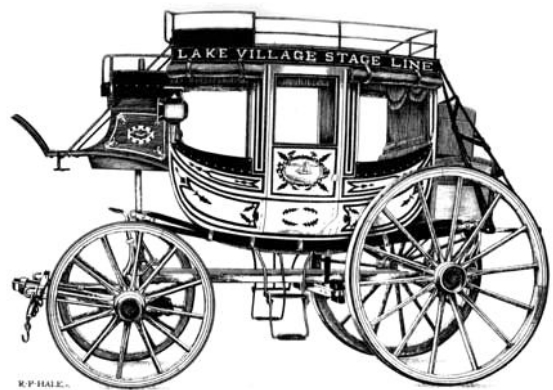


Stagecoach Etiquette

(Attributed to the *Omaha Herald*, 1877)

The best seat inside a stagecoach is the one next to the driver. You will have to ride with back to the horses, which with some people produces an illness not unlike seasickness, but in a long journey this will wear off, and you will get more rest with less than half the bumps and jars than on any other seat.... [When anyone] who traveled thousands of miles on coaches offers, through sympathy, to exchange his back or middle seat with you, don't do it ... Bathe your feet before starting in cold weather and wear loose overshoes and gloves two or three sizes too large. When the driver asks you to get off and walk, do it without grumbling. He will not request it unless absolutely necessary. If a team runs away, sit still and take your chances; if you jump, nine times out of ten you will be hurt. In very cold weather abstain entirely from liquor while on the road; a man will freeze twice as quick while under its influence. Don't growl at food at stations; stage companies generally provide the best they can get. Don't keep the stage waiting; many a virtuous man has lost his character by so doing. Don't smoke a strong pipe inside especially early in the morning; spit on the leeward side of the coach. If you have anything to take in a bottle, pass it around; a man who drinks by himself in such a case is lost to all human feeling. Provide stimulants before starting; ranch whiskey is not always nectar. Be sure and take two heavy blankets with you; you will need them. Don't swear, nor lop over onto your neighbor when sleeping. Don't ask how far it is to the next station until you get there. Take small change to pay expenses. Never attempt to fire a gun or pistol while on the road; it may frighten the team and the careless handling and cocking of the weapon makes nervous people nervous. Don't discuss politics or religion, nor point out places on the road where horrible murders have been committed, if delicate women are among the passengers. Don't linger too long at the pewter washbasin at the station. Don't grease your hair before starting or dust will stick there in sufficient quantities to make a respectable "tater" patch. Tie a silk handkerchief around your neck to keep out dust and prevent sunburns.... Don't imagine for a moment you are going on a picnic; expect annoyance, discomfort and some hardships. If you are disappointed, thank heaven.



Questions for Discussion

1. What does the word etiquette mean? Which rules do you find most surprising?
2. When you visit the museum, you will learn that the Concord Coach could carry many passengers at one time. Why do you think following these rules was important to people traveling in a crowded stagecoach?
3. Based on the rules in this article, what differences do you notice between the way people traveled in 1877 and today?
4. Why might the coach driver ask passengers to “get off and walk”? What does this tell us about the condition of many roads in the 1800s?
5. Where is Omaha? Why do you think this article about a coach made in New Hampshire appeared in a western newspaper?