

STAGE OPERATIONS AND THE MAILS IN NEW JERSEY

By Steven M. Roth



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Introduction

Prior to the Revolutionary War, major travel in the colonies was restricted for the most part to the waterways surrounding and flowing through the colonies, and the Atlantic Ocean and major rivers served the colonies well for intra-colonial and inter-colonial communications for as long as settlements remained along the eastern seaboard.

When travel in the Colonial Period was not on water, it tended to be on horseback. Goods often were transported by pack-horse, although the limitations with respect to how much freight a horse could carry became an issue for merchants. Gradually, carts and wagons replaced pack-horses for the carriage of freight. To effectuate this, roads were widened and smoothed out, and plank surfaces added. Eventually, the wagons began to carry passengers as well as freight.

As the number of passengers increased, staging freed itself from the freighting business and fell into the hands of inn keepers who catered to the needs of passengers, thereby providing themselves with a steady source of income for their inns and taverns. Gradually innkeepers bonded together to form stage lines with scheduled staging stops for meals and lodging at the owners' inns. This became the pattern for future staging operations.

In due course, the carriage of mail became an important source of reliable income for stage lines. For the fifty or so years between 1785 and 1830, the stagecoach reigned supreme as the carrier of the mail on the nation's leading post roads.² Indeed, prior to 1800, there were few stages that did not carry letters, albeit on an informal, unlawful and erratic basis. Increasingly after 1800, however, as turnpikes and other roads were constructed and improved, and as the mail coaches were speeded up and the hours of travel by mail coaches were extended far into the night so that passengers got little rest, the mail coach proprietors were forced to establish accommodation stage lines that gave their main attention to the comfort, convenience and safety of their passengers.

Some Questions Concerning Stage Lines

Recently, a friend raised some interesting questions when he reviewed the mounted pages in my eastern stage mail collection. The questions, and my responses, were as follows:

1. Is there a listing of stage lines?
 - No. However, many of the stage routes are found listed in travelers' guides, city directories and advertisements, although not in one place. These listings generally describe routes and mileage, but not the names of the stage lines.
2. How many stage lines had mail contracts?
 - The answer to this would require a year-by-year examination of the records of the Postmaster General (Bid Books) and Reports of the Postmaster General. To my knowledge, no such compilation has been made.

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3. If there is no admonition on a cover (e.g., “per stage” or “per driver”), how can you tell if a cover was carried by a stage?
 - The only way to tell is to determine if there was a mail contract for the stage on the route traveled by the cover. If there was no mail contract and if there is no ‘stage’ admonition on the cover, you cannot know if the cover was carried by a stage. Of course, the reverse could also be true: a cover might be marked ‘stage’ or the like, but not carried by stage.
4. Is there a map showing [the New Jersey] stage routes?
 - Not to my knowledge, although some maps illustrate articles in journals. The best overall description I have seen of New Jersey stage routes is found in Lane, Chapter 4.³
5. Can we assume that all or most mail from 1787 onward was carried by stage?
 - Yes until the advent of steamboats and railroads.

New Jersey’s Principal Stage Roads

There were three principal stage roads across New Jersey.⁴ There was the Lower Road (also called Lawrie’s Road) which ran through Burlington, Bordentown, Walnford, Hightstown, and Cranberry to Amboy. There was the Upper Road which ran through Trenton, Princeton, Brunswick and Elizabethtown to Amboy. And there was the Old York Road, to the northwest of the Upper Road, which ran from Philadelphia and then New Hope to Coryell’s Ferry (present day Lambertville) and to Flemington, Somerville, Plainfield, Scotch Plains and Newark.

From Stage Wagons to Stage Coaches

When staging started, the first vehicles in the 18th century were heavy wagons whose main business was to carry freight. These eventually gave way to the lighter Jersey wagon produced primarily in Newark. The Jersey wagon passed through successive modifications for the comfort and convenience of passengers until it was replaced by the oval Jersey stagecoach which was distinctive in style, and often seen in newspaper advertisements for the carriage of mail. It was referred to as a ‘post coach’.

The Jersey coach was the direct ancestor of the Albany and Troy coaches that, in the 1830s and 1840s, dominated the highways, and the Concord coach that came into prominence in the 1850s on the American frontier.

Staging Across New Jersey As Reflected in Some City Directories

City directories have proven to be a fruitful source of information for postal historians. They offer the student of staging (as well as students of local private posts and government mail carriers) information that was available to contemporary citizens concerning the names, addresses, routes and schedules of stage lines.

Because New Jersey largely acted as a cross-road for the commerce of Philadelphia and New York, it is in the directories of these anchor cities that we must look to for information concerning inter-state staging. For intra-state staging (local and accommodation feeder lines), we look to the city directories of the major New Jersey towns and cities.

The first Philadelphia city directory to address New Jersey staging was the 1785 edition of Francis White's Philadelphia Directory.⁵ White gave the following information concerning stages setting out for New York City from Philadelphia:

Stages:

Sets out every morning at 4 o'clock for New York from Mr. Francis Lee's, at the Indian Queen, and from Mrs. Paul's, at the Indian King; others return the same day.

A stage-boat leaves the Crooket Billet wharf for New York, at tide time, every Sunday and Wednesday morning; returns are made from Coemtie's dock, New-York, every Monday and Thursday.^{6 1}

From this, it appears that Quaker Philadelphia had no qualms about running stages on Sunday.

The Philadelphia directory for 1793 also addressed staging from that city to New York.⁷

NEW-YORK STAGES.

There are at present four stages that ply between this city and New York, two of which set off at three o'clock in the morning, and arrive at New-York that evening; the one, from James Thompson's, at the Indian Queen, 15, So. Fourth St., the other, from the city tavern, 86 So. Second St. A stage sets off from the George tavern, corner of Second and Mulberry Sts. precisely at half past 8 o'clock in the morning, and on Saturday at 6 o'clock, and arrives at New-York the succeeding day by 1 o'clock.

The mail stage sets off at 1 o'clock, P. M. from Mr. Anderson's, at the sign of the sorrel horse, 39, No. Second St. carries only four passengers, and arrives at New-York in 21 hours, after its departure. The fare for each passenger in these stages, is four dollars, and four pence per mile for way passengers.

A New-York packet-boat starts from McKean & Van Emburgh's wharf, the first wharf below Mulberry St. on every Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and proceeds to Bordentown or Burlington (each place alternately), from one of which places one or more good carriages start on the succeeding morning for South Amboy, from which port a convenient packet will sail for New-York immediately after their arrival. The fare for each passenger is two dollars.

¹ Spellings as in the original.

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The directory for 1805 addresses land stages, water stages, and stage boats leaving from Philadelphia for New York:⁸ A similar listing appeared in 1810 with the addition of two (Dover Stage and New York Mail Pilot line):⁹

1805 LAND AND WATER STAGES	1810 LAND AND WATER STAGES
LAND STAGES:	LAND STAGES:
<i>Allentown Stage from Franklin & Camel Inns, Wednesdays & Saturdays, 5 A.M.</i>	<i>Allentown Stage from Camel Inn, Wednesdays & Saturdays, 5 A.M.</i>
<i>Boundbrook Stage, from 18 North Fourth, Every day, Sundays excepted, 6 A.M.</i>	<i>Bound-Brook Stage, from 50 North Fourth, daily, Sundays excepted, 8 A.M.</i>
<i>Coryell's Ferry, Crooked Billet, Cross Road, Swift Sure Stage, from 18 North Fourth daily, Sundays excepted, 8 A.M.</i>	<i>Coryells' Ferry, Crooked Billet, Cross Road, Swift Sure Stage, from 50 North Fourth daily, Sundays excepted, 8 A.M.</i>
<i>Brunswick Stage, from Arch St. ferry, Wednesdays and Saturdays.</i>	<i>Brunswick Stage, from Mulberry-street Ferry, Wednesdays and Saturdays..</i>
<i>New York Diligence, George Inn, every day, Sunday excepted, 8 A. M.</i>	<i>New York Diligence, George Inn, 18 South Third, daily, Sunday excepted, 8 A.M.</i>
	<i>Dover Stage, George inn, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, 5 A. M.</i>
<i>New York, U.S Mail, Hardy's Inn, every day, Sundays excepted, at noon.</i>	<i>New York, U.S Mail, George inn, and 18 south Third, daily, noon.</i>
	<i>New York Mail Pilot, 18 South Third, and 9 south Fourth, daily, noon.</i>
<i>New York Commercial Stage, George Inn, every day, Sundays excepted, 2 A. M.</i>	<i>New York Commercial Stage, George Inn, every day, Sundays excepted, 2 A. M.</i>
<i>New York Federal Line, Indian Queen, every day, Sundays excepted, 8 A. M.</i>	<i>New York Federal Line, Indian Queen, every day, Sundays excepted, 8 A. M.</i>
<i>New York New Line Industry, from 50 N. Fourth and George Inn, daily, at 7 A. M.</i>	<i>New York Newline Industry, 9 south Fourth and George Inn, daily, Sundays excepted, at 8 A. M.</i>
<i>New York Swiftsure, 18 North Fourth, every day, Sunday excepted, 8 A. M.</i>	<i>New York Swiftsure, 50 north Fourth, daily, Sunday excepted, 8 A. M.</i>
<i>Somerset, Scotch Plains, Springfield, Swiftsure Stage, from 18 N. Fourth, daily, Sundays excepted, 8 A. M.</i>	<i>Somerset, Scotch Plains, Springfield, Swift Sure Stage, from 50 N. Fourth, daily, Sundays excepted, 8 A. M.</i>
<i>Trenton Stage, 84 North Front, every day, Monday excepted, 7 A. M.</i>	<i>Trenton Stage, 45 North Third, daily, 7 A. M.</i>
WATER STAGES AND PACKETS:	WATER STAGES AND PACKETS:
<i>Bordentown Packet, from Smith's wharf, Sundays & Wednesdays, Tuesdays & Thursdays alter.</i>	<i>Bordentown Packet, from Smith's wharf, Sundays and Wednesdays, Tuesdays and Thursdays alternately</i>
<i>Burlington Packet, from Old Ferry, every day.</i>	<i>Burlington Packet, from Old Ferry, daily</i>
<i>New York Packet, from Old Ferry, Sundays & Wednesdays, Tuesdays & Thursdays altern.</i>	
<i>Trenton Packet, from Old Ferry, Wednesdays & Saturdays.</i>	<i>Trenton Packet, from Old Ferry, Wednesdays & Saturdays.</i>
	<i>Amboy packet, Old Ferry, daily.</i>
	<i>Amboy South Imlay's wharf, Sundays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays.</i>

The Problem of Naming

There is no standard in postal history scholarship for referring to the names of stage lines. In some instances where we know the points of origin and termination of the through lines we refer to the stage line by that name [e.g., Bordentown stage or Trenton - Brunswick stage]. Where we have less information, we sometimes refer to the stage line by the name of the town that appears on a folded cover as part of a dateline [e.g., Millville stage] or as the destination [Marlton stage]. In some cases, like the contemporaries who sent their mail via stage, we refer to the line by the name of a driver (e.g., MB Wills stage).¹⁰

Contract Carried Mail vs. Non-Contract Carried Mail

When we look at stage mail carried in or through New Jersey, we consider two types of such mail: mail carried by stages having a mail contract and mail carried by stages not having a mail contract. Among the stages carrying mail under a mail contract, there also are two types of mail to consider: (i) mail that was processed by a post office, placed in a locked box or bag, and the box or bag given to the stage driver, and (ii) loose letters handed to the driver by senders, rather than taken by the senders to a post office. This latter group of letters often contained a redundant admonition such as “per stage” or its equivalent.

In the case of mail locked in a box by the post office, this would appear to be like all other mail to collectors and generally does not contain any special post office notations or senders’ admonitions indicating carriage by stage. One can only determine stage carriage of such locked-box mail by ascertaining the routes of such letters and becoming familiar with the mail contracts for such routes.

Letters carried by a stage not having a mail contract were equivalent to loose letters discussed above, and were carried either as an accommodation to the sender or for remuneration by the driver or a passenger. Such letters often were marked to indicate stage carriage, and were illegal beginning in 1827 whether or not remuneration was paid for such carriage.

Stage Boats

Stage boats were ferrys that were large enough to carry one or more stage wagons or stage coaches on board. These vessels were used in the west to cross the Delaware River to and from Cooper’s Ferry (present day Camden) or to and from Trenton, Bordentown and Burlington to go to and from Philadelphia, and in the east to and from South Amboy to travel to and from Lower Manhattan.

The Role of Inns and Taverns in Staging

Although the carrying of freight initially provided the impetus for developing staging, in due course the carriage of passengers as a way of providing taverns and inns located along the stages’ travel routes with a steady stream of customers proved to be the strongest motivating force. Indeed, many of the first stage lines and ferries were created by consortiums of tavern owners who scheduled the staging runs and ferry crossings to coincide with the eating of breakfast, lunch or dinner or the lodging of passengers overnight at the owners’ inns.

