

## CHAPTER III

### BRIDGES, DAMS, ETC., ON THE MULLICA RIVER AND ITS TRIBUTARIES

**A**s the Mullica River is a boundary line between counties for almost all of its distance, an account of the several bridges spanning the stream will not come amiss.

Beginning at the mouth and working up-stream, the first bridge met with is the Chestnut Neck span, three and one-half miles from the mouth, as the crow flies. The Act authorizing the building of this bridge was passed by the State Legislature, March 14th, 1856, and the first structure was erected soon afterwards. The wording of the Act is as follows:

**AN ACT to authorize the erection of a draw or swing bridge over the Mullicus\* River.**

1. **BE IT ENACTED** by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey, That it shall and may be lawful for the boards of chosen freeholders of the counties of Burlington and Atlantic, to build and maintain a good and sufficient bridge over the Mullicus river, at or near Chestnut Neck, in the township of Galloway, in the said county of Atlantic, to a point opposite, in the township of Little Egg Harbor, in the county of Burlington, with a suitable draw or swing therein, which said draw or swing shall be at least thirty-five feet in width, for the convenient passage of all vessels navigating the said river.

2. And be it enacted, That this Act shall take effect immediately.

Approved, March 14th, 1856.

This bridge is part of the New York-Atlantic City highway and takes care of a great deal of traffic. Proceeding from Chestnut Neck, where the upland

\*Notice the incorrect spelling. The legislators should have known better.

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touches the stream, the span is crossed and the traveller comes out upon the extensive salt meadows of the Burlington County side, over which a firm road has been built leading to the village of New Gretna.

The bridge has recently been rebuilt and is a very modern and substantial structure. The building of the span has been fraught with a good deal of litigation between the contractor, George S. Bennett, and the counties of Burlington and Atlantic, who jointly shared the expense of construction. This contract was approved in March, 1915, but Bennett stopped work on February 20th, 1917, his work proving unsatisfactory to the county engineers. Forty thousand dollars had been paid to Bennett up to this point and it cost the authorities sixty-three thousand dollars additional to complete the job after Bennett quit.

Six miles further up the river we come to the Lower Bank bridge, which is very convenient for the people of Lower Bank and vicinity who travel to Egg Harbor City and contiguous territory. The bridge at present, however, is in poor repair, and has been the cause of several accidents to motor vehicles. Rather than build a new bridge, the authorities of Burlington county wished to do away with it altogether, and thereby cause the people to use the Green Bank bridge further up, which would necessitate a much longer journey to Egg Harbor City on the part of Lower Bank residents, who do most of their business in that town. Led by Mr. Lewis Adams, a prominent resident of Lower Bank, a vigorous protest was made, and the idea of doing away with the bridge has been given up. A new bridge will soon be built, or the old one

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thoroughly repaired, at the joint expense of Burlington and Atlantic counties.

Lower Bankers, desirous of getting to Philadelphia, used to ferry across to Clark's Landing and from thence proceed, via highway, to Philadelphia; or take the train, after the Camden and Atlantic line had been built in 1854, connecting Atlantic City, then just starting, and Philadelphia.

The Act authorizing the Lower Bank bridge was passed February 25th, 1863, and is as follows:

**AN ACT to authorize the building of a bridge over the Mullicus River, at Lower Bank.**

1. Be it enacted by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey, That it shall be lawful for the boards of chosen freeholders of the counties of Atlantic and Burlington to build and construct, or cause or permit to be built and constructed, a bridge across the Mullicus River, commencing at the terminus of the road running from Capt. J. Johnston's store to the river, at Lower Bank, in Washington township, Burlington County, to a point on the opposite side of the river, in the township of Mullicus, county of Atlantic, meeting and connecting with a road now being constructed by the Egg Harbor Association, from Egg Harbor City to said river, and to place in said bridge a draw or swing of at least thirty-five feet in width, of such construction as to impede as little as possible the navigation of said river.

