

## Historic Agricultural Communities - South Tour

The southern part of the county obtains an abundance of farmland and lush pastures. Full of history and folklore, the south route will take you through mill sites and areas with interesting origins. With curving roads and wildlife, you won't find yourself bored on this drive as you follow our primitive side roads to each stop. Enjoy your drive, don't be in a hurry, and keep your eyes peeled, because you never know what you will see along your way as you reminisce of simpler times.

For this tour, you will be following the Red Route (red arrow signs are up) for the most part. We have provided for you turn-by-turn directions along with some history of the areas you will see along the way.

- Leave north side of Depot parking lot, turn left onto Ohio Street (US 36). At next street, turn left on Erie Street. At the stop sign, continue slightly left onto Bridgeton Rd.
  - Right after you turn onto the Bridgeton Road, you will go under the overpass of the Pennsylvania Railroad. The railroad is no longer active and Parke County, Inc. has purchased the depot and made it into a tourist information center.
- The first covered bridge will not be able to be seen due to such a small and narrow road, a bus will not fit. This is #12 Crooks Covered Bridge.
  - The history about this bridge is a little wishy-washy. So, here are a couple of options that we think may be the case with this bridge. Crooks Bridge, like many others, was originally associated with a mill. Parkers Mill was built in 1830 on a Little Raccoon ripple known as "Indian Crossing". It was located about a half mile south of the Little Raccoon Bridge on the Rockville New Discovery Road. The mill account states a covered bridge was constructed just upstream from the ripple and dam.
  - There are several historical conflicts which could be resolved by a clear separation into two or three different original bridges. In any case, the name "Lost Bridge" is appropriate. The bridge stood, forgotten, over a dry stream bed on a road abandoned for lack of a bridge over the new creek bed. It was moved to a new location where no road yet existed. One account states that the bridge was rebuilt and moved to the present location in 1872 by General Arthur Patterson. A second account states that the bridge was washed to the present location in a flood. It was jacked up and abutments built beneath it. The road was moved to connect with it. Juliet Snowden seems to have confused this bridge with the Greencastle Road Bridge, However, in another account she wrote that the bridge was built by General Arthur Patterson in 1856. General Patterson was one of the founders of Rockville in 1824. He owned land and businesses throughout the county, and she believed this bridge opened the road to commerce between Rockville and Mansfield.
  - In 1863, J.J.Daniels was contracted to dismantle the bridge on the Greencastle Road. In 1865, a viewing committee, which included J.J.Daniels, recommended the bridge be restored. Various people requested that it be relocated near their homes. In 1867,

J.J.Daniels recommended that it be rebuilt at Darroch's site where he considered it safe from flood and there were no "bayous". No roads were built to the bridge for several years. One story relates a wet trip by a cold I.R. Strouse, on a horse named Alice, searching for a crossing of the rain flooded Little Raccoon in 1875. He was directed through a confusing maze of connecting horse trails, finally crossing "Darroch's Lost Bridge".

