Volume 16, Number 4
Winter 2016

The Filson

A Publication of The Filson Historical Society, Kentucky's Oldest and Largest Independent Historical Society

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Well, it's done. The Filson's major campus expansion has been completed. It's the culmination of several years of dreaming, planning, design, and construction. The Filson has benefited from the vision of the architects, the dedication of a very industrious construction team, a wise board, and a patient and flexible staff. But it was the donors who made it all possible. Hundreds and hundreds of people gave more than $12.4 million to give history a home in Louisville.

As you can see from the photographs in this issue, not only is the building project complete, it's popular. We've seen thousands of people at the opening events, including a concert to celebrate our new Tom T. and Dixie Hall collection, a series of programs examining the life of Muhammad Ali, a retrospective of Louisville architect Jasper Ward, and a lecture by Wendell Berry. Exhibits of photography, portraits, artifacts, and documents, as well as the restored period rooms in the Ferguson mansion, have drawn crowds of visitors.

The new Filson campus was built to accommodate these crowds. The new program space, the Dan and Frances Street Hall, can seat 225, more than twice our capacity in the past. And Caperton Hall, the multi-purpose room above Street Hall, can hold even more. There's more free parking than ever before and generally better accommodations for the guests at Filson events.

On the quiet side of the Filson, our research rooms have been improved and expanded. They're now quite elegant. We've also added five floors of climate-controlled archival storage and digital preservation space.

The Filson's membership ranks are growing as well, and our members have big expectations for us to live up to. I hope you'll join me in thinking the Filson is where history has a bright future.

Craig Buthod
President and CEO

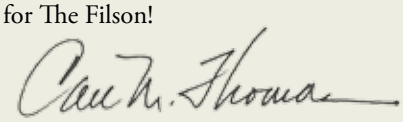
FROM THE CHAIR

Hopefully you were able to tour the new Filson campus during our weeklong celebration that began on Monday, October 25, 2016. This celebration was preceded by a reception and dinner for our major donors, which was held in the Frances and Dan Street and Caperton Halls in the Owsley Brown II History Center. Highlights of the week included the Gertrude Polk Brown lecture at The Temple on Monday, October 25, where Jeffrey Rosen delivered an impassioned talk on Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis; the reception for all of our donors on Wednesday, October 27; the dedication ceremony on Thursday, October 28, with Mayor Fischer, Congressman Yarmuth, and City Councilman James; and the public open house and concert on Saturday, October 29. All of our members, donors, and neighbors have been dazzled with the renovations to the Ferguson mansion and carriage house and all of the new construction. If you have not yet toured these magnificent facilities, we encourage you to do so. We also had a terrific lineup of programs that extended for the remainder of the year and several new exhibits.

It is especially fitting that we recognize the tremendous contributions of The Filson staff during the two plus years of construction and renovations. They have endured countless and, at times, seemingly endless disruptions and hardships, including dirt, dust, mud, heat, cold, burst pipes, and office moves. The Filson never once closed. They continued to pursue our mission throughout without ever a complaint and, almost always, with smiles on their faces. We truly appreciate their accomplishments and know that they will really enjoy their new environment.

In the coming months and years, we will be reaching out to even more segments of our communities. We encourage you to refer your family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors to join our membership. We have also introduced a very exciting corporate membership program and have already enrolled companies such as Brown-Forman, Hilliard-Lyons, YUM! Brands, and Frost Brown Todd.

We eagerly look forward to the future. We are confident that in our 133rd year, the best is yet to come for The Filson!



Carl M. Thomas
Chairman of the Board

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and story ideas.
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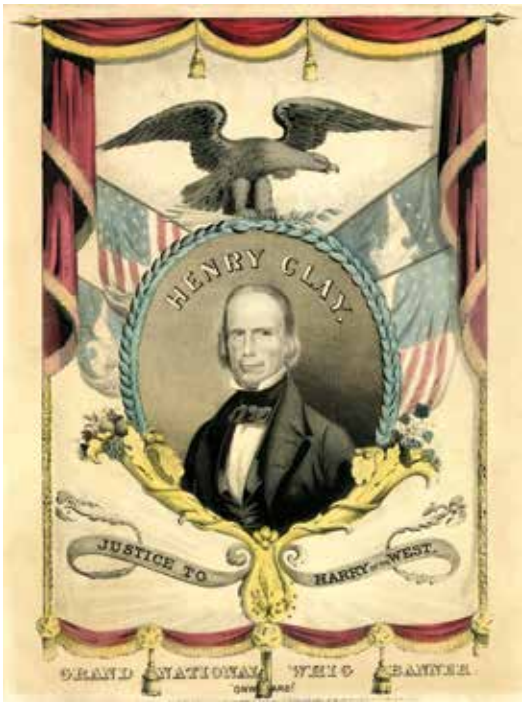
OUR MISSION:
To collect, preserve, and tell the significant stories of Kentucky and Ohio Valley history and culture.