2. And be it enacted, That this Act shall take effect immediately.

Approved, February 25th, 1863.

The road mentioned leading from Captain Johnston's store was, and is, the main street in Lower Bank. Later in the same year the location of the bridge was moved down the river a little distance to a point then opposite the house of Samuel Cavileer. The Act authorizing this change is as follows:

**A SUPPLEMENT to an act entitled "An Act to authorize the building of a bridge over the Mullicus River, at Lower Bank.**

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1. Be it enacted by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey, That the bridge which by the act to which this is a supplement, the boards of chosen freeholders of the counties of Atlantic and Burlington were authorized to build and construct, or cause or permit to be built and constructed across the Mullicus River, shall commence near the residence of Samuel Cavileer, at Lower Bank, in Washington township, Burlington County, and end at a point on the opposite side of the river in the township of Mullicus, county of Atlantic, meeting and connecting with a road now being constructed by the Egg Harbor Association from Egg Harbor City to said river; instead of being built as in said original act is directed; and they shall place in said bridge, over the deepest channel of said river, a draw or swing of at least thirty-five feet in width, of such construction as to impede as little as possible the navigation of said river.

2. And be it enacted, That the said act to which this is a supplement, in so far as the same is inconsistent with the provisions hereof, be and the same is hereby repealed.

3. And be it enacted, That this act shall take effect immediately.  
Approved March 24th, 1863.

After leaving Lower Bank, the road crosses the river and proceeds through the meadow to Gloucester, formerly called Gloucester Furnace, and from thence to Egg Harbor City.

Three miles further up the river we come to the Green Bank bridge and over it crosses the main highway from Tuckerton to Egg Harbor City. This bridge was the first span to be thrown across the navigable part of the Mullica River, that is, from Batsto to Great Bay, and before it was built there was no means of crossing the river below Batsto, except by boat. After leaving Green Bank, the road crosses the bridge, proceeds over a section of swamp and arrives at the settlement of Weekstown, called Weeksville in the Act of 1856 authorizing the building of the bridge. Here the road divides, the western fork leading to

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Elwood and the southeastern to Egg Harbor City, via Gloucester.

AN ACT to authorize the erection of a draw or swing bridge over the Mullicus River.

1. Be it enacted, by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey, That it shall and may be lawful for the boards of chosen freeholders of the counties of Burlington and Atlantic to build and maintain a good and sufficient bridge over the Mullicas river, at Green Bank, in the township of Washington, in the said county of Burlington; to a point opposite in the township of Mullicas, in the county of Atlantic, with a suitable draw or swing therein, which said draw or swing shall be at least thirty-five feet in width, for the convenient passage of all vessels navigating the said river; provided that before the freeholders construct said bridge, the inhabitants of Greenbank and Weeksville enter into bond to construct the causeway connecting the bridge with the main land free of expense to said counties.

2. And be it enacted, That this act shall take effect immediately.

Approved March 15th, 1855.

The causeway spoken of, is the highway extending over the swamp on the Atlantic County side of the river.

We have now enumerated all the drawbridges crossing the Mullica River. Other bridges cross the non-navigable parts of the stream and are simple, stationary spans. There are three at Pleasant Mills, one at Batsto on the Batsto branch, two at Atsion, nine from Atsion to the source, and numerous others crossing the non-navigable branches.

### WADING RIVER

The only drawbridge crossing this chief tributary of the Mullica River is at the village of Wading River, or Bridgeport, as some call it, five miles, in a straight line, above the confluence of the two rivers. It was the first drawbridge to be erected within the territory

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covered by this bridge and antedates the earliest bridge over the Mullica by forty-one years. Although the Mullica was a more important stream, the main highway from Tuckerton to Camden led across the dam at Batsto, whereas the road could not avoid the Wading River, as a glance at the map will show. We append herewith the authorization Act, passed January 18th, 1814.

