

Friends of Rocheport

Walking Tour of Historic Rocheport

Prarie, those men inform that
the Kansas Nations are now out in
the plains hunting Buffaloes, the
hunted last winter on this River
Painted a projecting rock on which
was painted a figure  and a creek
at 2 m. above called Little Manito
Creek. from the Painted rock this
creek 20 yds wide on the L. S. passed
a small Creek on L. S. about a
very bad sand bar of several m.
in extent which we named Sand

Illustration from Lewis & Clark Journal

Walking Tour of Rocheport

Begin at the corner of Second and Central Streets (in front of our post office.) Because the first 10 items on the list below do not require any walking, you might find a bench to rest while you read these items.

1. When Lewis and Clark stopped here, there were no buildings, roads, or people visible. The area was a forest. The expedition reported seeing evidence of buffalo (presumably meaning buffalo scat), and an excessive number of rattlesnakes. They sent a few men up Moniteau Creek looking for salt (perhaps thinking they were approaching the spring that became known as the Boonslick Salt Works – several miles up the Missouri River).

2. In 1804 a French trading post existed about 60 miles upstream. Also in that year the Governor of the Missouri Territory ordered white settlers out of the area (relocating downstream to the area near what is now known as the city of Herman), because he said he couldn't protect settlers from hostile Indian tribes. Most of the settlers complied, including 100% of those who survived.

3. Lewis and Clark found native pictographs on the bluffs upstream from this place, including a representation of the "Mantoo" or Great Spirit. A drawing from their journal is reproduced on the cover of this brochure. The pictograph had been placed there by Sac and Fox

native, who had been moved into the area by the British, trying to dilute the influence of the Osage tribe, who were allies of the French. This pictograph became famous among Europeans, and fit into the prejudice of the whites, who thought that the horns on the pictograph indicated that the natives were "devil worshipers." (The pictographs were destroyed in 1893, when dynamite was used to reduce the bluff into the roadbed for the railroad). Our creek is named Moniteau, because of this pictograph. There is another creek entering the Missouri River from the other side also known as Moniteau Creek. And one of the nearby counties was named Moniteau County.

4. The first inhabitants of this place were Native Americans relocated to the mouth of Moniteau Creek by the governor of Missouri Territory, contingent on a promise of not fighting any settlers. It is said that during the war of 1812 these Indians had a difficult time keeping that promise.

5. White people (and their black slaves) began to permanently settle in this area around 1809, eventually building forts behind log stockades. These forts were located about 10 miles from one another. In 1811 a fort ("Fort Hempstead") was established at Thrall's Prairie, near where the nearly extinct town of Woodlandville is now located. The first settler killed around here in the war was a black slave

known as “Sam,” killed near Fort Cooper (located in the flood plain, near the present town of New Franklin). Nothing else is known about this man. When the war of 1812 was ended in 1815, the forts were abandoned and all Indian tribes were expelled to Nebraska and eventually relocated to Oklahoma, where remnants can be found today. The town of Franklin was established across from what is now Boonville, and became the first county seat of the area. (It was washed away by floods).

6. With the Indian tribes gone, settlers began to move into the native dwellings. Daniel Boone’s son told (long after the event) of staying in one of the dwellings on his way to the salt lick he operated near the present town of Boonsboro, in Howard County (northwest of here). Gradually log cabins were built to replace the Indian dwellings. It has been said that the first log cabin was built by John Gray. In 1921 Gray obtained a license to operate a ferry across the Missouri River at this location.

7. The forest that Lewis and Clark found was gradually used to construct flatboats, to send farm produce to market in St. Louis and further south, and to build cabins. The proprietor of a tavern along the Boonslick Road (Daniel Boone’s trail from St. Louis to Franklin and the salt lick) built a warehouse on the banks of the creek, buying farmers’ produce,

holding, and shipping the products downriver for his own profit. For a time this place was known as “Arnold’s Landing” after the tavernkeeper.

