

THE STONY PART OF SCHUYLKILL

ITS NAVIGATION, FISHERIES, FORDS AND FERRIES.

BY CHARLES R. BARKER.

The Swede who settled on the Delaware had little need for roads. He found the river a broad highway, with its appropriate vehicle, the canoe, already manufactured, and gliding smoothly over its waters. In the use of this craft, the Swede became adept, and, paddling swiftly from cove to cove, saved himself the burden of hewing a path through the wilderness.

The Swedish hamlets hugged the Delaware bank, and their farms spread up-stream along the marshes. Even when, after the coming of Penn's settlers, the Yocums, Rambos, Mattsons and Holsteins moved up the Schuylkill, the water-loving Swedes did not settle inland, but had their plantations laid out along the river.

The English settlers saw the advantage of getting lots with river fronts. Rule Four of Penn's conditions of settlement reads:

"That where any number of purchasers, more or less, whose number of acres amounts to five or ten thousand acres, desire to sit together in a lot or township, they shall have their lot or township cast together, in such places as have convenient harbours, or *navigable rivers* attending it, if such can be found"; etc.

The first lands surveyed within the present limits of Lower Merion were laid out fronting the Schuylkill. Adjoining them, also on the river, was the Manor of Mount Joy, which Penn had reserved for his daughter Letitia. The original township of Merion, as surveyed for Dr. Edward Jones and his associates, was so divided that 12 of its 17 purchasers had water frontage; and a glance at the original draught of survey

shows how evidently practical considerations were sacrificed to this desire to be "on the water."

Of much greater volume then than now, the Schuylkill was navigable by fair-sized vessels as far up as the Falls. Many farmers of Merion and vicinity, in 1706, asked for a road to a landing place just below the Falls, "this being [they explained] one of the nearest places to us that a vessell of any Burthen can come to." But the smaller craft, if skilfully guided, found the foaming rapids no obstacle, and from the Indian canoe, with its adaptability for "shooting" the perilous places, was soon developed a heavy type of freighter, hewn from a single trunk. William Penn saw one, made from a poplar tree, that carried four tons of brick.

As early as 1740, Thomas Rees had a saw-mill in Lower Merion, "fronting upon Scylkil, so that the said Mill may be cheaply supply'd with Timber." David Davis, who owned the mill in 1749, described it then as "very convenient for water carriage, both for bringing loads to the mill, and rafting timber to Philadelphia, it being by the river Schuylkill"; but it was not until 1758, after Christopher Robins had improved the property, and had built a grist-mill, as well, that a public road to the mills was asked for; and we may assume that "water carriage" was the object in locating the grist-mill, also, at that point. At Anthony Levering's grist-and-saw-mills, at what is today West Manayunk, there was, in 1774, "a canal . . . from the mill to the river by which boats and canoes may unload at the mill on freshes"; while the land of Gerard Jones was considered "convenient to water carriage, having about 140 perches front, on the river Schuylkill."

A petition for a road in Upper Merion, in 1772, informs the Court that John Roberts has purchased a merchant-and-grist-mill, not far from Schuylkill, and

that "said Roberts hath an Intention of Transporting his Flour from said Mill to Philadelphia down said River at all suitable Seasons." In 1785, this grist-mill had a capacity of 15,000 bushels of wheat per year.

As trade grew in volume and variety, the river appeared a broad avenue, over which were hauled to market the product of the farms and mills of Montgomery, Chester and Berks. Behind the canoe came the "long-boat," narrow of beam and sharp-prowed, laden with barrels of flour from the mills of Reading. "Flats," or shallows, piled to overhanging with hay, or "arks" filled with produce, dotted the water. From the upper Schuylkill, bringing the pine and hemlock timber of the Blue Mountains, came strings of log-built rafts, undulating like serpents through the narrow places, as their helmsmen skilfully directed them by long oars fixed bow and stern. Wherever clearing went on, or where wooded slopes came down to the river, saw-mills sprang up, and boards, shingles and lath helped to weigh down the heavy-laden vessels. The later rafts were built of boards, bound with withes of hickory.

Here, as elsewhere, knowledge of the river was the surest safeguard against disaster. Besides falls, the Schuylkill abounded with small islands, rocks, sand-bars and shoals. So, while "flats" sailed at all seasons, "long boats" must patiently await high water, and then, taking advantage of the "fresh," must shove away promptly. Thus, the downpour that made land travel unbearable, proved a boon to the mariner of Reading or of the Little Schuylkill.

