



Fifty Years of Rapid Transit: 1864-1917 (Classic Reprint)

James Blaine Walker

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Excerpt from Fifty Years of Rapid Transit: 1864-1917

"Rapid Transit" in New York City means the transportation of passengers from one part of the city to another by trains of cars, as distinguished from transportation by single cars or "street cars." It is distinctly a modern development covering roughly a half century, although practical, rapid transit operation dates back only to 1871.

Located on a narrow island between the Hudson and East rivers, New York City presents probably the most difficult situation in regard to internal traffic of any city in the country. Bounded on West, South and East by water, the only outlet for growth was toward the North, with, the result that early in the Nineteenth Century it became a long, narrow city, with its business section at the southern end and its homes at the northern extremity - an extremity that has always receded as the business section grew and pushed it further away.

When Wall street was the northern limit the traffic problem was simple, but when that limit had been transferred to Twenty-third street the population had grown to such an extent that it was a difficult matter to provide facilities to take its business men down town in the morning and up town at night. Omnibuses were the first public conveyances following the stage coach days. Then came horse cars, then elevated railroads, then electric trolley cars and finally subways. Each class in its day was overcrowded. This was due principally to the phenomenal growth of the city, which added to the traveling population faster than transportation facilities could be provided.

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