

What to See and Do ... in Benton

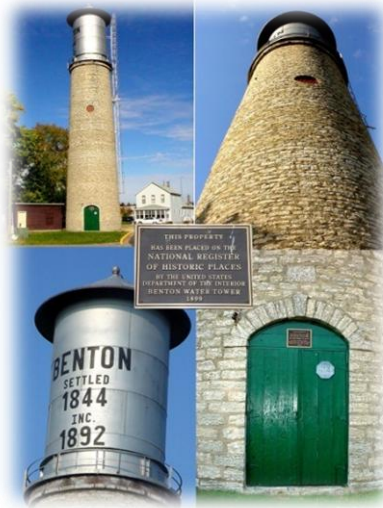
Historical Limestone Water Tower Water Street—Benton, Wisconsin

Built in 1900, Benton's historical limestone water tower is one of the few of its type in the Midwest and one of only two in the state of Wisconsin.

Originally the water tower had a red wooden tank on top. Perched atop the tank was a windmill that pumped water from the well below and had blades that are said to each have been "as big as a man."

The limestone water tower was Benton's source of water from 1900 until the spring of 1998 when the current water tower was put into use. In 1999,

Benton's limestone water tower was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. *(Image courtesy of Dave Driscoll.)*



Mazzuchelli Gravesite and Rectory Museum 237 E. Main—Benton, Wisconsin

[Father Samuel Mazzuchelli](#) came from Italy to America at the age of 22. Following his ordination, he was assigned to be a missionary priest for the Northwest Territory. He was highly admired and earned the respect of all to whom he ministered, including settlers, miners, and the area's native tribes.



Father Mazzuchelli was the child of wealthy parents and received a comprehensive, cultured education which included the command of several languages and the study of

architecture. As a pioneer priest, Father Mazzuchelli designed and built 25 churches in the upper Mississippi Valley area—including Benton's St. Patrick Catholic Church, built in 1852, and New Diggings' St. Augustine Church, constructed eight years prior to that. *(Photos courtesy of Dave Driscoll.)*



In addition to his renowned missionary work and his formation of Christian communities in the region, Father Mazzuchelli was also a pioneer in Wisconsin education. He opened and taught in public schools in Benton, New Diggings, Hazel Green, and Sinsinawa, teaching the children of lead miners in those towns. In 1852 he established St. Clara Academy for Girls in Benton. The school continued here until 1867 when it was moved to Sinsinawa Mound. St. Clara Academy was in operation in Sinsinawa until it was closed in 1970. Father Mazzuchelli also founded schools for girls in Prairie du Chien and Galena, and he established the teaching congregation of Dominican Sisters at the [Sinsinawa Mound](#), Sinsinawa, Wisconsin. His command of native languages of the area enabled him to publish texts for the Winnebago and Menominee Indians of the region. He is credited, too, with having published the first book in the state, a liturgical almanac in the Chippewa language.

Father Mazzuchelli ministered at St. Patrick for the last 15 years of his life. His rectory during his early years as Benton's priest was a small home that was moved to Bean Street when a larger parish house was built. In 1989 Father Mazzuchelli's first rectory house was moved from its Bean Street location back to a site on St. Patrick Church grounds. It was restored and stands preserved as the Mazzuchelli Rectory Museum.



Father Mazzuchelli died in 1864 and is buried in St. Patrick Catholic Church Cemetery. In 1993, Pope John Paul II declared Father Mazzuchelli venerable, the first step to possible canonization as a saint.



Visitors may visit the Mazzuchelli Gravesite at any time. Appointments for tours of the Mazzuchelli Rectory Museum may be made by contacting Pauline Alexander at 608.759.3441.

(Visitors might like to continue learning about Father Mazzuchelli by visiting his archives at the [Sinsinawa Mound](#), located 12-14 miles west of Benton on Cty Rd. Z in Sinsinawa, Wisconsin. Father Mazzuchelli founded the Sinsinawa Dominican

Congregation there in 1847. The Mound is currently home to nearly 700 Dominican Sisters and houses Father Mazzuchelli's exhibit, "[Samuel Mazzuchelli, Tracing a Journey](#)." The exhibit includes highlights of his life and accomplishments, and showcases a number of artifacts. Included in those artifacts is the chain Father Samuel wore as penance, secretly hidden beneath his vestments and wrapped tightly around his waist. Many people—particularly the ill and ailing—have prayed with Father Mazzuchelli's [penance chain](#) in the hope of being granted a miracle.

