SOUTHWEST OHIO HISTORY

Reverend James Kemper

STEVE PRESTON

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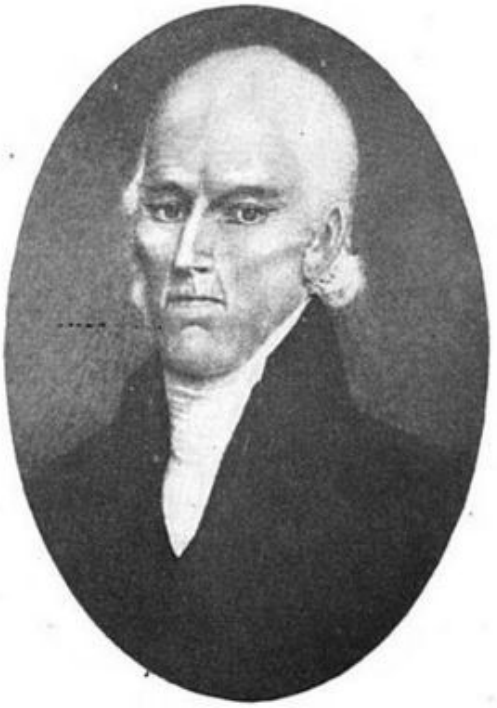
By Steve Preston



Introduction

The inside of Fort Washington overflowed with wounded soldiers and militia. Some of the most grievously injured showed signs of trauma from tomahawk and war club damage. Some sat seemingly uninjured in silence, unable to do much other than stare into space. Several lacked a complete uniform. Many had discarded whatever kept them from making a speedy retreat, including throwing down their weapons. Such was the state of the American Army, the protectors of the inhabitants of Cincinnati, November 9, 1791.

That day, fear was everywhere. Everyone expected an Indian war party to appear out of the surrounding forest and massacre the entire town. Many planned to make their escape to civilization back east, but not one peculiar man, quite well dressed for the frontier. Wearing knee breeches, ruffles and silver buckles, the 5-foot-nine, 160-pound Reverend James Kemper went door to door imploring settlers to remain here on the edge of civilization. He must have cut quite the odd figure compared to the rough-hewn settlers clothed in hunting frocks and patched up clothing he visited. So began James Kemper's ministerial career in Cincinnati.

The Kemper family homestead at Cedar Grove

Early Life

James Kemper was uniquely qualified to be the spiritual head of early Cincinnati. While being a man able to mix with his flock, he worked on a higher level with a vision for Cincinnati. Kemper was born November 23, 1753; the third son of Virginia planter John Kemper. He was the grandchild of Johannes Kemper, a founding member of the Germanna German colony of 1714, near Culpepper, Virginia. He later moved near Warrenton, Virginia. Here, in 1745, John Kemper built a ten-room wood frame house on 70 acres of land purchased from Lord Fairfax. "Cedar Grove," as his father's estate was called, provided a comfortable setting for James and his six siblings' upbringing. James himself states he was "considerably indulged by his parents." James attended school from age 12 to 15, where he excelled in writing, grammar, and reading. By his own admission, he was never "apt" at arithmetic. His three years of schooling were rather typical for this period in history. In 1768, at the age of 15, James lost his mother during the birth of his sister, Alice. His oldest sister, Sarah, raised the children for her father, even taking in an African-American boy who had lost his mother. The death of his mother affected Kemper so much that he chose to relate it to the readers of his memoirs some sixty years later. Other than this tragic occurrence, James Kemper's childhood appears to have been rather traditional and somewhat idyllic for this time in history.

The Kemper's Cedar Grove home came with neigh-

bors. Judith Hathaway, born April 28, 1756, was the oldest daughter of American Revolutionary officer Captain John Hathaway. The oldest of 14 children, Judith grew up in a family of "considerable property both in lands and slaves in Virginia." Her grandfather was one of the earliest settlers of Virginia. Although born in White Stone, Lancaster County, the family later moved to Fauquier County near where the Kemper homestead was located. The Kemper and Hathaway families were quite friendly even before Judith's betrothal to James.

Judith Hathaway Kemper was James' beloved throughout his life.

On His Own

In the year 1772, Judith, sixteen, and James, eighteen, were married. The young couple received a dowry from Judith's father. As if this was not generous enough, Kemper's father also provided a small parcel of unimproved land. Kemper's family was unusual for the time as his father provided land to all his sons in a time dominated by primogeniture, the practice of inheritance of everything by the firstborn son. James and Judith built a small cabin with a dirt floor and a mud and stick chimney. James cleared four acres of land for cultivation. After improving the land and living on it for about a year, he traded properties with one of his brothers. Despite receiving what many young couples would desire in the way of setting up housekeeping, James seemed to want more than the life of a farmer. The strain of starting over seemed to be too much for Kemper as he states, "…the labor of opening a farm proved too hard for me and I fell sick." As a result of his exertion, he was under a physician's care for one year. As he felt stronger, he taught school for a time to bring income to the home. He states in regards to teaching, he "could not bear it. . ." Kemper's instructing local children in their educational studies was the beginning of Kemper's career in education.

As if a growing family, farming and teaching weren't enough, Kemper began religious studies. Kemper had always been a man of faith. He grew up in an

Episcopalian household, where he was baptized. He also married in this faith, as Judith's family was Episcopalian. As James delved deeper into theological study, he was torn between his Episcopalian heritage and that of the Presbyterians.

During the American Revolution, James joined the patriot cause. While little is known of his service time, he probably fought alongside his brother, Peter, in the Fauquier County Company, Virginia Militia. This unit saw action at the siege of Yorktown in 1781. Peter was wounded by shrapnel during the siege. James appears to have escaped the action unscathed. Despite James Kemper's otherwise well-documented life, there is no record of the campaigns he served in, and he seems never to have applied for a pension for his time in service. In fact, in his own unpublished memoirs, Life's Review, he makes no reference to the war and instead discusses his strengthening of his newfound Presbyterian faith and friendship with a preacher named Hezekiah Balch.

