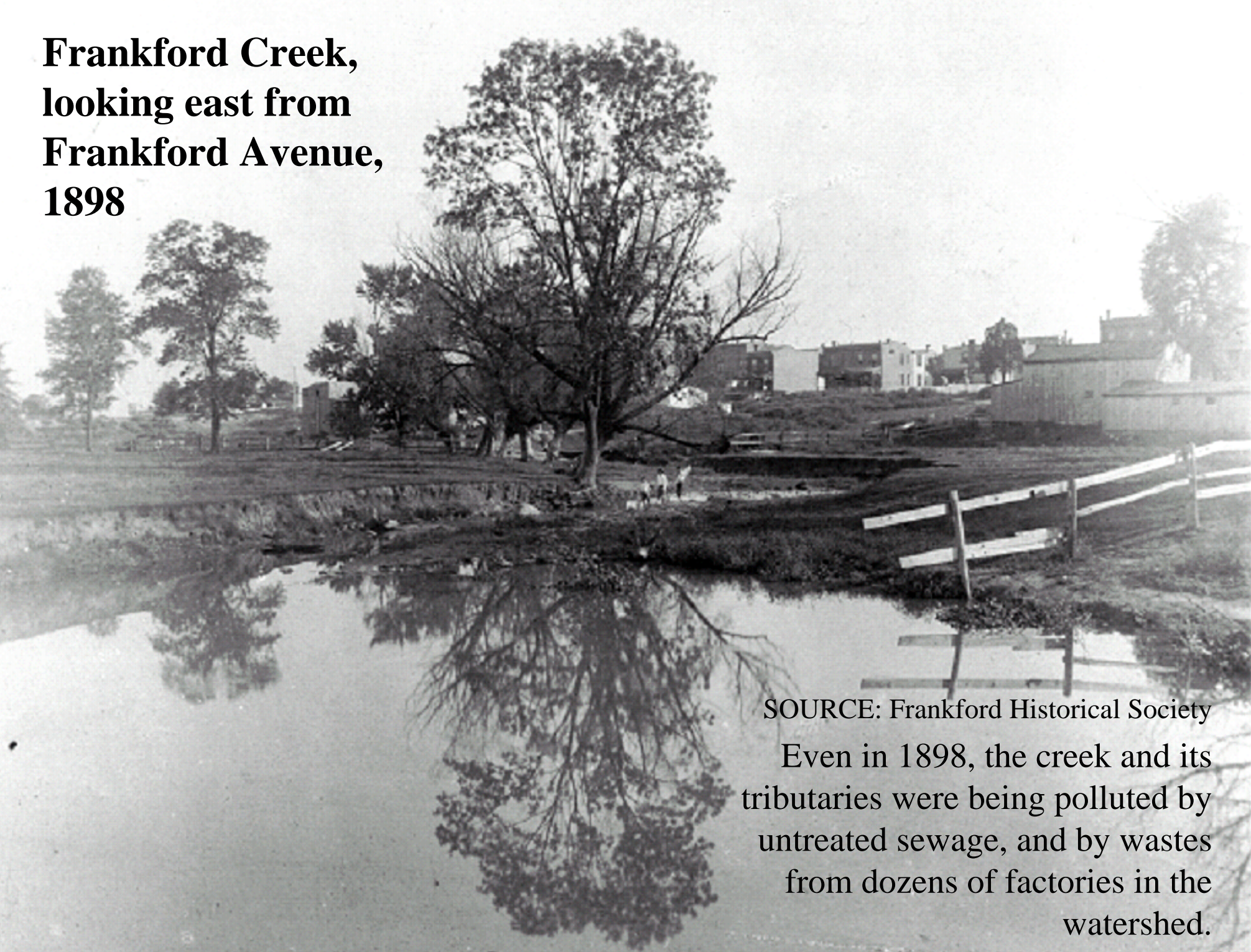


# Frankford Creek: The Sad History of an Urban Stream and its Watershed





**Frankford Creek,  
looking east from  
Frankford Avenue,  
1898**



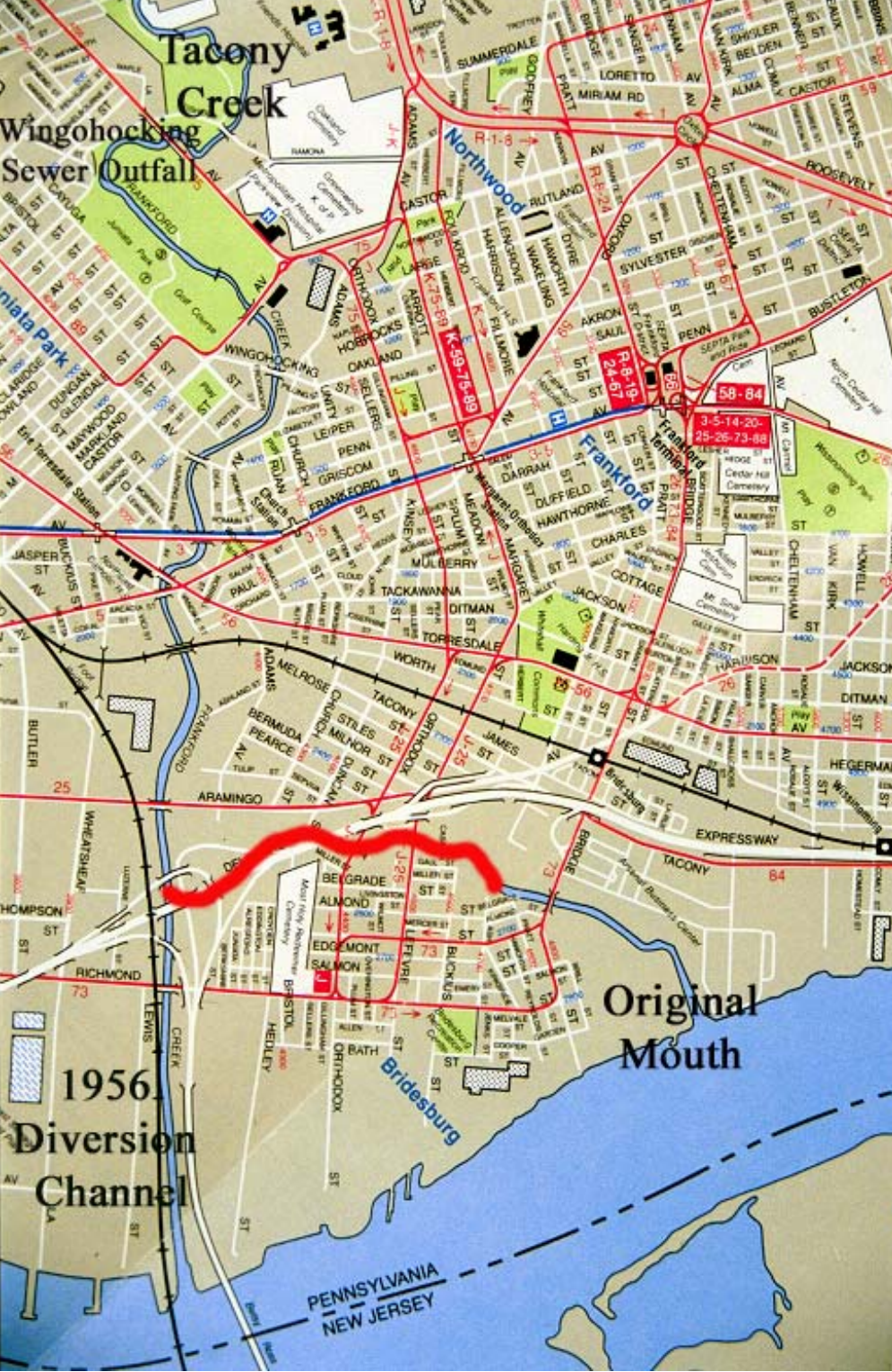
SOURCE: Frankford Historical Society  
Even in 1898, the creek and its  
tributaries were being polluted by  
untreated sewage, and by wastes  
from dozens of factories in the  
watershed.



# Modern SEPTA Map showing lower part of the Frankford Creek Watershed

SOURCE: Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority

In 1956 a diversion channel was built to carry the creek directly to the Delaware River, cutting off a stretch of the stream that wound through Bridesburg. The original mouth of the creek still exists, visible on this map as the little dogleg to the north of the modern creek outlet. The old creek bed, roughly marked in red, was filled in, and now is the location of the Delaware Expressway (I-95) and various sewers. The sewer outfall upstream shows where the former Wingohocking Creek, now carried underground in one the largest sewers in the city, once joined the Tacony Creek to form the Frankford.

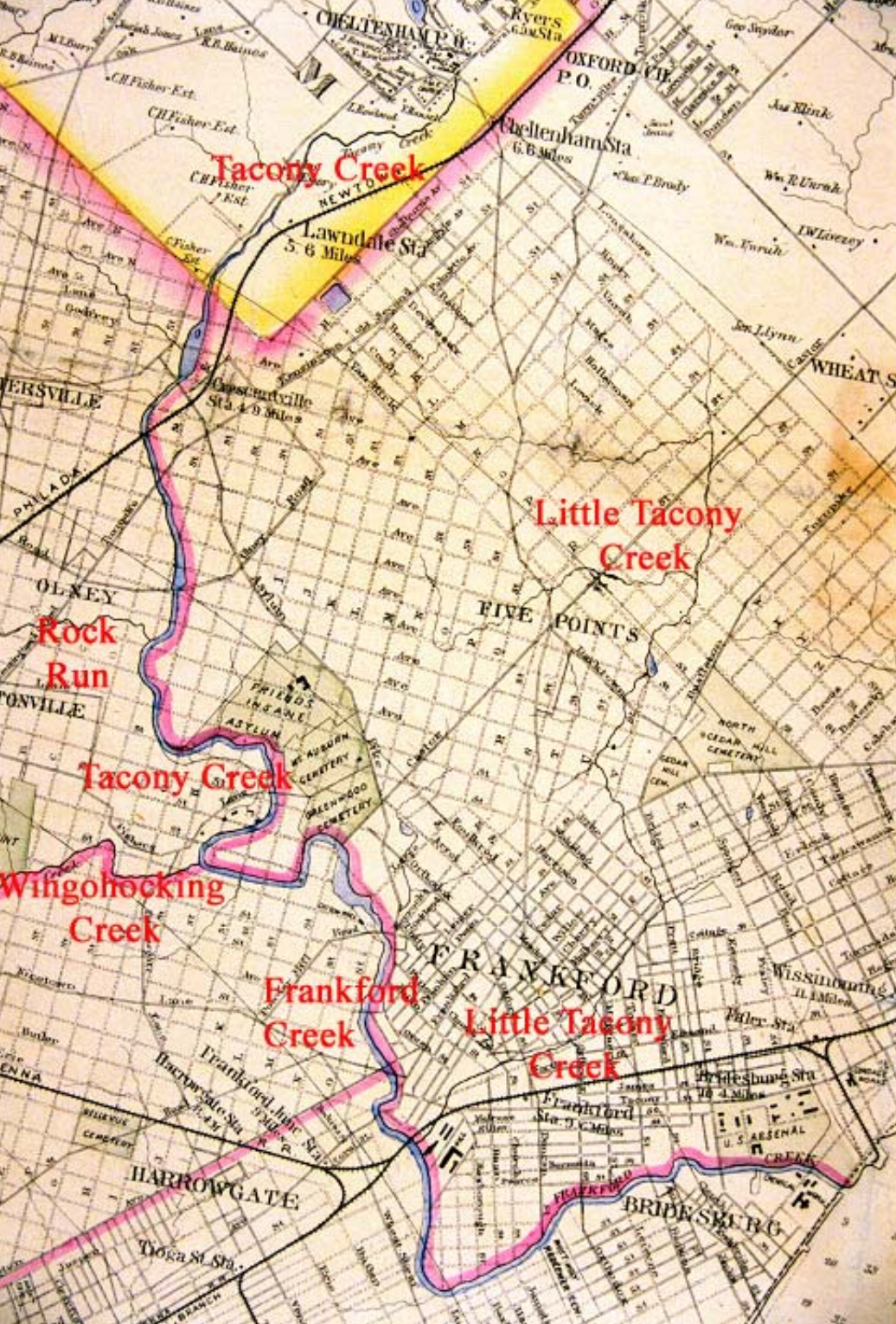




# Frankford Creek Watershed in Philadelphia and Montgomery Counties, 1889

SOURCE: Free Library Map Collection, Baist Atlas, 1889

Moving upstream from the mouth at the Delaware River in Bridesburg, the tributaries to the Frankford include Little Tacony Creek, Wingohocking Creek and Tacony Creek, which has Rock Run as one of its tributaries. The watershed covers 35 square miles in Philadelphia and Montgomery counties. Except for the Tacony and the Frankford, all the streams in the Philadelphia section of the watershed have been converted into sewers.





# Lower section of Frankford Creek, 1849

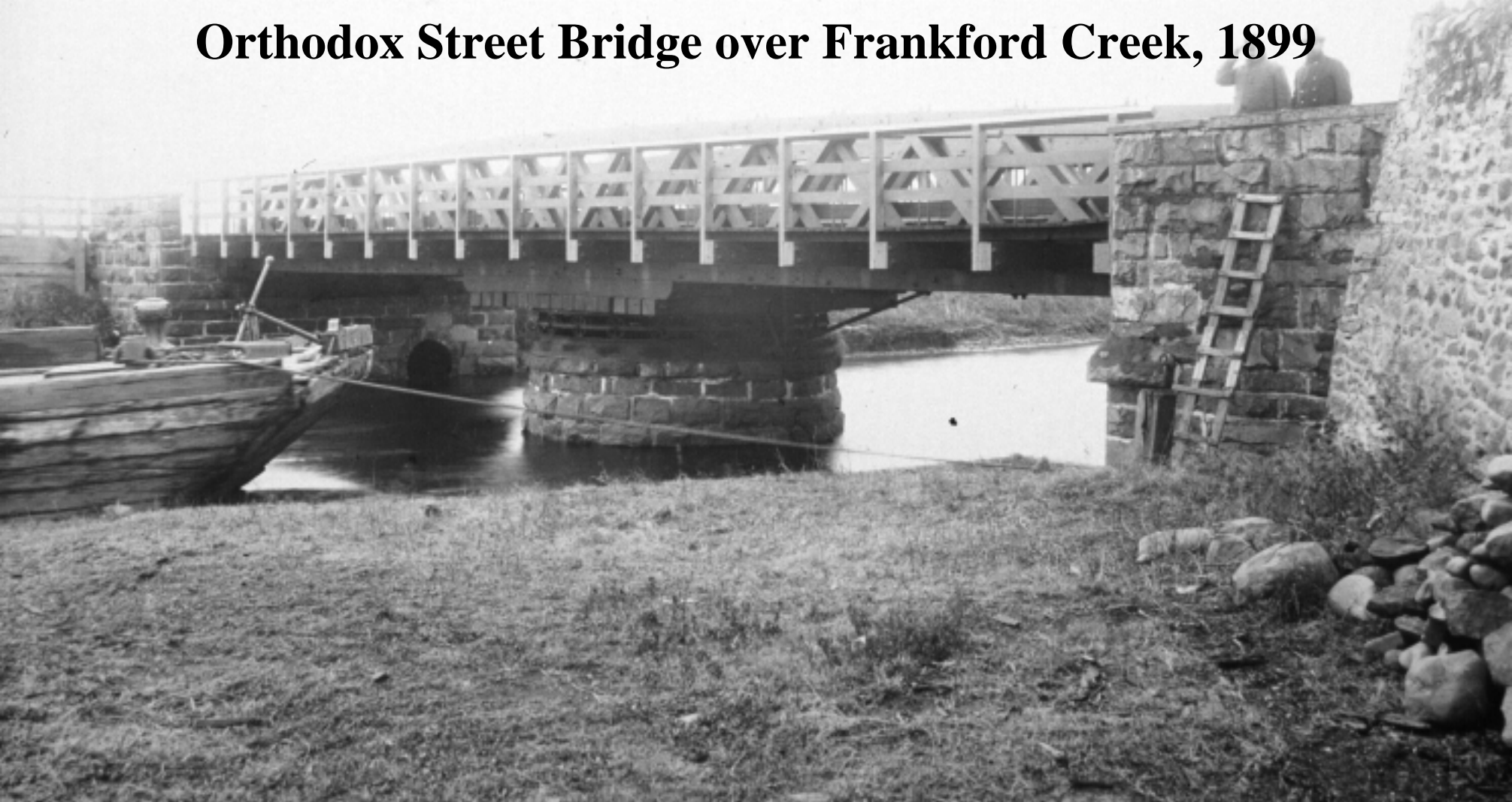
SOURCE: Free Library Map Collection,  
Dripps Map, 1849

Industrialists made major changes to the creek, damming it in various places, digging channels, called mill races, to carry the water from these mill ponds into and out of their factories. More than 30 factories of various sizes, many of them making textiles, operated in the watershed in 1849. In spite of this industrial presence in certain sections, the watershed as still mostly open land, with its tributary system still intact.





