

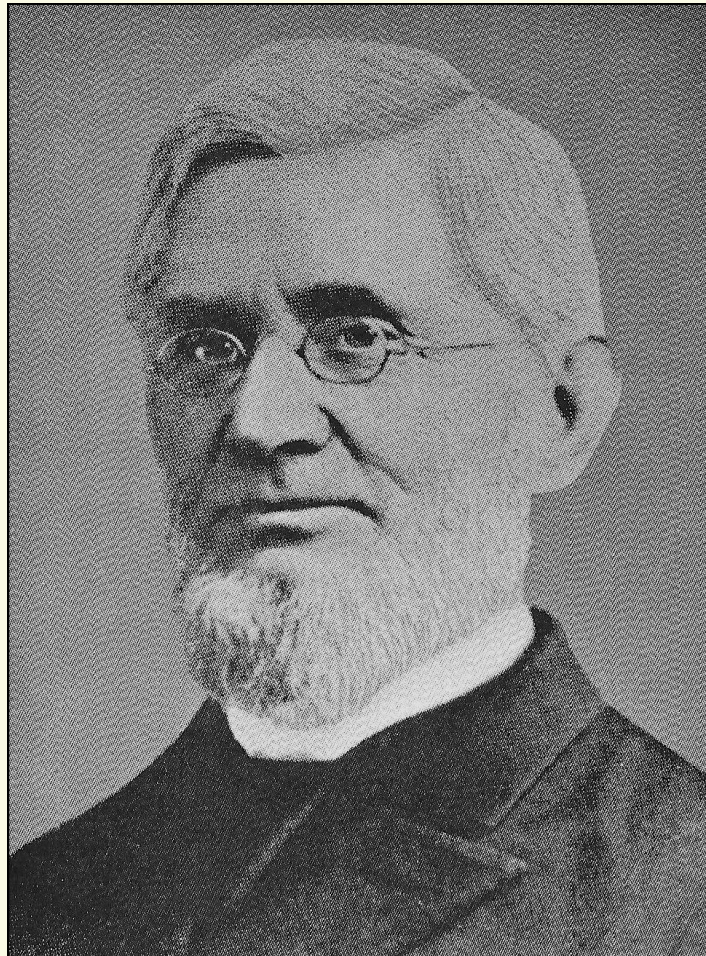


# Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society

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May / June

2016



**Amos Shinkle:  
Profile of a Self-made Man**

**Out of Kentucky:  
Oxford, Ohio's African-American Community**

# Amos Shinkle (1818-1892): Profile of a Self-made Man

Don Heinrich Tolzmann

One of the murals on the Covington, Kentucky riverfront by Robert Dafford depicts the Suspension Bridge with the two persons chiefly responsible for its construction in the foreground: John A. Roebling (1806-69) and Amos Shinkle (1818-92). Both names also appear on the marker nearby that indicates that the bridge is on the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>1</sup>

Roebling of course built the bridge, but Amos Shinkle coordinated fund raising to make it happen. He was the enterprising businessman who became the driving force of the Covington & Cincinnati Bridge Company, serving on its board from 1856 to 1865, and then as its president from 1866 until his death.

In my book *John A. Roebling and His Suspension Bridge on the Ohio River*, I devoted a chapter to the “Roebling mystique,” as a key to understanding his life and work, and in like manner, this article aims to explore the personality of Amos Shinkle.<sup>2</sup> I begin by looking, first, at the standard sources that contain biographical information about him, and, second, his family history, and then conclude by trying to bring a profile of his personality into focus.

## Shinkle in Review

Amos Shinkle is best known for his service as President of the Covington & Cincinnati Bridge Company, so a good place to start is with comments on the role he played there. Harry R. Stevens writes in his book *The Ohio Bridge*, “From the day Shinkle was elected to the board, February 5, 1856, a new spirit entered into the company.” He also notes, “Ten years later, in large part as a result of his wisdom, energy, and strength, the Ohio Bridge was completed and opened as the greatest bridge in the world.” For the next quarter of a century, after the dedication of the bridge in 1867, he successfully led the bridge company as its president, “...helping the bridge keep step with her (the nation’s) progress.”<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, he solidified his position as one of the wealthiest persons in the Greater Cincinnati area, while contributing generously to philanthropic causes throughout the area.

One of the earliest lengthy biographical sketches of Shinkle’s life was his obituary in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*:

