Chapter 2

HISTORIC CONTEXT

A. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no other place in Delaware conjures up romantic images of the past as does the Woodland Ferry. Today, there is a sense that a ferry has inevitably *always* existed there, that it has always been a part of the tranquil Village of Woodland that exists today. But in fact, the Woodland Ferry was once a small part of a large and lucrative Cannon family business operating on the Nanticoke River. The Cannon family operated the ferry from the 1740s until the end of the 19th century. When railroads replaced the Nanticoke as the primary mode of transportation in the region, warehouses and wharves associated with the Cannon enterprise in Woodland slowly came down and the ferry was transferred first to Sussex County and then to the State of Delaware. Today, though the old wooden scow that was once manually plied across the river has been replaced by a modern motor-driven steel boat, the Woodland Ferry crossing stands as a living reminder of a long and storied past on the banks of the Nanticoke River.

B. EARLY HISTORY

Today the Woodland Ferry crosses the Nanticoke River in Sussex County, Delaware but this portion of the Nanticoke was originally part of Dorchester and Somerset Counties in Maryland. In 1669, Dorchester County was laid out between the Choptank and Nanticoke Rivers stretching into present-day Sussex County, Delaware. Somerset had been laid out three years earlier and included all the land between the Nanticoke River and Atlantic Ocean. These two counties were set up as original colonies in Maryland, meaning they were created from previously non-county territory. Portions of Somerset within the project area were taken to form Worcester County in 1742. Thus, until Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon formally surveyed the western and southern borders of Sussex County, Delaware in the late 1760s, the Nanticoke River within the current project area served as the boundary between Dorchester and Somerset (later Worcester) Counties, Maryland. By the end of the century the area had been transferred to Sussex County, Delaware (Figure 2.1) (Jones 1902:35; Lyon 2005).

Because of its relative isolation, the Nanticoke Watershed developed much more slowly than did other parts of the Delmarva Peninsula. When John Smith first discovered the Nanticoke in 1608, the watershed was sparsely populated by Nanticoke Indians. Lord De La Warr and Lord Baltimore granted the first land charters in 1632, but as noted above, until the 1660s, the region was not populated enough to warrant county and municipal divisions and even then population grew slowly throughout the 17th and early 18th centuries. This was due in part to the fact that the Nanticoke watershed was not along the major communication and trade routes that had formed by the early 18th century. Most of Delaware's waterways flowed into the Delaware River, thus linking the state to the port of Philadelphia. The Nanticoke, however, flowed in the opposite direction. Moreover, most early roads bypassed the Nanticoke watershed in favor of connections between Wilmington, Dover and eastern Sussex County (Figure 2.2; Connor 1996:4, 45).

The communication and trade routes that did exist in colonial Maryland depended, in part, on public and private ferries crossing the colony's numerous rivers. Though ferries most likely existed since the earliest

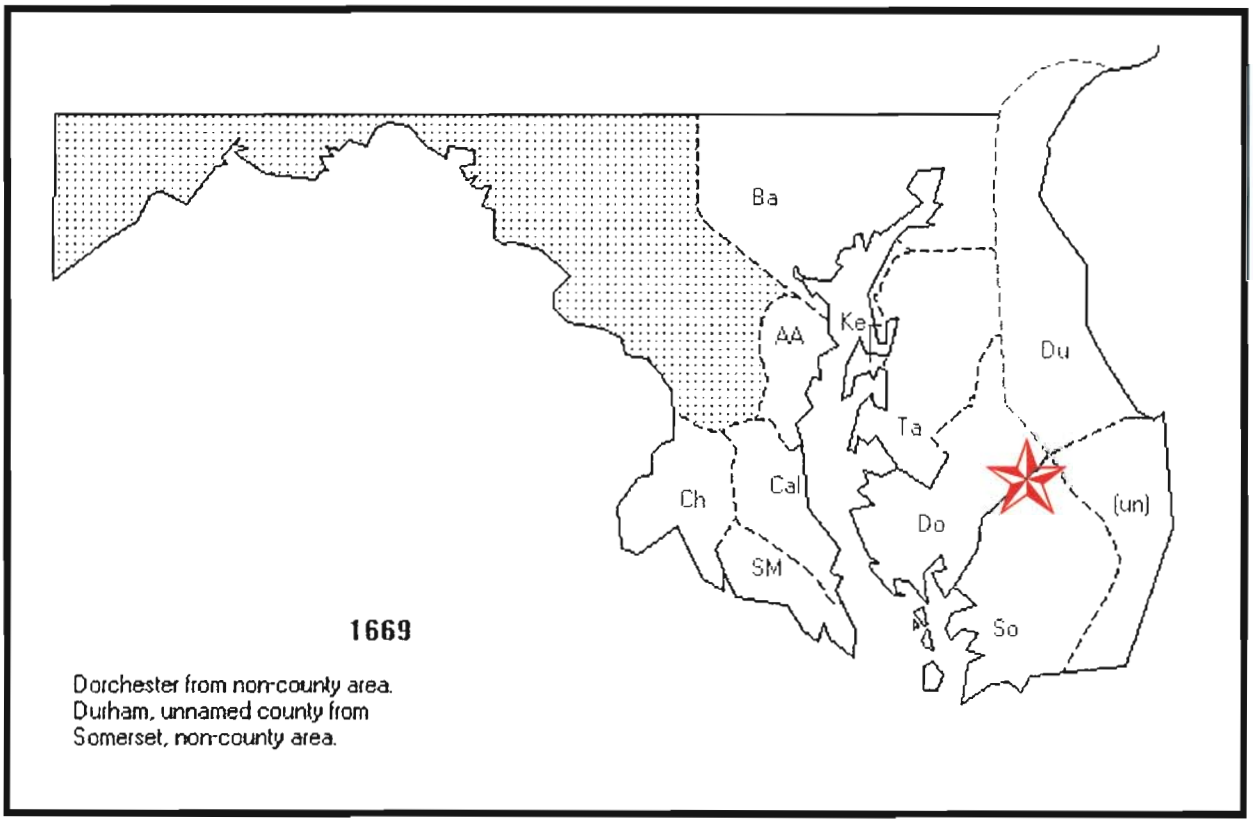


Figure 2.1. Maps Showing Maryland County Boundary in 1669. (Source: http://www.familyhistory101.com/maps/md_cf.html). Study area starred.