# Orthodox Street Bridge over Frankford Creek, 1899



SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

In 1799 Frankford Creek was declared a “navigable stream” from the mouth to Frankford Avenue, where the influence of the tide ends. This put the creek under the jurisdiction of the U.S. government, specifically, the engineers of the War Department (now known as the Army Corps of engineers). As such, the bridges over the creek in that stretch either had to be high enough to let craft pass under, or be movable, as was this turn bridge at Orthodox Street.



## Drawbridge at Bridge Street, ca. 1896

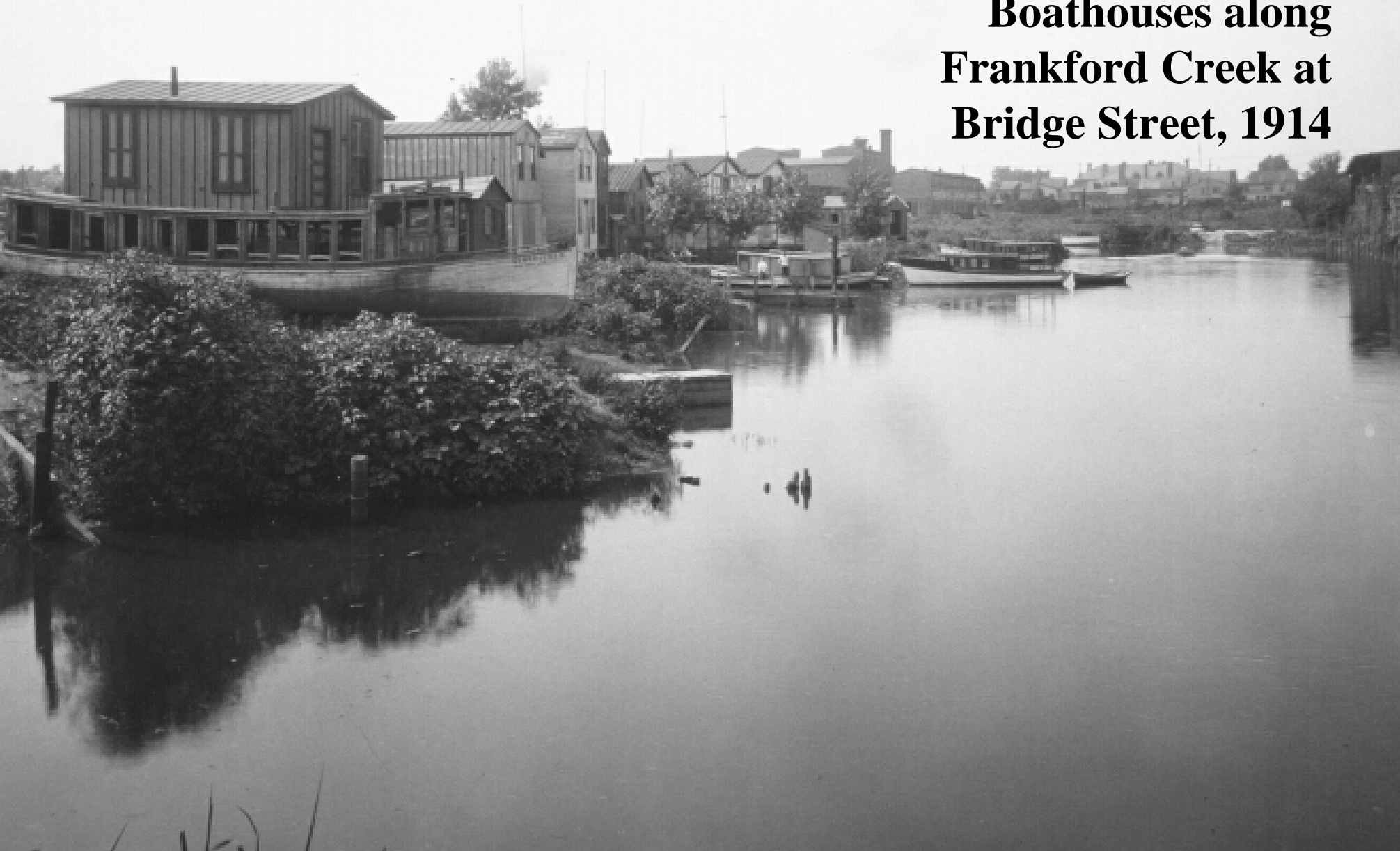


SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

Unfortunately, the Federal authorities did little over the years to help maintain a navigable channel in Frankford Creek. Even though they mostly refused to maintain the creek after the 1880s, they maintained jurisdiction for more than 50 years afterwards, which made it difficult for the City or any governmental body to do any work on the creek channel.



## Boathouses along Frankford Creek at Bridge Street, 1914

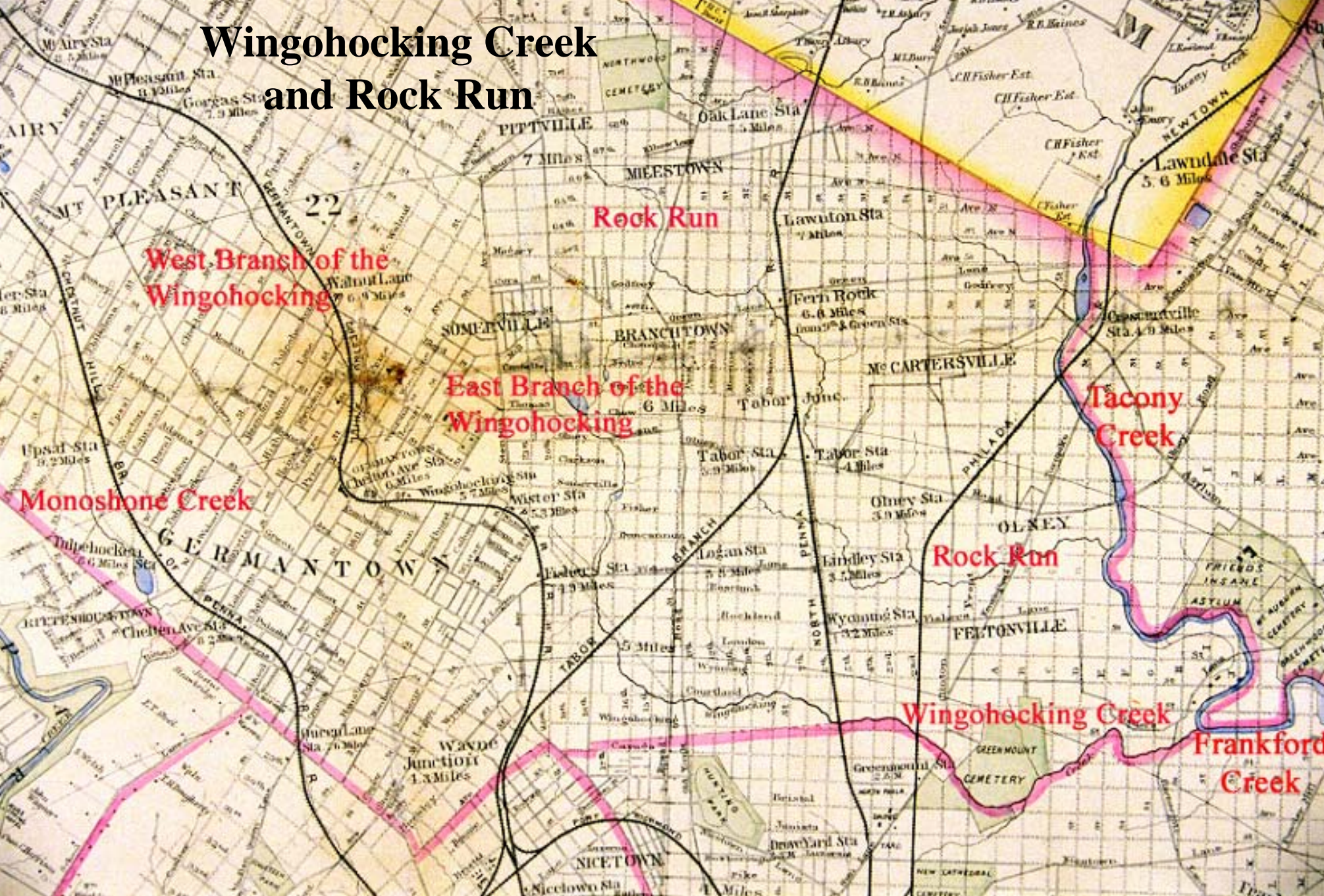


SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

The City did dredge the creek at various places, but by 1929 the lower Frankford was basically not navigable by large commercial craft.



# Wingohocking Creek and Rock Run



SOURCE: Free Library Map Collection, 1889 Baist Atlas

Wingohocking Creek drained most of Germantown and reached as far as northwest as Mt. Airy. Rock Run drained the Olney, Fern Rock and Oak Lane sections of the city.





## **The Frankford (r), Wingohocking (l) and Tacony (c), 1916**

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

The Wingohocking was largest creek system in the city to be put underground. With east and west branches and other smaller tributaries, its watershed covered 9 square miles with about 21 miles of stream. By the time this photograph was taken, it had been partly piped underground, with the above-ground stretches basically an open sewer, carrying the wastes of tens of thousands of people and dozens of factories.



# WINGOHOCKING CREEK IS TO BE PUT UNDER GROUND

OCT 5 1924

City Awards Two Big Contracts  
for Construction of Main  
Sewers.

Record

Two important improvements, vital to the health and development of the city, will be advanced by the award of two contracts yesterday by Director Biles, of the Department of Public Works. The Pennypack Creek intercepting sewer is being built in sections. Its ultimate cost will be \$1,500,000. The contract awarded yesterday was for part of the work to William H. Garson for \$109,235.

Wingohocking Creek is to be sewerred at an approximate cost of \$2,000,000. It is now an open creek from Bodine street to Frankford Creek, into which it empties. Much land will be reclaimed by the construction of this sewer. Adolph Jafolla was awarded part of the work at \$308,476.

**“Wingohocking Creek is to be  
put under ground”  
Philadelphia Record,  
October 5, 1924**

SOURCE: Temple University Libraries/  
Urban Archives, Philadelphia Bulletin  
Collection

This article refers to one of the final sections of Wingohocking to be converted into a sewer. The process of burying the creek began in the 1880s and culminated in 1928, when the creek was finally obliterated from all but the city's sewer maps. The creek was covered in Germantown first, and then the sewer was extended both upstream and downstream as adjacent areas became ripe for development.

"The construction of the Wingohocking sewer will have the ultimate result of eliminating Wingohocking Creek which at the present time is an open creek from Bodine street to Frankford Creek, into which it empties. All the sewage from Germantown, Wayne Junction and the vicinity empties into this creek which has made it a menace to health and a real obstacle to the development of ground on its either side for housing purposes. The sewer has been constructed from a point in Germantown to Bodine street and the contract awarded yesterday by Director Biles provides for the carrying of the sewer construction from Bodine street to Rising Sun avenue. From this point it will be carried later to Frankford Creek where it will connect with the Frankford Creek intercepting sewer that has already been constructed. It is estimated that aside from eliminating the health menace as represented by the open creek the completion of the sewer will open up for housing development approximately 400 acres of ground.

**“Wingohocking Creek to  
be put under ground”  
Philadelphia Record,  
October 5, 1924**

SOURCE: Temple University  
Libraries/Urban Archives,  
Philadelphia Bulletin Collection

Before creeks were converted into sewers, branch sewers simply emptied into them, and factories dumped their wastes into them. Converting these polluted streams into sewers was seen by city engineers and health officials as a way to bury a potential health hazard, as the highlighted sections of this article note.



## Wingohocking sewer under construction in Annsbury Street, 1909

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia



Besides the perceived benefits to public health, putting creeks into underground pipes was the cheapest and easiest way to provide an undeveloped area with a main sewer (a large sewer into which many smaller sewers empty). Sewage is more than 99 percent water, and the easiest way to move water or any liquid is by gravity. Since the creeks were already flowing downhill by gravity, putting sewers in stream beds provided the gravity flow needed. Instead of excavating to bury the pipes in a trench, which was expensive, the completed sewers were then buried under fill.



## **Frankford Creek in vicinity of Wyoming Avenue. 1945**

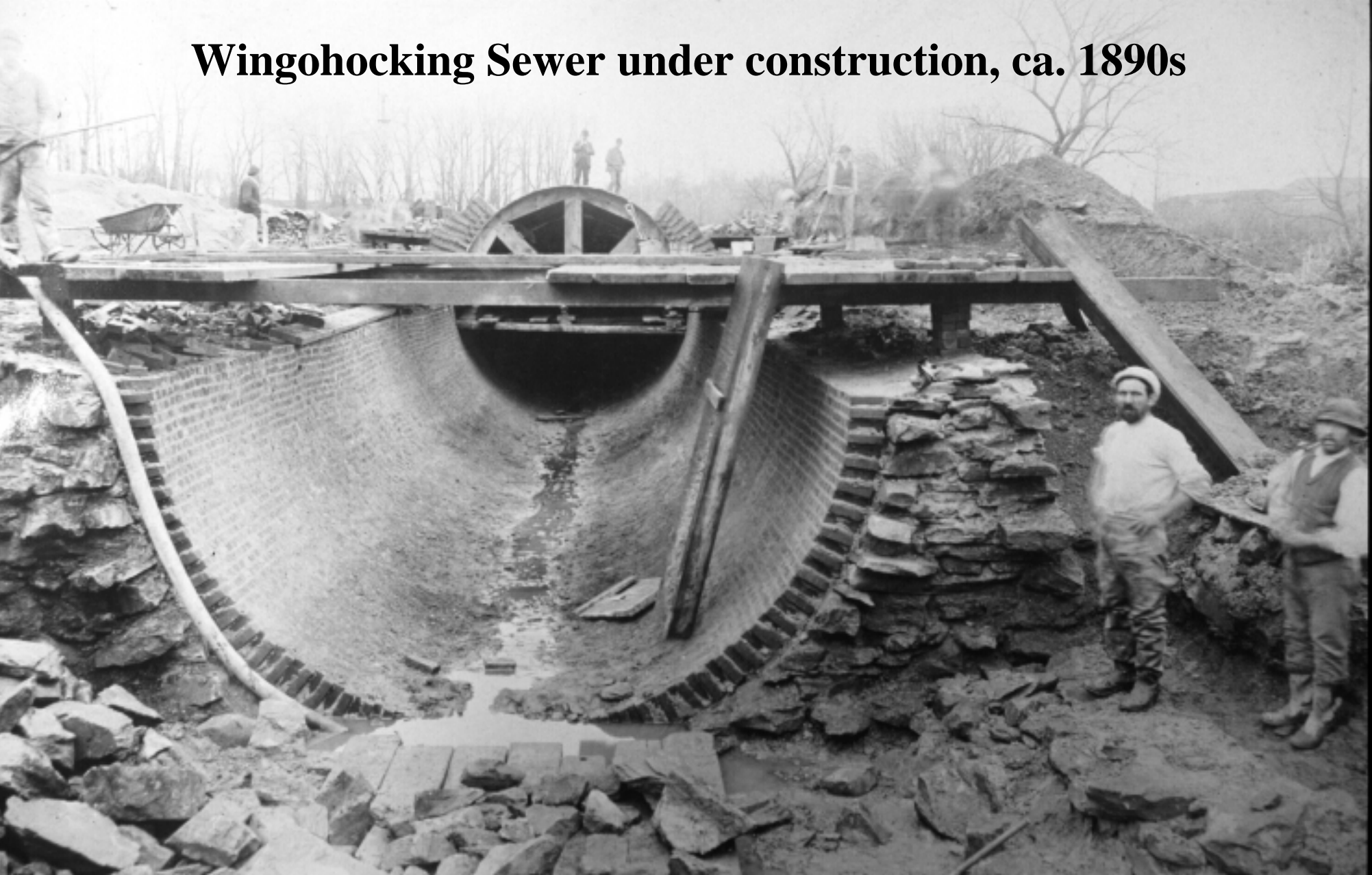
SOURCE:  
Free Library Map Collection

Another reason for burying streams has to do with the city's grid system. Streams don't follow straight lines, they meander here and there, cutting across

the rigid geometry that has been imposed on the Philadelphia landscape since William Penn's time. After burying the creeks, their valleys would be filled in -- the Wingohocking valley, in some places, was leveled with up to 40 feet of fill-- and then the street grid could be run over the valley without having to build expensive bridges at every creek crossing. Note the two bridges needed to cross this bend in Frankford Creek at Wyoming Avenue. A slight deviation from the City's rectangular grid could have placed a curving street around the bend, and eliminated the cost of the bridges.

