

The 1833 Levi Warner Survey

The Galena Trail Becomes a State Road

Excerpts and Commentary by Patricia Goitein, Editor, Galena Trail Newsletter

By 1833, the Galena Trail was a well known old frontier road crossing northern Illinois. Taverns had been established at regular intervals, and thousands of travelers crossed it in relative safety every year. It was open and nearly ready to accommodate the expected tide of immigration into Illinois following the Black Hawk War.

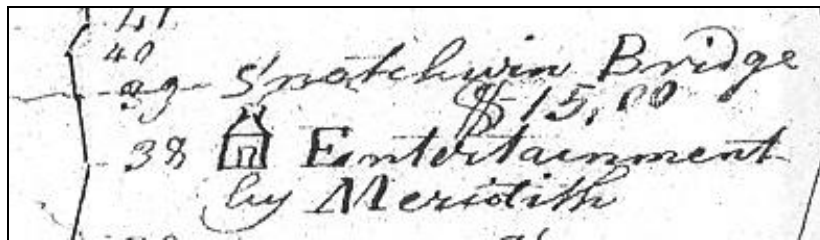
On January 18, 1833, the Illinois General Assembly passed an Act *Declaring the Road from Peoria to Galena a state Road*. The bill declared that the old road, when “*altered and staked, shall be henceforth a state road, and shall be opened at least four poles wide, and kept in repair as other public highway are.*” Joseph Meredith of Peoria County, Charles Boyd of Putnam County, Joseph Smith and John D. Winters of Joe Daviess County were appointed commissioners to examine the road, and “*stake such alterations in the old road as in their belief and judgment will best promote the public convenience and utility, taking into consideration the nearest route and best ground, as well as those points of timber most contiguous to the nearest route, adapted to the location of houses for the entertainment of travelers.*” They were also required to “*note the distances between the houses of entertainment, and the size, quality, and number of all the water course which, in their opinion, will require bridges, and the probable cost of the same, as well as the general bearings of the road from point to point.*” Upon completion of the survey, the Commissioners were required to file a survey map and notes with the courts in Peoria, Jo Daviess, and Putnam counties and with the Secretary of the State of Illinois. The County Commissioners Courts were required to pay the state appointed commissioners \$1.25 for each day they worked on the survey, and to pay the survey chain bearers at the local going rate. Levi Warner of Jo Daviess County was later hired to survey the road under the supervision of the appointed Commissioners. (*An Act Declaring the road from Peoria to Galena a state road, and for other purposes, approved, January 18, 1833*, published in Laws, passed at the eighth session of the General Assembly of the State of Illinois, Kaskaskia, 1833, pp. 176-177, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, IL.)

Warner and the Commissioners started the state survey in Peoria on May 16, 1833, “at the east corner of the Public Square” According to Warner’s original survey notes, the Commissioners argued about the Peoria County alignments. The entries record that their new alignment did not closely follow the old Galena road. In fact, the old road

is not mentioned in the early entries of Warner's original survey notes. (Warner survey notes, non-paginated and unpublished document, Polo Historical Society, identified hereafter as *Polo notes*.)

On May 20, 1833, 31 Miles north of Peoria, the Commissioners' arguments came to a climax. Warner states that the *"Commissioners, being dissatisfied with the route they had taken on account of the probable expense that would occur in making of the same and also of the angular points in the same, Return back to a point 4 miles from Peoria and recommence at a post marked with four notches in it."* (Polo notes, May 20th entry).

The Commissioners' second start proved more successful. This time, they followed the old road (the old Galena Trail) closely, at times taking readings "on the east side of the old road," "to the middle of the old road" etc. Although they were still arguing, Warner and the Commissioners quickly crossed Peoria County. Eight miles out, opposite John Ridgeway's house, Warner reports that the Commissioners were *"disagreeing as to the route to proceed, whether to go on a straight direction on good ground for a road or whether to go angling on bad ground where several bridges would be required."* (Polo notes, line 27) The survey shows that they chose the straight and good route, and presently arrived before Thomas Reed's house at the northern end of LaSalle Prairie, 14 miles from Fort Clark/Peoria. They stayed the night at Joseph Meredith's nearby tavern.



Detail, map, official survey, op cit., Warner 1833

Warner and the Commissioners entered Putnam County the following day, Warner noting that in Putnam County they were on *"a very good location for a road thus far,"* it being *"a large prairie extending to Rock River"* (ibid, entry # 42).

