

Binding Our State Together – A Timeline of Important Developments

- 1800 First post office – Kaskaskia
- 1814 Post offices began to describe and number mail routes -- 16 post offices in 1817
- 1816 Treaty with Native American groups to secure land rights along the “Chicago portage” route
- 1817 first upstream steamboat reaches St. Louis
- 1818 Illinois becomes a state with northern border extended 41 miles north, giving the state control of the Chicago River and Chicago portage

- 1836 Construction begins on the Illinois and Michigan Canal
- 1848 96-mile Illinois and Michigan Canal opened (closed officially in 1933)

- 1836 Galena and Chicago Union Railroad chartered (but construction issues delayed opening until 1848)
- 1839 First railroad mileage in Illinois – 12 miles from Springfield west to Meredosia
- 1848 Railroads pushed out from Chicago – by 1851 state had 45 miles of railroads
- 1850-1870 decades of major railroad expansion and major expansion in number of post offices (by 1860 – 2,679 miles in the state; Chicago was served by 11 railroads and had established as the key rail center in the country; by 1870 – 4,823 miles in the state)
- 1850 Federal land grants for the Illinois Central Railroad, including 705 miles in Illinois for its main line from Cairo to Freeport and the “Chicago branch” from Centralia to Chicago; chartered in 1852 – completed in 1856 (first use of federal land grants as an incentive for rail construction which later was used and expanded for the construction of the transcontinental routes)
- 1854 Chicago and Rock Island Railroad reaches Rock Island (1856 crosses the Mississippi)
- 1855-64 Other railroads reach the Mississippi River at Burlington, Quincy, Clinton, E. Dubuque, and Alton)
- 1880 Railroads were “ubiquitous in Illinois” - most settlements of any size were within 5 miles of a railroad
- 1882 Peak tonnage on the Illinois and Michigan Canal
- 1883 Standard time zone adopted by railroads
- 1920 Peak railroad mileage in Illinois 12,128 miles (#2 in the country)

- 1863 Free home postal delivery, first in Cleveland and quickly expanded to other cities
- 1864 Chicago and Northwestern had the first official Railway Mail Service – “an innovation which changed American’s concept of distance and time”; by 1910 rail handled 98% of intercity mail
- 1870 1,494 post offices in Illinois
- 1882 Montgomery Ward begins mail order business in Chicago
- 1893 Sears Roebuck begins - becomes second major mail order company
- 1896 Beginning of Rural Free Delivery as an experimental service, including out from Auburn in Sangamon County); 1902 - RFD became a permanent postal service; by 1905 was implemented in most places
- 1913 Introduction of Parcel Post by the U.S. Postal Service

- 1892 Construction begins on the Illinois and Mississippi (Hennepin) Canal – extending 75 miles from Hennepin to Rock Island, 419 miles shorter than the Illinois and Mississippi River route (idea for this route dates from 1834, but action was delayed repeatedly, often a result of railroad lobbying)
- 1907 Opening of Hennepin Canal – officially closed in 1951 -- never carried much traffic – but the communities along it perceived some linkages – now linked by the state recreational parkway

- 1895 First electric interurban railroad in Illinois
- 1900-1912 Period of growth of electric interurbans, notably the Illinois Traction System (started in 1901) which operated 400 miles in a “reasonably connected network” in central Illinois and was the largest system under one management in the U.S.
- 1914 Peak mileage year in Illinois – 1,422 miles (#4 in the country) (1916 - national peak 15,580 miles)
- 1908 Henry Ford introduces Model-T -- revolutionizes auto production and auto sales – prices drop in each of the next 8 years – became the people’s car” -- produced the 1 millionth Model T in 1924
- 1910-30 Rapid increase in auto ownership in Illinois 131,000 (1910), 375,000 (1918), 1.6 million (1929)
- 1900-1920 Expansion of the Good Roads Movement as
- 1913 Tice Bill – committed state of Illinois to improving roads
- 1913 Founding of the Lincoln Highway Association
- 1914 First Lincoln Highway “seedling mile” just west of Malta, Illinois; Illinois became the first state to complete paving of its entire section – 179 miles
- 1916 Federal Aid Good Roads Act – provided \$75 million in 50/50 matching money for states over 5 years
- 1918 \$60,000,000 state bond issue for road improvement – for routes 1-46
- 1921 Federal Highway Act – commitment to develop a large national highway system; more money
- 1924 \$100,000,000 state bond issue for road improvement -- for routes 47 to 185
- 1925 4,800 miles of hard surface roads in Illinois
- 1925 American Association of State Highway officials unified the road numbering system
- 1926 Famous U.S. 66 was designated; most of its diagonal route in Illinois used already-paved state Route 4
- 1925-1931 Period of major decline of interurbans
- 1933 Opening of the expanded and deepened Illinois Waterway system as part of Lake-to-Gulf route
- 1938 Completion of the nine-foot navigation channel on the Upper Mississippi River from Alton to St. Paul
- 1956 National interstate highway bill approved – committed country to 41,000 miles of divided highways
- 1968 First interstate highway completed across the state – Interstate 80
- 1971 Beginning of AMTRAK service in Illinois
- 2017 199 miles of commercial nine-foot navigation from Chicago to Grafton and from E. Dubuque to Cairo
- 9,982 miles of operating railroads (#2 state in the country) – used by 41 railroad companies, including 7,792 miles by all seven Class I railroads operating in the U.S. (only state in the country)
- Thirty cities or towns with regular AMTRAK service on one of four routes
- METRA lines in Chicago metropolitan area – 11 routes, 455 miles, 94 trains each week-day
- Continued operation of the 90-mile Chicago, South Shore and South Bend Railroad (interurban)
- 61,822 miles of paved roads (including 2,184 miles of interstate highways on 25 routes);
- 59,937 miles of “low type” bituminous pavement (bituminous and surface base of less than 7 inches); 22,440 of oil/gravel roads; and only 2,768 miles of earth roads (1.8 per cent of our total road network) (2016 data from Ill. Dept. of Transportation)
- 4,524,709 automobiles registered (2016) (10.4 million total vehicles)
- 1315 post office (#5 in the nation) and continued urban and rural mail delivery