

The Old Brookville-Brownstown Road

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Early east-west travel along the general line of the Brookville-Brownstown Road is evidenced by fragmentary references in journals and diaries of that day. Washington, in 1770,¹ exploring the western country, wrote:

Upon conversing with Nicholson,² I found he had been two or three times to Fort Chartres at the Illinois, and got from him the following Acct of the Lands between this³ and that;—That from Fort Chartres to Pittsburg by Land, is computed 800 Miles; & in travelling thro the Country from that place he found the soil very rich—the Ground exceeding level to Opost⁴ (a French Settlement) & from Opost to the Lower Shawna Town⁵ on Scioto equally flat;—that he passed through large Planes 30 miles in length without a Tree except little Islands of Wood—That the distance from Fort Chartres to Opost is about 240 miles & the Country not very well watered—from Opost to the lower Shawna Town about 300 more abounding in good Springs & Rivulets—that the remainder of the way to Fort Pitt is Hilly; and the Hills larger as you approach the Fort tho the Ld in general is also good.

Further evidence of travel between Fort Chartres and Fort Pitt is found in the correspondence of this period. George Croghan in his letter⁶ to Sir William Johnson, dated at Fort Chartres Sept. 10, 1766, wrote: As I am so Reduced with Sickness I shall be obliged to go round by New Orleans as I am not able to ride aCross the Country to Fort Pitt." The Morgan-Baynton-Wharton⁷ correspondence con-

¹ Archer Butler Hulbert, Ed., "Washington's 'Tour to the Ohio,'" *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications*, XVII, 482-3.

² Joseph Nicholson was engaged as Interpreter for Washington's voyage down the Ohio. "His guide [Nicholson] told Washington that the stream was called Wheeling. It is said that Nicholson was a scholar and knew the country perfectly well." *History of the Panhandle of West Virginia* (1879), 181. Cornplanter, in his speech to the Great Council of the Thirteen Fires said, in 1791: "We know Joseph Nicholson and he speaks our language and we rely on what he says. Let him stand between to intreat you." *American State Papers*, I, *Indian Affairs*, 688.

³ Washington had returned to Fort Pitt when the entry for "Monday 19th" was written.

⁴ *Aux Post, Post Vincent* (Vincennes).

⁵ Lower Shawnee Town in 1770 was located on the Scioto River, 90 miles up from the mouth, in Pickaway County, Ohio.

⁶ Charles Augustus Hanna, *The Wilderness Trail* (New York, 1911), I, 50.

⁷ Clarence W. Alvord, Ed., *Great Britain in the Illinois Country. Collections of the Illinois State Historical Society*, XVI (Springfield 1921).

tains frequent references to overland trips from the Illinois country to Fort Pitt. On October 30, 1768, Morgan,⁸ writing from Kaskaskia, mentioned the advantages of this route:

I shall proceed to Post Vincent by Land & . . . from Post Vincent I can proceed by Land to Fort Pitt & I imagine I may make an easy Journey of it in twenty odd days In which Route there will not be the least Possibility of Danger . . . for exclusive of more Important Concerns, I would by far prefer Walking to Fort Pitt from hence to traversing the Atlantick.

Again, under date of Dec. 22, 1767, he wrote:

Dear Partners, Silver Heels being detained several days longer than I expected in waiting for Col. Reed's Despatches, gives me the Disagreeable opportunity to inform you of Lt. Phyn & his Partys being detained by ice . . . The Indian who was to accompany Him to Fort Pitt could not be ready . . . to return with me and my Friend by Land or Water as I may choose.

In the same letter, he requests a pocket compass which he would need, if he should return to Fort Pitt by Land, and states that he is "convinced I shall be able to walk it in twenty Days and in a Route of not more than 400 [?] Miles."

Morgan wrote to his wife, sometime after Sept. 5, 1768:

In a few Days Silver Heels will leave this place to go to Fort Pitt by Land. I intended to have him accompany me but Colonel Wilkins has requested me to engage him to go Express for him as there is at present no other suitable Person & as I am not yet determined what Rout to take nor shall untill I again hear from you which I expect will soon be the Case for the last Time as we have Reason to look out for the Return of the French Express every Hour?

