

A SHORT HISTORY OF PAULDING COUNTY

Clinton G. Wright

Paulding County was named for John Paulding, one of the three militiamen who captured Major Andre in the War of the Revolution. The county is all within what was once known as the Black Swamp area and the land throughout the county is practically level. Mad Anthony Wayne followed the Maumee River, laying waste everything before him in 1794. The military roads cut by Wayne's army became routes and highways over which came the first settlers.

The land was covered with valuable hardwoods which were destroyed as the early settlers cleared the lands for farming. However, large quantities of oak staves were made, and the construction of ship timber netted the county thousands of dollars annually. The Wabash Canal crossing the county east and west was constructed in 1843, and two years later the Miami Canal was finished traversing the county from the north and south. Where these two canals joined, the town, "Junction", had its origin. The old locks there, while long unused, are still well preserved.

There were two furnaces for the smelting of iron ore in the county. The ore was brought from the Lake Superior region by way of the canal. Charcoal was used for the smelting and cost 7 ½ cents per bushel. Limestone for the foundry was obtained from Defiance County.

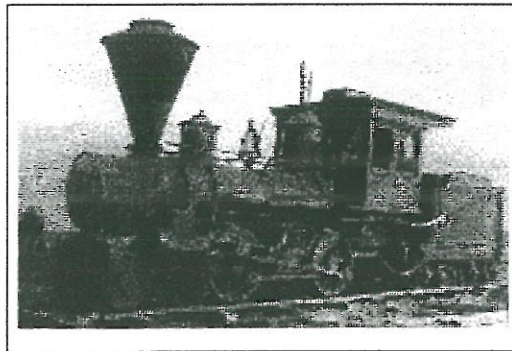
Just east of Antwerp in this county was the reservoir of the Wabash and Erie Canal which connected the Miami and Erie Canal at Junction City. When a bill to have the reservoir abandoned was rejected by the State Legislature (a lot of valuable farming land was covered by the water of the reservoir), a band of some 200 men, residents of the county, captured the two guards who were protecting the locks, and blew up the locks with dynamite on April 25, 1888. Since so many of the residents were in sympathy with the destruction of the reservoir, prosecution was dropped.

Paulding County now boasts of a great farming region with acres of corn, wheat, soybeans, and oats raised every year, of stone quarries, tile mills, defense factories, brake lining factory, and the **BEST PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE STATE.**

A REMINISCENCE OF PAULDING COUNTY, OHIO AROUND THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

On a recent stopover in the town where I spent my early boyhood, I learned that this year of 1970 is the sesquicentennial of the founding of Paulding Co., named for John Paulding, one of three Revolutionary War patriots who captured the British officer, Major Andre who conspired with General Benedict Arnold (a name that has become synonymous with treason) to surrender West Point on the Hudson to the Redcoats, for a price. If the plan had succeeded, the history of this nation of ours might well have been much different, In the light of what happened to some of Britain's other colonial possessions. I learned of this decisive episode early in life and have always been proud of the fact that I hailed from a part of the country so named.

I was not born in Paulding, but not too far east in Putnam Co., (named for another patriot) in a place called Hector on the Nickel Plate R.R. a short distance east of Continental. I might add here that I had an awful narrow escape; my parents considered naming me for the town. It was a thriving little community, as I learned many years later, but the only industry was a stave and heading mill for making sugar barrels and where my father worked. It was owned by the Hector O. Havenmyer Co. (hence it's name) who were in the sugar business in N.Y. It seems that the elm timber from which the barrels were made, was about exhausted, coincident with my arrival, so my folks moved to Paulding where there was another mill and a plentiful supply of elm timber, another fact that I didn't learn until much later. This mill was operated by the Weideman Co. who owned a square mile of virgin timber four miles west of town known as Section Eight. There was a small settlement on the SW corner of the section with a few houses for the workmen and small general store. I vaguely remember of being in the store once, because of the candy counter. It was straight west on the road to Ft Wayne, Indiana.



