



From Leatherlips to Microchips

Scott T. Weber, Burton, Ohio, February 1993

Seventy years after its founding by the Sells family in 1810, Dublin had its Wild West times and then a small band with a big heart tamed life down for a while.

When the Sells family first gazed out over what was to be Dublin in the early 1800's, they must have imagined Utopia. Here were the raw products that every beginning community hoped for: high limestone banks along the Scioto River that resisted flooding, plenty of hardwood timber, good clean springs in the rocks, friendly Indians and plentiful game and fish. While the river was low most of the year, it had the promise of flooding in the spring which would propel a man and his flatboat clear to New Orleans, if he had a mind to go that far. There were limestone rocks for foundations and walls and fences, clay for the potter and sites on the river for gristmills and sawmills. And certainly there were plusses that no other community had. Spilling into the Scioto was a wide, two-mile gash (later to be called Indian Run) that promised well-irrigated farmland on both sides once the trees were cleared. And the new town was centrally located between major trading posts—like a spider in the middle of its web.

All of this was dancing in the head of Ludwick Sells, a tavern keeper from Huntingdon, Pa., who moved to Franklinton (west Columbus) in 1800. So impressed was he by his numerous scouting and camping trips to the Virginia Military District land that in 1801 Sells sent two of his sons, Peter and Benjamin, up river to purchase 400 acres where the village of Dublin now stands for their brother, John, 100 acres for himself, and 300 acres north for his other sons.

For eight years the Selles took as many trips as possible up the Scioto from Franklinton to observe their new purchase. By 1806

they had a deed and a mortgage. In May of 1809, during the spring floods of the Scioto, John Sells poled a flat-bottomed boat up river to claim his 400 acres. With him was his pregnant wife and a flashy black Kentucky-bred stallion with the princely sum of \$350. In just a few weeks he was able to fashion a crude log cabin on the river bank just south of a particularly active and clean spring near the present location of the Dublin bridge. On August 16, 1809, Sells' wife gave birth to the first white child born in the newly-christened "Sells Settlement".

That fall, Sells built another log structure, the Black Horse Tavern; to attract travelers' eyes, he fashioned a crude sign with the likeness of his black stallion. Sells Settlement was a welcome relief to roadmen and soldiers before they made the last 12 miles to Franklinton. The Black Horse became known as a landmark for both white and red men. One Wyandot chief, Shateyoranyah, or Leatherlips as the settlers called him, was a favorite of John Sells and encouraged white settlement in the area. Above the line of Sells cabins and the tavern where High Street now stands was an Indian trace that Indian parties from Upper Sandusky used in the spring, their horses laden with bales of beaver, mink and wolf pelts, deer hides and maple syrup to trade with a French trader in Franklinton for powder and ball, beads, blankets and traps. On the way to and from, they found John Sells a willing barterer and friend and one who would listen to their stories and allow them to camp on the steps of the Black Horse Tavern. Journals of the period describe groups of Indians sitting cross legged around Sells' door telling stories of their hunts and conquests.

While the Sells Settlement enjoyed no threat of Indian attack, the calm was shattered on the evening of June 1, 1810, when six Wyandot warriors led by a Chief Roundhead inquired at the Black horse Tavern for the camp of Leatherlips. "Equipped in the most war-like manner and exhibiting during their stay an unusual degree of agitation," as John Sells would state 20 years later in his written account of the matter, the six war-painted braves cradled English rifles in their arms; tomahawks and long knives were stuck in their belts. Somewhat reluctantly Sells directed them to Leatherlips' lodge, which was two miles up river in a grove of sugar trees.

What Sells did not know at he time was that these six warriors were a death squad hand-picked by the mighty war chief Tecumseh's brother, the Prophet, who had singled out Leatherlips as one of the key chiefs who would not allow his Wyandot people to join the swelling ranks of the 1,000 brave alliance gathered less than a week's ride from Sells Settlement in Propohet's Town near Tippecanoe. Leatherlips was among a handful of chiefs who not only opposed Tecumseh's alliance, but had sold Indian land east of the Wabash to William Henry Harrison — a man especially hated by the Prophet for various war crimes. The verdict of the Prophet: execution for treason and witchcraft.

