

Developments in transportation



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Can you imagine how difficult it would have been for people in the early 1800s and prior to be able to trade goods from town to town? Trade then was so slow compared to all the advances in transportation that were made between 1800 – 1850. “ As the nineteenth century unfolded, however, more and more farm families became engaged in *commercial* rather than *subsistence* agriculture...” (Shi and Tindall 353) Americans decided to liberate “...people from the constraints of distance” (Shi and Tindall 353) by renovating and/or creating a national network of roads, rivers, canals, and railroads along with the usage of steamboats, flatboats, and clipper ships. (Shi and Tindall 353, 356, 360) There were also improvements in coast to coast travel.

“ Until the nineteenth century, travel in America had been slow, tedious, uncomfortable, and expensive.” (Shi and Tindall 355) People were unsure where the funding for all these renovations should come from: State and local governments or the Federal government. “ In 1803, when Ohio became a state, Congress had ordered that 5 percent of the money from land sales in the state would go toward building a National Road from the Atlantic coast across Ohio and westward.” (Shi and Tindall 356) This road, The National Road, ended up going from Cumberland, Maryland all the way to Vandalia, Illinois. Even though federal funding was still controversial, the improvements of roads continued to stimulate the growth of towns, opened new markets, and reduced transportation costs. (Shi and Tindall 356)

The Ohio and Mississippi Rivers were key to trading between the states adjacent to them. “ Steamboats, flatboats (barges driven by men using long poles), and canal barges carried people and goods far more cheaply than did

horse-drawn wagons.” (Shi and Tindall 356) Steamboats were so important because they could go against the natural flow of the rivers. “ Thereafter, the use of wood- fired steamboats spread rapidly, opening nearly half the continent to water traffic along the major rivers.” (Shi and Tindall 356) The invention of the steamboat not only increased transcontinental trade, they also promoted growth and woke up slow towns because they needed river ports. There were many downsides to these steamboats, for example, “ Accidents, explosions, and fires were common, and sanitation was poor.” (Shi and Tindall 357) The steamboat was still popular despite that.

Sticking with the upside of transportation via water, canals were also coming into play, but they had to be built. It took many workers, many years to build them. A lot of cities in New York benefited from the Erie Canal which “... connected the Great Lakes and the Midwest to the Hudson River and New York City.” (Shi and Tindall 357) This new canal acquired some of the products that would have otherwise been transported to ports via the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Instead of going to Canada or New Orleans, they could go straight to New York. “ It brought a ‘ river of gold’ to New York City in the form of an unending stream of lumber, grain, flour, and other goods from western New York and the Midwest, and it unlocked the floodgates of western settlement.” (Shi and Tindall 359) After the success of New York, canals started popping up everywhere.

Canals boosted the economy by enabling speedier and less expensive transport of goods and people. They also boosted real estate prices for the lands bordering the canals and transformed sleepy rural villages like Rochester, New York, into booming cities. (Shi and Tindall 359)

Ocean trade was still going on. Once gold was found in California, merchants needed a fast way to get their goods across to the east coast. The clipper ship was "...twice as fast as the older merchant ships." (Shi and Tindall 361) As prospectors and entrepreneurs flocked to the west coast, goods were also needed to supply their needs. Before the clipper ship, a conventional ship would take around 179 days to get from New York to San Francisco. (Shi and Tindall 361) These clipper ships were fast, but they could not carry a lot. An eventual solution to this was the steamship.

The most important invention of this era was the railroad. " It surpassed other forms of transportation because of its speed, carrying capacity, and reliability." (Shi and Tindall 360) The speed of the railroad was one of the major benefits. Another perk was that it could run all year around. You and/or your products were shielded from the weather. Not only that, but now cities and towns that were not conveniently set next to a river, canal, or ocean could compete in the market. This seemed like the answer America needed, but there were some adverse effects on the Native Americans. " Writer Nathaniel Hawthorne spoke for many when he said that the locomotive, with its startling whistle, brought ' the noisy world into the midst of our slumberous space.'" (Shi and Tindall 360) It did not stop with these first tracks of the railroad.

Despite the benefits it brought to the U. S., the transcontinental railroad had some negative consequences. Most starkly, the forced relocation of Native Americans from their lands resulted in widespread destruction of Native American cultures and ways of life. Many conflicts arose as the railroad project continued westward, and the military was brought in to fight Native

American tribes. In addition, many natural resources were destroyed to make way for the expanding train tracks and stations. (GTG)

Americans used clipper ships, steamboats, flatboats by sea, and stagecoaches and railroads by land. In the beginning of America's independence, they realized that trade and a flourishing economy were going to be important factors in their success. It was agreed that better and safer forms of transportation were going to be needed. "The result of new and better roads, canals across the states, and railroads was to enable Americans to grow more, to create more, to build more factories, and to send their goods and crops farther to market by virtue of especially the railroads." (Norton)

Works Cited

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