

**INTERESTING FACTS
ABOUT
MY HOME TOWN**

by

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It has been said that traditional history, even at its best is unreliable--that when transmitted to the third and fourth generation it becomes especially so. No written record exists as to the first settlers in German Township. Much of the information in this paper has been handed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next.

Archbold, Ohio, located in what was originally known as the "Black Swamp" was the last town to be settled in Fulton County. It is on state highways #2 and #66, and was named in honor of two civil engineers, "Arch" and "Bold", who, in 1855 built the "Airline" division of the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad.

There were settlers in German Township as early as 1834. In that year there came a small group of people from Millhausen, Switzerland and a couple of families from Northern France who settled at what is now known as Lauber Hill. These were Amish Mennonite people coming here to seek religious freedom. Well used to hard work in their homeland, they were a group of people able to endure the hardships which establishing homes in the "Black Swamp" country entailed. The German Township area was made up of great trees and swamp which had to be cleared before it could be used. This was the "sugar bush" of the Indians who came to gather maple sap. It is recorded in an 1880 history of Fulton County that it took some of these people nine days to cut their way from Napoleon, Ohio to Lauber Hill. That for a long time they had little to eat except corn bread, and that they ground a large portion of this between two stones. They had no place to get grinding done in the whole country, short of Maumee and this journey was seldom undertaken. They made a dish which was called "pumpkin pie" on which old and young "fed voraciously".

Orrin Taylor of the *Archbold Buckeye* gave me this interesting item about his great uncle Lucious Taylor. In 1834 he was traveling by foot to Winameg. He came to what is now Brush Creek. It wasn't the dried up "trickle" it is today--it was a wide, swift flowing river with a swamp and dense forest on the other side. It was June, but there was still snow on the north side of the trees. There was no bridge by which he could cross, so, holding his few valuable papers above water with one hand, he swam across!

In 1838 and 1839 another influx of immigrants occurred. Many came to escape military service in Europe; others because of religious persecution.

An interesting item among records made out by the W. P. A. in 1939 was this one. During the administration of President Buchanan, federal authorities negotiated with the residents of the Black Forest region of Germany to settle in the wooded sections of German Township and clear the land of its valuable timber. The United States government promised them immunity from military service, which they disliked, if they would agree to do so. Apparently a considerable number took advantage of this offer, for many carloads of lumber were shipped out of German Township (1857-1861). This lumber was used extensively by the English in the ship-building industry which was a thriving industry at that time.

Archbold is surrounded by prosperous farms, often still operated by descendants of these first German and Swiss farmers. This fertile land sells today for as much as \$500 an acre.

The town was laid out in 1855 by George Ditto (the great grandfather of my neighbor across the street), who had bought the year before, a quarter section in the territory now called Archbold, together with a land speculator from New York by the name of Haywood who purchased 38 lots (still known as Haywood and Ditto division). My neighbor tells me that George Ditto came over from Seneca County. He walked over with two dogs, an ax, and some flint. He encountered Indians (possibly the Potowanames), but they were friendly. He built a log cabin on North Defiance St. where Bill Arthur now lives. Then he walked back to Seneca County to get his family and their few belongings.

The early settlers had oxen to do their plowing. They would clear enough land so that they could sow some wheat and corn, also a garden spot. They had to take their wheat and corn to Morenci, Michigan, to be ground. Many walked that distance.

At that time there was a German shoemaker by the name of Nicholas Wolfe who came here from Bavaria, Germany. It is said that he made fine boots and shoes, but had to walk from Archbold to Toledo for leather.

A carpenter by the name of Jacob Bourquin who came here from France was the only man in the surrounding territory who owned a turning lathe, so he was very much in demand making furniture for the early settlers.

Archbold became an incorporated village in 1866 with a population of 300.

First election was held August 8, 1866. Mr. Fred Stotzer, hardware merchant, was voted mayor. Today his great grandson still runs the store.

In 1870 council fixed the mayor's salary at \$9.00 per annum. The clerk received \$6.00.

It is recorded that one of the first undertakings of this newly incorporated village was to erect a building to house "unruly characters". This was to be a 2 story structure 12 feet by 12 feet.

A public well was dug in 1867. The village had several wells for public use at all times. Records disclose the fact that the wells were a cause of considerable controversy and annoyance, being frequently petitioned for a new well or to replace existing wells in usable condition by repairing pumps and platforms.

