

BASS RIVER GAZETTE

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

Issue No. 5: September-December, 1999

donations appreciated

BASS RIVER CEMETERIES MIRRORS OF THE PAST

by Peter H. Stemmer

Anyone interested in Bass River Township history or genealogy quickly discovers that there is not much written information available other than Leah Blackman's 1880 classic "History of Little Egg Harbor Township." It's one of the reasons we are publishing this newsletter and are working on a Bass River history book. One source, often overlooked, where we can turn to learn about our past is the township's six cemeteries and a seventh which is out of town.

The first cemetery used by Bass River residents was the Quaker Cemetery adjacent to the Friends Meeting House in present day Tuckerton, the only public cemetery in the area from the early 1700's until just before the Revolution. It is here that the Great John Mathis, his wife, and many of his descendants are buried. This should not be surprising as the first few generations of settlers in the area were mostly Quaker, and Bass River and Tuckerton were both a part of a larger Little Egg Harbor, the former until 1864 and the latter until 1901. It is also likely that the progenitors of the Cramer and Allen families, Stephen Cramer and Robert Allen, are also buried here as they were Quaker. Unfortunately, we do not have a complete list of those buried in this ancient graveyard as Quaker tradition shunned the use of tombstones, and the Little Egg Harbor Friends records are incomplete or portions have been lost. Again, we find ourselves turning to Leah Blackman (pp 206-208) who includes a partial list of the older burials.

The early settlers and residents of Bass River who were not buried in the Friends graveyard in Tuckerton were buried on their farms and homesteads. Two of the six cemeteries in Bass River today, the Cramer Cemetery in Frogtown and the Adams-Leek-McKeen Cemetery in Bridgeport, are small private cemeteries that evolved from these home burial grounds.

The small cemetery on Hammonton Road (Rt. 542) adjacent to the Cramer Auto Recycling yard evolved sometime in the mid 1800's. There is no sign to announce the cemetery's name to a visitor, and a stroll among the 27 stones gives little clue that this is a Cramer family graveyard. True, there are seven stones that bear the Cramer name, but the remaining 20 stones bear other surnames seemingly unconnected to the Cramer family: Allowell, Hickman, Johnson, Loveland, Robbins, Riley, Sherman, and Williams. The oldest marked graves provide the best clue to the cemetery's nature; those of Isaac Cramer (1756-1839), the Revolutionary War veteran, his wife Dorcas (1766-1848), sons Isaac, Jr. (1796-1831) and Uriah (1793-1852), and daughter Hope (1804-1839). [See the May, 1999 Gazette for story on the Isaac Cramer family.]

A little detective work uncovered the links of most of the other names to the Cramer family: Ellen Cramer, daughter of Uriah and Maria, married Joseph **Hickman**; Lucy Ann Cramer, daughter of Isaac and Dorcas, married Edward **Johnson** and had a son - the legendary Jesse **Johnson**; Mary Cramer, daughter of Isaac and Dorcas, married Isaiah **Robbins** and had a daughter Mary who married James **Loveland**; Gertrude Cramer, daughter of Wilson Bodine and Edith Cramer married Josiah **Sherman**. I can't account with certainty for the two Riley stones and the Allowell stone. Anyone wishing to further research these names should review "The Descendants of William Cramer of Elizabethtown, NJ" by Jean & Murray Harris, available in our local library.



Henry Beck (circa mid 1950's), author of *Jersey Genesis* and other books on South Jersey, at the Adams-Leek-McKeen Cemetery in Bridgeport. The Wading River Bridge which was the site of the old Leek wharf in the mid 1700's is in the background. (Photo courtesy of William Augustine Collection, Rutgers University)



The first graveyard in Little Egg Harbor was adjacent to the Tuckerton Friends Meeting House, originally built in 1715 and rebuilt in 1865. The ancient graves which surrounded the church are long gone and are memorialized in a marker which reads "In unmarked graves here were buried many of the pioneer settlers of Little Egg Harbor at the end of the seventeenth century and during all of the eighteenth century. In the main they represent a noble type of manhood and womanhood devoted to the good of the world and to the service of God." Later graves, mostly from the mid to late nineteenth century, surround the church today. (Photo courtesy of Burrel Adams)

The Adams-Leek-McKeen Cemetery sits off Leektown Road on a hill overlooking the Wading River bridge, the location of the old Leek wharf and store on the Wading River. It started as the Leek family cemetery sometime in the late 1700's. The oldest known marked graves are those of John Leek, Sr. (1715-1777) and his wife Phoebe, simple rough stone markers bearing only their initials, "JL" and "PL". Resting beside them are succeeding generations of Leeks, the most notable being their son, John Leek, Jr. (1735-1790) who served as a Captain in the Burlington County militia during the Revolutionary War. McKeens and Adams who later acquired the Leek property joined the Leeks in their eternal resting place. Alice Adams Weber, wishing to preserve the old cemetery, deeded the small graveyard in 1969 to the Old Bridgeport Memorial Society, a non profit organization formed in 1959 by herself and members of the Leek, McKeen and Adams families to oversee and maintain the cemetery. Burials are restricted to these families.

