

Boone County Historical Society  
Presentation by Ruth Wade Cox Brunings  
January 18, 1999

Slavery in Kentucky

It is an honor to be invited to speak at the first meeting of the newly reorganized Boone County Historical Society and I am proud to talk to you tonight about my Bedinger ancestors. I want to thank Bruce Ferguson and the Board of Directors for inviting me and especially thank Bruce for his introduction. I also want all of you to know how good it is to be home. Boone County, Kentucky will always be my home.

Dr. Benjamin Franklin Bedinger was my great great grandfather. One of his namesakes, Benjamin Franklin Bedinger, my grandmother's double first cousin, married Lucy Harrison Gaines, descendant of James Gaines, brother of John and Archibald. I am a Bedinger descendant. My two cousins (second cousins once removed) Mary Ella Bedinger Logan and George Gaines Bedinger are both Bedinger and Gaines descendants.

Although I will tell you about the Bedingers and their role in early Kentucky history, my focus will be on slavery in northern Kentucky. This is not only an important part of any history of pre Civil War ancestors but also relevant to recent events and local news. I want to start with a quotation I found in one of the resource books I have on the Gaines family.

"If America forgets where she came from, if the people lose sight of what brought them along, if she listens to the deniers and mockers, then will begin rot and dissolution. " Carl Sandburg

Beloved by Toni Morrison, which won both a Pulitzer and a Nobel Prize, was required reading in a literature class my daughter took in college. I read it then and thought it was great literature. It is a fictionalized story of a desperate runaway slave, based on a very few of the actual facts and events which occurred in Kentucky. It makes no pretense of being history but captures the mood and feelings of a tragic time.

Briefly, the story Beloved was based on the life of Margaret Garner who was a mulatto slave of John Pollard Gaines living at Maplewood on Richwood Road. At the age of 15 she married Robert Garner, who was a black man owned by the Marshalls on a nearby farm. They had a black son. During most of their married life Robert was hired out to different farms all over northern Kentucky. In November 1849 John Gaines sold Maplewood to his brother Archibald and moved to the Oregon territory in early 1850 to become the Governor. Margaret then had three mulatto children. In the spring of 1855 she became a Christian and joined Richwood Presbyterian Church. In the winter of 1855 her husband returned to the Marshall farm on Richwood Road. A short time later, the Ohio River froze over and in January 1856, Margaret and her four children ran away with

Robert and his parents on a horse drawn sled. They were pursued by their owners and, with the help of law enforcement, were captured in Cincinnati the next morning. Rather than allow her children to be returned to slavery, Margaret killed her two and one half year old daughter with a butcher knife and attempted to kill the other children.

All of the slaves were imprisoned. There was a dispute over whether the federal court had authority to try the runaway slaves first, under the Fugitive Slave law, or whether Ohio had state's rights to try Margaret for murder first. The federal court won and federal marshals were stationed to restore and keep order. The trial received national press coverage. The Ohio abolitionists tried to convince the court that "free land makes free man" but lost. The federal court ordered the slaves returned to their masters then the state court issued a warrant for Margaret to be returned to Ohio and tried for murder. Instead, the slaves were sold down the river to plantations in the South, where Margaret died of typhoid fever a few years later. The feelings of the North and the South were polarized by the trial over state's rights and slavery.

The recently released movie Beloved is true to the book but covers only a part of the story - it is a ghost story. The producer must have known this to be so as it was released for Halloween. Steven Weisenburger's book, Modern Medea was published at the same time the movie Beloved was released for obvious publicity reasons. Unlike the novel Beloved, Modern Medea is promoted as a historical account of the life and trial of the slave, Margaret Garner. However, Modern Medea is not historically accurate and has serious factual errors. I have documented mistakes of geography, names, and dates, as well as misrepresentations of the Presbyterian Church and Kentucky culture. The Gaines descendants have documented even more mistakes. Examples include repeated references to the railroad station at Richwood, which did not exist until 1869; the location of Forest Home which is not across from Richwood Church but a mile west of Maplewood and a half mile back from Richwood Road; and the assumption that Archibald's second marriage, which occurred in Kenton County, was common law because Mr. Weisenburger could not find a record of it in Boone County. Mr. Weisenburger continuously confuses the identity of the Bedingers with one another and the daughter of John Gaines with a young slave girl. The Gaines genealogy is not correct and Gaines family letters are misread. Every reference to the Presbyterian Church is wrong - the dates, the names of the ministers, and a reference to the Session Books, which are official church records, as "a sort of weekly log." Most disturbing are the assumptions Mr. Weisenburger makes without factual basis. The book has an angry overtone toward white men in Kentucky and is filled with sarcasm and innuendo. There is clear defamation of character of my ancestors. I recently read a letter to the editor of the Los Angeles Times which I would like to paraphrase and share with you: "In order to study sensitive issues one must first rid oneself of unacknowledged agendas, all racial, regional stereotyping of people, and cultural biases. To do otherwise results in inflammatory and unsubstantiated allegations."

