MIDDLE BASS ISLAND

TOUR 7
Wine and Peace
(7.9 miles)

1. The Lonz Winery
2. The August Schmidt House
3. The Middle Bass School
4. The Middle Bass Town Hall
5. The Middle Bass Cemetery
6. The Helse Farmhouse
7. The Gemelch House
8. The George High House
9. The John Lutz House
10. The East Point Manor
11. The Siegrist-Lonz Farm and Winery
12. The Charles Schneider House
13. The Bretz Winery
14. The Middle Bass Club
TOUR SEVEN
Wine and Peace
(7.9 MILES)

The history of Middle Bass Island mirrors that of South Bass. Both had almost identical beginnings with Alfred Pierpont Edwards selling the land to José de Rivera. The latter owned Middle Bass until the late 1850s when he sold the island, except for the eastern point, to three German immigrants—Andrew Wehrle, William Rehberg, and Joseph Miller (Mueller in German)—and to George Caldwell of New Hampshire. The island had already been logged by its previous owners, who had sold the wood for steamboat fuel, and these four new settlers established vineyards on the cleared land. In 1863, the eastern section of the island was sold by de Rivera to John Lutz (or Lutes), who also planted grapes. Today, Middle Bass Island is noted for its tranquillity and for its wineries. The island architecture reflects a mixture of designs unlike any of those found on the other islands, and residences range from simple farmhouses, to clusters of ornate cottages, to a Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired mansion.

1. The Lonz Winery. Our Middle Bass tour begins at the southern tip of the island, just west of the ferry docks, at the Lonz Winery. The present structure is built on top of the hewn-limestone wine cellar established about 1870 by island pioneer Andrew Wehrle. Wehrle’s company, the Golden Eagle Winery, once claimed to be the largest producer of wine in the nation. The original vaulted Golden Eagle cellars are still used by the Lonz Winery; entered through a massive round-arched entrance, the ancient cellar is open for public tours. In 1871 Wehrle built a huge frame pavilion above his winery; it burned in 1923, along with an adjacent hotel that had been built in 1906 when the winery was operated by August Schmidt. Most of the buildings surrounding the winery were built by Wehrle to house workers.
Golden Eagle Wine Cellars, 1874. The Lonz Winery (pictured below) now occupies this site.

The present building was constructed by George F. Lonz, who merged the wine-making enterprises of his father Peter with the Wehrle-Schmidt operations and founded the Lonz Winery. The public wine-tasting rooms and production areas, as well as the structure’s castlelike exterior, are the result of the creative imaginations of George Lonz and his builder, Henry Blocker. The winery’s unique tower once served as a Lonz family observatory. George Lonz died in 1968. But Meier’s Wine Cellars, the current owner, has begun a complete restoration that includes a replanting of the vineyards. Paramount Distilleries, based in Cleveland, purchased Meier’s Wine Cellars, based in Cincinnati, in 1976 and
Lonz Winery, based on the islands, in 1981. Lonz Winery is open from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. from Memorial Day to Labor Day, then on weekends through September. Other island-area wineries owned by Paramount Distilleries include Firelands Wine Cellars, Sandusky, and Mon Ami Wine Cellars, Catawba Island.

Wine cellars at the Lonz Winery

Interior view of restaurant/bar at the Lonz Winery
2. **The August Schmidt House.** Located just east of the Lonz Winery is the residence built by August Schmidt about 1906. It became the home of George F. Lonz in 1926; he lived here until his death in 1968. The building is a late Queen Anne dwelling and features a broad porch, a corner tower, and a Shingle Style roofline.

3. **The Middle Bass School.** Following Fox Road north to Runkle Road, we see at the very center of the island the Middle Bass School, Town Hall, and cemetery. The one-room schoolhouse, one of only a few in the state still in use as an elementary school, is an excellent example of the Gothic Revival style mixed with Eastlake elements. The cupola and weathervane that top the roof make this an easily identifiable island landmark; the steep gable’s decorative woodwork is a testament to the skill of its Victorian-era carpenters.

4. **The Middle Bass Town Hall.** Across Runkle Road is the building that was constructed by South Bass contractor George Gascoyne in 1877 for $1,875. Now minus its wooden cupola, the Town Hall remains the center of Middle Bass’s community activities. With its long windows and decorative window moldings, the structure is another adaptation of Italianate architecture.
5. The Middle Bass Cemetery. Directly behind the schoolhouse is the cemetery that has served the island more than one hundred years. Many ornate stone monuments may be seen here. Especially worth noting is the elaborate stone-carved Gothic mausoleum of German vintner and island pioneer William Rehberg.

6. The Heise Farmhouse. Across Fox Road from the Middle Bass School and Town Hall is the farmhouse constructed about 1860 for the Schleuse family. Greek Revival and L-shaped in design, it still looks much the same as it did when it was constructed over one hundred twenty years ago.
7. The Gemelch House. At the end of Fox Road is one of the few brick homes seen in the islands. Anton Fisher, another German vintner, erected this remote island residence after purchasing the land from pioneer George Caldwell in 1874. The home is a fine example of Italianate architecture, with its bracketed cornices and stone door and window moldings. It also sported a decorative front porch that fell into decay and was removed during a recent renovation.

