

History of the Lake County Historical Society



Laurence H. Norton and a group of prominent Lake County citizens founded the Lake County Historical Society in 1938 as a Lake County chapter of the Western Reserve Historical Society in order to care for the James A. Garfield presidential home site. The Society also began collecting historical records and artifacts of Lake County while it operated the presidential home. By 1953, LCHS incorporated as its own entity and continued to operate the site until 1983 when the National Park Service took over operation of the Garfield site.

At that time, the Society moved its operation to Shadybrook, a former turn of the century summer home belonging to the Arthur D. Baldwin family. Over the next 25 years, the Society operated the Lake County History Center at Shadybrook, incorporating an historic village and hosting the popular Little Mountain Folk Festival.



In 2007, the Society acquired the Lake County Home from Riverside Local School District with significant support from the Painesville Township. The property included a 30,000 square foot building and several outbuildings on eight acres of land.

The Lake County History Center includes changing and permanent exhibits on Lake County history, educational classrooms, archives, a research library, administrative offices, community meeting rooms and a reception hall. The Society's Pioneer Village remains a popular and informative field trip destination for area schools and groups. The buildings and grounds are available for rental for weddings, special events, and meetings.

The mission of the Lake County Historical Society is to collect, preserve, interpret and present the heritage of Lake County, Ohio.

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Established by Ohio revised code and managed by each county's Commissioners, the concepts of a "county poor house" became law in 1816. These facilities provided a home for the poor and indigent and became a place of confinement for the mentally ill.

Lake County was established in 1840 and by 1852, the County Commissioners had purchased the Pettingel family farm of 116 acres on which to locate the Lake County Poor House. Twenty-four years later, in 1876, the Lake County commissioners built this 22-bedroom, 30,000 square foot home for \$30,000. The architect was Benjamin Morse of Lake County and the builder was Col. Arthur McAllister of Cleveland. McAllister also built the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Cleveland.

Records chronicle the comings and goings of the residents, providing a glimpse into the home's history. Originally known as the County Infirmary, the name was changed to the Lake County Home in 1919. By the mid-20th century, the site evolved into a self-sufficient, working farm with a large herd of registered Guernsey milk cows.

"6-Year old Elizabeth and her 20year old brother, William, were brought to the home because their parents had abandoned them."

"May 1856, William O'Herron-age 32-arrived from Ireland with no family to stay with and came to the home."

"People were admitted with broken bones, stab wounds, amputated limbs...and typhoid fever. Some were blind and had no family."



This building is an excellent example of Italianate architecture used in an institutional structure. The interior was a unique "mirror" structure with each wing of the building being an exact copy of the other. Men were housed on one side, women on the other. This building temporarily housed the county jail. The first county hospital was built on the grounds in 1897 and served all of Lake County until the 1920s. Most of the home's operation was self-sufficient with residents assisting with farm and housekeeping chores. The county closed the home in 2004.