

Transportation in Lower Delaware, 19th and 20th Centuries: The first steam-powered river boats that took over from sailing vessels in the early 19th century were not very large, and the tidal rivers that flowed mostly into Delaware Bay provided enough depth to be navigable. Therefore, thriving towns like Cantwell's Bridge (later Odessa) on the Appoquinimink, Smyrna on Duck Creek, Dover on the St. Jones, Frederica on the Murderkill, Milford on the Mispillion, Milton on the Broadkill, and Seaford on the Nanticoke (flowing into the Chesapeake), made it possible for farmers and others to have access to Philadelphia and the outside world.

By 1850, however, as the rivers silted up and steamboats got larger, many of these formerly prosperous towns fell on hard times and farmers, representing most of the population, had no means of fast transportation or communication vital to their survival. The Delaware Railroad, pushing south from the New Castle area in 1859, came to the rescue and opened up a new era of growth and prosperity for all areas of the state to the south. The main line of the railroad was built to the west of most of the towns formerly served by the small steamboats. A new community of Middletown grew up 4 miles west of Odessa that was bypassed. The town of Clayton to the west of Smyrna served that community. The new railroad did touch the west side of Dover, the state capital. Frederica, Milford, and Milton were bypassed and superseded by railroad stations such as Harrington, Bridgeville, Seaford, Laurel, and Delmar. Before many years, however, branch lines from the main served almost all towns in Delaware with a population of 500 or more and some that were even smaller. The Delaware Railroad connected with the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore just southwest of Wilmington, and fast service for people and goods to the cities was assured. Eventually, all railroads on the Delmarva Peninsula became a part of the Pennsylvania Railroad system. Officially, it was the Delmarva Division, but railroad men called it simply the "Delaware Road." Today, the limited mileage still with freight service is operated by Norfolk Southern Corporation. Except for brief experiments, passenger service on the original Delaware Railroad was terminated about 1955.

When T. Coleman du Pont offered to build the state (at his expense) a concrete road 18 feet wide for roughly 100 miles from Wilmington to Delaware's southern border with Maryland during World War I, the exact route was studied, and apparently it made sense to include towns not on the main line of the railroad. With this in mind, the new road went through St. Georges, Odessa, and Smyrna, then down State Street in Dover, before Magnolia, Frederica, Milford, Georgetown, Millsboro, Dagsboro, Frankford, and Selbyville, the southern part being some 15 miles east of the railroad. With the opening of this road before 1920, downstate people had excellent routes, by rail or by automobile and new bus lines, to the outside world.

When major roads became U.S. highways about 1930, the DuPont Highway became U.S. Route 13 from the north to Dover, but 13 then followed the old mainline railroad route to the south, which was not the original Coleman du Pont Highway. His road was designated U.S. 113 to Selbyville on the Maryland line, with Delaware Route 14 going off to the southeast at Milford for Lewes and Rehoboth. The modern, limited-access Delaware Route 1, a toll road, follows closely the old DuPont Highway to the Milford area, after which it follows the former Route 14 to service the Delaware Seashore, not so important in 1920. Humans have now replaced mosquitoes in that region.