



# THE HISTORICAL TIMES

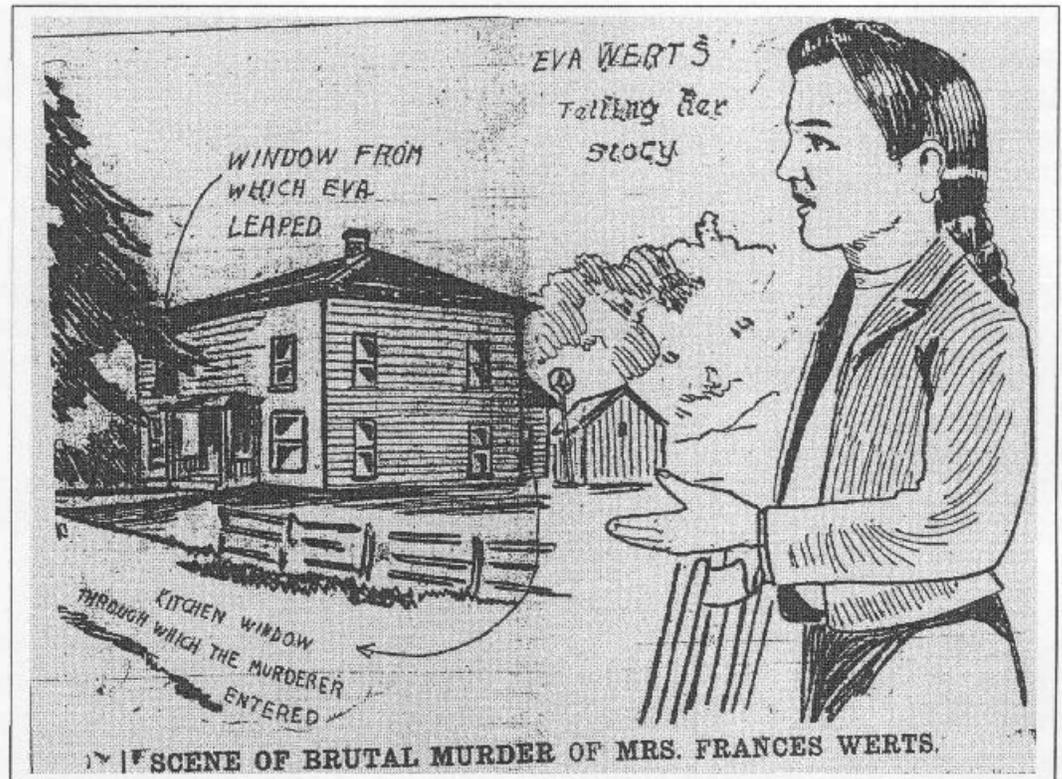
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In an age where the use of photographs was limited in newspapers, artist's sketches were used on important stories. Here, the sensational nature of the Frances Wertz slaying is captured in a June, 1905 edition of the *Newark Advocate*.



## The dark side of Granville

A history of murders in a quiet Ohio community

By B. Kevin Bennett

(First of two parts)

Laid-back Granville, in the heart of Licking County, is rich in culture and beauty. With its small town ambiance seemingly taken from a Norman Rockwell sketchbook, to many it represents the ideal place to live and raise a

family in a safe and nurturing environment. Warm, friendly Granville seems worlds away from the incidents of violent crime that seem to occur with all too common frequency in nearby urban centers. To the casual observer, the persistence of jaywalkers and illegal U-turns near the Post Office are the most vexing

criminal issues facing the community.

But there is an inexplicable dark side to Granville. While largely forgotten over the years, there have been ten incidents of murder, several involving multiple victims, in the community history. The first was recorded in 1905, the last in 1990. The details and facts of each match the range of personalities involved, from the truly tragic to the pathetic. While hopefully there will be no further incidents to mar our peace and tranquility, common sense and the sometimes uncontrollable passions of human nature dictate otherwise.

As noted, prior to 1905 there are no official reports of murder, but it is probably folly to believe that none occurred. Law enforcement during the first century of the community's existence was minimal. The village maintained a part-time constable; the township had to rely on the County Sheriff in Newark who maintained only a few deputies. There were no forensic investigation teams as popularized by television. Indeed, the office of County Coroner was not established by law until the late 1880s. In short, it was simply easier "to get away with murder" and escape detection during Granville's first century.

## 1905

### **The Unsolved Murder of "Granny" Wertz**

The first known murder to be reported was that of Mrs. Frances Wertz at her farmstead in the north part of Granville Township on Dry Creek Road. Occurring on June 1, 1905, the story of her brutal murder captivated county residents due in large part to the sensationalist coverage by the Newark Advocate. Mrs. Wertz, aged 60, was staying at her home accompanied by her 14-year-old granddaughter, Eva Wertz. Her husband, James Wertz, was recuperating from a debilitating injury at a friend's home nearer to Granville and a treating physician.

After retiring for the night granddaughter Eva was later awoken by noises that appeared to be coming from the ground floor of the house. She went to her grandmother's room and awakening her, told her that she thought someone was in the house. Being a rather self-

sufficient person, Mrs. Wertz grabbed a pitchfork she kept for protection as well as an oil lamp and started downstairs. With young Eva peering nervously behind, Mrs. Wertz made her way down the stairs but was unable to open the door at the bottom due to the intruder holding it from the other side. Eva then related that after a few brief moments of her grandmother pushing at the door, it opened and a "tall man, wearing a dark suit and holding a big club", partly opened the door, reached in and struck Mrs. Wertz on the head with the club. According to Eva, she heard her grandmother say, "Eva, I'm gone now". With that young Eva bolted from the stairwell to a window overlooking the front porch. She then claimed to leap from the window onto the porch roof and then jumped down to the ground. With the sound of her grandmother's screams ringing in her ears, she ran quickly for help to a neighboring farm a quarter-mile away.

