FAIRBORN'S HISTORY

A Tale of Two Towns

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A Tale of Two Towns is an excerpt from Cleo Wilson Hodgkins' book.

This version was revised by Charles R. Linderman as part of the Fairborn, Ohio American Revolution Bicentennial celebration in 1976.

The year is 1799.

The guns of the Revolutionary War had ceased and the British Redcoats, in defeat, had gone back to England. All was quiet on the eastern seacoast. General Washington had already served his two terms as President of the States, and John Adams, the second President, had now succeeded him in that office.

Yes, all was quiet along the western seacoast, but here, in what was then known as the Northwest Territory, another kind of frontier history was being made. Ohio was yet to be recognized as a state when the first settlers came to Reed's Hill and looked down upon the fertile lands below. They liked what they saw, and their journey was over. It was 1799. This was not a real estate development they were looking upon, where the land was cleared, and plotted off into sections that could be purchased for so much per acre. This was a tomahawk development. This settlement meant the forging of homes out of a wilderness in which the Indians presented one of the great stumbling blocks.

The wilderness of this territory was lighted by the campfires of the Mingoes, Delawares, Miamis, Wyandottes, and in this particular area, the all-powerful Shawnees.

Tecumseh had not yet known defeat. A Chief to whom Greene County can boast and be duly proud. No Indian ever fought harder for the rights to the land of his tribes than did Tecumseh.

It was under these circumstances that the first settlers came into these parts. But the early fathers had faith, and thus the first log house was built in 1799 in the old settlement of Fairfield. Patriot soldier, John Griener, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, is reputed to be the builder of the first cabin. Having served at Valley Forge under the command of General George Washington, the Continental Army veteran had received a grant of land in the Northwest Territory for his service to his country.

The area found favor with pioneers who were moving northward westward from Kentucky and Virginia. They sent favorable word back to other members of their clans and the early history of the area reveals the effects of this.

The Cozads of Virginia and the Tatmans of Kentucky contributed dozens of sturdy families to the building of the new settlements.

With the growth came hardships but out of the hardships came a name of the new settlement.

Their story has come down through the years. The Indians had made sporadic raids on the settlements in the early years. While there were no massacres here, a white child would disappear from time to time. This went on for a number of years. When, in 1810, the eleven year old son of William Cozad was kidnapped, the settlers planed a program of retaliation. Each time a child disappeared, the settlers would raid the nearby Indian Village and carry off an Indian child. After five years of such raids, a truce was declared and arrangements were made for a meeting, someplace between the Indian village and the new settlement. At the meeting, the Indians lined up on one side and the Whites on the other, and the transfer was accomplished.

The Indian Chief himself returned William Cozad's son. The Indians had the boy for over four years -- he was now

fifteen years old, and the tribe had grown to love him dearly. Thus, it was natural that the Chief wanted to see the place where the boy would live.

Accordingly, Cozad, with his son, walked with the Chief to the top of Reed's Hill (Route 235 to Xenia) and pointed to the settlement below. The Chief looked down upon the settlement and surrounding land, and turning to William Cozad, he said, "Yonder lies fair field. Me see thousand white men moving about in that beautiful fair field."

Cozad took this as a prophecy and decided it argued well for the future of the settlement -- that one day it might become a thriving city.

Growth was rapid for those days, and by the time volunteers were called for service in the War of 1812, the settlement was able to furnish a goodly number for military service to their country. The Cozads listed more than a score of veterans of that war.

Seventeen years after the first log houses were built and many new pioneers had come to clear the land, William Cozad, along with his brother, Samuel, and Joseph Tatman, laid out the village of Fairfield. The name was coined from the words of the Indian Chief when he said, "Yonder lies a fair field."

The new village was laid out on the road between Dayton and Springfield. The road was know as the Old Cumberland Trail during the stage coach days. At the present time, it is identified as Route 4 (In Fairborn it is Broad Street/Rt. 444).

The town was one of the few in the country that was laid out "square with the world", its streets being laid out due north and south and east and west.

By 1810, land sold for $2.25 per acre. At the same time, a pound of tea cost $5.00 and calico was selling from 60¢ to $1.00 per yard. That same year Fairfield had its own school, and by 1821 pupils numbered 300 for Bath Township. The village was becoming a busy stop on the "broad pike" between Dayton and Springfield. The rectangular area set aside for the village contained 40 acres and was divided into 151 lots selling for $75.00 each just a short time after the land was plotted (1816).

the early 1830's, there were three hotels in the village, and the Exchange Tavern was an important stop in those days. It was at the old Exchange Tavern that horses and drivers changed for the continuation of the stage coach journey. Many were the stories that were told in the old tavern; the happenings along the Cumberland Trail -- Indian uprisings in the newer parts of the territory, of new pioneers coming from other places and states. Ohio was now a State, but a new one, having achieved statehood March 1, 1807. (The Exchange Tavern no longer stands on Broad at Middle Street, having been victim to progress.)

