

Springboro, Ohio



**Founded
1815**



A Self-Guided Walk into History

Springboro Area Historical Society

110 South Main Street

Springboro, OH 45066

www.springboroareahistory.org

Call 937-748-0916 for Guided Tours

This Brochure is Funded By



Self-Guided Walking Tour

Jonathan Wright, a member of the Society of Friends (Quakers), was born in 1782 in Pipe Creek, Maryland. Wright grew up to become a prosperous surveyor and miller in Menallen, Pennsylvania. When his father decided to make his home in the Miami Valley on one of the tracts of land he purchased on a surveying trip to Ohio, Jonathan sold his business and moved as well. In 1815, Jonathan Wright founded and platted the village of “Springborough,” naming it for the numerous underground springs found in the area.

Springboro’s involvement with the Underground Railroad followed naturally from the Quakers’ rejection of slavery. Even though aiding freedom seekers was against the law, Springboro’s residents, both Quaker and non-Quaker, answered to conscience. Through the years an oral history has been passed down, and evidence of hiding places and tunnels has been uncovered.

This brochure takes you on a “walk into history.” Some buildings are businesses and are open to the public. However, there are several private residences. Please observe these from the sidewalk. You may begin and end your tour at any point.

Note: many, though not all, South Main Street businesses are closed on Mondays.

KEY:

- ★ Building has a documented connection to the Underground Railroad.
- ✧ Possible connection to the Underground Railroad. Research is ongoing.
- Private Residence

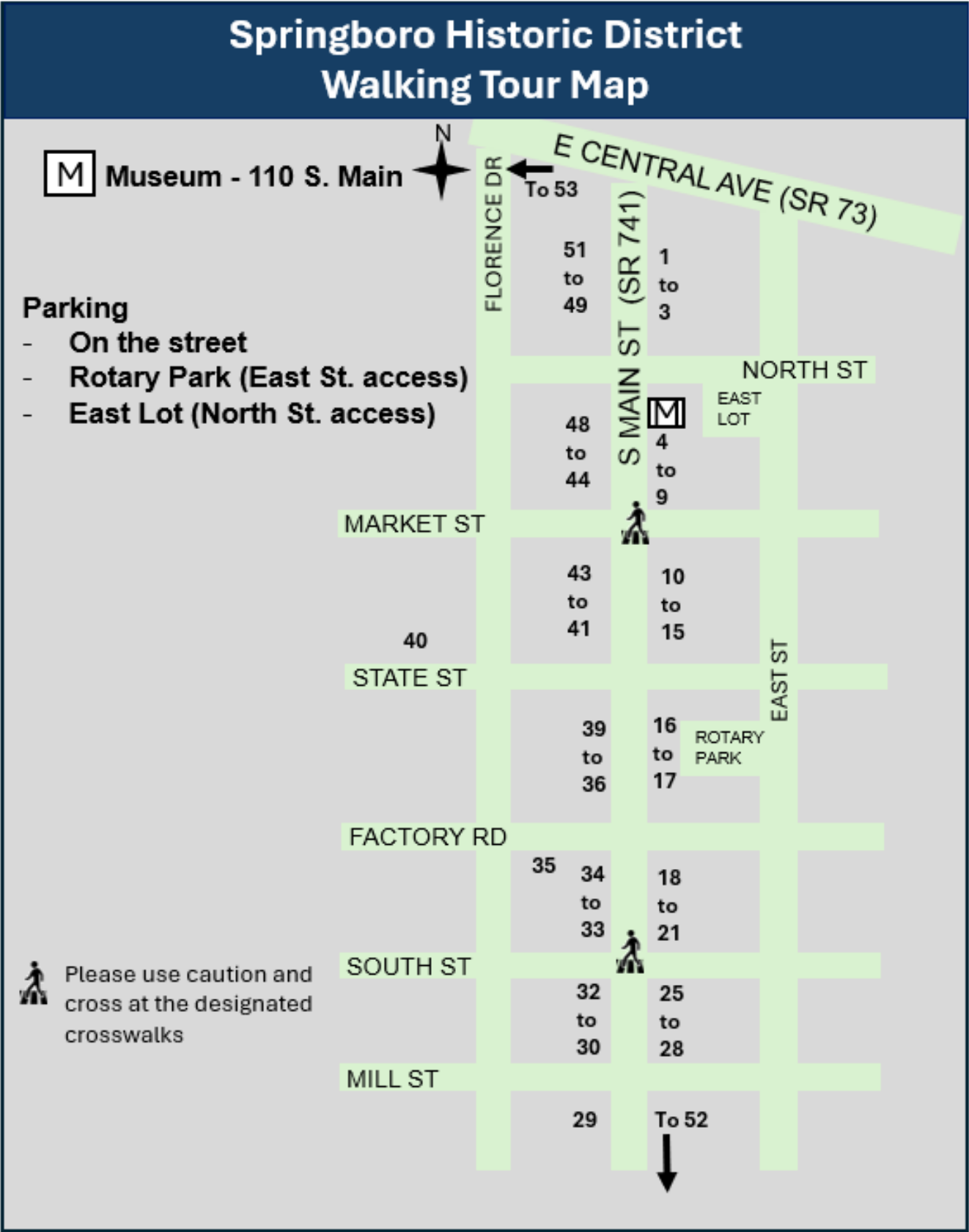
Photos courtesy of the Springboro Area Historical Society