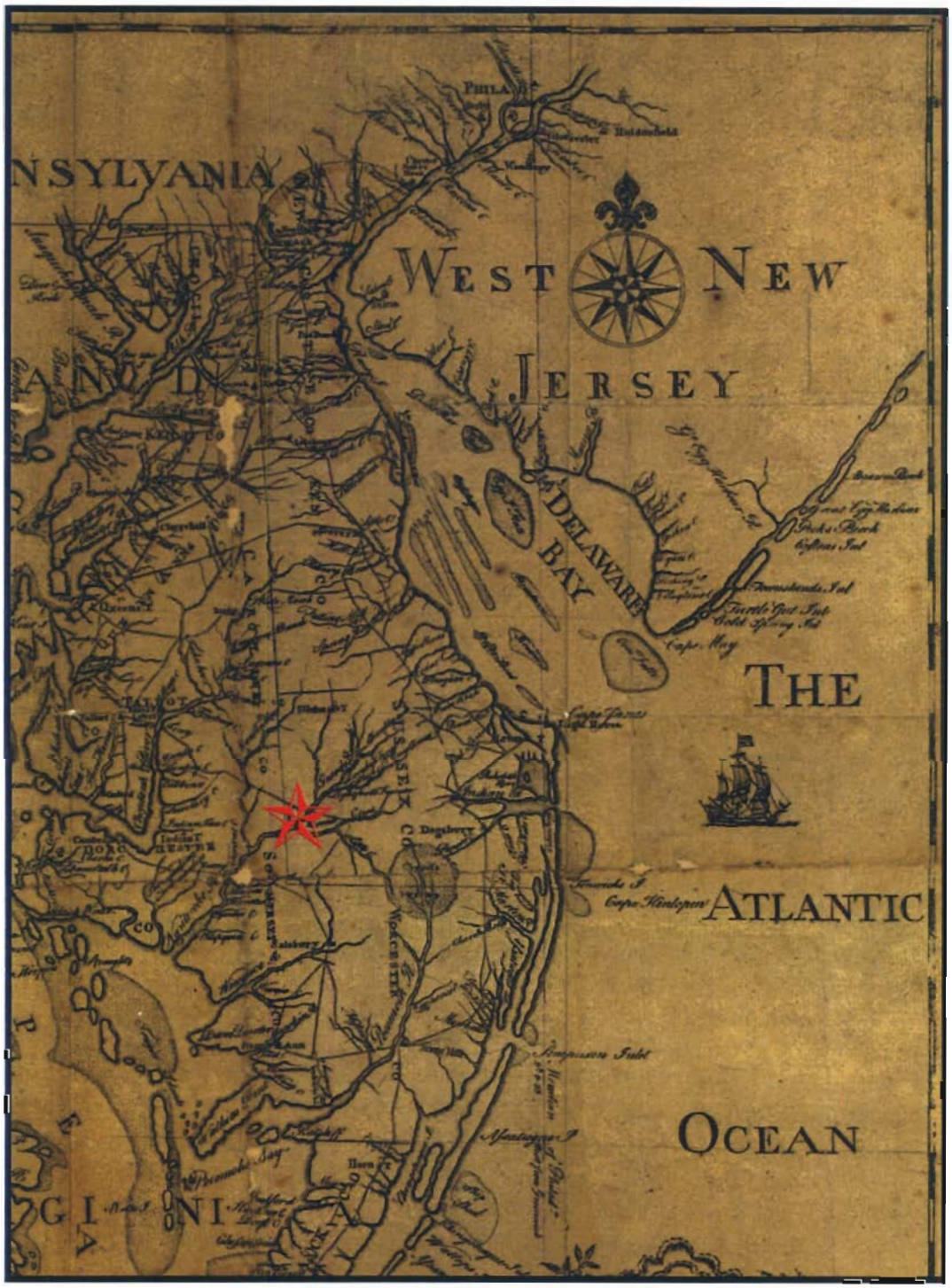


Figure 2.2. Churchman, John. *This map of the peninsula between Delaware & Chesopeak Bays, with the said bays and shores adjacent drawn from the most accurate surveys. Circa* 1778. Scale: 1 inch= 14 miles (approximately). Study area starred.

settlement of the region, the General Assembly passed the first general law to publicly regulate such enterprises in 1658. This act required all counties except Kent to maintain a public ferry. Each county court was to determine the most appropriate location for the ferry and assess taxes to pay for a boat and compensate the ferryman (Browne 1883a:375; Melville 2003:141). However, this act had little effect on the current project area as the sparsely settled upper reaches of the Nanticoke River existed outside of county boundaries until the 1660s. No evidence was found to suggest that this act resulted in the establishment of a ferry at present Woodland.

In 1671 the Upper House of the General Assembly passed an act establishing ferries over several rivers including one across the Nanticoke River into Somerset County (Browne 1883b:318). Historian Elias Jones states that this early ferry was located at Crotcher's Ferry, present-day Brookview on Marshyhope Creek, which was formerly known as the Northwest Fork of the Nanticoke River (Jones 1902:930). However, in 1671, the Northwest Fork was fully within the boundaries of Dorchester County. The main channel of the Nanticoke River served as the boundary division between Dorchester and Somerset Counties. Therefore, though a ferry may have been established at Crotcher's Ferry in 1671, the act referred to above likely established a ferry over the main branch of the Nanticoke. At this time, Vienna was the primary focus of early settlement on the Nanticoke, for it provided the first "fast land" one encountered along the Nanticoke north of the Chesapeake Bay (Connor 1996:5). Formally established in the early 18th century, Vienna had existed as a coherent town "for some years prior to 1709 when a 'chapel of ease' was built there" (Jones 1902:79). Logic leads to the conclusion that Vienna was the most likely location for this 17th-century public ferry across the Nanticoke into Somerset County.

Owing to the scant population and the existence of other ferries on the Nanticoke and its tributaries, it is unlikely that a public ferry existed at present-day Woodland, Delaware in the 17th century. One must remember, however, that early acts passed by the General Assembly regulated only *public* ferries. Numerous private ferries existed throughout the colony without regulation and therefore left little historical record. Data uncovered in the course of this research neither certainly confirms nor refutes the existence of a private ferry operating at Woodland in the 17th century.

C. JAMES AND JACOB CANNON (1734 – 1780)

However, all available evidence does indicate that the first ferry to regularly cross the Nanticoke River at Woodland was started by James Cannon in the 1740s. The clearest evidence of this fact exists in Elizabeth "Betty" Cannon's petition to the General Assembly asking for exclusive ferrying privileges in 1793. Her petition was based, in part, on the claim "that a Ferry hath been regularly kept at the said place by James Cannon, and afterwards by Jacob Cannon, his son, the late Husband of your Petitioner for the space of fifty years," thus placing the beginning of her family's enterprise on the river around 1743 (Cannon 1793).

If James Cannon indeed started Cannon's Ferry, he did so between 1734 and 1748. On May 1, 1734 James Cannon patented a 377 acre tract called *Cannon's Regulation* (the original name of the Woodland tract) in Dorchester County, Maryland (Wright 2000:15). Cannon's will, written in 1748, divided *Regulation* between four of his children. At that time, the 100 acres of *Regulation* that he left to his son Jacob included 50 acres along the river and a "warf [*sic*] and two houses" (Cannon 2001:63). This certainly supports Betty's claim by showing that James Cannon

was in position to operate a ferry at Woodland by the 1740s. After James' death in 1751, Jacob Cannon took over the ferrying business (Cannon 2001).

Outside of Betty Cannon's aforementioned petition of 1793, several other lines of evidence point towards Jacob Cannon's continued operation of the ferry. A Tax Levy of Worcester County from 1766 listed a tax of 1500 lbs. of tobacco paid "to Jacob Cannon for keeping a Ferry over Nanticoke River the Year past" (Pleasants 1944:510). By 1773 the crossing was widely known as "Cannon's Ferry." When the Maryland General Assembly set off Caroline County from Dorchester County in that year "the Main Road (that Leads to Cannon's Ferry) to Nanticoke River" served as one boundary of the newly-created county (Merritt 1947:209).

D. BETTY, JACOB, AND ISAAC CANNON (1780 – 1843)

When Jacob Cannon died in 1780, he left his land, housing and water craft to his son Isaac, while allowing his wife Betty the occupation of his house and one-third part of his land until her death or remarriage (Sussex County Probate Records). Betty and her sons Isaac and Jacob, who was born shortly after his father's death, continued to operate the ferry into the mid-19th century.

Betty Cannon expended great effort to improve and maintain the ferry. Her husband Jacob had constructed a causeway over the marsh on the banks of the Nanticoke to the ferry lying on the road leading from Broad Creek toward the State of Maryland prior to his death (Cannon and Cannon 1807). But since Jacob's death, Betty herself had "laid out considerable sums of money in erecting and making wharves and landing places on both sides of the River Nanticoke" and had "also been at considerable expence [sic] in improving the Road leading to the said Ferry" (Cannon 1793).

Yet despite these personal expenditures the Cannons did not hold exclusive ferrying privileges. In 1807 a number of Sussex County citizens recalled that prior to 1793, the ferry over the Nanticoke was kept on the east side of the river by Christopher Cardiff and later his widow Peggy and on the west side by Jacob and later Betty Cannon. According to the citizens, this arrangement led to a ferry that operated "without any kind of interruption and to the great convenience of the people" (Siman *et al.* 1807). However owing to the great expense and effort Betty spent to improve and maintain the ferry, on January 14, 1793 she petitioned the General Assembly of Delaware for exclusive ferrying privileges. She claimed that she "hath been lately interrupted in the management of the [ferry] by persons who have never expended anything towards making the wharves or causeway at such Ferry" (Cannon 1793). The General Assembly agreed with Betty and granted her and her son Isaac exclusive ferrying rights at Cannon's Ferry for a period of fourteen years, allowing the Cannons to charge five cents for the ferrying of each person and horse, ten cents for every two-wheeled carriage, and thirty cents for every four-wheeled carriage (Delaware General Assembly 1793).

While the Cannons did improve the infrastructure on and around the ferry, they did not provide travelers with comfortable or reliable ferrying service. James Hemphill, who traveled through Maryland and Delaware in 1802, expressed displeasure with Cannon's Ferry and was especially surprised to find no public house there. In his journal, Hemphill recorded a description of the ferry boat as follows: "the flat was very small & only one man to scull her across so we put the chaise on first & I took one oar, pulled across[,] returned again, took the horse over, & set out with an empty stomach for Laurel town where we arrived safe in the evening" (Munroe 1948:70).

While this one-time traveler was seemingly disappointed, those that used the ferry on a more regular basis were also unhappy with Betty and Isaac's operation of boat. When the Cannons petitioned for renewal of their ferrying rights in 1807, they met strong opposition from area residents who railed against the irregular and unreliable service the Cannons provided. These residents claimed they were forced "to wait very often in the cold rain and snow for hours before they can wake or rouse with a loud strong voice or conk [*sic*] shell an old negro slave upwards of sixty years of age who has been the only ferryman to said ferry to manage and row a scow" (Siman *et al.* 1807). Moreover, as stated above, prior to 1793 the ferry had been successfully operated by those who owned land on both sides of the river. Therefore, the signers of a petition against Betty and Isaac Cannon urged the General Assembly not to grant exclusive ferrying privileges to any single person. Yet Stephen Moore, the owner of land on the east side of the Nanticoke River at the time, petitioned the General Assembly to grant *him* exclusive rights to the ferry, claiming that the Act granting such rights to the Cannons had deprived him of his entitled financial benefits (Moore 1807). In the end, Betty and Isaac Cannon prevailed, as the Delaware General Assembly granted them exclusive ferrying privileges for another ten years (Delaware General Assembly 1807).

