



<http://www.cumauriceriver.org>

## Diked Farms

Today when you travel the tidal Maurice River in Southern NJ, the most striking feature is the expansive marshlands which border the main channel.

But this was not always the case. Dutch and Swedish colonists diked and farmed the fertile soils of the marshlands. So what you would have seen from the late sixteen hundreds until the nineteen fifties was a vastly different landscape. There were cattle farms, subsistence farms, orchards, and rows of crops. By the 1780's, diking and ditching were a very organized practice governed by the New Jersey Board of Agriculture, ensuring that dams, floodgates, banks, and sluice gates were in proper working order. And the adjacent river provided transportation.

In the more saline areas salt hay was king. The salt hay market declined in the 1920s when glass companies began using corrugated board for packing glass, although there was still some demand for the product for a multitude of purposes such as suppressing weeds, insulating crops and freshly poured concrete from frost, and even stuffing casket mattresses. These diked farms went out of favor when road access was improved and upland farming practices were enhanced by fertilizers. By the 1950s most of the dikes were all but gone, with the exception of a few salt hay farms that remained till the 1960s. Today one of the few such farms remaining is the Burcham Farm in Millville, New Jersey.

Most of the Delaware Bayshore farms are once again flowed by the tide, allowing the marshes to act as a nursery for fish just as nature intended.