

Historic Clifton, Ohio



The Original Opera House Built in 1893, Centennial Year 1993

1802 - 2023
Where Time Stood Still

Preservation Society of Clifton

Clifton.... Our Little Town

The Walking Tour of Historic Sites in our Village

Village of Clifton History (the condensed version)

Prior to Ohio becoming a state in 1803, The Greenville Treaty of 1797 opened up the Ohio territory for settlement. There were many frontiersmen who roamed the area in wonder of the natural beauty of the Ohio Valley i.e. Daniel Boone, Simon Kenton and Cornelius Darnell, who made the famous leap across the gorge to escape a band of Shawnees from which he had escaped. Soon after Ohio became a state, 2 of those frontiersmen ventured into what is now our Village of Clifton. Owen Davis a Welsh immigrant and his son in law Gen Benjamin Whiteman Jr, (both Revolutionary War veterans), not only saw the beauty of the area, but they saw the potential this area had to offer. They saw thick forest and the waterpower generated by the water flowing through the cliffs of the limestone gorge of the Little Miami River and here is where they settled. Clifton was first known as “Davis Mills” after the first mill that was built by Davis, then Whiteman’s Settlement. Col Robert Patterson (of NCR legacy) came to the settlement around 1806. He built a 4-story mill that spanned the gorge, purchased 95 acres from Owen Davis and hired a surveyor to plot a village and 17 homes were built, By 1817 the village took on the name of Clifton for the beautiful cliffs that surround the Little Miami River, and was incorporated in 1833.

Despite losing the bid for the building of the Railroad to Yellow Springs, Clifton grew and was prosperous. The village census of 1880 was the highest at 310, there were two grocery stores, two blacksmith shops, a wagon shop, two shoe shops, a sawmill, flour mill, paper mill, a barrel stave mill, and a tavern. However, as the need for “water powered” energy declined, so did the village.

Today the village is small with the 2020 census of 147 persons but has a vital sense of community. Each week you can hear concerts in the Opera House, have lunch at the Clifton Mill, and shop at the Clifton Co-op. The welcome mat is always out to join us at our July 4th cookouts and enjoy our Clifton Gorge Music and Arts Festival held yearly at the end of August. October brings our community gathering for the Halloween cookout and hayrides. The most spectacular is the Christmas light display at the Clifton Mill from the day after Thanksgiving till the New Year.

Much of the History and heritage of Clifton is still present, and many of the buildings have a story of their own to tell. Many of the historic buildings and homes of Clifton are within a few blocks of the center of town, which is easy if your village is only 6 blocks long and 2 blocks wide!! A short drive to the east you can view the original Whiteman stone house which is still occupied as a private residence. The Clifton Cemetery to the north is full of history, and nothing is better than a hike in the Clifton Gorge at any time of the year.

This booklet will guide you to them and tell the history and secrets that they hold.

Enjoy our Village, come back anytime.

1. THE CLIFTON UNION SCHOOL

The Clifton Union School was constructed 1872-1873, and spans both Greene and Clark Co. which is marked by an “X” on both sides approximately under the second window. Land for the school was purchased from Bennett Lewis for \$1.00. There were 4 classrooms and students received a 12-year education with the first class graduating in 1878. The first graduates were Mattie Bradfute Benham, Alice Haines, Lella Littleton Wren, Nellie Haines, and Sadie Barnett.

A storm in the late 1800’s damaged the Bell tower and roof of the school, but they were repaired. The north addition occurred in the early 1900’s and in the 1980’s the slate roof was replaced by the Village.

In 1916 the high school was closed. The father of Ohio State Legendary Football coach Woody Hayes was superintendent at the school from 1911-1916. In 1955 the Clifton Union School merged with Cedarville School District to become the Cedar-Cliff School District. The Clifton school was used for the 5th and 6th grades until the decision was made to close permanently on May 28, 1962. The Clifton Union Schoolhouse is currently being renovated with a grant issued by the State of Ohio under Governor Michael DeWine to be completed by the end of 2026.



