

Script for Julie Woods
slide show

1. The Way We Were

The history of Wheeling is as unique as the Village itself. Many little-known facts, legends and experiences were expressed to us through the cooperation of the Wheeling Historical Society, Mr. Marshall Balling, and Adeliene and Lucille Schneider, perhaps Wheeling's oldest residents. By sharing with us "Wheeling's Heritage," we have been able to understand its development patterns and have incorporated these in our redevelopment plans. We would like to share with you some of Wheeling's colorful past because we think it helps to explain why Wheeling looks like it does today and why its future looks so bright.

2. Des Plaines River

It all began along the "Plaines" river, so named by the early French explorers Jacque Marquette and Louis Jolliet as they travelled by canoe from the Mississippi River to the Green Bay in 1673.

3. Canoeists

This was the land of the Pottawatomie, meaning "the people of the place of fire" lead by Chief Haf Da whose people fished, travelled, and hunted along the Des Plaines.

4. Prairie

The prairie's blue skys, colorful flowers and grasses, and stands of big, black burr oaks beckoned the pioneers to settle and homestead along the river's banks.

5. Cabin

In 1833, Mr. Sweet arrived and built a cabin along the river near the present site of the Palwaukee Motor Inn. Six months later he sold his claim to Mr. George Strong who became Wheeling's first permanent settler. This cabin represents what his cabin may have looked like during this period.

6. Filken's Tavern

Filken's Tavern, shown at the far left of this photograph, was Wheeling's first commercial enterprise. Mr. Filken served weary stagecoach travellers from Milwaukee and Chicago with down-home hospitality that has since made Wheeling famous. His tavern also served as Wheeling's first post office in 1837, and was located on the northwest corner of Milwaukee and Dundee Roads.

7. Piepers

During the early 1840's a logging industry developed in Half Day, creating a need for housing, hostelries, taverns and shops to serve the loggers and their families. Greek Revival Architecture developed during this period because its balloon-framing was easy to construct. Virtually every pioneer had a copy of the "Builder's Handbook" which showed the basics of architecture and was illustrated with the classic Greek orders -- Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. Today, Chicago has few remaining examples of Greek Revival houses because they were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1871; Wheeling is fortunate to have many fine examples of this styling as exemplified in the Pieper's house shown here. Note the half returns at the eaves, a quality indicative of this architecture.

8. The Union Hotel

The Union Hotel, just down the road from Filken's Tavern, also exhibited Greek Revival architecture before it was destroyed by fire in 1925. As a hotel, it also offered the travelling public a good meal and a place to rest.

9. Schneider House

According to Adeleine and Lucille Schneider, direct descendents of Dr. John George Schneider, Wheeling's first veterinarian, their house was constructed in the early 1850's. Another Greek Revival home, the house was built on Muetzeberg Hill, the location of Wheeling's finest homes of leading families.

10. Mors House

One of the original farmers and landowners, the Mors family constructed their farmhouse on South Milwaukee Avenue. Every day the Mors' cattle were lead across Milwaukee Avenue to drink the cool, clean water from the Des Plaines. In the evening, they were lead back again to their pasture which extended westward as far as the Soo Line Railroad.

11. Periolat House

Back on Muetzeberg Hill, next door to the Schneider House, Mr. Napoleon Periolat constructed his home from the profits he made as Wheeling's first industrialist.

12. Periolat Brewing Company Along River

Mr. Periolat owned Periolat's Brewing Company shown in the distance along the river, in the vicinity of what is now Hein's Pub.

19. Don Roth's

Today it is the Don Roth's Restaurant.

20. Sigwalt & Bollenbach Houses

Mr. Sigwalt and Mr. Bollenbach constructed a general merchandise and variety store during the late 1880's. Though the store is gone, both of their houses remain on South Milwaukee Avenue.

21. Welflin House

In 1893, Mr. Welflin constructed his home on Dundee Road east of the River. To facilitate the development of the Forest Preserve, it was moved to its present location adjacent to the Wheeling Trust & Savings Bank. Mr. Welflin purchased Sigwalt & Co.'s General Store and operated his general store until the 1950's.

22. Sicks' House

The Sicks' House, constructed in the 1880 - 1890 period, was recently renovated and now serves as offices for the Doetsch Realty Company...

