

Cover Sheet

Overview

This is a chapter from the fourth edition of the e-book “**In Search of the Turkey Foot Road: Unraveling the mystery, charting new history, plotting the route**” (2014). To access other chapters, see the [online table of contents](#).

As described on pages 3 to 6 of [Addendum A](#), the fourth edition mistakenly claims that a dashed line route on the 1755 Fry and Jefferson map is an antecedent to the Turkey Foot Road. Shortly after publication, I realized that the dashed lines actually represent Christopher Gist’s second Ohio Company Tour. If that or another known mistake affects this or another chapter of the book, the relevant text will be highlighted in yellow, and the mistake will be briefly described in a comment that is accessible via a clickable comment icon.

In this and other chapters of the book, any supplemental information will be provided via clickable comment icons, inserted yellow sheets, or other readily identifiable means.

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11. Washington's correspondence mentions the new Turkey Foot Road

Doctor James Craig's October 2, 1784 letter to General Washington

Doctor James Craig's letter to General Washington ([Appendix 0026](#)) from Mount Vernon, dated October 2, 1784, mentions the Turkey Foot Road from Cumberland. It states:

I have thought it might be more satisfactory to leave you the different accounts I received respecting the communication between the waters of the Youghiogany and the North Branch of the Potomac, that you might, from a view of the whole, collect an opinion for yourself. It appears to me, that the land carriage from the Fork of Youghiogany to Cumberland, which, from a variety of accounts, will not be more than thirty miles, is to be preferred to sixty miles of difficult navigation up the Little Crossing, and twenty miles land carriage afterwards, which is the distance from the Little Crossing on the Turkey-foot road to Cumberland. If the communication is to be carried on by the Little Crossing, the Turkey-foot road is to be preferred to Braddock's old road, as it is infinitely Better, and above two miles shorter. Indeed I found the whole Turkey-foot road across the mountains much better and nearer than Braddock's road; that if there were good entertainment, no one could hesitate in the choice.

This passage is interesting because:

- It refers to the Casselman River itself as “*Little Crossing*”, and also refers to a Casselman River fording site on the Turkey Foot Road as “*Little Crossing*”.
- It contemplates the possibility of using the Casselman River for navigation from Braddock's road, which may be in relation to developing parts of the river into a canal³⁰⁰.
- The phrase “*difficult navigation up the Little Crossing*” is in reference to trying to take a watercraft upstream on the circuitous Casselman River.
- It mentions Braddock's road and the Turkey Foot Road in the same sentence, so it is clear that Craig is not calling Braddock's road the Turkey Foot Road.
- It identifies the fact that the distance from Cumberland to the Casselman River was shorter using the Turkey Foot Road, compared to Braddock's road.
- It indicates that the Turkey Foot Road was “*infinitely Better*” than Braddock's road.
- It mentions “*the Fork of Youghiogany*”.

In contrast to Craig's October 2, 1784 letter, Washington's September 11, 1784 journal entry describes how bad some of Braddock's road was:

³⁰⁰ The contemplated use of the Casselman River as a canal may be why the stone arch on the Little Crossings Bridge near Grantsville is built so unusually high. According to Steve Colby's “**The Cumberland Road Project**” website, a 1963 sesquicentennial document of the Little Crossings Historical Committee quotes an article by Captain Charles E. Hoyer from the September 30, 1947 issue of “**The Glades Star**” which indicates that the arch was intended to accommodate a canal.

Set out half after 5 o'clock from Tomlinson's, and in about one and a half miles came to what is called the Little Crossing of Youghiogheny. Breakfasted at one Mount's,³⁰¹ on the Mountain 11 miles from Tomlinson's. The road being exceedingly bad, especially through what is called the Shades of Death.³⁰² Baited³⁰³ at the Great Crossing of the Yohogheny, on Braddock's Road, which is a large water distance from Mount's 9 miles, and a better road than between that and Tomlinson's.

On September 22, 1784 Washington wrote about Craig's trip

The earliest use of the term 'Turkey Foot Road'

One reason why Doctor Craig took the Turkey Foot Road is revealed in Washington's journal, which is included in Hulbert's 1905 book "**Washington and the West, Being George Washington's Diary of September, 1784, Kept during his journey into the Ohio Basin in the interest of a commercial union between the Great Lakes and the Potomac River**". On September 22, Washington wrote:

... From this information I resolved to return home that way; & my Baggage under the care of Doct. Craik and Son, having, from Simpsons, taken the Rout by the New (or Turkey foot) Road as it is called (which is said to be 20 Miles near[er] than Braddocks) with a view to make a more minute enquiry into the Navigation of the Yohiogany Waters...

