

History

The area's original inhabitants were Lenni-Lenape Native Americans who peacefully co-existed with English settlers- followers of William Penn- who arrived in the late 1600s. In 1695, the English formed the community of Waterford Township, one of the original townships of old Gloucester County. The community had a long, varied, and successful existence as an agricultural center and mill town.



Abraham Browning's Cherry Hill Farm, c. 1875, faced today's Rt 38 at Haddonfield Rd.

On March 13, 1844, residents held a town meeting and incorporated the Township under a new name- Delaware Township- which then became part of the newly organized Camden County.

A description of Delaware Township, in 1886, depicted a "prosperous agricultural community" composed chiefly of gristmills and carriage-making shops.



The Ellisburg General Store, built at King's Highway and Route 70 in the early 1800s by Isaac Ellis, was demolished in 1938 to make way for the state's construction of the Ellisburg Circle.

Ellisburg

Now prominent only as the name of a shopping center, Ellisburg once served as the social and governmental hub of the former Delaware Township. Named for the prominent Ellis family who settled the area, Ellisburg developed around the crossroads of Cooper's Creek Road (Route 70) and Haddonfield-Moorestown Road (King's Highway).

Isaac Ellis built a tavern at this intersection, and a blacksmith shop and private homes soon followed. The tavern, later purchased by John Ilg, became the Ellisburg

Inn- a popular stagecoach shop until 1881 when the railroad between Philadelphia and Medford began operation.

The Township's first schoolhouse, a log cabin, was located on Ellis's property in the 1750s. A later building, the Ellisburg School/Waterford Town house, was erected in Ellisburg in 1831. As the name suggests, this school also hosted the community's town meetings and elections until 1885, when a Town Hall was erected next door. These buildings stood on the property now occupied by a McDonald's store on Route 70.

The Inn, along with the Ellisburg General Store, was demolished in 1938 for construction of the Ellisburg Circle. The traffic circle was removed by the State in 1992 to ease traffic congestion in the area.

Coolestown

Colestown was a small village founded in the late 1600s on the south branch of the Pennsauken Creek near the present-day intersection of King's Highway and Church Road. It was named after Samuel Coles, who purchased 1,000 acres there in 1685.

The village, which contained two stores, a blacksmith shop, several dwellings, a church and a cemetery, grew with the popularity of the Fountain Hotels resort in the 1800s. Its main attraction was a mineral spring thought to have medicinal value. The owner reportedly had the water tested, and a record of the analysis was cut into a marble slab, set up beside the spring. A subsequent owner of the property dismantled the hotel, used the materials for a farmhouse and installed the marble slab as a doorstep.

The Colestown Cemetery, where the earlier burial was recorded in 1746, is the only remnant of this long-vanished hamlet. The familiar stone gatehouse, constructed in 1858, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. One side of the gatehouse was used as a chapel for funeral services, and the other side was the living quarters for the superintendent of the cemetery. Below the chapel is a vault once used as a winter holding room for bodies that could not be buried in the frozen ground.

St Mary's Church, one of the first Episcopal churches in West Jersey, stood inside the cemetery gates from 1751 to 1899, when it was destroyed by fire. Legend has it that Unami Indians were buried behind the Church. George Washington is said to have taken communion at the Church, and the brick path over which he might have walked is still visible.

Our first Town Meeting

On March 13, 1844, the "First annual meeting of the inhabitants of the Township of Delaware was held at the town house at Ellisburg." That building, constructed in 1831, also served as the Ellisburg School. If it were still standing, the building would be near the McDonald's on Route 70.

One can read from the handwritten notes some of the highlights of the meeting, including a resolution to raise \$700 (in taxes) for the use of the Township in the ensuing year.

Another resolution determined that the dog tax monies should be set aside to pay for sheep killed by dogs. The constable, John Lawrence, was to be paid \$25 per year for his services and the physicians, Charles D. Henday and Richard M. Cooper, were to be paid \$10 per year.