2. THE CLIFTON OPERA HOUSE

Designed by Charles Creager of Springfield and built by D.B. Moon of South Solon for a cost of \$2909.00, The Clifton Opera House opened its doors in 1893 for the community and has not stopped! The Opera House has been a performance center built with an inclined floor with seating for approx. 500 patrons. It has served as a theater for plays and musicals performances, and meeting house for civic and school activities. In the 1900’s the floor was leveled and used as a gymnasium for the Clifton Union School. When the school closed in 1962, the building was sold to the Village of Clifton for \$1.00. At this transition the Mayor, John White, had the village offices moved to the location.

In the 1980’s the Opera House suffered some structural damage and there was talk of tearing it down due to financial burdens. Due to a village effort and volunteers with the leadership of Howard Printz who was president of the Historical Society, the building was spared and renovated with donations of monies, period theater seats from Memorial Hall salvage in Springfield Ohio and the Masonic Lodge in Cedarville., (the seats in the balcony are original seats with the gentleman's “hat rack” underneath for their top hats), the Chandelier was a donation by Paul (mayor) and LaVeda Lazorski. The kitchen equipment, curtains, lighting, and sound systems from multiple donors. The Clifton Opera House is currently being renovated with funding from a grant from



the State of Ohio under Governor Michael DeWine to be completed by the end of 2026. The Village is still in control of the Opera House, and you can be entertained every Saturday night with musical performances, local school plays, and is also available for rentals.

3. SHOT TOWER

At the corner of SR 343/ Clay St. Due to the unrest in the new territory, Robert Patterson had the shot tower built in the early 1800's. The shot tower was used to make ammunition (lead balls/shot) by dropping molten lead through a sieve on the second floor into a water tank on the ground floor rounding in form on the way into the water to cool. Large musket balls were formed in molds and hand trimmed. At the start of the War of 1812, General Henry Harrison appointed Robert Patterson as Quartermaster of the Army with the rank of Colonel. Ammunition from this shot tower and Col Patterson's woolen mill (for uniforms) supplied many of the troops. The building has been added on over the years and is now a private residence.



4. GENERAL STORE

John Knox built a general store in 1830. A place where the community could gather to exchange ideas, news, gossip and shop. At one time it also was the local post office. There was a gas pump on the north side of the building which was removed approx. 1970's. The second floor of the building was used for community square dancing and meetings of the Knights of Pythias Lodge. The building was kept by David Weber and brothers for years as one of the best-known antique shops and malls in the area. It is now standing empty with hopes of being restored to a useful purpose.



5. WILLIAM D JOHNSON HOME

William D. Johnson was a large landowner at the north end of the village. He had a Federal Italianate House built on the hill in the 1820's – 1840's. At one time he was owner of the Clifton Mill, a distillery in town, and was a Clark Co Commissioner. He was an Elder in the Presbyterian Church. He and Bennett Lewis donated the land on which the current Presbyterian Church sits. Andrew White married Johnson's niece and inherited the home. Andrew White was active in the community and served on the school board of the newly built school. John (Thelma) White (no relation) purchased the house in 1947, and John White served as Mayor of Clifton for many years. He then sold the house to Paul and LaVeda Lazorski in which Paul served as Mayor from 1965-1985. The home is a private residence still owned by the Lazorski Family.



6. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

At one time Clifton supported 4 churches but now only one. In the early settlement, there was no one denomination that could support a minister, so a meeting house was erected on North River Rd north of Benjamin Whiteman's house that all could worship.

At the beginning of 1811 there were enough Presbyterians in the area that they formed the first church in Greene Co/Miami Township, what was then called The Church of Yellow Springs, but they were still meeting in private homes. In 1814 the first Presbyterian Church was a log church built in the cemetery.

By 1830 the congregation had expanded, and a larger building was built in the cemetery. Plans to build another larger church in 1850 were postponed due to a failed wheat crop, but in 1854 the present-day Presbyterian Church was built on ground donated by Bennett Lewis and William D. Johnson.

