

## CHAPTER 2

### BACKGROUND HISTORY OF LEBANON

THE VILLAGE OF LEBANON stands on land which was part of a larger tract called Tidbury. This 400-acre holding was laid out by the Kent County Court in 1683 for Thomas Williams. Tidbury lay on the south side of Tidbury branch or creek and on the west side of the Dover (now Saint Jones) River, at their confluence. Across the branch lay the tract that eventually became today's Wildcat Manor, home of the Hunn family. On the Wildcat tract, near the mansion house, was an important shipping point called Forest Landing (FIGURE 3), which served the areas now known as Dover, Camden, and North Murderkill Hundred.

#### *Prehistoric Lebanon*

Before European settlement, Native Americans occupied Delaware for ten millenia. During their earlier, more mobile, historical periods, the Indians were hunter-gatherers, following game and fruits in seasonal migration patterns. Projectile points of the Archaic hunters typically are found on high ground overlooking watercourses, as they are in the fields around Lebanon (Custer 1986).

As they gradually became more sedentary during the later part of the Archaic period and during the Woodland period (after c. 3000 BC), they established more permanent settlements and developed elaborate religious systems. The Adena people, who lived in Delaware during the centuries immediately before the birth of Christ, practiced elaborate burial rituals at a site near the project area.

Pottery and other cumbersome personal goods are indicative of a more sedentary life that typified the last phase of prehistoric Delmarva. Woodland-period people settled in semi-permanent villages convenient to several different food sources, where they raised crops. A favored situation for settlements during this period was the well-drained woodlands in the middle of stream drainage, between the tidal marshes to the east and the high wetlands of the interior. From such base camps, hunting, fishing and foraging parties could sortie into a variety of food sources without leaving the crops untended. Such base camps can be expected somewhat upstream from Lebanon. Two known prehistoric sites are located within the project area. On the north bank of Tidbury Branch is 7K-C-22, which was occupied during the Woodland period and at earlier times as well. 7K-C-41, on the south bank of Tidbury Branch, is a high field that has yielded mostly projectile points of the Archaic period.

## *The Colonial Period*

During the colonial period, the lower King's Road ran from the Dover area to the Frederica area skirting the meadows on one side and the unsettled forest on the other. It crossed Tidbury Branch near the present State Street bridge. The old crossing was a planked ford through the marsh and a footbridge for pedestrians. The upper road, through the present site of Camden, followed higher ground. The road westward from the mouth of Tidbury, called the Forest Landing Road connected at Camden with the Choptank Road to Maryland.

This area was an early nexus of Quakerism in Delaware. Even before the establishment of Penn's colony in 1682, the Delaware had begun to attract Quaker settlers. Some of these settlers came directly from England, while others came from the sugar islands of the West Indies, where Quakers had settled in the middle of the seventeenth century. Some came from neighboring colonies along the Atlantic seaboard, where their radical religious and political ideas and their missionary zeal had made them unwelcome. Priscilla Kitchen was one of these refugees, arriving in the middle 1680s after encountering hardship and (perhaps not entirely unsolicited) persecution in New England. She had married Nathaniel Hunn, a local Quaker landowner, and bore him children. After his death, she married another Quaker landowner, George Bowers (Reynolds 1982:16).

To serve the growing Quaker community along the Dover River, a meeting is said to have been briefly established at Tidbury (Scharf 1888:1130). This meeting was subsumed into the Motherkill Monthly Meeting at Magnolia by 1760. The Motherkill meeting was, in turn, predecessor of the present Camden meeting. A descendant of the Quaker settlers states that there is no folklore tradition of the virtually undocumented Tidbury meeting house (William Hunn, personal communication).

Tidbury's meeting house, if one existed, may well have stood on the high ground in the Tidbury tract at the mouth of Tidbury Creek. It was customary at that time for churches and meeting houses alike to be placed on high ground at or near landings where they would be accessible and visible to waterborne traffic; one such meeting house still stands at Greenwich, New Jersey. A short distance upstream, the Anglicans of Kent County at about the same time built their first church on a similar promontory opposite the mouth of Puncheon Run.

Thomas Williams sold the Tidbury tract to William Coe in 1717. The deed specifies that Tidbury contained 600 acres, but that may have been a clerk's copying error, since the tract was described as 400 acres in both later and earlier descriptions. Coe held the land only three years, leaving it in 1720 to his nephew Thomas Coe, who sold it to John Houseman in 1735.

Houseman must have entertained some doubts about the security of his title, for he had the tract resurveyed in 1746 and applied for a new patent, which was granted in 1748. The next year Houseman sold 169 acres of Tidbury to John Pleasanton, who bought an adjacent 160 acres from John Vining in 1761. Pleasanton sold the part at the confluence of the two streams (including the south part of the project area) back to John Vining in 1767.

Vining's executors deeded 123.75 acres to John Hutchinson in 1783. Subdivision of the Lebanon townsite appears to have begun during Hutchinson's ownership, for he sold smaller parcels in rather quick succession. Daniel Mifflin bought approximately four acres at the confluence of Tidbury and Saint Jones in 1783 (FIGURE 5). At the same time, Mifflin bought the present Camden townsite from his brother and began selling lots. Since Forest Landing was the port for Camden, the two purchases may have been related. Jabez Jenkins and Skidmore Wilson bought an adjoining one-acre parcel downstream on Saint Jones in 1783, and Isaac Draper bought twelve acres at about the same time. The Draper holding lay downstream and outside the project area, although he lived in a rented house on Daniel Mifflin's tract in the project area (FIGURE 3). Draper was the first in Lebanon to lay out small urban-sized lots. These lots lay below the present road to Rising Sun, which Ezekiel Hunn later built in the deep ravine that formed Draper's northern boundary.

