

THE STORY OF THE MORRIS & ESSEX RAILROAD

By Don Bowe

First, a bit of New Jersey Railroad history...

Colonel John Stevens is without a doubt the father of railroading in New Jersey, if not in this country. As early as 1809, he demonstrated the use of steam engines on a ferry, the *Juliana*, which ran between New York and Hoboken, and on ocean-going vessels. He watched with interest the development of a locomotive as early as 1803 by a Cornishman in Great Britain, followed by a locomotive designed by George Stephenson in 1814. In 1812, Stevens wrote a treatise entitled *Documents tending to prove the superior advantages of rail-ways and steam carriages over canal navigation*.¹ His vision was clear, that the use of railroads would far exceed the value of canals for the swift transport of goods, and the opening of the country to the west to growth and settlement. It was almost with disbelief that he found his ideas ridiculed and rejected. A working model was necessary to demonstrate his ideas.

So without ado, Stevens proceeded to build on his property in Hoboken, a circular track with an engine. This was used to amuse visitors and guests to his estate. The passengers actually rode on the engine itself. This circular “railway” operated until 1828, when the “Steam Waggon” was moved to a linear tract closer to the waterfront. Stevens continued to fiddle and tinker, making improvement, but there is no proof that this locomotive ever pulled cars behind it.²

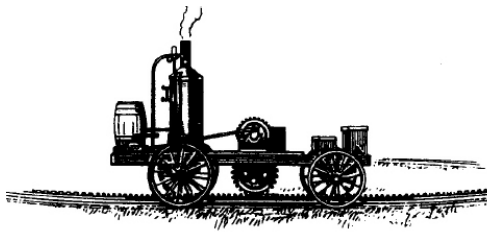


Fig. 1: Col. John Stevens' first engine at Hoboken. Note the lack of coal (or wood) car, and in fact, passengers rode on the engine itself.

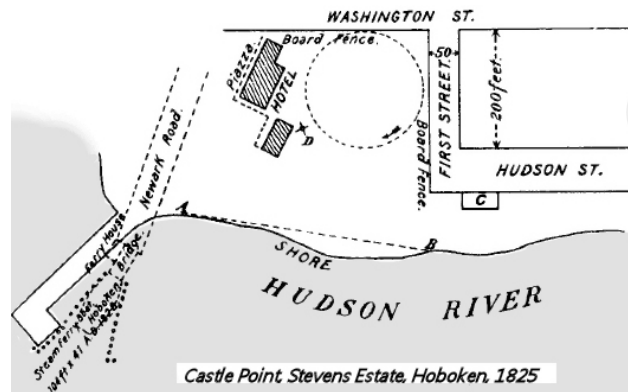


Fig. 2: This engine first rode on a circular track, and was later moved closer to the shore, perhaps to make it more accessible to more people – especially those crossing on the steam ferry *Juliana* to Hoboken.

Gradually the powers that ruled in Trenton began to change, and in 1815 a charter was issued to build a railroad from the Delaware near Trenton to the Raritan, near New Brunswick. It however failed to gain the financial support needed to build it. Again in 1823, another proposed railroad to be under the direction of John Stevens failed again for lack of funds. By 1830 however, a charter was established by the Legislature in Trenton for the Camden and Amboy Railroad, with one million dollars in financing sold within 10 minutes. Something had changed – whether Stevens' efforts had anything to do with it is hard to measure.

While the Camden and Amboy (which incidentally was chartered Feb. 4, 1830, the same day the Delaware & Raritan Canal was chartered – a compromise under the “Joint Companies” – between the canal and railroad interests), many other railroads were soon to follow. Once the flood gates were opened, a torrent would follow.

Next steps...

Once the feasibility of railroads had been proven, the public clamored for the advantages they offered. The population of Northeast New Jersey who already worked in or depended on the commerce of New York City were eager for easier and quicker ways to access the available Hudson River crossings, and so it is not surprising that the next charters granted by the New Jersey legislature were for railroads to Jersey City – both the Paterson & Hudson River (January 1831, and the New Jersey Rail Road and Transportation Company (March 1832) jumped into that breach, and solved the problems of the bridges over the Passaic and Hackensack, crossing the Meadowlands, and perhaps the most imposing barrier at that point, Bergen Hill. Early locomotives were still struggling to pull cars up inclines, and until this was solved by the Bergen Cut, horses were used to pull cars over the top when locomotives quite literally could not make the grade.