A stone's throw from the Adams-Leek-McKeen Cemetery, just down the hill toward Leektown Road, you will find a few tombstones nestled among the oak trees. A casual observer may not notice them. Most are at or near ground level and are small. Depressions in the earth and some scattered bog iron stones suggest others may be buried there. The five engraved stones - Lucy Ann Evans, d 1834; Lydia Hallock, d 1830; Godfrey Jerew, d 1848; E. Kimel, d 1825; and Mary Lippincott, d 1834 - indicate the age and the brief use of the small burial ground.

(Continued on page 7)

ANOTHER THING I REMEMBER

by Almira Cramer Steele

SUNDAY SCHOOL PICNICS

One of the most pleasant memories of my early childhood was going to Sunday School. There were classes from the very youngest to the senior adults and all ages in between. The church was full every Sunday, and the one big event that everyone looked forward to each summer was the fabulous Sunday School Picnic.

These picnics were family affairs with both the Methodist and Presbyterian Sunday Schools joining together. Mothers would pack a lunch in big picnic baskets, and we all ate together, we all played together, and we all had a wonderful time together.

The picnics that hold the fondest memories for me were the ones in the 1920's when we went to the Steeplechase Pier on the boardwalk in Atlantic City. Maybe it was because I was very young and the excitement overwhelmed me. I don't know, but those memories have lasted a lifetime.



A vintage postcard shows the entrance to Steeplechase Pier, the scene of our Sunday School picnics in the 1920's. (Postcard courtesy of Joseph & John Polillo via Ed Davis)

All the kids were so excited we could hardly wait to get off the bus and rush onto the pier to be the first ones on the rides. We all had name tags pinned on our shirts and that was our ticket of entry. This was our day and the pier was reserved for our group only. A few of the kids I remember enjoying all this fun with were Etta, Lillian & Virginia Allen; Leila & Orval Mathis; Clarence & Naomi Post; Jack & Mildred Mathis; Helen, Jack and Harold Sears; Dick & Sara Loveland; and many, many more.

Just as we entered there was a big revolving barrel we could walk through if we dared to take the chance. The problem was if we fell down it was almost impossible to get up on our own. After we tumbled around and around for a while the attendant would help us up and walk us through.

I remember one of the mothers, who was rather rotund and a good sport, decided she'd like to try walking through the barrel. Remember, all ladies wore dresses at this time - not slacks. Well, she fell down the moment she entered, tumbling over and over. She tried to get up but to no avail. A couple of attendants went in and tried to stand her on her feet, but it was an impossible task. Finally as a last resort, they had to stop the barrel and go in to help her up and walk her out. Believe me, a crowd gathered around to witness all that excitement. That episode was what we called a REAL barrel of fun!

The pier, for the most part, was enclosed and most of the rides were inside, but the big Ferris wheel and the picnic tables were outside at the end of the pier overlooking the ocean - a most spectacular view from the Ferris wheel and a cool and refreshing place to eat our delicious picnic lunch.

Once we were on the pier all the rides were free, and we could go on them as many times as we wanted. I especially remember those beautifully polished and waxed hardwood slides. The huge high and wide one was so slippery and fast that, if you weren't careful, you might get burned if you touched the surface going down. Burlap bags were provided for us to sit on for our protection. That slide was the thrill ride of them all.

Another slide was called the "soup bowl." You went down a short slide into a big bowl winding around and around and ended up at the very bottom. In order to get out you had to use your muscles and pull yourself up and out by a big rope.

The one that was fun to watch as well as ride was shaped like a "pie plate" upside down. Several kids would sit all together on the flat, slippery surface, bracing themselves with their hands to stay on. The top started to turn slowly then faster and faster until, one by one, when the kids could hold on no longer, they would swiftly slide off into the padded side of the enclosure. The object was to see who could stay on the longest. The one in the center was usually the winner. Spectators watched from a railing above.

There were many other rides like the Turkey Trot, the Whip, the Merry-Go-Round, the swings, and a whole lot more, but the slides were the main attraction of them all. The full length mirrors that made you look real fat or real skinny



Some of the girls who enjoyed the annual Sunday School picnics. Front row (l-r) Doris Cramer & Sabrina Downs. Back row (l-r) Etta Allen, Marie Allen, Anita Mathis, Leonora Loveland, Virginia Allen & Myrtle Wiseman. (Photo courtesy of Etta Allen Bannan)



The "Pie Plate Ride" always gathered a crowd. (Postcard courtesy of Joseph & John Polillo via Ed Davis)

YESTERDAY'S RECIPES by Elaine Weber Mathis



Mabel Maxwell Sooy as a young girl from Wading River. (Photo courtesy of Steve & Millie Potter)

Our recipes this issue come from Sheryl Potter Price. Cheryl is the oldest daughter of Steve and Millie Potter. Steve and Millie also have two other daughters, Linda and Maureen. Sheryl's recipes come from Mabel Sooy, who was the wife of Len Sooy. Len and Mabel were the parents of Esther, who was the wife of Steven Potter, Sr.