While Betty, Isaac and Jacob operated the ferry, the Cannons were also involved in other business and personal enterprises at Cannon's Ferry. Jacob and Isaac Cannon earned their fortune from the merchant and shipping business they established on the banks of the Nanticoke River at Cannon's Ferry. By 1816 the brothers owned 5,473 acres on the Delmarva Peninsula as well as land in Baltimore and number ships that traded between Seaford and Baltimore (Roth 1998:191). Moreover, all three of the Cannons lived in Cannon's Ferry. Stories say that Jacob Cannon built the impressive dwelling known as Cannon's Hall (Plate 2.1) around 1820 for his bride-to-be shortly after which she jilted him and he never lived in the home. Cannon's Hall stood empty for over twenty years before finally passing to Jacob's heirs in 1843 (Federal Writers' Project of the Works Project Administration 1938). Isaac Cannon's house on the river was eventually destroyed by fire (Scharf 1888:1305). When Betty Cannon died in 1828, she left her dwellings, land, wharf and store house to her two sons (Sussex County Probate Records).

The Cannons' business and personal endeavors, like many of their neighbors in Sussex County, relied upon the institution of slavery. In fact, as noted above, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the ferry itself was operated by a slave (Siman *et al.* 1807). In 1807, 1813 and 1816, Sussex County taxed the firm of Isaac & Jacob Cannon for three slaves. By 1822 they owned at least five slaves; by 1840 the number had increased to at least thirteen. Isaac and Jacob Cannon each held personal slaves as well. In 1840 Isaac owned twelve additional slaves and his brother owned five slaves (Sussex County Board of Assessments). A small home shown in a photograph identified in Shannon Willey's *Images of America: Seaford, Delaware* as "a picture of Cannon Ferry, a little home that stood at the Ferry Slip in Woodland" may have once served as living quarters for Cannon family slaves (Plate 2.2).

Since the Cannons obviously supported and relied on the institution of slavery, rumors abound linking them and their ferry to the sinister activities of the infamous slave catcher Patty Cannon and her gang. Indeed, Patty Cannon and her husband Jesse Cannon, who was a second cousin once removed to Isaac and Jacob Cannon (see Figure 2.3), together with Joseph and Ebenezer Johnson did embark on a business of kidnapping blacks, both free and slave, and selling them to slave dealers in the Deep South. The gang considered murder to be necessary for the protection of their business. They operated out of Joe Johnson's Tavern

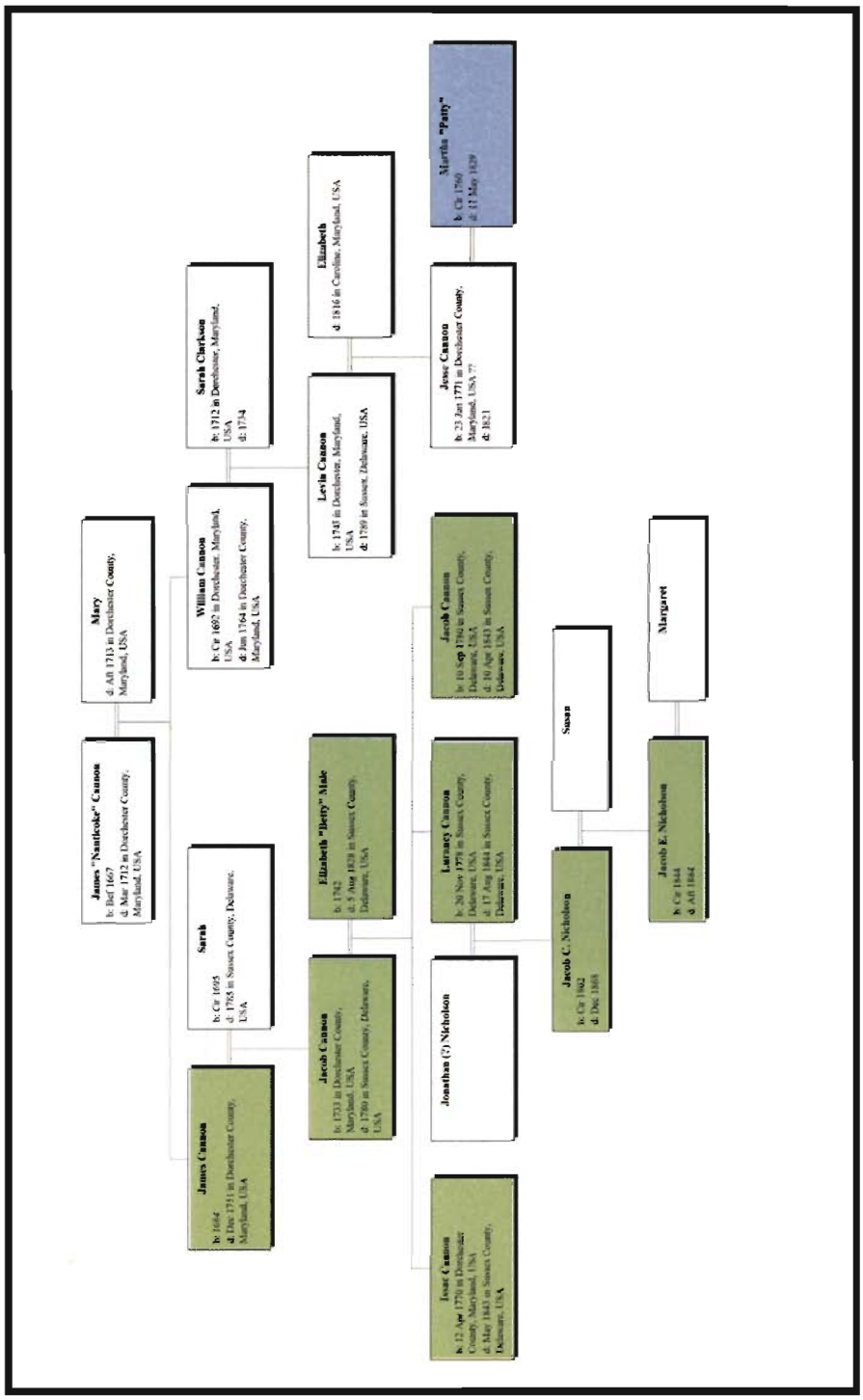


Figure 2.3. Descendents of James Cannon of Nanticoke showing the relationship between Patty Cannon and Isaac and Jacob Cannon (in blue) and outlining Cannon family ownership of property at Cannon's Ferry (owners in green).

Plate 2.1. Historic postcard of Cannon's Hall. Undated. (Source: Collection of Jack Knowles, Woodland, Delaware).

Plate 2.2. Historic photograph of a home that once stood at present Woodland. Undated. (Source: Willey 1999).

on the border of Maryland and Delaware at today's town of Reliance, Maryland, located a mere four miles northwest of Cannon's Ferry (Roth 1998:1-2).

Historians and other writers, past and present, have forged a link between Patty and Jesse Cannon's gang and Cannon's Ferry (e.g. Townsend 1955 [1884]:335-357; Footner 1944:146). The fact that Patty and Jesse Cannon were related to the Cannons living in Cannon's Ferry (albeit by a somewhat distant relationship), the generally unfavorable opinion of the family, and the fact that Betty, Isaac and Jacob Cannon had extensive slave holdings themselves all contributed to this implication. But Patty and Jesse did not establish Cannon's Ferry, nor were they ever its proprietors.

In fact, if Cannon's Ferry played a role in Patty Cannon's escapades, it was only peripheral to her business. When Patty Cannon found buyers for her slaves, she reportedly moved them from the attic of Joe Johnson's Tavern to ships headed south on the Nanticoke River from Truitt's Wharf (at present-day Sharptown, Maryland) or Crotcher's Ferry (at present-day Brookview, Maryland) (Roth 1998:127). Both of these shipping points were approximately seven miles distant from Patty's home base in Reliance, Maryland, three miles further than Cannons' Ferry.

Why wouldn't Patty choose to ship her slaves from the port operated with the sympathy of her own family? The answer likely lies in 19th-century slave-trade laws. In 1808 the United States Congress made the importation of slaves from abroad illegal. But, while importation was banned, slave trade between the states was still a lucrative business – everywhere except Delaware. The small state of Delaware had banned exportation of slaves for sale (Roth 1998:3). Thus, Patty Cannon faced fewer legal barriers by transporting and selling her slaves through the state of Maryland than she faced in Delaware. Because of the favorable location and family connections she had at Cannon's Ferry, Patty Cannon undoubtedly used the port and the ferry on occasion, however her primary shipping points were those located in Maryland.

Regardless of their possible implication in the slave trade, Jacob and Isaac's business practices alone won them more enemies than friends within the community. According to Northwest Fork Hundred resident William Morgan, the Cannon brothers were "as much despised by the community as any two men that have lived among us" (Hancock 1980-1981:112). In addition to their merchant shipping business, Jacob and Isaac made a fortune in money lending and a program of land acquisition fueled by foreclosure. Isaac Cannon was known to have "emptied victuals from cooking pots and took beds away from the sick in an effort to collect his debts" (Hancock 1980-1981:112).

