

## GARRETT COUNTY, MARYLAND

## Portal to the West

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PHOTO BY LANCE C. BELL

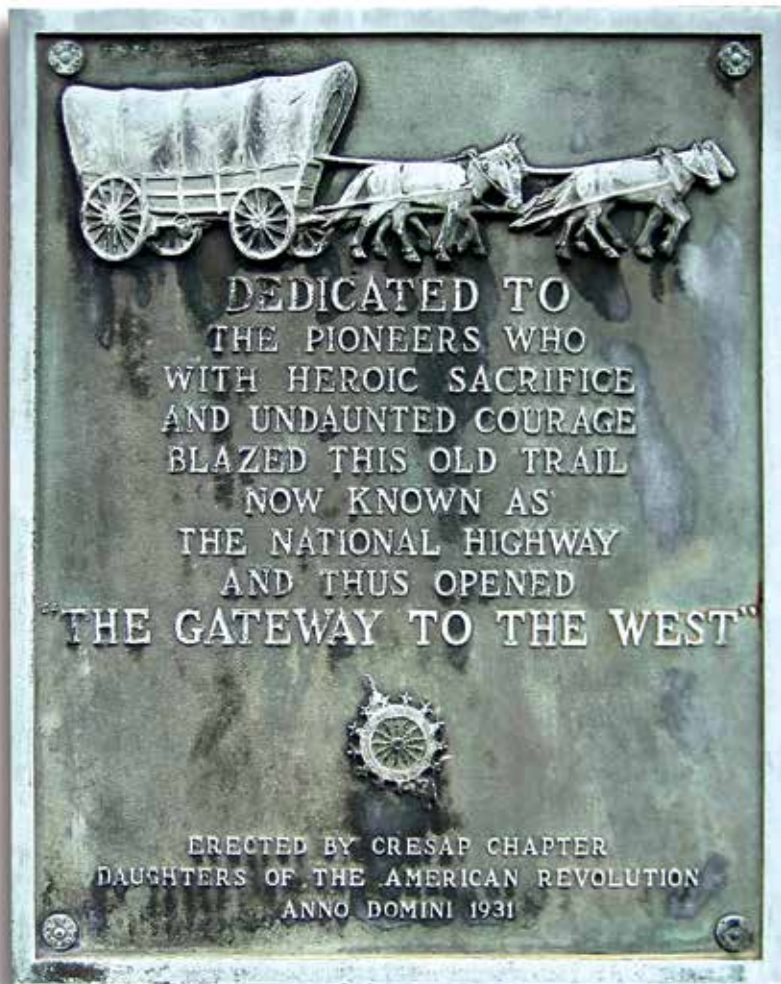
With over four million miles of roads weaving their way throughout our country, there is no end of opportunities to explore. We can enjoy the freedom to travel from city to city and state to state without hindrance. The easiest way for most of us to explore is by automobile – just hop in your car or truck and hit the road. You don't even need a map – just punch up your destination on your GPS and get step-by-step guidance to the destination of your choice.

But this has not always been the case. To better understand the importance of Garrett County, in Western Maryland to the early growth of this nation, it's important to note that there were only three main paths that provided access to the western development of the United States. (In this article we will refer to the area as Garrett County, although it did not officially become a county until 1872.) **Garrett County** with its unique geographical advantages permitted explorers, traders, and later settlers, to take advantage of the growth potential westward, and to realize the riches of the Ohio Valley territory and beyond. Two other portals existed in the eastern US; to the north was the **Kittanning Gap** through Pennsylvania, and to the south was the **Cumberland Gap** located near the point where Kentucky, Virginia and Tennessee meet.



Garrett County provided the portal that connected the central mid-Atlantic region westward. Incidentally, both Cumberland, Maryland, and the Cumberland Gap were named for William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland (1721-1765), the son of King George II.