Again Morgan refers to this overland travel, writing from Kaskaskia:

I refer you to Mr. Williamson's letter from Post Vincennes to you for what I have entrusted to his care. I shall direct him to wright to you very particularly by Monsr Mayot as he is to tarry a day with him on his March to Fort Pitt.¹⁰

Both methods of travel are mentioned in another letter: "There were three Men, a Woman & 2 Children arrived the other Day in a Canoe from Fort Pitt & brought

⁸ Colonel George Morgan was an agent for the firm of Baynton-Wharton. He was with Montessor, Capt. Harry Gordon, Ensign Thomas Hutchins, Croghan and others on a trip from Fort Pitt to Kaskaskia by batteaux. *New York Historical Society Collections* (1882), XIV, 380.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 479.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 447.

a number of letters (None for Myself) as I suppose Mr. Campbell imagined that the Express would be safer and of better Opportunity."¹¹

The general direction of this travel is shown by the map of Lewis Evans (1755), carrying the title, *A General Map of the Middle British Colonies in America*. Sayer & Bennett's *Map* (London 1776), shows a trail from Fort Chartres to Great Wiaut, on the Wabash, on to Piquatown and thence to Fort Pitt. It is extremely difficult to localize the routes of travel from these maps when the distortion of the map (a common characteristic of early maps) is taken into consideration. The fact that there were several towns at various times during this period named "Piqua" and that there might have been confusion as to G. Wiaut and L. Wiaut¹² adds to the difficulty. As an example, there was an Indian village, Piqua, near the present site of Xenia, Ohio, which doubtless was on or near the Fort Chartres-Fort Pitt Path, while the map maker in 1776 might have still been placing Pickawillany, occasionally mistaken for Piqua, on his map and drawing the trail through this spot. The destruction of the stockade and the Indian village occurred in 1752, however, and they were never rebuilt.

Hutchin's Map of 1764 locates "Old Lower Shawnee Town" at the mouth of the Scioto, near the present site of Portsmouth, Ohio and Lower Shawnee Town "near the site of the later village of Westfall on the west, and on the Pickaway Plains to the east, four miles below Circleville in Pickaway County."¹³ The town was moved sometime between 1750 and 1752 following a disastrous Ohio River flood. This is near the mouth of Walnut Creek where it joins the Scioto.

It seems safe to conclude that from these early maps only general directions of travel can be assumed and not the exact locations of the trails as marked off by the cartographer drawing his map on the other side of the Atlantic from but scanty information furnished by these early travelers. Likewise, trails shifted with changing villages, stream crossings and varying trade and terrain conditions.¹⁴

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 480.

¹² Vincennes.

¹³ Hanna, *op.cit.*, I, 146.

¹⁴ Frank Nelson Wilcox says that "to attempt to give an absolutely authentic report of a trail today would be to attribute to the Indiana a tendency to follow beaten paths. Knowing his nature for what

The presence of this route of travel is mentioned at various times in the field notes by the government surveyors who first came into the territory. The "Field Notes of the western boundary line of the Indian cession by the Treaty of Greenville, Aug. 5, 1795" (Vol. 44-J of the General Land Office, Washington), verify the location of trails approximately the line of this trail which later became the Brookville-Brownstown Road. On page twelve of these "Notes" it is stated that at the end of 32 miles, 28 chains and 50 links north of a point "Commencing at a Maple tree 10" [10 inches] in diameter standing on the north bank of the Ohio river at a point opposite the mouth of the Kentucky River," "a road leading to Vincennes, N60E." An entry is also made at a distance of 39 miles 16 chains—"a road marked and the brush cut out leading to Vincennes" (page 15). These notes were made in 1800 when the surveying was done, and, since it was the privilege of the chiefs who signed the treaty to accompany the surveyors of the treaty line, the information as to the destination of the trails may have been supplied by the accompanying Indians.

Later, in 1806, the land acquired under treaty of 1805 was surveyed by A. Henri, one of the government surveyors. In his record is a notation made while surveying in what is now Jennings county. Using his phraseology: "North on East Boundary of section 13, township 7N, range 8 E . . . 70 chains . . . Kibby's trace from Cincinnati to Vincennes." This would locate Kibby's trace as running through¹⁵ Dearborn county, crossing the Greenville treaty line near Holman, through Manchester, and thence westward into Jennings county, near St. Anne's Parish Church to near Queensville where it probably joined the trail, later, the approximate location of the Brookville-Brownstown road.

it was, we may assume that at no time were all trails in service; nor were they constant in their courses." *Ohio Indian Trails* (Cleveland, 1933), 51. The author also concludes that "By the time of the second war with England in 1812, most of the Indian trails had become the white man's property." *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁵ From the *Western Spy*, July 23, 1799. "Capt. E. Kibbey, who, sometime since, undertook to cut a road from Fort Vincennes to this place [Cincinnati] returned on Monday reduced to a perfect skeleton. He had cut the Cincinnati road 70 miles, when by some means, he was separated from his men—after hunting some days without success he steered his course this way. He has undergone great hardships and was obliged to subsist on roots, etc. which he picked up in the woods."

