

JOURNEY STORIES

A Most Mobile Nation!

A mobile people in a vast land:
Some of us were here already,
Some of us came hoping for a better life,
Some of us came in chains, ...

And all of us are still in motion.

We all have Journey Stories ...

Each of us has a powerful journey story deep in our personal heritage. It may be a story of a family uprooting itself in order to stay together, or of sons and daughters moving to another land, or of a distant ancestor, perhaps unknown

Americans have always been intensely mobile, and we still are. Farmers, mechanics, entrepreneurs, immigrants, and slaves have built American society over four centuries. Travel over roads, rails, rivers, and trails — even the skies — has shaped the American cultural and economic landscape.

- Image: New Citizens Waving Flags, J. Emilio Flores

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Quotes on Banners:

“When they landed on the banks of the river they saw many Indians whose bearing had suggested that they would receive them in a most civil and friendly way, as was proved in practice.”

Jacques le Moyne de Morgues, describing the
first French expedition to Florida, 1591
- Image: Theodor de Bry print, ca. 1591
John Carter Brown Library at Brown University

“The horses’ hoofs clop-clopped with a dull sound, the wagon wheels went crunching...All around the wagon there was nothing but empty and silent space.”

- Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 1935

Image: Go West
Getty Images

“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send those, the homeless, tempest-tost, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

—from *The New Colossus* (1883) by Emma Lazarus

Image: Arrivals at Ellis Island
Library of Congress

*Some are coming on the passenger,
Some are coming on the freight,
Others will be found walking,
For none will have time to wait.*

Poem, They're Leaving Memphis in Drovers, From the Chicago Defender

Image: Florida Migrants on their way to Cranberry, NJ
Library of Congress

“My grandmother told me that when she was young our people...put their packs upon dogs or on little pole travois drawn by dogs....But when they got horses they could move more easily from place to place...Our people traveled over the whole country between the Elk River and Mexico.”

- Iron Teeth, Tsistsistas (Cheyenne), 1926

Image: Indians Traveling
W. Duncan MacMillan Foundation

“Nearly every American hungers to move.”

- John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 1962

Image: Passengers board an United Air Lines DC-3
National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution

Section 1: ONE WAY TRIP

Coming to America was often a one-way trip. Explorers, colonists, indentured servants, and slaves left friends, extended families, and familiar surroundings behind, never to be seen again. In search of religious freedom, opportunities, wealth, or adventure, many set out voluntarily to explore and settle an unknown land. Others were forced to leave their homes to survive as best they could.

“After a long and tedious voyage, the ships come in sight of land. . . all creep from below on deck. . . and they weep for joy, and pray and sing, thanking and praising God.”

—*Gottlieb Mittelberger, German emigrant, 1754*

Background image:

“Mayflower Approaching Land,” engraving published by John A. Lowell, 1905, after Marshall Johnson, shows the ship on its 66-day journey to bring some 100 Pilgrims to establish a new home to practice their faith at Plymouth, Massachusetts, in November 1620.

Library of Congress

Cut-out figure:

“Puritans going to church,” engraving published by Thomas G. Appleton, 1884, after G.H. Boughton. More than 20,000 Puritans moved to America between 1629 and 1643 to break free from practices of the Church of England that they viewed as corrupt.

Library of Congress

Map:

Atlantic Immigrant Routes

Wall Case:

Replicas of items typically used by emigrants aboard ship

“...when they came to the [dock in the Netherlands] they found the ship and all things ready, and such of their friends as could not come with them followed after them...And then with mutual embraces and many tears they took their leaves of one another, which proved to be the last leave to many of them.”

—*William Bradford, Of Plymouth Plantation, ca. 1620*

Image: “Embarkation of the Pilgrims,” published by A.B. Burbank after Robert W. Weir, 1844

New York Public Library

“[On board] the people are packed densely, like herrings... The misery reaches the climax when a gale rages... so that every one believes that the ship will go to the bottom.”

—*Gottlieb Mittelberger, German emigrant, in 1754*

We Were Here First

Native American civilizations were well established on the continent. Some tribes welcomed colonists with hospitality and taught them skills to survive. As more Europeans arrived, severe conflicts broke out as colonists encroached into traditional tribal lands.

“...the Colony of Connecticut encroach[ed] upon the remainder of the Moheagan lands which [my] Ancestors had reserved . . . for hunting & planting . . . and the Moheagans were threatened to be slain...”

—*Mohegan chief Mahomet Weyonomon, in a formal letter to King George II of Britain, in 1735. The chief journeyed to England but died before the king or his counselors would see him.*

Background images:

An elder member of the Algonquian village of Pomeiooc (top). Tribal members canoe past a Native dwelling or storehouse (below). Both published by Theodor de Bry, ca. 1590–91.

Mariner’s Museum, Newport News, VA
John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

Small image left:

Natives onshore greet French ships off the coast of Florida with skins and bows, published by Theodor de Bry after Jacques le Moyne de Morgues, ca. 1591.

John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

Small image right:

Native American tribesmen in Virginia craft a dugout canoe by carefully burning and removing layers to create a strong, light-weight hull, published by Theodor de Bry, ca. 1590

Mariner’s Museum, Newport News, VA

Maritime Colonies

The United States originated as a set of British colonies clustered on a narrow coastal shore. The colonists depended on active overseas trade—exporting commodities valued in Europe, such as tobacco and eventually cotton, for essential and luxury goods from England. Coastal travel was the most efficient way for colonists to trade among themselves, while land routes were difficult and dangerous.

Lower background:

Baltimore Town in 1752, a 19th century lithograph by A. Hoen & Co. after the original watercolor by John Moale, shows the great city when it was a small coastal village, dependent on water-borne trade.

Maryland Historical Society

Map:

Native American Groups & European Claims – 1750

“Madeira wines, sugars, salt, wicker chairs, and tin candlesticks are the most of the commodities [the English traders] bring in.



They disperse themselves into several small creeks of this province to sell..."

—English Emigrant Appeals, 1666

Images:

View of the early colonial port of Philadelphia from "The South East Prospect of the City of Philadelphia" by Peter Cooper, 1720

The Library Company of Philadelphia

In this 1795 certificate of membership in the Society of Master Sail Makers of the City of New York, the scenes around the border illustrate the commercial trades supported by ocean shipping. The scene at top left is open to interpretation: is it a slave receiving his freedom?

The New-York Historical Society

Title page of *Nova Britannia: Offering Most Excellent Fruits by Planting in Virginia*, published in 1609 for the Virginia Company. This "publicity sermon" was meant to spur colonization to English settlements like Jamestown.

Library of Congress

Map:

Atlantic Trade 1700 - 1800

Object Case:

American colonists depended on Britain for many household goods. Chinaware, silver, and tea were imported, while tobacco was exported to Europe. Importation of slaves into the U.S. became illegal in 1807. Cowrie shells were often used as money in West Africa. For slaves in America, the shells were symbols of home and freedom.

Bartmann jug, china plates, tobacco twist, tea brick, cowrie shells

A web of seaborne trade fueled the growth of the American colonies. Ships loaded with textiles and manufactured goods left European ports for America or Africa's west coast. There, some of the captains reloaded their ships with enslaved Africans for the horrific "Middle Passage" to the West Indies or America. From Caribbean ports, ships brought sugar and rum to the American colonies and Europe. America's primary export was tobacco.

Many Motives

Early Spanish and French settlers claimed land north, south, and west of the British colonies. Spanish explorers seeking a route to Asia found the Americas rich in resources. French traders began exporting fish, sugar, and especially furs to meet increasing demands in Europe. Early French and Spanish settlements arose primarily to facilitate trade and exploitation. No matter the country of origin or reason for coming to America, these explorers and colonists experienced many of the same hardships in coming to a new land.

“We came to serve God and also get rich.”
— *Bernal Diaz del Castillo, mid-1500s*

Images:

(background)

“Landing of De Soto in Florida in 1539,” from *Ballou’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, 1855.

Historical Museum of Southern Florida

New Amsterdam— now New York City— in 1667. Lithograph by George Hayward, ca. 1851. The Dutch established thriving colonies in what is today New York and Delaware but eventually ceded them to British authority.

The New York Public Library

As shown in “The Embarkation of the Acadians,” British troops forced the French colonists in Acadia—what is today eastern Quebec and the maritime provinces of Canada—from their homes. The Acadians dispersed widely, but many journeyed to Louisiana in the 1760s giving rise to the Cajun communities.

The New York Public Library

left:

Navajo artists depicted Spanish soldiers on their way to attack Navajo settlements and enslave residents in this pictograph in Canyon de Chelly, Arizona, ca. 1805.

Canyon de Chelly National Monument, National Park Service

right:

“On the 25th of the month of June, of this year of 1709, passed by here on the way to Zuni, Ramon Garcia Jurado.” A Spanish traveler in what is today New Mexico left his mark at a well-used trail campsite.

El Morro National Monument, National Park Service

Many Came in Chains

Hundreds of thousands from Africa came to America by force—as slaves. Slavery became a crucial part of the economies of most American colonies, north and south. Slaves endured harrowing journeys and were treated as trade goods rather than human beings. Many died on the Atlantic crossing.

Enslaved Africans endured a transatlantic journey known as “The Middle Passage,” which was part of a cruel trade system. Ships brought captured Africans and goods to America and the Caribbean. In the Caribbean, slaves produced sugar and rum for export; from America, slave-produced tobacco and cotton went to England.

background image:

The Arrival of the First African Americans at Jamestown by Sidney King. Twenty African-born slaves arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619.

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

“The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time . . . but now . . . it became absolutely pestilential. [The ship] was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself . . .”

—*Olaudah Equiano, freed African slave, author and prominent British abolitionist. From The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vass, the African, 1794*

Images:

A line of captured Africans, including children, are chained together and driven to the coast of West Africa to be sold as slaves in this 1865 engraving by Josiah Wood Whympier.

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

below:

The French slave ship *Vigilante*, showing one of two slave decks, as drawn in 1823 by S. Croad (artist) and J. Hawksworth (engraver).

New York Public Library

“[The slaves on board are] in irons for the most part which makes it difficult for them to turn or move or attempt to rise or to lie down . . . Every morning, perhaps, more instances than one are found of the living and the dead fastened together.”

— *Reverend John Newton, Englishman, 18th century, year unknown*

Circle image:

Captive Africans packed below deck in a slave ship, published June 20, 1857.

New York Public Library

Audio:

Press the button to listen to the words of former slave Olaudah Equiano as he recounts the horrors of the voyage from Africa, from his autobiography.

Narrator:

Olaudah Equiano was taken from his home and loaded onto a slave ship bound for America. The horror recalled by Equiano's 1794 account was experienced by hundreds of thousands of native Africans.

Olaudah Equiano:

“At last, when the ship we were in had got in all her cargo, they made ready with many fearful noises, and we were all put under deck, so that we could not see how they managed the vessel. The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us . . . This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.”

Section 2: PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

As the population on the East Coast increased, Americans pushed at the western boundaries of the colonies and then of the new nation. Trappers and settlers followed existing Indian trails and were often surprised to find well-established Indian towns, with cultivated fields. As settlers arrived, they wanted new roads, bridges, ferry crossings, and—by 1800—canals. Many wanted these “internal improvements,” as they were called, to be financed by the government. Until the 1860s, slaves and new immigrants provided much of the labor to construct these new, essential connections.

“It was the first of May, in the year 1769, that I resigned my domestic happiness for a time and left my family and peaceable habitation on the Yadkin River in North Carolina to wander through the wilderness of America . . . and after a long and fatiguing journey through mountainous wilderness, . . . from the top of an eminence, [I] saw with pleasure the beautiful level of Kentuckie.”

—*Daniel Boone, 1769*

Background images:

Daniel Boone leads settlers through the Cumberland Gap on the Wilderness Road (today’s U.S. Highway 25). This romantic view, set in far-western Virginia around 1775, was painted in 2004. Between 1774 and 1796, some 200,000 settlers traveled this same route.

Gateway to the West, by David Wright, 2004

Cut-out figure:

An emigrant from western North Carolina, ca. 1805. Travelers from the East heading to the Mississippi Valley and Arkansas often used segments of a long-established Native American trail known as the Warrior’s Path.

North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina

“In many parts we were immersed in woods; then again we came into open ground, and saw the winding river just below us, and the sides and tops of the mountains soaring above.”

—*Thaddeus Mason Harris, recounting his 1803 journey through the Alleghenies, 1805*

“The man carried an ax and gun on his shoulder,—the wife, the rim of a spinning-wheel in one hand, and a loaf of bread in another . . . [They] go in quest of lands for themselves and children, where land is good and cheap.”

—*Rev. David McClure, describing a Scots-Irish emigrant family, 1773*

Audio:

Traveling

Narrator:

Thousands of Americans and new immigrants traveled into the frontier. But their journeys were not without precedent. Native Americans, Mexicans, and Spanish descendants established networks for travel and trade. New roads and trails evolved from the routes taken by Americans who had been here for generations.

Early East Coast settlers used some of these routes to pass over the rugged Appalachians. Still, as Thaddeus Mason Harris recounted from his 1803 journey, the landscape was both imposing and inspiring.

Thaddeus Mason Harris:

“We had, for several days past, seen their blue tops towering into the sky . . . These stupendous mountains seemed to stretch before us an impassable barrier . . . The deep and gloomy valley below was a vast wilderness, skirted by mountains of very hue and form; some craggy and bare, and others wooded to the top . . . In many parts we were immersed in woods; then again we came into open ground, and saw the winding river just below us, and the sides and tops of the mountains soaring above.”

Narrator:

People were eager to move to new land and new lives. This adventuresome, restless spirit was shared by Gideon Linsecum, who was excited to leave Georgia for Mississippi in 1815.

Gideon Linsecum:

I had been reared to a belief and faith in the pleasure of frequent change of country, and I looked upon the long journey, through the wilderness, with much pleasure . . . I was as strong as two common men and could do anything . . . and was determined to seek a home in the wilderness.

Narrator:

Moving was an integral part of the culture of some Native American nations. Crow medicine woman Pretty-Shield described the experience of preparing to move an entire village.

Pretty-Shield:

A crier would ride through the village telling the people to be ready to move in the morning. Down would come the lodges, packs would be made, travois loaded. Ho! Away we would go, following the men, to some new camping ground, with our children playing around us. It was good hard work to get things packed up, and moving; and it was hard, fast work to get them in shape again, after we camped . . . We women had our children to care for, meat to cook and to dry, robes to dress, skins to tan, clothes, lodges, and moccasins to make. . . We not only pitched the lodges, but took them down and packed the horses and the travois, when we moved camp. We were busy, especially when we were going to move. I loved to move. . . Moving made me happy.”