The first trails through Garrett County were blazed by Indigenous peoples seeking to summer in the fine pastures and sumptuous glades that provided fresh food for



**This bronze plaque, dedicated by the Daughters of the American Revolution, is located along the National Road (US 40) at the LaVale Toll House.**

themselves and their herds. After them came the hunters and traders from the east to gather pelts and other desirable goods to bring back to the colonies. This awakened easterners to the existence of more land beyond the mountains than they thought possible. Soon, military trails and crude roads were built. Then came the wagon roads. Each improvement brought more settlers and more industry and jobs. Construction of a railroad brought still more movement of people and goods through this gateway to the west. The demands for transportation continued to make Garrett County the passage that was vital to growth and sustained movement of people and goods, serving as a cost-effective connection between the Mid-Atlantic and the Midwest.

The access through Garrett County continues to enable the same three key transportation corridors still in operation today: US 40, US 50, and the CSX Railroad. Construction of each is a story of growth and ingenuity that was so important to the westward expansion of our nation.

## THE NATIONAL ROAD (US 40)

Several hundred years ago, in the summertime, Indigenous peoples made a path to Garrett County to let their buffalo and other livestock graze on the tall, rich plant growth. Later, hunters and trappers began trading with the natives. In about 1750, wanting to seize on these growing trade opportunities, Christopher Gist, the well-known frontiersman, hired Thomas Cresap to work with a Delaware Indigenous chief, Nemacolin, to improve the pack mule trail between the Ohio country and Western Maryland to better the movement of trade goods to market. This trail became known as the Nemacolin Trail. Shortly after, in 1754, a young George Washington improved the trail to accommodate a force of 300 soldiers.

Two years later, General Braddock left Cumberland, MD, for what is now Pittsburgh, PA. His legions expanded the Nemacolin Trail to a 12-foot-wide crude road to march his force of about 4,200 men to a fateful battle with the French at Fort Duquesne. Braddock was severely wounded in that battle. He was carried by the retreating English army, now led by George Washington, along the same road they had come.

Along the way General Braddock succumbed to his wounds. Fearing his body would be desecrated by the pursuing French, Braddock's body was laid to rest in the middle of what would be renamed Braddock Road.

In 1806, President Thomas Jefferson authorized the improvement of Braddock Road and renamed it the Cumberland Road. This was the first federally funded road; however, a federal financial crisis in 1811 followed by the War of 1812 caused delays in the completion of the road.

Eventually, after three years of working west from Cumberland, over the Alleghenies, the construction crews arrived at Wheeling, WV. The cost was an unheard-of \$13,000 per mile (\$314,000 today). Finally, in 1818, the highway between Cumberland and Wheeling was completed. The nascent country finally had an improved highway connecting the Potomac and Ohio rivers.

In 1822, President James Monroe vetoed a bill to finance the upkeep of the road. Initially, some funding was paid by investors hoping the improved highways would raise trading profits. For a while investors placed toll gates every 20 miles to help raise funds needed for maintenance, but



they soon found that profits after expenditures did not warrant their efforts. In 1831, the federal government began transferring control of portions of the newly named National Road to the states, and by 1832 the states also began collecting tolls to fund repairs. In 1834, the National Road became the property of the states through which it passed.

For a few decades the National Road saw public and private vehicles all jostling for room on its 30-foot-wide surface. Burly teamsters guided huge wagons of goods and stagecoaches weighing a ton or more, flew by honking their horns to warn other travelers and drovers pushing pigs, sheep and cattle along the road, destined for markets. Mixed in with all of this was a continuous stream of settlers traveling steadily west in family groups or caravans of neighbors with Conestoga wagons. They were heading west to form a new nation. Today, in Maryland, this road has a length of 221 miles —



**Top: Motorists travel along the National Road (US 40) at Keyzers Ridge, west, Garrett County, MD.**

**Above: The Casselman Inn along US 40 in Grantsville, MD. Both of these photos were taken by Garrett County photographer, Leo J. Beachy, between 1905 and 1927.**