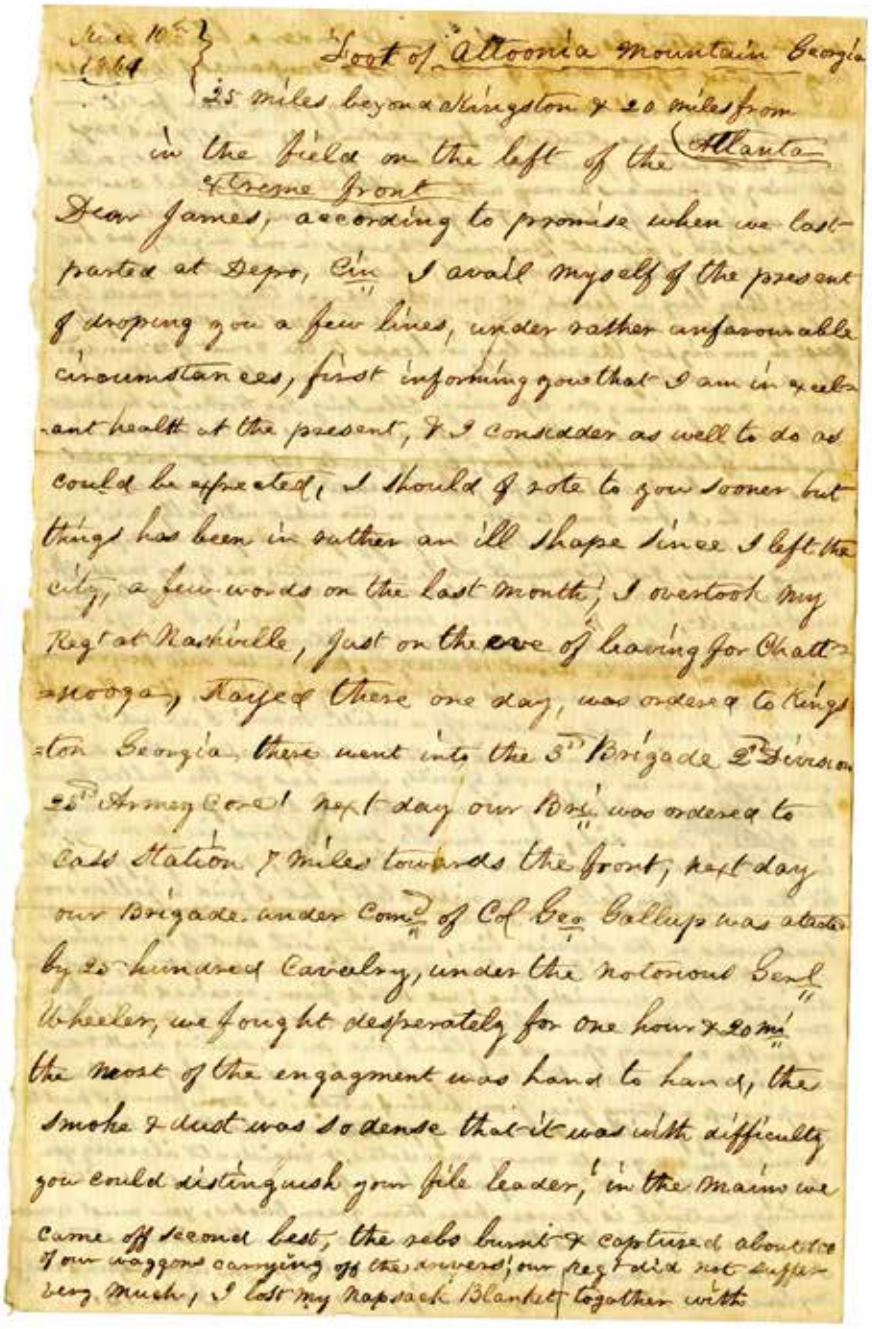
Recent Acquisitions

Acquisitions for the close of 2016 finished as strongly as they began the year. A variety of material was acquired across all areas of the collection—museum, library, and special collections. These are just a few of the highlights recently added. As always, thank you to our donors for keeping our collections growing!



Currier print for Henry Clay's 1844 presidential campaign.

"Locks at Louisville" by John Bauscher, 1930.



June 10 1864

Foot of Altoona Mountain Georgia
25 miles beyond Kingston & 20 miles from
in the field on the left of the Atlanta
& Resaca Front

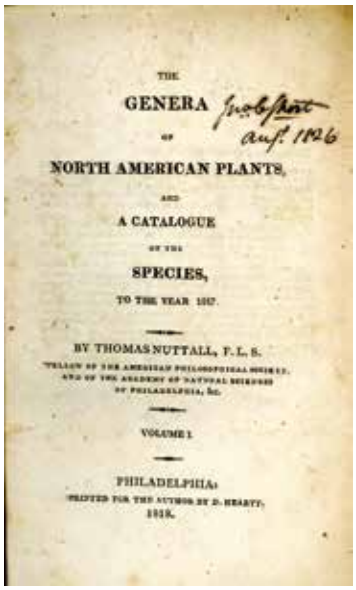
Dear James, according to promise when we last parted at Depot, Cin I avail myself of the present of droping you a few lines, under rather unfavourable circumstances, first informing you that I am in excellent health at the present, & I considder as well to do as could be expected, I should of wrote to you sooner but things has been in rather an ill shape since I left the city, a few words on the last month, I overtook my Regt at Nashville, just on the eve of leaving for Chattanooga, Rested there one day, was ordered to Kingston Georgia there went into the 3d Brigade 2d Division 2d Army Corps next day our Brig was ordered to Cass Station 7 miles towards the front, next day our Brigade under Comd of Col Geo Gallup was attacked by 2d himdred Cavalry, under the notorious Genl Wheeler, we fought desperately for one hour & 20 Mi the most of the engagment was hand to hand, the smoke & dust was so dense that it was with difficulty you could distinguish your file leader, in the mains we came off second best, the rebs burnt & captured about 40 of our waggons carrying off the drivers, our regt did not suffer very much, I lost my Napsack Blanket together with

Letter written by Sgt. John Burgess of the 14th Kentucky Infantry during the Atlanta Campaign, June 10, 1864.

Recent Acquisitions (cont.)

Portrait of Robert Wickliffe by Matthew H. Jouett, ca. 1820 (gift of W. Wickliffe Kelley).

Portraits of William Browne and his daughter Virginia Lafayette Browne Bayless by an unidentified artist (gift of the daughters of John Speed: Virginia Speed, Anne Speed McNaughton, and Lloyd Speed).


THE
GENERA
OF
NORTH AMERICAN PLANTS,
AND
A CATALOGUE
OF THE
SPECIES,
TO THE YEAR 1817.
BY THOMAS NUTTALL, F. L. S.
VOLUME I.
PHILADELPHIA:

John Cleves Short's annotated copy of Thomas Nuttall's *The Genera of North American Plants*, 1818. Short's brother, Louisvillian Charles Wilkins Short, was a renowned 19th century botanist (gift of Kevin Thomas).

Portrait of Belknap Hardware executive Harry S. Perkins by an unidentified artist, ca. 1915 (gift of Joe and Holly Gathright).

1960s newspaper ad from the Sam Swope and Swope Auto Group Collection (gift of Patti Swope).

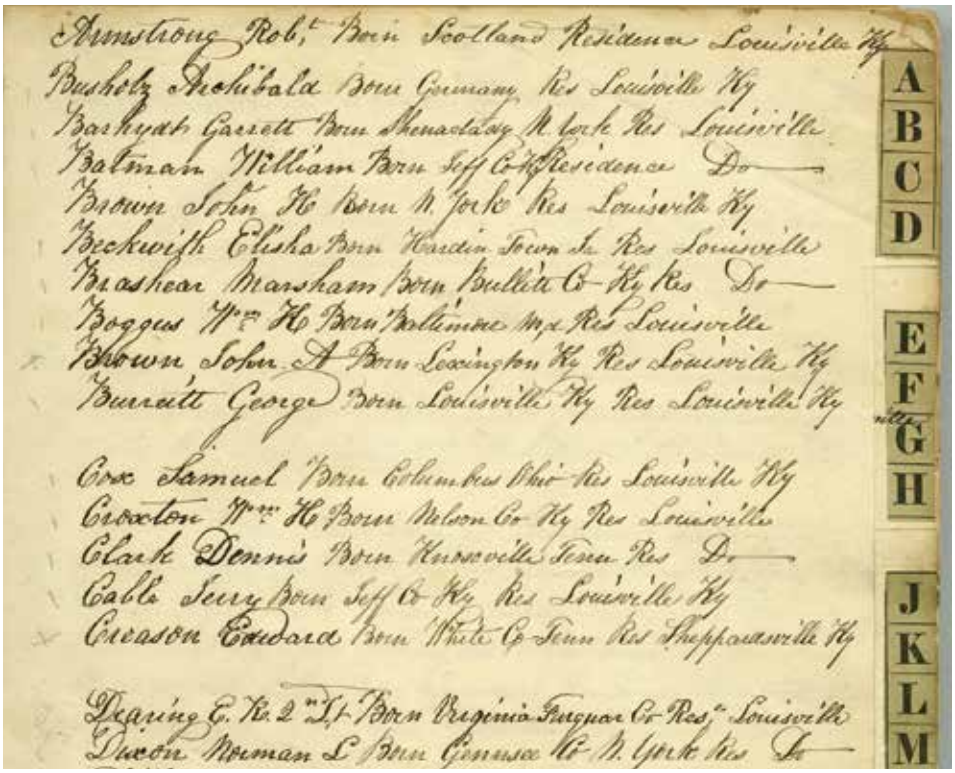
All Quiet on the (South)western Front

BY JANA MEYER | ASSOCIATE CURATOR OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

