



Harrison Heritage News

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March 2016

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Harrison County Bourbon Baron

T. J. Megibben



T. J. Megibben

Article begins on page 3

Harrison County Historical Society

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WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Wayne King, San Angelo, TX
 Mrs. Charles H. Switzer, Hot Springs, AR

Upcoming Events and Meetings

Meeting time and place: *Hospice of the Blue Grass on Oddville Avenue, 1317 US HWY 62E. Meeting room is 1st floor rear entrance. Except March 19 Sat. 10 am Rohs Opera House.*

December - no meeting.

- March 19** - Saturday, 10 am, Rohs Opera House, 10 am.
- April 28** - Eddie Price, author of the Kentucky-based novel *Widder's Landing*, will speak on "1812: Remember the Raisin!" Kentucky's contribution in the War of 1812 was vital to the American War effort. This presentation shows how deeply Kentuckians were involved — economically, politically, militarily, and emotionally.
- May 26** - Programs by the History Clubs at Northside and Eastside Elementary. Come and support our junior historians.
- June 23** - TBA - officer elections during business meeting.

Field Trips for Historical Society Members

(Sign up sheets on page 10)

- April 23 - 10 am - "Harrison Co. Historical Society Day" at the Cynthiana - Harrison Co. Museum.
- May 7 - Tour of Mary Todd Lincoln Home, Lexington.
- May 14 - Tour of "Kentucky Room" at the public library.



(above) Cynthiana covered bridge being dismantled. Detail from aerial photo in Louisville Courier Journal Magazine, Feb. 19, 1950. Photo, c. 1947-1948.

President's Corner

- Don Wagoner



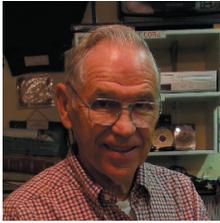
2016's first meeting will be on March 19, 10:00 a.m., at the Rohs Opera House, 133 East Pike Street, Cynthiana, Kentucky. Mr. Roger Slade, a co-owner of the theater, will present the history of the grand old building, where generations have spent many enjoyable and pleasant hours seeing live, stage performances and celluloid movies shown on the silver screen. Always, it was a pleasure to go to the Rohs Opera House, which was well-appointed, clean, and smelled good.

In the 1940s and early 1950s, most theaters had a sign on the front of the business very visible to the public that read, "Cool Inside." Those words were effective advertisement that brought as many customers to the "movies" as did the quality of the "picture shows," during the hot summer months. Since most homes did not have air conditioning and remained too hot to be comfortable on summer evenings, theaters were filled to capacity on week nights, as well as Saturday night.

The reason was referred to by many as "to get some refrigeration," since the term "air conditioning" had not become the popular reference. No matter how good the movies were, it was a great night, if the refrigeration was good. No matter what season of the year, people looked forward to going to the Rohs Opera House and were always pleased they went there. The exception was never on Sundays, when only heathen, sinners dared to enter any theater.



Rohs Opera House/Aeolian Hall (above) was located on the second floor of the present Rohs Opera House on Pike Street. The building was erected in 1871 and was the scene of plays, balls, graduation ceremonies, and even roller skating. The hall was reached by a stairway that stood in the present theater hallway. The room was approximately forty feet square, with the stage at the back of the building facing the street. An attractive horseshoe-shaped balcony provided more seating. In 1941, Aeolian Hall was replaced by the present movie theater which was built on the first floor. Today, the basic features of Aeolian Hall remain, including the room, balcony, and part of the stage and curtain controls. (Information/photo from *Cromwell's Comments*, 2002, William A. Penn, George Slade, editors. Photo, 2002, Bill Penn.)



Kenny Simpson, Curator www.HarrisonCountyKy.US/Museum

Tom Megibben Was a Man of Many Distilleries

Jack Sullivan

(Reprinted from <http://pre-prowhiskeymen.blogspot.com/2015/09/tom-megibben-was-man-of-many.html>.)

An American distillery owner most usually was engaged in just one such whiskey-making operation, although occasionally a proprietor might have two plants under management at one time. An exception was Thomas Jefferson (T.J. or “Tom”) Megibben who controlled multiple Kentucky distilleries and at his death was said to have “an interest” in at least six. Megibben is a whiskey man whose story can be told through a list of distilleries.

