

HERITAGE SPOTLIGHT

SPOTLIGHT NO. 1

RIBBON OF HISTORY

The Maysville to Lexington Road

A. Gwynn Henderson and Nancy O'Malley

WHAT historic road and the archaeological sites along it

WHERE Bourbon, Fayette, Fleming, Mason, Nicholas, and Robertson counties in Central Kentucky

WHEN prehistory, and history to the mid-twentieth century

SUBJECT an overview of the history and archaeology of the Maysville to Lexington Road and its roadside. A companion spotlight, *Historical Archaeology Along The Maysville to Lexington Road*, presents archaeological research findings occasioned by highway improvements, carried out at a cross-section of historic-era sites in Bourbon and Fayette counties that lie within this historic road corridor.

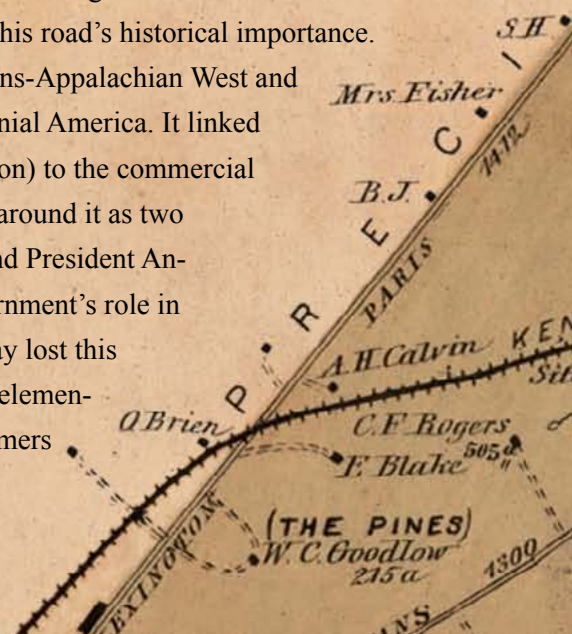
SUPPORT for this project was provided, in part, by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and the Kentucky Archaeological Survey (jointly administered by the Kentucky Heritage Council [State Historic Preservation Office] and the University of Kentucky Department of Anthropology.

