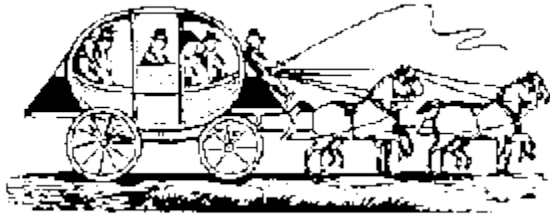




Bergen County, Where America Begins

New Bridge Inn, Stopping by the Wayside by Kevin Wright

The roads ran from bad to worse. Their repair fell to the overseers of the highways, who were elected each March "to provide labourers, animals, implements and materials for the work, and to erect such bridges as can be built by common labourers..." Farmers generally "worked off" their road tax by providing labor and equipment for highway maintenance within their road district. At their personal convenience, they rather haphazardly fulfilled their obligation by ploughing roadside ditches and throwing dirt to the center of the roadbed, where it was



eventually compacted by passing vehicles. This operation was repeated yearly, the dirt being washed back to the sides with every recurring spell of soft weather. Having been warned out, anyone who neglected to perform his quota of work

was fined \$1.00 a day for their own absence, \$1.50 for a horse and cart, and \$2.00 for a wagon or cart with a team of horses or oxen.

Consequently, the 'mud road' was handed down from generation to generation for centuries, together with the trouble and expense of carting heavy loads over ruts or mire. Under the old system of casual scraping and dumping, local road conditions naturally varied with the terrain and the weather. Spring thaw and rains softened highways while freshets swamped fords and swept away bridge timbers. Dry summer winds made wagon paths hard and dusty, rattling bones and choking man and beast. Hopefully, cold weather returned in time to freeze the mud for the autumnal trip to market. Better yet, snow and ice occasioned the use of sleigh and sled, easing the carting of cordwood. At this turn of the season, blacksmiths worked overtime, sharpening horse shoes enough to keep business moving on icy roads.

Sometimes we forget the obvious: in past times, overland journeys were made in "stages." The degree of difficulty, the limits of endurance and the need for refreshment determined the interval between stopping places. Consequently, inns beckoned to harried travelers from busy crossroads, bridges, fords, ferry landings and canal locks, near churches and courthouses, and from the foot of steep mountain passages - in short, wherever the demands of the traveling public sustained a profitable trade in food and lodgings. Some arose simply as halfway houses along extended stretches of the beaten path. Often the inn operated in proximity to a store, blacksmithy and wheelwright shop, forming a crossroads full-service center.

Given the primitive condition of the country, wayfarers could expect shelter and sustenance from any abode where necessity compelled them. Regular stages or ordinaries were seldom more commodious or better outfitted than the average household. Before 1835, dwellings conveniently situated for travelers' respite were commonly known as "public houses."



The Court of General Quarter Sessions allowed only "a person of Good Repute for Honesty and temperance" to keep a Tavern or public house. In old colonial days, applicants for the license had to be "Provided with two Good Spare feather beds More than is Neceary for ye families use"

and "well accomedated with house Room, stabling and Pature (for ue of Drovers)." A Public House Keeper and several neighbors posted a recognizance bond of £20, attesting that he "shall not game himself nor suffer any peron to game in his house for money or the Vallue of Money but Shall during the said time in all things Respecting himself as a public house keeper ue and maintain good order & Rules & find & provide good & sufficient Entertainment for man & proviions for hores" Old diaries, journals and newspaper accounts commonly refer to an innholder as "my landlord" or "mine host." Sometimes a widow and her children ran an inn.

In busy times and places, guests slept up to five to a bed, removing only their boots and laying crosswise. According to a table of rates from 1846, lodging alone, per night, cost 12¢, while lodging two or more in one bed, cost 8¢. Teamsters and drovers slept on the kitchen floor so that they would not spread fleas and other crawling vermin to the better class of guests.

A driver routinely drove his stage wagon over one leg of an established route. As with a sailing vessel, several investors formed a partnership in the purchase and operation of a stage line. With a vested interest in its success, a tavern keeper might financially underwrite such an enterprise, often joining in business with his

kin or in-laws. In the fullness of time, a seasoned stage driver might retire to the ownership or management of a popular stand.