Shortly thereafter, accompanied by the neighbor and his son, they discovered the body of Mrs. Wertz lying on the floor in a pool of blood, her skull badly crushed. Some hours later several deputies arrived from Newark with a bloodhound team but were unable to track down the killer.

Eva Wertz was kept in protective custody during the course of the investigation and acquired something of celebrity status. Although she admittedly had only caught a brief glimpse of the killer, she related to authorities that she believed that Mrs. Wertz's nephew, a Levi Brevard, was the killer. He was arrested at his Granville home and stood trial in Newark the following year.

During the trial the defense offered testimony that Eva was in actuality 17 years old and was involved with a local boy who was objectionable to Mrs. Wertz. Supposedly she caught the young couple together late that night and a scuffle ensued, which resulted in Mrs. Wertz's death.

In any event, Levi Brevard was acquitted by a jury and the murder was never officially solved.

1916

### Another Murder on the Wertz Farm

The specter of violent death again visited the Wertz farmstead eleven years after the murder of Frances Wertz. In an affair that one commentator noted, "had all the ingredients of a cheap dime novel", James "Bud" Wertz gunned down his brother-in-law George Stevens in a domestic situation that spiraled way out of control.

Stevens, a 25-year-old native of Newark, first made acquaintance with "Bud" Wertz while both were serving time in the Licking County Jail. Stevens had been found guilty of trespassing on B&O Railroad property. Lacking the money to pay his \$10 fine, he had to serve 30 days confinement. In contrast, Wertz was no stranger to law enforcement and was serving a six-month sentence for brutally beating an elderly shopkeeper in a dispute over a bill. Previously he had run afoul of the law on various assault, public intoxication, and disorderly conduct cases. He had even crossed paths with Licking County Sheriff Charles Swank by having an affair with his wife. Warned by the sheriff to steer clear of his spouse, Wertz apparently disregarded the advice. This resulted in a publicized affray in the Newark Arcade in which Wertz came off the worse. Shortly thereafter, Sheriff Swank divorced his wayward wife.

Wertz and Stevens became good friends while serving time together with the latter writing letters for Wertz. In this manner George Stevens became acquainted with Helen Wertz, the teenaged sister of "Bud" Wertz. Both were discharged from prison around the same time and Stevens was hired on as a farmhand at the Wertz farmstead. He took more than a passing fancy to Helen and they began a secret but torrid relationship. Once Helen reached the age of 16, she and Stevens secretly eloped to Columbus much to the dismay of Bud and his father, Jack Wertz. The newlyweds returned to the Wertz farm and were given a home, but the level of animosity between Bud Wertz and his new



James "Bud"  
Wertz

brother-in-law rapidly escalated with bitter verbal quarrels occurring on an almost daily basis over the next three weeks.

On the morning of Saturday, March 18, Bud Wertz and his father made the trip into Newark by horseback for a meeting with the family attorney to discuss "how to get rid of George Stevens". Conducted without the knowledge or consent of Helen, ostensibly they were seeking legal advice on how to obtain a divorce or annulment. While in Newark, they used the opportunity to visit the taverns and both became intoxicated. As they arrived back at the Wertz home around 2 p.m., they were sighted returning by George and Helen from the kitchen. Apparently their physical characteristics betrayed their condition for Helen later recalled her husband stating that they appeared to be drunk and that he was going to go outside to help them secure their mounts.

What transpired next between the men is uncertain, but within a couple of minutes a loud blast rang out and George Stevens lay sprawled on the ground by the front porch with a gaping wound in his abdomen. His body was described as being like a bloody sieve from 159 pellets of chilled lead shot delivered at close range. His young wife rushed out of the house and as she lifted his head from the ground, he gasped "Sweetheart, I think I am dying, go get a doctor". Helen ran to the neighbor's house down the road and placed a telephone call to the office of Dr. Carl Evans in Newark. She then rushed back to her home to find that her husband had died while she was on this errand. During this time, the neighbor placed a call to Sheriff Swank's office and reported that there had been a shooting at the Wertz place. Accompanied by an armed deputy, Sheriff Swank "jumped into a machine" and made his way to the scene. One

suspects that there was some grim satisfaction on Sheriff Swank's part at being able to possibly settle some old personal scores.

Upon arriving the Sheriff encountered Dr. Evans, who had arrived minutes before and had just finished examining the lifeless body of George Stevens, which was still lying where he had been shot. Standing nearby was the father, Jack Wertz, who appeared to still be in an intoxicated state. Frustrated in his attempts to get rational answers to his questions, Sheriff Swank brushed by Jack Wertz and went inside to find his son, Bud. Locating him, he questioned him on what occurred. With an indifferent demeanor Bud Wertz indicated that he had returned home to find George Stevens choking Helen inside the home. According to Bud, he then intervened and angry words were exchanged. He claimed Stevens then left the room and obtained a butcher knife from the kitchen. When he (Bud) went out on the porch; Stevens had the knife in his hand and threatened to kill him. Wertz readily admitted that at this juncture he had discharged both barrels of his loaded shotgun at Stevens. He justified it by stating, "I

did what a man had to do". The reaction of his father rivaled his son's in its lack of contriteness. Jack Wertz reportedly told the Sheriff "Well, Bud did a good job didn't he? He saved me the trouble for if he hadn't killed him, I would have done it myself"

Helen and her mother were then separately interviewed and both refuted the allegations that George Stevens had been engaged in choking or otherwise physically abusing Helen. With that, the body of Stevens was placed inside a now waiting ambulance vehicle and James "Bud" Wertz was taken away under arrest.

