

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #1

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

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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.

THE PAVEMENT BENEATH YOUR FEET

As you are walking around the Madison-Bouckville area and visiting all of the many vendors, consider for a moment the pavement that you are walking on. That may seem like a funny idea but the roadway through the "Show" site has a rich history of its own.

In 1803 the "Third Great Western Turnpike" was chartered by the State of New York and was to extend from Cherry Valley in the east to Manlius in the west. Thus, the route of the new highway would run right through the Madison and Bouckville area. The roadway was to be built by private firms along the route and as such, tolls would be charged. Some examples of those tolls were – 4 cents for a horse and rider, 5 cents for a score of sheep and 6 cents for a cart, sleigh or sled drawn by two oxen or two horses. That might not sound like a large fee, but toll gates were set up every ten miles which was the length of the construction area for each private firm. In taking a flock of sheep from Madison or Bouckville to Albany for example, tolls could be paid at least nine times.

The road was of dirt, with a crown in the middle to shed water. Drainage was provided by ditches on the sides, and bridges were constructed over the many streams of the area.

Since the construction of the Erie Canal, Chenango Canal or the New York State Thruway had not become a reality at this time, the "Turnpike" became the major route to the west and the Madison-Bouckville area prospered because of it. Madison, named after President James Madison, and Bouckville (originally named Johnsville for John Edgerton, an early settler) but later renamed Bouckville, in honor of Gov. William C. Bouck, who was an uncompromising advocate of the Chenango Canal route through Bouckville, grew quickly and attracted many businesses.

Very soon after the construction of the "Western Turnpike," the route was lengthened and became known as the Cherry Valley Turnpike. The road later extended from Albany in the east to Syracuse in the west – a total distance of 135 miles.

In 1926, the Cherry Valley Turnpike Association was formed with the intent to further promote the growth of business opportunities along this scenic highway and to attract the ever-growing flow of motor traffic to the region's restaurants, diners and lodging sites. These efforts produced great results, mainly by using a yearly brochure which highlighted both the history of the Turnpike route and also the businesses along it.

In 1914 and 1931 the roadway was further improved. Many people have wondered why the section of highway through Madison and Bouckville stays in such good shape. The answer lies in what was done in 1912 and 1931. The improvements in 1914 were made by using a base of crushed stone, covered by a layer of concrete 5 inches thick. The improvements to the road in 1931 were made by the further use of concrete and produced a 30 foot wide highway. The new concrete layer was 8 inches thick and was poured in three 10 foot wide strips. The Dale Engineering Company of Rochester had the contract for the cement work. Blacktop has been placed over the concrete in the ensuing years, but with that kind of a base, is it any wonder that the roadway is in such good shape.

In 1934 the Cherry Valley Turnpike was officially renamed U.S. Route 20. The section through the Madison-Bouckville region is part of a highway which begins in Newport, Oregon and has its terminus in Boston, Massachusetts. It is the longest road in the United States. As you can see, there is no chance that the highway you will use for the show will give way any time soon!

("Turnpike Tales" is written by Jim Ford for the Show Newsletter. Jim has written a series of books about the Town of Madison region. His books include, Sweet Cider Days, a history of the Mott's Company in Bouckville, The Pride of Cidertown, a history of the Bouckville Summits baseball team, and Grove, the story of area businessman, Grove Hinman. For those of you who are unfamiliar with our area, the entire Mott's company began in Bouckville through the efforts of Samuel R. Mott in 1868.)