

U.S. Route 6 (Iowa) East-to-West Travel Guide

Wilton – Walkable Historic Downtown

Type: Historic Landmark / Walkable Town

Wilton's small downtown is steeped in history. Its jewel is the **Wilton Candy Kitchen**, the world's oldest continuously operating ice cream parlor and soda fountain (est. 1860) visitmuscatine.com. Housed in an 1850s building (the oldest in town), this soda fountain still serves up sweet treats amid Victorian-era décor. The surrounding **Wilton Commercial Historic District** features brick storefronts and vintage signage, offering a charming glimpse of 19th-century Iowa small-town life. A blue historical plaque marks the Candy Kitchen's significance, and nearby you'll find an old train depot that recalls Wilton's railroad heritage.

Address: 310 Cedar Street, Wilton, IA (Wilton Candy Kitchen) visitmuscatine.com

Suggested Walk: Park along Cedar Street and start at the Candy Kitchen. After an ice cream or quick peek inside, stroll north on Cedar Street to admire other century-old buildings in the two-block historic district. Loop around the block to see the restored Wilton Depot and historical plaques, then return to Cedar Street. This short walk (about 4 blocks round-trip) lets you soak in Wilton's quaint, *frozen-in-time* atmosphere.

West Liberty – Heritage Depot Museum

Type: Historic Landmark / Museum

West Liberty offers a walk into the past at its **Heritage Depot Museum**, set in the town's 1897 Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad depot muscatinecountyiowa.gov. The restored depot houses local historical exhibits and railroad artifacts, highlighting West Liberty's importance as a rail junction. Outside, the small **Heritage Park** includes a preserved one-room country school and the recently relocated 1840s stagecoach inn, which together create a little historic village ambiance thegazette.com. West Liberty's Main Street, just a block away, retains late-1800s storefronts worth a peek, reflecting a classic Iowa farm town center.

Address: 405 N. Elm Street, West Liberty, IA (Heritage Depot Museum) westlibertyiowa.com

Suggested Walk: Begin at the Depot Museum on N. Elm and explore its displays (check if open). From the depot, walk one block south to historic **3rd Street** (US 6's old alignment) to see brick commercial buildings. Stroll east along 3rd Street for two blocks, then loop back, passing the Victorian storefronts and the town gazebo. This 3-4 block walking route covers the core sights – the depot, Heritage Park, and Main Street architecture – all within West Liberty's easily walkable downtown.

Homestead (Amana Colonies) – Historic Colony Village

Type: Historic Landmark / Scenic Village

As Route 6 skirts the Amana Colonies, it passes directly through **Homestead**, one of the seven communal Amana villages. Homestead was founded in 1861 as the Amana Society's connection to the railroad socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu, and today it feels like a 19th-century German village frozen in time. Along the highway, you'll see original colony structures: sturdy brick workshops, communal kitchens, and barns with star motifs. Informational signs describe Amana communal life and how Homestead served as the “**gateway**” to the colonies. While many Amana Colony attractions lie a few miles off Route 6, Homestead itself gives travelers a scenic glimpse of this National Historic Landmark community amanacolony.com without leaving the highway.

Address: Intersection of U.S. 6 and U.S. 151, Homestead, IA (village center) en.wikipedia.org

Suggested Walk: Park near the Amana Society agricultural store at the junction of US 6 and 151. Walk along Main Street (old Route 6) for two blocks, passing the old **Homestead General Store** and a historic **Amana barn**. Turn around near the 1860s **Homestead Church** and return. This short stroll (0.25 miles) lets you admire the simple brick architecture and perhaps peek into the General Store, experiencing the quiet charm of an Amana village.

Grinnell – Historic Downtown & Sullivan Bank

Type: Walkable Town / Historic Landmark

Grinnell is a vibrant college town whose downtown is rich with turn-of-the-century architecture. The star attraction is the **Merchants' National Bank** (1914), a National Historic Landmark designed by legendary architect Louis Sullivan grinnelliowa.gov. This “Jewel Box” bank features an ornate façade with a large stained-glass oculus window and intricate terra cotta designs homepages.bluffton.edu. Today it serves as Grinnell's visitor center, allowing a peek inside at the colorful interior. Around the bank, the commercial blocks along 4th and Main Streets showcase classic brick buildings, including the 1890s **Hotel Monroe** and a vintage theater marquee. Grinnell's history is also preserved at the **Grinnell Historical Museum** (in an 1860s Italianate villa a few blocks from downtown), but the core downtown itself feels like an open-air museum of Iowa architecture and culture.

