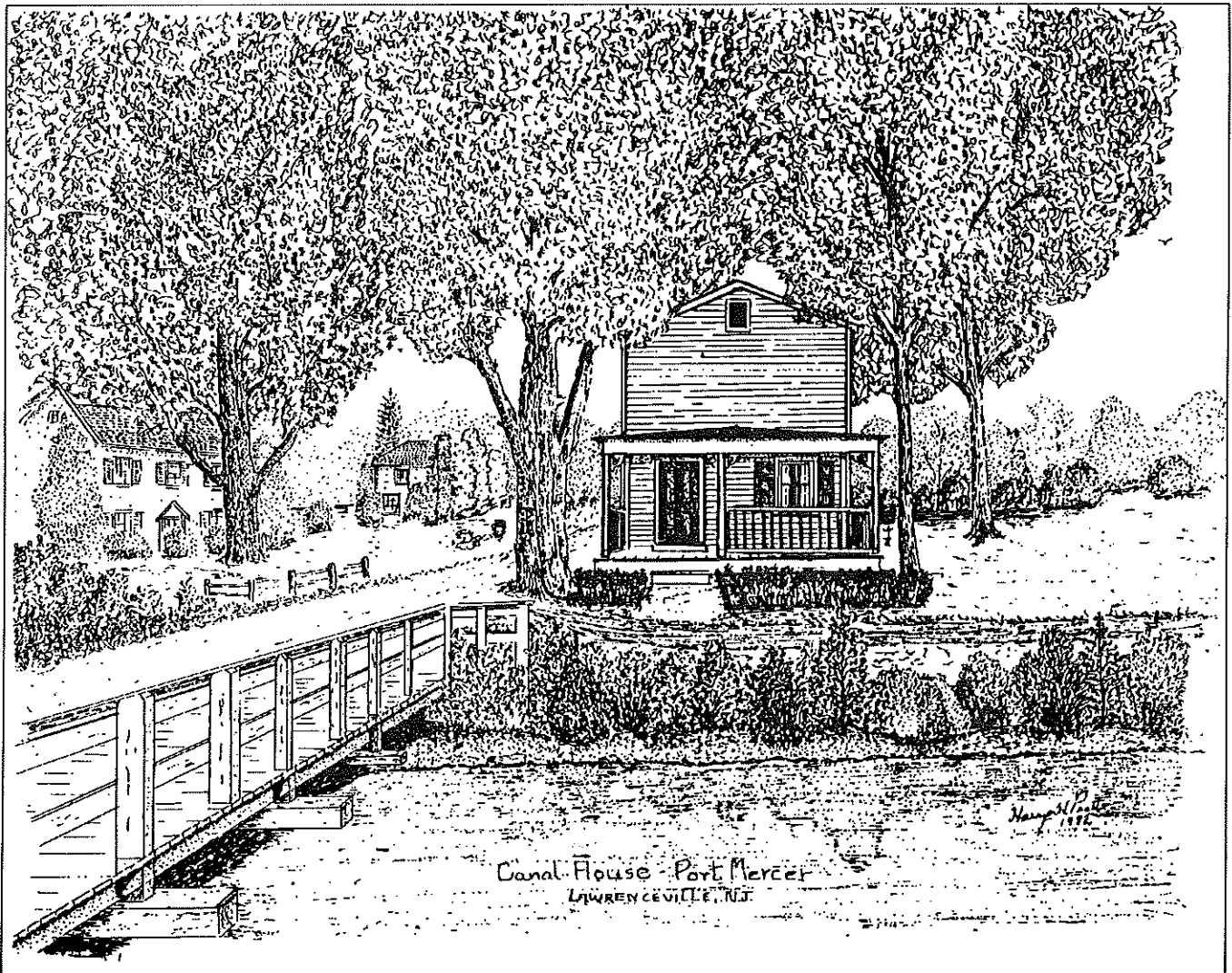


1993 ANNUAL REPORT

DELAWARE & RARITAN CANAL COMMISSION



NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND ENERGY

DELAWARE AND RARITAN CANAL COMMISSION

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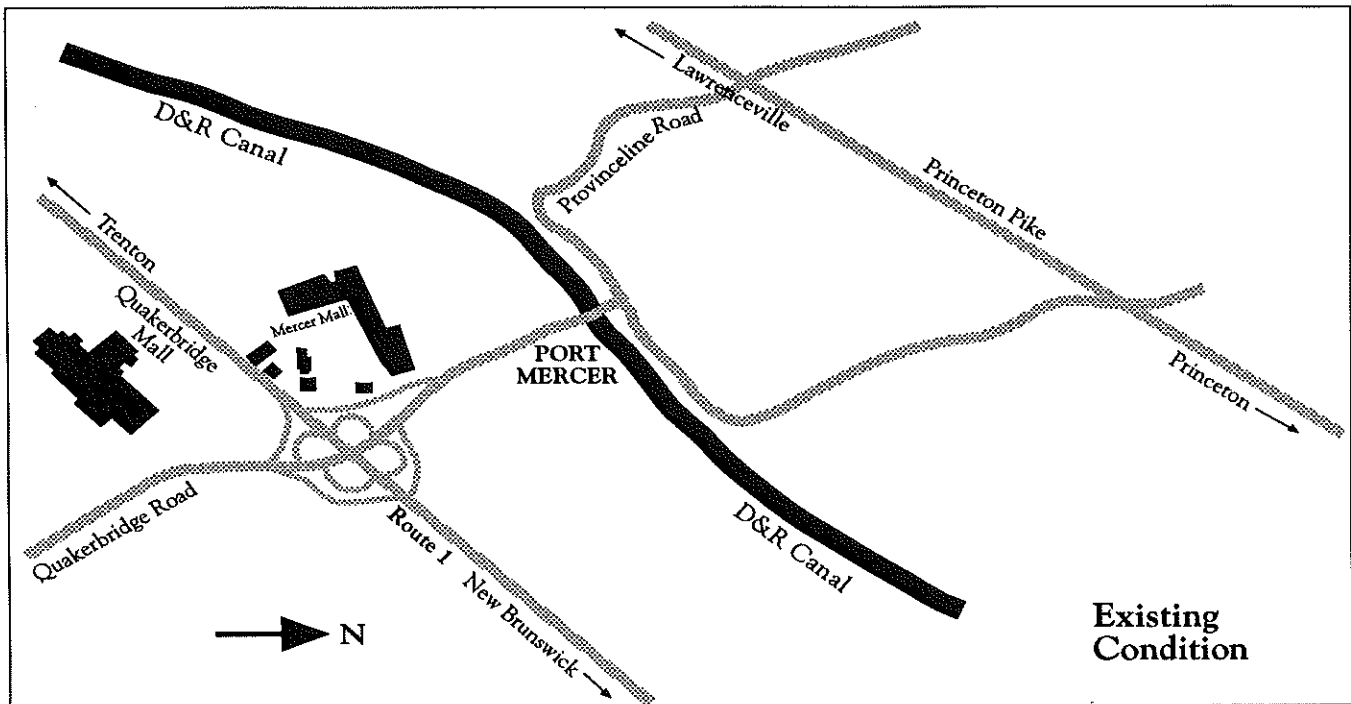
Janice Holms, Assistant to the Director

PORT MERCER: THE MAIN EVENT IN 1993

Port Mercer—the name alone evokes the romance of the past. Today, the old saw mill and lime kiln are gone; Crater's General Store and the Inn for canalmen are now private homes, but the romance has somehow remained. The canal still flows past the front yards and farm fields are in the rear. Even though Quakerbridge and Mercer Malls are nearby, this historic canal community has held onto its nineteenth century character. Only the relentless traffic on Quakerbridge Road makes a forceful 20th century intrusion into the historic setting.

In 1993 the prospects for Port Mercer's continued tranquility ended.





