



### *EARLY HISTORY OF VIOLET TOWNSHIP*

Fairfield County was originally four times as great as now, encompassing all of the present county of Licking, nearly all of Knox, probably a portion of Richland, portions of Pickaway and Hocking, and extending into Perry some distance east of Somerset. The name of "Fairfield " is suggestive of the broad, beautiful lands lying at the head of the Hocking Valley today, and the possibilities open to these hardy pioneers doubtless prompted them to name the district, in accordance with their prophetic views.

Violet Township is in the northwestern part of Fairfield County, and is bounded on the north by Licking County, on the east by Liberty Township, on the south by Bloom Township, and on the west by Franklin County. The Township was set off and incorporated in 1808. From the variety and abundance of its masses of purple flowing wild flowers it took the name of Violet. A portion of the original Refugee Tract established to provide land to Canadian refugees and to Refugees of Nova Scotia who had abandoned their settlements and fled to the United States to aid the colonial cause during the Revolutionary War is located in Violet Township, thus the name of Refugee Road, which was it's southern most boundary.

Pennsylvania and Virginia supplied the largest numbers of earlyimmigrants. Many came in large numbers from the Pennsylvania and the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.

This area was originally part of the Northwest Territory, and land grants were originally primarily issued as reward for military service in the Revolutionary War. The first man to take up his residence here was

Revolutionary soldier by the name of George Kirke, who owned the eighty acres on which the original Village of Pickerington now stands. His property eventually came into the possession of Abraham Pickering, and in 1815, he laid off a few lots. The town was first called Jacksonville, after the amazing Andrew Jackson. About a dozen years later, the town families chose to honor their founder, and renamed Jacksonville to Pickerington.

Violet Township in its early days was a dense forest of beech, hickory, sugar, white and blue ash, and red and white elm. In selecting farms, it was customary for several to join together, get the range and section from corner trees, pick out a section and for one of them to hasten to the land office to secure it by making an entry, and paying the one-fourth part (fifty cents per acre) down. There was then a busy time among them helping each other to build log cabins. Some brought their families with them, while others came alone, preferring to build the cabin first.

Indians were few and friendly, and soon left for lands further west--- while here, the children of settlers and Native Americans played together, amusing themselves by wrestling and running foot races. Wild animals, such as the wolf, deer, bear and wild-cat, were numerous. The northern twelve sections of this township belonging to the Refugee lands had numerous flocks of wild turkeys and pigeons. Turkey was an ordinary dish for the farmer, and during the fall and winter months, many of them were dressed and sent to market. Shooting pigeons formed the farmer-boys' holiday pleasure and frequently his day's work, to keep them from destroying the crops. They lit in such numbers on trees as to break the branches.

When Pickerington was first laid out, lots were given to any one who would build on them. For a few years it seemed to do well, then came to a stand still with indications of finally dying out. The Hocking Valley Railroad, passing through the southern part of the Violet Township, seemed to invigorate it to some extent, but it was not long till it began to decline again until the Ohio Central Railroad passed through its limits, when it awakened to new life.

After the coming of the Ohio Central Railroad, the Village of Pickerington contained many fine residences, two churches, a substantial modern style school building, an elevator, a flouring mill, two dry goods stores, five groceries, one drug store, one hardware store, two hotels, a tin shop, two blacksmith shops, a harness shop and a lumber yard. During the first few years William McIntosh and Abraham Pickering, of this place, were extensively engaged in buying hogs for eastern markets. The rich fruits of the forest formed such an abundance of food, that rearing them was very little trouble, and many farmers gave it considerable attention. The price paid was \$1.20 per hundredweight, and when a sufficient number had been secured, they were driven to market to Baltimore, Maryland; the trip taking about three months. They continued in this until the Ohio Canal was opened, when hogs were slaughtered and the pork shipped.

A lodge of Independent Order of Odd Fellows was instituted here the 22nd day of November 1881. Probably the first dry goods store was kept by James Mullen, on the southwest corner of the public square. James O'Kane owned the next one and after a few years sold out to Drumm & Lee, who several years after were succeeded by the McArther Brothers. Up to this time there were no groceries, as the dry good stores kept a general assortment of family supplies. The first hotel was kept by Colonel John Ricketts. Stephen Whitesel built the first blacksmith shop and was followed by James Cannon.

Mr. Badger owned the first mill in Violet Township. It was run by horsepower and the grain when ground had to be bolted by hand. The next was a water gristmill, on Walnut Creek, built by George Hoshor. Michael Loucke then built a saw and grist mill on the same creek. Mr. Lee built a sawmill, and Billingsly Allen, a gristmill in the northern part of the township. In 1881 the Strickler Brothers built a large flouring mill in Pickerington.

The first school in the township was taught at Pickerington by Isaac Reneir. Clemuel Ricketts taught the next in section 22. The next was taught near Waterloo by Joseph Ginton. Schools gradually sprang into existence until each district has a good school building, well supplied with the necessary furniture.