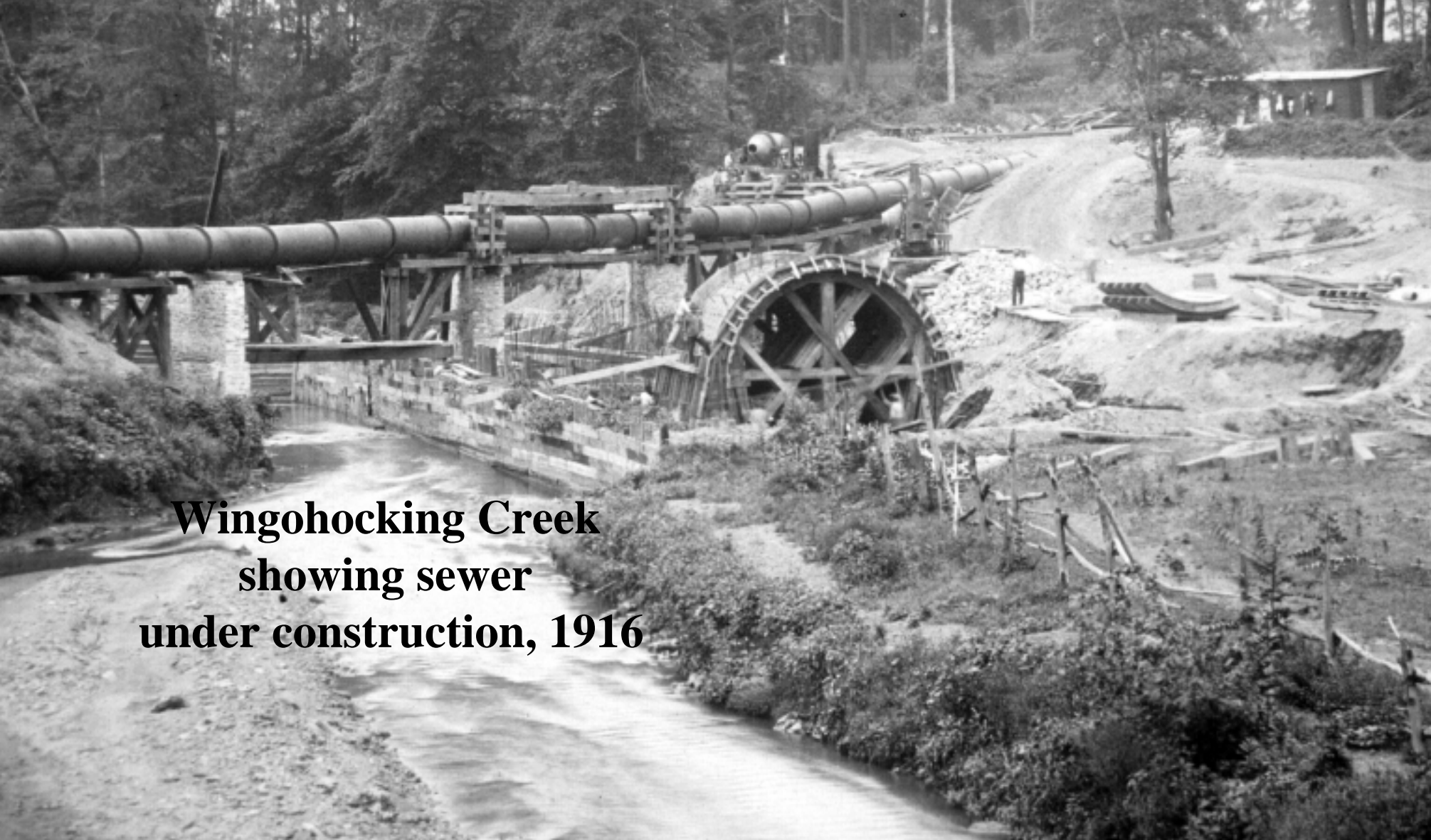


# Wingohocking Sewer under construction, ca. 1890s



SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

Sections of the Wingohocking sewer includes pipes more than 20 feet across, among the largest in the Philadelphia's 3000 mile sewer system.



**Wingohocking Creek  
showing sewer  
under construction, 1916**

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

The elevated metal pipe is temporarily carrying water over the work site. Once the sewer is finished, it will be buried along with new water and gas lines, with a new street built and paved on top of it, providing a ready-made infrastructure for the dense residential development that quickly spread over this once-rural area.





**Wingohocking sewer under construction in  
Annsbury Street, 1914**

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia



**Wingohocking sewer under construction in  
Annsbury Street, 1914**

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia





## Rock Run Sewer in Ashdale Street, 1922

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia



## **Rock Run Sewer in Ashdale Street, 1922**

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

This ditch, or flume, will carry the creek flow as the sewer is built in the creek bed.





## **Rock Run Sewer in Ashdale Street, 1922**

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

Workmen pausing for the city's Public Works photographer.

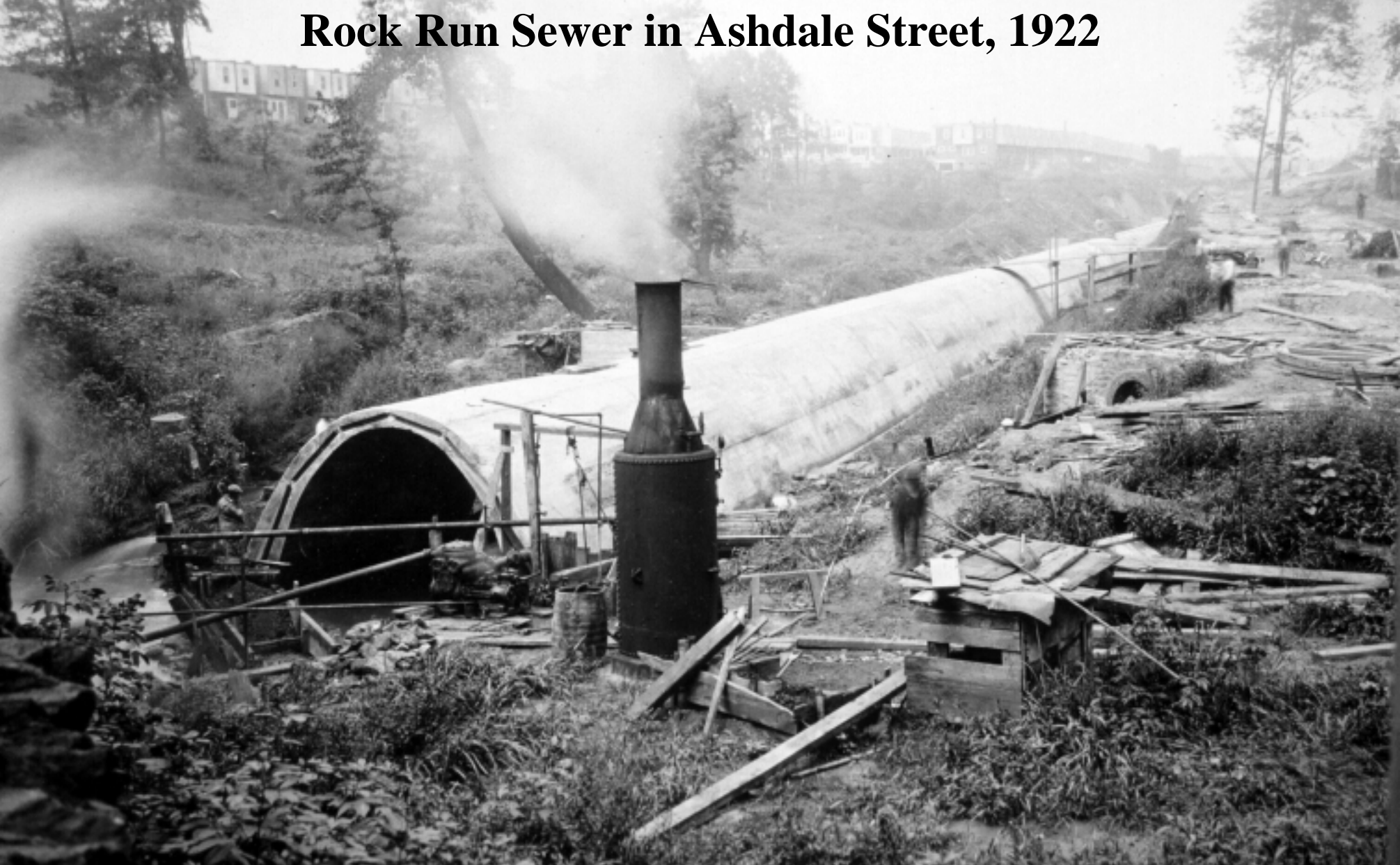


## **Rock Run Sewer in Ashdale Street, 1922**

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia



# Rock Run Sewer in Ashdale Street, 1922



SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

Once the sewer is finished, the pipe will be buried, Ashdale Street will be laid out on top of it, and new rows of houses will join those seen in this photo on the valley's edge.



**Rock Run Sewer in  
Ashdale Street, 1922**

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia  
A view inside a completed section of sewer.





## Little Tacony Creek, showing Briggs & Co. mill pond and mill race

SOURCE: Free Library Map Collection, 1849 Dripps Map

By the 1890s Little Tacony Creek was badly polluted, both by industrial wastes from textile factories such as Briggs & Co., and raw sewage. Frankford Creek is on the left.



# Little Tacony Creek running through Globe Dye Works, 1910

SOURCE: 1910 Smith Atlas,  
Free Library Map Collection

Streamside factories (such as the Globe Dye Works) would often use the water for their various processes, and then dump the used water back into the creek. The wastes from a dye works could turn a creek many colors, depending on the dyes being used. Beginning in the early 1900s and continuing into the 1930s, a sewer was built to carry this polluted tributary. Note on the map how the city engineers, planning for the eventual burial of this stream, laid out Torresdale Avenue along its course.





# Frankford Creek Intercepting Sewer Under Construction, 1930

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

The city's first large-scale sewage treatment plant was opened in 1923, on Wheatsheaf Lane near the mouth of Frankford Creek. The first sewage to be treated by the Northeast Sewage Treatment Works was the flow of the Wingohocking Creek/Sewer, which still ran in the open creek bed in various places.

The stream was diverted into an intercepting sewer and carried to the plant, relieving Frankford Creek of the sewage of more than 100,000 people.



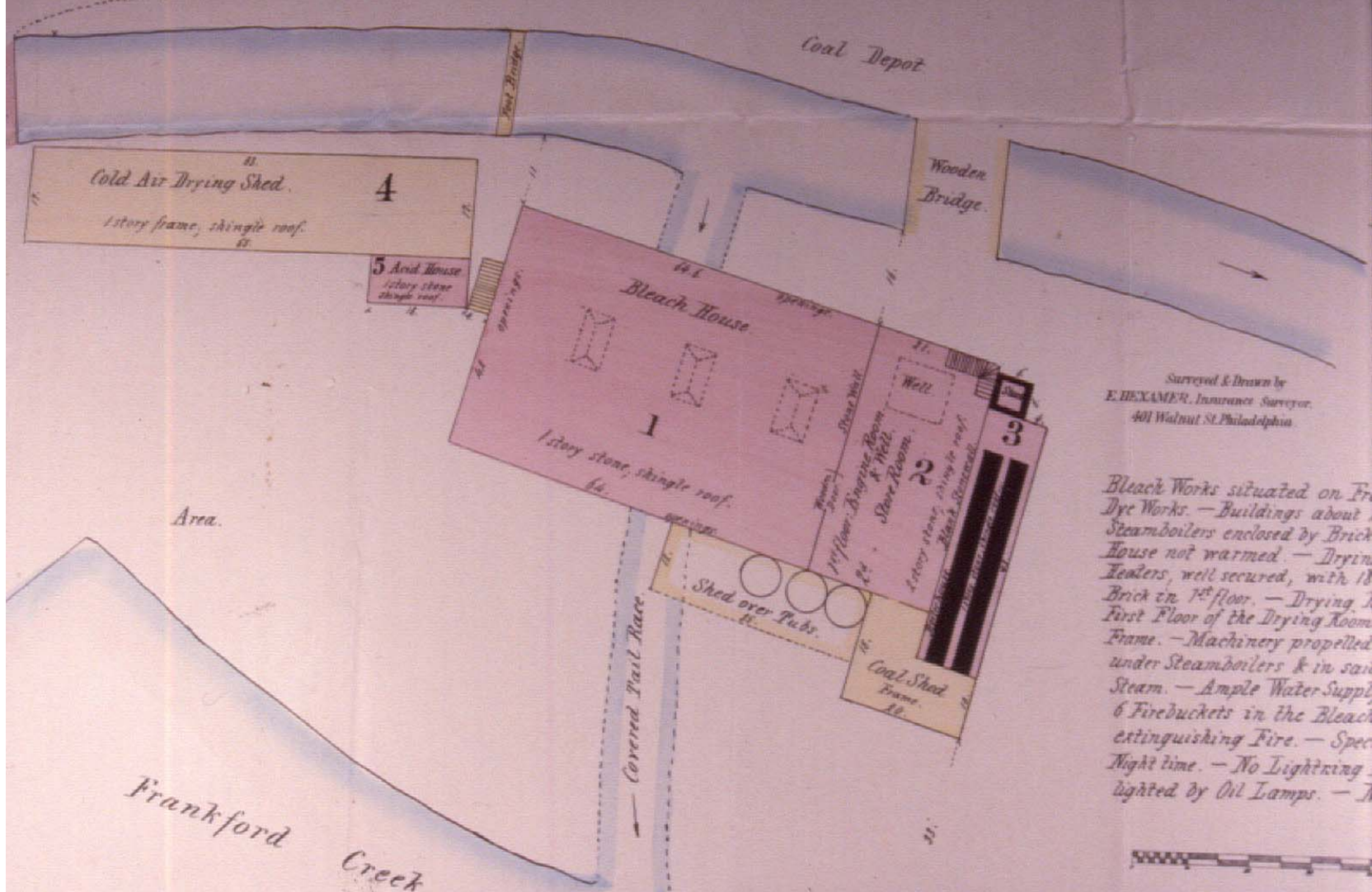


## Frankford Creek Intercepting Sewer Under Construction, 1930

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

The complete interceptor system for this area took many years to complete, due to delays caused by the Depression and World War II.

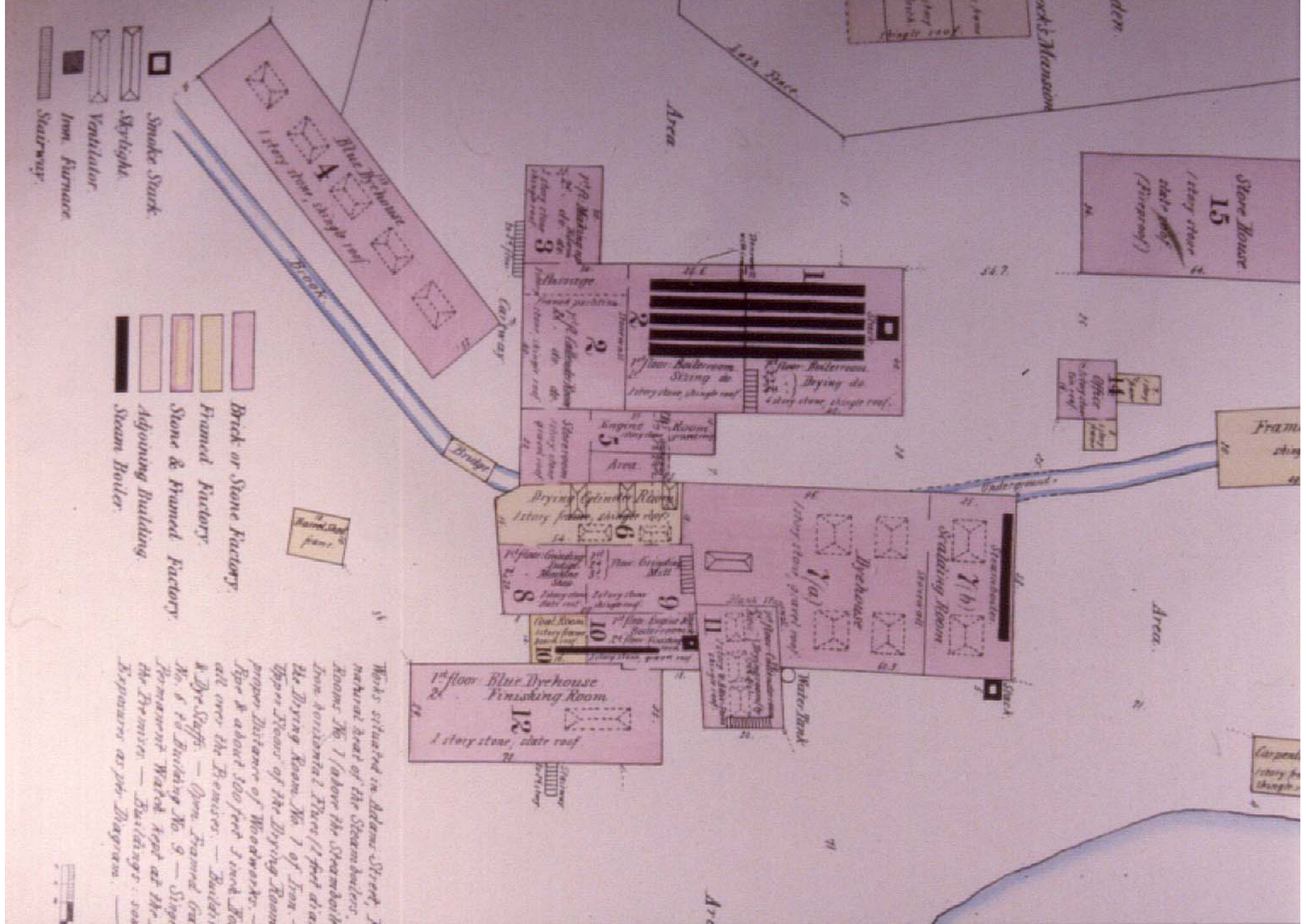




## Hexamer Insurance Survey, Frankford Bleach Works, ca. 1870

SOURCE: Free Library Map Collection

Even the city began to deal with raw sewage in streams, industrial pollution continued to be a problem. Many factories continued to run waste pipes directly into Frankford Creek and other Philadelphia streams. In this plan, the mill race runs under the bleach house, no doubt carrying wastewater directly to the creek.



