THE ROMANCE OF THE NATIONAL PIKE

By Mrs. Carroll Miller

When we view our great country from the vantage point of the present, we are apt to forget the causes of its tremendous growth and rapid spread in the half century following the Revolutionary War. Familiar as we are with the story of the original thirteen colonies, we sometimes fail to realize why it was that they extended more than twelve hundred miles along the sea coast, but penetrated no farther than four hundred miles inland. Consider for a moment a map of the United States and notice how near the Appalachian Mountain range is to the sea, and you have the reason for all the early settlements holding fast to the Atlantic shore.

At the end of the Revolutionary war the chief ports and cities of the new republic were Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore. All were within a radius of four hundred miles and all were receiving a steady stream of emigrants who had left the old world for more spacious lands and liberties in the new. When these emigrants reached this land of promise they found, if they were to secure for themselves any of the vast areas awaiting in the west, they must first cross a forbidding mountain range.

Long before our Day of Independence dawned France and England were both aware that the key to the Mississippi valley lay at Pittsburgh; and we of Western Pennsylvania know full well the struggle for a continent waged here amidst our hills and rivers.

The first passage-way through the mountains was of course by way of the Indian trails which followed to a large extent the buffalo paths once crossing Pennsylvania. Later some of these Indian trails were widened to bridle paths and in 1752 the path over the mountains at Cumberland, Maryland, had been made broad enough for pack horse trains by the Ohio Company, which had established a stone fort or trading post in 1750 at the mouth of Redstone Creek, now Brownsville, Pennsylvania. The Ohio Company had been
formed by a group of Virginia and English gentlemen partly to aid England in securing control of the Ohio valley and partly for trading with the Indians. In 1754 George Washington widened this path to the crest of the mountains when he brought his colonial troops northward in the expedition planned against Fort Duquesne, which the French had erected at the Point in what is now Pittsburgh in order to control the Ohio valley.

It was not however, until General Braddock brought his army against the French at Fort Duquesne in 1755 that there was anything approaching a real road constructed over the mountains. Unfortunately Braddock's road led only to defeat and death, but in 1758 General John Forbes built a new road somewhat farther north and his road led to victory and English supremacy on the North American continent. The road cut through the wilderness by General Forbes was not extended or further maintained by the English government. Perhaps that government was not impressed by the necessity of building roads for the colonists, or possibly considered itself better off if the colonists were left non-communicating.

Less than twenty years after the fall of Fort Duquesne, shortly to be renamed Fort Pitt, came the Revolutionary war, and the colonists, whatever their desire for easier means of intercourse, had little time for road-building. Our own ancestors in Western Pennsylvania doubtless realized fully the need for better and more connecting roads, for the Indians massacres, from which they suffered so long and so cruelly, were due in large part to the fact that the settlements were isolated and far scattered throughout the forests. When the Revolutionary war had been won and the new government established, the push of the pioneer westward became more persistent, and the demands for easier approach to the west more irresistible.

Washington was among the first to anticipate the value of better western connections, for he said that without them separation between east and west would be inevitable. He knew Maryland and Western Pennsylvania as perhaps few of that day. His first military responsibility had been in this part of Pennsylvania and here Washington had received his first baptism of fire. Washington had been
earlier so impressed by the nature of this part of the colony of Pennsylvania that he had taken up several thousand acres of land in southwestern Pennsylvania, and knowing whence its rivers led, he must have perceived the untold wealth which lay beyond. But of what use were these rivers as avenues to riches as long as the mountains to the east remained a barrier to trade and emigration?

In 1784 Washington wrote, "There are in that state (Pennsylvania) at least one hundred thousand souls west of Laurel Hill who are groaning under the inconveniences of a long land transportation." At that date it cost $249.00 to carry a ton of merchandise from Philadelphia to Erie by packhorse; in 1789 it cost $3.00 per hundred pounds to carry merchandise from Hagerstown, Maryland, to Brownsville, Pennsylvania, and the first wagon load brought over the mountains was thirty days in transit. This meant that the horses in this wagon made less than five miles a day. Hence, whatever was left of the old Braddock road could no longer be dignified by that name.

One plan of reaching the west was undertaken by the "Potowmac Company," of which Washington was the first president and a share holder throughout the rest of his life. This company was chartered in 1784 for the purpose of connecting the Potomac valley with the west by means of a canal, and the initial step was made by building a canal and locks at Great Falls on the Potomac; but this work was not completed until 1802.

Thus it remained for a Pennsylvanian to point out to Washington the most feasible route to the west, for in 1784 when Washington made his last trip to this region, he met Albert Gallatin who had come to this country a few years previously from Switzerland. Washington was in a mountain cabin discussing routes with a group of frontiersmen, when a dark haired young man stepped forward, and placing his fingers on the map said, "There is the best route." Gallatin afterward related that the great general frowned heavily at his seeming impertinence; but, at Washington's request, the young foreigner proved his point, and then began a friendship which terminated only at the death of the older man.
The road which Gallatin traced on Washington's map was then and still is the most practical course across the Allegheny Mountains, connecting the East and West, and the easiest one across the mountains between the states of New York and Alabama. Nothing tangible was accomplished toward building a road over the mountains until three years after Washington's death when Thomas Jefferson was President and Albert Gallatin his Secretary of the Treasury.

In 1803 it cost $5.00 per hundred to bring merchandise from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, so it is not to be wondered at that the settlers who had managed to get beyond the Ohio were making loud protests to the statesmen at Washington over the lack of decent land transportation.

The bill admitting Ohio to statehood in 1802 declared that five per cent from the sale of all government lands in that territory should be used for "building roads leading from navigable waters emptying into the Atlantic and the Ohio. Such roads to be laid out under authority of congress with the consent of the states through which they shall pass."

In 1805 a committee of the Senate reported to that body, the manner in which the money appropriated by the Ohio act should be applied. This committee recommended that such money be used in building a road "from Cumberland on the northerly bank of the Potomac to the River Ohio at the most convenient place between a point on the easterly bank of said river opposite Steubenville and the mouth of Grave Creek which empties into said river a little below Wheeling in Virginia."

Generally speaking this new road was to follow the route of Braddock's army and Cumberland was chosen as the beginning of the road because it was considered "The Key of the Mountains" and was the head of Potomac navigation as well. It was explained in this report that such a road would "accommodate" roads from Baltimore, cross the Monongahela where good boat transportation could be had, and also bring Philadelphia and Washington in closer touch with the expanding west.

There was already a privately owned road between Baltimore and Washington. Pennsylvania was planning a
road from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, so if this proposed road by way of Cumberland should be carried through, it would link important points in several directions with the Atlantic Ocean and the western frontier. Ohio was now a full fledged state and the territories of Indiana and Illinois were fast gathering a goodly population which would shortly need further highway recognition. The government was willing to do its share in such an enterprise not merely from a humanitarian standpoint but from a practical and economical one as well.

Despite no well defined or passable roads emigrants were toiling westward in ever increasing numbers and the government found it necessary to protect such citizens from the bands of marauding and hostile Indians still lurking beside narrow and lonely forest trails. Therefore if a proper road could be built, emigrants would move in greater numbers and with greater security and speed and the government be saved much expense and trouble. The Senate committee referred to previously, after citing the advantage of the route recommended, giving distance between important points and showing the feasibility of construction, ended its report thus: "Politicians have generally agreed that rivers unite the interest and promote the friendship of those who inhabit their banks; while mountains on the contrary tend to the disunion and estrangement of those who are separated by their intervention. In the present case, to make the crooked ways straight and the rough ways smooth will in effect, remove the intervening mountains, and by facilitating the intercourse of our Western brethren with those on the Atlantic substantially unite them in interest, which the committee believe, is the most effectual cement of union applicable to the human race." In those days isolation held no advantage!

