

Section

2

Transportation

Main Ideas

1. Poor roads and shallow rivers made travel and transportation of goods in Texas difficult.
2. Stagecoaches, steamboats, and railroads each offered advantages and disadvantages as means of travel.

Why It Matters Today

Texans in the 1800s worked to improve transportation. Use current events sources to learn about modern advances in automobiles or other forms of transportation.

Key Terms

- oxcarts
- steamboats
- Harrisburg railroad

The Story Continues

Horses and mules did not endure the dry heat of West Texas very well. The U.S. Army soldiers stationed there wanted animals that could survive better. In an experiment, they brought 33 camels from Africa to West Texas. A Texas boy remembered his first encounter with a camel. “When my horse saw one of those things, he ran away with me. I just could not hold him.” The camels were never used widely, and eventually the army sold some of them to freight companies.



TEKS: 4C, 8A, 9A, 10A, 17C, 20A, 20C, 21B, 21C, 21D, 21E, 22D

myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on various forms of transportation used in frontier Texas.



Stagecoach and Freight Lines

Whether by horse, mule, or camel, transportation in early Texas was often slow. Roads were little better than in the Spanish period, turning to mud during wet weather. The lack of good transportation limited economic growth. For the state to prosper economically, Texans needed to find good ways to transport both goods and people.

Most passenger travel in Texas took place on stagecoaches, which also carried mail between towns. Stagecoach lines included routes between Houston, Austin, San Antonio, Indianola, El Paso, and other towns. But travel by stagecoach was difficult and dangerous. Rugged or muddy roads were hard on both coaches and their travelers. Passengers often found themselves repairing broken wheels, fighting bandits, or pushing the coach through streams. A typical stagecoach could carry as many as nine passengers inside and a few more outside.

Daily Life

Texas Roads

Texans—whether on foot, horseback, or stagecoach—often found travel difficult because many Texas roads were little more than trails. Roads zigzagged around obstacles and turned to mud during wet weather. Stumps in the middle of roads could shatter wagon wheels. One traveler noted, “Broken wagon parts lying along the roads give the best evidence of their condition.” **How did the condition of Texas roads affect travel?**

Stagecoach service in Texas improved in the 1850s. In 1858 the Butterfield Overland Mail company began service in Texas. Its line ran from St. Louis, through Texas, and on to San Francisco. Butterfield stagecoaches ran twice a week, providing fast, reliable mail service to California. The 25-day trip cost \$150 plus meals—about a year’s wages for many Texans. Stations along the route kept the coaches stocked with fresh mules and water. U.S. troops at various forts provided protection, but their presence did not guarantee safety, as one customer noted. “The Comanches regard our soldiers much as they would a company of children armed with pop-guns and penny whistles.”

Most stagecoaches were not large enough to move such heavy freight as food products, dry goods, and farm supplies. To transport these goods, Texans used freight wagons—heavy wagons with iron axles and large wheels. Teams of 10 to 20 horses, mules, or oxen pulled each wagon. Most freight companies were located in Gulf Coast towns, because most of the state’s goods moved through Houston and Galveston. From Galveston, export goods could be shipped by water to ports outside the state.

Mexican Americans played an important role in the overland freight business, particularly in San Antonio and South Texas. Much of the freight traffic in this region was carried on **oxcarts**—large, slow, two-wheeled carts with solid wheels. Because they worked cheaper than other freighters, some Mexican American teamsters were attacked in the mid-1850s in an episode known as the Cart War. A number of carters were killed or wounded, and more had their carts destroyed.

Reading Check Drawing Inferences and Conclusions How did the vast distances and difficult terrain in Texas affect the state’s economy?

Interpreting Visuals

Steamboats. Although steamboats provided an alternative to wagons, river travel in Texas was limited. **What benefits of steamboat transportation can you see in this image?**

