Upper Merion History Signs

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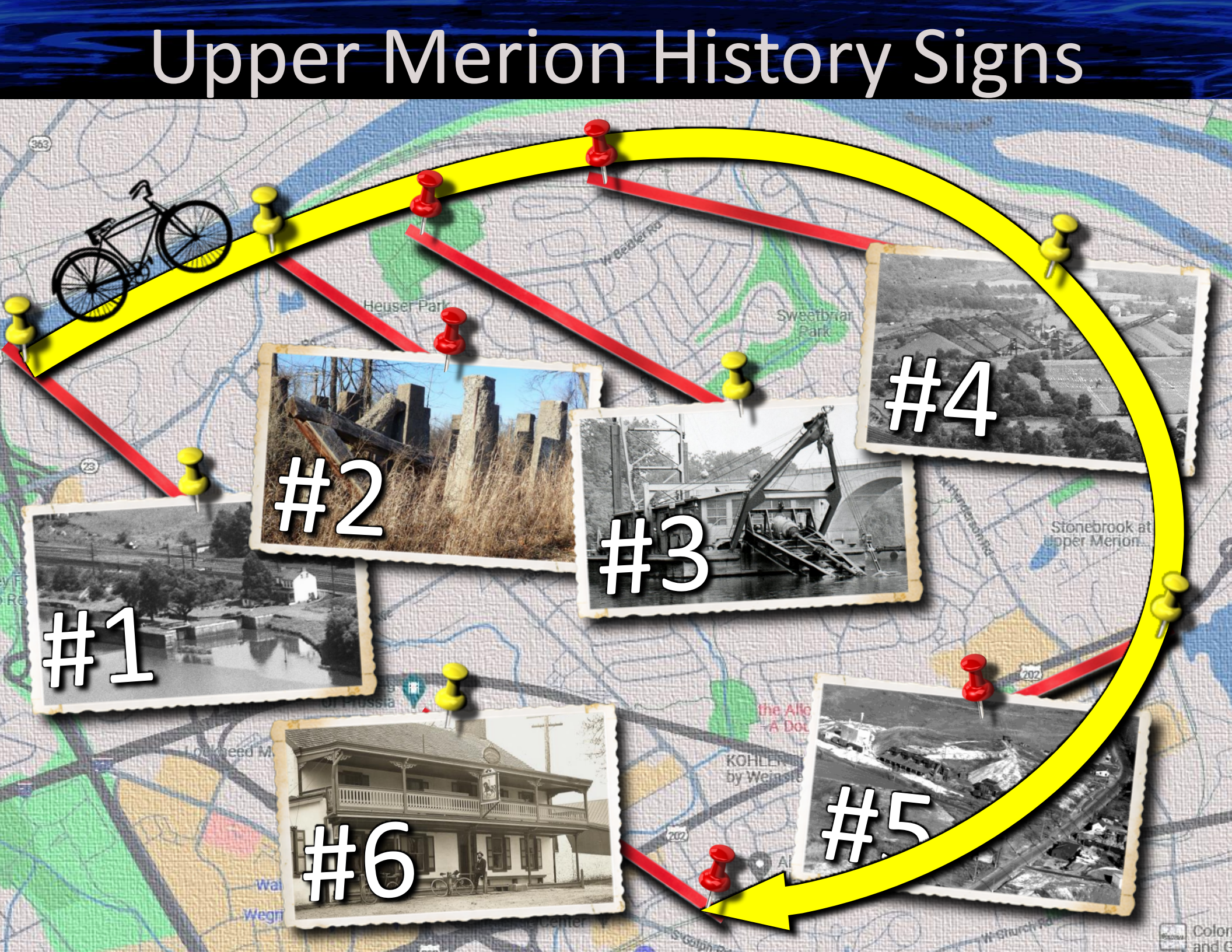
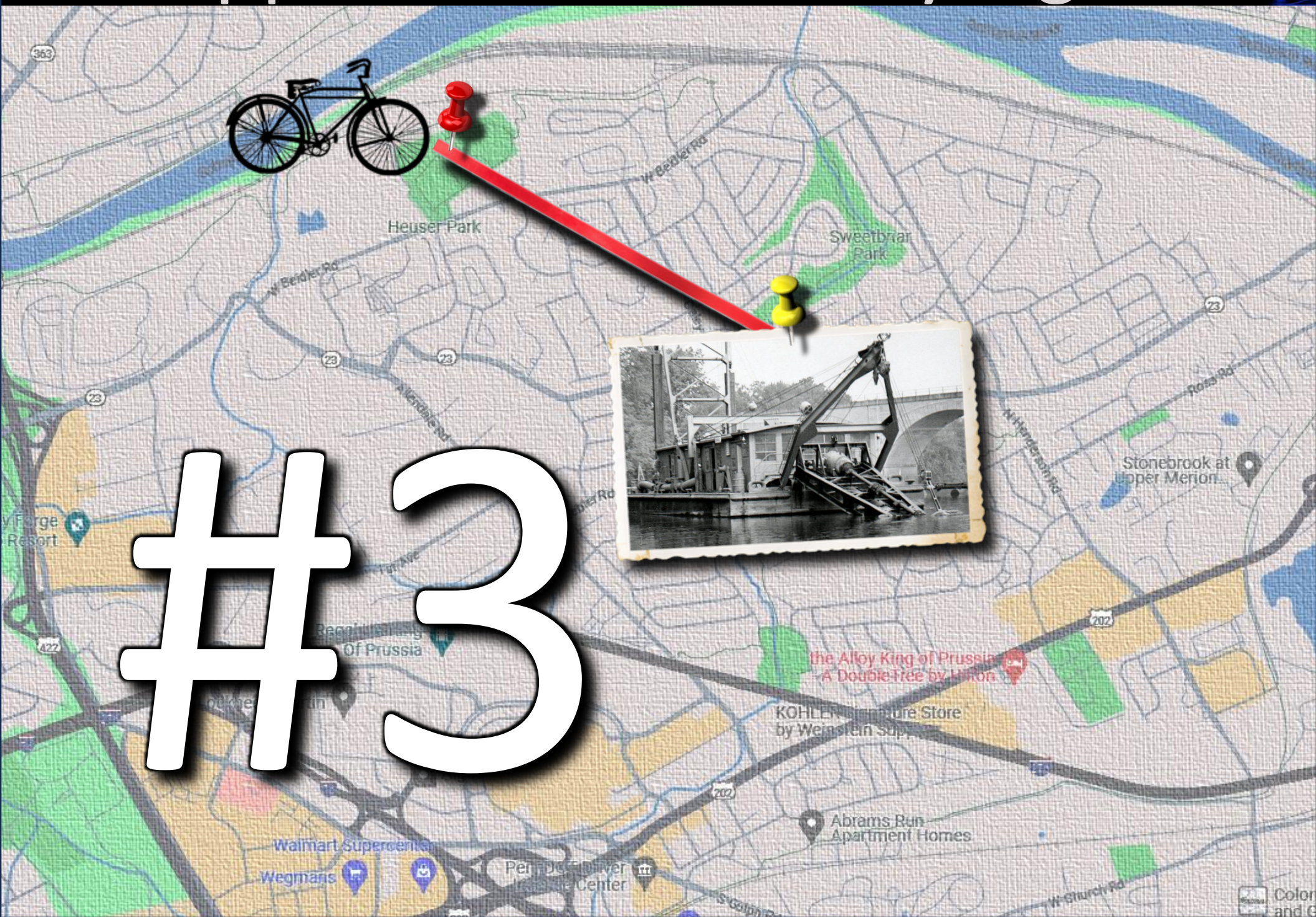
Upper Merion History Signs



Upper Merion History Signs



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

You are here

Heuser Park

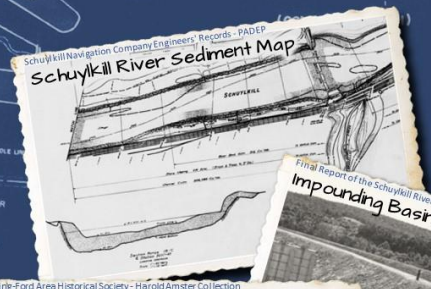
Bob Case Park

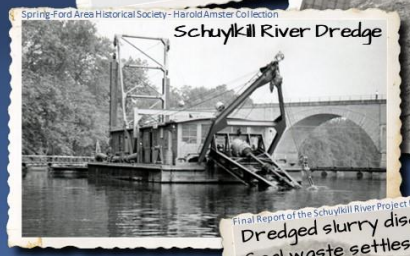
Through the first half of the 20th century, coal mining in the upper Schuylkill River watershed dumped two million cubic yards of coal silt into the river annually, compromising the public drinking water supply, hindering navigation, and exacerbating flooding.

