

## CULTURAL HISTORY

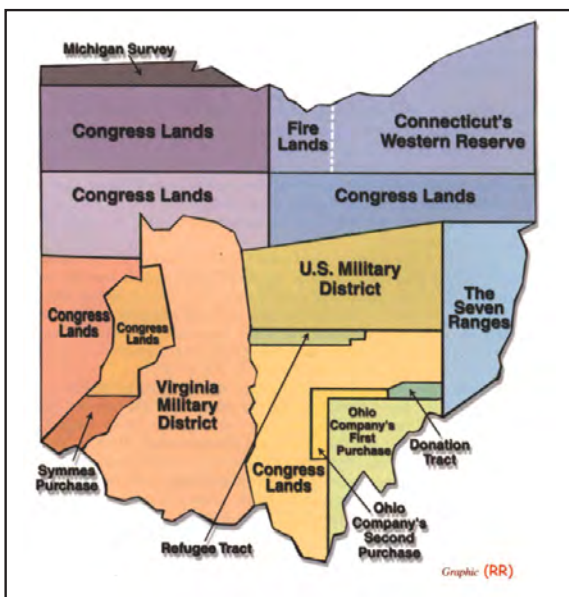
### CONNECTICUT WESTERN RESERVE

Since the days of the first discoveries of the Americas, all the lands belonged to the crowns of Spain, France, Holland, and England. As a gesture to their favorites, the monarchs ruling for the next two centuries granted charters to American land, which had not been explored or surveyed. As the American colonists soon discovered, one charter frequently overlapped another. When Congress assembled after the War for Independence, it asked the 13 original states to yield all territorial claims based on early grants from the British crown. They responded by giving up their rights to land beyond state borders with one exception. Connecticut reserved a strip of western land, between the latitudes in which that state lies (approximately 41°N to 42°N), from the western Pennsylvania border westward for 120 miles (Sherman 1925), known as the Connecticut Western Reserve. Thus, the land area of the Reserve, bordered by Lake Erie on the north, had an average north–south distance of 50 miles. This is the origin of the Western

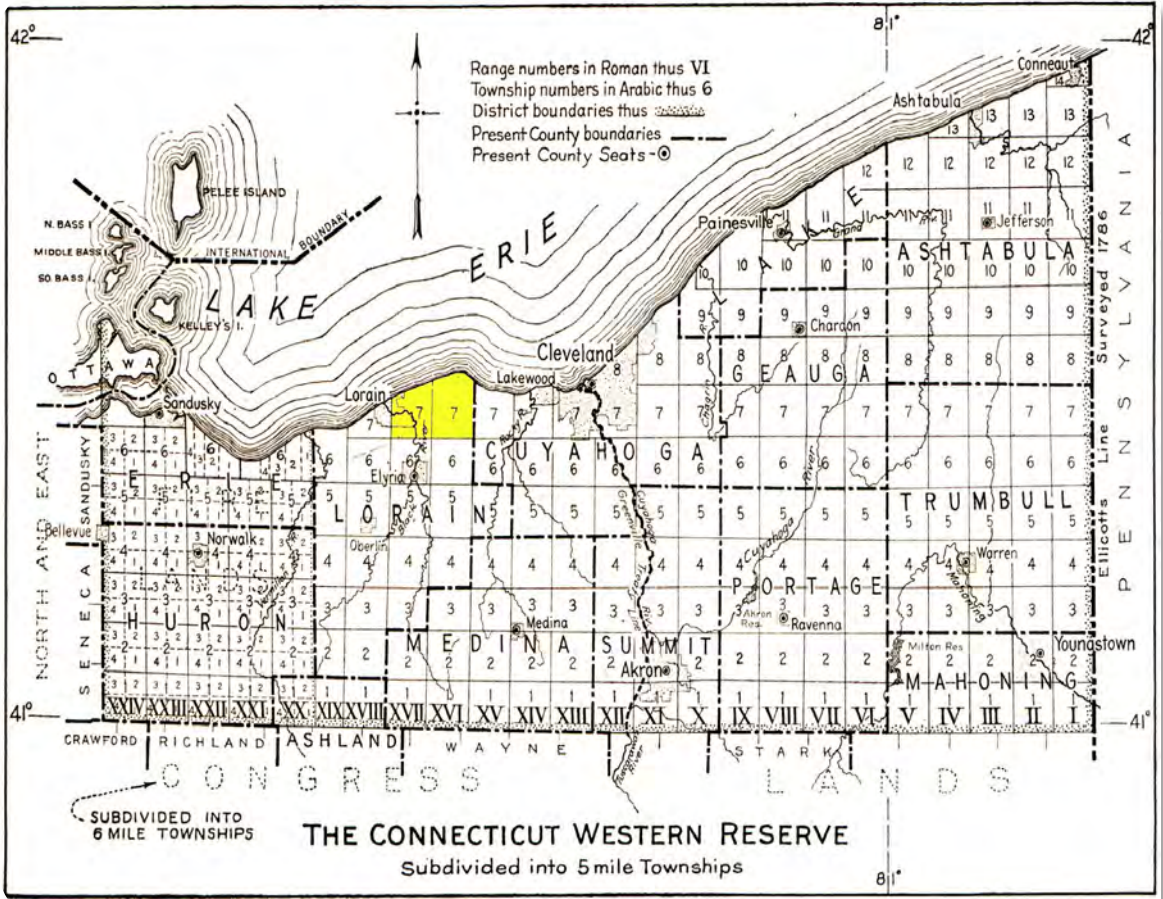
Reserve in which the communities of Avon and Sheffield are now located.