- **The second covered bridge you will be able to see from a distance, it is #11 McAllister Covered Bridge located on County Road 400S (Gravel).**
  - James D. McAllister, born in 1854, owned the large Fairview Hill Farm near the McAllister Bridge. It is possible to see Neet, McAllister, and Crooks covered bridges at the same time in winter. From a bird's eye view, Nevins could also be seen. This bridge was built during the height of J.A. Button's bridge building career. His sons were providing the bulk of the labor. He was 77 the year McAllister covered bridge was completed. The bridge has a galvanized steel roof. It has several noticeable repairs reinforced by steel. The abutments are wider than the ends of the bridge which are instead supported with reverse kingposts. The portal credits include J.M. May, J.L. Linebarger, W.M. Mottern, Commissioners, J. Elder, Auditor, J.H. Rush, Treasurer, H. L. Davies, Engineer, J.A. Britton, Builder, 1914.
- **Continue on Bridgeton Road to the next covered bridge, #10 Neet Bridge on the left.**
  - Also known as "Dietrich Bridge". The Neet Bridge was the last covered bridge contracted by J.J.Daniels. He was 78. (He may have been the builder of the Roseville Bridge in 1910, contracted by J.P. Van Fossen. The bridge was named, for nearby landowners. Enoch Shrigley referred to it as the Joe Neet Bridge. Joseph W. Neet, born in 1862, owned the 176 acres of section 33 in Adams Township. His son was Parke Neet. George M. Neet, born in 1869, rented 20 acres north of the Bridge. Later, Robert E. Detrich owned part of the section at the bridge through 1959. By 1990 he owned 40 acres a little further from the bridge, although the property is marked as Detrich Tree Farm. The Central Indiana Railroad route through Bridgeton to a junction east of Rockville passed the Neet Bridge. The elevated railroad bed crossed the Bridgeton Road just north of the bridge. The railroad bridge across Little Raccoon Creek was just upstream from the Neet Bridge and was visible from it in Fall and Winter. Stencils and a note card in the bridge state that the bridge was repainted March 25,1989, by Rockville Boy Scout Troop 469. The note says four gallons of paint was required and the painters included Ted Gahimer, Bruce Girdler, Matt Garrett, and Shawn Taylor. The portal credits include H. Grode, Engineer, A. Pickett, J.J Daniels Builder, 1904, load limit 8 tons.
- **Stay on Bridgeton Road and you will come into Bridgeton and see #8 Bridgeton Bridge.**
  - The first settlers came to the Bridgeton area around 1821. A log mill was built on the bank of Big Raccoon in 1823 and the principle function of this mill was to crack corn. A distillery was built and whiskey became the "cash crop". Soon the little town that sprang up around the mill was known as "Sodom" because of the general wickedness of the place. The mill burned and the distillery was abandon. The little town took the name of Bridgeton in honor of the first bridge that was built there.
  - The Bridgeton Bridge was burned by arson in 2005, and the bridge that you see now was built in 2006. This is a double span bridge that was originally built in 1868 by J.J. Daniels. It is 248 feet long. In 1967 to make it easier for the farmers to move their equipment through Bridgeton, the bridge was bypassed. It is safe to walk across and inspect.

- **On the south side of the Bridgeton Covered Bridge, you will find the Bridgeton Grist Mill.**
  - The present mill was built in 1868. This is the oldest grist mill west of the Alleghenys that has been in continuous operation. It was originally equipped with two turbine wheels. It is now electrically operated and grinds whole wheat and rye flours and corn meal.
  - There is a historical marker at the north end of the covered bridge that marks the location of the Ten O’Clock Line. This line was an imaginary boundary line for three million acres of choice land in west central Indiana that the Indians deeded to the white man in 1809 at Fort Wayne. The boundary line extended from the mouth of Big Raccoon to the White River on the line made by the sun at 10:00 in the morning, thus the name, “The Ten O’Clock Line”. General William Henry Harrison, then Governor of the Indiana Territory, was in charge of the negotiations. The treaty was first signed by the Miamis, the Potawatomis and the Delawares. A month later the Weas confirmed the treaty and in December of 1809 the Kickapoos consented. That left only the Shawnae to ratify the treaty. Tecumseh and his brother, the Prophet, were the military and religious leaders of the Shawnee and they were opposed to settlement by the white man in these choice lands. Tecumseh traveled through Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, and Kentucky to enlist the Indians in a grand conspiracy to drive the white man back across the Alleghenies. The Prophet, meanwhile, united the Indians that opposed the treaty at Prophetstown and attempted to muster them into a fighting force. The plan might have succeeded. The downfall of the Indian scheme was the vanity of the Prophet. The Prophet assured the Indians that as long as they were under the protection of his great magic the white man’s bullets could not harm them. The Indians were unprepared when General Harrison attacked Prophetstown and Harrison enjoyed an easy victory. Later, the Prophet declared that his squaw had handled his magic charms and destroyed their potency.
- **Continue the Red Route through Bridgeton. Turn right on High Banks Road. Turn right on Rosedale Road. As you are coming into Rosedale, you will see #16 Thorpe Ford Bridge. This bridge is not on the marked route, but you can find it by turning onto Cemetery Street in Rosedale. Staying on Cemetery Street, it becomes Catlin Road. Proceed to the bridge.**
  - The area of nearby Rosedale was first settled by John M. Doty in 1811 on an 160 acre land grant. During the War of 1812 and the Tecumseh Indian Expedition he served in Ohio, Ft. Harrison, and Vincennes, returning in 1814. From his first two story log house he expanded his farm to 1280 acres. The town was called Dotyville until after John Doty’s death. Chauncey Rose paid for the cost of incorporation in exchange for changing the name to Rosedale. Rosedale was not thought of as a significant town until 1860 when the E&C Railroad was built. Later, coal mines opened and a second railroad was built through town. Willis Beauchamp was the first merchant. Other communities in the area included Daisyville, east of the B&O Railroad, and Blocks, a Martin Coal Company owned town, west of the Vandalia Railroad. The Thorpe Ford Bridge was named for the earlier ford and the Thorpe family. In 1920, Mrs. Sarah E. Thorpe owned 92 acres next to the bridge. In 1948, her son Dan Thorpe lived near the bridge. Early Parke County road maps show that the Thorpe Ford area is a location where the Big Raccoon Creek bed is still in motion. They show two crossings, two roads, and a road intersection about where the bridge is now. The creek bed has moved as much as 1/4 mile from the west during the last 100 years. Previously, the present road continued north to connect to the Greencastle Road which also crossed Big Raccoon before continuing to Coxville. The intersecting road, now gone, continued up the steep hill as a straight line extension of the Snow Road. Thorpe Ford was

