

US 12 Heritage Trail Western Tour

Saint Joseph County



Set off in 1829, the county's name is derived from the St. Joseph River, which, in its turn, was named, by the explorer LaSalle, in honor of the patron saint of New France. In prehistoric times the region was occupied by "Mound Builders" and later by the Potawatomie and Miami tribes. The first permanent settlements were at Sturgis, Mottville and White Pigeon in 1826-27.

Two important trails crossed the county, the Chicago or Sauk trail and the Washteneaw Trail. The Chicago trail is today US12 while the Washteneaw ran along a line from Leonidas to Centreville, Constantine and Mottville. In 1851 the Michigan Southern Railroad arrived in Sturgis. The availability of rail transportation gave raise to industry especially in Sturgis and Three Rivers. Today both industry and agriculture are important to the economy as well as tourism. (*Michigan County Atlas*, Universal Map, Williamston, MI., pg.162)

The Chicago Road

In 1825 the United States Government appropriated \$3,000 for a federal highway, the second in the nation, which was laid out along an ancient Indian trail. Maintained almost constantly by federal, state and local governments, the highway has been used constantly through the present. Today this highway, US 12, traverses the State of Michigan, retaining alongside it an invaluable legacy of structures, artifacts, and landscapes. These structures represent a built environment that reflects the needs of both the regions travelers and its settlers.

US 12 has many names: The Sauk Trail, The Chicago Road, Michigan Avenue. The corridor through which it passes has been used by man since prehistoric times. When the Europeans first entered Michigan in the seventeenth century the route was already a well-established pathway through the wilderness. It roughly followed, from Lake Erie to Lake Michigan, a geographical line where the abundant forests of the north gave way to the more open grasslands to the south.

Near Saline and parallel to the highway, paleontologists from the University of Michigan have excavated portions of the longest mastodon trailway ever found, suggesting that game animals were using the corridor over 10,000 years ago. The indigenous peoples of Michigan who hunted the animals followed, establishing migratory routes. Burial and encampment sites have been identified along the highway. During the early history of European Dominance the trail was used by both native peoples and the French in the lucrative fur trade. After the British gained control of the region, the indigenous people continued to use the trail as they seasonally traveled to receive their yearly stipend from the British at Fort Malden in Ontario.

Through the early part of the American era, such a pattern continued, but when the Erie Canal opened in 1825, settlers were able to reach Michigan Territory by water, turning

the nation's westward push north. In this movement the Old Sauk Trail played a key role, as settlers left the boats in Detroit to travel overland to Chicago and points in between. The great flood of settlers soon created such a demand for land that the two land offices located in Detroit and Monroe became insufficient. (*Past, 1998 Pioneer America Society Transactions* Volume XXI, Martin C. Perkins ed., *The Sauk Trail: Roadside Culture and Transportation History in Southern Michigan*, Gladys Saborio, pg.71.)

The White Pigeon Land Office

The White Pigeon Land Office opened in 1831 and remained in operation for little less than three years. During that short period of time the office processed land patents on almost all of the territory in southern Michigan west of the meridian line, including several of Michigan's large cities, Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and Battle Creek. This building is an excellent example of the vernacular Greek Revival Style brought to Michigan by settlers from New York and New England. (Saborio, pg.73)

Tasty Nut Shop

In this late 1800's, Italianate commercial building, shop for fresh roasted nuts and chocolate. The shop boasts that it "exports all over the world." A not to miss feature of the store is an intact 1950's era soda fountain.

Chief Wahbememe Marker

On the western edge of White Pigeon a marker has been erected to commemorate Chief Wahbememe. According to legend this Native American, who was friendly with the American settlers, collapsed and died after running all the way from Detroit to warn settlers of danger during the Black Hawk War.

State Police Post White Pigeon

During the great Depression the federal and state governments poured money into the economy by sponsoring building projects to hire unemployed workers. Among other projects, Michigan constructed state police posts. The White Pigeon Post is a good example of these small, classically styled buildings. We will see another in Niles this afternoon.

Cass County



Set off October 29, 1829, the county is named for Lewis Cass, Territorial Governor of Michigan from 1813-31. Native burial mounds that date to 100 BC have been found along the banks of the Christina and Dowagiac Creeks.

