

The effects of changes in transportation history essay



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This paper will discuss the effects of transportation changes on Americans between the year 1800 and 1839. It is well known that moving from one place to another is in the nature of mankind. Even the modern man can be said to be still leading a nomadic life up till today. Man's intelligence and the continuous process through which man has adapted to his surroundings have been reflected in changes in the means of transportation and the improvements in transportation methods throughout history. In America, there were some changes in the mode of transportation between 1800 and 1839, and this affected the American people in various ways.

Transportation and Communication

Nowadays, transportation and communication are usually treated in different contexts. However, during early 1800's, long distance communication was very much dependent upon transportation. During that period, transportation was synonymous to communication, and the growth of transportation directly affected the developments in communication to a great extent. During the 1800's the 'pony couriers', a means of transportation as well as communication, influenced the history of transportation in America. In order to appreciate the changes in transportation during that period, it is necessary to analyze the process under the then prevailing circumstances, and gain an understanding of transportation methods and processes back then. There were various means of transportation in America during the 1800's, including Steam Boats, Horses and the use of Public Ferry

Steam Boats

Transportation includes transportation of people, goods, and even animals. Transportation in sea or waterways was developed comparatively even before 1800. Later after the invention of steam boats, they were the primary means of transportation by sea and inland waterways. The commercial steam boat services started in 1807, transporting cotton, sugar, and passengers. Transportation of the agricultural and industrial commodities strengthened the economy of the country. Within few years steam boat services grown very fast, catering to the development of the economy, and a news article is given below.

Natchiz, Jan 2: Important Arrival - Arrived here on Monday last, the Steam-Boat from Pittsburgh which had... as a regular trader She was only 921 hours underway from Pittsburgh to this place a distance of near two thousand miles.”[1]

It was only the inland transportation, which remained primitive on account of the slow pace of technological development, relying mainly on horses, mules and asses. Animals like horses, mules and asses were the means of transportation in the early days, and continued throughout the period, and thereafter also. Only a careful analysis of the newspapers of this period in the history provides glimpses of the status of transportations prevailed in those times.

Horses

During the 1800's it was normal to come across the advertisements in newspapers, a sample of which is given below, for trading in horses. " A Mare and Horse for Sale, Classified Ad 4"[2]

Public Ferry

Public ferries were also very much in use during that period, and adverts like the one below were to be regularly seen in the newspapers.

" Be it ordained by the Mayor, Aldermen, Common Council, and Freemen of the City of Hartford, That if any person shall willfully, or negligently, ride or drive any kind of Carriage, or Vehicle, or ride, lead, or drive any horse upon any Side Walk in laid City, now laid out, or hereafter to be laid out, unless for the purpose of necessarily... and to pay to such party just damages."[3]

The political and social background in America

The early 1800's has been declared ' an era of good feelings' and it started with Thomas Jefferson becoming the first President of the country despite fierce opposition. The industrial revolution first started in Europe, and the technological and economic progress gained momentum first in Europe during this period. America was slow to catch up with the emerging trend on account of consolidation and internal problems during this period, and there was hardly any major development taking place in the transportation sector. Moreover, unlike European countries, America is vast and there were difficulties in reaching the interior parts of the country. People rarely traveled by coaches, they rode horse back or walked. The conditions of the

roads were poor. Also there was another notice to the public from the City of Hartford by Solomon Porter on the same day next to the above.

“ The port cities and ferry places were active with import and export of cargo of various types. Primitive types of vehicles and carriages were in use for transportation of goods to and fro ferry places. Wagons of various types, Stage coaches, etc. were all later developments. Carriage construction and repair industry developed well during the period prior to rail road era which started in 1820s. The role of stage coaches during this period was very important in the movement of goods and the economic development of the county. Advances made in technology helped improvements in the manufacturing of various types of wagons such as Conestoga, Concord and so on with improved designs which increased mobility of people.”[4]

State Governments’ initiative in repairs and maintenance of roads

The conditions of the roads were poor, and it was a great impediment to trade and commerce. The State Government took initiative to repair and maintain the roads in proper condition to ensure freedom of movement. They took efforts in this direction and gave importance to these projects on priority basis. In this connection, a notice in newspaper is given below.

“ Notice published by the Contractor: All persons who are under contract to keep in repair the Hartford and New London Turnpike Road are hereby notified that a punctual compliance with the with the last orders of the States Commissioners respecting that repairing said road is absolutely necessary to save them from incurring damages ... repair according to

contract by the first Monday in July next to the acceptance of the States' Commissioners." [5]

We can understand that the traffic due to the increased movement put pressure on the roads and the Government took initiatives to put some control on traffic to improve the situation. A notice issued in this regard is reproduced below.

