

# Richard Borden's Providence Line Began in 1827

## Steamboats.

Mention the word and one's thoughts almost automatically turn to the glorious vessels of the Fall River Line.

However, 20 years before the first of the Fall River Line's floating palaces left the ways, the Providence Line was established by Col. Richard Borden, managing agent and treasurer of the Fall River Iron Works Co.

His idea to provide regular transportation between the city and neighboring communities was not original. Others who tried met with only partial success.

But Borden's line, begun in 1827, proved highly successful, operating as part of the iron works until its 1880 incorporation as the Fall River & Providence Steamboat Co.

A reputation for regularity and punctuality undoubtedly helped the line flourish. According to chroniclers of the city's history, it was not unusual for tardy passengers to be left on the docks, waving their handkerchiefs.

The Hancock, first of the line's boats, began regular three hour trips between the city and Providence in 1928. The 98 ton vessel, built in Castine, Maine, and purchased in Boston by Holder Borden, was captained by Thomas Borden.

The captain, piloting the boat here from Boston, ran into some difficulty at Stone Bridge. It seems that at 89 feet long, 18 feet wide, the Hancock was simply too large to pass through the draw.

One historian, citing the captain's determination, wrote that Borden took a broad axe and hacked away enough of the span's guards to allow the boat to continue up the Sakonnet River.

The Hancock was succeeded in 1830 by the *Union*,

was used as a supplementary vessel.

The *Canonicus*, reportedly the most beautiful of the iron works' side wheelers, was built in New York in 1849. She was slated to be named the *Puritan*.

However, the local press got wind of the name, announced it, and thoroughly angered Col. Richard Borden. He changed her name on the last minute, much to the surprise of those who gathered on the dock for a look at the *Puritan*.

The 179-foot long *Canonicus*, commanded by Benjamin Brayton, was the company's first steam engine steamboat. The vessel weighed 434 tons.

The boat made regular trips to Block Island, and, for a few years the *Canonicus* was run between Newport and Providence, via Bristol and Fall River.

At Bristol, the *Canonicus* put in at the State Street Wharf, where passengers lined up to pay the five cent fare to Providence. A woman, who frequently made the trip as a child, later wrote that a ride on the *Canonicus* was more exciting than the circus.

The *Canonicus* was the first vessel to be equipped with a calliope. It was said that although the music was pleasant when heard from the shoreline, it proved deafening to those aboard.

That problem, coupled with difficulty getting up enough steam for both the music and the engines, marked the calliope's end.

In 1862 the *Canonicus* was sold to the United States government for transport work. Three years later, the iron works bought the vessel back and until 1877 it was used for extra excursion trips to Rocky Point, Newport and Block

dence and the city in an hour and a half, including stops, making her particularly popular with passengers.

The *Richard Borden* was eventually sold to the *Joy Line*. Re-named the *Fairfield*, the boat traveled from New York on the *Bridgeport Line*, prior to being dismantled in 1910.

In 1896 the line was sold to the *Providence, Fall River and Newport Steamboat Co.* The line continued to run well into the 1900s, although service to the city was terminated because it wasn't profitable.

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The Hancock was succeeded in 1832 by the King Philip, built in New York as an ice breaker. Upon encountering ice, the boat's bow would rise and slide along the top until her weight caused the ice to cave in.

In winters previous to the advent of the 169-ton King Philip, a large number of men with saws and other tools had to be employed to chop ice away from the iron works' docks. Occasionally, the same method was used to carve channels as far as Mount Hope and Bristol Ferry.

The King Philip, also captained by Borden, was 120 feet long and equipped with the first steam whistle among boats plying American waters.

The boat was sold to New York interests and put to work as a tow boat in and around the city's port. It did a brief stint as an excursion boat, running between Boston and Nahant. The King Philip was returned to tow boat work and eventually capsized and sank during a squall.

In 1845, the Bradford Durfee, named for one of the eight original owners of the iron works, was placed on the route. It had a square engine and was still in use in 1877. The King Philip, meanwhile,

trips to Rocky Point, Newport and Block Island.

The Canonicus was sold again in June of 1887 and ended up carrying freight to Albany, N.Y. A year later, she was being used on the Delaware River.

