Sesquicentennial Address 1964 (Transcript)

Avon Oral History Project -- February 10, 1964

Time: ..... 9:00 pm

Before: .... Avon Junior Women's Club

Location: .. Central Security Bank Avon, Ohio

Recorded by: Tony C. Zuppero

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I. OPENING REMARKS:

MR. ZUPPERO: This is a talk on the History of Avon by Don Hicok. His wife's name is Mary Ellen Hicok. This talk was done on February the 10th, 1964 at 9:00 pm at Central Bank Building in the Community Room. And my name is Tony Zuppero and I recorded it for the Avon Junior Women's Club. I recorded it on reel-to-reel tape.

II. HISTORY OF AVON:

MR. HICOK: Welcome to Xeuma or Troy or Avon Township, as it was called. I've been asked to talk about the history of the area this evening.

The first permanent white settlement was made here about a hundred and fifty years ago, but to talk about the last hundred and fifty years and forget the millions of years that went before would be sort of like giving a book report on the last page of a novel. I'm sure this wouldn't be very satisfactory. So I would like to take you back to the beginning of the story.

Scientists tell us now that the earth is approximately four hundred and fifty million years old [How about 4.5 billion years old]. And while this continent has been called the New World, the Laurentian granite which make up the Adirondack Mountains are the oldest rock formation known in the world.

Now, we know that this continent has gone through many periods of violent upheaval and lowering, and this area right here has been covered with water as many as seven times, as can be read in the layers of stone and shale beneath us. Yet at times it has been elevated such that the tremendous gorges of the Cuyahoga, Rocky River, Black River, and so forth, were cut down through these hundred million year old shales.

In these exposed layers of shale we can read the ancient history of the area, from the first one-celled organisms to the lush tropical forests and prehistoric birds, animals and fishes. Of prehistoric man, however, no record has ever been found in North America.

Now, as the earth wobbled and changed its axis during these many periods of structural alterations, so the climate changed, and stone-age man, as we know him, was able to survive on its surface some seventy-five to a hundred thousand years ago on the continent of Asia, which seems to be the starting point of all of the races, red, yellow, black, and white. It is known that fifty thousand years ago man started to plant seeds, and twenty-five thousand years ago he farmed and kept animals.

Sometime in this period the gradual migrations began into Europe and Africa, and after the Ice Age into North America and down into South America.

Now, we cannot ignore the Ice Age since it was the last physical change acting on this area to produce the results with which we are so familiar. The climate became such in the Northern Hemisphere that great snows fell and packed until they became glaciers and solid ice, which formed faster than they could melt, and gradually forced their way down over the North American continent, scarring the land to great depths, pulverizing or carrying along everything in their path.

In Ohio they pushed south beyond Cincinnati, about seven miles into what is now the State of Kentucky. At this point in Avon imagine, if you can, a layer of ice five thousand feet thick over your head. This was the Ice Age.

Another climate change started the ice to melt and the water ran off into the Mississippi Valley. And this continued until the water level fell below the level of the watersheds in Central Ohio. Now as more ice melted an immense glacial lake was formed and the water flowed from the Maumee River into the Wabash at Fort Wayne, Indiana and on into the Mississippi Valley. And this held the lake level constant and formed the series of ridges that we know as South Ridge, which consists of Butternut and Murray Ridge in this area, and this was the beach line for many thousand years in this glacial lake.

Now, when the ice finally melted back from Michigan, it exposed the area around Port Huron and a new lower channel dropped the lake level fifty feet as water passed across the peninsula into the Grand River and then into Lake Michigan and through the Illinois River, again into the Mississippi Valley. This new shore line formed the beaches known today as Middle or Center Ridge.

Further melting exposed the end of the peninsula and let water directly into the Grand River and formed the new lake level another fifty feet lower with its beaches on which we now stand, the North Ridge.

Subsequent melting exposed the Niagara River and dropped the lake to its present level where it remained for perhaps twenty-five thousand years.

This solid copper nugget was torn from the earth in Northern Canada and dropped by the glacier onto the State of Michigan where it was found about fifty years ago. It's been cleaned with acid. It was all covered with a thick layer of copper oxide. This is raw copper. This is probably the oldest antique you have ever seen. It may be perhaps as old as the earth. But, nevertheless, the glacier had no respect for anything. It just tore things right out. This was torn right out of solid rock and brought down into Michigan.

Now the climate here became more suitable for man to survive. And as the population increased in Asia, more and more groups were forced to migrate in search of game and other sources of food. During the ice age the glaciers apparently formed a land bridge from Asia to Alaska where the Aleutian Islands now remain.

And after the waters receded small bands of various races, which we now call Indians, came over the bridge, some moving along the Pacific coast down into Central and South America and others coming down this side of the Rocky Mountains. The first groups appear to have been the most cultured. The Incas of Peru, the Mayas, the Aztecs, and the Toltecs of Central and South America -- pardon me -- Central America and Mexico, and the Mound Builders of Ohio.

