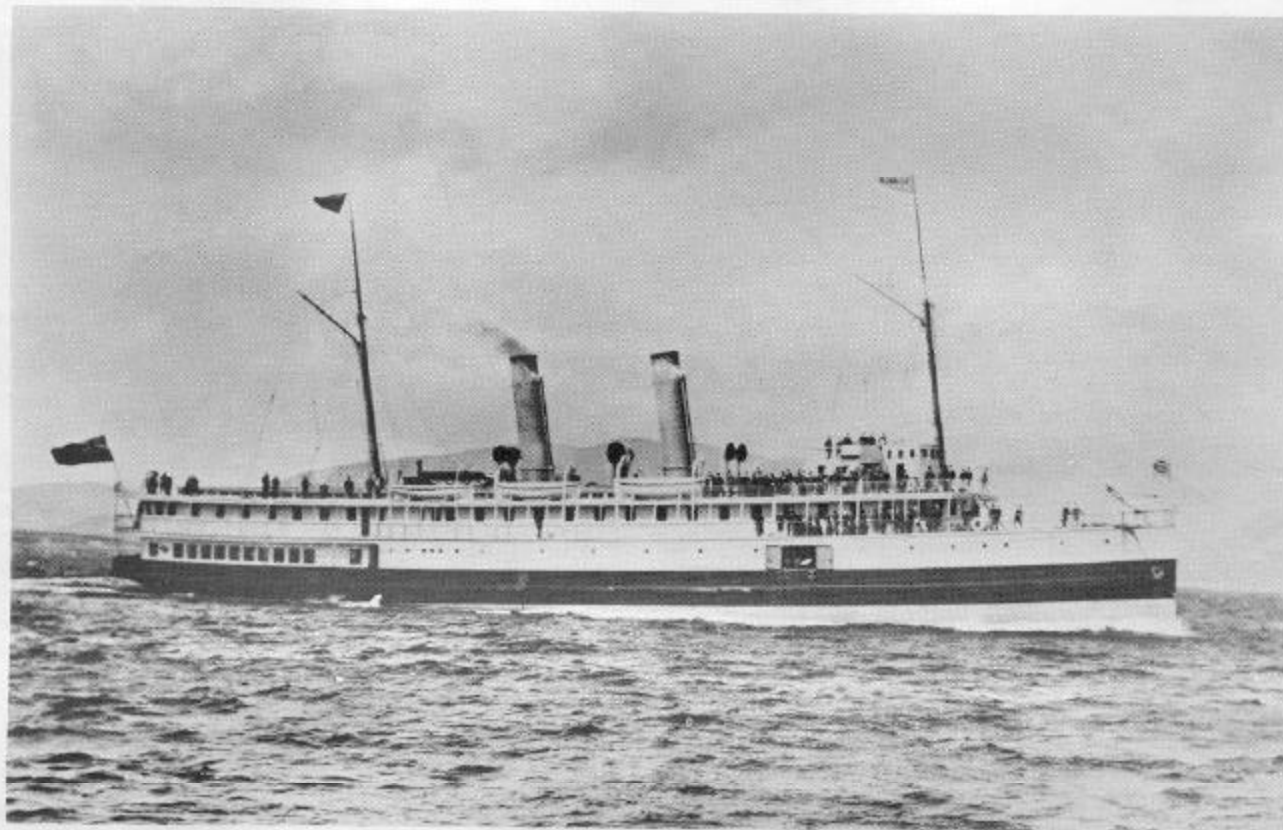


# STEAMBOAT BILL

No. 70

Summer 1959



Journal Of The Steamship Historical Society Of America

West Barrington



Rhode Island

1952, PRINCESS KATHLEEN sailed from Juneau, bound for Skagway. She was in no hurry, and went quietly on her way at 10 knots. Captain G. O. Hughes left the bridge and turned the ship over to Chief Officer C. W. Savage. One by one the familiar landmarks slipped by: at 2.31 a.m. she was abeam the light on Portland Island, at 2.43 a.m. she was opposite the light on Shelter Island. Moments later it seemed to the Chief Officer that she was getting too close to land on the port (Shelter Island) side. Turning to the quartermaster at the wheel, he said, "Starboard"—then suffered a lapse of memory that has never been explained. He intended to steady the ship when her heading had altered a quarter-point, but he failed to do so. Nor did he notice that she was steadily swinging to starboard. The look-out reported land on the starboard bow, and later, land ahead, but Savage seems not to have understood. Eventually the quartermaster spoke to him, but by that time it was too late. As the report of the official investigation notes, the PRINCESS, "swinging all the time to starboard, crossed the channel" and at 2.58 a.m. "crashed upon a rocky ledge at Point Lena, her bow wedged in the rocks, her stern in deep water."