The first log house, standing at the southwest corner of First and Middle Streets, is still used; much the same as when it was built in 1799. The house is now sided with shiplap board. The City of Fairborn negotiated with the owners for purchase of this historic property. The intent is to acquire it for retention under the Heritage '76 portion of the Fairborn, Ohio American Revolution Bicentennial Committee of '76 Observance in 1975-1976.)

Commerce was underway from the very early days of the settlement. Daniel Shoup opened a dry goods and grocery store in 1832. In May of 1834, political sophistication set in, and Fairfield passed its first set of village ordinances -- designed to "preserve the peace". Robert Mercer was elected Mayor.

Each year brought additional settlers and new businesses appeared. A flour mill, a blacksmith shop, wagon making shop, cabinet maker, funeral director, and the first turning lathe appeared in town. Later, a time shop, followed by a tanner, butcher, tailor, shoemaker, carpenter, cooper, stonecutter, and a gunsmith opened for business.

The first person entered in the village cemetery was Mrs. Hare, followed by Mr. John Peck, the latter being put to rest in 1849.

Although the narrative passes through the period of the War between the States with no mention of the participation by the people of this area, there is without a doubt a story that has not yet been written.

By 1870, Fairfield had one dry goods store, one drug store, two groceries, a so-called "notions" store, two wagon shops, two blacksmith shops, and one grist mill. It was a busy village on the "mainstream" from the end of National Road in Springfield to Dayton.

Although the Reformed Church was built in 1834, for many years the Methodist Church was the only one functioning in the community. Later a Baptist Church was organized, and served the village. Also, a Catholic Church stood across from the village cemetery and services were held there until it became a school house.

At one time in the village history, Fairfield had three schools. If a child didn't like one school, he or she could quit and take his or her troubles to another. When the Baptist Church closed its doors, instead of it becoming a school,

it was used for an entertainment center called the "Opera House." (Culture had come to the village of Fairfield.) Unfortunately, before the turn of the twentieth century, this building burned to the ground, also.

Before the turn of the century, Fairfield had two high schools, both in the same building. The school building was located at the present location of the fire station on Broad Street. The present building was erected in the year 1884. The original building was destroyed and this made room for the brick structure that we now see at 29 North Broad Street.

The two rooms downstairs took care of the pupils through the first eight grades, while the second floor's two rooms served the two high schools -- Bath Township High School, and Fairfield High School pupils met in respective rooms on the second floor.

The "little red school house" - a red brick building - stands today as a sample of architecture of the by-gone day; it now houses one element of the Fairborn-Bath Township Fire Department, as well as the office of the Fire Chief.

Three toll gates were in operation on different pikes leading out of Fairfield. One gate was on the Xenia Pike near the spot where the Township High School (Central Junior High School on N. Central Avenue) now stands. Another was on the Springfield Pike approximately across from the location of Hoak's Greenhouse (on N. Broad Street). The third toll house was location on the Dayton Pike, near Simms Station, where the Wright Brothers performed their experiments with the airplane.

The toll charged for use of the roads between various hamlets and cities varied according to the type of conveyance passing through. For example: a heavy wagon was charged a higher toll than that which was assessed against a horse and buggy.

By 1900, the Traction car or Interurban going between Dayton and Springfield passed across the Main Street of Fairfield. This form of mass transportation afforded folks an easy method of going to and from either city, and places in between.

Passengers departing Dayton were able to watch "those damned fools", the Wright Brothers, fly their airplane from the field at Huffman Prairie. Little did they understand the awesome potential of what they witnessed from the window of the interurban car as it traveled to Fairfield.

Fairfield had three saloons at one time, but they disappeared in the 1890's. There were also three physicians and one lawyer practicing in town. In 1871, descendants of the Pierce clan arrived and settled in the village. They were direct descendants of the clan which owned the ship "Mayflower" as well as a fleet of seven other vessels, in the 17th Century. Mr. S. H. Pierce, one of the oldest living residents of the community, is a descendant of that clan. His wife, Effie Wilson Pierce, is a descendant of the pioneer settler, Isaac Wilson, who came to these parts in 1801, and owned 1,200 acres of land immediately east of Fairfield. Among other descendants of this pioneer is a great, great, granddaughter, Cleo Wilson Hodgkins, writer and author of this historical sketch.

The greatest population of Fairfield was reached in 1850 when 500 people called the village "home". Then an event happened that was to stunt the growth of Bath Township's first village for 66 years until 1916, when Fairfield observed her 100th anniversary.