This committee not only gave its report but presented a bill to the Senate entitled "An Act to Regulate the Laying out and Making a Road from Cumberland in the State of Maryland, to the State of Ohio." This act Thomas Jefferson signed in March 1806, and thus began our national government's first venture in road building, and except for military roads or those laid out in national parks, cemeteries and the like, it has remained the only one. The act of 1806
placed the President in practically full control of this project; he was to appoint the commissioners and they were to report to him and he was given authority to reject or accept their report in whole or in part. This act stated that "the road was to be cleared the width of four rods (66 feet); raised in the middle of the carriage way with stone, earth or gravel, and sand or a combination of some or all of them, leaving or making a ditch or watercourse on each side." After some further particulars was added, "But the manner of making such road in every other particular, is left to the direction of the President."

The three commissioners whom the President was to appoint were to be paid $4.00 per day; surveyors $3.00; chainmen $2.00; markers $1.00 and the sum of $30,000, judged necessary for the preliminary survey, was to be taken from the sale of Ohio lands. President Jefferson at once appointed as commissioners, Thomas Moore and Eli Williams of Maryland, and Joseph Kerr of Ohio who soon began their work and in January 1807 their report to the President was submitted by him to Congress.

This report makes interesting reading, for the commissioners had many difficult problems to meet: the most trying being that every community between Cumberland, Maryland and Steubenville, Ohio wanted this new road to pass through it. The commissioners seem to have been very conscientious in the work of locating this road for they refused to be influenced by local "boosters" unless it was to the advantage of the general public. Some of the villages made no protest at being omitted from the route but there was one town in Pennsylvania passed by in the first survey which immediately "raised a holler", Uniontown in Fayette County. Pressure was at once brought to bear on the Pennsylvania legislature and that body when passing the permit bill for the road, requested President Jefferson to include not only Uniontown on the route of the road but also Washington in Washington County. It was this same town of Washington which later during the road's eventful years was always referred to locally as "little Washington" in order to distinguish it from the nation's capital.

In a communication to Congress in 1808 Jefferson approved the route laid out by the commissioners with one
deviation which was to carry it through Uniontown, and later when the road was extended to Wheeling, the same favor was shown to little Washington. In this same communication Jefferson wrote that the route from Brownsville to the Ohio was yet to be decided, saying he would "pay material regard to the interests and best wishes of the populous parts of the state of Ohio, and to a future and convenient connection with the road which is to lead from the Indian (Indiana) boundary near Cincinnati, by Vincennes, to the Mississippi at St. Louis, under authority of the act of April 21, 1806." From this it will be seen that the contemplated Cumberland road was not to end until it reached the Mississippi.

And now began the building of what is generally called the National Road, or National Pike, though all acts of Congress refer to it as the Cumberland Road; but to the generations of Pennsylvanians who knew this highway in all its glory, it was always affectionately referred to as the "Pike." Strictly speaking it could not be called a pike at its inception for that name meant a road where sharpened poles were let down to prevent travellers from escaping tolls. Later when the road passed from national to state control, heavy iron or wooden gates were erected at the toll houses then constructed, in order that tolls might be properly collected.

This road had staunch supporters in Congress from all parts of the country both before and after its completion, chief among them being Henry Clay, who never failed to support with vigor all measures presented for its maintenance. In consequence Clay was very popular along its route and received an ardent welcome at all taverns where he stopped, and it is related that he was so fond of the buckwheat cakes served in this state that he never could tell which came first in his affections—his pet policy of a protective tariff or the famous Pennsylvania breakfast buckwheat cake.

Col. "Andy" Stewart of Fayette County for years worked indefatigably in Congress for the support of the road, as did Hon. T. M. T. McKennan of Washington County. In the Senate its interests were carefully looked after by Hon. Daniel Sturgeon of Uniontown; and Gen. Henry W.
Beeson, a representative in Congress in the busy forties from the same town, was so convinced of the importance of the road that he made a speech proving that the Pike brought more prosperity and service to the people than the approaching railroad ever could. And every man, woman, and child along the Pike cried "Amen" to Gen. Beeson's celebrated speech, and it brought him a re-election to Congress.

The road as first laid out extended from Cumberland 24½ miles westward in the State of Maryland, passing through Frostburg and Grantsville. Then it bore north west into Pennsylvania for 75½ miles, passing through Addison, Smithfield (now Somerfield), beyond which lay Great Meadows, Fort Necessity and Braddock's grave. It crossed Laurel Hill on the western most ridge of the Allegheny Mountains before reaching Uniontown, and from Uniontown continued to Brownsville, in an almost straight line north west, on the Monongahela River. From Brownsville one could reach Pittsburgh by boat and thence down the Ohio to Wheeling, and from Wheeling south west through the states of Ohio, Kentucky and Illinois. At southern Illinois the way lay open to the Mississippi, to St. Louis and the boundless regions beyond.

While the first survey carried the road only to Brownsville, further extensions were at once clamored for and planned. In 1820 work was begun which took the road to Zanesville and Columbus, Ohio; in 1833 from Columbus it was extended to Richmond, Indiana, by 1838, and to Indianapolis shortly afterward. As far as completion went the road actually stopped at Indianapolis, though grading was done to Vandalia, Illinois. The survey was completed to Missouri but because of the approach of the age of steam, no work was done after 1843.

It can readily be seen from the location and the length of the road in Pennsylvania that it meant more in a financial way to the Keystone commonwealth than to any other eastern state, but what it meant to the unmeasured new country in the west can scarcely be calculated. During more than thirty years the National Road was the main artery through which flowed the bulk of travel from the north and east to the south; and practically all travel and
emigration westward for a generation swept across this great thoroughfare. Though the road was at first constructed only as far as Brownsville, nevertheless it meant that at last the gateway to the west was open and without delay a far country began its phenomenal growth.

The contracts for this road were very carefully drawn. They provided that thirty feet in the middle of the road called the carriage way, should be built up of large stones. The spaces between the large stones were to be filled in with smaller stones and the whole to be covered with sand and gravel. The depth of the stones in the center was to be eighteen inches and on the edges twelve inches; edges were to be supported by solid shoulders of earth or curbstone; the upper six inches of stone were to be small enough to go through a three inch iron ring and the lower strata small enough to pass through a seven inch ring. All stone to be well covered with gravel and rolled with an iron faced roller capable of bearing three tons, and the gradation of the road was not to exceed five per cent in elevation.

Twenty-five feet on either side of the stone carriage way was to be cleaned of all stumps, timber and the like; nothing to be left standing in carriage way over nine to fifteen inches in height and nothing on the sides over eighteen inches. According to specifications the stones put on the carriage way would cover whatever stumps were left there, but it is likely that such slight obstructions as eighteen inch stumps on the side parts of the road were not removed. These side areas twenty-five feet wide were made for drainage and support and later provided plenty of space for the many thousands of cattle constantly driven along this highway.

The construction of the road was put in the hands of the War Department and then let out in sections to contractors at a cost which averaged $9,745 per mile from Cumberland to Uniontown, a distance of sixty-three miles. This price included all expenses of survey and location, salaries, making of drains and the erection of the remarkable bridges over the many streams which this road crossed.