This quote is interpreted as referring to starting Doctor Craig back on the northern part of the road that was cut a few years before by Charles Clinton and Providence Mounts, since it refers to "...the New (or Turkey foot) Road...". This is the earliest usage of the name "Turkey Foot Road" encountered during this study. The specific reason that Washington sent Doctor Craig back that way was "to make a more minute enquiry into the Navigation of the Yohiogany Waters...".

³⁰¹ Andrew Ellicott's November 24, 1784 journal entry describes his experience with the road west of Mount's, and with Mount's tavern, as follows: "*Before Day this Morning we eat Brakefast and began our Journey about Sun-Rise-the Weather extreme cold and the Roads bad to a degree before unknown the ground covered with Snow which hid the Mud-Holes and rendered Traveling not only tedious but dangerous...About 5 OClock P.M. we took up our Quarters at one Mr. Mountains. ... Mr. Mountain has a Sufficiency of Liquors and provisions but falls short in the Article of Bedding-he has but three one Occupied by himself and Wife one by the small Children and the Other by the Bar-Maid-for this last I endeavoured to stipulate for my fellow Traveller and colleague the Rev^d Doc^r Andrews on account of his late ill state of health but she Absolutely refused having any thing to do in a Bargain... I then requested a part for myself the other she might occupy herself in if she pleased to this she objected I then offered her my Blankets and Sheets to this She agreed with pleasure I then told the Doc^r the Bed was his and gave him my title but the Hussey immediately Reniged and reclaimed the Bed-We then concluded to spread our Blankets and Sheets before the Fire-this we performed and lodged amidst an Heteroclite of all the Characters of the Mountains...*" Dr. Wellford's October 26, 1794 journal entry refers to the tavern as "Mountain's Hovel". The Turkey Foot Road portion of his journal is covered in Chapter 13.

³⁰² During the westward portion of his journey, Doctor Wellford's October 24, 1794 journal entry also mentions the bad condition of Braddock's road, but refers to a different area as the "Shades of Death", stating: "*From Strickers the Army proceeded this day to Tomlinson's, at the little Meadows, 11 miles. the course of this day's march led the Army over a thousand times ten thousand rocks, thro' a dark, dreary part of the Mountains called the "Shades of Death," & by an almost continued ascent to that rugged and elevated part of the Alleghany Mountains known by the epithet of the "back bone of America."*" The October 23rd journal entry describes Strickers as being 11 miles from Cumberland.

³⁰³ According to Sheridan's 1780 "A General Dictionary of the English Language", one definition of "bait" is "To stop at any place for refreshment..."

Gilbert Simpson lived where Perryopolis is located

On pages 109 and 110 of his book about Washington, Hulbert indicates that Simpson lived at the present-day site of Perryopolis³⁰⁴, writing:

Therefore it now seemed to Washington necessary to make a westward journey immediately. A very valuable tract of land owned by him in Pennsylvania had been appropriated by about a dozen families upon whom the threats of his agent, Gilbert Simpson, had had no effect. Simpson, who lived on the Youghiogheny River at the present Perryopolis, Pennsylvania, on a tract of Washington's land, had been in his service since the outbreak of the Revolution. Since that time Washington had probably never had an opportunity to settle affairs with him. It is clear that Washington desired to hold on to his lands on the Ohio River, and make arrangements to sell that which lay further away, on the Great Kanawha. "My property in that country," he wrote one of his correspondents after his return from the journey, "having previously undergone every kind of diminution, which the nature of it will admit, to see the condition of my lands, which were nearest and settled, and to dispose of those, which were, more remote and unsettled, was all I had in view." He accordingly made an appointment to be at Simpson's house on the fifteenth of the following September, when a public sale of his co-partner interest with Simpson should be held³⁰⁵. Simpson had built Washington's mill here and managed the twelve hundred-acre estate.

Washington returned via Braddock's road

Washington's journal entries of September 11 and 12 reveal that he took Braddock's road west to the Great Meadows. His entry for September 18, which is somewhat confusing, states:

I gave up the intention of returning home that way³⁰⁶—resolving...to return by the way I came; or by what is commonly called the Turkey foot Road.

This passage can be interpreted two different ways. It seems to say that Washington's trip west was by a road that was "*commonly called the Turkey foot Road*", but a closer examination of his diary makes clear that he actually used Braddock's road. Another interpretation is that he was thinking of returning by one of two different routes; Braddock's road (i.e., "*the way I came*") **or** the Turkey Foot Road. This is the correct interpretation. Washington did not use the Turkey Foot Road on his way home, and the map that he made after the expedition ([Figure 0121](#)) does not show it.

One of the purposes of Washington's trip was to evaluate trading routes

One of the purposes of Washington's September 1784 trip was to find trade routes that would tether the western lands to the thin band of civilization on the east coast. In his 1905 book, Hulbert eloquently states this aspect of Washington's visionary thinking:

"There are no Alleghanies in my politics," said Daniel Webster in the Senate in 1836; that was Washington's political theory in 1784. "Intercourse between the mighty interior West and the sea-coast," said Edward Everett in Faneuil Hall in 1835, "is the great principle of our commercial prosperity"; that was Washington's commercial theory in 1784. Far-seeing as were Everett and Webster and Clinton and the Morrisises, Washington excelled them all in that he antedated them in realizing the destinies of America ran east and west.