Rounding the bend at Spring Mill, the boatman saw rough work ahead. The steep banks of Lower Merion and Roxborough confined the current within a narrow channel, while in the next six miles there was a fall of

24 feet. Before him was Spring Mill fall, a rapid of sufficient import to have been mentioned by the Provincial Council, in 1730, in an act relating to obstructions in the river. Somewhere between the fall and Mill creek, there was a ridge of rock known as "Squaw's rock," which may or may not have extended into the Schuylkill; its name strongly suggests one of those "lover's leaps," whose legends, so familiar in all parts of Pennsylvania, attribute to the stolid aborigines a form of emotionalism probably unknown to them. Passing on his right a number of islands, the boatman reached (at what is now Flat Rock dam) Rummel fall—a rapid whose sinister voice, raised high during spring freshets, reverberated among the hills of Lower Merion, "Wind N.," wrote Joseph Price, in May, 1805, "could hear Rummel falls Roare plain." The turbulence of the fall may be judged today by the rough character of the river bed below the dam, where, at low water, an active youth may cross (as the writer has seen one cross) by springing from rock to rock; while curious "pot-holes" and gnarled trees show the force of the water in past times. A visitor to Flat Rock dam in 1818 describes it as erected "on the very spot where *Rumhill* Falls endangered the lives of the boatmen."

Five hundred yards beyond these rapids, Flat Rock jutted out of the water—a landmark which has given its name to a dam, a bridge, a tunnel, a road, a turn-pike, a hotel and a village. Here the river skirted the base of a rocky hill (since pierced by Flat Rock tunnel), and here again, foaming, turbulent waters warned the mariner of another fall—Mount Ararat—named for the old Jones plantation in Lower Merion, one of the boundaries of which here touched the river. "Mount Ararat Fall" is referred to in a patent for a nearby island, dated in 1772; while its treacherous character is suggested by a contemporary advertisement:

"Roxborough township, Philadelphia county.

February 3, 1773.

Was taken up, on the sixth day of January last past, by the subscriber, from the rocks in the river Schuylkill, at the Falls of Mount Airy, the remains of a RAFT of WHITE-OAK hogshead STAVES, that came down the said river adrift. The owner thereof, on proving his property, and paying charges, is desired to take the said staves away.

JACOB AMOS."

Below Mount Ararat fall was "the Narrows," or "narrow place in Schuylkill," mentioned in deeds of sale or partition of the Jones lands, which fronted upon it. But the real test of the boatman's eye, arm and nerve was reserved for his encounter with the falls of Schuylkill, two miles farther along. A map of 1816, recorded with an agreement between the Schuylkill Navigation Company and Josiah White, of Blockley township, shows in great detail the numerous rocks, islands and gravel banks that here beset the way, with the main channel, through which a boat must be guided with the utmost care, hugging the right bank. Here the raging waters were enough to make any but the experienced lose his head, and here, sometimes, the navigator came to grief. A news item of 1765 says, "Tuesday last a Boat coming down Schuylkill, over-set at the Falls, four Miles from Town, when two Men were drowned."

In 1761, the Assembly of Pennsylvania declared that "the river Schuylkill is navigable for rafts, boats and other small craft in time of high freshes only, occasioned by the obstruction of rocks and bars of sand and gravel," and commissioners were appointed to receive subscriptions, and apply the resulting fund to the improvement of the channel. This was evidently slow work, and as the Revolution interrupted all operations, little was done until many years later, when improvement took the form of canal construction.

In making their report, the Commissioners recommended the removal of fishing-dams, which had been

a source of contention between boatmen and fishermen for many years. We shall learn more of these fisheries later. The Commissioners also proposed to remove loose stones, so that flat-bottomed boats might navigate successfully; while the removal of rocks at the falls near Reading and below Morris's mill (Spring Mill), it was thought, might render the river navigable for timber products, or even for boats of 4000 lbs. burthen. A similar view was taken in 1789, by John Adlum and Benjamin Rittenhouse, who had been appointed for the same purpose. They reported, in part:—

“We conceived it most advisable to examine that part of the Schuylkill lying between Spring Mill and the Great Falls, being that part of the river said to be the most dangerous to the navigation of boats from Reading to this city.”

Not the least attractive feature of the picturesque Schuylkill was the wealth of islands, which, throughout its course, diversified its pleasant blue waters with the vivid green of spring, or the golden and russet hues of autumn. Many of these islands now tell no tale; but the official surveys, giving names and locations, point out the very places where they have sunk beneath the pools formed by Fairmount, Flat Rock and Conshohocken dams. For some reason not quite clear, all islands in the Province had been reserved to the Proprietary, one of Penn's instructions to Lieutenant Governor Markham having read:

“Let no islands be disposed of to anybody, but all things remain as they were in that respect till I come.”

This rule was strictly observed, and so, for three-quarters of a century, numerous islands of the Schuylkill lay unexploited, the resort of wild fowl, and, perhaps, the pasturage of hogs and other live stock, until the growth of the fishing industry, discovering a use for them, made them a thing of value, and a subject of bargain and sale. And so, in 1760, a warrant issued for their survey.