probably the north creek crossing rather than the south crossing now near the creek bend and intersection with the Rosedale drainage ditch. The building of the bridge is attributed to County Commissioner J.M. May. Soon after his election he attempted to travel from Rosedale to Rockville. Rather than traveling thru Coxville he obtained directions for a shorter route. After following the convoluted directions and periods of being lost, he promised a new bridge would be built. After the construction of the Thorpe Ford Bridge in 1912, it was located on the major route from Terre Haute to Crawfordsville, It was called the Ben Hur highway. General Lew Wallace was a famous Crawfordsville resident and the author of the novel Ben Hur. Through the years, many have remarked on the modern day "chariot races" being conducted along this road. Many elephants and other circus animals crossed here on the way to winter camp at Peru, Indiana. Some residents remember this road as little more than a dirt path. The WPA constructed a concrete pavement in the 1930's. Most traffic was diverted to Highway 41 after its construction in the 1920's. Heavy agricultural traffic continued on the road. When the bridge was condemned and bypassed, it was due to the continued heavy loads using the route and the availability of federal funds to maintain roads meeting upgraded standards.

- **To continue the red route, turn around and return on Cemetery Street to the stop sign. Turn right to continue the route. Continue through Rosedale following the red arrow signs. You will see #18 Roseville Bridge on the right.**
  - After the 1865 Roseville Bridge was burned in 1910, the Parke County Commissioners advertised to replace it with a concrete bridge. Apparently, the cost of a concrete bridge was prohibitive since it was replaced by the present covered bridge. (This seems like a good choice since the concrete bridge replacing the downstream Armiesburg Covered Bridge in 1917 collapsed in 1930 while the Roseville Bridge still stands.) Jefferson P. Van Fossen received the contract to build the replacement bridge. The brothers J. P. and J. L. Van Fossen were associated with the county road department and were involved in constructing four or more Parke County covered bridges and foundations. J. P. Van Fossen was contracted the same year to build the Jessup Bridge. Witnesses from the construction site claim the on-site foreman was Joseph J. Daniels. J.J. Daniels built the 1865 covered bridge. He was 84 at the time the 1910 bridge was built.
  - A photograph of the nearly finished bridge shows the portal lettering. It credits J.P. Van Fossen Contractor, J. Brooks Builder. J.J. Daniels does not appear in the photo. The onsite witnesses didn't remember Mr. Brooks, and later portal lettering photographs show J.J. Daniels listed as builder. The same photograph shows the sides of the bridge painted white rather than the now familiar barn red. The portal opening is the familiar "Daniels Arch". Through the years photographs and postcards show the bridge painted red and brown. The portals have been red, brown, white, and knocked away. The transition from the J.J. Daniels arch to the present portal may have been assisted by the engraved sign boards being mounted too low, leading to the flattened arch on the latest repairs. Another picture shows the first stone for the 1910 bridge loaded on a horse drawn wagon. Most covered bridges built after 1900 had poured concrete abutments. The new abutments were needed for a new bridge of a different length. Stone abutments are consistent with J.J. Daniels construction while the Van Fossens used poured concrete on their other bridges.
  - Doc Wheat practiced near the west bridge portal. He was a herbalist with a reputation of producing cures still unavailable to modern medicine. One of his eccentricities was his distrust of banks. After his death, his yard and house was riddled by treasure hunters searching for his Mason jars full of money.