Wilson¹⁶ mentions "another Indian road" farther west which was located by still another early surveyor, John MacDonald, surveyor of the "ten o'clock" line. This Indian road, approximates closely the later route of the Brookville-Brownstown road. Wilson states that it was "south of White River, near Brownstown, where he mentioned another Indian road, going east and west; west perhaps to the old Delaware camp at the forks of White River."

The route of this cross country trail could easily have been that of an Indian trail across what is now southern Indiana considering the location of Indian Villages and trading posts along the route. From Vincennes, always a central point of Indian travel,¹⁷ eastward to the junction of the branches of White River, at which point there was a camp of the Delawares in 1779 and later; thence to Vallonia, a French trading post and Indian rendezvous located on a trail from Vincennes to Vallonia, and from there northeastward to Detroit.¹⁸ Continuing eastward is the Indian road identified in 1803 by John McDonald. Farther on was Shield's Trading House,¹⁹ erected for trade with the Indians, near the present sites of Seymour and Rockford. Then came Geneva, a village in Jennings county, at which was located an early Indian village and trading post. From this place the route ran to the junction of the east and west forks of the Whitewater, near the present site of Brookville, where Amos Butler in 1805, reported having seen a large camp of Indians. Close by was Conner's trading post on Whitewater established in 1803, from which the course ran to the mouth of Mad River, which flows into the Great Miami. From this evidence, it would appear reasonable to believe that this route was not only a path between the Indian vil-

¹⁶ George R. Wilson, "Early Indiana Trails and Surveys" *Indiana Historical Society Publications*, VI, 351ff.

¹⁷ Edward Cole, writing from Fort Chartres to Sir Wm. Johnson, said: "It is absolutely a Necessity to Establish a Post at Post Vincent, and to have some one there in the Indian Department. It is by the great Path through which all the Northward Indians pass and a great place of trade." *Papers of Sir William Johnson*, VI, 197. Wilson, *op.cit.*, 362, says: "Indian traces and trails established Vincennes as the 'Indian capital' of southern Indiana."

¹⁸ *History of Shelby County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1887), 300: "It is quite probably that the first men to cross this territory [Shelby County] were the French traders who dealt with the Delawares; the whites travelled from Detroit to Vincennes by way of old Fort Vallonia in Jackson County."

¹⁹ Wilson, *op. cit.*, 352.

lages but also a sort of *route de marchands*, or the route of traders, considering the number of trading posts established along the way, usually located close to the camping places of the Indians.

The Secretary of the Treasury under date of June 26, 1802, made inquiry of Rufus Putnam saying "another road in contemplation is from opposite the mouth of Grave Creek²⁰ by Lancaster and the mouth of Walnut creek²¹ and that of Mad river²² to the Western Indian Boundary."²³

The advisability of improvement of this path was the subject of a report to the House of Representatives on January 17, 1811, by a "Committee on the Expediency of Opening a Road from Vincennes, Ind. towards Dayton, Ohio."²⁴ Mr. Jennings, for the committee appointed to make such inquiry, reported that

the opening of such a road was contemplated by Congress in the act passed April 1806, but the moneys appropriated for that and similar purposes have been found insufficient to accomplish the desired objects. That the opening of the contemplated road would certainly expedite the sale of public lands, insomuch, that the government would shortly be remunerated from that source for the necessary expenditure independent of the general advantage to be derived from such an addition to the number of our public roads. That it will be found the most direct course from Pittsburg to Vincennes and St. Louis and will no doubt become the chief post route to the Territories northwest of the rivers Ohio and Mississippi from the seat of Government of the United States by way of the seat of Government of the State of Ohio. The Committee therefore beg leave to submit the following resolution: Resolved, That it is expedient to cause to be opened a road from Vincennes or some point on the road leading from Vincennes to the Falls of the Ohio to the eastern

²⁰ Near the present site of Moundsville, West Virginia. A fort had been erected here in 1777 at the mouth of Grave Creek. The Act to Regulate the Laying Out and Making a Road from Cumberland, in the State of Maryland, to the State of Ohio, approved March 29, 1806, specifies that the road was to "strike the same [Ohio River] at the most convenient place between a point on its eastern bank opposite to the northern boundary of Steubenville . . . and the mouth of Grave creek."