This is how Mr. Weisenburger erred. In his research he failed to include the Historical Societies; to interview Gaines or Bedinger descendants; to contact local African

American, historical, sociological, or religious authorities; or, contact the Boone County Historical Preservation Planner, an even more obvious resource. These are resources that would have been available to him in his search for historical truth. These are resources that are still available and have been offered to him since publication, offers to which he has not responded. As a behavioral scientist, I am impressed with the anger with which he writes. In Beloved Toni Morrison presents both sides of slavery in Kentucky - the kind master and the peaceful life of the slaves prior to the death of the good master and the resultant change of ownership of the farm with its slaves to a cruel master. Mr. Weisenburger writes only with anger and negative assumptions about cruelty. There is no balance or contrast in his literary effort.

### **The Bedingers**

There was another side to slavery - a benevolent one. Some slave owners acquired slaves with land that they purchased. Some slaves were inherited. Some slaves were purchased to free them from harsh masters or to unite them with their families. Some sold themselves into slavery and were indentured for a specified number of years. Slaves in the early 1800's were the most available labor force for clearing and farming land. Although slaves were acquired in various ways and for different reasons, the benevolent slave owner was faced with a dilemma. On a religious and moral level the institution of slavery was seen as evil and contrary to the ideals of the democratic society which had been established by the founding fathers with freedom for all. On a personal level slaves became a part of the extended family with genuine feelings of love between the races.

With the welfare of the individual slave a concern, how could the benevolent slave owner free the slaves and cast them into a hostile community where they had no protection under existing laws? Freed slaves had to carry their emancipation papers with them at all times or be jailed. After 1851 freed slaves had to leave the state of Kentucky. Even with papers, freed slaves were kidnapped by slave traders and sold back into slavery. Freed slaves who were poor were arrested and hired out and their children were apprenticed until adulthood. Blacks fared unequally in competition for employment with white laborers in the north and with both white laborers and slaves in the south. A black man could not testify against a white man. There was not equal protection under the law and there were laws that were punitive specifically to freed blacks. An early movement in Kentucky by the American Colonization Society to resolve the dilemma of the benevolent slave owner was the newly organized country of Liberia in Sierra Leone, Africa where captive slaves could be returned to their homeland. However, most slaves did not choose to return. Another solution was manumission, a procedure by which an individual slave could be granted freedom by or purchase freedom from the master. Manumission, or gradual emancipation, was preferred by benevolent slave owners as slaves could first be educated and trained so that they could become financially independent as free persons in a generally hostile society. Abolition of slavery by the government did not offer this preparation and protection to the individual.

The Presbyterian Church in Kentucky in 1797 determined that slavery was a moral evil but that all persons who owned slaves were not guilty of a moral evil. There is no

condemnation of slavery in the Bible but instructions to slave owners and to slaves which outline expectations for each in this culturally accepted institution of that time in history. The recorded position of the Presbyterian Church was to outline the responsibility of slave owners as follows: to treat their slaves with kindness, to provide education, to encourage moral and spiritual values, to encourage attendance at religious services and provide religious instruction, and to legally emancipate their slaves as adults after they were prepared for freedom and independence. The church's position on the age for benevolent emancipation is supported by contemporary experts on slavery who write that the peak years for productivity and profit from slaves is between the ages of thirty and fifty. Profitability is diminished by the cost of keeping children, training young adults and maintaining old people. Slaves after the age of thirty were thus best prepared for and most capable of living as freed persons.

Another problem that existed in the time of slavery and faces us today with some welfare recipients is dependency. Slavery reinforced dependency, making it difficult for some individuals to strive on their own for a better life. Slaves were in a foreign country and unlike emigrants did not have the resources of an extended family or an established community. Emigrants came voluntarily and were for the most part independent individuals with a sense of adventure. The slaves in this country included those who were by nature independent and those who were not. A dependent slave with a benevolent master had security which some were reluctant to give up for freedom, just as some welfare recipients are today.

The Bedingers were benevolent slave owners and among the first land owners in Kentucky and Boone County.

