

The Filson

A Publication of The Filson Historical Society, a privately-supported historical society
dedicated to preserving the history of Kentucky and the Ohio Valley Region.



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Good news! The Filson has just received a major grant from the Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence to support the creation of a permanent Jewish Community Archive. This grant underwrites the costs to organize, catalog and retain forever the archives of the former Jewish Hospital of Louisville, and to create a broader archive of materials from Jewish organizations, families and businesses.

The influence of Jewish community members on the region's history has been great. While The Filson's archives have always included representative materials from known Jewish leaders, in the past there was no concerted effort to form a comprehensive collection. Now the documents and artifacts that reflect that aspect of Louisville's history will be preserved in a permanent home where scholars, researchers, and interested students of history will find them for decades to come.

The work ahead will require the hiring of a special archivist and a technician who will develop the Jewish Hospital archives, digitize important documents for preservation and broader access, and begin the process of incorporating materials from Jewish organizations like the Jewish Community of Louisville. The Filson will then reach out to community members with private collections from families and businesses. The Filson will produce public programs and exhibits to showcase the collection and to generate community awareness and understanding. Finally, The Filson will seek funds from additional sources to create an endowment to fund the archive's operation in perpetuity.

This new initiative is in keeping with The Filson's commitment to becoming *everyone's* history resource. As an institution we are grateful to the Jewish Heritage Fund for Excellence and we look forward to creating this major new archive for Louisville.



Craig Buthod,
President and CEO

FROM THE CHAIR

The Filson Historical Society has enjoyed a long and beneficial relationship with the Gheens family. Both C. Edwin Gheens and his wife, Mary Jo, served as officers and directors of the Society. We are so pleased to have recently received a gift of portraits and photographs from family member Frank P. Strickler III. These included portraits of Charles W. and Molly Figg Gheens, the parents of C. Edwin Gheens, and Anne Gheens, the sister of Charles W. Gheens. The portrait of Charles was painted by Harvey Joiner. While unsigned, the other two are believed to have been also done by Harvey Joiner. They were painted late in the 19th century and are reflective of the time. With financial assistance from the Gheens Foundation, the portraits were sent to the very talented Terry A. Boyle Collector's Art Group in Cincinnati to be conserved. On Thursday, April 27 the trustees and the staff of the Gheens Foundation came to The Filson to view the restored portraits. Everyone in attendance was delighted with the results. Lead Curator Jim Holmberg and Assistant Curator Johna Picco oversaw this endeavor. These are wonderful additions to our collection of over 450 portraits.

We so value our relationship with the Gheens Foundation, which has provided financial assistance to The Filson for decades, including major grants for the acquisition and renovation of the Ferguson Mansion in 1986 and for the recently completed Cornerstone Campaign.

This is yet another example of the significant historical treasures that reside with many families in our region. We are so appreciative of Mr. Strickler's gift! We encourage you, your family, your friends and your colleagues to be alert to opportunities to add to our wonderful collections, so that they may be preserved and enjoyed for many future generations.



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Chairman of the Board

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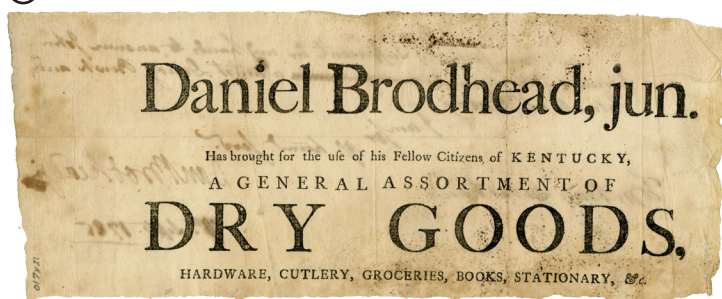
OUR MISSION:

To collect, preserve, and
tell the significant stories
of Kentucky and Ohio
Valley history and culture.