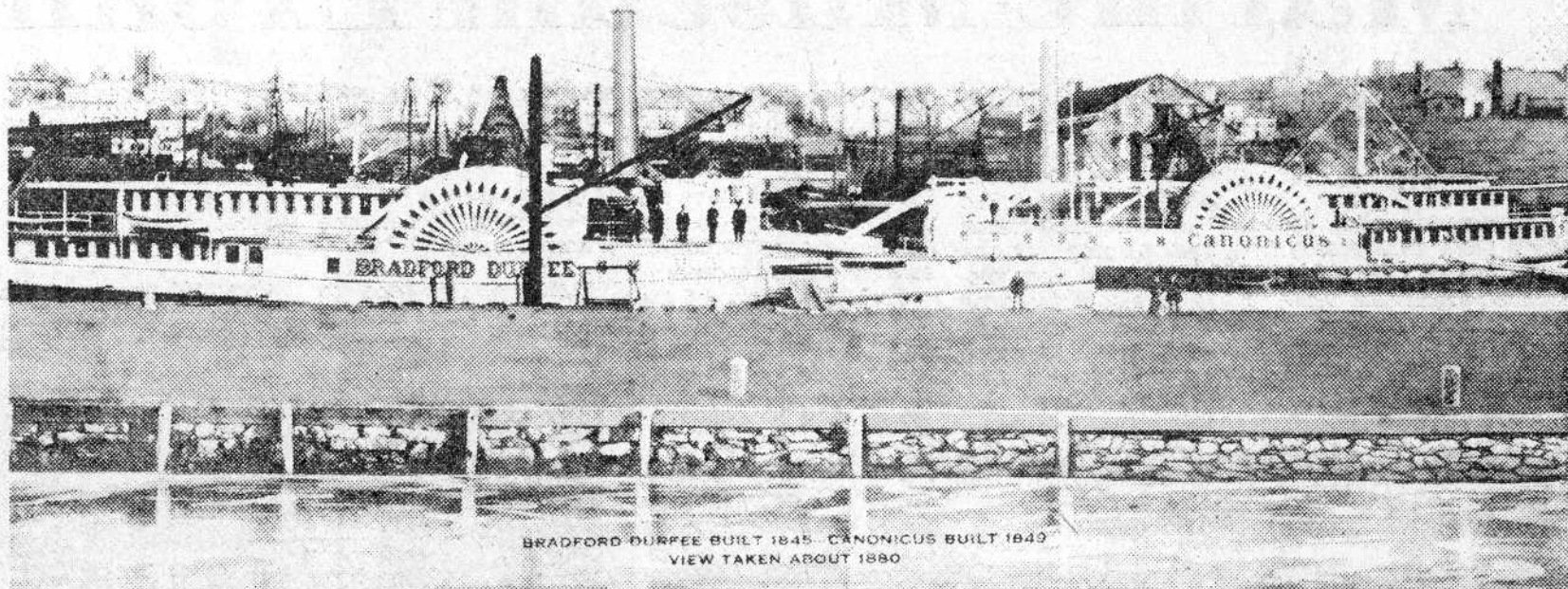
The end came on June 18, 1894. The Canonicus, berthed at Port Richmond, Staten Island, N.Y., burned to the waterline.

In the meantime, the Metacomet began working the bay in 1854. It was 170 feet long and 26 feet wide.

The United States government purchased the Metacomet in 1857 and transformed her into the gunboat "Pulaski." The Navy put the boat up for sale in Montevideo, Uruguay. As late as 1870, it was working the LaPlatte River. Eventually, it was wrecked off the coast of Mexico.

The Richard Borden, at 785 tons, was the last of the Providence Line steamers. It was constructed specifically to accommodate the narrow Providence River, which posed turning problems for many vessels.

The boat was a "double ender" and could run in either direction, much like a ferry boat. Unusually fast, she was able to travel between Provi-



The Bradford Durfee and the Canonicus, steamboats of the Providence Line, operated by the Fall River Iron Works Co., made regular runs between this city and Providence. They are shown tied up at their

docks, with the sparsely settled city in the background. The Bradford Durfee had a square engine, while the Canonicus was equipped with a calliope.