

# BASS RIVER GAZETTE

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

• Issue No. 14: January-June, 2003 (Next issue due December, 2003) • donations appreciated •

## BASS RIVER'S ONE ROOM SCHOOLHOUSES

### Part 3 - The Bass River School System

by Peter H. Stemmer

The Bass River Township School System came into being in May, 1864 when, by an act of the New Jersey State Legislature, Bass River Township was created from Little Egg Harbor Township. With the 4 1/2 school districts within the boundaries of the new township came four one room school houses to serve the educational needs of Bass River Township's children.



Jesse R. Sears became the first Bass River Schools' superintendent and was responsible for organizing the new school system. His 1864 report to the Burlington County Superintendent of schools shows that 3 out of the 4 school houses were in operation that first year with a total budget of \$374.28. He lists 241 township children between the ages of 5 and 18 as eligible for a public education with 180 students attending for a whole or part of a year. Unfortunately, the names and locations of the schoolhouses do not appear in the report nor

is there any reason given for the failure to operate one of the schoolhouses that year.

The 1868 County Superintendent's Report shows the following attendance and money spent for the Bass River Schools: Bass River- 123 (\$289.39); East Bass River- 78 (\$183.51); Union Hill- 60 (\$141.16); Martha Furnace- 45 (\$105.87); and Cedar Grove- 13 (\$30.58). The Cedar Grove School was actually located in and run by Stafford Township, Ocean County, and served, as tuition students, those Bass River children living in Sim Place.

Education was clearly not equal throughout the township. Union Hill, Martha Furnace, and Cedar Grove were listed as being in poor condition and opened only 5 months during the year while the Bass River School was opened for 10 months. Seventy five students were listed as not attending school. The male teacher at Bass River was paid \$40.00 per month while the female teachers in the other schools were paid \$30.00 per month.

Edgar Hass, Burlington County Superintendent of Schools, wrote a History of Schools in Burlington County in 1876. He wrote of five Bass River schools but does not name them:

*There are five school houses in the township, all one-story frame, two of them are furnished with modern desks. The whole amount of black board surface is 105 square feet; in 1866 there was none. The seating capacity is 300, in 1866 it was 250. The number of children in the township between five and eighteen years of age is 323. The present value of the Public School*



The old one room school house to the east of the lake at Harrisville served the papermill town well throughout the years. The above photo, circa 1920, was taken when Harrisville was used as a YMCA summer camp. (Photo courtesy of The Fehl Collection via John Pearce's book, Heart of the Pines)

*property is three thousand and fifty dollars as contrasted with nine hundred dollars that of ten years ago, being an increase of 238 per cent.*

A review of the Superintendent's Reports through 1895 shows: (1) the addition of a New Gretna District in 1871; (2) the closing of the Martha Furnace School after the 1875 school year; and (3) the opening of a school at Harrisville in 1876.

Following is a brief description of the one room school houses in Bass River from 1864 through 1899 when the New Gretna Graded School was opened on Allentown Road at the present North Maple Avenue school site:

#### **Bass River District - Frogtown School**

The schoolhouse serving the Bass River district was known locally as the Frogtown School. It would have served those children from the Bass River to the Mullica River. The building was originally the old Methodist Church located at Hillside Cemetery where the flagpole now stands. When the new Methodist Church was built on New York Road (Rt. 9) in 1852, the old building became a schoolhouse. It was moved across Hillside Lane and was in operation until 1899 when the New Gretna Graded School opened on Allentown Road (North Maple Avenue).

#### **Union Hill District - Union Hill School**

The Union Hill School was located on a small rise on the southwest corner of the present day intersection of Chatsworth and Leektown roads. It was destroyed by a fire in 1894 and rebuilt that same year. It was the last of Bass River's one room schoolhouses being in operation until 1917. The local community used the schoolhouse as a church for many years.

(Continued on page 4)

# GENEALOGY CORNER by Jean & Murray Harris

We were delighted to receive this memoir of her grandmother from Ann Stratton Keklak of Toms River.

Mary Minnie Mathis was a descendant of the Great John Mathis, coming down through the line of his second son, Job. Her branch of the Mathis family lived on Dan's Island, originally called Biddle's Island, in Bass River Township. The name was presumably changed to Dan's Island when Minnie's great grandfather Daniel inherited the island from his father Job.

Mary Minnie, familiarly known as "Min", was probably born on the island, since her youngest brother, Walter Roy, was born there in 1882. He was three years old and Min was twelve when their mother died in 1885. Roy always said that Min raised him, and as proof of his affection and gratitude named his first child Minnie after his sister.

