

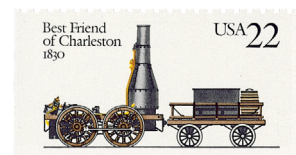
This Day in History... December 25, 1830

First Run of the *Best Friend of Charleston*

On December 25, 1830, the *Best Friend of Charleston* completed its first run.

During the 1820s, the once busy and prosperous harbor town of Charleston, South Carolina began to suffer from an economic recession. It was the result of increased settlement to the west that drew people away from the town.

In 1827, a group of Charleston merchants encouraged the state government to form the South Carolina Canal and Rail Road Company (SCC&RR). One of the goals was to explore the possibility of a railroad system to connect the town to inland markets. The railroad was deemed possible and work began on the steam-powered *Best Friend of Charleston*, which was the first locomotive to be built entirely within the United States. New York's West Point Foundry constructed it in 1830.



This stamp is from the 1987 Steam Locomotives Issue



The train and rail line were developed to help Charleston's struggling economy.

After construction was complete, the locomotive was disassembled and sent by boat to Charleston, arriving in October 1830. The *Best Friend of Charleston* made its inaugural run on Christmas Day, December 25, 1830. On that day, it pulled a passenger train along a six-mile route. With this, the *Best Friend of Charleston* became the first American-built steam locomotive to haul a train of passenger cars on a public railroad.

A newspaper article a few days later recounted the event: "The one hundred and forty-one persons flew on the wings of wind at the speed of fifteen to twenty-five miles per hour, annihilating time and space... leaving all the world behind. On the return we reached Sans-Souci in quick and double quick time, stopped to take up a recruiting party – darted forth like a live rocket, scattering sparks and flames on either side – passed over three salt creeks hop, step and jump, and landed us all safe at the Lines before any of us had time to determine whether or not it was prudent to be scared."

At the time, the *Best Friend of Charleston* was one of the fastest ways to travel. The only thing faster was a well-trained horse and rider. The *Best Friend of Charleston* began the first regular passenger service in the country following a six-mile route in Charleston. The *Best Friend of Charleston* has another, rather unfortunate distinction. On June 17, 1831, it was the first American train to suffer a boiler explosion, which seriously injured its crew. Reportedly, a fireman accidentally caused the explosion when he closed the steam pressure release valve.

Another account claims the fireman set a piece of lumber on the valve and then sat on it. The incident led to the creation of a new rule in the company's operating manual. It stated that engineers must remain on station at all times. The *Charleston* was badly damaged, but some parts were salvaged to build the *Phoenix*.

Despite its short life, the *Best Friend of Charleston* was a success – it helped Charleston thrive once again and inaugurated regular steam passenger service. A replica of the *Charleston* was built in 1928 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the SCC&RR. Today, it and another replica are on display in Atlanta, Georgia, and Columbia, South Carolina. There's also a *Best Friend of Charleston* Museum that opened in Charleston in 2014.

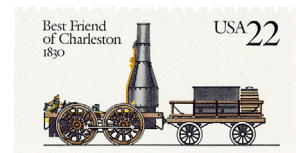
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