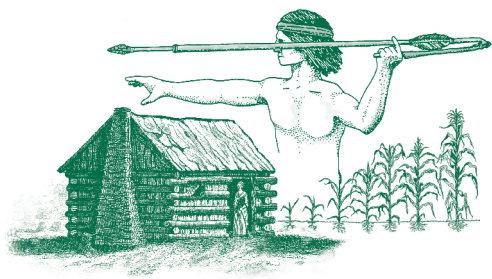


UP FRONT



MEADOWCROFT

By Mark Kelly
Meadowcroft Interpreter/Tour Guide

Carried in Comfortable Coaches


In 1806, Thomas Jefferson signed “An Act to Regulate the Laying Out and Making a Road from Cumberland in the State of Maryland, to the State of Ohio.”¹ This road would ease the journey of settlers moving west by improving part of the existing road cut by British General Edward Braddock in 1755, and link the nation together through the Appalachian Mountains. Construction of the Cumberland Road was completed to Wheeling, Virginia, in 1818. Thanks to the newly graded surface, the four- to six-week-trip from Baltimore to the Ohio River could now be completed in less than half the time.² Drivers moved herds of cattle,

This advertisement informs travelers about passage on the National Road Stage Company's line of coaches.

The Reporter, July 22, 1843.

sheep, and pigs from western farms to the markets of Baltimore and Washington, D.C. Wagoners could transport salt, sugar, tea, coffee, and iron to western settlements, then return with whiskey, wool, flour, and bacon much more efficiently in their Conestoga wagons.³ Even though this improved route made the journey easier for many, the pace of travel was still only a few miles an hour. For those who could afford it, stage coaches offered speedy travel between cities in the East and the Midwest.

The earliest stage lines spanned the 131-mile-trip from Cumberland to Wheeling in four different sections, but ran only three times each week.⁴ These original lines, bought by enterprising businessmen like Lucius W. Stockton and Richard Stokes, were made into a thriving business.⁵ In 1821, Stockton and Stokes ran a stage line between Gettysburg and



FARE REDUCED.
ON THE GREAT CENTRAL ROUTE via NATIONAL ROAD AND BALTIMORE & OHIO RAIL ROAD.

New Line of U. S. Mail Coaches,
For Washington City, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York.

THIS Line is in full operation, and leaves Pittsburgh daily at 7 o'clock, A. M., via Washington, Pa., and National Road to Cumberland, connecting there with Rail Road Cars to all the above places. Travelers will find this a speedy and comfortable route. It being a separate and distinct Pittsburgh and Cumberland Line, facilities will be afforded which have not heretofore been enjoyed. Extra Coaches furnished at the shortest notice, with the privilege of going through direct, or taking one night's rest, at their option.

Fare from Pittsburgh to Baltimore.	\$10 00
Pittsburgh to Relay House,	\$10 00
Thence to Washington City,	2 00
Pittsburgh to Philadelphia.	13 00

For railroad tickets, apply at our Office, at Monongahela House, or corner of Exchange Hotel, and for seats in Washington, apply at D. Valentine's "National Hotel."

J. W. STOCKTON
President of the N. Road Stage Co.
J. C. ACHESON, Sec'y.
March 25, 1843.—1f.

Hagerstown, Maryland. An ad in Washington, Pa.'s *The Reporter* on April 30, 1821, states, “The arrangement of this line, will secure a passenger a safe conveyance from Wheeling to Philadelphia (a distance of 346 miles) in a little more than four days.”⁶ The pair continued to expand their operations west, establishing the National Road Stage Company in Uniontown around 1824.

The National Road Stage Co., with Stockton as president, had lines leaving daily from Washington, Pa., for points both west and east, but needed support infrastructure along the way.⁷ About every 12 miles, Stockton set up relay stations to change the team of horses in a matter of minutes.⁸ These stage coaches could carry nine passengers inside with another sitting beside the driver.⁹

In addition to passengers, mail was also carried on these stage lines because of their efficiency and speed. Before the completion of the road, mail was sent once a week from Baltimore to Wheeling, taking about eight days to arrive.¹⁰ Using stage coach lines,

This stage coach was built by the Abbot Downing Company of Concord, New Hampshire, which operated from the late 1820s to the early 20th century. Factories like Abbot Downing manufactured vehicles to supply companies with the means to transport passengers and goods along the Cumberland Road.

Photo by Mark Kelly.





The Queen of the Road, built by Richard R. Forrest, was the last stage coach to leave Washington, Pa., for Pittsburgh on May 18, 1871. With the completion of the Chartiers Valley Railroad, stage coaches couldn't compete in carrying passengers between the two cities.

HHC Detre L&A, *History of Washington County Pennsylvania*, 771.

mail could be transported 28 times a week and in less than 48 hours along the same route.¹¹

Traffic on the road boomed and then began to wane by the 1850s and '60s as the railroad moved further west. Railroads moved goods, people, and mail further, faster, and in greater volume than the wagoners and stage coach drivers. Stage coaches were still used, for a time, to network areas together that were not yet connected by rail. Eventually, they ceased to be needed and many of these vehicles were sold west to do the same thing they did here: move people and goods ahead of the railroad.

A stage coach, as well as a Conestoga wagon and other vehicles, can be seen in the *Trails to Trains* exhibit at Meadowcroft when the museum reopens in May.

² *Register of Debates in Congress*, Mr. McKennan speaking on Cumberland Road, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., May 3, 1832, 8, pt. 2:2728.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Earle R. Forrest, *History of Washington County Pennsylvania* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1926), 1:748, 750.

⁵ Thomas B. Searight, *The Old Pike: A History of the National Road, with Incidents, Accidents, and Anecdotes Thereon* (Uniontown: privately printed, 1894), 148.

⁶ *The Reporter*, April 30, 1821, 3. Google News Archive.

⁷ Forrest, 750.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 753.

⁹ Searight, 148.

¹⁰ *Register of Debates in Congress*, Mr. McKennan speaking on Cumberland Road, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., May 3, 1832, 8, pt. 2:2728.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2729.

¹ U.S. Congress, *An Act to regulate the laying out and making a road from Cumberland, in the state of Maryland, to the state of Ohio*, 9th Cong., 1st sess., March 29, 1806.

Below (Left):

Hill's Tavern, now known as the Century Inn in Scenery Hill, was built in 1794 by Stephen Hill to provide food and lodging for settlers moving west before the Cumberland Road improvements. After the road was completed, it continued to be used as a stop for wagons and stage coaches. On August 17, 2015, an accidental fire caused heavy damage, forcing it to close, but the owners are rebuilding and hope to reopen this year.

HHC Detre L&A, *The Old Pike*, 267.

Below (Right):

With increased traffic came increased maintenance. This led to ownership of the road being transferred to the states it ran through. Pennsylvania took possession of its section in 1835, and six toll houses were built to defray the cost of maintaining the road. Searight's toll house still stands just west of Uniontown as one of the original six.

HHC Detre L&A, Charles M. Stoltz Photographs, MSP 0021.B003.F26.101.

