

***Stagecoach Inns
of Early Mukwonago June 22, 2025 Red Brick Museum***

***Where travelers sought
respite, back in the day....***



The Advent of Stagecoach Lines in Wisconsin

By the late 1830, companies delivered mail and passengers to key points. Milwaukee, Green Bay, and Prairie du Chien were connected by the first Military roads. By the 1840's, more "Plank Roads" were built. The rides were long, dusty, bumpy and sometimes risky.

Routes connected early Wisconsin Territory villages. Inns sprang up on these routes offering Rest-Food-Drink-Shelter.



***Big Bend,
Mequanego,
Caldwell, and East
Troy were on key
trails to the west.
From the other
direction, these
villages also saw
traffic from the lead
mines of Mineral
Point. Slow
lumbering wagons
pulled by oxen
headed to the port
of Milwaukie.***



*Mequanigo, Big Bend,
Caldwell & East Troy were on
the roads west:*

- The Mukwonago Plank Road
(National Avenue)*
- The Janesville Plank Road
(Forest Home Avenue)*

*These roads roughly followed
earlier Native American
paths.*

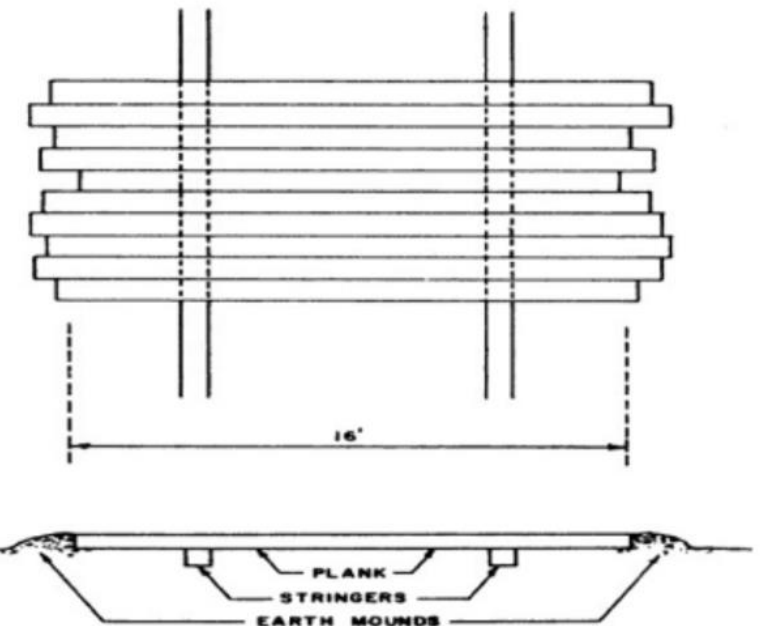
*Along the Janesville Plank
Roads, inns were about 5
miles apart.*

