

Upper Merion History Signs

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Upper Merion History Signs



Upper Merion History Signs

#3



the Alloy King of Prussia
- A DoubleTree by Hilton

KOHLER Signature Store
by Weinstein Supp.

Abrams Run
Apartment Homes

Peri-Doc Oliver
Health Center

Walmart Supercenter
Wegmans

Stonebrook at
Upper Merion

Heuser Park

You are here

Through the first half of the 20th century, coal mining in the upper Schuylkill River watershed dumped two million cubic yards of coal silt into the river annually, compromising the public drinking water supply, hindering navigation, and exacerbating flooding.

In the 1940s, James Duff, Attorney General of Pennsylvania, championed an initiative to halt the dumping of coal silt into the Schuylkill River and restore its waters. As governor in 1947, Duff advanced the cleanup project.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania constructed a series of basins between Auburn and Norristown to contain dredged material from the river. Silt and culm (fine pieces of coal) settled in the basins while the water drained back into the river. This dredging process removed over twenty million cubic yards of coal material from the river.

In 2001, Upper Merion Township acquired basins 23 & 24. Stoudt's Ferry Preparation Company purchased the impounded coal waste to resell as coal products. The basins were backfilled with material excavated from nearby highway projects. Heuser (HOY-zer) and Bob Case Parks were built on these sites. The earthen ridge in front of you is part of Basin 23's embankment.

1940 Map - Reading Area Community College
Schuylkill Navigation Digital Collection
SNC Engineers' Records
PADEP

Bob Case Park

AMERICA'S FIRST RIVER CLEANUP

2024



KING OF PRUSSIA
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ESTABLISHED 1970

Impounding Basin 23 - Heuser Park

Upper Merion History Signs

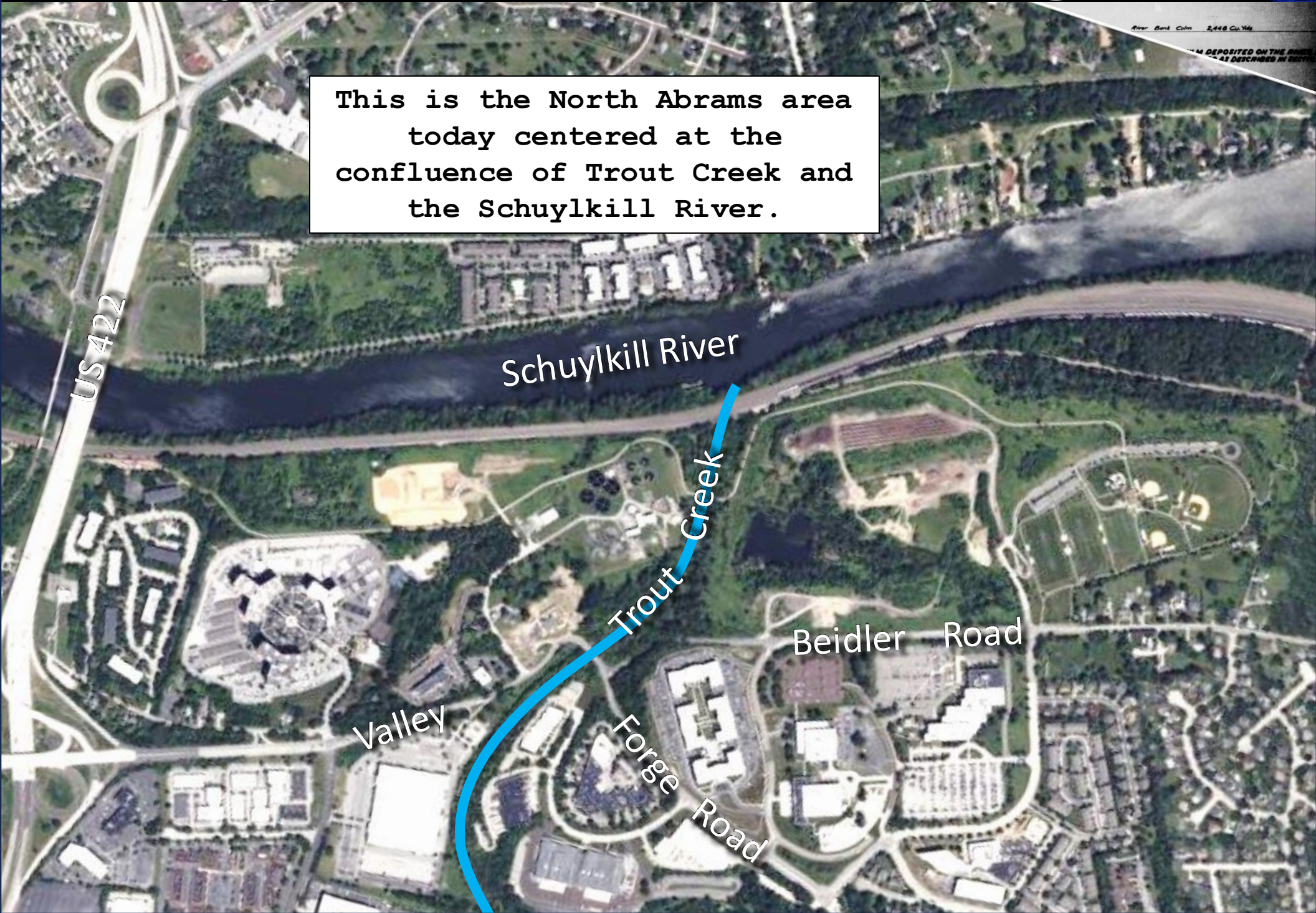
Backstory: What's culm?



Answer: Coal-dust (esp. of anthracite).
It looks like fine black sand.