Particular mention should be made of some of the well proportioned and handsome stone bridges built by those
early contractors, and many of them still support the weight of the flying pleasure cars and heavy motor trucks now traversing the same route. The stone bridge known as "Little Crossings" over the Castleman River near Grantsville, Maryland, is at the point where Braddock's army crossed on its way to Fort Duquesne in 1755. The fine stone structure over the Youghiogheny River near Somerset has always been called "Big Crossings" and it marks the spot where Washington crossed with his colonial troops in 1754. This bridge was opened for traffic on July 4th, 1818 with an old time jollification which included speech making, a big dinner and plenty of free whiskey. The bridge over Dunlap's Creek at Brownsville is an iron one, the first of that kind to be erected west of the Allegheny Mountains, and was opened to the public a few years after the road was put through. A smaller but graceful stone bridge over Jenning's Run west of Uniontown will ever be remembered as the affectionate meeting place of Albert Gallatin and General La Fayette when the latter was the guest of the nation in 1825. The bridge over Buffalo Creek, six miles west of little Washington, has always been known as the "S" bridge, owing to its peculiar shape, and in the Road’s palmy days there was a tavern at either end of this structure.

The contract for the first ten miles of the road west of Cumberland was let in 1811 and finished in the fall of 1812. People seem to have enjoyed laboring in those days much more than they do now, for we read of the great pride of everyone in this work. The government engineer, the contractor and the day laborer, all were proud of their share in it. After the road was finished care was taken of everything connected with it, and fines were imposed for neglect or defacement of any part of it.

A witness to the making of the road near Uniontown wrote in his later years, "I was there to see it located, and the stakes struck down the mountain, across the old common south of Woodstock (Munroe) and so on west before there was a shovel full of earth displaced, and also to see that great contractor Mordecai Cochran, its builder, with his immortal Irish brigade, a thousand strong, with their carts, wheel barrows, picks, shovels and blasting tools,
grading these commons and climbing the long mountain side up to Point Lookout, like a well trained army, and leaving behind them as they went a road good enough for an emperor to travel over.”

A distinguished Scotch engineer, David Stevenson, who travelled in this country in 1838 thought that the United States would never get very far in the making of roads because this country “lacked the stone fitted for the purpose.” Evidently the dense forests of that period prevented Mr. Stevenson from seeing the stone on the mountains, though he did acknowledge that the National Road was a remarkable achievement; but apparently he thought it would be the only one.

The second war with England interfered considerably with the work of the road but further contracts were let in 1812, 1813 and 1815 for different portions; and by 1817 the work was practically finished to the Virginia line and mails were running from Washington, D. C. to Wheeling in an incredibly short space of time. Before this road was built it took one week to carry mail on horseback from Baltimore to Wheeling, and now, with the road opened, mails were taken by stage between the same points in two days. This meant steady travelling for the usual passenger service over the mountains took about three days and the price from Cumberland to Wheeling was approximately $15.00, varying of course with the style of coach and speed demanded.

Before the advent of the road it took six to eight weeks to transport goods from Baltimore to the Ohio River and now it could be done in less than half the time, some drivers even making the trip in two weeks. With so much time being eliminated, it is no wonder that at once an unending stream of travel and communication started westward. Travellers on foot and on horse back, pack trains, conestoga wagons, mail carts, stage coaches, droves of hogs, cattle and sheep, flocks of turkeys, bands of gypsies, strolling players, circus caravans, and even slaves tied together, moved in long crowded lines from early morn ’til dusk and in the case of stages sometimes all through the night.

A contemporary traveller wrote that it was no exaggeration to say that as far as the eye could see this wonder-
ful road was filled with one vast moving throng. In 1822 there were five thousand wagons unloaded in Wheeling alone. They brought with them merchandise of various kinds, the finer grades of cloth, household staples, utensils, and implements for the settlements beyond, and on their return trip each carried whiskey, bacon, flour, hemp, tobacco and wool, skins and pelts. Every tenth wagon crossing the Alleghenies went on to Ohio which meant that the empty west was receiving men and supplies almost as rapidly as they could be absorbed. Indiana and Ohio received more than ninety thousand inhabitants a year for a generation and at least ninety per cent of them came by way of the Pike.

At an inn on Negro Mountain, Maryland, during one night there were counted more than thirty-six horse teams in the wagon yard, one hundred Kentucky mules in the barn yard, one thousand hogs in another enclosure, and as many fat cattle and sheep, gathered from the rich valleys of Ohio and Illinois, were pastured in the fields round about. This was only the clientele of one inn during one night, and when you consider that there was a tavern to almost every mile of the road, you can readily compute the business passing daily. One writer speaks of seeing fifty-two wagons with six to eight horses to a wagon in sight on the Pike at one time, and four thousand head of cattle quartered at one place in a single night. To all this add thirty or more stages going each direction daily, hundreds of horse pack trains, innumerable emigrant outfits and countless pedestrians, and you will begin to realize that this highway was a veritable hive of motion.

There are no figures available as to the number of passengers hauled by stage over this road during its busy years; but it is known that in eight years there were over two hundred thousand persons who took boat passage at Brownsville for Pittsburgh and the west. From these and other occasional statistics which are found, it is safe to say that the average number traversing the Cumberland Road every year was close to two hundred thousand. By far the greater number on the road never saw the inside of a stage coach for the fast flying coach was for the rich or well-to-do who could travel in style and were in a hurry to reach
their destination, but teamsters, drovers, emigrants, riders and pedestrians far outnumbered the coach passengers.

Emigrants usually had but a one horse wagon and they frequently travelled in groups, each family having all their possessions in a small wagon with the father leading the horse, the mother and older children trailing behind, while in some safe spot in the wagon were those too young to keep up the pace which averaged eighteen to twenty miles a day. Some emigrants came with a pack horse or two which they sometimes sold when they reached the river ports if they intended to travel by boat, and on these willing pack horses were strapped clothing, household utensils and tools. The feather beds were always tied on well toward the horse's neck in such a way to make a soft spot where the babies could lie in safety and comfort.

Many emigrants going beyond Pennsylvania and Virginia continued to follow the road past Brownsville to Washington and Wheeling and then over the government road through Ohio and still further west. The greater number followed the rivers to their new homes, leaving by flat boat from Brownsville, Pittsburgh, or Wheeling. It is stated that from sixty to seventy flat boats left Wheeling every day for Marietta, Cincinnati, Louisville and St. Louis and practically all such passengers had come over this new road.

In James' account of an expedition to the Rocky Mountains in 1819 we find a description of how the emigrants travelled down the river in flat boats or "arks" laden with cattle, horses, furniture and implements or any other possession they could afford to carry with them to some new home. Numerous families had all their belongings on the same boat and went "floating onward toward that imaginary region of happiness which lies away 'beyond the place where the sun goes down.'" Perhaps many of these emigrants never reached that "imaginary region of happiness" but judging from the population and prosperity which soon made itself known in the great Mississippi valley, the greater number of homesseekers found what they had hoped for in their new surroundings.

A New Yorker as he styled himself, in a book of letters published in 1835 described the wonderful scenic beauty of this road; commented on the well dressed pedestrians who
walked forty miles a day; sketched the very comfortable clothes of the men riders and set down with some amazement the styles of the women riders. It seems to have surprised this city traveller to see women riding in short skirts, and in groups unattended by any of the braver sex, but most of all did he exclaim over the saddles which were “of purple velvet with scarlet saddle cloths embroidered in orange.” What a gay picture these Amazons must have made as they galloped over the highway! The women riding over the road must have been very much at home on horse-back for a young lady from New Jersey going for a visit to Ohio commented on the fact that they carried more baskets and bundles than the men did back home.