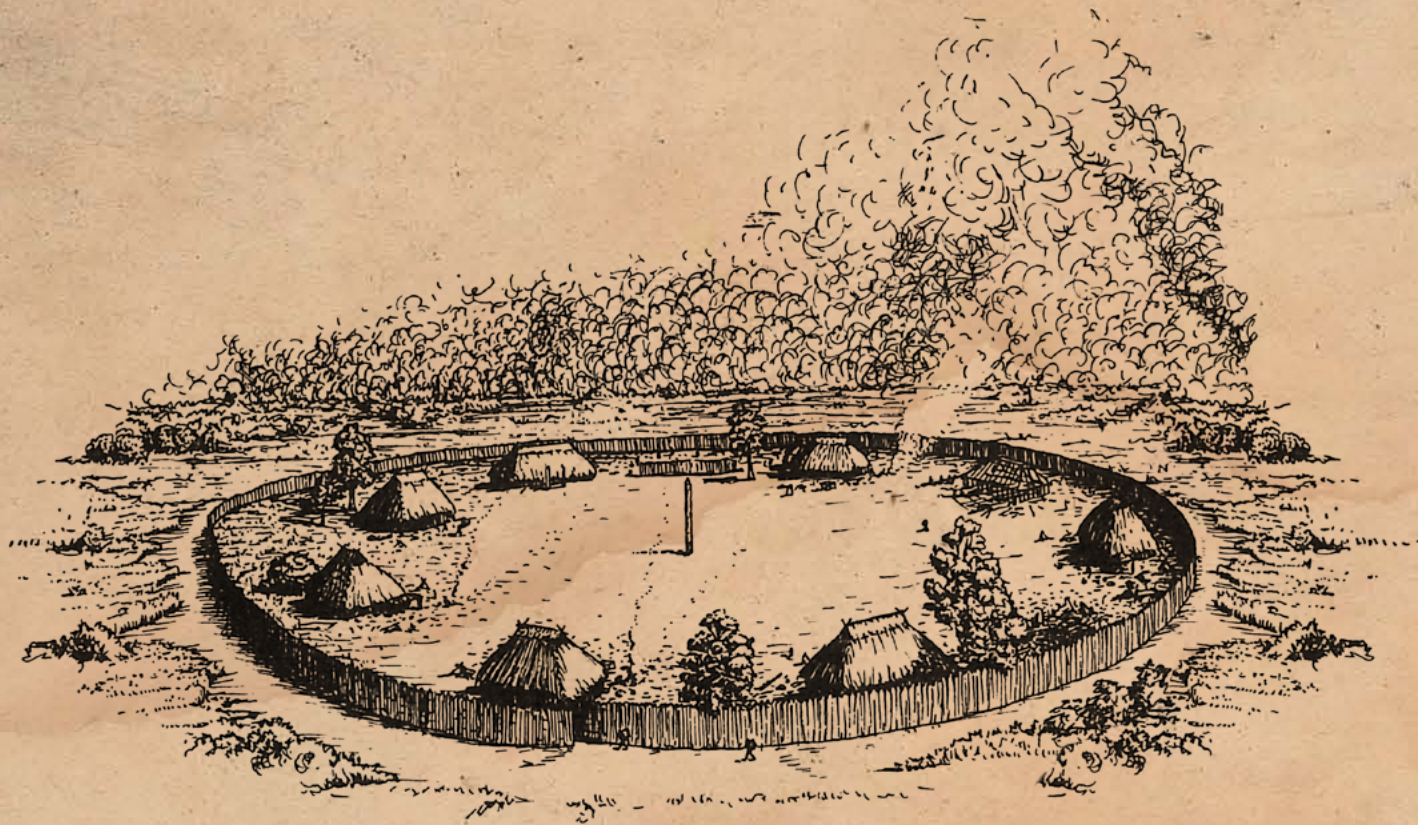
Today's roads and highways are built to be safe, efficient. They intrude on our travel experience only on the rare occasion when they present obstacles to travel - an accident, a detour, or a stretch with potholes and bumps. Travel on modern roads is so effortless; we measure it in terms of time rather than distance.

But roads and highways are much more than routes to get us quickly from here to there. Roads and their roadsides - the space that sits next to the roadway and extends to the visible horizon - are a special kind of landscape and they hold their own complex history. "Blue highways," towns bypassed, and curves straightened reveal the history of engineering, modes of travel, and commerce between communities and regions. Their roadsides contain the tangible links to local histories and heritage. Moving through these landscapes, we pass by ancient Native American camps, mounds and villages; late eighteenth century homesteads and inns; and nineteenth century farmsteads and forgotten communities. In a very real way, highways and their roadsides are ribbons of history.

While all Kentucky's roads exhibit this historical character to a certain degree, none does it better than the Maysville to Lexington Road. It is not even 100 miles long, but length is no measure of this road's historical importance.

It was the nation's first highway in the trans-Appalachian West and one of the most important roads in post-colonial America. It linked the "Eden of the West" (early 1800s Lexington) to the commercial centers of a growing nation. Debate swirled around it as two powerful politicians - Senator Henry Clay and President Andrew Jackson - argued over the federal government's role in maintaining regional infrastructure (alas, Clay lost this battle, too). But most importantly and most elementally, it was the lifeline for rich and poor, farmers





and businessmen, and a constant companion to all travelers, locals and visitors alike.

History and the Maysville to Lexington Road Corridor

The Maysville to Lexington Road starts at the Ohio River. After climbing the steep river bluff at Maysville, it extends southward through the rolling Outer Bluegrass. It enters the chronically difficult Eden Shale Hills past Maysville, and begins to trend southwestwardly. For 20 miles, the road negotiates steep-sided hills and narrow valleys. Just before Millersburg, it emerges into the gently rolling, mildly karstic Inner Bluegrass. It continues through this rich countryside to Paris before ending in Lexington.

Like all roads, the Maysville to Lexington Road has been anything but static in form or route. During its long history, it has changed from trail, to trace, to turnpike, and finally, to highway.

Trail

In prehistory, there was no Maysville, no Lexington. There were no roads as we think of them today. There were only trails.

