

## ***On the Rocky Fork Metro Park Area***

A representative of the Franklin County Metro Parks met with John Saveson and Dennis Keese on March 5 in the Ealy House to obtain information concerning the history of the land in the Township to be included in the proposed Rocky Fork Metro Park. The area runs along the top of Plain Township between Walnut Street and the Franklin County-Delaware County line from Peter Hoover Road on the east to, on the west, the north-south Plain Township line beyond Harlem. It is in fact four-fifths of the northernmost Tier of mile-square 'Sections' surveyed in or soon after 1812 by the Federal Government in order to dispose of government land. The one fourth missing, is bounded by a continuation of the same lines on the north and the south from Peter Hoover east to the Licking County line. After the Revolution, of course, the Federal Government owned all of the land in this area.

The Federal Government, before 1800, designated all of Plain Township as part of a Military District set aside to satisfy the claims of Revolutionary War veterans of the Continental Line. They had been promised land in return for their services. Shortly before 1800 the southeast Quarter of the Township was surveyed into 100-acre lots. Each veteran who had been a common soldier had a 'warrant' for that amount of land. Before such a survey was needed in the southwest Quarter, Dudley Woodbridge submitted, in 1800, forty such warrants for the 4000 acres there. He had collected them from veterans who for one reason or another did not wish to move into the wilderness. Woodbridge obviously was a land speculator and probably it is a given that he acquired the warrants for a pittance.

By 1800 the Federal Government felt that it had satisfied veterans' claims.. And it moved to dispose of the upper half of the Township using a different kind of survey, namely, into the mile-square 'Sections' mentioned above. Each Section contained 640 acres. There were five Sections (numbered 1 to 5) from east to west across the top of the Township. Peter Hoover is on the north-south Section line between Sections 1 and 2. Bevelhymer Road is on the north-south half-Section line in Section 2; and Route 602 is on the half-Section line in Section 3. Below the first Tier, a second was numbered, from west to east, from 6 to 10. Below the second was a third, in this case, a half Tier numbered from east to west from 11 to 15. The Sections were sub-divided into quarter Sections and later on, quarter Sections were divided in two. But immediately after 1812, the unit of sale was a quarter Section. Over the years 160 acres came to be regarded as a suitable size for a small family farm, that assumption reinforced by the way in which original property lines had been laid out.

We have a copy of the Federal Government's sales record for Plain Township which we obtained from the Secretary of State some years ago. Most likely it came from the land office in Chillicothe, one of four in the state. It tells us some things we may not have taken in before the Metro Parks sparked our interest.

*Number one.* Between 1813 and 1818 there was a veritable land rush into the northern half of Plain Township. Archibald Smith, who came to the Township with his father in 1818 wrote the following in his Autobiography: 'In the year 1814 Father and Uncle Peter Smith and a young man by the name of John Brown went [from northern New Jersey] to see Ohio which was then creating a great excitement and hundreds were moving to the new country.' The rush had begun the year before. In 1813, in the northernmost tier, the records tell us, there were 2 sales; 10 in 1814; one in 1815; 3 in 1817; and 3 in 1818. Nineteen of twenty quarter Sections were sold in five years and there were comparable sales in the other tiers.

*Number two.* One of two early buyers of lots in 1813 was a young man, Mathias Dege (descendants spell it 'Dague'). Mathias bought the northeast quarter of Section 1 in the northeast corner of the Township; also in the same year, the southeast quarter of Section 9. He had first choice because he was already here. His father, also named

Mathias, was one of a group of related German families from Pennsylvania who settled the southwest Quarter of Plain Township soon after Dudley Woodbridge, above, in 1802 sold it to John Huffman for 4000 gallons of whiskey. Mathias, the elder, a Revolutionary War veteran, is buried in an old family cemetery behind Hoggy's restaurant.

