

Centre Bridge

Pennsylvania



The Burning of Centre Bridge

*Struck by lightning July 22, 1923
Painted next day by Edward W. Redfield*

Original Research
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PREFACE

Centre Bridge was the subject of extensive research and documentation by Gwen Davis, Helen Sirmay and Andrea Graham in the early 1980s as part of a Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey. It was the intention at that time to create a number of historic districts throughout Solebury Township and Bucks County. The documentation was completed under the auspices of the Solebury Township Historical Society, but the formal designation as a Pennsylvania historic district was not consummated until March 26, 1985.

Additional original research for this study of Centre Bridge was done in 1994 by Carol Lansill in partial satisfaction of an architectural history course at Bucks County Community College.

The research was further enhanced by interviews with two long-time residents of this area. The first was Mrs. Dorothy Hartmann, a very kind and dignified lady who grew up on the farm that is now called "Burgess Lea". She presently lives on a neighboring farm on the hill above the River Road in Centre Bridge.

The second interview was with Mr. Russell Thompson, whose father was the Justice of the Peace in Centre Bridge and sold real estate in the area. Mr. Thompson spent his early years in both Brooklyn, New York and Centre Bridge. He settled in Pennsylvania with his bride of one year in 1936 and has lived here ever since.

Both of these sources were extremely generous in their recollections and their gracious hospitality.

W.M.R.

March 2000

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HIGHLIGHTS OF HISTORY

- 1696 William Penn grant to Brazillian Foster of 500 acres along the Delaware River including the site of Centre Bridge.
- 1712 Reading's Ferry across the Delaware River, the first ferry to link the route between Philadelphia and New York.
- 1813 First wooden bridge to Stockton, New Jersey replaces the ferry.
- 1834 Delaware Canal opens to carry anthracite coal from the Poconos via Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton to Bristol and Philadelphia.
- 1841 Freshet takes out 2 piers, 3 spans and the toll house, all on New Jersey side.
- 1845 Centre Bridge name adopted and first post office established.
- 1870s Centre Bridge becomes a summer resort for Philadelphians.
- 1898-1965 Painter Edward Redfield lives in Centre Bridge and paints landscapes of the Delaware Valley.
- 1908 Tuscarora oil tank farm built a mile south of the village.
- 1923 The Centre Bridge to New Jersey is burned by lightning.
- 1927 Steel bridge erected by Delaware River Joint Bridge Commission.
- 1937 Fire burns tanks of Tuscarora oil tank farm.
- 1950s Oil tanks are removed.
- 1955 'Hundred Year Flood'.
- 1961 Centre Bridge Inn burns and is rebuilt in the architectural style of Williamsburg, Virginia.
- 1990s Cliff swallows return to settle beneath the Delaware Canal bridge in peaceful Centre Bridge.

HISTORY

The village of Centre Bridge is located on the River Road between the New Hope and Lumberville bridges over the Delaware River in Solebury Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. The village is bordered on the east by the river and the Delaware Canal, and on the other side by Chestnut Ridge which rises about 410 feet to the west and casts a cool shadow over the village.

The area was first known as Reading's Ferry, named for Col. John Reading who established the river crossing. Colonel Reading, whose name appears in Gloucester County, New Jersey, records as early as 1684, probably came from Dublin, Ireland and was a member of the London Company, a mercantile organization similar to the Free Society of Traders in Philadelphia. In 1704 he purchased a tract of land in what is now Amwell Township in Hunterdon County, New Jersey. It covered the present communities of Stockton and Prallsville. He established a ferry, the exact date of which is unknown. However, in 1711 a "John Reading Landing" is mentioned in a petition for a convenient road from that place to Buckingham Meeting, and from there to Philadelphia.

Reading's Ferry was on the New York Road, as viewed from the larger city of Philadelphia in those times. When additional roads and ferries were opened, this route became known as Old (New) York Road, and more recently as Upper York Road, PA Route 263. Lower York Road splits off about five miles south at Lahaska and leads to the New Hope - Lambertville bridge. The competition between the two crossings, which was keen among the local residents, tended to be settled by the horses, that found the grades up out of the valley to be less steep out of New Hope and Lambertville.

After Col. Reading's death in 1717, the ferry was idle until his son-in-law Captain Daniel Howell reopened it in 1731. It was then known as Howell's Ferry until 1770, then Robinson's Ferry, Hart's Ferry, and finally Mitchell's Ferry from 1796 to 1813 when the first bridge was built. William Mitchell owned the ferry landing on the Pennsylvania side of the river, where he operated a fishery and mill on Paxson's, or Hendrick's, Island, about a mile upstream.

The Delaware Canal was dug in the early 1830s to bring hard coal from the Lehigh Canal at Easton to the tidewater Delaware River at Bristol. The canal brought a modest level of business and settlement to the villages along the river. Numerous smaller homes were built at this time in Centre Bridge.



Here is how the community was described in the National Register of Historic Places application prepared by the Solebury Township Historical Society in 1985 —

"In the early nineteenth century a small village began to develop around the bridge. With a steady flow of travelers using the bridge, commerce in the village fared well. The addition of the Delaware Canal which began operating in the community after 1832, enhanced the commercial potential of Centre Bridge. At the time the canal opened, the village consisted of a general store, a tavern, the inn and half-a-dozen dwellings. Soon afterward a post office was established and, a decade later, the construction of a schoolhouse became necessary. In the years that followed Centre Bridge came to include the homes of three dozen families and a host of businesses, including blacksmiths, carpenters, masons and wheelwrights. Spurred by business from the nearby mills and quarries, as well as the bridge trade, Centre Bridge prospered during the period.

"By the 1860s the Belvidere Railroad, which was built along the east bank of the Delaware (between Phillipsburg and Trenton in New Jersey), had ended the days of slow

CENTRE BRIDGE P. O. c. 1871

Blacksmiths, Eldridge Green, Samuel Shupe, Alfred Wannamaker. Journeymen, Samuel Cowgill, Hiram G. Sheppard
Boatman, Samuel Reisner
Carpenters, Isaac H. Hamilton, David Kirk, Silas M. Slack
Commission Dealer, Peter Snyder
Hotel, Asa Rittenhouse
Limo Burner, James Meginnnes
Lumber, John Hendricks
Masons, Wm. Sanders, Jacob M. Shaddinger, Hartzell Worman
Mill, Jonathan Lukens
Merchants, J. W. Bowlby, Albert Livezey, James Meginnnes, Merrick Pearson
Physician, Joseph B. Walter
Saw Mill, John Hendricks
Shop Keeper, Henry M. Reigle
Shoemakers, Stephen W. Potts, Samuel Rose
Tailor, Elihu W. Allen
Undertaker, Isaac H. Hamilton
Wheelwrights, Jesse Randall, Thomas Wannamaker. Journey-men, Aaron Randall, Joseph Randall

Farmers.

Biles, William J.	Johnson, David R.
Bodine, Charles	Johnson, Samuel S.
Burd, Lewis S.	Kesler, Joseph
Carver, Oliver	Kirk, Allen
Childs, Isaac	Kirk, William J.
Cooper, Samuel	Kitchen, John
Crout, John	Kitchen, Wm. Jr.
Crout, Susan J.	Large, William S.
Dudbridge, William	Livezey, William
Eichlin, George	Major, Hugh
Ely, Eliza	Major, John
Ely, James H.	Major, Theodore
Fell, Elias B.	McEntee, John
Fell, Jesse B.	Meginnnes, James
Fell, J. Remington	Mood, Monroe
Hamilton, Isaac H.	Phillips, A. J.