Now, we know that the first four tribes existed until the Spanish Conquistadors came to America and practically wiped them out. Our own Mound Builders came about 500 A.D. and stayed long enough to leave their unmistakable trademarks, their unusual burial mounds, and their magnificent fortifications.

In every instance they would come up a river to a smaller stream, build a strong impregnable fortification near the mouth of that stream, and then move up the small stream to a point where they would locate their main village with more fortifications. And French Creek in Avon in this area was one of these Mound Builders' villages.

Such forts still exist at the junction of French Creek and Sugar Creek and up the Vermilion and Huron Rivers. There were six mounds built along the Black River and one mound was directly across the street on the Jameson property. This mound was leveled in 1834 when the First Methodist was built in Avon. And these skeletons indicated that these people were very tall, six to seven feet tall. They were a very large race.

Curiously enough, the descriptions of the stone walls found by the early settlers at these fortifications show a construction identical to the early Inca ruins in South America as does the snake symbol found on the mound in Southern Ohio. What misfortune or circumstance

caused the Mound Builders to leave this area about 700 A.D. will probably never be known. The Indian migrations continued until there were about two million in the United States at the time of Columbus consisting of over two hundred different tribes and dialects, in other words, no tribe was very large and there were an awful lot of them.

Now first into this area of the Indians, as we know them, were the .., Eries from which Lake Erie was named. The name meaning "wild cat" which abounded in the dense forest of this region. There were fourteen Indian villages along Black River from the lake and up the French Creek to Avon.

Some idea of the large number of Indians can be estimated from this collection of arrowheads found on the George Knight property on Route 76 [now SR 83]. This is part of a collection of over five hundred arrowheads that were found in a quarter square mile. This will give you some idea of the number of Indians that must have been here and hunted in this area.

Now, the Eries ... lived off of whatever berries, roots and so forth they could find and whatever fish and game they could kill including their own dogs in the wintertime. ... They were so jealous of their more cultured neighboring tribes in New York State known as the Six Nations or Iroquois that they plotted to destroy them and take over their lands and their crops and possessions. At the last moment the treacherous plot was discovered and the Iroquois wiped out the Eries, hunting them down almost to the last man. So the Eries practically disappeared from this part of the country.

This area then became the hunting ground of the Iroquois, but was also used by other tribes who lived to the south and to the west. The Delawares, the Chippewas, the Shawnees, the Ottowas, the Wyandots, the Mingos, the Miamis, and even the Potowotamies could be found hunting in this area, but their settlements were only temporary.

During the wars between the French and the British for possession of this territory, the Indians fought for both sides at one time or another ... for whatever they could gain at the moment. And, likewise, during the Revolution they fought either for the Americans or the British.

When the Northwest Territory was finally ceded to the United States at the Treaty of Paris in 1783 giving us all the territory as far as the Mississippi River, the land was still claimed by the Indians.

In 1784 the Iroquois gave up their claims to this area, but it took General Mad Anthony Wayne to defeat the remaining tribes to the west of here, and peace with the Indians finally came to this area in 1795.

Now, by 1803 most of Ohio had been surveyed and Ohio became a state. Many parts of Ohio had already been settled as well as parts of other states further west, but not this area,

because title to this section had been held since 1662 by the State of Connecticut which had never released any of this land for sale.

Now, Huron County was finally released by Connecticut to families whose homes had been burned by the British, and thus that area became known as the Firelands.

Now, Lorain County was not surveyed until 1805. And in 1807 Pierpont Edwards purchased Avon Township plus three islands in Lake Erie for twenty-six thousand and eighty-seven dollars. This land sold for twice what the land sold for east of the Cuyahoga. At last the way was clear for the settlement of Lorain.

The first settlers, Ezra Beebee and his wife, and Nathan Perry, the trader, arrived at the mouth of Black River in 1807. The Bronsons, the Williams and Strongs came into Columbia that winter as part of a group of thirty from Waterbury, Connecticut.

And in 1809 and 1810, the Terrells, the Beebees and Roots settled in Ridgeville. They were also a part of this Waterbury Colony. And in the fall of 1910, the Morgans and the Wilmots settled in Eaton Township. They were also part of the Waterbury Colony. Also in 1810 and 1811 came the Reids, Daniel Perry and the Kelso brothers, who settled west of Black River. And the Quigleys and Sigleys who settled in Amherst. Ralph Lion settled in Beaver Creek, and Noah Davis came to Avon Lake in 1812, but he did not remain for long.

Now, again, the long-awaited settlement of the Western Reserve was held up this time by the War of 1812 with England, and no more groups came till 1814.

In the summer of 1814 the first permanent settlers arrived in Avon: the Wilbur Cahoon family, Nicholas Young and his son, and the Louis Austin family came from Montgomery County in New York State. Cahoon paid two thousand dollars for six hundred and eighty-six acres.

In 1815 the Cooper brothers, Ephriam Keys and his family, and the three Moon brothers came to Avon, a fourth brother coming later.

Mrs. Cahoon's brother, Waterman Sweet, came in 1817 with his parents, his family and his sister. And the Larkin Williams family came from Massachusetts.