For even as the ebb and flow of bird migration through the air and over the land, so was the yearly migration of fish in the rivers, of the Province. Like birds, too, each swarm sought and found, by an unerring sense, its favorite haunt. After untold ages of this natural selection, each variety had so developed its individual qualities, that even today, the flavor of Delaware shad is, to the epicure's palate, like unto none other. By May 25th, the fish had begun to arrive in the Schuylkill, and soon, in vast numbers, shad, herring, catfish and sturgeon were making their way upstream to spawn. At fording places, where the river shoaled, travelers crossing the stream could descry, in the water all about them, the dark mass of migrant hordes, out of which, now and again, the white belly of a catfish sent back a gleam of reflected sunlight. During certain prescribed seasons, shad were protected by law, but the "open season" was eagerly awaited, and then, wherever weir could be built to detain the fish, or seine spread to ensnare them, there was great sport. From early times, however, weirs had been a bone of contention between fisherman and boatman, and were finally outlawed. Stone fishing-dams, too, were constructed, which extended far enough into the river to confine the current to a narrow channel, and so greatly aid in the catch. An agreement of partition, dated in 1704, between Thomas and Cadwalader Jones, of Lower Merion, mentions "the Runn that Leads to the fishing Damm"; while John Melish's map of Philadelphia county, more than a century later, indicates "Fishdam Falls," which seems to have been close to Flat Rock dam.

Writing about 1750, Gottlieb Mittelberger says: "In Pennsylvania multitudes of fish can be caught every spring in the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers. . . . The fish ascend at their season from the sea . . . so many are often caught that many a one

salts a whole barrel or tub full of them enough for a year." "A half barrel of Shad" is noted, in 1778, among the confiscated effects of Melchior Meng, who owned land at Pencoyd. Pickled sturgeon, too, was a great delicacy, and detailed recipes for its preparation may be read among the "ads" of the "Pennsylvania Gazette" of that period.

Robert Sutcliffe, giving his impressions of the Falls of Schuylkill, early in the last century, noted that

"At this part of the river the Shad Fishery is prosecuted with great spirit in the early part of summer. Almost every farmer who happens to have a field on the banks of the river, keeps a net for this purpose; and, with a little industry, may, in the course of two or three weeks, lay up a supply for the whole year. The fish are salted, and are brought out, through the winter, as a relish at breakfast and supper";

which, considering the lapse of time, agrees remarkably with what Mittelberger had set down in his journal.

In his "Early History of the Falls of Schuylkill," Charles V. Hagner, commenting on a statement by John F. Watson, says:

"There was nothing extraordinary in Mr. Shronk's catching 3000 catfish in a night; I dare say there are persons still living in the neighborhood who have taken more than that number repeatedly, and that so late as 1817. I have seen men, in one scoop of the dip-net, have it so full of these catfish as to be unable to lift them in the boat . . . and I have known as many as seven large shad taken at one scoop of the dip-net."

By 1767, so great had become the activity of fishermen on the lower Schuylkill, that dwellers on the upper reaches of the river complained of a scarcity of fish. It was therefore enacted that not more than one seine or net (excepting hoop-nets) should be cast in any one pool, or fishing place, within the same 24 hours. Where a pool was used in common by residents of opposite banks of the river, they must fish on alternate days, turn and turn alike, a day to be from noon to noon. In 1771, the use of seine or net was prohibited "between the Sun's Setting on Saturday, and the Sun's

Rising on the Monday next following." Penalty for infraction of the law was £5, to be paid to the Overseers of the Poor. Thus was the fish given "a chance for his life," and the fisherman of upper Schuylkill a chance for a living, while doubtless an occasional fine helped to enrich the Poor Board's treasury.

Moving up stream from the Falls, we find a fishery at what is now Pencoyd. In 1758, Woolery Meng, Jacob Coleman and Melchior Meng, all of Germantown, bought 100 acres in Lower Merion, fronting on Schuylkill below the present West Laurel Hill Cemetery. Next year, they made partition of their land. Melchior Meng, in 1768, advertises a lot of 14 acres "bounding on Schuylkill, with a Conveniency for a Shad Fishery, having a small Stone Fishing-house on it." Coleman, in 1770, likewise advertises a

" . . . tract of land, of about 40 acres, situate in Merion township, bounded by lands of Melchior Myng and John Roberts, with a large front on the river Schuylkill, on which there is a shad fishery, which with a little more improvement, may be made a good one."

In 1778, Melchior Meng's lands were confiscated as the estate of a loyalist, but must have been restored, for next year he sold his Lower Merion "division" to William Smith, D.D., who held it until 1803; then conveyed it, with other lands, to Robert Kennedy, a Roxborough farmer. In 1806, Kennedy disposed of about half his purchase to Philip Mowery, of Lower Merion, together with the privilege of fishing in the Schuylkill the whole length of his land; the remainder he sold in 1808 to Messrs. Robeson, Alexander and Randall, of Roxborough, who very soon reconveyed it to Tobias and William Miller, of Lower Merion—doubtless the same William and Tobias Miller who leased a shad fishery from Andrew Anderson, owner of most of the site of the West Laurel Hill Cemetery. The original lease was in existence not many years ago.