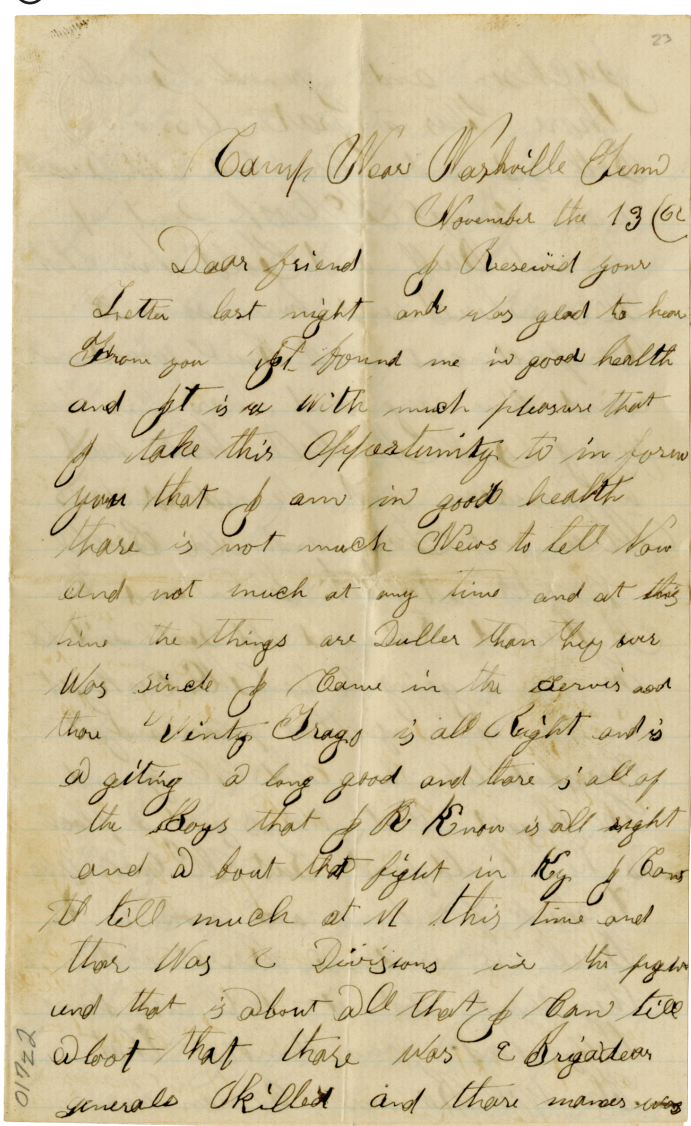
Recent Acquisitions

Interesting and historical additions have been made to The Filson's collections in the past few months. From a very early pioneer Kentucky broadside to a Barney Bright sculpture created some 200 years later, The Filson continues to preserve our region's rich heritage.

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1-2. This very early Kentucky broadside was issued by Daniel Brodhead, Jr., in September 1785. Brodhead owned the first store in Louisville. His signed note on the back lists other early Louisville residents and dates the broadside. [Donated by Maureen Horrigan]

3. Letter written by David Wynn of the 49th Ohio Infantry about the Battle of Perryville, November 13, 1862.

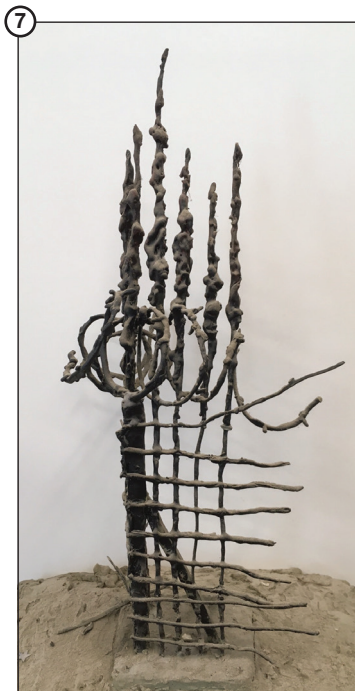
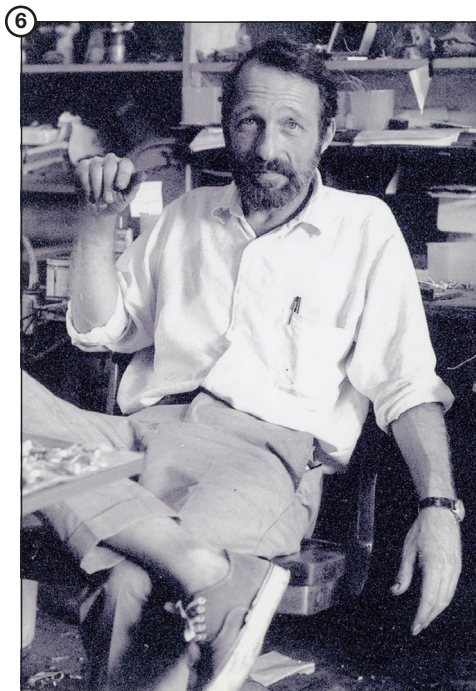
Recent Acquisitions (cont.)



4. Portrait of Ben Schrader by Albert Rose, 1935. Schrader was one of the founders of Falls City Brewery. [Donated by Laura Shaughnessy]



5. Photo of Louisvilleian Luther H. White next to his B-29. Captain White was a bombardier. He was killed on May 9, 1945, when his plane went down on a mission over Japan. [Donated by Marlene Welsh]



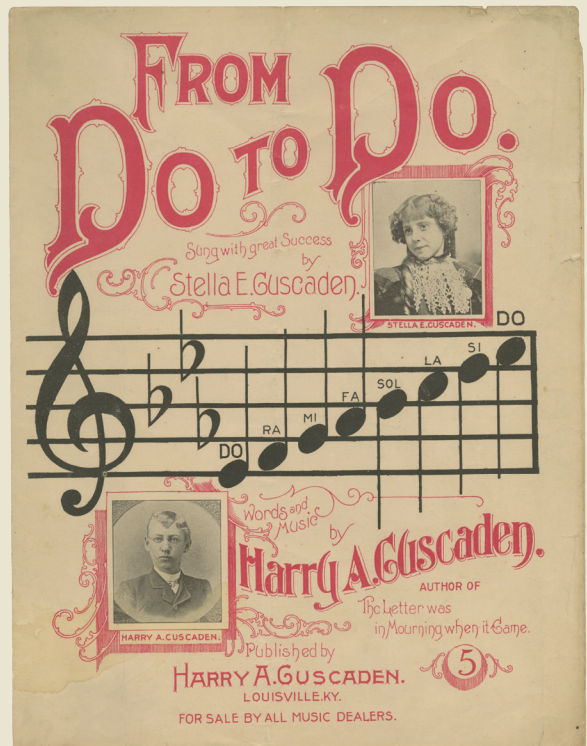
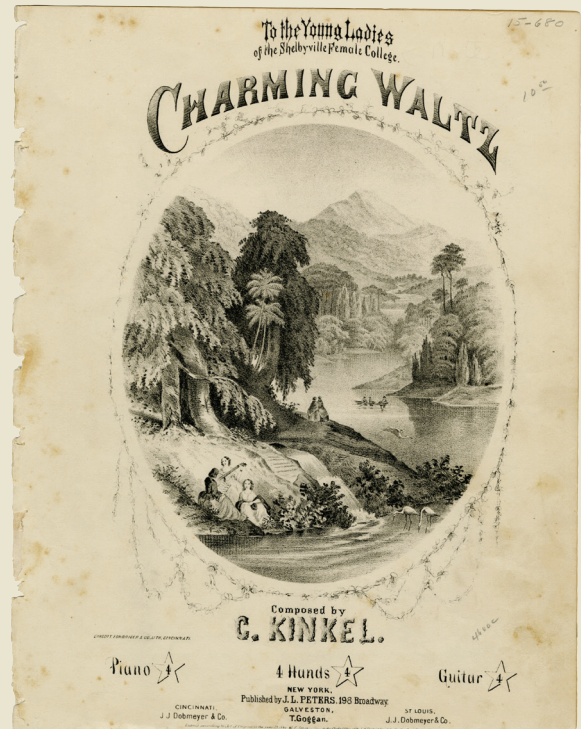
6-8. Well-known Louisville sculptor Barney Bright and models of two of his works—the Holocaust Memorial (the full-scale work is at the Jewish Community Center in Louisville) and the Louisville Firefighter's Memorial (full-scale work in the park at 6th and Jefferson). [Donated by Jep Bright]

