



**Name of Property:** Zoar Historic District  
**City, State:** Zoar, Ohio  
**Period of Significance:** 1817-1898  
**NHL Criteria:** 1 and 5  
**NHL Criterion Exceptions:** 1 and 6  
**NHL Theme:** II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements  
2. Reform movements  
III. Expressing Cultural Values  
5. Architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design  
**Previous Recognition:** 1969 National Register of Historic Places; 1975, boundary increase; 2013, amended to national level of significance  
**National Historic Context:** XXXI. Social and Humanitarian Movements  
A. Communitarianism and Utopianism

**NHL Significance:**

- Zoar was the only permanent home of the Society of Separatists in the United States, and clearly conveys the founding, successful development, and eventual dissolution of the Society of Separatists, a nationally significant communal utopian society based in one location. The Zoar Historic District expands the understanding of communal utopian societies in nineteenth-century America.
- The Zoar Historic District represents a significant, distinctive, and exceptional entity that embodies and reflects the traditional landscape design, architecture, and way of life inherent in the Society of Separatist’s world view and beliefs. This includes the



landscape and setting, as well as the intact nineteenth-century buildings, many of which reflect medieval building traditions transplanted by its German-American settlers as well as the German customs, traditions, and religious beliefs of the community.

- Zoar also provides important insights into nineteenth-century religious and secular communal societies' varying attitudes toward gender equality, and the role of women within the social and economic organization of these communities.

**Integrity:**

- Zoar's ability to convey its unique history is enhanced by the retention of its rural setting, distinctive architecture, and key landscape features. These physical features provide one of the best understandings of the Society of Separatist's world view as reflected through the built environment. The intact rural setting provides a visual reminder of the agrarian and rural industrial economy as it developed at Zoar, while specific properties within this landscape, such as the Garden of Happiness, represent the physical manifestation of the Zoarites' faith.
- In 1938, the US Army Corps of Engineers constructed an earthen levee on the western and southern edges of the village as flood protection. The levee was raised to forty-five feet in 1950. The south side of the village, where the railroad was re-routed, several buildings demolished, and two roads raised to cross the levee, was the most impacted.
- Zoar retains an exceptional degree of historic integrity as a small village that is primarily residential in character and set in a rural agricultural landscape. Most individual historic buildings remain, with historic character-defining features, materials, and details intact. Very few have been demolished or been subjected to extensive modifications or alterations. Importantly, the civic buildings and spaces which convey a sense of the communal aspect of the Society are intact. The original street grid remains, and the sense of place within the village, defined by small-scale buildings generally set back from the streets with open lawns and few sidewalks, remains. The sense of the village as a distinct entity with defined boundaries and visual gateways has retained its integrity both within the confines of the village, as well as in its external rural agricultural setting. Open fields remain to the north of the community, while woods and open fields abut the village at the eastern edge.
- Three buildings within this district were reconstructed by the Ohio History Connection in the early 1970s. Because these reconstructions were based on strong research and were built on the same site as the originals, and because they are essential components in the historic district, NHL Criteria Exception 6 (reconstructions) applies.

**Owner of Property:** Multiple (local government, private, several of the main historic properties are historic sites owned by the Ohio History Connection [formerly the Ohio Historical Society] or the Zoar Community Association).

**Acreage of Property:** 208 acres

**Origins of Nomination:** Local interest in NHL designation was prompted by a proposed Army Corps of Engineers project to repair/replace the levy. The Corps initial study included options

such as flooding or relocating the village. A consultant was funded in part by the Zoar Community Association along with the Ohio History Connection and State Historic Preservation Office to write the NHL nomination.

**Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:**

- NHL designation will bring attention to this equally significant utopian community and provide interest in its preservation.

**Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** None known.

**Landmarks Committee Comments:**

**Landmarks Committee Recommendation:** Designation. Dr. Stevens moved, Dr. Chen seconded; unanimous approval.

**Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of 11/18/15):**

Thomas W. Strickling, Heritage Home Association of Tuscarawas County, Ohio  
Rick and Diane Geis, The Treasurer's House, Zoar, Ohio (owner)  
Kim Jurkovic, Curator, Tuscarawas County Historical Society, New Philadelphia, Ohio  
Daniel M. Rice, President and Chief Executive Officer, Ohio & Erie Canalway Coalition, Akron, Ohio  
Eleanor J. Sullivan, PhD, Author of the Singular Village Mysteries, St. Louis, Missouri  
Zachary T. Space, Vorys Advisors, Columbus, Ohio  
Belle Everett, Kerry Metzger, Chris Abbuhl, Tuscarawas County Commissioners, New Philadelphia, Ohio  
Al Landis, State Representative, 98th Ohio District, Columbus, Ohio  
Dennis P. Saunier, President & CEO, Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce, Canton, Ohio  
Scott Robinson, President/CEO, Tuscarawas Chamber of Commerce, New Philadelphia, Ohio  
Franklin Price, Vice President, Zoar Community Association, New Philadelphia, Ohio  
Jennifer Sandy, Senior Field Officer, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Chicago, Illinois  
Joyce Barrett, Executive Director, Heritage Ohio, Columbus, Ohio  
Jon T. Elsasser, President, Zoar Community Association, Zoar, Ohio  
Amanda Terrell, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Ohio History Connection, Columbus, Ohio  
Scott and Marilyn Gordon  
Kathleen M. Fernandez, North Canton, Ohio  
Ann Eberly Calvert  
The Honorable Bob Gibbs, Ohio 7th District, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC  
Roxanne R. Kane, P.E., Resident, Bolivar, Ohio  
The Honorable Rob Portman, United States Senator, Washington, DC  
The Honorable Scott C. Gordon, Mayor of the Village of Zoar, Ohio (resolution supporting designation of Zoar Historic District, 2015-19, passed 11/10/2015)  
Burt Logan, Executive Director & CEO, Ohio History Connection, Columbus, Ohio  
Chuck Knaack, Director of Zoar Museums, Zoar Community Association, Zoar, Ohio

**Advisory Board Recommendation:**