The ornate stained-glass rose window and terra cotta details of Louis Sullivan's Merchants' National Bank (1914) in downtown Grinnell grinnelliowa.gov homepages.bluffton.edu.

Address: 833 4th Avenue, Grinnell, IA (Merchants' National Bank building)
homepages.bluffton.edu

Suggested Walk: Start at the Sullivan Bank on 4th & Broad. Take a moment to step inside and view its gilded interior. Continue west on 4th Avenue one block, then turn right on Main Street to see the historic **Hotel Monroe** and storefronts. Walk two blocks north on Main to 6th Avenue (which is Route 6) and turn right, passing the landmark **Strand Theater** and other

1900s-era buildings. Conclude at **Central Park** on 4th & Broad, where you began. This 5-6 block loop highlights Grinnell's architectural gems and local shops clustered in a very walkable downtown.

Brooklyn – “Community of Flags” Historic District

Type: Walkable Town / Historic Landmarks

Brooklyn proudly bills itself as “*Iowa’s Community of Flags*,” and travelers on Route 6 will spot its year-round **Flag Display** from afar. An 80-foot pole flies a gigantic U.S. flag, surrounded by the 50 state flags and military branch flags, all arrayed in a plaza that lights up at night traveliowa.com. Just behind the fluttering flags stands Brooklyn’s red-brick **St. Patrick’s Church**, creating a picturesque scene. Adjacent to the flags is the 1869 **William Manatt House**, now the Brooklyn Historical Museum, which showcases local history. Another must-see is the restored **1930s Standard Oil gas station** on Jackson Street – it still provides full service, complete with retro pumps and a smiling attendant, as if you’ve driven back in time traveliowa.com. The **Brooklyn Opera House** on Front Street (recently renovated) is another pride of the town, hosting performances as it did a century ago. Brooklyn’s compact center offers an Americana tableau that is both unique and patriotic.

Brooklyn’s famous year-round Flag Display, featuring all 50 state flags, lines the Route 6 corridor through town traveliowa.com.

Address: 302 Jackson Street, Brooklyn, IA (Flag Display plaza) southeastiowaunion.com
traveliowa.com

Suggested Walk: Park near the big flagpole on Jackson Street. Wander through the Flag Display plaza, reading the plaques explaining Brooklyn’s “Community of Flags” project. From there, walk half a block south to the **Brooklyn Historical Museum** (Manatt House) at 207 Jackson – if open, step inside to see local memorabilia. Continue one block east to Woodlawn Avenue to admire the classic **Brooklyn Opera House** facade. Then loop back west toward your car, detouring to the old Standard station at Jackson & 3rd. This easy 3-block circuit covers the flags, museum, and historic downtown buildings all within a close radius.

Colfax – Mineral Springs Historic Museum

Type: Museum / Walkable Town

In the early 1900s, Colfax was a booming health resort destination, famed for its mineral spring water and sanitariums. Today, the **Colfax Historical Society Museum** preserves that legacy. Housed in a brick building near downtown, the museum contains artifacts from Colfax’s “Spring City” heyday – from antique mineral water bottles and spa equipment to Victorian-era hotel memorabilia traveliowa.com. Exhibits explain how thousands flocked to Colfax for healing waters circa 1900. Outside the museum, Colfax’s small downtown along Walnut Street features a few turn-of-the-century buildings (like the 1894 **Hotel Colfax** building, now apartments) and a painted mural celebrating the springs. Just west of

downtown, you can spot the fenced-off remains of a concrete spring well and a historic marker at Mineral Springs Park, indicating where visitors once “took the waters.”

Address: 500 N. Walnut Street, Colfax, IA (Colfax Historical Society Museum) traveliowa.com

Suggested Walk: Begin at the Museum on Walnut & Division – after touring its displays, walk south on Walnut Street into downtown. In two blocks you’ll reach Howard Street, Colfax’s main corner, where an old drugstore and bank building (c.1900) still stand. Cross Walnut to see the **Spring City mural** on the brick wall. If you wish, continue another block west on Howard to visit tiny **Mineral Springs Park**, where a gazebo and plaque mark an artesian spring. Return to the museum along Walnut. This approx. 4-block walk immerses you in Colfax’s past, from museum to the very spring that made the town famous.

