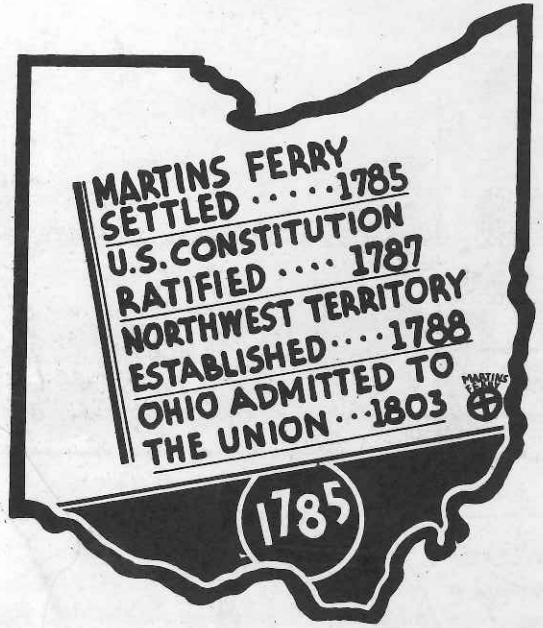
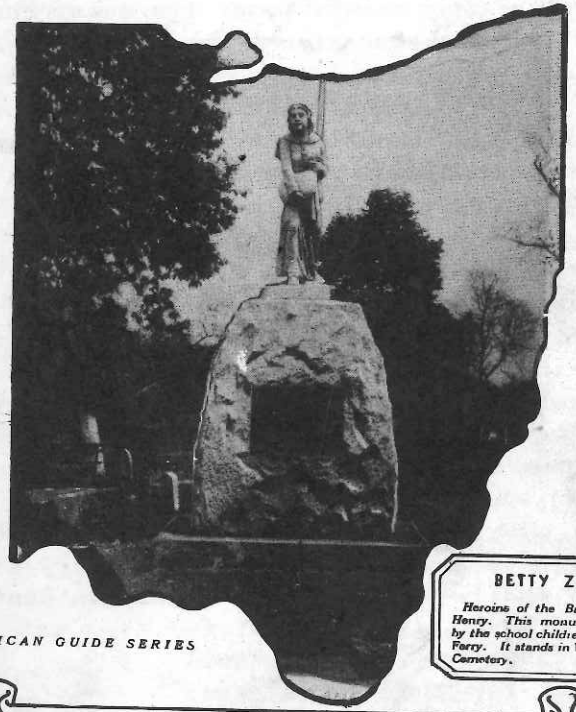


MARTINS FERRY

SESQUICENTENNIAL



BETTY ZANE

Heroine of the Battle of Fort Henry. This monument erected by the school children of Martins Ferry. It stands in Walnut Grove Cemetery.

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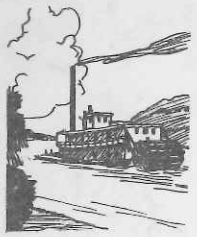
MARTINS FERRY SESQUICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE, INC.

1785 MARTINS FERRY 1937

THE OLDEST CITY IN THE STATE OF OHIO



The hemming hills to the west have forced Martins Ferry to spread out along the narrow flood plain with short side streets crossing the main thoroughfares at curious angles. As a result the community presents a variety of arrangements, both pleasing and satisfying, and departs noticeably from the stereotyped crosspatch arrangement of many towns. Today its squat business houses occupy the section nearest the river just as they did a century and more ago when the Ohio was the front door of the settlement. The passing years have witnessed the declining importance of this natural highway which, however, has never failed to contribute, year after year, to the city's prosperity.

The congested streets are filled with busy shoppers, some speaking the strange tongue of their native land, others speaking as did their ancestors - the founders of Martins Ferry. Into this melting pot have been poured many diverse strains, all being fused, gradually but no less surely, into true American citizens proud of the city of their adoption or birth.