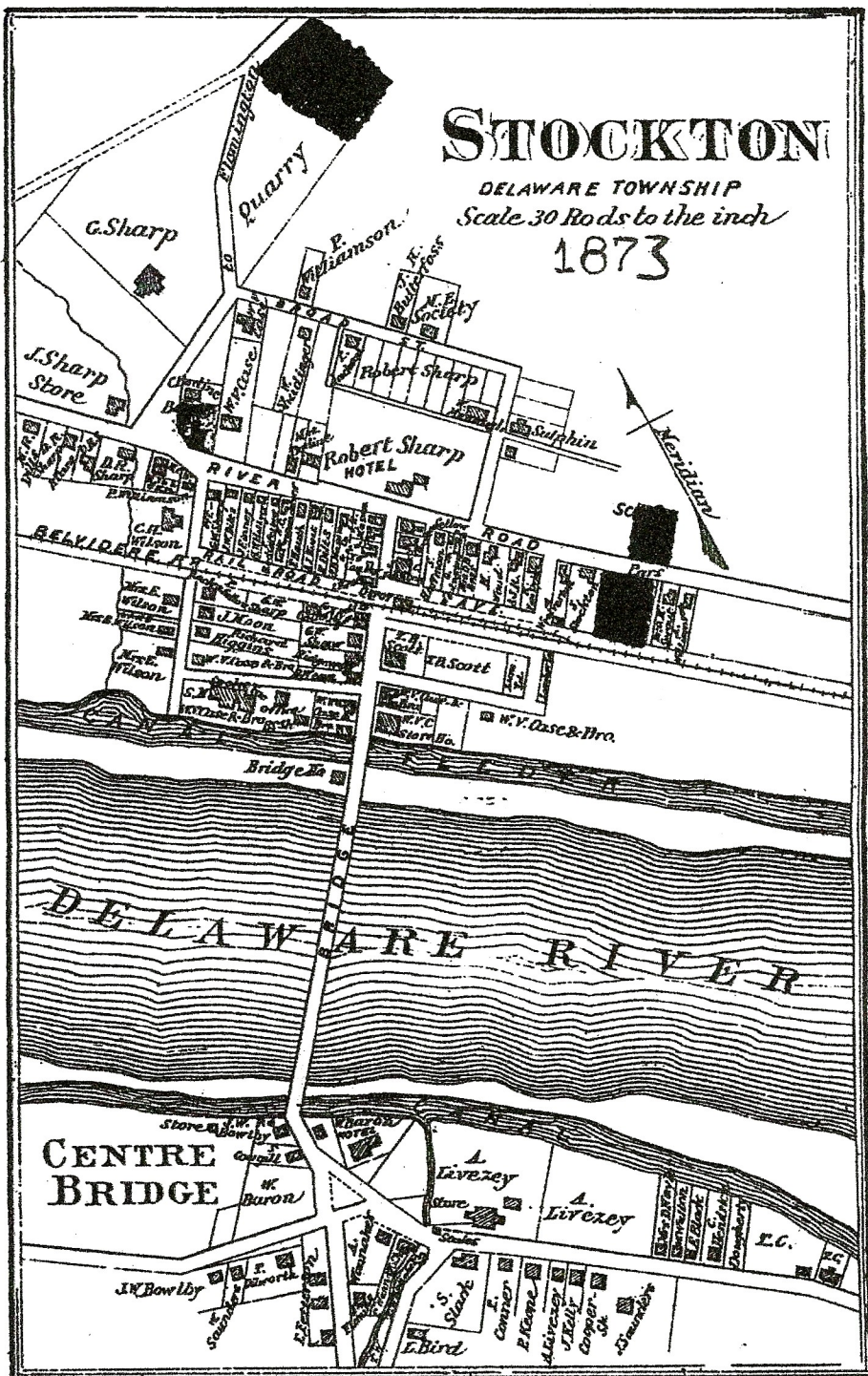
but steady growth for Centre Bridge. The railroad provided a cheap method of transporting coal, thus significantly reduced the canal traffic through Centre Bridge. While the village remained the primary trading place for nearby farmers and the bridge served a regular flow of travelers, the village grew only slightly during the late nineteenth century.”

The antebellum years were prosperous in Centre Bridge. There were active lime quarries and a lime kiln a couple of miles south at Limeport. Local limestone was burned to produce lime for building mortar and for agricultural fertilizer. There was a particularly favorable toll rate for the hauling of lime across the bridge to the farms in New Jersey. The farmers assisted each other in what were referred to as “lime frolics”.

The “lime frolics” were described as follows in the August 13, 1987 issue of the New Hope Gazette. By the time the farmer arrived at the kiln he and his horse were ready for some refreshment. After unhitching, feeding and watering his horse, he joined a jovial group of farmers (there were usually 10 to 20 farmers waiting for lime), a bottle was generally passed around. After exchanging the latest news and bits of gossip, he would visit a nearby restaurant where he would partake of one of their famous chicken dinners. Thus refreshed, he would return to the kiln, pay for his lime, hitch up his horse, bid good-bye to his fellow farmers, and in a delicious befuddled haze trust the horse to get him safely home.

About 1880 there were thirty-two farmers in the Centre Bridge vicinity. Some kept flocks of sheep which were driven across from Centre Bridge to Stockton to be sold. The natural beauty of the valley attracted the attention of artists, such as Edward Redfield, who settled here in 1898. In the same period at the end of the nineteenth century vacationers came here from Philadelphia. These were followed in the twentieth century by visitors and weekenders from New York.

The post office was maintained in Centre Bridge until Mrs. Bowlby, the postmistress, died in 1931 when she was in her 90s.



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BRIDGES

In 1809 a number of residents conceived the idea of erecting a permanent bridge between Pennsylvania and New Jersey to connect the lime kilns on the Pennsylvania side with the many farmers across the river in Hunterdon County, New Jersey. Petitions were submitted to the legislatures of both states. While the subject was under discussion in the legislatures, two additional petitions were submitted, one for a bridge four miles down stream connecting New Hope and Lambertville, the other about four miles upstream connecting Lumberville with Bull's Island and Raven Rock, New Jersey. Commissioners were appointed to study the alternatives, and a verdict was rendered in favor of the "center bridge", with the cost to be subscribed from the public. Initially, the two villages at either end of the bridge were both known as Centre Bridge; the New Jersey town was renamed Stockton in 1851.

Centre Bridge Company was chartered in both states in 1811 as a joint stock company with William Mitchell elected president. Mitchell owned the land on the Pennsylvania side; Joseph Howell owned the approach on the Jersey side. Most of the 123 original investors were local men, although one was the famous Philadelphia financier Stephen Girard. The bridge was constructed in 1813 by New England contractors and opened for travel in the spring of next year. From that time both bridge and village have been known as Centre Bridge, the name being suggested by the central location between New Hope and Lumberville, four miles from either place. Of three covered bridges spanning the Delaware from the Solebury shore to the Jersey side, Centre Bridge was the first opened for travel. The New Hope - Lambertville Bridge was built a couple of years later.

The original piers are stone filled and built on timber crib foundations. The piers were encased in reinforced concrete in 1926. The abutments are random ashlar faced masonry, built in 1814. The overall length of the river bridge is 821 feet. The overall width is 29 1/2 feet. The current road surface is grid steel, as was used to create instant landing strips during World War II. There is a 6-foot-wide sidewalk on the downstream side.

Structural work on the original bridge was soon found to be faulty and on December 5, 1829 the stockholders, meeting at Hunt's Centre Bridge hotel, decided to rebuild the wooden superstructure on the old stone piers. The contract was awarded to Amos Campbell and the building committee comprised John Ruckman, Esq., and Dr. John Wilson for Pennsylvania and Messrs. Rittenhouse, Gordon and Larson for New Jersey. It is known that all classes of labor employed in erecting and repairing the bridge received very small pay. A resolution of the officers of the Centre Bridge Company, entered into the minutes of the company, fixed the pay for masons and their helpers at no more than \$1.00 per day.

A maximum rate of tolls allowed to be collected by the company was fixed by the Legislature of New Jersey. For each coach, landau, phaeton or other pleasure carriage with four wheels, drawn by four horses, the sum of 75 cents. For every wagon with four horses, the sum of 63 cents, and for every carriage drawn by two horses, the sum of 50 cents. For every chaise, riding chair, sulky, cart, other two wheel carriage, or a sled or sled with two horses, the sum of 38 cents, and the charge with one horse, the sum of 25 cents. For a single horse and rider, the sum of 12 and a half cents. For every foot passenger, the sum of three cents. For every head of horned cattle, the sum of three cents. For every sheep and swine, the sum of one cent.*

Notwithstanding these seemingly attractive rates, the stockholders of The Centre Bridge Company rarely saw a dividend. Maybe the situation was aggravated by the special rates offered to shad fishermen during the season, or persons attending religious services, as well as funeral processions and military bodies, all of whom were allowed to pass free.

