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Marion Voices Folklife + Oral History's



the Marion County
Cultural Heritage
Assets Mapping Project
(CHAMP)

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Marion Voices Folklife + Oral History presents ...

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Cultural Heritage
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🏆 Marion County CHAMP Report: 🏆 Western Marion County

Communities: LaRue, New Bloomington, Green Camp, Morral
For more: marionvoices.org/CHAMP



This report details community feedback, findings, & discussions from our June 8th, 2024 Western Marion County CHAMP Session, held on the grounds of the LaRue Township Building at the Oorang Bang Community Festival, organized by the LaRue Community Alliance. Report findings are ultimately only reflective of the participants at each session; but provide a useful starting place for thinking about future investments in arts, culture, & community in Marion County!

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Marion County CHAMP Report: Western Marion County

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Session Summary & Participants: Western Marion County -- LaRue, Ohio

Our Western Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Session was held in June 2024 in LaRue, Ohio as a part of the Orang Bang Community Festival, held in collaboration with the LaRue Community Alliance. Our small-but-mighty session drew four participants alongside two Marion Voices team members. One participant lives in Marion; two live in New Bloomington, & one lives in Green Camp. All four participants had especially strong ties to Marion County Latine and/or German communities & heritages & languages. Their mapped cultural assets reflect an excitement about new mixtures of culture, community, & language in Western Marion County. Participants highlighted area cultural assets including our natural cultural heritage, indigenous histories & legacies in the area -- & the resurgence of indigenous identity with the migration of indigenous Mayan-speaking peoples from Central America to the New Bloomington area -- & a strong potential for local reinvestment in vacant historic structures of heritage significance.

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Amplifying Marion County's
Heritage and Traditions
For More Just Futures

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Cultural heritage assets mapping projects lead to lists // directories of cultural assets organized by community, as well as lots of good ideas about how to better activate, network, & build on our resources. They often also surface projects & demands for funding: community needs that Marion Voices can bring to municipal, non-profit, & philanthropic leaders as a part of our advocacy efforts to grow arts- & culture-based economies for Marion County.

In short: your ideas & contributions will help us build more just, more abundant futures for everyone in Marion County ... starting with our diverse local heritages! **Let's goooo!**

Cultural Assets Mapping Resources, Thank-Yous, & Citations

We are grateful to a number of municipal, non-profit, & community Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Projects across the country for sharing resources, guides, & materials, which helped our Marion Voices team develop our folklife & cultural arts-based Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project kit, facilitation plan, & materials! We are especially grateful to the City of Austin's Cultural Assets Mapping Project (CAMP) & CAMP Kit, which served as a model for this packet!

Thank you to our funders, the **Ohio Arts Council**, **Ohio Humanities**, **National Endowment for the Arts**, & private Marion Voices donors, for helping to make the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping process possible for Marion County! Additional thanks to the **America-250 Ohio Semiquincentennial Commission** for support for the project's next phase: the North-Central Ohio Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project, helping bridge this work with our regional neighbors!

Project Team -- Credits & Acknowledgements: Jess Lamar Reece Holler -- Project Director, Lead Facilitator & Analyst, Graphic Design; Jeff Nagle -- Maps, Session Notes, Graphic Design, & Research; Johnnie Jackson -- Outreach & Strategic Lead; Danlaly Pavón -- Translation, Interpretation, & Language Justice; CHAMP Community Liaisons -- Irene Tron (Western Marion County), Danlaly Pavón & Evelyn Olivios Lisiecki (Latine Communities); Ms. Linda Sims & Ms. Katie Reese-Hairston (Marion City & Suburbs); Ms. Jessie Thompson (African-American Communities); Shannon Pegg & the Marion Area LGBTQ+ Coalition (Queer/Trans* Communities); April Morrison & Cody Higley (Eastern Marion County); Tim Gorenflo & Susan Ann Rhodes (Southern Marion County).

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Thank you for being CHAMPs for Marion County Culture!



