

# See Van Wert County Driving Tour 1

## 1. Van Wert County Courthouse

This tour begins at the Van Wert County House in downtown Van Wert. This historic structure, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1874 at a cost of \$110,174. Van Wert's history really began in 1835, when Captain James W. Riley bought 240 acres of land in the center of the county and laid out a town to be called Van Wert.

Drive east on Main Street (also known as Lincoln Highway) for 1 mile

## 2. Marsh Homestead

George H. Marsh was one of the original settlers in this area. He was an industrialist who took advantage of the dense forests and seemingly endless acres of standing timber to open a barrel stave factory. The Marsh Foundation School was established through a bequest of over four million dollars from Mr. Marsh's estate to maintain a school and home for children, who by reason of economic stress were unable to remain in their own homes. Today the Marsh Foundation School serves children in grades 2 through 12 who suffer from severe behavioral difficulties. The school sits on 1400 acres containing a school, auditorium, dormitories, a greenhouse, barns, and many other out buildings. The Marsh Homestead is open for tours by contacting the Marsh Foundation office.

Continue to drive east on Lincoln Highway approximately 4 miles. On the right, you will see the remnants of the Wassenberg Peony Farm.

## 3. Wassenberg Peony Farm

Van Wert used to be the Peony Capital of the World. In 1930, local resident Charles Wassenberg became interested in growing peonies. His first peony garden was behind his residence at 643 S. Washington Street. During the flowering season, in early June, it was visited by thousands of people. He expanded the garden to two acres of land between Washington and Elm Streets, using a barn located there to store and package peony tubers for shipment throughout the United States and to foreign countries. It eventually became necessary for him to move the garden to a farm on East Lincoln Highway; the peony and iris plants there covered 30 acres. In 1932, it was decided that Van Wert should provide some form of entertainment for the large number of visitors touring the many commercial peony farms which flourished in the Van Wert area. During the 1930's, the Festival became a major event with crowds estimated at over 100,000 people. Two parades were held at the time, one in the afternoon and an illuminated parade in the evening. Each parade had over 40 bands and 45 floats. A 1938 newspaper article stated that the Peony Festival had more quality floats than the Mardi Gras! This is the site of the original farm.

Continue driving east on Lincoln Highway another one-half mile. On the right is the former Lincolnway Home.

#### 4. Lincolnway Home

Facilities such as this used to be called the Old Folks Home or the County Infirmary or the County Home. It was the place of last resort for people too poor for other care or who had no family to care for them. The original County Home, built in 1867, was destroyed by fire. The present building was constructed in 1976 as a 50-bed nursing home. The County has now closed the facility due to low occupancy rates and the property has been sold.

Continue 1.8 miles east on Lincoln Highway to Middle Point Road. Turn right and continue 1.2 miles to Middle Point

#### 5. Middle Point

The village of Middle Point was laid out in March, 1852 and was incorporated in November, 1874. It was named for its location mid-way between Van Wert and the city of Delphos. At one time it boasted one the largest stone quarries in the state of Ohio. The quarry plus the presence of the railroad boosted the population of the town and it was quite prosperous. Today not much remains of the once busy town.

Leave Middle Point, traveling east from the village to Converse-Roselm Road, turn right, go .5 miles to Volk Road, turn left and follow Volk and Gerdeman to State Route 697. Turn left and proceed to Delphos.

#### 6. Delphos

Delphos is a city divided between Van Wert and Allen Counties by the Miami Erie Canal. The city was incorporated in 1851. Its location was selected by Reverend Father Otto Bredeick and his brother, Ferdinand, because of its location along the canal, the waterway that once ran from Cincinnati to Toledo and was responsible for opening the area of northwest Ohio known as the Black Swamp to settlement. While in Delphos, take time to check out the Delphos Canal Museum on North Main Street. The museum features canal era exhibits including the only preserved canal boat in Ohio.

Retrace your route, leaving the southwest side of Delphos, but instead of following highway 697, continue straight ahead on Jennings Road. Follow Jennings Road until it intersects with Township Road 199 and turn left. Proceed about .5 of a mile to State Road and turn right. Go 1 mile to the intersection of Converse-Roselm Road and turn left. Follow Converse-Roselm Road 2 miles to Venedocia Eastern Road, turn right and drive into Venedocia.

#### 7. Venedocia

The village of Venedocia, an early Welsh settlement, was incorporated in 1897. The origin of the name is attributed to 19<sup>th</sup> governor of Ohio, William Bebb. Governor Bebb named the village for North Wales. We know from other sources that the Welsh word "venedotia" refers to North Wales, and that the Romans named a tribe there "Venedotians". The discovery of oil in the area in the early 1900s

resulted in tremendous growth for the community. Unfortunately, the reserves of oil were not sufficient to maintain the village's growth. Today Venedocia is most famous for its annual Gymanfa Ganu, or Welsh hymn sing, held every Labor Day weekend, bringing hundreds of people to the Salem Presbyterian Church.

