

A THESIS

A HISTORY OF

THE BALTIMORE-FREDERICK TURNPIKE

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PREPARED FOR

THE PHI MU FRATERNITY

A HISTORY OF THE BALTIMORE

FREDERICK TURNPIKE

Since roads are built to answer the needs of a country, a good record of the history of any nation may be found in a study of the development of its highways. Roads are built to answer the needs of conquest and commerce, and the history of a particular road should give some light upon the need for its existence. It is with this idea in mind, as well as the view from the engineering side that this paper is written.

The origin of the Baltimore-Frederick road cannot be exactly ascertained. It is supposed that it was originally a trail used by the war parties and hunting expeditions of the Monoca Indians who inhabited the territory about the Monocacy River, in their raids on villages at tidewater.

The town of Baltimore was laid out in 1730, and Frederick, or Fredericktown, was laid out fifteen years later. Settlements had been made for some years, however, and communication between the towns was maintained either by pack-horse over the trail, or by the "Monocacy Trail" to the Potomac River. The settlements around Frederick were slow because ^{of the} difficulty of communication with the settlements at tidewater. No settlement inland from navigable water had been made until the Germans settled in Western Maryland in 1710. The same conditions existed in all the colonies on the Atlantic seaboard; Maryland was not alone. The mother country provided no improvements that "cost money" (as it was said), and forced the settlers to provide their own methods of transportation. For the first hundred years of

American settlement, all intercourse was carried on by pack trains and boats.

With the gradual increase in population in the towns near the bay on what is now the Baltimore Frederick Pike, the need for better roads was keenly felt. As early as 1666 an act was passed by the Assembly for making trails "passable for horse and foot". Overseers were appointed, and taxes of tobacco or labor were placed upon the taxable people of each county. People were required to work a certain number of days each year upon improvement of the trails. Substitutes might be hired by one. Heavy fines were levied for non-performance of duties. The highways that the people of this era worked upon were scarcely more than tracks through the forest. Transportation by wagon was as yet unknown .

With the gradual increase of wealth and population of the colonies the use of carriages was increased. As early as 1739 the inhabitants about the Monocacy River petitioned that a road be cleared through the country to enable them to bring their grain and other commodities to eastern markets. The original trackways were cleared so as to allow the passage of vehicles. It has been ascertained that sometime soon after 1745 and previous to 1760, a semblance of a road was established between Frederick and Baltimore. This road could not have been in elegant condition, since an early writer states that Braddock upon leaving Fredericktown in 1755 "in a cumbersome chariot" in which he thought to ride in great style, discovered that the road was ill adapted to a conveyance of that character."

In 1774 "an improvement of the principal market roads of the counties of Anne Arundel, Baltimore, and Frederick" was considered necessary. Among the roads mentioned in an act passed at this time was the road under discussion. Bills of credit were issued by which money was loaned to the counties to pay for these improvements. For repayment of these a tax of tobacco was collected by the sheriff from each taxable inhabitant. Eight pounds of tobacco per capita were collected in Frederick County; twelve pounds in Baltimore, and four pounds in Anne Arundel.

During the next decade many petitions were sent to Maryland's legislative body requesting adoption of the turnpike system. In many of the backward sections of the East, especially in Virginia, old roads will be found still known and operated as "turnpikes". The term "turnpike" was used because pointed gates or "pikes" were placed at intervals along the roads and were used to bar the travelers path. These "pikes" were lifted or turned upon payment by the traveler of a certain sum or toll. The money thus collected was used for road improvements, or, in the case of privately owned roads, to give a return on the investments of the owners.

These old roads have their place in history because connected with them are old romantic traditions of the glory of the stage-coach days; and along their rights of way may be found old dilapidated buildings^s marking the temporary stopping-places of great men. These roads are also historic for the part they played in the settlement of the West before the railroads and canals be-

came common carriers.

The turnpikes as existing in the latter part of the eighteenth century were considered to have three characteristics; namely, (1) a system of toll-gates placed at certain intervals; (2) *a system of toll-gates placed at certain intervals;* (3) an incorporated company with shares of stock, furnishing capital for the construction of the road.

Acting upon the petitions sent in, the Legislature of Maryland appointed commissioners to "examine", survey, lay out, and mark a public road from Baltimoretown to the Baltimore county line in the direction of Fredericktown in Frederick County." This road was to be "sixty-six feet wide, and on as straight a line as the nature of the country" would permit." This improvement was considered expedient because of the impassable condition of the road in winter. It was thought that building up the turnpike would increase commerce, ~~and~~ raise the value of the land, ^{and} besides greatly reduce the price of the carrying of freight by land.

This road had two of the characteristics of a turnpike since it was to be improved and toll gates were erected. It was not, however, operated by a corporation. The construction, maintenance, and management was given over to officials appointed by the court of Baltimore County. This road was to be cleared the total width of the right of way; the bed, was to be forty feet wide with a crown of eighteen inches at the center. Where necessary the bed was to be covered with small stones or coarse gravel. Milestones, and guide-posts were to be set up.

