

Walking Tour #3

Discovering Milan

You will be starting your tour at the ‘Heritage House & Old Canal Days Museum’ {1} in St. Helena Heritage Park {2}. Crossing to the west side of Cherry Street to the Towpath Trail, proceed right [north] along the banks of the old Ohio & Erie Canal to Market Street. Picture how the port of Canal Fulton used to look with its tall brick and frame buildings; their lower levels at the canal for transfer of goods to and from the canal boats. Tall warehouses stood where one-story brick buildings are now. The parking lot of the Cherry Street Creamery, which you are crossing, was once the site of a livery stable.

Here, on the south side of Market and Canal is a marker {3} for the site of one of the three hotels that flourished in town during the canal era. Known at times as the Easly House, Liberty Hotel, Porter Hotel, Bloomfield Hotel and Hotel Ludwig, it was built in 1840 as a warehouse for the storage of grain and later remodeled for uses as a hotel by Mr. Easly. Constructed of oak lumber, it had cross beams nearly 50 feet long brought from nearby forests. President William McKinley stayed here during the presidential campaign of 1896. Fire consumed the building, destroying this popular stopping place for many of the country’s prominent canal travelers.

A concrete culvert now runs under Market Street; you can see the canal again as it leads off toward Lake Lucerne and the feeder system to the north. The Ohio & Erie Canal was completed in 1832, seven years after ground-breaking. Running from Cleveland on Lake Erie to Portsmouth on the Ohio River, it was the first commercial avenue within the state. After it was completed, goods could be shipped by water directly to New Orleans by way of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers or to New York City via Lake Erie, the Erie Canal and the Hudson River.

Beginning in the Cuyahoga Valley and extending down to about Zoar, the Buckeye Trail follows along the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath.

Turn left (south along Market Street) and head towards the old ‘Stone Arch Bridge’ {4}, which has carried traffic back and forth across the Tuscarawas River since it was constructed in 1900. An excellent example of a stone arch bridge, its north side has been altered somewhat to allow for the addition of a foot bridge. In 1785 the Tuscarawas marked the western boundary of the United States. With the Treaty of Fort Industry in 1805, Native American tribes relinquished claim to the territory west of this river as well.

Just beyond the river, on its west bank, stood the ‘Daily Building’ {5}. Built in 1908, this solid brick structure once contained a morgue on the first floor, party room broom factory and casket storage on the second floor, fur storage on the third floor and a bowling alley in the basement. An elevator took you to your particular destination of the moment. Attached to the ‘Daily Building’ was an old wooden granary. Grain was stored here while waiting to be shipped by railroad to the great grain warehouses in Chicago.

The land between the railroad tracks and the river used to be the scene of much activity. The Cleveland, Lorraine and Wheeling R&R carried local coal up through Medina to be emptied into lake boats at Lorain. Freight offices, passenger waiting rooms and the popular saloon-lunch room that used to contain the 'Heritage House' (before it was moved to the Park) catered to travelers and townspeople alike.

Proceeding across the tracks, you will pass the site of the old Drop Forge {6} plant. The present brick building is common of factories constructed around the turn of the century. The roof, consisting of a continuing row of shed roofs, forms a saw-tooth effect. Glass in the high clearstories permitted soft north light to filter into the work area. To the south, along the railroad tracks, stood other businesses connected with the coal mining. Coal was discovered in the area in 1865 and attracted over 300 miners. Businesses such as the Fulton Pit Car Company, the Fulton Tool Works and the Fulton Machine Company flourished in the period between 1870 and 1905.

Up the hill from the railroad stands Saint John's Lutheran Church {7}. Its first home was a log cabin, on the circuit of German Lutheran minister George Henry Weygandt in 1827. By 1854 the congregation had joined the Salem Reformed and was worshipping in its building on West Market across from the cemetery. An expanding congregation caused St. John's to move to the United Brethren building in 1912. Later additions have changed the façade along Market Street, but the original siding and stained glass windows can still be seen along its west side.

Continuing west on Market Street, you will pass two story frame houses typical of Canal Fulton's building boom of the late 1800's. The white frame home at the southeast corner of Milan and Market however, probably dates back to at least 1850. You are now at the town square of Milan {8}. Platted by Matthew Roland and recorded in Canton in 1814, Milan was the first settlement west of the Tuscarawas River in Stark County. Surrounding Lawrence Township would not be platted until a year and a half later. Milan, West Fulton to the south and Fulton to the east merged to become one town in 1853. The west side of the Tuscarawas was selected for settlement first because its single lots were less expensive than the double lots on the east side of the river. The early pioneers also thought it would be easier to construct roads here as the soil was better drained. Thus, from 1814 to 1825 (when work began on the canal and the towns of West Fulton and Fulton began to be established) Milan flourished with its shops and early settlers.

