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Old Trails of Hancock County

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(Prepared for the Illinois State Historical Society at the request of some of the Hancock County Members of the Society).

The land surveyor often notices on plain or hillside old grass grown furrows or gullies. Many of these are all that remain of former Indian trails or pioneer roads and some of them can be traced from river to river and even across States.

The tracing of these old trails would be an excellent exercise for boy scouts.

One of the principal trails of Hancock County was the Commerce and Rushville State Road. It extends from old Commerce, now a part of Nauvoo on the Mississippi River, at the head of the rapids, diagonally across Hancock County through Carthage to Plymouth and thence across Schuyler County through Rushville to Beardstown on the Illinois River, being almost on a line from Nauvoo to Beardstown. On the removal of the State Capital to Springfield, the stage road took this trail from Springfield to the Mississippi River and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad follows near this old trail from Springfield to Beardstown, its present western terminus.

Isham Gillam Davidson, grandfather of I. C. Davidson, present postmaster of Carthage, Illinois, drove the stage from Springfield to Beardstown on this trail.

The stage coach made regular trips over this trail from Springfield to Nauvoo, and I have heard old settlers tell of seeing the coach appear at the edge of the clearing at Plymouth, the driver whipping up his four-horse team for the grand entry while the man beside him winded a horn and the

inhabitants of the little group of log cabins gathered in front of the tavern to hear the latest news from Springfield. I get this by direct tradition, as my grandfather, W. Jenkins Salisbury, was a pioneer blacksmith of Plymouth, and my father, D. C. Salisbury, was born there in 1841.

If you will examine a road map of Hancock and Schuyler Counties, you can see many places where the old trail is still in use, as for instance, the road northwest of Plymouth from corner to corner of Section 25, the road crossing Brunce's Creek in that section; in the northwest corner of St. Mary's Township and the southeast corner of Carthage Township and the crossing of Prairie Creek southeast of Carthage.

From Carthage to Long Creek the trail is easily traced across the land of W. O. Kunkel, and George Aleshire. The present road following the old trail down the hill to the creek and for some distance along it. The road also follows the old trail at the little creek near Nauvoo. On the northwest quarter of Section 30 in Rock Creek Township, a house recently owned by Emile Coeur stands parallel with the old trail and while surveying land I have noted many of the overgrown trenches and gullies that mark the old trail from Nauvoo to Beardstown and to the ancient town of Frederick on the Illinois River, this side of Beardstown. This trail may have been used by some of the Indians on their journeys to the "dark and bloody" ground of Kentucky.

Almost the only good records of the pioneer trails are the physical traces. Very few documentary records were made until the land owners began to ask to have the roads run at right angles around their farms. In June, 1856, Warren Miller was ordered to survey a new route for that part of the Commerce and Rushville State Road extending from Rock Creek Township to Nauvoo, and the road was changed to run west directly from Section 30, in Rock Creek Township, to Sonora Landing on the Mississippi, and thence up the shore to Nauvoo. Another well known marked trail is the old route from Fountain Green, through Carthage to Warsaw. A branch of this trail leads southerly along the bluffs to Lima

Lake,—the hunters' Paradise of aboriginal and pioneer times.

From Warsaw to Lima Lake the bluffs were dotted with prehistoric mounds and strewn with arrow heads and stone axes, while the shores of Lima Lake until recent years, abounded in broken flints from arrows and fish spears. Up to 1870 many people of Fountain Green vicinity traveled this trail to Lima Lake to fish, hunt ducks and gather pecans and persimmons.

John Brewer, whose son, Thomas Brewer, is said to have been the first white child born in Hancock County, and the Lincolns, were the first settlers of Fountain Green Township. They found the Black Hawk Indians inhabiting the Crooked Creek woods and were on friendly terms with them. These Lincolns were relatives of President Lincoln.

The Black Hawk Indians used the Fountain Green to Warsaw trail. From Fountain Green to Carthage the trail is the ideal Indian trail, as it follows along the top or comb of the old glacier moraine and while passing across a region of many steep hills and creeks, avoids all but Crooked Creek, which it approaches at an easy incline and crosses at a ford, maintaining nearly a straight line the entire distance.

From Fountain Green the trail ran northeast, probably to Peoria and the Great Lakes. I was born in Fountain Green Township in 1870, and when a boy have seen the old trail east of Fountain Green in use as a road, as well as many other trails that ran across the woodlands of the county before the woodlands were fenced.

My mother, Sibian Weinman Salisbury, born in Fountain Green Township in 1842, and brought up a strict Presbyterian by Robert and Joanna (Brewer) McConnell, preserved many traditions of pioneer times told to her by the first settlers of Fountain Green Township and passed them on to me.

Robert McConnell was an uncle of Senator O. F. Berry and M. P. Berry, of Carthage. The McConnells were of good old Pennsylvania Scotch Presbyterian stock and M. P. Berry preserves with great care, the flint lock pistols carried by his

grandfather, Francis McConnell, in the war of 1812, while Frank Walker, of Fountain Green, has his sword.

Mrs. Robert McConnell, sister of Thomas Brewer, mentioned above, told my mother of her father entertaining a group of the Black Hawk Indians, at his cabin west of Fountain Green, at supper. After supper they gathered around the large fireplace to smoke the pipe of peace. One of the braves was seated on a heavy three-legged stool of rude construction, and when he leaned forward to light his pipe at the fire, the rear leg of the stool dropped out and upon resuming an upright position he fell over backwards, whereupon his comrades laughed uproariously.

