

BASS RIVER GAZETTE

A newsletter from the History Committee of the Bass River Community Library
and the Great John Mathis Foundation

Issue No. 10: May- August, 2001

donations appreciated

BASS RIVER'S CHURCHES PART 3 - The Methodists

by Peter H. Stemmer

It's difficult to pinpoint exactly when Methodism came to the Bass River area as there are no written records documenting an exact time and place. Leah Blackman, in her classic *History of Little Egg Harbor Township*, credits Eli Mathis (1730-1795), the youngest son of the Great John Mathis, as holding the first Methodist Meeting in his farmhouse, probably in the vicinity of today's Miller Cemetery. Eli was a Methodist Class Leader and local preacher. It is likely that these meetings started sometime before the Revolutionary War. His farmhouse was burned by the British in a raid up the Bass River as part of the Battle of Chestnut Neck. [See Franklin Kemp's *A Nest of Rebel Pirates* for details.]. The Methodist Meetings continued after the Revolution in the rebuilt farmhouse and other homes in the Bass River area. A report from the 1786 Methodist Quarterly Meeting held in Hopewell states, "The Class at Matthis's [sic] contributed 15 shillings and 9 pence for the Circuit's expenses." A June 28, 1787 entry in Rev. Ezekiel Cooper's journal reads, "Preached at Esquire Matthia's [sic] to a tolerable congregation." Both these entries support Blackman's viewpoint regarding Eli Mathis.



The Methodist Episcopal Church on Route 9 in New Gretna was built in 1852 to replace the small Methodist Meeting House which stood in the middle of Hillside Cemetery. The adjacent parsonage was completed in 1885. (Photo courtesy of Steve Eichinger.)

dusk, finding lodging wherever a kind soul would offer their home or barn. Often, they had to sleep under the stars with little or no food, even on freezing winter nights.

An old story illustrates a perceived difference between the Methodist and Presbyterian circuit riders. A preacher inquiring about a night's lodging was asked, "Please let me know whether you are a Presbyterian or a Methodist." When asked why, the host responded, "Because I wish to please my guests, and I have observed that a Presbyterian minister is very particular about his food and his bed and a Methodist about the care and feeding of his horse." The preacher replied, "Very well, I am a Presbyterian, but my horse is a Methodist." The story shows the wit and resourcefulness of these remarkable men of God. I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the perception.

Bass River was part of the Trenton circuit where, in 1789, two preachers traveled 6 weeks through most of Monmouth (which included today's Ocean County) and Burlington counties, making over 50 stops in an effort to preach to the 372 enrolled Methodist members and all who would listen. The circuit riders continued visiting Bass River, even after a Meeting House was built. The following July, 1843 entry in A.D. White's journal shows the Methodist foothold in the area. Methodism was clearly on the rise.

We visited Bass River. Six miles from Tuckerton- found a kind reception for ourselves and work with Mr. Evy Adams, Class Leader and Exhorter in the Method: Church. There are about 100 families in Bass River Neck and there is a considerable Methodist Soc.

Surprisingly, the property upon which the small Methodist Meeting House at Frogtown was built was not deeded to the church until 1848 when Enoch Adams sold the one half acre parcel upon which the church and surrounding cemetery stood to the Methodist Episcopal Church of Bass River Neck for the sum of \$1.00. Trustees at the time were Evi Adams, Charles Loveland, Enoch Adams, Darius Cramer, Ellis Mathis, Eli Mathis, and John Sears.

Shortly after this transaction, it was obvious that the tiny Meeting House in Frogtown was too small for the growing congregation. Micajah and Ann Mathis deeded land on New York Road, now Rt. 9, to the church in 1852 and a large, well constructed church was built at a cost of \$2,500. The old Meeting House was then moved across the cemetery lane and became the Frogtown Schoolhouse, one of four one room school houses in the township. It was abandoned in 1900 when the New Gretna Elementary School opened its doors.

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A plaque, erected in Hillside Cemetery in 1940 by the New Gretna Old Home Society, marks the spot of the first Methodist Meeting house in the Bass River area. (Photo courtesy of Steve Eichinger.)

Local Methodist Church tradition says that the first Methodist Meeting house was built around 1799 in the Frogtown area; however, I could find no documentation confirming this date. The earliest documentation that I could find is an 1809 road survey that states a section of the road that is now Hammonton Road went "... between the friends and Methodist Meeting House." A plaque marks the spot in Hillside Cemetery where the small, original church stood. Its inscription reads "Original Site First Methodist Episcopal Church Erected in Bass River about 1800 AD Continued As A Church to 1852 And Used As School House To About 1870." The supposition that the first Methodist meeting

house was built in 1799 may have resulted from the diary of Richard Sneath, a Methodist circuit rider, who preached at Bass River in 1799, but his diary entries do not specify if he preached in a church or a private home.