8. In 1819, the first steamboat to come up the Missouri River arrived here, stopping to take on wood to use as fuel for its journey further upriver to Franklin.

9. Boone County was organized with its present boundaries in 1819, the territory being removed from Howard County.

10. The first structures built here were not “owned” by the settlers. The land belonged to the US government. In 1822 the government gave 191.4 acres to a guy named David Gray, as compensation for land that was rendered valueless (allegedly) because of the New Madrid earthquake. The land in 1825 came to John Gray (the operator of the ferry) who took on 4 partners. These people began to advertise lots for sale. The sale of a lot included a requirement that a log house would be constructed within 13 months of the purchase. The proprietors of the town wanted to call it “Rock Port,” but a French Jesuit missionary is said to have convinced them to use the French name instead. (Later German immigrants corrupted the name to “ROACHport.,” to the disgust of some local purists.

Now it will become necessary to walk around. And because you will be looking at surviving buildings, the items discussed will not be in chronological order. We trust you can adjust to the change. There is a map at the end of the booklet to help you with navigation.

11. Bank buildings. Notice the post office building is labeled the “Rocheport Bank.” The building across the street, now called the “Christian Church Annex” was the location of the Farmers and Merchants Bank of Rocheport. In 1870 these two banks flourished, and the town rivaled Columbia in size and importance. However, the town lost out to Columbia as home for the University of Missouri, and after the Civil War the town gradually lost population and influence.

12. Cattycorner from the post office is a brick house, one of the oldest surviving structures in town (1830). It is called the Keiser/Dimmitt House. Keiser was a riverboat captain, and he built the oldest parts of this structure. Dimmitt operated a drug store (now occupied by the Rocheport General Store – a great place to get a dish of ice cream, but we’ll get to that later).

13. Move down Second Street to the middle of the block where you will find the Christian Church. Built in 1840; note the frosted

glass windows, and the two entrances (one originally for men, the second for women). Noted for the dispute that grew between two factions, resulting in the incineration of the church’s records in the stove. Church disputes have always been less than Christian in their character.

14. In spite of the Christian Church’s past internal disputes, it is the oldest Disciples of Christ church building in continuous use in the world and was named the Missouri Rural Church of the Year in 2015.

15. Move down the street to the corner of Second and Columbia Street. This is the street that used to connect to “Old Rocheport Road” from Columbia. At one time there was a covered bridge over the Perche Creek, and daily stage coach trips between the two cities. (The covered bridge was a favorite hiding place for bushwackers waiting to rob the stage.)

16. On the left side of the street is the Rapp/Chambers House built in 1878. This “modern” house is one of the stately Victorian houses you will find throughout the city. Cattycorner from that house is a really modern structure (1912) known as the Bysfield/Rodabaugh house. This house was recently remodeled and enlarged, and is remarkably attractive, considering its modernity.

17. The brick house on the third corner (not the Yates House B & B which is a recent construction) is the Wilcox/Barth/Dew House, built in 1837. Dr. Wilcox was an early physician. Moses Barth was a local merchant and entrepreneur. (He was one of the few people in town who supported the Union during the Civil War.). The house is a private residence, with an antique shop in several of the rooms. The antique shop can be entered through the Columbia Street side.

18. Turn left onto Columbia Street and walk to the middle of the block until you come to the Methodist Church. This is the second building for this church – this one was built in 1901. There is a basement under a portion of this building (left over from the first church building). That basement was used as a school room in the 1850's, and was used as a hospital during the Civil War.

19. "Bloody Bill" Anderson was a terrorist who made Rocheport "my capitol" in 1864. From here he launched raids on Centralia. (successful from his point of view) and Fayette (unsuccessful), and participated in the raid on Lawrence, Kansas. Frank and Jesse James were members of Anderson's gang; these 2 men continued the Civil War for several decades after it was officially over. If the basement of the Methodist church was used as a hospital, it seems likely that wounded men from Anderson's

gang would have been the patients.

