

# The Pennsylvania Road

## ~ Traffic ~

Both the *Braddock Road* and the *Forbes Road* were constructed by and for military. Both led to the French Fort Duquesne, renamed Fort Pitt, later the site of Pittsburgh. At the height of *Braddock's Road* building effort, about 3000 troops engaged in construction. As many as 4000 men worked on the road at Laurel Hill under Forbes' command.

*Braddock's Road* was the first road to cross overland through the entire Appalachian Mountain range, and for the first time allowed horse-drawn wagons to travel into the West.

Migration moved westward through Fort Pitt as settlers on foot, horseback and wagons trekked from eastern Pennsylvania and New England west to new lands and opportunities.

Leaving from Philadelphia at 2:00 a.m., the Lancaster stage traveled 33 miles to reach Downing Mill by nightfall. The second night the traveler reached Lancaster, another 33 miles.

"The German craftsmen at Lancaster and other towns in the Conestoga Valley were proud of their work. They had designed their huge wagons with bodies shaped like lazy, inverted rainbows to carry their produce to market in Philadelphia. Although the rigs were so heavy that six husky horses were required to pull them, they couldn't be constructed any other way, for it took the toughest oak to keep the vehicles from being shaken apart--as many less-well-made wagons were. Then, too, the hickory-spoked wheels, lofty as a man's shoulder, were especially built not only to withstand the most jarring boulder, but to carry the wagon above the tree stumps which studded all but the most frequented roads." --Douglas Waitley, *Roads of Destiny*.

Toll roads were built by contractors or by hired laborers supervised by trained road-builders. Turnpike companies had to hire people with at least some understanding of civil engineering to lay the road out. On the whole, the turnpike roads were well located, and well built. Most American turnpikes were 20 feet wide. The *Lancaster Pike* was at least 24 feet throughout and even wider in places.

When the Pennsylvania river-canal system opened between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, it reduced traffic on Pennsylvania's turnpike. As Robert Fulton had suggested in 1807, "on a road of the best kind, four horses, and sometimes five, are necessary to transport only three tons. On a canal one horse will draw twenty-five tons, and thus perform the work of forty horses."

## ~ Features ~

The *Forbes Road* story: Faced with the need to build a road to move troops during the French and Indian War, General Forbes met both military and political objections to his plan to cut a new road to Fort Duquesne instead of dropping down from Fort Bedford to the old *Braddock Road*. His proposed road was 54 miles shorter with no major rivers to cross, and there was grass for the horses. Virginians, wishing to have no competition for the area they claimed around Pittsburgh, wanted *Braddock's Road* to be used. Pennsylvanians demanded a road through their territory to aid in the later development and settlement of their western country. The determined Forbes won permission and pushed on with his chosen route. The Indians and the French were at first unaware of the existence of *Forbes' Road* construction efforts. That changed when Major Grant attempted a premature ambush of Duquesne, with a fight resulting in 273 British and Colonials killed, wounded, or taken prisoner. Soon after, the French commander sent most of his 3000 troops home until the following spring, and word of this reached Forbes. At Fort Ligonier, Forbes abandoned road improvement and set off to Fort Duquesne with a force of 2500 men. They were nearly to the Fort and camping for the night when they heard deep thundering rumble; the French blew up their fort and abandoned it. The mission was over, and a nearly completed road would continue to serve the Americans. Forbes renamed Fort Duquesne as Fort Pitt, after his commanding general.

A State charter for the Philadelphia to *Lancaster Pike* required that it be 50 feet wide between fences. Of that, at least 24 feet was to be bedded with wood, stone, gravel, or other hard substance, then faced with gravel or other small hard substance to secure a firm and even surface. The gradient was limited to an angle of 4 degrees with the horizon, the equivalent of a grade of 7 percent.

The *Lancaster Pike* returned no more than 2 percent of the invested capital for the first 5 years after its opening, but, as the western part of the State developed, the profits rose, and in some years they reached the maximum permitted by the charter (15 percent.)

After completion of the *Lancaster Pike* to Lancaster, the Pennsylvania Legislature granted charters for extending it on westward to Pittsburgh. The State of Pennsylvania subsidized this *Pennsylvania Road* by subscribing to stock in some of the companies.

The area designated as "The Forks of the Ohio" is the site of present-day Pittsburgh.

~ *Timeline* ~  
**The Pennsylvania Road**

Pre-colonial

The Indians' *Allegheny Path* runs along the Schuylkill River to connect Shackamaxon (later Philadelphia) with Paxtang (Harrisburg.) Another Indian trail--the *Raystown Path*, continues on from Paxtang to Shannopins (later Pittsburgh.) Together the two cover much the same distance as the future *Pennsylvania Turnpike*.

1725 The first overland road begins as early as 1725 to what becomes Lancaster and then on to Harrisburg.

1731 Lancaster sends 200 citizens to the Provincial Council complaining about the need for a suitable road to Philadelphia for the transport of their produce.

1733 Money is approved for the *Great Conestoga Road*.

1741 The *Great Conestoga Road* is completed. It later becomes part of the *Pennsylvania Road*.

1755 General Braddock's military road is constructed, chopped out to a width of 12 feet, wide enough to pass his train of 150 Conestoga wagons in a single file.

1758 The *Braddock Road* has reverted to a trace through the forest. Other roads are needed for defense against the Indians and the French.

1758 A trans-mountain *Pennsylvania Road* is widened during the French and Indian War to provide passage for General John Forbes' wagon trains.

1792 The Pennsylvania Legislature establishes the *Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike Road Company*. The act specifies the termini and general route of the road, sets minimum engineering standards and confers the right of eminent domain for taking necessary right-of-way and road materials.

1794 The *Lancaster Turnpike* opens to traffic in 1794 at the going rate of a penny a mile, depending on the number of horses and the size of the wagon.

1834 The Pennsylvania river-canal navigation system opens between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. This causes heavy freight to be diverted to the canals. Most of the wagon freighters go out of business, but the stagecoach lines continue to prosper.



The Pennsylvania Road

**Route of the Pennsylvania Road**

**Great Conestoga Road and the later Lancaster Pike:**

- Philadelphia, PA
- Lancaster, PA

**Forbes Road:**

- Harrisburg, PA
- Chambersburg, PA
- Ft. Loudon, PA
- Ft. Bedford, PA
- Ft. Ligonier, PA
- Ft. Duquesne, PA (Pittsburgh)

**Pennsylvania Road:**

After the *Lancaster Pike* was completed, the Pennsylvania Legislature granted charters to extend it westward to Pittsburgh, following closely the route of the *Forbes Road*.