The Saint Marys Story



1823 - 1973

Saint Marys, Ohio

www.andyniekamp.com

The Saint Marys Story

An historical narrative describing
the life and time of 150 years
since the founding of

Saint Marys, Ohio

1823 - 1973

By
FRANK B. SHUFFELTON

With
Subchapters of Special Subjects
By

K. C. GEIGER, EDITOR,

THE EVENING LEADER

Drawings By
RICHARD J. CROMER

This publication supported by a
grant from the City of Saint Marys to
commemorate its 150th Anniversary

Printed By
The Leader Printing Co. and Hunter Printing
Saint Marys, Ohio 45885

1973

www.andyniekamp.com

The Saint Marys Story

By

Frank B. Shuffelton

I. Three Men and a Dream
II. The Growing Frontier
III. The Canal Period
IV. Some Days are Good–Some Not
V. Oil Boom and Industry
VI. The Beautiful Years
VII. Depression and Recovery

Chapters of Special Events

By

Kathryn C. Geiger

www.andyniekamp.com

PREFACE

In presenting **The Saint Marys Story,** it has been the aim of the author to portray life, times, thinking, problems and plans of those who came to a wilderness and created the city as we know it today. It was felt essential to keep this work limited to the 150 year period, and at the same time to stay closely within the descriptions set down by writers of another day.

The history of Indian tribes and military expeditions are well recorded in many books. They had a certain effect on Saint Marys, but this work is limited to the people who made the community. Likewise, old courthouse recordings are not requoted here as they are still available in official files. They record facts, not feelings. This historical narrative seeks to emphasize the spirit rather than the letter of history. The goal is readability, interest and instruction.

The strength of a community lies in its people -- their visions, their actions, their achievements and the disappointments they suffered. Without doubt, there are scores of items, events and people who could have (and should have) been included. The limitations of space and time are with us all. The author can only beg forgiveness and tolerance.

It is appropriate at this time to extend appreciation to many sources. The writings of John J. Hauss as printed in **The Evening Leader** have been of great help. Henry Howe's **Historical Collections of Ohio,** the histories written by Murray and Simpkins, old county atlases and county records as well as Ohio State archieves have been researched. Much valuable material was obtained from a **History of the Maumee Valley** written in 1872 by H. S. Knapp. The style of writing is attributed to Prof. Walter Havighurst, an early tutor of the author at Miami University, who has put so much history into a beautiful narrative form.

A special great big thank you is due Mrs. Don Cook (Doris Krogman) who translated the scribbling to typewritten form, corrected spelling and punctuation and added critical comments.

To The Leader Printing Co. and Hunter Printing and Supply Co. whose fine cooperation is responsible for the final product, the Sesquicentennial Committee is deeply grateful.

Finally, the Sesquicentennial Committee would like to extend commendations and congratulations to Miss Kathryn C. Geiger, Editor of **The Evening Leader** and a member of this committee. Fifty years ago, Casey or K. C. was the cub reporter for this newspaper. She "minded the store" during the Great Centennial of 1923 while the rest of the office force were taking parts in that celebration. It is almost unbelievable that for a full one third of our existence that this remarkable person has recorded the births, marriages, deaths and "goings on" of Saint Marys. Her keen memory for details is matched by the wisdom of her editorials. She has guided her community with a firm and benevolent hand. Saint Marys owes her a great debt of gratitude.

Now it is time for other people of vision and action to lead our city on to its Bi-Centennial in 2023!

www.andyniekamp.com



Chapter I

Three Men and a Dream

The lead rider pulled his horse up short. A slight tug on the bridle turned his steed crossways of the narrow trail. His two companions stopped also and looked back over their shoulders where their leader was pointing.

"Yes, sir, men, we're doin' the right thing. When we get back from Greenville, that there will be the town of Saint Marys, Ohio, and we'll own it!"

The man in the brown linen suit looked thoughtfully. He saw only a few shanties, the deserted fort and stockade where only five years ago the generals Lewis Cass and Duncan McArthur had negotiated a peace treaty with the Indians.

Although that treaty had brought practically all of the northwest quarter of Ohio, much of Indiana and part of Michigan under the control of the whites, the whites had been slow to enter these new lands. They wanted to see first if the red men would really respect and honor their part of the bargain.

In 1818, at Saint Marys, the U. S. Government had bought millions of acres from the native tribes for less than one-tenth of a cent per acre. In 1820, the Congress, yielding to pressure for land expansion, agreed to sell these public lands for $1.25 per acre. For $100 a man could buy 80 acres of land!

The man turned his head forward and stated, "There's a lot of work to be done before the town of Saint Marys is a town. And tell me, Mr. Murray, where are all these people coming from and how can they make a living where there is nothing but wilderness. You've made it here for years by trading for the Indian's furs. Now they are gone — or going; but where are the people, Mr. Murray, where are the people?"

www.andyniekamp.com

Murray seemed not to hear. Instead it was the other rider who spoke up.

"Now Houston we've been over this a hundred times. Look at what John Manning has done at Piqua! When he came there, there was nothing. He started a mill, bought grain from the scattered farms and started shipping down the Miami. As more people came in, he laid out the town. I was looking for an opportunity to grow with, so I started my store there and done right well. But there are other places coming on that offer big chances to the man who's not afraid. But that country south of here is all 'old country'; this is the 'new country' and our town is the gate. "We're at the front door to ten thousand miles of America!"

Murray turned slightly in the saddle. Raising his right arm so that the fringing on his deerskin jacket shimmered in the slight breeze, he pointed southward.

"There are your people! Listen! Hear that ring of an axe against timber! That's John Armstrong clearing an 80, and you can't hear them from here, but there are others. And there will be more, many more.

John's right, Bill, we're at the front door to the next fifty years. This country's gonna grow and everything they buy will come through here, and everything they sell will come through here. And when they get that canal dug — whooee! But right now we gotta get these papers to Greenville. Court stuff's your field, John, so let's get going!"

It was a long hard day through a wilderness trail, a trail that had been opened first by General Mad Anthony Wayne in his march against the ferocious opposition of the Indian tribes. The Indians had seen their lands taken and occupied by the invading hoards of whites streaming over the mountains and down their beautiful Ohio.

Another trail led southward from this coming town of Saint Marys, a trail that had been beaten by ancient tribes. Long before this time peoples of the Miamis, Shawnees, Wyandottes, Delawares, Hurons and so many others had come to use it as a highway to the Kentucky hunting grounds and the salt licks of the blue grass country. Only fourteen miles long, this trail had connected the Saint Marys River with the Great Miami River at the place which had come to be known as Loramie's Store. So important was this as a trade route, that even in those earliest pioneer days, trading posts were established at both ends of the portage.

In 1745 a French-Indian trader was engaged at Loramie. However, he changed his allegiance from the French to the English. Angered at losing such a profitable post, a French army detachment and about 240 Indians descended on

www.andyniekamp.com

this little settlement. After burning the stockade and robbing all merchandise, the Indians boiled and ate its proprietor, "Old Brittain" as he had become known. The 24 English traders who were also there were placed in captivity and led back to the French city of Detroit. None made it or were ever heard from again.

In any case, the trading continued as new posts came into being.

After George Rogers Clark destroyed the Shawnee town at Piqua in 1782, the Indians retreated to Saint Marys where they were supplied by a trader whose name seems to be lost. However, the Shawnees had in captivity a 12 year old white boy, George Ash. Ash lived here as an Indian for almost two years before his tribe moved on down the Saint Marys river toward Fort Wayne. To George Ash, even though living as a red-man, must go the recognition of being the first white resident of what is now Saint Marys.

Certainly he was preferable to the next, for he was followed by the infamous renegade James Girty.

Girty, a Pennsylvanian, had been serving in the Virginia Militia at the outbreak of the Revoluntionary War. He and his brothers, Simon and George, along with the McKees deserted the American cause in 1778 and went over to the British side. It is open to historical question whether these desertions were for British gold, resentment of the treatment of the Seneca tribe by the American forces or for personal conflict with certain superior officers.

The Girtys had been captives of the Senecas for a number of years before their escape. They had witnessed the torture and slaying of their step-father, John Turner.

James and Simon Girty were leaders in many raids against the white settlers coming into Ohio. They enjoyed the Indian life and warfare. A scalp was a scalp, and the British would pay well in whisky and supplies. Of the two of these, James was probably the better only because Simon was worse.

More can be learned of this pair from other sources, but it was James Girty who engaged more in trade. He established a trading post in 1788 at the head-waters of the Saint Marys River near where the old Lutheran Cemetery is now located.

Several times he packed his stores to flee into Indian country. First, when General Harmer lead a United States Army against the tribes. However, Harmer's route went to the east and he was so badly defeated at Fort Wayne. Later General St. Clair came north from Cincinnati with another army. This one was wiped out at present Fort Recovery. In 1794, General Mad Anthony

www.andyniekamp.com

Wayne came through on his way to Victory at the Battle of Fallen Timbers. One of his supply posts was the fort he built at Saint Marys. This time Girty had fled, but he left behind a name that took many years to erase. This place was known as Girty's Town for years and was still widely called by that name as Charles Murray, William Houston and John McCorkle set out that August day for Greenville, Ohio to file their "law stuff" and create the new town of Saint Marys.

Leaving the clearing that had been cut out by the builders of the forts and stockades, the men entered the forest. Here their trail was easier to follow. The virgin oaks, hickorys, beeches, towering maples and spreading elms had cast much shade over the soft springy ground that the second growth, the vines and the brambles had not had such favorable conditions to crowd out the pathway. The deep ruts cut into the soil by the many army wagons bringing supplies from Fort Greenville through the woods to Fort Saint Marys and the later built Fort Barbee left a mark so deep and distinct that many years later a settler would point them out to his children as General Wayne's Trail.

From time to time, Murray would halt as he pointed out some place that had particular interest. Only a few miles had passed when he turned to his companions.

"Now right over there a short piece is the Big Swamp. That's where those canal men say they're gonna make a lake. Takes water to run a canal. There's over a hundred good flowing springs in there, so they say they can build a dam over a mile long from high ground to high ground. Then they'll go a mile or so west and build another dam. Between the two dams they'll store water to float the boats. Can you just see that now! A great big lake out there almost a whole mile square!"



www.andyniekamp.com

A few miles farther they stopped for a drink to water the horses at a clear flowing stream.

"Now this is called The Chickasaw," he remarked.

"Had a wagon load of stuff ambushed right here about ten years ago. But when them Indians found out it was for old Charlie Murray instead of the Army, they just beat it back into the woods. Never did find out who they were. The hostler was too scared and the redskins was too embarrassed to ever admit it. Always treated 'em fair and square, gave 'em good trade for furs and beeswax and another thing, I never sold 'em enough likker to get too drunk on. Drunk Indians is no good. First they holler an' laugh an'sing; then ker-pow they start fighten'. A drunk Indian ain't afraid of nothen'."

A little before noon, Houston pulled up short.

"Hey, Mr. Murray!" he called out.

"Here's some wagon tracks cutting right across ours. Where do they come from – or to?"

"Greenville Treaty Line. Runs from the Fort at Recovery right through here to the Old fort at Loramie, then goes off east someplace. Look at that red oak there. See that blaze about six feet up? That's the line – cut through here in 1796 right after the big signin' at Greenville. Those were wild and wooly days, believe you me."

"You mean that from here on we're in white man's country?" McCorkle cut in.

"Yep," stated the older man, "but it's all white man's country now–either side of that line."

"Anyway, I feel better now. I've heard so much about the red devils, it kinda scares me. But you lived with 'em Murray, were you at Greene Ville then?"

"Lordy no! I was at my place all that summer–Saint Marys–but everybody called it Girty's town then. Busy as a bee in a berry patch! Those Indians all wanted to look their best when they met 'Kitcho Sheniagana' which is what they called Wayne. That's Shawnee for 'who sleeps with his eyes open'. I sold 'em brass buttons, six for a beaver, ten for a deer skin and twelve for a bear skin! Had to send clean to Dayton for more! Sold 'em copper rings, bracelets and bells, some silver stuff to the chiefs and beads by the boxes! And their squaws, did they ever buy me out of yard goods! Two of them got into a fight over my red and white wool shirt. I just whacked it in two and sold them each a half! Yep, I had 'em all that year, from the Cuyahogas of northeast Ohio to the Ojebwas and Ottowas in Michigan–good summer! Those that didn't come for the signin', came for the Pow Wow–Indians love to Pow-Wow!"

www.andyniekamp.com



Building a log cabin on the frontier. A cabin was built in one day.
From collections of Ohio Historical Society

After crossing the Treaty Line, the forest was broken by the scattered clearing of a settler. Long before they reached each homestead, the silence of the wilderness was broken by the barking of dogs who sensed that some stranger was approaching. By the time the riders broke into the open, the farmer and his wife were usually standing in the cabin doorway with loaded muskets, the ox team having been quickly unhitched from the plow was tied up close at hand. One couldn't be sure in those days who might be passing by. However, as the trio approached and were recognized as friendly, an invitation to "come and sit a spell" was universally extended.

With each plot of newly broken ground, the pathway beneath them became a little wider and more smoothly worn. Some of the marshy spots had had brush cut and laid like a pattern of cloth to keep the wagons from sinking hub deep in the mire.

Soon they came to a trail leading off to the side. Murray swung his horse into the lightly trodden way. Calling over his shoulder he told the other two, "Fellow named Silas Atchison laid out a town just a ways over here. I'd like to see how he's doin' with his place. Calls it Jacksonville, I hear, but I just can't see much future. No transportation, no river, no road to speak of either to Greenville–which isn't much–or to Piqua over on the river."

Murray's prediction proved to be quite true. Later renamed Versailles, the town languished until the "Big Four" railroad provided the transportation needed. Sixty years later the village had grown to about a thousand population, and after a hundred and fifty years had become one of the nation's largest poultry and egg centers with the produce going out over a network of fine highways to the cities of America.

www.andyniekamp.com

They paused at the edge of Jacksonville only long enough to view the few scattered cabins on the hillside, the lone "general store" and the newly erected Baptist Church.

"Transportation," Murray seemed to be talking to himself, "transportation you gotta have. No use raisin' a thousand bushels of wheat if you gotta carry it on your back two bushels at a time all the way to Dayton or Cincinnati to sell it. You know, men, that's what makes Saint Marys such a good spot for us. We got the transportation now, and we'll even be better when the canal is built. Imagine what it will be like, a man made river fifty feet wide and straight as an arrow for miles, no rapids, no fallen trees, no zig zagging around and an evenflow of water all the time. Even going up stream, they say that there's hardly any difference. We've had the Saint Marys River and it's been good travel much of the time, but it goes for miles to get such a short distance and you can't depend on an even flow. It goes from flood to stale."

As to the time and volume of commerce on the Saint Marys River at this early date, Howe's stated:

Paul D. Butler, on the 21st of August, 1809 gives notice in the (Dayton) Repertory of his intention to navigate on the Miami River. . . . He and Henry Desbrow soon after proceeded to build two keel boats.

"They were built during the winter of 1809-10 in the street in front of the courthouse, and when finished were moved on rollers up Main St. to the river and launched. They ascended the Miami to the Loramie portage. . . . One of the boats was taken out of the river and drawn across to the Saint Marys. For some time this boat made regular trips on the Maumee and the other on the Miami. The portage between them being about twelve miles across. A freight line which did a good business was thus established between Dayton and Lake Erie.

"In 1819 a second line of keel boats was established for carrying grain and produce up the Miami. At Loramie it was transferred after a portage between the two rivers, to other boats hence down to the Rapids of the Maumee (todays Grand Rapids, Ohio). There it was loaded aboard lake vessels. At the Rapids there was a large warehouse for storage of cargoes."

This commerce was greatly encouraged in 1818 when "Walk-in-the-Water" became the first steamboat to ply the waters of Lake Erie carrying the products of the new west to the markets of the east. It was indeed as Charles Murray had declared "the transportation we got to have."

The summer sun was sinking slowly as the three horsemen splashed across Greenville Creek and up the gentle rise of ground toward the village. Greenville itself was a far cry from the hustling, bustling place it had been in the days of General Wayne.

www.andyniekamp.com

Remnants of the old stockade enclosing the parade ground were still in evidence, as were the old block houses standing like lone sentinels against the passage of time. Broadway, as it's name implied, was a wide dusty cut in the prairie sod. Along its course lay a string of log cabins centering around several stores, shops and the solitary inn. The inn, itself, as had several of the other business houses, been recently refaced with wide cut boards, their laps had been sealed with narrow batons to keep out the wintry blasts and to protect the much chinking of the log structure from being washed out in seasonal rains. The stable lying at the rear of the inn was of newer construction being erected entirely of cut or hewn timbers and sided with oak planks. They reined up at the hitching rack along side the stable, tethered their mounts and eased their saddles to the ground.

Houston volunteered, "I'll take care of the horses. I used to know the livery man here. You fellows see about lodging. Anything's alright with me."

"That's fine," Murray spoke. "McCorkle, you get us a room for tonight and a good hearty meal. If you don't mind, I'm gonna slip over to the store yonder and talk a little tradin'. See you soon." With that he strode off.

McCorkle turned to Houston. "Do you think it's alright to get a room tonight? I don't care about the loft. It costs a little more, but we won't have everybody stirring around all night."

With an affirmation from his companion, he entered the inn. Although the sun hadn't set yet, a couple of candles flickered from atop the long common table.

A short plump woman of middle age looked up from the fireplace where she was gently turning potatoes so they would bake on the other side close to the glowing coals.



www.andyniekamp.com

"Supper won't be for an hour," she announced. "Stayin' all night?"

"Yes. There are three of us. We'd like a room, please, if you have one."

"Got just one room. Rents to four people. Have to git fifty cents the way things are now. Makes no difference if there's one, two, three or four. All new oats straw in clean tickin'. Lofts good too. It's clean and sleep ya fer six and a quarter cents a head. No bugs – I run a clean place. Supper an' breakfast 'll cost ya thirty-seven cents."

"I'm sure that will be fine with us. We'll take the room. You want me to sign the register for the three of us?"