Findley & Foley Distillery. Megibben was born in 1831 in the Ohio river town of Neville, Clermont County, Ohio, the son of William and Emily (Galvin) Megibben. Educated in the Neville schools until the age of 16, he left school to make his own living, finding employment as an employee in a local distillery. He quickly learned the whiskey-making trade and after two year, relocated to Cynthiana, Kentucky, a town in the north central part of the state and the seat of Harrison County, located about half way between Cincinnati and Lexington. There in January 1849 Megibben took a job with Findley & Foley Distillery.

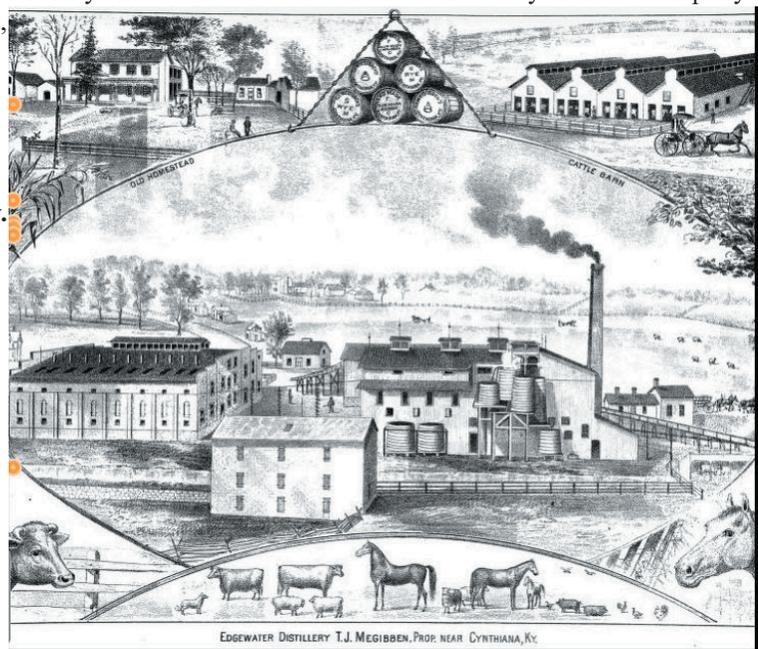
These partners had established a distillery near Broadwell, Kentucky, several years earlier. They hired Megibben initially as their assistant chief distiller. After spending a year working in that capacity he so impressed the proprietors that they made him the chief distiller. He stayed in that job until about 1854 when a severe drought hit that region of Kentucky and the corn failure halted any distilling. One biography says Megibben then “engaged in [unmanned] agricultural pursuits.”

Megibben had strong incentives to keep working. In June 1853 he had married Elizabeth J. David, the daughter of Simon and Nancy (Brown) David of Harrison County. Elizabeth has been described as “a lady of most exemplary character, pleasing address, and good judgment, and well worthy to be the life companion...”

The Megibben’s first child, Mary Loraine, was born a year later. In time there would seven other children, a total of four sons and four daughters.

Megibben & Bramble “Excelsior” Distillery.

In the early 1850s with a partner, C. Bramble, Megibben struck out on his own, building a distillery near his home in Cynthiana at a place called Lair’s Station. The flagship brand was “Excelsior Whiskey” and the distillery became known by that name. Tom took his brother, James, into the business with him at this facility. By the early 1800s, Megibben’s plant had a mashing capacity of 700 bushels and three warehouses with a capacity of 17,500 barrels. A on-premises cooperage shop could turn out fifty barrels a day and at peak the distillery employed forty hands. Annual production



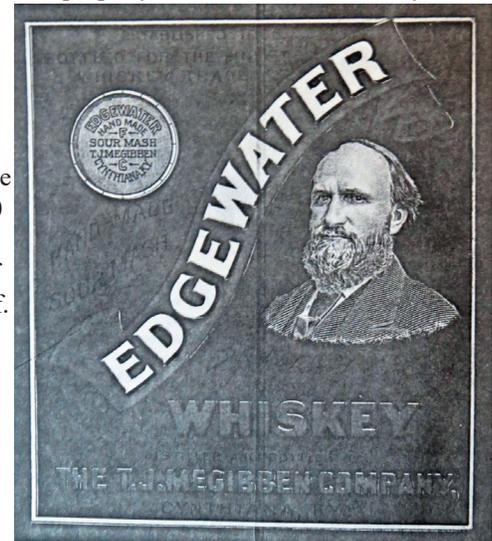
of Excelsior and other company brands was 8,000 barrels while an additional 11,000 barrels were aging in bond. In 1868 this extensive operation was turned over to a Megibben nephew.

