
III. Historical Summary of the Tulpehocken Creek Study Area

THE FIRST INHABITANTS

To the early Leni-Lenape Indians, the Tulpehocken was a region of approximately 270 square miles. It included the area just beyond the source of the Tulpehocken Creek in present day Lebanon County, and encompassed an area extending to the Cacoosing Creek near Reading in present day Berks County. These Indians were not migratory and grouped together when the environment provided ample food. Evidently, the Tulpehocken region had sufficient sustenance. Reports indicate there was a large Indian village near the confluence of the Mill Creek and Tulpehocken, west of Womelsdorf. In addition, the Allegheny Path from the Delaware to the Susquehanna at Harris Farm bisected the Tulpehocken (or Shamokin Trail) region near present day Womelsdorf.

One of the earliest references to the Tulpehocken region can be found in the Provincial Records of Pennsylvania. These records reveal that a French and Indian trader named Nicole was captured by a man named Martin, tied to a horse and delivered to Philadelphia by way of

Peixtan (present Paxtang, a suburb of Harrisburg), TURPYHOCKEN and Manatawny. Although, the records do not specifically define the location of the Turpyhocken, it was an Indian town named by the Indians as "Land of Turtles".

THE COLONISTS ARRIVE

In the early 18th century, many Germans arrived as immigrants at Governor's Island in New York City and settled on Livingston Manor. By 1712 a number of these individuals reached the Schoharie Valley, about 160 miles north of New York City and 40 miles west of Albany. After farming for nearly a decade the settlers found they did not have title to their lands; a number left the valley in 1723 to search for lands which they could claim and legally hold to establish family farms or trades. Travelling down the Susquehanna River, they arrived safely at the mouth of Swatara Creek just south of present day Harrisburg. They followed the Swatara eastward to the source of a stream called the Tulpehocken. This group, and subsequent settlers from the Schoharie area, dispersed

along the banks of this waterway staking out claims wherever possible among the native Indians.

The settlers, joined by others, increased in numbers and caused the area to grow and prosper. Due to pressures from settlers and the influence of Conrad Weiser, who had settled in the area, officials of Lancaster County recognized the need for local government and in 1734 established Heidelberg Township. Records from 1749 indicate that some 12,000 immigrants had set ashore in Philadelphia and many had headed for the Tulpehocken area. It is surmised that early settlers spoke of the richness of its soils and helped establish its popularity.⁽¹⁾

The colonists and Indians lived together for some time until events elsewhere brought on the French and Indian War in the period 1754 to 1763. Although there was never fighting on a major scale within the Tulpehocken region, there were a number of atrocities committed on local families by Indian raids. Because of threats to the settlers, six forts were built in or near the region to protect the settlers. In addition, a number of safe homes served as forts due to the number and suddenness of Indian attacks. One of these homes, Fort Zellers, is still standing near the Mill Creek at Newmanstown.

EARLY INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE

The Tulpehocken, Mill and Cacoosing Creeks were very important to the early pioneers as a source of power. Numerous mills--grist, saw, paper and fulling--sprang up along the banks of the Creeks. The first major industry was established in 1749 when the Tulpehocken forge was

erected to process pig iron into wrought iron. Later, "Baron" Steigel purchased the forge and renamed it Charming Forge. Sometime later, furnaces to produce pig iron and other forges were built in the South Mountains on tributaries of the Tulpehocken.

Settlement and commerce were greatly enhanced when the old Tulpehocken Road (now US Route 422) was laid out in 1727. Running between Reading and Womelsdorf, the old road was replaced in 1817 with the Berks and Dauphin Turnpike and trade along this road flourished.

