

VII History of Liberty Township

Early Surveying

Liberty Township is located in a region lying between the Great Miami (simply the Miami River at the time) and Little Miami Rivers and as such is a part of the “Between the Miami’s” district identified by C.E. Sherman in his report Original Ohio Land Subdivisions. Judge John Cleves Symmes, bearing certificates of indebtedness for assisting George Washington on his retreat thru New Jersey in 1776, made application for 1,000,000 acres of land between the Miami’s. Symmes traveled across the mountains in October of 1787 to lay claim to his territory. Unable to raise enough cash to pay for the entire grant he was eventually given a deed by George Washington on September 30, 1794 for a total of 311,682 acres, including several reservations for use by Congress.

The area is unique in its numbering of the subsequent breakdown of the land into smaller portions known as sections, towns, and ranges. Also, the contract with Symmes required these subdivisions be done at the purchaser’s expense, resulting in a fair number of surveyors being employed by Symmes. The survey instructions given by Symmes, yielded less than desirable results with many irregular shaped sections being created with overlapping boundaries which caused land disputes. The Supreme Court of the State eventually stepped in and confirmed that earlier instructions given by an act of Congress and accepted at the Treasury Department were final and obligatory and, therefore, could not be altered.

Today, what little recorded information that remains concerning the original surveys within the Symmes Purchase is recorded in Hamilton, Butler, and Warren counties Recorder Offices. Most of the original survey notes were destroyed in a fire at Judge Symmes home in North Bend in 1810.

Early Settlers

Early settlers in Liberty Township are listed on the Jas McBride Map of Butler County, Liberty Township, dated 1836.

Historical Development

In 1803, the Legislature of the State of Ohio divided Hamilton County, establishing Butler County. The Legislature appointed County Commissioners on April 15, 1803, who in turn appointed associate judges. The associate judges in Butler County established five townships: Liberty, Fairfield, Lemon, St. Clair, and Ross. In 1804, the Legislature passed a law empowering County Commissioners to alter the boundaries of townships and to set up new townships. On June 2, 1823 Union Township (now known as West Chester Township) was formed from part of Liberty Township.

Prior to 1800, the area, today known as Liberty Township, was a wilderness area inhabited by Indians and animals. The last decade of the eighteenth century saw the first white settlers in Liberty Township. Into the beginning of the nineteenth century, the pioneers, mostly from Maryland and New Jersey, bought large tracts of land for agricultural pursuits. Even by 1840, the land was still owned in quarter and half sections

by a relatively small number of people. The early activities in the Township were farming and some commercial and industrial enterprises in the fledgling villages. The earliest villages were platted in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century along the turnpike roads. The busy and self-sufficient character of these town's early histories, particularly of Princeton and Huntsville, with such enterprises as shoemaking, brick making, pork-packing, distilleries, and stores, suggest communities in relative isolation from larger centers where they could get such services. These villages served the surrounding agricultural countryside throughout the nineteenth century.

The towns were thriving at mid-century, still possessing their early character as agricultural centers and as stops on the turnpike roads. Bethany was becoming the largest village, presumably because the Great Miami Turnpike, where it was located, was the busiest of the roads throughout the Township. A number of industries including wagon makers, shoemakers, blacksmiths, masons, and carpenters, were located in Bethany throughout the nineteenth century, as were a variety of stores. By mid-century the Methodist-Episcopal Church in Huntsville, the first in the Township, was moved to Bethany.

Many farmhouses were constructed during the mid nineteenth century, a fertile period of growth in Liberty Township's history. These farmhouses, many still in existence today, replaced earlier log cabins or brick and frame houses.

After the Civil War, the biggest event in the Township was the construction of a railroad line through this area. In 1872, the Cincinnati and Dayton Short, also called the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, and St. Louis Railroad, was built through the center of the Township. Two stations, known as Hughes Station and Kyles Station, were established in the Township. Small settlements grew up around both stations, which like the earlier villages served the surrounding agricultural community. Bethany was still growing in the late nineteenth century, probably achieving its peak growth in the 1870's and 1880's. The other early villages were losing their self-sufficient character by this time while Bethany appears to have become the "town" for the community. In 1859, a new church building replaced the earlier 1830's structure for the Methodist-Episcopal Church in Princeton, indicating some vitality there, but the Universalist Church and the Auburn Methodist-Episcopal Church organizations were basically gone by the Civil War. In 1875, a new brick structure for the Methodist-Episcopal Church was built in Bethany; that same year the Cumberland Episcopalians built a church in Bethany, at the south end of the village (see Exhibit 18, 1875 Atlas).