The Colestown Cemetery gatehouse still stands (above) at the corner of King's Hwy & Church Rd. The pre-Civil War structure is all that remains of the village of Colestown and once shared the site with St Mary's Church (below, courtesy Mike Mathis), c. 1751, which burned in 1899.



The prominence (or was it nepotism?) of the Coles family is evident by the many offices they held in the early days of our town- John Coles was appointed the moderator, or leader of the meeting; his son, Mahlon M. Coles, became the Town Clerk; Samuel T. Coles was a Town Committee member; Joseph H. Coles was a Commissioner of Appeals; and Job Coles was an Overseer of highways.

Town Meetings were held on a monthly basis beginning in 1901, and, in 1924, the meetings became bi-monthly. The tradition continues with meetings on the second and fourth Mondays of the month at 7:30 p.m. in Room 208 of the Municipal Building.

Agricultural growth

Around the rural villages of early Waterford/Delaware Township, vast family farms grew throughout the 19th century. Supplied by Ellisburg, Colestown, Haddonfield, Merchantville and other towns and relying on various mills such as the Kay-Evans mill at today's Croft Farm, Cherry Hill's farms overflowed with the produce for which New Jersey became known as the 'Garden State.'

Notably, much of Cherry Hill's produce was grown for the Campbell's Soup Company, which is to this day headquartered in Camden.

Family names like Coles, Cooper, Roberts, Lippincott, Browning, Ellis, Wilkins and DeCou became ingrained in the area's heritage, and remain today in various forms denoting landmarks, roads and more.



An ad for the Colwick development features a model home furnished entirely by Philadelphia's John Wanamaker department store.

More than 'the country'

Throughout the early years of the 20th century and particularly following World War I, bordering Philadelphia suburbs began expanding, blurring the lines between Delaware Township and its neighbors.

For example, the Colwick neighborhood developed in the 1920s along the borders with Pennsauken and Maple Shade.

In Colwick, fine brick homes with generously proportioned lots lined streets named for elite suburbs on Philadelphia's legendary Main Line. This area echoes similar developments of the time and contains some of the earliest 'tract housing' in the region.

In other neighborhoods like Hinchman, Locustwood, Erlton, Barlow, East Merchantville, Still Park and Wilbur, similar expansion continued throughout the 1900s. As the vision of the American dream continually broadened, Cherry Hill grew accordingly.

During these years, most residents adopted mailing addresses in nearby, more developed towns. It seems Delaware Township's image had yet to warrant much allegiance from upwardly-mobile homeowners.

Entertainment and luxury

Following the Great Depression- and even as the United States faced the prospect of entering another growing World War- entrepreneurs took critical gambles on Delaware Township's inexpensive land, banking on its convenient proximity to both Philadelphia and longstanding South Jersey population centers like Camden and Gloucester City.



The Garden State Park racetrack's original grandstand (built 1942, shown above) burned on April 14, 1977. The track rebuilt, opening in 1985 (shown below). The final race was run in 2001.

The sleepy agrarian region proved exceptionally inviting for resort and entertainment-oriented ventures.

Garden State Park, a grand horse racing venue, was built by developer Eugene Mori during the early 1940s on the Marlton Pike (Route 70).



Work-weary laborers and their wealthy bosses rubbed shoulders here, united in their desire to escape long days and the troubles of the world. 'The Garden' quickly became a regional destination point and served as the center of gravity for the attraction of hotels, night clubs, and restaurants.

The resounding success of the Park led to the construction of luxury hotels including Mori's Cherry Hill Inn on the site of Abraham Browning's former Cherry Hill Farm. The Inn's prime location at the junction of Haddonfield Road and State Route 38 proved fortuitous, as Cinelli's Country House restaurant opened just across the street, also adjacent to the booming racetrack.

The ultra-luxury Rickshaw Inn sat opposite the racetrack's main entry gate on Route 70 and became a local landmark with its plate-gold roof and Asian decor.



