

LEGEND

PAVEMENT: Such as Asphalt, Brick, Concrete and Hard-Topped, Dustless Macadam.

IMPROVEMENT: Such as Gravel, Stone, Shell and Good Sand-Clay.

MAIN CONNECTING EARTH ROADS:

MINOR ROADS:

MILEAGE AND HIGHWAY NUMBERS:
Numerals in circles correspond to State Highway Numbers.
Numerals in shield correspond to Federal Route Numbers.
Plain numerals indicate mileage between outlined points, thus:

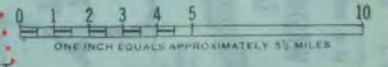
7 1 4 5



COPYRIGHT

THIS MAP REVISED ANNUALLY
NEXT ISSUE APRIL 1931

SCALE OF MILES



1012 D-1

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

THESIS PRESENTED TO
MARYLAND BETA CHAPTER
TAU BETA PI

BY
RALPH W. WATT

APRIL 17, 1931.

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

SUMMARY

Although there are early references to a mail route across the Patuxent at Benedict, there seem to be no references to a ferry at that place. A study of the conditions of trade and living at the time bears out the probability that there was no ferry.

In more recent times there have been some ferrying operations carried on at irregular intervals and with the most convenient equipment. However it can hardly be said that a ferry existed.

The year 1922 saw a ferry start making trips across to Burch's Landing (variously known as Burch and Holland Point). Reputed indifference in operation is said to have caused considerable inconvenience to patrons.

In 1925, a rival line started business. Competition waxed warm. There was a court clash over landing rights at Holland Point which ended in both sides getting equal privileges. Toward the end of the year the original operator discontinued and left the field to the newcomer.

The ferrying is carried on by means of rather simple, but at the same time adequate and efficient equipment. Trips are made on call throughout the year. Rates are moderate and the service is convenient.

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

In spite of the competition of the new Southern Maryland Boulevard east of the Patuxent, the ferry is reported to be in a healthy financial condition and should continue to serve the public indefinitely.

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Benedict, Maryland, situated in Charles County on the Patuxent River about fifty miles south and east of Washington, D. C., is located in that part of Southern Maryland which is sufficiently remote from the Nation's Capital to have escaped the suburban influence of that city.

Charles County, possessor of an extended shore line on the Potomac River, would be entirely shut off from the Patuxent were it not for a neck of land some three and a half or four miles long and two to two and a half miles wide which runs back from the river to join the main body of the county in the vicinity of a North-South line through the village of Patuxent. Benedict is located on the river end of this strip, a short distance above Indian Creek which divides Charles from St. Mary's County on the south and is the only town in the county on the Patuxent River.

Benedict-Leonardtwn, later shortened to Benedict, was first settled under the township plan of the Maryland Assembly in 1683. At that time the town was in Calvert County but, about 1700, when the west shore holdings of Calvert were apportioned among the west shore counties, Benedict was placed in Charles County.

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

By the year 1695, Southern Maryland, though thinly settled, felt the need of a post to take mail and packages to Annapolis, on from there by Stage to Philadelphia, and even to New York if occasion demanded. Accordingly, on May 22, 1695, the Assembly appointed John Perry to carry the post for the sum of fifty pounds sterling yearly. He was to carry all official documents without fee. His route started at Newton's Point on the Wiccocomoco (now Wicomico) River, passed over the Patuxent at Benedict-Leonardtown, and on to Annapolis. The trip was to be made eight times a year.

The crossing of the Patuxent at Benedict opens the question of mode of accomplishment and hints at the possible existence of a ferry across the river at that point.

There seem to be neither existing records of such an institution nor any references thereto, although the records of the Assembly contain the letter that Perry carried by which he was empowered to commandeer the aid and facilities of any ship riding at Wiccocomoco when his official duties took him into Virginia and caused him to cross the Potomac.

A study of the conditions bears out the contention that no ferry existed at that time at Benedict.

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

Southern Maryland was a land of plantations whose principal crop was tobacco. The market for this crop lay in the mother country. Direct water transportation was not far distant any point in the territory. The Chesapeake Bay on the east, the Patuxent cutting into the peninsula about a third of the way across toward the west, and the Potomac on the west with its many navigable arms reaching far into the land, afforded excellent facilities for shipping. Indeed, branches of the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers which today are hardly navigable to a rowboat, were then accessible to ocean vessels, for the sedimentation which ruined them was only then beginning to be accelerated because of deforestation by the colonists. Since trade was thus limited as to market and aided by natural transportation advantages, there was no need to develop trade routes north and south, with the result that a ferry was not needed for trade purposes.

