

Mile by Mile on the National Road in Ohio

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TONI LELAND

THE FATHER OF OUR COUNTRY was also the man who recognized the potential of opening the “gates to the West.” In George Washington’s time, the “West” was that unknown and impenetrable area past the Appalachian Mountains. Washington spent his younger years as a surveyor in the forests of West Virginia and Ohio. He saw the potential, and when Ebenezer Zane finished the road called Zane’s Trace from Wheeling to the interior of the Ohio Country, Washington knew the time had come.

Although Thomas Jefferson signed the National Road into reality in 1806 as the first large public works project in American history, not a spade of soil was turned until 1811, making this year the bicentennial of the Road’s beginnings. Work at Cumberland, Maryland, opened the beginning of the “road to build a nation.”

The plan was to build a road from Cumberland to Vandalia, Illinois — a distance of 600 miles. The road reached Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1818, and pioneers began to search for better ways to get goods to the interior of the Ohio Country. Noted Ohio historian Dr. Lorle Porter says, “It cost more to transport supplies 30 miles inland than it did to ship them to London.”

The Panic of 1819 brought construction to a standstill, but the Road had already made an impact: “In 1822, more than 5,000 wagons unloaded



The National Road in Ohio spans 227.9 miles from Bridgeport on the Ohio River across the center of the state, ending at New Paris at the Indiana border.

in Wheeling, and every tenth one continued across the ferry and onto the jolting Trace” (*A People Set Apart*, Lorle Porter, Ph.D.).

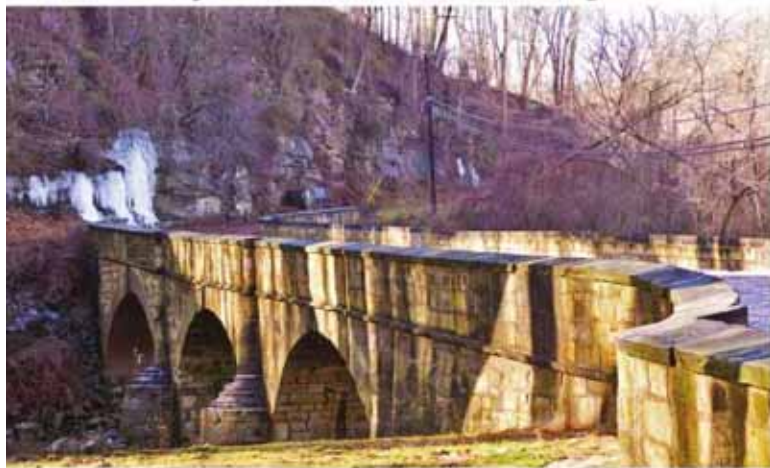
Eventually, Congress released \$150,000 for construction from Wheeling to Zanesville, but the money was depleted before the Road reached the Belmont-Guernsey county line. (The final cost for the entire project would come to \$8,000 per mile!)

There’s a Road in Them Thar Hills!

The biggest challenge for builders of the National Road was the topography. Terrain determined the distance between “pike towns” — towns that came to be because of the Road. Those in the higher elevations were closer together due to the need to change out draft animals. As the Road progressed, engineers traveled ahead of the construction, building stone bridges across creeks and streams. The “S” bridge is a significant feature of the eastern Ohio portion of the Road. Dr. Porter states that “the need to build a bridge [where] the arch would go straight across the stream accounted for the ‘S’ style.”

Much of the original old National Road is covered by what is now U.S. 40, but many portions are still navigable. We begin our Ohio National Road journey at Bridgeport on the Ohio River, where construction began in 1825. The road starts to climb almost immediately as we leave the town.

About three miles inland, we come to an important stop on this trip: the Blaine S-Bridge, built in 1828. It is the oldest, longest and only remaining three-arch stone bridge in Ohio, and it is the official Ohio Bicentennial Bridge. To reach it on the old National Road, plan on rough travel through tiny coal



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Zanesville: The National Road/U.S. 40 crosses the famous historic landmark, the Y-Bridge, which spans both the Muskingum and Licking rivers.

towns. An easier access is via Interstate 70 at the National Road/County Rd 214 exit. The bridge is directly beneath the Arches of Memory Bridge (U.S. 40).

