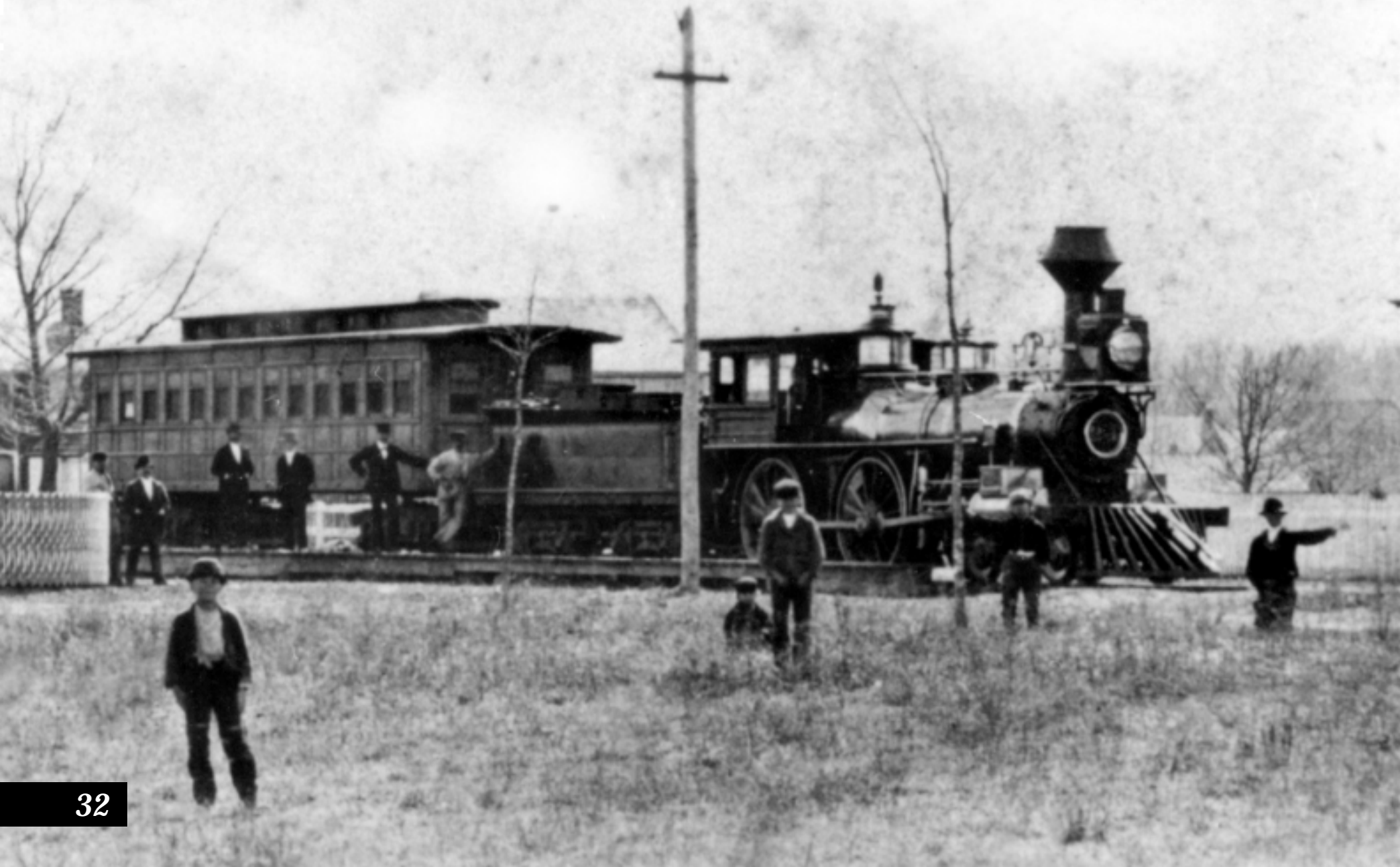


# DELAWARE'S



# RAILROADS 1827-1996



The development of the railroad industry in Delaware mirrors that of the nation as a whole: railroads developed beginning in the late 1820s as a rapid, all-weather transportation alternative. They expanded their geographic range throughout the 19th century, fostering community development at transshipment points and transforming local economies by providing greater access to markets. Years of overbuilding left railroads vulnerable to outside forms of competition, particularly motor vehicles operating on improved highways, which by the mid-20th century undercut the dominance of railroads as the major long-distance transportation system. Delaware railroads, like railroads throughout the country, restructured in the face of competition becoming parts of consolidated systems that continue to play a prominent role in the state's economy.

