

Early Roads in California & Center Townships

By Elmer E. Lucas

I have always been very much interested in the way our pioneer ancestors developed our raw country and then turned it over to us to further build it up and hand over to our descendents.

I was given a booklet that was prepared for the North Judson Centennial and in it was a map of the county dated 1876, giving the location of the schools, cemeteries, lakes, creeks, towns and other items pertaining to maps. The road interested me most as I have lived long enough to remember many of the roads as trails along the high places.

One of these roads was called the Winamac Road in the south part of the county. One road came from the north and apparently got to Knox in a round about way hitting the high places. Another went west and finally wound up at North Judson and San Pierre and one part went over into LaPorte County below English Lake which was a huge body of water in the old days. These roads intersected on my son's farm in Section 34 of California Township on a ridge. This ridge is still called Trotting Ridge as travelers could troy their horses while on it. This ridge took travelers to Pigeon Roost Hill so named because of the many wild pigeons that once roosted in the trees. From there the ground was high enough to make a road to Paddy Hills south of Beardstown on our present U.S. 35 and then there was a pretty good road to Winamac. Winamac was a town a number of years before Starke County was organized so the early settlers had to go there to get their supplies and sell their produce so this road was important. I have heard many of the old timers tell of trips to Winamac with some wheat, corn and buck wheat so they could bring back to their Ma their ingredients for the meals to come for many months. I can remember the buck wheat cakes for breakfast every morning in the winter and the kettle with the makings on the back of the stove. What was put on them was butter, with honey or sorghum.

These old roads followed closely the trails the Indians made between the Tippecanoe and the Kankakee and Yellow Rivers.

We lived when I was a boy south of Knox two miles on what is now U.S. 35 at the jog in the road. There were no roads east or west and a very poor one south. That country was very swampy. The people of central California Township had a road coming across the woods starting at the Hammerlund Farm, traveling to our corner and then into Knox. We kids liked to watch the people go by and as old timers they were very glad to see anybody along the way and they would wave at us.

The other road which many traveled was about one half mile north of us and was the road people from Bass Lake came to Knox on. The part I remember best started through the woods about one half mile east of the Chrysler Garage. It went angling north-west through the woods and came out on the road where U.S. 35 is about where the Bowling Alley is. The road was high enough and dry then into Knox. How the people of Bass Lake got to this road I do not know but they must have used corduroy roads through the swamps west and north of the lake or go miles around.

One of my remembrances of this road was that a band of gypsies camped along the road in the middle of the woods for the most of the winter. There people were Nomads from some European country and had no home in this country and would live off and wander over the country. We children were very much afraid of them.

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