³⁰⁴ Perryopolis is located on the Youghiogheny River. It is about 11 miles south of West Newton, and 12.4 miles northwest of Connellsville. On modern roads, Perryopolis is 14.2 miles from where the Turkey Foot Road crossed Jacobs Creek.

³⁰⁵ The sale was advertized in the July 15, 1784 issues of the "*Virginia Journal*" and the "*Alexandria Advertiser*".

³⁰⁶ The referenced "*that way*" was an exploratory route.

Washington's earnestness is well exemplified by the timeliness of his activity; even before the close of the Revolution he began this active campaign for commercial expansion. Leaving his camp at Newburgh, New York, he made a three weeks' tour up the Mohawk River into central New York, in order to view that great artery of communication to the West and the Lakes. Returning, he wrote from Princeton, October 12, 1783, to Chevalier de Chastellux concerning his impressions, as follows: "I could not help taking a more extensive view of the vast inland navigation of these United States and could not but be struck by the immense extent and importance of it, and of the goodness of that Providence which has dealt its favors to us with so profuse a hand. Would to God we may have wisdom enough to improve them. I shall not rest contented till I have explored the Western country, and traversed those lines, or great part of them, which have given bounds to a new empire."

In view of this trip objective, Doctor Craig's October 2, 1784 letter to Washington compares the Turkey Foot Road to Braddock's road. According to Barrow's 1888 book "**The United States of Yesterday and of To-morrow**", Washington wrote the following to Governor Harrison of Virginia after his 1784 journey:

I need not remark to you that the flank and rear of the United States are possessed by other powers, and formidable ones too. ... If the Spaniards on their right and Great Britain on their left, instead of throwing stumbling-blocks in their way, as they now do, should hold out lures for their trade and alliance! When they gain strength, which will be sooner than most people conceive... The Western States hang upon a pivot; the touch of a feather would turn them any way.

September and October were good months to travel

October was a good time for George Washington and Doctor Craig to be traveling in the wilds. Walking or riding through low-lying wooded areas in summertime Pennsylvania can be a nightmarish business due to the itchy bite of the mosquito and the painful bite of the deer fly. When Mr. Dietle was growing up in rural Pennsylvania, he had to cross a long wooded valley to visit friends. The summertime trip usually called for the fastest bicycle ride possible, in an attempt to stay just ahead of the deer flies. Spring and fall were not a problem in this regard.

Wallace references this same seasonal traveling advantage on page eight of his 1965 book. He mentions the peril of wintertime travel, due to ice, snow, and cold. He also mentions the peril of traveling during spring thaw, when the fords were not only cold, but could be treacherous due to flooding,³⁰⁷ and floating ice.

George Washington's 1785 letter to Richard Henry Lee

According to the 1825 book "**Memoir of the Life of Richard Henry Lee...**" ([Appendix 0027](#)), on February 8, 1785, George Washington wrote to Richard Henry Lee about "...an application to the state of Pennsylvania, for permission to open another road from fort Cumberland to the Youghioany (sic), at the three forks, or Turkey foot." It is not clear what route was being contemplated. In any case, Washington's and Craig's 1784 letters already mention the Turkey Foot Road, and by 1785

³⁰⁷ Circa 1975, Mr. Dietle came very close to losing his life in a stream that was swollen due to snowmelt near Greenville, Pennsylvania. As a result, he can testify that snowmelt flooding is not a thing to be trifled with. The peril was due to high water velocity and vegetation obstructions which together very nearly swamped his small boat. After much difficulty landing the boat due to high floodwater velocity in a narrow steep-walled channel, Mr. Dietle then experienced hypothermia due to cold paddle-splashed water-laden clothing. He and his boating companion were still shivering uncontrollably after **a two-mile run** that was undertaken in an attempt to get warm.

various Pennsylvania land surveys already clearly show the route of the Turkey Foot Road that is the subject of this book. For example, the Turkey Foot Road is shown on the March 2, 1785 survey of Christian Hochstetler ([Figure 0306](#)) and the April 1, 1785 survey of William Tissue ([Figure 0304](#)).

