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Front Cover: Palisade, Nevada. (Nevada Historical Society)
RIVAL ROAD BUILDERS
Private Toll Roads in Nevada, 1852-1880

David T. Beito and Linda Royster Beito

Although the word *privatization* had not yet entered the vocabulary, early Nevadans thoroughly understood the underlying concept. During the nineteenth century, they often gave leading roles to companies and voluntary associations in schooling, social welfare, sanitation, and many other services. On occasion, the authority of nongovernmental institutions, such as mining districts and livestock associations, even extended to such basic functions as legal adjudication and punishment. Although not as well known to modern historians, Nevada’s experience with private long-distance roads was especially significant. Between the 1850s and 1880s, local entrepreneurs financed, built, and operated more than one hundred toll roads or turnpikes. This represented an enormous amount of activity for an area with so few people.¹

Prior to the era of toll roads in Nevada, the main transportation networks were little more than rough trails. Attention to maintenance ranged from poor to nonexistent and many travelers were left to their own devices. The Comstock mining boom in the northwest-central section of Nevada put an unbearable strain on this existing road system—such as it was. In the one-year period 1859-60 alone, the state’s population increased from fewer than five hundred to more than six thousand.²

The condition of the Placerville State Road, a mountain artery on the section of the Overland Trail that connected Virginia City with Placerville, California, illustrated these transportation dilemmas at their worst. In *A Peep at Washoe*, traveler J. Ross Browne described it as “absolutely impracticable for

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wheeled vehicles” in many places. The trail

was literally lined with broken-down stages, wagons, and carts, presenting every
variety of aspect, from the general smash-up to the ordinary capsize. Wheels had taken
rectangular cuts to the bottom; broken tongues projected from the mud; loads of dry-
goods and whiskey barrels lay wallowing in the general wreck of matter; stout beams
cut from the roadside were scattered here and there, having served in vain efforts to
extricate the wagons from the oozy mire.

After a harrowing journey that year, Horace Greeley warned, “I cannot con-
scientiously recommend the route I have traveled to summer tourists in quest
of pleasure, but it is a balm for many bruises to know that I am at last in Cali-
ifornia.”

Public officials were largely helpless to mitigate these frustrating travel condi-
tions, at least by direct action. Until the late 1870s and later in many cases,
governments had neither sufficient legitimacy nor taxation capacity to under-
take serious construction. In a typical example, the Board of Commissioners of
Ormsby County appointed a road supervisor but did not give him actual power
to build roads. Tongue in cheek, the surveyor general of Nevada lamented that
as to “suggestions concerning county roads, reference is respectfully made to
my former report, in which, it is believed, they have been presented at least
one generation too early.”

In their search to improve their transportation infrastructure, early Nev-
dans began to embrace the model of the private toll road. The idea was an old
one. Many feudal lords in medieval Europe, for example, charged travelers to
use their roads. In addition, associations such as guilds and religious orders
operated toll bridges. The long-distance private toll road first arose in Great
Britain in the early eighteenth century.

Although these methods never caught on in the American colonies, local
governments authorized tolls for other purposes, such as private ferries. The
first toll roads did not appear in the United States until the 1790s. Legislatures,
first in the Northeast and then in other regions, issued thousands of franchises
to profit-making companies. While the prospect of paying tolls sometimes pro-
voked grumbling, even many critics acknowledged that the quality had im-
proved markedly over that in the previous system of state and county roads.
The spread of toll roads followed closely behind western settlement, and by
1852, the territorial legislature of Utah had issued a few franchises for roads in
the area that is now modern Nevada.

As in much else, however, Nevadans most looked to California for guid-
ance. Toll roads had become ubiquitous there since the gold rush of 1849. As
former Californians, many pioneers on the Comstock had observed how toll
road builders had kept pace with a booming mining economy and surmounted
an imposing terrain, conditions also present in Nevada. According to the Reese
River Revielle of Austin, “California has shown that a moderate toll is the best
guarantee for practicable roads through mountainous sections with a sparse population.”

