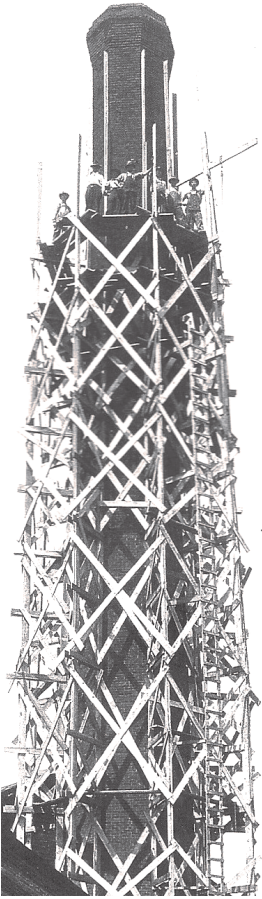


# From Under the Oak Tree

Fall September 2013  
Vol. 13 Issue 3



Cincinnati Northern Railroad Chimney Stack  
Van Wert Shops Circa 1910~



**Special points of interest:**

- There is no charge to visit the Museum or any of the Museum Campus buildings
- Guided tours available, special group visits
- Open Sundays 2—4:30 pm now to November 17
- The Gift Shoppe at the Seven Oaks is open on Sundays with the Museum
- Check out the Schedule of Events insert

**Announcing to all Veterans of Van Wert County  
“Victory Day” will be held on Wednesday, September 3  
During the Van Wert County Fair, Sept. 1—5, 1919**

**All World War soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Surgeons, Red Cross Nurses, and Veterans of the Civil and Spanish-American Wars will be given free admission to the grounds and the Grandstand. On that day a great free dinner will be provided by all the people of the county.**

The Van Wert County Agricultural Society and the County Council of National Defense organized the reception for soldiers and sailors. It was described in the newspaper the following day as, “a splendid success – the greatest event of the kind ever held in this part of the country. The event was deferred until the present season (*County Fair 1919*) on account of a desire to have the fullest possible number of World War soldiers present, following their discharge from service.” Attendance was described as near thirty-thousand, the largest attendance ever at the County Fair on a Wednesday.

Prior to the fair each veteran was mailed an official lapel button to be worn to gain free entry to the Fairgrounds and the grandstand. The buttons were inscribed “Van Wert County Victory Day.” If any veteran did not have their button at the fair, they could get one issued at the main ticket office at the Balyeat Ave. and S. Washington St. grand entrance.



A veterans day was started at the Van Wert County Fair in 1914, when it was called **Soldiers Day**. On Sept. 3, 1919, the day was designated as “Victory Day” and all veterans from the Civil War, Spanish-American War, and WWI were admitted free to the grounds & grandstand. This type of honoring of veterans would later become a national holiday starting as Armistice Day, then Veterans Day and finally earning the status in 1978 of a Federal Government holiday held every November 11th, the current “Veterans Day” for honoring American veterans of all wars  
*(This is the badge given to all county veterans for entry to the County Fair in 1919.)*

There was a dinner at 12 noon in the grandstand. Almost 1200 soldiers and sailors were seated made up of (*approximately*) 200 Civil War, 80 Spanish-American War and 900 World War veterans, all of whom claimed Van Wert County as their home. Chief bugler, Bruce Townsend, sounded mess. Rev. G. W. Whyman, formerly of Convoy, pronounced grace. They had all marched into the grandstand together except for the Civil War Veterans. They were headed by Hon. G. M. Saltzgaber, U.S. Commissioner of Pensions, and as they had been seated earlier due to their advanced ages, arose and paid respects to the marching columns that represented, “youth, vigor and . . . the patriotic spirit by Issac Van Wart, John Paulding and David Williams,” as they carried an authenticated picture of Issac Van Wart. (*Reference to the three men who captured Major John André in 1780.*)

The dinner was served by volunteers made up of twelve ladies and four men from each township, a total of 192 workers.

*Continued on page 4 . . .*

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The Cincinnati Northern Railroad shops in Van Wert, Ohio. This location is between Center St. & Anderson Ave., on the west side of today's north-south tracks. The turntable is located at the front of the steam engine. Circa 1910.



