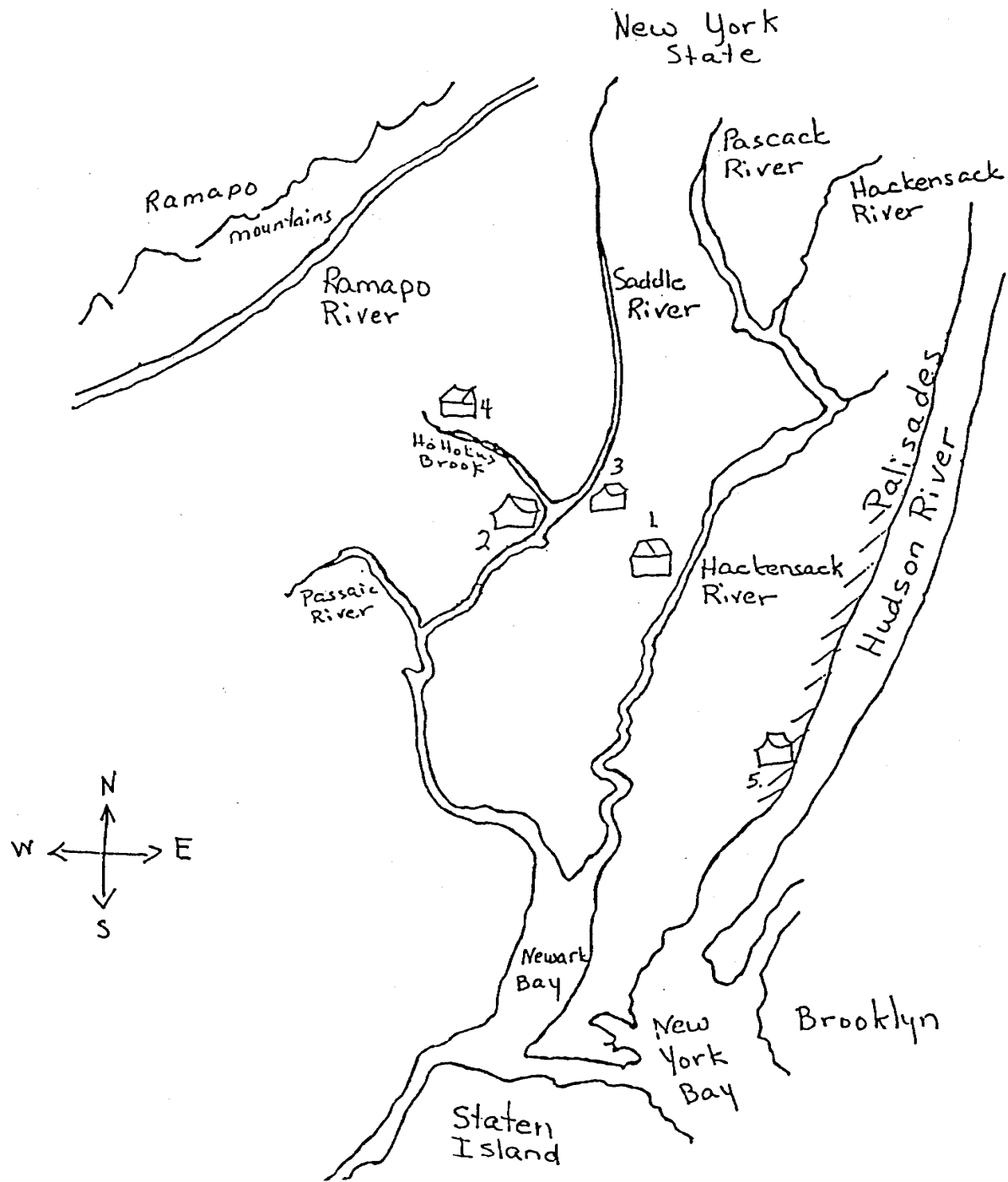


# THE STEUBEN HOUSE

## AT NEW BRIDGE LANDING



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1. Steuben House
2. Zabriskie mill
3. Zabriskie House
4. Hermitage
5. Fort Lee

## THE STEUBEN HOUSE AT NEW BRIDGE LANDING

The Steuben House is a landmark house built before the Revolutionary War. It is located in River Edge, New Jersey and is a wonderful example of the distinctive sandstone architecture prevalent in Bergen County 200 years ago. Its handsome size indicates the wealth of the millers and river merchants that have lived there.

Its location on the Hackensack River is what made it become historically significant. First, because the river is a tidal river, it was a perfect spot for a grist mill. The rising and ebbing tides of the river actually operated the water wheel. Second, the house was built at the narrowest point on the Hackensack River which made it an ideal place for a bridge. When the bridge was built in 1744, it not only brought more business to the area as it was the nearest river crossing to Newark Bay, but later it became a strategic path for both the American and British troops during the Revolutionary War.

The full name of the house is the Ackerman-Zabriskie-Steuben House. Johannes Ackerman built the house in 1713 near his father's gristmill. Jan Zabriskie acquired the property in 1745 and in 1752 doubled the size of the house to 12 rooms with 7 fireplaces. The house was considered a mansion in its time. It was constructed of the native sandstone.

In the 1700's, the well-cultivated valleys of the Raritan and Hackensack Rivers were called the "Garden of North America." Jersey Dutch farmers planted and harvested wheat, oats and rye which needed to be ground into flour for breads. Farmers had to travel to grist mills with their grains. This was not easy because of the few and muddy roads which made maneuvering wagons and carts difficult and very time consuming. Boat travel was faster, easier and more reliable. Therefore, the Steuben House's location at New Bridge Landing with its mill, made it a natural place for a very successful trading post or store. Many people travelled up the river by boat or across the bridge to reach the mill where their grains were ground into flour and the sacks could be loaded onto boats and shipped down river to New York City. Other materials such as sugar, salt and cloth were shipped back and sold or traded at the store. The river was, indeed a main highway of its time, and New Bridge Landing a commercial center.