"Don't keep no register, Mister, too many of the folks comin' through here can't write anyway." A smile broke across her dour face. "It's nice to have a fine gentleman once in awhile though."

After a hearty meal of roast beef, baked potatoes, raw beets, raw carrots and a goodly slab of apple pie, the men sat awhile swapping news with other travelers. As the twilight dimmed into dusk, they climbed the steep stairway to their room. It was a small cubicle just large enough for the four fully stuffed straw bags that lay directly on the plank floor.

Across the stairway from the room was the loft. McCorkle peered in. It was a larger room, perhaps twenty feet square with a low ceiling that made it appear smaller. A plain board wall enclosed a small section at the front. This was the "ladies" room although as often as not, the women slept with their men, gathering the loose straw to arrange their own beds. Any other bedding or covering was supplied by the traveler.

The precise little merchant from Piqua shook his head. He wondered how his friend John Manning, settler, pioneer, developer of Piqua, land speculator and already a wealthy person in this new country – how had he talked him into this Saint Marys deal. Manning had assured him that this was a golden opportunity, the ground floor, the doorway to a beginning of a tremendous future.

McCorkle was beginning to get the enthusiasm of the frontier. In the last few weeks of working out this "Saint Marys deal" he had learned how to stare into the darkness of a forest and see a sparkling village booming in commerce and surrounded by amber fields of grain. Manning had advised him to go ahead – to take a chance on it. He was beginning to like it. He had become aware of the vast field of opportunity that lay to the north and west.

As McCorkle stretched his slim body out on the straw tick, his mind was rapidly scanning the whole area from Saint Marys to Toledo and Fort Wayne

www.andyniekamp.com

with the new canal forming one side of a triangle, the Saint Marys and Maumee rivers forming the other two sides. As he dropped into slumber he was thinking to himself, "The canal is some years from digging – but at Ft. Wayne, in Indiana, a man can go either up or down the river and maybe they'll have a canal too! I just might look into that."

Eight months later, on April 2, 1824, McCorkle sold to John Manning and William Berry for the sum of $1500, almost 250 acres of land just south of Saint Marys and 29 lots in the new town. He came in on the ground floor, made a quick profit and got out. Mr. McCorkle was now looking for bigger game.

Shortly after a land office was opened at Fort Wayne, John McCorkle and a Mr. Barr of Baltimore, Maryland, bought for $1.25 per acre the land known as the "Old Plat of Fort Wayne." Within fifteen years some of this land was selling for more than $1.25 per inch of front footage!

The clock the next morning had not yet struck eight when these men were gathered around a large table at John Ingraham's, Justice of the Peace. The "Squire" had gone over the papers and maps presented very meticulously, stopping occasionally to add figures on lot measurements and street widths to insure that everything checked out. Finally he looked up.

"Everything seems to be in order, gentlemen. You will each sign the dedication, and I will take it to the Recorder's Office.

"Although your town of Saint Marys is in Mercer County, this will be filed here in Darke until you folks up there get organized. I wish you good luck–and I do hope you can live down the name of Girtystown–that renegade!"

Squire Ingraham rose from his chair, and the three men in turn took up the long goose quill pen and affixed their signatures. They all felt a certain solemnity of the occasion. There was no conversation during the signing. The seal was impressed and the certification of the Justice of the Peace was inscribed.

"There's just one thing that I noticed, not that it's wrong, mind you," the Squire stated, "I notice your Front Street is quite a ways from the river. Most places have their Front Streets right on the river bank instead of a couple hundred feet away."

"Now that's an easy one to answer," spoke up William Houston. "You see, the canal surveyors were through already, and they say the canal will stay west of the river through town – so Front Street will front on both the canal and the river. Then the canal will cross over the top of the river on a water-bridge they call an aqua-duct. That will be just at the north edge of our town. They say that a water fall of some twenty feet will give power to saw mills and flouring mills and such."

www.andyniekamp.com

"Oh that canal! Everybody here or 'at comes through here is talking about canals. We had some folks about here 'at went to Cincinnati to get the canal to come here – right up Wayne's Trace 'n straight north to Shane's Crossing of the Saint Marys River. (Present day Rockford.) They could go down that river to Fort Wayne; get the Maumee from there to the Lake–we figured it 'ud be shorter and cheaper."

"What happened?" asked Houston.

"Well the canal commission said no and for three reasons, they said. One was that Ohio was buildin' this here canal and they couldn't build part of it in Indiana; two, they had to serve the people and towns that were already here and most of them were along the Great Miami River, and then they said we were too flat here–no place to build a lake to supply water for their canal. Ya know, there's some talk here, that if this canal thing works out good, we can build our own canal right down Greenville Creek to the Stillwater and get to Dayton easy. I dunno though, we'll just wait and see."

The business of the day being completed, the three were soon on their way. Their destination, Saint Marys, Mercer County, State of Ohio, United States of America!

Each man had a separate feeling of awe and achievement. Each had a personal pride in every word of their new enterprise. In deep contrast to their trip to Greenville the day before, they were unusually quiet on their return. They had talked yesterday of many things. They had had a keen interest in every landmark. There had been much speculation of the future. There had also been much conversation relating to the past and of each man's own experiences. But now, homeward bound, they were quietly meditative.

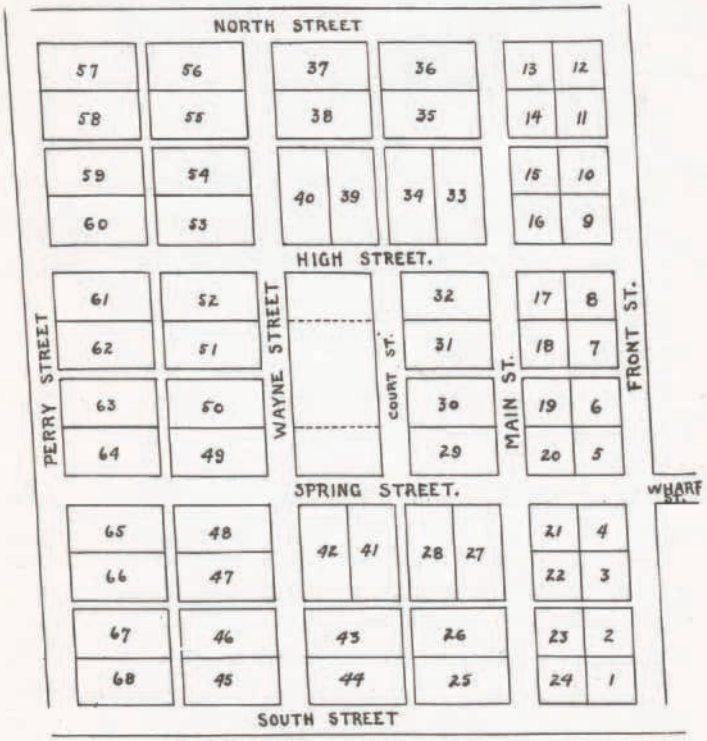
Charles Murray's thoughts were on plans to develop more trading and commerce. First we must start with the new settlements that were springing up down river from here. Then as the canal is built, we will have the trade all along that route on which to grow. Indeed the future looked better now than at any time in the past twenty-eight years. He reflected shortly on that day when he "set up store" in the shack that had been James Girty's. "How times have changed!" he said to himself, "and times are changing faster now."

William Houston was thinking of the thirty some families now settling in the neighborhood. He had talked with many of these and found that practically all of them were urging relatives and old friends back wherever they came from to join them in this wonderful rich country. There would be lots of people here in years to come. Saint Marys would be their home.

www.andyniekamp.com

John McCorkle, the storekeeper from Piqua, was now the visionary. While the other two partners were so interested in the prospects of this new town of Saint Marys, McCorkle was looking afar.

At last they broke through into the clearing they had departed from yesterday morning. Wood smoke from many supper fires was curling into the sapphire sky. Horses had been watered and turned into the small pastures to feed. The three riders, without a command but acting as one, spurred their mounts into a gallop. As they sped past each cabin they shouted, "We did it! We did it! We are now Saint Marys, Mercer County, State of Ohio!"



ORIGINAL PLAT OF ST. MARYS

A DEDICATION FOR THE SESQUICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
St. Marys, Ohio, June 14, 15, 16, 1973

To the early settlers and the founders of our town,
The river boatmen, the builders of lake and canal,
To the soldiers, long-dead, of the forts of old renown,
To the fur traders and Indians who loved this wild locale, –

To the leading townsmen throughout the city's past,
And to all within, around, who served and gave,
And to each who've built and dwelt here, the first and the last,
These days are dedicated, (to the timid and the brave).

– Robert N. Sampson

www.andyniekamp.com



Wash day in the wilderness.

Chapter II

The Growing Frontier

William Houston had once asked, "Where are the people, Mr. Murray, where are the people?"

They came. They came in ox carts through unmarked wilderness trials, by river barges floated down the Ohio and pushed by poles up the Miami River to the portage. They came by horseback through the Great Black Swamp to the north. They came by the long boats across Lake Erie and up the Maumee and Saint Marys rivers. They came by the long overland trail from Pittsburgh over rugged mountains following a poorly cut grade that was later to become The National Trail, then U. S. Highway 40. Today, Interstate 70 speeds the modern traveler over wide ribbons of concrete where an hours time will cover more miles than his ancestor trekked in a month of torturous labor.

In many cases the arrivals were whole family groups, parents, children of all ages and grandparents. Their amazement at the vastness of the forests through which they had passed had long since been dulled by their ordeal of just getting here. Usually though, the new emigrants consisted of an advance party of the men folk who would locate their land, make a clearing and erect some kind of a shelter. Then as the hard freezes of winter set in they would go "back over the mountains" for their families leaving one or more of their party to survive the cruel mid-western weather. As the soft spring arrived, the families would again be reunited and all hands were busy clearing, planting, preserving, building and creating a new life on the frontier.

www.andyniekamp.com

These people came, yes; they came from all walks of life, the skilled and the unskilled, the learned and the untutored, the rich and the poor, the descendants of old Dominion planters, Dutch patroons and Yankee families with ties to the Mayflower.

They came right down the gangplank at Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, James River ports from sailing ships of all of Europe. Some were fleeing the war torn area of Napoleon's new empire; others sought escape from the new spirit of militarism in their homelands. Others came to avoid heavy punishment for minor crimes such as indebtedness or bondage, but one thing was certain–they all came to seek a better life, to breathe a freer air and to prosper according to their energy and effort.

Each group brought with them something of that which they were leaving behind. Grape cuttings from the valley of the Rhine, plum stones and peach stones from the orchards of France, herbs from the gardens of England, all securely bundled and tied to the underside of the lumbering wagons, as were chickens boxed in crates tied to the tail gate and good dairy cattle as Jerseys and Holsteins following along under the watchful eye of the traveler. Hogs, cattle and horses foraged for their food in the forests each evening as the campfires twinkled along the trail.

Weary wagoners repaired their carts from the damages of each days wear while their womenfolk were preparing iron kettles of bacon and beans to simmer in the cookfire overnight.

As darkness began to settle over the campsite, one of them would likely open an old well-worn Bible for a "reading," followed by an old hymn sung in English, German, Dutch, Irish brogue, or French. It did not seem to matter much to such a group that had met up along the trail and were all headed for the Ohio Country.

Rations of whisky or rum were meted out to "ward off the chills and fevers" and soon the valley was as still and quiet as it had been for thousands of years.

Wagon trains were headed west. By 1823 much of the lands in southern Ohio had been claimed by the Sciota Land Company, the Ohio Land Company and by the Symmess Purchase. Good lands were still available in these areas, but the new Congressional Lands beginning at Saint Marys and extending north to Lake Erie were now offered at an established price of $1.25 per acre with small sized plots available to those who had to earn their way.

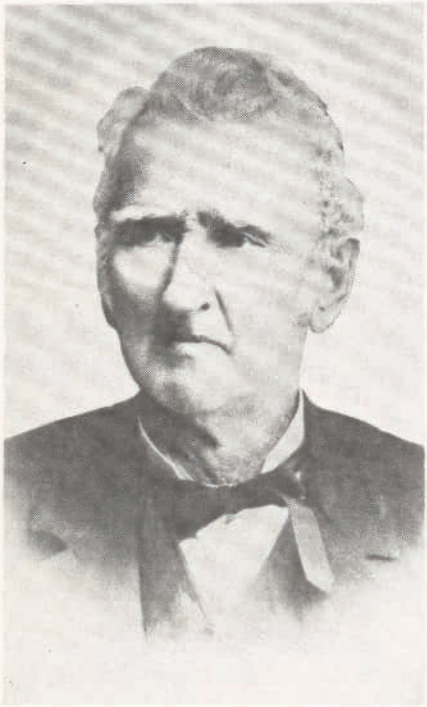
The William Henry Harrison Land Bill had provided for purchase of land at the figure set by Congress and allowed the purchaser three years to pay for his claim. At the going rate of thirty cents a day, a man could easily find work

www.andyniekamp.com

clearing trees and brush for a neighbor, building cabins, splitting rails for fencing, do a little fur trapping on the side and could in one season set himself up on an 80 acre farm of his own.

So it was in 1823. The new town of Saint Marys, Ohio, had been legally established. The old Forts, Barbee and Saint Marys, with their stockade fences were decaying in the ground on which they stood. In their stead were rising newer buildings to serve the needs of people rather than the needs of a military force.

Among the many names of those first settlers — and some were here before Saint Marys became a reality were: Lt. John Armstrong, Pickett Doute, Rev. Asa Stearns, R.R. Barrington, John Hawthorn, John Blew, Tom Scott, Sam McKee, Herwig Smith, Henry and Isaac Helm, Christian Benner, Isreal Johns, Henry Noble, Stacy Taylor, Judge Phelps, John, Robert and William Elliott, Gideon Mott, John and William Hollingsworth, Charles Watkins, Joseph Catterlin, Thomas Sturgeon, James Gibson, Andrew Collins, R. B. Gordon, Henry Barrington, Sam Scott, S. R. Matt and William Helfenstein. The list is almost endless and no doubt those recorded here are merely a cross section of the community in those days.



Judge Stacy Taylor
First Mayor of Saint Marys

www.andymekamp.com

Historians of the period have recorded some of their special acts or skills. Stacy Taylor was elected as the first Mayor in 1834 when the town was incorporated. Later he moved to Columbus, Ohio, and became a character in James Thurber's "Carnival." John Pickerel and William Hollingsworth were building rafts of a special type for river travel to Fort Wayne before 1820 and lived to build on the canal. The boats built for river travel were astounding large when one considers the river conditions of the modern era. A length of 40 feet, a width of 6 feet with sides up to 4 feet were not uncommon.

Then there was James Lord, who bought the first town lot, No. 21 (where the Bungalow now is) and was taxed ½ of one cent in 1824. Lord is apparently the same as is recorded in other histories as James Laird who taught the first school from 1825 to 1831. He is said to have taught almost as many adults to write their own names as he had children.



Deluxe home of 1823.

Henry Helm had been building river boats also, but as the town of Saint Marys grew, he turned his skills to house building. In 1827 he erected the first hewn-log house at the southwest corner of Spring and Perry. All the houses to that time had been erected as regular log cabins, laying notched round logs one atop the other to the heighth required. The spaces between the logs would then be filled with mud to keep out the weather. Helm built a better house. He would first square up the logs with a broad axe and then fit them together so that they required no mud chinking of the cracks. A thin layer of clay would be spread on the next one to it. Helm continued active in the building trade for many years. Of course, as saw mills were available, he used cut lumber. One of the houses built by Helm is still standing in 1973. This is the Ed Baxter home at 115 North Chestnut Street. There may be others.

Christian Benner was also one of the first buyers of lots in the new town of Saint Marys. His first purchase in 1823 was of the three lots where the Baker Auto is located and the adjoining lot where the late Dr. Place lived. Benner also owned a large tract at the north edge of the town and on both sides of the river. When the time came that the community needed a new cemetery, he

www.andyniekamp.com

donated the area on North Defiance Street known as Benner Cemetery.

William Helfenstein was not among the very first pioneers of the frontier. He arrived just a few years later. He found here a town larger at that time than the places called Fort Wayne or Toledo. This was a place for a man of his talents. In 1837 he developed the North Addition. In 1838, the West Addition and in 1839 and 1840 he crossed over the river and started the East Addition. Other developers during the same period had laid out several additional plots to the south. In five short years, Helfenstein had increased the size of Saint Marys to almost ten times its original boundaries.

Scarcely a day passed but some new family would arrive seeking a home in this wonderful new land. The combination of cheap fertile land, available in suitable sized plots at reasonable terms, and a good demand for labor brought an influx from the old colonies that swept over this area and continued to the Pacific Ocean.

Many new towns were laid out during these times. Sóme like Jacksonville languished until transportation gave them a rebirth. Coilstown faded from the picture until the oil boom fifty years later when it was resurrected as Mendon. Places such as Deep Cut and Amsterdam flourished for a time until they eventually faded back into the plowed fields from which they sprang.

The new town of "Saint Marys, Mercer County, State of Ohio" as Murray, Houston and McCorkle had so proudly hailed, prospered. It had a good combination of things going for it. It had high ground that provided good drainage. It had good rich soil, free of rock out-croppings; it had an abundance of good sweet water from the many springs that flowed all year; but above all, it had what Charles Murray had proclaimed a necessity, transportation. The river route to Fort Wayne provided the basic line of travel and supply to the developing sections of Indiana and at the same time provided the commerce through Saint Marys.

The river, slow, crooked, unreliable as it was, was merely the promise of things to come. It was important in its day, but its days as a channel of commerce were numbered. Transportation was indeed the key but newer, more reliable, more efficient and larger means were in the making. Throughout the whole State of Ohio a new idea was sweeping like a forest fire to capture the imagination of its citizens. The new idea — canals!! Canals were to be built not only in eastern Ohio to connect Lake Erie to the Ohio River but also in western Ohio to link Cincinnati, the Great Miami river, the Maumee river and Toledo on Lake Erie as well. It had by then been established that this new town of Saint Marys would be on the line of this new mode of transportation.

