

SCOPING OUT THE TERRITORY

Traversing the Uncharted Wilderness

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Traversing the Western Reserve in 1996 was a far different proposition that it had been at its founding two hundred years earlier. Today one can cruise into Ashtabula County on I-90 from Pennsylvania at sixty miles an hour and barely slow down once before gliding out again in Sandusky, two hours and a hundred and twenty miles to the west. At no point is there much doubt as to your location and your proximity to all the Reserve has to offer, as signs and maps abound to keep you properly oriented.

Contrast that to the plight of David Hudson, who in coming to the Reserve in 1799, spent six hours just trying to find the township line that he could follow to his new lands deep in the wilderness. Because the Connecticut Land Company had distributed the Reserve's lands by lottery, land owners needed to travel to all points in the Reserve from the outset and had precious little to guide them. They followed the southern shore of Lake Erie, the creeks and streams that fed it, the ridges the streams flowed down from, the trails left by native Americans and the roughly hacked traces of the Company's surveying parties, but what they really needed were good maps.

The early maps of the Reserve, published in the final years of the eighteen century and the initial decades of the nineteenth, were the first portrayals of the Reserve available to prospective settlers created by Seth Pease, Abraham Tappan, and Almon Ruggles.