

THE THREE NOTCH'D ROAD

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Of the numerous roads built during the eighteenth century as settlement moved across Piedmont Virginia, probably the most noted was the Three Notch'd (later Three Chopt) Road, which ran from Richmond to the Valley as a main east-west route from the 1730's to the 1930's, when it was straightened and paved, emerging as U.S. Route 250. Interstate 64 follows the same general route as far as Crozet where, diverging, it crosses the Blue Ridge at Rockfish Gap instead of Woods (later Jarman's) Gap as did the Three Notch'd Road. Nevertheless, most of the Three Notch'd Road remains in service as a secondary road today, from Richmond to the Valley, and can be driven by the amateur road historian. A recent publication available from the Virginia Highway & Transportation Research Council details the early development of this road and contains a modern road map with the Three Notch'd Road superimposed upon it.

Although the road appears on late eighteenth century maps, it can first be specifically located on the maps prepared by the Confederate Engineers, and these show it almost precisely on its present course from Richmond to the Valley.

No doubt originally an Indian trail, various sections of it were gradually improved to the status of roads during the 1730's as the settlers moved into the upper Piedmont. It is first mentioned in a road order issued by Goochland County Court in June 1733 calling for a road to be opened "from the Mountains [the Southwest Mountain] down the ridge between the North River [Rivanna] & Pamunkey River [South Anna] the most convenient way . . ." In the spring of 1734 Peter Jefferson became surveyor of this road, which came to be called the Mountain or Mountain Ridge Road (not to be confused with Louisa's Old Mountain Road). From that time, orders concerning this road were issued frequently as the settlement of the present area of Albemarle County continued apace.

In the following years the western portions of this road were constructed so that by about 1740 at the latest a road was open to Beverly's Mill Place (later Augusta Court House and, now, Staunton). Already, in 1737, this road possessed a system of numbered mile markers running from west to east with No. 12, "the twelve mile tree", being located near Shadwell and Nos. 36 and 40 in the lower end of Goochland County. Most of these were probably numbers incised or painted on trees, with No. 0 evidently being the D.S. Tree, a tree with

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the initials of an early settler named Davis Stockdon carved on it, located near the present Ivy in Albemarle County. It is likely that Peter Jefferson, the father of Thomas, was responsible for these mile markers since they first appear in the records just after the end of his tenure as surveyor of the Mountain Road.

For the first decade of its existence, this road was regularly referred to as the Mountain Road. The first use of the name "three notch", "three notched" or "three notch'd road" occurs in a Louisa County ordinary license of 1742. A few days later the name appears in Goochland County Records and is regularly used there and in the new county of Albemarle, when it is formed in 1744 from Goochland. This name seems to be the preferred original name, maintaining its popularity down to the Revolution, although "three chopt" or "three chopped" appears occasionally. The old name, Mountain Road, evidently rapidly fell from favor, although as late as 1755 an advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette*, published in Williamsburg, refers to it as the "Three notched mountain road". The origin of the name Three Notched is being studied and will probably be the subject of a later article by the author.

By the time of the Revolution the Three Notch'd Road was a well-known road almost a half century old. As such it played a significant part in the events leading to the climactic surrender at Yorktown. In early June 1781, when Colonel Banastre Tarleton and his Dragoons rode toward Charlottesville in the hope of surprising Governor Thomas Jefferson and the General Assembly which was meeting there, it was over this road that Jack Jouett rode to warn them of impending doom.

A few days later, on June 13, 1781, the Marquis de Lafayette, by a clever night march from his camp in the Green Springs in Louisa County, secured a position commanding the Three Notch'd Road at its crossing of Mechunk Creek, thus thwarting the movement of Earl Cornwallis toward the ammunitions stored at Albemarle Old Court House near Scottsville and beginning the British retreat which would end at Yorktown.

Today, the amateur road historian, with the aid of the aforementioned map, can drive most of the route followed by such worthies as Thomas Walker, Thomas Johnson, William Johnson, Patrick Henry and a multitude of other Louisa Gentlemen as they journeyed "down the country" toward Williamsburg, the colonial capital. Or, if such be his fancy, he may turn his face in the other direction, toward "The Ledge", Blue "Ledge" or "Great Mountains" and follow the road to the crest of the Blue Ridge. There, at its juncture with the Appalachian Trail, he will find a tree recently marked, coincidentally no doubt, with three modern notches, for the Three Notch'd Road is unmarked, without even a historical marker to note its antiquity.