



February 16, 2017, Our Old Bookcase, St. Marys, First Mercer Co. Courthouse

Photo caption: Court Street indicates the site of the first Mercer County Courthouse, when Saint Marys was the County Seat of Mercer County. Map credit: C. S. Williamson's "History of Western Ohio and Auglaize County," printed by W. M. Linn & Sons, at Columbus, Ohio, 1905.

OUR OLD BOOK CASE

By Joyce L. Alig, President, Mercer County Historical Society

Saint Marys, Ohio was the County Seat of Mercer County, Ohio, from 1824 until September 12, 1839.

The ownership of the Indian Lands of what is now Northwest Ohio was transferred to the United States Federal Government following the Native American Treaties of 1817 and 1818. As of February 12, 1820, the following counties were established in Northwest Ohio: Van Wert, Mercer, Putnam, Allen, Hancock, Hardin, Crawford, Richland, Seneca, Sandusky, Wood, Henry, Paulding and Williams. This same act also provided that Van Wert and Mercer Counties be attached to Darke County until otherwise ordered. Mercer County was subsequently detached in 1824. In 1824, Van Wert was detached from Darke County and attached to Mercer. Van Wert County was organized March 18, 1837.

Saint Marys became the County Seat of Mercer County in 1824. Court was held in various buildings until the first Mercer County Courthouse was constructed in 1828-1829, on Court Street, Saint Marys.

I have not found any historical record as to why the Mercer County Courthouse was moved from Saint Marys to Celina. As of September 12, 1839, the Mercer County Commissioners held their first meeting at Celina. In reference to the book, "*Ohio Sunshine Laws: An Open Government Resource Manual*," by the Ohio Attorney General, at Columbus, Ohio, there is the statement, "*A public body must keep full and accurate minutes of its meetings. These minutes are not required to be a verbatim transcript of the proceedings but must include enough facts and information to permit the public to understand and appreciate the rationale behind the public body's decisions.*" I wish that the Sunshine Laws had been in effect in 1839, and were enforced so that we could understand the Commissioners' 1839 decisions.

When I was serving as a Member of the 75th Anniversary Committee of the 1923 Mercer County Courthouse, I wrote the book, "*Mercer County's Courthouses, Celina, Ohio, 1824-1998.*" I spent weeks, going through every Journal of the Mercer County Commissioners, from 1824-1998, and I found no written explanation as to why the Mercer County Courthouse was moved to Celina in 1839.

February 14, 1848, Mercer County was diminished by the formation of Auglaize County. Parts of Mercer County were attached to Allen and Van Wert Counties. Saint Marys, New Bremen and Minster became part of Auglaize County. Parts of Darke County, the land south of the 1795 Treaty Line and north of the present Mercer-Darke County Line, were attached to Mercer County. This land included Gibson Township and parts of Granville and Marion Townships

I have not done research in Auglaize County's newspapers. When I read old newspapers, I see that over a century ago, local citizens had no problem about writing their opinions in the newspapers. It would seem to me that there would have been citizens in Saint Marys who were against moving the Mercer County Courthouse to Celina. At some point, someone must have been writing about the early history of Saint Marys, and wrote about why the Mercer County Courthouse was moved to Celina. I cannot find any record of why the County Courthouse was moved to Celina, in the Auglaize County History Books. Does anyone, who studies Auglaize County's history, know why the Mercer County Seat of Justice was moved from St. Marys to Celina in 1839? Does anyone in Mercer County know the answer to this question?

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