
ROSSVILLE:

Hamilton's West Bank

Its People, Ghosts, Places, Bridges & Businesses



Management and employees, West Hamilton Brewery, about 1876

By Jim Blount

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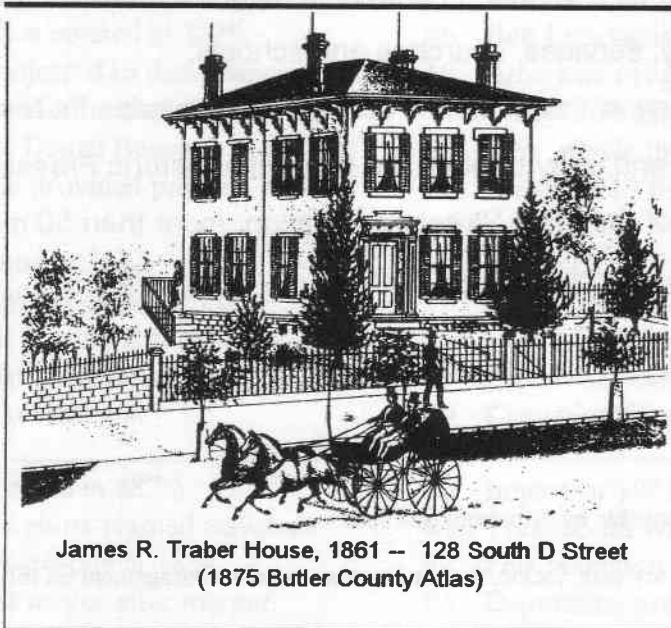


This was the scene Sept. 20, 1866, before the flooded Great Miami River swept away the Miami Bridge, a two-lane wooden structure opened in 1819. This view is from Rossville. See Pages 19-22 for more details.

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**Its People, Ghosts, Places,
Bridges & Businesses**

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Introduction: Rossville endures

This book - the first of a proposed series on local history - is about a community that has refused to die. Rossville (1801-1855) disappeared from Butler County maps about 140 years ago, but its identity has endured.

This book is about what Rossville was supposed to be, how it evolved, how it changed, and what it became. It also is about some of the people who made it happen; their dreams, successes and disappointments. It covers a range of topics - from hotels, bridges, schools, railroads and ghosts to paper, malt and frogs.

Now, as part of the expanding First Ward of Hamilton, the original Rossville area continues to develop as a pleasant residential neighborhood complemented by a mix of business, industry, services, churches and schools.

Rossville is one of three historic districts in Hamilton. Its residents promote neighborhood pride and unity through the Rossville Historic Preservation Association.

As members of the Main Street Association, more than 50 merchants encourage West Side shopping and civic improvements.

Jim Blount

This book was made possible by its patrons and sponsors.

Special thanks goes to my wife, Jackie, for her assistance and encouragement on this and other projects.