Early Staging in New Jersey

The most important lane of land travel in Colonial times was across New Jersey, connecting New York and Philadelphia. As elsewhere in the colonies, the first stage service in New Jersey was provided by wagoners whose chief business was to convey freight back and forth between the two anchor cities. In the Colonial Period, this meant conveying goods between the depots at Brunswick or Perth Amboy on the eastern side of the state and Trenton, Bordentown, or Burlington on the Delaware River.¹¹

The road between Perth Amboy and Burlington opened in 1684, and likely was the first land route upon which provision was made for public transportation.¹² A man named Dell received from Governor Andrew Hamilton the exclusive privilege of driving a wagon between these towns to convey public goods.¹³ Dell thereafter proceeded to inaugurate carriage between New York and Philadelphia.¹⁴ Later, Lord Cornbury, who succeeded Hamilton in 1702 as governor, gave Hugh Hardy, a merchant in Burlington, the exclusive right to convey goods on this route.¹⁵ Not until 1729, however, do we find the first public solicitation over this route for passengers. A newspaper advertisement for Redford's ferry over the Raritan River at Perth Amboy stated “. . . a Stage Wagon kept at the said Ferry, for Transporting of Passengers and Goods from thence to Burlington, whenever freight presents.”¹⁶

The first stage on a more northerly route, between Trenton and Brunswick, was established in 1738. It ran twice each week¹⁷ and it, too, directed its ads toward passengers: “. . . the wagon will be fitted up with Benches, and Cover'd over so that Passengers may sit Easy and Dry.” The service was suspended in 1739, but renewed in 1740.¹⁸

The year 1740 also saw the creation of the Bordentown & New York stage line started by Joseph Borden, Sr.¹⁹ This line operated until the late 1790s. Borden's goal was to establish a stage line from Amboy Ferry to Bordentown so that he might head off Burlington and Trenton as depots on the Delaware River and capture the New York to Philadelphia trade.²⁰

Borden, in an advertisement that appeared in 1750, offered his clientele a through trip from New York to Philadelphia, declaring in his ads that his line would operate on a set schedule at both ends of the land route, running stage wagons in both directions and connecting with a stage boat to cross the Delaware River to and from Crooked Billet Wharf in Philadelphia, as well as a ferry between South Amboy and lower Manhattan.²¹

Although the Bordentown line expected its chief competition to come from the Trenton-Brunswick stage line, it actually came from the Amboy-Burlington stage.²² All three stage lines used Amboy Ferry, located near South Amboy, as their stopping place. The Trenton-Brunswick line stopped at the tavern operated by Obadiah Ayers; the Bordentown line stopped at the rival tavern operated by John Cluck. It is not reported which tavern serviced the Burlington line.²³ In the end, the Bordentown and Burlington lines prospered and survived while the Trenton-Brunswick line, which required a much longer water passage than its two rivals, foundered.²⁴

In 1756, however, and for several years thereafter, the Trenton-Brunswick line resuscitated itself and again became competitive as it advertised that its stages would follow a new route between Philadelphia and Trenton that would, it claimed, reduce the water part of the passage and increase the land portion of the travel.²⁵ Soon thereafter, the Trenton-Brunswick line

advertised additional improvements at the northeastern part of the trip from Brunswick through Woodbridge to the Blazing Star Ferry on Arthur Kill.²⁶

In the next decade the Trenton – Brunswick line again advertised a land extension between Trenton and Philadelphia to replace the slow passage up the Delaware River, and demonstrated the cooperative nature between the coaches and the boats.

PHILADELPHIA STAGE-WAGGON AND NEW YORK STAGE BOAT, perform their Stages Twice a Week, -- John Butler, with his Waggon, sets out on Tuesdays, from his House at the Sign of the Death of the Fox, in Strawberry Alley, and drives the same Day to Trenton Ferry, when Francis Holman meets him, and proceeds on Wednesdays to Brunswick, and the Passengers and Goods being shifted into the Waggon of Isaac Fitz Randolph, he takes them to the New Blazing Star to Jacob Fitz Randolph's, the same Day, where Reuben Fitz Randolph, with a boat well fitted, will receive them and take them to New York that night. John Butler returning to Philadelphia on Wednesdays, with the Passengers and Goods delivered to him by Francis Holman, will again set out for Trenton Ferry on Fridays, and Francis Holman, &c, will carry his Passengers and Goods with the same expedition as above to New York.²⁷

The trip between New York and Philadelphia across New Jersey for the first time was now made in two days.²⁸

From this time on, competition among stage lines was confined mostly to the northern land routes while the southern routes and lines that combined land and water travel found their share of business diminished. The Burlington – Amboy line was dropped for a time, but was revived by Joseph Haight, a Burlington inn keeper, in 1770.²⁹

In the spring of 1773, two new lines left Philadelphia for New York four times a week – the Flying Machine line and the New Philadelphia & New York stage line. Both left Philadelphia for Princeton, then headed to Paulus Hook (present day Jersey City). From there they took the stage boat for New York. The return trip also was made four days each week on alternate days.³⁰

By 1790, stages carried the mail between New York and Philadelphia five days a week. Few stages left these cities on Saturday because to do so would require that they also run on Sunday to complete the trip. In 1791, however, service was extended to six days each week. To accommodate the Sabbath, the so-called Saturday stage actually left each city on Friday afternoon to go through before Sunday.³¹ The entire trip normally took one and one-half days, with the passengers spending one night at a roadside inn.

In 1799 a new stage line emerged which used a different route. The stage set out from Philadelphia from the inn known as the Sign of the Bunch of Grapes kept by Joseph Davenport – one of the owners of the line – and went to Coryell's Ferry fifteen miles above Trenton where the crossing of the Delaware River was made by stage boat. From there the stage crossed New Jersey via Flemington, Somerville, Bound Brook, Plainfield and Newark to Paulus Hook. This was the first stage line from Philadelphia to go by way of Newark and to use the new causeway

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across the Passaic and Hackensack marshes.³² The route was known as the Old York Road and the stage line was known as the Swift Sure stage line.

New York City, unlike Philadelphia, had little reason for either local or inter-colony stage lines to spring up because of its first-class port facilities which gave the city excellent water transportation to nearly every neighboring settlement. Philadelphia, however, although also a port city, always played second fiddle to New York as a port city, but was second only to Boston in the number of locally-based stage lines in the late Colonial Period. For example, Aaron Silver in 1767 started a weekly stage which ran from Salem to Cooper's Ferry (present day Camden), then to Philadelphia³³. William Shute ran a weekly stage from his inn near Roadstown to Cooper's Ferry, then to Philadelphia (1771).³⁴ Similar lines opened in Bridgeton (1771)³⁵ and Greenwich (1772)³⁶.

Staging in New Jersey ended during the Revolutionary War with the occupation of New York and Philadelphia by the British and the frequent military battles within the state. But this was merely an interruption. Shortly after the British evacuated Philadelphia, stage lines again commenced operations across New Jersey as far north as Brunswick. In November 1778, Joseph Borden advertised renewed service by his stage boat to Bordentown and then by wagon to Brunswick.³⁷ In February 1779, John Wills announced that he had re-established his line running from Burlington to Brunswick.³⁸ In 1780, a stage line commenced running again from Brunswick to Elizabethtown, thereby extending the route to a point where water communication with New York City was again possible.³⁹ Also in 1780, Gershom Johnson of Philadelphia and James Drake⁴⁰ of New Jersey renewed the land route from Philadelphia through Trenton and Princeton to Elizabethtown, extending service to twice each week.⁴¹ Another stage line opened at about the same time to connect with this line at Princeton for Morristown.⁴²

Stages and the Carriage of Newspapers

A principal reason for the dependence of the Post Office Department on the country's expanding staging facilities was the burden of newspaper carriage. Until 1792, newspapers had not been carried as part of the mails, but were privately carried by post riders or by stage drivers who, with the silent acquiescence of the Post Office, made their own private arrangements with the printers for remuneration.

The Post Office Act of 1792 made the first reference to the free exchange of newspapers among publishers and for the rates of postage chargeable for the carriage of newspapers in the mails.⁴³ As the country became more populated and as the availability of news became more critical to commerce and politics, the burden of transporting newspapers in the mails via horseback became impossible to cope with and gave rise to the necessity of using stages. This became clear in 1788 when Postmaster General Hazard put the mails back on horseback and discovered to his dismay that one post rider could not service his route using only one post horse.

Staging and the Mails During the Confederation Period

The natural increase in trade and travel after the cessation of hostilities formed the incentive for the creation of most stage lines. In some cases, however, stage entrepreneurs had to be encouraged by the granting of monopolies for a fixed term of years. This occurred in New York State in 1785 when Isaac Van Wyck, John Kinney and Talmadge Hall were granted a ten year monopoly for the run along the east bank of the Hudson River between Albany (which was not yet a post office in the Federal system) and New York City; in 1784 in Virginia with the grant of a three year monopoly to Nathaniel Twining and John Hoomes for the route between Alexandria and Petersburg; and, in 1785 in Maryland when the state granted the privilege for three years to Gabriel Van Horne to run stages between the Susquehanna and the Potomac Rivers.

This practice was necessary in such geographic regions to encourage stage line investment and operations where the population was not yet sufficient to support competing stage lines and, in the case of the south, where no stage lines had run during the Colonial Period. Such monopolies were not necessary (and did not occur), however, in New Jersey where the combination of the population, general business and trade, and the existence of the commercially successful anchor cities of New York and Philadelphia made competition not only feasible, but also likely, so that rival stage lines repeatedly sprang up. Indeed, in 1786, New Jersey found her roads so busy with stage traffic that the state levied an annual tax in the amount of 150£ on each stage line that crossed the state between New York and Philadelphia. The tariff was hotly protested by the Federal government,⁴⁴ and the amount was lowered in the following year to 100£.⁴⁵ To appease the stage line operators, the New Jersey legislature agreed that one-half the collected tax would be used each year to improve stage roads.⁴⁶ Finally, in 1799, the New Jersey legislature exempted all stage lines from the need to purchase an operating license and pay the tax.⁴⁷

The greatest incentive to the development of staging came in 1785 when the Federal government decided to contract with stage lines for the carrying of mail. This not only resulted in steady income for the lines, but offered them the imprimatur of the fledgling government in the form of semi-official status. This placed the power and authority of the government and the greater interest of the citizenry behind the stage lines, especially during the period of the ratification debates when the consumption of newspapers increased dramatically. Now, people who rarely or never traveled by stage became interested in its success because stages became the means by which news (in the form of mail and newspapers) was received and forwarded. Members of Congress became sufficiently invested in the expansion and welfare of the stage lines which vitally affected the interests of, and received so much attention from, their constituents to grant mail stages special privileges such as rights of way at ferry crossings.

Yet in the beginning, it was not at all clear that stages should be involved in the carriage of mail, and the practice became a significant and heated controversy of the Confederation Period, encountering opposition from Postmaster General Hazard as well as practical difficulties. Eventually, stiff pressure on Congress from commercial interests and Congress' desire to increase post office revenues by eliminating the clandestine private carriage of letters by stage drivers and passengers won the day. After significant debate, Congress in 1785 ordered Postmaster General Hazard to employ stages in the carriage of mail.

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The practice of stage drivers secretly carrying mail for pay was a significant economic factor for the stage lines – if an unstated one – in the debate over using stages to transport the mail. The practice had given rise to the first stage mail contract in North America in 1773 with the British efforts to capture the letter carrying business from a stage driver named Stavers who operated between Boston and Portsmouth. As Hugh Finlay reported in his journal, it was cheaper for the British Post Office to pay Stavers more than the 10£ he annually made from secretly carrying mail (and, thereby, to recoup his salary and any profit) than it would be to compete with Stavers.⁴⁸

Other stage drivers, of course, including those in New Jersey, also secretly carried mail and benefitted from the remuneration paid them by senders. This practice resumed with the restoration of stage service after the Revolution and into the Confederation Period notwithstanding the Ordinance of 1782 which specified that the postmaster general, his deputies and agents,

*and . . . no other person whatsoever shall have the receiving, taking up, ordering, despatching, sending post or with speed, carrying and delivering of any letters, packets or other despatches from any place within these United States for hire, reward, or other profit or advantage.*⁴⁹

To enforce this law and end the illicit practice among stage lines, in December 1784, Hazard successfully brought suit against Gershom Johnson of Philadelphia and obtained an injunction that required that Johnson cease carrying mail and that he pay damages for past practices. It is likely that Johnson had been selected by Hazard as a demonstration case to serve as a warning to other stage operators because Johnson operated on the busy route across New Jersey between New York City and Philadelphia where, according to Hazard, the evasion of the law was most pronounced. The lawsuit was a highly visible, *in terrorem*, test case and warning.

But the illicit carriage of letters was only one consideration for it to address when Congress debated the question whether stages should carry the mail. Another was the increased weight of the mails on the main routes resulting from the increased volume of letters and newspapers which weighed down the horses and overflowed the saddle bags rendering the letters, packages and newspapers (which were not yet officially part of the mails) susceptible to damage.

When Hazard first considered the contracts he would enter into with stage lines, he assumed that because the stage operations were already sustained by their package and passenger business, that the operators would take this into account and that the resulting contract costs to the government for adding mail carriage would be low. He was sorely wrong. Hazard had failed to consider that he was eliminating the substantial revenue the stage lines received as private, unlawful carriers of mail, and that the bidders would likely take this lost revenue into consideration in rendering their bids for mail contracts.

Another problem Hazard encountered – one that particularly plagued the New Jersey lines operating on the New York City to Philadelphia route – was the question of the operating hours of the mail stages.

When setting their hours of departure and arrival, the stage operators always thought first of the convenience of their passengers since passengers represented their most significant source of income. The Post Office Department, however, thought only of the safety and expeditious transmittal of the mails and of the merchants it serviced. This required a different set of operating hours by the stages. While the practice of the stage lines was to depart early in the morning and arrive late at night, this did not suit the Post Office which would then be required to keep post office clerks working late into the night to keep the mail flowing smoothly or to appease merchants who closed their businesses before the late arrival of the stages (and did not open their businesses before the departure of the morning stages). This problem was not resolved during Hazard tenure as Postmaster General.

Although Hazard remained a skeptic with respect to the suitability of stages for transporting mail, he was a good government employee. When Congress took action on September 7, 1785 and ordered Hazard to enter into agreements with stage lines, he did so, but in an incredibly stupid manner. Rather than enter into a separate contract with each stage line for each route, Hazard entered into one blanket agreement that covered all stage/mail operations among all the contractors from Portsmouth, New Hampshire to Petersburg, Virginia. He also omitted in this generic document a basic clause that required that if the contractors were to enter into any subcontracts, the subcontractors agree in their subcontracts that they would be subject to the control and direction of the Post Office Department. Under Hazard's blanket contract, subcontractors could ignore the Post Office Department and answer only to their prime contractor. This became an issue along the New York City – New Jersey – Philadelphia route when the prime contractor, Matthias Ogden, sold his interest in his contract, but reserved to himself under the terms of sale the revenue generated by his subcontractors.⁵⁰

Hazard also had concern for the safety of the mails and felt that another stage rider along the New Jersey route, who would be charged with the care and custody of the mail on the stages, was necessary. He even corresponded with Alexander Hamilton on this subject, expressing his concern that the absence of such a custodial person along the busy New York City – New Jersey – Philadelphia route rendered the mails at risk. Hamilton in his response stated that he had concluded after careful study of the matter that no such extra person or guard was needed.⁵¹ Hazard felt otherwise. When Hazard sought bids from stage lines for 1787, he required that each proposal include a sum for the engagement of an extra person to have custody of the mail. As a result, the bids for 1787 were so high that Hazard's plan to include an extra employee as a custodian or guard had to be dropped from the proposals.⁵²

When Hazard had initially examined these 1787 bids, they were so high that he recommended to Congress that the mails be put back on horseback between Portland, Maine and New York City, and, perhaps, between New York City and Philadelphia.⁵³ Congress rejected the suggestion, and Hazard entered into contracts for one year with the bidding stage lines, but with all bids reduced to reflect the dropping of the extra stage employee as part of the proposal.⁵⁴ As the time approached to let bids for 1788, Hazard returned to Congress with his familiar litany of complaints, and again requested that he be given the discretion to enter into contracts either for the carriage of the mail by stage or by horse. This time Congress agreed. Hazard's request ultimately would bring about his downfall.

