

# BASS RIVER GAZETTE

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

Issue No. 9: January- April, 2001

donations appreciated

## BASS RIVER'S CHURCHES

by Peter H. Stemmer

### PART 2 - The Presbyterians

The predominant, almost exclusive, religion in the Bass River-Little Egg Harbor Township area was the Friends or Quakers who settled in the area in the early 1700's and controlled most aspects of religious, social, political, civic, and economic life for well over 100 years. [See "Bass River Churches, Part 1- The Quakers," in the Sept-Dec, 2000 *Bass River Gazette*.] The first intrusion by another religion appears to have been the Presbyterians through the efforts of their tireless circuit riders, missionary preachers who would ride a horse over large distances with little other than their bibles and the clothes on their backs in order to preach the gospel to small groups scattered throughout the barren stretches of South Jersey.

Leah Blackman in her 1880 *History of Little Egg Harbor Township* says that John Brainerd, the famous Presbyterian circuit rider, would ride straight through Tuckerton and onto Bass River as he could find no welcome ears among the Quakers of that hamlet. She also identifies the two Wading River-Bass River residents, who warmly welcomed Brainerd and were eager to hear his message, as John Leek and Charles Loveland. Both Leek and Loveland were baptized into the Presbyterian faith prior to their coming to Wading River and gladly opened their homes for Brainerd to preach. Brainerd, in his journal, documents trips to Wading River on April 17th and in November of 1761 but is not specific as to the exact location of his preaching nor as to the size of the meetings other than to say that he "preached at Wading River" and "preached a Lecture to a considerable congregation." In a June 21st 1761 letter, he hands over his "shore" circuit to a young Enoch Green and specifically lists the homes of Charles Loveland and John Leek at Wading River as stops on the circuit which ran from Toms River southward to Cape May. This letter is significant, as by mentioning the homes of Leek and Loveland, Brainerd himself documents that there was not a specific church building at Wading River in 1761.

We do not know exactly when the first Presbyterian church building was erected in Bass River, but we do know where it was built. John Leek was a man of means who built and owned the Leek Wharf near the present day Wading River Bridge. I was privileged to read the original will with his signature and wax seal, dated August 26th 1777, at the New Jersey State Archives in Trenton. In it he gives to the "... inhabitants of Wading River and Bass River ... sixty-five perches [41 acres] of land and meeting house and burial ground for the use of a Meeting House for Presbyterians to carry on the worship of God." His detailed description of the property's dimensions in relation to the building clearly indicates that the church and grave yard existed, a fact lost on some who read only the abstract of the will which leaves one with the impression that Leek is leaving the land for the building of a future church. So, if the church didn't exist in 1761 when Brainerd was preaching in the Leek and Loveland homes, and it existed in 1777 as stated in Leek's will, then we can say that it was built sometime in the 16 year period between 1761 and 1777. It was likely a small, crude log structure built closer to 1761 than to 1777, because it is doubtful that the Leek family would have undertaken the construction of a

church in the uncertain times leading up to the American Revolution. No one is alive today who remembers the old foundation, and there is no physical evidence of the exact location of the church. However, we know that it was located along the present day Hammonton Road adjacent to the cemetery we now call the French Cemetery which sits beside the Ives Branch of the Wading River.

We know little about this early Presbyterian church as there are no surviving records. It is likely that its membership was small and that it was abandoned shortly after the close of the American Revolution. The cemetery, however, continued to be used long after the church disappeared.

The present Presbyterian Church building on North Maple Avenue appears to have no connection with the early church inspired by Brainerd. Allen H. Brown and Samuel Miller, Presbyterian missionaries, visited the area in the late 1840's and encouraged the development of the church. Joseph Baker Cramer donated land in 1850, the church was built in 1851 under the leadership of Francis French, and the building was dedicated on August 24, 1851.

The church operated for nearly a decade before Reverends Brown and Miller, on February 24, 1861, formally organized the church with 8 members from the Tuckerton church. Incorporation papers



The First Presbyterian Church of New Gretna in 1928, shortly after the installation of the stained glass windows. The large Maple trees show the reason the street name was changed from *Allentown Road* to *North Maple Avenue*. (Photo from church files.)



The membership of the First Presbyterian Church of New Gretna was 79 at the turn of the last century with Sunday School enrollment at 155. This 1930's photo shows a still vibrant congregation that was active in all aspects of community affairs. The church manse, housing the minister and his family, can be seen just to the left of the church. (Photo courtesy of Don Cramer.)

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# ANOTHER THING I REMEMBER

by Almira Cramer Steele

## Life & Times of the Bayman

There was a time in Bass River when most of the men in town were self employed Baymen. They would travel down the Bass River each morning with their tongs and rakes to dig enough clams for a good day's catch and sell them to the dealers on their way back home. Every day was pay day back then because when they dropped their clams off the dealers would pay them and that's how it was. Among the places they could sell their catch enroute were Arnold Cramer & Sons, Curtis Maxwell & Sons, Allens Dock, Dow Robbins, and possibly a few others along the way.

