



THE HISTORICAL TIMES

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The history of *your* house

Tools provided to research the 'genealogy' of your home

By **CYNTHIA CUNNINGHAM CORT**

Granville as a community is justly proud of its many older homes. In the case of a few of the oldest, a great deal is known. Some are on the National Register of Historic Places and have plaques telling us who built them. But these are the exceptions. Most of us who live in

older homes know little if anything about the people who built them and lived in them, but in many cases the resources exist to answer these questions.

Exploring your home's history opens an interesting door into the history of our part of the United States. Some of the questions you may be looking for answers to include: When was the house built? Who was the architect? The builder? What did the house look like originally? Who was the original owner? The original occupants? How does the house fit in to the history of the neighborhood?

In this article I will give pointers on how to find



The Cort home at 1632 Newark-Granville Road was believed to have been built around 1900. Research into its history found otherwise.

— *Photo by Cynthia Cort*

some answers to these questions. I do not address subjects such as structure, style, or materials, which are additional routes to information on dating a house.

I discovered that the three-part process of finding out about the people who have lived in a house is interesting and full of challenges. The main steps include:

- Gathering information about the deeds pertaining to the property, its definition, and the names of previous owners.
- Searching all published materials about those names, the neighborhood, or specific property you are interested in.
- Searching local and state archives for unpublished materials about those people and places.

STEP 1: Gather information about the deeds pertaining to the property, its definition, and the names of previous owners.



Deed books in the Licking County Recorder of Deeds office in Newark.

