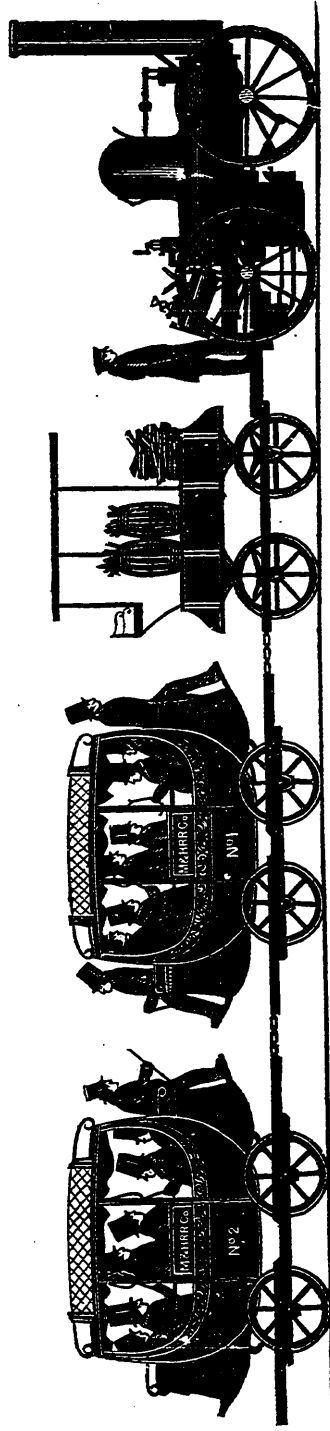


MOHAWK AND HUDSON RIVER RAIL ROAD.



STYLE OF FIRST PASSENGER TRAINS BY STEAM POWER BETWEEN ALBANY AND SCHENECTADY, 1831.

THE
Origin, Progress and Vicissitudes
OF THE
MOHAWK AND HUDSON RAIL ROAD
AND
THE FIRST EXCURSION ON IT.

By J. MUNSELL.

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Mohawk and Hudson Rail Road.

The tradition of an extraordinary excursion upon the rail road between Albany and Schenectady, at an early day in the history of that road, being a subject of much discussion at this time, and not generally well understood, I have endeavored to investigate thoroughly the facts concerning the event. Although it occurred within the memory of persons who may now be present, and who witnessed or may have been cognizant of it, there is still no little doubt and controversy about it, especially as to when it took place, and who occupied places on the train.

The lithographed representations of it that are frequently met with serve to perpetuate the memory of the mysterious trip, and to excite curiosity respecting it.

Observing that Knickerbocker began the history of New York with an account of the creation, and that a more recent chronicler has commenced the annals of a neighboring inland county with the discovery of America by Columbus, I am disposed to make a starting point at that era in the history of artificial locomotion, when the transportation of coals for fuel in England had become so great a strain upon physical exertion, as to stimulate invention in aid of the efforts of man and beast to overcome obstacles in the pursuit of that enterprise.

Accordingly we find that in 1676, two centuries ago, a rude contrivance was brought into use, by which coals were moved in cars running upon wooden rails; and it

was not until a century later, that iron rails were introduced. Indeed, although a rail road was constructed in France, in 1783, the principal use made of rail roads until near the end of the first quarter of the present century, was the transportation of coals in England. They were mostly short roads or tram ways among the collieries, and the trains were taken up and down inclined planes, by stationary engines. The era of successful operations for the transportation of passengers upon rail roads by locomotives propelled by steam power, dawned but half a century ago; and the plateau familiarly known to us as the pine plain, between Albany and Schenectady, was the theatre of a genuine passenger rail road almost as early as any in the world.

Overlooking the theories and experiments of Oliver Evans in the last century, we find that in 1812, a pamphlet was published for the purpose of explaining the superior advantage of rail ways and steam carriages over canal navigation, particularly on the peculiarly favorable route from Lake Erie to Hudson's river, which had been the ancient trail of the Indians, and which will undoubtedly ever remain the natural and most feasible land passage between the two waters. Mr. Stevens of New Jersey endeavored to persuade all who were engaged in public improvements, that rail roads were cheaper and more effective, as well as far more rapid in transit, than was possible to be attained by water. Mr. Featherstonhaugh of Schenectady also put in a plea for rail roads.

