

STORIES of New Jersey

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44 Chestnut Street, Newark, New Jersey

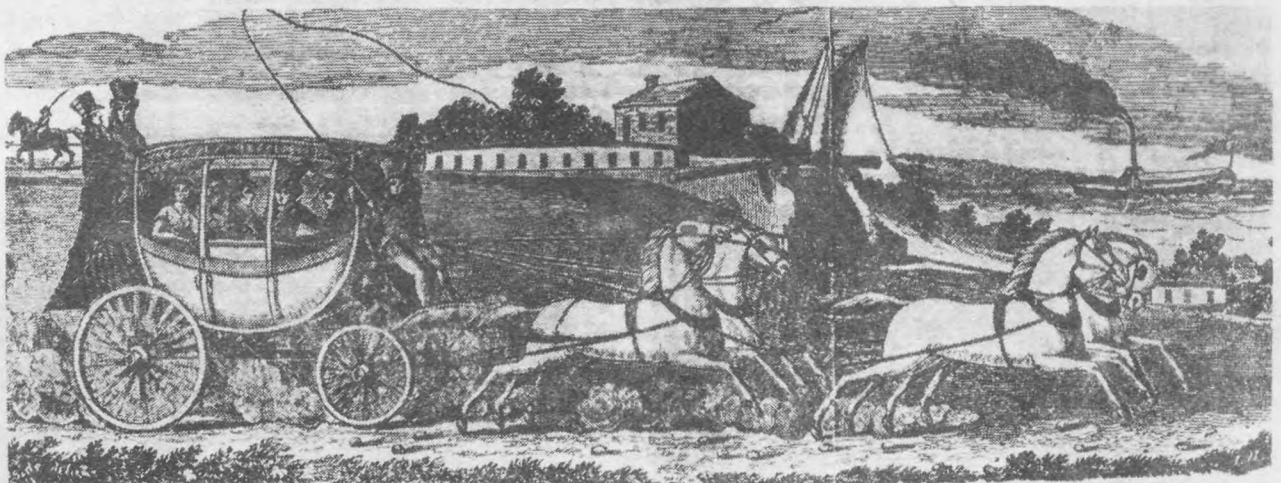
STAGECOACHES IN NEW JERSEY

"Phil-a-delllll-phia! Next stop!" The electrified, streamlined express is about to draw into the station after a one and one-half hour trip from New York, 100 miles away. The passengers fold their newspapers or close their magazines and rise ready and fresh for their business. Two hundred years ago a few weary travelers clambered down from a stage wagon after completing the same journey. They had been sitting cramped on backless wooden seats and shaken unmercifully as the heavy wagon had traveled over the muddy ruts that passed for roads. And except for a few hours' rest at night in some wayside inn, they had been riding steadily for nearly a week. Thankful to have arrived, they were even more thankful that the overland trip had become possible at all.

Newcomers to America built their first settlements near navigable waterways, because traveling by boat was easier than hacking roads through the wilderness. Explorers and Indian traders who traveled on foot or on horseback and used packtrains to carry the furs back to the coast settlements could follow the Indian trails that crisscrossed New Jersey, but settlers who wanted to build homes for their families found the narrow, winding paths almost impassable.

When the Dutch took control of the Delaware from the Swedes, they communicated with the settlements there either by sailing around the coast of New Jersey or by sending Indian messengers across the 100 miles of forest that separated the Delaware communities from those on the Hudson. The English, who in 1664 wrested New Jersey from the Dutch, were better colonizers. Small bands of settlers or single families struck out on the old Indian and trader trails to build new homes deep in the woods. Their axes were always at hand to chop down the trees that blocked the way.

When the towns of Perth Amboy and Burlington were made the capitals of East and West Jersey respectively, the proprietors, some of whom owned land in both divisions, realized the necessity of having a road connecting the two. Deputy



The stagecoach of 1828.

From Dunbar's History of Travel in America.