



America's First Interstate:

The National Road and its Reach Toward St. Clair County, Illinois

BY ANDREW J. THEISING

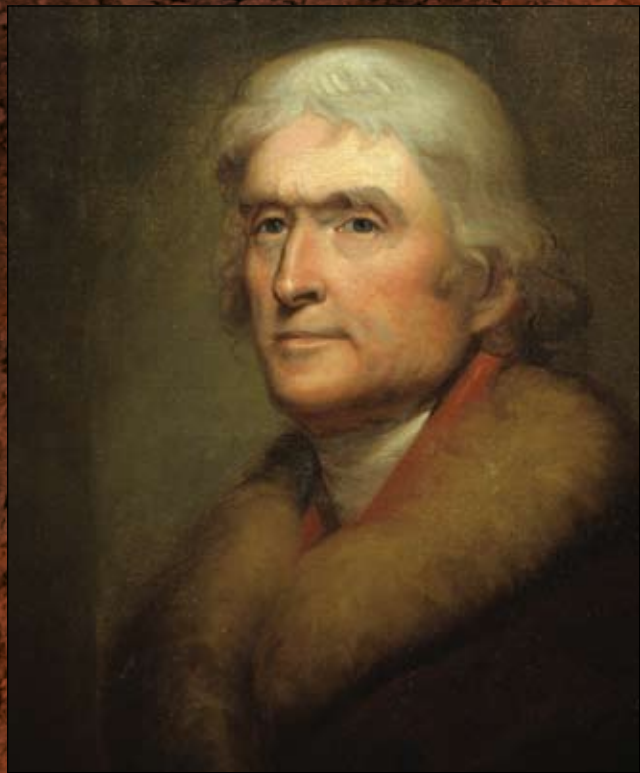
Today's interstate system makes it difficult for us to imagine a time when we were not all connected by a web of highways funded by state and federal governments. Yet some of them follow the same routes as the earliest roads built in America. These "internal improvements," as they were called, were designed to facilitate both commercial growth and population movement. Some were better roads than others, of course; the first legislation authorizing construction of the Boonslick Road in Missouri Territory, for example, mandated that tree stumps in the roadway could be no taller than eleven inches. The National Road, on the other hand, started as a projected state-of-the-art highway stretching from eastern Maryland to the edge of the frontier.

When the bill to create and build the National Road was approved by Congress on March 29, 1806, and signed by President Thomas Jefferson, it was envisioned to span from the established states of the Atlantic seaboard to the western frontier in Ohio. It was a fitting project for a time period defined by the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The National Road, like so many initiatives of the national government at the time, was a new and experimental direction for public policy. Today, no one thinks a national infrastructure initiative is unusual. In 1806, though, Congress had not fully tested its constitutional powers to regulate interstate commerce and to do what is "necessary and proper" to carry out its work. With the authorization of the National Road, Congress was

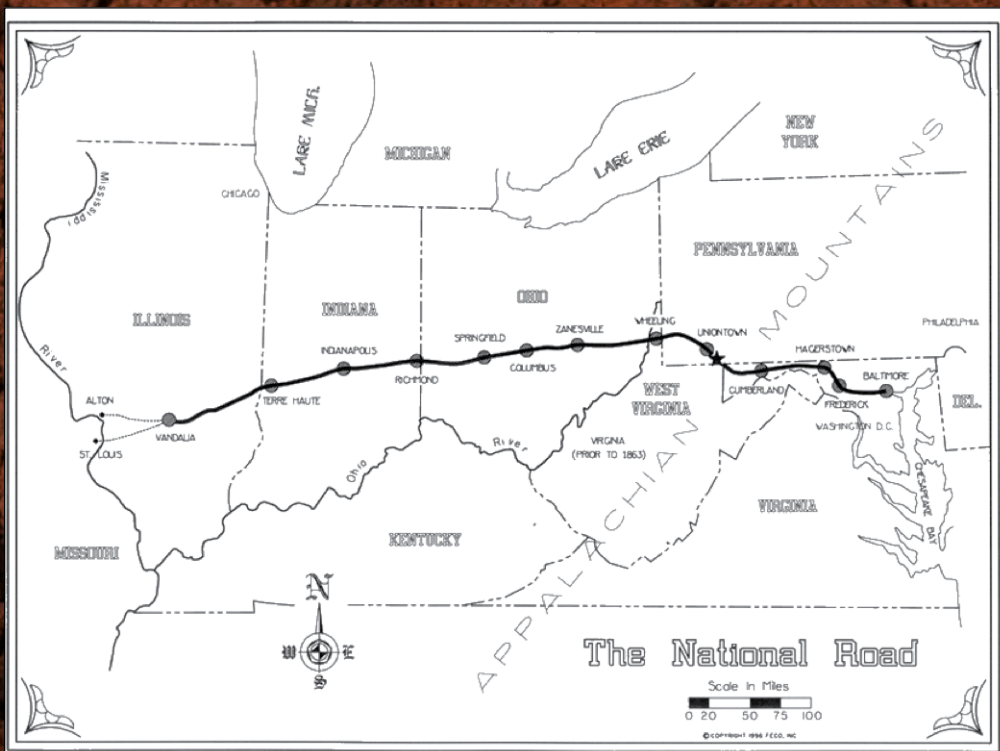
testing the boundaries of its power.