As Kemper moved west, he found work as a surveyor

Moving West

The friendship that blossomed between the Kemper family and Hezekiah Balch became the impetus for the Kemper's next adventure. Balch and his family headed west into Greene County, North Carolina. James joined his friend to check the suitability for his own family. Finding it suitable, Kemper moved his growing family to Greene County, North Carolina, in November of 1783 (current-day Tennessee). To make this move, he was forced to sell the land his father gave him to settle debts and afford new property. This seemed to cause a rift between him and his father; his father traveled with them the first day of the trip, but they never saw each other again after that. The Kemper family spent their first few weeks in a friend's cabin. The family had grown to include six children: Frances, Elnathan, Sarah, Caleb, Peter, and Edward. The Kempers soon found themselves starting over in a windowless, dirt -floored log cabin built by James.

Kemper found gainful employment working as a deputy district surveyor. He surveyed at an opportune time, when the nation was beginning to pour over the mountains and into present-day Kentucky and Tennessee. A surveyor's profession could provide many chances to increase wealth, both monetarily and with land. However, any job on the frontier was fraught with danger. Surveying and marking wild lands put a man at the mercy of local Indian

tribes, wild animals, wild terrain, and the elements. This was quite the change for a son of a Virginia planter. It was an occupation that soon proved unsuitable for James Kemper.

Early in Kemper's career as a surveyor, he began to have problems. The water where he surveyed was largely filtered through the limestone rock abundant in the area, and this proved problematic to Kemper's health. He began to suffer from skin lesions on his body, especially his wrists, back and legs. These "tormenting irruptions" were most likely what we call today, "hard water dermatitis." This severely curtailed his career as a surveyor. At this time, Kemper began to "fall out" with Hezekiah Balch over religion.

A religious debate and schism began to take place in the Kemper's area of Greene County. A new youthful Presbyterian minister had moved near the area and began using a different version of Psalms for their psalmodies. This break with tradition caused the new minister to incur the wrath of Balch. Kemper was taken aback by Balch's vitriol and "unpresbyterial" and "unchristian" behavior. Soon, Kemper began to distance himself from Hezekiah Balch. Though he seemed to say nothing about it publically, he soon was also a victim of Balch's hatefulness. Between his work issues and the growing hostility between Balch and him, remaining in Greene County became untenable and certainly contributed to Kemper's decision to leave and start over yet again.

Hearing the Call

Kemper and his family had embraced the Presbyterian faith as a result of his initial friendship with Hezekiah Balch. His falling out with Balch was now the impetus for Kemper to explore the possibility of attending the presbytery located near Danville, Kentucky. James had mentioned in passing to friends how he wished he had been prepared for the ministry. Kemper's cousin, Jacob Fishback, had previously moved to Mercer County, Kentucky, and he recommended Kemper's interest in ministry to those at Transylvania Seminary. The seminary sent word back to Kemper letting him know what he would need to move and attend the seminary. David Rice, an established Presbyterian minister, extended the invitation, despite a disparaging letter by Balch. Kemper wrote back to Rice, stating that he would be interested in studying at the seminary if business concerns and family issues seemed conducive. In response, Rice sent 40 men with horses to escort Kemper and his family back to Kentucky. Forced with a sudden decision, Kemper sought the counsel of his wife, employer, and closest friends—they all supported the decision to move to Kentucky.

The journey from Greene County, North Carolina, to Danville, Kentucky, was a distance of 180 miles through land long-bloodied by conflict between white settlers and Native Americans. The Kemper family, including a very pregnant Judith, undertook their journey on April 1, 1785. Accompanied by a

guard of forty men, the group traveled through the high cane and passed by several spots where remains of settlers had been ambushed and killed by Indians. On the 18th of April, the family arrived in Lincoln County, Kentucky, at Jacob Fishback's home. The next day, Judith gave birth to a healthy baby boy who they named James Jr.

The Kemper family set up housekeeping in the log cabin that the Fishbacks used for a kitchen. As one might guess, this was a bit of an inconvenience to the Fishbacks. This arrangement lasted throughout the spring, summer and into fall—when Kemper made an offer to trade 400 acres of Tennessee land for 150 acres of land owned by the Fishbacks. Kemper set about improving the land and built a "more convenient cabin;" that is, a double cabin or double pen log home. It seemed he was beginning to make a fine start in Kentucky.

Kemper soon found employment as a catechist, traveling 12-15 miles every Sunday, and also became the teacher in the first public school in the state of Kentucky. On May 25, 1785, a school opened up 10 miles northeast of Danville. Actually part of the Transylvania Seminary, the school was endowed from lands confiscated from British loyalists during the American Revolution. Kemper's confidant and mentor, David Rice, served on the board that over-saw the school. The Harmony Church School thrived and was later moved to Lexington.

However, bad luck seemed to follow James from Virginia. Soon after the American Revolution be-gan, James purchased a mare with colt and some

other items on credit. The amount came to thirteen pounds, ten schillings, Virginia currency. The state had just passed a law allowing Virginia currency to be used in payment of British debts, regardless of the market value of Virginia currency. Kemper failed to make the required payment in time, missing the date by only one or two hours. As a result, he defaulted on his creditor and was now forced to re-pay the principal and interest in guineas, British gold specie. This proved much more costly, as Virginia's currency was highly devalued at the end of the American Revolution. Not having the finances to deal with this debt requirement, Kemper was forced to sell his newly-improved land, cabin and all. This left Kemper and his family with very little. Kemper says he was left with; ". . . a couple of small horses and perhaps scarce anything more left."

