Explore History!
A Guide to the

Historic Sites & Homes
of
LeClaire, IA
LeClaire, Iowa  LeClaire, IA was known mostly for location and river traffic. The town is situated on the point where the Mississippi River makes a sharp turn to the west and runs southerly for fifteen miles. In earlier days this was known as the Upper Rock Island Rapids. It was dangerous to navigate because of high rocks and a narrow twisting channel. During the 1840's to 1910, LeClaire was home to specialized riverboat captains and pilots who would navigate this 15 mile stretch of rapids for Mississippi riverboats.

Members of the Sauk and Fox tribes lived in the area of LeClaire. There was a fierce Native American battle in 1804 in the area between LeClaire and Princeton, Iowa, where the Olathia Golf Course is located today, the battle was fought between the Sauk and Fox fought tribes against the Sioux tribe. Around 1000 Native Americans were killed in the fight.

Antoine LeClaire  In 1829 three homesteading families moved into the LeClaire area and through the Peace Treaty of 1832 the Natives gave a section of land at the head of the Upper Rapids to Antoine LeClaire. This tract is where the City of LeClaire is now located.

The City received its Charter in 1834. The state of Iowa became the 29th state in 1846 and in April of that same year "Buffalo Bill" William F. Cody was born in a log cabin two miles northwest of LeClaire. The years up through 1850 showed the town growing. There was one hotel, a town pump, boat supply store, and several river pilots built homes. By 1850 LeClaire development was so rapid that it had promise of becoming a large city. By 1856 there were eighteen new stores, and employment available for carpenters, caulkers, and mechanics on the boulevards. There were sawmills, flour mills, a plow factory, and brick making among the early industry. From LeClaire itself came much of the stone, brick, and wood used in the construction of the homes. Many which are now recognized as part of the nine block Cody Road Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places. By 1857 financial panic hit LeClaire after Davenport bridged the river. The Stone School was built in 1866. By the late 1890's the railroad came through town, and wing dams and revetments built on the upper Mississippi made nearly all channels navigable. Both these events caused decline in river pilots and river traffic reached a low point - logs and lumber were now railroaded. Farming became more popular with the decline in river employment.
The famous Green Tree elm was located along the banks of the Mississippi River in LeClaire. It was known as a landmark among people who lived in LeClaire, and to people who had visited LeClaire. In 1920 it was placed on the register of the American Forestry Association's famous trees. In 1964 it contracted Dutch Elm disease and had to be cut down. A section of the famous tree can be viewed in the Buffalo Bill Museum on the LeClaire levee.

The Lone Star Steam Wheeler (built 1869, retired in 1889. In 1890 a new Lone Star was built and decommissioned 1967) is the only surviving example in the United States of a wooden-hulled boat built in the traditional Western Rivers fashion. The Lone Star was designated a National Historic Landmark and is open to visitors at the Buffalo Bill Museum.

**Historic Sites & Homes of LeClaire**

**Horton – Suiter House**
102 N 2nd Street
Built c. 1860
The house is believed to be built for Henry Horton, who worked as an engineer on the raft steamers. The house was later occupied by James Suiter, one of the last of the LeClaire rapids pilots who supported his river income by working as a mortician during the winter months. Style: The 1 1/2 cottage is five bays across the front with a low pitched gable roof. A one story addition with a slanted roof was built later. The house is now a private residence.

**Jacob Suiter House**
214 South 2nd Street
Built c. 1860
Jacob Suiter (1828-1904) was the second generation of Suiters to be a raft and rapids pilot. Style: A variation on the Italianate style, the home features a bracketed cornice and corner pilasters. At the rear of the house is a one-story brick kitchen addition. The house is now a private residence.
George Tromley Sr. House  
806 North Cody Road  
Built c. 1840  
George Tromley Sr. began his career floating log rafts before the Civil War. Tromley was among the first to experiment with steamboats pushing log rafts.  
Style: The house is a 2 story home with a low pitched roof and was built in 2 sections, the first in 1840 of brick and the second section is framed construction with narrow cornices above the windows. The house is now a private residence.

John McCaffery House  
208 North Cody Road  
Built 1870  
John McCaffery a boat clerk, captain, and raft boat owner as well as having interests in lumber and mining ventures. McCaffery was born in Ireland 1842.  
Style: This 2 story frame Italianate house is built on a stone foundation and has curved wooden lintels. The roof is low hip with an unbracketed wooden cornice. There is a 2 story polygonal bay on the south with a bracketed cornice above the first story bay. The house is currently a business.

William Suiter House  
227 Wisconsin Street  
Built c. 1855  
William Suiter was one of the community’s original settlers and rapids pilot. William began life on the Mississippi as a raft hand, but was piloting boats by the time he was 21 and continued for almost 40 years.  
Style: 2 story house with shallow gable roof is 3 bays wide. It follows a simple center hall plan. The house is a private residence.
George Tromley Jr. House
127 Jones Street
Built c. 1865
George Tromley Jr. was the second generation of pilots to work on the upper rapids, and thus was among the distinctive family groups which maintained their connection with the river trade over many years.
Style: 1 ½ story frame house. The main roof is a jerkinhead dormer centered in the front façade. The house is now a private residence.

