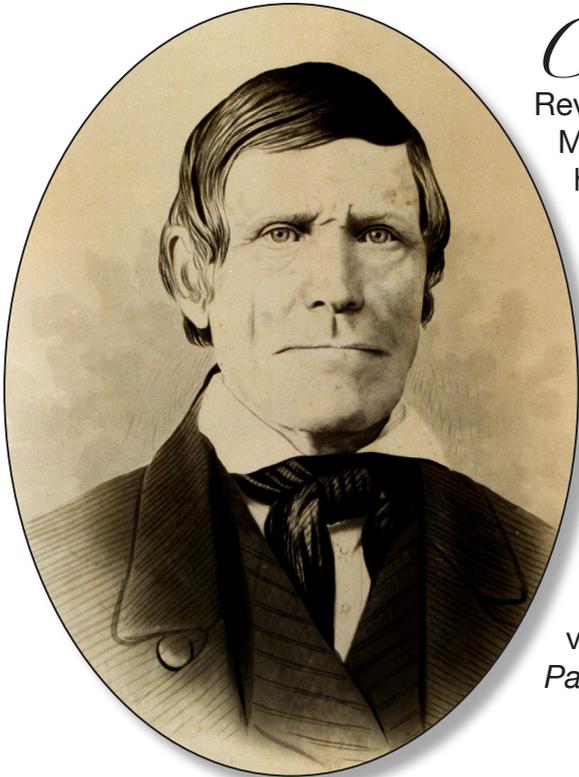




## **BICENTENNIAL BULLETIN No. 6** **—Sheffield Celebrates 200th Birthday**

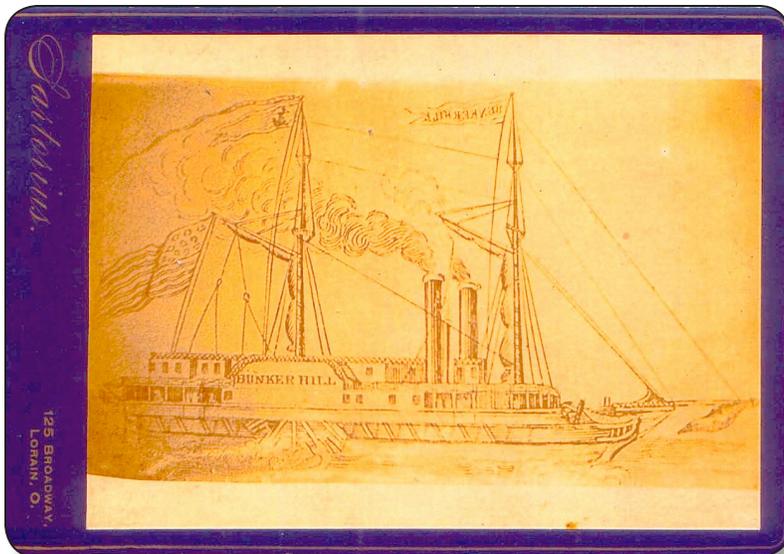
The Sheffield Bicentennial Commission will issue a *Bicentennial Bulletin* each Monday throughout 2015 that illustrates the rich heritage of our communities. **View them at — [www.sheffieldbicentennial.org](http://www.sheffieldbicentennial.org) or [sheffieldvillage.com](http://sheffieldvillage.com)**

### **CAPTAIN AARON ROOT (1801-1865)** *Great Lakes Pioneer Mariner*



Captain Aaron Root, grandson and namesake of Revolutionary War Colonel Aaron Root, was born in Sheffield, Massachusetts. As a boy of 14, he journeyed to Ohio with his pioneer parents, Henry Root (1767-1829) and Mary [Day] Root (1772-1859) and five younger siblings. The Roots were the first family with children to settle in what would become Sheffield, Ohio. The Root homestead was located on the southwest corner of Colorado Avenue and Abbe Road. Aaron became a noted master of sailing ships and early steamships on the Great Lakes. At an early age he became enraptured with life on Lake Erie. Learning the seaman's trade, he eventually operated and/or owned several Great Lakes ships between 1825 and 1860, including the steamers *Bunker Hill*, *Henry Clay*, *Lexington*, and *Sheldon Thompson* and the sailing vessels *Beaver*, *Florida*, *Nehemiah Hubbard*, *North Carolina*, *Palestine*, *Wm. S. Pierson*, and *Young Amaranth*.

*Side-wheel steamer Bunker Hill*



One of Captain Root's early boats was the steamer *Bunker Hill* (1837-1851). Built by F. N. Jones in Charleston, Ohio [later Lorain]. She had a wood hull 154 feet in length, 24-foot diameter side-wheels, a cross-head steam engine, and a displacement of 457 tons. On December 28, 1837 the following notice appeared in the *Cleveland Herald & Gazette*: "The new steamboat *Bunker Hill* arrived yesterday from Charleston where she was built. This craft is of the largest class of lake boats and intended for the carrying of freight. The commander, Capt. Aaron Root, is well-known as an experienced navigator, who in every respect is qualified for the post."

Captain Root is known to have transported escaped slaves from Lorain and Huron to Canada on the steamboat *Bunker Hill*—the last leg of the “Underground Railroad.” His daring efforts in this regard are commemorated on the Ohio Bicentennial Historic Marker located at the Burrell Homestead on East River Road in Sheffield Village and on the Historic Marker for Underground Railroad Station 100 at the mouth of the Black River, where Captain Root’s warehouses once stood.



In 1859, Captain Root and his associates had a sea-going barquentine, the *Wm. S. Pierson*, built in Sandusky, Ohio at the shipyard of Merry, Fordham, & Gay. This was a grand experiment to sail cargo from the Great Lakes to England through an early Welland Canal. The vessel was built of white oak, 143 feet in length, 24 feet in breadth, and 12 feet in depth with a displacement of 392 tons. Captain Root was master of the ship on its maiden voyage from Lorain to Liverpool with a cargo of gunstocks and barrel staves. The trip over was prosperous and successful, but the return trip was a stormy one. In mid-ocean the ship sprung a leak and the crew, which included Aaron’s nephew, Frederic O. Day, had much difficulty in mending it and bringing the vessel safely to the American shore. Meanwhile the provisions ran low, so hunger and thirst were added to the hardships. To sustain the crew Capt. Root was forced to break open the cargo of British cheese.

Aaron Root married Esther Buck (1811-1872) of Huron in 1828 and they lived on the family homestead in Sheffield. They had 9 children: Henry, 1830-1908 (married Fanny Jones 1852); Walter, 1832-1837; Edward, 1834-1897 (married Julia Garfield, 1866); Eliza, 1836-1838; Alice 1838-1842; Charles, 1840-1925; William, 1842-1908 (married Emma Crane); Emma, 1844-1928 (married Charles Edwin Reeve, 1873); and Julia, 1846-1928 (married William Warden 1872). In 1840, a German immigrant named John Forster purchased 50 acres of land from Capt. Aaron Root and thus became the first of many German immigrants to settle in Sheffield. Then in 1845, Captain Root sold an acre of land to the German Catholic community and the first St. Teresa Church was built near the Root Homestead the following year. Aaron died of dysentery on September 13, 1865 at the age of 64; he and Esther are buried in Garfield Cemetery.

Half-model of barquentine *Wm. S. Pierson*

