

**MEMO**

NEW JERSEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

TO Garry Wheeler Stone DATE April 15, 1993  
FROM James R. Apffel JRA  
SUBJECT Historical Research - Washington Crossing State Park

I have reviewed your research papers on the Blackwell House, Bear Tavern, Joseph Phillips House, Johnson Ferry House, Nelson House, and Continental Lane.

I wish to compliment both you and Phillip Hayden for superb documentation and investigative work. This information will assist greatly in our interpretive programs at the park.

glm

c P. Sedor

WASHINGTON CROSSING STATE PARK IN THE 1770S  
Washington Crossing, Hopewell Township, New Jersey

Grounds maintenance at the Johnson Ferry House, the resulting discovery of a kitchen midden, and the need to register the Park's archaeological sites led me to make a quick survey of existing research. I found a remarkable amount in the files of the Park, the Ferry House, and the Hopewell Township Historic Preservation. I also was very fortunate that Philip Hayden of the Princeton Historical Society is actively studying the domestic architecture of Hopewell Township. When I added to this a sampling of the primary sources available at the State Archives, I was surprised at how readily a broad outline could be sketched of the "Slack's Ferry" vicinity in the late 1770's. My guide in this has been the unfinished map of Hopewell Township farms begun by Betsy Errickson, the former chair of the Township Historic Preservation Commission. Using Errickson's map as a guide reveals that 1776 Washington Crossing State Park was a neighborhood of small farmers, artisans, and tavern keepers. It was not a "typical" neighborhood. Roads and river crossings supported two taverns while the river provided profitable fisheries.

At the ferry was James Slack's plantation and tavern. As Slack was a tenant of an absentee owner, presumably the farm was much the same as when Rut Johnson had advertised it for sale in 1769:

To be sold a plantation, supposed to be 240 acres in the township of Hopewell, Hunterdon county, New-Jersey, situate on the river Delaware. The soil is certain for winter and summer grain, 180 cleared, and about 10 of meadow, the rest thrifty timbered land, an old orchard of natural fruit, and a young one ditto of grafted fruit, in full prime, a large frame house with five rooms on a floor, with a cellar underneath, and a large stone kitchen, which is now occupied and has been for some years past as a tavern and ferry, and a spring of excellent water near the door, never known to fail, barn and stables, and a stone shop all in good repair. Any person inclining to purchase may enter on it the first day of May, and have it on easy terms, by applying to the subscriber on the premises.

RUT JOHNSON.

—*The Pennsylvania Chronicle*, No. 142, September  
25-October 2, 1769.

Except for the flat boats and bateau at the ferry landings, Slack's plantation would have looked little different from an ordinary middling Hunterdon County farm. In 1778, Slack was taxed for the 240 acres that he rented, his ferry [no tavern!], 4 horses, 8 cattle, and 3 hogs. While no probate inventories have been located

for James Slack or his 1779 successor, Richard Slack, the Slacks' successors as ferry keepers and tavern proprietors, the Tomlinsons, left probate inventories for 1802 and 1817. From reading the inventories, it would have been impossible to tell that the Tomlinsons were tavern keepers. Their bedding, provisions, and spirits were no more abundant than required for a large farm family. Dominating the inventories are their livestock, farm implements, and crops: "wheat, rye, and oats in stack and barn - \$800; Corn and Buckwheat on the ground --\$300 [1817]."

Along the SE boundary of the Ferry Farm was the three rod wide road laid out in 1766 upon the petition of Rut Johnson, his abutting neighbor, Henry Margerum, and other neighbors. The road began at a hickory between the upper and lower ferry landings and then followed Johnson's and Margerum's line until it left their property, crossed land of John Hart and John Anderson, and met the "Great Road" to Bellemont about two chains north of the eight mile stone. (This was slightly north of the modern intersection of 546 and Bear Tavern Road.)