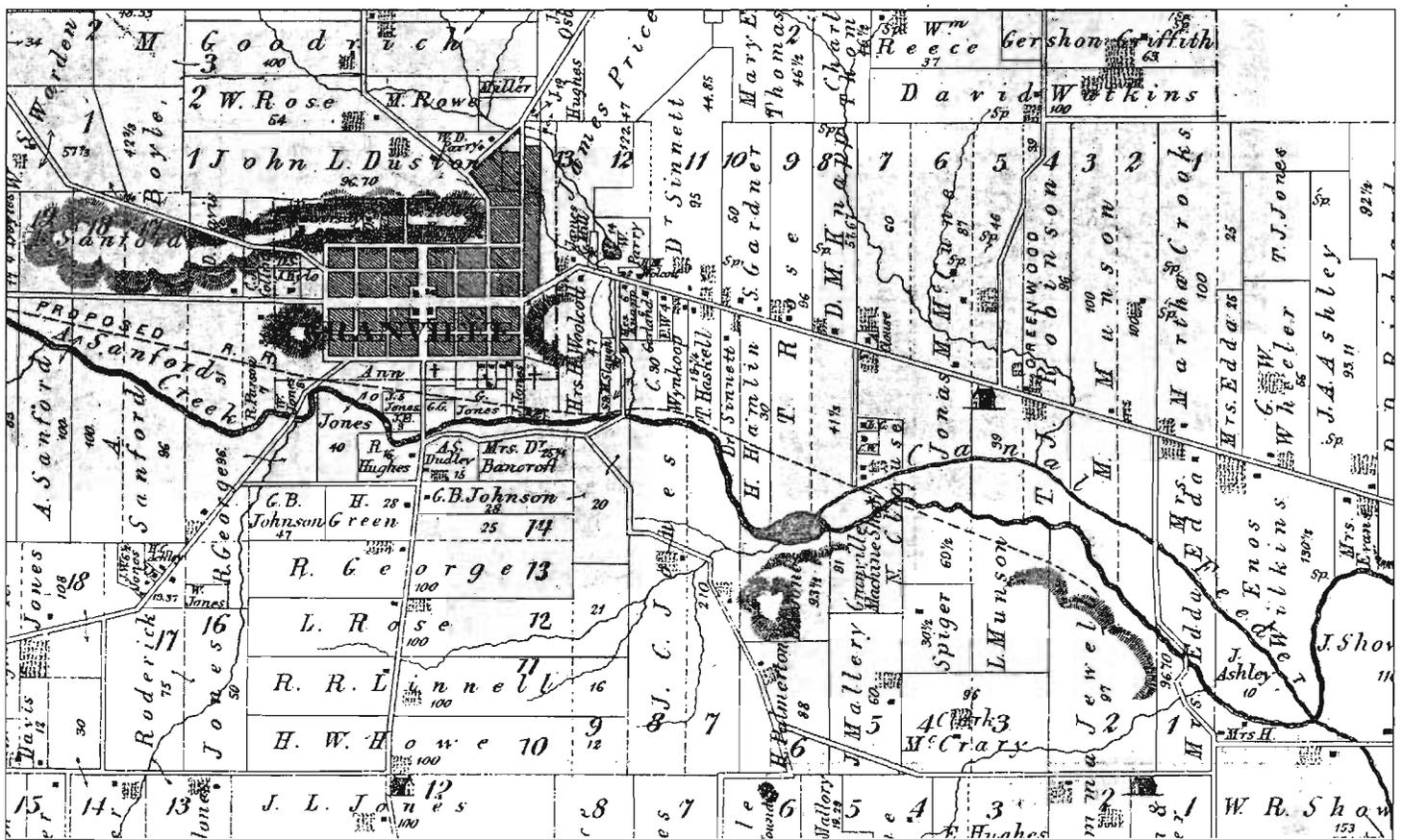
—Photo by Cynthia Cort

My husband and I bought a house on Newark-Granville Road in 1992. We were told at the time that it was built at the turn of the century, i.e., about 1900. That's what the tax records showed, but no one really seemed to know. Occasionally a workman would come and comment on things like the foundation and confirm that it was a type that was common then, but we still could not pin down an actual year. I decided to use the deed records in the Licking County Recorder's office to find out who had owned the land and perhaps who had built the house.

The Recorder's office, on the third floor of the Licking County Administration Building, at 20 S. Second St. in Newark, houses the official copies of deeds and mortgage records since the county was founded, in 1808. Records from before 1808 are in the courthouse in Lancaster in Fairfield County. The recorder's office is working to get all the deeds they

have into a searchable online database (<http://www.lcounty.com/recordings/>) but at the moment it only goes back to about 1970. Look up your own deed first. It will tell you the exact legal description of the property, whom you bought it from, and possibly what you paid for it. Sometimes modern deeds will also refer to older transactions [...being the same parcel of land conveyed by X to Y by deed dated August 3, 1954 and recorded in Vol. 352, page 195...].

You should read carefully the legal description on your deed to become familiar with the language. This allows you to compare your parcel of land with that described on earlier deeds to see if parts were sold off or added on by other purchases over the years. In towns the land is usually described as a lot number in a block or subdivision, and refers to a town plat map also on file in the recorder's office. In unincorporated areas the land is usually described using the Range/Sec-



Old property maps often provide names of owners and neighbors. Nineteenth-century maps often show the owner's name written across each piece of land. *L.G. Everts Atlas of Licking County, 1875*