### *The Hunns develop Tidbury*

The Hunn family became landowners in the new village soon after development began. Jonathan Hunn bought Jabez Jenkins' one-acre parcel, which he left to his son Nathaniel. The Hunns had ambitions for the land at the mouth of Tidbury. Jonathan also mentioned in his will the land, formerly part of the Daniel Mifflin lot, that he had given his sons, Nathaniel and Jonathan, for a mill or forge seat (Kent County will book N-1:34). In 1793 the Delaware General Assembly passed an act entitled, "An Act to enable Nathaniel Hunn and Jonathan Hunn, their heirs and assigns, or either one of them, to erect a Forge and Sawmill at the Forest Landing, near the mouth of Tidbury Branch in Kent County." The law gave them the right to condemn land for the pond, and to take earthen fill to build the dam. It also required them to be drawing bars at their forge and sawing timber on their sawmill within three years. The works were built, but by 1818 the site was described as "Hunn's Mill Pond gone down" (*Laws of Delaware* II:1129; Estate of Daniel Mifflin, 1818, Kent County Orphans Court docket X-2:1).

The Hunn brothers were obliged to relocate the main road from Dover to Frederica, which would be flooded by their dam. In 1794 they petitioned for the road to be relocated below the new dam (Kent County Court of General Sessions petition, 1794, Delaware Archives). A survey in 1809 shows such a causeway between the dam and the creek (FIGURE 3), but there is no evidence of a connection to the southward. In later years, the main state road followed the route now known as Old Mill Road, through

Rising Sun from Dover to Frederica; it was superseded in the present century by the duPont highway, now South State Street Extended, near the route of the long-abandoned lower Kings Road.

The forge was built on the Lebanon (south) side of the branch, while a sawmill was built on the north. The dam, located along the line of the present causeway, washed out and was rebuilt. According to local folklore, the rebuilt dam was high enough to run the sawmill, but the forge was abandoned. The documentary and archaeological evidence appear to bear out this story (FIGURE 3). The mill race on the south side of Tidbury, part of which still stands open, is about nine or ten feet above sea level. The 1813 survey, made after the dam was rebuilt, describes a mill pond edge along a contour that is four or five feet above sea level.

Wooden footings of wharves and the alleged site of the nail factory may still be seen adjacent to the causeway at low water (PLATE 14). After the ironworks failed, the landing now known as Lebanon began to develop as a commercial center and shipping point. The old Forest Landing had been the port for Dover, but nothing more; there was never any subdivision of ownership that would have marked the old Forest Landing as a central place or a village. In 1797, Jonathan and Ezekiel Hunn bought Draper's undivided part of the Tidbury tract, 147.75 acres which comprised the west and south sides of the present village.

The Hunn mills fell into the hands of many heirs of the two brothers, and were never rebuilt. Death of a partner was probably the commonest cause of failure for large industrial concerns at that time. Before incorporation became a common form of organization, industrial capital was collected through partnerships, in which each partner was financially liable for the company's actions and could be imprisoned for its debts; each partner's consent was required for any transaction. If a partner should die, each of his heirs could bring the business to a halt by withholding consent. This is apparently what happened to the fragmented Hunn mill seat estate within a few years after it was established. More than a century later, a descendant reassembled the various claims into a single holding.

At the same time the Hunn project was disintegrating, the Deep Creek ironworks at Old Furnace in Sussex County was falling into ruin because the original partners' many heirs could not agree. It took a special act of the legislature to dissolve the Deep Creek partnership. These were not isolated examples, or even peculiar to Delaware. Throughout America, industrial expansion was hobbled by the lack of general incorporation laws. When industrial corporations became more common, later in the nineteenth century, each one was chartered by a separate legislative act. Not until the beginning of the twentieth century was it possible in Delaware to form a corporation without the express consent of the General Assembly.

It is therefore difficult to say if the Hunn mills or any other industrial venture of the period failed

because of a flaw in the physical plant, or because of the capitalization problems inherent in doing business as a partnership.

### *Hunn Town and abolitionism*

The Hunn family were among the earliest and most active abolitionists among the Kent County Quakers. John Hunn of Camden suffered fines, confiscation and ultimately financial ruin for his work on behalf of escaping slaves. According to legend, slaves were smuggled into the cellar at Wildcat, whence they travelled by ship to freedom in Philadelphia (Jamison 1984:31).

Along the road to Wildcat were several houses, all but one of which were gone by 1945, known collectively as Hunn Town. Two houses in this area are shown on the 1822 division of Ezekiel Hunn's estate, allocated to his daughter Guliema together with two warehouses and wharf; she later sold the property to her brother Ezekiel, who owned the rest of the present Wildcat property. The residents of these houses were originally freed slaves who worked on Hunn properties. The last Hunn Town resident, housekeeper Martha Patton, was left as a baby on the Hunn doorstep before the Civil War. The houses are shown in Beers' *Atlas* of 1868, plate 53.

The Hunns were well known for their philanthropies. The Camden Friends Meeting House stands on land given by the family, who also funded schools for both blacks and whites. The extent of their philanthropies may never be known; John Hunn's son, later a governor of Delaware, burned the records of the Underground Railroad in obedience to his father's deathbed request.

### *Lebanon in the age of sail*

Lebanon was a commercial center during the age of sail. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, bulky and heavy goods were moved almost exclusively by water. Lebanon served as the landing for the St. Jones drainage, including Camden, Hazletville, Dover, Rising Sun, and, later, Wyoming. Businessmen in the inland towns ordinarily kept wharves and warehouses at their landings, and commonly invested in ships.

Forest Landing lay at the eastern end of the portage between the Choptank and the Delaware, now State Route 10, then known as the Choptank Road. This portage was a major overland route from the beginning of the eighteenth century, and probably earlier.