Connecticut's claim was based on charters granted: (1) by King James I in November 1630 to the Plymouth Council, (2) from the Plymouth Company to the Earl of Warwick in the same year, and (3) from the Earl to Viscount Say and others on March 19, 1631. The last grant was confirmed by King Charles II, April 25 1662, and upon this confirmation chiefly rested Connecticut's title to the Western Reserve (Sherman 1925). It included all the land contained between 41°N and 42°N latitude, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Charles II shared the belief held then by men everywhere that the Pacific was to be found in America just over the next hill. This illusion was not fully destroyed until the Lewis & Clark Expedition in 1803-1806.

Politically, the Reserve was first a Connecticut colony, then part of the Northwest Territory after the American Revolution, and finally Trumbull County when Ohio was organized as a state in 1803. The General Assembly of Connecticut, having persuaded Congress to allow them this wide swath across the top of Ohio, eventually formulated a plan for selling it. They first appointed a committee of 8 citizens to arrange the sale of approximately 3 million acres to produce no less than 1 million dollars which was to go into a fund for the support of Connecticut schools. This led to the creation of the Connecticut Land Company which, while it was never formally incorporated, is the authority for all original deeds to land in the Reserve. The funds from the sale of the Western Reserve are still used to help support Connecticut schools.



*Ohio's original tracts (courtesy of State Auditor).*



*Connecticut Western Reserve map showing Sheffield and Avon Townships (from Sherman 1925).*

The Connecticut Land Company ordered the first survey of the Western Reserve, led by General Moses Cleaveland in 1796 (Gregory and Guitteau 1942). Cleaveland, born in Connecticut and a graduate of Yale University, served as a Captain of Engineers in the Continental Army. On July 22, 1796 he selected the site for the city of Cleveland on the shore of Lake Erie at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River.

Cleaveland was also the agent who negotiated with the Western Indians at Buffalo in 1796 and gained their permission to settle Reserve territory as far west as the Cuyahoga River, although Indian title to this land was extinguished by the Treaty of Fort McIntosh on January 21, 1785 (Burke 1996). Cleaveland presented gifts to the resident tribes and paid them a sum of \$1,500 on this occasion. He obeyed the terms of this agreement so strictly that he did not allow a surveyor to build even

a shack on the west bank of the Cuyahoga. However, the Connecticut Land Company had to have information on how much was land and how much of it was water—thus Cleaveland sent one man, Augustus Porter, along the Lake Erie shore to the 120 mile limit of the Reserve in order to have an accurate contour of the coast (Hatcher 1949). This survey was the first to define the shorelines of



*General Moses Cleaveland, original surveyor of the Connecticut Western Reserve (from Gregory and Guitteau 1942).*

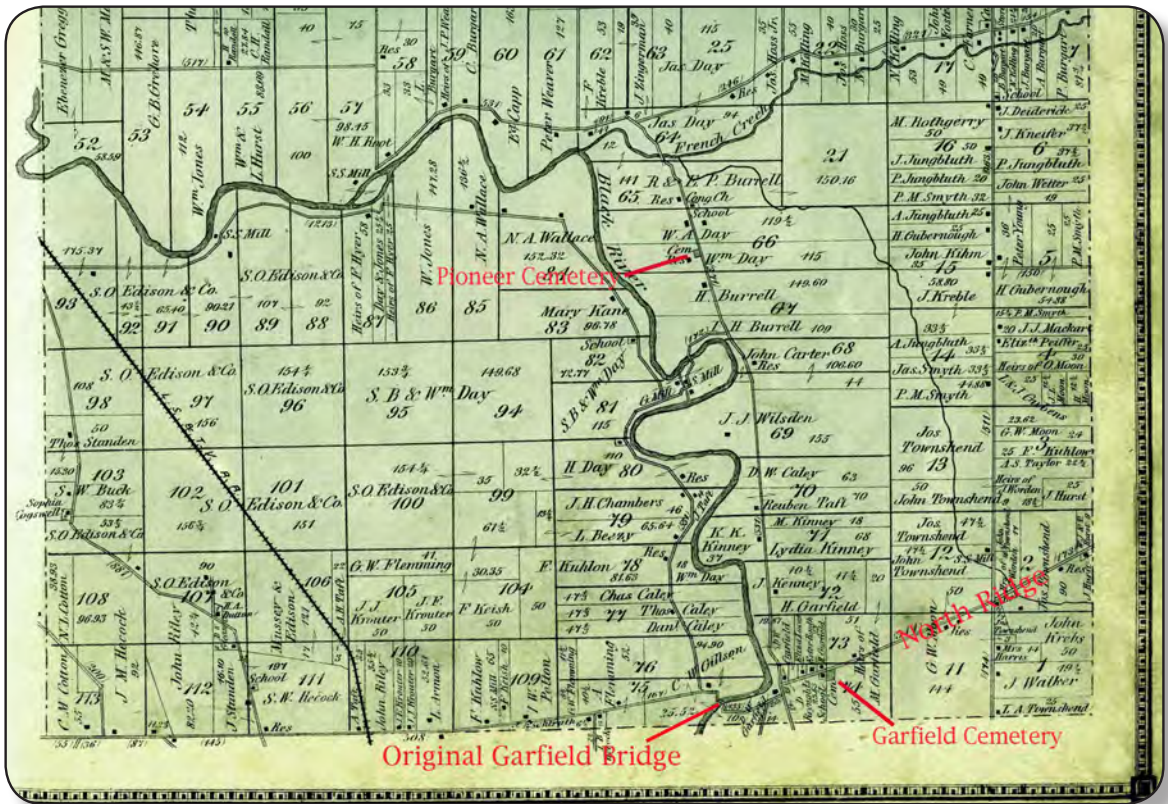
what would later become Avon and Sheffield Townships.