Frid 16, 1799 (August) - preached at Bass River to a large congregation of men and women I felt the power of darkness as sensible as ever I did I thought there was something in the way but in the end of class meeting the Lord made bare his arm several fell to the floor then I soon found out what was the matter a most awful power of opposition, some swore, some smote their hands together at my head, afterwards I heard that they had agreed to beat me but that they could not do so but they knashed their teeth and foamed with furey I gained one to the class that had previously agreed to beat me.

Frid 13, 1799 (September) - preached at Bass River where they had threatened to beat me but how was the lions tamed into lambs and those that persecuted and raged when I was there before cursed and swore that they never would go to hear me again but they was there crying for mercy I hope that they are not far from the kingdom, Glory to God for his wonderful workes to the children.

The life of a circuit rider was grueling. The black-coated Methodist missionaries were renowned for their fierce dedication to spreading the word of the Lord. They practically lived in the saddle, sometimes riding from dawn to

ANOTHER THING I REMEMBER

by Almira Cramer Steele

Restaurants and Other Eatery Places

Bass River has never been a bee hive of activity, but it seems to me there were a lot more businesses in town “way back when” than there are today.

The restaurants and little eating places that dotted the highway along Rt 9 from one end of New Gretna to the other bring back a lot of memories for me. I will try to name a few that I remember, starting with the *German Kitchen* by the Ocean County line and going south, ending with the “Dew Drop Inn.”

Mr. And Mrs. Henry Kruse owned and operated the *German Kitchen* which later became *Ernie's TV* across from Off Shore Manor not far from the Ocean County line. Their home was just behind the restaurant and both buildings are still standing. I'm sure many people enjoyed Mrs. Kruse's famous German cooking during the years she was opened for business. The Kruse's had one son, Henry, who attended the local schools and all of us older folks remember him as a real nice fellow.

Further south there was a tavern operated by Steve Lee just beyond Job's Creek in the old Mathistown school house building. That business was in operation about the same time that Cliff Allen had his fruit and vegetable stand in Mathistown. The *Wig-Wam* and a couple of gas stations were also open for business in the same area. Joe Blees, a local Justice of the Peace, had his home and office there, also. There was quite a lot of activity in the Mathistown section of Bass River at that time, but today the only business operating in that area is Dellaporte's Heating and Cooling, just across the street from the old Mathistown schoolhouse.

The *White Oak Inn*, on the northeast corner of East Greenbush Road and Rt. 9, was a very classy place in its day that offered food, drink and lodging. There was a large canopy covering the driveway at the front entrance where guests could drive up and be protected from the weather as they entered the Inn. It was a large white building surrounded by huge oak trees, hence the name. The Inn was very elegant for our town and quite an attention getter, because it was busy all year round. The building is still standing and is now an apartment house, but the glitz and glamour has definitely disappeared.

Just over the Bass River Bridge, about a quarter of a mile, Mr. And Mrs. John Martin owned and operated a diner on the northeast corner of Bowers Lane and Rt. 9. They ran the business for several years until they retired to their cozy cottage on South Maple Avenue. The diner later caught fire and was destroyed. The debris was removed from the property with no trace of a diner ever being there at all.

On the four corners of Rt. 9 and North and South Maple Avenues there were two restaurants, the *New Gretna House*, and a general store, all in full operation. Ashton Lamson owned and operated one of the two restaurants where the *Rustic Inn* stands today. Just across North Maple Avenue Miss Anne, as she was affectionately known, owned and operated the *New Gretna House* that provided food, drink, and lodging for it's guests. Both the *Rustic Inn* and the *New Gretna House* are now closed and boarded up.



Steve Lee's old tavern-restaurant on Rt. 9 was in the building that had been the Mathistown School House. The “EAT” sign can be seen hanging to the right of the door. It is now a private residence. (Photo courtesy of Steve Eichinger.)



The *White Oak Inn* on the north east corner of Rt. 9 and East Greenbush Road, was once a classy restaurant. This photo was taken after its hay day, but before it became an apartment building. (Photo courtesy of Franklin Gray.)

Across Rt. 9 from the *New Gretna House* was C.G. Mathis' General Store and, on the corner where the abandoned bank building is located, there was another restaurant operated by several different people through the years – some of whom were Bill and Annie Cramer, Zeb and Bess Mathis, a man whose name I have forgotten who offered only a seafood menu, and Mr. And Mrs. Sorroco. The Sorrocos were the last owners before it was sold and the building demolished. Today, only the newly opened *New Gretna Munchies* deli is in operation on this once busy intersection.

