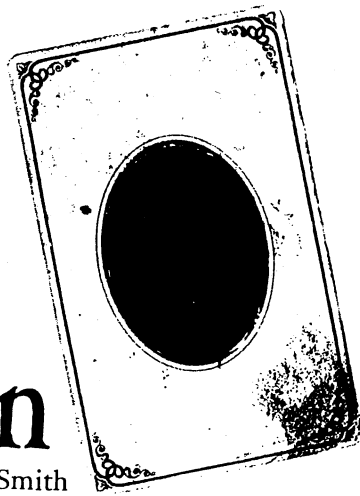


Avon

by Jack Smith



The city of Avon is located in northeast Lorain County near Lake Erie.

By the Treaty of Fort Industry in 1805, the Indians gave the Americans territory on the west side of the Cuyahoga River which included the site of Avon. However, it was too dangerous to attempt permanent occupation of this land until the power of the Indians and the British was smashed in the Lake Erie region. This was accomplished by the defeat of Tecumseh at Tippecanoe in 1811 and by the victory of Oliver Hazard Perry on Lake Erie in 1813. The long struggle came to an end with the triumph of the British in Europe during 1814.

Avon received its first permanent American settlers during 1814 from Montgomery County, New York, led by Wilber Cahoon. The township was administered by Dover Township and was part of Cuyahoga County. In 1818, Township Number 7 was organized and named Troy Township. In 1824, Lorain County was created, and the name of Troy Township was changed to Avon Township.

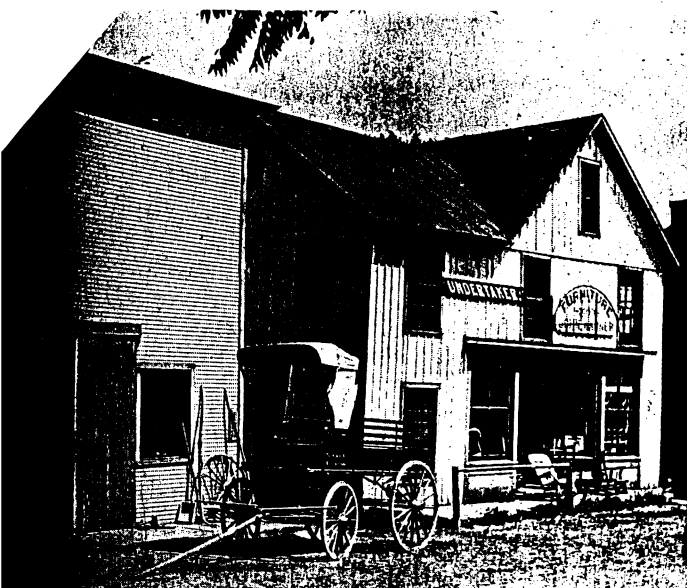
Religion played an important part in the lives of the pioneers and several Protestant congregations were organized soon after Avon was settled. In 1833 the Schwartz, Miller and Faber families arrived in Avon from Bavaria and a Roman Catholic congregation was established. Sawmills and a grist mill were built to process raw materials produced by the settlers. These early factories were powered by water from French Creek, but as the forest was destroyed the flow became irregular and the mills could not operate.

The American economy had bottomed in the mid 1840's, and a wave of excitement began to grip the nation. It was the destiny of the United States to expand from the Atlantic to the Pacific. "Remember the Alamo" and "Fifty-four forty or fight" were the slogans of those years. It was an exciting time, with the discovery of gold in California and the battle over the dusting of Kansas.

Little is known about how Avon responded to the enthusiastic spirit of the times. There was evidently a

Interior of Charlie Wagner's blacksmith shop — 1872





*Charlie Wagner's blacksmith shop and
John Wagner's Furniture Store on Detroit Road*

new burst of enterprise. In the 1850's a steam sawmill and a steam flour mill were built to replace the obsolete water mills. Other ventures were also attempted. At least one home in Avon was a station on the underground railroad which moved escaping slaves to Canada.

The crash of 1873 and the following depression caused hard times for the Avon mills. The rapid growth in railway transportation following the Civil War and the development of efficient, large-scale industrial facilities in urban centers forced the Avon mills out of business. Avon became a quiet community of well-kept farms.