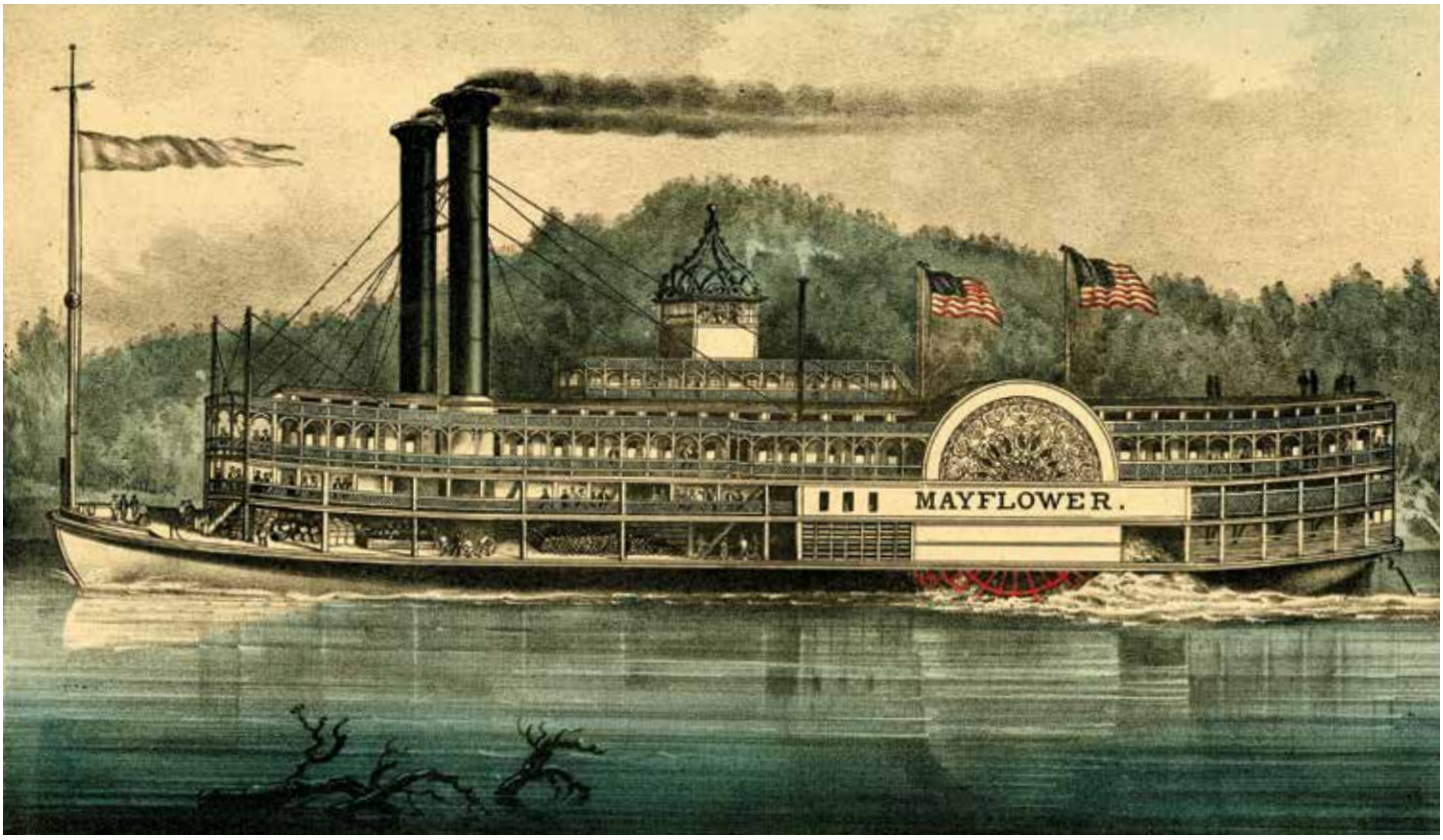
On May 24, 1846, a steamer called *Diana* prepared to depart from the dock at Shippingport near Louisville. The sun sank low to the horizon while a crowd thronged at the riverbanks to bid the boat's passengers farewell. As the steamer weighed anchor and pulled away from the dock, the crowd fired a salute and raised three lusty cheers for the young men on board. The *Diana* turned her bow to the west, following the course of other boats bound for the Louisiana coast. On her passage down the Ohio and Mississippi, she was greeted by a succession of cheering crowds, which gathered not just at the principal towns but all along the river. This enthusiastic reception was unusual, but the men who slept or diced or gambled in the *Diana*'s hold were no ordinary passengers. They were volunteer soldiers bound for Texas, determined to defend their nation in its recently declared war against Mexico.

On board the *Diana* were the men of Captain Ebenezer B. Howe's company of Light Artillery. The 31-year-old Howe was a native of New York, an energetic and restless individual who rarely remained in one place for long. Howe would not only fight in the Mexican War but would also follow the California Gold Rush, join the Confederate Army in San Antonio, and be captured by Union forces during the Red River Campaign in Louisiana. He loved women, marrying multiple times, once simultaneously; upon his death two of his widows applied for his pension. Howe and his men were members of a militia unit called the Louisville Legion, which had been reorganized into the 1st Kentucky Volunteer Infantry.

Lithograph depicting the Louisville Legion, a militia unit which organized in 1836. The Legion drilled regularly at the Oaklands racecourse during the early 1840s and was one of the first units to volunteer for service during the Mexican-American War.



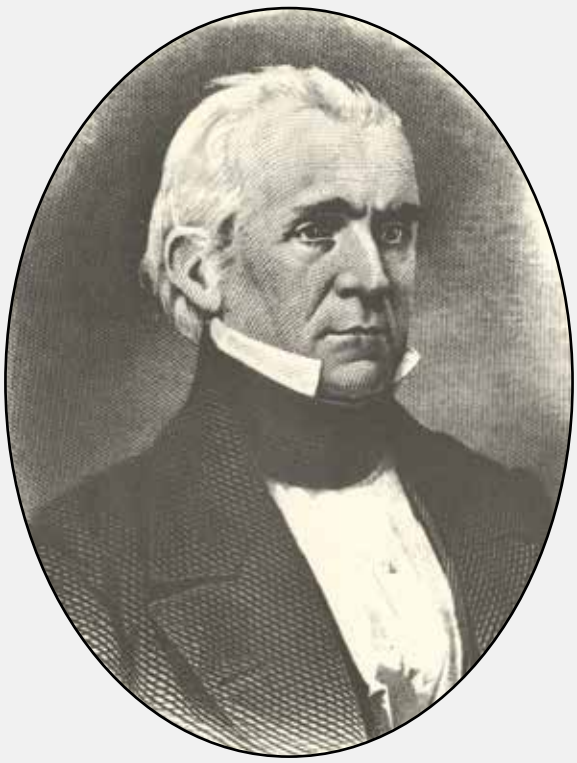
A portion of the muster roll of the Louisville Light Artillery, a company of the Louisville Legion. Led by Captain Ebenezer Howe, the Light Artillery served under General Zachary Taylor during the Mexican War. The Filson holds the journal detailing the company's experiences during the war.



