

AN ILLUSTRATED TIMELINE

(1750 - 1937)



OF PORTLAND KENTUCKY



ARTWORK BY DANNY SEIM - EDITED BY ASH BRAUNECKER

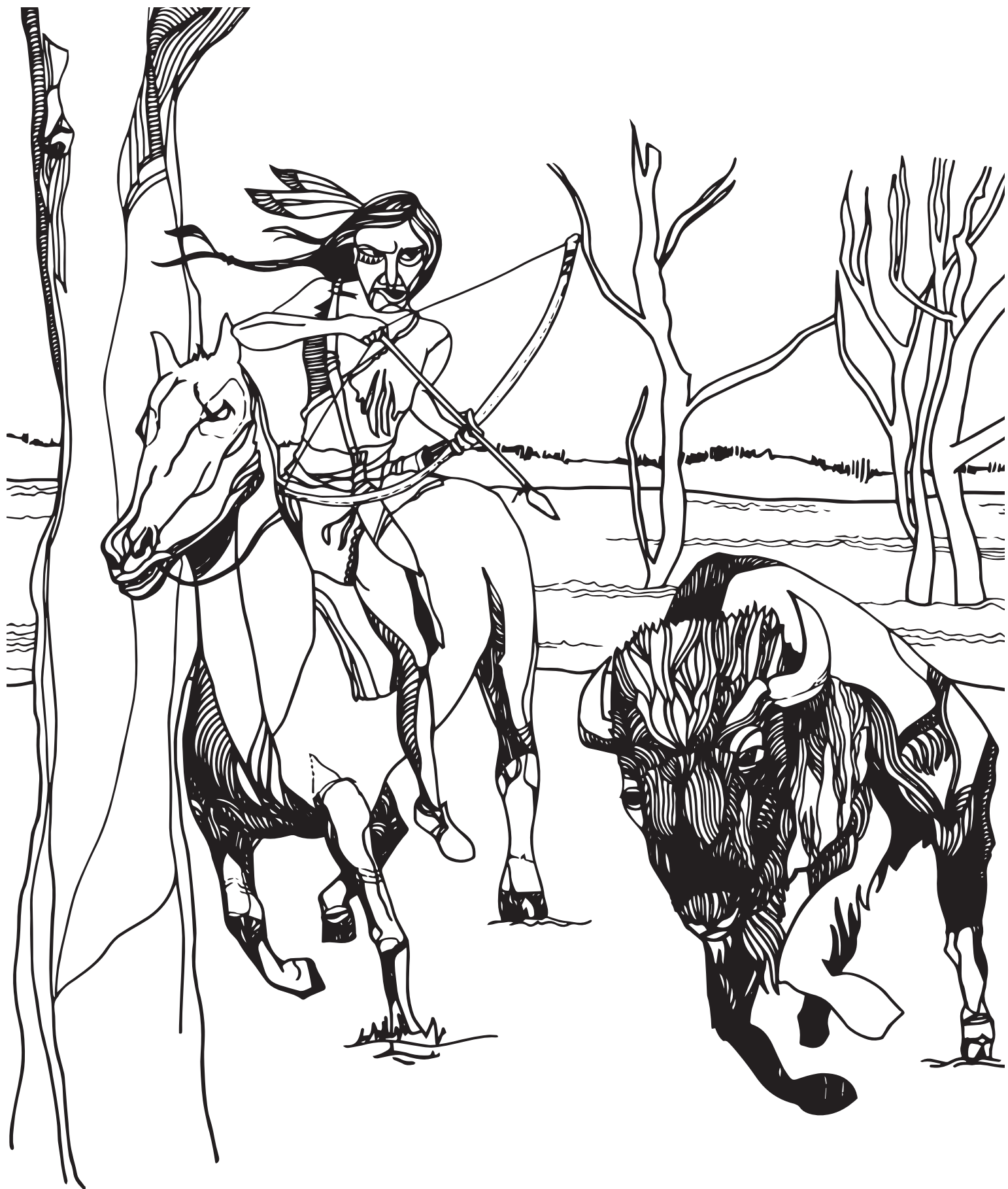
Printed at Portland Museum - 2308 Portland Ave, Louisville, KY 40212

PRE - 1750



Native Americans living in present-day Kentucky included the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Mingo, Shawnee, and Yuchi tribes. The origin of the state's name is highly debated – some claim it has connections to different Native American languages, and others say it was created by European settlers. One translation comes from the Iroquois word Kentake, meaning meadow, though the Iroquois people largely resided in the present-day state of New York.

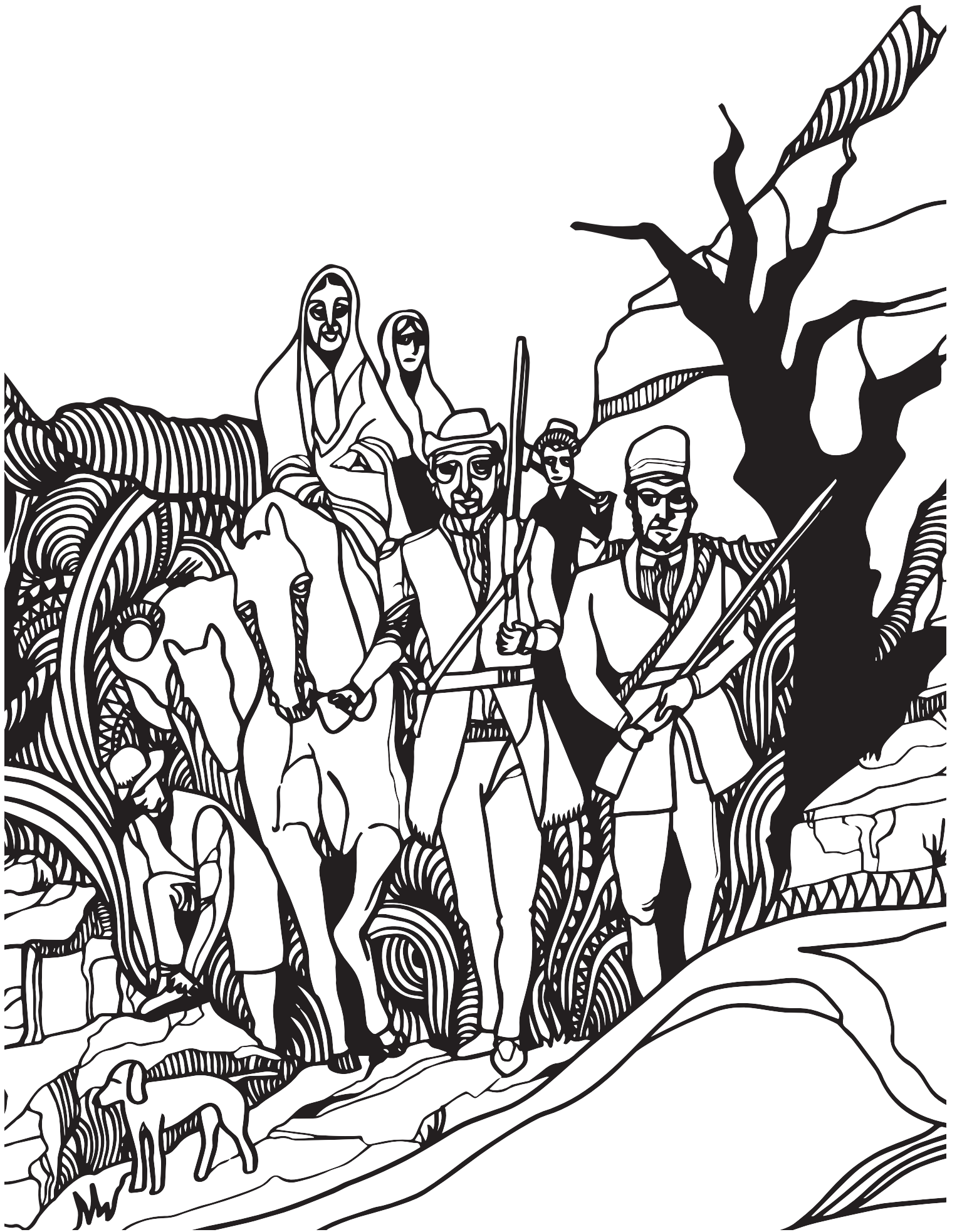
Native American tribes were essentially different countries sharing the land that became the US, and their tribal languages are very different from one another's. Today, many Native American tribes are nations living within a nation and have dual citizenship, meaning they're citizens of their tribal nation and of the US.



