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Book Review: George Keats of Kentucky: A Life

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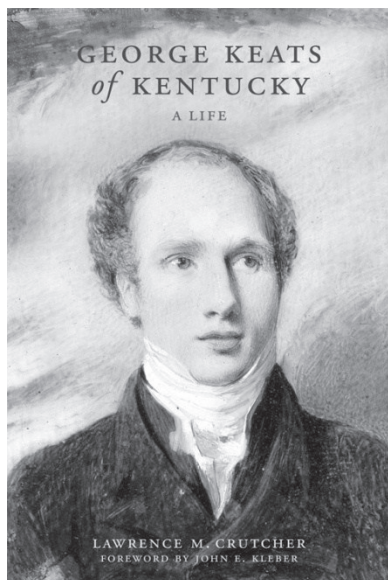
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like. This stunning success is paramount for academic and public libraries and is beyond price to people interested in the Delta.

Melinda F. Matthews
University of Louisiana at Monroe



Crutcher, Lawrence M. *George Keats of Kentucky: A Life*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2012. 342 p. ISBN 978 -0-8131-3688-2. \$40.

In the book, “*George Keats of Kentucky: A Life*”, any reader will be immediately drawn to the family connection that highlights this biography. Written by Lawrence M. Crutcher with a foreword by John E. Kleber, this 342 page publication sets a delightful pace and maintains it as the story unfolds.

Mr. Crutcher is a Former President of Book of the Month club and currently is a corporate director. Mr. Crutcher is a great-great-great grandson of George Keats and author of another book, *The Keats Family*.

George Keats of Kentucky: A Life begins with an introduction of the biography of George Keats by alerting us quickly to the relationship between George Keats and the famous English writer and brother, John Keats. Taking us to the towns of Henderson, Kentucky, and soon thereafter to Louisville, we see George plunge into business ventures and became a community leader and respected entrepreneur using the natural resources that abounded in the newly developing country during the early 1820s in lumber mills, steamboats, and real estate, George made connections and led business associates. By 1828, George was highly connected with local entrepreneurs and flourished financially.

The table of contents gives the reader a look at periods in George’s life that defined his challenges and successes as a leader in his community in Louisville and shed light on his

family in England, especially his famous brother, John Keats. One such chapter, entitled, “Who Failed the Poet?” leads the reader to ponder four questions: was it (George) his brother who failed to provide financial support to John, was it his doctors who failed to treat his illnesses, was it his critics who failed to give him open minds, or was it the poet himself who cared little for his personal health.

The book jacket and photograph that stares out at the reader presents a sophisticated, quite British subject with elegant dress with an open innocent stare—not a dandy but certainly the look of privilege. The reader is immediately drawn to the mystery behind the face and the innocence apparent of any hard and grueling impacts his life may have faced.

For a scholar of John Keats, the author’s research, almost painstaking, gives many avenues to investigate the 1800s in Kentucky life and times. Family interactions and stressful concerns about a family divided by allegiances to both England and to the new life in America tugged at the familial connections between the brothers and their families. While George appears to keep his family ties in England alive, he can be seen to grow tired of his brother’s complacency and the lack of strong dedication to the achievement motives he felt so dramatically in the newly developing Kentucky.

A beautiful collection of color plate photographs, depicting the life and the acquaintances and scenes from George and his family life and surroundings, add greatly to the imagination of the life and times of George Keats. The author of the work diligently searched and bought forth items and related information on the cultural and sociological background that is highlighted through the biography.

The Appendices --Circle of Friends and Acquaintances, Pertinent Documents, Events in the Life of George Keats, the Notes, Bibliography and Illustration Credits bring invaluable resources to an historian searching for documentation for on-going research on the life of the Keats families and the history of early Kentucky cultural and sociological development of real estate, banking, manufacturing and shipping.

The issue for the reader of this book may be the desire to know more of the life of George Keats’ brother, John. At first glance, *George Keats of Kentucky: A Life* may appear to be another biography but the tact with which the author draws the reader into the story by weaving George’s relationship with his famous brother, the renowned English poet, John, keeps the reader involved and that character development does not falter as the story unfolds. The book will be helpful to historians as it creates highlights of the rich cultural and social fabric of life in 1800s in Kentucky!

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