

STORIES of New Jersey

er, he began to take business away from the older Burlington route. Almost as soon as the Borden line was running smoothly William Meghee started a rival line and promised that if there should be enough business he would make two trips each week.

Despite Borden's efforts, the Trenton-New Brunswick line soon became the most popular. This route was by far the shortest overland, and roads being what they were it is not strange that travelers preferred to use them as little as possible. Naturally the New Brunswick-Trenton route necessitated the longest water trip at each end, but even with waiting for tides and winds the water trip was so much more comfortable than the bumpy, tiring wagon that travelers preferred it.

Travel at this time was confined almost entirely to the late spring, summer and fall, for winter made the roads impassable. It wasn't until after 1750 that winter travel was possible. The trip between New York and Philadelphia took four or five days even after the stage wagons had been operating for almost 20 years.

The elegant coaches of Europe were well known in this country long before the first stage lines were formed, but only the rich could afford them and only the smoothest roads were suitable for them. Stage wagons, on the other hand, a modification of the early New Jersey farm wagon, were crudely built and sturdy enough to stand the rough widened Indian trails. To protect merchandise and travelers, the early stages were covered with a cloth top. The passengers sat on hard benches that ran across the wagon. Those who sat in the rear had to climb over the other passengers to get to their places, and for this reason the benches were made without backs. The traveler clung to anything at hand to keep from being dashed against the sides of the wagon or against his fellow sufferers. Springs were never used.

The wheels were held on the axle by wooden pins which often broke off or slipped out, throwing the passengers to the floor or out of the wagon. If going upgrade was too much for the four or six horses, the male passengers were expected to get out and walk. If the wagon bogged down, the men would literally put their shoulders to the wheel.

At night the traveler rested for a few hours at a wayside tavern, but long before dawn he was aroused and the trip was resumed. Time was of the greatest importance, and passengers were willing to undergo additional discomfort to shorten the journey. Horses were driven hard and changed frequently; passengers and driver alike did without rest and food to beat a rival stage.

Competition, Comfort and Speed

During the third quarter of the 18th century the traveler's preference swung toward those routes with the shortest water trip. New lines that eliminated the boat trips down the Delaware and the Raritan forced Joseph Borden to re-route his lines so that they crossed the Delaware on a ferry, to continue the journey by land on the Pennsylvania side, thus eliminating the long sail to Philadelphia. Roads had become slightly more comfortable, and the pressure of competition had forced the stage owners to equip their wagons with springs and backs for the seats. The New Jersey wagon was still in use, but it was lighter and faster than before.

In 1764 the Powles Hook (Jersey City) ferry to New York was established. At the same time the road from Bergen Point (Bayonne) to Powles Hook was improved, and it was then possible for the New York-Philadelphia stages to ferry across from Perth Amboy to Staten Island, cross the island and then ferry across to Bergen Point. From there they drove to Powles Hook where they ferried