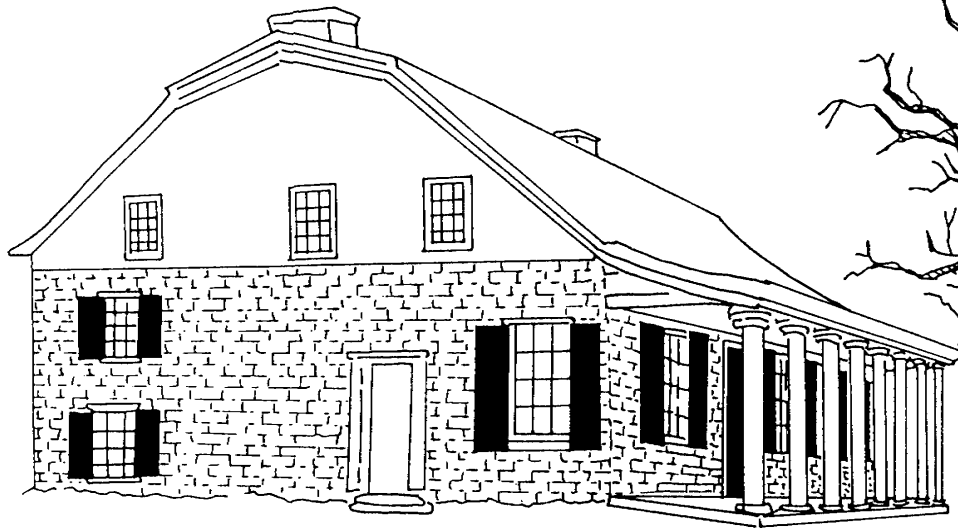
During the American Revolution, New Bridge and the Steuben House continued to play a very important role. New York City was the main headquarters of the British Army, consequently, Bergen County because it was so close, became the scene of numerous battles. The army that controlled New Bridge controlled the passage between New York and Northern New Jersey. Food supplies for both armies came from New Jersey farmers and New Bridge was the entryway to the New Jersey countryside which both armies wished to control. In November, 1776, 6000 British troops crossed the Hudson River to attack Fort Lee. Washington led the retreating Continental Army over the New Bridge to safety. The bridge has been referred to as "The Bridge that saved a Nation." Baron von Steuben also helped our army win the war. He was a very well-respected German soldier who came to America to help train the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. He turned the farmers into effective soldiers. In fact, his manual was not only the first book of rules and regulations for the U.S. Army, but it continued to be used until 1941. At the end of the Revolutionary War, the house was given to Baron von Steuben by the State of New Jersey to thank him for his contribution to our independence. This is how this historic home came to be called the Steuben House.

New Jersey is very fortunate to have the Steuben House so finely preserved and even today, at low tide, traces of the dock and grist mill foundation are still visible. Just as in today's homes there are things that make our lives easier, in the Steuben House are objects that the people of Bergen County made and used for their needs. Where there are closets in today's homes, the Steuben House has 2 Kases or cupboards. Stoves are now used instead of fireplaces, boots have replaced wooden shoes and electric lights have replaced candles.

The Steuben House, located at 1209 Main Street in River Edge, New Jersey is open Wednesday through Saturday from 10:00 A.M. until 12:00 noon and 1:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. The house is open on Sunday from 2:00 P.M. until 5:00 P.M. It is owned and maintained by the New Jersey Department of Parks and Forestry. On display in the house are collections of the Bergen County Historical Society. For further information and group tours call (201) 487-1739.

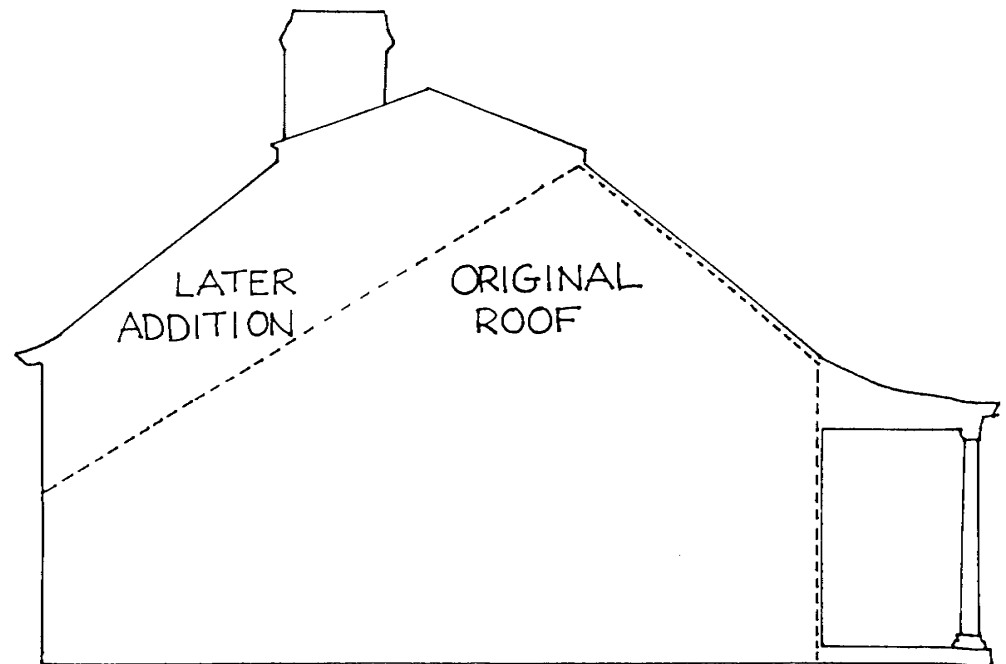


The Ackerman family, like other immigrants, came to America for freedom and economic opportunity. They settled in New Jersey because of the fertile land, access to water power from mills and its proximity to New York, one of the largest trading centers.