The impact of the railroad industry is large, eco-

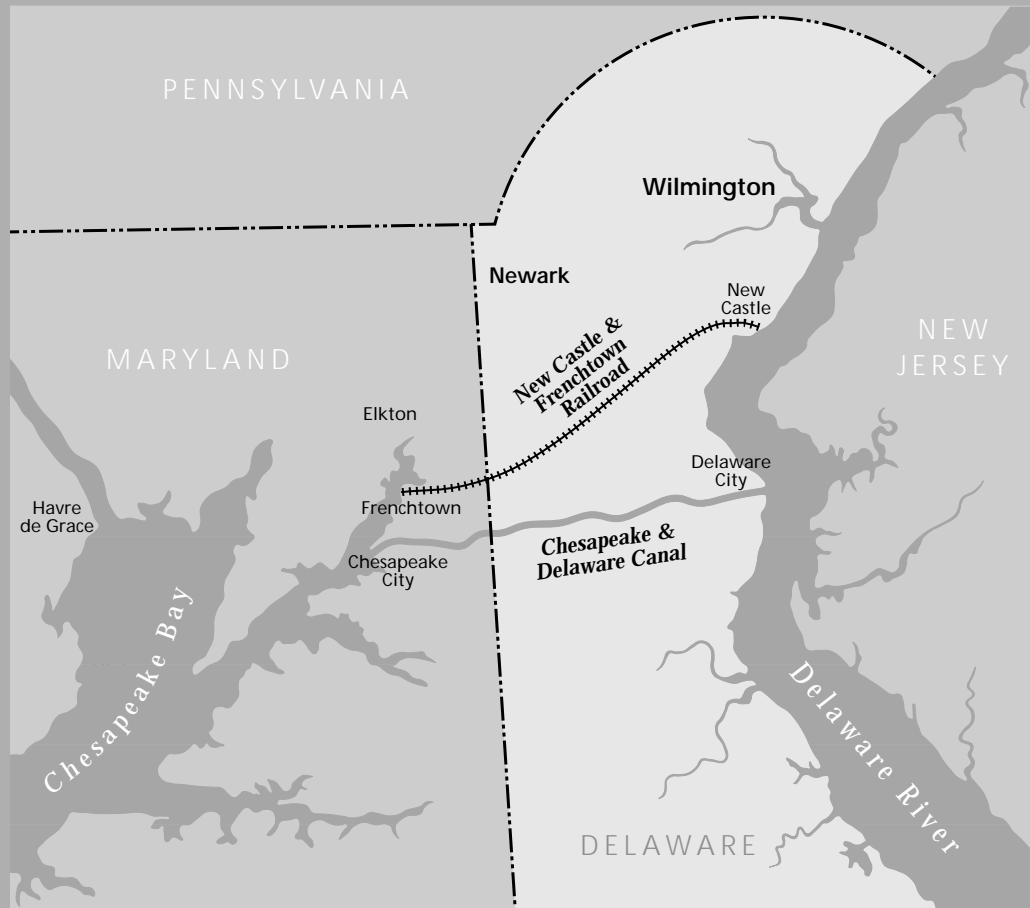
---

*The Delaware Railroad, established in the late 1850s, opened southern Delaware's agriculture to new markets. The railroad chose to locate inland away from the colonial towns and villages that had been founded on navigable waterways nearer the bay. Here, a train stops at Felton, Kent County, one of the many towns that grew with the railroad.*

nomically, socially, and politically. Railroads helped Wilmington grow as a manufacturing and trading center. Rail times and travel transformed the economy of lower Delaware, creating new towns and shifting the centers of commerce in established ones in the process. Their imprint remains large on the built environment in the form of depots, towers, office buildings, shops, bridges, rights-of-way and signal towers.