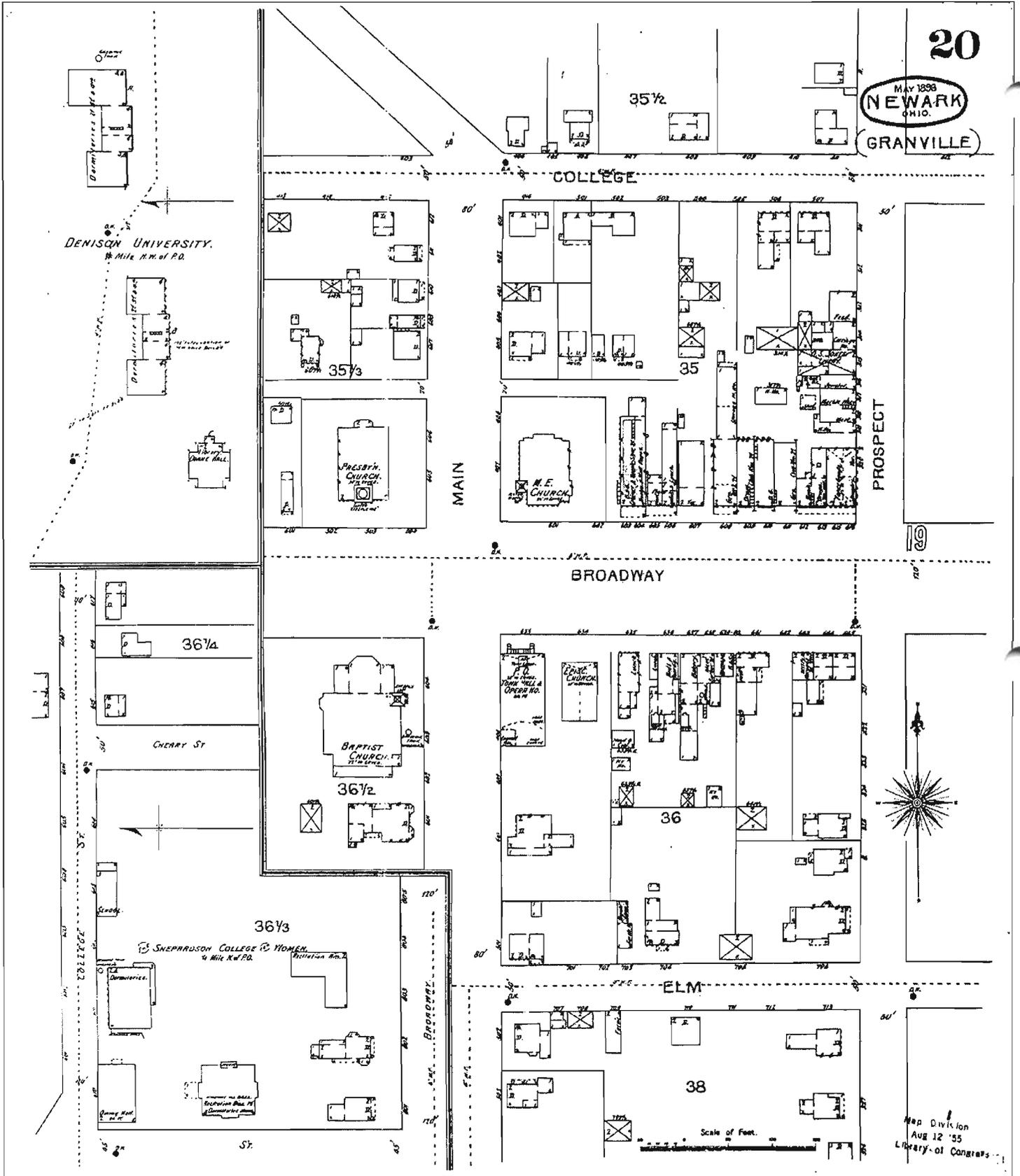
tion and Township numbers of the Public Land Survey System, a federal system for mapping and dividing land, and within that by landmarks and surveyors' measurements. (For more information describing the township and range system of the PLSS go to http://www.nationalatlas.gov/articles/boundaries/a_pls.html.) My lot is described as "Commencing in the center of the Newark and Granville Road...X feet north and west of the intersection at the center of the Newark and Granville Road and Township Road No. 125 [Jones Road]."

It is also useful to look at all the old maps you can find to get names of owners and neighbors. Nineteenth-century maps often show the owner's name written across each piece of land. Sometimes structures or the location of an orchard or a spring are shown. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps (published between the 1880s and the 1920s) are wonderful for urban areas because they were issued periodically. They show existing structures at a given time. They also show what buildings are made of because their specific purpose was for fire insurance companies to

know what they were insuring. They are available online for the state of Ohio through the public libraries from the [Ohiolink Digital Media Center](http://dmc.ohiolink.edu/), <http://dmc.ohiolink.edu/>.

Make a list of all the names, dates, book and page numbers you find. If your deed lists only the immediately previous owners, look up their purchase deed and record what you find there. When you are working with deeds earlier than the database makes available, you need to go to the index books for grantee (buyer) to find when a buyer bought a parcel of land and the book and page reference to get the next earlier name. Sometimes there are gaps when an owner sold a property but does not appear to have bought it. (This usually means an inheritance.) There are also indexes organized by grantor, and sometimes it is necessary to find a transaction in these volumes when you have a gap but have an earlier owner referenced in the deed itself to see who that person sold it to. Eventually you will have a list of all of the owners of a property.

Deeds are for land only and do not usually mention buildings. Thus, even with my list of previous owners



Sanborn Fire Insurance maps — this one showing a section of the Village of Granville in 1893 — depict structures, which many property maps do not include. They also show what buildings are made of, since their specific purpose was for fire insurance companies to know what they were insuring.

The Granville Historical Society website. Notice the Historical Index, Newsletter (*The Historical Times*) and Oral History buttons on the left of the screen.

