

## **HISTORY OF OUR AREA**

### **THE OLDEN DAYS:**

The recorded history of our area, claimed originally by the French and later by Great Britain, dates back only to 1662 when the British King, Charles the Second, made a land grant to Connecticut colonists which became known as the Connecticut Western Reserve. About 120 miles long from East to West and an average of 50 miles wide from North to South, this wilderness included the 25.9 sq. miles of land that is now Bainbridge Township.

Ohio was admitted to the Union in 1803 as the 17th state. The land was surveyed and Geauga County was the second county to be created in the state and was named for a river. Geauga is the Indian name for raccoon. The river was later renamed the Grand River.

### **THE INDIANS:**

Recent archeological finds indicate that pre-historic Indians inhabited the Chagrin Valley thousands of years ago. Small Indian mounds have been found in Geauga County; however there is no evidence that any Indian Tribes were native to this area after the mound builders disappeared centuries ago.

The Eries and the Chats first came here in the early part of the 17th century, but they were driven out or destroyed by the Iroquois about 1655. For almost 50 years Ohio was next used only as a hunting ground. In the 1700's, the push westward by the white man forced thousands of Indians into Ohio. Two principal Indian "families" were involved; Algonquins and Iroquois. The tribes included Miamis, Wyandots, Hurons, Shawnees, Delawares, Tuscarawes, Senecas, Cherokees, and Ottawas; 15,000 in all. Their war parties and hunting parties roamed the wilderness. Indian trails crisscrossed our area. Our route 306 was originally an Indian Trail and another crossed in the Tanglewood area near McFarland's Creek. Arrowheads can still be found in this area. Between Bainbridge and Catsden Roads there is a flat "tablerock" having several depressions which catch and hold water. It is believed to be a mill where Indians ground their corn and sharpened their tools.

### **THE EARLIEST PIONEERS AND THE BEGINNING OF BAINBRIDGE:**

The first road through what is now known as Bainbridge was begun in 1801. A Captain Edward A. Paine and his engineers, working under authority of the territorial government, surveyed a North-South route from Lake Erie to Chillicothe, which was the political center of the territory at that time. The road followed, for almost its entire length, what was the old Indian Trail.

Over this mud road came the early settlers, leaving their homes in the East to start a new life in the wilderness. On Thanksgiving Day in 1811, David McConoughey, his wife, Mary, and their 6 children became the first settlers in what was to become Bainbridge Township. They had purchased 100 acres of forestland in what is now Southeastern Bainbridge, from a Benjamin Gorham. They spent many months clearing their land and building their log cabin; 18 x 20 feet for 8 people.

Here was a beautiful, fertile, heavily forested land in the lowest foothills of the Alleghenies (Geographers have said that the great plains of the Midwestern and prairies states begin in this latitude at the foot of Cleveland's Cedar Hill Road).

Wood was abundant for cabins, barns and furniture. They had a choice of maple, beech, white ash, oak, basswood, cucumber, whitewood, hickory, black walnut, wild cherry and wild plum as well as the long-gone abundant and disappearing elm. There were ample lakes, ponds and streams that abounded in fish and game. There were bear, deer, elk, wolves and wildcats plus fox, beaver, rabbit, squirrels, and raccoons. Pheasant, wild turkey, grouse, ducks and geese were also sources of food for the pioneers.

The early settlers found hardship and danger as well. Though wild game was abundant there were also wolves and bear. Indians still lived in the forest even though treaties had taken their rights to the land from them. Some were resentful of the white intruders and were a real danger. A few of the wild animals mentioned above also were a threat to person and crops. Passable roads were all but non-existent. In spite of it all, two other families joined the McConoughey's in 1811; the Jasper Lacy and the Gamaliel Kent families. Roughly 50 families followed to Bainbridge Township (created and named in 1817) in the next 25 years. The area became known at various times as Ailstintown, Kentstown, and Bissell's Corners. The descendants of some of these early founders still live in the area and their names are well known to all of us. They have been perpetuated in physical features of the township; McFarland Creek and McFarland Corners, Haskins Road, Pettibone Road, Taylor-May Road, Snyder Road and Savage Road were named after early arrivals to the area.

Bainbridge, the name selected for the township, was in honor of a popular naval hero of the War of 1812. Wounded in battle and with a long career in the Navy, Commodore William Bainbridge commanded the USS Constitution known as "Old Ironsides."

In 1818, Justus Bissell opened a tavern on Chillicothe Road (Route 306) a little south of Bainbridge-Solon Road. He was appointed the first postmaster and the post office was located in the tavern. The tavern formed the nucleus of Bainbridge Center, as we know it today. Some years later, Bissell moved his enterprise to the Northwest corner of Chillicothe and Bainbridge-Solon Road. The original tavern became a private residence and stands today as the oldest home in the township.

