



Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society

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2014



“Toto, We’re Not in Napa Valley Anymore”
The Viticulture Industry on Prospect Hill,
Covington, Kentucky

Charles Stolzenburg (1867-1903):
A Stonemason Carves His Name into History
on the Roebling Suspension Bridge

Charles Stolzenburg (1867-1903)

A Stonemason Carves His Name into History on the Roebling Suspension Bridge

Don Heinrich Tolzmann

A frequent question received by the Covington-Cincinnati Suspension Bridge Committee is whether it has any information on who worked on the bridge. Such questions come from families who have heard stories about an ancestor who is said to have worked on the bridge and the question finds its way to me as the Historian for the Committee.¹ We definitely do know of one person who did work on the bridge, because he carved his name on top of the northern tower. Who was he and how did his name get there?

From 1895 to 1899, work was undertaken to reconstruct the bridge under the direction of Wilhelm Hildenbrand.² One of the stonemasons was Charles Stolzenburg. He was born in 1867 in Bellevue, Kentucky, the son of Frederick S. Stolzenburg (1841-1926) and Louise Mattes Stolzenburg (1845-79).³ Both parents were members of St. John's German Evangelical Church, now the St. John's United Church of Christ in Newport, and are buried at the Evergreen Cemetery in Southgate, Kentucky. According to church records, the father was German-born and the mother likely was also.⁴

An obituary for Charles Stolzenburg indicates that he died in 1903 at age 36 and that he left a widow and several children and that he was buried at Evergreen Cemetery.⁵ The cause of death was pulmonary tuberculosis. The 1898 city directory of Covington lists his occupation as that of a stonecutter.⁶ From this information, we can draw the conclusion that he was employed during the 1890s reconstruction of the bridge.

We can date him to the bridge reconstruction because his name is followed by the date it was carved. The depth of the carving reveals that this was the work of a stonemason, as the name is not scratched, but carefully chiseled into the stone by the tools only someone in that trade would have had.



Upper image, showing the chiseled name of Charles Stolzenburg, is three separate photos placed together.

Lower photo: close-up of the date carved on the tower.

Photos courtesy: Nancy Wood, Public Information Officer, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, District 6



The carving measures roughly 2.5 inches by 2.5 feet and spells out: "Chas. Stolzenburg May 28, 1898."

Since his name is on top of one of the towers, his carving is relatively unknown. We can only conjecture what may have caused him to carve his name there, but it most likely was the same reason that has motivated people to carve their names on stone going back to ancient Egypt when stonemasons inscribed the pyramids with their names: they wanted to carve their names into history. Charles Stolzenburg accomplished this, resulting in us now having the name of one of the many who worked on the bridge. It is a tiny footnote in the history of the Roebling Suspension Bridge, but a footnote nonetheless that sheds light on who worked on the bridge.⁷

Endnotes

1. Due to the frequent inquiries regarding people who worked on the bridge, the author is collecting a file on the topic. If you have information on someone who worked on it, please get in touch with him: dhtolzmann@yahoo.com

A Look Back at The Headlines

An on-going feature reliving local headlines.

This issue features:

The Daily Commonwealth – July 4, 1880.

In The City

Grass at the courthouse yard had at last been mowed.

A.L. Graves has reestablished the Burlington bus line.

Thirty of Robert Stickney's Circus Troupe, which shows here Monday next, stopped at the Clinton Hotel on Sunday.

Early Sunday morning, officers Cutler and Holtrup captured two men on Eleventh Street, each bearing away with him two fine game chickens. The culprits at first refused to carry their bounty to the courthouse but were compelled to do so by the arresting officers. They will be tried this afternoon.

Several accidents have occurred within the city incident to the popular mode of celebrating our Independence Day. The boys do not regard it as any sort of a Fourth of July unless there is an incessant bang of shotguns, pistols, and crackers, and a whiz of rockets, serpents, and many other ingenious and devilish arrangements of flashing material which endangers property, and life and limb. In the three days' celebration just passed, these displays were more universal, more incessant than ever before. The only wonder is that there were not more and worse accidents. We heard of no attempt whatsoever to check the nuisance. People who left the city to spend time in the country did well to do so.

Perhaps one of the most surprising facts in connection with the celebration of the Fourth of July was a picnic in Pattontown without a fight!

Stolzenburg – continued

2. Regarding the reconstruction of the bridge, see: Joseph F. Gastright, "Wilhelm Hildenbrand and the 1895 Reconstruction of the Roebling Suspension Bridge," *Northern Kentucky Heritage*. 8:1(2000): 1-14.

3. Biographical information on Stolzenburg and his parents can be found on the Internet at *Find A Grave*.

4. For the records of the church, see: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~kycampbe/united1859marriages.htm>

5. For the obituary of Stolzenburg, see: "Covington Deaths and Funerals," *Kentucky Post*. (December 11, 1903), p. 8, column 1-2. Thanks to Bill Stolz, Kentucky History Librarian at the Kenton County Public Library for finding this obituary.

6. Thanks also to Bill Stolz for this reference.

7. Descendants of another stonemason report that their ancestor, Herman Heinrich Meiners (1821-1904) also worked on the bridge. According to *Find A Grave*, he was born in Ankum, Germany, came to America in 1841 and was then apprenticed with a stonemason. Given his earlier dates, however, he would most likely have worked on the original construction of the bridge, rather than its later reconstruction. Meiners is buried at the cemetery of the Mutter Gottes Kirche/Mother of God church in Covington. Although this obituary indicates he worked on the bridge, there are no employment records extant to verify this. Nevertheless, the author will add information on him to the file he is collecting regarding people who worked on, or are said to have worked on the bridge.

