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## HISTORY OF GERMAN TOWNSHIP.

COMMUNICATED BY R.

### German Township, Fulton County, O.— Its Early Settlement—Its Organization—Incidents—Subsequent Improvements, &c.

Upon inspecting the map of Fulton county, it will be seen that German township is the largest township in the county. It occupies the south-west corner of the county, and contains fifty-two square miles. It is eight miles long from east to west and seven miles wide from north to south, which would give it an area of fifty-six miles; but there is a tract of two miles square out of its south-west corner, which belongs to an adjoining county. We speak of the township as now formed. When first organized in A. D., 1840, while yet a part of Lucas county, it contained but forty-two square miles. Its northern line being then two miles farther north than it now is. Its southern boundary is now two miles farther south than it then was. The western boundary line lies two miles farther west than did the old line.

The first settlement in the township was made in the summer of '34 by Swiss Germans who came from Millhausen, a town in Switzerland, near the line separating that country from France. Five families came together to-wit: Jacob Bender, his wife, and seven children; Christian Louber, his wife and four children; George Meister, his wife and five children; Jacob Grunday, his wife and three

children; ——— Kibler, his wife and six children; making of the five families thirty-five persons; several of the children were men and women grown. Accompanying these families from "Väterland" were Henry and Jacob Roth, Christian Reigsecker, Michael Figy, and one or two others, all of whom were then young and unmarried. These persons were members of the Amish church, and from these grew the present numerous body of Amish in the township.

#### THE NAME OF THE TOWNSHIP

originated in the fact that it was first settled by Germans. The families named left Europe early in the spring of the year 1834; crossed the Atlantic and landed in the city of New York.

Great was their delight on first beholding the New World, and especially were they delighted with the metropolis of America, as viewed from the approaching ship. From New York they came through to Cleveland; went from there to Massilon, where, unexpectedly, they were met by a host of Amish brethren, who, having heard of their coming, were on hand to meet and greet them, after which they took them to their own homes and entertained them for several months, and then sent some of their number with their new brethren to aid in selecting a proper location in the west. This was noble conduct, generous and Christian-like. Having purchased five yoke of oxen, one for each family, with a wagon for each team, they loaded on what things they had and started for what is now called German township. They came through by way of Napoleon. Some of the surviving members of those families tell me that long before they arrived at the last named place, they began to inquire for "Napoleon," which from the greatness of a name with which they were so familiar with in their own land, they

did not doubt, was a place of some magnitude. What was their astonishment and indignation when, upon calling at a double log shanty, to inquire how far to Napoleon, they were assured that they were in the place! The house just described was the only building in the village at that time. It was occupied by a man by the name of Hueston. Here our German friends left their teams and families for three weeks. The male members being all that time opening a road through which to pass to German township. The distance was only about fifteen miles, but it was

a herculean task. The ground was often covered with thick woods, heavy fallen timber, water, &c., Added to this was the almost intolerable annoyance suffered from the incessant attacks of innumerable hosts of musquitos. All things being ready, they left Napoleon, and in about three days, reached a point in German township, two miles east of where the village of Burlington now stands, where they located.

Here the prospect was gloomy enough. They were in a dense forest, without a house or shelter for themselves or cattle. The woods were full of bears, misquitos and wolves. They put up a shed and covered it with bark and for two months, had no other house or shelter. Their nearest neighbor was Joseph Bates, who resided in Williams county, six miles distant.

#### THE FIRST HOUSE

erected in the township, was put up by Mr. Christian Lauber, who still resides on the same place, but not in the same house; having now one of the finest houses and best farms in German township. Bender, Kibler, Meister and Gundy soon selected farms and put up log cabin, all of which were for a long time without other doors or windows than holes, made by cutting off a portion of the logs in which quilts or sheets were hung. The ground itself was the floor.

