

# TYLER DAVIDSON FOUNTAIN

## **Tyler Davidson and Henry Probasco:**

- Tyler Davidson owned a hardware company in Cincinnati and became one of the largest hardware firms in the West (remember, at this time Cincinnati was considered the West).
- Henry Probasco, at the age of 15, started working as a clerk for the company.
- He worked his way up to a partner in the firm and then married the boss's half-sister.
- Both Davidson and Probasco wanted to give something to the citizens of Cincinnati, a city which had been very generous to them; however, Davidson died unexpectedly in 1865.
- Probasco wanted to give something lasting and aesthetically pleasing to the city and decided on a fountain. He travelled to Europe looking for the perfect design. However, most fountains were composed of Olympian gods and mythical figures, none of which appealed to him. Probasco wanted a fountain that told a story and had moral values.
- At the Royal Foundry in Munich, Germany, he was shown a 20 year old design by August von Kreling showing the benefits of water, a theme that was so appropriate for Cincinnati which was settled and flourished because of its proximity to the Ohio River.
- Probasco had a model of the proposed fountain made (presently at the Cincinnati Art Museum) and presented it to city officials. Probasco would provide the fountain if the city would maintain it.

## **Fountain Site:**

- The ideal site was in the city center which was 5<sup>th</sup> street between Walnut and Vine. However, there was a market there (compare to the Findlay Street market) and the butchers refused to move because of an 1827 land deed that designated the area as a market.
- The city didn't renew the lease to the market and the butchers sued. This case went to the Ohio Supreme Court that sided with the city. While the butchers were meeting with the city attorneys, city street cleaners and policemen demolished the entire marketplace in 43 minutes leaving an immense pile of rubble. Now there was a place for the fountain.

## **Building the Tyler Davidson Fountain:**

- The fountain has a stone basin weighing 80 tons; this basin had underground compartments. The cast bronze pieces were added with the 9 foot Genius of Water standing at the top. The entire bronze part weighs over 100 tons.
- It was dedicated on October 6<sup>th</sup> 1871

## **Information about the fountain:**

- The woman at the top is The Genius of Water; water flows from her palms. There are 438 holes in each palm. (Suggestion, especially for children, how many holes do you think are in her palms?)
- Below the Genius are 4 sculpture groupings showing the benefits of water:
  - A man hopes for rain to put out the fire destroying his home; he is on his roof.
  - A young woman offers water to an old man.
  - A farmer leans on his plow watching for rain to nourish his crops.
  - A young mother takes her young child for a bath.
    - There is rumor that the model for this young woman was Lola Montez, a courtesan and consort to the Bavarian monarch Ludwig I.
    - Lola had quite a reputation and the phrase "Whatever Lola wants Lola gets" may originate from her adventures.

- **Four bas-reliefs** adorn the fountain base. These depict the practical use of water – navigation, milling, fishing, and power.
- **Figures of children occupy the corner niches of the pedestal;** these children depict the various pleasures of water:
  - A girl adorns herself with pearls
  - A warmly clad boy puts on ice skates
  - A girl listens to the sea in a shell
  - A boy holds a crayfish he has caught
- **Four figures surround the base of the fountain:**
  - Water spouts from the mouths of a turtle, goose, viper, and dolphin
  - In the old days, metal cups were attached at these four figures and one could get a drink of water.
  - There was 2000 feet of coiled pipe in the fountain base that was packed with ice so one could get a cold drink in warm weather.
  - In order to get enough water pressure to the fountain, the city installed a special water tank on Mount Auburn.