But the great enterprise of constructing the canals, in which the energies of the state were at that time involved, overshadowed all other schemes. Yet no sooner were they completed, and in successful operation, than the project of a system of rail roads parallel to the Erie canal began at once to be persistently agitated. A writer in the *Argus* of 1825, urged upon capitalists the absolute necessity of their entering upon the construction of a rail road to Schenectady

to prevent the city from going to decay through the rivalry of Troy! And as if that danger was really felt to be imminent, we find that in November of that year it was announced agreeably to statute, that an application would be made to the next legislature for an act to incorporate a company to construct a rail-road from Schenectady to the Hudson river at Albany or Troy, as should be deemed most advisable.

The project was brought before the legislature early in the session of 1826, and a bill to incorporate the Mohawk and Hudson rail road company introduced. On the 10th of March the bill was discussed in the assembly. It is amusing to note the tenor of the arguments advanced by some of the legislators on that occasion.

Mr. Lush, the Albany member, moved to strike out that part of the bill which gave the company permission to locate the termination of their road at any point of the river lying within the distance of three miles above or below the city of Albany. He hoped the house would not consent to a measure which might have a tendency to divert trade from this city, and carry it to a place below, where speculators might purchase land and build up a town which might rival and seriously affect the interests of Albany. The Albany and Schenectady turnpike company had spent much money, he said, in improving a road between the two cities, and had never realized more than two per cent on their investment.

Mr. Hoffman had yet to learn that the interests of Albany were to be looked to as paramount to those of the state. If the company found it advantageous to terminate the road here, they would no doubt do it; but if it should be inconvenient from the nature of the ground to do so, they should certainly have elbow room enough to terminate it at any other place.

Mr. Sill did not know as it was important that the proposed road should come out just where the old Dutch

church had stood. The ancient burgers of Albany thought that nothing could be an improvement which went beyond its limits. The City of Hudson owed its origin to such narrow views. Many years ago a number of persons from the eastern states wished to purchase the ground at the southern extremity of this city, called the pasture; but the Albany dons would not sell it, because they did not think it right that population and business should go beyond the old bounds. The consequence was that the immigrants went and settled at the place now called Hudson. Some years ago the Albanians wanted a bridge, but the project was defeated by their quarrelling among themselves, whether it should be opposite one wharf or the other. Something of that sort appears to be going on now.

The speaker of the house, Clarkson Crolius, thought that passengers and light freight might be easily conveyed upon the road, but he conceived that heavy articles would be transported on the canals, and the revenue of the state derived from that source would not be diminished. It had been said that rail roads in England, had almost superseded the use of canals. The reason might be that the boats were small and the supply of water scant; the boats in England could, by the aid of machinery, be placed with all their freight upon the railway carriages, but he doubted if our heavy boats would ever be conveyed in that manner. He would like to see the experiment of a rail road tried in this country, and hoped the bill would pass, and that the applicants would be permitted to make the experiment at their own expense.

G. W. Featherstonhaugh, in a letter to the mayor, said that transportation of property from Albany to Schenectady was seldom effected in less than two, and sometimes three days. By rail road the communication between the same points would be safely made, in winter and summer, in three hours, at no greater cost than by canal, paying for sixteen instead of twenty-eight miles. He regarded this

experiment as a test whether this economical mode of transportation would succeed in this country. At this time the most available and rapid inland travel was by stages, and more capital was invested in them than in any other enterprise carried on in this city.

The bill passed the assembly on the 27th of March, 1826, incorporating the company with a capital of \$300,000, with liberty to increase it to \$500,000, and a duration of fifty years, limiting the time for construction to six years. Stephen Van Rensselaer, known as the old patroon, and G. W. Featherstonhaugh were the only persons named as directors in the charter.