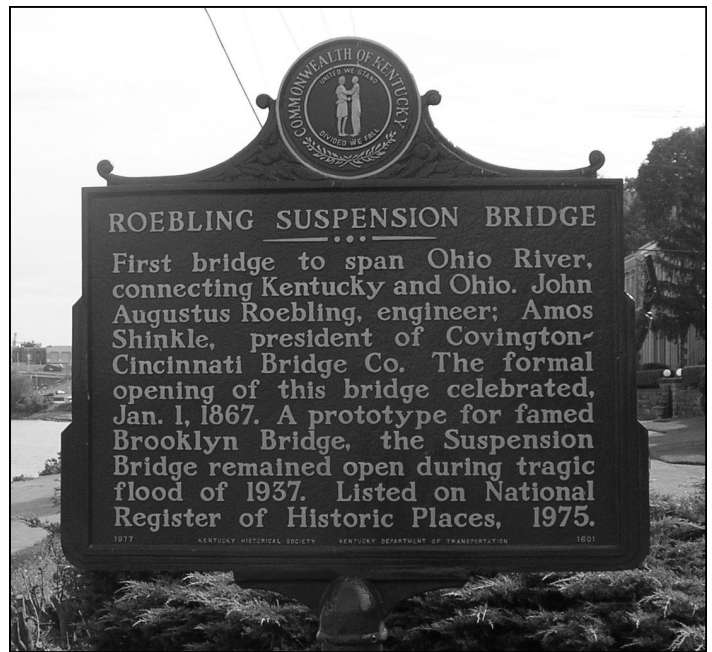
*“Amos Shinkle was a man in all the word implies. He was generous to a fault, but although he contributed thousands of dollars every year to charity, no one ever heard him say a word about it. He built the Protestant Children’s Home in Covington and gave it to the city. He has made a liberal donation for its support ever since it has been built. He has contributed to every Methodist Conference since he has been a member, and that has been for the past 20 years. His contributions to church and charity have for the past 20 years amounted to over \$30,000 a year. Mr. Shinkle has attended the dedication of every Methodist Church in Covington and for every dollar that the congregation has given he also gave one. He has given a half million dollars to Methodist churches and conferences during his life. Mr. Shinkle leaves a fortune estimated at \$2,500,000 and he does not owe it to anyone. He made every dollar of it by his own exertions. The bulk of Mr. Shinkle’s fortune has been amassed since 1865 when he obtained control of the Suspension Bridge and First National Bank. The mansion in Covington in which Mr. Shinkle died is one of the finest in Northern Kentucky, and cost nearly \$350,000.”<sup>4</sup>*

An even lengthier biography can be found in Charles F. Goss’s history of the area, which will be briefly summarized here, focusing on references to Shinkle’s character traits. It begins by referring to him as “...a prominent factor in financial circles of Cincinnati,” noting that his “...rapid rise as a man of affairs placed him in commanding position among the men of his community, and he carried into successful operation extensive and important enterprises.”<sup>5</sup>

Amos Shinkle was born on a farm at White Oak Creek in Brown County, Ohio on 11 August 1818, but left home at an early age with only 75 cents in his pocket. After getting a job as a cook on an Ohio River flatboat, he traveled all the way to New Orleans and back, and therefore had seen a bit of the world, demonstrating ambition to get ahead early in life. His flatboat career was a success: *“By dint of industry and frugality he eventually acquired the capital sufficient to purchase a flatboat of his own.”* He next tried his hand in the grocery business, but soon faced bankruptcy. Goss comments that Shinkle turned this negative into a positive: *“In due time, through unremitting effort and much self-denial, he paid every cent of his indebtedness, thus gaining a reputation for integrity that proved the foundation of his future success and definite prosperity.”*<sup>6</sup> According to Goss, Shinkle was able to retire in 1864.

During the 1862 Siege of Cincinnati he was appointed Colonel of the Kentucky Home Guards, which was assigned responsibility for the defense of Covington, an indication of the respect he commanded by that time. Other indications of his leadership skills can be found not only in his work with the bridge company, but also in his having founded and serving as president of the First National Bank of Covington and the Covington Gas Company. Additionally, Shinkle served on the Covington city council, and was considered an unostentatious but a recognized power. He was also directly or indirectly involved in many organizations and institutions, including the Covington board of education, the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows, the Protestant Children’s Home, the Freedman’s Aid Society, etc. The Methodist Episcopal Church was particularly important to Shinkle, with Goss noting that: *“he threw himself unreservedly and with characteristic zeal into the work of building up the organization and its interests.”* He describes him *“a noble specimen of the devout, God-fearing Christian,”* who was *“a pillar and pride of the local church.”*<sup>7</sup>

E. Polk Johnson’s *History of Kentucky and Kentuckians: The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Industry and Modern Activities* was published the same year as Goss’s history, and also provides a biographical sketch of Shinkle.<sup>8</sup> It covers the same



Historical marker on the Covington, Kentucky riverfront  
*Courtesy the author*

ground, but does amplify on some of the character traits mentioned by Goss. Johnson writes of Shinkle: *“He was well endowed with the cardinal virtues of industry, integrity and frugality, and he carefully conserved his earnings, with the result that he finally became the owner of a flat-boat.”* He also notes Shinkle’s *“intrinsic honesty of purpose and his determination to do right under all circumstances.”* Furthermore, he was *“distinguished throughout by wise forethought and inflexible integrity of purpose, permitting no compromise with expediency.”* He elaborates:

*“He was conservative to a degree, but missed no opportunities, and through his indefatigable energy, fair dealings and progressive methods he built up a large business, by medium of which he was a substantial capitalist at the time of his retirement therefrom, in 1864.”*<sup>9</sup>

Johnson also refers to *“his executive ability and mature judgment”* with regard to his service as head of the local Home Guard during the Civil War. And, he mentions that statements like the following were made of his efforts on behalf of the bridge after he joined the bridge company:

*“Through numerous and almost appalling discouragements he never lost faith in the success of this great project until he beheld its grand actuality ten years later, becoming president of the company at the time of its reorganization and giving its affairs the benefit of his*

*splendid administrative powers and capitalistic support.*"<sup>10</sup>

Finally, he takes note of Shinkle's faith:

*"His piety was a primary and inwrought conviction and he consecrated to the church and to his fellow men that which was his to bestow. It would be a violation of the modesty of those who bear his name to enumerate the gifts to various causes which signaled the period of his religious life, but it is simple justice to his memory to state that always munificent in his benefactions, he in some years distributed to charity sums which many an ambitious man would regard as adequate fortunes."*<sup>11</sup>

Another informative, but critical commentary comes from Washington Roebling, who served as Assistant Engineer for the building of the Ohio Bridge. In the biography he wrote of his father Washington Roebling noted that Shinkle made money *"...in everything he touched. If he lost in anything, he did not sit down and mope and cry but before the day was over he had started something new."* He explained: *"Amos could make money where all others failed – he could buy cheap and sell dear, and was familiarly known as a skinner. Amos was in the water works, gas works, street cars, glass works, coal, tobacco, whiskey, stone, hardware, bridge, real estate, he owned seven wrecking steamers, and a dozen enterprises"*<sup>12</sup>

But while Shinkle earned praise from others for his frugality, Roebling chided him, noting: *"With his contemptible parsimony he was a thorn in my father's side; why he actually rented out the towers (of the bridge) to be plastered over with advertisements from top to bottom."* And when the bridge opened, Shinkle *"...mounted a barrel and collected pennies from 11 A.M. until 11 P.M. Not a penny got away from him, and the basket held \$700 worth – such men deserve to succeed."* Roebling claimed: *"Raised a wharf rat himself he kept his only son in a palace in Italy to wear off the plebian stains which stuck all over the Shinkle hide."*<sup>13</sup>

In defense of Shinkle, it should be noted that he did begin work on the Ohio River at an early age, and was a self-made man who climbed the ladder of success, making his way from the bottom rung to the top. He clearly did not come from the upper echelons of society, but Washington's sarcastic reference

to him as a "wharf rat" is unwarranted, as this was actually a derogatory term his father used for workers he felt were unreliable or incompetent, and Shinkle was neither.<sup>14</sup>

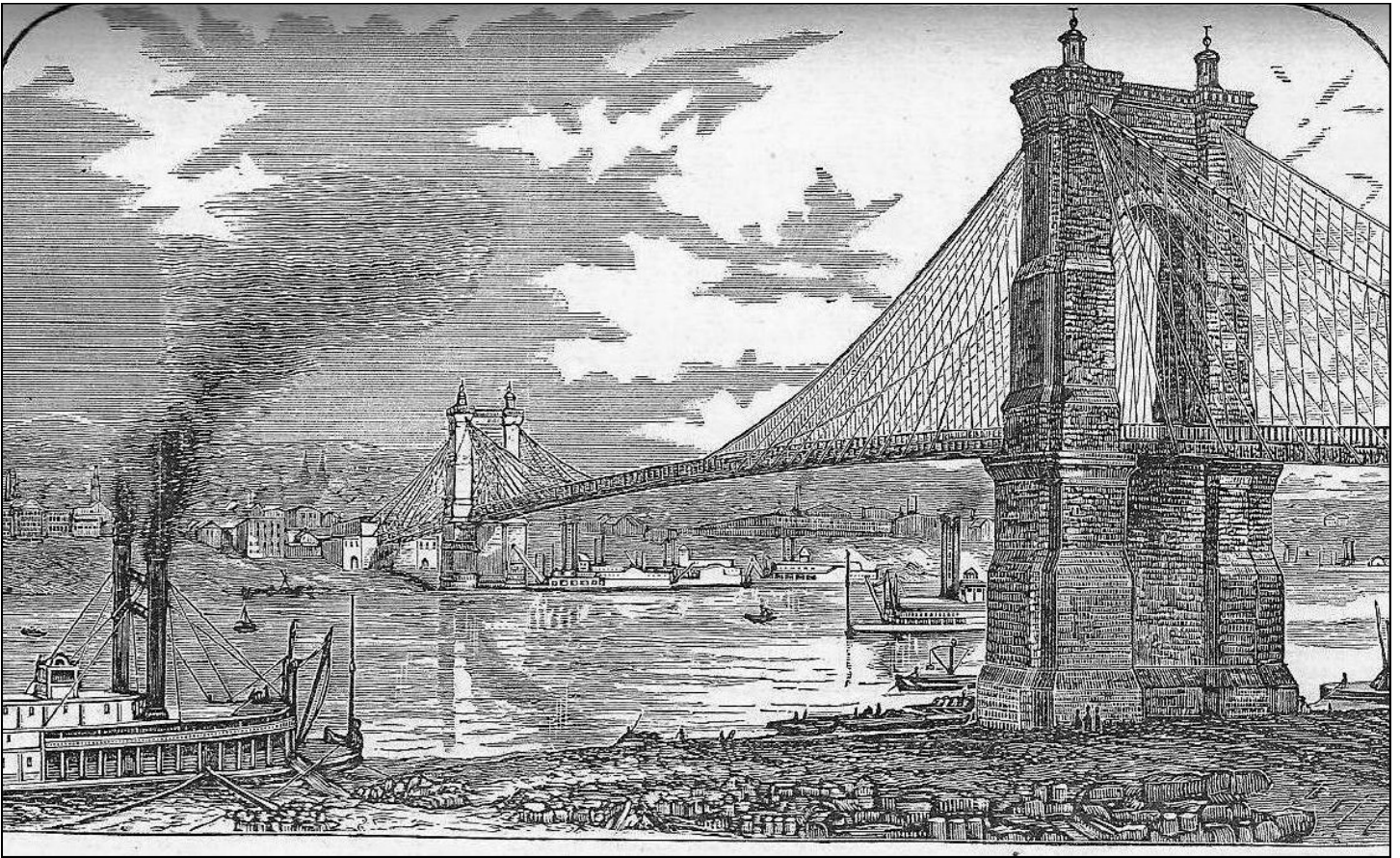
Other biographical sketches could be mentioned, but the ones covered thus far provide a good survey of how Shinkle was viewed.<sup>15</sup> One factor, however, that has been surprisingly overlooked in these works is Shinkle's family history.