From Blaine, we take U.S. 40 through the hills for approximately four miles to St. Clairsville. Five miles west, one can visit the beautifully restored Great Western Schoolhouse (built in 1870) and the Shaeffer/Campbell Covered Bridge. North of St. Clairsville, Mount Pleasant is the site of what was the largest Quaker colony in the world in 1830.

About 10 miles west, the National Road entered Morristown in 1826. From U.S. 40, take the Old

Every township on the National Road doubled its population every decade for 50 years.

Road at the stone marker. The village is home to the Black Horse Inn, built in 1807, an important stage stop on the Road. Much of the architecture in the village center is original and typical of the homes built at road's edge.

Leaving Morristown, Interstate 70 engulfs the road past Hendrysburg (birthplace of actor William Boyd, a.k.a. Hopalong Cassidy), but we return to U.S. 40 at Fairview and drive to Middlebourne, where we find another important S-bridge. Registered as a National Historic Landmark, this is the only remaining S-bridge over which cars can travel.

At this point, the National Road is again absorbed by I-70 until we reach Old Washington. For Civil War enthusiasts, this town holds the distinction of being the northernmost battle site during Morgan's Raid, which took place in 1863. The site is on the National Registry and includes a cemetery that is home to three fallen Confederate soldiers.

The Road arrived at Cambridge in 1827, bringing more prosperity to an already flourishing "Trace town." Cambridge would become a leader in glass-

ware production in the early 20th century, and that history can be enjoyed at the National Museum of Cambridge Glass. A magnificent county courthouse and the Stone House Museum are also worth seeing. West of the city, another S-bridge crosses Peter's Creek and, from that point, the Road is called the East Pike.

The National Road (now the John Glenn Highway) continued into New Concord, seven miles away, arriving in 1828. The 1834 Harper cabin still stands on the Road today, just up the street from the John and Annie Glenn Historic Site. Continuing west out of town, we pass the last restored S-Bridge in the area, Fox Run.

In 1829, the Road spawned another pike town, Norwich, a mere two miles away, but located at the top of a very steep hill. The road surface through Norwich is still the brick paving put down in 1918. The National Road and Zane Grey Museum, built to resemble a fort, is located about one mile west on the East Pike. (See sidebar, page 35).



St. Clairsville: The Great Western School House is a traditional one-room school built in 1870 in Belmont County.

The Land Flattens Out

After Congress approved another \$170,000, the National Road entered Zanesville in 1830. The town has many historic attractions, the most famous of which is the Y-Bridge, which crosses both the Muskingum and Licking rivers, and over which the National Road continues west. Other historic buildings include the Nelson Gant House and the Smith

House and barn next to the old Headley Inn (est. 1806, now a private residence). The magnificent barn on the hill behind the Smith House originally sat where the eastbound lane of U.S. 40 runs now.

As the terrain levels out, the pike towns are farther apart, separated by miles of beautiful farmland, to Hebron, where the road arrived in 1832 on exactly the same day as the Ohio & Erie Canal. From there, the Road rolled into Columbus in 1833. Of unique interest is the Civil War prison and Camp Chase Cemetery in the Hilltop neighborhood, where 9,400 Confederate soldiers were imprisoned, and 2,066 eventually buried.

Leaving the urban area, one is again transported through farmland until the village of Lafayette and the Red Brick Tavern, the second oldest stagecoach stop in Ohio (1836). Six United States presidents stayed there: John Quincy Adams, Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler, Taylor and Harding.

The next stop on our journey is Springfield, where the Road's progress languished for almost 10 years due to political arguments over its course and final destination. The Clark County Historical Society has an impressive permanent National Road exhibit, and the elegantly restored 1839 stage stop, Pennsylvania House, is worth a visit.