Sheryl told me that as she was growing up, she spent a lot of time with her Great Grandmother, Mabel Sooy. She said that everyday when she was going to school, she'd get off the school bus at her Grandmother's house and everyday they would cook something together. They would make pies and cookies and other special treats together. On snow days, when school was closed, Sheryl would walk to Mabel's and they'd cook. Sheryl has Mabel's collection of handwritten recipes in a bound notebook, in Mabel's own handwriting. She also has her Gold Medal Flour Cookbook, published in 1910. What a treasure to own. When asked about her cooking skills now, Sheryl would tell you that she is a gourmet cook. Small wonder, with all that practice that she had growing up.



Mabel Sooy later in life on the Sooy farm in New Gretna. (Photo courtesy of Steve & Millie Potter)

It was difficult for Sheryl to choose among the numerous recipes, since so many of them were her favorites. She decided to submit two that I believe you will enjoy trying. Caramel Popcorn and Clam Chowder. Sheryl's whole family absolutely loves the popcorn, especially her father, Steve. Sheryl makes popcorn for Steve for every special occasion that she can. (Birthdays, Father's Day and Christmas).



Steve Potter, Sr. (l) met his bride to be, Esther Sooy (r) during the reconstruction of Rt. 9 in the 1920's. Elizabeth French is in the middle. (Photo courtesy of Steve & Millie Potter)



Steve & Esther Potter in their Sunday finest (Photo courtesy of Steve & Millie Potter)



Len Sooy loved to tell tales of the pine barrens and high seas to his grandsons Steve (left) and Paul. (Photo courtesy of William Augustine Collection, Rutgers University)

CARAMEL POPCORN

1 stick butter
1 lb brown sugar
½ cup maple syrup (Log Cabin)
or white corn syrup

Put into heavy saucepan on top of stove.
Bring ingredients to boil to hard ball stage.
(Drop of boiled syrup into cool water will become hard)
Check every two minutes, after it comes to a boil.

Prepare popcorn - 15 cups when popped. (3 packets microwave popcorn)

Pour caramel syrup over the popcorn and stir in immediately.

Put mixed caramel and popcorn onto a large cookie sheet until cooled.

Store in a large metal can.

Mabel Sooy would pop the corn in a large pot on top of the stove. Sheryl uses Microwave Popcorn.

PINEY CLAM CHOWDER

1 small piece salt pork, cut in small pieces.

Fry it out until crisp.

1 medium onion, chopped fine

6 medium potatoes, cut up in small cubes

4 stalks celery, cut up small

4 large tomatoes, cut up in medium cubes.

(or 1 pint canned tomatoes, chopped)

4 carrots chopped

1 pint fresh white corn kernels

24 clams (chowder size) chopped coarsely,
save juice from the clams.

Put it all together with enough water to make 4-5 quarts.
Add a small pinch of thyme and salt and pepper to taste.

Simmer until vegetables are tender.

Serve with cornbread.

HOUSEHOLD HINTS

[From 1003 Household Hints and Time Savers-1941 & Heaven and Home Hour Family Handy Hints- 1933]

- A pinch of baking soda added to boiled syrup will prevent it from crystallizing.
- Before measuring honey or syrup, slightly oil cup or spoon, it will slide off slick.
- Onions will not make the eyes water if scalding water is poured over them before they are peeled.
- When soup is too salty, slice a raw potato into it and boil it for a short time. The salt flavor will soon disappear; then remove the potato.

If you would like your family featured in a future "Yesterday's Recipes" column, please send a few recipes to Elaine Weber Mathis c/o Bass River Community Library, P.O. Box 256, New Gretna, N.J. 08224.