Together these two railroads combined to create the Bergen Cut, which very much reduced the grade, and inventors continued to improve the locomotives of the time, so that when the Morris & Essex was chartered in January 1835, it was a matter of connecting with the New Jersey Rail Road already created, (although until 1854, that connection was made by removing the cars from the Morris & Essex tracks in Newark, and hauling them down Center Street behind horses, to connect with a New Jersey Rail Road engine for the trip to Jersey City).

The Morris & Essex was born to carry people, and the route it chose from Newark first to Orange (1836), and then to Morristown (1838), reflected this. In 1840, a person could board the train in Morristown, and be in New York three hours later. The age of the commuter was born.

Seth Boyden, a Newark inventor, worked to improve the pulling strength of the locomotive. His first engine, the *Orange*, failed on its first attempt to climb the hills west of Newark, but the *Essex* was a significant improvement, and it was no longer necessary to use horses on the steeper inclines.

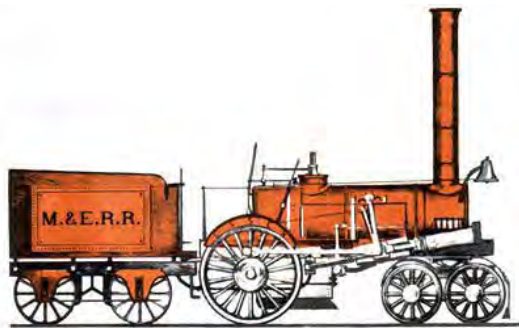


Fig. 3: *The Orange* – M&E's first engine, soon replaced by the more powerful *Essex*.

MORRIS & ESSEX RAIL-ROAD.
NEW-YORK, NEWERK & MORRIS-TOWN.

ON and after MONDAY, the 2d day of April next, the Cars will leave as follows--
Leaves the depot at Morristown, at 6½ o'clock, A. M. and 1½ o'clock, P. M.
Leaves the Depot at Newark,--At 10 o'clock, A.M. and 5 o'clock, P. M.

Passengers will be taken up and delivered at Madison, Chatham, the Summit, Milleville, and Orange.

FARE.

From MORRISTOWN to	NEWARK	75 cts.
MADISON "	"	62½ "
CHATHAM "	"	50 "
SUMMIT "	"	41 "

Fig. 4: Early M&E Advertising of its routes and fares³.

The early years of the Morris & Essex were lean – it costs a great deal to build and operate a railroad. To push its lines further west, the Morris & Essex agreed to haul freight of all kinds, and bringing New Jersey products to market helped the bottom line. Wheaton J. Lane describes these years of the Morris & Essex below:

The Morris and Essex was a small line with little traffic; passengers provided almost the entire revenue at first. The line's two locomotives, the Orange and the Essex, slowly pulled one or two passenger cars over the winding route through the hilly territory which it served.... Baggage was carried in a box fastened under the cars. The trains stopped anywhere for travelers, and the engineers frequently had to get out and drive cows from the tracks.