### **George Michael Bedinger**

The story of the Bedingers in Kentucky begins with George Michael Bedinger, one of the first white men in Kentucky and about whom much has been written, including the books, George Michael Bedinger, A Kentucky Pioneer; For Brave America, The Bedinger Brothers in War and Peace, 1775-1843 and The Hunters of Kentucky, A Narrative History of America's First Far West, 1750-1792. George Michael was the son of a German emigrant, Henry Budingen. Henry came to America in 1737 at the age of eight with his parents. Henry's father, Adam Budingen, was from Alsace, a member of an old German family for whom three villages had been named. The Budingens belonged to nobility and had a coat of arms. Adam acquired a large tract of land in Pennsylvania and prospered. He gave each of his sons a farm when they married. Henry married Magdalene von Schlegel, lived first in Pennsylvania and then moved to northern Virginia (which later became West Virginia) in 1762 where he died ten years later, leaving his widow with eight children. Henry owned considerable property in the town of Shepherdstown (about 20 miles south of Pennsylvania) as well as several farms. In addition to the property he left to his widow, which was hers during her lifetime, he willed a farm to each of his five sons and a house in town to each of his three daughters. George Michael and his older brother Henry had to assume considerable responsibility for the family as teen age boys.

Although German continued to be spoken in the home, English soon became the language of choice for them as for other emigrants of this time. The Budingens anglicized their name to Bedinger and left the Lutheran Church after a dispute over reading the liturgy in German instead of English. They joined the Episcopal Church, which they called the English Church.

George Michael was described as a sturdy six footer with black hair and blue eyes. He was a skilled backwoodsman, fond of hunting, fishing and riding. He became an expert rifleman at a young age, which combined with bravery and patriotism, made him a good soldier. George Michael and a friend, inspired by Patrick Henry's rhetoric, were the first two from Shepherdstown to volunteer in 1775 to participate in an armed resistance to the governor in Virginia, called Lord Dunsmore's War, the prelude to the Revolution. When the Revolution started, George Michael and his brother Henry were among the first recruits to join a Virginia rifle company. The British soon learned to fear the expert Virginia marksmen and George Washington paid them special honor for their skill and heroism.

The Revolutionary War was fought by volunteers who served for a limited period of time - usually a set number of months. George Michael fought the British for a period of time, then went home to help his mother with the farms, then fought Indians in Kentucky with Daniel Boone, then fought the British again. He was a brave soldier and natural leader, and was never captured or injured. During the Revolution pioneers began adventuring into Kentucky. Daniel Boone built his fort at Boonesborough in 1775, following the purchase of Kentucky from the Cherokee Indians. In 1779 George Michael joined a party of twelve men from Shepherdstown and arrived at Boonesborough in time to help defend it from fierce Indian attack. He remained there for seven months serving as an Indian spy, scout, hunter, surveyor and soldier. The war with the Indians was another battlefield with the British who incited the Shawnee Indians from north of the Ohio River and supplied them with weapons and soldiers. George Michael wrote: "I have ever considered this service at this place and during this time the most useful to my country, as we were almost constantly surrounded by parties of Indians, who were lying in wait for us... "

He participated in raids on Indian villages as far away as Illinois as the pioneers took an offensive position in their battles with the Indians. He returned to the Revolutionary War to take command as captain of a company of militia and served until the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781. After the War he participated in a partnership in a mill in Virginia for a limited time, then returned to Kentucky as a surveyor and explorer. As he surveyed land for the soldiers of the Revolutionary War, who had been given land grants as payment for their military service, he accumulated a great deal of land for himself. Surveying was dangerous employment due to the perils of wilderness life as well as hostile Indians. He had many adventures and narrow escapes. After being left for dead by his companions he recovered from a long illness and returned home for several years. During this time he bought property in Maryland, built a saw and grist mill, married and had a daughter. Both he and his wife had a serious illness, which she did not survive. When Michael recovered he left his infant daughter with his mother-in-law and returned

to his frontier life in Kentucky. Once again he surveyed land for his old comrades in arms, fought with hostile Indians and served on peace-making missions with friendly Indians. He received a commission from President Washington, who appointed him major of a battalion in the war with the Indians. He was chosen for a military promotion by his general, which led to some dissension as another candidate was older and favored by the War Department. Michael elected to remove himself from controversy, resigned from the army, and eloped on horseback with the sixteen-year old daughter of Dr. Henry Clay of Blue Licks, Kentucky. His wife Henrietta Clay was a cousin of the statesman Henry Clay and the emancipationist Cassius Clay. Their marriage had been opposed due to the difference in their ages. At the age of 37, Michael gave up his adventurous life and settled down to a long and happy life on his farm in Blue Licks. He had acquired a great deal of property in different parts of Kentucky, including land, mills, and houses. Nearly all of lower Blue Licks belonged to him. Working shoulder to shoulder with his laborers, he built three houses *on The Bedinger Place* on the Licking River, first a log cabin, then a stone house, both by the river, and then a large white frame house on the hill which had over 30 rooms including the kitchen wing which housed the slaves, or servants as he called them. He donated two acres of land for the first school and church at Blue Licks.

