

MY VIEWS: Agriculture, budget, energy

As Kentucky's new fiscal year officially began on July 1, lawmakers spent the first week of July laying the groundwork for the year ahead through four Interim Joint Committee meetings and one statutory committee meeting. From reviewing how taxpayer dollars are invested in schools and state programs to examining Kentucky's prison system, energy assistance, agricultural industries, and education accountability, legislators received updates on the implementation of recently enacted laws while exploring priorities that



THOMAS HUFF

will help shape future policy and budget decisions. Together, the meetings reflected the General Assembly's continued oversight of state government as a new fiscal year gets underway. IJC on Agriculture: Lawmakers heard updates on two industries: medical cannabis and bourbon. Officials with the Office of Medical Cannabis discussed the state's medical cannabis program, its implementation, and what it could mean for Kentucky farmers and the agricultural economy. Members also heard from the Kentucky Cannabis Industry Alliance about the indus-

try's outlook. The committee concluded with a presentation from the Kentucky Distillers' Association on bourbon's economic impact and its long-standing connection to Kentucky agriculture. IJC on Appropriations & Revenue: Members examined how Kentucky plans, funds, and prioritizes school construction projects, hearing from the Kentucky Department of Education and the School Facilities Construction Commission about the partnership used to assess facility needs, allocate state and local funding, and help ensure students have safe, modern learning environments. Members also reviewed career and technical education investments that prepare students for high-demand

careers and discussed the state budget process, including how the executive branch manages funding appropriated for agencies and programs. IJC on Judiciary: Members heard from the Department of Corrections on the state's prison system, inmate population, and reentry programs designed to help individuals successfully transition back into their communities after incarceration. The committee also heard an update from the Kentucky Parole Board on its work and responsibilities. Finally, members received a presentation on House Bill 60 from the 2026 Regular Session, legislation related to geoeengineering, from the bill's sponsor IJC on Natural Resources & Energy:

Members heard a presentation and public comments on Kentucky's application for federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding for federal fiscal year 2027, which helps eligible households pay heating and cooling costs. The committee also received an update on the implementation of Senate Bill 8 from the 2026 Regular Session, discussed efforts to provide safe drinking water following disasters, and received reports on the state's solid waste management plan and utility pole attachments from the Department of Environmental Protection and Public Service Commission. Education Assessment & Accountability Review

Subcommittee: Members discussed a series of reports and updates from the Department of Education and Office of Education Accountability. First, the Department of Education discussed the implementation of HB 257(2026), which restructured the state's education assessment and accountability system. Next, the panel discussed career and technical education in the state's assessment and accountability system. Finally, the Office of Education Accountability presented its annual report. As always, I can be reached anytime through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181. You can also contact me via email at Thomas.Huff@kylegislature.gov and keep track through the Kentucky legislature's website at legislature.ky.gov.

Glimpses of Bullitt County: Fireproofing records

CHARLES HARTLEY
LOCAL HISTORIAN

Leading up to the Civil War, counties in Kentucky mostly stored their legal records at their courthouses, or at separate clerk's offices as was the case in Bullitt County. Such records included deeds, wills, marriage records, court order books, and several other important records.

Over time some counties experienced record lost due to fires, and these losses were compounded during the war by deliberate burnings mostly by Confederate forces and Southern guerrilla fighters who targeted courthouses to disrupt local governance and destroy legal documents. In all 22 courthouses were set ablaze in the state.

After the war ended, state and local officials recognized the need to better protect legal records, and in February 1867, the Legislature passed an Act requiring all County Courts to have one or more fireproof vaults for the safe-keeping of their public records.

The law specified that such fireproof vaults or buildings were to be paid for out of the county levy, a set tax levied on all adult males in the county.

Like some other counties, Bullitt County was slow in responding to this law, and in February 1870 it was given two additional years to meet its requirements.

The County Clerk's office was then located at the corner where the old Bullitt County Bank building sits today.

Here the county had built a brick office for the County Clerk in 1811, which the Circuit Court Clerk usually shared. Despite numerous repairs, by the Civil War it was really showing its age. Its record books were generally stored on open shelves or in wooden cabinets.

