Locals take trip down memory lane at National Road celebration

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NORWICH - It was standing room only at the National Road Zane Grey Museum Sunday when more 200 people attended a celebration of the 200th anniversary of the National Road.

“This is actually the kick-off of a year-long celebration,” said Alan King, curator of the museum. “The National Road was actually commissioned and legislation signed March 29, 1806, by President Thomas Jefferson and was the first federally funded highway.”

The museum is the only one of its kind on the National Road that is dedicated to the National Road.

Construction on the road began in Cumberland, Md., in 1811. Work didn’t begin in Ohio until 1825, didn’t reach Zanesville until 1830 and Columbus until 1833. The road travels 700 miles across six states beginning in Baltimore, Md., and ending in St. Louis, Ill. It stretches 225 miles across Ohio.

“The road almost wasn’t built,” King added, “originally, $30,000 was appropriated for the road. It ended up costing $7 million.”

The National Road was designated a state scenic byway in 2000 by the Ohio Department of Transportation. It was designated an All-American Road National Scenic Byway by the Federal Highway Administration in 2002.

Kevin Coveney of the Friends of the Museum, a group of concerned citizens who provide support for the tourism industry, said they act as a liaison between the museum and government agencies.

“Our goal is to make the tourism season longer,” said Coveney. “Beginning Memorial Day and at least until mid-October. Due to budget cuts that began in 2002, the museum is only open from Memorial Day until Labor Day (September).”

Coveney said that was really a shame because “this museum is a great asset for the community.”
Several events are planned throughout the year including a National Road Yard Sale, when communities on the National Road will hold yard sales on a specific date; an antique trailer collectors show; and The Great Race, a cross-country race of automobiles from Baltimore to California (it’s not a race, but a rally.). Participants will stop in Cambridge June 25 for lunch.

Glenn Harper and Doug Smith, co-authors of “The Historic National Road in Ohio” guide book, gave a short presentation on the importance of the National Road.

“We began working on projects relating to the National Road in 1992. We wrote the guide because people who were traveling throughout the state wanted to know more about the area they were in.”

The guide book is available at the Cambridge/Guernsey County Visitors and Convention Bureau.

For more information about the National Road or related events scheduled for this year, call the Tourist Information Center at 432-2022.

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