1750s



Following the route marked by Daniel Boone (1734 - 1820), European settlers began moving to present-day Kentucky by way of pack animals through the Cumberland Gap and the Pound Gap. During this time, the Kentucky area was part of Virginia. By the end of the 18th century, over 200,000 settlers migrated to Kentucky/Virginia by way of Boone's Wilderness Road – the creation of the trail started when a North Carolina judge and his business partners hired Boone to create a path through Tennessee and the Cumberland Gap into central Kentucky so that they could purchase land from the Cherokee tribe on the Kentucky side of the Appalachian Mountains. Boone's Wilderness Road was later lengthened to extend to the Falls of the Ohio by following Native American trails.

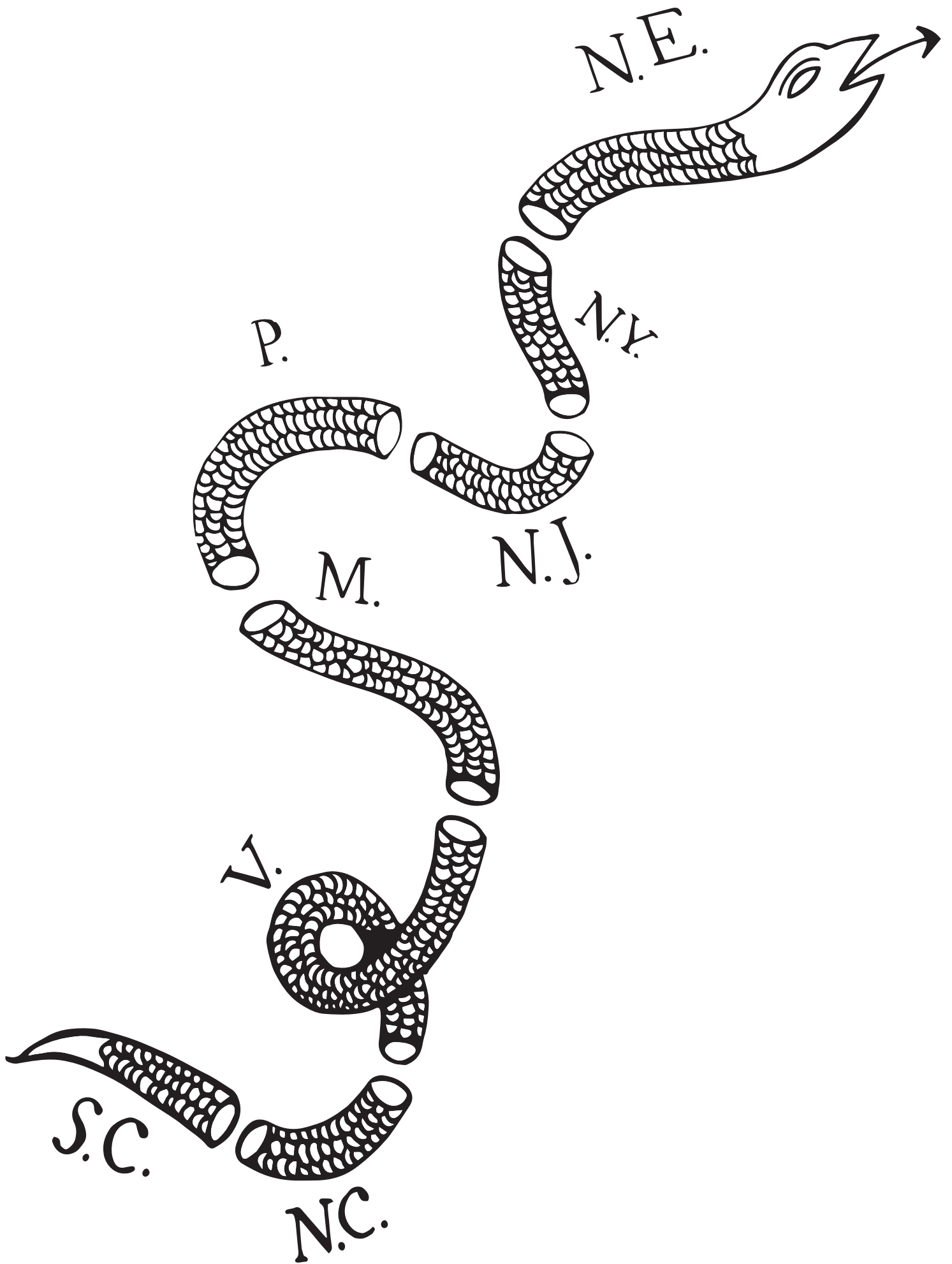


1765 - 1783



The Stamp Act went into effect on March 22, 1765, starting a series of events that led to the American Revolution. The last British troops departed New York on November 25, 1783, marking the end of British rule in the new United States.

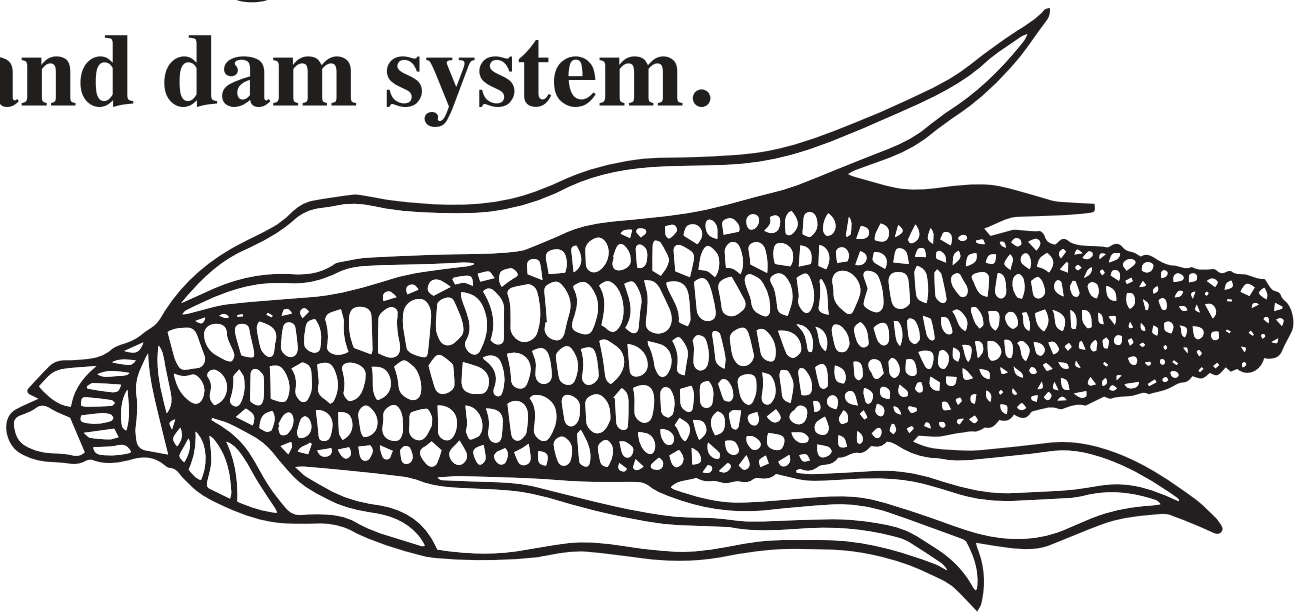
JOIN, or DIE.

