

Identifying Migration Trails

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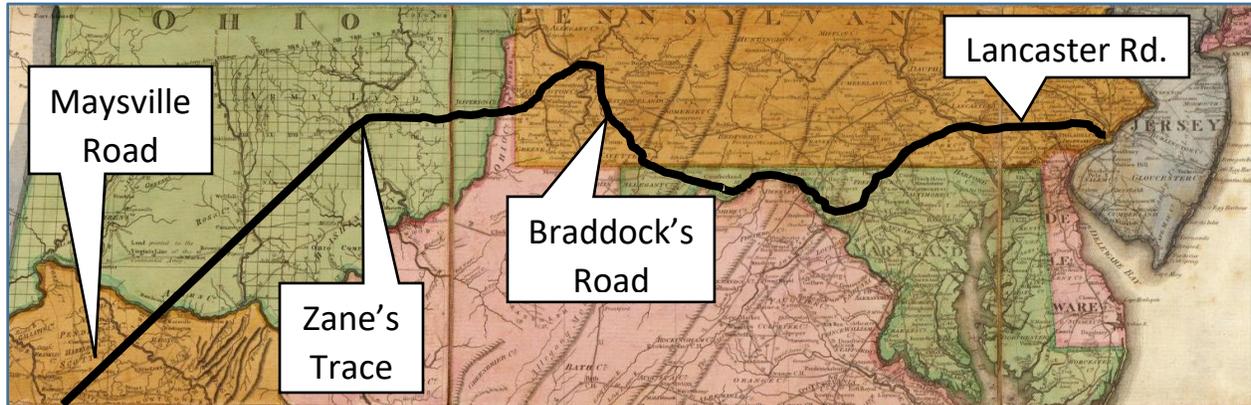
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Identifying the post roads, footpaths, and rivers our early colonial ancestors used to migrate is a key strategy in resolving complicated genealogical queries. Reasonably Exhaustive Research requires that genealogists explore all avenues – including identifying common patterns. This raises the question - **Is there a more common pattern than the route of migration?** If we explore migration patterns, all points along the path become possible places to research.



Abraham Bradley (1804) Map of the United States: exhibiting the post-roads, the situations, connexions & distances of the post-offices, stage roads, counties & principal rivers.

The origins of overland migration routes begin from very simple means – rivers, streams, and game trails. Native Americans improved on these routes, establishing a network of paths. Europeans began to improve upon these routes in 1660s with the first Colonial Post Roads – but it would be decades before some of the earliest roads were passable by wagon – and many were not passable by horseback. By the 1830s, the development of Canals, Railroads, and Steamboats changed migration – but many of the routes remained important and continue to be used today as part of our American highway system.

Major Overland Trails and Routes:

A. Rivers and Streams

- St. Lawrence River
- Great Lakes
- Hudson River
- Mohawk River
- Delaware River
- Potomac River
- Chesapeake Bay
- Ohio River
- Kanawha River
- Connecticut River
- James River
- Susquehanna River
- Santee River
- Monocacy River
- Mississippi River
- Illinois River
- Wabash River
- Savannah River

B. Game Trails

- Game use ridge top paths for protection from predators and they were free from snow.
- Game trails provided travelers access to water and food.

- C. **Indian Footpaths** – Native Americans established a crude highway system of footpaths built on game trails, rivers, and streams to connect their villages. Many of the named paths were actually a network of paths – some of these networks became major routes for Europeans:
- **Iroquois Trail (Mohawk Trail, Onondaga Trail)** – Connected the Hudson River to Lake Ontario (Fort Oswego) and Lake Erie (Fort Niagara).
 - **Forbidden Path** – from Albany to Lake Erie along northern edge of Catskills.
 - **Old Connecticut Path** – from Boston to Hudson River to Lake Champlain and St. Lawrence River.
 - **Great Warrior Path** – network of paths connecting New England with locations as far south as Mobile, Alabama
 - **Catawba Path** – trade route from Carolinas to Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania.
 - **Great Trail** – from Forks of the Ohio at Shannopin Town (Pittsburgh) to Coshocton, Ohio.
 - **Great Shamokin Trail**– Connected Kittanning, the largest Lenape village in western Pennsylvania with Shamokin the largest Lenape village in the East.
 - **Frankstown Path (Allegheny Path)** - from Paxtang (Harrisburg) on the Allegheny west to Forks of the Ohio at Shannopin Town (Pittsburgh)
 - **Monocacy Path** – an early trade route along the Monocacy River in Maryland and Pennsylvania connecting Conejohela (Wrightsville, PA) with Frederick, MD and Loudoun Co., VA. A second route went further west to the Blue Ridge via Gettysburg and Fairfield, PA.
 - **Kanawha Trail** – mountain ridge route from Lynchburg, VA which connected with the Kanawha River (Anstead, WV) then followed the Kanawha to the Ohio (Point Pleasant, WV) crossing the river towards Sandusky. Used by white settlers as the Kanawha Trace.
 - **Falls of Ohio Trail** – connected Great Warrior’s Path through Cumberland Gap to Kentucky and Ohio River region.
- D. **Post Roads** - the need for communication among European settlements led to the development of “post-roads” – these roads were little more than crude, horse capable paths linking coastal European cities. These roads were improved in the late 1730s-1740s.
- **Boston Post Road** (1664) – connected Boston to New York via Hartford– sometimes referred to as the King’s Highway. A later southern route was added through Providence.
 - **King’s Highway** (1664) – extended Boston Post Road to Charleston, SC utilizing some of the network of trails of Great Warrior Path - sometimes referred to as Boston Post Road. Went south from New York to Philadelphia to Fredericksburg, VA to Norfolk, VA, and Wilmington, NC.
- E. **Early Colonial Roads** –The geographical fall line separating the Tidewater and Piedmont and the Blue Ridge Mountains limited east to west travel – improved roads were necessary for settlement of the backcountry.
- **Fall Line Road** – at Fredericksburg, VA, separates from King’s Highway following the Fall Line between extending south to Mobile, AL – along portions of the Great Warrior Path.
 - **Upper Road** – (Carolina Road) – departed King’s Highway at Fredericksburg, VA, taking an interior route along the front range of the mountains extending across Virginia and into the Carolinas.
 - **Lancaster Road (Old Philadelphia Road)** – Overland route connecting Philadelphia with the Susquehanna – and the Great Valley Road and Monocacy Road.
 - **The Great Valley Road** (1744) – followed treaty which established a line (route of Great Warrior Path) between native and European settlement. Followed former routes of warrior path and