"The railroad is coming through" was a stirring cry in the early days of the steam locomotive. The Fairfield residents, including pioneers and their descendants, received this stirring news with mixed emotions.

The settlers and their offspring had cleared the wilderness, built their homes, fought and made peace with the Indians, and made the land tillable, in those first fifty-one years.

The fact was, they had just begun to live in peace and contentment. It was a natural reaction that those villagers and folk of the surrounding countryside didn't want their lands torn up by the railroad tracks coming through. Neither did they want to be reminded of any shrieking sounds that might bring to mind the days when the Indians lurked behind trees and made raids on their settlement. The Mad River and Lake Erie Railroad plan, that indicated the roadbed "was coming through" to cut up this newly claimed land, was turned down.

The railroad did not drop its plan, but did change the course of its right-of-way. The rail lines then missed the village by one mile, going through what was then known as the "prairie", one mile to the west. As there were no trucks, and there would be none for years to come, the railroads provided a ready and reliable means of transporting goods and people. Railroad towns were springing up all along these new transportation lines. The railroad was a new economic and cultural device. The railroad was considered a good reason for building a new village, and a good site for a grain market. One such village grew up about one and one-half miles to the northwest of the Village of Fairfield.

The newly inspired village was laid out in 1850 by John Cox and Samuel Stafford, with the assistance of a surveyor, Washington Calloway. A street 300 feet wide was provided for the Mad River and Lake Erie railroad right-of-way and tracks. Samuel Hadwell built the first house in Osborn in the same year. Growth was not immediate, as it was almost a year later when Henry Huskett put up the second one. The new village was recorded on May 20, 1851 and incorporated in 1876. The village was named in honor of the railroad Superintendent, who was Mr. Osborn.

Osborn grew rapidly -- much more rapidly than had the first settlement in Bath Township, Fairfield.

There were many reasons, but first of all, the Indians were all gone. Tecumseh, the powerful chief, was killed in 1813 and the others had departed the area with scarcely a red man left in the area by 1825. Secondly, the railroad was held in much esteem, and people were eager to settle in and near the new, growing railroad centers.

Within the next twenty-five years, Osborn could boast of two dry goods stores, groceries, bakery, two hardware stores, two drug stores, one barber shop, one fruit store, one hotel, two blacksmith shops, two wagon shops, one express office, one paint shop, one grist mill, one commission grain dealer, one lumber yard, four churches (Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Catholic) one grade school with four departments, one select school, one justice, two physicians, two lodges (Masons and Odd Fellows), and five saloons. These businesses, civic and fraternal centers were followed in later years by the Farmers Milling Company which later become known as Tranchant and Finnell Mills, the Egg Case Factory, the Whip Company, and the Keen Kleener Company. Dr. Hartman's "Peruna" was born in Osborn.

The first newspaper, the BULLETIN, appeared in 1866. After a period of time, the paper died. In 1882, the MAD RIVER TIMES came into being and Osborn had a local newspaper from then on. In 1883, the paper changed its

name and became the MAD RIVER LOCAL and in 1884 the name was again changed to the OSBORN LOCAL, and as such it continued until changes in the village itself were made.

Sometime late in the 19th century, Mr. J. H. Barkman founded a bank along with others from the community. Mr. Barkman was President and Mr. O. C. Jackson served as cashier. The bank failed in 1913.

The First National Bank was charter in 1910 with Michael Finnell as its first President and with Mr. O. B. Kauffman as the first cashier. This bank has served the residents of this area down through the years. At the present time, Mr. Noah LeMaster is the president of the bank, which now has two locations to serve its customers.

Time brings changes and it's an ill wind that brings no good to someone or something. The City of Dayton was ravaged by the devastating water of a flood in March 1913. Even before the ravages of the water were completely controlled, the citizens of that community began a measure to bring the Miami River under control. By January of 1914, a conservancy bill became law.

Almost immediately steam shovels were at work building a series of dams. Included in the plan was an earth dam to be constructed across the Mad River near Huffman Prairie, just west and south of Fairfield and Osborn.

The Huffman Dam across the Mad River would back the waters of that river onto the prairie (now referred to as a flood plain) and into the area occupied by the village of Osborn. Osborn must take action. The villagers acted quickly, lest the village lose their identity.

While Osborn's citizens were solving one of the biggest problems a town ever had to face -- move or be inundated during future floods -- nearby Fairfield was also involved in a happening that would cause her growth, by leaps and bounds, and that would forever change her face and place in American history.