A couple of doors down from the *New Gretna House*, Mr. And Mrs. Charles Lang and their son, Charlie, owned and operated the Esso Garage and Gas Station. Inside Mrs. Lang tended a soda fountain and snack bar where kids in town could get some of their favorite snacks. The customers, both kids and adults, could relax a while and enjoy one of Mrs. Lang's sumptuous soda fountain treats. James and Evelyn Belk were the last ones to own and operate the garage and gas station which has been closed for several years now.

Mrs. Edna Sears ran a grocery store on Hammonton Road and made delicious hoagies and other sandwiches to eat in or take out. This grocery store followed the lead of some other businesses in town and closed its doors many years ago.

IN A STRANGE LAND

by David Altscher

It was a warm summer evening in 1952 when we got off the bus in New Gretna. There we were, my younger brother Harold, my mother Rose (real name Rosa), my father Sam, and I. We stood there in a cloud of exhaust as the bus pulled away, holding numerous suitcases and bags looking like the eastern European immigrants that we were. To most Americans, New Gretna was a typical small country town but to us it was indeed a strange land.

New Gretna was to be our new home and we were excited. We had just spent two years living in a small basement in New York City so the country life sounded very appealing. As we stood at the corner of the New York Highway/Route 9 and North Maple Avenue we directed ourselves toward the small chicken farm my father had bought one month earlier. Our new home didn't have an address, it never had an address, it was "one half mile down North Maple Avenue road and on the river."



The Altscher family on their North Maple Avenue chicken farm. (l-r) Sam, David, Rose, and Harold. (Photo courtesy of David Altscher.)

We struggled with our bags for a few steps when two young men offered to help us. Their names were Gary and Dude Allen. They were a few years older than my brother and I and lived down North Maple Avenue. They walked with us to our new home and helped us with our bags. I recall my father giving them each a quarter. I don't recall whether they were pleased or disappointed, I was too excited to be in a new home and already met two nice people.

I'm sure our family was an enigma in this little town with the red brick schoolhouse and blinking light indicating the center of town. We didn't speak English, my folks had gold teeth, which was common for eastern Europeans, and we merely wanted to fit it and be liked.

Oh the wonderful memories I have of the people and activities in New Gretna as we grew up. Hunting behind the Janvier Hunting Club, fishing off of West's dock at Coal Landing on the Bass River, trick or treating with George Hancock, Rick Steele, Woody Allen, Jimmy McAnney, Larry Archer, and Harrison Cunningham. Having a cherry coke at Sorroco's restaurant on the south-east corner of Rt. 9 and South Maple Avenue.



Jimmy McAnney (r) and Rick Steele were two of the gang who went trick or treating in the neighborhood. (Photo courtesy of Margaret Cramer McAnney)



Mike Allen was a good friend to David Altscher and remains so to this day. (Photo courtesy of Ben and Elaine Allen.)

Over the years my folks worked long and hard on the farm. Chickens are needy animals and don't allow a day off. My parent's social life consisted of many of the town's people coming for a dozen eggs and a good neighborly chat. It was a scene right out of Norman Rockwell.

There were 3 physicians in the area. They were doctors Hunter, Carmona and Snyder. Dr Hunter is the one that became our family doctor. I don't recall why, but he seemed the most interested in our family. I believe all 3 doctors made house calls. Dr. Hunter would show up at our house in his black Buick when my brother or I had a bad cold or flu and never charged for the house call. My mother would give him 2 dozen fresh eggs and he reported he was very appreciative.

There was Benny and Elaine Allen who lived up the street from us with their son Mike. What nice people! Elaine volunteered as the leader of our small Cub Scout troop, and I mean small. I couldn't afford a full uniform, just a shirt and bandanna, and she never mentioned my incomplete uniform. Ben used to do a lot of plowing in town and came to our small farm regularly to till the soil for our garden or remove snow from our driveway.

I remember the Volunteer Fire Department coming each year on Christmas Evening with a present for my brother and me. It was to be the only presents we received which made it even more memorable.

I remember several grammar school classes going to Chips Folly for an end of the school year picnic and swimming event. My buddy Robbie (Walter) Roberts pushed me in the pool and I couldn't swim. Bud Steele saved my life! Bud dove in the pool and rescued me. Needless to say, I learned how to swim the following week by walking off of Floyd West's dock and into the river at low tide. Floyd and Betty West were our neighbors. They were nice people, good neighbors and had three cute daughters.



I remember an art studio called River Hill studio just up the road from us. The artist was Margaret Johnson, and she lived there with her parents, the Sullivans. In addition to being an artist she was an executive with Crayola Crayons. One year she came to our house at Christmas and gave us crayons, drawing paper and other supplies to make sure we had an opportunity to appreciate art. What a sweet and thoughtful lady.

