

A Walk Through History

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LOCAL HISTORY RESOURCE CENTER NEWSLETTER
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RANDALL R. ARNOLD: PIONEER, SURVEYOR, CARPENTER AND WRITER

Randall R. Arnold (1806-1897) was one of the pioneer leaders of the Westerville community. He constructed the first frame house in the village, helped plat the original village, and helped bring Otterbein College to the community.

In his youth Arnold traveled with his family to Central Ohio and settled in Orange Township in Delaware County. After years of helping his father create a farm from the wilderness, he moved as an adult to the

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area that later became Westerville. He was a carpenter and constructed the first frame home in the village in 1838. He assisted in surveying the village and laying out its town lots and streets in 1839.

When the Blendon Young Men’s Seminary, a Methodist school founded on land

donated by the Westervelts, failed in 1845 one of its original trustees, R. R. Arnold, was instrumental in finding another college to replace it. Arnold was visiting a store in Columbus and overheard a conversation about the desire of the United Brethren Church to have land for a college. Arnold rushed back to Westerville and informed fellow citizens of what he had heard. Representatives were sent to the next meeting of the trustees of the United Brethren Church with a proposal to offer the grounds of the Blendon Young Men’s Seminary to the church for assumption of the debt on the land and buildings. As a result Otterbein College was opened in Westerville.

For fifty years Randall R. Arnold served as justice of the peace in Westerville. He assisted in settling law suits and signing legal papers. R. R. Arnold wrote about the history of the Methodist Church in Westerville, the travels of his family and pioneer life, and also wrote poetry. The local newspaper published his writings.

R. R. Arnold had 8 children but only 4 survived to adulthood. One of the tragedies of his life occurred in 1886 when a fire killed his beloved grandson, nine-year-old Harry Evans, at the Weyant Opera House on State St. (the building that currently houses Old Bag of Nails). Randall is buried near this grandson in the Old Pioneer Cemetery on South State Street. When R. R. Arnold died at the age of 92 he was the oldest person living in Westerville.



Association Building at Otterbein, torn down in 1975

Traveling to Ohio

Randall R. Arnold was six years old when his parents decided to move to Ohio. Leaving Vermont in August of 1812, the family encountered many hardships. Randall, his wife Eunice, and their nine children, ranging in age from one to nineteen years old, traveled with a large company of families making their way to the new state of Ohio. R. R. Arnold described it thus, "The long train of horses and wagons on that beautiful morning was



an imposing sight."

The wagon train traveled across the state of New York to Buffalo and on to Cleveland.

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Farmers shared fruit from their overflowing peach trees with the passing wagon train. The wagon train traveled through the "40 mile woods" after leaving Cleveland and turning toward Central Ohio. In the midst of the trek through the heavy forest the members of the wagon train found a deserted log cabin and a small garden patch whose only crop was turnips. So the group acquired the second food treat of their long journey.

In the "40 mile woods" the travelers faced the danger of an attack from Native Americans. They chose one of their group – Joshua Prince – as "captain" of the wagon train. He was charged with the protection of his fellow travelers. Two soldiers who were traveling back to their homes after serving in the army crossed paths with the wagon train and were asked to serve as sentries as the wagons moved through this dangerous territory. The soldiers were paid a dollar and given supper in payment for their services.

Rain fell all day long as the wagon train moved through the "40 mile woods." When they stopped to camp, they built a fire and dried tree branches by the fire. After dinner, when all the cooking and eating utensils were placed back on the wagons, the newly dried tree branches were placed on the wet ground with the weary travelers' beds laid atop and quiet fell over the camp as everyone drifted off to sleep.



At midnight only the two guards and two fathers were awake keeping vigil. Randall said, "Everything seemed hushed into silence save the quiet talk of these two fathers and the uneasy stepping

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of the horses standing without shelter and only scantily fed; the occasional hoot of the night-owl; the occasional snoring of those

who slept; the raindrops as they fell from the leaves and branches into the fire..." Into this quiet a chorus of howls sounded. The soldiers gave the alarm as all awoke from their deep sleep at the frightening din. What made this awful sound? It was a nearby pack of wolves looking for food, posing no danger to the travelers but just being noisy neighbors in the woods.

a special guest

As the travelers left the "40 mile woods," two men on horseback drew near. Both were in military uniform and both were leading pack horses laden with sacks of food. The first man identified himself as General William H. Harrison. The wagon train halted and felt honored to be in the presence of such an important man. Randall said, "It was by an urgent and respectful invitation that the General allowed his horses to be held while he made a well-timed speech." At the end of the



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speech and the enthusiastic applause of those gathered in the woods the General saw Randall's mother sitting by her wagon looking very fatigued. He walked to her side and asked if he could assist her with the gift of some food. He then generously divided the food on his pack horse with her providing tea, coffee, sugar and other items. (This gracious man became the President of the United States in 1840 but served only one month before dying.) The encounter with the general was the last adventure in the trip, for soon the wagon train reached their final destination in Delaware County, Ohio.