**Art & Connie Weber were surprised with a donation in honor of their June 8, 50th Wedding Anniversary.**

Art & Connie Weber of Van Wert were surprised when they learned a donation had been made in their names in honor of their June 8, 2013, 50th Wedding Anniversary. The donors, Art's sister and her husband, requested a card be sent to the Webers after the anniversary date advising them of the donation made to the Historical Society. Art is a current Society Trustee and both Art & Connie have been devoted Society volunteers.

**Grants from The Van Wert County Foundation**

The Van Wert County Foundation Board of Trustees awarded the following grants to the Van Wert County Historical Society in 2013:

**To Benefit the Van Wert County Historical Society**  
From the Stephen J. and Billie L. Kouts Memorial Fund. Mr. Kouts established this fund with a portion of the income to be used to benefit the Society.

**Holiday at Home Celebration July 4, 2013**

Grant for musical entertainment during the Celebration. This grant was made possible by the Ruth E. Cottingham Memorial Fund.

**To Benefit the Van Wert County Historical Society**  
From the William Howard Johns Memorial Fund. Mr. Johns established this fund with a portion of the income to be used to benefit the Society.

**Quips from the Museum**

Just how long has Van Wert's famous retired barber, Larry Webb, been working with the Historical Society? Thirty years! He joined the Board of Trustees in 1983. He was snipping hair down on S. Market Street but Larry made time and became a devoted worker at the Museum. Right after Larry is Jeanne Zeigler, who started the next year. Following Jeanne is Linda Mechling. It is believed that Larry holds the title of longest serving Trustee at the Museum, retired or active. When you see Larry, give him a big

"attaboy" and the same for Jeanne Zeigler and Linda Mechling. These two ladies have given countless volunteer hours to the Museum. The Historical Society always needs volunteers of all styles, shapes and sizes. There are many ways to get involved with your local Historical Society.

**Is it still there?**  
There is a Van Wert County Sesquicentennial (150th

Anniversary) time capsule buried in the Museum's front yard, southwest corner. The celebration was back in 1971. It was specified to be opened in 50 years. The Sesqui Committee wanted to bury the capsule on the Museum lawn and it was. How do you count to 50 years? Like for birthdays (2021) or start with 1971 (2020) ?

*The Society's monthly meetings are the first Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. in the Annex Bldg.*

From Under the Oak Tree  
Vol. 13 Issue 3

The railroad history of Van Wert County is a long story starting in the later 1800s. Many railroad tracks have come and went. Today we know there are the north-south tracks in Van Wert and the east-west tracks across Van Wert County. They are usually called the Cincinnati Northern and the Pennsylvania due to how long those railroads were operating in Van Wert County.

There also was another set of tracks running through Van Wert County called the interurban - this system is long forgotten. This pre-1900 to mid 1930s system ran from town to town, east and west. The interurban tracks hauled freight and shuttled passengers allowing convenient commuting between towns. It came into Van Wert on Jennings Road, through town in the middle of Main Street and turned north just past Shaffer Street and followed the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks into Indiana. The interurban line had their own depot on the northwest corner of Cherry and E. Main Streets. No trace of it remains. In the summer of 2013, railroad ties from the interurban were uncovered on West Main Street during an extensive reconstruction of the street. This might be the last evidence of the interurban in the City of Van Wert that will be found.

Where are the buildings, structures and other evidence of Van Wert County's railroad history? They are gone. There are no buildings left of the Cincinnati Northern shops. Few know the current owners of the railroads in Van Wert County. An entire generation of locals has grown up without knowing anything about local passenger service.

Is there a place in Van Wert County where this railroad history is preserved? Only one place - the Van Wert County Historical Society. You know about the red caboose that has been at the Museum Campus since 1989.

It sits on a section of track that also is the resting place for a "Speeder" track inspection car. *(It is stored in the small shed by the tracks.)*

New railroad artifacts have been installed on the east side of the red caboose in 2013. There are now two flashers from the South Shannon Street railroad crossing, circa 1930s, standing proudly by the caboose. *(These tracks were part of the Cincinnati Northern, owned by The Big Four, in turned owned by the vast New York Central system.)* The flashers were installed by the Van Wert County Engineers office on May 23, 2013. Alexander & Bebout prepared the mounting holes and K & L Ready Mix (John Brown Rd.) donated the concrete for setting the flashers.



Photo: W. Main St., Van Wert, May 2013-Interurban RR ties being removed from the middle of the street.

