Brick Wall Special Interest Group
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MIDWEST MIGRATION BY RIVERS, ROADS AND RAILS

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It is first necessary to locate "waypoints" to plot your ancestor's path of migration. Matching those locations with navigable waterways, trails, roads, or rail routes can provide clues to the most likely paths and means of their westward migration. This presentation will cover three steps.

TO DETERMINE LIKELY MIGRATION ROUTES:

1. Search for sources which establish your ancestor's whereabouts at specific dates
2. Plot the locations on a map to verify if they follow a logical path
3. Consult maps and other resources from the same time period to establish probable routes and modes of transportation commonly used by migrants

1. ESTABLISH RESIDENCE AT SPECIFIC DATES:

Traditional Genealogical Sources: Use these sources to create a timeline, plot a path, and detect gaps or inconsistencies in your information.

- Vital Records (Birth, Marriage, Death, Burial)
- Censuses (Federal, State or Local, such as Town or School Censuses)
- Tax Lists
- Church Records (Histories, Congregation Records, Quaker Certificates, etc.)
- Land Patents and Deeds (often state residence of purchaser)
- Military Records (Civil War & other Draft Registrations, Enlistment, Muster Rolls, Pension Files, etc.)
- Probate Files (place of death and may list residence place of heirs)
- School Records (Grade Cards, Group Photos, County Records, etc.)
- Court Records

Search for Your Ancestors in Published Resources:
Surname Genealogy Books, County, Township, or Church History Books

- Google locations and surnames
- Consult Family Search Wiki for sources
- Find online books at:

https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/
https://www.hathitrust.org
https://archive.org
https://books.google.com
www.ancestry.com also has books online – search by topic, location or surname
Libraries, Genealogical & Historical Societies, Archives, Universities, etc.

City and County Directories
County Plat Maps (residence & land ownership)

Newspapers
www.newspapers.com
www.newspaperarchive.com
www.chroniclingamerica.org

Periodicals – Search using PERSI Index

Diaries, Journals, Letters, Etc.

Obituaries

Stories gatherer in "old timers" books and newspaper articles

Lineage society memberships and applications

Pioneer Family Certificates (usually through state genealogical societies)

Your Ancestors FAN Club (Search census, tax, etc. documents for neighbors, relatives, etc. who live nearby. They may have migrated together.)

Searches

- Google locations and surnames
- Family Search Wiki for sources about specific locations or topics and the repositories where they are held

Don't Overlook Motivations for Migration - Usually Land and/or Money!

- Military Land Warrants
- Historic Events such as the Louisiana Purchase in 1803
- Military Conflicts and Natural Disasters
- Public Sales of Land
- Homestead Act – Land was FREE
- Gold Rush
- Employment Opportunities

2. PLOT THE LOCATIONS AND DATES ON A MAP:

- Use online or paper maps from the dates of residence and/or contemporary maps
- For accuracy, look for red flags that might indicate more than one person with the same name or the wrong family, such as backtracking, questionable lengths of travel time between locations for available modes of transportation, unlikely locations for marriages, children's births, etc.
- Study topography for nearby natural barriers like mountains or dense forests which could influence the routes and modes of transportation used
- Look for navigable waterways, roads, railroads, etc. in use at the time
- Consider the season/possible weather challenges at the times your ancestor traveled

3. CONSULT RESEOURCES FOR POSSIBLE MIGRATION ROUTES AND MODES OF TRAVEL AT SPECIFIC TIME PERIODS:

- Match map dates as closely as possible to dates of residence
- Compare rates of travel by different routes and modes of transportation to dates of residence
- Determine which routes would be likely

Work Backwards for Clues

- From a known location
- Study the routes that were often traveled
- Follow them eastward to identify previous residences
- Compare arrival dates with possible routes and modes of travel

Paths, Trails, Roads, Turnpikes, Highways

- No roads in Colonial America before 1735
- On foot - 1633
- On horseback - 1667 (Horses are limited to 12-mile increments without rest.)
- Two-wheeled cart or small wagon - 1735
- Large wagon (Military, Prairie Schooner or Conestoga) National Road to Ohio in 1818, to St. Louis in 1840
- Sled in winter months – Easier to pull sleds over frozen ground than wagon wheels in mud!
- Stagecoach – 1795 to 1855, especially in West where rivers were scarce
- Wagon Roads in West until the Transcontinental Railroad was finished in 1869
- Automobile – Interstate Highways began in 1916

Rivers, Canals, Lakes, Gulf of Mexico

- Canoe
- Sailing Vessel
- Raft or Flatboat (usually downriver – wood was recycled for homes)
- Canals (Highest use 1820 – 1855)
- Steamboat (Highest use 1850-1870)
- Via Isthmus of Panama (Gold Rush Era)

Railroads

- Limited to locations with completed tracks 1850s – 1916 (Highest use after 1880)

Transportation Schedules

- Search newspapers for stagecoach, boat and rail schedules and fares
- Determine best-case and worst-case timeframes for travel under different weather conditions
- Search for journals, diaries, newspaper articles, etc. which detail travel time and conditions in the same time period

