

ACCORDING TO THE ORAL HISTORY, a home located on West Fourth Street in the city of Maysville, built by a family by the name of Bierbower¹ who migrated from Pennsylvania in the 1830s and settled in Kentucky to manufacture carriages and wagons, was used by the family and its inhabitants² to conceal runaway slaves who would be ferried across the Ohio River to freedom in the north by way of the network known as the Underground Railroad. Recorded by Alice K. Gallenstein of Maysville, conveyed by the late Christine McNutt Maher also of Maysville and the last person to live in the house, the oral history was obtained by Maher by way of the late Grace Bierbower, the last living descendant of the Bierbower family of Maysville.

The following is the record of the Bierbower/Maher Property History in its entirety.

The following is the history of the Bierbower family and their Maysville residence. The family opened their home as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

Jonathan Ayers Bierbower was the son of Henry Bierbower. Henry was born in York County, Pennsylvania. Henry's father was Casper Bierbower (1736-1823). Casper Bierbower came to America from Germany.

Jonathan Bierbower's wife, Lucitta Carey, was born on August 2, 1810, in Mechanicsburg Pennsylvania. They married on November 30, 1830. The couple came to Maysville, Kentucky in June 1837. Jonathan was a buggy and carriage maker. He carried on this work in Maysville. His business was last located on the corner of Cherry Alley and East Second Street. In the 1940's this same building was known as the Keith and Keith building. He also had businesses located in New Haven, Connecticut, Lexington, and Louisville, Kentucky.

Shortly after arriving in Maysville between 1837 and 1847, Bierbower built a large house at 38 West Fourth Street. The house still stands in good condition. The Bierbowers homesteaded this property, but it was not until August 19, 1847, that the property was conveyed to Jonathan Bierbower by William Tureman.

William Tureman, along with John Wood, conveyed land where the Baptist meeting house stood. It would later be called Bethel Baptist Church. This was conveyed February 10, 1826. This church stood in what was the first free black community.

When coming to Maysville, the Bierbower's had only three children: Frederick (1833-1910), twins Richard Carey (1835-1907), and Mary (1835-1910). They also brought

¹ Also spelled, Bearbear, Bierbauer, Bierbraver.

² In addition to the Bierbower family, living at the residence on 38 East 4th Street was a woman named Susan Keighley, relation unknown. Also, one slave <name unknown>, by 1840 census under Bierbower and in 1850, five slaves <names unknown>. Their ages and sex respectively were

with them a lady by the name of Susan B. Keighley (She might have been a widow sister or aunt). She lived with the Bierbowers until her death. The Bierbowers soon had more children. James C. (1838-1924), Frank (1842-1927), Ellen (1845-1927), Susan (1847-1909), Agnes (1848-1824), Hugh (1850-1896), Grace (1852-1944), Fannie (1854-1940). There has been mention of fourteen children, but names or records of the remaining three have yet to be found. They may have died at birth.

The mention of fourteen children is only in the obituary of Fannie and Grace Bierbower, however this information is not contained in their mother's obituary.

Because the Bierbower family was so large, information on most of the children has yet to be uncovered. It is known, however, that three of the children were married. Mary Bierbower married a man named King and James C. Bierbower married Mary Garrard and Hugh Bierbower married Ada L. There were also nieces and nephews, because they are named in the wills of Fannie Bierbower (1940) and Grace Bierbower (1944). The following names were nephew Richard Carey Bierbower and James Culver Bierbower of Lampasas, Texas, nephew Captain Charles Garrard Bierbower of San Antonio, Texas, sister-in-law Mrs. Garrard Bierbower of San Antonio, Texas, and a niece Mrs. J. Wilber Ellis of Lampasas, Texas.

The oldest son, Colonel Frederick Bierbower, was a prominent figure in shaping the history of this nation and of the world. He was a distinguished officer of the Union Army. Prior to the Civil War, he served in the United States Navy. He had the distinction of being the youngest officer of Commodore Perry's famous expedition to Japan which resulted in framing the treaty opening the harbors of the Nipponese Kingdom to the commerce of the world. There is a fan in the Mason County Museum which he brought back from Japan. In Maysville, he became a well known lawyer and one of the early mayors. This information about Colonel Frederick Bierbower was derived from his sister Grace's obituary in the Ledger, 1940.

Between 1874 and 1884, the Bierbowers had stopped making carriages. They now were the manufacturers and dealers in stove, grates, mantles, sheet iron ware, copper, tin, castings, brass, hollow, wood and stoneware and fire brick. This new business was located at 39 Market Street, Maysville. This building would have been somewhere at the north end of Market Street, however, this area was razed in 1974.

The stoneware ranged in different sizes. The stoneware was grey with blue lettered "Bierbower & Co. Stoves Tinware Market St. Maysville, Kentucky." There is a piece in the museum. I am also a lucky owner of a piece of Bierbower Stoneware.

