



LEXINGTON HISTORY MUSEUM

Our heritage lives here.

January 2017

LexHistory events planned to mark premiere of documentary 'Belle Brezing & the Gilded Age of the Bluegrass'

When he started working on a documentary about Belle Brezing, the famous Lexington madam, Doug High knew that she had been the model for the Belle Watling character in Margaret Mitchell's "Gone with the Wind."

Now he believes she was much more.

An inspiration for Mae West? Yes. Dolly Parton? Probably. Miss Kitty from "Gunsmoke"? Of course.

"It all started with Belle," High said. "There was no other character like her."



High now is putting the finishing touches on the two-year project. The result, "Belle

Brezing & the Gilded Age of the Bluegrass," will premiere Feb. 16 at the Kentucky Theatre on Main Street. This is the only scheduled theater showing of the one-hour documentary. It will later be aired on Kentucky Educational Television.

Tickets are \$8, and are available now at www.kentuckytheater.com or at the theater box office on Feb. 16. All proceeds from the premiere benefit the Lexington History Museum. Other underwriters of the documentary are VisitLEX, the

Kentucky Historical Society and the Kentucky Employees Credit Union.

Brezing, who was born in 1860 and died in 1940, was a well-known and well-connected madam who ran a highly successful house of ill repute on what is now Eastern Avenue in downtown Lexington. The documentary details her journey from hardscrabble youth to murder suspect to Baroness of the Brothel.

High is the executive producer and director of the documentary, which is a High Impact Productions Film produced by Post Time Studios. He also is the news anchor on "Good Morning Kentucky" on WTVQ-TV ABC 36.

High was a history major in college, and is always looking for projects that marry his love of history with broadcasting. And he was surprised to find that no one had made a documentary about Brezing.

He has created a Ken Burns-type documentary that mixes experts talking about Belle and the Lexington in which she lived, rare photos from the University of Kentucky Special Collections and actors reenacting moments of Brezing's life. The story is narrated by Elizabeth Shatner.

Laurie Genet Preston portrays Brezing. She is familiar with the role, having starred in the Actors Guild's 2011 production of Margaret C. Price's *Belle Brezing*. She also played Brezing's mother in a 2004 staged reading of the play at the University of Kentucky.

Bob Singleton played Brezing's lover, Billy Mabon, in the play, and reprises the role in the documentary.

The historians who talk about Brezing in the documentary are Maryjean Wall, author of *Madam Belle: Sex, Money and Influence in a Southern*

See "Brezing Documentary," page 2



Production photo shows Laurie Genet Preston as Belle in one of the costumes designed by Nelson Fields for the documentary. This dress will be on display at LexArts HOP on Jan. 20. See page 4.

You're invited

LexHistory Select Event Reception

5:30 to 7:00 p.m. Feb. 16, 2017 • Portofino, 249 East Main St., Lexington, KY. Hors d'oeuvres, one drink and ticket to the documentary premiere, \$60/person. *Reservations required by Feb. 9, 2017.* Details on Page 2.

Premiere showing of "Belle Brezing & the Gilded Age of the Bluegrass" • 7:30 p.m. Kentucky

Theatre, 214 East Main St., Lexington, KY
Tickets \$8.00; available now at www.kentuckytheater.com or day of event at the box office.

The LexHistory Select Event and Premiere benefit the Lexington History Museum.

For more information and production photos, "like" the Facebook page for "**Belle Brezing & the Gilded Age of the Bluegrass.**" Check out www.lexhistory.org, and the Lexington History Museum Facebook page for updates on these events.

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A Chance to Mingle Before the Show

Belle Brezing was known for showing people a good time, and so are we! Well, the similarities end there...

You're invited to join us for a taste of the Gilded Age before the premiere of the Belle Brezing documentary at the Kentucky Theatre. You'll have the opportunity to find out how and why the movie was made and support the Lexington History Museum.

This LexHistory Select Event will take place from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Feb. 16 at Portofino restaurant, 249 East Main Street.