Thus, if most accounts are to be believed, not a tear was shed in the spring of 1843 when both Cannon brothers suddenly died within a month of each other. On April 10 of that year, Jacob Cannon returned to Cannon's Ferry after a visit to the Governor's office, where he had sought assistance regarding business disputes. Jacob had just stepped off of the ferry boat when Owen O'Day approached him on the wharf to confront him about a petty business matter – Cannon had accused O'Day of stealing a "bee gum" from one of his farms (Federal Writers' Project of the Works Project Administration 1938:368). O'Day chose bullets instead of words to settle the dispute and shot Jacob Cannon dead on the wharf. Most of the community sympathized with O'Day and thus while the Delaware Courts did indeed indict him for murder, he had no problem escaping the charges and fleeing west (Scharf 1888:1305).

Isaac Cannon died suddenly of natural causes less than one month later on May 6, 1843 at the age of seventy-three (Scharf 1888:1305). Upon the brothers' deaths, William Morgan wrote in his diary:

After fifty years, cheating, oppressing and distressing, selling and takeing [*sic*] every thing they could lay hold of, there they ly in the graves unlamented and unmourned by any except a few flatters. One for his oppression and cruelty was shot in cold blood and died as a beast. The other was permitted to die in his bed! But *money was his God.* Two (other) such men have not lived in this county, and we hope two other never may (Hancock 1980-1981:111-112).

E. LURANEY BOLING, JACOB C. NICHOLSON AND JACOB E. NICHOLSON (1843 – 1883)

Upon their death, the Cannon brothers bequeathed their land in Baltimore, including several dwelling houses and a soap and candle factory, to their sister, Luraney Boling, their niece Julia Ann Hall and their nephew Jacob C. Nicholson under the condition that they properly maintain the properties. Owing to the fact that neither Jacob nor Isaac Cannon had any children, the remainder of their estate, which encompassed all of their holdings in Cannon's Ferry, passed to their next heir at law – Luraney Boling (Sussex County Probate Records).

A detailed inventory of Boling's possessions taken in 1845 after her death the previous year provides clear evidence that the ferry and its accoutrements had passed to Boling. This inventory listed one wood scow, one schooner "Sailor," one large old scow, two small old scows, one ferry scow, one old and worn out chain cable, one lot of old cable chains and two scow chains, all of which were located "on and about the wharves" (Exhibit J.C.N. No. 7, Maryland Chancery Court 1849).

Through her will, Luraney Boling left her dwelling house in Cannon's Ferry to her son Jacob C. Nicholson to be held in trust for her daughter Julia Ann Hall. The rest of her real estate, including land in Delaware and the property in Baltimore that were willed to her by Jacob and Isaac Cannon, passed to Jacob C. Nicholson and upon his death the residue of her estate was to be divided among her grandchildren. Thus, Jacob C. Nicholson was the next Cannon heir to own the land on and around the wharves and ferry at Cannon's Ferry (Complainant Exhibit C, Maryland Chancery Court 1849).

After his mother's death, Jacob C. Nicholson lived in Cannon's Ferry for a brief period of time. In 1844 Sussex County taxed Nicholson for "one house + lot at Cannon's Ferry [occupied] by self" (Sussex County Board of Assessments 1844). Jacob C. Nicholson lived in Cannon's Ferry until 1849 when he faced a bitter lawsuit over his mother's estate. By the time the lawsuit was filed, Nicholson had moved to Baltimore where he resided until his death.

Due to his inheritance, Jacob C. Nicholson was a very wealthy man. Yet Nicholson did not possess the same business and management skills that his uncles had held, for by the end of the decade Nicholson had so thoroughly mismanaged his mother's estate that his own children banded together and sued Nicholson for possession of the estate. They claimed that the estate was "in danger of being wasted and lost through the default, neglect, misapplication and misconduct of the said Jacob C. Nicholson" who had "embarked in extensive commercial business and having been unsuccessful therein had become wholly and utterly insolvent to an extent far greater than the trust estate in his keeping" (Bill of Complaint, Maryland Chancery Court 1849).

The Maryland Chancery Court agreed with Nicholson's children and on May 3, 1849 the Chancery Court transferred proprietorship of the trust from Jacob C. Nicholson to his son John A. Nicholson (Decree, Maryland Chancery Court 1849). At the time of the lawsuit, Jacob C. Nicholson still held 2989 acres of the 7800 acres in Delaware that had been willed to

him as well as several houses and lots in Cannon's Ferry, which by the judge's decree were to pass to John A. Nicholson (Inventory No. 2 and Exhibit J.C.N. No. 10, Maryland Chancery Court 1849).

However, John A. Nicholson never actually took control of the land. In 1852, Sussex County continued to tax Jacob C. Nicholson for 2760 acres of land, including "200 acres of land unoccupied about the Ferry," as well as a store house, wharves and several houses and lots in Cannon's Ferry (Sussex County Board of Assessments 1852). Sussex County subsequently taxed Nicholson for large sums of property in Delaware in 1856 and 1860 (Sussex County Board of Assessments 1856, 1860). Furthermore, Beers' *Atlas of the State of Delaware* (1868) confirms that Jacob C. Nicholson owned most of the property in Cannon's Ferry until his death (Figure 2.4). The fact that John A. Nicholson never possessed the land is confirmed in Jacob C. Nicholson's will, written in 1864. In his will, Nicholson states that though the judge's decree had ordered John A. to take control of the trust, the estate in fact continued to be held and controlled by Jacob C. himself (Sussex County Probate Records).

Jacob C. Nicholson's will divided his land amongst his children. He reserved two lots specifically for his son Jacob E. Nicholson, who also ultimately became the sole owner of a lot known as the "Bradley Lot" fronting on the Nanticoke River. This soon became an attractive piece of land to the Sussex County Levy Court, which was given the authority to establish a public ferry in Woodland in 1883.

F. SUSSEX COUNTY LEVY COURT (1883 – 1935)

On April 19, 1883 the Delaware General Assembly passed an act authorizing the Levy Court of Sussex County to establish and maintain a ferry at Woodland and to make the necessary appropriations to procure a boat (Delaware General Assembly 1883). That the Assembly felt the need to establish a public ferry at Woodland may be an indication that an official ferry no longer operated regularly in town or that whatever ferry did operate was in substandard condition.

Regardless of the reasons why a ferry was to be established, work on ferry improvements began immediately. In 1883, the Sussex County Levy Court directed William S. Moon to purchase shells to finish the Woodland Ferry crossing. The Levy Court purchased additional shells in 1889 to construct a causeway at the ferry. On October 23, 1883 the court ordered that a small house be constructed at the ferry to shelter waiting passengers during inclement weather. This single story house was to be no less than twelve by fourteen feet and was to be funded in the same manner as were other county road expenses (Sussex County Levy Court).

In order to properly attend to and maintain the Woodland Ferry, the Sussex County Levy Court deemed it necessary to purchase a one-acre tract fronting on the Nanticoke River, adjacent to the land of Benjamin Fooks and Julia A. Hall. On February 18, 1884 Charles M. Cullen, trustee of the Sussex County Levy Court, purchased the necessary tract, known as the "Bradley Lot" from Jacob E. Nicholson for $300 (Sussex County Deed 100/162). This is the earliest evidence of Sussex County owning land on or around Woodland Ferry.

The General Assembly required that the county transport all Delaware citizens across the river at all times between sunrise and sunset free of charge (Delaware General Assembly 1883). As reported by the Office of the Bridge Engineer in 1961, elder residents of Sussex County at that time described the old county-owned ferry as "a scow which was poled across the river" (Office of the Bridge Engineer 1961). With no guide cable, this early ferry would at times drift further upstream or downstream than planned, but the ferry