Using the discretionary power Congress gave him, in 1788, Hazard put much of the mail on the main routes between Boston – New York City – Philadelphia on horseback. The offended

STAGE OPERATIONS & THE MAILS IN NJ~ Steven Roth

stage line operators promptly struck back and advertised that they would carry letters free of charge, as they were permitted to do under the Ordinance of 1782.⁵⁵ The result was a financial disaster for the Post Office Department, and resulted in mail delays which infuriated George Washington as he awaited reports on the state ratification proceedings. Washington wrote to John Jay on July 18, 1788, that,

It is extremely to be lamented that a new arrangement in the Post Office unfavorable to the circulation of intelligence should have taken place at the instant when the momentous question of a general government was to have come before the people.⁵⁶

Washington went on to censure Hazard for substituting horseback for the stage transportation of the mails.⁵⁷

Hazard eventually responded to the stage operators' carriage of letters for free by entering into contracts with the stages for the balance of 1788. This did not appease George Washington, however. When Washington set up his cabinet under the Constitution, he exercised his displeasure with Hazard and did not bring Hazard along with him. Hazard's Federal career was over.

Staging and the Mails During the Constitutional Period

Once Washington became president and Samuel Osgood his postmaster general, Hazard's influence over the role of stages in carrying the mails disappeared. Even Congress responded positively and in the second major postal act under the Constitution (Act of May 8, 1794), provided in Section 2, that,

It shall be lawful for the Postmaster General to provide, by contract, for the carriage of a mail on any road on which a stage wagon or other stage carriage shall be established, on condition that the expense thereof shall not exceed the revenue thence arising.

After this, there never was any question about the role of stages in carrying the mails except to the extent technology interceded in the form of steamboats and railroads.

New Jersey Stage Lines

Among the many local and inter-state stage lines that operated in New Jersey, the principal lines were the Bordentown & New York Stage, the Burlington Stage, the Trenton – Brunswick line, and the Swift Sure line.

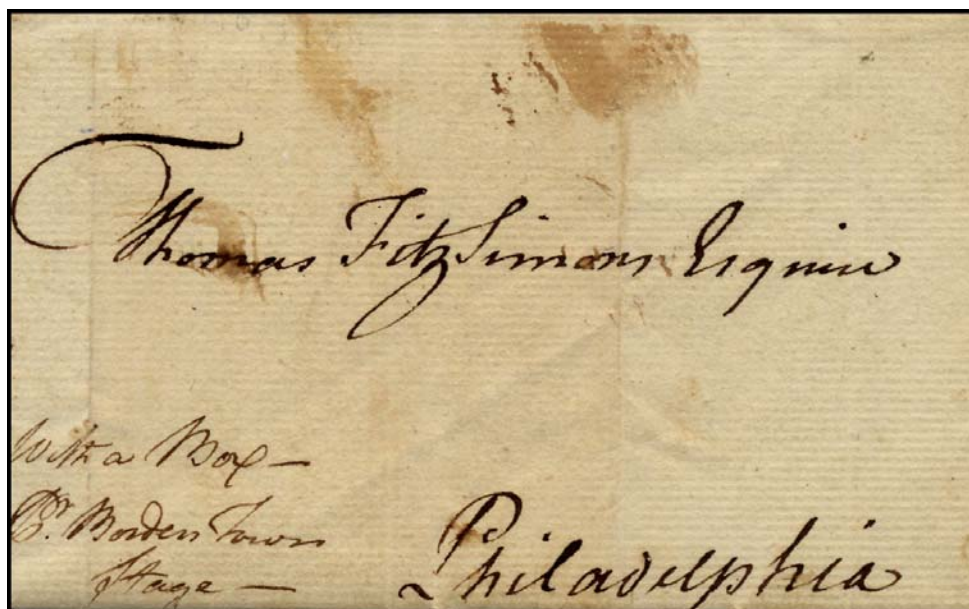
The division between stages that served more than one state and those that ran within New Jersey only, often was blurred. In some ads only one service or the other was mentioned. In categorizing such service and listing the stage lines for discussion purposes in this article, I have categorized the stage lines according to the service I am most familiar with from my reading of city directors and advertisements. It is an arrangement of convenience, only for my purposes here.

INTER-STATE STAGE OPERATIONS

The Bordentown & New York Stage⁵⁸

The foremost student of this stage line is Robert G. Rose.⁵⁹ Mr. Rose has recorded seven folded letters having manuscript notations indicating the senders' desire to have those letters carried by the Bordentown stage (folded letters dated from January 6, 1775 to [unstated month and day], 1792) [See, for example, *Figure 1*]⁶⁰ and six folded letters (from August 23, 1786 to November 21, 1786) having the well-known handstamp "Bordenton & New York Stage." [See, for example, *Figure 2*]⁶¹ No reports of covers not included in Mr. Rose's census have come to light since his publication of his data.

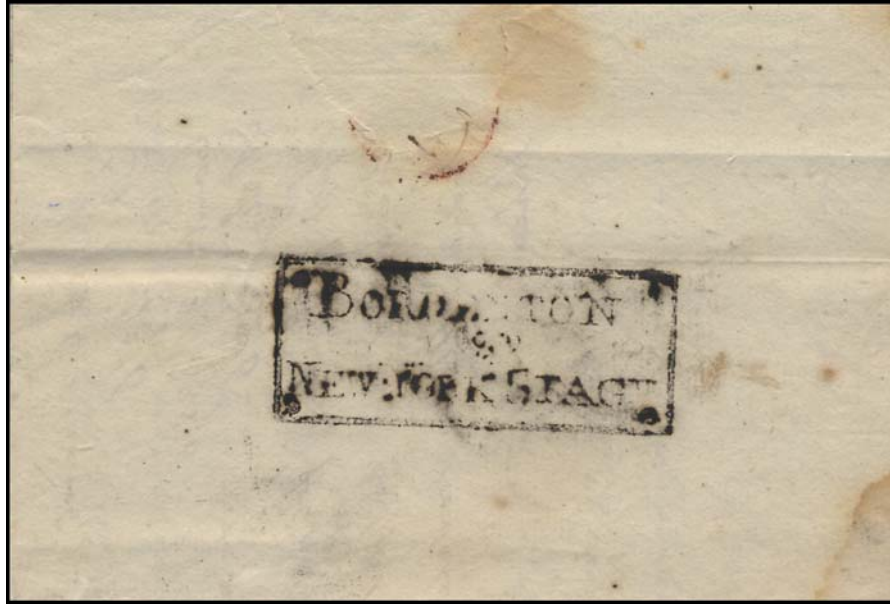
Figure 1 is the only reported manuscript cover that made the north – south journey over the entire route covered by the stage line from New York to Philadelphia.



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Fig. 1. May 16, 1784. New York City to Philadelphia. Ms. Notation "With a Box/Pr. Borden Town/Stage."

All of the reported handstamp covers originated in 1786, the same year the Post Office Department first entered into mail contracts with stage lines. This fact gave rise to Mr. Rose's as yet unresolved inquiry concerning the private vs. government contract carrier nature of the Bordentown & New York Stage handstamp covers, as described below.⁶² Similar research, as part of his overall study of the mails in the Confederation Period, are being conducted by Dr. Vernon Morris.

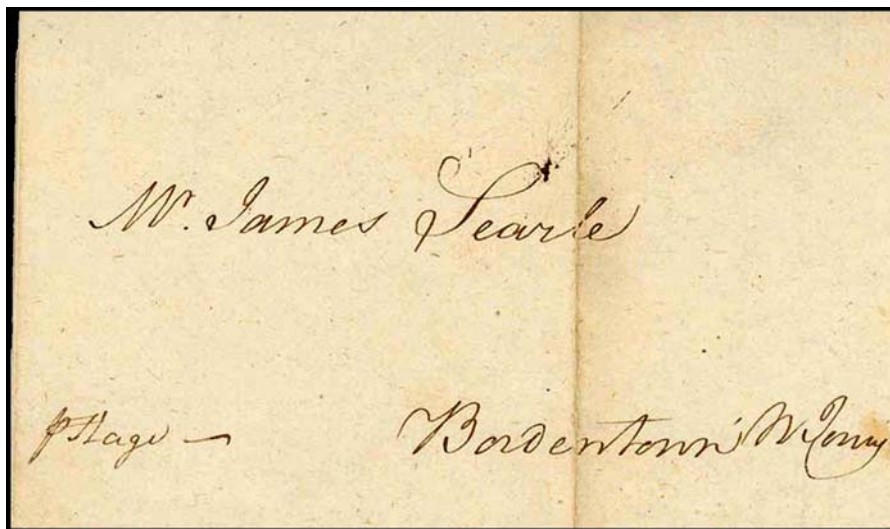


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Fig. 2: October 28, 1786. Marked "per Stage" on address side. Addressed to "Richard Waln /Walnford." Originated in Philadelphia.

The two stage lines providing the most competition for the Bordentown line were the Trenton - Brunswick stage and the Burlington stage, both of which operated rival stage boat legs of their journeys. The Trenton line operated a stage wagon from Brunswick to Trenton Ferry where the stage was placed on a barge to Philadelphia. The Burlington line operated between New York and Philadelphia, covering the same route as the Bordentown line, but substituting Burlington for Bordentown as its main hub.

It is not always possible to tell if a cover was carried by the Bordentown line or by one of its rivals. *Figure 3* is an example. Although addressed to Bordentown, this privately carried letter might have been carried by the Burlington stage line and thereafter taken privately to Bordentown.



ex-Morginstin; ex-Steven M. Roth

Fig. 3: May 30, 1787. New York City to Bordentown.

See *Figure 7* for another, but more complex, example of this problem of identifying the stage line which carried a letter.

Often, too, it is not possible from advertising to tell which line was being described. In a 1797 ad, the stage line between New York and Philadelphia was described as a “Federal Line,” nothing more [*Figure 4*].

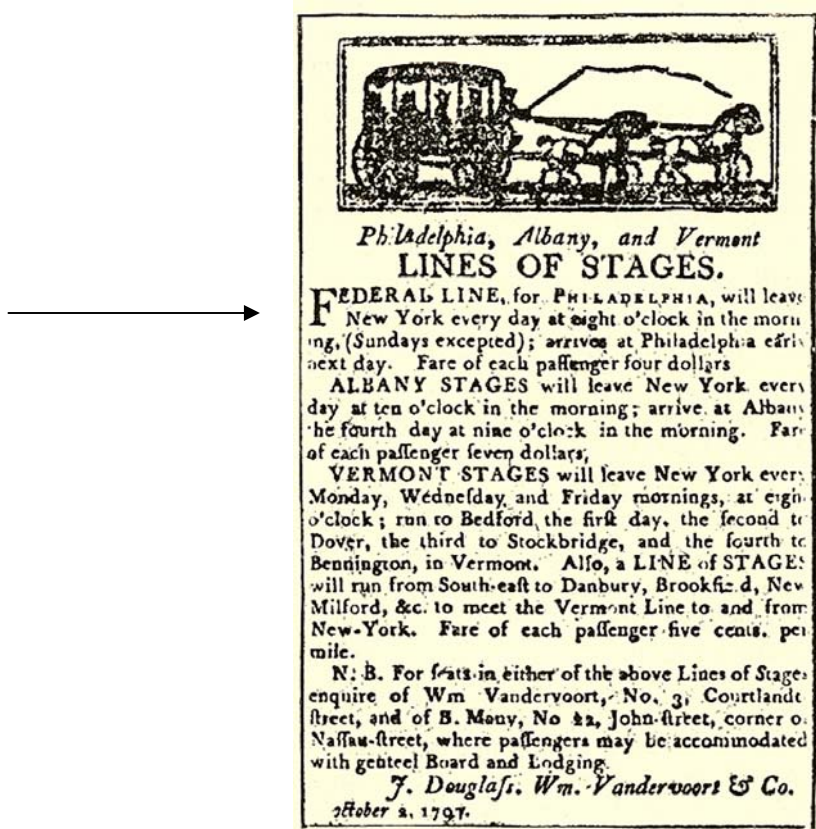


Fig. 4: “Federal Line:” a name or a descriptor?

Bridgeton Stage

Although the standard text for Bridgeton indicates that stage service there did not begin until 1774, in fact it began as early as 1771. In their paragraph under Bridgeton, Cushing and Sheppard stated,

STAGES – The first stage of which there is any account was run by Mr. Haskel who lived in Upper Hopewell, near the present Cohansey post-office. It ran from Greenwich through Roadstown and Cohansey Corners (now Shiloh), by Mr. Haskel’s house, to Cooper’s Ferry, as Camden was then called, and was in operation as early as 1774. Soon after the Revolution a stage ran from Bridgeton to Philadelphia, by way of Roadstown, making two trips a week, which was afterwards changed to one trip that way and one by Deerfield. About 1806 or 1807 it went up one day and down the next, and in 1809 another line was started, which went up on the days the first line came down. These were afterwards united, and a daily stage was ever after run until West Jersey Railroad was opened in 1861.⁶³

A rival line in opposition to Mr. Haskel's stage did spring up in 1772 which made connections at Cohansey Bridge and then proceeded to Cape Island.⁶⁴ Unlike Mr. Haskel's line, this opposition stage appears to have been a local line only.

Burlington Stage

The Burlington line's antecedents were found in the opening of the road between Perth Amboy and Burlington in 1684⁶⁵ and in a grant made in 1704 for a line of stage boats to operate between Burlington and Philadelphia.⁶⁶ The Burlington stage line, however, was not founded until 1740 by William Meghee. It offered weekly service between Burlington and Amboy.⁶⁷

Like the Bordentown line, the Burlington stage offered both land travel and stage boat service on the Delaware, but in the latter case between Philadelphia and Burlington rather than Philadelphia and Bordentown. At the Philadelphia end of the route, the stage boat was operated by Patrick Cowan; at the Amboy end by Matthias Iselstine. The line's stage wagons were furnished by Fretwell Wright, keeper of the Blue Anchor Inn in Burlington, and by John Predmore, a tavern-keeper in Cranberry, and by James Wilson of Amboy Ferry.⁶⁸

The Burlington stage between Burlington and Amboy (but not Burlington and Philadelphia) ceased doing business sometime around 1765, but was revived in 1770 by Joseph Haight, a Burlington inn keeper. It continued to operate until the Revolution. Like its competitor the Bordentown stage, the Burlington line depended mostly on the carriage of freight.⁶⁹ This focus began to shift for it in February 1779 when John Wills, operator of the Burlington line, announced that he ". . . hath erected a stage for the accommodation of travellers [sic.] from Burlington to Brunswick."⁷⁰ His rival, the Bordentown line, had made a similar announcement in November 1778.⁷¹

Eventually, on the part of the route lying between Burlington and New York, the Burlington line, like the Bordentown stage, ran with regularity and stopped at Hightstown (sometimes spelled Hydestown or Hytestown), Cranberry and South Amboy. Its stages, too, used the ferry to and from South Amboy and Lower Manhattan.



