

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, July 3, 2017

**Crossing the Delaware River:** The Delaware River and Bay is nearly 300 miles long, rising in the western Catskill Mountains only about 30 miles west of the Hudson River Valley. Soon it forms the border between New York and Pennsylvania and then for most of its length, the border between New Jersey to the east and Pennsylvania and Delaware to the west. Two major tributaries come in from the west, the Lehigh and Schuylkill Rivers, both entirely in Pennsylvania, with many creeks and short tidewater rivers as well. The Delaware River cuts through a ridge of the Appalachians, known as the Delaware Water Gap, about 90 miles upstream from Philadelphia, and it is navigable from Trenton, New Jersey, to its mouth, a distance of about 140 miles.

There were Swedes and Dutch in the Delaware Valley as early as 1638, and the area was ceded to England, along with New York, in 1664. Early Quaker settlements had begun in what was called West Jersey at least 10 years before William Penn sailed up the river and established Philadelphia in 1682. Penn traveled extensively up and down the Delaware as he laid claim to his new colony to the west. On his second visit in 1699-1701, he built a fine country home called Pennsbury, facing the river about 25 miles upstream from his capital at Philadelphia.

With several Quaker Meetings having been established in what are now Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Salem Counties in New Jersey, frequent crossing of the Delaware to Philadelphia, the capital of Penn's Quaker colony, became mandatory. Many ferries were established, several surviving into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. History indicates that not only could wagon teams cross the ice for several weeks in the winter (probably not during all winters), but a farmers' market was established on the ice in the middle of the Delaware River opposite Philadelphia. That has not been possible in the past 150 years. George Washington and his army crossed the Delaware about eight miles upstream from Trenton on December 25, 1776, but there is no evidence that his crossing was blocked by ice.

In the upper reaches of the Delaware, the river is less than one mile wide- in some places less than ½ mile. Tiny ferries were established along the way, in most cases less than 10 miles apart. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wooden covered bridges were taking their place at important crossings. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century dawned, steel truss bridges were replacing the covered bridges. Two covered bridges across the Delaware that I remember were at Portland, Pennsylvania, and Belvidere, New Jersey.

From the north, early crossings were at Hancock (NY), Port Jervis-Matamoras, Dingman's Ferry (PA), Portland (PA), Belvidere (NJ), Easton-Phillipsburg, Stockton (NJ), New Hope-Lambertville, Washington's Crossing (PA-NJ), Trenton-Morrisville, Bristol-Burlington, Philadelphia-Camden, Chester (PA), Wilmington-Penns Grove, and New Castle-Pennsville. Originally all ferries, early bridges replaced them, first on the upper sections of the river where it was not wide. Railroad bridges were often built before those for the highways. The first bridge for vehicular traffic at Philadelphia, now called the Ben Franklin, was opened in 1926, as part of the city's Sesquicentennial Exposition.

Today, all these crossings remain important, and many additional spans have been added during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In midcentury, a new ferry service was added across the mouth of Delaware Bay from Lewes, Delaware to Cape May, New Jersey, a distance of about 15 miles. All other ferries on the river are gone. The southern-most bridge, the first of two Delaware Memorial Bridges, opened in 1951, and the nearby New Castle-Pennsville Ferry closed down immediately. The Bristol-Burlington Bridge and the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge, both upstream from Philadelphia, were built in the 1930s, and the Walt Whitman and Betsy Ross bridges, south and north of Philadelphia, date from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. In the late 1950s, the Pennsylvania Turnpike was connected to the New Jersey Turnpike with a new bridge over the Delaware about eight miles south of Trenton. Finally, in the early 1970s, the Commodore Barry Bridge replaced the Chester-Bridgeport Ferry, and a second Delaware Memorial spanned the Delaware alongside the original 1951 bridge.

Ocean-going freighters and a few passenger ships ply the Delaware as far as Philadelphia and sometimes to Trenton. Members of the Delaware River and Bay Pilots' Association, based in Lewes, Delaware, are responsible for piloting all shipping in the Bay and River. Not a government agency but fully accredited by the Coast Guard and the Army Corps of Engineers, this association has an apprentice system whereby a candidate works for little more than room and board for three or four years, after which, if accepted, he shares equally in the profits of the association. I have two cousins and had a good trapshooting friend who were pilots in this association.

The Delaware River and Bay Authority, with members appointed by the Governors of New Jersey and Delaware, operates the Delaware Memorial Bridges and the Lewes-Cape May Ferry. The bridges have heavily subsidized the ferry service, but their revenues can easily do that.