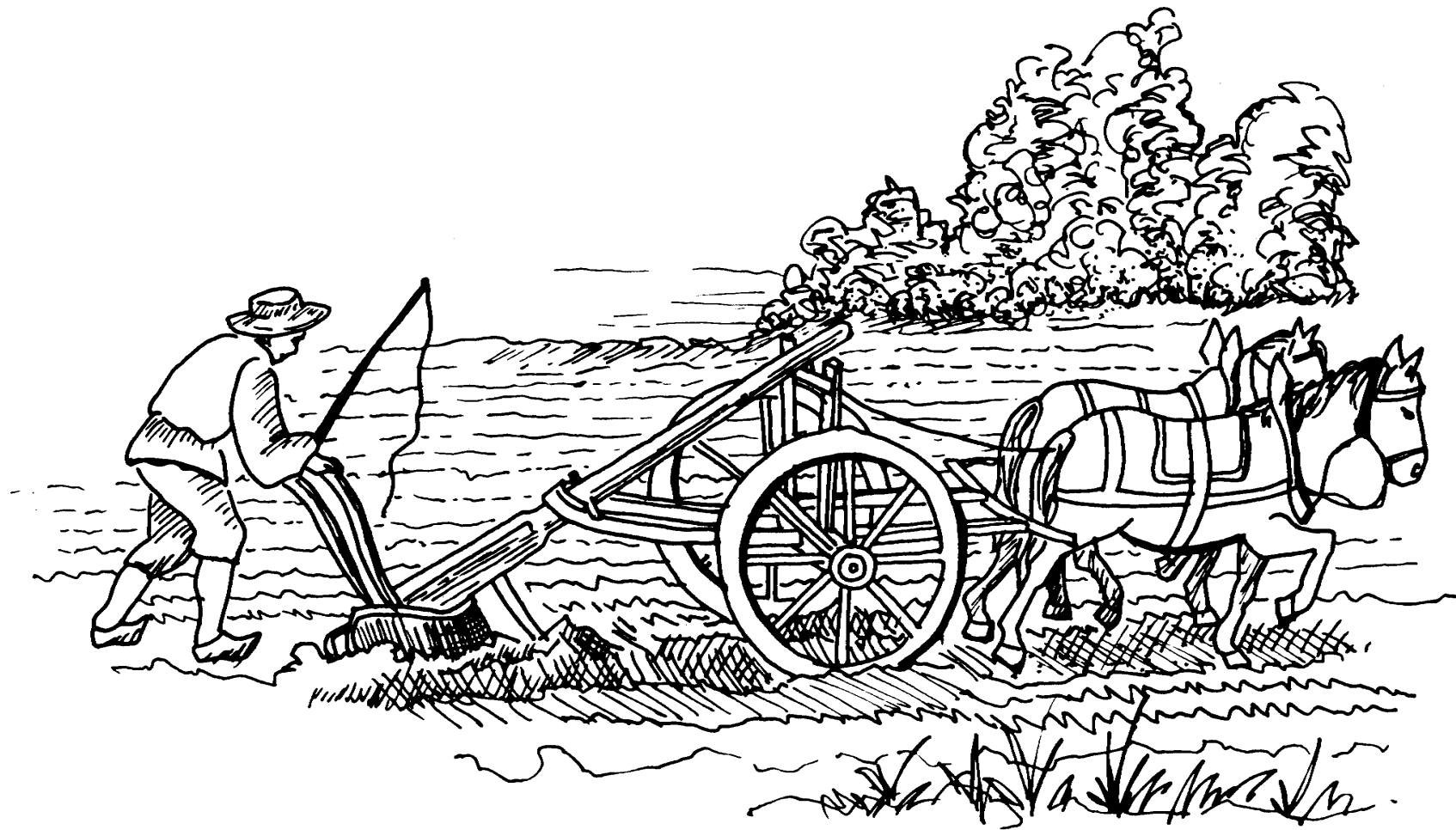


Jan Zabriskie enlarged the Steuben Hou by raising and changing its roof line.

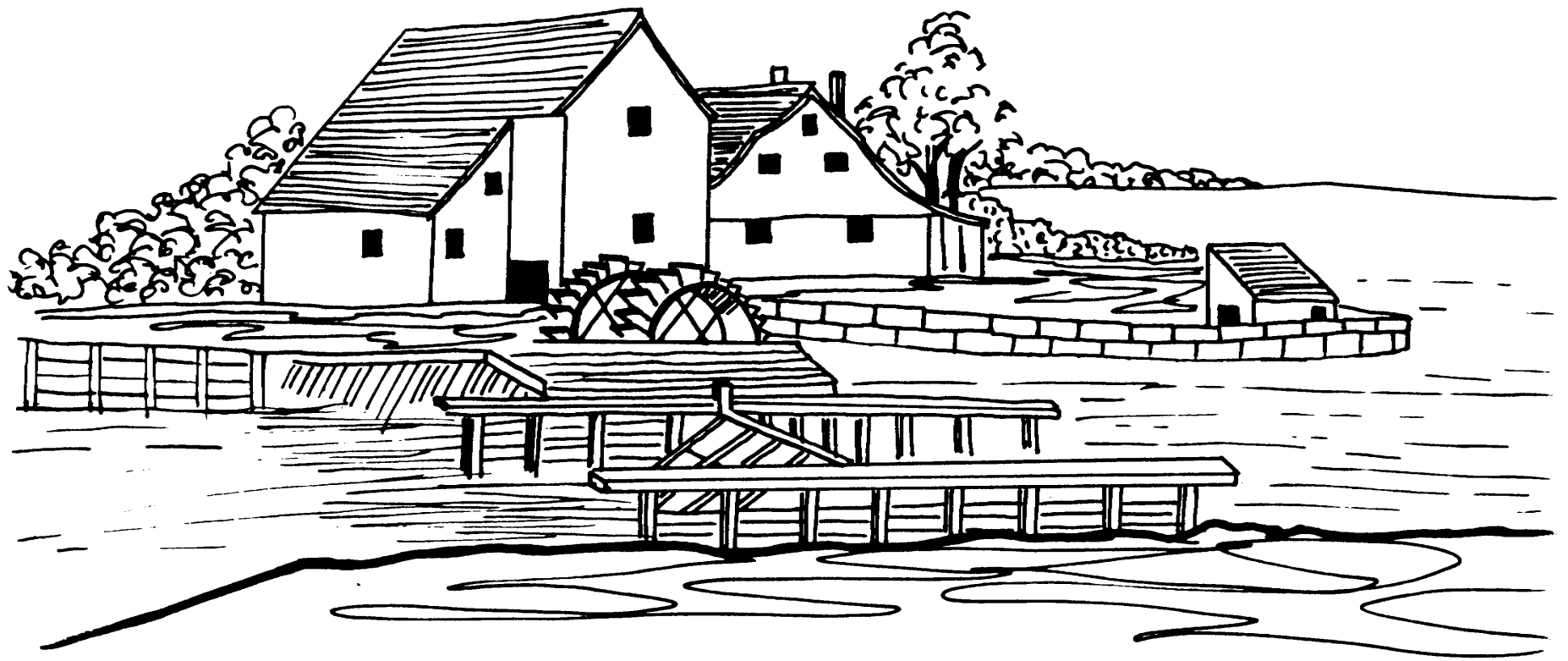
This style roof is a hip or gambrel roof. The addition of curved eaves gives it the distinctive bell-shaped Jersey Dutch profile.





