

# Cultural and Historic Resources of Sussex County



Photo by Rob Sheffield

*Keen's Grist Mill, Mill Pond*

*"Sussex County Then & Now...250 Years of Progress"* Theme for the 2003 Sussex County Road Map

The link between Sussex County's physical geography—including its topography, natural resources, and geology—and the way in which the county developed allows historic resources to be easily viewed through a thematic lens. Prominent historic themes in the county such as iron mines and furnaces, railroads, mill towns and agricultural settlements shed light on the geographic distribution of these historic resources, and the natural resources on which they relied.

Each of the three physical regions of the county developed with a reliance on a different suite of natural resources and environmental constraints. The Upper Delaware Valley relied on the Dutch link to Kingston, New York, as it was hemmed in by the Delaware River on the west and the Kittatinny/Shawangunk Mountain on the east. The Kittatinny Valley developed agriculturally due to the relatively flat, glacially enriched soils and the easy transport to markets. The Highlands, which occupies the eastern one-third of the county, was the location of one of the largest iron mining operations in the country in the middle 1800s. The region has since come to be known for the extraordinary conservation value it possesses. The Highlands provides clean, abundant drinking water for millions of residents and contains tens of thousands of acres of preserved lands.

The land in Sussex County was originally occupied by the Lenni Lenape Indians. The Lenape, which means "the people" or "original people," were divided into three main groups in New Jersey. The Minsi, or "people of the stony country" lived in the north. The Indians were a migratory people, moving seasonally from the rich coastal

shellfisheries to the upper Delaware Valley along a set of established trails. Several modern Sussex County roadways have evolved from the early Lenape trails.

Route 80 was originally the Manunkachunk Trail, which followed the Wisconsin Glacier's terminal moraine from the Delaware River to the village of Watnong, now Denville. Route 15 and Route 206 north of Ross' Corner generally follow the Great Minisink Trail, which ran from Minisink Island in the Delaware southeastward to Elizabeth and the tidal areas. The Manunkachunk Trail met the Minisink Trail at Watnong. A spur trail between the Minisink and the Manunkachunk trails in Sussex County is presently Route 206 as it runs north-south between Ross' Corner and the Musconetcong River.

Another trail, known as the Pompton Trail, had one end at Minisink Island and the other at Hackensack. The Pompton Trail traversed the rugged northern Highlands by following the natural corridor carved out by the Pequannock River. This trail is now followed generally by Route 23. Route 94 was also an Indian trail, as was the corridor from Sparta through Newton to Swartswood.<sup>1</sup>

Several locations along these trails contain archeological evidence of the Native Americans that once lived on the land. Prominent Native American artifacts are located at Minisink Island, along Troy Brook between Little and Big Swartswood Lakes, on the periphery of Paulinskill Meadows north of Newton and in Vernon Valley. The Paulinskill Meadows site contains the third largest collection of Indian artifacts in New Jersey.<sup>2</sup>

## **European Settlement**

European presence in New Jersey came in the early 1600s. At that time, Dutch and Swedish settlers had claimed parts of New Jersey, and had some success at colonization. Swedes had settled New Sweden along the banks of the Delaware River in south Jersey. The Dutch, who also explored the Delaware Bay region and the New Jersey coast, settled New Amsterdam at the southern tip of Manhattan Island in 1626, and Bergen, the first permanent settlement in New Jersey, in 1660. The Dutch also sailed up the Hudson River and settled Esopus, which is now Kingston.

Around the middle 1600s, the English began attempts to settle the region. An early effort in New Sweden had been unsuccessful, but in 1663 King Charles II deeded all of New England, and the land that is currently New York and New Jersey to the Duke of York. This was met with little resistance by the Dutch, and in 1664 the land formerly became an English possession.

A grant in June of 1664 by the Duke of York defined the borders of New Jersey as they remain to the present day, with one notable exception: The New Jersey of 1664 contained a thin strip of land to the north of the current border. The name given to the province was in honor of one of the grantees, Sir George Carteret, who was born on the island of Jersey in the English Channel, and had spent several years as its Lieutenant Governor.

As settlements arose in northeastern New Jersey, and populations grew, social and political imperatives necessitated the surveying and sectioning off of land as new political units. The first major division came in 1676 with the establishment of East and West Jersey. It was intended that the division would run from Little Egg Harbor in a straight line to the northwest corner of New Jersey, which at that time was located around present-day Cohecton, New York, on the Delaware River.

The survey, which had begun from Little Egg Harbor in 1687, never made it that far north. The line that was being run was further west than specified in the original deed, and would have provided less land to West Jersey than originally intended. Thus, when the survey reached the South Branch Raritan River near Three Bridges, it was halted by the governor of West Jersey and a more equitable division was legislated.

