

LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP

Lawrence Township Minute Records

YESTERDAY AND TODAY

by
Marie B. Loveless

Every day is history making day, especially when we take time to browse through official minute records. Lawrence Township has a complete set of minute records of all the official meetings of the Township, dating back through the years to the year 1712.

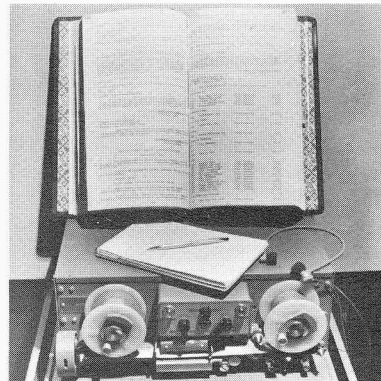
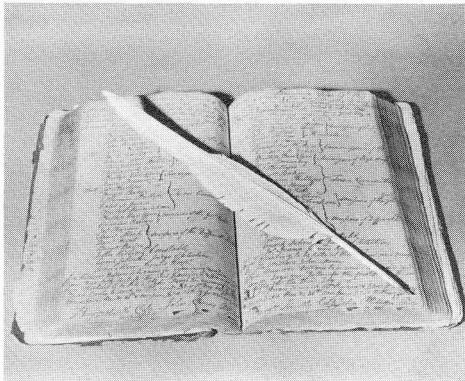
The records of our local government of Lawrence Township show a rich and useful past, and a promise of great fulfillment in the future. As in all municipalities, our records fall into four major classes. First, are those necessary in our daily operations, second, are the records of finance, and third the category of which I am writing, are the minutes which are of great historical significance. Fourth, we have the miscellaneous correspondence and items which make up the usual business record keeping.

A minute record must be adaptable to binding, and it should be of a standard approved type, utilizing a high grade of paper. If the record book is of a loose leaf variety, the pages should be pre-numbered. The minutes should always be properly signed, and each municipality is responsible for the safe keeping of its public records.

The Municipal Clerk is the recording officer of the municipality and it is the duty of the Clerk to prepare the minute record after each meeting.

Lawrence Township's minute records prove how times have advanced. In many instances they also prove that the same problems that plagued our forefathers are still with us as problems of today as history continues to repeat itself.

Our minute records record two hundred and fifty two years of local history. The oldest book contains some three hundred and fifty pages, and it records meetings held from 1712 through 1869. During most of this time the officials met but once a year. They met at one of the homes of the various officials and usually in the month of April.



1712 — Lawrence Township Minute Books — 1964
From Quill to Tape Recorder

In reviewing the old minute book record, few details were given on the meeting. Usually there was a listing of the names of those who were in attendance, their expenses, and quite often detailed descriptions of the new animals acquired by the various landowners

An example of such an entry would be on November 1748 minutes — "Thomas Price — records a gray mare about twelve hands high, flea bitten about the eyes, a long bob-tail, eleven or twelve years old". Another example would be the entry of December 16, 1815 — "Samuel Mershon posts a red, no horned cow, with a half penny in the right ear, and a hole in the same". I can only presume that these records were made to discourage the stealing of their animals.

A horse was a very valuable animal in 1814, when we consider this entry dated April 11, 1814 — "Horses to work on the roads, two dollars and fifty cents a day; eighty cents a day for hands, and one dollar a day for overseers, but nothing for warning hands".

Until 1816, Lawrence Township was called Maidenhead, and the record shows that the residents at the time preferred the old name, and voted against the change. When the question came up to the public vote, the minutes state "not less than sixty voted against a change" and "not more than twenty in favor".

The minutes reveal nothing further except to state that on January 24, 1816, the State Legislature made the change in honor of Captain James Lawrence, and from this point the minutes record "Township of Lawrence".



The first pay to be granted to the Township Committeemen as officially recorded, shows up in June 25, 1811. There is no statement though, of the amount to be paid. Their terminology states "a reasonable compensation".

Let us consider some of the records of the present fees and problems and compare these with the fees and problems of so long ago. Really, they are very much alike.

We are still licensing dogs today. Our present fee is \$2.50 per dog, and you may license and own as many as you like. Back in 1812, dogs were being licensed at the fee of "Fifty Cents first dog, Second Dog, Ten Dollars, every additional dog Twenty Five Dollars". These fees I thought to be rather high, and wondered if they had been recorded correctly, and to be certain, I checked the record of 1813.

Here it appeared the same with the exception that every dog now over two, the license fee was "Fifty Dollars". This makes me wonder if the cost of living has really gone up. The dogs, however, must have been doing considerable damage and the funds were used to pay the farmers for these damages.

Next, let us consider the road problems. Our Township fathers today are constantly working and planning to build and keep in repair our complex road systems.

Our forefathers had to cope with this problem too, for the minute records in 1865 show how ten or twelve men would be appointed each year and were given certain sums of money to do the road repairs in their various districts.

What about engineering and planning? In the 1800's much time was spent to locate exactly, the roads near the boundary Townships. It is amusing today to note the type of landmarks used during that era, such as "so many paces to a stone standing in a fence" or "to a large black oak stump".

It is not difficult to see though, that they were attempting to plan and engineer our community in a sensible manner, the very same as we are attempting to do it today.

There is very little history of a personal nature recorded in these records. However, on April 11, 1868, there was listed a number of Township men who had volunteered for action in the Civil War. It noted some who were "killed" and others "who died in service". These names to be recorded and kept in the official municipal records forever recording their bravery to their country and municipality.

It has been said "the poor we have with us always" and as good residents of our community we should look after the poor. This problem though fortunately not serious, is still provided for today, but in a very different manner than in May of 1784. I quote from the minutes of May 7, 1784: "There was sent to this Township from Trenton by warrant of removal, a pauper, ordering him to be provided for as an inhabitant of the Township. In consequence thereof, the pauper was put out to the lowest bidder till next town annual meeting. He is to find him sufficient victuals and drink. In case he should die within the year, the said bidder to be paid in proportion to the time, and the town to be at the expense of his burial, and in case of him being legally removed also be paid in proportion to the time he may keep him".

At a similar meeting in 1807, a question arose as to whether or not a certain person should "be sold for one year and a quarter or three years and a quarter, it was carried for the latter".

The minute records of yesterday and today do differ in many ways. In particular, when we consider the oldest book contains three hundred and fifty meetings. Today, in comparison a five hundred page volume contains but one year of meeting minutes.

There are so many interesting items recorded in our public minute record! From the payment of the bills, showing the trend of the costs of government over the various years, to the many items of business studies showing the growth of population, the progress of the community, to the proclamations of the Mayor denoting the outstanding events of the times.

These are such valuable and important records, and they are the personal history books of our municipality. In reviewing our set of minute books it showed the great pride with which our ancestors governed our community, a tradition which we today must continue to uphold and record for our future generations. We must hope that sometime in the future the new generations will review our history through our minute books and gaze upon them with the same pride in which we study those recorded and left for us to study.

Mrs. Loveless an early member of our Tercentenary Committee is the Lawrence Township Clerk. She was named Clerk in 1957 and was elected that year. Her reelection in 1960 resulted in tenure for the office.

One of a series of "Lawrenciana" monographs prepared by

The Lawrence Tercentenary Committee
Lawrence Municipal Building
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