

WEST JEFFERSON IN DAYS GONE BY

By Charlie Miller

Series 17

THE NATIONAL ROAD: In 1805 Congress passes a law entitled “An act to regulate the laying out and making of a road from Cumberland, in the State of Maryland, to the State of Ohio.” The road was surveyed as far as Columbus in 1825 and to the Illinois State line in 1827. The real construction was much slower, ground was not broken at St. Clairsville until 1825 and was not completed in Columbus until 1833. In 1836-37 the road was built through Madison County. Along it sprang up three villages, Jefferson, Lafayette, and Summerford. Between Jefferson and Lafayette along Glade Run was a tavern called “The Golden Lamb,” located about the area where the current Byerly Rd. meets the National Road. Also built around this time was the Red Brick Tavern in Lafayette.

Passing through Jefferson in later years were such famous people as Henry Clay, Gen. Andrew Jackson, and Davey Crockett. Sometimes as many as 16 coaches ran each way on this busy highway. The coaches stopped running in 1853 due to the railroads. So much traffic was reduced in 1876 the State Legislature reduced it to the level of other pikes.

The following has been taken from the *London Ohio Democrat*, dated July 1911 and written by H.H. Prugh. There are only a few pioneers of those stirring days now living. Every root was removed with the aid of a mattock, pick, crowbar, and shovel leaving a large opening in the earth. These openings were filled with the dirt accumulated from removing the mighty roots. Next came grading, heavy plows, and scrappers were drawn by three large yokes of oxen. It took three men to lift one of these plows. Another team of men were set to work pulverizing the rock. The stone was broken into pieces to weigh three ounces. It was then filled with fine-screened gravel making the road bed five inches thick.

The width of the road was originally 80 feet, but the traveler passing over it will find that the property owners have encroached to some places it is only 10 feet between fences. When the Pike was in its prime the stream of emigrants was so immense that every house abandoned by the hunter was pressed into service as inns and taverns, and many of them had but one or two rooms.

Jonathan Greer can narrate many interesting stories of these exciting scenes while the Pike was in its glory. He speaks about sleeping in hospitable inns, where there was music, dancing, and carousing. Pallets were laid all along the sides of the house, on them perhaps would be 25 persons, lying side by side. In the women’s apartment, it was pretty much the same.

Wagons from the smallest to the great mountain ships, fast expresses nicknamed “Shakerguts” tore along the highway and moving wagons by the hundreds, in many instances four abreast with the motto, inscribed on the canvas covers of their wagons, “To the Western Empire or Bust.” Gay coaches of four and six sprightly horses rolling through the valleys and over the hills, carrying thousands of passengers, and important messages of State, from the East to the young empire of the West...pioneers say.”