For several years they had scarcely any other than corn bread, and as they had no mill nearer than Maumee that they could go to for grinding, and as it took them with their ox-teams a week to go there, they ground a large portion of their corn by means of two grindstones, one placed upon the other and made to revolve around; and not a small portion did they grind in their coffee mills. They were often very destitute of food, sometimes having nothing but meal so ground and wa-

ter. They had cows, but there being no enclosures, they would wander off, and were of but little consequence. Every chance the cattle got they would go back to Napoleon, and compel their owners to go after them. After they had been upon their farms for a sufficient time, the settlers raised pumpkins, of which they made a kind of sauce, called by them "pumpkin pap," on which young and old fed with voracious appetites, and until they were full as ticks, and yet, as they tell me without satisfying their hunger.

One time Gundy went to Maumee to mill, and finding a lot of mushrooms, brought home three bags full of them, upon which our German settlers fed with such voraciousness that the half of them were "used up still."

LOST IN THE WOODS—FRIENDLY INDIAN—A VISIT HOME—THEIR RETURN.

Soon after Bender came into the woods; three of his daughters, Catharine, Anne, and Barbara, all young women, went out to work. Barbara went to Providence, Anne to Napoleon, and Catharine to some point about nine miles from the latter place. About New Year's Catharine became home-sick, and resolved to go home. The distance was twenty-four miles, all of which had to be traversed on foot. From Napoleon to German was still a dense and unbroken wilderness. She started and called upon and took her sister Anne with her. They traveled for some distance but finally lost their way, and were compelled to spend the cold dreary night in the dismal forest, liable at any time to fall a prey to the wild beasts with which the woods were filled. They sat down by a large log and remained there until morning. The night passed away, during which they slept and dreamed of being at their father's house, seat-

ed by a pleasant fire. In the morning they retraced their steps until they came to the path from which the day before they had wandered. They were wearied and hungry. The provisions that they brought with them had become so hard frozen that they could not eat it. Their feet had become wet the day before, and their stockings were now frozen upon their feet, yet upon their finding the right path again, they almost forgot their sufferings, with the glad hope of soon seeing home and dear friends. Soon after they had found their way they heard the stroke of an axe or tomahawk against a tree, and immediately surmised that it was done by an Indian. A few moments confirmed their suspicions. Upon looking ahead they saw, not ten rods distant, approaching them on their path a tall athletic Indian, armed with knife and tomahawk. They were greatly alarmed, but resolved to continue on the path, as no better alternative offered. He proved to be a young and friendly Indian, who, after asking them in his language, how far to next "wigwam," and receiving an answer in German, continued his course. The girls finally came in sight of their father's house and upon nearing it humble as it was, their hearts beat with joy, and Catharine observed to her young sister how beautifully the smoke ascended from the chimney of their home.

THE RETURN—UNEXPECTED MEETING.

Remaining a few days at home, they started again for Napoleon. Having got several miles into the woods on their way, they saw the track of a huge bear fresh upon the snow that had just fallen, and were filled with consternation, expecting every moment to meet bruin himself. They had not proceeded far before they saw, at a considerable distance, in advance of them, an object in motion resembling a human being, loaded down with clothes, put upon the person in every conceiv-

able shape. They soon ascertained that this object was no other than their sister Barbara on her way home from Providence. She told them that she was sick, and wanted the gentleman for whom she worked to bring her home. He refused, not wishing to be without her services. She determined to go home, sick or well, and accordingly bundled up her clothes and started on her journey of more than thirty miles. She also became bewildered and lost her way. After wandering around for a long time in a vain effort to find

the proper path, she came in sight of a house which, upon approaching, she found unoccupied. It was now night, and she concluded to spend it here in the house, but it looked so lonely that she was afraid to stay in it, but sat all night upon the porch, and to keep herself from freezing prudently put on all the clothing she had. The next day she was met by her sisters as above stated. They directed her to follow their tracks and she would reach home, which she did.

#### FEVER AND AGUE—DEATHS.

It was no strange thing then to be lost in the woods. Among other troubles incident to the early settlement of this township, was one from which no part of the west was entirely exempt to wit from the fever and ague. In the fall of 1831, two of Mr. Meister's sons died with this disease. There were no physicians to be had. These were the first deaths in the township.

To clear up their heavy timbered farms was a severe task for these German people. They were not accustomed to clearing and chopping. They were not used to living in the woods. But with a commendable spirit and extraordinary industry, they went to work; men and women, boys and girls, all engaged in the labor of preparing the ground for tillage. Some of the women did about as much of the chopping and rolling as the men.