Today the evidences of this pride can be seen in many phases of the city's contemporary life -- in the small, unpretentious homes, in neat gardens and lawns, in the willingness to labor for community welfare and for the common good, and in the absence of industrial strife. These have been, and will continue to be, the proud possession of Martins Ferry, city of steel mills and of colorful historic background.

HISTORY

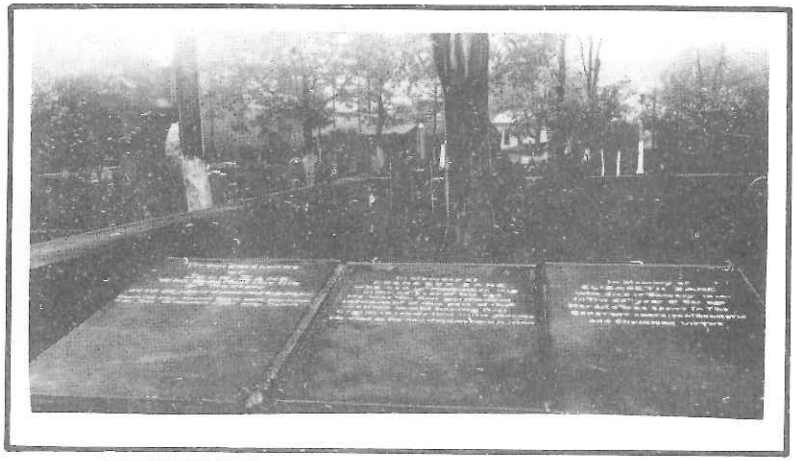
More than 150 years ago a band of sturdy and courageous pioneers came through dense forests and tangled underbrush, over rough streams and towering hills, arriving at length at the broad and beautiful Ohio River. Once on the Ohio, they made their way along its banks until they came to an ideal spot for the establishment of their homes. The place they selected is now known as Martins Ferry, and is in all probability the first city established in Ohio.

At this time there were small villages of Iroquois and Mingo Indians in the region. The Red Men complained that these white settlers were encroaching on their hunting grounds; and as early as 1778 Col. Broadhead reported to Gen. Washington that he had sent troops from Pittsburg to drive off a land company who were trespassing on the Indians opposite Wheeling.

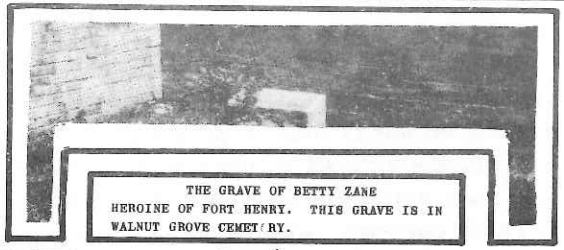
When it is remembered that the Ordinance of the Northwest Territory was not passed by Congress until July 13, 1787 and that the first settlement and establishment of government under the ordinance at Marietta did not come until 1788, it can readily be seen that Martins Ferry's claim of being the oldest city in Ohio is valid.

The claim is further supported by Dr. Archer Butler Hulbert of Marietta College in his historical work entitled *The Ohio River*. Dr. Hulbert makes the following statements:

"Beginning about 1780 a fringe of camps sprang up on the 'Indian side' of the Ohio. These were the first American pioneers to



THREE GRAVES IN WALNUT GROVE CEMETERY
THE GRAVE IN THE CENTER IS THAT OF EBENEZER ZANE WHO LIVED HERE IN 1769.



THE GRAVE OF BETTY ZANE
HEROINE OF FORT HENRY. THIS GRAVE IS IN WALNUT GROVE CEMETERY.