The migration of industry from rural communities was accompanied by a migration of people to the cities. An interesting view of this era is found in the writings of a former Lorain Countian, Sherwood Anderson. Harrison Williams, who was born in Avon Township in 1873, was part of the migration. Williams abandoned an unsuccessful bicycle manufacturing business in Lorain in 1903. He went to New York City and took a job with a carpet sweeper company. By the time he was 56, in 1929, Williams had accumulated a fortune estimated at one half billion dollars in public utilities.

An electric interurban trolley line was built through Avon Township in 1898 by Tom. L. Johnson, who also founded the present U. S. Steel plant in Lorain. The interurban and the resort community along the Lake Erie shore were a familiar part of the quiet rural life in Avon at the turn of the century.

A new boom began in the middle of the 1890's; and with the Spanish-American War, the United States joined the savage struggle for colonies and world trade. Perhaps the excitement of the European arms race found a pale reflection in Avon Township politics. In 1911, the residents of the northern portion of the township voted to form the incorporated village of Avon Lake. Then possession of the Nickel Plate Railroad was granted to Avon Lake by a

court decision. The remaining portion of Avon Township was incorporated as the village in 1917.

After the frenzy of World War I, the boom peaked in 1920; but there was no end to dreamy plans for the development of Cleveland's western suburbs. Sidewalks were laid and a right-of-way acquired for the creation of a four lane boulevard on Hilliard Road in Westlake almost to the Avon border. This speculative fever made itself felt in Avon; but the tide had turned. The birth rate began to decline in the 1920's; the automobile revolution was sweeping the country, and the only thing to hit Avon in this decade was the tornado of 1924.

The crash came in 1929. Among the victims were the noted Cleveland real estate developers, the Van Sweringen brothers, the creators of the Shaker Rapid and the Terminal Tower. The bubble had burst, and Avon farmers were locked into a grinding struggle to pay their taxes and save their land. Some citizens of Avon lost their jobs as the Great Depression deepened, and many of today's golden agers remember those hard times.

The electric interurban was forced to close in 1938 and new highway construction was concentrated on the east side of Cleveland. Avon's relative transportation capability was reduced. The interurban rails were disposed of, the car barn turned into a motel, and some of the right-of-way made available for automobile use. Today, in 1974, with the price of gasoline over fifty cents a gallon, we might wish that the interurban was still here.

Photographer's workshop above blacksmith shop





Women's suffrage meeting

World War II marked the end of the depression, but general farming continued to decline in Avon. At the same time, greenhouse farming began to increase in importance. More and more citizens of Avon were commuting to jobs in the cities. Progressive leadership in the neighboring community of Avon Lake brought industrial growth north of the Nickel Plate railroad tracks. Many Avonites, whose ancestors had farmed for generations, left the land to take factory jobs in Avon Lake.

At the end of World War II, there was widespread concern that the country would fall back into a depression; but it was time for another boom. Avon entered the 1950's with a bang. A city water system was begun, and Northgate became Avon's first experience with a large housing development. By 1955, some Avonites had had enough of the new prosperity. Strangely, some of the most vigorous opponents of further growth were new residents of Avon. They explained that they did not want Avon's rural image spoiled. A major salt mining company wanted to begin a large underground operation in Avon. It was turned down.

However, there were good reasons for the people of Avon to be wary of development. In 1955, the developer of Northgate abandoned the sewage treatment plant which served the subdivision. Avon was

forced to operate the plant to protect the health and safety of its citizens. The Northgate sewage treatment plant also brought Avon into direct confrontation with the State of Ohio Water Pollution Control Board, which issued its first discharge permit to Avon in July, 1955.

The new prosperity was coming at Avon from all directions. The State had decided to build Interstate 90 through the middle of Avon from west to east. Avon was to be blessed with two interchanges. In the early 1960's, there was a long wrangle with the State over the relocation of State Route 83. Some citizens feared that the only thing to be relocated would be the SR 83-I-90 interchange, and that the rest of the new SR 83 would never be built. Avon had lived for years with the dogleg intersection of Center Road and State Route 254. The State's proposal threatened to saddle Avon with a super dogleg of indefinite duration at Center Road and I-90. As could be expected, the State had its way.

A new era of good feelings is perhaps beginning in Avon. Nationally, the boom is reaching its hectic climax, and the sound and fury may soon begin to subside. The Avon Festival of Flowers, held for the first time in 1974, has been highlighted by an enthusiastic spirit of total community cooperation. Avon welcomes the future.



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