These Germans showed an excellent judgment in selecting the lands they did. The farms are among the best if not the very best in the township. Old fathers Louber and Meister are still alive and living here upon their old farms. The other old men are gone. Old Mrs. Bender and Mrs. Kibler, are yet living, at an advanced age.

#### EATONBURG.

In the year 1835, or '36, John Reynolds, and his sons, Isaac, Adna and John, came into

the territory formerly in German township, from Vermont, and settled on the east bank of Bean Creek. The year following, his son Roswell Reynolds and family also came and located near his father. About the same time old Mr. Eaton came out from Seneca county, purchased a farm on the west bank of Bean creek, about a mile south of where Johnson's mill was subsequently erected, laid out a portion of it into town lots and called it Eatonburg. A few log houses were put up and a small store started by one Montgomery Hooper Fitch, a half-breed Indian, who sold the first goods that were ever sold in German township. One Hastings, was, we think, the next merchant.

Eatonburg was the first village in the township. There is but little of it now remaining and what does remain looks shabby enough to warrant one in believing that it was built at least a century before Noah's ark.

#### JOHNSON'S MILL.

About the year 1837, or 1838, George Ditto, John Lutes, Henry Lutes, and Benjamin Brown came into the township from the east. The Johnson's we believe, came in as early as 1836, and purchased the land upon which they a few years later, erected the famous Johnson's mill.

Jonathan and Dorsey Barnes settled in German about the year 1837, near the German Settlement. Jonathan soon learned the German language and was a very useful man as long as he lived.

#### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE TOWNSHIP—FIRST ELECTION.

The township, we believe, was first organized in the year A. D. 1840, while yet a part of Lucas county. The first election held in the township was held in the spring of that

year. It was held at the house of Mr. Jonathan Barnes. At this election Samuel B. Darby, Esq. was elected Clerk of the township and also one of the Justices. The other Justice, if we mistake not, was Nathan Borton. Mr. Darby was "sworn in" by "long Billy Jones," Clerk of Clinton township. Mr. Darby's commission as Justice is dated May 3d, A. D. 1840, and is signed by Wilson Shannon, Governor of the State.

#### PLACE OF HOLDING ELECTIONS—POSTOFFICE ESTABLISHED AT ELMIRA.

Previous to 1840, the settlers were compelled to go all the way to York Center to vote, or else not vote at all. Through the efforts of Mr. Darby a Postoffice was established in the month of May, 1839, of which Mr. D. was appointed Postmaster. The office was named Elmira, and eleven years later, was removed to the village of Burlington, where it is still called Elmira Postoffice, notwithstanding the name of the village.

Albert S. Fleet, Hugh Fairfield and Anthony Moine, Peter Gull and several others settled in the township about the year 1840. James F. Rogers came in sometime in the year 1842. Jacob G. Wildin, the most active and useful man of his time, in the township, came about the year 1839 or 1840. Jonathan Rogers, father of James F., came into the township, we believe, with his son.

#### FIRST TAVERNS—THE LANDLORDS.

Michael Gish was the first landlord in the township. He kept in Eatonburg. James Smith was the first, Jonathan Rogers second in the village of Burlington. They kept tavern in a building still standing in the village of Burlington.

As late as 1842 and for some years thereafter the early settlers were compelled to encounter many difficulties, not the least of which was the want of any thing worthy of

the name of roads. The ague was very prevalent and malignant. Markets and mills were distant. For want of fields in which to put them, it took much time to hunt their cows and oxen, the woods being almost boundless, and the ground often covered with water; this was a drawback, which we of more favored times, can hardly comprehend. Comparatively little progress was made in clearing their lands. They had but a small amount of produce, and it was worth the half of what they did have to get it to mill or to market.

Men and women wore wooden shoes, and the men wore buckskin breeches. For days and weeks together many of them had no other food than "water gruel"—i. e. corn meal and water. Corn, coffee and "hominny" were esteemed dainties. Some of them used wooden knives and forks, with a huge log, leveled on the top for a table; their bed-ticks were filled with leaves. Their bedsteads were often constructed out of poles, with bass-wood bark for cords. These were primitive times.