The Road continues west, ending the 228-mile Ohio journey in New Paris, where in 1865, Abraham Lincoln's funeral train stopped for ceremonies. The town was chosen for this honor because of strong Union support during the war.

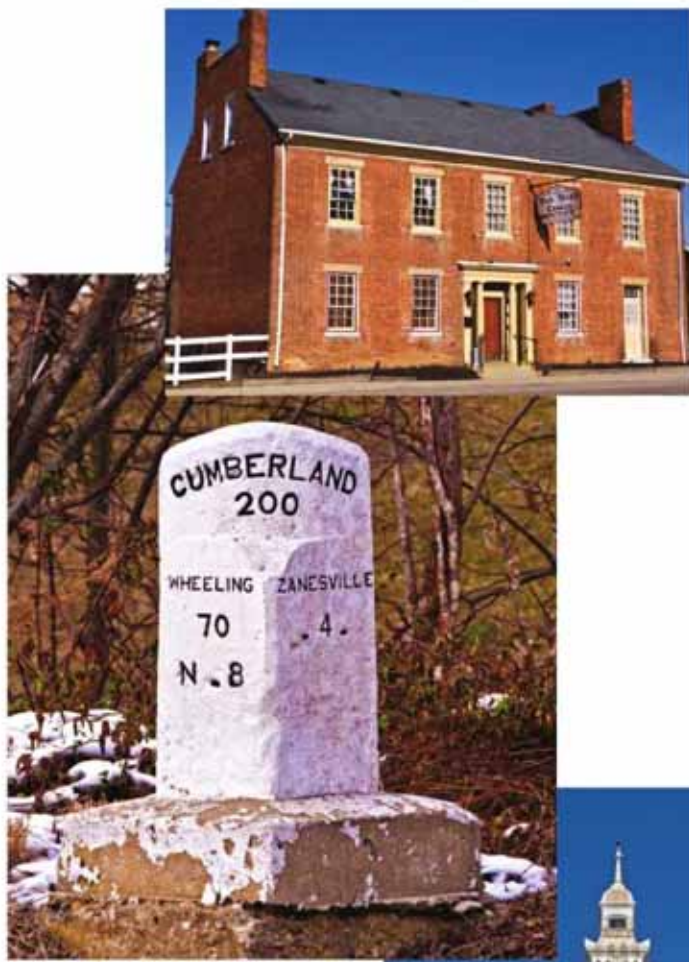
Without exception, every township on the National Road doubled its population every decade for 50 years, according to Porter.

Traveling the Road Today

As you visit these historic places, keep in mind that, just as with any other old road, time takes its toll. Once prosperous villages have lost their charm; the roadsides are littered with decayed buildings and discarded vehicles. Just remember that had you traveled this stretch in its heyday, the landscape itself wouldn't have looked much different.

So try to imagine what the experience must have been like on foot, on horseback or jouncing along in a wooden wagon. The fierce determination of those settlers carved out our own place along the National Road in Ohio. ☞

TONI LELAND is a freelance writer from Nashport.



Top: Lafayette: A classic roadside inn, the Red Brick Tavern is the second oldest stagecoach stop in Ohio. Built in 1836-37, it hosted six U.S. presidents. The tavern operates today, still serving meals on a daily basis.

Middle: Mile markers were placed every 10 miles along the National Road as it was constructed. Today, only 83 remain.

Right: Cambridge boasts a magnificent stone courthouse and clock tower.