The first major tollroad projects in Nevada centered on the mountain passes between Virginia City and northern California—the perilous Placerville Road to the south of Lake Tahoe and the Henness Pass to the north. As early as 1859, the Territorial Enterprise of Virginia City had called for privatization, lamenting that as “the matter now stands, it is strictly speaking nobody’s business to keep the road open.” In 1861 and 1862, the legislatures of California and Nevada finally acted by franchising private companies to operate each state’s section of the two roads.

The resulting improvements were dramatic. Referring to the Placerville Road, Eliot Lord commented that a “narrow, dangerous, wretched trail [which] was scarcely fit for the passage of sure-footed pack-mules” had been transformed into “a broad, compact, well-graded highway, which might fairly be likened to an old Roman road.” J. Ross Browne agreed: “It is now a magnificent highway . . . . The rise is so beautifully graded as to be scarcely appreciable.” During three winter months of 1863 alone, 2,500 wagons passed over it. Swan and Company, which was in charge of a ten-mile stretch, devoted $2,000 per mile to yearly maintenance in the 1860s and earned annual receipts ranging from $40,000 to $70,000."
The “turnpiking” of the Placerville Road and Henness Pass was just the beginning. Between 1861 and 1864, Nevada’s territorial legislature granted fifty-five more franchises. A typical franchise document described the route, established maximum tolls and stipulated minimum standards of repair. Median tolls authorized by the legislature for 1862 franchises follow:

- Wagon with two horses: $1.00
- Each additional animal: .25
- Horse and rider: .25
- Pack animal: .10
- Loose animals: .05

After 1864, the state transferred authority for issuing, as well as regulating, franchises to the counties. The legislature also approved a 2 percent tax on gross proceeds which it earmarked for the state school fund.10

The proliferation of franchises inspired considerable satire, most notably from the pen of Mark Twain, who was a reporter on the Territorial Enterprise from 1862 to 1865. Twain wildly exaggerated the particulars of the franchise frenzy but captured much of its intensity. In 1862, for example, one of his articles, co-written with colleagues, took the form of a mythical legislative report for the “Committee on Internal Improvements.” It recounted how “Colonel Williams,” a legislator, had secured a franchise for a road to run “from a certain point to another place.” A decade later, Twain returned to this theme in Roughing It:

...it was estimated that every citizen owned about three franchises, and it was believed that unless Congress gave the Territory another degree of longitude there would not be room enough to accommodate the toll-roads. The ends of them were hanging over the boundary line everywhere like a fringe.11

While many projects never became more than words on a page, a considerable number were built. Information from various sources, including newspaper accounts and official reports, shows the completion of at least 117 toll roads in Nevada between 1859 and 1880. Construction came in two main waves (Table 1), the first was between 1859 and 1864, and the second was between 1865 and 1880. As might be expected, the pace fluctuated with the ebb and flow of mining activity. Most of the first roads were in the northwestern counties near mining centers, Ormsby, Storey, and Washoe. In general, they followed an east-west pattern (Figure 1) and linked up with the mountain routes to California at points such as Virginia City or Aurora.12
During the second wave, construction shifted to the new mining areas centered around Elko, Nye, White Pine, and Churchill counties. In contrast to the east-west configuration of western Nevada roads, these new arteries followed a north-south pattern. This, of course, reflected the north-south orientation of the mountain ranges and valleys in the east. The nearby mining communities of southern Idaho used these roads as their main outlets for ore shipments to the Pacific coast.\textsuperscript{13}

The amount of resources that the builders devoted to construction varied greatly. For some level grades, they did little more than mark out a route by having a team of horses drag logs to remove obstructions. Other projects received more careful attention, such as smoothing out steep grades, filling in gullies with stones and loam, erecting bridges, and digging wells. The builders of the road from Carson City to Empire City successfully improvised a smooth surface by laying down large pieces of sandstone.\textsuperscript{14}

