

Highland County is born

County was named for being situated on high land

Photo courtesy Jean Wallis

Shown is a picture of the Barrere Tavern, once located on the northwest corner of Main and Ohio Streets in the village of New Market. The tavern was the site of the first court held in Highland County and remained as such until November 1807.



Editor's note: In conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the Highland County Historical Society, longtime historian Jean Wallis looks back on the history of Highland County in articles originally presented as part of her long-running Highland Guideposts series that appeared in this newspaper for nearly three decades.

On Friday, February 18, 210 years ago the county of Highland was established by an act of the Ohio general assembly, thus becoming the 21st county formed in the state. The county was named Highland because of its situation on the high land between the Scioto and Little Miami Rivers.

The act creating Highland County passed by the general assembly on Feb. 18, 1805 consisted of five sections, parts of which appear in as follows.

Section 1. "Be it enacted by the general assembly of the State of Ohio, that all that part of the counties of Ross, Adams and Clermont, within the following boundaries, be and the same is hereby laid off and erected into a separate county, which will be known by the name of Highland: beginning at the twenty mile tree, in the line between Adams and Clermont counties, which is run north from the mouth of Eagle Creek, on the Ohio River, and running thence east twelve miles; thence northeastwardly until it intersects the line which was run between the counties of Ross, Scioto and Adams, at the eighteen mile tree from the Scioto River; thence northwardly to the mouth of the Rocky Fork of Paint Creek; thence up main Paint Creek, by the bed thereof, including John Watt's survey of one thousand acres, on which the town of Greenfield is situate, to the south line of Franklin County; thence with said line west, to the east line of Greene County; thence with said line south, to the southeast corner of said county; thence with the south line thereof west to the northeast corner of Clermont County, and from the beginning west, to the north fork of Whiteoak Creek; thence north to the south line of Warren County; thence with said line east to the corner between Clermont and Warren Counties."

Section 2. On May 1, 1805, Highland County was vested with all the powers, privileges and immunities of a separate and distinct county.

Section 5. "That the courts to be held in the said county of Highland, shall be holden in the town of New Market, until a permanent seat of justice shall be established in said county."

The organization of Highland County ushered in a new era in our history. Daniel Scott in his "Early Settlement of Highland County" says: "The fact of a new county being organized, brought into the public arena a new set of men not heretofore visible as "public men," and infused an energy and ambition into others who had previously indulged in no other thoughts of distinction. A public spirit was at once aroused. Men began to feel that they had something else to do than raise corn sufficient for bread and hominy, or kill deer enough for meat for their families.

"They had been for three years citizens of a State, and their duties were brought closer to their homes by the erection of a county for them to organize and sustain. They took hold of the work manfully and results have shown that they were fully equal to the task."

At the organization of the county it was divided into four townships, they were Brushcreek, Fairfield, Liberty and New Market. New Market had been formed on Tuesday, April 27, 1802 by an act of the Ross County commissioners from Paxton Township and remained a part of that county for the next three years.

Following the formation of Highland County, New Market covered all the southern portion of the county from the Rocky Fork; Brushcreek the southeast and east; Liberty east and west from present day Hillsboro and extending north nearly to the present town of Samantha; Fairfield included an immense territory extending north to the Franklin County line.

After the creation of Highland the general assembly elected three Associate Judges for the new county, who held a special court in the town of New Market, on Thursday, May 16, 1805. These judges were Richard Evans, John Davidson and Jonathan Berryman. According to their record no business was enacted at this time, except to appoint David Hays clerk pro tem, who took an oath of "allegiance and office."

From the records of said Court: "Be it remembered, that at a Court of Common Pleas began and held in the town of New Market, in the County of Highland, on Wednesday, the 12th day of June 1805, being the first Court held under the Constitution of the State of Ohio, for the county aforesaid, on which day, being the day and place appointed by an act organizing the Judicial Courts; present, the Honorable Robert F. Slaughter, Esquire, President, John Davidson and Jonathan Berryman, Esquires, Associate Judges."

The sheriff, Dan Evans returned the following persons as Grand Jurors for the county: Samuel Gibson, William Hill, Amos Evans, John Creek, Benjamin Chaney, Terry Templin, Ezekiel Kelley, Jacob Metzger, William Boatman, Ebenezer Hamble, Edward Carey, James Fitzpatrick, John Gossett, Samuel McQuitty, Michael Metzger, Anthony Franklin and Christian Bloom; The Court appointed Samuel Gibson foreman.

Abram J. Williams is appointed Prosecutor for the county of Highland. The report of the State Commissioners Nathaniel Beasley, James Denny and Peter Light for fixing the seat of justice in the county of Highland, was this day handed in and ordered to be filed.

On Thursday, June 13, 1805 the Court appointed Walter Craig as County Surveyor.

On Friday, June 14, 1805 the Court appointed David Hays as County Recorder.

We will continue next time with more on Ohio's 21st County.

Jean Wallis is a local historian and the writer of the longtime feature Highland Guideposts.