Sheet Music and the Filson Collection

Sheet music is a handwritten or printed form of music notation that uses modern musical symbols to indicate the pitches (melodies), rhythms and/or chords of a song or instrumental musical piece. Currently, written music notation is essentially a graph made up of five vertical lines and horizontal markers; where the vertical axis is pitch and the horizontal axis is time. The musical notes are placed on the lines to represent the melody. The medium is typically paper (or, in earlier centuries, papyrus or parchment). The first printed sheet music was made with a printing press in 1473.

Sheet music is the basic form in which Western classical music is notated so that it can be learned and performed by singers or instrumentalists. In 1764 Josiah Flagg compiled the first collection of popular and religious printed music made in the American colonies. By the 1770s professional music publishers were arriving from Europe and opening shops in New York, Boston, Baltimore, and Philadelphia.

By the 19th century the music industry was dominated by sheet music publishers. In the first quarter of the 19th century, about 10,000 pieces of popular music were printed by U.S. publishers. The industry however did nothing to promote music or develop writers, songs usually became popular by word-of-mouth. The sheet music industry rose in tandem with blackface minstrelsy, and most minstrel troupes and professional singers wrote their own music or had songs written to order. Stephen Collins Foster (1826–1864) was one of the first composers who tried to make a living as an independent professional songwriter. Many of his works done with Christy's Minstrels in the late 1840s and 1850s are still popular today. In addition to "My Old Kentucky Home," Foster wrote "Oh! Susannah," "Camptown Races," "Old Folks at Home (Swanee River)," "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair," and "Beautiful Dreamer." Unfortunately, Foster did not earn much for his songs, his only real income came from the sale of the sheet music.



With stronger copyright protection laws in the late 19th century, songwriters, composers, lyricists, and publishers began to work together for their mutual financial benefit. The biggest music houses were established in New York City, while small local publishers, often connected with commercial printers or music stores, continued to flourish throughout the country. An extraordinary number of Eastern European immigrants became the music publishers and songwriters on New York's Tin Pan Alley, the most famous being Irving Berlin.

The late 19th century saw an explosion of parlor music. Pianos became fashionable in middle class households. If middle-class families wanted to hear a popular new song or piece of music, they could buy the sheet music and perform it in their home. In the early 20th century the phonograph and recorded music replaced live performance in the family parlor. This, joined by the growth in popularity of radio broadcasting from the 1920s on, lessened the importance of sheet music and sheet music publishers. During the 20th century the record industry eventually replaced the sheet music publishers as the music industry's largest force.

The Filson maintains a large collection of 19th and 20th century sheet music. Much of the collection reflects the popular music of the day, such as patriotic marches, homesick laments, or romantic ballads. Highlights include a collection of Confederate sheet music published during the Civil War given to the Filson by Walter Barney, and music by Louisvillian William Shakespeare Hays (1837–1907), an American poet and lyricist who is credited with writing over 350 songs under both his name and pseudonyms.

Many of The Filson's sheet music pieces have beautifully illustrated covers and our collection contains a nice selection of music with Kentucky themes. The "Charming Waltz" (1864) is dedicated "to the young ladies of the Shelbyville Female College." Its cover features a lovely pastoral scene of some hills and trees, a river meandering through the countryside and a few young ladies playing musical instruments on the bank of the river. The music is for piano and guitar and has no lyrics.

Another local piece of sheet music can be found in the Cuscaden Family Papers. Harry Cuscaden was a member of the family who opened the first ice cream shop in Kentucky. His talents included composing music, two pieces of which are, "The Letter was in Mourning When It Came" (1897) and "From Do to Do" (1898).



Ernesto Natiello, the composer and publisher of “There’s a Rose in Old Kentucky (That’s Blooming Just for Me)” (1914), was born in Italy and later settled in Louisville. He became one of the top band leaders in the county and moved to Washington D.C. in 1921 to lead the orchestra of a movie theatre. Three months later, on January 28, 1922, the roof of the Knickerbocker Theatre collapsed. A combination of heavy snowfall and faulty construction led to the disaster during the opening of a Saturday night movie killing 98 and injuring 133. Ernesto was among the casualties, his wife Mary, who was in the audience, survived and later returned to Louisville.

