

## PIONEER SETTLERS OF AVON FOUNDED COMMUNITY IN 1814

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By Norma Higgins

A tall, stalwart man squinted weather-lined blue eyes westward, and with an unconscious pull at the reins, the heavy wagon came to a stop on a shadowed ridge. The rushing of water gave an illusion of coolness in the hot autumn afternoon, and there was silence as a tired little group waited.

Wilbur Cahoon pushed his hat back off his head a little and rubbed a dust-crusted hand across a moist brow. He looked at Priscilla, his wife. The deep shadows of the trees looked tempting and cool. And they were tired.

Priscilla was expecting their eighth child, and the road had been long and hard since the family had started from their home in Salisbury, N. Y. They had traveled from the east in a wagon drawn by oxen, passing through Buffalo, which was still smoking from the fires of British enemies.

Thus in September, 1814, the first settlers came to Avon. Accompanying Cahoon and his family were Nicholas Young and son, William; Lewis Austin and family, Ephraim Keyes and family; and two brothers, Spink and Reuben Cooper, with their wives. The cavalcade consisted of five horses, four yoke of oxen and five cows. There were many who followed in the footsteps of Wilbur Cahoon, Nicholas Young and Lewis Austin, but as in any history, those who were first are remembered in memories until they have become almost legend.

In the summer of 1815, three brothers arrived in Avon. They were Abraham, Oliver and Lodowick Moon, who settled further west. Another brother, Amos, arrived shortly after the first three, and the original Moon homestead on Detroit Rd. still is occupied by Mrs. Flora Moon. Col. Abraham Moon purchased 300 acres of land, planted an orchard of 500 trees, erected a double log house, and became vitally interested in the civic organizations of the village.

On the 27th of October, 1818, the area set off from Dover was organized into a separate township and named Troy by the commissioners of Cuyahoga county. At this date, the river, from the point where it passed into Sheffield north to the lake, was the boundary line between Huron and Cuyahoga counties.

History is really the story of people, highlighting their ambitions, their sorrows and their joys. Taking one family, the Cahoons, as an example, we would be able to follow the development of Avon from 1814 to the present day. It would be impossible to encompass the other prominent families in a brief history, but they were nonetheless important in the village's progress from 1814 to 1954, a total of 140 years of history.

First Child Born

The last child of Wilbur Cahoon, Leonard, was born Dec. 1, 1814, and was the first white child born in the village. When Wilbur decided to settle on the ridge, where now Detroit and Stoney Ridge Roads run, he first built a log house. Soon after, he built a frame house, and while there is still some question, it seems perfectly logical that the present site of the "Cahoon House" is the location of the third house to be built by him. Homes were built and rebuilt without too much concern since lumber was plentiful, families were large, and help was always available.

That Wilbur Cahoon was a far-sighted individual is proven by the fact that although he lived but 12 years in the village, his influence has been felt through the ensuing years. His wife lived until 1857.

Most of the families had traveled west because of oppression of their religion, a desire for more land, or simply the spirit of adventure, and no one can accuse them of being stodgy and backward. The risks confronting them did not prevent them from pushing ever westward, and the hard courage and full-bodied stature of these personalities are an excellent example of the pioneer spirit.

All of the Cahoons married, and Leonard, the last born, married Mary Titus, a teacher in the Avon Schools. Their daughter, Susan Cahoon, the story goes, was married with all the luxury the age provided. Pulled the nuptials in a carriage drawn by the best man and uchers in all their bridal finery, Susan and Charles Warden was married in the Baptist Church, which was the first church organized in the village. The Wardens later moved into a so-called "modern" house on Centennial Ave., now occupied by Mrs. Mabel Semon.

Susan Warden, later Susan W. Jameson after her second marriage, was considered an influential person in the village. She personified good living. As Miss Gough, a resident of Avon, says, "She set a good table, loved to eat herself, and was a mighty popular woman."

Miss Gough, looking back over the years, recalled, "I can see Aunt Susan as though it were yesterday, swishing into church in her brown watered silk dress". Susan Jameson at this time must have been in her later years, but evidently was active until the time of her death.

#### Saw Mill Erected

Avon's first saw mill was erected on French Creek in the fall of 1815 by Wilbur Cahoon. He also erected a grist mill, and the waters of French Creek were utilized to propel the crude machinery of the mills.