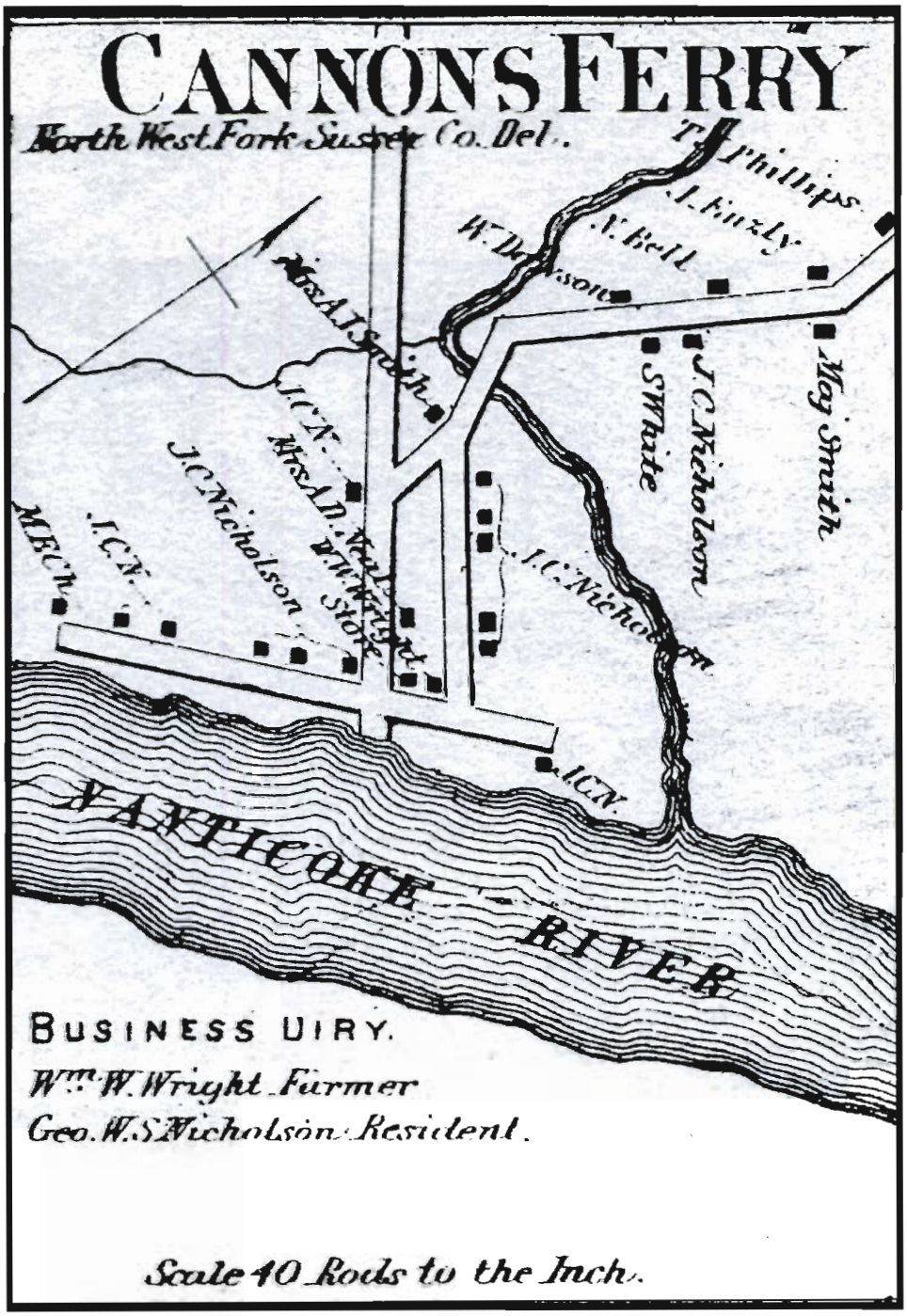


Figure 2.4. Beers, D.G. *Atlas of the State of Delaware*. 1868. Scale: 1 inch= 330 feet (approximately).

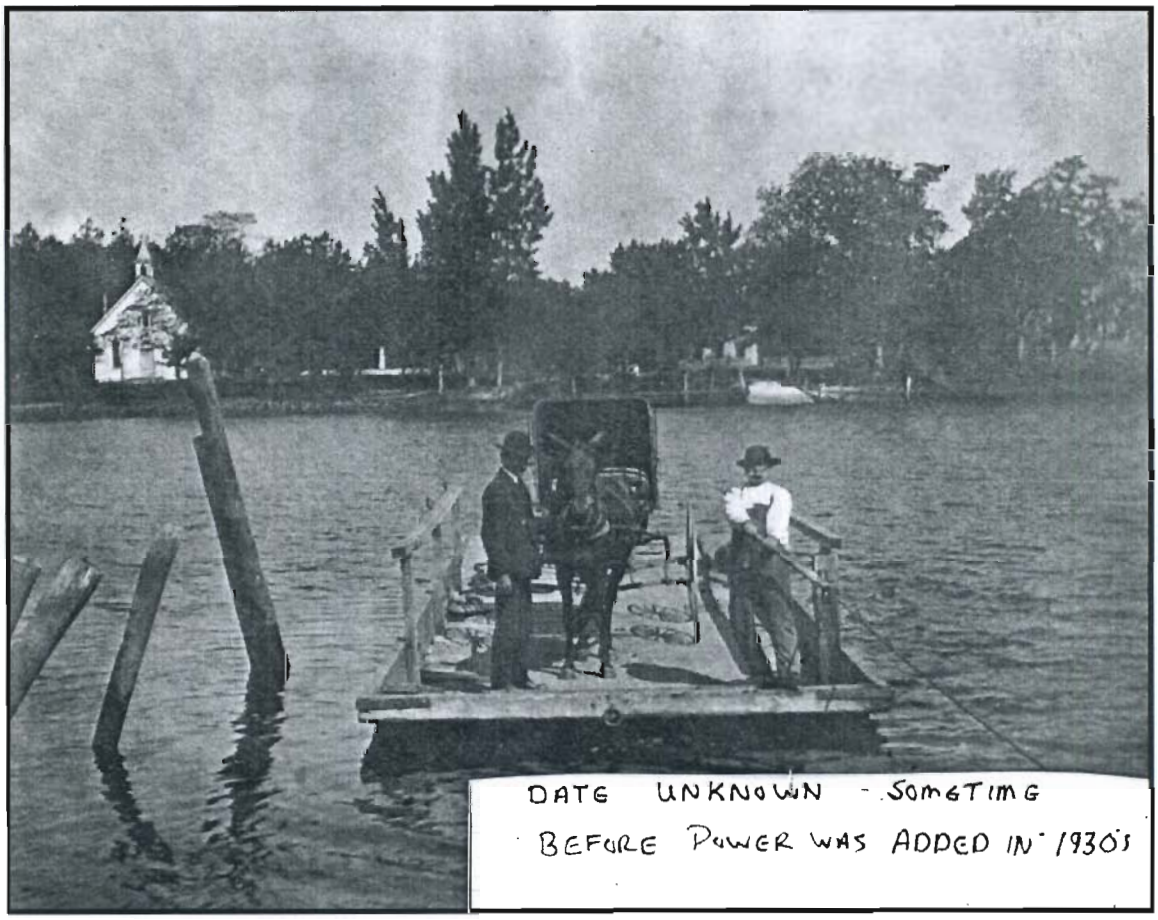


Plate 2.3. Historic photograph of Cannon's Ferry. Undated. Note the Methodist Church in the background (Source: Collection of Jack Knowles, Woodland, Delaware).

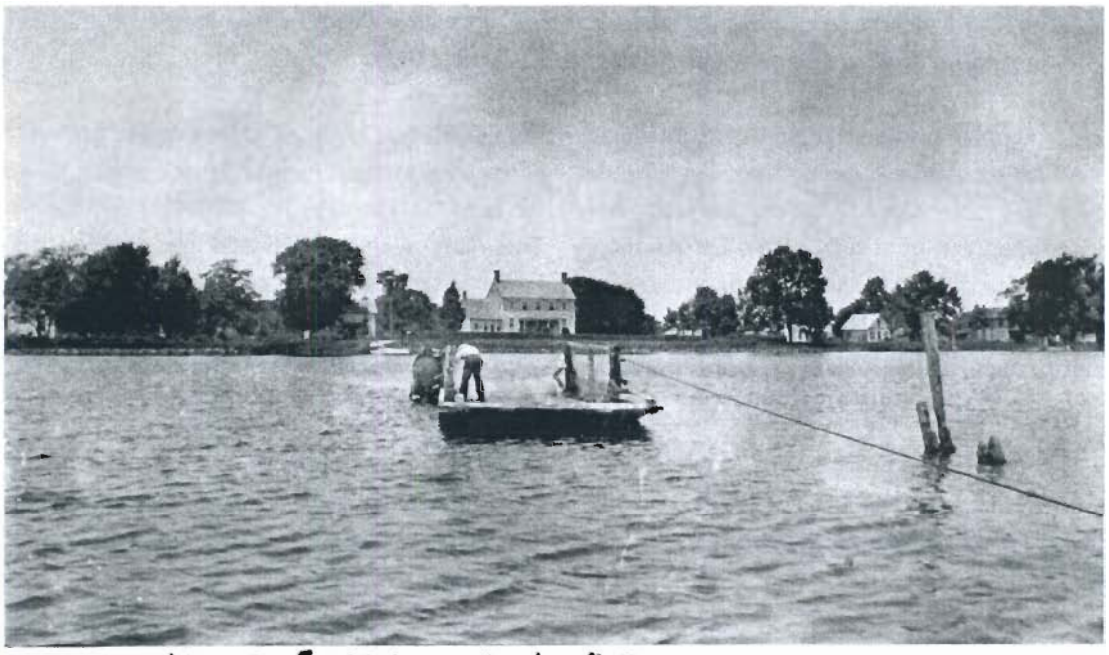


Plate 2.4. Historic photograph of Woodland Ferry with "Model T" engine. Cannon Hall is in the background. 1930. (Source: Collection of Jack Knowles, Woodland, Delaware).

was eventually replaced by one attached to a guide cable that held the ferry in line as it crossed the river. The ferry man propelled the boat with a pole "which he wedged down on the cable at the forward or bow end, according to the direction to be traveled, and then walked back toward the rear or stern, propelling the boat forward" (see Plate 2.3; Office of the Bridge Engineer 1961). The Sussex County Levy Court hired William B. Ellis to "pole" the ferry across the Nanticoke. In 1885 Ellis was paid an annual salary of $119.99 for his efforts (Sussex County Levy Court).