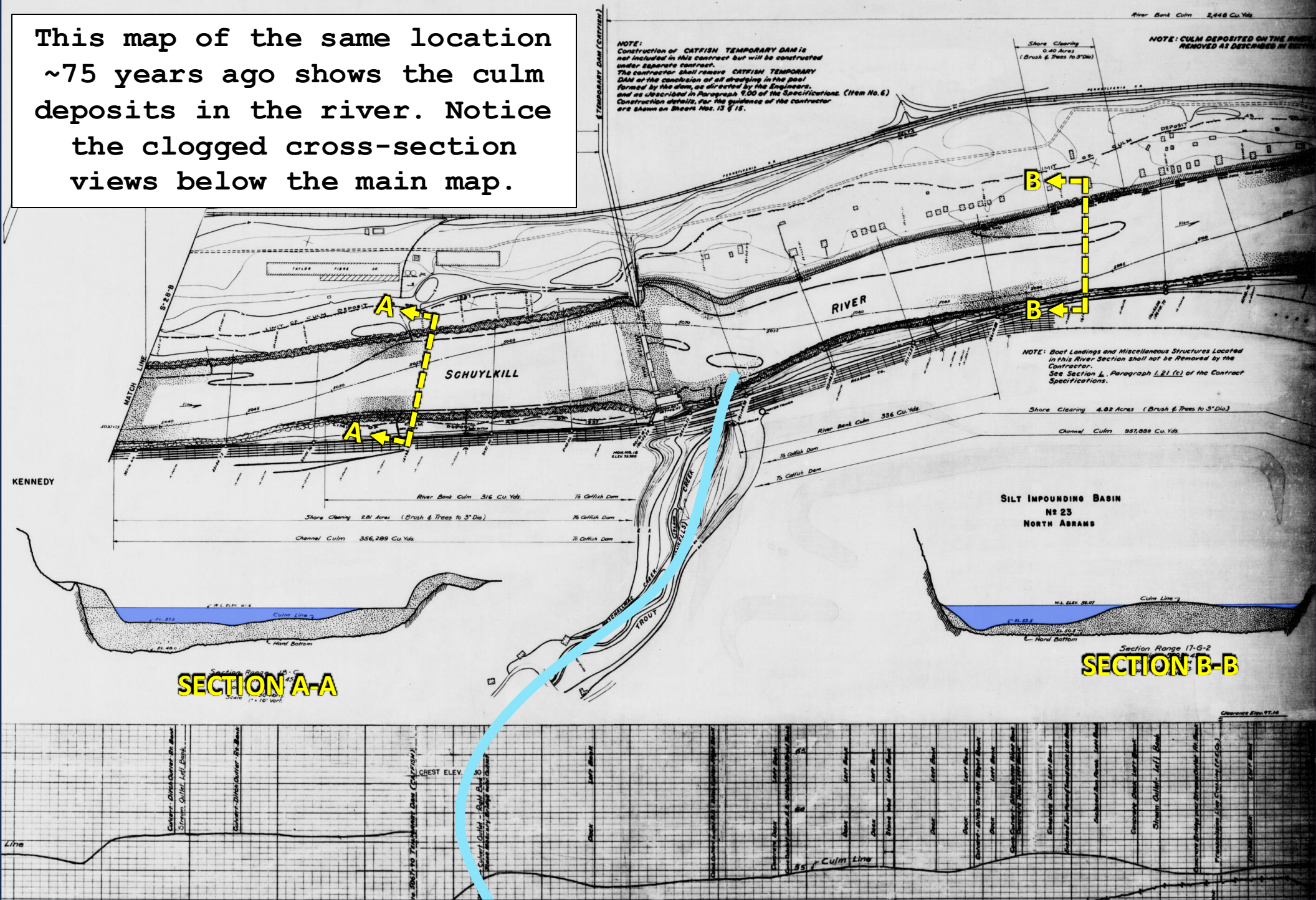
Upper Merion History Signs

This is the North Abrams area today centered at the confluence of Trout Creek and the Schuylkill River.

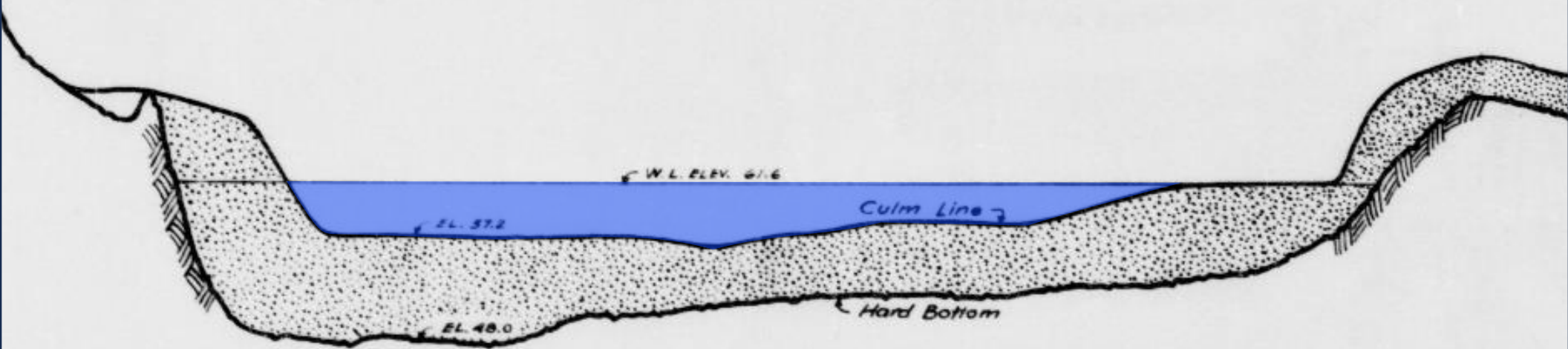


Upper Merion History Signs

This map of the same location ~75 years ago shows the culm deposits in the river. Notice the clogged cross-section views below the main map.



NEDY



Section Range 18-C
 & Station 5055+45
 LOOKING UPSTREAM
 Scale 1" = 50' Horiz.
 1" = 10' Vert.

Upper Merion History Signs

Channel Culm 957,889 Cu. Yds.

