



Trenton in Mercer County, New Jersey — *The American Northeast (Mid-Atlantic)*

## Ferries across the Delaware

**Inscription.** Two ferries across the Delaware River in the Trenton area date from the late 17th century – the Yardley Ferry and the Trenton or Middle Ferry. Two more – the Upper and Lower Ferries – were added later in the 18th century. The Yardley Ferry, four miles above the falls, was established in 1683 and formalized through an act of the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1722. It operated into the mid-1830s. The Trenton or Middle Ferry, which may have been in place as early as 1675, crossed the Delaware just below the falls from the foot of Ferry Street. The Pennsylvania Assembly authorized this ferry in 1718; it was also the subject of a patent granted to James Trent by New Jersey’s provincial government in 1726.



By Gary Nigh, November 2007

1. Ferries across the Delaware Marker

On the Pennsylvania side of the river, the rights to the Trenton Ferry passed between the Chorley, Biles and Kirkbridge families before being purchased by Patrick Colvin in 1772. In New Jersey, during the colonial period, the ferry was controlled by the owners of the property known today as the William Trent House. The patent of 1726 guaranteed James Trent, William’s son, exclusive ferry rights along the New Jersey riverbank for two miles upstream and downstream. These rights passed down through subsequent owners of the Trent estate (William Morris, George Thomas, Robert Lettis Hooper and Daniel W. Coxe), but the ferry was typically operated through lease arrangements with local ferrymen. In the 1750s, one enterprising operator, Andrew Ramsay, “late of Long Island Ferry,” linked the Trenton Ferry to the stagecoach line between Trenton and New Brunswick and a downstream boat service to Philadelphia.



By Gary Nigh, December 2004

2. Ferries across the Delaware Marker

Upper Ferry, circa 1781-1806 – also known as the Falls Upper Ferry, the New Trenton Ferry, Beatty’s Ferry and Rutherford Ferry  
Trenton or Middle Ferry, circa 1675-1806 – also known as the Old Ferry, the Upper Ferry (1773-81), the Blazing Star Ferry, the Continental Ferry, Trent’s Ferry and Colvin’s Ferry  
Lamberton or Lower Ferry, circa 1773-1806 also known as the Falls Lower Ferry, the Continental Ferry and Bond’s Ferry

In the 1770s, as Lambertson was expanding from a fishing village into a river town and Trenton’s port, a second trans-Delaware ferry was added. Set up in 1773 by Elijah Bond in New Jersey and John Thornton in Pennsylvania, this ferry was known as the Lambertson or Lower Ferry. For several years it competed successfully with the Trenton Ferry, serving between 1776 and 1781 as the “Continental Ferry” where Americans in active military service could cross the river at reduced rates. In May 1781 the Continental Ferry designation was shifted upstream to the Trenton Ferry where, later that year, French military topographers, compiling an itinerary for Rochambeau’s army noted: “You reach the ferry, where there are several houses  
....

There are generally 2 ferryboats and some sailboats available for crossing.”

A third ferry, the Upper Ferry, also started up during the Revolutionary War period. Crossing near where the Calhoun Street bridge spans the river today, this ferry was apparently established by George Beatty and was in use around the time of the Battles of Trenton in the winter of 1776-77. All three Trenton ferries – Upper, Middle and Lower – competed for river crossing business for a quarter century or so. Their importance faded quickly after the first Trenton-Morrisville bridge was opened in 1806.



By Gary Nigh, December 2007

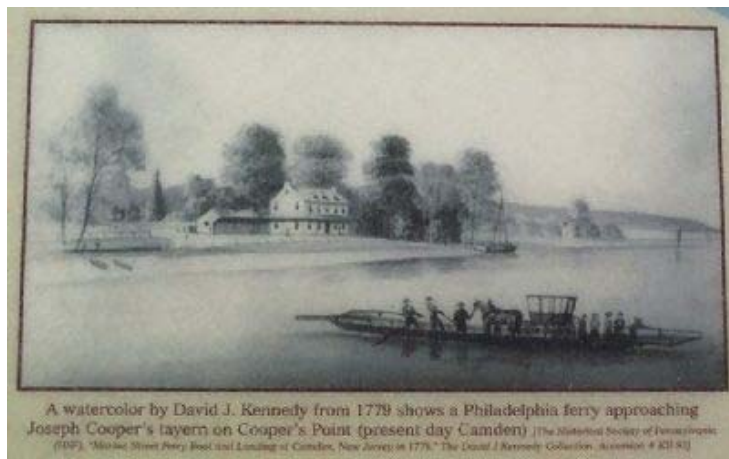
**3. A typical pole-driven ferry used for crossing small rivers in the colonial period**

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### Crossing the Delaware at Trenton

Crossing the river between Trenton and Morrisville has always been a challenge. The so-called “falls of the Delaware,” a ragged spread of schist in the riverbed between the Trenton Makes and Calhoun Street bridges, are barely passable on foot and horseback at low water. Yet, this ford was important as the furthest upstream point where the river could be crossed without resorting to boats. As a result, prehistoric and early historic land routes converged on this point in the landscape, providing much of the stimulus for the local

settlement growth. With this confluence of roads, it was not long before ferries were established in the area to handle traffic too awkward or cumbersome for the ford. The boom ferry years extended from the late 17th through into the early 19th century. With the completion of the first Trenton to Morrisville bridge over the Delaware River in 1806, the need for ferries began to wane. Today, three road and two rail bridges carry traffic across the river in the immediate Trenton area.



