

# 22 Going Places

## Helping the Coachman

*In 1774 Dr. Josiah Quincy, the president of Harvard College, took a week to get from Boston to New York by stagecoach.*

**W**e reached our resting place at night, if no accident intervened, at 10 o'clock, and, after a frugal supper, went to bed with a notice that we would be called at three which generally proved to be half-past two, and then, whether it snowed or rained, the traveler must rise and make ready, by the help of a horn lantern and a farthing candle, and proceed on his way over bad roads, sometimes getting out to help the coachman lift the coach out of a quagmire or rut.

**Ingenuity** (in-juh-NEW-uh-tee) means "inventiveness"—finding a way to get things done.



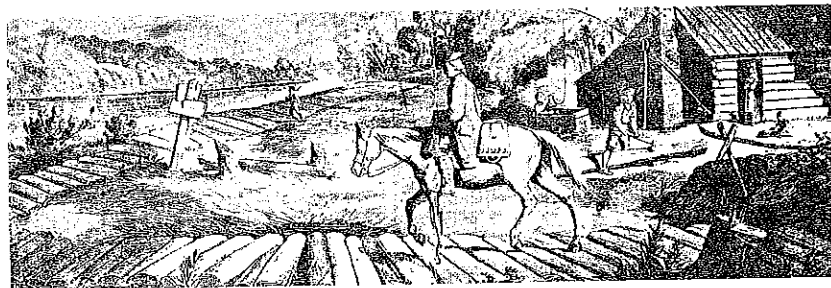
By 1800 the mail stage could do the 200 miles from Boston to New York in two days—in good weather. In winter it might take a week.

One thing leads to another: if you start making cloth, thousands of yards of it, you can't keep it all in New England. You have to send it to other markets.

If your ships go to China and bring back fine goods, you can't keep all those goods in Salem or Boston. If you grow grain in New Jersey, or forge iron in Pennsylvania, or make guns in Connecticut, you need to find ways to get your products to people who want to buy them. If you live in the West, you want to send your grain, furs, and cattle to eastern markets. How do you get your goods to market? How can you get cloth from Boston to Buffalo?

In the first half of the 19th century, roads were no answer. Picture this: ruts, holes, mud, stones, and when you come to a river—no bridge. Now you have an idea of the roads.

What was needed was modern transportation. Americans—who



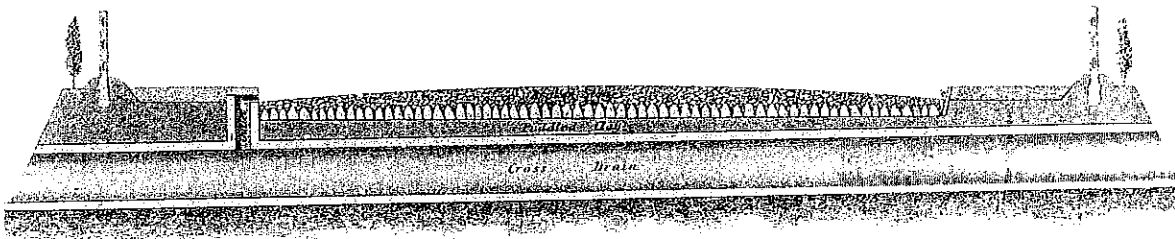
Bumpy corduroy roads such as this were an improvement on dirt tracks, which were soggy swamps in spring and choked with dust in summer.

were becoming known all over the world for their ingenuity—soon came up with some answers. They were: canals, steamboats, railroads, and improved roads.

Let's start with the new roads. Actually they were pretty terrible—but in the 19th century they seemed exciting, and much better than the existing roads, which were usually just dirt paths. Do you know what *corduroy* is? Well, it is a cotton cloth with ridges and valleys. Some roads were made of round logs placed next to each other. They were called "corduroy roads." Can you see why? What would it be like to ride on a corduroy road? Plank roads, made by placing flat wooden planks next to each other, were better, but not great. They quickly rotted away.

Road building was a new science. No one knew how to build good roads, so they experimented. Often the new roads wore out or washed away almost as soon as they were built. Still, some very useful roads did get finished. The best were macadam roads, built with a new process developed in Scotland (by a man named McAdam) using crushed stones and clay as a base and asphalt or tar on top.

**In 1807, Fortescue Cuming** wrote, "The travelling on these roads [in western Pennsylvania] in every direction is truly astonishing, even in this inclement [bad-weather] season, but in the spring and fall, I am informed that it is beyond all conception." (What he is saying is that an astonishing number of people were traveling.)



