

Stories in Stone: Major Ariss Throckmorton

5 Feb 1790 - 25 Dec 1867

Section H Lot 27

Contributed by Bryan Bush

Ariss Throckmorton set the bar for Kentucky's reputation of gracious and convivial hospitality. Born in Virginia on February 5, 1789 in Frederick County, Virginia to Thomas Reade and Mary Ann (Hooe) Throckmorton, his large family migrated to "Rich Hill" plantation in Nicholas County, Kentucky around 1801, settling on the Licking River area. Ariss' brother, Col. John W. "Jack" Throckmorton, erected a tavern in 1810 known as Throckmorton Inn on the Maysville Pike outside of Millersburg, KY.

Throckmorton was in the War of 1812 and the Black Hawk Wars of 1832 in Illinois and Michigan Territories. Following his return from the War of 1812, he became the congenial host of the Blue Licks Springs Tavern, located near the Blue Lick Springs in Nicholas County. Spurred on by the cholera pandemics of 1826 and 1832 that decimated large cities and small towns across the United States, it became popular to travel to mineral springs to "take the waters" for one's health. The Blue Licks Springs waters were rich in salts and minerals, and were comparable to White Sulphur Springs in (West) Virginia and Saratoga Springs in New York State.

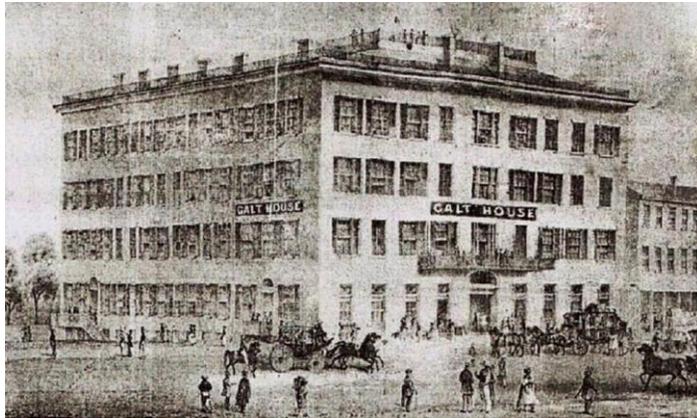


Throckmorton Lot in Cave Hill Cemetery

Blue Lick Springs Tavern was designed for tourists' comforts and extended stay. It featured a central tavern building with stables, surrounded by individual cottages; the hotel could accommodate up to 100 guests at a time.

Throckmorton's reputation as a superior host quickly spread throughout the entire South. A great many people came every year to spend the summer in his Blue Licks Springs hotel. Major Throckmorton was the type of tavern keeper, particular to Virginia and Kentucky, who carried their business with all the grace and courtesy of a fine gentleman. He was more like a grandee dispensing magnificent hospitality than the keeper of a public house. Distinguished senators of Kentucky such as Henry Clay, John J. Crittenden, and Robert Letcher would spend the summer as guests at Throckmorton's hotel. A game of whist between Clay, Crittenden, Letcher and Throckmorton was an everyday occurrence. Henry Clay became a close friend of Throckmorton and he even had a Lexington artist paint a portrait of him to give to Throckmorton as a gift of their friendship.

In 1830, he moved to Louisville and became the manager of the famous Washington Hotel, which was located on Main Street, between Second and Third Streets. In 1835, the Galt House was completed on the northeast corner of Main at Second Street. Just a year later, Throckmorton resigned from the Washington Hotel to become the proprietor of the Galt House. He and his friend, Isaac Everett, jointly owned the lease on the Galt House for ten years. Throckmorton set a high standard of gracious hospitality taking a personal interest in the comfort and entertainment of each of his guests. Isaac Everett essentially took over the management of the hotel, ensuring the operations ran smoothly.



Rendering of Galt House Hotel

A story often recounted is of Charles Dickens' stay at the Galt House in 1842. Throckmorton thought that he would give his distinguished guest an unexpected pleasure and gave Dickens an exquisite dinner. Guests included George Prentice, the editor of the *Louisville Journal*, Tom Marshall, Dr. Theodore Bell, Chancellor Pirtle, and a few other prominent men of the city to meet Mr. Dickens. After all the guests had been seated at the table by Major Throckmorton, Mr. Dickens, who had not learned the difference between the proprietor of a great hotel in America

and inn-keeper in a provincial town of England, remarked in a bland and cordial way to Throckmorton: "There, that will do, landlord, you may retire now." It was all that the remainder of assembled company could do to prevent the irate Throckmorton from throwing the mistaken Dickens out of the third-story window and the dinner became a strained affair. Dickens realized that he was not dealing with an English inn-keeper and afterwards wrote a flattering description of the Galt House in his "American Notes."

Not all incidents with Englishmen and Throckmorton ended in disaster, however. While in New Orleans, William Thackeray, an English novelist, author, and illustrator known for his satirical works in *Vanity Fair*, saw Major Throckmorton standing in the corridor of a hotel, and asked to be introduced to "that distinguished-looking person." He was delighted with Throckmorton and they not only dined together but spent time together in each other's society.

After the lease had expired on the Galt House property in 1845, Throckmorton co-jointly kept the lease with his son, John Throckmorton, and brother-in-law, John Raine, for five more years. He continued to run the hotel for several more years with George Anderson. He eventually left the hotel business and became manager of the Bank of Kentucky and a member of the Louisville City Council. On December 25, 1867, he died at the home of his friend Isaac Everett on Bardstown Road.

<https://www.newspapers.com/clip/68751008/the-pittsburgh-gazette/>

<https://www.genealogy.com/forum/surnames/topics/throckmorton/642/>

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The William and Mary Quarterly

Vol. 3, No. 4 (Apr., 1895), pp. 240-242 (3 pages)

Stage-Coach Days In The Bluegrass

By J. Winston Coleman Jr.