Three spans, two piers and the toll house on the Jersey side of the remodeled bridge were carried away by the flood of January 8, 1841. Some of the damage was caused by huge log rafts that measured as much as 200' by 60', when these broke loose upstream. An incident attending this flood created much excitement. George B. Fell, a storekeeper, who walked out on the bridge from the Pennsylvania side to obtain a better view of the flood, was swept downstream when the span on which he stood suddenly collapsed. By lying flat on some planks, Fell managed to pass safely under the Lambertville Bridge. Several rescue efforts were made from both shores. At New Hope Hiram Scarborough rowed out into the river in a batteau (Durham Boat?), but was unable to reach Fell before the driftwood to which he was clinging was carried by the swift moving current over Wells Falls. At Yardley Edward Nickelson succeeded in bringing the nearly exhausted man to shore in a rowboat.

The Freshet of June 6, 1862 carried away most of the bridges along the Lehigh River. Not only did the high water create havoc, but many log rafts broke loose acting as battering rams against the bridges downstream. Fortunately, the recently rebuilt Centre Bridge held with only minimal damage.

The bridge, rebuilt by Courtland Yardley, was the only one between Easton and Trenton not carried away or seriously damaged by the greatest of all Delaware River floods on October 10, 1903. Not only did floods threaten Old Centre Bridge, but fires were an ever-present danger. In 1853 the burning of the hotel barn, a tailor shop, and a shoemaker shop near the Pennsylvania end threatened to destroy the bridge. Only heroic efforts saved the community.

*Elmer Robertson, The Centre Bridge, page 7.

Again on July 19, 1923 an old unused fish cabin located on the river bank near the New Jersey end broke out in flames that for a time threatened the bridge. Fortunately, the Stockton Fire Company came to the rescue just in time.

But three nights later later fire succeeded where floods had failed. On July 22, 1923 the famous old structure was struck by lightning in a violent thunderstorm accompanied by high winds. The shingle roof and dry timbers burned furiously, in spite of the efforts of firemen on both sides of the river. Stockton firemen ran a hose out on the bridge and fought the blaze from inside, but they were unsuccessful. They had retreated to the first span which the fire had not yet reached, when that span gave way, carrying eight firemen and eight volunteer helpers down to the river bed thirty feet below. Some were painfully bruised, but no lives were lost. The fine old bridge that served faithfully for 109 years received a fitting eulogy —

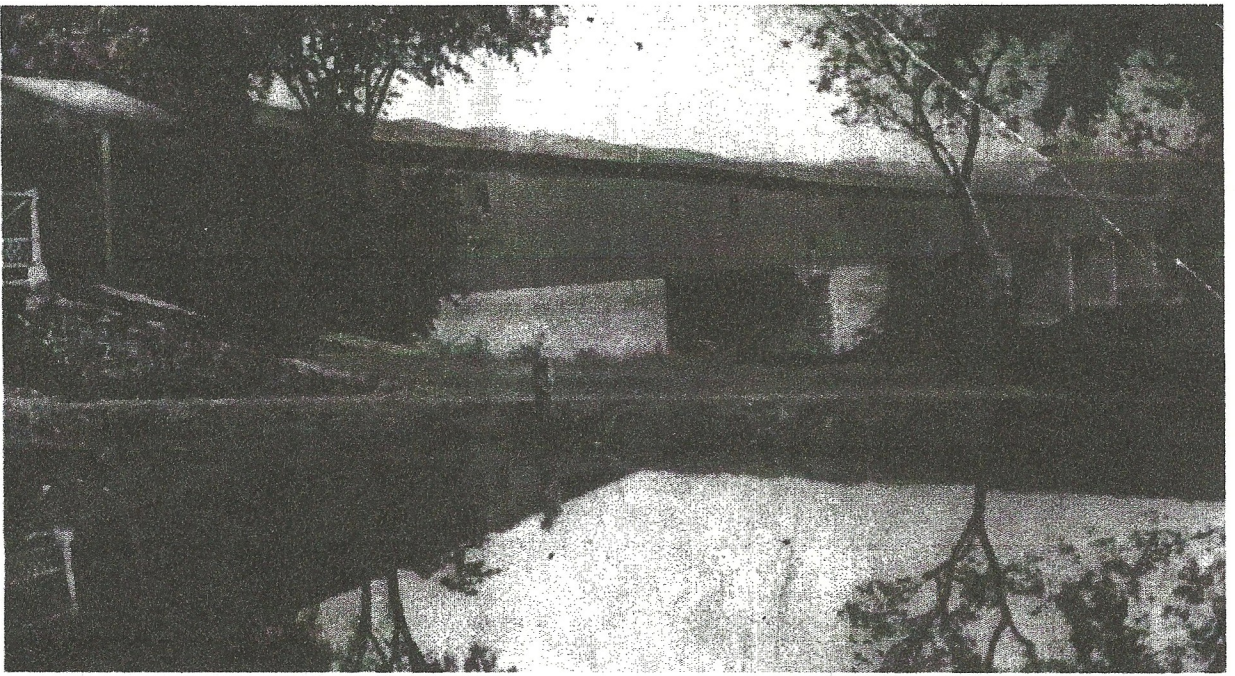
“Old Centre Bridge! Old Centre Bridge over the Delaware! Designed by the fertile brains and wrought by the skilled hands of our forefathers, whose dole was the ‘widows mite’ compared to the reward of labor in our generation!

“Choicest of pine, stoutest of oak, from America’s primeval forests, and rock from the hills that form the banks of the beautiful river which thou hast safely borne generations across, entered into the construction. Faithfully thou didst perform the service for which thou wast fashioned.

“Thrice wast thou threatened by devastating floods that occur a generation apart. Thrice did the fire fiend tear at thy vitals, and in the third battle, though strong trained men came to thy aid, did accomplish thy destruction.

“Majestic, spectacular, exciting in thy moments of death agony, thou didst furnish inspiration for the brush of famous artist and the pen of more humble author. Thanks be to God! In all thy more than century of service, never didst thou destroy a human life.

*“Shame on us if we, though of weaker but wiser generation, forget our effort and our substance from thy restoration.” **



The Covered Bridge at Stockton, NJ, 821 feet long, was built in 1814 and rebuilt in 1830 and 1841



*Covered Bridge across Delaware River, Stockton, NJ – Center Bridge, PA
Struck by lightning and burned – July 22, 1923*

In that spectacular blaze Old Centre Bridge was totally destroyed. Among the witnesses of the fire was Edward W. Redfield, famous American landscape painter and nearby resident. Next day he transferred his impressions of the scene to canvas, making a strikingly realistic picture, and including representations of many of his neighbors who had stood on the canalside watching the devastating blaze.

The piers, approaches and stone toll house were sold for \$10,000 on November 6, 1925 to the Joint Bridge Commission, which, after repairing piers and abutments, erected the present steel bridge thereon at a cost of \$258,135. *