Min's only sister who survived to adulthood was the Lida mentioned in Ann Keklak's memoir. She had a half-brother, Asbury Mathis and brothers Lewis Lane and Harry V., in addition to Walter Roy. There were six brothers and sisters who died in infancy and childhood. Their six little stones, reading simply Howard, Margaret, Jennie, Cora, Maud and Hannah, are in the Lewis Lane plot in Miller Cemetery, a mute testament to the heart-breaking rate of infant mortality in previous centuries.

Mary Minnie, during the period in her life from age five to twelve, lost not only her mother, but six brothers and sisters. Ann Keklak says that she found her grandmother to be a "formidable lady". She probably had to be to survive.

## MEMORIES OF MY GRANDMA CRAMER

by Ann Stratton Keklak, granddaughter to Mary Minnie (Mathis) Cramer

My grandmother, Mary Minnie Mathis, was born in Bass River on the 6th of February, 1872. Her parents were Lewis Lane Mathis and Hannah Walton, both of Bass River. She married William Darius Cramer, son of Charles Henry Cramer and Sarah Jane Maxwell, on August 31st, 1889 in the New Gretna Presbyterian Church.



I have many fond memories of my Grandmother Minnie Mathis Cramer. (Photo courtesy of Ann Stratton Keklak)

After the birth of my mother, Hannah, Minnie & Darius moved to Beach Haven on Long Beach Island. My grandfather became active in the Life Saving Service there. Eventually, they built a three-story home on the corner of Beach Avenue & Third Street, which still stands today. A relative of mine, Joseph Sprague, now deceased, told me he thought it was the most beautiful home built on

the Island at that time . . . in the 1890's. Their home had features that I thought were different than other peoples . . . such as, sliding doors that fit in the wall and you could close them and separate their living room from their parlor. If any of the visiting relatives from the mainland wanted a nap, that's where they would go for peace & quiet. Also, going to the upstairs in the house, there was a landing with an octagonal shape rose-colored window. How I loved to look out of that window at the surrounding landscape and pretend I was seeing something really special . . . a world of make-believe.

My memories of Grandma Cramer are varied and I never knew my grandfather, Darius, as he died at the age of 48. But, I do have a letter that my mother wrote to a friend when her friend's father died. This friend was kind enough to pass it on to me many years later and I treasure it. In the letter, my mother, Hannah, reminisced about her own father, whom she loved dearly. I would like to quote it for you: "My father's death was the first break in our family, too. I

was twenty-six, teaching in Beach Haven at the time. He was an unusual man in lots of ways. Besides loving his wife and children he was the first barber on the Island . . . doing the job in our kitchen . . . the first Insurance agent on the Island. John Price of Tuckerton didn't like the idea of his being an insurance agent over here and tried to have him "annihilated", but the company kept him on until he died. He always had a fine garden, could repair his children's shoes and could cook. He liked to have breakfast ready for Aunt Min & the kids after he was out of the Life Saving Service or Coast Guard as it's called now. He could play a cornet! Well, he was a wonderful guy!" Unquote. Because someone saved a letter, I now have some knowledge of my Grandfather, Wm. Darius Cramer.



I never knew my grandfather, Wm. Darius Cramer. (Photo courtesy of Ann Stratton Keklak)

So, now I shall return to my Grandma Cramer, who was quite the formidable lady, at least to me. I gather she was that way with my mother as well. Hannah, never told her mother that she was getting married and on the 28th of December 1918, she and Carol Woodhull Stratton got the early morning train from Beach Haven to Camden and were married there by Rev. Alexander Corson. I never asked my mother what her mother had to say about all this and if you don't ask, you don't get any answers!!

I have so many fond memories of my Grandma Minnie . . . so many birthdays of her grandchildren were celebrated in her home. Homemade ice cream was the order of the day, and us kids and cousins each had our turns at turning the crank of the ice cream maker. It was no easy task turning that crank near the end of the completion of the ice cream, but maybe this helped me in later yrs. when I played baseball and basketball at Barnegat High.

(Continued on page3)



# GRANDMA CRAMER

(Continued from page 2)



Hannah (r), my mother, and her sister, Rachel, helped out at the family store. (Photo, circa 1890's, courtesy of Ann Stratton Keklak)

I grew up thinking that my Grandmother entertained everybody and fed them delicious 3-course meals because anytime, especially during the summer months, there were always relatives from the Mainland visiting her and enjoying her food and there was always lively chatter. Grandma lived in her three-story house all winter but come summer, she moved her living quarters to the back of her grocery store, which was next door. It had bedrooms upstairs and downstairs were her sitting room, dining area, kitchen and another area for eating and greeting people. Many a time I would walk in and find her making

butter in a wooden bowl and another time she would be scraping corn off the cob and making her own succotash. But, her own Clam pie was the best I've ever had! Nothing went to waste in her store. She was so conscientious, and her son, my Uncle Charlie, ran the store.