36 miles from Peoria and near Mr. Charles Boyd's house. *"Good ground for a road thus far with some few exceptions where ravines or low sways of ground intervene which would render it disagreeable traveling until the same shall be improved by work done on it"* (ibid, entry #45).

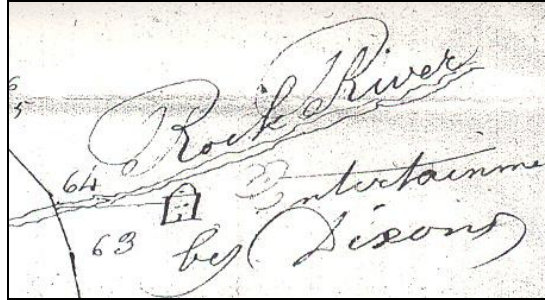
Editor's Note: **Boyd's Grove was a popular stop along the Galena Trail.** Charles Boyd's two story log tavern was usually crowded, and beds were scarce. In 1834, after latecomers arrived and found two guests sleeping comfortably, each in his

own bed, the landlady at Boyd's Grove was heard to complain: *"Ugh! Great people, truly! A bed to themselves, the hogs! They travel together - and they eat together - and they eat enough too, - yet they can't sleep together."* The traveler, Charles Fenno Hoffman, goes on to say that the landlord [probably Charles Boyd, ed.], was *"a respectable middle-aged man, who did everything to make our situation comfortable during the thirty-six hours we spent at his cabin, interposed, and silenced his better half and, the new comers wrapping themselves in their cloaks before the fire, in a few minutes all became still about the establishment. The good dame, who must have been a fine-looking woman in her day, and was, I believe, in spite of her scolding ways, really well-disposed towards us at heart, gave us a capital cup of coffee and a kind farewell in the morning."* (Hoffman, Charles Fenno, *A Winter in the Far West*, London, 1835, Vol. I, pp.277-8)

May 25, 1833, 54 miles from Peoria, opposite and near to Mr. Shirley's house and grove. *"Level prairie for the last six miles."* (Polo notes, Saturday, May 25, 1833 entry) According to H.C. Bradsby's 1885 *History of Bureau County Illinois*, Warren Sherley came to Illinois in the spring of 1829. After making enough improvements to hold his claim at the grove, Sherley went home to Massachusetts and never returned. His claim was later known as Heaton's Point. (Bradsby, pg. 86.)

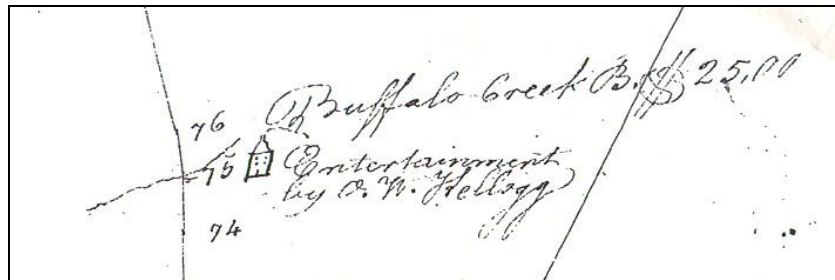
May 26, 1833, 62 miles from Peoria, *"opposite and about one chain from Mr. Joseph Smith's house, situated in the point of a small grove of timber on a very high elevation of ground. 63 miles from Peoria. From Mr. Shirley's to Mr. Smith's, good ground for a road."* (ibid, May 26th entry.) Monday, May 27th, 1833: *"Joseph Smith lives in Joe Davis County about 3 miles north from the county line."* (Polo notes, May 26th entry)

May 28, 1833, 74 miles from Peoria, to *"a point on a high ridge where the grove at the ferry on Rock River, and the Grove at Mr. Smith's are both in open view at the same time"*. At Dixon's Ferry (present day Dixon, IL.), *"across Rock River from bank to bank - Rock River is a beautiful stream, Rocky bottom and good healthy water."* (ibid, May 28th entry)



Detail, map, official survey, op cit., Warner 1833

Wednesday, May 29, 1833, 91 miles from Peoria, to a point “*opposite and about one chain from Oliver W. Kellogg’s house, where he now resides. By and by he will be in his new house on the road near the edge of the Grove*”. Warner notes that the nearby Buffalo Creek is a “*beautiful stream of water about 25 links wide, running through Buffalo Grove*”. (ibid, May 29th entry).



