

**History of the Dock Road Arcola Creek Area
Madison Township, Ohio
1796 – 1863**

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Presented on August 9, 1980, during the Year of the Coast Event, "The Arcola Float."

1796 Madison Township, known to the early surveyors and named for President James Madison, was the largest township in the entire Western Reserve. 1

1798 The first settlers to attempt to tame the virgin wilderness of Madison and to remain permanently were Colonel Alex Harper, William McFarland, Ezra Gregory, and their families. From Delaware County, New York, they landed at the mouth of Cunningham Creek (Madison Dock or Ellensburg) in June 1798. The following day, the group started south, soon finding the township line tramped out by the surveyors two years before. At what is now the South Ridge, an Indian trail crossed the surveyor's track and the Harpers turned east to settle just beyond the border of present day Lake County. The junction of the two forest paths became the crossroads at Unionville. Colonel Harper died at the end of the summer and was buried on the Southeast corner of the crossroads. His is probably the oldest grave in the Western Reserve. 2 His sons chose to remain even though there was a "starving time" when the Harpers had to live on just six kernels of parched corn apiece per day.

1803 Ohio becomes a State. In 1803 Joel Russell Norton and his wife Orpha Foster Norton came from Oxford, Connecticut by raft, with all perishable belongings done up in oilcloth, to Buffalo, from where a sailing vessel brought them to Madison Dock. Joel Russell and son were expert ship builders and worked at Bailey's shipyards at the dock. The government put up a sort of lighthouse little more than a great tall pole with three globes holding three long candles. 3

1809 Governor Caleb Strong of Massachusetts who owned a tract of land in Madison Township, Ohio, offered to trade his land for that of Captain Cunningham in Plainfield, Massachusetts, which was of similar value. In 1809 the Captain sent two of his sons, Cyrus and Artemas, out to Ohio to look at the land. "They made the journey on horseback as far as Hamilton, Madison Co., NY and from there, to Ohio on foot. They returned with a favorable report of the country, and the trade was made." 4

1811 In 1811 Captain Cunningham and his wife, his sons Artemas, Amos, and Cyrus and his wife, migrated by wagon to this newly acquired land. The land that he had purchased was located in Madison Township and comprised 2,699 ½ acres. It lay on the East side of the township and extended from the Middle Ridge to the shore of Lake Erie. It was bought to be divided into lots, and sold to suit purchasers. It was solid timberland with a waterway, later known as Cunningham's Creek, cutting its way through the forest in an irregular course to the Lake where lay the possibility of a harbor. Captain Cunningham built his log cabin near the corner of the Middle Ridge and County Line and

at once began to clear the land. Cyrus Cunningham chose the corner of the North Ridge and Dock Roads for his homesite. Artemas settled on the lakeshore near the mouth of Cunningham's Creek, and Amos on the North Ridge near County Line. A few Indians still wandered through these woods and there was abundant wild life: bears, deer, wolves, and small game. The nearest mill was in Erie, Pennsylvania, sixty miles away; and the nearest store, in Austinburg in Ashtabula County. A plague swept the area in 1812-1813 and five Cunninghams died. 4

1811 Madison Township was organized. 1

1812 In 1812 iron ore was discovered in the swamps near North Ridge in Madison. Surveyors and axe men were cutting their way through the wilderness to mark the course of a 70-foot wide road from Cleveland to Erie, when they found the bog iron. The ore found in Lake County was an immature rock much like peat. Its texture was open and spongy, usually a yellowish brown color. It was mixed with clay and vegetable matter also deposited in the settling pools. The ore may be found as scattered nodules or in sheets of several acres. The thickness ranged from a few inches to several feet. The largest of the deposits found was on land that extended from the Middle Ridge to Lake Erie, land owned by John Cunningham. 5

1813 The Battle of Lake Erie cannonading was heard distinctly in the area. Artemas Cunningham married Patty Hanks. He built his home on the corner of Dock and Lake Roads and operated a sawmill there. At this time the Old Tavern at Unionville became one of the well-known stations of the Underground Railway for the runaway slaves en-route to Madison Dock. The negroes entered a tunnel having its entrance near the Southeast corner of the crossroads. This led them to a deeper area under the tavern where they could stand upright and have communication with the innkeeper through a trap door. From the tunnel exit back of the tavern these slaves were released or taken by wagon to the Madison Dock where they boarded boats for Canada. On this last leg of their journey, if more help was needed, the homes of Amos and Cyrus Cunningham were open for their protection. 4

