

## **Historic Data Given of First Travel Routes**

**Dr. Mitchell, Genealogist, Writes of Bayonne's Early History**

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**Stages Ran Here**

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**Railroad Greatest Factor in Development of This City**

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It was March 15, 1861, that Bayonne obtained her independence from the town of Bergen, even as exactly two centuries before Bergen had been granted her independence from New Amsterdam and the name Bayonne first appears in the Annals of our State.

Today we are inclined to point with pride to the progress of the town in which we live and the transportation facilities we enjoy. Now as we a city took part in the opening of the Vehicular Tunnel under the Hudson River that connects our big-sister city of Manhattan, it might be well that we turn back the pages of the past, use a while and review the story of the peninsula we know as Bayonne that we compare the past with the present and in the writer's opinion not always to the detriment of the past.

To better understand the attainment of the present we will have to consider the activities of pioneer and settler, the prosperous colonist, patriot and the Troy in the olden days, till the advent of steam water and the land traffic and the recent achievements of the past century.

### **Nature Furnished First Routes**

Situated as we are at the Southern tip of the county we will have to go back into the history of the towns north of us now forming Jersey City the routes of travel as

interest must perforce pass through that city before they cross our boundary. However, it was the routes furnished by nature that were first available for traffic and transit and this to Bayonne is the Kill van Kull.

First only the fly boats and yachts of the Dutch of Manhattan in their limited trips of exploration till they used this route from New Amsterdam to Hackensack. Even in the very first land grants on our Kill shore the lot on the east side of Broadway from First to Fifth streets was reserved as "The Ferry Lot" showing that a ferry to Staten Island was to be provided for even though it came a year later. It was not until the latter part of the eighteenth century that packet sloops began to convey passengers from Elizabeth Port to New York and we have records that on Saturday, November 10, 1789 the Elizabeth packet sloop was wrecked off Bergen Point and eight passengers from the present Union and Morris Counties were drowned. This however was not the first accident to travel via Bayonne, as we will see later.

### **Few Vessels Stopped Here**

In 1664 the Dutch government of New Netherlands temporarily ceased and the English Colony at Elizabeth was founded. The next year Robert Treat and his Connecticut Church-folks sailed through the "Kills" and founded Newark and commerce of the Kills grew as New Jersey opened up to settlement. But except for individual vessels they all passed Bayonne. The small settlement at the Hook and Pamrapo was too far off the route to attract. So on through the Revolutionary War period to the days of steam navigation. Just when the first steam passenger vessel coasted the north shore of Staten Island the writer is at present unable to say of if it made stops on the Bayonne side.

Foulton and Livingston had secured from the State of New York a ten year monopoly to run passenger steam vessels in the waters of New York State consequently the first steamboats on the Kills were compelled to land their passengers at New Brighton at the mouth of the "Kills" to complete their journey to New York in sailing sloops. On the opening of the Elizabethtown and Somerville Railroad from Elizabeth Port to Somerville, now the "Central" and its boats connection with the New York and Elizabeth Port ferry, Bayonne had regular steamboat connections with not only New York City. Which continued two trips each way each day except Sunday to within comparatively recent years. And for a short time after the industrial developments they also made a Hook stop during the late 70's. In 1835 the steamboat Newark the first regular liner from that city to New York was burned in the "Kills" off our shore. But history is silent if she ever made a Bergen Point stop, though other Newark steamers did at a later date.

### **Many Drowned in a Ferry Upsets**

From the very first settlement of the Kill Shore of Bergen Point it would seem that some sort of ferry was at the service of such settlers as did not themselves possess boats. The fact that one of the original town lots was designated as "The Ferry Lot" locates its site though the name of the ferryman is lost to history. From the founding of the Reformed Church on Richmond Avenue, over 250 years ago, many of the Bayonne people found it more convenient to cross the Kills to service than to journey to the church in Bergen Square. But soon after 1760 a scow ferry boat that was sufficient size to transport vehicles and teams was in service and we read that in August, 1763, the Philadelphia stage with its four horse team and nine passengers were lost by the upsetting of the scow. The bodies were recovered and interred on the Hook. Four years later in

1767, the Philadelphia stage being insecurely secured on the scow ran off the boat with passengers and team and among the lost was Miss Morris an actress of note at the period and her maid. These two accidents led to the abandonment of the route from New York to Philadelphia through our city, and the "Flying Machine" as the stage was known from the wonderful speed of reaching Philadelphia from Jersey City ferry between daylight and dark. But we have no record that these stages ever carried local passengers.

From that period until Captain A.C. Nickerson put the little steam ferry "West Point" into service it was a rowboat service. However, from the beginning of the steamboat service on the north shore of Staten Island many Bergen Point residents crossed the Kills to connect this route to New York a practice that continued till the building of the Rapid Transit. The "Kill" looked deserted when compared to a time when its speedy side wheel occupied its waters and the horizon was white with sales.

To grasp some ideas of progress through the years of the land route to our city we will have to turn our attention to the history of the city to the north of us, and of the original town of Bergen of which we formed an isolated part.

### **First New York – Jersey Ferry**

The first regular ferry from New York to New Jersey was established at the foot of Communipaw Avenue and later the first road in the county was laid out from this ferry the village of Bergen. This route followed very closely the present Communipaw Avenue from the shops to the Junction then Summit Avenue to Academy Street where it entered the village from the east. This route did not last many years for William Jansen who had the ferry rights since 1661 fell out with the Governor and another ferry was established from Manhattan Paulus Hook a causeway built over the marsh to just below

the present Jersey City Hospital where a winding road climbed the hill to Academy Street. A full century elapsed before Bergen Avenue was extended to the Kill Van Kull shore.

It was not until 1836 that the Morris Canal crossed Bergen Neck building a bridge where it passed under the only road to Bayonne and that period, the old Bergen Road to Bergen Point. I have been told that packet boats did operate on the Morris Canal. If so I doubt very much that they transported passengers east of Newark. However the building of the Canal established the line that was to be the northern boundary of our city, while the bridge built by the company was to be for many years the gateway to the peninsula. The Bayonne abutment is still standing, one of the few remaining landmarks, 100 feet or so west of the Avenue C Bridge while the bridge was still in service after 1900.

When this road was first laid down it is not mentioned in available records. But we know the Philadelphia stage was operating over it in 1763. And in 1766 a road was planned from Paulus Hook to Bergen Point. This was however not for the entire distance but a road to connect with the Bergen Road (avenue).