- By the 1950's there were only a few homes left in Coxville and only one business, the Coxville Tavern. The tavern occupied a small log room with a stone fireplace and resembled a scene from the Snuffy Smith Comic Strip. Then Tex Terry retired from his acting career as a western villain. (He appeared in numerous movies with Roy Rogers and others.) His first retirement venture back home in Indiana was development of Mansfield.
- **Continue following the red arrow signs, you will continue on Coxville Road, cross US 41, and continue to #21 Mecca Bridge.**
  - The name Mecca was originally attributed to the city in Saudi Arabia that is a center to the Moslem faith. There are two stories about how Mecca, Indiana got its name. An immigration of Syrian Moslems led to a settlement among the white sands and clay banks of the Big Raccoon. The settlement became known as Little Arabia or Arabia. The Arabian Church and the Arabian Cemetery were located on top of the hill, south of the Philips or Arabian Covered Bridge. In a second story, "Arabians" was a name for second class citizens thought of as scoundrels and cattle thieves. In either case the Arabians made trips to the larger town with a mill and stores that became known as pilgrimages. The name came from the expression, "There goes another caravan of Arabs on their way to Mecca!"
  - Earlier, the town was called Maidstone. Alexander McCune and Samuel Lowery built a sawmill on Big Raccoon in 1832. In 1833 they built a carding mill and in 1834 they added machinery for fulling cloth. Jephtha Van Vickler built a sawmill in 1835. McCune and Lowery built flatboats and packed pork for shipment to New Orleans. In 1855 they built a flour mill in the area that became known as Old Mecca. Other owners included Frank L. Batman in 1860, George Batman in 1874, and John S. Hardin in 1897 when the equipment was sold and the building converted to storage. When bids for the Mecca Bridge were opened, they included William Blackledge, \$8,000; James Moyers, \$7,800; and J.J. Daniels, \$7,650. J.J. Daniels was awarded the contract. From 1877 through 1879 a new gravel road was constructed between Rockville and Mecca. This increased traffic across the covered bridge. Today, US 41 uses most of the same route from Rockville to the church at Bradfield Corner. The road building reduced the building of other bridges during this time period to one.
  - New Mecca was built a half mile on the other side of the bridge. The Indiana Coal Railroad was built along the Big Raccoon Valley. West Mecca was started at the train station. The W.E. Dee Company operated two clay plants, started in 1895 and 1904, concurrently with the operation of the Indiana Sewer Pipe Company on the east side of Mecca. Nearly 300 were employed in these plants. A grain elevator and a steam powered sawmill were other businesses. The town population was around two thousand in 1900, a thousand in 1927, and 400 now. There were two hotels, two bakeries, a bank, a pool hall, a blacksmith shop, coal mines, a hardware store, a newspaper, four churches, etc. The Mecca Historical Society bought, moved, and restored a schoolhouse near the west end of the bridge. At Christmas, the bridge and schoolhouse are decorated. Christmas caroling is held in the bridge. A sunrise service is held in the bridge on Easter. The bridge survived the floods of 1875, 1913, 1957, and 1990. The water rose above the floor in July 1957 and 1990. In another flood, two families waited it out inside the bridge, confident in J.J. Daniel's construction.
- **This is the last bridge on the route and the remaining signs will bring you to US 41. Turn left and continue back to Rockville.**

**Thank you for taking our tour through Southern Parke County!**