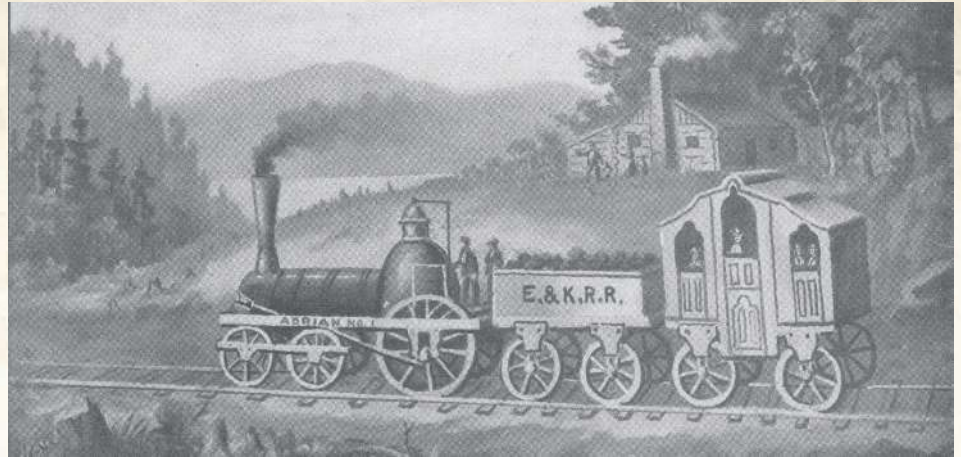


Sylvania – From Footpaths to Expressways and Beyond

By Gayleen Gindy and Samantha Ayres of Heritage Sylvania

Sylvania’s first link to the outside world was made in the 1830s when the Indiana Territorial Road, also known as “The old Territorial Road,” became the first improved public road. It ran from Lake Erie in Toledo, through Sylvania, and west to the Indiana border. It started out as a path cut through the dense woods. The surveyors stuck to the high grounds from Toledo to Tremainville and then west. When they hit the area that became Alexis Road they ran into deep sand dunes and loose sand, which became their next hurdle. As they continued west to Monroe Street, and through downtown Sylvania to today’s Sylvania-Metamora Road, they hit the “Cottonwood Swamp” where the mud and clay was almost impossible to get through most of the year, but they cut their way through it. As time went on, and the horses and wagons started using the path, it wasn’t long before deep ruts developed and travel became impossible.

In 1833 a group of Toledo, Sylvania and Adrian businessmen got together and organized a railroad company which they called the Erie & Kalamazoo Railroad Company. The original plans were for the tracks to run from Lake Erie in Toledo to the headwaters of the Kalamazoo River, but the Ohio-Michigan border dispute caused them to stop at Adrian, Michigan. The first advertisement in May of 1837 boasted that immigrants and travelers could save two days time. As time went on the company was sold and over the years the route was expanded



and became a major source of travel in and out of Sylvania, and our depot was a very busy place. Passenger services were offered on these tracks until 1956.

In 1848 Sylvanians were informed that the first county “Plank Road” would be built from the headwaters in downtown Toledo, through Sylvania, into Indiana and eventually on to Chicago. This route was similar to the original Territorial Road route, but would be the new and improved road. Sylvania residents looked forward to this road which would bring travelers right through our downtown. By the time it was finished Sylvania had three hotels and many businesses to accommodate these travelers. At first this was a toll road, and as early as 1850

there was a toll booth in Sylvania on today’s Erie Street, across from where the Highland Meadows Golf Club is located today? In the meantime, locally, officials were spending just about all tax monies collected on developing our interior roads.

The next big travel event to hit Sylvania was in 1898 when the Toledo & Western Railway Company, an electric passenger train business, announced they would be purchasing the necessary right-of-way to lay tracks from Toledo to Pioneer, Ohio, with a branch line to Adrian, Michigan. Sylvania’s officials were very pleased with this proposal and worked out a deal where they supplied the property for their headquarters to be located in Sylvania, where the Sautter’s



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grocery store is located today. This passenger train service was heavily used from 1901 through 1932, and we had a passenger depot on that same property. The Depression hit them hard and they went out of business in 1932.