Afraid to follow the war party in the ensuing dark to help his friend, John Sells alerted the other settlers and waited until morning before gathering three of his brothers and a settler, George Ebey, then saddling up his black stallion and heading for Leatherlips's camp. When John Sells and his party arrived they found Leatherlips with his hands bound behind his back and

Roundhead deep in his accusations against the old chief.

Desperate to save his friend, John Sells offered his Kentucky stallion in exchange for the chief's life. "Let me see him," said Roundhead. Sells trotted the horse for them in the camp clearing and the Indians poked his satin hide, the prize being so great they retired to a lengthy council. Perhaps fearing repercussions from the Prophet, they emerged from their consultation two hours later and rejected the tempting offer. Roundhead pointed to the sun and swept his finger across the sky — the execution would be at four o'clock that afternoon.

Leatherlips accepted his fate. He walked to his lodge, washed himself, put on his best buckskins and beads and carefully painted his face with scarlet, blue and white clay scooped from small pots. He shook the hands of the Sells brothers and George Ebey, then paused for several moments gazing into the eyes of John Sells.

Leatherlips began his death chant and the Sells men followed the six warriors about 80 yards into the woods where they halted by a shallow grave. Here the old chief knelt and prayed and Roundhead prayed beside him for a time. Roundhead straightened up and with a wave of his hand called one of the braves up behind the kneeling Leatherlips. The warrior drew a bright tomahawk from the folds of his kapote, paused for a second with it high above his head, then brought it down with all his weight into the back of Leatherlips's head, nearly cleaving his skull.

With Leatherlips dead, the powerful Wyandot nation would join Tecumseh's war council and adopt the teachings of the Prophet in a last ditch effort to drive whites from the Great Lakes area.

Later in 1810, Sells began to survey his 400 acres into town plots. Sells Settlement had gained a Methodist Episcopal Church in 1807 and a Christian Church which met in settlers' cabins. A Franklinton resident and itinerant Methodist minister, John Shields, preached sermons. In addition to preaching, Shields was a fine stonemason and surveyor and helped Sells lay out the plots. When he was finished, Sells asked him to help name the new town. Shields replied, "If I have the honor conferred upon me to name your village...surrounding this beautiful valley, it would give me great pleasure to name your new town after my

birthplace, Dublin, Ireland."

Peter and Benjamin Sells built and operated the town's first gristmill on the banks of the Scioto. The mill was operated by George Ebey until 1855 when John Corbin completely rebuilt the structure with frame siding. By 1900 the mill was in ruins and the flood of 1913 dashed it to mere foundation rocks.

John Sells started a distillery near the present Dublin bridge and built a hatter shop, which he later trained his two sons, Charles and Eliud, to run. For years travelers knew the business as "the hatter shop on the way to Franklinton." John Ashbaugh set up a pottery shop along the river in 1813 and did a lively business selling earthenware dishes and cups not only to settlers and travelers, but to dozens of Indians who traded for his goods. Farmland continued to be cleared and the downed trees were dragged by horse and oxen to a sawmill John Sells built on Indian Run.

In 1818 John Sells ran an ad in the *Columbus Gazette* stating that on April 10 he would sell 200 acres in the new town of Dublin. As an incentive he offered one year's credit for the first payment and the balance in two yearly payments. He cited the fact that there was ample stone, lime, sand, and excellent clay for bricks, several clean springs and "excellent sawmills and grist mill adjoining. This town stands on a high bank and is known to be remarkably healthy," the bill read.

Few took John Sells up on his offer despite the reasonable terms. The country was in a depression and Columbus was drawing the settlers. The 1820's saw several new businesses, however; Basil Brown arrived in 1826 and ran a successful shoe store. Joseph Button and Giles Weaver were saddlemakers. The Indian Trace on top of the river bank became the present High Street (Upper St.) and Eliud Sells moved the Black Horse Tavern there. The post office was commissioned in 1820. John Sells and Moses Davis floated flatboats loaded with flour from the gristmill down river to New Orleans for sale; their profits barely covered the trip back, but they were heroes when they rode back to Dublin.

By 1830 Dublin was prosperous enough to attract the services of a handsome 34-year-old physician, Dr. Albert Chapman, who settled in town and promptly carried on a much-talked-about love affair with

16-year old Lucy Sells, daughter of John Sells. When the good doctor, a learned and well-bred gentleman from the East decided to marry Lucy, a prominent church-going young lady, John Sells was so delighted he built them a fine limestone house with deep, walnut-lined windows on High Street.

