



Buckeye State Follies



1 - The Headquarters of the Longaberger Basket Company at Newark, Ohio (from Route 16)

As a practicing architect struggling to work creatively in a corrupt, failing and completely over-regulated planning system, I look with envy at the freedom that my American colleagues enjoy and the imagination that they can introduce to their buildings as a result. That liberty provides energy, excitement and enrichment to America's built environment, and is one of the reasons why I spend so much time there because it constantly reminds me what being an architect should be about.

An example of this freedom emerged when Dave Longaberger was looking for a headquarters for his basket making company, and decided that he would prefer to build one of his own instead of taking a standard office downtown. At first, his architects encouraged a traditional response, but the liberty that people have under the American planning system allowed Dave to tell his architects that "If a company can raise its sales from six to 7.7 million baskets in 25 years, it can jolly well have a headquarters building that looks exactly like the product." It meant that in 1997, Dave was able to officially open his **Longaberger Company Head Office** on East Main Street in Newark.

The architects' (NBBJ of Columbus) had the relatively easy job of scaling up one of the baskets and finding a way of squeezing in a central atrium and the office space that was required. Less easy was the task put to the Columbus firm of Kordal-Nemeth Engineering who had to come up with a way of supporting the 333 ft (101 m) long handles.



2 - The Longaberger Medium Market Basket, costing \$70

They achieved it using 26 galvanised steel boxes at a combined weight of 70 tons, raising the building to a total height of 196 ft (59.8 m) and accounting for \$1-million of the \$30-million project cost.

Put-in-Bay is a tourist town on South Bass Island, set at the Cleveland end of Lake Erie and located close to border with Canada. It has a pleasant downtown area where *the* place to meet and be seen is the **Round House Bar**, circular restaurant with a low-domed roof that resembles one of Mr McDonald's famous buns. The island is also home to the **Perry Victory and International Peace Memorial**.



3 - The Perry Column at Put-in-Bay

At 352 ft (107.2 m) tall, the column honours Master Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry and his defeat of the British Navy in the Battle of Lake Erie on 10 September 1813. Despite its significance at the time, the event was all but forgotten until 1908 when a local hotelier suggested marketing it as a way of drumming up trade. Two years later a multi-state and Federal commission had been set up, funding had been secured, and a national design competition launched.

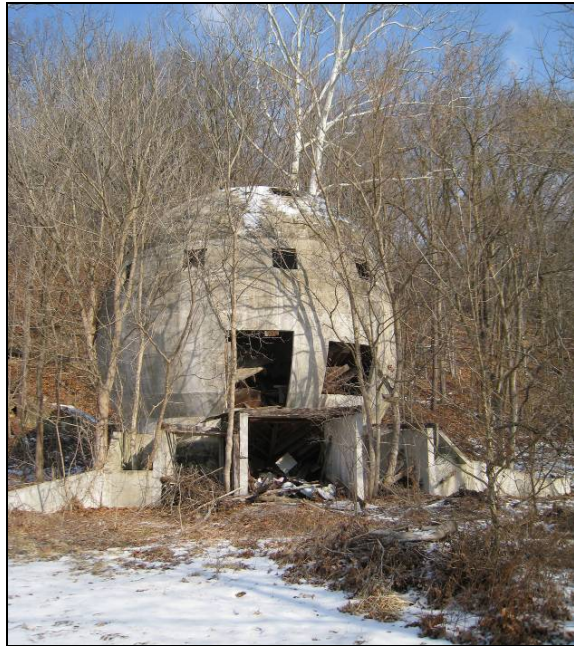
The winning entry was designed by Joseph Freedlander and A. D. Seymour Jr. of New York, who proposed a giant Doric Column built in pink granite. Work began in October 1912, and while a few people were allowed up in June 1915, the park was not finished for another twelve years and not officially dedicated until 1931. Being America there is no point counting the number of steps to the top because visitors ascend by lift to the 45 ft (13.7 m) viewing platform, just below the 23 ft (7 m) high bronze urn.