# Hexamer Insurance Survey, Frankford Dye Works, ca. 1870

SOURCE: Free Library Map Collection





## **Frankford Creek, ca. 1930**

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

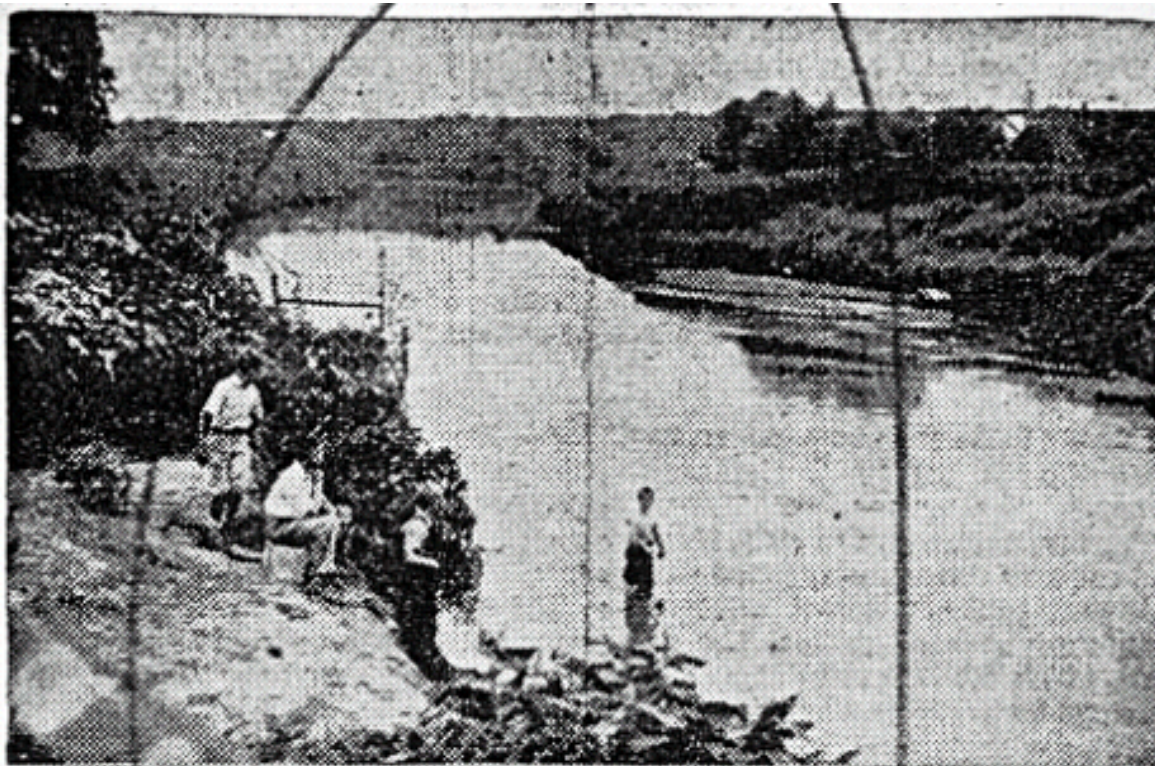
A 1937 law forbidding the dumping of factory wastes was rarely enforced, partly due to the political and economic power of factory owners.



**Frankford Creek  
“purple and  
perfumed”  
Philadelphia  
Evening Bulletin,  
July 15, 1938**

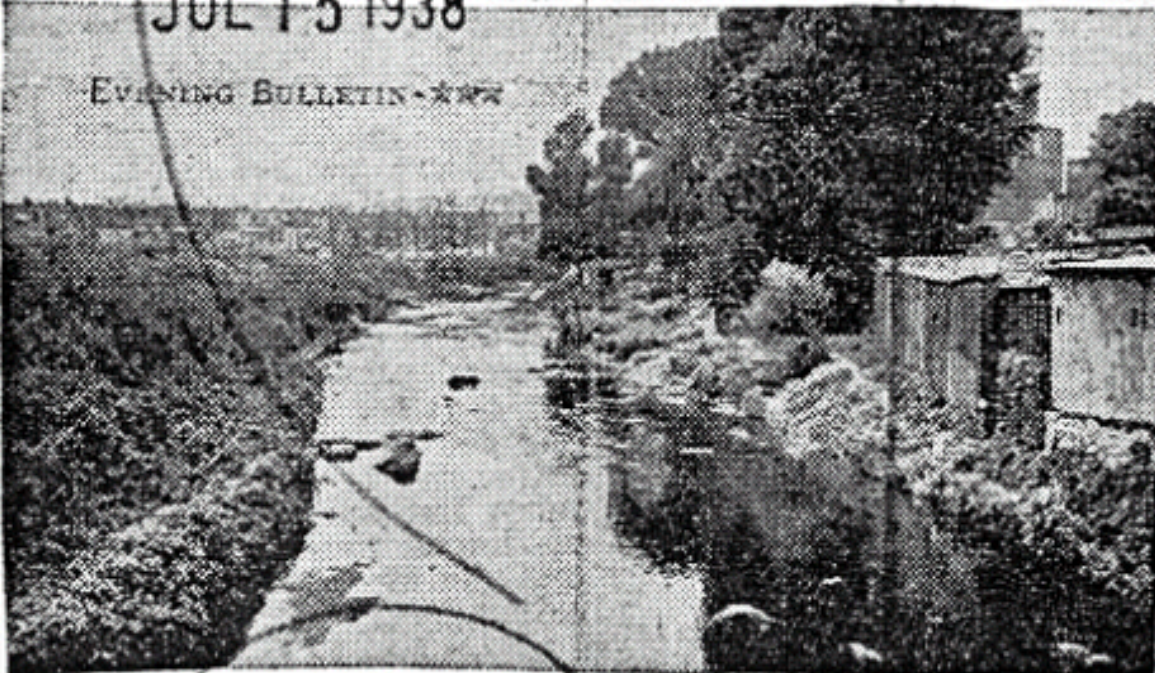
SOURCE: Temple University  
Libraries/Urban Archives  
Philadelphia Bulletin Collection

See the next slide for the  
text of the letters that  
accompanied these  
pictures which, being  
black and white, don't  
show the creek's true  
colors.



JUL 15 1938

EVENING BULLETIN - XXX



FRANKFORD CREEK "purple and perfumed"



## FRANKFORD CREEK "purple and perfumed"

Letters to The Bulletin;

SIR: Many funny and ill remarks have been made by citizens of Frankford and vicinity when Frankford Creek is mentioned. A new deal is really needed for this contaminated blotch of Philadelphia. People and organizations have from time to time shouted their woes about this disgrace. Some improvements have come from the city after long, tiring drives of citizens, but we are still slumbering regarding sanitary sewage. Sewers may be the best available, but if sanitation is poor, what good are they? Sewers take

the wastes from homes and factories and drop them off in this once beautiful creek, where the rank smell is carried by warm winds to produce an unhospitable welcome to visitors of this industrious city.

Politician

SIR: Today I looked at Frankford Creek and found it purple and perfumed—and what perfume! Tomorrow the water may be pink or yellow, depending on what particular kind of factory wastes are dumped in. But the perfume is always just about the same, that is, terrible.

Frankford

## Frankford Creek "purple and perfumed" Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, July 15, 1938

SOURCE: Temple University Libraries/Urban Archives  
Philadelphia Bulletin Collection

# CREEK CALLED POISONED

**Relatives Blame Child's Death on Impurities in Frankford Stream**

Relatives declared today that poisons in Frankford Creek were responsible for the death yesterday of Earl Lintz, nine, 2136 N. Darlen st., mascot of the 20th Ward Fidelity baseball team.



Earl Lintz, although warned by his uncle, Kirby

With John Haig, eight, 2114 N. Darlen st., Earl went to the game with the Kerbaugh A. C. at Thompson and Berkshire sts.,

Hale, 22, catcher on the team, to stay at home.

The boys soon wandered from the lot to the creek and in a few minutes Earl fell in. Several players plunged in, but it was an hour before another uncle, Fred Exler, 2116 N. Franklin st, recovered the body.

Earl's grandfather, Orville Hale, said a physician at Northeastern General Hospital said that even if the boy had been revived he would have died within an hour from poisons that seeped into his system.

At the hospital authorities said the boy's death was due to drowning. Chief Herbert M. Packer, of the Bureau of Housing and Sanitation in the Department of Public Health, pointed out that the Frankford creek actually is a sewer, and will be until money is available for proper pipes.

**“Creek Called poisoned”  
Philadelphia Evening  
Bulletin, June 2, 1933**

SOURCE: Temple University  
Libraries/Urban Archives  
Philadelphia Bulletin Collection



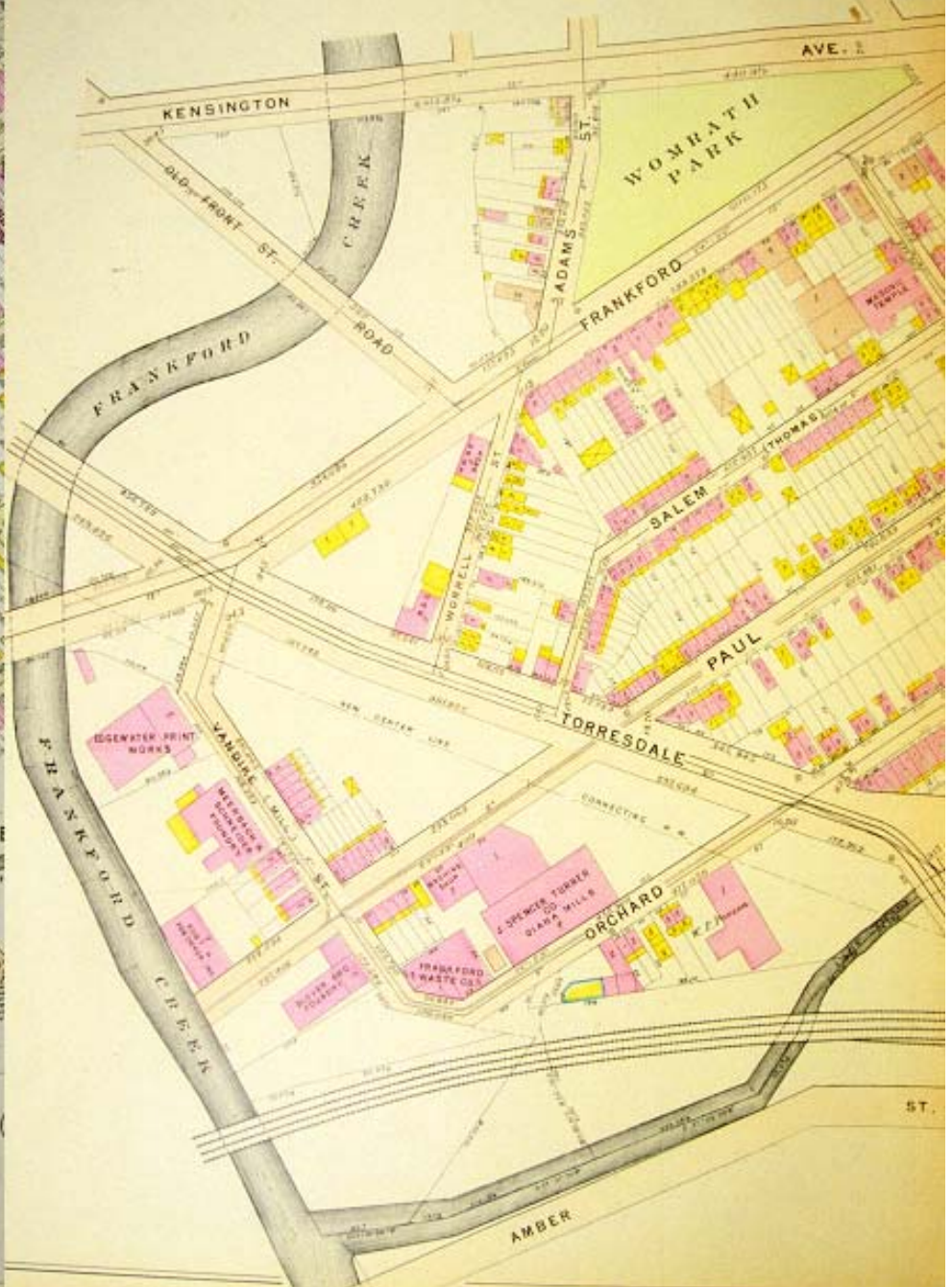
# CHANNEL CHANGES

Besides the dams and mill races built by factory owners, and the occasional encroachments of their buildings into the flood plain, official

channel changes, paid for by government funds, were also undertaken.

Emergency dredging projects, by the city or the U.S. government, attempted to keep the lower stretches of the creek open for navigation. Other channel changes were designed to remove constrictions in creek, such as sharp bends, which were often the locations of overflows during storms. The first channel change of which there is a good visual record was undertaken by the city in 1901-1902. As shown in the following atlas plates, a sharp bend was smoothed out, which allowed the construction of two higher bridges and reconfiguring of streets in vicinity of Frankford.





## Frankford Creek channel before & after 1901-02 Revision

SOURCE: 1894 Bromley Atlas and 1910 Smith Atlas, Free Library Map Collection



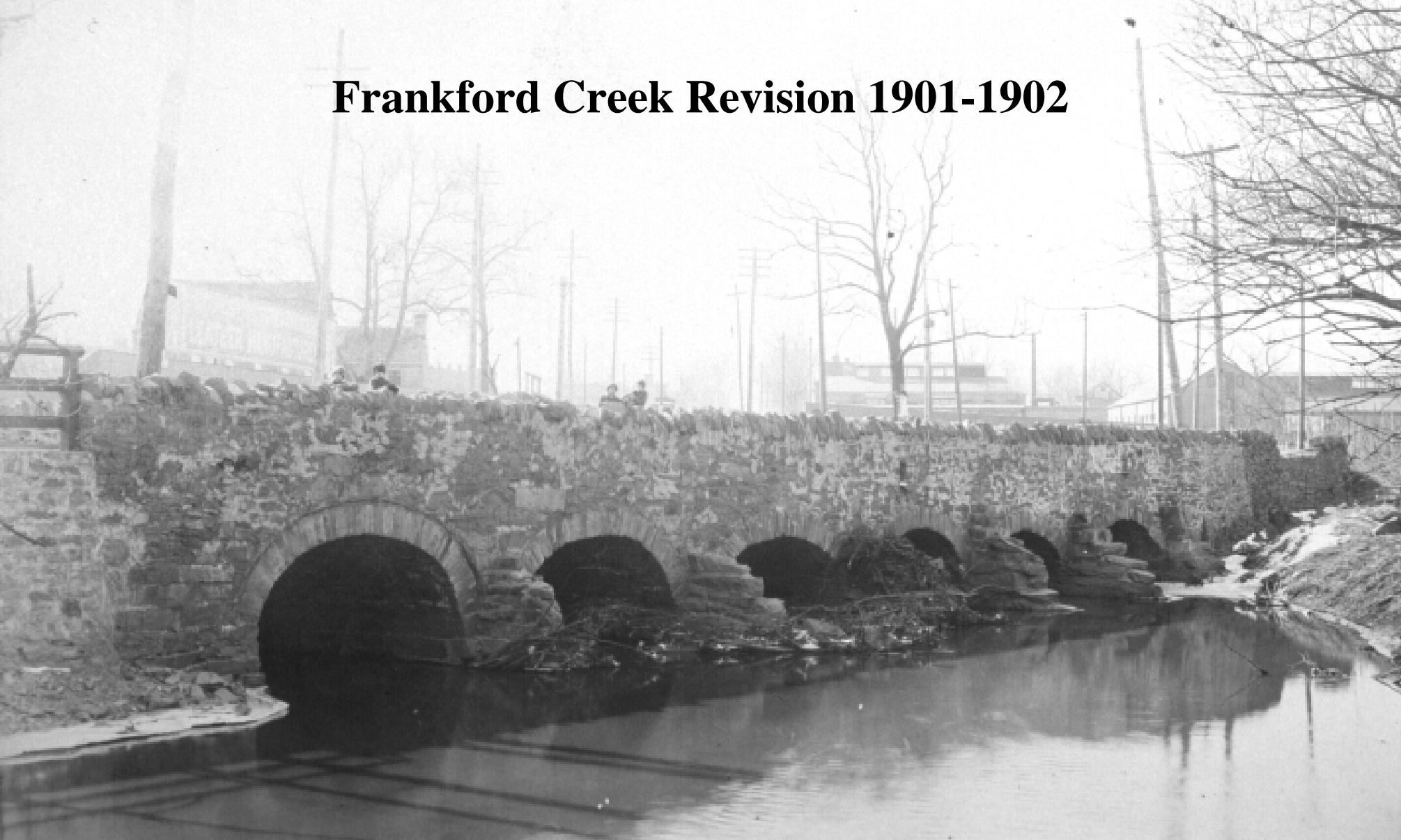


## **Frankford Creek Revision 1901-1902**

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

In this photograph, taken before the channel of the creek was changed, it is difficult to even find a channel at all.