23. Picnic

The "Gay Nineties" brought to Wheeling the need to incorporate as a village. So in 1894, with a population of some 200 people, and six taverns, the Village incorporated. On July 17, 1894, Mr. Henry Boehmer was elected Village President; the six trustees were men well-known to the villagers and many of their homes still stand on Milwaukee Avenue. They were: John Forke, Jacob Fassbender and J. A. Schminke. Celebrations of the incorporation likely brought people together in Brown's Grove for old-fashioned picnics and bicycle races. The Grove, located south of the Hartmann House, along

the river was the site of the Wheeling Firemen's annual picnics.

24. Wiest House

At the turn of the century, the Wiest family constructed their home on Muetzeberg Hill.

25. Wiest House Today

Today, their house has been successfully refurbished to serve as a contractor's office.

26. Dam No. 2

In 1916, the Cook County Forest Preserve District was created to provide recreation opportunities and preserve the flora and fauna of the region. Dam No. 1 was constructed in 1917 to allow swimming in the otherwise shallow Des Plaines River, and to control flood waters from damaging communities downstream. Dam No. 2 shown here, was the site of many day trips by the Wheeling Girl Explorers, predecessors of the Girl Scouts.

27. Paving Milwaukee Avenue

In 1917, Milwaukee Avenue was paved, and Wheeling once again had plenty to offer the travelling public.

28. Automobiles

"Wheeling" to Wheeling became an ever-popular past-time, especially because of its fine reputation as a restauranteur's town. Milwaukee Avenue, known as "Restaurant Row" continued to be a major transportation route and the new forest preserves along it brought many Chicagoan's out for fine food and recreation.

29. Adam Hartmann House

The Hartmann House was known nation-wide as the place to go for chicken. Adjacent to Brown's Grove, this structure serves as the major anchor of our South Milwaukee Redevelopment Plan.

30. Ice House

The Ice House immediately behind Hartmann House is the last remaining ice house in Wheeling. Ice was cut from the Des Plaines River and stored here through the summer months, keeping the restaurant's food and beverage cool.

31. Schmidt House

The Schmidt House, built around 1915 was owned by the village butcher whose store was located in the present Schlangen Realty office.

32. Forke House

The Forke House, built in 1916, has been beautifully restored as a lawyer's office in our Riverside Renaissance area located near Milwaukee and Dundee Roads.

33. Reeb Mill

During the Roaring 20's, additional construction included the Reeb's Mill.

34. Walt Whitman

...Walt Whitman School...

35. Community Hospital

...and Community Hospital next to Kollsak's Funeral Parlor.

36. National Plumbing & John's

Industrial architecture from this period is reflected in the facades of National Plumbing Supply and John's Shoe Repair, both businesses included in our Renaissance Plan.

37. Harrison Supply

The original site of Wheeling's blacksmith shop, Harrison Supply, is yet another fine example of industrial architecture.

38. Union Hotel

The Union Hotel, rebuilt after its 1925 fire, has recently become a welcome addition to Wheeling's long list of fine restaurants. Today it is called Billy & Co.

39. Childerly Chapel

On North McHenry Road, Mrs. Frances Crane Lilly built this chapel and a retreat house for the families of the Crane Company's employees in 1926. Recently restored by the Wheeling Historical Society, and dedicated by the Wheeling Park District, Childerly Park still offers a serene atmosphere for passive recreation and contemplation. The Crane Company is perhaps one of the world's largest plumbing supply company.

40. Royal Blue Store

The Depression slowed much of Wheeling's growth but during this time, a food chain, Royal Blue, constructed a grocery store on Muetzeberg Hill.

41. Player Piano

Perhaps one of Wheeling's better examples of prairie style architecture, the Player Piano's structure was built along the Des Plaines River and is still another good example of a residential structure being reused for commercial purposes.

42. The Balling House

Last, but certainly not least, is the Balling House located on Dundee Road just west of the River. The Ballings operated

an egg and honey store called Wheeling Farms from its street level storefront. Prior to operating this creamery, Mr. Balling helped found the Wheeling State Bank in 1921. Today, it is the Wheeling Trust & Savings Bank. The Balling House location at the east entrance of the Village makes this structure and those adjacent a prime area for historic preservation and commercial reuse.

From the history that has evolved out of our research, we have become sensitive to Wheeling's past and are trying to preserve its character by incorporating many of its structures into our redevelopment plans. Old Wheeling, as we know it today, retained its small town atmosphere through the years until developers and returning veterans saw the opportunities Wheeling afforded. Change was imminent, and thus, in the late 1950's, Wheeling Boomed!