

# Ste. Genevieve County's Historic Highways

Robert J. Mueller, April 2020

Before the Louisiana Purchase, travel in what is now Missouri was difficult and often time consuming. The Mississippi River and local streams provided the major means of transportation for the initial settlements in Ste. Genevieve, St. Louis, Cape Girardeau, and New Madrid. Pirogues, bateaux, and canoes paddled or poled by humans transported both people and goods. A two wheeled carte made entirely of wood was used within the confines of the villages and the surrounding agricultural lands. These vehicles known as charettes were pulled by oxen or horses. For most people, travel was accomplished by foot or horseback usually along traditional Native American trails.

The Ste. Genevieve District's **Three-Notch Road** from Ste. Genevieve on the banks of the Mississippi 14 leagues distant to rich lead mining area of Mine La Motte has been called the first road in Missouri.<sup>1</sup> Early explorers searched the area for precious metals such as silver but in the end found rich deposits of lead. The Jesuit Father Jacques Gravier noted a discovery of lead on what he called the River Miaramigoua (Meramec). In 1715, Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac, the governor of Louisiana, followed the Saline Creek up to near present-day Fredericktown where he found lead and subsequently left his name for the area. As Ste. Genevieve began to grow, its inhabitants seasonally ventured to that area to either mine lead for themselves or as engages (workers hired for part of the profits). The lead was transported from the crudely smelted and transported along what became known as the Three Notch Road to Ste. Genevieve for trans-shipment down to New Orleans and other places. Real currency being scarce, lead along with salt, furs, and grain became the currency for trade.

Portions of this historic first Missouri road still exist and one can travel the basic route from 250 years ago Ste. Genevieve along Missouri M, N, NN, PCR 840/843, Holmes Road, Missouri T, Old Jackson road,

Rock Creek Road to Mine la Motte.<sup>2</sup> One of the sites along the way is the Old Burnt Mill, a flour mill that was destroyed by fire before the Civil War.<sup>3</sup>

**The King's Highway** or sometimes called in Spanish, El Camino Real, was the next major road to be completed in Ste. Genevieve County. Initially constructed in 1779, this road started in St. Louis and only went as far as Ste. Genevieve. On July 13, 1779, Lt. Governor Fernando de Leyba wrote:

“A road has been constructed from this town to Ste. Genevieve, from which will result to the district under my command the following benefits: to be able to help that town with the new calvary company if necessary; to have communication with it all the year round. This formerly was lacking during the winter, as the great mass of ice which comes down the river (when it is not entirely frozen over), prevents not only navigation from this town to that one, but also crossing to Cao (sic Cahokia)”.<sup>4</sup>

In the beginning, this road was not much more than a path as evidenced when in May 1780, de Leyba asked Ste. Genevieve's Commandant Silvio de Cartabona and Capitaine de Milice François Vallé pere to come immediately to St. Louis. He asked also to have them send 60 militia men, supplies, and cannon by boat as quickly as possible to defend St. Louis from an anticipated British attack. It must have been quicker to transport themselves by boat rather than trying to move so many men and their supplies along the newly constructed “road”.<sup>5</sup>

Later during the colonial period, the King's Road was extended to Cape Girardeau and eventually New Madrid.<sup>6</sup> In 1808, the territorial legislature made this the first public road in Missouri.<sup>7</sup> In 1917, the Daughters of the American Revolution placed granite markers at several locations along the route including Kimmswick, Ste. Genevieve, Perryville, Cape Girardeau, Sikeston, Benton, Lone Rock Road, New Madrid and Caruthersville.<sup>8</sup> In Ste. Genevieve, the Missouri red granite monument was initially placed along the old road at the Chas. Trautman farm.<sup>9</sup> The monument was later moved to the curb on south side of the courthouse.<sup>10</sup> The inscription on the Ste. Genevieve monument reads:

El Camino Real

New Madrid

Cape Girardeau

Ste. Genevieve

St. Louis

Erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution

A.D. 1917<sup>11</sup>

In 1918, the street in front of the monument was renamed King's Highway. It was evidently reversed a short time later as were other attempts by the City Council to rename the downtown streets.<sup>12</sup> In 1934, the monument was moved back a few feet due to the widening of 3<sup>rd</sup> St. where it remains today.<sup>13</sup>

