



Portrait of a Founder: John Purdue and Purdue University Online Exhibit

Early Life

John Purdue was born in a log cabin in Germany Valley (near Shirleysburg), Pennsylvania October 31, circa 1802. He was the only son of Charles and Mary Short Purdue and had four older sisters: Catherine (McCammon), Nancy, Susan (Thompson), Sarah (Prosser); and five younger sisters: Eliza, an unnamed sister who died as an infant, Margaret (Haymaker), Mary (Miller) and Hannah (Clark). The Purdue family may have been descended from French Huguenots, although they lived in a German-speaking region of Pennsylvania and may have attended a Dunkard church (John Purdue was still noted to speak with a German accent years later).

Charles Purdue worked at a nearby iron foundry, and the family endured extreme poverty. John began attending a local school at age eight, but had to drop out at age twelve to help support his family as a hired worker. He may have also taught school in Pennsylvania when he was a little older.

In the early 1820s, the Purdue family moved to Adelphi, Ohio. Charles Purdue died either right before or during the move, as did his daughter Nancy. John Purdue took a job teaching in a one-room school house in Pickaway County, and may have also apprenticed with a local merchant during this time. After brief stints teaching in Michigan and purchasing and running a farm in Ohio, Purdue was persuaded by his neighbors to take their hogs to eastern markets and sell them, which he did, making a tidy profit of his own and broadening his experience in the business world. Purdue continued to sell crops and livestock for his neighbors on commission, and he began to save as much money as he could while still providing for his mother and sisters.

Sources:

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