

LANDMARK HIGHWAY

New York State Route 43, from Defreestville to Reichards Lake Road, is known to most of us since it is the main route to Albany. It has been so for well over 200 years, developing from a path in the earliest days, to a laid out road in 1773. Until about 1800 it was the main road from Albany to Williamstown. At that time, it was superceded in part by the Eastern Turnpike which also went to Williamstown. In 1849, parts of this route were made into a Plank Road. The route has had at least five designation changes from the earliest to the present.

In September 1773 Commissioners of the Highways for the Manor of Rensselaerswyck described the highway from Defreestville to Berlin as follows:...

...and also one other Road belonging to Hudsons River at Jan Ooms Pat or Road thence continued Easterly as the Road now runs to Edward Hogels at the South end of his House as the road now runs and is easterly along the North side of Lawrence Rysedorphs fence and continued Easterly as the road now runs to the House of Zachariah Feller at the South side of his House and so to the Grist Mill at the North side of the Mill so to the House of Hendrick Siperley at the South end of his House so to the Three Squear Lake from thence to the house of Michael Rucard between the House and Barn from thence to the House of John Carpenter to the North side thereof from thence Easterly to the House of John Kelly to the North side thereof and so continued to the East side of his Land and from thence Easterly in the most Direct and convenient place to strike the Little Hosick Road about three hundred yards Northerly of the House of Peter Seamons at Little Hosick [Berlin]...

Looking at Van Alen's 1788/89 map of Greenbush we can find the properties, mentioned in the description, of Edward Hogel, Laerence Rysedorph, Zachariah Feller, the Grist Mill, and Hendrick Sipperley; Drie Squear Lake [in Dutch, Trie Kante Lakie, which means Three Sided Lake, now Reichards Lake], Michael Rucard [Michael Ryckart], John Carpenter, John Kelly. This last name is located at the line that separated Greenbush from Stephentown in 1788. (Presently, about where Miller Hill Road begins.) The last named person is Peter Seamons located at Little Hosick [Berlin]. This description is of part of the road known as the Old Hoosick Road.

A 1788 map of Middletown, by Job Gilbert shows the route of the Old Hoosick Road as it followed the most direct and convenient way through Middletown. The map of a 20000 acre subdivision in Stephentown (an area that encompassed all of present day Stephentown, Berlin, Petersburg, Grafton, Nassau, and parts of Poestenkill and Sand Lake in 1788), shows the route from John Kelly's in Greenbush to Peter Seamons' (Seimans) on the Little Hosick Road (now Route 22).

This road from the city of Rensselaer to the intersection of Reichards Lake Road, (Route 351), thence north to Route 66 is virtually all in use, and has been for at least 230 years.

The New York State Legislature authorized the first turnpike in 1799. It was to be called the Eastern Turnpike, to extend from Bath to Williamstown. It was completed about 1804. An 1818 dictionary defines "turnpike" as "A cross of two bars armed with pikes at the end, and turning on a pin, fixed to hinder horses from entering: a gate erected on the road to collect tolls to defray the expense of repairing roads."

A 1983 dictionary refers first to this old usage, and adds "a road having

tollgates, a toll road, or loosely, any highway.

HISTORY OF AREA

During the 17th Century, Fort Orange, later called Albany, was the center of the fur trade industry in America. It was also a center of transportation, being halfway between New York City and Montreal, and at the junction of the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers.

For the first hundred years of this area's colonial history, settlement seldom extended much farther than ten or fifteen miles in any direction because of Indians, mountains, concentrating on fur trading or because it was poor farming country. Schenectady and the area of the Hoosick Patent of 1688 on the Vermont border were exceptions. However, early settlement in Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire had established outposts along the Connecticut river in the late 17th century and early in the 18th century and by the 1840s and '50s, Western Massachusetts and what is now Vermont were being settled. East Hoosuck and West Hoosuck (early names of Adams and Williamstown, MA) were land grants in 1749 and 1750 at Fort Massachusetts. Stockbridge and Lenox were settled in the 1740s and Bennington (Melloonscot) was granted in 1749 by Benning Wentworth Governor of the Province of New Hampshire. There were now many more reasons for communication to develop between the East Manor of Rensselaerwyck (Rensselaer County) and the East. Wentworth, Governor of the Province of New Hampshire.