²¹ On the Scioto, near the location of Lower Shawnee Town, mentioned by Washington. It is, from Nicholson's report, on the land between Fort Chartres and Fort Pitt. This would lead to the belief that the approximate location of the Fort Chartres-Fort Pitt path was still well known and in use at this date (1802).

²² An Indian rendezvous at the site of the present Dayton, Ohio.

²³ Greenville Treaty Line of 1795. In Indiana, this was the western

²⁴ *American State Papers*, XXXVIII, *Miscellaneous*, II, 145. boundary of what is known as the "Gore".

boundary of Indiana territory in a proper direction towards Dayton in the State of Ohio.

The Brookville-Brownstown road was thus a part of the longer Dayton to Vincennes roadway until 1811 when a widened thoroughfare was provided.²⁵ The territory about Vincennes, the territorial capital of Indiana, and the White-water Valley were settling up, and with emigration restricted by the diagonally drawn Grouseland and "ten o'clock" treaty lines, this Dayton-Vincennes road probably reached the zenith of its importance. Canals, railroads and the National Road were unknown to the territory and to the newly formed state in 1816. The great expanse north of the "ten o'clock" line and the Grouseland line was still Indian country and all East-West travel across Indiana probably found it's easiest going over either the Falls of the Ohio-Vincennes, the Cincinnati-Vincennes or the old Brookville-Brownstown roads. Along this latter road, settlers were moving in from the Eastern states. The earlier settlers to take up land in Ripley, Jennings and Jackson counties located their purchases for the most part close to this road. Hindostan, New Natchez, Geneva, three "boom towns" of the early nineteenth century, all since disappeared, were located in close proximity to this then important highway. The prospectus for Geneva,²⁶ mentioned the fact that "This town is laid out in a healthy situation upon the present Indian boundary . . . and the leading road from Brookville to Vincennes passes through it."²⁷ An advertisement of a sale of lots in the newly located town of New Natchez, Washington county, Indiana Territory, was said to be "Elegantly situated . . . 6 miles east of Vallonia and 2 miles below Cherry Bottom." and that "it must for years be on the most advantageous

²⁵ Robert W. Steele, *Early Dayton* (1896), 102: "The journeys of our Dayton merchants to Philadelphia to buy goods and of their wives to their old homes in the East were made on horseback . . . Also two years later a bridle path was cut two hundred miles distant to Vincennes." Crew's *History of Dayton* (1889), 89: "A bridle path was, in the winter of 1810-11, contracted for and cut through from Dayton to Vincennes, a distance of two hundred miles."

²⁶ A town laid out in 1818 by J. LaTourette, a New York merchant, on the site of an earlier Indian trading post and Indian village. It was located on Sand Creek in Jennings county. It flourished until the location of the Madison-Indianapolis state road and the railroad, when its decline was rapid. Only the burying ground now remains.

²⁷ The *Indiana Republican* (Madison, Indiana), Sept. 26, 1818.

route from Brookville and Salisbury²⁸ in the northern part of the territory."²⁹

Early county records contribute to our knowledge of the location and relative importance of the road from Brookville to Brownstown a century ago. The minutes of the commissioners court of Franklin County refer to this road as the "White river trace."³⁰ An advertisement appearing in 1820³¹ locates land with reference to this road. The Jackson County record illustrates the fact that this road in 1820 and 1821 was such a well defined landmark that a township line was established along it.³² Numerous maps³³ of this period show the course of this road, some of them carrying the legend as to distances between the towns located along the route. The distances given on a map published in 1835 were as follows: Brookville to Napoleon, 28 miles; Napoleon to Scipio, 20 miles; Scipio to Brownstown, 23 miles.

Following the removal of the state capital from Corydon to Indianapolis, this road was not included among those designated as "state roads" except one section from Brookville to Napoleon, although provision was made for several years by the Legislature for maintainance,³⁴ appropriations being made for several different portions of the road. Again, to show the importance which must have been attached

²⁸ Salisbury was then the seat of justice of Wayne County.