Her pantry in her winter home was always well-stocked with pies, cakes and goodies of all sorts, which we kids would sneak into and snatch a piece of this or that, hoping we didn't get caught!

Now when she was ready to move from her winter home into the summer home, I was called into active duty. She would have me roll up the carpets in the winter home and I would go down a flight of stairs over to the second story of her summer place. Where they went from there, I don't remember. She would give me 25 cents for oiling the bare wood floors in the large house and I also helped her by ironing sheets that had been used by the renters. That was another way Grandma made some extra money . . . by renting out rooms in her winter home to the summer visitors to the seashore. My Aunt Rachel, my mother's sister, would



Wm. Darius and Minnie Mathis Cramer built a three story home on the corner of Beach Avenue & Third Street in Beach Haven. Their store was next to their home. (Photo, circa 1890's, courtesy of Ann Stratton Keklak)

come over from West Creek to help her mother and would bring her daughter, Doris, along. Summers were busy times with the wealthy people of Philadelphia coming to open up their summer homes. Cramer's grocery store delivered the meats, milk and whatever else was needed.

As I was growing, it seemed to me my Grandmother Cramer was always going somewhere. One week it would be to Atlantic City, another time to Philadelphia and in June of 1934, she even traveled to Chicago to a convention of the Home Owned Stores of which she was a member. Grandma was active in her Church, entertaining the new ministers as they came along and relatives, as I say, were either visiting her or she, them. A lot of Mathises and Cramers around, you understand. My sisters and I always visited Minnie's sister in New Gretna, when the new chicks would be born. We knew her as Aunt Lide and her husband, Uncle Jesse, who was a Loveland. He was the tallest man I had ever seen. We would look forward to picking teaberries in the woods and later on, teaberry gum was made and it was always a favorite. In Grandma's pocketbook were always goodies, to keep us occupied while riding in the car, I suppose.



Uncle Jesse Loveland, lived on Allentown Rd (now North Maple Avenue) in New Gretna. His home was across the street from the New Gretna Grade School. (Photo courtesy of Jean & Murray Harris)

Looking back on the years of growing up with Grandma Cramer, I realize I never really got to know her as well as I would have liked. She did live to see me become engaged, and meet my present husband, Stephen Keklak. She liked him and got along well. One day, while ironing her sheets upstairs in the summer home, she said something I shall always remember. "Steve is a nice man, even though he is a Catholic." To this day, my heart warms at those words of honesty . . . I wished I had hugged her at the time, but she did make me smile.

Grandmother Cramer was truly a fine lady and it saddened me that she died about four months before my wedding. She was deeply missed and still is, to this day. She and her dear husband are both buried in Miller Cemetery of New Gretna.

## A Postscript

My mother, Hannah Cramer Stratton, taught until she married. She was the first Principal of the Beach Haven Grade School that you see today (the red brick part). My father had the first Freight Line on the Island, from Long Beach Island to Philadelphia and New York. He was also very active in the Exchange Club there, being President at one time, was Fire Chief for 15 years . . . very active in the community until the day he died. He was also an expert marksman in clay pigeons and trap shooting contests around the State and won many a prize. He died too young, in 1938, leaving a trucking business for my mother to run. No easy task for a schoolteacher, eventually selling the business and later on, working at the Post Office.

# ONE ROOM SCHOOLHOUSES

(Continued from page1)

## East Bass River District- Mathistown School

The East Bass River School District served those children living on the east side of the Bass River. The building has been remodeled and is presently a private Route 9 residence across the street from Delaporte Heating & Cooling. The original building was located about a mile further north on Route 9, somewhere in the vicinity of Amon Marine Company. It was closed down a few years after the New Gretna Graded school opened in 1899.

Edgar Hass, in his History of Schools in Burlington County writes the following about the Mathistown School:

*In 1852 or 1853, upon special application, the district was enlarged to nearly its present size, and the house moved one mile west of its former location, and near where now stands the present school building. In 1866, the house burned; it took fire while the school was in session, the teacher and pupils barely escaping when the roof fell in. Everything was lost with the exception of the Dictionary and Gazetteer. During the summer following, the present house was erected, at a cost of seven hundred dollars; it is a neat and substantial building, but one whose furniture is more durable, perhaps, than comfortable. Since the erection of this new building, with one or two exceptions, a good school has been kept open eight or nine months each year. At present, it is under the charge of Abigail W. Mathis.*

## Harrisville District- Harrisville School

As the papermill town of Harrisville continued to grow, it became obvious to its owner, Richard Harris, that a schoolhouse was necessary. He successfully petitioned the authorities and received permission to operate a school for the children of Harrisville. It opened in a private residence, in 1876, and served 51 students taught by a male teacher earning \$40.00 per month. Over the years the school operated in various rented facilities before a schoolhouse was built. As is common in the pines, the schoolhouse burned down in 1886, as noted in the following December 11, 1886 *Mt. Holly Herald* news item:

*The Harrisville School caught fire from a defective flue, and was burned to the ground on Friday last. Fortunately there was help near, who saved the seats and organ. The building was used as a church also.*

The Harrisville School continued to operate through 1899 when the Harrisville children were transported to the New Gretna Graded School.