The congregation split in 1878 over the states' rights/slavery issue and another Presbyterian Church was built just 3 blocks away, but in 1973 the congregation merged and is once again in the original building. The 2nd Church has since burned down from a lightning strike.



7. CLIFTON CEMETERY

The Clifton Cemetery lies northwest of the village. Here is where most of the founders of Clifton are buried. Some of those resting are from the Revolutionary War. The first pastor of the Clifton Church has a raised tombstone which is on the site of the pulpit of the first church. Roderick Austin, the Stagecoach driver, had a fatal coach accident 100 yards from where he is buried. The vault is still present that was used to house many of the deceased from the Cholera epidemic of 1849 due to the inability to dig the graves fast enough.

8. SENIOR CENTER

141 ½ Clinton St. This building was originally built in 1893 (same year as the Opera House) as the new town hall including the Mayor's office and The jail was a small area to the back (which is still present) and used to house those who had broken the law until they could be transported to the county jail by horse and wagon. The jail was used until the 1900's. This building served as the town hall until 1963 when offices were moved to the Opera House. The building was converted into a fire station for the local volunteer fire department, and the jail was converted into a kitchen which was used for the many local community dinners that were held there. It is now the home of the Senior Citizens, and again as the meeting place for the monthly Zoning and Council meetings and other community organizations. The portion of the old fire station now houses the Clifton Mailing Station since the closure of the Post Office in December 2025.



9. POST OFFICE

The Clifton Post Office was established in 1832, originally housed in the General Store. It was moved to the present location in 1964 into what use to be a home owned by Erna Caupp who served as Postmaster for 30 years. Our post office was one of the smallest in the State of Ohio. The full service post office was closed in December of 2025.



10. THE LAST SALOON

Directly behind the post office is the Last Saloon Clifton had. The home was moved to its current location, and the living room of the home is where the tavern was. The Saloon was closed down one night after the town constable was shot and killed there.

WATER STREET

Water Street is the historic business district of Clifton since its founding fathers built the first mill along the cliffs of the Little Miami River.

11. THE CLIFTON HOUSE

At the corner of Clay and Water is the Clifton House. Built in 1839 by John and Harriet Truesdell Anderson. They had eight of their nine children born in that home and it was occupied by the original family line until the 1900s. It is now owned by Anthony Satariano Jr. and Family who run the Clifton Mill Operation. The house was also the office of Dr Harris who served the community for years. Mr. and Mrs. William Waite bought it in 1967, restored it, and it was featured in the Greene Historical Home Tour in 1974.



12. THE BRICK GENERAL STORE

This store was built in 1833 and had been mostly used as a General/Grocery Store until the 1960's. It was managed in the 1800's the Clark family and then later the Sparks. It is now in private ownership.



13. BLACKSMITHS BUILDING

The Blacksmiths shop was built circa 1829. There were at one time 3 blacksmiths in Clifton, Confarr, Hopkins and Walker. Besides being a farrier for horses, the blacksmiths also specialized in buggy repair, coppering, and making farm implements.



14. TAVERN

At East end of Water St is the brick Tavern. 10 acres of land (lots 1,2, &3) were sold to Horace Lawrence in 1835 along the Columbus-Cincinnati Road (also known as the accommodation line branch). Benjamin Holloway, a brick mason from Pennsylvania, was credited with building the brick tavern on this site (lot #1). The Tavern stood 3 stories tall, had a winding staircase, a ballroom on the 2nd floor and the bar was at the south end of the Tavern. The tavern served as a stagecoach stop offering lodging and meals for weary travelers. In 1906 the Bell telephone exchange was housed in the southeast corner of the second floor, and at one time the post office was located here. The Tavern is now a private residence.



15. CLIFTON MILL

The original mill was built in 1802, rebuilt in 1830 and again after a fire on site. In 1869 the water wheel was replaced by a Leffel turbine (invented and produced in Springfield Ohio—Lane). The main set of grinding stones were brought over to this after being quarried in France, used as a ballast in the ships. the turbines as an energy source the mill once produced and supplied the electricity for Clifton, Cedarville and Yellow from 1908-1937 for a cost of \$1.00 a month. Some of the owners of the mill were Owen Davis, Armstrong Family, Preston William D. Johnson family, Robert Heller Family and the current owners the Satariano Family. The current owners still offer flour products shipped worldwide, and a wonderful restaurant that serves famous plate size pancakes from their flour, a gift shop and the Legendary Christmas Lights of The Clifton Mill from Thanksgiving until the new year. Their lights won the ABC “Great Christmas Light Fight” in 2018.