The Edgewater Distillery. Not content with running only a single distillery Megibben during the 1850s purchased an existing plant that had been established in 1836, owned and operated Benjamin Brandon as part of a grist mill and whiskey-making complex. After passing through several proprietorships, about 1855 it was leased for three years to Megibben and two partners. The



lease included twenty-five acres of farm land on which cattle could be kept to feed spent mash. The venture proved very profitable and before the end of the three years, Megibben, after buying out his partners, purchased the entire property. It included the distillery, “all the appurtenances thereto belonging,” and a 200 acre farm.

As sole owner, Megibben lost no time in improving and expanding the distillery. As shown above [see p. 3], it was expanded over time into a large complex, featuring five warehouses with the capacity to hold 25,000 barrels of aging whiskey. According to insurance records, the distillery itself was of frame construction with a metal or slate roof. The warehouses included three adjoining bonded buildings constructed of brick with metal roofs, a separated iron-clad bonded stone warehouse located 250 feet southwest of the still, and a “free” (non-bonded) stone warehouse with a shingle roof, located 120



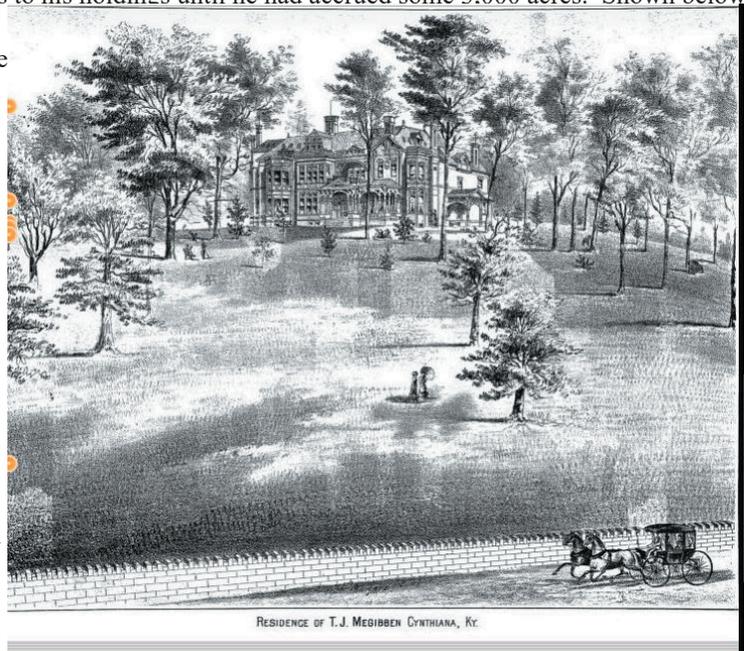
feet east of the still.

According to an 1893 report on Megibben’s Edgewater distillery: “The warehouses...are constructed after the most approved plans for the maturing of the product and are lighted by immense skylights which give a perfect flood of light and safe so arranged that the reflected rays of the sun are thrown upon the entire space. The whiskey is still further matured by the use of steam-heat which is forced by steel blowers to all parts of the houses.”

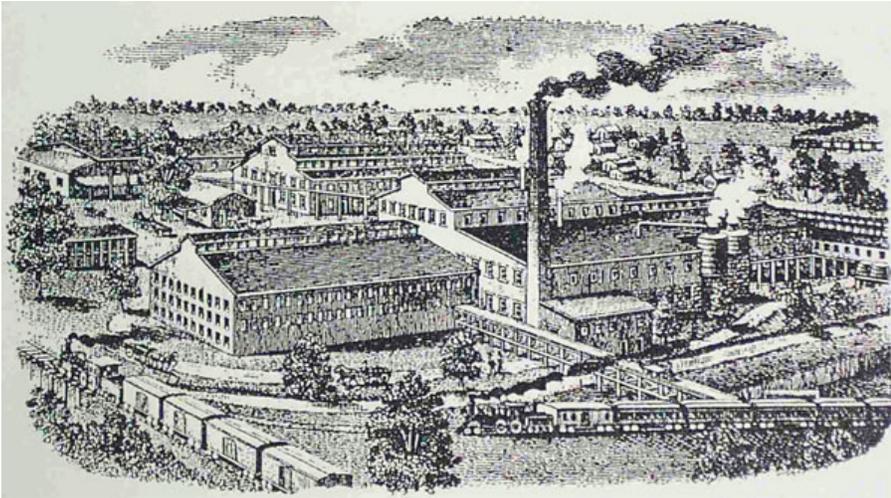
His flagship brands became “Edgewater Sour Mash Whiskey” and “Edgewater Rye.” Megibben put his own portrait on the labels, perhaps as an indication in his pride in the product. He merchandised these whiskeys vigorously throughout the country, finding a ready customer base because of their quality. It was one of the Kentucky brands specially featured at the 1893 Columbian World’s Fair in Chicago. A Kentucky publication boasted that Edgewater Whiskey “is to be found in nearly every first-class hotel and bar in this country.”

