

BASS RIVER GAZETTE

A newsletter from the History Committee of the Bass River Community Library

Issue No. 1 July, 1998

OLD STORES OF NEW GREटना

As told by Gladys Wilson

December, 1985

Many years ago, on a corner of Route 9 and Amasas Landing Road, was Mary Ann Mathis' Candy Store. This was a home-operated store, and the house still stands today. (Mrs. Wilson wasn't sure just who owns it today.)

Chalkley Cramer's Hardware Store was located five houses south of the Methodist Church. My grandfather took me there many times for nails, tools, shotgun shells, and such. This store can be seen at the Old Smithville Village. Mr. Fred Noyes purchased it several years ago, and moved it in with his collection of old houses. The store was known as Chock's Store.



Cramer's General Store, in 1942, when it was owned and operated by Theora Cramer, Chalkley's daughter. The sign above the door reads "TB CRAMER GENERAL STORE". (Photo courtesy of Ruth Cramer Soles)

The Lafayette Gerew Grocery Store on Hammonton Road was purchased several years ago by Mr. Schroder, who ran it for several years before selling it to Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Sears. They are not native of our area. They moved here from Riverside, N.J. and were the parents of Eddie Sears, who has the government Surplus and Flower Stand on Route 9 just north of town. After her husband passed away, Mrs. Sears ran the grocery store, also serving soup and sandwiches to workmen for several years. In later years, Mrs. Sears moved back to Riverside and passed away. Mrs. Sears' son-in-law, Mr. Robert Sutton, lives alone in the old store today. I believe he sells second hand auto parts.

Post's Grocery Store and Ice Cream Parlor was located on Route 9, opposite Chock's Store. Mr. John Q. Post is, today, 103 years old and lives in New Gretna with his daughter, Naomi Maurer.

There was a grocery store owned by Howard and Hattie Mathis opposite the New Gretna Hotel, which is now known as the New Gretna House, and is a restaurant. Clarence G. Mathis took over this store after his parents passed away. This was quite the meet-

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HELLO NEW GREटना !

by Peter H. Stemmer, Layout Editor

The History Committee of the Bass River Community Library is composed of (l to r) Steve Eichinger, Peter Stemmer, Almira Steele, Elaine Mathis, Harry DeVerter., and Jean & Murray Harris (not in picture below). We are working on a book about the history and culture of Bass River Township. Since the book will take a few years to finish, we thought that we would share with you, in a quarterly newsletter, some of the information we've collected. We hope you enjoy it and are motivated to contact us about sharing something that may help us with our book.



We are looking for photos, postcards, family bibles, deeds, letters, documents, maps, local recipes, newspaper clippings, store advertisements, and anything else that is a part of Bass River Township's heritage. We need to borrow the items for only a few hours as we will scan them into a computer and return them immediately. You are welcome to watch so that the items never leave your sight. If you have something you're not sure we could use, please contact us and ask. History is often made up of a great many "little" things.



Edna Sears with her ever-present smile serving Marge (l) and Dora (r) Sutton in her Hammonton Road store. (Photo courtesy of Ken Rose)

ANOTHER THING I REMEMBER . . .

By Almira Steele, Editor

THE OLE SWIMMING HOLE

As kids, we couldn't wait for summer to come so we could go swimming. The girls usually waited until after school was out, around the first of June, but not the boys. They always tested the waters of Bass River, sometimes as early as April. That was the macho thing to do back then.

We spent many happy hours at our favorite spot, "Coal Landing." Muddy water and all, it didn't matter, we loved it. The only thing that did matter was the tide. We had to wait for high tide.

Sometimes a boat or two would come up the river and we'd float over the waves of their wake. "Super," we thought. Oh, the simple things in life.

Then, before we were out of high school, Lake Absegami was built, and that was the end of the "Ole Swimming Hole."

Summers were then spent at the Lake, where we didn't have any tide to wait for, or any mud to stir up.

As much fun as we had at "Coal Landing," I must say, beautiful Lake Absegami with Bud Steele as the first life guard, was a BIG improvement.



Can you find Almira and name her 6 companions shown here at Lake Absegami? Write her with the names and win a life subscription to the Bass River Gazette.

(Photo courtesy of Margaret Cramer McAnney)

Readers are encouraged to write Almira c/o Bass River Community Library, P.O. Box 256, New Gretna, N.J. 08224 with comments and recollections on items appearing in "Another Thing I Remember" columns, or any fond Bass River memories that you may have. Your letters and recollections may be published in a future column.

