

The following is excerpted from "Images of Parma" by Diana J. Eid

What was Parma before it became the big city it is today?

To get an idea, the area known in the Western Reserve as Township 6, Range 13 was once called Greenbrier after the many thorny bushes that filled the area. Imagine traveling by foot or wagon hundreds of miles to arrive at a destination only to have to hack a clearing out of the woods. That is just what the first settlers did when they arrived in the area in 1816. In doing so, they made that clearing their home and soon set out to build up the land. The first settler was a merchant and soon after arriving saw an opportunity for business. In 1819, this merchant and his family built a home and turned it into an inn and tavern. Business soon began to thrive as more settlers landed in the area. People in Cleveland were referring to the area as Briar Hill. Somewhere along the line, a medical doctor in Cleveland named Dr. David Long visited the Duchy of Parma, Italy, and was very impressed with the area. He came back into town and persuaded the people of Greenbrier that they should have a better name. He suggested the name of Parma to them, which they accepted.

In 1826, the township of Parma was formed when settlers separated themselves from Brooklyn Township. It was also in this year that the first and second school districts were formed. Parma was steadily on its way. Around this time, the town was also divided into road districts, and many roads had simple names. For instance, Ridge Road was once called Center Road, mainly because it ran through the center of town.

By 1840, there were 963 people living in Parma. While the land was quickly becoming occupied with new arrivals, there was still a problem with the number of bears, wolves, and rattlesnakes that were destroying farm animals and crops. In 1842, a hunting party was organized and lasted several days in an attempt to rid the area of these animals that were wreaking havoc. From 1850 to 1910, Parma's population growth slowed down, as there was very little land available for purchase, having been used mostly for farming. Early records show that a few businesses were already in the community. In 1876, there were blacksmith shops and repair shops in the area, while grocery stores were many miles apart from each other. Around this time, Parma and its surrounding towns were expanding as bridges and plank roads were now being built. In 1912, a portion of Parma broke off and became known as Parma Heights. Some say it had to do with the Temperance Movement, which was a social movement against the use of alcohol. Since Parma had an abundance of taverns and inns, many believed the people of Parma Heights wanted to form their own community that would give them the right to make their own laws and government. The U.S. census of 1920 listed Parma Heights's population at 310, while Parma had 2,345 people.

After World War I, many developers started looking at land in the area. They wanted to build, and soon after many homes appeared in Parma. Howard A. Stahl was Parma's first major land developer and was responsible for much of the layout of Parma's streets. Today, the dinkey streetcar soon became a regular fixture for transportation in the area. In 1924, the people voted and Parma was incorporated as a village. The first mayor of the village of Parma was John F.

Goldenbogen.

During this time, a new town hall was built. The previous one had been in an old schoolhouse at Ridge Road and Bean Road (now Ridgewood Drive). The city continued to thrive. In 1927, Parma was considered Cleveland's fastest-growing suburb. With a population of 2,345 in 1920, by 1930 it was booming with over 13,000 people. More schools were being constructed as well as businesses and homes.

Parma became a city in 1931. However, it wasn't as joyous an occasion as it should have been. The 1930s saw the Depression, which had an effect everywhere, including Parma. Wages of employees were cut in order to keep the city afloat, and many people were unemployed at the time. There was talk of the city and school district annexing to Cleveland, but the people took a vote and decided against it. By the beginning of the 1940s, Parma was beginning to emerge again with more growth around the city.

After World War II ended, many soldiers came home and needed a place to raise their families. Many of them moved to Parma. Abandoned streets were rebuilt, and new homes sprouted up everywhere. The 1940s and 1950s saw much growth to the industrial side of the city. The General Motors Chevrolet Plant was being constructed in 1947, and the Union Carbide Research Center was established as well. More schools were being built to keep up with the growing area. In 1950, the population was over 28,000, but by 1960 it had tripled to more than 82,000 people. The 1960s saw many shopping plazas pop up in the area as well as Parmatown Mall. Parma Community General Hospital also opened its doors during this time. Even a new city hall was built to keep up with the city's rapid expansion. Parma was known at this time as the fastest growing city not only in Ohio but also in the United States.

Parma is a unique city and has had its share of visitors. From the president stopping by to make a speech to local comedians doing spoofs on Parma, each and every event has made this city into what it is today. It is interesting to note that no one person can be credited with shaping the city. The first settlers might have had a vision of what they wanted Parma to be, and along the way, every citizen of the city, even now, has united to keep Parma strong. The city is still growing, but one thing remains the same, and that is the loyalty each resident has to preserving history.

"In the Beginning"

In 1816, a man named Benajah Fay, his wife, Ruth, and their 10 children arrived on a piece of land identified by the Western Reserve as Township as Township 6, Range 13. They decided to make this area their home. Benajah and Ruth had come from Lewis County, New York, and they most likely arrived in this area for the land and better opportunities. The family soon set out to clear a patch of land in which to live on. They settled on what is now Theota Avenue at the intersection of Pearl and Ridge Roads.

About a year later, another family arrived, and soon thereafter Parma had a small group of settlers who had decided to stay in the area. Benajah and Ruth had the first child born in Parma,

in 1720, and named her Mabel. The first death in Parma was that of Isaac Emerson in 1823, and the first marriage in Parma took place between Lois Small of Parma and Ephraim Fowles of Middleburg Heights.

By 1820, the inn and tavern that Benajah worked to build was becoming a busy place, as it was the "No. 2 stop on the Cleveland-Columbus stagecoach line. Blacksmith and repair shops as well schools and churches were erected in the area, as the residents decided that they wanted to stay and build on this land that they had chosen to settle on. By 1850, Parma had around 1,500 people living in the area, which was a big change from 1816 when there were only 500 people living in the same area, which was a big unique change from the 1816 when there were only 12.

As more settlers arrived, they brought unique skills. Chapter One of this book, **Images of America Parma** by Diana J. Eid, shows early images of Parma citizens as far back as the late 1800s. While the farms and businesses are no longer there, these photographs serve as reminders of how the early residents lived and what they did to help Parma grow.

"Just Parma"

Parma is said to be named after a city in Italy. While it may share a similar name, its personality is far from the same. Many of the early settlers in Parma were of German descent. Over time, the city has become a mixture of different cultures. Parma's history is rich and has had many events for which it was made famous. In earlier times, Parma Day was a yearly celebration by the residents, as was the Ice Carnival, and later on, Nationality Day made its way through the city to celebrate the diversity of its people. Other events, such as National Milk Week and Pancake Day, also helped to put Parma on the map.

While many people think that Parma may be just an average city, it has had some very interesting visitors. For instance, comedian Bob Hope made appearances in Parma. Other famous local personalities include Ghoulardi and Big Chuck. Actor and comedian Drew Carey had a theme song for his television show called "Moon Over Parma". More recently, he ordered 45 pizzas from his favorite pizza establishments, Antonio's Pizza in Parma, and had them delivered to him in California. Many political figures have also made appearances in the city. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter came to Parma to speak with senior citizens and community leaders. President Bill Clinton always made sure to make a stop at Parma Pierogies when campaigning in the city. In 2008, Hillary Clinton paid a visit to Grace's Grille on Pleasant Valley Road to talk about health care.