It was not merely the frequency of passengers but the contract to carry mail that made a particular route profitable. Over little traveled roads, the mail franchise alone justified operation of a stage line. Addressees collected their mail at the neighborhood inn, whose proprietor was usually the post master, or at least accommodated the post office within his establishment. Consequently, many a rural hamlet was named for its post master or the emblem on his tavern sign. In the Federal era, postmasterships were tokens of partisan favor. On the local level, a change in the National Administration could result in the appointment of a new post master and consequently a change in the name of the village.

Large gatherings of humanity were exceptional events in most rural districts. Political caucuses, revival meetings and holiday celebrations were open-air affairs, convened at a central location, amidst a shady grove with a potable supply of water. Churches and county court houses were the only buildings large enough for public assemblies. The local hotel provided a gathering-place for elections, exhibitions, dances, public meetings and dinners. Here people gathered to celebrate political and military victories, to settle their grievances in municipal court, or to bid at public vendues and sheriff sales. The itinerant State tax assessor and local township collector appeared at regular intervals to receive declarations of ratables or to collect revenue. Each autumn, drovers and backcountry farmers crowded inns, resting en route to city entrepôts.

Standing at strategic nodes in the primitive network of highways, taverns were relay-stations for the dissemination of information. The front stoop was the rumor mill where newspapers and correspondence passed hands and where travelers told tales. With each debarkation of stage passengers or mail delivery, the congenial hosteler soaked up news and gossip, transmitting worthy tidbits to his neighbors. In times and places of low literacy, he perhaps even read letters and newspapers to his unschooled audience. There is little evidence, however, to suggest that his central role in the community easily translated into either great wealth or political power.

Railroads speeded the movement of people and goods, creating new destinations while bypassing many a crossroads hamlet. In their wake, country inns languished into obscurity and obsolescence.

The Old Stone Tavern at New Bridge

The history of the earliest hostelry at New Bridge is obscure, but it is quite certain that an Old Stone Tavern stood on or about the present site of the General Store at 79 Old New Bridge Road, near the east abutment of the bridge. Lawrence Pieterse Van Buskirk resided near the river, south of French Creek, before 1738 - perhaps at this location. As early as 1717, there was reason to open a public road from the present intersection of River and New Bridge Roads, leading west to the river. The Return for widening River Road from Winkelmanns (in Bogota) to Old Bridge, dated November 23, 1717, includes mention of this spur leading west to the Hackensack River:

"Then there is Likewise by the Line of Peter van Boskerk, his Line upon the Land of John Demarest, a Road altered and Laid out by the Line of Peter van Boskerk to the north side of the said Line from the main [River] Road to Hackensack River, to be four Rods broad, as it is now marked out by John Demarest..."

French Creek formed the boundary between lands of John Demarest (to the north) and Peter Van Buskirk (to the south). West of River Road, New Bridge Road remains on the north side of French Creek until it turns south onto Old New Bridge Road, crossing then to the lower side of the brook. The 1717 survey indicates a route continuing on the north side of the creek, as does present-day New Bridge Road.² This road probably accessed a landing, canoe ferry, or ford.

The first inn was possibly opened on Lawrence P. Van Buskirk's lands (if not in his house) when a new bridge was opened at the narrows of the Hackensack River in 1745. On April 13, 1745, a four-rod road was surveyed at the request of Lawrence L. Van Buskirk:

"Beginning at the Road of New Hackensack that leads from the bridge east on land of Peter Demarest to the first corner of the run of water [that is, French Creek], thence over the run to a black oak stump on the upland of Lawrence Van Buskirk as near the brook as possible and so as said land runs to a walnut sapling and so over the run of water to land of Peter Demarest and on said land as near the run [of water] as possible to the Boiling Spring that makes the Division line of the aforesaid Demarest and Van Buskirk and on said line of land as far as said Division Line runs and a straight line on the land of David Demarest, Jr. to his bridge and from thence East to Road of Tenack [Teaneck Road/ Washington Avenue] which Road we lay out four rods wide."