Through World War II one carrier dominated the Delaware railroad industry: the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad (PW&B) and its corporate parent, the Pennsylvania Railroad. The carrier converted the state's transportation system from water dependent to rail based and fundamentally altered the state's physical environment. Its impact stimulated the development of industrial corridors, agricultural warehouses, and processing sites along the rail line. The PW&B tied Wilmington and New Castle County into the megalopolis running from Washington, D.C. to New York City. Electrified in the 1920s & 1930s, the line, the nation's busiest rail corridor, continues to serve passengers today as part of Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. The PW&B's downstate extension, the Delaware Railroad, was the transportation spine for the state prior to the development of Delaware's state highway system. In its wake came

# Delaware's Canals & Railroads –1830



*The period from 1820 to 1860 has been called the “transportation revolution” by historians. It is noteworthy for the construction nationwide of hundreds of miles of railroads and canals. Delaware’s transportation revolution began in 1828-30 with the opening of a canal and competing railroad across Delaware’s northern neck. The Chesapeake & Delaware Canal and the New Castle & Frenchtown Railroad were built to speed travel between the Chesapeake and Delaware bays.*

towns, feeder rail lines, and roads that transformed the economy and environment. The Delaware Railroad continues as part of Conrail’s Delmarva section. The PW&B/Pennsylvania Railroad main line and the Delaware Railroad are significant on a state level. The Pennsylvania Railroad main line also has national significance in association with the electrification project of the 1920s and 1930s.

Other railroads have played a part in the Diamond State’s development, including the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O), the Reading, and a number of smaller carriers feeding traffic to the Pennsylvania and Delaware railroads. None had the formative, long-term impact on the state of the PW&B-Pennsylvania, and all should be considered local in importance. This includes the B&O, one of the “Big Three” mid-Atlantic carriers (along with the Pennsylvania and New York Central), whose operations in Delaware were restricted to passenger operations and one minor freight line.

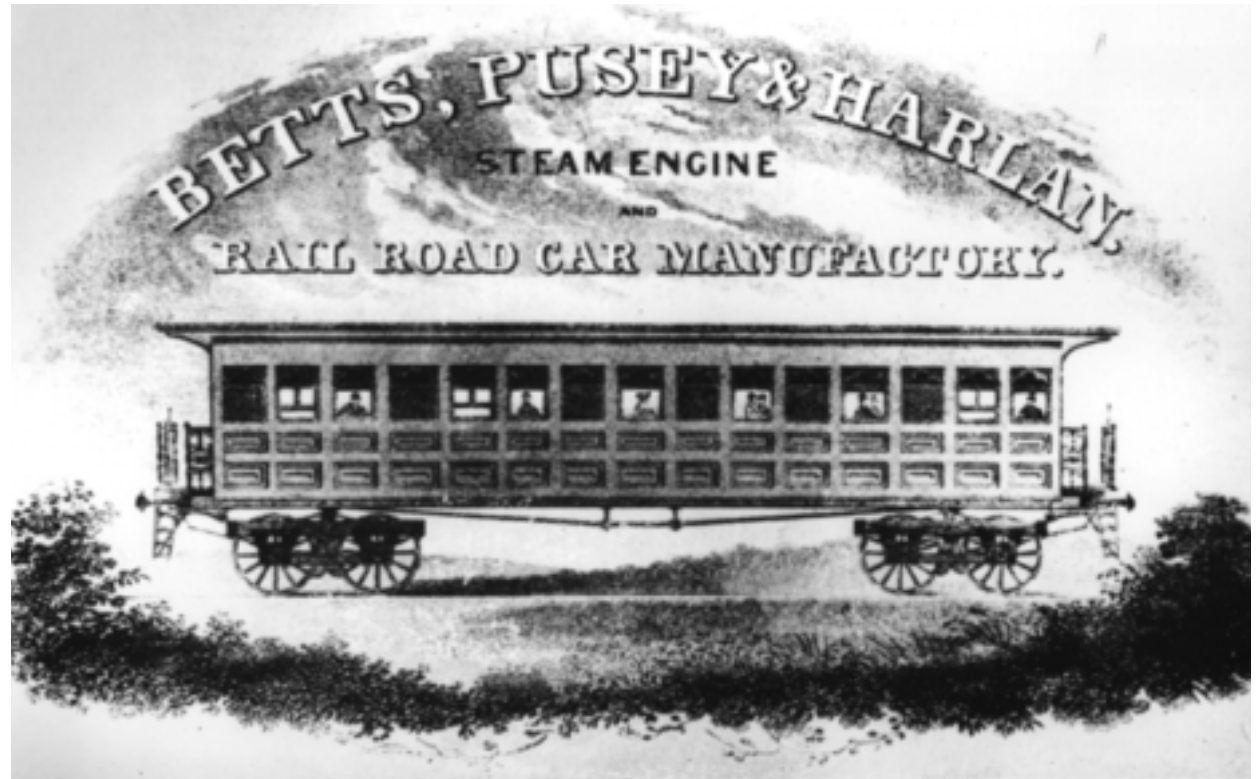
## Early Railroad Development in Delaware