Waterloo is a small village on the Ohio Canal and Hocking Valley Railroad. It was laid out in 1828 by Squire John Donaldson. Wm. Stevenson owned the first dry goods store, which he kept in one room of the old warehouse on the Ohio Canal. Nathan Bray kept a small hotel. As of 1882, Waterloo contained only one store, a saloon, and a shoemaking shop. Its first inhabitants were Levi Moore, David Painter, Thomas Morton, and George Hoshor. At one point, Waterloo became infamous during the Body Snatching frenzy of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when on Christmas day 1879 a party of boys, while hunting, passed through the cemetery near Waterloo, Fairfield County, where they found several tufts of human hair scattered upon the ground. They reported their findings, which led to an investigation, and it was discovered that the body of the late Jonathan Boyer had been removed from the grave.

Lockville, a small hamlet, is on the Ohio Canal, partly in Violet Township and partly in Bloom Township. There are several locks in the canal at this place from which the village derived its name. Francis Cunningham laid out the town and built the first store in which he kept a saloon of some notoriety---it being the resort of passengers while the boats were passing the locks. John Tenant and his brother succeeded Cunningham, and in a few years were followed by the Mithoff Brothers. In 1845-50 the Mithoff Brothers erected the largest distillery in the county. Three hundred bushels of corn was consumed each day, making a daily yield of 1,200 gallons of whiskey. They remained in business about fourteen years. Once they left the village, it began a slow decline in prosperity. Currently, the Lockville Canal Locks are listed on the Nation Registry of Historic Places

Henry Dove brought his family to settle in this fertile area about 1811. He divided his land between his sons, Reuben and Jacob. When the Ohio & Erie Canal came through Reuben Dove's wheat field, he wanted to sue the state. The canal workmen convinced him that he would be better off laying out a town since the area was midway between Columbus and Lancaster. On November 4, 1828, Reuben Dove and John Colman recorded the first plat for Winchester, Ohio, in Violet Township, Fairfield

County. Dove named the village after his father's hometown of Winchester, Virginia. Winchester flourished because of agriculture and transportation. The Ohio–Erie Canal brought passengers, freight and a means to transport grain to market. The first canal boat floated through Winchester in 1831. In 1869, the railroad came to Canal Winchester, bringing continued prosperity. The village became Canal Winchester when the post office was established in 1841 because there were other towns in the state of Ohio with the name Winchester. The original post office resided in Waterloo, and since the prosperity of a village many times was dictated by the possession of a post office, the original post office building was, secretly during the cover of darkness, hauled onto a sled and quite literally stolen away to the Village of Canal Winchester, thus proving that possession is really 9/10<sup>th</sup>'s of the law! The village was annexed to Madison Township, Franklin County, in 1851. In May of 1866, the Ohio Secretary of State granted incorporation papers for the Village of Canal Winchester. Portions of the now City of Canal Winchester remain in Violet Township.

Another portion of Violet Township resides inside the City of Reynoldsburg corporation limits. Reynoldsburg was named for James C. Reynolds who was born in 1806. He arrived in the area around 1831 where he initially boarded with John French. He then built a cabin and opened a sutler's store for the road gang building the Cumberland Road. While selling work clothes, whisky, molasses, calico and general provisions, Reynolds provided a central gathering place and was the first merchant in the area. It is possible the town was named "Reynolds Burgh" because the mail was delivered to his store. Reynolds, a Whig, served as a Brigadier General in the Ohio Militia and a Representative in the Ohio General Assembly. He died of complications from malaria in 1854.

One of Violet Township's most famous residents was James Jackson Jeffries ("The Boilermaker") (born April 15, 1875, died March 3, 1953). Jeffries was a world heavyweight boxing champion. He was the son of Alexis Jeffries, a farmer and minister, and Rebecca Boyer Jeffries. Jim had four brothers and three sisters. Jeffries was born in a home located on Basil–Western Road, halfway between what is currently Allen Road and Carroll Northern Road in southern Violet Township. The original home of

his birth was moved piece by piece and reconstructed on East Waterloo Street in the old village area of Canal Winchester, where it remains today. He began boxing in 1896, and in 1899 he won the heavyweight championship from Robert Fitzsimmons at Coney Island in New York City. He retired undefeated in 1905, but returned to the ring in 1910, when he was defeated by Jack Johnson in Reno, Nevada during a hotly debated match. In his later biography, Jack Johnson referred to Jeffries as the greatest heavyweight boxer to ever live. In Jeffries later years, he trained boxers and worked as a fight promoter. He promoted many fights out of a structure known as "Jeffries Barn." Jeffries Barn is now part of Knott's Berry Farm, a Southern California amusement park.

*Excerpts taken from The Canal Winchester Historical Society Website;*

*"History Of Fairfield And Perry Counties, Ohio" (Compiled by A. A. Graham, 1883; Perry Co. Historical Society and transcriber, Timothy E. Fisher);*

*The Reynoldsburg Historical Society Website (Compiled by Suzy Millar Miller referencing the book, "History of Reynoldsburg and Truro Township, Ohio" by Cornelia M. Parkinson, copyrighted October 1981;*

*The Ohio Historical Society Online Volume 59, "Body Snatching in Ohio During the Nineteenth Century" by Linden F. Edwards, Professor of Anatomy, Ohio State University (This article was given as a paper at the annual meeting of the Committee on Medical History and Archives of the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, held at the Ohio State Museum, Columbus, April 15, 1950.)*