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16. LITTLE MIAMI RIVER

The Little Miami River flows from two headwaters to the confluence east of Clifton, through the Clifton Gorge on its way to the Ohio River. This river was the source of power that encouraged the building of the mills along its banks that functioned for years supplying goods to the early settlers of the area. The Little Miami River was the first river to be designated as an “Ohio Scenic River”. That year (2023) the river celebrated its 50 year anniversary of being a National Scenic River. For more information contact the Little Miami Watershed Network LMWN at Info@LMWN.org (937) 815-1492. We also invite you to become a member of the Ohio Scenic River Association at ohioscenicriverassociation.com



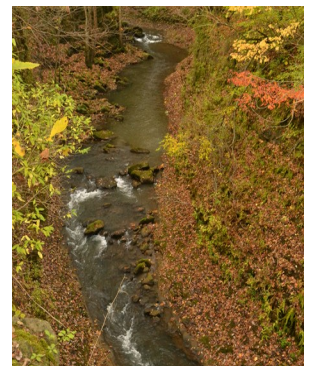
17. THE CLIFTON DAM

A few hundred yards east of the Clifton Mill is the Dam that was originally built to supply water to the Mill Race which provided water to power the water wheel at the Clifton Mill. It is a vital structure that allowed the mills along the river to flourish. It was reinforced in 1978 after the waters rose in the spring after the snow melted from the historic blizzard of 1978. The dam and mill race are kept in working condition by The Clifton Mill, with the removal of trees and debris that float downstream. The dam is on private property and cannot be seen unless by kayaking to the dam.



18. THE CLIFTON GORGE

At the foot of the dam, the Little Miami River begins the Clifton Gorge. This is where the Little Miami River starts to cut through the Niagara Limestone to form The Clifton Gorge. The gorge is the southern and western borders of the Village of Clifton, then extends into John Bryan State Park south to the Ohio River. The gorge is maintained by the park services with the southern edge being a nature preserve established in 1973 dedicated to Dr John L. Rich, a noted geologist and educator, and the northern rim with trails both high and low to view the beauty of the area which we are so fortunate to have in our backyard. The Clifton Gorge has been designated as a National Natural Landmark by the U.S. Dept of the Interior.



19. GENERAL WHITEMANS STONE HOUSE.

Just east of the village (½ mile) on North River Rd. is the location of Benjamin Whiteman's home. He and his father-in-law Owen Davis were the founders of the settlement to become known as Clifton. The home was built in 1816 and is still a private residence. The site originally had a log home built around 1800, then was replaced by the stone home of present. General Benjamin Whiteman served both in the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 before settling in Clifton and becoming a Mill owner. He also served as the first Associate Judge of Greene Co., 1803-1805. and is the reason that Clifton is divided by both Greene and Clark Counties. There was a cemetery to the east of the property that held the graves of servants and his beloved horse, of which there is no evidence of today. It was also said that he owned a bear that was kept on the property.