Further, the interests of the planters lay in the home parish and county, save only the attention that was directed to affairs of the Assembly. Overland conveyances and roads were of the most primitive sort. Almost universally owned, boats were used in journeying about on the convenient waters of creek, river and bay, and this obviated the necessity of a traveller's ferry. Since the planters were undoubtedly friendly to the post, by means of which they had

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

their meager but essential communication with the northern colonies, it seems logical to assume that Perry used the most convenient plantation boat when his work called him to cross the Patuxent.

Early in 1698, Perry, who had been a faithful public servant, died. His position, thus made vacant, was never filled. Maryland abandoned the post, although it may have been carried on by Pennsylvania.

Benedict, ~~was~~ reincorporated in 1733, must have continued to be the tobacco port on the east of Charles County and perhaps to serve nearby parts of St. Marys and Prince Georges Counties. However, Port Tobacco, on the Port Tobacco river, a branch of the Potomac, centrally located in the county as a glance at the map shows, maintained the position of leading town of the county.

The sudden shift of attention from water to land transportation caused by the coming of the railroads about the time of the Civil War, doomed both Port Tobacco and Benedict. Hughesville, seven miles inland, on the Southern Maryland railroad, began to replace Benedict as eastern center of trade in the region.

Meanwhile, the tide of immigration was sweeping by and overlooking the good opportunities of Southern Maryland, its eye set on richer opportunities elsewhere. Moreover, an actual decline in the population of this section

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

began in 1800. The resulting decrease in population, together with the reduced fertility of the land, long devoted to a single crop, had begun to reduce the trade through the ports of the county before the railroads came.

However, the railroads were not to receive all the trade. Vessels were able to hold their own in handling shipments under certain favorable conditions. Steam replaced sail to a large extent toward the latter part of the nineteenth century and the steamboat lines gained control of most of the wharves. This forced the provision of small scows for loading and unloading sailing vessels at their anchorage in the stream.

The occasional ferrying operations which came to be necessary as time advanced were carried on by means of these scows propelled by sweeps but this intermittent work was neither done by any particular scow nor as a definite business. Therefore, it cannot be far from the truth to say, with the inhabitants, that there was not a ferry at Benedict in the recent past.

HISTORY OF THE EXISTING FERRY

The ferry at Benedict owes its existence to two facts. The first is that following the World War a much improved automobile was made more universally available to the

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

people of our country. The second is that the automobile enabled the people to heed the call of the outdoors at greater and greater distances.

Resorts on the peninsula between the Chesapeake and the Patuxent gained public favor. Solomon's Island quickly grew to be a prime favorite of the fishermen. The shortest, quickest route from Washington to Solomon's lay, not over the winding, difficult road through Upper Marlboro, Mt. Zion and Prince Frederick, but rather down through the less thickly settled region between the Patuxent and the Potomac to Benedict, over the river to Burch's Landing and Prince Frederick and on to the destination, if one could cross the river conveniently.

Also, the neighboring people, their interests widened by the coming of the automobile, and travelling salesmen as well, in increasing numbers, needed to cross the river to conveniently meet the new demands on their time.

Accordingly, about 1922, a Mr. Higgs of Benedict, began to run a ferry across to Burch's Landing, now locally known as Holland Point (called Burch on the map). It is said that the ferry operator, when business became slack, would often leave the ferry without an attendant to go off fishing or oystering and that at times patrons were delayed at the crossing as long as half a day.

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

Traffic increased and in the spring of 1925, Mr. P. C. Henderson, a Benedict storekeeper, began to operate a rival line. Competition became bitter for there was not sufficient business to allow both ferries to operate at a reasonable profit. Townspeople took sides and actively solicited business for one ferry or the other, mostly, it is reported, for the Higgs boat since they seemed to believe that Henderson was not playing fair. The opposition even went so far as to make an attempt to deny Henderson the right of landing on the Holland Point side of the river.