Summer and winter, the routine was about the same. However, there were many days during the winter when the river and bay were frozen over, and they couldn't get out. But as soon as the thaw came, they were right back in the bay digging those clams again. Sometimes, if the weather was bad for too long a period of time, the Baymen became quite anxious, because the funds were getting low. But they always seemed to survive somehow. Neighbor helped neighbor and friend helped friend.

The work was hard, and their hands were rough and callused from working those tongs day in and day out, yet I believe most of them preferred this way of life to anything else. It was work they enjoyed for the most part, because they were their own boss and were free to work as much or as little as they wanted. Also, if they were good clambers, they could make a decent living and provide well for their families. They were affectionately known as "Clam Diggers" and they were not the only Baymen that worked in or on the water at that time, but I believe they were the most notable because there were so many more of them.

It seemed that everything had a season back then. There were a few days set aside each spring for Oyster Season. The baymen looked forward to that time when the oyster beds were opened, and they could work those beds and reap the benefits that were offered to them. Some of the baymen planted their catch while others sold their lot to the dealers who were right there on the spot ready to buy them. That tells you quite a bit about how important that season was to the baymen. The oysters were in great demand.

There was also a season every winter for gill net fishing. The fishermen prepared for months to take advantage of this special time each year. As usual, it paid off well when they made a good haul, but like everything else, there were good seasons and there were seasons that were not so good. That was the chance the bayman always had to take. Nothing was ever sure, and nothing was ever certain.

Many of the baymen worked the bay for crabs, minnows, snappers, eels, mussels or whatever lived in the water and there was a market for. The Baymen were always looking for ways to eek out a living from the bay, and they usually found something that suited them. Some of the old time baymen I remember were Ferron Lamson, Ruy Allen, Joe Cramer, "Boot" Mathis, Delbert Robbins, Talbert McAnney, Keever Allen, Walt Mathis, and Dow Robbins.

Because of all the activity that went on in the bay at that time, watchmen were hired by the State to patrol and watch over their leased holdings. The watchman's job was to patrol the bay, check on all the workers, assist anyone who needed help, and in general see that everything was operating as it should be. They also had to keep a record of each day's activities because, if there was ever a question, they had their notes to refer to.

There were three places in Great Bay where the watchmen were stationed: the "Ditch" which was manned by John Newcomb, *Gravelling Point* where Sam Mathis stood watch, and across the bay at *Cape Horn* where "Gid" Cramer was stationed.



A familiar sight on Great Bay was my uncle, Joe Cramer (1906-1976), here in the foreground tonging for oysters at the mouth of the Mullica River with his customary "roll your own" cigarette dangling from his lips. (Photo courtesy of the William Augustine Collection, Rutgers University Library Archives.)

you can understand why. They lived and died digging



Otto Kalm's family often stayed with him at the Cape Horn watchman's cabin throughout his weekly watch over the oyster beds in Great Bay. Here his children (1-David; 3-Fred; & 6-Claire) and some friends (4-Jack Maxwell; 2-Donald Maxwell; & 5-Joyce Maxwell) play at the cabin in 1942. (Photo courtesy of Alston & Claire Kalm Allen.)



Adelbert Robbins, known as "Del", (1893-1967) was in the Life Saving Service at Stone Harbor before he worked the bay. (Photo courtesy of Ronald & Marjorie Bozarth.)

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# MY, HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED OVER THE YEARS !

by Mike Allen

## The Town

Now, I may be telling my age, but it's no secret. When I grew up in New Gretna during the late 40's, 50's and early 60's, things were quite different than what I see when I visit now-a-days.

I remember a place where no one ever locked a door. Most probably didn't know or care where the key was anyway. Everyone knew who you were and could even guess who was who in a Halloween mask. I could never figure that one out, but each year, they all knew and always sent you away with a heavier candy sack. And, who would have ever thought to have the candy sack x-rayed, as is the practice today?

It was a quiet little town that knew no strangers. Deals were



My grandfather, Harry Allen (1890-1983), his wife, Rae (1892-1973), and my mother, Elaine Bangert Allen. Harry sure could spin tales of old New Gretna. (Photo courtesy of Ben & Elaine Allen.)

done with a hand shake, people worked hard, went to bed early and yet took the time to answer a young boy's questions. As I have grown older, I look back on those days and all the town's people who have passed away, only to wonder what a loss of knowledge and history that was never passed on. My grandfather, Harry Allen once told me just after we put the first man on the moon, "Son, it is a TV hoax - I saw the first car, the first radios, the first TV's, the first tele-phones and the first air-o-planes fly, but I can't see them up there on the moon with these two eyes . . . so, I say again, it is a TV hoax." Gosh,

I remember the tales he used to tell. Boy, if he were still here today, they would be some real whoppers. Now, I could go on and name many more, but I won't. I would just like to say that these men and women played a big part in my growing up, and I thank God for each and everyone of them.