The next survey was not made until ten years later, 1806, this time due to the urgency of the “Connecticut Sufferers”—former citizens of New Haven, Greenwich, New London, Norwalk, Groton, Fairfield, Danbury and Ridgefield in Connecticut whose homes and property had been destroyed by the British during the American Revolution. The State of Connecticut settled claims amounting to a little more than one half million dollars by releasing to the heirs and assigns of these citizens one half million acres in the Reserve. The area thus disposed of includes Huron, Erie, and eastern Ottawa Counties, Ohio, since known as the Firelands.

Again the Indians were consulted, but it was not until the summer of 1805 that they were finally induced to give up their land west of the Cuyahoga River. On July 4, 1805 the Fort Industry Treaty was signed on the banks of the Maumee River by the Indians

and by representatives of the United States Government, the Connecticut Land Company and the Sufferers (who had incorporated themselves). The Indians ceded their claims to all of the Reserve west of the Cuyahoga, 2,750,000 acres for \$18,916.67 from the land companies, plus monetary gifts from the Government (Hatcher 1949).

Seth Pease directed the survey west of the Cuyahoga starting in 1806. Abraham Tappan ran the township lines between the Cuyahoga River and the Firelands and Almon Ruggles finished the laying of the tracts in the Firelands in 1807. Each township was five miles square (except along the coast of Lake Erie were the northern township boundary was the lakeshore). The ranges, or north to south rows of townships, were numbered from the Pennsylvania line and the townships in the east to west rows were numbered from the bottom, or south range, up. Thus, Avon is Township 7 in Range 16 and Sheffield is Township 7 in Range 17.



South portion of Sheffield Township in 1874, showing location of North Ridge (map from Lake 1874).

## HISTORY OF SHEFFIELD

Sheffield Village is rich in human history that began several thousand years ago with Native American Indian occupation along the beach ridge of an ancient glacial lake (North Ridge) and at the confluence of streams tributary to the Black River. Archaeological evidence indicates that several Native American cultures established settlements in Sheffield over the ages, but by the mid-1600s few were left in northeastern Ohio.

Soon after the War of 1812, hearty pioneers from New England began to recognize the natural attributes of northern Ohio. In January 1815, Captain Jabez Burrell and Captain John Day of Sheffield, Massachusetts purchased a large tract of land designated as Township 7 of Range 17 in the Connecticut Western Reserve.

They formed a partnership with several other Massachusetts families and later that year and the following spring settlers began to arrive in the valley of the Black River at the mouth of French Creek where they built log houses and founded a community they called Sheffield in honor of their former home.

Living up to a provision in the purchase agreement, in 1817 Captains Burrell and Day erected the township's first saw and grist mills along Black River about one-half-mile upstream from the mouth of French Creek. The settlers also built a schoolhouse and a Congregational Church. Milton Garfield, and his cousin John Bird Garfield, were the first to settle on North Ridge, clearing the native forest for his 200-acre farm.



*Arriving in the fall of 1815, Joshua Smith and his son Douglas built the first log house in Sheffield (courtesy of Ohio Historical Society).*

*Eyewitness Account of Sheffield Pioneers' First Years.* In the draft for shareholders in the Connecticut Land Company of 1814, General William Hart, a man who never lived in the township but whose name appears on the original land titles, drew the township that was to become Sheffield. In January 1815, Captain Jabez Burrell and Captain John Day of Sheffield, Massachusetts, purchased the township from General Hart.



National Register of Historic Places plaque for the Jabez Burrell House.

