

Fort Wayne Trace – The First State Road

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The Northwest Territory governed the region until July 4, 1800, when the Indiana Territory was established in preparation for Ohio's statehood.¹ William Henry Harrison was the initial Governor. The Territory contained present day Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and part of Minnesota and ironically, in 1816, Indiana became a state.

General "Mad Anthony" Wayne organized a Legion of the United States and defeated a Native American force at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794. In 1795, the Treaty of Greenville was signed a part of eastern Indiana was opened for settlement. Although Reserves for Native American Indians remained until about 1840 when the Miami Natives finally departed for Oklahoma, pioneers and settlers were moving west, gradually settling Indiana.

National Congress passed in 1805-1806, "An act to regulate the laying out and making a road from Cumberland in the state of Maryland to the state of Ohio." The concept was to design the road through state capitals. An extension beyond brought the trail to Indiana Territory crudely connecting Richmond, Indianapolis and Terre Haute.²

"Wagons pulled by oxen and horses passed in steady stream, freight haulers, with loads piled high and secured by rope, dozens of stages lacking in paint swept forward. Drovers, with heavy dust in matted whiskers trudged patiently behind cattle and sheep. When Ohio was filled they clumped into Indiana to erect their homes and plant fields along the Wabash. It was a people's highway and the people crowded in from rim to edge until their carts, wagons, stages and carriages challenged each other for a right of way."³ Traveling was a new travel trend despite being so cumbersome and deliberate.

Our newly formed state found it necessary to expand from the National Road. However the United States Government gave states three dollars out of every one hundred taken in for road building.⁴ That wasn't much to spend on a National Road and nothing was remaining for other local roads. During the early 1820s Indiana's young Legislative body provisioned for a network of rough and ready trails to connect Indianapolis to other Hoosier towns across the state. Wagoners, stages and carriages, travelers, and mail riders on these new roads only meant one thing to our backwoods state. Progress!

Commissioners William Conner and James Blake's intentions were to follow old Native Indian paths, buffalo trails while staying on higher ridges avoiding swamps and aligning with the shallows of existing fords. Both men were well connected with travel of the times from familiarity with the Territory.

In 1823, W.H. Keating of the University of Pennsylvania described an expedition from the Ohio line to Fort Wayne as "...the country is so wet that we scarcely saw an acre of land upon which settlement could be made. We traveled for a couple of miles with our horses wading through water, sometimes to the girth. Having found a small patch of grass we attempted to stop and pasture our horses, but this we found

¹ Indiana Historical Bureau. "[The Indiana Historian – Indiana Territory](#)". Indiana Historical Bureau.

² Beverly Whitaker, genealogist

³ P.D. Jordan, The National Road

⁴ Country Roads, Esarey, The Indiana Home

impossible on account of the immense swarms of mosquitoes and horse flies, which tormented both horses and riders in a manner that excluded all possibility of rest.”

Construction on the Fort Wayne Trace began in 1825 and was completed in several years and employed till the 1870s. The route was rudimentary about 10 to 12 feet wide and when the road sadly changed for the worse or furrowed by flooding, a corduroy configuration of logs assisted travelers. The Trace was definitely challenged, blemished with bogs, swamps and untraveled territory; it required dispelling of brush, vegetation and some trees to brand the trail passable.

The Fort Wayne Trace cut through Madison County from McClintock’s ford near present day Perkinsville at White River cutting through Jackson Township at Section 14 and Section 11 in Pipe Creek Township on Frankton’s south and east sides. The Trace continued through the county at a northeasterly heading crossing Pipe Creek at the ford several hundred yards downstream from 300 West.

Along the Trace were three pioneer cemeteries, Lily Creek, Star and Vinson south of Summitville. A log cabin of Charles Bramel’s sat nicely on the south side of the Trace facing the angle of the trail. According to Raymond Davis’s account, “Along the Trace,” Elijah and Matilda Shinkle entered the land on September 22, 1835 and deeded to Joshua Vinson, in 1839, Francis Vinson in 1869 and Charles Bramel in 1875 and to Zacheus Bramel 1906 and Charles R and Isabel Bramel in 1949.⁵

Shinkle’s place was approximately halfway between Indianapolis and Fort Wayne and served as a place to rest for the night. A horse could travel at daylight from Indianapolis and arrive at Shinkle’s Inn by dark.

The present road 100E angles into Summitville on the old road. The Trace was surveyed and the summit between the White and Wabash Rivers was north of Summitville, thus the name was attached. The name Skipperville is a nickname given to Summitville; some say because a traveler happened to get some bad cheese in the village a long time ago. Just to the north of Summitville the Trace exited the county continuing on a northeasterly direction to Fort Wayne.

Another local trail was the Alexandria Pike. This road was slashed from Shelbyville through Anderson and Alexandria and converged with the Fort Wayne in northern Monroe Township about 1830.

Railroads killed the old National Road, but the automobile resurrected it in a blaze of glory. The road had barely known any traffic for 40 years, but with the introduction of the automobile, there also came requests for hard healthier roads.

⁵ Raymond Davis, Etcetera