Adel – Courthouse Square & Brick Streets

Type: Walkable Town / Historic Landmark District

Adel welcomes travelers with the charm of an old county-seat town. The streets around the town square are still paved in their original clay bricks, lending a distinctive ambiance (and the reason Adel’s downtown is on the National Register of Historic Places) mcclurevision.com traveliowa.com. At the center stands the **Dallas County Courthouse**, a majestic limestone and brick structure built in 1902 with a towering clock dome en.wikipedia.org. The courthouse lawn often has seasonal displays or festivals (Adel’s famous Sweet Corn Festival is each August). Encircling the square are late 19th-century buildings: you’ll find an old-fashioned hardware store, the restored **Adel Bakery**, and several boutique shops occupying Victorian buildings with iron cornices. Interpretive signs describe Adel’s history, including a Lincoln Highway marker (as the town was also on that historic road). The combination of brick-paved streets, the stately courthouse, and intact storefronts truly lets you experience “Iowa’s past” in Adel traveliowa.com.

Address: Courthouse Square – around Nile Kinnick Dr. & Court St., Adel, IA traveliowa.com

Suggested Walk: Park on the brick-paved side of the square (Court Street or Main Street). Take a leisurely lap around the Courthouse Square (about 0.3 miles). Start by walking to the **Dallas County Courthouse** steps – enjoy the architecture and check for any posted historical info. Then continue clockwise, heading down Main Street, visiting a shop or two. Turn up Nile Kinnick Drive (Route 6) past the historic **Adel Bank** building, then along Court Street, passing city hall (in an old 1890s structure). You’ll traverse all three blocks of preserved brick street. End your walk back where you started, perhaps with a treat from the local bakery. Adel’s compact downtown is perfect for a short heritage walk.

Menlo – Vintage Neon Gas Station Man

Type: Historic Roadside Landmark

Blink and you might miss tiny Menlo – but you shouldn’t miss the **Neon Gas Station Man** waving a welcome on the edge of this hamlet. In front of what was once the Kalbach Oil Station, a 12½-foot-tall metal attendant in a blue uniform stands with his arm raised in

greeting. Erected in 1934 along the old White Pole Road (US 6's original alignment), this neon-outlined "Gas Station Man" beckoned motorists to stop for gas roadsideamerica.com. Airline pilots even used his bright red neon wave as a nighttime beacon back in the day roadsideamerica.com. After decades dark, the sign was lovingly restored in 2013 and now once again flashes a friendly wave at dusk roadsideamerica.com. Next to the sign, you can see the old white stucco service station (now closed) where travelers in the 1930s–50s fueled up on their cross-Iowa journeys. Menlo's neon man is a kitschy and delightful reminder of Route 6's mid-century Americana.

Address: 502 7th Street, Menlo, IA (old Kalbach Service Station) roadsideamerica.com

Suggested Stop: Menlo's Gas Station Man is best viewed by pulling onto the wide shoulder or adjacent vacant lot on 7th Street (old Route 6). There isn't a traditional "walking route" here – it's a quick stop to admire and photograph the sign. If time permits, walk a few paces down 7th Street to see the **White Pole Road** heritage sign and a row of early 1900s buildings on Menlo's short Main Street. In total, you'll only walk about 100 yards – but the memories (and photos) of the giant smiling attendant will last much farther down the road!

Stuart – Bonnie & Clyde Bank Landmark

Type: Historic Landmark

The town of Stuart holds a notorious claim to fame: it was robbed by the infamous outlaws **Bonnie and Clyde** in 1934. On April 16 of that year, the Barrow Gang hit the **First National Bank of Stuart** at the corner of N. Division Street and 2nd roadsideamerica.com. Today the two-story brick building still stands, now housing a hair salon, but a large sign above the entrance proudly (or quaintly) announces the historical event: "*This bank was robbed by Bonnie & Clyde*". The building's exterior has been restored to its 1930s appearance, and a bronze plaque provides details of the robbery roadsideamerica.com. A few doors down, you can spot other early 1900s structures, including the deco facade of City Hall and an old hotel, illustrating Stuart's boom years on the railroad and highway. Stuart also has a restored **Rock Island Railroad Depot** (now a museum) a couple blocks south of downtown if you're inclined to explore further. But the Bonnie and Clyde bank – a real slice of Depression-era folklore – is the highlight right along Route 6.

Address: Stuart Savings Bank (former First Nat'l Bank), N. Division St. at 2nd St., Stuart, IA roadsideamerica.com

Suggested Walk: Park on N. Division Street near the old bank. Take a minute to read the Bonnie & Clyde sign above the door and the historical marker out front roadsideamerica.com. From there, walk half a block north on Division to view the handsome **Hotel Stuart** building (now apartments) and the historic **First Congregational Church** across the street. Turn back and head south two blocks to Front Street, where you'll find the **Stuart Depot** museum (if open, step inside for railroad exhibits). Return to your car up Division St. This roughly 4-block stroll will give you a feel for Stuart's downtown as it was in the 1930s – the era of gangsters, railroads and bank robberies.

