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Transportation and the Community



◀ *Interurban railroads, such as the Lakeshore Electric (shown at its Sandusky station in 1927) connected communities much as bus lines do today. CAC General Photograph Collection.*

Transportation has been vital to the settlement and development of the nation, and Ohioans have created thousands of records relating to it. By tracing the history of transportation through the variety of materials available at the Center for Archival Collections, researchers can follow the economic history of the state.

Community cooperation is documented in subscription lists for bridge building and local records for ditch and road maintenance. The development of engineering can be traced through blueprints and maps used for construction. The canal era is represented in canal boat registers and maps, while the **Historical Collections of the Great Lakes** holds a significant collection on the Great Lakes shipping industry.

Though railroads were private enterprises, they were scheduled, regulated, taxed, and unionized, leaving behind a rich source of information on Ohio business and everyday life. The petroleum industry flourished because of the need for fuel and is represented in the surviving records of such businesses as the Oil Well Salvage Company (MMS 15) and in the photographs of the Irven I. Freyman Collection (**MS 91**). The automobile industry continues to be of great economic importance for northwest Ohio, and CAC collections include material on its unions, workers, and companies such as Willys-Overland. Transportation-related records offer a unique perspective on many aspects of American life. Researchers are invited to sample the possibilities.

—Lee N. McLaird

Local Government Transportation Records

Serving both interurban and automobile traffic, this refreshment stand at Ceylon Junction, Ohio used signs to attract customers in 1930. CAC General Photograph Collection. ▶

Local government records often have responsibility for roads, ditches, ferries, wharves, streetcars, and airports; consequently, county, township, and municipal records may relate to them. Not only do these records reveal community effort and construction techniques, but they also teach much about the people, economy, and changing landmarks.



In the early nineteenth century, the Ohio General Assembly gave the Board of County Commissioners the task of constructing local highways. *Free Turnpike Records*, *Highway Improvement Records*, *Tollkeepers' Reports*, *Works Progress Administration Files*, and the *Commissioners' Journals* from the County Commissioners' office include a variety of information on the history of transportation.

By 1862, rail transportation was so important to local economies that the General Assembly created a regional Board of Railroad Appraisers and Assessors for each railroad company. Each county in which the company had a right-of-way was represented by its Auditor at an annual meeting to determine the taxable value of railroad property. Records such as *Annual Appraisement Reports* and *Apportionments for Taxation* were kept by the Board. The Board was disbanded with the creation of the Tax Commission in 1910. Today, these records may be preserved in the archives or found in the county Auditor's office. In addition, *Railroad Deed* and *Lien Records* may be located in the County Recorder's office. Lastly, *Records of the Railroad Policemen's Commissions*, which contain copies of appointments and commissions issued by the governor to railroad police, may be found in the Court of Common Pleas. The growing importance of the automobile was demonstrated as early as 1906 when the County Surveyor gained engineering responsibilities for roads and bridges. By 1935, the title changed to Engineer, and candidates for election were required to be licensed professionals. *Road Records*, *Bridge and Culvert Records*, and *Free Turnpike Records* contain valuable information on county roads.

The Board of Township Trustees is responsible for ditch and road maintenance. *Ditch Records* (including *Journals*, *Plats* and *Profiles*) include proceedings on the establishment and construction of ditches, while *Road Records* contain information regarding the establishment, alteration, or vacation of public roads. These may also include plats and maps, accounts, and names of citizens who worked on roads. *Minutes* of the Trustees may also include information relating to transportation.

In the late nineteenth century, some municipalities operated streetcars, and city records may have been preserved detailing their financial and physical operation. City Engineering and Street Departments retain records such as *Blueprints*, *Maps*, and *Plans*, *Contracts* and *Agreements*, and *Improvement and Repair Records*, which document the construction and maintenance of streets and bridges. Some cities also have Traffic and Transportation Commissions to address these issues specifically. Airport records, such as *Air Traffic Reports*, *Minutes of the Airport Commission* or *Airport Authority* and *Proceedings of the Airport Zoning Commission* are created by offices responsible for the operation of municipal airports.

Local government records also may be found relating to riverboats and river dredging, lake vessels and ports, canals and canal boats, and stagecoaches. Check your local government offices or the CAC for information regarding the history of transportation in northwest Ohio.

--Victor S. Wagher