George Stevens was mournfully laid to rest at Cedar Hill Cemetery the following Tuesday in a small funeral ceremony that was not attended by his widow. Bud was indicted, denied bail and seemed to revel in all the newspaper attention. He entered a plea of not guilty asserting self-defense. His attorney attempted without success to change the location of the trial from Newark claiming that he could not get a fair trial locally. When that tactic failed Bud Wertz agreed to plead guilty to the charge of manslaughter in return for a 10-year jail sentence at the Mansfield



**The Jones Homestead:  
On Oct. 26, 1938  
farmhand William  
Walker sought revenge  
for a beating he had  
suffered at the hands of  
Ernest Jones. A shotgun  
blast to the abdomen  
mortally wounded Jones  
on the front porch. (See  
page 5.)**

Reformatory.

1938

**"Guess this Means the Penitentiary for Me."  
The Murder of Ernest Jones**

Ernest Jones was a very prominent man within the Granville community in 1938. A Township Trustee and prosperous businessman, he and his wife Grace lived just south of the village in a stately brick house at the base of Flowerpot Hill on Lancaster Road. This property was also the location of a substantial dairy farm operation that employed three farmhands, two of whom were provided housing on the farm. Living nearby was his son Ross and his young wife Rhea Belle Jones who resided at a home on South Main Street in the village.

In mid-October 1938 the Granville community was shocked and saddened by the death of Mrs. Eve Marie Hitt, who had taken her own life in a fit of depression.<sup>1</sup> On Oct. 26, Ernest and Grace Jones, accompanied by their son Ross, attended the afternoon funeral services in the village. During the services Ernest was summoned to take an urgent phone call from his daughter-in-law, the 22-year-old Rhea Bell who had stayed behind at her home. In what must have been an emotional conversation, she related that she been sexually assaulted by a William Walker, one of the farmhands. Walker, a 38-year-old black man, had worked and intermittently lived on the Jones farm for over three years. After the call concluded, Ernest Jones went back to his wife and son and requested that his son return to his home to tend to his wife. He then gave his wife keys to their vehicle, so she could do grocery errands in the village. It seems evident that he did not share the contents of the call with his wife. He then briskly walked the half mile back to his farmstead.

What happened after his arrival is unclear as there were no surviving witnesses. What is certain is that Ernest Jones sought out Walker and a physical confrontation ensued. At some point Jones smashed a wooden chair over

Walker's head, leaving a deep, bloody gash and deep bruising. From all the physical evidence, Jones got the better of the fight and when it finished, Walker limped back to the humble shanty in which he lodged on the farm. Apparently his blood was still up for he retrieved and loaded a single barrel shotgun that he kept to shoot varmints. He proceeded back to the Jones house and discovering Ernest Jones on the front porch, leveled a blast at him and dropped him with a large wound to the abdomen. It is unknown what, if any words were exchanged between the two men prior to the shot being discharged. Walker quickly fled the scene.

This occurred shortly after 6 PM and no one else was present at the house at that time. Ernest Jones was evidently a tough old bird for despite his massive injuries, he managed to drag himself to the telephone inside his house and called his neighbor, Ivan Dunlap for help before collapsing. Dunlap quickly arrived and called for the ambulance from the Morrow Funeral Home and then contacted the Licking County Sheriff's office. Jones was then transported to the Newark Hospital by ambulance but his travails were not yet over. While enroute, the ambulance collided with an automobile driven by an Ervin Smoke at the intersection of 5<sup>th</sup> and Church streets in Newark. Upon finally arriving, medical staff quickly determined that the wound was fatal but commenced a series of blood transfusions to prolong life to allow time for family members to arrive. Ernest Jones, aged 52, died without regaining consciousness during the early morning hours of Oct. 27.

Meanwhile, police officers arrived at the Jones farm and commenced a search for Walker. Visits were made at his relatives' houses in Johnstown and Sunbury without success. Badly battered and bruised, he evaded capture all night long by hiding in the dilapidated hog barn on the Jones farm. The next morning he saw his fellow farm workers and Ivan Dunlap in the yard and suddenly made an appearance. As he was still armed with the shotgun and they were not, no



Pictured from left to right are Mary Williams, Elizabeth Tatham and Ernest Tatham. Taken shortly after the murders occurred, their faces reflect the shock and dismay over the bloody events that had unfolded before them on New Year's Eve 1948. Mary was no doubt thinking on how her actions had helped lead to this tragedy.



**Ellis Raymond  
McLaughlin**

attempt was made to apprehend him. Walker inquired as to what had happened to Jones and was informed that he had passed during the night. He responded in a dejected tone "that means the penitentiary for me" and then sauntered over to the nearby spring to get a drink of water and splash water on his bloodied face. Perhaps reflecting on what type of justice that a local jury would dispense to a black man at that time, he then walked about 20 feet farther away, placed the muzzle of the gun on his chest, and in sight of the others pulled the trigger with his toe,

resulting in almost instantaneous death.

Police arrived shortly thereafter and took possession of Walker's body, releasing it to his relatives later that evening. He was buried in the family plot in Sunbury. Ernest Jones was buried in a well-attended funeral at Maple Grove Cemetery but the family tragedy continued. On the morning of the funeral, his older brother John O. Jones of Alexandria died of a heart attack while sitting down for breakfast.

