



The Chagrin Falls Historical Society

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Chagrin Falls, Ohio

www.chagrinhistorical.org

A brief history of the Village of Chagrin Falls

Beauty was not the prime consideration of the founders of the Village of Chagrin Falls. They were attracted more by the clear river, with its large and small waterfalls, and the towering timbers of its virgin forests. These represented sources of power for mills and lumber for buildings. The present serenity of our tree-lined streets, well kept houses and charming shops do not suggest our beginnings as a bustling mill town. Yet our destiny was to evolve from a manufacturing town to a peaceful and friendly residential community.

The first settlers in 1833 were God-fearing, hardworking people looking for greater opportunities for their families, and so they were interested in the lands of the Western Reserve. They came predominately from New England and England, the last part of their journey by canal boat, wagon, or on foot.

First they built shelter for their families, Then they went about the task of establishing mills and small factories. Soon they began meeting together to worship God according to their personal inclinations---in homes, or “over a store”, until congregations could be established and funds raised. Early denominations included the Congregationalists, Disciples of Christ, Methodists, Free Will Baptist and Bible Christian Church.

The waterfalls along the river were soon harnessed to run a variety of enterprises ranging from saw mills, flour, woolen and paper mills, foundries and factories for making axes and woodenware. In a one mile stretch of the river there were nine mills. In the years after it was incorporated in 1844, the Village exhibited all of the hallmarks of a mill town including muddy streets and saloons.

As mill owners prospered, they replaced their early homes with more impressive ones, often moving their first homes to other lots. The classic house of foundry owner J.W. Williams on South Franklin St. replaced an earlier home on the site that was moved to the street behind. Today, architectural variety lends charm to the village. Chagrin boasts three separate historic districts on the National Register of historic places, with over 100 contributing structures.

Education was highly valued by early residents. At first classes were held in private homes; churches sponsored spelling classes; and a small school was opened on main street. The present Chagrin Falls school campus, which the High School, Middle School Performing Arts Center and athletic facilities occupy, was once the Cuyahoga County Fairgrounds.

Chagrin Falls reputation as an art center also had early beginnings. Henry Church Jr. (b. 1836) a blacksmith in the Village, was a gifted artist known for his paintings, stone statuary and his carving of Squaw Rock in the Metro-parks. The Valley Art Center, The Chagrin Valley Little Theatre, Chagrin Falls Historical Society, Chagrin Arts, the Chagrin Documentary Film Festival and the Performing Arts Academy all contribute to the lively cultural richness of the Village today.

Chagrin Falls has evolved from a manufacturing town, to a center for the surrounding farms (1930's), to the prosperous suburban community that it is today. People are still drawn to Chagrin Falls, where history can be felt, the river still makes its eternal trips through town, and the waterfalls exert their age old fascination