## Martha Furnace District - Martha Furnace School

Please see Issue # 12 of the Bass River Gazette for a description and discussion of the Martha Furnace School.

## New Gretna District - "Squab Hill" School

The New Gretna School District was created in 1871 when a division was made of the existing Bass River School District. The building of the Bass River Bridge in 1833 led to more development in the present New Gretna town center area making a school in the area desirable. Fifty nine children were taught by a male and a female teacher in the "new" school which was listed in the Superintendent's Report as being in "poor" condition with a property value of \$200.00.

The schoolhouse was located on a small rise on Allentown Road (North Maple Avenue) called "Squab Hill", across from the intersection with Adams Avenue, and became known by the community as the "Squab Hill" School. It is an empty lot today. The schoolhouse was moved down the road a short distance, in 1899, to the site of the New Gretna Graded School which was being built and was joined to the new construction. It thus became a part of the new school facility - sort of an early form of recycling.

There is some confusion regarding the "Squab Hill" School as the New Gretna School District was not created until 1871, yet the 1849 Otley & Whiteford Map shows a schoolhouse at the "Squab Hill" site. Since there are no records of this school in the County Superintendent's Reports prior to 1871, it may well be that the 1849 map is in error. More research is needed to understand this discrepancy.

## THE MATHISTOWN SCHOOL NOW AND THEN



June, 2002

Bottom: Charles Adare, a Civil War veteran from Bass River, stands (circa 1880) in front of the Mathistown School which served the East Bass River District. (Photo courtesy of Tom & Judy Cramer)



## 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. You may 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 our guest columnists, Ann Straton Keklak and Ted Briggs, for their stories and hope that others are motivated to also send a story or a Letter to the Editor.



# “Unc” and “Mim” Revisited

by Ted Briggs

The story, Memories of “Unc” and Mim” in the December 2002 edition of the *Bass River Gazette*, sparked my own personal remembrances of Henry and Minnie Updike from a long time ago. They live in my thoughts forever.

I was a 10 year old boy fascinated with trapping. Each evening after supper I walked the short distance to Hen’s two-story colonial style house on North Maple Ave. Destination - the basement. First I had to pass two big black standard poodles standing guard behind a gate at the top of the basement stairs. They barked, growled and inspected me before going downstairs.

Hen taught me how to skin muskrats and offered me a job when I was 12 years old. He paid 25 cents for each rat I skinned. It was exciting to have the master Skinner think highly of my skinning skills. Alston Allen often helped Hen skin the muskrats and other critters.

The basement held the muskrat odor. A wire cage was built in the backyard to hold the muskrat guts. This wire prevented animals from reaching the guts. Washtubs full of rat carcasses awaited eager customers from Atlantic City who came to buy the meat to eat. Folks prized the rats, also known as marsh rabbit.

In the 1960’s Hen sold me used box traps for 25 cents each. New conibears cost \$1.10 and foothold traps were 90 cents.

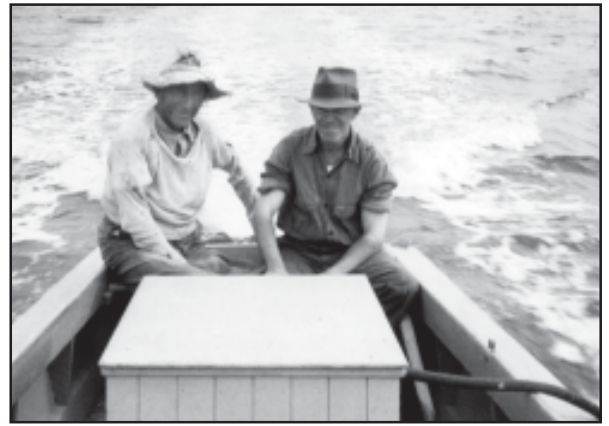
Many New Gretna youth trapped muskrats to earn extra money. Those selling rats to Hen were Ben Adams, brothers Doug and Jeff Cramer, Robert Belk and myself, Ted Briggs. Some of us now own prized possessions belonging to Hen. Traps and decoys decorate rooms in their homes. I remember Hen saying to me: “Tell your father I have a good gun to sell him.” That is how I came to own Hen’s LC Smith double barrel. Henry sold his Dodge Valiant to Rocky Zarillo. It was a great car with push button shifter.