The fourth U.S. census conducted in 1820 counted 199 residents. By 1850, there were 1,014. Chillicothe Road (Route 306) was and is the main route through the township. Three others were soon built; the Bainbridge-Chagrin Rd., the Bainbridge-Solon Rd., and the Bainbridge-Auburn Road, but all three were commonly referred to as Bainbridge Road. It was only in recent times that the situation was clarified when the road to Chagrin Falls became officially named Chagrin Road and the road from Solon through Bainbridge to Auburn became simply Bainbridge Rd. For almost 100 years, the road from Chagrin Falls through Bainbridge to Auburn was part of the main route from Cleveland to Youngstown.

#### **ROOTS OF PILGRIM VILLAGE:**

From 1662 until 1800, the Connecticut Land Company owned the lands of the "Western Reserve" given to them by King Charles the Second of Great Britain.

On February 20, 1800 4,043 acres "being the whole of Tract #2 in Township #6 in the 9th Range" was

deeded by Trustees of the Connecticut Land Company to:

David Waterman	\$4,128
Judson Canfield	\$9,538.50
James Johnson	\$5,322
Nathaniel Church	\$1,995
Frederick Wolcott and Elijah Wadsworth	\$262.30
Samuel Canfield	\$688
Elijah Wadsworth	\$300
Judson Canfield, James Johnson, David Waterman and Nathaniel Church	\$864.66

The total amount paid was \$23,098.41 or \$5.71 per acre. The amount paid by each is shown above; however, the deed conveys "an interest as tenant in common and undivided."

Records indicate that later the same year, Samuel Canfield sold his interest to Judson Canfield for \$680.00, and in 1801 Frederick Wolcott sold his interests to Elijah Wadsworth for \$100.00.

About this time, the land was evidently divided among the above owners since there is a Quit Claim Deed dated April 14, 1801 showing that 680 acres were granted to David Waterman by Church, Johnson, Wadsworth and the Canfields. This is the land of which Pilgrim Village is a part.

There is no record of conveyance from David Waterman or to the State of Connecticut. However, in some way the State again acquired ownership of these 680 acres since the record shows that it was sold by the State on September 27, 1814 to Nathaniel Robbins and John Calhoun for \$4,000. In the same year, John Calhoun sold his interest in the land to Nathaniel Robbins for \$680 and again in 1814, Robbins sold the land to Joseph Battell for \$812.00.

On May 10, 1834 Joseph Battell sold 239 of the original 680 acres to Josiah Pettibone for \$1,059. The description of the land references Chillicothe Road as the western boundary, so we know to this point that all the land of what is now Pilgrim Village was in this 239 acres.

There is no record of Administration of the Estate of Josiah Pettibone or a Rufus Pettibone; however, on December 1, 1893 certain daughters and heirs of Rufus Pettibone deeded 224 acres of land to Henry Pettibone, son and heir of Rufus. Again, today's Pilgrim Village lies within this 224 acres.

On January 21, 1908 Henry Pettibone sold 95 acres of the above 224 acres to Thurston and Vera Taylor. Thirty of the 95 acres were sold off in 1909 leaving 65 acres.

Howard Taylor, for whom our Lake Taylor is named, inherited the 65 acres from his parents, Thurston and Vera.

The 65 acres that we have followed from the Crown lands of Great Britain to today are the acres that comprise the "new section" of Pilgrim Village. They extend in general, from the rear of the property on Lost Trail, east to Haskins Road.

In summary, the history of the land upon which we live shows:

British Crown Lands to:  
Connecticut Land Company to:  
Canfield, Waterman, etc. to:  
David Waterman to:  
State of Connecticut to:  
Robbins and Calhoun to:  
Robbins to:  
Joseph Battell to:  
The Pettibone Family to:  
The Taylor Family to:  
Pilgrim Village.

These are the roots of our land. In fact, Howard Taylor is the one responsible for providing the basic information for the above.

Shortly after World War I, the route from Chagrin Falls to Chillicothe Rd. was improved and later extended to the East and became known as Route U.S. 422. This improved highway had a major effect in Bainbridge. Traffic through the township was diverted to the shorter better route to Youngstown and it slowed the development of Bainbridge since businesses tended to move to the new road.

In 1816, the first school in the township was opened in a log house on the north side of Taylor-May Road between Chillicothe and Haskins Roads. It was soon replaced by a larger building on Chillicothe Rd. opposite Taylor-May. By 1861, there were 10 schools scattered around Bainbridge with a total attendance of 90 boys and 77 girls. These schools were discontinued around the turn of the century when a new frame building was constructed on Chillicothe Rd. at the township center and was known as the Bainbridge Centralized School. In 1942 the current Intermediate School replaced it.

There are now 5 schools in the Kenston system (today combined with the Auburn Schools) with a total enrollment of about 2500 pupils.