An English woman grew enthusiastic over the happy healthy children and contented women she saw living in log cabins in mountain clearings, in strange contrast to the misery and poverty she had left behind in England. The same writer was impressed with the intelligence and fine manners of the inn keepers, the American feeling of equality everywhere apparent but better still the unusual deference paid to women.

Another traveller wrote, “It is truly interesting to see people of different costumes coming forward in the mail coach, on horse back and on foot. At first view this great emigration leads to the conclusion that oppression and the fear of want are in extensive operation somewhere to the eastward,” probably meaning Europe, though there is no doubt that many thousands left the New England states at this time because it was growing increasingly difficult to make a living there.

The Cumberland Road was completed through Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio and to Indianapolis in Indiana, and surveyed and graded to St. Louis in Missouri at a cost of $7,000,000 which was considered an enormous sum a hundred years ago. Such expenditures brought magnificent returns because for every dollar spent, at least ten more were added to the wealth of the nation, but what can not be computed in dollars was the feeling of national solidarity which this road built up between the east and west.

Appropriations for the road continued to be made cheerfully by Congress for a number of years, but in 1822
The road bed needed so much repairing, as the travel had been far heavier than ever anticipated, that a new plan was proposed. Consequently a bill was drawn and presented to Congress in which provision was made for the erection of toll houses and the collection of tolls along the route of the Cumberland Road. President Monroe, much as he approved the original plan of the road, vetoed this bill because Congress did not have the power to establish turn pikes, with gates and tolls with penalties; neither did the states have the power to grant such rights to Congress without an amendment to the constitution. Imagine the consternation and damnation along the road when it was noised abroad that the money for much needed repairs was not to be granted. Local supporters of the road who were in Congress as well as "The Gentleman from Kentucky," Mr. Clay, all held forth against the veto of the President, but in vain! The veto stood and to this day when presidential pronouncements are handed out in regard to the encroachments of the federal government, the line of reasoning usually harks back to this sustained veto of President Monroe. Two years later another bill was drawn more to Monroe's liking and this one he approved.

Despite the controversy over the government's policy toward the road, travel over it never ceased but became heavier all the while, so that the necessity of constant repairs and supervision became very acute.

Consequently in 1831 a bill was brought forward to have the road taken over by the states through which it passed, provided the government would first put it in good condition. Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Ohio approved of this plan. Congress voted the money at different periods for repairs which were made by the MacAdam system. One by one the states took over their share of the road and thenceforth managed it. Pennsylvania formally took over her mileage in 1835 and continued to collect tolls on some parts of the road for almost another half century.

As soon as Pennsylvania became master of her seventy miles of road, toll houses and gates were erected at intervals along the highway and the tolls collected were used for the upkeep of the road. There were six toll houses built in Pennsylvania; some stone and some brick and three of
these interesting old houses with their octagonal towers are still standing; one of them near Uniontown still retains a restored wooden panel set in the wall in place of a window, which gives the rates of toll for almost a century ago. Mileposts were also erected along the highway and many of the monumental shaped iron ones are still standing in Pennsylvania as are some of the tomb stone like stone ones in Maryland. At each toll house massive iron or heavy wooden gates were hung in solid stone pillars; some of the pillars may still be seen but not one of those old hand wrought iron gates remains, the impoverished state of Pennsylvania having sold the last pair for scrap iron in 1875!

Great care was taken of the road. Fines were levied for neglecting drains, defacing mile posts or otherwise causing any injury to the property of the State, but few fines were ever imposed for the general public had such admiration for the road that respect and care for it were universal. Hon. Edward Everett of Massachusetts once referred in a speech to the Cumberland Road as being “the pride of the country,” so its fame was nation-wide.

Tolls collected varied greatly according to what passed over the route. A narrow wheel vehicle paid more toll than one with broad heels because the latter cut the road bed less. A score of sheep or hogs cost six cents, the same number of cattle twelve cents; every sled or sleigh and the hose or ox drawing it three cents each; a vehicle with two horses and four wheels cost twelve cents; every wagon with wheel rims two and a half to four inches wide, four cents; those from four to five inches three cents; from six to eight inches two cents; and eight inches or over were free of tolls. This last provision led to the building of the broadest wagon tires probably ever constructed, as toll was like taxes, every one wanted to avoid paying it.

Of course there was a free list and it was a dull person who could not contrive sooner or later to put himself or his family on that list at least one day a week. Toll could not be collected from “a person passing from one part of his farm to the other; to or from mill; to or from places of public worship, funerals, militia training, elections, or from persons or witnesses going to and returning from courts, or from wagons or carriages laden with the property of the
United States, or any cannon or military stores belonging to the United States or to any state.” The large wide board firmly fixed in the wall of every toll house, displayed in plain letters all the rates of toll. Thus there was no excuse for any argument over the amount of toll to be paid.

Despite frequent repairs the constant and severe travel over the road made it extremely rough at times and this brought forth many complaints from travellers who were unfortunate enough to “hit the high spots.” It must be remembered that when the road was surveyed, the commissioners by act of congress, were ordered to find the shortest route which they did, and in consequence a ride over it was “up one hill and down the other.” The original survey out of Cumberland took the road straight over Wills Mountains and it was not until 1833 that the more picturesque and more comfortable route through “The Narrows” which form the floor of the gorge at that point, was adopted. When Corbett, the celebrated English publisher and writer, travelled over the Pike he grumbled about the “up and downness” of the road but he praised it as having been made “to last forever.” Another traveller in speaking of it near Zanesville, Ohio, found it “superlatively good.” And in a general sense both these statements were true as the cement road makers of the present day will testify that there are places on the Pike where the foundation is the same as was laid more than a century ago.

In 1823 an English farmer came to this country for a visit and before leaving home, he promised a neighbor that while in America he would visit the neighbor’s son living in Illinois. Doubtless Illinois was farther away than the farmer anticipated but he kept his promise and to do so had to travel the Cumberland Road for several hundred miles. He wrote back to England that because of the precipitous heights and dark woods a traveller needed “nerves of iron and brass,” but added “such however is the expertness of the drivers here that there is no ground for real apprehension.” Another complaint frequently appearing in the letters from early travellers was of the forests which seemed interminable. The trees were so thick for miles along this road that at times little light penetrated so it is not to be wondered at that such spots as “The Shades of
Death" near Cumberland were feared alike by stage driver and wagoners because of highwaymen. It is well that these complaining travellers can not come back and see those once heavily wooded hills now completely deforested.

Previous to the construction of the Cumberland Road, everyone writing of this section described the so-called road as "execrable" and most of the inns they put in the same category. Until the coming of the road, very few houses along its route were worthy of the name of inn, and most of them had not been built for that purpose. Persons crossing the mountains took shelter in any trapper's hut or settler's cabin they could find. If a farmer were able to build a fairly good size log house, before he knew it the travelling public had forced him to become a tavern keeper as well. Thus the tavern keeper had to fill a variety of offices; he was the one person who always was paid in cash and in consequence he became a frontier banker; letters were left with him to be given to other travellers expected to stop that way and thus he became a kind of postmaster; travellers brought him the most recent newspapers and wayfarers handed out the latest gossip about everything that came within their ken, and thus he became the best posted man in the countryside, and frequently the only one with whom intelligent travellers could discuss the affairs of the day. This was especially true of inn keepers along the Pike and some English travellers, who were surprised at the easy manners of a tavern keeper, were much more amazed when they found out he could discuss foreign affairs with understanding.