John Steel was the first settler in French Creek Village and his cabin was on the site of the present St. Mary's Church. And the Millers, Youngs, Moores, Mastons, Edmonds, Carlys and Brittons all came to the Avon Lake area, but most did not remain there.

The first white child born in Avon was Leonard Cahoon. And the first death was that of Lydia Williams on January 11, 1818, and she was buried at her request under her favorite chestnut tree on a natural knoll at the center, which is the present Avon [Mound] Cemetery.

Now, when the forefathers of these early settlers came to America the Indians were running it. There were no taxes. There was no debt. The women did all the work, and yet these forefathers thought they could improve on this system. The settlers probably wondered if they ever could.

The American colonies were essentially agricultural, but in New England the land was not well-adapted to farming. Also, the colonial population, which was only twenty-five thousand in 1640, numbered well over two million in 1775.

These were some of the factors which prompted the pioneers in this area to leave New England, sell their lands and homes, and move to Ohio with only their treasured possessions.

I can well imagine how any of you Ladies would react if your husband came home tomorrow night and said, Darling, guess what, I've quit my job, sold the house, car, and most of our furnishings. I bought a piece of land near Hartford, a horse, four oxen and two wagons. Now hurry over to Barnum's and get enough food for about six months and get the children's shoes half soled because we're all going to walk to Connecticut.

Now, this sounds a little fantastic, but this is exactly what happened about a hundred and fifty years ago. It was this pioneer spirit of adventure, a desire to make a better life, stick-to-it-tiveness, and just pure guts which brought these people down hundreds of miles of mud roads, fording the streams, clearing the underbrush, pushing the wagons out of the mud holes, and cooking and camping in all kinds of weather.

Remember, these people were not used to this life. They were not all young and strong. Only a few of the older men had fought in the Revolutionary War and were somewhat trained for such a trip. Yet the trip was the easy part.

No one was prepared for the dense virgin forest which covered all this land, three, six to eight feet across the trunk, thirty-five feet to the lowest branch and so closely packed together and filled with underbrush that one woman who ventured no more than two hundred feet from her cabin in Ridgeville could not find the way back and was lost for three days, or the Ridgeville man who lost his way and came out of the woods way down on the lake bank. He walked along the beach to Black River, borrowed a horse to return home, up the Indian Trail to French Creek, and up Stony Ridge to his home several days later.

To add further hazard, with the bears and the wildcats and the black rattlesnakes, the banded rattlers and the copperheads. Despite these problems, food was the major problem, how to bring enough here with you from Connecticut to last until the first crops could be harvested. The pioneers were forced to revert to the type of life experienced by their colonial ancestors nearly two hundred years before.

Each home was of necessity self-sufficient. Grain was ground, wool was spun and woven, and hides were tanned, only in order to supply the needs of the family.

Money was very scarce and was often earned by selling the black salt or lye obtained by cooking water and wood ashes down each day in large iron kettles.

However, as the population increased and times developed, each settlement was furnished with mills for grinding grain, sawing wood, and usually driven by water power. And due to the heavy forest, the creeks and rivers were much deeper than we ever see them except perhaps during the spring floods. Many dams were erected on French Creek from Ridgeville all the way down the Black River to furnish water power.

Now, early settlers were forced to revert to the Indian method of farming. The earth was exposed to the sun by girdling the trees and burning the branches and the underbrush. Four grains of corn and two beans were then planted at four foot intervals into openings made with an axe or a hoe. If possible, a fish was placed for fertilizer in each hill.

This was because they didn't have time to cut down all these trees and pull up the stumps and plant fields like we are accustomed to these days. They had to get some food started growing very rapidly and this was the only way they could do it.

This was a time when neighbors were really neighborly. Every cabin and barn was raised with their help. What cabins these were, were made of tremendous logs with no windows, a bark roof, a packed earth floor, and a fireplace of wood lined with clay or just a hole in the roof to let the smoke out. The widest board in the wagon bottom became the door. Beds were of ticking filled with dried leaves. This was home, and comfort mattered little after a day of fighting the forest and sleep came quickly to dog-tired bodies.

For fifty years the woods rang to the sound of flashing axes, the singing saws and the swish and thud of falling timber, and the land was finally cleared. But every family unknowingly burned up a fortune in black walnut. Oaks, elms, ash, maples, chestnuts, butternuts, hickories, sycamores, beech, cottonwoods and birch, all fell to the woodman's axe. And the black cherry was eagerly sought to make new furniture to replace that left behind in New England.

In 1840 the first German families came into East Avon and formed what is now Holy Trinity Church. The Muellers, the Fabers, the Schwartzes, Nagels, Biermachers, Zeys, Marsh, Krause and Scheets were welcomed by their American neighbors and became an important part of the Avon community.

In many Lorain County areas the first families moved on to greener pastures, but in Avon most remained because of the excellent land. Here they weathered the storms, outlasted the sickness and epidemics of the times, and sent their boys off to win the Civil War -- many who never returned.