## 1948

### Triple Slaying at the Williams Farm

A naïve spinster, a mentally unbalanced younger man and a shotgun was the volatile mix that led to Granville's bloodiest homicide incident. It all started with a summer vacation trip to Yellowstone National Park by 47-year-old Mary Williams and her older sister Jane Williams in 1946. The war was over, restrictions had ended and people were free to travel and consume without the overhang of rationing. Jane Williams, a 54-year old schoolteacher with the Cleveland school system, had returned home for the summer break to live on the family farm just south of Granville. While on a tour bus at Yellowstone, they made the acquaintance of a fellow tourist, Ellis Raymond McLaughlin, a 33-year-old resident of Willamette, Oregon, who had recently been discharged from the Army. Apparently there was some type of chemistry between Mary and the younger man, for the three spent the remainder of the vacation in each other's company. Over the next several years, contact was maintained by correspondence and by visits by McLaughlin to see the sisters in Granville. On another occasion the sisters travelled to the west coast to visit with McLaughlin and his parents.

Unfortunately, this long distance relationship was not destined to culminate in happily wedded bliss. Evidence suggests that McLaughlin proposed marriage on at least several occasions to Mary. While she did not accept the offers, she did not flatly reject them as she kept up a warm, affectionate correspondence with him. Apparently

something about McLaughlin alarmed older sister Jane and she began to warn her younger sister against continuing the relationship. As it turned out, Ellis Raymond McLaughlin was a very disturbed man, prone to fits of uncontrollable rage. While he had never been committed to a mental institution, his erratic behavior had caused his parents to consider involuntary commitment actions on several occasions. Indeed, his mother sent Mary Williams a letter in September 1948 warning her about her son's instability and of the danger he might pose. Included in the letter was notice that Ellis had recently become very agitated about the marriage situation and was convinced that Mary's family was turning her against him. According to McLaughlin's mother, he told her "If I can't marry her, I'm going to go back and the kill the whole bunch of them". Mary Williams replied to this dire warning letter with a short, polite note stating that she would be careful.

The situation came to a bloody climax on New Years Eve of 1948. Ellis McLaughlin had taken a train to Newark and booked a room at a local hotel a few days before Christmas. Over the next several days he made several visits to the Williams farm outside Granville, or at least neighbors reported seeing him around the premises. It seems clear that he had been meeting with Mary, for in his hotel room a Christmas card from her with an "affectionate note" was discovered afterwards.

During the evening hours of New Years Eve, McLaughlin caught a bus from Newark, which passed near the Williams farm. The bus driver later recalled that McLaughlin seemed very nervous and sat on the edge of his seat the entire time. He was carrying a large satchel bag, which unbeknownst to the driver, contained a sawed off shotgun and ammunition. He got off the bus around 6 p.m., walked the short distance to the Williams place and then secreted himself in an adjacent outbuilding until around 8 p.m. From footprints later discovered in the snow, it appears that he went to several windows to

observe who was in the home and their locations. Inside were seven people; Mary and Jane Williams, their sister Mrs. Elizabeth Tatham with her husband Ernest, Ernest Roley, who was a farmhand, and a visiting relative named Jack Hodson and his wife.

The four women were in the kitchen preparing a late dinner when McLaughlin burst in the kitchen door, loaded weapon in hand. He told the startled women that he was hungry and wanted something to eat. One of the women lost her composure and screamed for help. Jack Hodson ran into the room only to be met by a blast, which ripped open his stomach. McLaughlin then proceeded to the basement where Ernest Roley was busy working on the furnace. A struggle ensued and the 55-year-old Roley, a decorated WWI veteran, attempted to wrest the gun away. He died instantly when he received a blast of buckshot to the face.

While this was taking place in the basement, the four women fled in terror. Mary Williams, Mrs. Hodson and Elizabeth Tatham ran out of the house into the frigid cold to hide in the nearby orchard. Jane Williams inexplicably went upstairs to hide in her room. McLaughlin began searching the house. He found Ernest Tatham feverishly attempting to staunch the bleeding on the grievously wounded Jack Hodson. He told Tatham, "I don't want you" and went up the stairs to search the bedrooms. There he discovered the terrified Jane Williams huddled under her bed and delivered two deadly blasts that struck her in the neck and right side. He then rested a few moments, reloaded his shotgun and then turned the gun on himself.

When the police arrived, the only real mystery that remained was motive, inasmuch as Mary Williams downplayed her relationship with McLaughlin and claimed he was a "chance acquaintance" that she met on a vacation trip years before. She also stated that she had no idea that he was in the Newark area. As the investigation continued, law enforcement concluded that Mary Williams' story was at great variance to established facts but initiated no adverse action against her. Perhaps she was



Danny Joe Leasure, second from left, admitted slayer of his parents, is led from the Licking County Juvenile Court by Sheriff John Koontz, left, and Det. Sgt. Kenneth Rickus. Leasure's attorney, J. Gilbert Reese, right, had no objections to send-

Danny Joe Leasure on the way to court. From L to R, Sheriff John Koontz, Danny Leasure, Detective Rickus and Attorney Gib Reese. The advocacy skills of Reese kept the matter in the juvenile court system and spared Leasure from a sentence in an adult prison. He was committed to a youth facility and released once he turned 21.

guilt ridden and feared what the reaction of the small close-knit community of Granville might be. In any event, police probably concluded that she had suffered enough and the matter was closed. Mary Williams died in 1982 having been a teller at the Peoples State Bank and active within the Cambrian Society. She never married.

## 1964

### A Family Tragedy

In the frigid, early days of January 1964, the Granville community was still recovering from the shock of President John Kennedy's recent assassination. This was soon to be surpassed by a double killing that rocked the community and still reverberates to the present day among many longtime residents.

