

Ancestral Road Trips
Part I: East of the Mississippi
Mt. Diablo Genealogical Society
April 14, 2022

Why study internal U.S. migration?

- The study of migration answers the questions “What was he doing here?” and “How did he get here?”
- The “Push – Pull” theory of migration explains why our ancestors left a certain place (“push” away) and why they decided to settle in a specific place (“pull” toward). Among the most common factors are:
 - Push Factors
 - Lack of Land
 - Overcrowding
 - Religious or ethnic persecution
 - Lack of job opportunities
 - Death of the patriarch of the family
 - Governmental policies
 - Natural disasters and climate
 - Wars
 - Need for adventure
 - Pull Factors
 - Availability of land
 - Freedom to worship
 - Chain migration
 - Better job opportunities
 - Less governmental interference
 - Adventure
- Geography both helped and hindered migration and settlement.
- Many times, ancestors traveled with neighbors from the old country or with extended family members. It pays to look at the people they knew.
- It places your family’s history and historical events into perspective.
- Few people went non-stop to their destination. It can explain why families stayed in one location for several generations, then moved.

Early trails and routes

- Original native trails followed animal trails.
- Early colonial routes followed the native trails. Native trails were narrow enough to allow travel by single file on foot or horseback. It wasn’t until around 1755 that some roads were widened for wagons.
- Early settlements were near the coast or inland rivers. It was uncommon for travelers to take to the open ocean to travel from one settlement to another.
- People usually migrated north-south and east-west.

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- The timelines of many routes and trails overlapped. They were not sequential. In some places, multiple roads branched off from a main road.
- Many trails and routes into the interior began before the Revolutionary War, not after; despite what we were led to believe in school.
- Many modern roads today follow the early land trails.

Early colonial routes (1607-1750)

- Boston Post Road – connected Boston, MA to New York City, NY
- King's Highway (includes the Boston Post Road) – connected Boston, MA to Charleston, SC
- Lancaster Road – connected Philadelphia, PA to Lancaster, PA to Harrisburg, PA
- Fall Line Road – splits off King's Highway at Fredericksburg, VA connecting to Augusta, GA to Augusta, GA to Montgomery, AL
- Great Valley Road aka Great Wagon Road – connected Philadelphia, PA through the Shenandoah Valley through VA, to the Carolinas and Georgia
- Upper Road aka Piedmont Road – connected Fredericksburg, VA to Charlotte, NC to Greenville, SC
- Pioneers Road – connected Alexandria, VA to Winchester, VA
- Pennsylvania Road – connected Philadelphia, PA to Lancaster, PA
- Albany Post Road – connected New York City, NY to Albany, NY

Later colonial routes (1750-1775)

- Braddock's Road – connected Cumberland, MD to present day Pittsburgh, PA
- Forbes Road – connected Philadelphia, PA to Pittsburgh, PA
- The Wilderness Road – connected Bristol, VA to Boonesborough/Louisville, KY
- Mohawk/Iroquois Trail/Great Indian Trail – connected Albany, NY to Fort Oswego on Lake Ontario. A branch led from Fort Schuyler (Utica), NY to Fort Niagara (NY)

Going into the Interior:

- ***The Interior***
 - Zane's Trace – connected Wheeling, WV(VA) to Maysville, KY
 - Nashville Road – connected Knoxville, TN to Nashville, TN
 - National Road – connected Cumberland/Baltimore, MD to Vandalia, IL to St. Louis, MO
 - Chicago Road and State Road – The Chicago Road connected Detroit, MI to Chicago, IL. The State Road – connected Chicago, IL to Galena, IL on the Mississippi.
- ***The Old Southwest (land southwest of the original 13 colonies)***
 - Natchez Trace – connected Nashville, TN to Natchez, MS

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- Old Federal Road – connected Savannah/Athens GA to Knoxville, TN to Nashville, TN to Huntsville, AL
- ***To New Orleans***
 - Jackson's Military Road – Nashville, TN to New Orleans, LA
 - Natchez Trace – an extension connected Natchez, MS to New Orleans, LA
 - Federal Horse Path aka Federal Road – Milledgeville, GA to Mobile, AL

Water Travel

- Early travel was on rivers long before colonial trails were begun.
- Rivers, once they were able to be navigated, were faster and cheaper than overland trails.
- Many times, inland travel involved the combination of rivers, overland trails and later canals
- Main watercraft:
 - Canoes, sloops – to go on coastal rivers such as the James River.
 - Rafts – to go on inland rivers. Floated on the water. Powered by men using poles and the current.
 - Flatboats – to go on inland rivers such as the Ohio River. Flatboats were rectangular flat-bottomed boats with square ends. It displaced water so it floated in the water. Dismantled when it reached its destination. Powered by men using poles and the current.
 - Steamboats – used on rivers such as the Mississippi River or Ohio River. Powered by steam engines turning paddlewheels. The first steamboat created in the US was by Robert Fulton in 1807.