“Louisville Lou (That Vampin’ Lady)” (1923) was written by Jack Yellen, who was best known for writing lyrics to “Happy Days are Here Again” and “Ain’t She Sweet”. He collaborated frequently with musician and composer Milton Ager. They entered the music publishing business together as part owners of the Ager-Yellen-Bornstein Music Company. Ager would go on to Hollywood to write music for the movie industry. A photo of Sophie Tucker, a Ukrainian born singer, actress, and radio personality, with a deep sultry voice, appears on the cover of “Louisville Lou.” She was a popular entertainer during the first half of the 20th century, and known by the nickname “The Last of the Red Hot Mamas.”

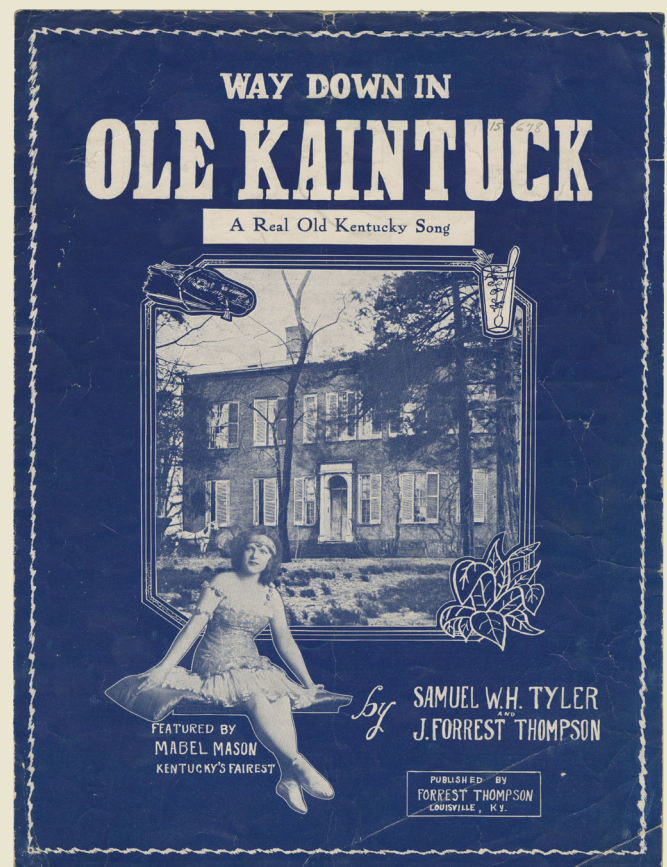
The main image on the cover of “Way down in Ole Kaintuck” is Federal Hill (“My Old Kentucky Home”) which shows Stephen Foster’s influence in music and how Kentucky is perceived. In each corner of the picture are images of other Kentucky icons – a racing horse’s head, a mint julep, a tobacco plant, and a picture of singer Mabel Mason “Kentucky’s Fairest.” The music was written by Samuel W. H. Taylor and J. Forrest Thompson and published in Louisville in 1924.

These are just a few examples of the Filson’s wonderful sheet music collection, each one telling a story in addition to the song. Finding aids to the collection can be found on the Filson website at this address: <http://bit.ly/2q0lyBj>

Citations:

Wikipedia.

Ambrose, Kevin, “Haunting faces, scenes and stories from the Knickerbocker Theatre roof crash 95 years ago,” *Washington Post*, January 27, 2017.



LeeAnn Whites

Director of Research, Filson Historical Society



LeeAnn Whites came to The Filson in 2014 as the Director of Research. She is in charge of the Fellowship and Internship program and serves as one of the editors of *Ohio Valley History*. We sat down with LeeAnn to find out a little bit more about her.

Pathway to The Filson

I briefly got a job at Virginia Tech but I spent most my career at the University of Missouri, Columbia. I was hired into the US Civil War Reconstruction position but I wasn't trained as a Civil War historian at all. I was trained as a US Women's historian. It was the only place in the country that had two jobs open where both my husband and I could teach there. This was before they would do spousal accommodation. At that point, we had a three-year-old and my husband came in and

said "Look honey! Here's a place with two jobs, one in British History for me and one in Civil War History for you!" They hired both of us and I had to figure out how to teach Civil War history. So, I became a Civil War historian.

People don't think about universities this way, but I think of them as a one-room schoolhouse. If you think about this, you have freshman, undergraduates, Master's, and PhD. students all in one school, so it's basically 13 years of schooling and I taught it all.

I was sitting in my office in Missouri and I thought to myself, "I don't want to do this Introduction to U.S. History class one more time." I wrote Glenn Crothers and email and said, "These are the things I like to do. I don't suppose you have a job at The Filson?" And he wrote back and said, "Well it just so happens..." So, I ended up getting the Director of Research position. I had never even been to The Filson.

I love being the editor of the *Ohio Valley History* journal. The other aspect of my job is running the fellowship program. It's so great because you get to see what types of research other people are doing, read their applications, and then they come here to do research. I get to talk to them about their work but I don't have to be responsible for them getting a job. It's all the fun parts of being an academic advisor.

I like working at The Filson because there are so many wonderful, engaging, supportive, and talented people who work here.

I love Louisville. I love bridges, I love old houses, I love Old Louisville, I love being able to walk to work and going in different directions. You get to live with all these beautiful big mansions but you don't have to keep them up.

I like to do hand work. I used to do a lot of needlepoint and all my friends and family have been subjected to getting what I have made. Right now, I'm making a baby blanket because I just learned how to knit. I like to garden. I like to travel. I like "doing" traveling vacations, such as bike tours.

