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National Road marker installed at Red Brick

(by Kristy Zurbrick, Madison Editor - September 29, 2010)

The National Road, which spans over 700 miles across six states, was the first federally funded interstate highway in the United States. Now, Madison County boasts one of 60 interpretive signs the Ohio National Road Association is placing at landmarks along the road's 227 miles in Ohio.

The honored landmark is the Red Brick Tavern restaurant, located in Lafayette outside of London on Route 40. As the sign states, the business was built in 1837 as a roadside inn and tavern in



photos by Mike Munden

Messenger

A crowd of about 50 people attend the unveiling of an Ohio National Road Association interpretive sign at the Red Brick Tavern on Sept. 15.

anticipation of completion of the National Road. In its early years, the inn played host to six U.S. Presidents.

"We feel honored to have a sign in front of the building recognizing the National Road, because the road is why we're here," said the Red Brick's manager, Sharon Alexander. "The Red Brick was important as a stagecoach stop back then because they could only run the horses for so long without a rest. So, we were a very popular place... and today the 173-year-old building is still strong and in operation."

The Red Brick Tavern is one of 30 sites in the first phase of the Ohio National Road Association's interpretive sign project. So far, the association has unveiled signs at 11 of those sites, the nearest being the old Buena Vista Tavern west of South Vienna in Clark County. Built in 1836, the brick tavern is now a private residence with an adjoining rear addition that houses Johnson's Lamp Shop.

"The first 30 sites were chosen by a consultant," explained Cyndie Gerken, president of the Ohio National Road Association. "Eight members of our signage committee are accepting submissions for the other 30."

A \$160,000 National Scenic Byways grant is paying for 80 percent of the cost of the sign project. The Ohio Road Association is soliciting donations and sponsorships for the other 20 percent. Co-sponsorships cost \$1,500. Full sponsorships cost \$3,000.

A fourth edition of "A Traveler's Guide to the Historic National Road in Ohio" will feature addresses for all of the



Gathered

around the sign are: (from left) Red Brick owners **Madonna Christy and Cris Cummins**, bartender **Kelley Meredith** and staffers **Rhonda Casteel, Neval Pennell** and **Lyn Watson**.

Constructed during Thomas Jefferson's presidency, the National Road stretched from Baltimore through Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana and Illinois to East St. Louis. It later became part of Route 40 which runs from coast to coast. The Federal Highway Administration named the corridor an All-American Road. The Ohio Department of Transportation named the Ohio portion an Historic National Road and a State Scenic Byway.

For more information about the Ohio National Road Association, including upcoming interpretive sign unveilings and the Oct. 22 fund-raiser, go to www.ohionationalroad.org or call Louis Agresta at (937) 521-2134.

Couple from New York sponsors National Road interpretive sign in Madison County

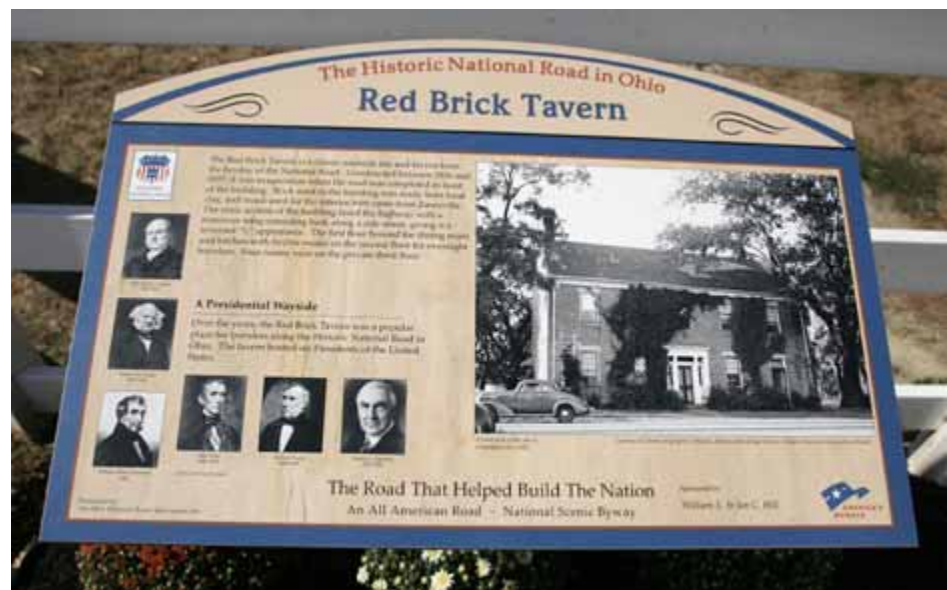
Why would a couple who lives on Long Island sponsor an interpretive sign for an old restaurant in Madison County, Ohio? Their answer hinges on a love of historic trails and appreciation for a good meal.

William and Jan Hill of Centereach, N.Y., have spent decades traveling out West to explore the nation's oldest byways. William, a retired social studies teacher, has written several books on the subject.

His latest is "The Pony Express Trail: Yesterday and Today," published by Caxton Press.

"Our interest lies mainly in the trails west of the Mississippi, but leaving from New York we often drive the National Road to get out West," William said. "So, at least once a year for the last 30 or 40 years, we've driven by the Red Brick Tavern. If they're open when we're coming through, we stop and eat."

The Hills are members of the Ohio National Road Association, as well as the Sante Fe Trail Association, the Oregon-California Trails Association and many other organizations dedicated to protecting and preserving the history and landmarks of the country's early throughways.



"We've donated to many other organizations for signage and that kind of thing, so when the opportunity came up to do the same for the National Road, we thought it would be a nice thing to do," William said.

He and Jan, a retired special education teacher, chose the Red Brick Tavern sign from a list of possible sponsorships listed in the Ohio National Road Association newsletter. They couldn't attend the sign's unveiling last month, but plan to stop for a look at it on a trip out West this coming spring.

Private sponsorships and a grant from the National Scenic Byways Program are covering the cost of the 60 signs the association is placing along the National Road in Ohio. For more information about sponsorships, go to www.ohionationalroad.org or send e-mail to onra@clarkcountyohio.gov.

History of the Red Brick Tavern

The Red Brick Tavern was built in 1836-37 and was in operation when the National Road was completed through Madison County. Horses were housed in a barn (now demolished) at the rear of the property which served as a relay station for mail delivery.

The inn had one landlord, John McMullen, who managed it from 1837 to 1859. During those years, the tavern hosted visits from five U.S. Presidents: John Quincy Adams, Martin Van Buren, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler and Zachary Taylor.

After 1859, tavern-keeping on the stagecoach roads became unprofitable due to the advent of railroads. As a result, the Red Brick Tavern and other businesses like it closed due to lack of patronage. Members of the Minter family, which established the town of Lafayette, lived at the Red Brick until 1924 when, with the coming of the automobile, it opened again to the public. Soon afterward, a sixth president, Warren G. Harding, arrived by horseless carriage. Business thrived after 1926 when the National Road became U.S. 40 as part of a coast-to-coast highway.

The Red Brick Tavern's business declined again in the 1960s when I-70 took much of the through traffic away from U.S. 40. The structure was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975, but by 2005 was closed. In March 2007, current owners Madonna Christy and Cris Cummins saved the building from the auction block and reopened it again as a restaurant and bar.

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