By Gary Nigh, December 2007

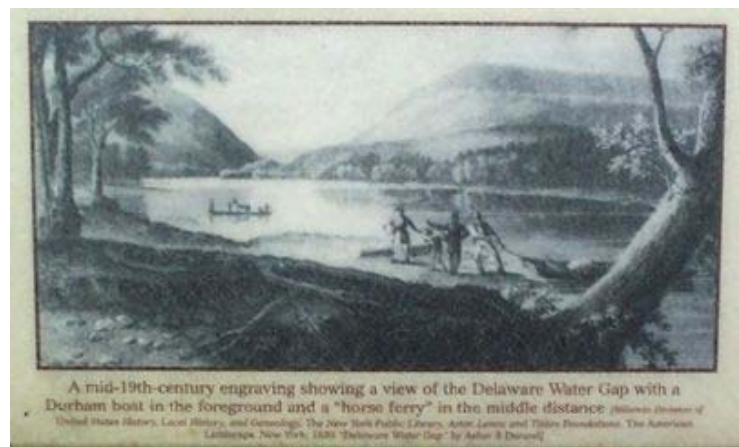
**4. A watercolor by David J. Kennedy from 1779 shows a Philadelphia ferry approaching Joseph Cooper's tavern on Cooper's Point (present day Camden)** [The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSF), “Market Street Ferry Boat and Landing at Camden, New Jersey in 1779.” The David J. Kennedy Collection, Accession #K11-93]

river currents and various other items, such as hooks, chains and ropes, were part of the ferryman’s standard equipment. The ferry terminus often emerged as the hub of a larger settlement complete with a ferry house, a tavern and other residences. Trenton Ferry, for example, was a small but lively riverside enclave in the mid-18th century, a place where George Burns saw fit to open and advertise a “house of entertainment” in 1754.

**Erected** 2004 by New Jersey Department of Transportation.

**Marker series.** This marker is included in the [The Washington-Rochambeau Route](#) marker series.

**Location.** 40° 11.818' N, 74° 45.479' W. Marker is in Trenton, New Jersey, in Mercer County. Marker can be reached from U.S. 29. [Click for map.](#) This marker is in South River Walk park which is built over top of Route 29. Marker is in this post office area: Trenton NJ 08611, United States of America.

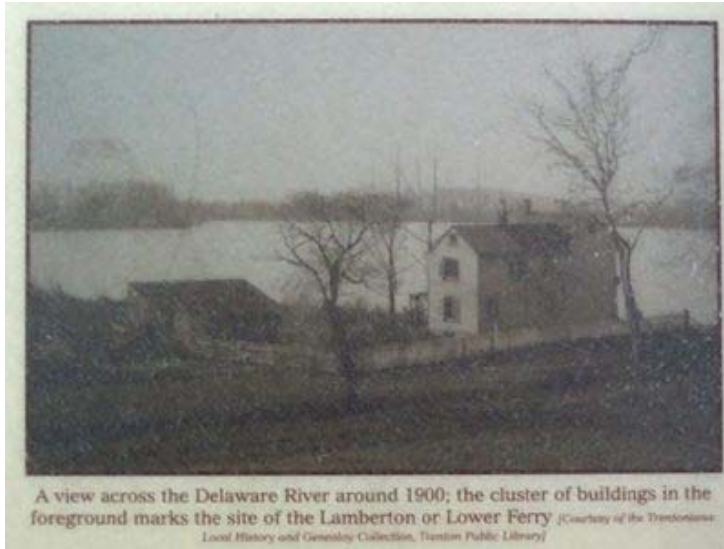


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**5. A mid-19th-century engraving showing a view of the Delaware Water Gap with a Durham boat in the foreground and a “horse ferry” in the middle distance** [Milstein Division of United States History, Local History, and genealogy, The New York

**Other nearby markers.** At least 8 other

markers are within walking distance of this marker. [Shipping on the Delaware](#) (within shouting distance of this marker); [South Riverwalk Park](#) (within shouting distance of this marker); [Ice, Brewing and Bottles](#) (about 400 feet away, in a direct line); [Pre-17th Century Trenton Timeline](#) (about 400 feet away); [Europeans at the Falls of the Delaware](#) (about 400 feet away); [Quakers Lead the Settlement of West Jersey](#) (about 400 feet away); [The West Jersey Proprietors Rule](#) (about 400 feet away); [William Trent of Trent's Town](#) (about 400 feet away). [Click for a list](#) of all markers in Trenton.



**6. A view across the Delaware River around 1900;** the cluster of buildings in the foreground marks the site of the Lambertson or Lower Ferry  
*(Courtesy of the Trentoniana Local History and Genealogy Collection, Trenton Public Library)*

By Gary Nigh, December 2007

— Submitted January 13, 2008, by Nancy Heath Dallaire of Trenton, New Jersey.

**More about this marker.** The marker is in the southern half of the park closest to the main entrance at Lalor Street. It overlooks the Delaware River.

**Also see . . .** [Yardley Ferry Chronology](#).  
*(Submitted on January 13, 2008.)*

**Additional comments.**

**1. Yardley Ferry Chronology**

In reference to Ferries across the Delaware, please see the Yardley Ferry Chronology ("Also see" link above). My ancestor, Andrew Heath, operated the ferry ca. 1700, then known as Heath's Ferry, across the Delaware from Lower Ferry Road. Heath's Creek (now Gould's Run) still runs parallel to Lower Ferry Road through the property of New Jersey Manufacturers' Insurance. Note To Editor only visible by Contributor and editor



By Gary Nigh, November 2007

**7. Ferries across the Delaware Marker**

**Credits.** This page originally submitted on December 26, 2007, by Gary Nigh of Trenton, New Jersey. This page has been viewed 1,789 times since then. **Photos:** 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. submitted on December 26, 2007, by Gary Nigh of Trenton, New Jersey. • J. J. Prats was the editor who published this page.

**Categories.** • Waterways & Vessels