

Old Turtle Trace

By Jackie Layne Partin

Not too many years ago, my three grown sons and I received letters wanting us to choose a name for the road on which all of us had dwellings. This was a task for homeowners for the 911 project that was taking place all over. We happened to all live on portions of the old Partins' dairy farm on the east side of the main road called Partins' Farm Road—so we believed that was the name! However, we had such a long private drive going along the Fiery Gizzard Gulf that we needed to come up with a name for our private road. Of course, everyone was too busy to be bothered with such an assignment, so it fell to me to take on the task.

Please be patient with me; I am going somewhere historically with my little story. It seemed easier to just name it, Partins' Farm Rd., but that was taken, and besides we lived on only one side of the old farm; the other part of the farm was on the west side of Partins' Farm Rd. I named our private road, Partins Place, which was accepted by those running the show. The named, aluminum sign was posted and all was well with me—well, that was, until the sign that was put up by the powers that be was stolen and replaced again and stolen again and never replaced. Aluminum was a favorite theft item at the time. Actually, the only sign we ever needed was a sign saying, "Turn Back—This Is Not the State Park!" To Google map searchers, we live on Getin Rd.—from where in the world did that come?

Moving on down the road, nowhere near the old Partin dairy farm, I understand that someone took it upon himself/herself to name the main road out that way, "Partin Farm Road." I believe if I had been the local folks, I would have been kicking and screaming about that since it was nowhere near the old Partin farm. I know that there were some Partin family members who were saddened when they found out that they did not live on Partins' Farm Rd. any longer but were now abiding on Pigeon Spring Road. That spur road further out should have been named Wooten or Ben Wooten Rd., a historical tribute to old Benjamin Wooten himself. It was quite entertaining to watch the homemade signs go up at the entrance of the big main road—Pigeon Springs Rd., Partins' Farm Rd., Angle Manufacturing Rd. I believe I would not have given the road the name Pigeon Springs Rd. just because it continues "forever" over into Marion County and on to the end of that finger of the plateau overlooking Battle Creek and Fiery Gizzard Cove. At the county line is where the name should have become Pigeon Spring Rd. if there was to be no research done.

Now folks, it doesn't amount to a hill of beans about any of these names because I believe that road, whatever you wish to call it, that turns south off Highway 41 and goes south for many miles until one can overlook Fiery Gizzard Cove, Martin Springs, and the Battle Creek area was once called Battle Creek Road. In the **1920 Census**, Lorna Leone Lumley wrote that Ben A. Wooten, Lem Headrick, William Worley and William White (of White Hotel fame) lived on **Battle Creek Road**. Possibly earlier it was called **Turtle Trace Road**. We all had missed it. Instead of researching for the original name of the road/s, we became possessive of our own little areas.



Old Thomas Benton Wooten House later his son, Benjamin Anderson Wooten House



The following excerpt is taken from a Marion County court case in **February 1909**:
*“Beginning in the center of Tracy City and Battle creek road at the south west corner of the James G. Hargis tract; thence eastwardly to the east line of said grant 6416; thence southwardly with the said east line of said grant 9416 far enough that a west line at right angles with the **Tracy City and Battle creek road** and with said road to the beginning. Would include 100 acres.”* Actually in **1909** the name of the road was decided by the direction your mule and wagon or feet were going – going South, Battle Creek Rd.; going North, Tracy City Rd. And to be more correct in **1857** when the railroad reached Ben Wooten Place (now Tracy City), then the road became Tracy City Rd. Before 1909, the road was simply **Battle Creek Road**, going or coming until Tracy City was born.

In the month of **May 1855**, Benjamin Wooten’s land in Marion and Grundy County was surveyed by the office of Marion Co. surveyor John H. Rogers and recorded in Jasper, Tennessee. Mr. Wooten was preparing to sell several tracts of land to the coal company. Years ago, while reading over his deed containing all the tracts of land being surveyed, this one little line out of many pages caught my eye. *“to wit: One tract being the Wooten tract number 1 (one) on the waters of Little Fiery Gizzard Beginning at a stake in Benjamin Wooten*

out field near a chestnut stump at or near the old **Turtle trace** beginning thence South 75 degrees west passing the beginning corner of the five hundred acre survey (Tract number two of one hundred and thirteen poles crossing the Mitchell Tract..." What in the world was "the old Turtle trace"? The search was on because I like to chase rabbits, or in this case, turtles. It wasn't easy, but I found the following hint.

A FAMOUS HIGHWAY

Transcribed from the Neenah Times (Wisconsin) – Feb. 12, 1910

The "Old Turtle Trace" That Led From the Colonies to the West

*One of the most famous highways in America is the "Old Turtle Trace" through the valleys and the hills of the lower Appalachians, over which the early pioneers made their way from the colonies to the wilds of Tennessee, Kentucky and the great west. Its usefulness long since having ceased, it has been abandoned with a ruthlessness that causes something akin to pain in the hearts of people who love old things of a historical nature. It is doubtful if at this late day the course of the "Old Turtle Trace" can be accurately defined. I have frequently heard it remarked in east Tennessee, and twice in northern Alabama has an old roadbed been pointed out to me as the course of that historic highway. Presumably it passed over the Cumberland plateau, and a few miles from **Tracy City, Tenn.**, it is most plainly marked. Its course can be followed easily, though the roadbed is now filled with the accumulation of years and the way barred by giant trees that have fallen crosswise or young trees that have taken root and flourished in the path of the rocking chaise of a century ago.*

Obviously, the name "Turtle Trace" was bestowed by the Indians. Local tradition says that the predecessors of the stage were the Indians of the Turtle clan, who led their war parties to the westward over this trail. Another and quite as well-founded tradition is that a turtle's shell was the symbol of the stage line that traversed the route in the early days, a rather humorous play on the speed with which the line used to deliver its fares to the western terminal. At any rate, the "Old Turtle Trace" played no small part in the early development of our west and is to be considered one of the really historic roads of America. It is a very slight test of the imagination to stand by the side of the deep scar in the beautiful face of the Cumberland plateau and see the old chaise rocking along through the afternoon shadows. One can almost see Jefferson, Johnson, Webster and other notables of their time step therefrom, stretch their legs, cramped from travel, and take a refreshing pinch from their gold snuff-boxes. Not a man is now alive who remembers the old days of travel on the Turtle Trace, but doubtless most of the men of the early part of the last century who figured in our country's formative period bowled back and forth over this road on their mission of history making. – (John D. Wells in National Monthly)

I'll end my little story by saying, "I wished I had known my local history and named our little part of Battle Creek Road, the "Old Turtle Trace." I like that far better than Getin Place.