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.





AMERICA'S FIRST RIVER CLEANUP

Impounding Basin 23 - Heuser Park

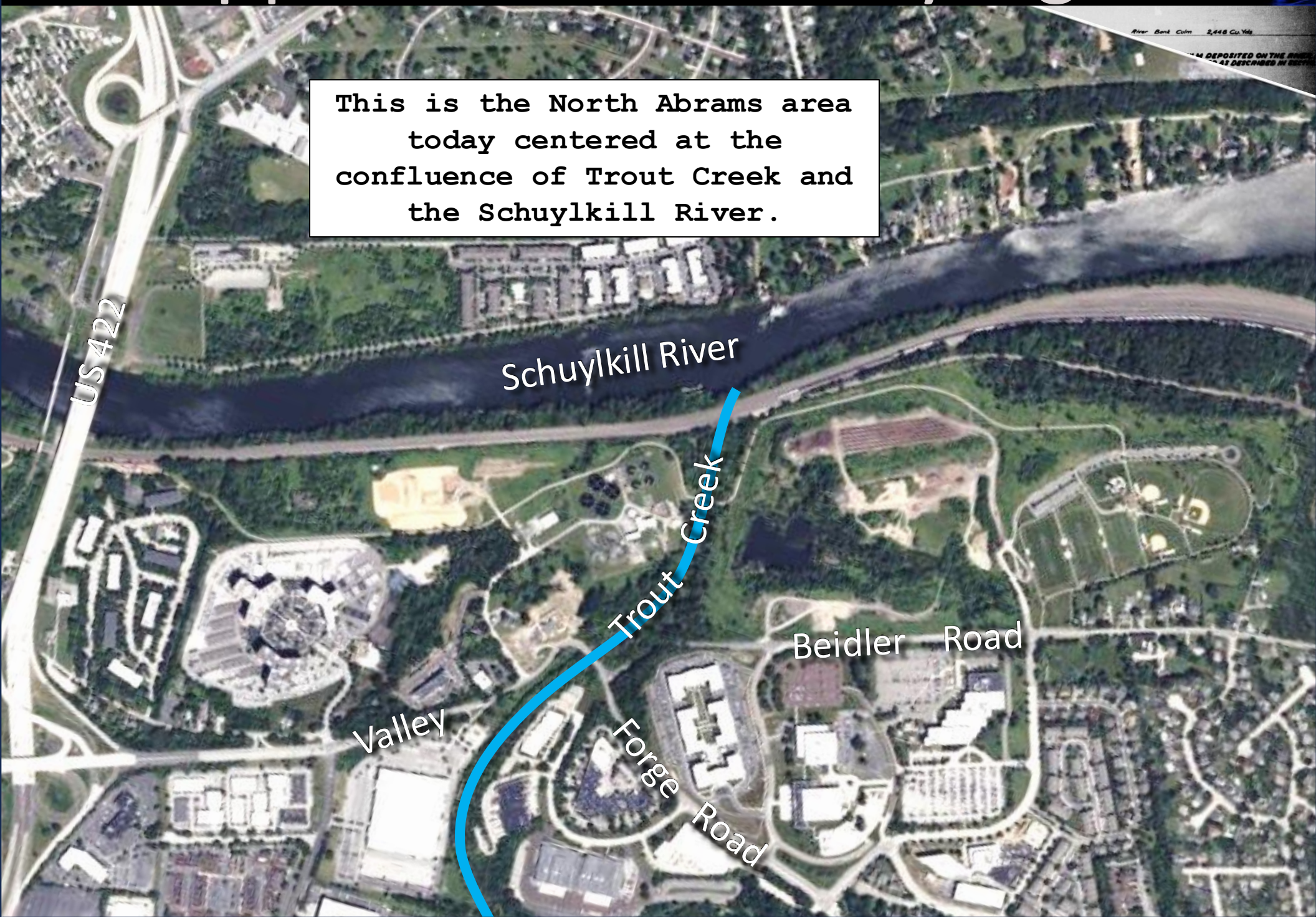
2024

Upper Merion History Signs

Backstory: What's culm?

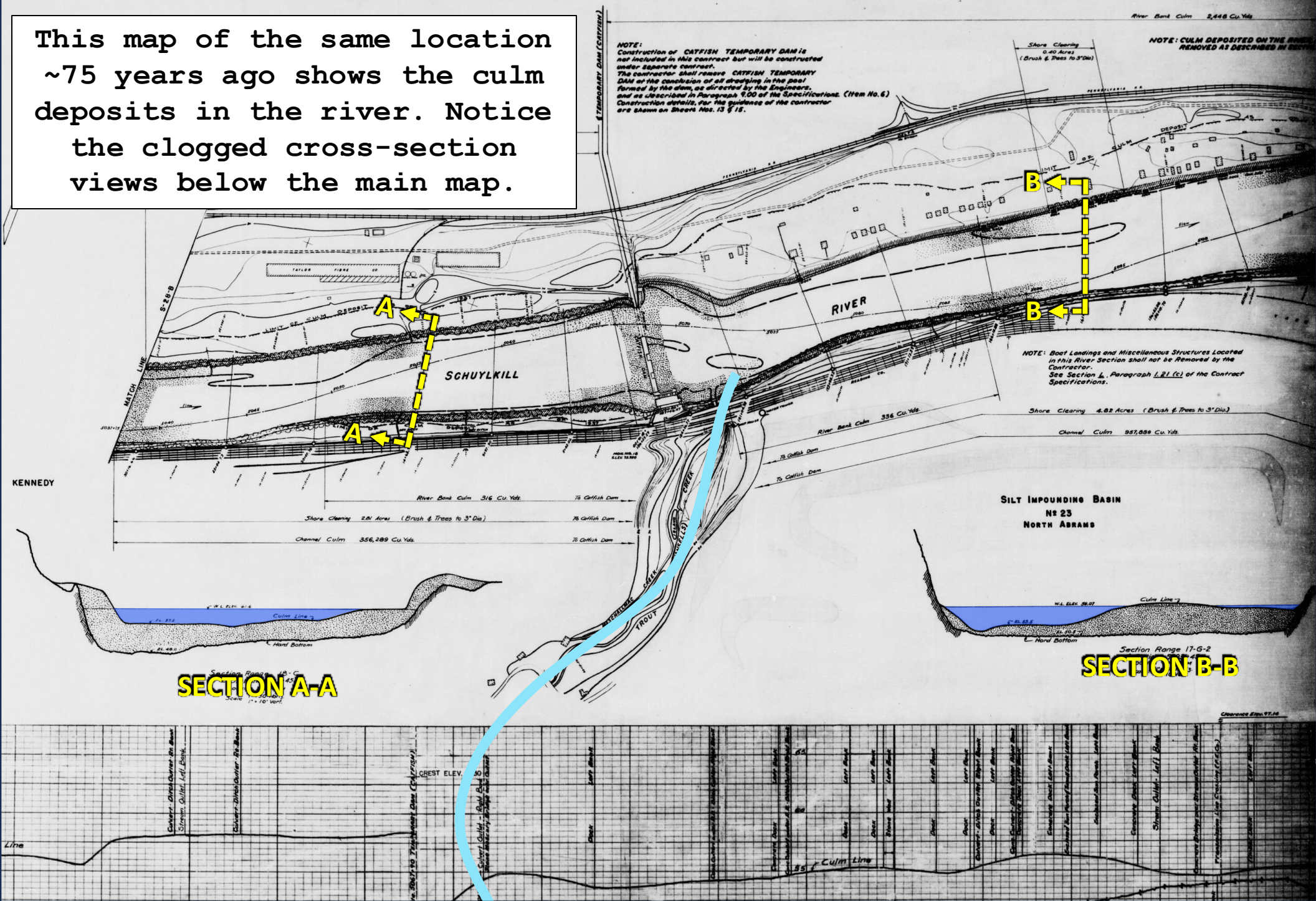
Answer: Coal-dust (esp. of anthracite). It looks like fine black sand.