A PLACE CALLED BODINE'S FIELD

by Steve Eichinger

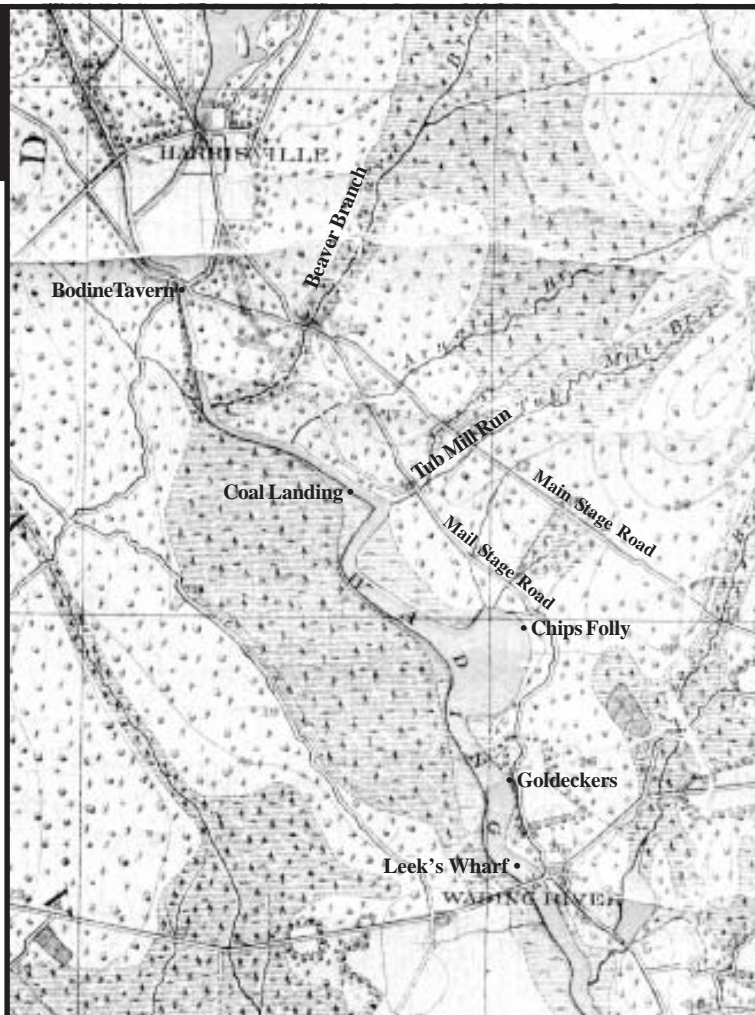
I began a trip along the Mail Stage Road that runs from Bridgeport on the Wading River to Bodines Field in the October, 1998 issue of the *Bass River Gazette*. In the last issue I stopped at Tub Mill Run, also known as Ashtamen Run, a stream that was once the northern boundary line of Little Egg Harbor (incorporated into a township in the 1740's) until 1864 when Bass River Township was formed. The boundary line followed Tub Mill Run to its head or beginning then (1) crossed overland in a northeasterly direction to Breakfast Point on the Oswego River; (2) ran West to Lawries Bridge where the present day Washington and Woodland townships lines meet; and (3) changes course in a southeasterly direction until it reaches a point on the East-West Jersey Survey line which is now the Ocean County line.

As we continue on the Mail Stage Road a short distance from Tub Mill Run, we'll pause a moment and take a left turn and go to Coal Landing on the Wading River. This is where they loaded charcoal for transport to larger ships further down the river. The vessels that they used were called "scows." A scow was wide, long, had a shallow draft, and was pointed on both ends. They were poled along the narrow areas of the river and rowed in the wider areas. They may have looked like the ones used by George Washington when he crossed the Delaware.

Going back to the Mail Stage Road, we continue up to the fork where we meet the Main Stage Road that runs from Tuckerton to Bodine's Field. After a short distance we cross over Beaver Run where the fork to the right goes to the old town of Harrisville. We continue straight and cross the road leading to Hay Landing where products from Martha Furnace and McCarthy's Mill, which pre-dated Harrisville, were loaded onto scows to be taken down the Wading River to Leek's wharf at Bridgeport where they were transferred to larger ships. Shortly after crossing the road to Hay Landing we come to Bodine's Field.



Ore boat being raised at Batssto in 1956 is similar to the scows used to transport cargoes from Coal and Hay Landings to Leek's wharf at Bridgeport. (Photo courtesy of William Augustine Collection, Rutgers University)



1889 topographic Map showing the Mail Stage Road journey from Wading River (Bridgeport) to Bodine's Tavern passing by Goldeckers, Chips Folly, Tub Mill Run and Coal Landing. [Note corrections regarding the locations of Goldeckers, Chips Folly & Bodine Tavern from the map in the May 1999 issue of the *Bass River Gazette*.]

The road goes straight to the river, passing John Bodine's tavern and stage coach stop located on the south side of the road about 100 feet from the bridge. This was the only bridge across the Wading River from the late 1700's until a swing bridge was authorized to be built adjacent to Leek's wharf at Bridgeport in 1814. The field next to the tavern was designated as the site for the local militia to train. According to the Martha Furnace Diary, many of the men who trained at this area had trouble getting back to the furnace to work thanks to sampling some of John Bodine's wares. Today, Bodine's Field is a wilderness camping area in the Wharton State Forest owned by the State of New Jersey.

This completes my trip up the old Mail Stage Road from Bridgeport to Bodine's Field. I hope you have learned something along the way.

John Milton Adams, a friend of mine, wrote a short story about Bodine's Tavern and field that I would like to share with you [see accompanying article on opposite page]. It illustrates what the tavern may have been like. John is now in his 80's and still loves to talk about Bridgeport, Leektown, New Gretna, and the Bass River area. His roots go back to old Heskiah Adams, and his ancestors have lived in the Bass River area in often forgotten places such as Calico, the Morey Place, Allentown, and Merrigold.

