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'The road that built a nation'

(by Christine Bryant, Eastside Editor - September 20, 2008)

Nadine Morse remembers first moving to Reynoldsburg in 1960 and staying at the Haft Motel.

Growing up, she and her family ate at Don's restaurant and visited many of the other treasures that lined Main Street.

Driving along the thriving Reynoldsburg thoroughfare today, visitors and residents can catch a glimpse of a time when Main Street - part of the National Road - was a vital part of the nation's economy.

"If you travel east on Main Street - past the Agriculture Lab - you will see remnants of motor courts and motels that were once thriving businesses," said Morse, an administrative assistant in the Development Department with the city of Reynoldsburg.

To educate the community about the history of Reynoldsburg's Main Street, the Development Department has secured 10 National Road interpretive panels that are now on display in the lobby of the City Building.

Through Oct. 15, the public will be able to view postcard images of the road, along with snippets of historical relevance, describing why Main Street was once known as "the road that built a nation," Morse said.

"The National Road interpretive panels enable the city to share a view of how important Main Street was to our nation," she said. "It seems fitting that after the revitalization of our main thoroughfare in recent years, we now have the opportunity to look back and see just how far we've traveled since the road was first constructed."

The panels, created through the efforts of the Ohio National Road Association in Springfield, Ohio, have been traveling along the road in several locations, including the Zane Grey Museum, the Englewood Government Center, the Columbus Metropolitan Library and the Ohio Statehouse.

Declared a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark in 1976, the National Road has been designated a State Scenic Byway by the Ohio Department of Transportation.

Ohio's construction of the road began in 1825, and because the bulk of trade, general travel and east/west mail passed through the road, a number of communities sprang up along the way, Morse said.



Photos courtesy of the City of Reynoldsburg

Visitors can get an early look at Main Street and how it was a vital part of the nation at an exhibit now on display at City Hall.



Don's Restaurant was a popular destination for visitors along Main Street, also known as the National Road. Visitors can get an early look at Main Street through an exhibit now on display at the Reynoldsburg City Building, 7232 E. Main St.

"For those towns already in existence, like Reynoldsburg, inns and taverns were initially built to accommodate weary travelers," she said.

During World War I, major sections of the road in eastern Ohio were rebuilt and paved with brick to provide a reliable military transportation route. It was reborn as U.S. 40 in the 1920s and became a major east-west artery.

"Traffic peaked on the National Road around 1960 and quickly diminished when I-70 and subsequent freeways were constructed," Morse said. "To this day, one of the stone markers that shows the distance from Reynoldsburg, W.V., remains in front of our city building as a quaint reminder of our National Road's importance in history."

The public can view the National Road interpretive panels from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday in the lobby of the Reynoldsburg City Building, 7232 E. Main St.

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