

SHIPBUILDING MADE BRIDGEBORO
By the Visiting Reporter
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Probably few residents in Burlington county remember when Bridgeboro was a shipbuilding center.

But older residents give credit to this for the first real settlement and development of this community. It attracted people from other sections.

Wallace L. Gennett, who will be 80 on April 1, and one of the oldest natives of Bridgebor, remembers when there were six shipyards all working. His father was a ship carpenter and built packet boats. He remembers when his father built a three-mast canal schooner also. Fishing boats were also constructed.

Gennett said the shipbuilders had to cut their lumber for their boats out of the surrounding woods, and prepare it by hand, for there were no saw-mills in those days. But these pioneers overcame all obstacles.

Over century ago State Highway Route 25 was an old public highway with the "Pony Express" carrying mail over the route from Philadelphia to New York via Bridgeboro. The rider would stop at Bridgeboro, put the mail on the ferryboat, and the boat would carry it across the historic Rancocas creek to another rider waiting on the other shore, who would continue on.

Later the highway was purchased by a corporation and it became a toll road, with toll gates on a site near Odd Fellows Cemetery, Burlington, and another at Fairview, just a short distance west of Bridgeboro.

Finally the road was sold to the county, and now is under the jurisdiction of State Highway Department. It was 34 years ago the road was first macadamized according to Gennett, and he helped to

supervise the work.

Much interest was centered about Bridgeboro many years ago from the standpoint of coal and lumber. Canal boats transported coal from the coal regions of Pennsylvania to Bridgeboro. Lumber was also brought in. Wallace Lippincott, who also became Assemblyman, was the big coal and lumber man. Deliveries were made by horse and wagon to Moorestown, Riverside, Riverton, Palmyra and surrounding territory.

Years ago steamboats started at Lumberton, loaded pigs, hogs, chickens, truck, fruit and many other things, stopped at Bridgeboro, and then proceeded to the big market at Philadelphia. The boat continued out the Rancocoas creek to the Delaware river and on down the Delaware to Philadelphia.

Build Bridge

Over 100 years ago a bridge was constructed across the creek at Bridgeboro to displace the ferry. A short time later a wooden covered bridge was built, which was a familiar sight in those days. This bridge continued in use at Bridgeboro up until 10 years ago, when the present modern drawbridge was built. The wooden covered bridge was one of the last to be removed in the country. It was from this bridge that Bridgeboro is believed to have obtained its name. A few years before it was taken away part of the roof was damaged by fire.

Probably the oldest structure in Bridgeboro is the double house on the south side of Route 25, just a short distance west of the main intersection of the town. The house, owned by Gennett, is believed to be over 200 years old. It is occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Virgil Porter and Mr. and Mrs. Earl Bird.

Two other landmarks include the Odd Fellows Hall building on the southeast corner of State Highway and Main street, and Bridgeboro Inn on the northeast corner. The latter has been renovated into a bar and hotel and is operated by Alex Szymanik. The Odd Fellows and Red Men have one part of the other building and C. B. Warden and Son sell awnings, window shades, truck covers and make repairs in the other side of the building.

Bridgeboro, Fairview, Riverside Park and Cambridge make up Delran township today. Years ago the township also included Riverside, Riverton and Palmyra. Gennett helped to carry the chain, he said when Delran and Riverside Township were divided, fixing the boundaries.

Bridgeboro is also considered part of the Triple Towns. The other two are Riverside and Delanco. Daily bus service runs between Riverside and Bridgeboro and Moorestown.

There are approximately 200 homes and a population of over 500 persons in Bridgeboro. The community is two miles south of Riverside, four miles north of Moorestown, and five miles west of Burlington.

Frank Yansick is chairman of the Delran Township Committee which meets in the Delran Fire Company, No. 1 firehouse in Bridgeboro. Other members of the committee are William F. Kauderer, Harry Moreland and George Little, clerk. Little has served as clerk for the past quarter of a century.