Bud Steele rescued Donald when he was pushed in the pool at Chip's Folly during a school picnic. (Photo courtesy of Almira Cramer Steele.)

I left New Gretna shortly after I graduated from high school in 1964 to seek my fortune and conquer new, strange lands. California is about as strange as it gets! I think back on my youth in New Gretna and have fond thoughts of the people and environs that were so good to my brother, mother, father and me.

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 AT 296-6748 IF YOU CAN HELP. 3

MINNIE MATHIS SHROPSHIRE'S FRUIT CAKE



Minnie Mathis Shropshire (1902-1976). (Photo courtesy of Jean Shropshire Harris.)

I am proud to honor a very special former neighbor and Aunt (in-law), **Minnie Mathis Shropshire**. I had the privilege of living across the street from her for 13 years until her death in 1976. Minnie was the daughter of Roy and Ethel Mathis and wife of Fred Shropshire. Their Children are Jean, Mildred, Alice, Joseph and Lewis.

Minnie was a beautiful pianist. At the age of 16 while staying with her Aunt "Min" in Beach Haven, she was the piano player at the Beach Haven Movie Theater during the showing of silent films. She also played piano for the very popular minstrels, not only in New Gretna, but in many surrounding towns. Minnie was a schoolteacher and taught in Ocean, Burlington and Atlantic Counties including the New Gretna school for a few years. Her husband, Fred, was the State Wildlife Manager for over 30 years.

As you know, many good cooks never follow a written recipe. In many cases, they prepared a recipe so many times that it was memorized and filed in their memory's vast filing cabinet of unrecorded favorites. That was the way with **Minnie Mathis Shropshire**. I have asked two of her daughters for some of their mother's favorite recipes, and they told me that she didn't have any because she usually did not write them down. Well, I had heard that she used to make a delicious **FRUIT CAKE** and, after a lot of searching, I found the recipe in my mother-in-law's recipe file. It was written in Minnie's own handwriting and I want to share it with you. Minnie made this fruit cake every year for each of her children up until the year of her death. [Editor's note: I've tasted it too. It's a winner!]



Minnie with her three girls (l-r) Mildred, Alice, and Jean. (Photo courtesy of Jean Shropshire Harris.)



The Shropshire family, (l-r) Fred; Minnie; granddaughter, Jean Felsberg; son-in-law, Murray Harris; Jean Shropshire Harris; Lewis, and Joe, enjoyed Minnie's fruit cake every Christmas. (Photo courtesy of Jean Shropshire Harris.)



The five Shropshire children (l-r) Mildred, Lewis, Jean, Joe, and Alice at their North Maple Avenue home across from the Presbyterian Church. (Photo courtesy of Jean Shropshire Harris.)

Minnie's Fruit Cake

(The original recipe came from "Aunt Sammy's Radio Recipes" - 1926)

¼ pound citron (cut fine)	4 cups flour (sifted)	½ cup cider	2 teaspoons baking powder
1 pound raisins (chopped)	½ pound butter	½ cup tart jelly	½ teaspoon baking soda
1 pound currants	1 cup sugar	½ cup sour cream	1 teaspoon salt
2 cups chopped nuts	5 eggs (yolks & whites separated)	1 cup molasses	1 teaspoon cinnamon
			1 teaspoon nutmeg

- Prepare the fruit and nuts carefully.
 - Combine, and rub in 2 cups of flour, so that the fruit is separated into small pieces.
 - Cream the butter.
 - Add sugar, beaten egg yolks, cider, jelly, sour cream and molasses.
 - Sift the remaining 2 cups of flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt and spices.
 - Stir into the liquid mixture.
 - Add the floured fruit and nuts.
 - Fold in the well-beaten egg whites.
 - Bake in a tube pan lined with greased paper in a very slow oven. (250 – 275 degrees) for about 3 hours.
- This cake will weigh from 5 – 6 pounds and will keep fresh for a long time if stored in a tin box.

The recipe that I found (in her writing) states that Minnie changed the recipe as follows: I used 2 boxes raisins, 2 boxes currants, and a 2-pound jar of fruits (already prepared). The batter was about the same, except I used cranberry juice instead of tart jelly and instead of half cups, I used about ¾ cups of the liquids, and 1 ¼ cups of molasses. You can use apple juice instead of cider and part Crisco instead of all butter.

