

## Outside the Circle: Wabash

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Last month we visited [New Harmony](#), a town situated along Indiana's most famous waterway, the Wabash River. The Wabash flows 475 miles and drains two-thirds of Indiana's 92 counties. In 1897, Paul Dresser penned "On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away" and in 1913, the Indiana General Assembly adopted it as the official state song.

This month, we're traveling up the Wabash to a place that takes its name from the great river. The city of Wabash is located in north-central Indiana at the site of a former gathering place for the Miami people. Two known Miami villages, *Ketongah* and *Al-lo-lah*, were located in what later would become the city of Wabash.



*The hilly streets of downtown Wabash are lined with historic storefronts. The [Downtown Wabash Historic District](#) was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.*

In 1826, the United States negotiated two treaties near present-day Wabash that opened up northern Indiana and southern Michigan to white settlement and allowed a canal to be built across land reserved for the native population. The place became known as Treaty Grounds and by 1833 had attracted a number of settlers. Colonel David Burr, a canal commissioner, and Colonel Hugh Hanna platted the town of Wabash nearby and in 1835, Wabash was selected as the seat of government for Wabash County.



*The Wabash County Courthouse was constructed in 1878 by the Indianapolis architectural firm B. V. Enos and Son.*

The first early catalyst for development in Wabash came with the Wabash and Erie Canal. Construction began in Fort Wayne in 1832, passed through Wabash, and eventually reached the Ohio River. The state's short-lived canal era was soon supplanted by the railroad with the first passenger line reaching Wabash in 1856. The Big Four Railroad built its repair shops in Wabash and an abundance of local limestone further spurred development.

Wabash gained one of its greatest claims to fame on the evening of March 31, 1880. At 8 P.M., four Brush arc lights were successfully lit atop the courthouse flagpole, making Wabash the first electrically-lit city in the world.



*A historical marker in front of the Wabash County Courthouse commemorates Wabash being the first electrically-lit city.*

Like many other Indiana communities early in the twentieth century, Wabash was a center of automobile production. The Champion Auto Equipment Company and the Service Motor Truck Company both produced vehicles locally.

The Honeywell Heating Specialties Company got its start in Wabash, founded by Mark C. Honeywell in 1906 and specializing in hot water heat generators. Through various mergers, Honeywell's company became part of what is today known as Honeywell, Inc., the international conglomerate celebrated for its thermostats, among many other products and services. Although no longer operating in Wabash, the company's impact is readily apparent around town thanks to the [Honeywell Foundation](#).

Observant travelers may notice another of Wabash's claims to fame in their journeys throughout the world. In 1889, Edwin Ford began building water meter boxes in the basement of his Hartford City home. In 1911, he and his business returned home to Wabash. The Ford Meter Box Company was incorporated in January of that year and is this year celebrating its centennial. Today the company employs about 500 and produces a range of waterworks products exported to 50 countries.



A water meter box cover observed in New Orleans, Louisiana and produced by the Ford Meter Box Company. Photo courtesy and © of [Felipe N. Martinez](#).

### Things to Do

Take a [walking tour](#) of downtown Wabash and along the way, find plenty of opportunities for [shopping](#). [Antiques](#), baked goods, candy, used books, and apparel can be found in downtown storefronts. Another walking tour is available of the [West Wabash Historic District](#).

[Charley Creek Gardens](#); 551 North Miami Street, Wabash, Indiana 46992; 260.563.1020; open year-round, dawn-dusk for self-guided tours; guided tours by appointment; free admission.

The Charley Creek Gardens is a horticultural center dedicated to the study, conservation, and appreciation of plants through garden displays, education, and research.

[Dr. James Ford Historical Home](#); 177 West Hill Street, Wabash, Indiana 46992; 260.563.8686; Open W-Th: 10-3, F-Sa: 10-5, and Su: 12-5; admission is \$3/adult and \$2/children 15 and under.