Close to the Roxborough shore (now the Manayunk

“island”), and facing the green slopes where, today, rise the gray memorials of Westminster Cemetery, lay a resort of water fowl, significantly called “Killdeer island.” Under this name, it was patented, in 1808, to Philip Shubert, and Michael, Benjamin and John Tibbens, being then described as in Roxborough township, and “susceptible of cultivation”; but evidently fishing, not agriculture, attracted the purchasers. Squire Perry L. Anderson, an erstwhile collector of Lower Merion lore, notes that Tibben’s fishery was “where Pulp Works now are”; and Sherman Day, writing of the locality in 1818, says, in his “Historical Collections of the State of Pennsylvania”:

“Previous to this time, and to the erection of Fairmount dam, it was remarkable only for an extensive shad fishery.”

Duck island, about two acres in extent, was a short distance above Green Lane bridge, and opposite Anthony Levering’s land. A patent for it was obtained in 1811, by Aaron Levering, who probably established a fishery there, for Squire Anderson, himself a descendant of the Levering family, places Levering’s fishery “above the present Manayunk bridge.” Writing of Duck island, forty years ago, William J. Buck says that it is covered with numerous willows, and a favorite resort for wild fowl.

Jones island, still on the map, may be found close to the lower portal of Flat Rock tunnel. It was patented, in 1772, to Margaret, widow of Robert Jones, and was described as being “opposite the land late of Robt. Jones deced & just below Mount Ararat Fall.”

Between Flat Rock dam and the tunnel, and probably on an island, was Bicking’s fishery. Its proprietor, Frederick Bicking, a well-known Lower Merion paper-maker, died in 1809; a year later, his executors conveyed to his sons David and Frederick a pool and fishery in the Schuylkill, known as Rummel Falls Fishery, with the privilege of drawing a seine, etc., along

the river bank during the shad fishing season. In the same year, Michael S. Snyder applied for "an Island in the River Schuylkill, situate in Lower Merion Township, Montgomery County, below Bucking (Bicking's?) Island, supposed to contain about half an Acre." Frederick Bicking had sold to Conrad Krickbaum, in 1798, a piece of land extending from Mill creek to Mill (now Hollow) road; in 1807, Krickbaum conveyed to Philip Shuperd, a Roxborough cooper, a half interest in an island and shad fishery in the Schuylkill, opposite Krickbaum's land. The purchase carried with it the right of drying fishing-nets and building a cabin on the shore, the purchaser to pay half the expense of keeping island and fishery in repair, and to give Krickbaum first refusal of purchasing said fishing place.

It is difficult to realize that beneath the waters impounded by Flat Rock dam lies the site of a once flourishing industry. Yet Hagner relates that the building of the dam raised the water in the mouth of Mill creek about fifteen feet, while a description of the dam quoted by Thompson Westcott says, "It slackens the current to the distance of about five miles up the river, the pool extending into the limestone and marble country more than a mile above Spring Mill." These statements suffice to explain the disappearance of the chain of islands once strung along the Schuylkill between Mill creek and Spring Mill.

"On Lough Neagh's banks, as the fisherman strays,
When the clear, cold eve's declining,
He sees the round towers of other days
In the waves beneath him shining."

Until the barrier of the dam cut off its supply of fish, and its islands, their occupation gone, sank, Atlantis-like, beneath the rising waters, Port Royal fishery did a thriving business. Situated just above Mill creek, it was approached, from the Roxborough side, by what is still called Port Royal avenue. A road

of the same name led to it from the Lower Merion side; these were connected by a ford, through which, no doubt, the islands were made accessible. In 1798-9, a public road was opened along the Lower Merion shore from Spring Mill ferry "to the intersection of a road called Port Royal road" (probably Hagy's Ford road).

By a patent from Thomas and Richard Penn, in 1768, title was vested in William Johnson, John Culp, Leonard Streeper, Joseph Johnson and Christopher Robins, to Islands 1, 2, 3 and 4 in the Schuylkill, opposite lands of Hugh Roberts and Christopher Robins on the west side. Through devises by Robins, Streeper and William Johnson, these interests descended to sundry children and grandchildren, who, in 1806, sold to William Hagy, of Lower Merion, and Jacob Culp, John Culp and Jacob Johnson, all of Roxborough, three-fifth parts of an island or islands, and shad fishery, in the Schuylkill, called Port Royal. By another patent, in November, 1808, John Culp became seized of "an Island in the River Schuylkill called Port Royal, situate in Lower Merion township, Montgomery County, and opposite to the Land of the said John Culp and William Haga"; next month, he sold a seven-eighths interest to William Hagy, Jacob Culp, and Jacob and Samuel Johnson. In the following spring, all these parties conveyed to William Bicking, of Lower Merion, and William Wolf, of Roxborough, part of an island and sand-bar, with shad fishery, in consideration of which the grantees surrendered their right to fish in the channel on the easterly side of the river.