Plank Roads

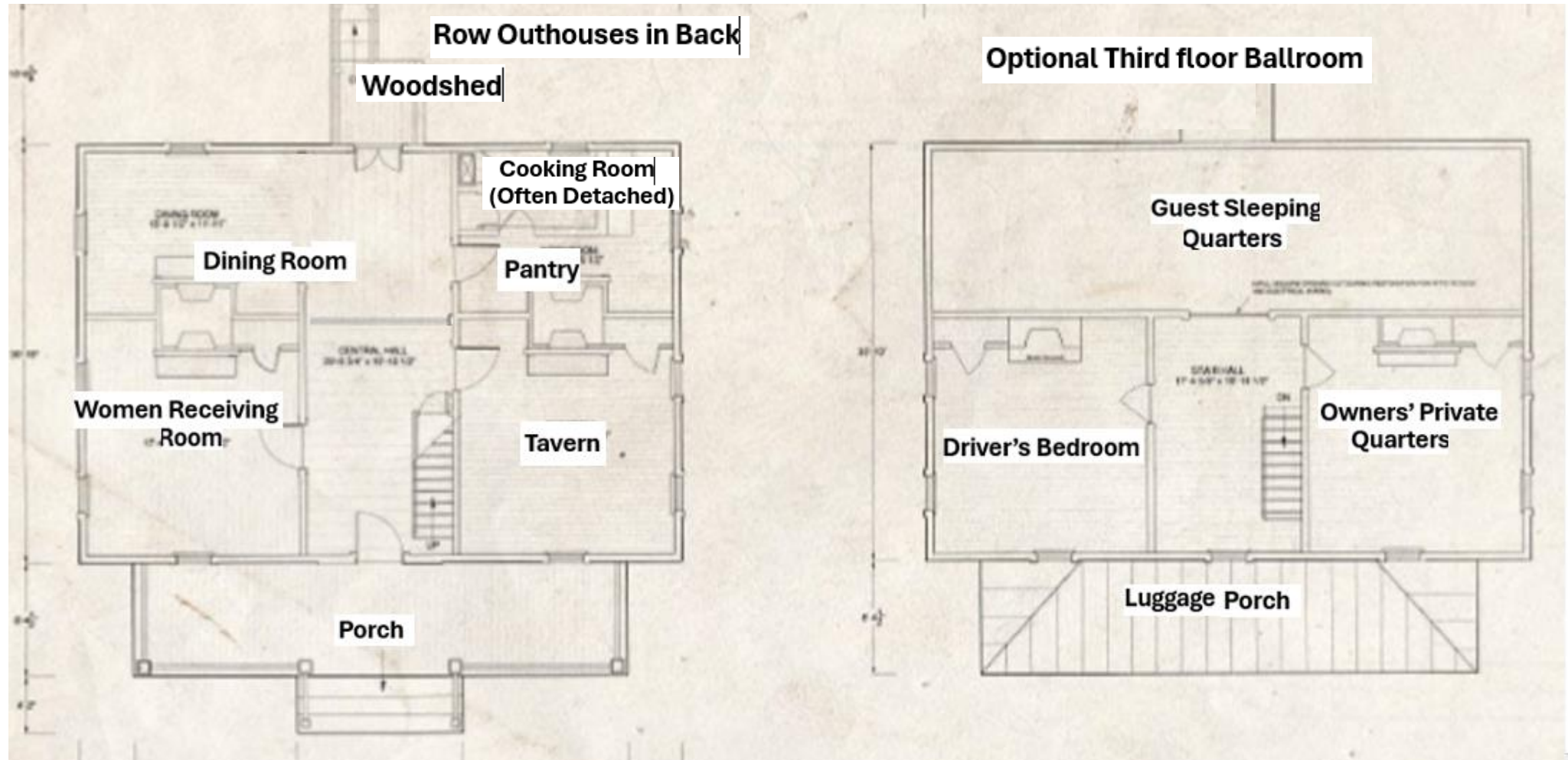


Reproduced from Edwin C. Guillet, *The Story of Canadian Roads* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 68. The drawing was prepared by A. D. Margison and Associates Limited.

PLAN AND SECTION PLAN OF
PLANK ROAD WITH STRINGERS



Typical Stagecoach Inn Floor Plan



Charles B. Stockman Inn, South Main Street

Built a log cabin on the site in 1837. Married Lucy Jones in 1840. Likely Mukwonago's first inn. This was replaced with the frame structure in 1850 shown at left. Since 1930, the Siefert family has owned the property and for many years was known as Siefert's Lincoln Tap. The fish fry was a local favorite but currently the building is headed for the wrecking ball.



Stockman Inn Built in 1850 by Charles B Stockman



Today

***John M. Stockman Inn,
Purchased land east of Sea
Serpent Lake (Upper Phantom)
starting in 1837. John's and
Louisa's (nee Morse) house was
the third frame house in
Mukwonago. In 1852, the family
left for California and ran a large
hotel in White Oak, CA. They
returned in 1856 and must have
taken travelers into their home
judging from the sign. The house,
near today's Elegant Farmer, was
burned for fire department
training about a decade ago.***





Henry Camp Stagecoach Inn 1841

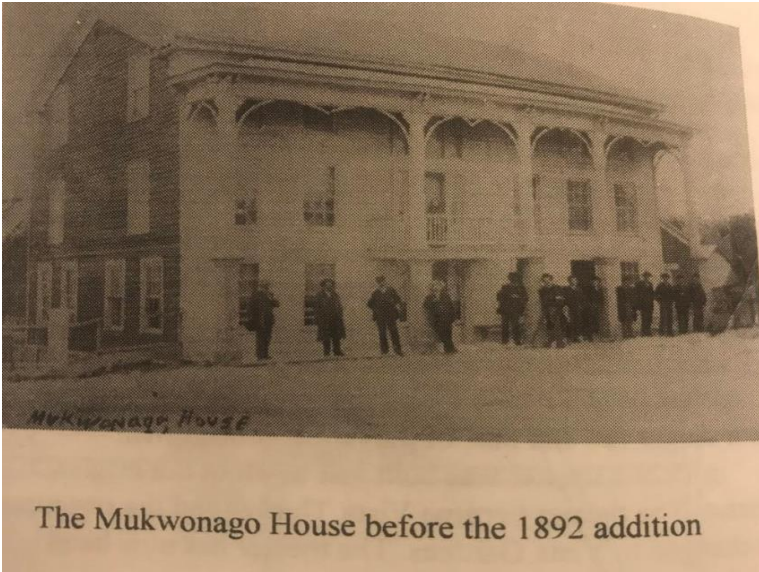
Photo taken 1878 also shows the Greeley Store

Picture of Mukwonago Wis 1878
Father of W. H. Greeley
Peter Greeley General Mills Store
Camps Hotel to the right run
by Mrs. Camps. Birthplace of
Warren Hamilton Greeley
Father of Warren Ed. Howard
Warren, and Holbrook V. Greeley

The Camp Hotel operated into the 1880's. After Henry's death, it was run by his widowed wife. It was torn down in the the early 1900's. This photo discovered in Arizona and put on eBay in late 2024 has revealed a view of downtown that had been long forgotten.



