

Ohio River Trail North Shore Extension Trail Proposal

North Shore Extension Trail – Ambridge to Leetsdale

The Ohio River Trail North Shore Extension Trail is primarily a “share the road” trail that begins in South Height and travels to the Woodlawn–Ambridge Bridge crossing the Ohio River onto 11th Street in Ambridge. From 11th Street the trail turns right onto Merchant Street.

Ambridge is near the location of Legionville, the training camp for General Anthony Wayne's Legion of the United States. General Wayne was the first to provide basic training for regular U.S. Army recruits and Legionville was the first facility established for this purpose.

Ambridge also remains the home of Old Economy Village, a National Historic Landmark administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. The site interprets the Harmony Society, one of America's most successful 19th century Christian communal societies. A commune is an intentional community of people living together, sharing common interests, property, possessions, resources, work and income. Old Economy Village also provides public education and preservation of the Society's unique material culture. The communal society was founded by George Rapp.

Established in 1824, Old Economy, known to the Harmonites as the village of “Ökonomie”, was founded upon German Pietism, which called for a higher level of purity within Christianity. Soon the Harmonites were not only known for their piety, but also for their production of wool, cotton, and silk. As a pioneer in the American silk industry, Economy became known as the American silk center in the 1830s and 1840s. Today, the site maintains seventeen carefully restored structures and gardens that were built between 1824 and 1830. The buildings reflect the unusual life style of the organization, which, by the 1840s, was well renowned for its economic success in textile production. The site also portrays the community's involvement with agricultural production, railroads, and oil. The recreated gardens encompass more than 2 acres, providing colorful 19th century flowers. The gardens' formal pathways, stone pavilion, and seasonal flowering hedges are among the striking features. Old Economy's buildings, grounds, library, archives and 16,000 original artifacts are fused to create an interpretive facility for the Commonwealth.

The Harmony Society first settled the area in the early 1800s, founding the village of “Ökonomie” or Economy in 1824. Although initially successful, accumulating significant landholdings, the sect went into decline. By the end of the nineteenth century, only a few Harmonists remained. The Society was dissolved and its vast real estate holdings sold, much of it to the American Bridge Company, who subsequently enlarged the town and incorporated it as Ambridge in 1905. The American Bridge Company hired thousands of immigrants who left their European homeland to fulfill their dreams of work, freedom, and peace. Most of the employees were relatives of relatives and the small town grew, with wards separating the town into ethnic sections.

With the growth of the steel mills, Ambridge became a worldwide leader in steel production. The borough became known for bridge building, metal molding, and the manufacture of tubes (large iron pipes). During World War II, the American Bridge Company fabricated steel for the building of Landing Ship Tanks (LST's). The steel was then sent by rail to the adjacent American Bridge naval shipyard in Leetsdale, PA where the LST's were built. The area was also home to several other steel mills like Armco, the “Pipe Mill” which manufactured oil piping, and A.M. Byers, a major iron and tool fabricator. Eventually competition by foreign steel producers reduced the share of the steel market for U.S. manufacturers. With the shift of steel production to overseas, the Ambridge Bridge Company ended operations in Ambridge in 1983. The legacy of American Bridge can be seen today from coast to coast, from the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco to the Brooklyn Bridge in New York.

Although the different ethnic groups of Ambridge have blended over time, the community continues to recognize the origins from which it came. Since 1966, Ambridge has held an annual heritage festival celebrating the borough's ethnic pride. Diversity in food, music, and entertainment continues to unite the community in remembering its origins. Organized by the Ambridge Chamber of Commerce, the three-day Nationality Days festival takes place in May and is located in the heart of the downtown Commercial District. Vendors line the center of Merchant Street as thousands of attendees – locals and tourists – enjoy Italian, Ukrainian, Greek, Polish, German, Croatian, and Slovenian cuisine. Booths are sponsored by numerous churches in Ambridge, bringing with them the recipes for their cultural dishes such as pirohy, haluski, stuffed cabbage, and borscht. Live entertainment, arts and crafts, and children's activities can be found.

Even though the steel mills no longer dominate the landscape and Ambridge now is over 100 years old, revitalization is beginning to occur along Merchant Street in the Downtown Commercial District. Entrepreneurs and investors have begun to renovate the Victorian facades of the commercial

storefronts. Antique shops are opening in the Historic District, which is also a National Historic Landmark, and a once industrial warehouse area is being converted to condominiums, shops, and parks. In 2007 Ambridge was designated as a Preserve America Community by the White House.

In Leetsdale, Merchant Street becomes Beaver Street passing Edward C. Henli Park and Quaker Valley High School (QVHS) providing a safe route to school. QVHS is well-known for an innovative laptop-technology grant, received in 2000 from former Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge. In the spring of 2006, U.S. News & World Report ranked Quaker Valley High School among the top 80% of public high schools nationwide. The school is also very strong athletically, having won PIAA State Championships in Boys Cross Country, Girls Tennis, Boys Soccer, Boy's Tennis, and Boys Hockey.

