

## THE WILMINGTON REGION

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The Wilmington Region occupies the greater part of Clinton County in southwestern Ohio on the eastern margin of the Little Miami drainage basin (Fig. 1). This region is the area tributary to the town of Wilmington. The region is approximately circular with a radius of some ten miles from its center, the city of Wilmington.

The settlement pattern is irregular, with property lines running in various directions forming many different geometric designs. No north-south or east-west property lines, roads, or village streets occur in the region served by Wilmington. This settlement pattern is characteristic of the entire area between the Scioto and Little Miami Rivers known as the Virginia Military Lands.<sup>1</sup> The failure of Wilmington to square with the cardinal points of the compass is noteworthy since the city was platted on a rectangular pattern as the county seat in August, 1810.

The historical occupancy of the region can be divided into four periods: (1) the early period of settlement from 1804 to the formation of Clinton County in 1810; (2) from the establishment of the county to 1852, when Virginia relinquished all her remaining claims to the Federal Government<sup>2</sup> (3) the opening of remaining lands to all settlers, 1852-1880, a period of greatest growth; and (4) 1880 to the present, a period of decline in population.

The terrain of the Wilmington Region varies from undulating to gently rolling. It lies within the till plains of the Central Lowland.<sup>3</sup> The area was covered by drift during the Illinoian, Early Wisconsin and Late Wisconsin glacial stages.<sup>4</sup> The most conspicuous glacial features are the Cuba Moraine, terminal moraine of the early Wisconsin, and the Reesville Moraine (Fig. 1), terminal moraine of the late Wisconsin, and the erratics. The Illinoian drift was covered by a thin layer of loess. The underlying bed rock is dolomite, limestone and shale of the late Ordovician and early Silurian ages. The Niagara Formation of early Silurian is the only mineral deposit worked in the area.

The streams of the region are small, often irregular in flow. Most of the streams are tributary to the Little Miami River with the divide between the drainage basins of the Little Miami and the Scioto Rivers following the Reesville Moraine through the eastern part of the county.

The original vegetation at the time of settlement consisted of an oak-hickory hardwood forest with oak, hickory, beech and maple predominating.<sup>5</sup>

The soils are gray-brown podzolic and gray planosols.<sup>6</sup> These soils have been formed in a humid, intermediate climate. The podzolic soils are the more fertile and are associated with the Wisconsin drift. The planosols have been formed from the loess deposits and are characterized by the level areas they occupy and the development of impervious hardpan layers at varying depths.

<sup>1</sup>Peters, W. E., *Ohio Lands and Their History*, 3rd ed. Athens, 1930, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup>Fenneman, N. M., *Physiography of Eastern United States*. New York, 1938. p. 455.

<sup>4</sup>Austin, G. M., *Surface Geology of Clinton County, Ohio*. Wilmington, 1930. p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Watson, S. A., *Vegetation of Clinton County at Time of Settlement*. Wilmington, 1927.

Mimeographed.

<sup>6</sup>U. S. Dept. of Agric.—*Yearbook of Agriculture*, 1936. *Soils and Men*, Map—"Soil Associations of the United States."

This region has been classified as humid microthermal with adequate precipitation at all seasons.<sup>7</sup> On the average, January is the coldest month (30.3° F.) and July the warmest (75.8° F.). The yearly mean is 53.0° F., with an average growing season of 153 days. The average annual precipitation over a 28 year period