HIGHWAYS, TURNPIKES AND PLANK ROADS

In 1703 the Provincial Government of New York enacted laws governing the layout of highways and roads. The first roads mentioned were on east and west sides of the Hudson River, now Routes 9 and 9W. Highways had developed early along the River because this was the main path between New York, Albany and Montreal. Ships could sail up and down the river as far as Lansingburgh, in good weather, but winter made it necessary to travel by foot or by horseback. Highway growth to the East and West was slow because people lived in the various settlements along the River. At best, Indian trails and paths between houses were used as roads. Because Albany was only about 40 miles away, the round trip for supplies took only a week or so.

With the end of the French and Indian War in 1763, there was extraordinary settlement along the rivers, and along Lake Champlain and the western borders of the New England provinces. The British Government granted land to veterans of the war. Expanding families required more land, and fear of hostile Indians was greatly diminished. Travel, however was still limited to trails and military roads that did not necessarily have commercial traffic as an objective. Even greater growth occurred after the end of the Revolutionary War in 1782, as well as 1790 when Albany became the capital of New York State.

Land travel, though, had not improved measurably for many hundreds of years, but after the Revolution when New York became a state, turnpikes were chartered to permit companies to build and improve roads between important places. These roads were widened and graded, stumps and rocks removed or covered over, and generally smoothed out so that wagons and carriages could travel faster and easier. *more easily* The Turnpike Companies were out to make money, but they usually were limited to a 10 or 12 percent profit after all costs of construction, maintenance and operation were paid. They also had a limited life of about 20 years, after which time they were to become part of the local road system. A way was found to extend the life of the system and provide still better service. This was to form a Plank Road Company. Here the road was to be built of planks laid on lengthwise timbers, so that the road would be even smoother than the turnpike road had been, and mud and dust would be reduced and the travel much faster.

Toll gates were established every few miles (not closer together than three miles) so the driver had to have a pocket full of change to pay the tolls. Turnpike Rates are listed below. Plank road rates were slightly higher.

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| Vehicle drawn by | 1 animal | 3/4 cent a mile |
| Vehicle drawn by | 2 animals | 1 1/4 cent a mile |

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| Vehicle drawn by more than 2 animals and 1/4 cent additional a mile for every animal more than two. | 1 1/4 cent a mile |
| For every score of <u>neat</u> cattle, and in the same proportion for any greater or less number of neat cattle or sheep or swine. | 1 cent a mile |
| For every score of sheep or swine | 1/2 cent a mile, |
| For every horse and rider, or led horse, | 1/2 cent a mile |

Persons exempt from tolls:

- Passing to or from public worship; to or from blacksmiths;
- to or from a gristmill for family use.
- Passing to or from a physician or midwife;
- to or from court when legally summoned;
- to or from militia training;
- to or from town meeting or election
- Residing within one mile of toll gate, unless employed in
transportation of goods of others
- Troops of the state or of the United States

Bridges over 25 feet in length were considered toll roads.

Local roads did not have the advantages of a toll structure to finance their improvement. Highway districts were set up and the residents of a district paid part of their taxes by working on the roads or furnishing horses and wagons for hauling. Residents could petition District Highway Commissioners for a new road or for a change in the road.

Route improvements and changes have continued almost since the road was opened. For example, in 1789, a part of the road was bypassed with a new section which saved a mile of travel. It left the existing road in the vicinity of Crystal Lake and joined again at Lynn Road in Poestenkill. Of course, use of the old section continued because of the many farms along it.

This is a story of the first East-West road across Rensselaer County. It passed through the town of Sand Lake, as well as the City of Rensselaer and the towns of North Greenbush, Poestenkill, and Berlin. Rensselaer County is fortunate to have outstanding records of early roads from the Van Rensselaer surveys as well as provincial and state legislation, making highway history accessible. Transportation arteries appear to have been in place as early as 1800. In this century, as speeds increased, road technology improved drastically. We can hope that technology will continue to improve.