REFERENCE RESOURCES:

BOOKS:

- *Map Guide to American Migration Routes, 1735-1815* by William Dollarhide, published Heritage Quest, 1997; Available for in-house reference use at TGS and TSCPL; Purchase on Amazon.com, etc. for about $25.
- *History of Transportation in the United States before 1860* by Caroline E. MacGill and Collaborators, Washington, D.C., Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1917; Digital copy online https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.224433/page/n1/mode/2up
- *Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States: Volume 10,* by Charles Oscar Paullin; Digital Copy at https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=miun.abl7462.0001.001&view=1up&seq=5&skin=2021

LINKS AND WEBSITES:

- US Internal Migration - https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Migration_Internal
- Migration Trails and Roads – https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/US_Migration_Trails_and_Roads

- US Migration Rivers and Lakes – https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/US_Migration_Rivers_and_Lakes
- US Migration Canals – https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/US_Migration_Canals
- American Migration Patterns - https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~gentutor/genealogy/migration.html
- River Maps, Mileage, Images of Levees and Cities, Boating Guidebooks, etc. https://www.riverlorian.com
- Diaries, Journals, Misc. https://iowahist.uni.edu/Frontier_Life/Frontier.htm
- Maps - https://www.loc.gov Select "Maps" from the default dropdown "Everything" before typing a location into the search bar; Select other topics for more great resources
- Online Steamboat Research Library https://steamboats.com/research/index.html#q
- Online Steamboat Research georgetownsteamboats.com/gs/site-introduction/
- https://www.reddit.com You decide! Lots of maps!
- www.google.com You decide!

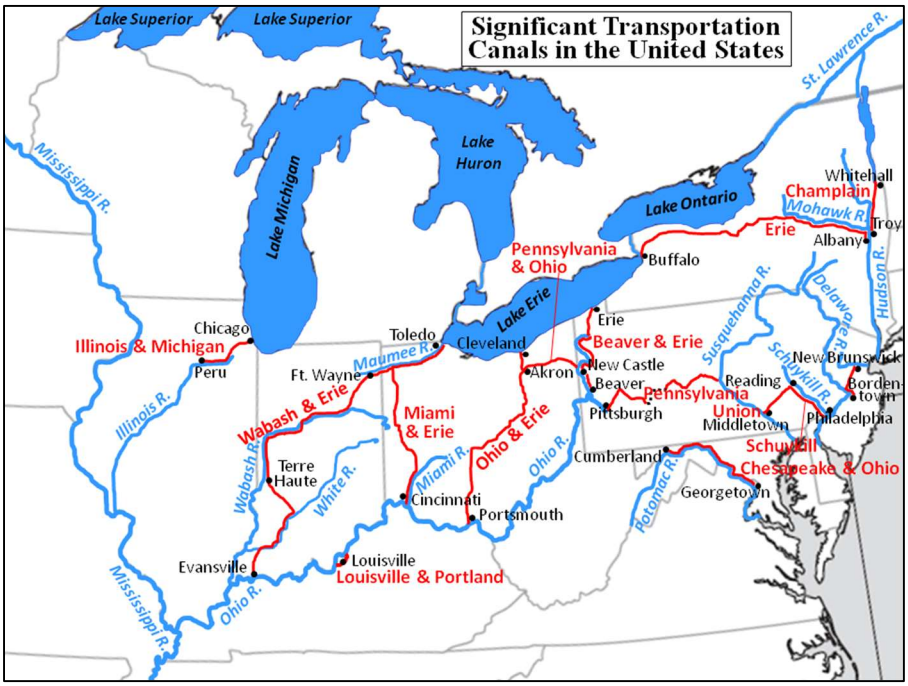
VIDEOS AND WEBINARS:

- Video – Map Your Way to Genealogical Success by James Tanner; good tips for this process; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tii0ig0_FuM
- Free RootsTech video - https://www.familysearch.org/rootstech/session/go-west-american-migration-1783-to-1900
- Video – Case Studies in Migration for Genealogists by James Tanner https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDmZ8YGxldo