Some were trails pounded out by buffalo, deer, and other herd animals as they moved from lick to lick and to rich browsing spots. Native Americans, who lived in the region for thousands of years, likely walked these trails. But they also would have traveled paths made not with tools, but by the feet of

Above Trails linked prehistoric farming communities to each other, creating a network of social and cultural connections.

Below right In the period political cartoon, Senator Henry Clay appears to have the upper hand as he wrestles with President Andrew Jackson.

countless human travelers threading across the landscape to reach their destinations. Sections of old animal trails are still visible west of the current roadway between Blue Licks and the Fleming County/Mason County line.

Trace

The arrival of European settlers marks the beginning of the Maysville to Lexington Road as we think of roads today. They knew it as the Limestone Trace.

Settlers traveling to central Kentucky down the Ohio River on flatboats stopped at Limestone Landing (present-day Maysville). Then, after transferring their belongings to wagons, they followed the trace inland to Lexington.

With use, the trails became wider as the vegetation was cleared back. But travel along The Trace was challenging and difficult. There were many streams to cross, and few or no bridges. In some sections, mud, deep ruts, and other obstacles made the road impassable.

The Trace formally established the Maysville to Lexington Road Corridor. Route choices were straightforward, but topographically sensitive: the most resistant surface, the lowest gradient, the shallowest river crossing. Engineers have altered its route in only minor ways.

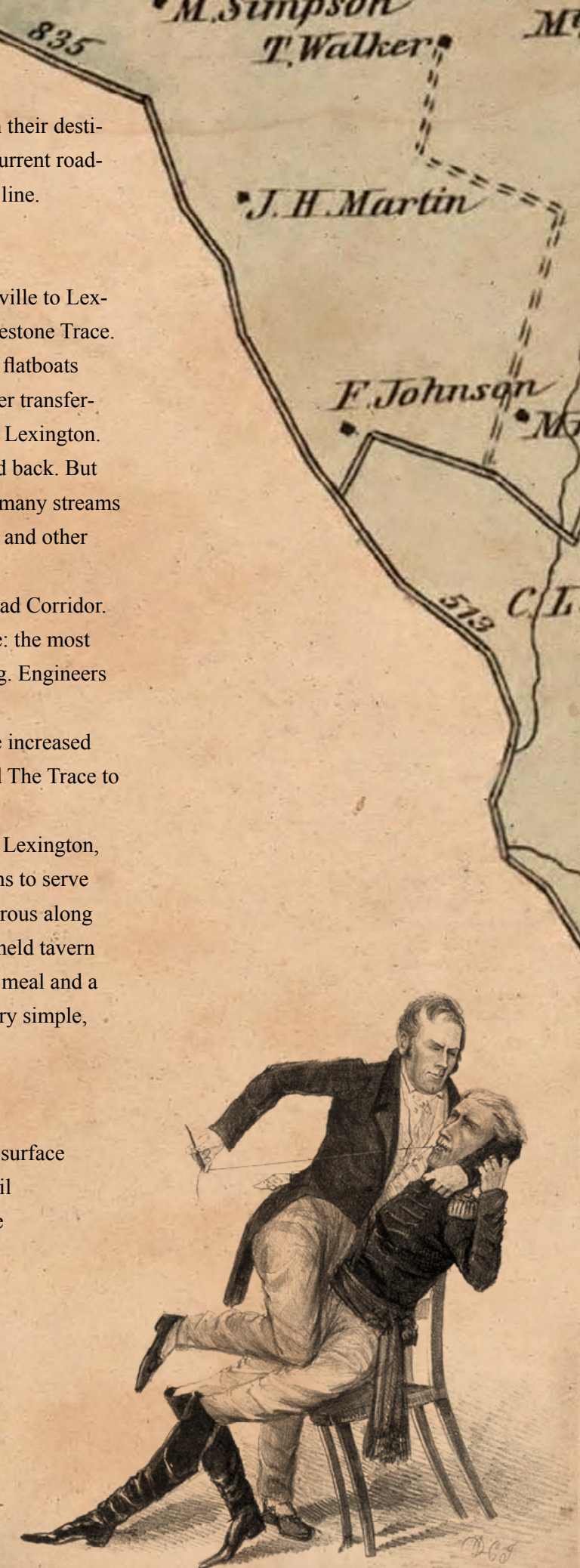
After the Revolutionary War, travel along the Limestone Trace increased sharply. Settlers streamed into Kentucky. Commercial traffic used The Trace to move goods in and out of the new Commonwealth of Kentucky.