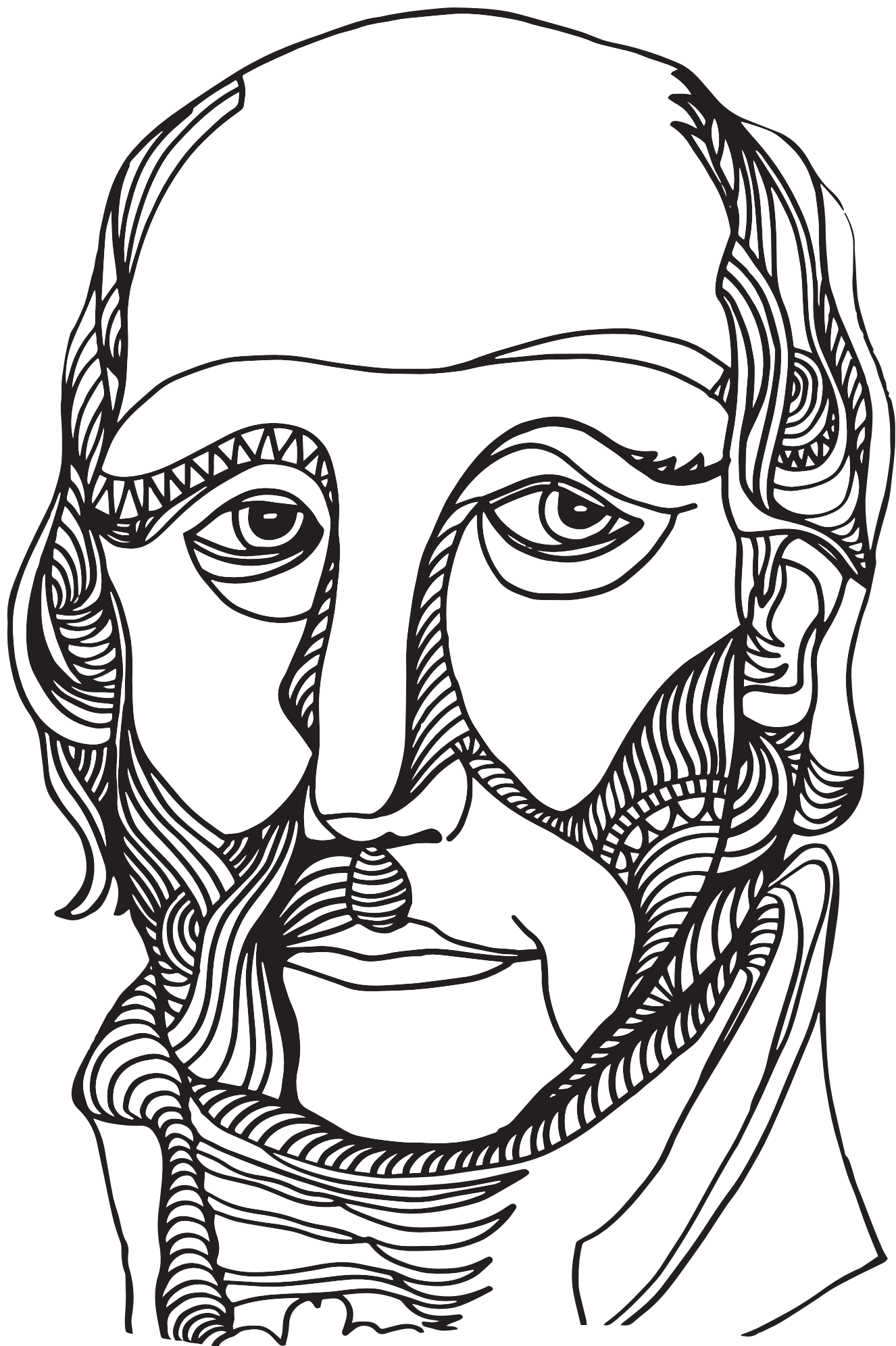


1778



George Rogers Clark (1752 – 1818) and his troops settled Corn Island as part of a military expedition to seize British posts during the American Revolution. Today the island is underwater due to extensive limestone mining and the modern locks and dam system.