SILT IMPOUNDING BASIN Nº 23 NORTH ABRAMS

W.L. ELEV. 59.07

Culm Line

EL 53.5

EL 50.5

Hard Bottom

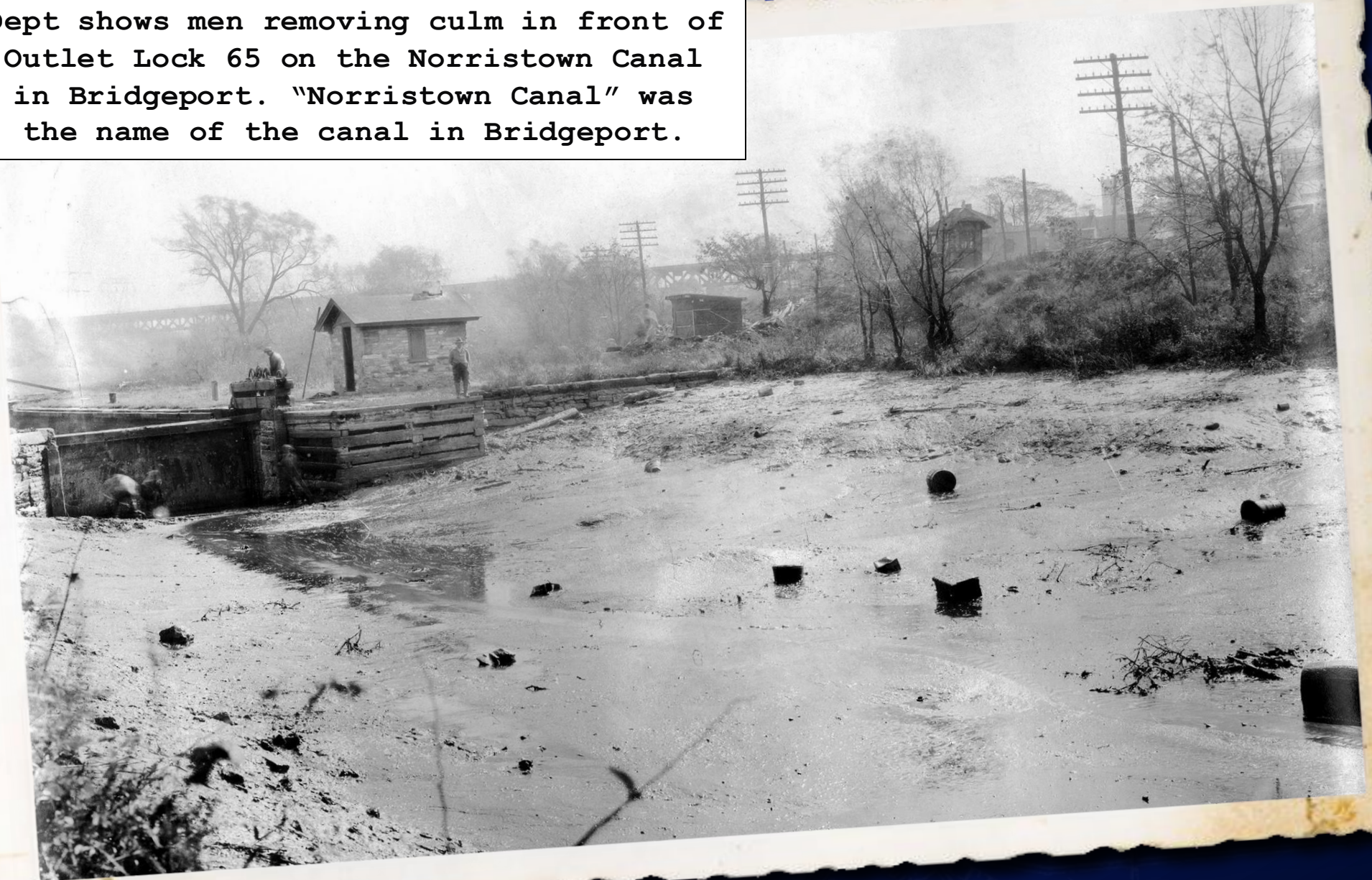
SECTION B-B

Section Range 17-G-2
& Station 5093+45
LOOKING UPSTREAM
Scale: 1" = 50' Horiz.
1" = 10' Vert.

Clearance Elev. 97.14

Upper Merion History Signs

A 1928 photo from the Philadelphia Water Dept shows men removing culm in front of Outlet Lock 65 on the Norristown Canal in Bridgeport. "Norristown Canal" was the name of the canal in Bridgeport.



Lock 65 Bridgeport

Upper Merion History Signs

Visible in the background of the previous photograph is the crenelated tower of Christ Church (Old Swedes).



Lock 65 Bridgeport

Upper Merion History Signs



Also visible is
the Pennsylvania
Railroad's
Trenton Cut-Off
Bridge spanning
the Schuylkill
River in
Swedesburg, PA.

Lock 65 Bridgeport

Upper Merion History Signs

The upper photo of the Norristown Canal is looking downstream under the Philadelphia and Western Bridge in Bridgeport. The DeKalb Pike bridge over the canal is visible in the distance. Both photos show the accumulation of culm.



1928 Bridgeport

Upper Merion History Signs



75 Years go, the Schuylkill
River was the site of
America's First river cleanup.

Upper Merion History Signs



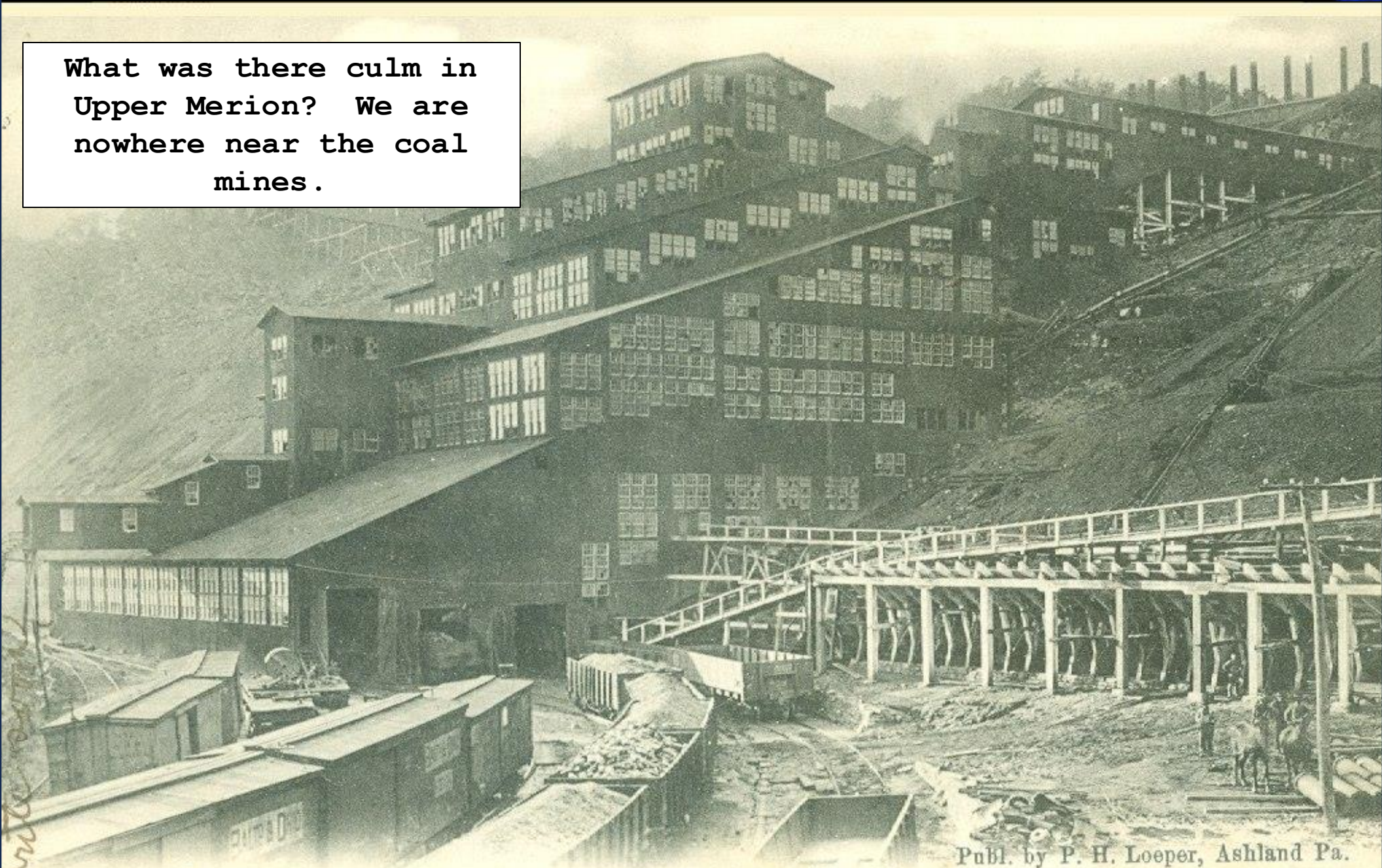
Upper Merion History Signs



This is the Heuser trailhead. The Schuylkill River West Trail cuts through Impounding Basin #23's wall. Impounding basins were an important part of the cleanup.

