

Horses Powered Warren County Development

By Roy W. Urrico

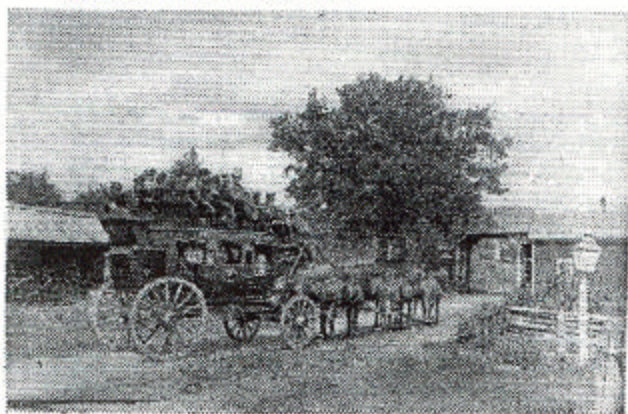
Horses played an intrinsic role in Warren County development. The iron "horses" and horsecars of railway systems connected surrounding commercial centers in the late 19th century and the horseless carriages propelled by "horsepower" ushered in 20th century growth. However, the four-legged variety —which transported passengers along crude plank roads —blazed the county-development trail.

Travel in the early 1800s consisted mainly of bumpy, sometimes dangerous, rides by cart and sleigh over old military highways that were only slightly better than trails. Economic setbacks in 1816-1817 prompted the call for more adequate transportation.

The first significant transportation advance was the Northern Turnpike, called the "state road," in 1820. Until then, there were a small number of four-wheeled wagons around Glens Falls. By connecting Hudson Falls to Glens Falls and then on through Lake George, Warrensburg and Chestertown, the turnpike unlocked access to the North Country. The plank roads, financed by tolls, arrived almost 25 years later to spark the stagecoach era. The highways consisted of thick boards laid across timbers on a graded surface.

In 1844, a plank road between Glens Falls and Lake George was constructed. Four years later, that road was stretched to Warrensburg; and in 1850, the road was extended farther north along the general path of today's Route 9 to Chestertown.

Advertisements for stagecoaches have been found dating back to 1829. Then the coach lines operated out of Albany to Ballston, Saratoga Springs, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Montreal via Whitehall.



Stoddard photo courtesy of Chapman Historical Museum

By 1848, stages met trains at Fort Edward to take passengers to Lake George. "In 1867, E. Putnam advertised that his Lake George Stage Lines left that village at 7:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. daily, connecting with the Rensselaer and Saratoga Railroad at the Moreau station, on the west side of the Hudson, opposite Fort Edward," according to *The History of Warren County* (1963). By 1856 there were also stage lines running between Glens Falls and Chester.

Warren County's stagecoaching heyday was 1869-1882, and historians have credited these vehicles for promoting the popularity of Lake George and points north as resorts. The stagecoach companies made extensive use of the plank roads during this era and until the very early 1900s. In the early days, four-horse teams drew the coaches; later, when stagecoach competition was at its height, six-horse and eight-horse teams pulled "tallyho" coaches.

Continued on next page

The fare differs depending on the source. *The History of Warren County* (1963) places the fare from Glens Falls to Lake George at a steep \$1.25 for the hour and 15 minute trip. "During this year (1880) the fare was fifty cents from Glens Falls to Lake George but only 25 cents on Sundays," according to *The History of Glens Falls* (1936).

While it signaled another advance, stagecoach travel could not have been comfortable. Despite "red coaches with top railings and spring cushions," time and weather roughened and warped the planks. This made the ride rather jerky and noisy particularly when driven over by large Concord coaches, which carried from 25 to 30 passengers. In the early days it was common practice for passengers to "pass the hat" to encourage drivers to pass the lead coach so they would not have to inhale dust. That is, until company rules stopped the stagecoach racing for safety reasons.

Stagecoaches were not the only means of horse-powered travel as evidenced by the number of carriage manufacturers in the area. "Traveling in style was in full swing by the 1860s," says the *History of Warren County* (1885). Edward Joubert and James H. White began manufacturing light carries as early as 1860. Their patented combination buckboard was shipped all over the country. Nelson LaSalle, in the 1870s and 1880s, also manufactured all kinds of wagons and carriages in Glens Falls under the name of the Union Carriage Works. Other carriage manufacturers included James Palmetter, who had a carriage factory for many years, William B. Griffin and Freeman Woods (Griffin & Wood), started in 1882, and Cashion Brothers began in 1883.



From collection of Eleanor Cuddeherk

Tollgates in the Glens Falls to Lake George plank road were located at Glen St. and Lincoln Ave. (later moved north to the city line) and French Mountain. Around the turn of the century, the rates were 12 cents for a horse and 24 cents for a team between Glens Falls and Lake George. Between the city and Bloody Pond, drivers paid nine cents for one horse, and 18 cents for two. Persons who resided between gates paid a flat yearly rate (kind of a plank road EZPass).

In 1885, four-wheeled horse cars on rails began operation between the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Glens Falls to the Bradley Opera House at Ford Edward. The cars held one driver and eight passengers (seven passengers and a stove in Winter). The round trip lasted two hours. By 1891, the horsecars give way to an electric railway line.

Louis V. Emerson of Warrensburg was the first person to travel the plank road in a "horseless carriage." He was through the gates so fast (15 miles per hour) that the Glens Falls town gatekeeper could not get to him in time. Eventually he paid the two-horse rate but that Glenwood Ave. site would be the last tollhouse when the plank road was abandoned in 1904.

###