

# Fall River Line Began in 1847

A haunting whistle, heard no more in the port of Fall River, still echoes in the memory of coastal dwellers who can remember back as far as 1937.

For three generations before that, the sound marked the schedule of one of the world's most celebrated transportation services — the Fall River Line.

The first whistle of a Fall River liner was heard in 1847, when the Bay State Transportation Company acquired two of the fastest boats on Long Island Sound, the Bay State and the Massachusetts.

In that year, Col. Rich-Borden and his brother Jefferson Borden banked \$18,000 profit on their \$300,000 investment in three ships — the Bay State, the Massachusetts, and the Empire State.

In 1845, the Fall River Railroad was begun, enabling coordination of the

sound steamers with the boat train from Boston. The Old Colony Railroad transported passengers to South Braintree; from there the Fall River Railroad brought them to the dock in this city.

The boat train of the Fall River Line surpassed any other in the world for length of continuous service. And the ships it served had a splendor that grew from the speedy Metropolis, which held the eight-hour, 22-minute record for 50 years, to the elegant Priscilla, princess of the fleet and reigning monarch of the Mauve Decade.

The charm of the overnight cruise to New York attracted so many passengers that The Empire State was added as a sister ship to the Bay State.

Lithographers Currier and Ives, depicting the salon of the Bay State, noted, "The wealth and

fashion of New England promenaded here."

Owners changed, but the popular steamship service expanded. In 1863, the Boston, Newport and New York Steamboat Company acquired the Bay State Steamboat Company and Newport became the terminus of the line, with Fall River a mere stopover on the train from Boston to Newport.

While the "summer cottages" of New York tycoons were being built along the Cliff Walk in Newport, the steamer "Newport" joined the fleet. In one of Henry James' stories, "An International Episode," the hero takes a leisurely voyage to Newport on a well-appointed steamer.

The period recalls the flamboyant days of "Admiral" Jim Fiske, who became president of the Narragansett Steamboat Company and added the

Boston, Newport and New York Steamboat Company to his empire. He changed the line's terminus to Bristol for a time, and acquired the luxurious steamers Bristol and Providence, three deckers with gaslights steam heat, and brass bands in military attire.

In 1869 "Jubilee Jim" Fiske transferred the main port to Fall River. This city remained the eastern terminus of the Fall River Line until the final voyages of 1937. In 1874 the line was acquired by the Old Colony Steamboat Co., a corporation organized by the interests that controlled the Old Colony Railroad Co.

The first iron steamer, the Pilgrim, joined the fleet in June, 1883; the Puritan in 1889, the Plymouth in 1890, the Priscilla in 1894, Providence II in 1905, and the Commonwealth in 1908.