

STORIES of New Jersey

from New York to New Brunswick cost 6 cents with a meal thrown in.

The desire to beat competitors resulted in many accidents. Both stages and boats would race to get to the landings first. Just how quickly the passengers were put aboard the boats can be only estimated, but in 1828 the Legislature ordered all boats to remain at their docks at least one minute. Stage drivers were instructed to stay sober and to avoid injuring each other. From the record of accidents it is apparent that the Legislature's action did not entirely eliminate the trouble.

As was natural, the best steamboat service was to be found in the through lines, but many small cities on rivers, creeks and bays clamored for and finally obtained their own steamer facilities. As the steam lines spread, stage lines spread with them to connect the coastal or river towns with the inland country. In 1828 there were 12 stage lines spreading out from Camden, and Newark had eight for commuters. In this heyday of coaching the oval-shaped conveyance had been exchanged for the Concord coach, a flat-topped vehicle with better springs. Commonly called the "only perfect vehicle," it had a larger capacity and afforded passengers more space.

Then in the 1830's iron rails were laid across the State, and the end of stagecoaching approached. The New York to Philadelphia stages could not compete with the speed and comfort of the railroads, and local coach lines could not keep their fares down to the levels of the horse-drawn trains. In a final effort to compete with the New Jersey Railroad between Newark and Jersey City the stage lines on that run carried passengers not only to the terminals but directly to their homes.

The stages were not scrapped immediately in New Jersey. Many short lines were operated to make connections between railroad terminals and outlying communities. For a time whenever the railroads raised fares stagecoaches were put back into service. When the rail rates dropped, the stages went back into retirement. The days of racing coaches clattering across the State were done. The horses of flesh and blood were no match for their iron-muscled brothers, and the roar of steam silenced the ringing of hoofbeats. But now history has swung back again, and the supremacy of rail transportation is threatened by vehicles that use the roads--the huge, bright trucks that day and night roll from coast to coast along the smooth concrete. Perhaps some day someone will compose a poem about the end of present day transportation as J. P. Morgan's great-grandfather did when the stagecoach passed away:

We hear no more of the clanging hoof,
And the stage-coach rattling by,
For the steam-king rules the traveled world,
And the old pike's left to die.
The grass creeps o'er the flinty path,
And stealthy daisies steal
Where once the stage horse, day by day,
Lifted his iron heel.

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And the old pike road is left alone,
As the stagers seek the plow;
We have circled the earth with an iron rail,
And the steam-king rules us now.