I did a bike tour in Italy last year. I walked the Camino de Santiago through Spain. It was only a generation ago that people got the idea that they would reclaim these old pilgrimage roads. It was a tradition that has fallen by the wayside, and people decided that they would go and remark these roads. It's fascinating, because the people you meet are fascinating. There are hostels along Caminos and you meet all these people. Approximately 10% of them speak English. The children in the towns are particularly helpful because they see the people as pilgrims and are taught that they should help them.

The Filson Historical Society,
1310 S. 3rd St., Louisville, KY

OCTOBER 27–28, 2017

Conference Conveners: Lorien Foote, Texas A & M
Daniel Krebs, University of Louisville

**SAVE
THE
DATE!**

CALL FOR PAPERS

FROM COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS TO THE IRAQ WAR: PRISONERS OF WAR AND THEIR PLACE IN HISTORY

The Filson Historical Society's Institute For Advanced Study will offer a two day academic conference that explores the experience of POWs in all American conflicts since the colonial period. The conference aims to advance our understanding of the integral role prisoners of war played in the economic, cultural, political and military waging of American wars.

Too often prisoners of war have been considered by historians to be a special, separate topic. If discussed at all, POWs make only a brief appearance in legal histories or in the history of POW policies or histories of POW camps. They show up as sums in casualty lists or are discussed as a burden on military resources, creating more mouths to feed, house and guard. This conference will consider prisoners of war as more than simply casualties, losers or victims by examining the range of ways in which POWs played an active role in the conduct and outcome of America's military encounters.

Other topics will include the way the handling of POWs decided campaigns and operations, the range of roles that POWs filled both on and off the battlefield—as hostages, consumers, laborers, propaganda tools, and means of communication, to mention only a few. At the same time, this conference will look for ways to move toward an integration of the POW experience into the larger narratives and problems of political, military, and social history.

Papers and discussion panels will cover the following topics:

- POWs and Military Campaigns
- POWs and Strategy
- POWs and Diplomacy
- POWs and the Economy
- POWs and Post-War Memory
- POWs and the Politics of Warfare
- POWs and Gender
- POWs and Race
- POWs and Community Studies
- POWs and Propaganda
- POWs and Consumer Culture
- POWs and Empire
- POWs and Globalization
- POWs and Migration
- POWs and Labor
- POWs and Health Care

A selection of revised essays from the conference will be published in an anthology that will be co-edited by Lorien Foote and Daniel Krebs.

A detailed schedule and sign-up information will be available later this summer. Keep an eye on your mailboxes for your conference mailer!

**You are cordially invited to the
24th Annual House Tour**

Distinctive Dwellings

Sunday, September 24, 2017

Filson members and their guests are invited to The Filson's Annual House tour, celebrating the distinctive beauty of Louisville homes.

***Distinctive
Dwellings***

Sunday, September 24, 2017
Tickets are \$150 each

You may register in one of three ways:

Online: filsonhistorical.org/events

By Phone: (502) 635-5083

By Mail: Clip this registration form and return to:

*The Filson Historical Society
Attn: Jordan Sangmeister
1310 S. 3rd St.
Louisville, KY 40208*

Please send _____ ticket(s) for The Filson's 24th Annual House Tour

Member Name(s) _____

Guest Name(s) _____

Please mail tickets and tour notes to:

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

Method of Payment (Please make all checks payable to The Filson Historical Society):

☐ Check ☐ Visa ☐ MC Card Number _____ Exp. Date _____

Name on Card _____ Signature _____



The Filson Historical Society is in search of volunteers to host the homes featured on the 24th Distinctive Dwellings House Tour. The tour runs from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 24. Each home requires 2–4 volunteers per 2.5 hour shift. Shifts are 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Volunteers will be able to tour the other homes before or after their shift. Volunteers will be provided with everything they need for their shift (name badges, guest lists, and information about their assigned home).

If you are interested in volunteering for the 2017 House Tour, please contact Jordan Sangmeister, House Tour Volunteer Coordinator, by phone at (502) 635-5083 or by email at JordanS@filsonhistorical.org.



The Home for Friendless Women

BY KELLY MORRIS

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE COMMONWEALTH CENTER FOR HUMANITIES AND SOCIETY INTERN



Susan Speed Davis, from the Speed Family Portrait, Filson Historical Society Photograph Collection.



The Home for Friendless Women, circa 1919. In William Henry Slingerland, *Child Welfare Work in Louisville*, 1919.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And forget not all his benefits,
Who forgives all your iniquity,
Who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit*
Psalm 103

The above psalm was read at the beginning of an 1887 Board meeting for the Home for Friendless Women, a charity that operated in Louisville from 1876-1919. It is hard to imagine this would be a go-to name for an organization nowadays, but there was a time this was a common euphemism for poor, unmarried, pregnant women. Louisville's Home for Friendless Women was located at 512 West Kentucky St. (later the site of the Salvation Army Susan Speed Davis Home and Hospital, and currently the Crimes Against Children Unit of the Louisville Metro Police) and it opened May 19, 1876 with the help of Susan Speed Davis.