**AN ACT** authorizing the board of chosen freeholders of the county of Burlington, to build a Draw-bridge over Wading River, at or near Leakes wharf.

1. Be it enacted by the Council and General Assembly of this state, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same, That it shall and may be lawful for the board of chosen freeholders in and for the county of Burlington aforesaid, to build and maintain a good and sufficient bridge over Wading river, at or near Leakes wharf, where the main road leading from Longacoming to Tuckerton crosses the same, with a suitable draw therein, of a sufficient width for the convenient passage of vessels navigating the same.

2. And be it enacted, That if any master of a vessel, or other person or persons shall hoist the draw in said bridge, and leave the same hoisted so as to prevent travellers and others from passing over the same, for more than fifteen minutes, when the same is not absolutely necessary for the passage of some vessel through the same, or if any person or persons shall cut, remove, or destroy any piece or pieces of timber, or any plank or planks belonging to, or a part of said bridge, draw, post or piles, or shall remove any piece or pieces of timber, or any plank or planks off said bridge, or any iron work belonging to the said draw, posts or piles, or otherwise wilfully damage, or do any act which may have a tendency to injure said bridge and draw unnecessarily, he, she or they so offending shall for each and every such offense, forfeit and pay the sum of twenty dollars over and above the damage done to said bridge, or draw, to be recovered in an action of debt, before any court having competent jurisdiction, with costs of suit, by any person who shall sue for the same, one-half of said sum to be for the use of the prosecutor, and the other half to be paid into the hands of the county collector, to and for the use of said county.

A. Passed at Trenton, January 18, 1814.

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Longacoming is now known as Berlin, and Leake's Wharf has long since crumbled away. The river is the boundary line between Bass River and Washington townships. There are many fixed bridges further up the stream, among which may be mentioned those at Jenkins, Martha and Speedwell.

### BASS RIVER

Bass River is by some regarded as a more important tributary than Wading River, due to the uniform and deep channel of the stream. From the mouth to the bridge at New Gretna, a uniform depth extends throughout the width of the stream. It is a common sight to see a sailboat tacking from bank to bank. The drawbridge is about three miles above the confluence with the Mullica and above this the aspect of the river changes and shoal spots appear, although it is navigable for some distance further.

The bridge was authorized in November, 1823, and erected during the early part of 1824. The lower road, through what is now New Gretna village, had been laid out in 1821, which necessitated bridging the stream at this point. Previous to the building of bridge and road, through-traffic went via the upper road extending from Tuckerton across the upper bridge at Bass River Hotel, thence to Wading River.

AN ACT authorizing the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Burlington to build a Draw-Bridge over Bass River, about a quarter of a mile above the dwelling-house of Benjamin Mathis.

1. Be It Enacted by the Council and General Assembly of this State, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same, That it shall and may be lawful for the board of chosen freeholders, in and for the county of Burlington aforesaid, at

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their discretion, to build and maintain a good and sufficient bridge over Bass River, about one quarter of a mile above the dwelling-house of Benjamin Mathis, and about one hundred yards below William Butler's house, where the new laid-out road crosses the same, leading from Tuckerton to Bridgeport, with a suitable draw therein, of sufficient width for the convenient passage of vessels navigating the same.

2. And be it enacted, that if any master of a vessel, or other person or persons, shall hoist the draw in said bridge, and leave the same hoisted, so as to prevent travellers and others from passing over the same, for more than twenty minutes, where the same is not absolutely necessary for the passage of some vessel through the same; or if any person or persons shall cut, remove or destroy any piece or pieces of timber, or any plank or planks belonging to or composing a part of the said bridge, draw, post, or piles, or shall remove any piece or pieces of timber, or any plank or planks off the said bridge, or any iron or iron-work belonging to the said bridge, draw, post, or piles, or otherwise wilfully damage, or do any act which may have a tendency to injure the said bridge or draw unnecessarily, he, she, or they so offending, shall for each and every such offence, forfeit and pay the sum of twenty-five dollars, over and above the damage done to the said bridge or draw, to be recovered in an action of debt, before any court of competent jurisdiction, with costs of suit, by any person who will sue for the same; one-half thereof to the use of such prosecutor, and the other half thereof to the use of the county of Burlington.

