

◆ Boone Co. Historical Society ◆

Editor: Betsy R. Conrad

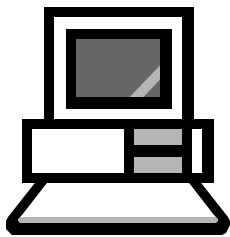
September—October 2004

Mark Your Calendar for these events:

September 11: Family History Seminar and Book Fair in Louisville. Classes on dating/preserving old photos. See www.rootsweb.com/~kylgs for details.

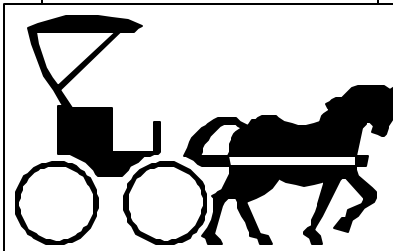
November 18: Don't miss our own **Mike Rouse** as he presents **old-time funeral customs!** Florence Government Center.

To view this newsletter online, visit www.BooneCountyKy.org. We appreciate the County providing us a place on their website.



Click on Boone County Heritage Tourism Council's website, www.boonecountyheritage.org. You'll be able to view old photos, learn about the County's rich history, find out about special events at local venues, and link to Dinsmore Homestead, Boone Cliffs, the Nature Conservancy and other local organizations' websites.

The mission statement of the Boone County Historical Society will be to develop awareness and promote appreciation of the history of Boone County.



Copies of **BOONE COUNTY: FROM MASTODONS TO THE MILLENNIUM**, the library-quality hard-bound volume full of fascinating stories and pictures of Boone County's history, are available during business hours at Florence Government Center for \$30. All proceeds go to the Boone County Historical Society.

September program: Civil War Doc-

Noted Boone County Physician Dr. J.M. Huey will present a program about his grandfather's experiences as a doctor and prisoner of war during the Civil War. The program will be held at 7 p.m. Thursday, September 16, in Community Room C, lower level of the Florence Government Center on Ewing Boulevard.

Subscribe to the **Northern Kentucky Heritage Magazine** — only \$15 / year for this wonderful semi-annual publication. Visit www.kenton.lib.ky.us/~histsoc or call 859/431-2666.

Northern Kentucky Encyclopedia Update

Northern Kentucky Encyclopedia needs authors for Boone County articles. Please check the website or contact Dr. Paul Tenkotte at 859/426-1776. As of June 25, there are a number of articles that do not have authors.

Visit <http://www.libertastechnologies.com/nkyencyclopedia/> for more info.

Transcription from the Boone County Recorder . . .

Compiled by Laurie Wilcox, Reference Associate, Boone Co. Public Library

*The following is a transcription of a series of articles from the **Boone County Recorder**. It is an interview with John Norris, who was a resident of Petersburg, telling of his experiences in the Battle of Lake Erie where he served under Perry in the war of 1812. The series starts on October 17, 1878 page 2: 3 and continues through November 7, 1878.*

Oct 17, 1878 page 2 col. 3.

"A Hero of Lake Erie"

Reminiscences of Perry's famous victory, as gathered from the lips of an eyewitness. Experience within therein of the last survivor "I came to fight sir" - An Honorable record. "

To The editor of the Recorder

By your indulgence I propose in a series of short articles to give to the reader of the Recorder a summary of an interview held by the writer with John Norris Sr. of Petersburg, Boone county, KY. in relation to acts and incidents performed and observed by Mr. Norris in the memorable battle of Lake Erie. The citizens of Boone should feel honored by having in their midst the aged vetran, whose deeds on that famous September morning gained him imperishable renown. His memory should be as precious as the actions were valuable. The first article of the series will be merely introductory, and if it should prove tedious and uninteresting, I hope your readers will pardon these defects on account of what is to follow.

A sail of two hours from Cincinnati down the beautiful Ohio on one of the fine steamers that navigate that river will take the tourist to Petersburg in Boone County, KY. This little village of some three hundred inhabitants nestles at the foot of a considerable hill, which during the Champlain epoch (and probably later), was an island surrounded nearly to its summit for years by the wide spread waters of the ancient river. During the long arctic winter of the Glacial Epoch, which preceded the Champlian, the whole northern portion of the continent was covered with a thick pall of ice, and the south-

ward movement of this immense mass moving slowly but irresistibly swept before it large masses of stones and gravel which filled up the valleys and river beds in this region. Subsequently this debris was to a great extent, displaced and removed by the impetuous flow of water caused by the melting of the ice, the rapidity of the currents so formed being accelerated by the upheaval of the region to the northeast and northward. Split rock, three miles below the town- the rugged escarpment extending for a mile above the mouth along the south bank of Woolper Creek - together with the large masses of conglomerate on Middle Creek, are some of the evidence of the tremendous energies displayed by the forces of nature during that era of the worlds geological history. Many other interesting evidence of these mighty geological events abound in the vicinity, but the purpose of these articles precludes a cursory mention even of the most import.