Trading

Narrator:

Waterways and roads bustled with merchants and traders. They supported an expanding lifeline of goods into the frontier.

Rivers were important thoroughfares for emigrants and traders alike. The port of New Orleans welcomed many of them, as Rev. Timothy Flint witnessed in 1827.

Rev. Timothy Flint:

The Americans come [to New Orleans] from all the states. Their object is to accumulate wealth and spend it somewhere else....There are sometimes fifty steam-boats lying in the harbour...and there were from twelve to fifteen hundred flat boats lying along the river.

Narrator:

Jesse Pierson was a young wagoner who carried goods on the National Road in 1844. In letters written fifty years later, he recalled life on the road – the long distances and camaraderie among the wagoners.

Jesse J. Pierson:

We reached Brownsville without incident or accident, made a little money, and loaded back again for Cumberland. In coming back, it looked as if the whole earth was on the road; wagons, stages, horses, cattle, hogs, sheep, and turkeys without number.

After supper and attention to the teams, the wagoners would gather in the bar room and listen to music on the violin, furnished by one of their fellows, have a ‘Virginia hoe-down,’ sing songs, tell anecdotes, and hear the experiences of drivers and drovers from all points on the road,...unroll their beds, lay them down on the floor before the bar room fire, side by side, and sleep, with their feet near the fire, as soundly as under the paternal roof.”

Escaping

Narrator:

For enslaved Americans, gaining freedom required bravery in the face of risk. Escape was a dangerous proposition with no guarantee of finding safe refuge from capturers who returned runaways for reward money.

John Brown escaped from two owners in less than two years – in 1846 from Georgia and in 1847 from Louisiana. He traveled to Canada and later sailed to England, where he detailed his story in an 1855 book.

John Brown

“During my journey I observed the plan I had followed on former occasions; namely walking by night, and lying by for rest and concealment in the day, sleeping behind logs, like a wild man. I guided my course by following the muddy waters of the Mississippi, but I was frequently . . . coming to inlets full of alligators. I used to hear these creatures at night, snorting and plashing about in the water – to my mortal terror. I lived . . . by eating raw corn, potatoes, pine roots and sassafras buds.”

Narrator:

Later, Brown met up with Quakers who participated in the Underground Railroad and helped him continue. The group moved constantly to avoid detection.

John Brown:

All that afternoon, the whole night, and the whole of the next day, we traveled, only stopping at times to let our beasts graze. At last . . . we reached the station; and glad enough I was. I felt quite happy, knowing I should meet with none but friends on my road to Canada. My way seemed perfectly clear, and the only description I can give of my sensations is, that I felt like a new man.

Arriving:

Narrator:

Travelers from the east found long-established Native American and Spanish communities in the Southwest. Josiah Gregg made his first trip along the Santa Fe Trail in 1831. He later described his arrival with a trading caravan in bustling Santa Fe.

Josiah Gregg:

Wagon after wagon was seen pouring down the last declivity at about a mile's distance from the city . . . The arrival produced a great deal of bustle and excitement among the natives. "Los Americanos!" [pause] "Los carros!" [pause] "La entrada de la caravana!" were to be heard in every direction; and crowds of women and boys flocked around to see the newcomers . . .

Narrator:

In 1852, seven-year-old Marian Sloan, her mother, and brother sent out for the gold fields of California. They joined Captain Francis Aubry's train on the Santa Fe trail to New Mexico. Her mother cooked for the wagon train to support their journey. Marian described their experiences along the trail.

Marian Sloan:

In the late afternoon, we found our wagons winding in and out among some dwarfed cedar trees that grew on a flat mesa. There were a dozen Indian lodges there, and we saw the smoke issuing from the top of the lodges... This was different from anything we had seen... That evening when Captain Aubry came to sit at our fireside, he told us we were now in New Mexico Territory.

New Trails, New Roads

Americans settling west of the Appalachians cut new roads through the dense hardwood forests that blanketed the eastern U.S. Travel was mostly on foot or horseback, or—for some—by coach; freight moved on wagons drawn by horses or oxen. Trade inland was slow—for goods to reach Pittsburgh from Philadelphia took three weeks or more; travel by stagecoach took at least a week.

The trail to the Cumberland Gap followed a natural funnel of hills and valleys through Virginia to eastern Kentucky and Tennessee. Frontier outposts grew into small villages, with nearby farms scattered where new arrivals had, with great effort, cleared woodlands for their fields.

lower background image:

Fairview Inn, on the National Road a few miles west of Baltimore, 1829. By this time, the “wilderness” that writer Morris Birkbeck commented on just twelve years earlier was nearly gone, replaced by bustling roads, towns, and a rapidly growing number of roadhouses serving travelers.

Fairview Inn or Three Mile House on Old Frederick Road (1829) by *Thomas Ruckle*.

Maryland Historical Society

“Old America seems to be breaking up and moving westward. Many, like ourselves, when they arrive in the wilderness, will find no lodge prepared for them.”

—*Morris Birkbeck, on the Cumberland Road, 1817*

Images:

upper left:

Settlers crossing the Appalachian Mountains penetrated a seemingly endless forest of pines and hardwoods that blanketed most of eastern North America. Glimpsing the sky was often rare, and just clearing a few acres to plant a crop was a prodigious task.

Settler’s Log Cabin (*unknown*) by *Cornelius Krieghoff*

McMichael Canadian Art Collection

upper right:

Scene sketched along the Tobyhanna River in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania, 1832, from a contemporary book of travels by a visiting German group. Early travelers often encountered tolls along the way. Ferries and covered bridges were privately owned.

Indiana Historical Society

This “Kentucky Almanac” for 1810 contained information useful for farmers settling in Kentucky, including tables for sunrises and sunsets at Lexington, and predictions for weather affecting crops and the growing season. Kentucky was populous enough to become the first state west of the Appalachians, in 1792.

University of Chicago Library

To extend their cleared land, settlers “girdled” trees, stripping a belt of bark around each trunk, which killed the trees in a year or two and thus made them easier to cut. Smoke from burning piles of dead, girdled trees was a common sight in the 1700s and early 1800s.

Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

A military convoy on the National Road, ca. 1820. The National Road began as an Indian trail in western Maryland. After grading and bridge-building began in 1811, the road stretched across southern Pennsylvania, crossed the Ohio River at Wheeling and continued westward to Indiana. The road became the nation’s first great central highway; its peak years as a wagon road came in the 1840s.

Indiana Historical Society

Interactive: How Did Whiskey Start a Rebellion?

Farmers who migrated over the steep Appalachian Mountains to settle needed a cash crop to sell for essential goods. Many settlers distilled their corn crop into whiskey—a form readily transported to market. When the new American government taxed distilled spirits in 1791, western farmers rebelled against this threat to their livelihood, in the nation’s first and only armed insurrection.

“... I shall . . . exert all the legal powers with which the Executive is invested, to check so daring and unwarrantable a spirit.”

—George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, September 7, 1792

Image:

Illicit Distillation of Liquors – How the Article is Carried to the Southern Markets, by A.W. Thompson, in Harper’s Weekly, 1867. The same method of transport moved whiskey eastward over the Appalachians in the 1700s.

Library of Congress

Map:

Roads and River Highways 1800 -1850

The Great River Highways

The first great ‘highways’ west of the Appalachians were the Ohio, Mississippi, and Missouri rivers. The Ohio and the Mississippi together linked the states and territories from the western Appalachians to the Great Plains; the Missouri provided a navigable pathway west for flat-bottomed steamboats to the territories of the upper Great Plains as far as Montana. Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, Louisiana, Indiana, Mississippi, and Illinois became our 15th through 21st states. Cincinnati grew into what people called, “The Queen City of the West,” while St. Louis became the hub for development even farther west.

“...there are many [boats] loaded altogether with merchandise...destined to Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, and the territories. Many others are family boats, seeking places of settlement in their new countries, where their posterity may rest in safety,...where each man is a prince in his own kingdom...”

—Zadok Cramer, 1811

lower background image:

Drama on the river: The steamer *Yellowstone*—on the Missouri River and headed for Nebraska—lies aground on a sandbar. Storms and a fire on-board in April 1833 caused the boat's helmsman to lose control. Crew members try to save some cargo by taking it to shore.

Newberry Library, Chicago

upper background image:

Emigrants, with their horses and a cow, travel by flatboat on the Ohio River, ca. 1833. Travelers coming down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers from Pennsylvania, Ohio, or Kentucky were called, "Kaintucks," roughly meaning anyone from west of the long-settled eastern seaboard.

Kentucky Historical Society

small image left:

A "Ladies' Cabin" on a river steamboat in the mid-19th century. Both trains and steamboats in that era provided separate accommodations for women traveling without spouses or male escorts. Women appreciated such "safety," and their travel greatly increased.

Public Library of Cincinnati & Hamilton County

small image right:

St. Louis in the 1850s, shown in a bucolic view from a book for German readers. A flatboat floats downriver, while steamboats gather. The book, published in Dusseldorf, was intended for readers considering emigration to the United States. Note the Germanic-looking spires on the skyline.

Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Interactive: Lewis and Clark

In 1803, President Jefferson charged Army Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase in the hope of finding a route to the Pacific Ocean. Along with a crew of about 40, they traveled by boat up the Missouri and Jefferson rivers into present-day Montana. Indians provided horses and guided them over the Rockies. The explorers then canoed down the Snake and Columbia rivers to the Pacific, which they reached in November 1805.

Image:

Lewis and Clark: The Departure from the Wood River Encampment, May 14, 1804 by *Gary Lucy*.

Gary R. Lucy Gallery, Washington, Missouri

"The Border Crossed Us"

In the 1840s, more Americans began settling in lands claimed by Mexico and inhabited by Native Americans and people of Spanish descent. The United States annexed Texas in late 1845, and Mexico and the U.S. went to war in early 1846. Two years later, Mexico ceded what is now California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming in exchange for \$15 million. Native Americans there suddenly



found their lands claimed by the U.S., and Mexicans living in the same areas were given the choice to leave or come under U.S. jurisdiction.

lower background:

John Sutter's Fort, near Sacramento, California, ca. 1850. Swiss immigrant Sutter received a land grant from the Mexican government in 1839. It became California's first non-Indian settlement in the Central Valley, but in 1846, the land fell under U.S. control.

California State Library

Images:

The Santa Fe Trail, shown in a painting by Frederic Remington about 1904, was the major artery of the Southwest from the early 1820s to 1846. Shortly after a Missouri trader helped mark the route in 1821, traffic and trade boomed, and people of every background traveled along the trail. By the early 1840s, most travelers in either direction were Mexican.

Frederic Remington Art Museum, Ogdensburg, New York

"I am an American because the [T]reaty of Guadalupe placed me on the other side of the line dividing the two nations ... I have both Mexican and American children and I desire for my native land all the prosperity and progress enjoyed by the country of...mine by adoption."

—Mariano Vallejo, 1877

"... the Santa Fe Trail, an ancient route and one of the longest in history...If we could but measure it by the tears and the smiles it has known we would never be able to trace its way through American history."

—Marian Sloan (Russell), 1845–1936

Davy Crockett, frontiersman and congressman from Tennessee, died at the Alamo in San Antonio in 1836, during the revolt against Mexico that eventually added Texas to the United States. Davy Crockett's *Almanack*, published from 1835 to 1856 with stories attributed to him, helped spread his legend.

Center for American History, UT-Austin

Map:

U.S. Territory until 1854

small image lower right:

In Isleta Pueblo—a self-governing Native American community established in the 14th-century near present-day Albuquerque—is St. Augustine Church, built about 1612 when the area was under Spanish rule. Priests established many such churches in that period, forcing Catholicism on the Indians.

Palace of the Governors

small image lower left:

Native Americans of the Great Plains lived in a highly mobile culture. Villages migrated seasonally, following the bison that provided necessities of plains life. Women often organized the travels, setting routes that, for example, allowed

bountiful berry-picking to augment diets. Said elder medicine woman Pretty Shield (Absaroke/Crow), “I loved to move . . . Moving made me happy!”

The W. Duncan MacMillan Foundation

Underground Railroad

Thousands of slaves escaped to the North, and many to Canada, via the “Underground Railroad.” Not a railroad at all, this clandestine and well-organized network of mostly nighttime walking routes ran through Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana, from about 1830 until the Civil War began in 1861. Hiding places and safe houses were called “stations,” and leaders along the way, “conductors.” Among the most active conductors were a Quaker, Levi Coffin of Indiana, and an African American leader, Harriet Tubman, who had escaped from a Maryland plantation.

lower background image:

A couple tries to elude slave catchers, in the Great Dismal Swamp of eastern Virginia, in this powerful painting by American artist Thomas Moran.

Slave Hunt, Dismal Swamp, Virginia, 1862
Philbrook Museum of Art

“When I found I had crossed that line . . . I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven.”

—Harriet Tubman , 1869

Other Images:

Runaway Slave announcement, The New-York Gazette, or, The Weekly Post-Boy, October 27, 1763

“A Ride for Liberty” is the title of this 1862 painting, emphasizing the raw courage of freedom seekers. Between 1850 and the Civil War, when fugitive slave laws were in effect, getting to a Northern state wasn’t enough. Only in Canada was freedom secure from the slave catchers.

A Ride for Liberty – The Fugitive Slaves (1862) by Eastman Johnson.

Brooklyn Museum

Artist Charles Webber portrays white “station agents” helping freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad. Fugitive slave laws not only permitted slave catchers to go into free states to capture escapees and take them back to slavery, the laws also included fines and jail terms for anyone giving help, shelter, or food to “runaways.”

The Underground Railroad (1893), by Charles T. Webber.

Cincinnati Art Museum

Harriet Tubman stands with a family group at her home in Auburn, New York, ca. 1887. Left to right: Tubman, Gertie Davis (adopted daughter), Nelson Davis (husband), Lee Cheney, 'Pop' Alexander, Walter Green, Sara Parker (aunt), and Dora Stewart (granddaughter of Tubman's brother, John Stewart). In the 1850s, Tubman made 19 trips into the South and personally led some 70 people to freedom.

Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College

Interactive: Broad­sides for runaway slaves

Library of Congress

Illustration from *The Underground Railroad* by William Still, 1872

Cornell University Library

The Maryland Historical Society

Stories of Escape:

John Thompson made a daring escape by a perilous railroad journey from Alabama. Abolitionist William Still described his journey: "Seeing but one way of escape, he resolved to try it. It was to get on the top of the car, instead of inside of it, and thus ride of nights, till nearly daylight, when at a stopping-place on the road, he would slip off the car, and conceal himself in the woods until under cover of the next night he could manage to get on the top of another car."

