

# Museum shows off quaint, quirky

Town expert hailed for building Ashville pride

By Randy Ludlow  
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

ASHVILLE, Ohio — Charlie Morrison is Ashville's most-accomplished packrat.

If it's old, odd or anything Ashville, no matter how remote the connection, Morrison wants it —

must have it, really — for Ohio's Small-Town Museum.

The Ashville Area Heritage Society museum overflows with an eclectic mix of paraphernalia plucked by Morrison and his band of volunteers.

Exhibits in the former Dreamland Theater feature such folks as Roy Rogers (fired from the local cannery as a young man for singing rather than working) and village native James Hulse, the only

Buckeye Munchkin in *The Wizard of Oz*. There's a World War I German helmet here, a 1920s perm machine for the well-coiffed lady over there and the still-warbling 1902 Edison phonograph by the door.

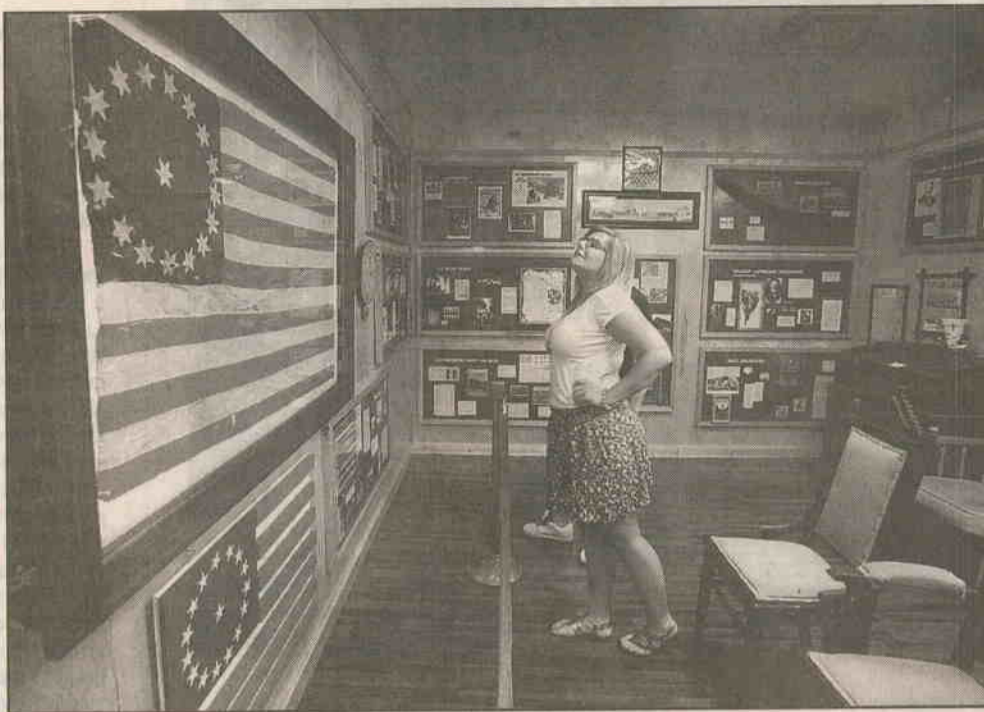
History oozes from every nook of the Long Street building, where the 80-year-old Morrison can be found nearly every weekday telling

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TOM DODGE | DISPATCH

Longtime Ashville leader Charlie Morrison was instrumental in starting Ohio's Small-Town Museum. The pride of its collection is this futuristic-looking traffic light built in the 1930s.



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High-school student Holly Covey is working on a documentary of the Ashville Area Heritage Society, which owns museum treasures such as the flag at left from the early 1800s. The 17th star in the middle represents Ohio.

## ASHVILLE

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tales that might seem tall but that he testifies are true.

Room is running out at the museum and, although there's talk of an eventual expansion, friends are counseling Morrison to be more selective in what he accepts.

"I can't say no," he says. "History is made every day."

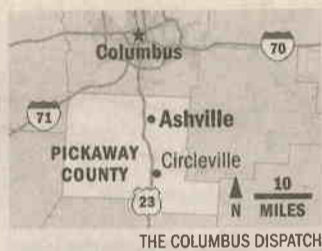
Morrison is known as "Mr. Ashville." He is a former mayor and 37-year council member who still lives in the house on Main Street that he and his wife, Mona, built for \$6,000 back in the '40s. He has worked most of his life to document the Pickaway County village's brushes with fame and save the artifacts glorifying times gone by.

Morrison's passion for all things old and his affection for Ashville, located about 20 miles south of Columbus, led to his induction last month in the Central Ohio Senior Citizens Hall of Fame.

"For some reason, I love to dig into the old past," Morrison said.

The roots of the museum sprouted more than five decades ago in Morrison's Market, a mom-and-pop grocery that Charlie took over from his parents while wondering why he knew so little about his hometown's heritage.

He began to bug customers to bring in old photos so he could use his camera and copy stand to make film slides to document Ashville's past. Memorabilia began to arrive, as well, turning part of the market into a museum.



The Ashville Area Heritage Society was created, and Morrison and others banded together to save the last surviving rail station on the former Scioto Valley Railroad. They moved it to land by the grain elevator and found tickets, coal buckets and lanterns in the attic that kick-started the idea for a true museum.

The society then acquired the Dreamland, a one-time silent-movie theater, and began to display its treasures to the public beginning in 1978.

The museum's signature piece is Ashville native Teddy Boor's unique, still-working 1930s traffic light, likened to a prop from *The Jetsons*, that hung for 50 years at Long and Main streets. A hand sweeps across the red and green lights, telling motorists how long until the lights change.

Morrison and others also tout a treasure unearthed from an Ashville attic and verified as a transitional 17-star U.S. flag with the star for the new state of Ohio in

## ON THE WEB



► To see a video of Charlie Morrison and the museum, go to [Dispatch.com/video](http://Dispatch.com/video).

the center of a circle of 16 stars. It dates perhaps to the time of the War of 1812.

Morrison has traveled to other small towns, urging them to save history so it can be passed down to generations to come.

Dorothy Cormany, 80, the museum's volunteer librarian, marvels at his enthusiasm.

"He has helped so many people. He's in here every day. He can tell you everything there is to know about Ashville. He's saved so much history."

Admiration of Morrison is not restricted to his generation. Ashville Village Councilman Brian Stewart, 28, values Morrison's work in making the town a place with a sense of identity, one firmly tied to its past.

"Charlie and some other folks of his generation have really made sure that Ashville is not just another small town. There's a pride people take in living in Ashville and being part of the community. Unfortunately, that's been lost in some other small towns," Stewart said.

Ashville is, Morrison says, a special place.

"Why do you fall in love with a town like this? It's home."

For information about the museum, visit [www.ohio-smalltownmuseum.org](http://www.ohio-smalltownmuseum.org).  
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