Transpeninsular portage was important to the commerce of Delaware, and to the prosperity of the entire Middle Atlantic region. North-south transportation consisted of water routes, such as the Delaware and Chesapeake bays, interrupted by portages across land barriers, including Delmarva and New Jersey. Delaware's first railroad was a portage from New Castle, Delaware to Frenchtown, Maryland. When the Delaware Railroad was begun, it was intended to connect Delaware Bay traffic at Dona's Landing, east of Dover, with the Nanticoke at Seaford. In preparation for the coming of a railroad, Kent County's first scheduled steamboat traffic was established at Dona, rather than at Forest Landing, which had long been the traditional port for Dover. After the Delaware Railroad reoriented its plans to an all-land route, Lebanon regained its position as the port for Dover, and Dona became a ghost town.

The advent of steamboat service to the peninsula brought dressed stone masonry to gravelly Kent County. Three stone buildings are associated with Manlove Hayes, the Quaker steamboat and railroad entrepreneur: the Octagonal School; the Stone Tavern; and York Seat. Camden's stone foundations of the period must have been unloaded at Lebanon at about the same time.

Shipbuilding began at Lebanon in the eighteenth century. In 1888 Scharf (1131) commented, "The village has long been noted for its ship-building, having turned out in recent years a 3-masted schooner of 800 tons burden for the trade to the West Indies and the Gulf of Mexico. It is nothing unusual to see 3 or 4 schooners at anchor here at a time."

The typical schooner serving Lebanon through the middle of the nineteenth century made between eight and twenty-eight round trips per year to Philadelphia. The schooner *T. P. McColley* made eighteen trips in 1867 and carried goods for Camden merchants Graham and Lord; Wharton A. Gildersleeve; Robert Lord, Jr., J. C. Durborough, Thomas Pickering of Lebanon; John H. Jenkins, Lebanon storekeeper William Dyer; and Camden fruit canners Stetson and Ellison. This last firm's shipments included 30 boxes of tin.

The ships not only linked Lebanon to Philadelphia, they tied central Kent County to the entire Mid-Atlantic region. The schooner *Stetson and Ellison*, owned by the Camden cannery operators and commanded by one of its partners, purchased ships' goods and repair work from businesses in Centerville, Maryland; Camden, Frederica, Bowers, and Philadelphia as well as Lebanon. (Richardson Collection, HSD, Freight Records book 1, MS 6217)

Thomas Pickering, a farmer who owned part of the Tidbury tract, owned interests in several of the Lebanon schooners. In 1883 he bought a half interest in the little two-masted schooner *Hattie Hall*, 29.18 tons, from Allabeda Kirkley of Leipsic for \$300. She was built at New Town, Maryland in 1871, 51.28 feet in length, 18.6 feet in breadth, 5 feet depth of hold (Pickering papers).

He also had a financial interest in the much larger three-masted schooner *Minnie A. Bonsall*, captain John L. Bonsall, which engaged in the coastal grain trade out of Lebanon. She measured 458.83 tons, 153.5 feet length, 37 feet breadth, and 11.5 feet depth of hold. Pickering held the mortgage on Captain Edward Stubbs' schooner *Jennie D. Blocksom* as well (Pickering papers).

### *The Farmer's Union*

Although the area around the mouth of Tidbury Creek had been a landing since settlement, organized shipping companies developed only in the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1855, the legislature passed a bill allowing Alexander Jackson, William Slay, Henry Pratt, John Hunn, and William Lewis, to sell stock in a company to be called the Farmers Union of Kent County. The corporation was authorized to "Purchase and receive ... not to exceed ... at any one time, fifty acres, and to build and construct wharves, granaries, store-houses and other needful buildings, and improvements for the storing of grain and other produce, at some suitable and convenient place as the said Company shall deem advisable, and to buy or build and own one or more vessels suitable for navigation, and to employ persons to sail or run the same in the shipment of grain and other produce. ..." These incorporators were largely businessmen from North Murderkill Hundred.

The original act must have been flawed, for two years later, it was amended and the Farmers Union was "declared to be a body politic and corporate under the name of the Farmers Union of Kent County and by that name shall have succession for twenty years and no longer...." The incorporators at this time included only William Lewis and John Hunn of the original five, and thirteen others (Enrolled Bills 1855, p. 289; 1857, p. 275, Delaware Archives)

Limited-duration corporations were the rule, rather than the exception, at that time. There was a deeply rooted American aversion to perpetual corporate entities. Even banks were chartered for a term, after which their business was to be "wound up" and the stockholders repaid their investments.

On July 1, 1859, Daniel Mifflin deeded a wharf lot, containing 65 square perches, to the Farmers Union of Kent County. Officers of the Union then were Henry Pratt, John Gooden, Jr., Thomas L. Madden, Andrew Calley, and Benjamin Stradley (Kent County Deed Book Q-4:193). In 1867, the property was taken up by a firm called Graham, Durborough, and Company, which apparently was a simple partnership consisting of John G. Graham, Captain John C. Durborough, James Grier, and Joseph L. Bonsall (Kent County Deed Book N-5:486), all of whom were involved in Lebanon shipping. This firm must not have had a separate existence, for when the Union's charter expired on March 2, 1877, the land reverted to Mifflin, whose heirs in 1890 conveyed the wharf to the Lebanon Navigation Company, which had some of the same participants (Kent County Deed Book I-7:268).

## *Lebanon as a canning center*

In 1869, Collins, Geddes and Company built a fruit cannery on the bluff above the St. Jones River at Lebanon, adjacent to the old Hunn mill seat. The partners were John S. Collins, a nurseryman of Burlington County, New Jersey; Samuel Geddes of Union County, Pennsylvania; and Jacob Brown of Kent County, who managed the company's affairs locally. The plant site consisted of two acres purchased from the Dyer family. Brown and Geddes soon sold their interests, leaving Collins the sole owner. Under the name of John S. Collins and Company, the firm processed tomatoes in canned form and as bottled catsup; peaches were canned, as was apple jelly. After a major fire on December 3, 1874, the cannery was rebuilt, only to be sold by the sheriff in 1878. William Paschal of New York, the buyer, held it for two years before he sold it to William E. Cotter of Philadelphia.

