

HALE HOMESTEAD

In 1810, Jonathan Hale came to the Western Reserve from Glastonbury, Connecticut, and took possession of the valley acreage he purchased from the Connecticut Land Company. He was the first legal settler of Bath Township, although a number of squatters already lived in the area. His family arrived three months later, and in 1824 he and his sons built the first brick home, a well-recognized landmark in the architectural history of the Cuyahoga Valley. Upon the death of Jonathan, his farm was inherited by his son Andrew (1844-1884).

During Andrew's ownership, he developed a large financial base, and enlarged the farm his pioneer father had created. Andrew was an expert forecaster who planted and enlarged his crop yields based on his studies of the outside market economy. Specialization of farming, such as commercial fruit orchards, market gardening, and the butter and cheese industry became popular due to urban demands. When Andrew passed away, he transferred this thriving, well-established farm to his son Charles Oviatt, better known as C.O. Hale (1884-1938).

C.O. Hale never wanted to be a farmer. In his early years he attended Hudson Academy and then the Oberlin School of business. He graduated in 1871 and then returned to the family farm. Using his business sense, C.O. turned his farm into a showplace and inn for recreational visitors to the valley. He elaborately planted the grounds and personally entertained guests who stayed for a week, or the entire summer. His principle income came from these paying guests. Upon C.O.'s passing, being childless, he willed the farm to his niece Clara Belle Ritchie (1869-1956), the great-granddaughter of Jonathan Hale.

Clara Bell Ritchie was the only daughter of the industrious, millionaire financier, Samuel J. Ritchie. A strong willed, well-educated, and business-minded woman, her interests revolved around devotion to her family, its genealogy, and her skills for investments. In her later years, her life's passion became the renovation of her great-grandfather's farm and bequeathing it as a museum to perpetuate the history of her family and the culture of the Western Reserve.

Today, the farm and its original structures survive as an outdoor living history museum operated by the Western Reserve Historical Society as Hale Farm & Village.

Written by Melissa Arnold, museum technician, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, 2011