Once again Kemper was forced to start over. He leased another tract of land, cleared four acres, built another double cabin, and planted more crops. As

Kemper's plan seemed doubtful to succeed, Reverend David Rice gave Kemper an opportunity to not only recover financially, but also to finally begin his seminary studies: Rice offered to house the Kemper family in some vacant cabins on his farm in return for his becoming the farm manager and superintendent over the others renting on his land. He also promised Kemper up to 12 acres of his own for cultivation. This was the lifeline Kemper needed to get back on his feet and to pursue theological studies.

For the next three and a half years, the Kemper family enjoyed a relatively stable life. Kemper settled into running Rice's properties, being mentored by Rice, being a catechist and church elder, serving as a sentry for others as they planted, and studying theology. It should be noted that during this time, James doted on the efforts of his wife, Judith, as she raised their family (which had now grown to eight children) and also as she worked the land, and did spinning and weaving. His schedule was such that most day-to-day management of the household rested solely on Judith's shoulders.

Breakdown

The pressure of Kemper's schedule was too much for him. He became physically and mentally broken down. Local doctors advised him to take a break from all he was doing and to remove himself from the situation. The decision was made for him to return to Fauquier County, Virginia—to his family home of Cedar Grove. Kemper would take this trip alone; Judith and their children remained behind in Kentucky.

James Kemper set out for Virginia in May 1790. After much difficulty, due to his state of health, he arrived home to convalesce. His time spent recuperating included cold baths, which meant literally immersing himself in ice cold water. Kemper would either break the ice and simply jump in or sit in a tub of cold water. He did this frequently throughout the winter and into the early summer. He lamented that the only effect the baths had on him was "increasing my appetite" and giving his skin a "bloated appearance."

The "water cure" was prescribed for ailments varying from muscle fatigue to psychiatric problems.

By the beginning of August, Kemper felt restored enough to return to Kentucky and his waiting family. He traveled about 100 miles before being overcome by the heat of the month. Despondent, he returned to Cedar Grove. He set out on a second attempt in early September. This time, both the weather and his mindset were agreeable, and he arrived safely back to his waiting family. Although still in a fragile state, Kemper was able to receive his licensing from the Transylvania Presbytery on October 1, 1790.

First Ordained Minister in Ohio

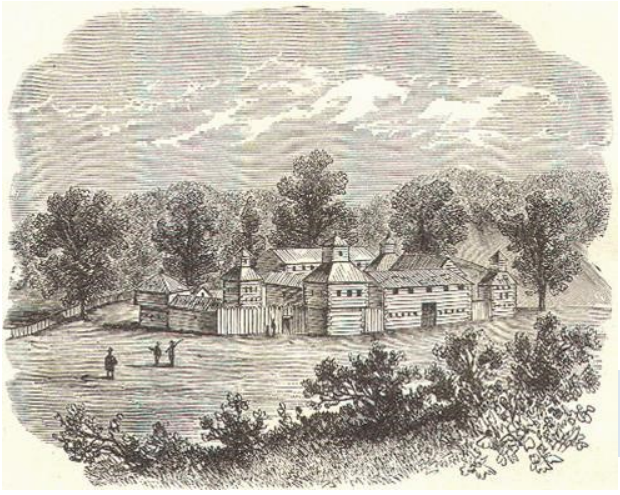
Soon after James Kemper received his licensing from Transylvania Seminary, a request came from an area in the newly-formed Northwest Territory: present-day Cincinnati. The presbytery was asked to provide a minister for the fledgling settlements of Cincinnati and Columbia. Southwestern Ohio had been opened for settlement and a New Jersey Continental Congress Delegate, John Cleves Symmes, had purchased the lands that stood between the two Miami Rivers all the way up into Butler and Warren Counties of present-day Ohio. David Rice went to the settlements, where he met with some of the settlers. They organized a "mother church" they called the Cincinnati-Columbia Presbyterian Church. Rice asked Kemper to visit the settlements to introduce himself to the settlements. Kemper first visited the settlements in November of 1790. He visited again the following spring of 1791.

At this time, he agreed to a one-year contract for ministering to the settlements. He agreed to arrive with his family in Cincinnati in October of 1791. Kemper requested an escort to see him and his family safely from Danville, Kentucky, to Cincinnati. Daniel Doty and another man named French traveled from the Columbia settlement to be the armed escort for the Kemper family. James, Judith, and their children (now numbering ten), along with their escorts, set out on the Wilderness Trace for Limestone, now Maysville, Kentucky, and the Ohio Riv-

er. Once they arrived at Limestone, they boarded a flatboat with all their belongings and floated the rest of the way to Cincinnati, arriving on October 25, 1791. Upon observing the small population of Cincinnati, Kemper wrote, "The people of Cincinnati when I came there formed a community of poor, but the most respectable people, I ever saw, beginning and making a settlement in a remote and new country."

Kemper's arrival occurred nine days before the return of Territorial Governor and General, Arthur St. Clair, and the remnants of his once-proud army. On November 4, 1791, St. Clair and his forces met annihilation at the hands of a confederacy of Ohio Valley tribes. So complete was the defeat, the Army of the United States of America suffered over 70% casualties.