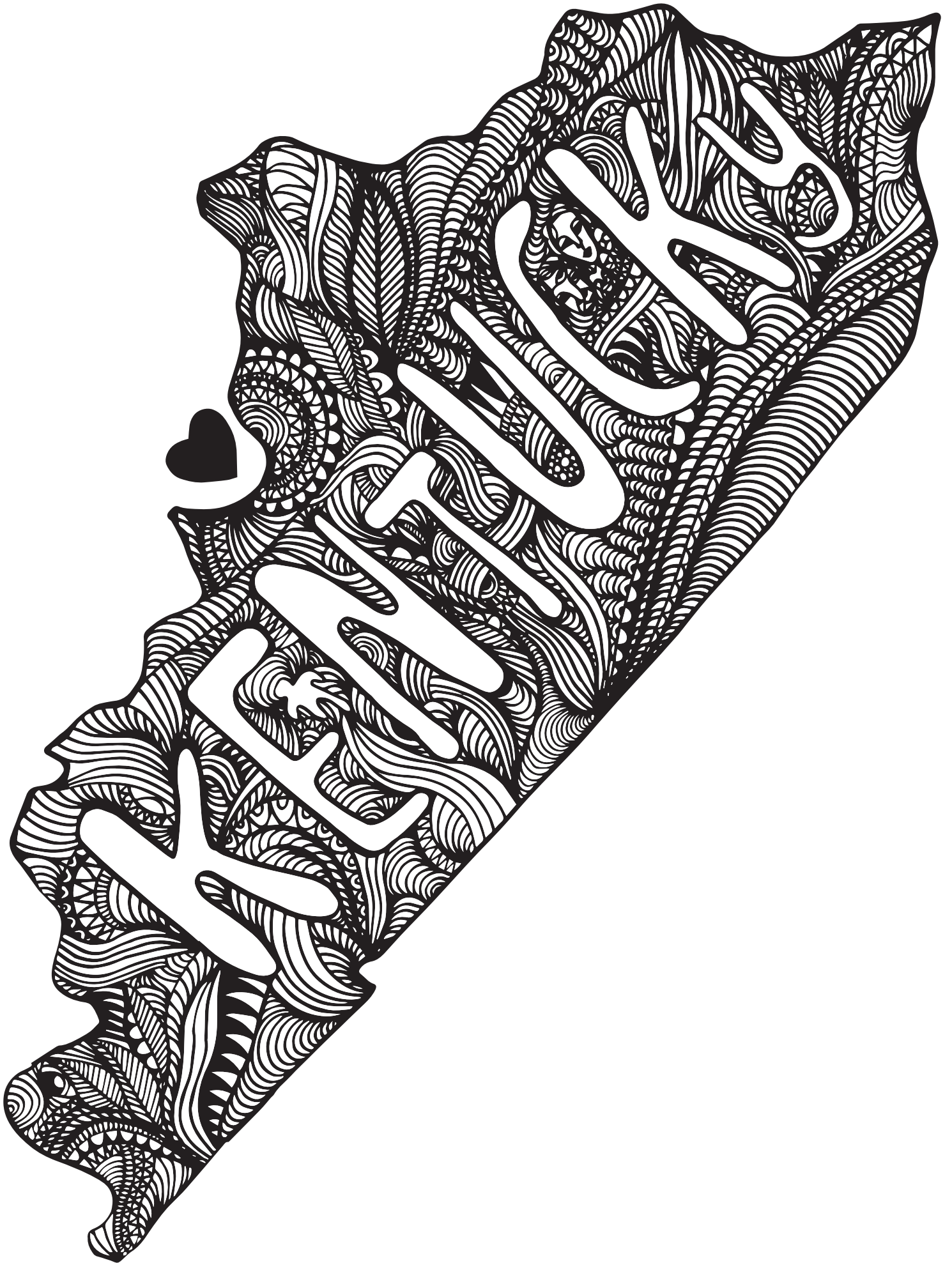


1792



After ten constitutional conventions spanning eight years, plus the approval of Virginia, the Kentucky area split from Virginia in 1792, becoming the 15th state to join the US. Isaac Shelby (1750 – 1826), a military veteran from Virginia, was elected as the first governor.

Kentucky is one of four states constituted as a commonwealth. While commonwealths are the same as states, the term became popular by the 1780s to highlight that states were founded for the common good and were free of Great Britain's control.



1808



John J. Audubon (1785 – 1851) opened a general store at Shippingport – at the time, Shippingport was an independent city that was a peninsula instead of an island. He described the area around the Falls of the Ohio as “a spot designed by nature to become a place of great importance.” After a few years, Audubon left the business and began hunting, painting, and drawing birds.

His wife, Lucy Bakewell Audubon (1787 - 1874), was an educator and the primary provider for their family, financially supporting the family and caring for their children to ensure her husband’s success as an artist. She also assisted with much of the business-side of her husband’s art career. Of his wife, John James stated, “My wife determined that my genius should prevail and that my final success as an ornithologist should become triumphant.”

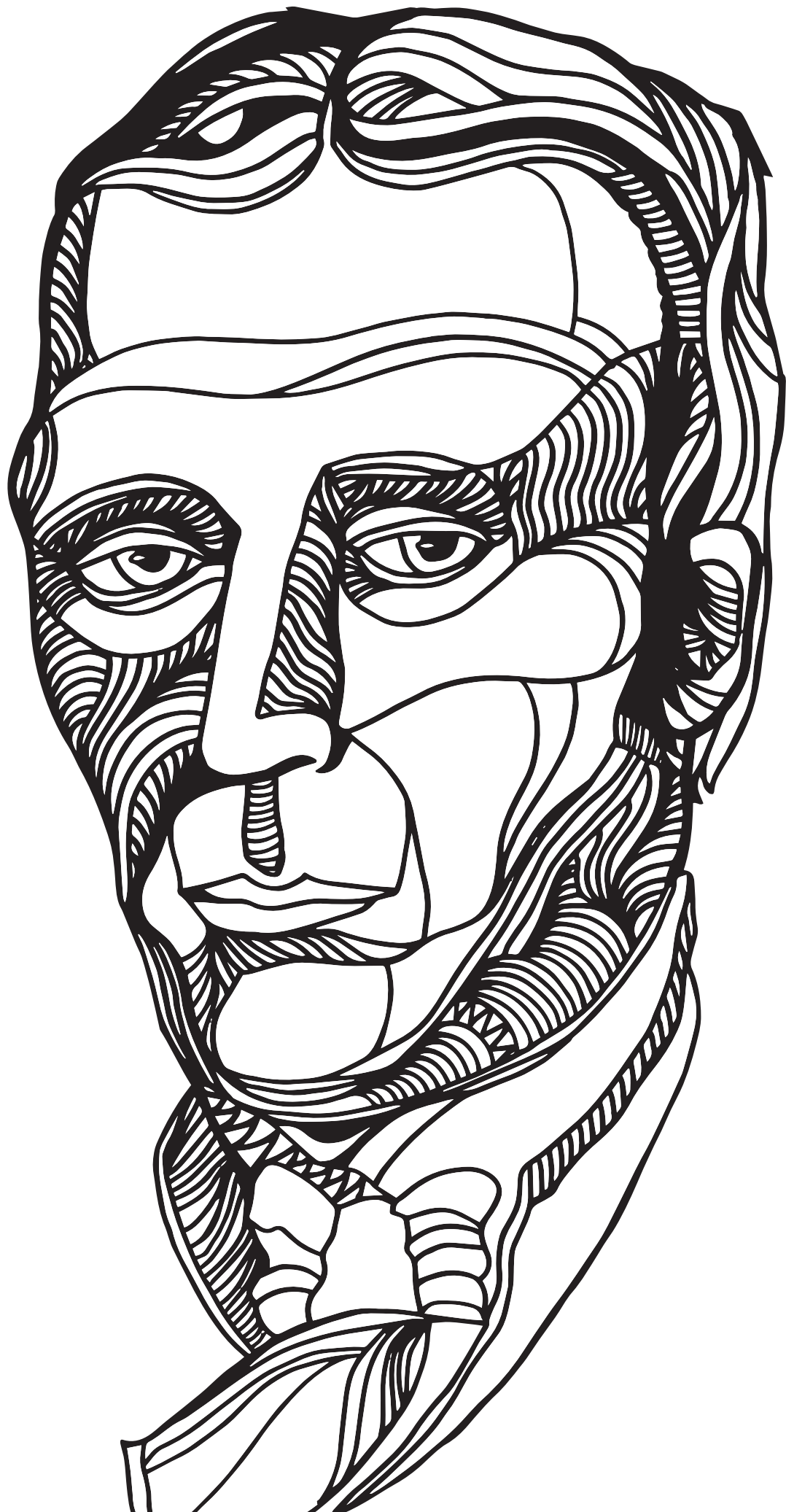


1811



General William Lytle (1770 - 1831) owned 2,000 acres of land just below the Falls of the Ohio. He worked to acquire this land, because he saw the economic opportunity in forming a new town due to river travelers having to stop in Louisville and travel by land to get below the Falls where they would board different boats.

In 1811, Lytle laid out the independent town of Portland, and it was officially chartered in 1834. The original settlement, known as Portland Proper, was between 31st & 37th St (east to west) and the Ohio River & Bank St (north to south).