In its prime, the cannery was said to have been the largest in the United States. The following notice appeared in the Dover *Delawarean* in 1870:

"...A story and a half frame building, about 150 feet in length by 50 in depth, stands on the high bank facing the creek, with which communication is maintained by means of a long elevated platform or pier, where necessary supplies are received and from which goods are shipped on board of schooners for New York and other eastern ports. On approaching the building we found a number of wagons from which fruit was being unloaded and hundreds of baskets of peaches waiting their turn to be pared, scalded and sealed in air-tight cans. ... On the day of our visit about three hundred hands were engaged in the various branches of the business about the premises. ... Last week 56,000 cans were put up, and this week it is said the number will touch 65,000. A basket of peaches will fill about ten quart cans. The hands here work from early in the morning until 10 or 12 o'clock at night, and on the day of our visit closed 16,090 quart cans, containing over 1600 baskets of peaches. They expect to put up 400,000 cans of fruit this season, including tomatoes, we suppose."

In early December of 1874, the cannery was putting up apple jelly and making cans for the next year's production. Only about forty workers were employed, as compared to 300 in season. Suddenly, in the middle of the night of Thursday, December 3, fire was seen leaping through the cupola of the huge frame building. Soon the entire plant was involved, causing a loss estimated at \$48,000. Two dwellings and the receiving house, also owned by the company, were not damaged. The *Delawarean* for December 5 reported that the ground was littered with tomatoes, catsup, and jelly.

The Milford *Peninsula News and Advertiser* for December 11 raised the possibility of arson, and suggested that Lebanon might not be the best place to rebuild the cannery:

The permanent loss of this establishment would be a great public calamity; and we are glad to know that the energetic proprietors intend to rebuild and resume operation as speedily as possible. We do not know what may be the special local inducements which attract them to the particular locality of Lebanon, but venture to suggest to the company that before rebuilding there they canvass the inducements which Milford offers for a great canning establishment like theirs. This is the very heart of one of the largest fruit growing sections of the Peninsula. The town is the second in size in the State; and labor could be had in abundance. We have navigation as good as at Lebanon, and railroad transportation with communication by steamers with New York via Lewes. It would seem to us that this is beyond comparison, a more eligible location for their great business than the petty and obscure village of Lebanon. Please consider it gentlemen.

Fire on Saturday morning, May 17, 1884, again destroyed the cannery. According to the *Delawarean* for May 24, 1884, the fire could be plainly seen from the steeple of Dover's court house. The cannery, sheds, and the home of the widow Dyer were consumed with all their contents. Since there was no fire brigade in Lebanon, the citizens worked to save other nearby buildings. The newspaper account stated that the idle cannery, owned by William Cotter, was leased to a firm that would have taken over the following week.

After the second fire, the cannery was not rebuilt; the sheriff again sold the property, which was bought by Charlotte L. Cotter. She, in turn, lost it at sheriff's sale in 1900.

### *Steamboating*

The natural channel of the St. Jones was never suitable for large vessels. The lower 12 miles, from Lebanon to the mouth, was only four feet deep in 1880. The upper nine-mile stretch to Dover had a low-water depth of only two and a half feet. In the River and Harbor Act of March 3, 1881, Congress authorized a channel three feet deep and 100 feet wide at the mouth of the river, to be protected by a jetty. The project was modified in 1884 to include a depth of six feet at mean low water. Work began in 1885, and was nearly finished in 1888. A cutoff about a mile below Lebanon was completed in 1890. Thereafter the channel was maintained below Lebanon at a depth of six feet (Chief of Engineers 1908: 213).

An account in 1887 reported that there were fifteen fishing boats at Lebanon, manned by twenty fishermen who occupied five fish houses and harvested terrapin and clams, as well as fish (Herman 1986:198).

The Lebanon Steam Navigation Company was organized in 1887, when the Delaware General Assembly passed a bill declaring "Thomas Pickering, William Ridgeway, John C. Durborough, George H. Gildersleeve and such other persons ... a body corporate and politic ... by the name ... of Lebanon Navigation Company." Like the earlier Farmers Union, the company was authorized to exist for twenty years. Its purpose was to "conduct and carry on the business of owning, controlling, using and employing

vessels to be propelled by steam or sail or both for transportation between the village of Lebanon on St. Jones Creek in Kent County and the city of Philadelphia and such other ports or places as may be deemed necessary. ..." The corporation was further authorized to purchase wharves and other facilities at Lebanon, and whatever equipment the company needed to carry on its business. The first stockholders' meeting was scheduled for the first Saturday in April 1888.

The new company moved quickly; in 1887 it purchased a waterfront tract from the Lord family. Three years later, it purchased the old Farmers Union wharf, where some of its stockholders had been operating under the name of Graham, Durborough, and Company. Facilities included a wharf, a warehouse, a granary built over the water, an office, a ladies' waiting room, and a scale house. The company's two waterfront properties were separated by the old Hunn forge site (FIGURE 6).

To carry out the trade, the company bought the four-year-old screw steamer *James F. Holt*, of Milford, which had been built on Indian River, Delaware. They had her lengthened from 71 feet to 106 feet at the Enoch Moore yard in Wilmington. Renamed the *Mary U. Githens*, she entered the Philadelphia-Lebanon trade under Captain John C. Durborough (PLATES 15 AND 16). The owners of the steamer were principals in the cannery at Rising Sun, and she was named for the ten-year-old daughter of the company's Philadelphia agent and backer.

Her career was not all routine, however. She was the first "large" steamer to ascend the St. Jones to Dover on July 8, 1887, when she brought coal to the dredge *Atlantic*, which was working to clear a six-foot channel to Draper's wharf at the foot of Water Street. Lebanon was the practical head of navigation, although some vessels occasionally ventured to Dover. Steamboats customarily turned around in the basin at the mouth of Tidbury. The *Wilmington Morning News* reported on July 9, 1887 that the "little steamer" from Lebanon had made the trip the day before and with some exaggeration proclaimed that "...the capital of the state is a seaport this morning."