Elaine's Note: After cake is cool, wrap it with cheesecloth soaked with brandy, then wrap it tightly with aluminum foil and store it in a tightly covered can in cool place. As cheesecloth gets dry, re-soak it to keep the cake moist. Cake will stay fresh a long time, and the brandy will add a nice taste to the cake. **Yum Yum**

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 III - THE McKEENS

by Steve Eichinger

This article is a continuation of the "Wading River Landings" article found in the January-April 2001 issue of the Gazette. This article covers 1845-1846 and is taken from Margaret McKeen's Day Book labeled "Bridgeport." This is the second book that tells of trade along the Wading River in Bridgeport. A reading of the book shows that there is not as much traffic on the Wading River as documented in the previous Day Book which covered the period from 1838 to 1845. This is not surprising as the roads were becoming much better for overland travel by wagon, but there was still a lot of "scowing" of hay, wood, and charcoal.



Margaret McKeen ran the McKeen store at Bridgeport after the death of her husband, Robert, in 1845. (Photo courtesy of Steve Eichinger.)

The 1845-1846 Day Book shows that the store was quite a large retail business for the sparsely populated area. Thirteen people are recorded as doing business with Margaret McKeen in the one year period covered in the Day Book. Margaret McKeen (1795-1851) was the wife of Robert McKeen (1780-1845) who had previously run the business located at the landing at Bridgeport. She must have taken over the business after her husband died even though it was their sons, Samuel and William, who ran the business in the later years of their father's life.

It seems that William McKeen had the largest account at the store. He spent \$50.96 in a fifteen month period from January 31, 1845 to April 5, 1846. His bill totaled \$4.33 1/2 cents from January through March, 1845. Some of the items he purchased during this two month period were 1 lb. coffee, 12 1/2 cents; 3 lbs. butter, 45 cents; 1 ball candle wick, 5 cents; 1/2 bushel of potatoes, 25 cents; 3 yards drilling [fabric woven with a threefold thread], 45 cents; 1/4 lb. tea, 22 cents; 1 peck of corn, 25 cents; 1/2 bushel of Indian meal, 30 cents; 1 quart molasses, 10 cents; one 8 ounce bar of soap, 9 cents; 1/2 lb. butter, 8 cents; 1 lb. rice, 5 cents; 10 1/4 lbs. pork, 82 cents; 1/4 lb. tea, 22 cents; 1 lb. sugar, 8 cents; and 1/2 gallon molasses, 20 cents. The prices sure are different than those of today! So was the diet.

Some of the other names listed in Margaret McKeen's 1845-1846 Day Book are Eliza Baker, Oliver Cobb, William Sears Cramer, William Leek, John Maxwell, Oliver Loveland, Frederic Prince, Capt. Uriah Sprag, Chockley Cale, Israel Broom, and Derias Cramer. They give us some idea of the families that lived in the vicinity of Wading River in the mid 1800's. Many of these family surnames are still in the area today.



William McKeen, Margaret McKeen's son, ran the biggest tab at the McKeen store in 1845-46 as evidenced by the McKeen store Day Book. (Photo courtesy of Steve Eichinger.)

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

Visit us at <http://members.nbc.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 are actual news stories transcribed from the Bass River section of issues of old newspapers.

MT. HOLLY HERALD

February 17, 1883

Capt. Sooy had an interesting experience with John F. Sullivan on Monday evening. The Captain displayed some fistic science, but was knocked off his pins, breaking one arm and otherwise injuring him.

MT. HOLLY HERALD

February 17, 1883

Sam Richards has just returned from some unknown country with a very fine stock of cats, which he offers at low prices. He has also struck a bonanza in the pork line and will have some fine Berkshires by the 1st of April.

MT. HOLLY HERALD

September 8, 1883

The schooner W.S. French, of Bass River, with a party of twelve excursionists returning from Atlantic City to New Gretna, capsized near Peter's Beach on Monday morning. The passengers were all saved by Yachtsmen and brought ashore. The schooner was finally righted and floated.

MT. HOLLY HERALD

September 11, 1886

The new road from New Gretna to Chestnut Neck via tunnel under the Mullica river is still being agitated. When the application was made, surveyors were appointed who viewed the ground, laid out the road and made their return. Joseph H. Gaskill, counsel for some of the citizens, entered a caveat against recording the return of the surveyors, and obtained a rule to take evidence before the Supreme Court Commissioner Slape to set aside the return on account of informalities. Jerome B. Grigg appeared on Thursday on behalf of the applicants. The object of it all is to get a bridge over the Mullica river.

MT. HOLLY HERALD

July 9, 1887

The surveyors of highways of Bass River, Randolph, and Little Egg Harbor have been notified to meet and lay out again the road from New Gretna to Chestnut Neck on the Mullica river where it is proposed to build a new drawbridge across to Atlantic county.

