

## THE HISTORY OF TUSCARAWAS COUNTY

Tuscarawas County is located in east-central Ohio, a short distance from several major cities, with highway access to all parts of Ohio and surrounding states. Much of the County is located along the beautiful Tuscarawas River. "Tuscarawas" is an Indian word meaning "open mouth" or "mouth of the river."

The inhabitants of Tuscarawas County, before the white man began arriving in 1750, were the Delaware Indians. These Indians were a peaceful people that took little part in the Revolution occurring around them. Even though the Delaware's tried to remain distant from the Revolution, the number and power of their tribes in the County and the rest of the state steadily decreased after the war. The area Indians were instrumental in creating mounds and trails that would be of interest and use to future inhabitants of the land. One of the greatest of these trails ran through Tuscarawas County, it was known as the Great Trail. The Great Trail was used by the Indians in their journeys from the Great Lakes to the Ohio River. Largely it followed the Tuscarawas and Muskingum Rivers, for this route was level. The Great Trail was first used by the Indian hunting parties and later by the white traders and Moravian missionaries. During the Revolutionary War, the Great Trail became a path of danger to the white men, but eventually it returned to a path of peace and progress. With the danger gone more white settlers followed the trail to the fertile fields of Ohio. The trail widened and hardened. Today part of Great Trail is the well-traveled State Route 800 that runs north and south through the County.

The first whites to visit the Tuscarawas Valley, in the mid 1700's, were the French, English, and American traders. These persons were usually hardened men who drank heavily and taught the Indians to do the same. But it was not until Christopher Gist's visit to the Valley, that daily records of a white man's travels were kept. Gist came to Ohio as an agent of George Washington and other Virginia gentlemen who had purchased land in the Ohio Valley. He was considered one of Ohio's greatest pioneers and an exceptional trail finder. Gist had arrived in the old Indian village of Tuscarawi (Bolivar) on December 5, 1750.

In 1761, a white man who was neither trader nor explorer appeared in Tuscarawi. The man was Rev. C.F. Post the first Protestant missionary in the Valley. He was given permission by the Indians to live among their people and teach them according to the ways of the Bible. Post returned to Pennsylvania only to reappear in the County the following spring with John Heckewelder, a noted teacher and preacher. Heckewelder continued his preaching in Tuscarawas County, but Post was called to Pennsylvania to help make an Indian treaty. He never did return to the County, for Indian rebellion broke out, making it very dangerous for white men to live in the Valley.

The white man's troubles began in the Valley in 1763 when the great Indian war chief, Pontiac, plotted with several of the Indian tribes to drive the whites out of the west. White people everywhere lived in terror. It looked as if Pontiac's scheme would succeed but the British sent out several armies which in a short time put an end to the Indian's terrorizing. One of these successful armies was commanded by Col. Henry Bouquet. This was the first army of white men to march through the territory that is now called Tuscarawas County. After successfully negotiating the release of some 200 white prisoners taken captive in Pennsylvania, the expedition returned to Fort Pitt.

Not long after this turmoil ended, the Revolutionary War began creating conflict between the British, Americans, Christian and non-Christian Indians. It was at this time that the brutal massacre of over 90 Christian Indians occurred in the Ohio missionary town known as Gnadenhutten. These Indians were led by the founder of Tuscarawas County John Heckewelder and his Christian minister friend David Zeisberger. In 1770, David Zeisberger was summoned to the Tuscarawas Valley by the Delaware Indians. The Indians sent a message that told of a disease, smallpox, that was killing their people by the dozens. Their medicine men could do nothing to stop the disease and they wanted to know if David could come to their aid. So in March of 1771, Zeisberger set out for the Tuscarawas River. He reached the river near the old Indian town Tuscarawi. He followed the river south for about 20 miles where he came upon a place where a strong stream flowed into a large river bend. He decided to name this stream Schoenbrunn, which means "Beautiful Spring." Schoenbrunn was the first settlement in what is now New Philadelphia, founded in 1804 by John Knisely.

After Zeisberger had preached only one sermon to the Delaware Indians, the smallpox disappeared. Believing this was due to his sermon the Indians were very eager to have him live with them permanently. Zeisberger was quite pleased to accept the Indians offer a large tract of land, including the site he had named Schoenbrunn, in return for his services as a minister. So on May 3, 1772, David and 28 of his Christian Indian converts, landed at the spring, and began constructing a Village laid out in the form of an inverted T. The Village grew rapidly; some of the surge in growth was created when John Heckewelder and over 300 of his Moravian followers moved to Schoenbrunn. Soon the Schoenbrunn Village became so crowded that it was necessary to build another Village further south. Under direction of Joshua, an elder in the congregation, the Christianized Mahicans built the Village of Gnadenhutten. Both Villages remained quite peaceful until the Revolutionary War in 1775.