Upper Merion History Signs

What was there culm in
Upper Merion? We are
nowhere near the coal
mines.



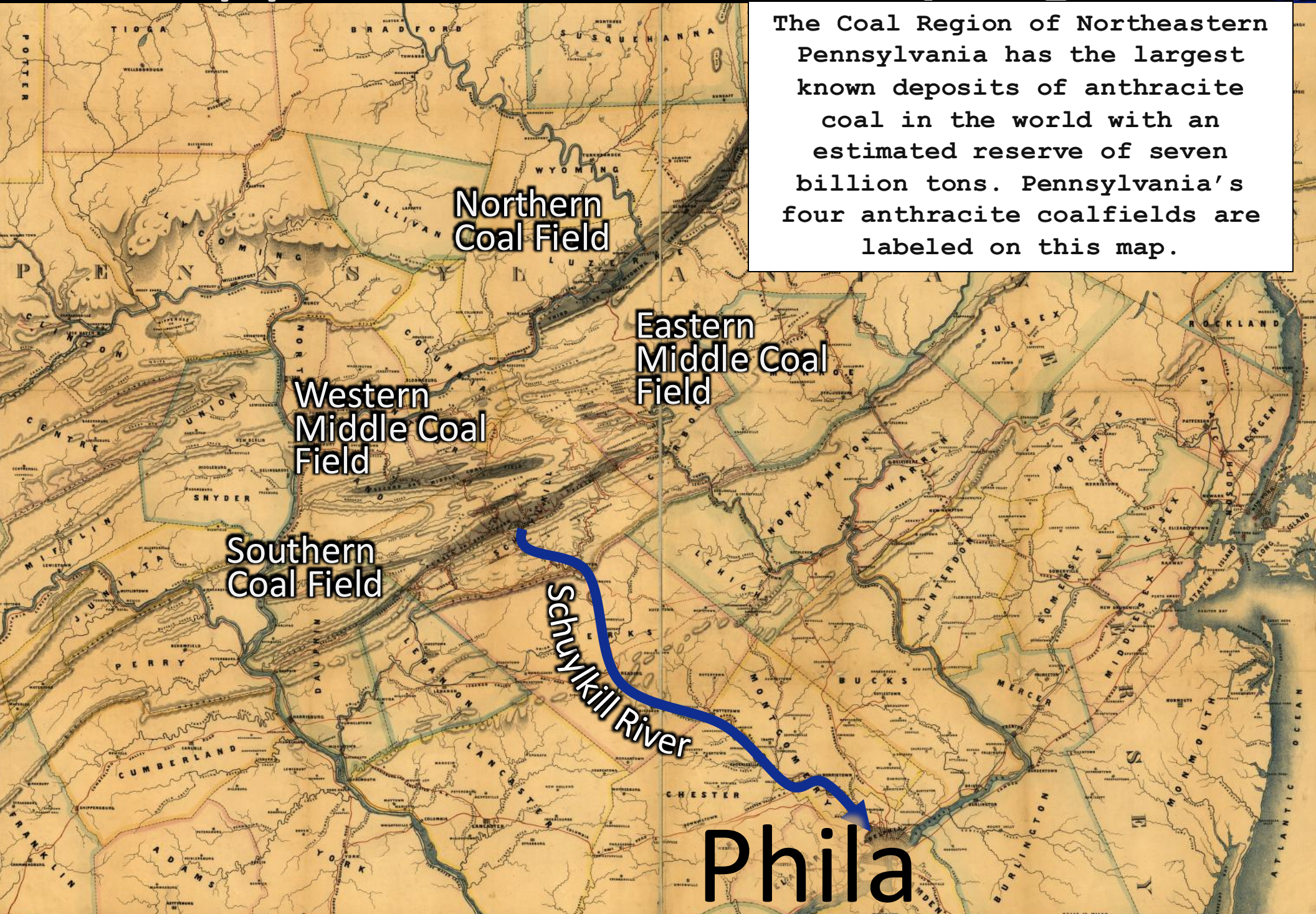
Publ. by P. H. Loeper, Ashland Pa.

Hammond Breaker, Girardville Pa.

This is where I'm going to start to work next week / ma

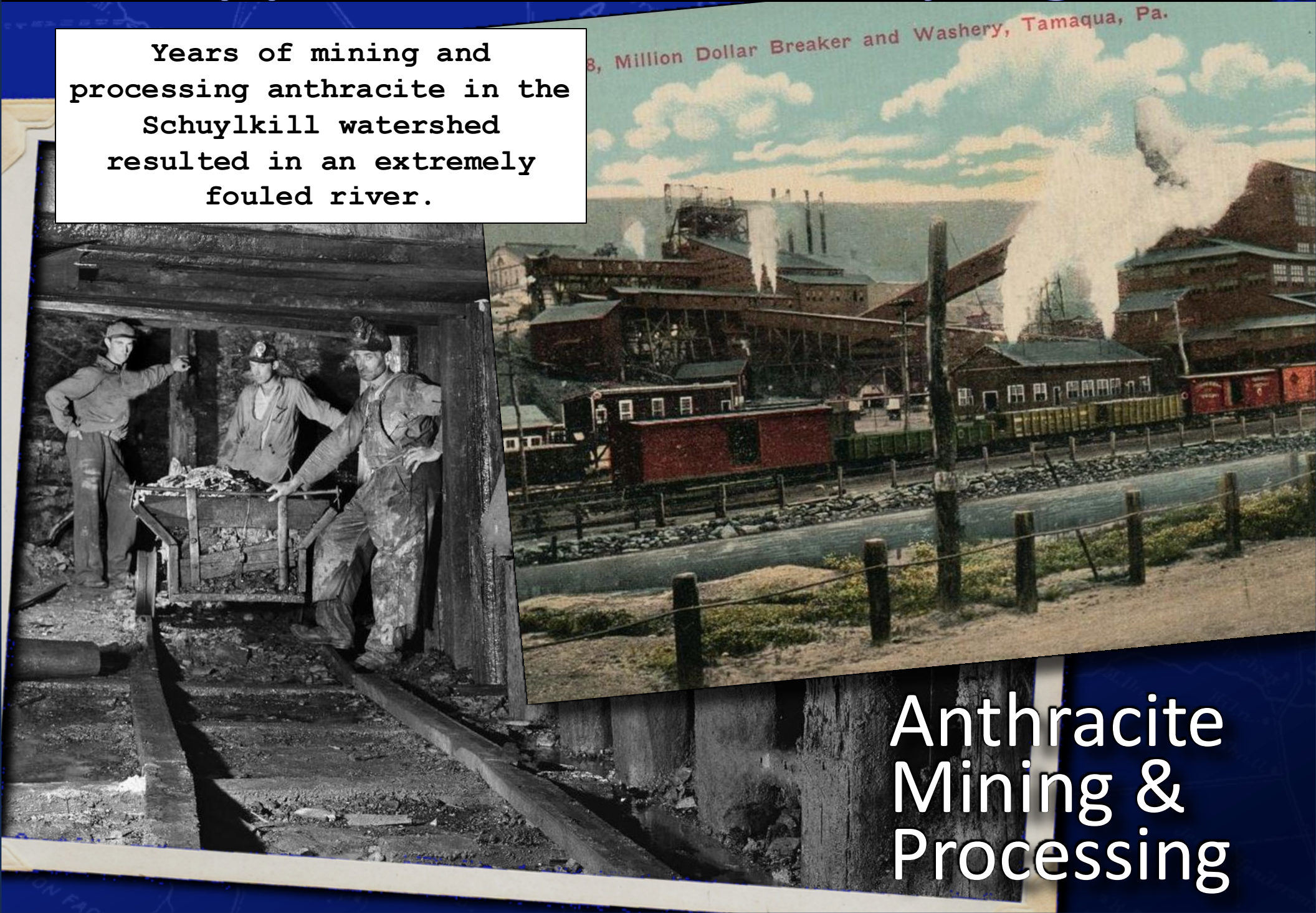
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The Coal Region of Northeastern Pennsylvania has the largest known deposits of anthracite coal in the world with an estimated reserve of seven billion tons. Pennsylvania's four anthracite coalfields are labeled on this map.