Herman and Carole Jean Leasure operated a 190-acre farm north of Granville on Burg Street. Described as a nice quiet couple, with their two sons, 17-year-old David and 15-year-old Danny Joe, they were viewed as a solid, average family. The boys, in particular were well liked by their peers and teachers. David was perceived as something of a rebel; younger baby-faced Danny was considered

the quiet, shy one. Both boys helped with chores around the farm and enjoyed outdoor sports, each having their own rifle, which was prominently mounted on a gun rack in the living room of their house. Beneath this calm facade however, were simmering tensions, which caused the younger son to gun down both of his parents during the evening of January 9, 1964.

A freshman at Granville High School, Danny had started to date a senior at the high school. His parents objected to a continued relationship, citing the fact that the girl was "too old". Things came to a head when his parents directed that Danny break off the relationship. He did not react well to this and, by his own admission, spent the next two days searching for a poison around the farm to kill his parents with. As he was unable to find any, he gave up this idea. On Thursday, January 9, while at school, Danny and the girl discussed his parent's objections to dating. They agreed to break it off for a while and apparently he did not appear to be overly upset or out of control.

That evening Danny helped with chores around the farm before joining his parents for dinner. Older brother David was absent at his

part time job at the Granville Stockyards. After finishing dinner, Herman Leasure proceeded to the dairy barn across the street for nightly milking chores. Shortly after he left, Danny grabbed his .22 caliber hunting rifle from the gun rack. He quickly went outside and positioned himself near a pine tree close to the kitchen window in clear view of his mother washing dishes at the kitchen sink. Resting the rifle barrel on a branch he took careful aim at his mother and squeezed off a round. It went through the window and hit Jean Leasure squarely in the left shoulder. Stunned, she made her way to a nearby telephone and attempted to call for help. As she picked up the receiver Danny fired another round. She dropped the phone and collapsed dead, face down on the floor. Carol Leasure was 33 years old, having celebrated her birthday on Christmas Day.

Danny then quickly made his way across the street to the dairy barn where his father was located. Herman Leasure did not hear the gunshots as he had a radio on blaring music. He was just finished his preparations having two cows in the milking stalls, sitting on a stool with a washrag in his hand. Danny opened the dairy parlor door wide enough to take aim, and still unnoticed by his father, fired a round which struck his father from the rear and killing him.

Returning to the house, Danny then obtained the keys to the family car and then drove south on Burg Street toward Granville. What his plans were are unclear, but his lack of experience in driving resulted in him putting the car in a ditch about a mile away. He then walked to the nearby house of Herbert Blackstone. Finding no one home, he made a forced entry and used the phone to call the Licking County Sheriff's office. Shortly thereafter, two deputies arrived and found Danny calmly sitting on the hood of the disabled car. Together they made their way to the Leasure home where deputies discovered the grisly scene. Shortly thereafter, David Leasure arrived home from work and both brothers were taken into custody and lodged

in the grim old County Jail.

Over the course of that night authorities investigated and attempted to find out exactly what had occurred. Danny initially told detectives that he had been upstairs in his room when he heard shots and came downstairs and found both his mother and father dead. As for David, authorities speedily verified his alibi of being at work and he was released the next morning to his maternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Ruffner. During that night the Ruffners, upset over their inability to speak with their grandsons, contacted a family friend for advice on obtaining an attorney. This friend (Don Oxley) then called local attorney Gilbert Reese during the early morning hours asking him to assist the Ruffners. Although civil law was his main area of practice, Reese agreed to help out and made his way to the jail that night to meet with the Leasure boys.

Meanwhile, word of the brutal murders made its way around the community and the High School was abuzz with rumors that Friday. Media statewide had picked up on the story and numerous reporters were prowling around the grounds of the old high school staging news clips and talking to students. One of the students interviewed was the girlfriend who offered that, "If he killed his parents, it's not the Danny I know". After reflecting on their relationship, she made a naïve request of the reporter for assistance in getting inside the County Jail to see Danny.

As several days passed, ballistic and other evidence strongly suggested to police that Danny was the only probable culprit. Still he stubbornly stuck to his story. According to the lead detective, Kenneth Rickus, throughout his initial questioning Danny was "calm about the whole thing, almost too calm". He also later observed that there was never any show of remorse and that Danny was "a hard boy to get through to". In hopes of obtaining an admission, plans were made to take Danny back out to his home to re-check his story. With that Danny agreed to confess and he related a full admission.

With the issue of guilt resolved, there remained the matter of how the criminal case should be disposed. For someone new to the criminal law arena, Attorney Reese appears to have worked a masterful deal for his client. He negotiated with newly appointed County Prosecutor Virginia Weiss to not try Danny as an adult and to keep the case within the juvenile system. Danny then pled guilty to killing his parents and was consigned to Ohio Youth Commission facilities until he reached the age of 21.

Time passed and the shock of this local parricide settled into the recesses of people's memories. Gib Reese went on to become one of the leading legal and philanthropic figures in Licking County; David Leasure went to live with his grandparents and finished his senior year at Granville High School. He now is retired and lives in Texas. Danny Leasure remains the same enigma that he was in 1964. After he reached the age of 21 he was released from the juvenile system. According to courthouse sources, he successfully applied for a name change and left the area. Other sources indicate he went to college where he met and married a girl from a wealthy Chicago area family. Others claim that they have experienced Danny Leasure sightings over the years.

There are several unanswered mysteries in this case. One is whether Danny was driven to his desperate and coldblooded actions by hard and unflinching parents. Statements by those who knew them do not suggest this; they were described as fair and loving parents. Perhaps the insight offered by Louella Reese, wife of "Gib" Reese, is instructive. Pointing out the young age of Jean Leasure at the time of her death and the very early age that she had started her family, she reflected that Herman and Carol Leasure were keenly aware of the barriers and missed opportunities resulting from unplanned teenage pregnancies. It appears that their actions were driven by a desire to have their son avoid that misstep. The biggest unanswered question is what was going on in

the head of Danny Leasure that caused him to pick up his rifle on the fateful evening of January 9, 1964.

