

Tales From Along the Trail...

An 1867 Election Day Story

On July 30th, 1867, the newly incorporated village of Kent held an election to select the first mayor and city council. The election was a close one with John Thompson winning (145 votes), Luther Parmelee (143 votes) and Sylvester Higgins (116 votes). Mayor Thompson was concerned that not all of the 2,300 citizens of Kent were law abiding and the railroads brought in their share of troublemakers. He ordered the construction of Kent's first jail which opened in 1869 on 124 West Day Street (current home of Walgreens Drugstore). The small, one story brick jail was constructed with three cells which became rediscovered after the Old Jail was moved to its new home in Fred Fuller Park. During renovation, the plaster was removed revealing the old brick walls and the mystery of the location of the five by ten-foot cells. The Old Kent Jail was moved across the Cuyahoga River in December of 1999 to begin its new life of serving the citizens of Kent as a meeting place in our parks. On the National Registry for Historic Places, the Old Jail is available for rent from Kent Parks and Recreation. The facility seats 22 people and has tables, chairs, a kitchenette, restroom and deck overlooking the Cuyahoga River. No doubt the facilities are much more welcoming and comfortable today than 151 years ago. In 1900, eight railroad "hoboes" escaped through a hole in the roof, leaving a penciled farewell "your birds have flown." Escapes like these and the growth of the community led to a new jail in the 1920's leaving the Old Kent Jail as an office.



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