Detail, map, official survey, op cit., Warner 1833

Thursday, May 30, 1833, 98 miles from Peoria, “*opposite and about 4 chains west from Chamber’s House.*” (ibid, May 30th entry)

Friday, May 31, 1833, “*a very disagreeable cold, windy and rainy day, went back to Chambers’ house and staid.*” (ibid Friday, May 31st entry)

Saturday, June 1, 1833, 108 miles from Peoria, “*opposite and about fifty links east from Mr. Thomas Crain’s house.*” (ibid, Saturday, June 1st entry)

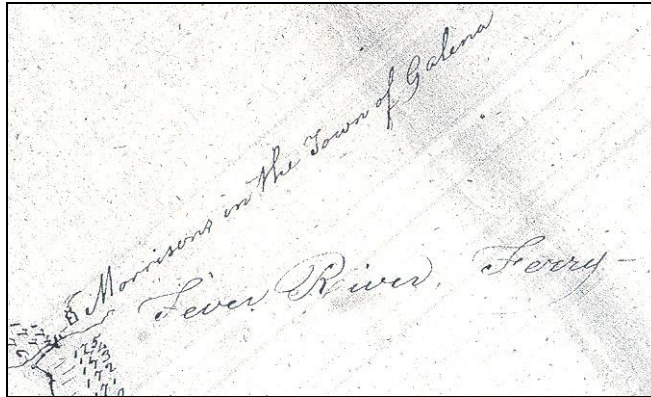
Sunday, June 2, 1833, 116 miles from Peoria “*to the old road at the end of Crain’s cut off – being a cut of I should guess one mile addition in length.*” (ibid, June 2nd entry) Warner and the Commissioners apparently surveyed a “cut off” leading to Thomas Crain’s tavern, the idea being to lead travelers to the tavern along a trail as directed by the General Assembly. Galena Trail lore has it that the Commissioners also changed the alignment to lead travelers to Dad Jo Smith’s tavern, and leading customers *away from* Ament’s at Red Oak. As the story goes, Mrs. Smith’s cooking was far more agreeable than anything served by the bachelor Ament brothers, who reputedly were agreeable fellows, but terrible cooks.

Monday, June 3, 1833, 132/33 miles from Peoria, at the banks of the Apple River, “a fine current of water andgood fording.” (ibid, Monday entry) *Entertainment at Mr. John D. Winter’s house.* (Official state survey document map)

Wednesday, June 5, 1833, *entertainment at “Mr. Elias P. Avery’s house, where he now lives”*, 136/7 miles from Peoria. (Polo notes, June 5 entry, and official survey report)

140 miles from Peoria, across Small Pox Creek, passing Rollins’ house one mile later.

145 miles from Peoria, **crossing the Fever River by ferry**, “to Morrison’s door in the Town of Galena”. (Polo notes, last page)



Detail, map, official survey, op cit., Warner 1833

“From Fort Clark to Galena is 145 miles, 26.25 chains. Thursday, June 6th, 1833”.
(ibid)

In Davis County, June 17th 1833. Ill-
I hereby certify that the foregoing Plats
together with the minutes annexed thereto to be
a true representation of the Location for a
State Road leading from Peoria to Galena
as Located by order and agreeable to the
Superintendance of the annexed Commissioners
Appointed therefor, Levi Warner Surveyor

We the Undersigned Commissioners having
Examined Located & Laid off, Surveyed &
Admeasured the State Road leading from
Peoria to Galena, do hereby certify the
foregoing Plats, together with the field notes
to have met our acceptance as being
a true representation of the Location
for a ^{the State} Road we have made

Joseph B. Meredith
Joseph Smith
Charles Boyd
Comandrs

Survey Certification statement filed at Galena, July 17, 1833 by Levi Warner, surveyor, and Commissioners Joseph B. Meredith, Joseph Smith and Charles Boyd.

Illinois State Archives, Springfield.

Warner Survey Sources:

An Act Declaring the road from Peoria to Galena a state road, and for other purposes, approved, January 18, 1833, published in Laws, passed at the eighth session of the General Assembly of the State of Illinois, Kaskaskia, 1833, pp. 176-177, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, IL.

Report of Road Com. Locating a Road from Peoria to Galena, June 17, 1833, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, IL.

Warner, Levi, ***Survey Notes for a road leading from Peoria to Galena, dated June 6, 1833***, unpublished, non-paginated document, Polo Historical Society, Polo, IL. These are Warner's original notes.

Warner, Levi, ***Survey Notes for a road from Peoria to Galena dated June 6, 1833***, John W. Clinton Collection, manuscript room, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL. This appears to be Warner's second set of survey notes. It does not record the Commissioners' second start from 4 miles north of Peoria.