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## Historic mile marker is on the move

(by Kristy Zurbrick, Madison Editor - August 04, 2011)

A piece of national history is moving a few feet back from its spot in the sun.

Crews recently removed the National Road mile marker from in front of West Jefferson's village hall to make room for new sidewalks, part of a major streetscape improvement project along Main Street. The marker will be displayed in village hall, and plans are in the works to install a replica on the street.

The sandstone marker dates back to the 1830s when the National Road, the nation's first federally funded interstate highway, came through central Ohio. The road stretches across six states, from Cumberland, Md., to East St. Louis, Ill. Within West Jefferson's village limits, it's called Main Street. Outside the limits, it's called Route 40.

In accordance with an Act of Congress, markers were placed on the north side of the road at one-mile intervals along the highway's full 700 miles. At the top, each showed the distance from Cumberland. The mileage to the nearest cities or villages was displayed on the east and west sides of each marker.

Some of the engravings on the downtown West Jefferson marker are still legible. The eastbound side shows Wheeling as 142 miles away; the mileage to Columbus is missing. The westbound side shows Springfield as 32 miles away; the number below Jefferson is missing. The top shows Cumberland as 272 miles away.

The markers' design and materials varied from state to state. In Ohio, they were square with rounded heads and stood five feet tall, two feet of which was buried in the ground. At first, they were made of reinforced cement, which didn't weather well. Many were replaced with sandstone, which also has deteriorated over time.

At least 83 of the sandstone markers still exist in Ohio, most of them in the eastern part of the state. The downtown West Jefferson marker, damaged when removed for the street project, is in the hands of Tim Roby of Roby Monuments in London. Roby will repair the marker with epoxy and set it in a new base.

David Hay, a West Jefferson resident who sells headstones for Roby, is personally covering the cost of the repairs, as well as creation of the replacement marker.



Messenger photo by Jeff Pfeil

**Alan Farley, West Jefferson's street superintendent, chips away concrete from the base of a National Road mile marker in front of village hall. The marker was removed to make room for new sidewalks, part of a major streetscape project along Main Street in West Jefferson.**

"I just hate to see things that are part of the past dug up and thrown away," Hay said of his reason for getting involved.

This isn't the first time the original marker has received a little TLC. At some point, it was painted. In the 1980s, the marker was removed and taken to Yaeger Monuments in London to be sandblasted back to its original finish.

"They also re-cut the engravings which had weathered with all the car exhaust and acid rain," said Charlie Miller, who was mayor at the time and is a member of the National Road Association. "We cut off the bottom and a guy from the village made a cement stand for it. We put a polyurethane sealer on it many times to try to protect it."

A second National Road mile marker is located on the west side of the parking lot at the Jefferson Local Schools administration building, also known as the B School, west of downtown West Jefferson. Miller said the marker originally stood about two miles east of Lafayette.

He also remembers a third marker sitting in the yard of the late Bob Wilson, who lived near the southeast corner of Route 40 and Plain City-Georgesville Road. As the story goes, Wilson asked the crew working on the Route 40 widening project in the 1940s if he could have the nearby marker. Miller does not know where that marker is today.

The original downtown marker and its replica likely will be ready for display and installation, respectively, sometime this fall.

—*With reporting from Jeff Pfeil*

<sup>^</sup> [back to top](#)