

Green Bank On The Mullica Once A Ship Building Town

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GREEN BANK is located on the Mullica or Little Egg Harbor River. For most of the history of the town it has been associated with the water. Here there were taverns, stores, shipbuilding areas, landings, ship captains' houses, and some local industry that was not directly related to the water. These industries included a saw mill, grist mill, lime kiln, and a glasshouse.

The town was principally built in Burlington County along the north bank of the river for a stretch of about two miles. There was also some development along a back road and the road which led to the bridge. None of the development was in what is now Atlantic County. The early town grew along the river at the opposite ends of the town near the taverns and the church. The up-river tavern area was part of a major development scheme in the late 19th century and is still called Hermann City after Charles Hermann, one of the principal investors. This was considered Green Bank before this time.

The water oriented industries declined after the introduction of the railroads. Within this century some shipping was done from Green Bank and some areas were used for winter moorage. The function of the river changed from a transportation route for raw materials and goods to an area of pleasure boating. As the last sailing ships moved cargoes along the coast from Green Bank and other areas, motor yachts and houseboats vied for passage through the bridge.

The earliest settlement was at the eastern end of Green Bank. Samuel Driver settled in this area by 1747. He at one time owned all the land along the river west to Drivers Run. By the late 1700's the Sooy Family, who were Dutch, but who had migrated to Lower Bank from Long Island, had settled in Green Bank.

Part of the Samuel Driver houses and two Sooy additions exist as one house. East of the house is the meeting house. The land here was given to them by Nicholas Sooy. It was used as a graveyard before the bequeath and continues as such. The present meeting house is used by a Methodist congregation. It is at least the second building on the site.

Toward the river from the house is the store-wharf area and the site of a shipyard. The store is used as a dwelling. Some of the original wharf area can still be seen at low tide. In 1834 the town consisted of two taverns, two stores, and 10 or 12 houses. By 1844 there were 20 plus dwellings, a saw mill, grist mill, and a glass house. In 1858 the focal point shifted from the store near the church to the store near the bridge. The town now centered around the bridge and a glasshouse which ironically did not survive the economic problems of 1857.

A second shipbuilding area developed adjacent to the new store east of the bridge. Diagonally across from the store was the tavern or hotel. Behind the hotel was the defunct glasshouse. Almost opposite the store was the store keeper's house. Scattered along the high bank towards the church were several dwellings reputed to belong to the glasshouse workers.

The glasshouse began circa 1838 and ran intermittently through 1857. It was built by William Coffin who was born in Green Bank but who is best known for his glasshouse in Hammonton. For most of its time it was owned by Sooy and Thompson of Washington Township and leased out to others. E. L. Wells of Philadelphia leased it from March 1st 1850 to March 1st 1852. The D. O. Ketchum Company had the factory from May 1852 to August 1853. In 1857 Samuel Huffsey and several other glassblowers leased the factory. The factory produced window glass while the Coffins had it and later produced bottles when the others were using the facilities. No record of the factory being used after 1857 has been found.

The 1858 bridge was a swing type with passage on either side. This was replaced by the present cantilevered bridge in 1929. The bridge provided a way to Egg Harbor City and the railroad. A railroad was designed to come through Green Bank from Egg Harbor to Tuckerton but it was never built.

North of the bridge there were three early homesteads. One was just south of Drivers Run. This predates the complex around the bridge but was made into a victorian structure circa 1880. In front of this house was one of the several places for winter mooring. This house was owned by the Taggerts and Iricks. For much of its history it was also owned by the Crowley Family. Crowleys also owned the house opposite the 1858 store. They are still extant.

The second house was located between Drivers Run and Bull Creek on the south side of the road. This

was owned by the Birdsalls who were related to the Crowleys. The house was torn down about 50 years ago. A third shipbuilding area was behind this house.

The third house was along the water in what is now considered Hermann City. This is now owned by the Koster family. The Kosters operated it as an inn from 1869 to early this century. The older section of the house was an inn or tavern which dates from before 1776. During these earlier years it was owned by the Sooy family.

Another town developed adjacent to this tavern. This included over 20 houses, a glasshouse, store, boarding house, and extensive wharfing. Three ships are sunken off this landing.

Bull Creek supplied water power for both a grist mill and a saw mill. The grist mill was built before 1844 and lasted until 1901. The saw mill started about the same date and was washed out in 1939. The saw mill was also run by electricity. The mill pond was later used as a cranberry bog. There were also bogs along Drivers Run.

The fast land along the river bank and to the back road was used for agriculture. While lumber and other wood products were the primary commodities shipped from the area, some crops were also sent out.

Several houses were built along the back road (Route 542) and along the road to the bridge (Route 563). These date for the most part from the third quarter of the 19th century. Green Bank still has many of the early examples of architecture. Most of these date from the 19th century. There are elements of 18th century houses contained within the 19th century structures. There is little evidence remaining that this was once a thriving shipbuilding and landing area. The ships, watermen, and stories of jaunts on coastal sloops or schooners are part of the historical record. Evidence of the weighs, hardware, oakum, pitch, and provisions lie buried in the ground.