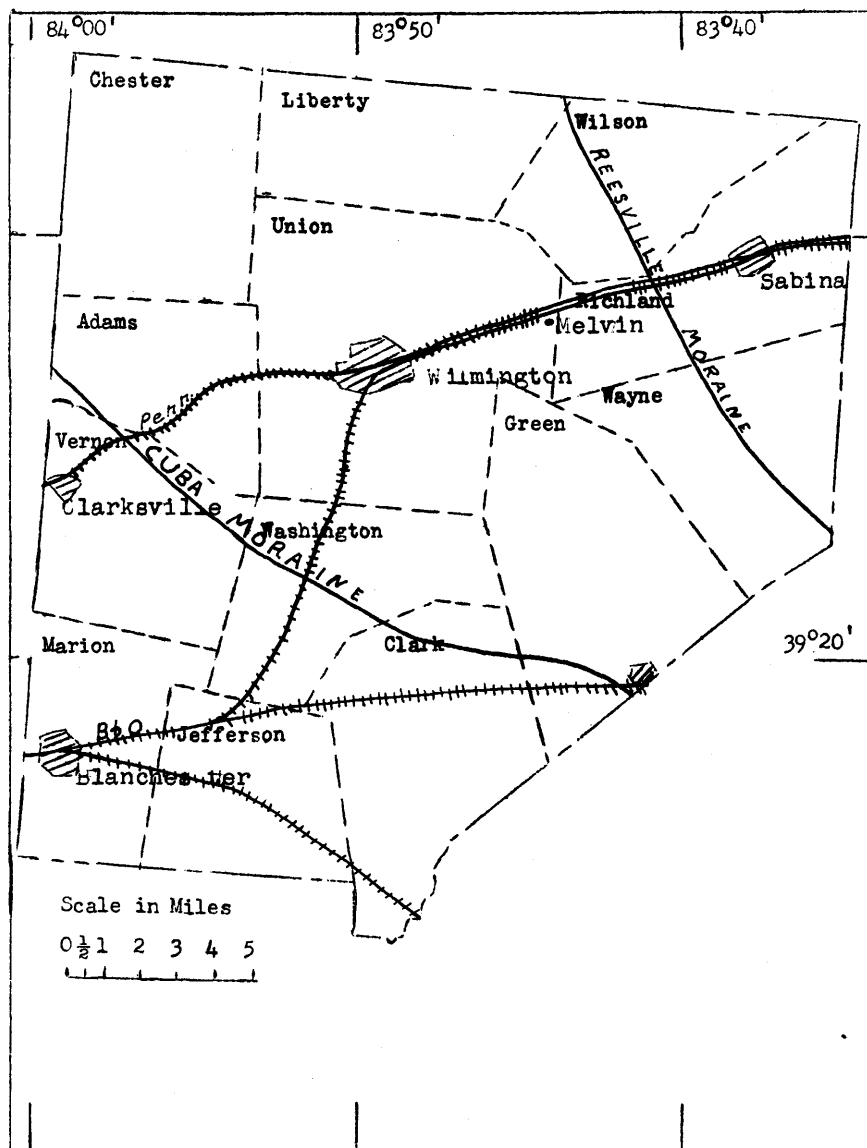


FIG. 1. Map of Clinton County, Ohio. Reesville Moraine—Terminal Moraine of Late Wisconsin Drainage divide between Little Miami and Scioto. Cuba Moraine—Terminal Moraine of Early Wisconsin. Wilmington—County Seat.

<sup>7</sup>Thornthwaite, C. W., "Climates of North America According to a New Classification," Geographical Review, Vol. 21, 1931, p. 633-655; p. 651; Map opposite p. 654.

is 45.9 inches,<sup>8</sup> rather evenly distributed throughout the year, but slightly higher and often irregular in the summer months.

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The difficulties of transportation in the early days of settlement made it necessary for the settlers to be practically self-sufficient. They raised all of their food and most of the products from which they made their clothing. Such early industry as developed was largely one of converting agricultural surpluses into marketable commodities, or to fill a local need. Flour or grist mills, tanyards and distilleries were established to take care of an agricultural surplus. Brick, harness, shoe, hat, cabinet and wagon making were among the first non-agricultural industries of the community. These products were consumed locally.<sup>9</sup> A corn-hog agricultural economy set in rather early. At first swine were driven to market, but by 1830 local slaughter and packing houses had been erected and shipments of their products were made by wagon to Cincinnati.<sup>10</sup>

The first railroad through Wilmington, the Pennsylvania,<sup>11</sup> was opened for traffic in 1853.<sup>12</sup> This made connections with Cincinnati and Zanesville. In 1883 another railroad, the Baltimore and Ohio,<sup>13</sup> provided connections with Cincinnati and Columbus.<sup>14</sup> These lines provided good facilities for bringing in finished products and shipping local agricultural products of the region to more distant markets.

The greatest change in the period following the building of the railroad came in a shift in the type of manufacturing. Local manufacturing already mentioned gave way to better and more economical products from other regions. However, an industry involving the manufacture of metal products developed in Wilmington. Although this new industry depended on raw materials imported from outside the region and upon a national market for the sale of finished products, it has attained great importance in the local economy.

The earliest highway in Clinton County was Kenton's Trace, known as the Urbana or Ripley Road, which was laid out before 1803.<sup>15</sup> The present system of roads is the outgrowth of various traces, turnpikes, toll roads and after 1848, free roads.<sup>16</sup> These early roads were poor by present standards, mostly rough, narrow, gravel roads, but none-the-less important.

The advent of the automobile changed road building standards here as elsewhere. Today Wilmington is the center of an excellent system of hard surfaced highways radiating throughout the county and providing easy access to all parts of the state. The importance of Wilmington to the county increased with the development of the automobile. The city became physically more accessible and in terms of time was now closer to all parts of the county. The Wilmington Region itself increased in size.

#### ECONOMY OF THE WILMINGTON REGION

The Wilmington Region is near the heart of a small section of the corn belt in southwestern Ohio called the "Fayette-Champaign Livestock phase of the Corn

<sup>8</sup>U. S. Weather Bureau, "Climatic Summary of the United States to 1930," Sec. 69. Southwestern Ohio, and Annual Reports, 1931-1943.

<sup>9</sup>History of Clinton County. Beers and Co., 1888, Chicago. p. 482-491.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 790.

<sup>11</sup>Originally known as The Cincinnati, Wilmington and Zanesville Railroad.