### Family History

A genealogy of the Shinkle family was published in Cincinnati in 1897, and will be briefly summarized here, supplemented as necessary with additional information found elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> Shinkle came from a Pennsylvania German family that settled in Ohio in the 1790s. His great-grandfather, Philip Carl Schenckel (1717-78) was born in Edenkoben in the Rhenish Palatinate. This was a region that had been devastated in the Thirty Years War (1618-48), and the War of Spanish Succession (1701-14), which were conflicts that ultimately led to the so-called "Palatine Exodus."<sup>17</sup> Philip Carl came to America in 1752, and settled in Heidelberg Township of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, an area heavily populated by Palatine immigrants.

The family genealogy indicates that his son, and Shinkle's grandfather, Hans Phillip Schenckel (1753-1829) was born in Heidelberg Township. He served in the Heidelberg Company as a private during the American Revolution, and then in 1796 traveled with his family to Pittsburgh. He took a flatboat down the Ohio River to a location near Higginsport, Ohio. Like his father, he was a farmer, as he acquired 300 acres of land there in 1805. His name is also found spelled as Shinkle, as it came to be spelled in the following generations.

Hans Phillip's son, and Amos Shinkle's father, was Peter Shinkle (1795-1886). According to the Find A Grave website, he was born in New Hope, Bucks County, Pennsylvania.<sup>18</sup> In Higginsport, Ohio he took up learning the trade of cabinet and furniture making. His business apparently was successful, as he sold furniture up and down the Ohio River as far as New Orleans. In 1844, he acquired a farm near Catlettsburg, Kentucky.



The Roebling Suspension Bridge connecting Covington, Kentucky and Cincinnati, Ohio  
*Courtesy the author*

In 1846, Amos Shinkle moved to Covington, followed by his brother, Vincent (1822-85), and his father, Peter, in 1848. Together with his brother he went into business, forming what became the Champion Coal and Tow-boat Company in 1847.<sup>19</sup> Aside from the coal trade, it was engaged in shipping on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers with connections to New Orleans, and was also involved in steamboat construction. Amos remained a partner until 1856, when he sold out his share so that he could turn his attention to real estate; this was right at the time when he got onto the board of the bridge company.

Shinkle was financially able to retire in 1865, according to the official family genealogy, although Goss and Johnson indicate it was 1864. In any event, it was an early retirement, as Shinkle would have been only 46 or 47. The genealogy emphasizes Shinkle's business acumen: "*Rising by his unaided exertions from poverty to wealth, honorably in every relation to life, his benevolence found constant expression in his liberal benefactions.*"<sup>20</sup>

James Owen Knauss, Jr. discusses several of the foremost character traits of the Pennsylvania Germans, two of which are quite prominent in the life and work of Amos Shinkle: his religiosity and his frugality. Knauss, Jr. writes that religion "*...was one of the dominating factors in Pennsylvania German civilization...*" He also stresses "*...their habits of industry, frugality and sobriety,*" and singles out frugality as one of the most striking traits of the Pennsylvania Germans.<sup>21</sup>

### Shinkle vs. Shinkle

In the 1880s, Amos Shinkle faced new challenges with a family crisis that had financial implications for him, and sheds light on his personality as well. His father began talking about getting married for a second time; his first wife had died in 1874. However, all his children objected to this for two reasons. First, they felt that he was too old. Second, they claimed that his prospective bride, Martha A. (Mattie) Bedgood, was actually after the money of his son Amos. Due to these objections, Peter Shinkle (age 88) and Martha (age 54) eloped on a trip to Lou-

isville in spring 1882, causing his children to assert that their father was not in his right mind.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the marriage was not in complete harmony, and the couple separated the following year, but then got back together again, even after Peter Shinkle had indicated he might file for divorce. Amos said that his father had acted childishly, and “..had been duped into the marriage.”<sup>23</sup> This turn of events, of course, was naturally quite upsetting to the Shinkle family, which was now deeply divided between father and children.