Fig. 5: August 16, 1796. Datelined Allentown [NJ]. This cover is identified as a Burlington stage cover by a reference within the folded letter to the stage stopping at Burlington.

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Figure 5 is an example of a cover carried by the Burlington stage. The folded letter originated in Allentown, NJ and was privately carried from there to Burlington, where it was turned over to the Burlington stage line for carriage to Philadelphia.



Fig. 6: Reverse of Figure 5 cover showing the manuscript notation "B." The meaning of this notation is not known. It might have reference to the stage boat as many waterway-carried covers have been marked "B," or it might reference the Burlington stage.

Figure 7 is a cover that cannot be specifically identified as a Burlington stage cover rather than as a Bordentown stage cover. This cover is part of the well-known Captain William Smith correspondence described by Mr. Rose in his census of Bordentown stage covers bearing the Bordentown stage handstamp. According to Mr. Rose's records, most of the Smith covers were carried by the Bordentown line and were so marked by the senders, but two that he is aware of - Figure 5 (which bears internal evidence of carriage by the Burlington stage) and a cover cited and described by Mr. Rose in his census (a cover, dated April 6, 1788) - were marked internally or externally, respectively, by the sender for carriage by the Burlington stage,⁷² indicating that at least some Smith-correspondence covers were carried on one of the lines or the other.



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Fig. 7: Dated Philadelphia June 5, 1790.

Figure 7 bears no evidence to indicate which of the two competing stage lines carried the letter from Philadelphia to Hidestown .

Trenton – Brunswick Stage

The Trenton – Brunswick stage line was the first of the major stage lines to form and operate on a northerly route in New Jersey. It ran twice each week, beginning in 1738, between the two cities. The founding proprietors were Thomas Hooten, keeper of the Trenton Ferry, and William Atlee, a Trenton merchant.⁷³ As seen above, its advertisement made an appeal to passengers, not to freight. The service ended in 1739, but was renewed in 1740 under the same ownership.⁷⁴ In 1766, the Trenton – Brunswick line ran from Trenton to Perth Amboy.⁷⁵

The Bordentown and Burlington lines soon pulled ahead of the Trenton – Brunswick line because of the length of the latter's water passage, that the part of the trip passengers eschewed if possible, putting the Trenton – Brunswick line behind its rivals who offered more and faster land service, free from the many accidents to the stage boats that seemed to plague this service, and free from delays resulting from ice in the winter and windless days.⁷⁶ It thus was a great advance in service when in 1756 the Trenton – Brunswick line advertised early on that it had significantly increased the land-service portion of its route between Philadelphia and Trenton to replace the slow and dangerous passage up the Delaware. In the following year, the land passage from Brunswick through Woodbridge was again extended, this time to the New Blazing Star Ferry on Arthur Kill (the narrow water passage separating Staten Island from the New Jersey mainland), thereby avoiding the outside passage from the mouth of the Raritan River around Staten Island.⁷⁷

Swift Sure Stage

The Swift Sure stage line was founded in 1799 as an alternative line which promised faster, cheaper, safer and more comfortable accommodations for passengers traveling between New York and Philadelphia. The stage used a route different from those used by the Trenton – Brunswick line (avoiding Trenton, Princeton and Brunswick) or the Bordentown and Burlington lines (avoiding Crosswicks, Hightstown and Cranberry).⁷⁸ The Swift Sure's route, known as the Old York Road route, required travel in New Jersey and Pennsylvania and – as Calvet M. Hahn demonstrated in his two-part article on this stage line – involved at least two different internal routes south of Bound Brook as way stops from time-to-time.⁷⁹ These two routes are shown on a map (*Figure 8*) prepared by Hahn for his article, and reflected partially in an 1800 advertisement for the Swift Sure line (*Figure 9*) and in an advertising card from 1806 (*Figure 10*). The line ran north through Jenkingtown to New Hope, fifteen miles above Trenton, where the stage crossed the Delaware River at Coryell's Ferry, and then passed through New Jersey by way of Somerville, Bound Brook, Scotch Plains, Springfield and Newark.

The first advertisement for the Swift Sure line appeared in the *Aurora General Advertiser (Philadelphia)* on July 1, 1799. This first ad was reproduced by Hahn in his article.⁸⁰ Subsequent ads for the Swift Sure line appeared frequently: in New York in the *New York Journal and Weekly Register*, *Loudon's Diary*, *Greenleaf's New York Journal*, and the *Commercial Advertiser*; and, in Philadelphia in the *Pennsylvania Packet*, *General Advertiser*, *Aurora and General Advertiser*, and *Claypool's American Daily Advertiser*.

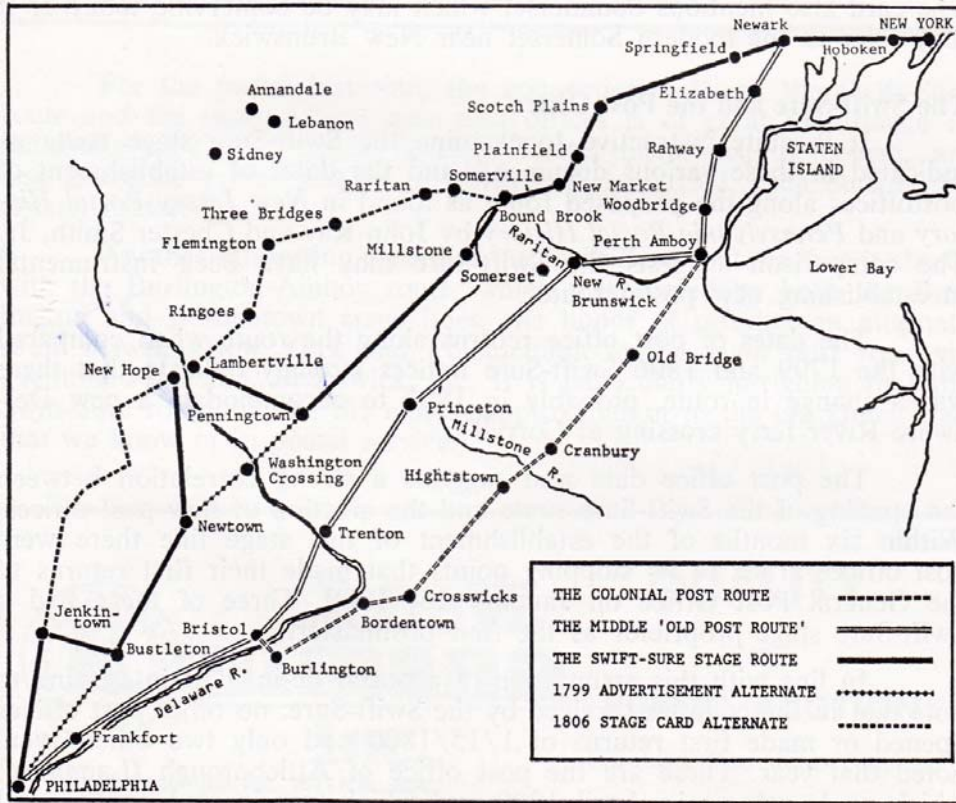


Fig. 8. Map prepared by Calvet M. Hahn.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

The Swiftsure Line of Stages.

Running from New York and Philadelphia,

By the shortest, cheapest, safest, and most pleasant road,

Through Newark, Springfield, Scotch-Plains, Union Camp, Bound-brook, Millstone, Pennington, Newtown, Bustleton, and Frankfort.

THE SWIFTSURE

Starts from New-York at 9 o'clock every day (Sundays excepted) and arrives at Philadelphia, ~~early~~ the next evening.

From Philadelphia it starts from the Green Tree, No. 50 North Fourth street, at 8 o'clock every morning, and arrives at New York early the next evening.

Fare for passengers 5 dollars, way passengers 6 cents per mile. Each passenger allowed 14lb of baggage. One hundred and fifty weight of baggage to pay the same as a passenger.

All baggage to be at the risk of the owner, unless insured and receipted for by the clerks of the different offices. Rate of insurance one per cent.


* * * Apply to WILLIAM VANDERVOORT, No. 48 Courtland Street, N. E. Corner of Greenwich Street, New York, and to JOHN McCALLA, No. 50 North Fourth Street Philadelphia.

Fig. 9: Advertisement for the SwiftSure Line (1800).

According to a report made by Van Sickle, Peter B. Lowe, one of the proprietors of the Swift Sure line wrote in December 27, 1826 that the Old York Road had two competing stage lines: the Swift Sure stage line and a stage line Lowe referred to as the New York and Philadelphia Mail Stage. Van Sickle reprinted an advertisement for this latter competing line, as follows:

Leaving Philadelphia every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 8 o'clock a. m.. Lodge at Centreville and arrive at New York at 2 p. m., the succeeding day. Likewise leave New York at half past 10 o'clock of the days above named, stop at Centreville and reach Philadelphia at 4 p. m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. One way fare is \$3.50, all baggage at risk of owner.⁸¹

In spite of its stated name, I have not been able to find any information about this competing line other than that reported by Van Sickle. There is no evidence of a mail contract with this line at or near this date, although the use of the term "mail" in its name suggests it had such a contract.



The Swift-Sure STAGE

STARTS from the Green Tree, No. 50 North Fourth Street, and from P. Howell's at the Sign of the Stage and Horses, No. 94, North Second Street, Philadelphia, at 8 o'clock every morning, (Sundays excepted) and after passing through Jenkintown, Crooked Billet, Cross Roads, Corryll's Ferry, Anvil, Sommerset, Bound Brook, New Market, Plainfield, Scotch Plains, Springfield, and Newark, arrives at New-York at 12 o'clock the next day.

For Seats in this line of Stages, apply to Abraham R. Woolley at either of the above mentioned places; at New-York, to William Vandervoort, No. 48 Courtlandt street, corner of Greenwich street. Fare of each passenger through, 5 Dollars, way passengers 6 Cents per mile, 150 lbs. baggage the same as a passenger, with the usual allowance of 14 lb. gratis. All goods and baggage at the risk of the owners, unless insured and receipted for by the Clerk of said Stage. Baggage insured in this Stage for one per Cent.

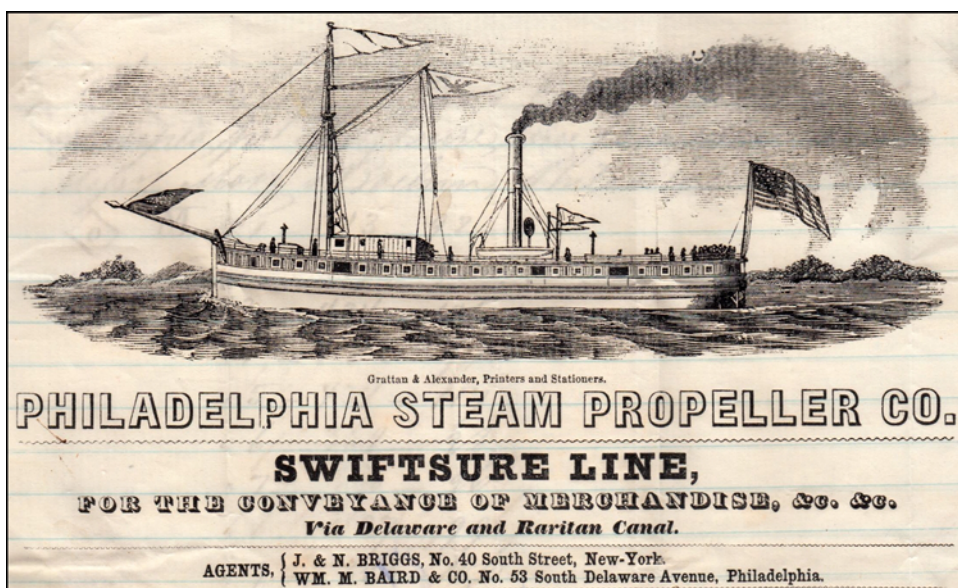
N. B. The public are respectfully informed that the Proprietors of this line of Stages have provided good houses for the accommodation of passengers. Also good Horses, Carriages, and sober drivers; and hope from their attention and desire to accommodate, they will receive the favours of their friends and the public in general, which will be gratefully acknowledged by

WOOLLEY & Co.

Cochran, printer

Fig. 10. A card for Swift-Sure from 1806 (shown in Hahn with a mss 1806 date, as part of a correspondence from that period)⁸²

It is clear from *Figures 8, 9 and 10* that the route in New Jersey (heading south) began at Newark and passed through Springfield, Scotch Plains, Plainfield, Somerville, and Bound Brook, at the very least.⁸³ Sometime between 1800 when *Figure 9* was created (showing fewer way stops than I have listed) and 1806 when *Figure 10* was printed, the route underwent variations after the stop at Bound Brook. Hahn's studies suggest that this resulted in two principal routes, at different times in the lifetime of the stage line, but he was not able to determine the exact variations.⁸⁴ I have not been able to add anything new to Hahn's findings in this regard, and the question of the exact stops after Bound Brook remains open. What seems clear from the literature, however, is that the trip over the Old York Road using the Swift Sure line was faster than the trips by its principal rivals, none of whom survived as long as the Swift Sure Stage which relied on its contract to carry the mails (which it first won in 1810) to help sustain it and also because the stage proprietors had the foresight to merge its operations with those of a steamboat line when that form of transportation became popular (See *Figure 11*).



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Fig. 11: 1855 letterhead for the Philadelphia Steam Propeller Company, showing the relationship between Swiftsure and The Philadelphia steamboat companies.

Figure 11 is a billhead from a folded letter used in 1855. As the engraving shows, the Swift Sure line at that time was a combined stage and steamboat operation that conveyed merchandise between New York City and Philadelphia via the Delaware and Raritan Canal.

Meanwhile, in Philadelphia, returning to the Swift Sure line's early days, the stage left from 18 North Fourth Street (1805) and, later, 50 North Fourth (1810). It ran every day except Sunday until 1827 when the schedule was reduced to three days per week.⁸⁵ In both cases, the stage travelled through Pennsylvania to Cross Road (present day New Hope), crossed the Delaware River to Coryell's Ferry, and then proceeded north in New Jersey to Newark.