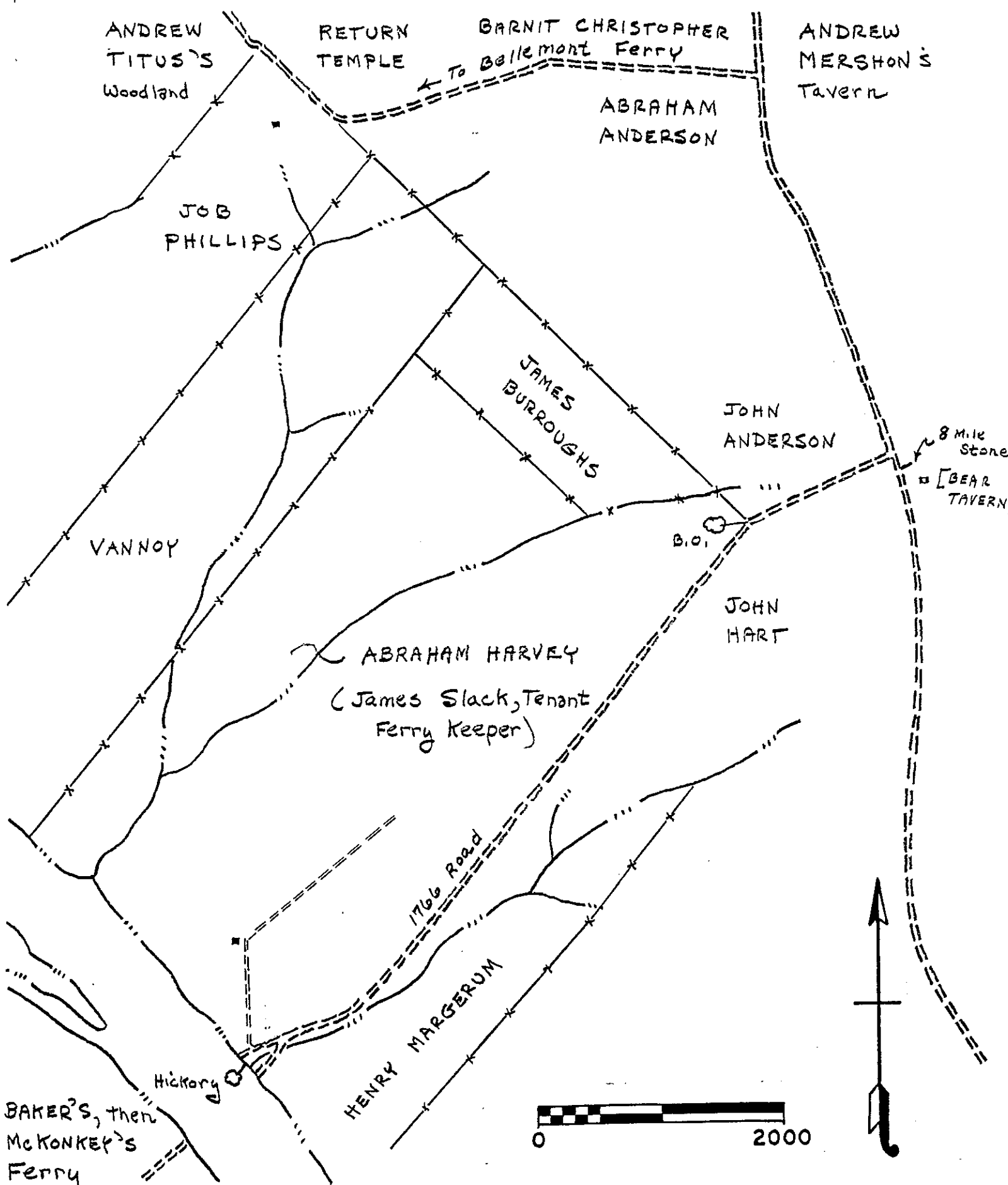
In 1776, the land SE of the road, a 100 acre farm, had been recently vacated by Henry Margerum, a blacksmith. Margerum had advertised his farm for sale in 1768, but stayed on for several additional years as a tenant:

To BE SOLD,

A PLANTATION, containing one hundred acres, in the Township of Hopewell, Hunterdon County, New-Jersey, eight miles from Trenton, situate with a large and beautiful prospect on the river Delaware, near good spring and summer fisheries, and varieties of water-fowl in their season; it was anciently known by the name of Parmer's Ferry, good crafts to go with the place. The soil is certain for winter or summer grain, and a considerable part of it is new, only in the first crop; a new meadow, and more can easily be made; a bearing orchard; a commodious garden, and the fencing mostly new; a frame house, lately repaired, with a cellar, a linto, with two rooms on a floor, a kitchen and draw-well near; a large and convenient black-smith's shop, with two hearths, coal-house and waggon-house, all of stone, and newly built, with a log barn and stable. Also 100 acres, chiefly wood-land, well-timbered, part of that valuable tract of Garret Johnson, deceased, contiguous to the aforesaid land. Any person inclining to purchase one or both, or part of either, may enter on the premises this winter or next spring, and have them on easy purchase, by applying to

HENRY MARGERUM.

—*The Pennsylvania Chronicle*, No. 100, December  
5-12, 1768. .



Washington Crossing State Park in the 1770s: 1 inch = 1,000 feet.

Northeast of the Ferry Farm, between it and the great road to Upper Bellemont and Harbourton, were the plantations of the Andersons. Deeds and road returns variously refer to "Anderson's Old Place [1770]," John Anderson's plantation [1766], and Abraham Anderson's plantation [1779]. On the opposite side of the road from Abraham Anderson's was Andrew Mershon's tavern. It was an important Hopewell landmark and social institution, the location of auctions and meetings. The 1780 tax list rated Mershon for his tavern, 135 acres, 3 horses, and 5 cattle.