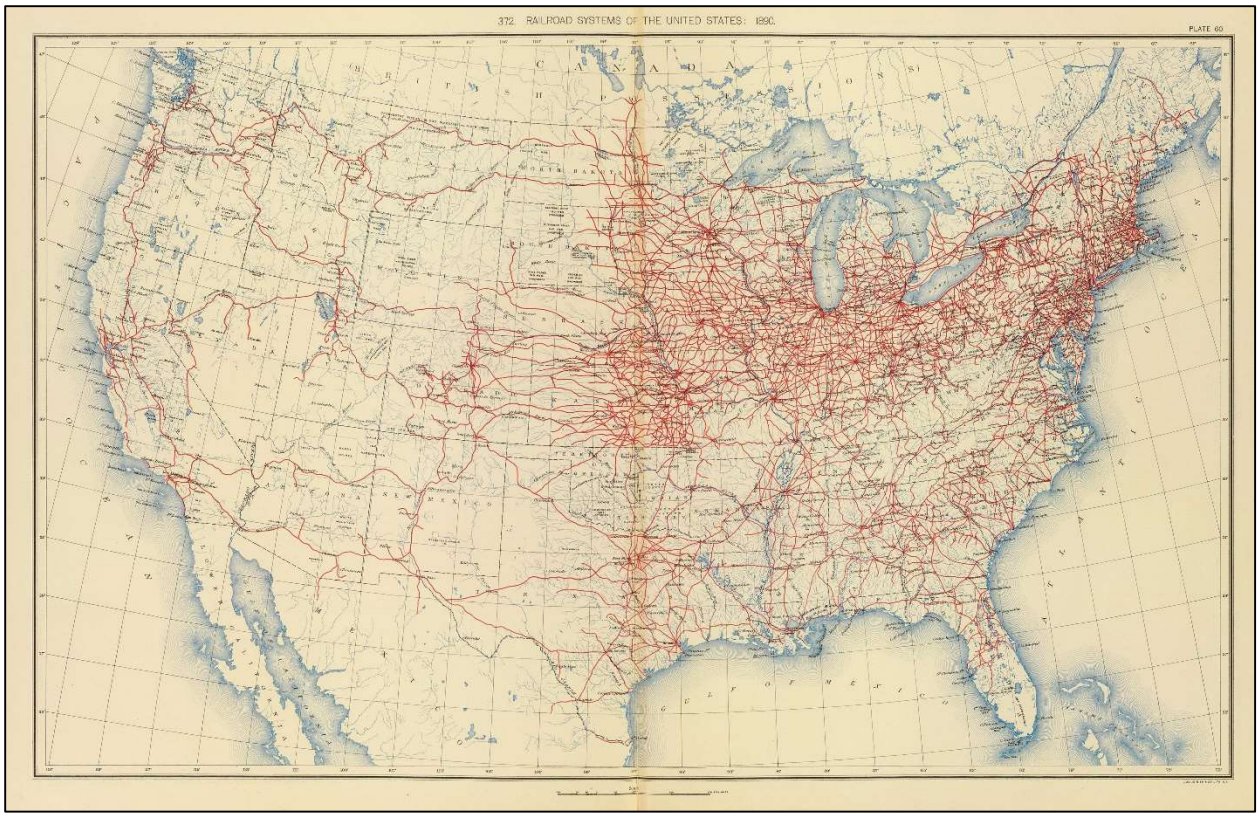
POPULAR OVERLAND MIGRATION ROUTES: (Free Download from Family Tree Magazine)

- **Boston Post Road—**Served as a mail-service trail between Boston and New York in the 17th century
- **Braddock's Road—**Military road that became the first overland route through the Allegheny Mountains.
- **California Trail—**Nearly 40,000 people caught gold fever in 1849 and traveled overland to California to find the precious metal. The trail coincided with the Oregon Trail until it crossed the Rockies.
- **Fall Line Road—**A popular road from Pennsylvania and Maryland to the Carolinas before 1750, it broke off from the King's Highway (see below) at Fredericksburg, Va., and followed the fall line through Virginia, the Carolinas and into Georgia.
- **Forbes Road—**First a military road to get General John Forbes' troops from Harrisburg to Fort Duquesne (later Fort Pitt and then Pittsburgh) during the French and Indian War, it provided a westward route for settlers from eastern Pennsylvania and New England.

- **Great Valley Road—**Migrating families to western Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee made this the most traveled road in colonial America. King's Highway—Formed by old post routes, the continuous highway helped colonists travel from Maine to Georgia.
- **Mohawk Trail—**Major route for hundreds of thousands of pioneers making their way west; precursor of the Erie Canal, New York Central Railroad and the New York State Thruway.
- **Mormon Trail—**Between 1847 and 1869, about 85,000 Mormon pioneers traveled along this 1,400-mile route from Nauvoo, Ill., to what became Salt Lake City.
- **Natchez Trace—**The only way to get to the Old Southwest before 1806, running from Lexington, Ky., to Natchez, Miss.
- **National Road—**Also known as the Cumberland Road or National Pike, this route for westward-bound settlers never quite met its goals. It had reached only from Wheeling, WV, to Vandalia, Ill., when the railroad eliminated the need for it.
- **Oregon Trail—**Along what was perhaps the most important migration trail, more than 350,000 pioneers—mostly from Iowa, Kentucky, Missouri and Illinois—journeyed the 2,000 miles from Independence, Mo., to the Columbia River region of Oregon from 1841 to 1869.
- **Upper Road—**An important migration route to the Carolinas from Fredericksburg.
- **Wilderness Road—**Thousands of pioneers followed this route to settle in Kentucky and the lower Ohio Valley.
- **Zane's Trace—**A way for migrating settlers to cross the Ohio River.



https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/US_Migration_Canals



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Major Rivers and Lakes Used for Migration in the United States

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/US_Migration_Rivers_and_Lakes