By 1930, ferry operators no longer had to manually propel the boat across the river. In that year a Model "T" engine had been attached to the wooden ferry. The ferry was guided by a steel cable that lay along the bottom of the river until winched in by the ferryman. The boat was propelled by a small automobile engine attached to its side (Plate 2.4; Federal Writers' Project of the Works Project Administration 1938; Knowles 2007).

G. STATE OF DELAWARE (1935 – PRESENT)

The Sussex County Levy Court continued to own and operate the ferry until 1935, when the Delaware State Highway Department assumed responsibility for the maintenance of all county roads and associated structures, which included Woodland Ferry. Shortly thereafter, the Delaware State Highway Department replaced the existing ferry with a new two-car ferry (State Highway Department 1935; Office of the Bridge Engineer 1961).

In 1937, the State Highway Department contracted with J.E. Friedel of Seaford, Delaware to construct a new timber ferry boat. The estimated cost of the boat was $1,587 (State Highway Department 1937). The new two-car wooden ferry boat, put in service later that year, was guided by a cable and propelled by a gasoline engine. The boat measured thirteen feet six inches wide and thirty five feet ten inches long and had six-foot ramps at either end (Plate 2.5) (Office of the Bridge Engineer 1961). According to local historian Jack Knowles, the ferry was replaced again between 1947 and 1949. Though no State Highway Department contract files speaking to this were located during the course of this research, photographic evidence certainly shows that the boat was altered, if not replaced at this time (see Plates 2.6 and 2.7) (Jack Knowles 2007).

This boat was only in commission for ten years, perhaps ultimately jinxed by the name chosen for the boat on January 21, 1959 – the *Patty Cannon*. The *Patty Cannon* operated for only a few additional months until the combination of typical wear and tear and a tragic fatal accident in which several ferry passengers drowned when their car backed off of the boat, forced its closure (Office of the Bridge Engineer 1961; Knowles 2007). At that time, the State Highway Department made plans to install a new ferry at Woodland. The department considered two different designs – one costlier than the other. Though chief engineer R.A. Haber suggested that the costlier version, with its elaborate "gingerbread" design, would be valued as a tourist attraction, the Department ultimately settled on the less expensive version, approving $50,000 for construction of the boat and slips (Figure 2.5) (Unidentified Newspaper Clipping 1959).

In 1961, the ferry was replaced with an all-steel, cable-guided boat constructed by R.T.C. Shipbuilding Corporation of Camden, New Jersey using the designs of George Meese of Annapolis, Maryland. The new boat, named the *Virginia C* in honor of the wife of Highway Commissioner Mr. Dallas D. Culver, could hold up to three cars and was powered by a 122 horse power diesel engine. It measured sixty-four feet, ten inches in length and eighteen feet in width and had ten foot ramps at either end (see Figure 2.6). In order to

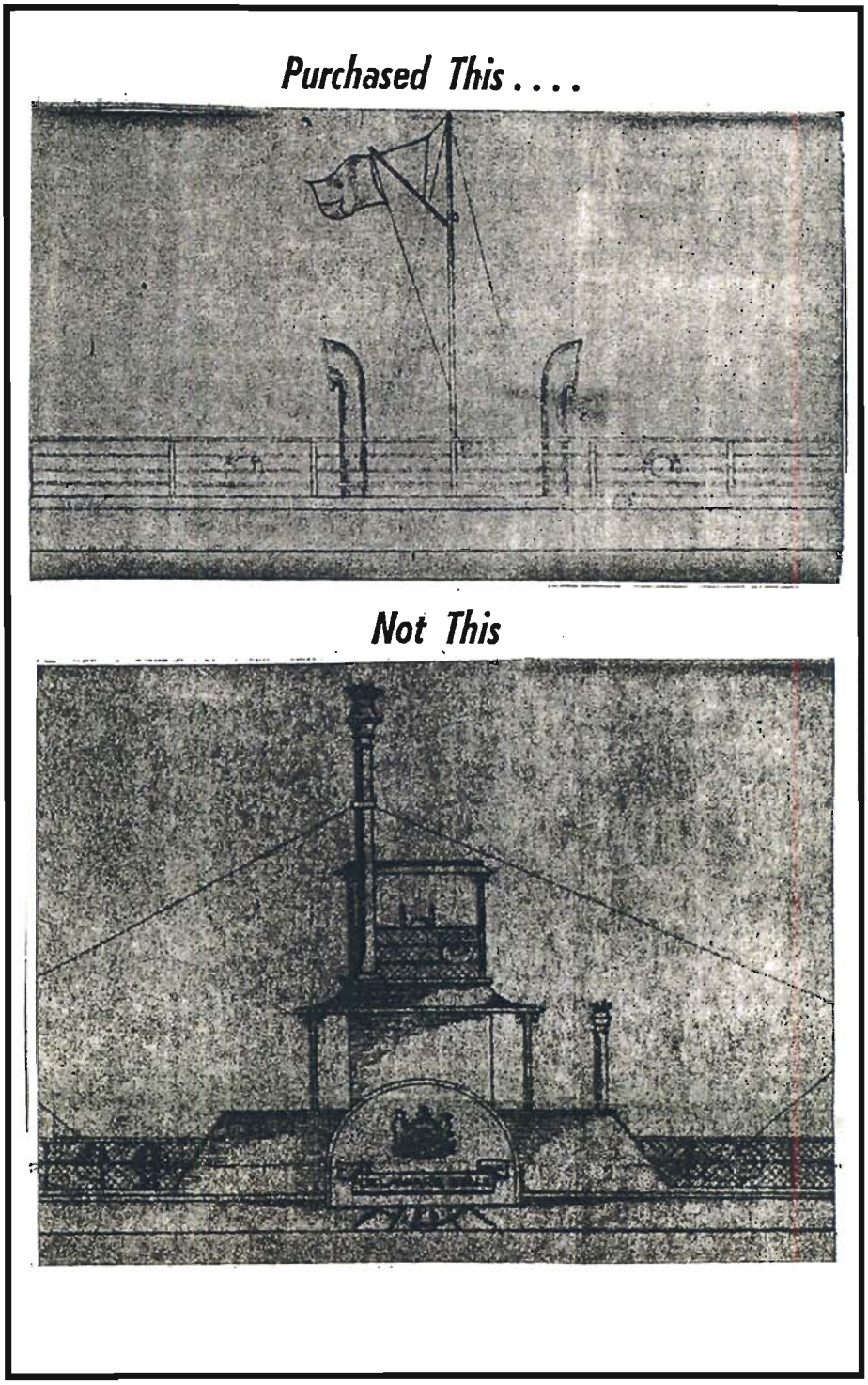


Figure 2.5. Drawing of Proposed Boats for the New Woodland Ferry. 1959. (Source: Newspaper Clippings Collection, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware).