Upper Merion History Signs

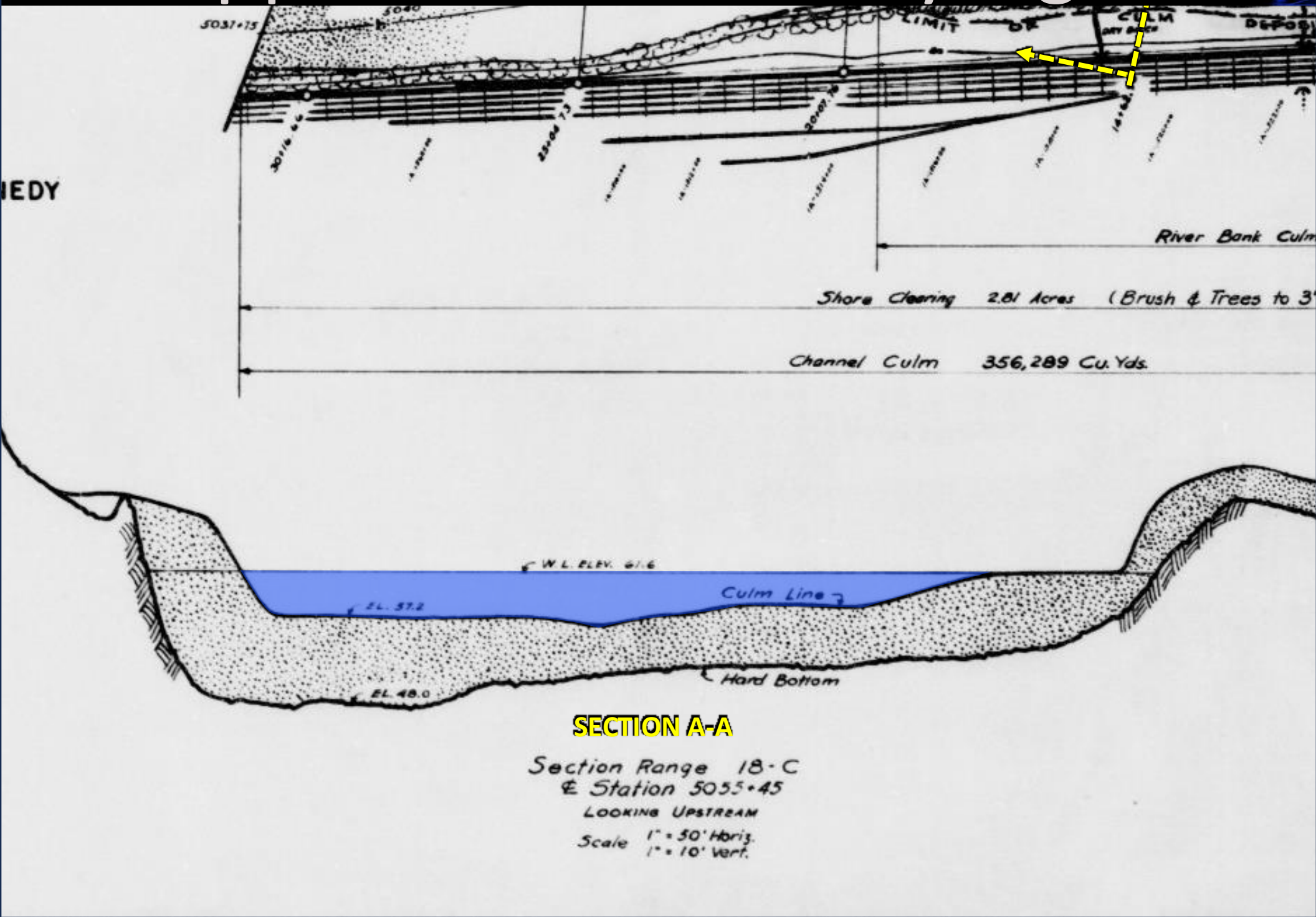


Upper Merion History Signs

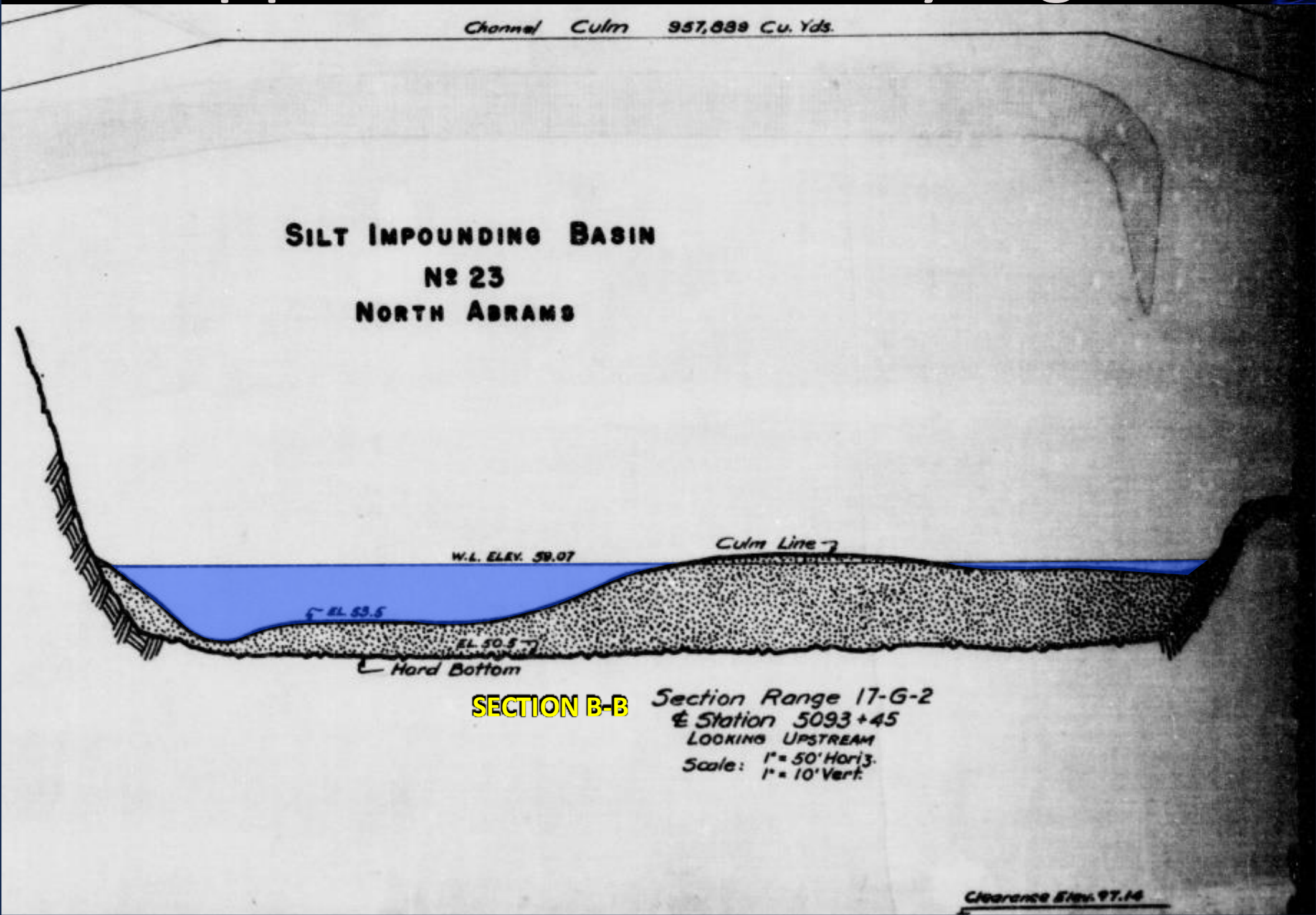
This map of the same location ~75 years ago shows the culm deposits in the river. Notice the clogged cross-section views below the main map.



