

Bethinking of Old Orleans

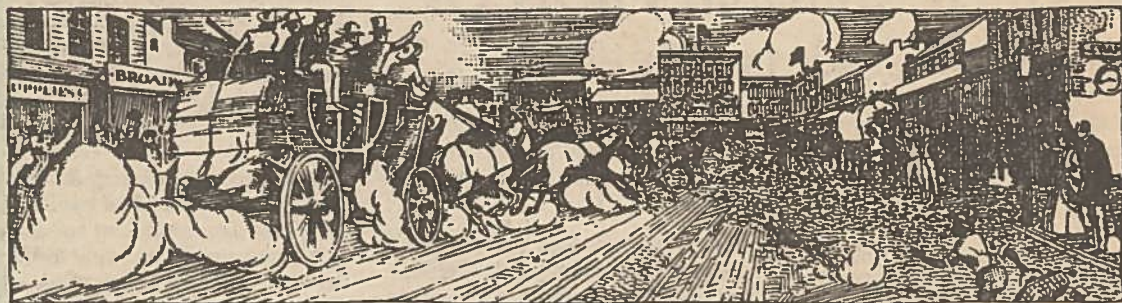
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STAGE COACHING



Approximately 10,000 years ago the Ridge Road (Rt. 104) marked the southern limit of Lake Ontario. As a result, a sand bar was left extending from the Genesee River on the East to the Niagara on the West, a distance of 78 miles. Later this afforded Indians a trail to pass from one hunting ground to another through the area.

As early as 1798 Eli Granger, a surveyor employed by Augustus Porter traced a road through the forest near its present location. On April 14, 1806 a law was passed in the State Legislature appointing three commissioners to lay out a road from the Genesee River to Lewiston. In 1810 LeWitt Clinton rode the entire distance and was much impressed by this section of the country. There were however, many obstructions including streams to ford and huge trees both fallen and standing as barriers.

It was not until April, 1814, when by an act of the Legislature, \$5,000 was appropriated and commissioners appointed to superintend construction, that the Ridge became a fairly good wagon road, and the following year this road was regularly laid out under an amended act.

In the early days the pioneers were obliged to go either to Batavia or Clarkson for their mail but in 1815 mail was carried over the Ridge Road twice a week on horseback by James Brown. The first post office in the county was established at Gaines, July 1st, 1816, through the efforts of Wm. Babbitt. He was the first postmaster and the post office was located in the log house in which he lived.

The first daily stage route was established in 1816, and the mails were carried through three times a week in carriages, drawn by two horses. This route ran west from Canandaigua to Buffalo, via the Ridge Road, Lewiston and Niagara Falls, and was controlled by the Coe Brothers. It was later owned by a man named Hildreth. Among the early proprietors of the state were Hiram Hubbard, S.A. Childs & Co., of Rochester, and Elias Walbridge of Clarkson. The Pioneer line was

established in 1828. This route left the Ridge at Wrights Corners for Lockport. It met with much competition and was discontinued in about two years.

The coaches used were the old-fashioned elliptical box pattern, resting on leather springs and contained four interior seats. In the winter season a coach box of different pattern was used resting on bobs. This was rectangular in form with side doors and windows, and with the same seating capacity as the others.

Passengers paid both first and second class fares, — a first class ticket insuring the owners an inside seat. As there was limited room on the inside of the coach, the top would often be crowded, as well, the baggage furnishing seats for the travelers.

As the country became settled and population increased, more taverns were needed to accommodate the tide of travel, and many, more or less pretentious ones were erected along the route. The town of Gaines at one time contained at least ten, each one doing a flourishing business.

Often the stage drivers might be seen racing their teams for the nearest tavern, the one arriving first securing the largest number of passengers. Stage coaching prevailed until 1850 on the Ridge when it succumbed to the passenger service provided by the canal. Many of the inn or tavern structures which once served as stage coach stops still remain along Ridge Road. However, the Village Inn at Childs is the only one which has continued in service, accommodating the sojourner.

Over sixty years ago Katharine B. Rowley penned the following verse about this piece of history.

Long ago at the end of
route
The stage drew up and the
folks stepped out.
They have all passed under
the tavern door --
The youth and his bride and
the grey three-score!