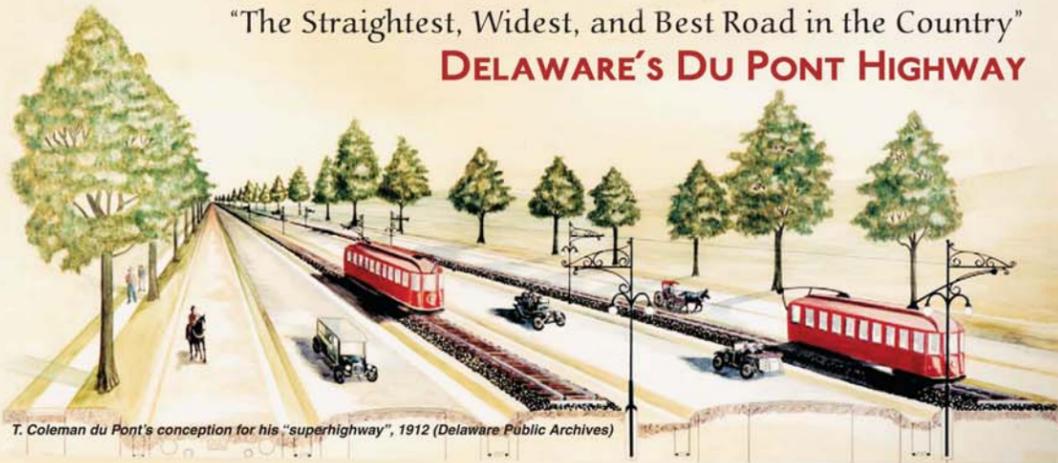
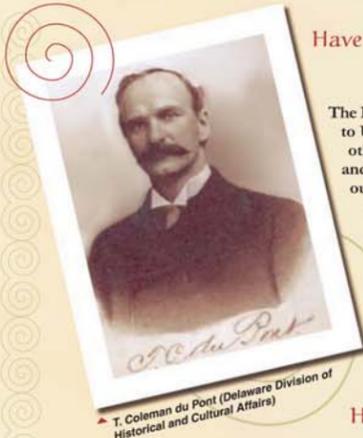


"The Straightest, Widest, and Best Road in the Country"

## DELAWARE'S DU PONT HIGHWAY



T. Coleman du Pont's conception for his "superhighway", 1912 (Delaware Public Archives)



T. Coleman du Pont (Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs)

### Have You Ever Wondered How The Du Pont Highway Got Its Name? When And Why Was It Built? Where Does It Go? Did It Replace An Earlier Road?

The Delaware Department of Transportation, as part of its planning effort for improvements to U.S. Route 113 (Milford to the Maryland state line), is finding answers to these and other questions as the history of the Du Pont Highway and the important buildings and archaeological sites that line the highway are investigated. This study will increase our knowledge and understanding of the people and places that have shaped present-day Delaware.

#### What Came Before The Du Pont Highway?

By the late 1700s a major road, known as the King's Highway, extended the length of Delaware from Pennsylvania to Virginia. Part of this alignment survives as State Route 213.

#### How Did The Du Pont Highway Come About?

The idea for the Du Pont Highway grew out of a nationwide campaign for good roads that began in the late 1800s. The highway was the brainchild of T. Coleman du Pont (1863-1930), a Wilmington businessman, industrialist, and early "superhighway" advocate. Du Pont observed the bad roads and poor economic conditions of southern Delaware as he traveled from Wilmington to his estate on the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland. He believed a new highway network was essential for the economic development of the state, and the backbone of this system could be a major north-south highway.

Du Pont envisioned a 200-foot wide right-of-way with separate corridors dedicated to high-speed automotive traffic, trolleys, trucks and wagons, horses, and pedestrians. Agricultural experimental stations were envisioned along the right-of-way, and monuments serving as "base points" for future surveys were to be placed at 1,000-foot intervals. Du Pont's far-sighted scheme for a multi-modal highway was never realized. The proposal faced significant local opposition, mainly because of the considerable acreage needed for the right-of-way.