Now transportation began to appear in the area. And following the more than one hundred wooden sailing ships built on Black River, the railroads began to take over the movement of goods and materials into and out of the area. From 1850 to 1900 seven different railroad

lines came into Lorain County, and no section of the United States was better provided with electric roads than Lorain County beginning in 1897.

In 1898 the first commercial automobile venture became a success with the sale of the first Winton in Cleveland. And by 1915 hard-surfaced macadam roads led from Lorain into Avon and Route 76 [now SR 83] from Avon to Avon Lake.

More and more industry appeared in the area. And by 1920 Ohio was one of seven states producing sixty percent of all manufactured goods in the United States.

As industry increased, farming decreased. As transportation improved, coal became more available. And the farmers of Avon became the growers of Avon.

As we pass the lighted greenhouses tonight, we can think back to the tiny candlelit cabins of a hundred and fifty years ago and the seven generations of blood, sweat and tears which have brought to us in Avon a free country with the highest standard of living ever reached by any civilization, a country of free speech and religious freedom, which is finally reaching out to complete the cycle of race, creed and color.

This then is our Avon heritage: Perseverence in all matters; reasonably thrifty; good neighbors; and above all, dedicated to a better America.

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III. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

MR. HICOK: I'll be glad to answer any questions that I can. And if you would care to come up, this is a photostat of a map with which one settler, the Krear family, came into Sheffield with this map in 1834. This is all they had to find their way. Of course, the arrowheads; this is a skinning stone; this is a hatchet; and this somebody's ornament, probably a Chief or someone.

And this map here is a photostat of a very crude sketch made in 1837 showing the Indian sites along Black River as the settlers found when they came to this area.

Are there any questions?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You referred to Avon [Mound] Cemetery. Is that the one at the intersection with 76 [SR 83 in 2006]?

MR. HICOK: Yes, that is known as the Center, and that is the original Avon Cemetery.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Is that a Mound Builder's Cemetery?

MR. HICOCK: No, that is a natural mound. Natural, probably more in the way of a sand dune. It is very natural. Of course, this is a ridge and for some unknown reason the sand was piled up higher at that point. But even in 1818 when Lydia Williams died, there was a chestnut tree growing on there which she would often come and sit under and this is where she asked to be buried, and that today is Avon Cemetery.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's nothing more than a natural ground?

MR. HICOK: That's right ...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I had that as a Mound Builder's mound for years.

MR. HICOK: Yes, I did too, and I did a lot of inquiring because some things like that occur but are never explored. The fortification, however, still exists down at French Creek and Sugar Creek.

Sugar Creek is the first creek going south after you leave Black River as you come to French Creek. And here at this point of the two creeks is this tremendous building of shale, which, of course, is natural, but this they fortified by building walls and by digging ditches that were eight, ten feet across, maybe eight, ten feet high.

In this instance I think there are a series of three ditches dug right across this immense peak of shale. Well, they could get up there, and they commanded both these rivers, and no one could get up river to this section.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Were the forests so dense that commanding the river kept it impregnable?

MR. HICOK: Just about. It's very difficult to imagine any virgin forest as heavy as the growth was in this area. We can only go by what we can read. In many cases the cottonwood trees, the stumps were blasted in two. They couldn't be sawed. The saw wasn't -- this would mean that a two-man bucksaw was not long enough to go across the trunk of the tree. They had to blast them in two.

And the tulip trees, also known as spikewood trees, they were especially liked for the making of siding for homes. And one tree would make the siding for a home, all the siding for a home on one tree. They were really enormous trees.

It is interesting to realize that had these people done nothing more than very carefully cut down and preserve all the black walnut trees on their property and stored them away someplace, that they all would be very, very wealthy. At this time they wouldn't have had to have done anything but just wait, but they just burned it up because they were clearing the land for farming, and that's all they were interested in.

Any other questions?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I understand there's still digging going on in the burial mounds of the Indians. Do you yourself do any of this?

MR. HICOK: No. I do want to get down to this fortification first chance I get this summer and do a little digging around to see if I can find some things. Some of these mound sites that you'll see on here are still available for exploration along Black River.

Although it's amazing, most of them had been covered up, either city dumps or by the National Tube Company dumping slag and things like that. They just happened to be low places where it would be nice to fill in the land and this is what we have done. So there aren't too many of them left as you'll notice as you look at the map here.

Anyone else?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I would like to know, I was told that German was spoken in the streets here in Avon?

MR. HICOK: It may well have been with so many German settlers that came into this area. There were an awful lot of them came into here and into Sheffield, this could have been true. I do not know whether this is true, but it very well could have been.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, I heard that point not too awfully long ago that they had stopped it. I wondered if you had any idea?

MR. HICOK: Well, German was always taught at Lorain High School up until a certain time when they stopped it. And there were an awful lot of German people who came into this area. In fact, throughout the whole area they were the first foreign people who came, you might say.

They were directly here from Germany. Of course, this was an excellent opportunity. I presume we taught them English and they taught us German and this was a good chance to learn both languages.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Do you know if they came down through New York, more or less?

MR. HICOK: Yes, I think they did. Of course, there had been a lot of Dutch and some German descent in New York. There were a lot of early Colonial people who were of German descent.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My grandfather came down through New York and then settled here in Avon, Ohio.

