

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.

L. Dietle

August 23, 2026

26. The early 1900s road from Cumberland to Mount Savage

The Legislative Road

In the early 1900s, the road from Cumberland to Mount Savage was called the Legislative Road⁵⁷⁷, and had recently been improved via state aid. A portion of old Route 36 through Barton, Maryland is still called the Legislative Road. Barton is about 12 miles south-southwest of Frostburg.

It stands to reason that much of the road between Barrelville and Mount Savage may have some fidelity to the basic route of the antecedent roads; i.e., the Wellersburg and West Newton Plank Road, the Somerset and Cumberland Turnpike, and the old Turkey Foot Road. It is difficult to compare the route in this area to some of the early maps, because of the relatively schematic nature of such maps. Nevertheless, the Reading Howell map ([Figure 0001](#)) and the 1797 Sotzmann map ([Figure 0013](#)) show the road to run along the north side of Jennings Run for a significant distance, just like the road is known to have done before the present alignment was built. Because of the meandering nature of the stream and the steep bank, the 1792 and early twentieth century routes must have been similar in at least the more geographically constrained locations.

The July 20, 1905 issue of the “**Engineering News**” includes an advertisement that states: “*CUMBERLAND, MD—Bids will be received by County Road Directors until July 25, for grading and macadamizing highway between Corriganville and Barrelville, about one mile. D. F. McMullen, Chn.*”

Volume six of the 1906 “**Maryland Geological Survey**” describes the “*State Aid road Law, commonly known as the Shoemaker Law, which was approved on April 2, 1904*”; i.e., Chapter 225, Acts of 1904. Pages 303, 327 and 328 of the book describe 1905 improvements that were made to the road as a result of the legislation ([Appendix 0077](#)). Page 328 describes the work, as follows:

Notwithstanding the expense of widening the old road and of raising the same, to bring it above high water of an adjacent stream, owing to the proximity of good limestone⁵⁷⁸, it was possible to keep the cost of this road below the average. The condition of the surface of this road, before the improvement was begun, was worse than that of almost any other whose improvement was attempted under State aid this year.

The quote indicates that at least some portions of the previous road were located very close to stream level. The name “*Legislative Road*” is evidently not derived from the “*Shoemaker Law*”, because the August 8, 1904 Allegany County Road Director’s Minutes ([Figure 0428](#)) already calls it that, stating:

Ordered that the State Road Commissioners be notified that the Road Directors of Allegany County wish to take advantage of the State Road law according to which Allegany County is

⁵⁷⁷ Cumberland Road historian Steve Colby refers to it as the State Aid Road.

⁵⁷⁸ This could be a reference to a quarry that was located in the immediate vicinity.

entitled to \$8967.39 And wish to build four miles of road; one mile on Legislative Road, extending from bridge west of Corriganville; one mile of Bedford Road beyond good road already built; one mile on Legislative road west of Frostburg, and one mile on National Pike between four and six mile posts.

[Figure 0102](#) is a 1906 Legislative Road photo taken about a mile east of Barrelville. It is from the 1909 “**Maryland Geological Survey**”, and shows that the “*improved*” road was still just a narrow **single lane** dirt road in 1906. This would have been a challenging location to build an early wagon road, but it was apparently made necessary by the flood-prone valley floor.

Part of the hillside was removed to make space for the roadbed, and to clear overhanging rocks. Some of the sheer rock surfaces in the photo appear to have been cut, but “*when*” is unknown. Early maps, such as the 1792 Reading Howell map ([Figure 0001](#)), show much of the Turkey Foot Road on the north side of Jennings Run. Unless it was magically levitated, the Turkey Foot Road was located between Jennings Run and the cliff-like mountainside right about where the road is shown in [Figure 0102](#). There is simply no other place for a road there, on the north side of Jennings Run. Figure 0102, therefore, shows an upgrade of the Turkey Foot Road, rather than a realignment. It may have been shifted away from the creek a few feet when the roadbed was raised, but right there between the cliff and the creek is where the Turkey Foot Road had to be.

