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The Connecticut Western Reserve

At present the term Western Reserve has only an historical meaning; but to the Medina pioneers it had immediate significance, because originally Medina was a part of this unique section of Ohio.

What are its unique characteristics? First, that the State of Connecticut was permitted to retain this part of her western lands in 1787 when the other states ceded theirs to the federal government; and secondly, the way in which Connecticut disposed of this huge piece of land which extended westward 120 miles from the Pennsylvania-Ohio boundary and southward from Lake Erie to the forty-first parallel, comprising an area of over 3,000,000 acres. The Western Reserve may also be described as a somewhat irregular quadrilateral in northeastern Ohio, with Conneaut, Youngstown, Willard, and Port Clinton at its corners. A glance at the map will show that the forty-first parallel is the southern boundary of both Connecticut and of the Western Reserve.

Several of the original colonies held grants of land which extended as far west as the Pacific Ocean because of the royal ignorance of or disdain for North American geography. Shortly after the beginning of the development of the Connecticut Colony, this small area became so overcrowded that groups of its citizens migrated to the Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania. There they established settlements, as this land was also included in Connecticut's original grant from Charles II of England. These claims caused a series of bloody struggles between the Connecticut settlers and the Pennsylvanians, because the Connecticut claims conflicted with the claims of the proprietors of Pennsylvania. These struggles are referred to in history as the Pennamite Wars.

After the Revolution the other states ceded their western lands to the federal government, but Connecticut was permitted to retain or reserve a section in Ohio approximately equal to what she had lost in the Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania. This land was given the name the Connecticut Western Reserve or New Connecticut.

The Connecticut Legislature sold this entire parcel to a group of land speculators for the sum of \$1,200,000, with the proceeds of this sale going to the Connecticut school fund. Originally a group of thirty-five men, including Elijah Boardman, who subsequently owned most of Medina Township, negotiated the purchase and formed themselves into the Connecticut Land Company. Each of the purchasers was granted a deed for his proportionate share of the still unsurveyed and undivided Reserve. The corporation eventually included other interested men who had been represented by the original thirty-five, bringing the total number of members of the Land Company to fifty-seven.

The seven directors of the Company had the property surveyed into townships five miles square and also carefully had the Indian titles extinguished, for the eastern part of the Reserve in 1796, and for the part west of the Cuyahoga River and the Portage Path, in which Medina is situated, in 1806. Also in the spring of 1806 the survey of this western part got under way.

In order to divide the land holdings of the Company as equitably as possible, the Connecticut Land Company held drawings for the shareholders in Hartford, in which each investor or group of investors drew his proportionate share of land. These investors then re-sold their holdings in the Reserve either to prospective settlers or to other land speculators who in turn ultimately sold to settlers. Often a piece of land would be re-sold many times before a real settler would take possession.

The Connecticut Land Company was dissolved as a corporation in 1809, five years before Zenas Hamilton, the first permanent settler, arrived in Medina Township. In 1816 Rufus Ferris established himself within the future limits of Medina Village to represent Elijah Boardman as his land agent.

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