Two days later, after the decimated forces returned, the surviving officers held a ball at Fort Washington. This seemed so out of place that one can only think



Fort Washington

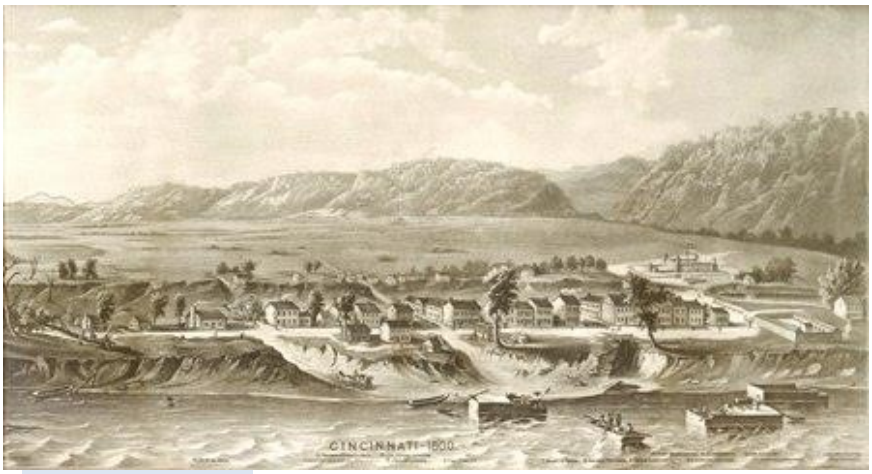
that it was held to build morale. James Kemper attended the ball. There, he met Chickasaw Indian chief, George Colbert. Piomingo, along with Colbert, were two of the leaders of a friendly force of Chickasaws from the South, serving as scouts for the American army. Kemper invited Colbert to dine with him. The chief accepted. During the course of the dinner, Kemper inquired of Chief Colbert how the Chickasaws would have responded after such a horrible defeat. Colbert told him that the mourning would have lasted all winter.

Despite the best efforts of hosting a ball in the garrison city of Cincinnati, Kemper's new home of Cincinnati was gripped in fear of an impending massacre at the hands of local tribes such as the Shawnee and Delaware. Legend has it that Kemper went nearly door to door, even talking to individuals at the public landing of the Ohio River, exhorting them to stay in Cincinnati. He told people that it was their duty as Christians to stay the course of settlement in a rugged land.

Most of the population stayed on, but did not venture far from the protective walls of Fort Washington. During this period in Cincinnati, derisively called by those in Kentucky the "Miami Slaughterhouse," it was not safe to be out after dark as Indians, emboldened by their recent victory, skulked through town at night stealing horses and attacking those not careful. Many of the small surrounding settlements found themselves the targets of Native-American attacks. Many areas such as Covalt's Station and Clements' Station, now Terrace Park and

the Columbia settlement, suffered casualties from Indian predations. Despite the danger, areas such as these were in dire need of a clergyman. This was the call that Kemper answered.

Kemper and his family spent their first days in a borrowed home provided by Cincinnati resident Jonathan Ludlow. After 20 or 30 days, Kemper moved his family to a double cabin, built by Jacob Reeder, located on the west side of Sycamore Street just north of Fourth Street. Kemper never was deeded this property, lot 65. This meant that this lot might have been what is known as a donation lot or that Kemper just had a "certificate of purchase" from John Cleves Symmes. The Kemper family would make this spot their home for the next two years.



Cincinnati 1800

Frontier Preacher

Life on the frontier proved full of struggles. Cincinnati was only established three years before Kemper arrived. Little production took place here beyond self-sufficient work. Supplies in a Western garrison town such as Cincinnati were hard to come by. When supplies were available, the troops at Fort Washington received first choice. What was left was available for purchase for the highest bidder or simply at inflated prices. Kemper recalls purchasing several barrels of sour flour, as regular flour or corn meal were not available, for eight dollars per barrel. Even at that price, the family was required to sift it for worms before use.

As mentioned before, the "Indian threat" limited mobility in the area. Settlements were slow to spread or remained small while the threat of attack remained. Everything that wasn't secured inside could be stolen at night, especially horses. Kemper learned this firsthand. Residents had warned Kemper to sell his horses before the Indians could steal them. He sold all but one horse, a mare that was pregnant. To keep her secure, Kemper developed a system of customized locks that only he knew, to keep her safe in the stable. This managed only to prolong the time he was able to keep her. In the spring, when she was close to foaling, Kemper walked to his barn to find nothing but an empty stall and strips of hickory bark for his troubles.

Kemper settled into a job that required him to do

the opposite of what common sense would dictate at this dangerous time. In order to tend his flock and to preach the word of God, he often had to travel from Cincinnati to the outlying settlements. In many places he would avoid the trails and ride through the woods to avoid "skulking Indians." Even when ministering in town, danger was ever-present. Throughout most of Kemper's first year in Cincinnati, he was forced to preach in the homes of members, at the Baptist meeting house, and even standing on a barrel under trees. Late in his first year, members put up a new wood frame church. This new Presbyterian Church was described by early settler and judge Jacob Burnet as, "enclosed with clapboards, but neither lathed, plastered or ceiled. The floor was made of boat-plank, laid loosely on sleepers. The seats were constructed of the same material, supported by blocks of wood. They were, of course, without backs; and here our forefather pioneers worshiped, with their trusty rifles between their knees." Church members were required during this time to attend church with their firearms, and failure to do so resulted in a 75-cent fine. Even Reverend Kemper kept his musket with him in the pulpit. In 1792, Kemper was officially ordained and installed as the minister of the Cincinnati Presbyterian Church for three years. This made him the first minister ordained in Ohio.

To Walnut Hills

In 1793, James, Judith, and their brood of now eleven soon outgrew their lodgings in town. Kemper expected that John Cleves Symmes would gift him a small farm, or that the church would receive one for his use. That was not to be, and Kemper had to finance his own land purchase. His congregation raised forty dollars for him. At two dollars an acre, that was enough for 20 acres. Kemper financed another one hundred and thirty acres. All of this land, on a hill northeast of Fort Washington, was located well outside the safe area around the fort. In this time of Indian wars, the Kemper family would be on their own for protection. The commander of Fort Washington, General James Wilkinson, strongly advised against the family moving so far from the protection of the fort and its soldiers, but Kemper could not be deterred from his decision. All General Wilkinson could do was issue Kemper some surplus muskets, and tell him if they heard shots, they'd respond—and then wish him good luck. A military response, should trouble occur, was doubtful to reach the family in time. It took a person roughly three hours to go from Fort Washington to Kemper's land outside of town.

