

Transit Times



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PLANK ROADS - How the stagecoaches traveled through St. Louis in the 1800's and the building of the National Road.

Before the 1800's, there wasn't even the rudest kind of Wagon Road. They found only narrow foot paths through the forests made by the Indians or trails across the prairies made by the Buffalo and deer.

In 1806, Congress voted money to build a road to the west. The government was selling public lands and was taking in large sums of money. Congress decided to use

some of this money to build a system of roads which would bind the country together.

The construction of the National Road, as it was called because it was built by the National government, did not begin until 1811. The section from Cumberland in Maryland to Wheeling, West Virginia was begun, but further construction was delayed because of the War of 1812. The War proved that roads were needed so the work resumed in 1814. Soon the road was open to a large number of emigrants and wagons carrying large loads of freight.

Congress planned to build the road as far as the Mississippi River and then to Jefferson City in Missouri. Building of the road into Ohio, Indiana and Illinois was delayed until 1825, because some thought that the project was an invasion of States' Rights by the Federal government. In 1840, the road finally reached Vandalia, which was the capital of Illinois at that time. Work stopped when a dispute arose

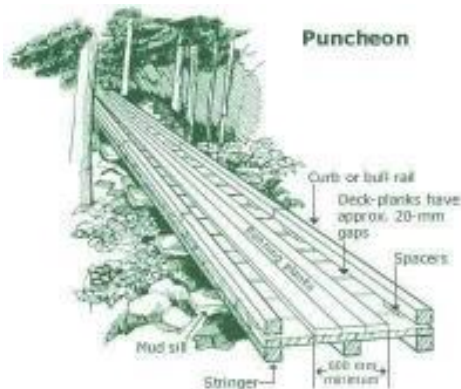
whether it should cross the Mississippi River at Alton or St. Louis.

The road had been surveyed through Troy, Goshen Settlement, Six Mile Prairie, to the Mississippi and a wagon road had been opened. But a good road to St. Louis was needed. After a rain, the mud was so deep on the dirt road that wagons and coaches would be mired in the roadbed. Passengers were required to get out and help push the wagon free.

Finally the Federal Government turned the road over to the State of Illinois, which erected toll gates to obtain money for repairs and try to complete the road. But the state had very little money. Finally, a

group of men got together and formed a company for building roads.

Crushed stone piled a foot deep was used to build the road in the east. Stone bridges were built across the rivers. But because of the ancient glaciers, Illinois was left with no stone or gravel to build their



roads. There were forests available in Illinois, and that would mean an endless supply of logs, so these road builders invented the Plank Road, which now became a part of the National Road. Lockhart Stallings, a descendant of Abram Stallings, was a builder of the Plank Road in Illinois.

Twelve foot logs were split and laid face up to make an even surface. Then heavy logs were laid along the edges to hold down the planks. To pay for building the road, the companies put up toll gates across the road every 10 miles. When traveler's came to the gate, they would have to pay a fee. A coach paid 20 cents, a wagon 10 cents, a horse and rider 5 cents, a cow 1 cent and a hog 5 cents. Then the gatekeeper would open the gate so they could go on.

The earliest transportation was by horse and oz-cart, Later, buggies, surreys, spring wagons, and farm wagons were used. Small spring wagons, called hacks, transported people. The building of the National Road from the East to St. Louis made it possible for passengers to travel, in stagecoaches and freight to be hauled in Conestoga wagons.

Heavy freight was moved in huge Conestoga wagons covered with canvas tops. The wheels and tongues of the wagons were painted blue and the bodies of the wagons were painted red. The wagons curved upward at each end like a boat so the freight would not rollout. Usually large companies owned the wagons, and they hired the wagoners to make trips.

Families traveled in a canvas-covered wagon called a prairie schooner. The schooners were made watertight, so that they could be floated across the streams. Inside the wagons would be furniture, tools, and small implements, as well as animals and provisions. At night after cooking their meals along the side of the road, families would sleep in the wagons. Ox teams were used in taking produce to market while cattle and hogs were driven on the hoof.

