

Presidential Pathways History

The story of Presidential Pathways Scenic Byway can be told in the hundred years between 1792 and 1892, commemorating the life and times of Presidents William Henry Harrison (9th President of the US) and his grandson Benjamin Harrison (23rd President of the US). What was life like during that century?



William Henry Harrison became familiar with the Northwest Territory after joining the army under General Anthony Wayne based at Ft. Washington in what is now Cincinnati. Known for defeating the Miami Indians at the battle of Tippecanoe near present day LaFayette, IN in 1791, he negotiated the Treaty of Greenville. He later gained honors by defeating the British, now allied with the Miami soldiers following Tecumseh, who were trying to re-establish a US foothold near Detroit in the Battle of the Thames during the War of 1812. Sometime around 1800, he established a farm in North Bend, Ohio, and married Anna Tuthill Symmes.

As a delegate to Congress from the Northwest Territory, Harrison successfully promoted and saw passed the Harrison Land Act which opened the Territory to greater white settlement. He served as a congressman from Ohio, and Governor of the Indiana Territory. He negotiated land treaties with the Miami in the Northwest Territories. He won the Presidential race in 1840 by a landslide. But a cold caught on his inaugural day developed into pneumonia, taking his life exactly one month after his inauguration. His presidency holds the record for being the shortest in US history. His bereaved widow moved in with her son, John and his family, influencing John's son, Benjamin (only 8 years old at the time), to follow in his grandfather's footsteps; serving in the military during the Civil War, and holding office in both Indiana and Ohio before being elected the 23rd President of the United States in 1889.

William's grandson, Benjamin, also left his stamp on the area. Growing up on the frontier in the newly formed state of Ohio, he saw that education was the way to put Ohio and even the United States on an equal footing with European nations. He went first to Farmer's College in Elizabethtown, OH, later transferring to Miami University to be near his future wife, Caroline Scott, who was then attending the Oxford Female Institute established by her father and other Miami University professors in order to assure higher education for their daughters. After Caroline and Benjamin's marriage, Benjamin established a legal practice in Indianapolis, preferring to be the power behind the politician rather than running for office himself. However, he was later convinced to run for and be elected as Governor of Indiana.



When Benjamin was elected as President, he championed the rights of Indians, former slaves and civil war veterans, helped shape a vigorous foreign policy agenda which included the establishment of the Pan American Union, an attempted annexation of Hawai'i, and a major expansion of the navy. He also signed the Sherman Anti-Trust Act in an attempt to protect fair trade practices.



Caroline Scott Harrison took upon herself the updating of the White House, adding electricity for the first time, cataloguing the presidential china and designing a set of china herself, as well as raising money for the building of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine—on the condition that they admit women. She installed the first Christmas tree in the White House and planned the grand centennial of the Presidency. Although she planned for the addition of a west wing for office space and an east wing for a gallery to be added to the Whitehouse, she did not live to see her plan carried out. Her meticulous cataloguing of former presidents possessions lives on in the China Room of the White House today.

This Presidential Century, from 1791 to 1892, saw the removal of native populations, the white settlement and burgeoning industrialization of Ohio; the growing evil of slavery and its termination. Both Presidents had a vision for Ohio and the nation. They often came down on opposite sides of the issue however, whether it was dealing with Native American-Settler relations, encouraging feats of engineering, higher education, issues of slavery and war, the rights of small business vs. corporations, the care of war veterans, or the conduct of foreign policy. Their debates about some of these issues continue today.

The two Presidents Harrison left their name and their mark on this part of Ohio in the communities, townships, landmarks, scholarships honoring the best of Miami's students and much more. Along the Presidential Pathway, you will see some of the things they saw, hear about some of their friends, learn something about the engineering feats that permitted them to tame rivers into canals, run them through mountains and cross them on durable bridges. You will visit memorial markers and the living institutions that carry on their memory.

The route from North Bend, through the cities of Cleves and Harrison, Morgan and Reily Townships to Oxford and Hueston Woods is approximately 60 miles. Entry points are at the Harrison Tomb in North Bend, the Harrison-Symmes Memorial Foundation Museum in Cleves, the Visitors and Convention Bureau in Oxford, and Main Street Harrison in Harrison, OH. There are also plans for a future Regional Interpretive Center in Metamora, IN, that will carry information on the Presidential Pathways byway.