Upper Merion History Signs

Years of mining and processing anthracite in the Schuylkill watershed resulted in an extremely fouled river.



Anthracite
Mining &
Processing

Upper Merion History Signs

These barges are Schuylkill River dredges shown working near Royersford. Their function was to loosen the culm deposits and pump the slurry into the impoundment basins.

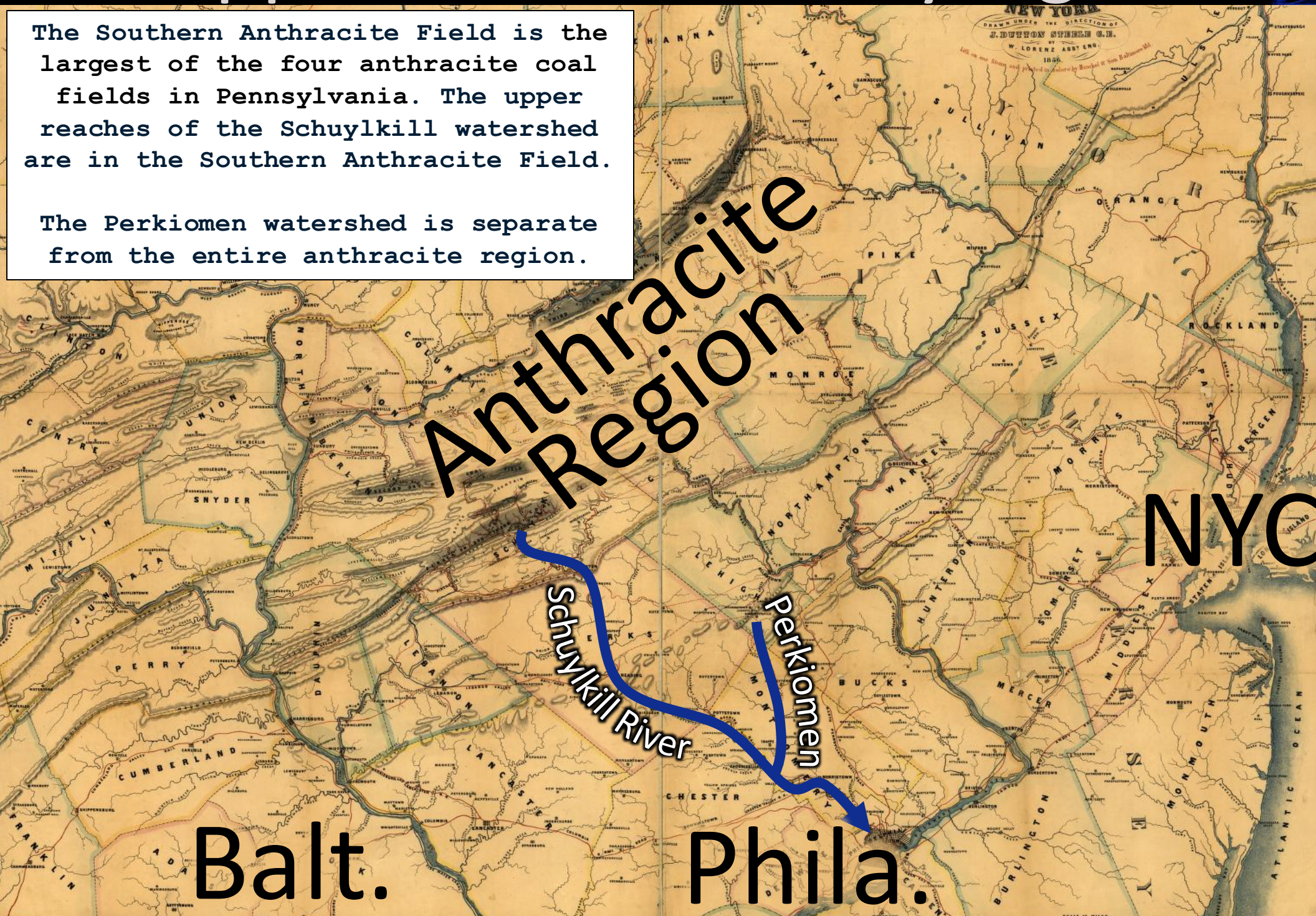


The dredges were made specifically for the Schuylkill River Project. The dredges were designed so that all components exceeding a 13-foot clearance could be lowered to allow passage under a bridge at a draft of 4 feet. They were also designed to be easily disassembled so that they could be transported overland more easily.

Upper Merion History Signs

The Southern Anthracite Field is the largest of the four anthracite coal fields in Pennsylvania. The upper reaches of the Schuylkill watershed are in the Southern Anthracite Field.

The Perkiomen watershed is separate from the entire anthracite region.



Upper Merion History Signs

June 8, 1950

Oaks

Oaks, PA - June 8, 1950
This is an aerial view above the
confluence of the Schuylkill
River and Perkiomen Creek. (Penn
Pilot)

Sidenote: Oaks, PA is named for
Thomas Oakes who was the chief
engineer of the Schuylkill
Navigation Company. He was
responsible for the design and
early construction of the
Navigation's Schuylkill River
canals in the early 19th
century. Oakes was also
instrumental in the design of
the Fairmount Water Works in
Philadelphia.