Upper Merion History Signs

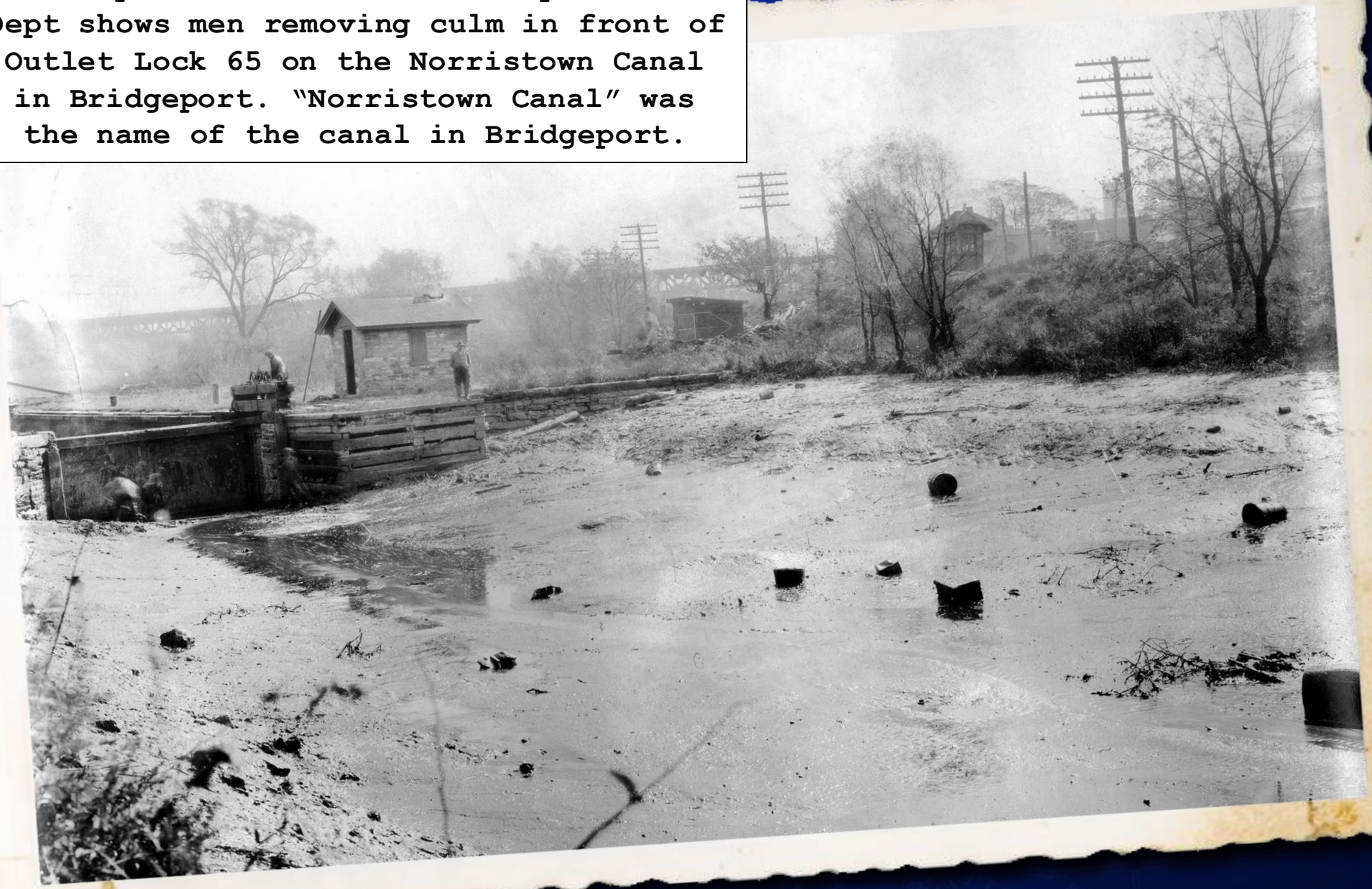


Upper Merion History Signs



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.