²⁹ *Western Eagle* (Lexington, Indiana), June 14, 1815.

³⁰ The minutes reveal that the commissioners met "to view a road from New Trenton to intersect the White River Trace." Aug. 18, 1818. Book E. page 157, Recorder's office, Franklin Co., Indiana.

³¹ Brookville *Enquirer*, July 4, 1820: "To Emigrants. For sale or also to lease rent; Several quarter sections of good land on the road to Brownstown, 4 to 5 miles from Brookville with or without Improvements. Caswell & Drew."

³² In describing the newly formed townships established by the Jackson County commissioners in Aug., 1820, Redding Township with its boundary lines are described as follows: "Beginning on the Brookville road above Crane's where said road crosses the section line dividing Sections 23 and 24, Township 6 N, Range 5 W," thence on the Brookville road to the county line, then north to Sand Creek, thence down the same to Driftwood River and to the place of beginning on the Brookville road." The county was redistricted in 1841 changing the township lines somewhat. At the May term of court of 1819, it was also ordered that "the road running from Depaws Ferry and Mill on the Muscattuck river to Vallonia and Brownstown thence up the boundary line towards Brookville to the county line is hereby declared a public road and highway."

³³ *Tanner's Map of Indiana*, 1823; *Lucas Map of Indiana*, 1823; *Finley's Map* 1824; *Mitchell's Map of Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan* (Philadelphia, 1835); *Colton's Map of Indiana*, 1838 (new); *Colton's Indiana* (New York 1863).

to this road as an artery of trade, the Legislature granted a charter for the construction of a railroad from Scipio to Brownstown,³⁵ promoted by local citizens. However, no construction work was ever done. For a time, portions of this road became designated by the post office department as post roads. A post office was granted to Geneva, in 1823, receiving mail over this road from eastern points. As late as 1851, mail was carried over the road, post offices along the way being served.³⁶

The Brookville-Brownstown road as a part of a longer system extending from the Mississippi to the upper reaches of the Ohio is probably best shown on Mitchell's map of the *States of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois with the settled parts of Michigan*, published by L. Augustus Mitchell (Phila. 1834). On this map, the entire roadway is delineated as beginning at Kaskaskia on the Mississippi and running through Mt. Vernon, Fairfield, Lawrenceville (all in Illinois), Vincennes, Washington, Mt. Pleasant, Hindostan, Salt Spring, Orleans, Bedford, Leesville, Brownstown, Scipio, Napoleon, Brookville (all in Indiana), Oxford, Ohio, and eastward across that state to the Ohio river, where it crossed to Moundsville, near the mouth of Grave Creek. Another map published in 1806, designated *State of Ohio Taken from the Returns in the Office of the Surveyor General* by John T. F. Mansfield, shows the eastern extension of this road which crosses the Great Miami at Fort Hamilton eastward to Lebanon, Van Matres, Upper Falls of Paint Creek, Greenfield, Chillicothe, Lancaster, Zanesville, and on to the crossing of the Ohio into Virginia. A British map of 1820, *Map of Ohio, One of the United States of North America*, well defines the route of the eastern extension of this road in Indiana from the state line to Hamilton, Ohio, then to Washington C. H., Circleville, Lancaster, Zanesville, and eastward. It is needless to say that the extension of the National Road into Indiana, the opening of the central part of the state after 1818, and the removal of the capital to

³⁵ *Acts of the Legislature*, 1848, chapters 28 and 46.

³⁶ Route 3964. On page 281 the "List of Mail Routes in Indiana" delineates, the route as "From Salem at 5 a.m. Tuesday and Saturday by Walnut Ridge, Cortland, Millport, Valonia, Brownstown, Payntersville, Rockford and Reddington to Scipio by 8 p.m., 47 miles and back between 5 a.m. and 8 p.m. Monday and Friday." Route 4116; from Otter Village by Zenas and Brewersville to Scipio and back.

Indianapolis all diminished the need for and the relative importance of East-West travel through southern Indiana.

The decline of the Brookville-Brownstown road has been gradual until today it loses its identity in the township and county roads except for its inclusion in a part of the state highway system in one or two locations. Travel along its route today is made up only of local traffic and except in occasional deeds and real estate descriptions, the road is seldom referred to. Only as one stops to inquire directions in southern Indiana communities along its way, in fact, is a casual reference made to this old "Brownstown Road" or the old "Brookville Road."