The site of Petersburg, with the immediate vicinity, is also an interesting field for the archaeologist, for here the remains of a prehistoric race are very numerous. From the hill back of the town a lover of the beautiful cannot fail to be charmed by the magnificent landscape spread out before him. For miles away to the dim distance the eye roams over one of the fertile regions of the earth. Here are interspersed sparkling rivers, large towns, smiling villages, cozy hamlets, beautiful farms, and all the evidence of thrift and comfort that can exist nowhere but in a specially favored clime. In this village in the midst of all the peace and plenty and beauty, lives the last of the brave volunteers who so gallantly assisted Perry to win his famous victory; if indeed he is not the last of all those who participated in the great naval battle.

W. H. Nelson

"Wishing to hear from the lips of "last survivor" some particulars of the great victory, the writer recently visited him with this object in view. Mr. Norris now resides in a neat cottage on the upper side of the town of Petersburg, adjoining the fine

farm which he still owns, and on which he lived for nearly fifty years. In his youth, and until a few years ago he was physically a fine specimen of Western manhood. Although now somewhat broken by age and enfeebled by disease, the quiet dignity of his commanding appearance could not fail to impress the most unobserving. His height is six feet, and when he joined the army in 1813 he weighed about 170 pounds. His frame was wiry and muscular, and his nerves under excellent control. He was one of the best of the famous rifle shots of those early days; a skillful boxer, having taken lessons from an expert in that manly art; and in all feats requiring strength, activity and address, he stood pre-eminent. Many interesting incidents are related of his daring and skill, one of which, although somewhat out of place, is worthy of relating here.

When the volunteers, on their arrival at the fleet, reached the deck of Caledonia, the sailors, being a rough lot, began boxing them around pretty roughly. Mr. Norris stood by looking on, for he was not molested, but seeing that his comrades, unable to defend themselves, were being worse and worse imposed upon, he said to a burly Irishman, who, from his great size and strength seemed to be the leader of the fray: "It seems to me you are very fond of abusing small men; why don't you attack one nearer your own size, and better able to defend himself"

"By G-d and is it yourself you man?" Responded the quick-tempered Irishman.

"That's just what I mean," was the calm reply.

This rendered the aggressive sailor furious, and, rushing on in his blind rage, he attempted to plant his powerful blows on the body of his smaller, but more agile antagonist. These Mr. N. easily warded off or skillfully evaded, and, watching his opportunity, delivered such a well directed blow, straight from the shoulder, that the son of Erin was sent sprawling on the dock, whence, like another famous hero on a similar occasion, "the subsequent proceedings interested him no more." This timely exhibition of skill and pluck had a soothing effect upon the boister-

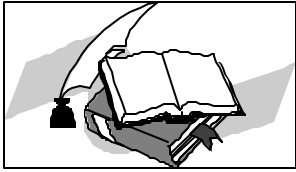
ous sailors, and thenceforth the volunteers were not similarly molested.

John Norris was born in Harford County Maryland, April 13, 1791. His father emigrated to Mason County, Kentucky in 1795, where the subject of this sketch grew up to manhood. In 1813, after repeated disastrous conflicts with the British and Indians, our army seemed no longer able to hold the territory north of the Ohio. In this crisis when it seemed as if all was lost, Governor Isaac Shelby issued a stirring call for volunteers to march against the foe. One of the first to respond to this patriotic summons was Mr. Norris, then twenty two years of age, who offered his services and was enrolled a member of Capt. John Payne's company of cavalry from Mason County. Mr. Norris was at that time unmarried, but to use his own expressive words, his future wife "was already courted", and he left her with the hope that a speedy victory would soon permit him to return and claim her for his own. And fortune favored him by permitting him to realize the fruition of both these dearest objects of his wishes.

During the stirring and decisive campaign, this company was a portion of the time attached to Col. R. M. Johnson's brigade, and the rest of the time to Col. Bell's squadron of Virginia light dragoons. On the march of Gov. Shelby's command to the lakes, nothing of special interest occurred, and the whole army, under Harrison, rested from the labors of the long and toilsome march in Camp Seneca, on the Sandusky River, near Lake Erie.

Pending this halt an express arrived in camp from Commodore Perry, asking for a number of volunteers to assist in manning his fleet, several vessels of which were so short of men as to be almost unfit to go into action. The Commodore's request was for "Fighting men, and none other but fighting men!" Mr. Norris soon heard of this and said he: "I thought this was a good chance. I had gone out to fight, and, though my time was nearly half out, I hadn't got what I went for."

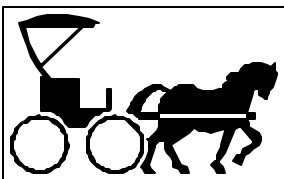
(To be continued in the next newsletter.)



Boone Co. Historical Society
P.O. Box 23
Florence, KY 41022-0023

Dr. J.M. Huey to speak at September 16 meeting!

The Boone County Historical Society provides program meetings on the third Thursday evenings of January, March, May, July, September and November. Unless otherwise announced, the meetings will be held at the Florence Government Center, 8100 Ewing Boulevard.



BCHS Membership Privileges

Annual Membership Fee is only \$15 per household, **due every January**. This modest fee covers the cost of our newsletter mailings. We appreciate all who have joined the Boone County Historical Society to help us preserve and make known some of the history of our County. Encourage your friends and neighbors to join and attend our meetings. Membership fees can be sent to:

**BOONE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. BOX 23
FLORENCE, KY 41022-0023**

The Boone County Historical Society has received **tax-exempt status**. This means that all gifts to the Society are tax deductible.