

History of Poston Farm and Potter's Tavern

The story of what is today called the Poston farm began prior to 1818 when Reuben Whipple first traveled to Ohio from Rhode Island and purchased 140 acres of land in Peru Township, Delaware County. A short time later, he returned with his family to begin clearing the land and building a cabin. Reuben was known as an expert carpenter who built high quality buildings. He eventually operated a carpenter shop on the property and became one of the most prosperous farmers in the area. Delaware County records showed that Reuben had increased his land ownership to 853 acres in Peru Township by 1826.

Asahel Potter made his way from East Haven, Connecticut to Ohio in the winter of 1817. Asahel and his wife Anna (Benton) and their six children traveled in a covered wagon drawn by an ox team and one horse. The journey lasted forty-eight days on roads almost impassable due to snow and mud. For a short time, the family lived on a rented farm near Westerville, Ohio and then purchased a 94-acre parcel of land from Reuben Whipple located on Alum Creek, in Peru Township, Delaware County. Potter built a home on this property in 1817. He was also the original builder and owner of Potter's Tavern in the 1820s.

Worthington-New Haven Road was laid out and built during the period between 1820 and 1825 and passed through the Potter farm. Colonel James Kilbourne, who was a congressman and surveyor appointed by the Cincinnati land office, laid out the road with the assistance of chain men, axe men and road makers. The Colonel located this road by generally following a Wyandot Indian Trail which originated at the Pickaway Plains (possibly Lower Shawnee Town), proceeding north toward Lake Erie and ending near Sandusky, Ohio (the location of Wyandot Town). The trail generally followed the ancient buffalo roads on ridges paralleling Alum Creek. (History of Morrow County Ohio, 1880).

The Worthington-New Haven Road was completed between Worthington, Ohio in Franklin County and New Haven in Huron County, Ohio in 1825. This road was used by livestock drovers, freight wagons, stagecoaches and other travelers. Freight wagons were used to haul grain to Sandusky, Ohio and bring back goods to sell in the Villages along the return route. Drovers herded livestock toward markets in the eastern states. Stagecoaches traveled this road and were common in Ohio during the 1820s to 1840s.

A series of taverns were set up along the routes of livestock drives to provide hay and grain for livestock and food and drink for travelers. There were three such taverns in Peru Township along the Worthington-New Haven Road operated by Asahel Potter, Hiram Fitz

and Reuben Benedict, respectively. Barton Whipple, a son of Reuben Whipple, lived a mile northeast of Stantontown along the route, also opened his home as a tavern. (Early Industries of Peru Township, Morrow County, Ohio and Changes Which a Hundred Years Have Brought, by George Watson).

Potters Tavern was located at the top of what was called “Beggar Louse Hill” an extensive wooded area located along the south shore of Alum Creek. The hill was named for the triangular seeds of the tick-trefoil plant which readily detach and stick to shoes and clothing.

Beggar Louse Hill and the West Branch of Alum crossing required a steep descent, a stream crossing and a climb up the opposite hill by a horse and wagon traveling along Worthington-New Haven Road. This was made much more difficult during muddy or frozen conditions and often required a double horse team to get up the opposite hill. A teamster without a double horse team could either wait for help from another traveler or empty his wagon and hand carry its contents up the hill. It is assumed that many travelers obtained rest and fortification at Potters Tavern since the next tavern along the road was a temperance establishment (Columbus Dispatch Article, 1968).

Taverns of this age and type in Ohio were usually single-story log or frame structures with a large single fireplace used for cooking, heating bath water and providing heat. Travelers usually slept on the floor or outside (when the weather was good). Some taverns had an attic used for children’s sleeping quarters.

The completion of Worthington-New Haven Road improved access to Peru Township and to the Alum Creek Society of Friends (Quaker) settlement about five miles north of Potters Tavern. The Quaker settlement was an important stop on the Underground Railroad and was often involved in the movement of slaves from the Ohio River to Canada. A series of brick buildings, built by the Friends members during the period from 1817 through the 1830s, was used for this purpose.

