

History

Early Travel In Ross

By Julius Murphy

Conestoga Wagon Days

We have never found anything in print that the Conestoga Wagon was used in Ross Township. We do feel however that the Conestoga Wagon is part of Ross's past.

From the days of the early traders to about 1790 the pack horse carried most of the freight that reached the Pittsburgh area. As settlements expanded and roads became smoother an increasing number of Conestoga Wagons found their way over the mountains, much to the disgust of the packers whose ponies were unsuitable for use in harness. For years hauling was best done in the winter because the amazing seas of mud that obstructed travel in other seasons of the year were then frozen, and it was not until 1816 and 1817 that hard-surfaced turnpikes were pushed through to the Monongahela.

The Conestoga era did not end until 1834 when the Pennsylvania Canal was completed. Due to the fact that local roads were much improved several years before that date, we feel the Conestoga Wagon was used in Ross Township.

Conestoga Wagons were pulled by six Conestoga horses. The first two horses were the lead team, the second two horses were the swing team, and the two horses nearest the wagon, the wheel horses. The Conestoga wagoner drove from the saddle of the left wheel horse, walked beside the wagon, or rode the lazy board on the left side of the wagon. When a six horse team was hitched to one of these "ships of commerce" the wagon and team were strung out a distance of sixty feet.

These wagons were distinguished by the upward slope of the bottom of the box at both ends and the enormous flare of the canvas cover at front and back. A completed wagon capable of carrying about 6,000 pounds cost \$250. The six powerful Conestoga

horses that pulled the wagon were valued at \$1,000 to \$1,250.

Each horse carried a set of bells attached to a special yoke on its collar. When I was a youngster I used to hear people say when they were invited to be at a special place at a special time, "I'll be there with bells on." This expression, no longer heard, goes directly back to Conestoga Wagon days. By custom if a Conestoga wagoner got stuck in the mire and had to ask the help of another wagoner to get out, the chap that got stuck had to surrender his bells to the chap who pulled him out. It was a mark of pride for a wagoner to arrive at his destination with his bells.

The wagon boxes were usually painted blue and the running gears red so that these parts formed a striking and patriotic contrast with the white covers.

Evidences of the Conestoga era still persist today. Pittsburgh has long been famous for its Stogies. These were named for the Conestoga wagoners who smoked them. Today if we drive to eastern Pennsylvania we will find that many towns have squares. These squares developed during Conestoga days. The drivers parked their wagons in the squares and their blanketed horses were fed and spent the night in them. On at least two corners of the square were taverns where the drivers were fed, entertained for the evening and spent the night in their bedroll on the bar room floor with their feet toward the fire.

There is another more widespread evidence. The reason we drive on the right hand side of the road today in the United States is because the Conestoga wagoner drove his wagon from the left hand side of the wagon.

With an average load of 200 pounds of freight it would take four men and two trains of 15 pack horses each to haul 6,000 pounds of freight. A Conestoga Wagon with one man and six horses could haul



A Plank Road

6,000 pounds. The trip from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh took 21 days which was the same time required by a pack train.

It would take ten men, 60 horses and ten Conestoga Wagons to haul 25 tons of freight.

One man, one boy and one canal boat could haul 25 tons of freight 20 miles in one day.

By carrying a spare horse or horses in a barn on the canal freight boat and by carrying extra drivers as well, the canal freighter could haul 24 hours a day. From the 21 days required for a Conestoga Wagon to make the trip from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, the canal boat managed as above indicated reduced the time required for the same trip from eight or nine days. It is easy to see why the Pennsylvania Canal brought the Conestoga Wagon era to a close.

Comparing the route of the Venango Path, as discussed in that part of this series, with a modern road map we find that while in some places it followed Route 19 in others it diverged greatly from modern Route 19.

Here is the route the Venango Path followed using a modern road map. It began at Pittsburgh, passed through West View, Perrysville, Warrendale, Evans City, Prospect, Old Stone House, Harrisville, Franklin, Cochran, Meadville, Saegertown, Waterford, and ended at Erie.

You will note that from Warrendale to Old Stone House, it followed present Route 528, at the Old Stone House, recently

restored, it followed Route 8 through Harrisville to Franklin. From Franklin to Meadville it followed Route 322, then followed Route 19 to Waterford and then Erie.

Besides Washington other historical figures associated with history travelled the Venango Path such as Tecumseh, Cornplanter, King Shingiss, Queen Aliquippa, General "Mad" Anthony Wayne and General Richard Butler for

whom Butler County is named.

