

Claridon in the early 1900's

I was born in 1896 on my father's farm approximately one half mile south of the village, and located on the Whetstone River Road, which follows the Whetstone River some distance. Several Indian campgrounds have been discovered along this road, probably Wyandottes or Delaware. My father was a veteran of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. He came to the U. S. in 1872, and eventually settled on this farm.

Our closest neighbors to the north were "Lize" and Sarah Smithson. They lived in a log house, partially weather boarded. They owned a small acreage for farming with a woods for winter fuel. "Lize", the older one was rather small, quiet, and unassuming. Sarah was quite the opposite. She frequently play the old reed organ, and also operated a loom for making rag rugs. When they had their little spats she was not averse to using a little profanity. They were good kind souls and remained spinsters all their life.

In the next house lived "Han" and "Lib" Smithson with their son Charley. Also Grandmother Smithson, an expert fisherwoman, who usually was seen smoking a "corncob" pipe. "Han" was a carpenter by trade. He played the "fiddle", mostly country style, with jigs, reels, and hornpipe. He liked hard cider and my father always had a supply. Many evenings were spent at our house playing the fiddle while my sister "chorded" on the reed organ.

On the west side of the road Willis and Molly Early lived in the next house. Willis was an orphan boy but was adopted by a well to do family who gave him a college education and he became a school teacher, teaching mostly in the one-room schools of the district. He was well qualified to head a larger system, but was never selected, "because he chewed tobacco". Living with them was Grandpa Watson who was an old 49'er, and I was privileged to hear many a story of the "Wild West".

Approaching closer to the village on the right side we find the home of "Grandpa" Converse, a kindly old gentleman. With him lived his daughter Mable and her son, Arthur.

Across the road on the west side was the home of Jacob Retterer, wife and family. Josephine, "Callie", Lillie, John, Bill, Jack, Charley and Bryan.

In the house north of the Converse home on the east side was the home of "Ed and Dode" Fields and family, Roy, "Jim", Grace, Emerson and Kenneth. This house was owned formerly by the Eberhard family.

North of the Fields home was a small house used as a residence, and then as a country store, operated by Charley Smithson, whose family lived across the street on the west side. Just north of this home was a large two story structure. The upper story housed a lodge formed locally. The ground floor was used as a livery stable and blacksmith shop, operated by "Jim" Lines. Jim studied in Chicago and became a chiropractor.

On the southeast corner of the square was a very large house intended to be used as a hotel. It was later occupied by several different families. It was used as a country store by Austin Seckel. On this corner was located the town pump and watering trough for horses and dogs. This was also the mecca for the town's story tellers on Sunday mornings.

Going eastward from here were four or five houses that changed occupants frequently. Only one seemed to be more or less permanent. This was the dwelling of “Dick” and “Mag” Squibb, son Charley, daughters Myrtle and Clara.

At the extreme east end of these properties is the beautiful Claridon Cemetery which was originally a gravel pit (south side of Route 95). The house bordering the cemetery was owned by Harry Bolen and wife. There were two daughters, Lilly and Sylvia. (Lill and Sid)

Crossing the highway (95) on the north side is the large 2½ story brick structure, built by Dr. Devore, Claridon’s first physician. There were three daughter, Flora, Emma, and Minurva, better known as “Flo, Em, and Nerv”. “Em and Nerv” remained spinsters. The grounds were spacious and housed a carriage and stables for the horses. “Nerv” played both organ and piano.

Next home west was the home of a Gettysburg veteran by the name of “Chris” Sipes. One daughter lived there with the family. The daughter took her own life with carbolic acid. “Chris” was a rather small and scrawny individual, very vocal and fiery. He owned one of the early “one-lunger” roadster Maxwells which cranked on the side. It ran sometimes and sometimes not. After a few expletives from “Chris” it would finally start and run another mile or two.

The next house became the home of the two doctors that followed Dr. Devore, namely Dr.’s Weiser and Britton who was the last physicians the village had.

The large brick bungalow was built by Geo. Williams and wife. They had two sons, Walter and Scott. Scott stayed a bachelor. Their house is now the home of Charley Evers, a WMRN radio personality. Charley is an animal lover, and has quite an assortment of them including donkeys, goats, geese, chickens etc.

The next house was the home of Rosa and Emma Owens, both good church workers. Emma taught a class of boys my age for many years in the Methodist Church. They both stayed single thru life.

COUNTRY STORE—

Now comes the proverbial country store and Post Office. It was called Adelaide at first. This store was the hub of the village. The first storekeeper was “Tip” Thomas, followed by Fay Smith. Beside the usual stock of groceries it carried a full line of Finch overalls, the popular brand at that time. For the ladies there were bolts of gingham and calico. In the back part a large pot-bellied stove was surrounded by old church benches occupied most every night by the village “Congress” which discussed and debated the burning issues of the day. Yes—there was the usual checker board, usually in use by the local champions. Later a barber chair was installed and it was no longer necessary to go to the city for haircuts and shaves. No one had to go hungry. There was always an open wooden barrel of crackers to go with cheese, pork and beans, sardines and such—salt vinegar and mustard were free. Saturday evening the grocer brought from Marion a 5 gallon freezer of ice cream. This disappeared in no time. Small boys brought in a couple of eggs to trade for candy if they had no money. The store at this time was owned by “Jake” and “Hen” Fetter. For a while they ran a huckster route through the country side.

