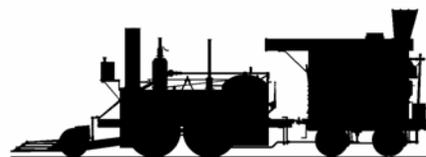
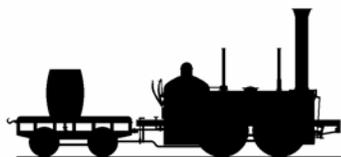


The
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The Mercer & Somerset Railroad-Built To Block A Rival?

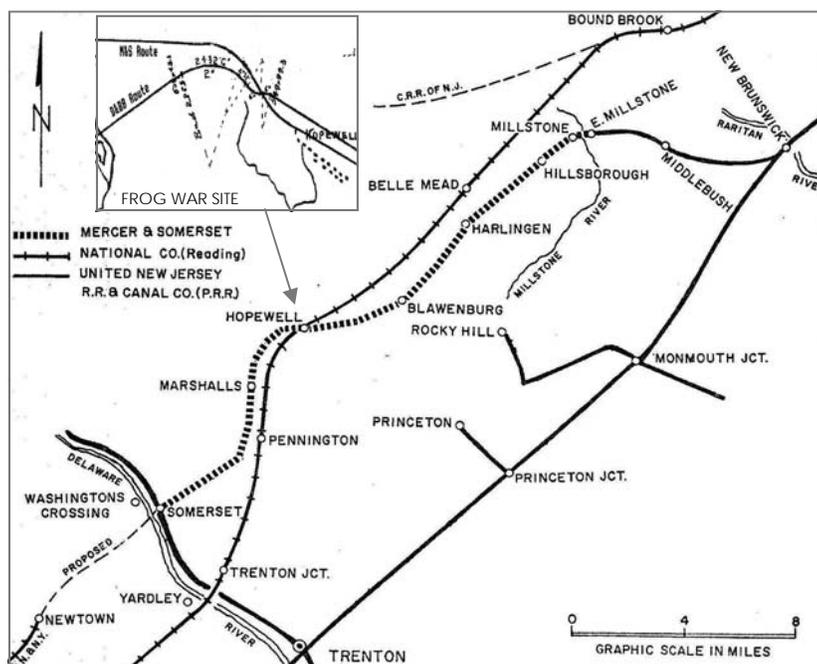
By John Kilbride

(January 5 will mark the 136th anniversary of an event that would forever change the course of New Jersey railroad construction; at various times, railroads could forestall or deny any competing roads from crossing their route(s) by simply relying on legal or political remedies, all as a result of the formation of the Camden & Amboy Railroad. Physical force occurred during an 1876 incident in Hopewell that serves as an interesting historical footnote to the construction of rail lines in the Garden State. The following article is an expanded version of a narrative I originally wrote in 1992, in conjunction with a bus tour of the existing Mercer & Somerset route. Both the history of the company's existence, and the resulting "Frog War", follow.)

"It shall not be lawful at any time during the charter to construct any other railroad in the State without the consent of the Companies, which shall be intended or used for the transport of passengers or merchandise between the cities of New York and Philadelphia", so stated an "Act of March 15, 1832, State of New Jersey" at the time of the Camden & Amboy Railroad charter.

As with most New Jersey railroad histories, the story of the Mercer & Somerset Railroad (or Railway, historians used both labels interchangeably!), is one centered around the region's early development. To understand the history of the line, a total prospective of the region's rail development should be examined.

Historical Prospective



MERCER & SOMERSET RAILROAD: Chartered to connect with the Central RR of New Jersey, the line was instead connected to another UNJRR&C (PRR) property when completed in 1873. Later, the Delaware & Bound Brook RR, a Reading-backed company filing as the National Company, also sought a connection with the CNJ to reach New York City, which would require a crossing of the M&S, and resulted in the confrontation in January 1876.

(From NRHS Bulletin, Fall, 1984, collection of John Kilbride)

(Inset) "FROG WAR" SITE: From the state archives comes this 1874 Delaware & Bound Brook Railroad survey diagram, showing their intent to cross the Mercer & Somerset in Hopewell at a right angle. (The respective railroad lines have been labeled by the author.)