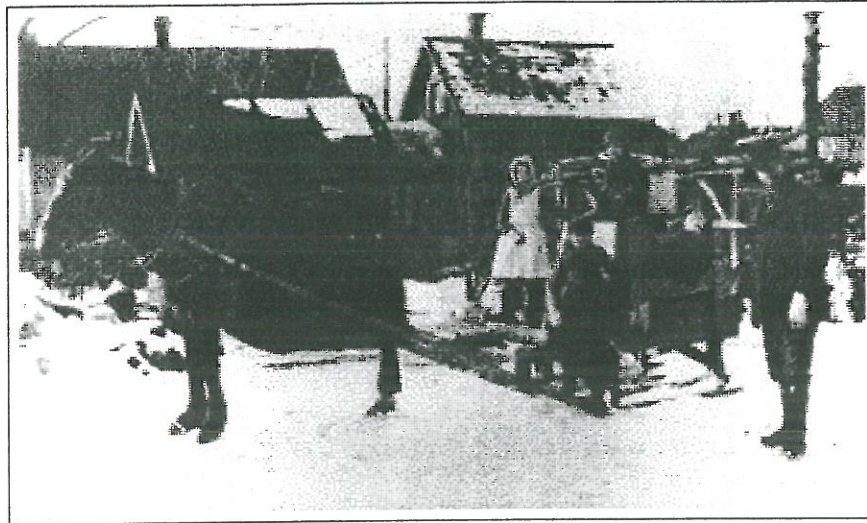
The timber was hauled to the mill on a narrow gauge railroad and the flat cars were drawn by a small steam locomotive known affectionately as "Old Betty". The right of way was parallel to and on the south side of the road. Until just recently, the remains of stone abutments of a bridge crossing a small stream or ditch could be seen. It was pointed out to me by Paul Eichling on whose farm it was. One of my earliest recollections of those times is of taking a ride on this train with my dad, and of being scared.

There was the drying kiln where the bolts of wood (the proper length for a stave) were cured before being processed, and the pleasant odor emanating there from still lingers in memory. My recollection of the mill itself is not too good, a place of whirling saws and slapping leather belts driving shafts, not too good a place for a small boy to be. One thing I do remember quite distinctly, although I was not an eye witness, is of a workman shoving his head into one of the buzz saws one day (it was a terminal case). His name was Curzy and they said he must have been crazy, which no doubt he was, and why I can remember his name. Then one unforgettable night my parents awakened me to see a red glow in the sky to the south. The mill was on fire and burned to the ground, and dad was out of work. The Weideman Co. also had a flour mill near by on the same premises and it too burned but I think some time later. It was built largely of masonry construction and for a long time the grounds were littered with brick that took some time for cooling. The Lutheran church was built in part of brick from the grist mill and I earned my first dollar cleaning the mortar off them, at a dollar per thousand. The same brick today would be worth more than new ones, for their decor value.

My dad also got many wagon loads for the hauling and later used them for the bigger house he built on Wayne Street just west of the railroad. We had been living in a small house built on the rear half of the lot, reserving the front half for a larger one when the need came. Later it was sold to P.A. Boy and moved to the rear of his home on S. Williams Street and is now used as a garage. After the fire he worked at several jobs to keep the wolf from the door; one I remember was on the railroad section gang with John Brown as boss; a good neighbor but hard taskmaster. The pay was a dollar for ten hours of grueling labor. Transportation to the work was by handcar, and on their own time, pumped up and down by the men while the boss rode sitting down, as was his "right". When the Great Bank Robbery was pulled one night, this same handcar was used for the "getaway", and getaway they did, south towards Latty. On Sundays it was used to bring in the newspapers from the south.