There were also long-term maintenance costs. At a minimum, these included wages for a toll collector, who usually lived on site. In many cases, he provided security, sold supplies to travelers, and made repairs. Toll road companies often hired additional workers for such tasks as periodic resurfacing, filling pot-holes, shortening the route, plowing snow, sprinkling water to keep down dust, and clearing debris. Thirty to forty men, for example, were constantly at work
Figure 1: Principal Nevada Toll Roads Completed 1859-1880 (Approximate location)
Abraham Curry, the Comstock pioneer for whom the Curry Mine was named. (Nevada Historical Society)
on the Devil's Gate toll road between Gold Hill and Silver City, which carried much of the Comstock's ore and supplies. The company in charge of a much longer road between Hamilton and Elko always kept five men busy with cutting sagebrush and smoothing the grade.\textsuperscript{15}

**INDIRECT BENEFITS, PROFITS, AND COMPETITION**

During both waves of construction, many investors, both large and small, sought their profit not primarily from the tolls but rather from the indirect benefits that a road would bring. These might include anything from faster ore shipments to more riders for stagecoach lines. People who lived along a road were often the first subscribers. It is significant that only a small minority of investors identified themselves in territorial and local directories and the United States census as being toll road owners or collectors (Tables 2 and 3). Ranching and farming, staging, mining, and hotel ownership were far more common in the list of occupations. Two leading individual examples were Myron C. Lake, a hotel owner who founded Lake's Crossing, later known as Reno, and Abraham Curry, the Comstock pioneer for whom the Curry Mine was named.\textsuperscript{16}

In the second wave, staging, freighting, and railroad entrepreneurs moved to the forefront. Some of the best known were Leonard Wines (Wells Fargo, Wines and Company), Erastus Woodruff and Joseph R. Ennor (Woodruff and Ennor, Eureka and Palisade Railroad), Nick Pritchard (Pritchard Fast Freight Lines), H.M. Yerington (Carson and Colorado Railroad), and Fred Birdsell (Dayton, Sutro, and Carson Valley Railroad). As had been true before 1865, many of these men regarded their toll roads primarily as appendages to more profitable enterprises.\textsuperscript{17}

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**Table 2.**

*Leading Occupations of Toll Road Investors, First Wave of Construction, 1859-64*\textsuperscript{18}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ranching or Farming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Station or Hotel Ownership</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freighting, Staging, or Teamster</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toll Road Owner or Collector</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and Mining Mill</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney</td>
<td>9.3</td>
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Table 3.
Leading Occupations of Toll Road Investors
Second Wave of Construction, 1865-80

<table>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Ranching or Farming</td>
<td>43.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freighting, Staging, or Teamster</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and Mining Mill</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Station or Hotel Ownership</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toll Road Owner or Collector</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most obvious contrast between the second and first construction waves was in the scale of the projects. Lengths of twenty miles, which had been rare before 1865, became commonplace. More than ever, the physical plant featured wells, hay ranches, repair sheds, and bridges. It became necessary for even a smaller road to have stations at regular intervals. These new attributes created a need for entrepreneurs who had more capital to invest and could contribute special expertise in transportation.19

A prominent example was Hill Beachey of the Railroad Stage Lines. Beachey was an investor in the 268-mile road between Winnemucca and Boise, Idaho. When completed in 1868, this thoroughfare had a long line of stations that offered food and lodging and fresh changes of horses for stagecoaches. Contrary to the wide-open-spaces stereotype of American westerns, a traveler stranded on this road, and many others, needed only to walk a few miles in either direction to find refuge. In fact, unlike the scattered rest stops that characterize modern interstate highways, the toll roads generally had stations every seven to ten miles. Referring to a proposed road between Austin and the Carson Valley, the Nye County News asked, “What teamster would begrudge [sic] a few dollars if he could have water for his animals every five or six miles along these deserts, with the patches of heavy sand covered up or otherwise obviated, and the alkali flats rendered passable in winter?”20