To determine, at this point, the proportionate share of each owner, calls for a mathematical computation quite out of place in these pages. But it is worthy of note, that, while land along the Lower Merion shore was high at \$100 to \$150 per acre, an island scarcely three acres in extent, probably unfit for farming and

without timber, was valued, because of its fisheries, at \$600.

A patent was obtained, in 1770, by John Roberts, miller, of Lower Merion, for an island in the Schuylkill. It was seized, in 1778, as the estate of a loyalist, but, remaining unsold, was restored by special act of Assembly, to Jane Roberts, the widow, who sold it, in 1794, to William Hagy. Among the confiscated personal effects of John Roberts, may be noted "A Net"—"29 fish hooks and sneads"—"fishing tackle"—"hooks and lines"—"fish angler"—all betraying the owner's interest, not only in the fisheries of the Schuylkill, but in the trout streams tributary to it, as well.

Michael S. Snyder applied, in 1810, for "an Island in the River Schuylkill, situate in Lower Merion township, Montgomery County, above Port Royal Island." Somewhere nearby was the fishery of Hugh Roberts, referred to in his will. In pursuance of this will, the executors, in 1809, sold to Frederick Stellwagon, of Philadelphia, a tract on the Schuylkill, reserving the privilege of the river and river bank "as far down as the Ridge of Rock known by the name of squaws for the use of a fishery."

A draught of 1756 shows two islands opposite the end of the present Young's Ford road. The larger one, called the Lower Island, containing about four acres, was surveyed in 1767, and was granted, in 1788, to Henry Dewees, William Dewees and Peter Streeper. It was then described as "a little below Reese ap Edwards Ford Opposite to the Lands now or late of David Davis and Hugh Roberts . . . in Montgomery County." Probably it is this island, reduced in size, to which campers still resort, and between which and the "fast land" on either side, their canoes today glide back and forth, as did those of their Indian predecessors, ages ago.

That many of the first roads of Pennsylvania were

Indian trails, there seems no reason to doubt. The Ridge road (now Ridge avenue, or Reading pike), leading from Philadelphia to Swedes' ford, was one of these, and was much resorted to by dwellers on the western side of the Schuylkill in going to and from town. Trails there were, to be sure, on the westerly side of the river, and he who went afoot must needs use them to reach Middle ferry (Market street) or Powell's ferry (Fairmount). But the Ridge road provided a shorter route, as well as a way of evading ferry tolls; so, as horseback riding became general, and carts began to appear, the fording places were sought out, or were learned from the Indians, and soon many bridle paths of Merion, Haverford and Radnor began to converge upon the Schuylkill fords.

A minute of the Provincial Council, dated December 19, 1693, reads:

"Upon the petition of the Inhabitants of Radnor, requesting a road to be Laid outt from the upper part of the sd. townshipp of Radnor unto marion ford; And of Andrew Robeson & Lawrence Cock, Esqrs., Requesting a confirmacon of the road that now is from marionford to philadelphia, and that it come into the third street in the sd. towne,

Ordered, That a warrant from the Leivt. Governor be directed to the Surveyor generall, to Lay outt the roads desired."

The Court of Quarter Sessions, in 1734, was asked to confirm a road, leading from the parting of the Plymouth and Norriton roads, on Barren Hill, to John Roberts's Mill road, in Lower Merion, by way of Rees ap Edward's ford. From the first settlement of the Province (say the petitioners) this road has been used without interruption; but "is now stopt to their great damage, there not being on the said river any other ford near the said place, nor by reason of its steep banks is elsewhere accessible with Carts or Carriages." This highway, now known as Young's Ford road, was duly opened in the following year. Spring Mill road, opened during the colonial period, was also connected, by a spur across the present Howard Wood

estate, with this ford road. Rees ap Edward's ford was a gateway, not only to the limekilns of Plymouth and Whitemarsh, but also to the Philadelphia markets, via Ridge road, connection with which was made at Barren Hill.

A mile below Rees ap Edward's ford, travelers passing between Norriton (Ridge) road, in Roxborough, and Lancaster road, in Lower Merion, crossed the Schuylkill at Port Royal, just above the mouth of Mill creek. This ford was known in later years as Hagy's; the road approaching it through Lower Merion, opened in 1758, is still Hagy's Ford road, but so altered is its course that the explorer can with difficulty trace the ancient roadbed down the steep slope of Mill creek valley.