The kitchen in the existing Potters Tavern building has a “hiding place.” This has led to speculation that the Tavern may have been used to shelter and hide escaped slaves. The Alum Creek Friends located nearby had a noteworthy reputation for their skill and success in expediting the transport of slaves to Canada through the Alum Creek area and Peru Township.

In 1850, a new railroad that connected Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati was completed and rail stations were added at the nearby new villages of Ashley and Leonardsburg. Ashley took the place of Westfield on the Mansfield-Delaware stagecoach and wagon road. Leonardsburg took the place of Kilbourne on the Worthington-New Haven

stagecoach and wagon road. These two new railroad stations were immediately swamped with agricultural business which continued up to the year 1920 (Our Frontier 1800-1860 & Birth of Our Town of Ashley, Cole, 1976). Stagecoaches could not compete with the railroads and ceased operation in Sunbury, Ohio a nearby stagecoach hub, about the year 1873.

The Potter property was eventually sold to Joseph Riley and Lucy Slawson in the 1870s. Joseph Riley was a farmer by pursuit and a carpenter by trade and renamed the property Hillsdale Farm. He and his wife were actively engaged in raising sheep and swine and producing fruit. The property was transferred to other owners over the years and was purchased by the Poston family in about the year 1940. The original owners of this family were Carl McClellan Poston and his wife Naomi Hartje Poston. Carl served as a Colonel in the Army and after retirement became an oil and gas producer. The Poston property has been in the family for multiple generations and has been well stewarded – with relatively light farming and timbering over the years. Habitat degradation from more intensive farming and forestry practices has been avoided and the timber on the property is very mature.

The building that was known as Potter’s Tavern still exists on what is now known as Poston Preserve. This house and surrounding farm is owned and preserved by the Appalachia Ohio Alliance (AOA) and is located at 150 County Road 24, Ashley, Ohio. Photographs of the existing buildings in 2024 are shown below.



Figure 1 The single-story building is the original Potter's tavern building. The 2-story addition was built around 1910.



Figure 2 Rear of the single-story and two-story buildings.

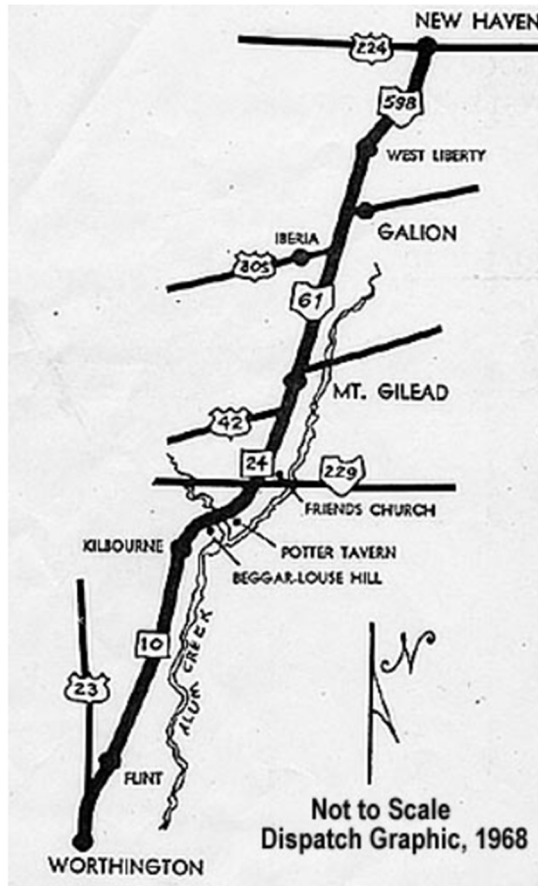


Figure 3-Vicinity Map for Worthington-New Haven Road (Columbus Dispatch, 1968)

Photos and article by: Jeffrey R. Kerr and Darlene A. Kerr. June 2024

References:

Early Industries of Peru Township, Morrow County, Ohio and Changes Which a Hundred Years Have Brought, by George Watson. Ohio History Connection Library

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