#### When Was The Du Pont Highway Built?

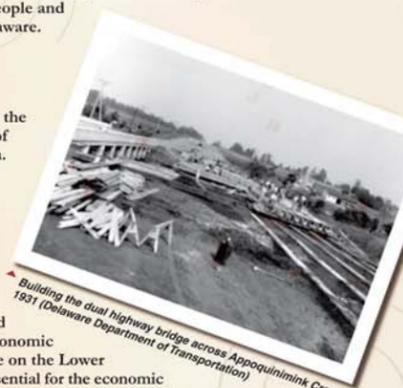
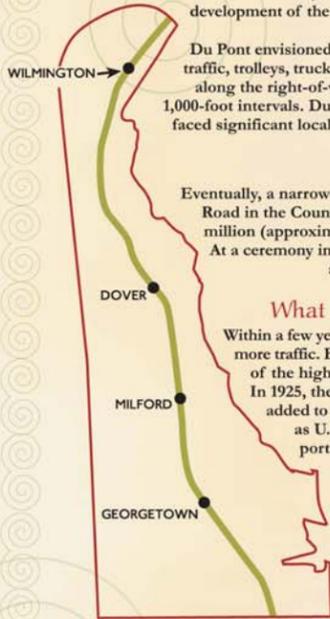
Eventually, a narrower right-of-way was acquired, and construction of "The Straightest, Widest, and Best Road in the Country" was begun in 1911. It was officially completed in 1924 at a total cost of nearly \$4.9 million (approximately \$53.6 million in today's dollars) and presented as a gift to the people of Delaware. At a ceremony in Dover, T. Coleman du Pont was presented with a silver and gold plaque (now on exhibit at the Delaware Public Archives) honoring his contributions to the state.

#### What Changes Did The Dupont Highway Bring?

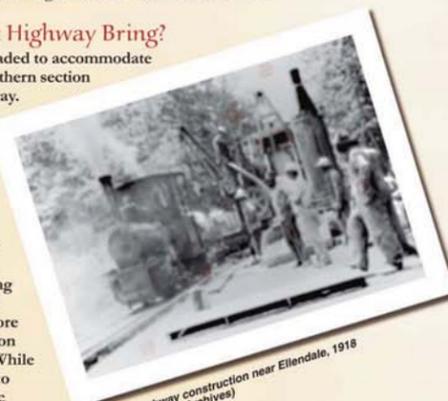
Within a few years the Du Pont Highway was upgraded to accommodate more traffic. By the late 1920s, a portion of the northern section of the highway was rebuilt as a divided highway. In 1925, the Du Pont Highway was officially added to the United States highway system as U.S. 113 and U.S. 13. Widening of portions of the 14-foot wide highway in Sussex County began in 1930.

The highway brought changes in farming practices, with lumber, market products and poultry raising gradually replacing grain and livestock farming. Faster and more efficient modes of transportation brought new industries as well. While

most through traffic from I-95 to Milford has recently shifted to Route 1, the Du Pont Highway continues to serve local traffic needs and provides access to roadside businesses. South of Milford, it continues to function as one of Delaware's major inland north-south routes.



Building the dual highway bridge across Appoquinimink Creek, 1931 (Delaware Department of Transportation)



DuPont Highway construction near Ellendale, 1918 (Delaware Public Archives)



A historic farmhouse near Milford (John Milner Associates, Inc.)

#### Telling The Story

The historical study of the Du Pont Highway is part of DelDOT's continuing efforts to engage Delaware residents in the discovery of the state's rich heritage. DelDOT is involved with public and private organizations to enhance and preserve landmarks and other parts of Delaware's cultural heritage, be it bridges, buildings and /or landscapes. The study of the human past through history and archaeology is another way that DelDOT is working with the community to learn more about our heritage.

#### The Past Needs You!

Archaeology and Historic Preservation are for everyone. The Delaware Department of Transportation's historic preservation projects are designed with the public in mind, and cannot work without you. We are gathering information about the study area, talking to people, looking at historic buildings, historic documents, maps and photographs to prepare a history of the Du Pont Highway and surrounding areas.

To make this study as useful as possible, we would like to hear from you! Please contact us to share your knowledge about the history of your Hundred or community, and to learn of the project team's historic findings about your community or area. You can also find DelDOT's archaeology and historic preservation reports on our web site, and in public libraries, schools, and historical societies across the state.

For more information, please contact:

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DelDOT's Route 113 Project Web site:  
<http://www.deldot.net/static/projects/us113/index.html>

DelDOT's Archaeology and Historic Preservation Web site:  
<http://www.deldot.net/static/projects/archaeology/index.html>