As a ford is usually named for the owner of the land at one end or other of the fording tract, it follows that a change of name indicates a real estate transfer. Mary Walter's ford, below Flat Rock tunnel, was known as Jacob Jones's, before 1798. In that year a road was opened from the ford on Schuylkill known as Mary Walter's ford "on the West side of Lloyd Jones's Paper Mill to the old Lancaster road," at what was lately called Merionville. Venerable Jacob Jones, making his will in 1807, referred to this as "a laid out road leading to Mary Walters Ford"; and deeds of later date confirm the spelling; yet through some error, today's maps will have it "Mary *Waters* Ford road," while a sign, "*Waterford* road," set up along this thoroughfare, and seen, some time since, by the writer, caps the climax by transmuting this old Welsh name into Irish! Benedict Leedom, whose old mill still stands beside the Reading Railway tracks, afterwards owned the land at this ford; it was here that teams from the marble quarries of Upper Merion customarily crossed—among them, we may believe, the "great

marvel stone team" of Titus Yerkes, better known as proprietor of the "General Wayne" tavern.

From Haverford township, a trail perhaps as ancient as old Haverford road, led, by way of Merion Meeting-house, towards the Schuylkill, and passing down the valley between Westminster and West Laurel Hill Cemeteries, followed the river bank upstream to the ford called Levering's. Comparison of present-day maps with a draught of 1770 fixes the position of this ford as that of the present Pennsylvania Railroad bridge. On the Lower Merion side, the road was carried past the ford to Anthony Levering's mill; on the Roxborough side, it followed what is now Main street, Manayunk, down-stream to the Ridge road, at Wissahickon creek. Travelers destined for farther up "the Ridge," ascended the steep slope of Green lane (as it is now called), thus greatly shortening the distance.

Of the road to Levering's ford, a petition of 1770 says:

"That on the first Settlement of the said Township & other Townships adjoining Many of the Inhabitants made use of the ford on Schuylkill near Anthony Levering's Mill which being on experience found beneficial to the Inhabitants they according to the Mode of those times (no law of the Province being then provided for laying out roads) Opened a Road from Haverford to the said Ford."

Two decades of increasing travel between Merion and Philadelphia had worn deep the trails through the woods, when, in 1703/4, "Inhabitants of the West side of Schuylkill" petitioned for a road from Merion Meeting-house to Powell's ferry; also, for

"a Road branching out of the former thence over the Lower ford of Schuylkill to the Road that leads from Wissahickon to Philadelphia, This Road also being of great use and of about twenty years standing."

This "lower ford," called, in a petition of 1705, "the Ford at Schuylkill near Garret Moreton's," was situated just above the present Fairmount Park trolley bridge. Scull and Heap's map of 1750 indicates ford

and surroundings. On the left bank, a lane led up from the ford to Wissahickon (Ridge) road, which it reached near to where Huntingdon street now joins. Hereabouts, the Hood family owned a large tract; and in due time, a tavern, kept by one of the family, hung out the sign of "Robin Hood." Like the negro's ingenious fish-trap, with a mouth up-stream and a mouth down-stream, "to catch 'em a-comin' and a-gwine," this inn was thus most favorably placed for the accommodation of the thirsty from all quarters, while nearby Nicetown lane, connecting with Germantown, York and Frankford roads, gave Robin Hood almost the advantage of a spider in the center of his web. Doubtless it was some of his "merrie men" who conferred his name upon the ford, which, thereafter, was also known as "Robin Hood."

In the "Pennsylvania Gazette" for March 1, 1775, James Hood offers at private sale:

"The Robin-Hood Tavern, with about $3\frac{1}{2}$ acres of orchard and garden ground thereto belonging, lying on the Ridge, or Wissahiccon road, about 4 miles from Philadelphia, likewise a lot of land adjoining, containing about 15 acres; bounded by the said road, the Ford road, the river Schuylkill, Joseph Swift's, and Hood's other land. . . . it is suitable for a Gentleman's country-seat, having an excellent prospect over the river aforesaid."

The strategic value, during the Revolution, of these fords, is realized when it is understood that no bridge spanned the Schuylkill until 1776, when a floating bridge was thrown across at Middle ferry as a military necessity. On September 11, 1777, while cannon still thundered at Brandywine, the Council passed the following minute:

"Ordered, That the Officers commanding the Militia of the County of Bucks, now at the Barracks, do immediately send a guard of Four Men to Robin Hood Ford, over the Schuylkill, four Men to the upper Ferry, Four Men to the Bridge, & four Men to Gray's Ferry, to take care of the Artillery placed at those places."

On the 12th, Washington's battered army went into camp at Germantown, but by the 14th, ready to be "up

and at 'em," it was again on the march. Lieutenant James McMichael, who was with Washington, has left us the following faithful account of the movements of his division:

[1777] "September 14—At 9 A. M. we marched from camp near Germantown, N. N. W. for a few miles, up the great road from Philadelphia to Reading, then turning W. S. W. we crossed the Schuylkill in the centre between Philadelphia and Swedes Ford, 8 miles from each. We reached the great road to Lancaster, at Merion Meeting house, and proceeded up that road, when we encamped in an open field, being denied every desirable refreshment."

