

# Voices of the Past - Driving Tour of Knox, New York

Knox Historical Society - [www.knoxhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.knoxhistoricalsociety.org)

Listen to Knox citizens of the past tell you about our town's history.

1. 



This tour starts at the **Saddlemire Homestead**, 2190 Berne-Altamont Road (Route 156)

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**Austin Saddlemire, Sr. speaks:** "When William Cray built this house in 1885, the Altamont Enterprise called it 'quite an ornament to the village.' I bought the property in 1915 and raised my family here. Unfortunately, in 1932, a fire took down our barn as well as the church and its buildings next door. Over the years, the farm fell into disrepair. The hip roof was replaced, and the old place changed hands, eventually being purchased by the Town of Knox for a historical museum and a new town hall."

See a timeline of the Saddlemire Homestead on our website - [www.knoxhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.knoxhistoricalsociety.org)

2. 



As you leave the Saddlemire Homestead, turn left onto Route 156.

**Knox Reformed Church**, 2177 Berne-Altamont Road (Route 156)

**Elizabeth Stevens speaks:** "This church was organized as a Presbyterian Church in 1825 and became a Dutch Reformed Church in 1842. I was a member for over 80 years and saw many changes, including building expansion and establishment of Knox Nursery School. I was known for my cooking and baking skills and was happy to work at the Election Day Chicken Dinner, which started in 1917 and continues every November to this day."

The Bicentennial quilt made by the Knox Reformed Church quilters in 1976 is at the Saddlemire Homestead.

3. 



On the left is the former Stevens Gas Station, now a private home.

**Stevens Gas Station**, 2170 Berne-Altamont Road (Route 156).

**Margaret "Si" Stevens speaks:** "My father, Daniel Webster 'Web' Stevens, bought the old blacksmith shop in 1929 and made it into a gas station and ice cream shop--at first selling hand-cranked gas and hand-cranked ice cream. In 1970, I took over the family business, continuing to pump gas for my customers day and night, rain or shine, for more than 30 years. Our porch was a favorite place for friends to eat ice cream and watch the world go by."

Knox Historical Society has Stevens's Mobil sign on display at the Saddlemire Homestead.

4. 



Proceed on Route 156 to the intersection with Knox Cave Road (County Route 252) to the large house next to the church. It's now a private home.

**The Ogden House**, 2157 Berne Altamont Road (Route 156)

**Isaac Ogden speaks:** "This house was built by Andrew Brown (see #19) around 1802. I bought it as a summer home in 1864. I ran a lumber business in New York City and made extensive improvements to the house, including the back addition, three porches, Victorian touches, a dumbwaiter, and black walnut striped flooring. We planted dark pink peonies in the gardens and enjoyed our summers in Knox from 1865 to 1895. Our son inherited the property."

The Ogden house was used as an inn briefly in the 1920s. The present owners enjoy the home's rich history and 150-year-old peonies, and, in case you're wondering, claim the house is NOT haunted.

5.



The next house, now a private home, is directly across the street from the Ogden House.

**Barckley House**, 2158 Berne-Altamont Road (Route 156)



**Magdalene Barckley speaks:** “My husband, Henry, was a farmer and ran a store in this building. Our son Edward, who took over the family businesses, served the town and county in several positions, including Knox postmaster and Albany County treasurer. Our son Michael served as a first lieutenant in Company K of the 7th New York Heavy Artillery during the Civil War. He was wounded at the Battle of Cold Harbor in June 1864, and I went down to Washington DC to care for him in the hospital. Unfortunately, he died of his wounds in July. The saddest time of my life was when I accompanied our son’s body on the train back to Knox for burial.”

Michael Barckley’s letters, photographs, and sword are on display at the Saddlemire Homestead.

6.



Turn left onto Knox Cave Road and continue to the corner of Street Road.