## Frankford Creek Revision 1901-1902



SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

The so-called ‘Six Arch Bridge’ at Frankford Avenue, built in 1796, tended to constrict the flow of the creek during high water and was replaced as a part of this project.





## **Frankford Creek Revision 1901-1902**

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia  
The new creek channel under construction.



## **Frankford Creek Revision 1901-1902**

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

The same view as the previous slide, after the channel revision.



# Frankford Creek, July 11, 1934

Looking downstream from Paul St. footbridge toward railroad bridge

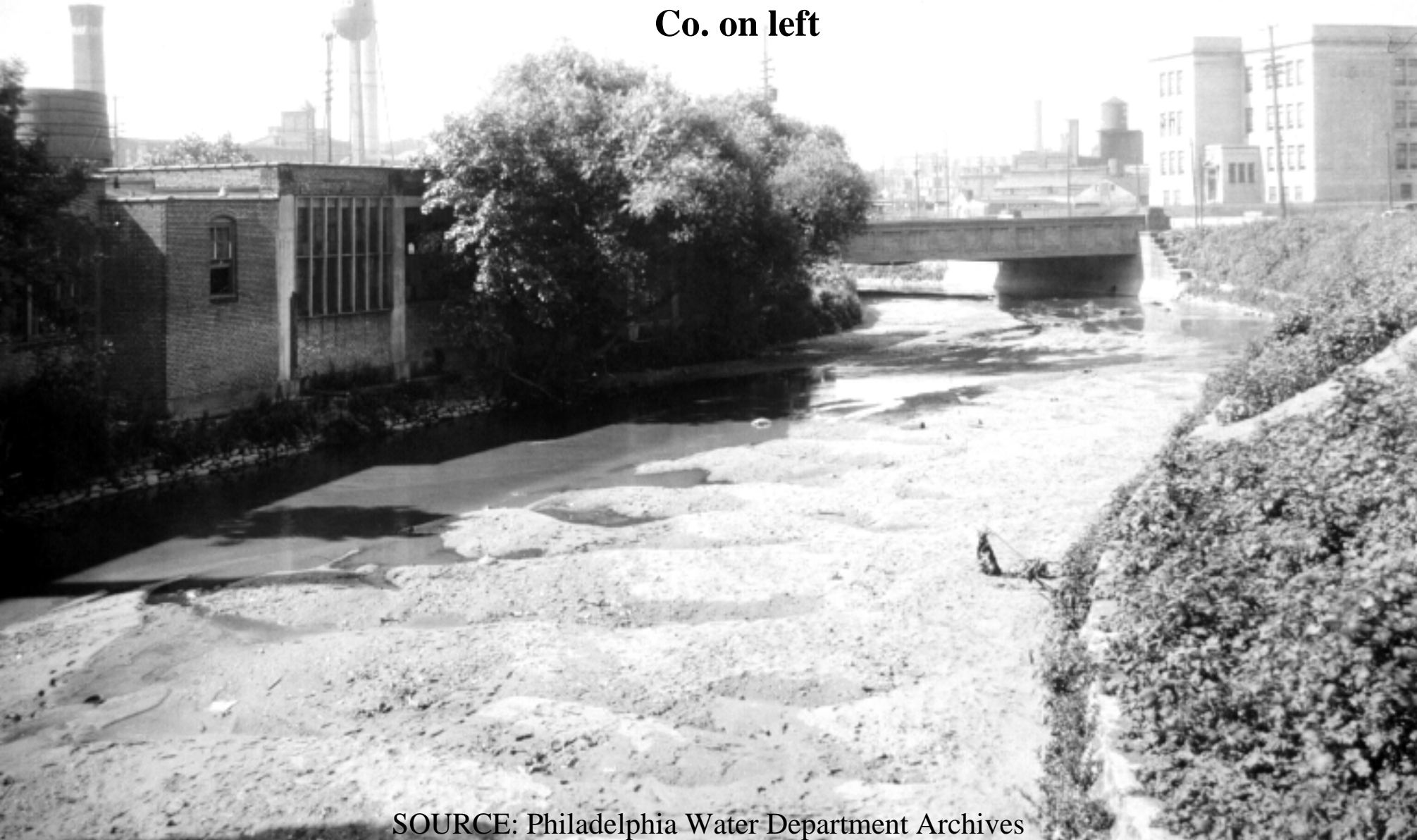


SOURCE: Philadelphia Water Department Archives

Flooding became an increasing problem after the 1920s, as the farmland upstream from Frankford proper was built up with dense rowhouse neighborhoods. The removal of several upstream dams also released large amounts of silt into the creek channel, reducing its capacity.

# Frankford Creek, July 11, 1934

Looking downstream from Worrell St. bridge, with Edgewater Finishing Co. on left



SOURCE: Philadelphia Water Department Archives

A 1931 study of the creek found that it had a capacity of only 2,200 cubic feet per second, while typical flood flows could range from 5,000 to 10,000 c.f.s.





**Frankford Creek,  
July 11, 1934  
Looking downstream from  
the Wingohocking St. bridge**

SOURCE: Philadelphia Water  
Department Archives

While the dry-weather flow,  
as seen in this picture, was  
barely ankle-deep on an  
eight-year-old boy, the  
creek during rainstorms  
could quickly turn into a  
raging torrent, spilling out  
into the adjacent factories  
and neighborhoods,  
damaging business and  
homes.

From This . . .



Floods like this on Vandike st., near Torresdale and Frankford aves., formerly were common after heavy rains.

## **Frankford Creek Flood, probably 1930s**

SOURCE: Temple University Libraries/Urban Archives  
Philadelphia Bulletin Collection

Illustration from March 18, 1956, Philadelphia Inquirer  
Sunday Magazine





**“Frankford Mills  
Ask Flood Relief”**

**Philadelphia**

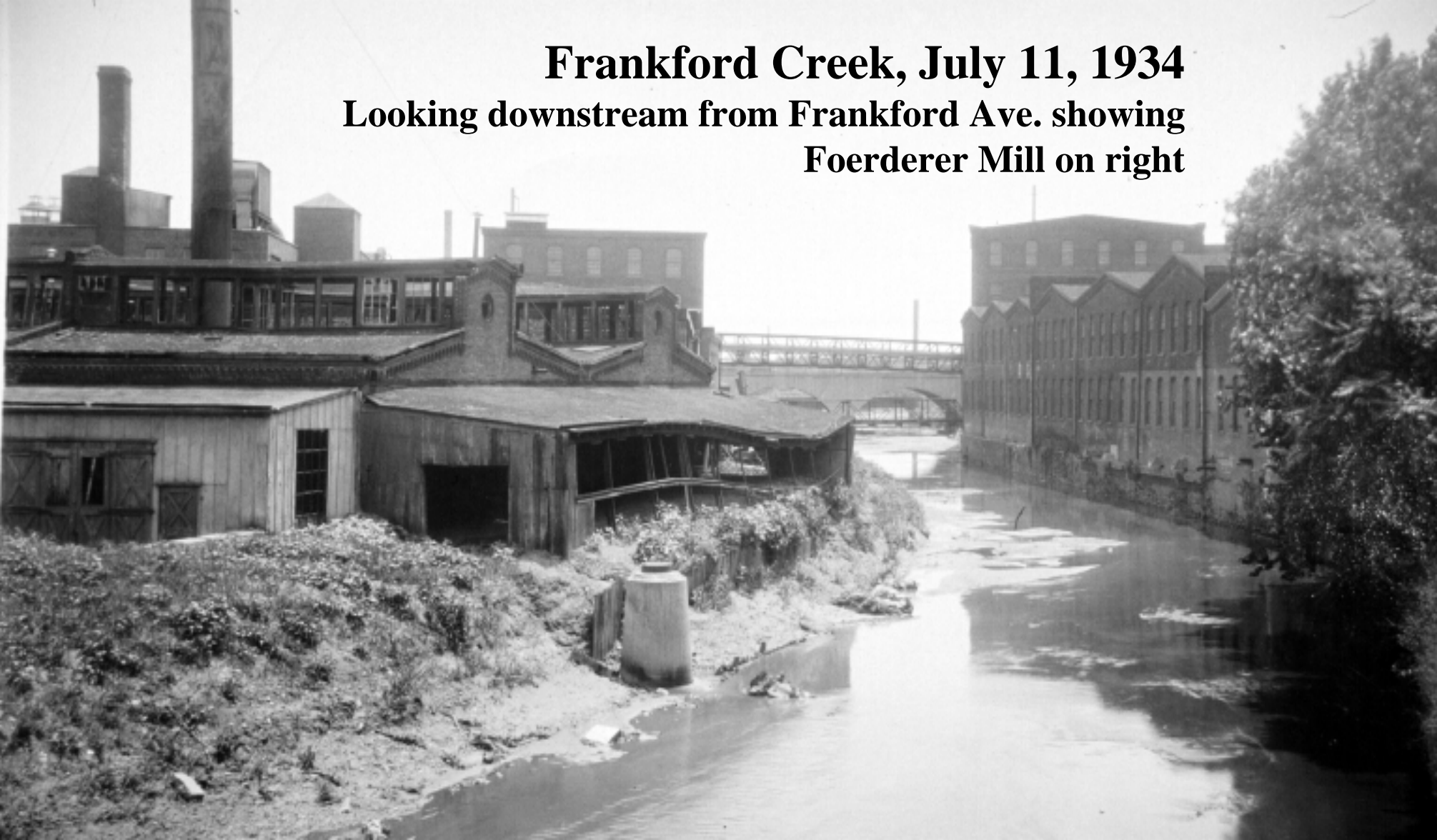
**Bulletin,**

**August 24, 1931**

SOURCE: Temple University  
Libraries/Urban Archives,  
Philadelphia Bulletin  
Collection

Owners of businesses along the creek appealed to the City for relief from the frequent floods, but the City deferred to the Federal government, which still maintained jurisdiction over the creek as a navigable stream.

**Frankford Creek, July 11, 1934**  
**Looking downstream from Frankford Ave. showing**  
**Foerderer Mill on right**

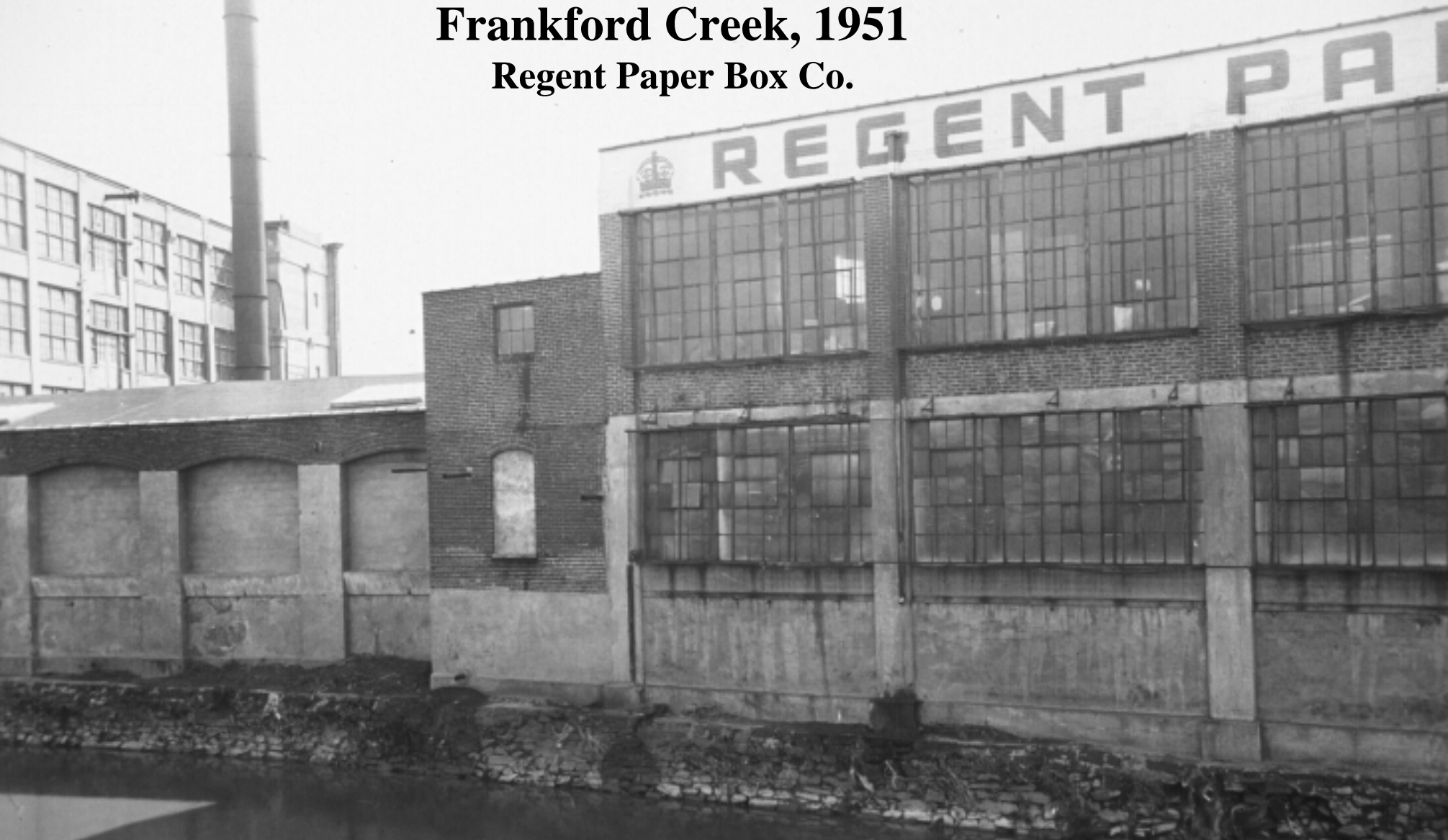


SOURCE: Philadelphia Water Department Archives

The fact that the factories were often built in the flood plain, or encroached in the creek channel, did not lessen the righteousness of the business owners' appeals. The jobs they created were an important bargaining point.