Saint Marys was, in the words of John McCorkle, "at the front door to ten thousand miles of America."

www.andyniekamp.com



Canal traffic south of Saint Marys

Chapter III
The Canal Period

"Canal Fever" swept over Ohio like a tidal wave on the ocean. The Erie Canal in New York state had proven the feasibility of a canal system. Connecting the eastern seaboard with the Great Lakes had brought prosperity, commerce, population and civilization to the interior of America. It was now Ohio's job to bring these blessings to its own people.

As early as 1807, Thomas Worthington, one of the first Congressmen from Ohio had presented to Congress a resolution for Federal aid to the western states for roads and canals. Worthington cited letters between Jefferson and Washington that discussed the possibility of canals to connect Lake Erie to the Ohio River and Lake Michigan to the Mississippi. By 1810, an Ohio Canal Commission had been appointed to again seek Federal aid through land grants. Although some progress was made by the Commission, the War of 1812 halted all activity in this field. The State of New York, however, proceeded immediately after that conflict to press for its canal system. Noting the tremendous advantages to the State of Ohio that such a cheap and easy route of travel would produce, Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York asked the now Governor of Ohio, Thomas Worthington for financial aid for his Erie Canal. The Ohio Legislature enthusiastically supported the proposition, but denied the funds. Ohio now was catching "canal fever" and consequently was looking to its own plans. By 1818 an Ohio Senate bill to authorize a private company to build canals was vetoed by Governor Ethan Allen Brown. Brown, who became known as the "Father of Ohio Canals" wanted the canals to be built as Public Works to serve the people of the State that all may benefit by its existence and profits.

www.andyniekamp.com

Finally, on January 31, 1822, the Legislature authorized engineering and surveying for five suggested canal routes. No time was lost. By the end of the year 1822, enough of their work had been done to insure that the western route running from the Miami River to Lake Erie would be one of the selected routes. It was sure by that time that the location of the future town of Saint Marys would be on that marvelous stream.

The years of 1823 and 1824 were deeply involved in engineering, surveying, designing, and locating the exact line of the canal. At the same time, money was being raised and right-of-way being secured. Finally on July 4, 1825, in a muddy field near Akron, Ohio, Governor Morrow of Ohio handed a brand new spade to Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York. To the cheering of thousands of voices of settlers, militia men, a mounted troup of cavalry, and dignitaries of the State, Clinton plunged his spade into the wet soggy earth. Ground had been broken! The canal system had been started!

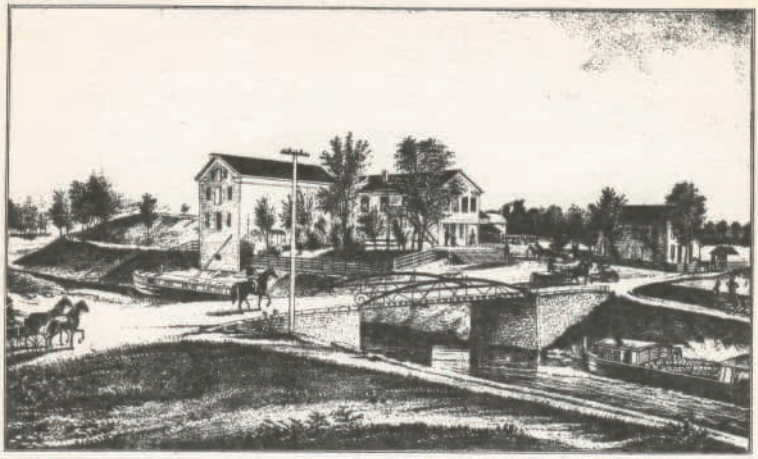
Two weeks later, the same two Governors along with William Henry Harrison repeated their "sod-bustin" in a field just south of Middletown, Ohio. Music from several bands, orations by the famous and finally with a firing squad salute, the Miami and Erie Canal was officially under way.

Even as the first bit of ground was turned in the formal opening, crews of men were lining up in front of the many contractor's offices seeking employment. In most instances there were neighboring farmers, drovers or businessmen who welcomed the opportunity for employment and for gain. Farmers and woodsmen, Irish from the Erie Canal and German immigrants fresh from the hillsides of the Rhine manned the picks and the shovels, shouted at the teams of horses, mules and oxen that moved the dirt. At thirty cents a day--cash wages--they paid off their farms, bought more land or built up a nest egg to use in bringing their families from the Old World. Only a few years later, the Irish alone were sending five million dollars each year to the folks back home.

There were no huge mechanical earth movers, no dump trucks, no compactors during canal digging days. Each inch of dirt had to be dug loose by pick-axe or plow. Long handled shovels hoisted each bit higher than a man's head into a wagon where it would be hauled to the place needed. In some places the canal was to be above the level of the surrounding ground, and here banks had to be built on both sides to contain the water. Other places the canal had to be cut deeply into the ground. At one place known as Deep Cut, just north of Saint Marys, the canal had to be cut through a glacial ridge almost a hundred feet deep and almost a mile long to reach the lower ground on the other side.

Slowly then, inch by inch, mile by mile, the magic ribbon of water crept across the Ohio countryside. In 1827 that part from Cincinnati to Middletown

www.andyniekamp.com



J. H. Dunathan Store at Deep Cut from County Atlas of 1881.

Note telegraph lines which followed the towpath from Cincinnati to Toledo

was in operation. By 1828 the canal was complete to Dayton which was as far as the first set of contracts had planned. The so called "Miami Extention" that was to carry the system on to Lake Erie was to be the next project. Financial and political problems delayed the development several years. The year of 1835 saw the canal extending to Piqua and at that time the contracts were prepared for the full completion of this effort.

Saint Marys was the center of development activities over the ensuing years. Ohioans were not the only ones to catch the "Canal Fever." Indiana had also been caught in the excitement.

A canal system proposed to connect the Maumee River at Fort Wayne with the Wabash at the old battlefield, Tippecanoe, was started in 1833 and by 1835 was completed.

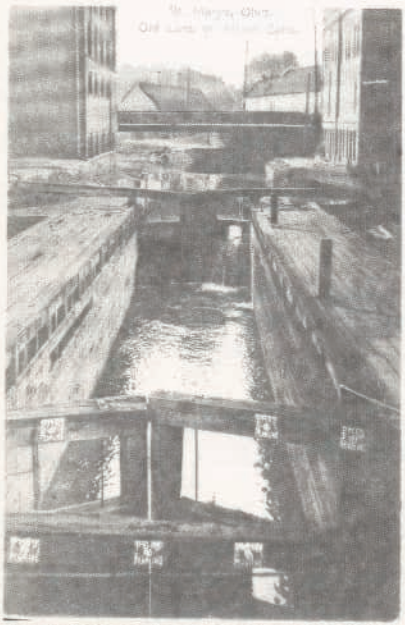
The contractors there complained of high costs of supplies that had to be brought in through the forests and down the river all the way from Saint Marys, Ohio. This was a situation that lead to some very strong feelings between the two states.

www.andyniekamp.com

After completing their hook up with the Wabash River southwest of Fort Wayne, the Indiana Canal Commissioners immediately started on their project to the east. It had been agreed that Indiana would extend their canal to the Ohio State line. This they did by 1840. However, Ohio had other priorities. Ohio was expending their efforts in creating the huge reservoir at St. Marys and at the same time building the locks around the rapids of the Maumee River to the north. The twenty mile section through the uninhabited swamps of Paulding County had little interest to Ohio. Bitter words were passed between the legislatures of the states. Indiana felt that Ohio was reneging on their agreement and Ohio resented the interference of Indiana in their planning. Two years of bickering and name calling between politicians finally came to an end three years later. In 1843 Ohio finally linked the Indiana canal at the state line with the main line of the Miami and Erie at the little town of Junction.

As this was accomplished, the river traffic down the Saint Marys River fell off to almost nothing. The river-port of Saint Marys had been a very busy place for twenty years. But as the M. & E. Canal was fully opened from Cincinnati to Toledo and Fort Wayne in 1845, the now incorporated village of Saint Marys took on new importance.

Old Charlie Murray had at one time been awed by the thought of a lake to be built "almost a mile wide and maybe a mile and a half long." Charlie's lake was built far greater than his dreams could comprehend. To catch the waters from the Chickasaw and Coldwater creeks, the western bank was located almost ten miles from the eastern levee and thereby dammed up an area of about twenty



Lock 13 between Spring and High



Lock from feeder into reservoir.

www.andymekamp.com

square miles. Lake Saint Marys, originally called The Grand Reservoir, created amid bitter controversy, poor financial management and some irregular land surveys, became the largest body of water created by man. It was not to be surpassed in size for many generations.

In addition to the gigantic reservoir, known today as Grand Lake Saint Marys, the canal in this area included every type of construction known to the builders. The bulkhead and lock on the East Bank Road, even today, stand nearly as they did in 1845. A beautiful multi-arched culvert carries the Feeder over the top of the Middle Branch of the River near State Route 66 while only a short distance downstream was the old aquaduct along Beech Street road. This structure, although flumed today, was a box like affair through which would pass the largest packets. In the city proper were Lock 12, now filled for parking and Lock 13 over which the Saint Marys Woolen Company built a part of their mill. North of High Street is the "Tumble," designed to prevent flooding by dumping excess waters into the next lower level. Between the city and 40 Acre Pond is another flood control that spills over into the river. Lock 14, just north of the pond is easily accessable by road. This lock has been rebuilt with concrete walls. Locks 9, 10 and 11 were apparently wooden locks and have practically disappeared. However, the beautiful Lock 8, built of cut and skillfully fitted blocks of native limestone still stands as a monument to those pioneers of a hundred and thirty years ago. It needs some attention and is deserving of recognition and preservation.

The hundreds and hundreds of men who had been engaged in digging and building stayed on to buy and clear the land they had purchased by their toil. They stayed to enter commerce and the industries that depended on the forest and the field. They stayed to work the canal as boatsmen and lock tenders and repair crews. They stayed because they had come to love this land and saw the great opportunities for a new life. The canal was not finished–it had just begun.

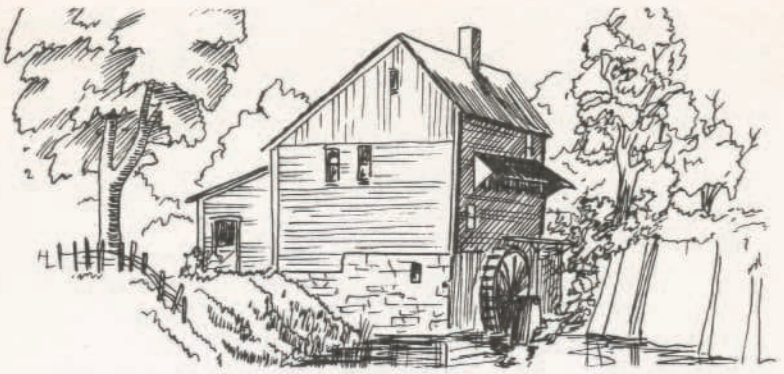


Farms near Saint Marys.



Bimel's Wheel and Spoke factory.

www.andyniekamp.com



This is the type of mill built on Saint Marys River in early times.

Chapter IV

Some Days are Good — Some Not

Probably every person at one time of life or another expresses a wish to have been born in another time. What a thrilling and wonderful experience would have been enjoyed by one living in Saint Marys, Ohio, in this period of expansion! Imagine 1,700 German and Irish immigrants working along side native farmers, building the great earthen dams that formed Lake Saint Marys. Picture in your mind the additional hundreds of men working on the canal system proper. See too, the local farmers, tradesmen and merchants supplying the needs of these crews. Henry Noble, one of the earliest settlers of Noble Township, had gone down below Piqua for information about bidding on a canal contract in his area. He found instead that there was a tremendous demand for potatoes among the Irish diggers. He brought home several hundred pounds of seed potatoes which he planted the following spring. His neighbors wondered what Henry was going to do with such a huge crop, but when he sold them at a very good price, they all wanted in on a "good thing." The next year, Noble planted only what he needed for himself, but made a second killing selling seed potatoes to all of his neighbors!

Clearing of the forest lands for farming produced huge quantities of timber. Much of this was used to build houses, barns and split rail fences. More was used to burn out stumps in the newly plowed fields. There was plenty left over to establish a fast growing need for wood products. An early sawing mill had been established about 1825 on the river southeast of town, and this was followed by several others also using river power. The opening of the canal provided a year round dependable source of water power not affected by flood or drouth, and the forests provided the new nations highest quality of hardwoods, oak, ash, hickory, maple and walnut. In later years, this lead to the establishment of such firms as the Schmehl Sawmills, Mackenbach Lumber Co., The Oar Factory, The Whipstock Mill, Bimel Carriage Works, Koch Buggy Factory, The Makley Carriages, Saint Marys Wheel and Spoke Co. and Crane-McMahan Furniture.

www.andyniekamp.com

There was plenty of activity for the youngsters of that day. School was a "sometimes" thing even after the public school system was established in 1853. Whenever one was caught up with his "chores," there was time for fishing in either the canal, the river or the lake. Bass under two pounds were thrown back to grow up, while sturgeon as large as fifty pounds apiece could be clubbed at the riffle of the river during spawning season. Fish and game in excess of family needs could be readily sold to local taverns or to the packing houses for shipment to Cincinnati. If one were to be on hand near the locks when a passenger packet was going through, there was always the chance of making a few coins by fetching a cold bucket of beer from a nearby saloon–ah! Shades of the past!

There was always some money to be made by filling sacks with shavings from the barrel stave shops and selling in town for quick kindling, and if you were big enough to handle an axe, wood chopping was always available summer or winter. There were the days of easy, leisurely living. Nobody had so much as to cause envy and yet everyone had enough to prosper. It was a time of growing opportunity and the old girl knocked many times!

As the canal opened vast acreage to farming, so too the produce of these farms expanded Saint Marys. Soon there were flour mills, woolen mills, linseed oil and flaxen mills, a distillery, a foundry, a tannery, tile and brick yards, boot and shoe makers, meat packers, salting houses for fish, game and pork together with warehouses and merchants for every kind of goods.

A few years later, Philip VonHerzing as a member of the Board of Public Works, reported that Saint Marys alone shipped on the canal in one season as follows: lumber - 1,650,000 board feet; grain and flour - 19,063,000 pounds; pork and lard - 330,000 pounds; whipstocks - 30,000 dozen; linseed oil - 155,000 gallons; oil cake - 1,060,000 pounds; other merchandise - 25,000,000 pounds.

Saint Marys did not depend entirely on the Miami and Erie Canal for its transportation and development. One of the first actions of the Mercer County Commissioners in 1824 was to survey and improve a road to Sidney. The crooks and turns of present day Route 29 shows how the surveyors sought to place their line to avoid low swampy ground and to cross streams at the best places. Even though the canal by 1845 connected to Fort Wayne, land travel was also much in demand. So much so that a private company was formed to build a "plank road" to Mercer, Rockford, Decatur, Indiana and Fort Wayne. This road was a toll road and was opened in 1852. A huge celebration was held at the edge of Saint Marys (Bunker Hill) that rivalled the opening of the canal a few years before. Present day U. S. 33 follows the old plank road almost exactly for 60 miles. Within a few years, the towns of Celina and Waupaukonnetta (as it was then spelled) became of sufficient importance to build plank roads to these two towns as well. During the 1860's the stage coaches or hacks were compelled to

www.andyniekamp.com

make three round trips daily to accommodate travelers, freight and mail. At Wapakoneta, the new road connected with both the new Dayton and Michigan Railroad and also with the toll road to Logan County.

What gay parties must have been enjoyed on many a sunny Sunday afternoon when a group of ten to twenty young couples would charter one of the steam boats for a picnic on the lake. The meeting place would be the "basin," a wide harbor where the Chestnut Street parking lot is today. There they would board the steamer with their baskets crammed with chicken, ham, roast beef, home made bread, cakes and pies. The men had already seen to it that a good keg of Minster's Wooden Shoe beer was already chilled and hidden back of the wheel house. With a long toot of the whistle, the party would steam up the canal through the aquaduct, turn right into the Feeder and approach the deep lock at the Bulkhead. An hour after leaving town, they would be out on the wide expanse of the Reservoir. After several hours of "paddle wheels a splashin', "good food and a song fest, the party would be heading back to town in time for the evening services in most all of the churches.



A picnic! What fun!

www.andymekamp.com

Samuel Doyle of Dayton had built the first of the steamers to ply the canal .oute; however, due to slow speeds required to prevent washing of the banks, steamers did not prove financially profitable for this trade. Doyle and Wheeler brought their craft to the Reservoir and as early as 1849, their "Niagra" was making daily trips to Celina and Montezuma. Round trip fare was 50 cents with leaving time of 9:00 a.m. and to return by 3:00 p.m. Some of the other steamers of the period included Bill Barienbrook's "Clipper," James Johnson's "The Pilgrim" and J. M. Davidson's boat carrying his own name. Steam boat traffic in the lake continued for many years. As late as 1891, a large party was on the lake to watch the shooting of a new oil well, drilled several miles out in the water.

In 1853 a new sound was heard in Saint Marys. School bells gladdened the hearts of some and saddened the hearts of others after the passing of the so called Akron School Law. Saint Marys is recorded as being the first town in the State to take advantage of its provisions and organize a public school. Within only four years, the new school had such a reputation for quality teaching that pupils came here from seven counties.

In earlier years, school had been on a subscription or pay basis. James Laird, as early as 1827 taught the three "R's." Other who had schools included Stacy Taylor, Rev. Gregg, Mrs. Dumbauld, Mrs. McGinley, Miss Medbury and Miss Henry. One of the largest and most successful, however, was that of Mary Barrington. In 1846 she had 65 pupils assembled in the basement of the Baptist Church. The demand was so great that the next year she employed her sister, Susan of Piqua, thus becoming the first two-room school. With support from taxation, the Union School was built where the Methodist Fellowship Hall is now located. It was enlarged from four rooms to eight rooms, than later tore down for the West Side School which in turn became the Saint Marys High School.