The most significant transportation development in the region was the construction and operation of the Union Canal. Proposed by George Washington as part of a larger network of canals and completed at its full length by 1828, it linked the Susquehanna River south of Harrisburg with the Schuylkill River at Reading. The Schuylkill Canal then provided the link necessary for transportation and trade from Reading to Philadelphia. For some 77 miles, the Union Canal followed the Swatara Creek to the vicinity of Lebanon and then on to Reading along the Tulpehocken. The canal boats carried lumber, coal, flour, whiskey and other merchandise from manufacturer to distributor and resulted in the growth of numerous businesses and trading centers (e.g. Myerstown, Womelsdorf, and Bernville) along its length. The canal's original narrow width restricted the size of the boats it could accommodate, and an expansion of the canal was completed in 1854. However, the additional tonnage and tolls collected from this expansion were insufficient to cover construction costs. Despite the help of lotteries and other subsidies, competition from the railroads which transported goods from Harrisburg, Reading and Philadelphia

⁽¹⁾ See Appendix I for a detailed account of early agricultural practices in the Tulpehocken/ Mill Creek area.

caused the canal to stop operations in 1884. The chief competition causing the demise of the canal was the Lebanon Valley Railroad, incorporated in 1836, and opened between Harrisburg, Lebanon and Reading in 1858.

THE 1900'S

The Tulpehocken region has been the result of steady and compatible growth rather than intensive development. A rural atmosphere of the sparsely settled communities in Berks and Lebanon Counties can still be found along the banks of the Tulpehocken Creek. Rolling farmlands, dense woodlands and picturesque hamlets and villages are familiar sights. Of most importance to the area has been the development of the Tulpehocken Creek in the 1960's and 1970's into a recreational center. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructed the Blue Marsh Dam and Recreation Area. Downstream the Berks County Commissioners established the Tulpehocken Creek Valley Park. These facilities, while changing the character of the stream, provide flood protection, water supply and active and passive recreational facilities for thousands of county and regional residents.

HERITAGE

Almost 275 years have passed since the first European settlers arrived in the Tulpehocken region. They made substantial contributions to the growth of the colonies and in so doing, left their legacy providing insight to the events and lifestyle that shaped the Tulpehocken region environment. A considerable number of buildings constructed during the

settlement era are well preserved and remain as testimony to the historical value of the area.

There have been numerous surveys and studies of the area and these have been arranged in this study as follows:

Map 6 and its Legend outline the historical importance and location of buildings and sites along or near the Tulpehocken and a portion of the Cacoosing Creeks. The source of almost all of this information is surveys conducted in 1983-85 by the Berks County Conservancy under contracts with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. These surveys were responsible for federal designation of the borough of Womelsdorf, the village of Stouchsburg and the Tulpehocken from near Bernville to the Lebanon County line as National Register Historic Districts.

Map 7 and its Legend also list similar information for the Tulpehocken region in Lebanon County. The Conservancy is indebted to Mrs. Viola Mohn, of Myerstown, for her expertise and help in identifying sites and making available her extensive library.



*Gruber Wagon Works
- Heritage Center*

LEGEND - MAP 5

***Historic Sites Along the Tulpehocken
and Cacoosing Creeks***

BERKS COUNTY

Bern Township

1. Berks County Heritage Center - contains (a) the Gruber Wagon Works, built circa 1882, a National Historic Landmark, one of the most complete surviving examples of 19th century rural manufacturing; (b) C. Howard Hiester Canal Center, a converted barn housing the most extensive private canal collection in existence today; (c) Melcher Grist Mill, built circa 1888, rare and complete example of a water-powered farm mill; (d) Wertz's (Red) Covered Bridge, built circa 1867, on National Register as longest single-span covered bridge (204 feet) existing in Pennsylvania; (e) a park office/stone farmhouse built circa 1780; (f) the Deppen Cemetery - early Catholic burial ground, relocated from Mt. Pleasant area. Also nearby is Union Canal Lock #47E - restored lift lock with miter gates.
2. Union Canal Lock House - stuccoed German stone home built circa 1825, site of Lock 48.
3. Hiester Mansion - Federal style brick house, built circa 1815, home of a Governor of Pennsylvania.

Bernville Borough

4. A potential National Register Historic District.

Jefferson Township

5. Christ Little Tulpehocken Church - organized in 1729. Log church built circa 1730. Present Union Church 1809 with Old and New cemeteries.
6. Site of Lock 34. Stone house may have been Lock Tenders residence. Now site of "Christmas Village" - a Tourist Attraction.
7. Former Cross Keys Tavern - an inn during Canal era; summer kitchen, barn, outbuildings. Nearby is John Zerbe house, frame barn with root cellar in hillside. Dating from 1800-1820.
8. Original Lorentz Zerbe Homestead and site of Zerbe/Krick Gristmill - house constructed of materials from Christ Little Tulpehocken Church in 1806.