In 1834 flour was worth \$15 per barrel, and corn and potatoes about a dollar a bushel. In 1842, when about the first produce was raised in the township for market, wheat was worth only from forty to fifty cents a bushel.

It was almost impossible for the settlers to get money. Times were for them extremely hard.

#### THE FIRST SCHOOL—FIRST MEETING.

The first school taught in the township was taught by Mr. S. B. Darby, in the winter of 1839-40. The first English meeting held in the township was held in the house of old Mr. John Reynolds; Henry Lutes officiated in conducting the exercises. Mr. Lutes and his brother John were both local preachers in the M. E. Church. Joel Smith was also a local preacher of the same denomination, and these three all came into what was afterwards German township, at about the same time and were the first English preachers in the township. John Bowser was also an early preacher. He belonged to the United Brethren Society, and is said to have been a most devout and excellent man.

FIRST BLACKSMITH-SHOP—FIRST SHOEMAKER—  
FIRST SAW MILL.

The first blacksmith in the township was John Reed, set to work by S. B. Darby. The first shoemaker was Henry Roth. The first grist and saw mill was put up about 1844 by George and William Johnson, two Englishmen, who came into the township several years before. These men were remarkable for powerful constitutions and extraordinary industry. Their mills were of immense utility to the people for miles and miles around. These mills paid, and the Johnsons were soon rich men.

FIRST MARRIAGE.

The first marriage celebrated in the township was that of Mr. Ransom Reynolds to Miss Perlona Crandall. They were the youngest couple ever married in the township. They were married by Nathan Borton, a Justice of the Peace.

FIRST ASHERY—A STORE.

About the year 1846, Jacob G. Wildin, of whom we have before spoken, built an Ashery in what is now called Burlington, and carried on the business extensively, employing many men to assist. At the same time he erected a log building for a store-room and brought on a good supply of goods, such as the new settlers needed. This store and ashery were just what the people needed, and Mr. Wildin was just the active, liberal, public-spirited man required. He sold the settlers what they needed and took pay in work, ashes, deer-skins, and anything else they had to sell. He owned land and "run" a blacksmith shop, by means of hired help. The men he sometimes had to work for him were so numerous as to resemble a little army. Mr. Wildin married Miss Anne Bender, the lady of whom I have heretofore spo-

ken; she still resides in Burlington. He died some twelve years since.

HOUSE BURNED—CHILD PERISHED IN THE  
FLAMES.

Soon after Mr. W. started his blacksmith shop, he employed one Samuel Lemon to work for him. Lemon and his family lived in a small cabin some fifteen rods distant from his shop. His wife one day noticed that the roof of the house was on fire from sparks blown upon it from burning logs in the vicinity. She became alarmed and ran for her husband, but unfortunately left her little infant child just outside but near the door. Upon returning the infant was enveloped in flames and could not be rescued. It was entirely consumed, save its little bones, which were black and charred. The agony of the bereaved mother, as she beheld her innocent babe burning to death in the fierce flames, was horribly excruciating. But to save it was impossible.

KILLED BY A FALLING TREE.

Another accident by which a human life was lost, occurred some time before this sad occurrence. A man by the name of Joseph Borton, went into the woods to cut down timber and, by some mishap, a tree fell upon and killed him.

SCARCITY OF WATER—THE REMEDY—STRANGE  
PHENOMENA—GAS WELLS—EXPLOSION AND  
ACCIDENT.

