

## STORIES of New Jersey

across to New York. The short ferry rides were preferable to the longboat trips.

Two new lines appeared to use this Staten Island route. One was operated by Sovereign Sybrandt and the other by John Mercereau. Mercereau, in an effort to speed up his service, never ferried his wagons across the rivers. To save time his passengers left the wagon, took the ferry across and boarded a wagon on the other shore.

The constant demand for speed went on. A corduroy road was constructed that connected Newark and Powles Hook, and most of the stage lines were again re-routed. This meant two ferries to cross the Passaic and Hackensack Rivers, but they were very short and took little time. Mercereau now announced that his wagons would make the trip from New York to Philadelphia in two days, although he expected that it would take a full three days during the winter. So well did he keep his schedule that he named his stages "flying machines." The *New York Gazette* announced that "Persons may now go from New York to Philadelphia and back again in five days, and remain in Philadelphia two Nights and one Day to do their business in..." The "flying machines" had an attraction in addition to speed and regularity: for the first time travelers across New Jersey could ride with comparative comfort in wagons equipped with springs.

Mercereau's supremacy in the stage wagon business was challenged by the establishment of a line using the old York road. The new wagons went through Lambertville, Somerville, Plainfield, Elizabeth, Newark and Powles Hook, and thus eliminated the use of a ferry across the Raritan at New Brunswick. An even more serious threat to Mercereau was Skillman's line. This new venture promised that no more than eight passengers would be carried at one time, a welcome relief from overcrowding.

Skillman not only advertised that he would make the trip in one and one-half days--he actually did it. Mercereau immediately undertook to meet the challenge and cut his running time to one and one-half days. In addition, Mercereau announced that his new wagons would be improved and would be built in imitation of a coach. The two lines advertised claims and counterclaims about the excellence of their service, but not until the Revolution was the time of one and one-half days bettered for the New York-Philadelphia trip.

Although the coach did not replace the wagon until after the Revolution, competition made stage operators continually improve their vehicles. Mercereau's stage made in imitation of a coach was probably little more than the old wagon with better springs and doors at the side. In 1772 Joseph Hart announced that for the comfort of his passengers he would operate a real coach instead of the modified wagon used on Mercereau's lines. This was the first use of the more comfortable vehicle in the State. Slung on good springs, it carried nine passengers instead of the usual dozen. Three passengers on the back seat and three more in the middle of the coach faced front; three on the front seat faced the rear. Another passenger was permitted to ride with the driver at a reduced fare.

With the increase in comfort and speed came an increase in fares. Borden charged only 4 shillings for the trip between Bordentown and Perth Amboy. In 1775 Mercereau's rates were 21 shillings from Powles Hook to Philadelphia on the "flying machine" and 30 shillings by coach. These rates included ferriage, but not meals and lodgings at the inns along the way.

The Trenton-New Brunswick route was still the most heavily used. The accommodations along this road were the best to be had, an important consideration after 10 hours in a jouncing wagon. The level country through which the route passed meant greater speed. Just before the Revolution four stage wagons and two coaches were passing over this road each way weekly. They could carry