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Walking Tour Map



Historic Downtown Sites

1. 20 S. Main | The Isaac Mullin House ~ circa 1828

Isaac Mullin was Jonathan Wright's brother-in-law. The property changed hands frequently, and in the late 1800s it was used as a tavern and stagecoach stop. The brick is laid in Flemish Bond style.

2. 40 S. Main | Washington Hall ~ circa 1837

This building was originally operated by Jeremiah Stansel as a hotel called Washington Hall. In 1839 Stansel sold it to Joseph Morton, who changed the name to Morton House and added the third floor with an elaborate ballroom. The Quaker village did not allow sale or consumption of alcohol, but because the hotel sat just north of the original village's northern boundary, it was exempt from this law. It was a popular 1800s destination.

3. 50 S. Main | The Mary Carey House ~ circa 1915

This house replaced a wagon shop, which was operated by Joseph Morton, owner of the hotel next door. Later, the house was owned by a local physician, Dr. Munger. His only daughter died as a child, and it's been reported that she haunts an upstairs room. The house is a nice example of an early 1900s bungalow.

4. 100 S. Main | The Clark Williams House ~ circa 1824



Built by Clark Williams, this property was owned by the Dayton Leather & Collar Company in the late 1880s. In the early 1900s it was owned by Napoleon Johnson, a former enslaved individual who was freed in 1847. He settled in Springboro the following year. Johnson served in the Union Army during the Civil War. As a successful plasterer, he was able to purchase several properties in town. He and his wife, Celia, lived in a cabin on Mill Street for many years. The building's style is early brick Federal.

Photo: Napoleon and Celia Johnson

5. 110 S. Main | The "Squatter's House" ~ circa 1810

The oldest existing building in the historic district, this was the home of Griffin "Griffy" Griffis before the village was platted. Since Griffis had no legal right to the property when Jonathan Wright founded the village of Springborough, the building became known as the Squatter's House. Griffis later bought it for \$300. It has been a bakery, butcher shop,

mail drop, telephone exchange, and private home, and is the current home of the Springboro Area Historical Society Museum.

6. 120 S. Main | The William Dearth House ~ circa 1835 ■

William Dearth learned tailoring at age 15. He had this house built as his home and his tailor shop.

7. 130 S. Main | The Rees-Haines House ~ circa 1854 ■

Records are unclear as to whether this house was built by Henry Rees or Joseph Haines. A well-known carpenter, Haines built many frame houses on Main Street. He was a pallbearer at the funeral of President William Henry Harrison.