Two means were provided for meeting expenses of con-

struction and management. One method was by means of the toll collected. The other way was by a property tax of three shillings nine pence per hundred pounds the first year, and two shillings sixpence for every year following for Baltimore County. Provisions were made for "Commissioners of Roads", "Commissioners of Review", a "Collector of Tolls", and a "Surveyor".

The ^Penal statute of 1788 gave the Commissioners a means of obtaining laborers. This law authorized them to put convicts on the road gangs. The accounts show that the labor of these prisoners in a large measure constructed the Baltimore County section of the Baltimore-Frederick Turnpike. Further labor was furnished by the Act of 1790 which allowed personal labor in payment of the tax levied by the Act of 1787. In these early times the improvements consisted mainly of filling holes with brush and covering ~~it~~^{it} over with clay.

In Chapter XLX of the Acts of Assembly (1792) the entire road^u existing from time immemorial from Baltimore to Frederick by way of Dillon's Field's, Ellicott's Upper Mills, Cummings new buildings, Fox's Red Horse Tavern, Cook's Tavern, and Poplar Spring["] was definitely established as a public road.

The plan of operating turnpikes under county authority was almost entirely unsuccessful. Frequent amendments were passed in the years around 1800, but no improvement was gained. When it became evident that the experiment with this arrangement was a failure, the Legislature tried to find private capital which would be willing to invest in turnpike roads.

An act passed in 1804 incorporated "companies to make

several turnpike roads through Baltimore County." Three corporations were formed under this act; they were: (1) the Baltimore-Fredericktown Turnpike Company; (2) the Baltimore-Reisterstown-Hanover Company; and (3) the Baltimore-Yorktown Company. These corporations required several years to complete their building programs. Baltimore County reserved the right to collect toll through its Levy Court until the Turnpike Companies had built their roads ten miles from the city of Baltimore.

When Albert Gallatin, the Secretary of the Treasury, investigated the turnpike conditions in 1807 in complying with a resolution by the United States Senate, he reported favorably on the Frederick Pike.

The capital stock of the Baltimore and Fredericktown Turnpike Company was \$500,000. The company secured a further privilege of extending its pike to Boonesboro beyond the Blue Ridge, sixty-two miles from Baltimore. Specifications were furnished the company concerning the building and maintenance of way. All angles of ascent were to be less than four degrees; the road must have a convexity of nine inches; and on a breadth of twenty-two feet was to be covered with a stratum ten inches thick of pounded stones not exceeding three inches in diameter, over which were to be spread two inches of gravel and coarse sand. The first twenty miles on the Baltimore end cost at the rate of nine thousand dollars per mile. The next seventeen miles were contracted for at a rate of seven thousand dollars per mile.

The true history of the Baltimore-Frederick Turnpike

cannot really be given without tracing its history above Frederick, because this pike became the easterly end of the Great National Turnpike which extended from Baltimore to Ohio.

As the settlers moved west into Ohio, the need of roads connecting ^{with} ~~to~~ navigable waters was again keenly felt. Federal aid was given to build a road from Cumberland to Wheeling. This was the first time Federal assistance had been given to highways.

A movement was started to open a road from Philadelphia to Wheeling via Hagerstown. To combat this and save the freight for Baltimore export, the Baltimore-Frederick Company secured permission to extend its road to Big Conococheague, but was unable to do so because of insufficient funds.

The leanness of the company's treasury was caused by the immense drain of building the bridge over the Monocacy Creek. The company was refused permission by the Assembly to charge extra toll for passage over the new structure.

The Banks of Hagerstown and Baltimore in 1822 built an extension to Hagerstown under the name of the Boonesboro Turnpike Company. The completed Cumberland or National Road was made up further of the Hagerstown and Conococheague Turnpike Bridge and Road Corporation, extension to Big Conococheague, the section built by banks to Cumberland, and the federal aid road to Wheeling, Ohio.

An enormous amount of traffic passed over this road almost from the opening day. This was the first all land connection with any large seaport. The through freight wagons from Baltimore to Wheeling were able to make the hitherto unheard of average time

of ten miles per hour. The largest of these were mammoth affairs capable of carrying ten tons and drawn by twelve horses. They had rear wheels ten feet high with tires one foot wide to prevent sinking in the soft ground. About 1850 a contemporary writer states that about sixteen coaches passed each way per day, while droves of cattle, sheep, and canvas-covered wagons were hardly out of sight of each other. Within a mile of the pike the country was a wilderness, but on the highway the traffic was as dense and as continuous as a main street of a town.