The motivation of Congress was simple: connect the country's great waterways by an overland road linking the Potomac River (at Cumberland, Maryland) to the Ohio River (at Wheeling, Virginia), and then link to the country's frontier (Ohio, admitted in 1803, was the most recent state added to the Union). The initiative was a solid economic concept that initially won widespread approval. It was recognition of the economic opportunity of the country and the rising importance of lands west of the original colonial settlements. The National Road was an important part of Illinois' experience because it recognized the frontier's importance to the growing national economy; it demonstrated the challenges of federalism, and it sparked a competition that, in the end, shaped the corridor's modern-day appearance.

In 1790, Northwest Territory Governor Arthur St. Clair established the first county in what was called the Illinois country, and named it after himself. The county was enormous, taking up about two-thirds of the present state of Illinois and even parts of present-day Michigan and Wisconsin.¹ The Territory of Illinois was not created until 1809, and it did not achieve statehood until 1818.² At the time, St. Clair County took in what is now Fayette County and most of all other counties stretching to the Indiana border. Most important for the National Road, St. Clair County bordered the Mississippi River. Members of Congress—particularly those representing western



Despite his rhetoric about limited government, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) signed legislation for construction of the National Road in 1806 connecting the east with the trans-Appalachian West.
(Photo: Monticello/Thomas Jefferson Foundation)



The original National Road ran from Cumberland, Maryland, to Ohio, but was later extended east to Baltimore and west as far as Vandalia, Illinois.
(Photo: National Park Service, Fort Necessity National Battlefield)

district interests—looked for the National Road to reach the Mississippi River too. Though the initial authorizing legislation ended at the Ohio state line, the vision of lawmakers reached all the way to St. Clair County.

What the National Road represented in vision, it lacked in practicality. Government had never used its power to build a road before, and it had little idea of the cost and logistics involved in building one. One point was clear, though—the future of the country was in the West, and the sooner people could get there, the sooner the United States could step into greatness.

Recognizing the Frontier's Economic Importance

Starting in the East • The National Road began on the Potomac River in Cumberland, Maryland. The route was to cut across the southwest corner of Pennsylvania, then into Virginia (now West Virginia), to reach the Ohio River at Wheeling. Eventually, it would be authorized to reach westward to connect the state capitals of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, all the way to the eastern shore of the Mississippi River “between St. Louis and the mouth of the Illinois River.”⁷³ The route stretched as new states were added to the union—Indiana in 1816, Illinois in 1818, and Missouri in 1821. The plans were very clear about the standard to which the road would be built. The method of construction, initially, was to be “sturdy and strong.”⁷⁴ A strip of land 66 feet wide was to be cleared of trees, brush, and stumps. Oxen and horses pulled mightily with chains to uproot large stumps. A thirty-foot strip down the center was leveled by pick and shovel to be the roadbed. Hills were cut down along the roadway, and culverts were filled. Construction crews worked in waves, with axe men going first, followed by “choppers, burners, graders, and stone crushers and finishers.”⁷⁵

The sides of the roadbed were allowed to slope not more than thirty degrees (and there were arguments



The Macadam (or Macadamized) Road, pioneered by Scotsman John McAdam (1756-1836) became a standard surface for roads like the National Road after the 1820s. McAdam simplified earlier ideas about stone road construction by regulating the size of the stones atop a level earthen surface using progressive layers of smaller and smaller rocks with the top layer smaller than any wheel that would travel over them. Men broke them at the site, as shown here; the premise was that the action of road traffic would cause the rocks to rub together and create a hard, compact surface.

(Photo: U. S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration)

between surveyors and contractors regarding angles and degrees). Drainage ditches were cut alongside both sides of the roadbed to carry storm water away. Within the thirty-foot roadbed, twenty feet of earth was covered with stones twelve to eighteen inches deep. Base stone had to pass through a seven-inch ring. Surface stone had to pass

Bonds such as this were issued by the Board of Public Works in Illinois to fund infrastructure construction—“internal improvements,” in the parlance of the day—like the National Road. (Collection of the author)



through a three-inch ring. Workers spent hours hammering stones to the correct size. Bridges were constructed by carpenters, while masons laid stone foundations for support. Bridge approaches were graded and imbedded with heavy logs for traction.⁶

As soon as a section of road was completed, travelers took advantage of it—creating even more havoc among the hectic scenes created by the gangs of workers. They traveled in large packs, setting up construction camps—“moving villages of rude shacks and time-stained canvas”—along the growing road.⁷ Timber and stump piles burned constantly. Sparks flew from blacksmith forges, always busy repairing tools and shoeing oxen and horses. Preparing food for workers and animals alike was a constant effort. Expenses mounted.

By December of 1813, two years after the first construction contracts were let and nearly seven years after congressional authorization, the National Road extended just ten miles—with eleven more nearing completion. The initial contracts, though, were to complete 39 miles. David Shriver, the superintendent overseeing the construction in Maryland, criticized the use of contractors to build the road and kept ratcheting up the cost estimates being supplied to Congress. His contractors briefly considered employing slave labor.⁸

Some 28 miles of road were completed by December 1816. Congress had allocated the massive sum of \$410,000