3. And be it enacted, That if any master of a vessel, scow, or other boat, of four tons and upwards, shall moor or fasten to the said bridge longer than is absolutely necessary for making ready and passing through the draw of said bridge, he or they shall forfeit and pay the sum of ten dollars to any person who shall prosecute the same, with cost of suit, before any court having cognizance of the same.

4. And be it enacted, That it shall and may be lawful for any person or persons, finding any vessel, scow or boat riding fastened or moored to the said bridge, to desire the captain, owners or occupiers of such vessels, scows, or boats, to remove from their said fastening or mooring, and if he or they shall refuse so to do, that it shall and may be lawful for any person or persons to loose the same, by casting off or cutting the same.

C. and A. Passed Nov. 13th, 1823.

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It may be interesting to note that Benjamin Mathis' house is still standing, though unoccupied and fast going to ruin. He was a grandson of John Mathis, first of the name in Burlington County, and lived and died in this house. The place had been owned by his father and grandfather before him. William Butler's house has long since disappeared, but its location is known to the older folks. William married Angeline, a daughter of his neighbor, Benjamin Mathis.

A new bridge was built some seven or eight years ago, of concrete, but inferior material was used, with the result that the piles are wearing away and a new span will soon be built by the State, a little north of the present structure. It is said that too little cement and too much gravel was used in the concrete. A hearing was held in Tuckerton during the summer of 1922 by the War Department, to determine whether the draw should be continued in the new bridge about to be constructed, or whether a fixed span would be satisfactory. The residents were unanimous in opposing a fixed bridge and the Department acceded to their wishes, and the drawbridge instituted one hundred years ago will be incorporated in the new structure. It devolved upon the author to point out the length of time the locality had enjoyed the draw feature and all present testified to the need of a bridge permitting free navigation throughout this important stream.

Two and one-half miles above New Gretna we come to the upper bridge. This location was known as Bass River or Bass River Hotel. There are in reality two

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bridges over two branches of the river—the eastern one is a rare bit of woodland scenery.

### NACOTE CREEK

Nacote Creek flows into the Mullica below the Chestnut Neck bridge, and is the last tributary before the main stream reaches the bay.

About one and a half miles from the mouth of the creek we come to the Johnson's Landing bridge, a fine, new structure, completed in the latter part of 1922, with a wide, high draw in the center. This bridge forms part of a new and shorter route from Chestnut Neck to Atlantic City, via Johnstontown and Higbee-ville, two small settlements, but cuts out the old and picturesque village of Port Republic, through which the previous and longer route passed.

It is not generally known that the above bridge is a modern realization of an old idea, but such is the case, as the careful searcher of the records will find that a bridge at this location was authorized April 2nd, 1869, but was never built until modern times, as related in the preceding paragraph. The authorization Act is as follows:

**AN ACT to authorize the building of a bridge over Nacot Creek.**

1. Be it enacted by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey, That it shall be lawful for the board of chosen freeholders of the county of Atlantic, whenever they shall deem it expedient, to build and construct or cause to be built and constructed a bridge across Nacot Creek, in the township of Galloway, in the county of Atlantic, at or near Johnson's Landing, and terminating on the opposite side of said creek at Chestnut Neck; and there shall be in said bridge over the deepest part of the channel of said creek, a draw or swing of

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at least thirty-five feet in width, of such construction as to impede as little as possible the navigation of the said creek.

2. And be it enacted, That this act shall take effect immediately.

Approved, April 2nd, 1869.

