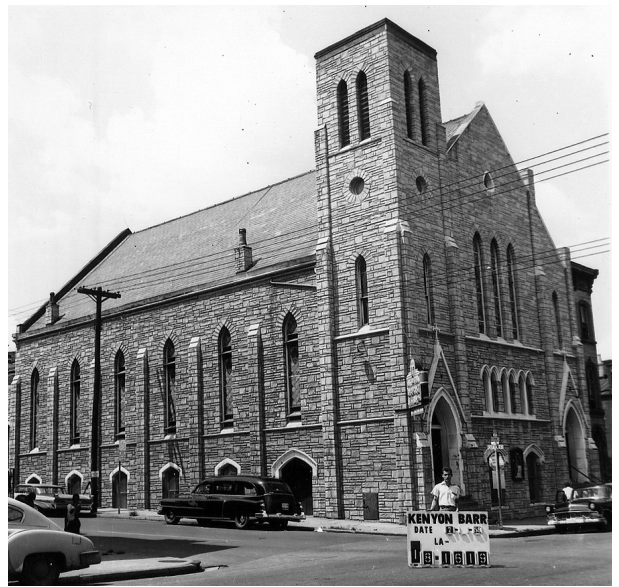
Beginning in the 1880s Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe moved into the West End just as German-speaking Jews of an earlier generation joined the migration to Cincinnati hilltop suburbs. Schachne Isaacs from Lithuania gained the reputation as a "fire-eater" for his militant defense of Orthodoxy in the face of the reform movement that dominated Cincinnati Jewish life. The Beth Tefillah Congregation's House of Prayer at 600 West Eighth Street was part of what was popularly known as Reb Schachne's Shul.



In the summer of 1959, Harold H. Cohen, the owner of a women's clothing shop at 1046 Freeman, could see that the end was near. Everything (and everybody) had to go.



West End children saw the man with the sign as a great chance to mug for the camera. The woman leaning out the window undoubtedly knew that the arrival of the documentary crew meant that the West End, the place 85 percent of all blacks in Cincinnati called home, would soon largely disappear from the map.



Charles Williams, who was born in Louisiana in 1877, began preaching when he was ten years old, and migrated to Cincinnati in 1917. The next year he organized the Southern Baptist Church at 701 Richmond Street with eleven families that had followed him north. Within a decade, the membership exploded to 2,500 and claimed to be the largest black congregation in Cincinnati.



Spencer and Alice Brown operated a neighborhood grocery store and confectionary shop at 749 West Court. The couple lived behind the store.

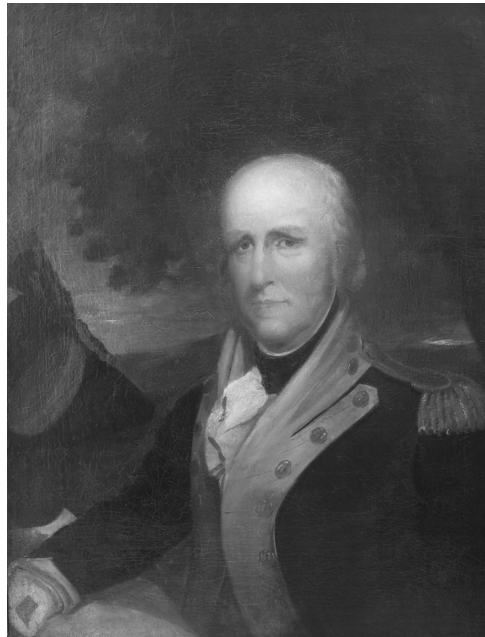
John Wesley Jarvis's Portrait of George Rogers Clark

The Filson has been collecting and preserving Kentucky and Ohio Valley historical material for 120 years. In that time, the society has acquired a large and significant nineteenth-century portrait collection, especially for the antebellum period. Art historian Estill Curtis Pennington states it is the “most comprehensive survey of portrait activity in the Ohio River Valley.” Among these many portraits are some of Kentucky’s most famous citizens, painted by famous artists. One of the first portraits acquired by The Filson, John Wesley Jarvis’s portrait of George Rogers Clark, embodies both these attributes—famous subject and artist. In the ongoing stewardship of its collections, The Filson recently had this portrait conserved at the Cumberland Art Conservation Center in Nashville. Given the condition of the portrait resulting from a nineteenth-century accident and subsequent conservation efforts, the best results possible were attained. Now properly conserved, this historic portrait of an American hero is in excellent condition.

Every portrait has a story, and what is that of Jarvis’s Clark? Jarvis (1780-1840) memorialized the “Hannibal of the West” some 185 years ago. The portrait has had quite a history, some of which is still shrouded in mystery. It is one of four major historical paintings of Clark. The first two were painted from life, one by an artist named Cook (most likely C. D. Cook) and the second by Joseph Bush shortly before the old hero’s death. Jarvis painted the first posthumous and first romanticized

portrait of Clark, followed about four years later by the well-known Matthew H. Jouett portrait believed to be based on the Jarvis work. The Jouett portrait also is in The Filson’s collection. The Jouett and other versions of the Jarvis are the historical portraits most often used to illustrate Clark.

