

Newark's History

No one really knows how many hundreds, or perhaps even thousands of years ago the spot where Newark is now located was first considered "home" by man. It is known that about 200 years ago, when the first settlers came in to the wilderness of the Licking Valley, they found a maze of strange earthworks, evidence of a great civilization that once had inhabited the area. These mysterious mounds were constructed by prehistoric men sometime after the last glacier receded, creating what is now a fertile valley ringed by picturesque hills. Two large groups of these mounds are preserved today in Moundbuilder's and Octagon State Memorials, where thousands of tourists come every year to look and wonder.

The first white man reported to have visited this part of Central Ohio was Christopher Gist, an explorer for the Virginia Company who viewed the area in 1751. In 1802, General William C. Schenck, G.W. Burnet and John Cummins decided that the confluence of the forks of the Licking River (then called the "Pataskala" by the Indians) appeared to be a good place for a settlement for hardy pioneers coming over the Alleghenies. They surveyed and platted the town, and called it Newark for their native community in New Jersey, which in turn had been named for Newark-on-Trent in England.

The first pioneer settlement within the present limits of Licking County consisted of 21 persons, comprising the families of John Ratliff and his uncle, Ellias Hughes. Known as Bowling Green, it was situated on the bank of Licking River near the mouth of Bowling Green Run, four miles east of the present Newark. Later, seeking higher ground, the pioneers moved westward to the confluence of the Licking River where they began building a homeland by clearing and cultivating the rich soil which was to provide the basis for their livelihood for many years.

In 1825, at a spot just outside Newark, now in Heath, construction of the Ohio Canal was begun. With Newark being the hub of the canal system between Lake Erie and the Ohio River, a great impetus was given to the growth of commerce. The canal provided an outlet for the produce of the county's farms, and, in years to come, for the varied products of industries which started and grew in this area.

The appearance of the first railroad in Newark in 1852, sparked the development of new industries, some of which still exist today. By 1880, Newark's population numbered more than 10,000. With its tax-supported school system, many fine churches, institutions and homes, the community had become a city by law and by stature. Through the years, Newark's growth has been steady and sound. The community has developed characteristics and qualities that provide good living in a good community. The attraction of new industry and businesses to the area in recent years have made Newark and Licking County one of the fastest growing areas in Ohio.

Licking County's History

Farmers and hunters settled in the rolling hills, forests and plains surrounding the city of Newark. In the early days of Licking County, most people raised their own vegetables and poultry. Since the countryside surrounding Newark was well suited to maintain stock, it was also common for Licking Countians to own dairy cows and beef steers. The first sort of commerce that was conducted in Licking County was based on market goods such as eggs, butter, meat and poultry sold mainly to tavern keepers. When occasion called for it, county settlers would assemble for husking bees, where the abundance of local produce and game would be the centerpiece of the celebration. People tucked into meals of venison, mutton, pork, chicken, turkey, wheat and corn bread, pies of all kinds, molasses and honey. County residents not only knew how to feed themselves well, they also were able manufacturers of their own clothing, mostly woolen or linen wear.

Licking County hunters were kept busy for a time supplying skins for the production of hats. Raccoon, mink, muskrat and beaver pelts were used to make hats in those early days. A healthy industry grew up around the production of hats that eventually waned when the Ohio Canal brought more cheaply produced hats from distant New York.

In Madison Township, just outside the city of Newark, there was a large tract of land that was curved with a dense growth of hazel, crab-apple and plum trees. This area was a popular hunting ground for Licking Countians. In the mid-1800's, this land was thought to be the largest rabbit warren in the state. The rabbits, and many squirrels, pheasants, quail and opossums were attracted by the year round presence of plums and other fruits on the ground under the trees.

County farmers became very prosperous because of the natural richness of the land. A writer in the late 1800's described their circumstances in this way: "We see them daily swarming into town with their stores, returning home with groceries and goods of all descriptions which they are abundantly able to purchase from the sale of their farm products...It follows that the farmer is essentially lord of the soil, and that agriculture is the most lucrative, honorable and independent employment in which mankind can engage." The agricultural community is still an important part of Licking County's economy.



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