

FROM BAY TO BAY — Horses and mules were used to pull cargo-laden barges between Newark and New York bays along the Morris Canal. Built in 1836, the canal was used until the early 1900s. When Bayonne became a township in 1861 and declared itself in-

dependent from the rest of Bergen, the Morris Canal served as the township's northernmost boundary. Senior citizens, during the city centennial celebrations, also recalled stories that the canal area was a favorite spot for lovers — if the Indians weren't around!

1849 Map Shows Bayonne's Early Homes, Industries

Editor's Note — The map discussed in this narrative by Dr. Walter Robinson, Bayonne historian, has been presented to the Bayonne Library. Detail on the map does not lend itself to newspaper reproduction, but Dr. Robinson's fascinating account of the route of the Morris Canal and the Plank Road, and the first homes and industry in Bayonne deserves reading, even without the map. Dr. Robinson estimates that the Bayonne of 1849 shown in the map and described had about 600 inhabitants.

The map here reproduced is a segment of a larger map called "Twelve Miles Around New York," published by Sidney in 1849. The Newark Public Library has an unusually well-equipped New Jersey Room which owns the original of this map. The director of the New Jersey Room very kindly arranged to have an unlarged photostat of our own area made for presentation to Bayonne Public Library.

This is the earliest of the large-scale maps capable of showing our peninsula in such detail that every home could be located together with the name of the owner. In general, it looks remarkably like a painted bird's-eye view or a modern aerial photograph. In 1849 this was still the southern end of old Bergen Township.

The name "Bayonne" was not officially adopted until 1861. Therefore, our peninsula was known as "Bergen Neck." The map shows chiefly the "neck" aspect. It will be noticed that the Morris Canal (built in 1836) wanders southward along Newark Bay, then crosses the "Neck" and moves northward toward Jersey City.

Why this long detour? It so happened that there was a deep cleft in the rock, running diagonally from bay to bay. (Today it would intersect Avenue E at 33rd Street, Broadway at 55th Street, Avenue C at 57th Street and pass between our Mercer Park and the Currie's Woods housing project.

In 1836 the canal engineers found it impossible to cross Bergen Hill in a straight line from the Hackensack River to the Hudson. Therefore they took advantage of this natural ravine further south, even though it meant extra mileage. It made possible an almost sea-level route across Bergen.

The water-level of the Canal was only about twelve feet above bay-level, with a canal lock at the Jersey City end and another canal lock at the Hackensack River end. Since there were no streams to feed the Canal, a steam pumping station near the Hackensack lock maintained the water level in the Canal. In 1861, when our five villages were combined into an independent township named "Bayonne," the center line of

the Morris Canal was made our northern boundary (and still is). It will be noticed that the first railroad has already been built through a ravine (north of present Journal Square) because railroad engines could climb where canal boats could not. It will also be noticed that Jersey City, already independent of the rest of old Bergen Township, has a complete street system. But, until 1848, the island on which Jersey City was built was cut off from the mainland of Bergen by swamps. In this year, before this map was made, Grand Street of Jersey City was built across the swamps to meet the old Communipaw Road (now Communipaw Avenue). Here it joined the Stony Point Road (now Garfield Avenue). This road climbed southward

along the steep Bergen Hill and ran along its eastern edge to the Morris Canal. Here it met old Bergen Road running southward from Bergen Square. Before 1848 mail riders and travelers had to detour around through Bergen Square. But after this time they could use this shorter diagonal route. In 1850 a group of business-men sensed the need of an improved surface on this important road from Jersey City to Staten Island. They formed the Jersey City and Bergen Point Plank Road Company, paved the road with wooden planks, and charged small tolls for its use. After 1850 the Plank Road bridge over the Morris Canal was our only road connection with the rest of Bergen Township. It will be noticed that this Plank Road wandered

considerably to the westward until it met the line of present Broadway at 32nd Street and followed this line to the Bergen Point Ferry.) Along this northern section the map clearly shows the village of Pamrapo, which later became known as "Saltersville," and the diagonal "Centre Street" which was replaced by right angled numbered streets after 1890. (But a two-block section of the old Plank Road remains today, between 47th and 49th Streets.)

In 1849 Constable Hook was an island cut off from the mainland (at present Avenue F) by swamps. The Hook Road (now 21st Street) is shown crossing these swamps on an embankment. At that time Constable Hook was nearly covered by Van Buskirk's Farm, with two exceptions. The dangerous Hassard Powder Works were allowed to locate at Constable's Point, as far as possible from inhabited areas. And on Kill von Kull we see our first permanent industry, a paint factory.

North of the intersection of the Hook Road and the Plank Road we notice the village of Centerville. We also observe that our shores of the Kill von Kull is already lined with estates, mostly owned by New York businessmen. The Jersey Central Railroad will not be completed until 1864. But in 1849 an excellent steamboat service connected the Bergen Point Dock with New York. And estates already extend along Newark Bay shore up to the present 30th Street. Such is the picture of our rural suburban peninsula in 1849.