Markers like this were used as the early-nineteenth century version of the green highway signs we see today, telling directions and marking mileage. This marker, one of the few extant ones, is on East Broad Street in Columbus, Ohio. (Photo: Jeffrey Smith)



in 1815 (4.76 million in 2008 dollars).⁹ Sections of the road cost \$7,500 per mile. Shriver had to bargain with landowners along the leading edge of the road. He would not proceed until the landowner signed a release. Already, his earlier stretches of road required maintenance. Shriver blamed misuse by travelers and landowners—felling and dragging trees along the roadbed, constructing fences in the right-of-way, and digging out the banks. Congress allocated an additional \$10,000 for repairs to the first sixteen miles of road, but also another \$3,000 to survey the next section.¹⁰

Approaching Illinois • The ride toward the Vandalia terminus was rough. Stagecoaches were referred to as “shake guts.” An early traveler, having been bounced around extensively, noted that “[t]he great object was to prevent our heads coming in contact with the roof of the carriage”; and it was “difficult to imagine any poor human beings more in the situation of shuttle cocks.”¹¹ The western end of the National Road, by 1841, looked nothing like its thoughtfully constructed eastern end. “Parts of [the road] ended in swamps and other sections were full of stumps. No effort was made to surface the road with crushed stone or gravel. Ruts in the center were leveled by a plow. Sometimes farmers ‘blocked the pike with fences, not caring that such antics forced travelers to detour through wet and spongy fields which sucked at wagon wheels and sapped the strength of horses.’”¹² The poor standard of road construction found beyond Vandalia is readily explained by the lack of funding for road construction in this part of the state. While there were certainly travel links beyond Vandalia, and despite the fact that the route was surveyed through to St. Louis, improvements were not necessarily maintained, and the road did not enjoy popular support across Illinois.

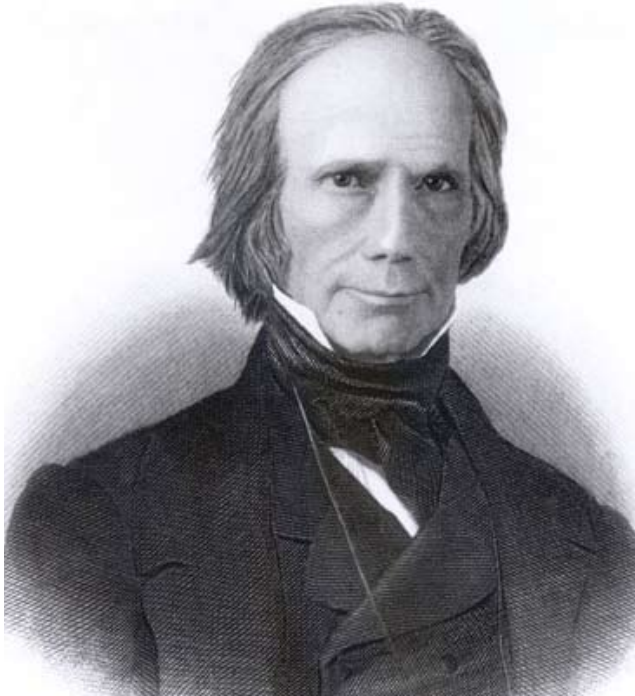
On May 15, 1820, Congress approved the extension of the National Road from Vandalia, the Illinois capital at the time, across southern Illinois to St. Louis, and on March 3, 1825, authorized further extension from St. Louis to Jefferson City, Missouri.¹³ Congress approved funding in excess of \$30,000 in 1830 to construct and open the Illinois section of the road. Additional appropriations were made in subsequent years, but the money was restricted for clearing, grading, and bridging.¹⁴

Progress was slow. By the time the National Road was built to Vandalia in 1839, America was already experiencing the rise of the railroads. The national government was already starting to divest some of its interest in the National Road as early as 1831, years before the route to Vandalia was even surveyed.¹⁵ St. Clair County was caught in the middle of a great national debate over transportation infrastructure. The county’s location across from St. Louis ensured its importance as a transportation center, but the county government had little say about what kind of transportation would serve it.

Fiscal mismanagement and construction problems forced a change in management of National Road construction. Previously, private contractors had done the work. The Army Corps of Engineers assumed

responsibility for building the Illinois portion of the road in 1834. Though the road was opened about 1839 to Vandalia, much of the Illinois section had an unfinished surface. Only 31 miles of grading and masonry paving had been completed.¹⁶

Not only were there construction and management problems, but Congress was not appropriating additional funding. The Panic of 1837 caused tremendous fiscal stress on Congress. Though the road was surveyed to Jefferson City, Missouri, Congress funded construction only to Vandalia. The road arrived there at a time when Illinois was in an enormous infrastructure-induced financial crisis of its own. St. Clair County would have to wait even longer for the National Road to reach it.



Henry Clay (1777-1852) of Kentucky saw internal improvements like the National Road as central to his “American System” to connect regions of the growing nation and facilitate economic growth through federal support of internal improvements, a national bank, a protective tariff, and a national currency. Despite being one of the most powerful and influential political leaders in Washington for four decades, Clay never won the presidency.

(Photo: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)

The Challenges of Federalism

Presidential Concerns and State Initiatives • The National Road never had lasting support in Washington, D. C. Its legality was challenged in the 1820s, and it was

losing its national status by 1840. States were dissatisfied with congressional maintenance of the road. Congress was leery about the ever-growing expense; as a matter of policy, the National Road brought out regional divisions in the legislature—pitting old country against new, west against south.