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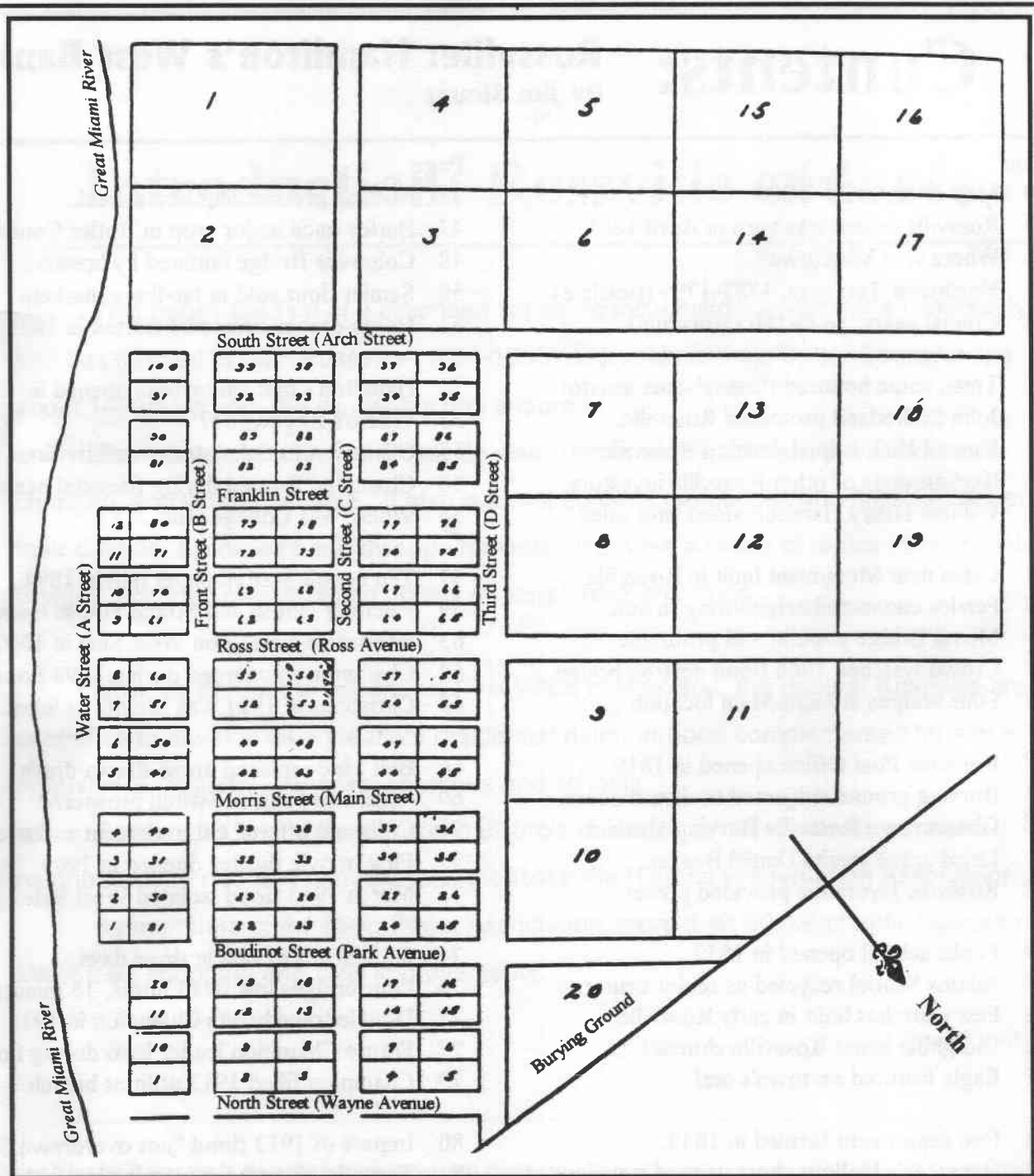
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Rossville, 1804:

When Rossville was platted, Ross Avenue - then Ross Street - was meant to be the main east-west road. It honored Sen. James Ross of Pennsylvania. Morris Street - later renamed Main Street - honored Sen. Gouverneur Morris of New York, who had joined Sen. Ross in working for free navigation rights for U. S. citizens on the Mississippi River. Boudinot Street (Park Avenue) honored Elias Boudinot of New Jersey, who had been a president of the Continental Congress during the American Revolution, later a congressman

and, when Rossville began, director of the U. S. Mint. Wayne Avenue on the northern edge of town was North Street in 1804, and Arch Street was South Street. North-south streets were Water (later A Street), Front (now B), Second (now C) and Third (now D).

Two lots at the northeast corner of Ross and Second streets - now the Senior Citizens Center - were marked as "public ground." Later, a school was built there.

A triangular plot - now between Park and Wayne avenues and North D Street - was reserved as a burying ground.

Rossville dream born in April 1801

The young town on the west bank of Great Miami River was envisioned as a port for recently-opened area and the seat of government for a new county

Rossville's founders - encouraged by recent national events in the 1800-1804 period - envisioned the village as a rival to Hamilton for commercial and government stature.

The young towns on opposite sides of the Great Miami River competed for some of the same business for about 50 years - until their citizens voted to merge into a single community.

Rossville, as planned in 1804, extended west from the river to about present F Street, south to present Millikin Street and north to present Wayne Avenue.



Attention **MIAMI GUARDS.**

You are hereby ordered to meet at the Lafayette Inn, Rossville, on Monday 5th January next, precisely at 10 o'clock A. M. armed and equipped agreeably to law for Company drill. Each member is required to furnish himself with 12 blank cartridges.