4 - The viewing platform atop the Perry Monument

Overlooking the world's longest undefended border, the Perry Monument is also a celebration of the long-lasting peace that has existed between Britain, Canada and the United States.

The town of Logan lies off Rt-33, between Lancaster and Athens, and is home to a prototype house known locally as **Stewart's Folly**. In the late 1960's, Mr Stewart was troubled by the number of people losing their homes to hurricanes along the east coast of America, and along 'Tornado Alley,' so he set out to design one that could resist strong winds. He concluded that by avoiding flat surfaces and external corners, wind resistance could be cut to negligible levels and the wind could simply blow past without causing damage. This meant that his new house needed to be spherical in its shape.



5 - Stewart's Folly at Logan

Work on the prototype house began in 1971 using poured concrete panels and Lexan windows (gasket sealed units for cars and boats) to give an improved performance. The interior was shaped by timber floors, walls and linings, and a garage was included in the basement. Not unsurprisingly, the project drew the attention of local people who speculated widely about its cost and nicknamed it "Stewart's Folly," a tribute that remains today. It was finished in 1973, at which time Stewart was offered \$350,000 for the completed building, but he turned it down and never again received such a generous bid.

Stewart's belief in the project continued to his death, but he never saw his idea put to the test. Today, his prototype is looked after by his son, and it survives through Stewart's original warning of '*All trespassers who survive the hazards that other trespassers created will all be prosecuted to the limits of the law.*' This has done little to prevent further damage and the building is now dilapidated and dangerous.

The equally unremarkable town of Nelsonville is a few miles from Logan and boasts that it has the **World's Largest Cross**. Standing at 65 ft (20 m) tall and 25 ft (7.6 m) wide, the white enamel coated steel cross on Kontner's Hill was erected in 1972 by Walter (Bud) Schwartz in memory of his

wife, Betty. Whether it is the largest in the world is doubtful, but at least it is the tallest in Nelsonville and is the town's second biggest attraction after the **Pencil Sharpener Museum** on Carbon Hill.

At Kenyon College in Gambier there is a **Greek Temple** in the woods behind Bexley Hall. It was built in stone with fluted Doric columns by the Beta Alpha Chapter of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity, and dedicated on 9 February 1929. Nearby is a **Gothic Revival Cottage** that was built by the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity in 1855, and is the oldest surviving fraternity building in the United States.



6 - Chateau La Roche at Loveland

The best folly in Ohio is **Chateau La Roche** at Loveland. According to Harry Andrews, who built it, the story began when he was a medic in World War I and saved the life of a young man fighting on the front line in France. That man turned out to be the son of an English Earl who later knighted Harry in gratitude for returning his son to him.

After returning to Cincinnati, Harry set up a group called the Knights of the Golden Trail, and started teaching at a local Sunday school. In 1927 he bought a piece of land by the Little Miami River at Loveland so that boys from his Sunday school class could go there to camp, fish and swim. If they also vowed to live by the Ten Commandments, Harry would make them Knights by dubbing them with a sword, thus building up a loyal following of friends. After a couple of years, the tents were beginning to decay so the Knights collected stones from the river and started to build a castle based on the ones that Harry had seen in France. They also cast concrete blocks in cardboard milk cartons and used them for the internal walls. The result is a huge and impressive castle with a 36 ft (11 m) tall central tower and a series of rooms in which the Knights could meet and stay.



7 - Chateau La Roche, from the south

Harry retired from work and moved into his castle on Memorial Day, 1955. He continued to live there until his death on 16 April 1981, when the castle passed to his Knights, many of which still maintain it in his memory.

A close contender for the title of 'best folly' is **H G Hartman's Rock Garden** at Springfield, which he started when he was laid off work in the Great Depression of 1932. In the beginning, he wanted to build a concrete and pebble fish pond in his Yard, but he liked the finished product so much that he scrounged odd bits of stone from a nearby building site, broke it into small pieces with a hammer, and started to build miniature houses, cathedrals and even a fort with a drawbridge and moat. He added replicas of The White House, the Independence Hall in Philadelphia, a miniature of Mount Vernon (there's another one in the town of Lima) and scenes from the Bible and American history, such as Noah's Ark and Custer's Last Stand; even the bloodiness and futility of war are depicted.



