

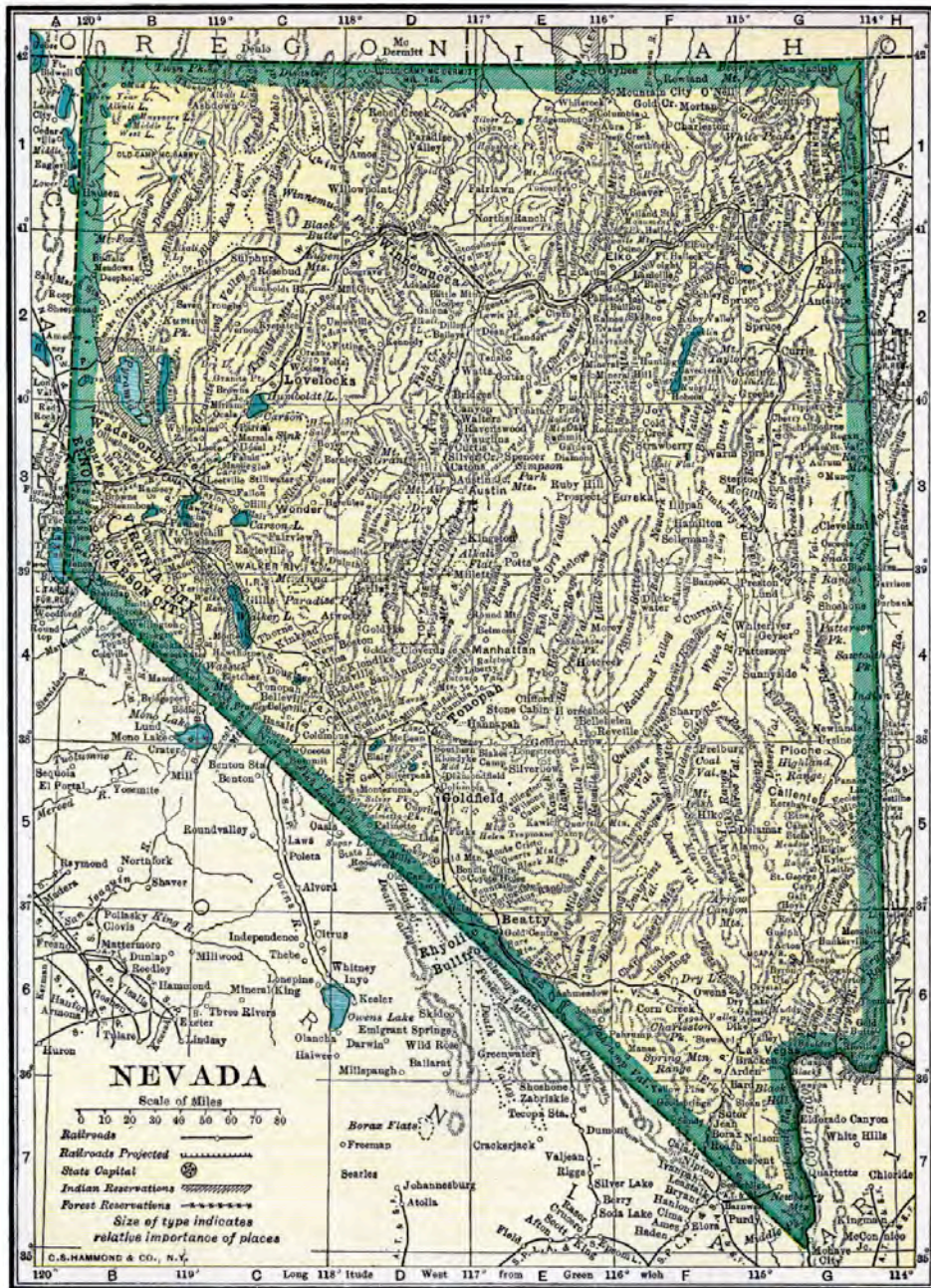
TRUCK TRAIN THROUGH THE SAND

THE 1919 TRANSCONTINENTAL MOTOR TRUCK CONVOY
ON THE ROAD THROUGH CARSON CITY



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Nevada map, 1919.¹

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DREAMS OF SAND

While some dreams glisten green and brown, other dreams sound full of noise and steel, grease and sweat. Americans settled the West with Yankee ingenuity and Pike County pluck. This synthesis seemed perfect for the geography and it endured. As the later 19th century's technological inventions became mainstream during the First World War and afterward, machines seemed to promise an unbridled capture of water and land as well as unlimited access to the natural wonders--spawning tourism on highways. Both efforts lay imbued with romance. The transcontinental truck train of 1919 came to Nevada and its capital, Carson City, signaling a fundamental shift in both the fortunes of the state and the West.

Lead by Lt. Colonel Charles W. McClure with Captain Dwight Eisenhower along as an observer, the 1919 military truck convoy through Carson City has been somewhat forgotten as has been the short-lived effort at a romantic highway in which Carson City played a central and losing role. See the 1919 government video of the convoy at <https://youtu.be/hZJKxkf1D8>

The truck train's machines heralded the end to the solitary wanderer afoot--a shift away from the romantic prospector, tramp or desert rat as he resupplied with his mule and then lived "out there". It would take until about 1927 for that to play out--both in rivalry between Carson and Reno for the ultimate transcontinental route and in the poetry of the "desert rat" collected in Reno. The end came with a world of mechanics and engineers whose would drain wetlands, build dams, plow vast fields and, along the old emigrant trail, conquer the spaces efficiently, sagebrush lain beneath their tires. They never developed a local or western poetry. Instead, after 1933, Nevada saw the gradual rise of a drinking culture beside a mythology of the cowboy delivered from Hollywood.

By the mid-1880s, the West's literati and upper crust had begun to push aside the far-western hero as defined during the 1860s-- the prospector--the cosmopolitan, opportunistic wanderer who picks up wealth off the ground. By 1905, in northern Nevada, the mythology of the West began to revolve around the man and woman who live "out there"--leading by 1919 to the image of the "desert rat". Well hidden lay the parallel dream of the desert mechanic--a story tied to efforts to pave the road across the Great Basin.

Today, Nevada enjoys "cowboy poetry festivals" with song. It also enjoys what might be called "mechanics poetry festivals"--car events that allow men and women from California's car culture to drive scenic highways and escape the traffic gridlock of the golden state--Hot August Nights, etc.. Nevada has always been, fundamentally, a trading culture--mining emigrant and tourist pockets of their dollars. For all the noble goals of the transcontinental truck train, it was the dream of the Lincoln Highway, of romantic commerce, that was most fundamental and enduring.

A western "road" replacing a crude trail has always been fundamental to American improvers who came West beginning during the 1840s. During 1854, the California dreamers thought up a wagon road--funded stage stations spanning the nation. Congress delayed and then only funded the central overland road and the territory that could protect it, Nevada, in 1861 when Southern representatives withdrew in fear of Lincoln's inauguration.

During the late 1850s, the desire for a central overland road led to Carson City as capital of a Territory protecting this road. This was conceived as the ultimate goal, a transcontinental railroad. During 1869, the Southern Pacific Railroad completed its track through Reno. After that, more and more, Carson City became a backwater—a supply town for prospectors, lumbermen, shepherders and ranchers.

Yet, Carson occupied a huge spot both historically on the road and, in the state, as the Capital. The Carson emigrant route had been preferred over the Truckee Meadows (Reno) route during the early gold rush. Carson seemed to be the cultural center of the state. The gold rush trail West saw tens of thousands of young men flee Victorian social duties to brave a land of “elephants”. In the phrase they would bandy back and forth from 1849 through the 1850s, the gold rush boys would “see the elephant” even while their respectable families in the East counseled that it would be mere humbug and flimflam. Honest young men do not pick up gold off the ground. They work in father’s store or on the farm.² And so the young men left—resolved upon the immoral proposition of easy riches. On their journey, bison, the thunderclouds and great looming mountains promised a land where one could pluck wealth from the sand like apples from a tree and live far from the bankers, merchants and debt.

On their heels came the improvers, men who saw their task not as sweating on the sandy bar or tunneling hard rock but as constructing civilization and selling the necessities of exploration—shovels, mules, wagons, grub. Commerce required infrastructure, progress. Along the way, even while fording the gravelly bed of a dry stream, young men struggled with that eternal American dilemma—do we work together or do I go it alone? Are we a company of “pardners” or are we heroes on a solitary quest? During America expansion into the West, companies formed and disbanded. Oxen and mules disappeared at taken, taken by renegade whites and natives. The Sierra rose in the West, a mighty green paradise after endless dust.

The trail West and then the wagon road and then the auto highway ever became the forum for debate. Is it my road? Or is it our road? Who will pay for it? Who will profit from it? Will Washington construct the road and ease the way for Americans in California to push aside other peoples? Or perhaps those in the West should build it themselves, stretching it eastward. Always, first came the dream and then frustrating years of inaction. Progress costs money even when it is obviously needed.

Finally, came those who reaped what others had sown—generations of unaware of who had lain the way or of how travel had always informed the romance of the Carson route. By 1913, for some, the proposition of pavement threatened their vision of Carson City as a quaint backwater. During April of 1916, upset at taxation by the local Board of Trustees, Carson City residents filed a lawsuit complaining about the effort to pave Carson Street. A nearly identical complaint emerged during 2016 when Carson City residents complained about returning Carson Street to two lanes from four. The City had been bypassed by the north-south freeway and the City was undertaking downtown redevelopment. But it costs money—tax money.



This was not the first time the funding of roads through Carson City had been questioned. The Carson route had been favored over the Truckee (Reno) route by gold rush emigrants from 1849 to about 1854. Then drought shifted many to the Truckee route. The loss of business along the Carson route to Placerville led to debate over funding of a wagon road and major debate occurred between California towns on the Carson route and more northern routes—specifically Marysville off the Beckwourth Pass.