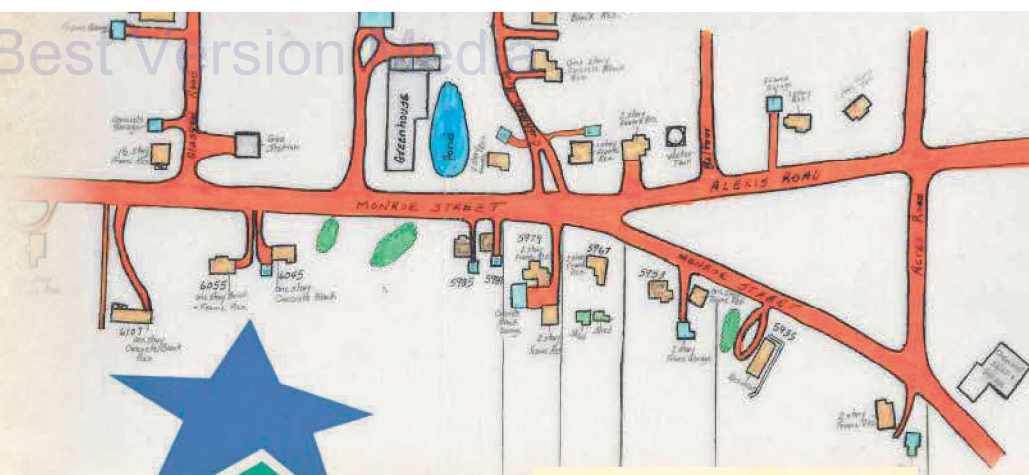
All through the Prohibition years (1919 to 1933) Sylvania became known as the headquarters for "moonshine" enforcement. Our Mayor, Clifford Peck, held what was called his "Mayor's Court" and his officers brought him liquor violators from all throughout Lucas County. As a result, this brought in thousands of dollars in fines into Sylvania's General Fund. In 1927 it was reported that by the time

Mayor Peck left office he could brag that "every street in the village except one was paved" and we had Burnham Park supplied with a pool, playground equipment and a new gazebo.

In 1956 Sylvania lost their last passenger train service, which had been offered by the New York Central Railroad by that time. Their passenger depot was located along the tracks just south of Convent Blvd. From 1858 until 1956 this depot structure was used in Sylvania as the gathering place to see people off and greet them home. (This depot survives today and is located in our historical village).

It was also in 1956 that the Ohio Department of Transportation informed the Sylvania officials that their U.S. 23 expressway route would be built, and would be running north and south through Sylvania. They intended to begin purchasing the necessary right-of-way, with their entrances and exit ramps taking up the 5900 block of Monroe Street. At this time there was a small community of houses with families living all along both sides of Monroe Street. It wasn't an easy task because these properties were owned by families who had lived there for many years, and they were not willing to give up their beautiful acreage and homes. The 1959 drawing shows what had to be removed before the ramps and road could be built. After three years of planning, negotiating, demolishing, and moving buildings out of the right-of-way, construction began. On December 1, 1959 a grand opening was held for the section of the expressway between Monroe Street and the Michigan line. At this same time Monroe Street was being widened and a new bridge was being constructed over our new expressway. Then the section from Monroe Street to Central Avenue officially opened on Nov. 2, 1962. This section of the expressway alone involved 110 property owners, and the construction of 13 bridges.

In 1971 our portion of I-475 that ties into U.S. 23, which runs through Sylvania Township and into West Toledo, opened to traffic.



So, here we are on Monroe Street 65 years later, and that bridge that they built over the expressway in 1959 needs to be replaced, and a few improvements need to be made. In spring of 2025, construction will start on this interchange at US-23 and Monroe. You may have noticed the once wooded patch of land is now cleared and open to allow for this new construction. The scope of work includes new ramps leading to and from US-23 as well as a new and improved multi-use bridge.

The bridge replacement will happen in 2026 and may require some more closures. Like with all construction, it may interfere with our usual daily routines, but we can all be assured that in the end, this will all be worth it. We have to think back to the early days of travel in Sylvania and see how far we've come.





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