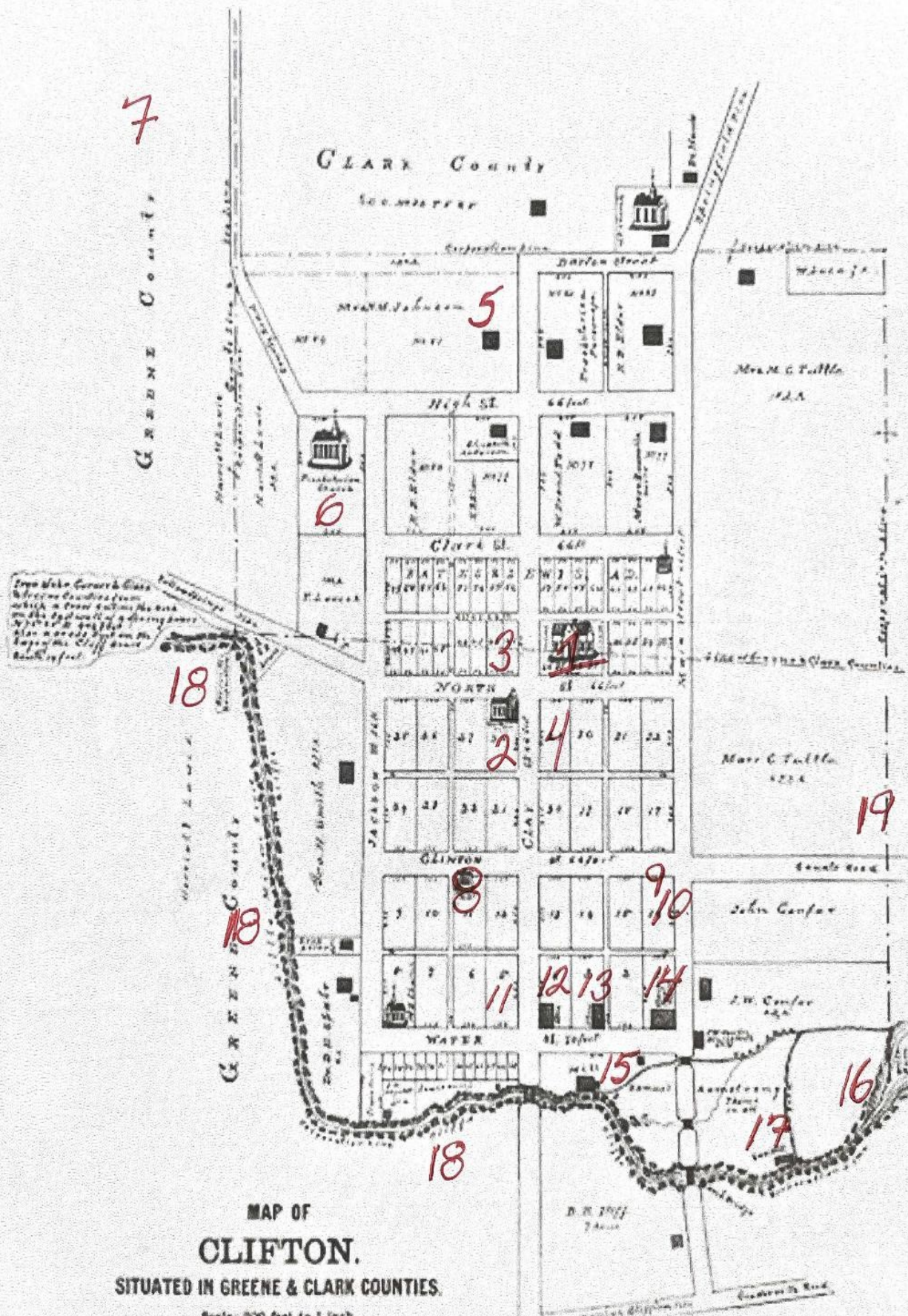
This history was obtained through personal diaries, local commentaries, documented histories from Greene and Clark Counties, and was compiled several times and recently updated by Paula Lazorski 2026.

If you read this and have different information and or documents that will add to the history of Clifton, we would love to hear from you. Village of Clifton PO Box 27 Clifton Ohio 45316 937-342-2175

We have established The Preservation Society of Clifton to obtain and preserve the history that is so important to the village.

We are encouraging membership to the PSC at \$20.00 a year, but you do not have to be a member to attend the meetings and programs.

You can keep track of our progress, find exciting historic facts, photos and information of upcoming meetings and programs we are offering on the Preservation Society of Clifton face book site, and on the Clifton News and Events Facebook page.



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MAP OF
CLIFTON.
SITUATED IN GREENE & CLARK COUNTIES.
Scale: 200 feet to 1 inch.