

Are We There Yet?

Adirondack Hotels: The Classic Period to World War I

Following the initial exploration of the Adirondacks in the early 1800's, there developed, slowly at first, then rapidly accelerating, the need for accommodations for the many people who wanted to visit this natural wonderland lying within a reasonable distance from the major Northeast cities. These accommodations ranged from rustic cabins to luxury hotels.

This display will look at some of those establishments through the envelopes produced to advertise their existence as well as postcards, brochures and other ephemera. They are grouped geographically by the railroad line that carried their patrons, from the east (Delaware & Hudson RR), the northeast (Chateaugay RR), the southeast (Adirondack RR), and the southwest and north (Webb's Adirondack & St. Lawrence RR et al.), in roughly chronological order of the opening of the various rail lines or their branches. The number on the map on the next page refers to the group being shown. Within groups, hotels are shown in the order of station stops from south the north or east to west.

As the lines developed, access to some of the hotels changed so the same hotel may appear in more than one group. Indeed, depending on where one was coming from, once all the lines were established, there might be several ways to approach the same hotel. For simplicity, it is assumed that all patrons were coming from New York City and that they would prefer to get as close as possible to their destination by rail rather than get off at an earlier (perhaps physically closer stop) and take a long stagecoach ride.

Some hotels changed names or were destroyed and rebuilt, detailing their changed ownership or appearance in their ephemera. Such alterations will be noted in the text.

Prior to the Civil War, most travel to the Adirondacks was by wagon, carriage or stagecoach. The road system was gradually improved. Steamboat routes on Lake George, Lake Champlain and other large bodies of water were established. But it was the railroad that was the major factor in the development of the Adirondacks. The initial railroads were all peripheral, with access to the interior only by stage or waterway.

The order of presentation is:

- I. The D&H reached Lake Champlain from the south, and Plattsburgh from the North, in 1852. Steamboat travel up Champlain did continue even after the line was completed in 1875.
- II. A branch to Ausable Forks opened in 1874, giving much better access to Lakes Placid and Saranac.
- III. The Ft. Edward to Lake George branch opened in 1882.
- IV. The Chateaugay RR from Plattsburgh top Lake Placid which opened in stages between 1878 and 1893.
- V. Dr. Durant built the Adirondack RR from Saratoga Springs to North Creek between 1865 and 1871, the closest approach to the High Peaks. It was to the North Creek Station that Theodore Roosevelt went upon learning of McKinley's death in 1901.
- VI. Dr. William Seward Webb build the Adirondack & St Lawrence RR (later the Adirondack Branch of the New York Central) from Remsen to Malone in 1892. Branches were established:
- VII. Lake Clear to Saranac, 1892
- VIII. Fulton Chain to Old Forge, 1896
- IX. Clear Water to Raquette Lake, 1900
- X. Fonda, Johnstown & Gloversville RR, 1875 to Northville, branch of New York Central & Hudson River RR
- XI. Carthage to Benson Mines, 1889 extended to Newton Falls, 1895. another branch of the NYC & HH RR

It is clear that there was a symbiotic relationship between the railroads and the resort hotels, aiding each other's growth. But the advent of the automobile ended that mutually beneficial arrangement. The peak year of rail travel was 1912 after which there was a slow decline. Most of the branch lines were abandoned, or little used, by World War II.