Much can be learned about Victorian society and vocabulary from the wealth of materials included in the records of the Home for Friendless Women at The Filson. There are admission logs, detailed minutes from the Board meetings, newspaper clippings, and letters addressed to the women who ran the home (referred to, rather unfortunately, as "Madames" in one letter). Many

women came to the Home from "houses of ill fame." In fact, in one letter the charity was referred to as "The Home for Fallen Women." It is worth mentioning that brothels were very common in Victorian times. In 1856, for example, when the population of Louisville was around 70,000, the Chief of Police reported there were 79 houses of prostitution.¹ Many crusaders and reformers during this time viewed prostitutes as victims of male lust and dominance, and it was believed that if a "fallen woman" could learn morality, religion, and honest work in a safe place, then she would not return to her former occupation.² One goal of the Home, therefore, was to help the pregnant women find respectable homes to work in after their child was born and also to encourage the women to lead Christian lives.

Religious activity, including prayer meetings and devotional exercises, along with hard work, was a daily part of the women's lives in the home. The newspaper article, *Home for the Friendless: Reports Show That Much Good Work Was Done Last Year*, reported that "work has been done cheerfully and satisfactorily as follows: 2,617 pairs of lace curtains have been laundered; 800 garments, 65 quilts and comforts have been made, and 853 garments repaired." The same article also listed the religious activity of the house, reporting that the Evangelical Committee

¹ Anita Ashendel, "'Notorious Home of Harlotry': Regulating Prostitution in the Ohio Valley, 1850-1860" (*Ohio Valley History*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 2003).

² Carroll Smith Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America" (*American Quarterly*, Vol.23, No. 4, John Hopkins Press, Oct. 1971).

held “fifty Sunday services, and fifty prayer-meetings; forty-six religious meetings were held by women of the board. Two of the girls have become church members.”

From reading the Board meeting logs, it becomes clear that not all the women became Christians or eagerly followed the rules of the home. In one entry, a woman is reported to have “gone back to a life of sin.” Another woman was expelled from the Home for profane language and yet another, it was feared, had returned to “evil causes.” There are certain characters that emerge from these pages, stories of women who refuse to be molded or labeled as fallen, and it is their stories that are often the most haunting.

For example, in one memorable scene from August 2, 1887, the inmates were called before the Board and sternly warned to be mindful of their conversations in private, which led to several women confessing to using improper language in private. The President then read aloud the rules of the Home and asked all who would follow the rules to stand; all but one rose. The woman who refused to stand, Belle, had been mentioned in previous entries. Earlier in the year, the women on the Board had praised her efficient work in the laundry and wanted to buy her new clothes, but they worried this would incite jealousy among the other inmates, and so they decided it wise to gradually add articles to her wardrobe. By August, Belle is being mentioned again, only this time for “misconduct” and “pernicious influence” on another inmate. It came as no surprise to read that by the time the next meeting rolled around, Belle had been expelled from the Home.

Incidents like these show the power of the women on the Board of the Home. They clearly took their job seriously and part of their job, they believed, was teaching the women “restraining influences” as well as offering opportunities for self-improvement. The board members met monthly to discuss the home’s finances, which were often



Three ledgers from the Home for Friendless Women Records, Filson Historical Society.

at a critical point—a few times it is mentioned the accounts were overdrawn. There is a mention in early 1880 that some of the members believe the assistant matron’s monthly salary of \$8/month to be “disproportionate to our means.” The board often formed committees, from scouting out a new building for the ever expanding home to fundraising.

The Board members also enforced rules for each other, such as a 25 cent fine for any unexcused absence from a meeting as well as forced resignation from the Board if more than four unexcused absences occur. In other words, this was not simply a social group who met once a month to gossip; these women actively raised funds for the home, solicited donations, and wrote letters to potential employers for the women.

And what about all the babies born in the home? It seems there wasn’t a “one size fits all” approach. Some women left their children at the home when they went to

work and sent for them later. Others took their children with them, still others chose adoption. In one entry from 1880, for example, it is reported that a Baptist man and his wife adopted one of a set of twins and this was “quite providential as the mother cannot take care of two children.” At a meeting in May of 1887, the Board was concerned with the following question: should the girls living out and boarding their children at the Home be allowed to take their children out for walks or rides? Ultimately the Board referred the matter to the Work Committee.

When one of the inmates passed away from consumption in October 1880, she left a testimony stating that the Home had blessed her and changed her for the better. The women on the Board were relieved and uplifted by her words and several expressed relief that the home was, in fact, making a difference in the lives of these women that society had given up on.

Agatha Bullitt Grabisch and The Great War

BY JENNIE COLE | MANAGER OF COLLECTIONS ACCESS

When originally researching women and World War I for a talk I gave several years ago, I anticipated finding correspondence by women to loved ones at war and perhaps even documentation on Louisville women who went to Europe with the Red Cross. I did not expect to find correspondence from Berlin, proclaiming the German viewpoint and decrying the fallacy of American neutrality. The letters of Agatha Bullitt Grabisch reveal a different take on America's feelings on the Great War during the neutrality phase, which lasted from the outbreak of the War in July 1914 through the United States' declaration of war in April 1917. The Filson's holdings include Agatha's correspondence in the Clark-Strader-Watson Family Papers and in the Bullitt Family-Oxmoor Collections.



Agatha Bullitt Grabisch, left, circa 1940.
Bullitt Family—Oxmoor Photograph Collection, FHS.