Adair – Smiley Water Tower & Jesse James Marker

Type: Roadside Landmark / Historic Site

Adair is known for two things you can't miss from Route 6: one lighthearted, one legendary. On the fun side, Adair's skyline is dominated by its bright yellow **"smiley-face" water tower**, cheerfully painted with a huge grin. The town's welcome sign even plays on this: "Welcome to Adair – It'll make you smile!" en.wikipedia.org. It's a quirky photo-op right from the highway. Adair's other claim to fame is the site of the **first train robbery in the West** by Jesse James. In 1873, Jesse James and his gang derailed a Rock Island train just outside Adair, stealing cash and gold. A state historical marker two miles south of town (near the railroad tracks visible from I-80) commemorates this event, and a replica steam locomotive wheel is mounted at the site. In town, a smaller plaque by City Hall also notes the famous robbery. Aside from these, Adair is a small farm community, but these two attractions – one evoking the Wild West and one simply spreading joy – make it a memorable stop.

Address: Smiley Face Water Tower – visible on south side of I-80 at Adair exit (Route 6 passes under it) en.wikipedia.org. Jesse James Marker – 1 mi. south of I-80/US-6 on County Rd G30 (at the railroad crossing).

Suggested Stop: For the **water tower**, you can snap a photo from your car as you drive by (the best view is from the Casey's General Store parking lot off Route 6 at Exit 76). If you wish to see the **train robbery site**, turn south on G30 at Adair and go about a mile – there is a pull-off by the marker for a short walk to the monument. Within the town itself, you might simply drive down 5th Street (old Route 6) to see the historic Adair City Hall and a small Jesse James plaque. Adair's stops are mostly quick photo or look-and-go moments rather than extensive walks.

Atlantic – Downtown Museums and Landmarks

Type: Walkable Town / Museums

Atlantic is a mid-sized town that invites you to stretch your legs and explore a bit of local history. The downtown, centered on Chestnut Street, features well-preserved late 19th-century buildings and a classic small-town feel. A must-see is the **Rock Island Railroad Depot**, a beautifully restored 1898 depot now serving as a visitor center and museum traveliowa.com. The depot, with its red tile roof and sandstone walls, anchors the downtown at 2nd and Chestnut and contains exhibits about Atlantic's railroad days. Two blocks north stands the impressive **American Legion Memorial Building** (the former National Guard Armory, 1920s), which houses a Military Museum and Atlantic History Center traveliowa.com. Here you can walk through displays of local military artifacts and see the restored 1940s era troop auditorium. Atlantic is also famously known as Coca-Cola's "birthday town" in Iowa – an unofficial **Coca-Cola Museum** on Chestnut Street displays vintage Coke memorabilia (Atlantic was home to a longtime bottling plant). After museum-hopping, enjoy the ambience of Chestnut Street's shops, maybe spotting the ornate facade of the 1903 Opera House or the Art Deco neon of the Palace Theatre marquee. In winter, the town decorates Chestnut Street with thousands of lights, adding magic to the historical streetscape traveliowa.com.

Address: Rock Island Depot – 102 Chestnut St, Atlantic, IA. American Legion Memorial Building – 201 Poplar St, Atlantic, IA traveliowa.com.

Suggested Walk: Park near the Rock Island Depot at 2nd & Chestnut. Visit the depot museum, then walk north on Chestnut Street three blocks through the heart of downtown. Along the way, you'll pass the Coca-Cola mural and museum (at 207 Chestnut) and numerous antique storefronts. At 5th Street, turn left one block to the American Legion Memorial Building on Poplar – step inside if open to view its small museums. Then continue west one block to Walnut Street to see the beautiful **Atlantic Carnegie Library** (1903) before looping back south to your car at the depot. This 6-7 block loop hits Atlantic's key sights – railroad depot, downtown shops, Cola museum, and Legion Hall – a rewarding walk blending railroad lore and hometown charm traveliowa.comtraveliowa.com.

Oakland – Nishna Heritage Museum

Type: Museum / Walkable Town

Oakland is a pleasant small town directly on Route 6, notable for its local history complex, the **Nishna Heritage Museum**. Occupying a row of historic buildings on Main Street, this museum showcases “all phases of life in southwest Iowa” – from prehistoric fossils to pioneer tools and Victorian furnishings traveliowa.com. Highlights include a covered wagon display, collections of antique farm equipment, and even a large assortment of native relics. The museum's multiple buildings (a former grocery, a replica log cabin, etc.) make up a mini-village, and a garden with native plants surrounds them oaklandhistoricalsociety.wordpress.com. Outside the museum, Oakland's downtown along Main Street features a beautifully restored 1880s brick bank (now City Hall) and several turn-of-the-century storefronts with their original ironwork. A new mural depicts the region's railroad and farming heritage. Oakland is also a gateway to the scenic Loess Hills to the west, but within town the vibe is peaceful and historical. It's an ideal quick stop to get a sense of everyday life in bygone rural Iowa.

