

AICP STUDY GUIDE

Podcast

Episode 8: By Land or By Sea

And welcome friends, to the eighth episode of the VERY UNofficial AICP podcast. I'm Jonathan Miller, and really, thank you all so, so much for joining me. I hope everyone enjoyed their weekends and got back to work okay, and are still surviving.

Last week we talked a little bit about the Land Ordinances of 1784, 1785, and 1787, and a little bit about the PLSS - that is Public Land Survey System - and how all of those changed the way land was chopped up, and ultimately, their effect on planning.

This week, we're moving forward and looking at what role the Erie Canal and National Road played in planning, and the development of the United States, in general. I mean, we can't get too far into the more modern parts of planning unless we know what helped us settle down on these areas in the first place.

That said, two of the major developments that were pivotal in allowing the westward expansion were the Erie Canal and National Road. So, take your pick, do you go by land or by sea; or rivers and lakes, whatever.

So, the National Road which was the first real highway built by the feds, and the Erie Canal was, a canal, the end. If only.

(01:36)

This time in our time travel machine, let's head to 1806.

If you remember from the last episode, the U.S. won the revolutionary war and we got all the land, eventually, we figured out how to cut it up and sell it/give it away as payments or what not, and we had created a pathway to statehood.

So, all the settlers start moving in, but because of the Appalachian Mountains, all these settlements seemed really cut off from the east coast.

Now G.W. - that's George Washington - and T.J. - if you didn't guess, Thomas Jefferson - think that this really isn't a great thing that it's cut off. They thought we needed to be more connected. They thought we needed to be unified. So, in 1806, Congress at the time, authorized the National Road to be constructed which created a connection, or which would create a connection between Cumberland, Maryland and the Ohio River.

But Why Cumberland, Maryland? Because that was sort of as far as the Potomac River would reach. And why the Ohio River? Because that connected to the Mississippi River downstream, and basically connecting these two would create really easy connections to a lot of lands in the new United States.

Anyways, 5 short years later and BAM; in 1811 construction was underway. The contract was awarded to a guy named Henry McKinley and in that first year, the first 10 miles were constructed.

By 1817? It was constructed from Cumberland, Maryland all the way to Uniontown, Pennsylvania. And

within a year after that? In 1818? It was completed all the way to Wheeling, West Virginia; the Ohio River. The plan was complete.

At this point, mail service was executed on the National Road and thousands of settlers began using the road to head west through the Appalachian Mountains. I mean there really weren't a lot of options here. It was this westward migration that led to the settlements of Wheeling, Columbus; it even helped cities like Pittsburgh and Cincinnati expand and grow because the National Road didn't just create a way for settlers to move west; it created a way for goods to move west.

The road brought supplies and created a way for people to send goods back east and brought goods to the west. That commercial expansion was pivotal in growing these western regions. Travel times between the Atlantic and the Ohio River, those were cut in half. But the national road wasn't the only infrastructure development going on at the time.

(04:32)

You could technically say that the Erie Canal technically started before the National Road. At least it was a little baby idea before the National Road was. In fact, it was originally proposed sometime in the 1700's, but that was a little too soon to take action, I guess.

It was repropoed in 1807 – remember, this is a year after the National Road was authorized - it finally gained some traction, and with a survey completed in 1808, the debate was on.

Interestingly, it was repropoed by a guy in debtor's prison actually, who failed a business because there wasn't a great way to transport his goods back east. In fact, it took about two and a half weeks to get from New York to Cleveland around that time, and it wasn't cheap either. The cost alone to transport really anything from New York to Cleveland - or anywhere else for that matter, hell, anywhere from one side of the Appalachian Mountains to the other - was so expensive that it was counter-productive to send pretty much anything.

The number one export at the time in the Ohio Valley - remember this is what they called basically everywhere in the northwest; the principle place developing at the time - was grain: Cheap grain, and hard to transport grain. So really, it wasn't even worth transporting grain back east.

Anyways, finally in 1817, when the National Road was just reaching Uniontown Pennsylvania, the Erie Canal started construction, and that was in Rome, New York. Within a couple years, the first 15 miles of the canal from Rome to Utica opened up.

Now that is not very impressive at all actually. Fifteen miles over two years is basically like construction times now. Most of this slow progress was due to a lack of innovation in ripping out trees, but that was solved relatively quickly with some innovation that we won't cover here....feel free to check the links provided for information on that one.