I still did not know when my house was built. Sometimes you can tell if a lot has been improved by a jump in the sales price from one owner to the next. In one case in the village I found that someone bought four lots and, two years later, sold them separately for several times what he had paid. This told me that houses had probably been built on those lots during the two years that person owned them. In my case I focused on the couple who had owned my land during the period that my house was supposed to have been built, that is the "turn of the century." The land had been bought in 1887 by a woman named Julia Watkin and inherited in 1917 by Margaret and Gwendolyn Watkin. This is unusual because in most of these old deeds, men bought property and men and women together sold it. This is because wives had dower rights to keep the land even if their husbands decided to sell it, and often a deed will say at the bottom that the judge interviewed the wife separately and that she agreed to sell of her own free will.

STEP 2: Search all published materials about those

names, the neighborhood, or specific property you are interested in.

I next turned to all of the published sources available in the public library about the history of Licking County. These include history books, newspapers, cemetery listings, ... (see the list below). Also remember to look at public records like probate files and court cases. This is one of the ways this research is a lot like family genealogy, because you are searching through all possible records to find out the story of someone's life. Leave no stone unturned. Search oral histories to see if neighbors or residents of your house discuss the house or the neighborhood. This can be a slow process because you are always finding sources you didn't know about or which were not available before. Because you don't always understand the importance of a piece of information when you first find it, you may need to go back to sources to make sense of things. More information is being added to the World Wide Web all the time, and it is a good idea to repeat unsuccessful searches periodically in case some new website has been added. At the time I was going



Front porch. Young poplar trees growing

An album of photographs taken by the Watkin girls, former owners of the house at 1632 Centerville Road (Newark-Granville Road), included this photo showing what the house looked like during their occupancy.

through the history books and not finding much, the *Granville Times* was being indexed by Laura Evans under the auspices of the Granville Historical Society. This index is online at <http://www.granvillehistory.org/> under the tab for "Historical Index." The *Times* was published between 1880 and 1941 with some gaps, so it covered the period I was interested in. For those of you with older homes, there were newspapers published sporadically in Granville, but the Newark newspapers may be just as useful. In addition, your house may have been altered after 1880 and its history may be discussed in the *Granville Times* at that time, so it is worth a search even if you think it may be older. Because the index is on the web, you don't need to go to the Historical Society to see if there is anything pertinent to your search. However, once you have a list of

articles about the people you are seeking, you need to see the microfilm of the actual newspaper. This is available at the local public libraries as well as the Historical Society itself. There is also a copy at the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus. Its archive has a large collection of newspapers from all over the state, and you may need to go there anyway to find materials not available locally.

It was when I searched the *Granville Times* index that I struck gold. After the Civil War, newspapers became much more locally oriented, and in addition to national news, they would print one-line local items of interest/gossip in every edition. There is an entry for March 19, 1914 which says, "Mrs. Julia Watkin will build a house on her farm on Centerville Street," and on August 6, 1914 one reading "Mrs. Julia Watkin is



Mail delivery at 1632 Centerville Road (Newark-Granville Road) ca. 1915, from the Watkin photo album.

moving into her new home on Centerville Street which has recently been completed by Watkin Thomas the contractor.” [Centerville Street is the old name for Newark-Granville Road because when people settled here they thought it was the geographical center of Ohio.] Part of knowing the description of your property is knowing about name changes. Most of the streets in the Village had their names changed in July 1888. From the *Granville Times* I learned that Julia Watkin’s husband John was a physician from Wales who died in 1895, that Mrs. Watkin herself died in 1917 in my house, and that there were only two children, Gwendolyn and Margaret. Julia, Margaret and Gwendolyn all attended Denison University.

While this told me who had caused my house to be built and when, it also gave me more information to go back to the history books and look up things like physicians in Granville and Denison yearbooks. In addition I got the bonus of learning the contractor’s name was Watkin (no relation) Thomas. I looked up his name in the index and discovered the addresses of several other houses he built in the area. I also discovered information on him from a lecture on the history of the Granville Feeder Canal by Al Davison in 1999 and an accompanying article in the Historical Society’s

newsletter, *The Historical Times*, also indexed on the website. He was called Wat Thomas and lived on River Road in the 1950s. He owned the first car repair garage in Granville. Some of his tools, possibly the ones with which he built my house, are on exhibit in the Granville Historical Society basement.

STEP 3: Search local and state archives for unpublished materials about those people and places.

