

Chapter III

The Growth and Development of Ohio's Counties: 1777-1851

Prior to statehood in 1803, several Ohio counties had already been organized according to the provisions of the Northwest Ordinance, which stated that portions of the Northwest Territory could be admitted to the Federal Union, provided certain steps were taken. The first county in Ohio to be established was Washington County, in 1788, by proclamation of the territorial governor, Arthur St. Clair. Hamilton County was established in 1790; Adams County, 1797; Jefferson County, 1797; and Ross County, 1798.

Wayne County (Michigan) once covered nearly a third of Ohio, parts of western Indiana, and the lower Michigan Peninsula. The author has not considered this area whose county seat was in Detroit, as part of Ohio.

In 1788, Washington County became the first county to be organized in the territory. At that time, Washington County covered all of eastern Ohio as far west as the Scioto River. Its northern boundary was to parallel the line established later by the Greenville Treaty in 1795. Marietta, Ohio's first permanent settlement, was designated as the county seat.

In 1790, Hamilton County was organized and covered all of the area west of the Scioto River to what eventually became the boundary of the Indiana Territory. It extended north to the present Michigan Line.



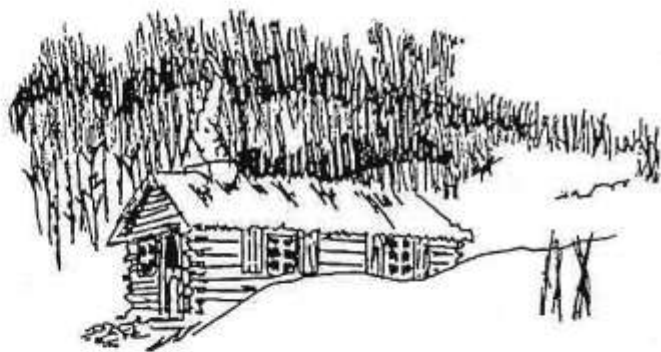
Map #4: Ohio County Boundary Lines in 1792.

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Map #3: Ohio County Boundary Lines in 1790.

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Andrea Kirsch

By 1799, Jefferson, Adams, Ross and Wayne counties were added. Wayne County as shown in Map #6 was formed in the area presently comprising the State of Michigan. As mentioned earlier, it included much of northern Ohio and western Indiana. The county seat was designated as Detroit. Thus, Wayne County, as shown in Map #6, should not be considered one of the original nine Ohio counties.



Map #5: Ohio County Boundary Lines in 1799.

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Map #6: Ohio County Boundary Lines in 1801.

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Table 3. Ohio's First Counties

County	Established	Original County Seat
1. Washington	1788	Marietta
2. Hamilton	1790	Cincinnati
3. Jefferson	1797	Steubenville
4. Ross	1798	Chillicothe
5. Adams	1799	Manchester

In April of 1802, The Seventh Congress of the United States approved the Enabling Act, which provided for the admission of Ohio as the seventeenth state. Provisions of the act included settling the boundaries of the new state. The northern boundary was to be Lake Erie and a line directly to the southern tip of Lake Michigan. Later, this was to cause a controversy with the Michigan Territorial legislature, which claimed a line farther south and including what was to become the city of Toledo. When the new Indiana Territory included areas lying even further north than the Ohio-Michigan Line, there was more dissatisfaction in Michigan.

The southern boundary was to be the Ohio River, while the eastern boundary was to be the Pennsylvania state line. The western boundary was established as a line extending due north from the mouth of the Great Miami River to the Michigan line. By 1802, the boundaries of Ohio appeared as shown on Map #6.

Table 4. Ohio Counties Formed by 1801

County	Formed	Original County Seat
1. Trumbull	1800	Warren
2. Fairfield	1800	Lancaster
3. Clermont	1800	Williamsburg
4. Belmont	1801	St. Clairsville

With the addition of these counties, Ohio's political organization as a territory was further advanced, with Chillicothe to be designated the capital of the Northwest Territory.

The exact date of statehood has often been disputed. Some claim that the date should be the passage by Congress in 1802 of the Enabling Act, while others claim the date when the new state constitution was signed, November 29, 1802. Most agree, however, that the official date for statehood should be March 1, 1803, when Congress gave its final approval to the resolution creating Ohio as the seventeenth state. It is also the date the General Assembly first met in Chillicothe.

Eight more counties were added in 1803, making seventeen, the exact number of states in the Union with the admission of Ohio.



Map #7: Ohio County Boundary Lines in 1803.

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Map #8: Ohio County Boundary Lines in 1810.