The steamer did not always follow her route. On June 5, 1888, off Billingsport, New Jersey, she was involved in a minor accident. Ordinarily she called at Barker's Landing and Bowers on the St. Jones; Port Mahon near the mouth of Little Creek; and Wilmington. She boasted private staterooms, ladies' and gentlemen's saloons, a dining room, electric lights, and steam heat. Roundtrip fare between Philadelphia and Lebanon was \$1.50 and meals were 25¢ in 1900.

Her agent was Githens, Rexsamer, and Company, produce merchants on Front Street in Philadelphia. Benjamin Githens had interests in several canneries on the Peninsula, which he helped start (Letter of Marion C. Weinn to E.D.Bryan, n.d.).



Plate 15 Mary U. Githens under way, from an original in the Mariners Museum  
Courtesy W. Thomas Pickering

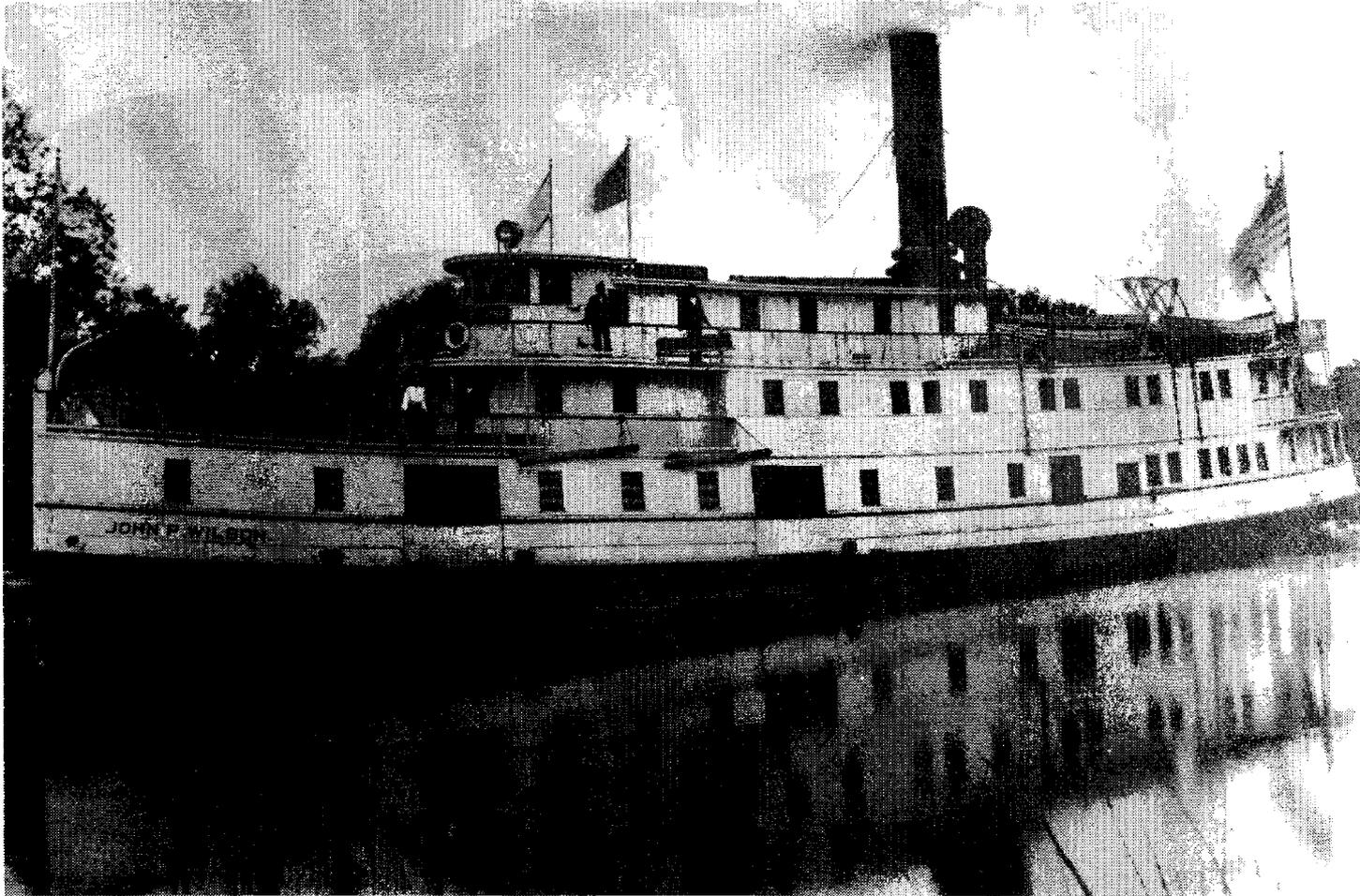


Plate 16 Steamer John P. Wilson, which replaced the Mary U. Githens in 1904  
Courtesy Ethel Stevens

Cargo manifests for the *Githens* and other Lebanon ships are housed at the Historical Society of Delaware. A typical round trip took three days. On July 19, 1887, the *Githens* left Philadelphia carrying the following items bound for consignees in Kent County:

James Anderson:

- 1 barrel sugar
- 1 box yeast powder
- 1 box fish
- 1 box beef
- 1 box soap
- 1 bundle bags

A. P. Hinsly:

- 1 barrel molasses
- 1 barrel sugar
- 1 box close pins
- 1 bundle brooms
- 1 box starch
- 1 bag salt
- 1 bundle groceries
- 1 chair
- 1 box soap
- 1 keg
- 1 bundle bags
- 1 bundle paper
- 1 bag peanuts

Raymond Gildersleeve:

- 1 bag rice
- 2 boxes bluing
- 2 box matches
- 1 cheese
- 3 box baken powder
- 1 box coffee