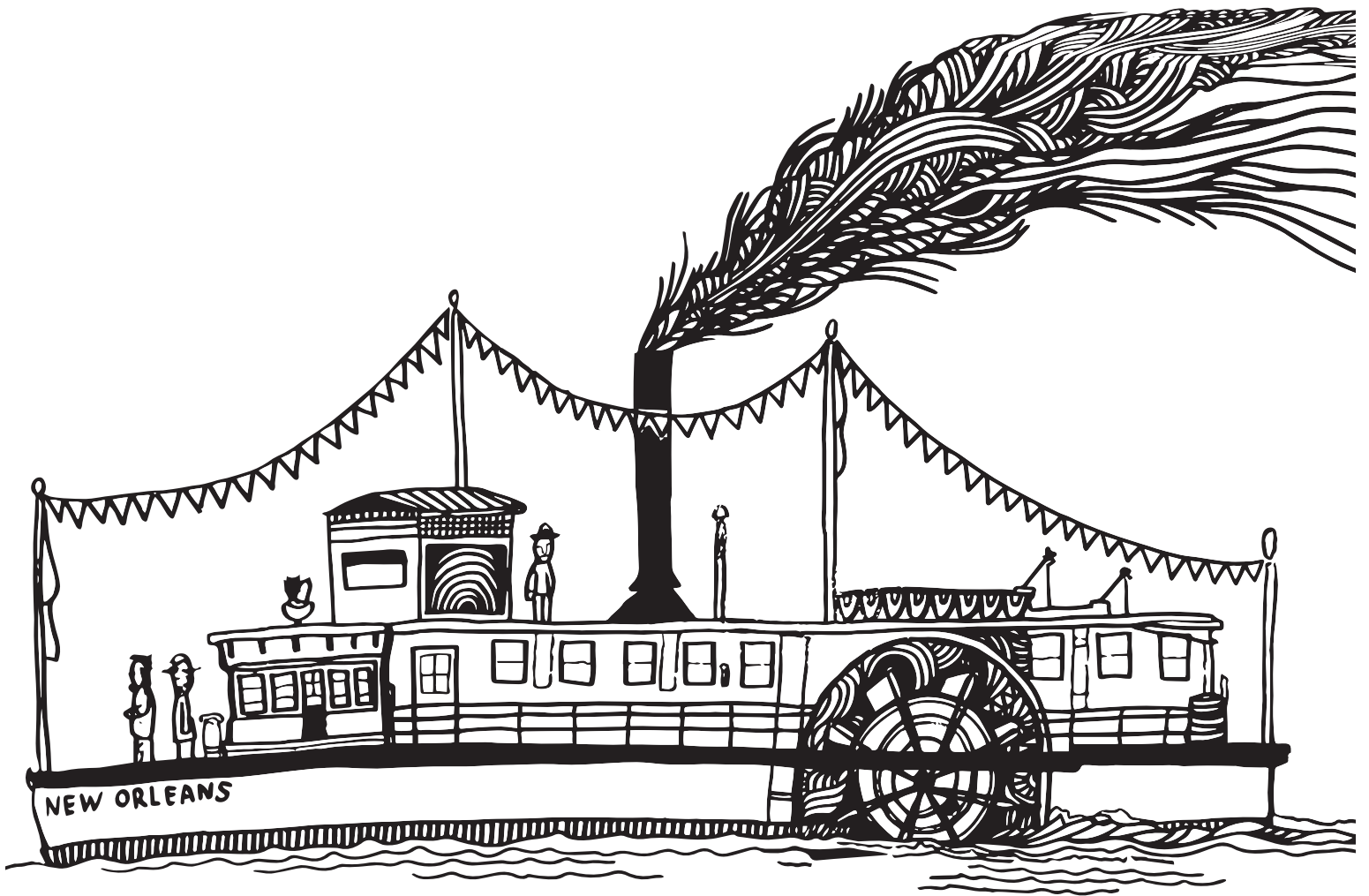
1811



Built by Nicholas Roosevelt (President Theodore Roosevelt's great-great-uncle), the New Orleans was the first steamboat to travel along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Roosevelt and his wife Lydia, who was eight months pregnant at the start of the journey, were among the passengers onboard. By the end of the trip's fourth day, the New Orleans arrived in Louisville, but the water was too low to navigate the Falls of the Ohio – the boat had to stay in Louisville for over a month to wait for the water level to rise, during which time, the Roosevelt's second child was born.

As the New Orleans made its way towards Louisiana, many people on land were fearful of the unfamiliar sound of a roaring steam engine. Some even thought that the loud noise was the Great Comet of 1811 crashing into the Ohio River.

Prior to the steam engine, boats were powered by hand, making trips take longer, and the steamboats of the early 1800s revolutionized transportation and increased river travel. Although the New Orleans did not have enough engine power to return to Pittsburgh against the river current, its creators were able to learn from the design and went on to build even stronger steamboats.



1830



Built to bypass the Falls of the Ohio – the only natural obstruction along the 1,881 miles of river between Pittsburgh and New Orleans – the Louisville and Portland Canal was the first significant improvement completed on a major US river. The initial excavation of about 112,000 cubic yards of rock and 633,000 cubic yards of dirt was done in 1825 by enslaved people and utilized archaic methods consisting of oxen, horses, and wheelbarrows.

The canal has been expanded and further modernized over time, and in 1960, it was renamed McAlpine Locks and Dam.

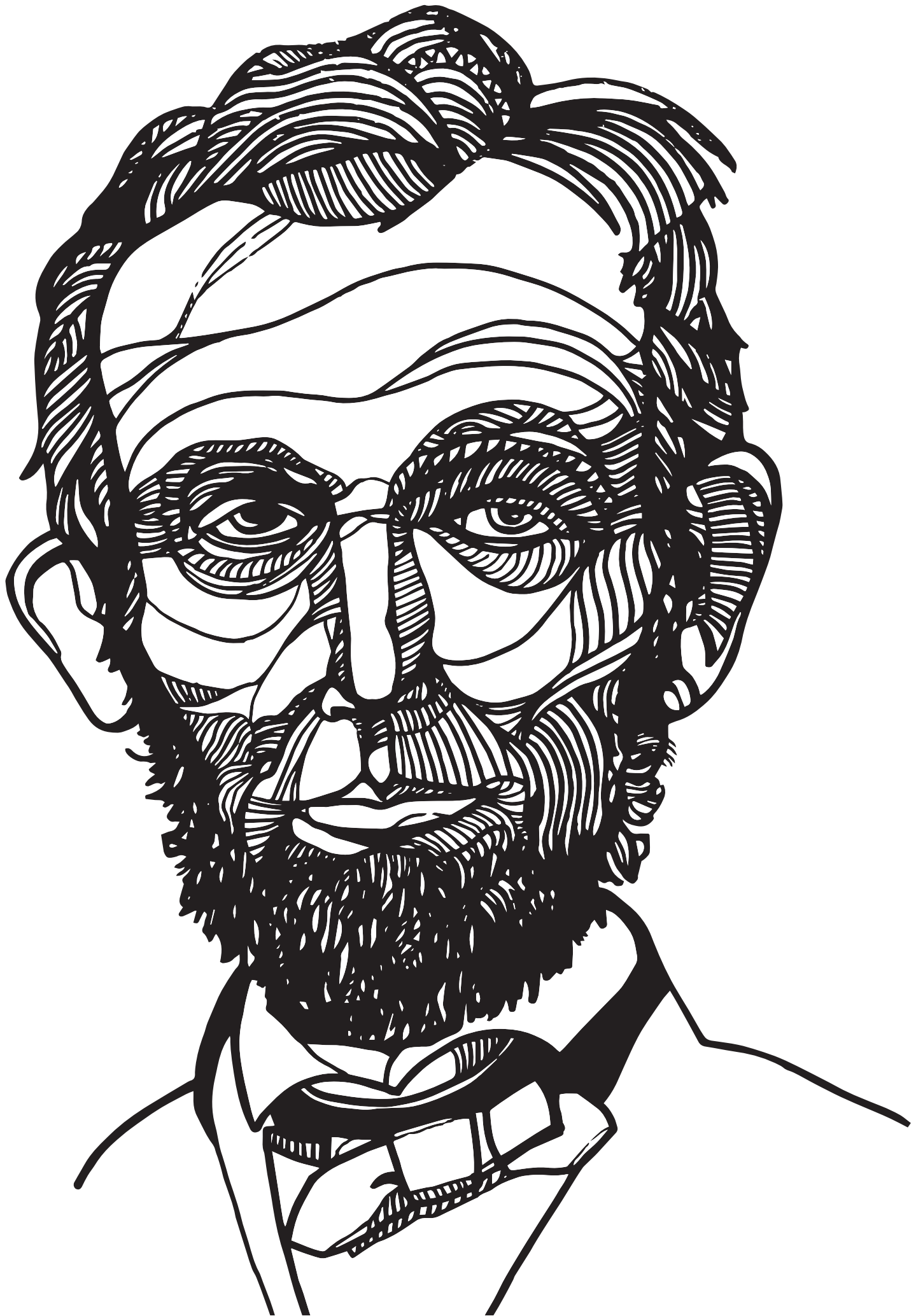


LINCOLN IN PORTLAND



In 1827, looking for opportunities to escape the family farm, a young Abraham Lincoln (1809 – 1865) worked briefly as a day laborer for the Portland Canal project and was well paid while working alongside enslaved people whose masters received payment.