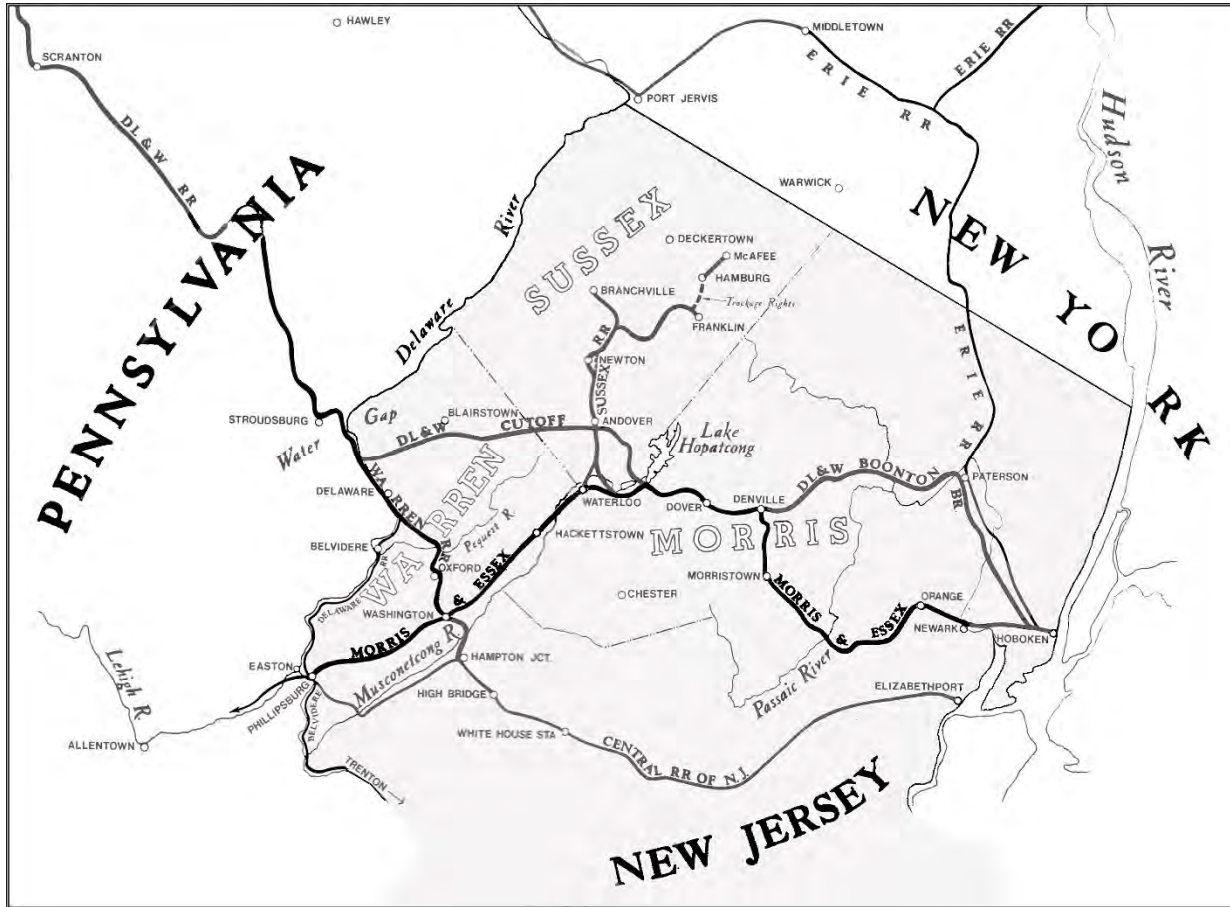
The Morris & Essex secured its first mail contract in 1840, to carry mail from Newark to Morristown for \$540 a year,⁴ and as its route expanded, so did its mail contracts⁵ –although first Morris & Essex cancels have not been recorded before 1851. Railway mail service was still unsophisticated in these earlier days: the mail was accompanied by a Route Agent (a postal employee) who accepted the mail, and cancelled in on board the train. However, sorting the mail was not yet part of his job.⁶ It was not until after the Civil War that the RPO service came into being.

By 1842 the M&E was near collapse, as its profits did not yet outweigh its indebtedness, but reorganization and the decision to go north to Dover to compete with the Morris Canal for anthracite business turned it around. By 1848 the line was completed to Dover, and it was now in true competition with the Morris Canal.

The diminishing forests and soft coal of New Jersey made it clear that a new source of energy was needed, and the anthracite coal fields of Pennsylvania were tantalizingly close – this fact drove the growth of several New Jersey railroads. The race to the Delaware and a connection to those coal fields would provide the needed energy for a flagging iron industry in New Jersey, and for an industrial explosion. It would also provide added railroad income and fuel for its engines. Better than intercepting coal already carried on the canal would be to carry it from the point it entered New Jersey. The Morris & Essex, backed by Newark businessmen, saw its destiny to the west, and in 1851, won the right to expand its lines to Hackettstown. Bonds were offered, and sold, and by 1854 the line was completed to Hackettstown. (See *Figure 5*.)