About 1806, some people with big ideas decided that we needed a road that would go across the country—well, at least from the East Coast to the Mississippi, which seemed across the country to most Easterners then. (Remember, the Louisiana Purchase was made in 1803. Hardly anyone knew what was beyond St. Louis.) That very long road was called the National Road and was to be paid for by the federal government. Does that sound like a good idea? Well, it didn't seem that way to everyone. It caused a whole lot of controversy.

The people in the West wanted it—they really wanted it. But many Easterners said, "Why should our tax money go for a road out to that wilderness?" In the South, people were shouting about states' rights. They didn't think the national government should pay for roads. If that happened, even states that the road didn't go anywhere near would have to help pay for them. President James Mon-

The Romans knew how to make good roads, but their skill was forgotten until the end of the 18th century. Then engineers began to build stone roads with drainage and a slope, or *camber*, for water runoff.

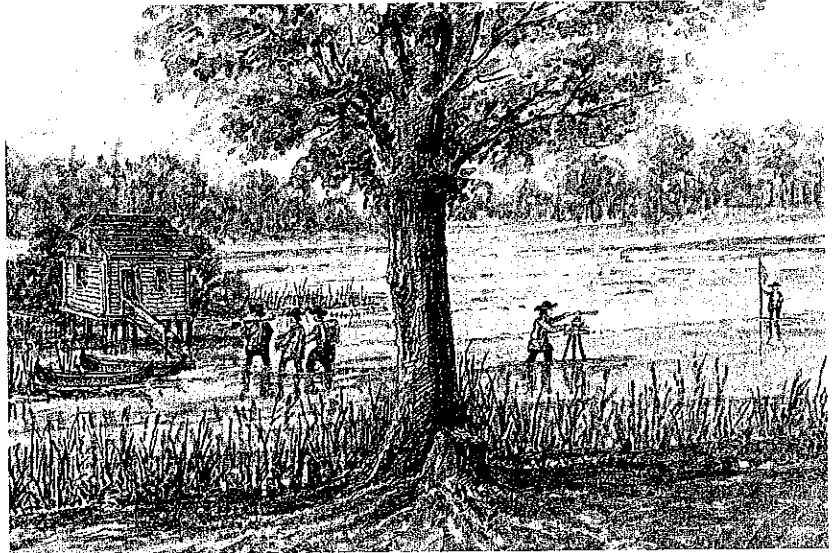
**Some people** called the National Road the Cumberland Road.

## A HISTORY OF US

**In 1815**, a committee report for the North Carolina legislature said that more than 20,000 inhabitants had left the state during the previous 25 years. Most had moved west.

**Renovated** means restored or made new.

**Usually an** ordinary household on or near the turnpike maintained the tollgate. On the Cumberland Road, for "every score of sheep, or every Dearborn, Sulky, Chair or Chaise with one horse," the toll was 6 cents, while "every Chariot, Coach, Coachee, Stage, Phaeton or Chaise with two horses and four wheels" had to pay 12 cents. Just like subway-fare dodgers today, some folks tried to avoid paying tolls. They were called "shunpikers"—which is where our word *piker* (meaning "cheap-skate") comes from.



Ahead of the settlers and pioneers went the surveyors, mapping routes and proposing roadways. Indians called the surveyors "land stealers."

roe said it was unconstitutional. But finally the National Road was begun. By 1818 it stretched from Cumberland, Maryland, to Wheeling in western Virginia. Then powerful Senator Henry Clay got involved. He wanted to see the road extended, and it was. By 1833 it went to Columbus, Ohio; by 1850 it was at Vandalia in central Illinois.

Over its wilderness route passengers squeezed shoulder to shoulder in hard-backed, leather-seated stagecoaches. That was a lot better than walking, which is what many did alongside their packed wagons. The road carried all kinds of traffic: mule-drawn carts heaped with farm produce; big, horse-drawn vans stuffed with bales of southern cotton going to northern mills; northern factory products heading south; and wagonloads of immigrants, still speaking foreign tongues, bound west to destinations they could not even imagine.

Before the National Road was built it took four weeks to travel from Baltimore to St. Louis. On the road, if you traveled without stopping, you could make it in four *days*. One traveler (his name was Charles Fenno Hoffman), who went the whole way on horseback, wrote this:

*It appears to have been originally constructed of large round stones, thrown without much arrangement on the surface of the soil, after the road was first levelled. These are now being ploughed up, and a thin layer of broken stones is in many places spread over the renovated surface....It yields like snow-drift to the heavy wheels which traverse it....There is one feature, however, in this national work which is truly fine, I allude to the massive stone bridges which form a part of it.*

New roads made it easier for Americans to travel, and to buy and sell goods. Some of the roads were built by private companies. The company would put sharp sticks—called pikes—on a movable rod that blocked the entrance to the road. To get on the road you had to pay a toll; the gatekeeper then turned the pikes.