**R**ailroading in Delaware began as part of an attempt to link the major cities of the eastern

# Delaware's Railroads

seaboard, including Wilmington, through a reliable, year-round transportation network. Delaware's first railroad line actually began as a turnpike. In 1811, the New Castle & Frenchtown Turnpike (NC&F) opened an improved, 16-1/2 mile long road across the First State's northern neck between Frenchtown on the Elk River in Maryland and New Castle on the Delaware. The roadway linked together steamboat operations on the Chesapeake and Delaware bays and formed part of a transportation route between Baltimore and Philadelphia. The graded turnpike was converted to a railroad in 1830 in order to more effectively compete with the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal, opened in 1828 between the two bays. Key capital for the reorganized NC&F came from Philadelphia and Baltimore financiers interested in improved transportation between their cities.

The NC&F was an instant success. The steam-powered railroad leg cut the travel time between Baltimore and Philadelphia, but the need to transfer freight from boat to railroad car and the difficulty of navigating on the Chesapeake and Delaware bays in



***Wilmington's industrialists became key suppliers to the railroad industry after the PW&B opened its line in the 1830s. Betts, Pusey & Harlan, later Harlan & Hollinsworth, helped build the city's reputation for railroad cars.***

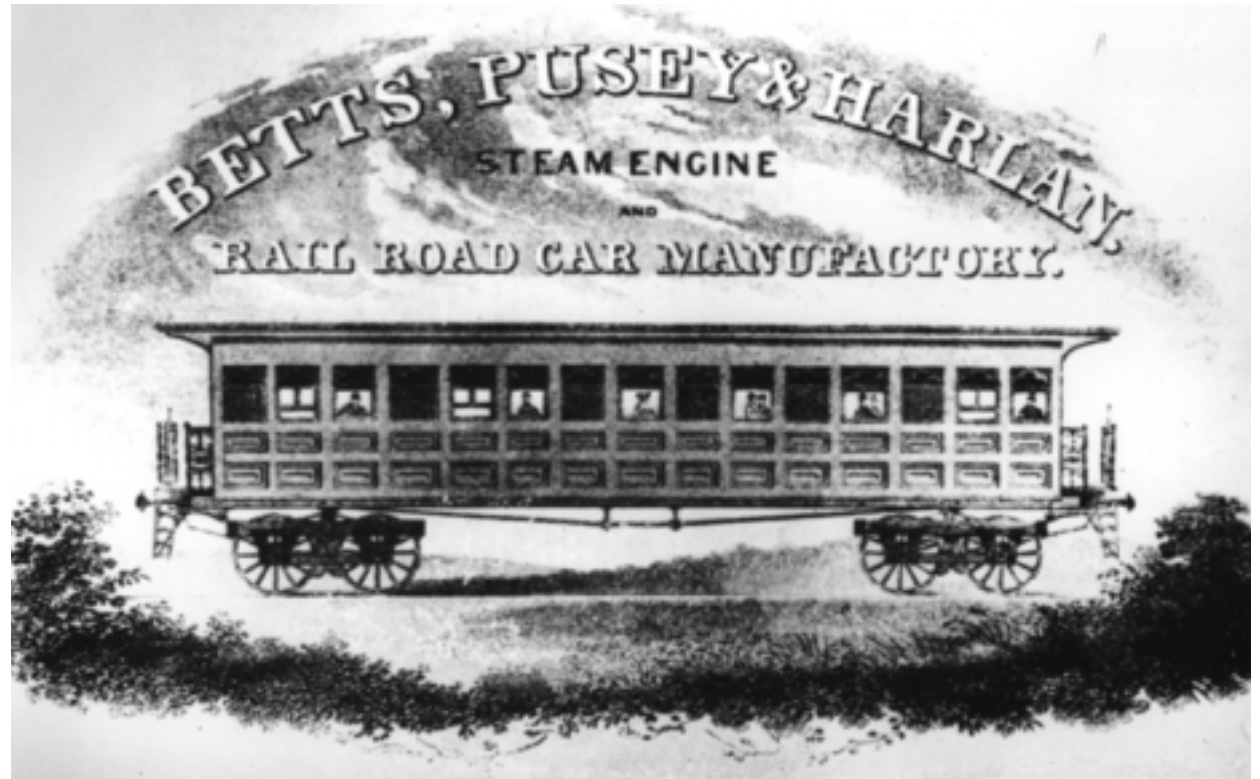
winter proved to be the line's undoing. In 1832, Wilmington interests chartered the Wilmington & Susquehanna Railroad, the Delaware portion of a rail line slated to run between Baltimore and Philadelphia. By 1843,

the integrated Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad, successor to the Wilmington & Susquehanna, had assumed control of the NC&F, relegating it to branch line service. The westernmost nine miles were

# Delaware's Railroads

seaboard, including Wilmington, through a reliable, year-round transportation network. Delaware's first railroad line actually began as a turnpike. In 1811, the New Castle & Frenchtown Turnpike (NC&F) opened an improved, 16-1/2 mile long road across the First State's northern neck between Frenchtown on the Elk River in Maryland and New Castle on the Delaware. The roadway linked together steamboat operations on the Chesapeake and Delaware bays and formed part of a transportation route between Baltimore and Philadelphia. The graded turnpike was converted to a railroad in 1830 in order to more effectively compete with the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal, opened in 1828 between the two bays. Key capital for the reorganized NC&F came from Philadelphia and Baltimore financiers interested in improved transportation between their cities.

The NC&F was an instant success. The steam-powered railroad leg cut the travel time between Baltimore and Philadelphia, but the need to transfer freight from boat to railroad car and the difficulty of navigating on the Chesapeake and Delaware bays in

