

# GRANVILLE'S INDUSTRIAL PAST

THERESA OVERHOLSER



GRANVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
POCKET HISTORY

# CONTENTS

Introduction

1

The First Industry

4

A Notable Family

8

The Iron Furnace

10

The Tannery

16

Woolen Cloth Factories

20

Silk and Sugar

27

What Happened?

30

A Note About Sources

32

IN MEMORY OF  
*Lance Clarke*

# GRANVILLE'S INDUSTRIAL PAST

IF YOU TRY TO DESCRIBE GRANVILLE TODAY, you might use the term “bedroom community,” or “little college town,” meaning lots of homes, schools, and a university, some shops and restaurants—but no heavy industry. It might surprise you to find out that that’s not how the founders envisioned things turning out.

There were nearly 200 of those “founders” back in 1805, men, women and children. We can’t really call them pioneers, because Ohio was already a settled state with many thriving towns. And they certainly weren’t frontiersmen. The frontier was already far to the west. Nor were they just a bunch of farmers, each one clearing his own 100 acres, only coming together for church on Sunday. No, they were a “company,” specifically The Licking Company, made up of business and professional men, craftsmen and mechanics, educators, and many farmers. They were friends and neighbors who all moved together to this beautiful spot in Ohio. And they wanted to set up a community that would grow and prosper for their children. The story is told of the little boy who cried when he couldn’t find enough good New England soil to cover his corn seed. Well, that little boy’s father found good farmland in Ohio, and the little boy, Alfred Avery, grew up to become one of the town’s richest investors and businessmen.

One of the first things the Licking Company did was find what they thought was the best locale for this prosperous-town-to-be. They chose

“a tract of choice land five miles square, centrally located in the county of Licking, State of Ohio. Through the center of it, from west to east, runs the middle fork of the Pataskala, or Licking River, this branch being commonly called Raccoon Creek. Irregularly skirting the stream on either hand is a chain of hills from one to two hundred feet high, out of whose base flow perennial springs. They are diversified with ridges, knobs, spurs and buttes, and here and there the chain is broken by the valleys through which the brooks, fed by those springs, find their way into the leading stream.”

—Bushnell's *History of Granville*

The land was fertile, game was plentiful, and springs were abundant. But those enterprising Yankees saw another great advantage to the site: Raccoon Creek, and its sparkling tributary, Clear Run. Water power was immensely important if the community was going to develop and grow beyond a cluster of cabins in a “someday” village. It was important if the people were going to move quickly beyond just keeping body and soul together. Manufacturing businesses powered by water or using great quantities of water were the key to prosperity.

The earliest Granville settlers were able to produce the basic food, shelter, and clothing for themselves, but no one had much beyond that at first. Once any cash from their savings was gone, there was a shortage of ways to replace it. The following letter from Jeremiah Munson, in Granville, Ohio, to his brother Augustin, away in Massachusetts on business, illustrates the predicament.

“February 20th, 1809

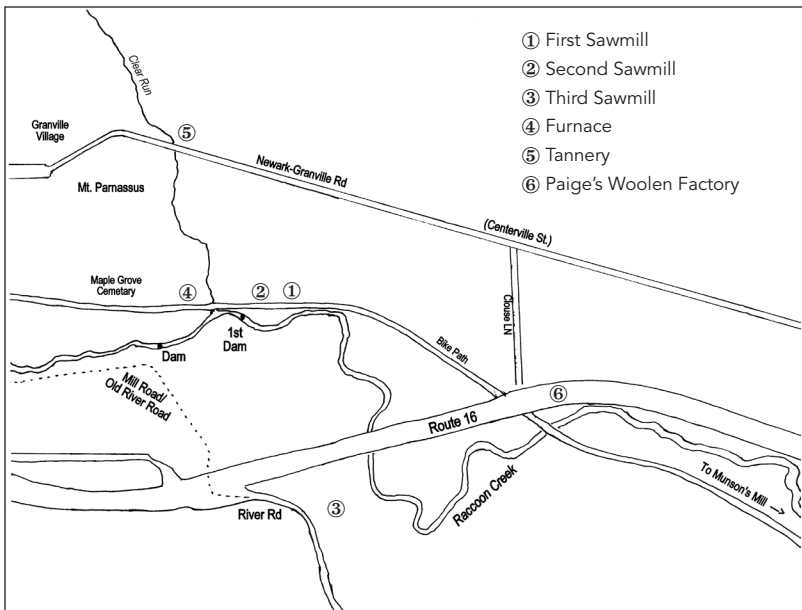
Brother

. . . times are growing shocking here—NO MONEY—execution upon execution [property seizure for debt payment] pushing many, property selling for almost nothing and an universal cry of distress . . . as yet I have

kept along side with the world, how long I shall continue so I know not. This minute away goes a pistereen [small silver coin] the largest piece of money in my exchequer for a bottle of whiskey to heat myself and a friend. My wife insists on another half bushel of cranberrys and sugar and that you see will end my funds. Your lot of hogs over the creek are gone, every one of them gone. Mr. Ward I arraigned last term for stealing them the proof damning against him . . .

P.S. I wish you to fetch me on an elegant hat a white one I shall prefer.”

Clearly, money needed to begin to flow: money to purchase necessities, pay taxes and repay loans, and buy the extras, like an elegant hat, that might make a hard life a little more pleasant. Money was needed for investing and for saving.



*A map of the key industries in early Granville described in this volume.*

Source: Granville Historical Society.

The streams, Raccoon Creek and Clear Run in particular, would turn out to be the solution to the cash problem. With the power of flowing water turning wheels, then gears, then machinery, craftsmen, mechanics, and entrepreneurs could produce enough goods locally to supply nearby demand and to sell over a wider territory. Mills and factories could also provide employment and job training for young men in the increasing population, as well as opportunities for investment. Cash could begin to circulate. Water and its power could produce comfort and prosperity for Granville. At least, that was the dream.

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## **The First Industry**

The families of “new” Granville had every intention of living just as nicely as they had in “old” Granville. Although in Ohio their first shelters were made of whole logs, and their first tables were made of split logs, everyone knew that it shouldn’t take long for things to improve. And, in spite of a few starts and stops along the way, it didn’t.

In the summer of 1805, three months before most of the migrants left New England, a party of five men and their families arrived in future Granville. Their task was to site and build a sawmill in preparation for the arrival of the main body of settlers. It was an ambitious undertaking, given the near-virgin condition of the area and the short time frame. This advance party included Timothy Spelman and Cornelius Slocum, who had charge of the project, Hugh Kelley, a blacksmith, Ethan Bancroft, a carpenter, and John Phelps, who had experience with mills.

The main necessity for a sawmill was, of course, water that flowed forcefully enough to power a water wheel. The water wheel, probably very simple in design, would turn a series of wooden gears that would raise and lower a rectangular saw through a log, while also advancing the log. Swiftly flowing water had been easy enough to come by in rocky western New England, but finding a useful amount in flatter Ohio in mid-July was an undertaking of larger scope. Because the new village’s site had already been picked out, the search for water power began just to its east, where Clear Run and Raccoon