

The Pioneer Returns

by Lynne Belluscio

Before the Erie Canal and the railroad, travelers relied primarily on the stagecoach to traverse the state. The overland trip was arduous and not for the faint of heart. Wealthy patrons might hire a private coach instead of a public stage. (Stage coaches were named because they traveled in "stages" along a route, stopping to change horses or for overnight accommodations at an inn.)

Road conditions were difficult at best. A published survey of roads in 1807 show the Ontario and Genesee Turnpike through Le Roy and Genesee County which ended at Buffalo Creek, just a few miles south of Black Rock near Buffalo. According to the 1807 article by Benjamin DeWitt, the ninety mile section that went through Le Roy and Batavia, was built with a capital stock investment of \$175,000. The same year, John Metcalf was given a charter by the New York State Legislature which gave him a monopoly on the route between Canandaigua and Buffalo, but it was not until 1811 that service was complete across the state.

Joseph Langdon and Company were responsible for the Western end of the line. The June 25, 1828 *Le Roy Gazette* carried an ad for the "Pioneer" which ran daily between Albany and Buffalo "Sundays excepted. New

splendid coaches and careful drivers. Ezekel Hall is agent in Le Roy. The line will be extended to Niagara Falls in a few days."

In 1828, there was considerable opposition to the stagecoaches that ran on Sunday, the Sabbath

resting on strong leather slings instead of steel springs, which indeed could not stand a mile on their roads; it consequently dances in the air like a balloon, giving a certain variety to the monotony of a journey. Each man

American coachee to favour me with a seat beside himself . . . I still however underwent a course of excruciating jolting and was exposed to continual danger of dislocation of my joints, or of being pitched off; but I enjoyed



in violation of the laws of God and of our country. However, the stagecoach lines were bound by a contract with the Post Office Department to transport mail seven days a week from Albany to Buffalo. Rival lines that were not contracted to run on Sunday advertised that they hired drivers who do not swear nor drink ardent spirits and who prefer the house of Worship on the Sabbath to the noisy bar-room. The "Pioneer" advertised that it hired careful drivers, which seems to be a necessary requirement, considering the road conditions. Captain Barclay described the American stagecoach in 1841: "a most ungainly vehicle, carrying nine inside, three on a front seat, three on a back seat and three on a bench hung in the middle. Instead of panels, it has oil-skin curtains to shut down at night; its body is something in the form of a boat,

drives a twelve or fifteen mile stage, and what much surprised me, pulls up every four or five miles and gives his horses an ad libitum dose of water. Including the long delays in changing horses, dining, breakfasting, etc, the average speed does not exceed four mile an hour ... I found myself placed beside eight large men and a child. For a time I submitted to threatened suffocation added to the risk of dislocated joints, but soon finding my position no longer endurable I tried what effect the offer of a fee would have in inducing the

the free air of heaven, and what to me was for the time of more importance, a full view of the country than which nothing can be imagined more beautiful!"

So starting this Sunday, the "Pioneer" will be starting out from the Eagle Hotel for a short trip around Le Roy. The road conditions have improved and I'm sure you won't have to get out and walk while the stagecoach navigates the mud. And I'm sure you won't be wedged between eight large men. The countryside will be beautiful.



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