Chorpenning ran an unfunded stage along the Carson route in 1858 and when this collapsed the Pony Express seized his stations and provided the romantic story of boys on horses that is now so fondly remembered. Congress delayed funding a stage line on the central overland route from 1854 until 1861, only accomplishing this when Southern representatives withdrew, unhappy at Lincoln's election. In the meantime, an unfunded stage line failed and the Pony Express was created to fill the gap. During 1861 funding of the central overland wagon road made Carson City a key location on the central overland route but for only eight years. Then the Southern Pacific spanned the nation—through Reno. Through the remainder of the 19th century, Carson City became a declining supply town for lumbermen, prospector and ranchers. At the same time, like San Francisco, it nurtured a literature steeped in the glory days of the Comstock.

Carson City became enamored of its singularity, history and smallness. Then, the 1919 truck train represented a dramatic shift away from the culture of the trading post and of men living “out there”. It presented a more mechanized world in which the old, bucolic mythology of the far West would soon need to be told through horses, cows and the lore of the cowboy. The lore of the miners, desert rats and tramps who traipsed the hills would disappear. The lore of the mechanic would go unrecognized by purveyors of culture as the image of the cowboy ascended from out of Los Angeles and the Southwest.

The truck train made it clear that the future lay in a strip of asphalt. It would take decades, again, for Congress to fund the inter-state highway system. However, both in general and specifically—through Eisenhower—the truck train made that direction clear. The truck train took the romantic dream of the Lincoln highway and turned it into a journal of worn bearings and blown engines.

In the background, surged rumors of a more basic and ancient truth. As with the stage, the auto adventurer might sink downward, hearing rumors of underground rivers beneath the Great Basin, legendary torrents driven by a sinkhole beneath Lake Tahoe³. Early on, it was said that rivers flowing eastward from the Sierra sank into the dust because, on the seventh day, God rested—to tired to run them to the sea.



THE YEAR: 1919

With the end of a catastrophic war and in the wake of an international flu epidemic, 1919 saw America thrust into a new era of sobriety, jazz, drunkenness, respectability, progress and nostalgia. In the West, the dream of the pioneers became a dream of mechanization, of linking isolated hamlets to the rest of the nation, of tourists exploring exotic sites, of practicality in boots. The West of prospectors and mules gave way to a West of rodeo cowboys and tin lizzies. At that moment, the capital of Nevada, Carson City, seemed poised to emerge from the snow-like shedding of the cottonwood trees and become a tourist mecca.



The Truck Train left Washington DC on July 7, 1919. Within a few days, merchants and others began telegraphing Washington and Nevada Governor Boyle, asking that the planned route be altered so that half the convoy would go on the "northern route"--through Reno--rather than all going through Carson City. He relayed these to Gael S. Hoag in Ely, Nevada--the Lincoln Highway Association State Consul for Nevada. Hoag wrote Governor Boyle strongly rejecting this idea. He blasted the Reno effort as a compromise of the Association and the government's plan. In essence, he stated that the Carson route was the better route precisely because it was the worse route and would thus provide the best test--showing the need to improve and pave an intercontinental highway.

My Dear Governor:

I have your wire as follows: "An avalanche of telegrams and citizens and organizations on Pikespeak route in Nevada is going to Washington and coming here, asking that army transport be divided at Saltlake-one half to be routed each way. Both roads must be built and every efforts has been made by us to see that each is treated fairly and that sectionalism is reduced to minimum. This matter, badly handled, may sow seeds of permanent discord, if request of Northern people is not heeded. In interest of whole road program would it not be a wide and gracious act were you to join in request that part of train take Northern route?"

While I appreciated that you would not have sent this wire to me unless you had felt the conditions warranted such a suggestion yet I feel compliance would be useless; This project was conceived by Mr. Osterman, Field Secy. of the Lincoln Highway, in 1918, shortly after the signing of the armistice; his objection, primarily, was to further the Good Roads propoganda, which we all believe can best served by concentrating on an object lesson road; that be creating a demand for on main artery the people will make that artery so strong on object lesson that first connecting lines, and eventually all roads will be made as good as we make the model.

The Lincoln Highway directors believe the true method is not to scatter out ammunition but to select an objective and then attain it.

In furtherance of that plan Mr. Ostermann spent many months of the hard work in Washington and it took even more time that originally expected to get the Government wheels to moving. Before the signal to state was given every detail--equipment, route, personnel, dates, etc.-had to be reduced to the finest detail, in accord with war dept. procedure. It would be quite out of the question to make a change in that itinerary at this late date....

...Those who are asking this seem to think it is just a Government circus out on parade, not a real military maneuver, and may be switched at will like a mine rescue car; therein they misunderstand the purpose of the trip.



The movement of a proposed change is backed by Reno,—the real reason being to attempt to nullify retaliation made by the Lincoln Highway officers of persistent efforts of that city to injure the Highway; the plan is too evident to be successful....

...The Reno crowd must furnish its own brains and not try to steal the fruits of the enterprises of others.....

G. S Hoag.

Dwight D. Eisenhower's report later summed up controversy, understating it.

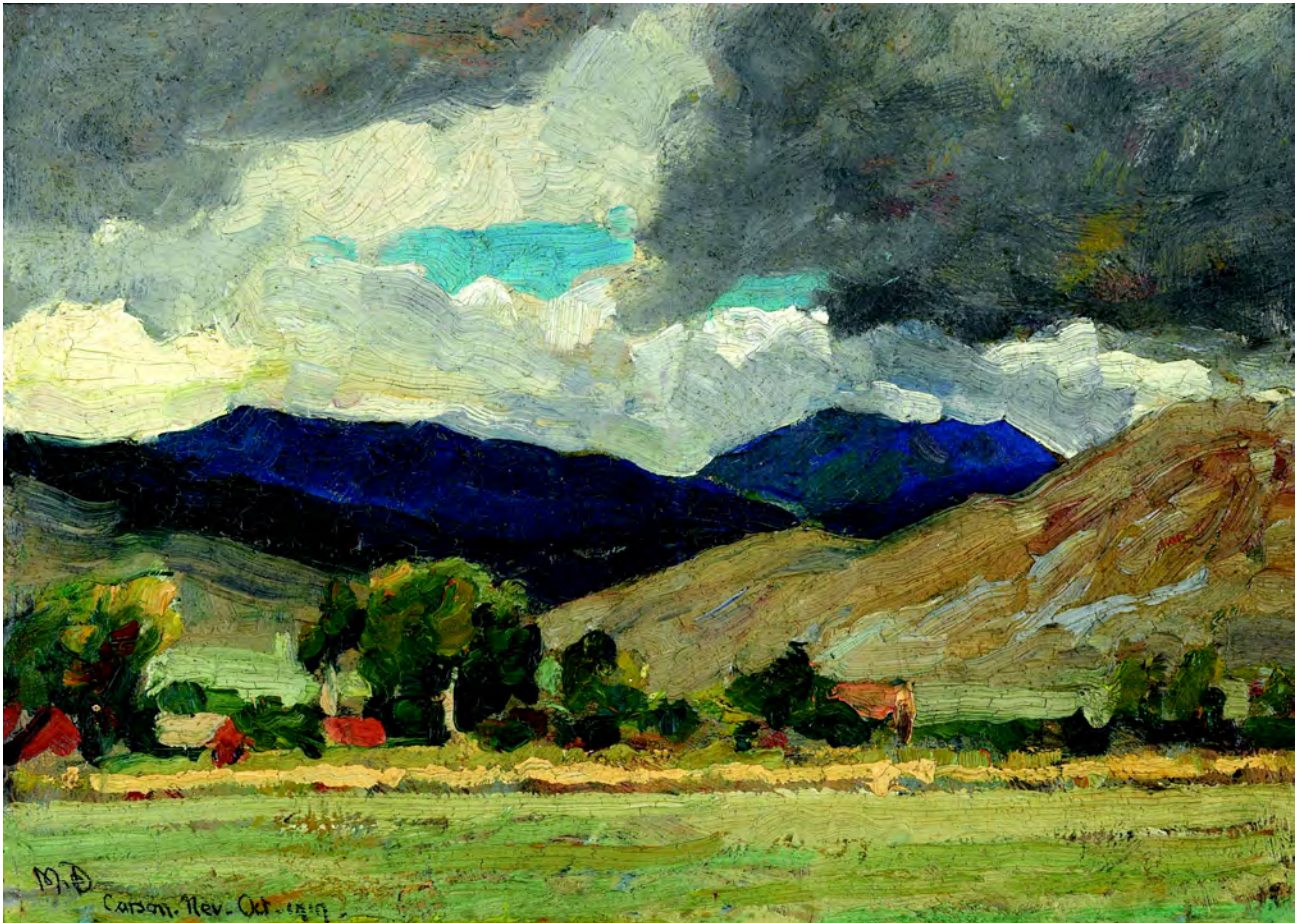
There exists at the present time a controversy between the Lincoln Highway Association and some of the people in the section west of Salt Lake as to the best location for the Trans-Continental Road across this part of the United States. Many citizens informed members of the convoy that there existed across the northern part of the states of Utah and Nevada a good location for such a road. They states this route is free from grades and summits, is close to water and railroads, and is through a more thickly populated section.⁴

Reno had strongly pushed for the convoy to take the "northern" route and had failed. As a result, at least on the surface, from 1919 to about 1924, Carson City seemed poised to capture the transcontinental auto route. However, by 1927, Carson City had been by-passed, nearby Reno securing the important highway.

THE ROMANCE OF THE WEST

Hoag's ruthlessly practical argument—that the Carson route was desirable over the Reno route because it would be the more difficult and hence provide the best "object lesson" belies a broader, public and cultural interest in seeing the nation as a site-toursim.

Mechanization—the automobile—promised to open up the West's scenic destinations. Maynard Dixon captured Carson City's bucolic western serenity in his October 1919 painting looking north across Fifth Street to the cottonwood trees that lay along the creek in Chinatown, running eastward past the capital. Further in the distance, to the north, lies Duck Hill, then Slide Mountain and Mt. Rose.⁵ Dixon loved to wander the West, the sound of his rattlesnake hat-band announcing his presence.