8. 140 S. Main | The Lyceum ~ circa 1898

Built by Springboro Lodge No. 574 of the Knights of Pythias, a fraternal organization, the building's large upstairs room was used for plays, lyceum courses, lectures, church services and graduations, as well as for the organization's meetings. The downstairs business rooms housed a variety of businesses, including a hardware store, pool hall and furniture store. Springboro's first movie was shown here.

9. 150 S. Main | The Mary & William Siegfried House ~ circa 1830 ■

Mordecai Millard, inventor of the Improved Water Wheel, lived here from 1845 to 1852. Mary and William Siegfried purchased this property in 1907 and operated the local general store at 245 S. Main. In 1915, Springboro's Centennial speeches were delivered from the porch. Following William's death in 1928, Mary sold the property in 1931. In later years it became the home of two of Springboro's mayors, M.J. Farr and Harry O'Neil. It was the first building in town to boast indoor plumbing. (see #41)



Photo: Springboro mayor and mortician, M.J. Farr 1915.

10. 200 S. Main | The Jonah Thomas House ~ circa 1833 ★

Jonah D. Thomas purchased this lot from Jonathan Wright for \$30. He built the front portion of the building as his harness shop and his home. A Quaker and an ardent abolitionist, he was a conductor on the Springboro leg of the Underground Railroad. Thomas sold the property in 1839 and moved across the street to 205 South Main Street. In 1875 the building was purchased by James Merritt who opened a grocery and bakery and may have built



the rear addition. From 1890 to 1942, the building served as the village post office. (see #43 and #45)

11. 210 S. Main | The Elizabeth Cowman House ~ circa 1830

When Elizabeth Cowman, youngest sister of Jonathan Wright, was widowed in Baltimore with two small children, she asked her brother for help. Wright sold her this lot for \$20 and had the house built. The family lived here until 1867, when Elizabeth sold it for \$1,000 and moved away to live with her son James.

12. 220 S. Main | The William Newport House ~ circa 1870

William Newport lived in this house. He operated a grocery store at 155 South Main Street.

13. 230 S. Main | The William Peebles House ~ circa 1835

At various times this building housed the original Wright General Store, the Duke Tobacco Shop, and Gilpin's Barber Shop. The sidewalk overhang is typical of business architecture of the era.

14. 240 S. Main | The Spring House ~ circa 1840

This tiny building was originally the spring house for the property next door, 250 South Main Street. Perishables were kept in the spring-cooled building in the days before refrigeration.

15. 250 S. Main | The Joseph Stanton House ~ circa 1833 ★

Joseph Stanton owned this property prior to 1834. This building was a stop on the Underground Railroad and may have been known as the "Quilt House." Quilts hung in the back of the house, indicating that it was safe to enter. The basement hiding space extended westward between the two basement windows, under what is now the sidewalk. Later, the house was owned by Lydia Wood, aunt of artist Grant Wood who painted the famous "American Gothic." (see #45 and #48).

16. 300 S. Main | The Old Stone Church ~ circa 1895

Now home to South Dayton Church of Christ, this church was built by the Universalist congregation. The congregation was made up of Springboro's more prominent citizens, including Mahlon Wright and the Gregg family.



17. 350 S. Main | The Jeremiah Stansel House ~ circa 1840 ✧■

Although he was a Universalist, Jeremiah Stansel is thought to have assisted freedom seekers, and his house is a suspected depot on the Underground Railroad. Stansel served as a Justice of the Peace and Postmaster of Springboro. He and his brother-in-law, Samuel Gregg, were business partners who owned warehouses in Springboro and Cincinnati.

