

# TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

## **"TURNPIKE TALES" #25**

*(Historical items from the "Madison Bouckville Antique Week" region)*

*By Jim Ford*

The Madison-Bouckville area has been rich in history from the arrival of the first settlers to the present day. As an addition to the website, we have decided to share some of that history in order that the patrons who travel to the Madison-Bouckville Show will have a better understanding of our truly unique region.

### **Things Seen Along The Turnpike**

Recently I was driving along Rt. 20 between Madison and Bouckville and began to think about all of the unique happenings that have occurred along this stretch of our historic highway. I decided to share a number of those items that I have come across in doing local history research for the past eighteen years.

Let's start with the early history of the roadway that we now call U.S. Rt. 20.

**EARLY ROADWAYS** – During the earliest years of settlement in the Town of Madison, roadways through the area were little more than wide paths. Trees had been chopped down to a height that would allow an ox cart to pass over. The early roads did not follow the current line that our modern Rt. 20 does.

Our local area had a number of swamps when the early settlers arrived. Roads had to avoid those swamps and were generally established on the hillsides. The swampy areas were also a place of disease, so the roads and the early farms were established on the higher ground. Our earliest communities were at Indian Opening, north of Madison Lake, and Madison Center, south of the current Village of Madison.

These were locations where travelers could somewhat avoid the swamps.

THE CHERRY VALLEY TURNPIKE – Things changed drastically when the State of New York passed legislation in 1803 to charter the Third Great Western Turnpike. This new highway would extend from Cherry Valley in the east to Manlius in the west. The roadway was to be built by private firms along the route and, as such, tolls would be charged. Work on the new road began in 1805 and in 1811 the entire stretch of 69 miles was ready for traffic. With the completion of the road, businesses began to open on the four corners intersection in Madison Village (as it was called then) and the eastern end of what was to become Bouckville.

The new roadway was to be built according to the following specifications: “The route of the new turnpike was to be grubbed of brush and trees from a swathe 100 feet wide, and zigzagged on the edges with split rail fences. The road itself was to be 28 feet wide, rising in the middle by a gradual arch ... imbedded with wood, stone, gravel, or some other hard substance, well-compacted ... faced with gravel or stone pounded ... with ditches constructed wherever practicable so as to admit sleighs to go in them safely.” This would constitute a formidable challenge for the contractors.

INNS AND TAVERNS – As settlers moved to our area and also passed through to lands further west, taverns and inns became important resting and social spots. Along the stretch of road in the Town of Madison there were four – Clough’s Tavern, just to the east of the present Earley’s Farm and Home Store, another that was located across the intersection of Rt. 20 and Lovejoy Rd., a third that was built on the northwest side of the main intersection in Madison Village, and McClure’s Tavern located near the east end of Johnsville. Johnsville was later renamed Bouckville. The tavern in Bouckville was later the home of Samuel Rogers Mott of apple cider fame.

There would be another inn/hotel established at a somewhat later time in Bouckville – 1837. This was built by Moses Maynard and was known as the “White House.” It served the public well into the 1900’s. In recent times it has been known as the Bouckville Hotel.

DRIVING LIVESTOCK TO MARKET – The Cherry Valley Turnpike followed a more direct route through the township. Swamps and marsh areas were eventually drained or filled in, allowing more people to start farms along the new dirt road. What a sight it must have been to see animals and birds driven down the highway to distant markets. Cows, horses, sheep, pigs, and turkeys were frequently seen. A wonderful story is told of General Erastus Cleaveland, Major Ephraim Clough, and Captain Seth Blair – all of War of 1812 fame, buying and fattening cattle and frequently traveling together, driving their cattle down the highway to the Albany market.

WINTER CHALLENGES – Wintertime brought many challenges to our settlers. Travel changed from wagons and carriages to sleighs. Snow rollers, drawn by horses or oxen were used to pack the snow so that the sleighs could glide along the road. Of course the sleigh had to have a braking mechanism for going down steep hills. You didn't want the animals to get hurt.