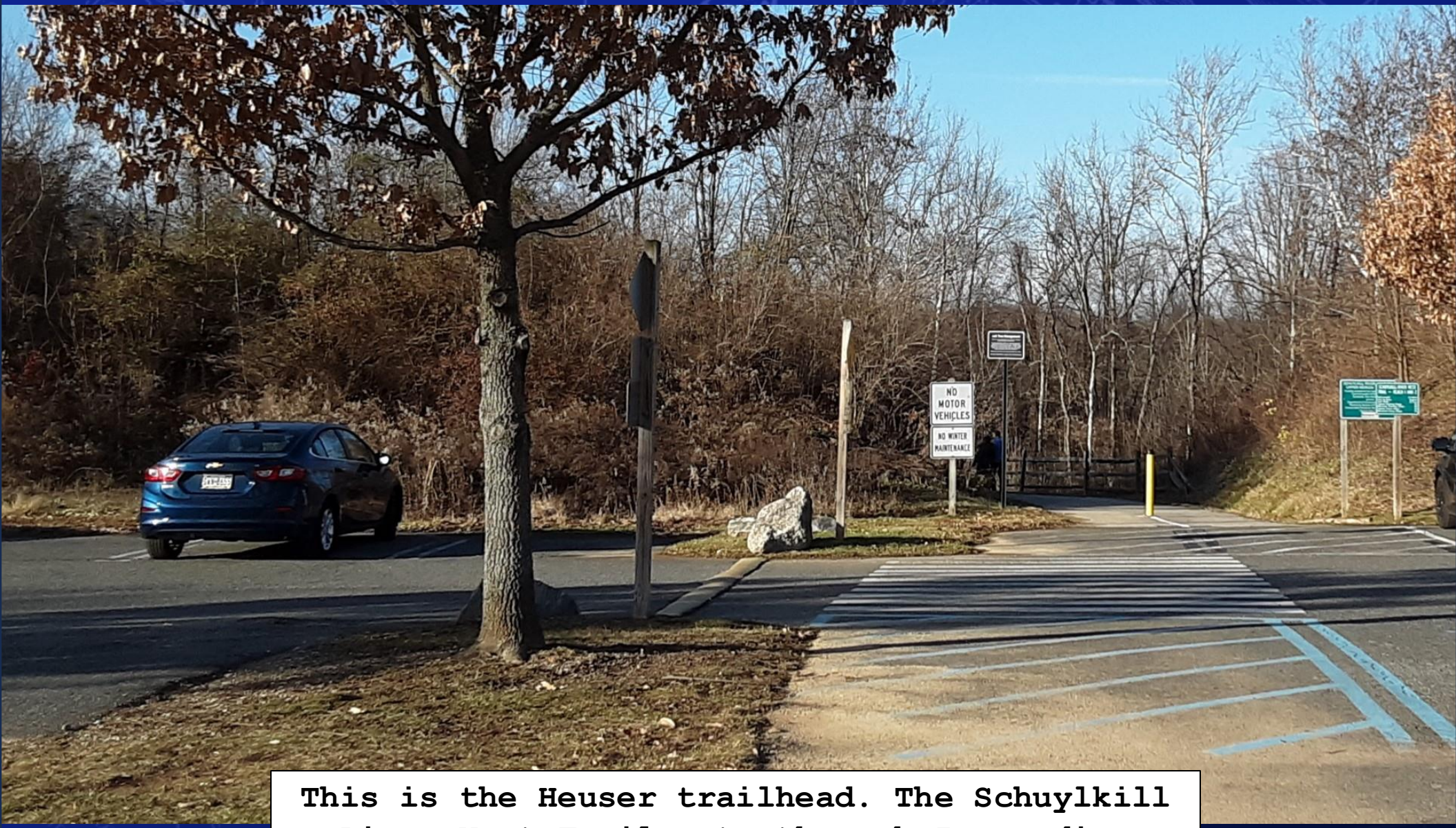
1928 Bridgeport

Upper Merion History Signs

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

Upper Merion History Signs

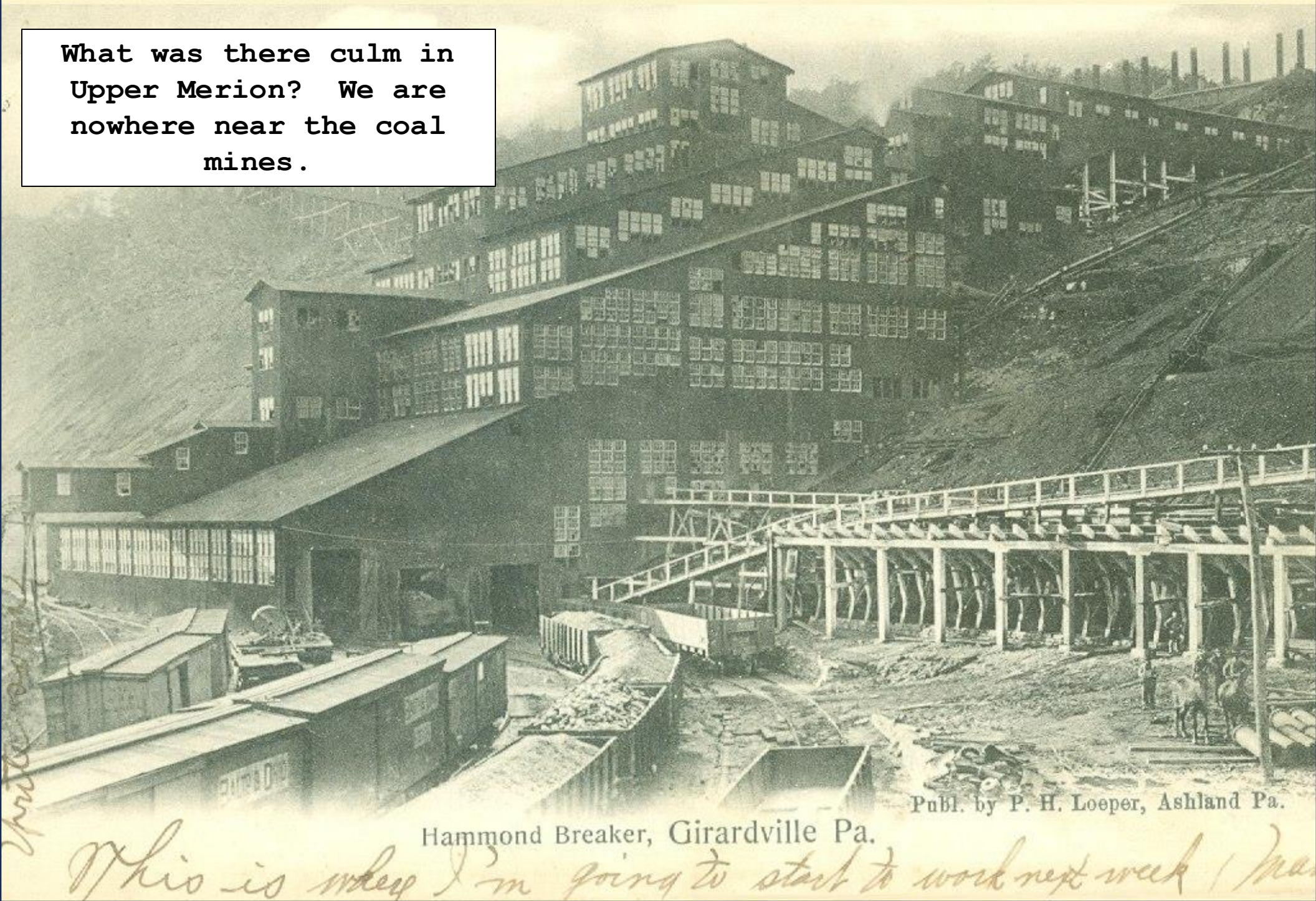
Upper Merion History Signs



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

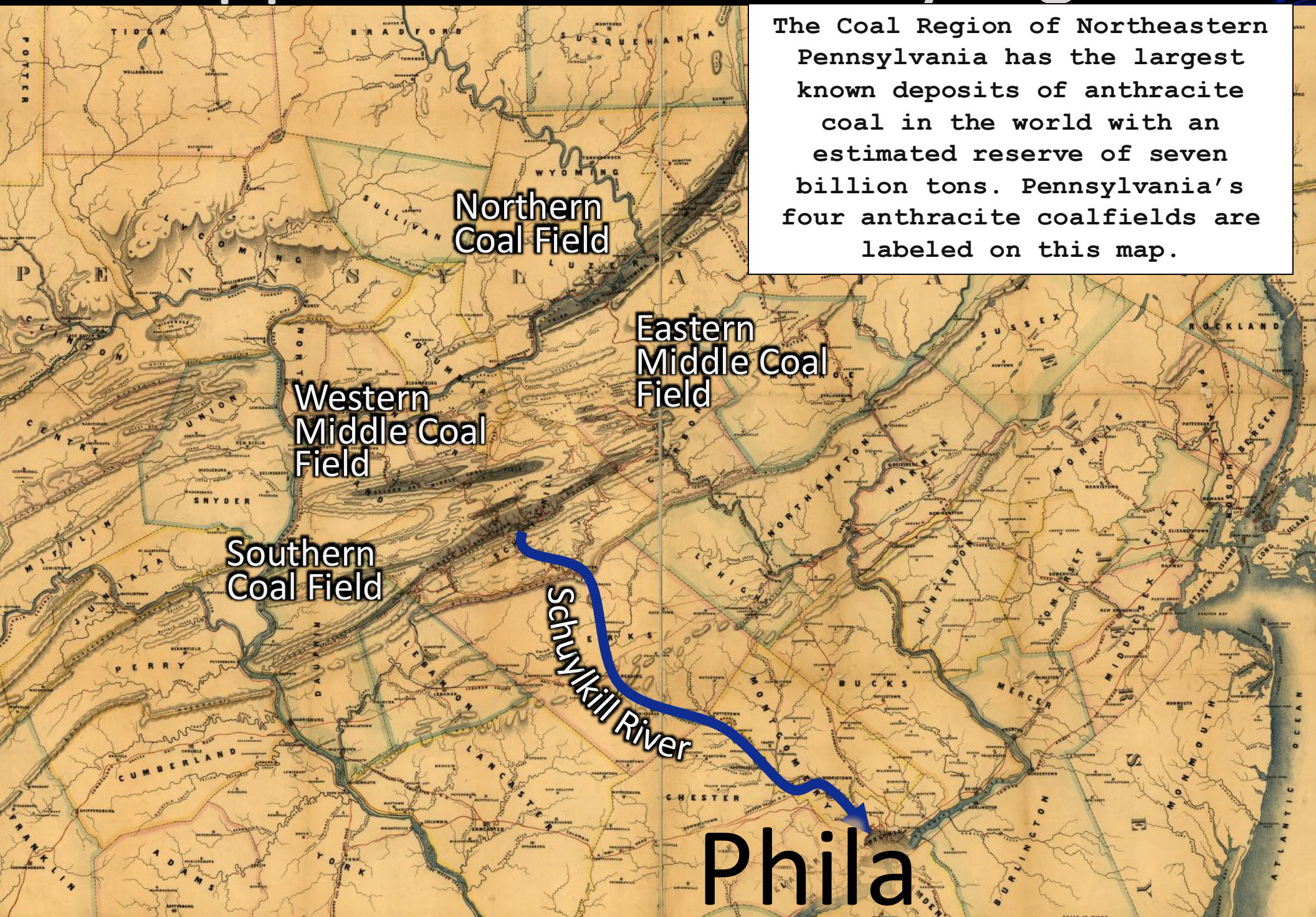
What was there culm in Upper Merion? We are nowhere near the coal mines.



Hammond Breaker, Girardville Pa.