What was not yet completed was a definite survey or plan to reach the Delaware. Ideally this would have been to the Water Gap, and the M&E made several different surveys in that direction. What they had not counted on however was John I. Blair, the moving force behind the Warren Railroad who had plans of his own. The right of way to the Gap became an issue in 1851, and the two companies, the M&E and the Warren (chartered in February 1851), came head to head in the State Legislature over which railroad would have the upper hand. The Warren won out, but the M&E leveled an injunction, which slowed the building of the Warren road until settled. This was further complicated by the terrain, and the building of bridges and tunnels, the worst of which was the tunnel north of Washington. All of these drained the resources of the Warren, so that when it was completed on temporary tracks in 1856, the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western was able to quickly lease it in 1857, even before the above tunnel was completed – giving it access to Jersey City by the Warren Railroad and Central Railroad of New Jersey – at a great profit for the Warren Railroad, and a big loss for the M&E.⁷ The M&E completed its connection to the Delaware at Phillipsburg in 1865,⁸ but the DL&W was committed to the Central RR of NJ line to carry coal to the east.

THE STORY OF THE MORRIS & ESSEX RAILROAD ~ Don Bowe



Morris & Essex Railroad Lines 1835-1870⁹

Timeline of the Morris & Essex

Jan 1835	M&E chartered (incorporated) to create line from Newark to Morristown
Oct 1836	Connection by NJRR to Jersey City & lower Manhattan ferry
Nov 1836	First section completed from Newark to Orange, trains pulled through Newark by horse power
Jan 1838	Completed to Morristown
July 1838	Congress declares all railroad routes as post roads
1840	First mail contract
Jul 1848	Completed to Dover
Aug 1851	first M&E RR cancels on mail
Jan 1854	Completed to Hackettstown
Aug 1854	new alignment of tracks in Newark eliminated horse-pulled trains through Newark
1854	Mail contract to Hackettstown
1863	New alignment - began using Long Dock Tunnel
1865	Completed to Phillipsburg
1868	M&E leased the Newark & Bloomfield RR
Dec 1868	Leased by DL&W, connecting to their Warren RR at Washington
Sept 1870	Boonton Branch - first east to Boonton, then to Paterson (1889), and finally connecting to main line at west end of Bergen Hill.

Morris and Essex Rail Road Company, }

NEWARK. December, 1851. }

SIR :

For the purpose of constructing that part of the extension of the Road to the Delaware River, between Dover and Hackettstown, the Board of Directors have resolved to open Books of Subscription for an increase of the Capital Stock of the Company of [\$500,000 00] five hundred thousand dollars on Tuesday, the sixth day of January next, at the house of Jacob Clawson, in Hackettstown ; on Wednesday, the seventh, at the house of Dennis Cockran, in Newton ; on Thursday, the eighth, at the house of Isaac Emmons, in Stanhope ; and on Friday, the ninth, and Saturday, the tenth, of same month, at the office of the Company, in Newark, from 10 o'clock A. M. to 4 o'clock P. M. of each day. The terms of subscription will be, in brief, as follows: ten per cent. of the amount subscribed to be paid in cash at the time of subscription, and for the remaining ninety per cent. nine notes each for ten per cent. of the amount, dated January 1, 1852, payable respectively at 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, 27 and 30 months, at some bank in the counties of Essex, Morris, Sussex or Warren, in this State, or in the City of New York. Should the amount subscribed be such as by this division to make the notes less than \$20 each, the number of notes shall be decreased so that each note shall amount to at least that sum, but the average time shall be as above stated; but no note will be received which has a longer time to run than 30 months. Subscribers may at their option pay the whole amount in cash at the time of subscription.

Interest dividends, at the rate of seven per centum per annum, will be paid semi-annually, in the months of July and January, upon the amount of all moneys paid in, until the road is so far completed to Hackettstown that the same can be used for the transportation of passengers and freight, after which the new and old stock will be blended together, and the same per centum in dividends paid upon each.

No subscription will be binding, unless at least the sum of three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) shall be, bona fide, subscribed for.

The new stock will be pledged and hypothecated to the Company for the payment of all the notes, and held liable to forfeiture and sale, in default of prompt payment of same at maturity.

WILLIAM N. WOOD,
JOEL W. CONDIT,
BEACH VANDERPOOL,
WILLIAM WRIGHT.

} Committee.

John I Blair Esq
Blairstown
Warren Co
N. J.

Fig. 5: Circular advertising of bonds for the extension of the Morris & Essex lines to Hackettstown, offered December 1851, to finance that enterprise. This cover was folded and sent to John I. Blair (the stamp corner cut away), who became the nemesis to the M&E in the years ahead.