Apart from damage to the bow, the KATHLEEN's hull was sound, and she was in no immediate danger. Later, however, Captain Hunter made the agonizing discovery that in spite of this his ship was doomed. No tugs were available, and her bow was held so firmly that she was unable to back off into deep water. She had gone ashore just before the peak of a high tide; as the water dropped, her stern dropped with it, to a dangerous angle. A moderate gale sprang up. The Captain set about landing the 307 passengers; by 9.00 a.m. all were safely ashore. "Soon after," the official report records, "the ship's condition on the falling tide began to deteriorate rapidly, the bow remaining high on the rocks, the stern sinking lower and lower; water began to find its way through openings on deck and the pumps could no longer control the intake."

At 11.30 a.m. the ship filled and the Master ordered her abandoned. Two hours later the weight of the water in the vessel's after part dragged her bow off the rocks and she sank, stern first, in 130 feet of water."

Dozens of cameras recorded the last hours of the PRINCESS; the photographs of her are almost as spectacular as those of the sinking ANDREA DORIA. And both share the special bitterness of a disaster that might so easily have been avoided. No wonder the commissioners who investigated the tragedy concluded their report by expressing "sympathy for the Company over the loss of this fine vessel."

Our next special issue will feature Hawaii. Contributions of suitable material will be welcomed. Deadline: November 1, 1959.

## THE WEEHAWKEN AND WEST SHORE FERRIES

By Harry Cotterell, Jr.

On Monday, March 23, 1959, the New York Central Railroad once more brought into play the famous slogan attributed to a Vanderbilt, "The public be damned!" Upon issuance of a ruling by U S Supreme Court Justice William Brennan, the company immediately issued press releases announcing that at the close of business the very next day, both the West Shore and the Weehawken Ferries would be discontinued.

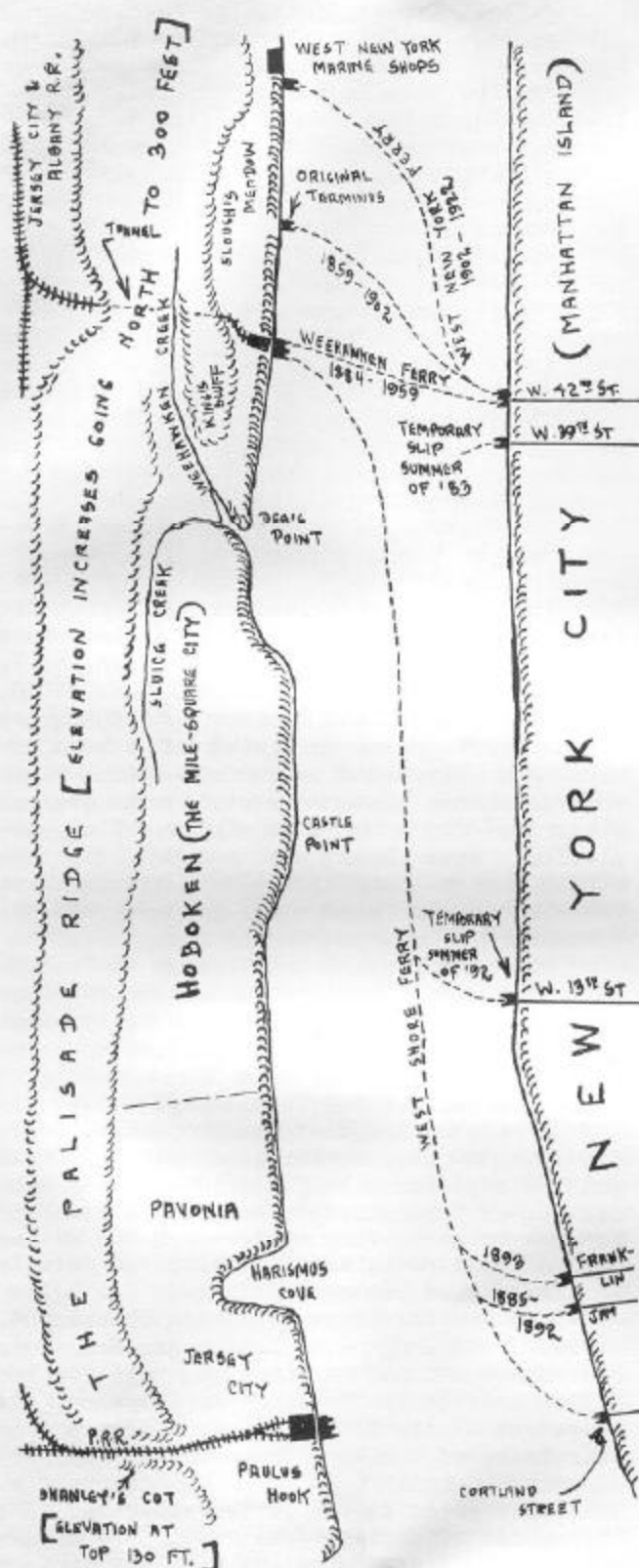
As told elsewhere in this issue, several SSHSA members were aboard the big STONY POINT on the final trip of the West Shore, and some also rode WEEHAWKEN on the last crossing of the Weehawken Ferry. These members' inquiries have prompted an outline history of the operations.