As early as 1820, the first stagecoach traveled to the east side of the Mississippi River. These coaches were drawn by four or six horses. The body of the coach rested on two leather braces which let it rock back forth. This made pulling the load easier for the horses. Leather covers could be fastened down in bad weather. Baggage was carried on top of the coach or in a "boot" in the back of the stage.

A daily line of stages running between St. Louis and Terre Haute, Indiana, passed over this route. The stages going East left St. Louis in the morning, crossed our area, Old Six Mile and reached Troy during the forenoon. Horses were changed at Troy after leaving St. Louis. Going west, the stages passed through Troy after dark, so stagecoaches made overnight stops at Stallings Road House, Six Mile House, Four Mile House, or the western Hotel all located in Old Six Mile. At each stop, there was a barn with a blacksmith who fed and cared for the horses. After buying a hot meal, passengers would 25 to 50 cents for a night's lodging.

Wagons stopped at Stallings with large herds of cattle and hogs. In nearby fields were large pens in which a thousand cows and a thousand hogs could be kept. The next day the animals were driven to Venice and transferred across the river to St. Louis.

The Six Mile House was six miles east of the Mississippi River. This was a stagecoach stop as early as 1832. Two large bedrooms on the second floor which accommodated the travelers. Downstairs was a large Tavern and restaurant room on one side. There was well-built stone cellar under the house, equipped with a wine cellar. Here were stored the whiskey and brandy. Hundreds of jars of canned goods lined the shelves in the fruit cellar. Nearby we would find the horse barn and a blacksmith shop.

The four Mile House was another gathering place for drivers and travelers. The Western was another hotel near the Mississippi River. Many cattle buyers had their headquarters here.

Matthew Kerr, a merchant from St. Louis had established a horse ferry between the Kerr Island and St. Louis in 1826. The National Road terminated at the Kerr Ferry landing on the banks of the Mile-Wide Mississippi where it met the ferry boat called "Brooklyn". The Plank Road was 100 feet wide in this area and was called, "The National Way". There were two livery stables, three general stores, two blacksmith shops and a hotel. "The National Way" became a large trading center where people would stop before boarding the Kerr Ferry to take them to St. Louis. By 1840, William Gillham represented the Madison County Ferry Company and obtained a license to run a ferry from Venice to North St. Louis. This company became a wealthy corporation. Credit: Georgia Engelke and her book The Great American

Bottom. Mrs. Engelke after her retirement as a teacher in our area became interested in the early history of our area. Mrs Engelke was also one of the founders of the "Old Six Mile Historical Society", whose purpose is to preserve our local history.

TROLLEY FREIGHT SERVICE – “THE CANVASS” – PART 2: - An approximate estimate of the nature, volume and destination of goods likely to be offered for transportation is needed before much else is done. It is suggested that a list of city and suburban points, obviously requiring improved service be printed and forwarded to leading shippers with a circular letter something like the following, with a stamped and addressed envelope enclosed for reply:

- *“Plans to establish a freight service on the lines of the L. M. N. Company, for all classes of industries, in and about B are being considered, and representatives will make a canvass to determine the attitude of shippers toward such a project. The idea has been generally approved, and substantial support promised.”*
- *“The establishment of freight stations conveniently located in B and in suburbs, in charge of trained attendants, and connected by a carefully arranged and rapid car service, is under advisement. Wagon service of any character whatsoever has no part in this plan, except as provided by the shipper or the consignee.”*
- *Classification and tariff sheets are in preparation.*
- *If you are interested in a quick service at low cost, kindly advise us promptly as to the probable volume of your merchandise, handled from or to B, between points named on attached sheet.”*

