

WEST JEFFERSON IN DAYS GONE BY

By Charlie Miller

Series 18

NATION RD. CONT'D: From H.H. Prugh 1911: "The first coaches to run on the Road were similar in shape to that of an old canoe, without springs or braces, with seats running crosswise. The door was in the front when the passengers entered they had to climb over the seats in order to find a place to sit. These old coaches were cumbersome and uncomfortable to ride in. Long before the Road reached Madison County, they had been replaced with ones that were fully up to the standard of present-day coaches, but on a larger scale. The bed of the old freighters was long and deep, scooping upward from the bottom at either end. As much as 11,000 pounds could be hauled drawn by six large horses.

It is doubtful whether you could find a single old stage coach now, as many were sold to showmen and adventurers going over the overland route west of the Rocky Mountains.

The drivers were generally men of fine and splendid physique, and they actively vied with one another in making acquaintances with distinguished guests. Whenever there was a political campaign, large gatherings were held along the Pike to which farmers would come in their wagons or on foot within a radius of 40 miles distance, and it would take them three or four days to return home.

I remember one old pioneer of Summerford, named Abraham Orpet, who walked to Dayton to hear Gen. Harrison and Thomas Corbin speak. He left Dayton the next evening and walked all night returning home sometime in the morning.

To the rising generation to whom tollgates are almost unknown, an explanation of the tollgate system may be of interest. Toll gatekeepers were appointed by the Governor, he invariably appointed some cripple. It was wholly proper that he showed favor to the unfortunate. The keeper's salary was \$200 per year. The rate of toll was determined by the width of the tires used, the narrower the tires the more the roadbed was cut up. Tires over 6 inches went free, practically serving as rollers. No toll was charged to persons going to or returning from church services, or muster, commonplace of business or marketing within the county in which they resided. This included wagons, carriages, horses, or oxen drawing the same. None was charged school children or persons in employment or doing services for the United States Government. Tolls ranged from 5c. for sheep, 20c. for cows, horse and rider, and 5c.

Vehicles with wheels under 2 ½" 10c., vehicles with wheels under 4" 8c., vehicles over 4" but not exceeding 5" 4c., every person occupying a seat in a mail stage, 3c.

Later the operation was transferred to the individual states. In Ohio toll gates and houses were erected every 15 miles. The traveler will still notice the milepost which marks the successive steps of the road. On the eastern portion, they are made of iron, and those of the western, sandstone which are fast disappearing under the actions of the weather. (one still stands in the middle of West Jefferson.)

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It is doubtful if there are in the world such monumental relics of old ponderous bridges, culverts, small bridges, and milestones which at one time was the pride and mainstay of the Nation, and has almost now passed from human recollection.” H.H. Prugh 1911.