Another new sound was added in 1861. This was the tramp, tramp, tramp of soldiers drilling for service in the Civil War. Company "C" of the Ohio 37th was enlisted as Volunteers under the leadership of Samuel Mott, Attorney-at-Law. Another Company composed of a good mixture of Irish and German recruits also drilled on the Parade Grounds laid out north of Bunker Hill. This Company acquired a reputation of fighting among themselves of Irish versus German, but in actual battle stood staunchly together against the enemy. Mott, who retired during the war because of his health, and Major Charles Hipp combined these two units and brought them safely back home with only the minimum of casualties. Again they entered their normal activities, married "the girl they left behind them," and continued the growth and development of Saint Marys. The girls who had been "left behind them" had been the young ladies of the village who had gone every drill night to the Parade Ground. There they watched their young men go through the prescribed formations until darkness. In the quiet evening hours, they would be "walked home" by the boys who were to Save the Union.

www.andyniekamp.com



Monument to Civil War Veterans

Growth and development next came to Saint Marys in the form of another new sound – the train whistle. Our neighboring community of Wapakoneta had so profited by the Dayton and Michigan Railroad that it was becoming almost as large and important as was Saint Marys. As old Charley Murray had said so often, "Transportation – you gotta have." The iron horse was eventually to replace the old gray mule of the tow path. The Lake Erie and Louisville Railroad Company had surveyed the path of their fledgling enterprise and had planned to build a line through this area. By the time Saint Marys was reached in 1873, the Company had not only changed ownership but direction as well. The goal was now St. Louis and the name changed accordingly to Lake Erie and Western. Later changes in ownership of this road made it a part of the Nickleplate and today is part of the Norfolk and Western.

Only one time did the citizens of Saint Marys forget the adage of its earliest resident. They were asked at one time to raise $75,000 to help with the cost of a new rail line connecting Pittsburgh and Chicago. Saint Marys turned down this opportunity. Lima not only raised the requested sum but even more if the new road would locate its repair shops at that place. Eventually the giant Lima Locomotive Works was a direct result.

Whether this failure to become a huge sprawling, smoky, grimy, industrial city can be termed a disaster depends on the point of view of the resident. In any case, Saint Marys has remained a beautiful city where living can be a pleasure and where commerce and agriculture blend a native population into a culture recognized as typically midwest American.

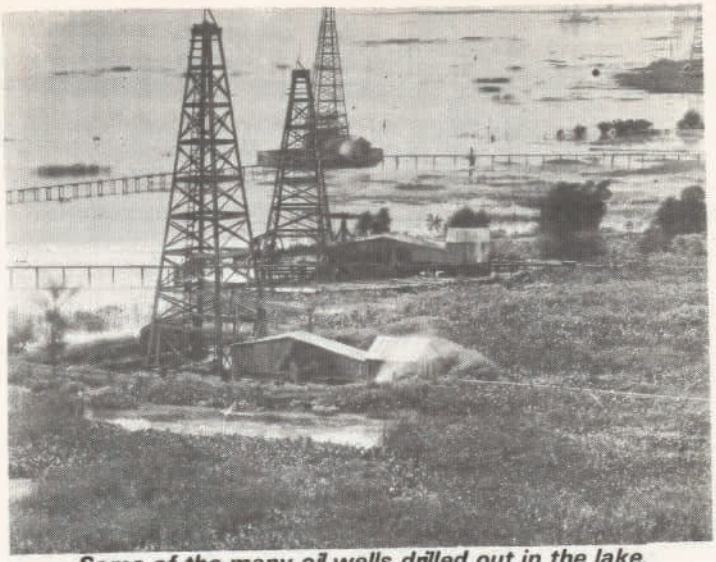
www.andyniekamp.com

Saint Marys was the victim of several other events that occurred at a much earlier date. When this area was laid out by the State Legislature in 1820, the County of Mercer contained the western half of present Auglaize County. In 1824 the proprietors of Saint Marys, Murray, Houston, and McCorkle gave the County Commissioners 31 of the 68 plotted lots. These were sold by the Commissioners to raise funds for the establishment of the county to build a courthouse, a jail and provide operating monies. By virtue of this gift, the new county was successfully established. Sixteen years later, in 1840 the controlling votes of the Commissioners passed to elected members of the western most parts of Mercer County. They wanted the county seat to be closer to themselves. Consequently they moved the courthouse and all to Celina, much to the unhappiness of Saint Marys.

A few years later, in 1848, a new county of Auglaize was formed along lines that are existant today. An election was held soon to choose a site for the new county seat. Wapakoneta wanted it as being close to the geographical center, while Saint Marys pushed its claim of being nearer the center of population. The eastern part of the new county was then, as now, less populated while New Bremen, Minster and New Knoxville were thriving communities tied with Saint Marys by canal commerce. Saint Marys was heavily favored by virtue of the support of its neighbors; however, the vote was close with Wapakoneta being declared the winner. It wasn't until sometime later it was discovered that the ballots of New Bremen and Minster had "mysteriously" failed to arrive and were never counted! Such are the seeds of discord that breed lasting bitterness between peoples!

These minor reverses did not slow the steady growth of the city nor did they make it a less interesting place to live. One calamity did befall the entire area. Striking in several waves between 1849 and 1855, the deadly cholera epidemic swept through much of this entire state. In Saint Marys 20 percent or one of every five persons died of this sudden killer. Characterized by cramps, fever, diarrhea and vomiting, many died within hours of the first symptoms. Church records in New Bremen show that 150 persons of a community of 700 died in 1849 alone. One story has it that a farmer living several miles in the country, seeing his wife having these symptoms, saddled a horse and came quickly to town for help. When he reined up at the doctor's office, he fell from his mount. Within a few minutes, he was dead. His friends in town went immediately to the farmer's home only to find the wife and one child already expired while two children, healthy but hungry, played on the kitchen floor. Those were dismal heart breaking days. Families re-formed taking care of nieces and nephews, in-laws and step-children as life was still for the living and time went on to better days.

www.andymekamp.com



Some of the many oil wells drilled out in the lake.

Chapter V

Oil Boom and Industry

July 24, 1886, had been a hot humid summer day. Toward evening though, a cool breeze had set in making a quite comfortable audience assembled at Town Hall. A traveling theatrical troup was to present "The Mikado." A few minutes before curtain time, Bob Gordon, George Orphal and John Hauss were catching the last cool breeze before entering the auditorium. They had been talking about the well being drilled on the Armstrong property in the east part of town. Orphal held up a finger for silence.

"Listen! You can almost hear it from here – whomp – whomp – whomp! Do you really think they'll find oil this far from Lima?"

"Hard to say from all I hear," Hauss replied. "They passed a thousand feet deep yesterday. Lima hit oil a lot less than that."

"Well, I can say one thing for sure," added Gordon, "if they find oil around here, this place will never be the same again. I've got a few options for drilling on several farms now. George, why don't you see what you can do too."

"Bob, that's just too risky for my blood. I'd rather have an option on your race horse, hosses I know!"

"Well we'll soon find out – but now we'd best get inside if we want to see the show. It's pretty good. I saw it in Cincinnati a couple years ago when I was there on the canal boat," stated John Hauss as he turned to go up the stairway.

www.andymekamp.com

A few minutes later, the orchestra had struck up the overture. The curtain parted and the Oriental Dancing Chorus was into its first number. The first part of the play moved swiftly, and the Great Mikado had made his first entrance. Before he was able to deliver his first line, a commotion was heard outside. Heavy feet were stomping up the old wooden staircase. Someone whose name has never been recorded, burst into the theatre.

"They struck oil! They struck oil", the visitor shouted.

"Oil," "Oil," "Oil," the crowd echoed, and every man, woman and child went flying out of the hall. The place was empty in seconds. Poor Mikado stood staring at the madly rushing crowd. As the last one scooted out the exit, he roared in his best Thespian tone, "Hell, I never saw an oil well! Let's go!" and with that he plunged his sword into the stage and took off with the entire cast in hot pursuit. The sword quivered and swayed long after the multitude had departed. That was the last of "Mikado" for that night!

All traffic was headed east that night. By foot, by horse or by carriage, citizens of every age and stature were converging on David Armstrong's cow pasture. A location about where Armstrong Park is now situated, was the site of what was to become Saint Marys miracle of prosperity. Only a few minutes after sundown on that July 24th evening, the drillers cut through the last layer of rock into the oil bearing sands. With mighty pressure, the oil and natural gas shot up the eleven hundred feet of the drill hole carrying the drills upward and shot them a hundred feet into the air. All night long, as practically the entire population of Saint Marys watched in awe, the black gold of petroleum spewed forth. Gigantic bubbles of gas burst the ears with their mighty roar as they were released from the captivity of 50,000 years.

What a mixture of citizenry witnessed this great event! The elite of the town in their finest "going to the theatre" clothes, shopkeepers and bartenders mingled with bankers and preachers, factory hands and farmers alike were so enthralled that even the Mikado and his Oriental Girls Dancing Chorus in full stage attire were no attraction compared to what Mother Earth was giving birth to!

This particular well was not destined, however, to be the foundation of a great fortune. In a few weeks it slowed down to several barrels a day, but it proved that oil was here. A few months later, one of the best wells in the area was shot on the Mike Hauss farm just east of Saint Marys. This one well produced almost half a million dollars worth of oil and gas in its lifetime. From the Hauss well with its plentiful supply of natural gas was laid gas mains into the town. By 1888, the village issued $100,000 in bonds and gas mains were extended to all parts of town. All the gas that could be used for heating, cooking and lighting were available according to the size of pipe that connected to the main. A one-inch pipe cost 75 cents a month while a two-inch pipe cost only $1.50.

www.andyniekamp.com

One resident is reported to have kept his heating stoves on full blast all summer long, all doors and windows wide open just because he "was paying for it and might just as well use it."

The boom that was to follow the discovery of oil in the Saint Marys field gave both short term and long term benefits. Immediate good results were bestowed on many who had been struggling to make a decent living from their small farms. Typical was a poor widow lady, a Mrs. MacMahan who went overnight from extreme poverty to fancy silks, a brass trimmed carriage and only the very best for her children who only a month before had little to eat but cornmeal mush. Charlie McIntire was another fortunate one, while Sam Scott recorded an income of $100 per day but was considered a "poor devil'" by Mr. Knopf who was collecting around $5,000 every month. Bob Gordon, who had "a few options" did well enough to carry him financially through a panic in the grain market and an embezzlement by a bonded friend.

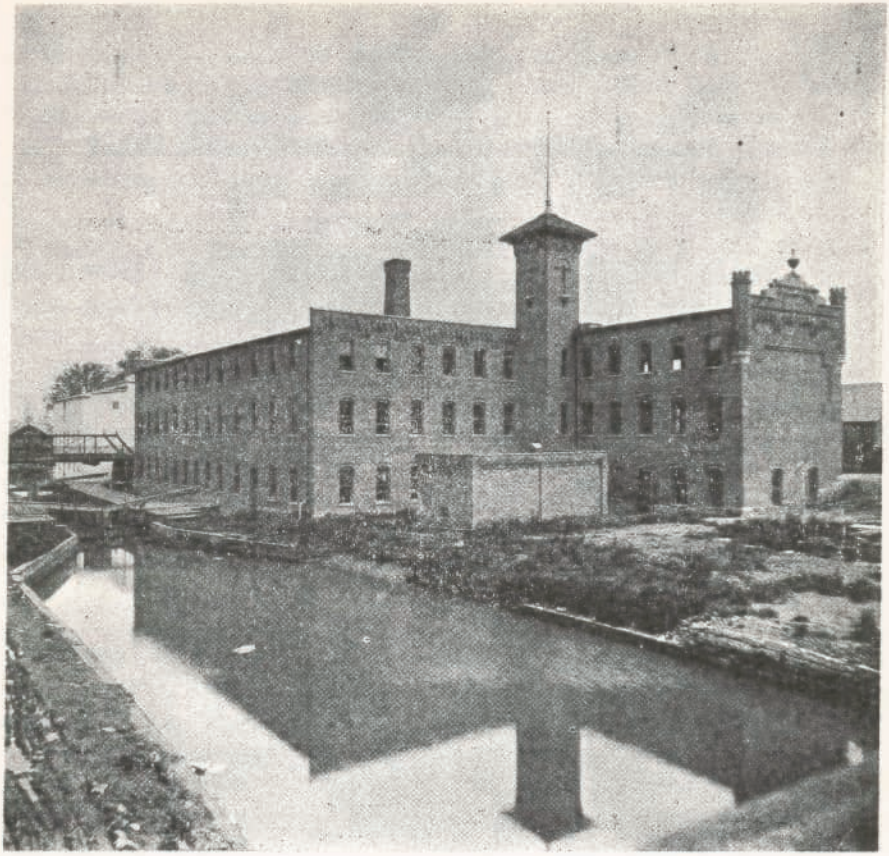
In the long run, however, Saint Marys took its prosperity in stride. The oil boom brought many new people to town, but as additional oil fields were opened up in Indiana, Illinois, Oklahoma and Texas, many moved on in hopes of someday striking it rich for themselves. Many others stayed on in Saint Marys — their names are far too numerous to list here — because they found here a good place to work, live and raise a family. In Saint Marys they found Home.

The oil fields required many things. One was a special kind of engine, powered by natural gas to pump the wells. This need was supplied by the Buehler Machine Shops, The Boos Engine Co. (J. D. Anderson, Supt.), Saint Marys Machine Company. Today this industry survives as the Saint Marys Foundry Company. The need for tools, supplies and equipment for the oil fields lead to the Jaspersen Supply Co., which still serves the community.

Another direct result of the oil and gas discovery was the growth of industry using these fuels. The Western Straw Board Co. located a huge paper mill using the plentiful supply of gas, water and in those days a constant source of good quality wheat straw from which they made their product.

The Saint Marys Woolen Mills, although founded quite a few years earlier, changed from water power to steam. Under the leadership of the Althausen and Herzing families, this mill became the world's largest producer of high quality blankets. Unfortunately, progress has a way of changing old reliable products. Better heating of homes in America cut heavily into the demand for woolen blankets. The invention of the electric blanket further reduced the need. The famous Saint Marys Woolen Mills yielded to the times only a few years ago. The name and the trade mark are still represented on the market by the Fieldcrest Company.

www.andyniekamp.com



Along the same lines of progress creating change is the fate of the Spoke Works. At one time this local industry was the largest wood wheel makers in the world. With the growth of the automobile, it seemed that America would be on wheels, and Saint Marys would supply those wheels. The development of steel wheels for cars was just too much. By the late '20's this largest employer was looking for new products.

As the Oil Boom created industry, industry in turn created skills. From the early beginnings of blacksmithing and carriage shops came the engine companies and foundry. In turn, then, the presence of a labor force skilled in metalworking, brought a succession of plants in that field. The Heisler Company and the Quick-Work Company became the antecedents of todays Parker-Hannifin Plant manufacturing a variety of metal equipment. The Cigar Factory and the Woolen Mill both relied heavily on women employees. Although neither is on today's scene, they each endowed the city with a female work force that represents one of the community's strongest assets.

www.andyniekamp.com

The Oil Boom days burst upon us suddenly and lasted many years. As it slowly receded, it left a heritage of diversified industry, a skilled work force, and a strong, solid, stable citizenry. Fortunes were made and fortunes were squandered and some made no fortune at all. For some the silks of riches became a way of life. For others the silken gowns became a keepsake in the attic trunk.

For the town as a whole, it was as Bob Gordon had said, "It'll never be the same again." Things began to happen. Old buildings of pre-Civil War days came down and new brick business houses began to line Spring Street. Gas lights illuminated the entire downtown and much of the residential area. Water mains began to provide running water to householders replacing the back yard well so often dug within a few feet of the horse barn. Streets were improved. Most of them had been graded with a gravel surface. Now the heavy oil rigs were cutting deeply through the shallow stone making a sea of mud during bad weather. In 1895, the principal part of Spring Street was dug out and filled with two feet of gravel. On top of this was laid the first brick pavement. Saint Marys had a new look!

An interesting observation on our older days pertains to our side walks. From early times the merchants had provided board walks in front of their stores, but even then the town had a few rowdies. The "boys," being out a little late and feeling none the worse, frequently rode their horses onto the sidewalks to avoid the mud in the street. Next day the merchant would find his walk in splinters. He soon learned to build the walk in sections so that when he closed his store at night, he could stack the sections of walk up and out of the way. The age old expression "they take up the sidewalks at night" was a common description of many a town!

An electric lighting plant was built first where the Union Hall is now located. In the beginning, its customers were downtown stores and "electric" was furnished from six to ten o'clock every night except Sunday. Within a few years, the demand for more service was so great that the city bought out the local company and moved the plant to its present location. Saint Marys was one of the first of it's size to have its own electrical service and is still one of the few not dependent on distant sources or power trusts.

At about this same time, the telephone came to Saint Marys. A group of private investors looked over many ideas in this new means of communication. Most systems had an operator or "central" on duty who took your call and connected you to your party. A new system was just being invented called a dial system. This required no operators. No one knew who was calling whom and no one could know what you were talking about. Saint Marys became the first in Ohio to use the dial system and one of the first in the nation. The rest of the world is now catching up with our beginning!

www.andyniekamp.com

Education and sanitation also progressed. The East and West schools were built at Spring and Pine and at Spring and Wayne. The West School had a clock tower that for years told time by its four faces and hourly strikes. Its mechanism has been preserved and some day, hopefully, will be again a beacon to our city. A sanitary sewer system was also extended to bring the convenience of indoor plumbing and reduce the dangers of infectious diseases so frequently stemming from the old out house.

Saint Marys burst proudly and brilliantly into the Twentieth Century. Electric street lights now illuminated the village and in 1900 came the Electric Interurban known as the Street Cars. Again as Charlie Murray had said, "Transportation — you gotta have." Now with the cars, travel to Celina, to Fort Loramie, to Lima or Dayton via Wapakoneta was swift, silent, clean and available every hour on the hour. To supply electricity to the new line, a huge power plant was erected between South Wayne and South Ash Streets. Its size and its eight tall smoke stacks was often passed off to ignorant visitors as our cities own pipe organ!

