

Westerville: A Dynamic History

Heritage, pride and growth have characterized Westerville since its founding

Westerville has grown through the years to become central Ohio's largest suburb, but it has managed to maintain a small-town feel while preserving its physical and cultural past. Residents consider the city's charm and its historic Uptown District to be among their favorite community attributes.

What follows is a narrative timeline of significant events in Westerville's history:

Westerville's humble beginnings can be traced to 1806, when Revolutionary War veteran Edward Phelps and his friend, Issac Griswold, settled along Alum Creek at Blendon Corners, which today is Westerville Road and St. Rte. 161. In 1809, Garrit Sharp and his family became the first people to establish a residence in what is now considered Westerville city limits.

New York natives Matthew and Peter Westervelt scouted the central Ohio area sometime between 1814 and 1816. Matthew and Peter were part of a lineage of pioneers in the Westervelt family, beginning with their ancestor Lubbert, who left Holland in 1662 for what is now an area near Brooklyn, New York. The Westervelts were attracted to what is now the Westerville area because of the considerable amount of cheap, available land. On January 24, 1816, Matthew and Peter bought 890 acres of land along the eastern bank of Alum Creek for \$3,562. By 1818, four Westervelt siblings were living in the area that would become Westerville.

In 1820, Gideon Hart built a home on his farm along Hempstead Road. This home is significant, as it is the oldest home still standing in Westerville and one of a dozen community buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. It remains a private residence.

Westerville's population had increased to nearly 700 by 1830. In 1840, the community was officially named Westerville after the Westervelt family, in part due to their generous land donations.

Westerville has been a Franklin County symbol for equality and education since before the Civil War. Westerville's own Otterbein College, founded as Otterbein University in 1847 by the United Brethren Church, was the first institution of higher learning in the United States to admit women without restrictions, the first to include women on its faculty, and one of the first to admit students of color.

Lewis Davis, the President of Otterbein College prior to the Civil War, was personally involved in Westerville's Underground Railroad efforts. Many Underground Railroad homes still stand today, including the George Stoner home on State Street just southwest of the Westerville Public Library and the Alkire home on North State Street just west of Old County Line Road (both buildings are now home to various Westerville businesses). The Timothy Lee home, another Underground Railroad home on Sunbury Road, remains a private residence.

In 1855, the Westerville School District was established. One year later, the district celebrated the opening of its first new schoolhouse, a one-room building on West Home Street.

Westerville was incorporated as a village in 1858, and John Haywood became the community's first mayor.

In 1860, Westerville's Fire Division was established and remained a volunteer fire division for more than 100 years. Today, Westerville's Fire Division consists of 79 full-time personnel.

The Westerville railroad was built in 1873, spurring economic activity for a number of mills throughout Westerville, including the Everal Tile Company. In recognition of its community heritage, the Everal family barn and homestead were recently renovated and are the focal points of the community's Heritage Park.

In 1898, Westerville established its own electric division. In 1901, Westerville had a burgeoning population of 1,462, and officials opened the city's first water treatment plant. More than 100 years later, Westerville's water plant treats up to 7.5 million gallons of water per day.

Westerville became the epicenter of a national debate about the legality of alcohol in 1909, when the Anti-Saloon League moved its headquarters from Chicago to Westerville. The debate continued for more than two decades.

Westerville's first paid police officers were hired in 1915 (today, the Police Division is comprised of more than 80 trained personnel). The following year, Westerville became the third municipality in the United States and first village in Ohio to adopt a council-manager style of government. The council-manager government establishes city council as the legislative and executive body, and provides for professional management through an appointed, trained municipal administrator. Day-to-day operations are the responsibility of the city manager, who serves as the city's chief executive.

In 1930, Westerville's first public library was opened in the old Purley Baker home, which was owned by the Anti-Saloon League. Three years later, the Westerville municipal government offices also moved into a renovated home, this one owned by B.T. Thomas at 21 S. State Street. The move and renovation were part of a federal government relief project during the Depression.

Construction on Westerville's first city park began in 1934. Known today as Alum Creek Park, it remains one of Westerville's most popular play and relaxation areas.

By 1940, Westerville's population had grown to 3,146; 10 years later, it was 4,102.

In 1955, the Westerville Public Library moved to its current location at 126 S. State Street. Thanks to public support, a massive library expansion occurred in 1998.

The 1960s brought other changes to Westerville: It was recognized as a city for the first time, and passed its first city charter; Westerville South High School was dedicated; Westerville's first shopping center was opened at the northwest corner of Schrock Road and State Street; Westerville hired its first full-time fire chief; a Parks

& Recreation Department was established; and Westerville's current Water Treatment Plant on Main Street was built.

Westerville experienced a population surge from 1970 to 1990. In 1970, the city's population was 12,530. It exploded to 23,414 by 1980 and 32,269 by 1990. During the 1980s, when Westerville's land use was approximately 90-percent residential, city leaders began to focus on business development efforts to ease the future tax burden on residents for city services. As a result, Mount Carmel St. Ann's Hospital became central Ohio's first planned suburban hospital. Soon after, the Brooksedge and Eastwind areas became prominent business developments in Central Ohio; they remain vital components of Westerville's economic development efforts, along with the Westerville Commerce Center, Uptown District, Westar Center of Business, and other Westerville business districts.

In 1999, the Cleveland Avenue and Polaris Parkway extensions were opened to traffic for the first time, providing direct east-west access to I-71 from northern Westerville.

In 2001, the Westerville Parks & Recreation Department received a national gold medal for its service excellence. That same year, the Westerville Community Center was opened to the public and became the city's 38th park or recreation facility.

In August 2003, the editors of *Sports Illustrated* named Westerville Sportstown Ohio. Later that year, Westerville's third high school, known as Central High School, opened its doors to its first students.

In 2006, Westerville Central High School celebrated the graduation of its first class.

Today, Westerville land use is now approximately 65 percent residential and 35 percent industrial or commercial. Westerville provides more city services than any other central Ohio suburb, with more than 150 trained full-time police officers and fire fighters, an electric division that serves all of Westerville, a water division recognized as one of Ohio's best, a state-of-the-art community recreation center, and countless other important city services. The Westerville School District's estimated student enrollment is approximately 14,000, with three high schools among more than twenty total schools in the district.

Westerville has gone through many changes during its nearly two-century history. Through it all, Westerville citizens have shown themselves to be rich in heritage, culture, pride, and vision – from the original settlers who took part in the Revolutionary War and those who risked their lives as part of the Underground Railroad, to today's residents who continue to aspire to make Westerville a better community for future generations.

Westerville. It's Just Right.