Sheffield is fortunate in having an eyewitness account of the migration, which followed this purchase. Norman Day, a son of Captain John Day, came to Sheffield as a boy and wrote an account of the early history of Sheffield for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the township settlement (Day 1876). At the Celebration, held on November 13, 1865, Norman Day reminisced about the half century that he lived in Sheffield:

*Among our earliest recollections were long discussions about New Connecticut, as the Western Reserve was then called. We remember the preparations for removing, the day we started, the good-byes and farewells, the blessings invoked, the prayers offered, and in one case the sermon preached on Exodus 33:15 "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence."*

*We remember, vividly, many incidents of the long and tedious journey, our arrival in the wilderness, the clearing away the forest, turning it into fruitful fields, the chills and*



Jabez Burrell fired brick on his farm to build his home in 1820.



*Ohio Bicentennial Historic Marker commemorating the Burrell Homestead.*

*fevers that prostrated us weeks and months, the attachments formed and broken, and the loves requited and unrequited. We have followed the common routine of human life; we have married, reared families, given them in marriage, and our children's children are growing up around us. We have been industrious, have secured a competence and are now enjoying the fruits of our toils. We have borne the burdens of life, and helped support the government that protects us; we have followed the faith of our ancestors, have sustained religious institutions and now see our children virtuous and honest, and many of them pious; we have gathered around the dying bedsides of our fathers and mothers; have smoothed their dying pillows, closed their eyes, buried them, and erected monuments to their memory.*

*We must now throw off our harness and commit these sacred trusts to our children. Sons and daughters, we charge you today to be faithful to the trusts we now commit to your care. Be true to your God, true to your country, true to yourselves and to each other.*

Norman Day (1876) writes that Burrell and Day explored the township in June of 1815 and selected lots for themselves and friends. They of course asked others to buy in. One of these shareowners, Captain Joshua Smith and his oldest son Douglas, then a lad of 17, set out for Ohio from Massachusetts in October. They drove a yoke of oxen and horse and carried in their wagon necessary tools for clearing and cultivating a new farm. On November 11, 1815 they arrived at Wilbur Cahoon's farm in Avon. The next day being Sunday, they rested, and on November 13 they followed down French Creek, without a trail, and commenced the first permanent settlement in the township. This was near the intersection of Abbe Road and Colorado Avenue in the area where St. Teresa of Avila Catholic Church now stands. Their nearest neighbors were John R. Reid and Daniel Perry at the mouth of the Black River, Wilbur Cahoon in Avon, and Moses Eldred in Ridgeville, all 4 to 7 miles distant. In a few days time two young men from Capt.

Smith's native town of New Marlborough, Massachusetts, Samuel B. Fitch and Asher Chapman joined them. These four men built a rude shanty where they spent the winter.

Next to arrive in the township were Mr. and Mrs. Freeman Richmond, who arrived in February 1816 and settled on North Ridge. In April, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Root with six children arrived. One of these, Frances, has also left us an account pertaining to the journey from Sheffield, Massachusetts. They too traveled with a team of oxen led by a horse, called a *spike* team, that drew the wagon loaded with their goods. Behind, the family traveled in another wagon drawn by a team of horses.



*Sheffield's Congregational Church. Founded in 1817, the congregation constructed this elegant church building in 1852 (courtesy of Edgar Day Gates).*

The Roots lived three weeks in the shanty with Captain Smith while they built a log cabin for themselves. The Roots stayed 17 years in this original location and then took up land elsewhere. One of the sons, William H., later built his home on the lakeshore, which still stands near the intersection of Root Road and U.S. Route 6. Mrs. Henry Root [née Mary Day] was a sister of Captain John Day, who arrived with his family on the July 27, 1816. Next, on August 11, Captain Burrell and family of eight arrived by way of Lake Erie, on the schooner *BLACK SNAKE*, and came up the Black River to the mouth of French Creek on John Reid's ferry scow.

Milton Garfield and his cousin John Garfield walked out from Tyringham, Massachusetts—two bachelors who had visited the township in the summer of 1815 and returned to New England for the winter. These men later married young women of the Western Reserve and their descendents still live in the area.

Among other pioneers was James Austin, a brother of Mrs. Day. He and his family settled a farm on the west side of the Black River, where a steel mill is now located.

These early settlers shared a similar background. Most of them represented families who had settled in the Berkshire Mountains around 1750. Before that they lived in various towns along the Atlantic seaboard. They were of English descent and had migrated to America in the early 1600s with the Puritans. In Ohio they continued a long established pattern of living and in no way relaxed their high standards of piety, culture, or courtesy in meeting the new conditions of the wilderness.

Each new family was welcomed into the log cabin of one who had already settled and stayed there until their own log cabin could be built. The first years were crowded with toil and hardship, which the people who had left well ordered homes and a cultivated community, faced with courage and resourcefulness.



*Pioneer Cemetery. Members of Sheffield's founder pioneers, the Day and Root families, are buried in this historic cemetery maintained by the Village of Sheffield.*



*Milton Garfield Monument in Historic Garfield Cemetery, honors the first settler on North Ridge.*

The men set to work clearing the dense forest. Oak, walnut, chestnut and tulip-tree were felled, providing wood which they found most useful when they got around to building their houses, but at first they piled the logs in heaps and burned them. Until roads could be cut through the forest and goods brought in from the East, pioneer households were dependent on the supplies they had brought with them.