The new division used the existing line from Little Egg Harbor to the South Branch (the Keith Line). From there, the boundary proceeded up the Lamington River to its source (in Mine Hill), then in a straight line to the nearest point of the Passaic River, then down the Passaic River to its confluence with the Pompton River, then up the Pompton River to the Pequannock River, then up the Pequannock River to its source, then in an un-surveyed northeasterly line to the also un-surveyed New York-New Jersey border. When East and West Jersey were re-united in 1702, the river boundaries were retained as the foundation for the counties that would follow.

By the 1740s it became necessary to survey the intended East Jersey-West Jersey line. Despite the line no longer having any political significance, property deeds were being affected by the difference between the two lines. The Lawrence Line was surveyed starting from the northern end in 1743. The Lawrence lines can still be seen in Sussex County: it is the northeast boundary of both Walpack and Stillwater Townships.

Northwest New Jersey, including most of Morris, and all of Warren and Sussex Counties, was the last part of the state to be assigned to a county. Burlington exercised some authority over the land, although the region was never officially part of that county. In 1713 Hunterdon County was created out of northern Burlington County, and included the unassigned land further north. Morris County was created out of Hunterdon County in 1739, and included Warren and Sussex Counties. Fourteen years later, on June 8, 1753, Sussex County was officially established. The new county's borders were defined as follows:

*“That all and singular the lands and upper parts of said Morris County northwest of Muskonetkong river, BEGINNING at the mouth of said river, where it empties itself into Delaware river, and running up said Muskonetkong river, to the head of the great pond [now part of Lake Hopatcong]; from thence north-east to the line that divides the province of New-York and said New-Jersey; thence along the said line to Delaware river aforesaid; thence down the same to the mouth of Muskonetkong.”<sup>3</sup>*

Because of the intersection of so many Indian trails that had evolved into European transportation networks, Newton was the logical choice for a county seat when Sussex

County was established in 1753. In fact, the original county courthouse is located at the point where three major Indian trails intersected.<sup>4</sup>

The last political division to affect northwest New Jersey was the creation in 1824 of Warren County. The border was simple. A straight line was drawn from the mouth of the Flatbrook southeasterly to the Musconetcong, passing through “the northeast corner of the Hardwick Church [in present-day Yellow Frame], situated on the south side of the main road leading from Johnsonburg to Newton.”<sup>5</sup>

Sussex County has over its history been a provisional part of Burlington County, and part of Hunterdon and Morris Counties. In addition, for 16 years after Sussex County was established, it contained part of Orange and Sullivan Counties in New York. Until 1769 the northern New Jersey border was a line running from the Hudson River at 41° N (the current location) to a point on the Delaware River at 41° 40' N (near Cohecton, New York). At the same time, New York was claiming a border that ran from 41° N on the Hudson southwesterly to the mouth of the Lehigh River. This would have made Sussex County actually a part of New York. The discrepancy was a result of both states' unique interpretation of the Duke of York's 1664 grant. The contested land was being taxed by New Jersey and New York, leading to social and political tumult. It is believed that there were several small battles as a result of the indefinite boundary and the claims being made by each state.

News of the unrest reached England, and in 1769 King George III appointed a commission to create a definitive and equitable boundary to quell the “boundary wars.” After deliberation, the commission devised a line, which still serves as the New York-New Jersey border. The boundary runs from 41° N on the Hudson River in a straight line to the mouth of the Neversink River. A marker today stands under Route 84 at the end of Port Jervis' Laurel Grove Cemetery, identifying the western terminus of the 1769 line, as well as the location where one can simultaneously stand in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.

## **County Settlement**

New Jersey's physical geography has historically prevented easy access to the Kittatinny Valley from the east. With the exception of mountain passes, the rugged hills and valleys of the Highlands, which run northeast-southwest through the state, effectively blocked the broad Kittatinny Valley from early settlement. The Wallkill River Valley by contrast afforded an easy entrance into the area. Coming southwest from Kingston, Dutch settlers made their way probably only as far south as Port Jervis by the mid to late 1600s.<sup>6</sup>

Legend abounds as to the origins of Old Mine Road, which runs along the Delaware River through Sussex County. It was once believed that the road was constructed by the Dutch as early as 1659 as a way to transport copper from the mines at Pahaquarry (north of the Delaware Water Gap) to Kingston for shipment to Europe.<sup>7</sup>

However, Old Mine Road most likely evolved from old Indian or game trails rather than purposefully being constructed by the Dutch. There is little evidence that economically viable amounts of copper ever existed in the Kittatinny Ridge, and little logic to support the notion that Dutchmen from Kingston (over 100 miles away) would have been wandering the wilderness.