Sleighs were used by farmers to transport goods to the local mills and bring home store goods. Sleighs were also used to enable parishioners to get to church during the winter months. And let's not forget the young people who used sleighs for outings to dances, parties, and school events.

MILITIA DEMONSTRATIONS – From the time of the American Revolution to modern day, the militia has played an important role in the security of the nation. During the revolution militia units were called to supplement the regular army. Following the war, militia units were organized and drilled to be ready for an emergency.

At various times these units would parade down the main street of Madison to show their preparedness. This was done during the War of 1812 time period and also in the years leading up to the Civil War. In 1858 a military parade was held in Madison with two units from Morrisville leading the way – The Madison Artillery (of Morrisville, the county seat of government) and the Morrisville Flying Artillery and Light Infantry. Many of those who paraded would soon go off to war following the attack on Ft. Sumter.

LOADS OF APPLES – Two large cider mills were located at Bouckville, those of the Peet Brothers and S.R. & J.C. Mott. In the fall local farmers would gather their extra apples and haul them by wagon to the cider mills. The sight of those wagons and the smell that was produced with the grinding process must have made Bouckville a very pleasant place to be during the processing season.

CELEBRATIONS AT THE LIBERTY POLE – In 1898 a new Liberty Pole and flag were raised on the southeast corner of the Village of Madison to replace one that had been raised in 1876. A total of \$60.00 had been donated for the new pole, which came from Pine Woods, New York. “The new flag pole was to be a jointed pole, 110 feet high, on top of which will swing “Old Glory,” 15 x 30 feet.” It was dedicated on Memorial Day with Military Band music, speeches, games, and races.

In later years the pole was used for a special contest. During village celebrations the pole was greased to a considerable height, where above that height a \$5 or \$10 dollar bill had been attached. The younger boys would be given a signal to try to get up the pole to win the money. Seems like the best strategy would have been to let a few others go first to remove some of the grease. Timing was all important.

HORSE RACES – As a feature of winter celebrations, horse races were featured. We usually think of the races being held in a field or on a track. The races in Madison were held right on the main street in January. The race would start in the area where Madison School is now located and finish at the eastern end of the village. The road crew packed the snow for the event. The crowds would be large and the bets would be larger still. The horses were fitted with special shoes in order to have good traction.

RUNAWAY HORSES AND WAGONS – It would be fair to assume that with all of the horse traffic coming and going through Madison and Bouckville during the 1800's and early 1900's, there would be incidents of runaway horses. This was true on many occasions.

We have recorded cases of horses being frightened by the barking of dogs, by the train whistle, or by strange and unfamiliar noises. An individual horse could be stopped after a distance was covered, but a single horse or a team of horses and carriage or wagon often resulted in injury for the occupants. Broken arms or legs have been noted in a number of cases. What a sight it must have been to witness the runaway incident and hope that no one was seriously hurt.

TROOP TRAINS – During WW1 and WW11 trains carried soldiers from training bases to coastal city areas for deployment overseas. Trains passed through Bouckville on a regular basis. Since train schedules were known to all of the inhabitants, citizens could look forward to a troop train passing through and give the soldiers shouts of encouragement.

GOING TO THE BASEBALL GAME – From the 1860's to the mid-1930's the national game of baseball was center stage in Bouckville. The team from Bouckville, known as the Summits, became known throughout Central New York for the fine teams that they produced year after year.

Games were played at Genesee Park where the present Cider House Show Field is located. Opposing teams would arrive by horse and wagon during the early years and then by train later on. Teams often came from Utica, and the crowd to watch the game was regularly estimated at 800 or more. The street would be crowded with fans and following the game, many enjoyed a delicious dinner at the "White House." (today's Bouckville Hotel)

We will conclude "TURNPIKE TALES" #25 at this point and continue the events seen along our historic Cherry Valley Turnpike/Rt. 20 in Madison and Bouckville in "TURNPIKE TALES" #26. There are many more events to share.