## STAGECOACHES IN VERMONT

## At the time of the American Revolution, Vermont was not easily accessible. A few military roads and major waterways, such as the Connecticut River, Winooski River, and Lake Champlain, provided the best routes through the territory. In the early 18th century, small earthen roadways carried travelers by foot or horseback. Ox teams were used for hauling heavy or large loads overland, such as the Vermont granite used in the construction of the [State Capitol](http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/centralvermont/cv20.htm). By the end of the 18th century, private individuals constructed several turnpikes, which greatly improved land transportation in the State, and enabled the establishment of stagecoach lines.



A stagecoach is a heavy, closed vehicle on wheels, usually drawn by horses, used to transport goods and passengers. Used in London at least by 1640, and about 20 years later in Paris, stagecoaches reached their greatest importance in England and the United States in the 19th century, where the new and improved roads made travel quicker and more comfortable. Prior to the railroads, coaches were the only means that many people had to travel over long land distances in the United States. In 1802 one could travel by coaches 1,200 miles (1,900 kilometers) between Boston and Savannah, Georgia.

Stagecoaches varied in design. Typically they were drawn by four or six horses, which changed at the stages, or stations, along the route. The great period of the coaches ended by the mid-nineteenth century as railroads were built throughout Vermont.

Improved roads made possible the careful scheduling of stagecoach departures and arrivals. The stage from Albany to Montreal via Middlebury and Burlington covered 220 miles and cost $11.25 a person.20 A typical trip of the period was that of Erastus Root in 1815. He left Brattleboro by stage at 3 a.m. and bad breakfast at Walpole, New Hampshire at 7:30. He spent the night in Rutland, which he left at 2:30 the next morning. He breakfasted at 7 in Brandon, dined at 12 in Middlebury, and arrived in Burlington at 8 p.m. The average stage time on cross roads of the day was about 40 miles in a 24-hour period. The fastest mail stages between the great commercial towns along the seacoast travelled from 60 to 120 miles in 24 hours. In 1819 the stages from Whitehall to Boston and from Middlebury to Boston both required but two days to go 200 miles.24 This was speedy but strenuous travel.

The coaches were strongly built, with heavy leather straps for springs. But they were subjected to tremendous strain from the deep mud, holes, rocks and stumps, and often they broke down. Although the coaches were not swung high, there was weight on top and they sometimes overturned. Not every stream had a bridge, and fording was dangerous, especially when the stream was swollen by rain. John Palmer of Lynn, England travelled from Vergennes to Fair Haven in 1817, apparently on horseback with a Vermont travelling companion. He described the Yankee thriftiness which limited the cost of a horse to 50 or 60 cents a day. At each stop his fellow-traveler ordered four cents' worth of hay and six or eight cents' worth of oats. Palmer found the tavern accommodations good, with charges of 25 and 37¥2 cents a meal, and a dollar overnight. He invariably found two New England dishes on the table-toast dipped in cream, and pumpkin pie. He was usually waited on by the landlord's daughter or other member of the household, neatly dressed and blooming with health and beauty. "Indeed," be wrote, "I think the ladies of New England are positively almost as handsome and have nearly as clear red and white as our English fair."

**Stagecoach Stands** A Stagecoach Stop was referred to as a “Stand”.

**Joel Beaman (1782 – 1846)(Buried in Poultney)**

In 1838 he was listed as an inn keeper in West Poultney, Vermont. In addition, he sold general merchandise from the same location as well as arranging for stage coach travel from his inn to Albany, Whitehall, Rutland and other towns. During the 1830s, he continued making arrangements for stage coach transportation, as well as starting a woolen mill in Hampton prior to 1838.

**Ebenezer B Dewey**

Dewey’s Stand was located in Hubbardton on the west side of what is now Route 30 just south of Hortonia Road. In the Wheelers book on the 1776 Mount Independence – Hubbardton 1776 Military Road, they indicate the following: Captain Abel said the military road went by the Dewey Stand. This was an old stage road tavern which burned in 1870. Lyman Chandler said it burned in the fall of 1875 or spring of 1876. Samuel Parsons, Town Clerk, now lives on the location.

Ebenezer B Dewey was from Royalton, VT. He was involved in many enterprises in Castleton and in Hubbardton. Prior to 1832 Joel BEAMAN, of Poultney, ran the stages in this part of the country, mostly in Rutland county. In 1832 E. B. DEWEY obtained the contract for carrying the mails hereabouts, and became stage proprietor. He made Castleton his central point.

**Arunah Waterman Hyde (1799 – 1874)(Buried in Sudbury)**

Arunah was one of the sons of Pitt William Hyde from Hyde Park, VT. His father built Hyde Manor in 1801, but Arunah became a businessman in Castleton. Around 1838 Arunah Hyde of Castleton purchased from Ebenezer B. DEWEY of Hubbardton, the lines of stages extending from Castleton to the most important stations in Vermont and Eastern New York. During the five years from 1839 to 1844, as a stage proprietor and mail contractor, he was as well known throughout the country and at the post-office department at Washington, as many of the railroad kings are at the present time. He sold out his stage lines in 1844.

Another source describes this to be slightly different: A. W. HYDE succeeded Dewey and purchased a line from Salem to Burlington, Rutland to Whitehall, Rutland to Manchester, between Lake Champlain and Lake George, and in winter had teams from Highgate to St. Johns. In 1841 he took the contract for carrying the "Lightning Express Mail," as it was termed, from Albany to Burlington, at $14,440 per annum. He was given a certain number of houses in which to deliver mail. During the muddy seasons of spring and fall he ran the mails in separate two-horse wagons, and timed himself with a watch imbedded in a block of wood. He also placed the way-bill in the driver's hands and obliged the postmasters along the route to register the time of his arrival and departure.