J. S. Cowgill:

- 1 bundle

James H. Reed

- 3 cheeses

John D. Durborough

- 1/2 barrel fish

C. Jensen:

- 2 barrels cabbage

On July 21, the *Githens* returned to Philadelphia, carrying Kent County's products and a few of her citizens to the city:

Margaret Nichols:

- 125 bu oats

L. E. Stone:

- 18 baskets potatoes

William Hill:  
 10 baskets onions  
 15 baskets potatoes

W. E. Maloney:  
 1 crate eggs

James Anderson:  
 3 crates poultry  
 20 dozen eggs

Frank Maloney:  
 9 baskets apples

Joseph Collins:  
 1 passage  
 2 meals

Mrs. Collins:  
 1 passage  
 2 meals

Renslaw Doran  
 1 passage  
 1 meal

J. C. Durborough:  
 3332 bu wheat

The *Githens* caught fire at the Lebanon wharf on the night of March 3-4, 1904 and burned to the waterline. William Carter and Frank Butler were staying on board as watchmen, for the boat was laid up for painting. The fire began in the engine room and quickly spread up to the upper decks. Flames leaped to the warehouse, but were extinguished, while the steamer drifted downstream and sank.

She was to become the best remembered of the Lebanon boats. A series of reminiscences on the last years of the *Mary U. Githens* appeared in the *Wilmington Every Evening* in August and September 1960. Respondents to an inquiry in the paper about the fate of the *Githens* remembered that the ship also had carried sturgeon and peaches in season to Philadelphia, and streetcar horses to Kent County, destined to end their days as farm horses.

According to the respondents quoted in the newspaper, she was replaced by a vessel called the *Vigilant*, which sank some years later at Barkers Landing. Also on the line were the steamers *John P. Wilson* (PLATES 16 AND 17) and *City of Dover*, which never inspired the folklore that surrounds the *Mary U. Githens*.

The *Wilson* was built by Neafie and Levy of Philadelphia, and entered service in September 1904. She had a steel hull, three decks, was 131 feet long in the keel and 27 feet beam. She could make the twice-weekly dash to Philadelphia in eight and a half hours under the command of Captain Durborough and a crew composed mostly of his family (*Delawarean* November 4, 1905). A new corporation, the Dover and Philadelphia Navigation Company, took over the Lebanon steamboat property in 1907, finally deeding its inactive assets to Samuel Harrington in 1923.

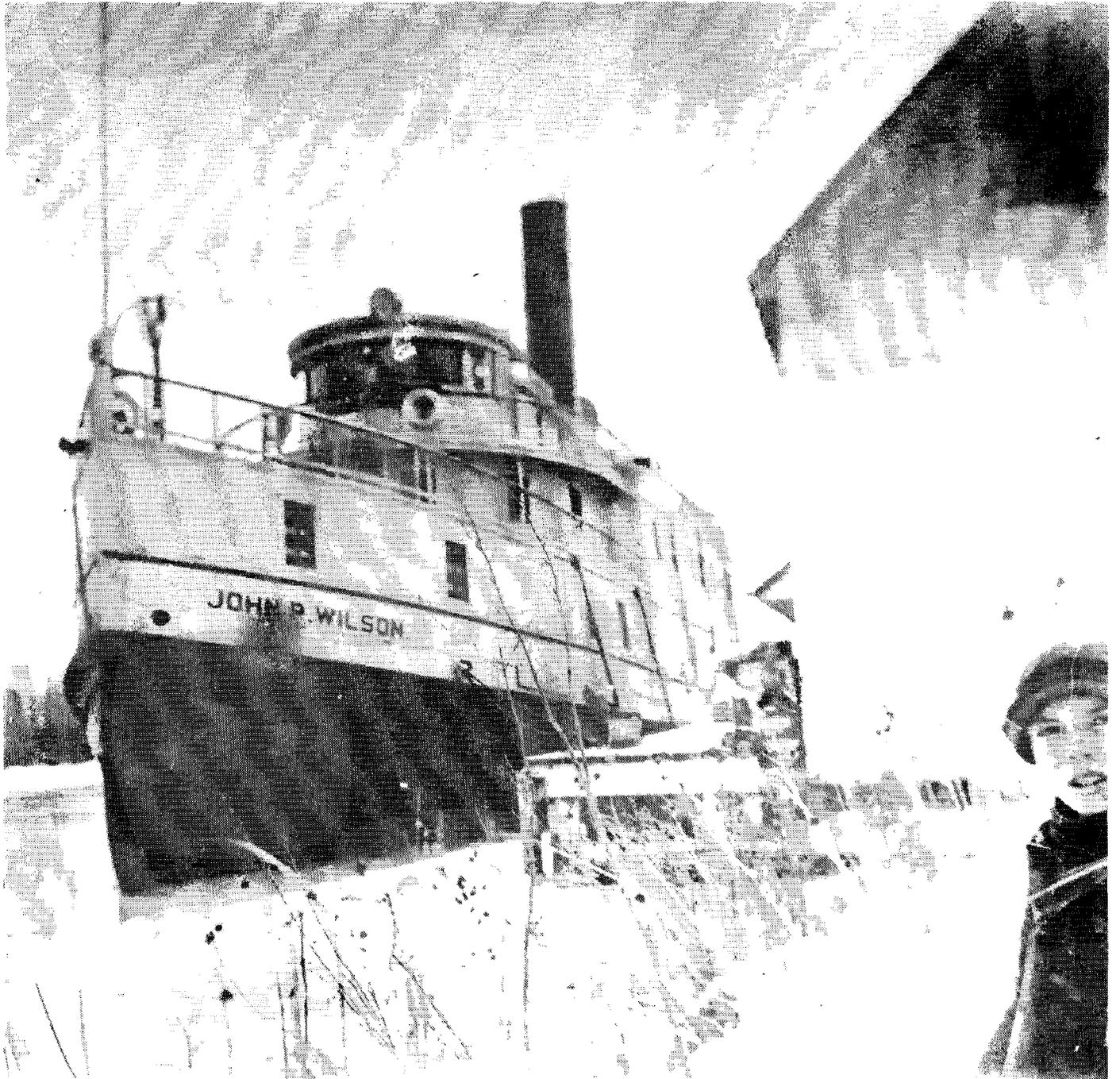


Plate 17 Steamer *John P. Wilson* at Lebanon, with the warehouse at the right and Albert Taylor looking on, courtesy W. Thomas Pickering