As clothing wore out, mothers cut the wool from the sheep and harvested fiber from flax which they spun, wove, and dyed. From these textiles, they cut and sewed garments as well as bedding. They also tanned the hides of wild and domestic animals to obtain garments and shoes. Candles, soaps and dyes were made at home. In winter, meal preparation was in the cabin's fireplace; but in summer a fire started in stumps of felled trees was often used to cook food.



In the winter of 1816 religious meetings were held at the cabin of Captain Burrell. They consisted of reading a sermon, singing, and prayer by Mr. Hanchett, then working for Mr. Burrell. Out of these meetings a congregation developed which eventually built and dedicated the Sheffield Congregational Church in 1852. It was a handsome white frame building, with a tall steeple, standing on the crest of a hill across the road from the Burrell homestead. On the top of an adjacent hill was a small log schoolhouse. The first classes were held there in 1817 and taught by Dr. Preston Pond who came from Keene, New Hampshire.

One of the terms imposed on the Connecticut Land Company was that each township was to have a sawmill and gristmill, built at the expense of the Company. During his first winter in Sheffield, Jabez Burrell and helpers built the mill on French Creek. Later, a mill was built on the Black River, just above the 31<sup>st</sup> Street Bridge. The area around this mill became the center of much of Sheffield activity. A schooner was built here and floated down the river to Lake Erie. Jabez also set up a brick kiln, where he burned brick for several houses, including the Burrell House, now a museum operated by Lorain County Metro Parks.

Farming became the main occupation of the early settlers. Also in the first years, a dependable source of income was “black salts,” which brought up to \$7.50 per hundred pounds. These salts, a by-product of the burning of timber, were produced as the land was cleared for farming.

Sheffield’s first pioneer, Captain Joshua Smith, was the first settler to die (September 29, 1817) and a burying ground was selected on the bluff near French Creek, located about two miles north of North Ridge. This small graveyard, where several of the other original Sheffield settlers are buried, has come to be known as the Day–Root Family Cemetery [or Sheffield Pioneer Cemetery]. In 1848 Captain

Smith’s bones were disinterred and deposited in Ridge Cemetery [Garfield Cemetery as of 1851] (Day 1876).

***Sheffield Becomes a Township.*** When Lorain County was formed in 1824, the population of Sheffield included 44 adult males and their families. The first action of the new County Commissioners was to officially establish Sheffield as a Township.

In 1836, Oberlin College established the Sheffield Manual Labor Institute on the Burrell Homestead in Sheffield. Here, for the first time in the nation, women and African-American students were permitted to attend college classes alongside white male students.

Another major wave of settlers came to Sheffield in the 1840s and 1850s when immigrants from Bavaria arrived and eventually built St. Teresa of Avila Catholic Church. Some of the emigrants came directly from Europe, others moved in from Avon. One of the first, John Forster, bought his acres from Aaron Root, Henry’s son who continued to farm the original Root site. Part of the bargain was that Aaron Root contribute one acre for a church. As more Catholics arrived a log church was built in 1845 on the site where St. Teresa Church now stands. Some 60 families of German descent eventually settled in Sheffield, most of them buying their acres from the tracts originally owned by the New England pioneers. The German farmers introduced grape culture, which suited the soils and the extended growing-season climate of the Lake Plain.

The early settlers shunned the lakeshore because richer soil was found on North Ridge and in the Black River valley. The river bottoms were richest and continuous floods had cleared the trees. The land on the North Ridge was also found to be highly productive and easily drained. Proceeding generations, however, showed appreciation for the beauties of the lakeshore and began to build their homes there.



*St. Teresa Catholic Parish was founded by Bavarian emigrants in 1845. This Gothic Revival-style church, built in 1907, replaced a wood-frame church destroyed by fire.*



*For the first 150 years of its existence, Sheffield was primarily a farming community. Members of the Conrad family manage the James Day Homestead in the late 1800s (courtesy of the Conrad family).*



Mr. and Mrs. William A. Day, Prominent Residents of Sheffield Township, and Their Home

*William Day House, built in 1879 by the grandson of Sheffield founder, Capt. John Day.*

Prior to the Civil War several Sheffield residents, such as Robbins Burrell and Milton Garfield, were active abolitionists and operated stations on the Underground Railroad. Captain Aaron Root, a Great Lakes shipmaster from Sheffield, secretly carried runaway slaves aboard his vessels to freedom in Canada. During the Civil War many of Sheffield's sons served in the Union Army and Navy—23 of them are buried in Garfield Cemetery on North Ridge.

Sheffield continued as primarily a farming community in the late 1800s, producing some 85,000 bushels of corn, oats, wheat, and barley and 30,500 pounds of butter, cheese, and maple sugar in 1878.

***Industry Comes to Sheffield.*** A dramatic change took place in 1894 when the City of Lorain annexed a large portion of the northwestern part of Sheffield Township which enticed the Johnson Steel Company [later the National Tube Company of U.S. Steel Corporation] to build a large mill and housing development for thousands of new workers there, known as South Lorain, on the west side of the Black River. By 1906 several

steam and electric railroads had been built through Sheffield to service the steel mill and provide commuter passenger service.

