

*Seventy Third Avenue Revealed*

## *The Great Sauk Trail*

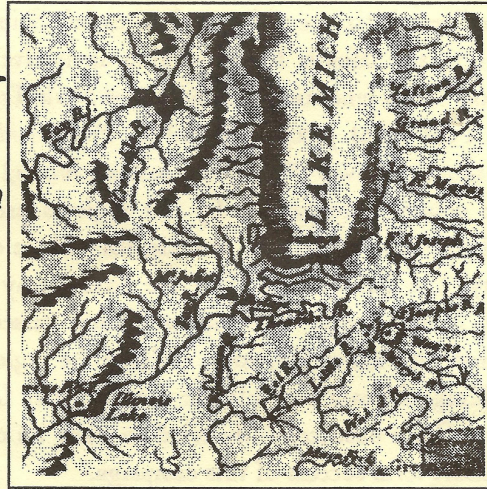
*Timeless "Main Street" for a Region*

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*A Hidden Identity: Human Epic in Continental Settlement*

Seventy-Third Avenue is a city street that we are all accustomed to driving each day. In Merrillville it is lined with the usual buildings, houses, sidewalks and curbs that we see on any other street in town.

The very less-than-romantic name of Seventy-Third Avenue conceals its epic import. It is not just another member of the city grid. It is a thoroughfare of continental importance. Importance which has endured for hundreds of years!

Think back a few hundred years and imagine a continental road no more than a trodden dirt path winding its way between green walls of Oak, Elm, Birch and Poplar; past open black soil prairie of beautiful flowering stands of grasses rising to a height of nine feet; past savannahs of Oak, through rivers and creeks and skirting marsh lands. A narrow path of communication, war and supply passing through a forbidding wilderness populated with black bear, timber wolves, elk, moose, and bison.

*This was a pathway of Native, European, & American Empire.*

*Native Wars: The Sauk Trail was the main road from here to Detroit - a major fur trade depot*

Seventy-Third Avenue is a road of History and pre-History. Originally it was a path of trade, communication and war for Native Americans. Warriors of the mighty Iroquois nation (from modern day upper New York State) probably moved west along the Great Sauk Trail to its junction with the Illinois River in order to attack the tribes of that region. In traveling through these parts they must have been none too kind. They combated the tribes of the Illinois River, destroyed their villages and claims to the land as they pushed them down stream to the Illinois' confluence with the River Mississippi. These attacks became known as the "Beaver Wars" (or Iroquois Wars) of the late seventeenth century.

This campaign was launched apparently due to a lack of furs for the lucrative European fur trade in the Iroquois homelands. The French constructed Fort Saint Joseph on the Saint Joseph River (near modern-day Niles Michigan) in the fall of 1691 out of concern of Iroquois attack upon the Miami Indians living in that region.

*War of the American Revolution: Changing European Claims - The Road to Empire takes a turn: 1775-1783*

The Americans had allies besides the French in their endeavors to separate from old King George the Third. The Spanish had interests based predominantly in the Gulf of Mexico and the lower River Mississippi. They laid siege at this time to British garrisons in Pensacola, Florida, and Mobile, Alabama. However, they saw fit at one point to strike at British holdings in the Old Northwest (here!). The War of the Revolution was in its sixth year when a Spanish-led column of

sixty-five militiamen and sixty Indians left Saint Louis (January 2, 1781), canoed up the Mississippi River to the Illinois River, picking up twelve more militiamen along the way. They took the Illinois to its junction with the Great Sauk Trail. From there they marched east to then British-held Fort Saint Joseph (*in 1763 the French had been defeated in the French and Indian War and had surrendered their New World claims to Great Britain*). They were granted safe passage by our region's previous residents, the Potawatomi Indians, for a share of the booty. On February 12, 1781 the little army took Fort Saint Joseph by surprise. They raised the Spanish flag above the work, claimed the region for the King of Spain, and left the very next day for Saint Louis by the same route. After hostilities ceased Spain unsuccessfully tried to stake its claim to the Old Northwest Territory based upon the short-term success of this campaign.

*Four flags have passed along the  
Great Sauk Trail - those of France,  
Great Britain, Spain, and the  
United States.*

#### **A Well-worn Trail of Settlement & a Path to Massacre**

*"What followed was butchery..."*

*Troy Taylor; Haunted by History*

All of our regional communities may claim this epic highway as their umbilical cord. Even Chicago shares in this honor for the original troops that the United States sent to garrison Fort Dearborn used the Sauk Trail en route. On the other side of the coin, warriors of the local Potawatomi tribe lead by war-captain Black Partridge and others used it on their way to capture Fort Dearborn during the War of 1812. Feeling shortchanged in surrender negotiations the Potawatomis fell upon the garrison and families as they peacefully left the fort. Around 86 innocents were slaughtered on the Lake Michigan Dunes a few miles south of the fort.

#### **The "Trail of Death"**

*"The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians..."*

*Article the Third, Northwest Ordinance; The United States Congress; 1787*

After the American Revolution the Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance, in which it established standards of settlement of the newly claimed region. After years of struggle and out-and-out war with the Natives, their land claims were abolished by the Federal government & they were removed in 1832. Some undoubtedly were taken along the Great Sauk Trail to points west, a trail known to history as the "Trail of Death."

#### **Community Growth along a Main Artery: Isolated campsites to Native Villages to Urban Infrastructure** *Change is the only Constant*

On an 1876 map the Sauk Trail is the only continuous route through Lake County. Known by then as the "Joliet Wagon Road" (it is still named Joliet Street in Schererville!) it was the route of local farm produce to mill and to market (*Wood's mill was in production as early as 1838*). Towns, such as Merrillville and Schererville grew up along its dusty way.

In the twentieth century our little road once again rose to continental importance as it became a section of the Lincoln Highway - a coast-to-coast highway connecting communities through their historic downtowns. It continued to serve the nation as an artery of commerce and recreation.

**Go Exploring!** *Make History relevant by thinking why things are the way they are and how they came to be*  
So, dear friend, now you know a bit more of a street that we all thought we knew so well. If you feel adventurous travel this important road. In the grand tradition of giving consideration to the load-bearing foot-sore traveler, the Great Sauk Indian Trail still follows the natural ridgelines gaining access by the easiest grades as it winds through the changing countryside.

*It Responds to the Land. Just as it has throughout the Ages.*