Steady growth marked the next few years of Saint Marys as a new Chain Factory entered the industries along with the Easy Washing Machine Company. Garages replaced livery barns. Filling stations began where blacksmith shops had been. The town grew into a population of over 5,000 and thereby became legally a city. The Post Office started delivery of mail to every house in town, and within a few years the Fire Department got a new motorized truck to replace the colorful and beloved horses.



Livery stables become the gasoline allys of the new day.

www.andyniekamp.com



Last of the horse drawn fire wagons.

The nation also rolled along to new growth and expansion. The Spanish-American War had brought the U. S. A. from a trading business into a world power with commitments from Cuba to the Philippines. In distant Europe, the war drums were sounding. In 1908, 1910 and 1912, events in that continent came close to bringing open warfare. There was no stopping it in 1914 and the Great War was on.

America tried to stay neutral, trying to trade with all nations on an equal basis. However, Great Britain and her allies had the ships, both freighters and war ships. Her navy was able to protect her supply lanes while Germany was sealed into the Baltic Sea. They developed the submarine or U-Boat as a weapon against British shipping. German subs ranged off the coast of the U. S. A. looking for their prey. In Congress at this time was much pro German influence. Some urged that we use our own navy to escort supply ships through the British lines and into German ports. The tide was turned when German subs sank the Lusitania either in error or in frustration. President Wilson called for a declaration of war. Soon the entire country was engulfed in that conflict.

Saint Marys responded with every manufactured product it could make from artillery wheels to army blankets to castings for war machinery. The Ohio Militia, just returned from fighting Pancho Villa on the Mexican border, was again mustered into the Rainbow Division. Some of these men were the first to land in France as "Black Jack" Pershing called out,

"Lafayette, we are here!"

Between April of 1917 and November, 1918, two hundred and thirty-five soldiers were enlisted or drafted. They served in many of the decisive battles and their vigor and bravery swung the tide of the war to victory for the Allies. Fifteen failed to return and many others suffered from wounds, shell shock and poison gas. Those who did return were determined to come back to a new way of life.

www.andyniekamp.com



Huge home coming day.

Chapter VI

The Beautiful Years

Eleven o'clock on November 11, 1918, the church bells of Saint Marys rang joyfully, factory whistles blew, shops and schools closed, citizens poured out onto the streets in a wild celebration. The Great War was over! The hero's of Company K and the Rainbow Division would soon be coming home. They had seen "Paree" and now would be "back on the farm." But these men had seen more of the world and a different world than that from which they had gone. They had dreams. They dreamed of a new and exciting life. They dreamed of better schools, better roads and a better city. The almost-a-century-old home town would never be the same again. Their vision was taken up by the entire community and beautiful things began to happen.

The Community Welfare Association had been formed during the war period to give aid to those families whose chief breadwinner had gone to "make the world safe for Democracy." Now they found themselves with a substantial treasury and no longer a stated purpose. It was proposed that this money be used for a fitting memorial to the veterans of the war. This suggestion rapidly lead to the idea of creating a Memorial Park in the center of town. The site recommended was then a rather delapidated collection of barns, livery stables, warehouses and other relics left over from canal days, together with several substantial homes.

In an amazing spirit of enthusiasm and cooperation the lovely Memorial Park was planned and completed in only one years time. The stage was now set for the grandest Homecoming and Centennial celebration that a town of this size, or comparably of any size, had ever witnessed. As a bit of nostalgia and to preserve the story for yet another generation, here is how the Centennial Supplement of 1923 told of this event.

www.andymiekamp.com

The St. Marys Centennial is now a part of History. The week of August 19th to 26th, 1923, was by all odds the most wonderful in the history of the old town. The 100th Anniversary of the City was celebrated in a manner that brought the highest degree of credit to civic enterprise in St. Marys. The celebration was planned along big lines and was carried out in the same big manner. For weeks previous to, and then during the week of the Centennial, all classes of citizens put aside their ordinary pursuits and stood shoulder to shoulder in putting across the biggest thing of this kind ever held in Northwestern Ohio. The harmonious action and unity of purpose shown through all the period of preparation was a most inspiring example of civic co-operation.

The crowds during the week were enormous. It had been expected of course that at times there would be several thousand people in town, but no one expected the tremendous turnout that occurred on different days of the celebration. During the Civic Parade on Tuesday morning fully 15,000 people were packed from end to end of Spring Street and on the streets extending north and south from Spring. On the day of the Pageant, "The Light of St. Marys," more than 25,000 people were in town. From every vantage point on every side of beautiful Memorial Park, dense masses of people were grouped where they could look down into the Park and see the striking scenes in the History of St. Marys. Thousands unable to see the Pageant that day scattered to different parts of town and waited to see the Pageant as repeated the next day. Of "Home Comers," 969 registered at the Community House. This number of course included only those who at some time had claimed St. Marys as home.

The week's program was carried out as planned, with only a few changes and additions. In this brief resume, only the high points of that Program can be touched on. On Sunday evening, August 19th, a great throng gathered at the Amphitheatre Tent for the union Church services. Here stirring addresses were delivered by Mr. A. Herzing of St. Paul's Church and Mr. John Sullivan of the M. E. Church. The wonderful music by the Centennial Chorus, the Centennial Octet and the Centennial Orchestra at this service, the two splendid addresses, the great mass of people present, and the very evident feeling of harmony and good will were all harbingers of the great week to come.

On Monday morning, August 20th, came the official opening at the Reviewing Stand in front of the Grand Opera House. Mr. John R. Coffin, General Chairman of the Centennial Committee, under whose far-sighted planning, efficient execution, and magnetic leadership, the Centennial plans were so successfully consumated, presided at this meeting. On the platform were seated the venerable Fathers and Mothers of the Community, so far as they were able to be present. The combined ages of these pioneers exceeded 2000 years. After a short and appropriate talk by Mayor Swift, he presented to Mr. Coffin the Key to the City for the week. Mr. Coffin responded with a glowing tribute to Mother St. Marys and her children. At the conclusion of his talk, Mr. Coffin asked for short talks from the pioneers. A number responded, among

www.andyniekamp.com

them being Mr. David Armstrong, Sr., 90 years of age, the oldest native born citizen of St. Marys; Mrs. Eliza Coney, 87 years of age, the oldest native born woman; Mrs. Caroline Makley; Mrs. C. P. McKee; Mrs. Ellen Levering; Mrs. Lucretia Prange; Mrs. Agnes Clover; James P. Smith; Charles Prange; and others. The music for the official opening was furnished by the popular St. Marys Band. This Band throughout the week gave most splendid service under the able leadership of Mr. Wm. Nichols. The Monday afternoon program at the tent was given by the Helmstetter Sisters Orchestra, with an address by Mr. O. V. Simons, Mr. George Wiss presiding. The Helmstetter Sisters are musical artists of the first rank and in the prelude were at their best. Mr. Simons gave a very able address on "Forward or Backward."

The evening program at the Community Tent was given by Mr. John C. Weber's Band of Cincinnati. This fine musical treat was given to the Centennial throng through the generosity of Mr. H. Collier Smith, and The Quickwork Company. Mr. Weber's Band is one of the really great Bands of the country and by their coming the Community enjoyed a wonderful musical program. Sharing honors with the Band were the great Soprano Soloist, Katherine Hoch, and the Cornet Soloist, Frank Simon.

Tuesday morning came the mammoth Civic Parade. This was a stupendous affair and was most splendidly organized and directed by Mr. H. Collier Smith. Mr. George Wiss acted as Grand Marshall. The Parade started just after 10:00 o'clock and it was just five minutes after 12:00 when the line of march disbanded. Not only was the Parade itself the greatest ever held in Northwestern Ohio, but the dense masses of spectators constituted the greatest assembly of humanity that ever viewed such a line-up in this vicinity.

The Tuesday afternoon program was marred by rain just after the concert by the John C. Weber's Band and the musical prelude. But Tuesday evening the program was carried out as planned with Mr. O. E. Dunan presiding. The musical prelude was given by the Centennial Orchestra and the Centennial Chorus in their best form. This was followed by an able and interesting address by Mr. Freeman T. Eagleson, of Columbus, Ohio.

Wednesday was Military Day and the scenes of that day brought back the memories of World War Days. Visiting military units were present from a number of neighboring cities and took part in the Military Parade, Embattled hosts of at least three wars were represented. A number of inspiring speeches followed the Wednesday afternoon march. The speakers included Roy E. Layton, Rev. Wm. P. O'Connor, Col. Wm. H. Marlin. Major Emil Finke presided. The evening was given over to a great display of fireworks, a sham battle, and a barbecue for all who participated in the days' parade.

www.andyniekamp.com

Thursday morning came the great Fraternal Parade. All nature smiled in pleasure as the Fraternity men, women and children in gay uniforms and Centennial attire marched and rode in long divisions through the streets of the City. It was a brilliant and inspiring spectacle.

The crowning event of the week came Thursday afternoon. This was the Pageant, "The Light of St. Marys." This Pageant was conceived and brought to perfection through the genius of an artist, Miss Ida Lee Beene, a resident of St. Marys. The Pageant brought not only immense credit to the City itself, but a magnificent tribute to its author, Miss Beene. It was a wonderful outgrowth of creative ability. Beautiful Memorial Park formed a unique setting for this great event. For months previous Miss Ida Lee Beene, Director, and a host of loyal and willing helpers had worked to prepare for this event and its rendition far surpassed the fondest hopes of the most optimistic. In beautiful and varied colors, with grace and poetry in every action, moving in well trained precision, the different units came and acted out the History of the City. It was stupendous in its planning, magnificent in its execution and gorgeous in its beauty. Thousands viewed the wonderful sight but more thousands were turned away, unable to get near the Park.

Thursday evening at the tent came one of the finest programs ever given. The music by Mr. Leo McFarland and the Chorus was of the highest quality and was an inspiration to the address that followed. This address was given by U. S. Senator S. D. Fess. Dr. Fess was at his best and made a distinct hit with the enormous crowd present.

Friday morning was given over to "Kiddies Day." Comprising the Doll Show, Doll Carriage Parade, Tricycle Show, Bicycle Show and Races, Push-mobile Show and Races. This was a very interesting part of the weeks events and attracted a big crowd. Friday afternoon at one o'clock came athletic and swimming events, directed by Mr. R. R. Barrington.

Owing to the fact that thousands were unable to see the Pageant on Thursday, it was decided to repeat it on Friday. This was done and another enormous crowd was on hand to view it. This repetition interferred somewhat with the Program given at the Tent at 2:00 o'clock. Mr. Hobart Scott presided at this program. The Prelude was given by the Centennial Orchestra under the direction of Mr. Wm. Nichols and was a distinct treat. Mr. Scott then introduced Mr. Chas. A. Mooney, U. S. Representative from Cleveland. Mr. Mooney is an old St. Marys boy, born and raised here and educated in the Public Schools of St. Marys. Mr. Mooney, because of the Pageant, spoke briefly but in a most able and interesting manner. He especially referred to old friends and neighbors and to old St. Marys as he knew it.

www.andyniekamp.com

Friday evening was given the Cantata, "The Legend of Nacooche," under the direction of Mrs. M. K. Clover. This was one of the premier programs of the week and drew a huge crowd to the tent. Three months of rehearsal on this difficult theme brought forth a splendid production which should be a matter of great satisfaction to those participating. The Cantata was followed by the playlet "Finders Keepers" which was skillfully given in artistic fashion by Mr. Emil Limbacher, Mrs. C. P. Kite and Miss Irene McNally.

Saturday was an open period for rest and visits. Saturday afternoon was given over to one of the most interesting programs of the Centennial, the pioneer's experience meetin'. Mr. C. C. McBroom presided at this meeting and on the stage were many of the pioneers of the city. Early scenes were recalled and reminiscences indulged. Mr. T. A. E. Weadock of Detroit, Michigan, spoke of his early days in and around St. Marys. Others who took part in recalling early days were James Weadock, Mrs. Charles Prange, J. D. Fike, Matthew Brodbeck, Samuel Murlin and Mrs. Wilbur Fiske. Interspersed through the program were beautiful and timely musical selections by the Centennial Orchestra, the Helmstetter Sisters orchestra, Mr. Arthur Nichols and Mr. Harvey Boltz.

During this program, an event occurred which was not on the official program. The North and South met. Mr. James P. Smith, a Union Veteran of the Civil War, called Miss Ida Lee Beene, a daughter of the South to the platform, and in behalf of the Civil War Soldiers, and in recognition of her splendid work with the Pageant, presented her with a beautiful brooch.

Saturday evening came the grand finale, the Mardi Gras. The air, the earth and the regions under the earth were represented by the hilarious celebrants. Angels, people, animals and the devil himself were all duly depicted. It was a spectacle in a class by itself. Music was furnished by the Chamber of Commerce Band and the Salem Township Community Band. The revelers were tendered an ovation all along the line of march by the multitudes packed along the street. Old time dances were put on near the north end of Main Street between Spring and High while the more modern dances were indulged in at the south end of the same space. Appropriate music was going at the same time at opposite ends of the dance rectangle.

Among the really big features of Centennial week were the great array of exhibits, ancient and modern at the Exhibit Tent. Industrial, mercantile, educational and antique relics were represented and classified. These exhibits drew great crowds all through the week. There was an elaborate display of school work of the schools today and also exhibits of pictures, manuscripts and books in use 30, 40, 50 and 60 years ago. There was also a wonderful collection of old laces, dress goods, cooking utensils, fire arms, tables, musical instruments, and dozens of other relics in the Historical Exhibit. Many of these relics were

www.andyniekamp.com

from 80 to 120 years old and were among the most interesting in the tent. Most of the manufacturers of the City had exhibits of their manufactured products on hand and these were a revelation to the sight-seers. The sight of these exhibits made every citizen feel proud that his City produced such high class goods.

The Centennial celebration is now a matter of History. It more than fulfilled the most sanguine expectations of the Community. It was a stupendous success of a stupendous undertaking. In closing this account it is only just that credit be given to three local boys for their loyal and efficient work in caring for the big Program Tent, Mr. Fritz Limbacher, Mr. Howard Meyers, and Mr. Lowell Botkin; to the Evening Leader for its splendid support; to Mr. H. Collier Smith, Sr., not alone for his generosity, but for the untiring and whole-souled support that he gave to the General Chairman; to Mrs. M. K. Clover, who gave so splendidly of her executive ability and musical talent; and to the citizenship of the City of St. Marys which stood shoulder to shoulder to put across the greatest event in its history.

—End of Reprint—



Grand finale of Centennial Pagent.



James and Simon Girty and Charles Murray as portrayed by local actors.

www.andyniekamp.com

The great centennial celebration was the emotional high point of the entire history of Saint Marys. However, during this same period men of vision and action were bringing this city into a new century of being! Men like Albert Herzing were working on a "Better Roads Association" to promote paving of highways while William Jasperson, thinking along the same lines, first proposed the idea of painting a center line on the pavement to eliminate the driver who "took his half out of the middle." (Many thanks, Bill, but they still do!) Another man was young Lieutenant Emil F. Marx just returned from the Great War. Marx recognized the need for a stronger defense force than the old State Militia. As soon as Congress passed the National Guard Act, he organized the first company in Ohio under this new law. They had the option of being Company "A", but chose to retain the designation of Company "K" as they had been during the late conflict. Marx also organized many other companies in Ohio and as a result of his vigor and dedication, Saint Marys was chosen in 1920 for one of the very first Armories to be built in the post war period. Marx continued his enthusiasm for the Guard and rose to be Adjutant General of Ohio in 1935. Since his retirement with the title of Brigadier General, he continued his service to this community by bringing into being the Joint Township Memorial Hospital.

Other men were pursuing other goals. The Memorial High School was under construction during the Centennial year. Lemon Gray Neely, the town's first millionaire, who had made his fortune in the oil boom and had built the quite prestigious home at Ash and South Streets, wanted to help the City with the new planned high school. Without any fanfare and with scant recognition, Neely purchased the land and donated it to the Board of Education. He asked that the name "Memorial" be used for the new school as a tribute to his late wife. His wish for no public accolade can be broken at this time to reveal the generosity of a true citizen. The new school was opened for use in 1924 and graduated its first class in 1925.

Harold G. Neely, his son, looked at a swampy weedy corner of Lake Saint Marys and saw a beautiful amusement park surrounded by a neighborhood of



Gordon Park on a typical Sunday.

www.andyniekamp.com

summer homes. Within a few years he and his associates had achieved their dreams. What Disneyland and Kings Island are to today's generation, Gordon Park was to as many as 60,000 people on July 4, 1925, when Saxi Holsworth's orchestra filled the pavilion as hundreds lined up to ride the wildest roller coaster and other rides. Disaster in the form of two fires, one tornado and the Great Depression of the thirties removed this park. The Villa Nova residential area has grown, however, and the State of Ohio now has the entire lake front site of Gordon Park as a recreational area.

Bill Jasperson was another man of vision and action. He found an area on the lake front that was heavily timbered with virgin forest. Here he established a more exclusive development which he named Northwood. A neighboring farm was laid out as a golf course between the highway and the lake. At the shoreline was erected an eighty foot replica of the famous Eddystone light house. The stately white column by day and the twinkling light by night still serves the hundreds of boaters, hunters and fishermen who visit Ohio's largest water recreational area.

The State of Ohio was keeping pace with the demand for changing canal lands to public recreation areas. At the constant urging of the local Fish and Game Association, the State fish hatchery grew from a quite humble beginning into what once became the world's largest hatchery. On down through many years, this growth has continued as The East Bank Park, the goose refuge near Montezuma, and the Trailer Camp at Saint Marys will testify.

The downtown area blossomed in these "beautiful years." Charlie Koch opened his new cafeteria where the tradition of fine food has endured and Tom Broad opened one new movie theatre called the Regent and then took over and modernized the creaking old "Grand Opera House."