North Shore Extension Trail – Leetsdale to Sewickley

From Beaver Street in Leetsdale the trail becomes Beaver Road in Edgeworth and Sewickley. Edgeworth Borough was founded in 1904 and took its name from the Edgeworth Female Seminary, a small school for girls that had moved to our community, called "Sewickley Bottoms", from Pittsburgh in 1836. The Seminary was named for Maria Edgeworth, a well-known Irish writer of the period who was much admired by the founder of the Seminary, Mary Gould Oliver. Edgeworth is home of three community parks. Way Park is located at the intersection of beaver Road and Meadow Lane. Morrow-Pontefract Park is located at the boundary of Leetsdale and Edgeworth Boroughs. Walker Park is an eighty-one acre park located along Little Sewickley Creek Road.

In Sewickley a right turn on Academy Road brings a safe route to the Sewickley Academy. The Sewickley Academy is a private coeducational college preparatory school that is the oldest independent school in the Pittsburgh area dating back to 1838. The school began as a boy's only school, which struggled to survive through the American Civil War years, and was closed for a short time while many students fought in the war, both for the Union and for the Confederacy. The school reopened in the 1870s as a school for boys and girls.

Sewickley Academy again would close for a short while as a result of the departure of their headmaster. When the school was reopened, it was named after the current headmaster Miss Maude Munson. In 1925, Miss Munson's school and the nearby Miss Dickinson's school combined to form a new Sewickley Academy. The 1960s brought change as the Academy introduced a Senior School to meet the demands of local families. The Academy remained mostly a community school until the 1980s when an emphasis was put on increasing diversity, which has resulted in a student body from more than 50 school districts in Western Pennsylvania, Eastern Ohio and Northern West Virginia.

Currently, Sewickley Academy enrolls approximately 800 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The Sewickley Academy Senior School enrolls approximately 300 students each year, with the majority of new students entering in the freshman year. The school comprises 8 different buildings on a 16-acre campus with an additional 14 acres, three minutes away with additional athletic fields and tennis courts.

From the Academy, the trails turns left onto Linden Place to Grant Street where a right turn merges the trail with Ferry Street. A left turn on Chadwick Street brings the trail to the beautiful Sewickley Riverfront Park, a railfan's favorite.

The Norfolk Southern Ft. Wayne Line averages about fifty trains per day carrying coal, mail and a variety of other products. In addition, Amtrak operates six trains daily.

Allegheny County has had a long history of promoting interest and development of its three rivers. The Ohio River Corridor Study was conceived in 1986. Sewickley was among nineteen municipalities to develop recreational uses for the river's edge. The idea of the Riverfront Park began around 1996 and came to fruition about ten years later. The park is about 2 ½ acres in size has an elevated walkway no higher than the level of the railroad tracks to allow the Chadwick Street neighbors to preserve their view. Most of the construction took place in 2000 and 2001. The park received two state grants and public contributions. One donor contributed the gazebo and her initials are woven into the design. Around that same time, Station Square in Pittsburgh was sold to Forest City, a New Jersey development company and they wanted to dispose of all of their historical artifacts. Many of these items are displayed at Riverfront Park. In addition, there are stones from old city schools and other demolished buildings in Pittsburgh.

The H.K. Porter engine and P&LE caboose are from Mr. Fred Okie's former house on Backbone Road in Sewickley. Mr. Okie was President of both the Union Railroad and the Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad. These two railroad cars were showcased in his front yard until he relocated to a retirement home in 1978 and they were moved to Station Square. The new Station Square owners, Forest City, returned the cars to Sewickley's Riverfront Park. The Tom Thumb engine was built in 1897 in Pittsburgh by the H. K. Porter Company. It was used for maintenance purposes in the Duquesne Works of the U.S. Steel Corporation. This small locomotive is best suited for short hauls at low speeds.

Another focal point of the park is the interactive sundial which uses a person's shadow to display the hour instead of a pointed object. The park management asked a Carnegie Mellon Math Professor to measure the sun's position and supervise the construction of the sundial to insure the correct latitude and longitude for the position of the sun's shadow at the exact spot at the park.

Another item in the park is the World War II Navy Anchor donated and built by the American Merchant Marines. This tribute to the fallen soldiers weighs about eight tons and was transported from Texas. Riverfront Park and the Navy Anchor were dedicated at the Sesquicentennial celebration.

Recently, Norfolk Southern Railroad offered a lease of additional land to Sewickley Borough. This area is adjacent to the park and is about an acre in size. It was added to the park in 2007. It looks similar to the existing park with a gravel path and plantings. It also opens the Walnut Street underpass to provide access to the Ohio River.

From Riverfront Park the trail continues along Chadwick passing the Montessori Children's Community School to the Sewickley Bridge via Chestnut Street and Kramer Street to traverse the Ohio River to Moon Township and the Ohio River South Shore Trail.

The Ohio River Trail North Shore Extension Trail is approximately eight miles.

This proposal was authored by Dr. Vincent Troia, March 2010.

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