Schuylkill River

Perkiomen Creek

Schuylkill River

Valley Forge

Upper Merion History Signs

June 8, 1950



Note the contrast in color between the Schuylkill and the Perkiomen. The lighter color of the Schuylkill is due to the culm deposits which the Perkiomen does not have.

Upper Merion History Signs

June 8, 1950

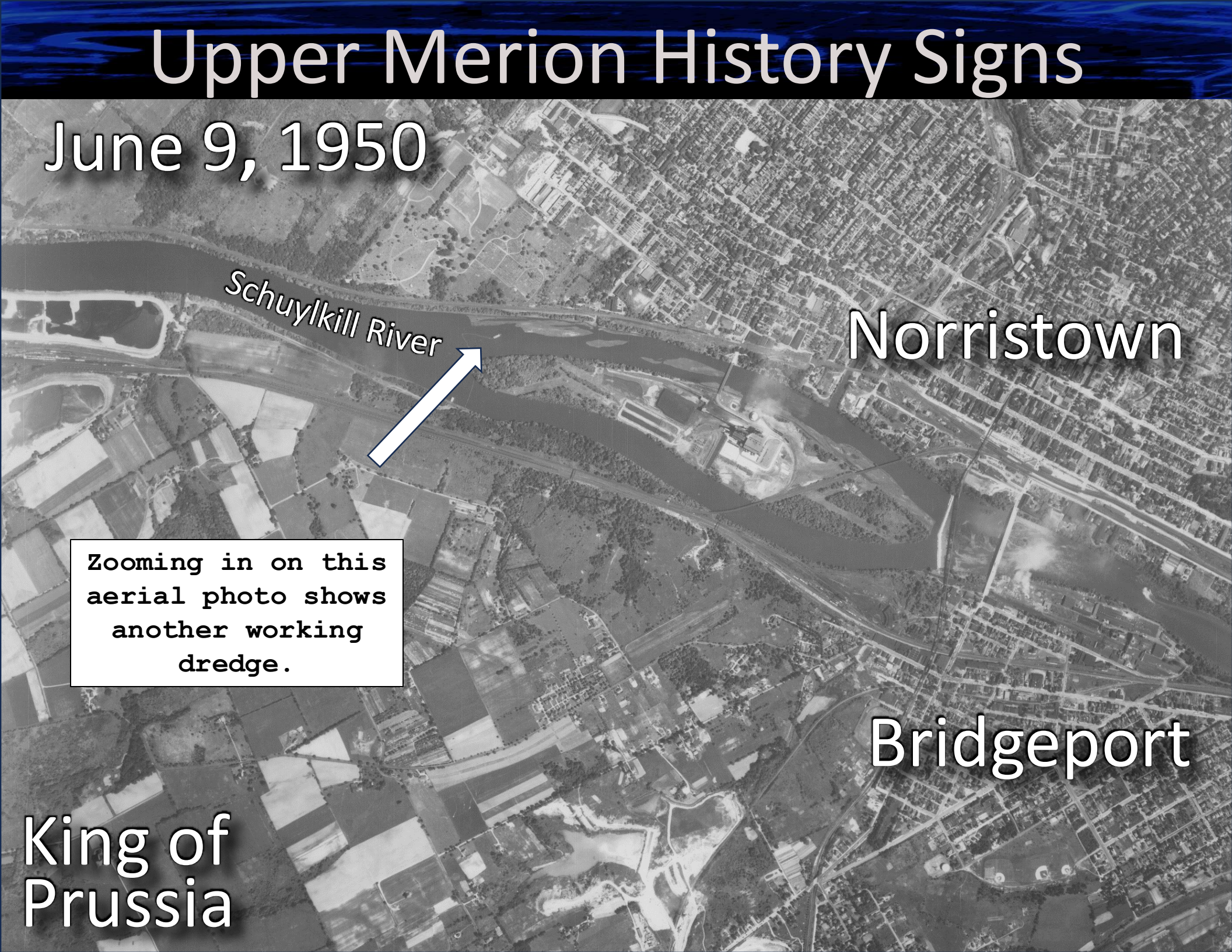
A black and white aerial photograph showing a wide, winding body of water, likely a river or canal. The water is dark and textured. A long, straight, light-colored line, identified as a pipeline, runs diagonally across the lower portion of the image. To the left of the pipeline, there is a small, light-colored rectangular area, identified as a working dredge. The surrounding land is visible as a lighter, textured area on the right side of the image.

Zooming in on the same aerial
photo shows a working dredge
and its pipeline.

Upper Merion History Signs

June 9, 1950

Schuylkill River



Norristown

Zooming in on this
aerial photo shows
another working
dredge.

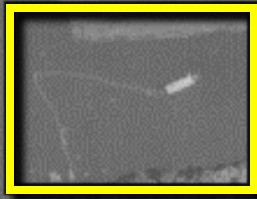
Bridgeport

King of
Prussia

Upper Merion History Signs

June 9, 1950

Schuylkill River



Barbadoes Island

Upper Merion



Upper Merion History Signs

June 9, 1950



This "island" is composed
entirely of culm.

Upper Merion History Signs



Dredge Discharge

The slurry from the dredge, composed of culm and river water, was pumped into basin.

From the basin, the water drained back into the river through a weir, leaving the culm behind. Weirs allowed control of the basin's water level.



Waste Weir

Upper Merion History Signs



This is the North Valley Forge basin, across the river from Washington's Headquarters. The weir has removable gates and a hollow interior.

