



# Historic National Road

While America was still in its infancy, a novel idea was hatched to build a roadway that would connect the fertile frontiers of the Midwest to the seaport of Baltimore, Maryland. There had been pikes and toll bridges before, but never had the federal government decided to build a toll-free road of this length. Eventually this road – aptly named “Historic National Road” – would stretch from Baltimore, Maryland to East St. Louis, Illinois, and on its way, it would have to pass through the narrow northern panhandle of what is now West Virginia. While the Mountain State contains only 16 of the 800 miles of roadway, these 16 miles would grow and prosper and attract many of the nation’s elite. These wealthy businessmen built many beautiful Victorian-style homes to go with their expanding factories along the Panhandle. Many cities would prosper by having the new Historic National Road pass through them, but few would be affected as greatly as northern West Virginia’s Wheeling.

## **The Wheeling Suspension Bridge**

Some would use this new road to head west with dreams of starting a family on the virgin lands west of the Ohio River; others would head east, bringing with them the agricultural bounty offered by the expanding Midwest. With Wheeling’s deep port on the Ohio River and the Historic National Road passing right through its downtown, it quickly became a magnet for both banking and industry. But west of Wheeling, this groundbreaking road would have to cross the mighty Ohio River, a feat never before accomplished. In 1849, the Wheeling Suspension Bridge became the longest single span bridge in the world when it was opened to the public. Today, motorists can still use this venerable bridge to visit Wheeling Island.

## **The Eckhart House**

Other historical sites abound on the nation’s first federal road. Nestled in Wheeling’s historic district, the three-story Eckhart House is filled with Victorian charm. In addition to public tours, the Eckhart House also offers a tea service complete with scones and Earl Grey tea. Once your visit at the Eckhart House is complete, drive through the rest of Wheeling’s Historic District and see many other grand homes built by wealthy bankers and industrialists. Both Wheeling

and Wheeling Island have historic districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

### **Kruger Street Toy & Train Museum**

Just a short drive from the Eckhart House, the Kruger Street Toy & Train Museum is Wheeling's one of a kind home to toys from many a bygone era! The museum, housed in an award-winning former Victorian schoolhouse, thrills visitors of all ages with a trip down memory lane and a lighthearted look at thousands of items from our childhoods. You can even take home some of the magic from their unique and family-friendly gift shop! The Museum is also the site of several special events and toy related conventions throughout the year.

### **Oglebay Resort**

Built by shipping magnate Earl Oglebay, Oglebay Resort features a Robert Trent Jones, Sr. golf course and a newer course designed by Arnold Palmer. During the winter months, Oglebay's Festival of Lights is one of the region's most highly anticipated events when the entire 1500-acre park is covered with holiday lights.

For a night of fun and excitement, try your luck at Wheeling Island's Racetrack & Gaming Center. With over 2000 slot machines, great promotions, and live greyhound racing, adults are guaranteed a night filled with entertainment.

### **West Virginia Independence Hall**

After a night of winning big at Wheeling Island, head towards West Virginia Independence Hall and see where western Virginians broke away from Virginia during the Civil War to form their own state. This authentically restored building (now a National Historic Landmark) housed a post office, custom offices and a federal courtroom until 1907. You and your family can learn all of this and more by viewing the museum's interactive exhibits and interpretive film.

West Virginia may have the smallest share of the Historic National Road, but with dozens of Victorian homes lining the road from one side of the Panhandle to the other, motorists and pedestrians can tell that this was no ordinary stretch of byway. Even today, almost 150 years after it was built, the Wheeling Suspension Bridge still impresses passersby. Yet this road is not just another byway, it was the hopes and dreams of an early nation and West Virginia has made certain that the Historic National Road and its lavish homes will be preserved so that its story can be told for generations.