information instantly across long distances, set it apart from previous communication and transportation of physical objects. By severing the link between communication and transportation, the telegraph helped reshape American society and culture.

**Phase One**

Before 1844, information travelled no faster than the pace at which goods and people moved yet the amount and diversity of available information increased, as did access to information networks. This happened without the invention of new communication technology, although advances in transportations, such as canals, steamboats and railroads did improve the speed and reliability of information flow. Political ideology, cultural institutions and administrative improvements in existing communication networks shaped the pre-telegraphic communications revolution. As shown by James W. Carey (1989), Americans in this period believed that the maintenance of national unity and preservation of republican institutions depended on communications that would unite the nation as an imagined community. Americans sought to unite the country through internal improvements in order to channel ideas and commerce, thus creating a national community of interest and sentiment. As Richard D. Brown (1996) points out this hope provided an important impetus for the establishment of institutions in the early republic, like a free press, postal service, government support for internal improvements and public education, local schools, libraries, museums and lecture halls.

It took seven days for New York newspapers to publish news of George Washington’s death in Virginia in 1799 but in 1830, New York papers published Andrew Jacksons state of the union address to Congress 15 ½ hours after it was given. Allen R. Pred claims that the period’s increased trade and commercial activity, which created a demand for faster and more reliable communications, was the main factor which accelerated information flow, but these improvements were far from uniform throughout the country. Towns located long established trading routes, especially on the Atlantic seaboard between Boston and Washington enjoyed fast and more reliable communication that interior points.

- In 1833 the first penny paper, the Sun, was founded in New York.
- In 1843 the U.S. Congress appropriated $30,000 to fund an experimental telegraph line from Washington D.C. to Baltimore.
- The number of post offices, for example increased from 903 in 1800 to 28,498 in 1860

This mix of motives provided much of the rationale for government assistance and similar motives lay at the heart of American postal policy after the passage of the Post Office Act of 1792. Richard R. John (1995) has credited the act with ushering in a revolutionary era of American communications. By the early 1830s, the postal network had reached 8,450 post offices and transmitted nearly 14 million letters and 16 million newspapers. John claims that the Post Office was the most important communications medium of the pre-telegraphic era and that the postal system was crucial in establishing integrated markets for both goods and information and in establishing both a political sphere and civil society of national extent. The Post Office Act of 1792 contained a mechanism for the rapid expansion of the system into the trans-Appalachian West and a system of subsidies for the newspaper press. These established the principle of universal access to information networks as the central feature of American communications policy. The Act also facilitated the growth of the postal system by placing the authority for establishing post offices and roads with Congress, which allowed local interests to pressure the national government for rapid expansion of facilities and reduction of postage rate. This brought about the Post Office Acts of 1845 and 1851, which reduced postage from up to 25 cents per sheet to 3 cents per half-ounce. After this, post was a social and commercial medium. The subsidies to press facilitated a dramatic growth of newspapers and subscribers between 1792 and 1840. Richard B. Kielbowicz (1989) argues that the post office and the press together constituted the most important mechanism for the dissemination of public information. Low postage on periodicals allowed religious, political and reform organisations to flourish in the Jacksonian era and develop a national audience. Post law allowed editors to exchange postage-free copies with editors of other newspapers; before telegraphs, these