*Number three.* Besides Mathias, the Younger's name, only two or three family names of first buyers have survived as familiar to Township residents today. On October 28, 1815, a 'C.Needles,' together with an 'I. Clymer,' purchased the southeast quarter of Section 4, midway between Schleppe and Harlem Roads. This undoubtedly is the 'Cabbage Needles' who turns up on other early documents and was a puzzlement to Clark Cabbage during his lifetime. The other name, only in a certain sense, is that of a 'first buyer.' On September 22, 1828, Jacob Bevelhimer bought the northwest quarter of Section 1 at the north end of Peter Hoover Road. The Federal Government sold it to him, having recovered it from Jonathan Wright. The parcels were often sold on credit and were taken back if the buyer, as here, defaulted. By 1872 Bevelhymers occupied not this parcel but a part of the southwest quarter of Section 2, most of it fronting on Walnut and Bevelhymer Roads. The town's maintenance buildings and playing fields are now located there. Kenny Bevelhimer of recent memory knew that Bevelhimers came from the Pennsylvania Dutch country to Plain Township, were dissatisfied and moved to the town of New Albany in southern Indiana, were dissatisfied and moved back to Plain Township.

The surname 'Miller' is familiar to area residents from Noel Miller's having owned the New Albany mill until recently. And there has been an unbroken string of Millers in the Township from the beginning. The question is, however, 'Miller' being such a common name, do they all descend from the W.K. Miller who, with D. Waggoner, bought the southeast quarter of Section 1 on October 26, 1814. Society files, unfortunately do not provide an answer.

These details illustrate a small part of the transfer of land from one owner to another over the years, not only in Tier 1 but throughout the area. In the transfers, one motive most likely was land speculation. Persons of some means bought a parcel, held it for a while, and then sold it. The biggest land speculator in the Township was Dudley Woodbridge, above, who trafficked, as we have seen, in veterans' warrants. Another was Abijah Holbrook who bought, with veterans' warrants, 16 of 40 hundred-acre lots in the Township's Southeast Quarter. Another motive, no doubt, was dissatisfaction with the purchase. Water was an important asset and land without a stream was less desirable. Marriage sometimes erased a bride's family's name on a property and substituted the groom's. And another driving force over the years was the large size of families, which, when children reached maturity, a farm of modest size would not support. The second John Clouse, who moved into the Township in the 1820's and had a farm and mill on Blacklick Creek below Route 161, had 14 children, 10 by his first wife and 4 by his second. The oldest, George, who knew he wouldn't inherit much land, in the 1830's began to put together a 150-acre farm mostly in the second tier but also 30 acres in the southeast quarter of Section 1 up against the Licking County line. Family tradition has it that to pay for his land, he walked the 15 miles to Worthington and stayed overnight to earn money by cutting wood.

*Number four.* The Metro Parks request has re-ignited our interest also in buildings of some age and architectural interest. One-room schools for almost a hundred years before 1925 were scattered through the Township, two of them in the northernmost tier. One was named the 'Alspach' (sometimes 'Alspaugh') school because, as in most cases, a property owner, as here, donated the land, usually part of an acre. Within recent memory that school, on the northwest corner of the intersection of Walnut and Peter Hoover, was enclosed in a contemporary house. The other one-room school was on Schleppe Road on land donated by Millers, of whom Ethel Miller Schleppe, familiar to local residents as an artist, was a member. Both one-room schools are located on the 1872 Map of the Township. Arloia Walton took down, from an 'old

timer,' these details of the Miller school, which are common to all the others: 'It had an old pot-bellied stove in the center of the room which roasted the people that sat close to it [and] a corner shelf that held the water bucket and tin cups. The pupils carried the water bucket from the neighbor's house.' The school started at 9:00 A.M. and closed at 4:00 P. M.

Another kind of public building, a Methodist church referred to by local residents as 'Plain Church' or 'Plain Chapel,' built in 1835, was located on the northwest corner of Schleppi and Walnut. It survived as a building until around 1985 when it was demolished, brick by brick, by the owner of the land it stood on. As a place of worship, it came close to disappearing in 1848 when most of the congregation left to become members of the newly built Methodist church in New Albany.

The 1856 Map shows another church, as a 'Temperance church' at the northwest corner of Harlem and Walnut; and the 1872 Map shows it as an 'Albright' church. We do not know its history at present. It may have paralleled that of Plain Chapel in that its members were absorbed in another area church. That a congregation organized itself around a principle such as Temperance is intriguing and bears further research. The church is a reminder too of temperance movements over the years. The first such meeting in Plain Township took place in 1823 in the Township's first schoolhouse on ground still occupied by the Waggoner Cemetery on Central College Road. The meeting was held by Abraham Williams, an early Justice of the Peace.

