

From American Railway Signaling Principles and Practices, Chapter 1, pp 8-9:

Various and sundry methods were devised for obtaining and transmitting information. At first, the lines were short and usually one or two trips a day were made by one locomotive on a single-track line. The speed was about 15 miles an hour; and even this speed was considered by many as excessive and dangerous. In a few cases, a man on horseback was required to proceed ahead of the train with a flag to warn of its approach.

When more than one train operated on single track, sidings were built a few miles apart to enable them to pass. Half way between these sidings, tall posts were erected and the train first reaching this center post had the right-of-way to the next siding, the other train having to back up to that point. To avoid turning back, enginemen soon began racing for these posts; and many arguments arose between train crews and passengers as to which train would have to back-up.

Time-tables were prepared to show the time of arrival and departure at junction or terminal points, but they were never taken seriously as delays were frequent and arose from many causes. In these early days of railroading, the trains did not always have exclusive rights to the track, as in some localities farmers were permitted to mount their wagons on the rails for taking their produce to town. After this practice was finally abolished, the railroad began to bring order out of chaos by the use of train schedules which told when and where trains should meet, the classification of trains, and the rights of each class. However, there still were frequent delays and many trains which were on schedule were compelled to wait hours at some scheduled meeting point.