## Conclusion

The casual observer reading this account might well form the impression that the Granville area is one prone to incidents of violent crime. Nothing could be further from the truth. The cited incidents are truly aberrations from the everyday flow of life in this community. While there have been significant changes in the nature and demographics of the community over the years, Granville was and still is a great place to live and raise children. Some may question the need to recount these unpleasant events, a point not without some merit. Always mindful of the potential to cause pain to those directly impacted by the outlined events, it is a difficult undertaking to balance of what is essential to tell the story accurately while at the same time excluding that which only serves to shock or titillate. History needs to be kept alive and recounted, no matter how ugly it sometimes is. We do this so that we have a better understanding of past and the reactions of people that were confronted by these situations.

--B. Kevin Bennett

**NEXT ISSUE: Granville became a factor in the 1978 .22-caliber serial killings in central Ohio, covered in part two of this series in the next edition of *The Historical Times*.**

*Kevin Bennett is the president of the Granville Historical Society. He is a frequent contributor to The Historical Times and was named Historian of the Year by the Society in 2012. He will give a presentation at the Granville Public Library on the topic of murders in Granville on Jan. 25.*

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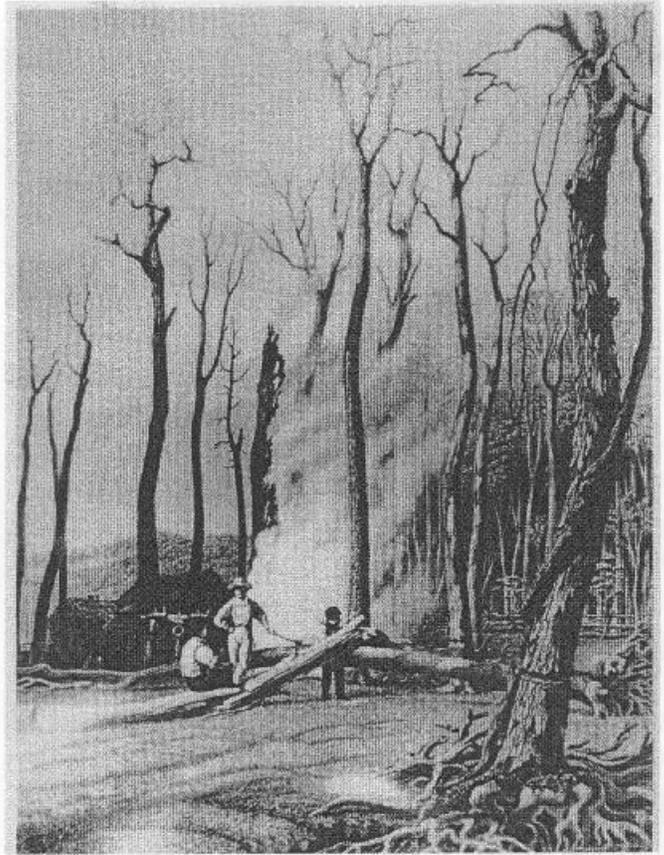
<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Hitt was well regarded in the community. To end her life she mounted her horse, rode him down to a barn on Silver Street. She dismounted and then consumed a bottle of strychnine. It had to be a very unpleasant death. Her horse meandered back home, occasioning a search for her.

# New England settlers ensconced in Granville: A different perspective

By Anthony J. Lisska

The generally accepted story of the emotional state of the Granville settlers when they arrived from New England following the arduous journey in two waves from Granville, Mass., and Granby, Conn., is one of joy and bliss. One need only to look at the village post office mural depicting the happy lot of travelers arriving at the center of their newly established village, cutting down a huge tree that served as a rough-hewn altar, and their singing voices of praise and thanksgiving carrying over the landscape. Jacob Little reports from his historical sources that the patriarch of the Welsh Hills community, Theophilus Rees, while looking for a lost cow, inadvertently discovered the newly arrived settlers when he heard what he thought were angelic voices coming from the valley where the village of Granville eventually developed. Even a brief reflection on the matter of the first settlers suggests a mostly happy and contented lot of former New Englanders now safely ensconced in the Valley of the Raccoon near the Welsh Hills of what would become Licking County.

In the early Autumn of 1805, these two groups of hardy New Englanders began the long trek, fording several rivers and climbing across the Allegheny Mountains through Pennsylvania, before arriving at their destination, which contained what they believed was fertile soil far better for agriculture pursuits than the rock strewn soil of New England. Most readers of the history of Granville know the story of the young lad crying out in frustration about the lack of soil in Granville, Mass., as he attempted to assist his father with the spring planting. Granville



**The hardships of pioneer life in Ohio took away the gentile nature of New Englanders who make the journey and the commitment.**

in Ohio promised, so the settlers were told, an abundance of fertile soil. This is but one query to be raised concerning the arrival of the first New England Yankees.

A recently discovered collection of first person narratives, *The Peopling of New Connecticut*, Richard Buel, Jr. (Editor): Connecticut Historical Society and Wesleyan University Press, 2011, contains several documents addressing the issues to be discussed in this set of essays.<sup>1</sup>

Over the course of the next several issues of *The Historical Times*, these essays will consider four queries often associated with

the migration of the New England Yankees from their erstwhile homes to Ohio then referred to as "the West"! (a) Were they the contented lot that students of Granville history usually believe? (b) Was the Ohio soil far more fertile and better than what was left behind in New England? (c) What was the role of the Land Companies and the speculators in the "selling of the move to the west"?, and (d) Were there political upheavals in Connecticut — and probably Massachusetts — that led to the migrations?

