

## The History of WILLISTON

The town of Williston consists mainly of farmland once owned by August Schimming (southwest corner); J. J. Johnson (southeast corner); James Thorpe (northeast corner); and Chris Nissen (northwest corner), formerly owned by Dewey Stave Company.

The original town of Williston was west of Martin-Williston Road and north of Route #579. In March, 1882, it was surveyed for Fitch Dewey, President of Dewey Stave Company.

The Yale addition was surveyed for James Thorpe in March, 1882. James Thorpe left Warrensville, Ohio, in 1870 and settled in Ottawa County, in what is now Allen Township. James was educated in Allen Township and went to high school in Toledo.

He bought 40 acres of timberland in Allen Township and after first building a log cabin, he set to work to clear his land. He found the soil to be very productive and with the shrewd judgment which had always characterized his career, he added eighty acres more, continuing to purchase as his means warranted, until he owned 335 acres.

On this property he had expended much time, labor and money and its high state of cultivation and consequent increase in value are evidences of the intelligent management of the owner.

Six years were spent in the humble log cabin, which then gave place to a handsome residence.

Mr. Thorpe was married on March 19, 1868, at Berea, Cuyahoga County, to Carolina, daughter of Van Rennesaler and Catherine (Weller) Surrarer, both natives of New York State. Of this union, one child, Yale J., was born on January 24, 1871.

After following farming for a number of years, in 1887 he began to study law, and began reading in the office of Thomas Marshall in Port Clinton, later to become a lawyer.

The Yale addition was named after his only son, Yale Thorpe.

Williston had its early beginning approximately June 1883, when a deeply religious group sought to formulate plans to build a house of worship. Rev. Rausch of Toledo spearheaded this movement. Gust Shephard, a local merchant, became its leader. As a result, St. John Lutheran Church was organized. In January, 1884, the first frame church was built.

In March, 1885, land north of Williston was purchased for use as a congregational cemetery. This was turned over to Allen Township authorities in 1941.

Later a small frame school room was built beside the church. As the town grew, two one-room school houses were built at the corner of Johnson Street and Martin-Williston Road. Around 1944, the one-room brick school was torn down and the other frame school house was converted into a home by Edwin Johnson.

Lumber was the leading business. Following the receding timberline, farmers began to clear the fields to till the soil. The mill town phase of village life was declining — soon to disappear. From it emerged a community of farmers, merchants, carpenters and other tradesmen.

The Dewey Stave Company, manufacturers of barrel stoves, set the pace. But, in addition, Williston also had the railroad, and through a combination of the two, the town had a basis for a more enduring life than most.

Along the south side of the railroad tracks by Martin-Williston Road, was a pump station with a water tower for trains to stop and get water for their steam locomotives to continue on their route.

F. O. Krouse had a coal company along the railroad. In 1912, it was purchased by Huntz Johnson for a lumber company. After his death, it was operated by his son, Harry Johnson.

At the turn of the Century, on the northwest corner of Route #579 and Martin-Williston Road was Lehman's General Store, later known as Krouse's Store, operated by Fred Krouse.

Across the road from it was Fred Tank's Hotel and Saloon. After prohibition, it was converted to an ice cream parlor and pool room, later to become Lowe's Red and White Grocery Store, which also housed the United States Post Office. The store is now operated by Don Deakin.

Next to this was a livery stable and barn which later became the town hall. Also, near this location was an ice house.

Across the corner (southwest corner of #579 at Martin-Williston Road) was Claus Jensen's Ice Cream and Beer Parlor. On the west side of the building was a barbershop. After Claus Jensen's death, it became a tavern, until the late 1970's. It has now been converted into living quarters.

Next to this, Frank Batch owned a small store which, in 1932, became H. A. Tank's Grocery Store. In 1939 it was destroyed by fire. While a new store was being built on the same location, he did business from the front of Dunn's Garage. Upon his retirement in 1956, the store was moved to the west end of town and converted into a house.

About 1918 Wallace Dunn opened Dunn Motor Sales on Route #579, selling Chrylsers, Nashes, Oldsmobiles and Studebakers.

Around 1940, Duchess Beauty Shop, operated by Bea (Dunn) Sutter, established quarters in the front part of this building. This shop was later moved and is presently operated from her home on the west end of town. Later this front section of Dunn's became a barber shop. In the back part of the building, Steve Thomas had a car repair shop. This building is now occupied by Durivage Pattern and Manufacturing.

Wallace Dunn also operated the tomato-pickle dock and sugar beet station west of the railroad tracks on Route #579. His son, Arnold, owned and operated a coal yard before entering military service.

Grover "Butch" Tank started a car agency in 1922, selling American Motors automobiles and GMC trucks. His son, Robert, operated the business from 1956 until 1981. It is now Conner's Bicycle Shop.

The Luther Home of Mercy, a haven of compassion for the mentally and physically handicapped, became a reality from the ideas of Rev. Max Schleicher, D. D. The first cottage was completed and opened in the depression year of 1929. Max preached at Williston and Blackberry until 1935 when the shelter had grown to where he was needed full time. His son, Pastor E. H. Schleicher, became director in 1964 and retired in 1982. The present director is Donald Baacke. A sixth housing-type unit and a habilitation building were recently added, comprising a \$3 million expansion in a two-year period.

In early 1930, a Sohio Gas Station, now operated by Terry Witt, was built by Otto Schimming.

Chris Nissen operated a coal yard, and he sold hay and straw, as well.

Also, on Main Street, Sohio had a bulk filling station which had various operators over the years. This is no longer in operation.

Not too far from this was the \_\_\_\_\_ railroad depot.

~~The fire station was built in 19\_\_.~~

In July, 1947, the trustees established a lighting district for street lights. A celebration in July, 1948, was a gala event in Williston. It started with a parade led by Carl Gust at the age of 88, on foot, carrying a lantern. The parade ended at the fire engine house where a crowd joined in singing "America." Rev. Max Schleicher threw the switch for the street lighting, with the words, "Let there be Light!"

Emil Johnson's first addition was accepted by the trustees in November, 1949. This was farm land purchased from August Schimming, plotted out for a housing development. The second and third additions were accepted in October, 1953, and December, 1955, respectively.

In 1950 the citizens of Williston petitioned for sidewalks. Through an agreement between the trustees and the property owners, sidewalks were put in.

In January, 1954, Thorpe Street in Williston was changed to Johnson Street.

In February, 1954, the trustees established house numbers for the town.

Around 1955 the post office was moved to the new brick building, its present location on Route #579. This building also houses Nancy's (Ruthsatz) Beauty Shop.

Also, Clyde Imhoff, D. O. opened a doctor's office in 19\_\_\_; in August, 1959, Darrell Rollins opened his barbershop; Lowe Insurance office opened in \_\_\_\_\_; in 1972 the Village Boutique Beauty Shop, operated by Phyllis Haeft, opened.

In 1984 the Williston Townhall was torn down and an office addition for the trustees was made to the fire station.

Williston is a quiet, peaceful town. Many homes have been built on farmland, once owned by the Schimmings, Johnsons, Thorpes and Nissens.

*Compiled by Robert Jank*