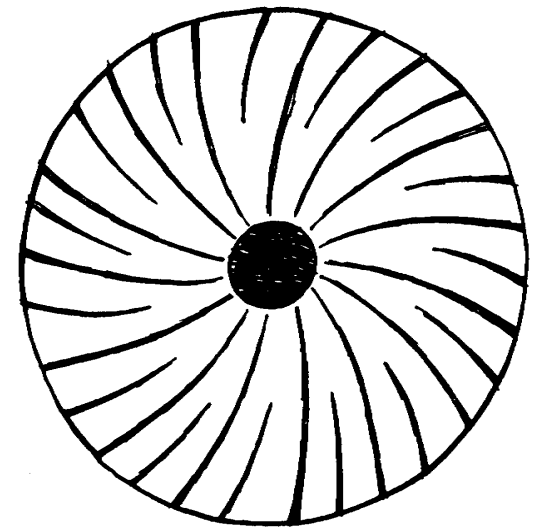
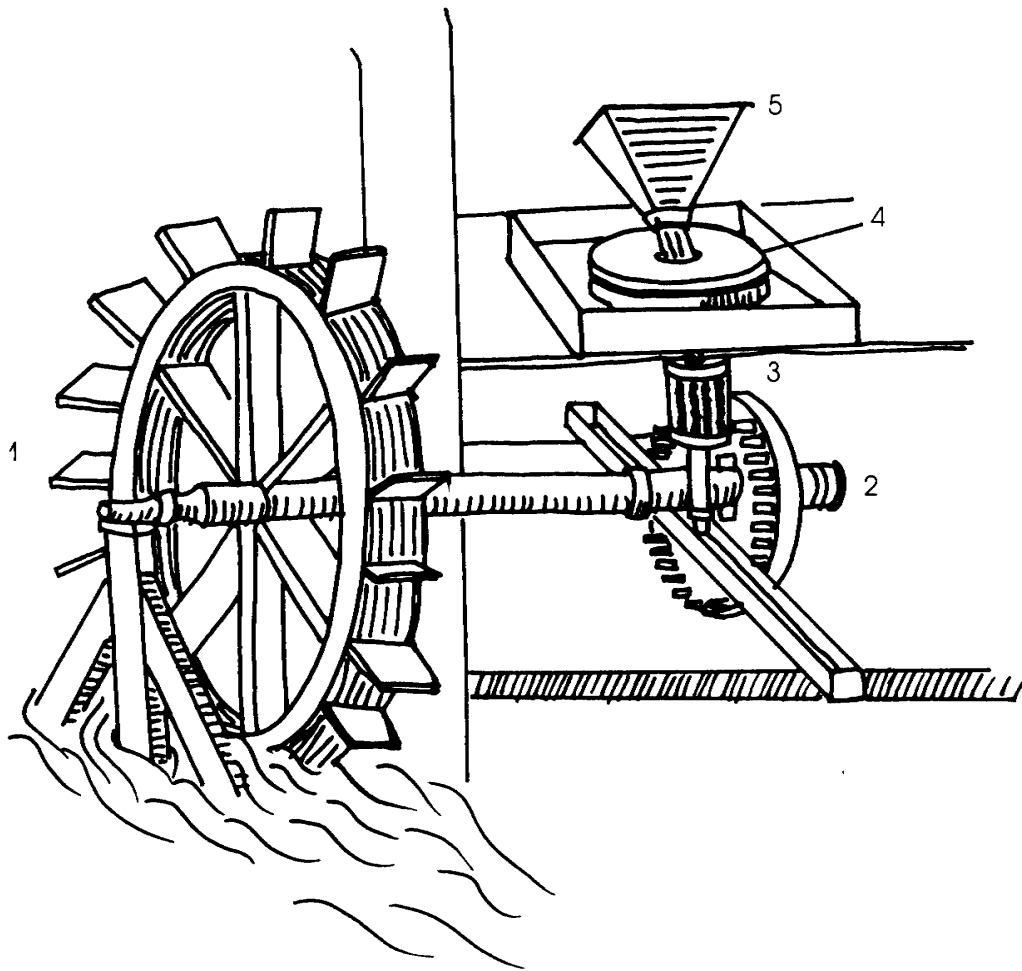


Today New Jersey is known as the "Garden State." The Hackensack River Valley was noted in the 1700's for its abundant production of grains and food products. Farmers traveled to mills with their grain to have it ground into flour for breads. The flour was then ready to be used by the family or shipped to New York City markets for sale.



This grist mill uses the tidal flow of the river to operate. The gates are shut to trap the water at high tide. The water slowly drains out, turning the water wheel and the grindstones inside.