This seems, therefore, to have been the first charter of what became a successful passenger rail road in this country. No rail road had been constructed on the American continent, for the conveyance of passengers by steam power, previous to this date. The South Carolina road was chartered nearly two years later, and its construction begun in 1828. The Delaware and Hudson, and Baltimore and Ohio roads were also begun in 1828. The first two practical locomotives built in this country, were constructed at the West Point Foundry, in the city of New York, for the South Carolina road, and the trial trip was made in November, 1830. The third was the De Witt Clinton, built at the same foundry, for the Mohawk and Hudson road, and put in operation nearly a year later.

On the 26th of June, 1826, books were opened for subscriptions to the stock of the Mohawk and Hudson rail road, and we have the authority of two daily journals, the *Albany Daily Advertiser* and the *Albany Argus*, that the stock was eagerly taken by capitalists. But the company seems to have moved with the safest haste from this time forward, for more than four years elapsed before the construction of the road was begun.

It may be remarked here that the Quincy Mass. road, which is often mentioned as the first rail road in this country,

was built for the purpose of transporting granite from the quarry to tide water, a distance of three miles, was not a passenger road, and was operated by gravitation and horse power, in 1827; and that the first substantial and effective locomotive put upon an American rail road was the Stourbridge Lion, built in England, and run out of Honesdale on the Delaware and Hudson road in 1829; but it was abandoned and never brought into practical use, horse power being adopted instead—for the reason that the structure of the road would not admit of the use of a locomotive of so great weight.

On the 29th of July, 1830, the ceremony of breaking ground for the Mohawk and Hudson road took place near Schenectady, "*with a silver spade*," by Stephen Van Rensselaer, then known as the old patroon in contradistinction to his son Stephen, the young patroon. In September it was announced that the stock of the road had risen to ten per cent above par, and the editor of the *Daily Advertiser*, always enthusiastic about such enterprises, predicted that trains would make trips between the two cities in three quarters of an hour, and reach Utica from Albany in four hours. The latter was a somewhat startling prediction, when we consider that the utmost exertion of the stages barely overcame the distance in twelve hours.

The officers of the company had decided to use steam power, and had ordered two locomotives, one from Stephenson of England, similar to those that were in use upon the Liverpool and Manchester road, and another from the West Point Foundry in the City of New York. On the 23d of July, 1831, neither of them had arrived.

The construction of the road was described by the editor of the *Argus*, Mr. Croswell, as supported upon square beds of rubble, in which a heavy stone block was imbedded, each pier containing eleven cubic feet of block and rubble stone, the piers as being placed three feet from centre to centre, and forming almost a continuous stone

wall. It was claimed that the construction of the road was superior to any other in the world! and that the stone filling alone cost as much per mile as the whole of the Baltimore road; and that it had an important advantage over other roads in being perfectly straight, and consequently less liable to lateral pressure. A force of about 2,000 persons had been employed in its construction. The highest ground on the line was 335 feet above the level of the Hudson river.

The locomotive De Witt Clinton arrived by tow boat on the 25th July, 1831, and was put upon the road on the 27th, twelve months from the time when the ceremony of breaking ground was performed. On the 30th of July an experiment was made with the locomotive, but owing to some defect or inexperience in burning Lackawanna coal, the speed did not exceed seven miles an hour, and it was determined to substitute coke. Meantime the road, which was completed and in use from the junction of the Western turnpike and Lydius street, about twelve and a half miles to the brow of the hill at Schenectady, was operated by horse power. Besides platform cars used in the construction of the road, a number of stage coach bodies were placed upon trucks for temporary use, affording seats for fifteen or eighteen passengers each. On the 3d of August the De Witt Clinton made the trip in one hour and forty-five minutes, and on the 10th they ran two trains each way with coke, making a part of the trip at the rate of thirty miles an hour!

Aug. 13, a large company assembled to take a trip on the rail road. The locomotive De Witt Clinton had been found defective in the capacity of the boiler, and portions thereof were returned to the foundery for improvement. The train was moved by horse power, consisting of five cars, each containing from fifteen to eighteen persons, most of whom were notabilities and interested persons, ac-

compained by Mr. Cambreling, the president of the company. These vehicles were usually drawn by two horses, driven tandem.