There is an older installation of a flasher/control box at the southwest corner of the caboose, along Third Street. It is from Elida, Ohio, on the Pennsylvania Railroad. The flasher signal installation was in the 1990s and was supervised by Harley Marshall. The control box was installed in 2002 by Bill Stanley, Gordon Drake of Van Wert Monument, and Don Thomas, past sheriff of Van Wert County, past Pennsy RR track man, and a fine runner with the pigskin for VWHS, under Coach Gil Smith, Class of 1948.

On June 19, 2013, five more railroad items were installed east of the caboose. Alexander & Bebout, also prepared these mounting holes.

There are two concrete whistle posts. They have a "W" marking on only one side and it is the only marking on these posts. The markers told the train engineer to "whistle" for upcoming crossings and other areas where safety was of concern.

Another new artifact is a wooden crossing sign that came from the Leeson Ave. crossing of the Cincinnati Northern tracks. This sign is at the north end of the caboose. Also near the north end of the display is a wooden post that will



Continued from page 3 . . . Van Wert County's Railroad History at the Historical Society

hold the signal relay box that is currently being sandblasted and repainted. It contained the electrical controls for the Shannon Street flashers.

The last item is a triangular, cast metal mile marker post at the south end. It is silver with "281" black lettering. It was at Middle Point on the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks indicating the mileage from Pittsburgh, PA, to Middle Point, OH, a distance of 281 miles. It was donated by Kenny Miller of Schumm.

The Van Wert County Historical Society thanks Alexander & Bebout, the Van Wert County Engineers office, and K & L Ready Mix for their generous donation of time and material to construct this new display of railroad items. A further thank you goes to Brian Mercer of Ace Hardware for donating the paint for the signals, and Fastenal of Van Wert (529 Bonnewitz Ave.) who gives the Society a special discount on parts and paint.

So who owns the tracks in Van Wert today? All tracks are owned by CSX and leased to Rail America, who was most recently purchased by the Genesee & Wyoming Railroad Company. The Van Wert section is still referred to as the Chicago, Fort Wayne and Eastern, or the C.F. & E.

*The Museum contains a large model railroad exhibit and many railroad history artifacts. This display is located in the basement of the Museum.*



The new installation of the railroad signals and markers.

"281" mile marker, a Shannon Street Cincinnati Northern Railroad flasher and a whistle marker. The flasher from Elida, Ohio, installed in the 1990s, and the control box installed in 2002, are in the background.



Continued from page 1, Veterans Day . . . They were under the leadership of Horace W. Clark, as chef. The food was supplied by all twelve townships. A special honor was given to the veterans of the World War. They were presented a Van Wert County Honor Medal. This medal was a reproduction of the medal presented by Congress to the Revolutionary War patriots Van Wert, Putnam and Williams, the first military medal ever awarded by Congress. The local medals were engraved on the reverse to show they were facsimile of the original. With the medal was a souvenir booklet telling the story of the capture of Major André.

The Van Wert County Fidelity Medallion presented to county veterans of World War I on Sept. 3, 1919. It is a copy of the original medal presented in 1780. The original had a plain center area on the reverse so the Van Wert version was engraved, "Facsimile medal given patriots Van Wert, Paulding & Williams 1776." The reverse inscription, "Amor Patriæ Vincit", means, "The love of country conquers."



**Your County Historical Society  
in Action!  
Through people like You!**



**2013 Corporate Issac Van Wart Award**

Bebout & Houg earned the corporate award for their contributions of material and labor for on-site work at the Musuem Campus.  
(L-R) Gary Houg, Tom Bebout and Ron Kessler, Museum Trustee & Treasurer.



**2013 Individual Issac Van Wart Award**

Bill Stanley earned the individual award for his volunteer work for the Museum. Bill is a retired Van Wert Post Office letter carrier whose hobbies include model railroading and railroad history. Bill has been a dedicated volunteer to the model RR display at the Museum. In 2012 and 2013 he led the effort for the installation of the RR artifacts on the east side of the red caboose. Bill Stanley and Theresa Mengerink, Musuem Trustee & Vice President



**Reunion at the Gift Shoppe at Seven Oaks—Summer 2012**  
Crestview High School Class of 1972 classmates (L-R) Barbara Clevenger and Cheryl Bauer met in the Gift Shoppe when Barbara visited to attend a book signing being held at the Gift Shoppe by Cheryl. Cheryl's book, Postcard History Series—Van Wert County, was published in 2006. It is a collection of Van Wert County postcards with descriptions, grouped by topics. Barbara surprised Cheryl when she showed up as Cheryl has not lived in Van Wert County for many years. Barbara's father, Ray Clevenger, ran the elevator for many years in Convoy. A former local man, Ken Cripe, contributed many of the postcards included in the book.