1814 Cyrus Cunningham married Mary Witter Crary. The ceremony was at the home of her father in Kirtland. The groom went on horseback accompanied by the minister, Rev. Leslie, and led a horse which the bride rode to her new home on the Dock Road – a fine brick house with hand carved doorways and spacious rooms in a setting of lofty trees. Here the first school in this location was taught by Cyrus in winter and Mary in summer in their new home. The pupils lived within two miles in every direction; each family sent a big dog to protect the children from the wild beasts while passing through the dense woodland. 4

1815 “Shandy Hall” on Route 84 was built just East of Unionville. It was the home of Robert Harper, youngest son of Alexander. It is still standing, and is in a remarkable state of preservation maintained by the Western Reserve Historical Society. 1

1818 Two brothers, Thomas and William King, and their young families came to Madison Township from Goshen, Orange Co., N.Y. Thomas bought over two hundred acres on the West side of the Cunningham tract and William later bought a smaller plot on the County Line Road. They were always interested in public and community affairs. 4

1821 There was a need for a road connecting the East line of the township with the Dock Road. At a meeting of the Board of Commissioners on December 3, 1821, a petition was presented asking that a sixty-foot road be laid out and established along the South line of Abner Owen's and Thomas King's land. This was granted and the road was known for many years as King Road. It is now called Cunningham Road. When the time was ripe for another school, Thomas King granted the use of three quarters of an acre of land on the corner of his new road and the Dock Road for the site of the school. 4

1825 Because of the needs for transportation on the Lake, shipbuilding early became an important industry. Richmond and Fairport also had shipbuilders, and craft of various sizes were constructed on the beach at both Mentor Headlands and Perry. Ellensburg, at the mouth of Arcola Creek in Madison Township, probably produced more ships than any other site. In 1825, the year the Erie Canal opened, a steamboat was built there by a man named Fuller. He was something of a mechanical genius and built the entire craft himself. He shaped the timbers, forged the spikes and necessary engine parts. The cylinder for the engine was made of wood heavily banded with iron. Fuller's was the first steamboat built West of Buffalo and the third such ship on Lake Erie. 2

1826 Cyrus Cunningham sold fifty-two acres of his land that lay on the south side of the North Ridge Road to Richard Root and Samuel Wheller of the Erie Furnace Co. Much of the land in that vicinity contained bog ore and here the Erie Furnace Co. built a blast furnace where it manufactured pig iron. 4

The settlement that grew up around this industry was called the "coming metropolis of the Western Reserve." Located thirteen and a half miles east of Painesville on Dock Road in Madison Township, Arcole Furnace and its prosperous port of Madison Dock (Ellensburg) were the pioneer iron centers of the Reserve. Furnaces were built to smelt the ore through a process that eliminated the organic matter and prepared the bog iron for easy reduction to iron. 1

1831 A small furnace plus the land was sold to Judge Samuel Wilkeson and sons of Buffalo, Uri Seeley, a prominent Painesville businessman, and others. The new owners renamed the Erie Furnace Company, calling it Arcole Furnace after Wilkeson's Buffalo firm. Wilkeson added a second blast furnace, this one operated by steam power, and production began on stove patterns, hollow ware and heavy castings. 1 The stacks were nine feet in diameter and thirty feet high. The furnace was equipped to use either hot or cold blast, which was unusual at that time. They operated by steam power when most furnaces were still using waterpower. 5 Wilkeson had become familiar in the area as a Pittsburgh salt merchant, carrying on trade as far as Lake Erie. During the War of 1812 he built a fleet of boats at Fairport for General William Henry Harrison. With the opening

of the Erie Canal he had gone into canal boating and soon developed a burning determination to make Buffalo the leading port on Lake Erie. He was interested in Arcole Furnace because it would serve as a means to stimulate shipping of much needed manufactured goods in and out of Buffalo. 2