Pictured is a typical Brookfield split-level house. Thousands like it were constructed during the 1950s in Delaware Township. Credit: Mike Mathis

Post-war population boom

With the end of World War II, Cherry Hill saw unprecedented population and economic growth. As the nation welcomed back its victorious GIs, housing demand skyrocketed. Developers turned to rural territories like Delaware Township, which was a particularly appealing destination due to its new-found reputation as a playground for the hard-working and the well-heeled alike.

Thousands of homes rose from empty fields: Kingston Estates, Brookfield and Downs Farm became known across South Jersey as quiet, clean and- best

of all- *new* places to settle down and raise a family. Excellent schools and swim clubs became obligatory fixtures in these chic 'planned communities.'

Exclusivity was the name of the game as luxury communities grew in various forms. Large, classic-looking homes near Haddonfield were built in the Barclay Farm neighborhood by local builder Bob Scarborough. Just beyond Brookfield, modern Woodcrest appeared complete with a country club and the ever-popular golf course views. In the remaining woodlands, contemporary ranch houses were tucked among the trees on large lots. These 'mini-estates' became private retreats with easy access to jobs in Camden and Philadelphia.

Professionals from Campbell's Soup, RCA and other Camden hallmarks found new, easy lives in Delaware Township and suburbia was born.

The Mall, the Latin and the question: "What's in a name?"

When the Cherry Hill Shopping Center (the East Coast's first enclosed mall) went under construction around 1960, the Cherry Hill Inn had operated for more than five years just across the street, and the name 'Cherry Hill' was becoming synonymous with the area as its star continued to rise.



The Latin Casino Restaurant Theater

Next to draw attention to Delaware Township was the Latin Casino, which opened at the end of 1960 and drew thousands of weekly spectators.

Internationally-renowned entertainers like Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Liberace and the Temptations helped lure concert-goers from Philadelphia and the entire region. In fact, the Latin Casino itself had been attracted to the suburbs after ten years of business in the city. Clearly, Delaware Township was cementing its reputation as a unique destination point.

With the seemingly mundane business of opening a new US Post Office for the area, the municipality was presented with a unique quandary: Delaware was the name of another town in New Jersey that already had a Post Office. "Shouldn't the name of the town match the mailing address?" The question sparked discussion and debate as well as a contest to suggest new names.

The recently-quadrupled local population voted in a 1961 referendum to officially change the municipality's name to 'Cherry Hill.' With a new title to match its new image and its trend-setting new Mall, Cherry Hill Township kept right on growing.



Cherry Hill's desirable residential neighborhoods (above) continue to grow. The commercial sector is among the strongest in the state. Subaru of America opened its corporate headquarters (below) in the 1980s on the site of the former Latin Casino.



A brilliant future

Cherry Hill's population growth steadied through the late 1970s and early '80s. Shopping, restaurants, commercial and industrial centers, high-rise apartment towers, schools, churches and synagogues grew with the burgeoning population, which reached about 70,000 by 1985. Attention shifted to the process of ongoing economic development, expanding educational excellence, enhancing the Township park system, managing regional traffic, and supporting cultural programs and the fine arts.

Today, Cherry Hill remains South Jersey's economic center. The Mall's continued success is complemented by the complete overhaul of the now-defunct [Garden State Park](#) racetrack. More than \$500 million in private investment is recreating the Park as a mixed-use town center.

The healthcare and hospitality industries continue to expand, along with technology-related companies like

Lockheed Martin, financial institutions like Commerce Bancorp, and manufacturing-based concerns such as Subaru of America, Inc.

The Township aggressively pursues the purchase of remaining Open Space to enhance the community and ease the burden of potential over-development while maintaining an environmental balance.

In fact, Smart Growth principles govern Township policy across the board, dictating the preservation of natural resources on every developed or improved property, increasing 'walkability,' offering incentives for the redevelopment of vacant structures and encouraging transit-oriented development and historic preservation.

Cherry Hill remains what it has been for more than 160 years- a growing, prosperous community of diverse people who seek economic opportunity, a safe, secure environment in which to raise a family and who focus on education and the development of a society that ascribes to the highest standard of American living. In short, we like to say, "***You couldn't pick a better place!***"