Presidents were inconsistent in their support. Thomas Jefferson, with his vision of exploring and settling the great west, was a supporter. James Monroe challenged the legality of the road in 1822, vetoing a repair bill. He felt Congress had no power to build infrastructure and that a constitutional amendment was required.¹⁷ John Quincy Adams spoke eloquently in favor of the Road, but he was the last presidential supporter of the project. Andrew Jackson saw the National Road as a violation of states’ rights. Martin Van Buren vetoed National Road legislation, and John Tyler proclaimed “we will not barter the Constitution of this land for any boon which may be offered [by the promise of the National Road].”¹⁸

The State of Ohio, still developing and eager to exploit the benefits of the National Road, chose to take matters into its own hands. The Road was far too important to leave in the hands of a bickering Congress. On February 4, 1831, the Ohio state legislature authorized state maintenance of the National Road funded by levying tolls at various points across the state.¹⁹ Congress readily approved the measure. Similar acts by the legislatures in Maryland and Pennsylvania were approved by Congress in 1832, and Virginia’s was approved in 1833.²⁰ Illinois and Indiana—two young states west of Ohio—grew nervous at the thought that the National Road might not extend to the Mississippi River as earlier envisioned. Indeed, Congress ended regular appropriations for the Road in 1838, and actually attempted to cede the entire road to the states in 1846.²¹

Tollgates stood every eighteen to twenty miles in Pennsylvania, and about every ten miles in Ohio. Tollgate keepers were allowed to skim collections for a total annual salary of \$180 in 1832, which was raised to \$200 in 1836. Returns were required on the first Monday of every month.²² Ohio engaged a state superintendent to oversee maintenance and tolls. All users would pay the toll; people going to religious services, military muster, funerals, or common marketplaces were exempt, as were coaches carrying the U.S. mail, U.S. property, or any coach related to military service.²³

Congress passed a law ceding control of the portion of the National Road in Indiana to the State of Indiana on August 11, 1848. Slowly, the National Road was becoming less “national” than ever before. (Congress would fully relinquish its control over the National Road in 1879, when it gave permission to Ohio and Maryland to make the road free, provided that it not create or recognize “any duty or liability whatever on the part of the United States.”)²⁴

Illinois Infrastructure Crisis • The State of Illinois, undoubtedly prompted in part by conjecture surrounding the National Road construction, went on an aggressive

DOCUMENTS

RELATIVE

To internal improvements in the State of Illinois.

FEBRUARY 23, 1839.

Submitted by Mr. Young, and ordered to be printed, and that 200 additional copies be printed for the use of the Senate.

Report of the board of public works.

VANDALIA, December 26, 1838.

SIR: In accordance with the requisitions of the 10th section of the law establishing a general system of internal improvements, the undersigned, commissioners of the board of public works of the State of Illinois, submit to you the following

REPORT:

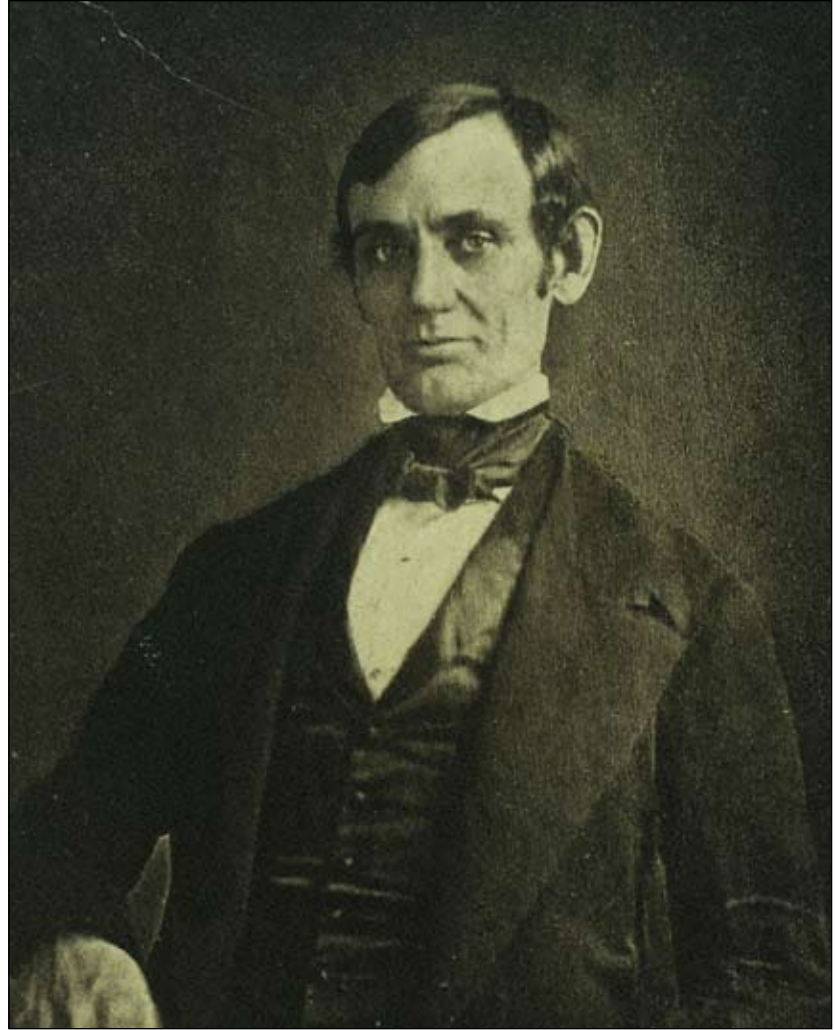
In performing the various duties enjoined upon them by law, the board have found many difficulties to encounter. This was partially owing to the want of experience on the part of the officers and agents employed, and the scarcity of mathematical instruments and apparatus necessary to a survey and reconnoissance of the different lines of road contemplated by law. In the first lettings of contracts, too, the absence of experienced and energetic contractors presented difficulties which no energy or efforts of the commissioners could surmount; yet it is believed that, in most instances, contracts were let at fair prices, and to responsible and energetic contractors.

