

# 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

## 27. The 1833 route through the Narrows

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### A logical passage between two mountains

[Figure 0118](#) is a view of Cumberland from Volume 10 of the 1918 book “**Maryland Geological Survey**”. The V-shaped mountain pass in the background is the Narrows of Wills Creek. One glance at this photo should instantly inform anyone as to why the Narrows is the most logical route for a road heading northward from Cumberland toward Corriganville. [Figure 0119](#) is a circa 1904 to 1929<sup>587</sup> view of Cumberland from a different angle.

Figures 0075 to 0079 are from Robert Bruce’s 1916 book “**The National road; most historic thoroughfare in the United States...**”. After the 1833 re-routing of the National Road through the Narrows,<sup>588</sup> many people traveling the old Turkey Foot Road into Cumberland presumably would have followed the National Road once they came to the stone bridge. Figures 0075 to 0077 document that route into the town of Cumberland.

[Figure 0075](#) is one of Bruce’s maps that shows the road that came down from Barrelville to the National Road. The road through the Narrows is the 1833 route of the National Road. Before that time, the National Road went west from Cumberland over Haystack Mountain<sup>589</sup>, running along or near the old Braddock Road.

According to pages 136 to 138 of Lowdermilk’s 1878 book “**History of Cumberland**” ([Appendix 0057](#)), when the National Road was rerouted through the Narrows, it followed the route of Lieutenant Spendelow’s 1755 road for a short distance. A map from that book shows Spendelow’s road; see [Figure 0436](#). Spendelow built his road as part of Braddock’s campaign. It crossed over to the west side of Wills Creek above Braddock Run. Lowdermilk wrote:

*Major Chapman had marched with his command, by the route marked out by Colonel Cresap and the Indian guide, Nemaquin. This route crossed Will’s Mountain, as heretofore described, by way of Sandy Gap. Lieutenant Spendelow, of the Seamen, who accompanied Major Chapman on his first day’s march, to aid in clearing the road, returned to the camp, impressed with the importance of discovering a less difficult route, and taking one of his officers and a squad of men, spent several days in examining the country. He finally concluded that a much more desirable road could be constructed along the East bank of Will’s Creek, through the “Narrows,” whereby he would be enabled to strike the old road, a few miles beyond, the distance being increased less than two miles. His advice as to this matter was accepted, and a road was built at once, the labor not being severe, whereby the heavy grades were entirely avoided, to the great relief of the transportation department. The troops that left the Fort after Major Chapman’s departure took the new route, which was used altogether in the movements of the army afterwards. This route is*

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<sup>587</sup> The factory with the rail yard was the 1904 to 1929 Potomac Glass Company that was located at Wills Creek and Market Street. It was destroyed by fire.

<sup>588</sup> Richard Delafield’s “*Report on a change in the location of the National Road to turn the Wills mountain by the valley of Braddock’s run*” is published in Volume 1 of the United States Senate’s 1832 book “**Public Documents**”.

<sup>589</sup> Haystack Mountain is marked as being part of Wills Mountain on some maps, such as the 1898 USGS topographical map of the area. The 1950 topographical map refers to the mountain as Haystack Mountain.

shown on the map here given, as well as the original road, which was located by Mr. T. C. Atkinson, an engineer of great ability and the nicest accuracy, who was employed in the survey of the Baltimore and Ohio Railway, and who spent considerable time in the examination of Braddock's route, and the traces still left in 1850 in the forests. The map as prepared by Mr. Middleton showed only the route over the mountain west of Will's Creek. The author has added thereto a line showing the new road opened by Lieutenant Spendelow through the "Narrows," and joining the other, five miles north of Fort Cumberland. The map as now given may be confidently accepted as perfectly accurate, in every respect. The route through the "Narrows" was eventually adopted by United States engineers in locating the great National Road, which, however, was made to cross Will's Creek at the entrance to the "Narrows," and to skirt the mountain on the west side of the gorge instead of the east. Lieutenant Spendelow's road skirted the margin of Will's Creek, along the eastern base of the cliffs of the "Narrows" until this wonderful gorge was passed; it then crossed the creek just above the mouth of Braddock's Run, and followed the course of the Run, crossing it at times, and in some instances taking the bed of the stream. It joined the other road near the Everstine place, five miles west of the Fort.