WALNUT GROVE CEMETERY
IN THIS CEMETERY ARE THE BODIES OF EBENEZER ZANE, FOUNDER OF WHEELING, EBENEZER MARTIN, FOUNDER OF MARTINS FERRY, ABSALOM MARTIN WHO RECEIVED FIRST GRANT OF LAND FROM GOVERNMENT, BETTY ZANE HEROINE OF FORT HENRY, AND MANY REVOLUTIONARY WAR, MEXICAN WAR AND CIVIL WAR VETERANS.

live on Ohio soil. It is difficult to count accurately these people but we know that by 1784-85, when the United States authorities attempted to stop the movement, the number of so-called illegal settlements was large.

"On March 31, 1785, Ensign Armstrong with twenty soldiers came down the river to drive back these settlers to the Virginia side of the Ohio. Armstrong reported that the settlers were coming in forties and fifties; and not only were they coming, but in their rough and ready way these first Ohioans had sought to establish civil government among themselves. At Martins Ferry two justices of the peace had been elected, and cases tried before them. There is evidence that this settlement was never broken up. This then is the oldest settlement of American pioneers in the State of Ohio."

Ebenezer Martin

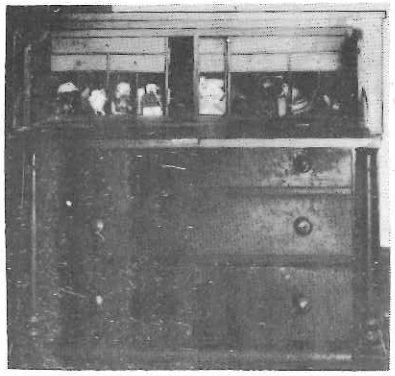
Records further indicate that Ensign Armstrong gave the early settlers in Martins Ferry until April 19, 1785, to move across the river. On his first visit he was forced to arrest a man named Ross who had berated the methods of the government. Ross was taken to Wheeling and placed in prison. But both Ross and the strong-minded pioneers stubbornly refused to be deprived of the new homes they had established; and in the fall of the same year when James Monroe (later President of the United States) visited Martins Ferry, he found that Ross had returned and that the citizens of this pioneer town had remained in spite of the Federal Government's order.

The settlement was first known as Norristown, and continued under that name until 1788, when Absalom Martin was granted the ground on which the city now stands. Failing in his efforts to make it the county seat, Martin left, believing that its proximity to Wheeling would hinder the

Chest of Drawers Used By Betty Zane

development of the town. In 1835 Ebenezer Martin re-platted the town and named it Martinsville, which name was changed later to Martins Ferry because another town in the State had prior claim to the name Martinsville.

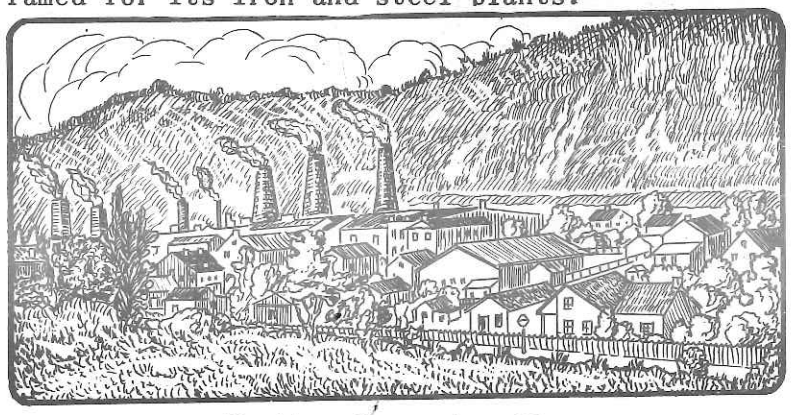
The second half of the town's new name referred to a ferry operated by Ebenezer Martin for the purpose of transferring hogs, sheep, and cattle from the East across the river into the newly settled lands of Ohio and the Northwest Territory. The first ferry used was a flat-bottomed scow rowed by sturdy ferrymen, but with the appearance of the steam ferry in 1841 the crude scow was outmoded. This phase of Martins Ferry history was a colorful one, with this constant flow of river traffic carried on by the rowdy, hard-working, hard-drinking boatmen and cattle drovers.