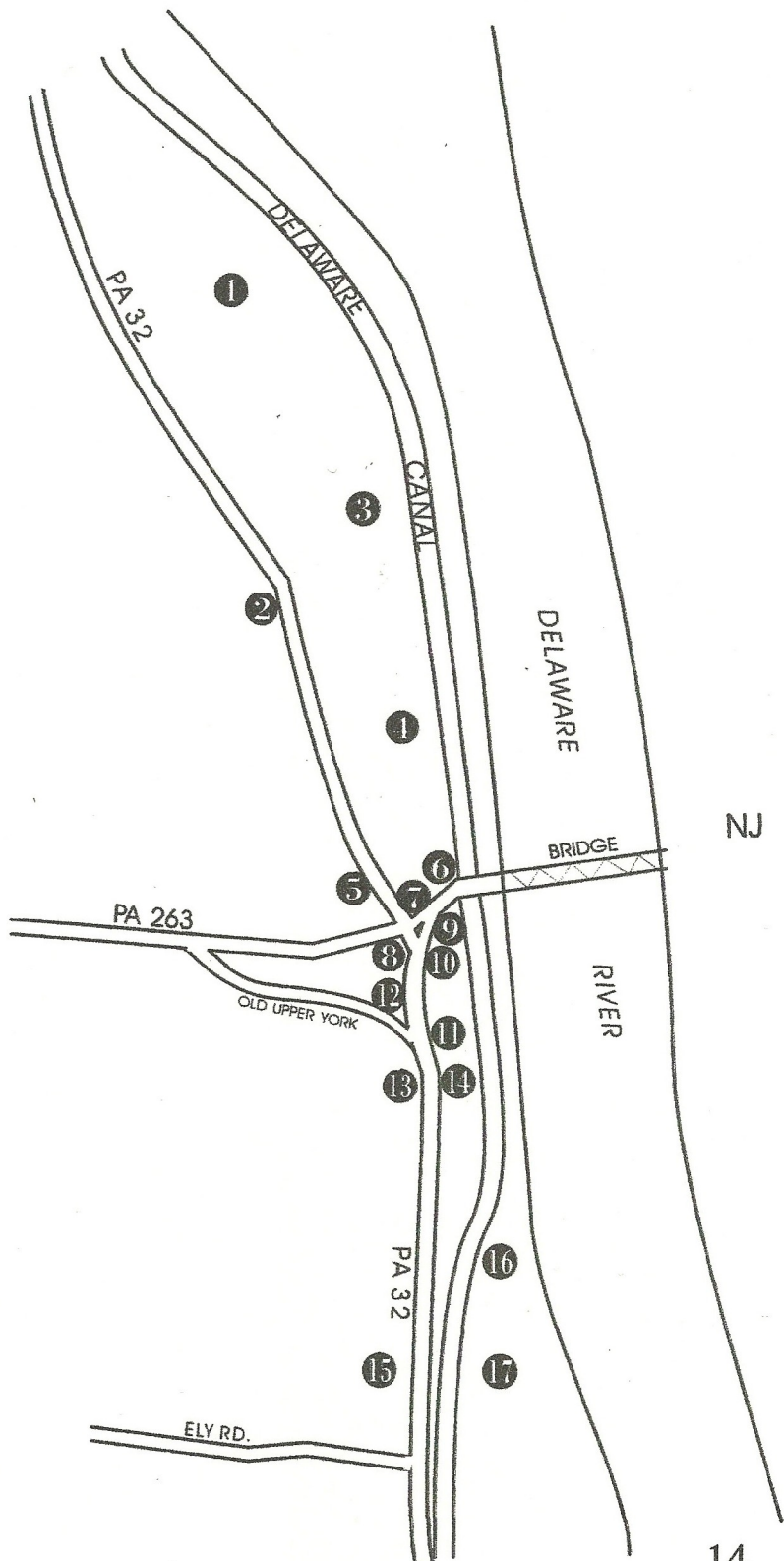


*MacReynolds, p 74-75

HISTORIC CENTRE BRIDGE

Map 2000

1. 'Burgess Lea'
2. Former Schoolhouse
3. 'Playwicky'
4. Edward Redfield Home
5. Taylor Home
6. Bridgekeeper's House
7. Dilly's
8. Elliott Realty
9. Centre Bridge Inn
10. Town Hall Site
11. First Post Office
12. 'Wanamaker Boarding House'
13. Sanders Row Houses
14. Colonial Revival Houses (3)
15. Former Tuscarora Tank Farm
16. 'Autretemps'
17. Colonial Revival



HOMES

Centre Bridge in the mid-1990s consisted of about sixty-five structures, of which ten were considered to have “significant historic value”, according to Gwen R. Davis, formerly executive director of the Solebury Township Historical Society. Some fifty were listed as having “contributing” histories. Only half a dozen were counted as “intrusions” of the twentieth century.

1. Burgess Lea — This earliest known farmstead in Centre Bridge was owned by Isaiah Paxson, who inherited the land through a series of bequests going back to his great uncle Henry Paxson whose daughter Elizabeth was married to Richard Burgess. This property has had only three owner families from 1689 to date, a unique record in any community.



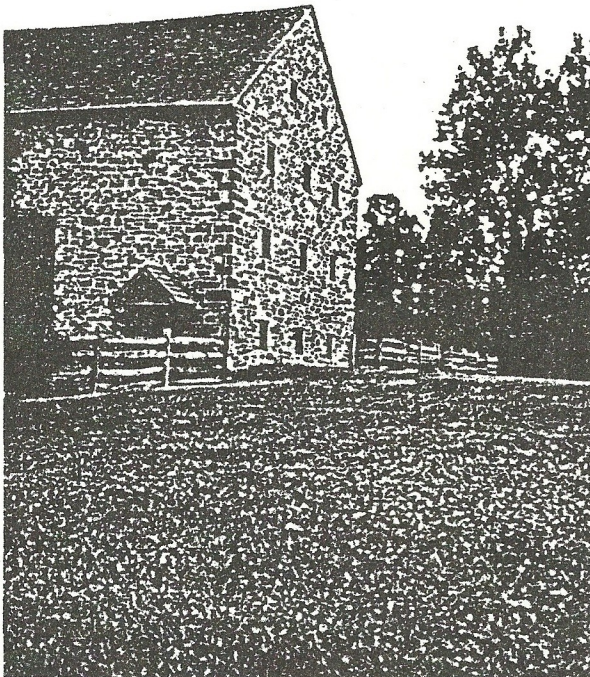
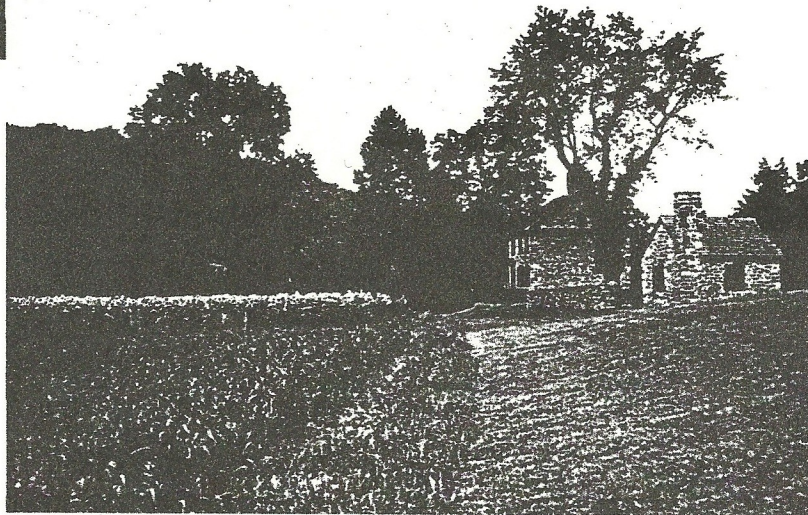
From deeds it is known that Richard Burgess was a brazier, or brass worker by trade. In 1689 he purchased three tracts of land in Bucks County totaling 480 acres. Two tracts totaling 300 acres were in or near the village of Newtown, while the remaining 180 acres were in Solebury Township. In 1692 he married Elizabeth Paxson, the daughter of Henry Paxson, the elder. After Burgess died in 1698, the property passed to his wife, and then to her father when she died in 1700. In 1702 this land, and presumably Paxson's (Hendricks) Island for a total of 300 acres, was owned by Henry Paxson. The Burgess tract stayed within the Paxson family until the death of Isaiah Paxson, Henry's great-great-nephew in 1811.

BURGESS LEA

1689

*Originally the Isaiah
Paxson Homestead.*

*Only three families
of owners to date.*



Fieldstone barn



Barnyard and office

Isaiah Paxson had his homestead farm of 200 acres here, plus another farm in New Jersey. He built a combination grist and saw mill, no longer standing, manufacturing sashes and shutters (1804-5). He had a financial interest in the Prime Hope Mills south of Lambertville.

At Isaiah Paxson's death his worldly goods were sold at public vendue, or auction. Included in the sale were standard household possessions such as beds, clocks, a ten plate stove, as well as farm items such as wheat, rye, corn and buckwheat. Other items in the sale give a fuller picture of the man. The ownership of a riding-chair and a carriage shed at the Solebury Meeting House indicates a man of wealth and social standing. The presence of mill tools, cogs, and rounds (grindstones) for sale verifies the existence of a working grist mill; staves, flour-casks, and cooper's tools reveal a barrel-making shop; the large number of window sashes and shutters indicate a saw mill. Shares of stock in a shad fishery and the company building the bridge across the Delaware River shows a man of diverse interests and recognition of business opportunity. Isaiah's belongings were advertised for sale in the Pennsylvania Correspondent Newspaper of March 1814.

In 1814 the property was purchased by John Johnson, following the death of Isaiah Paxson. By this time the property consisted of 201 acres with the house and the 99-acre Paxson Island, now known as Hendricks Island. In 1978 39 acres were purchased by the Durell family, consisting of the land surrounding the house and the remaining out buildings.

