

Samuel Herr and the National Road

From Paul Herr, a story about the family's "cattle drive" along the National Road which he recorded in June 2004.

"Hello, this is Paul Herr. My great-great grandfather, whose name was Samuel Herr, moved to Montgomery County from Pennsylvania in the early 1830s when my great grandfather was three years old. Ten years after moving here and buying land, they became interested in getting more livestock. Livestock was much more scarce in the west than in the area in central Pennsylvania where they had come from, so, they made arrangements to buy a large herd of cattle from their home area and drive them, on foot, all the way to Montgomery Co., Ohio. So one summer I think they went by some means of public transportation, or whatever, to Pennsylvania and bought the cattle and drove them West on foot all the way. They would stay overnight at various way stations or way houses where the cattle could be penned up. Each day they would take them on the drive further West to the next stopping place. My great grandfather, who by this time was 13 years old, was great help rounding up the cattle, keeping them moving and keeping them on the path. One night, when they stayed at a way house which was by no means fancy, they were permitted to sleep in a loft of the house. The loft was not full height; it was only about 2/3 as tall as a person when they stood up. I guess when you are sleeping you didn't mind the low ceiling, but anyhow, during the night, great grandpa got to dreaming about his day's activities of chasing cattle. Not only was he dreaming but he was sleep walking and he raised up quickly to hit a cow with a stick to chase it back into line and bumped his head hard on the ceiling and that woke him up. And this is the story that has come down through these generations, of driving cattle all the way from central Pennsylvania to northern Montgomery County.

Commentary by then RTHS president Paul Dewey: Walking all the way back to Ohio some 500 miles, driving cattle 400 miles over the National Road which was a dirt, gravel, crushed stone roadway, seems almost unimaginable in this day and age. We park our cars nearest to the entrance of a store, to save a few extra steps, and this is commonplace. The route they traveled: Annville to Harrisburg, PA, 20 mi.; Harrisburg to Hagerstown, MD, 74 mi.; Hagerstown to Cumberland, MD, 81 mi.; Cumberland to Uniontown, PA, 68 mi.; Uniontown to Washington, PA, 44 mi.; Washington, PA to Wheeling, W. Va., 33 mi.; Wheeling, W. Va. to Harrisburg (Englewood), OH, 200 mi.

Toll gates along the National Road were approximately every 11 miles in Pennsylvania and 10 miles in Maryland and Ohio. Few of us today are very familiar with the temperament or the needs of cattle, some are docile, and others can be quite headstrong and trying. Livestock was being driven over the National Road in great numbers; enterprising farmers built drovers' stands where livestock could be fed and drivers were given a place to sleep. The Herr family story does not tell how many days the return trip took; surely it was from sunup to sundown every day. Did they drive cattle on Sunday? Probably not. How many miles on a good day did they travel? Was it just the two of them?

The Expense: The tolls were paid in cash. The toll in Pennsylvania was 16 cents for a score of cattle for every 10 miles of passage and higher in Ohio. Toll houses were about 11 miles apart in Pennsylvania and 10 miles apart in Ohio. If anyone was on horseback it cost 4 cents for each 10 miles of passage. When they arrived at the Ohio River at Wheeling, there was no bridge. It was not built until after 1849. Did they have to ferry across or were they able to drive the herd across? How many head of cattle could be carried across the river at a time on the ferry? How much would it have cost? Did oxen pull the ferry back and forth? At Columbus, can you imagine cattle being driven on the National Road right past the Ohio statehouse?

An 1844 poster stated the cost of traveling by stagecoach from Cumberland, Maryland to Indianapolis, Indiana, a distance of about 450 miles, cost \$18.25. They traveled at 8 mph.

To get a sense of time, some stagecoach companies in 1844 promised to deliver passengers from Zanesville to Columbus in eight hours for \$2.00. From 1836 to 1838, the pony express traveled over the National Road and it took five hours to travel from Zanesville to Columbus. Farmers along the National Road sold grain and hay to travelers with livestock.

The railroad reached Wheeling in 1853. By 1863 the railroads had captured all the cross-country passengers and freight traffic to the Mississippi River. No longer did the shouts of drovers and clatter of six-horse teams echo from the National Road. Ohio had a tavern about every five miles along the road.

To learn more about the National Road read *The National Road, Main Street of America* by Norris F. Schneider or visit www.connerprairie.org/history online and www.route40.net/history/index.