" The inhabitants of the Town of Hartford are hereby notified that the annual Town Meeting in the town of Hartford will be holden at the State House in Hartford on the fourth Monday of November instant, which is the 25th day of said November at nine o' clock in the forenoon, for the purpose of transacting the ordinary business ... passing By-laws restraining cattle, horses. Asses, mules, sheep, swine and geese, from going at large on the highway" [6]

The Federal Government and National Road

Federal Government understood the importance of creating a National road that would be important for the growth and development of the interstate travel, trade and commerce. The Government planned to raise the resources by sale of public lands and utilize part of the sale proceeds to build National road project that ran from Maryland to Pennsylvania. They used the revenue from the sale of lands in Ohio in national road to speed up the interstate trade and economic development. The national road project started in 1811 was extended into 1839. National road reduced the barriers to the progress and the movement of goods considerably. The heavy traffic which ensued in the national road ensured safety from highway robbery, and

the interstate travel gathered momentum, apart from economic development.

Legislature on transportation

There were proposals in Legislature on taxation that reflected the developments in the field of horse wagons or coaches. It will be interesting to note an article in this respect.

" Mr. Austin said ... coaches worth 300 dollars, and horses 600, but not one in thousand has a coach or rides in it, ... this system of taxation is no more like the one which he proposed to the U. States, than darkness is like light.."[7]

Rail Roads

Railroads began to dominate the transportation from 1820's. This rapid growth of railways was due to cost efficiency, speed, and reliability. It became the cheaper and effective alternative to traveling by coaches or steamboats.

The expansion of railroads put breaks on the growth of the steamboats. Railways brought east and west closer which was an important step in the integration and consolidation of the economy. Initial reactions and support for this system of transportation may be observed.

" When the steam coach is brought fully into use, practice will teach us many things respecting it, of which theory leaves us ignorant. ... It is impossible to anticipate the effects of such an extraordinary facility of communication... -

The Americans with their characteristic ardor of improvements, are now

collecting information about railways and locomotive mechanics in England, and to them these inventions will prove of inestimable value.”[8]

Railways: An article in the newspaper dwelt upon detailed technical aspects, cost factors, etc. with regard to the railways and stated “ Railways are a much more recent invention than canals; and for particular purposes, such as the conveyance of coal, stone or other heavy commodities down a short inclined plane, sloping at an angle of three or four degrees, they are decidedly superior. As a means of general communication, they are cheaper in the first outlay than canals, more commodious in some respects.”[9]

The railroads have become the hub of economy in the interstate trade and commerce. Transportation by boat was slow and restricted to waterways and hence transport of perishable goods would be difficult. Tolls on canals were very high compared to railways. The organized growth of railways gave fillip to the ‘ freedom of movement’

Cost of Transportation on Rail Roads: A report in this connection indicates organized growth in railways. “ We have received a copy of the last Report of the Lehigh Navigation and Coal Co. which contains a statement of the actual expense of transportation on their Rail Road. This Rail Road, we understand, is about nine miles in length, and extends from the Lehigh Coat Mines to Mauch Chunk, where boat navigation commences.”[10]

The repairs to railway tracks and maintenance are less expensive and easy compared to canals. It should be understood that the growth and development of various forms of communication is inclusive. The

importance of canal and stage coaches has gone down significantly. But,
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there were needs for these forms of transportations for a balanced growth, since the vast land of the country was not completely connected by rail roads. The policies took into account these factors, as can be seen from an article about a meeting in Windsor in connection with the proposed projects.

“ From the New-Haven Chronicle: ... A meeting to be held at Windsor ... the “ the variety of projects - a canal to New Haven - a rail-road to Boston - and a slack water navigation of the river - all contemplated at nearly the same time.”[11]

The horses and horse coaches as the forms of transportations were also prevalent in this period, and a newspaper advertisement in this period may be useful for our understanding. An advertisement with the heading; “ New Saddlery for sale of saddles, bridles, etc.”[12]

Momentum in the growth of railways: There momentum in Rail Road activities picked up 1830's. The Government and public were participating in conventions throughout the country, held in connection with new rail roads connecting various cities and towns dotted the country.

“ RAIL ROAD CONVENTION: A Convention was held at Farmington, March 23rd 1836 to take into consideration the propriety of causing preliminary surveys for a Rail Road from the county of Berkshire, in Massachusetts, to intersect the Hartford and New Haven Rail Road”[13]

“ Connecticut River Rail Road: A convention has been held in Lyndon, Vt., to concert measures for procuring a survey of a Rail Road route from the mouth

of the Pasumpsic River to Canada line. The spirit evinced indicates that no lack of effort will be found among the citizens there"[14]

The evolutionary importance of transportation

Traffic is the life blood of any business. The transportation played an important role in the economic development of the United States and its civilization. Developments in the transportation affected the economy, and similarly, there were other factors which affected the transportation. During the year 1819 recessionary trends set in. The recession, a cyclical factor in the economy, became severe in due course of time and businesses in general all over the country collapsed. Many people lost their hard earned money and properties. This had repercussions on transportation sector also. Because, funding of big projects, laws related to companies in transportation sector, role of banks, active participation by the Governments, etc. were important factors in the development of transportation.

Freedom of movement is not 'unrestricted movement'. The Governments effectively controlled and regulated the sector through Legislature and undertook repairs, maintenance, developments, construction of new roads etc. The national road is an example of Government's initiative in transportation.