

The County Seat Controversy

When Guernsey County was first formed in 1810, the question of the selection of a county seat became a matter of considerable interest. Cambridge and Washington were of about equal size, with Washington being the older town. Both towns were on Zane's Trace. Washington was closer to the center of the county than was Cambridge.

How then did Cambridge become the county seat?

The state legislature appointed a committee to select a county seat, which committee was composed of Isaac Cook, James Armstrong and William Robinson. On April 20, 1810, one month and ten days after the county was formed, they published their written decision, which read as follows:

That, having paid due regard to the interest and convenience of the inhabitants of said county, we do hereby declare that the town of Cambridge is the most suitable place for the permanent seat of justice."

Apparently, no reasons were set forth as to why they had selected Cambridge. Wolfe suggests that it may have been,

however, that Zaccheus A. Beatty and Jacob Gomber had stated that they would donate the ground and furnish a suitable set of buildings ready to roof, if the county seat would be located at Cambridge. This certainly sounds like an attractive offer and perhaps it was the deciding factor. Other considerations could have been the fact that Wills Creek passed through Cambridge and would provide water for a town of considerable size that the county seat would no doubt eventually become, and also the fact that two major roads from the east intersected at Cambridge, Zane's Trace and the Charlestown Road, later to be known as the Steubenville Road. A town of considerable importance to the area was certain to develop at such an important road junction, and perhaps the commissioners felt that such a town should be the county seat, even though it was not as close to the center of the county as Washington.

Whatever their reasons, Cambridge became the seat of justice although until the 1880s when the new courthouse was built there was still rivalry between the towns.

Court House of 1810



Offices of Auditor & Treasurer in small building at left, Recorder & Clerk in building at right, picture taken in 1879

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