

Clio at f5.6

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September 4, 1888, marked a turning point in the study of history. On that date, George Eastman received a patent for his Kodak #1. For \$25, the average man could purchase one of the cameras loaded with film. After taking the roll, the camera was returned to the factory where prints were made in a circular format on two inch square paper for each of the 100 negatives. The camera was reloaded and returned to the patron. Thus, everyman could be his own historian, to borrow a term coined by Carl Becker in his address to The American Historical Association at its meeting in Minneapolis December 29, 1931. However, Becker noted that "the event itself once occurred, but as an actual event it has disappeared; so that in dealing with it the only objective reality we can observe or test is some material trace which the event has left—usually a written document." With the camera, the image of the event could be preserved—even if it showed warts and all.

In 1988, I was asked to serve on the advisory board for a pictorial history of Paducah. Citizens Bank and Trust Company acted as the host for the project which was under G. Bradley Publishing Inc. of St. Louis. Later, I was asked to write the text for the book. This paper examines some of the problems that I encountered. A second purpose is to encourage the Jackson Purchase Historical Society to consider a similar project which I feel is sorely needed.

The first part of Kentucky to be seen by Europeans was not the area around the Cumberland Gap. Father Marquette described the East bank of the Mississippi River below the confluence with the Ohio in 1673. Still, the land between the Tennessee and the Mississippi rivers remained Kentucky's last frontier due to the hostility of the Chickasaw. As a result, historians generally ignore the region in large part.

When the book appeared, many people came up to me and said that they wished they had known about the project as they had an attic full of pictures. I would assure them that I wished they had shared their trove with us. The major obstacle to the successful completion of the book was communications or the lack of it. Either the public did not read the appeals for pictures in the newspapers or ignored them. It seems to me that is another factor that should encourage you to sponsor such an undertaking. You have a ready made network throughout the Purchase region that would assure dissemination of information and also have available a cadre of interested historians who could help evaluate and seek out needed materials.

We got a plethora of photographs of the same event but found it next to impossible to find some things that had to be included. For example, Linn Boyd

made a significant contribution to the Compromise of 1850 and was rewarded with being made Speaker of the House for two sessions. Later, he moved to Paducah and was elected Lieutenant Governor of Kentucky, dying before he could take office. After the book came out a great grandson wrote me, but at the time I had to use a picture of Boyd that the Barkley Museum made available.

Having agreed to write the book, I dashed off forty or fifty pages before meeting with the publisher. Needless to say I was nonplused when I was told that I could have two pages per chapter and not more than six or seven lines per caption. Visual impact had to take precedence over the written word. I had to re-think my approach to history. It required a realization of the graphic quality of the event. Even the location on the page was important. I had never really thought about which side of the book was the more important, the left or the right.

As work on the book continued, pictures began to cluster around themes. We decided to include several vignettes such as the tobacco industry in Paducah. This led, in turn, to a discussion of the Black Patch war since the trial that ended the night riding in western Kentucky and Tennessee was held in the federal court in Paducah.

Churches, particularly the pioneer churches, were gathered into one section of the book. An effort was made to assure that the black community would be given equitable representation, which proved to be rather difficult as pictures of the earliest church buildings did not materialize. The decision was made in more than one instance to include second generation structures.

The railroad industry was so important to Paducah that we decided to include more than one section devoted to the evolution of the industry. We were fortunate to find several excellent photographs dating from the end of the Civil War until the early 1920s that went into one section. I am particularly proud of the latter section on the railroads since I spent some fifteen years as an official on the Illinois Central Railroad. In addition to some splendid photographs of the shops, I sought out views of the agent/ operator. The family of Oliver Gregson shared their pictures of this man who spent almost fifty years as a telegrapher. Other pictures were selected to show the variety of steam locomotives found in the Paducah area, particularly the 2600 class that was built in the IC shops here.

The camera allowed the average citizen to capture how he perceived his world. We found a family album at the Market House Museum and included representative shots that illustrate the reaction frequently found to seeing a lens aimed at one. Otherwise normal men are induced to put on their female friend's hats; families pose for holidays, and children had rather be somewhere else but are trapped on film. A moment of the past is preserved. Words are not sufficient to recreate the same effect as a good photograph.

We were fortunate to find a collection of excellent photographs put to-

gether around 1910 by W. W. Sacra. As it happened, I could cry over this part of the book. Much of the book went directly from the word processor to the type without a page copy due to the press of time. As it happened, the photographer's name appeared in one place as Sacre instead of Sacra. Utilizing the remarkable technology now available, I tried to search for such errors and correct them. The end result was that the name was misspelled throughout rather than corrected!

We were fortunate to find two pictures of the same event at the same spot by two divergent groups. Bob Evans was kind enough to supply us with two pictures taken at the foot of Broadway showing baptism—one by a black congregation and the other by a white congregation. Faith was firm in each group despite the rigorous segregation of the early 1930s.

No study of Paducah would be complete without a look at the various floods that have ravaged the community. We got pictures dating from 1884 and included 1913 and 1937. Can you imagine twenty thousand refugees? The latter flood was so severe in Paducah that the army evacuated the entire community for a time. In addition to the usual shots of buildings and streets under water, we found some that showed the impact on the residents and their animals. Naturally, the cow on the second floor had to be included. This animal was pictured in the National Geographic magazine during the flood. Bill Powell gave us one of his pictures that was as good or better than the one in the national publication. I have often wondered about that cow. It stayed on the second floor porch throughout the flood. Anyone knows that it is easy to get a cow to climb steps; but how do you get it to come down? That is another story, no doubt.

Famous Paducahans were featured. I tried to show Vice President Alben Barkley in his role as a resident rather than as a national political figure. His family supplied pictures of the "Veep" in his home with his grandchildren.

A page on food required a shot of Jim "Skinhead" Skaggs as his restaurant was featured in two national magazines as being one of the outstanding breakfast sources in the nation in 1978. Nor could I ignore the tradition of barbecue that has flourished here. Floyd Starnes is shown preparing some of the delicious meat ca. 1963.

Who else would merit a place in this gallery of honor? Nat Dortch taught for old PJC and has the honor of having a fossil named for him. Clarence "Big House" Gaines currently is the "winningest" active coach in college basketball at Winston-Salem State University. The final Paducahan selected was one of the few left-handed golfers on the professional tour. Russ Cochran earned his PGA ticket in 1982.

The book closes with a series of symbols. When he was Mayor, Tom Wilson saw to it that the city got historical markers depicting important events in the history of the community. One such tablet is shown. Other monuments, such

as that marking the westernmost extent of the 1937 flood on Jefferson Street, remembers the suffering of the citizens of Paducah. A lone sentry at Oak Grove Cemetery stands in tribute to those who fell defending their beliefs and their country. Other symbols of Paducah are views of dogwood in blossom, horses circling Carson Park with cart and driver, and the entry into Noble Park (before the rides were discontinued.)

The final image sought to convey a sense of continuity. Bob Shapiro was one of the few photographers in the nation whose work was selected to appear in One Day U.S.A. - A Self Portrait of America's Cities (ed. Richard Carver in 1986). In fact, Shapiro had two pictures: one showing a baby born just after midnight to start the book and the other a night shot of a funeral home that closed that book and mine. Life and death continue—such is the progress of Paducah.

Note: Those attending the session at Paducah will note that I have assumed a privilege often exercised by members of Congress to “extend my remarks.” Since my speech was extemporaneous, that event happened but cannot be recalled exactly as it occurred. Everyman, like Becker’s historian, is free to make of it what they will.