According to Volume 1, page 160 of W. C. Ford's 1889 book "**The writings of George Washington**", Washington wrote a letter in 1755 to his brother that states:

*Upon my return from Williamsburgh, I found that Sr. John St. Clair, with Maj. Chapman and a detachment of 500 men, had marched to the Little Meadows, in order to prepare the roads, establish a small post, and to lay a deposit of provisions there. The 2d of June Mr. Spendelow discovered a communication from Fort Cumberland to the old road, leading to the crossing of the Youghiogany, avoiding the enormous mountain which had proved so destructive to our wagon-horses. This communication was opened along a branch of Will's Creek, and finished by the 7th, when Sr. Peter Halket, with the First Brigade of the Line, began its march, and encamped within a mile of the old road (which is about 5 miles from the Fort) the same day. This encampment was first called Grove Camp, but was afterwards altered to that of Spendelow's Camp.*

Robert Orme's journal states:

*The General reconnoitred this mountain, and determined to set the engineers and three hundred more men at work upon it, as he thought it impassable by Howitzers. He did not imagine any other road could be made, as a reconnoitring party had already been to explore the country; nevertheless, Mr. Spendelow, Lieutenant of the Seamen, a young man of great discernment and abilities, acquainted the General, that, in passing that mountain, he had discovered a Valley which led quite round the foot of it. A party of a hundred men, with an engineer, was ordered to cut a road there, and an extreme good one was made in two days, which fell into the other road about a mile on the other side of the mountain.*

Based on the unique terrain, surely an Indian path would have passed through the Narrows somewhere. The east side of Wills Creek would have been the easier route through the Narrows for a primitive wagon road, because the ground is flatter and there is less of a hillside to contend with. It is not difficult to speculate that even if there was a path on the west side of the Narrows, Spendelow may have followed an Indian path along the east side. Figures [0163](#) and [0164](#) are photos of the Narrows from the 1897 book "**Artwork of Allegany County Maryland**" that are included to show how difficult the terrain would have been for Spendelow. For a detailed evaluation of the difficulty

of the terrain through the Narrows, see Lacock's article "*Braddock Road*" in Volume 38 of "**The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography**" (1914).

Present-day satellite imagery reveals that north of the Narrows, there was a heavily used fording site across Wills Creek near Braddock Run and the brick viaduct site, at Latitude 39.670678°, Longitude -78.789836°. This site correlates well with the location described (above) by Lowdermilk. There was also clearly a fording site near the present-day Shaffer Ford dealership. This fording site was located at Latitude 39.675010°, Longitude -78.791019°. That route survives on the east side of Wills Creek as "*Bear Lane*" in the community that is known locally as Locust Grove.

[Figure 0155](#) is a manual copy of a map titled "*Sketch of the situation of Fort Cumberland*" from Volume V of Winsor's 1887 "**Narrative and Critical History of America**". It shows two "*roads towards Fort Duquesne*". The two roads would be Braddock's road and Spendelow's road. The original of the map is said to be endorsed by George Washington. [Figure 0424](#) is an image of the original map; note the firing ports on the blockhouse located on the Ridgeley side of the Potomac River. [Figure 0413](#) compares Winsor's copy to an 1898 topographical map to show where Spendelow crossed over to the east side of Wills Creek near the fort. Wills Creek seems to be drawn to scale on Winsor's map. If the presumed scale is accurate, Winsor's map indicates that Spendelow's road crossed Wills Creek near the present-day viaduct between the Market Street and Valley Street bridges. It also indicates that Braddock's road ran west in the vicinity of Fayette Street.

### More images from Bruce's book

[Figure 0076](#) is a circa 1916 map from Bruce's book that shows a detail of the Cumberland area. Notice the stone bridge and Lover's Leap overlook. [Figure 0077](#) is a photograph from Bruce's 1916 book that was taken looking north from Lover's Leap. In the book, the caption to the photo reads:

*Taken from an exposed point on the high escarpment of Castle Rock or "Lover's Leap," about 800 feet above the stream. In the gorge: the B. & O., C. & P. and Eckhart Branch railroads on the right; Wills Creek, a tributary of the nearby Potomac, in the center; next the National Pike, on which runs the Cumberland-Frostburg trolley; on the extreme left, the Western Maryland Railway and the Pennsylvania Railroad in Maryland. The view is through the west portal of the Narrows, just beyond which (right at the high, two-span bridge of the Western Maryland Railway), the Valley of Braddock Run curves to the left, and is followed by the Pike. Wills Creek turns abruptly to the right; and about two miles further on the valley of Jennings' Run opens to the left.*

Figures [0078](#) and [0079](#) are photos from Bruce's book that show more of the Narrows, and the historic stone bridge<sup>590</sup> that crossed Wills Creek. The stone bridge was located at the sharp bend in Wills Creek, about where Route 40 crosses Wills Creek today.

### The brick viaduct at the mouth of Braddock Run

The brick viaduct across Wills Creek at the mouth of Braddock Run, built in the 1860s, was part of the nineteenth century scenery along the Turkey Foot Road. According to the 1984 National Park Service Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) report MD-5:

*The Wills Creek Bridge is located in the Cumberland and Pennsylvania subdivision of the Western Maryland Railway Company. It is a brick arch viaduct of four spans, each 45 feet in length. The*

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<sup>590</sup> According to the December 1971 issue of the "**Heritage Press**", the stone bridge was demolished in 1952.

*abutments and piers, of which there are three, are built of stone ashlar laid in cement mortar. Except in 1915, when the brickwork of the structure was pointed, it is unchanged. A recent survey showed that the viaduct vibrates considerably when an engine passes over it, the bricks are soft, and the arches require training.*

Photos from the HAER report are included as Figures [0620](#), [0621](#), and [0622](#). Two of these photos provide excellent views of the Narrows. [Figure 0623](#) is a 2009 photo of the viaduct site, and [Figure 0624](#) is a photo of one of the bricks from the viaduct.

Page 254 of the 1949 book “**The Genealogy of Michael Korns, Sr. of Somerset County Pennsylvania**” states: “*Jesse Korns born 1809, died 1888, buried in a vault in Rose Hill Cemetery in Cumberland...the viaduct across the river was built with his bricks*”.<sup>591</sup>

The viaduct was eventually torn down for flood control purposes. It acted as a dam, catching fallen trees and other debris that blocked the water flow. This blockage caused flooding of the neighboring Locust Grove community.

## **The Turkey Foot Road south of the stone bridge**

Whatever the route of the Turkey Foot Road was south of the stone bridge, nineteenth century railroads ([Figure 0164](#)) obliterated it. The situation has now come full circle, and the abandoned railroad right of way below the former location of the stone bridge is now used as the “*Great Allegheny Passage*” hiking path.

The section of hiking path that is located southeast of the Route 40 bridge across Wills Creek, to perhaps as far as Valley Street, can be thought of as the present-day iteration of the Turkey Foot Road. South of Valley Street, the most likely candidate to be the modern version of the Turkey Foot Road is the section of Cumberland Street between the Market Street bridge and the Baltimore Street bridge. That section of Cumberland Street is illustrated on the 1806 town plat ([Figure 0426](#)) as Water Street, and is the best candidate to be the route shown on the 1794 Dennis Griffith map ([Figure 0374](#)). The Griffith map is, however, too schematic to be definitive.

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<sup>591</sup> Mr. Dietle, whose mother is Estalene (Korns) Dietle, is a distant cousin of Jesse Korns. Mr. Korns' obituary in the 1888 “**Cumberland Times**” states: “*Mr Jesse Korns died this morning at his residence 64 Bedford Street after an illness of 6 months; aged 78 years. He was the eldest son of Capt. Henry Korns who came to Cumberland from Germany in the later part of the last century, settling on Mechanic Street above the Blue Springs in a house opposite Rabold's Tannery. He began work as a boat builder on Hoblitzell's, now known as Henderson's Island. In 1866, he established a brick yard until 1869, when he formed a partnership with William Landwehr until 1874. He married in 1831 to Miss Ruth Plank and had 1 son and 3 daughters; Mrs. M. C. Little of Cumberland; Mrs. William Price of Pittsburgh; Miss Hester Korns, deceased; and Mr. C. H. Korns of Allegany City PA. The funeral is from the Centre Street ME Church and the remains placed in the Korn's vault at Rose Hill Cemetery.*”