



## Bluefield State College

219 Rock Street  
Bluefield, West Virginia 24701

Division of Engineering Technology  
304-327-4121

May 27, 1987

Mr. Gary W. Scott, ✓  
Right of Way Division,  
West Virginia Department of Highways,  
Capitol Complex,  
Charleston, WV 25305

Dear Mr. Scott:

I do appreciate your sending me the copies from the field notes of the Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike, as well as your paper "Exploring the Old Turnpikes". I left on vacation just after receiving them, and this is my first day back at work, or I would have written much sooner.

You may be interested in looking at the paper I did, which has been submitted for inclusion with the Volume II of the Mercer County History. I plan also to run it on from the New River ferry crossing to Red Sulphur Springs, and submit it for "Wonderful West Virginia" magazine.

If you get the chance, come visit us at Bluefield State sometime. You will be very interested in some of the work which Frank Hart has done.

Thanks again very much for your help.

Sincerely,

D. C. Klingensmith, P. E.,  
Chairman

Greenbrier Community College Center  
Bluefield State College  
Drawer 151  
Lewisburg, WV 24901  
304/645-3302

Beckley Nursing Program  
Bluefield State College  
210 Minnesota Avenue  
O'Dell Hall  
Beckley, WV 25801  
304/256-5612

McDowell County Office  
Bluefield State College  
Mt. View High School  
P. O. Box 609  
Welch, WV 24801  
304/436-4033



## Bluefield State College

219 Rock Street  
Bluefield, West Virginia 24701

February 1, 1989

Division of Engineering Technology  
304-327-4121

Mr. Gary Scott  
Right of Way Division  
West Virginia Department of Highways  
1900 Washington Street East  
Charleston, WV 25305

Dear Gary:

Dave Klingensmith called yesterday about his desires to complete an intensive study on the Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike. Three years ago, you furnished me the field notes on this turnpike. We reduced these notes, prepared a mylar overlay for 7 1/2 minute maps, studied the existing roads, and prepared a paper which I am enclosing.

Dave has presented this paper and a slide show to numerous civic groups, and this paper will be included in the next edition of the History of Mercer County.

We desire to complete this project on the portion of the route of the turnpike in Monroe County if the field notes can be furnished to us. The notes you furnished ended at New River with a direction given to Shanklin's Ferry on the Monroe County side of the river.

Dave has retired as chair of this division. He has time, energy and desire to complete this project. We are interested also in the Fincastle Turnpike through Mercer County, and we have students who can reduce these notes if they can be furnished.

I look forward to hearing from you. If you are in this area, Dave would love to present his slide program to you. If this would be helpful to you in public relations, I am sure Dave would be willing to share.

Sincerely,

Frank Hart, Chairman

cjl

cc: Dave Klingensmith

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Bluefield State College  
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Lewisburg, WV 24901  
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An Equal Employment Opportunity/AE

### Fax Transmittal Memo

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To: Penny HARRIS	From: G. Scott
Co.: DEP	Co.: WVDOH
Dept.:	Phone # 558-3656
Fax # 465-1524	Fax # 558-4344

## THE PRINCETON AND RED SULPHUR TURNPIKE

David C. Klingensmith, P. E.  
Emeritus Professor of Mechanical Engineering Technology  
Bluefield State College  
Bluefield, West Virginia

E. Franklin Hart, L. S., P. E.  
Professor of Civil Engineering Technology  
Bluefield State College  
Bluefield, West Virginia

### ABSTRACT

The Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike is often mentioned in land records and in local history books. Its actual location has been debated. The authors used 1851 survey notes, computer coordinate computations, digital plotting of coordinates, 7 1/2 minute quadrangle maps and field inspection to determine the location of this turnpike. Through the power of modern computer technology, the accurate location of the original route of the Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike was accomplished and in so doing laid to rest several erroneous notions about where the Turnpike ran. A descriptive record is presented to identify the geographic location of the Turnpike.

### INTRODUCTION

"Location of Road from Princeton in the County of Mercer to near Red Sul. Springs in the County of Monroe by the way of Stuart & Co's Salt Well. Commenced Sept. 1851 - Beginning at Princeton Centre M. Street at Station 1" (3)

Thus began the field notes for the survey of one of Mercer County's first and longest roads, which exists to this day as a paved road (for the most part) through Princeton, Athens, Pettrey, Hilltop, and thence down to Lick Creek and with a dirt road to the New River.