***Sheffield Township Splits.*** In 1920 Township residents living east of the Black River voted to withdraw from Sheffield Township and form the incorporated Village of Sheffield Lake. In 1922, the new Village constructed Brookside School to replace several Township one-room schools that were built in the 1870s and 1880s. The new school, located on the corner of Colorado Avenue and Harris Road, was opened in the fall of 1923 and had five classrooms and a gymnasium. In the summer of 1924 the school was damaged by a tornado and was rebuilt with the addition of three classrooms. In 1929 Brookside received its charter, establishing it as a Grade A Class B school and it graduated its first senior class in 1930.

***The Village of Sheffield Created.*** By the early 1930s the new Village was experiencing internal problems—the south end of the Village had a sparse population with large farms, while the north end had a greater population living on small lots, the residents



*Aerial view of Johnson Steel Company, built in 1894 (courtesy of U.S. Steel Corporation).*



*Sheffield Township District School No. 2, built in 1883, became the Sheffield Village Hall in 1934 when the Village was formed.*

of these two segments found their interests to be incompatible. In 1933, the farmers in the south end voted almost unanimously to separate from Sheffield Lake Village. The north end remained as the Village of Sheffield Lake, while the south formed a new entity known as Brookside Township, which in 1934 was incorporated to form the Village of Sheffield. Clyde B. McAllister, a farmer from North Ridge, was elected as the new Village's first mayor. Mayor McAllister continued in this position for twelve years.

Thus, today the southern portion of the original township east of the Black River is Village of Sheffield while the northern portion has become the City of Sheffield Lake. A small portion of the original township, west

of the Black River, remains as Sheffield Township.

Because the new Village of Sheffield had no public buildings when it was formed in January 1934, Mayor McAllister convened the first meeting of the Village Council at his home. In December 1934 the Village purchased the North Ridge District No. 2 Schoolhouse from the Sheffield Township School District for \$500. This elegant Queen Anne-style red brick schoolhouse, built in 1883 adjacent to Garfield Cemetery, was no longer needed by the School Board with the opening of Brookside School several years earlier. In 1935 the building was converted to the Sheffield Village Hall and served that purpose for the next 65 years.

In 1978 the Village Hall and Garfield Cemetery were placed on the National Register of Historic Places along with two other nineteenth century structures on North Ridge—Milton Garfield House (built in 1839) and the Halsey Garfield House (built in 1854). Some of the buildings of the Garfield family, one of Sheffield's most prominent farm families on North Ridge, have been in this family for five generations. The Jabez Burrell House (built in 1820) on East River Road at French Creek is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Sheffield Village Hall currently serves as the office of the Village Clerk/Treasurer and the office for Garfield Cemetery. Three archaeological sites within the Village, the Burrell Fort Site, the Burrell Orchard Site, and the Eiden Prehistoric District, are likewise listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In the 1940s and 1950s Sheffield's North Ridge became known as The Greenhouse Tomato Capital of America, as 24 acres of land were covered with glass. In 1957 a new

fire station was built adjacent to James Day Park on a bluff overlooking French Creek. In 1999 this building was enlarged and now serves as Sheffield Village's Municipal Complex. In the 1960s the Lorain County Metro Parks began preserving natural areas along the Black River and French Creek, that now include a Nature Center and many miles of paved and earthen trails within Sheffield Village—the latest being the Steel Mill Trail, opened in May 2008, with high bridges over the Black River and French Creek.

Today Sheffield is again in a period of transition, as farmlands diminish and the Village moves toward becoming a modern residential and commercial center with some 1,600 homes and 230 businesses. Progress has come with some costs, as some Sheffield historic homes have been lost to commercial development. The Sheffield Village Historical Society was formed in 2005 to preserve the heritage of those who toiled to found the Village and who found joy in their accomplishments.



