

# Columbia: a Transportation Hub

During the mid-nineteenth century, Columbia was a bustling transportation hub. Turnpikes, ferries, bridges, canals, wharves, and railroads made Columbia a major transshipment point in the movement of lumber, coal, grain, pig iron, and people.

Because the Susquehanna is rocky and shallow, most large boats could not navigate the river's treacherous waters below this point. Even rafts were unloaded and broken up here in town, where warehouses stored cargo, and sawmills cut the rough-hewn lumber into planks.

In 1832, a canal was constructed linking Columbia with areas to the north and west along the Susquehanna. Another segment of this vast transportation network was added in 1834 when a railroad line connecting Philadelphia and Columbia was completed. It subsequently became part of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

The busy Pennsylvania Canal Basin in the 1800s with the Pennsylvania Railroad yard in the foreground.  
Courtesy Columbia Historic Preservation Society

In 1840, Baltimore businessmen, not to be outdone by their Philadelphia rivals in the north, constructed a canal along the York County shoreline. The Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal, as it was known, connected nearby Wrightsville to the Chesapeake Bay in the south.

The river transported people as well as goods. With large African-American and Quaker populations, Columbia was a way station on the Underground Railroad. Here, runaway slaves from the Chesapeake Bay region found safe haven on their way to freedom.



1828 Lyingom Coal map showing canals and railroads in the Mid Atlantic. The Lancaster-York Region is highlighted in the blue circle.  
Courtesy Harold Kramiec, www.mapsofga.com

Canal boats laden with coal at the Bruner coal wharf which was operated by H.F. Bruner & Son, North Front and Bridge Streets, Columbia.  
Courtesy Columbia Historic Preservation Society



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Lancaster - York Heritage Region  
Susquehanna River Water Trail

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