Now for the fun part, do you remember when:

- Muskrats were plentiful? I had a trap line and tended it after school, selling my "rats" to Henry Updike (I called him "Unc"). I got a dollar for a brown and a dollar fifty for a black muskrat. After "Unc" had finished his rounds, I spent many an evening in his basement skinning those same rats, and he paid five cents for each one skinned.
- Hunting was good; rabbits, squirrels, grouse, pheasant, quail, ducks, geese and, of course, deer?
- There was a "Welcome to New Gretna" sign with population "401"?
- Blueberries were hand picked?
- Cranberries were scooped by hand?
- The milkman delivered glass bottles with the cream floating on top. Once used, the bottles were picked up and returned to be used again. "Recycling"?
- Doctors made house calls?
- New Gretna had a custard stand (soft ice cream), 4 gas stations with repairs shops, a coffee/soda shop, 2 stores and a restaurant and bar?
- The school house only had 4 classrooms?
- There was no "Garden State Parkway"?



Bennie Allen, mowing or plowing a neighbor's field, is a familiar sight around New Gretna for the past 50 years or so. Ben is still going strong at age 83. (Photo by Betty West via Ben & Elaine Allen.)

- The river and bay provided a lot of the income for the area?
- My father, Benjamin Allen, riding around town on his tractor plowing up garden plots here and there? Most people had large gardens, and I will say, though my father has some of the best water-melons, they were never as good as the one that some of "us boys" acquired from someone else's patch.
- There was a full time bridge tender on Bass River?
- Boats were made of wood, and there was several sawmills in and around town?
- The ponds where we used to ice skate and play ice hockey. You know . . . Fletchers, Moonbeam and Steamshovel?
- The old gravel pit behind the school where we held soapbox races? Mine was made from a cranberry crate with wheels from a baby stroller. Can you imagine kids now being satisfied with that? Why they probably wouldn't be caught dead in such a thing!



Billie Sears (l) and Donald Maxwell, in 1947, skating on Fletcher's Pond in the woods off West Road. (Photo courtesy of Betty & Floyd West.)

## The River And Bay



Rube McAnney (1910-1972) pumping gas on Allen's Dock. (Photo courtesy of Margaret Cramer McAnney.)

Bass River and Great Bay have always played a big part in the area. The river has been home to all forms of creatures: fish, crab, fur bearing animals, and many of our feathered friends. These are all part of nature. The river has also been a very big part of the town. This has changed over the years. In the 1950's, things were already starting to change. Allen's Dock and the other docks were acting as harbors for the many garveys used in the bay for clam and oyster men of the area. You could go to any of these docks and see clam and oyster harvests coming in. Allen's Dock was

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## MOTHER AND DAUGHTER RECIPES

### • MONICA WALKER KALM & CLAIRE KALM ALLEN •



Otto (1898-1989) and Monica Kalm (1893-1966) in the front yard of their North Maple Avenue home. (Photo courtesy of Alston & Claire Allen.)

I am delighted to bring to you a delicious recipe that many 'old timers' have enjoyed over and over again and raved about how good it was. In fact, whenever Monica Kalm's recipe of **Apple Pan Dowdy** was cooling on the stove, friends and neighbors seemed to be drawn to her house as if by some kind of magnet. The North Maple Avenue home of Otto and Monica Kalm was a place where friends and neighbors gathered often, according to their daughter, Claire (Kalm) Allen. In addition to their daughter, Claire, Otto and Monica had two sons, David, who lives in Florida and Fred, a bayman, who makes his home in Tuckerton.

Otto was very active in the New Gretna Presbyterian Church. I remember how much I enjoyed hearing him 'preach' from the pulpit in the absence of the pastor. Otto and Monica are lovingly remembered by all that knew them.

Claire has a recipe for **Clam Pie** that is the best her husband, Alston, has ever tasted. Take it from Alston, a retired Marine Police Watchman and part-time clammer. He knows a good clam pie when he tastes it. So do Claire and Alston's children: Denise, Fred, and Melinda.



Monica Kalm & daughter Claire shared many hours in the kitchen together. (Photo courtesy of Alston & Claire Allen.)

