

# IMAGES

## ...THEN AND NOW

*From the Indian Hill Historical Society*



**Buckingham Lodge  
1861**

## Apprenticeships of Yesteryear

Apprenticeships were legal contracts between the apprentice (student) and the master (boss/supervisor). These documents were drawn up, signed before the courts, entered into public records, and considered binding. The obligations of both parties were described, as was the length of time of the contract.

In Europe apprenticeships were common practice as early as the 1300s. Boys were trained in shipbuilding, woodworking, engineering, painting, pottery and glass production and other allied industries, while girls learned various textile trades or household work. Laws regulated the terms of these contracts. Apprenticeships (or indentures) were customary in colonial America, following traditions of the “old country”. Youths learned a trade and the master of the trade obtained help. Most of these agreements were officially recorded, but some were privately arranged. The contracts contained the names of both parties and the conditions by which both had to abide.



**Cobbler apprentice**

Generally, the master trained the apprentice, provided food, shelter, clothing, and basic education. Sometimes a set of tools was provided at the completion of the service contract. The apprentice agreed to serve the master, behave well, and not pass on trade secrets. The length of the indenture ranged from 4- 7 years and terminated at age 21, but there were exceptions. Usually, the parent of the youth agreed to the contract, but county courts had power to place orphans or other disadvantaged children in apprenticeships. The apprentice worked for the master without pay and kept the same hours as the master. If the apprenticeship did not go well, troubles were settled by the courts. Runaways were not uncommon, and they endured punishments or extensions of their term of service.

The Ohio Legislature passed an act regulating apprentices and servants in 1824. It defined the role of minors, the covenants of the master or mistress, the requirements for recording the arrangement, and the remedies for breaching the contract by either party.

The Columbia Township records of Hamilton County, Ohio from 1801 - 1855 contain the agreements of several apprenticeships. A summary of one describes the terms. The township trustees “put and bind out Ebenezer Williamson, aged 11 years... as an apprentice to Lot Losh to learn the art, trade, and mystery of Farming... the said Ebenezer Williamson to dwell with and serve the said Lot Losh until the year 1845 at which time the said apprentice, if he should be living, will be 21 years of age. During that time the said apprentice the said Master shall faithfully serve, his secrets keep, his lawful commands anywhere and at all times readily obey, he shall do no damage to his said Master, ... he shall not waste the goods of his said Master; at cards, dice or any unlawful game he shall not play; he shall not contract matrimony during said term; taverns or ale houses or places of gaming he shall not frequent. ... In all things and at all times he shall carry and behave himself as a good and faithful apprentice ought. And the said Lot Losh does hereby promise to agree to teach and instruct the apprentice to read and write as so much as to include the simple interest, and shall provide good and sufficient meals, drink, clothing, both woolen and linen, and medical aid if necessary. And at the end of said term of service to give him a new Bible, two suits of wearing apparel, and one hundred dollars in money. In testimony whereof the parties have set their hands and seals on the seventh day of March one thousand eight hundred and thirty-six.”

Other recorded indentures in Hamilton County include Squire Henley, age 16 to Thomas Wainwright to learn house joinery until age 21; Martha Hill, age 7, to Daniel McLellin as a servant until age 18; Eliza Gibson, a destitute girl age 13, to Solomon Niles to learn the art and mystery of housekeeping until age 18; Francis Hill, age 14, to Jacob Flinn to learn farming until age 17; David Higgins (an orphan boy) age 7, to John Mahard to learn agriculture until age 21; William Tousley, age 13, to Henry Caylor to learn farming until age 21; Eliza Wright, age 11, whose mother is unable to support her child, to J. B. Ward to learn housewifery until age 18; Jobiscay Sprague, age 13, to Edmund Hunley, for farming until age 16; Luther Sylvester, age unknown, to Jacob Harris to learn blacksmithing for 15 years; and Henrietta Heywood, an orphan, age 9, to Elias Birch to learn housewifery until age 18.

Both boys and girls became apprentices - living and laboring with their masters. Notable Americans, who were apprentices, included Mark Twain, Ben Franklin, and Paul Revere. This arrangement was widely accepted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Times have changed.