There can be no doubt that this crossing was made at Hag's ford. Other divisions used the fords higher up. Colonel John Bull, writing, at about this time, to President Wharton, says:

"At present I am unable (if I was desirous) by reason of a violent Cold and Pain in my Limbs, occasion'd by a fall of my horse in the River Shulkil in conducting some general officers and a Body of troops over Reesap Edward's Ford."

While the opening of a ford depended only on the "sufferance," of owners of abutting land, a ferry was a Proprietary grant, constituting a monopoly over that part of the river within four miles on either side. In the dispute, in 1693-4, between Philip England, keeper of the Middle ferry, and Nathaniel Mullinax, this Proprietary privilege was affirmed, and the right of Mullinax to maintain an unauthorized ferry was denied.

At the same time, complaint was made against William Powell, who, for six months past, had been ferrying over people and horses. But in 1695, "the petition . . . of the welsh for a ferrie att Wm. Powell's" was "referred to the Committee for preparing of Bills to be past into Laws," and evidently met with favor. In 1703, a road was ordered, "Leading from Willm. Powel's Ferry, on Skuylkill, & passing by Haverford meeting House to ye Principal part of Goshen Township." Three years later, Council denied a petition from the Welsh Tract, for a ferry between lands of

Edward Roberts and Thomas Shute, "to be kept by the said Robt.," on the ground that "no other Public ferry over Schuylkill can be allowed untill a much Closer & better settlemt. of the Countrey shew a greater necessity for it than at present appears."

The original petition for this ferry is among the Logan Papers, in the collections of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

A petition, in 1723, to the Court of Quarter Sessions, urges the necessity of a road "from the Ferry lately erected over the Schuylkill near the Lower Ford to the Road from Roxborough Mill (or Andrew Robeson's) to Phila. which is about a Furlong distant." In the following year, another road is asked for "from Jno. Marshall's in this County to the New Ferry on Schuylkill." A little later, "Roche's ferry" is occasionally referred to in Court proceedings.

Perhaps all these were but one; certainly the ferry "near the Lower Ford" was the one later kept by Francis Garrigues, and indicated on Scull and Heap's map of 1750, as somewhat above the Fairmount Park trolley bridge. Garrigues evidently failed, for sheriff James Coultas, in January, 1758, advertised for sale "the Ferry-house near the Falls of Schuylkill," late the estate of Francis Garrigues. Phineas Roberts, of Blockley, petitioned the Court, in September, 1759, for a road "from ford Road on Schuylkill to a Ferry above the Falls." Further reference to "a Ferry lately erected by Phineas Roberts above the Falls" makes it appear an established fact. The Court, however, took a different view, and, on the return of the road, in 1760, ordered both return and petition set aside, "it appearing to them that the petitioner has not any settled or establish'd Ferry over the River Schuylkill as by the said Petition is falsely insinuated."

Doubtless this decision resulted from the appearance in Court of Dr. William Smith, best known as provost

of the College of Philadelphia, who exhibited a patent from Thomas and Richard Penn, dated January 21, 1760, vesting in him the sole right of a ferry over Schuylkill at the place designed by Phineas Roberts—namely, from his own plantation in Northern Liberties “to a road on the South West side thereof leading thro’ the lands of Phineas Roberts & others to the Lancaster road,” to take the place of a ferry formerly kept by Francis Garrigues, but now laid aside.

On the east bank, the ferry was connected with Ridge road by a lane, now separating Central and South Laurel Hill Cemeteries, and forming a continuation of Hunting Park avenue. It was at this “Ferry Wharff adjoining the Land of the Reverend William Smith,” that James Coultas, to demonstrate the navigability of the Schuylkill, consummated the notable feat of taking up, “from the Lower Part of the Big Falls,” two flats, with 4323 pounds of hay, in 21 minutes. A full account of the event, in the form of two “ads” inserted by the doughty sheriff, appears in the “Pennsylvania Gazette” for November 1 and 22, 1764.

Earlier, perhaps, than any other ferry north of Fairmount, was that which Andrew Robeson operated across the Schuylkill, from just above his mill, at the Wissahickon, to the Lower Merion shore. In 1723, the Court was asked to confirm a road of about 30 years’ standing, leading from the market-place of Germantown to Conestoga road, by way of this ferry. Strange, to say, no action upon this petition seems to have been taken *for more than forty years!* Meantime, the property had changed hands, and Peter Righter, of Roxborough, in 1741, received a grant to maintain a ferry between his plantation and the opposite shore. This privilege was to hold good for seven years, and could be—and was—renewed periodically.