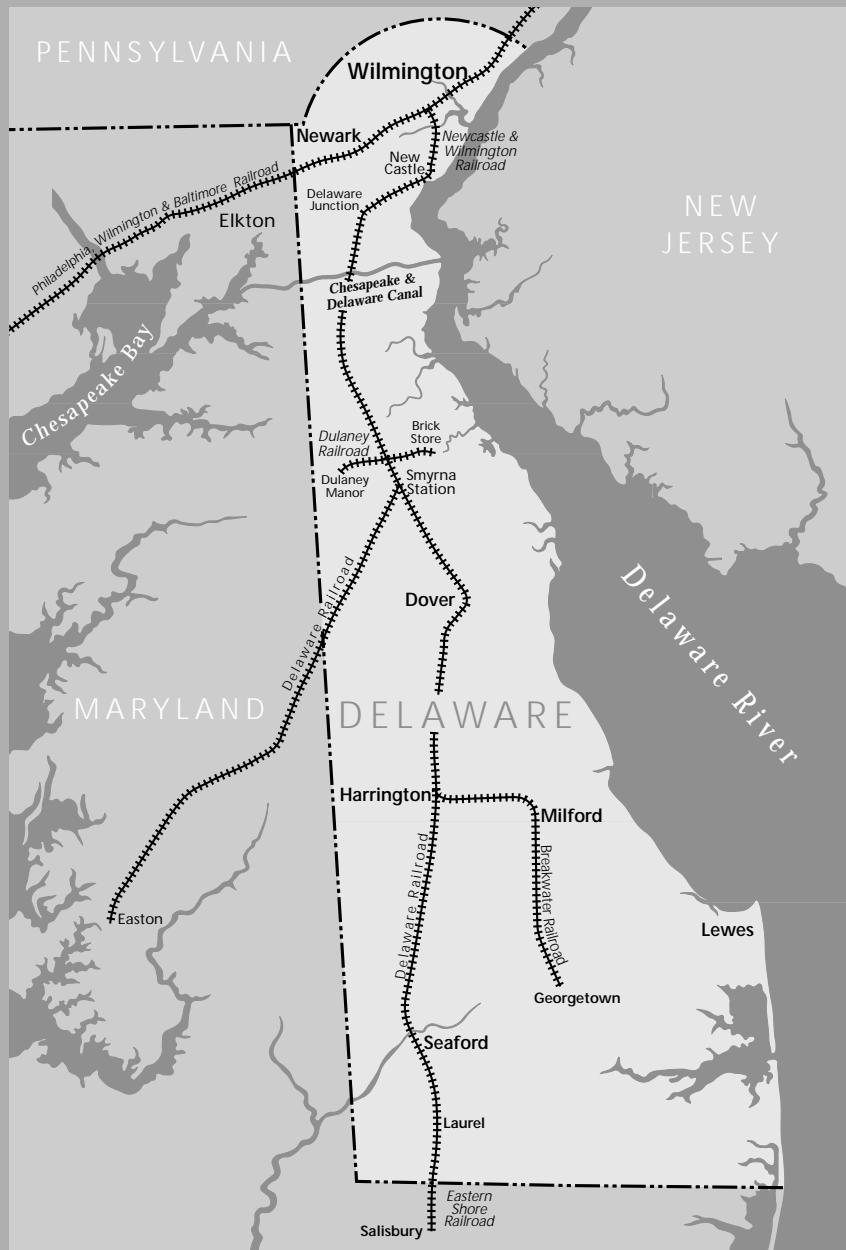


***Wilmington's industrialists became key suppliers to the railroad industry after the PW&B opened its line in the 1830s. Betts, Pusey & Harlan, later Harlan & Hollinsworth, helped build the city's reputation for railroad cars.***

winter proved to be the line's undoing. In 1832, Wilmington interests chartered the Wilmington & Susquehanna Railroad, the Delaware portion of a rail line slated to run between Baltimore and Philadelphia. By 1843,

the integrated Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad, successor to the Wilmington & Susquehanna, had assumed control of the NC&F, relegating it to branch line service. The westernmost nine miles were

# Delaware's Canals & Railroads – 1860



By 1860, the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad and the Delaware Railroad were established as the state's two leading railroads.

abandoned in 1857. The remainder of the old right-of-way was used as part of the link between Wilmington and the downstate Delaware Railroad. Six original miles are still in use today as part of Conrail's New Castle Secondary line.

## A Near Monopoly: *The Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad*

Construction of the all-rail route between Baltimore and Philadelphia began in 1837. Chartered as four separate companies, the lines merged in 1840 to form the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad (PW&B). The PW&B would dominate Delaware railroading for the next 45 years by offering two essential services: a fast, dependable all-weather route between Washington and New York, and reliable transportation linking Delaware with markets in the Northeast and the world.

The all-rail route between Baltimore and Philadelphia and through northern Delaware was opened in 1838, but engineering mistakes and poor economic decisions threatened the line's existence. In the late 1840s, the PW&B verged on bankruptcy. New management, however, engineered a dramatic turnaround, relaying the line with heavier T rail, contracting for better loco-



# Delaware's Railroads

In 1859, the Delaware Railroad extended its route south from Seaford. The railroad crossed the Nanticoke River on a wood girder bridge with a movable span to permit the passage of ships. This view was taken in the late-19th century.