The Burgess Lea property is laid out as a typical English manor, with house, bank barn, various outbuildings, orchards, gardens, and pasture, as a self-sufficient entity of which there were once hundreds throughout Bucks County. What makes Burgess Lea unique is that it still has integrity and excellent preservation. The first part of the house was built in 1732, a two-story fieldstone structure. It is in the late Georgian style with a pent roof over the porch and an interior end chimney. The 1785 addition features the early Federal style with three bays, two rooms deep, and pedimented gable ends with a return cornice. Because it bears a commodious roof and the first floor is set high above ground level, it has the air of a mansion. The windows are large with 9-over-9 panes. The front door is recessed and has an unusual oval bulls-eye glass transom. There is a triangular pediment above the doorway. The fieldstone is rough cut with decorative quoins on the corners.

The out-buildings are laid out on a common axis in alignment with the mansion house. The fieldstone springhouse with a clapboard addition is located near the kitchen door. Cool water flows through this springhouse to this day, to keep milk and eggs fresh. The fieldstone barn was built in two sections, the earlier part having a more steeply pitched roof. Two of the doors have pedimented hoods. There is a fieldstone wall enclosing the barnyard with a small stone (office?) building at the corner with a chimney in the side wall. Also on the property is a plastered stone carriage house built in the early twentieth century.

Burgess Lea has been meticulously restored and maintained by its present owner. It is a joy to behold from the River Road to its west.

Paxson, or Hendricks, Island was formerly farmed and had a farm road down the center. It was connected to the Pennsylvania mainland by a bridge manufactured by the Roebling Company in Trenton, NJ.. There used to be a large home with barns and out buildings. The island had fertile sandy soil suitable for vegetables and corn. The bridge to the island was damaged in the 1934-35 flood and was washed out completely in the flood of 1955. For a short time in the late 1950s the island was owned by Arthur Koestler, who gained fame by writing "Darkness at Noon", one of the first exposes of mind and behavior control under Communist regimes. Philadelphia Electric Company then bought the island with the possibility of constructing a nuclear power plant here. PECO burned all the buildings to lower their public liability. In the mid-1990s the island was incorporated into the Delaware River Island Park, with no further human use planned other than canoeing and camping. More recently the island has been the site of an archeological dig for remains of early Indian settlements.

2. Former schoolhouse for the village of Centre Bridge, more recently remodeled into a private residence. This one-room schoolhouse was built on land donated by John L. Johnson on August 13, 1849. About fifteen children from the vicinity walked to school each day. The building was without interior lighting and was heated by a 'pot-bellied' stove. The school ceased to operate about 1928.



3. "Playwicky" — The name relates to the site of a Lenape Indian village, thought to have been located in the neighborhood. However, the house that bears that name is anything but American Indian. The architecture is Mission style with pink stucco, a tile roof, and a random but elegant layout. The site is elegantly landscaped. The house originally was designed by the architect William L. Bottomley for Morris Llewellyn Cooke, a member of Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. Cooke became head of the Rural Electrification Administration in 1935 and had served as a member of the New York State Power Authority when Roosevelt was Governor of New York. Previously, he served as director of Public Works in Philadelphia from 1911 until 1915. Over his long and productive career Cooke held many federal government positions. He died in 1960 at the age of 87.

On the same property, and a few yards nearer to the bridge, is a 'playhouse for two grown-ups', a spring and fall house built in the late 1920s by Morris Llewellyn Cooke and designed by the architect William Lawrence Bottomley. The house is a jewel box - small rooms, large windows facing on the placid canal and on the turbulent river beyond. A French door opens onto the vine-covered pergola where 'young men can dream dreams, and old men can see visions', as reported in *House Beautiful* of October 1929. Between the house and the canal is an 8-sided studio. Playwicky is a charmingly eccentric and whimsical addition to the neighborhood.

4. Redfield House — Edward W. Redfield came to Centre Bridge in 1898 from Glenside, northeast of Philadelphia. At first he lived with his French wife, whom he always referred to as 'Madame', and his father in a small house on Hendricks Island in the river. In 1904 he sold the island farm and settled in a house between the canal and the river. In 1935 he moved to the fieldstone farmhouse beside the Delaware Canal, about a hundred yards above the bridge. Here he enjoyed a superb view of the Delaware River.. Redfield became one of the most successful and best known of the New Hope School of Pennsylvania Impressionists. His artistic style involved painting in the open air, usually completing his canvas 'at one go'. He is best known for his naturalistic winter scenes, frequently 4 by 4 feet. His summers were most often spent back in France with his wife's family or along the New England coast. An excellent profile of Redfield the man appears in the recently published book, *The Genius Belt* —

He chose Bucks County not for its natural beauty but because, as he said, "this is a place where an independent, self-sufficient man could make a living from the land, bring up a family and still have the freedom to paint as he saw fit". A self-reliant Quaker, he grew his own crops, collected his own water supply in a storage tank on the roof of his house, constructed his own furniture from driftwood, and built a boat and pontoon bridge from cast-away kegs and casks. His first home was on Paxson's, or Hendrick's, Island. In 1935 he bought at public auction the larger home that fronts on the Delaware Canal. According to legend, he acquired winter fuel by taunting bargemen on the canal, who pelted him with pieces of coal he then gathered. Redfield transformed the county's beauty into large-scale, boldly conceived paintings.*

**The Genius Belt*, p 122.

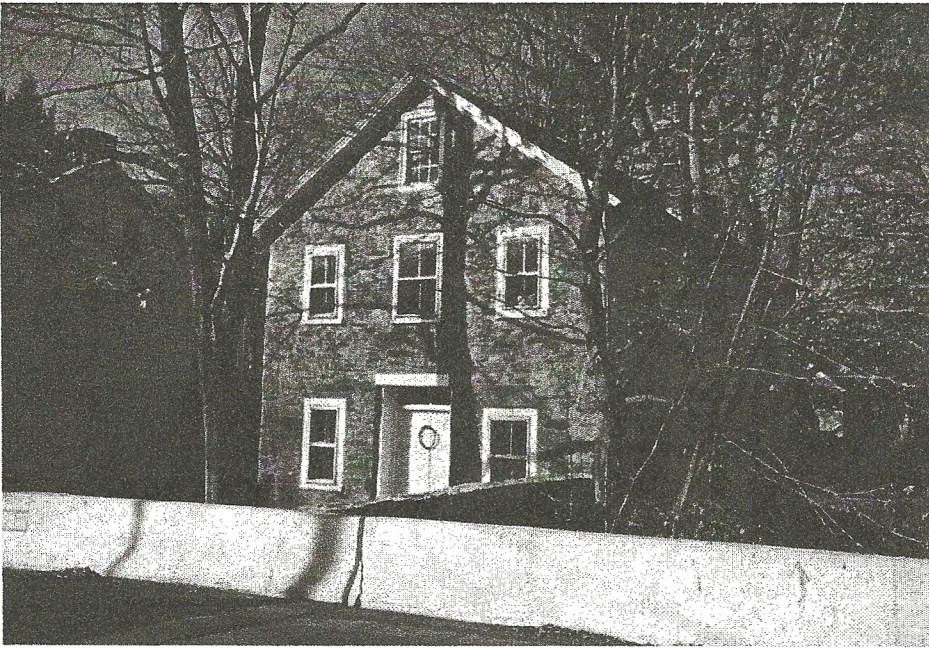


The Redfield house, a five bay, two room deep, two story house is Federal in style. Note that the windows facing the canal on the first floor have been expanded by Edward Redfield to convert part of the house to an artist's studio.

5. This fine Federal style building in two sections with adjoining front doors, was part of the original property of Joseph Mitchell, and was built in 1833. In 1933 it was extensively remodeled by the Taylor family, that has owned it most of the time since. This home is distinguished for the old maple tree on the lawn, the thickly clumped rhododendron, and the mature boxwood hedge to the south. Associated with the property is a simple cottage, doubtless formerly a shop, and a pointed fieldstone smoke house with its datestone inscribed 1888.