In January 1884, a lawsuit was filed by Peter, not for divorce, but rather against his son Amos. No doubt instigated by the new Mrs. Shinkle, this served to further enflame the situation. An agreement, however, was reached between both parties, but not lived up to, according to the new Mrs. Shinkle. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* reported:

*“Mr. Shinkle had lived with his son Amos for many years, and after his marriage sued his son for \$18,000, alleged to be due for services. This matter was compromised. But Mrs. Shinkle says this compromise was not lived up to by Amos Shinkle. The old man had intended suing to compel the performance of the compromise, but death overtook him before he did so. The contents of the will show the feelings that existed between Mr. Shinkle and his children. It says: ‘By the kindness and good nursing and faithful attention of my dear wife, I feel that my life has been prolonged. When others to whom I confidently looked for comfort and attention in sickness and in my declining years forsook me.’”<sup>24</sup>*

Peter Shinkle also bequeathed a manuscript copy of his autobiography, which aimed to “detail the trouble occasioned by his second marriage and the results thereof.”<sup>25</sup> Although Peter Shinkle did not live to file another lawsuit against his son, his widow did in January 1888.<sup>26</sup> She claimed that Amos had initially complied with their agreement, and began making payments on 1 July 1884, but had made the last one on 28 November 1886. This payment was made shortly after Peter’s death on 19 November 1886, and she claimed that Amos still owed \$16,729. In addition to these payments, Amos had also covered his father’s funeral costs.<sup>27</sup>

Since no further news can be found about the case, it can be assumed that it was settled out of

court, bringing the whole sad affair to an end. Amos actually handled the matter as fairly as possible, making payments while his father was still alive, and then bringing them to a close shortly after his death. He no doubt felt that he had done his duty, and that there was no justification for further payments, but when pressed further must have come to a private settlement.

Washington Roebling commented on the situation, noting: “At 88, the old man (Peter) married a biddy, just to plague the eminently respectable Amos.”<sup>28</sup> However, this obviously was not the case, and must be dismissed as a sarcastic remark on the part of Washington, which is reminiscent of his earlier remark about Shinkle’s frugality.

It is impossible to determine whether or not Peter Shinkle was of sound mind, but his elopement at age 88 to a woman three decades younger, his estrangement from his family, and his lawsuit against Amos certainly do raise questions. Commenting on the first lawsuit, Amos said that he regretted “...the condition of his father’s mind, and the fact that by any extraneous influence he could be induced to bring this suit.”<sup>29</sup> Early on, the family had cited this factor as the root cause of their father’s second marriage and estrangement.

The lawsuits filed against Amos clearly validate the concerns that the family had about the new Mrs. Shinkle, and what had motivated her to marry Peter. His son Amos, fortunately, took a levelheaded approach to dealing with the difficult issues his family faced, settling what must have been an extraordinarily painful matter, and he certainly must have earned the sympathy and respect of all those who knew what his family had to endure in the latter years of their father’s life. After a lifelong career of success, it must have been a bitter pill for Amos Shinkle, but it was swallowed, and life went on as before.

## Conclusion

On the basis of the descriptions we have found of Shinkle, the following profile comes into focus: He was an ambitious, energetic, and industrious person, who was well known for the zealous, but careful approach he took in any project he took on.

A God-fearing and devout person, he was considered a pillar of the church. He was prominent in the business and community affairs of the region, and widely respected for his wisdom, honesty and integrity. A self-made man, Shinkle became one of the wealthiest persons in the area, and was well known for his frugality. At the same time, he contributed generously to charities, especially those relating to the Methodist Episcopal Church. His outstanding administrative skills came into play in the many enterprises, organizations, and institutions he was involved with, and is best exemplified by his exemplary leadership of the Covington & Cincinnati Bridge Company.

In conclusion, this biographical review indicates that his noteworthy character traits were formed by the experience and wisdom he gained in his various business enterprises, as well as by the subtle influence of his Pennsylvania German heritage, and that these influences stood him in good stead through the many ups and downs he faced in his public and private life.

A character study of Amos Shinkle, therefore, brings us closer to an understanding and appreciation of the remarkable person that he was, and helps explain the phenomenal success he attained in his chosen fields of endeavor. It also confirms E. Polk Johnson's assessment of him:

*"The helpless failures cumber the sod, and hope and inspiration are inspired when it is given us to take cognizance of those who have wrought well in the stern battle of life and have made of success not an accident but a logical result. Such was the late Amos Shinkle, of Covington, whose patent of sterling character was that designated by his being numbered among the world's noble army of productive workers."*<sup>30</sup>

### Endnotes

1. Regarding the murals on the Covington riverfront, see: Don Heinrich Tolzmann, "Roebing Heritage Tour: A Guide to Sites Related to John A. Roebing (1806-1869) and His Bridge on the Ohio River at Covington, Kentucky," *Bulletin of the Kenton County Historical Society*. (November/December 2013): 8.
2. See: Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *John A. Roebing and His Suspension Bridge on the Ohio River*. (Milford, Ohio: Little Miami Pub. Co., 2007). For other biographical works I have published, which take a similar approach in exploring the personalities of the persons covered, see: *Christian Moerlein: The Man and His Brewery*. (Milford, Ohio: Little Miami Pub. Co., 2012), and: George Wiedemann: Northern



