

Some Old Trails and Roads of Western Pennsylvania with Special Reference to Clarion County

By Rev. George J. Reid

In these splendid, smooth, hard-surfaced highways, in the Keystone State, over which one can spin between widely separated points with a speed and comfort undreamed of before the motor-car revolutionized travel and transformed roads, it is interesting to go back a generation or two when, as many of us remember, we toiled in horse-drawn vehicles over the frequent hills of Pennsylvania, by dirt roads, with more or less—generally less—grading, worked once or twice a year by the township, rough stony on the steep stretches, and alternating with rare intervals, between dust and mud.

And yet these ways were a great improvement over those which the pioneers opened painfully through the endless forest, and struggled over as best they could. Still further back in time, rare Indian paths, the original ancestors of the modern highway, were the only means of communication through the vast wooded wilderness that western Pennsylvania once was. Over these, beside the red man himself, bold and hardy traders with the Indians penetrated the wilds with their horses and packs, from frontier settlements. It is the purpose of this paper to speak of certain of these pathways, and pioneer roads well-nigh forgotten by the very oldest survivors of the earlier times, and even by them known, if at all, only sectionally, and not as a whole.

The Chinklacamoose Trail and Others

Starting at the West Branch of the Susquehannah, at the mouth of Bald Eagle creek, an ancient Indian path, known in pioneer records as the Chinklacamoose, reached the waters of the Allegheny at Venango (Franklin), through the vast and savage intervening wilderness. It took off over the main ridge of the Alleghenies from Bald Eagle's Nest, near Milesburg, Center county, passed Snowshoe, and turning west came to Chinklacamoose, once an Indian village, where Clearfield now stands; thence it struck

in the Redbank at the point which at an early date became Port Barnett, near Brookville. Its course from there to the Clarion must have closely paralleled, and probably was sometimes identical with the variously named turnpike, which has become part of the Lakes-to-Sea highway. There are indications that the trail crossed the river at Clugh's Ripple, between Strattanville and Clarion; thence by the site of Clarion Furnace on Little Toby, northwest to the Indian village of Venango. A southern branch of this path, leaving Chinklacamoose, and going by Punxsutawney, joined the Allegheny river not far above Kittanning.

The first white man who is known to have traveled over the trail was Christian Frederick Post, a Moravian of Bethlehem, and a sort of lay missionary. The year was 1758. The French and Indian war was at a crisis, and at the instance of the Proprietary Council of Pennsylvania he undertook the arduous and perilous journey, accompanied by a few Indians, with the object of winning the tribes on the Allegheny to the English and Colonial side. Post kept a brief, rude journal, and in it he notes that he crossed "the big river Tobeco," that is, the Clarion, "Tobeco" apparently being the Indian original of "Toby's creek."

The Senecas and Muncies of the upper Allegheny naturally used this trail in their occasional raids on settlements in central Pennsylvania. In 1781 Seneca Indians captured two children, George Rote and his sister Rhody, at their home at Mifflinburg, Union Country. After some time peace was proclaimed, the separated children were freed, and met at the site of Clarion Furnace or Penn Mills, whence they returned home together, doubtless by the Chinklacamoose trail, as far as Center county. This incident is related in Linn's *Annals of the Buffalo Valley*, and vouched for by an informant who traveled afoot through the present Clarion county at an early date, and was very accurate as to facts. Chinklacamoose trail next emerges into history as the route followed in 1788 from Sunbury to French Creek by the little band of intrepid pioneers who founded Meadville, namely, David and John Mead, Stophel Seiverling, James Miller, Cornelius Van Horn, and two Randolph brothers.

Over it, too, came in 1797 Joseph Barnett, from Lycoming county, the first pioneer of Jefferson county. At Port

Barnett on the Redbank, then called Sandy Lick Creek the path was intersected by one from the Indiana county settlements to the Indian towns on the upper Allegheny, near the site of Tionesta. Probably this was the "path leading to Cus-cushing" which Colonel Brodhead took and to which he refers in his report of his punitive expedition of 1779, with 600 men from Fort Pitt, against Indian towns in the present Warren county, and which led him "through a country too inaccessible to be described."

Next in the broken and tiny stream of emigration into the wild west, by the old trail, comes in 1801 the group of Center county colonists of what is now Clarion county, the Clovers, Youngs, Potters, etc., who settled in what became Clarion township, but was then an unorganized part of the new county of Armstrong. Judge Clover, an excellent authority, in Caldwell's Historical Atlas of Clarion County, gives an intimate picture of the caravan threading the forest solitudes, "the women and children mounted upon horses, the cooking utensils, farming implements, such as hoes, axes, plows, and shovels together with bedding and provision, placed in what was called pack-saddles; while following on foot were the men with their guns upon their shoulders, ready to take down any small game that might cross their path, which would go toward making up their next meal."

