

Roads and Railroads in Braddock District

Opened in 1851, Orange and Alexandria Railroad (OARR) was the earliest railroad running through the Braddock District, utilized first for the transport of goods to the ports, then as a supply and transport route during the Civil War. A second competing railroad, the Manassas Gap Rail Road (MGRR), was under construction when the Civil War broke out, but never finished. Today, trains operated by Norfolk Southern Railway and Virginia Railway Express (VRE) over essentially the original OARR right-of-way, transport commuters to and from home and jobs; and the railroad's history in the district forms important childhood memories for many residents.

Several major roads running through Braddock District are centuries-old. Little River Turnpike, formerly a buffalo trace, was used for transportation from western Virginia to the Potomac River port of Alexandria. In 1802, the Little River Turnpike Company formed to build a 34-mile road from Duke Street in Alexandria to the ford on the Little River in Loudoun County. The company's job was to operate and maintain the road. Tollgates, established at five-mile intervals, were long poles connected to posts which could be turned to allow the vehicles to continue. Travelers were charged different tolls according to the type of transportation. A man on a horse paid less than the driver of a horse-drawn carriage. Even herds of sheep or cattle accrued tolls. A tollhouse was located in Annandale at the intersection of present-day Ravensworth Road and Little River Turnpike.

In 1896, the assets of the Little River Turnpike Company were turned over to the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. Taxes paid for the road, and private citizens were hired to fill potholes. In 1918, the State Highway Commissioner of Virginia took over supervision of the Turnpike, which then joined the state highway system of approximately 4,000 miles.

Braddock Road was built around 1752 between Alexandria and Rocky Run. During the French and Indian War, British General Braddock is reported to have used the road on his way to Fort Duquesne. Legend has it that General Braddock filled two cannons with gold coins and buried them somewhere along Braddock Road.

Shirley Highway was named in honor of Henry G. Shirley, the head of Virginia Department of Highways (today's Virginia Department of Transportation). Construction of the four-lane freeway began in October 1941, shortly after Shirley's death in July 1941.

The Capital Beltway, originally called the Circumferential Highway was approved for construction on September 18, 1955. The first section opened on December 21, 1961; the last section was completed August 17, 1964. Drivers had to learn how to merge using ramps, and new terminology such as clover leafs, Inner Loop (traveling clockwise), and Outer Loop (traveling counter-clockwise) came into use. A consistent numbering system for exits was established in 2000 to end the confusion caused by exits with the same numbers in both Virginia and Maryland.

Backlick Road is named from the salt licks in the area that attracted deer and woods buffalo. The road became an important connection between Little River Turnpike and Telegraph Road and Route 1.

Ox Road, also known as Middle Ridge Road was planned in 1729 by Robert "King" Carter. The road went west from the Occoquan Ferry to the Frying Pan Copper Mine, owned by the Carters. The Carters had discovered green sandstone which they thought to be copper ore. To transport the ore, Carter extended a trail developed by Native Americans to the Occoquan River and built a wharf there. The ore proved to be useless, but the mine operation brought about the construction of Ox Road and the Occoquan Wharf. The name of Ox Road is believed derived from teams of oxen which pulled carts and wagons on the road.

Rolling Road was named for the action of rolling hogsheads (large barrels) of tobacco over the road. Oxen and horses pulled the hogsheads to ports at Occoquan and Colchester.

Text from *Braddock's True Gold: 20th Century Life in the Heart of Fairfax County* by Marion Meany and Mary Lipsey, a product of the *A Look Back at Braddock* oral history project.