Amalthea – Central College

The village on the banks of Big Walnut Creek founded by Timothy Lee was originally named Amalthea. Amalthea Hart and Timothy Lee were engaged to be married in their home state of New York. Two days after they applied for a marriage license she died. Timothy Lee moved West to the state of Ohio but did not forget his fiancée. He wrote her cousin of his intention to name the community north of his home “Amalthea” in honor of his beloved who had died before they could be married. The name Amalthea was never legally changed.

Today we refer to this same community as Central College because of actions Timothy Lee took to establish an institution of higher learning in Amalthea. In 1832 Timothy Lee set aside 35 acres for use as a school of higher learning known as the Blendon Institute. The classes were taught in a blacksmith shop by Reverend Ebenezer Washburn. In 1839 Lee erected three frame buildings for use by the institute – a chapel, a boarding house and a classroom building.

In 1841 when Lee realized that the Presbyterian Church was looking for land on which to start a college, he donated 100 acres of land and promised to build the necessary buildings for the school. Central College of Ohio was incorporated March 1842 and Timothy Lee became one of the first trustees of the school. Lee built a three-story brick building with rooms for male students. Young women attending the co-ed school were housed in private homes. Timothy Lee gave an estimated $40,000 to establish and maintain the institution he began in 1832.

Despite Timothy Lee’s generosity and some very enticing advertisements to prospective students, the college had only one graduate and ceased to operate as a college in 1850. It was operated as a preparatory academy from 1850 until 1895. During these years the Fairchild Building was constructed to house female students and named to honor the only graduate of the college Mr. I. Fairchild. In 1895 a portion of the grounds and the buildings were sold to the Deaf-Mute Alumni Association. This began a new era for the community.
In 1805 twenty-year-old Timothy Lee was in love with Amalthea Hart. However, two days after they applied for a marriage license, Amalthea became sick and died. Timothy Lee bought 500 acres on Big Walnut Creek in what is now called Central College. He left New York on foot in 1807 and came to Central Ohio to the heavily wooded banks of the creek and began to work to establish a home and business. In honor of his beloved fiancée he later named the area Amalthea. That was the official name for the area we call Central College.

Upon arriving on his land Timothy Lee began to clear trees and underbrush around the creek. He roomed in someone else’s log cabin until he had time to build his own log home. In his daybook he wrote on August 14, 1810, “Finished log cabin.”

When the war of 1812 broke out Timothy Lee enlisted in the army and went to Worthington to recruit his own group of soldiers. His recruitment efforts earned him the rank of Captain.

Timothy Lee saw the potential of Big Walnut Creek and decided that he would go into the milling business. After the war was over he went to Kentucky to learn how to manufacture woolen cloth. Upon his return to Central Ohio he built a flour mill, sawmill, and woolen mill on the banks of the Big Walnut Creek.

In 1818 Timothy Lee married Rhoda Taylor. Rhoda came to Ohio with her parents and eight brothers and sisters in 1810. Two years after the family arrived the parents and their oldest daughter died. The rest of the children were divided among other family members to be cared for. Rhoda was sent to live with a cousin in Delaware County. She became a schoolteacher and then met and married Timothy Lee. Together they had three daughters and two sons.

As the Amalthea community grew Timothy Lee was generous in his gifts of land to the small village. He and Edward Phelps, one of the first pioneers in Blendon Township, jointly gave two acres of land for the building of a church. In 1841 Lee and his wife donated buildings and land for the formation of Central College. The college never lived up to Timothy Lee’s expectations. It had only one graduate.

Timothy Lee died in 1862. The following words were used to describe him by those who knew him and wrote or spoke about him: a man of strong character, just and honest, respected by all, loved by few, fine scholar, tall and spare, his words cut like a knife, and independent.

Lee House

By the 1830s Timothy Lee had prospered enough that he and his family could leave the frame house he had built in 1818 when he and Rhoda were married. Lee built a home on banks of Walnut Creek that stands today and is on the National Register of Historic Places. It is a large Greek Revival home built of red oak. The front of the home has four doric columns which stand on stone pedestals. One of the most distinctive features of the home is the fan-shaped window above the two-storied front porch. There were three rooms on the main floor – a parlor, dining room and library. The bedrooms were on the second floor and included a master bedroom which opened onto the second floor porch at the front of the home. The home was used as a station on the Underground Railroad. Slaves were hid in the attic among drying corn sheaves. Mary Skeel Lee, author of many children’s books and granddaughter-in-law to Timothy Lee, wrote a novel about children which was set in the Timothy Lee home and was about the Underground Railroad. The book Garret Grain was published in 1894.
Timothy Lee’s Journal Entries

1804 May - Went to work for C. Bond six months for $65, which I performed...

Dec 7 - Set out for the state of N.Y. in order to take a school. Stayed in Adams the first night, the next in Greensborough, where I found Asa and Obed Rice. They assisted me to find a school in Peterborough which I kept 3 months and took 20 in cash and $10 in trade and returned to Conway.