Amos Shinkle's Home, still standing  
on Garrard Street in Covington  
*Courtesy the author*

- Kentucky's Beer Baron: The Man and His Brewery. (Milford, Ohio: Little Miami Pub. Co., 2015).
3. Henry B. Stevens, *The Ohio Bridge*. (Cincinnati: Ruter Press, 1939), p. 65.
4. See the obituary: "Amos Shinkle," *Cincinnati Enquirer*. (14 November 1892). An estate of \$2,500,000 would translate into a value of ca. \$64,000,000 in today's currency (2016).
5. Charles F. Goss, *Cincinnati, the Queen City, 1788-1912*. (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Pub. Co., 1912, Vol. IV, pp. 50-51.
6. *Ibid*, p. 50.
7. *Ibid*, p. 51.
8. E. Polk Johnson, *History of Kentucky and Kentuckians: The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Industry and Modern Activities*. (Chicago: Lewis Clark Publishing Co., 1912), Vol. 2, pp. 620-23.
9. *Ibid*, p. 621
10. *Ibid*, p. 622.
11. *Ibid*, p. 623
12. Washington Roebing, *Washington Roebing's Father: A Memoir of John A. Roebing*. (Reston, Virginia: American Society of Civil Engineers, 2009), p. 199.
13. *Ibid*.
14. Regarding Roebing's use of the phrase "wharf rats," see: D.B. Steinman, *The Builders of the Bridge: The Story of John Roebing and His Son*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945), p. 273.
15. For a recent biographical entry, see: Paul H. Whalen, "Amos Shinkle," in: Paul A. Tenkotte and James C. Claypool, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), p. 826.
16. Louisa J. and Charles L. Abbott, *The Shinkle Genealogy, Comprising the Descendants of Philipp Carl Schenckel, 1717-1897*. (Cincinnati: Curts & Jennings, 1897).
17. For information on the Palatine Exodus, see: Don Heinrich Tolzmann, ed. *German Immigration to America: The First Wave*. (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, Inc., 1993).
18. Bucks County is well known for its Pennsylvania German heritage. After the American Revolution, many Pennsylvania Germans

migrated west into the Ohio River Valley, settling places such as Germantown and New Germany (now Camp Dennison), Ohio, and Germantown, Kentucky.

19. For information on the Shinkle business and the relationship of Vincent and Amos with their father, see: "Father vs. Son," *Cincinnati Enquirer*. (19 January 1884). An obituary of Vincent Shinkle noted: "Mr. Shinkle has owned a number of steamboats during his life. Among them were the ten steamer Champions, the Vint Shinkle, Chas. Bodman, Golden Ryle, Golden Crown and others. He was well and favorably known to all the river men from the head-waters of the Ohio to New Orleans, and had a wide acquaintance with the mercantile community. Business reverses and failing health compelled Mr. Shinkle to retire from active life about two years ago, and he assumed command of a steamer in the New Orleans trade. Mr. Shinkle was a kind-hearted, genial man, and his death will be sincerely mourned... the funeral will probably take place Sunday afternoon from the Fifth Street Christian Church in Covington, of which the deceased was a member... Mr. Shinkle was a brother of Amos Shinkle and Uriah Shinkle of Covington, and Oliver and Charles Shinkle of this city." See the obituary of Vincent Shinkle: "Shinkle," *Cincinnati Enquirer*. (13 November 1885).

20. Abbott, *The Shinkle Genealogy*, p. 78.

21. James Owen Knauss, Jr., *The Pennsylvania Germans: James Owen Knauss, Jr.'s Social History*. Edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann. (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, Inc., 2001), pp. 37 and 119.

22. See: "Old Peter, Meaning the Marriage of Peter Shinkle, Esq. and Mrs. Bedgood of Covington" *Cincinnati Enquirer*. (9 April 1882). The article described the bride as "a dashing widow, residing on Front street" in Covington. The couple traveled to Louisville to get married, because when he wanted to get a marriage license at the County Clerk's office, and his son Amos "got wind of the affair, and visited the County Clerk's office and advised the Clerk not to issue a license to the old gentleman, as he was 'kind of childish.' But the old man was not to be frustrated in this manner, so he visited the Union Ticket Office in Covington and purchased tickets for two for Louisville, and the train left for that city, where it is supposed the nuptial cord was tied that would bind this venerable loving couple together."

23. See: "Life's Tribulations: A Wife of Fifty Abandons a Husband of Ninety-Two: Mr. Peter Shinkle Reaps the Reward of an Old Man's Folly," *Cincinnati Enquirer* (25 November 1883). Here and elsewhere, the paper got the ages of Shinkle and his wife wrong, but it commented on Shinkle's marriage: "The affair created considerable excitement at the time, owing to the extreme age of Mr. Shinkle and rumors that floated around in regard to the woman. Mr. Shinkle's son Amos had endeavored in all possible ways to prevent the marriage, considering, as he said, that his father, from his great age, was childish, and had been duped into the marriage by some one. In spite of his efforts they ran away, and the representatives of the winter and autumn of life were united in the bonds of matrimony. At the time there were those who prophesied that the couple would not live happily together and would soon separate... This prophecy has been fulfilled." The article indicated that Peter Shinkle was now thinking of filing a suit for divorce, and indicated that son Amos had heard of this, but knew nothing further about it.

