

Walking Tour #1

A Visit to West Fulton

You will be starting your tour at the ‘Heritage House & Old Canal Days Museum’ {1} in St. Helena Heritage Park {2}. Developed during the 1920’s and renamed in honor of our canal boats, the park is located in downtown Canal Fulton between the Ohio & Erie Canal and the Tuscarawas River. It contains the Canal Fulton Canalway Center, a playground, picnic pavilions, soccer fields, baseball field and softball field. From May through October you can ride the St. Helena III, a reproduction of the old freight boats that traveled up and down the canal between 1825 and 1913.

The ‘Heritage House’ once stood just west of the ‘Stone Arch Bridge’ on Market Street but was moved to this location in the 1970’s. Formerly it was the middle structure of a complex that housed a dance hall, saloon and owner’s quarters. It now contains the Heritage Society’s collection of memorabilia showcasing the canal and Canal Fulton History. Beside it is the ‘Old Canal Days Museum.’ Moved to the park through the efforts of volunteer labor in the spring of 1979, the ‘Old Canal Days Museum’ was the work of Clyde Gainey. Mr. Gainey first displayed his collection of Canal Fulton memorabilia in 1964 when the village celebrated its sesquicentennial. His collection of local artifacts and photographs kept growing and his tiny summerhouse became a popular tourist attraction for visitors to our town. Adjoining with the ‘Heritage House,’ the two buildings now comprise the Society’s Museum.

Near the Museum is a marker for the Babst Tavern, a popular stopping point for canal travelers between Portsmouth and Cleveland (the site hosted three presidents – William Henry Harrison, John Quincy Adams and James A. Garfield).

Leaving the park turn left [south] along Cherry Street. Just beside the Museum you will see the St. Helena II, the first authentically built canal boat since the end of the canal era in 1913. As you are crossing over the Tuscarawas River {3}, you will notice to your right [along Market Street] is the ‘Stone Arch Bridge,’ one of the most photographed views in Canal Fulton. Originating in several small streams in Summit and Medina Counties, the Tuscarawas was used as a route by the early French explorers, who traveled down the Cuyahoga River from Lake Erie, crossed the portage to the Tuscarawas and from there went down the Muskingum, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers as far as New Orleans. Modern canoeists can enjoy the beauty of the Tuscarawas from canoe liveries here.

Proceed over the railroad tracks and walk up the hill. You are entering what used to be known as West Fulton, established in 1832. Houses here are typical of 19th century Ohio. There are several “salt-boxes,” so named for their resemblance to the containers that hung near stoves in the 1800’s. Two stories high, they were characterized by sloping rear roofs that incorporated another room on the ground level. An Italianate white frame on your left was built by Henry Brevard, proprietor of the drug store in the Great Western Warehouse. Continuing uphill you will reach the intersection of Cherry and River Road and the United Methodist Church {4}. The main part of the church was built in 1856 and remains much as it was then.

Turn left onto River Road. On your right you will pass a brown frame house set back from the road. During the last part of the 19th century, horses and their rigs were tied to a hitching pole that extended along the south side of the lawn as their owners attended church service. Next on the right is the Old Pioneer Cemetery {5} containing the graves of some of Canal Fulton's earliest settlers. Walk in and wander among the stone markers. In this shady and peaceful spot you can learn some about life on the early frontier.

Leaving the cemetery, continue down River Road and cross over the small ravine {6}, the site of one of many tramcar railroads that carried coal from local mines down to the canal and railroad below. Coal was discovered here in 1865 and at one time over thirty mines operated around Canal Fulton, attracting miners from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and later from Germany. Coal wages in 1888 were \$1 a day for a ten hour workday.

As you continue south, you will see a wooded hill on your left, now the site of several private homes. In the late 1800's, this was known as 'Whitmeyer's Grove' {7} and was a popular picnic site, affording a beautiful view of the town and valley below. On your right is a farmhouse moved to its present location from the Elias Miller farm – moved that is in the middle of the 19th century and looking very much at home with its barn and out-buildings.

Coming down the hill and around the curve, you will see another farmhouse (a green and white one), the home of E.J. McLaughlin {8}, proprietor of the McLaughlin Dry Dock from 1875 to 1913. Mr. McLaughlin kept a row boat tied at the bank of the river across the field from his home and would row to work rather than walk all the way back to the bridge in town. The field used to be known as 'Heuriot's Pasture' and was used by the townspeople's cows for grazing. Most families kept a cow, and the gentle tinkle of cowbells would be heard morning and evening as the cows moved between home and the pasture.

Beyond McLaughlin's, the road crosses a creek and the site of another trestle railroad {9} that brought coal down from the 'Old Fulton Slope' on the Hoover Farm back up the hill. River Road once extended south from here to Newman and on to Massillon, but is now closed off at Route 21. The railroad that now runs next to the road came to Canal Fulton in 1869 and marked the decline in canal traffic and eventually, the decline of Canal Fulton as railroad centers like Akron and Canton passed it up. Across the tracks runs the Tuscarawas River, and beyond this the canal. Young Joe Miller, who lived on River Road around 1815, described seeing many Indian canoeists paddling past his farm as they fished the waters of the river.

Unless you are game for a long walk in the country, turn around and retrace your steps along River Road, ending up back at the Methodist Church, where you will turn right for the short journey back to the Museum.