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Transportation **BRIDGING THE GAP**

Early Transportation

Transportation in North Dakota has been one of the largest factors in shaping the state. It all started when early settlers came to North Dakota in wagons.

In the early 1800's, transportation within North Dakota was strictly by horseback or walking. There were a few trails created by the Native Americans but travel was mostly done on the open prairie.

Steamboating on the upper Missouri began around 1832, when the American Fur Company reached Fort Union, west of Williston. Water transportation dominated in the state until the early 1870's, when the railroad arrived. The two largest population booms (before now) in North Dakota occurred as a result of railroad expansion, and most new arrivals settled near the railroad lines.

Development and Expansion

In 1872, Northern Pacific Railroad arrived in Fargo and started to pave a path across our state. The main Northern line was finished nine years later, across southern North Dakota, and the Great Northern Railroad began its construction in the northern part of the state. By 1890, there were 2,507 miles of rail in North Dakota. The railroad system influenced European immigration and brought one of the largest population booms to the state.

By the turn of the 20th century, the state was starting to develop a steady transportation system. Steamboats were being used on the river, the railroad was bringing in massive groups of immigrants, and roads were being developed all around the state. In 1904, the Public Roads Division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported 59,332 miles of public roads in North Dakota, of which 205 roads were surfaced with gravel and seven were surfaced with stone.

The Highway System

In 1905, State Engineer A.L. Fellows recommended North Dakota create a highway commission. Four years later, the Legislature established the Good Road Experimental Station in Bismarck. The state engineer was in charge of construction and convict labor from the State Penitentiary was used.

In 1911, the State Legislature required all automobiles to be registered. Registration cost \$3 per vehicle. 7,201 vehicles were registered that year and the first license plates were issued. The first motor vehicle tax was also implemented. Prior to this, the only source of road funding was personal property tax. Male adults were given the option of working on the roads for one day in lieu of paying the \$1.50 tax.

The content above came from North Dakota State Library items, ND Studies materials, The Department of Transportation and the State Archives

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