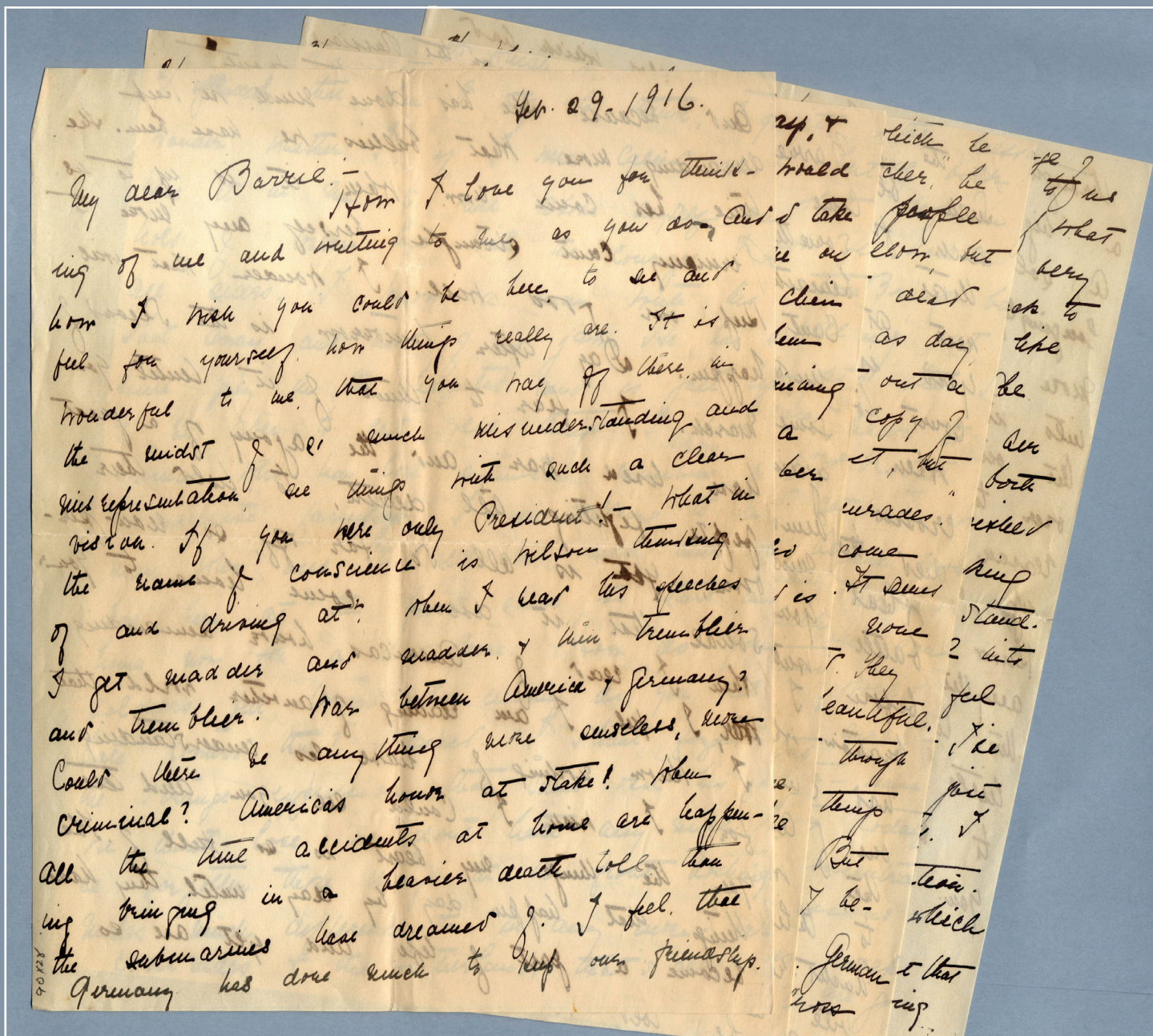
Agatha Bullitt was born to Thomas Walker and Annie Pricilla Logan Bullitt on November 24, 1875 in Louisville, Kentucky; presumably, she was well educated in local schools, or perhaps like her brothers, she attended boarding schools outside of Kentucky. She is mentioned briefly in her relatives' correspondence; a cousin referred to her as "the most brilliant girl he'd ever met;" her father's correspondence refers to her travels, beginning in the late 1890s. According to ship records, she was in Europe annually beginning in 1908; a note of her mother's states, "She chose to leave me and spend all her time abroad [after Thomas W. Bullitt's death in 1910]." Agatha did teach languages at Kentucky Home School for Girls from 1909–1911, but does not otherwise seem to have had a steady occupation.

In May 1913, Agatha wrote from Berlin, to her aunt, Mirah Logan, announcing her upcoming marriage to Josef Grabisch, a German professor of social economics. She was uncertain about her decision to come home for the wedding, writing, "What mother will say or do about it all, I don't know, but I am trying to do what seems to me the right thing and I am hoping that she will be nice to him." Despite her mother's displeasure, Agatha and Jo briefly visited Louisville for their wedding on July 3, 1913; Agatha was 38, and Jo was 37. They immediately returned to Germany and soon after, the war began.¹

In three surviving letters from Agatha to her friend Barry Milton Watkins in 1914, 1915, and 1916,² Agatha complained about America's unfair attitude toward Germany, the untruths being spread about Germany abroad, and the favoritism shown to England.

"Will you please tell me – what has come over America? I couldn't believe my own eyes when I read the accounts in our papers. I thought at first it was a hideous mistake and that only one side could be heard in America. But then gradually I saw that news was getting there from Germany too, and that still opinion was as harsh...as ever."
[October 26, 1914]

"The German army is no bigger than the French and not nearly so large as the Russian. The English army of course is small but her greatest boast is that her navy has not and never shall have an equal. Why don't people talk about the navyism of England?"
[October 26, 1914]



Agatha Bullitt Grabisch to Barry Milton Watkins, 29 February 1916. Clark-Strater-Watson Family Papers, FHS.

Agatha, far from home both physically and in opinion, was very unsettled.

