

CHILLICOTHE AND ROSS COUNTY, OHIO

by
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Ross County, with an area of 687 square miles, is located in south central Ohio. Long before white settlers came to the region, it was home to prehistoric civilizations and historic Native Americans. During the early years of settlement, numerous mounds and earthworks of the Adenas and Hopewells dotted the landscape. The Shawnee was the predominant tribe to inhabit the area before the arrival of the white man.

Chillicothe, the county seat, was founded in 1796 by Nathaniel Massie, a Virginian who was a surveyor and land speculator. He was the principal surveyor of the Virginia Military District, which was located between the Scioto and Little Miami rivers. The district contained lands set aside by Virginia to be given to soldiers from the state that fought in the Revolutionary War.

While surveying in the Ohio Country between 1793 and 1795, Massie found the rich, fertile valley lying between the Scioto River and Paint Creek and claimed it as his own for a future town site. Hostilities with the Indians made the interior region unsafe for settlement at that time. This did not become possible until the tribes were defeated in the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794 and the Treaty of Greenville was signed the following year. Between those two events, Massie and his surveying party fought the last battle against the Indians in the Scioto Valley at Reeves' Crossing near the present Ross County village of Bainbridge.

Massie and a party of thirty-nine men laid out his town in the summer of 1796. When it was completed, he called it "Chillicothe," a name derived from the Shawnee word "Chalagwatha," which means town or gathering place. He then advertised his town lots and lands he had surveyed for sale in Virginia and Kentucky newspapers. Congress also authorized the sale of the government-owned lands on the east side of the river. The area grew rapidly and by the summer of 1798, the population was sufficient to warrant the formation of a new county. In August, Arthur St. Clair, governor of the Northwest Territory, created the county of Ross, naming it for his good friend from Pennsylvania, Senator James Ross.

Among the Virginians Massie attracted to his settlement were Thomas Worthington and Edward Tiffin. They played dominant roles in the political development of the Ohio Country and made Chillicothe the political center. They led the faction opposed to Governor St. Clair and his Federalist allies who believed in a strong central government which would regulate the development of the country's frontier. Those supporting Worthington and Tiffin thought the people should have a degree of self-determination. The two men knew this was possible only through statehood and concentrated their efforts towards that goal.

Worthington and Tiffin were successful in their efforts. A constitutional convention was held in November 1802 in Chillicothe. The town had been made the seat of government for the eastern division of the Northwest Territory when it was divided in 1800. Congress approved the constitution, and the government for the state of Ohio was organized at Chillicothe, the capital, on March 1, 1803. Edward Tiffin had been unanimously elected governor in January, and Worthington was selected by the general assembly to serve as one of Ohio's first two U. S. senators.

Thomas Worthington, who has become known as the "Father of Ohio Statehood," was elected as the state's sixth governor in 1814. Other Chillicotheans who served as Ohio's chief executive were Duncan McArthur, the eleventh governor, and William Allen who served from 1874 to 1876.

Chillicothe was the state capital until 1810, at which time it was removed to Zanesville. It was returned in 1812 to remain there until 1816, when the new permanent capital at Columbus would be occupied. The Great Seal of Ohio is a constant reminder of Chillicothe's place in the history of the state. As described by the legislative act creating the seal, its background is a representation of Mount Logan to the east of the city as viewed from Adena, Thomas Worthington's home.

Chillicothe was the seat of government during the War of 1812, a conflict that was fought on Ohio's borders. The city became an "army town" when the 19th U. S. Regiment of Infantry was stationed there. Hundreds of soldiers were encamped in the vicinity. Chillicothe was on the line of march for those troops from the South and East going to and from the theater of war. Almost every family was affected by the war as thousands of Ross countians volunteered to fight the enemy threatening their state's frontier.

Following Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry's defeat of the British fleet on Lake Erie on September 10, 1813, the 300 seamen he captured were marched to Chillicothe for confinement. A stockade, which was called Camp Bull, was erected north of town to house them. They spent ten months in the prison camp. A few days before the prisoners of war began the march back to the lake to be exchanged, they witnessed the execution by firing squad of six American soldiers who had been found guilty of desertion.

The town continued to grow and flourish after its years of political influence were over. Settlements in the county—Bainbridge, Frankfort, Kingston, Clarksburg, Londonderry, Hallsville, Richmond Dale, Yellow Bud and

others—also prospered. The Ohio-Erie Canal in 1831 and the railroad in 1851 made economic growth possible, and the city and county exported a large variety of agricultural and manufactured goods.

During the Civil War, young men from the county enlisted in the many regiments organized in this part of the state. The 73rd regiment was organized and trained at Chillicothe.

The county had its share of heroes. Brig. Gen. Joshua W. Sill, a West Point graduate, was killed at the Battle of Stones River on December 31, 1862. His friend Gen. Philip Sheridan named Fort Sill in Oklahoma in his honor. Henry Walke, a career Navy man who rose to the rank of rear admiral, was said to have seen more naval action during the war than any other officer in the navy. While commanding the riverboat *Carondolet*, he was successful in ending the Confederate's blockade of the Mississippi River. Five men from the county were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroic action. On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. The country did not have a peacetime army large enough to fight the war. The draft was instituted to fill the ranks. Additional training facilities were needed to prepare the men. Word reached Chillicothe that the government was searching for sites for military camps. Recognizing the economic impact a military camp would have on Chillicothe and Ross County, John A. Poland, Chillicothe attorney and president of the Chamber of Commerce, aggressively sought the location of an army base in the area.

It was announced on June 8, 1917, that Chillicothe had been chosen for a training camp. The site lay north of town, along the Scioto River. The government leased the land—approximately 2,000 acres—from the farm owners, and on June 29, construction began. Within two and a half months, the work force that ultimately numbered more than 14,000, had erected a camp for 40,000 men and 12,000 horses and mules. Upon completion, there were 2,000 buildings; the cost of construction was \$4,000,000. The camp was named for Civil War general, William Tecumseh Sherman.

The first draftees and recruits from Ohio and surrounding states arrived at Camp Sherman on September 5. By the time the war ended, 123,581 men had received training there. The 83rd Division was the first to complete its training and left for the front June 19, 1918. The 84th Division was trained with that new military weapon—the fighter airplane. Two planes were brought in for that purpose. The 95th and 96th were on their way to becoming fighting units, but the war ended before they could be deployed.

The influx of construction workers and military trainees and personnel had a tremendous impact on Chillicothe. The population was increased from 16,000 to 60,000. There was a flurry of housing construction and opening of new businesses. The community made the soldiers and their visiting families welcome.

Two hundred German sailors were confined as prisoners of war at Camp Sherman from July 1918 until September 1919. There was quite a scare in the community when twenty-one of the prisoners escaped. Nineteen of them were captured almost immediately; the remaining two were soon found and returned to the camp.

The Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918 reached Camp Sherman in September of that year. More than 8,000 soldiers and personnel were infected and of those, nearly 1100 died. Almost 2,000 cases were reported in the city, resulting in thirty-one deaths.

The Ross County economy continues to rely on industry and agriculture. Paper is the leading manufactured product and has been for 150 years. Tourism is also important to the region, and there are many attractions for people wanting to know more about the birthplace of Ohio. These include Hopewell Culture National Historic Park, formerly known as Mound City; the Ross County Historical Society's museum, Franklin House, Knoles Log House and McKell Library; the Lucy Webb Hayes Heritage Center, the house in which the wife of President Rutherford B. Hayes was born; the Pump House Center for the Arts; and the Scioto Society's outdoor drama, *Tecumseh!*