

Edwards Trace

The 150-mile segment of trail between Fort Russell near Edwardsville in the south to Peoria in the north along with the trail running to the head of Lake Pimatoiu on the Illinois River became known as the Edwards Trace. This route was named after the Territorial Governor Ninian Edwards, who's October of 1812 march to attack the Native Americans living at Black Partridge Town. Historic use of the trace went back well over a hundred years before Ninian Edwards came to Illinois in 1809. Those who touted it the most forever entrenched the name of the trace in to our history and its true name became lost

The history of the Edwards Trace is a history of our state. It became a link between villages allowed for the movement of goods, people and information. It became a barometer to the populating of our State

One can understand the importance of the trace when we look at the geography of Illinois. The Illinois and Kaskaskia rivers and their tributaries in general, run north and south except for the Sangamon River. Between these waterway runs a ridge through Illinois Prairies. This ridge bounded by timber along with prairies gave the trace an undissected route north and south. I like to thin of it as a river with trees as the banks and Prairie as the water with the trace as the channel, which is followed.

Charles Horton Cooley in his Theory of Transportation writes population and wealth tend to collect where ever there is a break in transportation An example is when a tributary meet its major river or one changes from water travel to travel on land. Thus is the beginning of the trace. It is possible that prehistoric use of the trace was by the Mississippi culture whose agrarian society led to a series of villages and cities. This would date the trace to around 900AD.

When the French came they settled among the various Native American villages and made use of their trade routes. The Illinois River unlike today with its system of locks and dams in the past would become so low it was not passable and during the winter months, it would freeze. This made the trace an alternative. During the American Revolution George Rogers Clark, led by Frenchmen used the Fort Massac Road that parallel the Tennessee River to cross the Ohio River from Kentucky into Illinois travilling from

Kaskaskia and then on to Cahokia where he ordered Col. John Montgomery to march with troops from Cahokia to Peoria then on to the Sauk village on Rock River this action was the furthest battle in the American Revolution

Illinois earliest population centers were locations where modes of transportation change, water to land. Ft. Massac, Ft. Chartres, Kaskaskia, Cahokia, Peoria, Chicago all are points accessible by water and land by the use of a common trail or road (Edwards Trace). We use the name Edwards Trace because of the last major event associated with its use. Illinois Territorial Governor Ninian Edwards commanded a march of 350 men from Ft. Russell (Edwardsville, Madison Co.) to attack Black Partridge's Town near Peoria during the War of 1812. Before this use, the trail was known as the Kaskaskia to Peoria road and the Cahokia road to Peoria Road.

Once the Americans begin to populate the Territory, their findings concerning their surroundings began to become recorded. The placement of Indian villages and the roads connecting them became important military information,

Gaius Paddock and early settler of Fort Russell Township Madison County tells of a earlier Native American trail from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi river that traversed his property that was well worn with a deep rut

1711, French Jesuit Marest walks from Cahokia to Peoria, this is the first written account.

1735, Troubles between French and Cahokia Indians, force the move of the Indians north of the village of Cahokia to the prehistoric mounds thus giving the name Cahokia Mounds.

1776 The Canteen Trading post established at the crossing of two trails one being the Edwards Trace and the other an east west road.

1780, First American use of the trace when General George Rodgers Clark commands Col. John Montgomery and his men to march from Cahokia to Peoria then Rock River to attack Indians loyal to the British. This is the most western Campaign during the Revolutionary War.

1795, With victory at the battle Fallen Timbers General Anthony Wayne negotiates a treaty at Greenville in Ohio. He claims 6 square miles at Chicago and Peoria and 12 square miles at the intersection of the mouth of the Illinois and the Mississippi Rivers and all French villages in Illinois and traffic routes between them for the U.S. This is the beginning of the Americanization of the trace. During this period, it is named the Cahokia to Peoria Road and also the Kaskaskia to Peoria Road.

1804, John Kinzie strikes a deal with the government to sell supplies and trade with Indians. He establishes trading posts throughout the Midwest with a post at Le Large (now Sangamon County). Furs and goods are transported by horseback using the trail.

At the opening of the War of 1812 Edwards develops a system of ranging the Frontier to protect the people of Southern Illinois. The first line of defense is located at the Sangamon River seventy miles north of the second line. The northern line paralleled the Sangamon River with 350 Rangers splitting in to two groups with one traveling east to the headwaters Kaskaskia River and the other heading west to the Illinois River at Beardstown. West of the Illinois River, a company of Rangers traveled from Beardstown in the east to the Mississippi River. The ranger rotated every three weeks. The Southern line the final defensive line was a series of blockhouses across the Illinois territory from the Mississippi in the west to the Wabash in the east.

1812, Early in the year of 1812 Ninian Edwards builds Fort Russell just north of Edwardsville near Cahokia Creek. Edwards marches with his troops of about 350 rangers in six days to Black Partridge Town, attacks the unprotected village, and burns killing 30 women, children and elderly. Thomas Craig from Shawneetown burns Peoria the oldest historic village in the Mississippi Valley.

Edwards plans to build a fort where the trace meets the Sangamon River.

1813 Fort Clark is erected at Peoria. Life stock and goods are sent up the trace to support the soldiers at Peoria.

1815 Peace is made and due to the atrocities committed by both parties no land is negotiated at this time.

1815, R. Paul draws first map to show the trace.

1816, Stephen Long (army engineer) maps the Illinois River Valley for purposed Illinois And Michigan Canal. He shows the trace on a map.

1816 Thomas Brigs moves to the Litchfield area along the Trace

1817, Robert Pulliam builds a cabin on the trace becoming Sangamon County first settler.

1819, With the *panic of 1819* (Americas first economic depression) hundreds of homeless move up the trace to settle the Sangamon Country. In 1819 Ferdinand Ernst a German traveling Illinois to locate a place for settle his colony. In Ernst words he comes across well traveled road on his trip from Vandalia Illinois Capitol to the Logan county area. That same year the Kickapoo sell their lands in central Illinois at the treaty of Edwardsville. The citizens of Clear Lake on the Sangamon River petitions the Commissioners Court for a maintained road from Edwardsville to Clear Lake Jacob Judy surveyor and road viewers mark the Edwards trace with a post every mile marked with four notches. Madison County assigns road commissioners to improve and maintain the trace. A ferry is licensed to operate on the Illinois River at Peoria. The trace is named St Louis to Ft. Clark Road

1821, Sangamon County is formed and traffic is now routed into Springfield the County seat. Tens of thousands of people come to central Illinois using the Ft. Clark Road. The Vandalia News papers paper write of wagon train 7 miles long headed to the Sangamo country. Sangamon County divides into political townships and the Edwards Trace is used as a boundary.

1823, The Government begins to sell land to the public, with the Trace now on private property, portions of the trace are surveyed to property lines this begins the end of the trace as a public road. Sections of the trail begin to be tilled up into fields. The trace begins to disappear. A few Indians are said to have used the old trail to stay away from main roads.

1833, Ninian Edwards and Elijah Iles owning property and business in Alton and Springfield create the Springfield to Alton turnpike and it becomes a main road for traffic and ends the use of the as a major historic thoroughfare. Sections become localized broken into small pieces hidden in the countryside with the majority in cultivation. The Edwards Trace like Fort Russell and Fort Clark becomes just a memory.