Roads were expensive to build and maintain—there had to be a better and cheaper way to move goods and people.

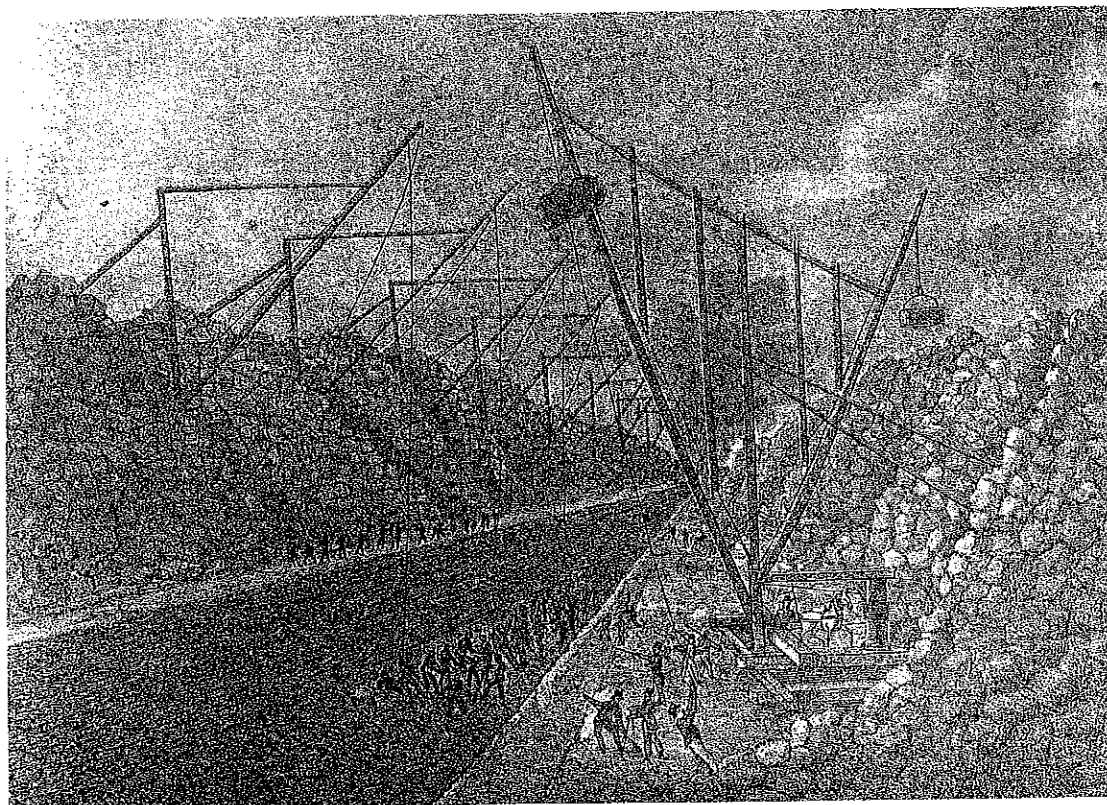
Some people thought canals were the answer. Ben Franklin, back in 1772, wrote, "canals are quiet and very manageable." George Washington believed that canals were the wave of the future. He invested in the Potomac Canal system (near Washington, D.C.) and in the Kanawha Canal. Investors thought that canal would be like a major highway, taking goods and people from Virginia's James River across the Appalachian Mountains to the Ohio River. But the Kanawha Canal was never completed.

In New York, DeWitt Clinton decided a canal could be built from Albany to Buffalo, which meant from the Hudson River to Lake Erie. It would be named the Erie Canal. Look at a map. That was to be some canal!

A canal, by the way, is a big ditch. That's what some people called this one: "Clinton's Ditch." Many people thought it a crazy



The Erie Canal was built with the most advanced technology, such as the horse-powered crane below. When Governor Clinton reached New York City to open the canal, he poured a keg of Lake Erie water into the bay.



**The first bicycles** were seen at the beginning of the 19th century. In 1813 a celeripede (suh-LER-ih-peed) appeared in America. It had two wheels but had to be pushed with your feet, like a kiddie car. True bikes came in the 1830s, but with the pedals on the rear wheel and the seat over that wheel.