Fig. 6. A Jan 17 1855 letter from Newark to Morrystown, postmarked with a light Morris & Essex handstamp tying 3 cent Dull Red 1851 Issue (Scott 11).



Fig. 7: A February 1 1855 letter from Hackettstown to Suckasunny Plains Mines, sent soon after the M&E line to Hackettstown was complete, Morris & Essex handstamp tying 3 cents Dull Red 1851 Issue.



Fig. 8: A May 1857 letter from the Morris Institute in Morristown to Brooklyn with an M&E cancel.

Fig. 9: A second letter from Morristown to Brooklyn, with docketing on front, sent July 21, 1857.

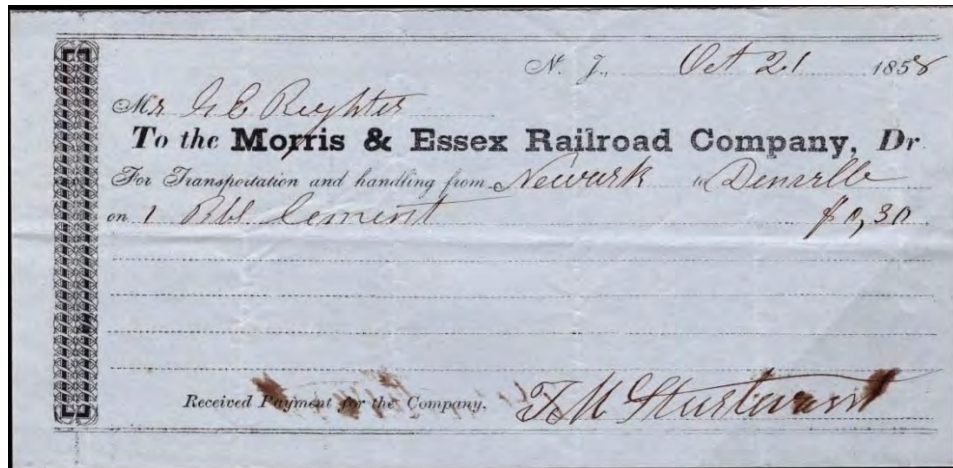


Fig. 10: Bill of lading, dated Oct. 21, 1858, for a barrel of cement carried from Newark to Denville on the Morris & Essex line.

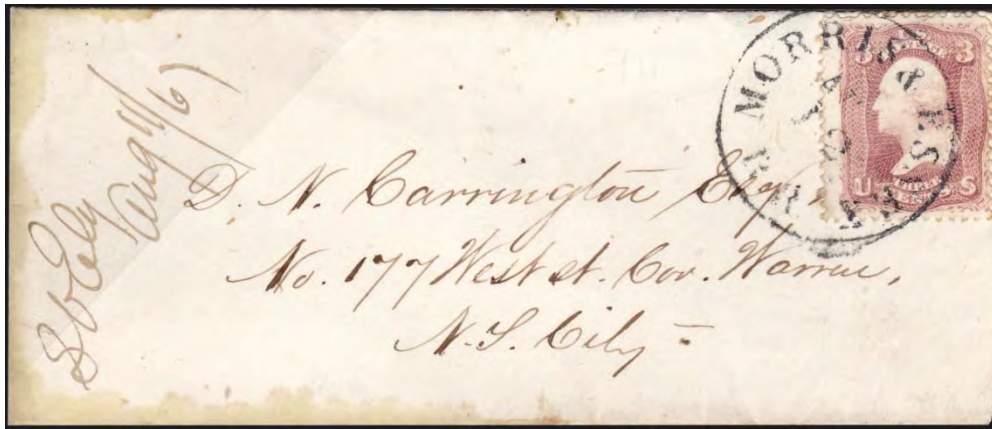


Fig. 11: An August 12, 1867 letter to New York City, postmarked with a M&E cancel.

From the final completion of the troublesome tunnel in 1862 to 1868, the DL&W worked with the Warren and Central of NJ RRs to ship coal east, but in the end, frictions developed. Perhaps CNJ's Elizabethport docks at its eastern end were too far from the New York market, but in 1868, the Morris & Essex, which had leased the Boonton Branch and established a new route to Newark, was in some economic distress,¹⁰ and was an easy target for the DL&W. In December 1858, the DL&W acquired the M&E, gaining access to docks closer to New York and to the Boonton Line.



