

THE NATIONAL ROAD

The Road to Allegany and Garrett County History

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Western Maryland received a major economic boost in 1806, and secured a place in American history, when Cumberland was selected as the starting point for the National Road, America's first federally funded highway that eventually stretched from Cumberland, Maryland to Vandalia, Illinois. The road was also called The National Turnpike and Cumberland Road. Several general reasons favored construction of the road in Maryland, including geography, land speculation, and economic pressures from western settlers. Cumberland was also a logical choice for the new highway as it was already connected to the port city of Baltimore by an existing road, commonly called the Cumberland Road, and because British General Edward Braddock used it as a base of operation in his highly publicized mission to Ft. Duquesne against French and Indian forces in 1755. A proposed canal from Washington DC toward Cumberland gave further impetus to a Western Maryland selection. Cumberland's many advantages were well known by military, commercial, and political interests by the early nineteenth century.

American Indian pathways traversed Western Maryland including an important trail known as Nemacolin's Path that extended into Pennsylvania. Upon General Braddock's arrival at Ft. Cumberland in 1755, decisions were made for road construction to support troop movements and Nemacolin's Path was used as a point of consideration. A crude road had already been laid out along that pathway due to the efforts of Nemacolin, a friendly Indian, and Christopher Gist, a renowned scout employed as an agent of the Ohio Company. The latter company constructed a small trading post in the location of present day Ridgeley, West Virginia. At first troops were dispatched to clear a path over Haystack Mountain in the general area of Nemacolin's pathway, but due to the steep incline a road was later cut through the swampy Cumberland Narrows. Both of Braddock's pathways would later be used as part of the National Road.

As military operations of the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars subsided, the young nation directed its attention to economic enterprises. Calls for improved roads were issued by commercial interests and land speculators who realized the monetary rewards of accessing natural resources in western territories. Manufactured goods moving westward benefited the settlers who also sought access to eastern markets for their crops and raw materials. Before roads, all commerce between the interior and the east coast had to be by a water route down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, through the Gulf of Mexico, around Florida, and then up the coast. Mutually beneficial interests caused a consensus to be formed regarding the need for better roads, but the funds to finance them remained elusive. When Ohio petitioned for statehood in 1802 the necessity of binding the eastern seaboard states with the expanding midwestern territories could not be ignored.

A specific proposal for resolving the problem was offered in 1802, by Albert Gallatin, United States Secretary of the Treasury under President Thomas Jefferson. Gallatin's plan proposed that states exempt federal land sales from taxation and then earmark a small percentage of that money for construction of roads to and through Ohio. His plan was well received and provided a means for financing road improvements. A special committee of Congress subsequently considered various plans for road construction in 1805. The final committee report stated "it expedient to recommend the laying out and making a road from Cumberland...to the Ohio River."

The report provided a basis for congressional approval of a federally financed road from Cumberland to Ohio, no small achievement in a time when federal government's support for state and local programs was still in its infancy. President Jefferson's signing of the bill on March 29, 1806, finalized the federal government's commitment to a National Road, thereby setting a precedent for future federal public works projects.



Maryland's only remaining Toll House along The National Road is located on US Route 40, about six miles from Cumberland. The building was constructed in 1836.

From 1806-1809, three road commissioners and surveyors were appointed to map a 66-foot wide path through the first 130 miles of wilderness. David T. Shriver was appointed Superintendent for the project. Initial government cost estimates were \$6,000 per mile, a figure that proved to be far short of actual expenditures. Eminent domain was not invoked nor was compensation offered to property owners. Farmers willingly donated land for the road realizing the benefits that would eventually accrue to them.

While preliminary work proceeded for three years, actual road building did not officially begin until 1811 when a contract was awarded for the first ten-mile section. The starting point was to be at "the corner of Lot No. 1 in Cumberland near the center of the confluence of Will's Creek with the North Branch of the Potomac River." The stone marker was moved by engineers in 1908 and placed near Riverside Park. Today, the small marker commemorating this historic event is inconspicuously located on a traffic island in front of Washington's Headquarters along Greene Street. A larger interpretative sign is more easily noticed by visitors.