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. **We thank David Altscher and Donald Maxwell, our two guest columnists, for their stories** and hope that it encourages others to submit articles for future editions. **Also, a special thank you to Bucky Lamson for his assistance with some photo identification.**

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.

RESTAURANTS AND EATERIES

(Continued from page 2)



Lou and Edna Sears on the porch of their Hammonton Road grocery store. Their sandwiches and soups were delicious. (Photo courtesy of Ken Rose.)

Then at the southern end of town, just before you approach the Meadow Road, or old Rt. 9, there were three small restaurants in the Frogtown section of town. Two of the buildings are still standing. The little house formerly owned by Dot Williamson, just beyond the land mark *Renault Wine Bottle*, was a teenage hangout at one time. It had a juke box and small dance floor, but only sodas and sandwiches were served. Next, Mr. and Mrs. Knockston operated a restaurant with a couple of gas pumps out front where I worked as a waitress for a short while. The restaurant is now a dwelling and the gas pumps have been removed.

The last little restaurant before you reached the Mullica River bridge and the Atlantic County line, right next to the garage operated by Walter "Ditty" Loveland was the *Dew Drop Inn*, a tiny little place with a cute little name. It was short lived and was torn down many years ago. Jersey Shore Collision now occupies the spot where Ditty's garage was located.

It is almost impossible to believe there were that many eating places in town during my youth; however, Route 9 was the main thoroughfare from New York to Atlantic City and many people passed through our town on their way to and from. The Garden State Parkway hadn't been built yet and the fast food restaurants were just someone's dream in the making. Maybe that was why those restaurants and little eating places were so plentiful and so important.

Today, we have only a couple of restaurants in the town of Bass River. The Custard Stand on the corner of Rt. 9 and East Greenbush Road and Allen's Clam Bar. That's about it! Maybe some day soon we will see the New Gretna House and the Rustic Inn refurbished and opened for business again.

Thankfully, the deli has recently reopened where we can get a loaf of bread, a quart of milk and other necessary items, and even a nice big hoagie if you are real hungry. I don't believe we realized how important the deli was until it closed it's doors a few years ago. Good luck to the new owners. I wish your Speedi Deli well. At least it is a step in the right direction. Let's hope our town continues to open up again and to be as active as it once was. How about it? Sounds good to me or is it only wishful thinking?

If you grew up in New Gretna, think about writing a short story for the Gazette. We are always looking for guest columnists. Give it a try!

BASS RIVER'S METHODISTS

(Continued from page 1)

A review of the records of the church shows the following highlights. The adjacent parsonage was completed in 1884 with Rev. Edwin Waters becoming its first occupant. In 1887, the present bell was donated by Levi French, a prominent politician and businessman. The church was struck by lightning in 1891 partially destroying the bell tower. Fortunately the bell was saved.

There were many renovations of the church over the years. Most notably, a major fire in 1954 severely damaged the altar and destroyed the old pipe organ. The sanctuary was remodeled, an electric organ installed, and the present Fellowship Hall and kitchen were added to the rear of the sanctuary.

There was another Methodist church built in the Mathistown section of Bass River Township, adjacent to the present day Amon Construction Co., near the fork of Rt. 9 and the present dirt road that was the old Rt. 4. David W. Mathis and his wife, Maria, sold the one half acre parcel to the Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Mathistown for \$1.00 on February 27, 1880 so that a church could be built. The trustees were listed in the deed as Samuel D. and Margaret Sleeper, Maja B. and Phebe Mathis, John A. and Susie Mathis, Samuel and Harriet Mathis, Charles H. and Mary A. Adair, Sylvester and Hannah Mathis, and Aden and Ophila Mathis.

It is likely that it was built shortly thereafter. Little is known of this church which apparently was not affiliated with the New Gretna Methodist Church. It was probably short lived. Howard Ware, now 80 years old, remembers seeing the shell of an old building at that location sometime in the late 1930's.



Rev. Joseph Uncle preaching in front of the pipe organ in 1952 before it was destroyed by the 1954 fire. Many credit the fast action of Rev. Uncle for saving the entire church from burning down. (Photo courtesy of Naomi Post Maurer.)



The New Gretna Methodist Episcopal Church, in the late teens or early twenties before electricity came to New Gretna, decorated for Christmas with laurel draped between the gas lights. (Photo courtesy of St. Paul's United Methodist Church.)

The Methodist church has played an important role in the history of Bass River Township from the mid 18th century to the present day. A look through its dusty roll books shows many old family names of the area including Adams, Allen, Bartlett, Cavileer, Cramer, Darby, French, Gale, Gaskill, Gerew, Hickman, Holloway, Leek, Loveland, Mathis, Maxwell, McAnney, McKeen, Robbins, Sears, Sooy, Souders, Truex, and VanSant. These names are a testimony to the rich heritage of the church.