**Frieda Saddlemire Building**, Helderberg Ambulance, Corner of Street Road and Knox Cave Road (County Route 252)



**Frieda Saddlemire speaks:** “I taught generations of young students at Berne-Knox-Westerlo school and enjoyed sharing my love of nature with children at the Heldeberg Workshop. I was the town librarian in Berne for more than 25 years and served as Knox’s town historian for almost 40 years, helping people learn about their roots. I was a long-time member of Knox Historical Society and helped revive the art of making pill boxes for Knox’s Sesquicentennial in 1972. I donated this land to the Helderberg Ambulance.”

See a pen-and-ink drawing of Mrs. Saddlemire in the Pill Box Room and the Sesquicentennial display in the Reading Room at the Saddlemire Homestead.

7.



Continue on Knox Cave Road; after #1015, turn into a small pull-off and gate on the left. Now private property, owned and managed by Northeastern Cave Conservancy. You need a permit to enter the property.

**Knox Cave**, Knox Cave Road (County Route 252).



**D.W. Robinson speaks:** “Knox, on the Helderberg Escarpment, is known for its caves, crevices, and sinkholes. In 1933 I started to put Knox Cave on the map as a tourist destination. I added stairs and lights and gave guided tours. Knox Cave was a very popular spot for two decades, with as many as 1,000 tourists on some weekends. I also built a large indoor roller skating rink aboveground. It was cooled by air blown in from the cave and drew crowds to its events. As Knox Cave’s popularity waned, the area fell into disrepair and is now private property.”

Saddlemire Homestead’s Knox Cave Room has maps, artifacts, and a scale model of the Gun Barrel.

8.



Continue on Knox Cave Road, taking a right onto Middle Road (County Route 262), and continue to where it joins Township Road (Route 146).

**Township Tavern**, 1412 Township Road (Route 146)



**Harry Palombo speaks:** “The old Township Hotel was on the Schoharie Plank Road, a main thoroughfare between Altamont and Schoharie. It was built around 1850 and served as a hotel, tavern, and restaurant for many years. My wife ‘Barney’ and I ran the bar and restaurant for decades and were known for our New Year’s Eve parties. During the Blizzard of 1958, the tavern was a haven for townspeople.”

The large painting on the gable end of the building is a barn quilt showing what the tavern looked like in the late 1800s. Knox Historical Society has maps of Helderberg Quilt Barn Trail.

9. 

Continue east on Route 146 for 1.4 miles, until you come to Sturgess Road. Please stay on Route 146.

**Sturgess Road**, corner of Route 146

**Earl Sturgess speaks:** “We Sturgesses have been in Knox since the 1840s and have always been a little adventurous. My wife and I were charter members of the Helderberg Grange.

My grandfather Charles served in the Civil War with Lt. Michael Barckley (see #5), suffered greatly in a Confederate prison, but returned to the family farm. In 1927 my father, Lewis, and Augustus Williamson bagged a 375-pound black bear in West Township. My dad kept the bearskin and donated the meat for a church supper later that week.”



The bearskin is on display at the Saddlemire Homestead and remains a favorite memory for visitors old and new.

10. 

Continue on Route 146, taking a right onto Lewis Road just after Altamont Spray Welding, and another right at the stop sign onto Berne-Altamont Road (Route 156). Then take a quick left onto Old Stage Road. High Point Cemetery is on your left. OK to park on the shoulder and go in. Watch out for poison ivy.

**High Point Cemetery**, Old Stage Road.

**Malachi Whipple speaks:** “I came to Knox from Connecticut in 1793 and settled on the farm still known as Whipple Farm [on Route 156]. In 1820, my farm took the premium as the model farm in Albany County. The prizes were awarded to me by the real owner of the farm, Patroon Stephen Van Rensselaer III. In 1821 I was a supervisor of Berne, and in 1822 I became a supervisor of Knox without moving an inch--Knox separated from Berne in 1822.”



Research records of all the gravestones in High Point Cemetery in our reading room.

11. 