Fig. 12: An 1867 letter originating in Madison, and sent on the M&E to New Haven, Connecticut.

The history of the Morris and Essex continues, with the name of its lines retained – even today – but the story now moves to the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western. In 1911, the long and difficult fight to the Delaware and the Pennsylvania coal fields became a blip in history, as the new cut-off line across the state to the north was completed, providing an easier and more direct route. The beautiful but disintegrating cement arch bridge across the Delaware not far from the Water Gap however, attests to the fact that all things change. The coal fields of Pennsylvania were replaced as a source of fuel by those in Minnesota, and oil then replaced both.

Timeline of the Morris & Essex (as the DL&W)

1911	The Cutoff completed - opening line from Port Morris to Slateford Junction in PA
1945	M&E formally merged with DL&W
1960	DL&W merged with Erie RR to form the Erie Lackawanna
1976	Erie Lackawanna became part of Conrail

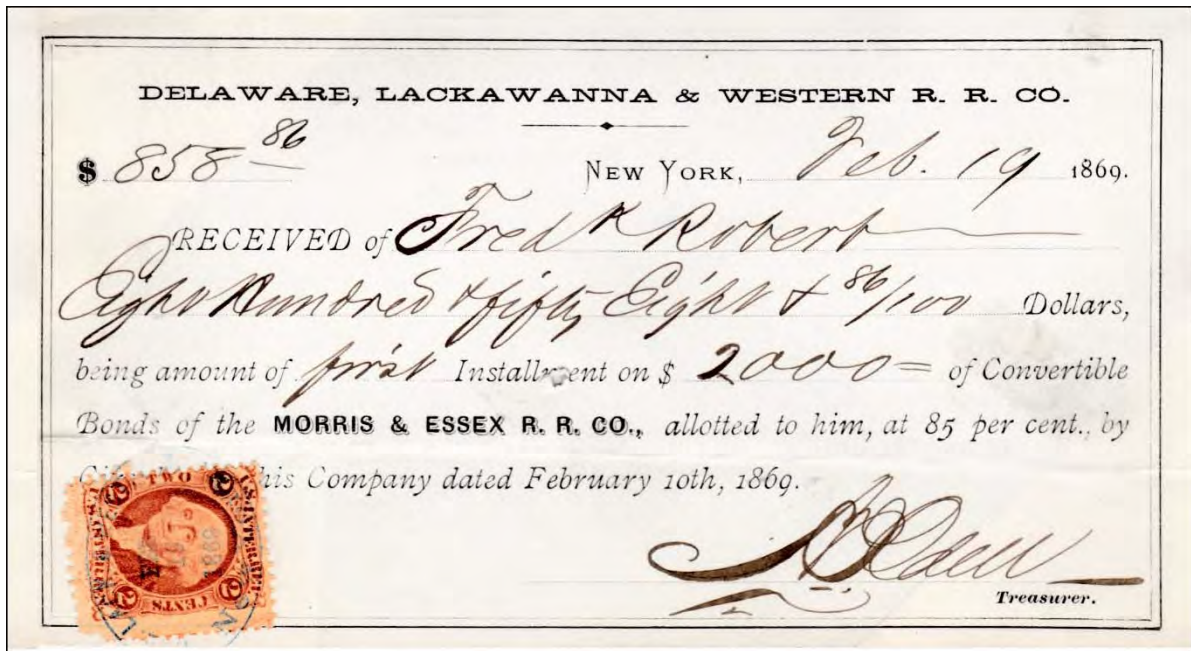


Fig. 13: A receipt for a partial payment on convertible bonds for the Morris & Essex, cancelled with a Scott R15 (Internal Revenue) stamp and a Del Lack & West. cancel Feb. 19, 1869.

The railroads continue, in a much-diminished state, for the transportation of goods and passengers, and only the future will tell what comes next. But in this earlier age, they opened the world to New Jersey.