The turnpike prospered until the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad tapped Frederick December 1, 1850. With the completion of the C. & O. Canal and the extension of the B. & O. to Cumberland in 1853, the through traffic on the pike dropped considerably. The importance of turnpikes dwindled, and they became mere feeders to the railroads and canals.

Toward the latter part of the nineteenth century considerable feeling was raised against the toll roads. In 1896 a bill was passed giving the State Geological Commission the job of investigating the subject of road building, and the advisability of assuming control of the turnpikes.

Letters were sent to those who used the pikes as well as to the presidents of the companies owning them, *asking opinions.*

The Report made in 1899 favored State control of these pikes, since continuing under private ownership was not desired by the people. They called attention to the fact, however, that the private rights and property values of the turnpikes should be con-

sidered, and a fair compensation should be paid to the private interests for the property assumed.

A State Roads Commission was created by an act of the General Assembly in 1908. This commission was authorized to begin negotiations for buying the turnpikes and abolishing the toll-gates. The purchase of the Baltimore and Frederick Turnpike was made in 1911 at ^aCost ^{of} about \$90,000. including preliminary surveys. This consisted of sixty miles of improved road. Money was provided for the operation of the State Roads Commission from three sources; (1) the State appropriations; (2) by automobile Registration Law (1910); (3) by Federal Aid (50% by U.S; 40% by State; 10% by residents near improvement). In the beginning, a bond issue was floated and \$3,500,000 worth had been sold before the end of the year 1911.

The pike has been constantly improved since the control by the State. By 1915, it formed part of an improved highway extending across the State from Oakland in the West to Crisfield in the East. In 1915, part of the pike had to be resurfaced with five or six inches of hard stone and macadamized. Considerable resurfacing was done in 1918 after the Great War, because of the wear by the heavy traffic, mainly the large trucks. The increased production of the automobile showed the pike to be inadequate. It was found that a great number of accidents ^{ts} occurred due to the excessive crown and narrow width. From 1918 to 1921, three foot concrete shoulders were placed on each side from Frederick to a point nine miles east at a total cost of \$90,000. This widened the road from fourteen to twenty feet. This will make an adequate two-lane road for the wide busses and large

trucks engaged in long distance hauling. Widening and banking of several sharp curves were planned, but the plans miscarried because of lack of funds. 20" x 30" signs have been placed as guide posts for tourists and warnings have been built at sharp curves. The white lines in the road centers at curves also ^{are} ~~are~~ a decided factor in the prevention of accidents. It is hoped that this improvement will continue the entire length of the pike.



EAST of Frederick, along the National Highway, about three miles out, there is an interesting old bridge, well known as the Jug Bridge, and so-called from the huge demijohn that guards its entrance. It spans the Monocacy River, whose dangerous but alluring waters are so closely associated with one of the big battles of the Civil War. During the Johnstown

flood, "Jug Bridge" was the only one that withstood the high waters. From the standpoint of masonry and expert bridge building it has been said not to have an equal anywhere. Built under most adverse conditions it stands today as a monument to its builders, who have long since passed into that land whence no man returneth.

BRIDGES

The history of the bridges along this pike also is interesting because it really is a history of the development of highway structures.

Probably the most interesting structure is the old bridge over the Monocacy River familiarly known as "Jug Bridge" because of the huge monument at the end of the easterly span. This jug bears an inscription "Built in the years 1808-1809. Jonathan Elliot first produced a bold plan of this bridge." The four sixty-five foot arches make one of the finest examples of stone arch construction in the world. The bridge has at last shown traces of weakness and disintegration. According to a report by A. N. Johnson, highway engineer, moisture has penetrated some of the joints and crevices and caused bulging and cracking with frost. The bulging of the sidewalls is particularly noticeable on the east end.

The old wooden structure built over the Patapsco River at Ellicott City was washed out by a flood July 24, 1868. A new white pine bridge was then built with an old shingle roof and weatherboarded sides. Fire destroyed this in June 1914. A makeshift was thrown across, however, and traffic was opened again within twenty-four hours. The site was changed to decrease the angle of approach by about thirty degrees, and two fifty-six foot span concrete arches were poured. The total cost of this replacement was about \$17,000.

The bridge at Gwynn's Falls was also rebuilt three times. The original was of timber, and withstood the traffic till 1899, when it was reconstructed with steel and the grade raised ten feet.

Up to this time the bridge had been at right angles to the channel. In 1904 another span was added by the Western Maryland R. R. to bring the pike across its Tidewater Branch tracks which were along the banks.

In 1913 the alignment was straightened and two one hundred foot span concrete arches were built forty-seven feet above the stream bed and with a clearance of 21'-9" above the Western Maryland tracks. This arch also was 14' above the old grade and lessened the drop on each side. The architecture of this bridge fits well with the beauty of Gwynn's Falls Park.

The assistance of the Baltimore-Frederick Turnpike in the settling of the western territories is beyond computation. Equally so is its value today in this era of transportation by highway.

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