The Mazzuchelli exhibit at Sinsinawa Mound is open from 10 A.M. to 3:30 P.M. Monday through Friday (closing from noon to 12:30), and from 12:30 to 3:30 P.M. on Saturday and Sunday.)

Swindlers' Ridge Museum 25 W. Main Street—Benton, Wisconsin

Located near the center of town, Swindlers' Ridge Museum is the home to artifacts and historical memorabilia from



Benton and the surrounding area. Included is memorabilia from the lead-mining industry that once was so prevalent in

and around Benton. The museum is open from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. every Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday between Labor Day and Memorial Day. Other visits may be made by appointment by contacting Pauline Alexander at 608.759.3441.

1851 Schoolhouse Museum Village Park—Benton, Wisconsin

Benton is fortunate to have a part of its educational history preserved in the 1851 Schoolhouse Museum, the first schoolhouse built in the village limits. At the time of its



construction in 1851, the schoolhouse was located near the corner of Main and Park Streets, and although it was a public school, Dominican nuns taught there until 1886. (There are historical indications, however, that perhaps they may not have been the school's very first teachers.)

When a new two-room school was erected in 1886, the first schoolhouse was moved to the rear of the new school. After being sold some years later, it was moved one-quarter mile east on Highway 11 and used as a private residence. In 1980 the building was donated to the Benton Alumni Association by Bill and Diana Sides and was moved, once again, to its present location on Catherine Street in the Village Park.

The museum houses a collection of Benton school and alumni memorabilia. It is open on Labor Day and Memorial Day weekends and other times by appointment by contacting Pauline Alexander at 608.759.3441.

Rustic Road Tour Benton / New Diggings Countryside

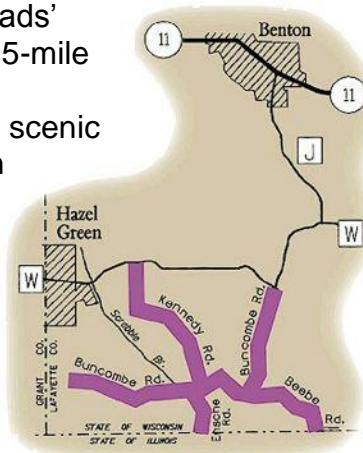
Created by the Wisconsin Legislature in 1973, the [Rustic Roads' Tour](#) is a statewide program that gives outdoor

enthusiasts the opportunity to travel through some of the scenic, peaceful countryside of Wisconsin. Travelers may enjoy the Rustic Roads' Tour by car, on foot, by bike, or even on horseback. Motorcyclists have long enjoyed the peaceful ride of a "road less traveled" and have included Wisconsin's Rustic Roads in their cycling adventures.



The southwest region of the Rustic Roads' system is a 7.5-mile trip that takes travelers on a scenic

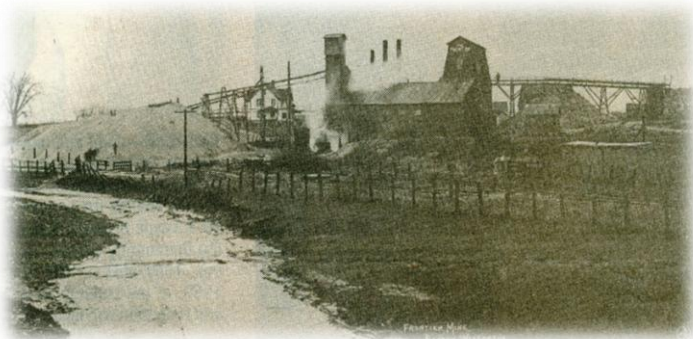
drive in the countryside between Benton, New Diggings and Hazel Green. It follows portions of Buncombe, Kennedy, Beebe, and Ensche Roads, making its way beside meandering creeks and the hilly farmlands and pastures of the area. The early mining history of the region is evident in remnants of the abandoned Kennedy Mine, once producing more than 1,300,000 tons of lead/zinc ore, helping Wisconsin to produce 85% of the nation's lead.



