

The Ferry Industry

The earliest record of a license granted for a ferry service was to William Royden in 1688. This ferry presumably located on Cooper Street, was later abandoned by Royden but continued in 1695 by Daniel Cooper and was to remain in the Cooper family for 150 year. Ferry systems were also established by William Cooper (Daniel's father) at Coopers Point (established c. 1689); on Market Street in 1800 by Abraham Browning, (later called the West Jersey Ferry); another on Market Street by Randall Sparks (c.1820); Federal Street Ferry (est. 1764) by another Daniel Cooper; Wrights Ferry, also on Federal Street, established by Joseph Wright in 1786; and Kaighns Point Ferry on Ferry Street by Joseph Kaighn in 1809.



The extensive ferry system at these various points along the eastern shore of the Delaware River was the original impetus which resulted in the growth of a few small settlements which would later consolidate into the city known as Camden.

The earliest structures which were built within the bounds of modern Camden relate directly to the ferry industry. Taverns, hotels and pleasure gardens were established at or nearby ferry sites around the turn of the century. The majority of the buildings which relate to the ferry industry are no longer extant. Infill westward along the Delaware River has extended the shoreline to its present configuration. Industries utilizing the proximity to the river for shipping purposes have located at the former ferry site, demolishing many historic buildings related to the ferry industries.

The “Coopers Point Hotel” or “Archers Hotel” which stood on State Street near Delaware Avenue was built by Samuel Cooper in 1770 and was the second ferry house erected at Cooper’s Point. It was torn down in 1896. When Samuel Cooper moved from the ferry house to his farm, (known as Pleasant View Farm) he erected, in 1793, the two and a half story brick house still standing on Twenty-Second Street in East Camden. Cooper died in this house in 1812.

At the Middle Ferry, the Daniel Cooper House, (1764) on the northeast corner of Front and Federal Street, became a tavern after his death in 1776. The house, also known as Parson Hotel was torn down in 1883. Also at Middle Ferry, the old “Ferry House” was on the north side of Cooper Street between Front and Point Streets. Erected 1794, it was used as the first post office in Camden. The house was later purchased by the city and demolished.

At South Ferry, a house formerly stood at the southeast corner of Kaighns Avenue and Front Street known as the “Ferry House” or “South Ferry Hotel.” It was built about 1770 by Joseph Kaighn, a grandson of the first settler in that area, and occupied by him until his death in 1797, when his son Joseph move into it. Having established a ferry at Kaighns Point, Joseph built a new house on Kaighns Avenue and turned the old homestead into a ferry hotel. The hotel is no longer standing.

One of the most significant remaining ferry-related properties in the city is that of the Benjamin Cooper House, at the intersection of Point and Erie Streets in North Camden. The two and-a-half story Dutch Colonial stone house is one of the earliest buildings and also the only remaining ferry tavern in Camden. The Cooper's Point property was conveyed to Benjamin Cooper by his father, the first Joseph Cooper, along with the right to operate the ferry in 1728. Benjamin Cooper built the house in 1734. Upon his death, it became the residence of his eldest son, Joseph, by whom it was occupied at the beginning of the Revolution. During the British occupation of Philadelphia during the Revolutionary War, the house served as the headquarters of British Lieutenant Colonel Abercrombie. In later years, the house was used as a saloon and called "The Old Stone Jug". It is presently used as a business office for the Camden Ship Repair Company. The Benjamin Cooper House represents the Cooper family's interest in the ferry business for over 150 years, as well as being representative of an architectural type prevalent in the Camden area during the first part of the eighteenth century.

The Joseph Cooper House situated at the head of 7th Street, consists of two portions, a one story Dutch Colonial style stone home and a two and a half story brick addition built prior to 1785. Joseph Cooper, who built the original portion c.1709, was the son of William Cooper, who established the Cooper Point Ferry at this location. The City of Camden purchased this property in 1913 and the house with the surrounding land was converted into Pyne Point Park. The building, the oldest known extant structure in Camden, was vandalized in 1980 during the initial phase of its restoration, and remains in a ruinous condition with only exterior walls standing.