What remains certain, however, is that the Upper Delaware Valley contains the oldest settled areas of Sussex County. Several extant homes along Old Mine Road date to the early 1700s, including the Bell House (ca. 1700), which is believed to be the oldest home in northwest New Jersey. The Upper Delaware Valley is also believed to have contained up to six forts that served to protect New Jersey from Indian incursions during the French and Indian War.<sup>8</sup>

The first European settlement in Sussex County was located along Old Mine Road near the present-day Montague-Sandyston border. This village, which dates to the early 1720s, was called Minisink and was located near the Indian village of the same name. The land along the Delaware contained good soil and was well-suited for agriculture. The existence of Old Mine Road also provided a means of transport to markets. Many of the buildings and place names of the Upper Delaware Valley reflect the Dutch influence on the area. Architecturally, the homes are more reminiscent of those found 100 miles away in Kingston, than across the Kittatinny Ridge in the central valley of Sussex County.<sup>9</sup>

## **An Agricultural County**

The Kittatinny Valley developed differently than the Upper Delaware Valley for three primary reasons. First, the threat of Indian attacks was not as imminent in the Kittatinny Valley primarily because of the defense provided by the Kittatinny Ridge and the forts along the Delaware River. Second, the cultural makeup was different. Instead of the heavy Dutch influence in the Upper Delaware Valley, the Kittatinny Valley was settled mostly by English moving west from New York City and parts of eastern New Jersey, and Germans moving north up the Musconetcong, Paulins Kill and Pequest River valleys. The third and perhaps most significant reason was the presence of the Morris Canal, railroads and other infrastructure that made transport much more economical and competitive. The lack of railroads in the upper Delaware Valley was, and still is, a function of the region's geographic isolation. From the Delaware Water Gap northward to New York State, the Kittatinny Ridge effectively blocks the Upper Delaware Valley from easily interacting with the eastern settlements. There is only one natural pass through the mountain at Culvers Gap, through which runs Route 206, and a few more roads that cross the ridge, following its contours.

Until 1825 the major agricultural product to come out of Sussex County was cereal grain. This was milled along waterways for flour and other products. The extended shelf-life allowed these products to stay fresh on long travels to markets. The grist mills and crossroads communities that developed along county waterways are associated with this early period of Sussex County agriculture. The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, and

the efficiency of transport it brought to the agricultural economy, sounded the death knell for cereal farming in Sussex.

The next period of agriculture lasted until 1870, and consisted of mostly butter and pork, with some beef production. During this time many of the back roads through Sussex County operated as turnpikes along which producers transported their products. Communities not associated with rivers or milling developed specifically to serve the needs of the carts and wagons that would pass through. Blacksmiths and woodworkers were present at each community to serve the needs of the passers-through. Inns and general stores also served the growing cash economy. This period of county history was changed by the railroads, which made transportation more efficient and carried perishable products out of Sussex County to be marketed to urban centers.

The rise of the railroads ushered in dairy as the major agriculture product in Sussex County about 1875. Sussex was situated perfectly to capitalize on the New York City area's dairy needs, but before the arrival of the railroads the necessary means of transportation did not exist. Once railroads became operational in Sussex, the county quickly became a major supplier of milk to New York, and the industry thrived. At the height of the age of railroads in Sussex County, numerous lines and branches crisscrossed the Kittatinny Valley and Highlands regions. Today, there remains only one active rail line in Sussex County.

New York's decision to stop buying Sussex County dairy products in the 1960s dealt a major blow to the industry. Although the fall of the railroads to roadways and trucking in the 1940s had no appreciable impact on milk as the most prominent agricultural product to come out of Sussex County, it did change the demographic of the dairy producer. Small-scale agriculture was displaced by larger farming operations that could afford the greater per-unit cost of trucking.<sup>10</sup>

The current conversion of abandoned Sussex County railroads to hiking trails provides an excellent opportunity to memorialize the cultural legacy of the railroads. While a main focus of the trails is recreation and conservation, highlighting the historic importance of the railroads could be included as part of the planning process. (*For more information on the location of railroads throughout Sussex County, refer to the Built Environment section.*)

## **Mining**

Over a billion years ago, powerful geologic forces were at work in what is today the upper Wallkill Valley. One of the results of this activity was the genesis of the world's richest and most concentrated deposit of zinc ore. Scouring by glacial ice sheets exposed a tiny portion of the deposit and soon after exploitation by man began perhaps first by native Americans and later by Europeans. The complex physical nature of the ore body made it difficult to mine and the complex chemical makeup of the ores made it even more difficult to process. After more than a century of trial and error, successful mining and processing techniques were developed.