The Albright name goes back to Jacob Albright (1754-1808), an American who started a denomination, in 1816 officially named the 'Evangelical Association.'. Eventually elsewhere it merged with the United Methodist Church. As an organization with German roots, it is a reminder of a group of German families who lived in that area early on, many of whom belonged to St. Paul's Lutheran Church, at the end of Walnut over the line in Blendon Township.

*Number five.* There are at least five houses of some interest in the first Tier of Sections. One we know the most about, the 'Alspach' house at 7869 Peter Hoover Road, according to a descendant, Jon Cowie, was built during the Civil War. We have a copy of a photograph of it in its original state. In the photograph, not in its later remodeling, it bears comparison with the existing 'Clouse' house, built in 1861, at the eastern end of Clouse Road, as brick houses typical of the time. The Historical Society's 'Dryer' house nearby, fronting on Walnut but on the south side, built by Jacob Alspach, was also disastrously remodeled, seemingly about 1912. Built in the late 1860's, it must have resembled the other Alspach house. The one on Peter Hoover was built by John Alspach (1785-1870) who moved to Plain Township between 1820 and 1825, according to John Cowie. He came from an Alspach settlement south of Pickerington. Alspach family members stayed on these properties until recent times.

Another house we know something about is the large brick house on Route 62 at its bend just before it reaches the County line, usually referred to as the 'Tippett' house from the family that built it. The Tippett name first appears on the 1872 Map. The 1856 Map shows another residence owned by George Coons in the same location, possibly a bit farther away from the road toward Blacklick Creek. The unusual layout of the rooms in the building as it exists today suggests that the earlier house may have been incorporated in or enlarged in the later one, a practice common in the area. The house is in very good condition, considering its age. Its outside appearance dates it to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The transfer of property from Coons to Tippett between 1856 and 1872 is a reminder of a Coons-Tippett-Bevelhymer interrelationship, that developed by marriage over the years, of families living on adjacent or nearby farms. Not by any means the only example. Another brick house from that time, handsome, Italianate, well maintained, stands at 7950 New Albany-Condit Road.

Finally there are two small, white frame houses that seem to be from the first half of the nineteenth century. We know little about them but they bear looking into. They stand at 7724 and 7934 Schleppi Road. In 1872 the first was owned by the

Brooks family, of which Clark Cabbage's mother was a member. Houses like the two exist around Granville, in Johnstown, and on. They are not the grand constructions of the Greek Revival movement but, assuming they are what they seem to be, they belong to it and can be described as very modest vernacular adaptations. Both lack the signature turned-in gable ends (they may have lost them over the years). The one at 7934 Schleppe does have another signature feature, small widows at floor level in the upper story.

*Number six..* Farmers plowing, persons fishing the streams have found Indian artifacts made of flint in Plain Township, and enthusiasts still go out looking for them. At present the two most aggressive collectors we know of are Daniel Thompson and Dennis Keese, both members of the Historical Society. They have found rich deposits in the designated Metro area and have acquired much knowledge. The Society, also, has a substantial collection donated by Naomi Fodor. We are not talking about the woods Indians the early settlers knew but a stone-age people whose implements are estimated to be 5000 years old.

At present the Metro Parks own a portion approaching half of the land to be included in the Rocky Fork Metro Park. The Park authority is not yet ready to begin a large-scale development. However, the Park representative who met with John Saveson and Dennis Keese, a landscape architect, will undertake soon construction of a small area, very accessible, where a branch of Rocky Fork Creek crosses Walnut between Route 605 and Harlem. The 1872 Map shows a saw mill there by the creek on land owned by the Cashner family. Plain Township whose property it was before the Metro Parks acquired it, some time ago, demolished a house that stood near the creek. The back part looked as though it had once been a building in its own right. It was made of very old lumber. The front part was added probably sometime in the second half of the nineteenth century. The building had been so extensively remodeled that it was judged impractical for the Township to try to restore it. From the property's potential as an historic site, demolition of the house, unfortunately, now seems a loss.

John E. Saveson