1832 January, the extensive store of the Arcole works burned with a loss of \$25,000 of property to the company. 5

1834 The firm reorganized and was incorporated in 1835 with a capital stock of \$100,000. This capitalization is sizeable. Arcole was said to be the largest industry in Ohio at the time. Between 1,000 and 1,500 tons of iron were produced per year. Painesville was larger than Cleveland and Madison almost as large as Painesville. 5

This new company flourished for over twenty years, furnishing pig iron to smaller pocket furnaces, manufacturing plowshares, potash kettles and the popular Buckeye stoves, which quickly supplanted the open fireplace. With all this industry came a need for grist mills, stores, hotels, and boarding houses to take care of the hundreds of men – some with their families to become settlers – who had come to work in the busiest spot in Ohio. A post office was needed and Cyrus Cunningham was the Postmaster, using the front hall of his home to carry on this service. Mail coming here was addressed to Arcole, Geauga Co., (later Lake County), Ohio. He was Justice of the Peace for many years and held court in his living room. He also served as Tax Assessor and County Commissioner. 4

Through the combined efforts of the Arcole Furnace Co. and Colonel Robert Harper, an attempt was made to develop the mouth of Cunningham's Creek into a harbor. This project was finally abandoned although the dock was a point of loading and unloading vessels for a long period of time, and shipbuilding was carried on at the dock for forty years. 4

1835 To produce this much iron many people had to be involved. The woods echoed from the sound of axes and the crashing of timbers as the big trees fell. No matter what the weather was, 200 men chopped and sawed the lumber to be made into charcoal. 5 Between harvest and spring planting, local farmers earned 37 ½ cents for every cord of wood cut from our abundant forests and hauled to the charcoal kilns. 2 Others loaded the wood into wagons to be carried to the charcoal pits where colliers tended their fires. Another two hundred men called molders cast the melted iron into desired shapes. A wooden trough was built across the pond formed by damming up the creek, which ran through the swamp where the iron ore lay. About 150 men worked the ore up and down in the water until the sand and soil were washed out. Then the coarse rusty red lumps were hauled to the log store where they were weighed. In a nearby shop, forms were made for casting the iron. Sheds had been erected to shelter wood and limestone. At most furnaces, the ore was roasted in a kiln with wood before being put in the furnaces. This process eliminated organic matter and hydrosopic water, changing the limonite into a soft hematite that reduced readily to iron in the furnace. The ore of the area usually gave a tuedk of 25% to 35% iron. It was mixed with small amounts of phosphorus and manganese, which gave an alloy of excellent quality. These two extra minerals give pig

iron strength and hardness, a material well suited to foundry work. 5 Other ore hauled to the Reserve by ox team cost a forbidding 25 cents a pound, but the local ore was an economical 6 cents a pound. These early furnaces were a seven-day a week operation where men took turns minding the kilns and furnaces around the clock. At peak operation 35 tons of iron could be produced in a week. The furnaces gave employment to many of our residents, furnished cheap iron products to our households and farms, and brought new money into the area through their exports. 2

1835 Ellensburg was an active harbor for many years. The long dock, built out into the lake was used by ships importing limestone from Kelley's Island for Arcole Furnace, and more ships sailed to Buffalo with Arcole products. The shipbuilding yards of Erastus and Edmund Lockwood were in brisk competition with those of Harlow and Alanson Bailey. Two or three masted schooners single-deck shallow cargo vessels were launched parallel to the beach and sailed past the dock and three government beacon lights into the open lake. Sails for many of these ships were expertly sewn in the cabinet shop of Joel T. Norton, where other furnishings for ships were also made. 2

Limestone for the furnace was obtained from Kelley's Island and unloaded at Madison Dock at the mouth of Cunningham's Arcole Creek. A bustling port developed there; it became a fishing, shipping, and shipbuilding center. During the boom years, Madison Dock (Ellensburg) bustled with activity. A bar and hotel, the Allen House, was popular among sailors and ironworkers. Two lighthouses, a company store, a three storied frame boarding house, a post office, a gristmill and shops made up the commercial heart of Madison Dock during the height of its prosperity. About 200 log cabins and frame houses surrounded the furnace, and something like 2,000 men, were employed by the Arcole Iron Company. 1