However, just as the geology was complex so was the legal ownership of the three principal zinc ores, Franklinite, Willemite, and Zincite and the surrounding country rock, which were titled to several rival companies. After years of litigation, which stalled profitable development, the various companies were consolidated into a single ownership, the New Jersey Zinc Company. Under unified ownership mines and mills were operated at both Franklin and Ogdensburg (Sterling Hill) providing employment for 2,000 individuals during the peak years of operation. The Franklin mine from which 22 million tons of ore was extracted was by far the most productive. For comparison in equal year dollars, the great Comstock (Nevada) silver mine produced silver valued at 365 million dollars while the zinc produced at Franklin had a value of 500 million dollars. More fascinating is that from the Franklin and to a lesser extent Sterling mines came the greatest assemblage of minerals ever found at a single location. Three hundred-sixty minerals or roughly 10% of all known minerals were found in the ore body. Of these thirty-three are unique to the Franklin-Sterling mines. Geologists from around the world came to Franklin to study this unique body of ore and museums from all corners of the globe clamored to obtain both crystal and fluorescent specimens for display. The fluorescence of Franklin minerals under short and long wave ultra-violet light is beyond comparison for color variation and brilliance and has earned Franklin the title of “The Fluorescent Mineral Capitol of the World.”<sup>11</sup>

From 1850 to 1950, more people were employed in mining than in agriculture in Sussex County. Most of the iron mining occurred in the Highlands, in the eastern one-third of the county. The Highlands extend from eastern Pennsylvania northeast through New Jersey and New York, ending in western Connecticut. The rocks of the Highlands contain magnetite iron ore, which was exploited as early as the 1730s (see *Natural Resources of Sussex County* section).<sup>12</sup>

One of the oldest iron operations was located at Andover, in the southern part of Sussex County. A forge was started there about 1730, and relied on iron taken from nearby Andover Mine. The pig-iron produced at the forge was packed to the Delaware River and then shipped to Philadelphia and England.

In 1763, the Andover Forge was built along the Musconetcong River in present-day Byram Township. During the American Revolution, the loyalist firm that owned the forge refused to make supplies for the American cause. To further the war effort the American government commandeered the forge to make supplies for the Continental Army. It is believed that Andover played an important role in the United States’ military campaign.<sup>13</sup>

Waterloo Village, which received its name in the early 1800s, became the new name for the settlement of Andover Forge. The village received a significant economic boost in 1831 with the opening of the Morris Canal. At its peak Waterloo contained several mills and shops, and was the center of commerce for the surrounding region. The construction in 1850s of the mule-drawn Sussex Mine Railroad provided iron mining a much-needed boost. Iron was carried to Waterloo where it was loaded and shipped west to be smelted.<sup>14</sup>

The Morris Canal existed for about 100 years and ran from Phillipsburg in the west to Jersey City in the east. Starting about the mid-1800s competition from railroads became increasingly difficult for the canal and it was officially abandoned in 1924.<sup>15</sup> To revive the village of Waterloo, which was dependent on the existence of the canal, plans were formulated for a large housing development. The 1929 stock market crash killed the plans, and the town died.<sup>16</sup> Today, the village is a preserved 19th century Morris Canal town, located within Allamuchy Mountain State Park in Byram Township.

Other early mines include the Ogden Mine in Sparta and Stanhope Mine in Stanhope. The Ogden Mine was operative as early as 1772 and the Stanhope Mine was opened in 1790.<sup>17</sup>

Most of the mining in Sussex County, however, was conducted during the mid to late 1800s. During this time, New Jersey led the nation in iron production.<sup>18</sup> Several forges and furnaces were operative throughout the Highlands region at that time, including Wawayanda, Andover and Franklin, providing mines with regional locations for smelting.<sup>19</sup>

Over the 150 years of the Highlands iron industry, more than forty mines operated in Sussex County. Aside from the Andover mines, arguably the most famous iron mining operation in Sussex County was Thomas Edison's operation off Edison Road in Sparta Township. The remains of his operation are located in the Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management Area.<sup>20</sup>

The geographic proximity of the Highlands to major urban centers, and the tremendous growth of the nation in the post-Civil War years, allowed mining to flourish through the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, mining in the Highlands was never easy. The topography is rugged and the amount of ore recoverable from the parent rock was relatively small. In addition, most Highlands mining was done manually and consequentially very slowly.<sup>21</sup> Most Sussex County iron mines closed in the 1870s. The few that hung on in Sussex County and throughout the Highlands were dealt a final blow in the early 1890s when the Mesabi Range opened in northeastern Minnesota. The ore there was of a higher grade and close to the surface, making it much more economically recoverable.<sup>22</sup>

## **Registered Historic Places**

Throughout Sussex County, numerous state and federally listed historic sites pay visual tribute to the county's rich cultural heritage. In addition to sites currently on the state and national registers, many more have been made eligible for listing, but have not yet been listed.