The Mukwonago House Hotel, 111 Rochester Street



The Mukwonago House was built in 1846 and was one of the earliest hotels in the area. On the first floor was the kitchen, dining room and reading room. Sleeping quarters for fifty to seventy-five guests were on the second floor and a ball room was on the top floor. Legend has it that none other than Sewall Andrews came to dances here and danced in his carpet slippers. The balconies, now long removed, were supported by pillars. Stagecoaches could pull up and unload luggage directly on the second floor for the guests. An addition was added in 1892.



Today the building houses several businesses. While it has been stripped of most of its original accoutrements, its “bones” still stand after more than 170 years.



Dance Tickets from Mukwonago House's Heyday!



The Dillenbeck Hotel, 215 Rochester Street



Gilbert Dillenbeck built this hotel in 1885 and added an addition in 1893. It had forty rooms, an icehouse, shops, and a two-acre park. Gilbert had earlier been a blacksmith. His father, Charles served in the Civil War. Rooms cost \$2.00 a night in its heyday and had a first-class delivery and stable. It later changed hands and became the Park Hotel in 1913. In 1927, the north end of the hotel caught fire after a New Year's party.



Later it became the Vista Gardens restaurant, then Inn The Olden Days. More recently it has been the Fork in the Road restaurant where fire again struck in 2015. Restored once more, it continues to invite patrons with its food and hospitality.

Leonard Martin Inn, Chamberlain (Big Bend)

Situated on the old Janesville Plank Road (Forest Home Ave,) Leonard Martin's stagecoach inn served guests in the 1840's and 1850's. The entire third floor was a dance hall where many a dance was held. It stood until the 1950's. Note the large Martin bird house in center and right photos.



THE MARTIN TAVERN on the Janesville Plank road just north of Big Bend, Wis., was built by Leonard Martin, who came from Vermont in the 1840's. The entire third floor is a ballroom where many a square dance was held long ago.
—Photo by Arthur Boerne



DESCRIPTION

View from fork in road of Martin's Tavern in Chamberlain. There is a horse and carriage with driver on the left. Three men sit or stand in front of the tavern. There is a multiple chambered bird house on a post in the yard.





***Jesse Smith
Stagecoach Inn,
Caldwell***



The Smiths came to the area in 1837 and built the first frame home in the Town of Vernon. He and wife, Sylvia, took in many a traveler there. In 1847, the house burned and by 1850, the Smith's had built this magnificent fieldstone inn with a ballroom on the 3rd floor.

The Smith inn survives today as a private home with several original outbuildings.



Surviving 1850's Sign



Today



This house on the corner of Stone School Road and Highway L (Janesville Plank) be a stagecoach sized structure. Midway between the Smith and Buena Vista inn locations However, the current owner says the house was build in 1890. A more likely location for an inn may have been in Beulah Station, less than a mile east. More research needed.



Inn. East Troy, Walworth County, Wisconsin. Photo by Jeff Dean, April, 1977 (#D-113/15)
ive at State Historical Society of Wisconsin. View: East (main) and north facades of

The Buena Vista House, East Troy

Built by Samuel R. Bradley between 1843 and 1846 out of cobblestones he personally collected. It was the largest surviving river cobblestone commercial building remaining in the US. It was a hotel for many years and later a tavern and restaurant. The original owners mysteriously disappeared spurring ghost stories through the years.

The End!

A major local landmark on the National Historic Registry, “the Cobblestone” was neglected in later years. Once the roof leaked, the cobblestone masonry was compromised. In 2022 it was condemned by the Village.



Stagecoach Inns Disappear

- *The advent of the railroads in the 1850's brought a lower cost, faster, and safer travel option for the flood of settlers moving west. Some stagecoach inn proprietors fought hard to keep railroad lines from following the same routes as the old plank roads. Stagecoach lines survived for a time, but it was the end of an era.*
- *By the 1870's, stagecoach inns were converted to private homes, taverns, or other business properties. Many were lost in the first half of the 20th century to decay. However, a few have been preserved as museums, ex., the Old Wade House (Greenbush) and Hawks Inn (Delafield.)*



Appendix: Stagecoach Inns and Plank Roads, an Account by Asa Craig (1847-1943)

Buried Secrets 80 Years Ago

(This is a transcription of an original, handwritten, unpublished manuscript written by Asa Craig, probably in the 1930's. It contains several errors in grammar and context that would undoubtedly have been corrected and smoothed out in a final version.)

