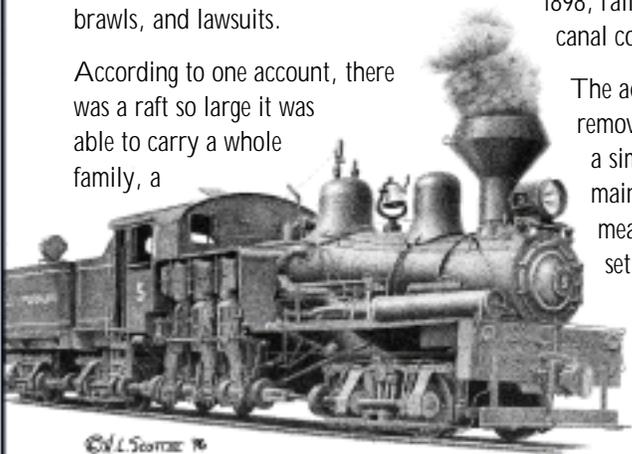


By the 1840s, mule-led canal boats loaded with Pennsylvania coal were stacking up on the banks of the Delaware, which they had to cross to continue their journey to the Hudson River. From there, the coal was transferred to schooners and barges for the trip to New York City.

Boatmen waited for days on the riverbank for slack water to rise, for high water to fall. Once in the river, the vessels were floated across to the other side.

Meanwhile, hundreds of huge timber rafts were being swept downriver to shipyards in Philadelphia—propelled by roaring spring freshets, the only steerage clumsy wooden oars. Collisions between the rafts, constructed of lashed-together freshly cut timber, and the poky canal boats were common. So were deaths, brawls, and lawsuits.

According to one account, there was a raft so large it was able to carry a whole family, a



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stable, a horse, and a cow on a trip south to trade the timber for goods needed to start a farm. In the spring of 1828, according to another account, over one thousand timber rafts rode the spring freshets to market.

As the river traffic increased, so did the lawsuits and the attendant legal costs. So in 1846, the Delaware and Hudson Canal Co. authorized construction of an aqueduct bridge to span the Delaware

River between Lackawaxen in Pennsylvania and Minisink Ford in New York. The bridge would link the canals and tow paths on both sides of the river.

The Delaware Aqueduct opened on April 26, 1849. It was designed by John A. Roebling, who built the fabled Brooklyn Bridge that spans New York City's East River.

For the next half century the aqueduct served as a watery transportation link, carrying the canal boats over the river. But this innovative passageway would eventually be overshadowed by another novel idea—Robert Fulton's Iron Horse.*

Steam engines were taking over the Delaware Valley, towing strings of coal cars to market at a rate much faster than the mule-powered boats. By 1898, railroads were "King" and the canal company was liquidated.

The aqueduct (or water) trunk was removed in 1930 and replaced with a simple wood deck. Rising maintenance costs overtook meager revenues and dilapidation set in.

The National Park Service purchased the structure in 1980 and came up with its own idea—restore the span to its original form, substituting a concrete deck for the wood one that had only been able to support foot traffic.

On June 13, 1987, the bridge was officially re-opened as a parade of horn-tooting antique cars fittingly tried out what is believed to be the oldest existing wire suspension bridge in the United States.

A year later the restoration project received a Presidential Award for

MULES and the



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IRON HORSE

Design Excellence, presented by the National Endowment for the Arts at a White House ceremony.

Not far from the old aqueduct stands the house where Zane Grey wrote his early stories before heading west in 1918 with his wife and children. He left a New York City dental practice behind, and a bridge with a fascinating story all its own.



COURTESY OF LOUISE K. FLORA

Delaware Aqueduct

Compiled by the
Delaware River Basin Commission
(www.drbc.net)

*John Fitch, a little known gunsmith from Trenton, N.J., is credited with building the first workable steamboat, well before the more celebrated Fulton unveiled his steam-powered vessel, the Clermont, in 1807. Fitch's boat made its maiden run during the 1780s on a stream near Davisville, in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. In 1790, a third boat designed by Fitch began scheduled trips on the Delaware River between Philadelphia and Trenton. Historians believe it was the first steam packet to operate in America.