18. 400 S. Main | The Warner Bateman House ~ circa 1858 ★



Warner M. Bateman was the nephew of Jonathan and Mary (Bateman) Wright. In 1817, Jonathan sold this property to Warner's parents, Jacob and Rachel Bateman, who were Quakers, abolitionists, and Underground Railroad conductors. The early home was built c. 1839 and Warner lived here in his youth and adulthood, possibly building or enlarging the current home c. 1858. His life's work as a prominent Cincinnati attorney and U.S. District Judge may have conflicted with his connections to the Underground Railroad through relatives and colleagues. In 1867 the house was sold to James Griffin, a Springboro druggist, who is buried in the Orthodox Quaker Cemetery at 145 E. Market Street.

19. 420 S. Main | The Wallace Baird House ~ circa 1878 ■

Wallace Baird's primary occupation was as a millwright. In 1872, he came to Springboro and chaired the Mechanical Department at Springboro's Miami Valley College. The Quaker college operated from 1871-1883 on what is now East State Route 73. In 1878 he commissioned the construction of this Italianate style brick home and the ornate interior woodwork that demonstrated his skills as a craftsman. C.W. and Martha Unglesby owned this property from 1943 to 1950. C.W. was a funeral director, as were other members of the Unglesby family over the years.

20. 440 S. Main | The John Bateman House (site) ~ circa 1869 ★■

Local tanner John Bateman, brother-in-law of Jonathan Wright, had his house, storehouse, and workshop on this site. A millrace, the channel carrying the swift current of water that drives a mill wheel, ran through the property and helped operate the tannery next door.

21. 450 S. Main | The Bateman Tannery (site) ~ pre-1847 ★



Although the original building is long gone, the Bateman Tannery was a station on the Underground Railroad. According to local history, the tannery was an excellent place to hide freedom

seekers, because strong odors generated by the tanning process kept bounty hunters and their dogs away.

22. 500 S. Main | The Samuel Sheets House ~ circa 1872

Samuel Sheets was among the earliest group of pioneers, arriving in the area around 1819. This house is best known locally as the home of Springboro Mayor Fred Mayne, who lived here during the mid 1900s.

23. 510 S. Main | The James Bennett House ~ circa 1856 ■

James Bennett was a prominent carriage maker in Springboro; his shop was across the street. In 1907, in a shed behind this house, Tommy Miller invented an oil can and a wagon jack for horse drawn carriages. He also designed the machinery to produce these items, which were sold throughout the midwestern United States. (see Bennett: #31 and Miller: #32, #37)

24. 550 S. Main | The Ford Service Station ~ circa 1919 ★

The Mahlon Wright House ~ circa 1818 (site)

This site was home to Jonathan Wright's son Mahlon, who served as an Ohio State Legislator and was the Springboro Postmaster. His house was a stop on the Underground Railroad and was connected by a tunnel to the Thomas property at 600 S. Main Street. This early service station replaced the home.



25. 600 S. Main | The Joseph Thomas House ~ circa 1836 ★

Early owners of this house included James Janney, James Farr and Joseph Thomas, all Quakers and all conductors on the Underground Railroad.

26. 610 S. Main | The Grafton Bell House ~ circa 1880 ■

The Bell family lived here until the early 1900s. The Gothic Revival architecture, evidenced by the gable trim, makes the house unusual in historic Springboro, as Quakers believed in plain living and rejected ostentation.

27. 660 S. Main | The Joseph Penrose House ~ circa 1832 ★ ■

According to local legend, a freedom seeker died of natural causes while being hidden in this house. He was secretly buried in the middle of the night in the Friends Cemetery. Existing cemetery documents show detailed records of each grave's occupant, including dates of birth, death and burial. However, one grave is simply marked "Unknown," giving

credence to the legend. Sightings of the freedom seeker's ghost looking out of an upstairs window have been reported. (see #35)

28. 700 S. Main | The Eli Somers House ~ circa 1848 ■

This house is a nice example of Italianate architecture.