Exact date of the commencement of the ferries during Colonial times is not known, however it is recorded that in 1742 Samuel Bayard (then owner of all of Weehawken) and Francis Kouwenhoven jointly petitioned the Governor and the Council of New York "for a ferry to Weehawken". Prior to the establishment of the Hoboken Ferry in 1775, this was the only regular means of crossing the Hudson between New York and northeastern New Jersey. Diversion of much patronage to the Hoboken Ferry, which had adopted steam, caused the abandonment of the Weehawken route in 1834.

The death of this route was not to be permanent. A group of nine men went to Trenton, N. J., on March 25, 1852, and obtained a charter for the Weehawken Ferry Company. Capitalized at \$500,000, it was to establish a ferry "between some suitable point or points in the city of New York and north of Dea's Point in the county of Hudson." Among the incorporators were Judge Francis Price and Dudley S. Gregory, who had been the first mayor of Jersey City. Unlike the charters issued by New York State, New Jersey did not grant exclusive privileges for a ferry monopoly, but instead made it unlawful for any vessel to touch at the landing places, except in case of distress.

As with the enterprise of Fulton, some wet-blanket comment had to be made publicly. An editorial appeared in the New York Evening Press of April 6th asking, "Where is the patronage to come from — to offset the proposed outlay of half a million dollars? Only inhabitants at Weehawken just now are some oak and elm trees."

The same men on the same day chartered a Ramapo & Weehawken Plank Road Co. to build a toll-road between the places named. A prospectus put out jointly by the two firms extolled the virtues of Weehawken and concluded with: "Agricultural and manufacturing products in great quantities, will be annually conveyed over this ferry, as well as many thou-



MAP OF THE WEST SHORE FERRIES

NOT EXACTLY TO SCALE.  
DETAILS OF OTHER R.R.'S & FYS OMITTED.

--Author's map

sands of cattle destined to the city market." (Readers should note this last item.)

Stock subscription books were to be opened for three days commencing May 9, 1853. There was no rush of investors. A supplemental New Jersey law passed in 1857 permitted the ferry to begin operations when but \$40,000 capital stock had been subscribed. Quite a step down from half a million!

The Weehawken Ferry was at last revived on New Year's Day, 1859, a very rainy Saturday, the course being between West 42nd St., New York, and Slough's Meadow on the 'Jersey side' (see map). The fleet consisted of two second-hand double-enders, ABBIE 1819 and LYDIA 14938, bought from the Union Ferry Company of Brooklyn. It was planned to rename them HACKENSACK and WEEHAWKEN, respectively, but because of a federal law restricting the name-changing of vessels, they continued to bear their original names.

In February, 1867, a New York state legislative committee conducted a probe of the many ferry lines then serving New York City. When it took up the Weehawken Ferry, mudslinging was indulged in by patrons and management alike. Otto Kohler, who owned a brewery at Weehawken, complained of an irregular schedule being run with one boat, LYDIA, whose cabins were occupied by pigs and sheep. ABBIE was unserviceable.