Address: 117 N. Main Street, Oakland, IA (Nishna Heritage Museum complex)
cityofoaklandiowa.com

Suggested Walk: Park along Main Street by the museum. If the Nishna Heritage Museum is open, take a self-guided tour through its buildings (the volunteer staff can guide you through various themed rooms). Afterward, walk north on Main Street for one block, passing the classic brick **Town Hall/Bank** building and a vintage drugstore sign, until you reach Oakland Avenue. Return on the opposite side of Main Street, perhaps stopping in a boutique or the local bakery housed in historic structures. This two-block stroll gives you a feel for Oakland's quiet downtown. Before departing, you can also walk half a block east on Oakland Ave. to see the **1913 Carnegie Library** – a neoclassical gem – rounding out the small-town heritage experience.

Council Bluffs – Historic Downtown & Railroad Museum

Type: Walkable City Center / Museums

At Iowa's western terminus of US 6, Council Bluffs offers several noteworthy stops packed into its historic downtown. As you drive in on West Broadway, you'll pass the famed **100 Block of Broadway**, lined with 19th-century brick buildings that once hosted frontier banks, saloons, and hotels. Today this district is lively with eateries and antique shops, but retains its Old West architecture. Just a few blocks south, at 200 Pearl Street, is the **Union Pacific Railroad Museum**, a must-visit for history buffs. Housed in a grand 1903 Carnegie Library building, this museum features engaging exhibits about the Transcontinental Railroad, including locomotives, historic photographs, and interactive displays uprrmuseum.org. You'll learn how Council Bluffs was the eastern terminus of the first transcontinental line, chosen by Abraham Lincoln. A short walk away (226 Pearl St.) is the **Squirrel Cage Jail**, an unusual three-story rotary jail built in 1885 en.wikipedia.org. It's one of only three ever built and the only three-story one; now preserved as a museum, you can tour its pie-slice cells that revolved inside like a giant lazy Susan en.wikipedia.org. The jail is operated by the local historical society and provides a fascinating – if eerie – look at penal innovation from the Victorian era. After exploring these sites, take a moment in nearby **Bayliss Park** (1st and Pearl) with its beautiful fountain and veteran's memorials, or drive up to Fairview Cemetery on the bluff for a panoramic view of the Missouri River valley. Council Bluffs' mix of railroad lore, quirky history, and scenic overlooks makes it a perfect finale for Route 6 in Iowa.

Address: Union Pacific Railroad Museum – 200 Pearl St, Council Bluffs, IA uprrmuseum.org. Squirrel Cage Jail – 226 Pearl St, Council Bluffs, IA en.wikipedia.org.

Suggested Walk: Park near Pearl Street and **Bayliss Park** (ample parking on 1st or 2nd Ave). Start by visiting the Union Pacific Railroad Museum – allow around 30–45 minutes to see the golden spike exhibits and locomotive simulators. From there, walk one block north on Pearl to the Squirrel Cage Jail. Join a guided tour if available to step inside the rotating cell block (tours last about 30 minutes). After exiting the jail, walk one block west to Broadway and up the 100 Block, where you can window-shop the antique stores and imagine the bustling terminus of the railroad era. Loop back to Bayliss Park to relax by the fountain, completing a roughly 6-block circuit. This route covers the key downtown sights on foot. **Note:** If you'd like a broader view, you can drive (rather than walk) 1.5 miles north on Madison Ave. to the **Lewis & Clark Monument** overlook for a sweeping vista of Omaha and the Missouri River – a scenic endpoint as you prepare to cross into Nebraska and continue westward on US 6.

Sources:

Historic U.S. Route 6 Association traveliowa.com traveliowa.com;

Iowa Dept. of Transportation Historic Byways traveliowa.com [Travel Iowa tourism site \[traveliowa.com\]\(http://traveliowa.com\) \[Local historical markers and museums \\[visitmuscatine.com\\]\\(http://visitmuscatine.com\\) \\[roadsideamerica.com\\]\\(http://roadsideamerica.com\\).\]\(http://traveliowa.com;</p></div><div data-bbox=\)](http://traveliowa.com;</p></div><div data-bbox=)

Each town description above incorporates information from local heritage organizations and

verified historical records to ensure accuracy for travelers.

Enjoy your journey across Iowa on the Grand Old Highway! en.wikipedia.org en.wikipedia.org