While railroads often brought the demise of toll roads, they could, if the opportunities were right, create incentives for the establishment of new ones. During the 1860s and early 1870s, entrepreneurs took advantage of opportunities to build north-south roads to connect outlying communities with the Central Pacific Railroad. In 1868, for example, some leading citizens of Austin began raising money for such a project. Attracted by the prospect of ore shipments, the Central Pacific and Wells Fargo made a joint offer. Should the road be completed, they would erect stations along the way and locate a railroad
Myron C. Lake was a hotel owner who founded Lake's Crossing, later known as Reno. (*Nevada Historical Society*)
Winnemucca, Nevada, 1881. (Nevada Historical Society)

Elko, Nevada, 1876. (Elko Free Press)
depot at the terminus. This conditional pledge was akin to the matching contributions used in modern fund-raising campaigns. To sweeten the offer for Austin, Charles Crocker, superintendent of the Central Pacific, donated $1,000 at a special meeting of local toll road investors. A similar series of events occurred further to the west in 1875. The Virginia and Truckee Railroad encouraged the completion of a road between Dayton and Carson City by pledging a special depot at the terminus. It also promised that shipping rates would not exceed those already charged at the more distant depot on the Central Pacific.21

The biggest winners in the second construction wave were Winnemucca, Palisade, and Elko and other towns along the Central Pacific. Because they served as trans-shipment points between the toll roads and the railroads, they fostered the development of new mining and agricultural subeconomies.

Cheaper, faster, and more accessible transportation made it possible to exploit low-grade ore in outlying areas for the first time. For many miners and farmers, a bumpy thirty-mile toll road trip for their products was a small price to pay if the final destination was a connection to the swiftest and most extensive transportation system in the United States. Through this process, Nevada’s toll roads served to integrate countless remote communities into the national economy. 22

Toll road investments in Nevada, much like those in other states, often reflected what economic historians Daniel B. Klein and Chi Yin have characterized as a “community enterprise model of action.” The “impetus for taking stock was not dividends but gains that flowed from the use of the road: better transportation, higher land values, stimulated commerce, maybe just town pride.” The community enterprise model went hand in hand with “social pressure tactics,” such as local gatherings, during which leading citizens were urged to purchase shares. In making an appeal for residents to purchase stock, the Elko Independent stated that “there should be no hanging back in this work by the businessmen and teamsters of our town. It will be an important work to all, and all should be ready to come down with the cash liberally.” In a more dramatic vein, the Reno Crescent declared of a proposed road that it would “do more for Reno and less for the holder of the franchise than any road built or likely to be built. Let us then help ourselves or order our coffin.” 23

A related motivation for new investors, both large and small, was community rivalry. For instance, town leaders in Austin and Paradise engaged in a spirited competition in 1869 over which would obtain a connection on a toll road to Silver City, Idaho. Austin gained the early advantage when Leonard Wines, a stagecoach entrepreneur, pledged to invest on condition that the road pass through the town. In the end, however, Paradise won the road company’s favor when a meeting of residents “tendered financial assistance.” 24

It was widely understood in Paradise and elsewhere that road location was critical in the race for community supremacy. In 1869, when citizens in Carlin, a stop on the Central Pacific Railroad, failed to raise enough funds for a con-
nection to a major toll artery, a newspaper editorial gleefully exclaimed, “Elko it would seem is destined to be the big and permanent town on the railroad after all.” Under some circumstances, the prospect of a road could engender cooperation between communities. In 1863, a joint committee of investors from Austin and Clifton solicited stock and urged residents to contribute labor for a road connecting both communities to the Overland Mail Route. Ten years later, shareholders in Columbus and Carson City personally helped to grade a road between their towns.25

Because of the promoters’ heavy reliance on indirect benefits and social pressure, it would be tempting to conclude that Nevada’s toll roads as such, were not profitable for the owners. Certainly, this was true in other states. Klein has pointed to the “nearly universal and well documented” poverty of toll roads and noted that, as a result, investors constantly had to be cajoled to exercise community spirit or be tempted with the prospect of indirect benefits. While the evidence for Nevada is more anecdotal, it does indicate a stronger record of profitability.26