24. See: "Peter Shinkle's Will," *Cincinnati Enquirer* (13 February 1887).

25. *Ibid.* Thus far, no further information could be found about this autobiography..

26. For the obituary of Peter Shinkle, see: "Died at Ninety-Two: The Venerable Peter Shinkle Passes Away at a Ripe Old Age," *Cincinnati Enquirer* (21 November 1886). This indicated that Peter Shinkle was the father of ten children, seven of whom were still living at the time of his death. It also noted: "His principal business was to collect rents for his son, although he still retained a practical knowledge of his mechanical ingenuity... Mr. Shinkle was remarkably well preserved and possessed a remarkable memory, often entertaining his friends with the history of the early days."

27. For additional information on the lawsuit, see: "A Father's Services," *Cincinnati Enquirer* (15 January 1888), and: "A Mother Sues her Millionaire Son," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (15 January 1888).

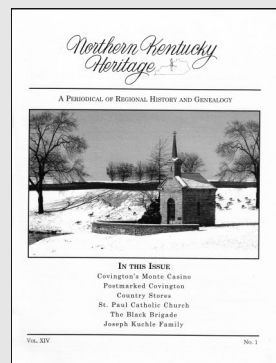
28. Roebing, *Washington Roebing's Father*, p. 199. Here we might also mention that in 1908 Washington (age 71) married Cornelia Witsell (age 39).

29. See: "A Millionaire's Answer," *Cincinnati Enquirer* (18 January 1884).

30. Johnson, *History of Kentucky*, Vol. 2, p. 620.

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# Out of Kentucky: Oxford, Ohio's African-American Community

John Boh

*The following was derived by John Boh from a presentation on April 16, 2016. Bridget Striker, Boone County Local History Coordinator, recalled how this research project, about an African American Community in Oxford, Ohio and its connection to Boone County, came into being and is ongoing. It should result in more public programs, website digitization, and history articles.*

In 1860, about 20 percent of Boone County's population was African-American – 2,000 enslaved and about 45 free blacks. Why had the percentage of black population in the county dwindled to only 5 percent by 1900? Who left? Where did they go? How and why did they go? Finding such well-known "Boone County names" (Ryle, Piatt, Marshall, etc.) among those listed in Butler County, Ohio's records and elsewhere sparked this research by Bridget Striker and other library staff.

Slavery in Boone County was more extensive than in the rural areas of Kenton and Campbell counties. But slavery was smaller in scope in Boone County than in the "plantation" South. Slaves worked in smaller numbers and on smaller farms and many times were leased to neighboring farms during planting and harvesting seasons. These activities allowed for greater interaction between enslaved individuals and resulted in many slave marriages with children.

Records suggest several patterns of migration: Before the Civil War a few freedom seekers from Boone County along the Underground Railroad made it to Canada, then moved in time to Oxford, Ohio; a number of former slaves from Boone County enlisted together in the Union Army, then as veterans eventually resumed life in Oxford; finally, some emancipated African Americans still in Boone County after the War in time settled in Oxford. By 1870, an African Americans community was established in Oxford. Leading into the 1890s, a number of African Americans from Boone County settled in Connersville, Indiana (66 miles to the southeast of Indianapolis) where jobs and land were more promising.



Eventually in this "second wave" some moved on to Oxford. Given its small population of African Americans in 1860 it was a significant portion that fled from Boone County, eventually to Oxford, some 50 miles to the north. Continuity and connections appear to explain the story of 350-400 descendants living in the Oxford area as of 1920. The library staff working backwards and forwards documented connections. A major step was at once linking many African American names in the Oxford area with "Boone County names" of white landowners found in an 1883 atlas. Library staff also used county census, tax and other documents and letters, even bounty hunter records.

North of the Ohio River, a web of connections were fostered by the Underground Railroad, by abolitionist institutions like Lane Seminary in Wal-

# A Look Back at The Headlines

*An on-going feature reliving local headlines.*

*This issue features:*

*The Covington Journal – December 31, 1853.*

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## Local Headlines

The Greenup St. M.E. Church is to be lighted with gas.

The Fair at Greer's Hall, for the benefit of St. Mary's Cathedral Church, considering the numbers of attractions offered to the public during the week, is doing very well. The Fair, we believe, closes tonight.

The suspension bridge was crossed on Wednesday last, by Mayor Foley and Mr. George C. Tarvin of this city, in a buggy. We are happy to say that the first vehicular passage was accomplished without accident. Covington, as usual, takes the lead. What has Newport to say?

On Wednesday evening, December 28, 1853, the principal streets of the city of Covington were for the first time lighted with gas. The event was the subject of congratulations, especially by those persons whose business calls them out after night, — of which class, by the by, there is an astonishing number for a moral city like Covington.