**Frankford Creek, 1951**  
**Regent Paper Box Co.**

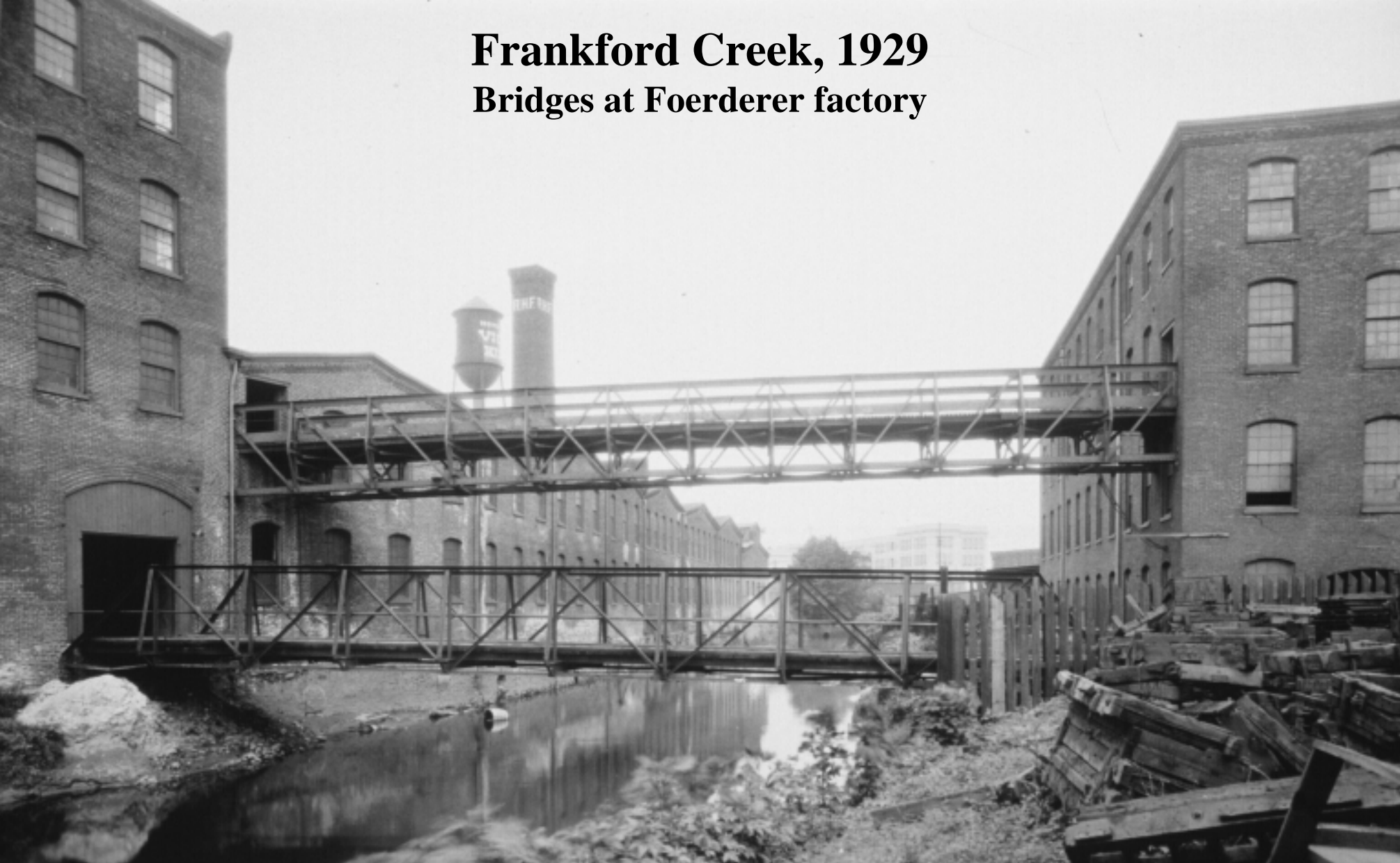


SOURCE: Philadelphia Water Department Archives

Factories tried to protect their buildings bricking up the lower windows and doors, to keep floodwaters at bay.

# Frankford Creek, 1929

## Bridges at Foerderer factory



SOURCE: Philadelphia Water Department Archives

Low-slung bridges, like this pipe bridge between two factory buildings, also tended to catch debris and constrict the flow of water.





MANUFACTURERS OF  
FRIEZES, MOHAIRS, AND VELOURS

ADAMS AVE. AND WINGHOCKING ST.

FRANKFORD, PHILA. PA.

New York, N.Y. May 13, 1932.

Honorable J. Hampton Moore,  
Mayor of Philadelphia,  
Philadelphia, Pa.

Honorable Sir:

My partner, Mr. R.G. Powers, cut the attached clipping out of the New York Daily Record and it struck me rather forcibly you would admit to the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, you had not bought a suit of clothes in three years. Is it possible that the Mayor of Philadelphia is suffering the same way as the City itself? As you stated to me you had no money and probably this is the reason why you did not buy the suit of clothes.

What chances are there for the poor manufacturers on the Wingohocking Creek to get your subordinates Director ~~Stige~~ *Seeds* and Captain Bernard to gather in enough money to buy a few dredges and clean up the creek as they promised they would when we last called upon them. My thoughts quickly changed when I cut out a clipping of the Ledger last evening, coming over on the train, the City of Philadelphia was going to offer \$20,000,000. bonds, there certainly ought to be a little of this money left to buy a few worn out dredges to clean up the old Creek with.

We had a visit from Mr. ~~Stige~~ *Seeds* and Bernard but after that we have not heard a word about any improvements to be made. A week ago last Sunday the Creek started on a rampage and we had two or three inches of water in one of the buildings.

I am just writing you to remind you what promise you made me and the Committee to give this your personal attention, and if the weather continues rainy as it has been in the last few days we might just as well expect another flood.



"SAVE A DAY"

"MAIL ALL ORDERS TO MILLS AMERICAN PILE FABRIC CO. FRANKFORD, PA."

# Letter from local business owner to Philadelphia Mayor J. Hampton Moore, May 13, 1932

SOURCE: City Archives of  
Philadelphia

Local business owners appealed to the Mayor to do something about the flooding problem. A city survey of the creek in 1931 had recommended dredging, channel changes and bulkhead construction that would have cost an estimated \$2 million. Since the country was in the midst of the Depression, no money was available for such work.

W.P.F.L.  
H. 83428  
*W.P.F.L.*

**Edgewater Dyeing and Finishing Co.**  
DYEING, FINISHING, PRINTING, NAPPING

AGENTS  
MYRICK & R. D. RICE  
320 BROADWAY, NEW YORK CITY



COTTON PIECE GOODS  
EXCLUSIVELY

H. CARROLL BROOKE, Secy & Treas 6-5

**4030 Frankford Avenue**  
**Frankford, Philadelphia**

June 8th, 1932.

Honorable J. Hampton Moore,  
Mayor of the City of Philadelphia,  
Philadelphia, Pa.

Dear Mr. Mayor:

Our subject is again Frankford Creek.

Four of your main departments should be interested in this matter. First, the Dept. of Public Works. Frankford Sewage Canal now represents a condition of inadequate engineering on the disposal of real sewage.

Second, Dept. of Wharves, Docks & Ferries. A clear unobstructed outlet for Frankford Sewage Canal should certainly be provided.

Third, Dept. of Health. Frankford Sewage Canal carries refuse, slime and filth through quite a residential and manufacturing section of your good city in the open where children play and people work.

Fourth, Dept. of Safety. Destruction of mill and vacant properties along the Sewage Canal goes on at a considerable pace - and refuse, junk and scrap are thrown into the canal because of inadequate patrol and fencing, walls and signs to protect the canal against encroachment.

Your previous replies have surely been appreciated. We surely hope that some means can be found to start on this important project.

Respectfully yours,

*John McCoy*  
John McCoy  
Sec. Edgewater D&F Co.

# Letter from local business owner to Philadelphia Mayor J. Hampton Moore, June 8, 1932

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia

In this letter, John McCoy, secretary of the Edgewater Dyeing and Finishing Company, refers to the creek as the "Frankford Sewage Canal." The irony that McCoy and other business people seemed to miss is that it was often their factories that were creating the problems that they were appealing to the City to alleviate.

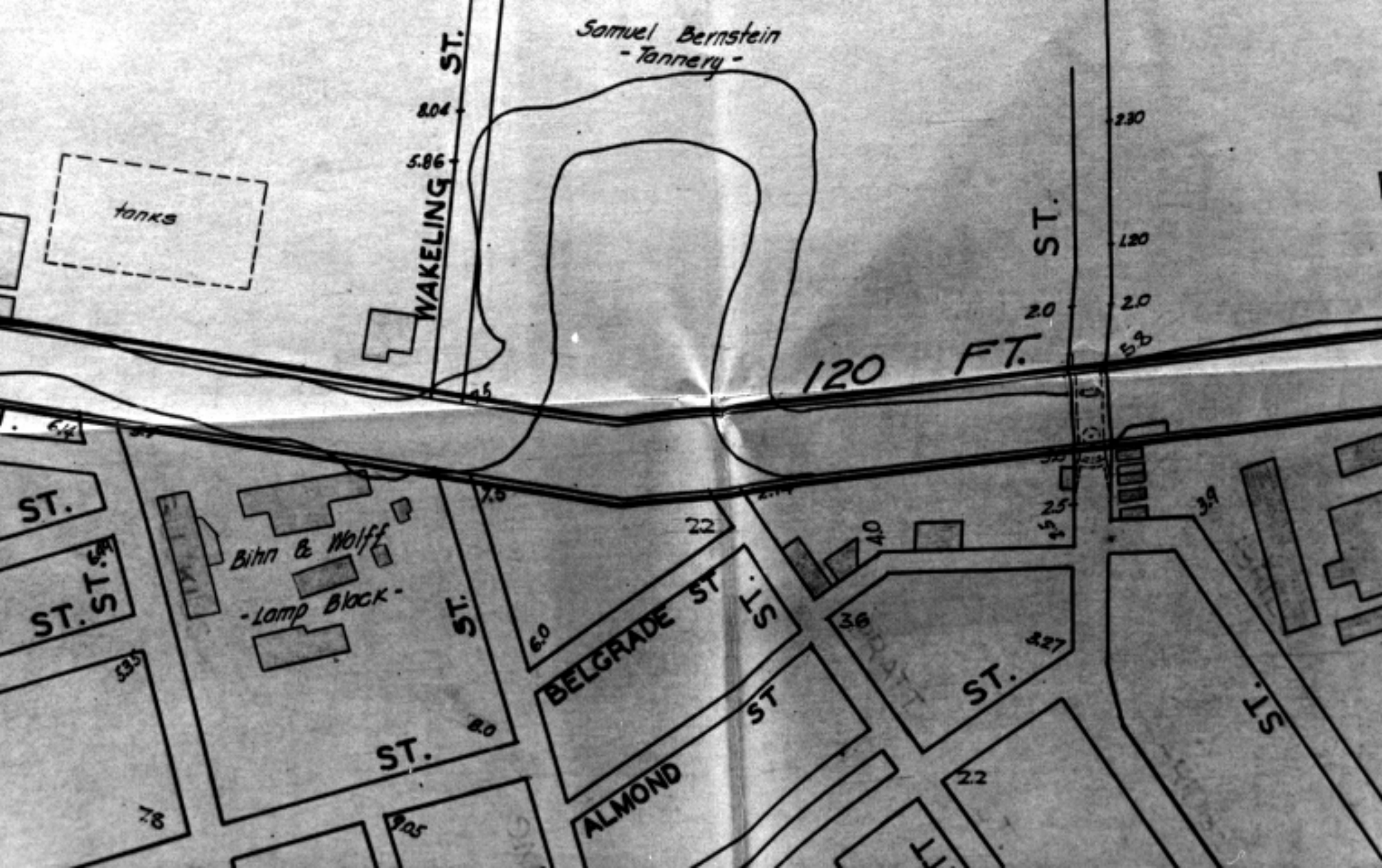




## **Horseshoe Bend, Frankford Creek, May 21, 1934**

SOURCE: Free Library Print & Picture Dept.

Instead of a major overhaul of the creek, the City was able to do only piecemeal projects. Undertaken in cooperation with the Works Progress Administration, the removal of this bend employed more than 1000 men, who worked at low tide using shovels and wheelbarrows to straighten the channel.



## Horseshoe Bend in Frankford Creek, from 1931 survey

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia





## Horseshoe bend Aerial view, 1930, and newspaper article, Philadelphia Bulletin, May 27, 1934

SOURCE: Temple University Libraries/Urban Archives,  
Philadelphia Bulletin Collection, and Free Library Map  
Collection

### FRANKFORD CREEK WORK WILL BEGIN TOMORROW

1,000 Men to Start on Removal of  
Horseshoe Bend

Work will begin tomorrow on removal of a horseshoe that never brought anything other than bad luck.

Upward of 1,000 workmen will begin the straightening of Frankford creek, between Margaret and Bridge





**Frankford Creek at the Delaware River, 1950**

SOURCE: Frankford Historical Society  
The area in red shows the former location of the horseshoe bend.



# FRANKFORD CREEK 'A LOST CHILD'

## Termed Such at Public Hearing on Pollution And Flood Control

Frankford Creek was characterized as "the lost child on the chart of the Delaware River," by Congressman Frank J. G. Dorsey at a public hearing in the U. S. Customs House today.

The hearing was held to consider a preliminary examination of flood control and pollution at Frankford Creek and was presided over by Major C. W. Burlin, district engineer of the U. S. Army Engineers.

Representatives of several community associations discussed the recent Congressional Act for the proposed survey.

Congressman Dorsey pointed out that a report made in 1934 was unfavorable to any development of the project and declared that "procrastination and inactivity on the part of public authorities" have resulted in a serious situation regarding flood control and the re-

moval of industrial firms formerly located on the banks of the creek.

"Industry should be given consideration because industrialists are taxpayers," he added.

A letter by Colonel L. H. Campbell, executive officer of the Frankford Arsenal, urged the closing of the creek and construction of a mile-and-a-half sewer to carry its water to the Delaware. The Frankford and Bridesburg Improvement Association recommended the report of Judge Curtis Box urging the elimination of dumping and the straightening of the banks of the stream.

Several industrialists, including Fred C. Auten, of the Edgewater Dyeing and Finishing Co., Frankford av. and Nicetown lane, told of losses due to floods in the creek. In seven years up to last year Auten said his firm had suffered \$50,000 in flood losses. He proposed the stream be dredged and retaining walls erected.

Alfred S. Bowman, of the Schneider, Bowman Co., 1612 Van Dyke st., said the company's \$200,000 investment had suffered \$25,000 damage from flood in seven years to 1937. On one occasion 23,000 pounds of molten iron were in danger of explosion should the flood waters reach to the furnaces. Findings of the hearing will be reported to the division engineer at New York, who will report to the War Department.

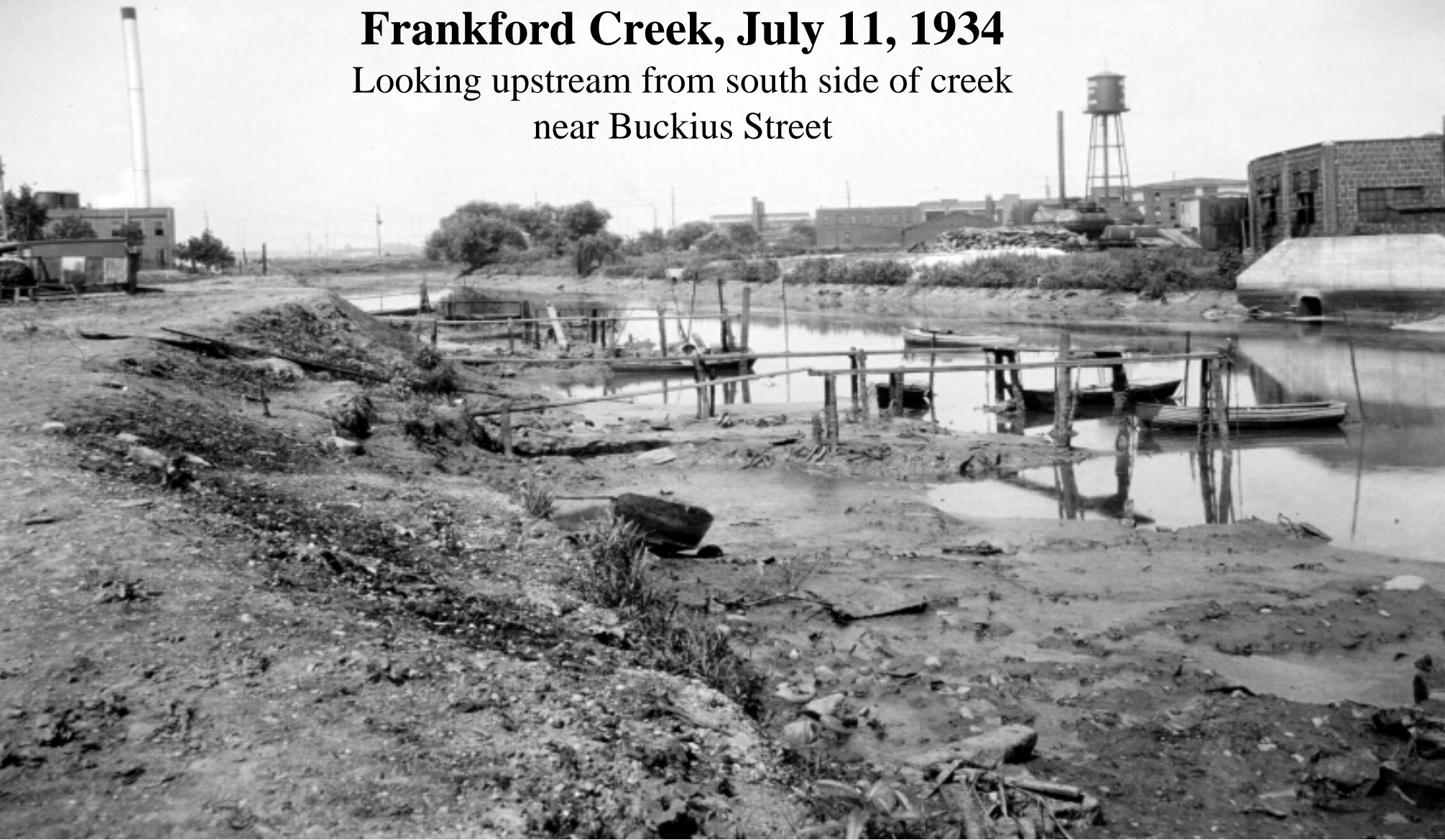
## 'Frankford Creek 'A Lost Child'' Philadelphia Bulletin, August 16, 1938

SOURCE: Temple University  
Libraries/Urban Archives  
Philadelphia Bulletin  
Collection

At this 1938 hearing, the Federal government refused to do anything about the flooding and problems, but continued to maintain its jurisdiction over the creek as a navigable stream. Without Federal support, the city lacked the funds to undertake any such project itself.