The main problem from there though was labor, but immigration was hitting a high swing and the influx of Irish helped with labor issues and kept everything moving along just nicely.

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On land though, in Wheeling at the National Road, everything had worked out nicely. The road was busy, packed with settlers; it was even described to be as busy as main streets in cities.

They worked out so nicely that Congress said, "Hold up;" this is paraphrasing again by the way. They said "Hold up, this National Road has been awesome, and people keep moving west! So "F" it, let's keep it going and extend this baby all the way to St. Louis."

And in 1825, they said "Scratch that, make it Jefferson City!" So Construction picked back up and they kept expanding the National Road, providing more access to more places to more and more settlers.

Up north though, they were still chugging forward at an amazing rate actually, and in 1825, while they

were dusting their shoulders off, they said, "Done!"

And with that, BAM! The Erie Canal was complete, and they had bragging rights too. When it was finished, the Erie Canal was considered an engineering marvel, and frankly, it deserved it. Over 363 miles long, including 18 aqueducts and 83 different locks, it connected Lake Erie to the Hudson River.

The weird thing was it was only 4 feet deep and 40 feet wide. That's just over a typical three lane road, not including shoulders, and well, shallow enough for most people to stand in. But it was enough to float 30 damn tons of freight.

Along the banks they had also included a towpath which, in case you didn't know why it was called that, was a path for horses to tow the boats.

It didn't end up taking too long though for the demands of the Canal to catch up to its initial capacity. They started projects to enlarge it in 1836 and by 1862, it was improved to be 7 feet deep - can't stand in it now - and 70 feet wide, more than most rights-of-way on local roads in today's planning era.

That extra 30 feet wide and 3 feet of depth? Well, that increased a boat's capacity to be able to carry 240 tons of freight, which frankly is just amazing.

(09:16)

When they completed the Erie Canal in New York, Congress had just finished saying, "Scratch that!... make it Jefferson City!"

Cruising along - pun definitely intended - they made it to Vandalia, Illinois in 1836. Unfortunately, an economic recession caused them to stop construction and move on to other worries, and so there it stops; in Vandalia, Illinois.

The National Road was also seen as an engineering marvel. Not only was it the first publicly funded roadway - even though maintenance of it was turned over to the states - it was also one of the first roads to use the macadam road surfacing.

Basically, both the National Road and Erie Canal were enormously pivotal in the settlement, development, and growth of the United States. The Erie Canal opened up whole new industries in the west, made it cheap enough to get grains to the east coast - which if you remember anything about economies of scale - allowed the western regions to start specializing in different economies.

The National Road on the other hand, while allowing some improved mobility of goods, mostly helped settlers move westward. It also opened up, with much greater ease, the ability to go back and forth, making the integration between these two geographies much more closely aligned.

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And there you have it. All you ever wanted to possibly know about the Erie Canal and the National Road, at least as far as the AICP exam might be concerned, and please pardon any mispronunciations. If you want to know more, feel free to reference the show notes for links to the information we used in putting this together, or just google around a bit and explore.

For those of you who tuned in to the last episode, the answer to our question: "What was the system of measuring and dividing property that was setup under the Land Ordinance of 1785 called...and was Section 16 in this system reserved for?" The answer to that is, the Public Land Survey System, or PLSS, and Section 16 of the survey township was reserved for public education.

For those of you who may want to play along this week, the question is: "In What City, and What Year, was the National Road completed?"

Well, thanks again everyone for tuning in. I can't say it enough, but it really means a lot to me. I hope it's at least some help for you guys, and if it isn't? Email me, send me a message on the website, whatever,

and let me know what I can do. Or let me know if there's something specific you want covered, or if you have any questions at all.

As always, all of the links I used to put this together can be found in the show notes. If you have any questions that you want to follow-up on, feel free to reach out to me at theveryunofficialaicpguide@gmail.com, or send me a message on Instagram or Facebook. Those accounts are the VERY Unofficial AICP Study Guide Podcast on Facebook, or just The Very Unofficial AICP Podcast on Instagram.

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Make sure you tune in next week too as we dive back into some more pertinent planning stuff. We'll talk about the initial model tenements, the New York Council of Hygiene, and how that played into Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's planning of Riverside, Illinois.

Thanks again everyone, 'till next time.

Links:

The National Road:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Road

<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/back0103.cfm>

<https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ah-nationalroad/>

The Erie Canal:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erie_Canal

<https://www.eriecanal.org/>

<https://www.history.com/topics/landmarks/erie-canal>