America was changed in these few short years from its small town personality into a nation seeking a better life. The black folding top of the Model-T emerged as a sleek and powerful V-8, and the horse barn became the garage. Every home had a radio tuned at 6:00 P.M. to Lowell Thomas and the problems of Amos and Andy were the talk of Spring Street. Flappers wore skirts above their knees, danced the Charleston, bobbed their hair, smoked a cigarette in seclusion and a few even drank a slug of bathtub gin. We "returned to normalcy" with Harding, "kept cool" with Coolidge and asked "who but Hoover" as we rolled merrily along through the most Beautiful Years.

Few, if any, could see the dismal disaster that lay ahead. No, none but the sour-puss, the skinflint, the blue-nose could see that these times were not forever — that this was the new America — that this was our world and that it was going to be even better.

www.andyniekamp.com



Hunter's Market — typical of 1920's.

Chapter VII

Depression and Recovery

"Oh! for Pete's sake, Mom, knock it off. I know hamburger was 10 cents a pound, eggs were 8 cents a dozen and bread 5 cents a loaf. But remember, too, that Dad was only working a day and sometimes a day and a half a week."

"Now don't you say anything about your father," the older woman admonished. "He did the best he could. He kept this family together. He kept you fed and clothed and he had to help grandma too. I just wish he could walk in here right now and see what style you young folks are livin' in! What with your electric icebox, your gas stove, and your washing machine with its electric wringer! You kids today don't know what it is to do without. I sometimes think a little depression would smarten you up."

This conversation could have taken place in 1940, 1950, 1960 or even 1973. Those Good Old Depression Days! Enough time has passed by now that the heartache and the hunger is forgotten. Only the struggle to recovery is remembered as though it were a personal virtue and victory. The Saint Marys story can only hold a small mirror to the national scene as business fell off following the collapse of the finance structure.

The local businessman who had bragged that he sold out of the stock market at 60, had bought back in at 65. A few days later his stock was worth 40 and a year later was down to $10.00 per share or perhaps completely worthless. The farmer who had sold his horses in favor of a Fordson tractor now couldn't even buy gasoline let alone pay his taxes with corn at 10 cents per bushel. With low tax income, teachers and other public employees had many payless paydays. In many cases, they were ten to fifteen months behind in receiving their money. The factory worker saw his week cut to four days, then to two and frequently to nothing as his employer folded up.

www.andyniekamp.com

Saint Marys and Auglaize County Welfare Department had been geared to help the "poor people in time of need." Suddenly they found that hundreds of families were in poverty, and only pride was keeping hundreds of others from accepting charity. Older folks were most severely hurt as their life savings dwindled away. Young men roamed the countryside in search of some kind of employment. And again the huge deliquency in taxes cut deeply into the funds available to aid the needy.

The election in 1932 of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his promised "New Deal" proved to be the turning point. Drastic, dramatic emergency action was called for--and it came.

Banking reforms closed many banks, but restored confidence in those remaining. The famous N. R. A. or National Recovery Administration set about to establish fair-trade practices for industry with a minimum wage base that protected the worker from exploitation.

The Agriculture Adjustment Act bought up the glut of farm products from the market place and put vast quantities into storage as an "Ever Normal Granary." To prevent further over production of farm produce, quotas were established with bonuses paid to those who held acres from farming and penalities to those who failed to do so.

The W. P. A. or Works Progress Administration was quickly formed to break the huge unemployment rolls. Vast sums of money were spent to get men off of welfare and into some kind of employment. Projects controlled by city, county and state governments appeared from coast to coast. Through W. P. A., parks were created or restored, streets paved or repaired, bridges were built as were school houses, swimming pools and stadiums. Flood control projects ranged from soil erosion on a small farm to the harnessing of whole river systems for power, navigation and recreation. In Saint Marys, miles of sidewalk and curbing were installed, bridges built, parks restored, school facilities improved, sanitation works extended as this city started its own route to recovery.

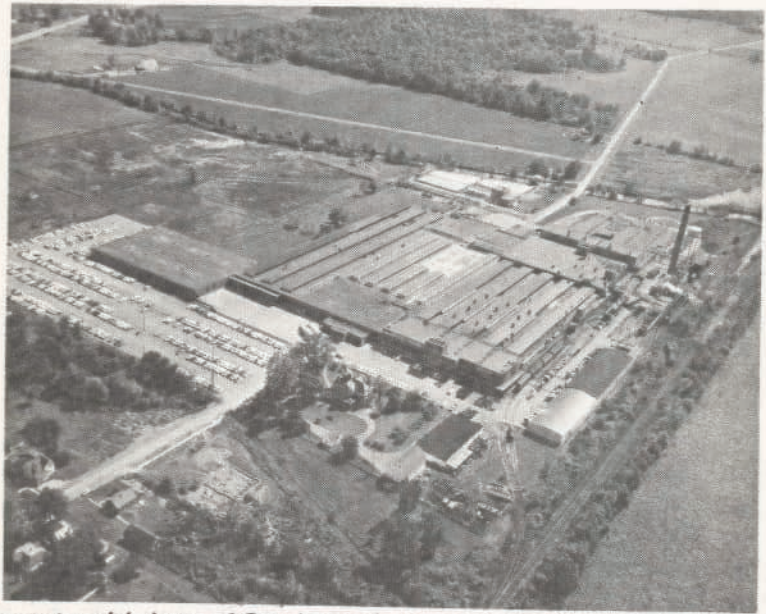
Out at the lake, a separate division called the Citizens Conservation Corps or C. C. C. was made up of from 100 to 300 single unemployed men. Military type barracks sheltered this crew as they worked on jobs around the State Parks. Their principal activity was at the State Fish Hatchery where acres and acres of ponds were created to make this facility the largest of its type in the world.

Pay checks from W. P. A. began to pump life blood into the economy as people began to regain confidence in America and in themselves. Now they felt that they could afford not only the necessities of life as food and clothing and home repairs, but now they could see the possibility of an electric icebox, a

www.andyniekamp.com

wringer washer and the miracle of its day–sliced bread! No longer were people lined up for surplus foods and the lines for employment changed to factory applications. Human nature, being what it is, housewives were soon complaining about having to pay 24 cents for hamburger!

Toward the end of the decade of the thirties, there were a lot of secret and confidential meetings taking place. Surveys of various sorts were being made, and rumors of all kinds went through the entire community. At long last the news could be held no longer. The story broke! Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company was coming! A whole new factory was to be built on the McKee farm at the south end of Wayne Street. They would employ as many as 200 people if that many could be found. The surveys that had been conducted had convinced Goodyear that a good stable work force was available here, along with a progressive school system, good sanitation, a plentiful supply of water for use and recreation and not the least of all was transportation. As old Charlie Murray had stated over a hundred years before, "Transportation–you gotta have." Good adequate transportation was one of the key factors in the selection of Saint Marys as a site for their new plant by this fine company.



Recent aerial photo of Goodyear plant – not showing recent addition.

Even as brick was being laid upon brick at this new construction, clouds of war were again forming over Europe. Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy were seeking to expand their borders and influence at the expense of their neighbors. In the Pacific area, the Japanese under Tojo were building a military machine that was to sweep over Korea, Manchuria and into China. Other nations had worked their way out of the world-wide depression by

www.andymekamp.com

creating forces for war. America was sailing along serenely in peaceful pursuit of its own internal welfare. It was America–an island unto itself; America first; no more foreign wars; let Europe settle its own affairs; America was isolated by two mighty oceans of water and a world of complacency within itself. We had laws that forbid sales of war material to other nations , but a new concept was devised. It was called Lend-Lease.

Soon American industry, shipyards, munition plants and aircraft factories were humming with activity. National Guard units were called up for training to "protect our coast lines" in case anyone dared an invasion of our sacred soil. America would never again be embroiled in the conflicts of the world.

The great bubble burst on December 7, 1941, as Japanese bombers flew in from over the Pacific. With sudden swiftness, they struck at Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands. In a few hours time, the bones of the American Navy lay crippled or sunken in the harbor, and the great airbase was a shambles of smoke and fire. With the dramatic fury of a tornado, the temper of America turned from peace to war.

In Saint Marys, our National Guard units had already been mustered into the U.S. Army and were training at Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Their advanced training put these units into the fore, and consequently, moved them into the first offensives against the enemy. Back home every citizen became involved. The Saint Marys Woolen Mills again, as in 1917, turned to army blankets as the Crane-McMahan's "Spoke Works" turned out army cots by the car load. Every facility in the area bent to its task. The new Goodyear plant expanded and expanded as the war effort needed more and more products that they were able to produce. Housewives who had never seen the inside of a factory took over the jobs of more than 800 men who went into service. Oldsters who had retired came back into the work force as youngsters also worked while waiting for their draft.

This being "The Saint Marys Story," the actions of the Second World War will be recorded elsewhere. The bravery, dedication and victories as well as the suffering and hardships of those embroiled in the conflict is deeply engraved in the appreciation of this entire country. The war ended as quickly and dramatically as it had begun. Pearl Harbor had been surprised by an attack of sudden destruction. A brilliant flash in the skies over Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought a new force of complete destruction to the world scene. The atomic age was born.

As the war came to a close, opinion in Saint Marys as throughout the nation varied as to the future. Many anticipated a lengthy period of adjustment to peacetime activity. Others saw the pent up need for better housing, furniture and appliances, automobiles, and in fact, consumer goods of all types.

America and local industry were better prepared than in 1920 to welcome

www.andyniekamp.com

home the returning veterans. Work opportunities were plentiful, and Saint Marys turned its attention to the needs of the city. Again, as at the close of World War I, the people sought a way to create a proper memorial tribute to those who had served. A city hospital was proposed. It was soon determined that a city of this size was too small of a base to support such an endeavor. Cooperation of other communities in the area led to the establishment of a Joint Township Hospital District with Jackson, German, Saint Marys and Noble townships working together. In May of 1953, the hospital was opened. The years since have been expansions and in the summer of 1973, the area will have completed a greatly enlarged facility dedicated to many specialized treatments. A more complete history of the Joint Township Memorial Hospital was prepared by Prof. A. J. Kohler at the time of its tenth anniversary.

Servicemen of World War II not only returned to their jobs in Saint Marys. They married, had children and built homes. New homes, new streets and whole new subdivisions in a few years doubled the residential capacity of the city. The so-called "baby boom" as had been anticipated took place.

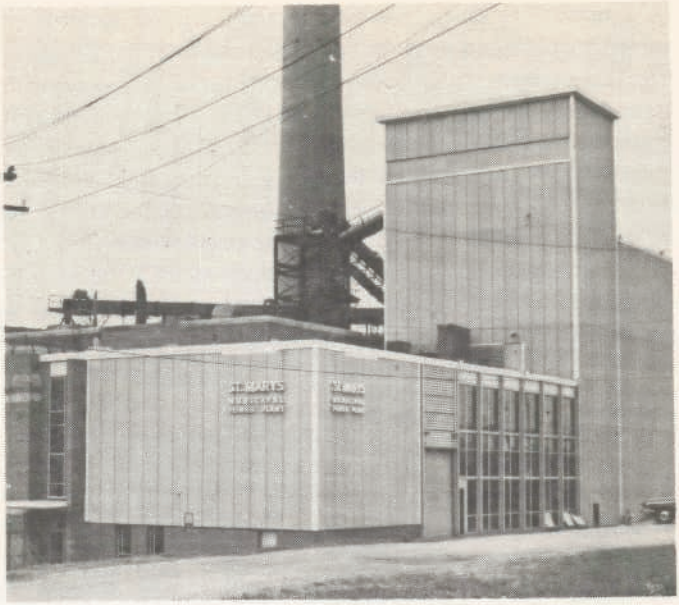
In the decade of the 1950's, to accommodate this influx of school children, the Saint Marys Board of Education was faced with a heavy building program. The McBroom Junior High was opened in 1952 with 13 rooms for seventh and eighth graders. In only three years, it was necessary to add on 10 more rooms. At the end of this ten year period, the old East and West Schools were replaced by new modern buildings located in more spacious grounds. Other public school expansions were completed at the Memorial and McBroom complex in 1962 and 1967.

The Holy Rosary Parochial School also kept pace with the growth in population. In 1956, they opened their new building with a capacity of 300 pupils.

Churches were also caught in the enlargement of population and service to their congregations as the Saint Pauls E. & R. (now United Church of Christ), the Zion Lutheran and the Methodist Churches all built new education facilities. The United Rubber Workers Local erected a fine meeting hall on East South Street that is available to the community for many public meetings and private parties.

As Saint Marys grew in size and population, the need for services supplied by city government also increased. A wholly new sanitary sewerage treatment plant was constructed even before the subject of pollution became popular. A water treatment and softening process was installed near the new deep well field south of town.

www.andyniekamp.com



Saint Marys Municipal Power Plant

In the "good old days" of W.P.A., Saint Marys had missed out on a swimming pool. Those who had protested then on the basis of our beaches at the lake and the swimmin' holes in the canal were now traveling to New Bremen and Wapakoneta to swim in their beautiful and crystal clean waters. Saint Marys now has its own pool, larger and more complete than the older W.P.A. structures.

The old "town hall," built in 1867 with bricks made locally by Shipley and Garrett and the scene of the Great Mikado's performance, was no longer adequate for modern fire equipment. A new Safety Building has been added to house both Fire and Police Departments. A completely new City Service Garage has been completed on North Chestnut Street to take care of street and water maintenance. As Saint Marians continue to chip in that "little old one per cent" income tax, the cities streets are being rebuilt on a more permanent basis.

The Municipal Electric Light Plant has expanded to meet every anticipated need although every addition was thought by many to be too large. Greater efficiencies in equipment and management have kept rates in line in spite of greatly increased costs.

The United States Post Office Department finally got around to building an office on a lot they had bought forty years before. For over thirty years, the Post Office had been downtown on the island between the river and canal. Here they

www.andyniekamp.com

had leased quarters from the Community Welfare Association with rental payments going to maintain the beautiful Memorial Park. When the Post Office moved into its new quarters on Chestnut Street, the City of Saint Marys took over the building as a new City Hall. This is the new civic center. Here are now located the Utility Offices, Mayor, Auditor, Treasurer, Service Director, Tax Commissioner's Offices as well as the City Engineering Department, District Court and City Council Chambers.

As the 1960's drew to a close, Saint Marys saw several changes in its industrial life. When the Woolen Mills closed, the Saint Marys Cotton Mills came in as a reprocessor of cotton goods. Their business has thrived to the point of employing a night shift a goodly part of the time. To carry out the tradition of Saint Marys as a home of fine woolen blankets, several skilled craftsmen of the Saint Marys Woolen Mills have established the Luxury Blanket Co. specializing in weaving a new line of products. The paper mill, properly known as the Weston Paper Company, was closed down recently. Rumors of new tenants for their excellent location are currently abroad. Something may develop in this problem within the very near future.

At the same time, other factories are enjoying continued rapid growth. The Saint Marys Foundry Company has tripled its capacity and installed some of the newest processes for gray iron casting and steel casting. The Parker-Hannifin Company has assigned more of its work to its local plant. Goodyear has extended its operations in molded rubber, extruded rubber and pliofilm and is again building another multi-million dollar addition to its operation in Saint Marys. Recreational facilities at the Grand Lake Saint Marys are constantly being improved to accommodate the thousands of boaters, campers and sportsmen who flock to this beautiful body of water.

As Saint Marys approaches the threshhold of its 150th anniversary, it is impossible to express what its earliest settlers would say if they could be here today. What would old Charlie Murray, who insisted that "Transportation–you gotta have," say of a train of 140 cars carrying more freight than the entire canal boat fleet. What would he say of the network of concrete highways that puts Cincinnati only an hour and a half away! What thoughts would cross the mind of Lt. John Armstrong? As Saint Marys was being established as a town, this veteran of the War of 1812 was clearing a forest. The home farm of John Armstrong would stay in the family for over a century and a half. The Lieutenant, shouldering his axe at twilight, trodding wearily homeward as the full moon rose, could hardly dream that his very own great great great grandson would be the first man to walk on the surface of that moon.

The truth is that Neil Armstrong lived in Saint Marys, Ohio, longer than he has lived in any one place in his life. Although actually born at his grandmother's home southeast of here, the famous astronaut was brought by his

www.andyniekamp.com

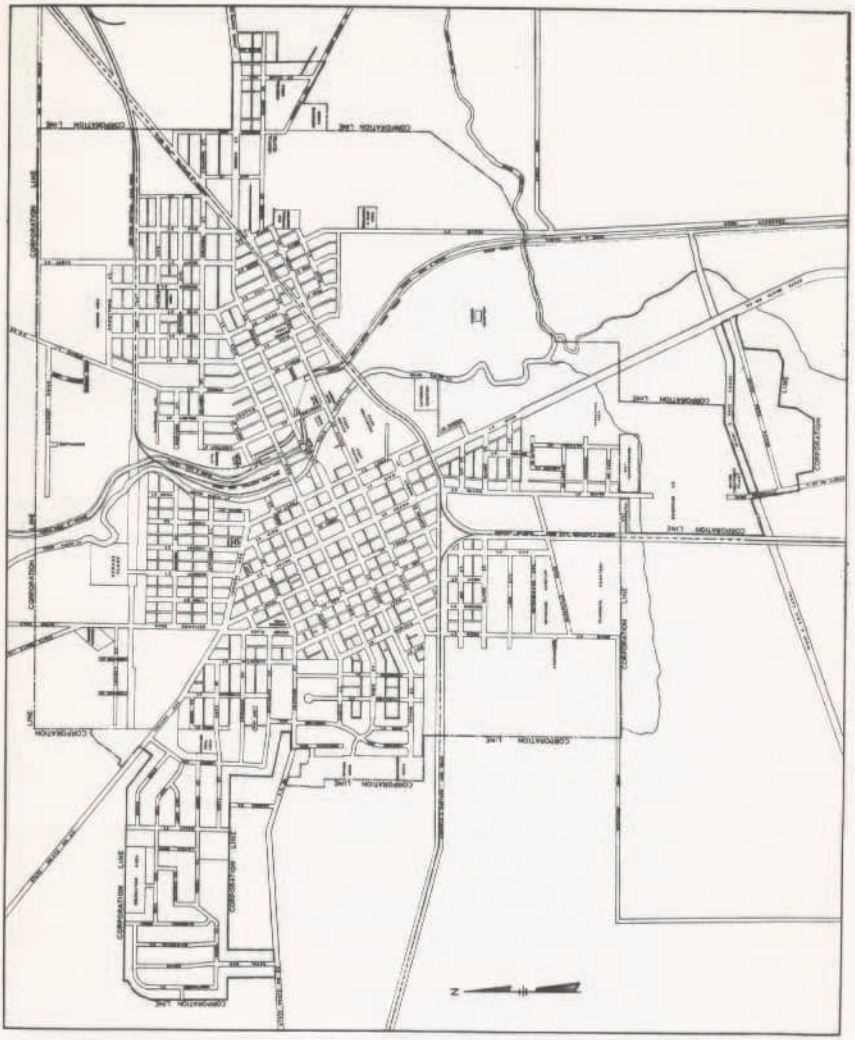
parents to their home when he was eleven days old. He grew up here, went through the fifth grade of school here, and at the age of twelve, moved to Upper Sandusky, Ohio. After three years there, his father, Stephen Armstrong, was again transferred. They made their home then in Wapakoneta where young Neil attended high school, learned to fly an airplane and went on to college–the Air Force–and the moon! With five generations of Armstrongs behind him, and an almost equal number on his mother's side of the family, a vast number of the local population can call him "cousin" or at least "cousin-in-law"! All of Saint Marys is extremely proud of this young man and respects his often expressed desire to stay out of the lime light.

