

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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43. Grandpa's hatchet

A thread of continuity to our lives today

In an old story, a man is proud of his ancestor's hatchet from the war, even though the handle was replaced three times, and the head once. All that remains is history; but to him, it is "*Grandpa's Hatchet*". The Turkey Foot Road is a bit like that. Indian footpaths became bridle paths, then primitive roads, and now, our highways and byways. The alignment has frequently moved hither and yon. The original is but history – and yet there is a thread of continuity, making parts of today's roads an evolution of the footpaths.

The analogy goes deeper than physical transformation. The hatchet was prized because it connected to people and events of bygone days. As we searched for the Turkey Foot Road and its history, it became obvious that we too are part of its legacy. As the significance of this barely remembered route – long the topic of speculation – drew more clearly into focus, it became our treasure. It tangibly connects to places, people, and events that make us who we are.

We, and quite possibly you, would simply not exist had the Turkey Foot Road not been there. It allowed ancestors to settle when and where they did, and their children to meet. If great-great-great grandpa had never met great-great-great grandma, things might be a tad different today. The road is a part of where we came from, and it remains part of our destinations in both a genetic and a transportive sense. Michael McKenzie, for example, is a descendant of pioneers who settled along the early Turkey Foot Road, and drives the current alignment to work in Cumberland hundreds of times a year. Nancy Thoerig, a descendant of some of the same pioneers in Mount Savage, Salisbury and Greenville Township, has traveled local segments of the Turkey Foot Road all her life.

In its heyday, the Turkey Foot Road was an early route west. It helped to settle the towns and environs that interest us most: Barrelville and Mount Savage in Maryland; Wellersburg, Pocahontas, and Salisbury in Pennsylvania. While it may sound strange to call this area the west, in 1790 the center of the United States population of 3.9 million was about 25 miles east of Baltimore.

The road also serviced points farther west, such as Springs, Savage, Confluence, Harnedsville, and so forth, all the way to Pittsburgh. By 1820, the United States population had grown to 9.6 million, and about half of the people had moved west of Cumberland⁸¹¹. As this tremendous migration and population growth occurred, some of the people along the Turkey Foot Road moved on, helping to settle and populate the great American west. The exodus continues today for the same old reason. The mountain economy is limited, and part of each successive generation must leave. Families scattered across America can trace their roots back to ancestors who would have used the Turkey Foot Road in day-to-day life, or westward migration. We hope this book helps them understand their heritage.

⁸¹¹ Census information is from the 1901 book "**The Leading Facts of American History**" by D. H. Montgomery. For a map of the center of population for the years 1790 to 1890, see [Figure 0140](#).

A summing up

The route achieved legendary status in parts of Allegany County, Maryland and Somerset County, Pennsylvania because of the significant role it played in settling those areas. The packer's path traditions in the Mount Savage, Maryland and Salisbury, Pennsylvania areas are confirmed by the Fry and Jefferson map, coupled with Gist's November 4, 1751 journal entry. This trading path is the first documented route across southern Somerset County. Its purpose was to facilitate trade between the English colonies in the east and Indian villages in the west, including Twightwee villages in Ohio. In the region between Cumberland and Salisbury, the trading path implied by Gist and shown on the Fry and Jefferson map can be considered an antecedent to the Turkey Foot Road.

Trading activity from Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New York precipitated the first significant attack of the French and Indian War, at the Twightwee village of Pickawillany in 1752. Although Indian trade with Pennsylvania was significant, the success of a Virginia trader is cited in contemporaneous records as one of the root causes initiating French aggression.

The assertion by various historians that the Turkey Foot Road was cut by the Ohio Company has been refuted. The original records show no such thing. The Ohio Company actually cut routes to the present-day locations of Brownsville and Pittsburgh.

Colonel George Morgan had the Turkey Foot Road cut in 1779 as a supply route to Fort Pitt, to facilitate supply of the western troops during the Revolutionary War. The heavy Revolutionary War use of the road by packhorses helps to explain the survival of packer's path traditions. After the war, the Turkey Foot Road appears on various maps. Those maps support the tradition that the road followed the antecedent packer's path near Mount Savage and Salisbury. The post-war route is readily identifiable from those maps, and from early property and road surveys, landscape scars, cropmarks, and analysis of Doctor Wellford's travel journal.

On the ground and in the records, traces of a plurality of routes have been identified: A literal maze. This informs us that the legendary Turkey Foot Road never really was just one thing. Instead, it is (and long has been) an evolving route which, when viewed in the context of centuries, represents a transportation corridor.