In 1841, Lincoln boarded a boat at the Portland wharf, upon which he witnessed an example for contemplating “the effect of condition upon human happiness” – enslaved people “strung together like so many fish upon a trot-line. In this condition they were being separated forever from the scenes of their childhood, their friends, their (family), and going into perpetual slavery...yet amid all these distressing circumstances...they were the most cheerful.” He surmised that God “renders the worst of human conditions tolerable.”



1839



The early French population, under the guidance of Bishop Benedict Joseph Flaget (1763 - 1850), established Portland's first church, Notre Dame du Port. The name translates to Our Lady of the Port and was referred to in English as The Church of Our Lady. The church still stands at its original location, 3511 Rudd Ave, though several floods damaged the building, making it necessary to rebuild twice during the first forty years, and the Great Flood of 1937 caused significant damage to the interior of the church.

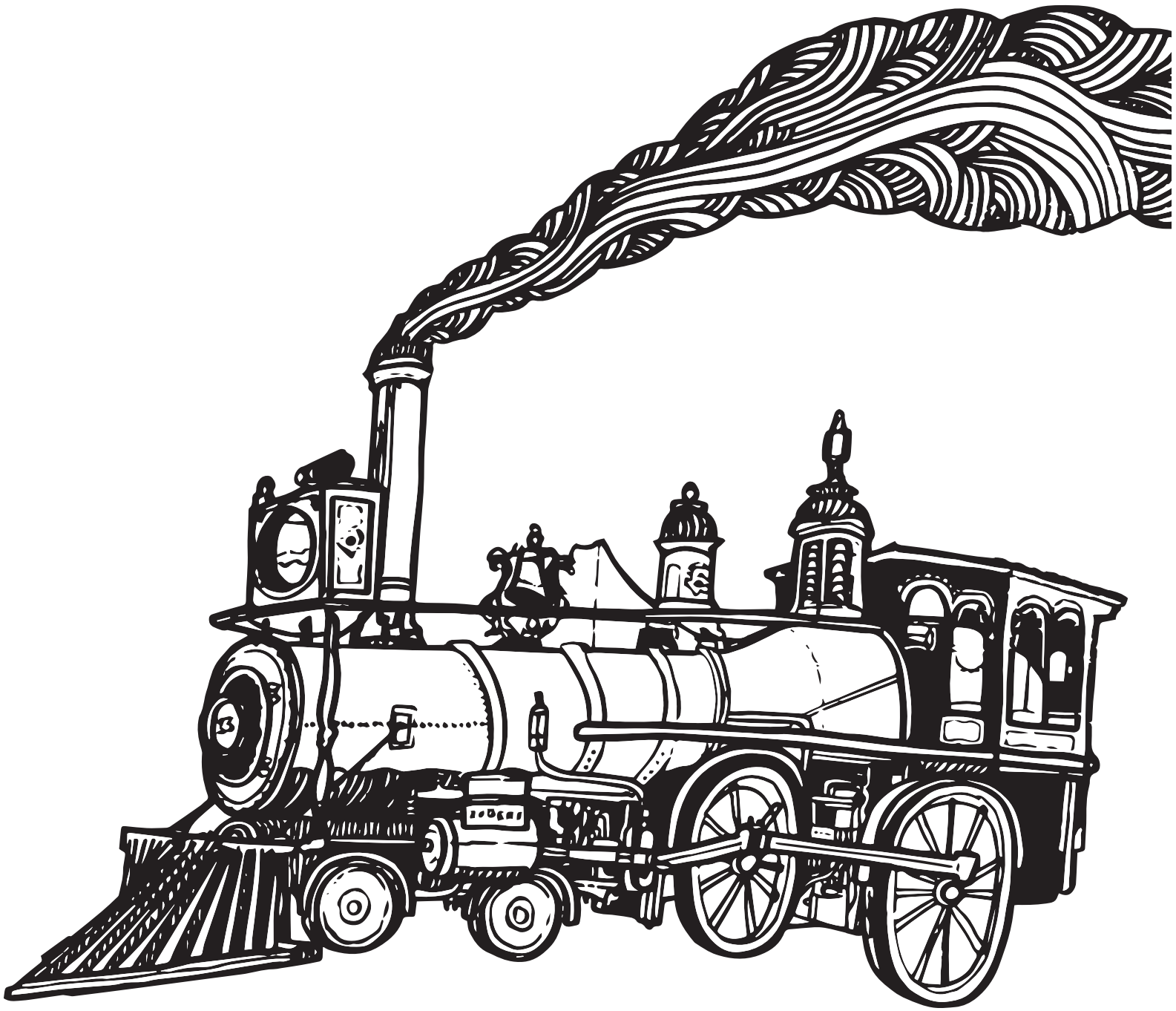
In 2009, the parishes of Our Lady, Saint Cecilia, and Saint Anthony merged under the roof of Our Lady and became the Good Shepherd Church.



1840s



Trains started taking over steamboats as the main mode of transportation for people and freight. While fluctuating water levels greatly affect the timeliness of river travel, trains can reliably arrive and depart the railroad stations. Steamboats never regained the popularity they experienced pre-railroads.



1842



During a tour of the US, Charles Dickens (1812 - 1870) visited Portland while waiting to board a different steamboat. Once aboard the boat and waiting for it to pass through the locks, Dickens requested a visit from the Kentucky Giant, Jim Porter (1811 - 1859). Dickens was so impressed by Porter's 7'8" height, he dedicated four paragraphs in his travelogue to the encounter, comparing Porter to men of average height as "a lighthouse walking among lamp-posts."



1846



Mary Millicent Miller (1846 - 1894) was born near 22nd & Main Street, the daughter of a steamboat engineer. She worked as a clerk and bookkeeper for her husband's shipping business, and when he got into legal trouble, Mary saved the business by becoming the first woman to be licensed as a steamboat master in the US. During much of the year, Mary also raised their seven children aboard the boats, such as The Saline, while they transported goods and people. She died in 1891 and is buried in Portland Cemetery.

In 2017, the City of Louisville purchased a 350-passenger steamboat and rechristened it the Mary M. Miller. It joins the Belle of Louisville in hosting dinner cruises and special events along the Ohio River.



1852



Uncle Tom's Cabin was published as an anti-slavery novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811 – 1896) and is credited with profoundly affecting people's opinions on slavery, becoming the second best-selling book in the world during the 19th century. The book's title character was modeled after Josiah Henson, an enslaved person whose family escaped to Canada via the Underground Railroad. A portion of the Underground Railroad passed through Portland, crossing the Ohio River at 36th and Water St towards the Town Clock Church in New Albany.



1855



George D. Prentice (1802 – 1870) was a slaveholder and a newspaper editor who used the **Louisville Journal** as a platform for his anti-immigrant views. On election day in **1855**, rioters, fueled with rage by Prentice's propaganda, attacked German and Irish immigrants, burning down a row of Irish Catholic houses at **11th & Main St.** At least **22** people died that day, **August 6, 1855**, which has become known as **“Bloody Monday.”**



1860s



“One of the most fearful and destructive tornadoes ever known” tore through Portland on May 21st, uprooting trees, destroying houses, and damaging the roof of the US Marine Hospital. After leaving Portland, the tornado travelled nearly 245 miles to western Kentucky.