This Road Return places the east abutment of the bridge on Peter Demarest's land, north of the outlet of French Creek. Perhaps the bridge superseded a canoe or boat ferry, running from Peter Demarest's dock across to the west bank. The location of the eastern abutment (and hence the orientation of the bridge) changed in 1753, probably to reduce the length of the span and its exposure to damage by ice floes

and freshets. On August 2, 1753, Peter Demarest, Jr., asked the highway surveyors to lay out a two-rod road (probably following the present route of Old New Bridge Road) "from Peter Demaris to New Bridge so called, now that the said bridge being removed, we lay the way out from said road with a southerly course to a post being four panell fence from the dock, easterly from said dock, thence from said line westerly lay out four rods wide."

Michael Cornelisse opened the Paulus Hook Ferry in July 1764, making the overland route via New Bridge of considerable use to travelers to and from Manhattan. At this time, New Bridge was the nearest span over the Hackensack River to Newark Bay. A "New road or highway which leads from New Bridge Easterly to Teaneck" (that is to say, present-day New Bridge Road, allowing for some adjustments and re-alignments over time) was laid out on the line dividing the farms of Peter Demarest (deceased) and Lawrence P. Van Buskirk (deceased) in 1767. On June 9, 1767, Peter P. Demarest, Jr., applied to the Court of the General Quarter Session of the Peace (his neighbor, Justice Lawrence L. Van Buskirk, presiding) and was granted a license to keep Tavern for the term of one year. He also purchased six acres on the south side of New Bridge Road, bounded south and west by lands of Lawrence P. Van Buskirk, from Lawrence L. Van Buskirk for £28. Exactly where he kept tavern is uncertain.

In May 1767, the farm of the late Lawrence P. Van Buskirk was divided among his children: Jacobus, Abraham, Andrew and Elizabeth Vroomen, wife of Isaac Vroomen. In September 1768, Lawrence's son, Andrew Van Buskirk, began driving a stage wagon between Hackensack and Paulus Hook, via New Bridge, twice weekly in summer and once weekly in winter. In an advertisement published in February 1771, Andrew offered to sell a "Convenient stone dwelling house" having "three good rooms on a floor, with two small back rooms," situated on one acre of ground at the New Bridge. The premises offered "a very convenient situation for a shop or tavern-keeper, as there has been a tavern kept for many years..." This was the Old Stone Tavern (now the site of 79 Old New Bridge Road). Shortly after his brother, Captain Jacobus Van Buskirk, a New Bridge merchant, died in November 1771, Andrew removed to Hackensack and discontinued his stage route. In May 1772, Peter De Marest, of New Bridge, advertised his intention "to drive a covered waggon from that Place to Powles-Hook, twice every Week." His stage wagon was "new and well fitted, with Curtains and the Horses in excellent Heart." By April 1773, however, Andrew Van Buskirk restored service twice weekly between Hackensack and Paulus Hook (via the New Bridge), complaining that the public had been ill-served by competitors who "like fair weather birds, have kept at home, and given no attendance during the last winter." In May 1775, Andrew Van Buskirk advertised that "the flying machine' he had formerly driven between Hackensack and Powles-Hook would

henceforth "for the sake of a better and shorter road," drive between Hackensack and the Hoboken Ferry. In May 1775, Verdine Ellsworth began driving the "New Caravan from Powles-Hook to the New Bridge above Hackensack."

In or about 1775, Cornelius Hoogland became proprietor of the Old Stone Tavern at New Bridge and remained so during the difficult years of the Revolution when opposing armies frequented the neighborhood. On November 20, 1776, when a surprise British invasion prompted the hasty abandonment of Fort Lee, American soldiers used the stone dwellings on either side of the New Bridge as forts to defend the crossing. Cornelius Hoogland later submitted a claim for compensation for the loss of twelve gills of rum destroyed or taken by the enemy. The Tax Ratables of Hackensack Township list Cornelius Hoogland as owner of the tavern at New Bridge from February 1779 through 1797, after which there is a gap in the record until July-August 1802, when his name does not appear. There is record of several trials held at Hoogland's between 1786 and 1789. A tavern account from New Bridge, running from June 24 to December 11, 1798, mentions all sorts of "Licker," including: beer, bitters, brandy, cider, gin or rum grog, milk punch, wine, and wine sling. It was also possible to hire a Riding Chair for taxi service.