The original route through Cumberland closely followed Greene Street and ascended over Haystack Mountain, a course that paralleled Braddock's earlier path to Ft. Duquesne. Remnants of the road can still be viewed today and one can imagine the thousands of travelers who struggled to safely climb the mountain with their possessions stowed in creaky wagons. Travelers faced even greater dangers descending Haystack Mountain, due to its steeper grade, near present day Sunset Drive. The road continued toward today's LaVale Plaza and ascended to the Clarysville Inn, an important wagon stand and stage house between LaVale and Frostburg. After stopping at the inn, it was a brief ride to Frostburg where many businesses offered travelers a variety of amenities.

Heading out of Frostburg was the second toll house in Maryland, built at the 13th mile marker. The journey up Big Savage Mountain (2,900 feet) and Little Savage Mountain (2,810 feet) allows present day explorers to view dramatic engineering features of the road including a double

TOLL RATES	
Forevery score of Sheep or Hogs.	6cents
Forevery score of Cattle.	12cents
Forevery Horse and Rider.	4cents
Forevery led or driven Horse, Mule or Ass.	3cents
Forevery Sleigh or Sled drawn by one horse or pair of Oxen.	3cents
Forevery Horse or pair of Oxen in Addition.	3cents
Forevery Dearborn, Sulky, Chair or Chaise with one horse.	6cents
Forevery Horse in Addition.	3cents
Forevery Chariot, Coach, Cochee, Stage, Phaeton or Chaise with two Horses and four wheels.	12 cents
Forevery Carriage of pleasure by whatever be it called the same according to the number of wheels and horses drawing the same.	
Forevery Cart or Wagon whose wheels do not exceed three inches in breadth, drawn by horse or pair of Oxen.	4cents
Forevery Cart or wagon whose wheels exceed three inches and does not exceed four inches in breadth for every horse or pair of oxen drawing the same.	4cents
Wheels exceeding four and not exceeding six inches.	3cents
Wheels exceeding six and not exceeding eight inches.	2cents
All Carts or Wagons whose wheels exceed eight inches in breadth. Free.	
DAVID T. SHRIVER. Supt.	

Collecting tolls was necessary for road maintenance. The state of Maryland collected \$9,745.90 during its first year of operation.

track incline used for safely lifting and lowering heavy freight loads. Travelers next welcomed "Long Stretch," a relatively straight line of roadway that still extends as part of US Route 40 for more than two miles in the direction of Grantsville.

The old road continues to the picturesque and historic Casselman Bridge, built in 1813 and used continuously for more than a century. It was the largest, single span stone bridge in America at the time it was built. Spruce Forest Artisan Village and Penn Alps Restaurant Craft Shop are adjacent to the bridge and provide a forum for local artists and craftsmen.

A half mile climb up the hill from the Casselman Bridge brought visitors to Grantsville and the Casselman



The stone bridge that spans Casselman River near Grantsville, Md. (1813), features an unusually high arch. It is believed the soaring arch was designed in anticipation of a C&O Canal extension into Garrett County. The bridge was closed to traffic in 1953.

Hotel, a structure built in 1842 to serve travelers. The Casselman Hotel still welcomes guests as it originally did in the nineteenth century by serving meals and providing lodging. Passing through Grantsville, the National Road continues to nearby Pennsylvania where it turns south toward the town of Addison.

Road work associated with the long and winding road proved to be physically demanding. Plans called for a 66-foot cleared swath through the forest, a 32-foot wide road surface area, and a 20-foot proper road bed. It was to have a maximum grade of five degrees. A stone base of 18 inches comprised the road center which tapered to 12 inches on both sides. Stones were to be uniform in size and were made to pass through a 7-inch ring for the road base while

smaller ones were broken and passed through a three inch ring for use on the upper surface. Backbreaking work required road gangs to hammer stones to the required size, pull stumps and level the road bed with picks, shovels, rakes and mattocks. Wages were valued according to task and skill levels. On the low end of the payscale workers received \$6.00 per month while a few skilled workmen commanded \$1.00 per day. Construction camps followed the road's progress adding to the general excitement created by the project. A predictable result of the increased labor was inflation that affected the local housing and real estate markets. Inflation also escalated road construction costs. The first major section of highway from Cumberland to Uniontown, Pennsylvania, averaged \$9,475 per mile, pushing up costs by over a third from original estimates.

