

BY THE HEARTH: Staying Indoors & “Learning Local” at Four Lake County Museums



2023 has begun, winter is at hand, and outdoor activities on snowy days may only appeal to those heartier souls. Escape the icy elements by trading your knit cap for a tourist's hat and visit these four local history centers. There are great things to discover! Over the generations, early histories were often oral recollections, tales from around the hearth and passed down through families. Sometimes homesteads, farms and landmarks were preserved by those who came before us to takes us back in time. Thousands of hours were invested by hundreds of volunteers who gathered, organized, and preserved the artifacts to document the people, places and things that tell Lake County's story.

These sites have public hours* and many others will be open in the months ahead. Enjoy this local history scavenger hunt by discovering the hidden treasures from Ohio's smallest county with the most history.

James A. Garfield National Historic Site

Located in Mentor, **Congressman James A. Garfield** and his family moved to a farm on Route 20 (Mentor Avenue) in 1876 they

called **Lawnfield**. The original Dickey farmhouse was enlarged from nine to twenty rooms, with a free-standing building to house Garfield's voluminous library. The home became the centerpiece for the Congressman's front porch presidential campaign in the fall of 1880. Garfield's election took James, Lucretia and their children to Washington D.C. for his March 1881 inauguration. The tragic events of the summer that followed saw the 20th U.S. President assassinated after just six months in office. After his death, the family returned to their Mentor farm to rebuild their lives. While Garfield memorabilia and restorations provide a fascinating glimpse of 19th century lifestyles, an equally remarkable story is that of the Rudolph Family, Uncle Joe and Garfield's widow Lucretia. An historic site maintained by the **National Park Service** since 1983, one may learn the many backstories to this famous property, Garfield humble, but state-of-the-art campaign office, and the descendants of the fallen President. Admission is free.

<https://www.nps.gov/jaga/index.htm>



Lake County History Center

Arguably the best-known site after Garfield's Presidential Home, the **Lake County Historical Society** is housed in the old **Lake County Infirmary** (Asylum). The building's history is itself worth the visit. The Historical Society was founded in 1938 by Laurence H. Norton and a group of prominent Lake County citizens. Norton's concept was to create a Lake County Chapter of the Western Reserve Historical Society in order to care for the James A. Garfield presidential home site. The Society began collecting historical records and artifacts of Lake County while it operated **Lawnfield**. LCHS incorporated in 1953 and continued to operate the site until 1983 when the National Park Service took over operation.

The Society relocated its collection from Mentor to Kirtland Hills to a site owned by the **Holden Arboretum** known as **Shadybrook**. The turn of the 20th century summer home belonged to the **Arthur D. Baldwin** family. A 25-year residency followed before concerns about the collection's size, safety, and preservation necessitated a new home. In 2007, the Society worked with the **Riverside Local School District** and the **Lake County Commissioners**, who had arranged a sale of 54 plus acres. The site included the historic building which



served as the former **Lake County Poor House**. The Lake County History Center currently occupies 8 acres and the building constructed in 1876 by the County. The building replaced the original Lake County Infirmary structure. The Asylum (Poor House) had occupied the same property since 1852 when the County bought a local farmhouse and 110 acres to support indigent, disabled and elderly souls without family to care for them.

The two-story T-shaped Italianate structure remains an excellent example of an

19th century institutional building, retaining much architectural design integrity and historic significance. The building's interior contains four rooms in the front, designated as the superintendent's quarters on the first and second floor. Two wings, extending from each side of the center, housed male and female residents separately. The rear extension held the kitchen, dining hall, and laundry area. The basement level had storage and workshop areas as well as a number of cells for housing the mentally ill. 1897 saw a cottage hospital added that served the entire county until 1924 when a modern hospital was built in downtown Painesville.

The Lake County Home remained one of the last few such operating facilities in the state until 2004. Visitors today will still be able to see much of the original home, cells, cottage hospital and outbuildings. However the real value in visiting the LCHS lies within each of the individual first floor rooms where local history themed displays have been created. Among the favorites are the rooms sharing the history of the Underground Railroad and the Interurban Railroad. The passion of Dr. Ron Taddeo, a local historian, can be seen in the Blue Coats Collection room. Among other LCHS favorites are: a display featuring the widowhood of Lucretia Garfield (a nice companion site to the Garfield farm in Mentor); and a 1940s-era kitchen offering a glimpse into daily life for homemakers and their families. The Mounds Club Room links Lake County to organized crime and Las Vegas history with a unique bit of local lore. A log cabin school, Civil War accounts, collection tours, special events and a research library serve to make this site a special repository of all things Lake County. <https://lakehistorycenter.org/>