Monticello. Over time Megibben continued to add parcels to his holdings until he had accrued some 3,000 acres. Shown below is a line drawing of the estate he created for himself and his large family not far from the distillery complex. These holdings allowed him during the 1860s to become known as a breeder of fine cattle. Willing to pay big money for prize bulls, Megibben assembled a herd that was said to be one of the finest in the United States. He also was breeding high-grade sheep.

The Ashland Distillery. His lust to own distilleries not yet satisfied, Megibben early in the 1870s became a partner in the Ashland Distillery, located on Manchester Street (Frankfort Pike) immediately in Lexington, Kentucky. Shown below, this plant on eleven acres had been established in 1865, produced the “Ashland Whiskey,” brand, and had gone through several ownerships before closing. Dates differ, but about 1871 Megibben, with well-known whiskey entrepreneur, William Tarr, acquired the distillery and restarted production. [See my post on William Tarr, February 2015.] The partners continued to produce the Ashland brand and introduced “Wm. Tarr



RESIDENCE OF T.J. MEGIBBEN CYNTHIANA, KY.

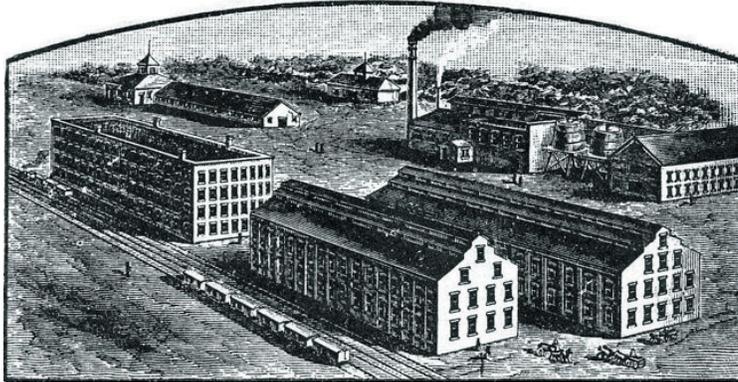


Ashland Distillery

Whiskey.” Both brands came in bourbon and rye versions.

In May 1879, a fire destroyed the distillery, one that largely had been constructed of wood. This disaster forced the city fathers of Lexington to establish a waterworks to provide a year around supply of water to fight fires and thereby lower insurance rates. With this safeguard the distillery was reorganized during which Megibben became a director, owning 40%, and his son-in-law, Joseph M. Kimbrough the plant manager. Shown here [at left], the plant was rebuilt at a cost of \$75,000 (almost \$2 million today). By 1882 the output was approximately 45 barrels a day with 18,000 barrels in bonded storage in two warehouses, both adjacent to a railroad spur.

The Van Hook Distillery. Not long after acquiring the Ashland Distillery, Megibben struck again, purchasing the Van Hook Distillery in Harrison County, shown below. Although scholars disagree on the origins of this facility, they agree that it was destroyed by fire in 1869 and rebuilt the same year. At the time of Megibben’s purchase, during the early 1880s, the distillery had a mashing capacity of 300 bushels per day and produced 3,000 barrels of whiskey annually, with 6,000 barrels held in bond. The size of the distillery was 35 x 55 feet and rose three floors. Three brick warehouses with a capacity of 7,500 barrels could be found on the grounds, containing L. Van Hook Pure Bourbon. A cooper’s shop attached to the still turned out 4,000 barrels. Waste from



Paris Distillery

the mash fed 150 cattle and 400 hogs. Shipments from the warehouses were made via the Kentucky Central Railroad from Cynthiana.

