

History

The Village of Milan, named after Milan, Italy, was the first settlement west of the Tuscarawas River in Stark County. The Village, located on the present site of Canal Fulton, was platted and recorded in Canton, Ohio on March 23, 1814. Seventy-nine lots were offered for sale at public auction. Market Street was the principal thoroughfare with cross streets named First to Fourth.

Several years after this, plans for the construction of a canal connecting Lake Erie to the Ohio River were prepared, and ground was broken near present day Newark on July 4, 1825. The canal route lay through Stark County and, as a result, its construction produced twenty-five new villages in the County from 1826-1836.

The first of these villages founded was Fulton. It was located on the east side of the Tuscarawas River opposite Milan. Two prominent Canton residents, James Lathrop and William Christmas, laid out the Village on May 16, 1826. The plat contained eighty-seven lots compared to the seventy-nine in Milan. Streets in Fulton paralleled the canal, while those in Milan were oriented to the north-south compass points. Two bridges connected the two villages.

In 1830, when the post office was established in Fulton, the community included three warehouses, two taverns, two stores, seven dwelling houses and forty inhabitants. In 1832, the name "Canal" was prefixed to Fulton as it seemed to convey a more dynamic quality. Several years later, the Village was incorporated and, in 1853, Canal Fulton, West Fulton and Milan merged to form one community.

The Ohio and Erie Canal was completed in 1832, at a cost of \$4.7 million. The route lay partially along the path of the Cuyahoga and Tuscarawas River valley, formerly the site of the most important north-south Indian trail in Eastern Ohio. The canal ran from Cleveland on Lake Erie to Portsmouth on the Ohio River. It was the first important commercial avenue in the state.

The census of 1840 reported that Stark County, as a direct result of the canal, was being transformed into one of the nation's greatest trade centers. Wheat, one of the primary exports, increased in price per bushel from ten cents to one dollar. However, the price of imported goods was reduced as a result of cheaper transportation costs and greater traffic volumes. With growing prosperity, land prices in the area skyrocketed five hundred percent.

Canal Fulton's commercial activity primarily served the canal traffic and the exporters of farm produce. Most of the business was conducted at two principal intersections, each distinctive in function and clientele. The Canal-Market Street intersection (Public Square) contained respectable businesses patronized by local residents. The lower intersection, Canal and Cherry Streets, were known as "Brimstone Corners" because liquor establishments were situated on

each corner. This very popular district was frequented by the canalers and others looking for action.

The most imposing structures were the warehouses, built for the storage of imports and exports. The best known hotel was the Babst Tavern. It was a pretentious hotel for its day; two full stories and a basement. The structure contained a bar, dining room, and kitchen on the first floor and a ladies' parlor and bedrooms on the second floor. In its day, the tavern resigned as one of the leading hotel along the canal.

The first permanent community school began operation in 1850. Prior to that time, frame buildings had been used for schools on both sides of the river. The Union School building was completed in 1855. Its two rooms could accommodate one hundred pupils.

The Canal Era began to come to an end in 1869 with the arrival of the railroad. Fortunately, coal mining gave impetus to the local economy after canal revenues declined. This change in the function of the Village was noted by the conversion of a warehouse into the Opera House in 1873. The six-story building was located on the northwest corner of Canal and Cherry Streets and seated 500 people. The Opera House was a leading community cultural center until it was destroyed by fire in 1930.

Canal Fulton had grown rapidly with its two main commercial ventures: canaling and coal mining. But, when these ceased, the population declined. This was due primarily to two reasons: 1) the railroad through Canal Fulton was not a main line, and 2) few industries had been established in the late 1800's which had been the basis for further growth.

Today, Canal Fulton serves the surrounding rural area as an education, retail, and transportation center. Several industries are located in the City, but most of the residents commute to work outside the community. In the 1990's, communities along the Ohio-Erie Canalway began working together to reconstruct the old canal towpath into a multi-use trail. Now with most of this trail completed in Cuyahoga, Summit, and Stark Counties, Canal Fulton has become a destination for cyclists, hikers, equestrian, and bird watchers throughout the region.

Tourism has become a major factor in Canal Fulton's commercial life, with its many quaint shops lining Canal Street. Rides on the St. Helena III, one of only four working canal boats in Ohio, also draws tourists from across the state.

Canal Fulton remains a vigorous community and its new potential for growth is now just beginning.