

William James' little cooper shop in Rarey's Port was crowded with citizens one night in the winter of 1846-47. More than a score had already assembled but occasionally the door would open to admit a late arrival. Soon the capacity of the small one-story building on Walnut Street close to the Ohio and Erie Canal was taxed to the limit. The weak rays from a valiant coal lamp reflected the determined look on the faces of all those who were within range of the feeble light and an old pot-bellied stove in the center of the room radiated welcome warmth to those assembled. When the meeting finally got under way, there were twenty-seven citizens present who had made up their minds to "do something about it."



For several years, an argument smoldered between Jacob B. Wert and William H. Rarey. This was an argument more of action than of words. Four years previously Wert had laid out Wert's Grove and Rarey had laid out Rarey's Port with only a section line dividing the two settlements. This section line ran directly north and south down what is now College Street, but which at that time was called East Street, Wert's Grove being to the west.

Each of these men was determined that his name should be perpetuated in the naming of the village and it was with pardonable pride that each maintained his stand. In 1812, Rarey's father, Adam, an original settler in the area, had constructed a log tavern on the site where now stands the freshman school. William Rarey donated the land for the Methodist Church and in other ways had contributed to the development of the community to the east of the section line. Wert was a progressive and public-spirited businessman and the community to the west of the section line had developed largely through his efforts. In 1844, he built two brick houses on Main Street just west of College Street.

Wert did hold one advantage, however, as he was postmaster and had been for a period of eleven years or more, operating the post office in a building he constructed on the southwest corner of Main and College Streets.

Not to be outdone from this post office angle, Rarey, it is claimed, advised his friends to address their letters to Rarey's Port and many letters were received addressed in this manner. Wert, equal to the occasion, simply scratched out the address and wrote in Wert's Grove eliminating as best he could the result of Rarey's scheming. Thus raged the feud with nothing being accomplished that was in any way beneficial to the community as a whole.

Now the citizens of both settlements took matters into their own hands. Partisans of both men were present, but it is interesting to note that neither Rarey nor Wert were in attendance at the meeting in James' cooper shop that eventful night. Apparently, both were willing that the issue

should be decided without interference on their part. However, when the meeting broke up late that night little had been accomplished, but it was apparent to all that a compromise name would have to be adopted and this thought was no doubt in the minds of many even before the start of the meeting. They decided to meet again a week later.

From the standpoint of attendance, the second meeting of the citizens was a little different from the first. At that time the United States was at war with Mexico, and the U.S. forces had won the initial major victory of the war at a battle fought at Palo Alto. As the battle had been fought only recently, the name of Palo Alto was proposed for the community. This proposal was given none too much consideration and finally Dr. Abel Clark suggested the name of Groveport, the derivation of which is readily apparent. Such a name, Clark pointed out, did no injustice to either Wert or Rarey. The name was readily adopted and in April of 1847, the Village of Groveport was incorporated.

An election was held on April 17, 1847 for the purpose of selecting officials for the new village. The first mayor was Abraham Shoemaker and Dr. Abel Clark was elected Clerk. J. P. Bywaters, E. M. Dutton, William Mitchell, Samuel Sharpe and C. J. Stevenson were chosen as councilmen. The first meeting of the council was held on April 29, 1847 at the Cherry Street home of Mayor Shoemaker.

After the incorporation of Groveport, Jacob Wert continued as postmaster until 1848 when Edmund Gares was appointed. Two years later Wert died and was buried in the Lutheran Cemetery in Obetz. William Rarey remained a community leader active in commerce and the Methodist Church until his death in 1877.

So it was that back in 1847 Groveport, with an approximate population of 250 was incorporated as a village. The original settlement of what is now the Village of Groveport began in the early nineteenth century. Settlers, with little except the determination to found new homes, began to arrive in the vicinity. They came from Pennsylvania, Virginia, Kentucky, Maryland and other states to the South and East. The signing of the Treaty of Greenville in 1795 ended hostilities with Native Americans and gave these hardy pioneers, traveling through the wilderness, a feeling of safety they had not previously enjoyed.

During this time the people of Groveport got their mail at Franklinton. Usually one man on horseback made the trip and brought back the mail for the entire community. However several weeks often elapsed between mails due to bad traveling conditions.

Transportation of freight and merchandise was a real problem back



in those early days. Roads as such did not exist and horses and wagons were not always able to negotiate the trails.

The opening of the Ohio Canal in 1831 was a boon to the settlements along its winding course and warehouses and mills began to spring up along the banks of the canal. In both Rarey's Port and Wert's Grove, the end of each street and alley that touched the canal was the site for a business of some sort: there were dry docks, warehouses, tanneries, saw mills, brick and tile factories, flour mills and meat packing concerns.

Then in 1868 came the railroad. Three of the men who were instrumental in building that part of the railroad which passes through Groveport were J. Moule, Ed Fawcett and Pat O'Brien. They lived at the Campbell Hotel which stood near College and Main Streets on the site now occupied by Stebe's Auto Sales. About this time another tavern, the Corbett House, was built by Michael Corbett on Front Street where Blue Pine Apartments now sit. Corbett donated land for the right of way of the railroad through his property and built the 15-room "house" primarily for the accommodation of the railroad men. He did everything he could to encourage the construction of the railroad which for a time threatened to pass three miles to the north. The first train passed through Groveport on July 16, 1868, and was the occasion for quite a celebration.