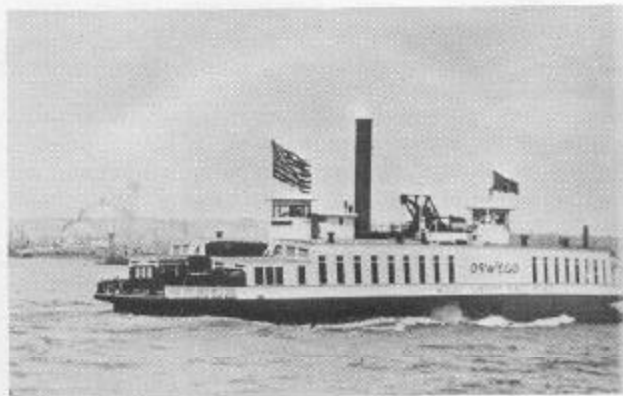
President N. Dole replied that there was still plenty of room left for what foot passengers there were. He added the thought that since LYDIA's engineer had defeated Mr. Kohler in being elected a town father, quite possibly the caustic criticism had been born of the bitterness of his defeat.

Another inquiry into the Weehawken Ferry took place at New York in 1870. The Committee on Commerce and Navigation heard the testimony of 23 witnesses that management was imperfect; one boat (again LYDIA) was maintaining an unpredictable schedule; the ferryhouses and the boat were in filthy condition. It was said that cattle dung was so deep on the boat's deck that no flooring was to be seen and that, as a safety measure, passengers carried sticks to defend themselves from the heavy droves of animals being handled on the hoof.

While Dole struggled to keep his business going, a unique "coincidence" occurred. Chapter 906, New York State Session Laws for 1871, and Chapter 290, New Jersey Special Laws of 1871, which were nearly identical in wording, provided for the formation of The Weehawken Transportation Co. Incorporated by C. A. Wortendyke (president of the New Jersey Midland Railway) and associates, it was to establish a ferry between New York and Weehawken, and to charge tolls not exceeding those "now taken at the present Weehawken Ferry".

To clarify this account it is necessary to intersperse railroad with ferry history.





OSWEGO in the days of white deck-housing and big flags, and with a strong tail wind to help her along. —McRoberts collection.

The Midland was one of several railroads involved in an attempt to link the smaller cities of central New York with both Lake Ontario and the Atlantic Seaboard. Rather than to share the oft-crowded facilities of other roads at New York harbor, and since practically all waterfront property south of Weehawken Creek was already occupied, the directors decided to acquire Slough's meadow for a terminal site and to dig a long tunnel or cut through the Palisade Ridge to reach it.

Meanwhile the NJM purchased ROSLYN from the Union Ferry Company of Brooklyn, and also gave an order to Lawrence & Foulkes to build a new double-ender, which was launched May 2, 1872, at Greenpoint, Long Island, and given the name MIDLAND.

Apparently the old Weehawken Ferry Company quit, for we find LYDIA abandoned in 1872 (Lytle List) and ABBIE migrating to the Albany & Bath Ferry.

The Weehawken Transportation Company changed its name to The Midland Terminal & Ferry Company on March 9, 1873, and also received authority to acquire waterfront lands, build piers, and lay connecting tracks to the NJM and its affiliates. On November 15, 1873, MT&F took over ROSLYN and MIDLAND, as well as the two ferry terminals and a leasehold from the New Jersey Midland.

During the spring of 1875 the Midland group went into receivership and all construction ceased. Various creditors obtained judgments against the system's component parts, threatening the continuance of the ferry. A court injunction issued July 12, 1875, forbade the New York County Sheriff to meddle with or sell MIDLAND or ROSLYN.

Six years were required to unravel the Midland system's financial mess, which included a \$2-million mortgage obtained by the MT&F from "Old Tilden's Barrel" (Samuel J. Tilden, later governor of New York).

The Midland was sold by the courts piecemeal fashion during 1879-80. A long segment extending from Oswego down to Middletown, N.Y., became the New York, Ontario &

Western Ry. Two portions, the Jersey City & Albany, and the North River Ry, were acquired by George Pullman of sleeping car fame. He intended to give Vanderbilt's New York Central & Hudson River RR competition by completing a closely parallel line from New York harbor to Lake Erie. For this purpose he formed a New York, West Shore & Buffalo Railway Company.

Midland Terminal & Ferry emerged in '83 as The Open Cut & General Storehouse Co., which was promptly renamed West Shore & Ontario Terminal Co. by reason of the fact that both the NYWS&B and NYO&W were co-guarantors of a ten-million-dollar mortgage obtained from Central Trust Co. of New York. A long-term joint agreement was made with the WS&OT by the two lines regarding use of terminal facilities at Weehawken, New York, and Brooklyn. The prorating of rentals was to be arbitrated by the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad!

