

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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39. A floating sensation

The significance of early Connellsville and West Newton

West Newton is about 20 miles downriver from and northwest of Connellsville. One reason West Newton and **Connellsville** were important road destinations is that they lay along the navigable portion of the Youghiogheny River below the Ohiopyle falls. Simply put, from Connellsville, it was possible to float heavy cargo down to the Ohio River in flatboats. Floating downriver was infinitely easier than hauling the same cargo over a primitive road using a horse-drawn wagon.

Connellsville is the first readily accessible point along the navigable portion of the Youghiogheny River, and is located about 17 miles below Ohiopyle. Thaddeus Harris' 1803 journal uses Ohiopyle as a reference when describing the navigable portion of the Youghiogheny River:

The navigation of this river is obstructed by the falls and the rapids below for ten miles; but thence to the Monongahela, boats that draw but three feet of water may pass freely, except in dry seasons.

James Moore Swank's 1906 book "**Progressive Pennsylvania...**" states the importance of West Newton and Connellsville as follows:

Boats were certainly built on the Youghiogheny at Connellsville and Robbstown, now West Newton, as early as 1788. In 1793 Zachariah Connell laid out the town of Connellsville, "because it was here that emigrants and travelers to the West, of whom there were already great numbers in transit, coming over the road from Bedford by way of Turkey Foot, reached a boatable point on the Youghiogheny river. Here, for several years, boats had been built by emigrants and others to take their merchandise and other movables down by water carriage." In his charter of the town Mr. Connell stipulated that "the space left opposite the ferry and fronting on said river shall be and continue free for the use of the inhabitants of said town and for travelers who may erect thereon temporary boatyards, or may from time to time occupy the same or any part thereof for making any vessel or other conveniences for the purpose of conveying their property to or from said town." One use of "the space left opposite the ferry" was the parking in it of the wagons of emigrants while their boats were being built.

Swank quotes anonymously here from the 1882 "**History of Fayette County Pennsylvania...**" by Franklin Ellis. The "*Turkey Foot*" reference is confusing, but the "*boatable point*" statement is not. From the locations mentioned, water carriage was possible to the Ohio River.

In Ellis' 1882 book, the text of Zachariah Connell's town charter follows the quote pulled by Swank above. As presented in Ellis' book:

The charter, executed by Mr. Connell, March 21, 1793, and recorded with the town plot in Book C, page 329, of the Fayette County records, is as follows:

Zachariah Connell, proprietor of the tract of land situate on the East side of Youghiogheni River, where the State Road from the north fork of Turkey Foot intersects said river, To all to whom these presents shall come sendeth Greeting, Whereas it is necessary that some provision be made at the place aforesaid for the reception an entertainment of Travelers, and as well to accommodate such

Tradesmen and others inclining to settle at or near said place, for their encouragement and better regulation, Has laid out a small Town at the aforesaid place by the name of Connellsville, agreeably to the plan hereunto annexed. ...

According to Volume 18 of the 1915 book “**The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania**”, the borough of Connellsville was brought into existence by Chapter MMDCLIX, an act approved on March 1, 1806. One of William Tell Harris’ 1818 letters during his “**Tour Through the United States**” describes Connellsville as follows:

...we descended into Connellsville, a neat brick-built town, extending down the hill to the river Youghiogany, which joins the Monongahela a few miles below, winding towards it through a romantic vale.

This town is dependent chiefly on the iron-works in the neighbourhood for support; there are also paper, fulling, saw, and grist mills, for which the numerous streams rising among the surrounding hills are well adapted.

The following description of West Newton is from Volume I of Boucher’s 1906 book “**History of Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania**”:

The town was laid out in January, 1796, by Isaac Robb, who came from New Jersey and took up the land upon which it is now built. When the army to quell the Whiskey Insurrection in 1794 passed through this section they tore down Robb’s fences, and this aggravated him so that he refused to put them up again. He thereupon made a lottery and sold off the lots for a town. The survey and plotting were made by two men named Davis and Newkirk. The founder of the town was, therefore, Isaac Robb, who after this became a trader on the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, going down with goods as far as New Orleans. In 1807 his boat lay at West Newton, and, when visiting it one night when the river was rising rapidly, he missed his bearings and fell into the water and was drowned, although he was said to be a splendid swimmer. Originally the town had been called West Newton, but, being founded by Mr. Robb, for many years it was universally called Robb’s Town in honor of him. But in 1835, when they began to talk of having the village incorporated, the original and proper name was restored to it, and by this name it has since been known. Still farther back, in 1796, the place was known as Simrall’s Ferry, which the reader may have noticed in the account of the Whisky Insurrection...

Examining Ellis’ statement, ‘by way of Turkey Foot’

Did a wagon road from Bedford to Connellsville via Turkeyfoot exist in 1793?