It is worth noting that first hand accounts from Nevadans show few indications that their toll roads had any general tendency to lose money. On the contrary, the predominance of evidence, limited though it may be, points in the opposite direction. Using company account books, Eliot Lord reported that Swan and Company, which was in charge of a ten-mile stretch, devoted from $2,000 to $3,000 per mile to yearly expenses in the 1860s and earned receipts between $40,000 and $70,000. From this, Lord deduced that a “toll-gate was far
more profitable than an ordinary mine." According to Hubert Howe Bancroft, a major Comstock area road connecting Dayton and Gold Hill "was a paying property." Historian Victor O. Goodwin estimated that the Bonanza toll road that passed through Carson City collected more than $4 million in tolls between 1859 and 1868, "making it the most widely profitable toll road enterprise in American history." That said however, it is also doubtful that Nevada's toll roads, taken as a whole, were especially profitable. It is significant that while promotional appeals mentioned the possibility of profit from the toll receipts, they almost never stressed it. Instead, they underscored indirect benefits such as improved land values and better travel conditions.27

That Nevada's state regulatory regime was not overly restrictive greatly contributed to the success of its toll roads. The franchises granted by the legislature rarely did more than name the route, set maximum (but generous) tolls, and establish expiration dates. Entrepreneurs faced fewer burdensome mandates on rates, location of toll booths, upkeep, and other specifics than did their eastern counterparts. Nevada's regulations were so lax that many investors never bothered to comply with the legal niceties of legislative authorization. Builders of at least eighteen roads failed to obtain the required franchises. In some cases, they secured authorization from a county's commissioners, but in others they operated for years without franchises.28

Unburdened by heavy regulation, tollroad owners in Nevada were better able to crack down on "free riders." The state's franchises rarely granted exemptions from tolls or provided loopholes for evaders. In the East, it was common for legislatures to exempt whole classes of individuals from payment. Pennsylvania, for instance, gave free passage to any person en route to public worship, a town meeting, or jury duty. Just as important, the eastern states did not effectively enforce laws against illegal toll evaders.29

Nevada's rugged terrain also helped to frustrate free riders. Owners were able to prevent evasion by placing collection booths at strategic locations such as mountain passes and bridges. The sparse population, great distances, and lack of water had the same effect. Because travelers were so dependent on amenities available only at stations, such as wells and food, there was less opportunity to evade tolls. The lack of navigable rivers forced many shippers to send goods either by road or not at all. The scant population also meant that tollroad owners did not have to expend vast sums to acquire rights of way. The United States Congress authorized local, state, and territorial governments to grant franchises for private parties to build on federal land.30

Nevada's regulatory laissez faire came at a price. Toll road companies in Nevada could rarely rest secure against the threat of competition, a state of affairs rare in the East. There were numerous instances of head-to-head competition. One of the most colorful involved the famous mining baron James Fair, one of the Big Four of the Comstock's crowd. Fair owned a road connecting Dayton with the Virginia and Truckee Railroad. Resentful over high tolls,
Treasure City, Nevada, 1869, The only known photo. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

Belmont, Nevada, 1863. (*Elko Free Press*)
Manly Johnson, a teamster, retaliated by hiring eight men to lay out a competing road. Faced with this prospect, Fair finally relented and granted Johnson a special exemption. Nowhere was toll road competition more heated than in eastern Nevada. For about a year starting in 1869 staging entrepreneur Nick Pritchard ran his coaches down a toll road between Elko and Hamilton, paying the owner of the road to exercise this right. Pritchard finally liberated himself from the tolls by building a rival road and running his stages free of charge.31

An incentive prompting companies to compete was the prospect of drawing travelers from existing roads by supplying shorter and more comfortable routes. Entrepreneur Sam Gilson boasted that his road between Treasure City and Elko was not only shorter than its competitor, but easier to travel in wet weather because the old road ran through alkali and marsh lands. As an added inducement, Gilson located stations every nine miles and exempted all stages from tolls for six months. Competitive battles such as these inspired the Territorial Enterprise to proclaim in 1867 that the “spirit of rivalry in road building to our place speaks well for this section and gives promise that the immense amount of supplies that will be required for the wants of the community can be hauled over good and easy roads.” A paper in Belmont used similar phrasing when it quipped that rival “roads to any section of the country are indicative of its general prosperity, and point to the standard it occupies in the estimation of the surrounding communities.”32