It took up to five days to make the trip between Maysville and Lexington, so hopeful proprietors established inns in towns and rural locations to serve travelers who needed a place to stay. Small, rural inns were numerous along the unimproved road. Most were simply local householders who held tavern licenses. These documents allowed them to charge travelers for a meal and a bed in their own homes. Quality varied widely. Some inns had very simple, even primitive, accommodations. Others were more luxurious.

Turnpike

Plans for turning the Limestone Trace into a turnpike with a hard surface were developed as early as 1817. They met with little success until 1827. A bill introduced by Senator Henry Clay (and passed by the U.S. Congress) authorized the investment of \$150,000 of federal funds in turnpike stock. President Andrew Jackson vetoed the bill, arguing that federal investment in state road projects was unconstitutional. The Kentucky State Legislature came to the rescue.

Fayette County surveyors James Darnaby and William El-





THE COFFLE GANG.

lis, Jr. were appointed to survey the old Limestone Trace and suggest realignments and improvements in its route. Completed in 1827, their map shows the location of private houses, inns, road junctures, and other landmarks between the towns and villages along the route. Many sections of the 1820s road alignment from Paris to Maysville are still visible as a linear depression to one side or the other of the current roadway.

It took four years for Irish emigrant laborers working for Irish road contractors to build what came to be known as the Maysville to Lexington Turnpike. Applying John McAdam's new method, they built an all-weather, broken stone "macadam" roadbed, the first in the state.

Quarry masons supplied stone for the road pavement and bridge abutments from roadside quarries. Other laborers, known as "turnpikers," performed the heavy work. They cleared the road corridor of trees and obstacles; cut down hills and filled-in depressions to create a level roadbed; and built a curb on either side. Using heavy cast iron sieves or mortars, they sized the rock and then spread the 2 ½ inch-diameter stones across the roadbed to the prescribed thickness. The first segment, between Maysville and Washington, was completed in 1830.

As five-mile sections were built, the turnpike company erected toll houses

The turnpike was more than a conduit for travelers and commerce. Much grimmer groups traveled the route: mourners moving the dead to cemeteries and traders moving slaves to market. Abolitionists used the road as an escape route.



and began to collect tolls from travelers. Toll houses were manned by toll keepers, often of Irish origin. They lived in houses on the premises. Completed in 1835, the 67-mile long Turnpike featured 13 tollgates and six covered bridges.

The new Turnpike represented an immense leap forward - in travel time, ease of passage, and transportation efficiency - and quickly became a major commercial thoroughfare. People and vehicles moved thousands of tons of goods along it between Kentucky and points east. Stock traders drove herds of livestock along the road to distant markets.

Three stage lines served the route. The trip between Maysville and Lexington included stops every ten miles to change horses. Initially, passengers paid one or two dollars for their journey. After the road was macadamized, stagecoaches could make the trip in about 10 hours. This put most of the small rural inns out of business, but better-quality taverns and hotels remained in the larger towns, catering to travelers from higher social classes.