The limestone Chapman house was for many years a landmark on the "upper street." Lucy would have circuit ministers stay for as long as six weeks when they preached in the Dublin area. The doctor opened a store in Dublin and later turned to real estate dealing when John Sells died in 1841 and left no will — the burden of land dispersal left to Lucy.

By 1840 there was a need to bridge the Scioto and eliminate the problem of fording the river, especially during the spring floods. Elisha Hays was commissioned to do the work and a wood covered bridge was built; it lasted in several forms and rebuilds until 1880, when a steel span was constructed.

In 1842 Dr. Eli Morrison Pinney became Dublin's second doctor and continued his practice for over 60 years. Dr. Pinney was an abolitionist and listed his fine brick house as a stop on the Underground Railroad for slaves fleeing along the Scioto River north to Canada. When slaves climbed the riverbank, they hid behind brush along the side of the house and talked to Dr. Pinney through a copper speaking tube that ran through the south wall to the parlor. The slaves were fed and rested in Pinney's horse stable at the back of the property, then given food and provisions for their journey north.

Dublin was not without its tragedies; shortly before noon, one hot August morning in 1878, Dr. Summerbell, one of the Christian Church's ministers, was leading a hymn when he looked over the heads of his congregation and saw a curl of smoke and flame shooting from E.W. Tuller's General Store and Drug. Hymnals flew and babies wailed as the congregation rushed to the site, hanging Sunday coats and hats on the trees and hitching posts along South High Street, and formed a long line from the spring down by the bridge. Dozens of buckets were passed up and down the line and dashed onto the store and adjoining buildings. Others raced in among the flames and pulled produce and dry goods into the street. By 2 pm the flames had totally destroyed the frame store and were burning Dr. Pinney's office and John Boord and

William Pinney's "Meat Shop and Oyster Depot" two doors down. Word shot down the water line that the whole town might be consumed by the terrible conflagration. Swift riders were dispatched to enlist the help of Worthington's fire pump. "The town was almost doomed and took a terrible scorching," reported the Columbus Gazette the next morning. Finally the townspeople were able to saturate Woodruff Tuller's home enough to halt the fire's spread after it consumed one block.

In the 1880's Dublin was known as the roughest frontier town in the area. Five saloons on the main street garnered a lively business at all hours of the day and night, seven days a week. Young men raced their buckboards and horses through town throwing mud over porches and shop windows. There were drunken brawls and cussing matches and rock fights in the streets with rival gangs from Worthington and Columbus.

There was a saying around the county that "Dublin's rocks had handles on them" and a smart traveler wouldn't approach Dublin without "a rock in each hand" to protect himself. Even the local doctor took to carrying a billy club in his surrey for traveling the outlying roads. By the late 1880's other communities penciled a tribute to the "river rats" of Dublin:

*"Dublin, Dublin, city of beautiful roses,
Gouged out eyes and bloody noses,
If it weren't for the solid rock foundation,
It'd be gone to hell and damnation."*

The ruffians were causing not only a dangerous situation, but an embarrassment for the prominent members of the community, especially those who had political aspirations, like the wealthy land baron and store owner E.W. Tuller. Before ordinances could be passed and outlaws jailed, the town had to be incorporated. So in September of 1881 Dublin became an incorporated village. T.J. Steinbower, the village blacksmith, a man large of stature as well as pocket-book, was elected mayor. E.W. Tuller, who would be elected to the state legislature in 1899 and who owned half of Dublin, was elected treasurer and Milton Smiley, clerk.

The new town fathers lost little time evicting the law breakers. They built a jail by the old school house on North High Street for \$34.17 and hired John Wing as the first marshal. Wing promptly deputized John Boord, a storekeeper, and Richard

Billingsly to help bring in the hellraisers. To keep the jail well-populated and fine revenues up, the mayor and his council passed ten ordinances regulating disorderly offenses prohibiting intoxication, obscene language, quarreling and gambling, and regulating the speed of horses and mules through the village.