**Junior Curators, June 13, 2013, Recognition Day**

These local students were recognized for their dedication as Junior Curators to the Historical Society.  
(Jr. Curators, L-R) Thomas Lichtensteiger (certificate for four years of service), Travis Lichtensteiger, Chelsea Gephart, Brett Ripley, Sarah Klinger. (Front) Maria Sanfilippo & (Right) Chad Kraner, Museum Trustees





**Not just another day in Van Wert.** This photo of downtown Van Wert is circa 1870s. The view is looking to the southwest into Third Ward Park (Fountain Park) from atop a building on the north side of the 100 block of West Main Street. Jefferson Street (north-south) will be west of the two-story hardware store. Town Creek is routed through the Park with fences on each side to keep the livestock out. The stores are Z. A. Smith Millinery & Fancy Goods, Brehn & Sidle, Domestic, and a hardware store. Across the street is a sign in the shape of a "boot" with the name Wilkinson.

This must have been a big celebration in Van Wert County. The first horse carriage carries a small musical band. The parade of horses and wagons is heading east and is passing by the future location of the Brumback Library at the rear of the picture. This photo is a copy of the original loaned by Sarah Kanan. The original photo was taken by Hartssock & Hester.

**Become a member of the  
Van Wert County Historical Society**

Your support is very important to the operations of the Historical Society. Choose from four levels of membership:

- Individual Membership** - \$20 annual donation
- Patron Membership** - \$50 annual donation
- Sponsor Membership** - \$100 annual donation
- Isaac Van Wart Membership** - \$200 annual donation

Memberships are annual, renewed at the beginning of the year. If you did not receive a notice to renew, please use the form to the right.

The Van Wert County Historical Society is a non-profit 501(c)(3) institution. All memberships are tax deductible. Your memorial donations, contributions and gifts may be tax deductible.

**From the Historical Society's bulletin "Historic Happenings, May 1984"**

*Memories by Frank & Katie Mounts. Frank was born in 1896, in Hoaglin Township and Katie in 1905, on a farm in Hoaglin Township.*

"Remember how Main Street got paved for the first time? The Palmer girls ran a stone quarry northeast of town. (*Think north of the Starr Commonwealth.*) Mr. Billy Semple married one of the Palmer girls and the other girl ran the quarry business. Somehow, the business became known as Semple's Quarry. They had to lay a wood-railed railroad to bring stone into the City of Van Wert. By 1848, they hauled the last stump out of Main Street so it could be paved. Then, on wooden rails, the wagons hauled their loads of stone in and gave Van Wert its first real Main Street."

"Does anyone remember the cottonwood tree behind Ellen & Orville Reed's house? Frank does. There was a rope hanging down from this tree. If you grabbed onto the handle on the rope, you could swing clear out across the (*Town*) creek and back again. It was great fun while it lasted. Unfortunately, one boy died from injuries he received while swinging there and the tree was cut down." *Today this is the location behind (west of) David Kirchenbauer's home, 303 N. Jefferson Street. Town Creek has been channelized removing any trace of the old creek bed and its wooded banks.*

"Frank also remembers one Halloween night, in the days of out-houses, when the boys decided to have some fun. They went down the alley between Walnut and Market Streets, and upset all the out-houses on the alley. Mr Stanton was quite upset with them for this prank—for, you see, he was in his out-house at the time."



To find and to hold for posterity

**Van Wert County Historical Society**

New Member                       Renewal

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

email \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Annual Memberships**

**Individual Membership** - \$20   
**Patron Membership** - \$50   
**Sponsor Membership** - \$100   
**Isaac Van Wart Membership** - \$200

I would like to volunteer  to help the Society.

We will contact you about your volunteer interest.

**Make payments payable to:**  
 Van Wert County Historical Society  
 602 N. Washington Street  
 P.O. Box 621  
 Van Wert OH 45891-0621

Questions and inquiries:  
 419.771.9851    vwc.historicalsociety@gmail.com

**Thank You!** 092513n

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If you would like to comment on, suggest content, or receive the newsletter, contact the newsletter editor via email at [gbjja@vwlocal.net](mailto:gbjja@vwlocal.net) or the Society via the contact information located on the last page of this newsletter.