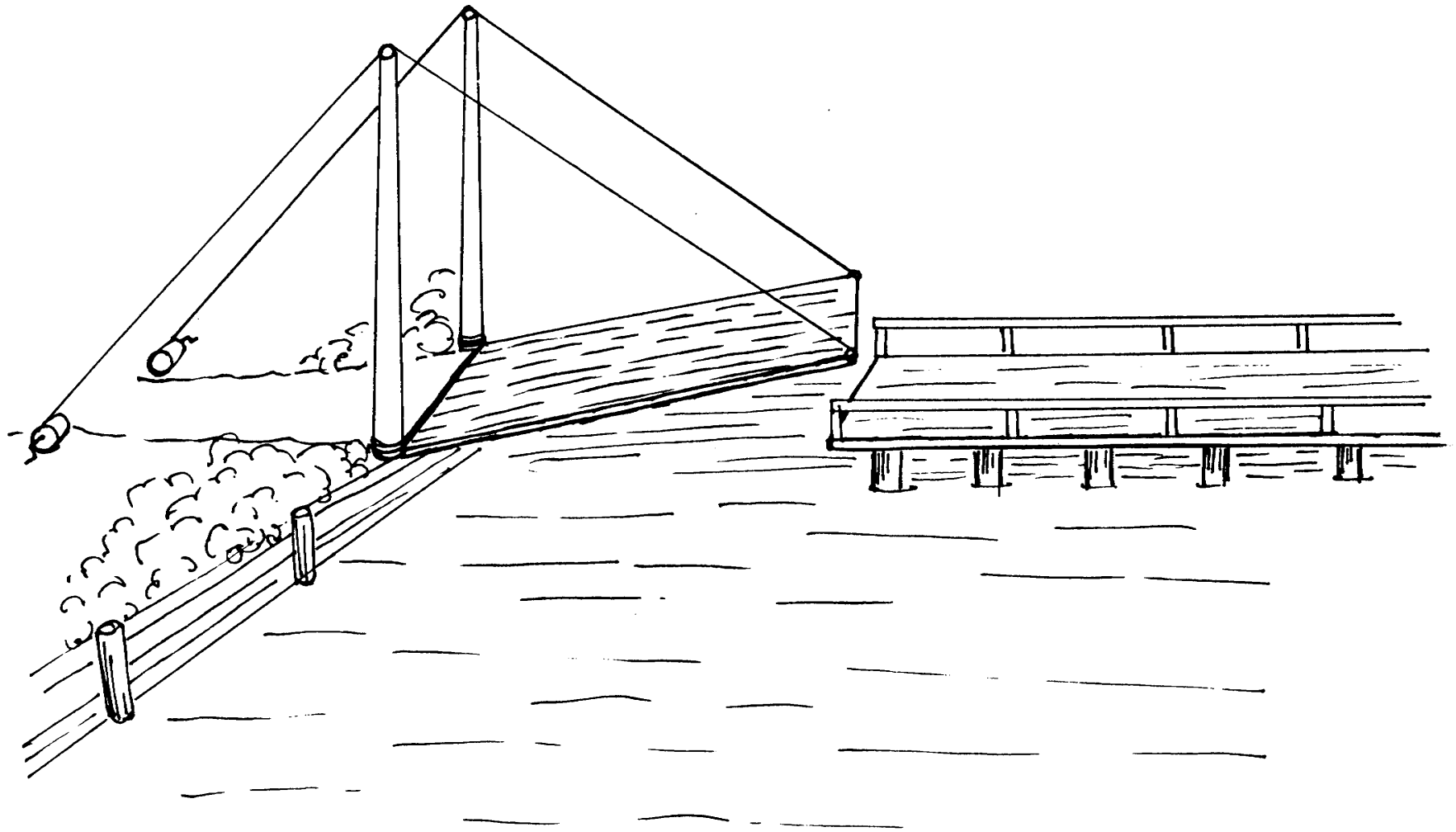


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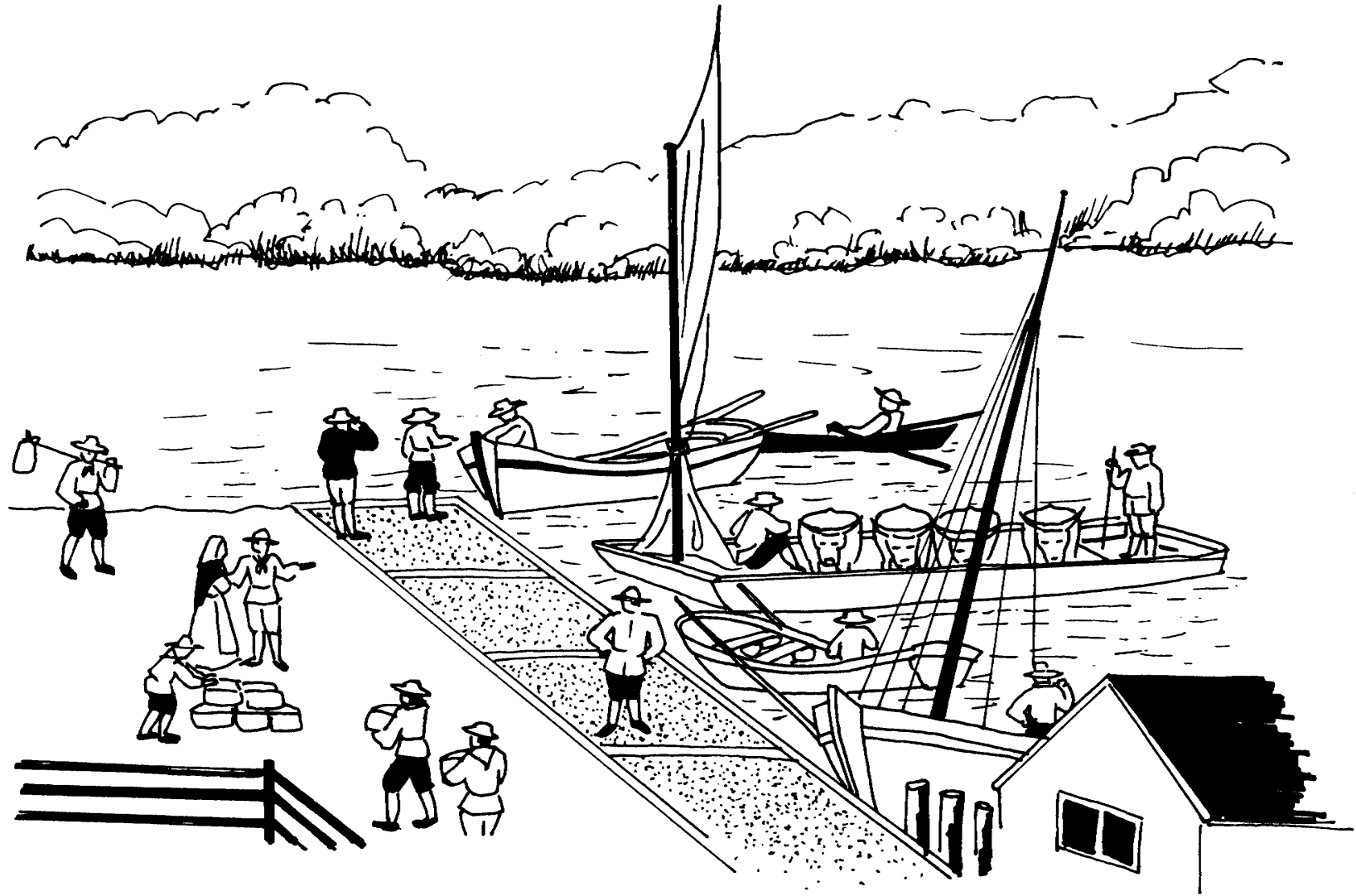
River water turns the paddle wheel (1) which turns the cog gear (2). The teeth of this large gear turns the posts of the small gear (3), activating the big runner stone on top (4). This top millstone can weigh up to one ton and turns 100 times per minute. The grain is fed from the hopper (5) through the hole and is ground between the stones into flour.