The Bullitt County Court addressed this issue at its November 1870 Court of Claims by appointing W. J. McConathy, Wilhite Carpenter and R. M. Harshfield commissioners to report to the court on the probable costs of a new courthouse to include a clerk's office with a fireproof safe, or separate clerks' offices with fireproof vaults.

Then in February 1871,

at the county's request, the Legislature passed a further Act making it lawful for the county to levy a property tax not exceeding forty cents of each \$100 worth of property to be used exclusively for the building of a courthouse and county and circuit court clerks' offices, and for repairing and remodeling the county jail or for one or more of said purposes, as may seem necessary.

However, the Act required that a majority of the justices concur before the tax could be levied.

In August 1870, Wesley Phelps had been elected County Judge, replacing Wilhite Carpenter. At that time there were eight Justices of the Peace, called magistrates today, two from each of the four county districts. The Shepherdsville district, numbered as one, likely included all of the county north of Salt River and west of Floyd's Fork. William McNutt and James Caswell were its representatives. George F. Collings and William Fox represented District Two (Mt. Washington) which likely included the northeastern part of the county. The part south of Salt River was divided into District 3 (Pine Tavern) represented by Walter Carlisle and James M. Carpenter, and District 4 (Leaches) represented by James V. Crenshaw and C. C. Weller.

In March 1871, the commissioners reported that a new courthouse was not needed, but the clerks' offices were in dilapidated condition, and a new office was needed to be built to accommodate a fireproof vault.

Carpenter and Harshfield were joined by Felix Harris as appointed commissioners to determine where to build such an office and on what site; and they returned in April with their report. Present at that meeting were County Judge Phelps along with Justices Caswell, Weller, Crenshaw, McNutt and Carpenter which formed a quorum.

On a motion to build a new clerk's office, Justices Crenshaw, Weller and Carpenter opposed the motion while Justices McNutt and Caswell and Judge Phelps were in favor, resulting in a tie vote. They then voted on trying to repair the old clerk's office which

resulted in another tie vote with the former yeas voting nay, and vice versa.

They finally agreed to let two men including Andon Gild, a respected carpenter, to take one more look at the old office to see what might be done.

It was June 1871 before they again took up this issue. By this time, William Shawler of the Pine Tavern District had joined the court as a Justice of the Peace.

Gild and W. A. Evans made their report that "the present County and Circuit Court clerk's office could not be repaired on the old walls and foundation so as to make them fireproof with any degree of certainty; that the old foundation and walls would not safely support a fireproof ceiling and roof; that a tin roof might be put on the present walls and house and be repaired for about \$800; but it would not be fireproof and that there was no room for a fireproof vault in the present building."

They then took another vote on building a new office, and with Phelps and Caswell voting yes, and Weller, Crenshaw, Shawler and Carpenter saying no, the motion was again defeated. It seemed that the sticking point was how they would go about paying for it, with most of them opposing the idea of another tax.

But time was running out. With the Legislature unwilling to extend their time beyond November 1872 for completion, the Court in November 1871 again voted.

Having decided that they had little choice but to comply with the law, they first voted on where to put a new office, either at the same location as the current one, or on the then current Jail lot. After consideration, they chose the Jail lot.

They then appointed Judge Phelps, Dr. Samuel A. McKay and former Judge Wilhite Carpenter as a committee to work out the details.

They reported in January 1872 that it should cost about \$3500 to build, and that it would be necessary to levy a tax of 10 cents on each \$100 worth of property to pay for it.

A vote was taken. For the levy of the tax were Judge Wesley Phelps, and Justices George N. Sanders, James M. Car-

penter, and James Caswell; against the levy were J. V. Crenshaw, C. C. Weller, and William Shawler. Those in the minority made a point of making sure that these votes were recorded in the order book.

The three commissioners were put in charge of planning and supervising the construction of this new office "of such size and material as they may deem best, except the walls shall be of brick, the underpinning or lower walls of rock or brick, whichever will be most durable."

They were also authorized to sell the old office and lot or the best price they could get to help pay for the new construction.

They began by contracting with Andon Gild and John McGee, two local carpenters, to do the job; and we know they got right to work for the sheriff was authorized to give them their first payment in September.