Enacted by the 1849-1850 General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the sum of \$4,200 was authorized for the survey and construction of the Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike. (4, 80) Calling for a sixty-foot right of way with a thirty-foot clearing and a sixteen-foot wide road, the act was amended in 1851 to require a twelve-foot road with grade not to exceed three and one-half degrees. (5, 110) That is a tough assignment even today in our mountainous terrain. The 1851 amendment also changed it from a turnpike road to a free road, but the turnpike name stuck.

Red Sulphur Springs is located on the present-day State Route 12, near Ballard in Monroe County, between Peterstown and Hinton. In 1851 it was known far and wide as a source of

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and Hinton. In 1851 it was known far and wide as a source of curative sulphur waters, in the same class as White Sulphur Springs and Hot Springs. Physicians of the day recommended that their patients take the waters for numerous ailments, but chiefly for "consumption", or tuberculosis. A Dr. William Burke, of Richmond, purchased the property on which the springs lay, and in 1832 began construction of a magnificent resort which at its apogee could accomodate 360 guests.

But Red Sulphur Springs was isolated and difficult to reach. Railroads had not yet made their way into the area. Roads were bad at best. And so it was that the Assembly was persuaded to finance a road which could provide easy access from Princeton through Mercer County, Virginia, to Shanklin's Ferry on the New River. Ferries, sustained against the current by cable, would be propelled by poles to carry carriages, wagons, and horses across to Monroe County, Virginia. Summers County had not yet been born.

The route of the Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike runs for nearly 19 miles to Shanklin's Ferry from Princeton. In 1851 it lay entirely in Mercer County. Its beginning was at the present corner of Mercer Street and Honaker Avenue in Princeton.

Leaving what was then the heart of Princeton with its 200-plus inhabitants, the Turnpike lies on present-day Mercer Street. It runs north-easterly and easterly to Brush Creek. In 1851 it crossed the site of the not-yet-built Virginian (or Norfolk Southern) railroad tracks on the old

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grade crossing which was used before the overpass bridge was built. The survey notes call for a bridge over Brush Creek on an easterly bearing, and the route then turns north-east. It passes through the United Transit Mix yard, then east of the Bailey Lumber Co. sheds, up a narrow lane which lies alongside the S. S. Belcher Co. scrap yard, thence through back yards and up a grassy swale until it intersects the Old Athens Road (or the Old Princeton Road, depending on which way you are headed). This is State Route 44/10, and it runs with the Turnpike until it reaches an interruption in the form of I-77. There the route of 44/10 turns to form a smooth approach to the overpass, while the Red Sulphur Turnpike lies on a drive into private property. East of the Interstate the Turnpike once again lies on the paved route of 44/10.

The one and one-half miles from I-77 to W. Va. 20 are the most picturesque in the entire Mercer County stretch of the old free road, winding down through beautiful horse farms outlined by white fences. It is easy to imagine, though, that the surveyors and early travelers found the view obstructed by tall trees of the virgin forests of Mercer County, Virginia.

The Turnpike crosses Route 20 as it intersects the Old Princeton Road, and for a distance of over half a mile runs near the hilltop roughly parallel with Route 20, on farm lands of the old John Bailey (or James Foster) farm. Its former route is clearly visible on the ground, and trees line its location. In this stretch it passes east of the

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former Withers home and affords a magnificent view toward East River Mountain. It crosses Route 20 again at the entrance to Legend Valley Farm, runs along an overgrown hillside on the Olivia Clarke property for a quarter mile, crosses Route 20 yet again to the Tennys Cheatwood farm, and finally rejoins hard road adjacent to the Dr. Charles Lane farm.

At this point the Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike behaves itself again and follows the highway into Athens. It passes stately white frame houses on State Street, the Athens Schools (old site of Concord Normal School), and the Athens Baptist Church. It rounds onto Vermillion Street at the Bank of Athens, passing the site of Mountain House, where Frank Parker's hardware store now stands; and which must have been a welcome sight for weary travelers.

