

History of Hudson

The history of Hudson actually begins in Connecticut. The colony of Connecticut had, from 1632, laid claim to a 120-mile stretch of Ohio territory, which came to be known as the Connecticut Western Reserve. After an Indian war was won in the region, the Reserve seemed ripe for settlement. On September 2, 1795, Connecticut sold the Reserve to a land syndicate comprised of 35 investors known as the Connecticut Land Company. The sale was concluded for \$1,200,000 for the estimated 3 million acres, or roughly 40 cents per acre.

The Connecticut Land Company, eager to earn profits through sales to settlers, quickly organized a survey team to scout out the Reserve. In 1799, David Hudson, a shareholder in the Reserve, led a party of surveyors through the wilderness of the Eastern forests to the Reserve itself. After an arduous expedition, the party eventually reached the territory and conducted its work, and on June 26, 1799, David Hudson arrived on what was to become Hudson Township. Leaving a contingent of the party to begin settlement, Hudson returned home to gather his family and possessions, and arrived again for permanent settlement on May 28, 1800. David later built his own home in 1806, where he would live until his death in 1836. Located on 318 Main Street, this house is the oldest structure standing in Summit County. In honor of David Hudson, the tiny settlement was officially named "Hudson" in 1802.

Although the journey to Hudson was difficult and perilous, settlers began trickling in, and slowly the community went through growing pains. On October 28, 1800, the first child was born. A year later, the first wheeled vehicle arrived. In 1802, the first school, a log cabin in the central park, was built. In that same year, the Congregational Church was established, with David Bacon as Hudson's first pastor. In 1806, the first stores and frame houses were built. Hudson experienced a period of growth and prestige in 1826, when due to the efforts of David Hudson, a college was chartered in the town. Named Western Reserve College, it was one of the only institutions of higher learning in the region, complete with the Loomis Observatory, the only observatory west of the Alleghenies at that time. The College soon became known as "The Yale of the West." The institution remained in Hudson until 1882, when it moved to Cleveland as Western Reserve University. The campus facilities in Hudson were reopened as the Western Reserve Academy, a preparatory school.

Only a year after the founding of the College, Hudson also witnessed the completion of the nearby Akron-Cleveland section of the Ohio-Erie Canal. This transportation hub helped the town continue its growth. In 1837, Hudson was officially incorporated as the "Town of Hudson, Township of Hudson, County of Portage."

Hudson's growth continued from 1850 until the outbreak of the Civil War. Known as the Business Boom, the town's population and the number of businesses increased during this time. With the growth of railroad, mills, warehouses, and printing presses sprung up throughout the town. By the mid 1850s, decadence had spread throughout Hudson, with saloons outnumbering churches, and many citizens who staked their life savings on railroad shares speculation. In 1857, the bubble burst, and railroad stocks plummeted. Many Hudson residents lost everything, signaling the end of a prosperous era for the Ohio economy.

Although the Civil War did not begin until 1860, in Hudson, issues surrounding the conflict had evident in Hudson. With its strong religious influences, Hudson society was adamantly opposed to slavery. The abolitionist movement had strong roots in the town. In fact, Hudson had such a reputation for its vocal antislavery rhetoric, that traveling abolitionist preachers often visited the town. Hudson became an active link along the famous Underground Railroad. Citizens helped fleeing slaves by hiding them in their homes and helping them on their journey to freedom in Canada. Today, Hudson has several underground tunnels below its streets. Some homes still have secret rooms and passages, all surviving evidence of this period in history.



Perhaps the most famous story of Hudson's Civil War period is that of John Brown, of Harpers Ferry fame. The Brown family, who had lived in Hudson since 1805, were active abolitionists who participated in the Underground Railroad. John Brown, educated at the cabin school near the downtown Green, became a militant adversary of slavery, eventually becoming involved in the violence in Kansas in 1854. In the summer of 1859, he organized and launched the famous attack on the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry. Following the defeat of Federal forces in the Shenandoah Valley, Washington petitioned Hudson for volunteers to serve in the Union Army for three months. Ultimately, 150 men signed on to fight for the Union cause.

Although Hudson continued to flourish after the Civil War, by 1882, a series of disasters threw the town into a state of distress. The first blow came in that year, when Western Reserve College relocated to Cleveland. In 1890, a fire broke out, consuming an important mill and a factory. Only two years later, a second fire erupted on Main Street, destroying homes and businesses. The final blow to the town came in 1904, when Hudson's only bank, the Produce Exchange Bank of Cleveland, suddenly closed its doors following an embezzlement case. Many citizens' savings were wiped out by the closure. Taken together, these tragedies sent Hudson into an economic slump, which, were it not for the intervention of one man, would have left the town in distress for the foreseeable future.



James W. Ellsworth, a native of Hudson, had grown up to become a millionaire, making a fortune in the coal industry. Going into an early retirement, Ellsworth returned to his hometown in 1907 and was heartbroken by what he saw. At that time, Hudson was in serious deterioration. The town had no electricity, water, or sewer services. Its streets were unpaved, the business district derelict, and its population in decline. Ellsworth had both the resources and will to intervene on the town's behalf. Before embarking on his enterprise, the only request he made to town authorities was to rescind all local liquor licenses. Hudson officials complied.

Vowing to reinvent Hudson as a "New Model Town," Ellsworth made a series of sweeping proposals to transform Hudson into a modern, vibrant community. His efforts were comprehensive: paved roads, electrical, water, and sewer services, telephone lines, a reorganization of the school system, tree planting, and revitalized banking. In 1912, as a symbol of these efforts, Ellsworth constructed the Clock Tower on the Green, easily the most enduring icon of Hudson. Four years later, again thanks to Ellsworth, Western Reserve Academy officially opened, operating on the grounds of the old Western Reserve College. Hudson was indeed reborn.

James Ellsworth died in 1925 and was buried in Hudson, ending an important era in the town's history. Thanks to his efforts, Hudson continued to grow and prosper into a vibrant modern town. The town increased in population. With tax revenues, Hudson steadily expanded its land base through land purchases and developed its public services. The story of Hudson from 1950 to the present has been one of growth, but also of a struggle to retain the town's rich history and unique charm. Visitors to Hudson are struck by the character of the town's old buildings and homes, and often describe the Hudson as having a quaint, New England charm. Indeed, Hudson's history is evident and beckons visitors to walk the City streets and relive its long and colorful story.

After the 1990 US Census, Hudson became a City and it was certified in a proclamation from the Secretary of State in March, 1991. The subsequent merger of the City and township following the election in November, 1993, with the merger becoming official on January 1, 1994. Today, the Hudson Historic Downtown District includes many commercial and residential buildings that are on the National Register of Historic Places. Hudson residents take great pride in the community's past and its ongoing efforts to preserve the historic character and quaint charm of the City's downtown and surrounding areas.