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Table 5. Ohio Counties Formed in 1803

County	Formed	Original County Seat
1. Columbiana	1803	Lisbon
2. Franklin	1803	Franklinton
3. Greene	1803	Beavercreek
4. Montgomery	1803	Dayton
5. Butler	1803	Hamilton
6. Warren	1803	Lebanon
7. Gallia	1803	Gallipolis
8. Scioto	1803	Portsmouth

The period from 1804 to 1810 saw a remarkable expansion of counties in Ohio. Twenty-five additional counties were created, bringing the total of 1810 to forty-two. Note that Montgomery County, as shown in Map #8, was divided by the establishment of Miami and Darke Counties. The population of Ohio was still primarily concentrated in the southern and eastern portions of the state. The capital during this period remained in Chillicothe.



Table 6. Ohio Counties Formed from 1804 to 1810.

County	Formed	Original County Seat
1. Ashtabula	1808	Jefferson
2. Athens	1805	Athens
3. Champaign	1805	Springfield
4. Clinton	1810	Wilmington

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5. Coshocton	1810	Coshocton
6. Cuyahoga	1808	Cleveland
7. Darke	1809	Greenville
8. Delaware	1808	Delaware
9. Fayette	1810	Bloomingsburg
10. Geauga	1806	Chardon
11. Guernsey	1810	Cambridge
12. Highland	1805	New Market
13. Huron	1809	Avery
14. Knox	1808	Mt. Vernon
15. Licking	1808	Newark
16. Madison	1810	London
17. Miami	1807	Staunton
18. Muskingum	1804	Zanesville
19. Pickaway	1810	Circleville
20. Portage	1808	Ravenna
21. Preble	1808	Eaton
22. Richland	1808	Mansfield
23. Stark	1808	Canton
24. Tuscarawas	1808	New Philadelphia
25. Wayne	1808	Wooster

The strong desire of the early settlers to preserve the concept of local government, as well as problems relating to distances and traveling time, may explain the creation of so many counties during this period of Ohio history. Many of these counties, however, were created prior to significant increases in population. Often a long period of time would elapse from the time the county was created until it was formally organized, a county seat established, and a courthouse erected. (See Table 10, page 16.)

When Ohio counties were organized, they generally followed the New England Township-County Plan, which was a requirement of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. The townships were usually thirty-six square miles with the township center, which often became a place for trade as well as the political heart of the township, located in the middle. Obviously this reduced the time necessary for traveling on horseback when one wished to conduct his business in the course of a day. When the county was being surveyed, the surveyors tended to follow the lines established by the townships. The township nearest the center of the county was often chosen as the site of the seat of justice.

The Land Ordinance of 1785 was intended to encourage orderly civil government and in the township. In Ohio history, the township has persisted to the present, though many cities have annexed or attempted to annex them. Many townships have even incorporated as cities once their population reached five thousand. Whatever the fate of townships in Ohio, they were the first step towards self-government and the preservation of the concept of local government in Ohio.

From 1810 to 1824, Ohio experienced another rapid growth in the expansion of counties. Thirty-one new counties were created during this period of time, bringing the total number of counties by 1824 to seventy-three.

Table #7: Ohio Counties Formed Between 1811-1824

County	Formed	Original County Seat
1. Allen	1820	Lima
2. Brown	1818	Ripley
3. Clark	1818	Springfield
4. Crawford	1820	Bucyrus
5. Hancock	1820	Findlay
6. Hardin	1820	Kenton
7. Harrison	1813	Cadiz
8. Henry	1820	Napoleon
9. Hocking	1818	Logan
10. Holmes	1824	Millersburg
11. Jackson	1816	Jackson
12. Lawrence	1815	Burlington
13. Logan	1818	Urbana
14. Lorain	1822	Elyria
15. Marion	1820	Marion
16. Medina	1812	Medina
17. Meigs	1819	Chester
18. Mercer	1820	Celina
19. Monroe	1813	Woodsfield
20. Morgan	1817	McConnelsville
21. Paulding	1820	New Rochester
22. Perry	1818	Somerset
23. Pike	1815	Waverly
24. Putnam	1820	Kalida
25. Sandusky	1820	Lower Sandusky (Fremont)
26. Seneca	1820	Tiffin
27. Shelby	1819	Sidney
28. Union	1820	Milford Center
29. Van Wert	1820	Van Wert
30. Williams	1824	Bryan
31. Wood	1820	Maumee (part of present Lucas County)

The period of history in Ohio from 1811-1824 was marked by several important events. Certainly the War of 1812 played an important part in Ohio history, with the victory over the British by Commodore Perry, at Put-in-Bay in 1813. The courageous defense of Fort Meigs near Perrysburg by General William Henry Harrison, against the combined forces of the British and their Indian allies, marked one of the final efforts of the Indians to defend their lands in Ohio. Commodore Perry wrote General Harrison a memorable note which not only encouraged the defenders at Fort Meigs, but became a fighting slogan of our naval forces.