Prior to this agreement the NYO&W had itself ordered four sidewheel double-enders from Ward, Stanton & Co. at Newburgh, N. Y. Named NEWBURGH, KINGSTON, ALBANY and OSWEGO, they were iron-hulled sisters of 1053 gross tons. Motive power consisted of a beam engine with Hayward's patent cut-off. Cabin interiors were Queen Anne style with stained glass transoms over each window. Upon completion, each boat was swapped with the NYWS&B for a locomotive. As a result these vessels did not become the property of the West Shore & Ontario Terminal Co.

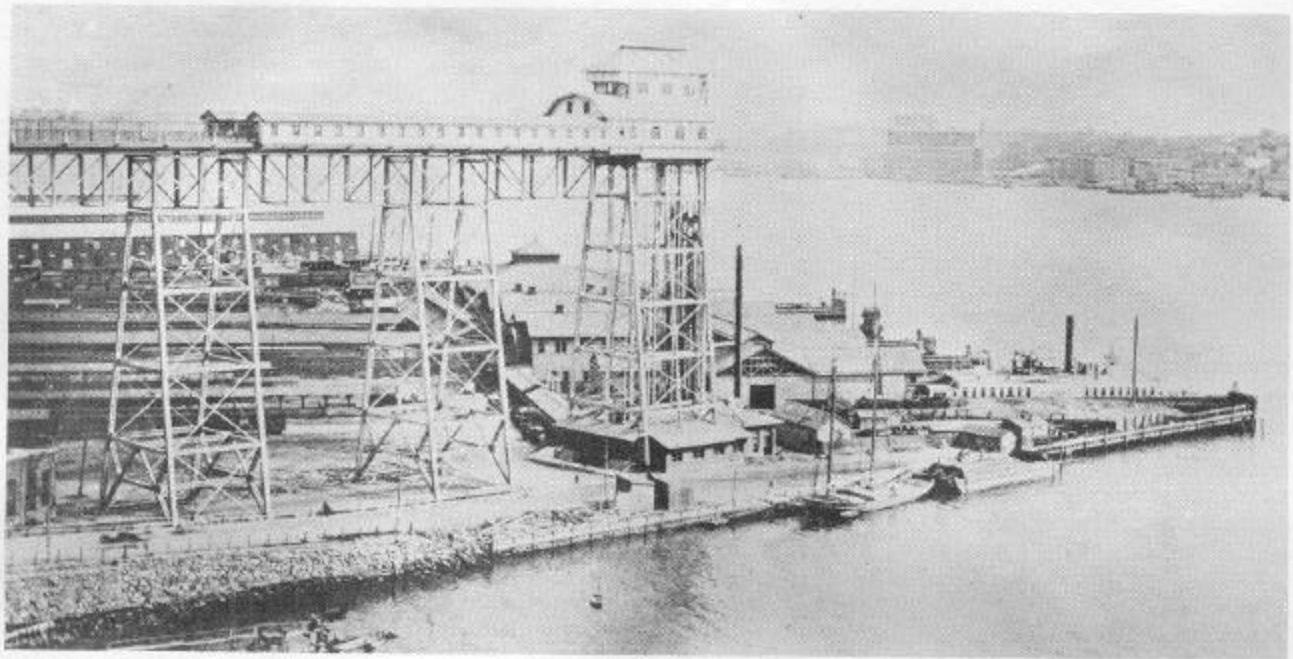
The tunnel was holed through in September of '83. Just outside its eastern entrance a large passenger terminal was built, from which the Weehawken Ferry began making trips on January 1st, 1884. The first scheduled train arrived one day in mid-May.

A rate war for ex-lake and up-state traffic brought receiverships to both the NYO&W and NYWS&B. Perusal of an 1100-page, 2 volume set of "Proceedings" before the New York Supreme Court sitting at Newburgh the latter half of 1884 revealed the complicated details of this second bad mess.

Who was the winner? Tycoon Chauncey M. Depew. In July, 1885, he organized a new West Shore RR Co. to take over the entire NYWS&B and the WS&OT under foreclosure. As president of the NYC&HR, he engineered a 475-year lease of the West Shore to the Central, expiring in 2361!