Minnie was a refined, sweet person who wore her waist long hair coiled in a bun on her head. She was constantly at Hen’s side in the Wading River blueberry packing shed. Turban on her head to ward off the Jersey mosquitoes, she labored hard, sorting and packing the picked blueberries.

My mother, Phyllis Briggs, my grandmother, Naomi Sharp, my aunt, Margie Bozarth, Elaine Allen, and Grover Sullivan picked berries for Hen. My mother said Henry had a kind

heart. Many days she could not pick 50 pints. The pay was 6 cents a picked full pint. Hen always gave her \$3.00 even though she did not pick that many. Grover Sullivan lived the long hot summer days with interesting stories.

If Hen and Mim could look back now to see how they have become the topic of conversation, they would be amused and pleased.



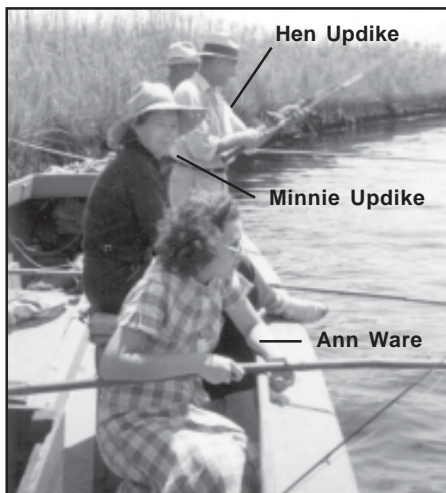
Hen Updike (right) on the Mullica River with his friend, “Booter” Mathis. (Photo courtesy of Ann Ware Walling).

## TRAPPING THE MARSH RABBIT

Trapping muskrats was a way of life for the young and old in the Bass River area in the “good old days.”



Fred Shropshire shows the results of a days trapping in 1932. He sold his furs to Hen Updike. (Photo courtesy of Murray & Jean Shropshire Harris).



Hen Updike was a fisherman as well as a fur dealer and blueberry farmer. Here he is fishing on the Bass River with Eugene “Booter” Mathis (top) and his family. (Photo courtesy of Ann Ware Walling)

Howard Ware, age 22 in 1945 on leave from the Merchant Marine, with a few rats to be sold to Hen Updike. Howard was a nephew to Hen, his mother Sadie being Henry’s sister.

Howard sold rats to Hen and skinned rats in the basement of the Updike home on North Maple Avenue. He also helped to tend Hen’s extensive trap lines sometimes numbering 200-300 traps.

When asked if he ever ate muskrat, Howard replied, “Once in a while. They taste like black duck.”

(Photo courtesy of Howard Ware)





## STAGE ROAD TAVERNS

(Continued from page 8)

the Wading River and Sooy's Tavern at Washington. The sun was just coming up when they reached the Mount Tavern where they made their first stop to feed and water their horses and to warm up inside the tavern. At this point they had traveled about 15 miles in four hours.

They continued on for about 4 miles and passed the Quaker Bridge Hotel. After another 5 miles they stopped at Ephriam Clines's Hotel in the Atsion area where they watered and fed the horses and warmed themselves by the corner fireplace of the barroom. Next, after about 2 ½ miles, they passed Josiah Smith's Inn at Indian Mills where the Atsion Road to Lumberton crosses the Jackson Road and continued on to Samuel Swain's hotel at Marlton. They stopped here for the night where they ate a supper of buckwheat cakes, Jersey sausage, butter, cranberry sauce and cucumber pickles, a most welcomed meal after a long journey in the middle of the winter. Leah reports, "Father spent the evening in the barroom with the men and I in the kitchen with the landlady and her maidens." Leah then describes going to bed for the evening:

*When bedtime came I was shown to the room assigned to me where there was a good feather bed, a chair and a stand, but no carpet on the floor, for in those days few people aspired to carpets, and especially so for hotel bedrooms. A tallow candle was left for me to see to go to bed by, but such a convenience as a friction match had not been thought of. When ready for bed I blew out the candle. It was a very cold night and when I got into bed, horror of horrors. I found that I had got in between two thick homemade linen blankets. The linen sheets struck a chill through me so that I shivered and shook most of the night and slept but very little. I was a bashful little girl and dare not remonstrate against the cold sheets., and this is the way travelers journied and suffered at hotels in the year 1829. [Old Times, p.128]*

At three o'clock in the morning they continued on their way to Cooper's Point in Camden. They would have passed Isaac Ellis' Hotel where the present day Ellisburg circle is located; however, Leah does not mention this hotel. At Cooper's Point, in Camden, they took a horse ferry across the Delaware River to Market Street in Philadelphia. Leah describes the ferry as being powered by blind horses that walked on a wagon wheel type arrangement on deck that connected to paddle wheels that powered the boat.