With mining in decline, much of the far West was turning away from the image of the rambling prospector toward the more upright, stable image of the rancher or cowboy as a western hero. A longing for a past that never existed in a singular sense—a cowboy west—was beginning to grip the West and it would be taken up by the industry that was replacing mining, tourism. Where the trail and then road through Carson City and into California had once signified intense struggle, during the height of the nostalgic era—1905 to about 1930—the road was being repackaged as scenic romance.

In the wake of this nostalgic era would come a West dominated by the machine—the automobile. From 1913 to the close of the Lincoln Highway Association during 1927, the interstate highway effort stemmed from the romance of the West coming out of California. Hence, for a time it was planned through Carson City. However, it ultimately became a practical enterprise, running through Reno.

1919 marked the beginning of this shift away from romance in the West and this shift came in the shadow of larger national changes. For the nation, 1919 would be a turning point. The end of the Great War saw disillusionment with old-line aristocracy, an embrace of a new, more fluid moneyed class. Progress was the word of the day. The Lincoln Highway's San Francisco dreamers envisioned a continuous route across the nation. Still, virtually none of that track was yet paved or even graded. They could look at that new invention, the automobile, and see a new age of progress. For these men the Lincoln Highway would be a scenic pathway, a romantic recreation of that earlier voyage to the golden state. The highway would be the last great road quest to be mounted by those in the West who had long been seeking a tangible connection to the East they had left behind. An alternate scenic route lay in the "Pikes Peak Route". Like the Lincoln Highway, until about 1923 this route had alternates—an ambiguous approach to a marketing idea. In this case, the goal was to bring travelers and dollars to St. Joseph, Missouri. By 1915, four national routes were proposed across the nation.

As had long been the case, this vision would be easier said than done, a venture more easily conceived in the big city than managed along the hot, dry, rutted trails that America then called roadway. The idea called for promotion. The most challenging portion lay in the dust and peaks to either side of Nevada's capital.

A western highway is a straight thing—going irrevocably in a direction, over the sand like a bridge over water. Construction of a road seems a protection from lawlessness in the wild. The chief architect of the Lincoln Highway idea, Carl Fisher, noted the difference between ideas and reality. "The highways of America are built chiefly of politics, whereas the proper material is crushed rock, or concrete", wrote Fisher in 1912. With motorcars multiplying, his cross-country highway proved a popular idea and 1913 saw the dedication of the Lincoln Highway, 3389 miles of roadway, less than half of it improved, little of it paved. This would be the nation's first idea for a transcontinental highway and, as such, the dream



had its feet in the romance of the 19th century West. There is surviving film of the Lincoln Highway opening.⁶

It's easy to announce a highway. It's another thing to build one. Pavement takes money—tax money. Early motorists on the Lincoln Highway were advised to carry chains, a shovel, an axe, jack, tire casings, inner tubes, tools and a Lincoln Highway Pennant. The guidebook said, “don't wear new shoes.” On a good stretch, a car traveling the Lincoln Highway might go as fast as 35 miles an hour. Overall, in the early years, the trip took 60 days, with cars averaging 18 miles an hour.

At first the Lincoln Highway was just a line on a map, a not very certain line, following trails and old stage routes. What the Lincoln Highway idea needed was publicity—never mind exactly where the line would be drawn. While 1913 represented the last year of the aristocracy and its romance, the Lincoln Highway got its boost in the aftermath of the aristocracy's destruction—the Great War. In 1919, the recent creation—at least by declaration—of the Lincoln Highway dovetailed with a strategic need by U.S. Army. Having sent a variety of trucks to battle during the Great War, the Army had noticed a variety of mechanical failures and, with the Great War ended, resolved to test its trucks. Additionally, they wanted to interest men in becoming mechanics, show the importance of trucks to the recent war effort and look at their ability to secure the West Coast in the event of an attack from Japan. The Japanese defeat of the Russians in 1905 had been alarming.

The Army sent a Transcontinental Motor Truck convoy onto the newly proclaimed Lincoln Highway, to cross the nation from Washington D.C. to San Francisco. With 253 men, 60 trucks and 12 cars, averaging 6 miles per hour, the expedition departed Washington D.C. on July 7, 1919. It covered 3,251 miles in 62 days at an average speed of about 6 miles per hour and contained 81 vehicles, a mobile machine shop, several motorcycles, a searchlight and 280 officers and enlisted men.

The truck train would be both the final great exploration of the trail by pioneers and a signal that, henceforth, the road served the purposes of social order. The time was ripe. During 1917, Nevada created a State Department of Highways and in 1919 began to fund highway construction.⁷



A TERRITORY TO PROTECT THE ROAD

The truck train suffered disagreements between officers and, at the onset, a lack of discipline.⁸ Initially, many drivers were inexperienced—driving was not yet a universal American skill. The nation was undergoing a great transformation from rural to urban—with even the rural areas now mechanized. Men often lacked mechanical skills and needed to learn by trial and error.



The Truck Train passing the Cold Springs Pony Express Station, central Nevada. August 28, 1919

Lessons learned from observation of personnel are that officers and men should be thoroughly trained as soldiers before entrusting them the valuable equipment of a motor train.⁹

The eastern portion of the expedition saw inexperienced drivers running off the road. It appears only two of the men in the expedition had had previous truck driving experience.



In the West, though the drivers now had hard-won steering ability, the drivers faced the Great Basin. The truck train headed West from Utah, crossing Nevada to Austin, Nevada, and, 65 miles later, passed the Cold Springs Pony Express Station. Though only operating for a year in 1860-61 and while operated as a stop-gap measure due to lack of federal funding for a stage line, to this day the Pony Express remains emblematic of bravery in the West. The most famous incident in its history came early-on when, in the wake of Major Ormsby's defeat by the Paiute tribe at Pyramid Lake, Pony Bob Haslam made a record breaking journey that included his dramatic arrival at the Cold Springs Station.

Major Ormsby had arrived in western Utah during 1857. In 1859 he rang his cowbell to call a convention to declare a new Territory. Beneath the surface, it was an effort by a Vigilante Committee. Ormsby saw this new Territory as vital to building and protecting an overland road. In his eyes, that road would bring many emigrants to the far West allowing California and Utah to split into many states—both slave and abolitionist. This would mirror that division in the East, ensuring the permanency of the slave state model and forestalling the looming national war. It might also result in creation of a separate nation, the Pacific Republic. Ormsby was the stage agent for the Pioneer Stage Lines and a political operative.

Ormsby's friend, political theorist James Crane, lobbied Congress through 1858. Through that year, a ramshackle and underfunded stage line ran east from Carson City, with stations along the trail. Though they had declared a Territory, announced the Comstock Lode and proposed taxing the flood of arriving miners, Ormsby's effort to create a stage line



floundered with arrival of the heavy 1859/60 winter. The Pony Express commenced, 55 men hired out of Carson City. One of their first chores lay in building a footing in the sand along the Carson River.

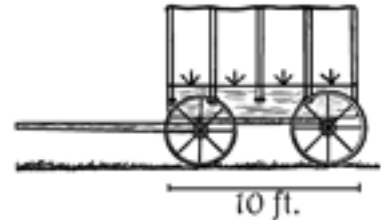
To begin with, we had to build willow roads, corduroy fashion, across many places along the Carson River, carrying bundles of willows two and three hundred yards in our arms, while the mosquitoes were so thick that was difficult to tell whether the man was white or black, so thickly were they piled on his neck, face, and arms.¹⁰

During June of 1860, Ormsby's death, along with 80 some men, at Pyramid lake, lead to Paiute raids along the trail and to Pony Bob's dramatic ride. Ormsby had

heard about a Paiute raid on the Williams brother's station along the big bend of the Carson River, east of Carson City.

He didn't know that the raid had been prompted by the Williams' capture of a Paiute girl whom they had "ravished" and/or Paiute concern for the Pony Express station consuming local grasses. He accompanied 100 men north to Pyramid Lake in an effort to enforce American justice—perhaps expecting the Paiutes whom he considered his friends, to be receptive to an armed American force.¹¹ The Pyramid Lake battle and the stories of this ride may have convinced Congress to fund the Pony Express. Congress remained deadlocked on the issue of funding a central overland road due to opposition from the South. This ended on the eve of Lincoln's inauguration as the South withdrew its representatives from Washington. Congress officially created Nevada Territory and funded the central overland road, ending the Pony Express, during March of 1861. The "pony" embodied romance:

...I had adjusted my Spencer rifle, which was a seven-shooter and my Colt's revolver, with two cylinders ready for use in case of emergency, I started. From the station onward it was a lonely and dangerous ride of thirty five miles, without a change, to the Sink of the Carson. I arrived there all right, however, and pushed on to Sand Springs, through an alkali bottom and sand hills, thirty miles farther, without a drop of water all along the route. At Sand Springs I changed horses and continued on to Cold Springs.... When I arrived at Cold Springs to my horror I found that the station had been attacked by Indians, the keeper killed, and all the horses taken away. I decided in a moment what course to pursue—I would go on. I watered my horse, having ridden him thirty miles on time, he was pretty tired, and started for Sand Springs, thirty seven miles away. It was growing dark, and my road lay through heavy sagebrush, high enough in some places to conceal a horse. I kept a bright lookout, and closely watched every motion of my poor pony's ears, which is a signal for danger in an Indian country. I was prepared for a fight, but the stillness of the night and the howling of the wolves and coyotes made cold chills ran through me at times; but I reached Sand Springs in safety. ¹²



Emigrant Wagon, the "Yankee"



TAKING ON THE DUST

The news around the convoy tended to take on a local slant at each major stop. In Salt Lake City, on August 19, The Deseret Evening News lauded the arrival of the convoy and subsequent parade.

