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Collective Memory
By Jane Galetto

Mary Hufford, Director of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Folklore and Ethnography, speaks of the need to preserve a living culture, not simply in artifacts but with a "collective memory." Artifacts in absence of the memories, knowledge, and utilization of them lack a true continuity or passing forward the skills of the past. It is upon this web of memories that a culture builds an identity and maintains true connections to the past and constructs a present. It is within this framework a region's identity is woven.

Hufford speaks of, "A handful of elders who possess a wealth of information about various places and habitats." She recognizes the value of passing along these traditions to future generations.

Many of the folkways and lifestyles are lost as a region is consumed by the influences of a society that is fast tracked and eventually outpaces or consumes these traditions. In Southern New Jersey a number of organizations seek to facilitate the passing along of the stories and memories of our elders. Some are linked to specific skills—like the production of glass. Artisans continue to implement those early skills at Wheaton Arts, where glass is tracked from its early Southern New Jersey roots to present day.

At Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and Its Tributaries, Inc. we value memories of our river denizens in a project called River Recollections. Found at our website, we have sought to document the names of the river reaches and the stories of elders who know them well.

Between the bends of the river are the segments referred to as reaches. Over time the reaches have acquired names, some from property owners bordering these stretch, others from activities along the shores, some from physical characteristics and some unknown.

Different eras have included different names. What seems most amazing is how many names have had common use; fisherman from the late 1800's to mid 1900's know

many stretches by the same name. Citizens United is proud to pass these stories and names along to our web visitors.

To wet your appetite for these stories consider the name “Jawbone” that is derived from the hairpin curve made by the channel in this riverbend. Or consider “Boneyard” where an eroding steep bank unearthed the bones of the River’s earliest colonial settlers at a Swedish Moravian cemetery. “Mudhaul” lacked the diking of many of the farmed marshes along the river and allowed fishermen to pull their nets up onto the bank. Then there’s “No Man’s Friend” where the current made netting a tangled challenge. In all over 40 reaches are documented. Topical essays discuss names and activities surrounding each reach.