Marion Township

9. Charming Forge Mansion and Forge complex - 13 buildings used as homes or summer cottages. Dam, forge site, mill race cut by Hessians, canal locks nearby.
10. Former lock house along Union Canal at Lock 24 - three arch bridge over Tulpehocken Creek. Formerly on "Tulpehocken Path", the Sunbury Road, now relocated as Route 419. Lock stones used in bridge ramp when canal abandoned. Also a stone house and barn associated with underground railroad.
11. Philip Braun Homestead - settlement 1723. Log/stone home, farm buildings, cemetery.

12. 1753 Germanic stone home, barn, cemetery - Lock 23 across road.
13. Reed cemetery - 1727. Site of first church in western Berks County. Three churches built here.
14. "S" Bridge - stone arch near confluence of Mill Creek. Near site of early Reed Mill c. 1730.
15. Stouchsburg Historic District - nineteenth century canal - era village and cigar manufacturing center.
16. Frederick Reed Homestead, log cabin - 1766 Germanic stone house, stone barn. Canal bed in meadow.
17. Christ Lutheran Church - founded 1743. Rev. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg married Conrad Weiser's daughter here. The parsonage was the birthplace of Governor John A. Shulze, (1824-29).

Wyomissing Borough

18. Tulpehocken Farms - 1840-1860 Vernacular stone farmhouse.
19. Kissinger Union Church and Cemetery - 1852, potential National Register Historic District.

Spring Township

20. Vernacular stone farmhouse, built circa 1831 by W. M. Gring - now offices of Berks County Park and Recreation Department. Stone gristmill built c. 1811 by David Gring.
21. Vernacular stone farmhouse built circa 1803 - now owned by PA State

University.

22. Vernacular stone farmhouse built circa 1803 - used as a residence.
23. Vernacular stone farmhouse built circa 1802 - used as a farmstead.
24. Vernacular stone farmhouse built circa 1820 by Henry Van Reed - used as a residence.
25. Vernacular farmhouse built circa 1773 by John Van Reed - used as a farmstead.
26. Vernacular farmhouse built circa 1800 - used as a residence.
27. Stone mill built between 1780-1820 - used as a residence.

Lower Heidelberg Township

28. Mansion House of Joshua Van Reed, owner of Van Reed Mill - intact Federal red brick farmhouse built circa 1834.
29. Stone farmhouse built circa 1853 - an active farm.
30. Reber Home - 1804 Georgian featured stone home.
31. Old Dry Road Farm - a farm complex of original log buildings and several moved from Blue Marsh Dam. Characteristic of an early Pa. Dutch farmstead.

North Heidelberg Township

32. Stone gristmill - Zerbe/Sunday. Operated by Lutz until 1957. Machinery intact, dam and race.

Brick house with addition, 1850.

33. Millers House, at Charming Forge - millers house nearby.

Heidleberg Township

34. Deppen Family Homestead 1780-1800 - early settlement, log house, stone barn, and former burial ground.
35. Braun gristmill - 1819 Federal style brick house, possibly inn along Sunbury Road. Mill rebuilt circa 1900 by Wagner and Emerick.

Womelsdorf Borough

36. The Borough is a National Register Historic District - architecture depicts development from 18th century log and stone houses to high style Victorian buildings.

LEBANON COUNTY

Jackson Township

- A. Trinity Tulpehocken United Church of Christ, Parsonage and old cemetery - on old Route 422. First Reformed Church in North America; original church built before 1746.
- B. In Millardsville, the Millardsville Tavern (now Danish Inn) - the lower story dates to early 1700's; upper part built around the Civil War.
- C. The John Immell House - on the south bank of the Tulpehocken.
- D. Breitenbach Complex - log barn, log house and first brick house in the area; a son of builder formed the

first medical society in the United States. Only real fort in Myerstown

area during French and Indian War (other limestone houses were used as forts when needed).

