

Biographical Information about Carroll, Ohio, Founding

<http://www.ci.carroll.oh.us/CarrollHistory.htm>

This article was written and contributed by Mrs. Joseph Gundy. (Also known as Jessie E. Wilson, a former resident of Carroll, Ohio.)

The little village of Carroll, Ohio, lies just off the new state highway leading from Columbus, the state capital, to Lancaster, thirty miles south. Carroll is situated among the beautiful rolling hills of Fairfield County, of which Lancaster is the county seat, and is seven miles north of that latter town. The pleasant little stream that flows through the valley just south of Carroll was called the Hock-Hocking by the Indians and has given the name of the Hocking Valley to the region.

To the travelers hurrying by in a constant stream, the town was only a name on a signboard for the route of the highway has been changed so that it also, now by-passes the town. To the curious few who may take the time to go half a mile out of the way, there may seem to be little interest in the quiet little town. Occasionally, however, some stranger may become lost trying to get out of town and may wonder why the few streets are laid out at such unusual angles. If he she should stop to inquire directions from a native and should express interest in the peculiar plan of the village, he might learn some interesting bit of local history.

Looking at Carroll today, it is hard to understand why a town was ever laid out in this location. There was no major cross road, the railroad missed the town completely, and the few business houses catered only to the surrounding farming community. But our friendly native could tell the curious stranger, if he would pause long enough to listen, that Carroll was not always just a sleepy little village and that there was, indeed a reason for its existence. That reason was that the junction of the Ohio and Hocking Canals came at this point, and since they came together at an angle, the streets were laid out accordingly "on the bias."

The story of the canal days is a colorful part of Ohio history. In the early part of the nineteenth century, the state of New York had built the Erie Canal, which proved to be a great success. The state of Ohio was the first one to follow suit. The Ohio legislature passed laws to insure a system of canals for the state, which should extend from Lake Erie on the north to the Ohio river on the south. The land required for the canals, about one million acres, was granted by Congress to Ohio to encourage this project.

The need for the canals was acute. Ohio's rich farm lands were capable of producing abundant harvests, but the farmer's problem was transporting the crops to market. Unless there was a natural waterway nearby, the only means of transportation was by heavy and cumbersome trading wagons drawn by four or six horses. Roads were very poor, having been carved from the wilderness, and were so full of stumps that one of the early laws required each able-bodied man to work two days at clearing stumps from the road before he would be allowed to vote.

Overland transportation was so slow and uncertain that the price of wheat was from twenty-five to forty cents a bushel.

The Ohio Canal was begun in 1825 and completed in 1830. It extended from Cleveland on Lake Erie to Portsmouth on the Ohio River, and the first boat to be towed over the entire length, the *Hebron*, occasioned great rejoicing. Even before this canal was begun, the boom along the proposed route made the citizens of Lancaster realize they would soon be crippled by lack of transportation. So on February 8, 1826, they organized a company to construct a branch canal to Lancaster. This was known originally as the Lancaster Lateral and later became part of the Hocking Canal.

Selling stock in the new company at twenty-five dollars a share was slow work until the Ohio Canal was completed and Lancaster's former trade went to Baltimore, Basil and other canal towns. After traffic began to flow on the Ohio Canal in 1831, it was only a year before all the stock was subscribed for the Lancaster Lateral and the contract was let. When it was completed and the first boat was towed into Lancaster on July 4, 1836, a cheering crowd of ten thousand turned out to witness the event. The celebration was accompanied by the booming of cannons, beating drums and waving of flags, with a free dinner of roast ox for all.

In the meantime, the state contracted to extend the canal from Lancaster to Logan, Nelsonville, Chauncey and Athens, fifty-three miles from Carroll. This portion of the Canal was completed on September 4, 1838 and in the same year the Lancaster Lateral was purchased by the state. The name of the canal from Carroll to Athens became the Hocking Canal.

One of the early subscribers to the stock of the Lancaster Lateral Canal Company was William Tong, who was a contractor on the Ohio Canal. He constructed the state dam west of Lockville and shortly after its completion, when the success of the Lancaster Lateral seemed assured, he laid out the town of Carroll. Little is known about Mr. Tong's early life, but in May, 1805, a marriage license was issued at the Fairfield County Court House in Lancaster to William Tong and Rebecca Watson. William Tong had a brother Oliver who assisted him in laying out the town site, in 1829.

The Tong brothers named the new village in honor of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Maryland, the last survivor of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. The revered statesman was born September 20, 1737 of Irish Catholic stock and was highly educated in France and England. He died at Baltimore on November 14, 1833, at the age of ninety-six.

The Tong brother's respect for religion was not limited to any particular faith. They donated the land upon which the former Methodist Church and parsonage stood and, specifying only that it was to be used for religious purposes. They also gave the town its streets, laid out so as to take the most advantage of the canals. Opposite the plot set aside for a church was a triangular piece of land which the Tongs donated as the location for a market house, without which no village of those days was complete. However, the market house was never built and the tract

has been used as a park, thus preserving the beautiful old maple trees which add to the attractiveness of the village.

William Tong's house was the first to be built in Carroll, on High street at the end of Market street. William and his brother Oliver built the first mill in the community, placing it near the stream west of the village. They also built and operated the first hotel, later owned by Ellsworth Heller. Unfortunately, William did not live to see the completion of the Lancaster Lateral or the development of Carroll; he died soon after the Ohio Canal was completed.