What do we know about Jarvis’s Clark portrait? The who and the what we know; but what about the when and the where, and to some degree the why?



By 1820 Jarvis enjoyed a national reputation. Though he was based in New York, he often wintered in New Orleans.¹ According to both Clark and Jarvis family recollections, on a trip down the Ohio River on his way to New Orleans, Jarvis visited Louisville in November 1820 and painted Clark’s portrait. As the story goes, Jarvis encountered War of 1812 hero Colonel George Croghan, whose portrait he had painted in New York in 1816, while traveling westward. The two men continued on together to Louisville and

Croghan’s home, Locust Grove.² It was there, while spending several days with the Croghan family, that Jarvis painted portraits of William and Lucy Clark Croghan and a more heroic portrait of George Rogers Clark. General Clark had been dead almost three years. He died at his sister Lucy’s home in February 1818, having lived there almost the last nine years of his life after having his leg amputated in 1809. Memories of him were still fresh among the Clark family, and the two life portraits of him as an old man did not inspire the reverence due the “Conqueror of the Northwest.” Although we do not know the family’s exact reasoning for having Jarvis conjure up a younger, military-themed image, it stands to reason that they wanted a more flattering and heroic depiction of Clark. Jarvis is believed

to have relied on family descriptions of Clark, the Cook and Bush portraits, and Clark family physical characteristics.³ There is also a report that Jarvis might have used a painting of Clark (since disappeared and believed destroyed) that Bush did for Clark brother-in-law Dennis Fitzhugh that depicted Clark as a younger man and in uniform. In Jarvis's portrait, Clark is in uniform and depicted as about forty-five or fifty years of age, not long after his prime and before the years of hardship and disappointment broke him down. Clark is shown from the waist up, sitting at a table covered with maps or documents. The family believed it was an excellent, and accurate, depiction of him. Versions of the Jarvis, including Jouett's depiction, are usually reproduced and most familiar today.

It isn't known if Jarvis completed the portrait at Locust Grove or at a later date. Perhaps he worked on it in New Orleans over the winter, or even in succeeding years. The facts regarding the painting became blurred over time, and some Clark relatives—including Charles Anderson and Rogers Clark Ballard Thruston—believed Jarvis painted the portrait from life sometime in the 1790s or early 1800s.⁴ A review of the known facts of Jarvis's life makes that impossible. Jarvis painted at least one copy of the portrait. Explorer William Clark had him paint a copy of the portrait of his beloved brother that harkened back to happier days. This painting eventually descended to George Rogers Clark III and was in the possession of his widow in the 1970s. It apparently remained in the family until the 1990s when it was reportedly sold at auction. George Catlin painted a miniature watercolor on ivory from this Jarvis portrait of Clark in 1832. Clark's son Meriwether Lewis Clark loaned the miniature to James B. Longacre shortly thereafter in order to have it copied by Longacre for his *National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans*. Longacre's watercolor on paper of George Rogers Clark served as the model used by Thomas Welch for the engraving that appeared in the *Gallery*.

There are some subtle differences between the various paintings, but there is no doubt that the Jarvis was the model from which the others came.⁵

The tale of this Jarvis and its offspring is much happier than that of the believed original now at The Filson. From its creation in 1820 or shortly thereafter until about 1835, its whereabouts are unknown. In or before that year, the story goes, a steamboat carrying the portrait sank in the Mississippi River near Helena, Arkansas. If this is true, why was it on the boat? Perhaps Jarvis so prized the portrait that he retained his depiction of the "Hannibal of the West" and he was shipping it north upon the closing of his New Orleans studio following his stroke in 1834.⁶

The single best source for the provenance of the portrait is Charles Anderson, Clark family relative and donor of the portrait to The Filson. Anderson was the son of Clark brother-in-law and comrade Colonel Richard C. Anderson, Sr. and his second wife, and was rather distantly related to the famous general by blood. But the family connections were such that he considered Clark his uncle. Whether he knew about the Jarvis of "Uncle Clark" at the time it was painted is unknown. Anderson learned of the portrait's history after its ownership by a Dayton, Ohio, artist named Charles Soule, Sr. It is believed that Soule purchased the portrait from the insurance company that paid the claim on its loss and then salvaged the painting from the muddy waters of the Mississippi. Soule kept the portrait in his Cincinnati and possibly his Dayton studios. Possibly it also spent time in New Orleans. The painter Clement Edwards intended to paint a copy of it in 1854 for the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. He remarked in a letter to collector Lyman C. Draper, secretary of the society, that he would be using Soule's excellent copy of the Jarvis done for Anderson and had the latter's permission to do so. The original Jarvis had been in Cincinnati about three years earlier, Edwards commented, when Soule painted a copy of it for Anderson (who stated he had acquired his Soule copy in 1836 or

