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The Tale of a Trail: Material Culture along Ridge Road

An ancient east-west route across western New York State acquired commercial importance in the westward expansion of the early nineteenth century. A combination of physiogeographic features and early immigrant life created a strip of material culture whose remnants can be seen today. A drive along Highway 104, Ridge Road's latest incarnation, reveals early burial grounds, old orchards, cobblestone houses, one-and-a-half cottages in the Greek Revival style, and rectangular barn doors painted to look like arches—but no log homes survive.

Ridge Road trail now Highway 104

What is today Highway 104 began as a trail on high ground through swampy land and became a well-traveled route in the nineteenth century, as settlers followed the pioneers into the Midwest and beyond.

Cemeteries on Ridge Road

Many cemeteries can be found along Ridge Road, or close to it. The sandy soil was easy to dig, and the number of travelers and canal workers created local demand. Cemetery records from Gaines indicate that most early settlers came from the east, especially New England.

Cemeteries on Ridge Road

Orchards on Ridge Road Trail

Apple orchardists took advantage of the good drainage on the ridge; many of the old trees are still standing.

Cobblestone House

Cobblestone structures were popular along Ridge Road at least among those who could afford to build them. Erie Canal stone masons supplied the skilled labor. The map plots their incidence along Ridge Road.

Cobblestone houses on Ridge Road Trail

One-and-one-half cottage

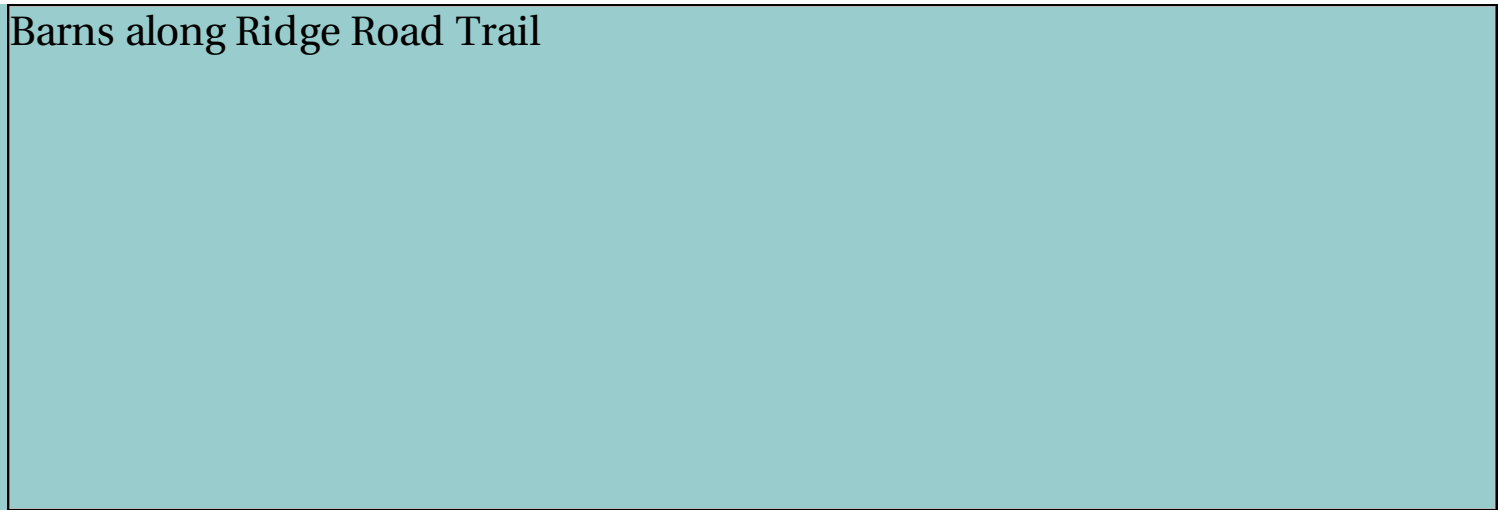
The "one-and-a-half" cottage was a New England house type built mostly in the Greek Revival style with half-windows just above the floor on the second level. As settlers came west in the 1830s, they brought this style of farmhouse with them and built many such structures along Ridge Road.

Greek revival houses on Ridge Road

Wood-frame barn

Wood-frame barns with painted-arch doors are fairly common on Ridge Road, as shown in the map below. The decorative idea apparently began in New York's central valleys and spread west into Ohio.

Barns along Ridge Road Trail



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