

ROADS

The Ohio River was New Albany's life blood in the town's early days. There were no roads on the site of the future city when the Scribner brothers arrived in 1813. The river was the link with the outside world – the ready-made route for travel and trade. When the early settlers ventured back from the riverbank they followed paths through the woods that had been made by the Indians and the buffalo . . .

On a cold December day in 1799, three young lawyers from Louisville were riding west across Indiana to Vincennes. Near the White River they saw ten buffalo. That was the last time the huge animals were seen in Indiana, but they left a hard-packed path across the southern part of the state that became one of the first roads out of New Albany.

This path was called the Buffalo Trace – a clearing through the forest that extended from Clarksville to Vincennes. The Buffalo Trace had been hammered out through thousands of years by the buffalo as they traveled between the salt licks of Kentucky and the prairies of Illinois. They crossed the Ohio at a shallow point below the Falls, followed a route near the present Daisy Lane, and climbed the Knobs in the vicinity of what is now State Road 150.

Shortly after the Scribners founded New Albany, they surveyed a road from their town to connect with the Buffalo Trace. That winding route through the hills is today called Old Vincennes Road. Other roads were built as Floyd County filled up with settlers. The Budd Road connected New Albany with the area down the river, and other roads reached back like fingers from the river into the hills.

These roads were nothing more than narrow clearings cut through the woods by hand with the tree stumps left in the way. To get the roads built, the County Commissioners required everybody who lived along the route to work on it and to spend several days a year keeping it in repair after it was built.

Gradually these roads were improved so that farmers from the county could bring their produce to New Albany and take back tools and household furnishings. These early roads had one goal – to reach New Albany and the river.

Later the State of Indiana built a better road up the Knobs than the Scribners had been able to do. This road, the first paved highway in the county, is today State Road 150. In the early days it was called simply the State Road and that part of it in New Albany became State Street.

As time passed, private enterprise stepped into the picture to build privately-owned toll roads. The road to Corydon, built in the early 1850s, was one of these and the road to Paoli and Vincennes also became a toll road. The first toll gate on the Vincennes Road was at State Street and Green Valley Road. On the Corydon Pike the first toll house was at the foot of Silver Hills not far from where Corydon Pike School is now.

Other roads were built to Salem, to Charlestown, to Jeffersonville, and to other points so that by 1850 it was possible to take a carriage or wagon from New Albany to almost any point in Indiana. Stage coaches operated from New Albany in all directions. Steamboats brought merchandise to New Albany and local merchants loaded the goods into wagons to sell all over the southern part of the state.

Then, in the 1850s, the first railroads came. They were faster and cheaper than the team and wagon and before long, public interest in roads began to decline. For years the roads were used only for local travel until the automobile appeared and the roads took on a new importance. After the first World War, the new State Highway Commission took over the care of many roads in Floyd County. The Corydon Pike was the last toll free public road. Today toll roads are again in the news and New Albany will share in the benefits of a toll road that will someday link Chicago and Florida. Other roads connect New Albany to all parts of Indiana and the nation. Roads that had their beginnings in the crude clearings the pioneers made to reach the river.

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