*COURTESY GARRETT COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

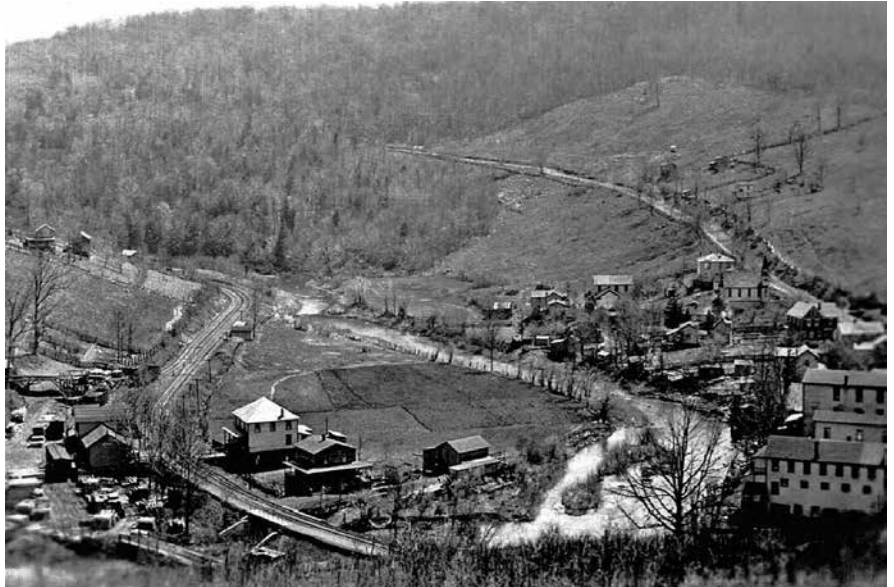
the longest numbered highway in the state. Almost half of the road overlaps or parallels with I-68 or I-70, while the old alignment is generally known as US 40 Alternate, US 40 Scenic, or Maryland Route 144. Nationally, the road now connects Atlantic City, NJ, with Silver Summit, UT, a distance of 2,200 miles.

## THE NORTHWESTERN TURNPIKE

A 16-year-old George Washington explored the South Branch Valley of the Potomac River in 1748 as he looked for a way to connect a canal to the Ohio River Valley. Others were also exploring ways to make a pathway to the west. The direction of this path slices through the southwest corner of Garrett County, going northwest from a crossing of the Potomac River near Gorman, WV, and continuing about two miles west of Red House into West Virginia.

The development of US 50 follows much the same pattern as did US 40 with subtle but significant differences. As with US 40, the beginning of US 50 was a pathway for Indigenous peoples and traders, but this path took advantage of the South Branch Valley of the Potomac River. They also used this path for trading, hunting and moving herds of buffalo so they could graze in the succulent grasses of Garrett County. In 1756, Samuel McCullough, a fur trader, made a packhorse trail that connected the South Branch Valley to the Glades (later Garrett County) by way of the Potomac's North Branch.

By 1831, the economic effects of the National Road demonstrated the value of another, more southerly route. This encouraged the Virginia legislature to establish a line of credit of \$125,000 to fund the construction of a new route "from Winchester to some point on the Ohio River to be situated by the principal engineer." It was devised and commissioned as the Northwestern Turnpike. The new 12-foot-wide road was constructed through the Appalachian Divide to the Ohio Valley, passing through nearly 9 miles of what is now Garrett County. The Northwestern Turnpike work was constructed between 1832 and 1838. By then, the cost of construction had risen to \$400,000 (more than \$13.5 million today). Improvements made to



**Overview of Gormania, WV (Grant County) and Gorman, MD (Garrett County) along the North Branch Potomac River, circa 1880.** PHOTO COURTESY JOHN MACGOWAN

the road surface and bridges continued until 1852 accommodating stage coaches to Romney from Winchester, Moorefield and Green Spring, as it provided the access westward to Parkersburg and the Ohio River.

The Federal Goods Amendment to The Federal Highway Act of 1921 consolidated 4,600 miles of country roads, including the Northwestern Turnpike, into a state highway system. By the 1940s the turnpike was renamed the George Washington Highway and later, US Route 50 as it was merged into the federal highway system.

Today, US 50 follows the same basic route of the Northwestern Turnpike. The many communities that dot the landscape along US 50 owe their existence to the commerce brought by the old Pike. Now US 50 stretches nearly 3,100 miles from Ocean City, Maryland, to West Sacramento, California.

## THE BALTIMORE AND OHIO RAILROAD

This third route through Garrett County made a significant shift from roads to rails. The first concept of a railroad was in 1812 and came to fruition in 1830 with the tracks laid for the nation's first railroad, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. That ribbon of steel became the first common carrier railroad in the United States. Merchants from the burgeoning port of Baltimore, which had already benefitted from the construction of the earlier National Road, wanted to grow trading operations using the new technology along

the same routes as developed by the previous trans-Appalachian settlers.