Another saw mill was built on the same stream, north of Detroit Rd., by Jameson and Hemingway in the year 1824. The remains of the mill are still standing, and the beams are hand-hewn, nailed with hand-made square-headed nails brought overland.

The "French Creek Factory", which was commonly known as a Cheese factory, was built by Wilbur and Joseph B. Cahoon in 1875 opposite where the present home of Mr. and Mrs. Roy Cahoon, the last descendants bearing the famous name, now live.

In 1850, John Benham came to Avon, bringing with him the know-how to erect and successfully operate a carriage factory. Benham evidently bought land from the original Cahoon estate, since Hayes St. and Centennial deeds carry the notification that they are originally of Benham's territory.

It is difficult to believe when crossing over the bridge at French Creek that once this was the location of a thriving business area. Of course, old buildings have been torn down and new ones put up, but the creek itself has reverted to a small stream where brush and trees have covered evidence of the past. Where Dr. C. H. Forthofer's Animal Hospital now stands was the location of Benham's carriage factory.

EARLY AVON BUILT CHURCHES, SCHOOLS  
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By Norma Higgins

That the pioneers of Avon were a godly people, as well as people who enjoyed life to the fullest, is shown by the early formation of the Avon Baptist Church in 1817. Before the formal building took place, religious meetings were held in the homes of Nicholas Young and Wilbur Cahoon.

The first ordained minister to settle in Avon was Rev. John Tuttle. In 1826 a large block meeting house was built by the members of this church. In it, meetings were held by all denominations. It burned ten years later and the present church was built in 1839, and is 30 by 40 feet in size.

In 1820, six years after the first road was made, seven men and nine women gathered to consider ways and means to establish and support a Methodist Episcopal Church. A log school house built in 1818 at the Center (Rt. 76 and Detroit Road) was used for Sunday School and religious services previous to the building of the block meeting house.

Built in 1834

In 1834 the first M. E. Church was built on the site of the present building on Detroit Road.

The land was bought from Wilbur Cahoon at the price of \$30. This church was 26x30 and cost \$500.

The following paragraph was taken from a yellowed clipping belonging to Mrs. Roy Cahoon, describing the part women played in these early days.

"An old book of interest is the record of the Avon Female Benevolent Society, beginning in the year 1839. This record was in possession of the late Arthur Burdette family for over 90 years. His mother, Elizabeth Hurst Burdette, was the first secretary.

"The first meeting was recorded thus: 'The Society met in the Methodist Chapel, listened to an appropriate address from Elder Mather after which the Constitution was read and eleven members added to the society. Made a present to Elder Mather of \$2 and two collars.'"

On Jan. 8, 1910, the church and all its contents were burned, the barn and parsonage badly damaged. Miss Gough on Julian Street has in her possession a piece of the cracked bell that once called the faithful to worship on Sunday morning. Everyone in town turned out to help save the building, but, of course, there was little they could do. The cornerstone of the present church was laid one year later on Jan. 8, 1911.

Arrive from Germany

The growth in east Avon became recognizable with the coming of several families who were natives of Bavaria, Germany. The first Catholic parish definitely established in Lorain county was here in Avon in 1833. It was organized in the log cabin of John Schwartz by an Irishman, Rev. Peter McLaughlin.

Holy Trinity Church at the s.w. corner of Detroit and Jaycox Roads was built in 1843.

As growth increased in the area, the church became too small, and the stone structure that is now present was completed in 1862. The congregation grew so rapidly that in 1841, it was divided and the French Creek parish established. Thus came into existence St. Mary's Church on Stoney Ridge Road.

#### First School Built

With churches, naturally came schools. The first school house was a log building at the Center, still known as Center Road and Detroit Rd. Larkin Williams was Avon's first teacher, and she had approximately 25 children in attendance. They were mostly from the families of Cahoon, Cooper, Williams and Steel. Sixty years later there were ten school houses (the famous red brick school house style) which with grounds and fixtures were valued at \$10,000.

Residents of the village remember being picked up with the "calf" wagon or the "kid" cart and being delivered to the school nearest their home. One of the schools vividly remembered in the minds of most of the fathers and mothers of today's children is the 4-room school that was erected on Julian Street. It has since been torn down and homes erected on the site.

Out of the memories of the older residents, come the entertainment and fun that every generation experiences. Sleighing parties that ended with oyster stew suppers (at 90 cents a pound) and dances that rocked the upstairs floor of "Whitchall" which was the social center for courtin' in those days.