<sup>12</sup>Annual Report of the Commissioner of Railroads and Telegraphs, State of Ohio, Year ending June 30, 1870. p. 622.

<sup>13</sup>Originally known as The Columbus, Cincinnati and Midland Railroad.

<sup>14</sup>Annual Report of the Commissioner of Railroads and Telegraphs, State of Ohio, Year ending June 30, 1884. p. 684.

<sup>15</sup>History of Clinton, op. cit., p. 359.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 363, 364.

Belt," while the southern limits are included in the "Maysville-West Union General Tobacco-Livestock Self-Sufficiency" province.<sup>17</sup>

Within this farming region there is a minimum of diversity. As one moves from the center towards the periphery few changes are noticeable. The terrain to the south becomes more highly dissected, the soil is less productive and there is less emphasis upon corn. No change is noticed within the region to the north and east where there is a continuation of the livestock phase of the corn belt. This type of agricultural economy extends to the hill section of the Appalachian Plateau near the Scioto River on the east, and northward a distance of over fifty miles.

Farming methods are more or less uniform. Crop rotation, generally on a three year basis, is the accepted practice. The order of succession is corn, small grain, pasture and return to corn. Corn is first in importance occupying over one-half of the land; wheat is second occupying one-third the acreage devoted to corn. Corn is grown as feed for swine and cattle, both of which are cash income crops. Wheat is grown for feed and for sale, but much the greater amount for sale. Other crops are: oats, sweet corn, rye, buckwheat, barley, wheat mixture (for feed only), soy beans, tobacco, potatoes and other vegetables.

The production of swine is of greatest importance in the Wilmington Region. Over 150,000 head are raised annually. Dairy products, sheep, poultry and some feeder cattle are secondary.

Most of the livestock moves from the Wilmington Region to Cincinnati, Dayton, Columbus and Washington Court House, while a little goes to more distant points. The weekly auction at Wilmington serves as a concentration point. Movement of livestock is about equally divided between the railroad and motor truck. All stock shipped to the Dayton market moves by truck.

The Clinton County Lamb and Fleece Improvement Association markets lambs and wool for members in Clinton County. The Clinton County Farm Bureau purchases wool in the county for shipment elsewhere.

The most important dairy product in the Wilmington Region is fresh milk. Two dairies supply the city of Wilmington. Four truck routes are operated throughout the county by dairies in Dayton, Cincinnati, Washington Court House and the condensing milk plant at Hillsboro.

Poultry products, eggs, chickens and turkeys, are sold to hucksters, regular customers in town or to local dealers. Most of those sold are shipped by the local dealers to Dayton and Cincinnati.

The total cash income realized by the farmers of the region in 1942 was approximately \$8,000,000. That received from livestock products exceeded 90 per cent of this total. Swine lead with 63 per cent; dairy products were next with 12 per cent; poultry, 8 per cent; cattle, 4 per cent; and sheep, 3 per cent.<sup>18</sup>

While livestock provide the source of the farmer's cash income, the production of grain for feed is of basic importance. Among those grains, wheat serves not only for feed but as a direct cash crop. Its sale accounted for 6 per cent of the cash income in 1942.<sup>19</sup> Most of the grain moves through the elevators at Wilmington.

The only mineral of economic importance in the region is Niagara dolomite. This formation has been quarried at various locations in the county. At the present time one quarry is in operation, at Melvin, 7 miles east of Wilmington.

<sup>17</sup>Map, Type of Farming Areas in the United States, Dept. of Agric., Bureau of Rural Economics, 1936.

<sup>18</sup>Morison, F. L., and Falconer, J. I. "Estimated Gross Cash Income to Ohio Farmers from Sale of Agricultural Products and from Agricultural Adjustment Agency Payments, by Counties, 1942." Dept. of Rural Economics, Mimeographed Bull. No. 171. O. S. U., 1943. p. 8.

<sup>19</sup>Morison and Falconer, op. cit., p. 8.

Manufacturing in Wilmington shows no relation to the raw materials available. All of the manufacturing is in the metal industries, namely, the production of auger bits, furnaces, grey cast iron, and products made from this iron. Most of the raw materials used by the four plants come from a distance of over 50 miles and occasionally from as far as Pennsylvania and Alabama. The market is both state and national. This is the largest group of metal manufacturers in the eastern half of the Little Miami Valley. Their labor supply, about 500 employees, mostly men, is drawn from the region and within a radius of 20 miles.

The retail business of the town depends to a large extent upon the surrounding farming community. Certain types of industry are definitely related to the agricultural economy. Elevators, feed mills, agricultural implement stores, and hardware stores supply the needs of the farmers. The town itself, with a population of only 6,000, could not alone support these establishments.

Wilmington and the surrounding agricultural area are an integrated unit. The city depends upon the purchasing power of the farmer as does the farmer upon the city as his market and a place in which to purchase his needs.

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