In November, Abraham Lincoln was elected President, and the Civil War broke out less than two months later.



1865



Henrietta Helm (1865 - 1942) was born the same year the 13th Amendment abolished slavery, although Kentucky didn't ratify it until 1976. In 1882, at age 17, Henrietta passed the Louisville School Board exam. In 1909, she became the principal of the Portland Colored Night School on Lytle St, teaching five different subjects at school. Due to a shortage of African American teachers, she was permitted to continue teaching even after she married. Following retirement, she still taught piano lessons at her Portland home.



1875



From 1850 - 1875, brothers Ike and Dan Batman were the “kings of the transfer business,” making millions as draymen transferring heavy goods between Portland, Shippingport, and Louisville wharves. Ike’s office was at Jim Porter’s Big Gun saloon in Shippingport. By 1875, business slowed down, and Ike opened a saloon at 26th & Portland Ave. Ike was legendarily generous and died penniless, reportedly giving all his money to children and the poor.



1881



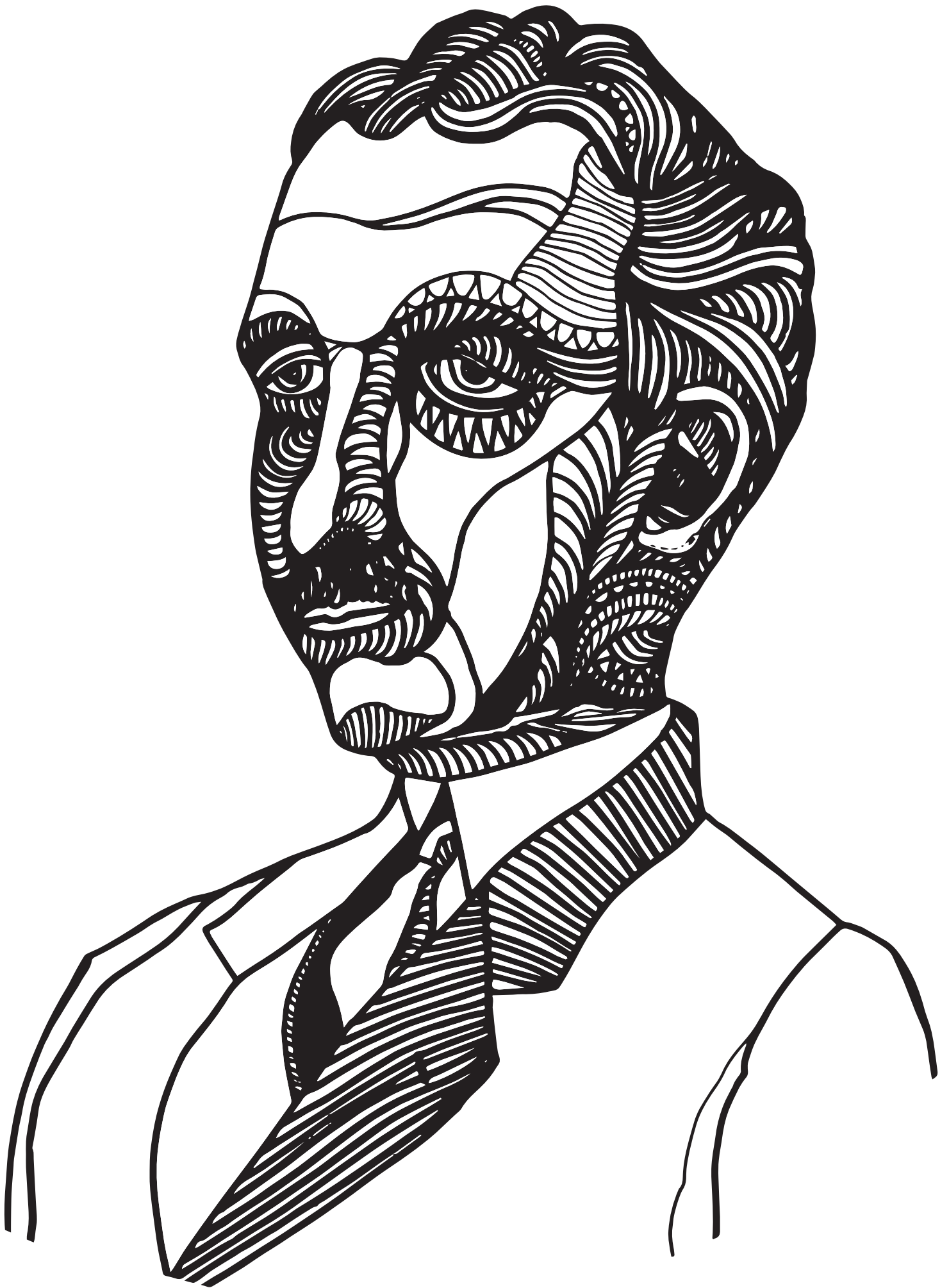
Emma Dolfinger (1881-1927) was a gifted biologist who served as a department head at the Louisville Girls' School and supervised science instruction throughout Louisville. She also advocated for women's rights as a prominent suffragist. In 1929, the Montgomery Street School was renamed Dolfinger School and operated until 1975. The 1853 Renaissance Revival building at 2500 Montgomery St once again bears her name as The Dolfinger and houses artistic and nonprofit entities.



1892



Captain Pinkney “Pink” Varble (1828 - 1892) was considered the best captain to ever pilot the Falls of the Ohio, with a 50-year career on the river. His legacy includes rescuing scores of capsized passengers, transporting Union supplies during the Civil War, using dynamite to widen the canal, and suffering a stroke while successfully steering a towboat around a whirlpool – Pink was a hero.



1905



The Portland Library was founded in 1905 as the third branch in the Louisville Free Public Library system. The construction of its current Beaux Arts style building at 3305 Northwestern Parkway, with its classical Greek/Roman architecture features, was funded by the Andrew Carnegie Foundation and opened in 1913. Surviving the Great Flood of 1937, the building acted as a Red Cross first aid relief center and helped over 1,500 people before the library had to be evacuated. For 115 years, the Portland Library continues to serve as an active force in its community.