In 1918, the King's Road was designated the Ste. Genevieve and Jefferson County State Road and Military Road.<sup>14</sup> After the State took over management of the road, it was renamed Highway 25.<sup>15</sup> The road was hard-coated and the final stretch was opened on July 15, 1941.<sup>16</sup> It was dedicated as Highway 61 on January 1, 1954.<sup>17</sup> The Hill and Dale Garden Club installed Blue Star Memorial Highway markers at the northbound rest area in 2006, the corner of Market and Highway 61 in April 2008, and at the southbound rest area in 2009.<sup>18</sup>

The route of the old King's Highway generally follows present day Highway 61 south of Festus but came into Ste. Genevieve via the Creek Road on the North Gabouri Creek. South of Ste. Genevieve, it generally followed present day Highway 61.<sup>19</sup> Visitors can travel one of the least modified sections of the King's Road from Lahaye street in Ste. Genevieve west along the Creek Road to its Junction with the Industrial River Road near Highway 61.

The third historic highway in Ste. Genevieve County is the **Ste. Genevieve, Iron Mountain, and Pilot Knob Plank Road**. On January 24, 1843, the Missouri legislature passed an act to incorporate the American Iron Mountain Company. The purpose of the company was to exploit the rich iron deposits

located at Iron Mountain west of Farmington, MO. Key members of the company were Conrad Ziegler, Pierre Choteau, James Harrison, and Lewis V. Bogy. Transportation of the iron ore, pig iron, and forged iron from Iron Mountain to the shipping point at Ste. Genevieve was difficult and expensive.

In February 1851, the Legislature authorized the construction of roads constructed of wooden planks. The act provided that plank road companies could hold real estate for the road and for tollhouse, provided for the condemnation of ground, authorized the taking of timber and stone, the ability to subscribe for stock and issue bonds and such stocks were exempt from taxation as long as it permitted all soldiers, ammunition, cannon balls, railroad iron, and granite for the State to pass free of toll. The Ste. Genevieve, Iron Mountain, and Pilot Knob Plank Road was authorized on February 7, 1851 and amended in 1852.<sup>20</sup> It was not the only plank road authorized that year as others in St. Mary, Glasgow and Huntsville, Richmond and Lafayette Counties, St. Louis Central, Fayette and Glasgow, Fulton and St. Aubert, Cape Girardeau, and New Madrid and Stoddard. Forty-nine plank roads were eventually chartered in Missouri but only seventeen were built.<sup>21</sup> The Ste. Genevieve, Iron Mountain, and Pilot Knob Plank Road at forty-two miles was the longest in the state.

The City of Ste. Genevieve authorized the issuance of bonds up to \$10,000 at an 10% annual dividend rate to help pay for the road. Construction began under the guidance of William R. Singleton.<sup>22</sup> The road from Ste. Genevieve to Iron Mountain was completed in 1853. The new road's popularity was celebrated in music when Emily G Berryman composed "The Ste. Genevieve and Iron Mountain Plank Road Quick Step".<sup>23</sup> Limestone mile markers were placed along the route<sup>24</sup>. Five toll booths were used to collect fees for using the road. One such booth existed near 10<sup>th</sup> Street in Ste. Genevieve. Another existed in Ste. Genevieve County along the route.<sup>25</sup> Forges operated at Pilot Knob, Iron Mountain, and Valley Forge (just east of Farmington) to refine the pig iron from Iron Mountain facilities.<sup>26</sup>

A contemporary article published in an 1854 Putnam Monthly described travel along the road:

“The thought that our whole day’s journey of forty-three miles must be accomplished on an excellent plank road, surveyed and laid out by my old college friend, Singleton. A few miles of travel convinced us that report had not belied the road. ... The planks were four inches thick – the grades all easy, though the natural country was abominably hilly and broken – its culverts, bridges, etc. were all of the best material and workmanship.