A 'don't miss' on the National Road: The National Road and Zane Grey Museum

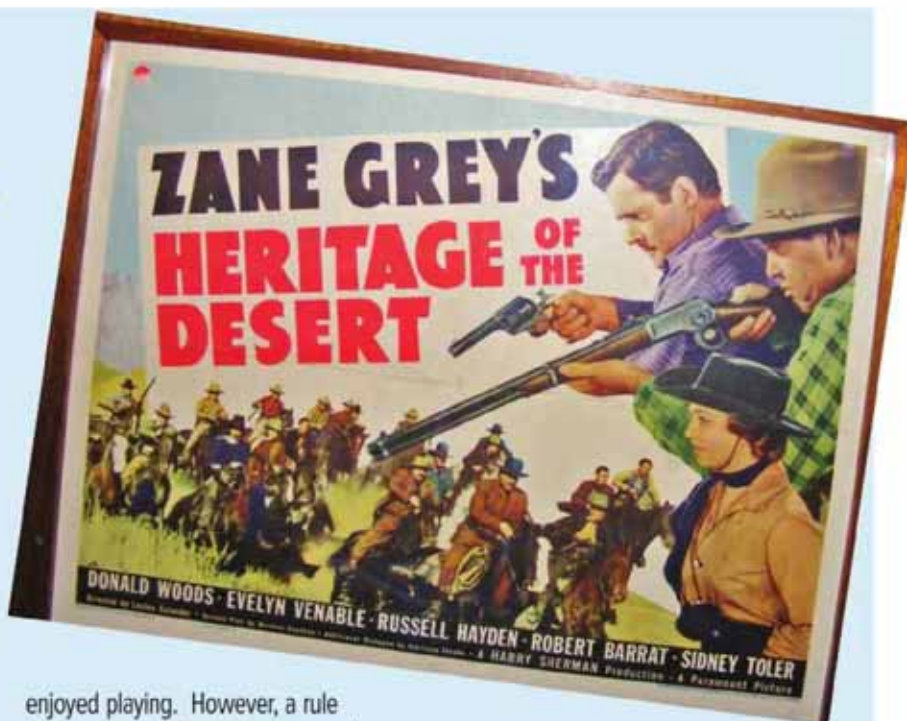
BY DAN WOODARD

LOCATED ABOUT 10 MILES EAST of Zanesville in Norwich, the National Road/Zane Grey Museum offers a fun diversion to history buffs and Western fans. The museum seamlessly combines displays about the building of the National Road and Grey's Western writings, both of which exemplify the American pioneering spirit. It also features a section on locally produced pottery and Zane Grey's world record fishing exploits.

A highlight of the museum is a 136-foot diorama depicting the construction of the National Road and life along its nearly 600-mile length. It features some excellent scale models plus many detailed pieces of trivia. I found it interesting that by the 1870s, the road's importance had declined due to railroad competition, and the state considered its days as an important trade and travel route done.

A life-sized depiction of a period wheelwright's smithy is also featured, as are several historical modes of transportation, including an Ohio-made Peerless automobile.

Zane Grey grew up in Zanesville, and wrote his first story at age 15. His father considered writing a waste of time and discouraged him by promptly ripping the story up. Zane studied dentistry in college, where he received a baseball scholarship. He was regarded as one of the better pitchers in the sport and truly



enjoyed playing. However, a rule change moved the pitcher's mound another 10 feet away from home plate, which ruined his game. It has been suggested that without this change, he might have stuck with baseball and never become an author. Instead, he ended up practicing dentistry in New York and writing at night.

His first book, *Betty Zane*, was not a success. He could not sell it to any of the publishers he approached. His wife paid about \$14,000 in today's dollars to have 2,000 copies printed and never recouped the investment. However, Grey did not give up, and he had more success with his following books, most of them Westerns. He wrote out all of his stories longhand, while his wife Dolly typed them up for submission to publishers.

He eventually wrote more than 80 books and hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles. His stories were turned into a record 110 movies over the years. In fact, he started his own movie studio to

profit from his books, eventually selling it to Paramount. He has been described as one of the first American author millionaires.

You might want to consider visiting from 1 to 4 p.m. on May 1, which is known as "Zane Grey Day" and will feature a vintage base ball game with the Ohio Village Muffins. There will also be other Zane Grey-themed activities for children. Museum admission is normally \$7 for adults, but there are no fees on this day. The museum is closed in fall and winter, except for group tours. Its normal summer hours begin on May 1.

For more information, call 800-752-2602 or visit the website <http://ohsweb.ohiohistory.org/places/se07/index.shtml>.

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