A small number of farmhouses, mainly of frame construction, were built in the Township during the 1880's and 1890's; but the largest concentration of farmhouses still existing are those dating from before 1870.

In 1911, a new set of railroad tracks was put through the Township, the New York Central Railroad, and the older tracks removed. Since the new tracks were generally in the same location as the earlier line, the two railroad communities of Kyles Station and Hughes Station remained unchanged; however, a grain mill and elevator were constructed at both stations. The Township hall, which was built in the 1890's at Hughes Station, presumably because of its central location and proximity to the railroad, remained here to serve as the community's voting hall.

Churches

Several churches were in the Township by the mid-nineteenth century. The first church was a Methodist-Episcopal, founded in the Huntsville area in the center of the Township. This Methodist-Episcopal Church also was the first in the county of this denomination. Another Methodist-Episcopal Church was established in Princeton in the 1830's and a third, called the Auburn Methodist-Episcopal Church was built in the northwest corner of the Township. A group called the New Lights built a brick church in Huntsville in the 1830's. In the 1850's a Universalist Church was built in Princeton, but by the Civil War it had languished. An Old School Baptist Church was erected in the mid-nineteenth century on Princeton-Glendale Road, north of Princeton, and appears to have lasted into the early twentieth century.

Schools

There were rudimentary schools in the Township before the mid-nineteenth century, but the number was very small. In 1853, a law establishing public schools caused the formation of district schools in the Township. One school dates from nearly this time, the District No. 5 School, or Kyles School, on Kyles Station road, dates from 1858. The other schools, two dating from 1871, one from 1887 and one from the 1880's, were replacements of earlier district schools in the same locations remain today. Two other schools in the Township, one located on Princeton Glendale Road, north of Kyles Station Road, and one on Yankee Pike in Huntsville, are the only schools that are not in existence today. In the 1920's, the district schools were disbanded as the result of the Rural School Code of 1914, which eliminated the sub-district and township units of organization. In 1928, the schools were superseded by a large consolidated school on Princeton Pike.

Industry

A small industrial community known as Rockdale, which is assumed to have been established by either a paper company or an asbestos manufacturing company, appeared in the early twentieth century in the northwest corner of the Township between the Great Miami River and State Route 4. Very little is known about the community, except that the industry moved houses here, presumably for its workers. Although the community is shown on the 1810 U.S.G.S. map, the majority of the buildings in this vicinity date from the 1920's through 1940's.

Another small settlement, known as Maustown, grew up along Princeton-Glendale Road in the 1920's through 1950's; it was named for members of the Maus family who owned the first lots there. Today Princeton Glendale Road is heavily traveled, and it is assumed that it had a similar character in the early twentieth century when the small houses with

large setbacks were built. The residents in Maustown were made up of a number of workers in the City of Hamilton's many industries; perhaps they were looking for a more pastoral, suburban location for their homes and yet within easy access to Hamilton.

A number of bungalows were built in the 1910's and 1920's, most of them small farm complexes built out of the larger tracts of nineteenth century farm complexes.

The future of Liberty Township's subsequent development was first seen in 1948, with the establishment of the Horse Shoe Bend subdivision along State Route 4 in the northwest corner of the Township. The small frame and concrete block houses on the road are assumed to have been built for laborers, who worked in Hamilton's industries.

Today, Interstate 75 runs north-south through the eastern edge of the Township. The Butler regional highway (State Route 129) runs east-west to Interstate 75 through the southern edge of the Township. Improved access saw substantial residential growth in the Township throughout the 1990's and the early 2000's. The planned interchange at Interstate 75 and Hamilton Mason Road has brought increased commercial development; it is anticipated that this commercial growth will continue to expand as the interchange project moves forward.

Refer to Exhibit 18 for the location of the neighborhoods listed below.