Castleton was thus the headquarters of nearly all the stage business west of the Green Mountains in Southern Vermont. It was the junction of the lines from New York to Montreal, and from Boston to Saratoga and Buffalo. The fare from New York to Montreal in winter was $14.00. Between Salem, N. Y., and Castleton, thirty-four miles, Mr. HYDE had six teams to do the work, and frequently had forty passengers here at one time.

**More on Arunah Hyde**

ARUNAH WATERMAN HYDE was born at Hyde Park, Vermont July 4, 1799. His father, Pitt W Hyde, was one of the pioneer settlers of that part of the state and through his exertions for the public interest earned the right of naming the county seat of Lamoille County. He removed to Sudbury in 1802, where Arunah’s boyhood was spent upon his father’s farm. At sixteen or seventeen years of age he was a student at Castleton Seminary. Soon after he obtained a position in the store of James Adams. After five years he purchased the business and formed a partnership with his brother Oliver M Hyde.

In 1829, learning that the funds raised by Solomon Foot were insufficient for the completion of the building for the Vermont Classical Seminary, Mr. Hyde completed the building at a cost of more than thirty thousand dollars. Indeed, he is claimed to have been both projector and architect. He was deeply interested in the prosperity of the town, and erected the Mansion House, three brick houses on Seminary Street, the marble block, corner of Main and Seminary Streets, and a number of frame houses in other parts of the village, opening up new streets for that purpose.

In 1831 he closed his mercantile business, and in 1837 purchased a number of lines of mail stages. In 1839 he formed a partnership with his brother, Pitt W Hyde, and purchased additional lines of stages. In 1844 this stage property was sold.

In 1842 A W Hyde purchased a water power and mill site at Castleton Mills, afterwards named Hydeville in his honor, and built the second marble mill of any size in Rutland County. He purchased a marble quarry at West Rutland, and in 1844 with P W Hyde, formed a partnership with D P Fuller, under the firm name of Hyde, Fuller & Hyde. The company owned most of the property around Hydeville. In 1850 the business was sold to the Hydeville Company and A W Hyde was made president, a position he held until his death.

He was deeply interested in the quarrying and manufacture of roofing slate, as also in the building of the Rutland and Whitehall Railroad. He filled large contracts for constructing portions of it and was made president, holding the office for twenty years.

He was a man of public spirit, interested in everything pertaining to his town and state, yet he persistently refused every public office tendered him, saying that he had no time for such service. He was killed in October 1874, by an engine while crossing the track of the railroad to the construction of which he had freely given time and money, near the site of Fort Castleton, but the memory of his many good deeds survived him.

In 1844 Joel BEAMAN secured the contract from Castleton to Troy, and after about six months sold out to Mr. HYDE. By the opening of the railroad in 1850 the nature of the place was materially changed. Instead of being the central point of numberless stage routes, it became merely a way station between Whitehall and Rutland. Hotel business consequently fell into a decline, and all other branches of business felt the effect.

**Arunah Hyde and “The Blue Cat of Castleton”**

Arunah, Hyde appears in the book: The Blue Cat of Castleton. Catherine Cate Coblentz (1897-1951) was a writer who tried to retell history realistically, but in a way that would appeal to a child's sense of fantasy. Her book *The Blue Cat of Castleton* was a runner-up for the 1949 Newbery Award. Arunah Hyde was used in this prize winning children’s book. Surely everyone has read this lovely book.

Here are two reviews of The Blue Cat of Castleton:

Teaching the River's Song, by [Gale Finlayson](http://www.amazon.com/gp/pdp/profile/A1SER5HLPRY6SB/ref=cm_cr_rdp_pdp)

Set in a kinder, gentler Vermont this quiet charmer by Coblentz permits readers to relax and savor the humble pleasures of a sleepy village through which a river meanders--a town where craftsmen take true pride in the creation of works of beauty. But then rich resident Arunah Hyde decides to make Castleton the center of the universe, with his fast coaches and dreams of even faster trains. Speed is all that matters as he insidiously weaves his Dark Spell--demanding faster work and shoddy standards, for he is obsessed with Time and cares naught for things of lasting beauty.   
  
Inspired by a visit to a NY Art Museum the author was impressed by a tapestry which included a blue cat in one of the hand-woven squares. While accompanying her husband on an extended business trip to Castleton, she decided to research the local folk lore surrounding a blue cat, whose almost invisible trail included works of handcraft admired to this day. A church pulpit and a hand woven linen table cloth are among its treasures.   
  
A blue kitten is born in a fragrant field by the river, and to his mother's dismay, and against her strict warning, begins to listen to its song--unable to resist; yes, destined to learn its song. No normal life will this kitten with only three black hairs on its tail live out, for he must teach the river's song to one mortal before he may find his home and hearth. Not an easy task when Arunah Hyde is spreading the dark spell throughout the town; besides, who will listen to the plaintive mewing of an orphan cat? Will the trusting Blue Cat be able to resist the clever trap set by Arunah--who has evil designs on him?

You too can seek and enjoy the Bright Enchantment of this storybook village, if you visit this charming town in September. Then the locals reenact the tale on a delightful Blue Cat Tour, by a uniformed guide, during which the story comes alive for readers and all cat lovers. This has remained one of my favorite childhood books for many decades and may secretly have whispered to me that I should move to Vermont some day.