

## Early History of Madison

The following account was prepared by Antoinette Walding Stanton to be read at a Homecraft Club meeting in June of 1966.

Let us go back to about 1798. This country was a dense forest. Most of it was owned by the Connecticut Land Company. A surveying party consisting of fifty persons was fitted out by the Company and headed west. They landed at the mouth of Conneaut Creek on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1796. The survey of that portion of this Reserve east of the Cuyahoga River was begun at once and finished in October of the same year. It was divided into lots and sold. Thus our early ancestors, having bought tracts of land from the Connecticut Land Company, came in by oxen and cart and by water.

In 1798, two years after the survey was made, three families arrived at the mouth of Cunningham Creek, coming by boat from New York State. There were about twenty persons in this group. The first family to settle here permanently was the John Harper family. They suffered much privation during the following winter and one writer tells that they were reduced to six kernels of parched corn apiece at one time. Three young men made journeys back to Elk Creek, Pennsylvania by sled and brought back corn and other supplies. To the Harpers was born a son, Rice Harper, and later a daughter; these being the first white children born in the township. The settlement was first called Chapintown or Chapin. As other settlers came it was changed to Centerville.

This first settlement, as you will note, was at what is now Unionville. Some of these people pressed on and formed Harpersfield.

On March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1811 at a meeting of the Commissioners of Geauga County (of which we had been a part) the land was divided and a separate township formed which was called Madison and that name has remained. A meeting was called for the purpose of choosing officers for the new township. There were fifteen ballots cast.

The following is copied from Book No. 1 of Records for Madison Township:

At a meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the County of Geauga –  
March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1811.

Ordered by the board that so much of that part of Harpersfield as lies in the County of Geauga and is included in township number twelve, and all that part of township number eleven which lies north of Grand River in the sixth Range of the original surveyed township be, and the same is hereby incorporated and erected into a separate Township by the name of Madison – hereafter to enjoy all the privileges and immunities to an incorporate and separate township belonging. And also that the Electors meet at the house of Phineas Mixer in said township on the first Monday

in April next at ten O'clock in the forenoon for the purpose of choosing Township officers, by order of the board.

Signed Nehemiah King, Clerk

Madison April 1, 1811

Agreeable to the above order the electors of Madison have met and made choice of the following town officers to wit –

Abner Tappen, Chairman

Samuel Totten ) Judges of Election  
John A. Harper )

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Samuel Totten Township Clerk

Uriah Bartram  
Asa Turney Trustees  
Thomas MtGomery

Rowland Ellis Overseers of the Poor  
James Miller

John Wood Fence Viewers  
Daniel Turney

Uriah Bartram Appraisers of Property  
Benjamin Custin

Voted that the township be divided into two Highway Districts.

Rowland Ellis Supervisors  
James Miller

Luke Bonesteel Constable

Abner Tappen Treasurer

The persons elected to the foregoing offices have taken the oath of office prescribed by law.

John A. Harper  
Elected Justice of the Peace

The township continued to grow in population and it is amazing to note what was accomplished in a short time. Needs were great but apparently cooperation and willpower was strong. In 1840 Lake County was formed and, as you probably know, Madison is the largest township in the smallest county in the State of Ohio.

These early settlers recognized the value and importance of schools and churches. They had been brought up to attend worship services in the east. One writer tells us that the first school in town was in the basement of the house on West Main Street, now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Blair. The teacher was Mary Crary (Cary?) This house is one of the oldest in town. The teacher was paid with other work and / or produce. The first school building erected in the township was built of logs and was called the Block School House. (1816) Some few years later the little Red School House (as then called) was built on the site of the present M. E. Church and was later moved south of the old brick school. Within my memory it was used as a dwelling (the custodian for the Brick School lived there.) The present Homer Nash Kimball School now occupies that site.

The early settlers had much foresight and early conceived and executed the purpose of establishing Public Grounds where in future time could be erected schools and houses of worship. Thus a subscription with 44 signatures affixed was raised for the purpose of purchasing such grounds. In 1816 land was acquired for this purpose and held in trust by these signers – three and one half acres known as the Common (now our Park). It was stipulated that any religious societies of Christians could here build places of worship. A part of this parcel to the east was to be burial ground – this being where the Bank and Betty Behm's house now stand. Later this was thought to be un-adaptable for this purpose and exchange of property was made conveying this parcel to Silas Newcomb for ½ acre 28 rods at the corner of what is now West Main and Eagle. This was in 1817. In 1854 a cemetery association was formed which purchased the site of the present cemetery and bodies deposited in former grounds were moved.

The first church building was erected in 1829 upon these Public Grounds of Common. This was done by subscription signed by nearly all of the citizens of this portion of the township. This building could be used by all denominations. Previous to this a handful of Congregationalists met for worship at the log cabin home of the Kimballs. (1814) Interesting to note in a paper written in 1880 there were at that time eight churches in the township – 2 Congregational, 4 Methodist, 1 Baptist, and 1 Catholic.

Roads had to be laid-out as previously there were only trails that the people traveled – and stories are told of mothers riding on horseback and toting their children to worship service.

As travelers became more numerous there was need for taverns. The first one mentioned by any of the writers was “Ladd's Tavern” on the property now owned and occupied by Maurice and Vivian Wood. This was operated as a tavern until 1827.

