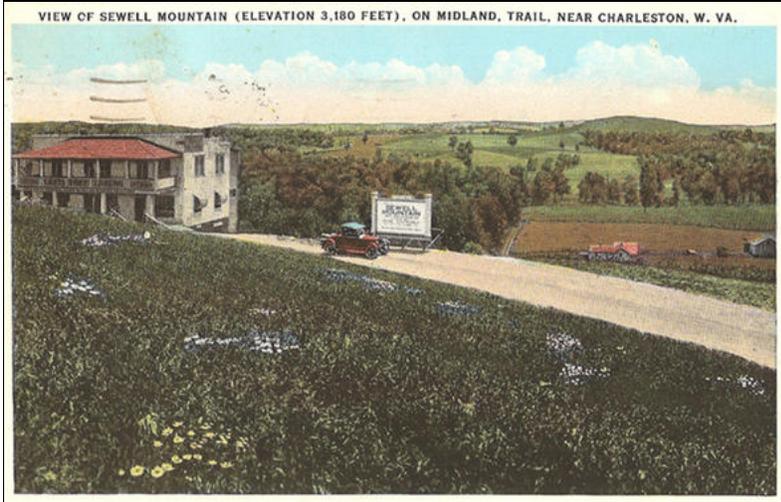


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Highway to History: Local author helps illustrate history of Midland Trail



Courtesy photo

An artist's rendering shows the view of Sewell Mountain -- elevation 3,180 feet -- on the Midland Trail southeast of Fayetteville.

By [Rick Steelhammer](#)

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The route U.S. 60 follows as it traverses the breadth of Southern West Virginia has gone through a number of name changes.

Known first as the Buffalo Trail in deference to the bison that trod out a pathway between grazing grounds and watering holes in the era before pioneer settlement, the route was later used by American Indians, European settlers, Civil War supply wagons and long-haul truckers.

"It was called the Lewis Trail, after Col. Andrew Lewis used it to take his militiamen from Lewisburg to fight Chief Cornstalk in the Battle of Point Pleasant in 1774," said James E. Casto, author of "Highway to History: A Midland Trail Scrapbook." Then, in the 1820s, it became the James River & Kanawha Turnpike," after the state of Virginia converted the pathway into a 66-foot wide toll road.

Following the Civil War, when armies of both sides used the road to move personnel and supplies between Lewisburg and the Kanawha Valley, the route became the Midland Trail, an unpaved road connecting Washington, D.C., to California. The Midland Trail was equipped with signs and opened to vehicular traffic in 1913, with the West Virginia section of the road initially designated as State Route No. 3.

According to a 1916 auto guide to the Midland Trail, the West Virginia section of the route, "generally speaking, is in very good shape and gives the average traveler no trouble," if travel is postponed until after the first of July. "In other words, don't even think of tackling the drive in anything other than mid-summer," Casto said.

In the late 1930s, the Midland Trail became U.S. 60, the state's first paved and numbered road.

Today, the road is known as U.S. 60, with Midland Trail remaining its official National Scenic Byway designation.

Once the main east-west route through the southern part of the state, the Midland Trail is now largely bypassed by long-distance travelers who prefer the easier, faster ride available on nearby Interstate 64.

In an effort to encourage more drivers to discover the history, scenery and small-town charm available along the Midland Trail's slow lanes, Casto wrote "Highway to History," and used more than 200 postcard views and vintage photographs to illustrate it.

"I've been haunting estate sales, eBay and antique stores for years, collecting vintage postcards and old photos, and I've used them to illustrate some of my earlier books" Casto said. "After driving back and forth over the Midland Trail so many times over the years, I started outlining an illustrated book about it in my mind."

Many of the postcards used to illustrate the book show scenes that can no longer be found along the Midland Trail, including the Kanawha, Fleetwood and Ruffner hotels in Charleston, the J.J. Jimison Tourist Camp at Culloden, and timber booms on the Big Sandy River at Kenova.

Others show towns along the route as they appeared in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

For the few points of interest along the route not depicted in postcards or archived photos, "I got in my Buick and took my own photos," said Casto, the former editor of the Huntington Herald Dispatch.

"There's history around every bend of its 180 miles," Casto said of the highway. "Travelers willing to take their time and drive the two-lane blacktop of the Midland Trail can get a glimpse into history that's denied those who hurry along the superhighway. If you like history, scenery and roadside novelties, you need to drive it."

Casto's 112-page full-color soft cover volume was published by Quarrier Press and is available in area bookstores or from the West Virginia Book Co. at 1-888-982-7422 or www.wvbookco.com. Retail price is \$17.95.

Casto will be signing copies of "Highway to History: A Midland Trail Scrapbook" from 10 a.m. to noon Nov. 19 in the Cabell-Huntington Convention & Visitors Bureau office at Heritage Station in downtown Huntington. River & Rail Bakery will provide refreshments.

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