

# Reminiscences Of Early Days In Wilmington

(By Staff Writer.)

## The New Castle and Frenchtown Railroad

The announcement that the State Highway Department contemplates building a concrete road from New Castle to Christiana, via Hare's Corner, on the line of "the old Frenchtown pike," recalls the fact that, according to history, this road was in a measure linked with the first railroad project in Delaware.

While the railroad has long since passed out, yet there are many persons living who have heard some interesting tales concerning its building and operation, and the impression it made upon the people of its day.

According to Dr. Walter A. Powell's History of Delaware, which was recently issued, the first railroad built in Delaware was known as the New Castle & Frenchtown. It extended from New Castle, on the Delaware river, to Frenchtown, Md., on the Elk river, "to connect with a line of steamboats running between Elkton and Baltimore." The rails were of wood, about six inches square, laid on iron plates, resting on blocks of stone. Holes were driven in these blocks of stone in which wooden pegs were driven. Spikes were then driven through the wooden rails into the wooden plugs, and bars of flat iron were spiked to the rails. The road was completed in 1831.

The first cars, with a capacity of 10 or 12 passengers, were each drawn by one horse. Glasgow and Bear were relay stations for changing horses. The distance from New Castle to Frenchtown was 16½ miles, "which was made in one hour and 35 minutes." In 1832 the motive power was changed to steam, the first locomotive being named "Delaware." With the advent of engines it was found necessary to change from wooden to iron rails spiked to wooden sleepers. With steam power the running time between the two places was reduced to one hour. It was said of this locomotive that "it lately performed 27 miles in two hours."

This railroad continued in actual operation in conjunction with a line of steamboats to Baltimore for about 20 years. It seems to have been operated for some time after that, also, for it is recorded that in 1854 "a railroad was completed from New Castle to Wilmington and operated in connection with the New Castle & Frenchtown railroad."

In 1836 a company was incorporated to build a railroad "from a point near . . . the New Castle & Frenchtown railroad to the southern line of the state in a direction toward Cape Charles, with full power to construct lateral branches to Lewes, Seaford or places within the limits of the state of Delaware." It was not, however, until 1852 that anything definite was accomplished. A company was then organized, with Samuel M. Harrington as president; William Tharp, treasurer, and Thomas B. Bradford, Alec Johnson, William Cannon, Charles Wright, Henry Ridgely, William C. Hedden and Beniah Tharp as directors. In 1853 the company was reorganized by placing on the directorate representatives of the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad Co., and of the New Castle and Wilmington road.

Work was begun at once on the construction of the road; it was completed and opened as far as Middletown in August, 1853. On May 4, 1855, the road was leased to the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Co. In January, 1856, the road was completed and operated as far south as Dover, in the following December to Seaford and in 1859 it was extended to Delmar. In 1859 also the Milford Branch railroad was completed from Harrington to Milford. The Eastern Shore road was opened from Delmar to Salisbury in 1860 and extended to Christiana in 1863. The Junction & Breakwater railroad was begun in 1865 and completed from Mil-

ford to Lewes in 1869. Later branches were built from Lewes to Rehoboth and from Georgetown to Franklin City, Va.

Other branch roads were opened as follows: 1866, Clayton to Smyrna; Townsend to the Maryland state line, which connected with a road to Chestertown and Centerville; 1867, Seaford to the Maryland line, where connection was made with Cambridge; 1868, Clayton to Easton, which was afterward extended to Oxford; 1874, Newark to Delaware City.

In 1874 the Wilmington & Northern (now the local division of the Reading) was opened; the Queen Anne railroad, extending from Love Point, on the Chesapeake bay, to Lewes, on the Delaware bay, was opened in 1897. The local line of the Baltimore & Ohio was completed in 1888.

# HISTORIC SPOTS IN DELAWARE

By Sewell P. Moore

## The Early Railroads of Delaware

**E**ARLY in his career, Oliver Evans made a prediction. This famous Delaware inventor told his father that some days would ride in carriages pulled by steam engines along a roadbed of rails and that travellers would be able to eat breakfast in Baltimore and dinner in Philadelphia. His doubting relatives calculated that this meant a speed of twenty miles an hour and also calculated that Oliver was a little off in his head.