THE DECLINE OF TOLL ROADS

The toll road era was beginning to draw to a close by the middle of the 1870s. Although several more roads were completed during these years, many others passed into governmental ownership or were simply abandoned. A good statistical measure of this trend was the amount of revenue raised through the 2 percent state tax on toll road gross proceeds. Totals recorded at five-year intervals show a consistent downward slide: $4,124 (1865), $2,879 (1870), $832 (1880), and $434 (1885).33

Despite some exceptions, the competition brought by the railroads contributed to the general decline of toll roads. Shortly after the Central Pacific’s track entered Nevada via the Sierra in late 1867, Wells Fargo ceased staging operations between Nevada and California. Several east-west routes such as the Placerville Road had fallen into disuse well before the 1869 completion of the transcontinental railroad at Promontory Point, Utah. Conditions only worsened as new north-south railroad short lines appeared during the 1870s and 1880s to link such communities as Virginia City, Carson City, Candelaria, Eureka, and Austin to the Central Pacific. Deprived of ore shipments and travelers, the toll roads could no longer stay in business. The unhappy fate of the Elko and Idaho Toll Road, which had cost $10,000 to complete in 1869, was symptomatic of the trend. Shortly after the last staging lines pulled out, the
road was put up for auction at a sheriff’s sale in 1874, and sold for $115.\textsuperscript{34}

Another factor in the decline of toll roads was the mining depression during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Between 1876 and 1881, production on the Comstock plummeted from $36.7 million to just $1.2 million. Prospects in other parts of the state became equally bleak and by 1894, total mining production in Nevada was only $1.9 million. Meanwhile, the population fell from 62,000 in 1880 to only 42,000 in 1900. As many once-thriving communities decayed into ghost towns, the toll roads that had served them withered away.\textsuperscript{35}

Toll roads also suffered from increasingly bad publicity. The most dramatic illustration was the imbroglio over Myron Lake’s toll bridge in Reno in 1872 and 1873. Lake had owned the main bridge over the Truckee River since 1861 long before Reno was founded. He secured a franchise from the territorial legislature in 1862. The terms prohibited the building of any other bridge on the Truckee River within one mile in either direction.\textsuperscript{36}

As Reno’s population grew so, too, did resentment against Lake and his bridge. Residents presented petitions to the county commissioners to either reduce the tolls or convert the property to a free bridge. Lake’s critics protested that they were victims of an “onerous and burdensome monopoly.” The crisis culminated in 1872 after the Board of County Commissioners for Washoe County rejected Lake’s petition for a five-year extension of the franchise. It then raised the stakes by declaring that his road and bridge were “to be and are a public highway.” Lake stood his ground. Armed with a revolver, he defied the order and kept collecting tolls as before. The stand-off continued for several days. Finally, he was arrested and fined by the sheriff after trying to stop a rancher from running his cattle through the toll gate without paying. Appealing to the
Nevada Supreme Court, Lake argued that the county had exceeded its legal authority under the terms of the franchise, but lost.37

The antagonism toward Lake had little apparent economic justification. He had always granted free passage to residents of Reno and charged half rates for people who lived in the valley even though the franchise did not require him to make these concessions. Historian John M. Townley noted that “tolls applied only to the long string of teamsters hauling goods between Reno and the Comstock who gladly paid their silver dollar for use of a smooth, maintained road for themselves and freight.” Townley concluded that “most of the clamor [against Lake] was petty resentment against Lake’s good fortune in being at the right place at the right time.”38