Near Mershon's tavern the road forked, the north branch continuing towards Upper Bellemont and Harbourton, the west branch to Bellemont Lower Ferry. The latter road passed by Barnet Christopher's farm and thorough Anderson's before cornering between Return Temple's and Job Phillip's.

Phillip's 1764 house still stands. A prosperous small holder, the 1778 tax assessors rated him for his 161 acre farm, a 40 acre woodlot, 3 horses, 6 cattle, and 4 hogs. His 1822 probate inventory reveals a barn and field oriented household with little conspicuous consumption about the house.

Between Phillip's farm and the Ferry Farm was the 161 acre farm that Francis Vannoy purchased in 1728. By 1785, John Vannoy was farming it. He was taxed that year for 161 acres, 5 horses, and 3 cattle.

The Vannoy farm abutted the Ferry Farm for its full length except at the NE corner. There a 50 acre lot had been sold by Garret Johnson's executors in 1770. As the new owner, John Burroughs, had other lands nearby, this probably was only a woodlot.

While the owners of the present parkland were small holders, or, as in the case of James Slack, a tenant, there were larger plantations in the vicinity: the 600 acre Baker's or McKonkey's Ferry plantation across the river, large, absentee owned tracts southeast of Henry Margerum's, the Titus plantations to the northwest, and, to the north of them, the large Bellemont holdings of the Coxes. Representative newspaper advertisements for these tracts follow.

1761

To be Sold and may be entered on the first of April next; Two Plantations or Farms, one called Bellemont, whereon the late Mr. Daniel Cox lived, situate on the River Delaware, on which it has an extent of at least a Mile. The Mansion-house is in good repair and very convenient either for a Gentleman or Farmer, and has four Rooms on one Floor, all with Fire Places, and good Cellars under the whole, partitioned into four Parts, also a large commodious Kitchen adjoining the House

with two lodging Rooms for Servants. There is besides a large new Barn well finished and several Out-houses, as a Smoak-house, Wash-house, &c. the place contains about 540 Acres of excellent Upland, Lowland and Meadow, well known for its Fertility and Riches both for Grass and Grain.

The other plantation contains about 507 Acres, is adjoining to and lying below the above place, and has also a Front on the Delaware of near a Mile, and is separated from the above Farm only by a Creek which is a very convenient and safe Harbour for Boats of all Kinds, either for ferrying over to Pennsylvania, or transporting the Country produce to Trenton or Philadelphia; it has about 100 Acres cleared, most of it Lowland with a small House, Barn and Orchard, and is Patent for a Ferry; to which there is a Road opened from Pennington, and the Land on the Pennsylvania Shore is purchased to secure a convenient Landing; both the above Farms are within 12 Miles of Trenton and 30 of Philadelphia by good Road. An indisputable Title will be given, and the greatest part of the purchase Money may remain some Years at Interest. For Terms apply to Mr. WILLIAM COXE at Philadelphia, or Mr. DANIEL COXE, at Trenton.

To be sold by public Vendue, on the 10th of the Third Month March next, on the Premises, the Plantation lately belonging to Samuel Baker, deceased, containing 600 Acres or upwards, lying on the River Delaware, in Upper Makefield, Bucks County, in Pennsylvania. There is on the said Plantation three Dwelling-houses, two Barns, two Stables, two old Orchards, and a Ferry over Delaware, known by the Name of Baker's Ferry, six Miles from Trenton, and thirty Miles from Philadelphia; about 50 Acres good Meadow cleared, and a large Quantity more may be made: the other Part of said Place very good for Grain of all Sorts, and produces good Pasturage; the whole well watered, and the uncleared Land well timbered. The Purchaser, paying one Half of the Money down, may have Time for the Remainder, on giving Security, and paying Interest, by JOSEPH BAKER, and JOHN BORROUGHS, Executors

January 7, 1763.

To be SOLD,

A Tract of Land, lying in Hopewell Township, and County of Hunterdon, six Miles above Trenton, containing 334 Acres strict Measure: It is beautifully situated on the Delaware to the West, and adjoins the Lands of Gerrard Johnson to the North, John Hart and Joseph Boroughs to the East, and William Lister to the South. There is a small House on the Place, now tenanted by Daniel Severns, and about 80 Acres cleared, the rest all Wood. It is supposed to be as good Wheat Land as any in New Jersey. The Title short and indisputable. For Terms apply to WILLIAM LISTER, Merchant, at Trenton, or to the Owner, RICHARD SMITH, Attorney at Law, in Burlington.—*The Pennsylvania Gazette, No. 1774, December 23, 1762.*

EPILOGUE

Johnson's old dwelling appears to have remained the ferry keeper's dwelling and sometimes tavern until 1817. That year the farm was divided between the heirs of Joseph Tomlinson. Joseph B. and Charles Tomlinson took the west half of the farm and the old house, while Abner Tomlinson took the eastern half and the ferry. Presumably, Abner constructed the first section of the future Nelson Hotel. Another document hints that increasing activity at the ferry would have better supported a tavern than in the 18th-century. In 1820, when a road was surveyed along the river, it noted that "Taylor's Store and Lumber Yard" stood south of "Tomlinson's Ferry." In 1836, the Tomlinsons sold part of their fishing rights to the "Taylorsville and Delaware Bridge Company" to for the construction of a bridge. The days of the ferry were over, but the hayday of the riverside tavern was only beginning.