# Frankford Creek, July 11, 1934

Looking upstream from south side of creek  
near Buckius Street



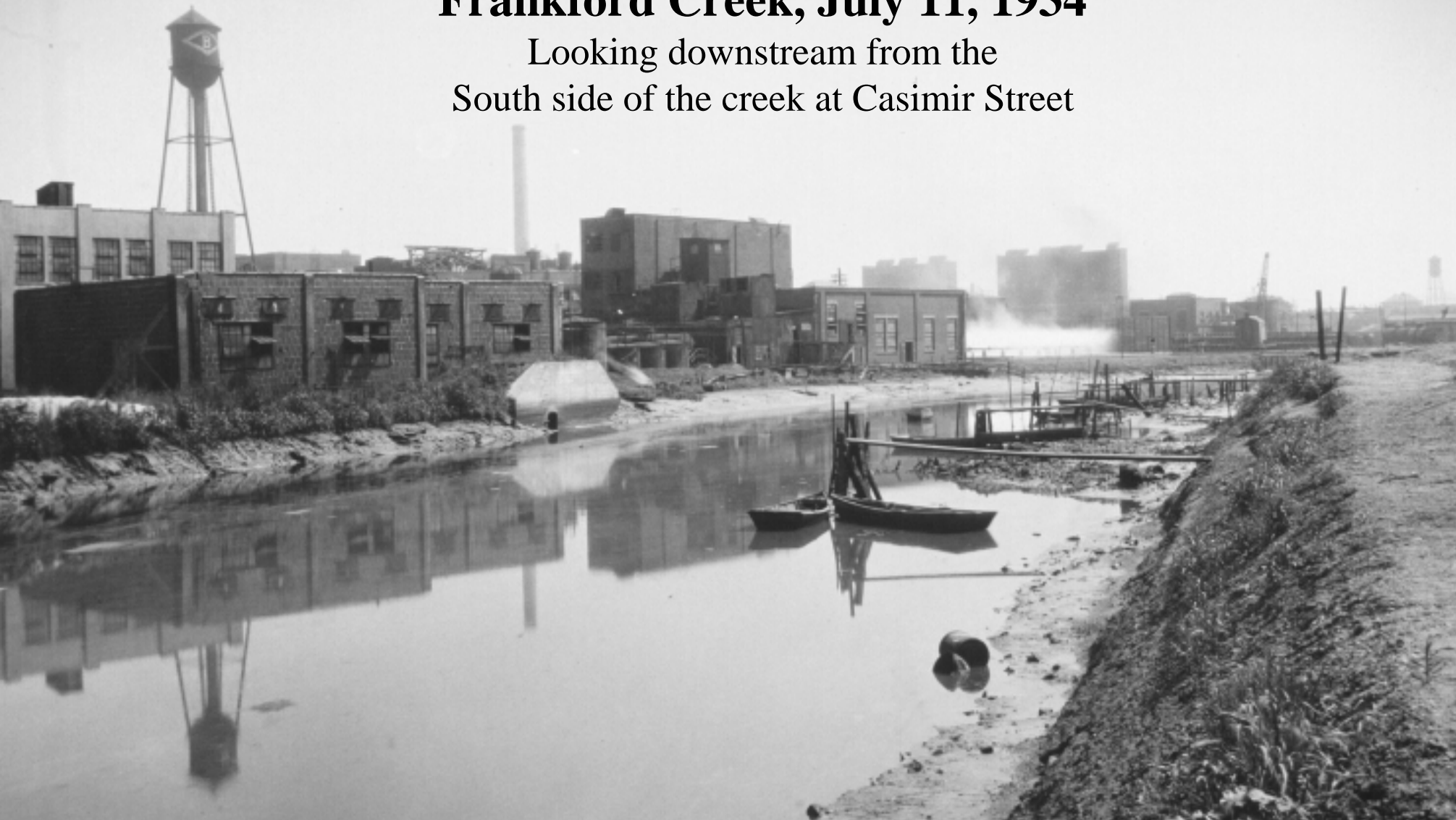
SOURCE: Philadelphia Water Department Archives

In fact, the Federal authorities knew that the lower creek had not been navigable since the late 1920s, due to silting problems that led to exposed mud flats in most places except at high tide. The city's 1931 survey of the creek found that it navigable only by small craft "at advantageous stages of the tide."



# Frankford Creek, July 11, 1934

Looking downstream from the  
South side of the creek at Casimir Street



SOURCE: Philadelphia Water Department Archives

Ironically, while lack of maintenance severely limited travel on the creek, one of the U.S. government's reasons for not funding improvements was that there was insufficient commerce on the creek to justify the expenditures.

# Action is Near to End Floods in Frankford Creek

2. Preliminary Steps  
to be Started Within  
Next Few Weeks

By JOHN G. McCULLOUGH  
Of The Bulletin Staff

The 66-year-old campaign to correct flood conditions along the erratic course of Frankford Creek is moving at last into the action stage. MAR 30 1947 S-A

Within the next few weeks, city engineers said yesterday, two important steps will be taken to get work under way on the \$4,000,000 program which was first advocated by Army engineers in 1881. The project will require the straightening of the present snake-like chan-

**“Action is near to end  
floods in Frankford Creek”  
Philadelphia Bulletin,  
March 30, 1947**

SOURCE: Temple University Libraries/ Urban Archives, Philadelphia Bulletin Collection

Continued lobbying finally convinced the Federal officials, in 1940, to declare that the creek was not navigable, relinquishing is jurisdiction and thus freeing the City to undertake much-needed work. The onset of World War II delayed the start of this and most other non-essential public work projects until after the war's end, in 1947.



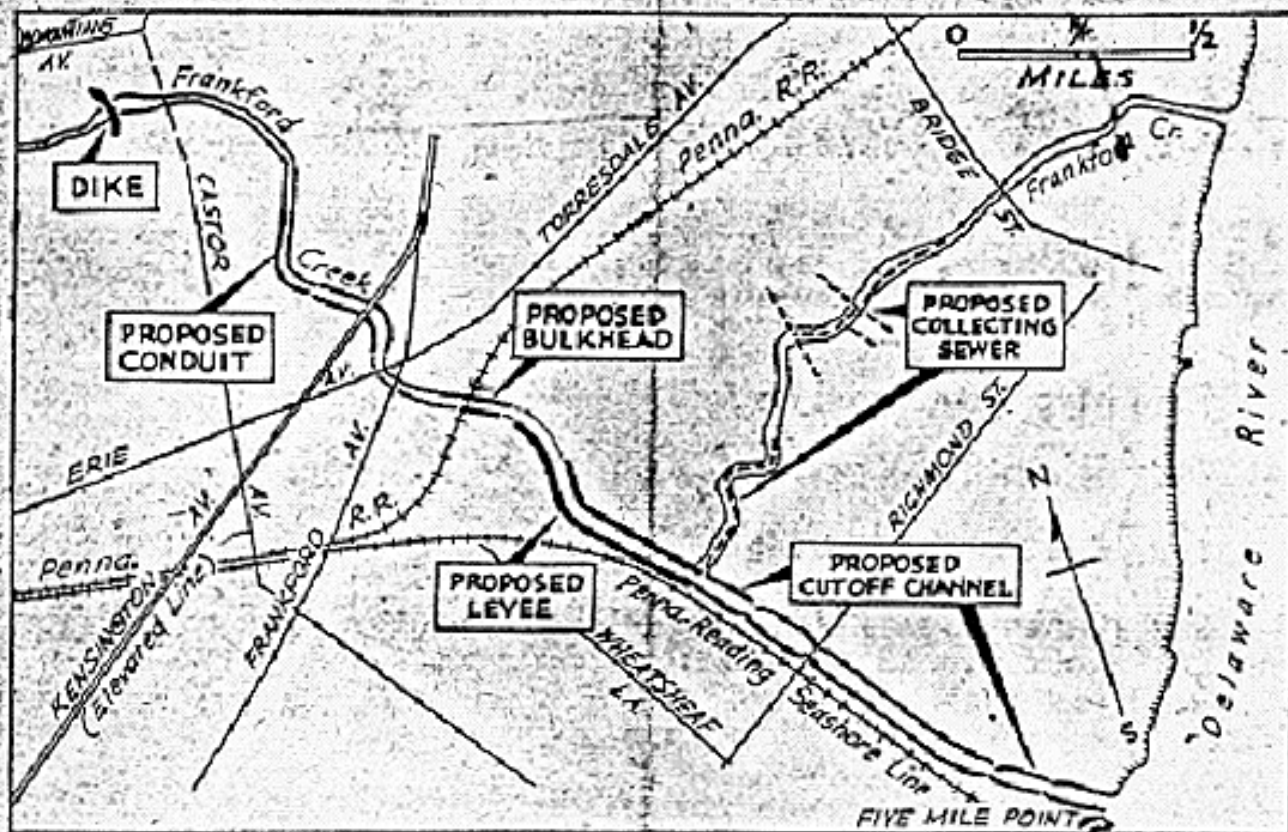
# Shift is Proposed in the Course of Frankford Creek

\$4,728,800 Program  
Would Change Face of  
Much of Bridesburg

By JOHN C. CALPIN  
Of The Bulletin Staff

A major face-lifting of a large part of Bridesburg, including a change in the course of Frankford Creek as a flood control measure, was suggested yesterday to Mayor Samuel.

## IF COURSE OF FRANKFORD CREEK IS CHANGED



Proposed channel would parallel Pennsylvania Railroad-Seashore Line tracks to point two miles south of present confluence. Upstream, new bulkheads would be built

## “Shift Proposed in Course of Frankford Creek” Philadelphia Bulletin, February 1, 1948

SOURCE: Temple University Libraries/Urban Archives, Philadelphia Bulletin Collection  
An integral part of the flood control program was the construction of a new cut-off channel to carry the creek directly to the Delaware River.



## Frankford Creek north of Frankford, showing bend in Juniata neighborhood

SOURCE: 1888 Baist Atlas  
City Archives of Philadelphia

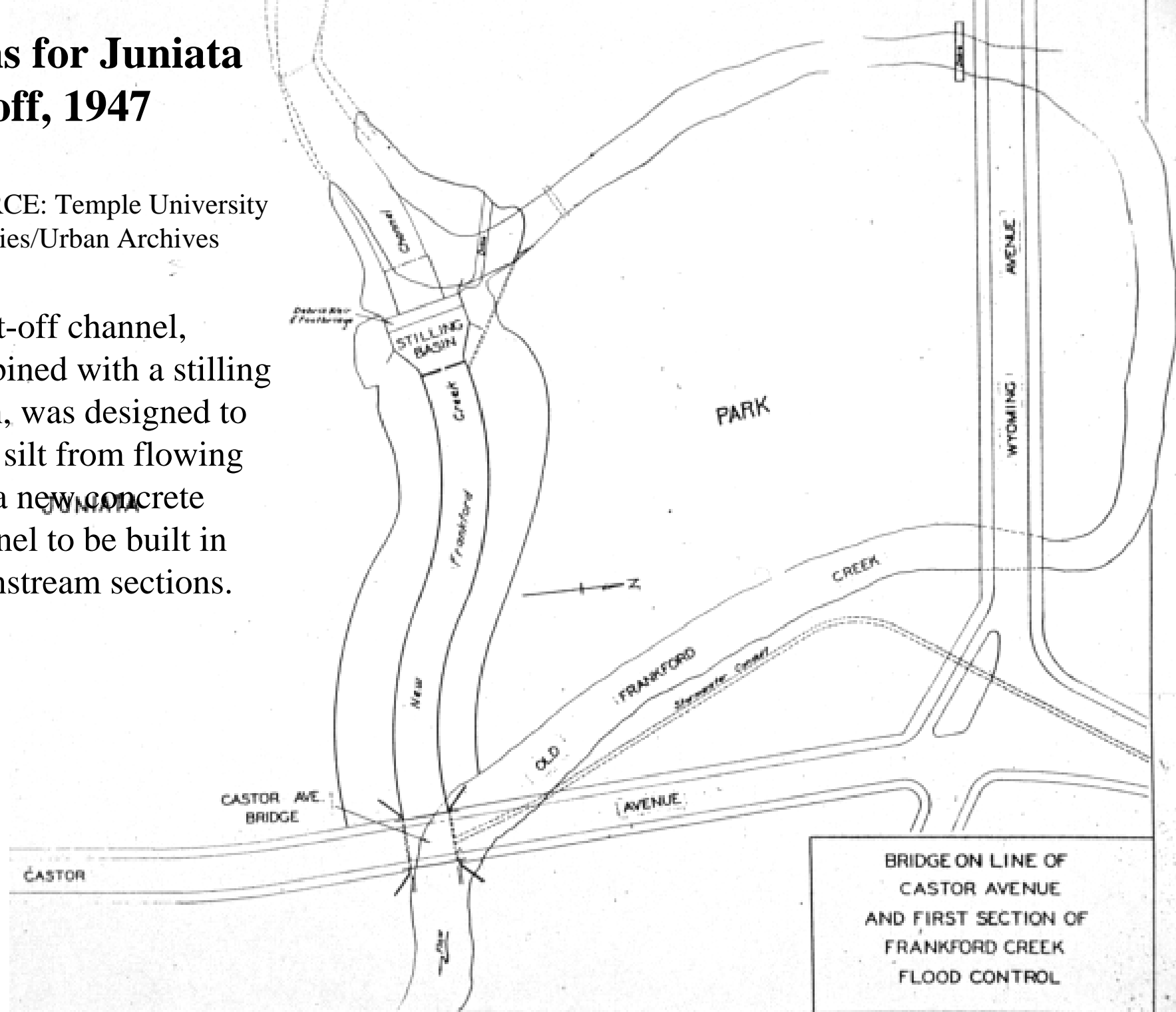
One of the first sections of the  
creek to be changed in the flood  
control project was this large  
bend in what is now the Juniata  
Park golf course.



# Plans for Juniata Cutoff, 1947

SOURCE: Temple University Libraries/Urban Archives

A cut-off channel, combined with a stilling basin, was designed to keep silt from flowing into a new concrete channel to be built in downstream sections.





## **Looking Upstream at Juniata Cut-Off, 1949**

SOURCE: City Archives of Philadelphia





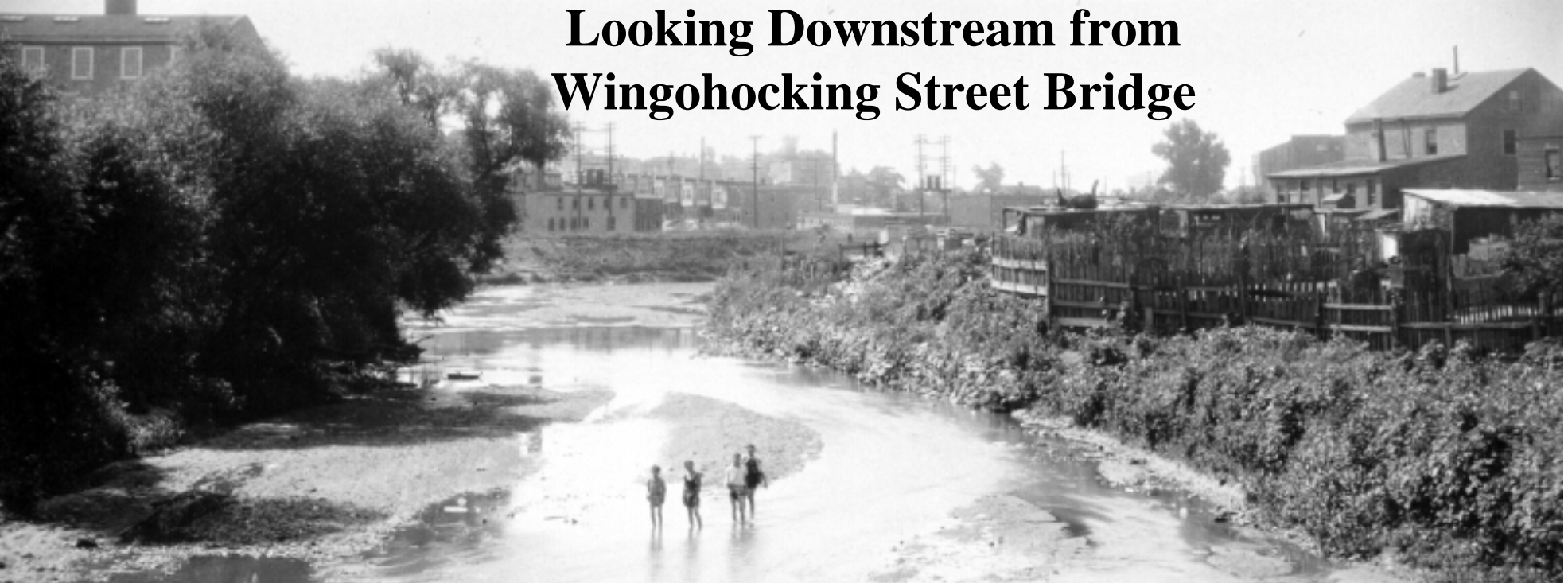
**Spillway for Detention Basin  
Juniata Cut-off, 1950**

SOURCE: City of Philadelphia Archives

**The following series of before  
and after pictures  
chronicle some of the changes  
made in the creek  
during the flood control project  
of  
1947-1956.**



# Looking Downstream from Wingohocking Street Bridge



**1934** (above)  
SOURCE: Philadelphia Water  
Dept. Archives

**1950** (right)  
SOURCE: City Archives of  
Philadelphia



40,988-2 10-10-50 FLOOD CONTROL FOX CREEK. LOOKING DOWNSTREAM  
FROM WINGOHOCKING ST. BRIDGE.