Napa Valley – continued

14. *Ibid*

15. Thompson, Egbert A., *The Cultivator and the Country Gentleman: Devoted to the Practice and Science of Agriculture and Horticulture at Large and to all the Various Departments of Rural and Domestic Economy*, Vol. 31, 32, page 190, 1867 Luther Tucker and Son, Albany, New York

16. Harmeling, Deborah (sister) O.S.B., *The Story of Covington's Monte Casino, Thomas More College*, Crestview Hills, Kentucky

17. *Covington Journal*, 1871, page 3

18. *Newport Local*, 1877, page 2

19. Harmeling, Deborah (sister) O.S.B., *The Story of Covington's Monte Casino, Thomas More College*, Crestview Hills, Kentucky

20. *Ibid*

Additional Resources

DuBreuil, A., *Vineyard Culture Improved and Cheapened*, 1867, Robert Clarke and Company Publishers, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Culture of the Grape and Wine Making. Fifth Edition. Moore, 1861, Anderson and Company, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Chorlton, William, *The American Grape Growers Guide Intended Especially for the American Climate*, 1856, C.M. Saxton & Co., Agricultural Book Publishers, New York.

Editors Table: Cincinnati Wines. *The Cincinnati Lancet and Observer*. Volume 12, Page 635, 1869, E.B. Stevens, M.D., Cincinnati

Editors Table: Cincinnati Wines. *The Cincinnati Lancet and Observer*. Volume 31, Page 636, 1870, E.B. Stevens, M.D., Cincinnati

Williams Cincinnati Directory, 1871

To the Bulletin Editor:

Re: "From Pioneer days to the 1920s" (March/April Bulletin) Records indicate that the Hearne House at 5th Street on the east side of Garrard was built in the early 1870s. Regarding the old firehouse shown in the picture (now "Tickets" tavern), an earlier engine house at Pike & Washington preceded the location at 6th and Washington. According to John Burns ("History of Covington, Kentucky through 1865") in 1864 Covington acquired its first steam powered engine and established a full time, professional department. The city then built the firehouse at 6th & Washington in 1866. It was later rebuilt and remodeled to provide for newer amenities and equipment including fire trucks; it was a firehouse until the 1970s.

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I Bet You Didn't Know

*Tidbits from Kentucky's heritage
for every day of the calendar year*

July 4, 1794: The first Independence Day celebration in Kentucky was held at the plantation of Col. William Price in Jessamine County.

July 9, 1850: Zachary Taylor died and was buried at what is now the Zachary Taylor National Cemetery near Louisville. Taylor is the only US president buried in Kentucky.

July 13, 1926: Ale 8-1, known as "Kentucky's soft drink," was first introduced by G.L. Wainscott in Winchester.

August 8, 1801: The Great Revival at Cane Ridge was the largest of all the early camp meetings, and marked the beginning of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), founded by Rev. Barton Stone, minister of the Cane Ridge Presbyterian Church in Bourbon County.

"On This Day In Kentucky" — Robert Powell

Programs and Notices

Society Members Annual Election Meeting
Also open to the public. For details, see insert in this Bulletin

"Vietnam: Our Story," Behringer Crawford Museum

This exhibit (every day except Monday) is based on stories told by local veterans, about their military service and the medical and social after-effects as veterans returning to civilian life. It includes public attitudes seen and heard of back home. BCM curator Tiffany Hoppenjans interviewed dozens of veterans. On display are uniforms, communications apparatus, other artifacts, photos and memorabilia with local and personal-story connections. The Behringer Crawford Museum in Devou Park is open six days a week (closed on Monday).

Ramage Museum Lecture Series

On Sunday, July 13, learn about the namesake of Fort Wright, KY., Civil War General Horatio G. Wright. Living Historian and Ramage Museum volunteer, Thomas Kreidler will portray the General as part of this year's lecture series. The lecture will cover the General's nearly 50 years in uniform, his role in protecting Cincinnati from Confederate invasion, and of the culmination of his military career as Chief of the Corps of Engineers. Location: Fort Wright City Building, 409 Kyles Lane, Fort Wright, KY 41011. Cost per Lecture: \$5.00 general public; \$4.00 Museum members. Location: Fort Wright City Building, 409 Kyles Lane, Fort Wright, KY 41011

Gaines Tavern History Center, Walton Kentucky

Summer Schedule: Sunday, July 6, & Sunday, August 17, 1:00 to 4:00 p. m., open house; Saturday, July 19, open 12:00 to 4:00, an Abner Gaines Family & Friends Reunion (Gaines descendants admitted free), Sunday August 3, 1:00 to 4:00, Art on the Lawn & Ice Cream Social. Adults \$3.00; students, \$2.00; under five no fee.

Volunteers Needed

The Society is working on a massive project of re-publishing the historic Christopher Gist Papers. The originals are in 12 volumes, approximately 100 pages each. We need volunteers to type them into the computer so we can edit them and reprint them so more can enjoy them. If you would like to help, please contact Karl Lietzenmayer (859) 261-2807 as soon as possible.