Drive south from Venedocia on St. Marys Road to State Route 81 (approximately 4 miles). Turn right on highway 81 and drive 1 mile to the village of Elgin

## 8. Elgin

Elgin was founded in April of 1845. It was once named Yorktown and Yorkville because of its location in the center of York Township. Its existence is credited to the oil boom that occurred in the area in the mid-1800s. As the oil production dwindled, so did the population.

Continue west on State Route 81 to Jonestown Road (about 2 miles). Turn right on Jonestown Road and drive 2 miles to Jonestown

## 9. Jonestown

Jonestown, settled in 1886, was originally called Tokio, but was renamed in honor of its founder, Evan Jones. There are very few records describing the early days of Jonestown, but its growth seems to stem from the farming industry. At one time there was a large grain elevator, a grocery store, a blacksmith, and seven houses.

Proceed north from Jonestown about .5 miles to State Route 709. Turn left and drive about 6 miles, crossing U. S. Highway 127, until it intersects with Burris Road, where you'll turn left. Drive about .5 miles to Ohio City. Turn right onto Carmean Street.

## 10. Ohio City

Ohio City was founded in 1876. It has also been known as Enterprise and Van Wert Junction, but in 1890 it officially became Ohio City. Ohio City's claim to fame is John Lambert. In 1891, John Lambert, a very successful and prosperous businessman in Ohio City, who successfully tested and drove a three-wheeled, surrey-topped, gasoline-powered runabout of his own design. This vehicle was America's first gasoline-powered automobile. Each summer, the village honors their past with the celebration of Lambert Days. Ohio City also profited from the discovery of oil in the 1840s.

Leave Ohio City following Ohio City-Willshire Road (just before you cross the railroad on State Route 118), heading west. Drive about 2 miles to Richey Road and turn right. Follow Richey Road 2 miles to Wren-Landeck Road and turn left. Drive another 2.5 miles to Glenmore Road and turn left and proceed to Glenmore

## 11. Glenmore

Glenmore was settled in 1890 and was originally known as Gilmore. Its location along

the railroad aided the growth of the town so that at one time it had a grocery store, 2 mechanic's garages, a hardware, restaurant, and barber shop, as well as the grain elevator.

Leave Glenmore by driving west on Glenmore West Road for 1.5 miles to Schumm Road. Turn left and drive 2 miles to Schumm.

## 12. Schumm

The hamlet of Schumm was laid out in 1879 by John H. Morse. The village was named for the John Schumm family, who moved to the area in 1833. The significant location in Schumm is Zion Lutheran Church. The church was founded in 1846 and later became a charter member of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The present structure was constructed in 1915.

Continue traveling south on Schumm Road approximately .5 miles to Willshire Eastern Road. After turning right, proceed to 3 miles to Willshire.

## 13. Willshire

The village of Willshire was founded by Captain James Riley, a sea merchant. In 1821 he brought his family to settle in the region, the first permanent residents. Van Wert County was formed in 1820 and Willshire served as the first county seat. A replica of the first county courthouse can be seen in the village park.

Leave Willshire, following State Route 49 North

## 14. Chief Richardville Reservation

Approximately 2 miles north of Willshire, on the right side of the highway, stands a historical marker, indicating the location of an Indian Reservation. Of course, before the arrival of Captain Riley, northwest Ohio was home to many Indian nations. The Treaty of St. Marys in 1818 provided for a reservation of 1,280 acres to be reserved for Chief Richardville, a nephew of the famed warrior Little Turtle. In 1827, this reservation was repurchased from the Indians for \$14,000.

Continue driving north on State Route 49 for approximately 3 miles to reach the village of Wren

## 15. Wren

The village of Wren was founded and plotted in 1844 as Greenwood. There was very little early activity here until the construction of the Chicago and Atlantic Railroad began and then many people moved to the area to work on the railroad. This small village actually owned its own power plant until 1931.

Proceed north on State Route 49 about 3.5 miles to the intersection with U. S. Highway 224. Turn right and drive 2.5 miles to Middlebury.

## 16. Middlebury

The village of Middlebury was founded in 1850. It was originally called Daise. In the 1920s this place was the bustling center of activity for Harrison Township. At that time it had 2 grocery store, 2 doctors, 2 barber shops, 2 saloons, a blacksmith, and a stockyard.