1837) and believed the original was in New Orleans at that time.⁷

Anderson regularly asked Soule to sell him the Jarvis. The Anderson family knew Soule. He had apparently painted portraits of some family members. Perhaps they admired Jarvis's Clark on visits to his studio. The Clark family agreed that the Jarvis was the best likeness of the general. Anderson remembered that it had been a particular "delight" for his mother. Testifying to his high regard for the portrait, Anderson considered Jarvis's Clark "one of the grandest portraits on this continent or Earth." His persistence in trying to acquire the portrait was finally rewarded when in 1861 Soule sold the Jarvis to him. The purchase price is not known, but one of the terms apparently called for Soule to receive either the copy of the Jarvis portrait of Clark he had done for Anderson years before or (as possibly intimated by Anderson) the latter's Bush portrait of Clark. From 1861 until Anderson presented his prized possession to The Filson in 1894, it resided in places of honor in his home.⁸

Are there—or were there—other Jarvis portraits of Clark in addition to the Anderson and William Clark canvases? Anderson believed that the Croghan family once owned one. In fact, he at one time believed that the Croghans owned the original Jarvis, but he later decided that he had the original. Did Jarvis perhaps paint bust-view copies of his larger depiction of Clark? Some believe that The Filson's often-reproduced portrait of Clark attributed to Matthew H. Jouett is actually a Jarvis. To this debate can be added the Clark portrait owned by The Library of Virginia in Richmond. It matches in almost every detail to The Filson's Clark. They clearly seem to have been painted by the same artist. The painting's attribution has gone back and forth between Jarvis and Jouett, and for some years wasn't attributed to anyone. While evidence exists to support both artists, the weight of data suggests it was by Jouett.⁹

Do additional copies of the Jarvis—by Jarvis—ex-

ist? Copies of it by other artists have certainly been executed over the years, going back to Soule. Maybe one day the mystery of the George Rogers Clark portrait by John Wesley Jarvis will be solved. Until then, we can continue to speculate about and admire this historic portrait of a famous American painted by one of our nation's most talented early artists.

James J. Holmberg
The Filson Historical Society

1. Draper memorandum on Jarvis, no date, George Rogers Clark Papers, Draper Manuscripts, 2J85 (hereafter cited as GRCP and DM).
2. Mary L. Winn to Draper, July 21, 1883, GRCP, DM, 2J23; Samuel W. Thomas, "The Face of the Founder," 5, in George Rogers Clark by Matthew H. Jouett portrait accession file 1929.8, Museum Records, The Filson Historical Society (hereafter cited as GRC Jouett portrait accession file 1929.8, FHS). An edited version of this article was published in *LouisvilleMagazine*, 23 (Nov, 1972).
3. *Ibid.*, 6.
4. Charles Anderson to Draper, Apr. 3, 1883, GRCP, DM, 10J252-53; Anderson to Draper, June 19, 1883, DM, 10J256; Reuben T. Durrett to Draper, Aug. 22, 1877, GRCP, DM, 2J93-96.
5. Linda T. Neumaier, compiler, *National Portrait Gallery Smithsonian Institution: Permanent Collection Illustrated Checklist* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1978), 30; GRC Jouett portrait accession file 1929.8, FHS; Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., web site, <www.npg.si.edu>, accessed last on Feb. 6, 2006; Meriwether Lewis Clark to Draper, Nov. 25, 26, 1868, GRCP, DM, 2J98-99.
6. Edna Talbott Whitley, *Kentucky Ante-Bellum Portraiture* (Privately printed, 1956), 352-53, 757; Anderson to Draper, June 19, 1883, GRCP, DM, 10J256.
7. *Ibid.*; Clement Edwards to Draper, June 19, 1854, GRCP, DM, 2J104.
8. Anderson to Draper, July 14, 1867, GRCP, DM, 10J248; Anderson to Draper, Apr. 3, 1883, GRCP, DM, 10J252-53; Anderson to Draper, June 19, 1883, GRCP, DM, 10J256; Anderson to Draper, Feb. 28, 1884, GRCP, DM, 10J259; Anderson to Draper, Aug. 5, 1890, Kentucky Papers, DM, 34CC61.
9. Howe P. Cochran to the Governor of Wisconsin, Feb. 17, 1881, with newspaper clipping from the *Daily Whig* (Richmond), Jan. 13, 1881, Cochran to Draper, Feb. 26, 1881, and Cochran to Draper, July 8, 1883, GRCP, DM, 2J82-84; Anderson to Draper, Apr. 3, 1883, 1GRCP, DM, 0J252-53; Letitia Floyd Lewis to Draper, July 22, 1883, GRCP, DM, 35J142; Katherine M. Smith to Martin F. Schmidt, Dec. 2, 1975, and Lois Price to Smith, Dec. 8, 1975, GRC Jarvis portrait accession file 1894.1, FHS; E. Griffith Dodson, compiler, *The Capitol of the Commonwealth of Virginia at Richmond: Portraits, Statuary, Inscriptions, & Biographical Sketches* (Richmond: Privately printed, 1937), 72-73; Tracy Kamerer, The Library of Virginia to the author in telephone conversation, Feb. 15, 2001.