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🏆 What is cultural heritage assets mapping? 🏆

Cultural heritage assets mapping is a tried-&-true participatory process used in communities across the United States & world to guide communities in identifying our cultural, historic, arts, natural, & community resources; & making plans for their protection. Cultural heritage assets mapping projects can surface what we have in our community -- cultural heritage assets. Knowing what we have is the first step in organizing & advocating together to better invest in these resources. Cultural heritage assets mapping can also identify resources we used to have, & lost -- & can lead to important discuss about why those losses occurred, how we can repair them, & how we can build different futures that reflect all histories & meet the needs of all community members. **Our goal is to set a blueprint for our county's cultural futures!**

🏆 What is a cultural heritage asset? 🏆

Cultural heritage assets are resources related to arts, culture, or heritage that are present in our communities & on the landscape. Some cultural heritage assets can be mapped -- physical locations, for example. Others -- what folklorists call "intangible cultural heritages" -- may be connected to a place in a more abstract or general way: like a regional foodways dish that is present across multiple restaurants or dairy bars, or an association (Marion & popcorn; Bucyrus & bratwurst.)

Some general categories of cultural assets we invite you to consider in our Marion County CHAMP process include:

- Organizations
- Performance Venues
- Galleries & Museums
- Foodways Establishments
- Businesses
- Religious Spaces

Tip: See our Marion Voices CHAMP Packet for more details on how to lead your own Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project!

Ultimately, there is no "right or wrong" or when it comes to identifying cultural heritage assets in our communities. You are the expert. If you think a resource is important to your community, say so ... & we'll include it!

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🏆 Historic Context: Western Marion County (LaRue, New Bloomington, Green Camp, Morral) 🏆

Western Marion County, like much of the county, is a region defined by both its natural heritage -- namely, the massive, rare Sandusky Plains prairie formation, & the prairie marshes of today's Kildeer Plains & Big Island Wildlife areas, & the mighty Scioto River and its flood patterns -- and industrialization of that landscape through the rise of the 19th-century railroad industries, the 20th-century construction of the Harding Highway (US-30; now Highway 309) & agriculture. Today's four extant Western Marion County villages also, historically, existed in relationship with a number of now-unincorporated transportation hubs: including Meeker, & the Harding Highway hub of Big Island.

🏆 Cultural Contexts: Western Marion County 🏆

The following major Western Marion County cultural contexts & traditions were identified by participants in the Western Marion County CHAMP session:

- **Multi-traditional Indigenous Heritage** (including Wyandot, Lenape, & Shawnee traditions; the complicated legacy of the Oorang Indians Pro-Football Team in LaRue; & a recent influx of indigenous peoples from Central America)
- **German Communities** (including LaRue Amish communities, & non-Amish German heritage communities, speaking a combination of High German & Platte Deutsch)
- **Latine/Hispanic New Immigrant Communities** (including families from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, & beyond)
- **Religious traditions:** including a strong Catholic tradition, given the region's history of both German & Central American immigration

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🏆 Community Trends: Western Marion County 🏆

Western Marion County CHAMP session participants report similar cultural landscape dynamics as in other Marion County rural communities: an erosion of local identity & sense of place caused by the loss of vibrant downtowns & local establishments -- including not just businesses, but also true community churches and schools -- & a lack of funds on the part of heritage building owners to revive those structures. Participants note the "Dollar General Phenomenon" remedies access needs; but often blocks local commercial resurgence. Unlike Eastern & Southern Marion County, however, participants note that Western Marion County has been blessed by an uptick in population: thanks, in no small part, to recent immigrant & newcomer communities from Central America, who have settled near New Bloomington & LaRue. The community is also defined by its enduring Amish communities & their trades; & German heritage. These cultures & communities intersect & co-habit in Western Marion County in important & exciting ways.



