

## THE GRAND RIVER TRAIL (Cont.)

Following an early, centuries old, Indian trail between Detroit and Lansing, (Michigan Village) the Grand River Trail traversed the county through its center, southeast to northwest; the route by which most settlers came to the Brighton Area. Surveyed prior to 1822, prospectors, trappers and homesteaders usually followed the trail by foot or on horseback. Wagons pulled by teams of oxen, would bring the family and its possessions once property was recorded by the purchaser. The felling of trees and pulling of stumps, building of bridges and filling of swamps made possible the use of stage coaches for travel and transport.

The staging business over the Grand River Road (sand, dust, ruts and mud, depending on the weather) between Howell and Detroit about 1838 was begun by Allen C. Weston and continued by Benjamin J. Spring and others. Stagecoaches made remarkably fast time from Detroit to Lansing, the 90 miles traversed in 12 hours; drawn by four to six horses which were changed every 12-15 miles. This resulted in inns and horsebarns being located along the route. The fare was about 7¢ per mile per person. The stage drivers also carried mail at 25¢ - 50¢ per letter. From these small beginnings grew the heavy traffic which afterwards passed over the Plank Road.

By 1852 the Grand River Trail was 'planked' from Detroit to Lansing. This route, built by the Detroit and Howell Plank Road Company (a company of private investors), became an immediate financial success. Toll was charged for the use of the road. Toll gates were built every 5-6 miles. Old maps indicate toll houses at Academy Drive, Challis Road and Ore Creek in Green Oak, Brighton and Genoa Townships.

The importance to Livingston County of this road was second only in importance to that which resulted from the opening of the railroad in 1871. Until that time, the Plank Road was one of the principle throughfares of the state; the means by which farmers' produce was delivered to market and items necessary for surviving the wilderness were transported to the pioneer from the city. This great and continually increasing business over the plank road ceased almost entirely with the opening of the railroad.

Following this diversion of a large part of the travel from the plank roads, it became the policy of the various road companies to remove the planking as it decayed and to fill in with substantial gravel so that by 1880 the entire line was a solidly graded turnpike. While toll was still being extracted, much complaining by the travelers, mostly local at that time, assured the quick demise of the gates. (To be continued. Condensed and edited from A Scrapbook of Michigan Memorabilia by William A. Pless and Livingston County History, 1880.)

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