To the right, or northwest, Milan Street leads out to the brick building where the Fulton Pit Car Company moved in 1891 when they needed more railroad frontage. Beyond lays the former town of Warwick (now part of Clinton). The site was a transferring point for railroad passengers to Akron and a junction with the railroad spurs from Rogue's Hollow (the location of much coal mine activity in the last century). Many houses along Milan Street north of Canal Fulton date from the middle of the 1800's. The gray shingle house, third from the corner, used to be at the northwest corner of Milan and Market, but was moved when Arthur Daily, who dealt in tombstones, built his large block

house there. The house across Market Street from the Daily house used to be Victorian Italianate, but was remodeled during the 1950's and most of its exterior lines changed.

Continue along Market Street, leave the square of Milan and ascending the hill toward the Canal Fulton Cemetery (formerly 'Union Cemetery') {9}. The second house from the corner on the south side of Market used to be a combination grocery and residence and was the only place for westside residents to buy food when the flood of 1913 closed off traffic to the other side of the river. Next door to the west, the gray shingle residence belies its varied history. Originally the Lutheran Church building, it later was converted to a cheese factory and finally a private residence.

Entering the Canal Fulton Cemetery, you will have the opportunity to study the tombstones and mausoleums of early Canal Fulton leading residents. Sit on the Myers bench and look down on the pretty panorama of the town. Gigantic trees help make this a peaceful retreat from the cares of the world below. Markers of World Wars remind us of the distance many of its sons traveled from the tiny community on the banks of the Tuscarawas. Canal Fulton's population began to decline around the turn of the century when the coal began to give out and other nearby towns such as Akron became larger railroad centers. Population did not pick up again until the post-World War II housing boom of the 1950's.

Find the exit to Market Street and turn left as if to go back to town. Market Street becomes Marshallville Road behind us at the City limits and leads past the old B-B Coal Mine, the Mt. Pleasant Stock Farm (site of harness racing for neighborhood horse owners on Sunday afternoons past), and the Lytle brick one-room school house. Walking east on Market toward Elm Street, turn right and follow the alley to Milan Street. This area, where streets merge into alleys and traffic seems to move at a much slower pace brings back the early years of Canal Fulton. Most of the same houses still stand – some inhabited by families whose parents and grandparents lived in the same house – and many gardens are planted where they've always been planted.

Reaching Milan Street, cross to the north side of the road and turn right [southeast]. Continue past the red house with the hitching post at the corner of Wooster and Milan. Once known as 'Quality Hill' {10}, Wooster Street becomes Arcadia at the City limits and leads off to Pleasant Ridge School and on to Alabama Street and the Pinchgut Coal Mine. A brewery was once located a little way up Quality Hill from Milan, where a product known as Babst beer was produced until prohibition put an end to such home-style enterprises.

Walking south along Milan, you will pass more houses of the late 1870's and 1880's. At the intersection of Cherry and Milan swing left and head back downtown. The first house on the northeast corner of the intersection dates back to around 1840 and was once lived in by an elderly Dutchman who rode his box sled into town on snowy winter days, steering it with his cane. On the same side of the street are several early log houses, their exteriors now covered with siding but revealing their origin by the thickness of their exterior walls. Across the street, later and more stately residences were erected

nearer the close of the century. An excellent example of Carpenter Gothic is the gold house next to the Methodist Church's parking lot. Its intricate gutter roof and porch trim have long made it a town landmark. It was constructed by Frank McGee, a local painter and decorator.

The Methodist Church, dating back to 1856, is described in Walking Tour 1. Across the street, the grey house on our left with the white picket fence, was built by station-master Wilbur George around 1907. Legend goes that the tall pine trees to the rear were unclaimed freight from California. Every house in town used to be surrounded by a fence to keep run-away horses and cows from trampling gardens and lawns.

Approaching the railroad tracks, note that the railroad reached Canal Fulton in 1865 and brought about the eventual decline in the importance of canal traffic. It is also interesting to note that just within this spot you can see the evolution of motive transportation from river, to canal, to train, to automobile. Pass the Canal Fulton Canoe Livery and the river and you are once again at the entrance to the park. We hope you have enjoyed these walking tours and we encourage you to stop in the various business and attractions that you have been by. Be sure to also take a ride on board Canal Fulton's St. Helena III canal boat to learn more about this area's fascinating history!

*A thank-you to Girl Scout Troop #593 for assisting in compiling this walking tour.