The Bierbower home is believed to have been a stop on the Underground Railroad which helped the slaves to freedom. The original kitchen and the rooms for the servants were on the first floor. The place where they hid the slaves is still in tact, just as it was when that

part of the house was in use. They hid the slaves under a false floor of the small sleeping rooms until they could be moved to another stop or across the Ohio River. The Bierbowers also fed the Union Army soldiers out a window off the kitchen.

First, I am going to describe the house as it was when it was built and second after renovations were made. The house was three stories with two high porches. The west side had two stories that ran back to the hill. The front entrance was a large hall after coming up a few steps, one was on a landing with doors to the right and the left. The door to the right was a kitchen and the door to the left was the servants quarters. The kitchen had a brick floor and a big iron cooking stove. Off the kitchen was a storage area and a sleeping room with a separate door from the outside. This was so that things could be put into storage without entering the main kitchen. There was a work area to the left of the fireplace and a shelf along the wall. Above the mantle was dated October 12, 1898. There were meat hooks hanging from the ceiling. There was a door to the right of the fireplace that opened to the outside and a window to the left of the fireplace over the work area to give it light.

Directly across the hall was the slave quarters which also had a fireplace. The room had a rock floor and a small window with bars. Meat hooks were also contained in this room.

There was a little sleeping room at the front of the house. In this room, the floor boards would be removed so that the slaves that were being helped along the Underground Railroad could hide. These slaves would climb down a ladder and the floor boards would be replaced and the sleeping cots returned. They would remain there until it was safe to be moved to another stop. The kitchen and the living quarters had sand plaster walls. From the back of this room were steps leading up to an enclosed porch. The servants would then serve the Bierbowers in their dining room. The dining room was located directly above the slave living quarters. The Bierbowers did have slaves of their own one girl in 1840 and five slaves by 1850. However, by 1860, they had been freed.

The second floor of the house had the dining room on the eastside and the living room or parlor on the Westside. Also, on the Westside was a small room used as a sewing room and/or nursery. There was an outside entrance to this small room. Around the back of the house were porches which gave entrance to the rooms without having to go through the main part of the house.

The third floor had a large bedroom on the east side, and on the west side there were two large bedrooms and one small room. One could also go down the back stairs which was located between one of the large rooms and the small room. There was a porch on the back side of the house providing an entrance to these rooms – one upstairs and one downstairs. There were four Dutch windows. Two of these windows led to the third story porches from the front two bedrooms. The other two led to the second story porches from the dining room and from the parlor. This gave easy access to the lovely view of the river and

to cool summer breezes. These windows have shutters that could be locked from the inside.

Gas was installed to the homes of Maysville in the early 1900's. To make use of the gas, three of the gas stoves were put in the house and were vented. These stoves are still in the house and are workable. There is also a gas light fixture remaining. All hardwood floors are original. When the water was installed in the house, the back porches were enclosed to make the two bedrooms.

In the 1930s, Fannie and Grace Bierbower turned the east side of the house into a separate living unit. The third apartment was not added until after the death of Grace and after it had been bought by Robert McNutt. It was at this time that the car garage was built (1947). Mrs. Christine McNutt Maher moved into the house by 1950. She made her residence in the west apartment on the third floor. She rented the other two apartments until 1989, when she moved to the downstairs apartment. The other two apartments remained empty at the time of her death, December 28, 1998.

The information about the Underground Railroad and the serving of the Union soldiers came from Grace Bierbower to her neighbor, Christine McNutt Maher.

Christine McNutt Maher was born in 1924, and lived across the street from Miss Bierbower for twenty-one years. She visited and spent time with Miss Grace, as she called her. After Grace's death, Robert McNutt bought the house at 38 West Fourth Street. When Robert died, he left it to his wife Sallie and she willed it to her daughter Christine McNutt Maher.

Where do I, Alice Kay Gallenstein, come into this bit of history. I have known Christine since 1950 and for the past ten years, I have taken care of her. She told me these stories of the Bierbower family and their house. She has relayed to me the floor plans of the house before it was changed and told me about the house being a stop for the Underground Railroad. I have been down where the slaves were hidden and the living space for the servants. It has not changed other than to make room for electric wiring and plumbing. The kitchen still has part of the original brick floor and mantle.

I know these things to be true, for they were told to Christine Maher by Grace Bierbower and then to me, Alice Kay Austin Gallenstein by Christine Maher. Christine was a private person; she was one that did not want to be bothered, but she like talking about her childhood and things in years past.

Alice Kay Austin Gallenstein
March 23, 1999

Information in this paper was documented from deeds, wills, newspaper obituaries, census records, and cemetery records obtained from the Mason County Museum and the Mason County Clerk of Courts.