No sooner was this road built than substantial frame, brick and stone houses were erected the length of the Pike sometimes only a mile apart for accommodations of the thousands soon asking for food and lodging. Not all the inn keepers were men, for some of the best taverns were managed most successfully by women. The business ability and right of freedom of the women along this road was apparently not questioned as it was in Massachusetts for that state had a law forbidding a woman to keep a tavern unless "she provided a fit man that is godly to manage the business."

The names of the earlier taverns were much the same
as those in England, for we read of “The Black Horse,” “The Indian Queen,” “The White Swan,” “The Green Tree,” etc; but when the country took on a more national character the names of the taverns were made to correspond. Then we read of “The General Jackson,” “The Benjamin Franklin,” “The Washington,” “The Fulton,” “The National House,” and “The Spead Eagle.” The history of the many inns of the Pike would make a volume in itself, but they should not be passed by without some description of their quaint life.

Taverns then as hotels now varied in their degree of excellence but the weight of opinion concerning those on the National Road, is that they were well kept, clean, hospitable and supplied an abundance of plain, well cooked food. Indeed some old timers went much further for one of the early patrons said years after the old tavern days on the Pike had ended, “The eating was the cream of the earth Sir! I dined at Delmonico’s last week, and my dinner was nothing to the venison cutlets and ham and eggs and Johnny cakes of the Pike.”

Poor inns there were as foreign travellers set down in their letters, but on the whole they were of a high grade and the cooking as they expressed it in those days, was “prime.” What was to hinder a reasonably good cook from preparing an appetizing meal when there were the following meats, vegetables and fruits to call on in their season? Chicken was always at hand for roasting, frying or stewing and the last named was invariably accomplished by the renowned Pennsylvania waffle. Beef, mutton, venison, bear, wild turkey, pheasant, grouse, wild pigeon, quail, rabbit, squirrel and pork made up the rest of the meats for the menus. Pork in some form could always be had, salt pork, smoked ham, roast loin, fried chops, spare ribs, young roast pig, pickled pigs feet, head cheese and souse; but most popular was the breakfast sausage which always came in arm and arm with buckwheat cakes and maple syrup. Ham and eggs could be had at any hour of the day or night and so well known was the fine flavor of Pennsylvania home cured ham that when General Jackson was feted in Uniontown on the way to his inauguration, he requested that his dinner consist of ham and eggs!
From the mountain streams and rivers came quantities of palatable fish; trout, perch, catfish and pike in Pennsylvania and from Maryland was added salmon, shad, blue fish, terrapin and oysters. The oysters were handled by a fast stage known as Maltby’s Express and they were carried as far west as the Ohio line and when weather permitted much farther and always found a ready sale. This same Maltby’s Express later became famous throughout the country as Adams Express on the railroads.

For vegetables the housewife who was frequently the cook as well, had the following for her menu; Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, peas, beans, cabbage, carrots, parsnips, celery, corn, onions, radishes and wild asparagus. Tomatoes grown along the garden fences or walls for decoration were called love apples but being considered poisonous were not eaten until well toward the middle of the century.

For fruits there were apples, grown mostly for cider and the making of apple butter in the fall, which the housewife made in a large copper kettle hung over a fire built out of doors. Occasionally some cider grew too hard to drink so it was allowed to “vinegar” and was used in making many different varieties of appetizing pickles. Then there were cherries, pears, peaches, wild strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, mountain blue berries and huckle berries and from these fruits were made the extensive variety of jams, jellies and preserves for which the old fashioned housewife was famous. And from these same fruits and from the pumpkins grown in the corn fields came the fillings for the more than million pies which were enjoyed by the hungry generations of the busy Pike. Maryland and Virginia melons added variety to the menu, herbs grown in the gardens gave savor to many dishes, and spices brought from afar gave a fragrance and flavor all their own.

Home made wine was made especially from the wild grapes growing on the mountain sides, and from wild cherries and berries came reviving cordials, but such drinks were kept mostly for old ladies or invalids or for the minister when he came to catechise the children. On such occasions the best wine and richest fruit cake and nut cakes made with hickory nuts, walnuts and butter nuts garnered from the woods, added greatly to the visit or to the visita-
tion, depending on whether you were the catechiser or the catechised.

Hot breads were almost as abundant on the Pike as they were in the south; biscuits and rolls were served at dinner, while corn cakes, fried mush, flap jacks, flannel cakes and buckwheat cakes were breakfast and supper accompaniments. All such cakes were served hot! Some English visitors who were stopping at what they considered a very satisfactory inn at little Washington, encountered the old fashioned corn griddle cakes for the first time, or as they called them “maize cakes” and they were much impressed at the cakes being served “hot and in relays.”

If the stage coach traveller stepped from a gaily painted coach into a well kept tavern on a cold winter day at the dinner hour of two o’clock he had something like the following to choose from to stay his appetite until supper time rolled around four hours later: boiled mutton, cold boiled ham, hot roast turkey, mashed potatoes, boiled onions, creamed turnips, cold slaw, celery, two or three kinds of pickles, four or five kinds of jellies and preserves, hot rolls, biscuits, wheat bread, mince pie, custard pie, apple pie, pound cake, suet pudding, doughnuts, tea and coffee. The price for this dinner was twenty-five cents!

Coffee was the favorite beverage. Tea could always be had and one English woman remarked upon its general excellence, but for the average American traveller or trader such a hearty dinner was usually washed down with several cups of strong coffee. The long handled iron toasting fork hung by the open fire place, and for the “finicky” toast could be made but such delicate dishes as toast, tea and porridge were ordinarily considered as food for the young, the old or the ailing.

The bountiful meals of those old days were never served in courses. Soup they sometimes had but it was such a sustaining affair full of meat and vegetables or noodles that a plate or two sufficed with the addition of little else for a meal. Private tables were unheard of; the dining rooms contained long narrow tables upon which all the food for the meal was set down before the guests took their places, and it is no exaggeration to say that the table cloth could scarcely be seen for the many dishes upon it. The land-
lord of the inn usually sat at one end of the table and carved the roasts while his wife or a guest sat at the other end serving cold or sliced hot meats. A person helped himself from the nearest dish and then served his neighbors until all had received what they wanted; plates were passed as many times as they needed replenishing, and though there might be servants in attendance, their work consisted for the most part of bringing in dishes of hot meats and vegetables and carrying them out to be refilled. Perhaps in the larger towns plates were removed for dessert, but at the country inn a guest ate everything on his plate to keep it free for the pies, puddings and cakes which he saw were to follow.

In those days cups had no handles so everyone drank coffee or tea from their saucers. When dessert time came the cup was lifted from the saucer and placed on the table cloth or on a tiny plate called a cup plate, and then the empty saucer was filled with whatever preserved or canned fruits the guest chose from the variety nearby. Cups had not handles and forks had but two narrow prongs. So the knife was used to convey food to the mouth, and the fork was used only to steady the meat while it was being cut. One knife, one fork, and one spoon for each person was all anyone could handle at once, so why burden them with more? In consequence the very best taverns provided but three pieces of table cutlery. If there was enough room everyone sat down in the dining room together as there was no difference in rank; a United States senator travelling in his private coach might find himself next a mud stained pedestrian while a titled foreigner might have as his neighbor a dusty cattle drover. Meal time at Pike taverns was for eating and not for conversation and acquaintance. Time was fleeting and stages ran on exact schedules so, no difference how abundant the meal, it was soon over.

When the meal was finished, passengers went at once to the waiting stage for which fresh horses had been provided; the driver blew a long blast on his winding horn and snapped his whip over the prancing thoroughbreds; the landlord shouted a cheery good-bye; the village belles standing on their door steps waved their handkerchiefs; the small boys hurrahed; the passengers called farewells and the
coach departed amid a joyful hubbub which would be renewed at the next stop.