**Access the Historical Society's publications and the *From Under The Oak Tree* newsletter at:**

[www.vwlocal.net/museum/files/newsletter](http://www.vwlocal.net/museum/files/newsletter)

## Van Wert County Historical Society

Van Wert County Historical Society  
& Museum Campus  
602 N. Washington Street  
P.O. Box 621  
Van Wert, Ohio 45891-0621  
419.771.9851  
vanwert.com/museum  
vwc.historicalsociety@gmail.com  
facebook "Van Wert County Historical Society"

Visit us for organization  
information, photo  
gallery, trustee and  
officer listings at  
[vanwert.com/museum](http://vanwert.com/museum)



The Van Wert County Historical Society was organized in 1953, during Ohio's Sesquicentennial celebration. In 1955, William Fosnaught, a local attorney and school teacher, donated to the Society a building which was built circa 1896 by the John Clark family. The building, now the County Museum, is located at the corner of N. Washington and Third Streets in Van Wert.

The Museum houses thousands of artifacts that have been donated by area residents. This original Museum property has been maintained as a Victorian home and features many displays.

The 1985 addition to the Museum Campus is a 50' x 50' building, called the Annex, with displays of other phases of early Van Wert life. The Annex features a Historical Walking Tour of early Van Wert.

You can "Like" your Historical Society on facebook! Our facebook page has many photos displayed so they are available to everyone. Many of these photos have been stored for many years without being seen by visitors to the Musuem Campus. On facebook we are "Van Wert County Historical Society."

### Well, I didn't know that . . .

The Van Wert County Commissioners at their Board meeting on June 12, 1975, adopted a resolution establishing an official flag for Van Wert County.

Commissioners present were Mr. W. Everett Jones, Mr. Steve Dickman and Mr. Hugh T. Rauch.

The Van Wert Business and Professional Women's Club had sponsored a contest to design a Van Wert County Flag for the United States Bicentennial Celebration, 1975—1976.

The winning design was by Mr. Rolland Blanke, Sr. of 133 Balyeat Avenue, Van Wert.

Mr. Blanke's design was described as follows:

The Flag is red, white and blue and takes its general shape from the State Flag of Ohio.

In a red bullet within a white circle, on a blue field, is the



tower of the Van Wert County Courthouse. The Courthouse is a National Historic Landmark and is listed in the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Register of Historic Places.

Over the three red and two white stripes is interposed a four spoke gear with stalks of wheat intertwined.

The wheat is symbolic of the county's rich agribusiness while the gear represents the county's diverse base of industry.

There are 12 cogs on the gear representative of the 12 townships in Van Wert County.

Mr. Blanke's design is unique in that it is symmetrical and appears the same when viewed from either side.

The wording of the resolution declared: "Whereas, the Business and Professional Women's Club does plan to have the flag reproduced and made available to the public during the Bicentennial; therefore be it

The Van Wert County Historical Society assisted the Lincoln Highway Centennial Committee with the promotion of the 100th Anniversary of the Lincoln Highway in mid-year 2013. The Centennial Committee was organized through the VW Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. Several of the Committee members were Historical Society volunteers.

A new Lincoln Highway information kiosk was installed on Main Street at Fountain Park. The Society hosted a discussion fourum in the Annex Building for anyone with a story to tell or pictures connected with the Lincoln Highway.

A tour booklet for traveling the Lincoln Highway in Van Wert County was published. Copies will be available at the CVB office while supplies last. This booklet is available online as a PDF file at:

<http://www.timesbulletin.com/ftp/Touring32Pages.pdf>

and at the Society's publication access page:

<http://www.vwlocal.net/museum/files/newsletter/>

resolved, that this Board . . . does declare this flag to be the Official Flag of Van Wert County, Ohio."

Today there are just a few flags on display left from the batch created in 1975. You will find one on display inside the Courthouse, the Van Wert Area Convention & Visitors Bureau/Main Street office and the Van Wert County Historical Society's Annex Building. Ask your parents or grandparents if they saved one. It has only been 38 years since there has been an official Van Wert County flag. There might be some that were flown and then stored away for a future generation to run up the flagpole.