THE STORY OF THE MORRIS & ESSEX RAILROAD ~ Don Bowe

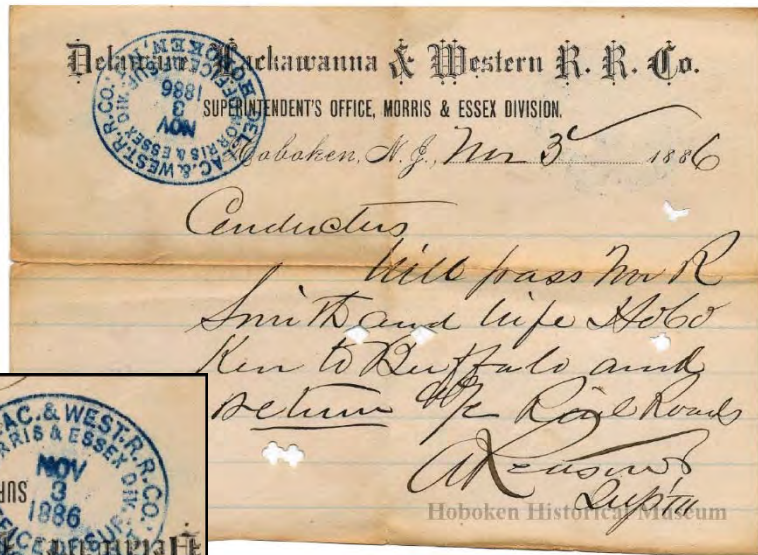
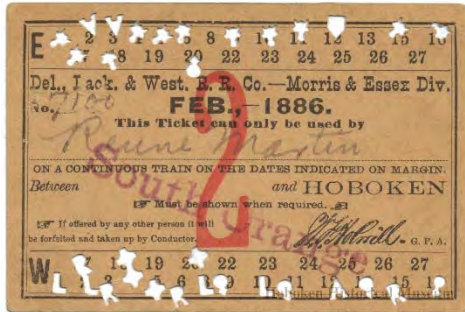


Fig. 14: 1886 railroad passes for the DL&W Morris & Essex Division.¹¹



ENDNOTES & REFERENCES:

- ¹ Documents tending to prove the superior advantages of rail-ways and steam carriages over canal navigation at <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=QoMpAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA18> . this document contains as well Stevens correspondence with Robert R. Livingston and Gouverneur Morris – answering their objections to his proposals
- ² James Alexander, Jr.: “John Stevens, the Man and the Machine” at <http://jimquest.com/writ/trains/stevens.pdf> in an issue of Milepost (no date given).
- ³ Both pictures from “Along the tracks..., How a Railroad Changed a Town,” on the Chatham library site at <https://chathamlibrary.org/tracks.pdf>
- ⁴ Frederick D. Macdonald, *Catalog of New Jersey Railway Postal Markings*, published by NJPHS in 1984.
- ⁵ On July 7, 1838, the United States Congress officially designated all railroads as official postal routes. Mail was picked up and dropped off at local stations. The first RPO car did not enter service until 1862, and it was not until 1869 that Railway Mail Service was officially inaugurated. The famous mail crane for grabbing mail on the fly was not invented until 1867, and not in use before 1869. See *Rails West: Railway Post Office Cars Sort and Distribute Mail* at <http://www.railswest.com/rpo.html>
- ⁶ Our thanks to Nancy Clark for her knowledge of the early history of railroad markings and service.
- ⁷ [Gustavus Myers](#)– “History Of The Great American Fortunes, Chapter V, The Blair And The Garrett Fortunes,” 1917 at http://www.yamaguchy.com/library/myers/am_fortune/am_fortune_405.html#N_2_
- ⁸ New Jersey Railroad Information at http://njrails.tripod.com/19th_Century/Morris_Essex/morris_essex.htm.
- ⁹ Adapted from map in front & back of *The Lackawanna Railroad in Northwest New Jersey* by Larry Lowenthal and William T. Greenberg.
- ¹⁰ Wheaton J. Lane, *From Indian Trail to Iron Horse* -p. 383.
- ¹¹ Both images from the Hoboken Historical Museum Online Collections Database at <http://hoboken.pastperfectonline.com/archive/>

REFERENCES:

- Cunningham, John, *Railroading in New Jersey*, published by Associated Railroads of New Jersey, 1951.
 Lane, Wheaton J, *From Indian Trail to Iron Horse*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1939
 Lowenthal, Larry, and Greenberg, William T., *The Lackawanna Railroad in Northwest New Jersey*, published by the Tri-State Railway Historical Society, Inc, Morristown, NJ, 1987
 Macdonald, Frederick, *Catalog of New Jersey Postal Markings*, NJPHS, 1984.