### **Connections with Granville**

The passages from *The Peopling of New Connecticut* obviously refer to the lands in the Western Reserve, often referred to as "New Connecticut," and not directly to Granville village and township. However, the inhabitants of the Western Reserve, which ran from the Pennsylvania border to west of Cleveland, were similar to the settlers from Granby, Conn. and Granville, Mass., who journeyed to Ohio from New England in 1805. One can argue plausibly that there were many similarities in these waves of western migrations in the early part of the nineteenth century.

### **The Degree of Personal Contentment with the Move to Ohio**

The first set of queries in this four-part discussion considers the personal contentment — or lack thereof — that these former Yankees felt in their new homes in "the West." While the Granville Post Office mural represents a group of tired but happy and contented settlers, there is some evidence that this degree of satisfaction with the trek to Ohio and the establishment of new home-sites was not one of universal satisfaction. Life on the Ohio frontier was hard; it is difficult to romanticize the hardscrabble conditions under which many of the settlers lived. While homesickness — what the Connecticut citizens called "maladie du pays" — certainly would contribute to a lack of satisfaction, the general poverty of the

residents in the newly developed Ohio lands was a serious contributing factor. In addition, those who remained in New England very often could not fathom how their fellow citizens could migrate to what was considered a barbarian land. Passages like the following are often found in such tracts: "The barbarian condition of such a vast frontier, and the million of slave population in the south, are two dismal plague-spots upon our country." [P. 116] In a similar vein, those remaining in New England often considered those migrating to the west to have ignored the civilized conditions afforded by the New England Colonies. Remarks like the following are discovered often in these texts: ". . . [In considering] . . . the scattered inhabitants of the western wilds, many of whose sons of necessity grow up in almost savage ignorance, destitute alike of religious, literary and moral instruction." [PP. 116-117] This anonymous writer goes on to state his profound disappointment that his fellow New England citizens do not see what they are giving up in moving to the west.

Considerations like these, always crowd upon my mind, when I see a neighbor whose circumstances are . . . captivated with the illusion of improving his circumstances, by emigration to the west. Few—very few, I believe, of those who have sold the inheritance of their fathers, to improve their fortunes in the western wilds, have fully "counted the cost" of their undertaking. For myself, I love my native state—I reverence her laws—her Religion—her morals—and her habits, and would not exchange them for the mines of Peru. [P. 117]

### **The Strenuous Mode of Traveling**

The travel conditions from central New England to Ohio were far from pleasant. The canal system had not yet been developed; the national road's beginnings were twenty years in the future, and of course, the railroad network had to wait until mid-century before

it became a serious alternative for inter-locational travel within the Mid-Atlantic States. Samuel Goodrich, often referred to as a "prolific author and publisher" during the early nineteenth century, at mid century published his memoirs. He describes vividly the migration travel travails of these early settlers moving westward:

I remember very well the tide of emigration through Connecticut on its way to the West . . . . Some persons went in covered wagons—frequently a family consisting of father, mother, and nine small children, with one at the breast—some on foot, and some crowded together under the cover, with kettle, gridirons, feather-beds, crockery, and the family Bible, Watt's Psalms and Hymns, and Webster's Spelling books—the lares and penates of the household. Others started in ox-carts, and trudged on at the rate of ten miles a-day. In several instances I saw families on foot—the father and boys taking turns in dragging along an improvised hand-wagon, loaded with the wreck of the household goods—occasionally giving the mother and baby a ride. Many of these persons were in a state of poverty, and begged their way as they went. Some died before they reached the expected Canaan, many perished after their arrival, from fatigue and privation, and others from the fever and ague, which was then certain to attack the new settlers. [P. 17]

Goodrich goes on to provide another vivid account, this one from a European visitor to the lands where the Connecticut settlers had migrated:

It was, I think in 1818, that I published a small tract, entitled, "T'other Side of Ohio," . . . . It was written by Dr. Hand, a talented young physician of Berlin, who had made a visit to the West about this time. It consisted mainly of vivid but painful pictures of the accidents and incidents attending this wholesale migration. The roads over the Alleghenies, between

Philadelphia and Pittsburg, were then crude, steep, and dangerous, and some of the more precipitous slopes were consequently strewn with the carcasses of wagons, carts, horses, oxen, which had made shipwreck in their perilous descents. The scenes on the road—of families gathered at night in miserable sheds called taverns—mothers frying, children crying, fathers swearing, were a mingled comedy and tragedy of errors. Even when they arrived at their new homes . . . frequently the whole family—father, mother, children—speedily exchanged the fresh complexion and elastic step of their first abodes for the sunken cheek and languid movement, which mark the victim of intermittent fever. [P. 17]

One author notes that many of the settlers with whom he had conversations were anxious to return to Connecticut if only they had the requisite funds. Hard currency appears to have been in short supply, and the usual role of barter for exchange of material items was limited in terms of its efficiency. Dr. William Hand, noted above, penned the following account regarding his conversations with New England transplants now living in the west:

I pursued my route and every day found Yankees; and never found any but upon questioning of their old homes, would immediately fall into the strain of repinings, and in the most plaintive tone describe the enjoyments of their former situation, which compared with their tale of suffering since they left them, added to the despair of ever again visiting their native soil, or making their adopted country seem like home—was enough to wring the hard heart of a land-jobber himself. I shall forever hold in utter abhorrence those men who bait my countrymen to exile. [P. 118]

Dr. Hand ends this narrative referring to the western lands as one where the inhabitants from New England hold "the

remembrance of better days and a better one than the lone land of exile." [P. 119]

