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# In History: Fort Wayne Trace in Madison County

BY STEPHEN T. JACKSON, MADISON COUNTY HISTORIAN

You might notice this home due to its striking appearance but fail to comprehend the way it is uniquely situated upon the property.

Instead of facing the traditional north-south-east-west directions as most houses do, this one sets on an angle facing the northwest and is located far back of the southeast corner of the intersection of State Road 9 and County Road 1400N.

The reason it sets at an angle is because the site once paralleled the old Fort Wayne Trace that passed directly in front of the property as it made its way through Madison County.

The Indiana General Assembly in 1821 provided for the construction of two dozen state roads, many connecting to the new location for the state capital at Indianapolis.

One of these was to be a stage coach road from Indianapolis to Fort Wayne. Construction was started in 1825 and completed three years later by companies operating out of both towns. The road was heavily traveled and lasted until long after the Civil War.

Also known as Indiana's first state road and the old state road, the Fort Wayne Trace crossed Madison County on a northeast-southwest axis. The trace was crude according to today's standards, undergoing many changes during its more than 50 years of use as the main avenue of travel through this part of the state.

## **Crossing the county**

During the early years and until after the Civil War there was hardly a session of the state legislature that did not give some attention to the improvement of some part of the Indianapolis-Noblesville-Strawtown-Fort Wayne road.

The trace left Indianapolis in a northeasterly direction and crossed the West Fork of White River at a ford east of the deserted Indian village at Strawtown. It was hardly a road in a modern sense but merely a trace that wound around the large virgin trees that were numerous in our area. The small trees and brush were cleared to about a 12-foot width close to the ground to allow for stage coach

axle clearance. When possible the course followed the ridges and higher ground aiming for the river fords and utilizing old Indian trails that were numerous in this area.

The trace entered Madison County slightly north of Perkinsville and crossed Jackson, Pipe Creek, Monroe and Van Buren townships. It passed to the north of the old Delaware Indian village of Nancy Town on the old Strawtown road east of Perkinsville. Pipe Creek was crossed at the ford slightly west of the Orestes road, County Road 300W. It skirted the Miami Reserve and left Madison County near the northeast corner of Van Buren Township.

Later, the establishment of a new and better ford, known as the Neese Ford, across Pipe Creek at a point located about one mile east of the old ford, caused the early road makers to build a new route that extended mostly along the east side of the stream passing through Kikthawenund Scout Camp.

This route was heavily traveled until long after the Civil War. There is a surviving fragment of the Fort Wayne Trace in this area which serves partly as the entrance to the Neese Cemetery and partly as a lane leading back to a home along Pipe Creek.

After leaving Madison County, the trace continued in a northeasterly direction towards Fort Wayne. The Mississinewa was forded near present Gas City; the Salamonie near Warren, and the Wabash River near Markle.

### **Old Vinson**

It is thought that the house described earlier is located on or near the site where a halfway house stood facing the road during the days of heavy travel. Its position was about halfway between Indianapolis and Fort Wayne and served as a place of rest and refreshment. Approximately one-and-one-half miles northeast of the house is another place of interest and more evidence of the trace.

Located on a hill approximately one mile south of Summitville is the Old Vinson Cemetery. Fronting the Old Vinson Cemetery is the New Vinson Cemetery which is entered from County Road 100E. In order to visit the "old" cemetery, visitors must drive to the back of the "new" cemetery, park, and walk across a meadow and up a hill. Here, the visitor notices the markers face west onto a large area of farm land. Also obvious is the back fence of the cemetery which angles from the southwest to the northeast following the cemetery boundary.

When the Old Vinson Cemetery was established the entrance was on the west end because a road ran along the western edge of the cemetery. This road is clearly visible on the 1876 plat map for Van Buren Township. The road was built on or very near the bed of the Fort Wayne Trace.

## **Just a trace remains**

Farmers have long ago plowed away evidence of the historic trace. However, a slight depression remains in the ground and can be found in a narrow band of trees outside the western boundary in the southwest corner of the Old Vinson Cemetery. When viewed from the air this depression lines up almost perfectly with the half-way house location and the angle road (100E) that enters Summitville from the southwest a mile to the northeast. It can only be speculated that the angle road follows the old trace into Summitville.

Summitville was definitely on the trace. The town was called by various names, including Wrinkle and Skipperville, before the community's post office was established in 1847 and the name Summitville was fixed.

The town is so named because north of town near the old Musick Cemetery is a slight elevation of ground. It was purported to have been the highest point between Indianapolis and Fort Wayne on the old road.

Other than the entrance to the Neese Cemetery and behind the Old Vinson Cemetery the evidence of the historic trace has been eliminated. To my knowledge these sites are the only visible evidence anywhere in the county. If you know of other sites, I would appreciate hearing from you.

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