In 1828, Abner Tomlinson had sold the ferry and his half of the farm to Bernard Taylor, of "Taylorsville," Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Taylorsville was the hamlet at the other end of the ferry crossing. Taylor appears to have been influential in the development of the "Washington Crossing" vicinities in the 19th century, and merits research. Most likely it was Taylor who constructed the first section of the Blackwell House and separated farming from ferrying and tavern keeping. In 1846, these functions acquired different owners when Taylor sold the tavern and icehouse to Alexander Nelson of Falls Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. By then, population growth, subdivision, and development had substantially altered the simple river crossing of the Revolution.

ANNOTATED LIST OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES:

Route 546: The "3 rod road" of 1766 and the road used by Washington's army in 1776. Landscaping should enhance the rural, agricultural aspect of the road through open fields, worm rail fencing, etc.

Johnson Ferry House: 1740s farmhouse-tavern operated as a house museum. Setting has been massively altered through construction of canal, Rte. 29, and Park. Many of the Park "improvements" need to be removed so that a portion of the house's setting can be reconstructed.

Barn: Stone barn substantially altered in 1929 to adapt it for modern office and museum functions. 1929 construction drawings document some of the changes to door and window locations. Requires an historic structure report and extensive restoration in order to complement the house.

"Continental Lane": Although this was not the Revolutionary War Road, old aerial photographs and topographic maps show that this was the organizing path of the Ferry Farm. From the house, the lane led directly south to the upper and lower ferry landings. From the barnyard, the lane led NE between the two rows of farm fields. Prior to the construction of the 1766 public road, this lane may have functioned as a private road connecting the "Great" or "River" road to the ferry.

The intrusive access roads and parking lot at the Ferry House should be relocated and this section of the lane reconstructed.

Nelson Hotel, c.1820 with additions of c.1850 and 1870. A ferry tavern that evolved into a Riverside hotel. Only remnants remain. Preserve site from encroachment and, in the long run, exhibit as an archaeological site.

Blackwell House and Outbuildings: farmhouse of c.1825-1835 with additions of c.1850 and 1870. Outbuildings include a root cellar, coal shed, and barn. The barn was reconstructed by the WPA. The exterior of the dwelling was recently restored. Used for employee housing, office, and maintenance. An important resource contributing to the rural character of Rte. 546.

Bear Tavern: Dwelling of c.1790 enlarged into a tavern c.1820. Retains important original fabric. Requires a complete historic structures report and extensive restoration. Historically important in Hopewell Township's 19th-century history.

Job Phillips House: 1764 stone house important architecturally and historically. Currently leased to a historic preservation professional. Lease should be maintained, but more attention should be paid to maintenance of an appropriate rural setting.



SOURCES:

[copies are on file with the Division of Parks and Forestry at Washington Crossing State Park, the Historic Preservation Office, and the Office of Capital Programs.]

Archives of the State of New Jersey, Newspaper Extracts:

First Series

- Volume XX: Belmont, pp. 492 [1760], 646 [1761]  
XXIV: Smith/Lister tracts, pp. 9, 117, 217 [1762-63]  
Lower Belle-Mont, p. 144 [1763]  
Baker's Ferry, p. 133 [1763]  
XXVI: Margerum Farm, p. 333 [1768]  
Johnson's Ferry, p. 507 [1769]  
XXVIII: former Margerum Farm, p. 451 [1773]

Second Series

- Volume IV: Belmont, p. 46 [1779]

D'Autrechy, C. Phyllis and Theo. M. D'Autrechy, "The Story of the Nelson House." For the Washington Crossing Association of New Jersey, 1977. MS [extensive documentation and illustrations].

Errickson, Betsy, Hopewell Township Property Ownership c.1700-1840. Map, Unfinished draft, Hopewell Township Historic Preservation Commission. [Mrs. Errickson is a former Chair of the Commission.]

Godfrey, Dr. Carlos E., "Washington's Debarkation at Johnson's Ferry on Christmas Night in 1776." An address given before the Trenton Historical Society, 17 November 1932. MS.

Hayden, Philip Aldrich. "The Cow and the Calf: Evolution of Farmhouses in Hopewell Township, Mercer County, New Jersey, 1720-1820. Thesis, the University of Delaware, 1992.