After the end of his military career, George Michael had a political career. He was a member of the convention that wrote the Constitution for Kentucky but was in the minority on the issue of slavery. He wanted Kentucky to be a free state. He was elected to the Kentucky Legislature and served as an elector for the first Governor of Kentucky. He was the first judge of the Court of Quarter Session. He was next elected to the U S Congress where he fought hard to abolish slavery and was successful in getting a bill passed to prevent the importation of new slaves. He was the chairman of the Committee for the Suppression of Slavery. In the Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. II he was described as: "one of the earliest and most bitter opponents of slavery in Kentucky. " His publicly stated views on slavery cost him reelection to Congress when he ran again in his later life. He opposed the famous Embargo and when he learned of a special night session to pass the act he attended and opened his speech with: "What means this gathering in such unseemly haste, under cover of darkness? Is it that you propose that which will not bear the light?" At the end of his scathing speech a fellow congressman said: "I am glad to see there is one honest man in the House." After four years in Congress he declined to run again although he had no opposition. He said: "rotation in office is favorable to liberty." He had progressive ideas about term limits and slavery and strong opinions about trade and taxes. He also opposed the Electoral College and believed the President should be elected by the popular vote.

George Michael's views on slavery are a matter of public record and were also expressed in letters to his brothers. When he inherited some slaves from his brother Jacob's estate he wrote the following to his brother Henry: "My mind has long since been made up on the score of slavery. My dear departed brother was well acquainted with my sentiments and with whom I have had severe and long arguments on the subject of slavery as I have always taken the merciful side in favor of freedom". Both his wife and son, Benjamin Franklin, advised him to accept his niece's offer to buy the inherited slaves but George Michael felt he should not trust someone else to free the slaves who had been entrusted to

him and bought a sister to these slaves as well so they would not be separated. He freed his own slaves before their 30th birthday and offered to pay their passage to Liberia. Only one chose to return to Africa. He wrote: "Slavery to me is an unhappy thing. " He wrote that he had no other trouble in his life "but if I once own them (slaves) responsibility seems to fasten on me." In another letter he wrote: "I should be quite willing to have sent most of them to Liberia if they were willing. I offered to let six of the oldest of them go and I would have paid their passage but they would rather stay. ... I think I will try to get the boys taught trades. " He never sold any slaves he owned but tried to prepare them for freedom and self support. All of his slaves were well treated and he taught them to "read, write and cipher". He called his slaves servants, paid them wages and built a wing on his house for them to live in. His children all held his views on slavery. His son Daniel left directions in his will that all of his slaves were to be freed at a set age with either their expenses paid to Liberia or land purchased for them.

George Michael fathered nine children with his second wife and made certain they all received the best education available - sending the older ones east to school and later the younger ones to Cincinnati. One son went to West Point and another to Surgeon's College in Philadelphia. George Michael owned the only copy of the Encyclopedia Britannica in Kentucky at one time and his daughter Elizabeth, who was a great scholar, read it cover to cover. His children prospered and married sons or daughters of prominent families; many of them stayed in Kentucky.

Fifty years after Michael and his brother left home in a company of 97 volunteers to join General Washington in the Revolutionary War they had a reunion, as they had promised, at the spring on the old Bedinger farm. Only five were still living and only Michael and his brother Henry were physically able to make the journey. Michael rode horseback from Kentucky at the age of 69. They were honored at a military ceremony.

George Michael outlived all of his brothers and sisters and half of his ten children. He was a soldier, patriot, pioneer, and statesman. A historical marker on Highway 68 across from Blue Licks State Park erected in his honor reads "PATRIOT-PIONEER Site of home and grave of Major George Michael Bedinger over on hilltop. Born PA 1756 Died 1843. Officer War of Revolution. In defense of Boonesborough 1779 and at siege of Yorktown 1781. In 1784 came back to KY. First to survey this area. Indian campaign 1791. KY legislator 1792-94. U S Congress 1803-07. Opposed slavery. Freed his slaves at their age thirty."

George Michael is buried on his farm in the Bedinger Cemetery, a parcel of land he surrounded with a stone wall and set aside on the Licking River in Blue Licks for the burial of his family and his servants. Buried in this family graveyard are George Michael and members of his family-including his extended family (i.e., former slaves).

His descendants are many and as a group are well educated, principled, willing to accept the responsibility of leadership, and known for their wisdom, compassion and spirituality.

Many have served their fellowman as doctors, social workers and teachers. Many have served God as ministers and missionaries. Some have served their country with distinguished careers in the military and in government. Others have achieved success in the fields of business, industry, law, library science, engineering, science and journalism. The Kentucky Bedingers were quite tall, most over six feet, and long lived.

### **Benjamin Franklin Bedinger, M.D.**

Most of George Michael's sons stayed in central Kentucky and operated various business ventures: saw mills, grist mills, the first store, the first ferry, salt production, bottled mineral water and a 300 room hotel resort at Blue Licks Springs (which was burned by the Union Army after the Civil War).

