

HISTORIC MILAN WALKING TOUR



Milan Square

The Village of Milan

The Village of Milan was founded in an area known as the Connecticut Western Reserve. This area includes the Fire Lands (approximately 25 square miles), land given to Connecticut residents whose homes had been burned by the British during the American Revolution. This land became open to settlement in 1809. Many of the original settlers were descendants of the Connecticut Fire Sufferers and brought with them the building techniques, architectural styles and town layouts they had known in New England. Platted in 1817, Milan saw rapid growth during its early years. Tanneries, distilleries, a carding mill, cooperages, doctors and lawyers all opened for business. The Village Square became the center of life for the community.



Milan Public Square

Originally a hitching lot for horses, the modern square was created in 1868 when grass and trees were planted. Prior to that time, the square was a dirt lot with wooden boardwalk style sidewalks connecting the various businesses and homes that had been constructed around it. The Old Eagle Tavern was built in 1827, and Seth Jennings was the first proprietor. In 1828, it was known as The Milan Coffee House and was the spot for celebration after the opening of the Milan Canal on July 4, 1839.



Milan Town Hall

The Eagle Tavern was remodeled in 1870, adding the second story balcony and renamed the Brotherton Exchange. A fire destroyed the building on August 1, 1873 and it was later replaced by the Township Hall in 1876. The building was dedicated on July 4, 1876, serving as a center for Township and Village government. The Milan Town Hall caught fire on May 4, 1888. The entire south side of the Square was destroyed, along with the Presbyterian Church. People came from miles to see the destruction the fire of 1888 caused. The Town Hall was rebuilt using the original brick walls. When it was reconstructed, Captain Henry Kelley donated funds to add a full-story clock tower.

MILAN TOWN HALL
1876



MILAN TOWN HALL
MAY 4, 1888





Civil War Monument

Dedicated on July 4, 1867, the Civil War Monument was designed by John G. King and built by Major J.E. Marsh, both of the Northwestern Marble Company located in Toledo, Ohio. The \$2,500 spent for its erection was raised by subscription in Milan Township. The height is 28'6" from ground to the highest point, and the masonry foundation is 4'6" high by 7' square. The first base was made of Berea sandstone, the plinth was brown freestone from Portland, Connecticut. It was topped by a carved spread-winged eagle cut from a block of stone by W. Kendall of Philadelphia, which was replaced by a bronze eagle in 1976.

At the time of the unveiling, there were 330 names of those who served in the Civil War from Milan Township and the Village of Milan inscribed on the monument. The iron fencing, which had surrounded the monument at one time, was reestablished through the efforts of the Milan Chamber of Commerce in 1995. A full restoration and rededication was done in 2015.



South Side of Square

The south side of the square once housed the jewelry store of Baster Ashley. A fire burnt the south side of the square, along with the Township Hall in 1888. The upper story of the jewelry store was the telegraph office in later years. The Milan Library was created in 1846 and was originally located in a business on the north side of the square. The present building was built in 1912 on donated land with a grant from the Carnegie Foundation. Additions were added in 1980 and 2012.



West Side of Square

The west side of the square in the 1830s housed the businesses of Mrs. Moyer's millinery, and Dr. Milo Stuart, the town druggist, who opened shop in 1835. A fire on March 23, 1852 destroyed the entire block which housed fourteen stores. The two brick buildings at the south end were added in the 1860s and 1880s (Invention Restaurant).