A proposal to build a Town Hall was approved in an election held on April 5, 1875. This structure was to be a jointly owned affair with the township, the village, the Masonic Lodge, and the Odd Fellows sharing the cost. Three locations were considered but the lot at the northwest corner of Main and Front Streets, offered by the Odd Fellows, was selected. The building was completed in the spring of 1876, with the cost being apportioned to the township, the village and the two lodges, in amounts based on the architect's estimate of that part to be used by each of the participants. The architect was J. H. Harris and the contractor William W. McCoy. Total cost was \$10,745.00, an amount that today would finance only an ordinary room remodeling.

The first occupants of the two business rooms on the first floor were H. H. Scofield and Company, Dry Goods Merchants, and Theodore Faulhaber's Grocery. In the early twentieth century the Town Hall was used by Groveport High School for basketball games, plays and graduation exercises. During the 1930's, an addition was built on the north side of Town Hall to provide restrooms for both women and men. During the 1940's, both first floor rooms were occupied by Redman's Hardware Company. Today the building is home to the Groveport Heritage Museum, Cultural Arts Center, Art Gallery, and Senior Transportation Program and provides meeting and social sites for individuals and civic organizations. Aside from recent renovations, the Town Hall stands as originally built in 1875.

The Scioto Valley Traction line, a third-rail electric trolley system, was constructed in 1901-1904. A franchise was granted on September 12, 1901, giving this line a right of way over Blacklick Street through the village with the provision that fares within the corporate limits of Groveport be fixed at five cents. Cars stopped at College Street and at Front Street but it is

doubtful if many nickels were collected for these fares between these two points. The stop at College Street was discontinued when the Scioto Valley Station was built at the corner of Blacklick Street and Brook Alley. William C. Black was the first station agent.

When the line was completed in 1904, a special car was run to Canal Winchester and many citizens of Groveport made the round trip. This line operated successfully for quite a number of years but finally discontinued passenger service entirely by the 1930s. Its demise was brought about by the advent of buses and the general use of automobiles.

The first street to be paved in Groveport was Front Street in 1909, then Main Street in 1911, College Street in 1915, Blacklick Street in 1923, Naomi Court in 1931, Walnut Street in 1939, Elm and Cherry Streets in 1939. The last three were government aid projects sponsored by the village. Groveport, thanks to active and alert public officials at that time, derived much benefit through the government aid program. The installation of the water works in 1934 was another such government aid program.

In 1904, the old coal oil lights gave way to natural gas, which in turn was replaced by electricity not many years afterwards. The first electric distribution system was installed by Lester Peterman about 1910. Peterman, the grandson of George Champe, was barely out of school when this installation was made. Current was secured from the Claycraft Brick Company. Later this distribution system was acquired by the Scioto Valley Traction Company who continued the service. It was then acquired by the Ohio Midland Light and Power Company. Today it is maintained by American Electric Power Company.

The Claycraft plant, which stood near the intersection of College Street and Rohr Road, burned in the Spring of 1911. Rebuilt immediately, it continued in operation until the supply of good clay was exhausted and it was no longer possible to make high quality brick that had always been produced. Groveport bricks were used in the construction of many of Groveport's and Columbus' finer buildings. The discontinuance of this plant was an irretrievable loss to Groveport.

In 1947, Groveport celebrated its centennial. Led by Charles Coon and Warren Rarey, a committee of 18 citizens put together a five-day celebration. A crowd of 5,000 people attended the celebration that included parades, games, speakers, dancing and historical displays.

Groveport's boundaries had remained relatively unchanged from its early days. But, after World War II, Groveport began to steadily grow. Development began in earnest in the 1950s with the annexation of the residential areas of Kessler Addition, Magnolia Addition, and Sunrise Addition. The 200 home Westport Addition followed in the 1960s. By the 1990s more subdivisions became part of the village – Grove Pointe, The Orchard, Bixford Green, Walden Pond, Hickory Grove, Greenbriar (also called South Groveport), Newport Village and Greenfield Place (the Lutheran Senior Services complex.)

Growth in the village was not entirely residential. In the past twenty-five years, industrial parks appeared along the Route 317 corridor as Groveport sought to take advantage of both the Rickenbacker Port Authority and the nearby interstate highway. These businesses, such as Radio

Shack, K-Mart, and Distribution Fulfillment Services (Spiegel/Eddie Bauer) provide jobs and a tax base for the village.

In the past ten years, Main Street was renovated. Historical street lights were installed along with brick crosswalks and new sidewalks. Storm sewers and water lines were also improved.

The village government outgrew the municipal building on Cherry Street and in 1992 plans were made for a new municipal building. The village purchased and remodeled the United McGill building on the southwest corner of Front and Blacklick Streets (formerly St. Mary's Church) for \$1.6 million. In 1995 the village government moved into its modern and spacious new home.

The old village has successfully combined its heritage and identity with plans for future growth.

*(Updated and reprinted from Groveport Centennial, 1847 – 1947.)*