Monocacy Path using the Shenandoah Valley as a means of northeast to southwest travel from Lancaster, PA to Cumberland Gap.

- **Pioneer's road (1746)** – Wagon Road est. from Alexandria, VA through the Blue Ridge – allowing Maryland settlers to not have to travel to Philadelphia before crossing the mountains.
- **Nemacolin's Path (Gist's Trace) (1750)** – Chief Nemacolin and Col. Thomas Cresap were employed by Christopher Gist as agents of the Ohio Company to blaze a direct route between Will's Creek (Cumberland, MD) and the mouth of Redstone Creek on the Monongahela River (Brownsville, PA). Gist established a plantation (settlement) along the route for the Ohio company. It was later destroyed following Washington's surrender at Fort Necessity.
- **Mohawk Turnpike (1793)** – as settlers moved from Boston west, the Old Connecticut Path and Iroquois path became the Mohawk Turnpike. In 1825, this route was utilized by the Erie Canal.
- **Buffalo Trace** – utilizing the route of the Falls of Ohio Trail from Lexington, KY to Louisville, KY the Buffalo Trace crossed at the Falls and went northwest to Fort Vincennes. French traders used the route east and it became a major route of migration west.

F. Late Colonial Roads:

- **Braddock's Road (1755)** - at the onset of the French & Indian War, Gen. Edward Braddock in command of 600 Virginia Militia and the Coldstream Guards built a military road along Nemacolin's Path. Col. James Burd oversaw construction. The objective was to take Fort Duquesne. Braddock's forces were surrounded just west of the "Turkey Foot" and Gen. Braddock was fatally wounded. Among his troops were Christopher Gist and Col. George Washington. The road was later completed to Fort Pitt (Pittsburgh) when the British seized control.
- **Forbes' Road (1758)** - Brig. Gen. John Forbes led a second expedition against Fort Duquesne. In 1755, Col. James Burd had used native paths to blaze a road from Fort Loudon (in PA) to the "Turkey Foot" (Confluence, PA) where it intersected Braddock's Road. Forbes followed Burd's route to Raystown (Bedford), then headed northwest towards Fort Duquesne – avoiding the lowlands where Braddock was surrounded.
- **Wilderness Road (1775)** – Following the "Falls of Ohio trail, Daniel Boone blazed a single-file horse trail for the Transylvania Company from Fort Chiswell through the Cumberland Gap to Lexington, KY where it met the Buffalo Trace. The way was steep, rough, and narrow – not unlike earlier Indian paths - and could only be travelled by foot or horseback. In 1796, it was improved for wagon travel.

G. Early Roads of the New United States

- **Nashville Road (1788)** – Virginia Militia built road from Knoxville to Nashville.
- **Zane's Trace (1796)** – Col. Ebenezer Zane, seeking financial opportunities to sell land, blazes a road from Wheeling, WV to Zanesville, then southwest to Maysville, KY.
- **Maysville Road (1797)** – connected ferries at Maysville, KY to Lexington, KY – Debate over its improvement lasted until May 22 1830 when the Maysville Road Act was passed by congress.
- **Natchez Trace (1800)** - road blazed from Daniel Boone's road at Cumberland Gap to Natchez Mississippi – allowing for west to east settlement in southern United States.
- **National Road (1816)** – paved roadway beginning in Pennsylvania, it reached St. Louis in 1838.
- **Hubbard's Trace (1828)** – wagon route from Fort Vincennes to Fort Dearborn (Chicago).

Resources for Identifying Routes

Federal Public Land Records

Land Patents issued in Federal Public Land States include a statement at the top of the record naming the purchaser and from where they are purchasing. Similarly, Military Bounty Warrants provide documentation of the former soldiers unit. Look where the unit was mustered-in and mustered-out.

County Histories

County histories often provide detailed early histories of the area, which may or may not describe migration routes or patterns. Listings of “Early Settlers” often describe from where those settlers came from.

Denominational and Church Histories

People generally move in groups – the most common being denomination. Pay close attention to clergy members – they are often well-documented – and their biographies can provide us with clues as to migration routes.

Military Histories or Atlases

Migration Routes often follow military roads or involve military forts. French Forts in New France became key points of migration. They often were established near waterways and were built because of trade access to Native American settlements.

Canal and Railroad Histories or Atlases

As Canals – and later Railroads – were constructed – they became heavily used for east to west travel. But these routes were not developed in a vacuum. Many of these routes simply follow earlier native footpaths or military routes or connect waterways of prior travel.

For Further Study:

Dollarhide, William. Map Guide to American Migration Routes, 1735-1815.

Lewis, Marcus W. The Development of Early Emigrant Trails in the United States East of the Mississippi. 1932. R 973 L675D

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Myer, William Edward. 1971. Indian Trails of the Southwest. R 970.3 M996I

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