A short time after Mr. Wildin got his ashery in operation, he experienced much inconvenience, in the after part of the summer, from an insufficient supply of water. To remedy this difficulty he resolved to dig a deep well near it. He accordingly procured the assistance of a number of men, and the digging commenced. After digging some

thirty or forty feet and boring some fifty feet more, the chief digger, F. Burwell, discovered, as he thought, strong symptoms of what they called the "damps." Previous to coming out of the well, on a certain evening, a lighted lamp was handed down to Mr. B. There was immediately a blaze enkindled when the lamp reached the bottom of the well, but Burwell blew out the lamp and put out the flame. The next morning he wisely declined entering it again until a lighted lamp was first let down. Mr. Wildin remarked that they would now have some fun, and at once ordered the lamp to be brought, which was let down, in the presence of a number of persons, all eager to participate in the coming sport. No sooner did the lamp reach the bottom of the well than the gas there accumulated, ignited, forming a beautiful blue blaze, which slowly and gracefully,

and in spiral form, ascended toward the top of the well. Mrs. Wildin and the other ladies, who were present, apprehending some danger, escaped before the flame had made much upward progress. The men, however, seemed to have no idea of danger, and remained standing about the well, some holding the windlass, and all being intensely engrossed in beholding and admiring the strange phenomena. Suddenly there was a terrific explosion and a report as loud as that of heavy cannon. One of the men, a Mr. Church, was thrown upon the roof of the ashery. Mr. Wildin was thrown several rods, his clothes badly torn, and himself so badly injured, that he never entirely recovered—  
**for more than a month he was virtually blind**

All the men, we believe, except one, were more or less injured. Mrs. Wildin, though she had reached the steps of her house, some six rods distant from the well, was, nevertheless, thrown upon the ground with such suddenness and violence as to render her for a short time, unconscious. The report was heard at the distance of ten miles, and the concussion of the earth was so great as to be felt for more than two miles around. It is a remarkable fact that in many of the holes bored since, for fountains, in the vicinity of this well, large quantities of this gas has been found to be present.

Some years since, in the village of Burlington, Mr. James Smith bored a hole for a fountain, from which immense quantities of gas were emitted. A pipe was so constructed as to extend a considerable distance above



the surface of the earth. The gas was ignited and burned vigorously and constantly, forming, I am told, an extended flame of nearly fifty feet.

Some three years ago, George Miller, residing about two miles from Burlington, bored a hole for a fountain. After getting down pretty deep, an explosion took place, throwing the auger and rods out of the hole, and to a considerable height in the air. In a short time thereafter, all the fountains for a mile around, ceased to flow. The neighbors tried to induce Mr. Miller to close up the opening, but he declined. Suddenly one night the gas was found to be ignited and sending up a magnificent and furious flame of nearly a hundred feet in height. This was doubtless the work of some public-spirited "incendiary." But the desired result was achieved. Mr. Miller's buildings were greatly endangered and he was glad to fill up the "gas fountain." We are informed that the gas was expelled from this hole with tremendous force; so much so that several wagon loads of earth were thrown out with the gas. Some considerable time after it was closed the neighboring fountains began again to flow as before. This instance strongly confirms we submit, the theory that gas is largely, if not exclusively, instrumental in causing the water in our fountains to flow. Mr. James F. Rogers, one of our oldest and best citizens, informs me that some years ago he and lady, saw, some two miles west of Archbald, one of these gas wells piped up, ignited, and a large kettle full of water suspended over it, boiling at a rapid rate.

OF THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE TOWNSHIP, I shall speak but briefly. The population is mostly German and French. The Germans being in the majority. There are now in

the township three villages, six churches, eighteen school houses, eight dry goods stores, one drug store, one hard-ware store, two grist mills, five saw mills, one shingle mill, four or five cane mills, one brewery, about a dozen saloons, half a dozen preachers, one doctor, one lawyer, and of shoemakers and such like, good fellows, numbers too tedious to mention. In addition to all these and without wishing to disparage others our township claims to have the finest women and the prettiest girls in the county.

THE TOWNSHIP, AS IT NOW IS, was formed, we believe, about the year A. D., 1850. The land is rich and productive. The inhabitants are, in the main, prudent and industrious farmers. Many of the early settlers are still living here, and are mostly wealthy. In many places, where swamp water was used by the first inhabitants, we now find beautiful running fountains of pure and wholesome water. The township abounds with excellent orchards. Fine houses and capacious barns are found upon almost every farm.

But we have now written enough and must stop. There are doubtless some mistakes in some of the dates given in this sketch, and there may be some other errors, but our information is from responsible persons and we think that what we have written is substantially correct.