In April 1823, Isaac and Jane (Demarest) Vreeland sold "two certain messuages, tenements, houses and lots of land" at New Bridge to Abraham De Voe, Jr., a house carpenter, for \$1,300. Six months later, De Voe sold the premises back to Isaac Vreeland for the same amount. On April 29, 1824, Isaac P. Vreeland composed the following advertisement:

Vendue

To be sold at Public Vendue on Saturday the 22nd day of May between the hours of 12 and five o'clock at the House of the Subscribers at the New Bridge: the two following Houses and lots of Ground with Improvements thereon, viz., the new two Story frame house wherein the Subscriber now resides, it is an Excellent Stand for a Tavern or Store. Also the old Stone house formerly occupied as a Tavern adjoining the above; it will answer very well for a Merchant or any other Kind of Business. Conditions of Sale made Known and attendance Given by the Subscriber on the Day of Sale.

Isaac P. Freeland

New Bridge April 29th, 1824

"The new two Story frame house" of Isaac Vreeland, erected in 1823 by house-carpenter Abraham De Voe, became the hotel familiar to succeeding generations. It stood east of the original Stone Tavern, at a sharp bend in the road. In May 1824, Albert G. Doremus purchased the old and new tavern houses, but retained

ownership for only a year before selling the property back to Abraham De Voe, Jr. In November 1838, Abraham De Voe and his wife Frances, residing in New Barbadoes Township, sold the three-quarter-acre Old Stone Tavern Lot to John Demarest, of New York City, for \$475.

And what became of the Old Stone Tavern at New Bridge? In late September 1895, Richard Earle, while watching workers tear down the old Henry Hall House in Hackensack, said that seventy-two years earlier (that is, about 1823) he had helped put up that same building for Paul Paulison. According to Mr. Earle's recollection, Paul Paulison had purchased an old stone building at New Bridge and transported the stone in a scow to Hackensack where it was re-used for the foundation. By Earle's account, "the stone was taken up the [Doctor's] creek, which in those days was something else than an open sewer, and landed on the ground [near the Bergen County Court House] ready for the masons."

In October 1841, Abraham and Frances De Voe sold the New Bridge Hotel on a half-acre of ground to Henry Pettengill of New York City for \$1,000. He remained five years, selling to Abraham T. Banta of Franklin Township in December 1846 for \$815. John Ackerman bought the premises in March 1854 and remained throughout the Civil War. These were perhaps the "glory days," before railroads superseded horseflesh. John Ackerman owned an omnibus with a door in the rear, which he drove between Fort Lee and New Bridge. Supposedly, "everybody liked to ride with Mr. Ackerman as he had fast horses."

Ackerman's Hotel was the neighborhood social center where public and private anniversaries were commemorated. The social calendar included a Washington's Ball to honor the first President's Birthday, election-night celebrations, and holiday entertainment of all sorts. For example, Opposition voters from Bergen County - the nucleus of what would become the Republican party - attended a Bergen County Festival at the New Bridge hotel on December 1, 1859, to honor the election of Charles S. Olden as Governor. In February 1862, an advertisement for a dress ball and supper to be held at Ackerman's Hotel, celebrated the genial host of this establishment as "the prince of good caterers, and a landlord not to be neglected by the kind remembrance of his guests." On Wednesday evening, March 19, 1862, the pupils of Abraham Waltermire's School at New Bridge gave an exhibition at John Ackerman's Hotel, consisting of "Recitations, Dialogues, Declamations, interspersed with Singing." The admission was 10¢.



On April 1, 1865, John and Anna Ackerman sold the hotel to C. G. Frederick Heine for \$3,750. During his tenure, Heine's Hotel remained a center of community life. On

New Year's Eve 1877, a reporter for The Bergen County Democrat noticed that the old folk had danced the night away at Heine's New Bridge Hotel where "they all enjoyed themselves but failed to go home with the girls in the morning." Local boys had "a marble ground" in front of the hotel, where they frequently engaged in their favorite pastime. On Sunday morning, September 17, 1882, people residing on the east side of New Bridge found it impossible to pass Heine's New Bridge Hotel on their return from church, a flood tide having risen rapidly within a few hours.