To be eligible for listing on the state and national register a site must meet several "criteria for significance in American history, archeology, architecture, engineering or culture, and possessing integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association."<sup>23</sup>



Listed historic sites in Sussex County range from barns to cabins to archeological sites to schoolhouses to the Morris Canal. There are a total of 36 registered historic sites and districts throughout 14 of the county's 24 municipalities. There are an additional 58 sites throughout the county that have been deemed eligible for listing, but are not currently on either the state or federal registers. There are only three towns—Branchville, Hampton and Lafayette—that do not contain properties either on the register or eligible for listing.<sup>24</sup>

A complete listing of properties on the state and national registers of historic places, and properties that are eligible for the list, is included in **Appendix C: Properties on the State and National Register of Historic Places.**

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Wright, Kevin. personal communication. March 10, 2003.
- <sup>2</sup> Wright, Kevin. personal communication. March 10, 2003.
- <sup>3</sup> Snyder, John F. 1969. *Bulletin 67: The Story of New Jersey's Civil Boundaries*. Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Bureau of Geology and Topography, p.34.
- <sup>4</sup> Wright, Kevin. personal communication. March 10, 2003.
- <sup>5</sup> Snyder, John F. 1969. *Bulletin 67: The Story of New Jersey's Civil Boundaries*. Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Bureau of Geology and Topography, p.34
- <sup>6</sup> Wright, Kevin. personal communication. March 10, 2003.
- <sup>7</sup> Decker, Amelia Stickney. 1942. *That Ancient Trail*. Trenton, NJ: Petty Printing Company.
- <sup>8</sup> Longcore, Bob. personal communication. March 5, 2003.
- <sup>9</sup> Longcore, Bob. personal communication. March 5, 2003.
- <sup>10</sup> Wright, Kevin. personal communication. March 10, 2003.
- <sup>11</sup> Information written and provided by Louis Cherepy, member of the Sussex County Open Space Committee, August 2003.
- <sup>12</sup> Lenik, Edward J. 1996. *Iron Mine Trails*. New York: New York–New Jersey Trail Conference.
- <sup>13</sup> DiIonno, Mark. 2000. *A Guide to New Jersey's Revolutionary War Trail*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press; Mitchell, Alison E. *The New Jersey Highlands: Treasures at Risk*. Morristown, NJ: New Jersey Conservation Foundation.
- <sup>14</sup> Morrell, Brian. personal communication. June 9, 2003.
- <sup>15</sup> Macasek, Joseph J. 1996. *Guide to the Morris Canal in Morris County*. West Orange, NJ: Midland Press, Inc.
- <sup>16</sup> Morrell, Brian. personal communication. June 9, 2003.
- <sup>17</sup> Pustay, M.R. and T.K. Shea. 1982. *Abandoned Iron Mines of Sussex County*. Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Department of Labor, Division of Workplace Standards.
- <sup>18</sup> Volkert, Richard A. 2001. "A Geologic Excursion Through the New Jersey Highlands" in *Sterling Hill Mining Museum Newsletter*, Vol. 10, No. 2. Fall/Winter 2001. pp. 20-22.
- <sup>19</sup> Dupont, Ron. personal communication. March 10, 2003.
- <sup>20</sup> Pustay, M.R. and T.K. Shea. 1982. *Abandoned Iron Mines of Sussex County*. Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Department of Labor, Division of Workplace Standards.
- <sup>21</sup> Lenik, Edward J. 1996. *Iron Mine Trails*. New York: New York–New Jersey Trail Conference.
- <sup>22</sup> Minnesota Historical Society. "Iron Range Region: Historical Overview"  
[http://nrhp.mnhs.org/iron\\_range\\_overview.html](http://nrhp.mnhs.org/iron_range_overview.html). Accessed: March 6, 2003; McCabe, Wayne. personal communication. March 4, 2003.
- <sup>23</sup> New Jersey Historic Preservation Office. "New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places".  
<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/1identify/nrsrfact.pdf>. Accessed May 6, 2003.
- <sup>24</sup> New Jersey Historic Preservation Office. New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places – Sussex County. <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/1identify/lists/sussex.pdf>. Accessed February 13, 2003.