Main Rivers:

- Rivers were used as the main connection before an inland road was built. They continued to play an important role in exploring the frontier. They gained more importance when connected to canals.
- ***Northern Rivers***
 - Chesapeake Bay
 - Connecticut River
 - Hudson River
 - Schuylkill River
- ***Southern Rivers***
 - James River
 - Potomac River
 - Carolina Rivers

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- Savannah River
- ***Interior Rivers***
 - Ohio River
 - Des Moines River
 - Mississippi River
 - Missouri River

Lakes

- Once the Erie Canal was connected to Lake Erie, it was not long before all the Great Lakes were accessible and the towns and cities along these lakes. Cities like Chicago grew exponentially with the increase in travel.
- Lake Huron
- Lake Ontario
- Lake Michigan
- Lake Erie
- Lake Superior

Canals

- The existence of canals connected urban areas to the “wilderness.” They enabled people to settle in new areas, in addition to farmers and manufacturers selling their goods and products to people out East. Canals were faster and safer than roads. What used to be a 4 week trip in 1800 was reduced to a 2-week trip in 1830 via canals.
- While there were many canals, certain ones specifically affected migration:
 - **Erie Canal** (1825) – connected New York City to Lake Erie and later the Great Lakes. First successful canal to transport people and goods from the East to the Great Lakes.
 - **Illinois and Michigan Canal** (1828) – connected the Great Lakes to the Mississippi River and its tributaries.
 - **Louisville and Portland Canal** (1830) – bypassed the dangerous waterfalls of the Ohio River. It enabled people to travel down the length of the Ohio River from Pittsburgh to the Mississippi River.
 - **Ohio and Erie Canal** (1832) – connected Lake Erie to the Ohio River.
- Railroads replaced canal travel after the 1850s. They were faster, cheaper and safer than canals. The heyday of canal travel was from the 1820s to 1850s.

Early Railroads

- The 1st railroad in the US was the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad which was opened in 1830. It was built to compete with the Erie Canal and a canal that Pennsylvania was planning to build.

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- The first steam locomotive was named “Tom Thumb”.
- By 1840, there were many short distance railroads in the East. The main problem was that each railroad used a different width of track so they could not connect with each other.
- By 1850, there were railroads in every state east of the Mississippi River, beginning to connect cities to one another.
- Certain cities like Chicago became hubs. They connected railroads to one another and to waterways.
- Railroads were faster and cheaper than canals and could run year-round as opposed to canals which sometimes froze during the winter.
- Stagecoach lines connected to train stations. People arrived by train then took a stagecoach from the station to rural or inland towns.
- Talk about a transcontinental railroad was begun as early as 1830 but it wasn’t started until the 1860s and completed in 1869.
- Railroads began the demise of the wagon train. Going by rail was faster and mostly safer.

Sources to Find Migration Routes

- Atlases and maps- State or territorial
 - David Rumsey Historical Maps – (www.davidrumsey.com/)
 - Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection – Univ. of Texas, (<http://www.legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/index.htm>)
 - Library of Congress, Map Collections – (www.loc.gov/maps/collections)
- Censuses – 1850 for birthplace and 1880 onward for birthplace of parents. Multiple censuses show the progression of the family from where the children were born.
- Compiled stories – Stories about migration about a route may mention your ancestor
- County and town archives-
- County histories – Gives early history of a county and the earliest settlers. It gives general information about the place your ancestor lived in or moved to.
- Court records – Sometimes an ancestor might be listed as a witness to a deed, will or other documents. They might be involved in a dispute about land rights or called to give testimony in a case
- Church records
 - Creation of a church- early members should be listed along with their former residence listed
 - Former residence of members of a congregation may be recorded especially if they came as a group
 - New members may have their former residence mentioned
- Diaries and Journals – (<http://www.over-land.com/diaries.html>)
- U.S. government records – military pensions, bounty land, homestead applications, and naturalizations

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- Land records – grants, bounty lands, homestead. They might reveal if someone lived other than where the property is. If ancestor was the original owner, his former residence might be listed.
- Libraries – public and private *Don't to forget to check WorldCat
- Newspapers may
 - List new arrivals
 - Have obituaries of early settlers
 - Record land transactions
 - Have articles about history of the area and early settlers
 - Report on governmental policies, new modes of transportation affecting settlers
- Pension records – The location where a man lived or enlisted may have information on his origins
- Probate records – Wills and other probate records may record or point to where someone previously lived.
- State archives
- Tax records
- University – Check the collections in the states your ancestor traveled through and ended up in. These will usually be in manuscript form.
- Vital records

