

Introduction

Imagine it is the year 1684. You have been at sea for months. You finally come on shore, to find “. . . a land well-settled with people.” You begin a journey inland passing droves of deer, elk, wild turkey, beaver, wolves, bears, and rattlesnakes. You encounter a tiny flea—a troublesome little flea.” (Today, we still encounter this troublesome little flea, but we call it a mosquito.)

You continue your journey until you reach the first range of mountains—the “blew hills” of the Watchung Mountains. There, you find mountain streams of fresh water and land for cattle to graze. You walk through fields of wild strawberries so thick you only see the color red. Wood for building abounds in the area. There are no “lawyers, physicians or parsons”—an advantage for those who wish to stake claim to vast tracts of land. You settle here, just “11 miles from New Perth (now Perth Amboy), and 12 miles from Elizabeth-town.” Civilization is close, yet not too close.

Our journey begins with this image of the land as it was in the 1600s, and will continue with photographic images of Scotch Plains and Fanwood. Along the way, a unique, privately-owned collection of historic maps will illustrate the increasing development of these areas. This journey will excite the imagination, because our communities have often played an important part in the development of our country. The long and fascinating history of Scotch Plains and Fanwood includes: the acquisition of landrights from the Native Americans in the treaties of 1778 to 1883; the importance of the area for agriculture and transportation via the “Swift Sure stage line” from New York to Philadelphia via Scotch Plains; the Revolutionary War and the Battle of the Short Hills, which was fought in the ash swamp of Scotch Plains in June 1777; the Civil War and evidence of our citizens’ involvement in the Underground Railroad; the patriotic loyalty to our country’s ideals through times of war and peace . . . Our images capture some moments of these periods, and will preserve these historic moments for our future and our children’s future.