ON FINDING A TARNISHED BUTTON AT BODINE'S FIELD

by John Milton Adams

At my feet lay a tarnished button. I had nearly trod on it but one last remaining speck of brass caught my eye. The scene was at old Bodine's Tavern site along the Wading River. As I held the old button in my hand I wondered about its owner, who he may have been. It was a type that in the olden days would have been worn by one of the local militia, a driver of the stage that made this a stopping place, or any one of the more prosperous travelers. It could have been thus.

The weary traveler received his first view of old Bodine's place as the horses lunged into their collars, giving the already pitching coach one more jerk. To the tired horses, it meant rest, rest from the hard work of pulling the heavy coach through the soft white shifting sands that lies like a carpet all through the pines. To the traveler, rest from the hard cramped position he had fallen into, for the side to side and up and down sway of the coach made it impossible to sit upright. If one tried this he might find himself in the lap of his traveling companions.

Bodines stood on the top of a gentle rise overlooking the stage crossing bridge. Here under the benevolent shade of some giant oaks, it seemed a haven of rest after long journeys. Across the road were the fields to which old Bodine had lent his name. Training days for the local militia were held in this field on stated days of the year. They were a rough and ready type, not used to taking orders from any man. A few of them had seen service in the Revolutionary War and took great pride in that fact. Old Bodine liked to have them use his fields as there was as much sampling of his wares in the liquid line as there was training or attention to drill.

Yet to the hard working men and boys used to work from sunup to sundown, these infrequent days off were looked forward to with great relish. In these times weddings, funerals and training days were the only time men from miles around saw each other, and the stale news and weeks-old gossip were eagerly exchanged. Sometimes when the boys got too gay from the juice of the vine, and their officers who were also only one step above the men were also oblivious to this worlds care. Fights would start. Bodine was always ready for these moments of disagreement. With a long horse whip he kept handy for just such occasions, he would wade into the. men, laying the whip about and dealt out blows with a few well chosen words of a particular type that seemed to have a somewhat sobering effect.

Inside of Bodines, the candles were being lighted as our traveler entered the low ceilinged main room. To those used to the more luxurious inns of Philadelphia, this room would have seemed very crude. It was large, taking up nearly the entire front of the tavern. The floor was covered with white sand, a huge ironstone fireplace was against one side, and a low sort of bar or counter faced the opened door. Stairs led upward to the mysterious realm above. Along side the bar was a door that led back to the kitchen from whence was brought the common foods the countrymen love. Huge steaming plates of venison from the nearby woods, chicken pot-pie lavish with dumplings, fish caught nearly from the door, and clams for stews or chowder from down Tuckerton way.

Here would be gathered workers from the landing - forgemen from Martha Furnace and Calico, fisherman from Bridgeport; baymen from Bass River, and carters & drovers from all around the countryside or passing through on their way towards Quaker Bridge. Several local landowners and more wealthy farmers, from their more exalted positions near the fireplace, sat and pontificated to the lesser folks their views on every subject from the present term of President John Adams in Washington to the quality of pig iron being made at Martha and Speedwell.

The October night draws swiftly on. Here, supper is over and our traveler is shown his room. The last of the patrons takes one more sip and departs; folks like these work hard and keep early hours. The host, Bodine, covers the fireplace for the night, snuffs out the candle, mounts the stairs. So to bed at Bodine's tavern. The last sounds of locking up mingle with the faint echoes of distant hoof beats and die out. All is still.

A traveler takes one last look out the window that looks down on the old wooden bridge. He sees the rising moon casting its soft light over the fields. Long shadows in the wind march to and fro as if to mock the would-be soldiers it has seen. The pines and oaks that form a silent ring look on as they have since long before the white man came here.



John Milton Adams at the remains of the family homestead in old Calico - 1956. (Photo courtesy of John Milton Adams)

A faint smell of pine smoke wafts up from the darkened fire, hovers for a minute and mingles with the mist from the river, the ever present river that keeps its secrets to itself as it takes the course towards the landing. Even it seems to keep a stiller tongue at night. It draws its mantle of silence softly over Bodine's field together with the soft silence of the Jersey pines, so still as though nature itself was hushing the world to listen.

Tonight, 150 years later, the same place, the same soft twilight, the ever kindly evening that hides the scars of time. Our tavern? Only a dim cellar hole surrounded by trees; friendly trees that guard it from the merely curious. Our host Bodine, the farmers, baymen, militia and travelers all have departed on the last journey we soon must all take. The bridge? The road? One all gone, but the dimmest of traces, the other only a few jagged pilings remaining that catch at the hurrying river as one who is looking for a familiar face. One who will never pass this way again.