Kemper named his new farm "Walnut Hill" due to the many walnut trees on the property. Unbeknownst to him, he had named that area of present-day Cincinnati. Kemper cleared his land and built a military-style blockhouse to shelter his family. This would be their home, while in Cincinnati, for the

A blockhouse—similar to what the Kempers would have built

next eleven years. Three more Kemper children were born in this blockhouse.

The Kemper blockhouse was built with a gallery around the second story that projected over the bottom floor. This made it easier to fire a weapon (such as a musket) at threats on the bottom floor. According to family members, all the older children, including the daughters, took their turn on watch to keep the family safe. While Kemper and his sons broke the soil and did the planting, his daughters Frances and Sarah would stand guard with muskets at the ready. Even something as simple as fetching water required an armed escort. One source of water was approximately 70 yards from the blockhouse. Their second source was even further and was deemed too dangerous for regular use. As prepared as the Kemper family was, there are no written accounts of any trouble occurring at the blockhouse during the Indian War years, 1790-1795.

Despite the safety concerns during the early 1790s, Kemper continued his travels just as the settlers of his flock branched out to new settlements, including Cincinnati, Columbia, Clements' Station, Covalt's Station, North Bend, and Duck Creek. During one service for the people of Clements' and Covalt's Stations, several settlers not attending service were killed and scalped, while Kemper preached to those present.

In late summer of 1794, a major barrier to expanding settlement was lifted. On August 20, 1794, General Anthony Wayne and his Legion of the United States defeated the Indian Confederacy at a place called Fallen Timbers. This put an end to widespread Indian predations in Southwest Ohio. Those settlers kept pent-up among the fortified settlements now felt it safe to move to land they had purchased that would have left them exposed to danger prior to Fallen Timbers. The settlement of Southwest Ohio blossomed. With the close of the Indian Wars, so closed Kemper's time as minister for Cincinnati. Kemper retired as minister of the Cincinnati-Columbia Presbyterian Church in 1796. Now, with the Indian threat gone, the combined Cincinnati-Columbia church split and each place started its own congregation. However, this did not mean the end of Kemper's ministering.

Circuit riders travelled miles to reach congregations of settlers who didn't have churches in their area .

Circuit Rider, Missionary

As the settlements of Southwest Ohio increased, so did the miles that Kemper and his faithful horse travelled. Kemper missed no chance to minister to the citizens of Southwest Ohio or start a new church as the settlers spread out across Southwest Ohio. Kemper rode the circuit that encompassed the area between the Little Miami and Great Miami Rivers and from the Ohio River to Hamilton, Ohio, to Beedle's Station just south of Lebanon, Ohio. Often times, Kemper was not alone in his travels. During the dangerous early 1790s, Kemper's older sons often accompanied him while riding his circuit. One account describes Kemper, "riding horse-back with his gun slung over his shoulder followed by 5 grown sons horse-back with guns riding the trail from Walnut Hills thro the woods to Duck Creek (Pleasant Ridge) for Sabbath Service."

In December of 1799, Kemper accepted an invitation to live and preach at the Turtle Creek Congregation, located just to the Southwest of present-day South Lebanon in Warren County. Kemper purchased another 100 acre tract of land from John Cleves Symmes and moved his family there in the same month. Kemper's stay there was not long or pleasant. By all accounts, the settlement was much more "rustic" than most of the family was prepared for. Judith Kemper's colorful and fashionable bonnets seemed out of place in a settlement where even the clothing worn by the young women was, ". . . fashioned from buckskin." It appears neither Judith

nor the children enjoyed their time there. A dispute also ensued between settlement founder William Beedle and Reverend Kemper over property lines. This lifestyle change, coupled with the property dispute, proved too much for Kemper, and he and his family returned to the Walnut Hill Farm in January 1801, after spending only one year in Turtle Creek. A year after Kemper left Turtle Creek, most of that Warren County congregation became Shakers.

Kemper accepted another call to minister—this time in Sycamore Creek, near present-day Montgomery, Ohio. The location of this congregation allowed for Kemper and his family to remain at the Walnut Hill home. Here, conditions weren't much better than Turtle Creek. Kemper writes in his autobiography of how he ". . . preached several months, standing on the head of a barrel, for want of a pulpit."

With Kemper's official pastorate term long expired, he was able to pick and choose where and when he preached. He also found time to build a more fitting home for his large, yet still growing family. Construction of another double pen log home was un-

In 1804, Kemper finally completed another log home for his family. This home now stands as part of Heritage Village Museum in Sharonville, Ohio.

dertaken in 1804. On the same high ground that Kemper had built his family blockhouse, just 60-70 feet to the northeast, he built his new home. On June 4, 1804, 50-year-old James, his pregnant wife, and the younger of their 14 children moved into their newly finished home, which would be occupied by the Kemper family until 1897. This time in Kemper family history is also remarkable because in the early hours after moving in, the Kemper's fifteenth child was born, a boy they named Charles Adolphus Benjamin Kemper. James continued to preach where needed and to travel as a missionary.

In 1807, Kemper received the honor of attending the Presbyterian General Assembly as a Commissioner in Philadelphia. This would be the first of three times the Presbytery would send him to the General Assembly. After three weeks travel, he arrived at the Susquehanna River. He left his horse there at a livery and continued on by carriage to Philadelphia. Staying with a cousin, he attended meetings, church, visited museums, libraries and hospitals—spending twenty-two days in Philadelphia. After returning to his horse, Kemper went south to visit Cedar Grove and his brother. Kemper returned home on August 5, 1807—after being away for three months and six days. Despite this long period away from home, Kemper found time to build and open a school in Walnut Hills. The Walnut Hills Academy opened, and his eldest son, Elnathan served as instructor.