But the worst was yet to come, for the Black Hawk Indians felt bound to observe the usages of aboriginal hospitality which dictated an Indian feast given in return.

The Lincolns and Brewers felt equally bound to attend the feast which abounded with venison, wild turkey, etc., and a large kettle of squirrels and prairie chickens boiled together, and alas, each bird and animal containing the viscera. Tradition does not say that the white visitors ate heartily of this horrid mess. My father says that the western Indians whom he visited in Nevada in 1865, were clean about their cooking.

The mounds on which this group of Indians built their teepees are still to be seen on the south side of the road across Section 30, near the center of the section on the high ridge along the old trail from Fountain Green to Nauvoo.

In an early day Warsaw was the chief market of the county, as there was no railroad, and steamboat traffic headed there.

Pioneers of Fountain Green prepared pork for this market and were obliged to throw away the excess of spare ribs, pork chops, etc., as the hams, bacon and shoulders only, were marketable; the hams bringing at one time two and one half cents per pound, payable partly in money and partly in calico, hardware, whiskey, etc., many of our early pioneers being great believers in the efficacy of alcohol.

Nauvoo was the only prohibition city in the State and in

1844 was the largest city in Illinois, and a University town, being twice as large as Chicago at that time. Carthage was then a little town, smaller than Webster. Now Carthage is a church and college town, larger than Nauvoo or Warsaw, and Nauvoo has the grog shops, which have been banished from Carthage for several decades.

According to the available records the "squaring" of the road from Carthage to Fountain Green began February 14, 1855, when, according to an Act of the Legislature, David Mack, M. Couchman and James A. Winston, being duly sworn by John M. Ferris, J. P. of Carthage, proceeded to re-locate such part of the State Road as lay between Carthage and Crooked Creek, to near its present location from Walnut Street to the southeast corner of Section 8, one-half mile north of the Fairview School house. The survey was made by Warren Miller, County Surveyor. The report of the viewers was filed May 2, 1855, C. Winston, Clerk, by E. Cherill, Deputy. Recorded May 20, 1863. F. M. Corby, Clerk, A. Cherrill, Deputy.

Another part was re-located in 1857 by R. M. Wieder, Reuben Jacoby and A. J. Griffith. On August 31, 1839, William Smith, James Head and Nathan Ward reported to the Honorable County Commissioners Court of Hancock County, that according to an order of the above named court, they viewed and located a road from Carthage to Warsaw, fifty feet wide and sixteen miles long, beginning at the west end of Main street in Carthage and ending at the east end of Clark Street in Warsaw.

Then follows the field notes of J. W. Williams, but as they are strictly technical and of interest to surveyors only, I will spare the reader any reference to them, except to say that the road ran in the present road to Elvaston until the first turn where it went right on to Warsaw, as directly as practicable, passing about one half mile south of Elvaston.

There was an old trail to Hamilton and a State road directly south from Hamilton to Marcelline in Adams County.

A branch of the Commerce and Rushville road ran to Venus

at the head of the rapids somewhere near the site of Sonora Landing. It is said that Venus was once the seat of government of Hancock County.

Another State road followed an old trail directly eastward from Carthage across Crooked Creek, (it is a little changed now), and Cedar Creek to Joetta and the county line and thence to Macomb, or Colchester. Joetta was called Uniontown in 1873, and was changed to Joettabo in honor of Joel and Etta Booz, and afterwards to Joetta.

The present Burnside road was called the Burlington Road.

The Carthage and LaHarpe trail ran from the Burlington Road along the east side of Robert Baird's residence on Section 5, directly across the southern part of Pilot Grove Township in a northeasterly direction past the south side of the McKay cemetery across Rock Creek and past the Cottage School house, and crossed the north branch of Crooked Creek nearly one-half mile further north than now, running thence in nearly the same direction to LaCrosse and on to LaHarpe. Since the country has been fenced, the road has been changed everywhere, except on the east side of Crooked creek, where it follows alongside the old route up the bluff.

A county road was established from St. Mary's in 1839 north past Bartlett's Mills on Crooked Creek to LaHarpe,—W. W. Graves, Joseph Botts and Franklin Bartlett, viewers.

In 1843 a road was laid out from the St. Mary's and LaHarpe road to the stage road near George Boston's house, probably to the Commerce and Rushville Road.

In 1843 Abraham Lincoln of Fountain Green and William Smith of Nauvoo, were authorized to view a road from Ramus to Nauvoo. This Abraham Lincoln was a cousin of President Lincoln and William Smith was a brother of Joseph Smith, and was a member of the State Legislature.

In 1844 Jabez A. Beebe and Charles Chrisman viewed a road from Fountain Green to Macedonia,—John M. Ferris, surveyor.

Thus we see that between 1843 and 1844 Ramus changed its name to Macedonia and is now called Webster.

An old trail is plainly discernible from LaHarpe to Dallas and in 1850 John M. Ferris surveyed a road from Fountain Green to Pontoosuc.

In 1850 Hancock County discharged her Court of Honorable County Commissioners and substituted Township organization.

There are many other old trails distinguishable across Hancock County, but it appears that the two most important were the Commerce and Rushville trail and the Fountain Green and Warsaw trail, which apparently crossed each other near the north side of the courtyard in Carthage and could be conveniently commemorated by a monument at that crossing.

The Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution of Carthage might very appropriately join in erecting such a **marker.**