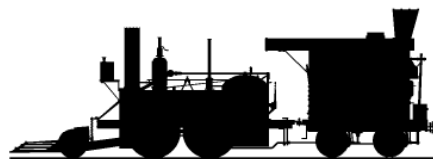
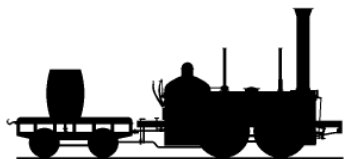


The
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MAIL BY RAIL ON THE CAMDEN & AMBOY

By Jerry Clearwater

Many *JOHN BULL-etin* readers might not realize railroads once carried much of the nation's mail and express traffic. The Camden and Amboy Railroad and successor Pennsylvania were parts of this nationwide web of connecting mail routes; a network of mail routes that evolved slowly over time. The network increased in size up through the 1920's and then started a long decline that finally ended in 1977.

Prior to the railroads carrying the mail, it was transported by stage and riders on the "Post Roads", along with some boats on inland waterways. Initially, mail carriage by rail started informally, soon after railroads initiated their operations. These first routes used contractors or railroad personnel to carry the mail and assure its safe passage. In August 1834, postmasters at Philadelphia, New York, Bordentown and Trenton were notified that arrangements had been made for the conveyance of "special mail" by railroad cars via Bordentown. At that time the mail contract was held by James Reeside, who had engaged the Camden and Amboy to transport the mails between Philadelphia and New York. The C&A route was probably the first official railroad mail route. This article will focus on the original line through Jamesburg.

In 1838, U.S. President Martin Van Buren signed into law an act designating railroads, both existing and



PRR MU train at Jamesburg, circa 1950's. Note mail/baggage/combine car in background; with all doors closed, it would appear the train crew is awaiting the completion of station work before their departure!

(Collection of Jerry Clearwater)

lines to be built, as carriers of the U.S. Mail. Through the 1850's, the US Postal Service primarily used private contractors, including railroads, to transport the mail. These contractors were designated as agents, route agents or mail messengers.

Initially, mail was not sorted on the trains, but was carried in closed bags or pouches. The mail destined for different cities and towns was divided into separate pouches at the starting terminal post offices. Later, route agents were employed directly by the Post Office and could also postmark letters that were received along the way. The first use of