Another job he had was delivering groceries for one of the stores, at \$5.00 per week and on Saturday nights the proprietor generously allowed him to take home over ripe fruit, oranges and bananas for HALF price, which would not have survived the weekend anyhow. We knew we were poor and accepted our lot, BUT it never occurred to us that we were UNDERPRIVILEGED, and asked nothing of anyone except the right to earn a living. We raised some of our food and canned it, and consumed quantities of corn meal mush; with milk for supper and fried the next morning, eaten with home made molasses. Beans seasoned with fat pork was also one of our mainstays, especially on wash days. A special treat was beefsteak we had on rare occasions; all we could eat for 15 cents per pound. Eggs were 3 doz. for 25 cents and crackers 10c a pound scooped out of an open barrel. Packaging of food as we know it today was unknown. Grocery stores were the only place where kerosene (coal oil) was sold for lamps and they didn't like to handle it because it sometimes contaminate food articles. To obviate this a small potato was placed on the spout of the can. Today that potato would represent the profit on the deal.

It was likewise true of gasoline which some used in cook stoves, also torches for outside lighting, especially at county fairs. SO, there was not too much hard feelings generated when dad decided to go into the retail oil business in competition with grocers, circa 1902-03, and we began to live a little higher on the hog. He put tanks on a spring wagon, bought an old plug horse and was in business. He made the town three times a week and country routes on alternate days, winter and summer with no protection from the weather, sitting up in front and in the open. On extreme cold days he would walk or run beside the wagon.



Prescot P. Wright in Paulding
with horse drawn delivery sled in 1903.

With a horse stabled on the back of the lot, to say nothing of the "Chicsalean Bungalow" near by, and which everyone had and took for granted, we had the ubiquitous house fly, "That flitted to and from the house, where ma was making pies" (unquote, and apologies to James Whitcomb Riley). We had screen doors which helped some to keep them out of the house, but none for the windows. Instead we used "mosquito bar", a coarse mesh cloth material tacked on to the outside but didn't help much as it was easily punctured. It's a wonder we survived, but seven out of nine did and six of us reached retirement age besides dad, who lived to age 94. Up to now this account has been mostly personal, but a background for what follows; what life was like back in the "good old days".

It seems that when I get my built in data processing equipment / to percolating it dredges up old long forgotten memories, some not too pleasant. There were several disastrous fires in Paulding in addition to the one that destroyed the mill. One that comes to mind was on the east side of the square and south of the alley. I believe it was of frame construction and was leveled to the ground. Leonard's saloon was on the corner and a lot of "giggle water" was "liberated" before the walls fell in. One well known "lush" couldn't wait to get the cork out of the bottle and knocked the neck off. After the ashes cooled we kids had fun sifting through the ashes for coins where the cash drawers had been. Another was the F.M. Bashore hardware store west of the old

bank building, and I think the Geo. Lynn jewelry store was involved. There was a hotel that burned on the NE corner of the square on the site now occupied by a gas station. It was before my time and all I remember of it was a hole in the ground where the basement had been. The theater burned after we left, the Grand wasn't it?

I see that old High School, the one I became a "dropout" from is still standing. The original frame "Dixie" school where I started has been moved across the street from it's original site and is now a church. Whatever happened to it's successor, the NEW Dixie that has been an eyesore for years?

Many Pauldinites left the old town years ago and found fame and fortune in faraway places. Others stayed at home and found it in their backyard, so to speak. I saw Stewart Green in California ten years ago; he seemed to be living quietly and comfortably in retirement. I stopped at the home of Ray Creviston but he was "not in residence".