His son Benjamin Franklin graduated from medical school and became acquainted with the well known Cincinnati physician, Dr. Drake. His oldest brother Daniel had married Dr. Drake's daughter. Franklin gave up the practice of medicine early in his career, to the disappointment of Dr. Drake who had a high opinion of his medical skills, as he was too kind hearted to do surgery without benefit of anesthesia. Pre Civil War medicine was not without pain. Franklin was 6 feet 8 inches tall and became so used to stooping to go through cabin doors on house calls that he would stoop to go through a gate. His son Everett described him "as large in mind and heart as he was in body."

Franklin married Sarah Everett Wade, daughter of David Everett Wade, a prominent Cincinnati businessman, city alderman and Presbyterian Church Elder. Her father had doubts about his daughter marrying a young country doctor and paid two of the workmen at his tannery to throw Franklin into the tanning vat. But Franklin, a very powerful young man, threw both of them into the vat instead. Another of his daughters also married a doctor and Mr. Wade eventually came to like and respect both of them. Sarah Everett was intelligent, educated, and dedicated to her perceived duty and to the church. She was known by all as deeply religious. Throughout their marriage Franklin's respect for his wife's wisdom was apparent. He was always involved in politics but declined public office due to a promise he had made to Sarah Everett.

Dr. Benjamin Franklin Bedinger made Boone County his home. He was born in Blue Licks in 1797, graduated from medical school in 1818, married in 1820, lived first in Kenton County and bought a farm in Erlanger in 1826. In 1834 he moved with his family to Cincinnati for eight years in order for Sarah Everett to care for her father who had a stroke and was bedridden. Following her father's death in 1842 they lived in Covington for three years and then moved to Forest Home in Richwood for 16 years. As his six children married, like his father and grandfather before him, he gave them each a farm and built homes for them. When David Wade Bedinger married, Dr. Bedinger gave him 300 acres of his large estate, Forest Home on Richwood Road, and the family home. Dr. Bedinger and his wife moved back to Erlanger and later bought the Bartlett Graves farm, Walnut Grove, and renamed it The Elms. He lived in Erlanger until his death in 1872 and Sarah Everett lived there until her death in 1880. The lives of Benjamin Franklin and Sarah Everett are well documented in the Centennial History of Erlanger, Kentucky.

After Dr. Bedinger gave up the practice of medicine, he became active in the building of toll roads and in politics. He was influential in getting the charter for the Lexington Turnpike Company of which he was President for many years and on the Board of Directors throughout his life. He also acquired a great deal of land and in the 1850 census was listed as one of the two wealthiest men in Boone County. (James Gaines was the other one.) He was prominent in politics and an ardent Whig, holding the same political views as his father, George Michael. He was an influential member of the National Convention which nominated General Zachary Taylor from Kentucky for the presidency. Abraham Lincoln was a member of the same convention.

Zachary Taylor became President in 1849 and favored free rather than slave status for new territories. He knew that Dr. Bedinger was of the same opinion and as a fellow Kentuckian asked him to be the Governor of the Territory of Oregon. Due to the promise he had made to his wife, Dr. Bedinger declined but suggested his friend Major John Pollard Gaines, who accepted the appointment. Sarah Everett said that they would lose half of their children on such a long and dangerous journey. Major Gaines not only lost two of the daughters he took with him but his wife as well. There is a letter in the Boone County historical archives by a granddaughter of Dr. Bedinger describing the December 1849 dinner which the Bedingers gave in farewell to Major Gaines and invited the whole community. An ad was placed in the newspaper which read: "Any friend of Major Gaines is invited to eat dinner with him at Forest Home before he leaves for Oregon." More than five hundred people attended, coming from far and near.

Dr. Bedinger's active role as a political advisor continued. His son Everett wrote in his autobiography: "I was with my father when he and Lincoln met in 1858 at a hotel in Bloomington, Illinois. They spent the greater part of the evening discussing the political situation, Dr. Bedinger warning Mr. Lincoln of the dreadful results that would follow the success of his new (Republican) party. Mr. Lincoln little thought that the loss of his own life would be one of those dreadful results." After the Civil War, Dr. Bedinger became a Democrat because of the way the Republican Congress mistreated the south, including Kentucky. During the post war period the Republican Congress impeached the Democratic President, Andrew Johnson, but failed to remove him from office.