29. 5 West Mill | The German Reformed Church ~ circa 1863

Now the United Church of Christ, this was the third location of the German Reformed Church in Clearcreek Township. German families in the area held services as early as 1800, initially in their homes. The first church structure was started in 1805, and the first services were held in 1806. A second church was built on Lower Springboro Road in 1824, and this third church opened for its first service in April 1863. The Heinrich Null, Adam Blinn, and Teter Kesling families, among others, attended the German Reformed Church.

30. 545 S. Main | The Daniel Weidner House ~ circa 1858



Daniel Weidner operated a blacksmith shop on the corner of this lot.

Photo: *The blacksmith shop with the house (still standing) behind it.*

31. 515 S. Main | The James Bennett House ~ circa 1855 ■

In 1854, James Bennett and Henry Blinn operated a carriage shop on this lot's southeast corner. The owner of the property at that time is unknown, but both Blinn and Bennett held some form of ownership at various times between 1855 and 1907. (see #23)

32. 505 S. Main | The Tommy Miller House ~ circa 1901 ✧

The current structure was built on the foundation of an earlier house built circa 1856. Possible traces of an Underground Railroad hiding place are still evident in the basement. Tommy Miller, a noted Springboro inventor, lived here. The main house is reportedly home to a resident ghost. (see #23 and #37)



Photo: *Tommy Miller, right, outside his home.*

33. 415 S. Main | The Harry Pence House ~ circa 1894 ■

This Queen Anne style house was built by Harry Pence for his parents, Charles and Ruth. To care for their parents, Harry's brother Warren moved in with them, along with his wife Clara and daughter Ethel. Harry Pence owned the Dan Patch Line, a rail line that crossed the Mississippi River. Warren Pence was the first president of Farmers Bank, Springboro's first bank. (see #43)

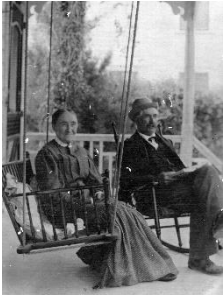


Photo: Charles and Ruth Pence on the front porch.

34. 405 S. Main | Odd Fellows Hall ~ circa 1830

Springboro's Relief Lodge 148 of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) was organized in 1850. The IOOF purchased this building in 1866 for use as their meeting hall, and enlarged it in 1869. The Odd Fellows organization began in England in the 1700s, as an association of common laborers who met for fellowship and mutual aid.

35. Factory Road | Friends Cemetery ★

This Hicksite Quaker cemetery is located half a block west of South Main Street, on Factory Road. Jonathan Wright, his wife, her family, and many of their descendants are buried here, along with eight other Quakers who were known Underground Railroad conductors. The first Quaker Meeting House stood toward the back of the site in the wooded area. Quakers marked their graves with simple river stones, bearing no inscription. In later years, more traditional headstones began to be used. Most of the stone markers have disappeared over the years. The graves in the front along the fence belong to Revolutionary War hero John Mullen and Civil War veteran Henry Barnhart. Because Quaker beliefs are rooted in nonviolence, burial within the cemetery was not initially permitted, but years later, the Quakers decided to soften their stance and moved the fence to include these graves inside the cemetery. The last person buried here was a member of the Bateman-Wright family who died in 1968. (see #27)

36. 355 S. Main | Ezekiel Cleaver General Store ~ circa 1830

Ezekiel Cleaver operated a general store in this building from 1865 until 1870. In 1878 John Robinson opened a grocery store here. The building across the street at 350 South Main Street was built as a mirror image of this one.

37. 345 S. Main | The Edward Null House ~ circa 1847

Edward Null was the grandson of Charles Null and the son of Jacob and Nancy Null. This house was once the home of Tommy and Laura Miller. Tommy was a well-known Springboro inventor. (see #23 and #32)

38. 325 S. Main | Town Hall, Jail, Fire Station ~ circa 1922

This building was built in 1922, to replace the late 1800's town hall building that was destroyed by fire. It housed Springboro's Town Hall and Jail for nearly 100 years. The south room housed the village council chamber, and the north room was occupied by a Model T fire truck, with jail cells to the rear. The fire alarm can still be seen on the roof. This was once the site of a brick blacksmith shop operated by Stephen Peeble.