Washington's letter to Lee pertained to Patowmack Company hopes

Washington's February 8, 1785 letter to Lee can be dismissed as irrelevant to the subject of this book. It relates to his involvement in the Patowmack Company, and the possibility of improving the Potomac River for navigation. See Corra Bacon-Foster's 1912 book "**Early chapters in the development of the Patomac route to the West**" for more information. Part 2 of the 1915 "**Report of the Chief of Engineers U.S. Army**" summarizes the work of the Patowmack Company as follows:

In 1785 The "Patowmack Company" was organized under the direction of George Washington, by authority of the States of Virginia and Maryland, for the purpose of making the Potomac navigable from Georgetown to Cumberland, Md., from which point it was expected that a good road would lead to the Ohio River. To this end it did some open-channel work and built five short lengths of canal to surmount the chief obstacles which were found at Little Falls, Great Falls, Seneca Falls, Shenandoah Falls, and House Falls, the latter being about 5 miles above Harpers Ferry. Navigation was opened in 1802, but the facilities afforded were not satisfactory. After an existence of about 35 years and an expenditure of \$700,000, the "Patowmack Company" became bankrupt.

According to an article by Rush C. Faris in Volume 13 of "**The Chautauquan**", in 1891, the road westward from Cumberland that Washington envisioned in the 1780s was finally realized when the National Road was built during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

George Washington's 1786 letter to Tobias Lear

According to the 1905 book "**Letters From George Washington to Tobias Lear...**" ([Appendix 0028](#)), in a November 30, 1786 letter, George Washington asked Mr. Lear to "*pursue the New road by the Turkey foot*" from Cumberland when traveling to the home of "*...John Stephenson (commonly called Stinson) which is on the road to Pittsburgh*". As with the 1784 letter above, this quote is interpreted as referencing Morgan's 1779 road.

Stephenson lived on Jacob's Creek

According to the 1912 book "**Frontier defense on the upper Ohio, 1777-1778**", John Stephenson lived in Fayette County on Jacob's Creek circa 1768 to 1790. The book states:

Maj. John Stephenson was a half-brother of Col. William Crawford, and was born in Virginia about 1737. He was out in the French and Indian War, and about 1768 removed to the West, settling on Jacob's Creek, in Fayette County. There in 1770 he was visited by Washington, who was then returning from viewing Western lands. In 1774 Stephenson commanded a company under Dunmore, and was active on the Virginia side during the troubles between that state and Pennsylvania. In 1775 Stephenson enlisted a company for the colonial cause, and joined Col. Peter Muhlenberg as captain in the 8th Virginia; this regiment saw service at Charleston and Savannah. In the summer of 1777 Stephenson contracted disease, and returned home that autumn. He did not again enter the Continental army, but served as a volunteer on Hand's campaign (1778), and that of McIntosh (1778-79). About 1790 he removed to Kentucky, where he lived and

died on the South fork of the Licking, leaving no children. He was a large, active man, brave, kind, and popular.

Stephenson's property is shown along Jacob's Creek on the W.P.A. map of early surveys of Upper Tyrone Township, Fayette County, Pennsylvania ([Figure 0016](#)). Stephenson's property would have been along the road that runs along the south side of Jacob's Creek, generally under the "s" in "*Jacobs Creek*" on the 1792 Reading Howell map ([Figure 0001](#)). Stephenson's property is along present-day Route 819, and is an estimated three miles west of the Turkey Foot Road.

Stephenson's survey (Book C-207, Page 25) does not reference a road, but says he settled there in 1769. The adjacent Ann Stephenson survey (Book C-201, Page 80) also does not reference a road.

Other post-war documents may refer to the Turkey Foot Road

Reverend Morse mentions two roads from Wills Creek to the Youghiogheny

The 1789 book "**Political opinions, particularly respecting the seat of federal empire...**" includes a quote by American geographer Reverend Morse that appears to describe both Braddock's road and the Turkey Foot Road:

From Fort Cumberland, or Will's-Creek, one or two wagon roads may be had (where the distance is said by some to be thirty-five miles; and by others, to be forty, to the Yohogany, a large and navigable branch of the Monongahela...

Jefferson may have mentioned the Turkey Foot Road in 1782

in 1782, not long after Morgan's 1779 road was opened, Thomas Jefferson wrote about the Youghiogheny River:³⁰⁸

In its passage through the mountain it makes very great falls, admitting no navigation for ten miles to the Turkey foot. ... From the falls, where it intersects the Laurel mountain, to Fort Cumberland, the head of the navigation on the Patowmac, is 40 miles of very mountainous road.

The "*very great falls*" Jefferson mentioned are the Ohiopyle Falls on the Youghiogheny River, northwest of Turkeyfoot. (For current and circa 1900 photos of the falls, see [Figures 0886](#) and [0350](#).) Although it is over 50 miles from Ohiopyle to Cumberland, regardless of the route, Ohiopyle is only six miles west-southwest of the Turkey Foot Road. Based on this, Jefferson's "*40 miles of very mountainous road*" may describe using the then new Turkey Foot Road.

³⁰⁸ The passage is found in Paul Leicester Ford's 1904 book "**The Works of Thomas Jefferson**" ([Appendix 0025](#)).