Of the important events in Covington of 1853, we note the following:

- the opening of the C & L R R;
- the establishment of a free high school;
- the lighting of the city with gas;
- the recognition of Covington as the metropolis of a Roman Catholic diocese and the commencement of a Cathedral Church; and
- the erection of a splendid suspension bridge over the Licking River.

Why, at the close of 1854, will be not be authorized to report the following: the commencement of a bridge over the Ohio; the opening of a public park; and the erection of a first-class hotel?

nut Hills. Abolitionist North College Hill seemed to have a connection with the Miami University campus in Oxford. Free blacks were already living in Oxford, North College Hill and Milford, Ohio. These established connections helped African Americans with a common origin in Boone County, by several routes, to settle in the Oxford area.

Memories of service in militia and as regulars fighting Indians, serving in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Mexican War, helped to keep majority sentiment in favor of the Union. Kentucky was a slave state, but it was a border state that maintained official neutrality during the War. As the story goes, Kentucky became Confederate after the War. In Boone County as elsewhere, resentment of freed blacks resulted in persecution, violence and even lynching. To many of the white population, Union military actions had not respected their rights during the War. The Union had recruited slaves for military duty despite Kentucky's neutrality. In coming decades leading in to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with retrograde attitudes in white society taking hold around the country, African Americans even in Oxford would lose some early prominence and standing. Real estate development pushed them out of their old neighborhood. Accused of crimes, they were not always treated fairly even around Oxford, Ohio. Economic opportunities declined. They became house servants and the like. In recent decades, very small pockets still remained in Boone County. African Americans like to keep to themselves and not talk about the past.

James H. Rile (1828-1931) lived a long life. In 1845 he escaped from the Marshall farm in Boone County. From Pennsylvania he enlisted in the Union army. After the War, returning to Boone County, he found that his family had left. They had settled in Oxford. John H. Rile traced his family history, now seen still in letters and documents.

Of two sisters in Oxford, who were daughters of ex-slaves from Boone County, one became a noted poetess and the other was a first graduate from Miami University around 1903. To this day African American Civil War veterans from Boone County are still honored in the well-kept Woodside Cemetery in Oxford.

## Then and Now



Left: Frisch's Restaurant sitting just to the north of what is now the Greyhound Tavern at the top of Orphanage road in Ft. Mitchell; Right photo: similar view in 2016.

Both photos courtesy Kenton County Public Library

## Mystery Photo

Can you identify the mystery photo below? The answer can be found at the bottom of the page.



**ANSWER:**

Front view of what was once Fifth District School, located at 18th and Holman streets in Covington. The structure was rehabbed and is now apartments.

# Kenton County Historical Society

May — June 2016

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## I Bet You Didn't Know

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

May 15, 1780: A petition was presented to the Continental Congress asking that Kentucky county be named its own state.

May 23, 1928: Rosemary Clooney was born at Maysville. She was the first female singer to grace the cover of TIME magazine (1953).

May 24, 1797: James Morehead was born near Shepherdsville. He was the first native-born Kentuckian elected as governor.

May 28, 1977: The Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate was destroyed by fire, killing 168 persons.

June 1, 1792: Kentucky was admitted as the 15th state of the United States of America. Population at the time was 100,000.

*"On This Day In Kentucky" — Robert Powell*

## Programs and Notices

### Exhibit: "Silent Storytellers"

This exhibit at the Behringer-Crawford Museum ends **Sunday, May 15, 2016**; featuring rarely displayed artifacts from the Museum's collections and family archives; see how heirlooms in museum collections ("Silent Storytellers") preserve the memories of our ancestors and recall people and traditions that impact our lives today.

### Exhibit: The Forgotten War:

#### Northern Kentuckians in the Korean Conflict

This exhibit at the Behringer-Crawford Museum opens Saturday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, closes August 28, 2016. It will show artifacts and photos and will feature recent interviews of Northern Kentucky Korean War veterans. BCM won a small grant from the Kentucky Oral History Commission. As agreed, copies of the interviews will be deposited in the Kentucky Oral History archives. The Museum is also finalizing a partnership agreement with the NKU Special Collections Archive for sharing interview rights.

### Roeblingfest

Saturday, June 18, 9:00 - 5:00, 3rd and Court streets, Covington; the Kenton County Historical Society will have a display booth from 9:00 AM into the afternoon. It will share space under a tent with other heritage groups. Roeblingfest every year schedules tours of the Roebling Bridge and of the Floodwall Murals. The free, festival-like event will include food, drink and music.

### Kenton County Fair

Monday, July 11 through Saturday July 16<sup>th</sup>; in the evenings; the Kenton County Historical Society will have its own booth for displaying and selling publications and maps, promoting memberships and subscriptions, and connecting with fairgoers young and old to answer questions and discuss local history.

### Upcoming Kenton County Historical Society Public Programs

The KCHS is finalizing programs open to the public for Saturday, August 16 and for Saturday, October 1. Look for details in the July/August Bulletin and on the KCHS website; in the Kenton County Public Library "Calendar" booklet and on its website and Facebook. On January 16, 2016, the Society hosted a public program on the background of each of the Covington Floodwall Murals and on April 16th a public program was held detailing stories of African-American descendants from Boone County who have been residing in Oxford, Ohio.