

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #27

(Historical items from the "Madison Bouckville Antique Week" region)

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The Madison-Bouckville area has been rich in history from the arrival of the first settlers to the present day. As an addition to the website, we have decided to share some of that history in order that the patrons who travel to the Madison-Bouckville Show will have a better understanding of our truly unique region.

Things Seen Along The Turnpike Part 3

We continue with more events that were seen along the turnpike over the years. It is hard to believe that so many wonderful and unusual events have occurred in such a short stretch of highway.

KNIGHTS OF PYTHIAS PARADES – A lodge of the Knights of Pythias was headquartered in Madison. Their meeting place was the former Congregational Church on South Street. It is now the home of Taylor's Auction Service. The Madison Lodge was formed in 1893 and continued into the 1920's.

The Knights of Pythias organization was founded in 1864 by Justis Rathbone when he was stationed in Washington, D.C. during the Civil War and saw the ravages that war had brought. His idea was to form a group that would be based on "Friendship, Charity, and Benevolence." The group name was based on the Greek story of Damon and Pythias, two friends that would lay down their life for each other.

The Madison Lodge featured a general membership, plus a drill team that competed across the state, a band, and an equestrian group.

For special occasions in the village or in preparation for contests in other parts of the state, parades were held down the main street of Madison. The children loved to see the horses and the precision of the marching group.

FUNERAL OF SAMUEL TAYLOR – Samuel Taylor was born in Bouckville and as an adult became one of the first State Game Wardens. While on patrol in April of 1914 near Rome with another game warden, John Willis, Taylor heard shots and investigated their origin. Two individuals were shooting robins with a shotgun. When confronted by Taylor, one of men turned and discharged both barrels of his shotgun. Officer Willis managed to get Taylor to a hospital, but he died of his wounds.

Samuel Taylor was a respected member of the Knights of Pythias and as such funeral services were arranged at both the Knights Lodge and at the Bouckville Church. Following the service at the lodge, the members of the group solemnly marched with the casket down the turnpike to Bouckville. For onlookers it was a never to be forgotten scene.

TANK ON TOUR – In July of 1919 a military tank passed through Bouckville on its way to Morrisville. The tank was on tour across the country to promote the Victory Liberty Loan. While passing over the bridge that spans the Chenango Canal, several planks and stringers of the bridge were broken, but the truck containing the tank reached the other side in safety.

On the way back from Morrisville, the bridge repairs had not been completed, so the men in charge unloaded the tank and proceeded to show a rather large crowd of people just what maneuvers a tank was capable of doing. The bridge was finally repaired, the tank reloaded, and the truck and tank drove off to Hamilton. It was a thrilling day for the Bouckville community.

THE BRIDGE COLLAPSES – In August of 1925, the bridge we read about in the previous article, that spans the old Chenango Canal at the western end of Bouckville, collapsed and sent two vehicles into the canal. The two cars were passing in opposite directions when the bridge failed and both went immediately into the water. Just before the accident a large truck and a passenger bus had crossed.

The structure was more than sixty years old and had been condemned for the past three years. As you can imagine, the scene created a lot of excitement with large numbers of people wanting to see the damage. A detour of several miles was necessary to avoid the area until a new bridge could be built.

A temporary bridge was built, followed by the construction of a new 40 foot wide, 70 foot long concrete bridge. It is the bridge still in use today.

EVERY STATE REPRESENTED – An article in 1925 stated that if you stood and watched the tremendous amount of traffic on the Cherry Valley Turnpike, you would see license plates from every state in the union. Our turnpike and Rt. 5, just to north, were the major east-west routes across the state. (In 1934 the Cherry Valley Turnpike was officially renamed U.S. Rt. 20.)

The heavy volume of traffic would end with the opening of the New York State Thruway in 1954. The volume of traffic decreased remarkably. The speed that you could legally travel and the absence of stop signs and traffic lights made travel on the new Thruway more appealing.

In the Madison-Bouckville area this led to the closing of stores, shops, gas stations, and rental cottages. It was a severe blow to the local economy. One case in point was that of Otto Fischer, of Bouckville. He ran a gas station, auto repair shop, and tow truck service. The year after the Thruway was opened, he had lost 50 percent of his previous business. This pattern was repeated all throughout the turnpike communities.

ADMIRAL BYRD'S SNOW CRUISER – The famous explorer, Admiral Byrd, was determined to explore Antarctica and claim portions of that continent for the United States. A snow cruiser was built, and then tested at the Pullman Company, just south of Chicago. The machine was 55 feet long, 20 feet wide, and weighed 37 tons. Following trial runs, it was to travel from Chicago, Illinois to the Boston Army Wharf.

During the travel east, the newly renamed Rt. 20 was designated to be used for part of the journey. News spread all along the route and in early July of 1939, the wheeled giant rolled through our area. The crowds along the way were excited to see the machine that was to explore the frozen Antarctic region.

SCRAP METAL DRIVE – One of the ways that citizens could aid the war effort during World War 11 was by having a scrap metal drive. This scrap metal would help in the production of war materials, such as tanks and jeeps. Our local citizens organized scrap drives in 1942 and 1943.

The scrap metal pile was located on the northeast corner of the main intersection in Madison. The site had been the location of the Louis Fuess Hardware Store in previous years. To kick off the campaign, a parade was held which included members of the American Legion, Village and Town Boards, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, the school Board of Education, the high school faculty, air raid wardens, fire auxiliary police, and Red Cross representatives.

The effort was a great success. Even small children brought metal for the pile, often arriving with the metal pieces in their carts. At the end of the two years 88 tons of scrap had been collected, worth \$718.54. These local efforts around the country certainly helped to win the war.

ANNUAL PARADES – Beginning around 1949 and virtually each year since, the Firemen-Legion group has sponsored a Memorial Day parade. The parade is a chance for area bands to play, various groups to make floats, and for all of us to reflect on the sacrifices that our military has made over many years to ensure our freedoms.

DAMAGE FROM STORMS – The threat of storms going through the area and causing damage is a constant, especially during the summer months. In recent times there have been three storms of note. The first occurred in the fall of 1950. Trees were uprooted, power poles downed, and one person killed.

In May of 1964 a storm tore through Madison with the power of a tornado. Trees along Rt. 20 were either snapped off or uprooted. Electric lines were downed and poles toppled.

Roofs were torn off a number of buildings. Just before the storm hit, it was impossible to see more than 10 feet in front of you. Fortunately, no deaths occurred.

A storm in 2018 caused damage from Bouckville to Madison. The high wind caused many older, historic trees to split. The wind also caused a line of electric poles to fall like dominoes.

THE MADISON-BOUCKVILLE ANTIQUES SHOW – A write-up like this would not be complete without mentioning our most current “THINGS SEEN ALONG THE TURNPIKE” and that is the yearly antique show. What started out as a show with 35 dealers, held in 1972 on the airstrip of Mr. Henry Tepolt, has grown to an event that lines the main street in both Bouckville and Madison and the surrounding fields of Bouckville.

To go to the show is an event which is looked forward to by the more than 2,000 dealers, as well as the thousands of visitors that travel the roadway looking for those special items to enhance their homes. Visitors to the show will sample delicious foods, support the local pie sale, visit with friends that they meet, and if the weather is cooperative, enjoy the sun along with the sights. The show is a definite boost to the economy of the area and it is hoped that it will continue for many years to come.

I hope that you have enjoyed this look back at some of the events that have been seen along our historic highway. Of course there are many more that could have been included, but I hope that the reader can appreciate those that were. Perhaps you will take a look at your own highway in a different light and try to find out more of your own events. It is a fun-filled venture!