



Ridgeville Store circa 1940

Overview of the History of Warren County and Clearcreek Township

For more detailed information, please visit the Springboro Area Historical Society and Museum, 110 S. Main St., Springboro, OH 45066, <https://springboroareahistory.org> or contact via email: springboromuseum@gmail.com or phone: 937-748-0916.

The area now known as Warren County was originally populated by indigenous cultures. The Hopewell people, who occupied the land from about 100 B.C. to 600 A.D., belonged to a "mound builder" culture, and built earthwork mounds for burials or community gatherings. Fort Ancient, an earthworks site on the Little Miami River that's believed to have been a ceremonial gathering place, is the largest hilltop enclosure in North America.

The mound builders had disappeared and been replaced by other native tribes by the time European explorers came to the area. Miami and Shawnee were the predominant tribes in southwestern Ohio.

Following the Revolutionary War, westward expansion resulted in the creation of Ohio and its counties and townships.

Timeline:

- 1787: The Northwest Territory, which was the first post-Revolutionary War U.S. territory, was established by Congress via a piece of legislation known as the Northwest Ordinance. Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and part of Minnesota would be created from this land.
- 1803: Ohio was admitted to the Union as the 17th state, and Warren County was created from Hamilton County as one of its first 12 counties (there are now 88).

1815: Clearcreek Township was created, and Springboro was founded.

Warren County was created from tracts of land bought directly from the government via federal land offices. One of the most well-known transactions was the purchase of 311,682 acres by Judge John Cleves Symmes, for 66 cents an acre. This land, which lay between the Great Miami and Little Miami Rivers, was known as the Symmes Purchase. Multiple mistakes were made in surveying it, largely because the surveyors used magnetic north instead of true north, and as a result Symmes sold some land that he didn't own. This technical error rendered the affected buyers/ squatters on public land. To correct this, Congress passed relief acts that gave those buyers first rights to purchase the land from the federal government.

Ohio counties are divided into smaller units called townships. A township provides government and services for unincorporated areas (those that don't fall within a city or village). Each township, which covers about 36 square miles, is further subdivided into 36 one-square-mile numbered sections.

Clearcreek Township is in north-central Warren County. It extends from Springboro (it's only incorporated area) to the south of Red Lion and Dodds.



Grain and Lumber Store - Springboro

Notable early residents in the area included:

- Joel Wright was a Quaker who first came to the area in 1788 with a team that surveyed the Northwest Territory. He platted the towns of Columbus, Dayton, and Louisville, KY.
- Joel's son Jonathan Wright platted Springboro in 1815. An experienced surveyor, he selected the location because of its abundance of springs that could be used for mills. Like his father, Jonathan was a devout Quaker, and he founded Springboro as a dry town. Jonathan built and ran three mills and opened his house for use on the Underground Railroad.

- Fergus McLean was a Revolutionary War soldier who moved to Ohio after the war and platted the town of Ridgeville in 1814. He was a central figure in the Clearcreek Baptist Church.
- John McLean (Fergus's son) practiced law in Cincinnati and Lebanon, founded the first Warren County newspaper, The Western Star, in 1807, and served in many state and federal government positions, including U.S. senator, Ohio Supreme Court justice, and the U.S. Postmaster General. He was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1829, as the first Ohio lawyer to serve on that court. In 1856, while on the Supreme Court, John heard the Dred Scott case, in which enslaved person Dred Scott sued for his freedom. Although the Supreme Court ruling determined that as a Black person, Scott had no legal right to sue, McLean's opinion dissented from that view, claiming that when his enslaver took him to a state in which slavery wasn't legal, he had in fact become free.

John ran unsuccessfully for president in both 1856 and 1860.