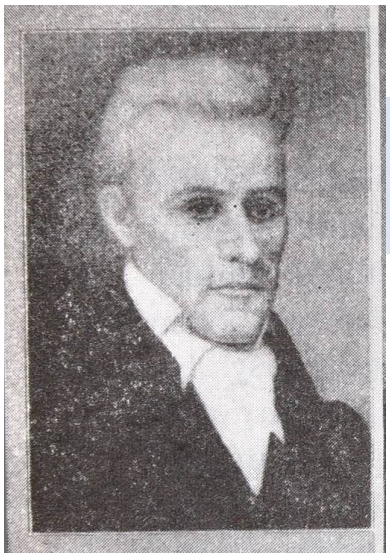
Reverend James Kemper traveled 2,000 miles in a missionary trip he undertook in 1809 to the North-

ern Neck of Virginia. While away, Kemper observed the U.S. Congress in session. His impression was, "they were a poor lot." On this four-month trip, Kemper gave over 30 sermons and lectures and surpassed 25,000 miles of travel on his nine-year-old horse. Kemper's trips were not the hardships one might think. He was paid roughly $85.00 for his time on a missionary trip.

When Kemper returned from another successful missionary trip in Virginia, one in which Patrick Henry rode nine miles to hear Kemper preach, the settlers of Johnston's Fork and Flemingsburg, Kentucky, asked Kemper to become their minister. In May of 1810, the Kemper family was yet again on the road. Financially, Flemingsburg was the most lucrative situation Kemper had experienced in his ministerial career: he was paid a $300.00 yearly salary. The Kemper family stayed in Flemingsburg until May of 1814. After almost four years, he became frustrated with the fact that the congregation still held services in an old log cabin. Kemper thought nothing of raising a better house of worship but the little country congregation was content to continue on in the cabin. This proved to be a deal-breaker for Kemper. The good reverend exhorted his flock to build a better church, to the point of threatening to not stay if they didn't. They didn't. True to his word, Kemper removed his family back to Walnut Hills except for one daughter, Judith Blair Kemper, who married a church elder there.

Kemper seems to have experienced some regret about leaving Flemingsburg. He not only left his

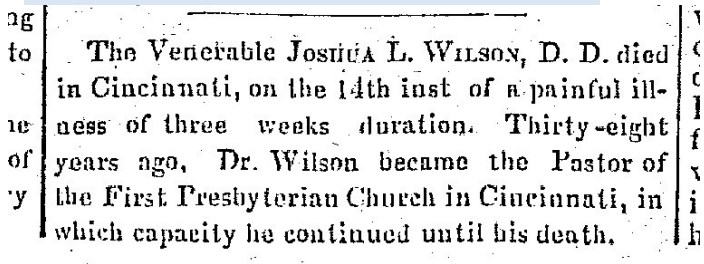
daughter there, but also a congregation he took from a lost and rough condition and molded into "…the best informed, pious and respectable people here, that I had been connected with since I was a catechist . . ." Kemper certainly seemed attached to this congregation. The location was also convenient as his wife Judith found herself close to four of her sisters and one brother. She had not seen her family since leaving Cedar Grove, over 40 years earlier. In fact, Judith never her saw her parents again.



Joshua Lacy Wilson

(1774-1846)

The Reverend Wilson died on August 14, 1846—after his tenure as Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati.



The Venerable Joshua L. Wilson, D. D. died in Cincinnati, on the 14th inst of a painful illness of three weeks duration. Thirty-eight years ago, Dr. Wilson became the Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, in which capacity he continued until his death.

Back to Walnut Hills

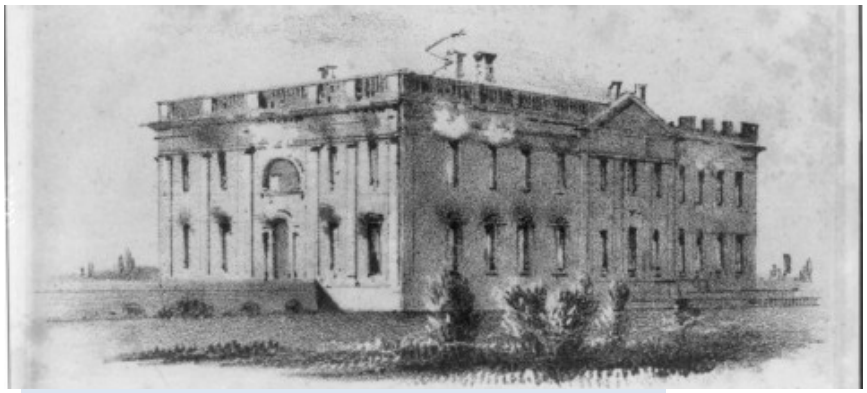
Kemper's return to Walnut Hills came with a vow to himself not to take pastoral charge of any congregation again. With this in mind, the Kemper family attended the First Presbyterian, the church first led by Kemper, now led by the Reverend Joshua Wilson. He still would, when needed, fill in as a preacher for services. He was still willing to travel the countryside and even substitute for Reverend Wilson in downtown Cincinnati. Kemper states he was ". . . contented and wished nothing more . . ." This "filling in" for Reverend Joshua Wilson, however, would become problematic.

It appears that Wilson's request for Kemper to substitute for him gave way to professional rivalry and jealousies. Kemper states that his time of covering for Reverend Wilson came to an end due to his doing his job too well. At some point, Wilson was told of the very good job that Kemper was doing in his stead. Because of this, Kemper wrote that ". . . his apprehensions seemed to be excited, and he invited me no more." Wilson went so far as to tell his congregation to worship at home rather than allow Kemper to substitute for him.

Wilson went a step further, bringing charges against Kemper for being out of order. He accused Kemper of preaching without asking his permission. This seems inaccurate as Wilson had previously sent two elders requesting him to cover his absences. Wilson claimed that Kemper, who at the time belonged to the West Lexington Presbytery, was

preaching without permission in the Miami Presbytery. Kemper, however, was a stickler for detail, and had in his possession written permission from the presbytery to do so. Kemper even countered that Wilson had knowingly used another man, Henry Rufner, as a part-time preacher without the consent of the presbytery. Wilson and Kemper reached a stalemate with charges and counter-charges. Wilson refused any more meetings with Kemper, and seemed content to leave things "off the record" after protecting his "turf."