"...on his way home to Alexandria [Virginia], he was captured and put in prison...but did, nevertheless, succeed in going off on the Underground Rail Road."

Illustration from *The Underground Railroad* by William Still, 1872

Library of Congress

Stebney Swan, John Stinger, Robert Emerson, Anthony Pugh, and Isabella all escaped from Portsmouth, Virginia, by a small boat. Noted abolitionist and author William Still described their harrowing trip: "This company came from Portsmouth, VA...and came in a skiff, by sea. Robert Lee was the brave Captain engaged to pilot this Slavery-sick party from the prison-house of bondage. And although every rod of rowing was attended with inconceivable peril, the desired haven was safely reached, and the overjoyed voyagers conducted to the Vigilance Committee."

Illustration from *The Underground Railroad* by William Still, 1872

Library of Congress

Lear Green risked her life to escape from Baltimore, Maryland, shipped in a wooden chest on a ship to Philadelphia. Abolitionist William Still's description of her journey: "A quilt, pillow, and a few articles of raiment, with a small quantity of food and a bottle of water were put in [a chest], and Lear placed therein; strong ropes were fastened around the chest and she was safely stowed amongst the ordinary freight . . .

Her [betrothed's] mother, who was a free woman, agreed to come as a passenger....Once or twice...she was drawn irresistibly to the chest...to see if the poor child still lived, and at the same time to give her a breath of fresh air...

After [Lear] had passed eighteen hours in the chest, the steamer arrived at the wharf in Philadelphia, and...[she] was delivered at a house in Barley Street, occupied by particular friends of the mother."

Illustration from *The Underground Railroad* by William Still, 1872,
Library of Congress

Section 3: ACROSS THE 'GREAT DESERT' TO THE WEST!

As emigrants continued pushing beyond the Appalachians, roads proliferated and canals were built in the “Northwest” of present-day Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Cincinnati became the “Queen City of the West.” Plantations spread throughout the Southeast, based on the burgeoning cotton trade.

Others dreamed of cheap lands in Oregon and, later, California. Americans assumed then that the Great Plains were mostly too dry to farm; in fact most of the Midwest, and not just the Southwest, was termed “The Great Desert” on pre-Civil War maps. Most of what is today Oklahoma was set aside as Indian Territory in 1830 and remained so for most of the 19th century.

So families joined wagon trains, bought supplies, and hired trail guides in such towns as St. Louis, Independence, and St. Joseph – to follow the setting sun to the Far West. From old traders’ routes, popular trails quickly developed, to carry families to the Pacific coast.

background image:

Emigrant wagon replica at Whitman Mission National Historic Site, near Walla Walla, Washington. Actual emigrant wagons were only this clean for a few days into the journey.

Whitman Mission National Historic Site, National Park Service

Cut-out Figure:

Beginning in 1847, Mormons began moving to the West to escape conflicts in the Midwest over their religious practices. Jack Strang and family, homesteaders in Utah around 1880, were among nearly 70,000 Mormons to make the trip.

Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University

“The crack of the ox-goad, the ‘whoa-haws’ in a loud voice, the leaping and running about of the oxen to avoid the yoke, and the bellowing of the loose stock, altogether create a most Babel-like and exciting confusion. The wagons commenced moving at nine o’clock, and at ten the camp was entirely deserted.”

—Edwin Bryant, 1846

“We are really a moving village—nearly four hundred animals with ours, mostly mules, and seventy men.”

—Narcissa Prentiss Whitman, missionary to Oregon

Small Image upper left:

This large emigrant family needed two wagons for the trip. At a campsite, the animals were unhitched and allowed to graze nearby, with “hobbles” on their feet to prevent wandering too far.

Denver Public Library

Object Case:

A few of the items that an emigrant family might take along for their trek: boots for young and old, a “hurricane lantern,” coffee pot, toys and a doll for children.

Images inside Case:

Emigrants pose at the summit of the Great South Pass in Wyoming, ca. 1866. All travelers on the Oregon, California, and Mormon Trails funneled through this surprisingly gentle pass over the Rocky Mountain crest and the Continental Divide.

Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Narcissa Whitman and her husband went to Oregon Territory in 1836—one of the first couples to do so—and established a mission to the Cayuse tribe in the Walla Walla Valley.

Whitman Mission National Historic Site, National Park Service

Homesteaders pose with their horses and oxen on the well-beaten trail in the Loup Valley, Custer County, Nebraska, 1886.

Nebraska State Historical Society Photograph Collection [RG2608-2938]

Flipbook:

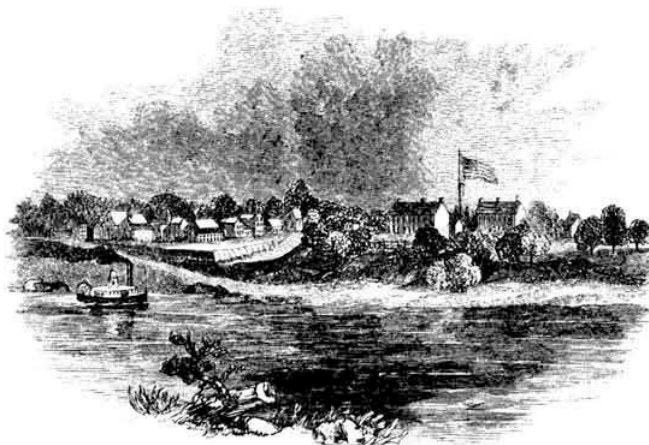
Westward travelers used guidebooks —such as *The Prairie Traveler*, by Randolph B. Marcy, Captain, U.S. Army, originally published in 1859 — to help them plan their journeys. These books outlined necessary supplies, the best time of year to set out, and major landmarks along the way.

Image:

Ferriage of the Platte River above the Mouth of Deer Creek, July 20, 1849, by Joseph Goldsborough Bruff. River crossings were hazardous along the trail. Sometimes wagons could ford across shallows and sandbars. When the waters ran high, local entrepreneurs offered ferry services for hire to cross deeper parts.

The Huntington Library, San Marino, California

THE PRAIRIE TRAVELER



A HAND-BOOK FOR
OVERLAND EXPEDITIONS

WITH MAPS, ILLUSTRATIONS, AND ITINERARIES OF
THE PRINCIPAL ROUTES BETWEEN THE MISSISSIPPI AND THE PACIFIC.

By
RANDOLPH B. MARCY
Captain U.S. Army

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FRANKLIN SQUARE.

ROUTES TO CALIFORNIA AND OREGON

Emigrants or others desiring to make the overland journey to the Pacific should bear in mind that there are several different routes which may be traveled with wagons, each having its advocates in persons directly or indirectly interested in attracting the tide of emigration and travel over them.

Information concerning these routes coming from strangers living or owning property near them, from agents of steam-boats or railways, or from other persons connected with transportation companies, should be received with great caution, and never without corroborating evidence from disinterested sources.

WAGONS AND TEAMS

A company having been organized, its first interest is to procure a proper outfit of transportation and supplies for the contemplated journey.

Wagons should be of the simplest possible construction – strong, light, and made of well-seasoned timber, especially the wheels, as the atmosphere, in the elevated and arid region over which they have to pass, is so exceedingly dry during the summer months that, unless the wood-work is thoroughly seasoned, they will require constant repairs to prevent them from falling to pieces.

Cows will be found very useful upon long journeys when the rate of travel is slow, as they furnish milk, and in emergencies they may be worked in wagons. I once saw a small cow yoked beside a large ox, and driven about six hundred miles attached to a loaded wagon, and she performed her part equally well with the ox. It has been by no means an unusual thing for emigrant travelers to work cows in their teams.

STORES AND PROVISIONS

Supplies for a march should be put up in the most secure, compact, and portable shape.

Bacon should be packed in strong sacks of a hundred pounds to each; or, in very hot climates, put in boxes and surrounded with bran, which in a great measure prevents the fat from melting away.

If pork be used, in order to avoid transporting about forty per cent of useless weight, it should be taken out of the barrels and packed like the bacon; then so placed in the bottom of the wagons as to keep it cool. The pork, if well cured, will keep several months in this way, but bacon is preferable.

Butter may be preserved by boiling it thoroughly, and skimming off the scum as it rises to the top until it is quite clear like oil. It is then placed in tin canisters and soldered up.

Desiccated or dried vegetables are almost equal to the fresh....They are prepared by cutting the fresh vegetables into thin slices and subjecting them to a very powerful press, which removes the juice and leaves a solid cake, which, after having been thoroughly dried in an oven, becomes almost as hard as a rock. A small piece...when boiled, swells up so as to fill a vegetable dish, and is sufficient for four men.

CLOTHING

A suitable dress for prairie traveling is of great import to health and comfort. Cotton or linen fabrics do not sufficiently protect the body against the direct rays of the sun at midday, nor against rains or sudden changes of temperature. Wool...is the best material for this mode of locomotion, and should always be adopted for the plains. The coat should be short and stout, the shirt of red or blue flannel, such as can be found in almost all the shops on the frontier: this, in warm weather, answers for an outside garment. The pants should be of thick and soft woolen material, and it is well to have them re-enforced on the inside, where they come in contact with the saddle, with soft buckskin, which makes them more durable and comfortable.

Woolen socks and stout boots, coming up well at the knees, and made large, so as to admit the pants, will be found the best for horsemen, and they guard against rattlesnake bites.

MARCHING

The success of a long expedition through an unpopulated country depends mainly on the care taken of the animals, and the manner in which they are driven, herded, and guarded. If they are broken down or lost, everything must be sacrificed, and the party becomes perfectly helpless.

The great error into which inexperienced travelers are liable to fall, and which probably occasions more suffering and disaster than almost any thing else, lies in overworking their cattle at the commencement of the journey...

In traveling with ox teams in the summer season, great benefit will be derived from making early marches; starting with the dawn, and making a 'nooning' during the heat of the day, as oxen suffer much from the heat of the sun in midsummer...When it gets cool they may be hitched to the wagons again, and the journey continued in the afternoon.

FORDING RIVERS

Many streams that intersect the different routes across our continent are broad and shallow, and flow over beds of quicksand, which, in seasons of high water, become boggy and unstable, and are then exceedingly difficult of crossing.

On arriving upon the bank of a river of this character which has not recently been crossed, the condition of the quicksand may be ascertained by sending an intelligent man over the fording-place, and should the sand not yield under his feet, it may be regarded as safe for animals or wagons.

In crossing rivers where the water is so high as to come into the wagon-beds, but is not above a fording stage, the contents of the wagons may be kept dry by raising the beds between the uprights, and retaining them in that position with blocks of wood placed at each corner between the rockers and the bottom of the wagon-beds.

When rivers are wide, with a swift current, they should always, if possible, be forded obliquely down stream, as the action of the water against the wagons assists very materially in carrying them across.

...A very good substitute for a ferry-boat may be made with a wagon-bed by filling it with empty water-casks, stopped tight and secured in the wagon with ropes, with a cask lashed opposite the centre of each outside. It is then placed in the water bottom upward...and the men on the opposite bank pull it across to the landing, where it is discharged and returned for another load, and so on until all the baggage and men are passed over.

BIVOUACS AND TENTS

Fortunately for the health and comfort of travelers upon the Plains, the atmosphere is pure and dry during the greater part of the year, and it is seldom that any rain or dew is seen; neither are there marshes or ponds of stagnant water to generate putrid exhalations and poisonous malaria.

During the rainy season only is it necessary to seek shelter. In traveling with covered wagons one always has protection from storms, but with pack trains it becomes necessary to improvise the best substitutes for tents.

A very secure protection against storms may be constructed by planting firmly in the ground two upright poles, with forks at their tops, and crossing them with a light pole laid in the forks. A gutta-percha cloth, or sheet of canvas, or, in the absence of either of these two, blankets, may be attached by one side to the horizontal pole, the opposite edge being stretched out to the windward at an angle...and there fastened with wooden pins...

This is called a "half-faced" camp.

Another method practiced a great deal among mountain men and Indians consists in placing several rough poles equidistant around in a half circle, and

bringing the small ends together at the top, where they are bound with a thong. This forms the conical frame-work of the bivouac, which, when covered with a cloth stretched around it, makes a very good shelter...

LIST OF ITINERARIES

Showing the distances between camping places, the character of the roads, and the facilities for obtaining wood, water, and grass on the principal routes between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean.

- I. From Fort Smith, Arkansas, to Santa Fe and Albuquerque, New Mexico
- II. From Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe, by way of the upper ferry of the Kansas River and the Cimarron
- III. Camping-places upon a road discovered and marked out from Fort Smith, Arkansas, to Dona Ana and El Paso, New Mexico, in 1849.
- IV. Leavenworth City to Great Salt Lake City
- V. From Salt Lake City to Sacramento and Benicia, California
- VI. From Great Salt Lake City to Los Angeles and San Francisco, California
- VII. From Fort Bridger to the "City of Rocks."
- VIII. From Soda Springs to the City of Rocks, known as Hudspeth's Cut-off
- IX. Sublet's Cut-off, from the junction of the Salt Lake and Fort Hall Roads
- X. From Lawson's Meadows, on the Humboldt River, to Fort Reading, via Rogue River Valley, Fort Lane, Oregon Territory, Yreka, and Fort Jones
- XI. From Soda Springs to Fort Wallah Wallah and Oregon City, Oregon via Fort Hall
- XII. Route for pack trains from John Day's River to Oregon City
- XIII. From Indianola and Powder-horn to San Antonio, Texas
- XIV. Wagon-road from San Antonio, Texas, to El Paso, N.M., and Fort Yuma, California
- XV. From Fort Yuma to San Diego, California
- XVI. From El Paso, New Mexico, to Fort Yuma, California, via Santa Cruz
- XVII. Peak and "Cherry Creek," N.T. via the Arkansas River
- XVIII. From St. Paul's, Min., to Fort Wallah Wallah, Oregon
- XIX. Lieutenant E.F. Beale's route from Albuquerque, N.M., to the Colorado River
- XX. Captain Whipple's route from Albuquerque, N.M., to San Pedro, California
- XXI. From Fort Yuma to Benicia, California.
- XXII. A new route from Fort Bridger to Camp Floyd
- XXIII. From Fort Thorne, N.M., to Fort Yuma, California
- XXIV. Lieutenant Bryan's Route from the Laramie Crossing of the South Platte to Fort Bridger, via Bridger's Pass
- XXV. Wagon-route from Denver City, at the Mouth of Cherry Creek, to Fort Bridger, Utah
- XXVI. From Nebraska City, on the Missouri, to Fort Kearney
- XXVII. From Camp Floyd, Utah, to Fort Union, N.M.
- XXVIII. Wagon-route from Guaymas, Mexico, to Tubac, Arizona.