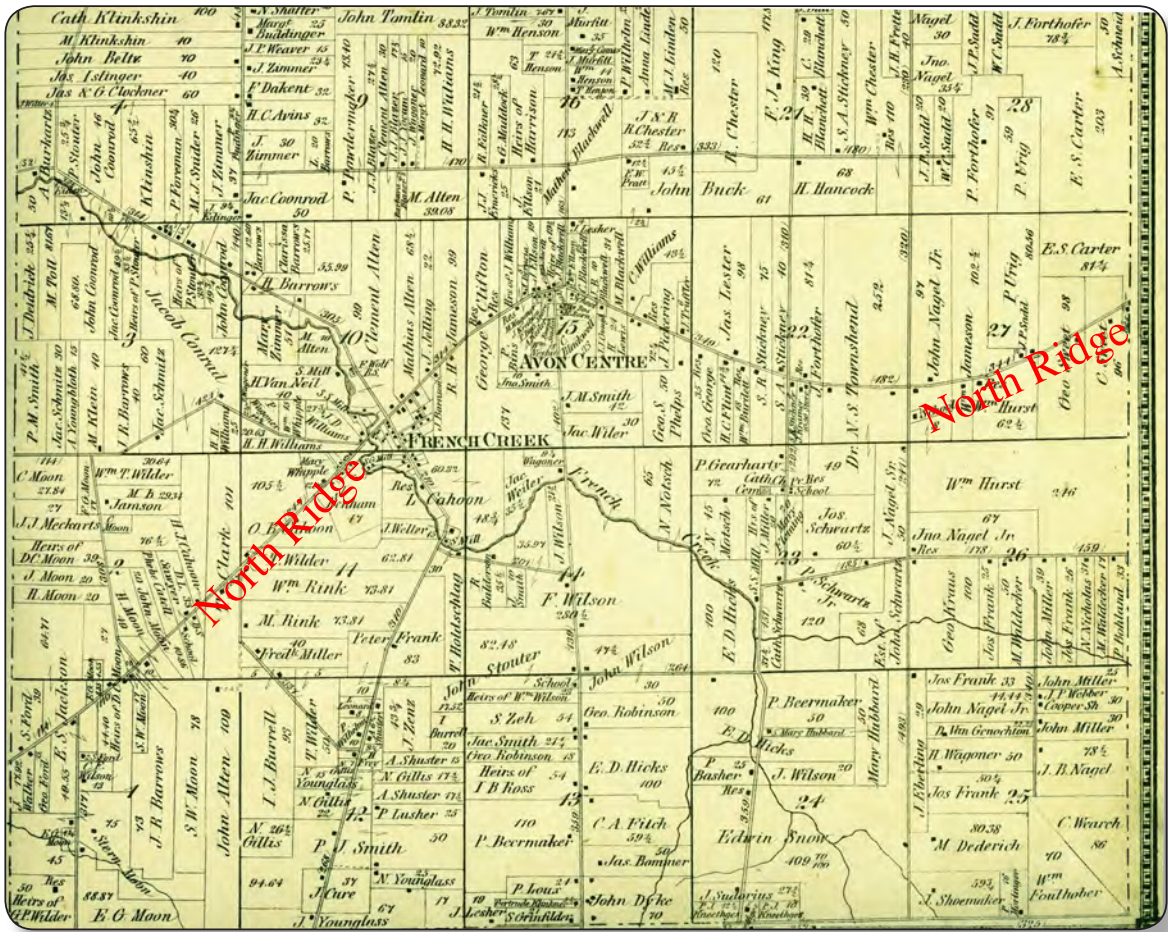
*A tradition begun in 1874, Sheffield families meet at the Burrell Homestead in August for a reunion. This gathering was for the 135th reunion picnic in 2009 (photograph by Dennis Davis).*

AVON HISTORY

**Settlement of Avon.** In many ways, Avon's early history mirrors that already presented for Sheffield. However, Avon received its first permanent American settlers a year earlier, during 1814, also originally from Berkshire County, Massachusetts. The first to arrive was Wilbur Cahoon who had moved from the Berkshire Mountains to Herkimer County, New York. The townships what would become Avon and Sheffield [east of the Black River] were initially administered by Dover Township within Cuyahoga County. In 1818, Township No. 7 in Range 16 was organized and named Troy Township [today's Avon and Avon Lake]. In 1824, Lorain County was created, and the name of Troy Township was changed to Avon Township.

Religion played an important part in the lives of the pioneers and several Protestant congregations were organized soon after Avon was settled. In 1833, emigrant families arrived from Bavaria and a Roman Catholic congregation was established. Many of these early settlers were staunch abolitionists. Tradition has it that a station on the Underground Railroad, which moved escaping slaves to Canada, was located in Avon.

Sawmills and a gristmill were built to process raw materials produced by the settlers. These early factories were powered by water from French Creek, but as the forests were cleared for farmlands, the stream flow became irregular and the mills ceased to operate. In the



South portion of Avon Township in 1874. Detroit Road meanders across the township, starting near the southwest corner, passing through French Creek and Avon Center, and ending near the northeast corner (map from Lake 1874).



French Creek District of Avon Township in 1874. Diagonal road leading from the southwest (lower left) to northeast corner of the map follows the crest of North Ridge (map from Lake 1874).

1850s a steam sawmill and a steam flourmill were built to replace the obsolete water mills. Other ventures were also undertaken to support the farming community, including mercantile businesses, blacksmith workshops [smithies], factories to manufacture buggies, carriages, harnesses, and wheel spokes, and even a bicycle fabrication shop.

**Economic Turmoil.** The economic crashes of the mid-1800s and the following depressions caused hard times for the Avon mills. The rapid growth in railway transportation following the Civil War and the development

of efficient, large-scale industrial facilities in larger urban centers forced the Avon mills out of business. Avon once again became a quiet community of well-kept farms.