Kemper continued his travels. He took two more extended missionary trips to Virginia and Washington, DC, one in 1815, where he lamented the burning of the capital in Washington, and his last in 1817 at age 64. Reverend Kemper continued to make smaller missionary trips into Kentucky and other areas of Ohio. He also traveled to attend Synods, local church government meetings, where he was quite involved. Even while busy as a missionary, Kemper's faith and focus returned to Walnut Hills in 1818.



"President's house after its destruction by the British"

A Church, A Seminary, & "ruction" come to Walnut Hills

Reverend James Kemper began to organize a new church right in his backyard, literally.

On land owned by the Kemper family, now the corner of McMillan and Melrose avenues in Walnut Hills, the family built a 30 foot by 40 foot stone church. At the age of 65, when most think of retirement, Kemper was installed in yet another "first" in his career, as the pastor of the newly formed Walnut Hills Presbyterian Church. Kemper considered this church his crowning jewel and preached there until his death.

Kemper had always wanted and supported having a seminary based on the "manual labor" system located to the northwest of the Ohio River. In 1827, it seemed that his dream would be realized. Kemper even offered some of his land in Walnut Hills for a location. The Presbyterian General Assembly, instead, awarded the new seminary to Alleghenytown, Pennsylvania. This decision actually put Reverend Kemper and his old antagonist, Reverend Joshua Wilson, in the same camp opposing this new seminary. Wilson, in fact, so vehemently opposed the seminary in Alleghenytown that he refused to cooperate with the seminary or recognize it. They weren't alone. A large backlash in the West occurred against the General Assembly's decision. Kentucky and Indiana's Synods decided to create their own seminaries.

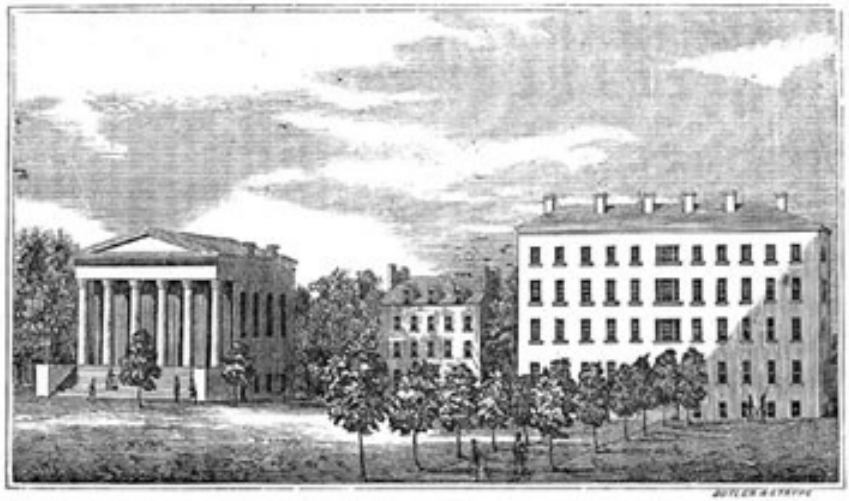
Ebeneezer Lane and his brother, William, expressed

interest in financing a seminary located in or near Cincinnati in 1828. It was James Kemper's eldest son, Elnathan, who helped Kemper realize his dream, but at a price. Elnathan, who had purchased a farm adjacent to his father's, offered sixty acres of his own land as a donation, plus an additional forty acres priced at $4,000.00. The new board set up to develop the seminary immediately accepted both offers from Elnathan. James Kemper was the patriarch of the Presbyterian Church in Southwest Ohio, and Elnathan wanted his father's name commemorated in the donation. It appears that Elnathan was under pressure from James to add the two brothers that were also interested in being part of the donation as well. The details surrounding this donation led to the dispute known as the "ruction" among family members. What should have been the defining moment for James Kemper only served to drive a wedge between his family.

In exchange for being added to the donation tract, James and his two other sons, Peter and David, agreed to transfer 22.5 acres of land to Elnathan. This led to arguments among the brothers as to what share of the donation each should get and when the transfers should be made. Disputes also occurred over property values for land that would exchange hands for a share in the donation. These disputes led to the schism in the family known as the "ructure," in which Elnathan, David, and Peter became estranged from each other.

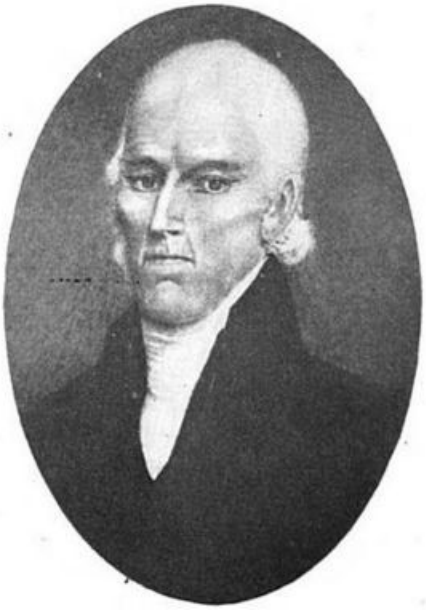
In 1832, construction of Lane Seminary on Kemper land was finished—and so was nearly any family

good feeling about it. Despite this, James Kemper tried to rise above the fray and keep his family united. Family relations between the involved members reached probably their lowest when David sued his brother Elnathan in April 1831 over a land transaction associated with Lane Seminary. Hard feelings lingered for years, with some family members not speaking to each other for the rest of their lives. To add insult to injury within the family, James's second -oldest son, Caleb, succumbed to cholera in October of 1832.



