

WEST PARK TIMES

A Nostalgic Look Back at the West Park Neighborhood

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1812 - 2012 Bicentennial of West Park's First Settlement by Dar McGeady

INVESTORS of the Connecticut Land Company, formed in 1795, fully expected to turn a quick profit on the resale of land in the Western Reserve. However, land title disputes, plus concerns about disease, Indian claims, and lack of roads and schools, made it difficult to attract settlers. For many of these early land company shareholders it was a losing proposition. Land surveys eventually progressed west of the Cuyahoga River by 1807. Townships of 25 square miles were formed and partitioned, then sections were subdivided and sold to investors by the State of Connecticut. The land owners often extended credit to pioneers as an inducement to settle.



A typical log cabin of the pioneer era. Logs were either hewn by hand or cut by an early sawmill.
Ralph A. Pflugstein Collection

Rockport was originally designated Township No. 7, Range 14, of the Western Reserve. Pioneers migrated from Connecticut through New York, then along Lake Erie's southern shore. Although settlements in the township were established near the mouth of the Rocky River as early as 1808, the first permanent settlers to venture inland through the wilderness were Nathan Alger and his wife Priscilla Peet Alger. Nathan was a descendent of Jonathan and Sarah Alger, who emigrated from England to Old Lyme, Connecticut, about 1665.

The Alger Family and Alger Settlement —

Traveling from Warren, Litchfield County, Connecticut, the Algers arrived with precious few belongings and little money on **June 7th, 1812**. Along with Nathan and Priscilla came their children: Amelia, age 25; Henry, 23; Fanny M., 20; Sally P., 18, with her husband John Kidney; Heman A., 15; Nathan Jr., 14; Thaddeus P., 11; and Elizabeth D., 8. Another son, Horace B., 22, married and settled permanently in Bennington, New York.

Nathan built a 225-square-foot log cabin in the vicinity of present-day Kamm's Corners. Soon they were joined by other New Englanders and "Alger Settlement" was founded. Daughter Amelia (1787-1818) married Benjamin Robinson in Cleveland on November 5th, 1812, the first union between township residents. Son Henry later married Susan Nichols, and Fanny M. (1792-1875) married Dyer Nichols.

Nathan bartered his labor for the necessities of frontier life, often walking great distances through the wilderness to find work in far-off settlements. Adding to the harshness of pioneer life were threats of wild animals, including rattlesnakes. As a testament to the hardships endured by these early pioneers, Nathan Alger Sr. died in January 1813 at age 47, the first recorded death in the township.

In February 1814 Nathan's widow Priscilla (1765-1839) married widower Ezekiel Woodworth of Harpersfield, Ashtabula County, Ohio. Ezekiel (1759-1839) was a Revolutionary War veteran and pensioner. Priscilla's youngest daughter Elizabeth "Della" (1804-1883) had relocated to Harpersfield with her mother and would eventually marry Lewis Woodworth (1801-1839), Ezekiel's son and Elizabeth's step-brother.

That September, Priscilla paid \$1,800 to land owners Nathaniel Robbins and John Calhoun of Litchfield County, Connecticut, for the deed to the Alger homestead: two parcels of township land totaling 790 acres on sections 12 and 13. Then, in October 1815, a deed was filed in Cuyahoga County whereby Priscilla quit-claimed one-tenth of the property to each of her nine offspring, "all children and heirs of Nathan Alger." There are more than 75 recorded deeds, between 1815-1899, involving Alger/Woodworth family land holdings. Heman A. Alger (1796-?) deeded a parcel to Rockport School District in 1833 for the building of a school house.

The Founding of Rockport Township —

There were eighteen families by 1819 and the citizens petitioned to adopt the name Rockport Township. Nathan and Priscilla's oldest son Henry (1788-1862) was now a prominent land owner. He was elected trustee at the first township meeting and later elected justice of the

peace. Henry Alger's writings about life of the early pioneers, published in the *Cleveland Morning Leader*, is the only existing contemporary record of the first decade in Rockport Township history.



Henry Alger, oldest son of Nathan & Priscilla Alger. Cleveland Plain Dealer. Courtesy, Gary Swilik

Alger Cemetery, 16710 Bradgate Avenue, West Park —

In 1828 son Thaddeus Alger, age 27, was killed by lightning, leaving his wife of three years, Angelina Parshall Alger. Later that year, one acre of land containing the Alger family plot was deeded to Rockport Township trustees by Priscilla Alger Woodworth, "for a public burying ground for said township." Nathan Alger's grave is located in the northwest section of the old cemetery and three generations of Alger family members are buried here.

It is estimated that unmarked and unrecorded burials in the original one-acre plot number at least 500. Adjacent land was acquired between 1859-1912, bringing the total to nearly twelve acres. Alger Cemetery is owned and managed by the City of Cleveland.

In Memory of
NATHAN ALGER
who died Jan'y 21, 1813
Aged 47 Years
"My friends I'm here the first
that's come
and in this place for you
there's room."



Photo by Ralph A. Pflingsten, 2006

Source acknowledgments:
Alger Family Lines by Charles R. Alger, ©2005, Heritage Books, Inc. Ashtabula County Genealogical Society • www.findagrave.com
Background of Migration into Ohio via Connecticut Land Company by Washington County, PA, Genealogy Project
Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Recorder – Deeds
From Rockport to West Park by Ralph A. Pflingsten, ©2004
Northeast Ohio Cemeteries by Vicki Blum Vigil, ©2007

Civil War Vets Recognized at Alger Cemetery Story and photo by Gary Swilik

In May 2009 gravestones were set on the formerly unmarked resting places of three Civil War veterans buried in Alger Cemetery. Soldiers receiving markers for the first time are John Brenneis who served in the 27th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, Jacob P. Urban of the 150th Ohio Infantry, and Herman Wolf of the 127th New York Infantry. They are among at least 29 Union Civil War veterans buried at Alger Cemetery.



The flat granite markers were provided by the Veteran's Administration through the efforts of William C. Stark of Fairview Park, Ohio. Mr. Stark is a member of *The Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War*, an organization created in 1881 for the purpose of preserving the memory of Union soldiers. Over the past ten years his meticulous research has led to the Veteran's Administration placing stones on the unmarked graves of dozens of Union veterans, bringing lasting recognition to patriots who might otherwise have been forgotten.



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