# Looking Upstream from Wingohocking Street Bridge

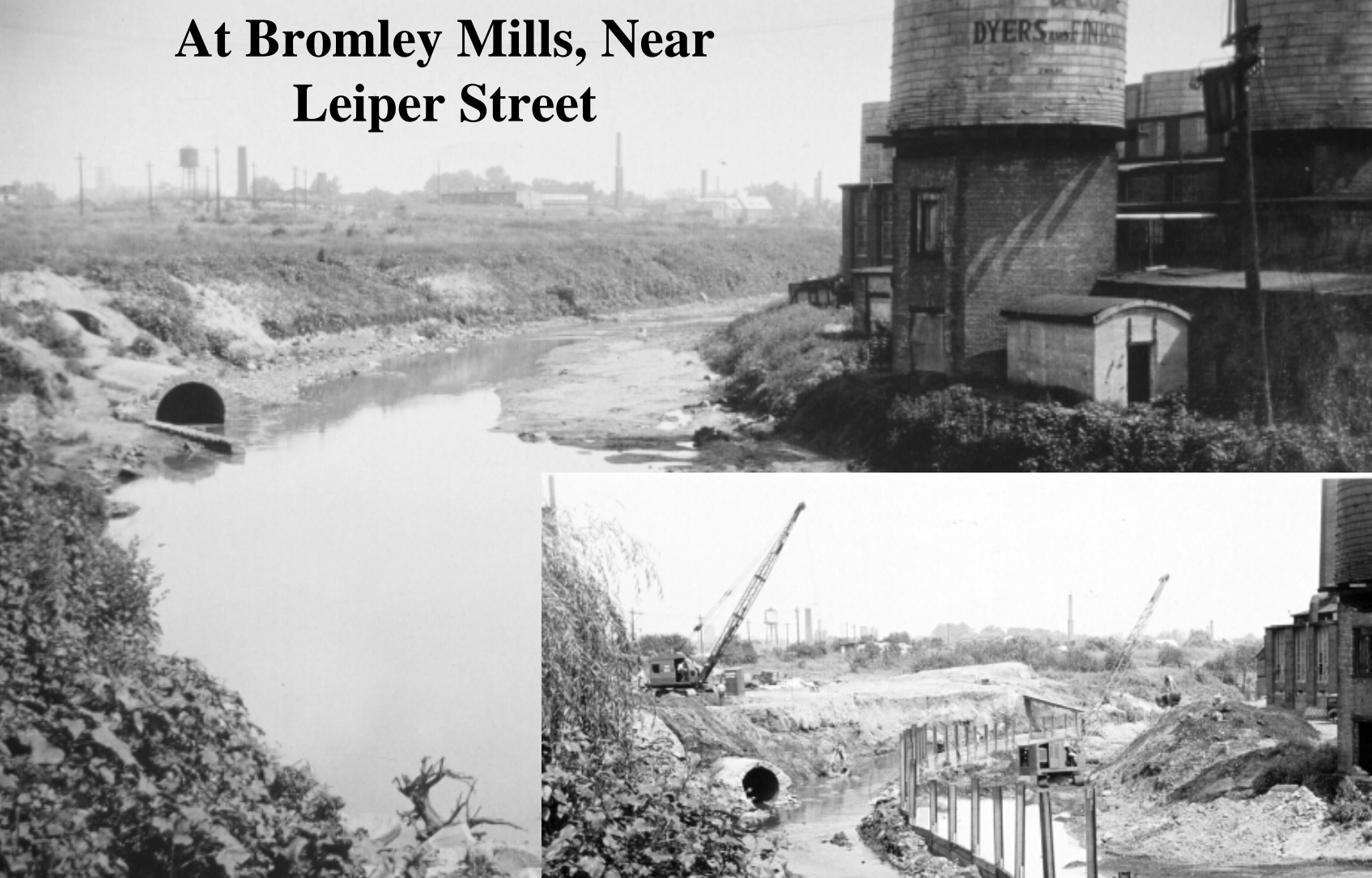


**1934** (above)  
SOURCE: Philadelphia Water  
Dept. Archives

**1950** (right)  
SOURCE: City Archives of  
Philadelphia

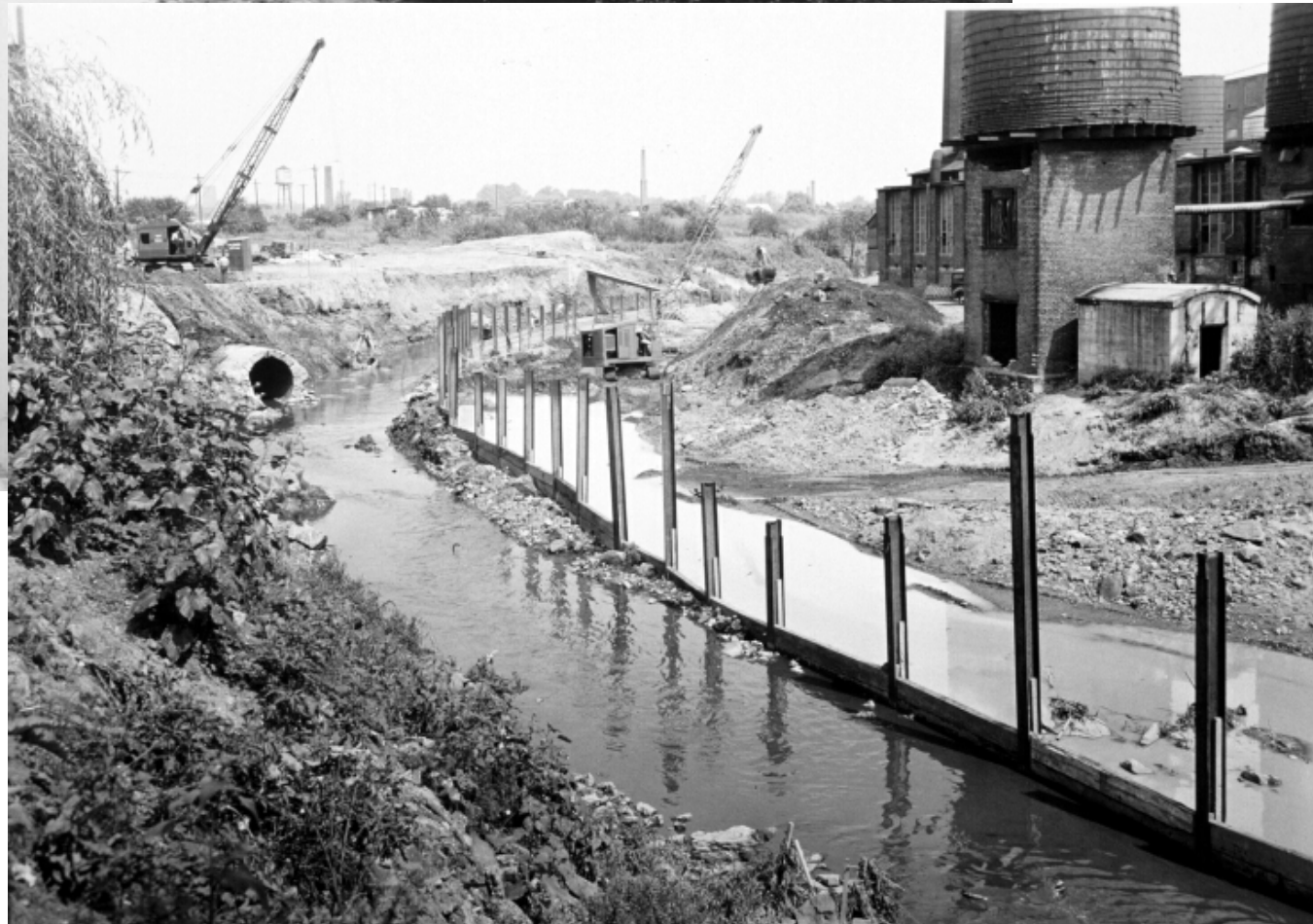


# At Bromley Mills, Near Leiper Street



**1934** (above)  
SOURCE: Philadelphia Water  
Dept. Archives

**1950** (right)  
SOURCE: City Archives of  
Philadelphia





**The following five slides  
show the progress of creek channelization  
between  
Castor Avenue and Wingohocking Street  
in 1950.**

**All photos from  
City Archives of Philadelphia**



**May 17**

Ground-breaking (or more accurately, creek breaking)  
Mayor Bernard Samuel is at the controls of the steam shovel



**June 27**





40877-1 7-17-50 FND CREEK FLOOD CONTROL- VIEW FROM LEFT BANK NEAR  
STA. 141+00 LOOKING TOWARD RIGHT CHANNEL CONSTRUCTION.

July 17



**August 25**



**October 10**



# Frankford Creek near Leiper Street, 1946 and 1960



SOURCE: Philadelphia Water Dept.  
Archives

A section of the creek near Leiper Street (shown in red) was channeled into an underground conduit as part of the flood control project. The aerial view to the left is from 1960; above, 1946.

# Eight Bites of Big Shovel Turn Path of Frankford Creek

OCT 17 1956 F4

At precisely 11.20 A. M. today, Water Commissioner Samuel S. Baxter waved a small red flag as he stood on the bank of Frankford Creek at Roxborough and Almond sts., Bridesburg.

Charles Boyd, of 14 Leighton terrace, Upper Darby, a power shovel operator, caught the signal and went to work on an earthen dam in the creek.

In eight bites of the shovel, Frankford Creek had been diverted into a new channel, part of an eight-year, \$6,900,000 flood-control project. A man who timed the operation with a stopwatch said it took exactly five minutes and two fifths of a second.

## Flows Straight to River

The new 5,940-foot-long channel, generally parallel to the tracks of the Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Lines, now carries the creek straight to the Delaware River, emptying into the river just north of the Delair Bridge.

Eliminated is a huge bend, 8,500 feet long, to the north of Bridesburg, which brought the creek into the river at Frankford Arsenal.

The new channel, 30 feet deep, 120 feet wide at the base and 250 feet wide at the top, passes

under four new bridges that carry Richmond and Thompson sts. and railroad lines along Carbon st. and Delaware av.

## 200 Attend Ceremonies

The diversion ceremonies started at 11 A. M., attended by about 200, including city officials, civic leaders and members and officers of the Northeast Chamber of Commerce.

Speakers included Baxter, Managing Director Donald C. Wagner and George R. Habgood, president of the chamber.

Wagner urged support for municipal improvement loan measures, pointing out that it was such a loan that made the creek project possible.

The ceremony was followed by a luncheon at the Engineers Club.

Baxter said that the project, undertaken after a half century of flash floods, will be completed by the installation of sanitary and storm sewers in the Bridesburg area.

At times in the past, the surging waters rose more than ten feet in a few minutes, flooding streets and cellars.

In past years, as flood control measures, the upper part of the creek was cleaned, dredged and deepened, a bend in Juniata Park was eliminated, and a dam with sluice gates was built.

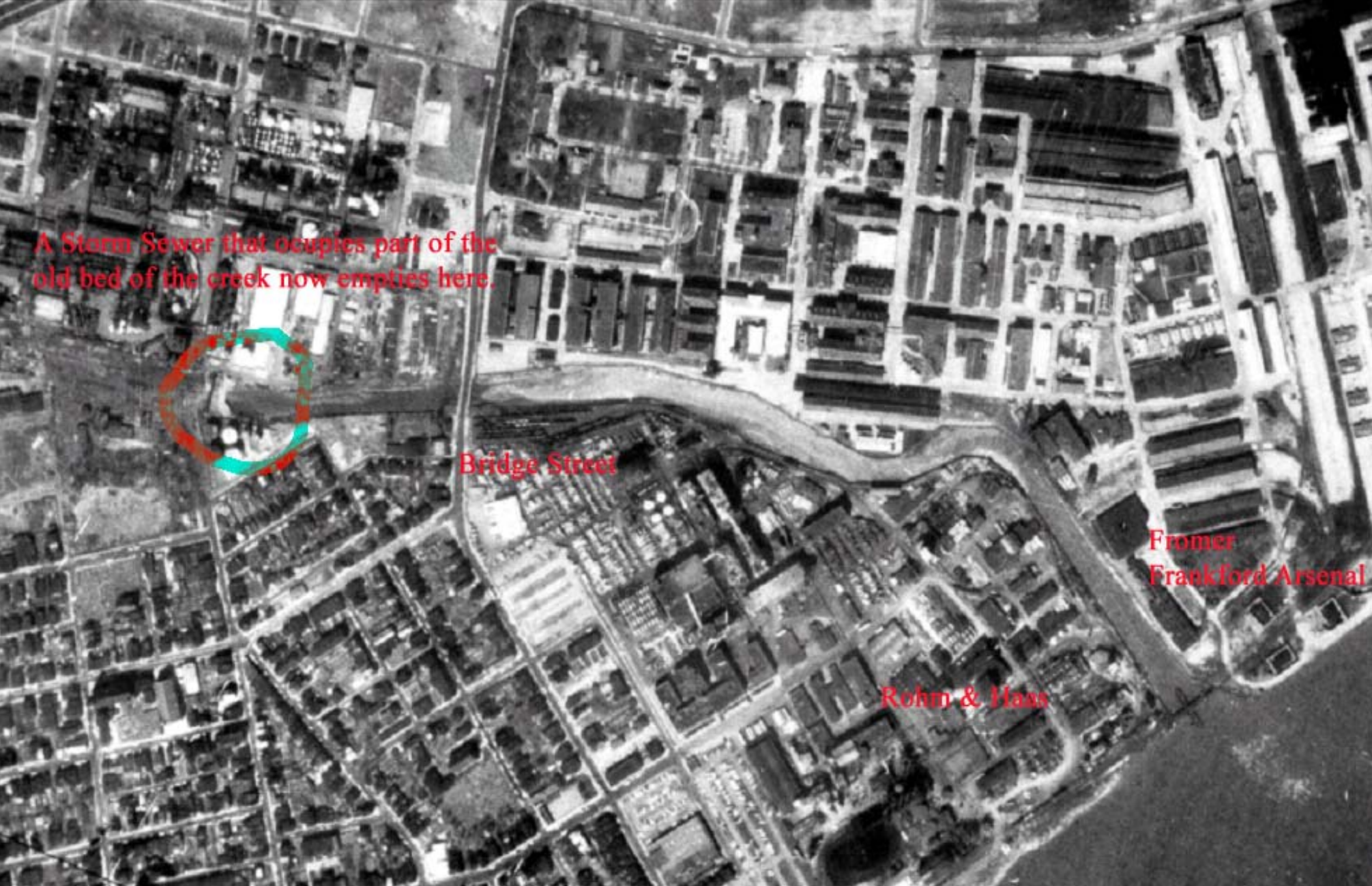
## “Eight Bites of Big Shovel turn Path of Frankford Creek”

Philadelphia Bulletin,  
October 17, 1956

SOURCE: Temple University  
Libraries/Urban Archives  
Philadelphia Bulletin Collection

The final part of the flood control project--the diversion of the lower portion of the creek into a new channel--was completed in 1956. The old creek channel was mostly filled in, with sewers built in part of its bed.





## Remnant of old mouth of Frankford Creek, 1960

SOURCE: Free Library Map Collection





**5'6" x 10' Sewer in former bed of Frankford Creek, 1957**

SOURCE: City of Philadelphia Archives



## Frankford Creek, Then and Now

In summary, the watershed of the lower creek was transformed from this natural, if compromised, system shown on the 1889 map (left), to what is, in many sections, now little more than an urban stormwater conduit.