For many years the assertion was made in the literature that the Swift Sure line had been founded in 1769, shortly after the completion of the Old York Road in 1765.⁸⁶ This contention was disproven by Hahn in his article when he illustrated an advertisement by the Swift Sure line, dated June 28, 1799, in which the stage line referred to itself as "A NEW LINE OF STAGES." (emphasis in original)⁸⁷

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The Swift Sure line remained profitable and continued operations into the late 1850s thanks in large measure to its ability to carry the mails. As seen in *Figure 11*, the stage line evolved from a primary carrier to a so-called accommodation line that served to feed business to steamboats rather than compete with them.

Two covers (*Figure 12* and *Figure 13*) illustrate a typical use of the stage line and its relationship to the mails.

Figure 12 is a cover addressed to Somerville (one of the stops always made by the Swift Sure stage), dated August 4, 1811. The origin of the cover is unknown.



Fig. 12: Addressed to Somerville. Aug. 4 (1811)

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The sender added the admonition “Swiftsure” to the folded letter since Somerville was along the route of this stage line. The cover entered the mails at New York where it received the CDS of the New York Post Office and was rated 10¢ due. From New York, the cover would have been carried by the Swift Sure mail stage in a locked box to Somerville.

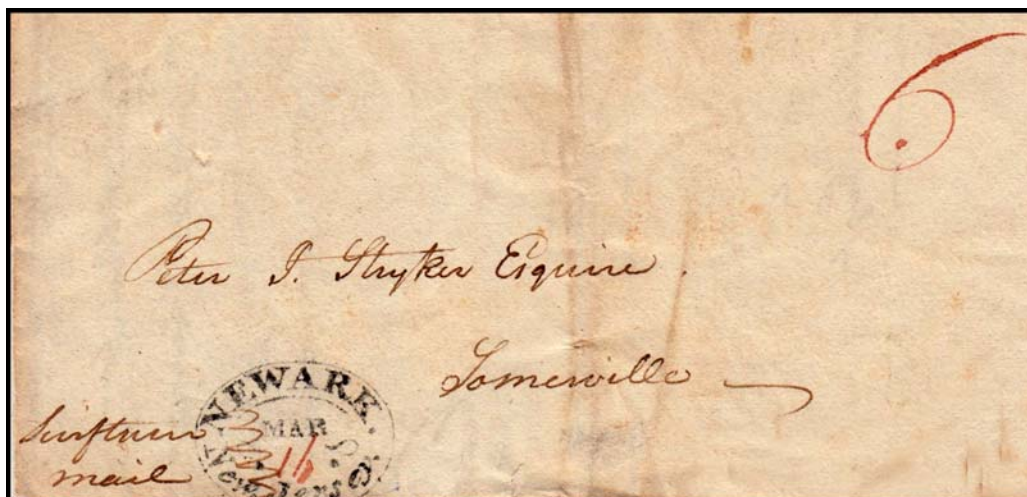


Fig. 13: Dated March 13, 1819. It, too, is addressed to Somerville.

Steven M. Roth collection

Like *Figure 12*, this cover received the sender's admonition to send the folded letter via the Swift Sure stage: "Swiftsure/mail." The cover originated at Newark where it entered the mails and received the Newark double oval. There the cover was placed in a locked mail box and taken to Somerville.

Like all stage lines, the Swift Sure stage depended on the availability of taverns and inns along its route to board and feed its passengers and to offer it an opportunity to change horses. For many years after its founding, the overnight stop in both directions was made at Centerville at the Halfway Public House; this later was changed to Flemington at the Tavern Stand and Stage House.⁸⁸

The Swift Sure stage (and the stages of all inter-state stage lines) usually arrived at their inn destinations just before sundown, if not later. The passengers received a hot meal and a place to sleep. In the case of the Swift Sure stage, this was preplanned because it made the entire run between New York and Philadelphia in thirty hours with only one overnight stop. Like all other stages, the Swift Sure left the inn at daybreak to take advantage of sunlight during the balance of the trip.

Although Centerville and later Flemington were the principal stopping places for the Swift Sure line, taverns, inns and horse changing stations at other locations were used at different times over the years. For example, Van Sickle reports that horses also were changed at the Westfield Tavern & Stage House and at Thomas Baker's Inn (also at Westfield) in the early 1800s, and that horses were changed at the Stage House in Lambertville in the years 1812-1814.⁸⁹

The Cumming Stage

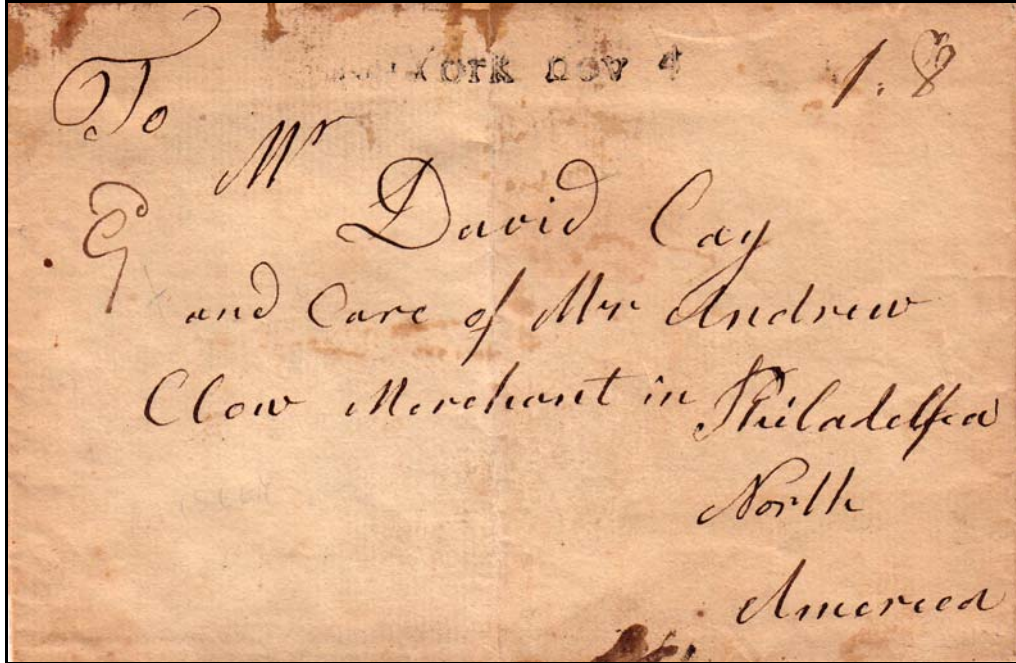
The dominant figure in New Jersey staging through most of the late 18th and early 19th centuries was John Noble Cumming of Newark who operated over the years with various partners (Richard Cumming Stockton, William Tennant Stockton, Michael Dennison and John Inskeep⁹⁰). Cumming received his first contract to carry the mails in 1786 as part of the first round of mail contracts with stage lines entered into by Postmaster General Hazard. Under the contract, which continued with renewals until 1829, Cumming carried the mail in stages from Newark to Elizabethtown, Brunswick, Princeton, Trenton and Bristol, to and from Philadelphia.⁹¹

Like many of his contemporaries in the staging business, Cumming owned several taverns along his route. In his case, Cumming leased these facilities to his business partners.

The Cumming Stage in the 1790s arrived in Philadelphia every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Once in Philadelphia, the stage first made its way to the Indian Tavern at 15 South Fourth Street, and then to the George Tavern at the corner of Second and Mulberry Streets. It then proceeded to the Post Office.

I have not identified any loose letters handed to drivers or passengers, and carried by Cumming and marked “stage” or “per stage.” There is much Cumming-carried mail, however, that is available to collectors that was not so marked because it was not loose mail. This mail had been placed in the post office by the senders and was then carried in a locked box aboard the stage between New York and Philadelphia. These covers generally are not recognized by their owners as stage coach mail because the covers do not have loose letter stage endorsements and because the covers’ owners are not aware of the Cumming mail monopoly for the New York – Philadelphia route. Such unmarked covers, however, were stage carried mail and are an essential part of the stage operations story even though the covers lack the desired endorsements. *Figures 14, 15 and 16* are examples of such unmarked Cumming stage mail.

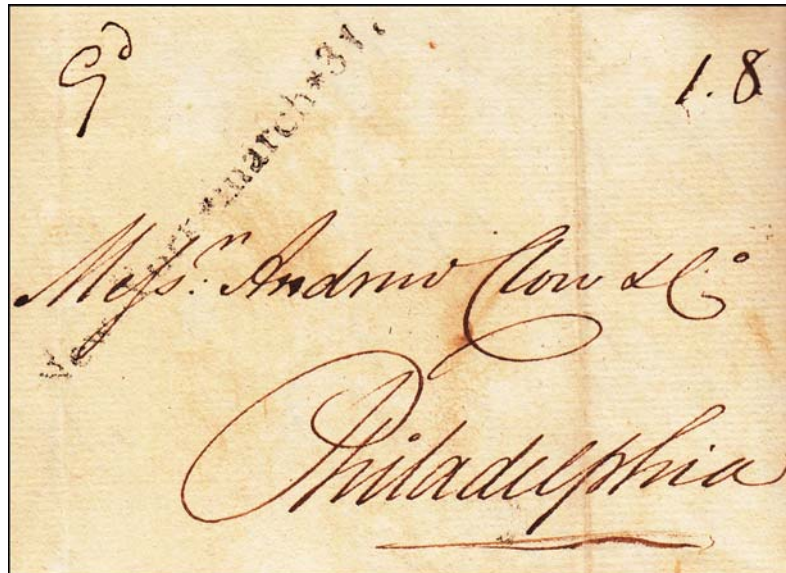
Figure 14 is an example of an unmarked letter from the Confederation Period carried by the Cumming mail stage during the third full year of its stage contract with the Post Office Department. The cover originated in Paisley, Scotland on July 19, 1788. It was privately carried to New York and entered the mails at New York on November 4, 1788. At New York it was rated 1.8 [1 shilling, 8 pence] due (there was no sea postage charged for this bootlegged letter) and placed in a locked mail box which was given to Cumming for stage carriage to Philadelphia.



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Fig. 14: A letter which originated in Scotland, but did not enter the mail stream until it reached New York (see straight line cancel) Nov. 4, 1788. It was carried by Cumming to Philadelphia.

Figure 15 is an example of an early Constitutional Period unmarked (locked box) cover carried by Cumming from New York to Philadelphia. The folded letter is dated March 31, 1790, and was rated 9 pence due [9^d] by the New York Post Office. At Philadelphia, the letter was rated 1.8 due, representing, unlike Figure 14, 1 shilling 6 pence for postage due (the equivalent in Philadelphia currency to the New York currency, adjusted by an inflation factor of 1.67 pence⁹²) plus 2 pence due for carrier service from the post office to the addressee in Philadelphia.



Steven M. Roth collection

Fig. 15. A Constitutional Period cover, carried from New York to Philadelphia. Posted March 31, 1790, with New York straight line cancel.

Figure 16 is a similar Cumming Stage example, but one that traveled in the opposite direction from Philadelphia to New York, and was rated in cents due [10¢] rather than in shillings and pence, a change which occurred under the Act of June 1, 1792. This folded letter does not show an inflation factor for the carrier service from the post office in New York City to the written street address in New York. This cover is dated January 12, 1797, and shows the common Philadelphia Bishop mark used at this time in place of a straight-line or CDS post office identification mark.



Steven M. Roth collection

Fig. 16. Another Cumming cover, but this one travelled from Philadelphia to New York, and was cancelled with a Philadelphia Bishop mark.

Hoboken Stage

The inter-state operation of this line occurred because, until 1803, there was no stage operation set up on the west bank of the Hudson River (as there had been established in 1785 along the east bank between Albany and New York when Van Wyck and his partners received a ten year monopoly). The cities on the western shore – Newburgh, Kingston and Catskill – received their mail prior to 1803 from the eastern shore.

In 1797, a stage from Hoboken began making weekly trips through the pass in the Ramapo Mountains at Suffern (then called New Antrim) to Goshen, NY. The stage line was started by Anthony Dobbin, a Goshen tavern keeper, but financed out of Albany by the State. His stage ran from Goshen to the New Jersey state line. This operation continued until 1803 when the New York legislature financed a stage route from Albany to Goshen (on the post route to Bethlehem & Philadelphia through Sussex County, NJ), and to other towns on the west side of the Hudson (Kingston and Newburgh), to and from New York City.⁹³

Moorestown Stage

Figure 17 presents a typical problem when trying to determine the route followed by a local stage that carried a cover. Figure 17 originated in Philadelphia and was addressed to Westfield, then in Essex County. The letter is dated August 1, 1842.



Steven M. Roth collection

Fig. 17. From Philadelphia to Westfield, noted by stage Moorestown, datelined August 1, 1842. It is difficult to tell which route it might have followed.

Figure 17 was carried across the Delaware River from Philadelphia to Cooper’s Ferry aboard the stage boat. The stage then carried the letter from Cooper’s Ferry to Moorestown. At Moorestown, there were three possible routes for the stage to follow:

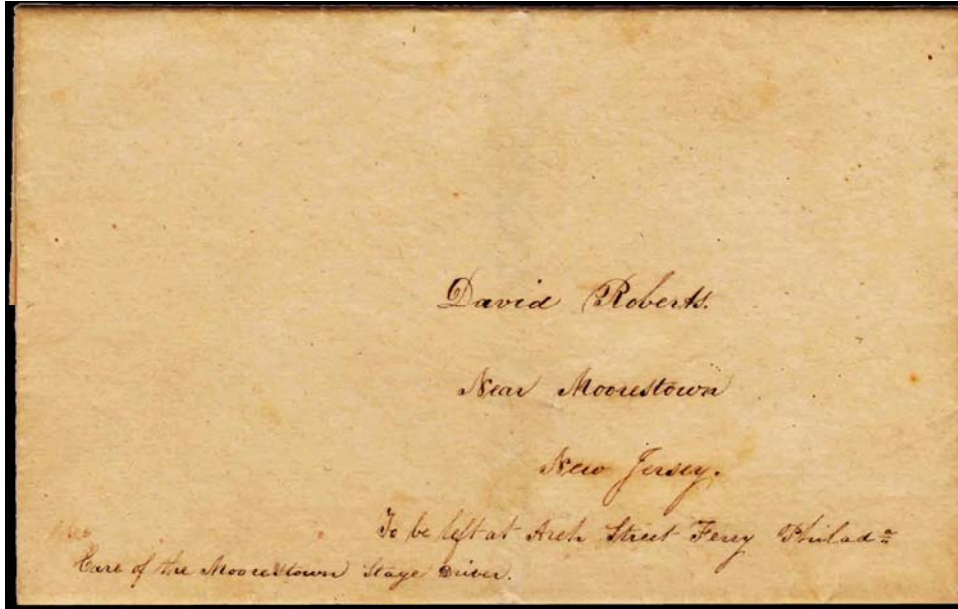
Route 1: Philadelphia → Delaware River [stage boat] → Cooper’s Ferry → Moorestown → Trenton → Brunswick → Westfield

Route 2: Philadelphia → Delaware River [stage boat] → Cooper’s Ferry → Moorestown → Bordentown → Hightstown → Cranberry → Perth Amboy → Westfield

Route 3: Philadelphia → Delaware River [stage boat] → Cooper’s Ferry → Moorestown → Burlington → Hightstown → Cranberry → Perth Amboy → Westfield

Several stage lines passed through Moorestown on the King’s Highway at this time so it is not possible to identify which specific stage line carried this letter or over which route, although the most direct route (and perhaps, therefore, the most likely) was the Trenton – Brunswick route (Route 1 above).

