



CLINTONVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Summer 2026 Newsletter

Mary Jane Mullin: Student and Chronicler of the Olentangy River

The Olentangy River has been central to the history of Columbus and particularly to the lives of people living in Clintonville. That is certainly true for Mary Jane Mullin for whom the Olentangy River has been the object of study for the 45 years that she has lived on its bank. While her own family first settled on Lane Avenue in Upper Arlington in 1803, and her great-great grandfather was a founder of the Union cemetery, she and her husband John raised their family in Clintonville where the Olentangy River has been an important part of their lives and has given her both the opportunity to observe its natural history and the incentive to learn its stories.

Mary Jane's scientific training has given her the tools to chronicle the evolution of the river over the years. She has an Ohio State University educational background in physical education and health education and taught science for 30 years in the Columbus City Schools as a middle school specialist. Mary Jane has brought that scientific perspective to her life on the river where she has been its careful observer. Her home in Clintonville is on Scenic Drive, and her backyard slopes down to the bank of the river where there are stairs that allow access to the water for fishing and collecting concretions, rocks, and fossils. There she has been able to observe the river and its plentiful wildlife over the years. She has frequently observed wild fowl, such as cormorants, kingfishers, wood ducks or egrets, and been delighted by the remarkable bald eagles that frequently swoop along the path of the river. There are plentiful geese too, and one time Mary Jane and a neighbor girl found and played with a gosling on the river bank. There are also muskrats, foxes, and deer. She has noticed that the deer, who are surprisingly skilled swimmers, frequently take to the river in order to leave their scat out of the way of coyotes who might be tracking them.

Mary Jane knows too that the Olentangy River has changed a great deal over time. At the beginning of Clintonville's history, there were many ways in which the river was integrated into the lives of Native Americans.

Indeed, in recognition of that fact, in 1833 the Ohio General Assembly gave the name "Olentangy" to what originally was called the Whetstone River. This native name means "river of red face paint." Mary Jane says that the Native Americans used the sycamore trees as a navigational guide because these trees promised water and shade. In fact, she notes that many of the large sycamore trees in Clintonville are growing on underground springs. The Native Americans also grew cranberries in bogs along its course, bogs that are long gone. Mary Jane is well aware of the many changes in the width of the river over time even in her own lifetime, as is shown in the photo of John Mullin canoeing with their children on a much wider Olentangy River than what we see today.



These changes have been noted by other chroniclers of Clintonville history as well. In fact, the river used to cause serious flooding in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nancy Pendleton in her book *Early Clintonville (and Grove City) and the Bull and Smith Family* describes a drowning in 1814 when a resident was either transporting his family across the river or returning from helping a neighbor put up a barn. Pendleton observes, "Even today [the late 1990s] the Olentangy can be pretty awesome when the ice melts and the waters are high and running fast." Richard Knopf and Miriam F. Near in their book *Reminiscence: Not Memoir*, a book that describes growing up in Clintonville in the early twentieth century, identify many areas that have been filled in but were flood zones historically: Starret road, ditches that lined Henderson Avenue—and what they as children called "Jackson's Island" that was located in the center of the river but disappeared during times of floods. They noted, "When the flood waters went down, the river banks are

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piled with debris washed downstream as well as arrow heads and spear points of a former Indian camp.” Mary Jane Mullin also recalls kids finding a plentiful supply of arrowheads around the old Weisheimer farm once the fields had dried after plowing and playing games with them.

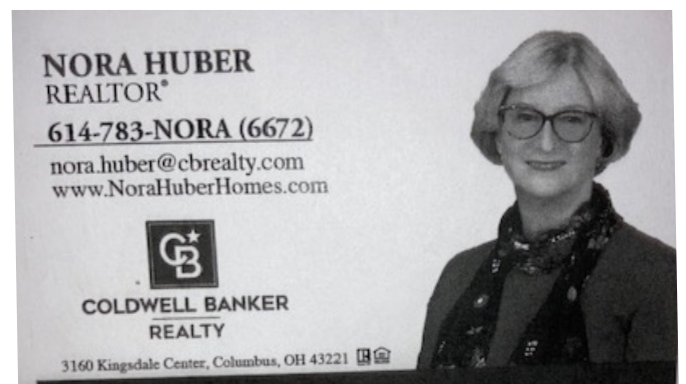
As a community leader, Mary Jane Mullin and her neighbors have been proactive about carefully monitoring some of these changes, especially when a water treatment plant was proposed. Their position was that it must be established in a way that was safe for the river. At other times Clintonville residents have been champions for the safety of the river as well, for example, when a new dam was constructed in Delaware to create a lake in 1951 and again when 315 was planned along its bank. Mary Jane herself has volunteered as a river monitor for the ODNR.

