

King's Tavern as a "Post House"

King's Tavern also served as a post house. A Native American carrier reportedly delivered the first US Mail to King's Tavern in the early 1800's. Before 1823 when Congress designated navigable waters as post roads and the real change came in 1838 when they designated Railroads as post routes, people who lived along the Natchez Trace relied on hundreds of privately paid post riders to deliver mail and other communications. It took at least two weeks for these independent post riders to ride the distance between Nashville and Natchez on horseback. When the U.S. Postal Service was inaugurated, it served 2000 miles of post roads with 75 post offices, but just 26 government post-riders. The independent post riders were allowed to continue to deliver letters, papers, and packages on their respective routes. Post riding was a dangerous, but lucrative profession. In 1838, Congress passed a law making all railroads in the United States official post roads, which allowed the railroads to transport mail. Unable to compete, Post riders were limited to working in postal districts that were not on railway routes.

The Natchez Trace

This famous stretch of historic road, now a parkway, runs from Natchez 444 miles all the way to Nashville, Tennessee. But in the 19th century, the passageway twisted over 500 miles through tangled forests, boggy swamps and broken valleys where dangerous animals, bandits and Native Americans were encountered. Bad weather and frequent flooding of small creeks and rivers turned into torrents and made the trails impassable. Open passages turned into soggy bog land that stalled horses and wagons in the muck. However, the greatest dangers on the Trace walked on two feet. The lonely roadway was a favorite for bandits and thieves. Bands of renegade Natives and whites alike set up along the Trace to ambush and plunder travelers. People constantly disappeared on the Trace, never to be seen or heard from again. It was not uncommon for even well known individuals to disappear; it was assumed that they had become a victim on the Trace.

One famous death on the Natchez Trace was that of Meriwether Lewis, of the Lewis and Clark expedition. In October of 1809, he allegedly committed suicide at Grinder's Stand on the Trace. Lewis's traveling companion, Major James Neely, arrived at the death scene a few hours after the event. Major Neely wrote to Thomas Jefferson: "It is with extreme pain that I have to inform you of the death of His excellency Meriwether Lewis, Governor of Upper Louisiana who died on the morning of the 11th Instant and I am sorry to say by Suicide." Many still question the suicide, choosing to believe instead that Lewis was murdered.