Henry County—rich in Indiana History, and one of them being the National Road which is also known today as US 40, the nation’s very first interstate. The National Road became a Gateway for thousands of settlers to the Midwest. Commissioned in 1806 by Thomas Jeffers-on, the Road was built in sections over more than four decades. The first axe and shovel split the air in 1811 at Cumberland, Maryland. Seven years later engineers reported the completion of the first major section, the 113 mile stretch from Cumberland to Wheeling, Virginia. One of the great advantages of the road, of course, was that it considerably shortened travel times. In 1832, even before the road was completed, it advertised its trips from Dayton to Indianapolis as taking only two and a half days, with nightly stops at inns or taverns. Later, express stage services provided for horses, lined the road. But perhaps the most numerous and renowned of these service industries were the inns and hotels. They were the truck stops and travel plazas of the period, offering a variety of services. The weary traveler could get a room, food, drink, a place for his animals, and any number of other necessities to make life a little easier.

One of the largest settlements in Henry County began to spring up with thriving business and growing communities. Blacksmith shops to make repairs, stores to supply customers, and livery stables to provide for horses, lined the road. But perhaps the most numerous and renowned of these service industries were the inns and hotels. They were the truck stops and travel plazas of the period, offering a variety of services. The weary traveler could get a room, food, drink, a place for his animals, and any number of other necessities to make life a little easier.

One of those largest settlements in Henry County became Knightstown, which was platted in 1827, just after the National Road was located, and named in honor of Jonathan Knight, an engineer employed by the government upon the road. Waitesell M. Cary was the first settler and the proprietor of the town. About 1830, Cary began to furnish entertainment for travelers and in 1832 opened a licensed tavern. The next house erected after Cary’s was built by Dawson Sanford.

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