Mary Jane Mullin has also been a student of the historical role the river has played in the lives of Clintonville residents. In the nineteenth century the Olentangy enabled the establishment of communities and made industry possible. The Weisheimer family’s land is near her own home on Scenic Drive. In fact, the strength of the Olentangy’s flow was what enabled Jacob Weisheimer to build a grist mill in Clintonville that was operated by Jacob’s decedents until 1954 when it was demolished. Mary Jane, who knows a great deal about her neighborhood, remembers how the farm and the old

Weisheimer place once were a draw to neighborhood children who would race to ride on the back of the horses as the farmer plowed his fields. Indeed, for many children living in Clintonville the Olentangy River was the center of their lives. For one thing, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the children who lived east of the river had to wade across it to get to school. It wasn’t until 1819 (some sources say 1815) that a new school was built that was more accessible.

All through Clintonville’s history the Olentangy River has been a source of joy in both summer and winter. According to Knopf and Near, in the summer, “We had no need for swimming pools because the river was ours.” Mary Jane and her family also went swimming in the river in years gone by (after first checking with their pediatrician who okayed the activity with the proviso that they shower afterward.) Mary Jane taught canoeing to girl scouts on the river as well although today she says it is more common to see people in kayaks, especially since there is now a kayak livery in Worthington. Knopf and Near describe a wide variety of summer activities for children on the river in earlier days: catching crawdads and clams, building rafts that might or might not stay together, fishing for sunfish and blue gills, trapping moles and muskrats, building tree houses in the sycamores, and finally at the end of the day, building fires along the banks. Mary Jane also recalls raft building on the river as the church boy scouts would use rafts in their annual, summer 11-day float down to the Ohio River while their dads paddled along behind them in canoes. In the winter there was sledding, the construction of igloos, tapping trees for maple sugar, and ice skating (at great peril!) on old clamp-on skates. In short, many joyful activities took place on the river. According to Knopf and Near, “Home was still open fields, quiet woods, and the river.” Sitting in Mary Jane Mullin’s beautiful living room and looking across the Olentangy River, one can well see the importance of the river in our lives.

Nora Huber has kindly sponsored
the mailing of this newsletter.



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Clintonville Historical Society: 2026 Get-Togethers

Past Events

February 14th

Valentine's Day Dinner with an AMERICA 250 Theme

Barbeque dinner followed by an excellent presentation by Mary Rodgers on the Clintonville Patriots who served in the Revolutionary War.

March 9th

History Day at the Whetstone Branch of the Columbus Metropolitan Library

Historic items, maps of Clintonville's Historic Markers, and CHS Newsletters were available to the public. Brad Schwartz gave a presentation on his historic home on East Lakeview that was built in the 1870's and has behind it a carriage house that was part of the Underground Railroad during the Civil War. This presentation will be expanded for the program on June 23rd.

May 21st

Work Day—CHS Crew moved historic paving bricks to the WW II Memorial Site on West North Broadway

To prepare for the completion of the restoration of this Memorial Site.

Upcoming Events

June 23rd

Presentation on Brad Schwartz's Home on East Lakeview

Whetstone Branch of the Columbus Metropolitan Library, 7 pm



July 4th

America 250 Celebration of the Signing of the Declaration of Independence

Clintonville Women's Club, 9 am to 1 pm

History Activity Books for children, co-sponsored by the Columbus Metropolitan Library, as well as a coloring table, will be available to the public.