2019

Upper Merion History Signs

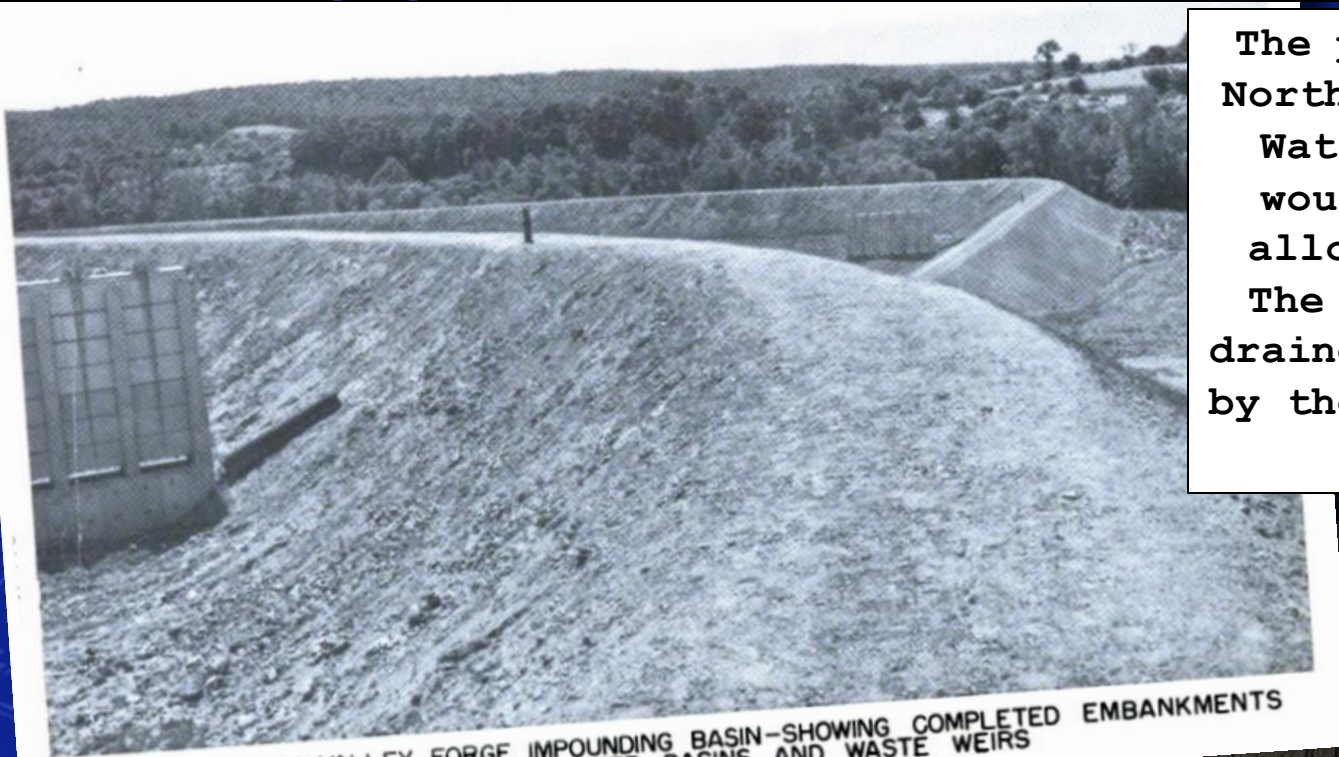
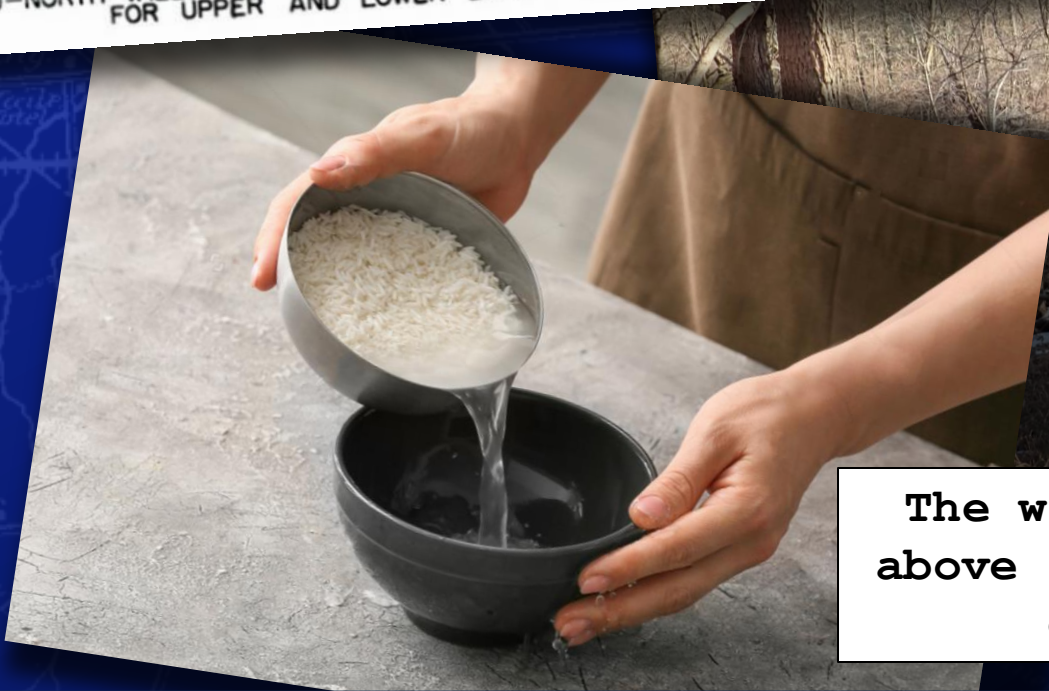


PLATE 9—NORTH VALLEY FORGE IMPOUNDING BASIN—SHOWING COMPLETED EMBANKMENTS FOR UPPER AND LOWER BASINS AND WASTE WEIRS

The photo to the left shows the North Valley Forge basins c1949.

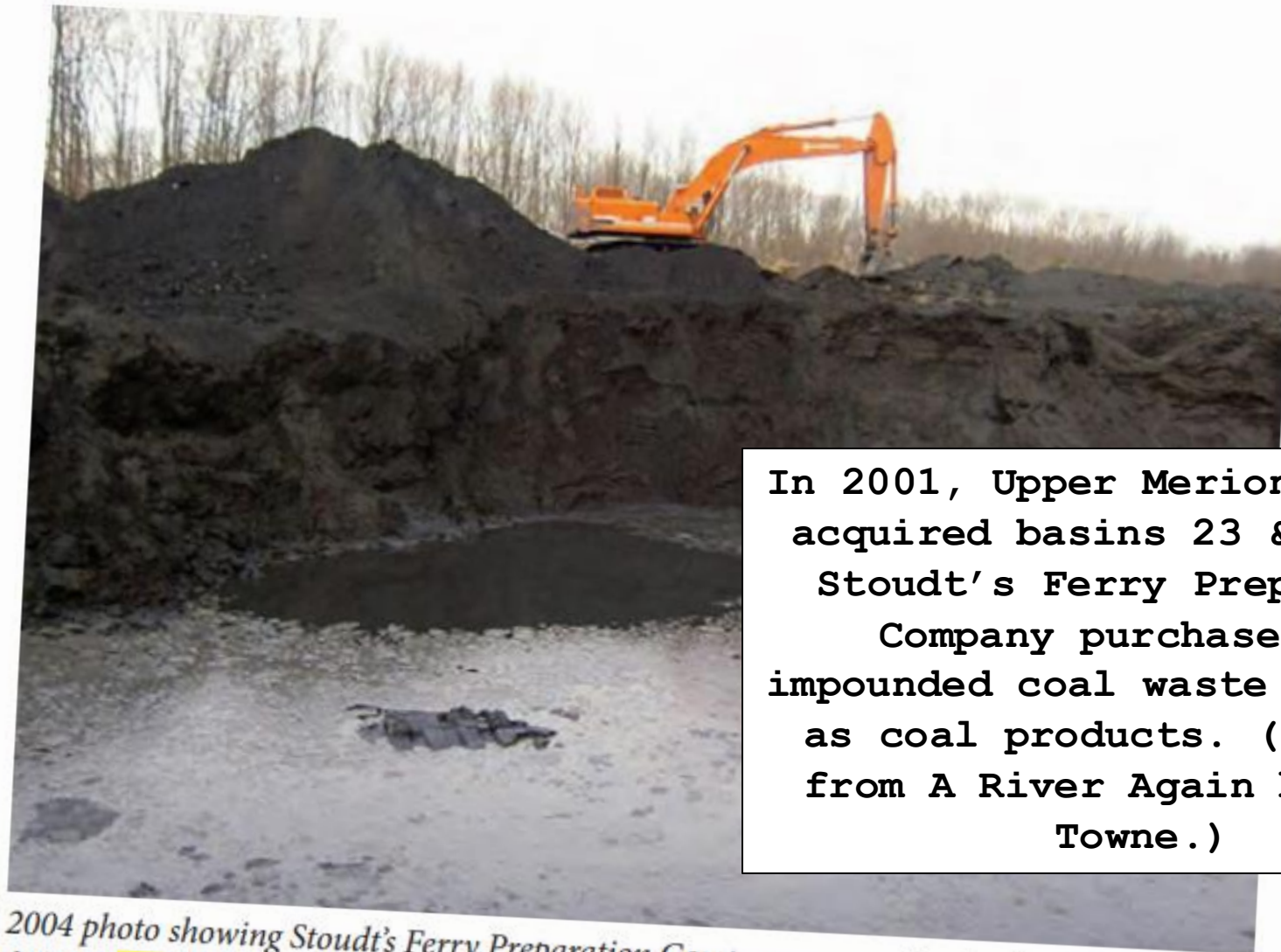
Water pumped in from a dredge would pool in the impoundment allowing the solids to settle.