"Whitchall" is now the grocery at the corner of Center and Detroit Roads. Box socials at the church, picnics, house raisin's, and even the daring antics of those who visited the old swimming pond on the Cahoon property, at the upper end of French Creek, were all part of the definite pattern followed throughout the Western Reserve Territory. They were dependent upon themselves, and evidently there was no lack of recreation facilities.

#### A Time Of Terror

In this time of uneasiness and fearfulness of attack, it is evident that when looking backward, everything was not quiet and serene as generally supposed. There was fear of Indian attacks and particularly during the War of 1812 there was fear that the British soldiers had landed at Huron. Men, women and children fled their homes in terror. Those who had left the lake section arrived at Ridgeville and found, to their horror, that it was deserted. They pressed on to Columbia. When they at last arrived at the outskirts of Columbia, they found it nearly abandoned. Fortunately, news arrived that the persons who landed at Huron were prisoners of war, and they returned to their homes.

However, they had learned their lesson and built a blockhouse south of Columbia. This was a fortress to which they were to flee in time of danger. There was just one drawback. The able-bodied men protected the garrison, while the old men, women and children were left to protect their homes, to cultivate the soil and receive the first assault of the enemy.

#### Tavern Built

There is a question as to whether or not John Steele was the first owner of

The Old Tavern, which was built on the banks of French Creek early in the history of Avon. As indicative of the times as the sturdy pioneer, the tavern was the local center for village activities. The information on the well-known landmark on Detroit Road, opposite Lorain Road, was taken from an old clipping owned by Mrs. Roy Cahoon. "Who the first taverner was, is unknown. Reuben Wilford was the last. A polished intellectual gentleman, father of Chas. T. Wilford, postmaster of Avon, took over the tavern in 1883."

At the right of the main entrance, is the old barroom. Back of this was a grocery store, introduced by Gersham Gillette years ago. For further convenience, a meat market was also built into the tavern by William H. Field. 'Among the later well known early settlers who gathered at the tavern were Spink and Reuben Cooper, John C. Steele, Reuben Chester, Waterman Sweet, Adam Miller, Gaston Young and Albin Stickney!'

#### Band Concert Offered

"Saturday night was concert night at the tavern. Twilight gently falling, the 'French Creek Band Boys' would ascend the main stairway leading to the second floor, through the upper hall to the porch door, curtained with a long shuttered blind, and out to the other porch, where they present delightful musical programs, under the leadership of Captain John Senze."

Gersham Gillette guided the destinies of the tavern through the middle years of the last century. According to the legend, Gillette was a lover of horses and near the tavern was a track, which developed some interesting events.

The Fourth of July was the day for the big races - people congregated from all over the country. The Moens, the Cahoons, the Youngs; the Williams, the Burrells and the Halsey Garfields, the Days and the Hoyts - they were all there. Gersham Gillette was French and wore velvet waistcoats, lined with gay colors. He never worked, was the perfect host - and a gambler. One morning the story goes he left the tavern with a string of horses, "and was never heard of again."

Thus runs the thread of romance and colorful frontier life, blending into the muted shades or respectability of pioneer family life. That there were hardships, undoubtedly, but laughter does not change through all the centuries of history, nor does the unquenchable spirit that dominated these pioneers. Thus, like these people who lived many years ago, we see the passing parade in the evidences of their lives.

## EARLY AVON DWELLINGS REMAIN

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By Norma Higgins

A revival of interest in old homes and landmarks has appeared in the past several years, and in many sections of the country, particularly in the east, these early examples of American architecture have been restored to their original beauty.

As does any pioneer village, Avon has a number of homes which were built and lived in since the founding of the village. There are too many to describe individually, but taking only a few as examples, it can be shown that the stability of culture of homes back east and beyond the oceans were built into the newly discovered and settled areas of the Western Reserve.

The Western Reserve Territory can best be identified structurally with the "farmhouse" clean-cut lines, of which an excellent example is the Sweet homestead on Detroit Rd.

Waterman Sweet came from Norway, Herkimer County, New York, to Avon in 1817. He settled on 300 acres of land, part of which faces Detroit Road, on the south side, and built his log house upon the site where the house now stands. As the legend goes, stage coaches drove past on their way to Sandusky and points west.