Currier and Ives lithograph of the steamer *Mayflower*. Steamboats similar to this one transported volunteers to war.

The men of Howe's company would have had numerous reasons for leaving friends and family in Louisville to fight in a far away war. Some were young and filled with a spirit of adventure. A few were recent immigrants, lured perhaps by the prospect of steady pay or the promise of land in return for their service. Others might have had relatives in Texas, as many Kentuckians had immigrated to the Mexican-province-turned-independent-Republic in the previous decades. But a commonality that united many of them was the desire to do their duty to their country and, like their Revolutionary forefathers, to win the honor that came from participating in battle.

Although their motivations may have been pure and their actions honorable, Howe and his men fought in a war that successive generations of historians consider questionable at best. In the war against Mexico of 1846-1848, it was the United States that was the primary instigator and belligerent. A weak and corrupt Mexico had exerted poor control over its far-flung provinces, presenting a tempting target to its bellicose northern neighbor. President James K. Polk, his government, and those who cast their ballots for him in the 1844 election believed in American exceptionalism and dreamed of expansion into the West. Polk had his sights set not only on the annexation of the former Mexican province of *Tejas*, but also on other territory in the West, including Mexican-controlled California and New Mexico,



Print showing President James K. Polk in his later years. Polk astonished Henry Clay and the Whig Party when he won the 1844 presidential election. He ran on a platform that favored the annexation of Texas.

as well as British Oregon. During his short four-year term as president, Polk would oversee the addition of vast swaths of western land to the nation's boundaries.

Military leadership was vital in realizing Polk's expansionist goals. Howe's men were bound for northern Mexico, where they would serve the duration of their year-long term under General Zachary Taylor. Affectionately dubbed "Old Rough and Ready" by the troops, Taylor had already won a string of early victories against the Mexican Army. It was Taylor who months previously had been ordered into disputed territory along the Mexican border. This action provoked the war's first military confrontation and aided Polk in his efforts to induce Congress to declare war.

An eager public answered the call to arms. At the outset of the war with Mexico, the United States had fewer than 7,000 regular troops. Volunteer companies like Howe's were quickly raised and dispatched to join Taylor's army; such units would contribute the bulk of the country's military strength during the war. The physically demanding routine of camp life, long marches through the parched chaparral, and exposure to the elements were especially hard on volunteers unused to a soldier's life. Men in Howe's company sickened and died. Others suffered unfortunate accidents from which they never recovered. An ill Private John Herrmann died of exposure to the winter elements when the company hurriedly broke camp following a false report of an enemy advance.

Lithograph by N. Currier of General Zachary Taylor. Taylor gained fame for his string of victories in northern Mexico, culminating in his triumph at Buena Vista in February 1847. His popularity helped him win the 1848 presidential election.

Some volunteers perished from more obvious wounds. When camped near the Rio Grande, Howe's men witnessed the bodies of their countrymen floating down the river on a daily basis. Those that were recovered for interment showed marks of violence. In September 1846, Howe's company was present during the assault on the city of Monterrey. Relegated to guarding camp during the battle, the men nevertheless witnessed an explosion of violence in the weeks following the American victory. Volunteers went missing or turned up dead. In Howe's company a young man named Dennis Clark went missing after riding out to find forage for his horse. An unsuccessful search was mounted amid growing suspicion that Clark had been killed by the Mexicans. Later that week the bodies of approximately 25 Mexicans were discovered near the volunteer encampment, presumably murdered in retaliation for the missing and dead such as Clark. After suffering further losses in the spring of 1847, the men of Howe's company set fire to a Mexican ranch called Ramos, burning every house in the town. As in most wars it was the civilians caught between the warring armies who suffered most.

Chromolithograph by Carl Nebel showing the capture of Monterrey in September 1846. Captain Howe's company guarded camp during the battle.

And yet, interactions between Americans and Mexicans were not always characterized by animosity, even in times of war. Perusing the brown and weathered journal in which the company's activities are recorded, I found indications of everyday interactions in which the paths of warring peoples crossed. Mexican civilians visited American encampments, laden with agricultural products such as bread, corn, and melons, which they attempted to sell to the hungry soldiers. When guarding wagon trains along the supply route from Monterrey in the spring of 1847, Howe's men often stopped at Cerralvo where the town's *alcalde* fed the weary troops fresh beef. In other collections at the Filson, Kentuckians describe visiting Mexican churches, dancing at *fandangos*, and even mention a volunteer who met and married a Mexican woman.

Such cross-cultural interactions were short-lived; the term of service for Howe's company drew rapidly to a close. On May 24, 1847, exactly one year since the *Diana*'s departure, a steamboat approached Louisville from the west. Her decks were crowded with weary men eager for the sight of home. Setting foot once more on their native soil, the men of Howe's company were greeted by the warm embraces of their relatives and the congratulations of their fellow citizens. The war, however, would drag on for months longer. The Americans would capture Mexico City in September 1847; in February the following year, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded vast portions of Mexico's northern territories to the United States.

Did Howe's men find the honor and glory they sought in Mexico? In their 12 months of service they witnessed two battles and lost four men captured to the enemy. They returned home to general acclaim. But it is hard to know for certain what each man held in his heart. Perhaps while soldiering in a foreign land, a few were reminded of the ties that bind us all. Mexican culture, climate, and customs often seemed alien and strange to men far from home. Despite these differences, perhaps some recognized that we are still united by shared hopes and dreams and a common humanity.

Ballard High History Club at The Filson

BY JOHNA L. EBLING | ASSOCIATE CURATOR

The Ballard High History Club, led by their Founder and President, Will Schuhmann, visited the Filson Historical Society for the first time in October. The Club is comprised of twenty members and was founded in 2015. Originally created to help students prepare for finals and AP testing, it has since morphed into something more. According to Schuhmann, "It turned into a group of kids who really liked history and wanted to pursue it outside the classroom and learn things not taught in the JCPS curriculum." The Club has plans to conduct a research project at The Filson and their chosen topic is Louisville's Camp Zachary Taylor.

The goal of their project is two-fold: gain research experience that will be useful both practically as well as for college application purposes and fulfill the desire to raise public awareness about Camp Zachary Taylor, especially as the 100th anniversary of America's entrance into World War I approaches. "We're doing our part to make sure that the forgotten generation is never truly forgotten," said Schuhmann.