After operating the Van Hook Distillery for a few years with continuing success, Megibben sold the property to another son-in-law, Felix S. Ashbrook. By this time he had become the largest landowner in Harrison County. His abundant energies included horse racing. In 1872 he bought his first thoroughbred horse and eventually ran a stable of fifty thoroughbreds and a hundred trotters and pacers. His horses competed in the Kentucky Derby in 1882 and again in 1884. Neither won.

The Paris Distillery.

Shown above, this whiskey manufactory had been built in 1860, located about half mile from Paris, Kentucky, on the Kentucky Central Railroad. It had been operated under at least two ownerships by the 1880s when Megibben got involved. This facility produced a whiskey called “Paris Distillery Hand Made Sour Mash.” The daily mashing capacity was 412 barrels per day and boasted a warehouse storage capacity of 15,000 barrels. The warehouses were five, four bonded of brick construction and one free, iron clad. The distillery was frame and the property included a frame cattle shed 225 feet west of the still. By 1884 Megibben also was in charge of managing this distillery.

While just keeping track of these many business activities might have been too much for an ordinary man, Megibben also found time for politics. He first was elected to the Kentucky State House of Representatives from Harrison County in 1871. According to a biographer: “By being always vigilant and watchful, regarding the best interests his constituency and singularly prompt in devising measures best adapted to their wants...,” he was elected to a second term. In 1879 he was elected to the State Senate, serving one term. A delegate to a Democratic convention that nominated Grover Cleveland, Megibben was a familiar figure in Kentucky Democratic circles and his mansion home, shown here, a frequent political gathering place.

Megibben also fulfilled the old adage, “If you want something done, give it to a busy person.” In addition to his many business and political interests, he often was tapped for other leadership roles. He founded the Latonia Track and Jockey Club, was president of the Shorthorn Cattle Breeders Association of Chicago, and president of the Kentucky Trotting Horse Breeders Association from 1873 until 1882. Megibben was elected the first president of the Kentucky Distillers Association at its 1880 initial meeting in Louisville. He continued to be active in the organization until his death.

At the End. When T. J. Megibben died in January 1890 at the age of 59, his obituaries noted, seemingly in awe, that he continued to have an interest in six Kentucky distilleries. Extra trains were run to Cynthiana from both Cincinnati and Lexington to bring some 300 mourners to his funeral services. A lengthy procession led from the church to the Battle Grove Cemetery where he was laid to rest in Section G, Lot 4. A tall stone pillar marks the place.

Megibben was the object of many tributes after his death. Among them, is one from the Frankfort Capitol that captured the man rather than the titan of Kentucky whiskey. In part it read: “Modest as a woman, gentle as a child, ‘Tom’ Megibben, as those who loved him loved best to call him, never betrayed a trust, never faltered in his devotion to a friend or forgot to keep his plighted faith to any man.”

Source: T.J. Megibben was given considerable biographical attention after his death, the information on which much of this post is drawn. Most important was the 1882 volume, *History of Bourbon, Scott, Harrison and Nicholas Counties*, by William H. Perrin.



Megibben monument -
Battle Grove Cemetery, Cynthiana, Ky.

About the author - Jack Sullivan

(Reprinted from <http://pre-prowhiskeymen.blogspot.com/>)

Over a period of almost two decades, I have written more than 325 articles for collector magazines and newsletters in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The subjects generally are those signaled by the title of this site. Although many of my articles can be found on several websites whose links are referenced here, and I will be continuing to write “in hard copy,” this blog will provide an outlet for research results that are too short or of such narrowly-focused interest as to preclude their publication elsewhere. Through the magic of the Internet -- and judicious use of key words -- I am hopeful that collectors, genealogy buffs, and those interested in arcane tidbits of history will find their way to this site and receive information not readily available elsewhere.

For further reading: See Chester Zoeller, *Bourbon in Kentucky: A History of Distilleries in Kentucky*, p. 166-171; Zoeller, *Bourbon Barons* (both, Butler Books). “Cynthiana’s Monticello Mansion,” see www.thecitybuzz.net/files/City_Buzz_Edition_55_pdf.pdf,

Genealogically Speaking....

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by President Donald Wagoner

The Cynthiana-Harrison County Library's Kentucky Room is the genealogists virtual jackpot of family history. Some of the material located there is as follows.