Although Dr. Bedinger and Major Gaines were neighbors, friends and political allies in the Whig party, they had very different views on the issues of war and slavery. In a letter to Major Gaines during the Mexican American War Dr. Bedinger wrote: "You know how much I disapprove of this war and whilst I feel for the brave men and poor soldiers who are suffering, pining, and dying from sickness, wounds and exposure and whilst I wish success to the aims of my country; I still doubt the propriety and patriotism of Whigs uniting with and risking their health and lives lifting this infernal Administration out of its difficulties and covering the one man's power and the one man's war with the glorious results of their suffering and valor thus sanctifying the usurpations of that last of little men, James K. Polk, and enabling him and his army of plunderers at Washington to fatten on the spoils of the nation, to triumph over the constitution, the liberties of the people, and the prosperity of the country. Would that all good Whigs were at home and out of

danger, I think it would not be long before Democrats would be damming the man who had got them into a scrape in which they, unassisted by the Whigs, would never obtain either honor or glory."

As a post script he adds "Though my wife still insists that you deserve some punishment for leaving the joys and comforts of home to go into such a war as this and she says further that she doubts not that you have been fully punished for it."

On the issue of slavery, U S Congressman Gaines voted for the extension of slavery into the western territories, unlike U S Congressman Bedinger's determined opposition to slavery. Unlike the Gaines families, the Bedingers had no mulatto slaves. No Bedinger testified at the Margaret Garner trial in Archibald's defense. Dr. Bedinger's son Everett was an Elder in the Richwood Presbyterian Church during the escape, capture, child murder and trial. The following was entered into the Session Book by him as Clerk of Session.

"Sunday - June 1st 1856 - Session met and made the following order - In view of the remarkably low state of piety; and the many sins with which we as a people and church have provoked with the withdrawal of the Divine favor and influence from our midst, and especially in view of the cold and languid state of our zeal for the service of the Lord and bearing in mind the many exhortations of the Devine Word thereto - We the Session of this church do hereby appoint Friday the 13th day of June as a day of solemn fasting and humiliation before God on account of our sins and departures from Him as a congregation and as individual members of the visible church - And we do hereby by virtue of the authority of this church - over whom God has placed us as overseers for edification - that they lay apart on that day their ordinary avocations and repair to the house of God for solemn worship, confession of sins and deep humiliation before God and invocation of the return of the Devine favor - And we do most solemnly recommend and enjoin it upon the consciences of all God's professing people to practice such bodily abstinence on that day as shall be suitable to their abasing themselves in the dust before the Great God whom we have offended and the supplication of his benign return to us, in reviving and quickening our own graces, and in granting us to see the return of his Spirit in giving efficacy to the means of grace in the conversion of others. - - After which Session adj'd. Opened & closed with prayer - Everett W. Bedinger, Cl'k pro tem."

Olivia Bedinger wrote: "My grandfather (Benjamin Franklin Bedinger, M.D.) was brought up to think slavery a great evil and reared his family in the same belief." These views made Dr. Bedinger unpopular with those of his neighbors who thought differently. When Humphrey, one of his slaves, married a woman belonging to a neighbor, Dr Bedinger offered to buy her. The neighbor refused saying he would never sell a slave to an abolitionist. During the Civil War, after Humphrey was freed and living in Cincinnati, he was drafted. He came in terror to "Marse Franklin" and offered to return and work for him forever (sell himself back into slavery) if he would get him out of the draft. Dr. Bedinger bought a substitute for Humphrey for \$1,000 and sent him back to freedom in Ohio. He also bought substitutes for his sons as they were drafted as he did not believe in the war. Long after the Civil War ended, the family teased Daniel Bedinger that he

should be dead as his substitute was killed in battle.

George Michael, Dr. Bedinger's oldest son, wrote that his father was an abolitionist and freed his slaves, giving each of them money and a horse. There was one slave he could not free because the man had lost a leg so Dr Bedinger sold him to his own mother for a dollar - which Dr. Bedinger gave to her. Both the man and his mother remained and worked for money but were still counted on the census as slaves in order to stay in Kentucky. George remembered as a child complaining to his father that Humphrey, a slave, had spanked him. His father asked no questions but said: "If Humphrey spanked you, then you deserved it."

Dr. Bedinger wrote a letter to the editor of the Covington Journal dated May 1, 1849 in response to a printed request by voters of Boone County who asked him to state his views on constitutional reform, emancipation and slavery. He wrote that the present constitution of Kentucky was inferior, "involving as master and slave nearly one half the population of the state, which many of our citizens consider a crying evil, dangerous to liberty, opposed to good morals, injurious to the welfare of the great mass of the white laborers of the State, prejudicial to the power and influence of the State as a member of the Union, incompatible with the rights and destructive of the true interest of man - bond and free, master and slave."

