

## The Curtis Stage Line Served Brooklyn, NY

By George Curtis, CFS President



Stagecoach on Long Island  
(Date unknown)

In this day and age of Interstate highways, urban mass transit and Uber, it's hard to imagine there was once a stage coach line running between the New York City borough of Brooklyn and the village of Hempstead in central Long Island (LI), a distance of 20 miles. A 1917 issue of the Hempstead, Long Island, NY "*Sentinel*" newspaper contained the following snippet:

"In business circles the name of Curtis is best remembered in connection with the stage coach line that ran from Hempstead village to Fulton Street, Brooklyn. Communication to and from the city was entirely by stage coach. Railroads had not yet been constructed to Hempstead. [There would be by the mid-1860's which eventually put the stage companies out of business.] The stage line was conducted by John Curtis and later his son, William, took control. The horses and stage were kept in the barn at the rear of the Curtis residence. The barn is still standing. Mrs. Hewlett has a receipt for \$475, the price paid for a new omnibus in 1849. From old account books kept by William Curtis, it would appear that the older residents did quite a business with city merchants and many commissions were executed by Curtis while in the city. It was the practice of the coach to leave Hempstead on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 8 o'clock and leaving to return from the city Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturday at 1 o'clock."

A 1909 article in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* stated:

"This early stage route, conducted by Curtis & Mervin, was well patronized and continued for many years."

An 1830 *Long Island Telegraph* advertisement announced,  
“.....it takes only several hours to reach Brooklyn.”

Armed with these newspaper items, I took up the challenge to find out more about this Curtis family with the goal of identifying their ancestral family. Through review of the Federal Census of Hempstead from 1790 through 1850, I was able to determine this was the only Curtis family in the village. The 1790 and 1800 census shows only one Curtis family, that of William Curtis, who was born before 1755 as he was ‘over 45’ in the 1800 census as was his unnamed wife. William probably died between 1810 and 1820 as he is last listed in the 1810 census. The 1800 census shows four males under 25 years old, presumably sons, and two females, probably daughters, less than 15 years of age. The 1810 census also shows only one Curtis head-of-household, this time a Sarah Curtis. The 1810 census enumerates one female 16-26 years of age, and an older male and female, both over 45 years of age for Sarah’s household.

It was in the records of Saint George’s Episcopal Church of Hempstead that I found the best information on William and his son John. The church’s Index of Registry of Marriage 1725-1813 is available at [www.longislandgenealogy.com](http://www.longislandgenealogy.com).

The index contains William’s marriage to Sarah Bedel on August 10, 1780. The entry describes William as a “volunteer in His Majesty’s New Hampshire Regiment.” The New Hampshire Regiment was comprised of loyalists recruited in New York City and Philadelphia in about 1777. The regiment assisted British forces on Long Island during the Revolutionary War.

William’s wife, Sarah, passed away on January 23, 1838 and was interred in the Saint George’s Church cemetery. Her tombstone is inscribed “Sarah Curtis, relic of William Curtis, died Jan 23, 1838, aged 81 years” indicating she was born about 1756-1757.

The marriage of William and Sarah’s son, John, to Sarah Wiggins on December 31, 1811 is also listed in the Saint George’s index of marriages. A daughter, Elizabeth Curtis, married Oliver Van Dewater on January 12, 1805.

The 1840 Federal Census revealed John Curtis as a head-of-household, born between 1780 and 1790. I assume John died between 1840 and 1850 as he does not appear in the 1850 census. I did find a death notice in the May 18, 1841 edition of the *Commercial Advertiser* newspaper for John Curtis, age 52, proprietor of a line of stages between Hempstead and Brooklyn, died May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1841. I was able to determine John and Sarah had at least five children – William (1811-1870), John H. (1818-1882), Joseph (1826-1869), Alfred (1833-1862) and Sarah Elizabeth.

Many of this Curtis family were interred in the Greenwood Cemetery in Union, LI, near Hempstead, which helped me identify family members through Find-A-Grave.com and LongIslandSurnames.com. Also, five Curtis family members are buried in the Saint George’s Episcopal Church cemetery in Hempstead.

The 1840 Federal Census also shows John's son, William, as a head-of-house with what appears to be his new wife, Maria Elizabeth Akley (1817-1894). They had two daughters, Sarah and Jane "Jennie", who married James Hewlett. Jennie Curtis Hewlett (1844-1922) is probably the Mrs. Hewlett mentioned in the *Sentinel* article who had the 1849 receipt for the new "bus." William took over management of the stage company when his father died until about 1870 when his occupation is listed in the census as "livery." This would coincide with the establishment of the train service from Brooklyn.

William's brother, John, was also a stage coach driver, and after the demise of the stage coach and the death of his brother William in early 1870, managed the family's livery stable according to the Hempstead 1870 and 1880 Federal Census. The other brother, Joseph, served as Sheriff of Queens County and was very active in Queens County politics. Joseph and his wife Sarah Elizabeth Smith (1831-1899) had seven children, six of who I was able to identify. One of their sons, William Joseph Curtis (1869-1959) and his wife Mary Barnes (1869-1936), appears to have continued this Curtis line with four children, two daughters and two sons well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The youngest son of John and Sarah, Alfred, was listed as a stage coach driver in the 1860 census. He died in the Civil War in August 1862 leaving a widow and several young children. Unfortunately, I was not able to determine the origins of this Hempstead Curtis clan before William. If anyone can lay claim to this family or has additional information, the Curtis Family Society would appreciate hearing from you via the "Contact Us" on the public home page of this website.