In the performance of this duty, they have met with various other difficulties. The law, under which they were required to act, was found upon experience to be, in many particulars, defective.

The commissioners were required to purchase lands for the use of the State, not absolutely necessary to the construction of any particular work. They were required to establish an office at the seat of government, and employ a secretary to keep said office. They were required to employ engineers and general agents, whose services could not be confined to any particular work; yet all the appropriations made by law were special, and confined to particular objects, and no fund was provided for any of those general objects of expenditure. Defects were found to exist in various other parts of the act, that rendered it difficult to be understood, and often still more difficult to execute.

The present mode of acquiring the right of way over the land of the citizens has been a source of much difficulty to the commissioners, dissatisfaction to the land owners, and, in many instances, great and unavoidable cost to the State.

Blair & Rives, printers.



Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) in the earliest known photo of him, at about the time he was a state legislator. Lincoln was a rising attorney in Springfield and a member of the Illinois House of Representatives during the controversy over moving the state capital. He served his first terms as a legislator in Vandalia, spanning both capital buildings.

(Photo: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum)

Internal Improvements report for Illinois charting progress on the National Road. (Collection of the author)



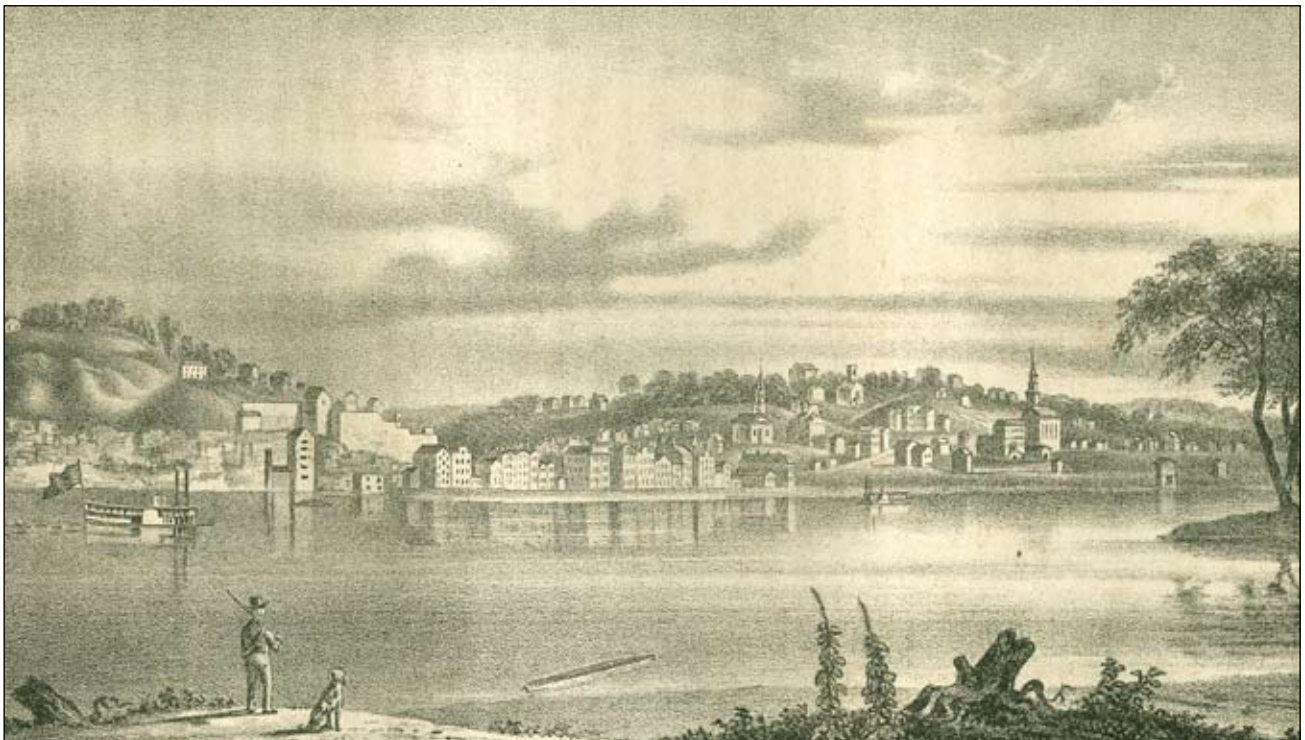
Vandalia became the second capital of Illinois in 1820, after state legislators thought it should be farther into the interior of Illinois than its current site of Kaskaskia, on the Mississippi River. In an attempt to head off efforts by leaders like Abraham Lincoln, this capitol was constructed in 1836 at a cost of \$16,000; the legislature was unimpressed, and still moved the capital to Springfield just three years later. (Photo: Jeffrey Smith)



