

STORIES of New Jersey

"First movement by steam on a railroad in the State of New Jersey, November 12, 1831, by the original locomotive "John Bull," now deposited in the United States National Museum in Washington. The first piece of track in New Jersey was laid by the Camden and Amboy Railroad between this point and the stone 3500 feet eastward, in 1831."

The Camden and Amboy, however, did not win the honor of being the first American railroad with locomotive power. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, the oldest company in continuous service in the United States, sent out its first train from Baltimore on August 28, 1830. It ran to Ellicott's Mills, a distance of 13 miles, drawn by an engine called the "Tom Thumb" built by Peter Cooper. There was also the Carbondale and Honesdale Railroad in Pennsylvania, which made a trial run with an English engine, the "Stourbridge Lion," August 8, 1829.

The railroads developed so rapidly that the little "John Bull" was soon out of date. It was stowed away in the care of the Smithsonian Institute along with the boiler and steam valve of Colonel John Stevens' earlier locomotive that had raced around his circular track at Stevens' Castle. But after 62 years, in 1893, the iron picture puzzle that Isaac Dripps had so laboriously put together for Robert and Edwin Stevens was run out of the Museum for a last glimpse of the nineteenth century. Beside a modern locomotive, it looked like a beetle.

It was taken to New York and there hitched to the old carriages that it had first drawn. It had been a long search to find them. One was being used as a chicken coop; the feathered passengers had to be dispossessed. The "John Bull" and its ancient tender and carriages were put on the railroad tracks and pointed due west. The boiler was stoked, water fed the tubes, steam generated once more in the old engine, an engineer pulled open the throttle and with a snort the train was under way for Chicago, 930 miles distant. The journey was made without breakdown or accident. In every city and village along the way it was hailed by enthusiastic crowds. All these cities, towns and villages had sprung into being as the result of the "John Bull's" first success. Its holiday ended, the antique locomotive was taken back to Washington, there to remain as a symbol of great American achievements.

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