PART 2-FAMILY MANUSCRIPT HISTORIES (IN THE IN-HOUSE COMPUTER WITH ORIGINALS IN FILE DRAWERS) DOCUMENTED ARE:

DRAWER 1

ADAMS; AMMERMAN; ANDERSON; ASHBROOK; ASHCRAFT; BAILEY; BAIRD; BANKS; BARKER; BARRITT; BASKET; BEAGLE; BECKETT; BEDFORD; BENSON; BERRY; BIGGS; BLACKERBY; BLAIR; BOAS; BOGGESS; BONAR; BOTTS; BOURBON; BOYD; BRADFORD; BRANNOCK; BROCK; BROOKS; BROWNING; BUCKNER; BURTON AND BUZZARD.

DRAWER 2

CAIN; CAPLINGERS; CASEY; CASSIDY; CHAMBERS; CHEATHAM; CLARK; CLARKE; CLARY; CLOUGH; CLOUGH & WHALEN; COBB; COLEMAN; COLONIAL BEACH; COLVIN; CONNER; CONARD; COOK; COON; AND COURTNEY.

DRAWER 3

CRAIG; CRAWFORD; CREASON; CROSSTHWAITE; CROXTON; CURRENT; CURTIS; DANIEL; DAVID; DAVIS; DAWSON; DOANE FAMILY; DOYLE; DUNCAN; DUNN; DURBIN; ECKLERS; EDWARDS; EGNEW; EICHHORN; ENDICOTT; EPPERSON; EVANS; AND EWALT.

DRAWER 4

FAULCONER; FEEBACK; FEIX; FIELDS; FIGHTMASTER; FITZWATER; FLYNN; FONES; FORSYTHE; FOWKE; FRAZEE; FRYMAN; AND FURNISH.

DRAWER 5

GARNETT; GARRARD; GEMMELL; GOODNIGHT; GREEN; GROVES; GRUELLE; GUNSAULIS; HAMILTON; HANNON; HARDEN; HARNEY; HARRINGTON; HARRISON; HART; HATCHER; HAUSBERGER; HAVILAND; HAYS; HEDDEN; HEDGERS; HENDERSON; HENDRICKS; HENRY; HENSON; HIGGINS; HIMES; AND HITEN;

DRAWER 6

HOFFMAN; HOGG; HUERKAMP; HUNT; HUTTON; INGLES; INSCOE/INSKO; IRELAND; JACKSON; JETT; JOHNSON; JOHNSTON; JONES; JORDON; JUETT; KARRICK; KEARNS;

Continued from p. 7 - Family history files in the Kentucky Room of the Cynthiana-Harrison County Library

**KEITH; KELSCH; KIMBROUGH; KING; LAFFERTY; LAIR; LANTER; LARIMORE;
LAUGHLIN; AND LARGLIN**

DRAWER 7

**LAWSON; LEBUS; LEE; LEHMAN; LENOX; LEWIS; LINEHAN; LINVILLE; LIVINGOOD;
LOWRY; LUCAS; LUIG/NIEHOFF; LYNEM; LYON; MADISON; MAFFETT; MAGEE;
MAHORNEYS; MAHURON; MAKEMSOME; MALCOM; MARSH; MARSHALL; MARTIN;
MASTIN; MAYBRIER; McCAULEY; McCLENACHEN; McClINTOCK; McClURE;
McDANIEL; McDOWELL; McFARLAND; McGINNIS; McKEE, McKENNEY, McKENNY,
McKENNEY/CROSTHWAITE; McKINLEY; McMAYTHRONE; McMILLEN; McNEEL;
McSHANE; MENEFEES AND MIDDEN.**

DRAWER 8

**MILLER; MILLION; MINTER; MITCHELL; MOBLEYS; MOORE; MORAN; MORELAND;
MOUNTJOY; MULLEN; MUNTZ; MUSSELMAN; MYERS; NELSON; MESBITT; NEWBY;
ODER; PATTERSON; PAVEY; PEDDICORD; PETTY & ROMANS; PHILLIPS; PIERCE;
POINDEXTER; POPE; POWELL; AND PROWS.**

DRAWER 9

**PUGH; RANKIN; RAVENSCRAFT; RAWLINGS; REMINGTON; RENAKER; RICHARDSON;
RICHEY; ROBB; ROBERTS; ROBINSON; ROGERS; ROHS; ROLAND; ROMANS; ROSE;
ROUTT; RUDELL; RUDDLE; SANDS; SCHAUBLIN & THOMMEN; SCHRIFLE & SHIVELY;
SCOTT; SELLERS; AND SHAWHAN.**

