

# The National Road

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In the 1740's there was a cry for a "national road." Even though there was not a nation yet, people wanted a road to the "West". The "West" was thought of as the land that lay between the Alleghenies and the Ohio River. The road was primarily needed as a portage between waterways due to the perceived superiority of water travel. Several groups lobbied for a road to ease settlement and the transfer of goods. The people already in the West wished for an avenue to make it easier to market their goods and to buy essentials. The military, too, found certain advantages to a western road. British General Edward Braddock, accompanied by George Washington, constructed a military road from Cumberland, Maryland, to Ft. Duquesne, which paralleled Nemacolin's path. Nemacolin was a Delaware Chief who was employed by Thomas Cresap to seek the best route for a road. This path followed an old Indian trail. These were merely trails, not roads. They were carved out of the wilderness, filled with stumps and sinkholes. Although a sturdy road was needed, little was done.

Economic considerations were highly in favor of a national road, which would allow farmers and traders in the west to send their products east in exchange for manufactured goods and other essentials. George Washington continued to add his support for a road. His western travels, experiences as a military commander, and land speculating convinced him that an easier way to the West was needed. In 1784, Washington traveled to the West, in part to find an optimal route for portages and roads. Along the way, Washington asked settlers for their views on these optimal paths. By the end of the eighteenth century there was a growing consensus that a national road was needed.

The lone problem would be the funding. The debate about paying for a national road came along at the same time as the controversies surrounding the proper role of the federal government. Who should pay? The federal government said it should have no role in "internal improvements." It was unconstitutional to do so. In 1802, a letter known as the "Origin of the National Road" proposed that states exempt federal land sales from taxing and a percentage of the proceeds would be used for road making. In building the road the lowest layer was 12-18 inches deep and consisted of base stones approximately 7 inches in diameter. The road was then made up of smaller stones which were grated down (they had to pass through a 3 inch ring) and gravel. Macadamization was the ideal surface for the time, but due to the expenses it was not available everywhere.

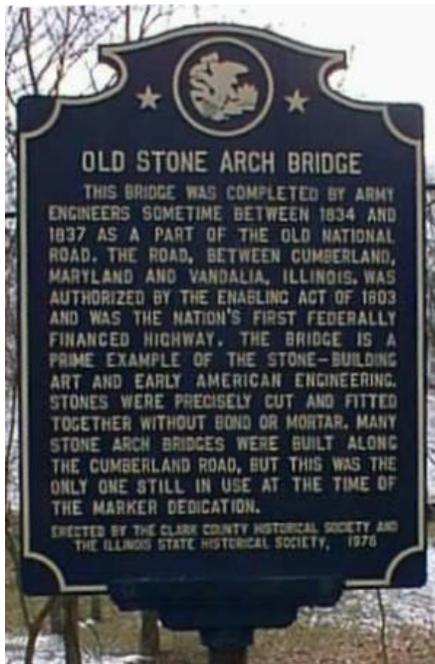
So the road was built. It began in Cumberland, Maryland in 1815. Built in sections, the road to Columbus, Ohio was completed in 1833. The section from Columbus to Indianapolis was made ready in 1840. The final section to Vandalia was made but never surfaced because the railroads had begun to dominate transportation.

The road became a lifeline of goods, people, and culture, from the eastern seaboard to the western frontiers. In 1822, President James Monroe vetoed a proposed legislation to turn the National Road into a federal toll road. Ownership of the road was given to the states

through which it passed. Pennsylvania accepted its part of the National Road in 1835 and built toll houses every 15 miles apart (one day wagon journey). Strong iron gates attached to an iron post were on the road in 1835 to enforce the payment of tolls. These gates weren't often needed because people were pleased with the condition of the road and paid willingly. The National Road had become a turnpike in Pennsylvania and made many of the small communities along it known as "pike towns." As a result of these toll houses, the Nestle Toll House cookies came to be known. Other states would soon follow and make toll houses. Ohio's toll houses collected \$62,446.10 in tolls.

The National Road caused many changes. It quadrupled Indiana's population between 1820-1840. Many towns popped up around the National Road, other cities just grew from the road coming through it. Marshall, Illinois was one of these cities.

**This stone arch bridge is still in use today in Marshall.**



Founded by William B. Archer, Marshall serves the farms that take up the forest land west of East Big Creek. Archer platted Marshall in 1835, at the junction of the National Road and Big Creek. Six years later, the Archer House (a two-story brick inn at the cross of Michigan and the National Road or Archer Ave.) was built and it still stands at the center of Marshall.

Around 1967, safety in a 50-mile stretch from Montrose, Illinois to St. Louis, Missouri came to the attention of people. Serious accidents plagued the area. A board was put

together to decide what was to be done. They had difficulty trying to convince the federal government that something needed to be done. Dr. George Mitchell set up a petition and had thousands of people sign it. The state sent a representative down to the area and a meeting took place. They took the representative out to a particularly bad place in the road. The road turned sharp directly after a hill. They watched for a few minutes when suddenly a small car popped over the hill making an oncoming truck swerve out of the way. This convinced the representative that something definitely needed to be done. He had the state come down to work on the road and put up signs, but the accidents still occurred. At this time, the 50-mile stretch was one of the most dangerous roads in the country. The commission again came together to decide on what to do. After many failed attempts they finally came to a decision. They moved the "no passing zone signs" to the left side of the road so that when a driver pulled out to pass he or she would see them. This seemed to help a lot and has now been adopted throughout the whole country.

The National Road and its history are very enlightening on how life was back then, and the way this great road helped our country. It has provided us with safe travel for many years and will continue to do so for many years to come. It is truly one of the greatest roads in the world.