The Dr. James Ford Historical Home offers a look at what life might have been like in Wabash during the 1870s. Dr. Ford was licensed by the Medical Society of Indiana and in 1841, moved with his family to this property. He served as a Civil War surgeon and helped found the North Western Christian University in 1850, known today as Butler University in Indianapolis. He was also the father of Edwin Ford, founder of the Ford Meter Box Company.



In 2003-2004, the Dr. James Ford Historical Home was restored to its 1865-1885 appearance and now operates as a house museum.

[Eagles Theater](#); 106 West Market Street, Wabash, Indiana 46992; 260.563.3272. Tickets \$3-5.

Catch a movie at the historic Eagles Theater in downtown Wabash.



The 1906 Eagles Theater is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It initially hosted Vaudeville performances, but was converted to a movie palace during the 1930s. The Honeywell Foundation acquired the theater in 2010 and has been making improvements to the facility.

[The Honeywell Center](#); 275 West Market Street, Wabash, Indiana 46992; 260.563.1102.

The Honeywell Center is operated by the Honeywell Foundation, whose mission is to enhance social, recreational, and cultural opportunities. The Foundation was created by Mark C. Honeywell, who built the Honeywell Center in the 1940s. The facility houses a theater, restaurant, and art gallery and draws national performers to Wabash. Upcoming lectures/performances in 2011 include Bob Knight, the Osmond Brothers, Aaron Lewis of Staind, Ronnie Milsap, and Darius Rucker.



The Art Deco Honeywell Center was initially built in the 1940s and draws national acts to Wabash.

[The Wabash Carnegie Public Library](#); 188 West Hill Street, Wabash, Indiana 46992; 260.563.2972; open M-Th: 9AM-8PM, F-Sa: 9AM-5PM.

The Neoclassical Wabash Carnegie Public Library was constructed in 1903 of limestone using funds provided from the [Carnegie Foundation](#). Inside, a beautiful stained glass dome and fireplace greet visitors.



*The 1903 Wabash Carnegie Public Library, open to the public.*

[The Wabash County Historical Museum](#); 36 East Market Street, Wabash, Indiana 46992; 260.563.9070; open Tu-Sa: 10-4; admission: \$3-5.

Housed in an 1894 building, the Wabash County Historical Museum houses exhibits telling the story of Wabash County.

#### Getting There



From Indianapolis, Wabash is about a 1.5 hour drive. Head north on I-69 to exit 5, IN-37 North. Continue on IN-37 approximately 25 miles. Turn left onto IN-13 North. Continue on IN-13 through Elwood and Swayzee. When you reach IN-15/Wabash Street, turn left to continue into downtown Wabash. Click [here](#) for directions.

#### Dining

Visitors to Wabash have a variety of cuisine [options](#), including ethnic, pub, buffet, diner, and upscale favorites.



Stop into [Modoc's Market](#) for a coffee and learn about America's most famous elephant.

### Lodging

[Charley Creek Inn](#); 111 West Market Street Wabash, Indiana 46992; 260.563.0111; rates from \$109/night.

Built in 1920 as the "Hotel Indiana," the Charley Creek Inn has reopened as a boutique hotel after a two-year restoration. Located in downtown Wabash, the inn features 30 guest rooms and suites, a casual up-scale restaurant, an ice cream shop, and several specialty shops.

[The Charley Creek Inn also just won Indiana Landmarks' highest award, the [2011 Cook Cup for Outstanding Restoration](#).]

[The Honeywell House](#); 720 North Wabash Street, Wabash, Indiana 46992; 260.563.2326; call for rates.

The Honeywell House was home of the late Mrs. Mark C. Honeywell and is operated by the Honeywell foundation. Six guest rooms with private and shared baths are available.

For additional lodging options, visit the [Wabash County Convention and Visitors Bureau](#) website.



Jars full of sweet goodies line the counter of the Charley Creek Inn's Ice Cream & Candy Shoppe.

**Note:** Please be sure to confirm all rates, hours of operation, and other details directly with the companies/organizations in question before planning your trip. The mention of and/or links to companies/organizations in this post do not constitute an endorsement.

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