Highway

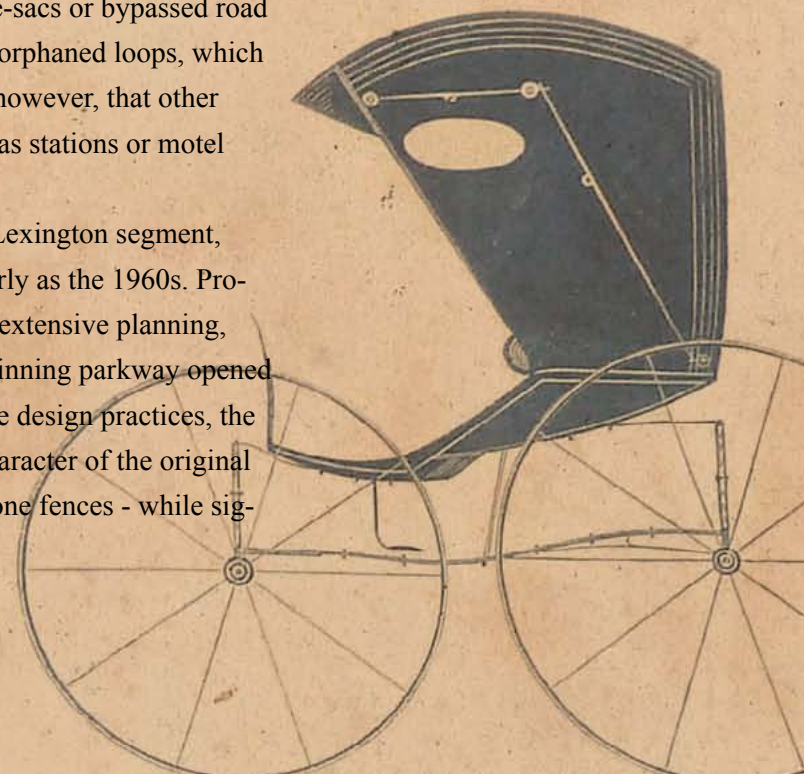
At the turn of the twentieth century, new machinery and road surfacing methods developed. The Maysville to Lexington Road kept up with the times. Engineers improved the old macadam surface with water-bound macadam in 1918, and in the following year, they sealed it with hot asphalt oil. Later projects created a surface that could handle heavy motorized vehicles.

Increasing traffic through the twentieth century exposed road alignment problems dating back to the 1827 survey. Beginning in the 1920s, a long-term program of road improvement began. Many sections underwent realignment. Curves were straightened, steep grades were lowered, and bypasses were built. Many of these realignments created closed cul-de-sacs or bypassed road segments. Today's travelers can still see some of these orphaned loops, which detach from and reattach to the main road. It is ironic, however, that other evidence of the early automobile road corridor - relic gas stations or motel buildings - is nearly absent.

Highway reconstruction was difficult. The Paris to Lexington segment, known as Paris Pike, was slated for improvement as early as the 1960s. Protests and lawsuits prolonged this until the 1990s. After extensive planning, design, and much public review and input, an award-winning parkway opened to traffic in December 2003. Utilizing context-sensitive design practices, the now divided four-lane Paris Pike retains the historic character of the original road - many of the original segments and associated stone fences - while significantly increasing road safety.



Humans have traveled across and within the Maysville to Lexington Road Corridor for millenia. Trails were the routes for much of human history. Trace/Turnpike/Highway travel developed only recently.



Highway Archaeology

Highway archaeology gives archaeologists the opportunity to study many sites they likely would not have discovered. Most archaeological investigations within the three mile-wide Maysville to Lexington Road Corridor have been closely linked to or dependent on the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet's proposed highway improvements. These include removing dangerous curves or updating the road surface, or building new roads. Nearly one-half of all recorded archaeological sites within the road corridor have been documented because of these projects. We would know much less about central Kentucky's rich and varied human history had it not been for them.

There is one major drawback to highway archaeology, however. The examined "ribbon of history" is only as wide as the road right-of-way. This means archaeologists document and investigate only those sections of a site within the road's actual footprint. Sometimes this means they do not study important site elements. Still, highway archaeology provides investigators the opportunity to carry out research before roads are built. This is something that did not begin in Kentucky until after Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966.

The most intensively examined road right-of-way within the historic road's footprint extends from the Licking River Bridge at Blue Licks southwestward to outside Lexington at Interstate 64/75. Work began in this stretch in 1987, when archaeologists surveyed the proposed right-of-way along Paris Pike - the section between Paris and Lexington. In the 1990s and occasionally thereafter up until 2006, archaeologists excavated several historic archaeological sites here. In 1995 and again in 2003, archaeologists surveyed the road right-of-way between Blue Licks and Paris, and carried out additional site investigations there as recently as 2011. As yet, no highway archaeology has been carried out within the historic road's right-of-way between Maysville and Blue Licks.