On the return trip Leah speaks of their overnight stay at Josiah Smith's Inn. It further illustrates the conditions endured when traveling through the backwoods of the New Jersey Pine Barrens.

*Here we found many travelers like ourselves intending to spend the night with Uncle 'Siah. Among the travelers was one lady. When bedtime came the landlady told us three females that they had so many men to lodge we three would have to occupy one bed. We went to our room and when we got in bed we were dismayed to find that there was no mattresses between the rope cords of the bedstead and the featherbed, and the cords seemed as if bent on cutting our flesh to the bones, but we had to endure the infliction. [Old Times, p.126]*

It took Leah and her father 1½ days to get from Tuckerton to Philadelphia over the Stage Road. They traveled at a more leisurely pace than that of the stage coach. When J.D. Thompson bought the stage line in 1828, he successfully set out to prove that the trip from Tuckerton to Philadelphia could be made in the daylight hours, an astonishing pace that must have been very tough on both the passengers and the horses. This is a far cry from today's advancements in roadways and automobiles which enable us to travel from Tuckerton to Philadelphia, in air conditioned comfort, in a little over one hour.

Editor's Note: If you are not familiar with Leah Blackman's [History of Little Egg Harbor Township](#) and [Old Times And Other Writings](#), stop by the Bass River Community Library located in the Bass River Elementary School on North Maple Avenue. Both are available to check out. The Community Library is opened to the public on Wednesday and Friday evenings from 6 PM to 9 PM.

## QUAKER BRIDGE THEN AND NOW



A crude log bridge was built by the Quakers in the early 1770's to cross the Basto River on their journey from western Burlington County to the Little Egg Harbor Meeting in Tuckerton. The top photo, from the William Augustine Collection via [Heart of the Pines](#) by John Pearce, shows the bridge, circa 1940, as contrasted with today's new iron bridge which was built in 1980. Steve Eichinger, looks out over the Batsto River (below), in April, 2002, wondering what the old Quaker Bridge Hotel must have been like when Leah Mathis (Blackman) was a child. Today a small depression in the ground just east of the bridge is the only reminder of the old hotel.



## Gazette Subscriptions

A yearly subscription (2 issues) of the Gazette is available for anyone who sends 2 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 2 envelopes are used. It may then be renewed by sending 2 or more additional envelopes. Don't fret if your copy is a month or two late. We seem to always be busy on some history project and can't seem to get to the Gazette in a timely fashion.

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 Bass River Community Library, P.O. Box 256, New Gretna, N.J. 08224.

# NEWS FROM THE PAST - THE BASS RIVER BRIDGE by Harry DeVerter

It is timely to present some "News From The Past" on the Bass River Bridge as work on replacing the Bass River Bridge is now progressing just south of the present bridge. The original bridge was a swing bridge built in 1833 (See Little Egg Harbor Township Minutes- March 12, 1833 below). Since that time and the building of the present drawbridge by the Strauss Bascule Bridge Company of Chicago in 1924 there have been a variety of bridge building and repair projects as can be seen by some of the following news items.

## Little Egg Harbor Township Minutes March 12, 1833

RESOLVED by the inhabitants of the Township of Little Egg Harbour that there shall be the sum of two hundred Dollars raised in the Township of Little Egg Harbour, in the same way and at the same time that all other taxes are raised in said township and appropriated for the purpose of building and making an additional part of a bridge to the east end of a certain bridge built by the Freeholders of the County of Burlington across Bass River or nearly across on the road lawfully laid out by six of the surveyors of the highways in said county, the road begins at a run of water near to Jacob Willits and in the road that leads from that neighbourhood to Tuckerton and from that run it is laid to Bass River and across said river and so on to Bridge Port and that the inhabitants of said Township shall appoint one or more suitable persons to superintend and build and such additional part of said bridge as far as the above sum will build it, so that it may become passable and usefull to the public, and to be built by the first of September 1833.

## Mt. Holly Herald - July 5, 1884

The draw over Bass river has been overhauled and rebuilt by Freeholder John O. Mathis. He did it in double quick-time, the bridge being up only seven days. He had 15 men at work on it and the rapidity with which he did it and the thoroughness of the work, entitle him to much credit. There is some painting and smoothing up yet to be done.

