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N.J. town's iconic small tunnel gets 5 seconds of fame in Netflix's 'History of Swear Words'

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An image of High Bridge's tunnel on Arch Street from Netflix's 'The History of Swear Words.' Courtesy

By [Caroline Fassett | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)

Not all Hunterdon County residents may be of the appropriate age to watch the latest documentary series released on [Netflix](#), but some may be familiar with one of the locations depicted in the show.

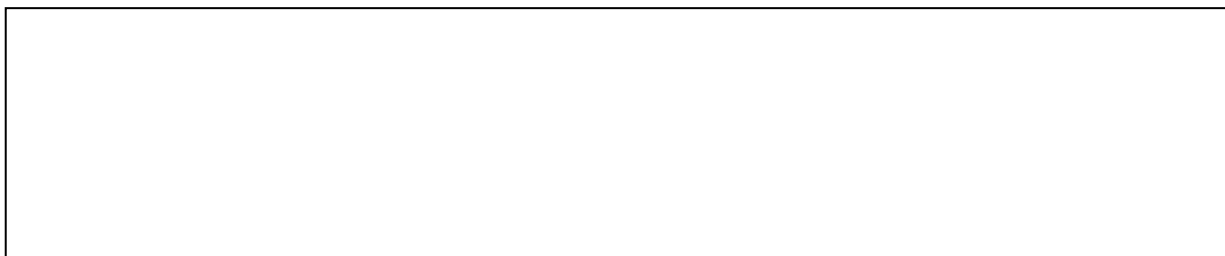
Approximately 19 minutes into the fifth episode of the “The History of Swear Words,” an image can be seen of the tunnel on Arch Street in High Bridge, which passes under the NJ Transit Raritan Valley Line tracks.

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In response to why she believes the tunnel was featured in the show, High Bridge Mayor Michele Lee said, “it’s just a cool tunnel.”

“It’s right alongside the South Branch to the Raritan River, and it’s actually where the trains go over into High Bridge,” Lee said. “It’s really echoey and you come around this curve and it’s this dark, huge tunnel that filters down into one lane ... There’s almost a romance to it.”

“The History of Swear Words” is a six-episode series hosted by Nicolas Cage and produced by [Funny or Die](#) and [B17 Entertainment](#). All six episodes were released on Jan. 5, with each episode analyzing the origins, usage and cultural impact of six different specific curse words.





Other stars including Sarah Silverman, Nick Offerman and Nikki Glaser also appear in the series.

It's unclear why the creative team decided to integrate a clip of High Bridge into its docuseries, as neither Funny or Die nor B17 Entertainment could be reached for comment.

However, Janice Kovach, who is both a commissioner for the [New Jersey Motion Picture & Television Commission](#) and the [Hunterdon County Film Commission](#), said the production companies for the series did not contact the state Commission to gain permission for filming. This likely means that they either used footage from a previous shoot, or gained permission to acquire and use the film from another source.

Reflecting on the inclusion of the tunnel in the series, Kovach said there's "a couple of pieces" explaining why the tunnel in High Bridge might have been filmed and incorporated into the show.

"The proximity to the city is key for anything, because there's a radius," Kovach said. "But you also have a large number of production people that live in New Jersey, so it tends to be cheaper. And if a studio decides they want to do something, there's enough of a base of staff that they can pull from here in New Jersey without having to drag people out from New York."

Kovach added that the road where the tunnel is located is not a particularly busy one, making the filming process both efficient and discreet.

"Depending on the time of the day they do it, they may not even ask permission to use it," Kovach said. "How many people actually travel through that other than in the morning or afternoon, before work or after work or school? Other than that, it's pretty empty, even on the weekends. So it's probably an opportunity for studios and filmmakers just to get a bunch of B-roll."

Beyond these logistical reasons, Kovach emphasized that the tunnel in High Bridge is “an iconic location” well-suited for filmmaking.

“I believe there were a couple of movies that also used that tunnel back in the eighties,” Kovach said. “It looks like a deserted road, it is one of those tunnels that can be any place, and the final benefit is the proximity to access.”

An earthen embankment was built on Arch Street in the mid-1850s because the 1,300 foot-long, 112 foot-high bridge for which the borough is named was too costly to maintain, and was not capable of handling the load and amount of traffic coming over it, Priscilla Racke, the secretary of the borough’s Historical Committee, said.



This photo was taken "not long" after the tunnel's completion in the mid-1800s. Courtesy — High Bridge Historical Committee

In the 1860s, the embankment was filled in and redeveloped to form the tunnel that it serves as now — with one side for the Raritan River to pass through and another for traffic, Racke said.

This marks at least the second time that the tunnel in High Bridge has appeared in high-profile entertainment. The 2017 music video for Kygo and Selena Gomez’s EDM pop song “It Ain’t Me” was also largely shot at the tunnel in High Bridge.

The video brought High Bridge into the homes of far more people than the borough's modest population of roughly 3,500 people, racking up over 544 million views.

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Caroline Fassett may be reached at cfassett@njadvancemedia.com.

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