The water would be decanted or drained from the top of the pool, by the weir, and flow back to the river through a pipe.



The weir in the 2019 color photo above is the same weir on the left edge of the B&W photo.

Upper Merion History Signs



In 2001, Upper Merion Township acquired basins 23 & 24, and Stoudt's Ferry Preparation Company purchased the impounded coal waste to resell as coal products. (Page 121 from A River Again by Chari Towne.)

2004 photo showing Stoudt's Ferry Preparation Company excavating dredged sediments from the **North Abrams impounding basin** to reclaim marketable coal. Used with permission of the Stoudt's Ferry Preparation Company.

Upper Merion History Signs

An aerial photograph showing a large-scale industrial operation, likely a coal processing plant. The landscape is dominated by massive, dark piles of coal or sediment, some of which are being processed by machinery. Several large, multi-story industrial buildings with brown roofs are visible, along with various pieces of heavy equipment like excavators and trucks. The surrounding area shows some greenery, but the overall scene is one of intense industrial activity.

Stoudt's Ferry Preparation Company
recovers coal and other materials
from Schuylkill River culm. The
average amount of coal reclaimed
from dredged sediments is 30
percent of the volume.
Some of the coal that came out of
Upper Merion's basins became an
ingredient for Kingsford
charcoal.

Stoudt's Ferry Preparation Co. - Oaks PA

1952



#25



#24
(Bob Case Park)

#23
(Heuser Park)

Upper Merion History Signs

2024



Heuser (pronounced "hoy-zer") and Bob Case Parks had highway construction fill added after the culm was removed, reducing the depth of the basins.

#23
(Heuser Park)

2024

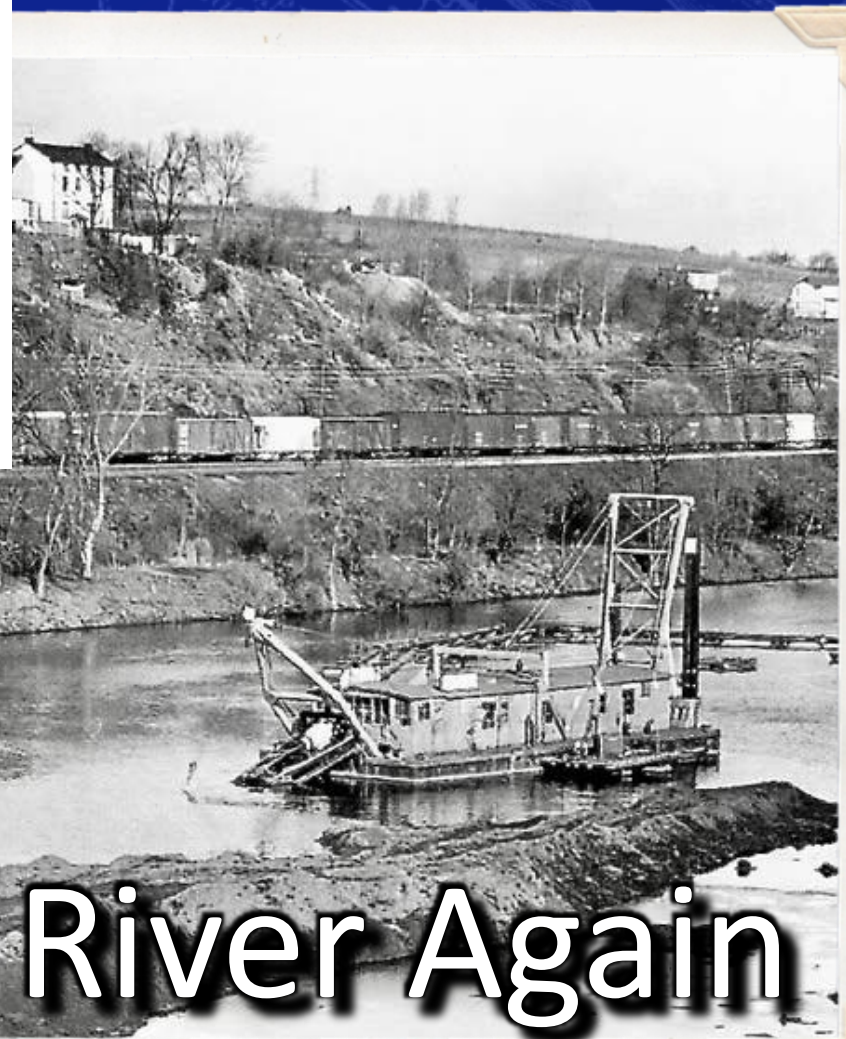


#23
(Heuser Park)

Upper Merion History Signs

The Trail Sign Project was conceived and directed by Upper Merion resident Neil Sardiñas, who also created the design for each of the signs.

Neil would like to thank Chari Towne, author of A River Again: The Story of the Schuylkill River Project, for her help with this sign.



A River Again

Story of the Schuylkill River Project.
Chari Towne