At night, when the wind moves the pines, if you listen well you may hear the sound of ghostly feet marching to the sound of a different drum than the one they knew. The jangle of harness, the creaking stage coach as it pulls to a stop, the rumble of heavy wheels over the bridge, and the sound of low voices. That's if you listen well. Or was it just the sound of the ever remembering river, or perhaps it was the wind in the pines after all?

But as I turned to go my way, I could hear the low sound of leaves, whispering to the water, dark murky water, tinged with red. And in my pocket I felt the hard smoothness of an old button.



John Milton Adams, now in his 80's, has deep roots in the Bass River area.

SUNDAY SCHOOL PICNICS

(Continued from page 2)

and real short or real tall and those sudden spurts of air here and there that blew the ladies dresses up to the delight of the male spectators were a lot of laughs for all of us too.

An incident happened on one of these picnics that really frightened the Sears family when their daughter, Helen, wasn't on the bus when it returned to New Gretna. It seems as though her grandmother who was taking care of her never noticed Helen's absence when the bus left Atlantic City. Not until they were ready to get off the bus did Mrs. Sears discover Helen was missing. In the meantime, Helen, who was only seven years old at the time, was as scared as she could be. A police officer saw her, and while Helen was telling her story, a lady and her young daughter who were from Tuckerton overheard the conversation and offered to take Helen home. But before they left the pier, the daughter wanted Helen to go on the ferris wheel with her. What a dilemma! Helen didn't know what to do. She was scared stiff of the ferris wheel but more afraid of straying away from the people who were going to take her home. Reluctantly, Helen took the chance and went on the ride with the daughter. Well, the three of them did arrive home safe and sound that evening, but Helen never went on the ferris wheel again. Yet, she was brave enough to get on the same bus for the following summer's picnic and all was well. AMEN



Helen Sears gave us all a scare when she missed the bus home to New Gretna. (Photo courtesy of Helen Sears Carty)

I believe the reason these picnics are so memorable is because it was a very special group, at a very special time, in a very special place. One of the saddest days of my young life was when I heard the pier had burned down. I knew then we could never recapture the unique grandeur and the magical moments we had on those very special Sunday School picnics. They were gone forever.

I've been told that the very kind and generous gentleman who arranged these great picnics for us all those years was Mr. Kirk Loveland. He was a banker in Atlantic City at the time and lived in New Gretna at his home on the South corner of Amasas Landing Road and Route 9. I never knew Mr. Loveland, but I wish I had, because I would like to have thanked him for all those cherished childhood memories.



Kirk Loveland made many children happy through the years by arranging the Sunday School picnics on the Steeplechase Pier. (Photo courtesy of Steve Eichinger)

Through the years we have had many happy and fun filled Sunday School picnics, but for me, none of them could ever come up to the uniquely spectacular ones we had at the Steeplechase Pier on the boardwalk in Atlantic City.

BY THE SEA . . .

Atlantic City was a very special popular place to visit, not only for Sunday School picnics, but also for day trips to enjoy the sun, sand, boardwalk, and the many piers. Below are two old photos of Bass River residents at Atlantic City.



Danny Loveland and Frogtown neighbor, Ella Johnson, pose on one of Atlantic City's famous rolling chairs. (Photo courtesy of Michelle Taryani)



Ann Gaskill (now Mathis) and Pete from the popular "Our Gang" comedy movies pose together on the Steel Pier in Atlantic City. (Photo courtesy of Ann & Norman Mathis)

Gazette Subscriptions

A yearly subscription (3 issues) of the Gazette is now available for anyone who sends 3 business size, 4" x 9 1/2", stamped, self addressed envelopes to Gazette Subscriptions c/o Bass River Township Community Library, P.O. Box 256, New Gretna, NJ 08224. There is no charge for the subscription, however, donations are appreciated. The subscription will start with the next issue unless otherwise specified and will expire after the 3 envelopes are used. It may then be renewed by sending 3 additional envelopes.

BASS RIVER CEMETERIES

(Continued from page 1)

Lucy's stone provides the key to the graveyard's origin. She was a Quaker minister in the Tuckerton Friends Meeting House who broke from the Orthodox Friends and joined the Hicksite sect in the newly built Quaker church in Bridgeport. The church has long since disappeared and the secluded burial ground, once adjacent to the church, now stands by itself, a lonely testament to the Quaker presence in Bass River. The graves are now maintained by the Old Bridgeport Memorial Society.



Lucy Ann Evans stone at the Bridgeport Quaker Cemetery, elaborate for a Quaker, was probably placed there by her husband, Jesse Evans, the manager of Martha Furnace. (Photo courtesy of Burrel Adams)

Another small cemetery whose origin lies with a long forgotten church is the French Cemetery on Hammonton Road (Rt. 542) on the north bank of Willets Creek, now known as the Ives branch of the Wading River. Unlike the unmarked, seemingly forgotten Quaker cemetery in Bridgeport, this graveyard is clearly visible from the road and has a granite monument proclaiming its name. This monument is somewhat of a mystery to me. I don't know who erected it, nor why they identified the old graveyard as the French Cemetery.

