

# DUTCH NEW JERSEY

## Old Churches, Houses Draw Sight-Seers Out to Northern Bergen County

By JOHN B. EHRHARDT

**N**EW BRIDGE, N. J.—In this town, just a mile north of Hackensack, an interesting collection of old buildings is coming to be a worthwhile objective for sight-seers. New Bridge (new in 1739) was caught in a sort of backwater when the rest of the country was growing one hundred years ago. Railroads came late to northern Bergen County and the old Dutch families here retained their language, their customs and their heirlooms unmolested by outside influences up to the middle of the last century. The two churches of the neighborhood, "Het Noorde Kirke van Schraalenbergh" in Dumont and "Het Haus des Heeres" in New Milford, still attest to the Dutch influence by their inscriptions and their tombstones.

At the Hackensack end of the bridge crossing the Hackensack River here is the Steuben House, given to Baron von Steuben for his services during the Revolution. The house was built in 1739 and was already old at the time of the gift. The general retained the property but a short time, then sold the house and moved to upstate New York where a similar (and larger) gift from the people of New York awaited him.

The house is maintained as a historic shrine by the state, in cooperation with the Bergen County Historical Society. The building is open from 2 to 5 P. M. on Sundays and from 10 to 12 and 2 to 5 on other days, including holidays. No visitors are received on Mondays.

### Relics of Early Days

The house is decorated and furnished in the original Dutch manner, while an unusual collection of local relics is on display in the garret. One of these is an Indian dugout canoe, recovered from the Hackensack River near-by; experts have declared it the best-preserved example of such Indian workmanship unearthed so far.

Also included are relics of New Jersey's famous wampum factory which functioned near here until the late Eighteen Hundreds. Shells were brought by boat to the New Bridge landing, whence they were carried to the water-powered mill upstream. The manufactured beads were largely sold to John Jacob Astor's fur trappers, who found

that western Indians accepted them without question as the genuine article.

At the New Milford end of the bridge is the New Bridge Tavern, begun in 1739 and expanded through the years by an amazing number of additions and accretions. It served as the rallying point for Light-Horse Harry Lee's Continentals after their unsuccessful raid on Jersey City during the Revolution. It still operates as a tavern.

One mile north on River Road is a new development that adds to New Bridge's attractions. Last year, the New Jersey Audubon Society acquired an old house of no particular historic connections as its headquarters. The Audubon Society's home is at 796 River Road and is open to the public from 10 o'clock to 5 every day but Monday and Friday. The society maintains a permanent exhibit here of the works of the great naturalist.

### Old French Settlement

At 904 River Road, on property abutting the Audubon headquarters, a simple granite marker proclaims: "Site of the French church and cemetery of Kinkachemek, deeded to David des Marest June 8, 1677, by the Tapan Indians." A short dirt road beside the marker leads to the cemetery with its crumbling tombstones and to the old Demarest homestead beyond. The building is intact, but poorly maintained within. Plans for a complete restoration, however, are well under way. A cooperative agreement between the Demarest heirs and the Audubon Society makes the whole tract, stretching down to the river, available to the public as a bird sanctuary and study area.

The Hackensack valley is a major fly-way and nesting ground and the concession provides a valued addition to local conservation and educational facilities.

New Bridge is less than a mile north of Route 4 at Hackensack, via Hackensack Avenue. Special road markers indicate the way to the Steuben House. Visitors from the Interstate Park area may prefer to follow the less-traveled northern avenues to old Kinderkamack Road, which can then be followed south to the Steuben House and New Bridge.