In Middlebury turn left on Harrison Willshire Road. After driving approximately 3 miles, Harrison Willshire Road will jog to the left on Monmouth Road and then jog right and then continue north 1 mile to Wolfcale. Turn right and follow Wolfcale Road to State Route 49. Turn left on highway 49 and proceed to Convoy, a distance of 2 miles.

## 17. Convoy

Convoy, Ohio is the only town in the United States with that name. Albert Nesbit, named Convoy after his hometown in Ireland. It was incorporated in 1874. Its location on the edge of the Great Black Swamp encouraged the development of the lumber industry. Later this gave way to farming and being a railroad town. Soon the community became the center for the milling of grain and supported stores and shops. Today visitors can still see the old fire house/city hall/ opera house.

Continue north on State Route 49 to Mentzer Road. Turn left and continue driving 4.3 miles to Werner Road where you will turn right and follow it to Dixon Cavett Road. Turn left and go 1 mile to the Indiana/Ohio State Line. Turn right and go .5 miles to Dixon.

## 18. Dixon

Dixon was laid out in April of 1854 on the Indiana-Ohio State Line. It was originally called Bobtown. The fact that it lay on the border hindered the growth of the village. It is located in a rich farming region and that, along with the fact that the railroad (now known as Conrail) ran through the village, resulted in the construction of a large grain elevator that employed local residents.

About .5 miles north of Dixon turn right onto Feasby-Wisner Road. Proceed about 13 miles (crossing U. S. Highway 30 and State Route 49) to Dutch John Road. Turn left and go 2 miles to the Van Wert-Paulding County Line Road where you will turn right and enter the village of Scott.

## 19. Scott

Scott was mapped out and plotted by John Scott in 1878. Its location on the edge of the Black Swamp meant the land was very low and needed to be drained. An early industry here was a tile mill. The area was also heavily forested and as the land was cleared for settlement, a lumber industry grew up making staves and hoops (in 1894, Scott had the largest stave factory in Ohio)

Continue on the Paulding-Van Wert County Line Road (crossing U. S. Highway 127) about 4 miles to Hoaglin Center Road. Turn right and drive 3 miles to Wetzel Road. Turn left and proceed 4 miles to Wetzel.

## 20. Wetzel

Almost no historical information could be found on the settlement of Wetzel.

Leave Wetzel on the Middle Point – Wetzel Road and drive 1 mile to the Intersection of U. S. Highway 224. Turn right and follow the highway back to Van Wert, a distance of about 10 miles. Stops 21 to 27 are located in or very near to the city of Van Wert.

## 21. Van Wert County Historical Society

The Van Wert County Historical Society's museum is located at 602 N. Washington Street (U. S. Highway 127). The museum was established in 1954 and contains many Van Wert County artifacts, as well as farming equipment in the red barn, railroad memorabilia in an old caboose, a one-room school house, and a historical gazebo.

## 22. Brumback Library

The Brumback Library was the first County Library in the United States. It was established in 1899 with funds from the estate of local entrepreneur, John Stanford Brumback. Today the library houses an excellent children's department, thousands of print volumes, periodicals, audio and visual materials and computer services. The library is located at 215 West Main Street, just a block west of the main downtown intersection of Washington and Main Streets.

## 23. Wassenberg Art Center

Located at 643 South Washington Street, the Wassenberg Art Center contains galleries that have been favorably compared to galleries in New York City and other metropolitan areas. The Art Center annually presents eight different and unique free exhibits as well as offering classes and workshops to the community.

## 24. Central Mutual Fire Museum

The museum, housed at Central Mutual Insurance Company headquarters at 800 South Washington Street, has a large collection of antique fire toys, a wardrobe of antique fireman helmets and uniforms, a collection of leather buckets dating back to the 1700s, a rare and valuable collection of "firemarks" dating back to 1720, and other fire-fighting equipment.

## 25. Van Wert County Fairgrounds

This 90 acre complex is home to the one of the premier county fairs in the state of Ohio. 2006 was the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Van Wert County Fair, held over the Labor Day weekend.

## 26. Heistand Woods Park

Located on Hospital Drive at the south edge of Van Wert, this park has pavilions, picnic tables, playground equipment, and hiking trails. It is an excellent area for bird watching as it is adjacent to the city's reservoir recreation area.

## 27. YMCA –Camp Clay and Nature Center

Situated on 252 acres of land just west of Van Wert, Camp Clay offers many activities for family fun. There is a 5-acre lake with boating, fishing, and swimming, a multi-purpose gymnasium and the Rotary Nature Center. There is also a 1-mile hiking trail and a Challenge Course consisting of 35-foot high obstacles.