🏆 Cultural Resources: Western Marion County 🏆

Participants named the following cultural heritage assets as important contributors to the cultural ecology & landscape of Western Marion County:

- Harding Highway // Highway 309
- Diverse Cultural Gardening Traditions: German, New Mexican, Central American
- the Tallgrass Trail
- the Sandusky Plains
- Indigenous Heritage & Re-Indigenization
- Small Catholic Churches
- Bars, Karaoke, & Music Venues in the Community
- Language as a Cultural Resource English, Spanish, K'iche', Mam, & Q'anjob'al, & Platte Deutsch
- Western Marion County Cemeteries & Stonemason Traditions
- Festival Traditions -- including Green Camp Hallowe'en with "Firehouse Chili"
- Heritage Businesses, like Ridgway Hatcheries (Geese, Ducks, Chicken) in LaRue
- Heritage Buildings, Storefronts, & Structures, like the LaRue Ice Box

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Amplifying Marion County's (and beyond) traditions & folk arts for more just futures

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🏆 Future Community Cultural Assets 🏆

Speculation, scheming, & dreaming from our CHAMP session on what Western Marion County could use; or ways to creatively re-imagine existing cultural heritage & community resources!



🏆 Cultural Grocery Stores 🏆

With the closure of LaRue's Cash & Carry, Western Marion County lost its last local grocery store & meat market. Latine residents in Western Marion County have to drive to Kenton for a Latine grocery store. Participants shared excitement about support for local entrepreneurs to open a Latine grocery serving Western Marion County.

🏆 Revitalize Existing Spaces 🏆

Residents say that Western Marion County is full of heritage spaces -- like LaRue's Catholic Church, or Big Island's historic Cozy Inn motor court -- that are ripe for reinvestment & new possibilities. Residents also identify many Latine & Amish residents with thriving businesses -- many connected to agriculture, horticulture, & foodways -- who could use new retail spaces!



🏆 Invest in Renewable Energy & Natural Spaces 🏆

Residents of Western Marion County are fired up about renewable energy & natural spaces. They would like to see electric vehicle charging stations available anywhere West of Marion, as well as an extension of the Marion Tallgrass Trail thru Hardin County, and continued investment in Marion County Parks District properties like Myers Woods near Morral.



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Spotlight on Key Community Cultural Assets

Western Marion County CHAMP session participants overwhelming describe these three cultural assets as defining features of their region.



the Sandusky Plains & Indigenous Heritage

Participants recognized Western Marion County's natural heritage -- including the Sandusky Plains open oak prairie formation & marshes -- as a defining cultural heritage feature, alongside the community indigenous heritage: including the complicated legacies of the Oorang Indians football team in LaRue, a team "featuring" (but not owned by) & also sensationalizing & often mocking indigenous peoples..

German & Amish Communities

Participants celebrated the strength of traditional Amish communities in Western Marion County near LaRue, including their agricultural, foodways, entrepreneurial & handcraft traditions & their Platte Deutsch language tradition, as well as the importance of other German heritage traditions in the region. Participants noted the important role Western Marion County's Amish communities play in maintaining agricultural & handcraft traditions, as well as local business.



Latine Communities

Western Marion County has seen a surge in popular from Central & South American newcomers in the past decade -- with more recent newcomers from Guatemala & Honduras. Participants saw Western Marion County's Latine communities -- and diversity of languages, & culture, with multiple indigenous Mayan languages now spoken -- as an exciting & important part of Western Marion County's cultural heritage landscape.



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Discussions & Major Themes: Western Marion County (LaRue, New Bloomington, Morral)

Our four community participants in our Western Marion County CHAMP session were all either immigrants or transplants themselves, or closely tied to immigrant communities, with special interest in education & language diversity: including a Nicaraguan immigrant, a German immigrant & retired K-12 teacher, a person with German heritage who is an ESL teacher for newcomers & immigrants to Marion County in the K-12 schools & in the community, & a gardener from New Mexico who is fluent in both Spanish & ASL. Participants shared excitement about Western Marion County's natural heritages (and especially, Marion County Parks Division's Tallgrass Trail), & the impact of the local Sandusky Plains prairie ecosystem, while also recognizing language as an enormous cultural asset for this part of the county: including the indigenous Mayan languages like K'iche, Mam, & Q'anjob'al spoken by families from Guatemala who have settled new New Bloomington, & the Platte Deutsch language of Amish communities near LaRue. Participants also mourned a general loss of community infrastructure in the region -- including recent losses of local grocery stores, pools, & Catholic Church facilities, & long-time corner stores. Participants unanimously felt the greatest cultural potential in Western Marion County would be connecting Amish & Latine communities: providing opportunities for linguistic & cultural exchange, & providing opportunities for new entrepreneurs through the revitalization & restoration of vacant historic structures.

