OLD TOLL GATES

ARE THINGS LONG TO BE REMEMBERED -

BALTIMORE COUNTY HAD MANY - "TARIF" WAS TOUGH ON FARMERS -

"Granddaddy, what is a toll gate?" was the questionn propounded to me the other day by my ten-year-old grandson. He had read of one in a story book and while he was acquainted with numerous gates a toll gate was a new one on him. Of coursre, I explained it to him—and then I began to think of the gradual disappearance of the toll gates and of how natural it was for my grandson to ask the question, and it occurred to me it might interest a number of the present generation to give them about the same information I gave to him.

The perfect concrete roads of today are the result of a slow and gradual growth with the Indian trails of the long ago as the beginning. Their growth is an illustration of the theory of evolution.

The State never seemed to have any policy on the subject of roads until late in the nineteenth century. Their location seemed a matter entirely in the discretion and judgment of the settlers, and whether they were passable or impassable depended entirely upon the soil and the weather.

The great roads of today from coast to coast follow the Indian trails, and they were pretty fair path finders. Of course, at first they were but narrow trails, only wide enough for a horse, for vehicles of any kind were unknown. Then as the country grew, and vehicles came, the trails became wider from the increased use. In those early times when the freight was hauled by wagons, they traveled in caravans for mutual protection. The horses wore bells, and if one of the teams got stuck in the mud, which often happened, the teamster who was successful in pulling it out, won the bells of the team that was stuck. It never occurred to those pioneers to make the roads hard or to the Statesmen of the period that good roads were an asset to the State.

From 1800 to 1814 several charters were granted by the State of Maryland for turnpikes—and some were built of stone. The York turnpike, the Harford turnpike, and the Hanover turnpike were constructed under these charters. The companies were authorized by their charters to collect toll for the use of the road and toll gates were placed from three to five miles apart. A toll-collector, of course, was necessary at each gate, so the companies had a house for his use.

A toll gate was simply a pole that was raised or lowered across the road to stop the traveler until he paid his toll. To give an idea of the number of gates on the roads—take the York turnpike to illustrate. Coming from Baltimore in the old days the first was located at Waverly, the second at Govanstown, the third just below Towson, the fourth at the 10-mile post at Timonium, the fifth two miles north of Cockeysville, the sixth at Piny Hill, the seventh at Parkton. During the day the gates were as a rule kept open, but the keeper was always on the lookout, but at night they were closed and if the keeper happened to be a heavy sleeper you had to wait a time with patience until your "hellos" aroused him and he had time to dress.

There was a law that made it a misdemeanor to refuse to pay toll or to use the roads and avoid the gates. Some of the gate keepers were very cranky and disagreeable, and were always looking for trouble, and they very often got it. It occassionally happened that there would be a dispute over the amount of toll; the teamster would refuse to pay and the gate keeper would lock the gate and then the teamster would hitch his horses to it and pull it down. The Court records will disclose more than one case of that kind.

There was a very cranky old farmer whose place was very near a toll gate in the upper end of the county who fell out with the gate keeper. His toll was two cents and when he passed through he would tender a $20 bill. He did this a number of times and the gate keeper could not change it, so he determined to get even. He had a $20 bill changed into specie, the greater portion of it being 10c, 5c and penny pieces. So the next time the farmer offered his $20 bill he took it and handed him the specie in a paper sack in change. They had quite a war of words, but the transaction was closed, and ever afterward the farmer had the two cents ready when he passed through. A toll gate very close to Towson was the scene of a terrible murder a few years ago which no one has forgotten. Old Mr. Rinehart was the keeper of the gate just beyond the Hampton estate on the Dulany's Valley turnpike. Isaac Winder and his nephew, Ben Winder (colored), tempted by the toll money they supposed he kept in the house, went there one night and murdered him. Isaac was hanged at Towson and Ben was convicted in Harford County of murder in the second degree and sentenced to eighteen years in the Penitentiary.

When Maryland awoke to its duty to its citizens and went into the road business the toll gate in Maryland was doomed, for the State took over one turnpike after another until they were all State highways and then the toll gates automatically disappeared.

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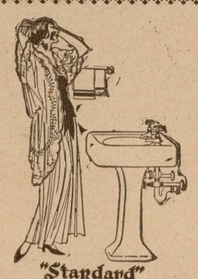

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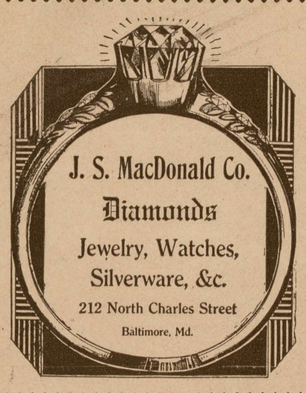

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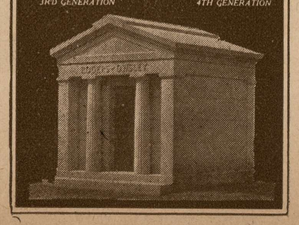

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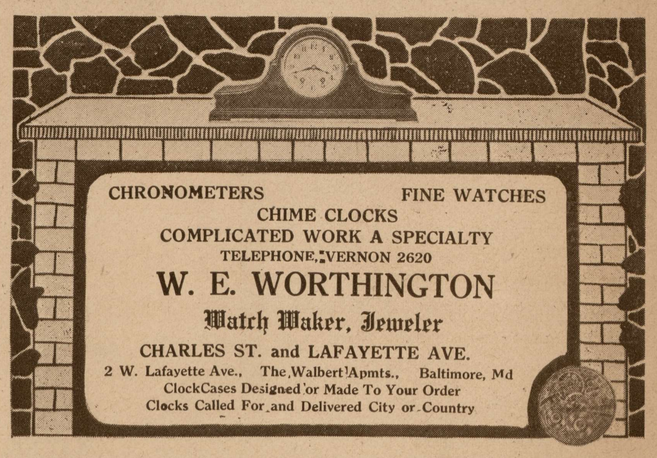

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