The migration of industry from rural communities was accompanied by a migration of people to the cities. An interesting view of this era is found in the writings of the noted Lorain County author, Sherwood Anderson [1876-1941]. Anderson grew up in neighboring Camden Township and was keenly aware of the growth of industrialization in the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He





*North Ridge at Avon Center circa 1880s (intersection of today's Detroit and Center Roads). Henry Green's Market is on the right. The market sold feed in sacks. Avon women would use the sack material to make dresses. The wooden fence beyond the market encloses Mound Cemetery (courtesy of Avon Historical Society).*



*North Ridge stone bridge over French Creek circa 1890s. View is to the south; Wilford Hotel is at the far right (courtesy of Avon Historical Society).*

joined the army in 1898, saw service in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, and returned to Ohio a hero. His most enduring work, *Winesburg, Ohio*, is a 1919 collection of short stories about small town life in a fictitious Ohio community during this period of movement to the cities. The career of Harrison Williams, who was born in Avon Township in 1873, exemplifies this trend. Williams abandoned an unsuccessful bicycle manufacturing business in 1903 and went to New York City where he took a job with a carpet sweeper company. By the time he was 56, in 1929, Williams had accumulated a fortune in public utilities, estimated at half a billion dollars (Smith 1974).

Tom L. Johnson, founder of the steel mill in Lorain, built an electric interurban trolley line through Avon Township in 1898. Although the interurban passed well to the north of North Ridge, it provided service to the resort community that was growing along the Lake Erie shore. In 1911, the residents of the northern portion of the township voted to form

the incorporated village of Avon Lake. By then, the east-west Nickel Plate Railroad had been built and formed a boundary between the two communities. A dispute ensued over who held possession of the railroad property. The lawsuit was settled by a court decision in Avon Lake's favor. The remaining portion of Avon Township was incorporated as the Village of Avon in 1917. The awakening of the nation brought on by the United States' involvement in World War I, stimulated an economic boon that peaked in 1920. Cleveland's western suburbs developed grandiose plans that included a 4-lane boulevard on Hilliard Road in Westlake that reached almost to the Avon border. The speculation fever made itself felt in Avon, but with a declining birth rate and the automobile revolution sweeping the country, nothing materialized.

The next decade brought more turmoil to Avon. A devastating tornado hit Lorain, Sheffield, and Avon in 1924, killing over 80 people, destroying many buildings, and causing much loss of livestock and crops.



*Tree-lined roadway in Avon circa 1915. View toward the west on North Ridge (courtesy of Avon Historical Society).*



*Wilson-Reigelsberger House, quintessential Greek Revival-style farmhouse (1936 photograph by Carl Waite, courtesy of U.S. Library of Congress).*

Then came the Stock Market Crash of 1929 that locked Avon farmers into a grinding struggle to pay their taxes and save their land. Some citizens of Avon lost their jobs as the Great Depression deepened, and a few of Avon's seniors are still alive that remember those hard times. The electric interurban was forced to close in 1938 and new highway construction was concentrated on the east side of Cleveland. Avon's relative transportation capability was reduced. The interurban rails were torn up, the trolley maintenance barn was turned into a motel, and some of the track right-of-way was converted to highway.

World War II marked the end of the Depression, and general farming became less prominent as greenhouse farming began to increase in importance. Eventually Avon, Sheffield, and western Cuyahoga County along North Ridge became known as the greenhouse tomato capital of America. However, more and more of Avon's citizens were commuting to jobs in the cities. Progressive leadership in neighboring Avon Lake brought industrial growth north of the Nickel Plate railroad tracks. Many of Avon's workers, whose ancestors had farmed for generations, left the land to take factory jobs in Avon Lake and Lorain.

As Cleveland grew at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Detroit Road within Cuyahoga County became a major transportation route with the advent of electric "interurbans" and inner city streetcar lines, but these lines never penetrated the rural lands of North Ridge in Lorain County.

***Farmlands to Residential Community.*** Avon entered the 1950s with robust plans. A city water system was begun, plans for a sewer system were formulated, and Northgate became Avon's first experience with a large-scale housing development. By 1955, some Avonites had had enough of the new prosperity. Strangely, some of the most vigorous opponents of further growth were new residents of Avon. They explained that they did not want Avon's rural image spoiled. A major salt mining company wanted to begin a large underground operation in Avon—the plan was turned down. In the 1960s the State decided to build Interstate 90 through Avon and the village was blessed with two interchanges that has helped Route 254 retain some of its rural character. North Ridge was again somewhat insulated because Interstate 90, which provides a more convenient alternative for most through traffic, closely parallels Route 254.



*Robinson-Fitch House—Center Road (1936 photographs by Carl Waite, courtesy of U.S. Library of Congress). This house, also known as the Lewis House, is now located in Olde Avon Village—36840 Detroit Road.*

Housing development exploded again in the 1990s and continues today. With the present population approaching 15,000 citizens, Avon continues to grow and build itself into a prosperous community. In recent years the city has built modern stations for its Police and Fire Department, a senior citizen center, and a new post office, as well

as a new minor league baseball stadium and public recreational facility. Avon's public pride is shown in the many gatherings held in the City, such as the Festival of Flowers, Heart of Avon Celebration, Antique & Uncle Junque Yard Sales, Fall Festival, Christmas Candlelite Walk, and the ever-popular Duct Tape Parade.



*Autumn along the North Ridge Scenic Byway.*