August Leimbach, "Madonna of the Trail," 1928. This ten-foot-tall granite monument, designed by St. Louis sculptor August Leimbach, was commissioned by the Daughters of the Revolution in 1927. It was part of a broader effort to commemorate pioneer women along routes such as the National Road and the Santa Fe Trail. (Photo: Jeffrey Smith)

streak of infrastructure investment. Unfortunately for St. Clair County, the program's agenda pushed the county's infrastructure needs even further behind schedule. Under the leadership of Governor Joseph Duncan (1834-1838), the state undertook the Illinois Internal Improvement System. It became a boondoggle and nearly bankrupted the state. However, statehouse leaders envisioned a web of roads, ports, and rails that would push the Illinois economy to the forefront of the nation.²⁵ The land speculation that was common along the National Road route began happening across the state—wherever the Internal Improvement System would touch. (Such speculation certainly was not unique to this case; it happens around all types of infrastructure and continues to this day.) Cities and towns seemingly sprang up overnight and land values skyrocketed.²⁶ Between 1819 and 1837, land sales in Illinois exceeded \$10.5 million (197.4 million in 2008 dollars).²⁷

Founded in 1818, Alton, Illinois, began thriving almost immediately. It was located between the confluence of the Illinois and Missouri rivers on the Mississippi, with an active ferry crossing into present-day St. Charles County, Missouri. By the 1830s, Alton was a thriving river town that had aspirations for greatness that included becoming the new state capital, replacing Vandalia. (Photo: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)





In a statewide election in 1833, Illinois voters elected to choose Alton as its new capital over several other choices, but the vote was too close and small to be binding. Thanks to efforts by lawyer Abraham Lincoln and others, the capital was moved to Springfield in 1839. (Photo: State Historical Society of Missouri Photo Collection)

Historian Clarence Walworth Alvord noted that the Internal Improvement System was a watershed event in state history. “Indeed the great speculative land sales of 1834-1837 may be regarded as the decisive cause of the more-than-speculative internal improvement scheme on which the state embarked in 1837. That system and the state’s later attempts to extricate itself from the ruin it brought divided the pioneer period of the state’s history from the era of transition.”²⁸ So many people were profiting from the land deals that politicians were reluctant to end the project. This is wholly consistent with the state’s individualistic political culture described well by Daniel Elazar in his landmark work, *American Federalism: The View from the States*, and, in fact, may be a significant event in shaping that political culture. Individualistic political cultures thrive on building relationships that deliver political favors and patronage.²⁹

After only a few years, the State of Illinois could no longer afford the program its politicians had begun. The state racked up \$14 million in bonded debt (or 298.5 million in 2008 dollars)—far too much debt for a population of only 476,000 to bear.³⁰ The state had exhausted its credit limit and faced financial crisis in trying to keep day-to-day operations going. The Internal Improvement System collapsed under the weight of its own debt.

Internal improvement programs existed in other states (examples include Florida, Connecticut, and

Pennsylvania), but there was a peculiar provision in the Illinois legislation that had great effect on infrastructure decisions and drastically affected St. Clair County. The infrastructure created by the program could not benefit cities outside of Illinois. Railroads built by the program must have both terminals within Illinois boundaries.³¹ This effectively cut off any construction headed toward St. Louis and left St. Clair County with very little public infrastructure of any kind.

Stalemate at Vandalia • There was a short-lived but significant rivalry between the cities of Alton and St. Louis for dominance as the primary river port of the Mississippi. The provisions of the Internal Improvement System required that infrastructure investment favor Alton, since St. Louis was outside of the state boundary and any development in East St. Louis would surely benefit St. Louis. This question carried over to the National Road. Alvord points out that “notice has already been paid to the meteoric rise of Chicago in the commercial field; but the city which showed the steadiest commercial development [at the time] was Alton. Alton had been hampered at the beginning of its career by litigation over the title to its site, and its aspirations to rival St. Louis had led it into a long, drawn out, and fruitless struggle to procure the passage of the Cumberland Road through it rather than through St. Louis.”³² Alton boosters had hoped that, by dominating St. Louis in river trade, the course of the National Road would



Although the route of the National Road through St. Clair County was surveyed, it was never used for the road. Later, the approximate route was adopted by railroads through the county spanning to the Mississippi River.
(Collection of the author)

be diverted away from St. Clair County and come along a northerly route through Madison County—even though Congress had already authorized and surveyed the St. Louis path.

At the time of this heated rivalry, Governor Duncan was busy implementing the Internal Improvement System. Since the state system could not benefit outside cities like St. Louis, the St. Clair County route for the National Road was inconsistent with state investment priorities. There was agreement about the National Road's location in Vandalia, but deep division existed over its route to the Mississippi. This was the political debate happening in Vandalia when the National Road opened there in the late 1830s.

In a last-ditch effort to secure the National Road route out of Vandalia, the City of Alton made a bold move. Vandalia had been given the privilege of being the state capital only for twenty years, and in 1839 a new capital would have to be chosen; Alton jumped into the competition.³³ The city believed that if it could secure state capital status, the National Road route would undoubtedly follow. This was logical thinking, as Congress had already approved routing the National Road to the Illinois capital of Vandalia before 1820, and to the Missouri capital of Jefferson City in 1825. Unfortunately, time ran out for both Alton and the National Road. Springfield won the competition to become the state capital in 1837, when a bloc of Illinois senators and representatives called “the Long Nine” (that advocated for Springfield and included

prominent residents and neighbors Abraham Lincoln and Ninian Edwards) agreed to back the Illinois Improvement System in exchange for a bloc of Illinois Improvement System votes that would support the capital's move from Vandalia to Springfield.³⁴

Congress ended regular funding for the National Road in 1838. The debate in Congress moved to railroads, led by the voices of Thomas Hart Benton and Henry Clay, who had once spoken in favor of the National Road. In 1840, Congress voted to stop building the National Road. No one will ever know if the bickering among Illinois leadership wasted precious time that could have been used to secure additional funding. St. Clair County was assured that the original National Road would never reach there. It is important to keep in mind that the National Road was used to bring traffic to Vandalia, and that these people did not stay in Vandalia, but instead pressed forward to St. Clair County toward St. Louis by way of other routes. St. Clair County was indeed to be linked to the rest of the continent—not by road, but by rails.