8 - Hartman's Garden on Russell Street, Springfield



It is said that Hartman stopped building in 1939 when he finally got his old job back, and that

after he died in 1944 his widow planted flowers in between the monuments. Today, the garden is still owned and tended by his youngest son.

Most road bridges are dangerous places, so it is surprising that the **Zanesville Bridge** is built in a Y-shape with a junction at the intersection. At the other end, the skylines of American towns are dominated by water towers, some of which are marked or painted in a unique way. For example, the Circleville one is painted to look like a pumpkin,



9 - The Y-bridge at Zanesville

complete with stem. Jackson has a similar one that is painted to look like a giant apple, and others are designed to look like rockets, beach balls and hot air balloons. But, are they follies? Just as arguable is the inclusion of topiary, although since they are the result of sculpture rather than of building, my own belief is that they are not. That said the Town Street gardens in Columbus has an impressive collection of topiary figures that have been trimmed and trained by James T. Mason and based on his interpretation of Georges Seurat's famous painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Isle of La Grande Jatte* (1884).



10 - The topiary figures at Topiary Park, Columbus

When most US Presidents die, their houses are preserved as National Monuments. Not so for Rutherford B. Hayes whose birthplace on E William Street, Delaware was knocked down and replaced by a gas station, much to the annoyance of local people who are proud of the fact that the 19th President of the United States was born in their town, even if he did win the disputed 1876 election by a single vote! "What makes it worse," a local man told me, "is the fact that it's BP Gas Station: a God-damned limey one!" If only he knew that we God-damned limeys had disfigured more of Ohio than this!



11 - The Sham Ruin at Cleveland Botanical Garden

For example, the Somerset-based Redwood Stone Company has built a kitsch **Sham Ruin** in the grounds of the Cleveland Botanical Garden, jumbling together such a wide array of architectural elements that it looks like a wrongly pieced together jigsaw! Their

more accomplished sham ruin stands in a private garden in Cleveland and is used as a **Garden Room** whenever the Ohio weather allows!



12 - The Garden Room at Cleveland (private)

Lastly, Pieter Boogaart enjoys the fact that Shropshire's Ruyton XI Towns is the only place in Britain with a number in its title. America has an equivalent in **Hamilton!** – the only town with an exclamation mark in its official title. It was added in an attempt to be honest about the town's state of decay and in the hope that it might bring new investment and a brighter future. It didn't, so the "!" has now been officially dropped.

Hamilton is where Captain John Symmes is buried. Who? Well, Symmes was the "Originator of the theory of concentric spheres and polar voids," which simply meant that he believed the earth was hollow and its interior could be reached through big holes located beneath the ice at each of the poles. His monument was erected in the 1840s by his son who placed on top of it a granite representation of the hollow earth. Standing on Sycamore Street, the column has been poorly restored in the past with



large areas of cement in place of cut stone, but at least the inscriptions have been carefully copied on new plaques set beneath the worn originals, put there as part of the town's bicentennial project. As if the town was keen to distance itself from the eccentric Symmes, the new plaques state clearly that he was "A native of New Jersey."

This edition of *Foll-e* would not have been possible without the assistance of Jane Ware, whose excellent books *Building Ohio* were constant companions during my travels. Her kindness and generosity in showing me around the Columbus area remains a treasured memory.

Picture credits: Kaboodle (2); www.communitywalk.com (3); Maria Gissendanner (5); Waxinggibbous [Flickr] (6); Wikipedia (7); Verybigjen [Flickr] and Ken Pinkham (8); Allen Huddleston (9); Redwood Stone (11) and (12). Other pictures are by the editor or taken from the Folly Picture Library: our grateful thanks to all of them for the kind and generous free use of their excellent pictures and illustrations.