Although circumstances prevented him from actually building the railroad of his dreams, it is fitting that Delaware was one of the earliest States to adopt this new idea of travel. As early as 1831, when steam trains were just beginning to be tried out, Delaware completed its first railroad. Horses were the motive power for the first year, but they were replaced by a steam engine in 1832.

This early road was the New Castle and Frenchtown Railroad, which was a connecting link of a boat line starting from Baltimore. When a journey north was to be made with speed, the traveller went by boat from Baltimore to Elkton and beat the slow stage coaches by several hours. At Elkton he took the railroad to New Castle and continued his way to Philadelphia.

This early road was not an attempt to imitate the steam roads of today, but rather an improved way of traveling by coach. The rails were pieces of timber six inches square. Instead of being laid on ties, they were fastened to blocks of stone. Each rail was laid on a string of separate blocks so as to give an unobstructed roadway down the center for the horses. The blocks were drilled and wooden pegs driven into the holes. The rails were spiked into these wooden plugs. Flat iron bars were then fastened to the wooden rails.

The first cars were glorified horse coaches and carried only ten or twelve passengers. Only one horse was needed to draw the load. Glasgow and Bear were relay stations, where horses were changed and the passengers given an opportunity to get down and stretch their legs. Judged by the standards of the day, this was one of the country's finest and fastest express lines. The entire distance of 16½ miles was covered in one hour and thirty-five minutes.

But the great thrill came the following year when a real steam engine on wheels replaced the faithful one horsepower locomotives. This new contraption of black iron and shining brass was christened the "Delaware", for no one realized that engines were not like horses and didn't need a name. Only Pullman cars today continue this old custom of horse-car days.

This new engine literally tore up the rails. They had to be relaid with wooden cross ties such as we have at the present. The running time was reduced to an even hour, although breakdowns almost every day made the new road less dependable than the old. This old engine made a record for herself by running 27 miles in two hours without a mishap. Although road building went ahead at a great pace, the New Castle and Frenchtown continued to operate as a part of the boat service for twenty years.

The next railroad in the State was

finished in 1838. It was the fore-runner of the P. W. & B., and was not really a Delaware road, as it only cut across the State at Wilmington on its run from Baltimore to Philadelphia.

The second link in the growing Delaware railroad network was an extension of the New Castle and Frenchtown from New Castle to Wilmington. This later became a part of the main line of the Pennsylvania down the Peninsula.

Visions of the present system were seen as early as 1836, when a group of local men organized a company to build a road to Delmar, where it was to connect with a line to Cape Charles. Branches were to run from such points as Seaford and connect with lines to Lewes and other towns. Nothing came of this plan until the company was reorganized in 1852, with Samuel B. Harrington as president. Under his direction, the work went ahead rapidly, and by 1855 the line had extended to Middletown. Just before the beginning of service, the

road was leased to the Philadelphia company, known as the P. W. & B., and they extended the service to Dover in January 1856, and to Seaford in the following December.

Seaford was the southern terminal for three years, when the link between Seaford and Delmar was completed to connect with the Eastern Shore Railroad, then being built to Salisbury. Delmar then became Delaware's southern railroad center and the traveller could go direct from Philadelphia to Salisbury and transfer to several lines that connected with Crisfield and other Eastern Shore towns.

The first branch line in the lower part of the State was also completed in 1859, connecting Milford with Harrington.

(Tomorrow's article is entitled "When Wilmington Was a Farm.")

## TWO STROKE VICTIMS TAKEN TO HOSPITAL

The police ambulance removed two women to city hospitals yesterday as the result of suffering strokes. They were Catherine Cavanaugh, 54, 1608 Lincoln St., who was removed to St. Francis Hospital and Emma Page, 69, 209 East 24th St., who was taken to the Homeopathic Hospital.

David Griffith, 57, 222 West Twenty-ninth St., was removed to the Wilmington General Hospital for observation.

Sarah Cannon, 65, 502 East Fourth St., was removed to St. Francis Hospital suffering from gangrene.

It's easier to glance up and down the columns of the Classified Section than to walk up and down the streets.



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