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Western
Marion County
CHAMP
Session
Participants
Gisela Grant &
Irene Tron
annotate a map
of the Village of
Green Camp with
cultural
traditions,
festivals, &
heritage
locations:
including a
beloved
Hallowe'en //
Chili Festival!



Western
Marion County
CHAMP
Session
Participant &
Project
Translator
Danlaly Pavón
annotates a
map of Marion
County as a
part of a
discussion of
local & Latine
grocery stores
in Marion
County.

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🏆 Key Takeaways: Western Marion County (LaRue, New Bloomington, Morral) 🏆

Here, we summarize key takeaways to each of the eight discussion questions which formed the heart of our Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping session, with participant recommendations for community investment & action.

- **Question 1:** What important cultural, arts, & heritage resources did we used to have in our community; & what happened to them? Participants largely noted the loss of core economic and cultural infrastructure in Western Marion County through school consolidation -- like the closing of LaRue's Elementary School due to flooding -- and the loss of long-time heritage facilities like the Big Island Service Center // Cozy Inn, LaRue's Catholic Church, & Larry & Jean's Steakhouse on 309: a prominent 50s dining institution.
- **Question 2:** What cultural heritage assets in our community are currently threatened; & what would protecting them look like? Participants said that demolition -- not by neglect, but by lack of owner funds -- is a major threat to Western Marion County's built environment; & also enthusiastically noted the opportunity to adaptively reuse existing structures to launch new businesses.
- **Question 3:** What cultural heritage resources or amenities do we not have in our community that other communities do have? What barriers exist to their existence here? What might building them require or look like? Participants unequivocally shared two things: a lack of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations West of Marion City; & a lack of diverse, locally-owned grocery store options. Participants cited the "Dollar General Catch-22," whereby Dollar General stores move into rural communities that have lost their local groceries; but Dollar General's economy-of-scale pricing can make it difficult for new local groceries to then arise.
- **Question 4:** What cultural assets define our sense of place & help make our community & local landscape distinct from other communities? For this question, participants celebrated the Sandusky Plains prairie ecology of the region, the region's strong connection with its indigenous heritages, the region's Amish communities, & the role Latine communities are playing in rebuilding & growing the region: including adding new cultural traditions & needed skills to the community.
- **Question 5:** What cultural assets in our community need to be invested in? What investments are needed? By whom? Participants, here, reflected the need & opportunity for language support in a region of Marion County with so much linguistic diversity: including opportunities to bring Amish & Central American communities together by learning each other's languages.
- **Question 6:** What cultural assets in our community are the "best kept secrets?" Should those assets be amplified? Latine & Amish communities in Western Marion County!

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Recommendations for Cultural Investment: Western Marion County

Based on community Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping, discussion, & recommendations at our CHAMP session, Marion Voices makes the following top three recommendations for investment in the cultural heritage landscape of Western Marion County, with additional recommendations below:

Cultural Heritage Recommendation #1	 Foster Latine-Amish Connections in Western Marion Co. 	
	Description: Connect Central & South American Immigrant & Newcomer & Heritage Amish & German Communities in Western Marion around shared heritage arenas like foodways & agriculture. Provide opportunities for language & culture exchange, and business // entrepreneurial exchange, to foster a more culturally-connected & collaborative landscape	
	Resources or Policy Change Needed: Language Classes; Small Business Training; Forums for Cultural Exchange -- Festivals, Council, etc.	Potential Changemakers: Language Teachers; Entrepreneurs; New or Extant Community Non-Profits