**The early 1800s** were years of fast growth. New words and expressions appeared in the language at that time—they were hurry-up expressions:  
*like greased lightning*  
*quick as a wink*  
*in a jiffy*  
*like a house afire*  
*shake a leg*  
*lickety-split*

project. It would cost a lot of money and would be very difficult to build. The Erie Canal would have to traverse 360 miles, most of it through the wilds of New York State. There were steep hills to climb. Boats would have to get over those hills. To raise the boats, locks would be needed. A lock is like an elevator for water and boats.

When Thomas Jefferson heard of the project he said to a canal booster, "Why, sir, you talk of making a canal of 350 miles through the wilderness—it is little short of madness to talk of it at this day!" No question about it, it was a very ambitious project. But that didn't stop DeWitt Clinton or the many Americans who wanted to build the canal. It was 1817 when they set to work.

Thousands of laborers were needed. Ireland was having economic problems—people in Ireland were hungry. Canal workers got 50 cents a day and all the meat they could eat. That sounded good to many Irishmen, especially to those who'd just arrived in this country.

It was planned that horses or mules would pull most of the boats on the Erie Canal. No, the animals didn't have to swim. Workers built a towpath next to the canal. Boats were attached to ropes and towed by the horses.

Somehow it all got built. It was four feet deep and 40 feet wide. It was a manmade river, it was an engineering marvel! You could ride on a barge from the Atlantic Ocean, up the Hudson River, across the Erie Canal, and on to the Great Lakes. On the canal there were 83 locks to raise and lower you, your boat, and the water you were floating in.

The canal was officially opened with a bang—actually, a whole chain of bangs. First, a cannon was fired in Buffalo and when that was heard down the canal, another was fired, and then another—in Rochester, Syracuse, Rome, and Utica—until they heard the blast in Albany, where they just kept the cannons going—on down the Hudson River. It took an hour and 20 minutes before the last cannon blasted in New York. Then, just for fun, they shot the cannons again, all the way back to Buffalo.

They didn't call it the "Big Ditch" anymore; now it was called the "Grand Canal" and sometimes "Clinton's Wonder." DeWitt Clinton, who was now Governor Clinton, took the first ride from Buffalo to New York City. It had taken eight years to dig the Erie Canal. Clinton's trip took nine days. Clinton's canal boat was called the *Seneca Chief* and carried a portrait of the governor in a Roman toga. The boat behind was called *Noah's Ark*. It carried two Indian boys, two deer, two eagles, and a lot of other twos. Another boat held four raccoons, two wolves, a fawn, and a fox. When Clinton got to New York City he dumped a barrel of Lake Erie water into the Atlantic Ocean. Then there was a grand parade; church bells rang and people cheered.

## THE NEW NATION

Everyone could ride the canal. There were fancy passenger boats that served fine meals on linen tablecloths. There were flatboats with people, cargo, and animals jammed together. There were ordinary rafts. You could go on a slow boat, at two miles an hour, and pay a penny and a half a mile. Or you could whiz along at four miles an hour and pay five cents a mile. Towns grew up around the canal; it made life better for people.

Before the canal was built, it cost \$100 to ship a ton of grain from Buffalo to New York. By 1855 it only cost \$8 on the Erie Canal. People packed their belongings and took the Erie Canal west; they moved to places like Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin. They went east, too; the canal helped make New York the country's largest city. Before long there was a canal frenzy throughout the nation. But no other canal was as successful, or as long, as the Erie Canal.

Canal laborers sang as they worked. Soon everyone was singing a song called "The Erie Canal."

The Erie Canal had 18 aqueducts—bridges that carry water over obstacles instead of people over water. Before railroads came, the canal was so popular that boats waiting for locks to open were often stuck in traffic jams.

*I've got a mule and her name is Sal,  
Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal.  
She's a good old worker and a good  
old pal.*

*Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal.  
We've hauled some barges in our day,  
Filled with lumber, coal, and hay,  
And we know every inch of the way  
From Albany to Buffalo.*

CHORUS

*Low bridge! Everybody down.  
Low bridge! We're a-coming to a town.  
You'll always know your neighbor,  
You'll always know your pal.  
If you've ever navigated on the  
Erie Canal.*

*We'd better get on our way, old pal,  
Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal.  
You can bet your life I'd never part  
with Sal.*

*Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal.  
Get us there, Sal, here comes a lock,  
We'll make Rome fore six o'clock.  
One more trip and back we'll go,  
Right back home to Buffalo.  
(Repeat Chorus)*