Tips

- Use census records (1850, 1880 -) to find someone's origins. Don't ignore Mortality Schedules from 1850-1880 or Septennial (Pennsylvania) or Special Censuses.
- Find the location of the youngest child's birthplace on the census and work backwards until you get to the birth of the parents. This will give you a clue as to the migration of the family.
- Trails started out with the path of least resistance. Your ancestor likely went on the road nearest to where he lived, then switched.
- Settlers moved to communities set up by people from their homeland. Look for ethnic communities along the route.
- Check the date your ancestor arrived in a location against the date a road was opened.
- Know the dates the US acquired territories. There were not many settlers before those dates. What was the "frontier" in a certain time period?"
- Learn about the "push and pull factors" that influenced your ancestor. What was so special about the area they settled in?
- Check the county histories of counties along the route for early settlers. You ancestors passed through many counties along the way. Records could be in any of them.

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- Connect the place your ancestor lived to the nearby trails, roads, rivers, canals and railroads. They were not mutually exclusive – Pennsylvania combined canals and railroads.
- Check marriage records. Many times, if a man married within the first 5 years of settling, it was to a girl back home. It is a possible clue to a settler's origins.
- Look for place names that suggest the area of a settler's origin. They would be kept in the names of towns, creeks, settlements and churches, i.e., Essex County, Massachusetts would have been settled by people from Essex County, England.
- Tax records, especially delinquent tax records, may be a clue as to when someone left the area. Sometimes, the records list where the person went to.
- New England records are mainly kept in town archives.
- Figure out where the "frontier" was. It was very fluid and constantly moving west.
- Look for colonial or territorial records. If a territory was formerly owned by a foreign government or another state, look for those records, i.e., Spanish land grants in the Florida Archives.
- Keep in mind that many original bounty land grant awardees sold their bounties to speculators or other parties. That may have been a factor in migration.
- Land records may show the end of an ancestor's journey. A description of the land will appear in official land and sometimes in tax records.

Sources to Find Migration Information:

- Atlas or Maps for state or territories
 - David Rumsey Map Collection, (<http://www.davidrumsey.com/about/david-rumsey>)
 - Library of Congress – Geography & Map Division – (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap>)
 - University of Texas Library, Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection, "Exploration and Settlement 1675-1800", (http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/united_states/exploration_1675.jpg)
 - University of Texas Library, Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection, "Exploration and Settlement Before 1675", (http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/united_states/exploration_before_1675.jpg)
- Censuses – 1850 for birthplaces and 1880 onward for birthplace of parents. Don't forget Septennial (Pennsylvania) or Special Censuses. Don't forget the Mortality Schedules of 1850-1880.
- Compiled biographies
- County and town archives
- County histories – Gives the early history of a county, main roads leading through it, and the earliest settlers. Check each county your ancestor passed through
- Court records-
- Church records may have:
 - The creation of a church with early members listed

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- The former residence of members of a congregation especially if they came together as a group
 - New members with their former residence mentioned
 - A record of christenings, marriages and deaths. The former residence of the individual or their parents might be listed.
- Diaries and Journals –
- U.S. government records
 - BLM land records- <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov>
 - Military pension files
 - Check NARA <http://www.archives.gov/>
 - state records
 - Fold 3.com <http://www.fold3.com>
 - Family Search (for Mexican War pensions) <http://familysearch.org>
 - Bounty land warrant applications
 - National Archives Record Group 15 Dept. of Veteran Affairs – <http://www.archives.gov>
 - Ancestry.com www.ancestry.com
 - Fold 3.com www.fold3.com
 - Heritage Quest www.heritagequest.com
- Land records – grants, bounty lands, homestead Check federal, state or territorial and county records.
- Libraries – *Don't to forget to check WorldCat
- Lineage Societies
- Newspapers may:
 - List new arrivals
 - Have obituaries of early settlers
 - Record land transactions
 - Have articles about history of the area and early settlers
 - Report on governmental policies, new modes of transportation affecting settlers
- Military records – unit histories, pension records, bounty land
- Probate records
- Riverboat passenger lists – not generally kept but the existing ones are usually in archival manuscript collections in river towns. Look in public and university libraries, historical societies and museums near your ancestor's stop.
 - Public Library of Greater Cincinnati and Hamilton Library has a collection called the Inland Rivers. It has account books, crew registers and passenger lists.
 - Missouri History Society (St. Louis) has a Steamboat and River History Collection
- State archives
- Tax records – Check local, state and federal records. People were taxed by different entities. Look in multiple holdings. Don't forget territorial taxes. They would be in state archives.
- University holdings – manuscripts and archived collections. *Don't forget to check WorldCat

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- Vital records – check the births, marriages, and deaths of all children of a couple. While most states did not mandate this record keeping in the 19th century, many localities did record at least births and deaths. If unavailable, check church records.

