Ohio Family History Research

Class 1: Settlement and Migration

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Ohio holds a very important place in the history of the United States. It was the first territory to be officially settled after the American Colonies became the United States of America. As part of the Northwest Territory, it became the testing ground for the Ordinance of 1787. Some of the land in present day Ohio was used to honor promises to the many men who volunteered as soldiers during the American Revolution. However, Ohio's history has connections as far back as the fur traders of the 17th and 18th centuries. Likewise, Ohio played a role in the welcoming of the African Americans who fled the southern states in the 20th century in what is known as the Great Migration.

Fur Trading

Fur traders from Nouvelle France (Quebec) knew there was an abundance of animals with valuable fur in the Ohio Valley. They had already built quite a system within the *Pays des Illinois* (Illinois Country), which was to the west of the Ohio Valley, and they had begun migrating east.

By 1700 there is proof that fur traders from the southern American Colonies had made an appearance in the Ohio Valley. The French had complained of fur traders from the Carolinas at this time. And a short time later, Pennsylvania's traders began to venture into the Ohio Valley, ultimately entering into a treaty with the Iroquois in 1732. Under this treaty the Pennsylvania traders were guaranteed protection by the Iroquois and as such their traders began to swarm into the area.

Tip: Ohio was in fact part of a much bigger region—the Ohio Valley.

Subsequent treaties between the colony of Pennsylvania and the Iroquois were signed. Each gave Pennsylvania more benefits. In addition to the protection they already had for trading in the Ohio region, traders were given additional lands to trap in. Through their association with the Iroquois, they ultimately had positive relationships with the Delaware, Seneca, Shawnee, and Miami. Finally, in 1748, Pennsylvania signed their most important treaty with the Native Americans—known as the Twightree Treaty of Lancaster—which gave them control of the fur trade in all of the Ohio Valley.

French and English

Meanwhile, the ongoing relations between the French and English within the area continued to deteriorate. The French continued to work their way east, and in one incident captured Pennsylvania traders. The English continue to push their way into the Ohio Valley to garner as much wealth as possible from the fur trapping. Eventually they built a trading post at Pickawillany—with permission of the local

![American Ancestors by New England Historic Genealogical Society]

Miami chief, Memeskia, who was also known as La Demoiselle or Old Briton. Present day Piqua, Ohio is near the location where the Pickawillany trading post once stood.

The governor of New France is displeased with La Demoiselle's willingness to allow the English into the area. He no longer sees value in working with this Miami chief and he orders the trading post destroyed and the killing of Memeskia (aka La Demoiselle).

The attack force was led by Charles Michel de Langlade, himself a member of the Métis of Canada, and a *coureur des bois* (an independent trader, often involved in fur trading). It originally included 272 Ottawa, though once they arrived in Detroit, 30 would desert, having heard there was a smallpox outbreak among the Miami. Once they reached the trading post, Langlade's force consisted of 240 Ottawa and at least one additional Frenchman (though some stories suggested there were more). To their credit, Langlade's men waited until the majority of the population had removed from the trading post to work in the fields before attacking. When it was all over many had been killed among the Miami as well as some of the English. As for Memeskia, he was killed, boiled and eaten in front of the Miami (a symbolic reunification of Memeskia into the French alliance). The trading post was burned, and Langlade and his men returned to Detroit with two English traders in tow and roughly £3,000 of trade goods.

Ohio Company

Meanwhile in Virginia, a group of men was formed in 1750 which was known as the Ohio Company (it included Lawrence and Augustine Washington—brothers of George Washington). Their intent was to acquire lands in the Ohio Valley and move settlers there. This didn't go as planned and instead they erected a fort and turned to fur trading. Not to be outdone, Pennsylvania suggested to the tribes they had treaties with that the Virginia men intended to steal their lands.

Despite this, the Ohio Company was able to enter into a treaty at Logstown with many of the tribes in the area in 1752. Fur trading continued for both the French and the English with each side trying to outwit and control the Ohio Valley. The French, in 1753, encroached on the lands overseen by Pennsylvania and began to build forts in Pennsylvania. Communication from Pennsylvania went to New York, which then informed Virginia to handle the situation. This was received by Robert Dinwiddie, lieutenant-governor of Virginia, who took action. He appointed Major George Washington to gather a small troop and move into Pennsylvania. Washington was specifically ordered to destroy the new French Fort at the forts of the Ohio, Fort Duquesne (what ultimately became Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania).

Washington never made it to Fort Duquesne. Instead, along the trail to Duquesne, Washington and his men came upon a group of French led by Coulon de Jumonville. A skirmish took place, with the French paying the price. France insisted that Jumonville had been murdered. This event is largely believed to be the spark that set off the French and Indian War.

French and Indian War

Begun in 1754 in North America, the British and the French took sides and were each supported by the various Native American tribes. Two years into this North American war, England declared war on France officially and this led to the Seven Years' War in Europe.