On the 8th of September, the De Witt Clinton was again upon the rail, but there was now difficulty with the feed pipe, and the train did not return. On the following day the train came over the road in forty-five minutes, but there was still trouble with the feed pipe. They had gone back to first principles and adopted wood for fuel.

On the 17th of September, the English locomotive was on the road. Its power and weight being double that of the American engine (12,742 lbs.), great expectations were entertained of its efficiency. A delegation from New York arrived, for the purpose of examining the road preparatory to a decision upon the application of the Harlem company, to lay their rails on the Fourth avenue of that city.

Active measures were also in progress to begin the Schenectady and Saratoga road, and a survey was being made by the Troy and Vermont company. The trustees of the Schenectady turnpike also had got an inkling that something new had turned up, which they had been slow to perceive. A survey was begun by Mr. Cushman with a view to laying down rails, it being claimed that they were invested with rail road privileges. The project was quashed, I am told, by a division of \$100,000 of Mohawk and Hudson stock, at par, among the stockholders of the turnpike.

Although the locomotive De Witt Clinton had been placed on the road in July, and the city officials and other dignitaries had passed over it both by horse and steam power early in August, it was so late as the 22d of September, when the locomotive was advertised to take passenger trains. The road was still uncompleted, and used only from the junction, as it was called, two miles from the foot of State street, from whence passengers

were taken to the train by stage coaches. The other terminus of the road was still at the bluff overlooking Schenectady, where passengers were again transferred to stages. The distance traversed was less than thirteen miles. From this small beginning, however, it has been claimed, ignoring the South Carolina and the Baltimore and Ohio roads, that this was the first passenger rail road on the American continent operated by a locomotive, entitled to consideration as a success. It was undisputably the first in the state of New York.

The precise time when the directors of the road felt prepared to crown the complete success of their labors by a grand excursion, to which were invited the state and city officials, and a number of eminent citizens of New York, was the 24th of September, 1831. There are so many different accounts of this affair, and it is involved in so much doubt and uncertainty that it has been suggested whether, after all, it was not an imaginary event. But we have the truthful portraiture of a portion of the train, the handiwork of Mr. Wm. H. Brown, a remarkable artist, who wrought with a pair of scissors, after the style of the Silhouettes, graphic representations of persons, and of things occurring at that time. This train was so vividly represented by Mr. Brown, that many persons have been led to imagine that they can identify the passengers from his *cutting*, as we may term it. A lithographic copy of this picture has been made, and extensively circulated, in which certain figures of persons in the cars are designated by numbers and names.

More inquiry has been made than the importance of the subject demands to verify the names of the persons claimed to have been present; but as five new cars, or coaches, had been put on the road for this occasion, there were not less than eighty passengers in all, and a crowd that could not obtain seats; therefore the efforts that have been made by several ardent antiquaries through personal inquiry and by

correspondence, to make up an accurate and complete list of the passengers on this train has failed, as might be expected.

In this picture but two of the coaches are brought into view, which are represented as carrying eight passengers each, while their real capacity was fifteen at least. These vehicles were built by Mr. James Goold at his manufactory in Union street, and were mere stage coach bodies, placed upon trucks and supported upon thoroughbraces in the manner of stages. They were ordered by Asa Whitney, who had charge of the construction and equipment of the road. The tender was a platform upon a truck, on which fuel was placed, the supply of water for half the route being taken in at the start, with provision of a tank at the half way house for water to carry the train through. The trucks were built in Schenectady.

It is doubtful whether the names collected after so much research, traditional and authentic, really belong to a single trip, or should not rather be distributed among two or three of the early excursions. The chief engineer, John B. Jervis, and the resident engineer, John T. Clark, who acted as conductor before the appointment of such an official; David Mathews, the engineer and builder of the locomotive, and John Hampson, the fireman, were there. Then follow the names of such invited guests as have survived the lapse of time and memory.

Churchill C. Cambreling, president of the road.

Enos T. Throop, governor of the state.

Charles E. Dudley, senator in congress.

Azariah C. Flagg, state comptroller.

Edward P. Livingston, lieutenant governor.

Joseph Yates of Schenectady, late governor.

Stephen Van Rensselaer, patroon.

Francis Bloodgood, mayor of Albany.