The slogan "Ladies First" may not have originated on the Pike but it was rigorously followed there for ladies had first seats at tables and the best seats in the coaches. This fact was a bit troublesome to some of the European travellers on the Pike, though Charles Dickens found much to admire in the treatment accorded to ladies travelling in America. Occasionally one reads of rather odd manners displayed by some of our own American women, or ladies as they preferred to be called in those days. William Owen, making a journey west in 1824-5 wrote of going to an inn in Washington, Pennsylvania, and being much travel stained, was shown into a room to wash and he added, "While we were undressed a stage arrived and parties were shown into the same room. One of the party a young lady, sat down by the fire and dressed her hair with great nonchalance." Mr. Owen stated that this young lady was the daughter of a general and senator. Perhaps she made a pretense of displaying the exotic manners of the capitol.

In Col. Thomas Searight's work on the National Pike, he prints a letter from Hon. James G. Blaine, then Secretary of State, dated 1892. Secretary Blaine had been born in West Brownsville and passed his boyhood and youth along the Pike. He and Col. Searight formed a friendship in their youth days which continued throughout life, and the fondest memory in which they both shared was the exciting and happy life of the old road. The letter is in part as follows: "We did not use the high sounding hotel but the good old Anglo Saxon tavern, with its wide open fire in the cheerful bar room, and the bountiful spread in the dining room, and the long porch for summer loafers, and the immense stabling with its wealth of horse flesh and the great open yards for the wagons. How real and vivid it all seems to me at this moment." At that moment was almost forty years after Blaine had left his native Pennsylvania to become the idol of the state of Maine.

There were generally speaking two types of taverns, or rather different taverns were used by different types of patrons. In the country or on the edge of the towns were the wagon stands, where the house itself was often not so
large as those where the stages stopped in town, but where the accommodations for horses and cattle were on a much greater scale. Huge barns filled with hay and grain stood waiting to feed and house from one hundred to two hundred horses at a time. The six stalwart horse wagon teams usually were kept in the open wagon yard except in winter time, but the smaller, speedy, well groomed stage horses were carefully stabled at all seasons.

Around the great open paved stable or wagon yard as it was ordinarily called stood the immense conestoga wagons with the drivers often asleep in their cavernous depths. It took a huge area to accommodate two or three dozen conestoga wagons over night for they were enormous vehicles, and took their name from the district near the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania, where they were first made. These wagons were long and deep; the bottom curved slightly upward at either end; the lower side was painted a brilliant blue with a movable, bright red board above, and above this came a white canvas covering which was stretched over wooden bows and drawn in at the back for protection from the weather. Picture the patriotic effect on the highway when several dozen of these red, white, and blue conestoga wagons, 20 to 25 feet long, went creaking along on their great high wheels. The wheels of these wagons were from fifteen to twenty feet in circumference, and the rims of the wheels measured from six to ten inches in width. The wider the rim, the less wear and tear on the road and consequently the less toll to pay.

Heavy and strong were the words which described such an outfit. Specially bred, powerful horses corresponded to the weight of the wagon, and the harness to the strength of the horse. An immense amount of leather was used to make this harness for some back bands were fifteen inches wide and the hip straps ten inches; thick black housing reaching to the bottom of the hames protected the horses' shoulders; brass mountings and trimmings carefully polished added brightness; heavy hand forged chains formed the traces and bright worsted rosettes and gay colored lines furnished an extra dash of color. Only a stalwart man could put this harness of the horses' back with one full wide swing as it was the custom to do.
Sometimes there were two men known as wagoners, to a wagon, but many of these six to eight horse teams were handled by one man who sat on one of the horses on a saddle corresponding in weight and dimensions to the rest of the harness. At least one pair of the horses was known as the bell team for over their backs stood an arched frame work from which hung cone shaped bells which tinkled sharply and gave notice of the approach of this slow moving vehicle. The wagon drivers wore what were called hunting shirts: wool shirts made with wide capes trimmed with red and their caps had red bands in keeping with the gaudily painted wood work of the wagon. To complete the picture, the wagoner smoked long, thin, cheap cigars, four for a penny which were first made in little Washington, and which ever since have been known as “stogies.”

When a wagoner turned his outfit into some great, wide stable yard at dusk his first thought was for his faithful horses which he at once unhitched. Then he took the feeding troughs from the rear of the wagon where they swung when not in use, and attached them on either side of the wagon tongue; filled them with plenty of grain and tied the horses there to feed and rest. Near the barns there always stood a huge, hollowed out log overflowing with clear, pure water from a nearby spring. Hence there was no lack of water for the horses and droves of cattle to be looked after every night. In the tavern yard was an old fashioned wooden pump and there in all kinds of weather the wagon drivers went to wash. At more pretentious inns where the best stages stopped there were sometimes negro attendants to pump water and bring towels for guests when washing out of doors, but stage passengers usually washed in rooms provided for that purpose.

At the wagon stands, however, the wagoners drew their own basins of water and set them on a bench near the pump, or put their faces and head under the flowing spout to refresh themselves after a long day’s drive. They then stepped onto an adjoining porch where they found a common towel hanging beside a small mahogany framed mirror, under which was a shelf holding several horn combs and with such accessories their toilet was soon completed. Wagoners were plain, reliable men who did not demand anything
“fancy” in the way of service or accommodation. Having 
“washed up,” the wagoner went with his blankets into the 
tavern; left the blankets in the bar room and then went 
into supper and sat down to a table on which were ham and 
eggs, beef steak, fried speckled trout, fried potatoes, hot 
cakes, flap jacks, preserves, pickles, pie, cheese, cake and 
coffee. For this meal he paid a “levy,” a Spanish coin in 
use at that time, whose value was twelve and a half cents. 
A generous cold lunch with drinks could also be had for 
the same price if occasion demanded. If the wagoner did 
not wish to pay for his meals and the horses’ feed sepa-
rately, he would lump it all in one sum, $1.15. This included 
two meals for the driver, all the drinks he wanted, a warm 
room to sleep in and all the hay and grain he needed for 
his six horses.

Supper disposed of, every one met in the bar room 
which was the largest room in the tavern and was lobby, 
smoking room and salon all in one. There pure whiskey 
was sold for three cents a glass or two for five; in the higher 
class inns where the stages stopped the same whiskey 
brought five cents a glass. No one drank liquor at meals 
except in the larger towns where some inns could supply 
foreign wines, and the sports of the time met there to drink 
brandy burned over loaf sugar. This was considered a very 
“tony” drink. One English woman wrote complaining that 
they had had “another dinner with no wine!”, but also 
stated that all the men before coming into dinner had taken 
“an eye-opener” or a “phlegm dispenser” of a “drink called 
rye whiskey and this she could not abide.” Though whis-
key was cheap every one agreed that there were few drunk-
ards and it was the rarest thing ever to find an intoxicated 
wagoner or stage driver. While the men stood at the bar 
drinking they exchanged the latest news, swapped stories 
and newspapers and discussed without end the political situ-
ation of the day.

Frequently some one produced a fiddle; the floor was 
cleared of chairs and an old fashioned dance or “hoe down” 
began with everyone taking part and enjoying the merriment. This lasted until midnight when the wagoners spread 
their blankets before the fire and slept until dawn. Then 
they arose, made a hasty but hearty breakfast of sausage
and buckwheat cakes, and started in the early morning for another day’s journey of from fifteen to twenty miles.