FROM LEAVENWORTH CITY TO SALT LAKE CITY

Miles

South Platte River – No timber all day. Good water and grass at all points, with buffalo-chips.

8 South Platte Crossing – No wood all day. Good water and grass, with buffalo-chips. The river is about 600 yards wide, rapid, with quicksand bottom, but can be forded when not above a medium stage. It is best to send a footman ahead to ascertain the depth of water before crossing the wagons and animals.

19 Ash Hollow, at North Platte River – Road leaves the South Fork of the Platte, and strikes over the high prairie for 16 miles, when it descends the high bluffs bordering the valley of the North Platte, and enters Ash Hollow, where there is a plenty of wood and a small spring of water. Half a mile beyond this the road reaches the river. Mail station and a small grocery here.

16 $\frac{3}{4}$ North Platte – Very sandy road; no wood; grass and water plenty at all points; buffalo-chips sufficient for cooking.

17 North Platte – Road sandy in places; no wood; good grass and water; some buffalo-chips.

16 $\frac{1}{2}$ North Platte – Road good; no wood; good grass and water; cattle-chips in places.

18 $\frac{3}{4}$ North Platte – No wood. Camp opposite “Chimney Rock,” which is very peculiar formation on the south of the road, and resembles a chimney. Grass good. Road muddy after rains.

17 $\frac{1}{2}$ North Platte – No wood; grass and water good.

16 “Horse Creek,” branch of the North Platte. In seven miles the road passes through Scott’s Bluff, where there is generally water in the first ravine about 200 yards below the road.

14 $\frac{1}{4}$ North Platte – Road follows the river bottom all day. Wood, water, and grass on the river.

12 Fort Laramie – Road rough and rocky in places. There are wood and water plenty, and before many trains have passed the grass is good above the fort. Mail station and post-office here, with a sutler’s store well stocked with such articles as the traveler wants.

Trails of Tears

Conflicts between settlers and Native Americans increased in the early 1800s. The Indian Removal Act passed Congress in 1830 stipulating new treaties, unilateral if Natives did not relent, to relocate Native nations living in the East. When Native leaders did not concede, Army troops used force to drive whole communities from their ancestral lands. Choctaws, Creeks, Cherokees, and others were pushed out of Georgia, Alabama, and western North Carolina to camps farther west.

In the winter of 1838–39, several Cherokee groups journeyed almost 1,000 miles to eastern Oklahoma. Most groups followed different land routes, but one group traveled by boat. Many—perhaps 4,000—died along the way from pneumonia, malnutrition, and exposure.

Background images:

Jerome Tiger's (Creek-Seminole) paintings show many of the hardships suffered by Native peoples.

top

Trail of Tears (1966) by *Jerome Tiger (Creek-Seminole)*

Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

bottom:

Trail of Tears (undated) by *Jerome Tiger (Creek-Seminole)*

National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum, Oklahoma City, OK

"[The soldiers] drove us out of our house to join other prisoners My brother Dick...my father and mother walked all the way There was much sickness among the emigrants and a great many little children died of whooping cough."

—Rebecca Neugin, age 3 when her family was removed in early 1830s

Images:

Many eastern native tribes, including the Cherokee, lived in well-established settlements and had regular trade networks with European settlers. Sequoyah, a Cherokee silver craftsman, statesman, and diplomat, invented the Cherokee *syllabary*, a writing system based on syllables, in the early 1820s.

Sequoyah by *Charles Banks Wilson, 1965.*

Oklahoma Arts Council



After the first groups of Cherokee suffered severe mistreatment by Army troops on the journey to Oklahoma, the Cherokee Nation asked to manage its own removals. They divided into smaller groups to more easily provide food and shelter along the way. Summer drought conditions in 1838 were followed by a bitter winter. And the Cherokee could not change the horrible conditions in the Army camps en route. Thousands of trekkers lost their lives.

Brummett Echohawk (Pawnee), The Trail of Tears (1957)

Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma

Map:
Trails of Tears

Canals and Communities

By the 1830s, the Midwest was no longer the western frontier. Local public attention turned from establishing a foothold to improving transportation and public services. Canals and early railroads brought settlers, recent immigrants, and manufactured goods to rapidly growing towns in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and shipped farm produce to trading centers back East.

The most famous canal was the Erie Canal, built between 1817 and 1825 across upper New York state from Albany to Buffalo. This gave New York a big competitive edge in trade with the growing towns in Ohio and west. Other states developed canals and railroads, including Pennsylvania and its “Main Line of Public Works.”

background image:

A bucolic view along the Erie Canal in New York state by John William Hill, 1832.
The New York Public Library

“Surely the water of this canal . . . must be the most fertilizing of all fluid for it causes towns to spring up . . .”

—*Nathaniel Hawthorne on Erie Canal, The Canal Boat, 1835*

“Canal boats filled with emigrants, and covered with goods and furniture, are almost hourly arriving. Several steamboats and vessels daily depart for the far west literally crammed with masses of living beings to those regions.”

—*Resident of Buffalo, New York, 1832*

Interactive: Canals

A “canal boy” and his horses slowly pull a canal boat, as they walk up the towpath.

Library of Congress

Inside:

Excavating for the Erie Canal, near Lockport, New York, ca. 1822. Blasting powder loosened the soil and rock, followed by wooden cranes and horse-powered winches to empty the trench.

The New York Public Library

View on the Erie Canal, John William Hill, 1829

The New York Public Library

“Head of Plane No. 6 Old Portage Railroad” by George W. Storm. Canal boats traveled across Pennsylvania along a combination of canals, railroad lines, and inclined planes. Steam winches hauled the boats up the steep planes.

Johnstown Flood Museum, Johnstown Area Heritage Association

Following the Setting Sun

Facing unfamiliar obstacles and physical hardship, thousands of emigrant families headed toward the sunset to Oregon and California in wagon trains. Traffic on the Oregon/California Trail peaked in the 1850s with more than 1,200 emigrant wagons passing into Oregon annually during the peak season of late summer and early autumn.

Families began trekking to Oregon’s fertile farmlands starting in the 1830s. California attracted ranchers, farmers, and merchants, especially after the U.S. claimed it as a territory in 1846. Two years later, the discovery of gold led thousands to pour into the territory during the Gold Rush.

lower background:

A wagon train on the Great Plains, ca. 1870. Wagons spread out five or ten abreast when possible to help avoid dusty conditions.

Denver Public Library

“Mile after mile of the road was level as a floor and deep with dust. The bushes and weeds were so dry that they crackled under foot. The bodies of oxen and mules were frequently seen beside the road...left by freighters to die.”

—*Emma Shepard Hill, ca. 1840*

“I protest against calling our route a road. Tis nothing but a miserable trail such as a snake might choose.”

—*Charles Ross Parke, 1849*

Image: (framed image)

The Rocky Mountains: Emigrants Crossing the Plains, 1866, by Currier and Ives, idealizes the journey. In fact, the trail route was arid and bleak. And the journey had to be planned to reach the West Coast before late fall, to avoid being trapped by winter snows.

The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

Small images:

Homesteading families on the Great Plains often lived in homes “dug out” from a dirt bank or made from cut prairie sod.

left: A typical “soddy.”

Photograph by Evelyn Cameron, Montana Historical Society

right: A dugout with sod walls.

Nebraska State Historical Society Photograph Collections

“I commenced my sod mansion last Monday and took some of the material on the ground such as brush and poles...Now I expect you think being so dry the sod would all break to pieces. Not a bit of it. You can grab a piece 10ft. long...and not tear it.”

—*Uriah W. Oblinger, Fillmore County, Nebraska, 1873*

Images

(large left)

Unlike this romanticized 1869 engraving of the westward journey, able-bodied emigrants walked to reduce the burden on the animals pulling the wagons. The animals’ health was vital to the emigrants’ survival.

Library of Congress

(large right)

A woman teamster guides her convoy of massive wagons through Dakota Territory, ca. 1880, to bring needed supplies to homesteaders.

Library of Congress

Gold miners at Spanish Flat, California, in 1852. The “Gold Rush” sparked movement to California. African-Americans, both free and enslaved, were part of the fevered migration. In the foreground is a “sluice box” used by miners to let gold flakes and nuggets wash free and settle to the bottom of the box for recovery.

California State Library

Map:

Pioneer Memories

Push to see important locations along the westward canals and trails and hear stories from travelers.

Emigrant Train, Strawberry Valley

Library of Congress

Pioneer Wagon / Meal on a Wagon Tailgate

Palace of the Governors

Fort Laramie 1849

Wisconsin Historical Society



Crossing the South Platte, by William Henry Jackson
Scotts Bluff National Monument, National Park Service

In Auburn Ravine

California State Library

Family with overturned wagon

Oregon Historical Society

Canal scene

State Museum of Pennsylvania

Audio:

Segment 1:

Narrator:

In 1834, William Nowlin's family took the Erie Canal from Utica to Buffalo, New York. Their final goal was a new home in Michigan.

William Nowlin:

"[My Father] said it was impossible for a poor man...to support his family [in New York] and he would sell what he had and go to a better country, where land was cheap ... Early in the spring of 1834 we left our friends ...[who] thought we were going 'out of the world.' [At] Utica...we embarked on a canal boat and moved slowly night and day, to invade the forests of Michigan.

When we arrived at Buffalo, the steamer [called], "Michigan"...lay at her wharf ready to start the next morning [onto Lake Erie]."

Narrator:

This musical selection was "E-ri-e Canal" performed by Pete Seeger is a Smithsonian Folkways Recording.

Segment 2:

Narrator:

For overland emigrants, the journey by wagon often began at the Mississippi or Missouri Rivers in St. Louis, Independence, or Omaha. Wagon teams left these cities in March or April. It was important to get going as early as possible to cross the mountains to California before fall and winter weather. Listen to the experiences of travelers that made their way across America.

Segment 3:

Narrator:

Artist James Wilkins accompanied gold-seekers heading for California in 1849. Early in his journey near Nodaway, Missouri, Wilkins caught a glimpse of one of the many hazards possible on the overland trails.

James Wilkins:

We are encamped this morn with 10 or twelve more wagons. The roads we find are cut up with the heavy California wagons. We passed one in the afternoon, completely broken down, one of the hind wheels smashed all to pieces, and its owners Irishmen apparently standing around mourning over their loss. 'Bad luck to the man that made it,' says one. The nearest blacksmith shop was some twelve miles off. Had it happened in the mountains I do not know what they would have done.

Segment 4:

Narrator:

Starting in 1846, more than 70,000 Mormons traveled west to Utah. From 1856 to 1860, ten large groups of Mormon emigrants used primarily two-wheeled handcarts pulled by the emigrants themselves to transport their supplies and belongings. Elizabeth Whittier Sermon commented on her 1856 migration.

Elizabeth Whittier:

There was no time crossing the rivers to stop and take off clothing, but [we] had to wade through and draw our carts at the same time with our clothes dripping wet, had to dry in the sun and dust as merrily on our way we go until we reach the valley...like a herd of stock or something worse.

Narrator:

One song remembered by members of Mormon handcart companies was "The Hand Cart Song". This selection by L.M. Hilton is a Smithsonian Folkways Recording from 1952.

Segment 5:

Narrator:

Fort Laramie, Wyoming was a welcomed stop along the westward trails. The Oregon, California and Mormon trails all passed nearby. James Wilkins recorded the difficulty of his journey up to the fort in 1849. After Fort Laramie, emigrants moved through the South Pass and met the treacherous terrain of the Rocky Mountains.

James Wilkins:

Arrive this morn by 8 o'clock at Fort Laramie where we shall stay a day or two to fix up, get our tires cut and other repairing. This is a great resting place for emigrants. Most of them by this time have seen enough of the elephant to know what they really want and what they can dispense with. The most prevailing cases are those where they have too much, especially with city men.

Segment 6:

Narrator:

After the trek across the Rockies, California-bound emigrants still faced Great Basin deserts and the Sierra Nevada mountains. Travelers knew that the Sierras must be crossed before winter. In 1841, John Bidwell joined the first overland emigrant train to California. His party abandoned its wagons in eastern Nevada so that they would not be slowed down.

John Bidwell:

We stopped one day and threw away everything we could not carry, made pack saddles, and packed oxen, mules, and horses, and started [again].

Segment 7:

Narrator:

At least 30,000 emigrants trekked overland to California in 1849. Cornelius Cole left Lodi, New York in February 1849 and reached Sacramento six months later. He recounted his reaction after crossing the Sierra Nevada in his journal.

Cornelius Cole:

...on reaching [the apex of a hill] the whole of California appeared at once spread out before us a most inspiring sight. It was to us the Promised Land.

Segment 8:

Narrator:

Missourian Luzena Stanley Wilson and her family traveled to California in 1849 to join the Gold Rush. Wilson captured the great excitement and promise that fueled the emigrants' desire to continue despite the hardships of the trail.

Luzena Stanley Wilson:

The gold excitement spread like wildfire, even out to our log cabin in the prairie, and as we had almost nothing to lose, and we might gain a fortune, we early caught the fever.

Our train consisted only of six wagons, but we were never alone. Ahead, as far as the eye could reach, a thin cloud of dust marked the route of the trains, and behind us, like the trail of a great serpent, it extended to the edge of civilization.

Nothing but the actual experience will give one an idea of the plodding, unvarying monotony, the vexations, the exhaustive energy, the throbs of hope, the depths of despair, through which we lived.

It was almost dusk of the last day of September, 1849, that we reached the end of our journey in Sacramento. My poor tired babies were asleep on the mattress in the bottom of the wagon, and I peered out into the gathering gloom, trying to catch a glimpse of our destination...

Section 4: RAILROADS SPAN THE NATION

By the end of America's Civil War, a great national project was already underway—constructing the world's first transcontinental railroad. Irish immigrants and war veterans built westward from the nation's existing rail network at Council Bluffs, Iowa. Chinese laborers built eastward from Sacramento, California. Eventually, they met in Promontory, Utah, after spanning some 1,776 miles. Later on, in the 1880s, other Asian immigrants came to the Pacific Northwest to build new railroads.