Archaeology and the Maysville to Lexington Road Corridor

There's more to the story of the Maysville to Lexington Road than what's written in history books, however. There are stories written in the ground. They are the purview of archaeology.

Archaeological research can shed light on aspects of the road itself, like its changing location and its diverse construction methods. Archaeological research also can generate information about the lives of those who once lived and worked along the road - lives that rarely appear in history books.

Ancient Native Americans did not write. They left evidence of their lives in the places they camped, or where they established their villages, or hunted or planted their fields, or where they buried their dead. We know about the lives of famous people who occasionally traveled the Maysville to Lexington Road through their letters and journals, but we know little about the "regular" folks who lived and worked adjacent to or within sight of the road, and who traveled it each day. Archaeology pulls into focus the lives of the Irish macadamizers, not-so-wealthy farmers, slaves, "inn" keepers, postmasters, butchers, and laundresses. By combining archaeology and history, we gain a richer, deeper, and broader appreciation for the ribbon of history that is the Maysville to Lexington Road.

Tollhouses were built at regular intervals along the Turnpike.



Road Corridor Site Snapshot

Since the late 1920s/1930s, when records began to be kept, archaeologists have recorded 181 archaeological sites of all ages and types within the Maysville to Lexington Road Corridor. Their work has generated information about every era in Kentucky's long history, beginning with the earliest human presence about 12,000 years ago. For this snapshot, we have defined the road corridor as a three-mile wide strip encompassing the road at its current location, the land that lies next to the roadway (the roadside), and the land that extends to the visible horizon for 1.5 miles on either side of the road.

Prehistoric Period Sites

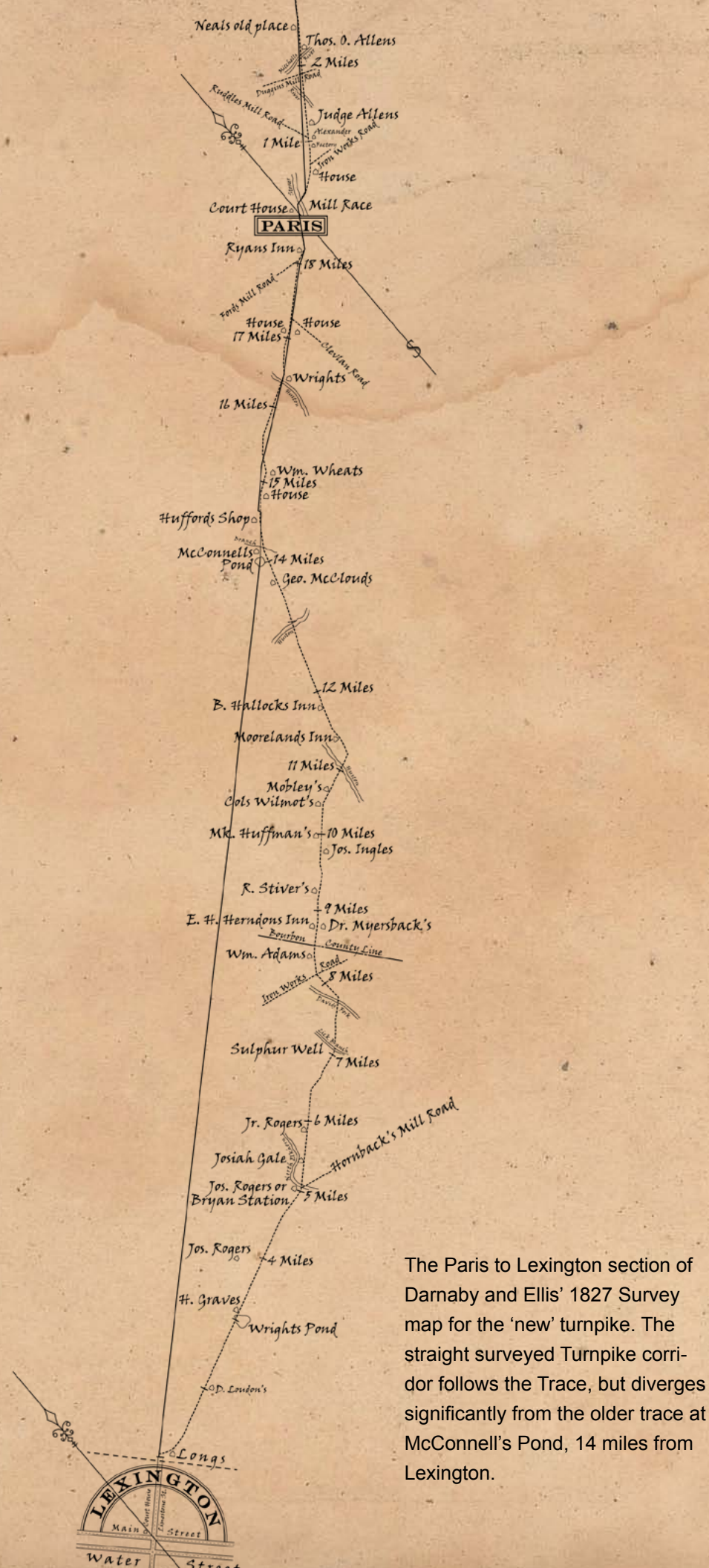
Investigators have found sites representing all of Kentucky's prehistoric eras within the road corridor. They include mounds, campsites, and villages. At Blue Licks, there is evidence for the very earliest people, who arrived at the close of the Ice Age and hunted the megafauna that came to the springs. Sprinkled across the corridor are numerous campsites where hunter-gatherer groups lived. A few mounds and earthworks built by their hunting-gathering-gardening descendants still stand in the corridor, as do examples of their camps and villages. Several villages of the latest native groups also have been identified within the corridor. These farmers' fields would have lain within it as well.

