

Excerpts from a paper by General Abel Kimball 1880

According to the survey of Connecticut Land Company in 1796, dividing the territory of the Reserve into townships 5 miles square, the township of Madison, the territorial name of which was Chapin, was number 11, its southern boundary same as at present, its northern boundary the Middle Ridge. Township no. 12 lying between the Middle Ridge and the lake, not containing the required 5 miles square of territory, was called a gore or fractional township. Township no. 12 was owned by Cunningham, Ford, Ely, Cole, Bowles, Hubbard, etc. It was divided into lots and sold to suit the purchasers.

In June 1798 Col. Alex Harper, William McFarland and Ezra Gregory, with their families, from Harpersfield Delaware Co., New York landed at the mouth of Cunningham Creek in this township no. 12.

The little colony of about 20 suffered much privation during the following winter, cut short of supplies by the loss of a vessel they had chartered to furnish them.

Col. Harper having died in the fall of 1798, his sons James, William, and John, made frequent perilous trips over the ice of the lake to Elk Creek, Pa. for bags of corn. The point at which the Harpers landed was early known as Harpers landing. John A. Harper bought a farm of 100 acres in township 11 in Unionville and was undoubtedly the first permanent settler in the township.

The next permanent settler is supposed to have been James Thompson who owned a farm on the Middle Ridge, opposite the Arcole Road, now owned by Pastors. It was later sold to Uriah Bartram in 1809. The first field of wheat in the township is said to have been planted on this farm. By 1810 there were nine families in Centerville (Madison) scattered along the trail between Turney Rd. (Bates Rd.) and Brooks corners (Dayton Rd.) mail was carried over the trail by John Metcalf on foot.

After the close of the War of 1812, settlements were rapidly made in the Western Reserve. As many as 150 persons in a single day were known to pass through the town on the South Ridge (84) to various points in the Reserve for settlement, and many upon stopping at Jesse Ladd's Tavern (the Morris Wood House) were persuaded to take up their abode here.

Frame houses were not constructed till after 1815 when Joseph Emerson built the first sawmill and in 1816, the first gristmill, just south of Grand River. Up to that time the pioneers had to crack or crush the grain in various ways; one method was to dig out the top of some huge oak stump and adjust a huge wooden pestle thereto and in this rude mortar crush their grain.

Asa Turney, ancestor of the late Col. Turney, moved to Ohio in 1810 and religious meetings were held at his house at the corner of Turney road as early as 1811 and continued until the Block School House was built.

The Bell Meeting House, at North Madison, was built in 1834, principally by the Hon. John Hubbard, who settled on the place across from the state Home on the south side of Middle Ridge, now owned by Moll's sold. The Hubbard Road from Madison to the Lake is named after the Hubbards who owned a large share of the land east of that road.

The Block School House was used for school and religious purposes and township affairs until 1819 or 1820 when the Town House was built on lot no. 1 Cole Tract, Middle Ridge, on the northwest corner of Middle Ridge and Hubbard, where Hubridge is now located.

The first church was built on the common, and occupied by the Methodists, Baptists, Universalites, and Congregationalists in about 1830. The first Baptist Church was completed in 1842 at Genung's Corners, the Methodist Log Chapel in 1834 and the present building in 1848.

Genung came the year they raised the first Baptist Church. As they approached the corner they heard a great uproar of yells like Indians on the warpath. When they came closer they saw a great gathering of men raising the walls of the Baptist Church and shouting their orders with the most rousing cries, refreshed by plenty of cider furnished by William Balch. Four bents were framed on the ground and a gang of men with ropes, raised and mortared and pinned them with wooden pins to the huge hand hewn beams. The women provided big dinners for house raising or barn raising days.

There was a small log schoolhouse on Middle Ridge about 1000 feet west of Burns Rd. near where the new High School is built. The Middle Ridge Road had to leave the present ridge and swing down south near the intersection of Hubbard and Middle Ridge because the trees grew so large and so close together on the road site at the present corner that the settlers could not cut them. So they built a corduroy road made of logs in the swampy section near the creek at Genung's Corner. Charles Genung plowed up pieces of the walnut logs that made the corduroy road when he was plowing his garden.

On the southwest side of Middle Ridge in school district 17, built of brick, there was one room and a woodshed where the wood was kept to burn in the large round stove in the middle of the room. In the front of the room sat the teacher on a raised platform, the better to see all. On a bench at her left was the pail and dipper for all to use. The back seat went across the building. Tired children could lie on the seats. The seats were nailed to the floor like church pews. The boys sat on one side and the girls on the other. Ages ranged from 6 to 16 or older through 8th grade. Children walked a mile or two to school.

The first settlers paid about \$2.50 per acre. In 1880 the tax valuation exceeded 1 1/5 millions of dollars, population 3000 – 3500 with 800 voters (women could not vote.) The township Board of Education maintained 18 school districts and eighteen schools, exclusive of village schools at an expenditure in 1878 of 3693 at a cost per scholar of nearly 11 dollars for 27 weeks. The Board of Education of the village which was incorporated in 1868 for the purpose of maintaining a higher and better grade of schools,

expended for the purpose of public schools 2612, \$15 per scholar for 40 weeks of school, the full course of which included a period of 10 years.

The Madison Seminary on the Middle Ridge was chartered in 1845 and built in 1847. The east section of the state owned Opportunity Village was a part of the seminary. From its unpretending walls have gone forth those who in after years became ministers, teachers, lawyers, doctors, judges, and congressmen.