N. B. Members are expected to attend punctually to the resolution of the company passed at their last meeting.

By order of the Lieut.

JOHN M. MILLIKIN. O. S.
Dec. 29, 1826, 6—

The town's founders expected Rossville to become a port for newly-arrived farmers. They anticipated new land owners bringing their abundant crops and livestock to Rossville.

There, produce, meat and other local products would be shipped via flatboats on the Great Miami, Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans, then the only practical market for their goods.

Dreams of Rossville as a busy port seemed realistic in 1803 as President Thomas Jefferson's representatives completed the Louisiana Purchase.

Historians emphasize that the \$15 million transaction with France doubled the size of the United States and opened the way for settlement of the American West.

Farmers and merchants in the new state of Ohio saw more immediate benefits.

From their perspective, the sale assured the U. S. control of both banks of the Mississippi River and the city of New Orleans.

Since Americans had started settling west of the Appalachians, first France, then Spain and France again had owned the western half of the Mississippi and the major port city 107 miles from its mouth.

With the Mississippi and New Orleans in U. S. hands, the frequent threat of either France or Spain exacting tariffs or imposing restrictions on Americans traders vanished.

With the nagging "Mississippi Question" solved, the government would be able to fulfill the promise of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.

Hamilton had been formed on the east bank of the river around Fort Hamilton in 1794 and 1795, when the frontier outpost was about to be abandoned by the U. S. Army. For a few years, the land west of the river, opposite Hamilton, was officially vacant.

Rossville started in April 1801 when the government placed the land west of the Great Miami River on sale in Cincinnati. Five partners purchased section 36 (640 acres), plus parts of sections 31 and 32.

The proprietors - John Sutherland and Henry Brown of Hamilton, and Jacob Burnet, James Smith and William Ruffin of Cincinnati - also promoted their town as a potential seat of government when a new county would be formed.

The town plat - 132 lots of varying size - was recorded March 14, 1804, the same day Rossville lots were placed on sale.

Ohio statehood was effective March 1, 1803. Twenty-three days later the Ohio General Assembly created Butler County, carving it from Hamilton County.

April 15, 1803 three commissioners (James Silvers, Benjamin Stites and David Sutton) were appointed to examine and choose a county seat from among an existing town (Hamilton) and some proposed towns (Rossville, Middletown and High Bank).

Rossville's owners offered half a square for public buildings (a courthouse, jail, etc.) between First (now B) and Second (now C) streets and north of Ross Avenue.

July 12, 1803, citizens in Hamilton initiated a campaign to raise money for public buildings. Three days later, the commission

Where was Minktown?

Minktown was a name given to the West Side of Hamilton (formerly Rossville) and adjacent rural areas in the 1800s because of the presence of mink trappers in the region.

accepted Israel Ludlow's donation of a block of Hamilton land as a site for county buildings.

The decision was a setback for Rossville's owners. Most of them soon lost interest in the projected town, leaving it in the hands of John Sutherland and Samuel Dick.

John Reily - a man who held many trusted positions in Hamilton, Rossville and Butler County - was general agent for Rossville's owners.

Reily supervised two public auctions of Rossville lots March 14, 1804, and May 16, 1804. The outlots - the larger tracts - sold for \$25 to \$28 each.

Fourteen years later - in November 1818 - Sutherland and Dick laid out additional lots north of Rossville and added them to the town.

Neither Hamilton nor Rossville offered much when 18-year-old James McBride arrived from Pennsylvania in 1807.

"In Hamilton at that time," McBride wrote later, "nearly all east of Front Street was an impenetrable thicket covered with young scrubby oaks, black-jacks and vines and hazel bushes, so thick that it was only in some parts that a man could make his way through them" except where "paths and roads were in some place cut through them to admit free passage."

"The improvements in Rossville were still fewer than in Hamilton," McBride observed. He said "a log house, near where the west end of the bridge now is, was occupied as a tavern and ferry house.

"Michael Delorac's house in the upper part of the town, and one or two log buildings in the lower part, comprehended the extent of improvement," McBride said. "Brush-wood,