During the time Benjamin Franklin and Sarah Everett lived at Forest Home they did much to promote education. A Sunday School was started at Richwood Church and Sarah Everett donated the money for books. This was recorded in Session minutes. Family history is that Sarah Everett, who had her own inheritance, donated the money to buy the land for Richwood Cemetery and Richwood Church when it was rebuilt in its present location. There is no record of this or where the money came from in the Session Books. The original 1842 deed was for one half acre sold to Richwood Church by William Mosely on land across Richwood Road and on the opposite side of the creek at the north east corner of the intersection of the current Richwood Road and Chambers Lane, where Benjamin Franklin was later granted use of Richwood Church property to build a school for neighborhood children. They were viewed as good parents. Their only daughter, Olivia, died when her son was eight months old. This child was raised by Benjamin Franklin and Sarah Everett. When Major Gaines returned from Oregon for a visit after his wife's death he left his youngest daughter Matilda at Forest Home, not with his brother Archibald at Maplewood. When a younger brother, George Michael Jr, was dying at his home in Boone County near Big Bone of cholera, he said "Tell that best of men, that dear brother Franklin, to take my child and care for him. Tell his grandmothers both they must not think hard of me for not leaving my child to them, but I think my brother is more capable of raising him." This child was named for his uncle Franklin and in the 1850 census there are three Benjamin Franklins listed at Forest Home - father, son and nephew.

Another aspect of Franklin's life was religion. He had been raised with religious instruction, married to a devout Christian, knew the Bible well and attended the Presbyterian Church with his wife and children. He was extremely well read and had an

inquiring, scientific mind. He was in all ways a moral and ethical man but had difficulty reconciling reason with faith. After the death of his only daughter he found God in his grief. In reading the Bible he found revelation and comfort and became convinced the Bible was God's word. He was ordained an elder in the Richwood Presbyterian Church and built churches in several Kentucky towns. On his death bed he told his sons to read the Bible carefully and they too would find it to be God's word.

Few men were as well known or as well respected as Dr. Bedinger. His obituary in the local newspaper stated that his convictions were most decided and he would make no concession of principle or tolerate any concealment of opinion. To write under an assumed name is inconsistent with Dr. Bedinger's known character, as stated in this obituary. Mr. Weisenburger attributes articles in the Covington Journal written during Margaret's trial under the pen name of Justice to Dr. Bedinger - without any proof. Justice has been identified as a man living in Dover, Kentucky. He confuses ownership of the Covington Journal, a weekly not a daily newspaper, between Dr. Bedinger and his son, George Bedinger, who was in fact co-owner and coeditor of the Covington Journal for a brief period of time, from 1848 to 1850.

Although I have had time to tell you about only two of my Bedinger ancestors, George Michael and Benjamin Franklin and their views on slavery, I want to mention what several of their descendants have done since the Civil War for civil rights.

When the Bedingers built a school for neighborhood children, they provided education for the black children as well. Elizabeth Ann, David Bedinger's widow, was from Cincinnati and was not liked by some of the neighbors for her northern views. She hired a black teacher from Cincinnati who lived half of the school year at Forest Home and the other half at Crescent Hill, home of her sister Mary and brother-in-law Daniel Bedinger. Elizabeth Ann and Daniel convinced Judge Lassing, Boone County Administrator, to build a school (which was also used as a church) in Burlington for the black children. The black children of the railroad workers joined the black children from the Richwood farms and were taught in this school. Education for black children was always important to the Bedinger family. When I was in grade school at New Haven School in the 1940's, the black children in Richwood were unable to go to their school in Burlington as there was no money to pay a driver for their bus. My mother, Sarah Elizabeth Roberts Cox, drove the school bus for the black children for six weeks and then spent the day at the Burlington Court House lobbying with Judge Cooper, Boone County Administrator, on behalf of the black children. She also spoke at the PTA meeting at New Haven School about this injustice. She was undeterred by a burnt out cross that the neighbor across the road showed her he had found in our front field. Money was found to hire a bus driver.

When the son of one of the neighborhood black families decided to buy his own farm, I was with my grandmother, Agnes Bedinger Roberts, when she withdrew money from the Walton Bank for a loan for Matthew Sleet in order for him to buy a farm with a cash discount. He had 75% of the cash purchase price and my grandmother loaned him the balance, which he repaid the following year. When I grew up at Forest Home in Richwood the black families in the neighborhood

were farmers, landowners, respected members of the community, and family friends. I learned about racism when I went north to Cincinnati to Jr. High School and High School.

When you study history you have to understand people in the context of the culture of the time. You would not call Jesus a sexist because all of his disciples were men. In the same cultural context you cannot call all slave owners racists. There were enough white Christians in the churches, enough white authors and public crusaders, and enough white men in government who believed slavery was wrong to end it. Slavery was the major moral, social, economic and political issue during the time between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. The Bedingers were politically active in effecting changes in the laws regarding slavery, both on a state and federal level. They knew the economic advantage of free or indentured labor and treated their slaves as servants, paid them wages, and freed them after a period of service. Socially their roots were in Pennsylvania, not Virginia; they married northern women; lived in Kentucky, a state that was neutral at the onset of the Civil War; and were members of the Presbyterian Church, which advocated church membership, education and gradual emancipation of slaves. Their moral opposition to slavery was taught to their children and practiced in their religious and personal lives. At the same time they worked within the political and social systems to abolish slavery, the Bedingers prepared their own slaves educationally, vocationally and financially for the freedom they gave them as adults.