Cultural Heritage Recommendation #2	 Extend the Tallgrass Trail & Invest in Natural Resources 	
	Description: Embrace the legacy and future of the Sandusky Plains Prairie Region by investing in, interpreting, & increasing opportunities for the community to connect to natural resources in Western Marion County; including through increased funding to & expansion of Marion County Parks District's Tallgrass Trail, & investment in other natural resources in the area, like the Kildeer Plains, Big Island Wildlife Area, & Myers Woods near Morral.	
	Resources or Policy Change Needed: Increased funding to parks & natural areas; increased interpretation & awareness of natural cultural heritage	Potential Changemakers: Community Members; Voters; Local Government; Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources

Cultural Heritage Recommendation #3	 Grow Historic Preservation & Community Revitalization 	
	Description: Honor the legacy & invest in the potential of Western Marion County's architectural & business heritage by supporting heritage building owners in historic preservation & restoration of existing spaces, rather than demolition. Focus on adaptive reuse of extant historic structures to provide spaces or incubators for new local businesses, with support for first-time business owners in launching business concepts in adapted historic spaces!	
	Resources or Policy Change Needed: Grants, programs, or strategic investment in historic preservation for legacy owners; small-business development support	Potential Changemakers: County or Local Government; Non-Profits; Colleges; Regional Planning & Land Bank

Additional Recommendations: Western Marion County

- Recommendation #4 -- Transportation History, & Futures:** Embrace transportation history while investing in the green economy -- participants wanted to see electric vehicle charging stations, & also recognition of the history of the Harding Highway (today's 309); an alternative route of the Lincoln Highway.
- Recommendation #5 -- Explore Religious Heritage & Futures:** Participants noted the enormous impact of LaRue's now-shuttered Catholic Church, St. Joseph, & parish priest, Father Joseph Losch; & traditions of other religious communities.
- Recommendation #6 -- Celebrate Re-Indigenization of Western Marion County:** Participants were excited to connect the region's rich indigenous heritage with new indigenous traditions brought by Central Americans relocating to the area!

the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project (CHAMP)



Marion County CHAMP Report: Western Marion County

For more information or to get involved: marionvoices.org/CHAMP

This report details community feedback, findings, & discussions from our June 8th, 2024 Western Marion County CHAMP Session, held on the grounds of the LaRue Township Building at the Oorang Bang. Report findings are ultimately reflective of the participants at each session; but provide a useful starting place for thinking about future investments in arts, culture, & community in each geographic or identity community!

Thank you to all who participated in the Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping process!



Western Marion County CHAMP Session Participants
Denise Falzone, Danlally Pavón, Irene Tron, & Gisela Grant discuss the New Mexico Hatch Chile Pepper tradition that Denise & her husband brought to New Bloomington from their former home in New Mexico.