With the arrival here today of the army motor transport convoy, “ship by truck” will be the legend of from 350 to 400 trucks that are participating in the big parade this afternoon to welcome the caravan here.....A “ship by truck” bureau has been established by the local branch of the Firestone Tire & Rubber company....¹³

When Lieut. Col. McClure, commanding officer of the convoy, reached the reviewing stand six Red Cross girls stepped out of the throng that crowded the streets and placed a large floral offering on the front of his machine.¹⁴

A dance was held. And a telegram was sent to Washington urging federal funding of a transcontinental road. The same edition reported auto tourists complaining that the transcontinental roads had been “cut to pieces” due to a long dry spell.¹⁵ The road and its inevitable changes were not universally welcomed. A few days later, Utah ordered signs to mark the Lincoln Highway across the state. When when they were put in place, many were destroyed by people throwing rocks.¹⁶

After struggling through the dust in Utah, the convoy progressed well across eastern Nevada across the flats between mountain ranges. Arriving in Fallon, Nevada, at 4pm on Aug. 29, the men feasted on 1700 lbs. of melons—“heart of gold cantaloupes”—while the 15-piece Goodyear Band gave a concert—much as it had done in many previous towns. All along the route, towns feted the soldiers.

The next morning the convoy set out across the ancient dunes remaining from the prehistoric sea. On the way into Fallon the truck train had passed Grimes Point—a rocky slope where petroglyphs testified to frogs and fish and the cave cache of trade goods that connected Native Americans from far north to far south. Snaking through the alkali flat valleys between Nevada’s innumerable dry mountain ranges, the convoy could look up at the descending rings along the slopes where the ancient sea had receded.

After a 4:45 am reveille, at 6:30 am on August 30 the truck train left Fallon Nevada heading west toward the dunes by Lake Lahontan and the faded location of Ragtown—destroyed in 1854 by bad whiskey. There, gold rush emigrants had built a town from the remnants of wagons destroyed by passage across the 40 Mile Desert that lead north from the Carson Sink to the Humboldt Sink.

In the dunes, two miles west of Fallon, as had earlier gold rush wagons, the truck train’s heavier vehicles sank a foot and a half into soft sand and quicksand. The tanker trucks sank five feet into the sand. The men pushed. A bridge gave way—the expedition found most desert bridges to be full of dry rot.¹⁷ The next 12 miles took 11 hours. The 66 miles to



Carson would ultimately require 20 hours.¹⁸ The uniformed men became “desert rats”, as prospectors referred to themselves—covered in dust like those old timers who still pulled mules across the dry ranges of the West.

The Desert Rat, Ralph Garnier Coole, June 3, 1919¹⁹

Tonopah’s some lively, son,
Boomin’ shore enough.
Strikin’ pay dirt every day,
Durn good lookin’ stuff.
Camp’s plumb full o’tenderfeet;
Plenty sourdoughs, too;
Some with pokes cram full o’dust,
Some without a sou.

Dancin’ girls with dreamy eyes;
Makes my heart grow young.
Heard one sing a song tonight;
One I ain’t heard sung
Since I hit these diggin’s
Years an’ years ago—
Heard the music sobbin-like—
Sobbin’ soft an’ low.

I was just a youngster then,
Careless, wild an’ free;
Might a been a millionaire—
But—spent it! That was me.
She had hair just like the gold,
Shinin’ fair an’ long—
Funny how it all came back,
Listenin to that song!

Life was young an’ so was I—
Then—there came a day!
He was sleek an’ handsome—
An’—well, she went away!
Many, many moons, son,
Since I heard that song—
Got a prospect in the hills—
Guess I’ll move along.



1919 signified the end to the “desert rats” with mules, the prospectors who had long camped out for months in the West, coming together to share poetry and slang. A few continued to own mules. But, the handwriting was on the wall. Their lore had been a defining element to the mythology of the far West, going back to 1849. Now, the machine—the “tin lizzy”, that reliable servant—made it possible for men to visit that perpetual base



camp, Carson City, pack for a few days, go “out there” and return to a warm bath in short order. The weekend lark would replace a life-style. The culture of desert rats soon evaporated, leaving in its wake only the slang of the working stiff and hoboes.

The world of the prospector was coming to the end and the mining imagery of the West would soon to be replaced by Hollywood’s imagery of the cowboy gunslinger. Improvement to the Lincoln Highway would soon make it possible for men to navigate out into the desert without bogging in the Fallon Sink. Prior to 1920, cars still needed to be prepared to dig out.

The post war reduction in need for metals left many Nevada miners faced with unemployment or a fresh need to strike out on their own and prospect. In 1919, gold production in Nevada was down.²⁰ Labor unrest was on the rise. Mining had generally become a corporative enterprise and 1919 occasioned great criticism of the socialist element, the Wobblies, in the mining unions. Joining in America’s first “red scare”, Nevada papers labeled the socialists, "rattlesnakes," "vipers," and "reptiles."²¹



In the dunes to the west of Fallon, the “dirty truckers”, as they called themselves, saw their “heaps” bog down.²² The “dirty truckers” learned what gold rush emigrants had earlier found –light vehicles sink less and, hence, work better in sand than heavy vehicles. The route from Utah to Carson City had become legendary. In his first Sherlock Holmes novel, during 1887, Arthur Conan Doyle outlined a desperate flight on horseback from Mormon pursuers westward along this trail.

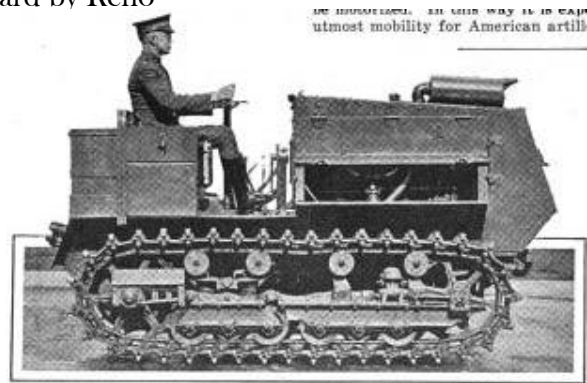
Once safe in Carson we may rest for the remainder of our lives. During the whole of that day they struggled on through the defiles, and by evening they calculated that they were more than thirty miles from their enemies. At night-time they chose the base of a beetling crag, where the rocks offered some protection from the chill wind, and there huddled together for warmth, they enjoyed a few hours' sleep.²³



Leaving Fallon, the truck train could have taken the more northerly route, through Reno. They could have turned south from Reno to reach Carson City. Reno certainly sought this route and had been warned about the road through Carson. Assigned as official observer for the Tank Corps, twenty eight year old Lieutenant Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower noted the practical reasons put forward by Reno boosters:

They state this (Reno) route is free from grades and summits, is close to water and railroads, and is through a more thickly populated section. At least, the Lincoln Highway over this portion of the country is so poor as to warrant a thorough investigation, of possible routes for building a road, before any government money should be expended on such a project.²⁴

Eisenhower's recommendation would prove prophetic but it would not be the generals in Washington who brought them to pass. The Reno Commercial Club had long been lobbying for Reno as the route of the Lincoln Highway. They felt that this status had been achieved in 1914.



Five-Ton Artillery Tractor, Successfully Tested at Washington Monday, June 3



However, as planning for the highway moved forward, Reno got into a dispute with the Lincoln Highway Association who felt the Carson route to be more beautiful, more historic and a more thorough object lesson in road building. The Carson route united travel with the romance of the West. As the disputed heated up, in 1919 there were allegations that money collected in San Francisco to improve the road out of Fallon toward Carson was diverted to Utah efforts in opposition to the Lincoln Highway.²⁵





The soldiers pulled the sunken trucks pulled through the sand with a Maxwell Artillery Tractor—a caterpillar tread adaptation of the farm tractor, like the tank. ²⁶



At the beginning of the trip, discipline among the enlisted personnel of the M.T.C. was almost unknown. This condition was probably the worst in the S.P.O. 595. This lack of discipline was largely due to inexperience, and poor type of officers. It resulted in excessive speeding of trucks; unauthorized halts; unseemly conduct, and poor handling of truck in the convoy.



In the East, due to their top heavy construction, slick and narrow hard rubber tires and inexperienced drivers, trucks slipped sideways off of muddy roads, rear wheels ending up in the ditch. In the East, the mud created a slick silt over the top of packed road beds. In contrast, in Utah and more-so at Lahontan dam, the trucks simply sank downward. The dam had been completed during 1915. However, the road ran perilously close to the water. A mile of road had been replaced as recently as May after becoming submerged.²⁷ The road bed often remained saturated, a thin and deceiving crust at the top. The resulting ground was not so much wet mud as dry quicksand.

The light cars did best. The heavy trucks broke through and there was no base beneath. The mud was not so much wet as bottomless. As they had in eastern Nevada, often dressed in overalls, the soldiers dug out the Mack truck carrying the Artillery Tractor after it sank in the ground. They chained the trucks together, pushed by hand and hauled them out of their holes using the tractor, as they had across the Great Basin. Sagebrush was spread in the wheel ruts for traction. Railroad ties were placed beneath the tires of the tanker trucks. In their shirts and ties, the officers supervised.

Eisenhower described the isolation of the desert route leading to Carson City:

In western Utah, on the Salt Lake Desert, the road becomes almost impassable to heavy vehicles. From Orr's Ranch, Utah, to Carson City, Nevada, the road is one succession of dust, ruts, pits and holes. This stretch was not improved in any way, and consisted only of a track across the desert. At many points on the road, water is twenty miles distant, and part of the road are ninety miles from the nearest railroad.²⁸ P4



Later, Eisenhower dryly understated the lessons that would accrue just east and west of Carson City. And he made the first official report that fatter tires do better when negotiating sand. And he suggested never bringing heavy vehicles into the sand.

In heavy going, such as sand and stiff grades, the heavy types were always in difficulty. Chain drive trucks would simply not operate in sand, and practically all of the heavy trucks had to be pulled through sand stretches. In such places, the lighter types, (1 1/2 ton) usually went through without help. This was especially true of those mounted on pneumatic tires (ambulances). The heavy types also labored excessively of stiff grades.²⁹

The heavy should be confined to rear areas, in supply depots and the like, on hard surfaced roads; and in general on short hauls.³⁰



OFFICERS TO A PARTY

The truck train and its military conquest helped pave the way for tourism on the highway. However, that highway would now be fundamentally a practical consideration--no longer dictated by scenery and instead defined by the machine. The dream could not compete with the needs of bearings and pistons.