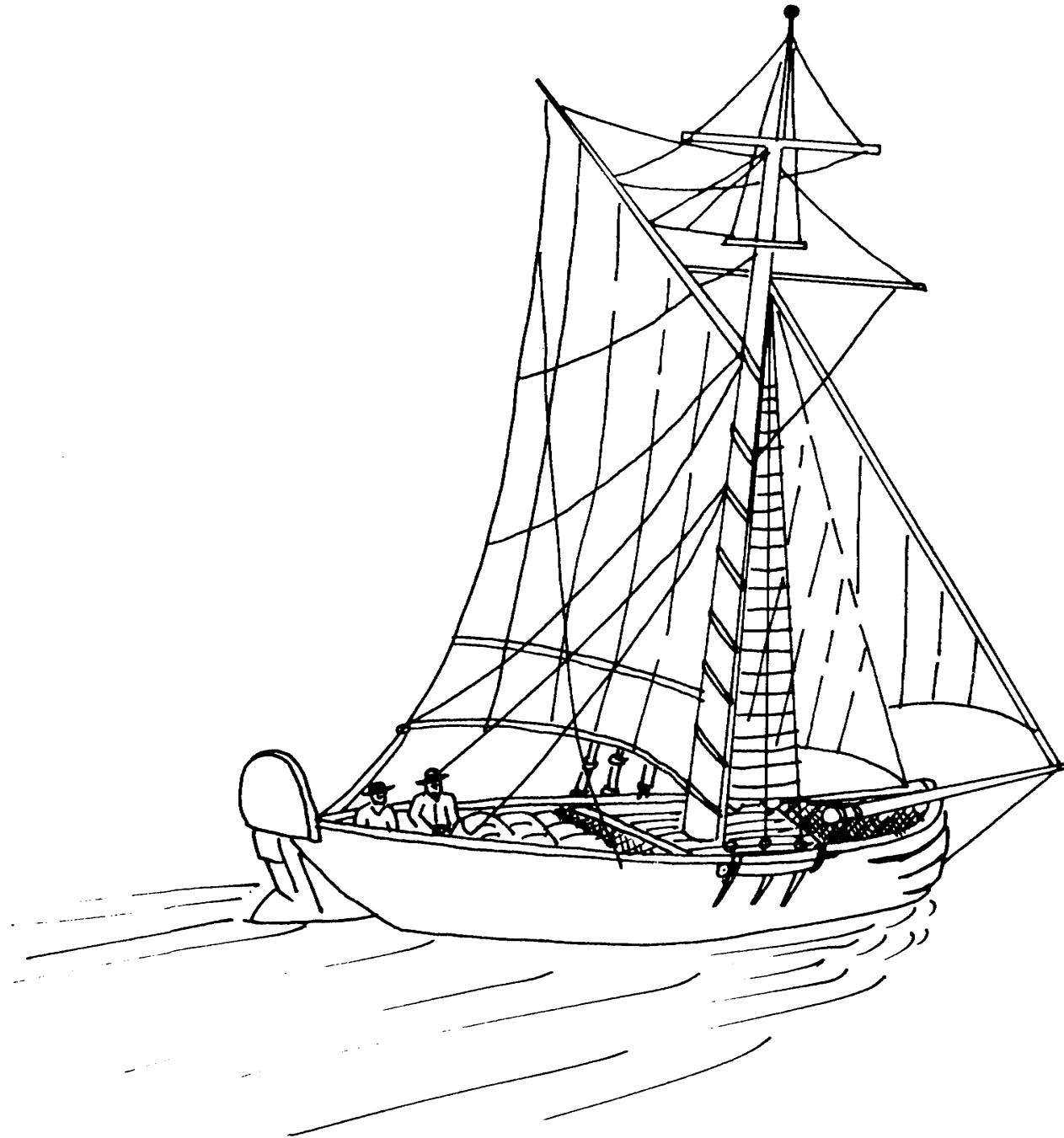
New Jersey had rough and muddy roads making travel and transportation by land very difficult. Travel by boat was easier. Pigs and other live stock were herded to New Bridge Landing to be taken to market.