(To be a part of Wisconsin's Rustic Road program, an area must have outstanding natural features or include open areas with an agricultural setting, must have a minimum length of two miles and be lightly traveled, and must not be changed or improved in such a way as to change its rustic characteristics.)

Self-Guided Driving Tour of Old Area Mines Benton, New Diggings, Leadmine, and Shullsburg

Benton, like a number of towns in the region, owes its very existence to early lead miners and the mining industry they

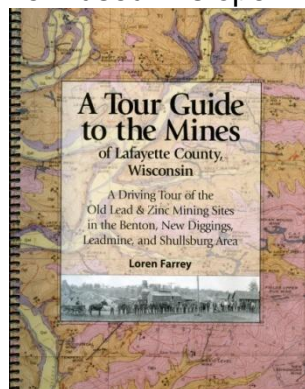


began here. Mines like the Frontier Mine and the Penna Benton Mine were common sites in the region. (The Frontier Mine was located on the west edge of town on property currently owned by Stella McDermott, and the Penna Benton was located in New Diggings.)



While there are no longer any working mines in the area, there still exist remnants of many of those old mines. Historian Loren Farrey has written a book—*A Tour Guide to the Mines of Lafayette County, Wisconsin*—that enables visitors to take a self-guided tour to the locations of a number of those mines. The book guides visitors past sites of 22 old mines and includes a history and pictures of each site.

The tour originates in Shullsburg's Badger Mine and Museum located in the Badger Park at 279 W. Estey Street. The museum is open from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. daily between



Memorial Day and Labor Day. While you may begin your tour at any point in the book, the Badger Mine and Museum offers visitors a history of mining and mining life that will lend valuable meaning to your driving tour of the area. Additionally, Swindlers' Ridge Museum in Benton has a number of mining artifacts and memorabilia and should be included on your tour, as well. Swindlers'

Ridge Museum is open from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. every Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday between Labor Day and Memorial Day. Other visits may be made by appointment by contacting Pauline Alexander at 608.759.3441. (Farrey's book, *A Tour Guide to the Mines of Lafayette County*,

Wisconsin, is available for purchase at Benton's Swindler's Ridge, the Benton State Bank, the Rock Café, and the Badger Mine and Museum of Shullsburg. It is also available for loan at the Benton Public Library.)

. . . *In New Diggings*

Izaak Walton Fever River Handicapped Fishing Dock Cty. Hwy W—New Diggings, Wisconsin

Seeing a need to have an area from which handicapped persons can enjoy the sport of fishing, the Southwestern



Chapter of the Izaak Walton League initiated and built the Izaak Walton Handicapped Fishing Dock. The dock—which opened in the spring of 2007—is located on the Fever River, approximately one mile west of New Diggings on Cty. Hwy. W.

Additional improvements will be made to the site as funding becomes available.

(Take a canoe excursion on the Fever River with Thomas Lindblade, American Canoe Association Instructor/Trainer. Lindblade and his crew put in at the Izaak Walton Handicapped Fishing Dock on County W west of New Diggings and paddled from there to Council Hill Road, a distance of 10.9 miles. Enjoy the sights and sounds of the Fever, a side trip into two railroad tunnels in the hillsides along the river, and Lindblade's educational commentary of the canoe trip.)

Video: ["The Fever/Galena River"](http://www.hauntedbywaters.com) (by Thomas Lindblade, <http://www.hauntedbywaters.com>)

Masonic Cemetery Cty. Hwy. W—New Diggings, Wisconsin

The Masonic Cemetery is located on a hillside on the west edge of New Diggings. It is the oldest—and the only consecrated—Masonic cemetery in Wisconsin; additionally, it is one of the oldest in the United States. In 1949 the

Masonic Temple—
Olive Branch Lodge
No. 6—was moved to
the cemetery grounds
from its site on Hill
Street in New
Diggings. Local
Masons set the
building's foundation
and restored the



lodge for use by Masons around the tri-state area. While typically closed to vehicular traffic, visitors may park at the entrance and walk up the hill to the historical cemetery.