39. 305 S. Main | The Jack Decker House ~ circa 1827 ✧

In 1831 this house was purchased by Emmor Bailey, a Quaker. It appears to have had a hiding place for freedom seekers added into the building during its 1843 remodeling, making this a suspected Underground Railroad site. Henry Rees owned the property from 1857 until 1890, when his heirs sold it to Harriet Decker. Her husband, Jack, operated a livery stable from the barn, providing a carriage service from Springboro to the Franklin and Carlisle train stations.

40. 80 State | The Jonathan Wright House ~ circa 1815 ★

This house, built by the village founder and his wife Mary, was an important Underground Railroad depot. A hiding place built into the attic floor has been opened and may be seen from one of the guest rooms. The western chimney is whitewashed on the south side. This was a sign for freedom seekers that the house was a station on the journey north to freedom in Canada.



41. 245 S. Main | M. & J. Wright General Merchandise ~ circa 1854

This building was built as a general store for Mahlon and Josiah Wright, sons of Jonathan and Mary Wright. It originally had a shed roof extending out over the street to protect customers from the weather when they arrived in their horse-drawn buggies. A large stepping stone is still in place near the street. The Wright family ran the general store until 1895, when it was sold to William Siegfried. Siegfried operated a general store here until 1930, when it was sold to the local chapter of the Grange. The Grange held their meetings here until 1989. **Note:** Ohio's Grange movement was born with the help of Springboro's Seth Ellis, who helped organize the local Grange in 1872. He served as

Master of State Grange for more than 20 years and as the Chaplain of National Grange. Originally called the “Order of Patrons of Husbandry,” the Grange still serves as a fraternal association for farmers. (see #9)

42. 225 S. Main | The Pence-Bradstreet House ~ circa 1892

The first forge for a blacksmith shop in Springboro was built on this lot prior to 1843. Other businesses continued to occupy the site until it was purchased in 1892 by Martha Pence, who probably had the current house built. In 1911 the property was purchased by Mary Bradstreet. It is a fine example of Victorian architecture.

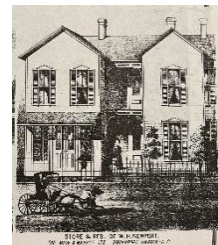


43. 205 S. Main | Thomas House, Shop, & Library ~ circa 1835 ★

Built by Samuel Dearth, this property was sold to Jonah Thomas in 1837. Thomas, a conductor on the Underground Railroad, used it as his home and harness shop, and a station on the Underground Railroad. The Thomas family housed a 2,000-volume community library, which was open to everyone in Springboro. It was one of the first circulating libraries in Ohio. In 1909 the southern end of the building became the Farmers Bank of Springboro, the first bank in town. Residents have reported living with a ghost upstairs - believed to be Jonah Thomas’s wife, Hannah. (see #10, #33, and #45)

44. 153-155 S. Main | The Newport Store ~ circa 1865

William Newport operated a grocery store here, where he also sold dry goods, boots, shoes, notions, and Queen's Ware, a type of fine, cream-colored Wedgwood pottery. It later became Bunnell’s Grocery Store.



Drawing: from the 1875 Warren County Atlas

45. 135 S. Main | The Stanton House ~ circa 1835

This house was owned by several notable Springboro residents, including Joseph Stanton, Alfred Thomas, Ira Thomas, and Jesse Wright. Alfred and Ira were the sons of Underground Railroad conductor Jonah Thomas. Born in the 1830s, Jesse Wright was the son of Josiah and grandson of Jonathan Wright. He wrote “An Early History of Springboro” for the town’s 1815 Centennial celebration. As a well-known local historian and speaker, Jesse Wright was responsible for documenting a great deal of early Springboro history. (see Stanton: #15, #48 Thomas: #10, #43)



Photo: Jesse Wright

46. 125 S. Main | The David Corwin House ~ circa 1879

This fine example of Italianate architecture was built by David Corwin, a millionaire who owned Georgia peach orchards.