MR. HICOK: There were two distinct, separate groups, in other words, there were the Colonial Germans who came here way, way back. Some of the first people to come, Peter Steyvesant, the Van Linsaleers, and all those people came way, way back. They were

Colonial people. And, of course, some of their ancestors moved down across and into these lands, or their descendants, I should say.

But the group who came here primarily came from Bavaria in 1840 and over into Sheffield about 1833, along in there. They were directly from the Old Country, and, of course, that's the only language they spoke.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: There has been some story -- I don't really know if this is true or not, but I've heard it -- that at one time there was a French [group] of people that, a small colony in Avon or in this whereabouts that was wiped out by the Indians. Is there anything to that?

MR. HICOK: Well, this much is known: On the Island, on Avon Isle, so-called, were found French military buttons. This would indicate that perhaps at some time a small scouting party of French, who certainly were all over the area, on the lakes and on the rivers, might have come up French Creek and possibly been slaughtered by the Indians at that point.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: That's been a story and I --

MR. HICOK: These buttons were actually found there many, many years ago, but there is no indication other than that as to why this was ever called French Creek and I can find no relationship. I have searched many, many times. And there's no indication that there were any [French] families ever settled here ...

The French were attempting to lay claim to this land and they were doing some trading with the Indians, but this was being done many, many miles from here in Detroit and in what is now Chicago and various places like that, in other words, they didn't stop off here. They went right on by.

They were trying to go much further west and claim much larger territories. In fact, they then came back up the Mississippi and they placed plates signifying that this was French territory at the intersection of every major river they came to, and then they'd go up those rivers and place more plates.

Unfortunately, the British overcame them and threw their rights out; otherwise, we might all be speaking French today rather than English.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I heard this tale one time -- I'd like to know if you could verify it -- that the Catholic church on Stony Ridge was the oldest Catholic Diocese in this area, including Cleveland.

MR. HICOK: This I do not know. There is very little that I can find in the history about St. Mary's. You can find it about Holy Trinity, and you can find it about the Methodist church. And you can find it about many of the churches.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, are they in the older records of this area?

MR. HICOK: Apparently, when most of the historical books were written the historical information from St. Mary's was never given to them, therefore, it has been lost somehow. I would hope that someone from that church would someday get back into the records, such as they are, and see if they can't verify some of these things.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I've heard that that church is a hundred and fifty years old.

MR. HICOK: This is not quite possible, because, you see, Cahoon only came in 1814 and Steel didn't come until a little later and he was the first settler and he settled on the site of St. Mary's. So you could say that that spot was the first point settled in French Creek. But I doubt very much if the church was built that many years ago. I don't know what the cornerstone says on it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Mr. Hicok, at one time my dad said that Holy Trinity is the oldest church [parish] of the diocese, so actually it would be the oldest church in this entire area.

MR. HICOK: That would be Holy Trinity, yes, that's possible, rather than St. Mary's. It could very well be. Holy Trinity is more apt to be the oldest, I would say. There weren't too many families here up until, say, 1840, and most of them were not Catholic families, so I doubt very much if there was a Catholic church that old. But when these people came from Germany, they were all Catholics and they immediately formed their church. And I imagine this is probably the oldest church in the area.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Is this route along 254, is that the second beach area you talked about?

MR. HICOK: That is the third beach area.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The third?

MR. HICOK: So you have South Ridge, which is Butternut [Road]. Then you have Center Ridge. And then you have the North Ridge. This is North Ridge here. And then you have the present Lake Shore.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Is Detroit Road the proximate route used in the westward movement?

MR. HICOK: Center [Ridge] Road was used much more and much earlier, because the first people to come in -- of course, the people came into Ridgeville long before they came into Avon. The first road actually was along the beach at Avon Lake, not along the land, along the beach. Many, many Indians and some Moravian missionaries, part of their group, when they came to Lorain, Ohio went along the beach from Rocky River.

Many, many groups traveled along the lake. It was just impossible to spend the time to cut down the trees that would be in your road to come along these ridges until people actually had to bring wagons in.

Most of the trails are along the rivers. And most of the travel was on the river by the Indians. They had no horses. They either walked or they used canoes. There were no beasts of burden at all. Their only domesticated animals were their dogs. So all of the Indian life centered around the rivers and the creeks.

There is a trail shown here that you will see on this map, which was on the west side of the river. And, of course, in the wintertime they would walk on the frozen river. Fish were plentiful and they would usually spear them on the little ripples at night and light torches and catch the fish as they were coming up to spawn in the shallows as they went over the little ripples.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Can you tell us the oldest homestead right now in Avon?

MR. HICOK: You mean the property as standing there?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Right.

MR. HICOK: The only people that I know that are in the original home are our neighbors right next to the south, the -- what is it?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: That home is in the Archives in Washington, a stone house on the rise on 76, north of Detroit Road about a half mile. That house was built in 1830, I believe.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes.

MR. HICOK: Yes. It's not a very big house, but the walls are over a foot thick.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Almost two feet.