### House Built By Brother

The next house that the pioneer traveler would pass and that is also an example of Western Reserve architecture, is the house now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Cyril Kromser, 32295 Detroit Road, just a few doors west of the Sweet residence. The two homes were supposed to have been built by the two brothers of the Sweet family.

Probably for a good reason, most of the older homes have been built on the ridge facing south. Farther up Detroit Road a short way stands the "Hurst House," which the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Tones, have restored to its original beauty. It was built in 1843 and, while it was being constructed, the family lived meanwhile in a log house back of the present stone house which is Greek Revival in architecture. All the papers, bills, contracts and agreements which accompanied the building of the house a hundred years ago indicate a way of life. It was built by William Hurst, who was a tanner, operating a tannery after which Tannery Street is named in Elyria.

### Oven in Fireplace

A ten-foot fireplace, with the original bake oven is still located as it was in 1843. The contract concerning the building of the house stated that the stone was to be quarried in Berea and hauled by team and wagon. Payment of \$660 was to be made in three parts: 1st, Cash \$110.00; 2nd, cloth value \$350 at \$1.00 per yard; and 3rd, \$150 in stock (animals) and lastly \$50 in boots and shoes or varied as partners agreed. The men and teams were to be housed and boarded by the Hursts. Framed in the hall of "Stone Eagle Farm" as it is now called is a certificate from the Department of the Interior advising them that the "Hurst home possesses exceptional historical interest worthy of careful preservation for the benefit of future generations."

A record of its present appearance and condition has been placed in the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C.

Another of the homes in Avon that stands as a landmark, is the square, one story stone house with a quaint set-in front door, that is located on Center Road, south, that is owned by Mr. Fitch. Another, north on Detroit Road, is identical, even to the set-in doorway, is owned by a member of the Lewis family. This house also possesses a certification from Department of the Interior, advising of its historical value.

#### Avon Isle Park

Another of the landmarks in Avon for the past 50 years is Avon Isle Park. Having various owners, Julius Barbier is the present owner. A location where dances are held for the various organizations in the village, many people know the "Isle" as a pleasant place for picnics in years gone by.

"Whitchall" will ring a memory or two in the minds of many of the older residents. This is the name of the building at Center Road and Detroit Road, where is now located a grocery store. There has been a store there for many years, but the social life of the village used to center on Saturday night dances that were held upstairs. The scene of dancing, box socials, and in spite of the fact, even when the crowd got a little boisterous, someone would find themselves tumbling down the stairs, Avon younger crowds would gather as one resident put it "it was a good way to court a girl."

With the building of these large, almost pretentious homes in a newly cleared territory, came the many luxuries that heretofore had not been obtainable. Also in the wake of prosperous family life, came industrial pursuits that make Avon a progressive and apparently far-sighted village. Life in the rural area was a comfortable one. Schools were built, roads were being more adequately built, and it is felt that through the Civil War period, tho there were periods of want and wealth, as in any other period of history, that on the whole, residents accepted their bounty without too much question.

Probably until very recently, the farming community that Avon always has been primarily, has been highly satisfactory to the families, most of whom have lived here for generations.

#### Area's 'Golden Age'

This, time, in looking backward, seems almost to have been the "golden age" of this area. Wars took some of the men, economic changes burdened heavily at times, but it would be generally agreed that life rolled quietly along for almost 75 years without much change.

It is this changelessness that appeals in a way to the people who are being harassed by the pace of the modern day civilization. The quietly regulated progress that the village had become accustomed to seems to be even more accentuated by the swiftness that events seem to be taking place during the past few years.

There is one note that should be mentioned in connection with this period just discussed. Up to the year 1870, there is some written information, clippings

or pictures that individuals have in their possession, but after that date, there is very little information. When the older residents that are now 70 years and older travel a road we must all take sooner or later, there will be nothing left but the garbled and sometimes erroneous stories that will linger in the memories of those who last heard them. Thus the almost legendary history of Avon will disappear into the past without a trace of substantiation.

Perhaps some way could be arranged that these bits of information and objects of historical value could be gathered in one place as their value to individuals or families decrease. In this way, irreplaceable papers and other records would be saved for future generations. To those of you, to whom the history of Avon is an old, and perhaps, sometimes tiresome story, do not forget that there will always be those who come after who are vitally interested in the past. For these interested people still in the future, it would be of invaluable assistance to have access to information that you, and only you can give.



