

The River: a Corridor and a Barrier

Although the Susquehanna has long been a north-south transportation corridor, it was an impediment to east-west traffic. As early as the seventeenth century, ferries emerged at various points along the river to overcome this barrier. John Wright, an enterprising Quaker, began operating a ferry in this area in 1730.

During the Revolutionary War, Patriot forces put this east-west barrier to good use. With British troops occupying Philadelphia in late 1777, the Continental Congress retreated westward, crossed the Susquehanna on Wright's Ferry, and established a capital in nearby York City for nine months. The river helped protect the fledgling American government from hostile British troops.

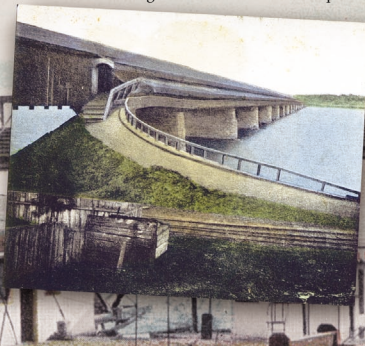
A postcard photo of the ferryboat "Mary," which ran between Wrightsville and Columbia, PA, taken near the beginning of the 20th Century.
Courtesy York County Heritage Trust



In 1814, the first bridge connecting Wrightsville and Columbia was completed. It was the longest covered bridge in the world (5,690 feet). Since then, five additional bridges have spanned the Susquehanna at this site. Of the six, two were destroyed by natural forces, and one was burned in 1863 by Union militiamen and townspeople to prevent Confederate troops from invading Lancaster County and reaching Harrisburg.

In the decades before the Civil War, the Susquehanna served as a south-north escape route for fugitive slaves who traveled the clandestine Underground Railroad in their quest for freedom.

View from Wrightsville towards Columbia, PA, of bridge burned down during the Civil War, June 28, 1863.
Courtesy York County Heritage Trust



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Lancaster - York Heritage Region
Susquehanna River Water Trail

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