



Bergen County, Where America Begins

A Century Ago

The River Edge Land Company sold a house to W. H. Moffit, of New York, and E. S. Perry built a new building on River Edge Heights in April 1907. Nearby, a noise coming from Mr. Hoffman's house, then in course of construction, awakened Arthur Watt. He discovered a man leaving the house with a bundle containing lead pipes cut out of the new house. The Riverside Borough Council accepted their new Borough Hall on May 6, 1907, and the fire apparatus moved into the new firehouse in the Borough Hall in July.

The best fishing grounds were located between New Milford and River Edge, while "Harris Hole" and "Paulison's Point" were favorite haling spots for seine fishermen. The herring were so numerous on May 1st that boys waded in the stream and caught them in crab nets. Bobbing for eels was indulged almost nightly in springtime. A downpour accompanied the change of moon on May 4th. There is an old saying among the farmers: "A wet May for hay." In June 1907, the summer pavilion in the grove on the east bank at North Hackensack was prepared for entertaining boating parties.

A stuck draw on the Paterson Plank-Road Bridge delayed one of the Mehrhof Brick Company's schooners. Consequently, on May 6, 1907, Freeholder Coe introduced a resolution to create the office of County Engineer at an annual salary of \$3,500. The motion passed 13 to 10. Ralph D. Earle, Jr. was appointed the first County Engineer on June 17, 1907.

An ancient dwelling on the east side of the river at New Milford, owned by the Bloomer family of River Edge, but long untenanted, was discovered ablaze on June 22, 1907. The building was an old landmark, a two-story and attic affair, and the oldest inhabitant said it was built more than a century ago. General Accalaries (?), of Civil War fame, occupied the place in his early career and it was widely said that a pirate had his den in the building long ago. Of late it had been known as the

“Beehive.” New Milford had another old house in a fair state of preservation, which was built in 1788.

The River Edge Improvement Association beautified the grounds on the west side of the River Edge station in June and July 1907, laying out paths and driveways and planting shrubbery, spruces and shade trees. A subscription drive raised \$150. The railroad company depot was wired for electric lighting and placed five rough pine bulletin boards upon the station in October, which greatly displeased the River Edge Improvement Association.

Cornelius Zabriskie, the Jersey City banker, died at his summer home in Sunapee Lake, New Hampshire, on July 10, 1907. He had been born at Cherry Hill on February 24, 1839, and began his business career at 15 years of age in a drug store in Jersey City. After a fire in 1871 destroyed his place of business, he turned to banking and met with great success. He donated 20 city blocks in Jersey City, which were transformed by him into a public playground.

By August, crabbing parties were seen along the river from sunrise to sunset. Reedbirds were scarce on the meadows and sweet corn was not of the best quality, owing to a summer drought. A dry rot affected tomatoes. Goldenrod and wild asters made the fields radiant, while swamp-maples showed their autumn tints in the first week of September. Peaches were at least fancy in price — selling for \$2 per basket. Perch fishing was good in the river during the last week of September and there were still many crabs of large size. Riverside Camp, an attractive spot for picnickers, just south of River Edge on the east bank of the river, closed for the season on October 1st.

Electric signs became quite the fashion on Main Street, Hackensack. A new common battery telephone system was expected to be in full operation there on September 15th. It was predicted that auto trucks would soon be used for hauling farm produce to city markets. Thomas Edison invented a process by which a three-story house could be built entirely of concrete in twelve hours at a cost not exceeding \$1,000.

Walter Christie, the record-breaking automobilist, of River Edge, was nearly killed at Pittsburg on September 9, 1907, when running his machine at the rate of 70 miles per hour. He was in the hospital with a broken wrist, a sprained back, lacerated head and injuries to his abdomen. He did not expect to ever race again. He was walking again with a cane by November.

The North Hackensack Hose Company was incorporated on October 9, 1907, with 35 members and 500 feet of hose. John Thompson, J. Pell Zabriskie and H. H. Burt were appointed a committee to purchase a hose cart.

Good quality potatoes sold for \$2.50 per barrel on local farms. Fire destroyed a small dwelling house opposite the New Bridge hotel on October 19, 1907. Only a stove and some crockery were saved from the ruins. Elmer Post owned the building, which a family named Kirkmann occupied. Mr. Kirkmann was in Brooklyn at the time of the fire while his wife was at a friend's house in another part of the village.

The Bergen Grange held its Fifth Annual Fair in its new hall on Spring Valley road on October 30th with a fine display of farm products, fruits and flowers. Leslie R. Fort, Republican gubernatorial candidate, defeated Frank S. Katzenbach, Jr., the Democrat, by 10,232 votes against 8,714 in Bergen County. Out of a total registration of 25,805, about 6,300 Bergen County voters failed to go to the polls. The Democrats held a larger majority on the Board of Chosen Freeholders than any party had held for nearly a score of years, having 16 Democrats and 10 Republicans.

Flowers blooming late in autumn were said to be an indication of an unpleasant winter. Hirschfield's pearl button factory returned to New Milford in November 1907. This time, it would be run by electricity and not by waterpower. A long iron smokestack arrived in May 1908.