New Diggings' Main Street County W—New Diggings, Wisconsin

Step back in time with a trip down New Diggings' Main Street, known as Prospect Avenue in its heyday, Although it's unincorporated today, the town was once a vibrant, bustling community, spurred on by an influx of settlers mining lead in the area and later by immigrants who had come from England and Ireland both to mine and to farm the land.

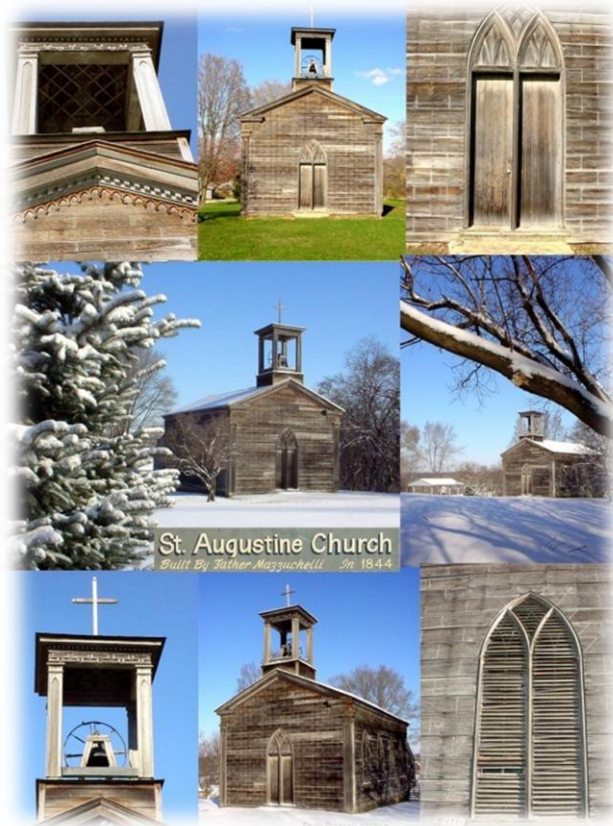
New Diggings was a thriving community in the mid-1800s. In addition to the mining industry and its offshoots, the town had many merchants, numerous hotels, gambling houses, saloons, and various other businesses. According to the 1870 census, it had a population of 1,794 people, and at one point in the town's history, it enjoyed the prominence of being larger than Chicago. A number of New Diggings'



businesses remained active well into the 1900s. The picture above shows the town's main business area around the 20s or 30s.

St. Augustine Catholic Church High Street—New Diggings, Wisconsin

Designed and built in 1844 in the Greco-Gothic style, St. Augustine Catholic Church stands today as a testament to Father Mazzuchelli's ingenuity and architectural prowess.



(Photo courtesy Dave Driscoll.)

Unable to build the church of stone, Father Samuel built it with wood planking made to simulate stone. The three rooms behind the altar served as living quarters for the pioneer priest whenever he stayed in New Diggings. In 1847, Father Mazzuchelli opened a school in those rooms and summoned Dominican Sisters from Sinsinawa Mound to serve as its teachers.

The weather-beaten church remains today much as it did during the time in which it was built—simple and unassuming. A memorial mass is held in the church annually on the last Sunday in September.

St. Augustine Church was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. Restoration and preservation of the 1844 church are currently underway, with funds being raised by the Assembly of the Knights of Columbus and partially matched by the Jeffris Family Foundation. Donations may be sent to:

St. Augustine Chapel Fund, Inc.
George Burns
150 W. Church Street
Shullsburg, WI 53580

or to: Robert Pluemer, Comptroller
314 Highway 61 South
Potosi, WI 53820.

St. Augustine Church is open on Sundays (1 to 4 P.M.) from May 31 to September 30. It may also be visited by appointment by calling George Burns (608.965.4517) or Charles Wiederholt (608.744.2868).