Cass County has an unusually large Black and Native American population. In 1837 one band of 250 Potawatomis resisted being forced from their lands by purchasing 1,000 acres in Silver Creek Township.

Many of their descendents still live in the county. Black families came to the county with the aid of the Quakers, who because of their objection to slavery, moved into Michigan from the south and settled here. They assisted blacks in escaping along the Underground Railroad.

The county leads the state in pork production and fruit is a major crop. (*Michigan County Atlas*, Universal Map, Williamston, MI., pg. 30)

Mason Township

District No. Five Schoolhouse

Built in 1874-75, at a cost of \$3,000, this late nineteenth century, Italianate style schoolhouse is made entirely of locally manufactured red and yellow brick. The 1882 Cass County history describes it as “the best rural schoolhouse in the state.” The building could accommodate 110 students in its two classrooms. Used as a school until 1959 it is now the Mason Union branch of the Cass County Library. (*Traveling Through Time: a Guide to Michigan’s Historical Markers*, Laura A. Ashley ed., Bureau of History Michigan Historical Commission Michigan Department of State, 1991.)

Edwardsburg

Ezra Miller House, 1840 (2662 Main Street)

“This small Greek revival house was built by Ezra Miller (1808-1879), who came in 1835 from Onondaga, New York. A one-and-a-half story, side-gable, symmetrical structure of locally fired red brick with cornice and side returns, it is considered to be the oldest house in Edwardsburg.” (*Buildings of Michigan*, Katherine Bishop Eckert, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York 1993. pg.234)

Lunker’s

Established by Dan and Fran Striz in 1985 and recognized by outdoor enthusiasts around the world, Lunker's is one of the largest fishing, hunting and outdoor stores in the country.

A one of a kind restaurant, The Angler's Inn is located inside Lunker's. People have been known to drive hundreds of miles to enjoy a meal here. One section of the restaurant has a beautiful, 1,000-gallon, salt-water tank. Spanning both the restaurant and the fish tanks is a canopy made to resemble the northern woods. Beneath this canopy, every 30 minutes guests are treated to a “thunderstorm” complete with lightning and torrential rains.

Berrien County

The county was named for US Attorney General John Berrien and set off October 29, 1829 and organized in 1831. Jacques Marquette was the first white man to visit the area, but it was Rene de La Salle who had the earliest impact. Arriving in 1679, La Salle built Fort Miami at the mouth of the Saint Joseph River. At the end of the seventeenth century Fort Saint Joseph was built at the present site of Niles.

Recently archeologists from Western Michigan University have relocated the site, which was lost for over 100 years. Excavations have begun on what promises to be one of Michigan's greatest archeological discoveries.

Over fifty miles of white sand beaches attract tourist from Michigan and surrounding states. Before the advent of the automobile sent tourists further north, the county attracted many tourists, especially from the Chicago area, who traveled by lake steamers, to its resorts on Lake Michigan and on its eighty-six inland lakes attraction at St. Joseph.

In Berrien County, peaches were being cultivated as early as 1834 and today's impressive fruit industry was launched in 1839 with the first shipment of peaches to Chicago. The County leads the state in the production of peaches, pears and grapes and Benton Harbor is home to the worlds largest outdoor fruit market.

(Michigan County Atlas, pg. 24)

Three Oaks



Innovations in travel changed the corridor in the post-Civil War days. The railroad soon replaced earlier forms of transportation. It did not, however, diminish the use of the transportation corridor. Railroad companies recognized the geographical suitability of the corridor and communities located along the old stage route vied heartily for inclusion along the new right-of-way. Tracks were laid alongside the old route bringing new vitality to the established villages and giving raise to new settlements. Goods that were manufactured locally found a national market. Merchants stocked stores with goods from all over the country. The wealth generated by this commerce led to the construction of many outstanding, residential, commercial, and civic buildings. Commercial blocks and homes in the Gothic, Italianate, and Queen Anne styles, abound from this period of affluence. Industries sprang up near the source of the raw material they utilized. What were originally small and medium-sized farming villages subsequently became manufacturing centers sending their products across the nation. *(The Sauk Trail: Roadside Culture and Transportation History in Southern Michigan, pg.71.)*

The Warren Featherbone Office Building

111 N. Elm National Register Building, 1905

Today the Public Library, the building houses, on its second floor, a museum of Featherbone Factory memorabilia. The factory manufactured stays for women's corsets in Three Oaks and shipped them by rail all over the nation.

