Steamship Services of Old: Before World War II, there were several old-time coastal and river services in the East, in addition to the many transatlantic steamships and ocean cruises. Many of these services were left over from a more profitable period when river and lake travel seemed affordable for almost everyone. The Merchant & Miners ships plied East Coast waters from Florida to Maine, as did those of the Eastern Steamship Company. My mother, who seldom went outside the country during her lifetime, took a Merchants & Miners ship from Philadelphia to Boston in the 1930s and sent a card home saying, as they started up the Atlantic shore from Cape May, “Last night we could see the lights of Avalon.” I had to find out where Avalon was.

Mother also took a Great Lakes Cruise from Erie or Buffalo to Duluth about 1929, accompanied by her niece, Betty Roberts (1903–1999). The Detroit & Cleveland Navigation Co. (D&C) and the Georgian Bay Line both operated nice cruise ships on the lakes. In 1946, the first Glidden Tour Revival used the D&C from Buffalo to Detroit; in 1958 I saw one of the Georgian Bay ships, either the North American or the South American, that had dropped anchor off Mackinac Island. One ship was in service to Chicago, the other to Duluth, both leaving from Lackawanna Terminal in Buffalo. On the Chesapeake Bay, there was overnight service from both Baltimore and Washington to Norfolk (and return) on the Old Bay Line. These ships like the City of Baltimore were probably built before World War I and certainly had no private baths.

Until World War II, the Fall River Line and possibly one other, operated an overnight service from New York to Boston, but their popularity was on the decline after the 1920s. I saw one of these ships sailing under the Mount Hope Bridge near Bristol, Rhode Island, in 1938, probably en route from New York to Fall River. A fast boat train took overnight passengers from Fall River or Providence to Boston, saving several hours of sailing through the Cape Cod Canal and Massachusetts Bay. My father went to the Stanley factory that way with his cousin Paul Way over Memorial Day weekend in 1910. They picked up a new Model 61 and drove it home, 400 miles, and Way enjoyed this car for many trips in the ensuing years.

Summer steamboat excursions were popular on the St. Lawrence River during the summer months, usually run by the Canada Steamship Company. All these ships were “old tubs” by the 1950s, but they were reasonably priced, and promoted widely by the railroads that took passengers from these parts to Montreal. The S.S. Richelieu was the flagship of the Line. Ports-of-call included Quebec City, Murray Bay, and Tadoussac, and a scenic cruise up the Saguenay River that flowed into the St. Lawrence some 150 miles downstream from Quebec. The steamship company owned big resort hotels at Tadoussac and Murray Bay, though many passengers could not afford overnight stop-overs to enjoy this luxury.