Madison was a station for the Underground Railroad during the Civil War. George Harris (Uncle Tom), one of the principal characters in Harriet Beecher Stowe's “Uncle Tom's

Cabin”, had one of his numerous thrilling experiences in Madison. One day while out driving with two of Dr. Merriam’s daughters in the carriage, he was seized by Negro chasers. They started with him to Ashtabula intending to return the fugitive slave to his southern owners, but were met by a crowd of citizens who rescued the Negro. S. N. Burroughs was a member of the rescue party and, the story was told by his son Carl to our Librarian, Lora Tobey. In 1824 two brothers and a sister, runaway slaves from Kentucky were visiting at Dr. Merriam’s, one half mile west of town. One of the slaves was overtaken while driving, by his owner’s son and a slave catcher and was taken before Judge Paige at the Bliss Tavern. Word was immediately sent out and old and young drove there in wagons, excited and determined that no slave should ever be taken from Lake County. After much scheming the slave was spirited away. He was a brother of George Harris. Bliss Tavern stood where the Hardware Store and the block next east now are. It was one of the first frame hotels.

The first store in the township is said to have been in a corn house on the Wood farm. We don’t know to what extent this store operated, but records show that a Mr. Ford had a store in 1818 and in a copy of a ledger from that store these items and prices are listed:

butter	\$0.15 lb.	bbl pork	\$25.00
loaf sugar	0.50 lb.	41 cords wood	17.94
1# blk pepper	0.50	2 ¾ bu. apples	6.84
1# tea	1.75	8 yds. gingham	4.50

Of course you all know the history of the Old Tavern at Unionville so I will not go into that, only to say that it was an “underground station” and many stories have gone out of helping slaves to escape.

In about 1849 a hotel was built at the corner of present West Main Street and River Street. This is remembered by some of us here tonight. It burned in 1927 or 1928. Many tales of humor and interest center around this building. It was first owned by Zeri Judd who made himself famous for his steak dinners – the steaks cooked over wood coals in the great kitchen stove. Mr. Judd was known to all the drummers, as traveling salesmen were then called. He kept a livery stable, renting transportation to these men to enable them to go into towns where there was no railroad.

In 1852 the first locomotive and cars passed through Madison on a single track, then called the Cleveland-Painesville-Ashtabula Railroad, later Lake Shore and Michigan Southern, then the New York Central Railroad. Frederick Burr Opper, a famed cartoonist and Madisonite once drew a picture of “Zeri” hauling the hotel on a sled. I have heard several old timers say they wished that could be found.

In the early days there were six distilleries and the product of the still was used, as a sort of legal tender as there was no money. Transfer of our\* property showed that in the early

\*Now the property of William and Antoinette Stanton.

days it had been a winery and I have been told it was quite possible that it was a brewery which made available to the residents the first brewer's yeast used for making yeast bread which was quite a treat and also a happy change from salt rising bread, the staple those days. Cobs were burned in a kettle to get "saleratus" or baking soda to bake with, and they picked up bones to use in making soap. Corn was pounded in a hollow stump, burned out for that purpose, or men walked miles carrying corn to get it ground. It is told that Joseph Talcott walked to Cleveland with a sack of corn on his back and returned the third night with one meal.

As time went on, having established schools and churches, many businesses were started. Blacksmith shops, a carding mill, Madison Woolen Mills (on the site of the old Basket Craft Co.), a chair factory, four tanneries, one of which was owned by Elisha Wood in back of his home (now the office of Oliver Bates.) Mrs. John Williams related to me that the vats used here were open and quite in evidence. When she was a child she was often cautioned not to go near them, but at every opportunity the kids walked around the wall of these vats, but no one ever fell in.

Grafting became a source of income in these early days. During the winter months men traveled south by horse and buggy, going as far as Alabama and Georgia. They planted grafts one winter, going back the next and collecting the ones that lived. The first red bud trees were brought into this section by these men. Mrs. Stearn's father, Mr. Shattuck, gave the first red bud seeds to \_\_\_\_\_ for propagation. The beautiful elms on West Main Street (many are now gone) were probably among the oldest in this section.

Now to some of the early homes. In 1820 the Bailey house near Grand River was built and the first 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration in Madison was held there. The flag was raised, a pig roasted and toasts given. Coming north, the house at present owned by Mr. and Mrs. Jarvi was built by Joseph Talcott (great, great grandfather of this writer), one of the earliest settlers. The story has often been told of Mr. Talcott and Mr. Able Kimball chopping wood on their adjoining properties when they heard strange and far off reverberations like distant thunder. They stopped their work and looked around with feelings of almost fear. No sign of a cloud in the sky. These sounds proved to be the echoes of cannonading during the battle of "Perry's Victory" which took place on Lake Erie on Sept. 10<sup>th</sup>, 1813. Asa Talcott, the son of Joseph Talcott, was a cabinetmaker and undertaker. At the time of a death he proceeded to measure the corpse and build a casket. He built his own house on the present site of the cemetery and it was later moved to the west side of River Street (next door to Mrs. North.)

Many of our frame houses were built by Addison Kimball (uncle of the late Carl and Abel Kimball) and were of somewhat the same architecture. The house recently torn down to make way for "Stratton Place" was one of his buildings. It is told that Indians being about then, but molesting no one, often hung their papooses in the wild grape vines in the valley east of this house. The house formerly owned by Abel Kimball (now by Dr. Klingbeil) is also one of his buildings. He also built many of the railroad stations in this section. Horace Newcomb built the houses now owned by the Tom Stantons and the

George Spears. They are some of the earliest. In 1807 a large log house was built west of Ed Wright's former home by a William Miller and his son. They opened a tavern and operated it while clearing the land.

A story is recorded of a family named Williams arriving in 1830 from Mass. They were to have a log house raising and the invited guests came early and worked with a right good will until they learned that no liquor was to be served – food was provided for them, but no liquor. They were told they would receive compensation and food for their work but they refused to work and went home. The next day help came from another settlement and the house was completed – the first raised in this vicinity without liquor.