The Spokes Bicycle Museum (Michigan Central Railroad)

3 Oak 1899

The museum is housed in a good example of small, late 19th century, Richardsonian Romanesque style railroad station. Some identifying features of this style of architecture, named for Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1836), a Boston based architect are: Round-topped arches occurring over windows, porch supports, or entrance; masonry walls, usually with rough-faced, squared stonework, and dark, or brick colored mortar. *(A Field guide to American Houses, Virginia and Lee McAlester, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1990. Pg.302)*

Three Oaks Township Hall

8 E. Linden, (State Register) 1866

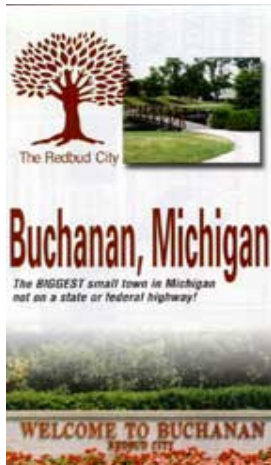
This Greek Revival style public building has been in use since construction as a township hall. It is acknowledged as the oldest continuously used township hall in Michigan.

Driers Meat Market

14 S. Elm (National Register), 1875

This building is a must on the tour, sawdust on the floor, delicious meats and cheeses, it has been family owned and operated since opening in 18.

Buchanan



Home of the Clark Equipment Company, internationally known for manufacture of heavy equipment, Buchanan is also famous for its flour milling operations.

Roosevelt Era Post Office

One of over 70 in Michigan, these buildings and the artwork that many contain stand as a reminder that in one of our Nation's darkest hours we produced some of our finest public works.

Built under the authority the Federal Public Buildings Appropriation Act of 1938, and designed by the Office of the Supervising Architect in 1940, the building and site cost of \$75,000. In 1941 Gertrude Goodrich , a New York artist, was selected to paint a mural, oil on canvas, by the

Section of Fine Arts of the Public Buildings Administration. It depicted nine workers, presumably at The Clark Manufacturing Company. Perhaps painted over, it is no longer extant. In its place is a large photograph of the original mural. (Documentation for *Michigan's Roosevelt Era Post Offices*, unpublished work in progress, Gladys Saborio)

Police Station (Ross Sanders House)

1856 Greek Revival Home of the type named "Basilica" by Talbot Hamlin. Hamlin states that the "Basilica" "is a variation of the temple type with wings...a characteristic Michigan type found...no where else." (*Greek Revival Architecture in America*, Talbot Hamlin, Dover Press, New York 1944, pg.294)

Pears Mill

The mill is an 1853 gristmill, one of thirteen that were located along this stretch of McCoy Creek a tributary of the St. Joseph River. Even more exciting than the encounter of a functioning water wheel is the sight of the working apparatus in the basement. The huge turning wooden gears and the pulley system are a microcosm of the ingenuity of the Industrial Revolution.

Niles

Niles prides itself as the only Michigan Community to have been under the rule of four nations. "Located along a principal ford in the Saint Joseph River, Niles was the site of

Major Miami and Potawtomi Indian encampments, an early Jesuit mission, a French fort, an Indian uprising and treaty, a very short Spanish occupation, and a Baptist Indian school-all before the first permanent settler arrived in 1823. The first apple and peach orchards in the state, the first horse-powered flour mill in the country, the first water-powered flour mill in southwest Michigan were all located here before the village was platted in 1831”(Eckert, pg.240)

The French built Fort St. Joseph in the area in the seventeenth century still later Spanish Raiders ran up that nation’s flag for a few hours. In 1761 the fort became a British outpost. The fort’s exact location had been unknown for over 100 years, until just recently, when archeologists from Western Michigan University were able to relocate the site of the fort. A local group hopes to raise funds to recreate the fort on the former foundations.

Main Street US12 Business Route

Before the bypass was built to the south of Niles the Chicago Road was the main street of Niles.

Niles is home to the Kawneer Corporation that manufactured aluminum panels for storefronts. Because of their durability and easy maintenance these panels were installed over many Italianate storefronts along Main Street in the mid twentieth century. Currently, with financial assistance from the state, these panels are being removed. Soon Main Street will once again have a late nineteenth early twentieth century look.