Prehistoric paths or "roads" did not attract human settlement like historic roads. Prehistoric peoples situated their camps, mounds, and villages on the landscape according to other concerns: location to water, ritual vistas, rich soils, stands of nut-bearing trees. Paths were a secondary consideration.

Prehistoric peoples' paths likely would have crisscrossed the Maysville to Lexington Road Corridor. If they paralleled or lay within its eventual footprint, it was a happy accident. The best places for human travel across difficult landscapes is the same, whether the travel was on foot, by horse, in buggies or stage coaches, or in automobiles and trucks.

Historic Period Sites

The Maysville to Lexington Road Corridor can be considered a long narrow historic archaeological site, with the individual sites documented within it representing diverse, intensive, specialized activity areas. These sites date mainly from the late 1700s to before the first half of the twentieth century. Most saw



The Paris to Lexington section of Darnaby and Ellis' 1827 Survey map for the 'new' turnpike. The straight surveyed Turnpike corridor follows the Trace, but diverges significantly from the older trace at McConnell's Pond, 14 miles from Lexington.

Why Investigate These Sites?

When the Kentucky highway department uses federal funds to build or improve roads, federal laws, in particular, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, require planners to consider the places of historic and archaeological importance that road building will damage or destroy in the process. Years before road construction begins, archaeologists walk within the planned location of the new road, documenting prehistoric and historic sites, structures, and bridges; in short, all cultural resources older than 50 years of age. They report these sites to the Office of State Archaeology at the University of Kentucky. This is the program charged by Kentucky state law to maintain the site files for the Commonwealth.

Archaeologists document every site they find, analyze the artifacts, and prepare reports of their findings. Only important sites merit additional investigation. Once work is complete, archaeologists curate the materials they found and the documents and files they generated. In this way, future archaeologists, scholars, and exhibitors can research or display these materials.



their major period of use in the 1800s.

Generally, these sites are situated close to the road. As the history of the Maysville to Lexington Road shows, historic roads are different in significant ways from prehistoric pathways. They attract settlement, industry, and development, and link towns and communities.

Archaeological sites investigated in the corridor include the domestic centers of farms, inns, small industrial sites, cemeteries, and vanished communities. William McConnell's fashionable stone farmhouse once stood near The Trace southwest of Paris. Built in the late 1700s, it served as the family's residence for nearly a century. Their house, the foods they ate, and the dishes they used reflect the McConnells' upper middle class lifestyle. For a short time in the early 1800s, Thomas Current, and his son Eli, ran an inn in their log home northeast of Paris along The Trace. This middle class family and their slaves provided tea, hearty pork dinners, and wine to weary travelers.