Ebenezer Martin's Desk

Martins Ferry was incorporated as a town in 1865. Before this it was an important station on the "Underground Railroad" system, by means of which slaves were assisted in escaping into free

territory. In the years following the Civil War excellent transportation facilities and a ready supply of coal provided the groundwork for the town's development as an important industrial center. The growth of Martins Ferry was steady and undiminished from this time onward, until today it is the largest community in Belmont Co., with a population of more than 16,000, and is famed for its iron and steel plants.



Martins Ferry in 1887

Points of Interest

Among the historic points of interest to be seen in Martins Ferry and vicinity are these:

WALNUT GROVE CEMETERY is one of the most interesting spots in the entire Ohio valley. Here are buried the famous pioneers, Ebenezer and Elizabeth Zane, together with many soldiers of the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Mexican War and Civil War. The cemetery is surrounded by a brick wall, and situated on a terrace overlooking the Ohio valley.

BETTY ZANE MEMORIAL is also located in the cemetery. This statue (*see cover photo*) was dedicated in 1928 in honor of Betty Zane for her heroism in the siege of Fort Henry in 1782. It was erected by the school children of Martins Ferry.

Soldiers' Monument

At the entrance to the cemetery is the PIONEER MARKER, bronze plaque mounted on a granite base. It is dedicated to the memory of the sturdy pioneers who settled here prior to 1785.

THE SHERMAN HOUSE, still standing but no longer used as a hotel, was once a very famous tavern. Such personages as Grant, Lee, Sherman, and Rutherford B. Hayes were guests here.

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD stations were located at Haines Mill, on Colerain Pike and at the house which still stands on the Woods property, North Third Street, in the city. From these points runaway slaves were sent on to Mt. Pleasant, which was the abolitionist headquarters of this section during the period preceeding the Civil War.

Located in the city park in the central section of Martins Ferry is the SOLDIERS' MONUMENT, a memorial dedicated to the World War dead of the city. The well-kept park provides playground and swimming facilities for the community.

Noted Personalities

Betty Zane

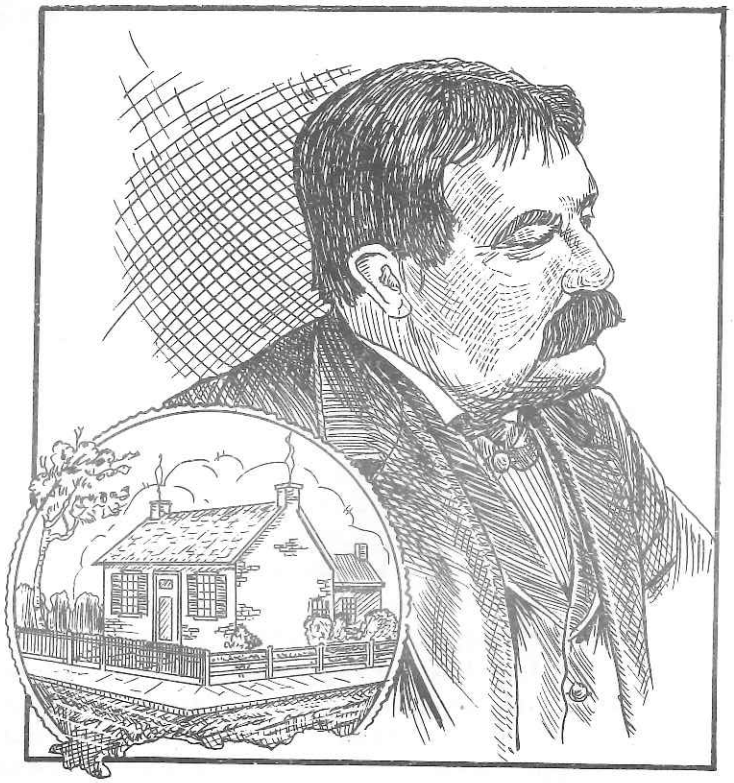
The story of Betty Zane's heroism at the siege of Fort Henry (located on the present site of Wheeling) was few equals in frontier history.