A wagoner rarely “cussed” at the cold as he lay on the bar room floor in his blankets with his feet toward the grate, open fire which burned all night long. The fire places in those old inns were either open hearths which held six foot logs or long deep iron grates where a wagon load of wood or a quarter of a ton of soft coal was burned. Over these glowing fires the inn keeper presided with a poker six to eight feet long, and no one but himself was ever supposed to handle this scepter of the hearth. It is related of one famous tavern keeper, ‘Boss’ Rush, that he was so particular about how his bar room fire was “poked” that he kept the poker under lock and key in order that no amateur should handle it.

There were two classes of wagoners: the regulars and the sharp shooters. The regulars made a business of hauling throughout the year while the sharp shooters were farmers who in slack seasons put their teams on the road and “cut in” on the regular trade. Sometimes there was great rivalry between the two and tremendous loads were hauled in consequence. One wagoner took a load of eighty-three hundred pounds from Baltimore to Ohio with but five horses, and on another occasion hauled twelve thousand pounds; but the average load in ordinary weather was somewhere between the two, and the wagoner received $2.50 to $4.00 per hundred for hauling. The wagoners were for the most part white men living on or near the Pike. Occasionally a negro driver, a freed slave, was seen, but he always ate and slept by himself. These drivers were proud of their massive wagons; their splendid horses; their vast loads; the fast time they made; the safe delivery of their goods, and almost without exception were loyal, trustworthy, up-standing citizens.

Someone once remarked that wagon drivers had better morals and stage drivers better manners. This of course was vehemently denied by both parties; but whatever the opinion on that score, every one agreed that the stage driver was the hero of the road, the hope of the maidens for hundreds of miles, and the envy of every small boy throughout the land. Dashing, debonnair and, alas, some-
times deceitful as village girls found out, but always the high cockalorum of the road as he sat on his lofty seat, winding his horn on the last hill to give notice of his approach, guiding his four or six beautiful horses down some precipitous mountain side, or racing them down a slope on to the level street as they dashed toward some famous tavern for rest and refreshment.

Always so much the king of the highway was the stage driver that he was the only person in the inn who ever dared demand a bed to himself. Beds were pretty plentiful in those old hostelries and sometimes there were six or eight in one room, but those beds were built to hold more than one sleeper, so when trade was brisk and guests were many, each bed was supposed to contain at least three occupants. Stage drivers got less sleep than other travellers as they sometimes drove for eight or twelve consecutive hours. Teams were changed every ten or twelve miles but the driver never left his box. While the hostlers changed teams in less than three minutes, the driver swallowed a hasty bite and a drink, took up the reins again and was off before the passengers realized what was happening.

Some drivers put on a great deal of style while on the box, wearing high hats, tightly buttoned cape coats and yellow buckskin gloves which singled them out as men of fashion. Some dwellers along the road coveted the stage driver’s “dressy” clothes but many more envied his fine, fast horses which literally ate up the miles of the Pike, as their driver sat, an aristocrat enthroned, on a coach that many a king might have considered worthy of royalty itself.

Often these coaches were lined with purple silk plush or red silk damask and were splendid examples of the best coach builder's art. They were carefully constructed, elaborately painted and gilded and with door panels ornamented with bright landscapes, and striking portraits of contemporary statesmen. Names and mottoes were painted on the sides. One coach bore the picture of a post boy on a flying horse with the inscription, “He comes the Herald of a noisy world, News from all nations lumbering at his back.” The earlier coaches were built without springs, the bodies being hung on broad leather straps, so any bump or rut on the
road must have been well felt by the passenger, but the later coaches were more comfortable as they had suitable iron springs. The ordinary coach contained three seats, a front and rear and a middle one that was movable, and there was room for one passenger beside the driver. This seat was eagerly sought for in good weather. Coaches were named for celebrated men, particularly those in public life. One carried the name of John Tyler, while he was Vice President, but later as President when he vetoed the U. S. Bank Bill, the name of this coach was changed to that of his deceased predecessor, General Harrison.

To help the horses up the steepest hills, postillions were stationed at certain points. Two horses with a boy riding one of them were hitched to the front of the stage and thus the steep grade was ascended more rapidly. The two extra horses were then unhitched and at once clattered down the hill to bring up another coach. Relay horses were ready so frequently that tired or worn out horses were rarely seen drawing a stage, and the stages went so regularly that farmers living along the way declared they could set their clocks by them any time of the day or night.

There were a great many lines of stage coaches but the best known were the “Old Line” or “Stockton’s,” the “Good Intent” or “Reedside’s,” the “Peoples’ Line” and for a short time one known as the “June Bug Line.” Private coaches could be hired by paying for a full number of seats and always one or two exceedingly handsome ones were put at the disposal of the presidential parties who travelled to and from Washington.

Presidents were no unusual sight on the Pike. President Monroe during his term of office came as far west on the Pike as Uniontown. Jackson travelled this highway to both his inaugurations, his family occupying a handsome coach for which “Old Hickory” insisted on paying, while he rode a spirited horse practically all the way from Nashville, Tennessee to Washington, D. C. James K. Polk came over the National Road with his family on the way to be inaugurated, as did General William Henry Harrison, whose “log cabin and hard cider campaign” had been carried out with fervor along this road. Gen. Zachary Taylor was another President who travelled this way when he went to
Washington to be sworn in as the Nation's head. Whenever a President passed over the road "every hamlet, village and farm" turned out to do him honor. Great barbecues were prepared, long and laudatory addresses were made and the guest of honor was not only supposed to eat and drink as much as he could but he was expected to make a speech at every stopping place. It is little wonder that both Harrison and Taylor both died shortly after assuming office.

Many years before he was President, James Buchanan took a trip over the Pike. In the same year 1846, an unknown and ungainly lawyer from Illinois stopped in Uniontown on his way to take his seat in Congress; but on that day no one dreamt that in fifteen years the democratic Lincoln would succeed the dignified Buchanan and save the Union. John Quincy Adams and Martin Van Buren both knew the Pike after their retirement from office, and John C. Fremont travelled this route several years before he became a presidential candidate.

Another distinguished traveller was John C. Calhoun when Secretary of War in Monroe's second administration. Gen. Sam Houston of Texas, Senator Thomas H. Benton of Missouri and Gen. Winfield Scott all spent the same night at the same tavern on the Pike. Henry Clay was a frequent visitor and every time he came he marvelled over the great distance so quickly travelled, one day making seventy miles by stage coach. Davy Crockett, the famous western scout, Black Hawk, the great Indian Chief, and General Santa Anna of Mexican fame journeyed over this road. General La Fayette, when he was the guest of the nation, received a tumultuous ovation for many miles along the Pike; and here too P. T. Barnum escorted the Swedish nightingale, Jenny Lind, when she visited America in 1850.

The best drivers with the fastest horses were always put in charge of the special coaches containing distinguished passengers, and proud indeed were the drivers who drove the coach containing a President of the United States who was accompanied from one town to another all along the Pike by the inevitable reception committee riding in gaily decorated coaches.

Wonderful tales are told of the fast time made by some of the drivers. Gen. Lucious Stockton who owned one of
the best stage lines, made frequent trips over the road; he was accustomed to leave Uniontown with two horses in a low carriage called the "Flying Dutchman," after breakfast; took three hours out for lunch and arrived in Wheeling sixty-six miles away, in time for tea. Tradition says he had whiskey put in the water the horses drank and that is the reason they made such good time.

