



THE KENNETT PIKE ASSOCIATION, INC.

P.O. Box 3592, Greenville, DE 19807

heritage...

Kennett Pike's right-of-way in Delaware was determined in 1810 as a result of a survey, requested by the Freeholders of New Castle County, aimed at finding the shortest route on suitable ground (no marshes; gentlest grade; fewest stream-crossings) between the southeasterly side of Orange Street and the state he at Twaddell's Tavern. On January 21, 1811, the State Legislature granted a charter to The Wilmington and Kennett Turnpike Company to build and maintain a "hardsurfaced", two-lane arched road on a 100-foot right-of-way along the previously determined route. Also chartered in that same January session were Delaware's sections of both The Wilmington, Concordville and West Chester Turnpike, and the Newport, Gap, and Lancaster Turnpike.

The Wilmington and Kennett Turnpike Company thrived from the time of its completion shortly after the War of 1812-14 ended until the mid-1870's when rail networks had supplanted most toll roads. Delaware's section of the Kennett Turnpike was often favored (vs Lancaster or Concord Turnpikes) partly because its grades were gentler and there were no significant creeks to ford, partly because the thriving village of Centreville (established in 1750) provided overnight hotel, tavern, and post office facilities an easy day's drive to tidewater at Wilmington, and finally because a tavern was always in sight between Centreville and Wilmington.

By end of the first World War, toll roads had become anachronisms. In 1919, W. Pierre S. du Pont bought out the Wilmington and Kennett Turnpike Company's shareholders (paying them double par value), assumed \$ 10,000 accumulated debt, widened the Pike fully to its chartered 100 feet by obtaining necessary deeds from adjacent land holders, paved its two lanes at his own expense, and, in 1920 transferred it, in toto, to the State for a token consideration of one dollar.

This transfer to Delaware contained these restrictions: "no trolley cars shall be permitted; no advertising signs are to be erected or maintained upon or along the road, without receiving the consent of each and every property owner along its entire length"! Between 1920 and 1945, none of the Kennett Pike's gradient, and little of its roadside appearance had changed except for erection of Atlantic, Esso, Gulf Shell and Tidewater gas stations in Greenville, and Socony/Mobil in Centreville. But, by 1950, most long-time property owners in Northern Christiana Hundred had recognized that, unless they took positive, collective action, the Kennett Pike's bucolic charm could be irreversibly lost to haphazard development, urban sprawl, and (in the vernacular of today) could "become another Concord Pike"