A defining characteristic of the Bedingers was their opposition to slavery and they should not be vilified by an author who failed to research history. I believe that as residents of Boone County we have reason to be proud of our heritage - not to stand by while others distort our history or defame our ancestors.

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### **Forest Home, Boone County, Kentucky**

According to family legend, Benjamin Franklin Bedinger, M.D. raced another man on horseback to buy a tract of land on Richwood Road that was being sold at the courthouse. The owner had built the largest house in Boone County for his new bride and had gone bankrupt doing so.

The original deed to this land reads as follows: "as part of a land office Treasury Warrant N17763 signed the 21st day of July 1783 there is granted by the said Commonwealth unto Thomas Gest a certain Tract or Parcel, containing six thousand acres" and it goes on to describe the location of the land. It is signed by Beverly Randolph, Esq. Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia and dated the 10th of February 1789. Kentucky was a territory of Virginia until 1792 and land was granted to veterans as payment for military service or to pioneers who surveyed it.

As found in the 1846 tax records, Benjamin Franklin bought 2000 acres of this original land grant in 1845. There is a recorded deed in 1841 when he acquired 110 acres with a reference to Forest Home as adjoining property. The house therefore had been built prior to 1840. He lived there with his wife and children until 1861 when he moved to Erlanger, Kentucky where he had acquired a great deal of land also. As his six children married he divided Forest Home into farms and built houses for them. His son Everett wrote in his autobiography that in 1852 upon his marriage his father gave him 400 acres of his 2100-acre Richwood tract. Everett was the third child to marry. Three sons sold their farms within a few years and moved out of Boone County. The other three children maintained possession of their farms throughout their life times. With each succeeding generation there were more divisions and more land sold. Today all that is left of Forest Home is the 56 acres on which the original house was built and still owned by a Bedinger descendant, Ruth Wade Cox Brunings.

The following is a description of the house taken from the Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky: "The Elizabeth Ann Bedinger house is probably the most massive of the numerous Greek Revival farmhouses built in Boone County. Five bays wide and based on a double-pile central passage plan, the house instantly conveys a feeling of sheer size, even without the third story, which was removed following a fire. In addition to the four-square main mass of the building, there is an original one-story kitchen ell, also of brick. "

The bricks were formed and fired on site and the wood in the house was from the surrounding trees. The outer walls were four bricks (twelve inches) thick to repel Indian attacks. Indian hostilities in Kentucky did not cease until the end of the War of 1812. The house was situated on a hill one half mile back from Richwood Road and in a forest of giant burr oak trees. It was located half way between Richwood Road and Beaver Road. Some of the giant oaks are still standing but the house is gone. It was partly destroyed by fire in 1874 and only the lower two floors were restored. David Wade Bedinger, son of Benjamin Franklin was living there with his young family at the time of the fire. He fell from an overhead beam during the reconstruction and died several days later of internal injuries. His widow, Elizabeth Ann Cilley Bedinger, decided not to rebuild the third floor ballroom and circular staircase to conserve money.

The rebuilt house was 6,400 square feet with eight rooms, two large halls, a walk in closet the size of a small room, a front staircase and a back stair way in the main part of the house and three rooms in the kitchen ell over a stone lined cellar with both an inside and outside staircase. The ceilings were 10 1/2 feet high and all of the interior walls were brick covered with wooden lath and an inch of plaster. Some of the original mantels and doors were salvaged and reused, others were replaced in the 1870's.

The floor joists on the first floor of the east side of the house were badly charred by the fire and not replaced. About a hundred years later the east side of the house started sinking and the roof divided into two levels. Due to this roof level discrepancy the house was not re roofed. Severe water damage occurred on the east side of the house, which was not occupied since 1977. A decision was made by two of the heirs that the house was unsafe and as a potential liability should be demolished. The third heir, Ruth Wade Cox Brunings, failed in her attempt to interest any historical societies in restoration. George Roth, Kentucky historical architect, was consulted and advised that the house was dangerous and should be demolished as restoration would be too extensive. The members of the Kentucky Historical Society who visited the site stated that there would be no interest in their supporting restoration as funds were limited and the house was not in its original three story state. As a result, the largest house in Boone County, when it was built almost 200 years ago, was demolished in 1982. This was several years before the establishment of a Boone County Historic Preservation Planner or this house might have been saved.

George Roth - Architect; Professor of Architecture, University of Cincinnati;  
Past President of Kentucky Heritage Society.

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