Two miles further up the creek, the Port Republic bridge is met with, first erected in 1829. As the motorist clanks over the structure going north from Atlantic City, he is struck by the prospect spread before him. The northern shore of the creek rises in a gentle roll from the stream and gives the village of Port Republic a higher appearance than is true. As we leave the bridge, a charming old brick house, with white verandahs around both upper and lower stories, meets our view. This is the Endicott house, erected in 1795, with the date carved on a stone set in the brick-work near the roof. Across the street is an ancient tavern, still older, and now used as a private dwelling. The shore becomes higher as the creek wends its way eastward, culminating in a knoll flanked by sharp banks, upon which sets an abandoned dwelling. A church spire is a noticeable landmark to the west of the bridge.

The Act authorizing the construction of the bridge is dated February 7th, 1829, in the following words:

AN ACT to authorize the chosen freeholders of the County of Gloucester\* to build a drawbridge over Nacott Creek, at a place called Port Republic.

Sec. 1. Be it enacted by the Council and General Assembly of this State, and it is hereby enacted by the Authority of the same, That the board of chosen freeholders of the County of Gloucester be, and they hereby are authorized to build and maintain a good and sufficient bridge over Nacott Creek, when they, or a majority of them, may think proper so to do, with a draw therein, at a place called Port Republic, so as to meet

\*Now Atlantic County.

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the road now laid out on the north side of said creek, in the township of Galloway; and the draw to be fixed in that part of said bridge where the vessels and boats may pass through with the greatest convenience; and that the draw in said bridge shall be at least twenty-five feet wide. Provided, nevertheless, that if the board of chosen freeholders, or a majority of them, as aforesaid, shall not agree, within one year from the fourth day of July next, to build said bridge, then this act shall be void.

Sec. 2. And it be enacted, That if any captain of a vessel, or other person or persons, shall hoist the draw in said bridge and leave the same up, so as to prevent travellers and others from passing over the same for more than fifteen minutes, when the same is not absolutely necessary for the passage of some vessel or boat through the same, or if any person or persons shall cut, remove or destroy any piece or pieces of timber, or any plank or planks, belonging to, or a part of said bridge, draw, posts, or piles, or shall remove any piece or pieces of timber, or any iron-work belonging to the said draw, posts or piles, or otherwise willfully damage or do any act which may have a tendency to injure said bridge and draw unnecessarily, he, she or they so offending shall, for each and every offence, forfeit and pay the sum of twenty dollars over and above the damage done to said bridge or draw, to be recovered, in an action of debt, before any court having competent jurisdiction, with costs of suit, by any person who shall sue for the same, one-half of said sum to be for the use of the prosecutor, and the other half to be paid into the hands of the county collector, to and for the use of the county of Gloucester.

Approved, February 7, 1829.

The width of the draw in this bridge was increased in 1861, as witness the subjoined Act of Legislature affecting it:

A SUPPLEMENT to an act entitled "An Act to authorize the chosen freeholders of the county of Gloucester to build a drawbridge over Nacott Creek, at a place called Port Republic, approved Feb. 7th, 1829.

1. Be it Enacted by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey, That the draw in the bridge authorized to be built by the act to which this is a supplement, shall be at least thirty feet wide.

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2. And be it enacted, That all acts or parts of acts inconsistent with this act, are hereby repealed.

3. And be it enacted, That this act shall take effect immediately.  
Approved, March 15th, 1861.

At the western end of Port Republic appears the old mill-dam and pond. These works were erected in 1774, and the following extract from the Session Laws gives full particulars:

### CHAP. XXVI

AN ACT for erecting a Dam, Mills and other Waterworks on Nacut Creek, in the County of Gloucester, and to indemnify those whose Property may be injured thereby.