Captain Charles Clinton was ordered to clear a packhorse route for hauling supplies westward in 1779; and in November of that year, Providence Mounts was converting it into a wagon road. One of these men evidently had enough manpower to establish a level path that would allow wagon passage without resorting to the streambed. We do not know the original contours of the outcropping that is shown near the center of [Figure 0102](#), so we do not know if they had to cut through it. They may have needed to clear only rubble at the base, or they may have had to cut through part of it. If rock excavation was indeed required, then they would have likely kept their road as near the stream bed as possible, to minimize the excavation effort.

If it was not Clinton nor Mounts who cut the rock face to the shape that is shown in [Figure 0102](#), then it may have been done for early local business interests, or by the 1832 Somerset and Cumberland Turnpike Company. In any case, the post-Revolutionary route had to have gone through the area shown in Figure 0102, since there was no other possible place north of Jennings Run.

In many places where the road was constructed next to the base of the mountain, the construction may have involved removing only the fallen rocks and debris that surely would have built up over the millennia. Stone continues to fall down onto the old roadbed today. If this debris were moved to the side, along with the dirt and shale that would have built up, then leveling a roadbed may have been a fairly easy task, if enough labor was available.

A fragment of the stone wall that is shown in [Figure 0102](#) is still standing at Latitude 39.698933°, Longitude -78.82535°, as shown by the 2009 photos of Figures [0103](#) and [0104](#). It is located near the western end of what is presently called the Portertown Road. Note that in Figure 0103, a house is located where the rock face was previously located in [Figure 0102](#). Jim Thoerig⁵⁷⁹ says that a store was in the bottom level of the house, at roadside. That store was on the route when he and his dad delivered milk for Glen Savage Dairy. In regard to the old road alignment in general, Jim Thoerig indicates that it used to flood when there was a hard rain. He said something like “*and when it*

⁵⁷⁹ Nancy Thoerig's brother.

rained, you didn't take that road." The "**Automobile Blue Book 1918**" Volume three ([Appendix 0071](#)), quoted later herein, says much the same thing.

The Portertown Road is a short surviving section of the Legislative Road that lies north of today's Route 36, along the northern side of the former path of Jennings Run. Jennings Run was moved some time between May 27, 1958 and September 4, 1967⁵⁸⁰, when the current path of Route 36 was established. The local path of the Legislative Road, and the old meandering path of Jennings Run, can still be identified on present-day satellite photos.

See [Appendix 0019](#) for an illustrated article from the 1906 "**Good Roads**" magazine⁵⁸¹ about the Legislative Road between Barrelville and Cumberland. [Figure 0106](#) is a 2009 photo taken from about the same vantage point as the third photo in the article.

[Figure 0107](#) is a USDA aerial photo that shows the 1939 path of the road and Jennings Run, east of Barrelville. It was annotated by Mr. McKenzie. The photo clearly shows how the road path was shoehorned between the mountain and the meandering Jennings Run, before Jennings Run was moved to its present-day man-made channel. [Figure 0173](#) is a 1939 aerial photo that shows the old alignment of the road in Corriganville; it survives as the present-day Kreighbaum Road.

[Figure 0029](#) is a markup of a 1908 topographical map that shows the old route in red and the present-day route in yellow⁵⁸². [Figure 0174](#) is another markup of the 1908 map that identifies two portions of the road that survive as the present-day Kreighbaum Road NW (Maryland 831C) and the Old Mount Savage Road NW (Maryland 831A).

[Figure 0452](#) provides a view of rock formations along Jennings Run from the 1913 "**Maryland Geological Survey**". The photo site was about one mile east of Barrelville, which puts it close to where [Figure 0102](#) was taken. The book describes the geological nature of the rock formation, and states that the rock was cut for the then-existing highway:

Exposure on Jennings Run.—The cuttings for the highway from the top of the Chemung up Jennings Run afford an excellent series of exposures of the Catskill formation. This is one of the best exposures of the formation in Maryland and nearly all its layers are shown in a continuous section. The dip varies from 62° at the base of the formation to about 30° at its top which is near the farm house at the upper end of the narrow part of the gorge.