"I came over at the age of nineteen on an immigrant boat from Japan... The first job I got was on the railroad in the State of Washington. There were about two thousand Japanese working there at that time. Young boys, most of us."

—*Taro Murata, Japanese immigrant, 1907*

Excerpt from *American Mosaic: The Immigrant Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It*, by Joan Morrison and Charlotte Fox Zabusky, © 1980. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Background image:

A Northern Pacific Railroad survey crew, including a Japanese immigrant, poses ca. 1885 near the Green River, Washington Territory.

University of Washington Libraries

Cut-out figure:

Chinese Railroad Worker

Oregon Historical Society

Map:

Major U.S. Railroad Routes, ca. 1890

"When I hear the iron horse make the hills echo . . . it seems as if the earth had got a race now worthy to inhabit it."

—*Henry David Thoreau, Walden, 1854*

A National Network

In May 1869, the U.S. became linked physically, economically and politically from the Atlantic to the Pacific for the *first* time. The U.S. consisted of 37 states and 10 territories. The nation's economy accelerated as trains quickly delivered produce and people to distant areas. By 1875, American industry was expanding faster each year.

There were also unintended consequences: California's population fell for the first several years after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, as busted-out gold seekers and other failed dreamers now had an affordable way to head back to the Midwest and East.

Below:

One of the most famous photographs in American history, Andrew Russell's iconic image captures the completion of the transcontinental rail line, in Utah, on May 10, 1869. Telegraph sent the news in real time to the nation, and bells rang in every major American city and in small towns as well.

Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

"[The railroad] will populate our vast territory, and be the great highway of the nations . . ."

—*Reverend Vinton of Trinity Church in New York, at Promontory, Utah, May 10, 1869*

Images:

Chinese workers move earth to reinforce a wooden trestle near Secrettown, California, in 1867. In the mid-1860s, the railroad company building the western half of the transcontinental line began hiring Chinese immigrants and soon after sent agents to south China to recruit thousands more. Chinese laborers worked in 20- to 30-man crews, each crew led by a Chinese spokesman for the group, and with its own cook to prepare Chinese-style meals. The crews soon developed considerable expertise, doing complex work with minimal supervision.

Union Pacific Museum

A railroad surveying crew for the Union Pacific Railroad scales steep rocks in Utah's Uinta Mountains while looking for a favorable route, 1868.

Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Dormitory cars for track crews in Minnesota, 1880s. The St. Paul, Minnesota & Manitoba Railway (later the Great Northern Railway) housed thousands of workers in rail cars three-stories high. Heavy ropes attached to top corners secured the cars to the ground and prevented them from blowing over in fierce prairie winds.

Library of Congress

Poster advertising the opening of the transcontinental route to trains, May 1869. From Omaha to San Francisco "In less than Four Days" promises the poster—a far cry from the four to five months to journey by wagon.

Union Pacific Museum

Railroad spike

"Free Land" and Railroad Land Grants

Free land for homesteaders and land grants for railroads were the two decisive keys to open the western plains to settlement.

Building the western railroads took unprecedented amounts of financing. In the days before income taxes, the federal government had very little money, so the land itself became the financing tool through the Pacific Railroad Act. Nearby free lands available through the Homestead Act kept prices low for lands given to railroads that were later sold to settlers.

Below:

Prospective settlers dash to claim land in the 1893 Oklahoma land rush. The U.S. government sidestepped treaties with Native Americans displaced earlier in the century to Oklahoma from southeastern states, allowing settlers to claim formerly Indian land. Forbidden from entering the area to stake claims until a specific date and time, people jammed the demarcation line and, on signal, the rush began.

Research Division of the Oklahoma Historical Society

“There are two ways of going in, one by railroad, and the other a ‘free-for-all-go-as-you-please’.”

—Preston, a settler in Wichita, Kansas, 1893

“A cloud of dust rose where the home-seekers had stood in line... the horses and wagons and men were tearing across the open country like fiends.”

—Harper’s Weekly, 1889

Graphics:

First train carrying would-be settlers into former Indian lands near Perry, Oklahoma, 1893.

The National Archives

Federal land grants to the railroads provided for rights-of-way, plus many sections of land on either side of their routes. The railroads sold these lands to pay the huge debts incurred to build their lines. Prices were generally fair, to encourage settlement—and thereby increase agricultural shipments.

Land advertisements to attract settlers.

*Library of Congress
Nebraska State Historical Society*

Interactive:

How did the Civil War help settle the West?

In the midst of war, President Lincoln signed the *Pacific Railroad Act* and the *Homestead Act*. Northern industrialists had long wanted these laws so they could supply the many goods needed by small, independent farms in free states and territories. Southern legislators had blocked passage, wanting to extend the plantation system—and slavery—westward. After the start of the war, Southern lawmakers were no longer in Congress. And so, in 1862, the new laws passed easily, opening rapid development of the West.

Train with mortar at Petersburg, Virginia, by Andrew Russell.

Library of Congress

A Disappearing Way of Life

The coming of the railroads struck a severe blow to Native American ways of life, especially on the prairies. Before the railroads came, Plains Indians allowed wagons going to Oregon or California to pass through their lands. When the railroads brought vast numbers of settlers to the Midwest who came and stayed, Native resistance increased but eventually became futile.

“Oklahoma is the war cry here. People are flocking in from all parts of the country. Several companies have already started from the place to take claims and locate town sites in the Indian Territory.”

—The Phelps County New Era, April 26, 1879—describing an illegal land rush ten years before Congress opened the Indian lands to homesteaders.

Background image:

A group of displaced Native Americans and their wagons seek sanctuary, at Fort Sill, Indian Territory (later Oklahoma), ca. 1890. Some 29,000 homesteaders went to Fort Sill in 1901 to register for the land lottery when the last major “opening” of formerly Indian lands occurred. Ironically, it was at Fort Sill that Chief Quanah (Comanche)—who had struggled against white encroachments—surrendered in 1875.

Library of Congress

“When older people heard that whistle out on the prairie, they would cry.”

—Albert White Hat, Sr., Lakota historian

Images:

Native American chiefs gather at Pine Ridge Agency, South Dakota, three weeks after the Wounded Knee Massacre, January 1891. Speaking from the circle’s center, Chief Kicking Bear (Oglala Sioux) asks leaders to disarm to avoid further hostilities and tribal removals.

Denver Public Library

From *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, May 29, 1869: this cartoon, printed 19 days after the completion of the transcontinental rail line, asks, “Does not SUCH a meeting make amends?” Not for the Native Americans of the central Plains. Before railroads came, settlers had largely passed through on their way to Oregon or California. After 1869, more new railroads extended toward the Pacific coast, bringing legions of settlers to fill the Midwest, forever changing native ways of life.

Library of Congress

More than 40,000 hides fill this buffalo hide yard in Dodge City, Kansas, 1878, one of dozens of such places. Decimation of the bison herds all across the Midwest led to widespread starvation among many Plains Indian tribes.

The National Archives

Railroad Colonization

'Immigration agents' in Europe, hired by American railroad companies, encouraged families to immigrate and purchase cheap railroad-owned land, or to homestead free land given by the federal government. Six new railroad companies built additional transcontinental lines. All the western railroads surveyed and created hundreds of brand new towns across the Midwest and Far West like Modesto, California; Cheyenne, Wyoming and Brookings, South Dakota. Existing towns—such as Kansas City, Des Moines, Omaha, Fort Worth, Denver, and others—grew to become great cities.

Image Below:

African Americans who left Tennessee and Kentucky for Kansas called themselves "Exodusters," referring to the escape of Jews from Egypt in the Book of Exodus. One of the towns the Exodusters founded was Nicodemus, shown here in 1885. The new settlers established stores, two newspapers, a stone church, and a school, and became active in local and state politics. In the 1890s, Nicodemus faded when no railroad company would extend a track to the town.

Library of Congress

"I asked my wife did she know the ground she stands on. She said, 'No.' I said, 'It is free ground' and she cried like a child for joy."
—*John Solomon Lewis, left Louisiana and joined the Kansas "Exodusters," Spring 1879*

"Our arrival was a joyous one. Cousins and friends were at the [railway] station to greet us. Their hospitality greatly eased my fears of seeing a strange land and people."
—*Bashara Kalil Forzley, Lebanese immigrant who arrived in 1897*
An Autobiography of Bashara Kalil Forzley, 1958

Graphics:

A new railroad bridge spans a tributary of the Mississippi River at Swede Hollow, in St. Paul, Minnesota, 1900. New infrastructure such as this throughout the Midwest further accelerated railroads' growth. Immigrants often lived in communities, such as Swede Hollow, clustered near the very rails that had brought them to their new home.

Minnesota Historical Society

Publicity promoting Dakota Territory, like this from an 1882 booklet, promised free homestead land and "cheapest railroad lands" for those who could pay the filing fee, build and occupy a cabin on the land, and bring in a crop. The pictures of lush fields suggested a farmer could achieve prosperity in just six years. But rains had been unusually good in the early 1880s. When annual rains dropped to their normal levels, many immigrant farmers went bankrupt.

Washington State Historical Society

This ad targeting African Americans in Lexington, Kentucky, in 1877, describes a self-governing colony—with a militia—heading to Kansas to join the black community of Nicodemus, founded in northwestern Kansas in July 1877. Three hundred fifty people responded to the ad. Thousands of African Americans, many in large groups, migrated west to claim homesteads between 1870 and 1890.

Kansas State Historical Society

A railroad freight yard and passenger depot in Watsonville, California, ca. 1890. The town in the Pajaro Valley, near San Francisco, became an important agricultural center.

Charles Ford Company

A Belgian family, refugees from the violence of World War I, wait at an immigration office in Detroit, 1915. Their American sponsor will recognize them by their card marked '25.'

Wayne State University

Emigrant ticket on the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad, connecting to the Central Pacific Railroad, April 1871—for passage “in emigrant cars only” from Chicago to San Francisco.

Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center (SAMCC)

Flipbook: Immigrant Stories

Shown here are close to 2,203 Polish and Russian people crossing to the United States in steerage class in 1905.

Minnesota Historical Society

“That was the time, you see, when America was known to foreigners as the land where you’d get rich. There’s gold on the sidewalk—all you have to do is pick it up. So people left that little village and went to America... Of course we came steerage. That’s the bottom of the ship and three layers of bunks. One, two, three, one above the other.”

—*Pauline Newman, Lithuanian immigrant to America when she was eight years old, 1901*

Excerpt from *American Mosaic: The Immigrant Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It*

Joan Morrison and Charlotte Fox Zabusky
University of Pittsburgh Press

Fifteen year-old Annie Moore and her two brothers from Ireland were the first immigrants processed at Ellis Island. U.S. Public Health Service Inspectors examined all steerage and third class immigrants for diseases, including a contagious eye disease called trachoma, ca. 1912.

Library of Congress

“No previous experience aroused for all such anxiety as the test of Ellis Island. With word or gesture from an official, one standing a few feet from the gate opening to the golden land could be refused entry after having traveled so far.”

—*Rachel Bella Calof, Jewish immigrant who agreed to an arranged marriage in order to leave Russia, 1894.*

*From Rachel Calof’s Story: Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains
Indiana University Press, 1995.*

Many immigrants boarded ‘emigrant trains,’ here depicted by *Harper’s Weekly* in 1874, which carried them from New York, Baltimore, Galveston, New Orleans, and other ports of entry to make new homes in the Midwest and West.

Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS Image ID: 31829

“I first looked at the railroad cars that would haul us. They were small, light, flat cars fitted with little wheels. We sat on rough-sawn benches, arranged crossways, half of the passengers riding forward, and the other half, backward. To protect us from the sun and rain, a board roof had been crudely knocked together.

“ . . . Then the journey got started, at first slowly, then faster and even faster. The little iron horse pulled well, and we were pleased, for the gentle rolling along on tracks really seemed like Paradise after the hardships of the ocean journey . . .”

—*Ernst Bohning, German immigrant who arrived in Baltimore and headed west with his family by train, 1843*

Like many immigrants and visitors traveling to Detroit before him, this young man arrived at the Michigan Central Railroad Terminal, 1912.

Wayne State University

“My fellow travelers took tickets to Houston [County]... Seeing this, I took a ticket to the next station beyond, Rushford. It took some little courage to cut loose from all I knew...rather than crowd myself on somebody’s hospitality. I was the youngest in the lot, only eighteen, and it was so far, so far from home!”

—*Andreas Ueland, Norwegian immigrant to Minneapolis, 1871*

Between 1820 and 1900, over 340,000 Dutch immigrants came to the United States. Pictured here is a group of immigrants brought from Holland to Minnesota by Francis H. Murray, 1910.

Minnesota Historical Society

“Language cannot exaggerate the rapidity with which these communities are built up. You may stand ankle deep in the short grass of uninhabited wilderness; next month a mixed train will glide over the waste and stop at some point when the railroad has decided to locate a town. Men, women, and children will jump out of the cars and their chattels will be tumbled out after them. From that moment the building begins.”

— *North Dakota pioneer, ca. 1880s*

Following the ‘Land Rush’ into Oklahoma, new settlers flowed into Guthrie, Indian Territory [Oklahoma], to establish a claim, 1889.

The National Archives

“Unlike Rome, the city of Guthrie was built in a day. To be strictly accurate in the matter, it might be said that it was built in an afternoon. At twelve o’clock on Monday, April 22nd, the resident population of Guthrie was nothing; before sundown it was at least ten thousand...At twilight the camp fires of ten thousand people gleamed on the grassy slopes of the Cimarron Valley, where, the night before, the coyote, the gray wolf, and the deer had roamed undisturbed.”

—*William Willard Howard, Harper’s Weekly, 1889*

The Homestead Act was in effect from 1863 to 1986. Over two and a half million claims, including this one by an African American family in Guthrie, Oklahoma, in 1889, were made in that time.

University of Oklahoma Libraries.

“Emigration has made [Lincoln] what it is. On all sides of town there is to be seen small huts about like our common pig pens and when you peep in you see family stuck here for winter.”

—*Uriah W. Oblinger, homesteader to Nebraska, 1872*
Nebraska State Historical Society

Chinese immigrants to America could become permanent residents, but only those born in America could be citizens. “Paper sons” paid Chinese men already in America to falsify their birth records. This resident document claims Ng Wing Moon (right) as the native born son of Ng Kai, 1910.

University of California, Berkeley

“My father often talked of wanting to bring his son to the United States. He searched until he found a merchant named Mr. Wong who would sponsor me. My father paid that man \$1,650... I was given a document listing me as the merchant’s son, and declaring that I was entering the United States as a student. In 1921, I arrived at Angel Island from Hong Kong on the ship *Nile*...”