This was a time of marvelous prosperity with "millionaires as thick as flies around the bung of a molasses barrel." The Republican Administration's *laissez faire* economic policies, Congress' endorsement of the gold standard and a high protective tariff, accumulated a great surplus in the National Treasury and a favorable trade balance. Big corporate Trusts dictated prices for everything from cradles to coffins without governmental interference or complaint. And yet, in November 1907, almost without warning, the Administration's supporters on Wall Street lost hundreds of millions of dollars, forcing banks to close, and thereby tying up the savings of the people and the money of the merchant and manufacturer. Just before Thanksgiving, Maine woodsmen commenced cutting Christmas trees for the rest of the country.

Wild geese flew south in late November as muckrakers gave the streets a semi-annual cleaning. Hackensack store windows began filling with holiday goods. Blacksmiths were sharpening horseshoes in their spare moments so as to be ready for icy conditions. Governor Stokes' Thanksgiving proclamation was read in Hackensack schools on that day and at the High School the proclamation of the first Governor of New Jersey was also given a reading.

Delaney & Furber, of Hackensack, laid a concrete foundation for one of the most pretentious residences in River Edge, which was being built for John Neuscheler, a Brooklyn merchant, at a cost of \$30,000. White stucco covered the outer walls of

the building. Mr. Neuscheler married Jeanne Swan of River Edge in the River Edge Congregational Church on April 8, 1908.

American military engineers worked to fortify Corregidor Island in Manila Bay, mounting 60 powerful guns and mining the bay. Locally, December 1907 set a record for snowfall. Woodrow Wilson, President of Princeton University, joined in the popular complaint that the “schools of to-day do not educate.” All patriotic citizens were asked to raise the Stars-and-Stripes on December 10, 1907, the day on which the United States’ fleet of warships was to sail for the Pacific Ocean. Unusually high tides were the rule during the second week of December, especially on December 10th, after a storm. On that day, local thermometers registered 70°. Winter began on December 22nd with balmy spring weather and lilac bushes budding. Thermometers registered only 16° above zero at 8 a. m. on January 6, 1908. But, despite one or two frigid days, coal dealers soon complained about slack sales due to mild weather. The first genuine snow storm of the season struck January 23rd, blanketing the countryside with eight inches of snow. By the middle of February 1908, iceboats flitted along the river. Fishermen speared many eels, cutting holes through the ice to hook the wrigglers. Muskrat hunters on the meadows were not very successful as the rats stayed in their holes on cold days. Potatoes from Florida sold for \$6 per barrel.

Children gathered pussy willows at the end of February. Carpenters worked on the Van Buskirk homestead at New Milford. Brower Brothers made their first haul of suckers on February 28th, pulling in 4,000 pounds. On Leap Year’s Day, Charles Folkenberg fell from a scaffold while carrying tile for John Neuscheler’s new residence on River Edge Heights, fracturing his right arm and badly bruising his body.

By March 1908, navigation resumed and the railroad bridge-tenders resumed their accustomed duty. Soon, Easter lilies bloomed and anglers reported perch running up the river. Robins were seen on Hackensack Heights, flitting among the old apple trees, hunting for nesting places, while flocks of blackbirds flew overhead daily. Massive iron girders were in transit from the Passaic rolling mill for the Court Street Bridge. Eggs were quite plentiful and sold for 28¢ per dozen. With the return of fair weather, Albert Hughes, of Teaneck, floated his big steam launch, which had been beached at River Edge over the winter. Joseph Russell, an extensive breeder of pigeons, having nearly 1,000 birds, was making large shipments to city markets.

A 4,200-pound gun arrived from the Watervleit Arsenal and was placed on the south side of the Green, opposite the Court House, on May 18, 1908. It was unveiled in Hackensack on Memorial Day and dedicated to the veterans of the Civil and Spanish-American Wars. The old boiler house of the Hackensack Water

Company, located on the south side of New Milford Avenue, was converted into a storehouse and the tall brick chimney removed. Herbert J. Riley, who became a resident of River Edge a year ago, fitted up a building in the rear of his residence on Bridge Street (River Edge Avenue) as a studio for the new process lantern slides of the Riley Optical Instrument Company.

On May 4, 1908, the Brookchester Land Company began developing the John H. and Isaac Zabriskie farms, recently purchased on the east side of the river at River Edge. The company laid sidewalks and made other improvements, before offering building lots for sale. A. Spence, of the Bronx, a salesman for the Brookchester Land Company, occupied the house vacated by Jacob B. Christie, who moved to Hackensack the week before. John H. Zabriskie, who sold his farm and leased a residence on Park Street, Hackensack, changed his mind and decided not to leave the old homestead where he had lived 62 years — he instead repurchased the old home and a plot of ground. Mrs. Zabriskie was in poor health and adverse to moving.

Riverside Camp acquired a rival, located about 300 feet to the south, where Charles Salzmann fitted up a resort for boating parties on the riverbank in May 1908. Crimson ramblers and daisies bloomed in the last days of May. A haymaker harvested the grounds of the River Edge Depot and at the same time enhanced its appearance. There were twenty rainy days in May 1908, making it the wettest May yet on record.

By Kevin Wright