The lower rocks of the Catskill formation, immediately succeeding the zone with Chemung fossils at the top of the Jennings formation, are brownish-red to red sandstones alternating with thick bands of red argillaceous shale. The lower half of the formation consists of nearly all red sandstones and shales, sandstones predominating, and there are but few bands of rather thin greenish shales. In the upper half of the formation coarse greenish-gray sandstones appear in the lower part in rather thin bands alternating with the reddish rocks; but in the upper portion there are thick zones of both greenish-gray sandstones and shales. Some of the reddish sandstones also are more of a brownish-red color near the top of the formation. All of the sandstones, as a rule,

⁵⁸⁰ Based on comparing USDA aerial photos from May 27, 1958 and September 4, 1967.

⁵⁸¹ The magazine was a publication of the "*League of American Wheelmen*". That organization, which was founded in 1880 and is now known as the "*League of American Bicyclists*", was the leader of the nineteenth century good roads movement. Lewis F. Korn, a descendant of the local Korn family, extols the virtues of improved roads in a chapter of his 1892 book "**The Bicycle, its Selection, Riding and Care**". He donated a copy of his book to the league.

⁵⁸² On the present-day route, when one drives past Motor City to Corriganville, and then on to about a mile west of Corriganville, one is actually driving on the location of the old rail bed of the Cumberland and Pennsylvania Railroad.

are very micaceous and there is considerable cross-bedding. In general, it is to be noted that in this section the reds, below the fossiliferous zone at the top of the Jennings formation have a rather brownish tinge; then the lower part of the Catskill is composed of quite red sandstones and shales, while in the upper half of the formation there are zones of greenish-gray sandstone and shales of considerable thickness with brownish red sandstones near the top.

Even though this passage clearly indicates that the road was cut through the rock, it does not answer the question of “*when*”. We believe that whenever possible, an early road builder would have routed the road to avoid rock cutting. At this late date, we do not know if the first road builders were able to avoid rock cutting everywhere along Jennings Run.

How rock cuts were made before the advent of dynamite

The rock in the area of [Figure 0102](#) is quite hard, according to Jim Thorig⁵⁸³. Because we speculate that Figure 0102 shows a rock cut that may have been made by an early road builder, we have to answer the question of how it could have been done in the days before dynamite and other high explosives. After all, manual rock cutting is labor-intensive, even if the ancients did cut tombs out of solid rock, and even though the emperor Trajan had part of Quirinal Hill removed in Rome.

Volume II of William Gilpin’s book “**Observations, relative chiefly to picturesque beauty, made in the year 1776, on several parts of Great Britain...**” touches on both manual rock excavation and the then relatively new art of blasting rocks. In regard to the terraces at the Queensberry House, Gilpin states:

The descent from the house has a substratum of solid rock, which has been cut into three or four terraces; at an immense expence. The art of blasting rocks by gunpowder was not in use, when this great work was undertaken. It was all performed by manual labour; and men now alive remember hearing their fathers say, that a workman, after employing a whole summer-day with his pick-ax, could carry off in his apron all the stone he had chipped from the rock.

As he presents the then new art of explosive rock removal, Gilpin implies that it was common in 1776, but not used at all in the early eighteenth century. Ferber’s 1776 book “**Travels Through Italy, In the Years 1771 and 1772...**” also describes the use of gunpowder for rock excavation before the American Revolutionary War. Page 202 documents part of a 1772 letter that states:

The alum-hills, N^o 7. are very high shining white rocks, separated by a long valley and large excavations, which are made in the following manner: The workmen descend by ropes to the steep rocks; thus suspended, they bore blasting-holes, fill them with cartridges, free the rocks, which by former blastings are loosened, and then are pulled up again. The firing of the powder is done by dry branches and leaves, which experience has taught them to throw from on high any place below.

The alum-rock is white-grey or chalk-white; extremely compact and remarkably hard.