Archives are usually not indexed by location unless a building is particularly important. When you have your list of names and have done as much research as possible in published sources, you have the ammunition you need to ask archivists if they have information on the people you know about or the clubs or companies you know or think they belonged to. You might find out more about the building of your house, but more likely you will be fleshing out the picture you have of the people who were a part of its history. I discovered an album of photographs taken by the Watkin girls when the house was new. It does not show house details very well but it does show them standing in the side yard and the mailman delivering the mail. Datable photographs, especially aerial ones, of the town and county will sometimes include, or not include will sometimes in-

clude, or not include buildings you are interested in. Ask about diaries, letters, photographs, and objects belonging to the families.

I hope that these suggestions will lead you into finding out not only more about the history of your home, but also about the history of Granville and Licking County. Let us know what you learn so we can add your research to the Granville Historical Society Archive.

RESOURCES FOR RESEARCH ON HOUSE HISTORY

Handbooks/Manuals

Finding the History in Your Home: from Old House Web. <http://www.oldhouseweb.com/stories/Detailed/10370.shtml>

Green, Betsey, *Discovering the History of Your House and Your Neighborhood*. Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2002

Light, Sally, *House Histories: A Guide to Tracing the Genealogy of Your Home*. Spencertown, NY : Golden Hill Press, 1989

McNealy, Terry, *How To Find The Story Of An Old House; A Guide To Research Sources & Techniques In Bucks County*. Bucks County [PA] Historical Society, 1997

Researching the History of Your House, guide prepared by the Special Collections Department, Kansas City Public Library. <http://www.kclibrary.org/kchistory/researching-history-building>

House Structure

Frary, I.T., *Early Homes of Ohio*. New York: Dover Publications, 1970

McAlester, Virginia Savage Talkington, and A. Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*. New York: Knopf, 1984

The National Park Service's Preservation Briefs series. 1966- 44 subjects available at <http://www.oldhouseweb.com/how-to-advice/the-national-park-services-preservation-briefs.shtml>

Newcomb, Rexford, *Architecture of the Old Northwest Territory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950

Ware, Jane, *Building Ohio: A Traveler's Guide to*

Ohio's Rural Architecture. Wilmington, OH: Orange Frazer Press, 2002

Maps and Atlases

Mt. Vernon, IN.: Newark, OH: Windmill Publications; sponsored by Licking County Genealogical Society, 1992.

Everts, L. H. *Combination Atlas Map of Licking County, Ohio*. Philadelphia: Thos. Hunter, 1875. Includes "History of Licking County, Ohio," "History of the villages and townships of Licking County," and "Personal sketches of some of the prominent men and pioneers of Licking County."

Licking County Plat Directories: 1975 / 1984 / 1991 / 1993 / 1996 / 1999 / 2001 / 2002 Newark: Newark & Licking County Chamber of Commerce. Available in the Licking County Public Library in Newark.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Ohio **Microfilm**: The Licking County Public Library owns only the roll that includes Newark, Ohio. On the same roll are the following Ohio towns: New Boston, New Bremen, New Carlisle, New Concord, New Holland, New Lexington, New Lisbon, New London, New Paris, New Philadelphia, and New Richmond. The maps on the roll for Newark are for 1884, 1889, 1893, 1899, 1905, 1912 and 1920. In addition, the 1884, 1889 and 1893 maps include Granville, Ohio. **Online**: The Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps also are available online through OPLIN at <http://www.oplin.org> or through the NPLS web site. A valid Ohio public library card is required to use this database.

United States National Atlas explanation of the Public Land Survey System, www.nationalatlas.gov/articles/boundaries/a_plss.html, accessed 4/15/09

Published histories and contemporary sources

[Facsimile reprints of several of these publications are available from Higginson Book Co. 14 Derby Square P.O. Box 778, Salem, MA 01970. phone: 508-745-7170.]

Bushnell, Henry, *History of Granville, Ohio*. Columbus: Hahn & Adair, 1889.

Granville Sentinel. 1970-

Granville Times, 1880-1941. index available at <http://www.granvillehistory.org>

Hayes, Ellen, *Wild Turkeys and Tallow Candles*. Wellesley MA: Four Seas Co., 1920; reissued by the

Granville Historical Society, 2004.

