



Medina 1818 - 2018

This month's article focuses on the growth that occurred after WWII and the challenges that growth brought about. This series will continue the first Saturday of every month through November of 2018. The Gazette and the Bicentennial Committee for the City of Medina are pleased to bring you this ongoing series. These feature stories are made possible by the sponsors located at the bottom of this page. This story and others in the series can be viewed online at medina-gazette.com/history

From Village to City: The first wave of postwar growth

By Roger Smalley

Medina's move from a Village to a City came as something of a surprise to many residents at the time. In the years following the end of World War II, local lives were focused on a growing economy and a return to normal family life. While an influx of new residents made it clear Medina was growing, the implications of that growth on the community's public systems and governmental services were beyond the radar of most citizens.

That condition changed quickly when the results of the Census of 1950 were released. Medina's new population was announced to be 5,093, a nearly 17% increase over the population in 1940. Five thousand was the State's threshold for determining what constituted a city under the Ohio Revised Code. In October of 1951, the village was notified by the State that Medina would be classified as a Statutory City effective January 1, 1952.

Some leaders urged that the community reject the State's mandate and somehow remain a village. One local judge commented, with tongue planted firmly in cheek, that rather than face creating a whole new government, it would be easier to just drive 94 people out of town. A majority of leaders, however, believed Medina's future would be better served by a city form of government. The immediate question then became, "What kind of City?"

If Medina remained a statutory city, it would operate by the rules set up for such municipalities in the Ohio Revised Code. Wadsworth had taken that course when it became a city on January 1, 1931. Medina's leaders decided that our new city would best be served by a set of operating rules written by local people and adopted by a vote of the community. A Medina City Charter Commission was created to draft a plan. The rare document shown here is a copy of the final Charter booklet signed by every member of that Charter Commission.

After months of thoughtful work which established, among other critical issues, that the election of local officials be non-partisan, the commission

presented the Charter to the community for review and some eventual revisions. On May 6, 1952, the voters of Medina approved the new Charter. For the purposes of nominating, electing and setting compensation for officials, the charter went into effect immediately. For all other purposes, it became effective on January 1, 1954.

Not in the original document but added later was the procedure that local government must establish an independent Charter Review Commission every ten years. That commission would be charged with revisiting the charter's language and recommending changes to city council, which would then decide whether or not to pass the changes on to the electorate. Major and minor charter revisions have occurred ever since.

One impact of moving from a village to a statutory city to a local chartered municipality was the added challenge of a primary source of government funding. Statutory cities were permitted to levy up to a 1% income tax without a vote of the people and most such entities did so. The Medina Charter was silent on that issue and it would be decades before Medina voters approved an income tax. As a result, the taxes needed to respond to the community's growth in the coming decades would be borne by property owners.

Medina's population more than doubled between 1950 and 1970. This first wave of growth presented the new city with serious challenges. To understand this period, it is perhaps most helpful to look at the effects of growth and at the responses to those effects. Local government, as a prime provider of services, took the lead in many areas. Safety forces and sanitary services were upgraded regularly during this period but major tasks surrounded the daily human needs of water and transportation. The community's water supply had primarily come

from its artesian wells, notably some of the finest water in Ohio, and the treatment of water from the north branch of the Rocky River.

Near drought conditions in 1963 and 1965 and the tremendous surge in population prompted government to create a more reliable source of water. Voters passed a \$1,000,000 bond issue to construct a reservoir, Lake Medina, and another \$600,000 bond issue to erect a major addition to the water treatment plant. The accompanying photo shows the construction of the 100-acre lake site which was eventually filled with nearly 600,000,000 gallons of water. The capacity of the water system increased by 150% and the reservoir served the community well until a second huge surge in population presented another challenge.



Construction of Lake Medina

Until the mid-1950's, streets in Medina were generally tar and chip although some streets remained brick and a few were still dirt. In response to growth, the voters approved a one-mill levy in 1958 which allowed the city to begin a major paving effort using concrete. The levy was renewed in the following year and was followed by an additional levy in 1965, the purpose of which was to widen older streets, provide for bridges and culverts, and maintain existing roads.

Another public entity struggling to respond to growth in the 1950's and 60's was the Medina City School District. Many newcomers arrived with young children and the schools began to bulge.



Garfield School with its 1951 addition

In 1951, Garfield Elementary was expanded after much controversy surrounding the cost of the addition (approximately \$550,000). Student enrollment had increased to such a point that by 1961 some Garfield classes were held in the First Christian Church next door. In 1956, a new high school



The 1956 High School

opened and the old high school on North Broadway became the junior high school. Despite additions and new facilities, a second elementary was needed. Ella Canavan Elementary was opened in 1960 and by 1963 it was already being expanded. When a third elementary, Sidney Fenn, opened in 1966, it was immediately filled to capacity.