You'll be able to talk with the documentary's executive producer and director, Doug High, and Foster Ockerman, Jr., one of the movie's featured historians and the author of *Historic Lexington – Heart of the Bluegrass*.

Tickets are \$60 a person and include hors d'oeuvres, a drink and a ticket to the documentary. Proceeds benefit LexHistory.

We encourage you to purchase tickets by following the link at www.lexhistory.org. You may also mail a check, payable to Lexington History Museum, to PO Box 748, Lexington, KY 40588-0748. Space is limited. Reservations are required by Feb. 9.

Lexington History Museum Speaker Series

Author to Discuss Book on Belle Brezing Jan. 29

Historian Maryjean Wall will discuss her biography of Belle Brezing, titled *Madam Belle: Sex, Money and Influence in a Southern Brothel*, from 3 to 4 p.m. January 29 in the large conference room of the Lexington Eastside Branch Library, 3000 Blake James Drive, 40509 (corner of Palumbo Dr. and Man o'War Blvd). The event is free and reservations are not required.

It is the first installment of a new Lexington History Museum Speakers Series that will offer programs on topics of local history.

Brezing was a well-known brothel keeper in Lexington, and was closely connected to the centers of power in the horse industry and local politics. She received pardons from two Kentucky governors. Her famous mansion for men was known as far away as Argentina.

Wall is an award-winning former sportswriter who specialized in horse racing. She has a Ph.D. in history from the University of Kentucky, and has taught there. She is one of three people interviewed for a new documentary, "Belle Brezing and the Gilded Age of the Bluegrass." (See page 1.)

Lexington Herald-Leader columnist Tom Eblen wrote that Wall's book shows how "Brezing clawed her way to the top by using men, investing wisely and playing politics." It also, Eblen wrote, explains how many others, from grocers to horse traders, made money from Brezing's illicit business.



Historian Maryjean Wall

To receive email alerts for future talks and other news from LexHistory, sign up at www.lexhistory.org. To suggest topics, contact the series chair, Jay Prather, at jprather@garmer-prather.com.

Brezing Documentary

(Continued from page 1)

Brothel; and Doug Tattershall, author of *Belle Brezing: American Magdalene*. Foster Ockerman, Jr., the Lexington History Museum's president and chief historian, talks about what the town was like in Brezing's day. He is the author of *Historic Lexington—The Heart of the Bluegrass*.

"Documentaries are a new medium for us, but a good one," Ockerman said. "We hope this leads to more such opportunities."

James L. Dickinson, chair of the Lexington History Museum Board of Trustees, said the organization's goal is to share Lexington's story and history. "When offered an opportunity to be a sponsor of a documentary about one of Lexington's most famous characters, we had to join forces with VisitLEX, the Kentucky Historical Society and the Kentucky Employees Credit Union" said Dickinson said. "LexHistory and its generous supporters are very proud of Doug High's most recent project."

We also are working with Kim Spillman on a display at the premiere of photos of clothes once owned by Brezing and possibly the clothes themselves from the Betty D. Eastin Costume Collection housed in the Retailing and Tourism Management Department at UK.

It is fitting the documentary will show at the Kentucky Theatre. When the Kentucky opened in 1922, Brezing was retired but still living in her house just a few minutes' walk away. She was there, old and very ill, when "Gone with the Wind" had its premiere at the Kentucky in 1939.

Yes, I want to support the work of the Lexington History Museum!

Enclosed is my donation of:

- \$25.00 \$50.00 \$100.00 Other Amount: _____ (Please specify.)
 Thomas D. Clark Society, \$1,000.00

Make checks payable to: Lexington History Museum or use your VISA Mastercard

You can also make your gift online: www.lexhistory.org/donate

Card Number Exp. Date: MM/YY 3-Digit Security Code

Signature

Name as it appears on your credit card.

Mailing address City State Zip Code

Please provide your email address:

(Providing your email address enables us to keep you better informed about LexHistory.)

Send this form with your check or payment information to:

LexHistory • P.O. Box 748 • Lexington, KY 40588-0748

The Museum is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. Donations are tax-deductible as allowed.