There was another Indian trail, from the south which guided pioneers into the future Clarion county, at an equally early date, and in two or three instances, earlier. This pathway's history is obscure and scant; what the writer knows of it has been gathered from scattered items and inferences in backwoods lore. It led from Blair, Westmoreland, and Indiana counties to Venango (Franklin), and may be called the Frankstown-Venango trail, although the southern portion of it consisted really of two converging branches of the better known Kittanning path. It crossed the Redbank at the mouth of Town Run (so called from a prehistoric Indian village on the Armstrong county side), and intersected the Clarion at Bullock's Ford, near Callensburg. It was doubtless by this forest path that Absalom Travis, the very first settler of Clarion county, coming about 1792 from the Black Lick settlement in Indiana county, found his way into the virgin wilderness, and hewed

out a home in what is now the southeast corner of Monroe township. It was by the same that two of the three earliest groups of colonists, also crossed the stream known to the Indians as the Lycamahoning, to the first settlers as Sandy Lick Creek, and now as the Redbank. 1801 is a notable date in the annals of Clarion county. The Center county emigrants arrived then. Likewise from the vicinity of New Alexandria, Westmoreland county, the Henrys, Shields, and others, who settled along Leatherwood creek, and in the same year, three Guthrie brothers and William Maffet, James Maguire, with their families and a few others left their homes at New Derry, in old Westmoreland, picked their way over this Venango trail, and striking northeast from it to a point about a mile east of where Strattanville now stands, found provisional shelter amidst the woods, in a cabin which the Guthries and Maffet had built the previous year. They were quite near the location of the Center county group, but in the thick forest the two little settlements were for a while unaware of each other's existence.

The Bald Eagle-Waterford State Road

This was the first highway in the district covered by Clarion, Jefferson, and Clearfield counties; also in Crawford and northern Venango, unless the early well-beaten track along French creek between Franklin and Waterford be called one.

As early as 1793 the Assembly provided for a commission to lay out a road from Reading to the fine natural harbor of Presque Isle, later Erie, in the newly acquired triangle on Lake Erie. Accordingly in the same year Governor Mifflin appointed Gen. William Irvine, a Revolutionary soldier, Andrew Ellicott, a prominent surveyor, and Col. John Wilkins. But the Indians of the northwest were such a menace that it was not till after Wayne's decisive campaign of 1794 that it became practicable to undertake any surveying. Even then the first commissioners and their assistants were protected by a company of state militia.

After Ellicott and Irvine had surveyed the triangle and laid out Erie, Waterford at Fort La Boeuf, and Franklin, in 1795, they turned their attention to the projected road, and opened a bridle path from

Waterford to the Allegheny river, but on a more northern course than the one eventually adopted. This done, the commissioners resigned, and the undertaking lapsed till it was revived by the Legislature of 1796 passing an act for the survey of a road from Bald Eagle's Nest in Center county to Erie. Bald Eagle was not a bird but an Indian warrior, and the nest was his wigwam or lodge, which was fixed in the valley which took his name, at the point where the Chinklacamoose trail turned northwest to ascend the mountains. The location is occupied by the old town of Milesburg, about two miles down the valley from Bellefonte. The new commissioners were still Irvine and Ellicott, but this time Andrew Irvine and Joseph Ellicott.

By 1799 the road was marked to the Allegheny through a wilderness which had as its only haven Clover's tavern, on the Susquehanna, where Curwensville now is, and the log homestead of Joseph Barnett on the Redbank, which was aptly known as Port Barnette, east of "Toby's creek" the route followed pretty closely the old trail.

Another act of the Legislature, in 1799, empowered the governor to contract for the opening of the road to the Allegheny, and for the laying out and continuation of it to "Le Boeuf or Waterford." Though the state may have opened the road, it was completed under contracts let by the commissioners, of the counties through which it passed, and doubtless these counties paid for the work. The cutting through of the highway westward, at least as far as the Allegheny river, was not finished till about 1806. We have seen that when the Center county band migrated to the present Clarion county in 1801 the old trail had not yet developed into a road. On the other hand we find Alexander McNaughton, the pioneer of Highland township also from Center County, settled on the state road in 1806. It was not built between the Allegheny and Clarion till about 1812, as appears from minutes of the commissioners of Venango county. The Howell map of Pennsylvania, 1811, shows it in its entire length and it had reached a stage of completion a few years later that enabled state militia units to march to and fro over it between the central parts of the state and Erie during the war of 1812. A cabin within the limits of Washington Township was built as a rude shelter for sick and disabled soldiers.