Sanitary conditions were not what they should have been. Many people in town possessed horses, cows, and pigs. This is recorded to have made the problem of manure disposal a difficult one. It is also recorded that in August 1867, council appropriated \$9.00 to build a pen in which the marshal could put all stray animals.

In the spring of 1876 a used Phoenix fire engine was bought from the Toledo department and in 1913 a fire almost destroyed the business section. The old hand pumps failed completely, so new fire equipment was purchased. The old Phoenix was sold as a curio in 1917, placed in the coliseum in Toledo, and, ironically enough, burned with the building later.

The fire department in early years obtained water from 15 publicly owned cisterns--8x14 feet in diameter.

In 1866 a 4 room log school was built east of the present Catholic church.

Archbold at one time had 14 saloons and 7 churches.

The first Lutheran church in Archbold was built in 1866, and in 1872, a Methodist. The first German Reformed church was built in 1856. The township is predominately Mennonite. At an early date there was also a Catholic church.

In 1868 council ordered street crossings to be made of two oak planks, 4" thick and 16" wide. For the next 40 years almost every month a new walk or crossing was ordered.

1896--the business district was laid in stone

1906--all walks were to be of stone or cement

In 1886, Alexander Fether was given authority to pipe the village for natural gas from local fields. This supply failed, so in 1915 a franchise was granted to the Archbold-Stryker Gas Company for artificial gas. Today it is the Ohio Gas Company.

Free mail delivery started in 1925.

Street lighting became effective in 1889. This consisted of 6 good oil lamps. My neighbor lady tells me the village lamplighter's name was Paul Kramer and that every evening he would take his little push cart with his oil can and ladder and would walk by her home on his way to light the lamps in early evening. In the morning he'd again go by to put out the lights, clean the lamps, trim the wicks and refill.

In 1898 the first telephone service was started.

Archbold's first newspaper, *The Herald*, was published in 1885. William O. Taylor, then 19 years old, was the editor. He sold it in 1892. He returned in 1905 and rebought it and started the *Archbold Buckeye*. This paper has stayed in the Taylor family and today is one of the excellent papers of the state.

In 1900 the Board of Health first required residents to be vaccinated against smallpox.

One of the older histories of Fulton County stated that Archbold would never be other than an agricultural town. The early industries were typical of most towns--a brewery, tannery, blacksmith and wagon shop, saw mill, a grist mill, cider mill, and cane press.

I can vividly recall as a little girl watching the wagon loads of sugar cane and apples going by my home. Chewing sugar cane is something this generation of children know nothing about.

Today the number of industries situated in Archbold is almost unbelievable.

The Wall Street Journal of Wednesday, March 26, 1958, stated that Archbold is the site of one of the world's largest regular auction sales of used farm machinery. That statement is typical of reports in the newspapers and magazines across the nation concerning this little town's industries, such as Lauber Manufacturing Company, Riegsecker Builders Supply, Archbold Concrete Products, Scott Port-A-Fold, Inc., Bil-Jax, Inc., Archbold Ladder Factory, Sauder Woodworking and Sauder Manufacturing, LaChoy Food Products, Lugbill Brothers (livestock auction), Eckert Packing Company, Eicher and Son Packing, Archbold Refrigeration, Lloyd Myers Livestock Feeder and Broker. Others are steadily moving in.

Many of these factories and businesses had very humble beginnings. The Archbold Ladder Factory really began years ago when a man by the name of Ed Gigax made ladders by hand. When he had a wagon load he drove through the country, selling them. Wyse brothers bought the business from him.

Archbold, over a period of years, was one of the largest contributors to the New York Central Railroad between Toledo and Elkart, Indiana. Ten years ago there were between 80 and 90 trains passing through Archbold each day. Today, most products are hauled by truck, and only 25-30 trains pass through our town.

Our two local banks continue to lead all other towns in the county in total resources, deposits, and loans.

Today the town of Archbold with its shady streets, its lovely park and extremely busy highways, is a far cry from the slow moving town of 50 years ago which I remember. The children of today know nothing about such interesting things as gypsy caravans moving into town, the traveling peddlers with their fascinating wares, the rag-peddler's wagon rattling down the street, the weekly and sometimes daily tramps who were always fed, or the scissors grinder's yearly visit.

These, and many others, are the changes that have taken place in one small village. This portion of the "Black Swamp" has changed into one of the most progressive small towns in Ohio.

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Personal interview with Byrl Swisher, former N. Y. C. telegraph operator

Personal interview with Mrs. John Schlapfer, great granddaughter of first land owner