In the first twenty miles, we met more than 50 teams loaded with pig and bloom iron, after which ceased to contact them, though they continued as abundant to the end of our journey. The wagons are generally drawn by four or six mules, though sometimes by oxen, and they haul an average of 1000lbs to each mule. The wagoners are allowed twenty cents per hundred for hauling to Ste. Genevieve, and they accomplish the journey there and back in three days.”<sup>27</sup>

The lack of economic viability soon became apparent and the planned section of the road between Iron Mountain and Pilot Knob was never constructed. The road continued operation until its demise in 1859 due to high maintenance costs unsupported by toll revenues and more importantly, by the completion of the St. Louis and Iron Mountain Railroad.<sup>28</sup> This railroad provided cheaper transportation costs and made the iron materials available to St. Louis industrial firms. Its demise was not without controversy as the City of Ste. Genevieve refused to pay the promised bond interest and was taken to court in the landmark case, Welch versus the City of Ste. Genevieve. The case was settled in favor of the bond holders and a special tax was instituted to pay for the interest.<sup>29</sup>

Road companies were later formed for both the Ste. Genevieve and St. Francois county portions of the road continued to be used for local people and farm product movement.<sup>30</sup> During the Civil War, it was used for troop movements from Fort Davidson to the steamboat landings at Ste. Genevieve.

<sup>31</sup>Eventually, road ownership and maintenance were taken over by the respective counties. In the early 1920’s with the advent of the Missouri State Road Commission, the route became the responsibility of

the State and was initially called Highway 68. The portion of the road between Farmington and Ste. Genevieve was re-named Highway 32 circa 1927.<sup>32</sup>

When initially constructed, the Plank Road did not go directly into Ste. Genevieve but angled off present day Highway 32 to Zell Station near the junction of State Road A and County's Lime Kiln Road.<sup>33</sup> The Plank Road then continued on the Lime Kiln Road through the middle of Mississippi Lime Company to Ste. Genevieve's Market Street terminating at landings on the Mississippi. The route through Mississippi Lime Company was abandoned in the late 1960's and a new section of road was constructed to connect to Highway 61. Once entering the town, the road followed Market Street east to its terminus at nearby landings on the Mississippi.

The section of Lime Kiln Road between Ponderosa and ending at its junction with Highway A is one of the most beautiful sections remaining on the Plank Road. Signs identifying that section as part of the original Plank Road were placed by Ste. Genevieve County Road District A and the Foundation for Restoration of Ste. Genevieve in 2017.<sup>34</sup>

The Three Notch Road, El Camino Real, and the Plank Road, are lasting legacies of the time before Missouri became a State and of a later period when Missouri was industrializing its mineral wealth. Visitors can still experience these roads of the past in and around Ste. Genevieve County. Sometimes they are hidden under modern concrete roadbeds but in a few places, the visitor can visualize a simpler time as they travel the country lanes or graveled roads that made up these historic highways.

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, Ida, *Missouri Historical Review*, Vol. 29, Issue 2, January, 1935, The First Roads West of the Mississippi, 92-94.

<sup>2</sup> *Southeast Missourian*, February 15, 2010, <https://www.semissourian.com/blogs/pavementends/entry/33176>, accessed April 18, 2020; *Park Hills (MO) Daily Journal*, May 9, 2010, Missouri's First Road led to Madison County; Note: all of these roads are located in the original Ste. Genevieve County, established Oct 1, 1808. Douglass, Robert, *History of Southeast Missouri*, 167, Madison was formed from parts of Ste. Genevieve and Cape Girardeau

---

counties on December 14, 1818: *ibid*, 169, 1818 and Perry County was formed from Ste. Genevieve County on November 16, 1820.

<sup>3</sup> Ste. Genevieve Herald, Bicentennial Edition, August 17, 1935, Renault page.

<sup>4</sup> Fernando de Leyba, Lt. Governor in St. Louis to Don Bernardo de Galvez, July 13, 1779, Kinnard, Spain in the Mississippi Valley.

<sup>5</sup> Leyba to Vallé, May 9, 1780, AGI, Cuba, leg. 193B, fol. 671

<sup>6</sup> Goodspeed's History of Southeast Missouri, 1888, 301; Houck, Louis, History of Missouri, Volume II, 150.