### MONICA KALM'S APPLE PAN DOWDY

4 cups sifted flour      1 teaspoon salt      3 cups or more of milk      1 box brown sugar      1 dozen large apples  
 6 teaspoons baking powder      3 Tablespoons sugar      1 1/3 cup shortening      Cinnamon      (more if small apples)

Grease pan (12"x16") heavily. Put in thinly sliced apples. Cover them with contents of box of sugar and sprinkle liberally with cinnamon. Cover with biscuit dough, which is thinned out by the milk so it will cover entire pan. Bake in oven until apples are tender and crust turns brown. 400 degrees for 30 minutes.



Claire Kalm and Alston Allen were married in the 1st Presbyterian Church of New Gretna on 4/26/1952. (Photo courtesy of Alston & Claire Allen.)



Claire has made many a clam pie over the years for her family: husband Alston and children (l-r) Melinda, Denise and Fred. (Photo courtesy of Alston & Claire Allen.)



Alston, in 1980, just before he retired from the New Jersey Marine Police. He also served as a bridge tender and oyster watchman. (Photo courtesy of Alston & Claire Allen.)



Fred Kalm, Claire's brother, in 1950. Fred has worked the bay all his life and probably has caught enough clams to make clam pie for every family in New Gretna and then some. (Photo courtesy of Fred Kalm.)

### CLAIRE KALM ALLEN'S CLAM PIE

- Make your favorite recipe for a 2-crust pie, using an 8"x8"x2" or 6"x10" pie dish.
- Cook the following ingredients in a saucepan until the potatoes are well done: 2 cups diced potatoes; 1 teaspoon dried parsley; ¾ cup water; ¾ cup clam juice; 1 ½ cups chopped onions; and ¼ bay leaf. Salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.
- Melt 3 Tablespoons butter in a saucepan. Add 1 ½ Tablespoons flour and stir to blend, making a thick paste, or ruex. Bring to a boil and boil on low heat until smooth (about 2 minutes), stirring constantly.
- Combine 10 ounces clams drained and chopped fine (approximately 1 ½ dozen) and 2 hardboiled eggs chopped, with the potatoes and onion mixture and the butter and flour ruex from above. Put into pie crust lined dish.
- Put 2<sup>nd</sup> crust on top and seal crusts together. Cut a couple of slits in top crust to vent.
- Bake at 350 degrees for about 1 hour.

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

# WADING RIVER LANDINGS

## Part II- The McKeens

by Steve Eichinger

[ This article is a continuation of the "Wading River Landings" article found in the Sept-Dec, 2000 issue of the Gazette. ]

Robert McKeen (1780-1845) bought the Leek homestead and property at Bridgeport in 1817 and continued to carry on the profitable Wading River trade at Bridgeport to and from the Hay Landing located about 3 miles upriver just below McCartyville, later called Harrisville. Up until 1838 there are no written records documenting this trade; however, I am fortunate to have in my possession a small 32 page McKeen Account Book from May, 1838 through January, 1845 which lists the expenses and receipts for the firm of *McKeen and Taggart* which operated from the McKeen wharf near the site of the present day Wading River bridge. The accounts were kept by Robert McKeen and provide a list of the Wading River trade activity generated by the McCartyville Paper Mill and town and Martha Furnace upriver. Robert McKeen was 58 years old when he made the first entry into the book. He died at age 65, about 9 months after his last entry. Two of his sons, Samuel (1821-1891) and William (1818-1850), whose names appear in the inside cover of the book, carried on the family's Wading River trading business after his death.

The 1838-1845 Account Book is one of six McKeen account books that I inherited from my Aunt Alice Adams Weber who was the great-great granddaughter of Robert McKeen. It is the earliest of the books which run sporadically from 1838 through 1879, the only one of the six books that had an entry regarding Martha Furnace, and the book from which I obtained the information contained in this article.

River trade between Bridgeport and Martha Furnace is mentioned throughout the Account Book. There was many a load of oyster shells, limestone, ore, hearth brick, brick, and store supplies recorded as being scowed to the Hay Landing for transfer to wagons for the 2 ½ mile trip to Martha. I counted 199 tons of oyster shells and limestone and 26 loads of ore, totaling 333 tons, along with large quantities of store supplies traveling upriver from Bridgeport to Martha Furnace. The oyster shells and limestone were pulverized and used in the iron smelting process. The ore was probably what they called "mountain ore" or magnetite which was



A hay wagon of the type used in carting salt hay from McKeen's wharf in Bridgeport in front of the paper mill at Harrisville, formerly McCartyville. There is some probability that one of the men may be Samuel McKeen as the old photo was passed down through the McKeen family. (Photo courtesy of Steve Eichinger.)



The old McKeen store/hotel/post office can be seen looking east from the Wading River Bridge. The McKeen wharf at Bridgeport was located to the left, or north, of the bridge. (Photo courtesy of Steve Eichinger.)

sometimes added, along with local bog iron, in the blast furnace. The scowing of store supplies to Martha Furnace is not surprising as the furnace enterprise was supported by a surrounding town whose store was in need of restocking.

