



**Court House
Trail:
Historic Walking
Tour of Viroqua,
Wisconsin**

Created by the Vernon County Historical Society

Trail begins across from the Court House, at the west side of the corner of Decker and Minshall.

1. 406 West Decker, McKittrick House

This brick house was built in 1862 for Elma and Edward Minshall, who sold it to John and Mary Jane McKittrick in 1881. John was employed as a janitor at the Court House across the street. Later it was sold to Mary Rusk, daughter of Governor Jeremiah Rusk, who had lived nearby (see #3) for some years. Larry A. Sieger, who served many years as District Attorney of Vernon County, bought the house in 1968. Arched windows grace the original structure. A modern addition is attached to the back of the house.

Walk north along Minshall.

2. 220 Minshall, Wyman House

O. B. Wyman moved to Viroqua in 1871. He studied law and then was admitted to the bar in 1877, elected District Attorney in 1881, and became Circuit Court Judge in 1893. La Crosse architect Carl Struck designed this home, which was built in 1885. Struck also planned the Vernon County Court House (see #8). Library shelves were built across the length of the living room: Judge Wyman headed the

Library Board for many years, and Viroqua's second library opened in his office in 1880. Architectural details include painted decorations in the east gable, and finials on top of the east and south gables.

Look across the street at ...

3. 219 Minshall, Rusk House

Jeremiah M. Rusk was elected sheriff of Vernon County in the 1850's, served in the 25th Wisconsin Infantry during the Civil War of the 1860's, and became a state congressman in the 1870's. Rusk was elected Governor of Wisconsin in 1881. He died on November 21, 1893. Two years after his death, this residence was constructed for his widow, daughter Mary, and son Blaine. The house features a large reception hall and an oak staircase inside, and decorative columns supporting the front porch.

Walk east 1 block on Gillette and turn left onto Dunlap.

4. 322 Dunlap, Bennett House

This house was owned by J. Henry Bennett and later by his daughter, Olga Bennett. In 1895, J. Henry was admitted to the bar. He later served as the county judge. Olga also became a lawyer and was the first female Viroqua city attorney, and the first female Vernon County judge. The Bennett home was built in 1899. Over the years the property has included a sun porch, a sleeping porch, a wood room, a summer kitchen, and a barn.

Now turn right on Parkinson and left on Rock.

5. Pioneer Cemetery, on Rock between Church & Broadway

This is the older of Viroqua's two cemeteries. Viroqua's founder Moses Decker is buried here, as well as many other pioneers who arrived in the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s. Several

farms were once located around this cemetery, and the farmers' pigs sometimes rooted around in the cemetery, knocking over gravestones and digging up grave sites. Consequently, when the Viroqua Cemetery was opened to the public in 1877, many people moved their loved ones there. Note the Lucy Stone marker in the southwest corner.

Walk back south along Rock to the corner of Rock and Decker.

6. 202 West Decker, Tollefson Repair

This building dates to about 1900. It was once home to a drayage company: the horses were kept in the back when they weren't out pulling heavy wagons to deliver goods. The draymen would meet the nearby trains and haul their cargo. Farmers also used the stable when they came to town in horse-drawn vehicles. Later the building was the home of Mueller Implement. The tall windows are now filled with glass bricks, and the outside has been covered with pebble-dash stucco.

Continue down Rock, turn right on Court, approach the Court House on the diagonal path across the lawn.

7. "June 1, 1888" plaque, formerly beneath tree on lawn to the left of the path

On this date, a mob of enraged citizens stormed the County Jail behind the Court House and pulled out Andrew Grandstaff, who had admitted to the brutal murders of Reuben and Matilda Drake of Kickapoo, and two of their small grandchildren, Laura and Denver Dupee. The mob lynched Grandstaff from a tree on the Court House lawn. (That tree and the plaque are now gone.)

8. Vernon County Court House

This is the third court house built in this county. It was built in 1880 of limestone from a local quarry, and was designed in the High Victorian Gothic style by Norwegian

immigrant Carl F. Struck. The stonework was done by William Lake of Viroqua and John Benson of La Crosse. Additions were made in 1904, 1924, 1955, 1988, and 1998. The Court House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Turn to the left, walk around south side of Court House.

9. old Vernon County Jail

This jail was built in 1910, the 3rd jail built by Vernon County. J. Henry Bennett (see #4) designed this jail and included features that were very modern for the era. The architectural style is a mixture of Mediterranean and Prairie. Additions have since been made to the east side. In 2005, a new jail was completed on the northern edge of town. The old jail was renamed the Banta Building after retired sheriff Geoff Banta, and was converted into county office space. Bars still cover the windows of the old cells.

Continue behind the Court House to the park.

10. Eckhart Park

This park was once the Methodist camp meeting grounds. The Reverend George Nuzum, who was appointed to the Viroqua Methodist Church in 1878, was instrumental in starting the camp meetings here, which continued until 1914.

Fredrick Eckhart came to Vernon County in 1862. He shipped the first load of grain out of Viroqua on the Milwaukee Railroad, and opened Viroqua's first tobacco warehouse. In 1917, he purchased the former Methodist camp meeting grounds and gave them to the City of Viroqua for the park which bears his name.

11. Explore the rugged trails on the south side of the park leading to **Courthouse Rock**, the **time capsule**, and the barred entrance to the **old cave**.