



Marker #1

The marker is gone, and perhaps few Guilderland residents today remember the significance of the iron talisman of Guilderland's past.

The Great Western Turnpike, incorporated March 15, 1799, was opened during a momentous period in history. The country was draped in mourning for its beloved George Washington, and the thriving little glass manufactory and hamlet of Hamilton (now Guilderland) had the honor of being the first village named after Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton.

The 52 miles of road from Albany to Cherry Valley cost \$167,388.93, was financed by private investors, and completed in 1804. The toll gate on Western Avenue in Guilderland was the second gate, the first being at Winthrop Avenue in the city. For each 10 miles it cost 12-1/2 cents for every wagon with two horses or 25 cents for a coach. It cost 3 cents to drive a pig on the road. No tolls were collected from persons going to or from church, to the election polls, to training or muster duty, to jury duty or for a physician or mid-wife.

The toll gate historic marker once stood on Route 20 on the site of the old Turnpike Drive-In theater of the 1940s and '60s, where the Highwood Village condominium complex stands today.

The covered wagons and coaches have disappeared. Drovers of cattle are no longer herded up the Turnpike; the emigrants, the taverns and inns that served them and the wolves that once lurked by the roadside are no longer visible. In the 1940s the road was still a two-lane highway. Now, a four-lane highway hosts 18-wheel trailers, trucks, school buses, rushing tourists and business men. And we who use the Turnpike daily for our living give little thought to its intriguing history.

(Research information from the writings of Historian Arthur Gregg and a series "The Great Western Turnpike" published in The Turnpike Record in 1957).