. . . IN OTHER NEIGHBORING WISCONSIN TOWNS

Belmont, Wisconsin

[\(Belmont Web Site\)](#)

- ◆ **First Capitol Historic Site**
Cty. Hwy. G—Belmont, Wisconsin

Wisconsin's [First Capitol Historic Site](#) is the birthplace of Wisconsin Territorial Government. In 1836 the framework for the state's government was penned in this building. It included laws, a judicial system, and planning for roads and rail that lead up to Wisconsin's statehood in 1848. The Capitol and Supreme Court building was used just once during the 1836 session. After that, Wisconsin's capitol was moved to Madison.

Cuba City, Wisconsin

[\(Cuba City Web Site\)](#)

- ◆ **Veterans' Memorial**
S. Washington Street—Cuba City, Wisconsin

Located in the town's park, the Veterans' Memorial honors area veterans who served in our country's military.

Darlington, Wisconsin

[\(Darlington Web Site\)](#)

- ◆ **Darlington Courthouse**
626 Main Street—Darlington, Wisconsin

In 1903 Benton native Matt Murphy bequeathed 70% of his estate to be used to construct the Lafayette County Courthouse in Darlington. At a total construction cost of \$136,556.17, the courthouse is the only operating courthouse in the United States that was paid for solely by one individual.

- ◆ **Darlington's Historic Business District**
Main Street—Darlington, Wisconsin

The National Register of Historic Places has designated Darlington's downtown a National Historic District.

Mineral Point, Wisconsin

[\(Mineral Point Web Site\)](#)

- ◆ **Pendarvis State Historical Site**
114 Shake Rag Street—Mineral Point, Wisconsin

Named for an estate in Cornwall, England, this Cornish miner's settlement is preserved much the way it was when it was first constructed in the early 19th century. Immigrants were attracted to Mineral Point by the prospect of mining lead in the area, and they brought with them a rich cultural heritage that is evident in the [Pendarvis](#) colony of buildings and artifacts.

Tours are lead by costumed guides daily between mid-May and mid-October.

- ◆ **Shake Rag Alley**
18 Shake Rag Street—Mineral Point, Wisconsin

Likely the oldest settlement in Mineral Point, Shake Rag Alley is a 2.5-acre site in which visitors can step back in time. The site includes nine historic cottages and is home to [Shake Rag Alley Center for the Arts](#), an artist community of talented individuals who teach their workmanship and artisan skills in year-round art workshops.

Platteville, Wisconsin

[\(Platteville Web Site\)](#)

- ◆ **Mining Museum and Rolla James Museum
405 E. Main Street—Platteville, Wisconsin**

The [Mining Museum and the Rolla James Museum](#) include an underground tour of the 1845 Bevans Lead Mine, a ride in a 1931 above-ground train, and exhibits about Platteville and area history.

- ◆ **The “M”
West Mound Road—Platteville, Wisconsin**

Representing the university’s mining school of the past, the “M” is a giant, whitewashed-stone letter embedded into the slope of a mound in the countryside east of Platteville. The “Big M” measures 214 feet wide x 241 feet high and consists of over 400 tons of whitewashed stone. The “M” was completed in 1937 by students of the School of Mines; students of UW-Platteville are now gatekeepers of the landmark. The lighting of the “M” is an annual tradition at UW-P. Two times each year, university students outline the “M” with smudge pots that are lit by a torch carried ceremoniously by student runners running from the campus to the mound. Once lit, the glowing “M” can be seen for many miles.

Shullsburg, Wisconsin

[\(Shullsburg Web Site\)](#)

- ◆ **Badger Mine and Museum
279 W. Estey Street—Shullsburg, Wisconsin**

The [Badger Mine and Museum](#) includes an underground tour of the Badger Mine and histories and exhibits from the mining era, from the cheese-making industry, and from Shullsburg's past.

- ◆ **Shullsburg Area Veterans' Memorial
W. Estey Street—Shullsburg, Wisconsin**

The Shullsburg Area Veterans' Memorial honors area veterans who served our country from the Civil War to the present.

- ◆ **Shullsburg's Historic Main Street
Water Street—Shullsburg, Wisconsin**

Stroll down Shullsburg's historic main street where you'll enjoy impressive old architecture, renovated buildings, good shopping, and fine dining.