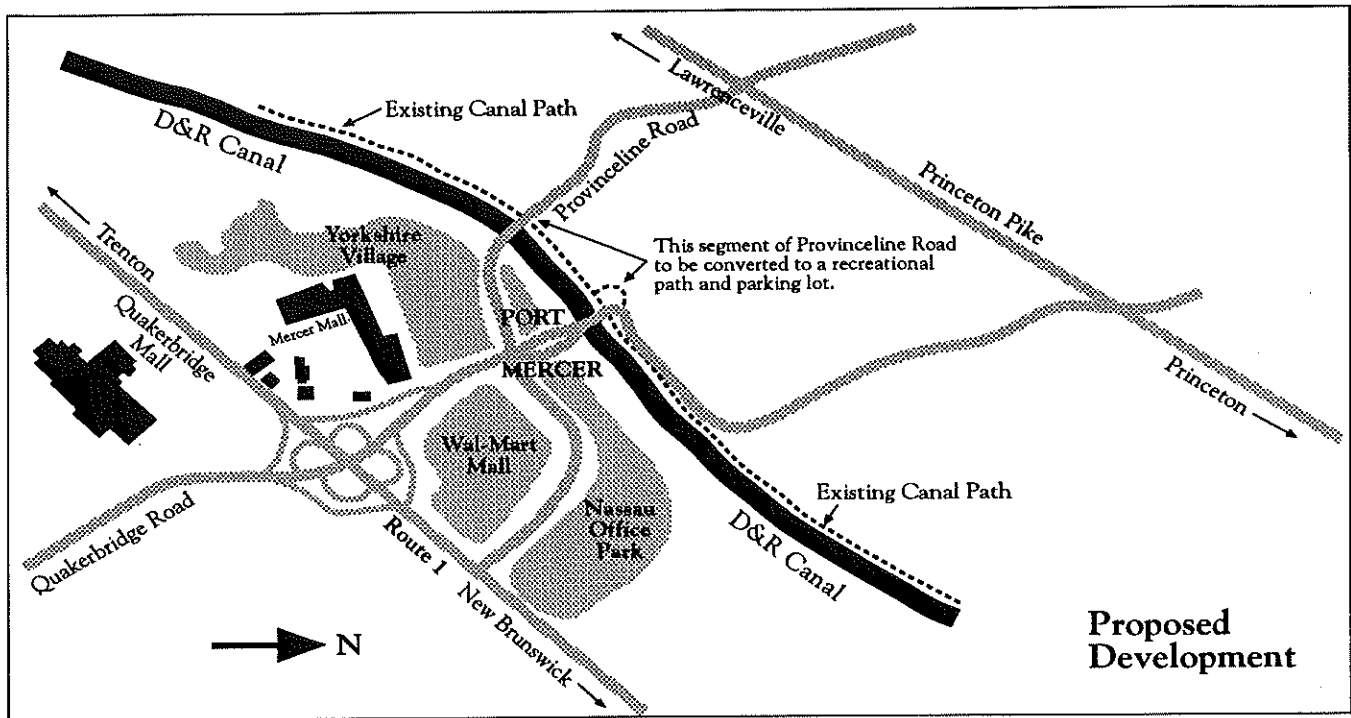
A huge new shopping mall and a complex of eight new office buildings were approved for construction on the land that is now a sod farm at the northwest corner of the intersection of Quakerbridge Road and Route One. A Wal-Mart store will anchor the mall while the office complex will have a total of one million square feet of space. Also in 1993, the Lawrence Township Council came to a court-ordered settlement with a developer that will allow him to put almost five hundred houses between Mercer Mall and the canal.

The Canal Commission did not deny these developments which had been reviewed and approved by the municipal and county planning boards, but it did review several aspects of each project to assure that their impacts on the Canal Park would be mitigated. The Commission's

Visual Impact Regulation required all of the new buildings to be set-back several hundred feet from the canal and required the developers to construct berms and plant hundreds of native trees and shrubs in the buffer areas. Also at the Commission's suggestion, the densities and the heights of the buildings in the office complex and the housing project will be lower near the Canal Park and higher near Route One. The Commission's Stormwater Management Regulation assured that all of the stormwater runoff from the new developments will be directed to basins that hold the water long enough to reduce flooding and to settle out pollutants. The Commission's Stream Corridor Preservation regulation established a corridor along the Duck Pond Run which will be left undeveloped.