The machines rolled on towards Carson City, the military creeping westward inexorably to deliver official progress to the eager western town. The narrow hard rubber tires that had carried many of the trucks to victory against the "Hun" during the recent war now sank into the sand.

After WW1, trucks, tractors and land reclamation pumps blossomed across rural America--often with a blind faith in the good. During the recent Great War, the future President had longed to be sent to battle. Instead, during 1918, Eisenhower was appointed commander of the Army Tank Corps training center at Gettysburg. Tank use during The Great War had precedent. It was entirely new--an experiment with a new weapon that became more effective in short order and through painful trial. Initially, tanks were sent head-on into battle, leading the infantry. This is how the Army had long seen war--tactics where the men remained paramount. In the industrialized combat of the Great War, the men were decimated and the tanks destroyed.

Nonetheless, the public found tanks exciting. Beginning in 1917, tanks appeared prominently in newsreels back home. By the end of the war, both George Patton at the front and Eisenhower at the Tank Corps believed tank could do more than lead an infantry charge. Eisenhower's observations of the truck train through the western desert would echo and refine what he and a few others had learned about tank warfare. Chain drive heavy trucks lacked maneuverability and easily sank in soft roads. Like the tank, the treaded Maxwell managed everywhere.



While the men struggled at Lahontan dam, leaving the bulk of the men behind to dig out, the truck train's officers rode in the light cars to Carson City, arriving mid-afternoon, August 30.



The men set up their tents east of town in a newly marked “campground” and posed in line for a picture. Many seem to have already put on ties for the festivities. Some of the men still had dirt on their faces. Eisenhower stood at the center. Later, Eisenhower’s report neglected to mention that the officers left their men.

...there were three instances involving an aggregate period of forty-two hours, which were spent in the most arduous and heroic effort in rescuing the entire convoy from impending disaster on the quicksands of the Salt Lake Desert in Utah and the Fallon Sink Region in Nevada. In these emergencies, the entire personnel, regardless of their rank, engaged in rescue and salvage operations.³¹

It was probably Nellie Davis who wrote about the event in her newspaper, The Carson Daily Appeal. For years it had been her husband, noted writer Sam Davis, who had run the paper while she ran their Holstein ranch. Sam died during 1918. She reported on the party to be thrown for the officers who had gone ahead in the light cars to Carson City.

Bad roads in the vicinity of Lahontan dam were responsible for the delay and they caused all kinds of trouble, not only giving away themselves and permitting the trucks to break through until the latter rode on their axels, but they were the cause of breaking many parts of the motors.

But, if the boys of the train had a hard time in overcoming the obstacles and difficulties which confronted them on the road between Fallon and Carson it was dispelled and turned into joy by the reception they received when they arrived in this city. As quickly as they arrived and could park their trucks they were at once taken to the lawn on the north side of the Capitol, where the tables had been placed and were set down in front of the greatest feed they had received on the road. Everything in the edible line, from soup to nuts, was there and it disappeared like a mist on a May morning. The tables were beautifully arranged, spread with linen and ornamented with flowers and real silver. Paper napkins, tin plates and pewter knives and forks were taboo, these giving way to furnishings that would suggest to the boys their own home life. And flocking about them, like ministering angels, were the ladies and girls of the local chapter of the Red Cross anticipating and attending to their every want.

Up until long past midnight the Carson band was on hand and furnished splendid music both for the entertainment of the guests while they were eating and also to permit them to indulge in the pavement dance which proceeding between times on the main street in front of the Capitol.

All about the Capitol block flags and banners had been strung and all was heightened and brightened by the glowing of thousands of electric lights. In all, it was a glorious scene, made perfect by natural settings and the warmth and balm of midsummer night.³²

Back on the Carson Sink, the remaining, regular soldiers continued to dig trucks from the mud. It took hours and hours.





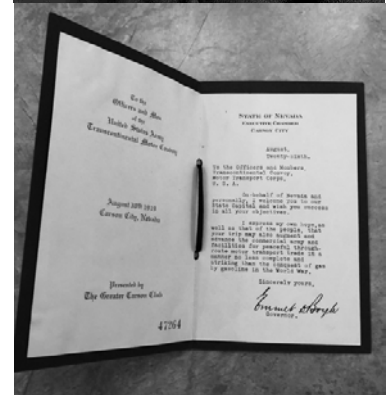
Required 11 hrs. to move Convoy from Fallon to a point 12 mi. west, on account several stretches of unstable, dry sand up 1 ½' deep and wet quicksand.³³

They continued to arrive in Carson City through the evening and into the early morning. By 2:30am Sunday morning, most of the men had finally arrived with the last vehicles. The last trucks straggled into downtown and parked next to the Capitol building. That morning, Aug. 30, religious services were held. Nevada Governor Emmet D. Boyle gave a speech and handed the convoy a small, blue ribbon-tied booklet with a photo of the capital and his greeting, dated Aug. 26, when they had been expected to arrive.



I express my own hope, as well as that of the people, that your trip may also augment and advance the commercial army and facilities for peaceful through-route motor transport trade in a manner no less complete and striking that the conquest of gas by gasoline in the world war.⁴

A greeting by Carson City's Mayor Gillson alluded to the past and to the pioneers who had extracted silver and gold:



Gentlemen: In welcoming you to our city permit me to say that in pioneering your expedition across the continent you have placed yourselves in company with the trailblazers of the world, without whose transmuted touch its wealth would lie forever buried in the bosom of the earth.

It was an age of motors trips, Earlier in the year, Boyle welcomed the first airplane to cross the Sierra Nevada and land in Carson City.³⁵ The day after the convoy came through Carson, he departed by train for Tonopah to discuss the labor dispute in that mining center. The miners went out on strike for higher wages. Boyle would work to split the bulk of the miners from the International Workers of the World (the IWW), first through negotiations and then by legal injunction.³⁶



The IWW represented the militant wing of the union effort and, a decade earlier in Goldfield, had been successful for a time in securing better wages and hours. Mine owners now leveraged the split between the militant IWW (the Wobblies) and the more conservative Western Federation of Miners to undermine overall union efforts in Goldfield. In Tonopah, like the newspapers, the governor would soon label the IWW as “Bolsheviks”— successfully dividing the mining unions. In the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution and discovery of a bomb plot against national leader during the spring of 1919, the period 1919 to 1921 would mark America’s first “red scare.”³⁷

This set the political stage for the 20s as a whole. While Eisenhower and the Motor Convoy were crossing the desert, in the wake of a foolish war, young men across the nation left the military for the decade long party called the Jazz Age. When, during 1931, Socialist leader Charles Ruthenberg organized a May Day parade in Cleveland, gathering local trade unionists, socialists, communists, and anarchists to protest the jailing of Eugene V. Debs., F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote, describing the war, the oppression of workers and the frenzy of the 20s:

The ten-year period that, as if reluctant to die outmoded in its bed, leaped to a spectacular death in October, 1929, began about the time of the May Day riots in 1919. When the police rode down the demobilized country boys gaping at the orators in Madison Square, it was the sort of measure bound to alienate the more intelligent young men from the prevailing order. We didn't remember anything about the *Bill of Rights* until Mencken began plugging it, but we did know that such tyranny belonged in the jittery little countries of South Europe. If goose-livered business men had this effect on the government, then maybe we had gone to war for *J.P. Morgan's* loans after all. But, because we were tired of Great Causes, there was no more than a short outbreak of moral indignation....³⁸

Early on the morning of Sept.1, soldiers towed the last broken vehicle, a Mack truck with a bad clutch, into Carson City A burned out wheel bearing was sent to Reno for pressing. Some soldiers bathed in the local Hot Springs while others visited the Governor’s mansion and local sights. In the evening, the officers met to discuss the climb into the Sierra Nevada. The drivers now had experience.



OVER THE MOUNTAIN⁸⁹

Over a hundred ranges dot the Great Basin—named for the water that runs East and sinks into alkali flat. An old story says God grew tired on the seventh day and neglected to run those river to the sea. Having wound their way through the alkali flats that lie between the rocky mounts, the convoy now faced the bold granite and green pines of the Sierra Nevada. Carson City sits at the foot of the eastern slope.

Early on the morning of Sept. 1, 1919, the transcontinental convoy prepared to head West out of Carson City, through Kings Canyon and over the Sierra. The soldiers gave a final inspection to steering gears, brakes, tow chains and wheel blocks. In front of the Carson Brewing Company on King St., . That route that later became Highway 50 was now sometimes advertised as, "The Tahoe Auto Route"—in the wake of its 1896 designation as the The Lake Tahoe Wagon Road, California's first named road. At the dawn of the Lincoln Highway, this designation of the route seems to have lead to the naming of a beer. During his youth, brewery owner Max Stenz yodeled on the vaudeville circuit. Having brewed in Gold Field and Santa Cruz, in 1910 he bought The Carson Brewery Company, split the stock to gain investors, and diversified into soda and bottled water that he he soon shipped by rail across the silver state. In 1918, prohibition left him feeling he must pay back the investors who'd helped him create Tahoe Beer during 1913. Business had been good, shipping beer, water and soda by train to the hard rock miners across the silver state. But, with Prohibition, in 1919, the Brewery on King Street sat closed—a silent witness to the irony of new ideas and the spectacle unfolding on its doorstep. Max Stenz would never quite recover from the blow to his dreams and sold the establishment to his soninlaw, Addison Millard, in 1926.