This wilderness highway crossed the Clarion by ford or ferry at the point still known as State Road Ripple, between Millcreek and Highland townships, passed the lone settlements of McNaughton (1806; Helen Furnace), John Vogelbacher (1820; Lucinda), and George Kapp, Christian Hemlen, and John Siegwarth (1815; Fryburg.) Continuing northwest it struck the Allegheny river not far below the site of Tionesta, and crossed the river at a ferry kept by Alexander Holman, an early settler there. Keeping its northwest direction the road approached, but did not touch Oil Creek—its original name—close to where Titusville now covers the large flat, which was occupied early by the improvement of a man named Titus, but did not contain a village till about 1820. The petroleum wealth of this region was yet far from discovery when the state road was put through. A little to the northeast of Titusville, the road, still a thoroughfare there, leads on the plateau through the "Sloan settlement," a once flourishing little community of Catholic farmers, who back in the '20's built a little church on it, which still stands. The road formed an arc to the large bend of the creek between Titusville and Centerville, and crossed at or near the latter point. About twenty-five miles northeast of this it came to its terminus, the village of Waterford, Erie county, the site of Fort Le Boeuf, made historic by the errand of young George Washington to the French commandant there in 1753, to protest in the name of Virginia against the French occupation of the Ohio and Allegheny valley. Between Waterford and the new town of Erie there was a road which had been built at an early date by the French to connect Forts Presque Island and Le Boeuf.

Much of this old state road is still in use, at least in Clarion county. The writer, and presumably also the readers of this article, would be interested to learn just what course it follows between Port Barnett, or at least between the Clarion-Jefferson line and State road ripple, and for that matter beyond the river, too; and if anywhere it is identical with the "turnpike."

To complete the article on the State Road, a word should be said about Pit Hole, which is a point on it in Venango county, about half way between Holman's (also spelled Holeman's) Ferry three miles below Tionesta, and Ti-

tusville. Pit Hole, named from the creek, is one of the forgotten places which belong to the romance of the first oil region. Oil was discovered there in the middle sixties, and as some of the wells produced between 500 and 1000 barrels, a town sprang up which enjoyed a tremendous boom, and then withered away. Today scarcely a vestige of the once famous Pit Hole City remains.

The Earliest Local Roads and Postoffices

Quite early in the last century, two roads were opened in the Clarion district. One was from the vicinity of what is now Strattonville, via approximately the sites of Reidsburg, Curllsville, and Callensburg, to Graham's Landing, connecting by ferry across the Allegheny with Parker's Mill, later Lawrenceburg, later Parker's Landing. This road intersected another from Watterson's Ferry on the same river, at the mouth of Redbank creek, to the Clarion at Gardner's Ferry, at the mouth of Beaver creek, thence up to the head of that stream and farther, till it met a branch from the state road to Franklin, which branch was about as old as the state road itself. The present Sligo-Canoe Ripple—Edenburg—Kossuth road is practically the same thoroughfare. This north and south road afforded a horseback mail route between Kittanning and Meadville, but there was no service on it within the limits of Clarion county. It was otherwise with a route which is identical in large part with what is known as the Watterson road, as it led from Watterson's Ferry via what are now Rimersburg, Sligo, Curllsville, Reidsburg, Strattonville. The post-offices, beginning at the south, were Maple Grove, moved to Pinksville, which became a part of Rimersburg then, Stoner's store (probably the first in the county), a mile south of Curllsville, then Hulingsburg, a mile above Reidsburg, named for an ex-paymaster in the war of 1812, from Franklin, who planned a salt works at "Hulinsburg," and bored for salt water, but disappeared in 1818 or '19 when he was threatened with arrest for having defaulted with government money. The terminal postoffice was another abortive place, Roseburg, sometimes, curious to say, called Clarion, which was a mile or so east of Strattonville, on the Millcreek road, and was laid out by Josiah Guthrie. The postoffice and prospective town was named in honor of Dr. Robert H. Rose, general agent for the Bingham lands,

whose residence was at Silver Lake, Susquehanna county. The Roseburg postoffice was opened in 1818 or the next year. When Strattonville was started, in 1828, the postoffice was transferred there, and Roseburg-Clarion, a town that never was, passed into oblivion.

These little backwoods postoffices got their saddle-bag mail about once a week. The route was very extensive, taking in Greensburg, Indiana, Kittanning, Lawrenceburg, and Freeport. Those who got their mail at the office at Sloan's Gap on the route between Kittanning and Olean, had to be satisfied with a service every two weeks, which brings us to

The Olean Road

This was a state road, and its survey was ordered by the Legislature in 1819, from Kittanning by the nearest and best route to the northern state line, "on a direction to the village of Hamilton, on the Allegheny river, in the township of Olean, in the state of New York." Hamilton evidently was the original name of the city of Olean. In 1821 the state appropriated \$8000 to open this road as surveyed, and the commissioners appointed for Armstrong county were David R. Lawson, of Lawsonham, always prominent in early surveying matters, and James Cochran, of the vicinity of Kingsville, both now within Clarion county. The road was to be maintained by the counties through which it passed. It crossed in a northwest direction the counties of Armstrong, including then southern Clarion county, Jefferson, including then the eastern part of Forest and the western of Elk, where the road touched the mouth of Millstone creeks thence northeast through Smethport, to the state line.