Dear General:

We have met the enemy and they are ours. Two ships, two brigs, one schooner and one sloop.

Yours with great respect and esteem,
O. H. Perry



Map #9: Ohio Counties, 1824.

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In 1810, The capital was moved from Chillicothe to Zanesville, where it remained until 1812, when it was returned to Chillicothe. No sooner had the capital returned to its former location than a debate began over moving the capital to a more centrally located site.

Northern Ohio by this time was developing rapidly, and Chillicothe was considered by many to be too far from the center of the state. Land speculators further up the Scioto valley argued that a location across the river from Franklinton would make a more ideal location for a new capital city, which later was renamed Columbus. With generous grants of land for future government buildings, the seat of state government was finally moved to Franklinton. A ten acre plot in what is now the heart of Columbus was designated the site of the state house. The first statehouse was not too different in design from the first one built in Chillicothe in 1801. It was later replaced by the present statehouse, completed in 1861 in the Greek Revival style.

The building of roads and canals also contributed to the rapid growth in population and the need to create seats of justice closer to homes of the settlers. With the War of 1812



Plate #2: Ohio's Present Capitol.

concluded by the Treaty of Ghent in 1815, easterners caught what has been called the "Ohio Fever", and the rich farm lands of the Ohio country soon began to fill the new citizens of the Buckeye state. This more than likely accounted for the extremely large number of counties created during this period of time. The population of Ohio was estimated to be about 500,000 by 1820. By 1840, the population rose to over 1,500,000. Not only did many easterners migrate to the rich farm lands, but this period of history marked a vast influx of Western Europeans to Ohio. In particular, Western Ohio attracted Germans and other northern Europeans. Among early settlers were Amish, and members of other Mennonite groups, most of whom settled in the areas of Holmes and Stark counties. Place names of many Ohio villages and towns recall the home lands of these early immigrants. Leipsic, Dresden and Hanover are excellent examples. The Irish came and settled primarily in areas around construction sites of the canals and roads. There were other groups of foreign immigrants, each one contributing in making Ohio the great state that it is today.

From 1825-1845, eight more counties were created. This now brought the total of counties in the state to eighty-one.



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Table #8: Ohio Counties Formed Between 1825-1845

County	Established	Original County Seat
1. Carroll	1833	Carrollton
2. Defiance	1845	Defiance
3. Erie	1838	Sandusky
4. Lake	1840	Painesville
5. Lucas	1835	Toledo
6. Ottawa	1840	Port Clinton
7. Summit	1840	Akron
8. Wyandot	1845	Upper Sandusky

The last counties to be formed in Ohio were created between 1846 and 1851, when Noble County, the last county created in Ohio, was formed. This brought the number of counties created in Ohio since the Proclamation of the Northwest Ordinance in 1787 until the creation of Noble County in 1851 to the present eighty-eight.

Table #9: Ohio Counties Formed Between 1846-1851

County	Established	Original County Seat
1. Ashland	1846	Jeromesville
2. Auglaize	1848	Wapakoneta
3. Fulton	1850	Wauscon
4. Mahoning	1846	Canfield
5. Morrow	1848	Mount Gilead
6. Noble	1851	Sarahsville
7. Vinton	1850	McArthur

Some modification of county lines has occurred over the years but basically the counties' boundaries are much the same today as they were when organized. The counties range in size from Ashtabula County, with 700 square miles, to its neighbor, Lake, with only 231 square miles. Cuyahoga ranks first in population, according to the 1980 census, with Vinton County having the smallest in population.

Map #12: Final Boundaries established for Ohio's counties, 1888.

Today, there are 3,049 counties in the United States, with Delaware having the least, only three, and Texas the most, with two-hundred and fifty-four. The concept of county government came to America with the first English settlers. In England the counties were referred to as "shires" until the fifteenth century, when the more common term "county" was adopted. The history of the term "county" however, goes much further back in evolution of organized government. In Ancient Rome, those who came together to govern and care for their region were referred to as the "comitatus", literally translated, the "companions". This later appears in French as "comte," which translated, means county. More than likely, this was passed on to England with the Norman Conquest in 1066.



Map #10: Ohio Counties, 1845

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Map #11: Ohio Counties, 1888

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OHIO—"The Buckeye State"



Map #12: Ohio's Counties Today.