The officers spaced the trucks 100 yards apart and allowed only experienced driver s to drive. The Nevada Highway Patrol closed the road to all other traffic. The slowest trucks were placed in the lead. On their Indians and Harleys, five motorcycle scouts were spaced between the trucks. Across the desert, the motorcycle tires had proved too thin but the road up the mountain would be firmer. The scouts were to keep the lighter vehicles from trying to As they ascended, engines steamed, overheating. The inspected wheel bearings every 4 minutes. overtake the slower





The truck train twisted up Kings Canyon. It took 6 hours to travel 14 miles. A mobile kitchen trailer--a wooden wheeled bar-b-que that Eisenhower called a "trail-mobile" and shown here East of Carson-- slid off the narrow grade and wrecked. He wrote that the men attributed its problems to "improper trailer connections".⁴⁰ This may refer to connections that did not allow the trail-mobile to track well behind the trucks. With the towing truck winding the mountain switchbacks, the kitchen probably failed went just enough sideways to tumble into a gully. at the hairpin turn.



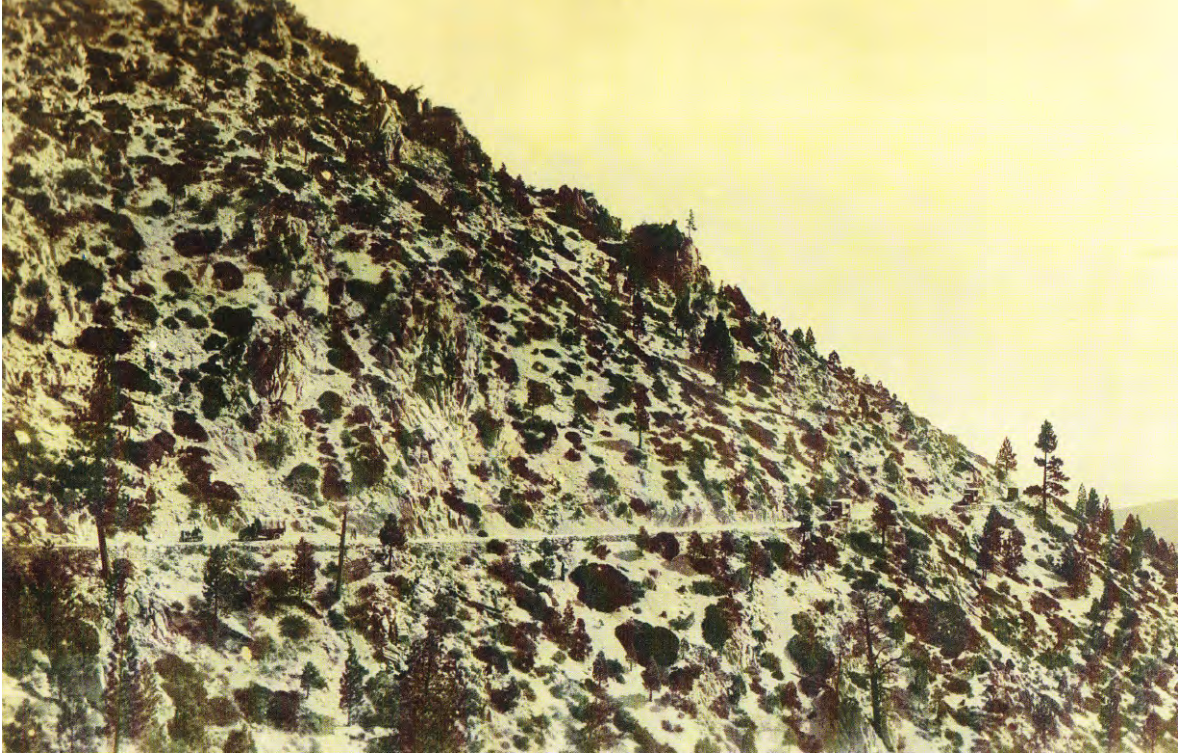
Trucks rolled very slowly. Soldiers stood on the running boards to watch the edge of the narrow mountain road.



At least three vehicles had to be towed—one car and two trucks. Eisenhower wrote that a Mack truck blew out a cylinder head. This appears to be a truck shown in pictures, pulled by the 5-ton Maxtor tractor.

In heavy going, such as sand and stiff grades, the heavy types were always in difficulty. Chain drive trucks would simply not operate in sand, and practically all of the heavy trucks had to be pulled through sand stretches. In such places, the lighter types, (1 ½ ton) usually went through without help. This was especially true of those mounted on pneumatic tires (ambulances). The heavy types also labored excessively of stiff grades. On a grade in California a Mack blew out a cylinder head. Travel on these grades necessitated constant work on the clutch assemblies of the heavy types. The heavies in these places slowed up the lighter and swifter light trucks; which type made all the grades easily. In this connection, I believe that the Riker (3 ton), and F.W.D., had less difficulty in negotiating stiff grades, and sand stretches, than any other type of heavy truck





The same stretch today:



Through dense forest, the trucks headed west, downhill to Lake Tahoe, their engines acting as brakes to keep the descent at a modest crawl. Today, this portion of the road lies under the modern Highway 50, west of Spooner Summit.





The Maxwell tractor delivered the damaged Mack truck to the shore of Lake Tahoe. At Glenbrook, men welded the damaged cylinder, probably at the railroad shop. The Mack truck then limped along on three cylinders into California. The Carson Daily Appeal bristled at Reno's attack upon the Carson route and doubt that the bridge around Cave Rock would hold up.

The roads stood up well under the test and the Cave rock bridge proved a Gibraltar, despite the suspicion put out by the Reno Gazette that Carson people themselves feared the result of the strain which would be put on the bridge and that it would crumble under the weight of tucks and precipitate them and their precious freight in the lake waters below. It was a nasty knock that Reno gave the road, and it was absolutely uncalled for.⁴⁹





The men waved to the camera as the trucks rounded Cave Rock. The journey down the western slope of the Sierra proved uneventful.





The convoy proceeded West from Lake Tahoe, down the American River. Reaching Meyers on the morning of September 2. They then rested in Kyburz.



Arriving in Sacramento, at the celebration, among several songs, to the tune of "I'm a Little Prairie Sunflower", the men sang. It seems, having survived the road into and out of Carson City, they finally felt they had something to celebrate.

I'm a wild motor transport man,
Growing wilder as I can.
Nobody wants to bother me,
I'm as wild as wild can be,

For I'm as wild as wild can be.
We've drove and dug and sweat like hell,
To cross the desert. Well, well, well
Nobody wants to bother me,

For I'm as wild as wild can be,
Yes, I'm as wild as wild can be.
If anybody thinks we've had good luck,
They ought to ride in a motor truck.

It's enough to make a crab of me.
So I'm as wild as wild can be,
Yes, I'm as wild as wild can be.
California sure looks good to me,

Girls and fruit under every tree.
They'll make a native son of me.
And, I'll be as wild as wild can be.
Yes I'll be wild as wild can be.⁴³



Some of the trucks and officers were ferried to San Francisco for another celebration and more hand-shaking with important people.



PROGRESS

All along the way, towns wined, dined and danced the soldiers. Americans applauded the convoy doughboys in their “Montana peak” campaign hats. They resembled their sons in the recent Great War and brought a mechanized reminder of America’s patriotic effort. The government offered each town along the Lincoln highway a mile of pavement as reward for its participation.



In the wake of the convoy, the dispute over the legitimate claimant to the Lincoln Highway route heated up.

Despite the many hours spent digging out trucks from the Fallon dunes, the Carson Daily Appeal vigorously defend the Carson route in order to refute the ongoing criticisms and gloom coming from Reno. One wonders if, having been fed, the soldiers were not simply being polite when they lauded the local trail.

—1849

An Appreciation

ONE cannot follow the trail of this Army Truck Convoy without looking back seventy years to the days of the immortal “Forty-Niners.” These men endured hardship, privation, discouragement, and even death, to reach this new land. Their blood is the blood of the Western country: strong — virile — self-reliant. They stand in revered tradition, makers of California and American history. So in this journey of yours across plain, desert and mountain trail, you, too, have blazed new trails—the trails of Commerce, Highways, Mechanical Achievement, and the Protection of the Flag. Surely no achievement could be more worthy of recognition and well earned praise.

—1919

But, to offset the impression that Reno has attempted to create are the encomiums that the caravan people are dealing out right and left. The roads leading in and out of Carson, according to their say, are among the best.

The 1919 Transcontinental Motor Truck convoy from Washington DC to San Francisco took 62 days. There, at a dinner, John Willys from the Willy’s Overland Company, the nation’s second largest automobile manufacturer, drew strong parallels to the journey of emigrants in 1849. The next year, the Willys Overland Company was brought to its knees by a recession. Years later, it would secure itself by manufacturing the Jeep for the American military and then civilian markets—a vehicle that became fundamental to mastering the rocks and sand.

J. Willys



Crossing the nation, the convoy damaged or destroyed and then repaired 88 bridges. The Maxwell Artillery tractor became known as the hero of the expedition, having repeatedly rescuing heavy trucks from ditches, broken bridges and finally the desert sand. Lieutenant Colonel Dwight Eisenhower summarized the impact on this new idea of road travel. Whatever resistance to pavement and transcontinental motor transport existed prior to WW1 disappeared as the truck train passed and the ladies celebrated the soldiers.

The truck train was well received at all points along the route. It seemed that there was a great deal of sentiment for improving of highways, and, from the standpoint of promoting this sentiment, the trip was an undoubted success....

He added a caution, doubting that heavy trucks could ever succeed on the Carson portion of the route.

Extended trips by trucks through the middle western part of the United States are impracticable until roads are improved, and then only a light truck should be used on long hauls.

When he returned to the East, at Camp Meade, Maryland, Eisenhower published “A Tank Discussion” –a bland discussion in which he presented a radical new military doctrine where tanks would not simply be armored guns leading infantry into battle but would maneuver and use speed.⁴⁴ However, the military’s upper echelons continued to believe that war is about bravery. The general officers reprimanded Eisenhower, sent him to the infantry and disbanded the Tank Corps. Still, the new tactics took hold.



Maneuverability became the basis for German tank strategy during World War II—the

blitzkrieg.

During the 1950s, having seen the roads around Carson City and having seen the Autobahn in Germany, President Dwight Eisenhower lead the nation in building a system of federally funded modern highways... including several across Nevada—at a cost of \$129 billion.⁴⁵

Having witnessed the army grind to a halt on the truck train route—both near Salt Lake, Utah made a decision that would ultimately relegate the Carson route to a backwater—becoming Highway 50, later called the “loneliest road in America.”