There are not many of my generation left; at least the ones I went to school with. Bud Ross, Ray Klinger, Donald Snook, Reed Essex, Eddie Finan, and Otto Kinkle who has been a neighbor of mine in Lima for many years. One girl, Eileen Russell living in Georgia the last I heard. Paulding produced some "characters" that I doubt their like could be found in but few places, and I'll place my dad at the head of the list. Sam Bowers, one of his friends, a homespun philosopher with ideas years ahead of his time on economics. I once heard him say that "We are building a national debt that our children's children will have to pay". I wonder what he would have to say today. Sam Kinkle, father of Otto and Amos Ross, father of Bud, both worked with dad in the mill, as did Emmett Studer who moved to a mill town in New York. Rance McGaw, a Civil War veteran who was a near neighbor of ours. Jim Russell the blacksmith whose vocation was shoeing horses, his avocation the raising of gladiolas and of which he produced some new varieties. Another blacksmith, Jake Knoedler who always kept his bible on the work bench and could be found reading it when work was slack. The Cutter brothers, bachelors who ran a laundry if I am not mistaken. Trines harness shop where there was a full sized "artificial" horse, fully harnessed for display purposes. Ben Moore's clothing store which I see is still doing business at the same old stand, but by the second generation. It used to be Burgners. The Harper Brothers store just east of it, ran by Nell and the brother whose name I have forgotten. Crain's hardware in the same place on the east side of the square, with the name "J.P. Crain" on the window that has been there longer than I care to remember, 65 years at least. Ed Buck the newsman who had a stand in the front of and on the north side of the old Post Office north of the Crain Hardware. He sold DIME novels that cost a nickel that we boys read surreptitiously behind the barn. Today they would be collectors items. I left a stack of them behind when we moved. Andy Shearer, a bachelor and ax handler maker who had a shop north of the square. And that reminds me that I must not forget a certain lady and her girls who ran an exclusive establishment for men only south of town. It could only be reached by walking south on the CN track and was south of the trestle. ALL I know about the place was what I heard the older boys say. Her clientele was known by all the housewives who lived near the railroad.

Paulding had it's tragedies. One I remember was of a family named Good in the country. They had two children, a boy and girl who disappeared in the wood after several days search parties were organized. One party was lead by a degenerate who lead them straight to a brush pile where he had murdered them and tried to burn the bodies. The Emmett Studers liked to fish and often went to the Maumee River. They had a boy about my age whom they took along and left to his own devices. Sitting on the bank they saw his cap float past. It was several days before the body was recovered. Jake Knoedler fashioned the grappling hooks that found him.

For the present generation who do not know the why or wherefore of a "Stave and Heading mill" I can provide a little elucidation. In the days before packaging as we know it today, cardboard cartons and such, most everything that had to be shipped in containers, was put in barrels or wooden boxes, the latter "dovetailed" together at the corners, and the few in existence today are grabbed up by antique collectors. The barrel staves were about a half inch thick but varied in width. To get the "bulge" in the barrel, the staves were trimmed at each corner, running out to nothing near the middle. This waste material was known as "listings" and made excellent kindling for starting fires in wood burning stoves. The company allowed the men to carry bundles of them home and we always had a good supply. The "headings" were of about the same thickness and were tongued and grooved together in a square slightly larger than the finished head. This left waste material at each corner with the inner edge the segment of a circle and these were called "coonrods" but don't ask me why. They too made good kindling in a time when nearly everybody had to start a fresh fire every morning.

Most walks in town were wooden, made of one inch rough native lumber nailed to stringers. Street crossings in the residential areas were made of planks laid lengthwise. The only streetlights were kerosene lamps on poles at each intersection and had to be lighted every evening and "put out" the next morning. They were enclosed and protected from the weather and provided jobs for several "lamplighters" who also at regular intervals went around in the daytime replenishing the "coal oil" and polishing the glass chimneys which tended to become coated with lampblack or soot, and cut down on the illumination. When electric lighting was installed and hung out over the street, I as a small boy couldn't figure out how the man was going to get up there to light it. I have a picture that I took some time in the 'teens of the Court House and the old bandstand on the SW corner. It is "dated" by the hitching racks for horses, where are now meters for cars.

I am amazed at times at the multiplicity of products on the market today and considered necessities that we got along very well without. Deodorants for one example. Away back then the only deodorant any "body" needed was soap and water, which was "degradable" and caused none of the water pollution that threatens the "environment" today. On my recent visit, Mr. Otto Ludwig and I took a run over to Junction, where the two canals used to cross; still do in fact, what is left of them. Once when they were still in operation, my father took me there via horse and buggy. I still have a mental picture of a wooden structure carrying water over another body of water, which I have always since thought was the Wabash canal. On this trip I found that it was the Flat Rock Creek instead. In it's heyday I am told, Junction was a thriving

community, but wild rowdy and wicked. Now a couple of churches, a few houses and piles of junk cars.