Large quantities of iron pipe, pig iron, and rails were scowed down river from Martha Furnace to Bridgeport. I counted 2,634 pieces of pipe ranging from 2 to 12 inches in diameter and 23 loads of pig iron totaling 333 tons being shipped in a two year period recorded in McKeen's accounts. The last entry of iron being shipped from Martha Furnace is October 6, 1840 and after 1841 there was no mention of any lime, oyster shells, or pipe being scowed upriver. This is probably when iron production at Martha Furnace slowed down dramatically or stopped. There was a saw mill at Martha Furnace, so when the iron stopped, the lumber started. Jesse Evans, who served as manager of Martha Furnace in its iron producing hey day, became its owner in 1841 and turned to the charcoal and lumber business, including the production of large quantities of "posts and rales" [rails] to turn a profit. I counted entries totaling 3,000 posts and 37,000 "rales" shipped prior to March, 1844. Charcoal was shipped from April, 1840 to April, 1844.

The closing of the iron furnace at Martha didn't stop the trade on the Wading River as McCartyville was still producing paper. This meant store supplies and rope, rags, hogsheads (barrels) of bleach, and salt hay which were all used in the production of paper were brought to Bridgeport by schooner to be scowed upriver to the Hay Landing for wagon transport to McCarty's paper mill. McKeen's accounts show 278 tons of rags scowed upriver while 129 tons of paper came back down river. Other entries show that they started to use wagons along with the river scows as paper production increased. Wagons are noted as carrying 64 tons of rope to the paper mill with 107 tons of paper finding its way, by wagon, to the McKeen wharf.

Account entries also show that William McCarty and Robert McKeen became partners cutting and hauling wood as evidenced by the Day Book's January 9, 1841 entry: *Wm McCarty & Robt McKeen Wood cut in the wading Run 50 ½ cords carried by Maja Leek in the Adgutant. Dr for carting the same Wood at 37 ½ cts pr load.* This could have been either firewood or wood to make charcoal.

River trade from Bridgeport was not limited to upriver trade with Martha Furnace and McCartyville as evidenced by the following notation found on September 22, 1840: *one load of lime was shipped to the Willow Tree on the Mulikey River [Mullica River].*

The ships listed in the Account Book that carried most of the freight to and from Bridgeport were the *Argo*, the *Huntress*, Capt. Maja Leek's *Adjutant*, William Gale's *Vulcan*, Capt. Maxwell's *Albert*, Capt. Oliver Loveland's *Atsion*, and unnamed vessels owned by William Leek, Jr., John Riley and Charles Loveland.

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## LIFE & TIMES OF THE BAYMAN

(Continued from page 2)

These men stayed at their stations a week at a time with one day off. That one day, they had to go home and do whatever business they had to attend to, stock up on supplies for the following week, and then return to their stations the next day. Doughty Cramer, my father, was the relief watchman. He went from station to station and also went to Tuckerton Bay to relieve Frank Morey who was the watchman there.

These watchmen stayed in little cabins along the bay and stood watch 24 hours a day. Their accommodations were far from luxurious with no electric, phone, or any modern convenience. They weathered many a north-east storm and a few hurricanes because of the lack of communications. But they were Baymen and were used to roughing it. They took it all as part of their job. Throughout that early period the only casualty

I remember was in 1939 when "Gid" Cramer was crossing the bay one evening to his post at *Cape Horn*. His boat accidentally got caught in some fishing nets, and he was thrown overboard and drowned. That was truly a sad day for all the baymen.

Several men from Bass River became watchmen afterwards. To name a few - Otto Kalm, Harry Allen, Woodrow Allen, Alston Allen, Washy Allen, and Harry Applegate. The watchmen were later replaced by the Marine Police which was a more modern, better equipped patrol operation.

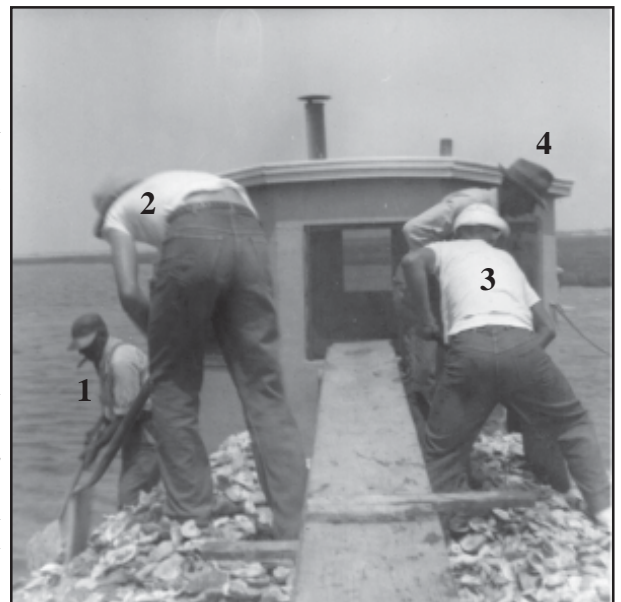
There are still a few men who work the bay today including Alston Allen, Steve Potter, Jim McAnney and son Tom, Ron Voorhis, Brett Nicklow and Fred Kalm, but very few depend on it for their livelihood. I am sure it is in their blood, and they are never more at peace with themselves than when they are out on the bay in their solitude, doing the thing they like to do best.