Those who have read James Fennimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* or seen the movie know that Cooper's characters were set in 1757 in the French and Indian War.

Once the English win, concessions are made by the French, including lands in Canada that will become Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Meanwhile in the colonies, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 results in the relinquishment of the Mississippi and Ohio valleys. In acknowledgement of their part, the British set aside the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains as hunting grounds for the tribes who helped the English. Likewise, the English forbid the American colonies from granting any lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. Of course, there are already some settlements of whites west of the mountains by this time.

American Revolution

In addition to the many acts and taxes that England has been handing down on the American colonies, the 1763 proclamation is just one more insult to those living in North America. As they try to recoup losses from the Seven Years' War and continue to build their military, England's imposing of the taxes and acts angers the colonists, who now feel safer with the lack of the French in the area.

Events such as the dumping of tea in Boston Harbor and battles at Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, and more predate the official signing of the Declaration of Independence—but make no mistake—war was on. Eventually the colonies reach out to the French, who assisted the underdogs, and finally Cornwallis surrenders at Saratoga, 19 October 1781.

It would not be until the signing of the Treaty of Paris, 3 September 1783, that American independence would be official, and the new fledgling country found itself with no money and promises to its soldiers.

Going West

Ohio emerged from what was originally known as the Northwest Territory. A number of schemes were suggested for the area along with names for the new sections, which would themselves become states later on.

The need for land was not just to pay the many soldiers who had volunteered during the Revolutionary War, but also in answer to economics and agricultural issues in the eastern states that would require people to migrate in order to make a living.

Ordinance of 1787

The new Congress, as part of the ratification process of the Constitution, had the states cede their trans-Appalachian claims. This was encouraged by the promise of the new government that the land would be sold, raising money for the operating of the government and thus delaying the inevitable—taxes.

The ceding of these lands did not happen overnight, but it prevented hostilities among the new states and gave Congress a way to raise much needed money as well as to offer bounty land to pay off the services of those who fought for Independence.

The Northwest Ordinance, enacted 13 July 1787, set out how the Northwest Territory—the northern portion of the ceded lands—would be governed. More importantly, it established the procedures for later territories to obtain statehood.

Additionally, the ordinance called for the division of the northern portion into not less than three nor more than five states. The original plan was to divide the land into an Eastern, Middle, and Western states. Eventually, though the land was divided into five states—Ohio (1803), Indiana (1816), Illinois (1818), Michigan (1837), Wisconsin (1848)—and the northeast section of Minnesota, which would become a state in 1858.

Getting to this new land would rely on some roads that had been created for military purposes as well as the use of waterways.

Ohio Territory

The birth of the Midwest was imminent. Some people saw great potential in this new land. Others were not so happy about the prospect of uprooting their established family and farm. So as soldiers were paid with bounty land in the untamed area, some felt it wasn't as great a deal as the government made it sound. They would have preferred monetary payments. This makes way for land speculators willing to purchase the bounty land certificates from these soldiers, as well as Rufus Putnum.

Rufus Putnum helped to populate a section of what would eventually become Ohio, and he figured out how to make money from it. As mentioned above, the Bounty Land warrants given to soldiers could be legally "assigned." The certificates were valued at $1.25 an acre. Rufus and his fellow investors would offer the soldiers pennies per acre. He also went to the United States government and offered to act as their agent if they would kindly group all his bounty land acreage together. In the end Rufus Putnum and his New Ohio Company would purchase some 7 million acres, which would end up in a premium location in Ohio, along the Ohio River.

Ohio is an interesting state as it has many acres that were reserved for one reason or another. It also seems to have drawn a mix of population that comes from most of the original thirteen colonies. A good portion

of Ohio was set aside for the bounty land warrants of those soldiers who did want to claim their own land. Some of it was set aside to honor bounty land grants made by the states of Connecticut and Virginia, when they thought they had title to those lands and the right to grant the land. Some of it was sold, and some, like that of the New Ohio Land Company, was sold by land speculators.

The sections of land set aside to honor different commitments as well as make money for the fledgling U.S. government in what ultimately became the state of Ohio made it look more like a puzzle than a state:

- The **Virginia Military District** contained over four million acres. Unlike the rest of Ohio, this section was surveyed using the metes and bounds system of Virginia rather than the Federal Rectangular System. This was originally set up to offset the state land bounties given by the state of Virginia to its Revolutionary War soldiers.

- The **Connecticut Western Reserve** was the result of Connecticut's bounty to its Revolutionary War soldiers. It was set up using five-mile townships instead of the one-mile townships found elsewhere. A portion of the original survey was set off as the **Fire Lands**, which was land given to those individuals who lived in the Connecticut towns that were burned during the War.

Map from Ohio Lands Book - Auditor of Ohio

- The **Seven Ranges** were the first public lands surveyed by the United States. Most of these early settlers had been living in Western Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland prior to the war. The first sale in October 1787 would result in 108.431 acres being sold in New York City. Much of this was purchased by land speculators. Individual settlers could not handle the cost as the government required that the sales be in 640-acre sections at $2.00 an acre.