- E. Rambler House - built circa 1741. Rambler was an early Whig politician.
- F. The Immel House - datestone 1759. A son of Immel was a captain in the Revolutionary War, and his daughter married J. A. Shulze, an early Governor of Pennsylvania.
- G. Chris Spengler House - built circa 1838. A lovely Georgian interior.
- H. Christopher Lei House - one of only two known of early Germanic houses straddling arches. Part of Tulpehocken Manor Complex. Nearby is the Michael and Eva Lei house, a limestone manor house built circa 1769, which is on the National Register. Also in the complex is the Michael and George Spengler houses. The Michael Spengler house has the other rounded arch.

North Lebanon Township

- I. Theiss Stone Cabin - 1744 datestone. Nearby is John Tise house, datestone 1796. Excellent example of farmstead with well-preserved limestone buildings.
- J. Richard Boeshore Farmstead - Georgian farmhouse and large bank barn of limestone construction, c. 1800.
- K. Schaeffer Farmstead - Brick

farmhouse and summer kitchen, dated 1861. Stone bank barn and family burial ground on property.

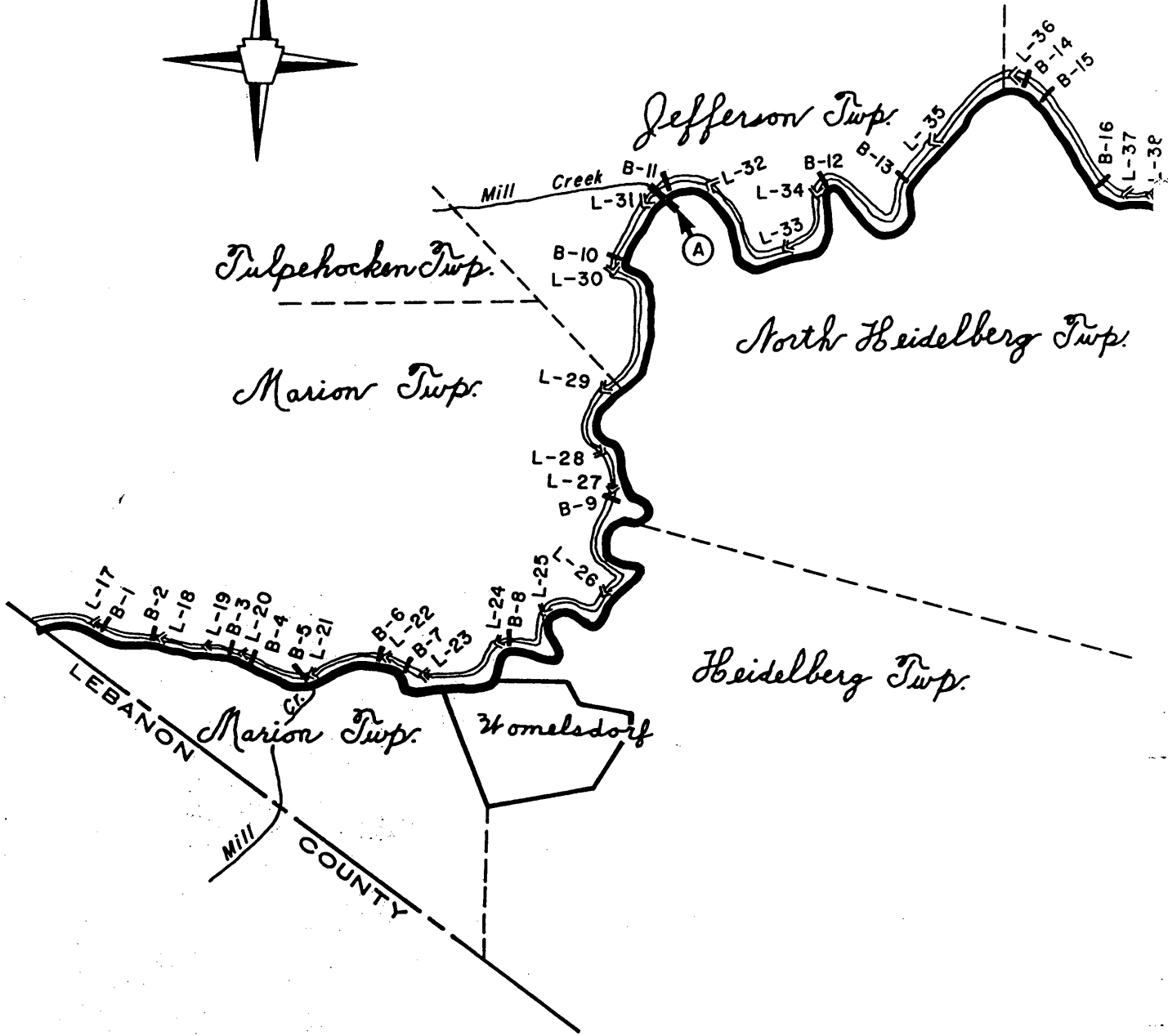
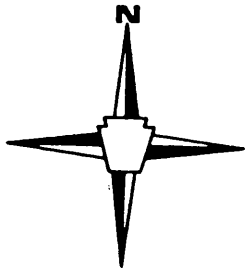
- L.. (Early Schaeffer Homestead?) - Stone farmhouse and springhouse possibly dating from the late 18th century.