Today there is a Bayman's Museum in our neighboring community of Tuckerton where everyone who is interested can recapture the workings of the Bayman and his life style. I am happy they have not been left drifting into the sunset without something to remember them by. It is all part of the history and heritage of this area and most of us who have been a part of it can really appreciate all the effort that has taken place recently to memorialize the Bayman. They were a unique group who have left a whole lot of memories for all of us.

Now with the help of several knowledgeable volunteers, the Bayman will be remembered with pride for many more years to come. This, I feel, is a great tribute to the heritage of the now famous Bayman and his special way of life.



My father, Doughty Cramer (1892-1962), left, was a relief watchman when he was not working the bay. (Photo courtesy of Margaret Cramer McAnney.) Harry Applegate (1879-1962), right, served as a shellfish watchman for many years. (Photo courtesy of Jean & Murray Harris.)



Ike Bowers (1); Steve Potter (2); Jimmy Cramer (3); and Ben Allen (4) shoveling oyster shells off the deck of the *Dreadnaught* into seed beds in the Bass River. (Photo courtesy of Steve & Millie Potter.)

## WADING RIVER LANDINGS

(Continued from page 5)

Following is a sample of a few entries found in Robert McKeen's account book:

- March 4, 1839- 1 Load of pig Iron 10 tons Put Board of John Rily vessel*
- March 9, 1839 - 1 Load of pipes 13 tons (24) of 4) inch 21) of 3) inch Put on bord of the Argo*
- March 11, 1839 - Went for iron on huntris 38 of 6) inch 62) 4 inch 34) 3 inch Put on board Argo*
- April 8, 1844 - To the team Carting 2 Loads Of Rag up to the mill from Bridgport - 1 Load of paper Down to Bridg*
- December 31, 1844- To 1 Load rags stones took from Bow of the vulcan - 2 tones of Cole from Bow Capt. Maxwell - Team to Carting 2 Loads of Rags Maxwell From Scots Landing to the mill*

I would recommend that anyone interested in reading more about the history of McCartyville - Harrisville paper mill towns and Martha Furnace read John Pearce's recently published *Heart of the Pines* which I believe will quickly become the "bible" for those studying the history of the area. A lot more can be learned about the every day working of Martha Furnace by reading *MARTHA - The Complete Furnace Diary & Journal, 1808-1815* by Henry Bisbee and his daughter, Rebecca Bisbee Colesar. Both books may be found in the Bass River Community Library.

## WHO WE ARE

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. Readers are encouraged to submit an article for publication. We thank Mike Allen, our guest columnist, for his article *My How Things Have Changed Over The Years* and hope that it encourages others to submit articles for future editions.

## VOLUNTEERS WANTED

**WEB PAGE DEVELOPER** - Our web page, which has back issues of the Gazette posted and other historical information, is grossly out of date because we do not have enough time to keep it current. We are looking for someone to help us keep it updated.

**AUTO CAD USER** - We need help from someone who would be able to plot old surveys and compile maps on a computer using Auto Cad.

**PLEASE CONTACT US IF YOU CAN HELP.**

## VISIT OUR WEBSITE

Visit us at <http://members.xoom.com/bassriver> for copies of *Gazette* back issues, a history of Bass River Township, and other goodies.

# NEWS FROM THE PAST

by Harry DeVerter

The following articles are from the *Bass River Mosquito Log*, a newsletter from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp in Bass River during the 1930s. It and its predecessor, *Bass River Mosquito Bits*, gives us an idea of camp life, the early development of Bass River State Park, and the CCC camp's impact on the community during the depression era. The camp was located just south of the monuments on East Greenbush Road.

## Bass River Log - March 11, 1935 Bass River CCC Company # 225

Many former beauty spots on Bass River State Forest, Burlington County particularly the vicinity of Fur Bridge, a relic of the good old days when sea-faring men navigated their sailing craft up Bass River, are being restored by the Civilian Conservation Corps workers quartered in the forest near New Gretna.