- The **Donation Tract** was set up to help protect the settlers in the Ohio Land Company Purchase from Indian attacks. Any male who settled on the land for a certain amount of time was given clear title to that land.

- The **Symmes Purchase** was named after John Cleve Symmes. He was from New Jersey, which is where he sold most of the land. By 1850 one-third of all people born in New Jersey lived in Ohio on the Symmes Purchase.

- The **U.S. Military District** was established to honor claims from the Continental Soldiers. Not all of those getting land here were soldiers. Some of the land was acquired by land speculators and then resold. Settlers from all of the thirteen colonies would end up here.
- The **French Grant** was set aside for those 101 French settlers of Gallapolis who were swindled in 1791. Induced by William Duer of New York to come to America, only to discover that he and his company did not own any land. Eventually they purchased land from the Ohio Company for $1.25 an acre and named their town Gallapolis.
- The **Refugee Tract** was granted to Canadians, primarily from Nova Scotia, who abandoned their homes to come to the aide of the American colonies during the Revolutionary War. These individuals lost their homes from this action.
- The **Twelve Mile Square Reservation** was set up to give land to those French and English settlers who could prove they had been living on the land prior to 1 Jul 1796. These settlers had settled there at the time that Fort Miami stood. The Fort was under French occupation when built in 1680. Later, the English occupied it from 1785 to 1794. It was then held by the United States until the War of 1812, when the English capture it. It was recaptured and abandoned in 1813, when Fort Meigs was built nearby.
- The **Two Mile Square Reservation** was surveyed in 1807. Fort Stephenson was built there in 1812 at the beginning of the War of 1812.
- The **Michigan Survey** covers a section of land that was disputed over by Ohio and Michigan due to the wording in the Northwest Ordinance. It was finally settled in 1836. Ohio kept the land, including the harbor at Toledo. Michigan was granted what became known as its Upper Peninsula as compensation.

National Road

Begun after the War of 1812, the National Road was built using revenue raised by the sale of public domain land in Ohio. Congress passed an Act in 1803 that set aside 5% of the money made from the sale of this land to finance the building of the road. While surveying and clearing began in 1808, it would not be until 1815 that construction of the road would begin. It would not be completed until 1838. While the original specifications for the road were to go from Baltimore to St. Louis, as shown in Figure 5, the actual road ended in Vandalia.

In addition to making it easier for those wishing to travel west, the National Road did something more for the cities along its route. Those cities began to rival the eastern seaports as trading centers and cities of culture. As people traveled the National Road, they knew they could find hotels and theatres and goods mercantiles in the cities along the road. Baltimore became a prime seaport because it was at the head of the National Road.

It is not unusual to trace an ancestral line back and find that children were born in towns near the National Road and that the lineage goes back to a Mid Atlantic state two or three generations before. Also, it was not unusual for families that migrated to Ohio, to then migrate further westward as the new states were opening up, including Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and finally Minnesota.

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The Great Migration

Considered to have taken place in two separate migrations, the Great Migration of African Americans from the southern states to the north took place between 1910 and 1970.

- The First Migration occurred 1910-1940, with people settling in urban areas:
    - Northeast: New York City, Philadelphia, Washington D.C.
    - Midwest: Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland
    - West: Los Angeles
- The first migration brought 1.6 million from mostly rural areas of the south to northern industrial cities.
- Second Migration:
    - Began after the Great Depression
    - Occurred 1940-1970
    - Brought 5 million to the North and West
    - Many were townspeople with urban skills

Tip: The second migration is considered to be the formation of the Black urban working class

Push factors were the primarily responsible for the initial tide of migrants which included:

- Segregation
- Indentured servitude
- Convict leasing
- Increased spread of racist ideology
- Widespread lynchings

While some of these factors, like segregation and racist ideology could be found in other areas of the country, they were especially dangerous under the Jim Crow system.

After the Great Depression, and while the United States was involved in World War II, the need for wartime labor was especially felt in northern Ohio. There were lots of jobs for those African Americans willing to migrate.

Ohio would see a massive growth in African Americans between 1910 and 1920, with some cities seeing populations that would have been seen by the National Census as middle size cities (10,000-25,000 people). In 1920:

- Cleveland 34,451 African Americans
- Cincinnati: 30,079 African Americans

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- Columbus: 22,181 African Americans

Cleveland along saw an increase from 8,448 African Americans residing in the city in 1910, 1.5% of the population, to a 300% increase by 1920. This did not come without growing pains. Many of the African Americans who set their sights on Cleveland migrated between 1910 and 1930 as a result of Cleveland's industrial boom. Not without its discriminatory issues, many of the African Americans settled in the Cedar-Central neighborhood having come from either the Piedmont region of Virginia or the southern Appalachians.

Though certainly not perfect, those African Americans who settled in Ohio were free and away from the many situations intended to keep them under the thumb of their previous enslavers in the south.

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