Just prior to the foreclosure, the NYWS & B opened (Sunday, June 21, 1885) a new water route between Weehawken and downtown Manhattan, landing at Jay Street, which became known as the West Shore Ferry. Routing of trains to Jersey City via the old JC&A, Marion Jct. and Pennsylvania Railroad was discontinued.

Instead of continuing as a competitor of the Central, the West Shore gradually became a relief line. For years now all inter-line



Weehawken terminal in the days of the Palisade RR trestle. ALBANY of 1883 in the slip.\*

tariffs to which the NYC is a party have contained an alternate routing clause permitting the sending of freight via the WS, either as intermediate or delivering carrier, even though the shipper specified "NYC" on the bill of lading.

However, the West Shore, as did all the lines radiating from New York, cultivated suburban passenger business to such a degree that some third and fourth track had to be installed, and the ferryboat fleet eventually grew to nine.

A second line began feeding traffic to the ferries at Weehawken in 1892. This was a steam road which began on a high steel trestle 148 feet above the ferryhouse (three elevators carried people up and down), entered a short tunnel into the Palisade's face, emerged in a little declivity and then turned north along the top to Guttenburg race-track. As the Palisade RR it was extended to Coytesville and electrified three years later. It subsequently became a part of the sprawling Public Service trolley system, and later the trestle was replaced by roadside tracks down to the ferry, shared by other streetcar lines.

The history of the ferries since the advent of NYC control has not been colorful, either dramatically or financially, and is here given briefly: The 42nd Street ferryhouse was badly damaged twice by fire, first on January 24, 1886, and again March 16, 1930. The original Weehawken 'house burned November 1, 1886, "loss about a thousand dollars". The downtown terminal was moved in 1893 to Franklin Street and afterwards to Cortland. In November, 1902, marine shops were established at West New York and the original terminus on the Jersey side was moved about a half-mile north to them. The old ferry then

became known as the West New York Ferry. Two more sidewheelers had been added and the color scheme of the fleet changed from white to pea green.

The West Shore was the last railroad-operated ferry on the North River to adopt the screw-propeller, their first being WEST POINT, launched November 10, 1900. Eight others followed in a quarter-century, all designed by Mr. J. W. Millard. ALBANY, completed in 1925, had the last engine built by Fletcher, builder's number 303.

Early in 1922, the West New York Ferry, which had no train or trolley connection on the Jersey end, was discontinued. This permitted increasing the frequency of trips on the Weehawken Ferry, where both passenger and vehicular patronage was very much on the increase. The next year the WS permitted the mayor and sundry town officials of Weehawken to issue "expedite" passes to certain people. This irked the other less fortunate motorists who often had to wait in line for hours to cross back into the city, especially on Sunday evenings.

Despite the very busy waterway on which these routes operated, no boat was ever lost from any cause while in revenue service. The double-decker CATSKILL was lost in a fog once but luckily for the passengers, crew, and the West Shore, the story has a happy ending.

Trouble began just as soon as the ferryboat left Weehawken at 6.50 a.m., January 27, 1944. She swung her blunt nose downstream, narrowly missing an inbound ocean liner that was moving cautiously upriver. CATSKILL steamed on like the proverbial ship of state. Her sixty passengers wondered if the promised

\*Photo courtesy of Hoboken Public Library.





STONY POINT, which made the final run out of Cortland St. March 24, is shown here nearing Weehawken March 8, 1947. —Author's photo.

landing, Cortland St., would ever be reached. After a long while the dim outline of a pier and also a tug became visible. The ferryboat captain asked, by megaphone, for bearings.

"Pier 7, East River," came the reply. The wheelsman "changed ends" and CATSKILL started back. She had not gone far when she shivered her timbers and churned up lots of dirty water. Mud flat! Passengers peered through the fog and made out the ramparts of Governor's Island. Wrong again!

CATSKILL worked her own way off the mud and tried again. Next thing, "Wham!" a tug had run under the guard, sheering off some of the braces and scupper pipes. Nobody was injured, so the groping was resumed. At last, at 8.51, CATSKILL confidently eased into the slip at Cortland Street. Then it was discovered that she was in the slip backwards and the few autos on board would have to be backed off! Only cost to the commuters for this unexpected 2 hour and 1 minute "cruise" might have been the loss of pay for those who were hourly-rated.

