



PILOT CLUB LOG
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Destination Catskill Mountains

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Prior to the development of steam navigation in the early Nineteenth century, travel was extremely difficult. The phenomenon of the family vacation experience was virtually unknown. Travel was limited to sloop and stagecoach until the successful introduction of the steamboat by Robert Fulton.

In the decade of 1820-1830, the Hudson Valley was the population center of the nation. The Hudson River Valley was the main artery of trade and traffic in the northeast. The scenic beauty of the Hudson Valley, and fast, reliable steam navigation, were prime factors in the development of tourism in the Catskill Mountains, America's first vacationland.

Before 1800, visitors journeyed to the Catskills purely for enjoyment of the scenery. Nature was the first attraction of the Catskill resorts. "A few years ago, this delightful retreat was almost unknown," an 1834 travel guide reported.

The development of the Catskills as a resort landscape is closely linked to the history of eastern industrial cities, especially New York. The proximity of the mountains allowed early and easy access, which translated into relatively low travel costs. From the mid-nineteenth century, the Catskills began to develop resort forms which extended the luxury of the summer vacation to the broadening urban middle class.

Steamboat travel on the Hudson was threatened by the opening of the railroads. On October 8, 1851, the Hudson River Railroad opened from New York City to Greenbush. The trip took three hours and fifty-five minutes, compared to the eight hour trip by steamboat. To compete with the Hudson River Railroad, the New York, West Shore,

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& Buffalo Railroad was built along the western bank of the Hudson. Opened in 1883 and connected with the Ulster & Delaware at Kingston, it stopped at Catskill where passengers connected with the Catskill Mountain Railroad.

To avoid the rigors of the last part of the Catskill journey by stagecoach, a number of small-gauge railroads were built. Among these was the Otis Elevated railway that lifted passengers up the mountain wall to the Mountain House. The Mountain House was the first and most famous of the luxurious Catskill resorts. It was followed by the Hotel Kaaterskill, and later, by a host of lesser (and less expensive) establishments.

Not everyone was happy with the railroads. Steamboats allowed passengers more time to enjoy the scenery of the Hudson and were cleaner and more comfortable. Many steamboat lines competed for the Catskill tourists. The best known and longest operating was the Day Line. Large, fast and luxuriously appointed, this floating palace made the trip an experience the railroads could surpass only in speed.

The increasing popularity of the automobile rang the death knell of the steamboat and railroads. The decline of passenger travel eventually forced the abandonment of railroad lines and cessation of Day Line travel. Today, Destination Catskill is possible only by automobile.