Sparking Competition that Shaped the Corridor

The Arrival of the Railroad in St. Clair County • The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad began in 1827 as a response to the opening of the Erie Canal through New York State to the north.³⁵ The business leaders of Baltimore felt threatened by the infrastructure improvements to its north, and sought to create a new infrastructure that would help

secure its economic advantages—building a railroad. Work commenced on July 4, 1827, and, interestingly, the path chosen for this new route was parallel to the National Road. First, though, the track had to transect the Allegheny Mountains. By 1842, it reached Cumberland. Ten years later, it reached Wheeling.³⁶ Though fifteen years in the making, this stretch of railroad diminished the significance of and reliance on the original National Road.

Through mergers and acquisitions, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad grew at a dizzying rate. Within five years of reaching Wheeling, the B&O (under the name Ohio and Mississippi Railroad) reached Cincinnati and then the eastern shore of the Mississippi River at St. Clair County, directly across from St. Louis. The first eastern train arrived in East St. Louis in 1857, and transportation there would never be the same.³⁷ On that day, the railroads achieved what Congress could not—create a land link between the Potomac, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers.

Within a generation of that first train's arrival, St. Clair County would become a major national railroad hub, with 22 separate rail lines terminating at East St. Louis by 1874.³⁸ St. Clair County would become home to the industrial suburbs of St. Louis, and it would experience economic and demographic growth on a massive scale. Factories in the area would work around the clock processing materials such as ore, oil, and steel that made the American economy work.

Meanwhile, on May 9, 1856, Congress transferred the National Road in Illinois, along with all rights and privileges connected with it, to the state.³⁹ The last National Road segment from Vandalia to East St. Louis was never built.⁴⁰ It would be a job that would have to be done in a different time by different roads. For the time being, the federal government had given up on the National Road in Illinois.

Finishing the Job: U.S. 40 and I-64 • The impact of the National Road on St. Clair County took time. In the early 1800s, the National Road never reached the place. By the late 1800s, St. Clair County was a railroad hub of mid-America, a prominence that would last well into the twentieth century. However, the establishment of U.S. Route 40 marked the rise of automobility and the beginning of the end for the golden age of rails.

The current U.S. Route 40 winds its way through St. Clair County and crosses into downtown St. Louis over the mighty Mississippi River. As the Route travels through St. Clair County, it passes through the once-great industrial center of East St. Louis and the surrounding industrial communities that housed the National Stock Yards, oil and metal refineries, steel mills and iron works, and countless taverns that had sprung up along the National Road from its beginning.⁴¹

U.S. 40 was established as a national route in 1925.⁴² Its designation and extension finally brought a modern version of America's National Road to St. Clair County—fulfilling the dream that began with Thomas Jefferson more than a century before. Interstate 64, which would not be designated an Interstate until 1961 and is still being built today, overlays U.S.40 in St. Clair County.⁴³

Certain realignments were made to U.S.40 that deviated from the original surveyed route of the National Road to St. Louis. Douglas Meyer notes the current U.S.40 and interstate system are not the best markers of



Macadam roads were still being built in the twentieth century, as seen in this photo from Oregon.

(Photo: Oregon Department of Transportation, History Center)

the intended route, “but rather the old St. Louis, Vandalia, and Terre Haute Railroad [Penn Central], which... ‘was intended to follow the exact line that the National Road was supposed to take between St. Louis and Vandalia, and would have overlaid the earlier 1820s road connection. The original U.S. 40 runs parallel to the Penn Central tracks.’”⁴⁴ The current road, Meyer notes, though in the same corridor as the original path, has been smoothed and straightened in the post-World War II era and is therefore deviated.

The End of the Road

St. Clair County marked the end of the road in more ways than one. The competition between road and rail was one of the key themes running through the history of the county at this time, and ultimately the road won. Just as East St. Louis was on a precipice, in a sense so was all of America. The innocence of the 1950s would soon be gone, and America's cities would be forever changed. Technological and economic change, as well as social change, would forever alter the way America operated. By the end of the twentieth century, the remnants of the National Road carried travelers by the old and the new, by the past and the future. There are many more choices today than back in the days of the National Road, but people still travel the route regularly to a variety of destinations. In fact, Meyer notes that St. Clair County is more than just the end point of the National Road—it is a symbol of America as well. The Road shows what the country was, what it became, its successes, its failures, its prosperity, and its poverty. “Here, in ensemble, lies America at the end of the Road.”⁴⁵



This brick edifice is the oldest remaining Illinois state capitol. Most famously, it is where Abraham Lincoln served as a member of the House of Representatives starting after the 1834 election. (Photo: Jeffrey Smith)

TABLE 1
Congressional Outlays for the National Road, 1825-1846 in actual dollars⁴⁶