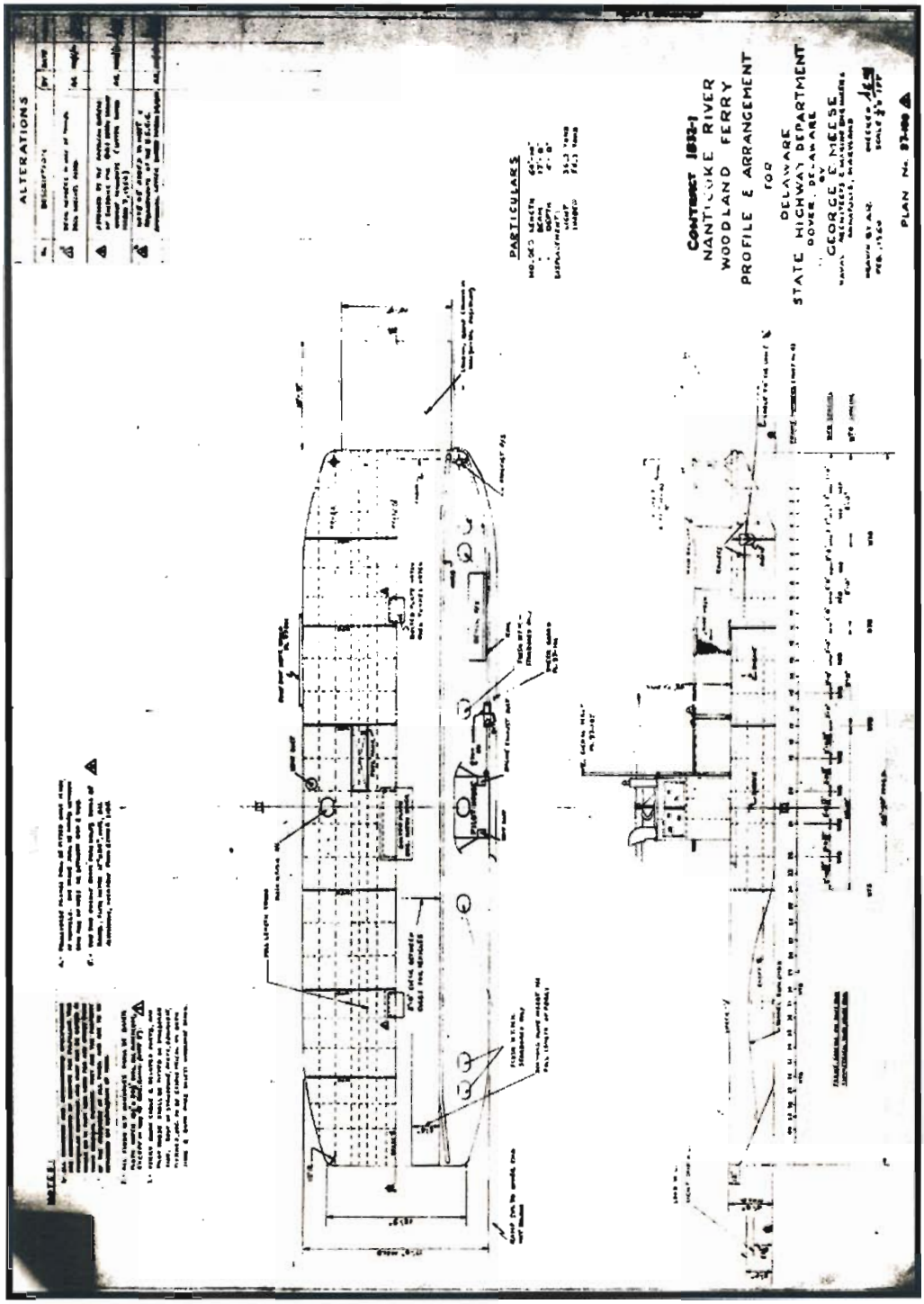


Figure 2.6. Diagram of New Ferry Boat. 1961. (Source: Delaware State Highway Department Contract Files 1832, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware).

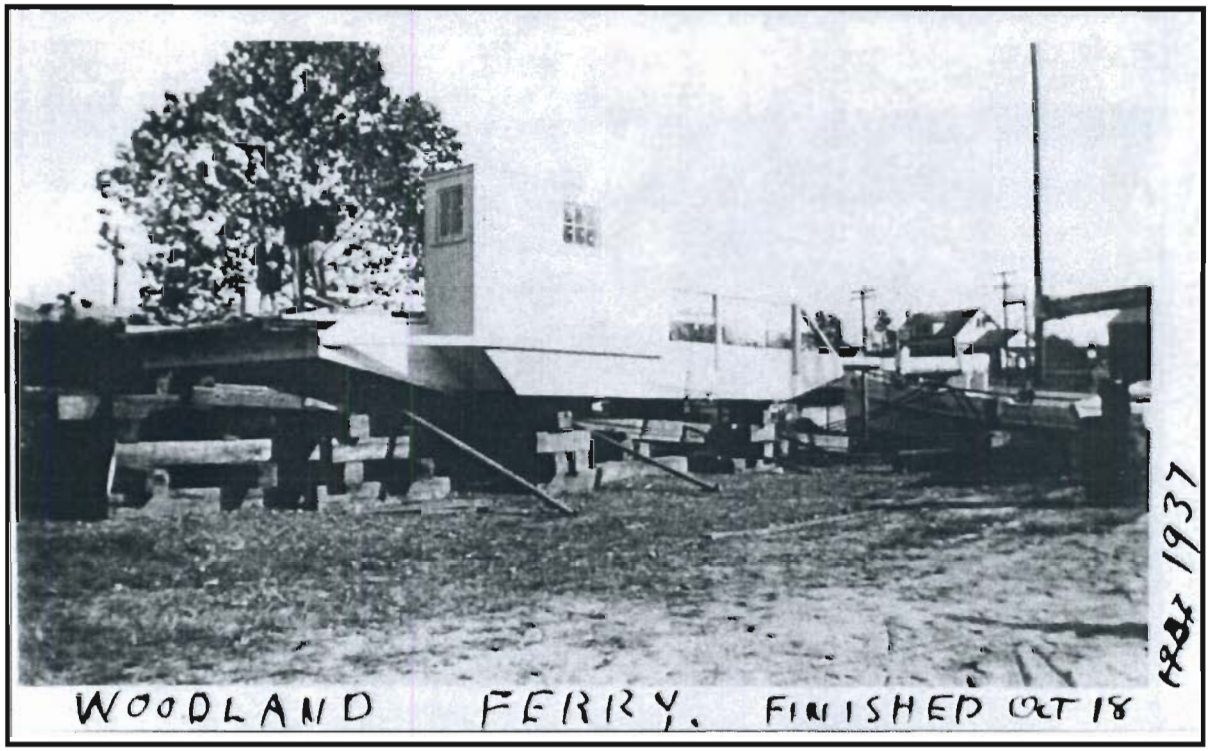
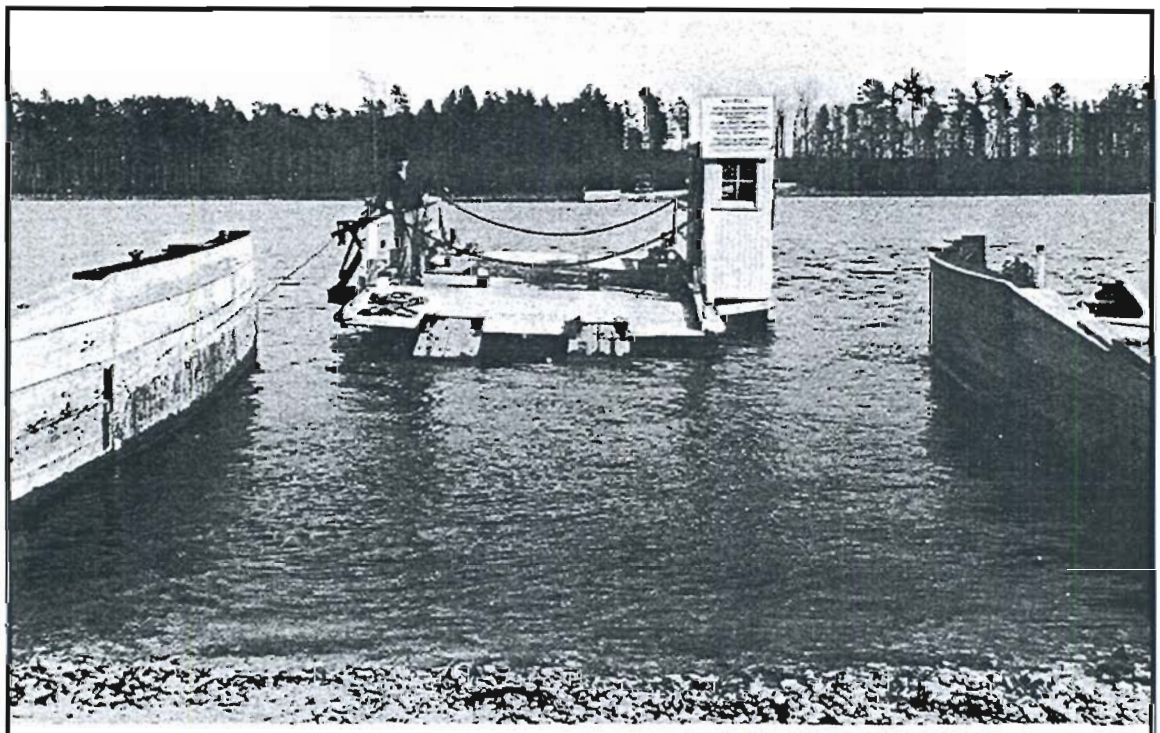


Plate 2.5. Historic photograph of ferry boat under construction in Seaford, Delaware. 1937. (Source: Collection of Jack Knowles, Woodland, Delaware).



CANNON'S FERRY AT WOODLAND, NORTHWEST OF LAUREL, SUSSEX COUNTY

Plate 2.6. Woodland ferry boat shortly after construction. 1937. (Source: State Highway Department 1937).

The old ferry at Woodland, southwest of Seaford.

Plate 2.7. Woodland ferry crossing the Nanticoke River. *circa* 1950s. Note the ferry slips as they existed prior to 1961. (Source: State Highway Department 1961).

accommodate the new boat, the Bridge Section of the Delaware Highway Department called for the replacement of the existing slips. The new slips, which were constructed by Burger Construction Company of Dover, Delaware, extended further from the banks of the Nanticoke than did their earlier counterparts and incorporated a system of piles and 7-pile dolphins (Figure 2.7 and Plates 2.7 and 2.8) (Office of the Bridge Engineer 1961).