New Jersey State Archives:

Aerial Photographs of Washington Crossing State Park Vicinity:

- 83.11.52 & 66  
83.16.8 & 9

Hunterdon County, Road Book 1 [Microfilm: DOT County Road Records, Reel 12]:

p.43: 25 Sept 1766 survey of 3 rod road from Johnson's Ferry to Great Road to Belmont.

p.121: 8 or 9 December 1779 resurvey of road from Andrew Mershon's Tavern to Belmont Lower Ferry.

Hunterdon County, Hopewell Township Tax Ratables, 1778-1785 (Box 41, items 4 to 10).

Secretary of State, West Jersey Deeds:

Volume AAA, pp. 302-303--4 Nov 1709: Daniel Coxe to Thomas Reade, 374 acres in Hopewell [Future Johnson Ferry farm].

Volume A-C, pp. 123-127--30 April 1770: Executors Garret Johnson to Joseph Burroughs, 50 acres [Robert Johnson's inheritance: NW corner of ferry farm].

Volume A-I, pp. 365-369--10 Dec 1770: Sheriff to Abraham Harvey of Makefield, PA., 200 acres seized from executors Garret Johnson [Rut Johnson's inheritance: ferry farm].

Wills and Inventories:

File 2041J: 1802 will and inventory of Samuel Tumbleson [inventory includes household furnishings, farm equipment, and ferry boats].

File 2914J: 1817 inventory of Joseph Tomlinson [includes household furnishings, farm equipment, and ferry boats].