John I. De Graff, mayor of Schenectady.

Reuben H. Walworth, chancellor.

Joseph Alexander, president of the Commercial Bank.

Samuel Swartwout, and Philip Hone, of New York.

Edwin Croswell, editor of the *Albany Argus*.

Jacob Hays, high constable of New York city.

John Meigs, high constable of Albany.

Erastus Corning, Lewis Benedict and John Townsend,
hardware merchants.

Jesse Buel Jr., * of the engineer department, who was on
the road from the first survey until it was in operation.

John I. Boyd, merchant.

William Bay, physician.

Simeon De Witt Bloodgood, counselor.

L. H. Tupper, * steam boat captain.

Thurlow Weed, * editor of *Evening Journal*. It is remarkable that no notice of these excursions, nor anything relating to the enterprise, is to be found in the files of the *Evening Journal*.

William B. Winne, the ancient penny post.

Of course others must have been present and joined in the excursion. It may be thought that I give importance to trivial matters in this connection. Erroneous dates and statements have been published concerning these events by persons writing from memory many years after they occurred. Happening as they did within my own memory, I have endeavored to corroborate my statements by cotemporary authorities.

It was intended that the English engine, which had been designated the Robert Fulton, should move an imposing train. But the old difficulty attributed to the feed pipe again interposed, and that machine was withdrawn, and the party, which had been delayed till twelve o'clock, was started off with a train of three cars drawn by the De Witt Clinton, and the others followed by horse power. A dinner was given to the party at Schenectady, whereat the

* Survivors in May, 1875.

president of the road, Mr. Cambreling, gave the following memorable toast :

The Buffalo Rail Road — May we soon breakfast at Utica, dine at Rochester, and sup with our friends on Lake Erie.

It occupied seventy-two continuous hours of wearing travel by stage to reach Buffalo at this time.

The locomotive returned with five cars, making the trip in thirty-five minutes. It was now dubbed jocosely Brother Jonathan, and the English engine John Bull ; although the true John Bull did not come on till the next year.

It is remarked that this trip removed the doubts of the gentlemen from New York, with regard to the practicability and utility of the Harlem enterprise.

Such was the increase of travel over the road, that while the daily average of passengers was 180 in August, in the month following it was 322.

The notice of an application to the legislature for a through road to Buffalo was soon after published, and a new medium for speculation arose, and grew in magnitude daily before the vision of capitalists.

In January, 1832, the company reported to the legislature, that the amount actually paid and disbursed in the construction of the road was \$483,215 ; that by the estimates \$156,693 would be required to complete it.

In the spring of 1832, the road was completed throughout its whole line, and the inclined planes being in working order, another grand excursion was given on the 14th of May, extending from the foot of Gansevoort street into the heart of Schenectady. The event was witnessed by a large assemblage, and attended by the firing of cannon. The cars were drawn up the inclined plane by means of a long rope attached to them, and to a stationary engine at the top, the whole steadied and balanced by a car loaded with stone descending on the opposite track. The same ceremony was observed at the Schenectady terminus, occupy-

ing much time, and becoming somewhat tedious when the novelty wore away. The same style of rail road coaches was still used. In the fall of this year a new pattern of car was built in Schenectady, more nearly like those now in use, the *architecture* of which was modeled from Dr. Nott's parlor stove, and was called the gothic car. No shop was yet prepared to turn out these vehicles with dispatch. Mr. Jesse Buel has furnished me with a representation of the new car, the drawing made by himself in 1832.

In January 1833, the company having erected in State street for a hotel, the building now occupied by the Free Academy, the cars were run by horse power from State street to the junction, where they were coupled to the locomotive. The stock at this time was selling at \$1.25, and matters were in a prosperous and satisfactory state with the directors, when an unexpected episode occurred to disturb the even tenor of their way.