Samuel Van Sant House
322 North Cody Road
Built c. 1860
In 1869 – 70 Samuel and his father J.W. Van Sant designed and built the J.W. Van Sant, a raft boat which revolutionized the movement of logs and lumber down the Mississippi River. In the 1880’s he moved to Minnesota and became the Governor of the state.
Style: This 1 ½ story is sided with clapboards. The upper story has a triangular dormer. The house is currently a business

Kattenbracher House
1125 North 2nd Street
Built c. 1860
Charles Kattenbracher established a foundry along the river, which was principally engaged in working with the LeClaire Marine Railway boatyards run by J.W. Van Sant & Son.
Style: 2 story rectangular house has a low hip roof with very wide bracketed eaves and medallions. This house is now a private residence.
John Smith House
426 Dodge Street
Built c. 1850
John Smith was a riverboat pilot known for his involvement in the “Effie Afton” case after the railroad hired him in 1856 to prove that a steamer could pass under the bridge without danger.

Smith also devised a towboat used to steer large rafts of logs through the river.
Style: This house is a small brick, 1 story built on a low stone foundation. It has a gabled roof and front is 3 bays wide, the sides are 2 bays wide. There is a large wooded frieze, headed at the bottom that runs across the front of the house. The house is now a private residence.

John H Suiter House
1220 N. 2nd Street
Built 1855
John Suiter was second generation river pilot. 1843 until 1875 John Suiter worked as a rapid pilot. John also acquired extensive agriculture and real estate holdings.
Style: 2 story house of frame construction on a stone foundation. The front of the house is 3 bays wide with a sheltered porch running the full width of the façade.

The house is now a private residence.

James Gamble House
527 Wisconsin Street
Built c. 1855
James Gamble was born in Ireland in 1821, emigrated with his parents to the U.S. in 1823. He received his medical degree in 1847 and moved to LeClaire where he practiced medicine for nearly 50 years.
Style: The house reflects the Italianate Palazzo style, with bricks laid in a 6 course common bond. The main roof is very low hip with 3 brick chimneys. The main entrance is sheltered by a flat-roofed porch with 2 wooded columns on high pedestals. The house is a private residence.
Old Mill House
419 N. Cody Road
Built c. 1851
Built by Alfred Jansen,
Acquired by J.W. Van Sant
along with adjoining boatyards
in 1865.
Style: The house features a
symmetrical façade and sits on a
stone foundation which on the
river side forms a walkout
basement. The house is now a
multi-use building.

Dawley House
127 S Second Street
Built: 1851
Daniel V. Dawley obtained his first river
job about 1836 as a clerk on the steamer
"Hero."
Style: 2 story brick Italianate style on a
stone foundation, the shallow hipped
roof has 4 short, wide chimneys. The 3
bays on the main façade are separated by
flat brick pilasters. The home is now a
business.

Rambo House
430 North Cody Road
Built 1855
William Rambo came to LeClaire
in 1844 and established a saw
mill. For almost 20 years he was
a pilot on the upper Rapids.
Style: Transitional Greek Revival/
Italianate frame dwelling. The
flipped roof features broad eaves
and large brackets. This house in
now a business.
Stone House
817 N 2nd Street
Built Cira 1840
The rock building was built for use as a girl’s school but was never used as such. It once was a headquarters for a gang of counterfeiters. Style: Vernacular early settlement-era structure composed of ashlar blocks of limestone. The house is a private residence.

Cody Road
Historic Commercial – Residential Building
114 N Cody Road
Built 1851
Note the stone foundation. This building is still used today as a commercial retail business.

Historic Commercial Building
101 South Cody Road
Built ?
The photo was taken when this building was used as the Green Tree Grocery. The historic Green Tree was located a short distance behind the building. This building is still used today as a commercial retail business.

Historic Commercial Building
201 – 203 North Cody Road
This building at the corner of Cody road and Jones has had a variety of uses including a doctors office, LeClaire City Hall and the Buffalo Bill Museum. This building is still used as a business.
The Gault House
Historic Commercial Building
207 N Cody Road
Built 1850
Early Hotel operated under the name “Gault House”. Later became the “Bard House”. This building is still used as a business.

On the Levee
Buffalo Bill Museum &
River Pilots’ Pier
199 N Front Street

The Buffalo Bill Museum, is focused on life along the Mississippi River and local history. Local history exhibits include the story of famous people from LeClaire, including American West showman Buffalo Bill Cody, engineer James Buchanan Eads and inventor James Ryan.

The Lone Star Stern Wheeler (built 1869, retired in 1889. In 1890 a new Lone Star was built and decommissioned 1967) is the only surviving example in the United States of a wooden-hulled boat built in the traditional Western Rivers fashion. That river system, comprised of the Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri Rivers carried most of the immigrants and freight that settled the Midwest. The Lone Star was designated a National Historic Landmark and is open to visitors at the Buffalo Bill Museum. The museum is open year round and 7 days a week.
Riverboat Pilots of LeClaire

Arthur Dawely

Charles Tromley

Jacob Suiter

James Suiter
Many of the homes listed in this booklet are private residences. Please respect the privacy of the home owners.

LeClaire Boat Yard 1898

This booklet was created and sponsored by the Buffalo Bill Museum
LeClaire, IA
Buffalobillmuseumleclaire.com

LeClaire view from the Mississippi River 1930

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