Amtrak Station (The Michigan Central Railroad Station)



The Michigan Central Railroad built the station, opening it in time to welcome travelers to the Chicago World’s Colombian Exhibition in 1893. Although Niles was a comparatively small town it was the railroad’s wish that the station be a showplace. At Niles, the last stop in Michigan, the railroad owners built a grand station. The Detroit firm of Spiers and Rhons, known for its many impressive Richardsonian Romanesque style rail stations across the country and in Canada designed the building.

This firm also designed stations for all the principal depots on the Michigan Central and Grand Trunk railroads. “To beautify the surroundings, John Gipner constructed an elaborate park, with gardens fountains, and greenhouses like those that Frederick Law Olmstead created for H.H. Richardson’s depots on the Boston and Albany railroad. (Eckert, pg. 242.) Flowers grown in the gardens were used in the dinning cars and given to the rail passengers as they stopped in Niles earning for the city the appellation of “The Garden City”

City Hall (Henry Austin Chapin House)

City Hall is a magnificent 1884 Queen Anne style house built for Henry A. Chapin. Chapin made his fortune by investing in 1865 in Upper Peninsula mineral lands on



which an immense deposit of iron ore was discovered in 1878.

Otis Leonard Wheelock and William Wilson Clay of Chicago, specialists in residential architecture created this one-of-a-kind house in Michigan.

The city purchased the property at auction in 1932 for \$300.00 dollars, with the stipulation that the house would always be used for civic purposes.

Fort St. Joseph Museum

Located behind the Chapin House is the Fort St. Joseph Museum. The building was created in 1939 in a WPA project that joined the carriage house to another out building on the estate. Among its most impressive exhibits is a collection of drawings by Chief Sitting Bull.



Four Flags Hotel

Opened on July 6, 1926 this Egyptian Revival Style Hotel was designed by Chicago architect Charles W. Nicol. The Niles Hotel Corporation raised \$350,000 to have it constructed. Eleanor Roosevelt and Al Capone are said to have been among its important and notorious guests.

Little changed on the interior, a visitor can still see samples of the original wallpaper, the old switchboard and phone booths with wooden accordion doors original to the building. The roof is of green tile and there are ornate turrets on both corners. (Ashley, pg.38)

Chamber of Commerce Building

This Classical revival building once housed the city's Carnegie Library. Steel magnet Andrew Carnegie is noted for his support of literacy and for donating funds for many libraries across the nation. This building is an outstanding example of the craftsmanship and of the architectural significance and of these buildings.

Veni Sweet Shop

Edwardsburg Rock

In the early decades of the twentieth century women's civic and church affiliated groups made an attempt to mark the route of the Chicago Road. Inscriptions were etched on boulders or on bronze markers attached to boulders and placed with much ceremony along the highway

Union Rock

Another example of the rocks, which marked the route of the Chicago Road in the early decades of the twentieth century, this example in Union, was just recently rediscovered. When owners of the property were clearing brush, the rock, on its original foundation was uncovered. The inscription reads “The Chicago Road 1824”. Although undocumented, it was most likely erected by the Grange in the year 1911. The foundation bears the Grange’s name and the year 1911.

Mottville Bridge

Congress passed the Federal Aid Road Act in 1916. As a result of this legislation, the Chicago road became a part of the Federal Highway system –US12- and was paved in 1926. Individual states organized departments of transportation and began a project of paving and building that in the following twenty years fostered more changes in the corridor than the preceding one hundred years.

Bridge building was among the major projects undertaken during this time. The State of Michigan took a leading role developing standardized plans used for bridges throughout the state. One such plan was for the camelback, which was constructed only in Michigan and in Ontario. The Mottville Bridge built in 1922 is particularly impressive and the only extant example, of several of these bridges, which spanned rivers along the Chicago Road. (Ashley, pg.250)

House of Twin Bays

Elbert E. Wade built the House of Twin Bays in 1934. Mr. Wade made his money in advertising in Chicago. He is most famous for the Alka-Seltzer and Caro Syrup promotions.

The building has been a florist shop for 23 years and is now branching out into antiques.

