Railroads in Indiana

Tracking the History of Railroads in Indiana

Purpose: Students will learn about the growth of railroads in Indiana then create and interpret a railroad timeline.

Subjects: Indiana Social Studies Standards 2023 (4.H.7, 4.H.13)

Materials Needed: Online Timeline (such as Google Timeline) or Two/Three Tab Paper Foldable (scissors, pencil, wall space for displaying)

Steps:
1. Read over the significant events of the growth of railroads in Indiana. (See attached page.)
2. Make a timeline rubric: completion (with deadlines), content (accuracy of date and events), organization (chronological order), drawings (accurate for time period), spelling/grammar, and presentation (optional).
3. If students are creating a paper timeline, display 8.5 x 11-inch sheets of paper for the decades, (for example start with 1830, 1840, and so on) or, if you have less wall space, every 20 years (1830, 1850, etc.). Display the name: Railroads in Indiana.
4. Divide the class into small working groups, with each group responsible for 2-3 chronological events, so that all the events are assigned.
5. Allow time for the students to complete their section. (Tab foldable: year on the outside flap, inside the event with a drawing.)
6. Ask students informal questions about the placement of the events, which events happened earlier, and how many years did one event happen after another.
7. Use a formal quiz about interpretation of a timeline. (Common Core Sheets has a prepared quiz called "Major Events in Transportation" Reading A Timeline.)
8. Explore these questions: Who benefited from railroads? Who was harmed by railroads? Why did railroads grow rapidly in Indiana during the 1850s? Explain why existing towns prospered and new towns formed where railroads passed, such as Mitchell and Seymour. Explain why towns declined and some died, if the railroad bypassed them, such as Spring Mill and Rockford.

Differentiation:
- Have students work together in pairs.
- Choose only 4-6 significant dates for the timeline.
- Provide options of different types of timelines.

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Extensions:
- **Storybooks: Fiction**—*The Little Engine That Could* (Watty Piper), *Train Song* (Diane Siebert); **Nonfiction**—*Ten Mile Day* (Mary Ann Fraser), *The Indiana Railroad Company* (Christopher Rund), *The Monon Railroad in Southern Indiana* (David Longest).
- **Math:** Teach parallel, perpendicular, and intersecting lines.
- **Art:** Practice drawing a train (https://www.colomio.com/train-drawing). Make a railroad diorama using a shoebox. Plan a transportation museum with models for: roads, covered bridges, wagons, stagecoach, canal boat, railroad.
- **Music:** Sing railroad songs, such as "I've Been Working on the Railroad," "The Legend of John Henry," and "The Wabash Cannonball." Listen to a train whistle compilation from locomotives that are steam, diesel, electric, passenger and freight (Train Horn and Whistle Compilation YouTube video).
- **Writing:** Write a creative story about a train trip (historical or modern) include meeting passengers and arriving at station stops.
- **Games:** Railroad Bingo (Oriental Trading) or Ticket to Ride Board Game.
- **Museums:** Indiana Railway Museum (French Lick); French Lick/West Baden Museum, French Lick, The Larry O'Connor Collection, Monon and railroad memorabilia

Resources:
- Indiana Railroad 1832-1900: https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~vklein/genealogy/railroad.html
- Railroad Vocabulary: https://www.frrandp.com/2021/05/rail-vocabulary.html
- Ten hands-on timelines: https://theowlteacher.com/10-different-timelines/
- Southern Indiana Trail will follow the historic Monon Railroad (South Trail) through five counties—Floyd, Clark, Washington, Orange and Lawrence.
- Greene County Landmarks
- Spirit of Jasper Luxury Passenger Train (https://spiritofjaspertrain.com)
- Dinah Zike's Foldables (page 31)
- Common Core Sheets—Major Events in Transportation (Link to quiz and answer sheet)

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Timeline of Railroads in Indiana
By David Nord

- **1832—The Indiana General Assembly chartered eight possible railroads. Only two of those railroads were actually built under these original charters: the Lawrenceburg & Indianapolis line and the Madison & Indianapolis line. No railroads were completed in Indiana in the 1830s.**

- **1836—The Madison, Indianapolis & Lafayette Railroad began construction. Its aim was to connect Indiana's new capital city with the Ohio River at Madison and to the Wabash & Erie Canal at Lafayette. The Madison & Indianapolis Railroad was completed in 1847. It was Indiana's first railroad.**

