

## BETHEL

(from "History of Clermont County, Ohio - 1880")

This is the largest village in Tate Township, next to the oldest in the county, and ranks among the most important business places in Clermont. Its location on the Ohio turnpike, 12 miles from Batavia, north of the center of Tate, for beauty and healthfulness is not surpassed in this part of Ohio. Within the village bounds are many springs which furnish an abundance of water for domestic use and manufacturing purposes. In this respect, Bethel enjoys unusual advantages. The village is located on John Breckenridge's survey, No. 2373, which was entered by General William Lytle, March 28, 1794. Not long after, 1500 acres of the choicest land of this survey were purchased by Obed Denham of Kentucky, who in 1798 here platted a village which he called Plainfield, but which for years was scarcely known by another name than Denhamstown. On the 26th of April, 1802, the plat of the village was duly recorded with the name of Bethel, which title in legal instruments the place has ever since borne, although Denhamstown (never the proper name) long after attached to the village. The deed for the village specifies that Obed Denham, of the county of Clermont, and territory northwest of the Ohio River, has laid out the village of Bethel, on the waters of Cloverlick Creek. There were also reserved from sale five springs, with a few rods of ground around each, one near the square, one near Kelly Burke's house, one near Barzilla Osborne's, etc.

The in-lots were laid out of uniform size, four to a block, and numbered from 1 to 178. Forty-eight out-lots, each containing 5 acres, were laid off in the east of the above lots at the same time. Some of the out-lots were subdivided by the Tice family; and additions to Bethel have been made, April 10, 1875, by Mrs. Margaret C. Sargent,--36 lots, lying between the Felicity and Augusta roads,--and October 12, 1877, by James McMurchy, 12 lots east of the projected railroad. The streets of the village intersect each other at right angles, and their direction is almost with the points of the compass. Those running east and west are Plane (which is the principal business street), Water, Cherry, Ball, Osborne, and Circus. The intersecting streets are West, Ash, Main, Union, Charity, and East.

The proprietor of Bethel was also the first to settle there. Obed Denham was a native of Virginia, but immigrated to this place from Kentucky in 1797, on account of his abhorrence of the institution of slavery. At first the family camped under a large beech tree near the tannery spring, but soon after permanently located on Town Run, a little west of the limits of the village. He offered liberal inducements to settlers, and a number of families soon followed him from Kentucky and the East, among them being the Becks, Burkes, Osbornes, Clarkes, Frazees, and Morris, so that at that early period, Bethel bade fair to prove a formidable rival of Williamsburg, notwithstanding the latter had just been selected as the county seat. Most of those were rather a superior class of people, but there were also living in the village at this time a few families not so highly favored in mental ability, and who unfortunately believed in the presence and power of evil spirits and witches. Of this latter class are remembered the Evans and Hildebrand families, the former residing on the lot at present occupied by Dr. McLain, the latter on the Dr. William Ellsberry lot. It appears the Hildebrand family especially imagined itself under the influence of witches, the older daughters, who were young women grown, giving unmistakable evidence that they were possessed by some evil spirits. On the approach of night they would scream, and at times become perfectly frantic from fright of the hideous objects which they professed to see, and which maintained such a spell over them that they were unfitted for their duties. Various devices were resorted to in order to exorcise these spirits. A

large bag of linsey-woolsey was made and held by a member of the family, while the other members went through some ceremony, at the conclusion of which it was supposed the witch had been forced to take refuge in the bag, which was quickly closed, and after being firmly tied was carefully laid on the porch of the house, where it was cut into a thousand pieces with a sharp axe. The fragments were then gathered together and burned; and one would surely suppose that if the witch had perchance escaped death while the bag which confined it was cut into fine shreds, the fire would put an end to its existence. Not so, however; the influence over the young women remained undispelled, and the witches continued to revel in the Hildebrand house. Soon the spirits assumed a material form, and appeared, as the young women averred, in the person of their neighbor, Nancy Evans; and from this time on it was not long until they believed that Nancy Evans herself was the witch, and that all their troubles had been caused by that unfortunate woman. She was shunned, and all intercourse with the family avoided; but the trouble remained. At last the justice of the peace was importuned to take the matter in hand, and if the woman, Nancy Evans, were really a witch, expel her from the presence of the afflicted family. The statutes of the Territory had made no provision for a case of this nature, the legislators evidently thinking that witchcraft would not flourish on Ohio soil; so the case had to be disposed of in another way. A tradition prevailed that if a witch were weighed against the Holy Writ, so great would be the overpowering influence of the Bible that the witch would be compelled to tip the beam. Accordingly, a rude pair of scales was constructed to decide this momentous matter, and all the interested parties having been called, as well as the neighbors, who were to witness the propriety of the proceedings, Nancy Evans was placed on one end of the scales and the Bible on the other, when she was thus adjured: "Nancy Evans, thou art weighed against the Bible, to try thee against all witchcraft and diabolical practices." This being done in the name of the law, and with a profound respect for the Word of God, seems to have had a solemn and conclusive effect. Nancy Evans was heavier, very much heavier, than the book, and was thenceforth relieved from all suspicion of being more than a simple old woman, who willingly submitted to this novel process in order to bring peace of mind to her neighbors, whom she sincerely pitied. In the course of a few years the Evans family removed to Brown County, where the old lady died respected by all who knew her. The Hildebrand family also removed, and since their departure witches have no more flourished at Bethel than at any other place, and the Village became noted for the general intelligence of its inhabitants and the neighborly relations which existed among them, and continue to this day.

In 1804, Thomas Morris, who afterwards became a United States senator, moved to Bethel from Williamsburg, and lived first near the Dr. Ellsberry place. In 1813 he built a large brick house on the southeast corner of Plane and Charity Streets, which was known as the Morris homestead until 1836, when the senator moved to Cincinnati, but in a few years returned to Tate, living on a farm a little west of Bantam until his death, December 7, 1844. His village home became the property of Holly Raper in 1836; and about 1845, of Jesse R. Grant (the father of General U. S. Grant), who remodeled it and occupied it as a residence ten or twelve years. While living there the general, at that time just from the academy at West Point, and later from the Mexican campaign, visited his father, and spent a number of months in this quiet village. On one of these occasions his daughter, Nellie, was born at Bethel. The greater part of the old house has been destroyed by fire, and but little remains to show its former comfortable proportions.

Closely associated with the events which brought General Grant into prominence was Thomas L. Hamer. In 1818 he came to Bethel a poor, friendless boy, and found a home in the family of Thomas Morris, with whom he studied law, and three years