The ordinances had little effect. The jail overflowed, but revenues from fines were quickly exhausted to feed the prisoners and pay the doctor who dressed their wounds. A couple of weeks after the last of the ordinances were passed "a roving band of young rock-throwing men from Worthington", as the *Columbus Gazette* reported in 1882, poured from a Dublin saloon late one night and challenged the Dublin boys to a rock fight. The "townspeople fled for cover under a hail of stones," and all the windows in the drug store, general store and the saloon were shattered, as well as the glass from several homes on High St. The town fathers ordered all saloons closed for 24 hours while they huddled in an emergency session. Effective immediately an ordinance was drafted that prohibited throwing rocks within the town limits; fifty more laws were passed to regulate the proper hitching of horses and mules, prevent fishing on the Sabbath and swimming in the Scioto from sunup to sundown. As a final jolt to the drunken rowdies, an ordinance was passed in 1895 requiring that all saloons close on Sunday.

Into this Wild West atmosphere in August, 1890, came a group of nine musicians and an able, college-educated director, Charles Erwin Davis. The Grey Eagle Band (later changed to the Dublin Cornet Band) provided wholesome entertainment at parades, fairs and special events. Blue uniforms with brass buttons and instruments were furnished quickly by a community anxious to rid itself of a "tarnished reputation". A four-hitch, brightly painted wagon was custom-built in Columbus and allowed the band to travel to London, Marysville, Magnetic Springs and Columbus to play at fairs, dedications and parades.

The Cornet Band was not exempt from the mischief of the period. "Penalties of one, or even two dollars, were laid upon members who returned from playing engagements with too hilarious a spirit," stated a band program. When members grew older, the after-practice location was moved to the saloons where bartenders graciously

allowed them to continue playing their instruments until the early morning. Many a jolly salute of trumpet blast was heard down the old Dublin streets as the members returned home.

By the turn of the century, with the saloons contained and troublemakers ordained into submission, Dublin had a community problem of quite a different dimension — religion. There were three churches in town, all fighting for a majority share of the community's sparse attendance. The Christian Church was on Rt. 161 near the cemetery, the Methodist Church on South High St. and the Presbyterian Church on North High. None of the three could afford a resident minister and all received missionary aid. There was considerable squabbling about the division of the community.

As many worshipers would later say, the Lord solved the problem. On Sunday, June 16, 1912, at 12:40 pm, just as the three congregations had safely reached their homes from morning services, a tornado struck Dublin. The main funnel touched down in the graveyard, flattening 50 tombstones and then skipping over the Christian Church's belfry and breaking into two smaller funnels. The south funnel passed over the tops of several homes, shattering chimneys and taking out some trees, then sweeping low only long enough to flatten the frame Methodist Church. The north funnel worked along High Street, doing minimal damage until it reached the Presbyterian Church, where it ripped off the belfry and blasted the roof from its supports. No injuries or deaths were reported.

Shortly after the tornado, the Christian Church welcomed the other two congregations and on March 4, 1913, the three churches officially become the Dublin Community Congregational Church. The first service after the alliance was attended by 228-more people than had belonged to all three congregations combined.

In the 1920's farming and quarrying were Dublin's main economy. The steam thresher helped harvest as gangs of up to 40 men and boys separated wheat and helped each other get crops in. The first gas tractor was in Dublin by 1930.

The Depression in Dublin was eased by storekeepers who sought to increase store traffic on Saturday night by showing movies on a large white screen set up on High St. Farmers brought their produce to swap at

the markets and later brought their chairs or blankets to watch Charlie Chaplin, westerns and early science fiction films. Swimming at the “Old Rock” on the Scioto was popular, even though it was illegal. Kids made soap box derby cars and raced from the old blacksmith shop down over the Dublin bridge; their parents put their Fords in neutral and took turns seeing who could cruise the furthest from the top of the 161 hill, through town and past the church—the prize for one competition was a new set of wire wheels.

The economy was boosted by the WPA project to build the Dublin stone bridge in 1935; several area stonemasons — Dan Eger, Ticky Wing, Eli Pinney — served as workers on the construction. The new bridge made Dublin more accessible from Columbus and Eastern Franklin County, but it would take 40 more years and Jack Nicklaus’ vision of a championship golf course to transform the village from a rural hamlet to a bustling suburban center.

SOURCES

“Shanachie: A magazine of Dublin culture and history”; “The Faces of Old Dublin”, Volume V, 1993.