I suspect the name resulted from the observation that the second oldest of the existing 16 stones is that of Thomas French (1776-1845) who is buried with his wife Hannah (1777-1848). A newer marker has been erected in memory of his father Francis French, Sr. (1740-1819), the first

French to settle in Bass River, and two of Thomas' sons, David and John, who died in 1848. A passage from Leah Blackman (page 219) also supports the French name for the cemetery - "It is said that Francis French, Sr. was the founder of the Cranmer saw-mill." Since the cemetery has long been associated with the adjacent saw mill and Blackman believed that the mill was built by Francis French, naming the small graveyard the "French Cemetery" seems logical. Further research, however, suggests that another name may be more appropriate.



French Cemetery Memorial stone reads "In Memory of Those Buried In French Cemetery. One of the Oldest Cemeteries in South Jersey." (Photo courtesy of Burrel Adams)

The saw mill was actually built by John Leek, Sr. who also owned the adjacent land along Willets Creek where a small Presbyterian church was built sometime before 1777 when Leek died. Leek left the church and adjoining cemetery property to the Presbyterians of Bass River. Francis French purchased the mill property from Leek's grandson, John Leek III, in 1814, well after the start of the cemetery. The mill property remained in the French family's hands for only 9 years, as Francis' heirs sold the mill to Isaac Cramer in 1823. It would, therefore, seem more historically accurate for the cemetery to be called the "Old Presbyterian Cemetery" . . . but that's just one man's opinion.

[To be continued in the January, 2000 issue with the largest of Bass River's cemeteries, Hillside and Miller cemeteries.]

NEWS FROM THE PAST

by Harry DeVerter

The following are actual news articles transcribed from the Bass River section of issues of old newspapers.

MT. HOLLY HERALD

September 8, 1883

A festival and picnic will be given in the grove adjoining the Presbyterian church this Saturday evening. The funds will be used as the starter for a brass band. There will be music, dancing and lots of fun. The woods have been cleared out, a platform and stands erected and no doubt it will be a success.

N.J. MIRROR

December 23, 1885

This village does not enjoy, like many others, the inestimable privilege of electric flashes and talking telephones, but simply a daily stage that carries communications and passengers from Tuckerton to Egg Harbor at a speed of about three miles an hour. Many here are under the impression, judging from the enormous price asked for conveying passengers over the route, that the boss may soon be able to hitch up better accommodations for the convenience of the traveling public, especially in winter. It seems that two dollars from New Gretna and back, a distance of only sixteen miles is exorbitant, and should not be tolerated.

MT. HOLLY HERALD

August 14, 1889

A few days ago a scow loaded with hay belonging to Capt. Marshall A. Loveland was sunk in some way. After a few days the scow was raised, and now the story is that the owner succeeded in bailing her out when she was fifteen feet under water, or perhaps it was only fifteen inches. Even that is bad enough.

MT. HOLLY HERALD

December 26, 1896

The tax rate this year in Bass River township was \$1.65; in Washington \$2. Ex County Clerk Levi French is the heaviest resident tax-payer in Bass River township. The recent rumors about his being sold out by the sheriff grew out of a sale in which he was only acting as agent for Joseph Wharton to perfect the title to the Harrisville property. Mt. Holly Herald 12/26/1896

The Bass River Community Library History Committee members are Harry DeVerter, Steve Eichinger, Jean & Murray Harris, Elaine Mathis, Almira Steele, and Pete Stemmer. If you have any information such as photos, letters, documents, maps, local recipes, newspaper clippings, etc. related to Bass River Township that may be helpful to us, please contact us individually; write us c/o **The Bass River Community Library, P.O. Box 256, New Gretna, N.J. 08224**; or call Pete Stemmer at 296-6748. We thank John Milton Adams for his contribution to this issue. Readers who are interested in Bass River Township area history are encouraged to submit comments to our columnists and/or an article for publication. We hope to include a "Letters to the Editor" column in the future, so let's hear from you.

AUTOGRAPH BOOKS by Jean and Murray Harris

Autograph collection is a popular hobby. It usually involves approaching a celebrity and asking for a signature, preferably with a personal message. Many other collectors send a self-addressed stamped envelope to a well-known personality and request an autograph or a signed picture. These notes, photos, and signatures are later displayed to other collectors and traded or sold amongst them.

A distant relative of this hobby is the purchasing of a small notebook with the word "Autographs" embossed on the cover, and handing it around to your friends with the request that they write something in it. Today you will find it difficult to obtain one of these books, as the practice of collecting friends' rhymes and signatures is all but out of fashion. Those of us born before World War II can remember trying to think up cute little poems to please or tease the girls in our classes who asked us to sign their autograph books.