Under the concrete foundations of Highways No. 14 and Country Trunk A lies buried many incidences which occurred 80 years ago. We think now as we watch the automobile traffic on these highways that if the people of that period could come forth and see the present, they would be amazed, but far more so would this generation be astonished if they could see a moving picture of what occurred during a period of twenty years of that date. These two highways were called the Janesville Plank Road which ran from the lead mines in the South-Western part of the State to Milwaukee. This road came to a fork or branch at a point about one mile East of East Troy, one branch going on a Southerly direction by Potter's Lake, Charley Miller, Caldwell Prairie, Jesse Smith, Dodge's Corners, Big Bend, Leonard Martin, Muskego, Tess Corners, and Hales Corners. The other branch passing Northerly through Mukwonago, Vernon, Prospect Hill and New Berlin.

As the lead mines developed there was a great need for good roads to transport their product to Milwaukee, the only market in the country that could be reached. The Janesville Plank Road Company was organized to build roads from the South-West to Milwaukee.

The great special need was the division with Muskego Hales Corners, Vernon and New Berlin. Mud was notoriously deep and sticky and more swear words are buried in that section than in any other place in Wisconsin, except that section running East from Menomonee Falls and South from Theanville. I have always wanted to get even with that streak of red clay so now I am pitting it against that Muskego mud of those long ago days. I have never heard that mud was human, but I believe the Muskego variety was largely so, for it was continually trying to get into the wagon box and ride.

Often the early settlers of Big Bend and vicinity preferred footing it to Milwaukee to get groceries than attempting to drive an oxen team. A husky settler would allow himself 100 pounds as a load and he would make it in a day and a half. My father on one occasion made a trip to the city with an oxen team taking 300 bushels of wheat. He was gone five days, stalled in the mud many times and one night slept in the wagon because he could not get out. He sold his wheat for 50 cents per bushel, and yet he had enough to buy his groceries for the coming winter and also pay his taxes, which were \$4.60.

The Plank Road Construction became a beehive of industry. Sawmills were erected, huge oaks felled and hauled to the mills and thousands of feet of planks, three inches thick, were laid and then Muskego mud had to go afoot. Toll-gates were established and the toll price collected. This toll road was a bonanza for the company as well as a blessing for the

teamsters. Now comes the great rush of the products from the South-Western mines. Even Galena, Illinois fell in line and thousands of tons of ore came over the new plank road. "Taverns" were erected, often no more than a mile or two apart. Between East Troy and Big Bend there were seven hotels and all were overburdened with teamsters. Many of these ore laden wagons had six oxen teams. While the speed of travel was slow, yet the traffic would make a good movie story and be a surprise to our auto people of today. (Insert: Oxen teams were shod in those days as well as horses.)

teamsters. Now comes the great rush of the products from the South-Western mines. Even Galena, Illinois fell in line and thousands of tons of ore came over the new plank road. "Taverns" were erected, often no more than a mile or two apart. Between East Troy and Big Bend there were seven hotels and all were overburdened with teamsters. Many of these ore laden wagons had six ox teams. While the speed of travel was slow, yet the traffic would make a good movie story and be a surprise to our auto people of today. (Insert: Ox teams were shod in those days as well as horses.)

One special feature is worthy of mention: I have seen 150 teams stored away for a night at one hotel. Charges for this hotel service were 75 cents for hay to teams, supper, lodging, breakfast and two drinks of whiskey. Lodging was more frequently wrapped up in blankets under some shed or on some barn floor with hay or straw for bedding. To the layman, the whiskey product appeared pretty near a free commodity. In those days the whole hotel bill would not buy a genuine whiskey of today. Just let me tell you something about whiskey. My home was in sight of a distillery, about two miles distance and I have seen it sold for 10 cents a gallon or \$3.00 per barrel. I will now startle the little staid village of Rochester, Wisconsin: Once I went with my father to deliver wool at this place. A general store located on the North side of the street had a barrel whiskey set on a box in the back store room with a tin cup hanging on the spigot with the inscription: "Help Yourself."

There was less teaming on the North branch running through Mukwonago, Vernon, Prospect Hill and New Berlin than on the Southern route. Accommodations were not quite as good but the two Stockman hotels, Mukwonago House, and several in New Berlin were well patronized. The John Stockman "Tavern" was build in 1836 and is in a fine state of preservation, and one of the oldest landmarks in these early settlements.



Credits

Collections of the Mukwonago Historical Society

Wisconsin State Historical Society photo archives

1880 Waukesha County Biographical History

Author's collection

Penny Honetor

Copyrighted 2025

Henry Hecker, Mukwonago Historical Society June, 22, 2025