Stone, Garry Wheeler, "Joseph Phillips House." MS report, 3 pp., March 1993.

\_\_\_\_\_, "Blackwell House." MS report, 2 pp., March 1993.

\_\_\_\_\_, and Philip A. Hayden, "Bear Tavern." MS report, 4 pp., March 1993.

Washington Crossing State Park, Architectural Drawings:

NELSON HOTEL:

17 October 1934: Existing Conditions, 1/4"=1'-0". Copies of field annotated, unfinished renderings depicting in detail the Alexander Nelson Hotel as modernized into a Gothic Revival structure c.1870. Drawn and traced by F.L.T. Emergency Relief Administration Project S11.A.37

31 August 1934: "Proposed Restoration of Building at Entrance to Washington Crossing State Park." Two sheets of 1/8"=1'-0" plans and elevations. The National Park Service, Fritz Steffens, Architectural Technician. [A proposal to demolish the oldest portion of the building and "restore" the c.1850 additions into a colonial tavern.]

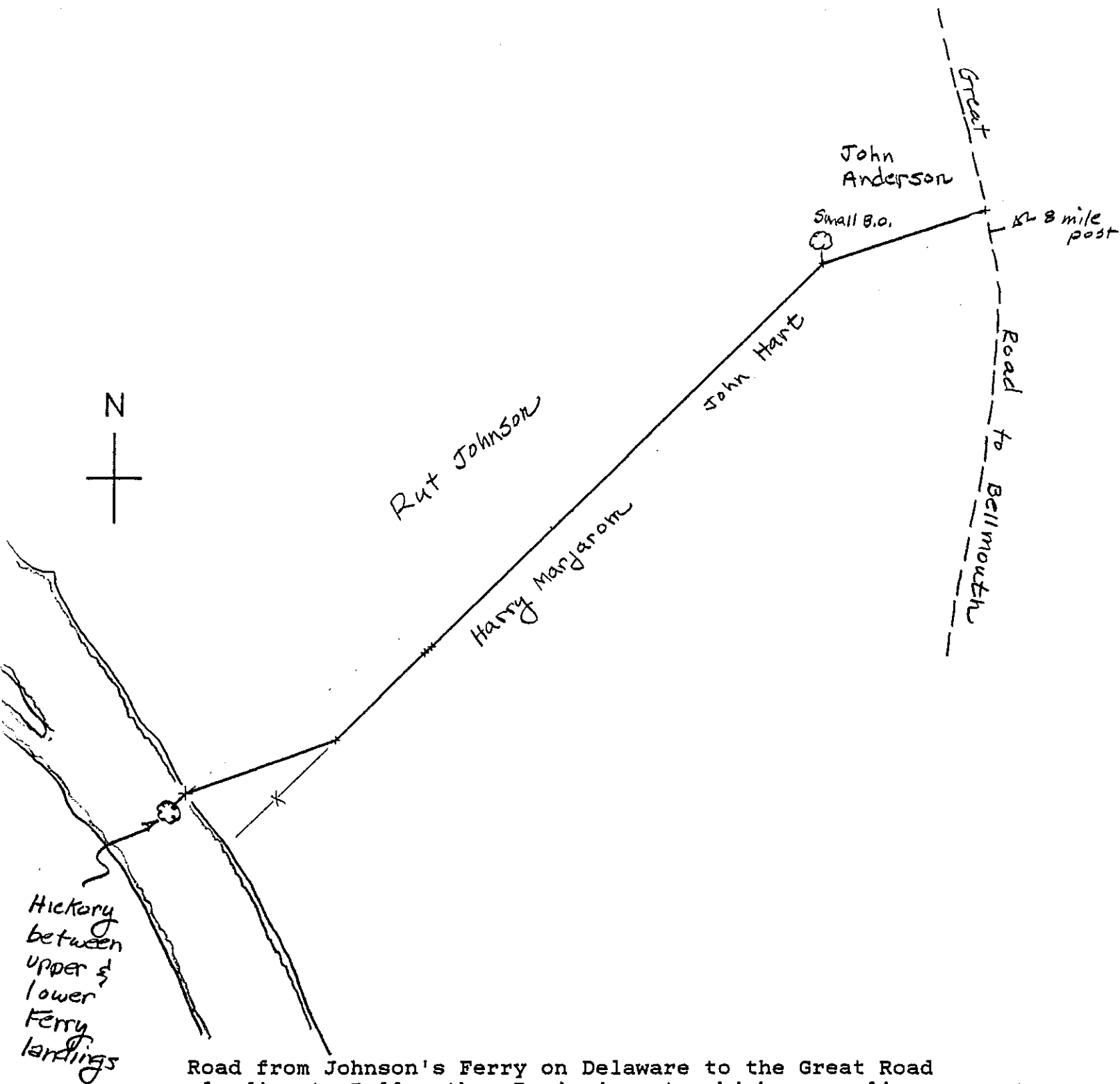
January 1935. 1/4", 1/2", & 3/4" scale "restoration" drawings. Sheet one only of a set of eight. NJ Department of Conservation and Development Emergency Relief Administration Project S.11.A.37. Unexecuted.