## TIME MARCHES ON IN HISTORIC AVON

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By Norma Higgins

Contrary to common opinion, histories of villages are not easy to write. It would seem that all one would have to do is list categorically the events, from the beginning in 1814 when Wilbur Cahoon settled in Avon, to the present, when families are moving into Avon so rapidly that, to some, it is bewildering.

Statistics are not interesting reading to most people. Age lends an intrinsic value to homes, families, and backgrounds only to those who appreciate them. Since the greatest changes in Avon have probably occurred during the last ten years, time probably seemed to stand still for the 50 years previous.

Farmers increased the value of the land by new methods and equipment. Work on the acres surrounding the village became easier with each passing year. There has been a steady prosperity that is evident to anyone looking at the village with appraising eyes.

### Let's Take A Trip

An interesting experiment for anyone living in Avon, whether born and raised here or having moved in last week, is to take a trip along the outlying roads that etch the village's 24 square miles.

Where acres of grapes stretched as far as the eye could see, one now sees small clusters of homes, bright with new paint and city children free in fenceless acres.

Starting with the town hall, which is typical of early American design, let's ride north on Colorado Road. It is also known as Conrad Road and Route No. 611. On the right is the mushrooming of "Northgate," the first large allotment of approximately 500 homes in one area. Where there was once brush and fields, are brick veneer homes, with the newest ideas in playgrounds and recreational areas.

Turning north on Moore Road, we head for the first boundary of Avon, the Nickel Plate Railroad. While crossing the tracks into Avon Lake, there is the thought of the separation in the early 1900's between the two villages, and the difference that is apparent today.

### Land Lies Idle

Acres of potential industrial land lie idle in Avon, while Avon Lake has incorporated large concerns into their municipality. Leaving industry behind, we go along Walker Road to Moore Road, and again turn south, returning over the tracks, and turning west on Chester Road. Here we see again the fields of the farms and the vineyards. Families living on Chester have tilled the ground for decades, and their families will continue after them.

All along the Nickel Plate Road, a strip 2500 feet deep has been designated as industrial land. When industry will locate there is an open question. The planning of water extensions, good roads, and a multitude of other considerations must be decided upon before industry could come to Avon.

Chester Road runs along the north end of the village all the way to the Cuyahoga line. Traveling south on Nagel, named for one of the old families of the village, the peaceful countryside offers much to the city dweller. Continue across Detroit Road, up as far as Schwartz Road, turning west. There we will find the small cluster of industries that Avon has.

### Greenhouse Territory

Turning north again on Center Road, or Route No. 76, between Avon and North Ridgeville, you notice large greenhouses. Here are grown quantities of flowers and vegetables. Greenhouses glittering in the afternoon sun, the precisely clipped lawns and well-kept homes give the viewer an impression of rightness and stability.

Turn off at Kinzel Road and drive west, along a new section of home building, until it branches into Stoney Ridge Road. Stoney Ridge is a combination of the old and the new. This is the section in which is deeply woven in the story of Avon.

Along the west side was the land that Cahoon planted and harvested. Here are where the early churches were built. This is the center of town; this is the post office, the country store. Here, for years, the musical strength of the French Creek furnished power for the mills of the village. Here is where one could sit on the front porch in the evening and hear music from the tavern. Here is where little girls wore to Sunday School their many starched petticoats, ironed by flat iron.

This is where parades pass on holidays. Here is where hardy pioneers turned their faces still further westward, and travelled along the cord road to settle western acres. Through the center, past the town hall, drove the stage coach. Here is where all the legendary figures in Avon's history have passed at one time or another.

### A Feeling Of Waiting

Some have gone away and returned, some left and were never heard of again. Perhaps what represents the people of Avon most is the feeling of waiting. Cahoon waited for his first crop of wheat, he waited for the fruit of his first harvest. Circuit riding ministers talked and sowed seeds of hope, and churches were raised. Children were born, and schools came into being.

While it seems at times to the newcomer to Avon that the village has been standing still for the last 100 years, this is a mistaken impression. These people welcome stability, and honor good character as a creed. They welcome honesty, and will respect those who show it.

Apprehension of newness is not detrimental, but the careful scrutiny of progress will benefit us all in the future. It was with this inherent characteristic that the first settlers were able to succeed when the future was the darkest, and the reason that we who have come after, have reaped so bountifully.