8. The George High House. Directly across Fox Road stands a frame dwelling that is similar in proportions to the brick Gemelch House. This was the home of grape growers George and Anna High, who arrived at Middle Bass in 1870. The Greek Revival structure features a doorway flanked by sidelights, and the home has typical multipaned Greek Revival windows that are framed by their original shutters.

9. The John Lutz House (also known as the Erie House). Heading back along Fox Road, we turn left at Deist Road and follow it to secluded East Point, the area settled by the grape-growing Lutz (or Lutes) family. With its shorefront location, the Lutz House commands an outstanding view of the lake. The dwelling was built about 1863 and is of Italianate design with narrow windows and decorative roof brackets. Several of the homes surrounding this one were built for the Lutz children as they married.
10. The East Point Manor. At the very tip of East Point, this rambling modern stone residence was built about 1925 and modeled after designs made famous by contemporary Chicago architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The unique home was a summer retreat for Harry F. Payer, a prominent Cleveland attorney who later served as assistant U.S. secretary of state. Payer’s hundred-acre estate included a golf course, stables, an air strip, and a game preserve. The former stables and wrought-iron fencing that served as entrance gates can be seen near the approach to the manor.

11. The Siegrist-Lonz Farm and Winery. We return to the intersection of Fox and Runkle Roads, where the Middle Bass School and Town Hall stand, and head east on Runkle Road, stopping at the first cluster of buildings on the south side. The simple, frame farmhouse was built about 1866 by vintner John Siegrist. In 1893, he passed the property to his daughter Cora, who was the wife of Peter Lonz, father of George Lonz and founder of the Lonz Winery. Thus this farm was the original Lonz wine-making operation; its unusual square brick wine press stands behind the main house. Today the farm is owned by Meier’s Wine Cellars, which plans to renovate the buildings.

The Lutz House
12. The Charles Schneider House. Across from the Siegrist-Lonz farm is the homestead of yet another early islander, Charles Schneider. The dwelling was built about 1870 and served as the Middle Bass Post Office when Schneider’s daughter-in-law Thelma lived here. The stylish brackets supporting the eaves identify the style as Italianate.

13. The Bretz Winery. After traveling farther east on Runkle Road and passing the former Bretz family homesteads, we turn north on a winding road and travel through a densely shaded thicket. Near the end of this road stands the winery founded in 1867 by German pioneer Joseph Mueller, one of the original vintners who purchased Middle Bass land from de Rivera. Mueller’s grandson, Leslie Bretz, continued wine making in this century until his death in 1985; now his sons operate the winery and produce six kinds of still wines and three sparkling champagnes. The winery is an interesting combination of old and new buildings; its older structures include a board-and-batten press house among their architectural designs. It has not been open to the public since the death of Mr. Bretz.

14. The Middle Bass Club. Backtracking along Runkle, we head north on Fox Road, then west on Lonz Road until it ends. Here, lining two rustic lanes called Grape and Grove avenues, the re-

East Point Manor
markable collection of summer cottages known as the Middle Bass Club is seen. The club was founded in 1874 by a number of influential Toledo businessmen; what began as a private vacation community developed into an exclusive summer resort for the social elite of Toledo, Louisville, Columbus, and Dayton. Island pioneer William Rehberg began selling land to the city dwellers in 1874. By 1876, there were seven cottages and a club house; by 1880, there were twenty cottages and more than two hundred members. In 1882, a new club house was built, designed by Toledo architect E. O. Fallis, who also designed South Bass’s monumental Hotel Victory. None of the cottages had kitchens, as meals were taken in the breezy club house. By 1894, the Middle Bass Club included a long dock, boat and bath houses, a laundry, a waterworks, a chapel, and an ice house. The three-story club house was of Eastlake architectural style and stood near the point’s southern shore, between Grove Avenue and Lake Erie. Members of the club boasted that four American presidents—Benjamin Harrison, Grover Cleveland, Rutherford B. Hayes, and William Howard Taft—were guests there during their terms in office.

The club house was demolished in 1949, and fire has destroyed some of the cottages over the years, but the resort community in its tranquil, parklike setting still features many fascinating examples of cottage architecture. Included here are Italianate, Gothic, Eastlake, Queen Anne, and Shingle designs, although the mansard roof and dormers of the Second French

George Bretz in front of the Bretz Winery
Empire style dominate the group. Of particular interest are the following three buildings:

A. The Queen Anne-style cottage at the north end of Grape Avenue. Noted for its bulbous porch posts, this structure is likely the work of E. O. Fallis, the designer of the Middle Bass Club and the Hotel Victory.

B. The “Doll House”-type cottage at the end of Grove Avenue. This dwelling combines Second French Empire and Italianate styles; it was built about 1880.

C. The Second French Empire cottage facing Grove Avenue. It features an interesting mansard roof, wide wrap-around verandas, and rounded wall dormer windows.

Grape Avenue, 1895