Continue along Old Stage Road. As you go up the hill and around the curves, you'll see ledges of the Helderberg Escarpment on your left. The Escarpment separates the Hilltowns from the Hudson River Valley to the east. In warmer months, you can take a side tour onto Carrick Road, just after #170, and explore the northern section of Thacher State Park.

**John Boyd Thacher State Park**, Carrick Road. Follow the trail marker to the kiosk.

**Fred Schroeder speaks:** “Look down at the parking lot. See the cracked pavement with grass growing up? That pavement was put here hundreds of millions of years ago and is the surface of the Helderberg Escarpment. I loved the outdoors and shared my enthusiasm with many people. I was an active member of Friends of Thacher Park, and there's a trail here named for me. My wife and I were fortunate to be able to build and endow the Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center here in Knox.”



Get information about trails of Knox on our website - [www.knoxhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.knoxhistoricalsociety.org)

12. 

Continue on Old Stage Road to the stop sign on the left side of the triangle, then drive along Thompsons Lake Road (Route 157), taking a left at Ketcham Road (County Route 256) and stopping at the white one-room schoolhouse on the grounds of Thacher Nature Center. Pull into the small parking area.

**School #5**, Ketcham Road (County Route 256) near Nature Center Way

**Fanny Ellis speaks:** “I was the teacher at this little one-room schoolhouse from 1926 to 1927 and taught all subjects to grades one through eight. We heated the school with a wood stove, had no electricity or running water, and used outhouses out back. I boarded with the Salisbury family down the road.”



School #5 was restored by the Kiwanis Club of the Helderbergs and is the only building in Knox in the National Register of Historic Places. Knox Historical Society has binders of Kiwanis Club history in the Reading Room at the Saddlemire Homestead.

13. 

Drive back along Ketcham Road and take a right on Thompsons Lake Road (Route 157) to the intersection with Berne-Altamont Road (Route 156). Take a left and proceed to Pleasant Valley Road (County Route 254), taking a left. Continue to Barber Family Farm on the right, with a blue-and-white barn quilt on the first barn. This is a private home.



**Barber Family Farm**, 224 Pleasant Valley Road (County Route 254)

**Nicolina Barber speaks:** “My family emigrated from Italy when I was 14. I met my future husband at a square dance in Altamont; we were married for 55 years and raised our sons on the farm. I worked at GE for 44 years and loved to cook, garden, and keep scrapbooks. I was also known for my handmade quilts and was active with the quilters of the Knox Reformed Church for many years.”

Mrs. Barber’s scrapbooks of the Knox Reformed quilters are in our Reading Room. Her handiwork is part of the Bicentennial quilt in the Front Room.

14. 

Continue on **Pleasant Valley Road**, crossing Knox Cave Road. As you go around the curve by Tabor Road, enjoy the beautiful view. Continue to the stop sign and turn right on Berne-Altamont Road (Route 156). Drive to Malachi Farms on your left. This is a private home with a farm stand out front.



**Malachi Farms**, 2548 Berne-Altamont Road (Route 156)

**Clyde Bassler speaks:** “Look at the taller barn behind the farm stand. It’s a New World Dutch Barn. They were built by Dutch and German settlers from the late 1600s through the early 1800s, based on European barns for storing and threshing grain. The Basslers were the original settlers and probably built this barn. My sister and I were the last generation to live here. The will stipulated that the farm would go to whichever of us remained single, so neither of us ever married.”

Get a driving tour of New World Dutch Barns in Knox at the Saddlemire Homestead.

15. 

Continue on Berne-Altamont Road. On the left is the Sand Farm with a brick house, a private home.



**Sand Farm**, 2538 Berne-Altamont Road (Route 156).

**Peter Sand speaks:** “My German grandfather, Christian Zandt, settled here in 1787. We changed the family name to 'Sand.' The original grant was for 500 acres but got divided among family members over the years. Around 1840, we built this brick house, with its beehive oven in the rear, next to the original house, which later burned. My son Sylvester continued to run the farm after me.”