- Christian Null built a log cabin now known as the "Null House" in the Springboro area in 1798. It still stands today and is the oldest on-site log home in Warren County.
- Martin Keever came to Warren County in 1806, after fighting in the Revolutionary War with the Colonial Army. He bought 102 acres near the current town of Ridgeville, and built a home there in 1809, at the age of 82. The Keever farm was one of the oldest in Warren County, and the house's foundation still stands today.
- Samuel Gregg moved to Springboro in 1798. He and his wife Nancy Ann had 13 children and 35 grandchildren. Samuel and his sons built more than 100 homes and bank barns in the Springboro area. By 1830, the population of Springboro village and Clearcreek Township was about 1300 people.
- William Gregg, Samuel's eldest son, was raised as a Quaker, but changed his affiliation to Universalism, and helped form a society for building a Universalist church in the area.
- Edward and Elizabeth Dearth moved to what is now Warren County in 1798. They bought 1,400 acres that had been part of the Symmes Purchase (and then had to repurchase it because it was part of the land that Symmes didn't actually own). Their home became a meeting place for the Methodist Episcopal church. Edward took out the first license for a tavern in the county, and his house was a voting site for their township.
- Henry Stansel moved to Lexington, KY in the late 1780s, and lived there for several years, helping other settlers (including Daniel Boone) protect the new community. In 1802 he moved to Ohio and built a home and farm in north central Clearcreek Township. Henry's son Jeremiah

built and operated a hotel in Springboro and served as both the Springboro postmaster and a justice of the peace.

- Jesse Wilson emigrated to what would become Clear Creek Township from New Jersey in 1805, carrying grafts of fruit trees in his saddlebags. He became the first settler in the area to cultivate grafted fruit and contributed greatly to the proliferation of high-quality orchards throughout Warren County.
- Napoleon Johnson was an emancipated slave who moved to Springboro in 1848. He married Celia Anderson, who was also a freed slave. Their cabin became a stop on the Underground Railroad. Both of them worked, he as a plasterer and she was a housekeeper. Napoleon joined the U.S. Cavalry in 1864 and served during the last year of the Civil War. He and Celia lived out their days as respected citizens of the village.
- Griffy Griffis settled in Springboro around 1800. He built a brick house in town and paid land tax on 100 acres for a farm, but never actually bought any of the land. In 1808 he was forced to pay Daniel and Nancy Richardson \$340 for his farmland, and in 1817 he had to pay Jonathan Wright \$300 for the land on which his house sat. That building, known as the "Squatter's House," is now the Springboro Area Museum, at 110 S. Main Street.
- Rebecca Ellis and her husband Seth were both active in the Ohio Grange (which Seth founded). When the National Grange organization passed an edict that denied women voting privileges in 1875, Rebecca made it her mission to reverse the decision. She attended the 1876 National Convention and successfully lobbied for women to be given an equal vote. Rebecca also worked tirelessly for improvements in agricultural conditions, taxation, and other causes.

Clearcreek Township, and especially the village of Springboro, played a large role in the Underground Railroad (UGRR). The UGRR was a loosely organized network of people that helped freedom seekers escape slavery. "Conductors" guided them to safehouses like churches, schoolhouses, and homes, on their way from the South to Canada.

Springboro was largely made up of Quakers (Society of Friends), and the Friends were deeply committed to equality and freedom. The town had at least 18 documented safehouses, and there were another nine elsewhere in the township. The region contained one of the most critical UGRR routes in Ohio.

By the late 1800s, Clearcreek Township was home to a variety of religious organizations, including Quaker, Methodist, Baptist, Universalist, German Reformed, and United Brethren congregations. Quakers were especially active in early township life, not only working with the UGRR, but also opening Miami Valley College, which admitted both men and women (very unusual at the time), in 1870 near Springboro.



Dodd Canning Factory - Near old 122 and Utica Rd

Manufacturing in the township was limited, due to lack of water power. Clear Creek and its tributary streams supplied the energy for mills early on, but as the area was cleared and improved, they largely dried up. These changes also put a virtual end to some existing enterprises, such as the production of commercial quantities of maple molasses, sugar, and syrup. There were still many early manufacturing establishments, including a woolen factory, sawmill, drain tile factory, pottery works, tanneries, and a match factory. The township also had its share of the more traditional industries of the era, such as blacksmiths, cobblers and wagon makers.

Railroad service came to the township in 1881, when the Cincinnati, Lebanon & Northern Railroad put in a line through the Dodds-Utica area. Inter-urban rail service once connected Franklin with Lebanon through Red Lion, as well.



Red Lion Store- near SR 122 and SR 741

Clearcreek Township's original population was 840 but has since grown to over 36,000. Springboro's growth stagnated in the mid-1800s, because transportation advances like the canal system and railroads bypassed it. However, growth began in earnest with the addition of the I-75/ Ohio 73 freeway interchange in 1961. Springboro now has 19,062 residents along with 17,176 Township residents (2020 Census), and has been named one of CNN Money Magazine's top 100 places to live in the U.S.