Figure 18 is an interesting Moorestown stage cover that traveled to a destination near Moorestown and, therefore, likely was carried from Cooper’s Ferry directly to Moorestown where it was delivered (out-of-the-mails) to the addressee.



Ed and Jean Siskin collection

Fig. 18. *Inscribed: "To be left at Arch Street Ferry Philad"/Care of the Moorestown Stage driver." Mr. Siskin has informed me that the cover, based on a now-missing enclosure, was dated 1820.*

Morristown Stage

According to Donald A. Chafetz, the leading student of Morristown postal history, stage service between Morristown and New York City existed at least as early as 1771.⁹⁴ This service was provided by Daniel and Silas Burnet who called their operation the "Morris town Stage Wagon." [sic] The stage service operated between the Paulus Hook ferry (conveying freight and some mail from New York), Springfield and Morristown. The trip was made every Thursday from Paulus Hook (present day Jersey City) with regular return trips. The journey was completed in one day. In 1774, the Burnets joined with Captain Joseph Morris to extend the line westward from Morristown through Mendham to the Black River.⁹⁵ This service operated at least until 1776. Mr. Chafetz also reports that a rival service, operated by Constant Cooper, commenced operations in 1771.

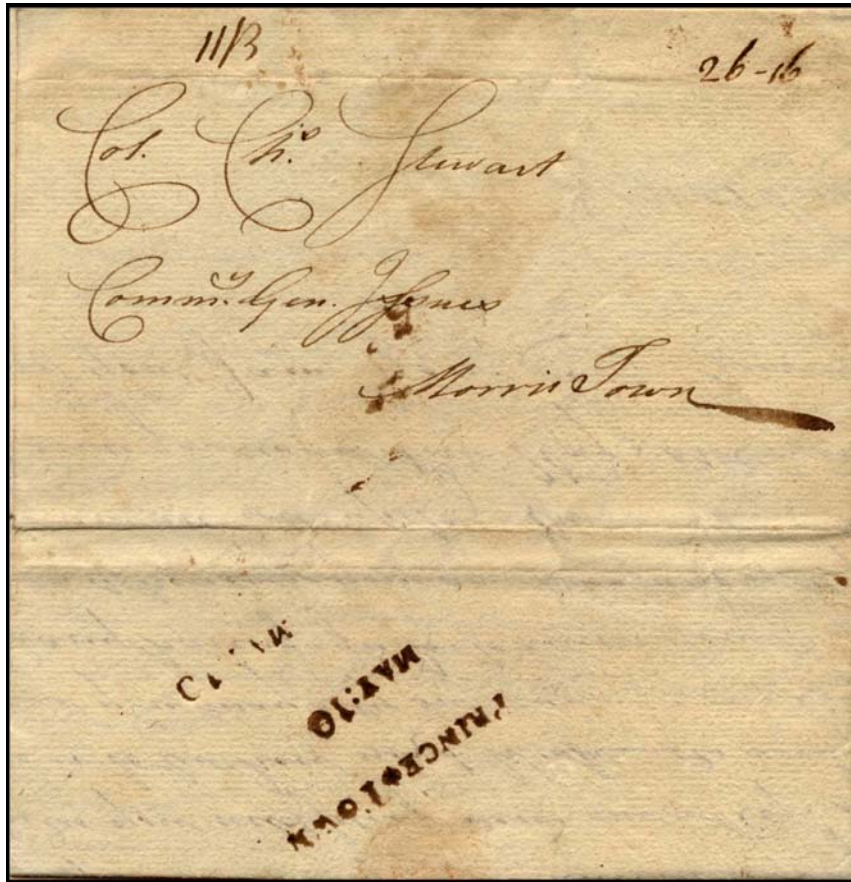
In his series of article on the Provisional Posts, Calvet H. Hahn reprinted a lengthy advertisement for a subscription post that would be carried by stage south from New York to Morristown, then to other New Jersey towns.⁹⁶ The March 9, 1775 issue of Holt's Journal carried news of the operation which involved running regular stages from Morristown to Paulus Hook, Springfield, Newark, and Passaic.⁹⁷

Hahn also reprints a report, dated April 11, 1776, from London's *New York Packet*, as follows:

*Notice is hereby given to the Public in general that the MORRIS-TOWN STAGE continues as usual to set off from Hackets-Town, every Monday morning. Every Tuesday morning sets off from Captain Dickerson's in Morris-Town at sunrise to Powles-Hook; from thence to return every Thursday morning at 7 o'clock as usual; And every Saturday morning again to set off from the house of Captain Dickerson at Morris-Town by way of Chatham and Springfield to Powles Hook and return from thence on Monday evening at 7 o'clock the same road to Morristown, and will be continued by DANIEL BURNET, JOSEPH CUNLIFFE AND SILAS BURNET.*⁹⁸

The service continued until late in 1776 when the Revolution interrupted service.

Hahn, in a different series of articles, stated that the Morristown stage service resumed in 1780, connecting Philadelphia, Trenton, Princeton and Elizabethtown with Morristown.⁹⁹ *Figure 19*, a scarce cover owned by Robert G. Rose, Esq., is an example of a cover carried by stage on this route.



Robert G. Rose collection

Fig. 19. Dated May 10, 1780. This cover is one of two known (and the only one in private hands) showing the "20 times" inflation rate instituted by the Continental Congress on December 28, 1779. This rate was in effect until December 1780.

The Morristown stage cover illustrated by Mr. Chafetz in his *NJPH* article, was a cover that originated in Morristown in 1797, addressed to New York. This cover is shown as *Figure 20*.



Donald A. Chafetz collection

Fig. 20: A 1797 cover from Morristown. Internal comments show it was carried by stage to Paulus Hook.

The notations at the upper right corner of this cover do not relate to the stage transport. As Mr. Chafetz explained in his *NJPH* article, internal statements within the folded letter referred to the carriage of the letter by stage from Morristown to Paulus Hook for further transmittal to New York.¹⁰⁰

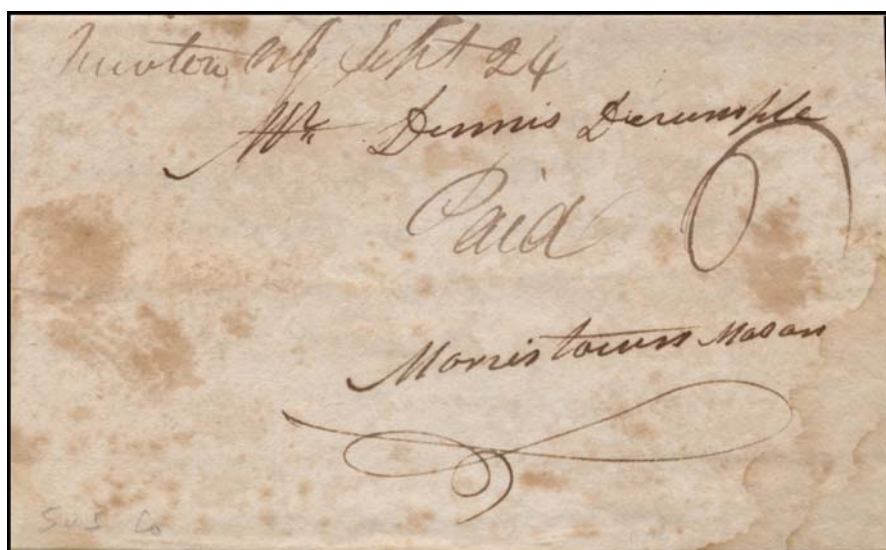
Morris and Sussex Mail Stage

A later line originating in Newton and passing through Morristown to New York was established by 1815. In his study entitled “Early Travel and Mail Transport in N.J.,” Len Peck notes that “the first stagecoach line was established between Newton and Morristown in 1808: It was at this time also that the mail contract was transferred to the stage coach line to be operated by Isaac Basset, Pettit Britton and James Hinchman, three prominent Newtown businessmen who started the Morris to New York stagecoach line. One of the drivers of this line was Zephaniah Luse who later became a co-owner of the line with James Hanna.

“The stagecoach line as originally established ran once a week, starting at Newtown by way of Stanhope, Succasunny Plains, Morristown, Bottle Hill, Chatham, Springfield and Newark to Paulus Hook (now Jersey City) and ferry to New York. The earliest advertisement that could be found of this line in a local newspaper appeared in the *Sussex Register* dated January 2nd, 1815. The transcript follows:”¹⁰¹

Z. Luse & James Hanna, proprietors of the Morris and Sussex Mail Stage between Newtown and New York;—Inform their friends and the public, that in consequence of a late regulation of the Postmaster General, they will in the future leave Newtown every Monday morning at nine o'clock, lodge at Morristown, and arrive in New York on Tuesday at twelve o'clock noon. Will leave New York every Wednesday morning at nine o'clock, lodge at Morristown, and arrive at Newtown next day at one o'clock,

*P.M.—Going and returning will pass through the following places, Stanhope, Succasunny Plains, Morristown, Bottle Hill, Chatham, Springfield and Newark to Paulus Hook and ferry to New York
The fare through, Three Dollars, and in that proportion for any part of the way.
Seats to be engaged in Newtown at Mark Luse’s or at Daniel Harker’s tavern, or of either of the proprietors; at Morristown at L Hayden’s tavern; at Newark at Moses Raff’s tavern, and at New York at Sanfords at the lower end of Courtland street, near the ferry stairs.
As the proprietors will always drive the Stage, they will take charge of any business and attend to the same with diligence, for a small compensation. Any person having business on the route through to Newburgh, are informed that a stage starts every Friday morning from Daniel Harker’s tavern, and will pass through Hamburg, Vernon, Warwick, Florida and Goshen. Also that the mail starts the same day for Milford, Pennsylvania. January 2, 1815.*



Leonard Peck collection

Fig. 21: *This 1816 cover was sent by Isaac Bassett of Newtown shortly after the establishment of the new stage service which he helped initiate. It is datelined September 24, 1816 and is addressed only to Dennis Dalrimple, Morristown Mason.*

Salem Stage

As previously mentioned, Salem was connected to Cooper’s Ferry (and thus to Philadelphia) by a stage line operated by Aaron Silver beginning in 1767.

Hahn in his Provisional Post series states that an advertisement appeared in the March 2, 1774 issue of the *Pennsylvania Packet* stating that Bennoni Dare had started a subscription post that would be carried by his stage wagon from Greenwich to Salem then on to Cooper’s Ferry for the crossing to Philadelphia.¹⁰² Hahn stated that this route followed the main roads through southern New Jersey.¹⁰³

The well-known Ed and Jean Siskin collection of pre-1800 postal history contained a 1775 folded letter sent by stage from Salem to Philadelphia via Cooper’s Ferry. *Figure 22.*



ex-Ed and Jean Siskin

Fig. 22. 1775 from Salem to Philadelphia, note by stage.

INTRA-STATE (LOCAL OR ACCOMMODATION/FEEDER) STAGE OPERATIONS

Accommodation stage lines (also sometimes called local or feeder stage lines) serviced towns within New Jersey without ever leaving the state (the “local” aspect of the operation) and also serviced steamboat ports and landings as well as railroad depots as feeder lines, bringing passengers and freight from the interior (the accommodation aspect) when steamboats and railroads became unstoppable rivals to the stages.

Little is known about these lines. We find indirect references to them in travelers’ guides which give route and mileage/distance information, and also learn about them from newspaper ads. It is clear that much more work needs to be done with respect to identifying local and accommodation stage lines and their operations.

I have set forth below those local and accommodation lines about which I have some information. This is not to be viewed as a definitive list of the lines or even as an accurate naming of the lines. This is set forth by me to “start the ball rolling” on the endeavor to learn more.

Hackensack Stage

An ad appeared in the New York Mercury on July 14, 1783, for this line:

The subscriber having established a STAGE WAGON to run between Hackensack and Hoebuck Ferry hereby informs the public that the roads are now very good, his Wagon and horses in very good order and proper attendance will be given. He sets out from Hackensack every Tuesday and Saturday morning at seven o’clock and returns the same day from Horbuck(sic) at 3 o’clock in the afternoon. He hopes so useful an institution will receive the encouragement of the public who it shall be his Study to Oblige.¹⁰⁴ (spelling as the original)

Cape May Stage

According to Craig Mathewson, the leading student of Cape May mail, sometime around 1800 a weekly stage began to run from Cooper's Ferry through Gloucester, Salem and Cumberland counties to Cape Island.¹⁰⁵ He developed a map of stage routes to Cape May (see *Figure 23*), but more research is necessary to know the exact stage companies and dates of operation on these routes. We encourage contributions from other members on this subject.



Fig. 23: Map of stage routes to Cape May, drawn by Craig Mathewson.

