

INTRODUCTION

The borough of Fanwood is nestled in the center of the horseshoe-shaped township of Scotch Plains. Its modest size—just one square mile—belies its significance as a community. The borough owes much of its identity to the railroad, which sparked public works and road improvements and helped establish Fanwood as a separate borough more than 100 years ago.

The development of Fanwood can be traced to the early days of railroading in New Jersey—the beginning of freight and passenger transportation. In the first part of the 19th century, Col. John Stephens, the so-called “Father of American Railroads,” believed that railroads would be an economical way to transport goods in the rapidly growing state. His ideas were at first met with derision, but when the Camden & Amboy Railroad was chartered in 1830, the means of moving products from the state’s industrial centers to distant destinations was launched. Stephens’s foresight was proven correct.

The transportation of passengers was also becoming important, and by 1838, work had begun on the Elizabethtown and Somerville line, which ran from Elizabeth, along Midway Avenue, into Plainfield. On January 1, 1839, the rail line opened with the New Year. Some 10 years later, the Central Railroad of New Jersey came into being.

In 1874, the rail line was rerouted, and the station was relocated from Midway Avenue and built on its present location near the corner of Martine and North Avenues. The Land Improvement Company, owned by the Central Railroad, had purchased 350 acres in the Fanwood Park area; it only made sense for the railroad to relocate to nurture population growth and promote passenger and freight business.

At this point, the rail line was a part of Fanwood Township, a large tract of land bordered by Green Brook and Robinson’s Brook. In 1877, a rift occurred between the old village center of the township and the new center, where the railroad had been relocated. Residents of the railroad center felt that they were not being treated fairly by the governing body of the township. The seeds of a separate borough were sown when meetings were held in the Old Club House on South Avenue. Street lighting and road repairs were the issues, as well as the system for granting liquor licenses.

Ever so slowly, the borough of Fanwood separated from Fanwood Township. In 1887, the Independent Citizens Club was formed to protest the unequal division of tax burdens. A vote against town improvements in the borough led George Kyte and Thomas Young to propose the creation of an independent borough. It took a special act of the state legislature to start the