1937



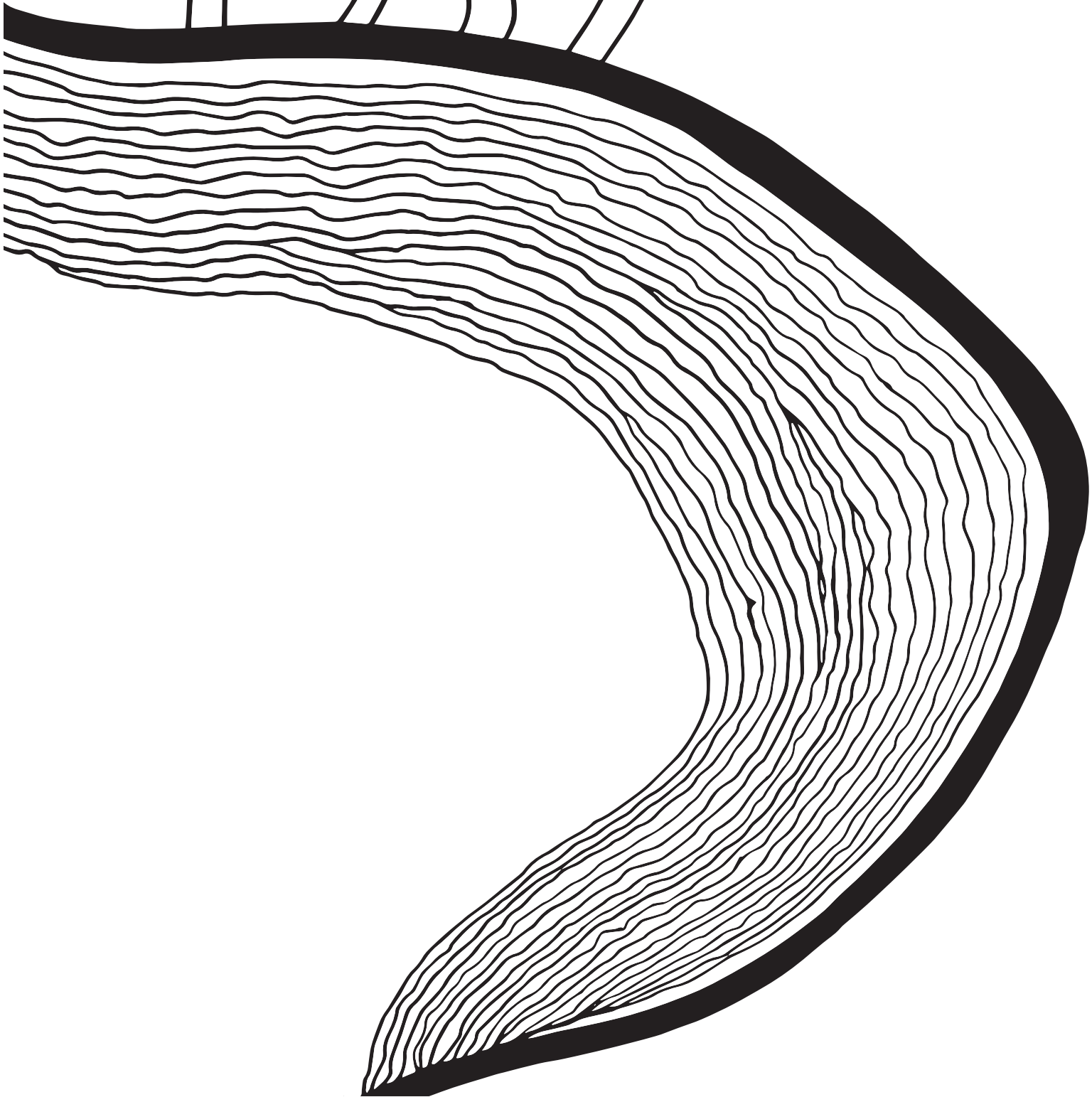
In 1937, the worst Ohio River flood in modern history covered 60 percent of Louisville. That January, it rained for nearly a month straight along the Ohio River Valley, triggering what is known today as the “Great Flood of 1937.”

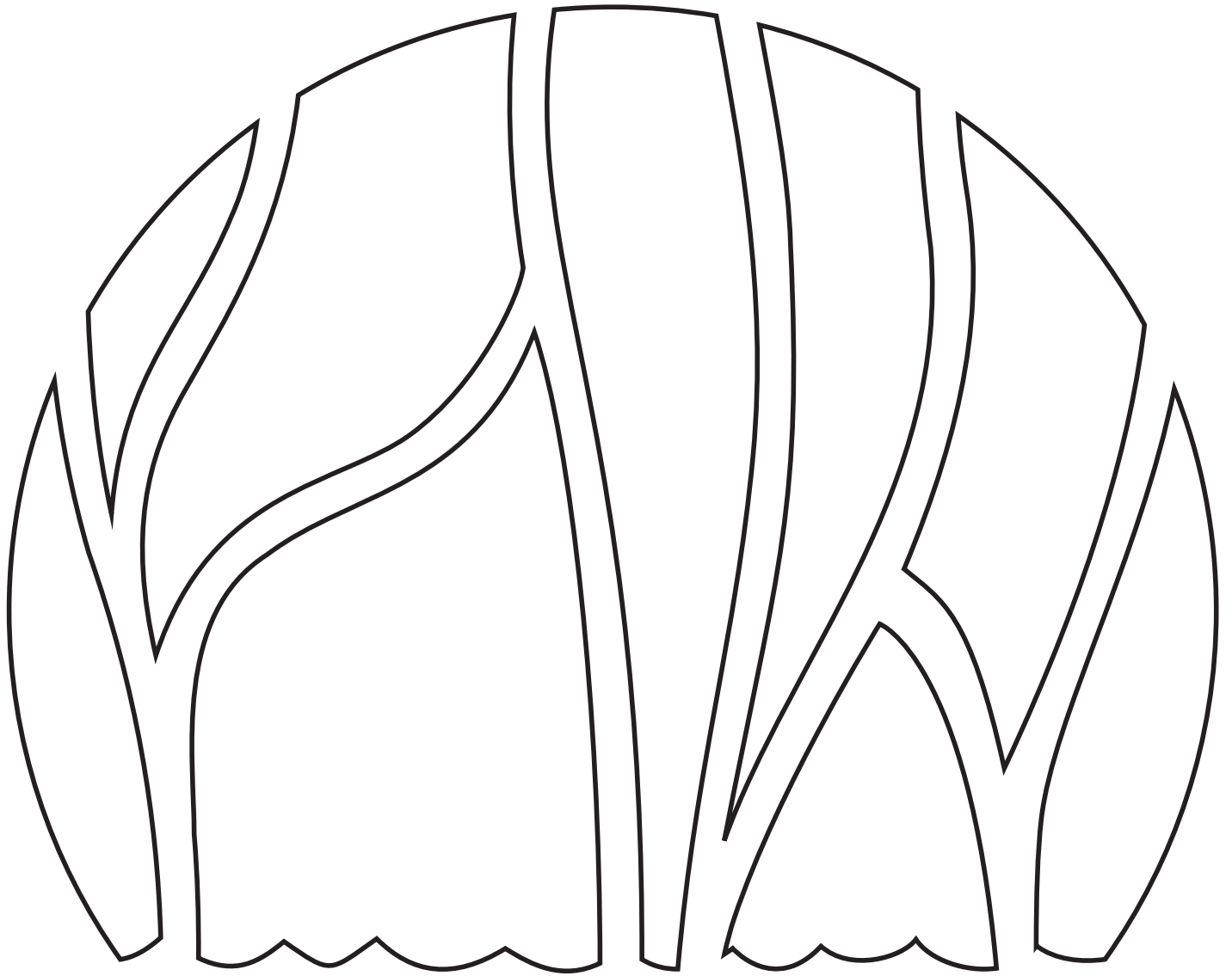
Most of Portland was submerged by the swollen river. Portland’s wharf and Shippingport Island were damaged beyond repair, and residents rowed boats down the streets to rescue people stranded on rooftops.

The devastation of the 1937 flood led to the immediate planning of a flood wall system, but the plans were put on hold in 1941 due to World War II. Then in 1945, the second worst flood occurred. The eventual flood wall built in Portland was a land levee, as opposed to a concrete wall with movable gates like those in other parts of Louisville. Although protecting residents from devastating floods, the physical barrier of the levee separates Portland from the waterway that spawned it.

The aftermath of both floods, as well as redlining housing policies during the first half of the 20th century, led to families moving away from the Portland neighborhood.

1937





PORTLAND MUSEUM



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Portland Museum is an educational resource where art & heritage celebrate the community and history of Portland, a neighborhood of Louisville that was once an independent town. The Kentucky Arts Council provides operating support to Portland Museum with state tax dollars and federal funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. © Portland Museum, April 2020, All Rights Reserved