The Commission's Traffic Impact Regulations were more difficult to satisfy because compliance required the joint participation of the three developers, as well as the agreement of Mercer County, the three municipalities that meet at Port Mercer (West Windsor, Lawrence, and Princeton), and several State agencies with review authority over the canal. Solving the Port Mercer traffic problem became the principal agenda item at six of the Commission's monthly meetings in 1993. In addition, a subcommittee of the Commission organized and led a number of meetings that were attended by the developers and governmental representatives from the local, county, and State levels.

After months of discussions and plan revisions everyone agreed to a plan that called for the construction of a new bridge over the canal a quarter



of a mile south of the existing Port Mercer bridge. The new bridge will connect to Provinceline Road, while the old bridge will remain open but will connect only to Quaker Road. The section of Quakerbridge Road between the proposed shopping mall and the canal will have its lanes divided, the westbound lane will be curved, and extensive landscaping will be installed to emphasize the road's route into a historic community and a State Park. This plan will improve traffic circulation in the Port Mercer area by reducing the volume and the speed of cars that take Quakerbridge Road, it will remove cars from the canal bank between the existing bridge and the new bridge, and it will allow a recreational path to be constructed between the two bridges connecting existing portions of the canal path to the north and to the south.

After addressing all of the impacts of these projects on the Canal Park, the Commission granted a Certificate of Approval for the proposed shopping mall, approved the General Development Plan for the office complex, and voted for a non-binding concept approval for the plan of the housing development. The developers and Mercer County signed an agreement that provides for the developers to assume the full cost of constructing a new road and bridge over the canal and to make the planned improvements to the Port Mercer section of Quakerbridge Road. The developers further agreed to assume the full expense of removing the section of Provinceline Road between the two bridges and constructing a recreational path and twenty car parking lot for people who come to use the Canal Park. The total cost of these improve-

ments, approximately \$3 million, will be borne by the developers, whose projects will generate the impacts, not by the taxpayers of the State.

Canal Park Development in 1993

The Canal Commission's staff worked with the DEPE's Division of Parks and Forestry on the final preparation of plans for the construction of a recreational path next to the canal in Lambertville and central Trenton. This project will complete the path from Trenton's Battle Monument for 32 miles up the Delaware River to the Hunterdon County town of Frenchtown. The project, estimated to cost \$1.5 million, is entirely funded by a Federal grant and will begin construction in March, 1994.

Complementing the trail improvement project in Trenton is the Canal Banks Project, a project directed by the City of Trenton which is aimed at improving the corridor alongside the canal in central Trenton. The plans for this project, which were completed in 1993, call for the development of a new park on both sides of the canal next to Warren Street, the revitalization of the historic houses that adjoin the canal, the encouragement of new shops to serve the needs of the residents, and the completion of the canal path from the Battle Monument to Route One. The project is presently funded by both State and Federal programs with a total of over \$4 million. The Commission staff has worked closely with Trenton's Office of Housing and Development to get this project underway.

The restoration of two canal



houses—at Carnegie Road and Zarephath—and the stabilization of a third canal house—at the Weston Causeway—were undertaken and nearly completed in 1993. This project's total cost of approximately \$400,000 was also completely funded by a Federal grant.

People who visit the Canal Park are almost always interested in knowing more about the canal. They are curious about its history, how it worked, and how it influenced the development of the region. The Commission staff worked with the Ewing Township Historical Commission and a private developer to erect interpretive signs next to the canal in Ewing that would provide information on the canal and the Ewing region. The staff also obtained agreements from the Department of Transportation for similar signs at the New Brunswick outlet locks and at a scenic pull-off under construction on the portion of I-295 that is near the

Bordentown outlet lock.

The Canal Commission's close association with the Delaware River Mill Society continued to bring results in 1993. A restoration and stabilization project that affected all of the principal buildings in the Prallsville Mill complex was completed this year. The total cost of this program was about \$400,000, of which \$150,000 was from a State Historic Trust grant and \$250,000 was privately raised at no taxpayer expense.