47. 115 S. Main | The Edna Dabney House ~ circa 1830

Edna Dabney owned this property from 1829 to 1833. Located in a back room of this house is an 1860 indoor artesian well, used to draw water for the kitchen. This house is a good example of Federal architecture.

48. 105 S. Main | Jonathan Stanton House ~ circa 1831 ■

Jonathan Stanton and his brother Joseph arrived in Springboro from Virginia in 1828. Both brothers were active on the Underground Railroad. They owned this house, but there is no evidence they ever lived here. The house is noteworthy for its unusual Greek Revival architecture. (see #15 and #45)

49. 65 S. Main | The Fox-Banta House ~ circa 1872 ■

Although it was purchased from Jonathan Wright in 1827 for \$14, this lot remained vacant until 1872 when Ellen Fox bought it for \$250 and built the house. In 1875 she sold the house and property to John Banta for \$800. John's daughter, Lucy, taught at Springboro School for many years and served on the Centennial Committee.

50. 55 S. Main | The Job Borton House ~ circa 1831 ★ ■

Job Borton sold this house to Edward Potts in 1836 for \$800. Like his brother John, Edward was an Underground Railroad conductor.

51. 45 S. Main | The Trotter-Potts House ~ circa 1832 ★ ■

Joshua Trotter built this Federal style brick house. Five years later he sold it to John and Mary Potts who were Underground Railroad conductors. The Potts family enlarged the house between 1837 and 1852.

Nearby Historic Sites

52. The Null Log House ~ circa 1798 ★

The oldest log cabin on its original site in Warren County was built by Christian and Charles Null, whose father gave them \$500 to buy land for building a home. Christian traveled west from Pennsylvania in 1794 to search for land. He chose this site because shallow-rooted sycamore trees meant a plentiful water supply, and because it was the highest point in the area, with a Native American trail passing nearby. Christian returned with Charles to build their house, which eventually also housed their wives and children. In 1832, the log home sold to Mordecai Taylor, who built the two additions to the primary home and the cellar, including a hiding spot for freedom seekers.



Directions: Drive south on Main Street (St. Rt. 741) and turn left at the sign for Heatherwoode Golf Course. Turn right on Heatherwoode Circle and follow the road around until you see the small sign for Null Log House on the left.



Photo: Glenna Throckmorton and Marie Kesling at the covered bridge that once spanned Clear Creek. As you head south on St. Rt. 741, it stood at the point where you see Heatherwoode Golf Course on both sides of the road.

53. 155 W. Central (SR 73) | Dr. Aron Wright House ~ circa 1857

Dr. Aron Wright, a Quaker and the son of Jonathan and Mary Wright, built this house for his family when they relocated from the East coast. Dr. Wright was the president of Miami Valley College, and the first commencement was held here. Later, this house was purchased by the Null family, and their daughter, Anna Mary Null Doyle, maintained it until the early 1990s.



Directions: Drive west on Central Avenue (St. Rt. 73) one quarter mile from the intersection of St. Rt. 741. The historic home will be on the left.

Photo: Aron Wright House in 2021. Photo credit to Cheryl Dillin (Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=112420002>)

Historic Springboro's Festivals & Events

~ Springboro Juneteenth Jubilee ~ first Saturday on or following June 19

~ ARTFest on Main ~ third Saturday in August

~ Haunted Hot Dog Roast ~ second Tuesday in October

~ Christmas in Historic Springboro ~ weekend before Thanksgiving



Visit our Museum!

110 South Main Street

Open Hours:

April: Saturdays 11am – 3pm

May through November: Fridays and Saturdays 11am – 3pm