When the war broke out between England and the Colonies, most of the Indian tribes in the Valley favored the British. The Christian Indians of Schoenbrunn and Gnadenhutten did as the American government suggested and remained neutral, a position that created endless problems, and finally led to their destruction in 1782. During the war, the Delaware Christian Indians were not safe from the British or the other Indian tribes as both parties wanted them out of the County. Finally, the Delaware's could no longer resist the pressure of the forces working against them and they left the area. Their church was pulled down and they sadly marched south to a safer territory. Two years later, thinking the danger had passed, Zeisberger, led his people back to Schoenbrunn where they found the Village in ruins. So the Delaware's set to building a new village across the river. This new village never did thrive; in 1781, a large band of renegade Indians appeared in this village and forced the Delaware's and Mohicans' to flee to a point near where Sandusky, Ohio now stands. Zeisberger and Heckewelder were taken to Detroit and kept there all winter by the British. That spring they were tried as American spies, but since nothing could be proven against them, they were freed. The people of Schoenbrunn never returned to their Village. Zeisberger on the other hand returned to the Tuscarawas Valley, in 1798, with another band of followers. This group established a mission at Goshen, a few miles south of New Philadelphia. It was at Goshen when Zeisberger died, on November 7, 1808, and was laid to rest.

The people at the Gnadenhutten settlement were not as fortunate as those at Schoenbrunn. The history of Gnadenhutten was much like that of Schoenbrunn before the Revolution. Once the war began the troubles there did likewise. The inhabitants were made to pay for the pillaging that the British Indians had done along the American frontier in Virginia and Pennsylvania. The frontiersmen were horrified and determined to avenge their losses, caused by the Indians, by wiping out the town of Gnadenhutten. Many frontiersmen believed the Christian Indians were savages who merely used Christianity to cover their murdering and stealing ways. In March of 1782, a small army of white men lead by Capt. Williamson acted as friends to the Christian Indians of Gnadenhutten, tricked them into giving up their weapons and tools, and had them gather in the church. There a trial was held and they were charged with murdering white settlers, stealing their goods, and burning their buildings. Over 90 Christian Indian men, women, and children were sentenced and put to death. Heckewelder returned to Gnadenhutten, gathered up the bones of his people, and buried them in a single large grave. This spot may be visited today in the cemetery at Gnadenhutten where a museum has been built in memory of the brave souls who lost their lives. The story of the Delaware Indians and their Moravian teachers is told nightly in the summer hills of Tuscarawas County at "Trumpet in the Land," Ohio's oldest outdoor drama.

Another spot that encountered devastation around the time of the Revolution was a place called Fort Laurens. In 1778, the American Congress decided to build a chain of forts in the west to stop the British and Indian raids. Fort Laurens, named in honor of Henry Laurens the President of the Continental Congress, was one such Fort. The spot chosen for the Fort was on the west bank of the Tuscarawas River about one mile south of the present Village of Bolivar. The Fort was built in the shape of a rectangle with diamond-shaped bastions at each corner. Problems began at the Fort when McIntosh, the general who was instrumental in the construction of the Fort, decided to leave with several men from the Fort's army and travel east to pickup supplies. One hundred men were left under the command of Colonel Gibson. It was not long before the Fort was surrounded by Indians who remained around the Fort for six weeks, making it impossible for the soldiers to go out and hunt. Because it was winter, many of the men grew ill from lack of heat and food. They were not even safe when the Indians sent word that they were leaving

because a party of Indians remained behind to ambush the soldiers who traveled outside the Fort walls. Supplies finally reached the Fort but by that time the men were ill, discouraged, and wished to leave. So in the summer of 1779 the Fort was abandoned. After the archaeological explorations of the 1970's and 1980's, the exact location of the Fort was found and the western outline of the Fort can be seen between the museum and the Ohio Erie Canal. However, the site of Fort Laurens has been purchased by the Ohio Historical Society it is now a state site containing a museum and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier of the Revolutionary War.

As one travels ahead in time we come to the spring of 1817, when about 200 German peasants left their country to seek religious freedom in America. Joseph M. Bimeler, the leader of these people purchased 5,500 acres of land in Tuscarawas County, land that later became the site of their Village that they named Zoar. Unsuccessful at democratic living, the Village people organized a communal settlement where everything belonged to the community. All crops raised were placed in a great community barn, all the cows were also kept in one barn, and a group of women was appointed to do all the dairy work. As years passed Zoar became a wealthy community and in time the residents owned over 9,000 acres of land, a large hotel, a tannery, an iron mill, a saw mill, a flour mill, a cabinet shop, a blacksmith shop, a bakery, a cider mill, a large herd of cattle, horses, sheep's, goats, hogs, and money in various banks. Towards the latter part of the century the young people of the Village began to grow tired of their communal life. They wished to be free to do as they pleased, to earn money of their own, buy their own clothes, and own their own property. So in 1898, the community dissolved and the property was divided among the remaining membership of the Society. Many buildings and relics of community days are still found in Zoar today; signifying that Zoar Village still represents the simplicity and charm of an earlier time.