Due to conflicts with the construction of the C&O canal, the B&O was required to build their road across the Potomac River in Virginia (later West Virginia) at Harpers Ferry. The B&O re-entered Maryland in Bloomington and it reached Oakland, MD, in 1850 before continuing west.

During the Civil War, despite the peril, B&O president John Work Garrett supported the Union. The B&O became crucial to the North as the main rail connection between Washington, DC, through the Appalachian Mountains and on to the Ohio country. During the war, the B&O suffered nearly 150 raids for its role as a lifeline for the Union's efforts and became the deciding factor in many battles. John Garrett's leadership allowed the vital B&O to remain a viable company throughout the war.

Passenger train travel in the 1880s generally cost two to three cents per mile, when one dollar would be the equivalent of almost \$26 today. Nevertheless, tourism in the mountains grew rapidly as there was an awakening to a new type of leisure for those who could afford it. The B&O took advantage of this and encouraged building the Deer Park Hotel vacation resort in 1873.

As a result of that success, two years later the B&O built a second hotel, the Oakland Hotel. A short while later, a third seasonal community at Mountain Lake Park was developed as a Chautauqua for those seeking both education and entertainment. These ventures brought hundreds of vacationers every season with the B&O making as many as 12 stops every day. Summer guests took advantage of swift and comfortable transportation provided by the trains from major cities such as Washington, Philadelphia, Richmond, and even cities to the west, such as Cincinnati – all to escape the city heat and relax in cool comfort for the summer.

Each of these three transportation developments, US 40, US 50 and the B&O spurred the growth of a nation as it provided access from the east coast to the Ohio Valley and beyond. But all of this would not have been possible if it were not for the portal that allowed access by a growing United States through the mountains of Maryland.



**Top to bottom: The B&O was required to build their railroad across the Potomac River at Harpers Ferry, WV, due to conflicts with construction of the C&O Canal.** PHOTO COURTESY JOHN MACGOWAN

**The B&O Railroad Station at Mountain Lake Park, near Oakland, MD, circa 1900. The station is still in existence and has been home to many businesses over the years.**

PHOTO COURTESY JOHN MACGOWAN

**Chautauqua, an educational and entertainment event, brought hundreds of guests by train to the community of Mountain Lake Park, MD, each year.**

LEO J. BEACHY PHOTO, COURTESY GARRETT COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Paving the Way....



Families traveling along the National Road near Grantsville, Maryland.

LEO J. BEACHY PHOTO, COURTESY GARRETT COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Travel and roads became so important to the development of America that constant building, improvements and repairs were necessary. In Scotland, amateur engineer John Loudon McAdam was developing the first innovation in paving since Roman times. This construction method became known as “macadamisation” or, more simply, “macadam.”

McAdam’s road cross section was composed of a compacted subgrade of crushed granite or greenstone designed to support the load, covered by a surface of light stone to absorb wear and tear and a cambered layer (making the road slightly convex) which caused rainwater to rapidly drain off the road rather than penetrate and damage the road’s foundations.

The first stretch of the National Road was finished before McAdam’s paving method crossed the Atlantic, but eastern reconstruction from the 1820s forward relied on McAdam’s system.

The first macadam surface in the United States was laid on the “Boonsborough Turnpike Road” between Hagerstown and Boonsboro, Maryland. By 1822, this section was the last unimproved gap in the great road leading from Baltimore on the Chesapeake Bay to Wheeling on the Ohio River.

In 1830, the 73-mile National Pike (or Cumberland Road) became the second American road to be built on the “McAdam principle.”

With the advent of motor vehicles, dust became a serious problem on macadam roads. The area of low air pressure created under fast-moving vehicles sucked dust from the road surface, creating dust clouds and a gradual unraveling of the road material. This problem was approached by spraying tar on the surface to create tar-bound macadam. Macadam roads were the forerunners of the bitumen-based binding that was to become tarmac and the word tarmac was shortened to the now familiar tarmac.

**Garrett County's strong history of outdoor recreation, transportation and natural beauty remain the pillars of our heritage. Come see what it's all about!**

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