Situated between the Trace and the Turnpike, the history of the now-vanished community of Monterey is inseparable from that of the Maysville to Lexington Road. Located southwest of Paris, it was home to whites and blacks, and laborers and businessmen during much of the nineteenth century. Franky Robison, a free black woman, owned property in the community in the early 1800s. The house she owned faced the old Trace. Less expensive cuts of meat and dishes reflect her family's modest means. The Foote family lived in

Toll House #10 when the Turnpike was new. Later owners used the structure as a warehouse. The Moore's, who were African-American tradespeople, ran their blacksmith business in Thomas Anderson's old blacksmith shop next to the Turnpike until the later 1800s. William Dorsey built a new frame house in Monterey in the 1850s. Aspiring to higher social standing, the Dorsey's ate expensive cuts of meat from dishes that reflected their true financial footing. Patrons to William Dorsey's unlicensed drinking establishment threw away the "evidence" in a nearby well.

Heritage Spotlight 2

The most intensively and extensively investigated archaeological sites documented by highway projects within the Maysville to Lexington Road Corridor are historic period sites. Sites targeted during investigations include early nineteenth century inns, the homes of nineteenth century middle class farmers, and the now-vanished community of Monterey, all of which lie within the Maysville to Lexington Road right-of-way or its roadside. We invite you to turn to Heritage Spotlight 2, Historical Archaeology Along The Maysville to Lexington Road, to learn more about what archaeologists discovered at these fascinating sites.

With road improvements, the time it took travelers to reach Lexington decreased significantly: from 40 hours in 1800 on the Trace to 10 hours along the Turnpike in 1834 to 3.4 or 4 hours on the Road in 1920 to 1 hour 17 minutes on the Highway today. In relative terms, a traveler in the 1920s leaving Maysville got only as far as Ellisville in the same amount of time it takes us today to reach Lexington.

To Learn More About It

If you are interested in learning more about the Maysville to Lexington Road or about Kentucky archaeology, read these University Press of Kentucky publications:

Karl Raitz and Nancy O'Malley, *Kentucky's Frontier Highway: Historical Landscapes along the Maysville Road*, published in 2012

R. Barry Lewis, *Kentucky Archaeology*, published in 1996

Nancy O'Malley, overview of Kentucky prehistory in the second edition of James C. Klotter's *Our Kentucky: A Study of the Bluegrass State*, published in 2000

James C. Klotter and Freda C. Klotter, *A Concise History of Kentucky*, published in 2008.

You also can access information via the web. For an illustrated historical record of American highway development, click on Carl Rakeman's

[Transportation Painting Collection](#)

These paintings vividly relate the story of U.S. civilization in the push westward from coast to coast.

To learn more about Kentucky archaeology, click on

[Kentucky Archaeology Video Series](#)

or the

[Kentucky Archaeological Survey's website](#)

Permanent displays in many of Kentucky's museums, most notably the Thomas D. Clark Center for Kentucky History in Frankfort, present information about Kentucky's ancient past based on archaeological research conducted in the state.

Visit an exhibit about the Maysville to Lexington Road and the archaeology conducted along it, **Road Life: Sites and Scenes Along Kentucky's First Highway**, at the Hopewell Museum in Paris (February through June 2013) and the Kentucky Gateway Museum in Maysville (June through September 2013).



About the Agencies

You will find more information about the sponsoring agencies by going to their websites:

[KENTUCKY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY](#)

[KENTUCKY HERITAGE COUNCIL](#)

[U.K. DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY](#)

[KENTUCKY TRANSPORTATION CABINET](#)

The authors would like to thank who???

Karl Raitz and Nancy O'Malley's book, *Kentucky's Frontier Highway: Historical Landscapes along the Maysville Road*, provided much of the content for this Spotlight. Also consulted were the Kentucky Archaeological Site Survey files at the Office of State Archaeology in Lexington.

Design by Hayward Wilkerson. Original artwork on pages ?, ?, and ? is by ?. ?? photographs courtesy of ??. Other photographs and illustrations by Hayward Wilkerson.

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