In late September of 1919, shortly after the truck train's passing, Utah ceased work on the Goodyear Cut-off—a route that allowed easy connection from the East to the Carson route.⁴⁶ Instead, it shifted to improvement of the Wendover Road, a route that connected the highway from the East to the Victory Highway into Reno—ultimately the route of Highway 40 and later Highway 80. The Wendover Road was opened in 1925⁴⁷ and completed in 1927.⁴⁸ That year the Lincoln Highway association folded. The romantic dream was over. By 1940, the term "Lincoln Highway" was little used.

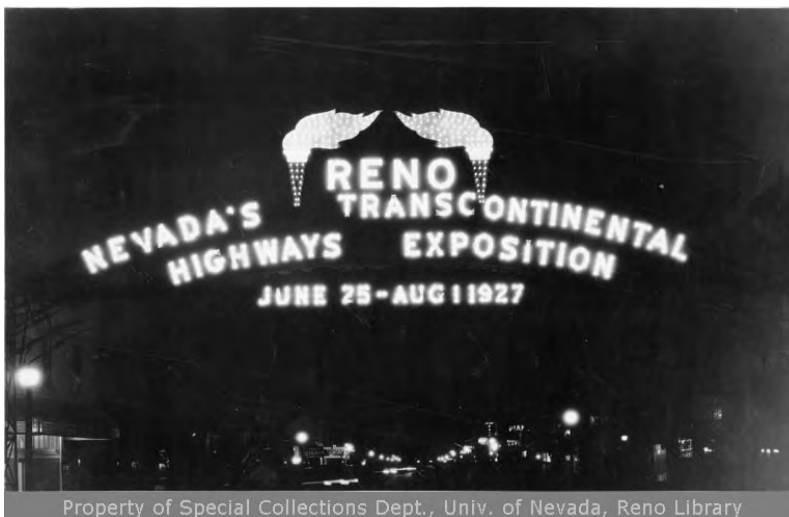
Reno stepped fully to the fore. Feeling bypassed, in the wake of the truck train, Reno remained its route the Pikes Peaks route.⁴⁹ Still, the Nevada Legislature In western Nevada, the convoy launched a conflict between Reno and Carson City over who would ultimately inherit the coveted "Lincoln Highway" title.

Local effort mattered. As had been the case with the stage road during the 1850s, the National government could not bring itself to quickly fund an adequate road West. In the wake of the of the 1919 truck train, Congress was hardly inspired to fund auto and truck road.

Through the 1920s, federal officials sought to encourage state efforts while proposals for federal funding were attacked as "socialistic".⁵⁰ Paving and the choice of routes were left to the vagaries of local politics. Nowhere did this play out so strongly as in Reno's ongoing effort to

become the Lincoln highway. The brief acendance of the Carson route can be seen in maps, particularly those drawn in Nevada. The 1919 Nevada Highway Map emphasizes the Reno route—that could then be called the Lincoln Highway or the Victory Highway-- roughly reflecting the routes that would become Highway 50 and Highway 80, many years later.⁵¹

In the wake of the truck train, for the first time since the 1860s, the route into Carson from the East emerged as a major route—for a couple years, at least in theory. The Nevada Highway map of 1922 emphasized the route both the routes into Reno and Carson.



Property of Special Collections Dept., Univ. of Nevada, Reno Library



The 1923 Nevada Highway map showed both the Carson and Reno routes but emphasized the Carson route.

This highlighting of the Carson route didn't last. Utah's 1919 decision to pave toward the northwest ensured

that the Reno route would ultimately prevail. By 1925, maps generally emphasize the Reno route. The “Victory Highway” through Reno had been launched in 1919. To affirm its position, Reno held the Nevada Transcontinental Highways Exposition in 1927 and erected the downtown “Reno arch”. The arch has become iconic of Reno.⁵² That same year the Lincoln Highway Association disbanded.

The 1927 Nevada Highway map shows the route into Carson as only a dotted line. Many people still regarded the Carson route as the Lincoln Highway. In fact, the Kings Canyon section was moved to Clear Creek—now Highway 50 west from Carson City—that year. But the end of Carson City’s glory moment was at end. To this day, Carson City remains caught in nostalgia for hope, yearning for a future as glorious as the imagined past. It became so wedded to its backward bucolic status that citizens sued the City during 1916, trying to prevent the paving of Carson Street. The state put a north-south highway, 395, through downtown Carson during the 1950s, ultimately destroying retail in the downtown. In 2016, as the state relocated Hwy. 395 through eastern Carson and returned Carson Street to the City, the City Supervisors voted to restore two lanes—restoring the infrastructure that would allow retail to return downtown. And some citizens complained loudly—perpetually seeking a primitive, romantic world.

Small town beer busts, loud bands and the posturing of tourism disturb the torpor of struggling immigrants and disconnected retirees. Young professionals flee. In 1986, Life magazine published an article dubbing the Carson route—be then called Highway 50—“The Loneliest Road In America.” Local promoters continue to use this as advertising. The road remains lonely.



Having been fully bypassed on the east/west route, Carson City remained to be bypassed again during the early 21st century on the north/south route—Highway 395. As this was finally completed, in 2017, local citizens obtains a beautification grant that funded installation of rusty steel miners, cowboys, trucks and 40 foot tall deer at various overpasses—celebrating the area's transportation history. In recognition of the Eagle Valley, a huge eagle was mounted next to its backwards shadow. Local planners proposed narrowing Carson St. to two lanes from the no-longer needed four lanes. It was hoped that a more walkable downtown might lay the basis for a destination—replacing trading station approach to cars passing through that had prevailed since 1859. Guarding their meager retirements, angry local curmudgeons complained that the plan for modifying the street lacked right turn lanes. Not only was government hugely impractical, they whined, it now had the audacity to reduce the capacity of a largely empty main street and lengthen the time required to get out of town.



Meanwhile, cars in the center two of the four lanes were mowing down pedestrians due to the unavoidable temptation to race at high speed along the deserted boulevard. The outside lane would stop. The pedestrian would begin to cross and “wham”, someone bent on setting new small town speed records would squash them flat. The jury is still out on whether Carson City can market any real history or will continue over a century of myth-making.

The roadway shift from western romance to practicality seems complete. To this day, Carson City remains caught—some might say paralyzed—in nostalgia, a yearning for a mythical western past that it cannot remember. The shift from western romance to practicality had long been in the works. During the early gold rush, men came West to “see the elephant” and pick up gold off the ground. Within a couple decades, mining became increasingly defined by corporate ownership. By 1900, the corporate mines controlled Nevada politics. After 1919, the image of the westerner shifted to the cowboy.

Still, the dream of living wild and free endured. And yet, the old timers couldn’t help but note the changes as the men in charge became those seeking easy gain on the back of the pioneer’s hard labor. Nostalgia for lost glory continued to sweep artists into western crevices and Sam Davis’ The First Piano In Camp was published in book form during 1919. For the book, a friend wrote:

Sam Davis was the last of that august company of magicians of the pen who told from first-hand knowledge the wonderful story of the Builders of the West.⁵⁸

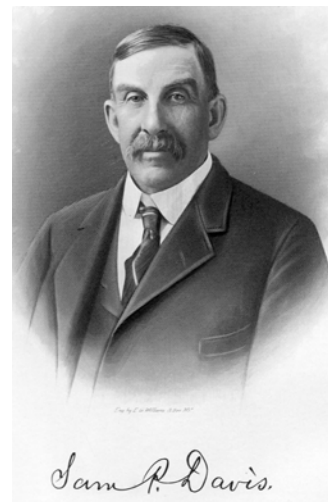
Not long before his death in 1918, having seen Nevada through the late 19th and early 20th centuries—having watched the corporate mines force out the independent owners⁵⁴, the insurance fraud⁵⁵ and the purchase of political office⁵⁶—Sam Davis wrote a poem, “The Gleaners”. It commented on the contrast between the old timers, the “pioneers” or “giants” as they were called, and those who came later. Like his poem, “The Lure of The Sagebrush”, the theme seems derived from Harry Leon Wilson’s 1902, Nevada based novel, The Spenders, about three generations of westerner: the pioneer, the builder and the spender who reaps the harvest.

The Gleaners

I watched the gleaners rake the field
After the ripening sheaves were stored,
Toiling the while in the noonday sun,
As they garnered their meager hoard.

And when they called on the autumn
winds To help them winnow the golden
wheat, The chaff went out to be scattered
wide, While the grain fell at their feet.

I wandered over the field of life, Following
after the harvest done;
While in the stubble I sought for friends,
And gathered them one by one.



And after the crowning autumn years The
field of friendship I culled once more.
And, as I gathered the winnowed grain,
I grieved at the scanty store.

The winds of adversity swept the chaff,
And, as it littered the desert sand,
I gathered the wheat from about my feet
And held it all in my hollowed hand.

In the wake of sad nostalgia, a poetry of the mechanics has come to be written in the music industry's car songs, beginning during the 1950s--with no western focus. Nevada remained dominated by nostalgia for the prospector as the rodeo and Hollywood spread the lore of the cowboy. In 1927-28, the Kings Canyon connection between Carson City and Lake Tahoe was by-passed by paving of the road up Clear Creek Canyon- and this was sometimes referred to as the Lincoln Highway, though the Lincoln Highway movement had largely faded. Though bypassed by Highway 80 as the nation's major central overal highway. Highway 50 remains the more romantic and scenic route. In 1986, Life magazine published an article dubbing the Carson route--designated Highway 50 during 1926 with major construction during 1940--"The Loneliest Road In America."