It is important to reinforce that the costs related to these increases in city and school services were borne primarily through property taxes voted in by Medina's community-minded residents. Concerned about the difficulties experienced by schools and local government relying on residential tax dollars to meet expanding service needs and recognizing the fact that no new industries had moved to Medina since 1941, the Medina Chamber of Commerce instituted a study of local conditions aimed at providing a plan to attract new industry. Information from the survey led to the development of a key element in the health



Ella Canavan just prior to opening in 1960

of Medina's response to growth, the creation of the Medina Industrial Park on the city's west side.

Led by a collaborative effort of the Chamber, local government, public utilities, local railroad lines, and investment development companies, a 600 acre area was developed and set aside for new industry. The results were dramatic. Between 1959 and 1965, over 20 new industries moved into the industrial

park providing nearly 1,300 jobs and investing over \$11,000,000 in buildings and equipment. The success of the strategy in meeting the tax distribution goal is evidenced by a tax source ratio which moved from primarily residential property to sixty percent indus-



Residents and businesses are invited to be a part of history in the creation of a photo book of Medina in 2018. The photo guidelines and submission form can be found on the Bicentennial website.

August 2018

Saturday, August 4th. In the 1818 Old Town Graveyard by St. Paul's at 1:00 p.m. The Friends of the Medina Cemetery will present an historical walk that will focus on the graves and stories of early pioneers in keeping with our Bicentennial celebration.

Sunday, August 12th, 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. During the annual Affair on the Square, displays and presentations will focus on Medina becoming a city and the community's growth in 50's & 60's.

Saturday, August 18, 2018, 1:00 p.m. Medina Library. A lecture will be presented on the history of transportation in Medina including early pioneer travel, the development of roadways, the advent of the railroad, the completion of I-71 and Freedom Field.

Saturday, August 25, 2018, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Public Square Park. Medina Fest! A day-long celebration of all things Medina! Bicentennial programs will be presented as a part of Main Street Medina's programming. Follow medina200.com for details.

September 2018

September 6th, 7th, and 8th: Spirits of the Past will present a special Bicentennial program. Tours begin behind the County Administration building each night. Check medinacountyartscouncil.org or medinahistorical.com for times.

trial. Other areas of the private sector were also impacted by this first wave of growth. Medina Community Hospital added a new wing in 1954, an additional new wing in 1960 and expanded again in the late 1960's.



Medina Shopping Center

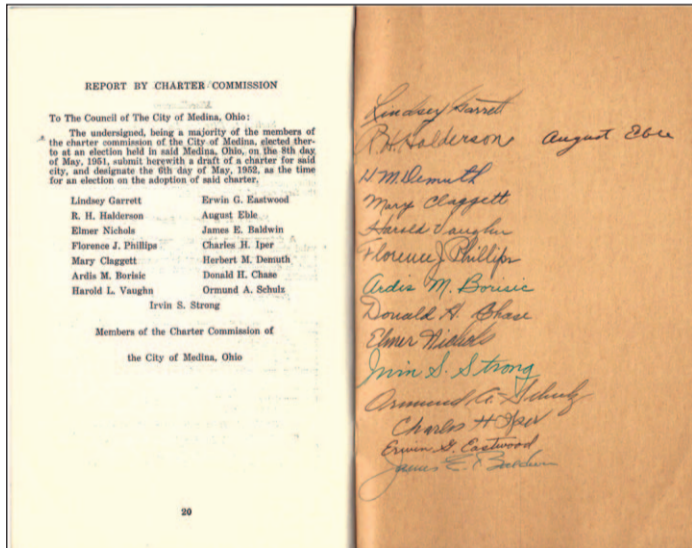
Housing developments which had begun to appear in the late 1940's in the Oak Street area continued to be built in every corner of the city throughout this growth period. Multi-family structures were constructed in many areas which greatly impacted population density. Retail shops providing sales and services mushroomed with the North Court shopping center leading the way in 1956 and expanding in 1960. In 1963, there were 165 retail outlets in the city and 23 wholesale estab-



I-71 and Route 18

lishments. By 1966, Interstate 71 was completed between Cleveland and Medina and the growth that event would lead to was easy to forecast. Anticipating another major population influx, there was a heightened sense that Medina needed to make major changes to better adapt to the modern world which was flooding into town. Just what those "major changes" might be became points of contention within the community that sparked spirited discussion and "creative" responses. One group actually advocated paving the Public Square Park over as a parking lot. The county considered tearing down the 1841 courthouse. Others were concerned about the loss of "small-town America" as population swelled and grand Victorian buildings were turned into billboards. The major loss of the history that occurred in 1954 when the 124 year old American Hotel fell to the wrecking ball remained fresh in the memories of some concerned about our town's changing dynamics.

Medina's future was at a crossroads. One aspect of how the community we know today evolved from this critical time will be the subject of the September 1 history article in The Gazette.



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