East Side of Square

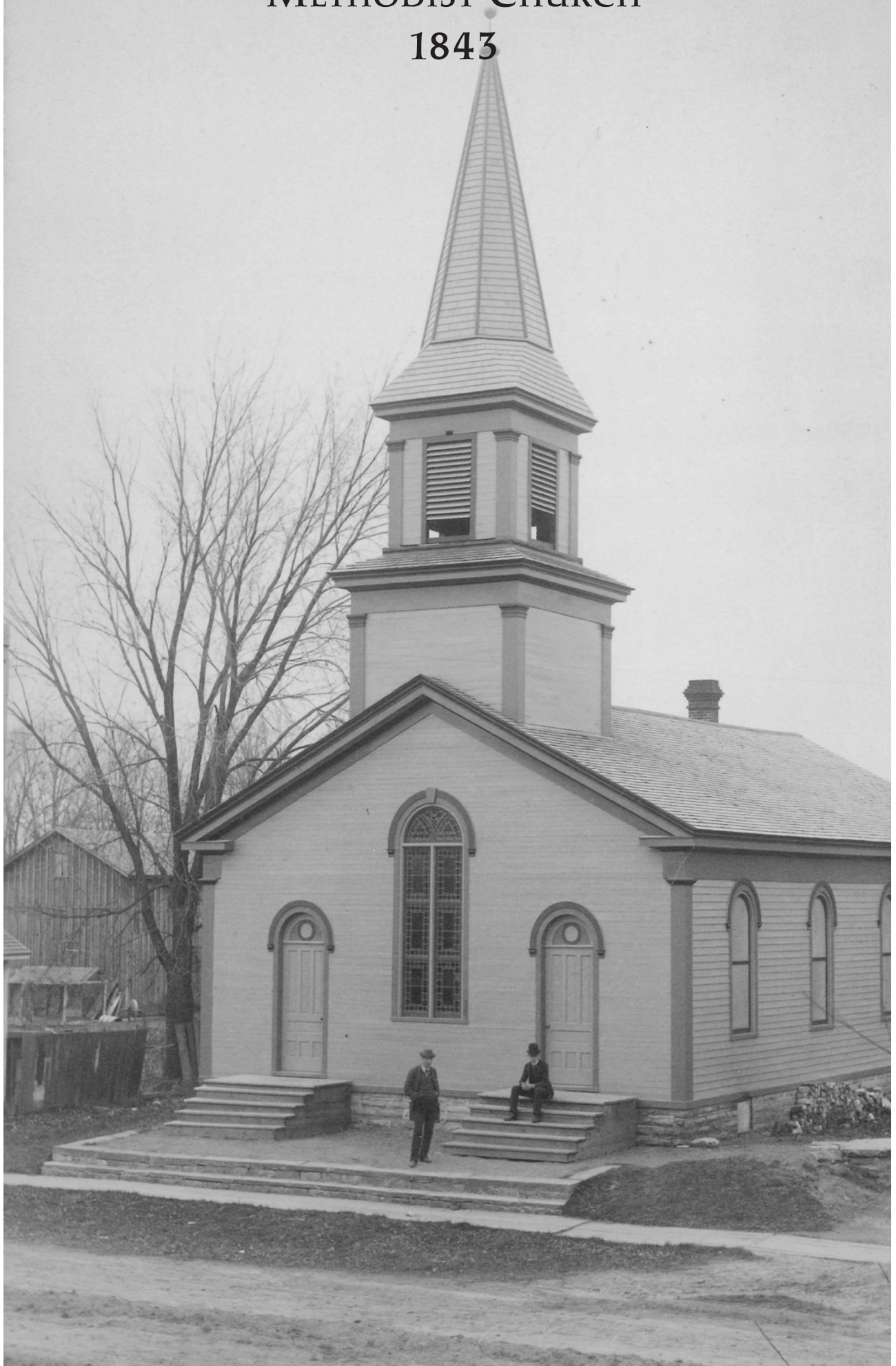
Thomas and Daniel Hamilton, along with Needham Standart, became members of the firm, Standart, Hamilton & Co. They constructed the Hamilton-Standart building in 1826 (Key Bank). Standart shipped the first grain from Milan Township in 1825-1826, but left Milan to further his business opportunities in Cleveland in 1836. The Hamilton brothers were the most prominent contributors to the Milan Canal and other local projects, but the economic crash of 1837 forced the brothers to suspend their businesses, which were heavily invested in real estate. In 1874, the Masonic Order took over the second and third floors. The Kelley Building was built by Captain Henry Kelley in 1869-1870. The building remains one of Milan's most iconic architectural structures.