When complete, members of the Club have plans to present their final work in the new Owsley Brown II History Center. This presentation is tentatively scheduled for March and will be publicized on The Filson's events page once confirmed.

Archivist Johna Ebling takes Ballard High History Club members behind the scenes and into the stacks where she explains how collections are labeled, foldered, and boxed.

Members of the Ballard High History Club look at entries within The Filson's physical card catalog, a resource unfamiliar to many of today's students.

"FAST FACTS"

What: The Ballard High History Club

About the Club: Founded in 2015 with the goal of helping students prepare for finals and AP tests, the club has since evolved into something more. Members meet every Friday after school for about one hour. Meetings typically feature guest speakers, student presentations, or group activities. Last year the Club had a catapult building contest as well as presentations from students on everything from the Crusades to the Civil War.

Members: Kevin Tran, Vaitheesh Jaganathan, Haseeb Tariq, Omar Arar, Nathaniel Sparks, Laziz Muradov, Jaylon Kiper, Erik Taghizadeh, Marc Nadmid, Kwanwoo Lee, Elizabeth Crain, William Schuhmann, Kairav Kukkala, Danielle Dugen, Sarah Cecil, Victoria Harris, Drew Hudson, Chris Osborne, Kermit Reder, and Sarang Park.

A Look Back at Our Grand Opening

Two years ago we broke ground on a 12-million dollar renovation and expansion project. This past October we finally unveiled the product of all that work with a week's worth of events to place the new buildings and renovations center stage. The culmination of that week—which had variously included dinners, a cocktail party, a ribbon-cutting ceremony, and speeches by several esteemed local politicians—was our Grand Opening. It was a day packed with festivities, tours, games, live music, historical interpreters, special exhibits, special lectures, and a tribute concert to one of Kentucky's greatest songwriting pairs. It saw our new space packed with hundreds of visitors, some the faces of old friends but many who were faces new to The Filson entirely. For those of you who unfortunately missed this day, and for those who simply want to re-experience it, we have included a photo gallery in this quarter's magazine featuring some of the highlights. Enjoy! And thank you for everything that you, the members and donors, do to make this possible!

From left to right: Board Chairman Carl Thomas, Congressman Yarmuth, Mayor Fischer, Fairleigh Lussky, City Councilman James, Orme Wilson III, and Filson President and CEO Craig Buthod cut the ribbon to open the Owsley Brown II History Center.

Visitors admire the Rogers Ballard Thruston Photography Collection hung in the grand staircase of the new History Center.

The Filson now has space for two rotating exhibits in the Nash and Bingham Galleries. At this time the exhibits are "Moments in Time: The Power of Pictures" and "To the Polls! Presidential Campaigns and Elections."

A visitor looks out at Old Louisville from The Filson's new archival space. These windows will always be open to the community, allowing our collections to be seen at all times.

The Filson's new entrance is now in the renovated Carriage House, housing the new Bingham Gallery in its back room. The Carriage House features a sleek open structure that juxtaposes the traditional and contemporary architectural elements.

A scavenger hunt was held on the first floor of Ferguson Mansion, which has undergone extensive restoration and contains some of The Filson's art collection.

Visitors to The Filson were first greeted by the sounds of the Reggie Bareham Band.

A costumed interpreter from the Frazier Arms Museum tells the story of John Floyd, Louisville pioneer and surveyor, whose story the actor researched using letters preserved here at The Filson.

A father and daughter enjoy the sounds of authentic Civil War Era songs and music.

Curator Jana Meyer prepares to lead a tour through The Filson's new archival space.

Chuck Sharp and Travis Conway play a humorous and crowd-pleasing rendition of Tom Hall's "I Like Beer."

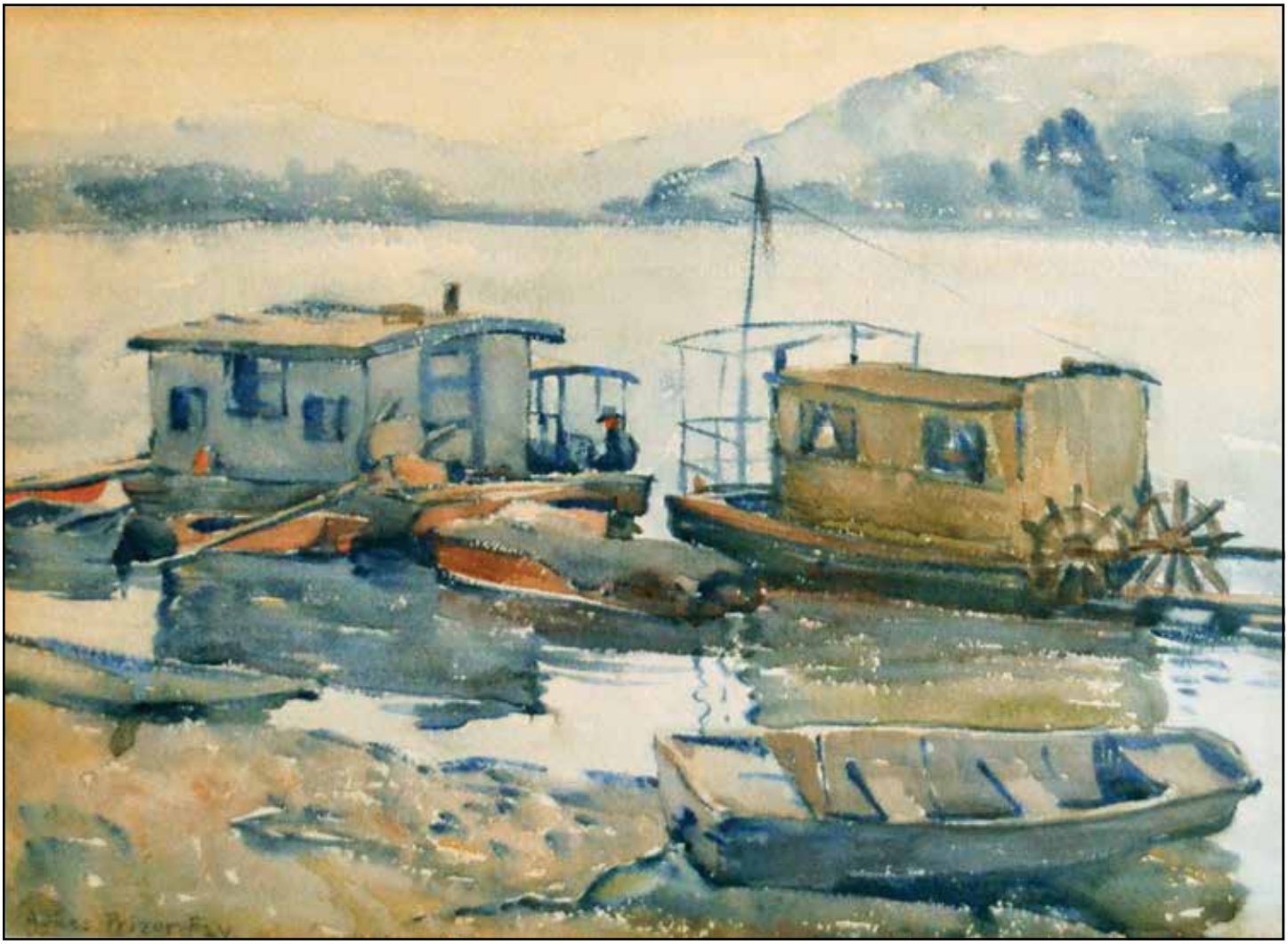
Brigid Kaelin and Steve Cooly perform Tom T. Hall's hit song, "Harper Valley PTA," at the Tom T. and Dixie Hall Tribute Concert.

