

THE DIXIE HIGHWAY IN NORTH KENTUCKY
(By H. B. Mackoy)

The DIXIE HIGHWAY, throughout its entire length, follows a route full of interest for the historian. The portion connecting Lexington with Cincinnati has been most appropriately and naturally chosen.

If one will look at the earliest map of Kentucky, prepared by its first historian, John Filson, he will discover a trail leading from the pioneer stations along the central rivers and creeks to the mouth of the Licking. This trail, known as "General Clark's War Road," was the path chosen by the hardy frontiersmen to the rendezvous for their campaigns against the Indians of the great Northwest. In the latter part of April, 1779, Col. John Bowman had directed the men from the Falls (Louisville) to meet other militia at this point with boats to enable them to cross. Clark and his intrepid heroes gathered there November 4th, 1782, before their campaign against the Shawnee towns. Later it was the camping place for the gallant band commanded by Colonel Hardin and Major Hall, who suffered so terribly in Harman's defeat in September, 1790; while two years later General Charles Scott's expedition against the Eel River Indians from the same point.

It is related that, when the troops returned from the last mentioned campaign, they journeyed "by way of Covington and along the Dry Ridge Road to central Kentucky". It is surprising to note how quickly the hunter's path had developed into the beaten way of commerce. The rapid change seems to have been a logical result of that close and helpful relationship which from the first existed between the little town of Lexington, founded the very year of Bowman's expedition, and its younger sister, Losantiville (now Cincinnati). It was largely also the work of three men, two of whom were identified with the history of each place. Robert Patterson, a young Pennsylvanian of Scotch ancestry, had laid off Lexington and helped to erect the first fort there. Now having become, with Mathias Denman, of New Jersey, and Filson, the schoolmaster, the proprietors of a tract of land opposite the mouth of the Licking River on the Northwest of the Ohio, they determined to establish another city "on that excellent situation".

In the "Kentucky Gazette" published at Lexington September 6th, 1788, these three promoters published their land-booming scheme, and announced that "the 15th day of September is appointed for a large company to meet at Lexington and make out a road from there to the mouth of the Licking" Judge John Cleves Symmes, the vendor of Denman and his associates, was expected to be at the new settlement when the company should arrive, but his coming being delayed, there appeared another announcement in the "Gazette" of September 13th, 1788. It said "The time appointed to go to the mouth of the Licking is put off from the fifteenth, as published last week, to eighteenth inst., when a large party will start from Lexington in order to meet Judge Symmes on Monday, the twenty-second, at that place, agreeable to his own appointment, and the business will go on as proposed".

Birth of Real Road.

It is not incorrect to claim the birth of the real road from Lexington to Covington dates from that September morning, when those sturdy emigrants met to hew their way through virgin forest to a new home. Good engineers they must have been, too, for the road they laid out was to be for many years the chief means of communication between the little groups of settlers in the Miami Valley and the older stations in the Blue Grass region. As will be seen, it was nearly three quarters of a century later (in 1854) that the macadamized roadway was

opened through from Covington to Lexington, and until then all freight as well as passenger traffic had to be carried on over this route.

The first road made after the macadam (or McAdam) plan in Kentucky was in 1829, being from Maysville to the little town of Washington, four miles away. At the session of the General Assembly held in 1826-27. Governor Joseph Desha, in his annual message, recommended improvements of this kind. Previous to that, however, there had been various acts incorporating companies for road construction, the first two being from Lexington to Louisville and from Lexington to Maysville in 1817.

"Within a year", Collins tells us, "the first-named charter was virtually repealed, and three new charters granted to cover the same distance. * * * Charters were also granted for turnpike roads (or artificial roads of stone) from Louisville to Portland and Shippingport, Lexington toward Boonesborough, Lexington to Georgetown, and Georgetown to Frankfort; and, February 8, 1819, from Georgetown to Cincinnati".

Nothing tangible seems to have been done under these charters so far as macadamizing was concerned. Efforts to secure federal aid were dashed to the ground by President Jackson's veto of a bill authorizing the Secretary of the United States Treasury to subscribe for \$150,000 of the capital stock of the Maysville, Washington, Paris and Lexington turnpike road company. But, inspired by the building of the Maysville and Washington pike, the Legislature of Kentucky made it lawful, January 29th, 1830, for the governor to subscribe \$25,000 for that purpose to the Maysville, Washington, Paris and Lexington Company.

System Spreads.

Thus inaugurated, the system of building such roads, aided by the State, spread rapidly. The cost of constructing them appears to have varied from \$5,046.00 to \$7,359.00 per mile, including bridges. "The bridges over the rivers", it is said, "cost from \$36,317.00 to \$60,000.00, with spans of from 176 to 420 feet - while those over the creeks and small streams ranged from \$500.00 to \$8,000.00, with spans from 20 to 100 feet."

The Covington & Lexington Turnpike Road Company was incorporated by an act of the Kentucky General Assembly, approved February 23rd, 1834, with authority to construct and permanently maintain "an artificial road" from Covington, Kentucky, through Williamstown and Georgetown, to Lexington in that state. The term "artificial" seems to have implied the use of some material, such as stone, gravel or timber, in addition to the natural ground formation.

Receipts Fall Off.

During its early existence the Covington and Lexington road was a fairly profitable investment, but, after the war there was a falling off in receipts. With the building of steam and electric railroads, the income was still further diminished, and the revenue derived from it in recent years has barely sufficed to cover the expenses of operation.