As Lebanon's steamboat era began to close, the River and Harbor Act of June 25, 1910 authorized a major improvement of the river. At the mouth, a mile-long jetty was to project the channel into Delaware Bay. Another sixteen cutoffs were to be dug, reducing the length of the river from the Bay to Dover to eighteen miles. During the next decade, local parties worked to obtain title to the proposed cutoffs at no expense to the government, as the law provided. The cutoffs finally were built, but too late to serve steamboats. Trade on the river dropped from 120,291 short tons in 1913 to 6,384 tons in 1916 (Chief of Engineers 1918: 417-419).

The government acquired the right-of-way for the last cut in 1925, after scheduled steamboats no longer ran. There is speculation that the motive was not to improve navigation, but to improve the river's ability to flush effluent from the Dover wastewater plant, which had been built at the old Draper's wharf. The last steamboat called for a load of freight at Lebanon around 1938.

### *The Lebanon Swing Bridge*

Bridge 357a, the former Lebanon swing bridge, was built by the Kent County Levy Court and was adopted into the state system when the State Highway Department took over the county roads. The exact age of the final wrought iron span is not known, but recent department documents suggest 1880.

The first mention of such a bridge is found in a 1794 legislative petition, signed by 21 citizens including the Hunns and a number of their Camden neighbors. The petitioners suggested a toll drawbridge to be authorized by the legislature (1794 legislative petition, Delaware Archives).

A pivot bridge is mentioned in a Levy Court document of 1845 (Levy Court loose paper February 18, 1845). There was a "new" pivot bridge here in 1856 (Kent County Deed Book O-4:360), which apparently replaced a drawbridge, which is pictured in a plot dated 1822 of Ezekiel Hunn's lot. Hunn may have built the bridge; contemporary documents credit him with building the road from the bridge to Rising Sun.

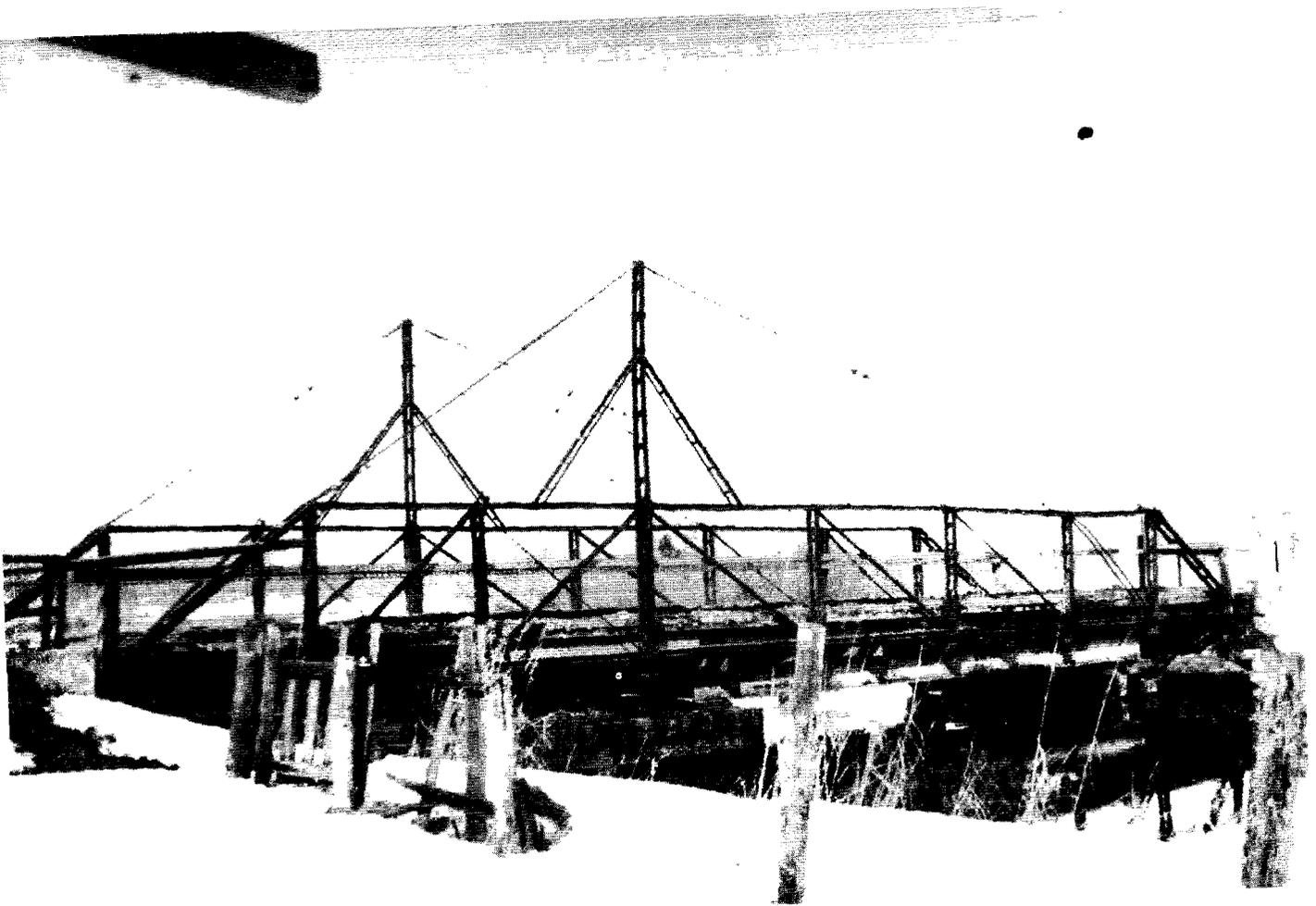
In 1911, the Levy Court advertised for bids to rebuild the eastern bridge abutment, a stone structure that supported the mechanism, which still is part of the structure.