Viewed from another angle, the Lake affair also revealed diminished ideological support for toll roads. Compared to those of the decade earlier, newspaper editors and politicians of the 1870s were less likely to expound on the innate superiority of toll roads. In his annual address for 1871, for example, Governor Henry G. Blasdel devoted part of his message to the subject. While he did not call for the abolition of toll roads, his over-all tone was one of hostility: “the records of no civilized State disclose such reckless, inconsiderate and unwise grants of power, or so little consideration returned for the enormous and unprecedented rates of toll authorized to be taken.” This backlash was by no means universal. County commissions still granted numerous franchises during the rest of the decade and praise for toll roads continued to surface in newspapers. Currents in the opposite direction were even more powerful, however. By the 1880s, counties devoted more resources than ever to “free” roads and bridges and increasingly established functioning road districts.39

**Conclusion**

Between the 1850s and the 1870s, private toll roads were critical to Nevada’s economic development. The movement to build them arose primarily from pragmatic motivations. By the end of the 1850s, many Nevadans had concluded that the status quo was inadequate to the needs of a booming mining economy, and like other Americans before them, they responded by turning to the private sector. Toll roads brought improvements in quality and reliability and were initially popular. By the 1870s and 1880s, however, a combination of new public attitudes and economic trends, such as the mining depression and competition from the railroads, had tipped the balance in the other direction. This trend was not limited to Nevada. At the turn of the century, few private toll roads still survived in the United States. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that the question of private toll roads once again appeared on public policy agendas.
I am especially grateful to David M. Anderson, Department of History, University of North Carolina, who provided extremely invaluable assistance. I am also indebted to the following individuals for comments and suggestions: Linda Royster Beito, Daniel Levy, Larry Schweikart, Eugene P. Moehring, Jay Coughtry, Vernom Mattson, Todd J. Olson, Catharine McNicol Stock, and Katherine Morrissey.


David Allen Johnson, Founding the Far West: California, Oregon, and Nevada, 1840-1890 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 75.


Territorial Enterprise [Virginia City], 10 December 1859, 3 March 1860.


Nevada Legislature, Laws of the Territory of Nevada (1864), 1-179; and Nevada State Controller, Biennial Report (1869), 7.


We relied heavily on newspapers, such as the Territorial Enterprise, White Pine News, Reese River Reveille, Elko Independent, and Eureka Daily Sentinel, for information about investments and to confirm whether a proposed road was built. Other sources included the manuscript census; Angel, History of Nevada; First Directory of Nevada Territory (Virginia City, 1866); Directory, Storey, Ormsby, Washoe, and Lyon Counties (Sacramento, 1871); Annual Report of the Surveyor-General of the State of Nevada (1854-1895); Roberta Childers, Magee Station and the Churchill Chronicles (Red: Jamison Station Press, 1985); Victor O. Goodwin, The Humboldts: Nevada’s Desert River and Thoroughfare of the

2Elko Independent, 5 January 1870.


4Elbert B. Edwards, *200 Years in Nevada: A Story of People Who Opened, Explored, and Developed the Land* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1978), 220; Gold Hill Daily News, 22 June 1865; and *Daily Inland Empire* [Hamilton], 16 April 1869; Reese River Reveille, 12 January 1869; Esmeralda Daily Union [Aurora], 21 October 1864, and *Territorial Enterprise*, 5 June 1873. Except for a few superfluous references, newspapers and other sources have remarkably little to say about the men who labored on toll roads or their working conditions.


6David F. Myrick, *Railroads of Nevada and Eastern California*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: Howell-North Books, 1962), 90, 155, 166, 210-11; Elko Independent, 2 June 1869; Silver Bend Reporter [Belmont], 11 May 1867, 2 May 1868, 13 July 1868; *Territorial Enterprise*, 29 April 1868, 7 October 1868; and Goodwin, *Humboldt*, II, 8-9, VI, 13.

7The survey included investors in toll road projects which were actually completed. The reason for the high percentages in some categories is that many individuals listed more than one occupation.

8Winnebago Argent, 17 September 1868; and *Daily Inland Empire*, 16 April 1869. In some cases, stage companies maintained the stations and paid the owner for use of the road. Lester W. Mills, *A Sagebrush Saga* (Springville, Utah: Art City Publishing Company, 1956), 34.