North Side of Square

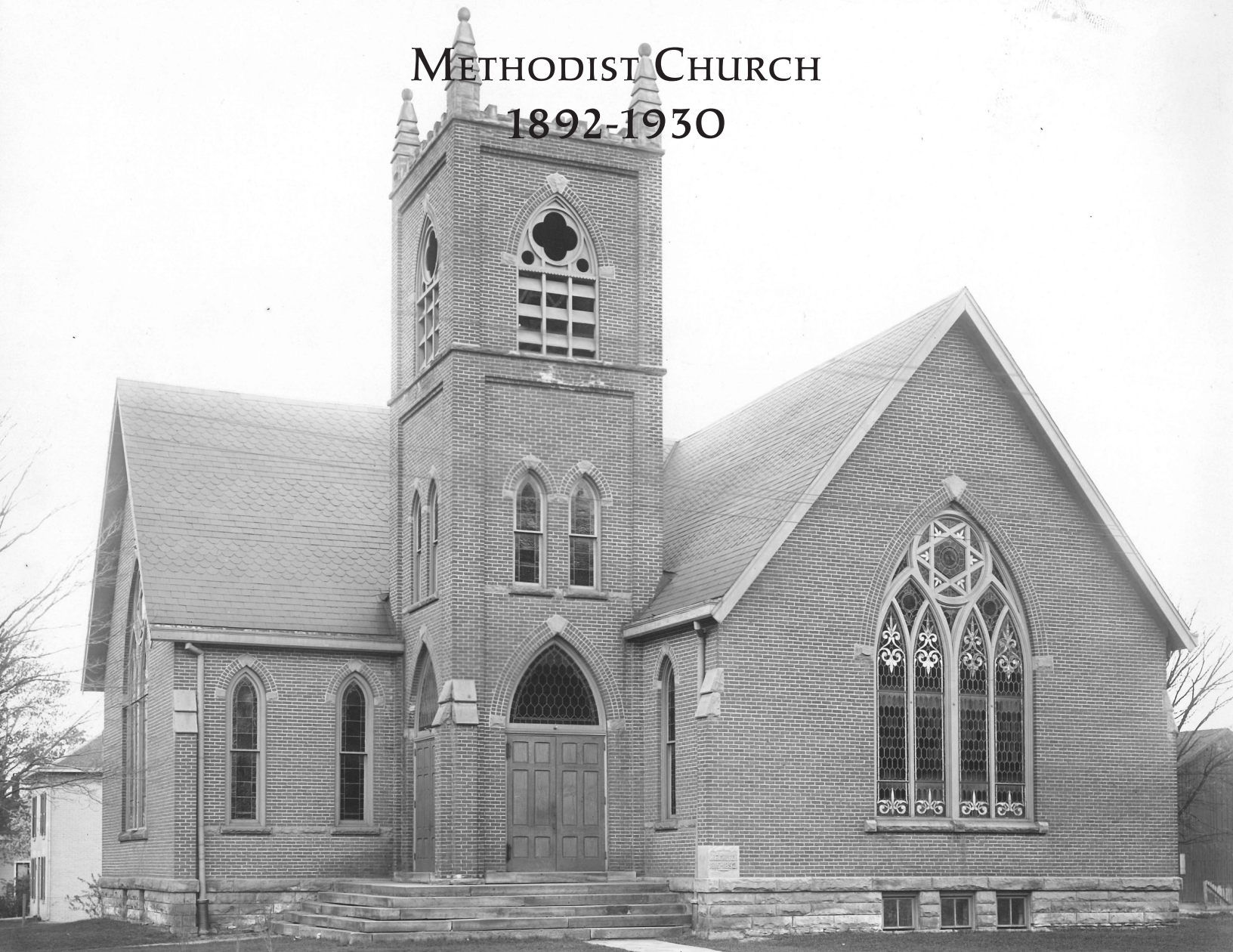
Nathan Jenkins built the first store on the square in 1821. In 1833, it was moved to the rear of the property and the Mansion Tavern was constructed on the site. A fire burnt the Tavern to the ground on May 7, 1850 and the store was moved back to its original location (Sipe's Hair Shop). The Andrews Building (Wonder Bar) was constructed in 1826, with three stories. The third floor, named Andrews Hall, was a center for town activities. William Molt, owner of the building in 1909, removed the upper part of the building.

METHODIST CHURCH
1843



METHODIST CHURCH

1892-1930



Methodist Church

The Old Methodist Church was built in 1843, when the congregation moved their meetings from the old school house and built a frame church. The steeple was added three years later. The building later became the Steeple Mill when a new, brick building at the southwest corner of Center and Church Streets was built in 1892.

The original brick Methodist Episcopal Church built in 1892 was destroyed by a fire on Christmas Sunday, 1930. For several months, the congregation met in the Presbyterian Church Chapel and then moved to a space in the Kelley Block while planning the construction of a new Church. The present structure was dedicated in 1938 as the Edison Memorial United Methodist Church.



Presbyterian Church

In 1835, a meeting was called by Needham Standart and Reverend Judson for those interested in building a place of worship in Milan. Both members and non-members of the Presbyterian Church financially supported the project. Construction of the building took two years and cost more than \$8,000.00. Dedication took place on January 31, 1837. A spark in the steeple set fire to the building during the fire of 1888, allowing burning wood to fall into the church below. The congregation continued to meet in the Lockwood Chapel, which had been built in 1886, as the new church was built. It was completed in May of 1890.



