

JEFFERSON COUNTY CHAPTER OF THE OHIO GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

HISTORY OF JEFFERSON COUNTY

Jefferson County was named for Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, Secretary of State, and Vice President of the United States at the time of the County's creation. It was organized on July 29, 1797 by proclamation of Governor Arthur St. Clair, six years before Ohio was granted statehood.

In 1786, the United States built Fort Steuben to protect the government surveyors mapping the land west of the Ohio River. When the surveyors completed their task a few years later, the fort was abandoned. In the meantime, settlers had built homes around the fort; they named their settlement La Belle. When the County was created in 1797, La Belle was selected as the County seat. The town was subsequently renamed Steubenville, in honor of the abandoned fort.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Jefferson County attracted a number of pioneers who were looking for a better life in the newly developing lands west of the Ohio River. Included in those brave souls were a large number of American Revolution war veterans, as well as several groups of Quakers. For example, the villages of Mt. Pleasant and Smithfield were founded by Quakers, which became early centers for abolitionist activity.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Steubenville was primarily a port town, and the rest of the County was comprised of small villages and farms. However, in 1856, Frazier, Kilgore and Company erected a rolling mill (the forerunner of steel mills) and the Steubenville Coal and Mining Company sank a coal shaft, resulting in Jefferson County becoming one of the leading centers of the new Industrial Revolution.

Jefferson County is a virtual treasure trove for history and genealogy researchers. It has over seventy pioneer cemeteries, the oldest Quaker meeting house west of the Ohio River, well preserved sites on the Underground Railroad, and the old Fort Steuben has been completely rebuilt as a public historic site and museum. Several of the towns and villages have formed historical societies, dedicated to preserving local history.

HISTORY OF THE JEFFERSON COUNTY CHAPTER OF THE OHIO GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

The Jefferson County Chapter of the Ohio Genealogical Society (JCCOGS) was formed in 1986 to support the objectives of the Ohio Genealogical Society by creating and building interest in the collection and preservation of historical and genealogical materials and records of Jefferson County and the adjoining areas of the Ohio Valley. For more information about the JCCOGS and its activities, please visit www.jeffcochapter.com.

THE RECORDS PROJECT

Old Jefferson County courthouse records were stored in the basement and the annex/jail for many years. Some of the records date back to 1797. They tell the stories of the early pioneers in the County, as well as the tens of thousands of later immigrants who came to work in the mills and mines.

These records have been slowly deteriorating, and there was fear that if something wasn't done quickly, soon they would be lost forever.

In 2002, JCCOGS began working with the County Probate and Common Pleas judges, culminating with their approval in 2009 for the Chapter to take possession of the records on a permanent loan basis. For more detailed information, please visit the Chapter website, www.jeffcochapter.com., and click on Records Project.