

The development of railroads in Britain made that country a leader in the Industrial Revolution. In 1830, the Kembles, a well-known family of actors and theater directors, were in Liverpool when George Stephenson made a trial run of his railroad. Fanny Kemble, a 21-year-old actress, was thrilled to be Stephenson's guest and wrote about her adventure in a letter. ♦ *As you read, imagine how different train travel was from anything people had experienced before. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Riding the Liverpool-Manchester Line

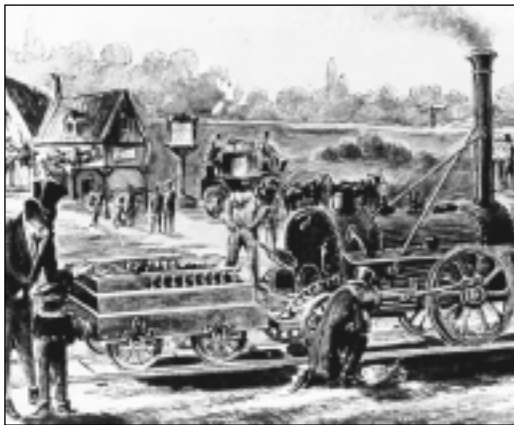
And now I will give you an account of my yesterday's excursion. A party of sixteen persons was ushered into a large court-yard, where . . . stood several carriages of a peculiar construction, one of which was prepared for our reception. It was a long-bodied vehicle with seats placed across it, back to back; the one we were in had six of these benches. . . . The wheels were placed upon two iron bands, which formed the road, and to which they are fitted, being so constructed as to slide along without any danger of hitching or becoming displaced. . . .

. . . We were introduced to the little engine which was to drag us along the rails. She (for they make these curious little fire-horses all mares) consisted of a boiler, a stove, a small platform, a bench, and behind the bench a barrel containing enough water to prevent her being thirsty for fifteen miles—the whole machine not bigger than a common fire-engine. She goes upon two wheels, which are her feet, and are moved by bright steel legs called pistons; these are propelled by steam. . . .

. . . This snorting little animal, which I felt rather inclined to pat, was then harnessed to our carriage, and Mr. Stephenson having taken me on the bench

of the engine with him, we started at about ten miles an hour. The steam-horse being ill adapted for going up and down hill, the road was kept at a certain level, and appeared sometimes to sink below the surface of the earth, and sometimes to rise above it. Almost at starting it was cut through the solid rock, which formed a wall on either side of it, about sixty feet high. You can't imagine how strange it seemed to be journeying on thus, without any visible cause of progress other than the magical machine, with its flying white breath and rhythmical, unvarying pace, between these rocky walls. . . .

We had now come fifteen miles, and stopped where the road traversed a wide and deep valley. . . . We then rejoined the rest of the party, and the engine having received its supply of water, the carriage was placed behind it, for it cannot turn, and was set off at its utmost speed, thirty-five miles an hour, swifter than a bird flies. . . . You cannot conceive what that sensation of cutting the air was; the motion is as smooth as possible, too.



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Source: *Records of a Girlhood*, by Frances Ann Kemble (Henry Holt and Co., 1879).

Questions to Think About

1. What were the engine and carriages like, according to Fanny Kemble's letter?
2. How does Kemble describe the sensations of riding on this railroad train?
3. **Determining Relevance** People called early railroads the "iron horse," and Kemble also compares the engine to a horse. Find some examples and then explain why people made this comparison.
4. **Activity** Think of the first time you traveled in an unfamiliar way—perhaps your first airplane flight or your first trip by train. Then write a letter describing your sensations at this new way of travel.