

Early Settlers In Norwich Township Were A Sturdy Lot; They Had To Be

(This is the third in a series of articles about the early history of Norwich township and the Village of Hilliards. It is the story of the men and women who founded an American community.)

These early settlers in Norwich township were a sturdy lot. They were strong men and women. They had to be. And they were people with vision and determination. The habits of these pioneers were of a simplicity and purity in conformance to their surroundings and belongings. The men were engaged in the herculean labor, day after day, of enlarging the little patch of sunshine about their homes, cutting away the forest, burning off the brush and debris, preparing the soil, planting, tending, harvesting, caring for the few animals they brought with them and in hunting.

While the men were engaged in the heavy labor of the field and forest, or following the deer or seeking other game, their help-mates were busy with their household duties. It was the sturdy pioneer women who provided for the day and for the cold, bitter winters. They cooked, made clothes, and raised their families. They were fitted by nature and experience to be the consorts of the brave men who first came into the wilderness of Norwich township in the early 1800's. They were heroic in their endurance of hardship and privation and loneliness.

Woman's work then, like man's was performed under disadvantages. She had not only the common household duties to perform, but many others. She not only made the clothing, but the fabric for it. That old, old occupation of spinning and weaving was the chief industry of the pioneer women. Every cabin sounded with the softly whirring wheel and the rhythmic thud of the loom.

These were the early rugged days of a typical American community, growing in the wilderness. And only the rugged survived. It was to this sparsely settled area that William Armistead emigrated from Virginia in 1809 and settled a mile below Hayden Run. He bought 300 acres of land which he cleared and improved. Mr. Armistead was married twice and raised five children. On his death he willed the property

to his wife who later sold it to Michael Walton.

Asa Wilcox followed the Armisteads to Norwich township in 1811 and settled on the River Road, on land later owned by David Elliott. He did not make a purchase there, but in later years bought land on the Hilliards pike, owned by Abraham Sells. Robert Elliott came to Norwich from Pennsylvania about the same time as Asa Wilcox. He bought land on the River Road north of the location of the old Wesley church. His wife was a daughter of Daniel Brunk, and by her he had several children. His son, Daniel Elliott, lived for many years on the home farm.

A Mr. Everett settled on land adjoining Elliott, on the south, about 1812. In the same year Henry McCracken settled near the farm of Abraham Sells.

In 1814, Ephriam Fisher emigrated from Maryland with his father. They joined with Elias Pegg in the purchase of 600 acres of land a mile and three-fourths south east of Hilliards. In 1816, Mr. Pegg moved to Franklinton and sold his part of the farm land to Moses Hart.

In 1818, Mr. Fisher built a cabin on his land. It was a small home 12 by 14 feet, with no floor. He split oak clapboards on which to place his bed, and soon made a comfortable home for himself and wife. He had come to the community in a large Pennsylvania wagon, drawn by four horses, and brought with him two cows and calves. The cows and one calf died of murrain, and the Fishers were obliged to go through two miles of wild forest to obtain the milk needed for their young son, George. George's clothing, when a boy, consisted of buckskin until flax could be raised.

Ephriam Fisher died in 1838 and willed his property to his children. He was twice married and had 11 children. George Fisher married Sarah Latimer and had eight children. The original proprietors of his land were William Price, T. Bentley and B. Anderson.

(Follow the next installment of the early history of Norwich and Hilliards pioneers in the Hilliards News next week.)