MR. HICOK: Yes. But those people are descendants of the original settlers and they're living in what was the original homestead. I don't know of any others around Avon where they're living in the original home.

ANOTHER AUDIENCE MEMBER: They're on the east or the west of --

MR. HICOK: That's on the east side.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The east side.

MR. HICOK: On the east side. (Two voices speaking, not clear).

AUDIENCE MEMBER: They're doing some remodeling.

MR. HICOK: Yes, they added onto the rear of it, but they didn't change the main portion of the house. It's all stone.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It would indicate the three stone houses or four in this area are pretty old then?

MR. HICOK: Oh, they're all very old, yes ...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You should tell -- maybe they're aware. I don't know how important it is -- the Cox home was the old schoolhouse years and years ago [Avon Center School built in 1910].

MR. HICOK: Yes, the Cox home, which is now the Cox home, that's the first home east of the Cemetery, that was the schoolhouse. That was completely remodeled.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: One-room school house.

MR. HICOK: No, more than one. It was actually a two-room schoolhouse.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: But George said one.

MR. HICOK: No. It had an entrance hall and a room on either side. I'd like to see how many pioneers there are here tonight. How many people here were born outside of Ohio? Now leave your hands up. Now how many people here were born outside of Lorain County?

All right. Now how many people here were born outside of Avon? Now you're all pioneers, you see. Pioneers always leave home. They never stay.

(Everyone chuckles).

MR. HICOK: So you're all pioneers. You've all ventured out into the world and to strange lands, strange people, taking strange jobs. So you're all pioneers. This is what is so wonderful about America.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: That is what is great about suburbs.

(Everyone chuckles).

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Have you ever gone through a territory west of Abbe, south of 611 followed by a view along French Creek, Abbe and 611? Have you ever been through back in there?

MR. HICOK: Well, as I say, I have been back in along French Creek, but I want to get up on that fortification at the junction of Sugar and French Creek.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Back in there are some stony places which to me look like natural fortifications. (Not clear).

MR. HICOK: No, I don't think that --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's over near that mound on the north there, they're skeletons there. Have you seen that or heard of that?

MR. HICOK: Yes, you can see those on this. The actual position of [SR] 301 is not shown, but when you come up here you can get some idea of exactly what this mound is in relationship to the area you're talking about. It would be right --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Not clear). You can almost imagine the Indians living back in there because some of the area went beyond that.

MR. HICOK: That's sort of a picnic ground there right now, isn't it?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: No. (Not clear).

MR. HICOK: No, I'd have to --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What would make the present rivers or creeks as they are known today regardless of the falling water table?

MR. HICOK: Well, you see the water table in the whole state has dropped due to the drainage of all of the natural swamps and things that we had, in other words, today when it rains the water goes down the sewer and out into the lake, and there's nothing to have this gradual, steady runoff that we had.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What happens to the lake runoff?

MR. HICOK: Well, this is only a function of how much water they let through the Illinois River and over into the Mississippi. If we were losing water that way I don't think our lake would be too up, because our lake level is strictly regulated by Niagara, by the Niagara River.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's down quite a bit. Isn't it fourteen inches or so this past --

MR. HICOK: Of course, there are periods, and there are government prints showing mean lake level, how it has varied for maybe the last hundred years, and it does vary from time-to-time quite a bit. But the biggest drop was one that was done purposely to let more water come from the Great Lakes over through the Illinois River. This is how they carry off their waste products in Chicago and over into the Mississippi.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Is there any information when one of these salt beds under (not clear) were formed?

MR. HICOK: The salt beds would be over, let's see, around seventy-five million years ago. Your oldest deposits below us are a hundred million years old, and the salt is somewhere in between.

(End of Side 1).

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Audiotape - Side 2:

MR. ZUPPERO: This is Side Number 2.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's supposed to be pretty good salt in that area around 76 [now SR 83] and (not clear).

MR. HICOK: Yes. There's all salt under this whole area, Cleveland, all this whole area here has a lot of salt, of course, the thickness varies. But it is very interesting to read to the fact, apparently just prior to this ice age, that there were what we would consider prehistoric animals roaming this part of the world. This is as they show up in some of the bogs and swamps that have been excavated in parts of the County area.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What would you estimate the trees that would be about six foot across in today's age?

MR. HICOK: Well, hardwood like oak, a tree of that nature probably would be two, three hundred years old. These trees must have been standing one long time and they must have had some wonderful soil to live on. Of course, this is the one thing about the ridges.

The ridges are what would be considered drained ground and drained ground is probably ten to fourteen degrees warmer than undrained ground, therefore, it thaws out faster in the spring and it stays warm longer in the fall and crops grow longer and grow better and grow deeper roots, and so forth. This, of course, is why the people flocked around this area because of the excellent soil that they had here ...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Have you knowledge of the location of our first post office?

MR. HICOK: Our first official post office?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes, um-hmm.

MR. HICOK: Well, let me see if I can think. The first mail to go through went through Avon Lake. That was the very first. And they used to stop at Noah Davis's cabin, down there. Of course, that was not a post office, as such.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: In Avon Lake?

