

THE FORGOTTEN FRONTIER:
CONNECTICUT'S WESTERN RESERVE

Lois Cunniff, Producer

In the largest sense, this is the story of the great New England migration and its transforming effects across the upper tier of the United States. Our film will bring this profoundly important national saga into understandable human scale by focusing on the settlement of one particularly interesting part of the "developer's frontier" -- the Connecticut Western Reserve of Ohio. This 52 by 125 mile rectangle on the shore of Lake Erie which the state of Connecticut reserved to herself when she ceded the rest of her western claim to the new United States became one of the most influential parts of America in the mid-nineteenth century, and its impact on the shape of the nation has never been fully explored.

The two themes which intertwine throughout the film are Order and The Land. We see the interplay of these ideas most graphically in the rectilinear pattern of the land survey, but it is also there in the impulse to "orderly liberty," the trust in the just rule of law, and in the flinty assertion of independence within the security of tightly bounded social norms.

In the dynamic period between 1790 and 1830, many of the same Americans who were so deeply engaged in the intellectual and political process of national self-definition were at the same time directly reshaping the land itself. Here, on the nation's first truly national frontier, ideas were tried out, old forms -- of government, social intercourse, agriculture and architecture -- were shaped to fit the new day. And a new order was found which stood against the chaotic conflicts of the old world and became the framework for exploration of the new.