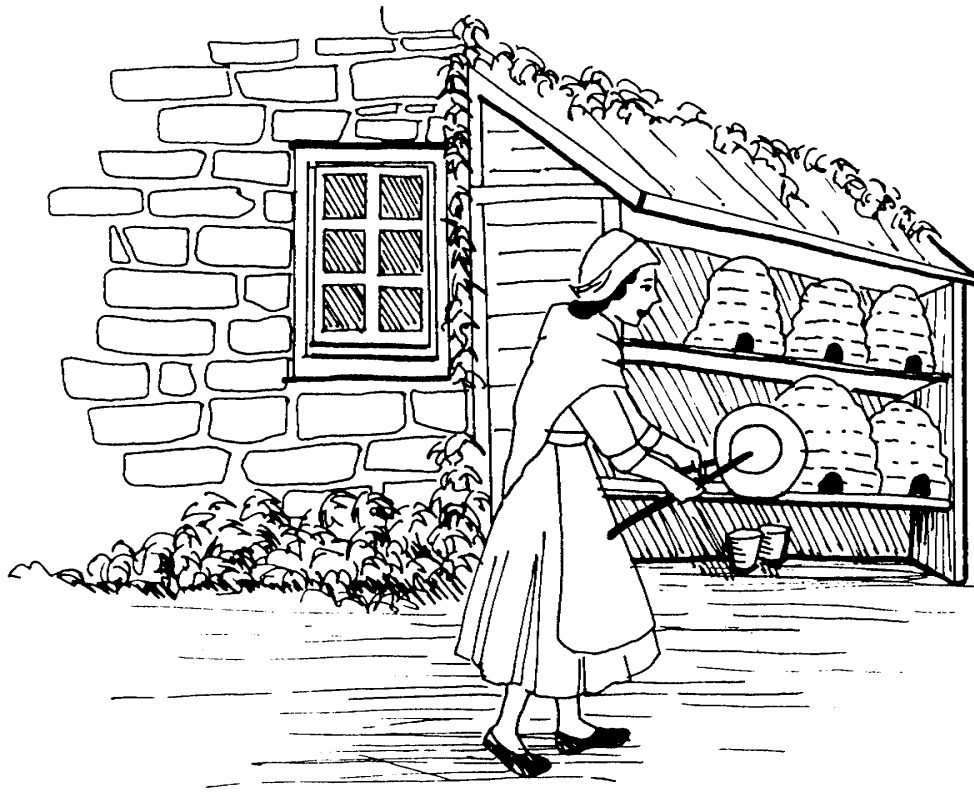
A wooden drawbridge was built at this site in 1744 at the narrowest point on the Hackensack River. This was the nearest river crossing to Newark Bay, making it a vital crossing point. The drawbridge allowed ships to pass underneath.



New Bridge Landing became a major trading area by 1790 because of the bridge and mill. Boats took grain, livestock, produce and other farm products to New York and returned with supplies such as sugar, salt and cloth to be sold locally.

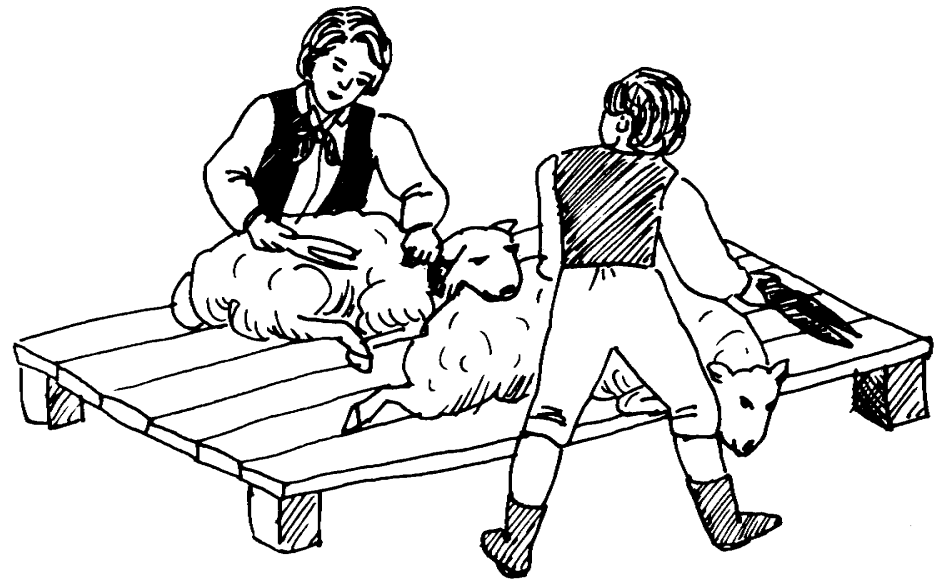


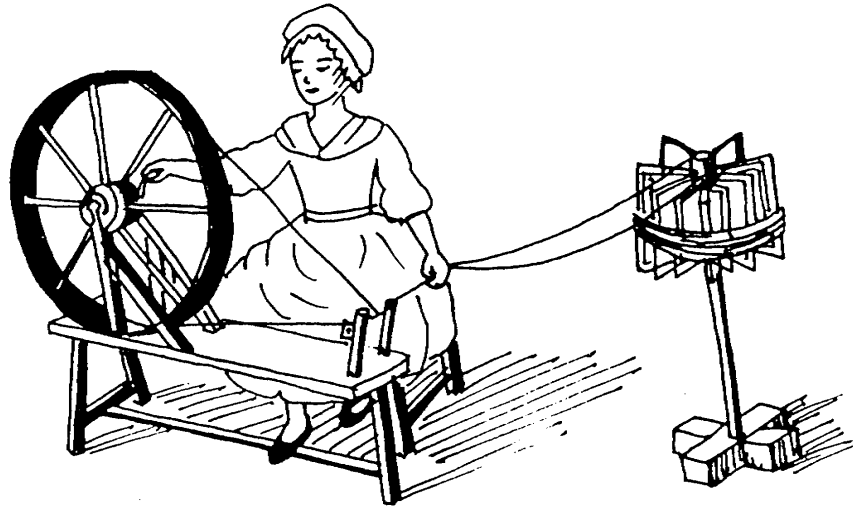
The wharf could accommodate ships large enough to transport iron manufactured at Ringwood and Long Pond in the nearby Ramapo Mountains. At high tide the river is eight feet higher than it is at low tide.



Days were always busy with many chores to be done. Bees were kept for honey and the wax was used for sealing jars, waterproofing shoes and candle making.