(PASSED MARCH 11, 1774)

Sect. 1. Whereas Evi Smith, Hugh MacCollum and Richard Westcot, owning the lands on both sides of Nacut Creek, in the Township of Great-Egg-Harbour, in the County of Gloucester, near the Fork of the said Creek, a little aboye Indian Landing, have proposed to build a Grist and Saw Mills at the said Landing: And whereas sundry Inhabitants living near the said Fork, by their petition to the Legislature of this Province have, in order to obviate the Objections of certain Persons holding Lands and Mills above the said Fork, on the Branches of the Creek, represented that the said Nacut Creek is not, in their Apprehension, navigable above the said Landing, nor ever has been so, or capable as they conceive, of being made navigable: That the erecting of a Grist Mill at the Place aforesaid would be of publick Utility, and praying a Law to authorize the erection of the said Dam and Mill;

2. Be It Therefore Enacted by the Governor, Council and General Assembly, and it is hereby Enacted by the Authority of the same, That it shall and may be lawful to and for the said Evi Smith, Hugh MacCollum and Richard Westcot, their Heirs and Assigns, to make and erect the said Dam sufficiently wide and strong for the Purposes aforesaid, at the Place proposed; and to erect and build thereon such Mills and other Waterworks as they may think beneficial and convenient, any law to the contrary notwithstanding.

3. And whereas it is highly reasonable that every Person whose Property may be injured by the Erection of the said Dam, Mills and Waterworks, should be reasonably compen-

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sated therefor, and the Petitioners have agreed to place in the Dam so to be erected, and keep in good Repair, Floodgates sufficiently wide to give a reasonable Passage for the Transportation of Lumber through the same, which the Pond raised by the Dam will enable them to do, Be It Enacted that the said Evi Smith, Hugh MacCollum and R. W., their H. & As., shall place in the said Dam, and during the continuance thereof keep in Repair, one good Pair of Floodgates sufficiently wide and large to give a reasonable and convenient passage for the Transportation of Lumber or other Property through the same, down the said Nacut Creek, at proper Seasons for that Purpose.

4. And in case the said E. S., H. McC. and R. W., their H. & As., should in erecting their said Dam and Works, either overflow the Grounds of any other Person or Persons, or injure his, her or their Property, it shall and maybe lawful to and for the Person or Persons so injured (if the Parties cannot agree upon or ascertain the Value of the said Lands so overflowed, or the Quantum of such Damage themselves) to request the Attendance of Micajah Wills, Esquire, Isaac Evans, Zachariah Rossel, Benj. Thomas and Robt. Mattocks, on the Premises to view the same, first giving at least twenty Days' Notice to the said E. S., H. McC., and R. W., their H. & As., of the time when the said Arbitrators are to meet; which said five Arbitrators, or any three of them, after due Proof to them of Notice as aforesaid, and full Hearing of the Parties on both sides, shall have Powe: to award and determine the Value of the Land so overflowed, and the Amount of the Damages done by the said Dam and Works, to such Person or Persons apprehending him, her or themselves injured: And the said E. S., H. McC., R. W., their H. & As., shall pay the Sum or Sums so awarded, agreeable to the Justice, Intent and Direction of the said Award.

5. And in order to prevent Doubts and Contention and more effectually to carry the said Award into Execution, the same shall be put in Writing, and a fair Copy made thereof, both which shall be signed by at least three of the said Arbitrators, and one Part delivered to each of the Parties; which Award so made and delivered shall be binding and conclusive to all Intents and Purposes; and on Demand and Refusal of the Monies, so awarded to be paid, in the Presence of one Witness, it shall and may be lawful to and for the Party, in whose Favour the said Award shall be made, to apply to the Inferior Court of Com. Pleas, or a Magistrate of the County, as the Case may require, for a Scire Facias against the said E. S., H. McC., & R. W., their H. & As., to shew Cause for

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such Refusal: Which if not done so as to impeach the Integrity of the said Arb., or to manifest a plain Deception, to the Satisfaction of the said Court or Mag., after hearing of the Arb., or some of them signing the said Award, the Court or Mag. shall have full power to give Judgment and award Execution as usual.