Perry Historical Society

A chance meeting in 1991 led two Perry residents to realize the need to preserve the history of the Perry Community. The Historical Society was incorporated in March 1992 and over 150 years of local history are now available to the community, county and all history enthusiasts. The main museum is housed at the corner of Center Road and Main Street in the old **Perry Town Hall**. Its archival records and files are stored in the former **Manchester West** school building. The Perry Historical Society members will tell you, "Put-in-Bay may have Oliver Hazard Perry's

military uniform, but we have Hugh Moser's drawers." Ohio Historical Marker 7-43 shares that story in county history. <https://perryohiohistoricalsociety.org/>



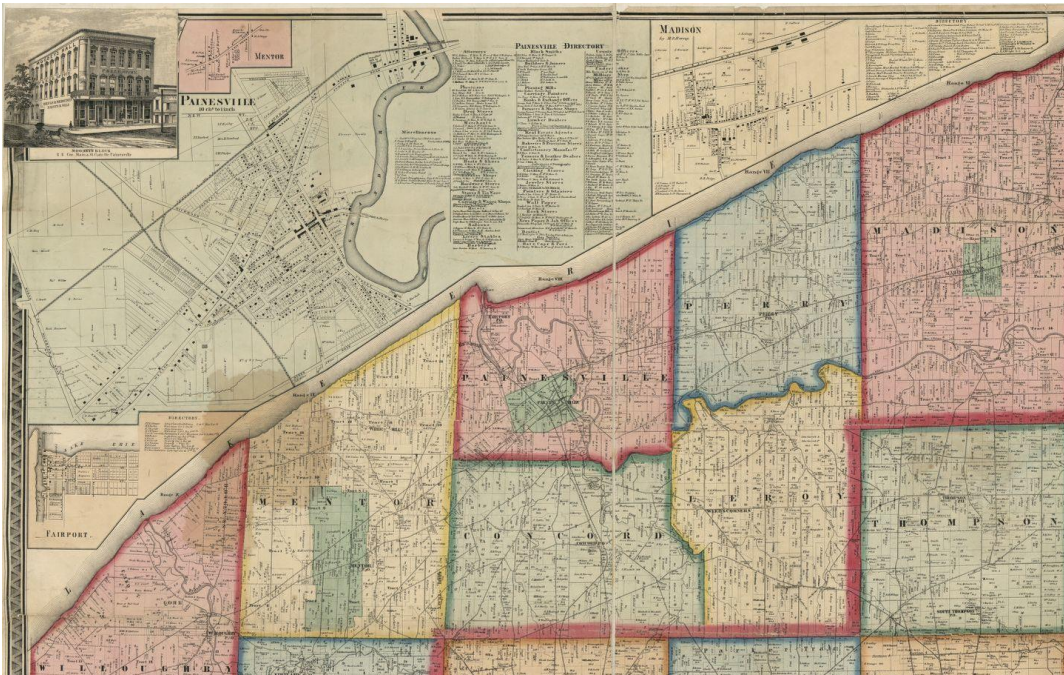
Madison Historical Society

An estate auction at the historic **Crandell Homestead** on Middle Ridge Road in 1977 saw one-of-a-kind artifacts leave Madison, Ohio, forever. Two Madison residents witnessed this sad event and in 1978 helped create the Madison Historical Society. Incorporated in 1980, the Society had many temporary locations in the village and township for the next two decades.

In 2020, the Society's greatest need and wish was granted -- a permanent home at last. They now reside in a

building whose own history is equally noteworthy. The Madison Village building was originally constructed as a **Carnegie Library** in 1918, after a 1915 grant application was awarded. Opened in 1919, the library had a 55-year history serving the village. After the library's move to a new building, the Madison Village Administration and Police Department moved in and were housed there through July 2020. Now housing the Historical Society, much has been accomplished in their new digs in just two years. With displays changing and evolving annually, the history of Madison will continue to grow, be shared and thrive.

<https://madisonohiohistoricalsociety.org/>



Each of these four sites will make for a wonderful daytime visit.* Whether visitors' interests lie in preserving the sands of time or is simply a curiosity about the past, do stop by and let the curators and volunteers share more about their stories of Lake County.

*Winter visitor hours usually fall within the 10-4pm range; while open days and weekends can vary. Do call or check the society websites for exact winter hours. All museums welcome volunteers, as the gift of time is always appreciated.

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