GROWING UP IN NEW GREтна

(Continued from page 8)

would say, "Where is Jack?", and I would say, "He's coming." She would make me go back after him.

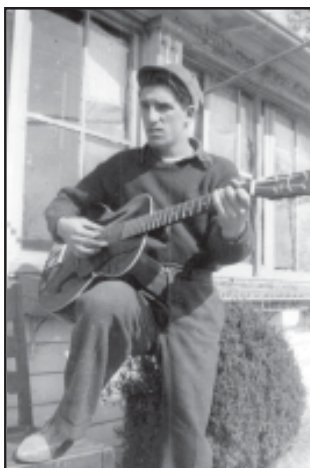


Jack Mathis and his sister Mildred picking blueberries at the Cutts Brothers' field in the 1950's. (Photo courtesy of Naomi Post Maurer.)

as she was trying to beat her brother-in-law Ben Maxwell. It was somewhat of an honor to be the first one there in the morning, but he would always be there ahead of her and would always say "Where you been Maggie? Thought you would never get here." Next day she said be out there at 4:30 A.M. in the morning, and I was. When we got there Ben would be waiting "Where you been Maggie? Thought you would never get here". Then Maggie would feel the hood and say "Ben, this engine is still hot. You haven't been here that long." She said next morning be out there 4 A.M. as I am going to beat that old bugger. Well we couldn't start picking until 7 A.M. or so, whenever the dew dried off the berries. My folks said find another ride, and I did with Elizabeth Cramer. She left at a decent hour, and I didn't have to disrupt the whole house getting off in the morning. Eventually the Cutts brothers ran their own transportation, but I was gone by then, off to bigger and better things.

On National holidays like Memorial Day and 4th of July, the town fathers would set up a large bandstand in the grove area between the Town Hall and where the bank was. The band would come down from 4 Mile State Colony on a bus and play music all day. We had eats and games to play and had a good time.

I remember all the Public Service buses and Lincoln buses going from Atlantic City to N.Y. stopping in front of the little restaurant right on the corner of South Maple Avenue and Route 9 as it was a regular bus stop. Sammy Carr would play his guitar and sing "Mammy Don't Allow No Guitar Playing Around Here." The passengers would roll down the windows and listen and applaud, and sometimes the bus driver would linger for a minute or so to hear the end of the song. I remember the older baymen would come down to the corner in the evening after coming home from the bay and having dinner. They would sit there until sunset talking about the days events. There were benches on



Sammy Carr played his guitar often around the New Gretna area. Home made entertainment was an important part of our growing up in the 1930's (Photo courtesy of Tom and Judy Cramer.)

Those long leisurely days of summer went by slowly, as there wasn't much to do but play. There was no way to make hardly any money as no one had much of it. Remember these were the 1930's. Our first chance to make a little school money was picking blueberries for the Cutts brothers. They had numerous blueberry fields near Harrisville and paid 2 cents a pint for picking them. I caught a ride to the fields for 10 cents a day with "Maggie Bob." [ed note: Margaret Maxwell was the wife of Bob Maxwell, hence the New Gretna style nickname.] She said to be at the corner at 5 A.M.

both sides of the steps for them to sit on. They were always dressed up. There was Dow Robbins, Chalkley Sears, who I remember was always dressed up and wore a flashy pair of spats, John T. Cramer, Al Mathis, etc.

In the winter we would ice skate on Fletcher's pond, off West Road, and Steam Shovel on Rt. 9. I remember the winter of 1934, about the coldest on record. It had rained hard for several days and then came off cold and froze everything up solid. It made a nice pond out back of our house on the cemetery road about 3 or 4 acres off the road in Govie Cramer's field. We all went skating as it froze solid to the ground. Practically everyone who could skate and some who couldn't were there. My dad got me a pair of double runner skates with a key, and that's how I learned. My dad made up some hockey sticks, and the men of the town who could skate played hockey all day into the night. I would lay in bed at night and see the glow in the sky from the bonfires, as they burnt old rubber tires and any old logs they could find. We used to toast marshmallows on the fire in the daytime. I was only 7 years old at the time but remember them saying that it was 34 below zero for quite a while. It wasn't until sometime in March that the rivers and the bays thawed out. You would be surprised at the older people who came out to skate and were real good at it. I remember uncle Harry Applegate skating and what a graceful skater he was.

I have always said that I thank God for allowing me the privilege of living and growing up in a town like New Gretna was in those days, to have all these childhood experiences, and to live in a time when life was so much simpler and less stressful. You could leave your house unlocked and go out for a while and when you came home find a note on the table saying who had been there, sorry they had missed us, and see you next time. What an era to live and grow up in! It was a time that will never be experienced again.