Descendants of Christian Zandt still live at the Sand Farm. In 1989 the farm was recognized by the federal government as having been in the same family since the birth of the US Constitution.

16. 

Continue on Berne-Altamont Road to the top of the hill; directly across from the silo on the right, see a Cape Cod house with a fieldstone chimney. This is a private home.



**Merrymen’s Tea House**, 2286 Berne-Altamont Road (Route 156)

**Merriman Nasholds speaks:** “I lived here and was a wheelwright, making and repairing wagon wheels. The wagons carrying barrels of pill boxes down over the escarpment usually needed repair when they returned to Knox.”

**Lesley Brower speaks:** “In 1927 I bought the house and property that once belonged to Merriman Nasholds because I wanted to open a restaurant. My signs were made from the old wagon wheels, on which I hung small tin ‘merry men.’ With a play on the wheelwright’s first name, I called my restaurant ‘Merrymen’s Tea House.’ I furnished it with antiques and hired local workers. From 1927 until 1941, the restaurant was a popular stopping place for guests from Albany and Schenectady, and our freshly-prepared food won national recognition.”

The tea house later burned to the ground, and this house was built around the fieldstone chimney. Merrymen’s display, including a wagon wheel sign, is in the Reading Room at the Saddlemire Homestead.

17. 

Continue on Berne-Altamont Road, where a historic roadside marker on the right notes a pill box factory. The house at 2229 is now a private home.

**Crary Home and Pill Box Factory**, 2229 Berne-Altamont Road (Route 156)



**Nathan Crary speaks:** “I was born in Connecticut in 1784. My family moved to Knox, which was in the wilderness. After years of toil, people struggled to pay yearly rent to the Patroon, Stephen Van Rensselaer III. When I was 22, I discovered that I could use the local basswood trees to make small pill boxes for sale to pill manufacturers. My brother and I received a patent for pill box manufacture and grew our business here in Knox, employing townspeople. Men worked in small factories (there was one behind this house) splitting the wood into shavings and stamping out the tops and bottoms for the boxes. Women and children worked at home gluing the boxes together. We produced millions of pill boxes and made Knox the ‘Pill Box Capital of the World.’”

Visit the Pill Box Room at the Saddle mire Homstead to learn more about this cottage industry.

18. 

Diagonally across the street is the former Knoxville Academy, now a private home.



**Knoxville Academy**, 2220 Berne-Altamont Road (Route 156)

**Denison Crary speaks:** “I am descended from some of the oldest Knoxville families, the Denisons and the Crarys. I attended Knoxville Academy and later became one of its last trustees. The school was active 1840-1869 and was a highly regarded preparatory school, with students coming from Albany and Schenectady, as well as abroad. The curriculum prepared students for college entrance, as well as professions in teaching and business. The establishment of state normal (teacher) schools contributed to the decline and eventual closing of Knoxville Academy.”

Old records and photos of Knox schools are in the School Room at the Saddle mire Homstead.

19. 

Continue on Berne-Altamont Road to the Old Knox Cemetery on your right. You may park by the Town Hall and go may go inside the cemetery. The fence and maintenance were provided by the descendants of Andrew Brown.