During the height of the fierce Indian attack on the fort, it was discovered that the supply of powder had run perilously low, threatening to bring an abrupt and bloody ending to the conflict. Betty volunteered to secure the needed powder from the Zane home outside the stockade. Immediate and violent protests were raised against her desperate plan, and a number of men stepped forward to take her place in the venture. She argued, however, that the Indians would stop firing when they saw a woman outside the stockade, and that, being young, she could perform the dangerous task more quickly than the older men. Her arguments won at last, and she slipped through the heavy gates and started out on her hazardous undertaking. The Indians stopped firing as she had predicted. Arriving at the supply house she filled her apron with powder and started back. Not until then did the Indians realize that they had been hoodwinked by a girl. They began firing, but it was too late. The gates of the stockade swung open and she entered, unscathed, but very exhausted by her ordeal. Her brave act saved the fort, and today Betty Zane lives in memory and legend as the most fearless heroine of the Ohio frontier.

William Dean Howells

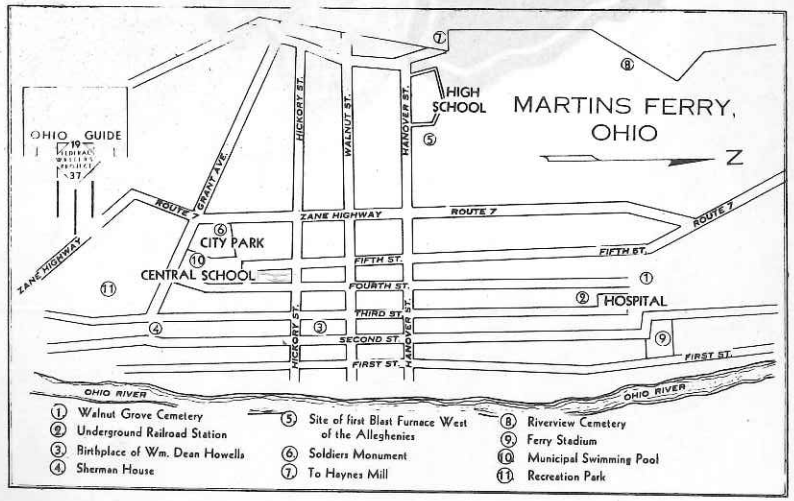
Often called the "Dean of American Letters", William Dean Howells is generally conceded to be the founder of the realist school of literature in America. He was born in a small brick cottage in Martins Ferry on March 1, 1837.

When Howells was yet an infant, his family removed to Butler County, where his father published the *Hamilton Intelligencer.* Later they moved again, this time to Dayton, in which city the elder Howells published the *Dayton Transcript,* and it was here that the great novelist got his first real training as a journalist. When his father's venture with the Dayton newspaper proved



William Dean Howells
INSET – *Howells' Birthplace in Martins Ferry*

a failure, Howells obtained a position on the *Ohio State Journal*, in Columbus, as a compositor, for which he received four dollars per week. At this time he was fourteen years of age. While there, he wrote a volume of poetry in collaboration with John J. Piatt, a fellow worker. Later he contributed poetry to the *Atlantic Monthly*, became a newspaper correspondent, and wrote a campaign life of Lincoln. From 1861 to 1864, he was consul at Venice. In 1866 he became assistant editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and later (1872-1881) editor-in-chief. However, Howells' greatest renown came as a novelist, his best-known work being *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. He died in 1920.

HAINES' MILL
Underground railroad station used by runaway slaves

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD STATION
The Woods property, N. 3rd. St.