By January 1873 the job was finished. At court, the commissioners reported, "It appearing from an examination this day made that Gild and McGee, contractors, have finished and completed their contract of building the County and Circuit Court clerks' offices, the said offices are now received by us. S. A. McKay, Wilhite Carpenter, Wesley Phelps, Commissioners"

And so a new clerk's office joined the second county jail on the lot that was destined to hold a new courthouse in the future. You can see their locations on the side by side drawings shown here. On the left is shown the jail and clerk's office, both facing Main Street, in 1886. On the right is the same courthouse square showing the new courthouse with the then new stone jail behind it. Of course to make room for the new courthouse, both earlier buildings were removed, found now only in drawings like this.

By the way, if you visit the History Museum and look in the display room where Mrs. Nancy Strange's old Circuit Court Clerk's office once sat, you can still see the door that once enclosed a fireproof vault where so many really old records were stored. Ah! The memories!

Cicadas, kaytdids and crickets

One of my favorite things about summer is my front row seat at the orchestra. The orchestra of insects, that is. Late summer, when temperatures cool down enough to turn the air conditioner off and open the windows, we fall asleep to the sounds of katydid, crickets and cicadas. For now, however, I have a nightly ritual of just sitting outside, simply listening to the insects and watching the lightening bugs before bed.

Katydid is primarily forest dwelling insects that get their name from the sound of their song. If you listen carefully, you can hear a battle between the katydid that sing "katydid, katydid" and those that sing "katydidn't, katydidn't". The two groups sound as though they are trying to out sing each other as the volume of their sound escalates through the forest. Katydid is green in color so they blend in with the green foliage of their forest dwellings. The male katydid is the vocalist, like most singing insects, and sings to attract female katydids.

The jury is still out on whether crickets are music to people's ears. They can be annoying when they migrate into our homes and find a corner to practice their resonating chirp. I love the chirp of the large black field crickets in combination with other musically inclined insects. The males rub their wings together to produce their 'chirp' to challenge other males and to attract females. I have to wonder if the first violin was modelled after the cricket? As cold weather approaches and their food supply dwindles cricket seek shelter indoors. They do not fly; they hop and crawl, so seal off cracks and weather strip doors to keep them from entering your home and feeding on your favorite sweater! Interestingly, crickets are omnivorous and will eat just about anything.

Cicadas are my favorite. Some people

refer to them as locust, which is a misnomer. Early colonists in North America confused cicadas with migratory grasshoppers that move in masses, flying and singing as they go. The word locust has been used for centuries to refer to these migratory grasshoppers so the colonists assumed that the cicadas were the same thing. The confusion over the name persists today. There are two types of cicadas: periodical cicadas that emerge every 13 or 17 years; and annual cicadas that emerge every 2 to 5 years. The cycles of emergence are very site specific so there is no universal emergence.

Annual cicadas first appear in mid-summer and are about 2 inches long. They are green to black once they emerge from their shell. The 13 and 17-year cicadas are orange to black. You may have seen their shells securely attached to trees; they look like empty brown shrimp shells. The cicada makes its presence known by its high-pitched song. The song of the male cicada starts out as an even vibration and crescendos into a shrill screaming match between hundreds of insects...and then the quiet hum is back...and then it begins again. It's exciting to listen to.

The bad news is that cicadas can cause damage to young trees when we see mass emergence years associated with the 13 and 17-year broods. The female cicada makes slits in young, terminal branches of trees where she will deposit her eggs. As the branch dies and falls to the ground, the young burrow into the ground to feed on the roots of the tree. If the branches do not die you will notice scarring on the underside of the small branches. This scarring rarely hurts the tree. We do not have to worry much about the annual cicada other than enjoying the music. And be ready for the next periodical emergence more for the remarkable spectacle that nature has to offer.



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home-raised annual flowers, hanging baskets, herbs, horticulture transplants, honey, eggs, fresh baked goods, plus a wide variety

of vegetables and fruit in season. In the fall, it offers locally grown mums, corn stalks, straw, pumpkins and more. An honor system market, Mitchells accepts cash, CashApp or Venmo. It is open March through October. For more, visit <https://www.facebook.com/MitchellsFarmandMarket/>

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