The road from Germantown to this ferry (School lane), together with its continuation through Lower

Merion (Righter's Ferry road), was opened in 1765. Two years later, the present Monument road was laid out to the ferry, and thence extended up-stream to Levering's mill. A petition of this period refers to "one of the first Established Ferrys on Schuylkill (and since confirmed by Patent to Peter Righter)."

Under date of February 17, 1787, Jacob Hiltzheimer's Diary says:

"Went with General Mifflin to his place at the Falls, and crossed the Schuylkill at Righter's, and went to look at the farm he bought last summer, about a mile from the river."

Peter Righter, ferryman, died in 1776. Among his children was a son, John, who succeeded his father, and continued the business of ferrying until his death, fourteen years later. "John Righter of ferrey Buried on Ridge this Day," writes Joseph Price in his Diary, under date of February 8, 1790. After a proprietorship of a century or more in one family, the ferry now passed into other hands. In 1805, it is called "Ming's" (probably Meng's); in 1812, "Ritter's [Righter's] now Jones's"; and in 1819, John Melish puts "Jones's ferry" on the map.

In 1771, a road was asked for, beginning on the Lower Merion side of Schuylkill "opposite to Spring Mills (where a Ferry is intended Shortly to be Erected)". By 1785, this ferry was seemingly well established, as an advertisement of the surrounding real estate offers also "a valuable ferry . . . with a good new strong ferry-boat, scow-ropes, &c . . . near the Spring-mills." Peter LeGaux, who purchased the property, petitioned the General Assembly, in 1786, for "the right of establishing and maintaining a ferry across the river Schuylkill at Spring-mill," and in the following year the act establishing the ferry was passed. But in 1792, his estate, including "a ferry over the said river Schuylkill," was seized in execution of a writ of sale. In 1796, Paul & Livezey appear

to have owned the property. William Richardson Atlee came into possession of the ferry, and in 1798 sold it to William Hagy. Hagy, in 1799, sold it to William Torbert, who conveyed his rights, three years later, to John Meconkey. A draught of 1802 indicates Spring Mill Ferry, between lands of "Messrs. Paul and Lewezely," on the left bank, and "Mr. Tolbert's house," on the right.

In 1807, John Meconkey was living in Northumberland county, and had evidently disposed of his interest in the ferry, probably to Rees Harry, who had a license for a hotel there, on the Lower Merion side, as early as 1804, continuing until 1830. "No passage at Harry's," writes Joseph Price, in January, 1808, when floating ice filled the river. Tanner's map of 1829 shows Harry's ferry at Spring Mill; and "Spring Mill Ferry Hotel" appears on Levering's map of 1851.

A flat boat, propelled by man-power, aided by the current, together with a rope strung across stream, by which the boat was guided to the opposite wharf, made up the chief mechanical equipment of the Schuylkill ferries. A petition for Plymouth Mill road, in 1746, says:

"Elias Rambo hath built a boat which is of very great Service when the river Schuylkill is high in helping the Neighbors over said river."

The usual type of ferry-boat was strong enough to carry an ox-team across. Paul & Livezey, of White-marsh, advertised for sale, in 1796:

"A large FERRY BOAT, forty-three feet long, eight and half feet wide, with large iron hinges, and fall at each end, built of white oak, double bottom, each side is of one solid plank, but two years old, and little worse of wear, will carry four horses, wagon and cord of wood across the river Schuylkill."

The establishment of rope-ferries inspired mischief-makers with an idea, and in time the sport of rope-cutting became popular enough to be added, by the Assembly, to the growing list of misdemeanors punish-

able by fine. There was argument, too, between the ferryman and the "masters" of flat-boats proceeding up-stream under sail, until a law required the latter to strike their masts, to avoid fouling the ferry rope.

A view of Mendenhall's (formerly Garrigues's) ferry over Schuylkill, as depicted on a Staffordshire ware platter, forms an illustration in Alice Morse Earle's "Stage-coach and Tavern Days."

Under the Law of 1690, the following rates of ferryage prevailed:

"Over Skuikill two pence a head for oxen, bullocks, heifers, horses and mares, and a half a pennie a head for sheepe and hoggs, and two pence a Single passenger and a pennie a piece for all passengers, above the Number one; but for a man's horse, Loaden or unloaden three pence."

How the picturesque Schuylkill, with busy craft plying up and down, fishermen drawing seines, horsemen and ox-teams splashing across at the shallows, and heavily-laden ferry-scows moving slowly from shore to shore, must have woven itself into the life of him whose calling drew him often to its banks! And how various the moods it must have shown him, from the turbulence of the "pumpkin-freshet," bearing seaward the golden spoils of looted cornfields, to the frigid calm of that winter when Paul Jones, turning his sleigh on to the snow-covered surface of the ice-bound river at Market street, drove all the way by river to his Lower Merion farm, while the guest who accompanied him marveled at the wonderful meadow through which they sped like the wind!