

HISTORY OF GNADENHUTTEN

Gnadenhutten (Tents of Grace) had its beginning in 1798 when John Heckewelder returned to this area sixteen years after the brutal massacre of ninety Christian Indians in 1782. The government had set aside three tracts of land, 4,000 acres each, for the Indians. When it was learned that they could not use all the land, the Gnadenhutten Tract was opened for white settlers. Many Moravian families from eastern Pennsylvania came to this area to live. John Heckewelder built the first house in the new settlement in 1798.

A museum owned and maintained by village council and the Gnadenhutten Historical Society was opened in 1963. It displays many artifacts relating to the history of Gnadenhutten and surrounding area. Close by is a monument, erected in 1872, in memory of the ninety Christian Indians who were massacred on March 8, 1782. During the 1970's excavation work revealed the sites of the two buildings where the Indians spent the night before their death by the hands of Colonel Williamson and his American militiamen. Those buildings, the Mission House and Cooper Shop, have been restored and are located on their original sites.

The early settlers' mode of transportation to this area was mostly by wagon. When the Ohio Canal was built, 1825-1830, it passed in the vicinity of Gnadenhutten and provided a better means for traveling and shipping goods. Many immigrants used the canal boats to come here from Cleveland. When the canal was partially destroyed during the 1913 flood it was never repaired. In 1853, a railroad had been built through the village. The railroad was the principal means of travel and freight transportation for many years.

For many years the village celebrated the Fourth of July with festivities and fireworks. In recent years the celebrations have been two or three-day events which include a horse-drawn parade, an Indian Princess pageant, chicken barbecue, fireworks, and a community outdoor worship service.

Gnadenhutten is a beautiful village in south central Tuscarawas County with a population of approximately 1,400. It lies in the valley partly surrounded by hills with the Tuscarawas River flowing along the southwest border. The two principal streets, Walnut and Main, intersect in the downtown area. These two streets are a spacious ninety-nine feet wide while the other streets in the village are half that width. Citizens take pride in their town and work to keep it clean and pleasant.

THE FIRST SETTLEMENT

Gnadenhutten (Tents of Grace) was settled five months after Schoenbrunn on October 9, 1772. Joshua, a Moravian Mohican Elder, brought a large group of Christian Mohican Indians from Pennsylvania to this location. Thus, the second Indian village was settled; Delaware's at Schoenbrunn and Mohicans at Gnadenhutten. This settlement grew rapidly, soon there were between fifty and sixty cabins. The group worked hard and prospered, their standard of living was high for that era on the frontier, their cabins had glass windows, they used pewter household utensils, they were adept in crafts and artwork, and loved music. The community had a spinet piano and one member played and led the singing. They soon developed gardens and had droves of cattle, hogs, and horses. Both the men and the women worked which was shocking to the Indians of the

other tribes.

It was here that the Roth child, the first white child, was born in this territory on July 4, 1773. All went well until the Revolutionary War began and the English at Detroit wanted all Indians to fight against the Americans, the local Indians refused. Conditions were fairly quiet for a few months, but again the British and the Indian Tribes to the west tried to persuade them to leave. When they would not, in September 1781, troops and Indian warriors rounded up all the Indians living in New Schoenbrunn, Gnadenhutten, and Salem and took them to captives' town. The trip was a terrible experience as they were mistreated, their clothes and valuables were taken from them. During the winter in the captive town many died of diseases brought on by the lack of food. By the late winter in 1781, conditions became so bad that some of the Indian leaders asked permission to go back to their homes in the Tuscarawas Valley and bring back whatever food they could carry. Permission was granted to 150. They arrived back home in February 1782 and were gathering food and belongings, when they were surrounded by Pennsylvania Militiamen under Colonial Williamson. Their weapons were taken away and they were told they would be killed in the morning. They were accused of raiding the American Settlements in Pennsylvania, giving aid to and comfort to parties of warriors, stealing horses and other articles from Americans, and that they had a dress that belonged to an American woman who had been killed in a raid in Pennsylvania, etc.

So, after a night of prayer and hymn singing ninety men, women, and children were massacred; then all cabins were set afire on March 8, 1782. Two boys escaped to warn others and tell the story.

If you wish to receive more information on the History of Gnadenhutten contact the Tuscarawas County Convention and Visitors Bureau at 124 East High Avenue, New Philadelphia, Ohio, 44663, call (330) 602-2420, or visit our website at www.ohiotimelessadventures.com. For further information contact the Tuscarawas County Public Library in New Philadelphia at (330) 364-4474 or the Tuscarawas County Historical Society at the Tuscarawas Campus of Kent State University at (330) 339-3391 Extension 47494.