In writing to his brother back in New England, Zerah Hawley too notes how many of the original settlers had a firm desire to return to their original homeland in the East. Hawley writes:

There are many reasons for these returns [i.e., back to New England]: the indifferent society, the want of market, where they may dispose of their produce, the impossibility of procuring many articles, which by habit have become necessaries of life, and the very great want of many other articles which are indispensably necessary to comfortable existence, such as shoes, wearing apparel in general, beds and bedding, and convenient furniture for the house. [P. 163]

### **Substandard Living Condition**

The living conditions were often substandard, even given the rural nature of the habitations. Log cabins were barely suitable for normal living arrangements. The following passage suggests the hardscrabble conditions under which many of the settlers lived. John Melish, a European visitor, travelled in Ohio from 1806 to just prior to the War of 1812. While he did hear positive comments from some settlers, nonetheless he also heard the opposite view expressed often. In northern Ohio near Cleveland in the Western Reserve, Melish reported that he "... saw some mills, but they were idle, and appeared to be going to decay. The country appeared poor, and the people sickly." [P. 150] Melish writes a bit later that upon coming near Canton, he observed again that "the people looked pale and sickly." [Ibid.] And a third reference to the general illness that scourged the area:

[The] people looked pale, sickly, and dejected. I learned that they had been affected with a very severe sickness this season. It was periodical, they said, and

generally fever and ague, but this season it had been worse than usual, and accompanied with some very severe cases of bilious fever." [Ibid.]

Furthermore, what might be called furniture was limited and primitive at best. One narrative suggested the crudeness of the household furnishing and the coarseness of the eating utensils.

I once had occasion to dine with a family... where six of us set (sic) at the table. There was a plate for each of us, a large dish in the middle of the table contained the food. I had the good fortune to obtain a decent knife and fork, one in the family had a shoe-knife and a fork, another one (if I mistake not) an old razor blade with a wooden handle, and the other three were contented to obtain forks only. This was a family which has been here for seventeen years, and have had time to be in a better situation . . . . The articles of crockery are also very few and indifferent . . . . For want of a glass, or other convenient vessel, from which to drink, if you are offered whiskey (which is the principal drink here), the bottle is presented to you, or a bowl, or tea-cup containing the liquor. . . . [P. 164]

Of course, in some places there was adequate housing constructed; one author notes that the various political office holders — especially the judges — fared better than the ordinary folks. A person returning from the West, one Matthew Hedges, gave anything but a glowing account: "[Hedges] . . . said he believed his wife had shed tears enough to grind a bushel of wet rye." [P. 120] The author comments: "If [Hedges's remarks] . . . be true, I should think that there was enough among them all to keep a mill a-going all the time. . . . All the richest best part of the country is settled and owned by the rich men, and rents are very high." [Ibid.] This author records the conversation with a Mr. Campbell, another New England person who emigrated to Ohio and in order to do so, he

sold "... a very good farm, as many others do for the same purpose, for about half what it is worth." [Pp. 119-120] The author notes that Campbell's letter has a style that is "... the plain unaffected language of truth and simplicity" It provides a rather sorry tale of the conditions of those who emigrated. This passage continues:

[Campbell's conversation"] . . . gives truly a sorry and lamentable picture of the situation of many emigrants who settle in that country. Land . . . he says is from 60 to 100 dollars an acre. . . . All of the best land in the country is engrossed by the rich, and by speculators. For three or four months in a year, the muddy roads, and indeed the whole face of the country, Mr. Campbell says, "resemble a Hog Yard in a wet time." "The great prairies and fertile places which we hear of . . . are very sickly. Five families went there . . . last fall, and insisted very hard for me to go with them. We have received letters from them since, which gave us an account of four of their heads of families that had died, and five or six of their children." [P. 120]

Zerah Hawley, a journalist as well as a doctor, rendered an account of life in Ohio in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Hawley too worried that the New England farmers were selling their farmlands at too low a price in order to facilitate the move to Ohio. He wrote:

. . . [P]ersons selling their property at a great loss in many cases, the expense of removing to Ohio . . . which swallows up a great proportion of their property, incapacitating them to pay for farms taken, disappointments of all kinds, on arriving at the place of destination, and in most cases an inability to return, however much it may be desired, in consequence of the impossibility of procuring the means of returning. [P. 159]

The following is a glimpse of what an early log cabin looked like through the eyes of a visiting Doctor from Boston:

I entered for the first time in my life into

a log house with one room without any fire place, the log being laid against the logs of the house and the fire build in front.

In consequence of this manner of building the fire, some of the logs were entirely burnt in two, and many were much injured by the fire. The furniture of the house consisted of a bed, laid upon a bedstead made of saplings of suitable size [having bark on] with holes bored to receive the legs which were made of the same materials.

A large hole through the roof, answered the two-fold purpose of a vent for the smoke, and the admission of light.

Hardly a romantic view of life in a log cabin on the Ohio frontier!

The next installment will consider the nature of the land for agriculture pursuits discovered when the settlers arrived from what they judged were poor soil conditions in Connecticut.

*Anthony J. Lisska is Maria Theresa Barney Professor of Philosophy at Denison University. He is the former editor of The Historical Times and was one of the publication's founders.*

#### END NOTE

<sup>1</sup> This fascinating collection of recollections and newspaper essays was discovered in a little bookstore on the Village Green in Guilford, Connecticut. Several slight editorial changes have altered the texts in order to improve the flow of the printed materials. All page numbers following the passages in this narrative essay refer to pages in this book, without a breakdown of individual authors, some of whom are anonymous. Of course, other positive reflections exist about life in early Granville—and probably the Western Reserve too—but this set of four essays intends to seek a balance between what the popular history narrative reveals and what the actual situation may have been.

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