



BICENTENNIAL BULLETINS **—Sheffield Celebrates 200th Birthday**

The Sheffield Bicentennial Commission presents a series of *Bicentennial Bulletins* on topics that illustrate the rich heritage and fascinating diversity of our communities. **Join in the 2015 Celebrations!**

JABEZ BURRELL HOUSE (built in 1820—the oldest brick house in Lorain County)
2792 East River Road, Sheffield Village, Ohio



Two Hundred years ago, as the War of 1812 ends, Captain Jabez Burrell and Captain John Day purchase a township in the Connecticut Western Reserve. In June 1815, they lead a small group of settlers to explore the land and select plots for their homesteads making the 600-mile journey on horseback from the Berkshire Mountains of Sheffield, Massachusetts to the Ohio shores of Lake Erie, then up the Black River to French Creek. Here they find favorable home sites on the bluffs above the fertile river valley. They call the plain along the river, *The Big Bottom*—swept clean of trees by occasional spring floods, it was ready for planting corn and other grains.

The upland reaches of the township were heavily forested and rich with game—bear, deer, wild turkey, beaver, rabbit, and even an occasional wild horse. The pioneers cleared forests for houses, vegetable gardens, pastures, and orchards. The felled trees were used to build their log houses and to burn for cooking and for warmth during the cold winters. Wild game and fish were particularly important to the survival of the early settlers



South parlor fireplace

during 1816—known as *The Year Without a Summer*. That year snow fell and freezing temperatures occurred every month during the entire year, causing the crops to fail. The next year conditions improved and more settlers arrived. Soon the little community of Sheffield, named for the town they left behind in New England, had a population of 50 settlers.

Captain Jabez Burrell selected 200 acres of land near the mouth of French Creek that extended up the valley to include the lower reaches picturesque tributary, Sugar Creek. Near where East River Road now crosses French Creek, Jabez and Captain Day built a temporary two-family log house while they planned their future homes.

Jabez discovered a deposit of clay on the banks of Sugar Creek that was suitable for making bricks. He built a kiln nearby and stated firing bricks for the grand Federal-style home that he had promised his wife, Mary Austin Burrell. Polly, as he affectionately called her, had made the long journey to Ohio with him and their eight children the next summer, by ox cart, horse-drawn wagon, and finally schooner. Next, Jabez located a sandstone outcrop on North Ridge, several miles to the south, that he quarried for the foundation and massive door stoops.

The house was begun in 1820 and within a few years it was ready for the family to take up residency. Five generations lived in the Jabez Burrell House, farming the land and influencing the growth of the community. Jabez was Justice of the Peace when Sheffield Township was formed in 1824. His sons, Robbins and Jabez Lyman, were instrumental in the formation of Oberlin College and establishing a station on the Underground Railroad on the homestead. His grandson, prominent farmer Edward Burrell, built a cheese factory there in 1869 that still stands. The next generation saw Tempe Garfield Burrell lead the Sheffield School District during the construction of Brookside School in 1923. Tempe's son Edward served as the third mayor of Sheffield Lake Village in the early 1930s and her daughter Doris served on the Sheffield Village Council in the 1960s.



Edward Burrell cheesehouse



Virginia, Eleanor & Doris Burrell (~1907)



In 1969, Doris, Virginia, and Eleanor Burrell, the three great great granddaughters of Jabez, made provisions to pass ownership of the Homestead to the Lorain County Metropolitan Park District after their passing for establishment of a pioneer museum. In 1976 the Burrell Homestead was accepted for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. In January 2001 Eleanor died, the last surviving Burrell sister. The Burrell Homestead is now managed by Metro Parks, offering historic tours, educational exhibits/programs, traditional picnics, and archaeological investigations on the property. On Saturday, the 1st of August the Homestead will celebrate its 200-year heritage by hosting the Sheffield Bicentennial Picnic & Reunion.