MR. HICOK: Yes, that was in Avon Lake. Of course, this was not at a post office, but this was where the man who delivered the mail stopped

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, the reason I asked was we are living in a home that's many years old. We were told that this home of ours was the post office.

MR. HICOK: It could be.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We had facilities for the mail there at the home.

MR. HICOK: It could very well be. Where is it located?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It was the Old Govinyor? Road estate on Jaycox Road.

MR. HICOK: Oh, on Jaycox.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes.

MR. HICOK: It could very well have been.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: And also the first shoemaker's shop.

ANOTHER AUDIENCE MEMBER: What was the original business center of Avon? In other words, I suppose John Wilke's store and the feedmill, that would be the logical center?

MR. HICOK: Well --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Were they located upon this end?

MR. HICOK: You see you're talking about two separate villages. There was the center, which we get Route 76 where the Cemetery is. And there was French Creek Village, which is, of course, located down here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: They were two independent organizations?

MR. HICOK: They were two independent organizations. And there were places to buy things and mills and what have you in both places.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Where is there a stream up there on that --

MR. HICOK: Well, I will admit there weren't any mills up there, but there were stores and places to buy things. And probably taverns, who knows.

(Everyone chuckles).

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was talking to a man that is pretty well versed on this locality -- he actually lives in my neighborhood -- and he was telling me when he was a child that they did have a flour mill here in Avon, one of the first, that they came from Elyria and adjacent communities to it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The farmers would bring their grain and they would have them mill it.

MR. HICOK: There was no mill right in French Creek.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: That was the first French ...

MR. HICOK: Well, you can almost guess that almost everything in this area that was built was built by Mr. Cahoon. He seemed to have an interest in just about everything. He had most of the land or the best part of it. I presume there is some reference and --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm quite sure this mill that he speaks of was located at a point beyond St. Mary's Cemetery. It was south of Ridgeville in the Clague(?) house there.

MR. HICOK: Um-hmm.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (First part not clear). About where the lawnmower service is now across the street.

MR. HICOK: Um-hmm.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Where did Cahoon get his land from?

MR. HICOK: He got his land from Ensign, a gentleman by the name of Ensign who had originally surveyed this territory; in other words, the surveyor was paid in land, and then he could sell his land for whatever he could get for it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Would he might have surveyed that for the Government?

MR. HICOK: He made a survey for the Connecticut Land Company.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: And they were chartered by Avon, I suppose?

MR. HICOK: No, this survey was made very recently. I mean, this was --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, I mean the Connecticut Land Company, who were they chartered by?

MR. HICOK: The Connecticut Land Company was chartered by the State of Connecticut; in other words, the Charter of 1662 gave Connecticut all the land within the boundaries, to the north and south boundaries of Connecticut, as far east as what they called the -- or far west as what they called the Western Sea, which could have been the Pacific Ocean. And this whole strip of land would have belonged to Connecticut.

Then when the other states were settled in between this strip of land and Connecticut, they fought and fought but they finally had to give up some of this land, of course, to New York State and to Pennsylvania. But the remaining land from here on was supposed to belong to Connecticut, and then they hashed that thing out and fought that out after the Revolutionary War.

And they finally decided that they would give one hundred and twenty (120) miles of land from the Pennsylvania border to the Connecticut Land Company as their portion and to satisfy all the claims that they might have on this land grant that they had.

When they gave this part of it, the back part of it, they gave it to their people who had lost their homes, and this became the Firelands.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Wouldn't that have gone to the Government, though, in other words, the original Government of the United States, to compensate the people that lost their property during the Revolution?

MR. HICOK: No, this was Connecticut. The State of Connecticut gave this to Connecticut families. This land belonged to the State of Connecticut. And this was all fought out. In fact, it was fought out by what would be in the Supreme Court of the United States after the United States was formed. This is one of their functions is to fight out arguments between states as to who owned certain lands, and this is what happened.

But to finally get the various states organized and to get the United States organized these things had to be settled. And so Connecticut got some, I think around six million dollars out of this piece of property that they had for all these years before they got through.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: And Cahoon bought from the Connecticut Land Company?

MR. HICOK: Cahoon bought from a surveyor for the Connecticut Land Company. He was given the land for the survey he made.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The land was a good business investment then?

MR. HICOK: Oh, yes, it was, especially since they missed it by six miles. You may have heard someone speak of tracts of land that were called gores. Now, these gores were merely

errors in surveying, and when they ended up the townships didn't come out square and ahead. A lot of problems in gores.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Wasn't the Connecticut Land Company the first one to set up a land deed, and so forth, throughout the country, wasn't it?

MR. HICOK: No. In fact, British Law set up the first deeds and this was long -- in fact, this deed by which Connecticut claimed this land was set up in 1662, so they knew how to write deeds way back then.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Oh.

MR. HICOK: But, as I say, they -- I think it was Sir Francis Drake that climbed up on the Isthmus of Panama and when he got up there he could stand and look into the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the Pacific on the other. So when these people didn't have any more knowledge than that, they didn't think the continent was very wide, so when they gave a deed for one of these pieces of land over on the East Coast, they said, Okay, from here to here and all the way west to the Western Sea or the Pacific Ocean.