Leaving Route 20, the Turnpike becomes Rt. 9: Vermillion Street in Athens and the Pumphouse Road east of town. On its north side it leaves the Concord United Methodist Church and the hand-fired brick Meador home, now owned by Athens Mayor Robert Richardson, built around 1880. Further along, at the lower end of town, it passes the beautiful campus of Concord College. Moved to its present site in 1911 following a disastrous fire at the State Street location, Concord lies across the Turnpike from the old Vermillion family home place. The house's white frame siding belies the log cabin still within it. Built in 1845 by Dr. James Vermillion, it lay on 1,575 acres of the original Cloyd survey. Concord College and much of Athens

were derived from Vermillion lands. The house is the oldest house extant on the Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike.

Following the Pumphouse Road, the Turnpike descends steeply and crosses Laurel Creek (one of 79 Laurel Creeks, Runs, Forks, Branches, etc. in West Virginia) near pump stations which once provided Athens' water supply. It deviates briefly from the paved road and bridge which now cross Trace Fork, and in its day forded the stream in a marshy area.

It is all uphill for the next three miles, as the Turnpike climbs its way out of bottomland. The traveler passes through Pettrey, a crossroads where the Pettrey Church of Christ and the turn-of-the century home place of the Blake White family are the sole landmarks. Beyond Pettrey, the Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike passes through lonely country. Only five houses lie along the roadside in the remaining eight miles to the bank of the New River. Where numerous farm houses once dotted early maps of the area, there now remains only a spectacular view to the east toward Peters Mountain and the Narrows, where the New makes its ancient way northward.

The Turnpike drops over a thousand feet in the next five miles. Between Pettrey and Hilltop (also referred to as Helltop and Tophet) the grade is fairly gentle. Hilltop now is home to the solitary Hilltop Baptist Church and two abandoned houses, empty windows staring blindly. The traveler bound for Red Sulphur Springs leaves civilization behind here. The road, though paved, is narrow and badly

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pot-holed. The grade beyond Hilltop is as steep as the legislation allowed, and on two hairpin turns seems much steeper.

Nearly 17 miles along its journey, the Turnpike abruptly levels out as it meets bottom land along Lick Creek. Here it departs from present-day hard road and generally follows Lick Creek eastward toward its confluence with the New River. The paved Lick Creek Road, if followed northward, would pass Brown's Chapel, the Bull Falls Road and the modern Oaks Supper Club, emerging on Route 20 near Pipestem Resort State Park.

The Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike, though, is at its rustic and most scenic best in its final two miles on the Mercer County side of the New. The traveler crosses Lick Creek four times: by bridge, ford, ford, and bridge. The bridges no longer exist, although the stone piers, which may have been erected at a later date, are still very much in evidence. The first bridge, an eighth of a mile north of the hard road, had three large piers. The second, a mile and a quarter farther down and near the mouth of Lick Creek, also had three piers. The lower of the two fords crosses at a wide shallows with a level stone bottom engraved in a peculiarly regular, rectangular pattern, as if God had planned a giant aquatic chess game with the surveyors. Beaver workings are still to be seen in this area. And unexpectedly the traveler breasts a lovely, wide waterfall having a drop of some twenty feet and a good swimming hole just at its foot. The hidden beauty of Lick Creek must

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surely be one of (the then) Mercer County's best-kept secrets.

A half-mile upstream from the final bridging of Lick Creek, and just above the falls, is the site of the Mercer Saltworks. Referred to in the survey notes as Stuart and Co's. Salt Well, this source of salt was of strategic importance during the Civil War. It was the only source of salt in the area and was the object of an attack in 1861 by Lt. Col. Rutherford B. Hays' regiment of Union soldiers. The future president was foiled in his efforts by local Confederate sympathizers, who destroyed the saltworks to prevent having it fall into enemy hands. An interesting account of this incident, by Miss Helen Caperton, is contained in the 1984 Mercer County History.

The final half-mile of the Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike in Mercer County, Virginia, runs upriver on a broad, level bluff parallel to the New River. Its destination is Shanklin's Ferry. The Mercer County side of the river at Shanklin's Ferry is indistinguishable from any other part of the river bank. On the other hand it is obvious that the Monroe County (now Summers County) side was made to order for a ferry landing. The 1851 survey party must have gazed across the broad river toward what is now a public camp ground and boat ramp, and said, "This is the place!"

The survey field notes on which this account of the Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike were based conclude with the following: "The foregoing notes show the location from

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Princeton by Stuart and Cos. Salt Well, to the bank of New at the proposed ferry making a distance of 18 miles 256 3/4 poles in the County of Mercer - Novr. 1851.