Hill, N.N., *History of Licking County, Ohio, its Past and Present, Containing a Condensed, Comprehensive History of Ohio, Including an Outline History of the Northwest: Biographies and Histories of Pioneer Families, etc.* Newark: A.A. Graham & Co. 1881. Available online at Heritage Pursuit: <http://www.heritagepursuit.com/Licking/LickingIndex.htm>

Historic Homes of Granville Ohio, Compiled for the Granville Bicentennial 1805-2005. Web page on the Granville Village Web Site: www.granville.oh.us/PDF/Historic%20Home%20Inventory.pdf

Historical Times. Granville: The Granville Historical Society Oct. 1987- online at <http://www.granvillehistory.org>

Howe, Henry, *Historical Collections of Ohio.* 1888 [Licking County section of Volume II is available on the web at <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~henryhowesbook/licking.html>

Howe, Richard H., *A Look at the Pictorial Past of the Village of Granville Ohio.* Granville: Granville Historical Society, 1970

Huff, Thomas, *Pioneer Life in Licking County, Selected Works of Ben Jones (1865-1947).* Newark: The Advocate, 1997

Hunter, Robbins, *The Judge Rode a Sorrel Horse.* New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1950

Jones, William Henry, *The Welsh Hills, The Story of a Pioneer Community.* Raymond Evans, ed. Granville: No Date [ca. 2000]

King, Horace, Granville, *A National Register Village, A Walking Tour Guide.* Granville: Granville Historical Society, 1988

King, Horace, *Granville, Massachusetts to Ohio, A Story of the Migration and Settlement.* Granville: *The Granville Sentinel*, 1989

Licking Countian, 1979-1992

Licking County Death Records, 1874-1908, on the web at <http://www.kinfinder.com/deaths/LickCoDeaths.htm>

Licking County Historical Society Quarterly Newsletter. Summer 1991-

Lisska, Anthony J., et al eds. *Granville, Ohio (-) A Study in Continuity and Change.* 3 volumes. Granville: Granville Historical Society, 2004

Maple Grove Cemetery list on web at: <http://www.kinfinder.com/cemeteries/MapleGroveIntro.htm>

Moody, Minnie Hite, "I Remember, I Remember," series of historical articles in the *Newark Advocate*, 1964-1976

Newark Historic Houses Inventory. Ohio Historic Inventory, Ohio Historical Society 1985-1986, <http://www.ohiohistory.org/resource/histpres/toolbox/historicinventory.html>

Newark Advocate, 1838-

Old Colony Burying Ground Inscriptions, 1886. Typescript in Granville Historical Society, on the web at <http://www.kinfinder.com/cemeteries/OldColonyBuryingGroun.htm>

The Old Northwest Genealogical Quarterly. October 1905 Vol. VIII, No. 32. Special Issue on the "Granville Centennial." Columbus: Old Northwest Genealogical Society, 1905

Pancoast, Chalmers, *Our Home Town Memories.* Vol. 1, Frankfort, IN: G.Y. Fowler's Sons, Inc., 1958; Vol. 2. Newark, OH: Robert W. Kelley Publishing, 1959.

Phillips Cemetery List, on the web at <http://www.kinfinder.com/cemeteries/PhilippsCem.htm>

Program of the One Hundred Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration, Granville, Ohio September 30-October 2, 1955. Includes a list and map of historic houses and their then current owners.

Shepardson, Francis W., *Denison University 1831-1931.* Granville: Denison University, 1931

Smucker, Isaac; *Centennial History of Licking County, Ohio. Read at the Centennial Celebration of the Licking County Agricultural Society, July 4, 1876.* Newark: Clark & Underwood, 1876. Reissued by the Ohio Historical Society, Columbus: 2006

Utter, William T., *Granville: the Story of an Ohio Village.* Granville: Granville Historical Society, 1956.

White, Charles Browne. *Philosopher of Mount Parnassus.* Granville: Denison University Press, 1948

Locations

Denison University Archives, Doane Library. 400 West Loop Rd. Granville OH; Contact: Heather Lyle, <http://www.denison.edu/library/collections/archives.html>

Granville Historical Society, 115 E Broadway, P.O. Box 129 Granville OH; Phone (740) 587-3951. Archives open for research Thursday 10 a.m.-3 p.m. <http://www.granvillehistory.org>. *Granville Times* Index, *The Historical Times* and Granville Oral History excerpts on the web.



Granville, Ohio, in the Seventies

Old photos of communities are often useful in determining the age of a house. This postcard photo of the Denison college hill during the 1870s shows a section of West Broadway (foreground) and Plum Street (starting at right), showing the houses that were built by that time.

Licking County Public Library, 101 W. Main Street, Newark, OH; Phone (740) 349-5510. Has Census indexes 1820-1880; Census microfilm 1820-1930 excluding 1890 and City Directories 1858 to present with gaps.