YESTERDAY'S RECIPES by Elaine Mathis



Woody Allen, Sr. and Woody, Jr. cruising along the meadows.

(Photo courtesy of Dorothy Allen)

Woodrow Allen, Sr. (1912-1995): Son of Edward (Keever) and Melinda Allen. Husband of Dorothy (Steele). Father of Janet, Marjorie and Woodrow, Jr. Woody lived in New Gretna all his life. He was a Marine Police 'Watchman' and clammed in his off hours. Woody's recipe is a very common local favorite that can be prepared in a 'hurry'.

WOODY ALLEN'S CLAM HURRIER

25 medium size clams
2 large onions
3 large potatoes
3 small slices of salt pork
pepper (dash)
½ c. water

Dice salt pork and fry in large iron frying pan. Slice onions thin and cook with salt pork. When onions become brown, add potatoes sliced thin and add water. Cook until potatoes are done. Add chopped or ground clams, also clam juice and cook about 10 more minutes with lid on.

HOUSEHOLD HINTS

(taken from 1003 Household Hints and Time Savers ... pub. 1941)

- **To open hardshell clams** easily, put them in the freezer for about 15 minutes.
- **To open hardshell clams** easily, pour boiling water over them and let them stand for a few minutes.

If you have an old New Gretna recipe you would like to share, please send it to Elaine Mathis c/o Bass River Community Library, P.O. Box 256, New Gretna, N.J. 08224

ing house for the old-timers. They would sit by the pot belly stove, chew tobacco, smoke and tell yarns. These old guys really passed the news around. No one needed a newspaper- if anything was happening in the town, these old codgers knew it.

Clarence's wife, Helen, started working in the store. She told her husband this place smells of smoke and needed to be cleaned. She started working on it, painting and cleaning it up. She made it a nice looking store. This didn't sit well with the old codgers, and when the benches were taken out they moved to Levi Down's Barber Shop. In those days one could go into Levi's shop and get a haircut for a quarter. They sure were the good old days.

Sometimes thereafter, the Mathis store was sold. I can't remember the persons' names who purchased it, but they only had it a few years, before selling it to Mr. and Mrs. Ruffo, the present owners. They opened a custard stand several years back, and changed it into a restaurant, which is open daily.

Ashton Lamson had a candy store and restaurant. He was noted for his good oyster stews. I can remember buying candy from him when I was a little girl. Mr. Lamson retired. His store stood on the land which is now occupied by the Rustic Inn on Route 9.

The prize of the town, when I was a little girl, was Aunt Ritie Allen's Variety Store. Her home was the store, or at least one room was. Was it ever packed full! She sold clothing, pots, pans, gifts, candy, toys. You name it, she had it.

Just before Christmas, Aunt Ritie came out with a big circular, showing all the toys and Christmas gifts. The circulars were sent to the New Gretna School, and we took them home to our parents. Us kids couldn't wait to get our hands on it. Boy, did all us kids have a ball readin' it.

I went there and did my Christmas shopping for the family. I bought mother and grandmother a pretty tray for 25 cents. I really thought that was the greatest store ever, as did all the kids and townspeople of that time. The house, today, is the home of Alston [and Clare] Allen.

Joe French opened a big store opposite the old town hall. He sold groceries, clothing, tools, paints, candy, ice cream, gifts, and antiques. He had the largest store ever in New Gretna. Once a week he traveled to Columbus, N.J. and sold things. Mr. French passed away several years ago, and his wife sold the store. It has changed hands several times. The last store in the building, about 1970 or so, was called Patchwork and Pewter, a gift shop. Today I think it is an office.

The New Gretna Town Hall is, today, Louise and Tony's Bakery & Deli.

I hope I haven't left out any stores.



(l to r) Jim Cramer, Clarence Mathis, and Delwin Downs accept a kerosene delivery outside the Mathis Brother's Store. Jim and Delwin worked for Clarence. (Photo courtesy of Doug & Eleanor Cowperthwaite)



(l to r) Clarence Mathis, Jim Cramer, Orval Mathis, and Frank Cramer gather in Mathis Brother's Grocery Store, circa 1938. (Photo courtesy of Norman & Ann Mathis)



Ash Lamson, Betty West's grandfather, stands behind the cash register in his restaurant located on the northeast corner of Rt. 9 and North Maple Avenue. (Photo courtesy of Betty Lamson West)

Gladys Maxwell Wilson (1915-1995) was a life-long resident of Leektown who is fondly remembered for her outgoing personality and love of Bass River history. Her "Old Stores of New Gretna" article first appeared in a December, 1985 edition of "The Pine Barrens BANNER." The spelling of some of the family names have been corrected in this reprint.