- **1841—In Madison an enormous rock cut was blasted in order to build an incline railroad up the bluff from the Ohio River, a rise of 400 feet in about a mile and a half. For a century this was the steepest grade (nearly 6 percent) of any standard-gauge railroad in the country. (A 6 percent grade means a rise of six feet in one hundred feet of track.) In the early years, horses pulled rail cars up the incline, eight horses per car.**

- **1847—The New Albany & Salem Railroad began construction. It was completed to Michigan City in 1854, connecting the Ohio River and Lake Michigan. Like most railroads, this one changed names several times, gradually taking on the nickname Monon.**

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- 1852—The Jeffersonville Railroad, organized in 1848, opened its line from the Ohio River to Columbus.

- 1857—The Ohio & Mississippi Railroad, which roughly follows the east-west route of today's Highway 50 from Lawrenceburg to Vincennes, was completed from Cincinnati to St. Louis. This line is still a working railroad in Indiana, operated by CSX and serving cities such as North Vernon, Seymour, Mitchell, Loogootee, and Washington.

- 1859—The New Albany & Salem Railroad (later called the Monon) was reorganized and renamed the Louisville, New Albany & Chicago, even though it did not actually reach either Louisville or Chicago.

- 1860—Indiana, which had only 228 miles of track in 1850, had 2,163 miles of track in 1860.

- 1865—The L.NA.&C. (Monon) was one of two dozen railroads to carry Abraham Lincoln's funeral train from Washington, D.C, to Springfield, Illinois. The Monon's segment of the journey was from Lafayette to Michigan City.

- 1866—The Jeffersonville Railroad and the Indianapolis & Madison Railroad merged to form the Jeffersonville, Madison & Indianapolis Railroad, which provided Indianapolis direct rail service to both Madison and Jeffersonville on the Ohio River. The Jeffersonville line later became part of the

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Pennsylvania Railroad system and remains in service today as the Louisville

& Indiana Railroad.

- 1866—The Reno brothers gang of outlaws boarded an O&M train in

  Seymour and stole more than $10,000 in what may have been the world's first

  robbery of a moving train in peacetime. After two more years of robberies

  and murders, several gang members were hanged by vigilantes in Jackson

  County, and several more were kidnapped from a jail by a hooded lynch mob

  in Floyd County (New Albany) and hanged.

- 1868—The 55-ton Reuben Wells, the world's most powerful steam locomotive

  at that time, was put into service to push trains up the steep incline at

  Madison. The Reuben Wells is now on display at the Children's Museum of

  Indianapolis.

- 1870—The Jeffersonville, Madison & Indianapolis Railroad in collaboration

  with the Louisville & Nashville Railroad of Kentucky opened the 14th Street

  Bridge between Jeffersonville and Louisville, the first railroad bridge over the

  lower Ohio River. That bridge, upgraded in 1919, is still in service.

- 1870—By 1870 Indianapolis was the crossroads of eleven mainline railroads

  and was often called "The Railroad City."

- 1880—Indiana had more 4,000 miles of railroad tracks.

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- **1906—Greene County had a rare triple railroad crossing. The Bedford & Bloomfield branch of the Monon, the Evansville & Indianapolis Railroad, and the Indianapolis Southern (Illinois Central) all crossed at the same point at Elliston, just west of Bloomfield.**

- **1920—Indiana had nearly 8,000 miles of track, the peak of railroad mileage in the state.**

- **1971—The Monon, often called the Hoosier Line, was sold to the Louisville & Nashville Railroad, and the Monon name was retired.**

- **2004—By 2004 much of the southern part of the old Monon line had been abandoned. Sections of the Monon right-of-way were gradually converted into popular walking/biking trails in Indianapolis and Bloomington.**

- **2020—Indiana had about 4,000 miles of track left in service, including the old O&M RR (now CSX, a major national company) and the Jeffersonville Railroad (now the Louisville & Indiana Railroad, a local short line).**

- **2023—The abandoned Monon tracks between New Albany and Mitchell were removed in order to begin construction of the 62-mile Monon South Trail, a recreational trail that may eventually be extended north from Mitchell to Bedford.**