Donald Maxwell and Bill Sears clowning around while skating on Fletcher's pond out West Road. (Photo courtesy of Betty Lamson West.)



Donald Maxwell in front of Clarence Mathis' store in May of 1945, just before his senior class trip to New York City. He is standing in front of "Lib" Shutte's 1940 Mercury that was being gassed up at Clarence's gas pump. Harry Allen's dump truck can be seen down the street. (Photo courtesy of Betty Lamson West.)

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GROWING UP IN NEW GRETNA

by Donald Maxwell



Donald Maxwell (left), his sister Joyce, and younger brother Jack enjoyed growing up in the middle of New Gretna. (Photo courtesy of Donald Maxwell.)

I grew up in New Gretna in the 1930's with my parents, Curtis and Dorothy Allen Maxwell, my younger brother Jack, and my sister Joyce. We lived right in the center of town, between the Rustic Inn and Joe French's store, directly across Route 9 from the old Town Hall, so there wasn't much that I missed. These are some of my memories.

I remember going swimming on hot summer days at the old swimming hole at Coal Landing. We walked barefooted up Allentown Road, now North Maple Avenue, underneath the shady mulberry trees, with mulberries squishing between our toes.

I remember playing a game called "bat" with soda bottle caps. The main players were Les Robbins, Jack Mathis, and Bill Sears. They played by the hour, day after day, with used

soda bottle caps from the soda dispensers in Clarence Mathis' and Joe French's stores. I remember Bill "the butcher" Cramer making his rounds from house to house delivering meats, cold cuts, etc. with us kids following him. He would give us each a slice of bologna or an occasional cold wiener. Don't try to run ahead of the wagon to meet him further up the road and get another one, as he knew all the tricks. On hot days we would follow Rollin Mathis as he was delivering ice from door to door. He would always chip off a piece or two and give some to each of us. It was an amazing feat he performed as both his legs were completely paralyzed, yet he hobbled on crutches carrying a large cake of ice in his tongs and delivered it to those old ice boxes, never once dropping one. I remember hitching a ride on back of Jack Wiseman's horse drawn hay wagon as it went by riding through

town feeling pretty darn important. I remember those hot summer afternoons and evenings when Harold Maxwell would drive down to the corner or center of town from Lower Bank in his old Model A selling homemade ice cream. He would stop in the center of town and ring a little school bell. People would come from all directions with cups and bowls. He would give ice cream cones, 2 dips for a nickel. Talk about taste good! These things were all good stuff to remember.

I also remember when the carnival came to town, setting up between the old Civic Hall & the fire



Les Robbins (left) and Jack Mathis practicing for a school play. They were lifelong friends of Donald Maxwell. (Photo courtesy of Harold Gerew.)



The old Town Hall, circa 1925, was built in 1892. It became the Knights of Pythias Hall in 1906 and was the dominant building in downtown New Gretna, serving many functions throughout the years, until it was demolished in 1994. (Photo courtesy of Paul Steinhaurer.)

house, and the traveling shows at the old Town Hall. They were mostly people down on their luck trying to eke out a living honestly. Remember, these were the depths of the depression years. People in town in those years had very little money, but a lot of town pride. They would put on plays and shows in the Town Hall for entertainment. I remember being in one show where I was the jack-in-the-box. I was just a little kid crouched down in an old card board box up on the stage with hot lights beating down waiting for my cue to pop out. It seemed like forever.

I remember in the summer when the old peddler would come through town pushing his cart before him selling house wares etc. to the housewives. He must have weighed 350 lbs. and walked very slowly. The soles on his shoes were all worn out and, being very heavy, he would walk on the sides of his shoes. He pushed that old cart full of household goods up and down the full length of Jersey for several summers.

I remember us boys riding our bicycles up to the old CCC Camp above Fir Bridge every Monday evening to watch the movies being shown there for the old WWI vets who lived in the barracks after the CCC boys left. We weren't supposed to be there, but they never ran us out. It didn't cost us money, and we saw some pretty recent movies, like Abbott and Costello, the Andrew Sisters, Errol Flynn, and other adventure and musical shows. I especially remember the ride home through the dark woods about 9 P.M., sometimes in the cold of winter. We older boys would tell ghost stories to scare the little ones and then start pumping our bikes real hard to leave the little ones behind. They were half scared to death and couldn't keep up as their legs were shorter. I would get home and mom



Clarence Mathis' store on the south-west corner of Rt 9 and Maple Avenues where Donald and his friends got many a soda bottle cap to play "bat." It now stands vacant. (Photo courtesy of Norman and Ann Mathis.)

(Continued on page 7)