Clearly, suitable rock blasting techniques were already available by 1779, when the supply route to Fort Pitt was cut. But was rock blasting actually used in North America for road building by 1779? The 1758 report of Captain Shelby, written from Fort Frederick, Maryland during the French and Indian War, provides the answer:

⁵⁸³ Mr. Thorig says, in his experience, concrete made from the red sandstone found along Jennings Run is extremely difficult to drill through.

The Distance from Tonalloway Creek to Fort Frederick is 9 miles, near Licking Creek (which is about 3 miles from Fort Frederick) are some Rocky Points that ought to be blown (perhaps 7 or 8 Blasts will be enough to make the Road sufficiently wide for two Waggons to pass abreast... ”

1897 photos between Corriganville and Barrelville

Figures 0168, 0169, and 0170 are from the 1897 book “**Artwork of Allegany County Maryland**”. Although these photos were taken before the 1904 Shoemaker State Aid Road Law, we include them in this chapter because they are from a similar time period.

We believe that all three photos were taken looking west. [Figure 0168](#) shows the road about a mile west of Corriganville, and obviously east of the location where the Cumberland and Pennsylvania Railroad crossed over to the south side of Jennings Run. [Figure 0169](#) shows a hillside road curving to the left, between Corriganville and Barrelville (Figures [0455](#) and [0456](#) are 2010 photos of the same place). [Figure 0171](#) is a 1939 aerial photo that shows the location where the Figure 0169 photo was taken. [Figure 0170](#) shows the general character of Jennings Run before it was rerouted into an engineered channel.

The road was called by various names

The 1913 Maryland Geological Survey book “**Devonian: Plates**” refers to the road between Corriganville and Barrelville by two different names. In a description of a dorsal valve fossil found one mile east of Barrelville, the book refers to the route as “*Jennings Run road*”. In a description of another valve fossil found one-half-mile west of Corriganville, the book refers to the route as the “*Barrelville Road*”.

A surviving alignment known as the Old Mount Savage Road

Just north of the Narrows, a short section of the previous alignment of Route 36 survives under the name “*Old Mount Savage Road*”. [Figure 0183](#) is a 2010 photo that shows the “*Old Mount Savage Road*” sign at the intersection with Dakota Street. This intersection is roughly three-tenths-mile from the southern end of the surviving section. [Figure 0184](#) is a 2010 photo taken from the northern end of the surviving section.

Macadamizing the road between Corriganville and Mount Savage

The January 2, 1907 issue of the “**Daily Bulletin of the Manufacturers’ Record**” has the following classified ad:

Road Construction—Separate sealed proposals addressed to Road Directors of Alleghany County, Cumberland, Md., indorsed “Proposals for Improving Public Highway Between Corriganville and Mt. Savage, Md., Known as the Barrellville Road (sections 3, 6 and 7),” will be received until May 22. All proposals must be made on regular forms furnished by State Geological Survey Commission, to be obtained through Baltimore (Md.) office. Work to be done includes grading and macadamizing of about one and three-quarter miles of road to be built under State supervision, according to plans and specifications on file at office of Road Directors, Cumberland, MD. Steam roller and stone-crusher will be furnished contractor by county. Proposals must be accompanied by certified check of \$200, payable to Road Directors of Allegany County; usual rights reserved; Clinton Uhl, chairman of board.

Ads on the same topic are included in the May 9, 1907 issue of the “**Daily bulletin of the Manufacturers record**” and the May 15, 1907 edition of “**Engineering-Contracting**”.

Description of the scenic automobile touring route

The April 20, 1916 issue of “**Motor Age**” describes a scenic alternative to the National Pike in the area west of Cumberland:

But within the last 2 years, an entirely new and even more scenic option has been completed up the left-hand side of Wills Creek as far as Corriganville. There it leaves the creek by turning west along the valley of Jennings run, through Barrelville and Mount Savage, entering Frostburg from the northeast. While the pike follows along the approximate levels immediate west of the narrows, this new scenic route skirts the foothills to the north, affording many exquisite views. Tourists having once made the conventional trip over the pike will find what has now come to be popularly called the Mount Savage route very interesting indeed, only 3 miles longer, and an equally good road, though there are frequent sharp curves and numerous grades, especially in the vicinity of Frostburg. It is the best example on this trip of the results from the fairly recent state aid program in Maryland, and also practically the last option along the National Road from Cumberland to Wheeling, though there are many tempting side trips.