12Klein and Yin, 680; Klein, “The Voluntary Provision,” 803; Elko Independent, 14 August 1869; *Reno Crescent*, 26 August 1871.

13Winnebago Argent, 23 July 1868, 27 August 1868.

14White Pine News, 17 April 1869; Reese River Reveille, 15 July 1863; *Territorial Enterprise*, 25 May 1873.


17In 1869, a paper in White Pine County reported that some of the locals made a practice of hanging a sack near a mountain gorge “upon which is printed (with axe[s] of grease) the rates of toll, [they] collect a few dollars from the credulous farmers, and have a spree.” *White Pine News*, 5 April 1869.


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34Jackson, Treasure Hill, 30; Ely Record, 9 September 1872; Elko Independent, 5 January 1870; Inland Empire, 29 June 1869; White Pine News, 16 January 1869, 13 March 1869; Territorial Enterprise, 15 May 15 1867; and Silver Bend Reporter, 1 June 1867.
35Edna B. Patterson, This Land Was Ours: An In-depth Study of a Frontier Community (Springville, Utah: Art City Publishing, 1973), 20-21; Goodwin, “Transportation,” 141, 145, 172-73; Nevada State Controller, Annual Report (1865), (1870), (1875), (1880), (1885)
38Townley, Tough Little Town, 52-54, 146-47; Nevada, Territorial Legislature, Laws of the Territory of Nevada, Second Session (1862), 19; Washoe County, Board of County Commissioners, Proceedings, 4 August 1868; Reno Crescent, 30 January 1869.
39Townley, Tough Little Town, 146-17; Reno Crescent, 21 January 1871, 9 January 1873, 30 January 1873, 6 February 1873; and Territorial Enterprise, 31 January 1873, 4 February 1873, 29 May 1873.
40Townley, Tough Little Town, 146; Reno Crescent, 30 January 1869. “Justice,” a defender of Lake, estimated that four-fifths of all teamsters “prefer a toll road in good condition, to a country road, which will necessarily be more or less unfit for travel.” Reno Crescent, 21 January 1871.
41Nevada State Legislature, The Journal of the Senate (1871), 12; Reno Crescent, 7 December 1872; Territorial Enterprise, 29 December 1874; and Patterson, This Land Was Ours, 20-21. For words of praise about toll roads during the 1860s, see Gold Hill Daily News, 15 October 1863, 22 June 1865; Humboldt Register [Unionville], 20 June 1863; and Reese River Reveille, 27 June 1868, 30 November 1868.
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Jackson, *Treasure Hill*, 39; Ely Record, 9 September 1872; *Ely Independent*, 5 January 1870; *Inland Empire*, 29 June 1869; *White Pine News*, 16 January 1869, 13 March 1869; *Territorial Enterprise*, 15 May 15 1867; and *Silver Bend Reporter*, 1 June 1867.


Townley, *Tough Little Town*, 146-17; Reno *Crescent*, 21 January 1871, 9 January 1873, 30 January 1873, 6 February 1873; and *Territorial Enterprise*, 31 January 1873, 4 February 1873, 29 May 1873.

Townley, *Tough Little Town*, 146; Reno *Crescent*, 30 January 1869. “Justice,” a defender of Lake, estimated that four-fifths of all teamsters “prefer a toll road in good condition, to a country road, which will necessarily be more or less unfit for travel.” Reno *Crescent*, 21 January 1871.

Nevada State Legislature, *The Journal of the Senate* (1871), 12; Reno *Crescent*, 7 December 1872; *Territorial Enterprise*, 29 December 1874; and Patterson, *This Land Was Ours*, 20-21. For words of praise about toll roads during the 1860s, see Gold Hill *Daily News*, 13 October 1865, 22 June 1865; Humboldt *Register* [Unionville], 20 June 1863; and Reese River *Reveille*, 27 June 1868, 30 November 1868.