## Mt. Holly Herald - March 20, 1897

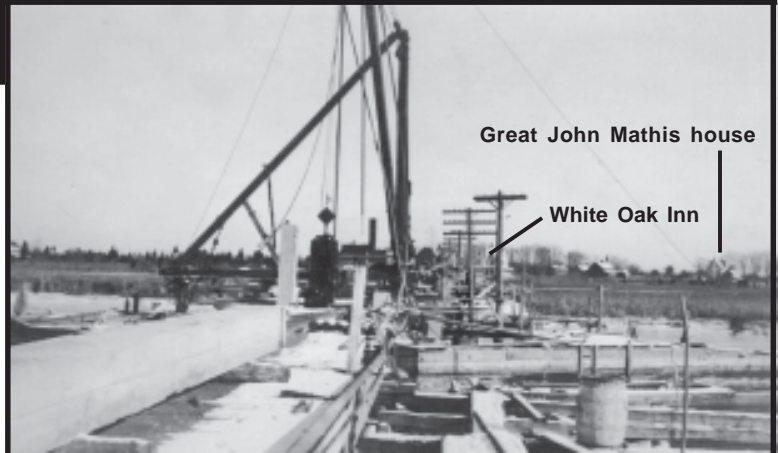
The proposed rebuilding of the big bridge in Bass River Township has been held up for the present as only one of the committee appeared to inspect the structure. It will be repaired at the expense of about \$500 probably. Mt. Holly Herald 3/20/1897

## Mt. Holly Herald - May 29, 1897

Since the Bass River bridge has been rebuilt everyone feels a good deal safer crossing it. The structure will now last a good many years. The Freeholder has made a good job of it. Mt. Holly Herald 5/29/1897

## Mt. Holly Herald - March 6, 1915

Now that the new bridge work is nearly over, New Gretna loafers will have to gun around for another attraction. Several regulars have been in constant attendance during the construction work and no doubt most any one of them could give the originators of bridges lots of pointers on building them, but not one could get that detour road question settled to the satisfaction of everybody. Mt. Holly Herald 3/6/1915



Bass River Bridge reconstruction project, December, 1914, looking east .  
(Photo courtesy of Ruth Cramer Soles)

## Mt. Holly Herald - December 18, 1915

### Board Wants All Its Property

During the past few months, since the new bridge was finished down at New Gretna, it has come to the notice of the board that the property of Harry V. Mathis, near the bridge, is occupying at least ten feet of the public road between New Gretna and Tuckerton. This matter was taken up in September and formal notice was given Mathis to vacate, but he failed to move and on Wednesday the board took definite action that will result in a legal determination of the county's rights. Mr. Mathis sent the board a communication and it was read on Wednesday. In it he gave indication that it will take something more than an ordinary notice from the board to move him from the property that he declares belongs to him, and he went so far as to state that the action against him was due to a frame-up between Freeholder Loveland and County Engineer Logan. It was already well known that the county merely wanted to straighten the roadway as it should be and the frame-up statement did not create even a flurry of excitement. It was suggested that there might be other property owners along the road who were on the county's property and it might be well to have the whole thing gone over. A committee was then appointed to have the lines of the roadway determined and authority was given to order the removal of everything encroaching on the public highway. It is not surprising that Mathis does not want to move, as about three feet of his house and all of his front porch are said to be in the roadway.

### Bridgetender's Salaries

- A.H. Cramer, 1 year salary, Bass River Bridge, \$10.00. Mt. Holly Herald 2/12/1881
- Drawbridge bills: William Cramer, Bass River draw, salary, \$24.75. N.J. Mirror 5/13/1885
- Drawtenders' Salaries: George L. Cramer, Bass River \$25.00 Mt. Holly Herald 11/16/1907



# STAGE ROAD REVISITED

## TAVERNS ALONG THE WAY

by Steve Eichinger

My original article about the Stage Road which appeared in the Jan-June, 2002 edition, Issue 12, of the *Bass River Gazette* was written to show just where the Stage Road ran. After looking at the lay of the land along the Stage Road and reading more about its significance, I thought it would be interesting to discuss the taverns along the way as you would travel from Tuckerton to Philadelphia in 1829. Taverns were an important part of the transportation process, as they were used to change horse teams that were taxed by the difficult sugar sand roads which passed through the pine barrens and for the feeding and lodging of stage and wagon passengers. Travel between Tuckerton and Philadelphia would be difficult, if not impossible, without these taverns.

Heading west from Tuckerton to Philadelphia via the Stage Road there were six taverns or hotels located within the boundaries of what was once Little Egg Harbor Township. You would begin the journey by catching the stage coach at the Union Inn at the southeast corner of Main and Green Streets. Built about 1805 by Ebenezer Tucker, it was enlarged several times and eventually was called the Carlton House. It burned down and was demolished in the mid 1960's.



The Carlton House, formerly the Union Inn, was the departure point for the stage trip from Tuckerton to Philadelphia. It was the only licensed hotel in Tuckerton, in 1880, when Leah Blackman wrote her *History of Little Egg Harbor Township*. (Photo courtesy of Tuckerton Historical Society)

The first stop after boarding the stage at Tuckerton would be the Bass River Hotel and Post Office. It was located at the present site of the Pilgrim Lake Campground office and was locally called the Red Tavern. The hotel was erected prior to the Revolutionary war, by William Davis, who carried on the business for several years. In 1816, Recompense Darby became the hospitable host, and carried the business on for a few years. The tavern passed through many hands over the years, and I have not been able to determine its ownership in 1829.