This is where I'm going to start to work next week. Ma

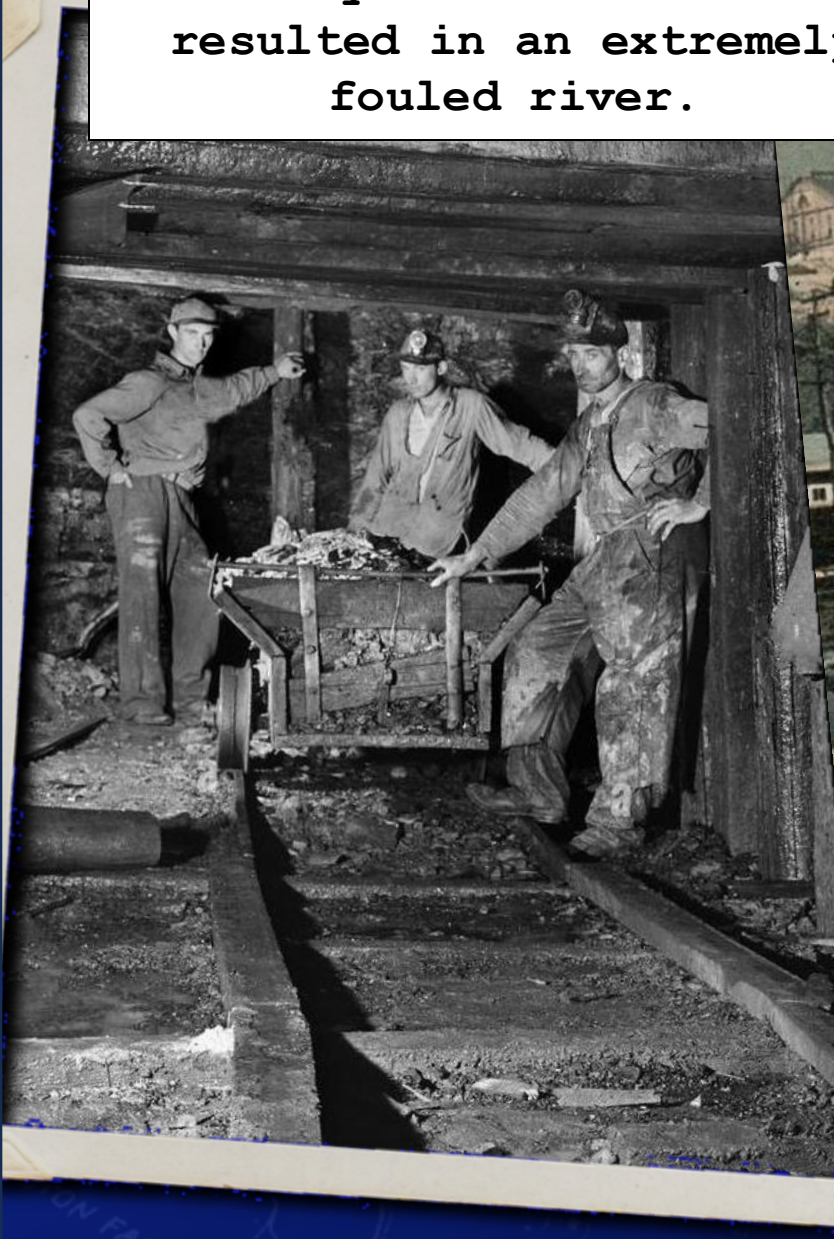
Upper Merion History Signs

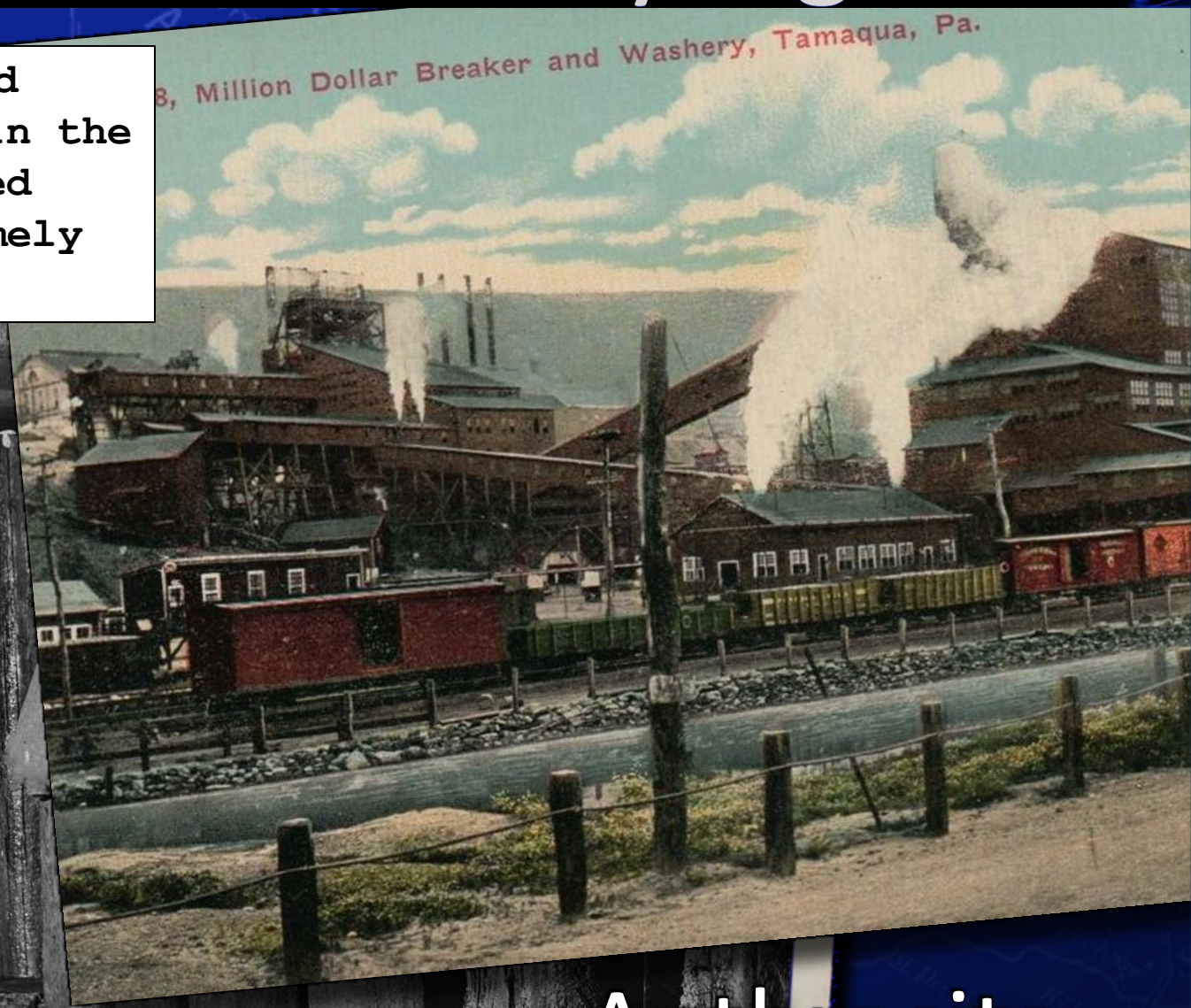


The Coal Region of Northeastern Pennsylvania has the largest known deposits of anthracite coal in the world with an estimated reserve of seven billion tons. Pennsylvania's four anthracite coalfields are labeled on this map.

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

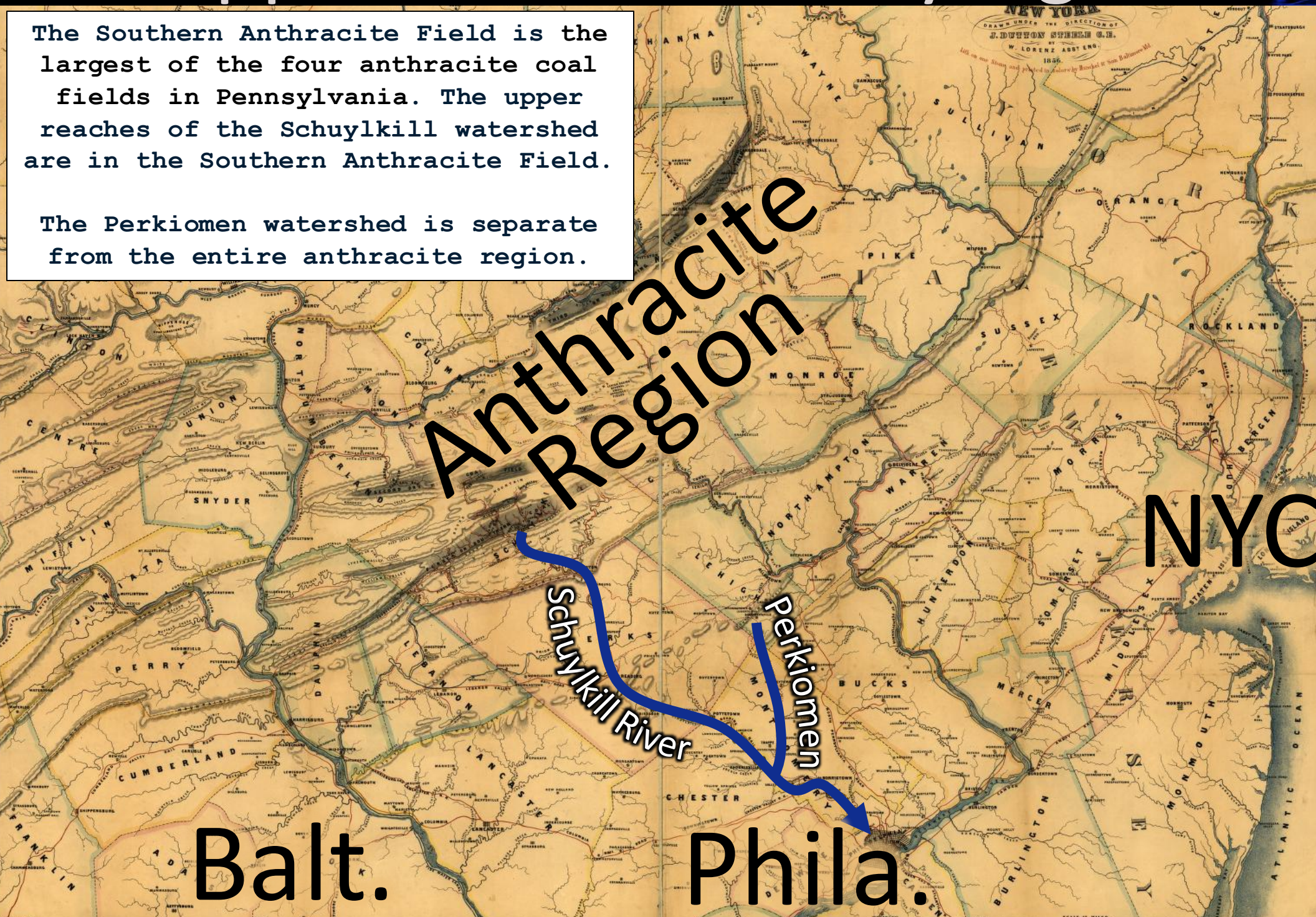
These barges are Schuylkill River dredges shown working near Royersford. Their function was to loosen the culm deposits and pump the slurry into the impoundment basins.