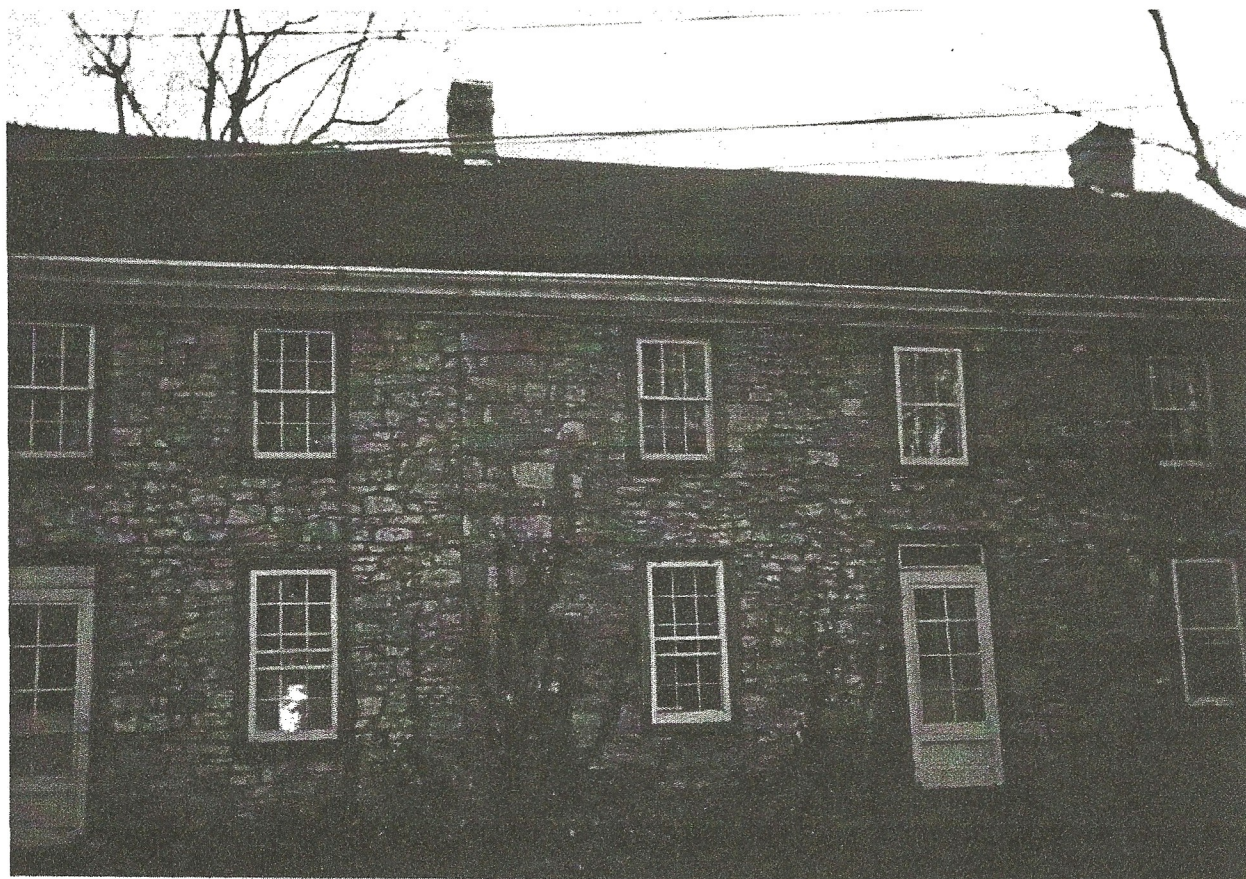
6. A bridgekeeper's house, a general store, a post office, and more recently a residence, this structure dates from the opening of the bridge in 1814. The Centre Bridge post office opened here in 1845. In 1869 a general store opened to serve the bridge, canal, and local trade until 1930.



7. Dilly's, and its predecessor. For many years on the southwest corner of the intersection of PA Route 263 and the River Road stood Thompson's Supplee luncheonette, in the area now used as a parking lot for Elliott Realty. This institution of the early twentieth century was torn down when Dilly's was built in 1959 on the diagonal opposite corner. The new place had prior names of owners, but the name 'Dilly's' stuck. It is derived from the name of a one-time owner, Les Dille, who drove to work each day in his Rolls Royce and flipped hamburgers "for the fun of it". This popular institution has become a refreshment destination for literally thousands of locals and visitors every summer.



8. Elliott Realty was doubtless constructed as a double house, or perhaps a house and a shop. There once was a large barn for lumber storage, and there may have been both a sawmill and a blacksmith shop on the property. It is probable that the building was built in the early nineteenth century when it was fashionable to stucco the exterior. More recently the stucco has been removed to reveal the random natural fieldstone design, which was then pointed. Such cleaning of buildings presents architectural history in vivid display.



9. Centre Bridge Inn. This property was formerly known as the Old Ferry Inn and probably served the traveling public from as early as 1712 when John Reading ran the ferry. Early records show a small structure on the site by 1757. The building suffered a small fire in 1814, was repaired and continued under several innkeepers until a disastrous fire on Halloween night in 1932. The fire left only one section standing, which was fenced off for about twenty years. In 1952 the inn was rebuilt. This was a two part fieldstone structure, typical of houses in the area. In 1960 it caught fire and burned to the ground, while the local fire companies stood and watched. The fire took place on one of the coldest nights of the winter, when water in the Delaware Canal was frozen solid. The owner at that time, Dewey Lee Curtis, was infatuated with things southern, so he rebuilt the inn in 1961 after the style of a Georgian Williamsburg mansion, as it stands today.



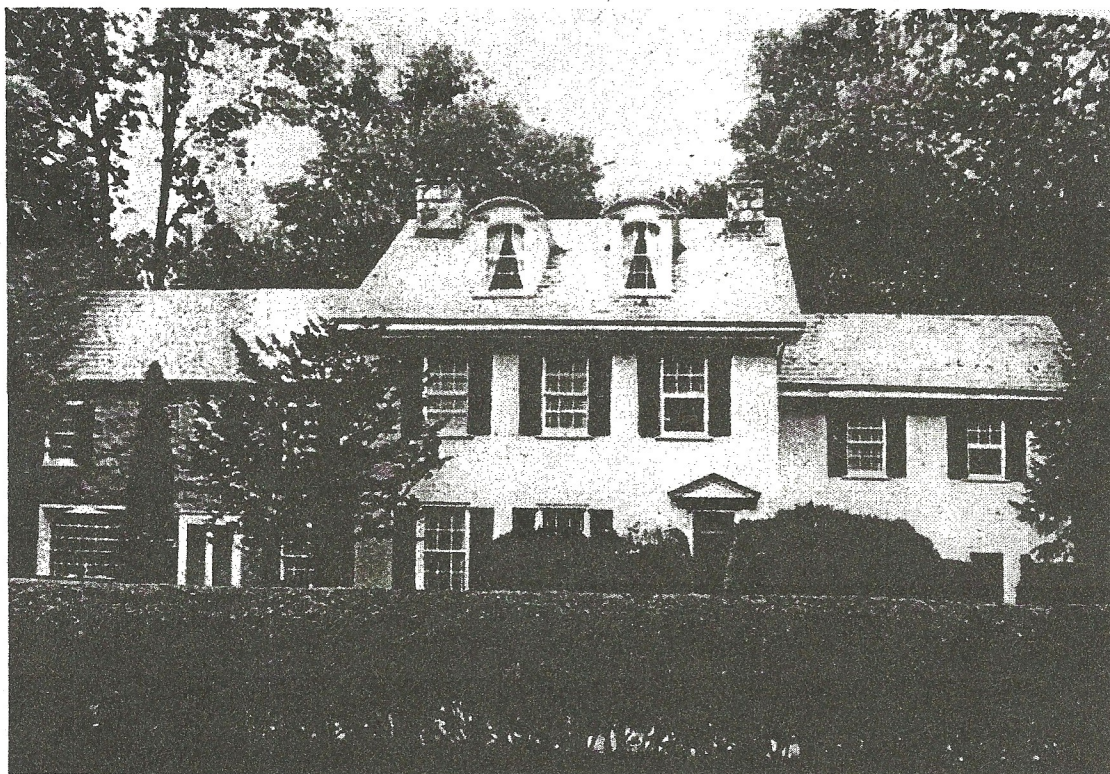
The Original Centre Bridge Inn Ablaze



*The New Centre Bridge Inn Built in 1961
Colonial Revival Style*

10. Town Hall, a wooden structure of perhaps 20 by 20 feet was built on top of, and across, the little stream that runs down the hill beside the Upper York Road. The old-timers must have had a flight of fancy, or could it have been the result of one of those “lime frolics”, for this town hall carried away in a freshet early in this century. Only the hint of the foundations remain.