Something must be said for the importance of the Tuscarawas River because of the County's location along the river. There is an abundance of fertile soil, many diversified industries, and has provided Tuscarawas County citizens with resources to construct a canal. The canal began to be built in 1825 and was named the Ohio & Erie Canal. The canal began in Cleveland, passed through Tuscarawas County, and later met the Ohio River at Portsmouth. The canal was a means of transportation for people and goods. The towns located along the canal flourished; however, when railroads began to appear in the County, business on the canal steadily decreased and the canal was finally abandoned. Scenes from an Ohio canal town may be viewed today at the Temperance Tavern Museum in Newcomerstown and at Union Hall in Port Washington. Today, some of the canals in Ohio have been restored and are in operation for all to enjoy.

In the early 1800's, a number of Swiss immigrants settled in the area. They set up small factories where they practiced the art of cheese-making which they learned in their native land. Sugarcreek eventually became the center of the Swiss cheese industry in Ohio. The idea of a Swiss Festival was proposed to promote the Swiss cheese industry and the Village. The first Ohio Swiss Festival was held in 1953 and the festival has become one of the highest attended in Ohio. In 1814, Abraham Shane founded the Village of Shanesville, at a point where two Indian trails crossed; he never dreamed that some day this would be the point where Ohio Scenic Routes 39 and 93 would intersect. Fifty years later, the small Village of Sugarcreek had the one thing Shanesville didn't: A railroad. Shanesville was officially incorporated into Sugarcreek in 1968. The stories of Sugarcreek, the Swiss cheese industry, and the Amish community surrounding the Village are all told today at the Alpine Hills Historical Museum and Tourist Information Center.

Railroads, as well as the clay industry, played a hand in the founding of Uhrichsville and Dennison, Tuscarawas County's Twin Cities. Uhrichsville, incorporated in 1866, was originally named Waterford by Michael Uhrich, its founder. Uhrichsville grew with the canal era, by becoming a central station for the Cleveland wheat market as Uhrich's mill expanded by building first one warehouse and eventually five more. The clay industry also flourished in the early 1900's and prosperity continued until the late 1950's and early 1960's. At one time the new industry could boast of as many as a dozen plants. The clay industry did decline and in recent years new industry has begun to move into the area to replace the clay industry including aluminum reclamation plants, plastics, ceramics, as well as many small businesses. Uhrichsville is also home to Union Cemetery, one of the most unique cemeteries in the

County. This cemetery is filled with Civil war Monuments including life-size replicas of soldiers and unique headstones made of clay that reflects the area's large clay-worker population.

Dennison, incorporated in 1873 and named for Governor William Dennison, was laid out in 1864 by the Dennison Land Company. The company purchased a large tract expressly to build the town. The site was chosen because of its location, a midway point between the Pittsburgh and Columbus corridors along the Pennsylvania Railroad line. The railroad built shops in the town and the area economy quickly centered on the railroad industry. During World War II Dennison became famous as "Dreamsville, Ohio," a canteen stop for soldiers traveling by train. The Red Cross was the supervising organization for the canteen. Volunteers came from not only Dennison, but from all over Tuscarawas and Harrison Counties to serve coffee and sandwiches to the servicemen. The canteen was in operation from 1942 to 1946. This history of the Pennsylvania railroad and the canteen is told at the Dennison Railroad Depot Museum today.

Dover was founded by Jesse Slinguff and Christian Deardorff in 1807. Originally named Canal Dover it was incorporated in 1842. The town's prosperity grew directly with the Ohio Erie Canal. In the 1880's, as the canal era declined, the railroad era played a large role in the industry of Dover. Steel mills, clay manufacturing, and other diversified industries attracted new residents then and today. The history of Dover is told at the J.E. Reeves Victorian Home and Museum. Once owned by Dover industrialist, Jeremiah E. Reeves, the Victorian mansion tells the story of the steel industry, Dover's most famous residents, and features military displays. Dover is also the home of Ernest "Mooney" Warther the "World's Master Carver." Warther Carvings, Gardens, and Button House Museum features the hand-carved trains, the knife shop where Mooney's family still makes unique cutlery and woodcrafts, the extensive button collection of Frieda Warther, and the beautiful Swiss-style flower gardens.

After reading this brief summary, one can see that Tuscarawas County is rich in history and various cultures. If you wish to receive more detailed information on the history of Tuscarawas County contact the Tuscarawas County Convention and Visitors Bureau located at 124 East High Avenue, New Philadelphia, Ohio, 44663, call (330)602-2420, or visit our website at: [www.ohiotimelessadventures.com](http://www.ohiotimelessadventures.com). For further information contact the Tuscarawas County Public Library in New Philadelphia at (330)364-4474 or, the Tuscarawas County Historical Society located at the Tuscarawas Campus of Kent State University at 330-339-3391 Extension 47494.