It is not likely that more than 20 per cent of the parties addressed will answer by letter, nor that more than a tenth of those will give a satisfactory reply. But the canvasser will find the shippers interested in the matter of the circular when he calls. When shippers are approached from an unexpected quarter, they are inclined to assume a defensive if not a combative attitude. The circular letter has probably been read if not answered, and the subject, having been 'introduced before the arrival of the canvasser, can then be discussed in a business way, and, depending on the common sense of the solicitor and the make-up of the shipper, ideas of character, quantities, and destination of goods, can be acquired. Considerable emphasis is laid on this matter of canvassing for the reason that a canvass can be good or absolutely useless. Many shippers in order to draw the solicitor out will assume an air of indifference or of opposition to the project. Others say, "Go ahead and put your plan into operation and if convenient and economical we will patronize you." This attitude is not novel; it is observed in commercial life hourly, and is a relic of the days when commercial transactions consisted of barter. Canvassers and salesmen are born, not made, and the representative for this work should be selected from the class of men who have a record for bringing home the goods. That sort of man knows it is better to see six firms a day and see them right, than to cover a lot of territory and come back with misty or mistaken notions of the situation. Cover the city territory carefully, form an idea of requirements for outbound business, then turn to the country round about and find what can be had to be brought into town. The cars should carry loads both ways. This solicitor should be a man who knows country life. It is not likely that the city canvasser, who can make headway with department stores, wholesale grocers, the butter and eggs men, the baker, the cigar maker and the brewer, will get on the right side of the farmer, the truck gardener, the dairy man and the poultry raiser. These people want the service whether they know it or not, and perhaps it requires more patience and tact to win their patronage than that of the city people. The best plan is to get hold of some enterprising countryman who can be educated to your way of thinking, and have him take a horse and buggy and circulate about among the people who raise potatoes, poultry, and pigs and sell milk. This sort of man should also canvass the city markets. It will be found that the country shipper within say 12 miles, will drive to market eight months of the year, and ship by steam road, if it is accessible, the rest of the time.



The owner can do better in the city market than his hired man. So he starts from his home late in the evening, gets to market between one and two a.m., puts up overnight at a hotel, boards out his team, and goes back with his empties when through with his work. He has been away from his farm a whole day or more, tired out his horses and very likely bought things on his own initiative or by request that could be done without. When shipping by steam road, he has the railroad rate to pay plus the city teamsters' bill for hauling his stuff from the depot to

the market or to other customers. Here is the opportunity for the representative who comes along with a proposition to open a depot, one, two, or three miles, as the case may be, from the farm, and rush the produce that is brought there to the market side track and bring back the empties in due time.

Canvassing for the milk trade is a specialty and requires a knowledge of city and farm conditions to make it successful. This commodity is brought long distances by the steam roads and is distributed by city dealers who have more or less extensive establishments for bottling milk and cream, washing and sterilizing bottles, etc. Some large distributors are worth a side track and the others may call at one of the city depots. Milk cars, which are treated in Chapter VI, should not be used for other freight, even though there may be a vacant space in them. The canvassers should make this clear to the buyers and shippers.

The country canvasser should have a sharp eye to the prospective increase in business due to facilities afforded. With a trolley freight service, the farm on which wheat, corn and hay were grown, may make a first class dairy farm, or a profitable truck garden, under an enterprising owner.

The company could dispense with a canvass altogether, and start doing business with a flourish of trumpets and half or twice the number of cars needed. The former course discredits the management and the other is expensive. The initiation and maintenance of a canvass for business has ample warrant, when one reflects what an active and aggressive department of the steam road equipment is the freight solicitor's office. *(To be continued.)*



A Foreword - It is a human trait to take for granted many of the wonders of our daily lives. Great institutions spring into being and grow up around us and with us. They form an important part of our activities at work or at play. But familiarity has made them commonplace robbed them of much of their interest. It does not occur to us to wonder what tremendous effort of brain and brawn lies behind them—what thousands of men and what millions of money are required to make them function as they do.

We, in the great cities, are calloused to the miracles of science and organization that make the modern metropolis habitable. We turn a switch and a room is flooded with light. We press a button and a week's washing is done. We turn a faucet for an unlimited water supply. We step on a street car and we're wherever we want to be.

And we take all these things for granted —our mammoth water systems, sewer systems, light systems, street car systems. Picture life without them—without any one of them.

Read of the early days of any cityOne of the first references will always be to a system of transportation. And the city's history, as it unfolds, will be a transportation history.

On the following pages some of the transportation history of our own St. Louis is set down. Something is told of the many things that are done daily and hourly year after year so that you may step out to your corner, be picked up by a street car and be taken anywhere in the city. We believe these glimpses behind the scenes where more than 6,000 persons serve you will be interesting.

“When St. Louis Moves...United Railways of Sat. Louis/SLPSC. Circa. 1926. To be continued.