Licking County Genealogical Society. Located on the upper level of the Main Library, 101 W. Main Street, Newark, OH; Phone (740) 349-5510

Licking County Research Links
<http://www.npls.org/lcgs/research.htm>

Licking County Historical Society, 6 North 6th Street, Newark, OH 43055; Phone (740) 345-4898
<http://lchsohio.org>

Licking County Courthouse - Probate Court, 40 West Main Street, Newark, OH 43055; Phone: (740) 349-6137 Hours: 8:30 A.M. - 4:00 P.M. Monday-Friday. Inheritance tax records; also, birth, death, marriage records.

Licking County Auditor's Office, 20 S. Second St., Newark, OH 43055; Phone (740) 349-6026. Licking County real estate tax records may show when a house was built or when an addition was made to the house. Tax records for 9/97 to the present can also be viewed online at <http://www.lcounty.com/auditor/>

Licking County Recorder's Office, 20 S. Second St., Newark, OH 43055; Phone (740) 349-6060 FAX (740)

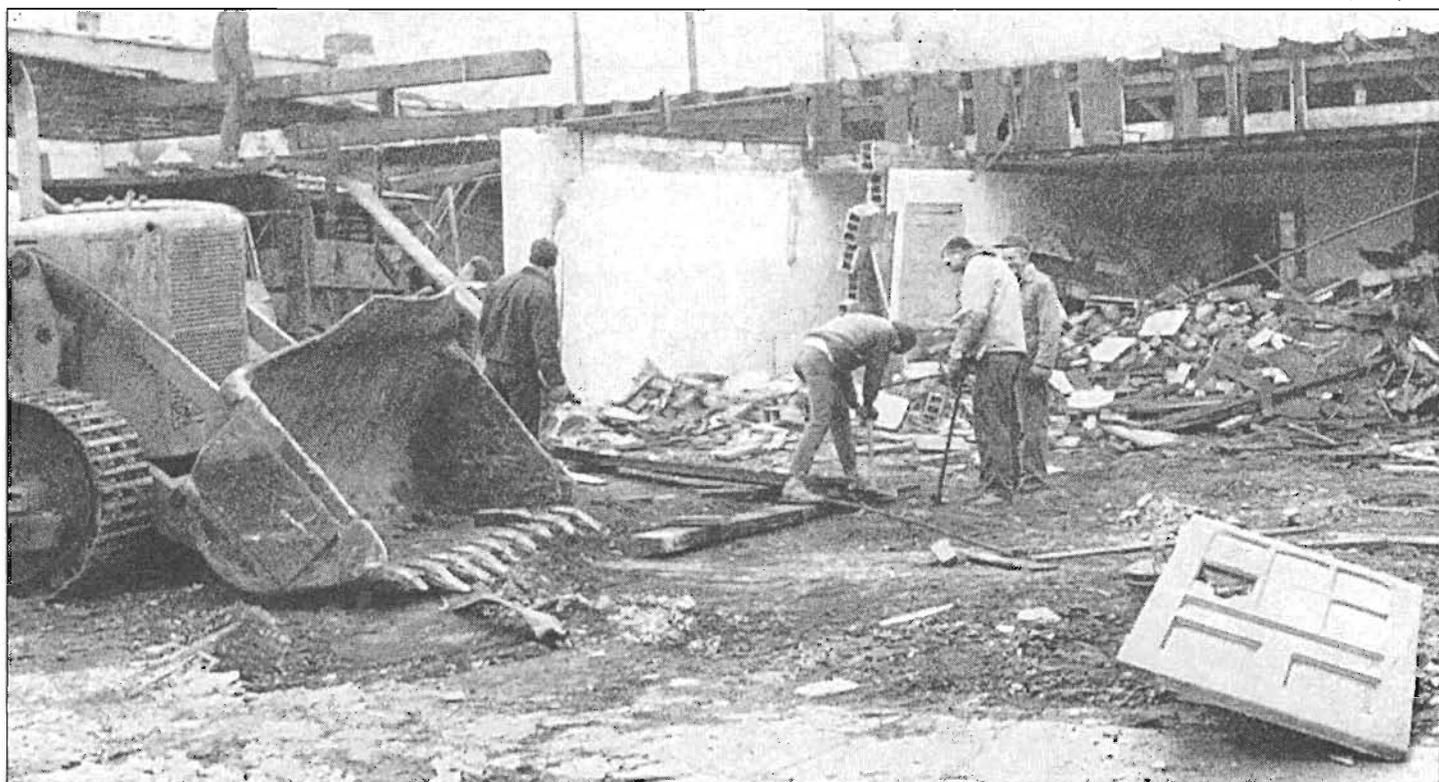
349-1415. Business Hours: 8:00 a. m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Land transactions are recorded at the county level in deed books. The Licking County Recorder's Office has some records dating back to 1808. Records filed after September 1997 are available online at <http://www.lcounty.com/recordings/>