The *Virginia C* was dedicated in March 1961 after being thoroughly tested and examined (Plates 2.8 and 2.9). In its annual report of 1961, the State Highway Department hailed the success of the new ferry (Plate 2.10). In its inaugural year, the boat had made 1,627 trips, carrying 3,215 vehicles across the Nanticoke River (State Highway Department 1961:34) while the remnants of the last wooden ferry lay largely unnoticed along the banks of the Nanticoke River (Plate 2.11) (Knowles 2007).

The *Virginia C* has been in use since 1961 despite a number of mechanical issues and breakdowns. After the ferry was closed for nearly a year between 1988 and 1989 and again between 1999 and 2000, Delaware legislators introduced a resolution calling for more regular maintenance and inspection of the ferry to prevent future, long-term delays in service (Shortridge 2000). However it was quickly apparent that the only way to guarantee regular, reliable ferriage across the Nanticoke River was to replace and enlarge the ferry and associated infrastructure. Today, this responsibility belongs to the Delaware Department of Transportation, the agency that absorbed the responsibilities held by the former State Highway Department in 1976.

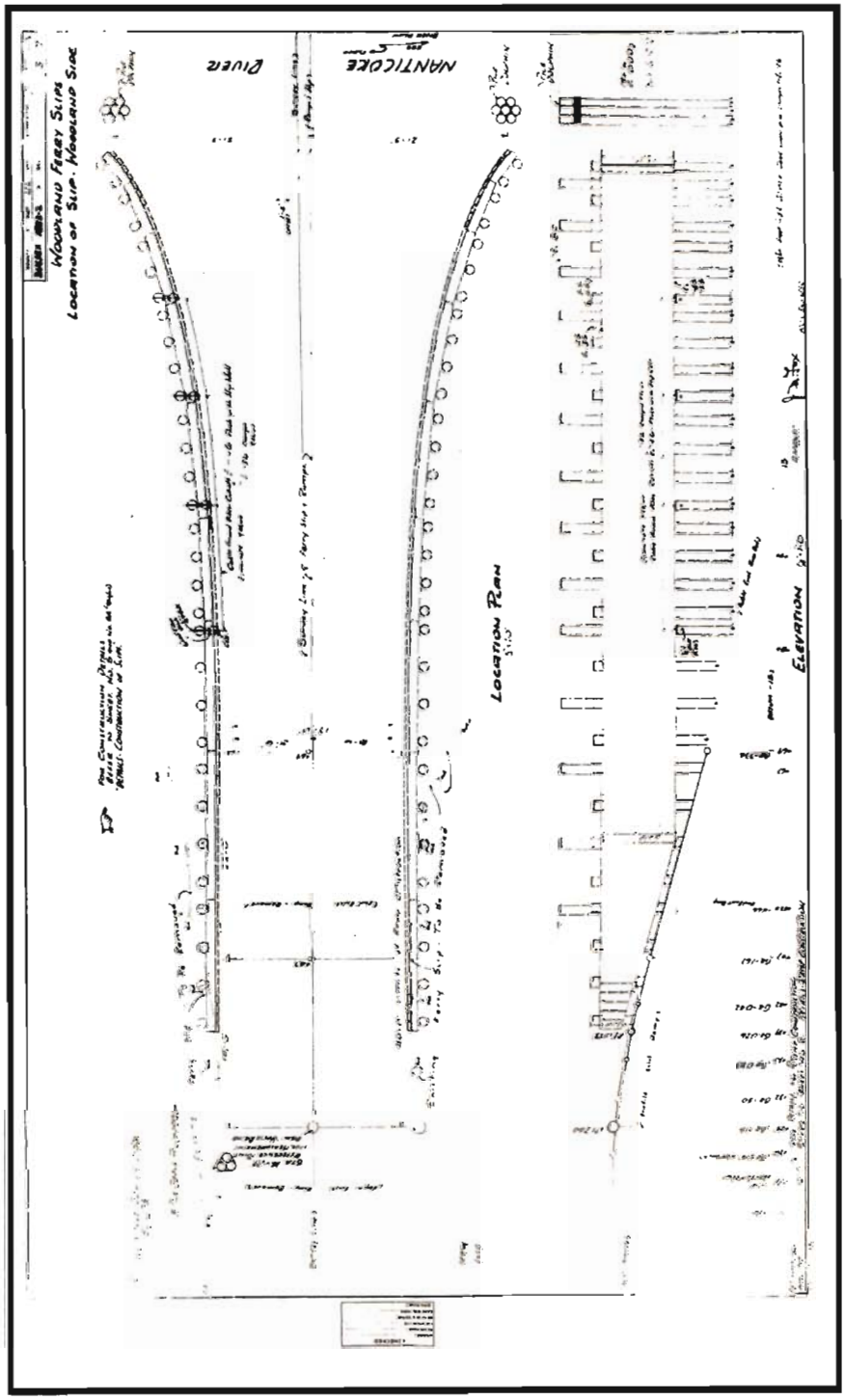
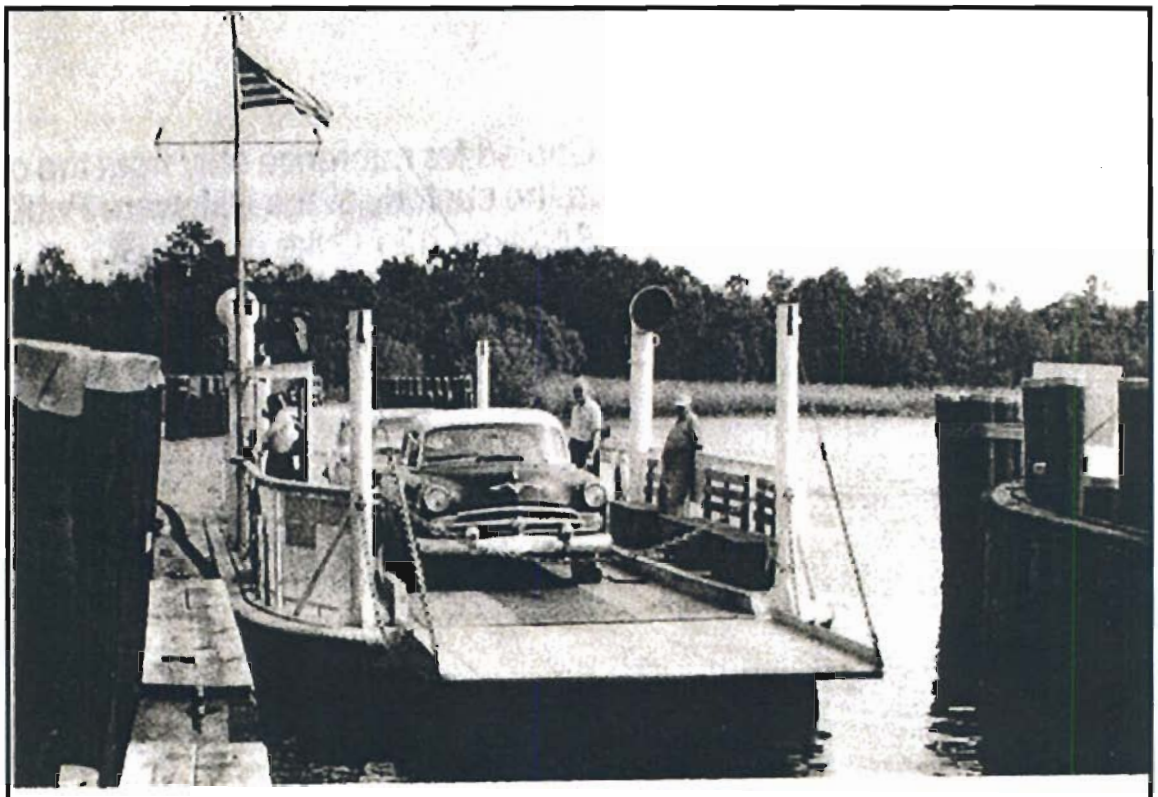


Figure 2.7. Diagram of New Ferry Slips. 1961. Note the indication of "ferry slips to be removed" on the left side of the diagram. (Source: Delaware State Highway Department Contract Files 1832, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware).

Plate 2.8. Photograph of officials testing the *Virginia C* prior to its dedication with Cannon Hall in the background. March 2, 1961. Note the more extensive system of pilings used in the new slip construction as compared to those of the earlier slips shown in Plate 2.5. (Source: State Highway Department Photographs, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware).

Plate 2.9. Dedication of the *Virginia C.* 1961. (Source: State Highway Department Photographs, Delaware Public Archives, Dover, Delaware).



The new ferry, "Virginia C," crossing the Nanticoke River at Woodland.

Plate 2.10. The *Virginia C* crossing the Nanticoke River. 1961. (Source: State Highway Department 1961).

Plate 2.11. Photograph of the remnants of the old wooden ferry boat on the banks of the Nanticoke River. 1980s. (Source: Collection of Jack Knowles, Woodland, Delaware).