Canal Park Land Acquisition in 1993

The history of land development in New Jersey makes it clear that once a piece of land is developed, it will never again support a natural landscape. If buildings are torn down and pavement picked up it is only to make way for newer and larger buildings or for more extensive pavement. Three hundred years after European settlement in central New Jersey it is now possible to envision large parts of this region without any natural areas left to be set aside, or, for that matter, to be developed.

This frightful vision has persuaded the Canal Commission that it is urgent to identify and acquire all of the land that would make the Canal Park a treasured public resource within a fully developed community. The Commission considered three different criteria for land acquisition; the need to widen the existing park in places, to create preserved corridors leading from the park throughout the region, and to preserve large natural areas next to the park. The Commission then adopted an acquisition program that reflects all of these needs. This program was submitted to the Division of Parks and Forestry and the Green Acres office. The Green Acres Office has begun the process of acquiring the highest priority parcels but there will never be enough money for direct State acquisition of all of the land recom-

mended by the Commission. If the Commission is to succeed with its acquisition goal it must find creative ways of preserving land. One alternative to State acquisition is to enroll the participation of private land trusts and work with municipalities and counties to preserve land that is important to the Canal Park.

Chief among the organizations that the Commission worked with in 1993 is the Delaware and Raritan Greenway, Inc., a non-profit land trust formed in 1986 by the Commission

and four environmental groups in the region. The Commission staff has worked hard to help the Greenway cause, including speaking at conferences in support of Greenway's program, meeting with foundations to encourage their financial support, and meeting with Greenway's Board of Directors to develop strategy. Working with the D&R Greenway has paid off. In 1993 the Greenway preserved a 34-acre tract next to the canal in Griggstown, acquired several

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parcels to further the creation of a greenway corridor on the Stony Brook from the canal to the Sourland Mountains in Hunterdon County, and organized and led community efforts toward the preservation of the 589-acre Institute for Advanced Study land in Princeton and the 1250-acre Hamilton Marsh.

The Commission staff worked with other organizations in 1993 on the preservation of greenway corridors

along the Raritan River, the Wickecheoke and Shipetauken Creeks, and toward the preservation of Kuser Mountain in Hopewell Township. The staff is also working with Princeton University to acquire a greenway trail that would connect the canal in Kingston to the Cook Natural Area, which is about a half mile east of the canal in South Brunswick Township.



Review Zone Actions in 1993

The State law known as the "Sunset Law" stipulates that all State regulations expire five years after they are adopted. In February, 1994, the Commission's Review Zone Regulations will expire, so the Commission spent much of 1993 scrutinizing its regulations. The Commission's conclusion from this scrutiny was that the Regulations are effective, easily complied with, and efficiently administered. No new regulatory programs were deemed to be necessary, nor were any existing programs considered to be expendable.

This rosy assessment of its own regulatory program may seem suspect to a touch of prejudice, but when the Commission published the regulations to allow the public to comment—they had been slightly revised to simplify and clarify the rules—there were seven letters of support from regional environmental organizations and no substantive complaints from anyone. The Commission accepted this response as a compliment to its regulatory program.

Sixty new projects were filed with the Commission for review in 1993. The Commission granted Certificates of Approval to sixty-seven projects; twenty-four in the A Zone and forty-three in the B Zone. All projects were visited by the Commission staff before, during and after construction.

Other Commission Activities in 1993

The Canal Commission has the unusual mandate of encouraging citizen groups and other governmental agencies to take actions that will make the Canal Park a better public resource. In pursuit of this goal, the Commission staff is involved in a wide range of activities that promote the Canal Park or that give direction to groups so that they can directly enhance the Canal Park.

The following are examples of staff activities toward this goal:

- ☐ Spoke at annual meetings, seminars, and other meetings
- ☐ Wrote a technical report on a bird census for a statewide environmental publication
- ☐ Worked to promote the goal of a bi-state greenway organization that focuses on the central portion of the Delaware River
- ☐ Collected historic photographs and documents for a canal archive
- ☐ Supplied maps, photographs and information to newspapers and magazines for articles on the canal
- ☐ Assisted the Delaware and Raritan Canal Transportation Safety Study Commission