The Wright Brothers, Orville and Wilbur, had experimented since late 1800's with a machine that would fly like a bird under its own power. The Wright Brothers continued their flight tests from the farm land identified as Huffman prairie after their success at

Flight 46. Huffman Prairie, 1905

Kittyhawk, North Carolina on December 17, 1903. The original hangar site is near the Simms Station of the Dayton-Springfield-Urbana urban line. This area is owned by the Miami Valley Conservancy and maintained by the United States Air Force. By 1916, the War Department had purchased 25,000 acres for a flying school and an aviation depot. The Wright Brothers flying school was already in operation from the Wilbur Wright Flying Field on Huffman Prairie. What a coincidence! The village was celebrating its 100th anniversary and former residents and natives were returning for the big festivities. While celebrating the first 100 years, the natives could hear the sounds of hammers and saws working away in the green fields bordering the village of Fairfield on the west.

Thousands of workmen were building hangars for airplanes, barracks for the troops, warehouses, and other structures necessary to make up an operational flying field and support depot.

The comment was often heard, and repeated, that those who selected these rich, fertile fields for this large project must have been riding in a limousine with the curtains drawn, since these were some of the richest farming lands in the entire Miami Valley. These rich farm lands had been reduced to the status of a flood plain in the Miami Valley Conservancy District plan.

The airplane was here to stay and Fairfield was to be the permanent home of this heavier than air machine. The airfield designator is F F O (Fairfield, Ohio) and is on all air charts throughout the world as such. Just as Osborn has boomed in 1850 with the coming of the railroad, Fairfield was now booming with the "coming of the airplane". However, the first soldiers arrived on June 2, 1917. These early arrivals were soon followed by officers and civilian personnel from every state in the Union.

The main depot building, designated as Building Number 1, on Wright Avenue inside the gate near Fairfield Cemetery, became the first building at the Fairfield Air Depot, with occupancy in September of 1918. Fairfield, because of its importance in supply and air training, soon became known the world over. The writer of this historical sketch recalls that while associated with the U.S. Army Corps at Hickam Field, Honolulu, Hawaii in 1944-49, the name of her hometown Fairfield, Ohio was seen on thousands of boxes, crates, and barrels of supplies which

filled many, many warehouses there.

So it was the world over as the organizations at Fairfield Intermediate Air Depot controlled most everything in the world so far as Air Corps supply goes.

Population in the vicinity of the booming air installation was increasing rapidly. There weren't enough houses to meet the needs of the new people, but the residents of the village were very cooperative.

They opened their homes, rented rooms, started new boarding houses, and used all available spaces in unused buildings and dwellings until such time as the community could take care of the expanding population. New homes were being built, new businesses were springing into being, and Bath Township's first settlement was enjoying a new surge of progress. The big birthday celebration for her 100th anniversary was the beginning of a new village.

World War I ended and with it the village returned to a pre-war way of thinking, but it was irreversible that the village must change. Fairfield could not return to the farm-oriented ways of the first 100 years. Over the years, the Miami Conservancy District has bought out three-fourths of the property owners of Osborn.

In 1921, the people of Osborn had solved their problem by deciding to move their village to land bordering Fairfield on the east. For this purpose, the Osborn Removal Company was organized. The villagers packed up their belongings and the buildings
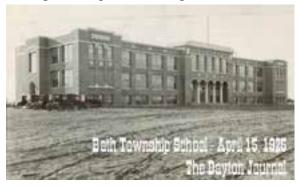

were moved to the new location -- "roof and rafters" as the saying goes. Everything was moved but the basements. Buildings were set on new foundations, new sites, along side of the village of Fairfield. Twin cities were created overnight. Beginning in 1921, we had the two villages -- Fairfield and Osborn -- close neighbors for a twenty-eight year period. Each kept its separate identity, having its own government, town council, post office, and such things as are necessary in any community.

Both communities prospered, however, the fate of Fairfield was certain. The community could not grow -- there was no place to go. The village of Osborn on the east; the flying field and supply depot on the west; on the north

was the Greene County line adjacent to the Clark County line, and to the south was another township line. The flood plain on one side, and foothills to the southwest. The finish of the two separate villages was a matter of time.

It came when the registered voters of the twin villages voted to merge and form a new village. The vote was decisive in favor of the merger in 1949. The charter

for the new village was delivered on January 1, 1950, and the name of the new village of Fairborn came into being.

As far as is known, Fairborn is the only city in the State of Ohio, or the United States of America, or in the world with its name.

Adopting the Council-Manager form of city government, it continues to function under that form, with an elected mayor, and an appointed City Manager.

The City of Fairborn was created by an act of the State of Ohio when it reached a population of 5,000 people, and was officially designated the City of Fairborn in August of 1950. Explosive growth propelled the city to more than 35,000 residents in the next twenty years. Although some of the information in this document is outdated, the historical information remains the foundation of our community roots and values.