20. The blue-green frame house, the Slade/Deputy House at the corner of Columbia and Third Streets, is one of the oldest remaining frame structures (1840) in Rocheport. The town was subject to several fires in the 19th century and (of course) several houses were removed to be replaced with more modern structures. The interesting looking house across Columbia is not an old structure; it was built in about 2010.

21. The older houses that remain (including most of the frame houses) are remnants of the upper class of the city. In the 19th century the lower white classes were largely transitory, moving westward. Wagon trains passed through here, using the ferry to cross the river (an easier route to Boonville and then to the Oregon or Santa Fe Trails).

22. Turn right onto Third Street, and walk uphill one block to Lewis Street. On the right is a yellow Victorian structure (1867) known as the Crump/Haines House.

23. Next, also on the right, is the brick Community Hall, which used to be a Baptist church. This building also dates from 1867. The building was restored in the 1930s' by a local boy who prospered in the banking business, as a memorial to his mother. The Community Hall is

now owned by the city, and can be rented for private functions. There is a stage at one end.

24. Go back to Lewis Street, and turn right (toward Fourth Street) and you will see the 1870 Ice House. Similar ice houses were common in town before electricity permitted the modern refrigerator. The Ice House is essentially a 15 foot deep hole in the ground, covered by a tent shaped roof structure. The ice was harvested from the river in winter, and stored with the hope that it would last until the next ice harvest.

25. At the intersection of Lewis and Fourth Streets (on the same side of the street as the Ice House) is the Ridgeway/Young House built in 1866.

26. Turn right on Fourth Street, go one block to Clark Street. On the left is the city's housing project for senior citizens, called Moniteau Housing.

27. Walk down Clark Street one block, and on the right you will pass the old Rocheport School, which is now the School House Bed & Breakfast. (Perhaps you noticed the front of the building while visiting the Community Hall). The school is built on the site of earlier school buildings, including one that was burned down during the Civil War (it was highly disputed which side set the fire). The current structure was first used in 1915.

28. From the intersection of Third and Clark, you could walk uphill to a sign indicating how to get to the city cemetery, which is an interesting place to explore. However, that trip is beyond the scope of this tour, and we suggest you continue down Clark Street until you again reach Second Street. On your way you will pass (on the right side) the 1857 Waddell/Rapp House (at Third Street) and the 1850 Tumey/Williams House (at Second Street).

29. From here, turn right onto Second Street one block to Lewis Street. On your right are two old houses. The Campbell/Koti House (1840) and the Grossman/Barth House (1850).

30. Turn left on Lewis Street and take it to the Katy Trail, then turn right and walk about 4 blocks to the MKT Railroad Tunnel, constructed in 1893. There was a serious dispute involving the construction of this tunnel, because the original contract had envisioned a tunnel that didn't need to be lined with masonry. As you can tell when you walk through the tunnel, it turned out that part of the way into the tunnel it was necessary to restrain the rock behind a masonry barrier to prevent collapse. The workers stopped work, and the Sheriff of Howard County was called to "restore order." Some historians describe the incident as a dispute between two capitalists about who should

pay for the unexpected complication (which the railroad, of course, won). Others describe it as an early strike and labor organizing effort (but very unsuccessful).

31. Turn around and return toward Rocheport, stepping off the trail at Moniteau Street. About halfway down the block is a brick business building constructed about 1830, that now holds the Friends of Rocheport Museum. This museum is open on Saturdays and Sundays, from May through October, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. You are requested to donate \$1 per person as an admission charge.

32. There is an alley beside the museum building, which you can follow back to Central Street. To the right is Gnome Park, built by the city after the 1993 Missouri River flood. A statue of a gnome stands in the park, holding a sign indicating how high the water rose during that flood.

33. Notice the stone gutters on both sides of Central Street on this block. One of the stones on the west (opposite) side of the street has an inscription, "H.W. 1844" indicating the high water mark for the flood of 1844. See if you can find it. (Hint: it is near the Katy Trail – the water was several feet lower than in 1993).