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.

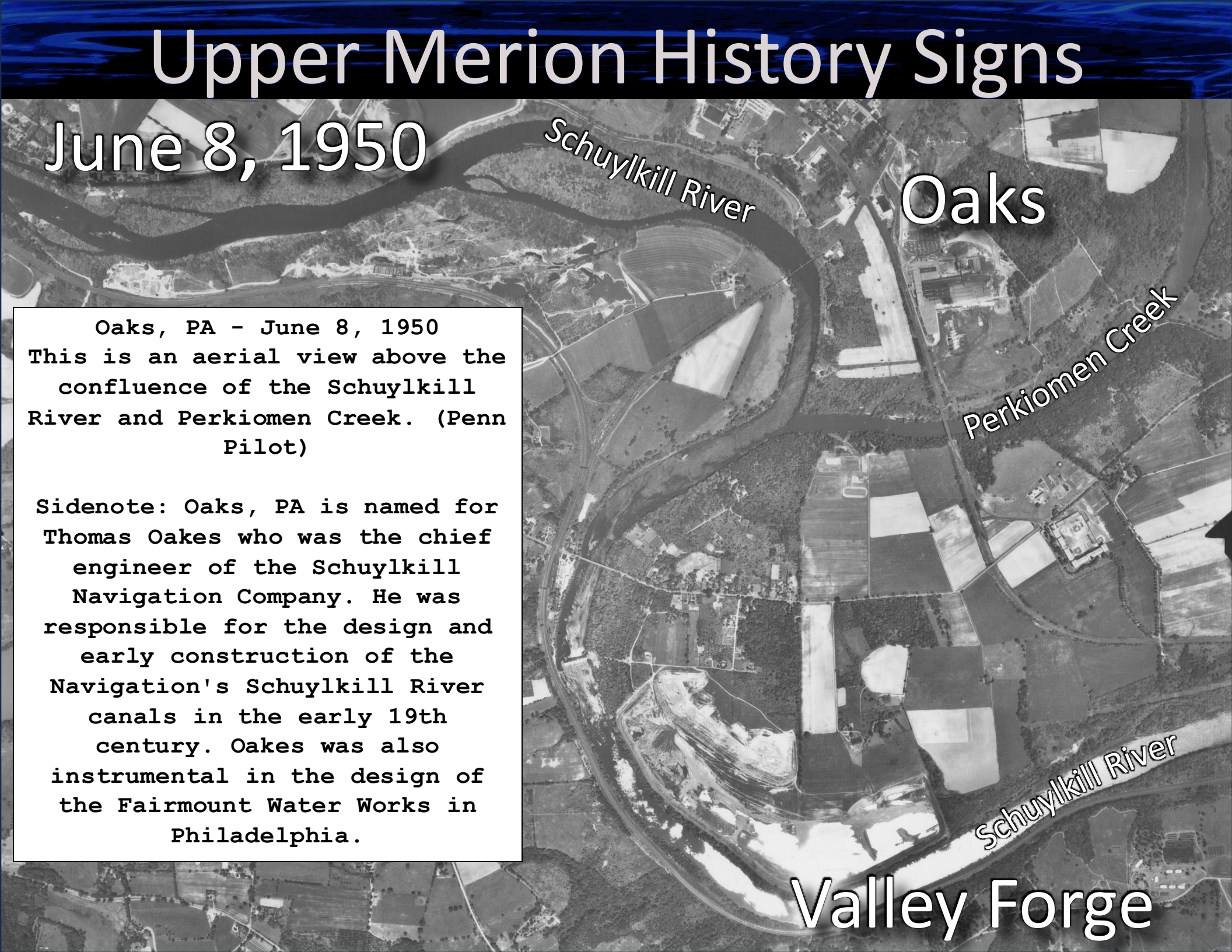
Upper Merion History Signs

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



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.

Upper Merion History Signs

June 8, 1950

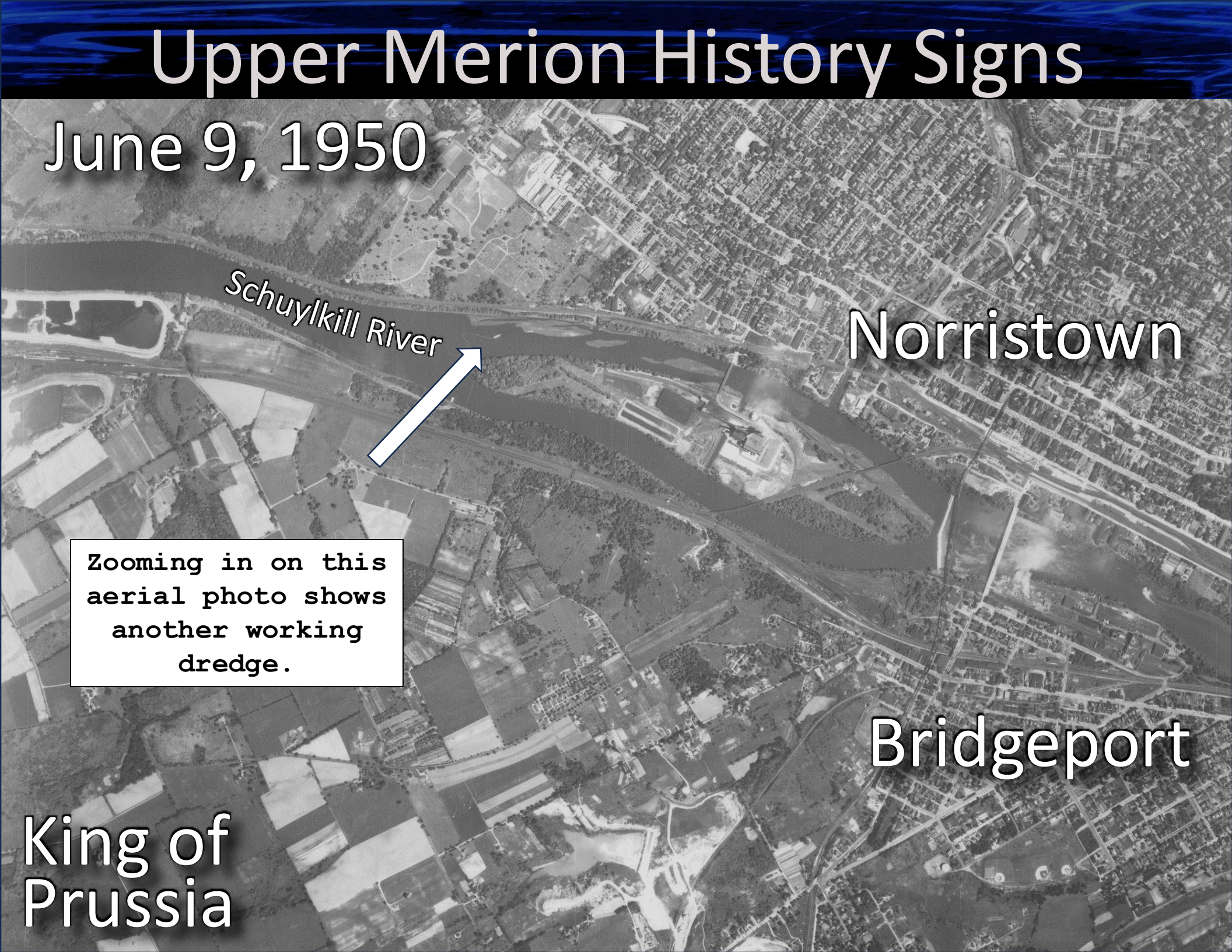
Note the contrast in color between the Schuylkill and the Perkiomen. The lighter color of the Schuylkill is due the the culm deposits which the Perkiomen does not have.