Volume three of the book “**Automobile Blue Book 1918**” ([Appendix 0071](#)) references the route from Cumberland to Frostburg via Mount Savage as follows:

Scenic option to the National Pike; about 3 miles farther, but equally good road and more picturesque. Has frequent sharp curves and considerable grades. Should not be used in wet weather.

The book describes the route in detail, giving total mileage and trip leg mileage in separate columns. The route is described as follows:

0.0	0.0	Cumberland, Center & Baltimore Sts. Start northwest on Center St. with trolley, passing under RR. viaduct
0.9	0.9	End of street, bear right with trolley onto National Pike. Cross 2 RRs. and bear left 1.3 across bridge over Wills Creek, going thru the Cumberland “Narrows.” Continue under 2 RRs.
2.3	1.4	Turn right onto State road, crossing small bridge over Braddock Run and passing under concrete RR. viaduct 2.5, following along Wills Creek on right. Cross RR at Kreighbaum Sta. 4.3 and Iron bridge over Jennings Run.
4.5	2.2	Corriganville. Straight thru across RR., avoiding right-hand road beyond— fine view of “Devil’s Backbone” over to right. Go under RR. 7.6 and cross 2 Iron bridges.
9.5	5.0	Mount Savage. Straight thru across Iron bridge. Cross two sidings and dangerous RR. tracks, 9.8, ascending steep grade with sharp curves. Follow macadam across several small bridges and RR. 12.5. Go under concrete RR. viaduct 18.4 and ascend steep grade—fine views of Frostburg and vicinity.
13.8	4.3	Fork; turn left onto macadam across RR., curving sharp right with macadam up steep grade.
14.0	0.2	End of road; turn right onto Union St., following trolley up steep grade.
14.2	0.2	FROSTBURG, Union & Water Sts.

[Figure 0399](#) shows one of the above-referenced “Iron” bridges. [Figure 0114](#) is an undated photo that appears to be from the early 1900s. It shows the Barrelville area trestle that was located on the branch railroad line to Wellersburg, Pennsylvania. This trestle crossed the road that ran from Mount Savage to Corriganville; i.e., the antecedent to the road that is now known as Route 36. (The present-day Route 36 does not follow the exact same roadbed as the old dirt road). [Figure 0115](#) is a 2009 photo of the same location. The January 1, 1938 Cumberland and Pennsylvania Railroad map ([Figure 0128](#)) shows that by 1938, the road was already known as State Route 36.

[Figure 0116](#) is a photo taken near the intersection of present-day Routes 36 and 47, looking north from the intersection. The large rock behind the sign is known locally as “Death Rock”. The old road that predated the present-day (2010) Route 36 passed alongside the rock. Mr. McKenzie’s mother, who grew up in Barrelville, reports that many people died from automobile collisions with Death Rock. [Figure 0049](#) is a 1939 aerial photo that identifies the location of Death Rock (Latitude 39.701237°, Longitude -78.842621°), and the route of the old road. Death Rock slid to its current location when a railroad cut was blasted out behind it, in connection with a three-quarter-mile-long mining-related railway siding and 300-foot trestle.

The Bell’s Rock story corroborates road flooding

An event that occurred along the route between Barrelville and Corriganville was written down by Barrelville resident Francis Bridges in March 2010:

There is a large rock along Route 36 below Barrelville near the tipple for the old clay mine. At one time Jennings Run ran near the rock and old Route 36 before the road was changed (circa 1959). The rock is called Bell’s or Beall’s rock. The story about the rock’s name came from a man who lived in Barrelville many years ago.⁵⁸⁴ I heard that his first name was John or George. This could be verified by old census records. Mr. Bell [or] Beall was involved in a poker game somewhere in Barrelville one cold winter night. After the game he disappeared; nobody knew what happened to him. Months later, during the spring thaw the creek became high and washed his body down and across old Route 36. His body was found under the overhang at Bell’s Rock. The rock was named after him and is still there. If anybody would like to see the spot where he was found, I can show them. I am probably the only person that knows.