Lane Seminary, Walnut Hills, near Cincinnati.

"Lane Seminary, Walnut Hills , near Cincinnati."



JUDITH HATHAWAY KEMPER

Twilight

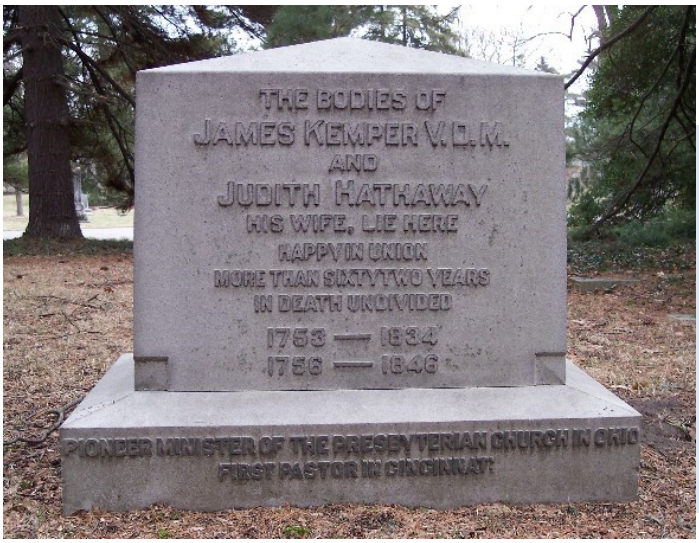
With the Lane "ruction" behind him, Kemper seemed content to try and repair family relations and continue in the pulpit of the Walnut Hills Presbyterian Church. The Kemper Records describe the later years of James and Judith Kemper in Walnut Hills as "…peaceful and comfortable in this substantial home . . ." It would seem that Kemper's golden years slowed down, and he was able to enjoy a stable life on Walnut Hills with his wife Judith.

James Kemper had always doted over his very understanding and capable wife Judith. One family anecdote tells of Kemper requesting a new riding outfit for Judith to be sewn by a daughter-in- law. For her to finish the sewing in time would require her to miss Sunday church services. It is that Kemper said nothing when apprised of this, but returned with the required fabric. On Sunday, when asked where his daughter-in-law was, Kemper informed those interested that Rhoda was doing "the Lord's work." It was a testament to a mutual devotion that sustained both of them throughout 62 years of marriage.

Tragedy struck the Kemper family once again in 1834. During the cholera outbreak of 1834, Kemper's oldest son Elnathan fell ill with cholera on his way home from church and was dead before morning. Kemper, once again, had to perform a funeral over one of his own. It was only three days later, on August 20, 1834, when Kemper, himself succumbed to cholera. He was aged 80 years.

In his life of 80 years, Kemper was a farmer, teacher, surveyor, catechist, elder, and a pastor of over 43 years. He had lived in Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio. He owned five residences in Kentucky and Ohio. Kemper started more than twenty Presbyterian churches in Ohio alone. In fact, James Kemper is arguably the founder of Presbyterianism in Southwest Ohio.

Kemper was laid to rest in the family plot in Walnut Hills, near his children. Judith lived nearly twelve more years. His beloved Judith would join him March 1, 1846. The inscription on their stone reads: "James Kemper and Judith Hathaway, his wife lie here happy in union more than sixty two years in death undivided." With the continued development of the Walnut Hills area, it became necessary to remove all Kemper family members resting in their family plot. They were reinterred in Spring Grove Cemetery on May 29, 1867.



The Kemper gravestone can be found at Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati, Ohio.

For Further Reading

Life's Review, James Kemper 1753-1834, James Kemper

The Old Kemper Home, Robert Ralston Jones

Historical Register of Virginians in the Revolution, Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, 1775-1783, James H. Gwathmey

*The Cincinnati Historical Society Bu*lletin, Volume 37, Winter1979, No. 4. The Founding of the Lane Seminary, Lawrence T. Lesick.

Queen City Heritage, The Journal of the Cincinnati Historical Society, Volume 50, Spring 1992 No. 1, A Calvinist of the Old School: Joshua Lacy Wilson in Cincinnati, 1808-1846. Robert C. Vitz

Queen City Heritage, The Journal of the Cincinnati Historical Society, Volume 45 Fall 1987 No. 3. William Henry Harrison Comes to Cincinnati, Hendrik Booraem V

The First Description of Cincinnati and Other Settlements, The Travel Report of Johann Heckewelder (1792), Edited by Don Heinrich Tolzmann

Kemper Records, 1946, A Supplement to the Kemper Family, 1899. Compiled by Virginia M. McComb

Stockades in the Wilderness, The Frontier Defenses and Settlements of Southwestern Ohio, 1788-1795. Richard Scamyhorn & John Steinle

About the Author

Steve Preston is the Education Director and a Curator of History and Research at Heritage Village Museum. Steve has several degrees, including a Master's Degree in Public History. His special area of interest within history is the study of the Ohio Valley, 1700 to 1815. Steve is married with one son. In his spare time, he enjoys fly fishing, reading, and travel.

Steve Preston has portrayed the Reverend James Kemper at Heritage Village Museum. Here, Steve is holding a replica 1745 Bible and a replica 1768 French Infantry Musket (commonly known as a Charleville for the armory where they were produced)—ready to preach in the dangerous regions of his early Cincinnati congregations.

The Mission Statement of Heritage Village Museum

To bring history alive, focusing on life in the late 1700s through the 1800s.

The Heritage Village Museum is owned and operated by Historic Southwest Ohio, Inc. a non-profit 501© (3) organization.

It is through the generous donation of time and fundraising by our board, members and visitors that we are able to continue providing quality educational and historical programs and events.

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11450 Lebanon Pike, Route 42

Sharonville, Ohio 45241

513-563-9484

www.HeritageVillageCincinnati.org