Absecon Stage

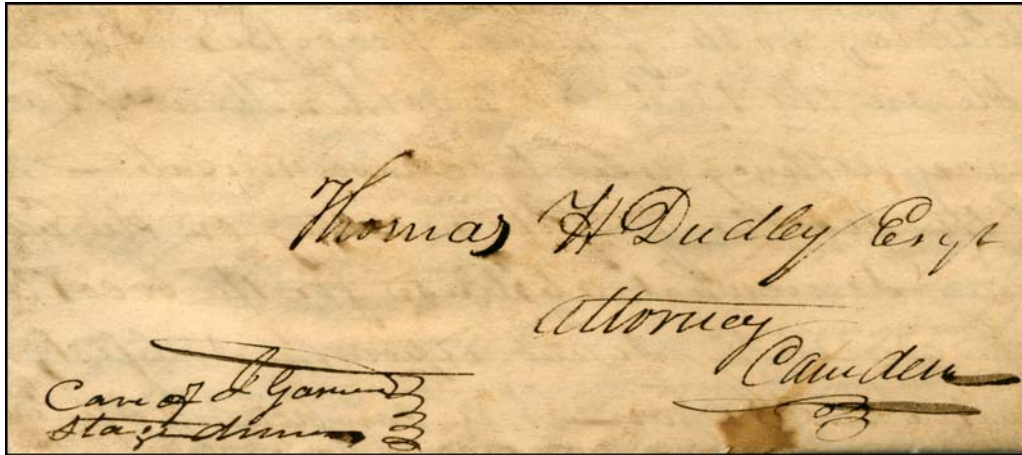
In 1773, William McCarrell started a line that ran between Cooper's Ferry and Absecon (present day Absecon near Atlantic City). It left Ann Risley's tavern at Absecon on Monday mornings and went by Thomas Clark's mill near present day Port Republic and the Forks of Little Egg Harbor to the Blue Anchor Inn near present day Mullica, then on to Longacoming (present day Berlin) and Haddonfield, arriving at Samuel Cooper's Ferry Tuesday afternoon.¹⁰⁶

Manahawkin, Mount-Holly and Burlington Stage

Based on the advertisement shown as *Figure 29*, this stage line seems to be one of the stages that passed regularly through Mount Holly and Burlington. I have not been able to identify any cover carried by this stage line.

Marlton Stage

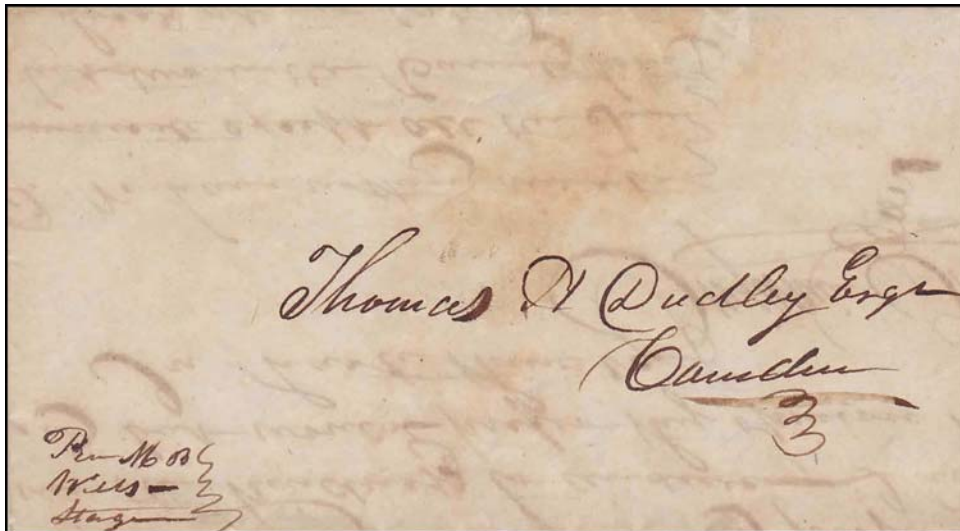
The Marlton Stage was a local stage that operated between Marlton and Camden. It appears to be one of those lines that was known by the names of its drivers. (See *Figure 24*)



Steven M. Roth collection.

Fig. 24: This cover originated at Marlton on January 10, 1841, and made the ten mile trip to Camden.

The sender endorsed the cover with this admonition: “Care of J. Garner/Stage driver.” Based on the admonition, it appears that the sender of this cover left it for the stage driver at some place of convenience (for example, an inn or a store).



Ed and Jean Siskin collection.

Fig. 25: This cover followed the same route on March 27, 1845. Note the admonition “Per MB Wills Stage.”

Millville Stage

This stage line is an example of an arbitrary naming by me of a stage line in my effort to categorize and organize the local and accommodation stage lines. There was, to my knowledge, no stage line known as the Millville Stage. Rather, according to Craig Mathewson, the leg of the operation that serviced Millville was part of a larger through stage line that operated from Cooper's Ferry to Cape May. Millville was one stop among several along the way. *Figure 26* is an example of such a letter.



Steven M. Roth collection

Fig. 26: This was sent in August 1851 from Millville to Denisville by private stage carrier.

Figure 26 was sent in August 1851 from Millville to Denisville by private stage carrier and was handled entirely outside the mails. The Cooper's Ferry – Cape May Stage serviced both Millville and Denisville as way stops.

The sender's endorsement indicates that the letter was given to and sent "by J. Eldrige/Stageman." In the letter, the writer urges the recipient to "please write me a word by Mr. J. Eldrige."

Mount Holly Stage

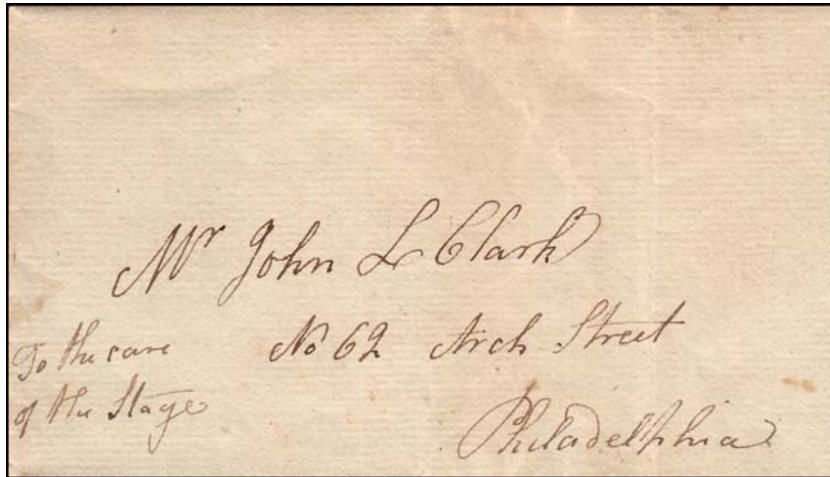
The definitive study of the Mount Holly Stage (which, like the names of other local lines discussed in this article might be a misnomer) was published in an article by Jean R. Walton in 2003.¹⁰⁷

According to Ms. Walton, Mount Holly, like many communities in early America, did not have a post office until long after the community had been settled. In Mount Holly's case, the first post office opened September 18, 1800. Before that date (and often afterward, too), mail was sent by stage driver or passenger outside the mails. The nearest post office to Mount Holly before 1800 was at Burlington.

Mount Holly, according to Ms. Walton, had a stage line as early as 1759. It was part of through service from Cooper's Ferry to Sandy Hook. When this through service ended, local accommodation stage lines replaced it.

STAGE OPERATIONS & THE MAILS IN NJ~ Steven Roth

Stage mail between Mount Holly and Philadelphia was given to private stage drivers and passengers who carried the mail (if going to Philadelphia) to Cooper's Ferry where the stage boarded a stage boat. Mail from Philadelphia to or through Mount Holly traveled in the same manner, but in reverse order. This pattern of private out-of-the-mails transmission continued even after Mount Holly opened its post office, as demonstrated in the well-known Clark correspondence by *Figure 28*.

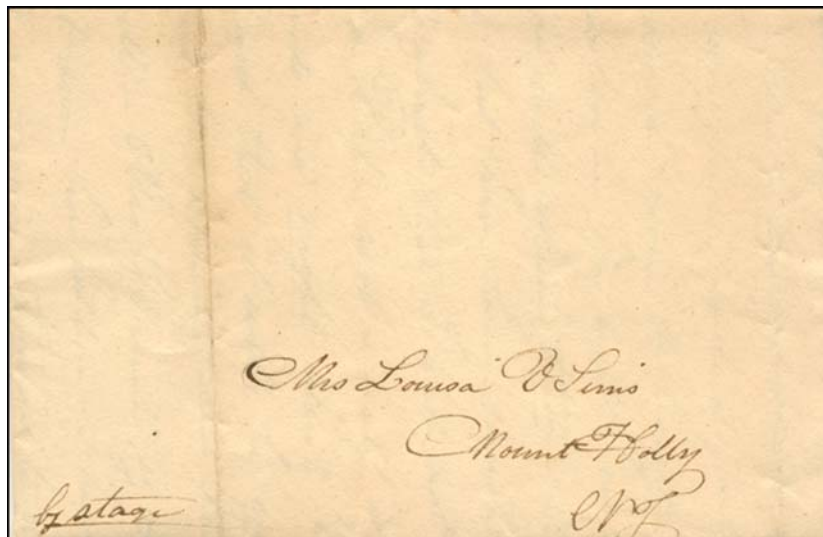


Steven M. Roth collection

Fig. 27: This cover originated at Mount Holly, and is dated June 26, 1797.

As Ms. Walton pointed out in her article, because several stage lines passed through Mount Holly at this time on their way to Philadelphia, we are not able to identify which private stage line carried the letter.

Figure 28, also part of the Clark family correspondence, originated in Philadelphia on March 11, 1824, after the opening of the Mount Holly Post Office. Nonetheless, the folded letter was sent privately.




Steven M. Roth collection

Fig. 28: Although Mount Holly now had a post office when this letter was posted in 1824, it was still sent by stage, outside the mails.

One of the stage lines that passed through Mount Holly in the 1820s was the Mannahawkin [sic] – Mount Holly – Burlington Stage. This line ran through the named towns with an extension to Tuckerton, all as seen in the ad previously published in *NJPH*, and shown here as *Figure 29*. Note that in *Figure 29*, one of the stages is referred to by the name of its driver rather than by the name(s) of the town(s) it passed through. We saw this, too, when we examined the Marlton Stage.

**Mannahawkin, Mount-Holly and
Burlington Stage.**



THE subscriber proposes running a Stage from Mannahawkin, every Monday and Thursday mornings, and meet Wm. C. Budd's Stage, at the Inn of Thomas B. Smith, in Mount-Holly, on the same evenings—from whence, passengers will be conveyed on the following mornings, to Burlington, in time to meet the Steam-boats passing to and from Philadelphia and Trenton. Returning, the Stage will leave Burlington every Tuesday and Friday evenings, and arrive at Mannahawkin on the following afternoons, in time to meet the Stage for Tuckerton, the same evenings. Good Boarding may be had in Mannahawkin, at the moderate rate of from \$2 00. to \$3 50 per week. Passengers will be conveyed at any time across the Bay, to James Cranmer's, Hazleton Cranmer's and Stephen Inman's.

Fare through \$1 75.

JOB F. RANDOLPH.

April 6, 1821. 316m

Fig. 29: Advertisement for one of the Mount Holly stage lines.

Newark Stage

Newark was a busy and prolific staging center. It was, for example, the northern terminus of the Swift Sure line. Some of this commerce is shown in the listing below in the section, “Other Local/Accommodation Stage Lines.”

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The completion in 1766 of the causeway across the Hackensack and Passaic marshes to Newark, as well as an opportunity to avoid the harsh and dangerous trip via the Amboy – New York City ferry, turned much of the Philadelphia stage travel to the Newark route. It also opened the way to the establishment in 1768 of a local stage (name unknown, but possibly the New York and Philadelphia Mail Stage) to Newark under the ownership of Matthias Ward.¹⁰⁸ The route was generally known as the Old York Road, and the stage was the first to go by way of Newark and to use the new causeway.¹⁰⁹

A notice placed by Hugh Gaines in the New York Mercury on May 19, 1783, is the earliest mention of staging in Newark I have been able to find:¹¹⁰

NEWARK STAGE

Peter Stuyvesant who for many years drove a STAGE WAGGON from Powles Hook to Brown's Ferry proposes to begin again next Wednesday for the purpose and will set off from Comunapu [sic] at nine o'clock in the morning and four in the afternoon every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday and drive to Brown's Ferry where Joseph Crane will be ready with another WAGGON to receive all passengers and proceed to Newark. A Boat will attend at Coenties Market to receive all passengers on the days above mentioned at seven o'clock in the morning.

Paterson Stage

In the summer of 1770, Cornelius Neefie advertised a line running from Paulus Hook to his tavern in Passaic Falls (present day Paterson).¹¹¹ I have no other information concerning this stage line.

Princeton Stage

This stage ran from Princeton to Trenton and connected at Trenton with the steamboats coming into that port. See *Figure 31*.

Tuckerton Stage

As shown in *Figure 29*, an accommodation stage existed in 1831 (at least) that ran from Mannahawkin to Tuckerton as part of the Philadelphia, Trenton, Mount Holly and Manahawkin line. I have not identified any covers associated with this line.

Union Stage Line

The Union line of stages was under common ownership with the Union line of steamboats. This arrangement is graphically shown in its advertisements as seen in *Figure 30*. See below ["The Symbiotic Role of and Competition from Steamboats and Railroads"] for a discussion of the roles of steamboats and railroads in the lives of the stage lines. The stage portion of the operation served as a local or accommodation stage line. See also *Figure 31*.

Union Line.—

THE subscribers respectfully inform the public, that they intend running a Stage, during the summer season, for the accommodation of those disposed to visit the Grouse Plains, Mannahawkin or Tuckerton—to commence the 1st of May next. The Stage will leave Mannahawkin every Monday & Thursday mornings, and arrive at Jonathan Deacon's Tavern, in Mount-Holly, on the same evenings; from which place, passengers will be conveyed to Burlington, on the following mornings, in Jonathan Deacon's Line of Stages, in time to meet the Steam boats for Philadelphia & Trenton. Returning, they will leave Burlington every Tuesday & Friday evenings, and arrive at the Ferries of Samuel Gray, Esq and Nathan Haywood, in Mannahawkin, early on the following evenings:—where ladies and gentlemen can be accommodated with genteel boarding and lodging, at the moderate rate of \$2 50 per week; and conveyed at any time across the Bay, to James Cranmer's, Hazleton Cranmer's and Stephen Inman's.

Fare through \$2 00.

**Samuel Gray,
James Bodine.**

April 2, 1820. 207 14w.

A conveyance will be in readiness at Mannahawkin, for Tuckerton.