McCutchen Looks for Jazz Age Beat in Lexington

Maya McCutchen is interested in the Jazz Age in Lexington. She knows there must have been important things going on here in the 1920s and early '30s as African Americans in other cities were creating a new musical style that eventually attracted middle-class whites.

She has spent hours in the Kentucky Room of the Lexington Public Library, but has found little in the public record about people who, because of their color and social status, often were ignored by local government and media. She has hopes, however, that that part of the city's history is not lost, but hidden away in closets or attics of the descendants of the people who played music or frequented clubs.

"I'm sure there are people around town, African Americans, who may not know that they have something of historical value," she said. "It could be photos, or maybe even jazz tapes. I'm sure someone has that type of thing somewhere in their house."

McCutchen, 22, is a senior studying history and political science (with a minor in violin!) at the University of Kentucky. Her father, Keith McCutchen, is a jazz pianist who teaches jazz at UK.

If you have any information about jazz musicians, clubs or fans in Lexington in the 1920s to the mid '30s, call or text McCutchen at (859) 907-0055 or email her at m.mccutchen157@gmail.com.

Even if you think your information isn't important, she wants to hear from you.

She's been a jazz fan as long as she can remember.

At last year's Fourth of July celebration, where LexHistory had a table, McCutchen was introduced to Foster Ockerman, Jr., LexHistory's president and chief historian. In short order, she was a LexHistory intern.

Ockerman told her about how he had once been in the basement of the former Mecca Bar and Grill on the east side of Broadway with a client who was considering buying the building. He saw the entrance to a tunnel that ran to what was once Lell's European Hotel on the other side of the street (where Saul Good's restaurant now is).

His theory was that the tunnel allowed African American hotel guests to come and go from the club without encountering white police officers.

In a book by UK history professor Gerald Smith, McCutchen also found a 1934 photo of Smoke Richardson and his orchestra at the Joy Club.

The photo is housed at the UK Libraries Special Collections Research Center. By coincidence, LexHistory has a print on loan from Richardson's daughter, Saunda R. Coleman of Lexington.

McCutchen recently interviewed Coleman,

who provided leads to other sources of information.

"My goal is to eventually write something," McCutchen said. "I'm not expecting to have it published, but something that could help someone later when they are looking into the Jazz Age in Lexington."



Smoke Richardson (top row center) and his orchestra at Club Joy in 1934. (Lafayette Studios photo courtesy of University of Kentucky Libraries Special Collections Research Center)

Happy Birthday, Kentucky!

Most people know what a bicentennial is, but what do you call a 225th anniversary?

We Googled it and found two answers: Quasiquibicentennial and bicenquasquigenary.

We have decided to discard both, and advise you that June 1, 2017, marks the 225th anniversary of Kentucky becoming a state.

We're planning, um, something to mark the occasion. Stay tuned for details as the big day draws nearer.

In the meantime, consider this:

When Kentucky became a state in the Union, it was No. 15, after the 13 colonies and Vermont.

Lexington was the (provisional) first capital. A census two years before statehood found 834 people living in Lexington and only 200 in Louisville.

Statewide, the 1790 census found 73,677 people, more than 12,000 of whom were enslaved.

Historians say that those numbers were out of date by 1792, and that 100,000 might have called Kentucky home at the moment of statehood.

Daniel Boone was 59. He had lost title to his land in Kentucky and left the state.

Henry Clay, who later would achieve national fame from a base in Lexington, was 15 and studying law in Virginia.

LexHistory

James L. Dickinson, Chair, Board of Trustees • Foster Ockerman, Jr., President & Chief Historian

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Facebook: Lexington History Museum • Twitter: @LexHistory

Mission: The Lexington History Museum engages all people in the discovery and interpretation of the history of Lexington, Kentucky, and the Bluegrass Region.

The Lexington History Museum, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation.

Newsletter written and designed by Andy Mead and Pace Cooke Emmons.



LEXINGTON HISTORY MUSEUM

Our heritage lives here.

PO Box 748

Lexington, KY 40588-0748

Mark Your Calendars!