11. First Post Office — By the early nineteenth century a small village developed around the bridge. The early homes were of stone plastered with lime in the Federal style.



12. Wanamaker Boarding House — This building was pictured in the Bucks County Centennial Atlas of 1876. Much altered over time, the building formerly had balconies that ran around each story. Formerly a summer hotel from the mid-1800s to the 1920s for people from Philadelphia, the operation was closed in the early 20th century, reportedly because of drunkenness on the part of the patrons. Today the building is divided up into apartments.

13. This residence with its wood facing is first mentioned in a deed dated 1841. A cooper's shop, owned by stone mason William Sanders, it is unusual in having been owned by the same family from the 1840s until 1970. Like many houses in the village, this home is bordered by old ash, black walnut, poplar, and maple trees.

Several homes from this period are still occupied. Most are three-bay, one room deep, with inside chimneys, 6-over-6 windows, and entrance doors on front and back are transomed with a pedimented cornice and flat vertical panels. All have had additions

over time. One house of this period has two arched dormer windows on the roof. This house, circa 1840, was once the general store selling staples, kitchenware and hardware. John Balderston established the first Post Office here in 1845. When Balderston sold his store in 1871, it is interesting to note that some customer accounts were posted and tallied on a slate, rather than in a paper account book.

Next along the River Road is a row of single-family houses built in the late 1800s by William Sanders, a stonemason. He probably built them as a real estate speculation. The men who lived here probably worked at Limeport, less than a mile away or were workers on the Delaware Canal.

14. A group of three Colonial Revival homes built in 1986 is deceptive. They look as though they have been here for generations, nestled among the towering sycamores next to the Delaware Canal. They fit neatly into the village, and are the newest homes in the neighborhood.

15. The Tuscarora Tank Farm formerly occupied this site south of the village. The thirty-two tanks are long gone, but the stain of the oil circles on the ground is still visible from the air. The red brick pump houses stand out in a country dominated by fieldstone homes and barns. The tank farm is located in the area long known as Limeport, because locally-quarried limestone was dug and burned here prior to its shipment on the Delaware Canal.

16. Autretemps — Home of Robert and Barbara Hillier, this International Style house faces on the Delaware River. It was built in 1991-92 as both a retreat from their Princeton architectural offices and as a showplace in which to experiment and show off new living concepts and building materials. Among their innovations is a design that combines an informal living area in a well area, surrounded by the kitchen and a design/drafting room. All of this is situated so that they can look out to enjoy natural life on the Delaware River. What appears from a distance as a farm silo is actually a glass brick stairwell to the guest bedrooms on the second floor.

17. A Colonial Revival home sits comfortably between the canal and the river, looking for all the world as though it has been here from the eighteenth century. No such luck; it was built in the early 1950s.

This enumeration of houses in Centre Bridge is intended to give a summary and overview of the sixty-five homes in the area. It is far from a complete inventory, nor is it supposed to be a definitive architectural or historical treatise. The owners or others may chose to do that in the future.

ART

An art colony came to this section of the Delaware Valley just after the beginning of this century. The colony was established by William Lathrop who lived with his English wife at Phillips Mill, about three miles south of Centre Bridge. They attracted other artists, often opening their home for afternoon tea in the British tradition. Soon the colony grew to include Daniel Garber and William Francis Taylor who lived a couple of miles north of Centre Bridge at Cuttalousa, as well as Kenneth Nunamaker, Rae Sloan Bredin, Morgan Colt, and John Follinsbee, who lived nearer to New Hope. These painters became known variously as the New Hope School, the Delaware Valley Impressionists, or the Pennsylvania Impressionists.

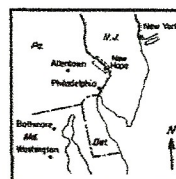
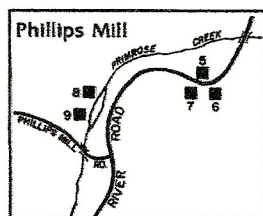
These artists are known for painting naturalistic landscapes, frequently executed out-of-doors in winter. They sought to capture the physical beauty of the valley, rather than experiment extensively with light and color effects, as the French Impressionists did.

Edward Willis Redfield (1869-1965) settled in Centre Bridge in 1898 where he soon became one of the best known of these artists. Though he was nationally known and honored, he was also one of the most independent of artists. He was born in Delaware, studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and while in France he became increasingly fascinated with snow scenes. Redfield became noted for his large exhibition-oriented winter landscapes. He became recognized as the central and most important painter in the growing school of Pennsylvania Impressionist landscape painting.

*Edward Redfield, Center Bridge Village, Ca. 1935-45.
Oil on canvas 32x40 in. Private collection.*



- 1 HENRY SNELL
- 2 JOHN FULTON FOLINSBEE
- 3 ROBERT SPENCER
- 4 RAE SLOAN BREDIN
- 5 PHILLIPS MILL
- 6 WILLIAM LATHROP
- 7 MORGAN COLT
- 8 CHARLES ROSEN (first home)
- 9 Dr. GEORGE MORLEY MARSHALL
- 10 EDWARD REDFIELD (first home)
- 11 DANIEL GABER



Drawn by:
Alfred B. Patton, Inc.
Dorrestown, Pa. 1890

Another artist who made his home in Centre Bridge was Kenneth Nunamaker, who painted here from 1923 until 1963. His work was exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington. He was primarily a commercial artist who maintained an office in Philadelphia. He too rendered the landscapes of the Delaware Valley, often with a gentle blue haze that is frequently seen here in winter. His son Alfred R. Nunamaker has continued the family artistic heritage.

In the 1950s Edmund Schiddel, author of twelve novels, lived in Centre Bridge. Among his titles was the controversial “Bucks County Trilogy” consisting of the “Devil in Bucks County”, “Scandal’s Child”, and “Good and Bad Weather”. Although his local characters were supposed to be imaginary, many local people were furious that they had been maliciously portrayed; others were equally irked at having been left out.

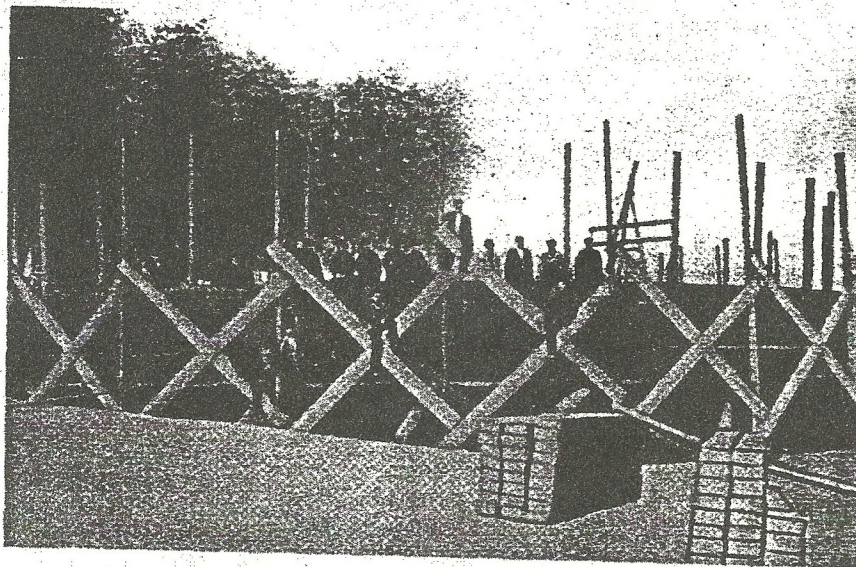
OIL

In 1908 the Tuscarora and the National Transit Pipelines were built from the oil fields in western Pennsylvania through Solebury Township, across the Delaware River, and on to the refineries in Bayway, New Jersey. Steel fuel storage tanks were built just below Centre Bridge where the Standard Oil Company erected a pumping station. When the area is viewed from the air, at least thirty-two tank locations can be spotted.

Lightning hit this tank farm in 1937, destroying two of the tanks. The blaze could be seen for miles, as reported in the accompanying newspaper article. After World War II the tanks had outlived their usefulness. The remaining steel plates were sold to Japanese shipbuilders who reused the material to “jumboize” wartime oil tankers. In effect, these shipbuilders cut the old ships across their midsections, installed new structural ribs, and replated the exterior of the vessel. The result was an almost new ship with a third to a half more carrying capacity, at only a modest refitting cost.



