Skiff House – Covington
Source: Faces and Places: Northern Kentucky Photographic Archive

Kenton County Public Library
Kentucky History Department
502 Scott Boulevard
Covington, KY 41011
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www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy
Interested in researching or restoring your historic home? Is your great-grandfather’s former bakery on the National Register of Historic Places? Whether you are a historic home owner, genealogist, local historian or architecture buff, tracing house and building histories can be fascinating and rewarding.

Though a building history quest often leads to area courthouses and other record repositories, the Kenton County Public Library’s Mary Ann Mongan branch offers many resources for beginning such a search. Included in this pathfinder are selected lists of materials and databases which may assist in tracing the genealogy of historic homes and structures.

Precursors to modern telephone books, city directories yield many clues about specific structures including names and occupations of their former residents. Usually published on an annual basis, the two basic types of city directories are alphabetical (by last name) and reverse (by address). Directories published after 1930 include both alphabetical and reverse sections. When exploring the history of a structure, researchers must be mindful of changes to street names and/or address numbers over time. The Library holds a large collection of city directories in print, microfilm and in digital form for Northern Kentucky and the Cincinnati area.

City and county histories not only document the founding and development of an area, they also often include biographical sketches of pioneer families, prominent citizens and business owners. Additionally, details on local businesses, schools, churches, and other institutions may yield clues about the history and uses of particular structures. The Kentucky History and Genealogy collection holds an extensive array of city
and county histories for Northern Kentucky and the Commonwealth. Additional digitized city and county histories may be viewed via the Library’s subscription to *HeritageQuest Online*.

### Published Family Histories / Biographies & Personal Papers

The Kentucky History and Genealogy collection features a large number of published family histories in its reference holdings, many of which include detailed family narratives, photographs and reproductions of original documents. Search the library catalog at [http://bit.ly/bHnO1n](http://bit.ly/bHnO1n) with terms such as, “Culbertson family” to find family histories in the Library’s collection.

In addition to published family histories, the Library’s History and Genealogy collection includes a number of diaries, scrapbooks and other biographical materials. These unique resources may provide clues about a particular property’s history and persons associated with the structure. A sampling of biographies and personal papers can be found at: [http://www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy/bios.cfm](http://www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy/bios.cfm).

### Local History Files / Family Files

The Library maintains vertical files of local families, prominent individuals, businesses and other history-related topics. These files may prove helpful when researching a house’s previous residents or owners. An index to these files is part of the Library’s geNKY database at [www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy](http://www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy). Contents of selected local history files have been digitized and can also be accessed from the geNKY database.

### Land and Property Records

Deed and real estate indexes, mortgage books and other land records are indispensable tools for discovering the names of previous property owners and specific events or activities associated with a property. A selected list of land-related records is available at [http://www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy/proprec.cfm](http://www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy/proprec.cfm). Also consult the Library’s online catalog for additional resources.

Though land records may be difficult to locate, the Kentucky Land Office, maintained by the Secretary of State, now offers searchable indexes to many of these records at [http://www.sos.ky.gov/land/](http://www.sos.ky.gov/land/). Included in the online records are Virginia Revolutionary War Warrants, Jackson Purchase Grants and more than 70,000 county patents from 1835 to the present - some of which have been digitized and are viewable from this site.

### Maps, Atlases, and Plat Books

The Kentucky History and Genealogy collection includes a large selection of 19th and 20th century historical atlases, plat books and maps. These invaluable geographic resources may provide clues about early land ownership, original property boundaries, and development of rural areas. Two such geographic resources include the 1877 *City Atlas of Covington, Kentucky* and the 1883 *Atlas of Boone, Kenton, and Campbell Counties, Kentucky*, available in digital format from the Kentucky History and Genealogy “Digital Library” at [http://www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy/pdf/index.cfm](http://www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy/pdf/index.cfm).
Newspapers

Local newspapers offer significant opportunities for researching historic properties, their former owners and important events. The Kentucky History and Genealogy collection contains newspapers from Northern Kentucky’s 14-county region including the Kentucky Enquirer and the Kentucky Post. The Library’s Northern Kentucky Newspaper Index (http://tiny.cc/57bc4), at over 1 million entries, features digital images of several older newspapers such as The Covington Journal, and the Licking Valley Register.

Photographs

Photographs provide invaluable clues about houses, historic structures and their surrounding areas. The Library holds a collection of over 65,000 digitized photographs in its database, Faces and Places: Northern Kentucky Photographic Archive at http://www.kentonlibrary.org/genphotos/. With photos spanning in time from the late 1800s to the present, the database is fully searchable by keyword and subject. Search terms could include the names of previous owners, businesses, and street names. Careful viewing of streetscape views for specific neighborhoods or blocks may offer a glimpse of a structure as it appeared years ago.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

Beginning in the 1860s, the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company developed maps to assist agents with property valuation and fire risk assessment. Details on construction and building materials, numbers of rooms and floors, locations of doors and windows as well as additions to homes, outbuildings, commercial and industrial structures are included. Sanborn Maps are also helpful for tracking changes to street names and numbering. Digitized copies of Covington and Kentucky Sanborn maps can be viewed through the Library’s web site at http://www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy. The Library also owns microfilmed copies of many Kentucky Sanborn maps; search the Library’s catalog for details on towns and years.
Tax Records

Tax lists and related records may serve as a general reference point for a property’s valuation; increases may indicate new additions or improvements made at a specific point in a structure’s history. The Kentucky History and Genealogy collection includes tax lists from many parts of the Commonwealth in print and microfilm formats.

Wills and Estate Records

Wills and estate proceedings may provide documentation of a house’s original contents, details on previously unrecorded sales of the property, or clues about former owners’ families. Examples of estate documents include appraisements, settlements and inventories. A selected list of will books, indexes, and abstracts for various Kentucky counties is available at http://www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy/wills.cfm.

Print Resources

Architectural History / Architectural Design and Style


House / Building History Research


**Restoration, Maintenance and Conservation of Historic Buildings**


**Periodicals**

*Old House Journal.* Virginia: Home Buyer Publications/Active Interest Media. ISSN: 0094-0178. (Bimonthly)

*Preservation: the magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.* Washington, D.C. National Trust for Historic Preservation. ISSN: 1090-9931. (Bimonthly)

**Web Sites**


Kentucky Trust for Historic Preservation: [http://thekentuckytrust.org/default.aspx](http://thekentuckytrust.org/default.aspx)

National Register of Historic Places: [http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/](http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/)

Additional links to related web sites can be found at [http://delicious.com/Kyhisgen](http://delicious.com/Kyhisgen)