

New Jersey Railroad Completed Tracks From Newark to Highland Park Side of Raritan

By DONALD ST. JOHN

Although most commuters and residents of this city didn't know it, yesterday was the 100th anniversary of the completion of New Brunswick's first railroad. For years the little city on the Raritan had been connected with the outside world by stage and steamer and it remained until July 11, 1836, before two long rods of metal pushed their way into the community, whose history they were destined to so greatly changed.

On September 15, 1834 the New Jersey Railroad was completed to Newark. Work was pushed on rapidly during 1835, and the road was completed to East Brunswick or what is now known as Highland Park, July 11, 1836. A few days later a new locomotive called the "New Brunswick," with 13 cars gayly decorated with banners, came from Newark—at the unheard of rate of 15 miles per hour.

The party was received by Alderman Zabriskie and was escorted over the Albany street bridge to the court house where a sumptuous entertainment had been arranged. Mayor Hardenbergh presided and speeches were made by several of the guests.

Trains Stopped in Highland Park
At this time all trains stopped across the river and passengers were transferred over the bridge in stages, at a cost of 6½ cents each. A railroad and vehicular bridge was begun in 1837 and in 1938 the first train was run across to the new depot on Somerset street.

The movement for a railroad, started in New Brunswick in 1835, shows how very early the city was in the new venture. The first railroad in this country was from the granite quarries of Quincy, Mass., to tidewater, and was built in 1826, being however, a horse and gravel-power affair.

The second was opened May 27, 1827 and was from Mauch Chunk to the Lehigh River. It was also horse-drawn. The first chartered passenger and freight railroad began July 3, 1828 on what is now part of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad—using mule power.

The first locomotive was imported in 1829 and placed on the tracks of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company's railroad, while the first engine to be built in America was constructed in Baltimore and was used on the Charleston and Ham-burgh Railroad, which was the first to carry mail. The Mohawk and Hudson, from Albany to Schenectady, clam the first train with imported engine, the "John Bull", weighing four tons, in 1831.

George Stephanson built an engine of 10 tons in 1831, also called the "John Bull." The latter engine was used for some time on the old Camden and Amboy line from Philadelphia to New York, before that road was taken over with the New Jersey line from Jersey City by the Pennsylvania in 1871 for a period of 999 years.

According to an account by Cornelius C. Vermeule, local historian, the New Brunswick railroad era began simultaneously with the canal. The Camden and Amboy Railroad was chartered at the same time as the Delaware and Raritan Canal in 1830. The first charter had been granted in 1815 but without result.

Conflict Canal vs. Railroad

"There was a sharp conflict as to the relative merits of the canal and railroads. The Stevens family, father and sons, ably and intelligently advocated the railroads and made many predictions as to their superiority, which were soon verified. The legislative committee of 1829, took the canal side and their arguments were amusing:

"The practical location, with water navigation at both ends, points out clearly the necessity of a canal and to the inutility of a railroad. A railroad here would be as completely locked-in by ice as the canal. Railroads effect a monopoly while canals operate as common highways. Any farmer may keep a boat and navigate on the canal, but an engine and wagon calculated for a railroad would be too expensive for ordinary use. Moreover the frost in this climate operates as injuriously to the railroad in affecting their foundations as the ice does to canals in suspending their trade."

"Many have thought that the canal was taken over and suppressed by the railroads in order to stifle competition. On the contrary, competition was never attempted and the two forces combined before either had been constructed.

"The state was divided into a canal party and a railroad party, each of which checkmated the other. Furthermore, the powerful stage and steamboat lines hoped to kill both, and in self defense the canal and railroad were forced to unite.

"The new means of transportation worked great changes in the Raritan Valley. The first effect of the railway was to the advantage of New Brunswick, as against that of Raritan Landing across the river. The latter retained some trade but the river transportation died and the wharves and warehouses on the north bank became useless.

Two Railroads in State

"At first the Camden and Amboy Railroad, being entirely south of the Raritan River, reached New York by steam boat. However, the New Jersey Railroad was incorporated in 1832 and opened its line from Jersey City to Newark in 1834, using horses to pull the cars. For two or three years it ran on the high bridge across the Hackensack and climbed over Bergen Hill. In 1836, it reached the north side of the Raritan."

All this activity had to do with connecting New Brunswick and New York. Now some far-sighted railroad executives began to see the possibilities of a through line

brought about is related by another local historian, John P. Wall:

"The Philadelphia and Trenton Railroad Company, with a road between Kensington and Morrisville, securing a controlling interest in the Trenton and New Brunswick Straight Turnpike Company in 1834 and hoped to use it as a right of way to connect with the Jersey Railroad, planning to reach Trenton over the Delaware bridge already completed.

"The Camden and Amboy Company, quick to perceive that such a project would prove disastrous to their road, took the offensive and bought the river bridge, securing all available stock in the Philadelphia Company and demanded protection of their charter.

"As a result the Camden and Amboy secured a charter May 15, 1837 for the new road which was completed, from Bordentown to New Brunswick, in 1838. That same year the Amboy line had a controlling interest in the Philadelphia road.

"January 1, 1839 was the date of the junction of the New Jersey and the Camden and Amboy Railroad—and at that time the through line was established."

Stages Connected Railroads

Before the junction had been effected, travelers from Philadelphia would journey to Trenton on the Philadelphia and Trenton Railroad and would then go on to New Brunswick through Princeton in stage coaches. Arriving in this city the stages would cross the Albany street bridge and then by passing along the River road reach the awaiting trains of the New Jersey Railroad.

When the railroad bridge was completed on January 1, 1838 the first train came over it and stopped at the little station on Somerset street, the site of the old Baptist Church, just off of George street. The crossing of this bridge and the opening of the station was made a lively day indeed.

"There was no such unseemly haste in those days," deplors Historian Vermeule, "as at the present time and even 30 years after the first development, trains came into New Brunswick with whistle blowing, and stopped for 10 or 15 minutes while passengers refreshed themselves at the restaurant in the old depot. A great bell hung over the platform and rang lustily when time to leave was near. With much ado, passengers were urged aboard, the locomotive whistled, wheezed and puffed, and travel toward Philadelphia was resumed. This performance was repeated at Trenton.

N.J. Railroads

Jul 12, 1934