About this time the family had outgrown the small house where seven had been born, and larger living quarters indicated. With thousands of used brick from the mill piled around the lot, it was decided to start the house that had been planned for some years. But before it got well under way, a new building material appeared on the market and a "cement block plant" was built to the south of us. Dad got the idea he could make his own blocks so procured one and had a mold made. I still have it in my possession, a souvenir of those long ago days.

With the building of the new house occupying most of his attention, he neglected the business and it began slipping away, so after the house was well under way, he sold out, "lock stock and barrel" along with the "good will" for \$100.00, not thinking there was any future in it. But I am getting ahead of my story. After embarking in the oil business, it soon became apparent that it would be handy to have a stock of oils, gasoline, Mica axle grease, etc. on hand that couldn't be carried on a wagon. So he put up a small building next to the side street to house them and to service the first few autos that began to appear on the road. There was a Realty firm in Ft Wayne that dealt mostly in farmland who traveled around the country in Stanley Steamers and got in the habit of stopping at our place for fuel which in their case was kerosene. I have a vivid mental picture of one that got stuck in the mud, that Paulding Co. jack wax, on the street east of the house and got clear down to the axle but managed to pull itself out under it's own power. Imagine a modern car of any make doing that.

A friend of my father's, Mont DeWitt, was the first man in the county to buy one of the newfangled contraptions, an Olds runabout one cylinder motor and steered by a tiller. I heard him say that "he was the first damn man in the county that had the nerve to buy one". He was one of our first customers a brick mason by trade and the one who built our house. The machine attracted quite a lot of attention in town and once when a crowd were discussing it, I heard Chub Crawford say that he saw it going down the street "at 20 miles an hour". It was the first car I rode in and once when it had to be pushed own the street, I was allowed to get in and steer it. The thrill can only be compared to piloting a jet the first time. It took some time for dray horses to get used to it and one of the diversions of the time was a runaway horse. What? You don't know what a dray is / or was? It was the forerunner of the delivery truck, a heavy flat bed wagon used to move loads and for hire. Before I get away form the subject, I remember the time a farm hay wagon passed our house form the west with two knocked down "machines" on it. The buyer had to assemble them or hire it done. I think it consisted mostly in the attaching wheels. The bodies were of wood with piano finish. I think they were Studebakers from South Bend, or they may have been Auburns.

Back in those "dear old days beyond recall", the only touch Paulding had with the outside world, besides the newspapers that came in from Toledo and Cincinnati, was the telegraph office in the railroad depot. On it we got the first news of the San Francisco earthquake and the assassination of President McKinley. There was one other source of information, the "drummers" or traveling salesmen who made periodic visits and had all the latest jokes and scandals. There was one other, who didn't make the town quite as often but was more spectacular; the Immortal J.N. Free. He traveled

gratis everywhere and stayed at the best hotels "on the house", for the diversion he created. The railroads granted him passes and he, like "Johnny Appleseed" who passed through this part of the country many years earlier, was considered a little "off in the head". But if so, he was "crazy like a fox" because he anticipated Social Security years ahead of it's time. I saw him once and he either was expected or the usual crowd of loafers was at the station to see that the noon train from the south got in on time. he was given a rousing welcome and escorted to the Barnes hotel where he held what has since become known as a "Press Conference". As I remember him, he wore a long frock coat and silk top hat.

I remember the sinking of the Battleship Maine and the patriotic fervor it engendered, much as Pearl Harbor did some forty years later. I was at the station when the Paulding contingent of the Boys in Blue entrained for the "Front". I also remember when they returned a few months later, those that didn't succumb to yellow fever. As I remember, they didn't get any farther away than camp Chickamauga. In those days it was NOT considered corny to express a love of country or devotion to the Flag. Today the hairy, be-whiskered so-and-so's desecrate Old Glory and get away with it. In 1898 we didn't mess around; pulled no punches and got the job over and done with. But THAT war was officially declared.