1805 June - Went to work at Burchertown for Phin Clark. I worked 4 months and he gave me $55 in cash. Came back to Conway and went to work for I. Chamberlain in order to learn the clothier’s trade, agreeing to work 2 years for nothing. (Timothy Lee worked with Chamberlain peddling cloth and other goods in exchange for fur and deer-skins. Eventually he traded with him for a piece of land in Ohio and traveled here by way of Lake Erie, Pittsburgh and Marietta)

1810 October 5th - Bought a pair of hams from an Indian

November 7th - Shot three times and killed a turkey. Mended my shirt and trousers.

November 9th - Shot a turkey and made a chimney to my cabin

November 14th - Shot a turkey and a deer

But neither of them did I come near.

November 15th - Made a door to my cabin. Shot a turkey

November 22nd - Shot at some ducks. Bought a piece of venison of an Indian. Began a hovel for my horse – horse got away.

December 10th - Went over to my place, cut some hemlock boughs and put them as covering to my hovel.

Timothy Lee kept a journal for many years sharing what he was doing, what he was buying, who he was visiting and even some poetry he wrote to describe some events. On November 14 in the entries above we see a simple example of his poetry. I want to encourage teachers and students to journal. Your pieces of writing are items that will be of importance to archives 25,50,100 years from now.

In 1976 as the United States was celebrating its 200th birthday a local resident Pat Ernsberger kept a diary of things that were going on in Westerville and reminiscences of days gone by. This past fall the Westerville Historical Society published this book. Copies of the book are available at the Local History Resource Center for purchase.

Ohio in 2003

As we move into Ohio’s Bicentennial Year plans are being made at the state and local level to celebrate our state’s history. If you need the resources and archives of the Westerville Public Library’s history center for any special event or project you are planning in your classroom or school please let us know how we can be of assistance. Phone Beth Weinhardt at 882-7277 ext 160 or e-mail bweinhar@wpl.lib.oh.us.
Biography Report on Timothy Lee
By
Jacob Bueter
3rd grade

I am proud to be a Westerville citizen. I feel that I was able to contribute to our city's heritage. My name is Timothy Lee, and I have a story to tell.

I was born August 14, 1785 in Conway, Massachusetts. I walked from New York to Worthington in the summer of 1807 to locate a Major's warrant for 500 acres of land. Sometime between 1814 and 1816 I helped plat the village of Amalthea named for my sweetheart who died 2 months after we were married. Amalthea is now called Central College.

In 1833 I built my first log home and married Rhoda Taylor of Newark, Ohio and we had three daughters and two sons.

As I prospered, I built a gristmill, saw mill and wollen mill on the banks of the creek. I liked to collect stamps in my free time.
SQUIRE TIMOTHY LEE

TIMOTHY LEE, ONE OF THE FIRST SETTLERS OF BLENDON TOWNSHIP, WALKED FROM NEW YORK TO WORTHINGTON IN THE SUMMER OF 1807, TO LOCATE A MAJOR'S WARRANT FOR 500 ACRES OF LAND. HE TOOK HIS CLAIM ALONG THE BANKS OF BIG BELLY (NOW BIG WALNUT) AND SOMETIME BETWEEN 1814 AND 1816, WITH THE HELP OF GIDEON HART, THEY PLATTED THE VILLAGE OF AMALTHEA (NOW CENTRAL COLLEGE).

TIMOTHY WAS BORN AUGUST 14, 1785, IN CONWAY, MASSACHUSETTS. HE DIED IN BLENDON TWP. IN 1862.

HIS FIRST HOME WAS A LOG CABIN, BUT IN 1833, HE BUILT THE BEAUTIFUL HOME OF GREEK REVIVAL STYLE ON THE WEST BANK OF BIG WALNUT.

HE MARRIED RHODA TAYLOR OF NEWARK AND TO THIS UNION WERE BORN THREE DAUGHTERS AND TWO SONS.

AS MR. LEE PROSPERED, HE BUILT A GRIST MILL, SAW MILL AND WOOLEN MILL ON THE BANK OF THE CREEK.

IN 1839, HE ERECTED THREE FRAME AND ONE LARGE BRICK BUILDING WHICH HE PRESENTED, TOGETHER WITH 100 ACRES OF LAND, TO THE PRESBYTERY FOR A CENTRAL COLLEGE. THOUGH SERVED BY SUCH DEVOTED CHRISTIAN MEN AS REV. EBENEZER WASHBURN, REV. HENRY BUSNELL AND OTHERS, THE SCHOOL NEVER ATTAINED A COLLEGE GRADE. BUT FOR FORTY YEARS IT WAS A SUCCESSFUL ACADEMY UNDER THE CARE OF THE PRESBYTERY, AND A NUMBER OF PROMINENT MEN IN GOVERNMENT, IN RELIGION, IN EDUCATION, AND IN BUSINESS AFFAIRS, RECEIVED THEIR EDUCATION HERE.

SQUIRE TIMOTHY LEE WAS A FINE SCHOLAR, VERY ACTIVE AND ENTER PRISING AND DID MUCH FOR THE TOWNSHIP. HE KEPT IT OUT OF DEBT, WHICH WAS IMPORTANT IN THE EARLY DAYS WHEN MONEY WAS SCARCE.