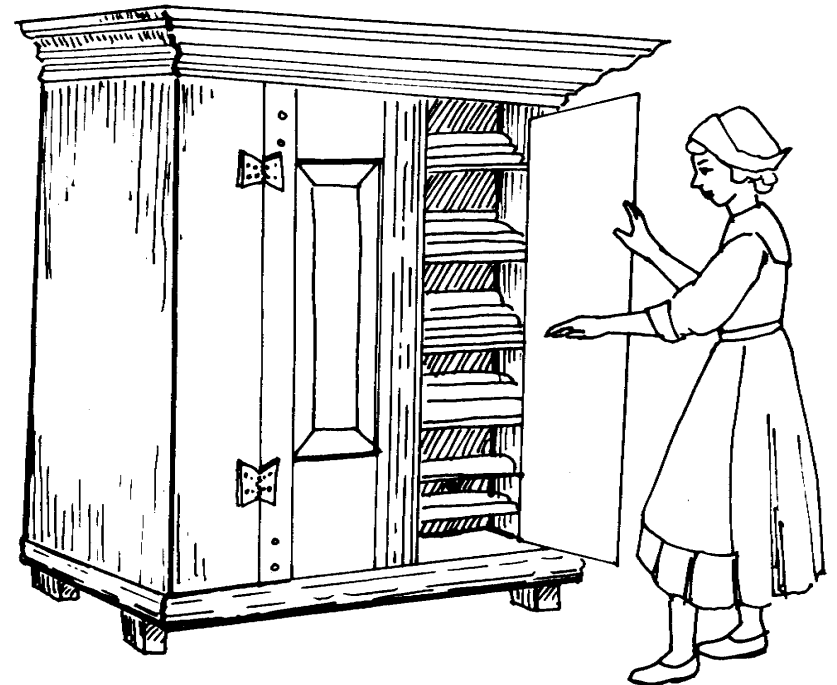
Families raised several kinds of animals that were used for food, clothing and to trade. The sheep were sheared and the wool used for cloth.



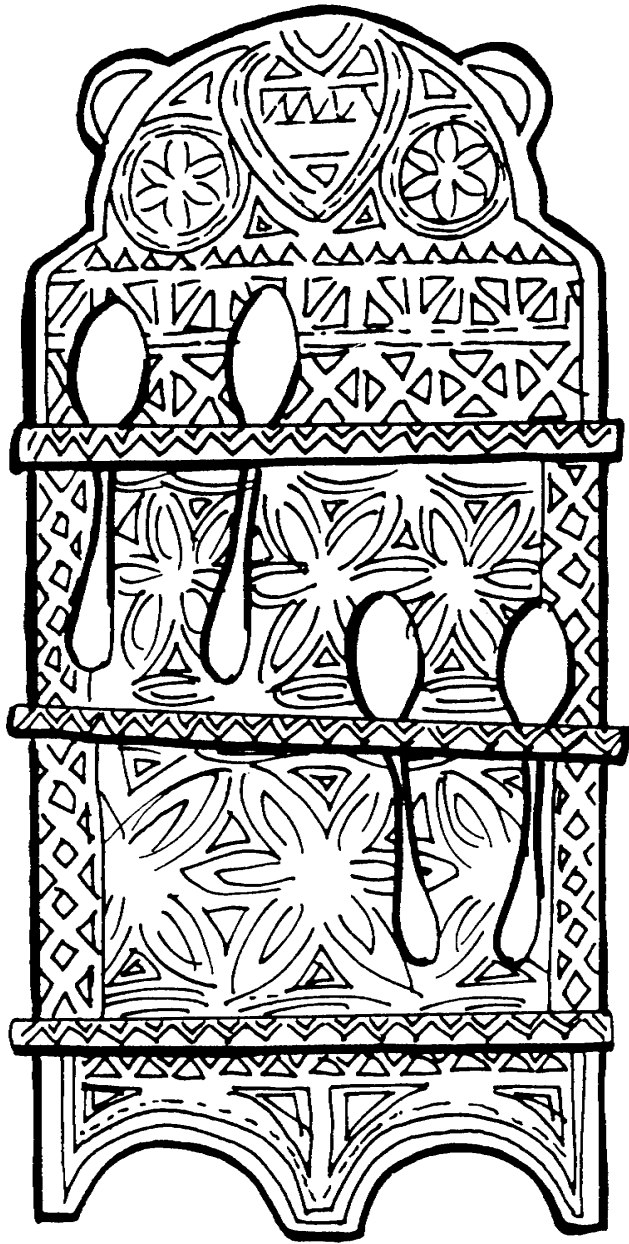


Spinning and weaving were time-consuming processes. The wool and flax were cleaned, combed, separated and then spun into yarn or thread. It was then woven into cloth.

The linens were carefully stored in a "kas." The kas in the Steuben House is made of cherry wood and over 200 years old. They were traditionally found in Dutch homes.







One Bergen Dutch tradition was to carve wooden "valentines" called spoon boards. They were carved by the men to give to their brides-to-be as an engagement gift, as is illustrated by the heart design at the top of this spoon board. As each new baby was baptized, a Christening spoon was added to the rack. There were usually slots for twelve spoons.



New Bridge Landing was an important river crossing during the Revolutionary War. The army that controlled New Bridge controlled passage between New York and Northern New Jersey. Both armies need this control. In November 1776, six thousand British troops crossed the Hudson River to Attack Fort Lee. General Washington led the retreating Continental Army over the New Bridge to safety. It has been referred to as "The Bridge that Saved a Nation." Steuben House was used as a fort, military headquarters, battleground and campground by the armies of both sides because of its strategic location at New Bridge Landing.



Baron von Steuben was a well-respected German soldier who is best remembered for training the Continental Army at Valley Forge. At the end of the war, the State of New Jersey gave the house to him to thank him for his service to our nation.

**THE STEUBEN HOUSE AT NEW BRIDGE LANDING** was written, edited and illustrated by members of the JUNIOR LEAGUE OF BERGEN COUNTY for the Bergen County Historical Society.

Illustrations: original drawings and adaptations by Sheila Oliver.

Acknowledgments: Kevin Wright, curator of Steuben House

Deborah Pollee

Joel Altschulter

Trustees of the Bergen County Historical Society

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