In 1797 the State contracted to cut a road through the wilderness closely following the old Venango Path from Pittsburgh to Franklin and on to Erie. This road, the Franklin-Pittsburgh Pike, played a vital role in opening Butler County to settlers.

Before we discuss the Franklin-Pittsburgh Pike let us go back in time to an account of how settlers

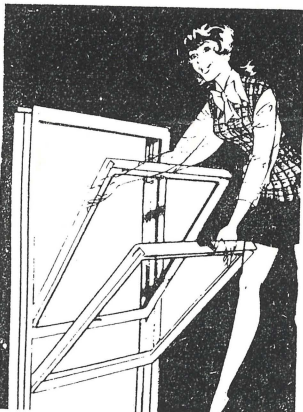
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History

Early Traveling in Ross Township

By Julius W. Murphy
With this article we begin a series on early transportation in Ross Township. Go back in time with us. Imagine the sights and sounds we will hear and see after the curtain rises on our topic.

First we will hear the cry of a baby as its mother carries it across the land-bridge at the Bering Strait between Asia and North America, next we hear the trumpeting of a dying mammoth as the ancestors of the people the white men found in the New World, and called Indians, kill the creature with spears for food. We will hear the scalp halloo as a victorious Indian travels an Indian path; later the bells of the pack horses as they graze at night. Next comes a wondrous sound, the ringing of the bells of a six-horse bell team pulling a Conestoga Wagon. This is followed by the cracking of whips and the blowing of coaching horns. Next to our ears comes the rumbling of wheels over the plank road and finally the shouts of drivers and cracking of whips as their wagons become mired in the mud of early roads.

Where Did The
Ancestors of the
Indians Come From?

Science and archaeology tell us that thousands of years ago there was no human being in North or South America. The map illustrating this article in science's best answer to the question raised by our topic.

Scientists tell us that the ancestors of the people we call American Indians crossed from Asia to present Alaska on a land bridge more than 20,000 years ago.

During North America's past there have been several ice ages, the last of which ended about 12,000 years ago. During these ice ages so much of the world's water was absorbed in the ice of the glaciers that dry land appeared in many places, one of which was at the Bering Strait. During the last ice age the glacier extended from the North Pole to the site of Lake Arthur which is a restored glacial lake. Scientists tell us that ice at the site of Mercer and New Castle 14,000 years ago was probably two miles thick. The oldest human remains so far found in North or South America are 20,000 years old.

The mammoth, a prehistoric elephantlike animal, with long hair all over its body, a thick layer of fat under its skin and a large hump of fat on its back was native to Siberia. During periods when food was scarce it lived on its fat. The mammoth also crossed the land bridge from Asia to North America and coexisted with early man. The primitive men killed them with spears or by driving them over a cliff by frightening them with fire. The mammoth became extinct in North America about 6,000 years ago.

Thor Heyerdahl's voyage on the Kontiki and his voyages on Ra I and Ra II have given new answers to the age old question of the ancestors of the Indians' origin.

Indian Paths
Many of our readers know that the Perry Highway or Route 19 was

formerly the Allegheny and Perrysville Plank Road, and before that the Franklin Road. The knowledge that the Perry Highway was once the Venango Indian Path is less widely known and seldom thought of.

Nothing could be farther from the truth than the common idea that Pennsylvania was a "trackless wilderness" before it was settled by our early settlers. Even though the area was thinly populated as compared to our modern days of the population explosion, it was covered by a network of trails or paths. In some areas there were as many roads as there are today, and in some places there were even more than our roads of today.

Most Indian paths were narrow, about 18 inches wide, just sufficient for persons moving single file. Our Indians had no beasts of burden and neither the North or South American Indians had progressed in their culture to the use of the wheel.

Indian paths were marvelous for their primitive engineering. Suited for travel by moccasined individuals, often bearing burdens on their back, they followed a course needing the least amount of exertion. Where they had to cross a stream they found a place to cross where they would hardly get their feet wet.