Upper Merion History Signs

June 8, 1950

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

Upper Merion History Signs



Upper Merion History Signs

Upper Merion History Signs

June 9, 1950

Upper Merion History Signs

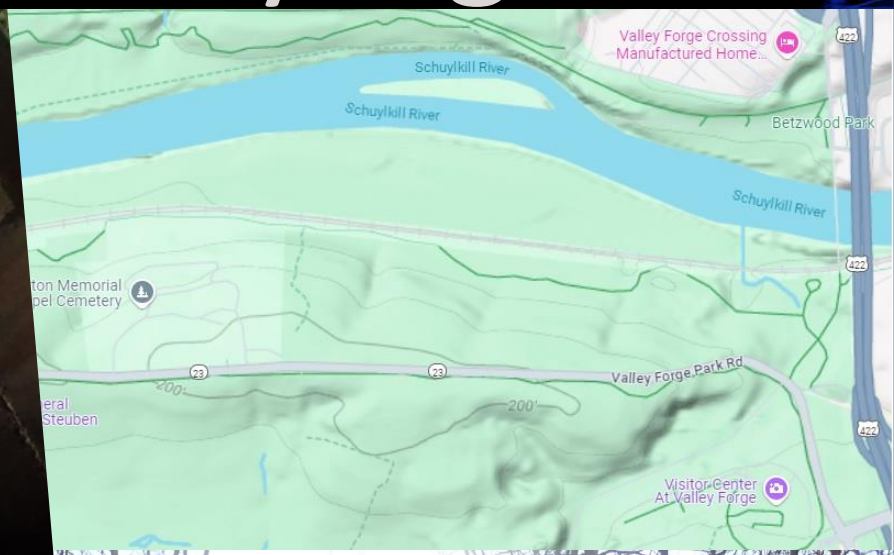
Dredge Discharge

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

Waste Weir

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.

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

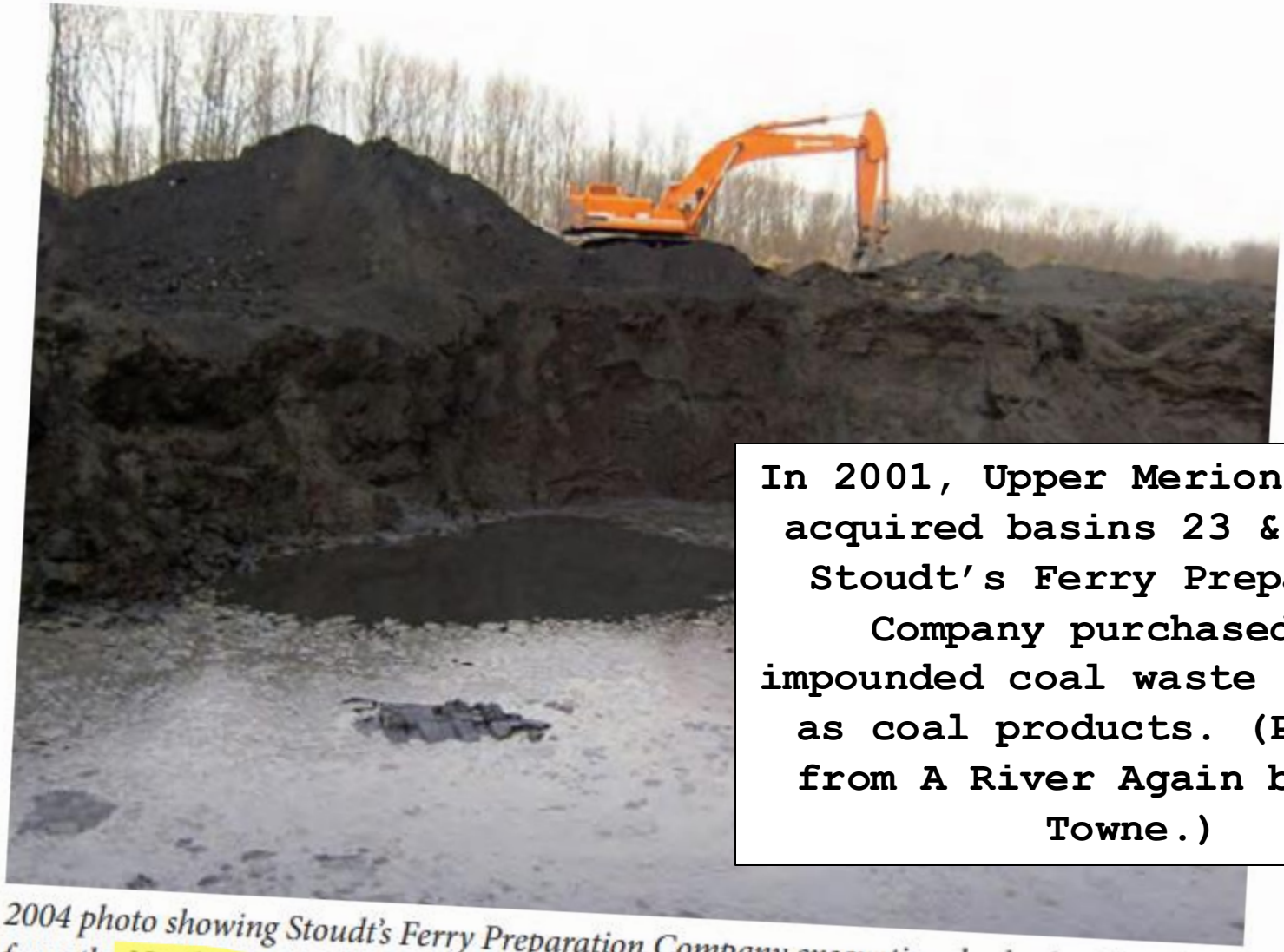
PLATE 9—NORTH VALLEY FORGE IMPOUNDING BASIN—SHOWING COMPLETED EMBANKMENTS FOR UPPER AND LOWER BASINS AND WASTE WEIRS

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

three sizes. Used with permission of the Stoudt's Ferry Preparation Company.



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.

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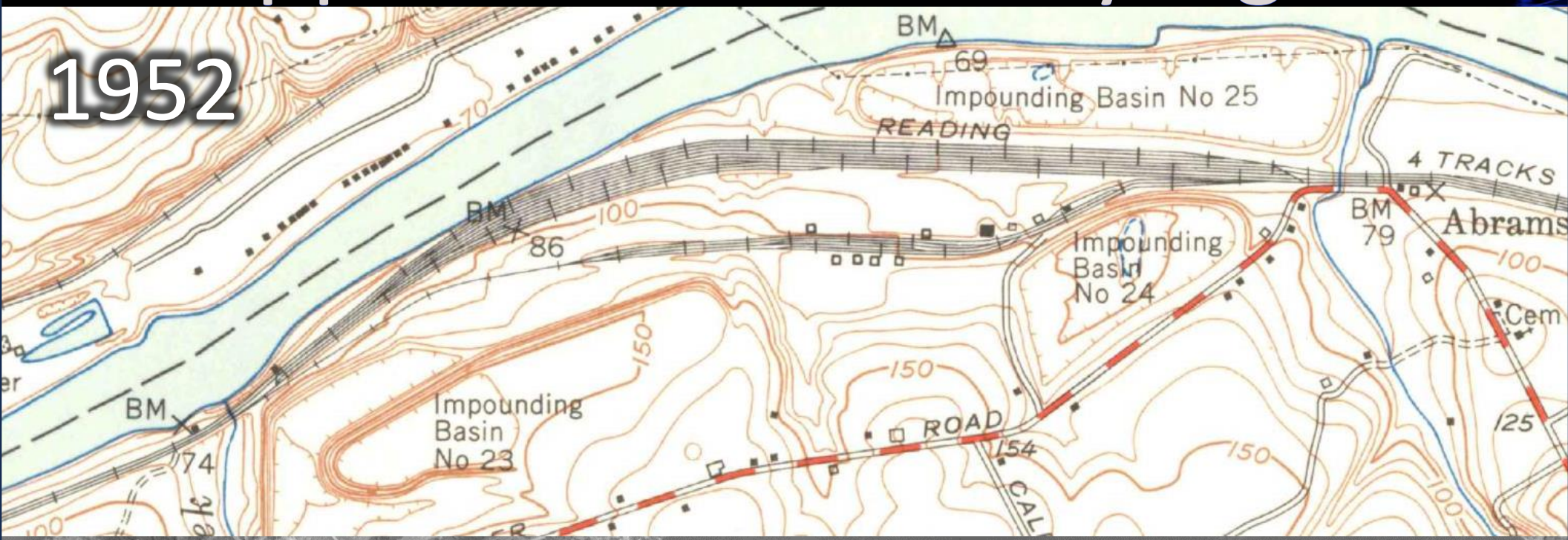
In 2001, Upper Merion Township acquired basins 23 & 24, and Stoudt's Ferry Preparation Company purchased the impounded coal waste to resell as coal products. (Page 121 from A River Again by Chari Towne.)

Upper Merion History Signs

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

Upper Merion History Signs



Upper Merion History Signs

2024

#23
(Heuser Park)

W Beidler Rd

Heuser Park

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

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.