The Saint Marys Story has now been told. The days of an Indian trading post have given way to an industrial-agricultural community. The sturdiness of the pioneer family is still prevalent in the character of the peoples who came to make this the strong city it is today. Men of vision and action for a century and a half have created here the results of their dreams.

There are still today men of great vision and their actions will make Saint Marys an even better place to live. Some men today see a restructuring of our downtown area or in failure to do so, the deadening blight of a shopping center. Some men today see the need for a "Golden Age" center where older folks can live their days in peace, free from the worries of household maintenance and personal loneliness. Other men see visions of vocational schools to better prepare our youth for the life that lays ahead of them, and still others see visions of preserving some of the heritage left by those who preceded us. The Miami & Erie Parkway has one last chance of survival. A few more years of neglect and it will all be gone. The green space available now as the South Park and containing the graves of our first settlers will in time become a second class subdivision or a factory site unless vision and action are again combined. Others vision a new home for our Community Library, a youth development center, or a Y.M.C.A. type of operation, and still others vision a senior citizen-art and craft hall.

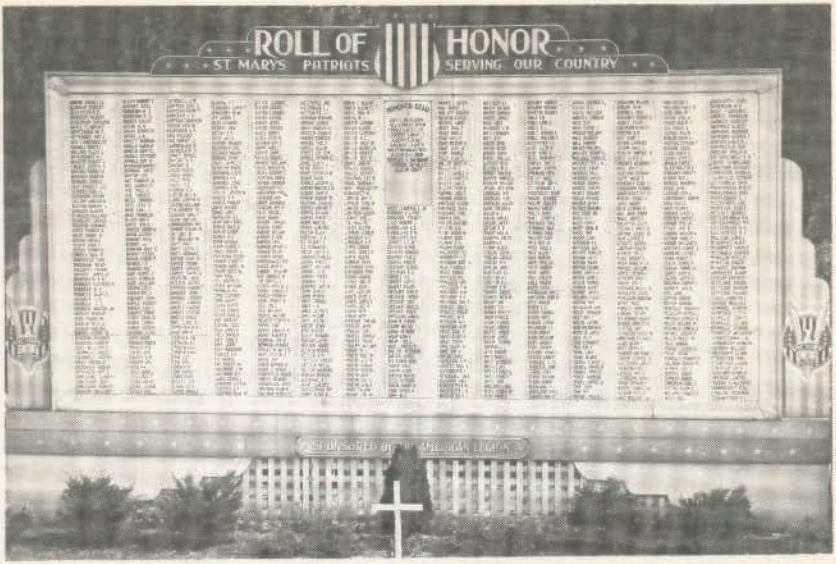
Visions are what tomorrow is made of–without them tomorrow will be worse than today! Good luck, Saint Marys! May your dreams and visions through your actions bring that better Tomorrow to each and everyone of you!

www.andymekamp.com



Present plot of Saint Marys — 1973

www.andyniekamp.com



Community Organizations

During the last 50 years – the period elapsing since our centennial observance – fraternal organizations of 1923 have all but disappeared from St. Marys.

The Masonic orders, Eagles lodge and Knights of Columbus continue to flourish. The other fraternal organizations no longer hold meetings here although some local residents continue their affiliation with them in nearby communities.

Classified service clubs – Rotary and Kiwanis for men and Soroptimist for women have been established here and to serve the community in many ways.

In addition to these three classified service clubs, the community also has Beta Sigma Phi chapters. The Venture Club sponsored by Soroptimist for young business women, a chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma, for outstanding teachers, the Mother's Study Club, Progress Club and Shakespeare Club for women interested in cultural growth, the St. Marys Music Club for men and women interested in music, the Drama club for women interested in the study and performance of the drama, and recently a chapter of the American Association of University Women.

4-H Clubs, Boy and Girl Scout troops are sponsored for the young people in the community.

The Western Ohio Fish and Game Association is composed of sportsmen interested in the propagation of game and fish and in the promotion of trapshoots and hunting safety.

Izaak Walton League chapter was formed here two years ago to protect the environment and to encourage the promotion of activities for protection of the environment.

www.andyniekamp.com

Patriotic organizations take an active part in community life-the Woman's Relief Corps established an auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic meets regularly at the Armory in the room reserved for patriotic organizations; the St. Marys Post 323 American Legion and the American' Legion Auxiliary meet regularly at their Post Home on highway 703 west of St. Marys; the Robert Lee Griner Post 9289 V.F.W. and Ladies Auxiliary meet regularly in the Post Home on U.S. Highway 33 in East St. Marys.

Newspaper and News

The Evening Leader, St. Marys daily newspaper, was established here in 1902 as a result of the merger of two publications, the Daily News and the Graphic. John L. Sullivan and Charles L. Hunter joined forces then to organize the Leader Printing Company, formally incorporated in 1905. Mr. Hunter became the business manager and John L. Sullivan the editor of The Evening Leader.

In 1907, Mr. Sullivan sold his interest to Mr. Hunter who continued publication of The Evening Leader until 1914 when he was appointed as St. Marys postmaster. W. A. Moxley, who formerly had edited The Evening Herald here, then became editor. He was succeeded by John W. Fisher. In February 1916, John L. Sullivan returned to St. Marys from Columbus where he served as state printer to become editor and manager of The Evening Leader, a position he continued to hold until 1926. At that time the present Leader Printing Company bought the interests of Mr. Sullivan and others in The Leader Printing Company.

A. C. Buss was named treasurer and general manager, John Whitney, business manager and Thomas E. Wilson, editor, and continued in office until 1927. A. C. Buss, one of the major stockholders of the company former editor of the New Bremen Sun and the St. Marys Graphic, a weekly, and the general manager of the Creamery Patron Printing Company in St. Marys, became general manager and editor of The Evening Leader in 1927, a position he continued to hold until his death in 1944.

In 1944 The Leader Printing Company directors elected H. W. Buss, treasurer and general manager and H. M. Blair, secretary and business manager. Kathryn C. Geiger was named editor. They continue to serve in these capacities. Officers of the company today include H. W. Buss, president and chairman of the board; H. M. Blair, vice president and treasurer; Brice H. Blair, secretary.

In 1969 The Evening Leader made many improvements including converting to offset printing, installed a modern offset press capable of turning out a 20-page issue in a single run to replace the flat-bed eight-page press, and has enlarged its editorial and advertising staffs to better serve the community. United Press International provides state, national and international news coverage.

The community is also served by metropolitan newspapers.

Radio station WCSM, located in Celina, has a branch studio here. The community is served too by stations WMER, Celina and WERM, Moulton, all three stations carrying news items from the community.

www.andyniekamp.com

Churches Established Early

Wayne Street United Methodist Church had its beginning here in 1824, just one year after St. Marys was incorporated. Circuit ministers came in early to hold services at periodic intervals. Historians report that the Catholic priests came here from Piqua and other points to hold mass in private homes and in the early hotels serving the area, although establishment of a parish came later.

Today there are Christian churches of many denominations serving our people.

The churches, the date of their establishment and their present pastors follow:

Wayne Street United Methodist, 1824, Rev. Richard P. Coad, D.D.
First Presbyterian, 1838, Rev. Clifford Ball
First Baptist, 1841, Rev. Robert Carnick.
Zion Lutheran, 1849, Rev. Theodore T. Stellhorn III.
St. Paul's United Church of Christ, 1849, Rev. Howard H. Poetter.
Holy Rosary Catholic, 1854, Rev. Anselm Boeke.
Grace United Methodist, 1897, Rev. James B. Kendrick.
Friends Church, 1908, Rev. Rick Matthews.
Wesleyan, 1914, Rev. Harry Reid.
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ, Latter Day Saints, 1921, Elder Wilbur Sawmiller.
Hillsdale United Brethren, 1961, Rev. Burton Patrick.
First Church of Nazarene, 1930, Rev. J. O. McCaskell.
Church of Christ, 1963, Rev. Ed Wade.
Gospel Mission, 1970, Rev. L. G. Anderson.
St. Marys Baptist Temple, 1971, Rev. Herstle Griffis.

Educational buildings or parish halls have been added by Zion Lutheran, St. Paul's United Church of Christ, and Wayne Street United Methodist churches. The Nazarene Church has converted its original church into a Sunday School annex to its new church.

Zion Lutheran Church has started construction of a new half-million dollar church edifice immediately north of the church which has served the congregation since 1908.

The United Methodist Church of this district has a church camp, Camp St. Marys, on state highway 364, southeast corner of Lake St. Marys established there 25 years ago, in 1947, by the Ohio-Sandusky Conference of the United Brethren Church, now merged with the Methodist Church in the United Methodist.

The Church of the Nazarene for this district has a church camp, the Nazarene Center on the north shore of Lake St. Marys west of St. Marys.

Both of these church camps have large tabernacles and serve many people throughout the summer. Camp St. Marys is rented too by other denominations for special retreats and conferences throughout the year.

www.andyniekamp.com



Reorganized Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter Day Saints



St. Paul's United Church Of Christ



Hillsdale United Brethren In Christ Church



Church Of Christ



First Friends Church



Holy Rosary Church



Hillsdale Baptist Church



Wesleyan Church

www.andyniekamp.com



Wayne Street Methodist Church



Church Of The Nazarene



Zion Lutheran Church



First Presbyterian Church



The First Baptist Church



Grace United Methodist Church

www.andyniekamp.com

Our School Children's Education Has Been Furthered

St. Marys citizens have demonstrated an active interest in the education of their children throughout the years. Our Centennial History reported that St. Marys was the first town in Ohio to take advantage of the Akron School Law, passed about 1850, providing for public support of the schools. That was in 1853. Previously schools were located here in churches and in private homes as pay schools.

Rev. A. Rodgers became the first superintendent of the St. Marys schools and served until 1855. The Union School came into being in 1855 under Jonathan Fairbanks who served as superintendent until 1857. During those few years he made a decided imprint on the people of the community and laid the foundations for the future education system here. Jonathan Fairbanks Clubs were started and continued meeting long after Mr. Fairbanks had left the community.

Succeeding superintendents were a Mr. Templeton, 1857-1858; G. H. Richardson, 1858-1860; S. F. DeFord, 1860-1864; J. B. Peaslee, 1864-1866; W. F. Torrence, 1866-1879; J. A. Barber, 1879-1881; J. A. Shawan, 1881-1883; C. S. Wheaton, 1883-1889; J. D. Simkins, 1889-1903; E. A. Hotchkiss, 1903-1906; C. E. McBroom, 1906-until his sudden death on April 14, 1945; O.O. Royer, April 14, 1945-June 30, 1945; Harold H. Cook, July 1, 1945-Aug. 1, 1968 and Frank Dennings, Aug. 1, 1968 -.

There were four public schools and Holy Rosary Catholic school serving the children of this community at the time of our Centennial Celebration in 1923. A new St. Marys high school building was in the process of being constructed at that time.

Today only one of those five buildings-Bunker Hill School-is still serving the community. The West School, which served as the High School and also as an elementary school for years, became an elementary school in 1925 with the completion of Memorial High School and continued serving as such until the new West School was constructed in 1959. The new East School was brought into use that same year replacing old East School which had been built in 1888. The first ward building was abandoned.

McBroom School had been erected in 1952 to serve the 7th and 8th grade pupils and was named in grateful remembrance of Charles C. McBroom who had served the schools 39 years as superintendent plus additional years as a teacher.

Both McBroom School and Memorial High School were enlarged in 1956. In 1963 they were united physically with the construction of the Library-Administration Section. In 1966 by vote of the people there was further enlargement of McBroom School and the gymnasium and a new building to house the industrial arts, some of the laboratory sciences and the vocational Ag to serve the High School. The McBroom, East and West Schools were erected and expansions achieved at a cost of $3,045,600 in four separate bond issues, passed by the voters with substantial majorities, proving the continuing interest of the people in our young people.

www.andyniekamp.com

The St. Marys School District has been enlarged by the addition of Noble and Moulton School Districts, adding the Noble and Moulton Schools to the City's administration.

St. Marys High School graduated its first class in 1874 with Anna Barrington, Lillie Dieker, Carrie Kelsey, Louise Nieber, Florence Hemisphar, O. E. Dunan, and R. B. Gordon as members of that first class. The 100th anniversary of the High School will be observed next year, in 1974. The Alumni Association was founded in 1881.

Holy Rosary Catholic School was founded in 1902 during the pastorate of the Rev. Father Francis Kessing. In 1957, the present fine school building was erected at a cost of about $300,000, contributed by members and friends of the parish. It includes classrooms, offices and a multi-purpose room to serve as a dining room, auditorium and gym.

The former school building provides space for the parish and school library.

All of the elementary schools, public and parochial, have multi-purpose rooms with the exception of Bunker Hill. These multi-purpose rooms serve as cafeterias, gymnasiums and as auditoriums for programs.

Memorial High School also has a large auditorium and combination stage-gymnasium.

The pupils and teachers of Memorial High use the McBroom cafeteria.

Memorial High School Football Field directly back of the school has a stadium and bleachers capable of seating approximately 2,000. The stadium was erected in 1937 and enlarged in 1965.

A baseball field and tennis courts are part of the athletic facilities at Memorial-McBroom.

The track, built this last year, is located at the West School grounds.

The St. Marys School District is part of the Auglaize-Mercer Joint Vocational School District which has sought to establish a joint vocational school to serve all of the schools in Mercer county, St. Marys, New Bremen, New Knoxville and Minster schools in Auglaize county. The bond issue proposed for the school and operating levy have been defeated three times by the voters. Recently the district was reorganized and will likely resubmit the issues.

The St. Marys School District is currently served by 138 certified personnel including the superintendent, principals for each of the buildings, guidance counselors in the high school, school nurse, a psychologist, art and music teachers, including vocal and instrumental. There are also about 60-non-certified personnel.

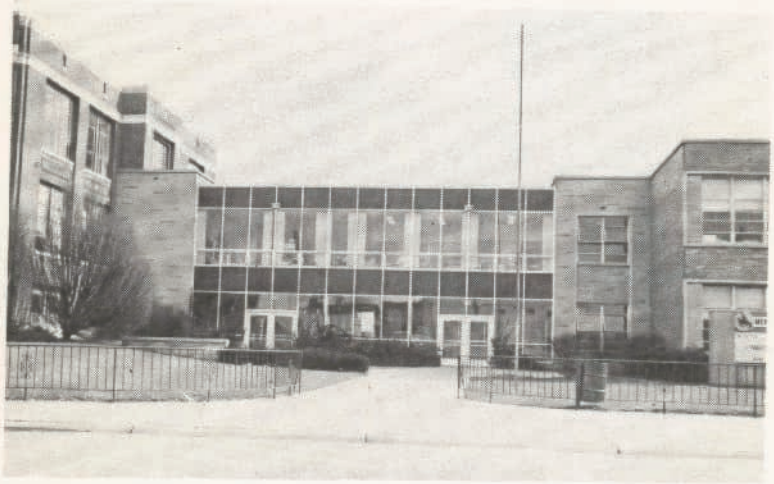
Holy Rosary School is served by the principal, Sister Marjorie Fahey, and eight teachers. Sister of the Society of Precious Blood and lay teachers serve the school.

www.andyniekamp.com

The Central PTA sponsors annual awards of scholarships to those interested in pursuing a college course to serve in education. The scholarship program was started to help alleviate the shortage of teachers.