James Reeside was perhaps the most celebrated driver on the Pike for he made such rapid time that the United States government took him from this road to carry mails between New York and Philadelphia. Before Reeside became a driver on the New York-Philadelphia road, it had taken twenty-three hours to travel the ninety miles between the two cities but at once he reduced the time to sixteen hours, and later to twelve hours. Hence it was no idle boast that the fastest stage drivers were those trained on the Pike; they knew how to get the best from their horses with the least fatigue, and on special runs horses were changed every five or six miles. This change was brought about so quickly that scarcely had the stage stopped before it dashed off again with the passengers almost unaware of the interruption.

Arrangements were made whereby through stages did not have to stop at the toll house, the companies paying by contract. Consequently no time was lost in halting to figure up tolls. On short drives, phenomenal time was often made; one driver going from Uniontown to Brownsville, a distance of twelve miles, in forty-four minutes, averaging a mile in three minutes and forty seconds which showed not only rapid going horses but remarkable horsemanship.

People in those days must have cared more about politics and administration policies than they do now for they were always so anxious to read the President's message that particular care and haste were used in transporting it. President Van Buren's message was carried from Washington to Wheeling, a distance of two hundred and twenty-two miles, in twenty-three and a half hours, but it remained for Redding Bunting to make the most talked of record of the road. Bunting was six feet six inches tall, of an imposing figure, of great dignity in manner and dress and handled the long lines with exquisite skill. When President
Polk issued his message declaring war with Mexico, Bunting drove from Cumberland to Wheeling, one hundred and thirty miles over the most mountainous part of the Pike, in twelve hours, averaging almost eleven miles an hour, and this time included a stop in Uniontown for breakfast. When his passengers recovered from this drive, they assured Mr. Bunting they would never forget him! As soon as Polk's message was read, driver after driver along the Pike volunteered for service in Mexico, and many a "pike boy" trained to take the grades over the Allegheny Mountains, helped storm the heights of Chapultepec.

In 1819 when the Pike extended only to the Virginia line, it took an intolerable time for mail to reach the distant west and south west. It was seventy-eight days from the time President Monroe's message was published until it was read in Little Rock, Arkansas. Ten years later when the road had been extended to Indiana, President Van Buren's message arrived in Little Rock in two weeks time, and the event was written up in the newspapers as if such a record could never be excelled.

With such rapid travelling it was necessary for passengers to pack their luggage well, and see that it was carefully strapped on the top or rear of the coach. Otherwise wardrobes might come to grief. It is related that a young Scotchman travelling to Pittsburgh at this time packed a number of silver dollars in the valise with his shirts, and when he opened the bag, found that the dollars had cut his shirts to ribbons.

For several years the United States Government had diplomatic difficulties with France over the spoliation claims and for a brief period in the thirties, war was feared. The government suddenly realized that should war come in the future, the country might be anything but harmonious, because the south west, particularly Louisiana, would have French sympathies. Should the west tend the same way, the country would be hopelessly divided. To offset such a contingency, the government put a fast mail on the road which would carry national news and policies to all parts of the newly settled west so quickly as to make it feel in close touch and understanding with the seat of government at Washington. This fast mail was known as the pony ex-
press, and it went daily each way from Washington to St. Louis, and from Dayton, Ohio to New Orleans. The rate of speed was ten miles an hour and mail was delivered to only the most important post offices. Companies contracted to carry this mail so much per section and each section was approximately sixty miles and required nine horses and three boys. A boy would leave Cumberland at two o'clock in the morning and ride three successive horses seven miles when another boy took the mail sack, mounted a pony and rode in the same manner, the three boys covering the sixty miles in six hours and a quarter. This was the fastest overland mail in America and everywhere people marvelled at such swift delivery of mail. The pony express ran for but one year for when the war scare was forgotten, the government found the experiment too costly to be continued. This fast mail was followed by what was known as the "Monkey Box Line," which was a small coach holding three passengers, and on the rear was a box where the mail sack was put under lock and key. "The Monkey Box" in turn did not prove very satisfactory, and for the most part the ordinary stages carried the mail with comparatively little complaint from the general public.

For years, life on the Pike went on with very little change; the different states kept the road in good repair; the conestoga wagons rumbled along with their great loads of freight; cattle, sheep and hogs were driven by in numberless herds; processions of pack horse trains and emigrants continued to move westward; fast mail and passenger coaches coursed back and forth; welcoming taverns provided cheer and comfort for the weary traveller and altogether it was such a busy, happy, gay and successful life that it seemed as if it should go on forever. "But a day came at last when the stage brought no load To the gate, as it rolled up the long dusty road. And lo! at the surprise a shrill whistle blew O'er the hills—and the old yielded place to the new— And a merciless age with its discord and din Made a wreck, as it passed, of the pioneer inn."

When the B & O Railroad was built to Cumberland in 1844 there were a few who then foretold the ultimate fall of the road, but for a time the increasing trade on the Pike
The Romance of the National Pike

seemed to prove such opinion wrong. The railroad brought more freight to Cumberland than formerly and to get this across the mountains meant increased travel and commerce westward; but this sudden boom came to an end in 1852 when the railroad was extended to Wheeling and the far reaching traffic of the Pike came to a sudden standstill. A few stages still continued to run between local points, but gradually one by one the beautiful stage coaches disappeared until today not one of those gorgeous, gilded carriages can be found. Some were left on the mountains to rust their lives away under the swirl of summer rains and winter snows; some were burned or destroyed when the huge stables which once housed them were torn down to make way for newer modes of travel; some were sent west ahead of the railroad and there took part in the exciting days of the gold rush across the plains and some were left to bleach beside the bones of the men who drove them through Indian raids across the desert sands.

To us in this far off day their painted panels, their gilded doors and their silk linings are but a legend along with the courtly gentlement and curtsying ladies who once rode merrily in those gay coaches. Here and there a conestoga wagon has been saved as a reminder of that picturesque era and many an old tavern, forlorn and forgotten for years, has again come to life on the newly cemented highway, once the old Pike, over which motors now rush and roar. To the men whose early and best life was spent along this road, the passing of its leadership came as a cruel and lasting sorrow; many turned their energies into new pursuits; a few followed the fortunes of the new iron clad king of the land; but many failed to fit themselves into the new life and never recovered from the Pike's decline. The real "old timers" hated the dirt and the clamor and the ruthlessness of the new age of steam, and scarcely hoped that a new power would rise to overthrow this heartless monster now shrieking over their hills.

In 1892 when Col. Searight finished his authoritative book on the Pike, he referred to the age of electricity just at hand, prophesying that this new force might be the nemesis of the steam power which had ruined the Pike. How it would interest him today if he could read of the rapid
electrification of the railroads, and how it would amuse him to note that the same agencies which drove the thoroughbreds off the Pike, are now in order to retain their trade, applying for charters to run motor busses over the highways.

If the ghosts of forgotten statesmen who predicted when the road was built that it would some day be a means of defense in war, could have stood along its hillsides in 1917 and 1918 and counted the long lines of motor lorries wending their way east for service over seas, they would have rejoiced that at last the Pike had come into its own. Many other pikes there have been and many other celebrated roads but along with the Pike's early adherents, the writer agrees that no other road holds a greater place in history. Over this road in one generation there swept practically all the men and women who were to carve out and build up the great states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska and Minnesota, and even more of the great and further west. These states because of this road were bound in their youth to the north and the east by the same economic ties and political ideals and when disruption and disunion came in 1861, the prosperity, the power and the President coming from the west to aid the Union, gave the old Pike, whatever its legal name, the right at last to call itself "The National Road."

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Note: The authorities cited here do not represent all those studied or consulted in search of material for the foregoing article. Access to family records and reminiscenses of many who lived in the days of the "Pike" were also used.

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