This same vessel burned up while in dry-

\* \* \* \* \*  
Key to Fleet List: Following the name is the official number, then date of build, dates in fleet, and rig(s)-single deck, d-double deck; w-wood hull, i-iron, s-steel; p-paddle, s-screw). Then place of build and builder, and disposition (to whom sold, etc.).

ROSLYN	21440	1860	1873-1888	s.w.p.	New York, bldr unknown.	Conv. to derrick barge.
MIDLAND	90729	1872	1873-1903	s.w.p.	Greenpoint, Lawrence & Foulkes.	Thames Ferry Co.
ALBANY	106246	1883	1883-1917	s.i.p.	Newburgh, Ward Stanton & Co.	Carteret Ferry Co.
NEWBURGH	130262	1883	1883-1911	s.i.p.	Newburgh, Ward Stanton & Co.	Pavonia Ferry Co.
KINGSTON	14420	1883	1883-1917	s.i.p.	Newburgh, Ward Stanton & Co.	Chesapeake Ferry Co.
OSWEGO	130644	1883	1883-1911	s.i.p.	Newburgh, Ward Stanton & Co.	Pavonia Ferry Co.
CHESTER W. /CHAPIN	126456	1875	1881-1901	s.w.p.	Kingston, J&J McCausland.	From Boston & Albany RR. Sold to Staten Island Railway.
BUFFALO	3704	1897	1897-1925	s.s.p.	Wilmington, H&H.	Chesapeake Fry Co. b CHESAPEAKE.
WEST POINT	81737	1900	1900-1941	d.s.s.	Newburgh, T.S.Marvel & Co.	Norfolk County Ferries.
SYRACUSE	117261	1903	1903-1959	d.s.s.	Newburgh, T.S.Marvel & Co.	Mowbray Tug & Barge Sales
ROCHESTER	202712	1905	1905-1959	d.s.s.	Newburgh, T.S.Marvel & Co.	" " " " /Co.
UTICA	207842	1910	1910-1959	d.s.s.	Newburgh, T.S.Marvel & Co.	" " " " " "
NIAGARA	210464	1912	1912-1959	d.s.s.	Newburgh, T.S.Marvel & Co.	" " " " " "
WEHAWKEN	212802	1914	1914-1959	d.s.s.	Newburgh, T.S.Marvel & Co.	" " " " " "
CATSKILL	212027	1914	1914-1955	d.s.s.	Newburgh, T.S.Marvel & Co.	Burnt 1952, scrapped.
STONY POINT	215069	1917	1917-1959	d.s.s.	Wilmington, H & H.	Mowbray Tug & Barge Sales Co.
ALBANY	225146	1925	1925-1959	d.s.s.	Mariners Harbor, Staten Is.	S.B.Co. MT&BSCo.

A booklet is being published as part of the Hudson-Champlain celebrations at Kingston, N. Y. Liberally illustrated, it carries articles on Kingston steamboats, railroads, and the D&H Canal. Copies are \$1.10 postpaid, from Chamber of Commerce, Gov. Clinton Hotel, Kingston, N.Y.

dock at Jersey City July 25, 1952, and was never rebuilt.

There have been some odd happenings. On Saturday, August 30, 1895, a young cyclone blew the stack off CHESTER W. CHAPIN and lifted one lifeboat out of its cradle (something similar recently happened to ROCHESTER, as reported in SB, xv:105. -ed.). It also dispersed a Cornell tow being made up off Weehawken and sent an ice barge crashing into NEWBURGH, which was coming upriver.

Midtown Manhattan commuters were inconvenienced on Sept. 30, 1932, when both float bridges at 42nd St. became disabled. One had been rammed hard and damaged. The hoisting cables on the other snapped and dropped it on WEHAWKEN, pinning her fast in the slip for six hours.

Peak year on the passenger traffic graph for the West Shore and the Weehawken Ferries was 1927, the year the Holland Tunnel opened. The combined total was over 27 million passengers. Annually since then, save 1934, business declined. In April, 1937, service on the long West Shore Ferry was reduced to week-day rush hour only. Other economies were effected but could not prevent red ink from becoming the regular color used for keeping the profit sheets.

On December 15, 1954, the WS filed an application with the ICC asking that it be allowed to discontinue both ferry routes. At the many hearings and court cases which followed, the parent NYC's "Manager of Passenger Research" extolled the pleasure and convenience of riding busses serving the same area. The ever-highway-minded Port authority, through its "Transportation Economist", concurred in the Central's line of reasoning. Final result: the complete abandonment as per the opening paragraph of this article.