The Ohio Canal entered Carroll from the east and formed the northern boundary of the town as it was originally laid out. The principal business street running along this waterway was named Canal Street. On the north side of this street the business houses were built facing the street and with the back doors opening on the canal, thus facilitating the loading and unloading of freight. Near the center of town, at the point where the Hocking Canal joined the Ohio Canal, the latter made a sharp turn to the north so that the canals were roughly in the shape of a spread out Y, with the Hocking Canal being the tail of the Y. The point where the two canals joined, which lies back of the former bank building, was called the Junction. Here stood a large business building, also called the Junction, with an outside stairway leading to living quarters on the second floor. Here the toll was collected and the team~ crossed the Ohio Canal. Just south of this location was the turn bridge, to allow traffic on Canal Street to cross the Hocking Canal. South of this bridge was the basin of the Hocking Canal, which lay just back of the present post office.

The boats were pulled along the canal by horses or mules, fastened two to the boat by means of a long rope. The path along which the animals and their drivers walked was called the towpath. The towpath of the Hocking Canal was on the east bank through the village, but changed over to the west bank at the southern edge of town.

At the northeast end of Canal Street was Lock number 9 of the Ohio Canal, also known as the Upper Lock, and just above this lock was the basin of the Ohio Canal. On the southeast bank this basin stood a mill built by J. C. Reynolds in 1849. This was run by water taken from the basin and dropped back into the canal below the Lower Lock. A.B. Kistler purchased this business, known as the Carroll Flouring Mills, in 1872. For a time it was the largest in the county, with a capacity of 125 barrels of flour daily. Charles Kistler, Carroll's former banker and a son of A.B. Kistler, recalls that his father used four stands of stones for flour, one for grinding corn and one for feed. Bran was considered a waste product in those days and a farmer was allowed all he wanted. The mill burned three times at this location. On the site of the mill now lies one of the old millstones, almost the sole reminder of this business.

On the west bank of this basin A.B. Kistler at one time had two warehouses. On the eastern end of the basin stood a warehouse owned by Saylor and Ebright. This was the original mill building, which had been built by the town's founder, William Tong, and moved to this location.

Mill Street ran northeastward to the basin of the Ohio Canal where the most of the grain trade was conducted. The old basin was also the headquarters of the state repair boat. A boathouse stood here as a shelter for the tools and the Dick Gorham, the state boat, lay up here during the winters. Mr. Gorham, for whom this boat was named, settled in this community in 1832 and for many years operated the town's drug store.

Carroll's flourishing grain market brought much business to the town. Mr. William Breck, a pioneer businessman, built and operated the first warehouse as early as 1832. Mr. Andrew Saylor was associated with him, but in 1862 Mr. Saylor went into partnership with his brother-in-law, Mr. Nimrod S. Ebright. The firm handled about 60,000 bushels of wheat and corn annually.

Although Carroll had a population of only about 200 in those days, there were three hotels in the town to care for the transients brought in by the canal business. William Breck, a pioneer businessman, built the first warehouse, started the first store and opened the first hotel. Jim Harris, Col. Bope and John Azbell later owned this hotel. During the time of the canal's closing years of activity it was known as Azbell House and had a tavern in connection which was popular with the boatmen. Later the ownership of this hotel passed to Mr. Azbell's son-in-law, Ellsworth Heller, and his wife, Ida.

The Historical Atlas of Fairfield County, published in 1875, lists this hotel as the only tavern in town. It states also that Carroll at that time had about two hundred inhabitants, two stores and a fine two-story brick schoolhouse. Charles Breck, who is named as the first postmaster in Greenfield Township, had his office in Carroll about this time.

The first brick house in Carroll was run as a hotel by Jacob Fenstermaker and later occupied by Mrs. Jennie Fenstermaker. The third hotel, on Canal Street, was operated by Thomas Manley, whose children were Bob, Eddie, Adaline and Katherine (Kit), Luella (Lee) and Frank. Elijah Winter's family of nine children later operated this hotel. A daughter, Cora, married Frank E. Wilson, brother of Mrs. Joseph Gundy.

Mrs. Wilson, residing in North Hollywood, California, recalled that Mother Daughterman owned the hotel at the time they lived there. She also recalled that the canal afforded the young people many pleasant experiences, such as fishing and boat riding in summer and ice-skating in winter. During the winter when the canal was frozen over, the state repair boat stayed in the canal at the center of town. She remembered a family by the name of Richardson who lived in the boat, and who were kind enough to allow the skaters to come inside the boat to get warm.

In 1880, when Cora Winter was five years old, there was a typhoid epidemic in the town. Her family was living at that time in the home of Dr. Nau, a widower, and her mother kept house for him. Across the Street lived Dr. Aldred, whose daughter, Emma, was Cora's friend and playmate. Emma's brother, Meredith and Cora's brother, George, succumbed to the disease and the two girls barely survived.

The Hocking Valley railroad, now the Chesapeake and Ohio, was dedicated July 4, 1825. As more and more freight was carried by rail, the canals were doomed. The last boats passed through the canal in 1897 and the state boat "DICK GQRHAM" was abandoned in the basin at Carroll. Many of the present residents remember the rotting hulk of this boat as it lay in the weeds after the water had been drained from the canals. Alex Richardson, successor to Bill Paul as state boss, lived with his family in the stern cabin and the crew occupied the bow cabin. This boat was named for Dick Gorham, a one-armed saloonkeeper who had been one of the town's early druggists.

The coming of the Scioto Valley traction cars in 1904, with hourly service between Columbus and Lancaster and a station much more conveniently located in the town, brought a new boom to the little community. Within a few years several brick buildings had been constructed to meet the community's needs. The United Brethren Church was completed in 1910 and the Town Hall was built in 1911. In 1911 a new High School building was const at a cost of \$26,000 which, with a new addition, is now a fine modem educational plant. The Methodist Church was built in 1912 and dedicated March 2, 1913, with modernization work having been completed within recent years.