When the road was built to the present landing place at Holland Point the surfacing was stopped some twenty feet short of the river in order that high water might not undermine and ruin it although the road extended and was used to the water's edge. The owner of the adjacent land who had allowed the road to cross his holdings, now claimed that the right of way ended with the surfacing and the last few feet belonged to him. Accordingly, he leased this land to Higgs and an injunction was sought to restrain Henderson from landing on this strip.

Then the State Roads Commission threatened to condemn sufficient ground to provide a landing place free to both parties. After this action, the suit for the injunction was dropped and no further attempts were made to deny Henderson the right to land at Holland Point.

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

The photograph opposite shows the broad strip of beach available for landing and the planks laid down to take the cars over the loose sand. The road runs from near the steamboat wharf (just out of camera range



to the left) behind the white sand ridge in the foreground and out of the picture between the two large trees in the right background.

About the end of the year (1925) the Higgs ferry discontinued service and Henderson had the field to himself. He has retained his hold on the business to the present time.

FLOATING EQUIPMENT

The equipment used by the ferry comprises two scows (so-called in reports to Maryland Public Service Commission). The first, 36 feet long by 14 feet wide, has a capacity of 20 tons and will carry five Fords. The second can take loads up to 12 tons, is 30 feet long by 12 feet wide, and will carry two small cars. Mr. Bowen, the ferry operator, says that at times the small boat has carried three model T Fords although at first glance the capacity would seem to be but a single car.

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

The scows are constructed of white oak and are designed so that the load is distributed by 4x4 stringers over a series of supporting posts and the sides of the hull.

The hull is about 3 feet deep, the long sides thereof rise vertically from the bottom while the ends slant upward at an angle of about 45 degrees. These sloping ends are protected from scuffing on the beaches by metal strips which are spaced about nine inches apart laterally and run from the deck down to the bottom of the hull.

The power is furnished by two cylinder-two ~~axis~~ cycle marine engines set on a platform built on the bottom stringers. The engine cockpit is placed about five feet from the stern in a position for direct driving of the propeller.

The rudder is controlled by a sweep handle which reaches to the rear of the cockpit so that one man can tend the motor and the steering from the same position.

When either of the boats is carrying a capacity load, the ferryman must get under a car to reach his motor because one of the cars must be pushed over the cockpit to complete the loading.

A low railing of 2x4 ~~or 4x4~~ stringers on 4x4 posts runs along the sides and across the stern of the boat. In the absence of a more substantial bulkhead, the safe arrival of the cars on the other side is guaranteed by the simple expedi-

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

ent of chocking the wheels with pieces of log flattened on one side.

Two cars on the little scow. Note the railing and the chock behind front wheel of the second car.



LANDING EQUIPMENT

The landing at Benedict is actually located on private ground but no attempt has ever been made to deny the privilege of its use as was the case on the Holland Point shore described above.

Some of the inhabitants say that the ferry landing is on the State road. However, the facts are that the State road turned about 150 yards short of the present landing and ran to the old steamboat wharf while the road over which traffic reaches the ferry landing is a private road opened some years ago by the owners of the cottages and hotels along the water front for their own convenience and over their own land. Efforts are being made at the present time to have the State take over and improve this dirt road at least to the ferry landing.

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

Docks or slips of any sort are impractical for two reasons. First, the boats are so small and any automobile is such a large proportion of the total capacity of the boat that as soon as the front wheels came on at the bow they would cause tipping and possible disaster, if artificial support were ^{not} present. Second, the cost of building any slips, not to mention slips of proper design to provide the artificial support mentioned above, would be out of proportion to the magnitude of the operation. Therefore, on both sides, the ferry lands by the simple expedient of driving her nose onto the beach and allowing the load to be removed over the gang board. This is about seven feet long, extends nearly the width of the boat, and is hinged to the bow. A lever on each side of the gang board, attached by a short length of chain, serves to hold it raised in transit when the handle is pushed down and secured by slipping a loop of rope into a notch on the top near the inboard end.

Photograph on right shows gang board lever. Note chain attaching it to gang board, fulcrum and bracing, and rope loop holding end of handle.



THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

Constructed of heavy white oak planks secured cross-wise on four shorter battens, the gang board is obviously the limiting factor with regard to the individual loads which can be carried. Probably the heaviest single unit transported was a C. & P. Telephone Company line truck fully loaded with wire, the weight of which may have reached seven tons.