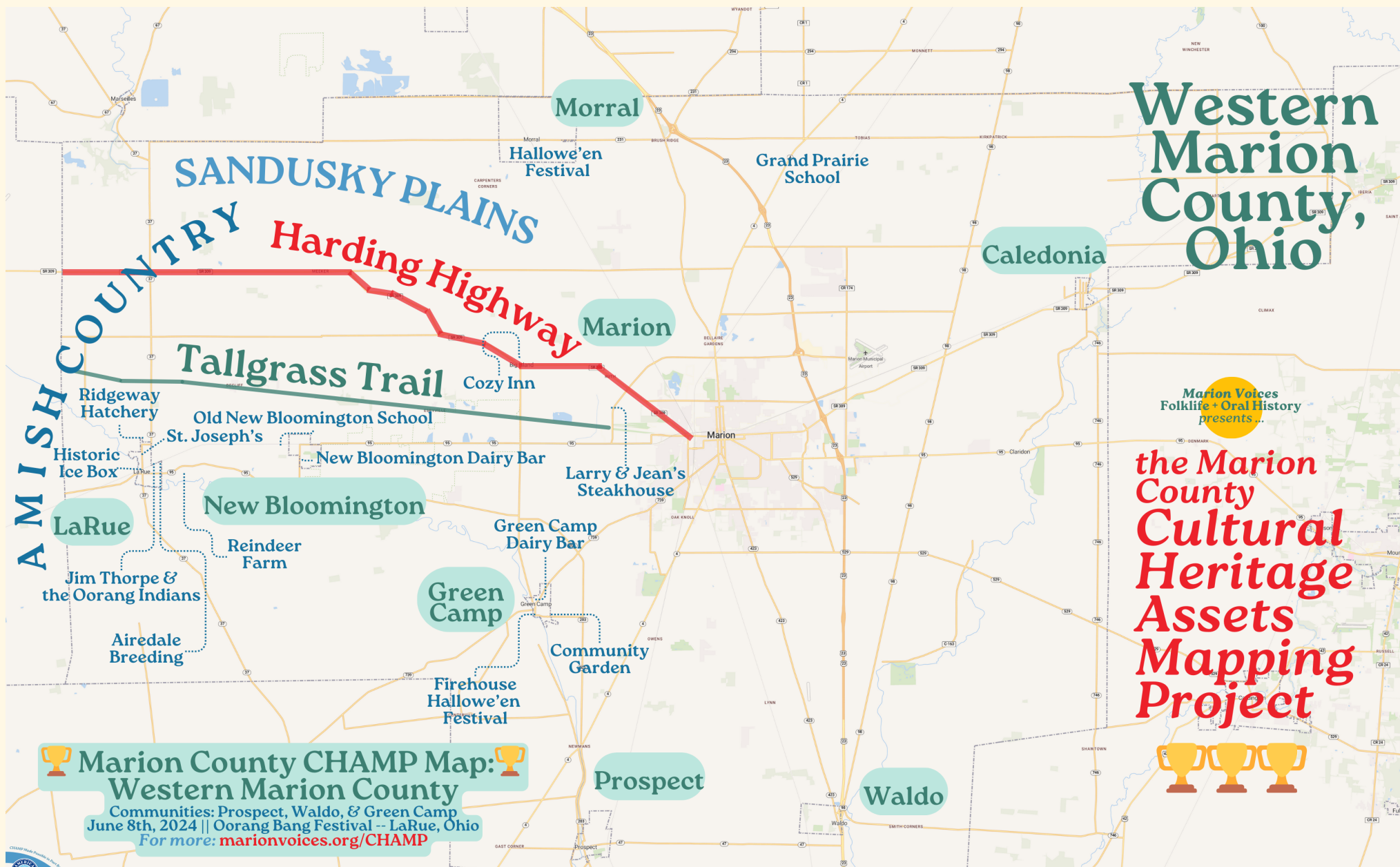
Western Marion County CHAMP Session Participant Irene Tron adds Marion County Parks District's Tallgrass Trail to a map of cultural assets in Western Marion County, with her dream of extending the trail to Kenton in Harding County with a coalition of intra-county support & advocacy.



Marion Voices Folklife + Oral History presents ...

Marion County CHAMP Map: Western Marion County

For more information or to get involved: marionvoices.org/CHAMP



About Marion Voices Folklife + Oral History:

North-Central Ohio's Folklife, Cultural Arts, & Heritage Non-Profit

Champions of Arts, Culture, & Heritage-Based Economic Development for North-Central Ohio!

Founded in 2017, Marion Voices amplifies the diverse cultural heritages & traditional arts forms of Marion County & North-Central Ohio to build more just, more abundant futures for everyone: connecting communities & building solidarities across difference, growing arts-based economies, & nourishing pride-in-place in North-Central Ohio. Our core programs include exhibits, festivals, historic preservation, & advocacy & training for regional artists through paid performance opportunities, a folk arts apprenticeship program, & our popular Marion Voices in the Schools K-12 arts residency program: bringing community cultural artists across genres into our local schools. Our Marion County Cultural Heritage Assets Mapping Project (CHAMP) takes us back to our roots: partnering directly with communities across Marion County to survey our cultural, arts, & heritage resources, share stories, & collectively imagine more just, more abundant futures for all. In late Summer/Fall 2024, we're excited to take this work regional with the launch of our North-Central Ohio CHAMP process & a new folklife survey in twelve neighboring North-Central Ohio counties. Join us!