—*Wong Yow, Chinese “paper son” immigrant, 1921.*

Feeding a Nation

The cattle industry of the Southwest and the great wheat belt of the upper Midwest prospered because of the expanding rail network. Wheat made Minneapolis and St. Paul into a major flour-milling center; Chicago, Kansas City, Omaha, Fort Worth, Denver, and Los Angeles became beef-packing centers. Eastern industries, too, prospered by supporting the legions of western settlers with goods, farm supplies, and agricultural equipment.

Lower Image:

Roundup on the Sherman Ranch, Genesee, Kansas, ca. 1902. The cowboy opens wide his lariat (or looped rope), preparing to chase down and lasso any young steer he spots that needs branding.

The National Archives

“...still settlers continued to push further west and engage in farming... As the sturdy farmer cultivates the soil the Great American Desert moves still further west, and in its place...find the most fertile and productive grain fields.”

—*Plum Creek Pioneer, Nebraska, 1883*

“I helped make my first cattle drive when only twelve years of age. My father’s outfit drove a herd of cattle from Bell County to Brady in 1886 and took me along... I thought it was a big trip. I can remember I had a grand time, but I sure got tired, and sometimes scared. The riders would tell ghost or Indian stories around the fire every night...”

—*Ellis Petty, recalling his first cattle drive in Texas, 1938*

Images:

A train carries sheep in the San Joaquin Valley of California, ca. 1910. The sheep have been loaded onto the cars from a track siding, and the train now proceeds toward a meat packing plant.

California State Railroad Museum Library

Loading cattle onto a livestock train, from a stock pen at Eland, North Dakota, on the Northern Pacific Railroad, near Dickinson, ca. 1899.

North Dakota State University, Fargo

“Bread and Cactus,” by F. M. Sherman, 1903. On a cattle drive, the “cookie” prepares a meal for a crew of cowboys, or drovers. Coffee was boiled, bread was baked in a pan, and vegetables (except potatoes) were scarce.

Colorado Historical Society

Interior of an “agricultural exhibit car” of the Great Northern Railway, ca. 1910. Railroads of the Far West were eager to promote the most up-to-date agricultural practices, since higher yields of grains, vegetables, and fruit meant more traffic for the railroad.

University of Washington Libraries

Bushel-box label for apples grown in Watsonville, California, in the 1890s. Apples, of various varieties, were one of the first types of fruit that could be shipped long distances successfully. California apples, in the 1870s, reached as far as Denver and Chicago.

National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

Cover of a fold-out map, produced by the Northern Pacific Railroad in 1882. The map promotes economic opportunity for new “colonists” along the railroad’s routes.

Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma

Section 5: ACCELERATED MOBILITY

The first half of the 20th century saw great transformations and rapid changes in mobility and commerce. Railroads ruled for the first 25 years, and electric streetcar systems proliferated in American cities. But then, automobiles, trucks, and airplanes made transportation farther-reaching than ever before.

Railroads reached a peak in the 1920s, while electric transit and gasoline-powered automobiles had become commonplace. More people could go more places for work and leisure.

background image:

The energy of the city is stifled by gridlock in this view of a traffic jam of trucks, wagons, and streetcars, ca. 1900, at Dearborn and Randolph Streets in Chicago.

Chicago Historical Society

“Yet there isn’t a train I wouldn’t take,
No matter where it’s going.”
—*Edna St. Vincent Millay, “Travel” from Second April, 1921*

“I need to have wheels under me.”
—*Florence Thompson, Great Depression migrant featured in Dorothea Lange’s photograph “Migrant Mother,” ca. 1936*

Cut-out Image:

An early motorist in 1908 dressed for travel across the country in his open-top car.

Detail of Image from the Collections of The Henry Ford.
Driver from “Model T Car, Cross-Country Tour”

Riding the Rails

From 1900 through the 1920s, railroads dominated land transportation throughout the nation. Some 80 to 85 percent of travelers and freight going between any two American cities went by rail. Many Americans traveled by train into the 1950s.

Electricity, not gasoline, fueled the revolution in Americans’ personal mobility between 1880 and about 1915. People could live in new suburbs and commute daily to town, and those living in town could shop and run errands more easily.

lower background:

An electric “interurban” car stops at Kenosha, Wisconsin, ca. 1919. Electric interurban lines, like this one that ran between Chicago and Milwaukee, offered frequent travel to towns and amusements beyond the suburbs.

Wisconsin Historical Society

“For much of the 20th century, railroads carried everybody and everything everywhere.”
—*John H. White, Curator Emeritus
Transportation History, Smithsonian Institution*

Images:

Northern Pacific Railroad engineer Ed Wolters, in the cab of his steam locomotive, 1909. He was a superb engineer and was selected to guide President Franklin Roosevelt's train during a trip in the Pacific Northwest. The President remarked on the particularly smooth running of the train. Wolters also guided regular passenger trains equipped with elegant dining cars. In this dining car, three African American waiters flank the steward in charge of the car. In the car's galley, three cooks prepared meals from scratch, made from fresh food stocks resupplied from the railroad's commissaries en route.

*Engineer Ed Wolters, 1909. Washington State Historical Society
Deluxe dining car of the "Overland Limited", ca. 1915. Library of Congress*

The *Chicago-Portland Special*, a fast passenger train of the Union Pacific Railroad, 1906. The first coach is for first-class mail, sorted en route by U.S. postal clerks. Passengers travel in comfort in the rest of the train.

Library of Congress

Market Square in Piqua, Ohio, on a summer day in 1906. While horse-and-buggy is still standard transport, many smaller towns have introduced electric streetcar systems.

Cars for the Masses

Automobiles were primarily luxury items for the wealthy until Henry Ford introduced the affordable Model T in 1908. More automobile builders entered the market in the next decades, and prices for cars fell. As it became easier for the ordinary person to own a "cheap, reliable car," driving and owning an automobile became central to the American experience.

lower background:

An early auto tourist admires the vista from Grand View Point, at the Grand Canyon, from his Toledo motorcar, ca. 1912.

Library of Congress

"Everything in life is somewhere else, and you need a car to get there."

—*E.B. White, American author and humorist, 1899–1985*

Image:

Men unload six Model Ts from a boxcar at the railroad depot in Rifle, Colorado, 1914. Fenders, tops, and other "accessories" will be added later to these new "flivvers."

Colorado Historical Society

Flipper: Henry Ford

“I will build a motor car for the great multitude...It will be large enough for the family but small enough for the individual to run and care for...It will be so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one...”

— Henry Ford

There were many innovators trying to invent the inexpensive automobile. Ford succeeded by combining mass production with high quality parts to produce a rugged car priced low through volume sales.

Industrialist Henry Ford, 1921.

Detail of Image from The Collections of The Henry Ford

Wall Case:

Driver's goggles, postcards, and road maps, 1920s–30s

The automobile redefined freedom. Taking the car out for pleasure, either long or short distances, became popular. Middle class people in ever greater numbers could enjoy automotive experiences that had before only been available to the wealthy.

Shipler and Dodd families in car, Big Cottonwood Canyon, Utah, 1910.

Utah State Historical Society

Women in the Midwest travel in a Model T.

Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer

A motorist and his mechanic struggle to free a 1910 Regal on a muddy road.

The Henry Ford

Building New Highways

The great majority of rural roads in the East—and nearly all in the Midwest and West—were dirt that turned to deep mud in spring and winter rains. Motorists across the country agitated for better roads, creating a nationwide “Good Roads Movement.”

Even by 1915, few principal highways were “improved” – less than 10 percent of major roads were graveled or paved. In the great expanse west from the Mississippi River to the Pacific coast, almost all roads were dirt.

background image:

Workers pour and smooth freshly poured concrete, as a rural highway is paved in the 1920s. By 1930, less than one-third of the network of nearly 325,000 miles of rural highways remained unpaved.

National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

The highway between Washington, D.C., and Richmond, Va., in 1919 (left) and 1920 (right). Although bicyclists originally began the “Good Roads Movement” in the 1880s, motorists pushed it to completion.

National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

bottom:

Road projects accelerated in the 1920s, funded by state and local taxes. In the Great Depression of the 1930s, public works financed by federal funds employed thousands of laborers to construct and improve highways.

Great Migrations: Heading North

In the largest demographic shift in the U.S. up to that time, African Americans living in the South “pulled up stakes” to head north. Looking to escape crushing poverty and racism, they took industrial jobs in Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Philadelphia, New York, and many other cities. From 1914 to 1950, more than a million African Americans became part of the “Great Migration.”

lower background:

Two agricultural workers try to hitchhike a ride north on Highway 27, North Carolina, July 1940.

Library of Congress

“This is our home and...we are not going to leave, unless we are driven by want and lack of freedom.”

—*African American male to the Atlanta Independent, May 1917*

Images:

African American families traveled north any way they could: on foot, by car, by train, and even by packet boat. If by car, it was important to know safe places to stop along the way. If by train, porters commonly gave migrating families vital information, such as contacts in northern cities for assistance. When families arrived, like the one at top in Chicago, local members of the NAACP often helped them find housing and jobs.

Family just arrived in Chicago, 1922.

The New York Public Library

A Pullman porter assists passengers, 1915.

Peter Newark’s American Pictures

A young girl and her family migrating from Florida to New Jersey, 1940

Library of Congress

African American migrants journeying in search of economic opportunity endured a racially segregated transportation system. Here, a traveler waits for a bus at the Durham, North Carolina, terminal in 1940.

Library of Congress

Flipper

“Take your eyes out of the sky because someone is stealing your bread.”

—*Rev. Owen Whitfield, sharecropper and vice president, Southern Tenant Farmers Union*

Many African American migrants to northern cities were former sharecroppers who had lived and worked on land owned by others. Early agricultural relief programs during the 1930s paid planters to take land out of production. Planters pocketed the incentives and pushed thousands of tenant farmers off the land and into desperation.

In January 1939, about 1,000 evicted croppers set up a camp along two highways in Missouri to protest their eviction and the inequities of sharecropping. Helped by students from Lincoln University, they later set up a community called Cropperville.

An evicted sharecropper in Missouri contemplates his future, January 1939. Library of Congress

"I am fed up
With Jim Crow laws
People who are cruel
And afraid,
Who lynch and run,
Who are scared of me

And me of them
I pick up my life
And take it away
On a one-way ticket –
Gone up North
Gone out West
Gone!"

—*"One-Way Ticket"* by Langston Hughes, 1949

"I am a hard working man but I can't make a living here and hardly that."
—*Anonymous African American to the Chicago Defender*

Great Migrations: Escaping the Dust Bowl

Americans being displaced in great numbers was nothing new by the 1930s. A short but sharp recession in the early 1920s accelerated migration from farms to cities. Hundreds of thousands lost their homes in the great Mississippi River flood of 1927.

Nationwide depression struck in 1930, compounded by terrible drought in the Great Plains and recurring dust storms in northern Texas and western Oklahoma in 1932–37. Financial upheavals, ruined crops, and the erosion of overworked topsoil bankrupted thousands of farm families. Hoping to build new farming lives, many of these families packed up their cars and headed away from the "dust bowl" to California.

lower background:

A truck races ahead of a roiling dust storm, March 1937. This storm lasted for three hours. Dust storms plagued the Great Plains during the 1930s drought.

The National Archives

Images:

A young mother and her child from Oklahoma sit in a government-provided tent in Imperial Valley, California, March 1937.

Library of Congress

“We got blown out of Oklahoma.”
—*Anonymous migrant*

below:

A family of dust bowl refugees from Abilene, Texas, looks for work in California, 1936.

Library of Congress

This group of photographs by Dorothea Lange reveals the difficulties faced by thousands of migrant families during the Great Depression. Above, this family with nine children left Iowa in 1932. Stuck in New Mexico in August 1936, they cannot find steady work and must sell everything they own to buy food.

Library of Congress

Flipper

During the Great Depression, unemployment rates reached as high as 25% in 1933 and remained at more than 14% in 1940. Work was short-term and hard to find. Families needed to travel from community to community in search of work.

A woman lives in an auto camp in Kern County, California, April 1940. Yesterday, she and her husband fortunately found work picking peas in fields 35 miles away. Together, they earned \$2.25.

The National Archives

Yes, we ramble and we roam
And the highway that's our home,
It's a never-ending highway
For a dust bowl refugee.

Yes, we wander and we work
In your fields and in your fruit,
Like the whirlwinds on the desert
That's the dust bowl refugees.”
—“*Dust Bowl Refugee*” by Woody Guthrie, 1938

Ludlow Music, Inc. New York, NY

Flip Book: Migrant Stories

A group of men ride on a freight train to travel in search of work in 1937.

The National Archives

“Myself and one of my friends from Alabama...him and I got on the freight train and hoboed up north. We had nothing but what we had on our backs, that’s all...We ran out of money the second day... There’d be fifty people on the freight train scattered all over, some sitting on top, some inside, some in gondolas, just riding where you could ride.”

—James Boggs, *migrant traveling north by freight train to Detroit, 1937*
Reprinted from Elaine Lutzman Moon, *Untold Tales*

Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit’s African American Community
Wayne State University Press

Vernon Evans stands next to his family’s car during a stop along their journey from South Dakota. Library of Congress

“Vernon Evans (with his family) of Lemmon, South Dakota, near Missoula, Montana. Leaving grasshopper-ridden and drought-stricken area for a new start in Oregon or Washington. Expects to arrive at Yakima in time for hop picking. Makes about 200 miles a day in Model T Ford.”

—Arthur Rothstein, *photographer’s notes, July 1936*

African-American travelers gather in a segregated waiting room at the Jacksonville, Florida rail station in 1921.

State Archives of Florida

“Lots of people in my home left and went to St. Louis, Chicago, different places like that. New Jersey. So that’s where I went. Better wages, that’s why so many people left and emigrated to California, because of the money, the better conditions and everything... And they’d write and tell us...how much better it was.”

—Matilda Foster, *migrant from Arkansas in search of work, ca. 1943*

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project: An Oral History with Matilda Foster conducted by David Washburn and Tiffany Lok, 2005

University of California, Berkeley, 2007

A child of a migrant family from Iowa waits along a New Mexico highway.

Library of Congress

“Part of an impoverished family of nine on a New Mexico highway. Depression refugees from Iowa. Left Iowa in 1932 because of father’s ill health.... Nine children including a sick four-month-old baby. No money at all. About to sell their belongings and trailer for money to buy food. ‘We don’t want to go where we’ll be a nuisance to anybody.’”