34. Across the street from the Gnome Park is a brick

commercial structure that has been unoccupied (except for storage) for at least 50 years. Just up Central Street from the brick structure is the Gaw/Glade/Byler House (1835).

35. Continuing up Central Street we come to Second Street, where this tour began. The one structure we haven't talked about is now Behind the Times vintage shop. 35 years ago it was a restaurant, "The Word of Mouth Café," offering excellent home-style cooking. The proprietor had a collection of vintage salt and pepper shakers, one for each table and several others displayed on shelves in the store. A lobbyist rented the café for an eventing and brought a group of legislators for a meal. When the meeting was over, several of the more valuable salt and pepper sets were missing. The owner of the café was outraged, and the media quickly learned of the event. The entire town had about two week's worth of entertainment at the expense of the Missouri Legislature. Eventually, some of the stolen items were returned, and the lobbyist paid for what couldn't be recovered. Needless to say, the particular thieves were never identified.

36. Please continue along Central Street past our post office, to another antique and gift store (with two comfortable benches in front). This is Stockton Mercantile. It is always fun to browse through the store.

37. Any of the shops in town can give you a copy of the latest RAMA brochure. Ask for one! RAMA stands for “Rocheport Area Merchant’s Association” and their brochure describes all their members and where they are located.

38. Next door to Stockton Mercantile is the Rocheport General Store (which has excellent ice cream, as we told you earlier). Also, you can buy wine, beer, sandwiches, and discover the latest news about the city (since one of the proprietor’s is our mayor).

39. Across the street is the Mariam Green Building, named in honor of one of the founders of the Friends of Rocheport. This building is a 1904 structure, occupying the location of the original Barth Store (some of you may remember Barth’s Clothing Store in Columbia on Broadway. That store was originally a branch of this one). “Friends Together Antiques” currently rents the building from the Friends of Rocheport.

40. Next to the Green (actually red brick) Building, is the Old Livery Stable. If you look from the other side of the street, you can easily make out the original drive into the building (now a wood and glass structure, the wood painted white).

41. Abigails, occupying the last business building along Central

Street, is a restaurant open from Wednesday through Sundays for lunch and dinner. The food is excellent and the desserts are incredible. If you are on a diet, you have been warned!

42. The log house across the alley from our remaining commercial structure is a modern construction (about 1985). It is occupied by another antique shop and there is an old truck with a wooden cabin on the back often parked in front. Drop in and say “hello!”

43. Located on the property of the house next door to the log house is a small outhouse – one of the two remaining outhouses in Rocheport. (It no longer functions as an outhouse, and is usually locked.) So, it’s historic! Many will object to that statement, but consider: Cholera was a serious problem in Rocheport in its first century, with epidemics sweeping through town in 1833, 1849, 1852 and perhaps at other times. We now know that cholera is spread through fecal matter contaminating the water supply. (It is said that during the 1849 epidemic a man named Alexander Graver came near to being buried alive. He was attacked with cholera and to all appearances died. His coffin had been prepared and full preparations made for his burial, when a Dr. Buster discovered signs of life, “and by dint of fresh blisters, vigorous rubbing etc., restored the alleged “corpse” to full animation.”) (It is also reported

that in three weeks during the 1852 epidemic 23 persons were buried, “Through fear and in consequence of the intense excitement, the dead and dying were frequently abandoned by their nearest relatives and friends.”) The invention of the outhouse and the use of lye to speed decomposition saved many lives.

44. Continue up Central Street until you reach the bridge across Moniteau Street. Here was located a grist mill, which was finally torn down in 1962.

45. Our town also boasted several distilleries, saloons, and tobacco barns during the 19th century. Also, there were several rope walks, where hemp stocks were separated into the constituent fibers, and the fibers turned into rope. (Now, of course, the position of a hemp plant is illegal). We also had a town jail. Many of these things were destroyed by fire or by a flood.

Thank you for taking our tour!

(This tour was prepared by Patrick Cronan, who is responsible for any errors you might find. Please report errors to wpcronan@aol.com. Updates made August 2017.)

