

Shupe Brief Overview Factsheet

February 28, 2016; updated August 4, 2021

Col. Matthew W. Nahorn, The New Indian Ridge Museum, Amherst

Jacob Shupe (1778-1832) and his wife Catharine (1780-1871) came to the area of what would become Amherst (then part of Black River Township in Huron County), with their family and a hired carpenter, Ralph Lyons, in 1810, from Pennsylvania. By 1811 they permanently settled on what is today known as the Historic Shupe Homestead. The Shupes purchased several hundred acres of land, and in one deed, it states that the property “encompassed the waters of Beaver Creek.” The Shupes settled on this site, constructing a very crude, rough log house for a temporary dwelling, where they attached their covered wagon to add a bit more space. They were the parents of the first native-born pioneer child in Amherst, Betsy.

Early histories state that in 1811, he and his hired carpenter, constructed the first sawmill in this area. It was an early, up-and-down sash-style sawmill, powered off of Beaver Creek. A millrace was cut across the floodplain of Beaver Creek, from one end of the Creek’s channel to the other, through land of what is today between Cooper Foster Park Road and North Main Street. They also selected logs for the Shupe frame house, and worked simultaneously on that endeavor. The main beams of this early post-and-beam style construction house are hand-hewn, which at that time was actually a more efficient way to raise a structure.

No tax records were kept that early, but Shupe’s house is listed on the earliest Huron County, then Lorain County records, respectively. At the time, this area was a part of Huron County, as Lorain County would not be created until 1822. Huron County’s boundary originally met Cuyahoga County at the middle of the Black River. Lorain County was carved from Cuyahoga, Huron, and Medina Counties. Tax records (for land) go back to 1815 in Huron County, and as part of my in-depth research efforts, I closely studied those at the Norwalk Courthouse. But, houses were still not taxed, or at least noted, on those records, until 1819. Shupe’s house appears on those records, but it was constructed before that time, c. 1812. (We are confident of this, having studied other similar early settlement areas.) The Shupe family, having eleven children in all, certainly made it necessary for the frame house to be finished as quickly as possible.

By 1813, he expanded the sawmill with the addition of a gristmill. Both were powered off of the same undershot waterwheel powered off of Beaver Creek. The Creek was a more powerful stream and had more constant flow at the time, for various reasons. The millrace, excavated across the valley, which directed the water’s flow, was quite effective in powering these “thundershower mills.” Grist stones used to grind the grain were hand-carved of granite boulders (Canadian Shield bedrock), which began as large glacial erratic boulders pushed here from Canada by the glaciers, thousands of years ago. The grist stone monument that stood at Amherst’s old Central School from 1934-2013, originated from Shupe’s mill and is now “back home” at the Shupe Homestead. By 1815, Jacob Shupe began a distillery operation. These mills spurred development in this area, making it more practical for early settlers to live here, as other closest mills were located at the Huron River or Chagrin Falls – a journey the duration of three days.

Jacob Shupe was killed on June 9, 1832 at the age of 54 when a timber fell on him as he was making an extension to his mill. His funeral was held in the Shupe house, as was customary in those early days. He was buried in the Cleveland Street Cemetery. Mr. Shupe’s original gravestone of sandstone was later removed from the Cemetery and replaced by the present monument (where he and his wife Catharine are both named on the same stone), after his wife passed away at nearly 91 years of age (certainly an accomplishment for that time). She operated the mills after his death and later lived with youngest son Isaac and his wife Minerva. The original gravestone was given to Isaac Shupe. It was found near their house, which still stands today, originally off of Elyria Avenue, now accessed by Shupe Avenue. It was acquired by a local historian and later donated for preservation at the Shupe Homestead.

Jacob Shupe Overview:

- 1st log house in Amherst; 1st frame house in Amherst and among oldest still standing in Lorain County
- 1st native-born pioneer child in Amherst (father of); participant in 1st funeral in Amherst
- 1st sawmill, gristmill, & distillery in Amherst (*mills made it more practical for early settlers to live here)
- 1st farmer in Amherst

See “Founding of Early Amherst” (2014) -Nahorn