—Dorothea Lange, *photographer’s notes, August 1936*

About 700,000 people were displaced by the Mississippi Flood of 1927. Segregated tent cities were set up, but black sharecroppers were forced back to construct protection levees. The devastation caused by the flood helped spur African American families to leave the south.

African American families await rescue on a levee in Hamburg, Louisiana.
University of Chicago Library

“So many people wanted to leave here and go to Chicago...In Greenville the train was at ground level, and they were pushing to get on the train. I surely wanted to go to Chicago. Everybody was going but me. They just knew they were going to the promised land”

—*Maurice Sisson, lived in Greenville, Mississippi during the Great Flood of 1927.*

The Great Depression forced thousands into motion to find work. Migrant farmers followed seasonal harvests nearly everywhere, picking berries in New Jersey, Michigan, and Florida; cotton in Arizona; and other crops. Public works projects shuffled workers around the country to build parks, roads, bridges, and government buildings.

Migrant fruit worker from Arkansas in Berrien County, Michigan, 1940.
Library of Congress

“I reached Newburgh...but an advertisement in the local newspaper said that berry pickers were wanted at a place seven miles up the river.”

At about eight o'clock the families began to arrive.... For one day's work of nearly ten hours the father collected for himself, his wife, and four children \$2.44....

I worked seven days and then took to the road again, with a net profit of ninety-eight cents.”

- *John Macnamara, worked as a migrant for a summer in the fields of the Hudson Valley*
The Nation, September 1934

A group of African American migrants gather outside of a Chicago rail station. Between 1920 and 1930, the African American population of Chicago more than doubled.

University of Illinois at Chicago

“The din of the city entered my consciousness, entered to remain for years to come... I looked about to see if there were signs saying: FOR WHITE – FOR COLORED. I saw none. Black people and white people moved about, each seemingly intent upon his private mission...”

—*Richard Wright, born on a Mississippi plantation then moved to Chicago, 1927*
Richard Wright. *Black Boy* (1945; 2007) HarperCollins Publishers

A woman and her child wait beside their car in Tracy, California during the Great Depression. Photographer Dorothea Lange's notes capture the family's plight.
Library of Congress

"Tracy (vicinity), California. Missouri family of five who are seven months from the drought area on U.S. Highway 99. 'Broke, baby sick, and car trouble!'"
—Dorothea Lange, *photographer's notes, February 1937*

Taking to the Air

Airplanes emerged as practical transportation when the U.S. Post Office Department awarded contracts in the 1920s for air mail. Single pilots flew former training planes built for World War I, carrying just several bags of mail on a few long-distance routes. Soon after, early airlines organized, buying new and larger airplanes to carry passengers as well. Travelers who could afford the costly tickets and were not afraid of novelty were the pioneering customers.

Early air travelers endured the noise and vibration of piston engines, drafts, and wicker seats. Schedules were often haphazard. By 1940, travel by air was safer and more extensive, even though only a small percentage of Americans had ever tried it.

lower background:

Pilot Bill Hopson, in his winter gear, 1920s. Enduring rain and wind, early airmail pilots flew in open cockpits (such as in the Curtiss "Jenny" shown below), often through hazardous storms.

National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution

Images:

The Douglas DC-3, produced starting in 1934, made commercial aviation truly practical. Carrying 14 to 21 passengers in relative comfort, the DC-3 brought airline travel to every major American city and to smaller towns as well.

National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution

"I have gone aloft in a great variety of air craft [sic] ..." In 1939, the *New York Times* called Clara Adams a "persistent first flighter." Her 1928 voyage on the airship *Graf Zeppelin* cost her \$3,000 and made her the first female passenger to fly commercially across the Atlantic. Adams later became the first woman passenger to fly around the world, on a 1939 journey that took just under 17 days.

University of Texas-Dallas

Map:

Postal Air Routes – 1926

Wall Case:

Passengers on a Ford Tri-Motor got a cup for airsickness, cotton balls to put in their ears to reduce noise, and gum to help clear their ears. Stewardesses, who in the early years of passenger aviation were trained nurses, also carried a fly-swatter and a wrench to tighten bolts if a passenger seat came loose.

Since tickets were expensive, airline flight in the 1920s was mainly for the wealthy and the somewhat adventurous. Here, ten passengers fly in a Ford Tri-Motor in 1929

The Henry Ford

Lower image:

Mail planes in the mid-1920s were often former U.S. Army trainers from World War I, such as this big Curtiss "Jenny" with a failed engine that ten men are pushing off a runway. Like other two-seat biplanes, the "Jenny" was piloted from the rear seat and the mail sack was carried in the front seat.

The National Postal Museum Library, Smithsonian Institution

"There were so many things wrong with our airplanes and their engines that we worked all night to get them in safe flying condition. For example, one gas tank had a hole in it and we had to plug it up with an ordinary lead pencil."

—Major Reuben Fleet, 1918

War Transportation on the Home Front

World War II (1941–1945) brought a dramatic resurgence in railroad travel. Trains in 1944 carried a crush of three times more passengers than rails had ever carried in any year before the war. Almost every soldier, sailor, and airman rode a train—often in cramped conditions—to the ship that would take him to battle.

Other Americans took far different journeys—to internment camps. In response to fears of a Japanese invasion and mistrust of Japanese-American citizens living on the West Coast, the U.S. government forced these citizens to leave their homes and property and relocate to isolated places like Manzanar, California; Heart Mountain, Wyoming; Topaz, Utah; and other "relocation centers."

lower background:

Troops eating in a Pullman sleeping car. A dining car—sometimes two on troop trains to provide sufficient galley facilities—did not have enough seating for everyone. At night, the seats converted to lower berths, and the upper berths folded down from above.

Southern Pacific Railroad, Pictorial Histories Publishing, Co.

Images:

Family and friends say goodbye to troops in Decatur, Illinois, June 1944. As an advertisement for the Association of American Railroads claimed, "Every month—two million members of our armed forces board American railroad trains under military orders to ride away on somber, terrible, necessary business—the business of America's salvation—the business of war."

Courtesy of the Herald & Review, Decatur, IL

This 1942 ad by the New Haven Railroad, praised by newspaper editors throughout the country, became famous and set a tone for personalization of the war and sacrifice on the “Home Front.”

University of Connecticut, American Premier Underwriters, Inc.

Both domestic and military cargo on the railroads increased by two-and-a-half times, compared to pre-war 1939. Nearly all war material went to embarkation ports by train. Celebrated newscaster Lowell Thomas commented, “I’ve watched troops unloading from train after train. We Americans needed a miracle in railroad transportation during early 1942, we expected that miracle, and . . . we got that miracle.”

U.S. Army Signal Corps, Pictorial Histories Publishing, Co.

Flipbook: War Stories

Sitting on her parents’ luggage in April 1942, a young girl waits for the bus that will take her to an “assembly center,” the first stop on the way to an internment camp. Japanese American evacuees had to leave most of their property behind.

National Archives

“We had only the dimmest ideas of what to expect. Most of the families, like us, had moved out from southern California with as much luggage as each person could carry.”

— *Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, internee at the camp in Manzanar, California, 1942*

Excerpt from FAREWELL TO MANZANAR by James D. Houston and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company

Newcomers to the camp at Heart Mountain, Wyoming, await induction, September 1943. Heart Mountain was one of ten internment camps located in seven states, most in the west. Sometimes, families already interned were moved from one camp to another.

The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

“The trip was a nightmare that lasted two nights and a day. The train creaked with age. It was covered with dust, and as the gaslights failed to function properly, we traveled in complete darkness most of the night...All shades were drawn and we were not allowed to look out of the windows...”

—*Mine’ Okubo, internee at the camp at Topaz, Utah, 1942*
‘Citizen 13660’ by Mine’ Okubo, 1946

Women filled many industrial jobs during World War II, including on the railroads. Some 150,000 women—nearly 10% of the railroads’ work force—served in traditionally male jobs, from telegrapher to mechanic. Mrs. Dorothy Lucke (pictured here in 1943) serviced locomotives in the roundhouse and engine terminal at Clinton, Iowa.

Library of Congress

“It was December 7, 1941. Our family and myself heard on the radio...the news of Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor. I went outside and looked up at the stars with

a thought of how can I help? I was 18 years old, I was one of...eleven children [living in] Oklahoma.

“ . . . I took a bus to California to live with my sister. I worked in a dime store a short time, then I heard that the government wanted women to sign up to be trained to work at ship building and aircraft repairs to replace men who were being called to services. My friend and I went to Fresno and signed up for training.”

— *Loucille Ramsey Long, migrant to work in ship and aircraft industries, 1942*

Rosie the Riveter / WWII Home Front National Historical Park

Many thousands of women moved to work in aircraft plants, bringing together women from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Here, Dora Miles and Dorothy Johnson assemble a transport airplane's bulkhead. They are a team: as Ms. Miles “drives” each rivet, Ms. Johnson “bucks” the rivet with a tool from behind for a tight fit.

Library of Congress

“I was born on a farm in Pottery County, South Dakota...the youngest of four children... We had heard the news of Pearl Harbor on the radio and were kind of in a state of shock; it did not seem real. In January of 1943, a friend and I left by train. I went to San Diego, my friend stayed in Los Angeles with her sister. We both went to work in the airplane factories.”

—*Ida Lemler Roseland, migrant to work in aircraft production, 1943*

Rosie the Riveter / WWII Home Front National Historical Park

Private First Class Woodrow Powers (in fatigue cap) plays rummy with fellow soldiers as they ride their train to Hampton Roads, Virginia, to embark on a troop ship to Europe in 1944. Like millions of soldiers during World War II, these men left behind wives and children as they journeyed into uncertainty.

Library of Virginia

“The train I was on had old Pullman cars for the troops (not air-conditioned) and the cooks set up in baggage cars and cooked as we rode. The train would stop in mid-morning and again in mid-afternoon so we could get off and stretch our legs. We played cards, read, slept, and each found his own way to kill the time and wonder what the future held in store for each of us.”

—*Private Thor Ronningen, 1 Company, 395th Infantry Regiment, 99th Infantry Division, traveled by train after his Army induction, 1943*

Section 6: OUR EXPANDED WORLD

Americans are marked by their *mobility*. We travel more miles in an average lifetime than the citizens of any other country. And we take the *right* of travel – going where we will, when we will – as seriously as any other civil right.

In the second half of the 20th century – and now into the 21st – we have seen the biggest changes ever in our mobility. We travel for fun, adventure, and family get-togethers. We commute, travel on business, and run errands. We also pull up stakes and move our families in pursuit of new opportunities. Meanwhile, people from distant shores yearn to become Americans, as they have for nearly 400 years.

Cut-out Image:

The Hernandez children during a family vacation, 2008.

Peggy Hernandez and Tina Lynch

Interchange linking I-4 and I-275 in Tampa, Florida, 2006. The development of the Interstate Highway System, beginning in 1956, made it easier for auto and truck travelers to drive quickly between destinations.

Photo by Julie Palermo Valdes, Aerial Innovations, Inc. Tampa, FL.

It's Been Quite a Ride

After the end of World War II in 1945, a boom in American mobility ensued – a boom that hasn't stopped. Today, every American has several journey stories, each a personal story. We travel more often than we used to. And we pull up stakes and move ourselves and our families to new opportunities more often than ever.

Object Case:

Viewmaster and slides, postcards, brochures, and maps

Lenticular photographs:

Urban transit by rail grew from electric trolleys on city streets to dedicated rail systems on their own rights of way. In 2000, more than 128 million Americans commuted by bus, rail, or both.

View from left to right: Electric streetcar in downtown New Orleans, 1946 / passengers at a Washington, D.C. Metrorail station, 2006.

The Historic New Orleans Collection
Susana Raab 2008

In the 1950s air transport began to grow and but was still primarily for the wealthy. With the advent of the jet airliner, which radically reduced costs, air travel became increasingly popular.

View from left to right: At Los Angeles International Airport, an American Airlines DC-6 about 1950 / LAX Terminal 7, about 2000.

Los Angeles World Airports

Public transit systems used buses to carry millions of commuters. City buses have experienced a renaissance in the 2000s, becoming roomier, more fuel efficient, and with fewer smog-causing emissions.

View from left to right: Atlanta city bus, 1941 / a prototype fuel cell bus in Hartford, Connecticut, 2007.

Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center,
Herbert H. Lee Photographs
Gretchen Gregg & Meaghan Mackin

Flipbook:

The Larson family poses for a photograph before heading out on vacation, June 1970.

Courtesy of the Larson family

“Every summer we would pack up our station wagon and our homemade car top carrier and head east or west from our home in Minnesota. My favorite was when we would head west!

We traveled highways and winding roads off the beaten path and discovered breathtaking vistas and picture perfect picnic spots. . . History came alive for us as we traveled the western states in our station wagon and stood in awe as buffalo grazed in protected preserves—we imagined vast herds of them rumbling across the open plains.

The country became ours as we traced our route in the US atlas and read the names of towns big and small from the passing signs. We marveled at the mountains that rose up from the plains and how the trees grow so tall in the west — big enough for a car to drive through! ”

-- Becky Larson Stromberg, describing vacations in her family’s station wagon,
2008

The Rosen family vacations at Valley of the Fires, New Mexico during a two week trip through the American West, 1969.

Photo by Louis Rosen.

“The Camp ‘Otel™ pictured here was a clever piece of equipment that appealed to our Dad’s fascination with gadgetry that favored function over fashion. Sleeping 4 in the tent on top of the car, it also featured a cook stove, water tanks, a shower and a toilet.

Our camping vacations usually involved long days of driving through mountains or desert, sometimes without air conditioning, and frequent stops at History Markers and Visitor’s Centers. The camping vacation was anything but uneventful, often combining the relentless onward march of a military campaign with picturesque social studies lessons. Each member of the clan would pitch in at every stop, setting up camp in the evening and taking it down when it was time to move out.

Mom was the unsung hero of the trips, fixing meals and creating a traveling home for us on the road. She was the organizer and planner.”

—Bob and Jeff Rosen, recalling family road trips, 2008

The Reed family took long road trips across the country. At top, the Reed family travels with their Sportcraft trailer at Glacier National Park in 1962. Center, Leon (far right) poses with his family by Yellowstone Falls in 1956. At bottom, the Reeds captured a line of cars and trailers at Tower Falls in Yellowstone National Park in 1956.

Photo by Walter Reed.