The first store in the community was located on Chillicothe and Taylor-May Roads and operated by the Kent family. In 1833, a general store was opened at the center, but the store that remains in clear memory to some of the most recent arrivals to the community is one that was located on the northwest corner of Chillicothe and Bainbridge-Solon Roads. It was built about 1846 and faced east. Horses and the grocery wagon were kept in the barn, which still stands on Chillicothe-Solon Road behind the site of the old store. When the State of Ohio acquired the land in 1971, the store was given to the Geauga Historical Society of Burton and was moved to its present location in Burton's Century Village.

The building now standing on the Southwest corner of Chillicothe Road and Bainbridge-Solon Road was originally built as the Methodist Church. It was sold to the township in 1867 when their new church was built across the road. The old building has had a varied history. It has been used as the townhall, a school, a basketball court, the fire station and as a garage. The "new" Methodist Church was changed to the Bainbridge Community Church in 1924 and is a township landmark today.

Along the southern boundary of Bainbridge on Crackel Rd. a small but flourishing industrial community known as Centerville Mills evolved. Within a radius of less than two miles there were over fifty houses, a

brickyard, a tannery, a blacksmith and shoemaker's shop, a gristmill, a woolen mill and a cooperage where barrels and wooded utensils were made. Freeman Howard built the first mill, powered by overshot water wheels around 1813. It was used as a gristmill, a sawmill, a rake factory, a blacksmith shop, and distillery. The mill was sold in 1901-02 to the brothers Alton L. and Otis B. Eggleston who operated the mill for ten years. In 1911 the mill property was sold to the Cleveland Young Men's Christian Association, and until recently was known as Centerville Mills Y.M.C.A. camp.

## **THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:**

The turn of the century, and the Industrial Revolution, changed the character of Bainbridge. Farming became less attractive and people moved to better paying jobs in Cleveland. At the same time, the automobile brought the city closer to Bainbridge, and the natural beauty of the land attracted people. They came for recreation, and some stayed to live, foreshadowing the growth of a residential community. The proximity of the city to Bainbridge and indifferent county law enforcement combined to attract people for less noble purposes.

The property now occupied by the Valley Presbyterian Church was once occupied by a house and barn that had been transformed into a "social and recreational" club known as the Maple Leaf Country Club, or more commonly, Himmelstein's Club. There was wide open gambling, bootleg liquor and other "social activities." Black Touring cars and couples in evening clothes came from Cleveland, and it is said that the Club also brought electricity to the township since the earliest line was strung along Chagrin Road ending at the Club. Several of the original buildings are still standing and are now a part of the church property. The Club was closed in 1927 by order of the sheriff.

The Pettibone, or Arrow Club, operated from about 1939 until 1949 on Pettibone Road across the line from Solon. This gambling casino was designed with a large central room surrounded by smaller rooms. The walls between the center room and the outside rooms were 3 to 4 feet thick and hollow, with a catwalk running through them. From the catwalk, any of the rooms could be observed through peepholes in the walls. The club burned down some years later.

Across the road from the club was the Bainbridge Race Track. It opened around 1927 and remained popular until 1939 when the betting of horse races was legalized by the State. A short section of the track is in Cuyahoga County. During its prime, the Cuyahoga sheriff occasionally attempted to stop the race as the horses passed into his jurisdiction. Since the illegal betting occurred across the county line there was little he could do. The track was also used for dog racing, and was later bought by the Cranwood Race Association. It was operated until 1956 when the grandstands burned to the ground.

The coming of the automobile also changed the recreational areas in Bainbridge. Geauga Lake, partly in Bainbridge, began in 1870 as a picnic ground. When the rail line cut through Bainbridge, a depot was built near the lake shore, and summer cottages grew up around it. Even though a hotel had been built, and an amusement park begun in 1884, the park remained mostly open meadow and apple orchard. The main attractions for a quiet weekend excursion were boating, popcorn, fireworks, hard cider, horseshoe pitching, apple butter and picnics. Excursions first came by train and later by bus. A dance hall was built that remained popular into the 30's. Amusement rides were constructed on the old picnic grounds in the middle 1920's. The park was updated and expanded through the years with the addition of modern rides. In 1970, Sea World, the first in the East, was built adjacent to Geauga Lake and operated until 2004.

The remains of Chagrin River Beach can be found on Bainbridge Road, opposite River Road. This picnic area was started in the early Twenties for an increasingly mobile society. There were three or four deep holes in the Chagrin River, which proved to be popular swimming areas. Portions of the bath houses can still be seen. A two-lane bowling alley was installed in a roofed pavilion in the early thirties and was popular for a few years. The two towers on either side of the gate were rumored to have been constructed as lookout points for a gambling club that never materialized. After the Beach closed, the towers were occasionally rented as low-cost apartments until 1960.

Today, Bainbridge is a thriving bedroom community. No longer the wilderness that it once was, we never the less have stands of virgin woods, open fields and farmlands, and many buildings well over a century old. We have Lake Lucerne, Tanglewood, and the very pleasant Chagrin Falls as our nearest "big" neighbor. Bainbridge is a nice place to live.