In the case of Covington and Lexington Turnpike Road Co. vs A.P. Sanford et al., which was passed upon by the Supreme Court of the United States, December 14th, 1896, an interesting question was raised as to the right of the State of Kentucky to regulate tolls on the pike. It was decided in favor of the company on the ground that the statute unreasonably prevented the corporation from keeping its road in proper condition and from earning dividends.

Revives Famous Case.

A singular fact in connection with the foregoing litigation was that William Goebel, afterward contestant for the governor's office and shot by the hand of an unknown assassin at Frankfort, January 30th, 1900, was attorney for Sandford and the other appellees interested in using the pike. This Sandford was a cousin of John Leathers Sandford, who was shot by Goebel April 11th, 1895, and who had also resided on the same road.

The Sandford and Leathers families had been among the earliest settlers on what was then the old state road cleared from Lexington to Covington in September, 1788. John Leathers, a soldier of the revolution, had acquired a large tract of land on both sides of the road, the boundaries of which extended to within four miles of the city of Covington. Among the children he brought with him from Virginia was a son named John, who was a soldier in the war of 1812. He succeeded to a large portion of his father's estate and built the old mansion now standing and owned by the family of Mr Charles Patton, Treasurer of the Cincinnati, New Orleans & Texas Pacific Railroad, situated five miles from Covington on the north side of the Highway. Here the family made its home for a number of years, one of them, Benj. W. Leathers, being the first banker in Covington. An interesting story about him relates that, having issued a quantity of paper currency in the early times, which he later redeemed and sought to destroy, it was placed in an old-fashioned stove to burn. Carried out of the chimney by the draft, it was redistributed through the community and Leathers was kept busy redeeming it again for several days. The old fellow never attempted, however, to claim that there had been a mistake on his part or that the persons presenting the money were not entitled to it.

The ancestor of the Sandfords was Thomas Sandford, who came to Kentucky in 1792, the year that Kentucky was admitted to the Union, and became the owner of another large body of land lying west and north of the Leathers tract, and extending thence to the Ohio River. His residence was on the bank of the Ohio River, within the present corporate limits of the city of Ludlow, but the home of John L. Sandford is still standing on the westside of Beechwood avenue, about one thousand feet north of the DIXIE HIGHWAY.

Historic Neighborhood.

A number of other interesting persons have lived along and near the Highway, and many historic events are connected with it, but time and the changes of modern progress have effaced the monuments by which they might be recognized or referred to.

Just at the top of the hill leading out of Covington one passes through the line of fortifications and rifle pits which were erected by the citizen soldiery of Cincinnati under General Lew Wallace at the time of Kirby Smith's threatened raid in September, 1862. Most of these earthworks have been levelled and the ground builded upon for suburban homes. Fort Mitchell, named after the distinguished student of astronomy and brave soldier, General Ormsby M. Mitchell, was the principal point of defense. It stood until 1909 on what is known as Fort Mitchell Heights, to the north of the pike, and gave its name to the Country Club and town of the same name lying immediately to the southwest. The only fortification still evident lies on the west side of Kyle's Lane about six hundred yards south of the pike.

Going on out the Highway, one passes an old frame house to the south of Fort Mitchell Heights, across the road, where the Kennedy family once lived. The first of the name in Kenton County, Thomas Kennedy,

established the earliest ferry between Cincinnati and Covington about the year 1790. He himself had built the first stone house in Covington on the bank of the Ohio, east of Garrard street.

Traveling still further, beyond Fort Mitchell town, and skirting along and through the old Sandford farm, the handsome Highland Cemetery is reached, where many prominent citizens of Kenton County lie buried. St. Mary's Cemetery adjoins it on the south and in the vicinity lies the cemetery of St John.

After leaving these and passing the remainder of the Sandford place now built up with residences, a comfortable looking brick house built about 1850 by Rev William Orr to be occupied by a girls' seminary is reached. It lies hard by the present southern terminus of what is known as the Fort Mitchell electric car line, which accompanies one along the pike for the last mile. Near this point the old state road crossed the present pike, and a half mile to the south, beyond the Leathers mansion, there is a portion of the old road still in existence, now known as part of the Turkey Foot Road (the north branch). This short section and another section, which branches off from the north side of the pike half way between Fort Mitchell and Covington, are all that remain of the pioneers' way.

There is an old frame residence on the Turkey Foot Road, some five hundred yards from its intersection with the Highway, now owned by Mr Joseph W. Pugh, which was a tavern on the state road as far back as 1815. It has been remodelled and added to since that time, but a part of the original structure is retained in the present one.

Interesting Homes.

Between the north branch of the Turkey Foot Road and Erlanger are several old homes interesting to the local historian, but best known of them all is a small frame cottage situated on the Shinkle farm, close by the six mile post. Here, when it was a log house, uncovered by weather-boarding, a boys' school was kept for a number of years and many well-known men studied there under Sackett Meade, and other scholars of that time. Among these students was a boy, who afterward was to become famous as John Uri Lloyd, the author of "Stringtown on the Pike". This little town, where Lloyd lived, and the real name of which is Florence, lies along the Highway in Boone County, a short distance south of the Kenton County line.

Right across the road from the former schoolhouse, on a farm now belonging to Harry B. Mackoy, but then part of the John B. Casey homestead, was the camp of Kirby Smith's men when they came so unpleasantly close to the Queen City in 1862.