On the far side of the stream the bank might be 30 or 40 feet high. The path would not go straight up the side of the bank. It would follow

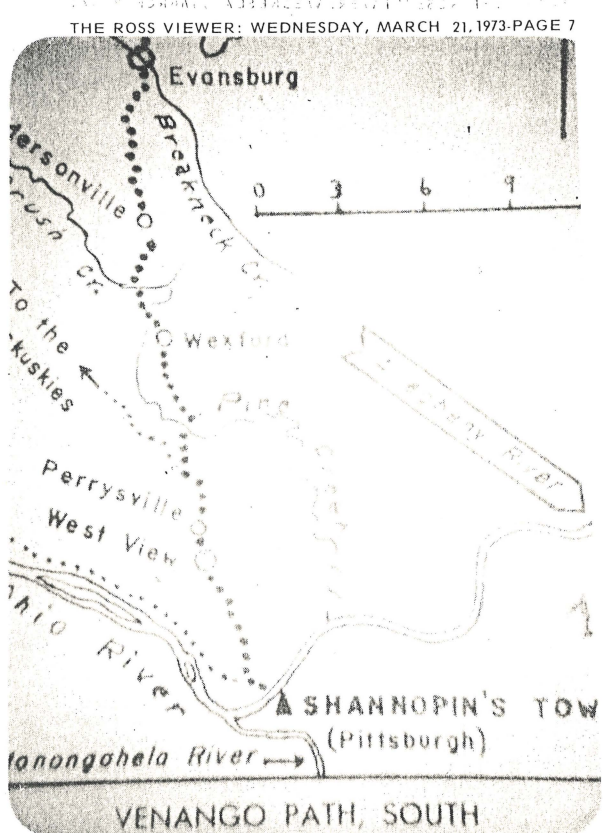
gradually upward along the side of the bank and reach the crest in such a way the Indian would be on top of the ridge with slight exertion.

The expression "on the war path" comes directly from Indian lore. The Indians had separate paths never used except for war. They kept to higher ground so the warriors could observe the movements of their enemies. They went through woods so that their own movements would be screened. Ascents were often sudden and steep to put the pursuer at a disadvantage and give the pursued an advantage.

A tribute to the Indians' primitive engineering is that fact that today as we travel over some of our modern roads we are never far from the Indian Path it followed. Nemacolin's Path became Route 40 or the Old National Road from Cumberland, Maryland to Brownsville, Pennsylvania. Catfish Path became Route 50 from Bridgeville to Canonsburg, 519 through Canonsburg to Route 19, then Route 19 to Washington, Pa.

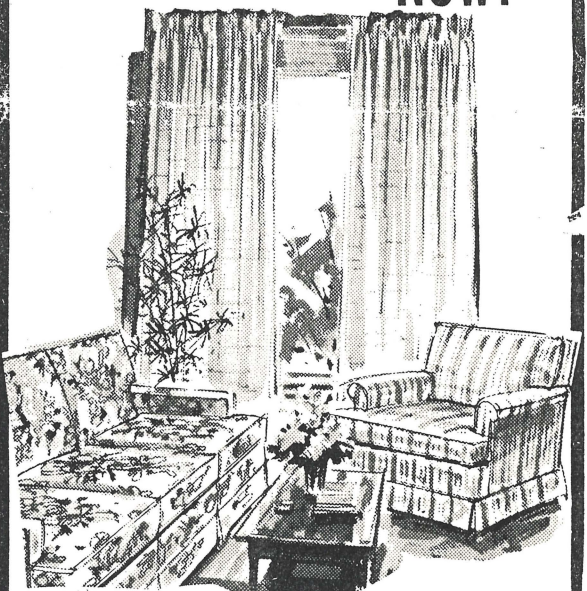
The Venango Path
The Venango Path started at Shannopin's Town (Pittsburgh) and went north through West View, Perrysville, Wexford, Evansburg, Prospect, Sisters, Forestville, Harrisville, Wesley, Springville, Mays Mills, Venango (Franklin), Carlton, Cochranstown, Meadville, Saegertown, Fort Le Boef

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Venango Path through Ross Township and West View.

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Early Traveling in Ross Township

Continued from Page 7

(Waterford), and ended at Fort Presque Isle (Erie). If you have ever wondered what Presque Isle means, it is French for "near island."

The most famous traveller of the Venango Path was George Washington. On his journey to Fort Le Boef he used a variant of the Venango Path which began at the Forks of the Ohio, went through Logstown (north of Ambridge), Harmony, Portersville and West Liberty. He left Logstown November 30, 1753 so he followed the best route in wet weather. From Crolls Mills he followed the Venango Path to Venango as outlined above.

Anyone interested in Indian Paths should buy "Indian Paths of Pennsylvania" by Paul A. W. Wallace which may be purchased from The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Pack Horse Days

The first freight transportation in Ross Township took place by means of pack train. The pack men chiefly used the Venango Path.

The first trading post established in the Pittsburgh district was the one established in the 1740's by George Croghan at the mouth of Pine Creek in what later became Shaler Township and is now Etna.

Western Europe's demand for furs resulted in the establishment of fur trading posts throughout the Upper Ohio Valley by Croghan and his partner Colonel William Trent.

