

ThisWeek Hilliard Northwest News

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Tim Woodruff: Guest columnist

Make tracks to Weaver Park to check out historic train station

What structure is the cornerstone of one of Hilliard's outstanding landmarks at the Historic Village in Weaver Park? The answer is the Train Station.

One of Hilliard's more famous individuals is Tom Gard. He was first and foremost a railroader, but he was also a singer/songwriter of Blue Grass music. He wrote the song "Ribbons of Steel" which was symbolic of "riding the rails" and the rails of course were what helped to create the Village of Hilliards. As we take a trip back in time and learn about how the historic village all began, I can almost hear Tom yell out in his distinctive robust voice "All Aboard" the Hilliard History Express!

Back in the middle 1800's, John Hilliard, the founder of Hilliard's Station, was on the board of directors of the Pennsylvania Railroad and was instrumental in creating and constructing the new railroad line from Columbus through Hilliard to Piqua and points west. He purchased land on either side of the railroad's right-of-way where Hilliard is located today and is the reason our city is named Hilliard. The tracks were finished in 1853, when the inaugural run was made from Columbus to Indiana.

As Hilliard continued to grow, the railroad owners took notice and decided that the Hilliard area might be a good stopping point for the train and therefore, decided to create a train station. The first station in 1895 was only temporary and consisted of combining three boxcars along the side of the tracks. This lasted for four years until the permanent wood structure was constructed. The stopping point was called Hilliard's Station. This structure was somewhat different from most train stations of that era in that it had only freight doors and no passenger doors. Although there was some passenger business, most of the business was commercial and agricultural.

As Hilliard continued to grow, two sidings were built to accommodate the Hilliard Lumber Company and the Russell Grain Company. The train station continued to play an important part in the life and times of the Hilliard community. Paul VanCulin was the Station Master for many years until the train traffic declined to a point that it became unprofitable, and the station finally closed its doors in 1962, after a remarkably successful and memorable run.

Some interesting facts about the trains and the station in its glory days:

- Trains often became a nuisance when they stopped and blocked the main roads in and out of the city.
- On the days the trains would go through the city, ladies knew not to hang their freshly washed clothes out to dry because the soot from the coal-fired engines would cause them to have to rewash the clothes.
- The station survived two Hilliard train wrecks, one being very close to the station.
- In the early days, the station master communicated by telegraph using Morse Code.
- The station was equipped for mail delivery and pick-up by using a mail hook from which the mail catcher pouch was hung.

After the station closed, some visionaries began to talk about preserving some of the historic buildings in the Hilliard area which resulted in the formation of a group that became the Northwest Franklin County Historical Society. The society negotiated with the City of Hilliard for part of the land in Weaver Park to be set aside for a historic village. It was in 1969 that all the I's were dotted and the T's crossed to begin the process of moving the first historic structure to Weaver Park. That structure of course was the Hilliard Train Station. It was amazing for the community to see the building astride the lowboy trailer slowly rolling down Main Street to its final resting spot. The station was placed on the preconstructed foundation and permanently attached.

Come visit the Historical Village to see firsthand how it has grown and developed into the gem it is today. The village is open on Thursday evenings from 6-8 p.m. and on Sunday afternoons from 1-4 p.m. through August. Mark your calendar and bring your family for a visit to the Historical Village and Museum. I promise you will not be disappointed. The village and parking are free, donations are accepted and greatly appreciated.

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President