JOHNSON FERRY BARN:

24 September 1929: Alterations to McKonkey Barn, J. Osborne  
Hunt, A.I.A., Trenton, NJ. 1/4"=1'-0".

Garry Wheeler Stone  
State Park Service  
March 1993

Hunterdon County, Road Book 1, p. 43  
 Scale: 5.28 in. = 1 mile (1 : 12000)



Road from Johnson's Ferry on Delaware to the Great Road leading to Bellmouth. Beginning at a hickory sapling between the upper and lower ferry landings, and running through Rut Johnson's land . . . . Upon application of Rut Johnson, Harry Marjarom, and others. Laid out 25 September 1763. [note: survey gives no distances for courses 3 & 4. Those above are dummies. Total distance scaled from USGS]

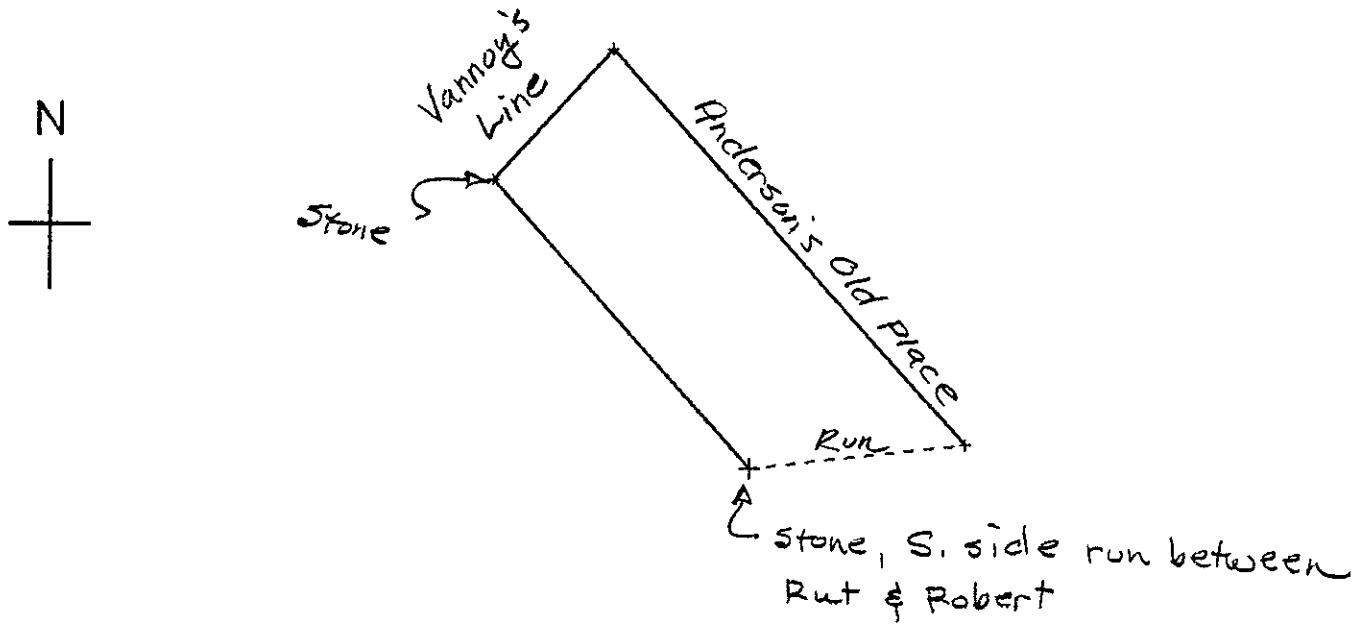
misc sites; rds1-43

n70e, 17.73c/W.O. on line btw. Johnson & H. Marjarom  
n45e, 14 /to thorn bush (road on Johnson's side)  
n45e, 1 /to birch, Marjarom's rear corner (his side)  
n45e, 61.5 /between Johnson & John Hart to small B.O.  
n71.25e, 19 /pt. thru J. Hart, pt. Jno. Anderson to Great  
/Road about 2 chains north of the eight mile post from  
/Trenton.

.t Hunterdon County, Road Book 1, p. 43

Road from Johnson's Ferry on Delaware to the Great Road leading to Bellmouth. Beginning at a hickory sapling between the upper and lower ferry landings, and running through Rut Johnson's land . . . Upon application of Rut Johnson, Harry Marjarom, and others. Laid out 25 September 1763. [note: survey gives no distances for courses 3 & 4. Those above are dummies. Total distance scaled from USGS]

Secretary of State, West Jersey Deeds A-C, pp. 123-127  
Scale: 5.28 in. = 1 mile (1 : 12000)



30 April 1770, executors Garret Johnson (Rut Johnson, Cornelius Hoff, Henry Margerum) to Joseph Burroughs, all of Hopewell, for L 152:10:0, 50 acres adjacent Rut Johnson, Robert Johnson having failed to pay his legacies. Beginning at stone south side run the division between Rut & Robert.

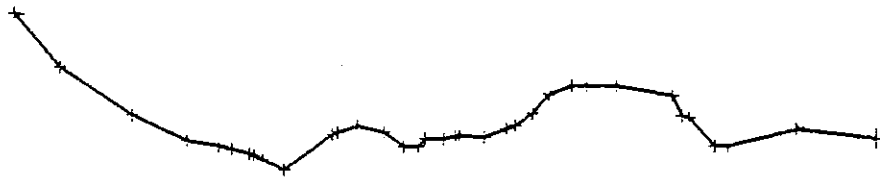
Miss. sites / wjac-123

n41.25w, 30.2c /to stone Vannoy's line, along it  
n42.25e, 13.8 /to stone in Anderson's old place, along it  
s41.25e, 41.27 /to corner by run, along run to begin.

.t Secretary of State, West Jersey Deeds A-C, pp. 123-127

30 April 1770, executors Garret Johnson (Rut Johnson, Cornelius Hoff, Henry Margerum) to Joseph Burroughs, all of Hopewell, for L 152:10:0, 50 acres adjacent Rut Johnson, Robert Johnson having failed to pay his legacies. Beginning at stone south side run the division between Rut & Robert.

Hunterdon County, Road Book 1, p. 121  
Scale: (1 : 48000)



