

Title: Glorious old road made area famous
By BETTY POKAS, Times Leader Area Editor
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BELMONT County once had the longest paved road in Ohio, and it received a lot of attention, just as Interstate 70 has been getting in recent weeks.

In 1916, the longest paved road in the Buckeye State was the National Road, stretching 30 miles from Brookside (Bridgeport wasn't mentioned) to Fairview, according to the Aug. 24, 1916, issue of the St. Clairsville Gazette. The article in the Gazette was provided by Sherry Anderson, clerk at the St. Clairsville Public Library.

And, it was a busy road, just as I-70 is today. The Gazette news story about the paving of the National Road, west of St. Clairsville, refers to the number of "machines" when reporting about the automobiles. With the work done in 1916 and the \$23 million project now under way on the much-used interstate in the Morristown area, it's obvious that Robert Frost wasn't referring to either highway when he mentioned the road "less traveled by" in his familiar poem, "Road Not Taken."

(Of course, with his poetic bent, he undoubtedly was writing figuratively about a road, not literally.)

The article in the Gazette reporting on the completion of the paving project on the National Road notes:

"The announcement last week that the paving of the National Road had been completed west of here brought out many autos Sunday. A short detour in the West end of St. Clairsville was necessary on account of the paving inside of the corporation not being complete, but the local Commercial Club placed a guard at either end of the detour and this eliminated much confusion. At one time there were twenty-five machines held up, but only a few minutes were required to relieve the congestion. One man estimated the number of machines to be 1500. During one hour 120 passed through one way.

"The paving extends from Brookside to Fairview, a distance of 30 miles and is the longest paved road in any county of the State. The improvement of the road was begun some three years since.

"The Commercial Club is perfecting plans to hold a big celebration here on October 5, and the entire county will take part."

Undoubtedly, there also was a big celebration when ground was broken for the glorious old road as it occurred July 4, 1825. Speaker at the event was attorney William B. Hubbard, who was prosecuting attorney at that time. Although the "History of Belmont and Jefferson Counties" by J.A. Caldwell doesn't mention fireworks, it seems doubtful they would have had a Fourth of July without fireworks.

The Gazette in 1825 notes, "The line of this road from Canton (Bridgeport) to Fairview, presents a scene of zeal and industry, seldom witnessed."

When Caldwell's book was written in 1880, he wrote that "there are *one hundred miles* of macadamized roads in Belmont county." (He's the one who put emphasis on the one hundred miles, and he didn't capitalize "county.")

Also mentioned were the contractors for the "Big Bridge" crossing Wheeling Creek. This could only be the bridge at Blaine.

The National Road's distance in Belmont County sometimes is listed as 28-1/2 miles rather than 30, but regardless, the cost is estimated at \$34,000 a mile for a total cost of \$100,000.

A.T. McKelvey's "Centennial History of Belmont County, Ohio, and Representative Citizens" points out that the road, which has been acclaimed in recent years as the nation's first interstate highway, gave a powerful impetus to Western migration.

McKelvey also gave the opinion that the National Road, as originally constructed, surpassed the Appian Way of the Roman Empire. He pointed out that six carriages could pass abreast on the National Road while only two could do so on the Appian Way.

One wonders what he would think of today's traffic on nearby I-70.

McKelvey also quoted an unnamed, distinguished statesman who described the road as "a monument of a past age, but like all other monuments, it is interesting as well as venerable."

We'll have to give a lot of credit to McKelvey for thoroughness. In addition to giving high praise to the great, old road, he told of the wagoners who, during their evenings for cheer and comfort at the taverns or inns along the road, could obtain two drinks of whiskey for a "fipenny' bit," which was equal to 6-1/4 cents.

Pokas can be reached at timesleader@timesleaderonline.com.