Edison Birthplace Museum

Born on February 11, 1847 in his home, Thomas Edison and his family remained in Milan until 1853. Due to the decline of the Milan Canal, the family once again relocated to Port Huron, Michigan. Thomas Edison became one of the most prolific inventors and businessman of all time. His work in electric light, sound recording and motion pictures forever changed the world. He holds 1,093 US patents in his name. The Thomas Edison Birthplace Museum opened on the centennial of his birth, February 11, 1947.



Milan Museum

Before becoming a prominent doctor in Milan and being the attending physician at the birth of Thomas Edison, Leman Galpin studied medicine under Dr. M. Stuart. He began his own practice in 1839, continuing for thirty-five years in Milan. He married Electa Euphrasia Adams in 1844, and together they had two children, William and Mary. Dr. Galpin built his home in Milan in 1846 in the popular Greek Revival Style.

William became one of Milan's greatest benefactors, donating half of the site for the Milan Public Library with A.L. Hoover donating the other half. He also contributed established endowments for the library and the Presbyterian Church, as well as land for the Galpin Sanctuary.



Jenkins Warehouse and Canal History along the Milan Towpath MetroPark

The last remaining canal warehouse in Milan, circa 1840 marks the start of a 0.9 mile Erie MetroParks path through the canal basin and along the towpath and railway.

Please adhere to all posted signs along the Erie MetroParks Milan Towpath. Please visit www.eriemetroparks.org for park hours and additional information.

Ohio Canals

The Ohio Legislature established the Ohio Canal Commission in 1820 that worked with those responsible for the Erie Canal. By 1821, Eleutheros Cooke of Sandusky supported the idea of a central-Ohio canal, however the routes of Cuyahoga to the east and Miami to the west were supported at the State level. The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, opened the Great Lakes for commerce with the East Coast. This new waterway stretched 363 miles from Buffalo to New York City.

Milan

Why a canal in Milan?

1. Milan is located in an area of fertile, wheat-growing land in North Central Ohio. However, farmers with excess crops to sell had to transport heavy, wheat-laden wagons to the lake ports across sandy, wet lowlands. Milan sat on higher, clay soil with better roads accessible to travel.
2. It was known that the Huron River was navigable to the lake only 3 miles north of Milan. Water travel was far less expensive and much faster which meant less waste for farmers. Canal shipping for 40 bundles of wheat for 100 miles was 1.68 cents per mile. By wagon, the same load would cost 18 cents per mile.
3. Grain came from as far south as the National Road near Zanesville, taking two weeks to transport to port and back. A canal at Milan would save the farmers days travel which meant less money and time lost.

In 1823, the Huron Harbor Company was formed by citizens of both Huron and Milan to improve the harbor at the mouth of the Huron River to allow the entrance of lake vessels. The next year, Milan undertook a survey for a possible canal route from the Village of Milan north 3 miles to where the river was navigable (Abbott's Bridge).

Building a canal in Milan would create a port ten wagon miles south of Huron, saving time and money. The Milan Canal Company received its charter from the State of Ohio in 1827, offering shares for \$50.00 each, although no stock was sold until 1831. Not enough money was raised to begin serious work.

At this point, frustrated canal supporters petitioned the Ohio Legislature to incorporate Milan to allow the Village to issue twenty \$1,000 canal bonds. These bonds were to be backed by the taxing authority of Milan and would be repaid with tax revenue, if necessary. The Village of Milan was incorporated on February 23, 1833, and with the tax provision in place, banks felt secure to purchase canal bonds and lend money for construction. Eventually the State of Ohio and the Village of Milan purchased canal stocks.

Construction began in 1832, but the canal was not opened to lake traffic until 1839. The canal had an original estimated cost of \$5,000 but ended up with a total cost of over \$75,000.

Opening Celebrations

The Milan Canal opened for lake traffic on July 4, 1839. On that day, crowds gathered to watch the 100 ton schooner *Kewannee* enter the canal. 500 people saw the ship get towed into the Basin, a celebration complete with bands, cannon salutes, and rides for the crowd on the canal boat *Waterwitch*. Festivities were not dampened by the sudden passage of Revolutionary War Veteran, Timothy Conklin, aged 96, when the cannon was fired. A banquet followed at the Eagle Tavern, where the 13 'regular' toasts were drunk, in honor of the 13 original colonies and Independence Day, followed by many informal ones.