October 20th

Annual Meeting, Election of Officers, and Talk by Danielle Poling about the Cooke Road Underpass Mural

North Broadway Methodist Church, 6:30 pm



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Join the Clintonville Historical Society Today!

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Clintonville Memories from Seth Golding



Seth Golding grew up in Clintonville, living at 111 Richards Road for many years and then on East Dodridge Street for 40 years. From his front yard on Dodridge you can see the outline of the foundation of the commissary of the Civil War's Camp Thomas, which was located right where Lucky's Market is today. Seth has enjoyed watching the store fronts on High Street change over time, with the exception of Longview Barbershop which is the longest continuous business in the neighborhood. One favorite activity was for Seth and his best buddy to drag empty refrigerator cartons from the old Clintonville Electric Store through the tunnel underneath High Street (that is still used by children today to get to Clinton Elementary.) The boys would then take the cartons to their backyards where they would decorate them with masking tape. They also had an actual wooden clubhouse in the backyard at the corner of Foster and Richards. Seth and his buddies always felt at home in the easy grid of Clintonville Streets and really enjoyed their exhilarating bike rides all over the neighborhood. Clintonville was their kingdom!

Clintonville Area Patriots From the Presentation of Mary Rodgers

At the Valentine's Day Dinner, the Clintonville Historical Society had the opportunity to hear another of Past-President Mary Rodgers' clear and well organized presentations on local history. In keeping with the evening's theme of America 250, the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, Mary identified key Clintonville figures who served in the Continental Army, that is, the Army of the United Colonies and later the United States, during the American Revolutionary War. Using her characteristic careful research, Mary introduced Thomas Bull, Jr., Philologas Webster, and George Balser Hess, who all participated in the war to later settle in our area. Thomas Bull, Jr. and Philologas Webster served in their state militias, Vermont and Connecticut respectively, and both moved west to settle in Ohio in 1812. George Balser Hess was born in York, Pennsylvania and fought in many battles during the war, his descendants even claiming that he accompanied George Washington during the crossing of the Delaware.

Hess arrived in Ohio at an earlier date, 1798. Other Clintonville individuals who may have contributed to the war effort were Dan Case and Roswell Cooke. Case seems to have served under Sam McClellan, arriving in Ohio in 1811 where he later partnered with Roswell Cooke to build the first mills on the Olentangy River. Cooke, who seems to have been a drummer in the Connecticut militia, arrived in Clinton Township in 1815. Thomas Bull, Sr. may also have been a patriot. He was brought to Ohio from Vermont by his son Bull, Jr. after the death of his wife. With her precise references to cemetery records and military rolls, Mary Rodgers showed clearly that these individuals, who contributed so much to the settlement of Clintonville, were also our very own Revolutionary War Patriots.

Board Profile: Libby Wetherholt

Libby Wetherholt, Secretary of the Clintonville Historical Society, has had an enduring interest in history. She explains it in this way:

Some of my interest in history may have come from vacations that my family took early on in my life to Washington, DC/Mt. Vernon, Williamsburg, and Boston. However, I gleaned a larger clue into my interest when I took a personality test later in my teaching career. From that test I learned that I had a need to know what preceded from my present situation. Therefore, when I learn about what is going on in some part of the world, I know that I will need to look into earlier portions of the history also.

I am a fourth generation resident of Franklin County. I grew up in Bexley, my parents grew up in the Olde Town East area (long before it was called that), as did my mother's father and mother and her grandfather. My dad's family came from the Jackson County area to Columbus in the late 1800s. Three of my dad's grandparents were born in Wales. So I not only have fun learning about the different neighborhoods in Columbus and how the city developed, but I have also had fun discovering parts of my dad's family and their origins in Wales.

I know a lot of people would call me a history nerd, and it is a badge I wear proudly. Luckily, my husband enjoys history (to a point), and we both like to visit historical areas wherever we travel. My husband grew up in Marietta, so we have an avenue of history to explore there. And when we visit my son in Yuma, AZ, I enjoy seeing the territorial prison there and seeing how that city developed because of the railroad. My daughter, her husband, and their 5-month-old baby girl live locally, and we are happily making new family history here in Clintonville.