5:00-8:00 p.m. Friday, Jan. 20, 2017

LexArts HOP: Display of original costumes from "Belle Brezing & the Gilded Age of the Bluegrass." Lexington History Museum Office, The Square, 401 West Main St., Ste. 312

3:00-4:00 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 29, 2017

Lexington History Museum Speaker Series Presents "Belle Brezing: Infamous Lexington-onian," by Maryjean Wall, Ph.D. Eastside Branch Library, 3000 Blake James Dr. (Page 2)

5:30-7:00 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 16, 2017

LexHistory Select Event • Reception before the Premiere of "Belle Brezing & the Gilded Age of the Bluegrass" • Portofino, 249 East Main St. Tickets, \$60/person. **Reservations required by Feb. 9, 2017.** (Page 2)

7:30 p.m. Thursday Feb. 16, 2017

"Belle Brezing and the Gilded Age of the Bluegrass" premiere at the Kentucky Theatre. Doors open at 7:00 p.m. Tickets are \$8; available online at www.kentuckytheater.com and at the door. (Page 1)

For details, see related articles in this issue.

We need your help!

Now that our newsletter is published more often, it's expensive to print and mail copies. We'd like to distribute most future issues via email. You won't want to miss an issue, **so take a minute now to visit our home page, www.lexhistory.org, to sign up for our electronic newsletter!**

You'll receive updates on events, but we will

not sell your address or flood your mailbox.

We're also on social media.

Please "Like" Lexington History Museum on Facebook and follow us on Twitter (@LexHistory) to keep up with facts about Lexington history and LexHistory events—there are many coming in the months ahead.

Jan. 20 at the LexHistory Office in The Square

LexArts HOP: Costumes from Brezing's Gilded Age

Adding a dash of history to art, the Lexington History Museum's office will be open six times in 2017 for the crowds who make the rounds of the LexArts HOP (more information at www.galleryhoplex.com).

We kick off our participation in the third-Friday-of-every-other-month tour on Jan. 20. The hours are 5 to 8 p.m.

We will rely on our large inventory of Lexington historical artifacts to present something new, different and exciting at each event.

But for the first HOP, the featured items are something borrowed: Dresses designed and made by Nelson Fields for the documentary "Belle Brezing & the Gilded Age of the Bluegrass." Fields, who teaches costume design at the University of Kentucky, will also present some of his sketches for the documentary's costumes. LexHistory would like to thank Fields for loaning us the costumes and sketches and helping with their display.

The one-hour show about the well-known late 19th- and early 20th-century madam will premiere at the Kentucky Theatre Feb. 16 (see article on Page 1), and then will be shown on Kentucky Educational Television.

Doug High, the documentary's executive producer and director, said Fields' creations and other costumes he rented from UK's costume department took the production to a new level.

"I feel like his storytelling through his costumes is every bit as important as our narrative," High said.

Fields has designed costumes for countless stage productions, but



this was his first film project. "I tried to be as accurate as I could," he said, "making sure it looks as much like clothing as possible, not costumes."

Three of Belle's dresses will be on exhibit. One is the blue velvet gown, shown in the photo on Page 1. Another, shown in Fields' sketch at left, uses a color combination he said was popular in Belle's era. He was inspired to create the gold gown with scarlet trim by a similar color combination worn by Scarlet O'Hara in the film "Gone with the Wind."

Also on display in our office on Jan. 20 are other bits of Lexington history you are sure to find interesting. These include a broadaxe that pioneer Richard Foley brought to Lexington in the late 1700s, a display on local politics, pieces of door hardware from the Old Courthouse now undergoing renovation, and other treasures from our past.

The HOP is a self-guided tour of the visual arts in downtown Lexington. LexTran's Colt Trolley will run approximately every 15 minutes and drop off passengers at any trolley stop along the route. The trolley will also pick up passengers at stops when someone is waiting. The service is free during the HOP hours. Routes can be found at www.lextran.com.

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Our office, which has room for displays, is in Suite 312 on the third floor of The Square (formally Victorian Square), at 401 West Main St.

While you are in the complex, be sure to visit the popular Artists' Attic on the fourth floor.