



Another



BY FOOT, HORSEBACK OR STAGE

1700

Travel In Colonial New Jersey

1800

For a half century, Old Raritan Road was a little more than a foot-path. In 1700, roads provided for single riders only, and when settlers moved inland their household goods and farm utensils were borne by oxen and the family walked or rode, single file, behind. There was not a coach in the colony and but twelve in America, and those who could afford it traveled in sedan chairs carried by slaves. The standard width of roads, as fixed by law, was from 4 to 6 rods, but this apparently was ignored, for in 1765 "the roads were still so narrow that stages could not run side by side."

When Benjamin Franklin crossed New Jersey, in 1723, there was no stage coach in operation, and "I proceeded on my journey afoot, having fifty miles to Burlington, where I was told I would find boats that would carry me the rest of my way to Philadelphia."

In that year came the first "wagon," distinguished by "its straight lines and tunnel-shaped top made of insey-woolsey." It contained three or four wooden benches, without backs, extending from side to side. In 1749, "yachts" carried passengers from Philadelphia to Trenton; thence to New Brunswick by stage; thence by boat down the Raritan and across the bay to New York. The roads, observed the explorer, Peter Kalm, were good "in sand or gravel, but in clay became

muddy and full of ruts. Few rivulets were bridged and trees seldom moved from the roads, wagons merely detouring around them."

Water routes were preferred until the coming of Mercereau's "Flying Machine" (1774), a stage which made the trip between Paulus Hook and Philadelphia in 16 hours. The writer, Brissot de Warville, describes the coach of 1788 as "a kind of open wagon, hung with double curtains of leather and woolen, which you raise or let fall at pleasure; it is not well suspended. . . . The horses are good and go with rapidity. . . . These carriages have four benches and may contain twelve passengers. The light luggage is put under the benches and the trunks fixed on behind.

"The road from New York to Newark," writes de Warville, "is really astonishing. Built wholly of wood, with much labor and perseverance in the midst of water, on a soil that trembles under your feet, it proves to what point may be carried the patience of man."

With the coach-and-four, equipped with leather-back seats and iron springs, land travel increased; roads were widened and improved, villages grew, inns were built, and by 1800 regular mail routes had been established throughout the state.

From Richard Pitts Powell, Jr.'s Prize Essay. (Princeton, 1930).