The borough of Myerstown in

Lebanon County contains numerous historic buildings, some of which are located near the Tulpehocken as it winds its way thru the country-side. Map 6 and its Legend shows the Myerstown sites in some detail. This material is derived from a booklet prepared and distributed in 1976 by the Myerstown Bicentennial Historical Committee.



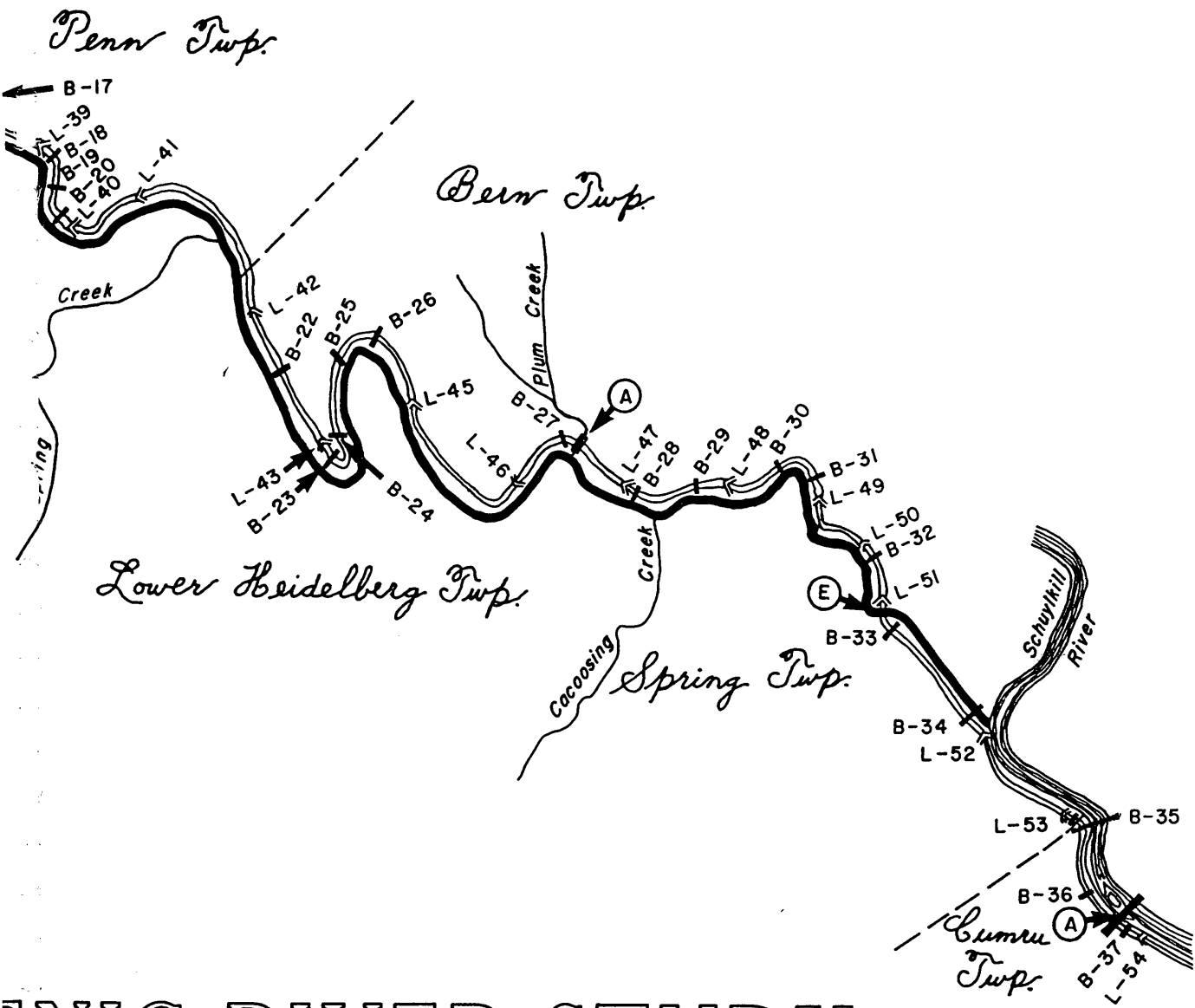
Charming Forge



TULPEHOCKEN SC

LEGEND

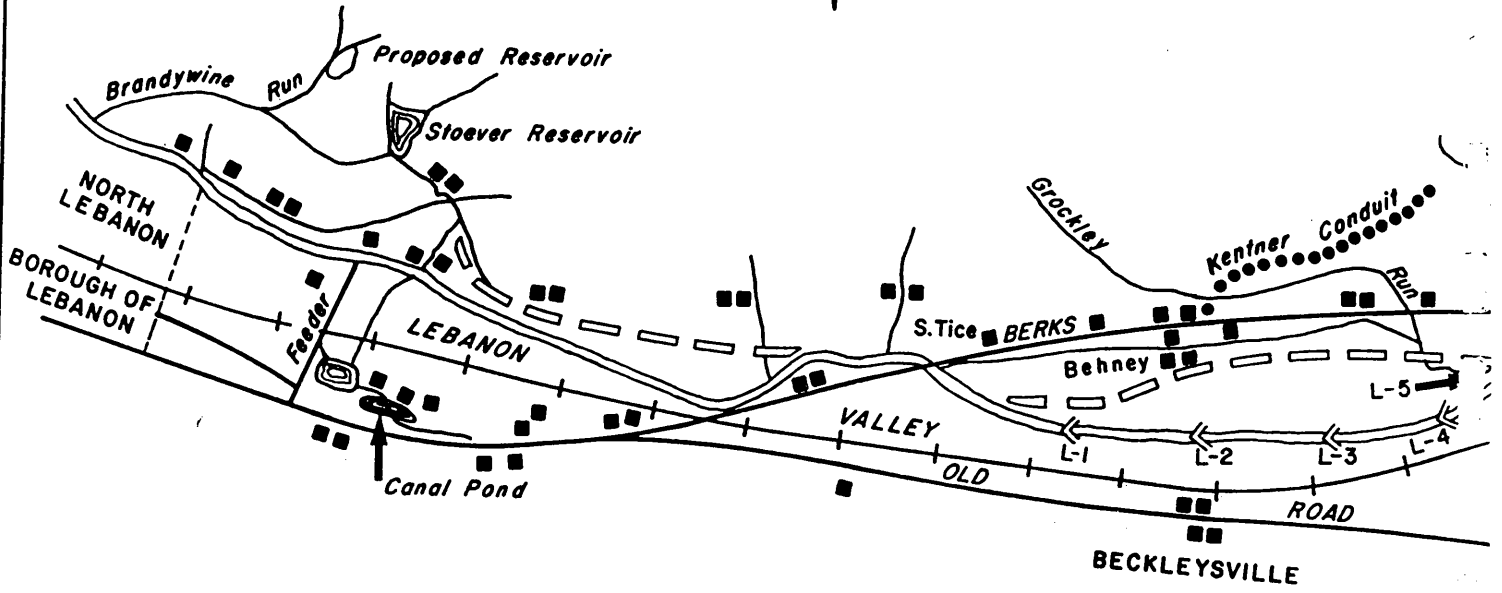
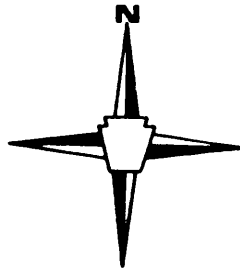
- B - CANAL BRIDGE
- L - CANAL LOCK
- (A) - AQUEDUCT
- (E) - AQUEDUCT (PRESENT BEFORE 1850)