Charles H. Anderson is Fire Chief of the township. Charles Hullings is assessor. Mrs. Doris Brown is postmistress serving for the past 14 years. The postoffice is in front part of the Brown home on Main street.

The Methodist Church, on the west side of Main street is another landmark, being founded in 1880. There is also a Christian

Church in the western part of the community.

There are three grocery stores along Main street, operated by Mrs. Vickers, James Langin and Earl Hullings. Arthur Langin operates a tobacco store, John G. Hann has a fine hotel on the northwest corner of Route 25 and Riverside road.

The school has grades ranging from First to Eighth. After graduating from here the pupils continue their education at Moorestown and Palmyra High School. Aaronson Bell is supervising principal of the township schools. One other school is located in Cambridge.

Bridgeboro also has a small foundry where light casting and molding is done. C. A. West is superintendent.

Many of the residents in Bridgeboro are employed in Riverside and surrounding towns. Few are employed on farms.

Fortnum Leader

One of Bridgeboro's own sons and the leading businessman of the community is Lester Fortnum, who operates a large auto agency and repair and supply shop, and also sells tractors, farm machinery, sprayers and packing house equipment.

He has been in business just 25 years this year, starting with a small shop for the repair of bicycles behind the residence of his parents on Main street. A year later he moved down the street next to where the firehouse stands, and in the building now operated by Arthur Langin as a tobacco store. Fortnum stayed here until July, 1914, when the first part of the present building on the north side of Route 25, just west of the creek was constructed. Since that time several additions have been made to the building, until today it is one of the finest businesses of its kind in this section. His residence is next to his business.

There are 38 persons employed by Fortnum at Bridgeboro. He also has another business in Palmyra, where 15 persons are employed. This place has been running since 1921.

On the south side of the highway, opposite his business, Fortnum also has a 24-hour service station. This has been open for about three years. An old tavern, another landmark in the community, was taken down to make room for the station.

Wallace Gennett is not only an authority on the history of Bridgeboro, but has quite a historical and interesting background of his own, in addition to being a philosopher of note.

His descendants were among the first to come to this country from France and Germany. Gennett is the lone survivor of a family of eight, four brothers, and four sisters. His brother, Richard, a veteran of the Civil War, just died a year ago.

Gennett first was a fisherman and farmer. Later he was elected as one of the first Overseer of Roads in Delran township. He claims the Riverside road was the first stone road in this section, being constructed over 40 years ago. He had the contract to grade it.

He served as a member of the Board of Education in the township. Gennett is also probably the only person in Burlington county ever to be elected to the same public office on three different tickets. He was first elected on the Democratic ticket, then the Independent, and last the Prohibition ticket. No other person is ever believed to have gained an office in this county on a Prohibition ticket. Gennett was elected to the Board of Freeholders on all three tickets, serving for seven years on the large board, being a member at the time the large board of over

30 members was cut down to five members. He also was appointed to serve out the unexpired term of Joseph Bright of about one-half year when he changed his residence.

After leaving politics Gennett became an ordained minister. He served his first charge in Johnsonburg, N. J. He also was pastor in Tullytown, Carversville, and Evergreen, Pa. He gave up the work 14 years ago, leaving Evergreen because of poor health, returning to Bridgeboro.

He is now living next door to the house in which he was born on south side of Route 25, just a short distance from Moorestown road. He owns his old homestead, the house he lives in and about six others in that neighborhood, ruling a little community all his own.

Gennett is married for the second time and lives with his wife Lida, who will be 72 in September. He has three sons and a daughter. One son, Stacy, owns a large farm on Columbus road, Burlington.

He was a member of the Bridgeboro Odd Fellows Lodge for 50 years on last July 30.

It was learned that Jacob Freck, at 93, was the oldest resident of the community, while Mrs. Sally Wood will celebrate her 90th birthday on January 5. She lives opposite the Gennett home.

The original families of Bridgeboro included Gennetts, Andersons, Seeds, Wells, Peirsons and Kimbles.