At a meeting of the common council in July, the mayor, Francis Bloodgood, made a long speech concerning the tearing up the pavement of State street, for the purpose of laying a track to the river, and concluded by recommending the prosecution of the company for an unlawful proceeding. It resulted in the company being fined ten dollars, by Justice John O. Cole. It is understood that the charter of the company required them to lay down a track to the river. It was never used, although the company completed it this year, notwithstanding the common council sought to relieve them of this unnecessary expense by an enactment. But the stock was largely owned in New York, and it was found that the act of the legislature could not be annulled by the city board, and the directors were apprehensive that a failure to comply strictly with the terms of their charter, would reinvest the turnpike company with the rail road privileges, which they formerly claimed to hold.

Aug. 5, 1833, a communication was presented to the common council in respect to the rail road entering the city through State street. It was submitted to a committee who reported that they thought the company might safely be allowed to approach the basin from Gansevoort street under proper restrictions.

1836. An effort was made before the common council to permit the laying of rails from Gansevoort street to Ferry street, to admit trains to reach the Greenbush ferry. The property holders held this project some time in abeyance, being opposed to the passage of trains through their streets. It was finally accomplished in 1839, and a depot improvised where the Taylor Brewery now stands.

The terminus at the head of State street was then abandoned, and the State street portion of the road having been indicted as a nuisance, the authorities proceeded to take up the track from the dock westward through State street to the junction with Lydius street, and horses were used only to draw the coaches to the foot of the inclined plane at Pearl street. Having fought a campaign with the city in laying the track down State street to fulfil the requirements of their charter, so greatly to their disadvantage, a new war arose when they proceeded to take up the track. A meeting of citizens was called by the Board of Trade to condemn the change of terminus and the abandonment of the depot at the head of State street. On the following day another meeting was held by another class of citizens, who deprecated the proceedings of the Board of Trade, and sanctioned the change made by the rail road company. The opposition, unable to change the action of the directors of the road, organized a line of stages to compete with them, and pitted horse power against the power of steam; and the last of the stagers, Joseph Webster, who had witnessed the entire decadence of a great enterprise, found himself quite suddenly reinstated in his old occupation. Active in this opposition was John L. Schoolcraft. A lively

business sprang up again in staging. The old coaches that had been laid aside were hauled out and brushed up, and State street saw the revival of a business that was supposed to have passed away forever. On the 22d of September a hundred passengers had been sent over the turnpike before ten o'clock in the forenoon. The fare was fifty cents, and such was the energy of the opposition, and the eagerness to save twenty-five cents so great, that in seven days 1,697 passengers were carried over by the stages, twenty stage loads going over in one day without taking all passengers that offered. Nothing like this had been known to the turnpike in the palmiest days of that ancient thoroughfare. Steam finally triumphed however, and the strife ceased.

In November, 1841, a special meeting of the common council was called to deliberate upon a proposition of the directors of the rail road, offering to the city their State street property and \$150,000 of the bonds of the company, if the city would undertake the expense of doing away with the inclined planes, at both ends of the road, and bring the eastern terminus as near the centre of the city as possible, locomotives to be used. The change was made, the shares which had declined to less than fifty cents on the dollar, again rose in the market and attained a respectable position among the stocks.

This may be as far as a *didactic discourse* on a pilgrimage to Schenectady in 1831, can with consistency be carried. A retrospect of the rude but novel appliances which we viewed with so much wonder and admiration less than half a century ago, will awaken for the moment by its contrast a more vivid realization of the progress of the age in which we have been placed. The simple and feeble locomotive with an imperfect feed pipe — the fragile tender, provided with two baskets of faggots and an armful of wood — the cramped coach bodies used as cars, having three inside seats capable of seating three persons

each — the vehicles coupled by three links, and the train thought to attain terrific speed at twenty miles an hour — have been superseded by ponderous locomotives whirling immense trains through the country with a speed, at times of sixty miles an hour — the track elongated to New York in one direction, and to Buffalo in another — indeed it may be claimed from the Atlantic to the Pacific — this line alone having within the state of New York 1300 miles of steel rails, and 700 locomotives dragging with irresistible force 2,000 passenger and freight cars through twenty-five counties and seventy cities and incorporated villages —

“ Whizzing through the mountains,
Rattling over ridges,
Shooting under arches,
Rumbling over bridges,
Singing through the forest,
Buzzing o’er the vale,
Bless us ! ” *how amazing !*
The wonders of the rail.