ENDNOTES

Note that several photos in this essay are from the Dwight D. Eisenhower President Library—a federally funded collection. <http://eisenhower.archives.gov/index.html>

- ¹ Charles Morris, *Winston's Cumulative Encyclopedia Vol 7* (Philadelphia, PA: The John C. Winston Company, 1919)
- ² See my extensive discussion of "seeing the elephant" in my book "The Strychnine Banjo".
- ³ See Sam Davis' The Hole In The Lake
http://books.google.com/books?id=MZpxJrGKcgYC&pg=PA69&lpg=PA69&dq=sam+davis+mining+comstock&source=bl&ots=031SSWYPeP&sig=Mg_P9MKEA0litXnD4GylXwGD5Ts&hl=en&sa=X&ei=5s_cT7LqB6bC2wWqxP3wAg&ved=0CEUQ6AEwATgK#v=onepage&q=sam%20davis%20mining%20comstock&f=false
- ⁴ Eisenhower report. P. 5.
http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/1919_convoy/1919_11_03_DDE_to_Chief.pdf
- ⁵ Image property of and used courtesy of Mark Sublette Medicine Man Gallery Tucson/Santa Fe, All Rights Reserved.
<http://canyonroadarts.com/links/Maynard%20Dixon%201875-1946.html>
- ⁶ <http://youtu.be/p8dYID6Z49E>
⁷ <file:///Users/chrisbayer/Downloads/Transportation,%20Department%20of.pdf>
- ⁸ Jackson report to Moody.
http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/1919_convoy/report_Jackson_to_Moody.pdf
- ⁹ P. 4 Report on Trans-Continental Trip. Lt. Col. D.D. Eisenhower, to Chief Motor Transport Corps, Nov. 3, 1919
- ¹⁰ J. G. Kelley, pm 40 A THRILLING AND TRUTHFUL HISTORY OF THE PONY EXPRESS, William Lightfoot Visscher, Rand McNally and Co. 1908
- ¹¹ See my book PROFIT PLOTS AND LYNCHING on scribd
- ¹² A THRILLING AND TRUTHFUL HISTORY OF THE PONY EXPRESS, William Lightfoot Visscher, Rand McNally and Co. 1908 CHAP VII p. 45
Painting from the book.
- ¹³ August 19, 1919 The Desert News p. 1
- ¹⁴ The Deseret News Aug. 19, 1919, p. 8
- ¹⁵ The Deseret News Aug. 19, 1919, p. 10
- ¹⁶ The Deseret News August. 25, p. 5
- ¹⁷ Carpenter, Colonel William T (April 1920), "Transcontinental Motor Convoy" (Google Books), *Journal of the United States Artillery, Volume 52*: pp. 341–353, retrieved 2011-03-25 Dry rot. P. 345
- ¹⁸ Eisenhower's log p. 21
- ¹⁹ From the NV. Hist. Soc. Poetry clipping file, newspaper dated June 3, 1919. Somebody's "Daily Chronicle." Source unknown.
- ²⁰ Gold production in Nevada, 1919. http://www.farlang.com/gemstones/us-geol-survey-1919/page_020
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- ²¹ <http://newsmine.org/content.php?ol=coldwar-imperialism/hover-red-scare-1919/hover-red-scare-1919-ch4.txt>
- ²² Photo of lemonade probably taken in Nevada or Utah from Gettysburg Farm collection.
<http://research.archives.gov/description/877008>
- ²³ A Study In Scarlet, 1887
- ²⁴ "Daily Log of the First Transcontinental Motor Convoy, Washington, DC to San Francisco, Cal., July 7th to Sept. 6th, 1919" [U.S. Army, Transport Corps, Transcontinental Convoy: Records, 1919, Box 1, Daily log of the first transcontinental motor convoy (typewritten copy)]
- ²⁵ Peter Davies clippings. Eisenhower library. Nevada.
- ²⁶ Iron age, Volume 101, Part 2 p. 1486c picture of Maxwell June 6 1918
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image:<http://books.google.com/books?id=NNAcQAAMAAJ&pg=PA1486-IA3&img=1&zoom=3&hl=en&sig=ACfU3U3tz4vx7kyfyQHDfLfsjvDB1y-2A&ci=238,450,537,387&edge=0>
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- ²⁸ Memorandum from Lt. Col. Dwight D. Eisenhower to the Chief, Motor Transport Corps, with attached report on the Trans-Continental Trip, November 3, 1919. [DDE's Records as President, President's Personal File, Box 967, 1075 Greany Maj. William C.]
- ²⁹ P.1 Report on Trans-Continental Trip. Lt. Col. D.D. Eisenhower, to Chief Motor Transport Corps, Nov. 3, 1919
- ³⁰ P. 3 Report on Trans-Continental Trip. Lt. Col. D.D. Eisenhower, to Chief Motor Transport Corps, Nov. 3, 1919
- ³¹ Principle Facts Report, p.9. http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/1919_convoy/principal_facts.pdf



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- ³² Carson City Daily Appeal 9/2/1919
- ³³ P. 21. Daily Log of the First Transcontinental Motor Convoy.
http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/1919_convoy/daily_log.pdf
- ³⁴ Carson City Daily Appeal, 8/30/1919
- ³⁵ 1919 The first trans-Sierra airplane flight landed in Carson City, Nevada on March 22, 1919. Three DeHavilands and a Curtis trainer landed in a field three miles east of Carson City. The flyers, who started at Mather Field in Sacramento, were welcomed by Governor Emmet Boyle, who flew with them on their return flight—making him the first civilian to cross the Sierra by airplane.
- ³⁶ Nevada's Twentieth-century Mining Boom: Tonopah, Goldfield, Ely By Russell R. Elliott p. 145-147
- ³⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Scare
- ³⁸ Echoes Of The Jazz Age, 1931.
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- ⁴⁰ P. 2 Report on Trans-Continental Trip. Lt. Col. D.D. Eisenhower, to Chief Motor Transport Corps, Nov. 3, 1919
- ⁴¹ Memorandum from Lt. Col. Dwight D. Eisenhower to the Chief, Motor Transport Corps, with attached report on the Trans-Continental Trip, November 3, 1919. [DDE's Records as President, President's Personal File, Box 967, 1075 Greany Maj. William C.]
- ⁴² Carson Appeal 9/2/1919

⁴³ [Commemorative Program](#), "A California Dinner in Honor of the Officers and Men Who Made up the First Transcontinental Convoy of the Motor Transport Corps, U.S. Army over the Lincoln Highway, Washington to San Francisco, July 7 - September 7, 1919" [U.S. Army, Transport Corps, Transcontinental Convoy: Records, 1919, Box 1] ↑

- ⁴⁴ Eisenhower: A TANK DISCUSSION
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- ⁴⁶ The Big Roads: The Untold Story of the Engineers, Visionaries, and ...
 By Earl Swift p. 79
- ⁴⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utah_State_Route_199
http://historytogo.utah.gov/salt_lake_tribune/in_another_time/120593.html
- ⁴⁸ <http://lincolnhighway.jameslin.name/history/part3.html> Chapter 16
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- ⁴⁹ Deseret News Nov. 21 1919. 'shorter, better, cheaper.'
- ⁵⁰ Pfeiffer, David A (Summer 2006). "Ike's Interstates at 50: Anniversary of the Highway System Recalls Eisenhower's Role as Catalyst". *Prologue* 38 (2). Archived from the original on 02 March 2011. Retrieved 2011-03-21. "*Motor Transport Corps S.P.U. 595* [sign in photo] ...west of Grand Island, Nebraska, soldiers use a winch to pull a Class B truck out of a ditch. Lt. Col. P. V. Kieffer surveys the scene. (Eisenhower Library)"
- This early in the debate, there were many critics of federal aid to highways. Thomas M. McDonald, who became chief of the Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) in 1919, "appreciated the need for a connected system of interstate highways, but he did not believe that a separate national system under a federal commission was the way to achieve it," according to a history of America's highways, *A History of the Federal-Aid Program*. He also questioned the assumption that long-distance highways were necessary for national defense, saying that what was needed was a system of roads connecting military installations.
- Correspondingly, McDonald believed that the state highway departments should be strengthened. The Federal Highway Act of 1921 reflected this view, strengthening the state highway department's control of the highway system, particularly in maintenance. This act temporarily quieted demands for interstate highways under federal control.
- By the late 1930s, however, more Americans owned automobiles, and highways were getting more congested. Public sentiment for federal control of the construction of transcontinental superhighways was increasing.
- ⁵¹ http://www.nevadadot.com/Traveler_Info/Maps/Historical_Maps.aspx
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<http://contentdm.library.unr.edu/cdm4/browse.php?CISOROOT=/lincoln&CISOSTART=1,121>
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- ⁵³ An Appreciation postscript to The First Piano In Camp
http://books.google.com/books?id=amLpuQE0IXkC&pg=PA3&lpg=PA3&dq=sam+davis+%22the+gleaners%22&source=bl&ots=sDeLc4MZ5I&sig=vUgrzFLnH2TsQ68XIDNjiQeXP9g&hl=en&sa=X&ei=_MLcT4eeBYGi2gXtsIG_DQ&ved=0CGGQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q&f=false
- ⁵⁴ Chapter XVIII History of Nevada by Sam Davis.
[http://www.nevadaobserver.com/The%20Comstock%20Milling%20Monopoly%20\(1912\).htm](http://www.nevadaobserver.com/The%20Comstock%20Milling%20Monopoly%20(1912).htm)



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- ⁵⁵ Annual Report of the Insurance Commissioner, 1905 by Sam Davis
<http://books.google.com/books?id=298ZAQAIAAJ&pg=PA1&lpq=PA1&dq=sam+davis+insurance+carson+city&source=bl&ots=LKcM1wleWh&sig=V5UnVLqk883VFYgRSWARFcevig&hl=en&sa=X&ei=08rcT8WAFILi2QWnx9WrDQ&ved=0CEwQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=sam%20davis%20insurance%20carson%20city&f=false>
- ⁵⁶ <http://www.newsreview.com/reno/newsview/blogs/post?oid=3295767> The Gleaners can be found at **Sam Davis: Ethical Comstock Humorist** Lawrence I. Berkove University of Michigan–Dearborn p. 93.
http://literatureandbelief.byu.edu/publications/sam_davis.pdf Citing: Stoddard-Crowell archive.