Resources & References:

Books (Atlases and Maps)

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- Dollarhide, William. *Map Guide to American Migration Routes, 1735-1815*, (Bountiful, Utah: Heritage Press, 1997).
- Eldridge, Carrie. *An Atlas of Appalachian Trails to the Ohio River*, (self-published, 1998)
- Eldridge, Carrie. *An Atlas of Settlement Between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi-Missouri Valleys*, (self-published, 2006).
- Eldridge, Carrie. *An Atlas of Trails Westward from New England*, (self-published, 2000).
- Paullin, Charles O., *Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States*, (Baltimore: A. Hoen & Co., Inc, 1932). Also available at www.ancestry.com

Books

- Finley, Lori. *The Natchez Trace*, (Winston-Salem, North Carolina: John F. Blair, Publisher, 1995)
- Gibbons, Gail. *From Path to Highway: The Story of the Boston Post Road*, (HarperCollins, 1986)
- Lerley, Merritt. *Traveling the National Road*, (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 1990)
- Schneider, Norris F. *The National Road*, (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio Historical Society, 1975)

Online sites and databases for migration routes

- Cyndi's List – "Migration Routes, Roads and Trails", (<http://www.cyndislist.com/migration>)
- FamilySearch Wiki – "US Migration Trails and Roads" – indexes of all roads www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/US_Migration_Trails_and_Roads
- FamilySearch Wiki – "US Migration, Rivers and Lakes" www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/US_Migration_Rivers_and_Lakes
- FamilySearch Wiki – "United States Migration Roads and Trails Resources (National Institute)", (www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Migration_Roads_and_Trails_Resources)
- FamilySearch Catalog – "migration routes" – lists of books dealing with migration or families migrating www.familysearch.org

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- University of Texas Library – Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection – Exploration and Settlement 1675-1800
(http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/united_states/exploration_1675.jpg)
- National Park Service (<http://nps.gov/nagpra/DOCUMENTS/ResMap.htm>)
- “Historic American Trails, Roads, and Migration Routes”, *RootsWeb*, alphabetical index of the termination points of most of the routes between the 17th and 19th centuries.
(<http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~tqpeiffer/genealogy/Documents/American%20Migration%20Routes%20TOC.htm>) VERY GOOD!
- “Historic Roads, Trails, Paths, Migration Routes: Virginia, Carolina, Georgia”, *RootsWeb*,
(<http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~tqpeiffer/genealogy/Documents/Ancestral%20Migration%20Archives/Migration%20Webpage%20Folder/Routes%20to%20VA,%20NC,%20SC,%20GA.htm>)
- “Paper Trail” (<https://www.paper-trail.org>) Migration documents. Can be accessed through Family History Center

Webinars – “Legacy Tree Webinars”

“Federal Records Relating to Rivers and Canals” – Pamela Boyer Sayre, September 22, 2021

“Migration Patterns East of the Mississippi Prior to 1860” – Mary Hill, May 27, 2015

“Migration Trails Across America” – Peggy Clemens Lauritzen, May 24, 2017

“Social Reasons for Migration” – Mary Hill, September 7, 2018

“Southern States Migration” – Mary Hill, October 11, 2017

Tracing Migration Using the Big 4 U.S. Record Sources” - Mary Hill. January 14, 2015

Course

“US Migration Patterns”, (online course), *National Institute for Genealogical Studies*,
(www.genealogicalstudies.com)

Articles (online)

- “American Rivers and Waterways”, *RootsWeb*,
(www.freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/gentutor/rivers.html),
- “Migration Routes from Pennsylvania to Virginia”, *RootsWeb*,
(<http://sites.rootsweb.com/~pacumber/migration>)
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(www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Migration_Patterns_1784_to_1839)
- “United States Migration Timeline 1784 to 1839 (National Institute)”, *Family Search Wiki*,
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- James Tanner, "Case Studies in American Migration: Part Two: The King's Highway", *Genealogy's Star*, (blog) August 26, 2018, (https://genealogysstar.blogspot.com/2018/08/case-studies-in-american-migration-part_26.html), accessed 31 Mar 2022.
- James Tanner, "Case Studies in American Migration: Part Three: Moving North to Vermont", *Genealogy's Star*, (blog) August 30, 2018, (https://genealogysstar.blogspot.com/2018/08/case-studies-in-american-migration-part_30.html), accessed 31 Mar 2022.
- James Tanner, "Case Studies in American Migration: Part Four: Pushing West to the Ohio", *Genealogy's Star*, (blog) September 8, 2018, (<https://genealogysstar.blogspot.com/2018/09/case-studies-in-american-migration-part.html>), accessed 31 Mar 2022.
- James Tanner, "Case Studies in American Migration: Part Five: The Erie Canal", *Genealogy's Star*, (blog) September 12, 2018, (https://genealogysstar.blogspot.com/2018/09/case-studies-in-american-migration-part_12.html), accessed 31 Mar 2022.
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