National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C. Military Service Records available at <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/get-service-records.html>

Ohio Historical Society, 1982 Velma Ave; at I-71 & E. 17th Ave., Columbus OH. Archives/Library Phone: (614) 297-2439. <http://www.ohiohistory.org>

Ohio Historical Society. Ohio Historic Preservation Office 567 E. Hudson St., Columbus OH. Phone: (614) 298-2000 Web list of all the Ohio properties on the National Register of Historic Places. www.ohpo.org

The Works, Ohio Center for History, Art & Technology, 55 S. First St. P.O. Box 721, Newark, OH 43058; Phone: (740) 349-9277. The Works has an oral history collection of interviews relating to the history of Newark and its industries. <http://www.atthe-works.org>



In this Polaroid photo taken Dec. 31, 1971, workmen are pictured removing debris from the demolition of the Granville Volunteer Fire Department building on North Prospect Street, making way for the new structure that stands today.

Photo by Gloria Hoover, Granville, OH

Reader relates another aspect of Granville fire department history

In response to *The Historical Times* article last year on the Granville Fire Department, longtime Granville resident Gloria Hoover kindly sent a photograph that she took on Dec 31, 1971, with the following description: "Workmen removing debris from demolition of Granville Ohio Volunteer Fire Department; A new building is to be built on the site on North Prospect Street." Gloria remarked that this is a photograph "I took with my Polaroid camera."

In reminiscing about the former firehouse, Gloria wrote: "I recall vividly the old fire house and the villager's concerns about needing a new one. But no funding."

In addition, Gloria shared with us the origin of her multi-year columns that appeared in the *Granville Booster*.

"At the time I was writing a column for the *Granville Booster*, Clark Snyder approached me few years previously and offered five dollars per edition for a column promoting downtown Granville-human-interest material (Just my cup of tea!). I agreed to write it but refused payment; I told Clark that at the

time there was little I could do for community service as I had some heavy responsibilities, but I could write at my own schedule. So for almost six years I produced a column.

"I recall writing one column — that Aileen Dunkin, owner of a well-known gift shop, and founder of the Granville Fellowship — asked me to quote her in a column referring to the lack of funds for a new firehouse.

"She stated that everyone in the village should give \$1.00 toward a new firehouse. Her philosophy was that encouraging individuals to give \$1.00 — an easy sum — would create a stimulus and snowball momentum for the remainder of the funds."

The Historical Times editors thank Gloria for her continued interest in the history of our village and for providing such valuable historical information, so that the story of Granville will always lean towards completeness.

Those new to Granville might note that the site of Aileen Dunkin's establishment — with a marquee noting her shops in "Granville and Palm Beach" — is now the busy home of Whit's Frozen Custard.

THE OLD BOYS
OF THE
NINETIES
VS.
DENISON
NEW ATHLETIC PARK.

Bosler, Frank Withoft, Outcalt, Barker, Hutson, Struble and others will play.

TUESDAY, 3 P. M.

BENEFIT GAME.

The entire proceeds of this game will go to swell the Athletic Park Fund. Come and "root" for the old boys and help a good cause.



THE
HISTORICAL TIMES

Celebrating its 23rd year of publication by
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Museums operated by the
Granville Historical Society:

Granville Museum
115 E. Broadway
Old Academy Building,
corner West Elm Street and
East Main Street

Batter up!

The Denison University baseball club of the 1890s used its fame to help promote a fundraiser for a new ballpark in June 1900. The club, made up of Denison men but not an official college team, went undefeated in 1891 using equipment and uniforms players bought with their own money. This fundraiser was for the new park ultimately built along the west side of South Main Street where the Denison heating plant is now situated. By the way, the "old boys" won the game, 9-6.

For excerpts from the Granville Historical Society's 2001 oral history project, log on to its Web site at www.granvillehistory.org/