Canal Peak

The peak year of canal commerce was 1847, having over 650 wagons recorded in one day. May 18, 1847 had 20,000 bushels of grain in a single day taken into the warehouses in Milan. By this time, 11 warehouses lined the Basin, even the two from Lockwood Landing had moved, having the capacity to store 400,000 bushels. As the grain trade increased, so did exports of other products, such as wool, pork, lumber, flour, and even hickory nuts, ashes, and cranberries. Aside from the general merchandise imported from the East, such as teas, cloth goods, china, and food, other imports included shingles, pig iron, cedar posts, salt, plaster, and even beer.

Farmers wagons from the south pulled by 4 to 6 horse teams would arrive in the Village via one of the three plank toll roads. Planking was put down, making the roads smoother and relatively dust free. Plank roads came from Monroeville in the west, Norwalk to the south and from Fitchville to the southeast.

From the square, the wagons descended down the Milan hill reaching a street above the warehouses. Farmers would sell their grain to a commission/sales house that was connected to a warehouse by a rail trestle. Grain was sent down to the upper story of the warehouse by a rail car – if the farmer wished, he could ride the rail car, too!

This ingenious system was devised by businessman George Lockwood to get the grain from the wagons on the roadway up the hill to ships waiting by the wharves of the warehouses at the base of the hill. It was done with small railroad cars elevated on timbers that ran from the receiving offices to the upper floors of the warehouses.

Farmers dumped their grain directly into the rail cars, where it was weighed and run to the upper story of the warehouses, emptied into bins, then run down by troughs directly into the holds of the schooners.

Farmers were likely given credit in the form of chits, or tickets, by the warehouse that they could use at the general stores to purchase merchandise. The 14 general stores, multiple taverns and distilleries were built in Milan to keep up with the business generated by the farmers and ship crews coming in and out of the Village. Between the years, 1849-1851, the population of Milan grew from 550 to 1,300 people.

Canal Basin Shipyards

Shipyards once located at Abbott's Bridge moved to the Basin after 1840. Between the years 1856-1867 more than 50 lake schooners were built in Milan. Milan had a sail loft and rope walk for ship rigging as well as the Butman Foundry that made pieces used in shipbuilding.

Several firms operated on the north side of the Basin between the years 1840-1860. The first schooner, Albany was built in 1840-1841 and the most well-known shipyard was that of Ebenezer Merry and James P. Gay. The firm of Merry & Gay did well in Milan until both Merry's sawmill and the shipyard burned in 1857 after which the firm moved to Sandusky. After taking on a government contract to build 6 revenue cutters, cost overruns and delays caused a dispute with the overseer and put the shipbuilders in bankruptcy.

A demand for larger vessels resulted in the decline of Milan's shipbuilding. Ships built in Milan were limited in size due to the constraints of the canal and lock dimensions. The last vessel, Mystic, was built in the Basin in 1866. At that time, shipbuilding was moved back down to Abbott's Bridge/Lockwood Landing – then known as Fries Landing. The shipbuilding industry would last here for many more years. In 1883 the Golden Age, the largest schooner built on Lake Erie was built at Fries Landing.

Decline

Only five short years after its peak, wheat shipments from Milan were $\frac{1}{4}$ what they were in 1847 and it was the last year that a dividend was paid out. A new, faster and cheaper mode of transportation was available. The steam locomotive did not depend on animal power and could operate in most weather conditions. The first railroad to enter the area was the Sandusky, Mansfield, and Newark RR. It was built south of the Port of Sandusky, reaching Mansfield in 1846 and Newark in 1851. The east/west lines of the Cleveland, Norwalk, and Toledo RR were built in the 1850s and linked the area to New York City and the east coast. Milan raised \$60,000 in subscriptions to let the Rail Company's directors know they were serious about being on the route – however the railroad bypassed Milan to the north. In 1864, ice flows damaged the river lock system and the last vessel carrying a load of hay bound for the Confederate POW Camp on Johnson's Island departed the Basin in 1864. That winter the feeder dam burst. It was rebuilt in 1865, but the following winter the locks failed. At this time, there was no economic justification for further repairs and the canal closed. AP Mowry built the Idaho in 1863 at a cost of \$25,000. The 350 ton cargo vessel sailed to Milan for repairs in 1873, but was abandoned in the first set of locks after failing to get to the dry dock. The remains of the ship could be viewed for many years. On July 21, 1881 the towpaths of the canal were leased to the Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad for 99 years at a price of \$50.00 per year. Included in the lease were the locks, basin and dry dock area. On March 28, 1906 the company was dissolved by the Erie County Court of Common Pleas.