

U. S. Transportation

In the political revolution of 1800, the government passed into the hands of the democracy. What the country needed most was a national consciousness and nothing could bring this about so quickly and so well as giving the control of the nation to the party of the masses. The Federal party had laid the foundation of nationality. The America of today was not born before 1800. After the War of Independence, the states had settled back into their old colonial habits. Even in politics the chief issues after 1792 were foreign, and not before the dawn of the 19th century did there exist a truly American spirit, and not until after the War of 1812 did the people open their eyes to the vast possibilities that lay before them.

In 1800 we were still a nation of farmers, bad roads and poor postal service. In 1790 there were only 75 Post Offices in the U. S.

The application of steam power in factories, the railroad, the steamship, telephone, telegraph, sewing machine, and electricity – all have come into use after the beginning of the 19th century. One of the most dramatic changes took place in the means of travel. For two thousand years there had been no improvement. The basic change came about with the advent of the railroad, where an over night trip would transport the traveler in comfort to a location several days distant if traveling by horse drawn vehicles.

From the earliest of colonial times, only the land east of the Appalachians was developed. At the end of the 18th century, a new frontier was sought in the great valley west of them. Just as the colonists who had come from England in 1630-1641 rarely if ever returned to their home country, so did the new pioneer seldom return to his origins in the east.

The 1800 census showed a population of 5,308,483, 1/5 of them slaves. Nine tenths of this population was east of the Appalachians, but 500,000 were already living in the valley of the Mississippi and Ohio.

Three great roads led from the coastal colonies to the region beyond the Appalachians; one from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, another from the valley of the Potomac to the Monongahela, the third led from Virginia southwesterly to what is now Kentucky.

The Philadelphia-Pittsburgh route basically followed along today's I-76 (Pennsylvania Turnpike). The route in 1837 took 3 ½ days if the connection with steamer ran daily.

The Potomac to Monongahela ran through Maryland along the Potomac through the Appalachians to Cumberland, then along today's U. S. 48 westward to the vicinity of Morgantown, West Virginia. The Monongahela River was navigable from about Morgantown northward to Pittsburgh. At Pittsburgh, the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers join to form the Ohio River, which connects with the Mississippi River.

The Virginia route led through Virginia to its southwest corner at Cumberland Gap, which led into Kentucky and Tennessee. The New River Gorge allowed passage through the main portion of the Appalachians, and then followed the trend of the Western Appalachians to the gap in Cumberland Mountain.

The first transcontinental highway, called the Lincoln Highway, began at Times Square, New York City and ended in San Francisco's Lincoln Park, a distance of 3,389 miles. It crossed Pennsylvania over the Pennsylvania Turnpike and across the continent

more or less following the alignment of I-80. In 1912 there were 901,000 cars in this country; in 1915 the number had risen to 3,000,000 and in 1920, 8,000,000. By 1923, it had pioneered a national highway system. The highway numbering system also began that year.

In Nebraska, it ran generally along U. S. 30, which is parallel to I-80, which is parallel to the Union Pacific RR, which is parallel to the Oregon Trail, which in turn is parallel to the Platte River.

During the 1920s, the Lincoln was sometimes described as “nothing more than a red line on paper, connecting all the worst mud holes in the country”.

In the 1830s, the railroad passenger car assumed the central isle still in use today.

The Mohawk and Hudson RR, constructed in 1830-31, reduced an all day, forty-mile trip through many locks of the Erie Canal to a fast 17 miles. Its first trip took 1 ¾ hrs. out and 38 minutes back.

By 1849, 3,000 miles of track existed in the U. S., 9,000 the following year.

Germans and Irish poured into America in the 1840s; Connecticut swarmed with inventive tinkers. Farmers, weary of the stony, hardscrabble farms of New England, were heading for the rich soil of the Middle West. The discovery of gold in California added fuel to the westward exodus.