

Kids' KOrner

Ferryboats: An idea that won't die

WASHINGTON — In 1967, ferryboats linking New Jersey and Manhattan made their last runs across the Hudson River, the victims of progress in the form of bridges and tunnels.

In 1984, planners studying how to alleviate congestion on those bridges and in those tunnels have been urged by New Jersey's governor and New York City's mayor to consider an old solution: ferryboats.

The planners will make no recommendations until the end of the year, but they are looking seriously at a resumption of ferry service. The mere consideration of the notion shows that some ideas refuse to die.

PASSAGE TO HADES

Ferryboats have played a role in civilization for millennia. Greek mythology tells of the first ferryboat captain, Charon, who ferried entrants to Hades across the rivers Styx and Acheron for a fee of one obolus.

When the first explorers came to America, many, like Hernando De Soto, were ferried across rivers by Indians. Though the building of bridges and tunnels has obliterated hundreds of American ferries, many have survived. Others have revived. There is something about ferries that maintains a hold on the popular imagination.

Walt Whitman wrote that ferries "afford inimitable, streaming, never-ending poems." And Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote of the days when "We were very tired, we were very merry, We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry."

All this is heady stuff for the unpretentious ferryboats of this world. Unlike cruise ships, ferries rarely have anything luxurious or

even comfortable about them. They are designed for a workaday job: to carry people and their possessions from one side of a river, lake, or sea to the other. "The ferry," wrote historian John Perry, "is the people's boat and its history is theirs."

For all intents and purposes, a ferry is simply an extension of a highway. But it links highways in a limitless number of ways, and many ferries have taken on a legend and a lore all their own.

Probably the most famous American ferry links Manhattan and Staten Islands. One early ferry on that run was started in 1811 by Cornelius Vanderbilt, who borrowed \$100 from his mother to launch the service. He soon paid it back and used his profits as the foundation of his fortune.

Today's Staten Island ferries can carry as many as 6,000 passengers at a time. The celebrated nickel fare has risen to a quarter, though that pays for a round trip.

ROWBOAT TO BROOKLYN

Vanderbilt's ferries came long after the first ferries to dock in Manhattan. As far back as 1623, Cornelius Dirksen rowed people back and forth between Manhattan and Brooklyn.

But even that came after the Massachusetts Bay Court helped set up a penny ferry service between Boston and Charlestown in 1630. A second ferry, between Boston and Cambridge, was established in 1635.

Ferry service between Rocky Hill and South Glastonbury, Conn., was established in 1655. That ferry continues to operate under the Connecticut Department of Transportation, making it the nation's oldest continuous ferry operation.

Maryland's ferries have seen their share of notable women. The Tred Avon ferry was home to Judith Bennett, who married three different ferry operators and ran the ferry herself for 10 years between husbands.

Patty Cannon, who kidnapped blacks and sold them into slavery in the 18th century, is said to have persuaded ferrymen to take her across Maryland's Wicomico River by bribing them with a kiss.

In 1859, the body of John Brown was ferried across Lake Champlain to the grave in which it was to lie a-moldering. Brown had been slain while attempting to free slaves at (Robert) Harper's Ferry, established in 1747 at the junction of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, in what is now West Virginia.

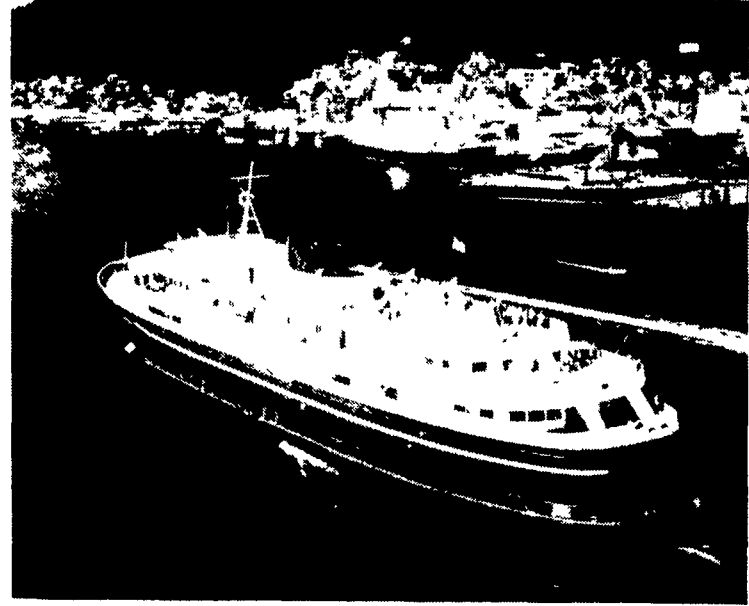
Fur trader John Harris' ferry across the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania was the site of a village that became Harrisburg.

Early ferries were canoes or rafts. Later ferries were sailboats or "teamboats," propelled by a team of horses walking on a treadmill. Others, including some still operating, ran along ropes or cables attached to trees on each bank.

MARINE HIGHWAY

Today, ferries play an integral role in government transportation systems. Ferries carry 40,000 commuters daily between Seattle and nearby islands. The coast of Alaska is linked by the ferries of the state's marine highway system. Ferryboats operated along the coast of North Carolina are affectionately known as the "Tar Heel Navy."

An extensive ferry system operates in Canada. There are ferries connecting Prince Edward



A ferry of the Alaska Marine Highway System steams past Ketchikan along the Inside Passage, a waterway that threads Canada's western coast and the island-dotted panhandle of Alaska. Half of the communities in Alaska's southeast are unreachable by conventional roads. Ferries play a vital role in linking them together and facilitating travel down the Pacific coast as far as Seattle.

Island and the mainland, ferries between Maine and Nova Scotia, and 30 ferries in British Columbia alone.

The most unusual is over the Fraser River between Boston Bar and North Bend, B.C.: an aerial cage suspended on cables crosses between towers on both banks. It can hold 40 passengers, or an automobile and its passengers.

"You'd better see it quick," says Frank Clapp, a British Columbia land survey officer. "Logging has increased traffic, and a bridge will replace it in 1986."

Abroad, the best-known ferries are those that cross the English Channel between Great Britain and the Continent. Almost as well known is the Star Ferry, which has plied Hong Kong waters since the

1880s.

But the range and number of ferries is endless. There are ferries between the Soviet Union and Bulgaria on the Black Sea, scores of ferries on the North Sea and the Mediterranean, and a ferry between Sicily and Italy on the Strait of Messina, where Ulysses sailed between Scylla and Charybdis.

DEATH NOTICES PREMATURE

Someone is always proclaiming the imminent death of ferries, and indeed, ferries as famous and obstinate as Arkansas's Toad Suck Ferry are gone. But others, like the boats that cross Lake Michigan between Wisconsin and Michigan, often are saved at the last minute, and others are revived --

(Turn to Page B11)

COLOR THIS!

- | | |
|-----------|---------------|
| 1. BLACK | 6. PEACH |
| 2. RED | 7. GREEN |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT. BROWN |
| 4. BLUE | 9. LT. BLUE |
| 5. BROWN | 10. LT. GREEN |

COMMON MARMOSETS. THIS IS THE NAME OF A GROUP OF THE SMALLEST MONKEYS KNOWN. THEY ARE ABOUT THE SIZE OF HALF GROWN KITTENS OR SQUIRRELS. MARMOSETS LIVE IN THE WARM REGIONS OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO. THEIR HAIR IS BEAUTIFULLY COLORED AND IS LONG AND SOFT.