(Signed) John H. Vawter Engineer

of Princeton & Red Sul Spr

The author is indebted to his colleague at Bluefield State College, Prof. Frank Hart, for the technical research which makes this account possible. Through the magic of modern computer technology he accurately resolved the original route of the Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike, and in so doing will lay to rest several erroneous notions about where the Turnpike ran. He obtained the survey field notes from Mr. Gary W. Scott, of the Right of Way Division of the West Virginia Department of Highways. He entered the calls into a computer program developed by himself and Prof. Jack Howard, also our colleague at Bluefield State, and fed a digital plotter set to the same 1:24,000 scale as modern Geological Survey quadrangle maps. The map was printed out on transparent mylar film, which was overlaid on the Princeton, Athens, and Lerona quadrangles. The conformity of the resulting route of the turnpike with existing paved roads is startlingly exact. Where the route deviates from modern roads, it is clearly evident on the ground that a roadbed had existed at one time, except in places where the ground has been disturbed by construction.

There is a common misunderstanding that the Turnpike ran along Laurel Creek and passed the ante-bellum William Henderson Franch mansion south of Athens. Prof. Hart's

research and our trace of the route on the ground show this to be erroneous.

To Prof. R. T. "Tom" Hill, of Concord College, the author is indebted for providing valuable historical background on the Mercer Saltworks. It is clear that with the saltworks destroyed, a major use for the Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike ceased to exist.

2

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#### MAPPING OF TURNPIKE FROM 1851 FIELD SURVEY NOTES

To answer a debated question on the location of the Turnpike, a copy of the 1851 field survey notes was obtained from the West Virginia Department of Highways. A computer program written in BASIC was developed to reduce the calls in the field notes to coordinates. These coordinates were used in a computer plotting program to plot the coordinates on a Tektronix flat-bed plotter to the same 1:24,000 scale as modern Geological Survey 7 1/2 minute quadrangle maps. These plotted coordinates were used at a base to trace the turnpike on transparent mylar film which was overlaid on the Princeton, Athens, and Lerona Quadrangle Maps. A field inspection was made of the plotted results to check for accuracy.

The conformity of the resulting route of the turnpike with existing paved roads is startlingly exact. Where the route deviates from modern roads or travelled ways, it is clearly evident on the ground that a road bed had existed at one time, except in places where the ground has been disturbed by construction.

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#### DESCRIPTIVE GEOGRAPHIC/HISTORIC LOCATION OF TURNPIKE

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(Signed) John H. Vawter Engineer  
of Princeton & Red Sul Spr" (3)

## CONCLUSIONS

This research project proved the ease of location of old Turnpike in West Virginia, particularly with respect to the topographic fit on 7 1/2 minute quadrangle maps. It is recommended that a more efficient method is to use commercially available surveying software linked to AutoCad to produce the maps. The other turnpikes in Mercer County will be mapped using this recommendation when time permits. This is a valid, feasible, and accurate method of linking the early history of road building to the present-day geography of the Appalachian region.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are indebted to Professor Jack Howard of the Bluefield State College Computer Science Department for developing the computer technology to help solve the location problem and to James Aliff, a student at Bluefield State College who used the computer technology to produce the coordinate plots for his senior research project.

Mr. Howard is now a computer scientist for Geological Consulting Services in Bluefield, Virginia. Mr. Aliff is now a surveyor for Greenhorne and O'Mara in Greenbelt, Maryland. Professor R. T. "Tom" Hill of the Concord College Geography Department provided valuable historical background on the Mercer Saltworks. It is clear that with the saltworks destroyed, a major use for the Princeton and Red Sulphur Turnpike ceased to exist. Mr. Gary W. Scott of the Right of Way Division of the West Virginia Department of Highways provided the 1851 field notes.

## REFERENCES

1. Mercer County Historical Society, Mercer County, History 1984, Princeton, WV, 1985.
2. Shumate, Haskell D. Reprints of numerous historical newspaper accounts and promotional brochures.
3. Virginia State Library "Field Notes - Princeton-Red Sulphur Turnpike", Richmond, Virginia. (Micro-filmed and of record in the Right of Way Division in the District Offices.)
4. Virginia State Library The Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Dated 1849-50, Richmond, Virginia, March 1850.
5. Virginia State Library The Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Dated 1850-51, Richmond, Virginia, March 1851.