<sup>7</sup> Laws of a Public and General Nature of the District of Louisiana, of the Territory of Louisiana, of the Territory of Missouri, and of the State of Missouri up to the year 1824, Vol. 1, 188-189.

<sup>8</sup> Missouri Historical Review, vol. 20, Issue 3, April 1926, 383-384.

<sup>9</sup> Ste. Genevieve Herald November 10, 1917.

<sup>10</sup> Ste. Genevieve Fair Play, December 1, 1917.

<sup>11</sup> Ste. Genevieve Fair Play, November 17, 1917.

<sup>12</sup> Ste. Genevieve Fair Play, February 16, 1918; Ste. Genevieve Herald March 16, 1918.

<sup>13</sup> Ste. Genevieve Herald, October 26, 1934.

<sup>14</sup> Ste. Genevieve Fair Play, March 9, 1918.

<sup>15</sup> Missouri Department of Transportation, Missouri Map Archive 1918 -2019, <https://www.modot.org/missouri-highway-map-archive-1918-2019>, 1926 statewide map, accessed April 20, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Ste. Genevieve Herald, July 19, 1941.

<sup>17</sup> Ste. Genevieve Herald, January 7, 1954.

<sup>18</sup> Ste. Genevieve Herald, October 25, 2006; Ste. Genevieve Herald July 19, 2006; Ste. Genevieve Herald, October 21, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> State Historical Society of Missouri, Map of King's Highway, 1913; Ste. Genevieve County Clerk's Office, Map of King's Highway, 1917.

<sup>20</sup> Laws of the State of Missouri Passed at the Frist Session of the Seventeenth General Assembly, Jefferson City, MO, 1858, 23-24.

<sup>21</sup> Missouri Secretary of State, <https://bsd.sos.mo.gov>, Business Entity Search, analysis by author.

<sup>22</sup> Tarver, M. and Cobb, H, The Western Journal and Civilian, 1852, Vol. #3. 136-146.

<sup>23</sup> State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia Research Center, sheet music for the Ste. Genevieve and Iron Mountain Plank Road Quick Step, Call # Music F1s.

<sup>24</sup> Ste. Genevieve Fair Play, June 11, 1932, Report of the Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>25</sup> Tarver, M. and Cobb, H, The Western Journal and Civilian, Vol. 10, April 1853, 425.

<sup>26</sup> Lesley, J. Peter, The Iron Manufacturers Gide to the Furnaces, Forges, and Rolling Mills of the United States, 1859, 138, 217; Tenney, William J., The Mining Magazine, Vol. 5, 1855, 96-99; Missouri Historical Review, Vol. 36, Issue 1, October 1941, 48-51.

<sup>27</sup> Putnam Monthly Volume 3, 1854, Visit to the Iron Mountains of Missouri, 298-302.

<sup>28</sup> Missouri Historical Review, Vol. 36, Issue 2, 1936, 217; Missouri Historical Review, Vol. 49, Issue 2, 1955, 168

<sup>29</sup> Dillon, John F., Cases Determined in the United States Circuit Courts for the Eighth Circuit, Vol. 1, 1871, 130-139

<sup>30</sup> Laws of Missouri Passed at the Twentieth General Assembly, Jefferson City, MO, 1860, 253-254, January 10, 1860, An Act in relation to the Ste. Genevieve, Iron Mountain and Plank Road Company, approved February 7, 1851.

<sup>31</sup> Scherneckau, August, Marching with the Third Nebraska, 86, 91-94; Standiford, Aquilla, Civil War Diary 1862-1865, State Historical Society of Missouri R0458 Collection; Ste. Genevieve Herald, April 10, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Missouri Department of Transportation, Missouri Map Archive 1918 -2019, <https://www.modot.org/missouri-highway-map-archive-1918-2019>, accessed April 20, 2020, comparison of statewide maps for 1926 and 1927.

<sup>33</sup> Missouri Historical Topographic Maps – Perry Castañeda Map Collection, University of Texas, Weingarten, 1907: *ibid*, see Farmington 1904 map for portions of the Plank Road in St. Francois County.

<sup>34</sup> Ste. Genevieve Herald, September 4, 2019, New Signs Mark Historic Plank Road.