The word "welfare" was in the dictionary then but in more recent years has taken on a different connotation. People took care of their own then and only extreme cases "went over the hill to the poor house". And nobody thought that the world owed them a living, wit the possible exception for the Immortal J.N.

My boyhood days in Paulding were not of the happiest. I was born with two strikes against me. Like St. Paul, I had a "thorn in the flesh", in my case an impediment in speech that made life miserable for me. I was the butt of jokes of my school mates, not all of them, but some could be as cruel as the grave. For that reason I was not sorry to get away and among strangers who did not know of my affliction. In time I outgrew it. My one regret in leaving Paulding was a certain raven haired beauty, the prettiest girl in town, just sweet sixteen but if she had ever been kissed I wouldn't know. I will call her Elsie, which was not her name, but a key to it. She will never know what a profound effect she had on my life, as after getting settled in our new home, I began looking around for another who had her general specifications. There was one in the neighborhood who came close to meeting my standards but had an entirely different personality, and I soon found that I was too "slow" for her anyhow. However, in getting acquainted with her family I discovered that she had two cute younger sisters, almost twins. After a courtship of eight years I married the older one. The reason for the long wait was that she was a senior in high school and after graduating, attended Bowling Green Normal School and became a teacher. In those days only single girls were allowed to teach in the Public Schools. Now they are not so particular, when they are hard to come by. Just goes to show how the ball bounces. We had forty-one good years together when I lost her; she was laid to rest on our anniversary. But wit three children she gave me, two with college degrees and one a seminary graduate and now an ordained minister of the Gospel, AND twelve grand children, I do not feel that my life has been in vain, even though I haven't personally set any rivers on fire.

Our main reason for leaving Paulding was a lack of opportunities for a large family of boys. However, others who stayed and grew up with the town have made out all right. Soon after we made the decision to leave, and had burned our bridges behind us, we heard rumors of a beet sugar factory locating here, but it was too late. The die had been cast and the Rubicon crossed. The next year (1910), after the plant was in operation, I came back and worked in the first "campaign" until the crop was worked up. I was there for about two months on the night shift, from six to six, twelve hours on and twelve hours off, seven days a week and for the munificent wage of 16 ½ cents an hour. I still have the pay envelopes among my souvenirs. While there I not only paid board and room but sent money home and had some left when I returned. How does that grab you, some of you guys today who make as much in a few days as I did in my whole tour there, and striking for more, and more, and still more. With the benefit of hind sight, I view with alarm the trend events are taking in this country, MY country. I am not a seventh son of a seventh son, and so far as I know was not born with a "veil" over my face, AND my crystal ball is busted, BUT I predict that UNLESS we awake to the peril facing us, we will soon, and sooner than we think, will be ripe for a takeover by an odious, alien political "phoolosophy" which is not necessary to mention, and without firing a shot. I sincerely hope I am wrong.

Even as I write this, a disturbance of major proportions has occurred in Lima, and the city is under martial law. It was triggered by a woman interfering with an officer in the performance of his duty. She fired on him and in self-defense the fire was returned and she was killed. I dislike very much to end this on a sour note, but it is a subject on which I have strong convictions. hope I haven't bored you ere you have gotten this far. The "good old days", who needs them? They are good to look back at but I wouldn't want to live them over again.

Clinton L. Wright



"I remember, I remember, the house where I was born."

I was not born here but it is the first home that I was aware of when I was about one year old. It was the one behind the family group on the wagon (taken some years later)

Dad is to the left with the push cart he used to peddle Standard Oil products when the mare he used to pull his oil wagon died. It attracted quite a bit of attention in the neighborhood to have a photographer. Notice the group of "rubber necks" in the distance beyond dad and cart.

When my parents moved to this location, I was about one year old. Dad had bought the lot for a few dollars and with the idea of building more permanently later. There were three large elm trees that were cut down and a ten room house built. Then the "old" house was sold for \$50.00 and moved to a new location.

(Typed on the back of the photo.)