We are looking for pictures of other stores and businesses in New Gretna including John Post's store, Joe French's store, exterior of Ash Lamson's restaurant, John's diner, Levi's barbershop, Knights of Pythias Hall, Civic Hall, etc.

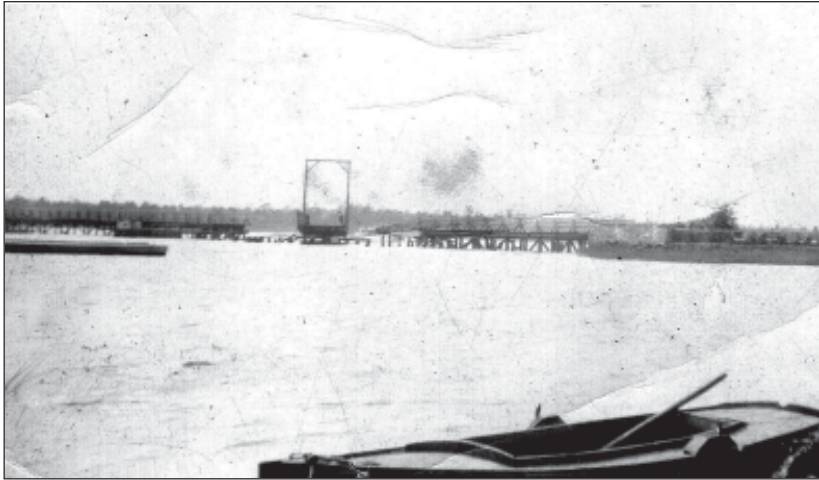
If you have a story about one of the stores in Gladys Wilson's store article, jot it down and send it to Almira Steele and become a part of a future "Another Thing I Remember" column.

THEN AND NOW . . . by Steve Eichinger

WADING RIVER BRIDGES

The first known bridge across the Wading River was located at “Bodine’s Tavern” on the old Tuckerton Stage Road from Tuckerton to Longacoming, now Berlin. It was about 1 mile below Harrisville. There is little sign of the bridge left as only a few stubs of the old pilings can be seen in dry weather when the water level is low.

The second bridge over the Wading River was built around 1814 at “Leeks Wharf” in Bridgeport, now called Wading River. This became the new Stage Road Crossing from Tuckerton to Longacoming. The bridge had a swing which turned in a half circle to allow the boats to pass.



Wading River swing bridge opening for a boat, circa 1910.
(Photo courtesy of Steve Eichinger)

The swing bridge was completely removed in 1924 when it was replaced with a new type of draw that, when opened for boat traffic, raised up in the air. It had a wooden deck, a shorter span, and was much higher from the water than the old swing bridge. This bridge served the area well until October 6, 1983 when it was closed for major remodeling.



Wading River draw bridge, circa 1945. Cages for Sam Merchant’s live duck decoys can be seen in the foreground. (Photo courtesy of Steve Eichinger)

Today’s bridge sports concrete decking, a new draw mechanism, and walkways on each side. The improvements were completed in October, 1984. In the near future there are going to be more improvements when the wooden pilings and bulkhead will be replaced with concrete.

NEWS FROM THE PAST

by Harry DeVerter

The following are actual news articles transcribed from old issues of the Mount Holly Herald.

MOUNT HOLLY HERALD

August 8, 1914

There is a little flurry of excitement down this way over the announcement that the Famous Players Film Company, of Trenton, has virtually decided upon the purchase of seventy acres of land in Bass River township for the erection of a moving picture studio. The studio will cost about a quarter of a million dollars. Work will be started next fall and the structure will be completed in the spring. The present studio is located on West 26th street, New York city, and when exterior scenes are needed it is necessary to go into the surrounding country to get them. At Bass River it is the intention for the players to have their own gardens, Roman baths and all other accommodations for the most beautiful exterior scenes available, for which thousands of dollars will be expended.

MOUNT HOLLY HERALD

September 15, 1883

F. French and Samuel Downs have been in our place for the past 2 days taking account of stock in the store of Francis French, now about changing hands to Capt. B.M. French. The old store is a good stand and we think will be very nicely conducted for time to come as is his intention to make it a first class store.

MOUNT HOLLY HERALD

July 8, 1899

The old butchershop has been bought by Mathis Bros, moved on the corner opposite their store, and it is said it will be used for a barber shop.



Steve Eichinger was the first person to drive over today’s modern Wading River Bridge. (Photo courtesy of Steve Eichinger)