The collecting of friends' autographs was also popular in the nineteenth century, as evidenced by two examples which recently came to our attention. One was an autograph book from the 1880s and the second, one from the 1850s. The two are quite different and give some insight into the thoughts that people had during these two periods and how their verses differ from the ones we used in our youth. There is also some family history to be gleaned by noting the relationships of the writers to the book owner.

The owner of the first book, Katherine, or Katie Hickman, was born 25 January 1871 to John F. Hickman and his wife Sarah Ann (Cramer) Hickman. She had older sisters Ellen and Emma and a younger brother Lewis. Katie's autograph book was found in the attic of the house in New Gretna occupied by Paul Sedlak on North Maple Avenue, formerly owned by Delvin and Olive Bozarth. The interesting little question of how the book came to be in this house was answered when it was discovered that one of the autographs was signed "**Your brother, Asbury Mathis.**" A search of the census and cemetery records showed that Katie's sister Emma had married Asbury Mathis, and that their daughter Olive Mathis (Katie's niece) had married Delvin Bozarth. Katie must have been close to her niece Olive because Katie and her husband, Elias Joynes, share the cemetery plot in Hillside Cemetery with Delvin and Olive Bozarth.



Three of Katie Hickman's relatives (1- cousin, Joseph Hickman, captain; 2- brother-in-law, **Asbury Mathis**; and 8- nephew, Marvin Mathis, Asbury's son) were members of the crew of the Adroit, a Menhaden fishing boat. Other New Gretna crew members: 3- Ira Gerew; 4- Mark Leeds; 5- Levi Chew; 6- Malcolm Billsborough; and 7- Joe Loveland. (Photo courtesy of Horace Somes, Jr. via John Pearce)

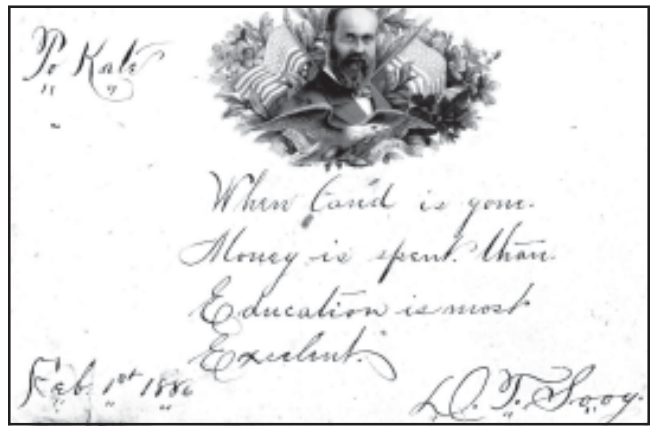
Katie's brother Lewis is also buried in Hillside Cemetery. He died in July 1886 at about 13 years of age. He signed his autograph in her book in January of the same year. That must have been a very precious memento for her.

Katie's sister Ellen, or Ella, married Lafayette Gerew and had children Ira, Lewis, Walter, Harold, Owen, and Beatrice. Ella and Lafayette are both represented in the autograph book, which also contains the poems and signatures of many of Katie's other relatives. They often signed "your cousin —." This led to our trying to list all of her cousins, as many of them just signed their first names. The list totaled fifty-six first cousins! Their surnames were Hickman, Cramer, Gaskill, Loveland, and Mathis. In addition to the cousins and friends who signed, there were two teachers, Eva Lamson and Mark W. Adams, as well as the Methodist minister P. W. Bilderback and his wife, Marietta.

An even older book, in the possession of Betty (Lamson) West of New Gretna, belonged to her great-grandmother, Lucy Marietta Cale. Marietta was born in 1827, the daughter of Josiah Cale and Phebe (Allen) Cale. She married Adolphus H. Lamson, a wheelwright, and had children Joseph B., Walter C., Ashton, and three others who died in infancy or childhood.

Marietta had brothers and sisters Josiah, Joseph, William, Martha, Mary, Eliza, Margaret, Phebe Ann, and Achsah. They married into the families of Leek, Loveland, Adams, French, Mathis, Cramer, Sears, and Cavileer. Through these marriages, and by virtue of her own birth, Marietta was connected to most of the old families of Bass River. Probably many of her relatives wrote messages in her autograph book. Unfortunately, in contrast to Katie Hickman's later book, this one is signed with just the initials of most signers, at whose identity we can only guess.

Both of these books have examples of beautiful old-fashioned handwriting and some well-crafted drawings. The verses in both are more serious, thoughtful, or religious in tone than the mostly joking ones we remember using as children. Here there is no "Roses are red, violets are blue," but rather "Life is real, life is earnest." It is evident from their autograph books that the young people of the last century had to grow up a lot faster than we did.



A page from Katie Hickman's autograph book signed in 1886 by Daniel T. Sooy, Jr. who ran the New Gretna House from 1904 to 1918. He is the great Uncle of Steve Potter who lives on Amasas Landing Road with his wife Millie. (Photo courtesy of Paul Sedlak)