

The Delaware Road (Second and Final Segment): From Dover south, one obvious route would have been to pick up the port towns of Milford and Milton, then the Sussex County Seat of Georgetown, before reaching Millsboro, Dagsboro, Frankford, and Selbyville on the southern border with Maryland. Possibly because at least two of these places still had commerce by water to population centers, a more westerly route was selected, connecting towns that soon had increased prominence and growth because of the railroad. These included Wyoming (just west of Camden), Felton, Harrington, Bridgeville, Seaford, Laurel, and what became the railroad town of Delmar, half in Delaware and half in Maryland. From here it was only seven miles to Salisbury, Maryland, and to this larger city the Delaware Road was soon extended. Delmar had railroad shops, and crews and locomotives were changed here, as the railroad eventually made its way down the southern part of the Delmarva Peninsula to Cape Charles, Virginia, about 20 miles across Hampton Roads from Old Point Comfort and Norfolk, gateway to the Chesapeake Bay.

It was not long before the Pennsylvania Railroad, expanding in every direction from its Philadelphia headquarters, absorbed the Delaware Railroad into its far-reaching system and greatly expanded the routes and service in downstate Delaware and the entire peninsula. The lines into Maryland, terminating at Easton and Chestertown, were mentioned last week, and there was another branch going southwest from Seaford to Cambridge at the mouth of the Choptank River. The main junction in Delaware, however, was at Harrington, where a branch line was built southeastward through Ellendale to Georgetown and towns and villages to the south. Although this was never a main line, it handled (and still does) a lot of freight traffic, first produce, then chickens, and finally fuel for the large power plant at Millsboro. From this eastern branch, shore traffic to Lewes and the new ocean resort of Rehoboth was made possible before 1900 by a branch-from-a-branch that ended in the middle of Rehoboth Avenue just short of the boardwalk. Actually the Maryland and Delaware Railroad had been built across the peninsula from Claiborne near Tilghman's Island in Maryland, crossing the Delaware Road at Greenwood, that first served Rehoboth, but it was soon taken over by the Pennsylvania Railroad. Baltimore and Washington vacationers could reach the Delaware shore and later Ocean City, Maryland, by a combination of these lines, after crossing the Chesapeake Bay from the Annapolis area by ferries.

In the final year of World War II, my father made a trip to Philadelphia by train. When he boarded at Broad Street Station for his return, it was announced that this was a "Delaware Road train," and it was pulled by one of the Pennsy's famous steam-powered Pacifics known as K-4s. My father liked that. Although all other trains were pulled by electric locomotives to Wilmington, steam engines headed the trains of the Delaware Road until they were superseded by diesels in the early 1950s. I put my mother on a train in Wilmington for a visit to Middletown about 1948, and another K4 was on the head end as the train headed south into a snow storm. As a travel agent in the 1950s, I would often come home late from Philadelphia, and sometimes took a Delaware Road train from 30th Street Station, which had an overnight run to Cape Charles. The train was often late in leaving and its coaches were filled with Navy men from the Norfolk Navy Yard who were trying to sleep stretched out across the seats. The railroad owned and operated the ferries across the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay to Norfolk. Once we got under way, it was a fast run to Wilmington pulled by a diesel locomotive. Passenger service on the Delaware Road was terminated about 1958. Freight service on some of the line, now single-tracked, is presently operated by Norfolk Southern. The old right-of-way between Lewes and Rehoboth is a hiking and biking trail.