UNION CANAL RIVER STUDY

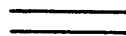




UNION CANAL LOCKS AND LOCATIONS IN BERKS COUNTY

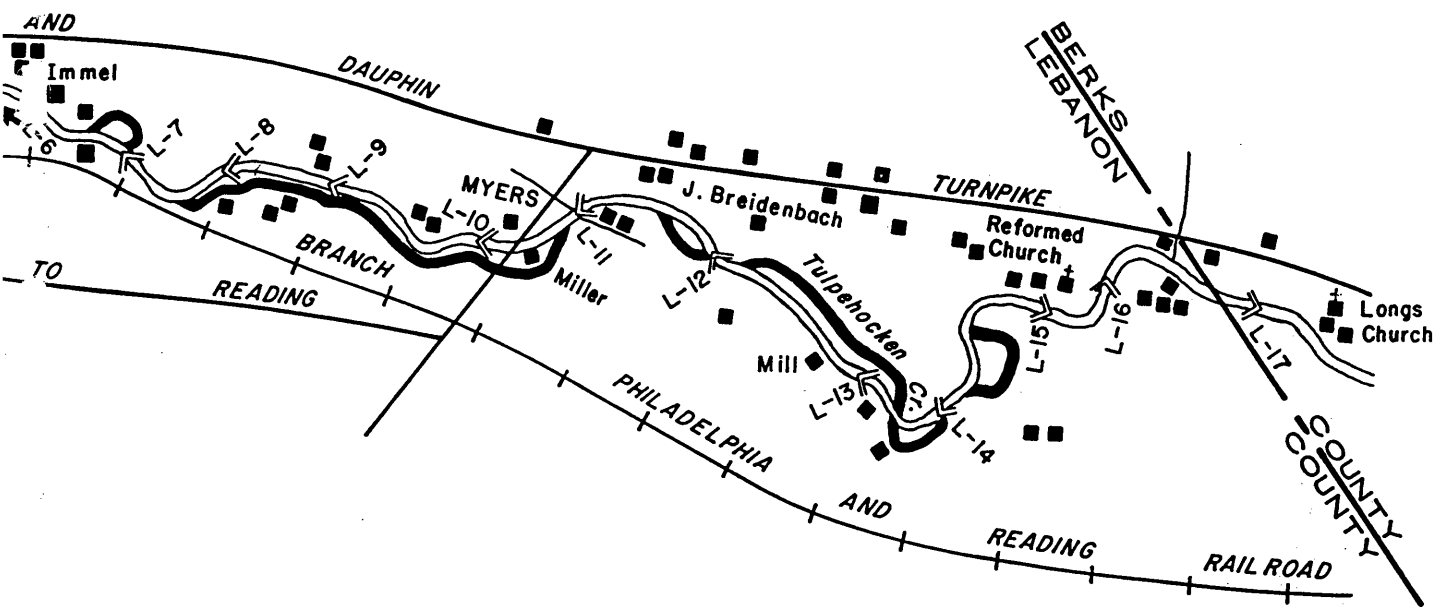
SOURCE: GEORGE M. MEISER, IX FROM DATA COMPILED BY D. S. ZACHARIAS



TULPEHOCKEN SC

LEGEND

-  - CANAL
-  - ABANDONED CANAL
-  - CANAL LOCK
-  - FARMS / RESIDENCES
-  - CHURCHES



UNION RIVER STUDY

LOCKS AND PHYSICAL FEATURES ON OR NEAR THE UNION CANAL IN LEBANON COUNTY

SOURCE DATA SUPPLIED BY LEBANON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Courtesy: Lebanon County Historical Society

*Mules pulling a boat
through a Union Canal Lock*