OPERATION

The ferry is available for service 24 hours a day every day in the year, weather and water permitting, according to the statement of the owner. As a usual thing, however, service is suspended on the Holland Point side at 9 P. M. unless an appointment is made for later service, although, if one is persistent enough in blowing his horn, he may "blow" the operator out of his bed and across the river to fetch him. The same rule applies to service at Benedict, except that a call at the operator's house replaces the horn blowing.

There is no regular schedule of crossings. The ferry stays at Benedict until a fare comes or until the white signal flag flutters to the top of the signal ~~msx~~ mast across the river, to indicate a waiting car. Those who make the trip often have come to expect to wait on the Holland Point side.

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

Therefore, even if the trip is made light, the boat returns to Benedict soon after each crossing.

The signal on the Holland Point shore is pictured opposite. It is more discernible from the Benedict side than is shown in the photograph because the low surrounding hills form a dark background for an observer on the far shore.



The charges for crossing are flat rates on the vehicle and nothing additional for extra passengers.

The tolls are as follows:

All passenger cars.....\$1.00

1 ton truck (light)..... 1.00

1 ton truck (loaded)..... 1.25

2 ton truck (light)..... 1.25

All other trucks (graduated according

to weight and load).....\$1.50 to \$2.50

The highest rate that has been charged was \$3.00 for a special drilling rig which is said to have been an exceptionally difficult job because of its length (truck and trailer

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

about 40 feet.)

The ferry owner estimated that during the four months, May, June, July and August, his equipment transports an average of about ten cars a day, with an average of six a day for the rest of the year. Saturday and Sunday are the days of heaviest traffic. However, observation revealed six cars ferried in three hours at mid-day on an April Friday. The inclement weather of the preceding two days may have been a factor in the seemingly abnormal traffic.

The average time required for a trip is a little less than ten minutes, although with ideal natural conditions and handling, the trip can be made in six. On one occasion the crossing was accomplished only after a cruise of forty-five minutes. A strong wind was quartering over the river. Water, driven before the wind was breaking high over the deck. The ferryman thought the occasion was hardly right for an attempt at crossing but the insistence of the driver won him his demand. He would be taken across if he were willing to risk dropping his car to the bottom of the Patuxent, some fifty odd feet deep in the channel. The ferryman declared that the rash fellow was begging to turn back before they had reached midstream but that he did not have this desire gratified by the obliging ferryman, who set him down on the other side.

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

OUTLOOK FOR THE FERRY

A competitor to the ferry, but a boon to the people of the territory east of the Patuxent, the Southern Maryland Boulevard, opened in the summer of 1930, cuts off about ten miles of the distance from Upper Marlboro to points in the central and lower peninsula. Then, too, the new road has provided relief from tortuous curves which made driving over the old road slow and difficult. The combined saving in time effected by these improvements has made it economical for many people who formerly used the ferry to drive around through upper Marlboro when going from one side of the Patuxent to the other. For example, people living as far down on the western peninsula as Waldorf are now only 36 miles by road from Chesapeake Beach.

However, in the year 1930, in spite of the inroads of the six months operation of the new highway, coupled with the reduced traffic naturally brought about by the business depression, the owner reports a profit in the neighborhood of \$600. on a capital investment of \$2,080. This would not be sufficient to tempt a man to run the ferry as his only business but when it is run as a side line it becomes an attractive proposition.

Moreover, as the interests of the neighboring people branch and spread, they will come the more to call

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

on the ferry to transport them back and forth in the course of their normal business and social life.

Favored by being a financial success and with prospects of increasing traffic, the ferry should continue to benefit both the neighboring people and their city brothers indefinitely.

FINIS



The above illustration shows the author's car about to be landed on the Holland Point side. By looking carefully through the rear window of the car, one can discern the back of the second car on the boat. The steamboat wharf to the right is not a bridge as would seem at first glance but extends only about two hundred yards ^{to} in the stream which is nearly a mile wide at this point.

THE HISTORY AND OPERATION OF THE FERRY AT BENEDICT, MD.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Officer Hall (D.C.M.P.)

Mr. P. C. Henderson, ferry owner

Mr. Bowen, ferry operator

"History of Maryland" John Thomas Scharf

Records of the Maryland Historical Society

Publications of the Maryland Geological Survey

Clippings at the Carnegie Library in Washington

"The Chesapeake Bay Country" Swepson Earle

Address before the Charles County Agriculture
Society (1848) John G. Chapman

Reports to the Maryland Public Service Commission