

Whetzel Trace (1818-1823)
Franklin County
24.1965.1

Prepared by the
Indiana Historical Bureau 2010
IN.gov/history

Marker Text

Here Edward Toner founded Somerset, 1816 & operated Toner's Tavern, 1816-1823, from which rallying point pioneers started west on Jacob Whetzel's Trace to the "New Purchase" of Central Indiana.

Report

Several aspects of this marker are correct. Franklin County land deeds show that Edward Toner did found Somerset in 1816. Most sources do agree that Whetzel cut the trace in 1818 and it did go to the New Purchase. For more information see R. Carlyle Buley's *The Old Northwest Pioneer Period* (1950), George R. Wilson's *Trails and Surveys* (1919), *The John Tipton Papers*, Vol. 1 1809-1827 (1942), the *Indiana History Bulletin* (January 1965), and W. S. Blatchley's "Internal Improvement in Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History* (March 1907).

The dates presented on the marker, however are problematic. The end date of 1823 in the title is challenged by two sources. J. David Baker claims in *The Postal History of Indiana* that "the route was used until 1826." In addition, Blatchley's "Internal Improvement in Indiana" states "by 1826 Whetzel's trace was no longer used, at least at the west end, being impeded by fallen trees." All other located sources do not indicate when the route ceased to be used, thus the use of 1823, as it appears on the marker, is unsubstantiated and contradicted by located sources.

The establishment and closure of Toner Tavern also presents some problems. The earliest record of Edward Toner receiving a license to "keep a tavern" is 1818; two years after the marker claims the bar existed. The Franklin County *Commissioners' Records* do not indicate Toner ran a tavern in 1817. In addition to this conflicting evidence, the end of Toner's Tavern cannot be corroborated. No source could be located that documented when Toner closed his tavern.

Were this marker to be rewritten today, IHB staff would also try to give a more accurate evaluation of Whetzel's Trace and its role helping settlers make their way to central Indiana.