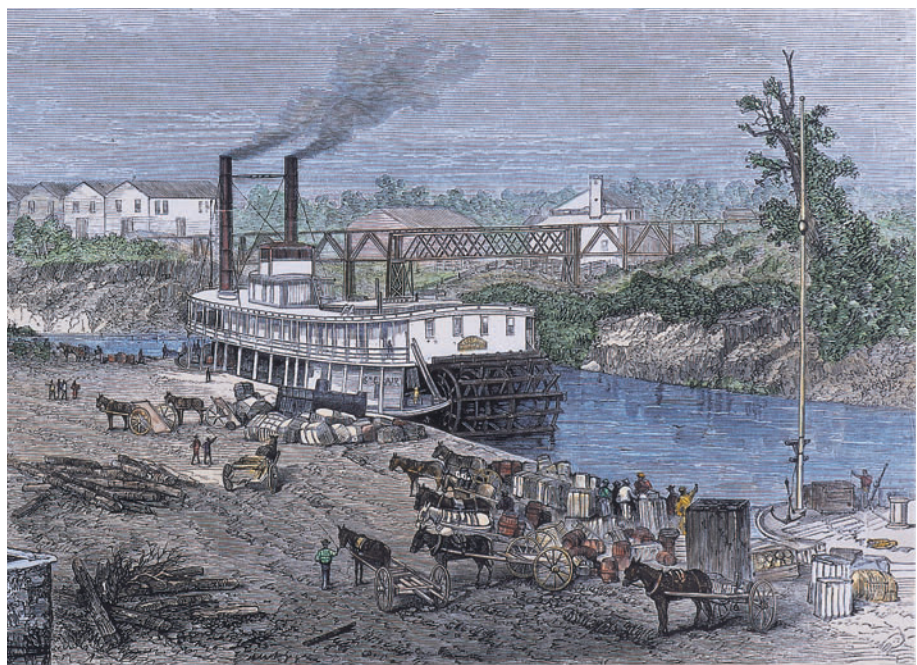


Image Credit: © North Wind Picture Archives



Transportation in Texas, 1860

Interpreting Maps Texas roads were in poor shape, and stagecoach lines were expensive to operate. During the mid-1800s Texans began to build alternative transportation systems.

Human Systems How did transportation around Houston differ from transportation through San Antonio?

★ Steamboats

Although freight wagons could carry heavy loads, they were unreliable and slow. Wagons alone could not keep up with the Texans' needs. So Texans turned to the state's rivers to transport goods. **Steamboats**—which got power by burning wood or coal—could travel along many of the lower parts of the state's rivers. In northeastern Texas, for example, steamboats were loaded with cotton at Jefferson. They traveled along Big Cypress Bayou to Caddo Lake, and from there down the Red and the Mississippi to New Orleans. When rainfall was plentiful, boats loaded with cotton could travel the Brazos, Neches, Sabine, and Trinity Rivers.

Because of its location, Houston became a transportation center and grew to become the state's third-largest city. On Buffalo Bayou, steamboats carried goods, particularly cotton, from Houston to the busy port of Galveston. From there the goods were loaded onto larger ships for the trip to New Orleans, then the South's busiest port.

A few steamboats, such as the *Kate Ward* and the *Colorado Ranger*, were able to travel as far upstream as Austin. But the shallowness of the Colorado River made the trip uncertain and even dangerous. Regular river service to Austin and other interior areas was never established.

Reading Check Identifying Cause and Effect Why did Texans use rivers for transportation, and what was the result?

Railroads

Steamships were limited to areas along rivers. Carts were slow and could not be used in bad weather. Railroads, on the other hand, were not hindered by weather and could move faster than any cart or steamship. But they were very expensive to build. In 1851 the Buffalo Bayou, Brazos, and Colorado Railway began construction on the first railroad line in Texas. Commonly called the **Harrisburg Railroad**, it charged five cents per mile for passengers and one cent per mile for each 100 pounds of freight. By 1856 the line ran 32 miles from Harrisburg on Buffalo Bayou to Richmond on the Brazos River. It soon expanded nearly 80 miles westward to the Colorado River.

Other railroad companies built lines in the Houston area during the 1850s. Lines also connected Victoria with Port Lavaca, and Marshall with Caddo Lake. To encourage more railroad construction, the state gave grants of land to companies. Even so, by 1860 fewer than 500 miles of railroad lines existed in Texas.

Reading Check Analyzing Information What benefits did railroad technology offer over other means of transportation?



Section 2 Review



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ONLINE QUIZ

1. Define and explain:

- oxcarts
- steamboats

2. Identify and explain the significance of the following in Texas history:

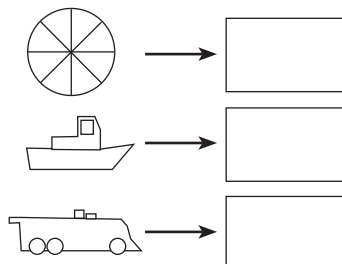
- Harrisburg Railroad

3. Locate on a map:

- Houston
- Galveston

4. Categorizing

Copy the graphic organizer below. Use it to list the advantages and disadvantages of moving people and goods by stagecoach, steamboat, and railroad.



5. Finding the Main Idea

- How did improvements in technology affect the economic development of Texas?
- How did the locations of Galveston and Houston affect their growth?

6. Writing and Critical Thinking

myWriteSmart

Supporting a Point of View Imagine that you are a Texas farmer in the 1850s. Write a newspaper editorial urging Texans to support or oppose railroad construction in the state.

Consider the following:

- a railroad's ability to carry heavy loads, even in bad weather
- the state's enormous potential for cotton production