

Transportation in Iowa

A Historical Summary

William H. Thompson



Transportation in Iowa: A Historical

Summary traces the development of transportation in Iowa from the territorial days to the mid-1980s, with special attention given to the economic and social influence transportation had on the state.

Written by Dr. William H. Thompson, Professor Emeritus of Iowa State University, this book is the product of five years of research. It includes maps, pictures, tables and other graphic explanations of transportation's growth and influence to support the text.

Beginning with a historical sketch of the settlement of Iowa, the book discusses early roads which came with the settlement of Iowa. The role of steamboats is also examined.

Moving to more "modern" forms of transportation, the book focuses on railroads in Chapter 3, including federal and state legislative actions taken to curb abuses carried out by the early railroad companies.

The demand for improved roads, and the resulting development of the state's massive road system are traced, again with an emphasis on federal and state legislation aimed at boosting this growing mode of transportation.

Chronicling the early 20th century, the book uses a decade-by-decade approach to highlight important developments in transportation and their effects on the state, tracing problems and programs through both prosperity and depression. Focusing on changes in the post-World War II period, the book stresses the emergence of the four-lane highway system, technological improvements in aviation, revival of river transportation—all of which played a significant role in the political and economic arenas.

The final chapters discuss the transition of transportation from a regulated commercial industry to the so-called "free market" era, and the drastic changes this transition brought.

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This book is dedicated to the
memory of Evelyn C. Thompson,
devoted wife and research associate
of the author

and to

the administrative officials of the
Iowa Department of Transportation
and members of the
Iowa Transportation Commission
who rescued the author from a dull
and boring retirement.



We wish to express our appreciation for the many hours of effort numerous individuals have contributed to make this history of Iowa transportation possible. Without these people, the original manuscript could not have become the book you now have in your hands. Those people include:

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Prologue

Regardless of the accuracy of Santayana's statement that "those who cannot remember the past are bound to repeat it," there probably is acceptance that the past offers insight into problems of the present and partial guidelines to the future. Sidney Harris, columnist, has said: "The ancient ages remained immature because they looked backward toward a mythical golden age and refused to face the future. The modern age remains immature because it looks forward and refuses to benefit from learning only what the sad lessons of history can teach us." Perhaps history cannot precisely forecast the future, but it is doubtful that the present can be understood or the future anticipated without some knowledge of the past.

In some respects, the history of transportation in Iowa reflects the history of the state. In his *Principles of Economics*, published in 1920, Alfred Marshall noted: "Probably more than three-quarters of the whole benefit (England) derived from the progress of manufacturing during the 19th century has been brought about through the indirect influence of lowering the cost of transportation of men and goods, of water, light and electricity and news; for the dominant fact of our age is the development not of manufacturing but of the transportation industries. It is they that have done the most toward increasing England's wealth."

By annihilating distance, transportation made possible a more efficient distribution of goods in a highly mobile and productive society, created new markets, expanded old ones, transformed the organization and location of industry, encouraged settlement, created great cities, united the nation politically and strengthened national defense. Without its development, there would have been little progress in agriculture, manufacturing, or the lifestyles of the people. Its causal and residual forces in the march of civilization make the industry a complex, fascinating, yet sometimes frustrating subject for study as it mirrors the ever-changing tides and currents of economic, social and political trends in our history.

This book traces the development of transportation in Iowa from territorial days to the 1980s. It shows the evolution of the transportation systems; how they originated, progressed and functioned; their structural organizations; effectiveness in overcoming obstacles, under the guidance of state and federal legislation; and their impact upon the development of the state. With some exceptions where the continuity of the discussion would be interrupted, the work has been organized on a decade-to-decade approach—to my knowledge, the first such experiment undertaken by any state in the nation.

To keep the length within reasonable bounds, it was necessary at many points to limit the presentation, with full realization that anyone who writes history will be criticized for what has been included as well as for what has been omitted. However, as the title suggests, this is a historical summary and nothing more, written to bring together in one volume the widely scattered works of many authors. The research covered hundreds of books, journal articles, government and university research reports, annual reports of state and federal regulatory commissions and departments of transportation, masters' theses and Ph.D. dissertations. Conferences and personal interviews were scheduled wherever appropriate to the research effort. From the seemingly inexhaustible list of materials available, only those examined have been included in the notes and references at the end of each chapter, by which the reader may be compensated for omissions of details on particular subjects.

The project was endorsed by Iowa Department of Transportation Directors Raymond L. Kassel and Warren B. Dunham and recommended by Ian MacGillivray, Director of the Planning and Research Division, to the Iowa Transportation Commission for approval and funding. Research was conducted in four libraries in Washington, D.C., at the three state universities, the State Department of Transportation, state historical facilities in Des Moines and Iowa City and at the Ames Public Library.

Guidance in the collection of source materials and suggestions for their use came from many individuals whose interest and assistance is gratefully acknowledged. In particular, I wish to express appreciation to Robert J. Anderson, Director of the Office of Economic Analysis, Department of Transportation, who acted as coordinator of the project. The following persons reviewed all or parts of the manuscript: From the Transportation Department, Harvey Sims, Railroad and River Division; Conrad Amend, retired, Transportation Regulatory Authority; George Norris, Information Services; Donald McClean and Robert Given, retired former Directors of the Highway Division; and G.W. Anderson, Deputy Director, Highway Division. Lester Paff, former General Counsel, assisted in clarifying court decisions and interpretation of Iowa laws. Alice Bear typed the first draft.

Iowa State University personnel involved in the reviews were: Keith Huntress, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of English; Professors Benjamin J. Allen and R. D. Voorhees, Transportation and Logistics Department; Professors Robert L. Carstens and Stanley Ring, Department of Transportation Engineering.

Singled out for special recognition are the efforts of Joseph H. Zaletel Jr., at the Department of Transportation, for his assistance in obtaining research materials and his interest in the project. Also to Ann Holtgren Pellegrino, leading authority on Iowa aviation history, my sincere appreciation for her contributions to the sections on air transportation.

Compiling the bibliography, researching and writing the manuscript was a pleasant experience—the fulfillment of an idea which began to stir during my final years as an active member of the Iowa State University faculty. It offered me a selfish opportunity to learn more about the evolution of transportation in the state and its impact on the state's development and to hopefully make a contribution to the state's historical literature. The effort will have been worthwhile if students of transportation find the book an informative reference source for future research projects and readers enjoy the narrative describing the growth and development of the transportation systems which currently serve the people and industries of Iowa.

Ames, Iowa

September 1, 1986

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William H. Thompson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

W. H. Thompson