North of the country store there were three or four houses. One was a log cabin partially weather-boarded owned by a bachelor named Joe Squibb. He was partially deaf and lived alone, rarely mixing with the neighbors.

Another house was occupied by “Ode” and Ethel Keeran and son Grover.

Next was the only industry Claridon had, a tile kiln which employed a number of men. It operated until the supply of proper clay gave out. At 12 noon (Sun time) they blew the whistle eagerly listened for by the children at school. This kiln was operated by "Billy" Williams who lived in the farthest house north. The Williams family consisted of wife and sons Irey, Lowell, daughters Margaret and Louise. Louise taught the Claridon Elementary School west of the village for about 25 years.

South of the Williams home was the small white United Brethern Church. Dwindling membership and attendance forced it to close. The building still stands in the field back of the original location, and is used for various purposes.

Across the road was the Miller home. Besides the parents there were two sons, "Ode" and "Jim" or "Snow" as he was known. There were also several daughters—Maud and "Totsie".

Going south about halfway to the square there was a small cottage on the west side. It was occupied by people by the name of Smith. They had one son named Philip. He attended school at the same time I did. Nickname was "Buck".

Now on the northwest corner of the square was the home of Joe Mitchell and wife. Two sons Wesley and Luther, also a daughter Dale. Joe was a farmer and sheep raiser, and always owned a well trained sheep dog. He also at one time owned a part interest in the Country Store. The house has been remodeled after having been occupied by the Sycks family consisting of Wilbur Russell and a daughter "Esty".

Across from the Mitchell home was the home of Henry Fetter, wife and daughter Gladys. A building which served as a garage, also located on this corner. The garage was operated by Frank Wittred who later moved to Kirkpatrick. (Henry Fetter had moved to the north side of the road)

West of the Mitchell home was the remodeled home of Henry Fetter and family. "Hen" was a grower of all kinds of strawberries, and at one time part owner with his brother "Jake" of the Country Store. Gladys married Ed Smith, a rural mail carrier. He also operated a garage on the Fetter property with his brother Raymond.

West of the Fetter home was and still is the brick Methodist Church. With the three classrooms open it will hold over 500 people. I attended Sunday School there.

Next house west was the home of "Aleck" Austin a large and powerful man. This house was razed and rebuilt and is now the home of Luther and Clara Mitchell. Clara's name before she married Luther was Trout. Her father was known as "Andy" Trout. Chester, Emmet and Harry were her brothers and she also had a sister, Mildred. Chester and Emmet are deceased. We all attended school together.

At the extreme west edge was the two story brick school house, with spacious playground and maple trees around it. Both stories were heated by pot-bellied coal stoves. The original building burned and school was held in the Township House and a residence on "Pig Tail" Alley until a new school could be built. It is no longer standing. There were no homes on the south side of the road.

Starting south on Pig Tail Alley on the southeast corner lived a couple who were deaf mutes, by the name of Kaufman. Sirepta Smith was brought in to teach their little daughter to speak and be educated. The home was bought finally by Jake Fetter.

Halfway down Pig Tail on the east side lived a bachelor by the name of John Smith. He was known as Captain “John Smith”. He had a cork leg that squeaked when he walked. He wore a shiny blue serge suit and “stiff cady” and also a celluloid collar. He was the sexton at the Methodist Church. One of his duties was to “toll” the bell indicating the age of the deceased.

On the northeast corner of the alley turning east lived a pensioned Spanish American war veteran Joe Fields along with his daughter who kept house for him. He kept a horse in a very small barn for some reason, and when he was asked why, he said, “Oh, she comes handy to haul in fodder with”. The horse had no other work whatsoever to perform.

Across from Joe Fields lived Albert and Kate Fairchild’s and family. Albert, an expert, kept all the saws sharp around Claridon. Kate was the Laundromat for the community.

Next house east was owned by “Mart and Bell” Adams. Mart was a Gettysburg veteran like Chris Sipes. He was a large man and always used a cane, probably been wounded, but never would talk about it.

Across from the Adams home is the old township hall. A large wood structure with old church benches for seating and a stage. It might have been a church at one time. It was used for political rallies, voting house, medicine shows and plays. It was also the rehearsal hall for the Claridon Band organized by Oscar, my brother, and his friend Esta Watson, who made his home with the Willis Earlys. They functioned mostly at fairs, festivals, political rallies and ice cream festivals. There were about 17 or 18 members. I was one of the members.

We are back to the Whetstone River Road where we began this story.

AFTERTHOUGHT—

At one time Claridon was to become the county seat, and the Black Diamond railroad was to run thru it to Sandusky. However that did not work out. The Black Diamond became the Pennsylvania and ran thru Marion, the county seat.

Irey R. Halt
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