Year	Construction, Cumberland	Maintenance, Cumberland	Construction, Cumberland to Zanesville	Construction in Ohio, west of Zanesville	Construction, Indiana	Construction, Illinois	Maintenance, existing length
1825	35,850						
1826	125,469						
1827	163,720	25,510					
1828	188,108	5,000					
1829			42,624	50,213	14,600		100,000
1830			64,977	115,500	34,700	12,155	
1831			2,700	77,765	57,365	33,361	950
1832			56,000	112,275	102,080	27,500	5,830
1833				122,747	101,000	40,000	253,440
1834				210,600	111,693	51,752	250,000
1835				241,387	213,562	109,000	385,195
1836				169,488	144,040	42,232	12,597
1837				210,017	130,488	58,453	7,777
1838			9,000	96,506	162,472	84,000	
1839				52,100	46,000	128,520	
1840				11,902	10,200	99,027	
1841					2,856	4,700	
1842					40		
1843							
1844							
1845				130		1,420	
1846							

- ¹ H. William Nunes, *East St. Louis, Illinois Year-by-Year Illustrated History* (Dexter, Michigan: Thompson-Shore, 1998), 9; W. C. Walton, *Centennial History of McKendree College*, 1928, Chap. 3 (online version, <http://www.rootsweb.com/~ilstclai/chap3.htm>, posted: n/d. accessed July 5, 2006).
- ² Nunes, *East St. Louis*, 9-10.
- ³ Archer Butler Hulbert, *Historic Highways of America, vol. 10, The Cumberland Road* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1904), 73.
- ⁴ Philip Jordan, *The National Road* (Indianapolis: Bobs-Merrill Company, 1948), 83; Thomas Searight, *The Old Pike: A History of the National Road* (Uniontown, Pennsylvania: privately published, 1894), 1-27.
- ⁵ Jordan, *The National Road*, 84.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 100-101.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 85-86.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.
- ⁹ The Inflation Calculator. 2010. (<http://www.westegg.com/inflation/>. Posted: n/d., last accessed February 23, 2010).
- ¹⁰ Jordan, *The National Road*, 88.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 198.
- ¹² Quoted in Harry Hansen, ed., *Illinois: A Descriptive and Historical Guide*, new rev. ed. (New York: Hastings House, 1974), 694-695.
- ¹³ Hulbert, *Historic Highways of America, vol. 10, The Cumberland Road*, 194.
- ¹⁴ Illinois State Historical Society, *Illinois State Historical Markers: National Road in Illinois* (1968) (<http://www.historyillinois.org/frames/markers/235.htm>, posted: n/d, accessed June 27, 2006).
- ¹⁵ Timothy Crumrin, "Road through the Wilderness: The Making of the National Road," *The Magazine of the Open-Air Museum Coordinating Council*, online version (<http://www.connerprairie.org/historyonline/ntlroad.html>, posted: 1994, accessed June 27, 2006).
- ¹⁶ *Illinois State Historical Markers: National Road in Illinois*.
- ¹⁷ Jordan, *The National Road*, 159-160.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 170-171.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 175.
- ²² Hulbert, *Historic Highways of America, vol. 10, The Cumberland Road*, 105
- ²³ Jordan, *The National Road*, 167-169.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.
- ²⁵ L. E. Robinson and Irving Moore, *History of Illinois* (Chicago: American Book Company, 1909), 112-113, 118.
- ²⁶ Andrew Theising, *Made in USA: East St. Louis—The Rise and Fall of an Industrial River Town* (St. Louis: Virginia Publishing, 2003), 67; Hansen, ed., *Illinois: A Descriptive and Historical Guide*, 692.
- ²⁷ Hansen, ed., *Illinois: A Descriptive and Historical Guide*, 692; and The Inflation Calculator, www.westegg.com/inflation
- ²⁸ Clarence Walworth Alvord, ed., *Centennial History of Illinois, vol. 2, The Frontier State 1818-1848* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1922), 188-189.
- ²⁹ See Daniel Elazar, *American Federalism: The View from the States* (New York; Harper & Row, 1984).
- ³⁰ Theising, *Made in USA: East St. Louis*, 67; The Inflation Calculator, www.westegg.com/inflation
- ³¹ Theising, *Made in USA: East St. Louis*, 67.
- ³² Walton, *Centennial History of Illinois, vol. 2*, 188-189.
- ³³ Douglas Meyer, "From Vandalia to East St. Louis and Alton, Illinois," *A Guide to the National Road*, Karl Raitz, ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 310.
- ³⁴ Andrew Bresnan, *The Long Nine* (<http://www.cam.k12.il.us/hs/teachers/bresnan/longnine.htm>, posted: 1998; last accessed February 23, 2010).
- ³⁵ *The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad: Linking Thirteen Great States with the Nation* (<http://www.american-rails.com/baltimore-and-ohio.html>, posted: 2007, last accessed February 23, 2010).
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ H. William Nunes, *East St. Louis, Illinois*, 17; *The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad*.
- ³⁸ Theising, *Made in USA: East St. Louis*, 64.
- ³⁹ *Illinois State Historical Markers: National Road in Illinois*.
- ⁴⁰ Meyer, "From Vandalia to East St. Louis and Alton, Illinois," 347.
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- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 347.
- ⁴⁶ Created from data Jordan, *The National Road*, 94; based on National Archive, R.G. 56 Records of the Bureau of Accounts, page from the volume *Receipts and Expenditures of the U.S., 1789-1846*.