

The Iron Road of Progress

The railroad was the first great technological and spatial innovation of the modern era, well ahead of ocean-going steam ships and continent-spanning telegraphs. Railroads rapidly eroded the difficulty and cost of shipping freight and people over progressively longer distances, promoting economic development and population growth. Railroads enabled the early modern maritime empires to become continental empires. In the United States, railroads became the fast and efficient way across the continent from east coast to west. As might be expected, railroads had an outsized presence in nineteenth-century life and cartography. Or was it the other way around, that cartography had an outsized presence in the creation, operation, and impact of the railroads?

Trackways began to be laid in the seventeenth century for horse-drawn wagons hauling minerals from mines to navigable waterways, but it was the introduction of small steam engines after 1830 that led to the rapid growth of railroads. The first railroads were short, either leading to waterways or connecting urban centers to nearby towns. They soon began to supplant the waterways and refocused industrial development at new sites, notably Chicago but also smaller centers such as Indianapolis. The discovery of gold in California in 1848 hastened plans for transcontinental railroads. Extensive explorations in the 1850s led to three main routes that leapfrogged the plains to reach the Rockies and eventually the Pacific coast; the costs were defrayed by grants of federal lands to the railroad companies, so they could sell the land to settlers.



Detail showing the path west of Salt Lake City taken by Lt. Edward G. Beckwith's 1854 expedition to survey a potential railroad route near the 41st parallel. From G. K. Warren, *Map of the Territory of the United States from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean* (Washington, D.C.: War Department, 1858). Size of the entire original: 110 × 120 cm. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division (G4050 1863 .W35). Illustrated in Volume 5 in Mark Ovenden, "Railroad Mapping in the Nineteenth Century."

Maps were crucial to railroads, from visualizing proposed routes through detailed surveys and engineering plans for constructing tracks and stations. Regional maps helped trains operate and guided riders through interlocking railroads; maps and views promoted particular routes and helped make grand statements about the national and imperial expansion enabled by the railroad. *Cartography in the Nineteenth Century*, Volume 5 of *The History of Cartography*, includes a dedicated entry comprising essays by fourteen contributors that thoroughly explores railroad mapping in all parts of the globe. Individual entries throughout the volume also touch on the topic, reinforcing the importance of railroad mapping in the nineteenth century.

Railroads completely redefined American spaces, from small places to national and imperial regions, and they intruded into every aspect of the economy. General state maps were retitled (from "map of X" to "railroad map of X") and repurposed for inclusion in guidebooks and published

timetables. Maps of railroads replaced the established spatial hierarchy of states and counties with long lines of towns strung like pearls on a necklace; the country itself became an almost organic network of industrial, agricultural, and demographic connectivity. Railroad maps captured and shaped the country's growth and transformation across the nineteenth century—an iron road of progress, indeed.



December 2024

Dear Friends:

I have wonderful news: we're ahead of schedule, and Volume 5, *Cartography in the Nineteenth Century*, is scheduled for press submission in July 2025!

For those unfamiliar with the publication process, "going to press" or "manuscript submission" always involves extensive coordination. My team is now preparing Volume 5 for submission, and it is a massive work. Our publisher, the University of Chicago Press, anticipates that it will take two years to move through the production process. The History of Cartography Project will partner with the Press during production, carefully reviewing each aspect of the volume. It is urgent that we have funding to retain a significantly reduced but experienced staff.

Private funding is now the foundation of our operating budget. Because the

underlying research for this volume is complete, we can no longer secure federal funding. Your donations are therefore crucial. I have set an ambitious but necessary fundraising goal of \$100,000 this season. I thank all of you who have generously supported the Project in the past: may I ask you now to increase your level of support? If you have yet to support the Project, perhaps you can make your first gift? Please consider your capacity for giving and make a gift that can help keep Volume 5 successfully on track.

Will you please make a generous donation today? Thank you!

Sincerely,

Matthew Edney
Project Director

SUPPORT THE PROJECT

Donate Online
supportuw.org/giveto/histcart

Donate by Phone
608-263-4545
877-461-7611

Scan To Donate



For information about giving, visit:
geography.wisc.edu/histcart/how-to-make-gift

The Road to Publication

Editorial Preparation COMPLETE Spring 2025

We wrangled 410 entries by 197 authors into a comprehensive million-word volume, having checked all text, 4,778 citations, and 1,054 illustrations.

Manuscript Submission JULY 2025!

Delivering the complete manuscript, including all content and high-resolution images with permissions to reproduce them, allows the Press to smoothly organize and launch production. This is a major accomplishment.

Volume Production "AT PRESS" University of Chicago Press with review by our editors

With our continued oversight, the Press turns our carefully curated content into a polished work by copyediting and producing galley pages and then page proofs for our review.

Publication VOLUME 5 PUBLICATION

Volume Five will be a balanced, insightful, and definitive history of the origins and development of modern mapmaking and also an elegant, full-color, 1,900-page book.

Above: Thomas A. Morris, *Railroad Map of Indiana* (New York, 1852). A promotional map proposing Indianapolis as the hub of several spoke railroads that would connect with existing waterways and the coal fields in the western part of the state. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division (G4091.P3 1852 .M6 RR210).

Front: *Map of the United States Exhibiting the Grants of Lands Made by the General Government to Aid in the Construction of Railroads and Wagon Roads* (1878) in John Wesley Powell, *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1879). Courtesy of the David Rumsey Map Collection, David Rumsey Map Center, Stanford Libraries. Illustrated in Volume 5 in Michael Conzen, "Property Mapping in the United States."

Special thanks: We are deeply grateful to the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation, through the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research, and to the University of Wisconsin's College of Letters and Science and its Geography Department for past and recent essential sustaining support. Many thanks to NEH and NSF, who provided earlier major support for the series, and to our many donors!

Cartography in the Nineteenth Century

ed. Roger J. P. Kain

Volume Five is going to press!

We are excited to announce that *Cartography in the Nineteenth Century*, Volume 5 of the *The History of Cartography*, is going to press this summer, six months ahead of schedule. This is a major milestone on the way to publication, especially significant because publication of Volume 5 will complete the series and the History of Cartography Project. We've devoted this newsletter to U.S. nineteenth-century railroad mapping, and we feature some of the illustrations that will appear in Volume 5. Enjoy!



Railroad Depot at Philadelphia (1832). Courtesy of the Osher Map Library and Smith Center for Cartographic Education, University of Southern Maine (OML Collections 48070).

Read about U.S. railroad mapping in the nineteenth century inside and online at geography.wisc.edu/histcart/2024-extras

Cartography in the Nineteenth Century is going to press in July 2025!