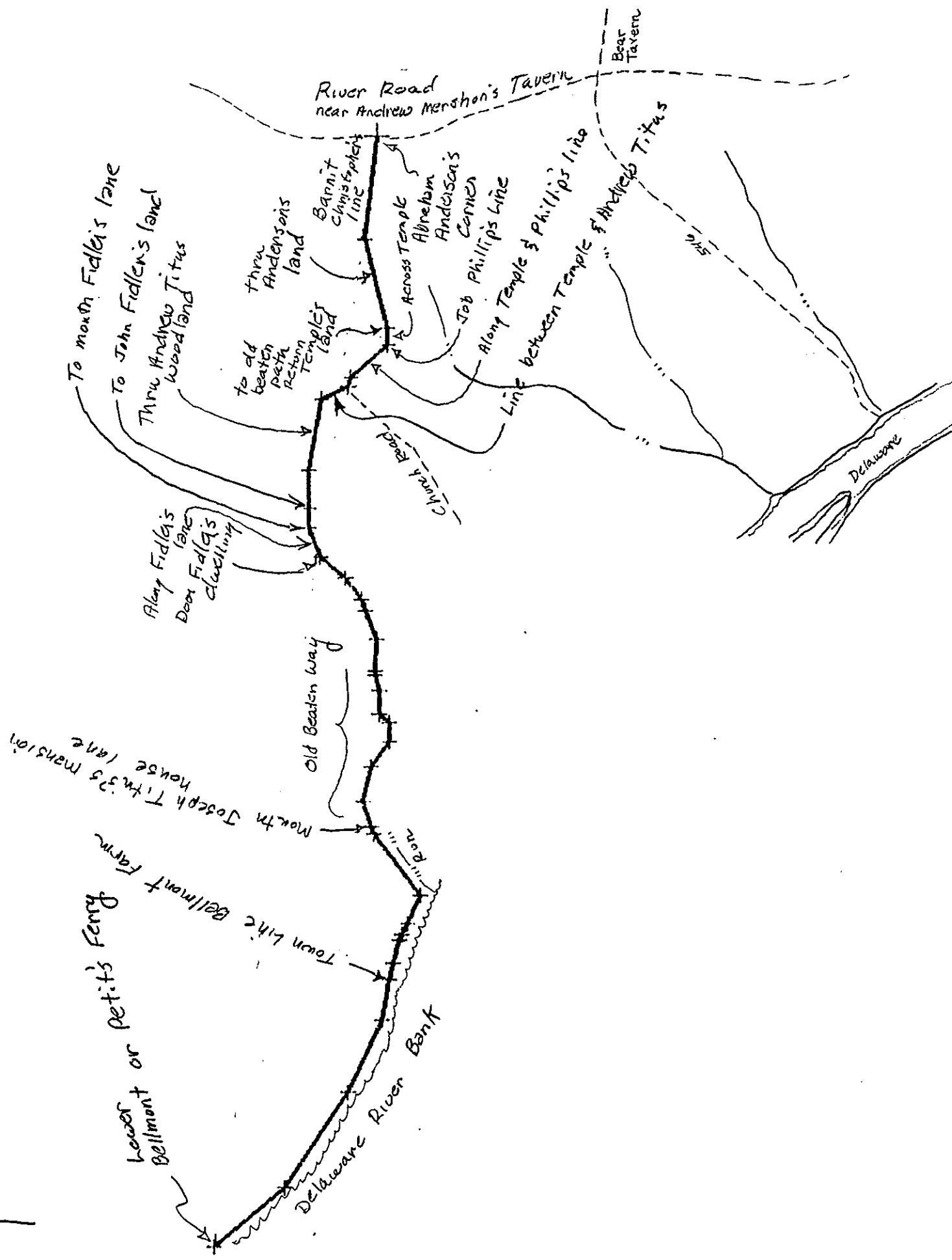
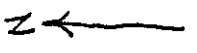
Relaying road in Hopewall from near Andrew Mershon's Tavern on River Road to the landing at lower Belmont or Petit's Ferry, 7 or 8 December 1779. Begin at Abraham Anderson's corner on Anderson's & Barnit Christopher's line.

Note: alterations on Joseph Titus's land to be at his expense.



Huntendon Co., Road Book I, p. 121

1 to 24,000



n83w,	25c	/to post in line
s76w,	22	/thru Anderson's land to old beaten path on /Return Temple's land
w,	3.82	/across Temple's to Job Phillip's line
n42w,	11.59	/along Temple's and Phillip's line
n72w,	2.45	/cutting off pts. Temple's & Phillips' to /line between Mesard [Return] Temple & Andrew Titus
n27w,	7	/along line to Temple's corner
n80w,	17.43	/thru Andrew Titus's woodland
n89w,	9	/to John Fidler's land
n89w,	5	/to mouth Fidler's lane
s69w,	7.5	/along Fidler's lane to door of his dwelling
s39w,	8	/on Fidler's land to near bank small brook
s54w,	6.5	/along brook bank
s70w,	2.75	/thru Joseph Titus's gate
s70w,	7.25	/thru Joseph Titus's land to old beaten way
n88w,	7.81	/along old beaten way
s78w,	1	/McCanasen's dwelling door
s78w,	4	
w,	5.42	/to old beaten way by Titus's meadow fence
s42w,	3.24	/along meadow fence
s89w,	4.75	/still along beaten way to corner meadow
n54w,	7.4	/near meadow to corner N. of gate on old path
n75w,	8.6	/still by old beaten way
s70w,	6.5	/to mouth Jos. Titus's mansion house lane /end of relay, beginning new 2 rod road
s70w,	2	/to N. side small run
s53w,	18.5	/down NW bank run to bank Delaware River
n64w,	7.5	/cross deep gully
n64w,	2.98	/leave Titus, enter Jonathan Stout's purchase
n64w,	1.52	/deep gully
n76.5w,	5.5	/sand gully
n76.5w,	4.05	/Town line of Belmont Farm
n80w,	10	/along river bank
n65w,	19	
n56w,	27.5	
n40w,	22	/to landing Belmont Ferry

.t Hunterdon County, Road Book 1, p. 121

Relaying road in Hopewall from near Andrew Mershon's Tavern on River Road to the landing at lower Belmont or Petit's Ferry, 7 or 8 December 1779. Begin at Abraham Anderson's corner on Anderson's & Barnit Christopher's line.

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