Welcome

Wagon

Garage Sale

The North Allegheny Welcome Wagon Club will hold a garage sale on March 23 and 24 at 136 Mohican Drive, Ross Township. There will be 130 families participating in the sale. Profits from the sale, as all club profits, will go to charity.

North Allegheny Welcome Wagon is a local non-profit organization whose three purposes are to (1) promote fellowship among women who are new to the community (2) take an active interest in the civic, social, and spiritual welfare of the community (3) undertake and promote charitable and humanitarian projects.

Their present membership is 137 ladies who live in Ross, McCandless, and West View. They have an average attendance of eighty members at their general membership meetings that they are held the third Tuesday evening of each month September-May at Northmont U.P. Church at 8:30 p.m.

They are presently planning a Royal Fun Night on April 13, 1973 at Royal Ridge Field Club 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. to benefit the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children Camp Hi-Hopes. This is a summer day camp for mentally retarded children in the North Hills. Prizes for the evening include a weekend for two at a resort, dinners, beauty services, hand made objects and many more; A hot buffet will be served at midnight. Tickets are \$6.50 a person and are available from Norma Johnston 364-1082 and Lorraine Lederbrink 366-4189.

One of these was the trading post at the mouth of Pine Creek. For this post they set up a storehouse, log cabins, a number of batteaux, canoes and planted 10 acres of corn. They also cleared the first land in the Township for use as pasture land by their numerous pack horses.

A pack train usually consisted of 15 or twenty animals tethered together, the tether running from the pack saddle of one animal to the animal following it. Two men usually accompanied the train, one went ahead and watched for danger and obstacles, the other man followed the train and kept a good eye on the packs so that none came loose or lost any goods. If the horse carried his feed his average load was 150 pounds of freight. If depots for feed had been established, the average freight load of the animal was 200 pounds. Each pack animal had a bell attached to a collar around its neck. The clapper of the bell was tied while the train was in motion but it was loosed at night when the animals were turned out to graze so they could be easily caught when the start was made next morning.

Pack horses or mules were small, wiry animals because the pack trails were so dangerous that they could not be safely negotiated by large heavy animals.

We take salt for granted. When Pittsburgh was founded salt was a scarce article, and so expensive that no one was allowed to walk on the floor while it was being walked. All of the salt used in Pittsburgh at that time had to be brought from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh by pack train, a journey that took 21 days. This salt sold in Pittsburgh for \$8 per bushel. James O'Hara devised an ingenious chain of transport by boat and wagon for salt from New York State which reduced the price of salt to \$4 per bushel. At this price many more people could afford it for the first time, others still had to do without it.

Traders brought trade goods from the east and traded them for

furs.

Not only traders used the pack trains for transport. Farmers and merchants of inland towns used them also. The farmers and storekeepers of each community united in the fall to send a pack train east to exchange for furs, whiskey, ginseng, and other goods for salt, iron, powder and even millstones. Packs of feed were taken along on these expeditions and deposited at convenient points on the route for use on the return trip. Farmer pack trains often visited old settlements from which they and their neighbors had come, delivered messages from those in the west and carried news to both their old home and their new one.

The early settlers in Ross Township either rode horses or walked. On the backs of pack horses were all the worldly possessions they could bring with them. A store of provisions to

provide food on the way, plow irons, buttons, needles, thread, and other indispensable articles they would need to found their new home. Lighter articles such as clothing, bedding, and similar necessities were carried in large creels braided from hickory similar to woven clothes hampers of a later day, one on each side of the horse.

The center of the creel space was reserved for small children, too small to walk or be exposed to the dangers of the trail. The children were placed in the creels, their tops secured by lacing, so that only their heads protruded, to keep them from falling out.

Nights were spent in encampments along the trail around a blazing log fire. Travel in early spring was especially hard on women and children who were not used to the exposure of outdoor camping.

The Packsaddle Trail started at Tarentum, went through Millers-town, Culmerville, crossed Route 8 at Bakerstown, crossed Route 19 at Warrendale and continued on across the Beaver River into Ohio.

At the Bakerstown crossroads a visionary among the land speculators, foresaw a future city and laid out a town plot called Charlestown, now known as Bakerstown.

Packsaddle Trail was used by pack train men as late as 1834 when the Pennsylvania Canal was completed. With the coming of the canal the pack train men vanished and the dream of a city vanished with them.

The dream of Bakerstown as a traffic crossroads never materialized, but it came close. The Pennsylvania Turnpike, following the best east-west route paralleled the Pack Saddle Trail just three miles south.

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