This story is instructive because it tells of Jennings Run overflowing its banks and washing over old Route 36. Bell’s Rock ([Figure 0903](#)) is located at Latitude 39.701918°, Longitude -78.836260°, about six to eight feet northwest of the old bed of Route 36. [Figure 0402](#) is a road improvement project plat that shows that road flooding was still a problem in 1937.

Bell’s Rock was already named in 1901. Volume 4366 of the 1901 book “**Congressional edition**” mentions:

Barrelsville, 0.36 miles east of; “Bell’s Rock” ledge, chiseled mark on, marked “9402”, with an elevation of 939.51 feet.

The Old Toll Gate General Store in Barrelville

One of the stops along the twentieth century road was Frank Caler’s “Old Toll Gate General Store” in Barrelville (Latitude 39.701325°, Longitude -78.843159°). [Figure 0108](#) is a 1957 photo of the

⁵⁸⁴ The story is about the man, not told by the man.

store, and [Figure 0928](#) shows what the building currently looks like. Old Route 36 used to pass directly in front of the store, as can be seen in the 1939 aerial photo of [Figure 0049](#). If one is traveling on present-day Route 36 from Corriganville to Mount Savage, the store is the first building on the left after one turns north on Route 47 in Barrelville. It is located no more than a few hundred feet from the present-day intersection.

Mr. Caler was blind, but it is well-known that he had some way of identifying money and giving change. He smoked cigars, and locals wondered why he never accidentally blew the place up with the dynamite⁵⁸⁵ that was stored under the counter. Mr. Caler's nephew Francis Bridges wrote the following about him in 2010:

Frank Caler married my Father's oldest sister Olive, which made him my Uncle. Frank grew up in Deal, PA. Later the Western Maryland Railroad would come by that area. Frank worked for the company that built the tunnel⁵⁸⁶ on the PA side of Big Savage Mountain as a clerk. He told me that he was good at math.

He told me that when he was a child, he traveled down the Plank Road for the first time in a horse drawn wagon on his way to Cumberland. I think he said he was with his Uncle or Father. He told me that this area was very different then. He said that huge hemlock trees were all along the road and there was much shade from their limbs.

He worked at some type of factory in Ohio for awhile, and at the company store in Barrelville. I don't know which place he worked first. Later he worked for the gas company in Cumberland, reading meters. This is when he lost his sight. I heard he was accidentally sprayed in the eyes from gas or some other chemical.

He lived in the house where Herb Bucy lives now. He later built the store he called the Old Toll Gate General Store. He sold many items including carbide, dynamite, black powder, caps fuses, etc. to coal miners. He also bought or built eight houses or bungalows, which he rented. He tore down the old company store and built a garage across from the church.

He called his store the Old Toll Gate General Store because there was a toll gate at the intersection of the Turkey Foot Road and the Plank Road, now the intersection of MD Routes 47 and old 36. I don't know when the toll gate was there, or how much they charged.

The old bridge over the North Branch of Jennings Run

[Figure 0048](#) is a 2009 photo that shows the remains of the bridge at the location where the most recent antecedent to Route 36 crossed the North Branch of Jennings Run. This is in the vicinity where Parker's is identified on the 1804 road survey ([Figure 0047](#)). The bridge was located just west of Frank Caler's store. The photo was taken from the present-day bridge. The remaining stub of the old road is identified as "Frostburg" on at least one present-day mapping service. [Figure 0419](#) is a pair of aerial photos that shows the Barrelville area before and after the route change.

⁵⁸⁵ When Mr. Dietle was a youngster in the 1960s, he helped a nearby Somerset County, Pennsylvania farmer remove trees from fields using explosive charges. It was amusing to help pack explosives, and then watch the debris blast hundreds of feet into the air.

⁵⁸⁶ The entrance to the Big Savage Tunnel bears a construction date of 1911.