“For about 12 years when I was young (from the early 50s through 1964), my family took one long vacation (5000 miles or more) or two medium-length vacations every year ... We took these 5000-mile trips on what would today be considered back roads: two lanes, no shoulders, through the middle of every town ... you saw a lot more – you drove right beside the roadside attractions ... We took most of our trips in a 12' Sportcraft trailer... The trailer didn't have a bathroom, so finding a place to stay each night was part of the adventure. ... Sometimes, we'd just stop at a gas station and pay the owner 50 cents to keep his bathrooms open all night for us.

The trip to Yellowstone was especially memorable because it was the first trip we took to “the West.” Yellowstone was like no place I'd ever seen – I was fascinated by the geysers and hot springs and by the bears, which at the time wandered freely through campgrounds and along the roads ... In ... 2006, I returned to Yellowstone [and] found exactly the spot where a memorable family photo was taken, looking over Yellowstone Falls ... [on] rocks my family sat on 50 years earlier.”

--Leon Reed, recalling his family's road trips, 2008

The Phillips family's two children return home from a vacation in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains along with the gear required for a modern-day vacation.

Photo by Karen Phillips, 2006

“Sleeping bags. Pillows. Coolers. Duffle bags. Camp chairs. A portable grill. A box of staples (ketchup, sugar, cereal, bread). Beach towels and flip flops and Boogie Boards and baby floats and cooking spatulas and tongs and aluminum foil. Cameras and a laptop. Toys, toys and more toys – for the beach, for the sand, for the lawn, for the rainy day, for riding on, for playing with in the car ...

Finally it all fit. It was like one of those games where one dislodged item would have brought the whole load crashing out of the open back windows. But it fit.

We sighed with relief and got in. Something seemed amiss. The car was too quiet.

The kids! They were still running around somewhere!

We crammed them in, using pretty much the same techniques we'd perfected on the duffel bags. Laughing at the scene in the back, I grabbed my camera and snapped the picture.”

--Karen Phillips, reflecting on packing the family car to return from vacation, 2008



Bill King's young son takes in the view from the airplane window.

Photograph by Bill King, 2006

On Mother's Day weekend 2006, we flew from Baltimore to Atlanta to visit some friends. My son... had flown before but was just a baby. On this flight, he was acutely aware that we were on a plane.

I took the photo moments after the wheels lifted-off from the runway....[He] was in awe of the acceleration, the view, and the roar of the engines.

--Bill King, describing his son's first flight, 2008

How Far We've Come

Mobility played a key role in modern civil rights struggles and in changing U.S. demographics.

Our Constitution's First Amendment guarantees freedom of religion, speech, press, petition – and the freedom “peaceably to assemble.” The right of free assembly means nothing without the right to travel. Asserting that right was an integral part of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Americans participated in bus boycotts and Freedom Rides to gain equal access to transportation facilities, as well as to education and full voting rights.

“When I declined to give up my seat, it was not that day, or bus, in particular. I just wanted to be free like everybody else.”

—Rosa Parks, 2000

Images:

Virginia Key Beach, Florida, about 1945, was a segregated beach with recreational facilities for African Americans. Civil rights legislation later required integration of all public facilities.

Virginia Key Beach Park Trust
Inset: Frank Library of Congress

Pressured by the Kennedy administration, the National Guard provides protection for Freedom Riders during a bus trip to Jackson, Mississippi in May 1961. The Freedom Riders challenged segregation by riding buses throughout southern states and demanding equal service. Riders were threatened and attacked at several stops.

Magnum Photos

Rosa Parks rides a bus in Montgomery, Alabama in 1956. Parks' December 1, 1955 arrest for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger sparked a carefully planned boycott by black citizens of the city's bus system.

Bettmann/Corbis

African Americans motorists needed to know where they could safely stop and locate motels, restaurants, and gas stations that would provide services in

segregated areas. These guidebooks provided critical information to help travelers.

Left: *Travelguide 1952*, published by Travelguide, Inc.; *New York Public Library*

Right: *The Negro Motorist Green Book: An International Travel Guide, U.S.A., Alaska, Bermuda, Mexico, Canada*, 1949 edition.; *From the Collections of The Henry Ford*

Getting What We Need on Time

Public support helped create the Interstate Highway System, which then ignited a revolution in trucking of the goods we all depend on for vital daily needs. Volumes of these goods surged dramatically, and so freight by rail boomed, beginning in the 1980s. Shipments by sea, rail, and highway now bring us every kind of consumer item: all our food, the things we buy from stores, and our mail orders from the Internet. And air express for our smaller packages is now the norm.

Lower background:

A container ship at the Port of Los Angeles. Combined with the neighboring Port of Long Beach, these two facilities make up the largest and busiest container terminal in the U.S. Sailors on cargo ships are global travelers, carrying freight containers over the sea to and from ports where freight trains and trucks carry the containers to and from the ships.

Photo by Charles Csavossy, 2006. U.S. Customs and Border Protection

“Being at the round house, surrounded by locomotives- feeling the vibration of engines... and it being around 2:00 a.m.- Wondering just what was I doing here? It really was amazing.”

--Christene Gonzales-Aldeis, recalling her 1974 appointment as the Santa Fe Railway's first female locomotive engineer, 2008

In 2006, the U.S. trucking industry carried 10.7 billion tons of freight.

Jupiter Images

Trucker Interactive:

“Trucking sure has changed over the years ... we were ‘knights of the road.’ But long-distance driving is more challenging than ever with a big rig, with all the traffic on the Interstates now.”

-- Robert J. (Bob) Patterson, driver of 18-wheelers

There are more than 3.5 million professional truck drivers in the U.S., some of whom travel more than 100,000 miles each year.

Cover photo: Photo by Kim Reiersen, 2002

Air cargo plays a critical role in the global economy. Delivery services in the U.S. move more than 21.5 million express packages each day.

United Parcel Service, 2007

Pilot Interactive:

"I've always loved flying. It's still beautiful to scan the sky from up front. Below, you can really see the geography of America. The real heroes, though, are the air traffic controllers, who guide every phase of our flights."

-- Tom Ambrose, Airbus captain

There are more than 25,000 air cargo pilots in the U.S.

Cover Photo: Courtesy of Los Angeles World Airports, 1965

In 2006, U.S. rails carried more than 1.9 billion tons of freight. That freight times the miles it was carried came to a record 1.8 trillion ton-miles.

Photo by Steve Crise, 2006

Engineer Interactive:

"Most people don't appreciate the skill and expertise it takes to safely guide a 5,000- or 10,000-ton freight [train] down a long, twisting descent on a steep grade. No computer can do it."

-- Bernard C.(Bernie) O'Brien, locomotive engineer

More than 180,000 people worked for railroads in the United States in 2007. Christene Gonzales-Aldeis, pictured on the flip cover, became the first female locomotive engineer on the Santa Fe Railway in 1974.

Cover Photo: Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, 1974

Tow barges, like this one on the Missouri River, transported more than 800 million tons of freight on American waterways in 2004.

Missouri Department of Transportation, 2007

Ferryman Interactive:

"For a riverboat captain ... anytime a situation arises, whether it's the current, the wind, shallow water, or an obstacle, the pilot must practice his or her skill to the utmost degree ..."

-- Jack Dillman, ferryman

More than 30,000 Americans work the nation's waterways. Barge captains navigate inland waterways with about 15 barges lashed together, each averaging 175 feet long and 35 feet wide. Each year, about 630 million tons of cargo are transported on U.S. waterways, totaling of 274 billion ton-miles.

Cover photo: Crowley Maritime Corporation

New Journeys to America

We're still traveling. The right of travel is in our bones – we are a nation of immigrants. Our migrations date back thousands or hundreds of years or perhaps perhaps even just yesterday.

The great lady at the entrance to New York Harbor still beckons those “yearning to breathe free” who apply to become new Americans. People continue to embark on long, often risky journeys and become our fellow citizens. Our global community is more tightly interconnected because of the millions of journey stories unfolding every day.

Images:

Family at a naturalization ceremony.

Cantigny Park, McCormick Foundation. Wheaton, IL, 2007

Students welcome Iraqi refugees

Photo by Marnie McAllister, The Record, 2007

Soldiers from 21 countries achieve citizenship

Photo by Pfc. Christina Sinders, US Army, US Department of Defense, 2008

Statue of Liberty National Monument

National Park Service

A Mexican family celebrates their new citizenship

J. Emilio Flores

U.S. Olympian Lopez Lomong was a “Lost Boy of the Sudan

” Reuters Press / Mike Blake (China), 2008.

Hmong refugees resettle in California

Getty Images

Thousands attain citizenship at a large naturalization ceremony.

J. Emilio Flores

Foreign-born Americans represent the world, many coming from Latin America, Asia and Europe.

J. Emilio Flores

Immigrants from 39 countries become citizens.

Cantigny Park, McCormick Foundation, Wheaton, IL 2007

September 17 –Citizenship Day—honors new Americans.

Cantigny Park, McCormick Foundation, Wheaton, IL 2007

Despite challenges, thousands still journey to become American.

J. Emilio Flores

Audio:

Segment 1:

Narrator:

Sue and Yih Yun Hsu came to America in the 1950s from Taiwan to study in the U.S. They met at school, eventually married, and became American citizens. But without the luxury of today's convenient and fast transportation, simply reaching America was an adventure.

Sue-Ying Hsu:

I traveled alone too by airplane, very scary. That airplane had no pressure control, or something [Laughs].

The airplane was a propeller type! [Laughs] So, it's not very comfortable in there. Some people even vomited in there, but I was okay [Laughs].

And when I came here also, because I came by airplane, the weight of a suitcase is very limited. It's only 33 kilograms. So, I only got a very limited clothes and a few favorite books, that's all. So, that's what I brought here [Laughs].

Yih Yun

And, then for my case, I did not fly all the way. From Japan, I took the 'President Cleveland,' the third class.

[Laughs] Yeah, it was...the President Cleveland was a good passenger and cargo ship.

But, what they did was, they put the "third class," quote, that's the students from India, from China, from Japan, where...all the Asian [students]. And, it was a big cargo space. They put thirty-six beds in there and one ventilation fan and...with a...you know, a cargo has a hole, right? And they put a tarp on that.

And, that was two weeks trip from Japan to Oakland. And then I took [the] train from Oakland to Chicago.

For my case, ah, the one very lasting memory to me was [when] the train passed through the desert to get to the Rockies and, just coming out of the Rockies, and looking from [the] train to the big plains, stretching all the way to the horizon.

'Wow!' I said, 'What a big country.' And open, very, very open.

Segment 2:

Narrator:

In 2007 alone, over 48,000 people resettled in the United States as refugees from war or civil strife.

For eighteen year old Vanja Bucic, America was his best hope to escape war-torn Bosnia. His parents first sent him across the border to Serbia. A year later in 1996, he arrived in Delaware as a refugee

Vanja Bucic:

I didn't even have a suitcase; it was more of a bag. I came with very little.

To tell you the truth, I didn't think anything about the future, at the time. It was very day-to-day....I just picked the bag up, sat in a plane, and came. And then, whatever happened, happened.

Segment 3:

Narrator:

A surge in discrimination against Jews uprooted seven-year old Rimma Shlahtechman and her family from their home in Russia in 1991. They discovered relatives already living in America who agreed to sponsor them. With her parents, grandparents, a few belongings, and \$2,500 dollars for the five of them, Rimma arrived in Columbus, Ohio hopeful.

Rimma Shlahtechman:

My father said that the first thing he did when he got on American soil was kiss the ground because he was so grateful that we were here, that the country had accepted us, that we could make a life for ourselves, that we were aliens, but that within five years, we could become naturalized citizens.

I remember going to the naturalization process and I cried because by that time, I was old enough to understand how important it was and what this meant. And raising my right hand and being sworn in was a really remarkable feeling.

....I realized that this is where I would raise my children and where my children would raise their children. And this is where we would all start anew.

Segment 4:

Narrator:

Enrique Aviles left El Salvador in 1980 when he was just 15 years old. Civil war had gripped El Salvador and his family arranged his flight to America. Initially hesitant to come, he now feels most at home here, where he draws inspiration from the great diversity and contributions immigrants have made to the country.

Enrique Aviles:

You know, I really did not bring much because I was in a rush. And, you know, there was really nothing that could bring except my clothes and...I couldn't say goodbye to many people. So, I brought a lot of memories, you know? That's what I brought.

I always ask people, I say, [to] Americans, white Americans, I say, 'Where are your ancestors from?' and most of the time I get England, I get...Germany, I get...Ireland, you know? Poland, you know? And we are just the same way. It's just that our last names are Hernandez, Ramirez, and [Indistinct], but we are part of that labor.



Our lineage and our blood and our sweat, our efforts, our work, our ethics, our culture, our language, our people, you know, has been here! It has been here!

We were a part of a birthing of a land...

...you know, I've always said that the United States is the only country in the world that has the whole world living inside of it.

Segment 5:

Narrator:

When war came to Iraq in 2003, Iraqi native Hossam Alkhafaji helped American troops and Iraqis find common ground. But his family received threats because of his contact with Americans. To protect his family, Hossam made a dangerous trip out of Iraq to America in 2007.

Hossam [Last Name Omitted for Safety of Participant]:

The road was, it, they call it the 'Airport Road,' was leading to Baghdad Airport, International Airport. It was very difficult for everybody to secure this road, even for military, because, eh, insurgents, at that time, when I left the country, was, eh, was not even reaching the highest level that they could reach. It was increasing. So, it was very difficult because of the insurgents.

And, again, the thing is, I was carrying the papers and was carrying my property, so I would be very easy target and if I'd been captured, that would...that would make me lose more than my, my journey. It would make me lose my life.

I love the country and I have all my hopes opening for a new life, for a new future, for people who would accept who I am.

Segment 6:

Narrator:

During the Civil Rights Movement, freedom songs were an important vehicle for expression as Freedom Riders, demonstrators, and march participants sought equal opportunity in mobility.

Song:

"Buses Are A-Comin,' Oh, Yes"

Narrator:

"Buses Are A-Comin', Oh Yes" was sung by Freedom Riders and other members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which organized the bus rides to protest segregated transportation systems in the South. This performance is by Bernice Johnson Reagon and is used with the permission of Rounder Records.

Song:

"Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" (Chorus)

[Off the album "Sing for Freedom" from Smithsonian Folkways Recordings]

Narrator:

“Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round” was a popular song during Civil Rights demonstrations. Its lyrics could be easily modified to name a local figure blocking equal treatment for African Americans. This recording of the song by The Freedom Singers was made during the march on Selma, Alabama in 1965. One of the stanzas incorporates the name of the state’s governor, George Wallace.