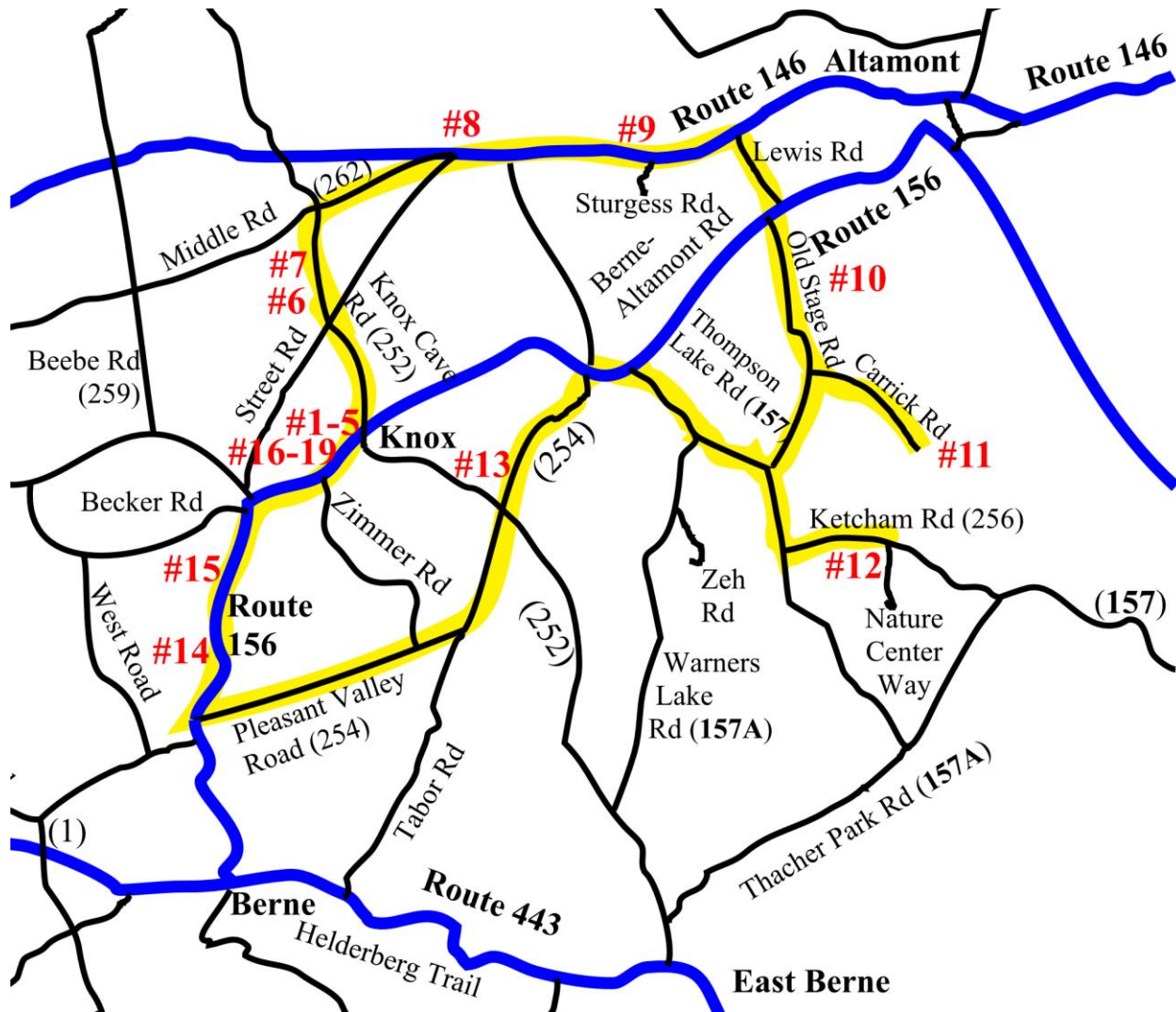
**Old Knox Cemetery**, Berne-Altamont Road (Route 156)

**Andrew Brown speaks:** “I was a Revolutionary War soldier from Connecticut and came to Knox with my wife and family after the war. There were only ten English families here, all in poor circumstances. The thin topsoil over the rocky landscape, unreliable water supply, and harsh winters made farming very difficult. I was somewhat of a speculator, and people used to say that when a man was doing well, ‘he was making money as fast as Andrew Brown.’”

Research our cemetery records in the Reading Room at the Saddle mire Homstead.

**Your tour concludes at the Saddle mire Homstead, where you can see artifacts and records related to the tour.**

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This guide was updated by Jane McLean and John Elberfeld for the Knox Historical Society.