Shanty Boat Louisville

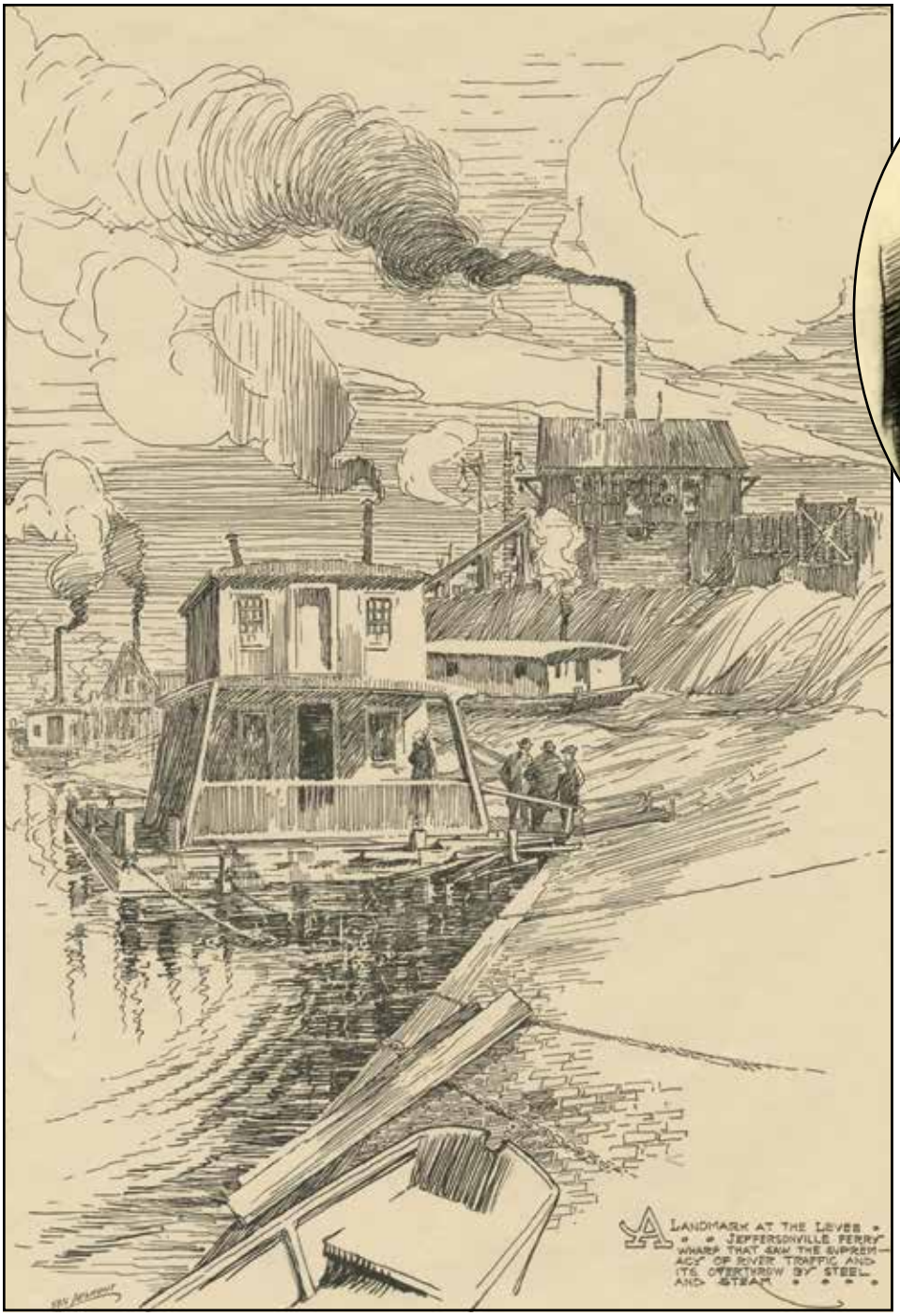
Documenting a Lost Neighborhood *by Mark V. Wetherington*

One of the joys of working at The Filson is discovering stories large and small that help us understand the social history of people and places. Over the years I've had the opportunity, along with the rest of the staff, to research and present a number of "Filson Fridays" programs. In this popular series we explore with our members and the public topics of research interest. For me as a historian, one of the values of the series—beyond supporting our educational mission—is testing our collection's ability to document and tell significant stories that at first glance might seem difficult to recover.

"Shanty Boat Louisville" was one of those stories. While the neighborhood disappeared around 1960 after a life of about 100 years, the stories of how its people survived on the edge of an urban landscape increasingly characterized by environmental damage—deforestation, air pollution, foul river water, and industrial waste—suggest that the issues the shanty boaters faced are relevant today. Almost two centuries before the tiny house movement gained popularity, shanty boat owners were living with less on the rivers of America. Traveler Timothy Flint sighted house boaters on the Ohio River during the 1830s. During the Civil War, artists captured the boats in images held by The Filson and originally printed in *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated*.



Watercolor of shanty boats by artist Alice Prizer Fay. A skiff (or john boat) is in the foreground.



A drawing by Alexander Van Leshout of the Jeffersonville ferry boat wharf with a beached shanty boat behind the wharf boat and an industrial neighborhood in the background. The text reads, "A Landmark at the levee Jeffersonville ferry-wharf that saw the supremacy of river traffic and its overthrow by steel and steam."

"Repairing the Net." Glen Tracy, 1940.

Autumn was shanty boat time in Louisville. According to shanty boat custom, it was time to cast off and drift south whenever five leaves floated by touching each other. Louisville's waterfront was a major gathering place for the Upper Ohio's shanty boats, especially in October when the migratory shanty boaters gathered to make last minute preparations, take on supplies, and renew old acquaintances before drifting south for the winter. At times during October there were more than 200 homemade house boats along the river banks. It was hard to find a parking place! Others tied up below the falls at Portland and across the river at New Albany, Clarksville, and Jeffersonville, Indiana. Louisville's more permanent boaters tied up east (or upriver) of the Big Four bridge behind Towhead Island in the "chute." There they were safer from the wakes of steamboats and tows.