The primary means of transportation along the National Road were stage coaches for passenger service and Conestoga Wagons for heavy freight hauling, horseback riding and walking. Taverns were located nearly every mile with the larger ones hosting both passengers and teams of horses. Streams of traffic funneling into Cumberland earned it the title, "Gateway to the West."

Heavy traffic, erosion, vandalism, theft of road bed stones, and encroachment by farmers all contributed to serious deterioration of the road through Allegany and Garrett Counties within several years. Conditions had deteriorated to the point that resurfacing was required in the 1820's and again in the 1830's.

The 1830's brought several significant changes to the National Road in Western Maryland. First, a decision was made to change the course of it between Cumberland and the Six Mile House in LaVale. The Six Mile House stage coach inn was situated at the intersection of what is today the National and Winchester Roads. The original road that followed Braddock's first path over Haystack Mountain was altered to follow the general's second and preferred course, a line through the Narrows along Will's Creek. This alignment added about one mile to the road but avoided the dangerously steep grade over Haystack Mountain, the site of many wagon crashes. To facilitate the new course, a substantial stone bridge over Will's Creek in the Narrows was completed in 1834 and remained in use until 1932, when an improved bridge was erected across the creek. Flood control work in 1952 required demolition of the historic structure.

Other changes occurred in 1831 when the federal government began to transfer ownership of the National Road to state governments. This change required that states provide for road maintenance, so tolls were charged for the first time during that year. Maryland assumed ownership of its section in 1835.

Only a few toll houses were erected in Maryland and the only one still standing was built in 1836, about six miles west of Cumberland in LaVale. It was placed on the National Historic Registry in 1972 and now offers parking facilities for visitors to utilize while they examine the superbly restored building, complete with a toll rate chart. The charging of fees required a gate, or pike, to be built across the road, hence the term "turnpike" that is associated with the National Road. Travelers who did not pay the fee were termed "pikers."

Technology affected the National Road by the mid-nineteenth century. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad's arrival in Cumberland in 1842 and the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal's completion to the city in 1850, increased traffic on the road as travelers had several options in getting to Cumberland but only one for leaving it if headed westward. But as the rail lines extended westward the old pike became outdated. Creaky wagons pulled by horse teams could not compete with the iron horses. Taverns and service related industries went out of business and the once vital artery became dormant in sections and was used primarily for local service.

Just as technology led to the National Road's decline, it also caused a revival in the early twentieth century as automobiles forever changed American travel habits. Increased motor vehicle traffic led to the Post Office Appropriations Act of 1912 and the Rural Road Act of 1916 which made federal funds available to rebuild sections of the National Road so they would be suitable for heavy traffic. In 1921, The Federal Highway Act provided for construction of an interstate highway system and the National Road became incorporated into a grid system, being designated United States Route 40 in 1925. By the 1940's, the old National Road was sporting a new name and became busier than a century earlier as buses, tractor trailers and cars streamed in both directions. More federal legislation in 1956, titled the Federal Aid Highway Act, led to the creation of Interstate Routes 70 and 68, thereby diminishing traffic along the historic road. US Route 40 became an alternative or scenic route along the way to Vandalia, Illinois, its termination point.

The National Highway has enjoyed a renaissance in recent years as residents and travelers recognize the significance of the road in our nation's history. Nostalgic glimpses into the past can be gleaned along nearly every mile of the old pike as numerous markers, bridges, and interesting buildings remind us of a time when travel was very different. Recognition of the National Highway's significance came to fruition when the United States Department of Transportation designated it as an All-American Road in 2002, acknowledging the highway for its archaeological, historic, cultural, and/or scenic qualities. Special events and programs are underway to commemorate those qualities of US Route 40, the road that built America.

The author would like to thank historians Dr. Harry Stegmaier and Al Feldstein for assistance in preparing this article.





DEDICATED TO
THE PIONEERS WHO
WITH HEROIC SACRIFICE
AND UNDAUNTED COURAGE
BLAZED THIS OLD TRAIL
NOW KNOWN AS
THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY
AND THUS OPENED
"THE GATEWAY TO THE WEST"



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DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
ANNO DOMINI 1931