DRAWER 10

**SHIVELY; SHORT; SHROPSHIRE; SIMPSON; SKINNER; SLADE; SMISER; SMITH; SNELL;
SNODGRASS; SPEARS & BURGER; SPEGAL; SPRADLIN; STITES; STOUT; SUMMIT;
SWINFORD; TALBERT; TATE AND TAYLOR,**

DRAWER 11

**TERRY; THOMAS; TOADVINE; TOWNSEND; TURLEY; VANHOOK; VARDIMAN;
WAGGONER; WAITS; WALKER; WALTON; WARD; WEBBERS; WEBSTER; WEST;
WHALEN; AND WHALEY.**

DRAWER 12

**WHITAKER; WHITE; WHITEKER; WILLIAMS; WITHERS; WOHLWINDER; WORKMAN;
WORLE; WYTHOR AND YAGER.**

Views of the Mary Todd Lincoln Home See May 7 tour sign-up sheet next page



Mary Todd Lincoln House at 578 West Main Street in Lexington, Kentucky, USA, was the family home of Mary Todd, the future first lady and wife of the 16th President, Abraham Lincoln. The house was built c. 1803-1806 as an inn and tavern, which was called “The Sign of the Green Tree” before its purchase by the Todd family. The family moved in to the three-story home in 1832. Mary Todd lived in this home until 1839, when she moved to Springfield, Illinois. After their marriage Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln visited her family here. Today the fourteen-room house contains period furniture, portraits, and artifacts from the Todd and Lincoln families. The Mary Todd Lincoln house has the distinction of being the first historic site restored in honor of a First Lady. Operated by the Kentucky Mansions Preservation Foundation, Inc., the house museum was opened to the public on June 9, 1977.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Todd_Lincoln_House

**MAY 7, 2016, FIELD TRIP TO THE MARY TODD LINCOLN HOUSE,
LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY.**

**SIGN ME UP FOR THIS FIELD TRIP, _____,
(NAME)**

TELEPHONE _____, IF 15 OR LESS MEMBERS SIGN UP FOR THE TRIP, WE WILL DEPART THE CYNTHIANA METHODIST CHURCH PARKING LOT AT 9:00 A.M. AND WILL ARRIVE AT THE MARY TODD LINCOLN HOUSE BY 10:00 A.M. WITH ADMISSION FEE OF \$10.00 PER PERSON. IF WE HAVE MORE THAN 15 MEMBERS SIGNED UP FOR THE TRIP, WE WILL DEPART FROM THE FIRST METHODIST CHURCH PARKING LOT AT 8:00 A.M. FOR A PRIVATE TOUR OF THE MARY TODD LINCOLN HOME BEGINNING AT 9:00 A.M. AND A FEE OF \$8.00 PER PERSON. YOU WILL BE ADVISED IN ADVANCED.

THIS FORM MUST BE RECEIVED BY APRIL 14, 2016 AT THE HARRISON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, P.O. BOX 411, CYNTHIANA, KY 41031-0411.

-----**(CUT HERE)**-----

APRIL 23, 2016, 10:00 A.M., CYNTHIANA-HARRISON COUNTY MUSEUM'S, HARRISON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY DAY.

**I, _____, TELEPHONE _____, WILL
(NAME)**

ARRIVE ON APRIL 23, 2016, 10:00 A.M., TO TAKE PART IN THE MUSEUM'S, HARRISON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY DAY. NO ADMISSION FEE.

MAIL THIS FORM TO ARRIVE BY APRIL 18, 2016 AT THE HARRISON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, P. O. BOX 411, CYNTHIANA, KY 41031-0411

-----**(CUT HERE)**-----

MAY 14, 2016, 10:00 A.M., SPECIAL TOUR OF THE CYNTHIANA-HARRISON COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY'S KENTUCKY ROOM.

**I, _____, TELEPHONE _____, WILL
(NAME)**

ATTEND THIS ORIENTATION VISIT. NO ADMISSION FEE.

THIS FORM MUST ARRIVE BY MAY 6, 2016 AT THE HARRISON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, P.O. BOX 411, CYNTHIANA, KY 41031-0411.