Flint called these craft "family boats," but they were also known as flat boats and were the quickest way to move a family or freight to the frontier during the early 1800s. Many flat boats were built on the Upper Ohio River, drifted downriver with passengers and cargo, and were then broken up and sold as lumber. Well before the Civil War, the frontier "family boats" evolved into house or shanty boats. Most likely a marriage of a downsized flat boat hull and the small and narrow shotgun house, shanty boats were homemade, constructed almost entirely of wood, and followed a vernacular design using nearby resources.

Given such a large field of play along the region's waterways, it is interesting that shanty boats had no means self-propulsion. They drifted downstream or hitched a ride upriver with steamboats or tows. A rare photograph in our collection shows a single small mast and sail atop one shanty. If the current was slow, a shanty boater could maneuver

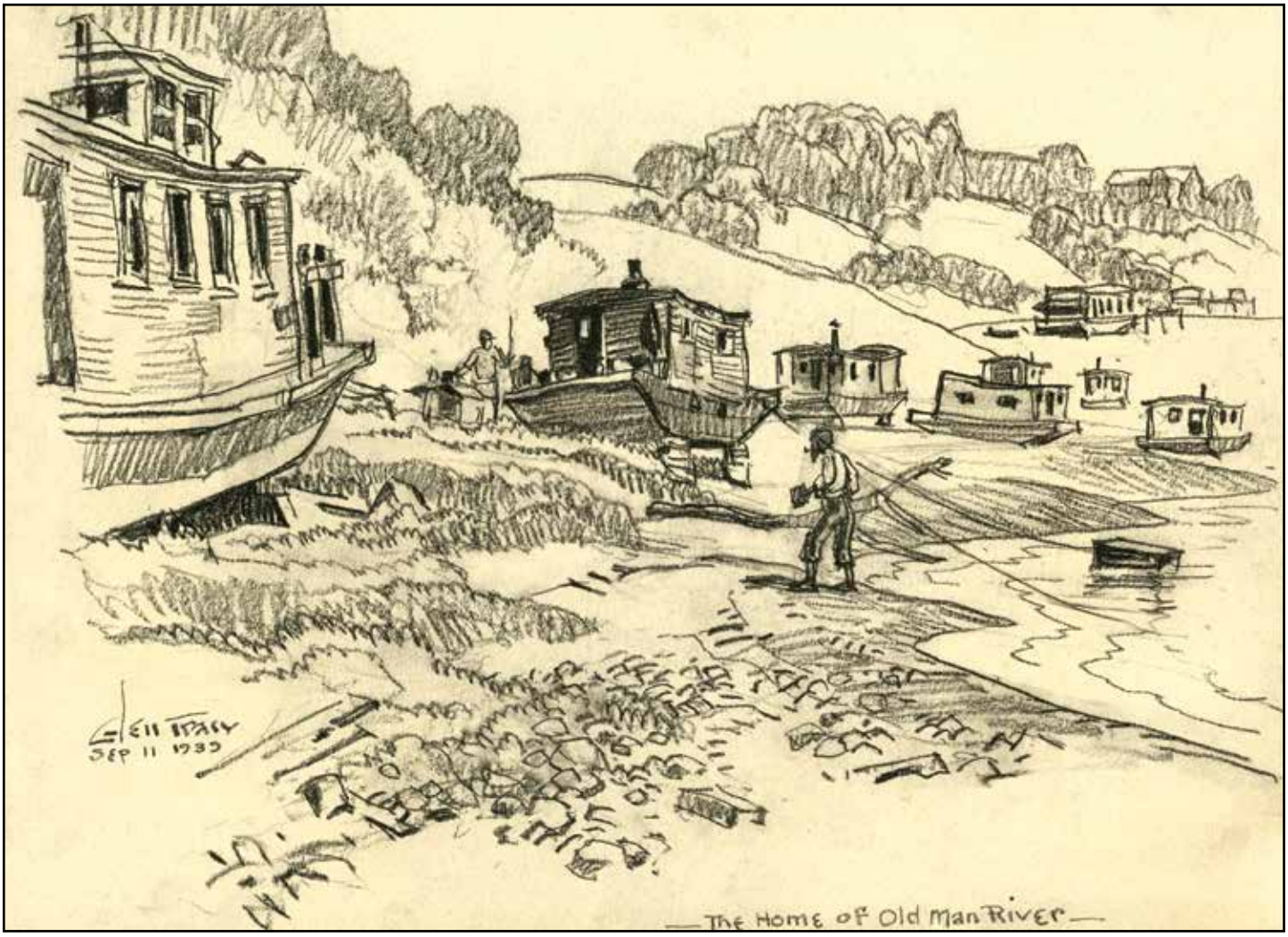
"Life on the Ohio." Henry Dutchin's shanty boat on upper end of The Point. Rogers Clark Ballard Thruston, Oct. 6, 1922.

and row his home over short distances. Skiffs (or john boats) often appeared in shanty boat images. They were used by fishermen to row out to tend their lines and nets and to return home with the catch. They had other uses as well: partially filled with water, boaters kept fish alive in skiffs until selling them. Skiffs were also a handy place to do the laundry.

Permanent boaters stayed in one place for months at a time and planted gardens on the river banks. They traded fish to farmers in exchange for meat, milk, and eggs. Most boaters avoided cities and towns. They gathered in places such as Louisville only at winter migration or because family members worked as laborers in riverbank mills and factories or as the help in hotels and private homes. About one half of the shanty boaters at Louisville made a living fishing, so the presence of fish and a fish market determined where families tied up their homes.

Life was hard. Shanty boats were crowded, cold in winter, and hot during the summer. A couple could make do with a single room, but most families with children had two rooms (a kitchen-dining room and a bedroom). Three rooms was considered a large boat. A good shanty boat could be built for a few hundred dollars or much less since most of the building material was found along river banks or floating on rising river waters. Seven people lived on one shanty boat at Louisville's "Point" in 1900. A door at each end and side windows gave some cross ventilation during the hot humid summers. A single stove was used for cooking and heating on one room boats. Firewood gathered from drift piles and coal pilfered from barges and railroad yards fed winter stoves. On wash day clothes were hung from porches, doors, and the braches of nearby trees.

As a neighborhood, Shanty Boat Louisville stretched from around First Street to the Beargrass Creek "cut off" at the eastern end of Towhead Island. The area of present-day Thruston Park was called the "point" after the 1850s when the natural course of Beargrass Creek was filled in where the *Belle of Louisville* ties up today. Rerouting the creek moved the point about a mile and a half upriver and made the steamboat wharf's expansion possible. The old natural creek bed was haphazardly filled in over the years leaving isolated ponds filled with debris, garbage, and aquatic life still visible on maps in our collection a half century later.



"The Home of Old Man River." Glen Tracy, Sept. 11, 1939.

This line of low standing water (called "Water Street" in places) was shanty boat Louisville's southern boundary. The river was unpredictable and could rise or fall five or six feet overnight. The Floods of 1883, 1884, 1913, and 1945 left shanty boats on dry land at the Point, sometimes for years. Industrious stranded boaters became squatters and staked out homesteads with fences, gardens, pig pens, and outhouses. As a result the shanty boat neighborhood extended a block or two inland where schools, churches, bakeries, and saloons provided goods and services to house boat families.

