

Lesson 6: Transportation in Pioneer Iowa

Learning Goals:

Students will understand that early pioneers traveled to Iowa by a variety of means including by foot, wagon, steamboat, stagecoach or railroad.

Iowa History Benchmarks:

6. Transportation
 - a. Transportation was very important for Iowa's early pioneers. Not only was it important for people coming to Iowa, but after arriving, people relied on transportation for their livelihoods.
 - b. The major means of commercial transportation steamboat, stagecoach, and
 - c. railroad developed significantly during the 19th century.
 - d. Each of these means of transportation had positive and negative aspects, and each helped Iowa develop economically.
 - e. The railroad was the most important form of transportation for 19th-century Iowa. It was faster and more dependable than any other form of transportation. It greatly assisted new settlers coming to the state and also aided in the development of new industry.

Materials:

Letter of Ephraim G. Fairchild
Recollections of Sarah Nossaman
United States wall map
Iowa road map

Activities:

1. Introduce the term “[primary source](#).” This term generally refers to official documents, letters, diaries, photographs, advertisements and about any other print material found in its original form. These materials may be transcribed and/or reproduced.
2. The letter of Ephraim G. Fairchild is a primary source. It provides historical information about the life of one early Iowa pioneer settler.
3. Read the letter to students having them listen for the various modes of transportation used by Ephraim as he traveled to Iowa. Using the wall map of the United States, identify the general locations mentioned in the letter as he traveled from the state of New Jersey to Iowa.
4. After listing on the board the modes of transportation identified in the letter, have students generate a list of other means of transportation pioneers may have used. (Examples: stagecoach, steamboat, horseback, etc.)
5. Then develop a chart identifying the advantages and disadvantages for each of the means of transportation (examples: the steamboat was not used in winter; a stagecoach was very cold in winter; the covered wagon could go where other vehicles could not, etc.).

Mode of Transportation	Advantages	Disadvantages
Covered Wagon		
Steamboat		
Train		
Stagecoach		

6. Conclude the lesson by reading to students a short section of another primary source, the recollections of Sarah Nossaman. This narrative describes travel from Fairfield to near Pella. Using this source, confirm and refine the information found on the transportation chart.

LETTER OF EPHRAIM G. FAIRCHILD

(edited for readability)

March 23, 1857

Preface

Ephraim G. Fairchild moved to Iowa with his wife and children in 1857. His uncle, Jeremiah Gard, owned land in Jones County. With the aid of his uncle, Fairchild and his family settled on a farm in Jones County. The following paragraphs describe the journey west from their home in New Jersey to Jones County, Iowa.

Pleasant Ridge March 23, 1857

Ever kind and affectionate Father and Mother and all the rest of the friends. I take my pen in hand to write a few lines to you to let you know, that we are all well at present and hope these few lines may find you all the same.

I will try to tell you something about our journey out west. We had a very slow trip. The cars ran very slow all the way from Jersey City up to Dunkirk so we did not make connection with the train from there and had to stop there from 2 o'clock in the afternoon until 2:30 Wednesday morning. Then we started for Cleveland and arrived there about noon and missed the train there again.

We had to stay there until about 4 o'clock in the evening. Then we started for Toledo and there we made connection with the wagon going to Chicago. There we had to stop about 4 or 5 hours longer. Then we started about 9 in the evening for Dunleath. We arrived there about 9 or 10 on Friday morning and there we met uncle Jerry. He started from home on Wednesday and arrived at Dubuque on Thursday. On Friday we crossed the Mississippi River on the ice with the horses and wagon. Then we started for Uncle Jerry's.

We got as far as the 11-mile house. Then we put up and in the morning we started again and went about 1 mile and broke the arm of the axel tree. Then we were in a fix. No house nearer than a mile. So Eliza and the children got out of the wagon and went on to the 12 mile house afoot and uncle and I unloaded the things into another wagon. We fixed up the wagon

so as to get to the 12 mile house and there was a black smith shop. The smith thought he could fix it. So he went at it as soon as he could and when he got it fixed it was about 2 or 3 o'clock.

Then we started again and traveled on until night. Then we put up at Ozark with a man by the name of E. West. They were very nice people. The next morning which was Sunday it thundered and lightening and rained quite hard until about 9 o'clock. Then it stopped and about 10 o'clock uncle said he thought we had better start before the river at Canton got so high that it wood be dangerous. So we started and got across the river safe and went on home. We got to uncle's about 4 o'clock Sunday afternoon all safe and sound but muddier going I never saw in my life.

RECOLLECTIONS OF SARAH NOSSAMAN, 1842-43
(Edited for readability)

Preface

These recollections of pioneer life were written by Sarah Welch Nossaman so that her children would have some record of her early life. In 1825, Sarah was born in Wilkes County, North Carolina. When she was six years old, her family moved to Indiana. Later they moved again to Illinois and then Iowa.

Sarah married Wellington Nossaman March 17, 1842. They were married near Fairfield where they lived the first year. In 1843 they moved from a rented farm near Fairfield to a land purchase four miles south of present day Pella. Of their new location Sarah wrote, "On May 17, 1843, we got to this part of God's footstool. We took a claim four miles south of where Pella now is. But when we got to our stopping place our feelings can be better imagined than described, for there was not a neighbor-for fifty miles, no house, no nothing you might say but wild beasts and Indians. But we thought it was the only way we could get a home."

They spent the spring and early summer getting somewhat settled. By July 3 they had little food and decided to head back toward Fairfield to get food, supplies and more household goods. The following paragraphs taken from her recollections describe the trip back to Fairfield.

As I have told you we got to our claim May 17. I also told you we raised a good crop close to Fairfield. When we started up here we put in our wagon what we could bring in the way of household goods and provisions, and that was not much for we had to make our roads most of the way as we came. On the evening of July 3 we found ourselves with only half a dodger of corn bread and that was baked with the bran in it. That and red tea was our supper.

So we started by team to Fairfield, Jefferson County, next day before breakfast. But we did not get there the first day. About one o'clock the day we started, which was July 4, 1843, we stopped to let our horses take their dinners on grass. We stopped near where the new courthouse now stands in

Oskaloosa, Mahaska County. All there was of Oskaloosa at that time was three men, a dog, a jug of whiskey, an ax, maul, and a load of stakes for staking off lots. Your father said to them, "What are you doing here?" They said they were laying out a county seat. Your father said, "You had better wait till the county is laid off." Canfield, for that was the name of one of the men, made reply, "We are going to lay off the county seat and survey the county around it." But we thought but little of what he said.

After our horses had eaten their dinners on grass, we started on to my father's at Fairfield. We traveled till the sun went down and found ourselves at what was known as Waugh's Point, which is now Batavia. There we stopped for the night, clogged our horses and turned them out to eat grass, but we were hungry and tired. We had some blankets with us. We laid them down under the wagon to keep the dew off and laid down on them for the night; but we were too hungry to sleep much. We thought we would get up about three o'clock and start on, but when we got up to start on our horses were gone.

Your father started in search and tracked them by the dragging of the clogs through the grass. About ten o'clock he found them several miles from the wagon, so it was after twelve o'clock when he got back to the wagon. It was a long hungry day for me. We started on as soon as we could get ready and at six o'clock in the evening we got to father Welch's, as we thought almost starved to death. But we were not as nearly starved as we thought, but we were hungry enough. You will say, "How was it you were so long getting to Fairfield? We can easily drive it in one day now." But we had to make our own roads. Winding around and hunting out places to cross the streams took much time.