The cargoes of limestone and other supplies for the Arcole Company were unloaded into a car, which was pulled by a mule and ran on wooden rails from the end of the pier to the shore. From there, the supplies were placed in carts and wagons which rattled and bumped over the Dock Road, their iron wheels crunching the thick layers of blue slag. Products made in Arcole were taken to the dock to be shipped in all directions. Many settlers first stepped onto Ohio land at Madison Dock. About 200 feet from the shore stood a three-story hotel near the side of Dock Road. Its lower floor was of logs, the other two of clapboards. This hotel was always well filled. The shouts and songs of the sailors would drift far out into the night. Across from the hotel, on the East side of Dock Road stood the lighthouse keeper's home, built by the federal government. This Cape Cod type home still stands. The keeper had two lighthouses to tend to. One was on the lakeshore at the creek; the other was at the end of the pier, which stretched out into the lake. At the south end of the Dock Road was the company store. Once just a log building, later on it was a frame building 100 feet deep and 30 feet wide, the center portion was the shopping center for the 2,000 men employed by the Arcole Iron Company. The store had an annual invoice of \$150,000. Business in the store was carried on by means of due bills, which served as money. The West wing was used to store the necessities of the community in winter when the boats could no longer bring freight in. The east wing contained the office of the iron company. Here the money records of the company were kept in a brick vault,

which had a 500-pound cast iron door. This was the financial center of the settlement because the nearest bank was in Warren about 50 miles distant, a day's trip when the roads were good. Near the furnaces was a three-story frame boarding house, its first floor a kitchen and dining rooms. The second was a large sitting room, and the third was used as sleeping rooms. Along Arcole Road were cabinet shops, pattern shops and harness makers. A three-story gristmill, its frame made of huge timbers, rumbled and shook with the vibrations of its huge stones. A short distance West of the furnaces on the North Ridge was the home of Charles Swan, the President of Arcole Company. The house had brass hardware! 5

The first vessel launched in 1830 was the "Caroline S. Bailey." In 1835 the schooner "Helens", a 75 ton vessel and, in 1847, "The Flying Dutchman" of 200 ton capacity was built and was the largest vessel on the lakes at the time. 3

1840 The Arcole Iron Company was bought by the Geauga Furnace. Most of the other furnaces had simply been abandoned. Why? What affect did this short industrial activity have on Lake County? The bog iron was of only limited supply. Iron ore available from other areas was a much high-grade ore. Geauga used these other ores, but the other furnaces either had been abandoned before the better ore was available or it was not economically feasible to use it. In the case of the Arcole Furnace, charcoal had become harder and harder to obtain. Sand bars had formed at the mouth of Arcole Creek, so that it no longer made a satisfactory harbor. 5

The need for wood to make charcoal stimulated the clearing of the land. This made more land available for agriculture, the county's major industry in later years.

Just because there are few physical traces of the furnaces left and only a few samples of their products can be exhibited, it would be wrong to say that the industry vanished from Lake County. Nineteenth Century Lake County was to no small degree a product of those furnaces. 5

1850 The prosperity of Arcole and Madison Dock faded rapidly after 1850. One is reminded of the boom and bust periods that led to the rise and fall of mining towns in the Far West and Rocky Mountain territories. With the end of prosperity, Madison Dock became a ghost town like many of those later towns in other parts of the frontier. 1

The Arcole Furnace Company came and went leaving the ground depleted of its ore. The chimneys have crumbled and fallen, and there is nothing left to remind us of the once thriving industry. The pier and the lighthouse at the dock, left to the waves and the weather are washed away. Hotels and boarding houses, deserted by the transient workers and sailors passed out of existence, and the township settled into a peaceful farming community until the drift from farm to city changed the picture. Only a few of the original landmarks still stand, and the name of the creek, which had practically its whole course on the original Cunningham property, has been changed to Arcola, the misspelled name of a short lived industry. 4

1863 The last ship was built by the Bailey Brothers and launched at the Dock. 3

1868 Chapintown or Centreville, now Madison Village, is incorporated. 1

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*Note-Arcole map attached to printed copy in file