Thompson's Supplee Luncheonette and gas station which was located in the parking lot adjoining Elliott Realty, and diagonally across the intersection from Dilly's.



A photograph taken of construction of the fuel tank at Center Bridge shows the comparative size of the excavation.

Old New Hope

By JIM BECK

Our photo today is from the Audene Cosner collection. It is a picture of the construction of an oil tank near Center Bridge. The picture is the shell of the tank.

On February 20, 1992, the Gazette printed an article I wrote about longtime resident Walter Worthington. As a child, Walter lived with his family on Limeport, now Ely Road, near the juncture with River Road.

I looked up the article and found the following:

It was 1908 or so when the Tuscarora and National Transit Pike line was being

built from the oil fields in Western Pennsylvania through Solebury Township and on to its terminus in Bayonne, N.J.

Laying the line in Solebury and across the Delaware River took considerable time and several executives of the pipe line lived for a time nearby and became quite friendly with Harry Worthington, Walter's dad.

Remnants of the huge storage tanks, which were located in the area and the ruins of the foundations of the pumping station can still be seen at the foot of Limeport Road.

One of the executives was named Newell and another

Walter. Thus we have Newell and Walter Worthington.

The Worthingtons provided a horse team for the pipe line. It was another age and the horses were used to drag huge earth scoops to dig the trench. The earth was loaded onto horse-drawn earth movers. These were specially built wagons, which were loaded, then driven to the point of deposit. The two-part hinged bottom of the wagon swung open when a handle was pulled, emptying the rig in one fell swoop.

Eventually the pipe line crew moved on and neither Newell nor Walter Worthington ever heard of their namesakes again.

Spectacular Blaze in Bucks County

Motor Police Form Zones to Lessen the Blocking of Highways and Danger to Spectators from Possible Explosion – Pillar of Fire Seen for Many Miles – Loss Approximately \$145,000

(By a Staff Reporter)

Lightning flashed out of a sudden storm in central and eastern Bucks County late yesterday afternoon and turned two huge storage tanks into mountains of boiling, blazing crude oil causing a loss of approximately \$145,000.

A million and a half gallons of crude oil went up in roaring flames and the blaze threatened to spread to a gasoline tank 500 feet away, when lightning struck two storage tanks of the National Transit Oil Company's pumping station at Centre Bridge at 5:30 yesterday afternoon.

The company, with headquarters in Oil City, pumps crude oil from the Western Pennsylvania and Virginia oil fields to the Centre Bridge station from which place it is pumped to Bayway, N.J., by the Tuscarora Oil Company, whose station is located along the River Road, adjoining the National Transit Oil Company's station.

Bubbled Out of Tanks

The crude oil lost, valued at \$110,000, bubbled over the top of the tanks, poured slowly down the sides and spread a flaming lake around the huge steel containers that will hold 35,000 barrels containing 42 gallons apiece, when filled to capacity.

Flames rose and fell in spurts, shooting 200 feet into the air at times and oily smoke spread for miles down the Delaware River, blackening the New Hope and Lambertville sections three miles away.

Seen For Many Miles

The red glare of the sky could be seen as far away as Philadelphia at times and from the top of Sellersville hill, and from points in New Jersey 20 miles away. Thousands of motorists from all parts of nearby Pennsylvania and New Jersey sped to the scene, clogging roads and bumping over fields in the darkness.

Block Off Sightseers

Members of the Pennsylvania Motor Police from the Doylestown sub-station were dispatched to the scene of the fire and to points some distance away to establish fire zones. The officers blocked the River Road at New Hope on the south and at Point Pleasant and Lambertville on the north. No one was permitted to approach closer than 100 feet from the burning tank except those who got there before the danger zone was established.

Police warned people living within the danger zone to take the proper precautions in case a storage gasoline tank some distance from the burning crude oil, might become ignited and explode.

In the heart of the famed New Hope artist's colony, the fire furnished a thrilling subject for many of the artists who were noticed painting near the scene of the fire.

Volunteer fire companies rushed to the scene of the fire from New Hope Union Company and Columbia Company of Lambertville; Stockton (N.J.) Fire Company and Midway Fire Company.

Firemen At A Disadvantage

The firemen could do little with the crude oil flames, but did heroic work in preventing the gasoline storage tank from exploding by keeping a steady stream of water on the tank to cool the sides.

Firemen together with other ground crews rushed to the scene from Harrisburg, dug ditches around the burning tanks to keep the fire from spreading.

Special crews of the Philadelphia Electric Company, telephone and telegraph company crews were kept busy throughout the night. Many trees along the highway were burned, poles were badly scorched and the insulation was burned off the telephone and telegraph wires.

Huge Pillar of Fire

The first oil tank boiled over about 10 p.m., and the second boiled over about 2 o'clock this morning. Those who stayed to see the second tank boil saw a sight they will never forget. Like a flash the flames leaped 200 feet in the air like an erupting volcano as dense black smoke covered the countryside for miles. Many of the nearby residents who had retired about midnight, were awakened by the deadly thud of the boiling explosion, thinking that the gasoline tank had exploded.

*Newspaper Report
August 21, 1937*

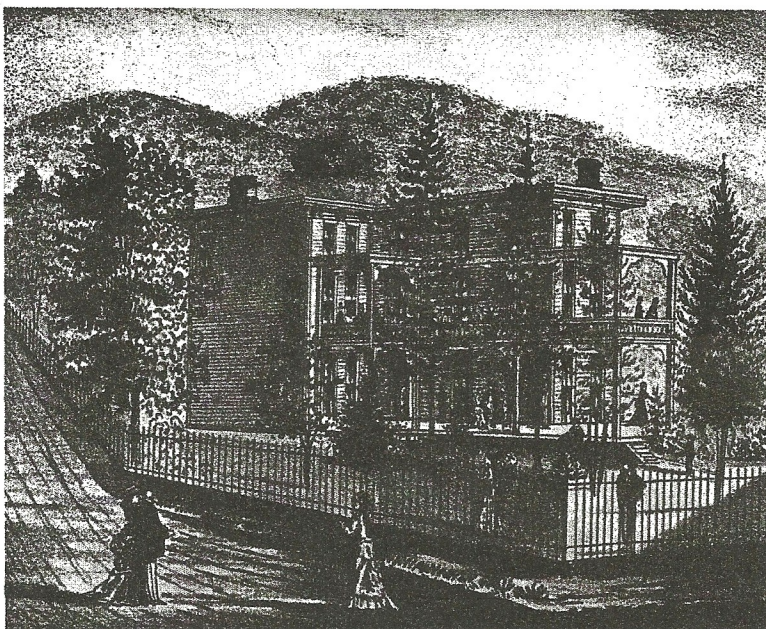
TOURISM

Centre Bridge has been a popular tourist destination for the past hundred and fifty years. Not counting the Lenape Indians who lived in this area, we may count the growth of tourism from the opening of the Delaware Canal that brought boatloads of picnickers from the commercial town of New Hope to this stretch of natural beauty. Within the next couple of miles north of the village there are native stands of rhododendron bushes, white-barked sycamores, and towering hemlock trees - reason enough for any nature lover to come for a visit.

There doubtless were small inns and taverns in Centre Bridge before the 1850s, but little is known about them. The first formal reference is to the residence of F. C. Wanamaker, described as "A Beautiful Location for Summer Boarding" in the 1876 Combination Atlas Map of Bucks County by J. D. Scott of Philadelphia.

Centre Bridge has become an increasingly popular stopping place for hikers along the Delaware Canal towpath and for bicyclists. Among the interesting routes is one that involves a circuit of towpaths — up the Pennsylvania side four miles to Lumberville, across the Walking Bridge and down the Delaware and Raritan Canal towpath to Stockton, and then back across to Centre Bridge. An alternate route involves walking four miles south to New Hope, crossing the bridge to Lambertville, and up the D & R Canal to Stockton, and back across to Centre Bridge.

A new group of tourists (?) has taken up residence under the road bridge over the canal — cliff swallows who enjoy this location, about as far east as they are known to nest. The birds normally winter in Central America. Their homes along this stretch of the Delaware River were built with help from the Bucks County Audubon Society.



Res. of F.C. WANAMAKER, Centre Bridge, Delaware To Bucks Co. Pa.
A BEAUTIFUL LOCATION FOR SUMMER BOARDING.

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*The Canal Dug in 1830's Used for the Transport of Mostly Coal
Barges Drawn By Mules*