

Highland County Historical Society celebrates 50th anniversary, Part XXIII

**By Pamela Nickell
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Elegantly dominating the upper front hallway of the Highland House between the Children's Room and the Caspar Collins Room is a very large full length portrait, pictured here, of The Honorable James Henry Thompson, Highland County Common Pleas Judge 1881-1882.

James Henry Thompson (1812-1900) moved to Ohio from Kentucky as a young lawyer, as recorded in the "Highland County Pictorial History" published in 2004.

In 1827, he married Hillsboro resident Eliza Jane Trimble, daughter of Ohio Governor Allen Trimble. She became known as Mother Thompson of the Temperance Movement.



There is so much to be read, written and respected about all these folks.

However, another James Henry – about whom this week's journey has led me – is the artist of this beautiful oil portrait. James Henry Beard was born in 1812 in Buffalo, N.Y. and died in 1893 in Flushing Queens, N.Y. But the hyphen in between (1812-1893) includes our own beautiful state.

He was 11 when his family moved to Painesville, Ohio. As a young man, oldest in the family of several children finding it necessary to assist his widowed mother, he taught himself to paint and became an itinerant portrait painter earning, at first, three and four dollars per picture. He traveled in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Orleans, and Kentucky. From 1834, he lived in Cincinnati and wintered in New Orleans before moving back to New York permanently in 1846.

In 1872, Beard was elected a full member in the National Academy of Design. He became very skilled with portraits and ultimately well known for soulful images of pets, mainly dogs, often interacting with people.

Beard's portrait of Sen. Henry Clay hangs in the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas. Several of his works are owned by the Cincinnati Art Museum. Ours is owned by the Ohio History Connection (Formerly Ohio Historical Society), loaned to the Highland County Historical Society on a year-to-year basis. We are glad, each year, to apply for the next year, providing proof of carrying insurance coverage as required by OHC. The win-win of this arrangement is proof of OHC's confidence in the HCHS and that Judge Thompson is home where he belongs.

Next to his portrait in the Highland House is a framed document of information: "Ohio Year Book 1969" by Ohioana Library, Page 11, states..."JAMES HENRY BEARD...versatile

artist...painted and sold in Cincinnati...Typical of self-taught artists of the 19th century whose talents were for painting every day American scenes characterized as "genre" subjects.

"Beard...was the son of the captain of one of the first brigs to sail on Lake Erie. While still a young boy he came to bustling Cincinnati, a river town, and soon identified himself with that large group of artists who were drawn to the Queen City."

The last line of this description, which I had never noticed until doing this article, reads, "He was the father of "Uncle Dan" Beard, a founder of the Boy Scout movement in America."

And, as many times as I've enjoyed and contemplated this picture, wondering about the times of Judge and Mrs. Thompson, it has only come to me now to really wonder about the artist. Another rewarding journey for me.

Connections (OHC has the right idea for its name) and layers.....pebble thrown in the water...History!

Sources: Highland House, www.jstor.org, The Art Journal Vol.1,(1875), pp. 366-368, www.s9.com/Biography, Highland County Pictorial History (2004).