Then Olean road is historically an enigma. It is hard to see a reason for its existence so early. With the exception of a few spots in northern Armstrong county, all the region through which it passed was wild and unsettled in 1821. In fact Jefferson and McKean counties were still only on paper; though long erected, they were not organized till 1824. When opened and for some years later, the road did not touch a single point worthy the name of a village between Kittanning and Olean. If it was intended to open up the country, it did not prove much of a success. It did not pay to keep it up, and became in places overgrown with

brush or clogged by windfalls. Day, in his *Historical Collections*, writing on Jefferson county, about 1841, notes "North of turnpike, however, this road has been suffered to be closed by windfalls, and is not now used."

The Olean road centers Clarion county at the mouth of Leatherwood creek, where there has been a bridge over Redbank as long as the oldest inhabitant remembers. It follows up Leatherwood by Rockville and Brinkerton, thence through Sloan's Gap, Frogtown, Kingsville, and crosses the turnpike at Corsica, which owes its existence to the intersection of these roads.

The Waterford and Susquehanna Turnpike

It is safe to say that the Bald Eagle and Waterford state road never was a popular route, for several reasons. Rough construction, no bridges over the larger streams, and bad maintenance, made it impassable much of the time for anything but horse and foot transportation. It passed through an extremely sparsely-settled and townless region, leaving the growing villages of Franklin and Meadville far to the west. So, scarcely was it finished when a demand for a better and more "civilized" route led to the incorporation by the Legislature of 1812 of two turnpikes to form a continuous road between the northern and central portions of the state. The western one was to begin at Waterford, and, passing via Meadville and Franklin, end at the West Branch of the Susquehanna, at the mouth of Anderson creek, Clearfield county, which is the location of Curwensville. The eastern was to begin there and lead to Northumberland by way of Bellefonte. As a matter of fact, as a stage route, the road ended at Bellefonte, and was often called the Bellefonte and Meadville turnpike. The incorporating act called for an "artificial" road, but there is no evidence that it was ever piked anywhere.

As the war of 1812 interfered with the execution of the project, the Assembly twice passed a bill extending the time. It was not surveyed till 1818. The surveyor of the western half was John Sloan, Jr., who had been sheriff of Armstrong county, but later lived in Jefferson, it seems. It was he who laid out Clarion Borough, much later. Clearing and grading began in 1819, and the road was finished in 1822. The work was let to various contractors in sections

of from ten to twenty miles. The bridge over the Clarion, a single arch, was built by Moore of Northumberland in 1821. As soon as five miles of the road were completed, toll gates were put up to help defray expenses. But it was not necessary to make an entirely new road all the way, for between the site of Brookville and Curwenville, a distance of over thirty-five miles, the state road was utilized. At least this is the conclusion I draw from the fact that Tanner's map of Pennsylvania, dated 1825, shows only one road between those points. Also much of the state road between Milesburg and Phillipsburg was used. From Curwenville the highway led via Phillipsburg and Milesburg to Bellefonte, where it connected with other turnpikes so that from about 1825 one could travel by stage all the way from Philadelphia to Erie. Clearfield was off the line till about 1840, when a loop was made from Phillipsburg, which took it in, and rejoined the original route at Curwensville.

The first stage line was established in November, 1824, between Bellefonte and Erie, by Robert Clark, of Clark's Ferry, Dauphin county. The quaint, gaily painted coaches, with four horses with relays for teams and drivers, began their fifty year career on this line with a tri-weekly service, which later became daily. One relay was at Corbett's (Cor-sica) and another at Berlin's. That was before Brookville and Clarion existed. A traveler from Bellefonte to Franklin, in 1825, would see the villages of Milesburg, Phillipsburg and Curwensville, and the hamlet of Port Barnett, then nothing but three or four taverns at wide intervals, and a couple of rustic postoffices; no Reynoldsville, no Brookville or Strattonville, no Clarion or Shippenville. In 1840 a little section of the turnpike became the Main Street of the brand-new county seat of the new county of Clarion, and the Waterford and Susquehanna turnpike was an important factor in the location of the town. The picturesque stage coaches held on, at least between Brookville and Franklin, till 1872. In 1883 the turnpike between Shippenville and Franklin was abandoned by the owners; in 1894 the sections between Shippenville and Brookville were given up to the townships. Very few of the old turnpikes paid dividends but they rendered necessary service to the public, at moderate charges.

In the preparation of these articles, which have now ended, I have received valuable help from Hon. A. B. Reid of Pittsburgh, and Mr. J. M. Owens of Clarion.