Memorial High School



McBroom School

www.andyniekamp.com



McBroom School



Bunker Hill School

www.andyniekamp.com

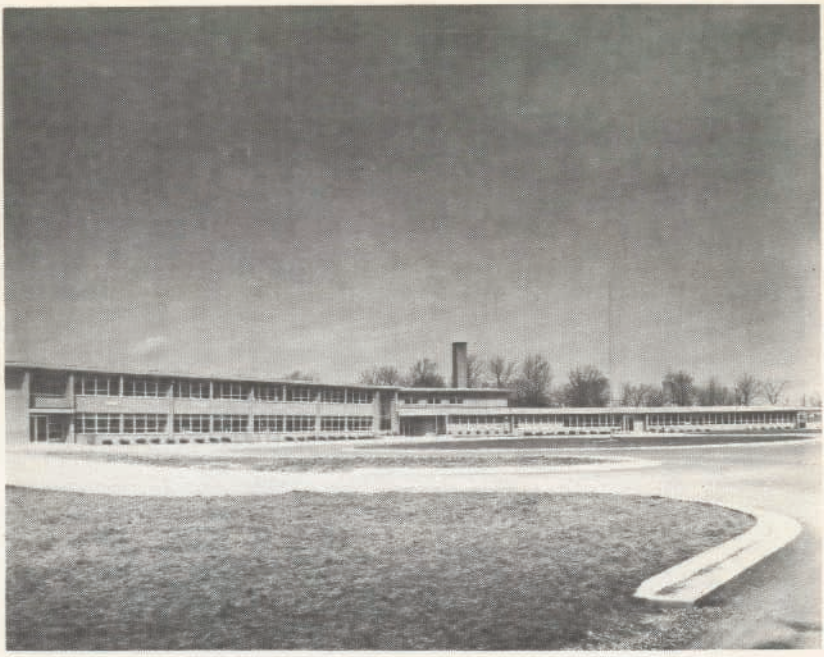


Old West Side School

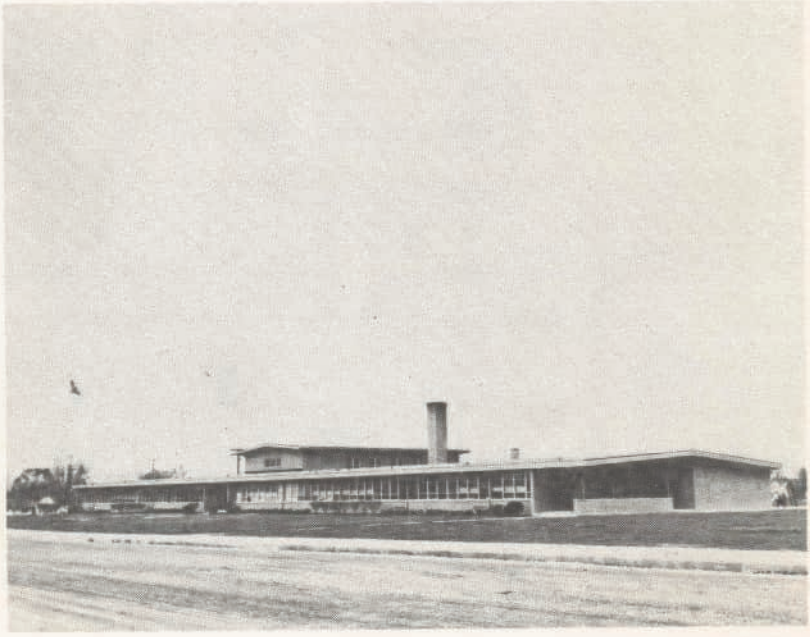


Old East Side School

www.andyniekamp.com



Present West Elementary School



Present East Elementary School

www.andyniekamp.com

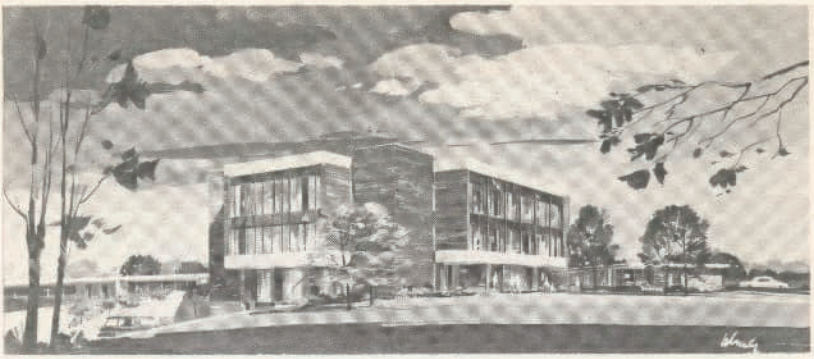


Old Union School



Holy Rosary School

www.andyniekamp.com



Joint Township District Memorial Hospital Flourishes

Joint Township Memorial Hospital, erected through a bond issue passed by citizens of German, Jackson, Noble and St. Marys townships on Nov. 5, 1946, officially opened its doors on May 5, 1953. It was erected after a legal battle carried to the Court of Appeals and to the Supreme Court of Ohio to establish that the bond issue had properly been passed under the Uniform Bond Act. The Federal Government under the Hill-Burton Act had added $250,000 to the $500,000 authorized by the voters of the four township district to provide necessary funds for constructing and equipping the hospital. The hospital promotion had been spearheaded by the American Legion of St. Marys.

The people of St. Marys in a fund drive subscribed the $14,282.80 needed to purchase the hospital site in Highland addition, St. Marys. This drive was undertaken after it was learned that purchase of the site had been omitted inadvertently from the bond issue as it was submitted to the voters on the ballot although it had been included in the resolution passed by the trustees.

Citizens contributed funds for furnishing the rooms.

Dedication of the Hospital was delayed until May 12, 1954 when it was formally dedicated to the memory of World War II members from the four township area who had sacrificed their lives.

Dr. Guy E. Noble, the chairman of the first Board of Governors, presided at the dedication.

Trustees of the first board of the hospital district - included Ofie Dowty, Harry Quellhorst and William Lietz, St. Marys Township, Burt Kennedy, William Vogel and Alfred Nedderman, Noble township, William Schowe, John Zahn and William Dammeyer, German township and Ferd Bockrath, Ray Meyer and Fred Steineman, Jackson Township.

Members of the first board of governors were Dr. Guy E. Noble, St. Marys, president; Reuben H. Dickman, New Bremen, vice president; Emil F. Marx, St. Marys, secretary; William Schowe, New Bremen, treasurer, Roy Meyers, Jackson township, Harry Freet, St. Marys and Roy Brodbeck, Noble township. At the time of the dedication the board included Dr. Noble, president; Earl Kuenning, New Bremen, vice president; Emil F. Marx, secretary; A. L. Kruse,

www.andyniekamp.com

New Bremen, treasurer; Harry Freet, St. Marys, legal representative, Joseph Stueve, Jackson township and Herman Oelrich, Noble township. Names on the Roll of Honor, placed on the bronze memorial plaque in the hospital lobby, are the following:

German Township

Gensler, George, Jr.; McNett, Richard; Knipple, Warren; Mohrman, Donald; Koenig, David; Shaffer, Gerald; Luebkeman, Frederick; Zahn, John, Jr.

Jackson Township

Heitkamp, Herbert; Thieman, William, Jr.; Ramsey, Paul; Weiskittle, Robert; Steineman, Herbert.

Noble and St. Marys Townships

Beale, Joseph S.; Liggett, George; Botkin, John P.; Lutterbeck, Myron; Clark, Raymond; Makley, Donald; Chamberlain, Robert; Miller, Doyt D.; Craft, Dale; Nealeigh, Guy L.; Cramer, Garard; Reiher, Thomas A.; Connaughton, William; Roettger, Vernon C.; Dickman, Vernon H.; Ryan, Ned Edward; Eberle, Franklin; Sweigart, Orvil; Faurot, Doyt W.; Sweigart, Carter E.; Felver, Carl H.; Schnelle, Vernon; Griner, Robert; Schamp, Walter; Huston, Alvin S.; Schelby, John E.; Joyce, Lester; Swysgood, Harold; Kettler, Charles; Yahl, Raymond; Linville, Herbert; Young, Delbert..

The hospital was expanded in 1957 with the addition of a 25-bed wing, constructed through a bond issue of $150,000 passed by the voters of the four township district.

A new laboratory and X-ray room were constructed in 1962. In 1963 the hospital was completely air-conditioned to make it one of the first small hospitals offering this convenience to its patrons.

On Aug. 16, 1963, the hospital received notification of its first official accreditation for a period of three years. Since then the hospital has received a maximum renewal of accreditation in 1966, 1969, and 1972, the last renewal having been received for a period of two years, the maximum today.

In 1965 the hospital added new storage facilities through addition of four rooms to the north wing of the buildings.

Then in 1970 the trustees of the hospital district, recognizing the need for enlarging the facilities, submitted to the voters of the four township area a bond issue of $2,230,000 to provide for a multi-story addition to the hospital.

When the hospital was originally built the state hospital officials had insisted that the hospital be a one-floor plan despite the fact that local officials, doctors and nurses had spoken out for a multi-story building.

The trustees determined in 1970 to submit to the people a bond issue for a three story and basement addition. The bond issue was passed by a substantial margin and the structure is now well under construction, scheduled for completion later this year.

www.andyniekamp.com

When it is completed the hospital will have 121 beds, an intensive care and coronary care unit, an enlarged surgery, expanded laboratory and X-ray facilities, and improved outpatient facilities, including physical therapy and inhalation therapy.

Miss Lillian Stoll, R.N., served as administrator of the hospital from its beginning until her retirement on March 31, 1972. She was succeeded as administrator by Robert Harman, who had served as assistant administrator for two and a half years.

During the capable administration of Miss Stoll and Mr. Harman, the hospital has functioned well, contributing much to the well-being of the community.

The present hospital board of trustees includes: Alton Woehrmyer, president; James E. Kite, vice president; Paul Koenig, secretary-treasurer; David Quellhorst, James, Shelby, Russell Morris, Howard McGee, Robert Vogel, Frank Niemeyer, Richard Koeper, Norbert Meyer and Adolph Tebbe.

The Board of Governors is composed of Norman Wurster, president; Dr. J. F. Bowling, vice president; Clifford Kempker, secretary; Lester Blanke, treasurer; Edward S. Noble, Louis Dammeyer and Alton Woehrmyer and Mr. Harman, recording secretary.

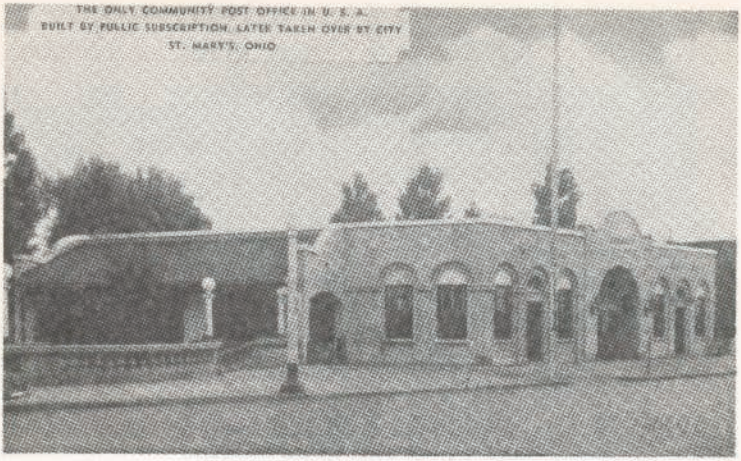
In the 27 years since the first bond issue was passed, the Board of Trustees and the Board of Governors have been served by many individuals who have contributed much to the hospital. In the 20 years the hospital has been functioning, the institution has gained an outstanding reputation for service throughout the area. The personnel of the hospital includes some fine dedicated individuals, some of whom have been there since the opening of the hospital. The medical staff has been increased during the last year. Efforts are being made to further enlarge the staff to meet local needs.

The Community Public Library

The Community Public Library was organized May 31, 1921 with its formal opening June 14, 1921, in the Community House in Memorial Park. It was started by the ladies of the Shakespeare club and maintained through the club's efforts until 1935 when it became tax supported. Initially the library's collection of books came from Shakespeare members and their friends and through purchases made from funds derived from Bake sales and other projects of the club.

The library was moved from the Community House to the Herzing property in South Main street, the former home of Miss Louise Bieber where it remained for a few years, and then was moved to the basement quarters in the Community-owned Post Office building, now the municipal building.

www.andyniekamp.com



Municipal Building Since 1957

Build Community Owned Post Office

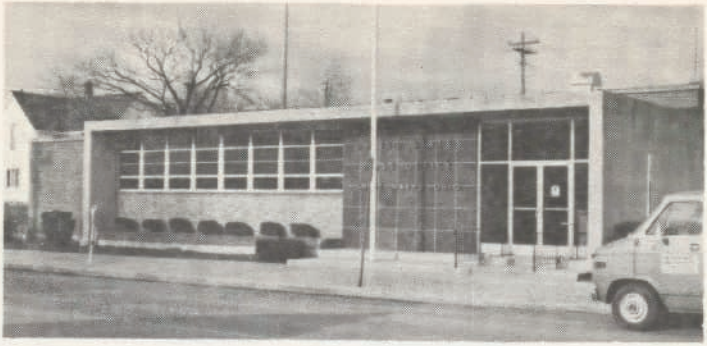
St. Marys citizens built the only Community Owned Post Office in the United States. Postmaster General New dedicated it in 1925. It was constructed on the island at the entry to Memorial Park through action of the Community Welfare Association, the same organization which promoted the construction of Memorial Park in 1920 as a memorial to the men and women of the community who served in World War I. The Community Owned Post Office was erected with the intention of maintaining the park through income from the Post Office lease and lease from the two office rooms, one on the east and the other on the west side of the post office lobby. The directors hoped too to retire some of the debt on the park and post office building through the income. Unfortunately the depression came, rentals decreased, and pledges for the Park and Post Office Building could not be met.

In 1938 the Community Welfare Association offered to cede all of its holdings to the City of St. Marys provided the citizens would approve a bond issue to pay off the remaining indebtedness. A bond issue of $27,000 was passed by the voters for 15 years to pay the debt and to provide for public rest rooms.

CITY ACQUIRES PARK

Thus the city acquired beautiful Memorial Park in the heart of the city, the Chestnut street playground, and much of the land that has gone into construction of the off-street parking lots on the west side of the St. Marys River and the east side of Chestnut street. In addition it acquired the Community Owned Post Office since converted into the Municipal Building.

www.andyniekamp.com



New Post Office

POSTMASTERS SINCE 1825

The first postmaster of St. Marys was James Laird, appointed Feb. 5, 1825.

Succeeding postmasters and the dates of their appointments were listed as follows:

Robert Bickers, May 4, 1828
William R. Armstrong, Feb. 8, 1834
Samuel McKee, Oct. 2, 1837
David Bates, Dec. 5, 1839
Albert Halferstein, Nov. 4, 1840
George H. McLaughlin, March 5, 1851
Anthony Dieker, May 16, 1853
James Wilson, Nov. 9, 1857
George McLaughlin, Dec. 22, 1862
Charles Hipp, Jan. 30, 1866
Lewis C. Sawyer, Nov. 4, 1866
Charles Hipp, March 5, 1869
R. B. Gordon, Jr., Feb. 8, 1886
Charles Hipp, Nov. 12, 1889
David A. Clark, Oct. 28, 1893
John L. Sullivan, Feb. 16, 1898
John A. Anderson, March 8, 1904
William A. Moxley, Sept. 11, 1909
John A. Anderson, Aug. 11, 1911
Charles L. Hunter, March 10, 1914
Roy Heap, Jan. 5, 1923
August C. Schneider, Acting, Feb. 9, 1933
William H. Uetrecht, July 19, 1934
Joseph A. Simons, Acting, Aug. 1, 1947
Frank B. Shuffelton, Feb. 1, 1948 until retirement May 22, 1970
H. Denzil Ice and Thomas Hevlin, officers in charge until May, 1971 when Denzil Ice was officially installed as Postmaster.

It is interesting to note that Major Charles Hipp in three appointments served a total of 21 years, seven months, 19 days. Frank B. Shuffelton exceeded his period of service by about nine months, serving a total of 22 years, four months, before his retirement.

www.andyniekamp.com

For years the Post Office was located in the east room of the Koehl Building, now owned and occupied by The Leader Printing Company.

In 1925 it moved to the Community owned Post Office and continued there until 1957 when the present Post Office was erected in North Chestnut street under a federal lease program.

Mayors Of Saint Marys

Stacey Taylor - 1836
Henry Lloyd
George Timmions
Wm. Hudson
J. J. Rickley
Wm. Smith
A.H. Trimble - 1849-50
C. W. Cowan - 1851
Levi Hamaker - 1852
Wm. L. Smith - 1853
Donald Cameron - 1854
Henry M. Helm 1856-58
S. Scott - 1859
L. H. Heusch - 1859
David Simpson - 1860
James Wilson - 1861
G. W. McLaughlin - 1862
Frank Koehl - 1863-1864
Wm. Sawyer - 1865-1873
J. S. Hickman - 1874-1875
David Simpson - 1876-77
James Ennis - 1878
Theo. Neiberg - 1880
J. H. Patterson - 1881-82
C. F. Bullock - 1882-86
Charles Hipp - 1886-88
E. F. Gross - 1888-92
D. A. Clark - 1892-94
W. L. Smith - 1894-96
J. A. Hay - 1896-98
L. E. Lambert - 1898-1900
Jno. Anderson - 1900-02
Thos. A. White - 1902-04

ST. MARYS BECOMES CITY

Dr. N. T. Noble - 1904-08
H. E. Henderson - 1908-12
Scott Wilkins - 1912-14
Dr. G. M. Raudabaugh - 1914-18
Harvey C. Smith - 1918-20
Dr. G. M. Raudabaugh - 1920-22
William H. Swift - 1922-24
Harold G. Neely - 1924-28
G. B. Hamilton - 1928-30
Wm. Uetrecht - 1930-34
G. M. Raudabaugh - 1934-36
Albert M. Koch - 1936-46
George K. Losher - 1946-50
Edward Mackenbach - 1950-52
Cecil M. Thwaits - 1952-55
Howard Schultz - 1955
Louis V. Sittler - 1956-60
Howard Hollman - 1960-62
Woodrow W. Wierwille - 1962-68
Norman Opperman - 1968-72
Howard Schultz - 1972-

www.andyniekamp.com

OFF STREET PARKING LOTS

The two large off-street parking lots were developed through the fine cooperation of the City and the Retail Merchants Committee of the St. Marys Chamber of Commerce with contributions from the merchants, organizations and individuals interested in helping with this civic improvement.

A portion of the Miami and Erie Canal was flumed east of Chestnut street and the canal bed filled in for the parking lot. The canal land was given to the City for public use by the state. The state also contributed toward fluming the canal.





www.andyniekamp.com





OIL WELLS IN THE RESERVOIR

www.andyniekamp.com

Notes

www.andyniekamp.com

www.andyniekamp.com