Bethany is a community in Section 14 in Liberty Township on Cincinnati-Dayton Road (formerly United States 25). The first house there is believed to have been built in 1798 by David Williamson, who also built a tavern there. Bethany was formally laid out in 1822 by Samuel Lowery. The Bethany post office, which was moved June 24, 1844, from Huntsville, closed in 1957. Nearby is the community of Jericho (or Jerico). Bethany (or House of Dates) was a biblical village, mentioned in the New Testament, on the Mount of Olives in Jordan near Jerusalem.

Huntsville is in Section 20 of Liberty Township at the intersection of Princeton Road (the extension of Hamilton's High Street) and Yankee Road. It was founded about 1800 by Thomas Hunt, who died in 1814 at the age of 65. Yankee Road reportedly got its name because members of the Hunt family were considered Yankees. The Huntsville post office was established on April 1, 1817, and was moved on June 24, 1844, to Bethany. In 1807, Thomas Hunt and his sons, Ira, William, and Nathan, built Yankee Road to Middletown. The sons constructed the Miami Bridge (on the present site of Hamilton's High-Main Bridge) between Hamilton and Rossville. The bridge opened in December of 1819.

Jericho, also Jerico, Jericho Corners, and Jerico Corner, is a name found on opposite sides of Butler County, in Milford and Liberty Townships. There was a Jericho post office from May 8, 1852, until December 28, 1855, in Liberty Township. The community is at the eastern end of Princeton Road at Cincinnati-Dayton Road, immediately north of Bethany and east of Huntsville.

Kyle, Kyles, or Kyles Station in Section 28 in Liberty Township was settled in 1803 by Thomas Kyle. A post office was established there on August 22, 1872, as Fontana. It was changed to Kyle's on August 29, 1879, and to Kyle on June 5, 1893. It also was a station on the Short Line Railroad (later the Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, & Indianapolis Railroad, New York Central, Penn Central, Conrail, and, finally, Norfolk Southern since June 1, 1999).

Maustown or Mausestown is at the intersection of Millikin Road and Princeton-Glendale Road (State Route 747) in sections 2 and 3 in Liberty Township. It was named after the Maus family, who is believed to have been the first to live there, starting with the Nicholas Maus family. The community name was misspelled as Mausestown briefly on state highway signs. Pronunciation of the name has been disputed as either "Moss town" or "Mouse town." In the 1970s, some residents tried to change the name to North Princeton, but failed.

Princeton is at the intersection of Princeton Road and Princeton-Glendale Road (State Route 747) in Sections 1 and 2 in Liberty Township. Princeton was laid out in 1812 by Samuel Enyart. A Princeton post office opened on December 27, 1816, and moved to Hughes Station on December 9, 1872. The name was changed to Clawson, from 1881 to 1900, to avoid confusion with another Princeton in Ohio, but eventually reverted back to Princeton.

Rockdale is on the Great Miami River at the Liberty and Lemon Townships line at the north end of Rockdale Road, north of State Route 4. The mill and factory site was situated on the Great Miami River, the Miami-Erie Canal, and the Louisville, Cincinnati & Dayton Railroad (now the CSX New Miami-Middletown line).

Subcommittee Goals

As part of the Comprehensive Plan Process, a subcommittee focusing on history was formed to work through historical information and to determine how, and to what degree, history should be incorporated into the plan. Given, the rich historical foundation of Liberty Township and seeing that foundation begin to erode with development, the subcommittee felt the following items important to Liberty Township's future:

1. Create a better inventory of existing historical resources in the Township (see Appendix 1);
2. Map the inventoried resources to make the community and decision makers aware of their existence (see Appendix 1);
3. Appeal to the public via the local newspaper to gather additional historic data on the resources listed on the inventory;
4. Provide incentives to developers (density bonuses, etc.) to encourage the protection and preservation of identified resources;
5. Create a driving tour / pamphlet of the inventoried resources enabling the community to learn firsthand about the historical foundations of Liberty Township;
6. Gather additional historical information on inventoried resources and incorporate that information into the pamphlet / tour.

7. Establish a historic district (incorporating architectural, pedestrian-friendly, and mixed use development standards for development / redevelopment) in the Bethany Road Corridor;
8. Identify the old boundaries of Maustown, Princeton, Bethany, Jericho, and Huntsville and provide historic signage.
9. Portray the value of the people (for example, work ethic, ideology, etc.); and
10. Re-create / restore historic stone turnpike markers along State Route 747 (Princeton-Glendale Road) and Cincinnati-Dayton Road.