



Main Street Meandering: Historic Walking Tour of Viroqua, Wisconsin

Created by the Vernon County Historical Society

Be very careful when crossing the streets – watch the traffic!

Start at the NW corner of Main St. and Decker St.

1. 202 N. Main, former site of City Hall

The building that used to stand here opened as a Farmers Bank in October, 1917. The bank was forced to close during the Depression. In December, 1933, the city bought the building for \$10,000 and moved City Hall's offices here, where they stayed until 2022. The building's shape mirrored that of 201 N. Main across the street, and these two corner blocks once formed the north end of the business district. *Now cross Decker St.*

2. 120 - 122 N. Main, Opera Block (Mister G's)

Charles C. Brown and Oliver G. Munson built this building in 1891. It once housed four shops on the first floor and the Opera Hall upstairs. Traveling troupes that played in the hall liked the convenience of the hotel next door [see #3]. The "Opera Block" sign is still visible at the top of the building. The right (north) half of the building has been "slipcovered" to give a more modern appearance.

3. 100 N. Main, the Fortney Hotel building

The North Star Hotel was built on this site in 1850. It was torn down in 1874 and another hotel, the Tremont House, was built

on the same site. When the Tremont moved, Torger Fortney built his own hotel here in 1899. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when tobacco was big business in Vernon County, many tobacco buyers stayed here. The turret over the main entrance once had a conical roof.

Turn right and walk down W. Court St.

4. 118 – 124 W. Court St., Driftless Café

This stone building was erected in 1896 as a livery. During the days of horse-drawn transportation, when people came to town for shopping or to stay at the hotel next door, they stabled their horses here. Today the building is divided into shops and has three different façades – light brick, dark brick, and the original stone.

Walk to the end of the block and cross Court St.

5. 123 W. Court St. (SE corner of Rock and Court), Shear Attitude

Formerly a garage, this building was turned into the Vernon Theater in 1932 by Ben Brown. He ran movie theaters in various locations around Viroqua beginning in 1908. The "Vernon" Theater sign can now be found inside the Vernon County Museum.

Walk back to Main St. and turn right. Note that Court St. is the north/south dividing line for Main St. addresses.

6. 102 S. Main, formerly Felix's (now Ewetopia)

Max Felix opened a shop in Viroqua in 1905 and moved to this location in 1920. After the original store here burnt down, this building was erected in 1930. It was the first free-standing building of its size in the region — there are no support poles. In 1933 Felix's placed a large neon sign out front, the first neon sign in Viroqua. Felix's Clothing closed in 2006.

7. 116 S. Main, the Temple Theater

In 1920 a fire burned down this section of the business district, but from the ashes arose this Temple Theater with the Masonic Lodge upstairs. Movies were shown here from 1922 to 1992. When the business and its Classical Revival building fell into disrepair, volunteers purchased the Theater and restored it. This is now a venue for live music and theatre.

Walk to the corner, cross Jefferson, and then cross Main.

8. 201 S. Main (SE corner of Jefferson and Main), Blue Dog Cycles

The first general store in Viroqua was built on this site in 1852. The current building was constructed in 1914 by Christ Ostrem – notice the date and his initials, CHO, at the top front. He ran a dry goods store in the north half and a grocery store in the south half. From 1937 to 1989, a Coast to Coast hardware store operated here.

Now walk down Jefferson.

9. 119 East Jefferson, Post Office

This was constructed in 1939-1940 as a federal building with spaces for the post office, IRS collector, and Farm Security administrator. Inside the post office is a large mural depicting Sac and Fox tribesmen stealing cavalymen's horses in the Blackhawk War, painted by Wisconsin artist Forrest Flower and installed in March, 1942. *Cross Jefferson.*

10. 118 East Jefferson (formerly McIntosh Library)

In the early 1900's, Andrew Carnegie provided money to build libraries in small towns across the country, including one in Viroqua in 1905. The building was remodeled and enlarged in the 1970's. In 2016, the library moved to a new building two blocks west. *Now return to Main St. and turn right.*

11. 123 S. Main, the Eckhart Building (Rockweiler's)

Several buildings have stood on this site since 1852, housing a hotel, doctors' and lawyers' offices, and Towner's Books and Stationery. Those earlier buildings burnt down. This building was constructed by Fred Eckhart in 1926, and its first tenant, Schultz Brothers Dime Store, did business here for 62 years.

12. 109 S. Main

This building, constructed after a fire on this block in 1891, housed jewelry stores from that time until 2014. First it was Herrick's Jewelry Store, then Boehrer's, then the Lucas Jewelry Store, and finally Biederman's. The huge black Lucas Jewelry safe is now at the Vernon County Museum.

13. 101 S. Main, bank building

The 1891 fire followed by a 1907 fire destroyed earlier buildings on this site. This current building was constructed in 1908 to house the First National Bank. The architecture of the building is the Greek Revival style, a solid, classic style intended to reassure customers that their money is safe.

Cross E. Court St.

14. 113 N. Main, Pacifico

This brick building was constructed in 1909. The post office was located here from 1925 to 1940 (see #9), but it has been a restaurant ever since: Oriole Café (1941-1967), Viking Inn Supper Club (1968-2015), the Eatery (2016-7), Pacifico (2018-).

Cross Decker St.

15. 201 N. Main

A business has stood on this corner since 1854. The current building was constructed in 1884. One grocery store after another was located here until 1968, then other businesses.