

Two Communities

of this area and all of what would later become Plainfield.

The inn, which still stands today, is now known as the Stage House Inn and functions as a restaurant and an antique center.

Being strategically situated at the foot of the mountains, the village and the inn played a significant role in the movement of troops during both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War.

The inn was used as a meeting place by troop leaders during both wars. The famous Battle of the Short Hills was fought by troops that marched through "the spring fields" down Diamond Hill Road to the top of the first mountain, which overlooks Scotch Plains.

Another significant milestone for the village was the construction of the Baptist Church in 1747 on the corner of Mountain and Park Avenues. "God's Acre," one of the oldest cemeteries in East Jersey, lies adjacent to the church. Scotch Plains' first school, called the Academy, soon followed.

Another settlement was also growing at this time, further away from the mountains, but which had flat, fertile land suitable for planting seedbeds. The farmers who took up residence in these outlying lands dubbed their village the "West Fields."

In surviving letters from the early 1700s, however, settlers continued to refer to their homesteads as being in either Elizabethtown, Piscataway or, simply, in East Jersey, as "Scotsplains" and the West Fields were still not indicated on most maps.

When the Civil War began in 1861, the Village of Scotch Plains remained immersed in a pastoral and rural way of life. The community had no paved roads, no street lighting and included only a church, one public school, an inn, two stores, five mills, 70 houses and several farms.

Elizabethtown, on the other hand, was experiencing the beginning of the industrial era with the advent of gaslight companies, foundries and locomotives. The establishment of the Elizabeth and Somerville Railroad (later the Jersey Central Railroad) connecting Newark, Elizabeth, Rahway, Plainfield, Somerville and Philadelphia in the 1830s ushered in a new age of suburbanite commuters and the ability to deliver goods in large quantities to factories.



MILESTONE YEAR... The residence of Fanwood's first Mayor, Thomas S. Young, in 1895. Fanwood was designated as a borough that same year. Mr. Young was elected Mayor on October 15, 1895. He died in 1917.

The various outlying areas, such as the West Fields and the Village of Scotch Plains, were considered wards of Elizabethtown. The first of these areas to break away from Elizabethtown and become an independent town was Springfield, formed in 1793, followed by Westfield in 1794, then Rahway in 1804, Union in 1808, New Providence in 1809 and Plainfield in 1847.

What often inspired people to break away from established communities and form new towns, according to the Union County Almanac, written by Sid Frank in 1976, was "dissatisfaction with an old town." Often, there were disputes over how taxes should be assessed or spent.

In "Under the Blue Hills," Mrs. Rawson attributes Westfield's need to break away from Elizabethtown simply to Westfield's "increasing population and the need for a more centralized government."

When Westfield seceded from Elizabethtown, in 1794, it included all of what would later become Scotch Plains, Plainfield, Fanwood, Clark, Garwood and Mountainside, as well as portions of Cranford and Rahway.

Before Union County existed, Elizabethtown and Newark were both parts of Essex County. There was an increased interest in moving the County Seat from Newark to Elizabeth, however, as the populations of Elizabeth's wards grew. The argument was that Newark's location was inaccessible, making it difficult to conduct court business or serve on juries.

There was also a growing belief that Newark was more concerned with its own economic development, according to authors Charles Aquilina and Richard Koles in "Elizabethtown and Union County, A Pictorial History."

An election to decide whether to build a new courthouse in Newark or Elizabeth was held in 1807. Everyone from both towns voted with great enthusiasm, some casting two and three votes, according to "As We Were, The Story of Elizabethtown," by Theodore Thayer. This election was voided, and another held, in which Newark won the courthouse.

Elizabethtown, however, soon declared her independence from Newark and Essex County, by establishing Union County in 1857. Union County was comprised of Elizabeth and the six towns formed from the city: Springfield, Westfield, Rahway, Union, New Providence and Plainfield.

Along the Central Jersey Line, real estate developers began transforming farms into streets and building lots. Many New Yorkers, attracted by the appeal of country living, took up residence in Westfield and Cranford, transforming these small villages into thriving towns.

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