Ellis indicates that emigrants were traveling from Bedford by way of Turkeyfoot by 1793, stating: “...there were already great numbers in transit, coming over the road from Bedford by way of Turkey Foot...” Traveling “from Bedford by way of Turkey Foot...” would be a long, roundabout route to Connellsville. Since this is a book about the Turkey Foot Road, the statement requires scrutiny. No maps that precede the 1793 town charter have been found that show a wagon road from Bedford to Turkeyfoot. The 1791 Pennsylvania map by Adlum and Wallis ([Figure 0798](#)) shows a road from Berlin to Turkeyfoot, but only shows a path from Bedford to Berlin. The 1792 Reading Howell map ([Figure 0001](#)) shows a southwesterly route that ran from a location near present-day Somerset to Turkey Foot, but it is also illustrated as a path, rather than a wagon road. The same is true of the 1797 Sotzmann map. The earliest map that has been found to show a road from Bedford

to Turkeyfoot is Thaddeus Harris' 1805 map ([Figure 0692](#)). The next is the 1829 Young and Finley map of Pennsylvania ([Figure 0088](#)), which shows a route to Connellsville following a road from Somerset. The seeming lack of a wagon road from Bedford to Turkeyfoot in 1793 casts doubt on the “*by way of Turkey Foot*” statement Ellis makes.

Connell's survey shows the river crossing site

The Connellsville charter mentions travelers, but does not say where they arrive from. In regard to roads, the charter simply indicates that the town was being located “*where the State Road from the north fork of Turkey Foot intersects said river*”. Connell's survey ([Figure 0393](#)) shows where the state road crossed the “*Youghiogeni River*” in 1794, and proves that the road turned north-northeast, as Crawford Avenue does today. At the present day, it seems odd to call that road the “*the State Road from the north fork of Turkey Foot*”. After all, by 1802, it was described as “*the great road leading from Uniontown to Greensburg*”.

An epiphany

What Ellis did not realize is that “*the State Road from the north fork of Turkey Foot*” was **not** a specific reference to a road from Turkey Foot. Instead, it was simply a reference to a road from Laurel Hill Creek, which was once known as the “*north fork of Turkey Foot*”.

A candidate route to Laurel Hill Creek

Zachariah Connell owned property just north of Woodruff's place, and had it surveyed in 1796. The survey ([Figure 0391](#)) refers to the Turkey Foot Road between Cumberland and Mount Pleasant as the “*State Road*”. Several nearby surveys also refer to the Turkey Foot Road as the “*State Road*”, as does the October 29, 1796 property transaction between John Vought and John Seighman. The Vought property was located west of Woodruff's on the Turkey Foot Road. The 1795 Thomas Meason survey ([Figure 0768](#)), which is located along present-day Hawk Road (then the Turkey Foot Road), describes the property as “*Situate on the State Road between Connellsville and Woodruffs old place...*”

As explained in Chapter 34 and shown on the 1792 Reading Howell map ([Figure 0001](#)), a road from Bedford via Berlin already joined the Turkey Foot Road at Cornelius Woodruff's. This intersection and Cornelius Woodruff's residence are shown on the enlargement of Reading Howell's 1792 map that is included as [Figure 0379](#). Woodruff's 1787 survey ([Figure 0389](#)) refers to the road from Bedford as “*the Road from Union to Bedford by Jones's Mill*.” That particular Jones Mill was located on a tributary of Laurel Hill Creek, and the road crossed Laurel Hill Creek. This probably explains Connell's description of “*the State Road from the north fork of Turkey Foot*”.

The “*Union*” referenced by Woodruff's survey is Uniontown. Then and now, the best route from Woodruff's place to Uniontown crosses the Youghiogeny River where Connellsville is now located. To get from Connellsville to Bedford on “*the Road from Union to Bedford by Jones's Mill*” in the 1790s, one followed a portion of the Turkey Foot Road that crossed the Vought, Meason, Connell, and Woodruff surveys, and then turned onto the road to Jones Mill. At present, this route seems to be the best candidate to be the route described by the town charter. Carey's 1814 “**General Atlas**” schematically illustrates a route from Uniontown to Bedford via Connellsville and Somerset ([Figure 0827](#)).

A review of other candidate routes

What other route could the Connellsville town charter reference? The Glade Road is a candidate, but is much more distant. The Turkey Foot Road did cross Laurel Hill Creek at present-day Ursina, but a trip through Ursina would be even more roundabout than the Glade Road, and no mapped wagon road has been identified that ran from Ursina to Bedford in 1793. The Springfield/Mud Pike would eventually extend eastward from Connellsville, but page 756 of Ellis' book indicates that route was not even surveyed until 1810. Was there some unknown wagon road antecedent to the Mud Pike? If this hypothetical route existed as a state road, then it would have been an important route; however, such a route is not shown on the 1792 ([Figure 0001](#)) or 1811 ([Figure 0020](#)) Howell maps. The first known map to show the Mud Pike is the 1818 Melish-Whiteside map. This chapter presents a viable candidate to be the road mentioned by the Connellsville town charter, but the subject is ripe for additional investigation.