Before the disastrous forest fires of 1929 and 1930 [See "The Great Bucto-Harrisville Fire of 1930" in the May-Sept, 2000 issue of the *Bass River Gazette*.], Bass River State Forest delighted the eye of the aesthetic with its natural beauty. The vicinity of Fur Bridge, with its dense cedar woods and clear, potable stream, was exceptionally attractive. Its proximity to good roads and its refreshing coolness during the hot South Jersey summers brought relief to many towns-people and travelers.

Fur Bridge acquired its name not from the opossum [sic], coon, fox or rabbit that may still be seen by the quiet observer, but for the quaint language of the baymen and sea-faring gentry who plied the waters of Great Bay. Sailing vessels, many years ago, came inland in search of fresh water. Some obtained water at the first bridge, but the best water was secured not at the "Near" bridge but at the "Fur" bridge. Thus the cedar bridge across the East Branch of the Bass River became Fur Bridge.



Residents from nearby Tuckerton also enjoyed the scenic beauty of Fur Bridge as evidenced by a dapper Talbert Loveland posing with Marjorie Jillson on the bridge. (Photo courtesy of Gladys Rutter Loveland.)

Since the fires, dense scrub oak on one side and charred, dead cedars on the other invited few visitors. The Civilian Conservation Corps workers have removed the dead and dying tress, destroyed the brush and greatly improved the place. It is further planned to clean out the stream, widen it below the bridge, and to complete a small, sandy beach on the East Bank. Soon a New Generation will find Fur Bridge a tempting resting place during the day and an irresistible trysting spot when the full moon hides behind the shadowy cedars.

## Bass River Log - December, 1935 Bass River CCC Company # 225

In order to provide an old-fashioned swimming hole and to improve the appearance of Greenbush Road where it crosses the east branch of Bass River on Bass River State Forest, a crew of Company 225, New Gretna, New Jersey has constructed two small ponds one on each side of the bridge and road, covering a total area of about one acre. Those ponds were constructed in the middle of an old cedar forest



Helen Sears poses, in 1941, on the foot bridge just south of Fur Bridge which can be seen in the background. Helen was to marry Owen Carty that same year. They met when Owen came from Pleasantville to work at the Bass River CCC Camp. (Photo courtesy of Helen Sears Carty.)

which had burned over and grown up in brush, making an eyesore on one of the main roads leading through the forest to the camp. At first, the task appeared hopeless as the place was filled with old cedar stumps sunk in the mud and water.

Pulling those stumps was a hard, dirty job. The boys had to wade in mud and water in order to attach a wire cable to the stumps so they might be pulled out by a tractor on the road.

After the stumps were removed, the muck was excavated by a rotary road scraper attached to the tractor by a long wire cable. Considerable difficulty was experienced in excavating the muck, because when the top layers were removed cedar logs as large as 24 inches in diameter were found embedded in the underlayers. These logs were of good, sound timber probably several hundred years old. But thoroughly water-sealed. It was necessary to remove these logs before the excavating could be finished.

The banks were formed by filling around the edges of the excavation with sand to a point above flood levels. The sand fill was covered with a layer of top soil and gravel, forming walls and areas for planting. A low bulkhead of cedar logs at about the level of normal water flow protects the edges of the slopes.

When this spot is planted to blend with the lakes and rustic railing erected on the existing bridge, and two rustic foot bridges constructed across the entrance and outlet to the stream, Bass River State Forest will not only be rid of an eyesore but will have a natural beauty spot for recreational purposes.



Fur Bridge was a popular spot for local residents to have a picnic, spend a quiet afternoon, and get their picture taken. Here Peg Cramer McAnney (l) and Mildred Mathis Kaufflin pose for a photo on the bridge in the early 1940's. (Photo courtesy of Margaret Cramer McAnney.)

**I'm looking for "News From The Past" items to include in future *Gazette* issues. Do you have old newspapers, magazines, diaries, yearbooks, etc. that contain news pertaining to Bass River? Contact me, Harry DeVerter, c/o Bass River Community Library, P.O. Box 256, New Gretna, N.J. 08224**

## HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED

(Continued from page 3)

run by Rube McAnney, and I remember spending many a day at the dock fishing, crabbing and just standing around listening to Rube and the baymen talk. Boy, could they tell some tales! Also, there were several pleasure boats that called Allen's Dock home, that fished the river, Great Bay and the ocean for tuna, blackdrum, bluefish, black sea bass, stripers, weakfish, croakers, catfish, perch and, of course, there were always the sea robins, oystercrackers and blowfish. Each and every boat returning always had a tale to tell about the really big one that got away. In those days, Great Bay was clean and clear. In 4 feet of water you could see the sand bottom and actually see the flounder take the bait.



Caleb Washington "Washy" Allen (1882-1960) was a State Shellfish Warden who kept watch over Great Bay from the cabin at Graveling Point. (Photo courtesy of Norman & Ann Mathis.)

