

The Place to Be

ROUGH RIDERS

From the early 1700s, daring men navigated primitive lumber rafts and large, shallow-draft Durham boats down the Delaware River, riding the spring floods to Eastern markets, where they sold lumber, coal, flour, and whiskey. Of all the rapids on the river, those at Wells Falls, south of New Hope, were the most daunting, and the spot on the shore just upstream became a convenient location for rafters to pull over, rest, and perhaps take on an experienced navigator to guide the craft through the rapids.



With the canal at its front door and the river at its back door, the River House was open to many types of patrons, including mules in its adjacent barn.

A TALE OF TWO WOMEN

In 1784, the River House—a general store, inn, and tavern—opened to cater to river business. When the Delaware Canal was built just inland from the River House in 1829, the property was turned into an island and—thanks to the new clientele—business boomed. In the nineteenth century, the River House could be a rough-and-tumble place dominated by men, but “Big Mag” Featherstone, a proprietor during the early 1900s, was said to be able to hold her own in a brawl.

By the mid-twentieth century, the River House was used only as a restaurant. In 1961, Odette Myrtil, a French actress, singer, and costume designer—best known for her portrayal of Bloody Mary in the Broadway production of the musical *South Pacific*—bought the restaurant and renamed it *Chez Odette*. Myrtil held court there for fifteen years, entertaining large numbers of enthralled guests, many of whom were up-and-coming actors and actresses performing at the Bucks County Playhouse, with gossip, food, drinks, and cabaret.



The renovated River House became *Chez Odette*, a popular restaurant and cabaret that drew both locals and noteworthy characters alike.

Odette Myrtil serving entertainer Maurice Chevalier in 1966.