Carl George Frederick Heine died February 6, 1894, aged 78 years, devising "the Hotel property at the New Bridge where I have resided for many years" to his daughter Anna, wife of John Henry Schreiber. The building then consisted of a kitchen, barroom, sitting room, ballroom, parlor, dining room, nine bedrooms, hall and garrets. For the guests' amusement, there was a bagatelle table in the barroom, a piano in the sitting room, and a pool table in the ball room. In March 1895, Anna O. Schreiber and her mother, Louisa Heine, sold the New Bridge Hotel to Conrad W. Bachmann for \$6,000. By October first, the hotel opened for business under the new owner. He advertised: "The New Bridge Hotel, Formerly Known as Heine's Hotel, Has Been Newly Furnished...And all first-class accommodations can be given by the present owner for fishing, sailing, hunting or pleasure parties. Night accommodations for 20 persons. Good German Cooking guaranteed."

After returning from Hackensack in William Weber's hack on March 22, 1896, C. W. Bachmann died suddenly at 47 years of age. He had but recently recovered from what was described as acute indigestion when he suffered a fatal heart attack. His widow continued the business. On October 29, 1897, The Bergen Democrat referred to the Bachmann Hotel at New Bridge as "one of the best road houses in the county." Mrs. Bachmann was forced to retire after suffering throat cancer for two years. In September 1899, she sold to Charles J. Kræmer. He relinquished his business in New York and settled at New Bridge while Mrs. Bachmann moved into a cottage near the hotel. Kræmer immediately commenced improvements upon the hotel property, laying a walk along the front of building. In November 1899, Kramer Brothers announced plans for extensive alterations to the old Heine Hotel, including construction of a bowling alley on the property now owned by them.

In October 1900, Charles J. Kramer leased the New Bridge Hotel to Oscar West for five years at a yearly rent of \$300 (he also had the privilege of buying the premises for \$5,800). In October 1901, Anna O. Schreiber and Louisa Heine purchased the premises at Sheriff's Sale for non-payment of the mortgage, amounting to \$4,198 in principal and interest.



During the century-high flood, occurring October 16, 1903, business at Kaufman's New Bridge Hotel was entirely suspended as the barroom and all floors even with it were submerged by rising river waters. The piano was saved by standing it on soap boxes and the spirits were stored on high shelves. In February 1906, Anna Schreiber and Louisa Heine sold the hotel to the William Peter Brewing Company of Union

Hill, Hudson County, New Jersey. In April 1909, Judge Demarest belatedly granted a hotel license to Frederick Stellman, of New Bridge. On January 24, 1911, the William Peter Brewing Company conveyed the hotel to Frederick and Katharina Stellman. An airship was built on Stellman's hotel grounds at North Hackensack in July 1911. In September 1912, the William Peter Brewing Company advertised the sale of its draught beer here. Frederick and Katharina Stellman conveyed the premises to Joseph F. M. Burger and his wife, Barbara Helen, of Lodi Township, on January 26, 1917. Joseph Burger died January 20, 1942. In 1954, Barbara H. Burger, widow, sold the hotel to Stanley Bader and Walter Coolick, Jr., partners trading as the "New Bridge Inn." Ralph J. Dietch replaced Walter Coolick as a partner in November 1954. On December 11, 1956, Stanley Bader and Ralph Dietch, owners of the New Bridge Inn, sold to WAD, Inc. of the City of Hackensack. Frank W. Adamski, of River Vale, was president of this corporation and Joyce Adamski, his wife, was secretary.



On Saturday, May 30, 1964, a fire originating in the barroom at about 2:45 am spread quickly throughout the building, which lacked any fire stops. A milkman making deliveries discovered the blaze and alerted Special Patrolman Frank Fyfe, who lived across the street. At times, the flames reached as high as 75 feet and could be seen for miles around. It was described as

one of the worst fires in the history of New Milford Borough, causing an estimated \$100,000 in damage. Christian Bensen, aged 76 years, a boarder at the inn, died of asphyxiation in the bathroom adjoining his second-floor room. He was a retired draftsman who worked as handyman on the premises. John Barry, the only other occupant of the sixteen-room building, escaped down a ladder placed under his window by Special Patrolman Fyfe and Patrolman James Entwistle. Fire Chief Verge T. Brower supervised the five-hour, 120-man effort, comprised of firemen

from Oradell, River Edge and New Milford; eight were injured. The frame of the old building was so badly damaged that owner Frank Adamski said "its remains would have to be torn down." He also said "it would not be rebuilt in its Dutch Colonial Style because it would cost about \$500,000 to do so." Frank Adamski, president of WAD, Inc. owned the rebuilt "New Bridge Inn" until 1970.