After many years of service, the swing bridge was worn out and needed to be replaced. Construction of Dover Air Force Base during World War II had changed Route 357 from a little-used back road into a major artery. A narrow, uneven, causeway built for wagons was carrying heavy trucks and lines of commuters. The wood-decked bridge was posted for a five-ton load limit, but heavy trucks rumbled daily across its narrow deck.

Plate 18

View of the old Lebanon swing bridge, circa 1964

Delaware Department of Transportation file photo



It was totally inadequate for its new role, and on September 20, 1951, the State Highway Department authorized its replacement with a new movable bridge. In 1952, the Department obtained permission from the Corps of Engineers to replace the bridge with a new movable span; work was to begin within two years. Time passed, and the project never began.

By the River and Harbor Act of 1960, the United States abandoned the dredged channel of the St. Jones above Lebanon, thus removing the legal requirement to open the swing bridge for river traffic. As the old bridge continued to deteriorate, sixteen-inch steel beams were inserted under the span and across the river, immobilizing the span even more. The March storm of 1962 raised the river to within two inches of the deck, prompting further questions about its safety.

By that time, a new high-level bridge on a new upstream location was being planned. In 1964, while the new bridge was being built, the state applied for federal permission to permanently shut the old bridge, but the proposal was dropped in the face of objections. The next year, the load limit was reduced to two tons. In 1966, the new Route 10 bridge was finished and state bridge engineers began urging the immediate removal of the swing bridge for safety reasons. The old span's daily burden had dropped from more than 4,000 to 1,900 vehicles a day, but even with the I-beams underneath, it was becoming unstable. Removal was authorized by the Highway Department in February 1968.

Most commuters never noticed that the bridge was gone, since it had become nothing but a back road from Lebanon to the Dover Air Force Base. With construction of new base housing on the Pickering farm in Lebanon in 1974, there was a renewed call for a replacement bridge at Lebanon. The Air Force Base schools are located near the east end of the Lebanon causeway, but children from the new housing were forced to travel out to Route 10 and down Route 113 to school. A footbridge was eventually installed on the old foundations for their convenience. It was assigned the number 357A, which for many years had designated the old swing span (bridge files, Delaware Department of Transportation).

This style of swing bridge was popular during the second half of the nineteenth century in Delaware and elsewhere. Several still exist on the Rideau waterway in Canada (Passfield 1976), where they are preserved in a park setting. At Rideau, asymmetrical steel through-truss bridges with latticed wrought-iron kingposts replaced older timber spans between 1888 and 1903.

## *Decline*

Establishment of the Lebanon Steam Navigation Company probably marked the peak of the village's prosperity. The waterfront along the river was lined with granaries, docks, stores, and offices. Lebanon had its own post office since the cannery opened in 1870. Coal, lumber, and store goods entered central Kent County through Lebanon, and grain and agricultural products left for Philadelphia through here. Although folklore states that competition from the railroads killed waterborne traffic on the Delaware, the coastwise trade reached its peak of prosperity a generation or two *after* the Delaware Railroad opened in 1856.

Widespread automobile transportation and paved roads finally spelled the death of waterfront commercial towns up and down the Delaware drainage. Lebanon was no exception. The Dover and Philadelphia Navigation Company sold its facilities in 1923. The steamboat company's buildings crumbled. An old man living in a float house on the marsh sold turtles to Philadelphia caterers whose buyers arrived in cars, and the new highway department dug away the hillside to build the roads that had made the steamers obsolete.

## *Gravel pits and cemetery*

Lebanon stands on a hill of easily-dug sandy gravel that was needed to fill the two causeways. Constant subsidence required repeated filling, which called for fill dirt in quantity. Two large pits were opened on the forge site and behind the steamboat company buildings, and another was dug at the east end of the causeway over St. Jones. About 62 years ago, a county highway crew was digging gravel at the south end of the Tidbury causeway on land belonging to the Hunn family, who were picnicking at Wildcat Manor at the time.

One of the workmen swung his pick into the bank and struck a skull. He fled. The county foreman, T. Edgar Townsend, gathered the bones into a bag and took them to Wildcat. According to one of the family, William Hunn, the brown rectangular stain of a coffin could be seen in the bank five or six feet below grade, at the eye level of an observer standing on the bottom of the pit. Gravel operations ceased abruptly. Folklore about the discovery has survived. Ethel Stevens of Wyoming, who grew up in Lebanon, recalled that she was told the cemetery lay behind the weigh house, which would place it on the steamboat company property.

### *The old bridge, base housing, and present land use*

The Lebanon waterfront finally was bypassed when the St. Jones swing bridge was removed in 1968. Route 10, the old Forest Landing Road, was routed over the river to Dover Air Force Base and the community began to settle into the role of a backwater bedroom suburb of Dover. Fishing from the bridge and from the old steamboat pier was good, and traffic was light. Then, in 1974, the Air Force built a tract of family housing at the Pickering farm on the Tidbury tract. The old road over the Tidbury causeway became a thoroughfare, especially threatening to pedestrians. Erection of a foot bridge over St. Jones relieved some of the problems, since it provided a shortcut from the Air Base school to Base Housing.

For several years a portion of the Wildcat tract, about 85 acres, was used as a landfill for Dover and central Kent County. When the Wildcat Landfill finally was ordered closed by authorities, its critics alleged that it was filled with hazardous wastes. While the present project was under way, health authorities posted a warning that fish from the river were contaminated with chemical residues.