. . . In Nearby Iowa and Illinois

Dubuque, Iowa

[\(Dubuque Chamber of Commerce Web Site\)](#)

- ◆ **Fenelon Place Elevator
512 Fenelon Place—Dubuque, Iowa**

Billed as the "world's shortest, highest, most scenic railway," Fenelon Place Elevator affords visitors a picturesque view from the top. Locals refer to the elevator as the 4th Street Elevator—whatever you call it, you'll call the view from the top "spectacular."

- ◆ **National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium
350 E. 3rd Street—Dubuque, Iowa**

Located in the Port of Dubuque, the [National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium](#) takes visitors on a trip on the "Mother of All Waters," the Mighty Mississippi. See fresh water aquariums, interactive exhibits, a wetland nature trail, a barge theater, live animals and living history presentations. The National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium is a "must see" while you're in the tri-state area.

- ♦ **Shot Tower**
East 4th Street Extension—Dubuque, Iowa

Dubuque's Shot Tower was built in 1856 and is on the National Register of Historic Places. As a means of providing the military with round, lead shot that was relatively uniform for use in muskets, the concept of shot towers began. Workers would drop molten lead through a grate at the top of the tower. The lead passing through the grate would drop hundreds of feet, cooling into a sphere as it dropped into the water below.

Dubuque's Shot Tower is one of the few remaining shot towers in the nation. It can be seen towering in the distance at its location near the Mississippi.

- ♦ **Walking / Driving City Tours**
Dubuque, Iowa

While in Dubuque, be sure to take a walking or driving tour of the city's downtown and riverfront areas. The city has numerous old buildings with magnificent architecture that virtually anyone will appreciate. Stroll around on the Mississippi River Walk, and enjoy the sights, sounds, and—yes, even the smells—of Ol' Man River.

Galena, Illinois

[\(Convention and Visitors' Bureau Web Site\)](#)

- ♦ **Galena History Museum**
211 S. Bench Street—Galena, Illinois

The Galena History Museum includes Civil War, steam boating, lead mining, and geology exhibits.

- ♦ **General Ulysses S. Grant Home Historic Site**
500 Bouthillier Street—Galena, Illinois

General Ulysses S. Grant was the leading Union general in the Civil War. He has been described as being a great general and an even greater strategist. He was living in Galena with his wife, Julia Dent, when the Civil War broke out in 1861, and he was called back into military service by the governor. In 1865, Grant forced General Lee's surrender at the Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia, ending a four-

year war that took more lives than any other war in history. When General Grant returned to Galena a hero of the war, the generous people of the town presented him with the [beautiful, brick home](#) that is now an historic site in the state of Illinois.

Grant was elected the 18th President of the United States in 1869. He served the Presidency from 1869 to 1877. After leaving the White House, Grant and his wife, Julia Dent, traveled throughout Europe for two years. In 1881, they moved to New York City and later to Mount McGregor, New York, where President Grant died in 1885.

- ◆ **Old Market House**
Commerce Street—Galena, Illinois

The [Old Market House](#), built in 1845-1846, was the center of community life at that time. Today the building is owned by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency and houses changing exhibits and special events.

- ◆ **Old Stockade on the Cobblestone Street**
208 Perry Street—Galena, Illinois

Built of upright logs, this structure provided safety for Galena's earliest pioneers during the Black Hawk War of 1832. Restored to its 1890's appearance, its history is displayed inside on the original logs.

- ◆ **Walking / Driving Tours of Galena**
Galena, Illinois

Be sure to take a walking or driving tour of Galena. Enjoy the old homes—some of which may be toured—and drink in the flavor of bygone years in the old river and lead-mining town called Galena.

Elizabeth, Illinois

[\(Elizabeth Web Site\)](#)

- ◆ **Apple River Fort**
311 E. Myrtle Street—Elizabeth, Illinois

During the Black Hawk War of 1832, Sauk and Fox warriors fought against the United States Army and

militia from Illinois and what is now Wisconsin. The [Apple River Fort](#) is the only fort that was attacked by Black Hawk during that war. The fort has been reconstructed and may be visited for self-guided tours.