"It is a terribly cut-off feeling that I have now and a terribly confused one; just as if I were standing on my head and looking at everything wrong side up. And when it is all over, I wonder what will become of everybody. It will all be so different; we'll have to begin everything over again...." [October 26, 1914]

She had a very different reaction from most Americans to the sinking of the British cruise liner *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915 by a German U-boat, which killed 1195 out of 1959 passengers (128 of whom were American). Agatha's letters provide accounts of the war from the German perspective.

"Of course the *Lusitania* was terrible ... Germany can not always respect American lives, especially when they deliberately place themselves in conflict with the German lives." [August 4, 1915]

"Until you have lived war and the agony of a great people fighting...to hold their own, it is all so far off, so non-personal that it doesn't come home to you. I wish I could see you and tell you the things my heart is full of." [February 29, 1916]

Another surviving letter from Agatha to her brother Scott, September 6, 1915, described visiting her husband, who was serving in the German army guarding Russian prisoners. Agatha took a train to visit him every Sunday, bringing him clean laundry, food, and cigars; she visited with the other German soldiers, as



Above: Helmeted German Soldiers Lined Up for Review. World War I Stereocards by Keystone View Company Photograph Collection, FHS.



Above: Parade of Cuirassier Guards Marching to the Parade Ground, Berlin. World War I Stereocards by Keystone View Company Photograph Collection, FHS.

Right: Josef and Agatha Grabisch with two unnamed ladies at Sanssouci, the summer palace of Frederick the Great, in Potsdam, near Berlin, Germany. Bullitt Family Photograph Collection, FHS.



well as some Irish prisoners of war. During this time Agatha ran a chocolate factory.

After America's entrance into the war, Agatha's brothers all supported the Allied cause. The family hoped she would return to the United States, and were willing to finance the trip. Agatha refused to return or to give up her pro-German sentiments; family letters from the late 19-teens and 1920s describe her pitiful living conditions. In a letter in 1919 from her brother to their mother, he described some acquaintances of his visiting Agatha in Berlin; she firmly declined assistance and the friends described Agatha's politics as being extremely socialist. Her brother wrote on March 20, 1919, "It is obvious that she is wholly German."

Agatha resided in Berlin until December 1938 when she returned to United States and repatriated due to fear of the Nazi party and Hitler; in May 1939 she reunited with her husband in Ireland. The Bullitt Family-Oxmoor Collection Additional Papers include letters from the early 1940s from Agatha to her sister-in-law, Nora Bullitt. On February 21, 1942 Agatha wrote, "You ask about our life here.... We have the mountains back of us and the sea is about twenty minutes' walk. You ask if life is harder than it was a year ago. Yes, much harder. Prices are staggering and material of every kind much scarcer." More letters from 1942 and 1943 described the rationing of food, gas, clothing, and other goods in Ireland during World War II; Agatha's letters indicate that Jo read

and researched, and she gardened and tried to keep them in food, clothes, and fuel. The letters were censored due to war, and Agatha remarked on not being able to say "lots of things which I can't."³

Agatha and Jo remained in Ireland, living near Dublin, until his death in August 1947, and Agatha's in June 1948. I have found some hints of information that Agatha became involved in the Irish Republican movement during her time in Germany, which may have been why she moved to Ireland, but have not been able to find supporting documentation in the collections at The Filson.

In Agatha's story, as seen through her correspondence and the correspondence of her family, one sees a family separated, both physically and intellectually, by war. While Agatha herself was not a soldier in either World War I or II, she was living far closer to the front lines than most American non-servicemen, and the war affected her more directly than it did many of her family members. They struggled to understand her choices, and she struggled to remain connected to them.

¹ All letters in this article between Bullitt family members, unless otherwise noted, are from Bullitt Family Papers-Oxmoor Collection (Mss. A. B937c), The Filson Historical Society.

² Three letters from Agatha Bullitt Grabisch to Barry Milton Watkins dated October 26, 1914, August 4, 1915, and February 29, 1916, Clark Strader Watson Family Papers, (Mss. A C595), The Filson Historical Society.

³ Bullitt Family-Oxmoor Collection, Additional Papers (Mss. A B937d), The Filson Historical Society.

Joan Brennan

Joan Brennan has been a member of The Filson Historical Society since 1993 and began volunteering in The Filson's Special Collections department in 1995.

I began volunteering at The Filson in 1995. When I got here, I thought that I would be proofing publications, but Judy (Miller) took me upstairs to meet with Jim (Holmberg) and he set me to putting collections in order.

I got interested in reading them (the collections) because that was more interesting than just putting them in order and I was always popping in to Jim's office and saying, "Look at this! Such and such is so fascinating," so he trained me to catalog the collections and I did that for several years using a typewriter.

I don't like to use computers, so once they became more mainstream in the organization, I started to go through old collections to find things that today's historians would be interested in. Historians are interested in very different things than they were 50 years ago.

One of the letters I was reading the other day was from a man writing in 1870s San Francisco and talking about an election held recently. He was complaining that they barely hired any Americans, that only 10 were American and the other 90 were Irish or other nationalities. Nativism is not a new thing, it seems.

It's hard to say what my favorite collection is because there are so many that stand out. The Mona Bismark Letters... she was an international beauty and heiress, with letters to and from people all over the world. I also love letters written during the Civil War from poor folks from the mountains. They could barely write, you have to read them phonetically to get the meaning.

Letters are so immediate, as if it could be yesterday except the topics are very different from today. It's personal, you feel like you know the people that you are reading about, especially if it's a series of letters.



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February–May 2017



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