Also during the time, my grandfather (Harry Allen) was a state shell warden, along with Washy Allen and Woody Allen, all from New Gretna. There was a cabin at Graveling Point in Great Bay, where they would stay and watch over the clam/oyster beds/lots day and night. I made many trips to this cabin with my grandfather. By today's standard, these individuals really were roughing it. There was only a generator for electricity, a real ice-box (ice had to be carried out there) and the only fresh water came from a barrel that caught rain water off the roof. Everything else had to be carried in across the marsh, including the gas for the generator, a distance of what seemed to me like forever, but in reality was probably a mile. During these trips to "the cabin" I was amazed at how, from the tower atop the cabin, they could tell who was in the bay that day, what clam/oyster lots they were working, and then were able to keep a log of it all. The cabin was taken by a hurricane around 1962, and no traces of it were ever found. This was the second cabin. The first cabin was much closer to Graveling Point. I don't know what happened to it as all I remember were a few remaining pilings.

As you can see, I have many fond memories of New Gretna, and truly enjoyed all experiences and insights from growing up here, knowing that I am a better person because of it.

## BASS RIVER PRESBYTERIANS

(Continued from page 1)

were recorded on December 11th of that year in the Burlington County Clerk's Office in Mt. Holly under the name of the *Presbyterian Church of Bass River*. Maja B. Mathis, Joseph Allen, Z.M.P. Mathis, Levi French, and Charles Adams signed as trustees with Rev. Miller acting as witness. The name was changed to the *Presbyterian Church of New Gretna* on May 9, 1888 with the filing of additional incorporation papers.

The earliest existing church membership records show the following members in 1864: Mr. & Mrs. Maja Mathis, Mrs. Ann French, Mrs. Ellen Adams, Mrs. Sarah Darby, Mrs. Josephine Mathis, Mr. and Mrs. Zadok Cramer, Mrs. Mary Adams, Miss Maggie Adams, Mrs. Julia French, Mrs. Joseph Allen, Mr. Samuel Williams, and Miss Eliza Thomas. Zadok Cramer and his wife are noted as being two of the eight charter members. The other six are not identified.

The church grew steadily and by the turn of the century showed a membership of 79 and a Sunday School enrollment of 155. Its members became influential in all aspects of community life, playing a dominant role in the development of the community well into the middle of the 20th century.

Today the building looks much different than the original struc-

ture with several changes and additions; including a Sunday School addition in 1910 which is the present kitchen, the installation of stained glass windows in 1928, an Education Annex in 1964 now used as a Fellowship Hall, and the installation of asbestos siding in 1950. The Education Annex produced the most dramatic change in the appearance of the church as the stained glass windows on the north wall were moved and incorporated into the addition, and its flat roof drastically altered the appearance of the church.

The manse was built just south of the church in 1889 with the assumption of a \$1,000 mortgage from Thomas Jefferson Gaskill. The carpenters were Charles Loveland and John A. Cramer. Its first occupants were the young Rev. S.G. Webb and his new bride. A single sentence found in the 10/10/1896 edition of the Mt. Holly Herald announces the retirement of the mortgage: *There was a time of rejoicing at the Presbyterian parsonage Saturday evening, when a*



This pre 1928 postcard shows the manse and the church before the stained glass windows were installed. (Photo courtesy of Floyd & Betty Lamson West.)

*\$1000 mortgage was burned.*

Pastor Larry Van Hise, Floyd West, Steve Potter, Harry DeVerter, and I went up into the bell tower in March, 2000 to repair the bell which was inoperable. The raised inscription, although brief, gives us valuable information. It reads: *McNeeley & Company, West Troy, N.Y. Presented to the Presbyterian Church, New Gretna N.J. By L.M. French A.D. 1887.* It was commissioned by Levi M. French (1841-1905) who, in addition to being one of the first church trustees, was a prominent businessman and influential politician. Levi had an impressive resume, having at one time or another, served as a Freeholder, County Clerk, the first President of the New Gretna Building & Loan Association, the President of the Tuckerton & New Gretna Telephone Company, an insurance salesman, land speculator, sloop captain, surveyor, and local builder.

Howard Ware, Harry DeVerter, and I subsequently ventured up into the bell tower of the Methodist church in town and found an identical bell except for the inscription of the church name which read "*ME Church.*" It seems that Levi commissioned and had two church bells installed. One might think that, in addition to being civic minded, he may have been trying to cover all his bases with the Lord!

The Presbyterian Church has played a role in the history of Bass River Township since before the Revolutionary War. Hopefully, it will continue to play a vibrant role in the affairs of our community for many more years to come.

## Gazette Subscriptions

A yearly subscription (3 issues) of the Gazette is 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.