The third tavern, Bodine's Tavern, was located just before the bridge where the Stage Road crossed the Wading River. It was operated, in 1829, by Thomas Burdell as John Bodine, its original owner, was deceased by this date. This tavern was mentioned in the 1808-1815 *Martha Diary* where it talks about the militia training at the site and the tavern being used to hold court and township meetings.

The fourth tavern was Sooy's Tavern run by Paul Sears Sooy who leased it to William DeBow in 1829. It was located at Washington at the intersection of the Stage Road and the road from Greenbank to Speedwell, about 5 miles from Batsto.

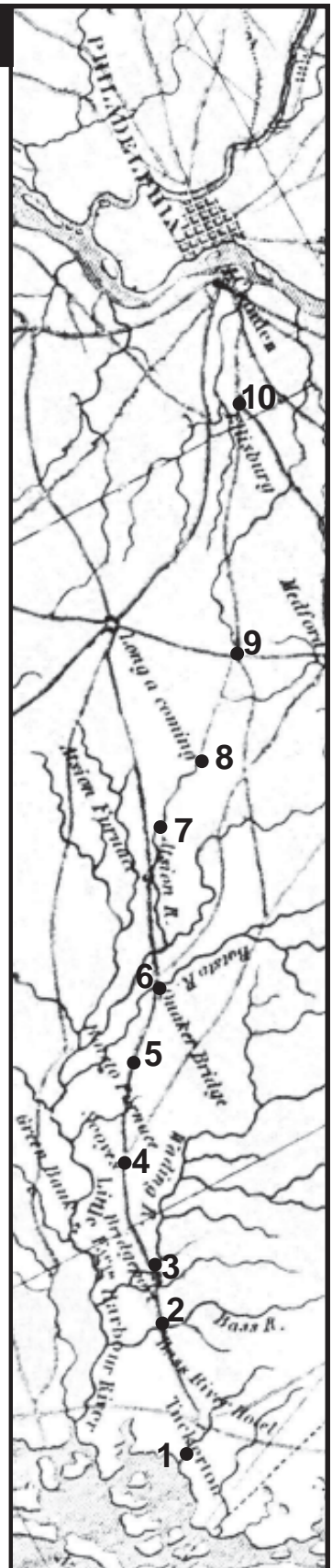
The fifth was called a hotel, but it was probably more like a small tavern sometimes referred to as a "Jug Tavern." It was located at the intersection of Stage Road and the road that ran from Herman City to Hampton Furnace and was called "The Mount" because of its location by a rise in the pine woods. It was operated by Alexander Thompson.

The sixth and last tavern along the Stage Road and within Little Egg Harbor's boundaries was the Quaker Bridge Hotel located on the east side of the Batsto River, a little north of the bridge. It was operated by Mrs. Elizabeth Thompson, the wife of Arthur Thompson, and the sister-in-law to Alexander Thompson. Elizabeth was also the mother of John Dickinson Thompson who purchased the stage line in 1828.

Each of these taverns were from two to six miles apart which allowed for the care and/or replacement of horse teams, the refreshment and/or lodging of the passengers, and the picking up of mail along the route.

My interest in the journey along the old Stage Road route from Tuckerton to Philadelphia was sparked by an account of an 1829 stage trip taken by a 12 year old Leah Mathis (later Blackman) and her father, Elihu, as told by Leah in her circa 1880 "Old Times - Country Life in Little Egg Harbor Fifty Years Ago" manuscript presented in *Leah Blackman's Old Times and Other Writings*, published November, 2000 by the Tuckerton Historical Society. She mentions the Little Egg Harbor taverns from the Bass River Hotel to the Quaker Bridge Tavern as well as the remaining taverns along the Stage Road to Cooper's Ferry which was across the Delaware River from Philadelphia.

Leah accompanied her father, Elihu Mathis, to Philadelphia traveling in the family's two horse buggy. They left their Little Egg Harbor farm about 2 or 3 o'clock on a cold morning in January, 1829 with only straw on the floor and a quilt to keep their feet warm. They quickly met the Stage Road which took them past the Bass River Hotel at the present site of the Pilgrim Lake campground office, Bodines Tavern on



Thomas Gordon's 1834 South Jersey map showing locations of the Stage Road taverns in 1829. 1- Union Inn (later the Carlton House); 2- Bass River Hotel; 3- Bodine's Tavern; 4- Sooy's Tavern; 5- The Mount; 6- Quaker Bridge Tavern; 7- Ephriam Cline's Hotel; 8- Josiah Smith's Inn; 9- Samuel Swain's Hotel; 10- Isaac Ellis' Hotel.