They didn't know they were deeding hundreds of thousand of acres and thousand of miles of land. Of course, these deeds never stood up because other people were claiming other sections of land also, but this is where they got fooled.

But out of this deal Connecticut made out all right, they sold the land and got what they wanted ...

MR. HICOK: Well, Ohio is the Indian name meaning Beautiful River. This is where Ohio came from, The Beautiful Ohio. And Avon was chosen by the people in this area. Until I think 1818 it was called Xeuma. And they didn't like that, so they called it Troy. And they didn't like that, so they finally went in and put the name Avon in. Now, who brought it here from where, whether it was brought from Avon in England or brought from Avon somewhere in New England that had been brought from Avon, I don't know exactly the originality of the name Avon.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Lorain changed it's name a few times too, didn't it? Black River?

MR. HICOK: Yes, it was Black River. It was Charleston. And then Herman Ely when he, of course, started Elyria as the County Seat, he decided to call Lorain after Alsace-Lorraine, that is, he called it Lorain County after Alsace-Lorraine. They Anglicized the spelling and it became Lorain County. Well, then Lorain finally merged as the largest city in the County and so it was given the name Lorain. But it was Black River and then Charleston, yes, sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I heard that Avon and Avon Lake at one time was one. Could you tell me how far back that was and when they split?

MR. HICOK: Well, here is something that is a little difficult to comprehend and that is this: Avon town is an abbreviation for Avon Township. And when they talked about a town, they were talking about a township, and this is where the confusion comes in. Avon and Avon Lake were never one except as a township. They were all part of Avon Township.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Not clear). We always heard that the town they were known as the conservatives, while the others up on the ridge, and the progressive people are going down the --

(Many voices speaking, chuckling).

MR. HICOK: This may have been. You see, every township was designed with a center, and the designer of the township built the roads to go through the center. 76 is a main road to go through the center of Avon Township.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Where was the center of Avon Township?

MR. HICOK: Right up at the center, 76 and 254. And this was the center. And here is where the designer of the township thought that the village for this township should be, there. Well, as it turned out, as you say, there were people who said, Huh, we're going to live up here. And there were other people who said, We're going to live down there. And so as it all worked out, it ended up as two municipalities instead of just one in the center.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: As well as Sheffield, Sheffield Lake, does that run through there?

MR. HICOK: There was no center drawn due to the river. There was no center drawn for the Sheffield Township due to the way it was cut up by the river. The center would have been right in the middle of the river so they didn't choose to have a center there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: One group went to the lake. One stayed up.

MR. HICOK: Well, actually, if you'll look into Sheffield, you'll find that much of the land was controlled by the same people, up and down. Now, who they sold to in either case and who liked it up here or liked it down there, I think was a matter pretty much of preference, of course.

Lots of times you will move into an area where maybe you're congenial with the neighbors. And if the neighbors down along the lake were what you thought was progressive, maybe this is the land you wanted to buy. So it's possible that you could end up with a batch of conservatives on the ridge and somebody else down the other end.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: What designated the boundaries of Avon then?

MR. HICOK: Well, they were surveyed, in other words, each one of these townships was surveyed, however crudely, and then these townships were all sold by the Connecticut Land

Company. And each township in this section in, let's say, in Lorain County was sold for twenty-six thousand dollars.

And they were all equalized by adding pieces of other townships or these gore lands or adding some of these islands. For instance, Kelly's Island was added to one section, and these three small Bass Islands were added to this section to equalize the thing. (Next sentence unclear).

AUDIENCE MEMBER: So a town then was bought by a group of people or by --

MR. HICOK: It could be bought by an individual. For instance, this one was bought by an individual. He had the whole sum of money in this. And he went up and drew up Avon Township. Some another fellow, maybe who represented -- ten people would put their money together. He picked out some other, Sheffield.

Of course, the thing that was really confusing is the way the counties were because there was no Lorain County. And Avon was part of Dover and Sheffield was part of Huron, and for awhile it was really all split up until they finally organized Lorain County and got things straightened out. So there was very little law and order, as such, but luckily due to their Puritanical background the people themselves kept the order pretty well.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: How long ago did the Bass Islands split from this area?

MR. HICOK: Well, in other words, I don't know who the proprietor of these lands, I don't know what he did with those. Who he sold them to. They weren't a part of this as a political part, but only as a part of his purchase; in other words, you could have had a township way down in the southern part of the county and attached to it could have been part of Black River Township, only for sale purposes to equalize the amounts of land, not as a political subdivision.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We all thank you very much.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS:

MR. ZUPPERO: This talk on the History of Avon was done by Don Hicok. His wife's name is Mary Ellen Hicok. My name is Tony Zuppero, and I recorded this talk by Don Hicok on February the 10th, 1964 at 9:00 pm at the Central Bank Building in the Community Room and I did it for the Avon Junior Women's Club. I recorded it on reel-to-reel tape.