By 1900 shanty boat Louisville's population was made up of about half adult males and half adult women and children (under the age of fifteen). These numbers (based on the United States Federal Census) defied the stereotypical view of shanty boaters as mostly single idle men with unsavory habits and reputations. About half of the men were fishermen, but their fishing season was usually three or four months long. They rented their skiffs to day trippers and found part time jobs on tows and steamboats. Others fished for mussels and sold their shells to pearl button factories. All had settled in Louisville's shanty boat neighborhood to make a living and provide for their families. Downstream below today's Big Four Bridge, shanty boaters worked in industrial settings—sawmills, iron foundries, and box factories—rather than in the fishing fleet. Their environment was as noisy and gritty as any industrial town. Stranded shanty boats in this area became small churches, the home of a spiritualist and fortune teller, women basket makers, and the scene of late night revivals.

Today the "chute" behind Towhead Island is lined with upscale weekend boats, but a century ago this place was the heart of shanty boat Louisville and a part of a larger shanty boat nation. One field worker estimated that as many as 50,000 people—out of work farmers, factory workers, and their families—lived on shanty boats during the Great Depression, and an estimate in 1938 suggests as many as 30,000 houseboats in the Ohio and Mississippi River basins. Despite the highly transient nature of the shanty boat community, the working class nature of their lives and stories are captured here at The Filson through images, vital statistics, and first hand accounts.

Judy Miller, Filson Deputy Director

by Bob Hill

The employment opportunity awaiting Judy Miller at The Filson Historical Society came with a mandate rarely seen or heard in any job market: Get the funereal feel out of the building and the dust off the books.

Certainly, the old Ferguson Mansion—the long-time, Third Street home of The Filson—came with a few ghosts and dusty corners. Built for $100,000 in early 1900s money, Louisville's most expensive beaux-arts mansion came with Tiffany glass light orbs, handcrafted paneling, and six servants.

The mansion added its stuffy, funeral reputation in 1924 when the Ferguson fortune collapsed and the house was sold to the Pearson Funeral Home, becoming the special place where Old Louisville society moved on to even greater glory.

Miller, The Filson deputy director who is retiring Dec. 31st after 24 years of service, remembers first visiting The Filson while being hired and agreeing the mansion needed a little airing out.

"If I do this," she asked Filson officials, "are you going to let school children touch the books and walk on your Oriental rugs?"

The answer was "absolutely"—and The Filson got its needed breath of fresh air.

Miller was the perfect pick to change popular perception of The Filson. A Louisville native, she attended Waggener and Eastern High School, Converse College in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and the University of Kentucky, where her father, Dave Lawrence, who was later Dean of Students at U of L, had been an All-American basketball player for Adolph Rupp.

She taught English and speech at Waggener High School, where she was only about four years older than many of her students. She also produced all the school plays.

"I just loved it," she said. "I loved teaching."

She left teaching to raise three sons, joined the Junior League, and while there worked on a concept of designing jobs

to fit organizations that needed volunteers. She took the concept to Jon Jory of Actors Theatre—who immediately hired her to implement it.

Her pitch was simple, effective, and a match for her personality. Start with small groups. Ask the participants to bring friends. Make people feel comfortable. Get them involved, ask them the right question: How do you feel about the selection of plays? Then be sure to be there in the lobby as they came to performances. She enjoyed that. She was very good at that.

"Part of it," she said, "is wanting people to care as much as you care. Eventually they will join, and will probably give some money."

She followed her time at Actors by doing much the same thing for the Louisville Orchestra. Later came the dust-clearing offer from The Filson. It was a place with a stuffy reputation. Its original members had to be nominated, voted in, and could then sit around smoking Filson cigars and drinking Filson cider.

In making changes, Miller received solid support from her Filson directors. She became their community face. The word "Club" was dropped from its name and "Society" added. Membership climbed to about 3,000—no votes required. And kids were let into the building—busloads of kids, thousands of kids—all allowed to walk on its rugs, maybe touch the books, and attend programs in the Carriage House. When she first started at The Filson, it had six programs a year. Now it has over one hundred.

The 132-year-old Filson moved into the Ferguson Mansion in 1984. It recently added its $12.4 million expansion and 20,000 more square feet of space. It now includes 1.8 million documents, 50,000 books, and thousands of photographs of Ohio Valley history.

Once Miller accepted the challenge to make The Filson more welcoming, she was amazed at the size and variety of the collections, most of them donated. She began making suggestions on what might become a good public program. She joked about being a "meddler." She worked with—and for—a dedicated research staff willing to listen, or at least not run away when she approached them.

"Every time I think I have a good idea," she said, "I'm causing somebody else trouble because I'm not doing the research."

She made her suggestions with the understanding Civil War buffs might have little interest in the decorative arts, or that architects might not care that much about genealogy, but that was all part of the broad Filson mandate to collect, preserve, and tell all kinds of stories.

She worked to incorporate the "Filson Fridays," during which its staff would give presentations on pieces of history or culture most important to them.

"I'm always amazed," she said, "by any scholar who can spend days and weeks and months focused on one tiny part of history. So if you ever just arbitrarily decide that something's not a good idea, then you are in trouble. Some people are just devoted to certain areas."

Her bottom line on the worth of any talk or presentation is will it have any impact on daily decisions; did the discussion provoke thought, make a difference?

Retirement means more time with her three sons—and those seven grandchildren. She hopes to go to places like the Robley Rex VA Medical Center and meet with veterans who get few visitors, talk to them like family.

Following in the footsteps of her mother—an excellent pianist who volunteered to perform for people dealing with cerebral palsy, Alzheimer's, and mental illness—Judy Miller will play for other needy organizations, especially those helping children.

She's already had a lot of practice at that while playing the piano for children at Christ Church United Methodist Church for 40 years.

"I want to go places where music would make people happy," she said. "I love to see the kids sing whether it's 'Yes, Jesus Loves Me' or 'Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round.' It gets them laughing. I think it will be fun to bring music to places that don't have it."

Then there is the Henry County family farm where she helps plan the hay and soybean crops and will soon be getting into cattle. It's the place where she will go when things get too busy in Louisville.

She has a quiet cabin out there—not far down the road from farmer and writer Wendell Berry. She said her life has been a good ride, and it's certainly not over.

Filsonian listing reflects membership renewals received August 16 through November 30

The Filsonians *August–November 2016*

The Thruston Legacy Circle is an honorary society established in 2015 to recognize those who have followed the example of R. C. Ballard Thruston by including The Filson in their estate plans. Since our founding in 1884, The Filson has been privately supported and planned giving is an ideal way to continue that tradition of private support.

If you have made a planned gift to The Filson and have not so advised us, we thank you and ask that you let us know so we can welcome you to the TLC. If you have not made a planned gift but would like more information about doing so, please call our Development Department at 502.635.5083 or email Laura Kerr Wiley at lkerr@filsonhistorical.org.

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