Fig. 30: Ad for the Union Line

Other Local/Accommodation Stage Lines

There are many stage lines that operated in New Jersey about which we have no or very little information. In most cases no covers have been identified by me as carried by these lines. The following list has been taken from advertisements and timetables/schedules which have appeared from time-to-time in *NJPH*:

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Allentown Stage | Belleville & Newark Stage |
| Bound Brook Stage | Paterson & Newark Stage |
| Dover Stage | Parsippany & Newark Stage |
| Scotch Plains Stage | Camptown & Newark Stage |
| Springfield Stage | Elizabethtown & Newark Stage |
| Orange & Newark Stage | Caldwell & Newark Stage |
| Bloomfield Stage | Princeton Stage |

There are several pre-Revolution stage lines mentioned in an article in an early issue of *NJPH*, but I have no other information about these operations and, in several instances, the information is too cryptic to incorporate into this article.¹¹²

The Symbiotic Role of and Competition with Steamboats and Railroads

Just as stage coaches replaced the individual horse for travel and for carrying freight and the mails, the steamboat replaced the stage and forced the stage lines to adjust their business models. Thereafter, the steamboat, too, was superseded in part by the railroad. Yet neither the steamboat nor the railroad could do everything that a stage could do. The steamboat could not travel inland away from navigable waters to pick up and drop off passengers and freight; the railroad could not travel anywhere tracks had not been laid down. The savvy steamboat and railroad operators realized this and entered into arrangements with stage lines to service the interior of the state to bring passengers and cargo to the landings and depots, and to take them back again to the interior. Hence was born the concept of the accommodation stage lines such as the Swift Sure stage, the Union Stage, and others.

This relationship is demonstrated by the advertisement previously reprinted in an issue of *NJPH* and shown here as *Figure 31*:

Fig. 31: Ad for the Princeton Coach



PRINCETON COACH.
THE Subscriber respectfully informs the inhabitants of Princeton and its vicinity, that he has commenced running a daily Stage from Princeton to Trenton, in connection with the Philadelphia and N. York Union Line Steam Boats. The stage will leave the Hotel of the subscriber, every day at eleven o'clock, for Trenton and return immediately on the arrival of the steam boats.

☞ For seats apply to the Captain on board the boat—at Joseph M. Bishams—or at the office of the Union Line, Trenton, and at the hotel of the subscriber, in Princeton.

LEVI HOWELL.
Princeton, April 12

Steamboats, at least initially, were slower than stages; they were dirtier from the smoke; they were subject to blocked or delayed passage from ice in the water; and, too often – at least in the early days – they were subject to fire and the explosion of their boilers. But they had one significant advantage over stage travel: they were more comfortable for passengers who could stroll around the deck rather than be restricted to hard, jarring bench seats and often poor road conditions.

As previously noted, the Swift Sure stage line was one of the earliest examples of the symbiotic relationship between stages and steamboats. The line not only was fortified with a mail contract which helped keep it in business when other stage lines were sinking, but it also profited from its flexibility and willingness to focus on local or accommodation and feeder travel.

The New York Evening Post for August 8, 1832 contained an ad which stated:

The Swift Sure Line is the pleasantest line now running between New York and Philadelphia. Fare reduced to \$2.75. Passengers by this line start from New York every Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning at 10 o'clock from Pier No. 1, Washington Street, corner of the Battery, in the splendid new steamboat "Cinderella" for Elizabethtown, Westfield, Scotch Plains, Plainfield, Bound Brook, Somerville, Centerville, and lodge at Flemington. Start next morning via Ringoes, Lambertville, New Hope, Buckingham, Willow Grove and Jenkingtown, and arrive at Philadelphia to dine. . . .

In preparing this article, I examined twenty-two traveler's guides published between 1823 and 1859 to determine both the means of travel (stage, steamboat and/or railroad) and the routes taken.¹¹³ The steady trend from stage travel to steamboat travel to railroad travel (and to combinations in varying degrees) was clear and inexorable, with the railroads eventually dominating the means of carriage to the point that eventually the guides were nothing other than railroad guides with footnotes mentioning places where stage or steamboat travel was required to supplement train travel.

Conclusion

Stage travel offered an important advance in terms of the development of the country and in furthering the dissemination of personal and commercial transportation in early America. It also was necessary for the spreading of the news and delivery of the mails. But little is known about the subject of stage lines and their operations – certainly far less than is known about railroad and steamboats. Much work on New Jersey stage lines and their routes remains to be done. This article is only the beginning, and we would welcome more information from other members. Please send information to me at stevenroth@comcast.net.

Acknowledgements

I thank the following people who assisted me by reviewing this article and commenting upon it or for answering specific questions I had and/or for making cover images available to me: Clifford Alexander, Donald A. Chafetz, Doug D'Avino, Leonard Peck, Robert G. Rose, Ed and Jean Siskin, and Jean R. Walton.



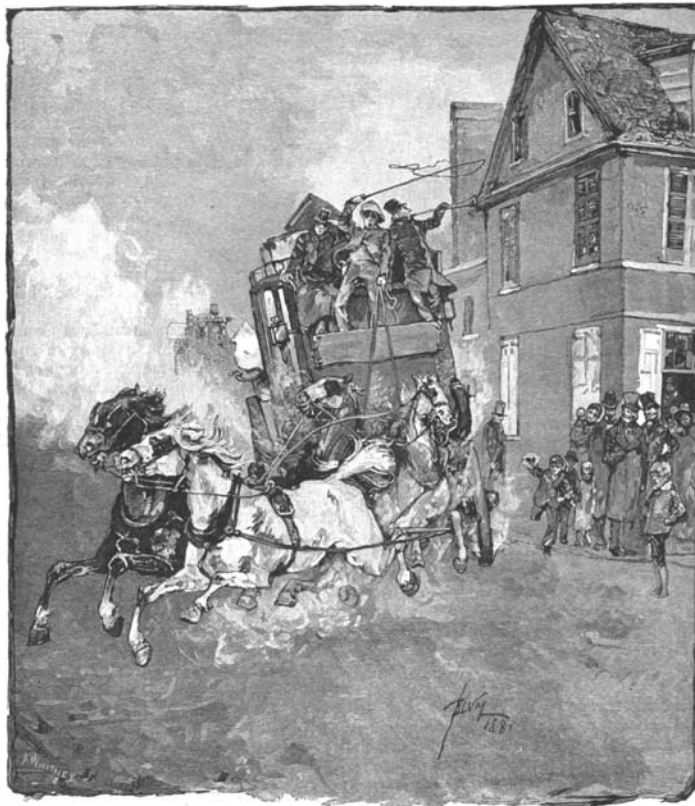
The Progression of the New Jersey Stage

ENDNOTES:

-
- 1 © 2013. Steven M. Roth
2 The first contract to carry the mail made with a railroad occurred in 1835.
3 Lane, W., *From Indian Trail To Iron Horse* (Princeton 1939)
4 *Ibid.*, 50-51.
5 White, F., *Philadelphia Directory* (Philadelphia 1785).
6 *Ibid.*, 97.
7 Hardie, J., *The Philadelphia Directory And Register*, 1793, 214.
8 Robinson, J., *The Philadelphia Directory For 1805* (Philadelphia 1805), lxiv and lxv.
9 Robinson, J., *The Philadelphia Directory For 1810* (Philadelphia 1810), unnumbered.
10 See *Figure 22*.
11 W.A. Whitehead, *East Jersey Under The Proprietary Governments* (1875), pp. 235-237, 419.
12 NJ Archives, First Series, III, 187.
13 *Ibid.*
14 *Ibid.*
15 NJ Archives, First Series, III, 176, 186-188, 250-251, 327; NJ Archives, First Series, IV, 129.
16 NJ Archives, First Series, XI, 162.
17 *Ibid.*, XI, 521.
18 *Ibid.*
19 Rose, R., Mr. Rose prepared a slide talk for the Hamilton Township Philatelic Society in which he discussed the current known scholarship concerning this stage line. The slide talk has been posted at www.hamiltonphilatelic.org/presentations/bordertown.pdf, and is available as a pdf file for downloading and copying.
20 NJ Archives, First Series, XII, 22, 29 and 94; NJ Archives, First Series, XIV, 654.
21 NJ Archives, First Series, XII, 681.
22 NJ Archives, First Series, IX, 86.
23 *Ibid.*
24 *Ibid.*
25 NJ Archives, First Series, XX, 116; Pennsylvania Journal, June 16, 1757.
26 *Ibid.*
27 Pennsylvania Journal, June 16, 1857.
28 New York Weekly Post Boy, January 8, 1758.
29 NJ Archives, First Series, XXVII, 137 and XXVIII, 286.
30 NJ Archives, First Series, XXVII, 477, 550; XXVIII, 92, 481, 466; XXIX, 186, 467; and XXXI, 11 and 46.
31 New York Journal and Weekly Register, January 7, 1790 and January 3, 1791.
32 NJ Archives, First Series, XXVI, 500, 513 and 545.
33 Philadelphia Gazette, December 3, 1767.
34 Philadelphia Journal, April 11, 1771.
35 *Ibid.* September 12, 1771.
36 Philadelphia Gazette, August 19, 1772.
37 New Jersey Gazette, November 25, 1778.
38 Pennsylvania Gazette, February 17, 1779.
39 Advertisements of William Rider and John De Grove in New Jersey Journal (Chatham, NJ), June 14, 1780.
40 Drake for many years was the keeper of the Indian Queen Inn at Brunswick and the proprietor of the ferry there that crossed the Raritan River.
41 New Jersey Journal, October 11, 1780.
42 New Jersey Gazette, October 4 and October 28, 1780.
43 Act February 20, 1792, Sections 21 – 22.
44 *American State Papers*, Post Office Department, Class VII (Compiled 1833), 21.
45 Patterson, *Laws Of The State Of New Jersey* (Newark 1800), 451.
46 *Ibid.*
47 *Ibid.*
48 *Journal Kept By Hugh Finlay 1773-1774*, (Reprint Edition 1975), 18.
49 *Journals Of The Continental Congress* (Washington 1904-37), XXIII, 673.

- 50 Ibid., LXI, fol. 263-265; Letter, Hazard to Alexander Hamilton, August 1, 1786, *ibid.*, fol. 272.
- 51 Hazard to Hamilton, *ibid.*; Hamilton to Hazard, *ibid.*, fol. 271-273.
- 52 *Ibid.* Fol. 271-273.
- 53 *Journals Of The Continental Congress, XXXI, 922-923.*
- 54 *Ibid.*, 929.
- 55 Advertisements of the New Line of Stages in New York Journal, March 1 and April 17, 1788. for example.
- 56 Quoted in Rich, W., *The History Of The United States Post Office To The Year 1829* (Cambridge 1924), 65.
- 57 *Ibid.*
- 58 This stage line is referred to on its 1786 handstamp as the Bordenton & New York Stage even though the town founded by Joseph Borden was known as Bordentown.
- 59 Rose, *op. cit.*
- 60 [NJPH, Vol. 33, No. 4 \(November 2005\), Whole No. 160](#), 181, n.10.
- 61 [NJPH, Vol. 39, No. 1 \(February 2011\), Whole no. 181](#), 4, n.2.
- 62 Correspondence between Mr. Rose and author, February 17, 2005.
- 63 Cushing & Sheppard, *History of The Counties Of Gloucester, Salem And Cumberland* (Philadelphia 1883) 587-588.
- 64 Pennsylvania Packet, April 13, 1772.
- 65 Whitehead, W. A., *East Jersey Under The Proprietary Governments* (Philadelphia 1875), 235-7; 419; Map opp. 118.
- 66 Lane, *ibid.*, 66.
- 67 Lane, *ibid.*, 81.
- 68 NJ Archives, First Series XIX, 86.
- 69 NJ Archives, First Series XXVII, 137 and XXVIII, 286.
- 70 Pennsylvania Gazette (Philadelphia), February 17, 1779.
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- 73 NJ Archives, First Series, XI, 521.
- 74 Pennsylvania Gazette, April 10, 1740.
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- 76 NJ Archives, First Series, XII, 209.
- 77 Pennsylvania Journal, June 16, 1757.
- 78 Holmes, O. and Rohrbach, P., *Stagecoach East* (Washington DC 1983), 36.
- 79 Hahn, C., "The Swift Sure Letters," Part 1, SPA Journal, Vol. 42, No.2 (October 1979), 78ff.; Part 2, Vol. 42, No. 10 (June 1980), 619ff.
- 80 *Ibid.* 83.
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- 83 *Ibid.*, 87. Map.
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- 86 See, for example, Van Sickle, *ibid.*, 58; Cawley, J. & M., *Along The Old York Road* (NJ 1965), 106.
- 87 Hahn, *ibid.*, 83-84.
- 88 Van Sickle, *ibid.*, 64-65.
- 89 *Ibid.* 60, 101-102.
- 90 Sometimes also spelled Inslip.
- 91 See, for example, Returns of Post Office for 1790, *Ibid.*, *American State Papers*, 9.
- 92 *Pennyweight/Sterling Conversion Table*, Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Sale No. 944 (October 24, 2007), Appendix, p. 171.
- 93 *Diary of Anthony Dobbin* (Albany 1823), p. 183.
- 94 Chafetz, D. A., "A Cover Analysis", [NJPH Vol. 6, No. 1 \(January 1978\) Whole No. 26](#) , 1ff; and Chafetz, D. A., "The Unknown Colonial Post Office", *American Philatelist*, (January 1980), 45ff. Much of the information I present here concerning the Morristown Stage is my synthesis of information published by Mr. Chafetz in these two articles.
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- 96 Hahn, C.M., "The Provisional Post of the United States," *Collectors Club Philatelist*, March 1975, 97.

- 97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., 98
99 Hahn, C. M., “Express Business: Origins and Definitions”, The Penny Post, Vol. 11, No. 4 (October 2003), 63.
100 Chafetz, D., [NJPH](#), Ibid.
101 Peck, Leonard, “Early Travel & Mail Transport in New Jersey,” [NJPH, Vol 36, No. 1 \(February 2008\), Whole No. 169](#).
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103 Ibid., 100.
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105 [NJPH Vol. 33, No. 3 \(August 2005\), Whole No. 159](#), pp. 130.-131
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107 Walton, J.R., “Mount Holly, N.J. Stage Mail”, [NJPH, Vol. 31, No. 1 \(February 2003\), Whole No. 149](#), 29ff.
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110 New York Mercury, May 19, 1783.
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113 *Morse Pocket Gazateer* (1823); *Davison’s Traveller’s Guide* (1833); *Disturnell’s Travel Guide* (1836; 1843; 1848; 1853); *Tanner’s American Traveller* (1839; 1844); *Holley’s Travel Guide* (1844); *Thompson’s Traveller’s Guide* (1845); *Appleton’s Railroad And Steamboat Guide* (1847; 1849; 1859); *Mitchell’s Traveller’s Handbook* (1849; 1857); *Colton’s Traveller’s Guide* (1850); *Conklin’s Guide To Travel* (1850); *Ensign, Bridgman & Fanning’s Travel Guide* (1857); *Trow’s New York City Directory* (1859).



AN ARRIVAL IN THE OLDEN TIME.

Heading for the Bordentown stage ferry
from *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, Vol XX1, No. 3, page 33 (1881).