

## Scotch Plains . . . Then

*"Old ways passed like the dust blowing." — Young*

Scotch Plains was originally a plain of natural grass, marked by three brooks at the foot of a mountain, the first one in from the sea. This plain, before the white man laid the foundations for his home, was inhabited by a tribe of about 2,000 Delaware or Leni-Lenape Indians. The Unami (the Turtlebacks) were a sub-tribe of the Lenape nation who hunted and fished the Scotch Plains area. Their totem and wigwam village were reportedly located in the Ash Brook area.

The heartland of Scotch Plains was first owned by a Dutchman, Peter Sonmans, whose property ran from the old mill on the Bonnie Burns Road along Green Brook through the entire north section of Scotch Plains. Thus, the town was part of an area explored and occupied by the earliest settlers of colonial America. The Dutch, sponsors of Henry Hudson, discoverer of Newark Bay in 1609, occupied and actively traded furs in the New Netherlands Province, embracing New York and most of New Jersey, until the English conquest in 1664.

Following this successful conquest ending Dutch claims to colonial America, the English Governor Nicolls encouraged agriculturally-minded English settlers from Connecticut and Long Island to settle this New Jersey area, which had been largely ignored by the Dutch settlers. In fact, there were probably no more than 200 settlers in all of New Jersey when the Dutch claims came to an end.

Between 1683-87 further colonization of this area was implemented by several Scottish immigrations, composed of persons of considerable education who were motivated by a desire to better their lot. Thus two expeditions left Scotland in 1684 for Perth Amboy, the flourishing port of entry to New Jersey. One of these two groups decided to push inland and subsequently found its way to the "large plain under the blew hills" as one of the party described the site. In September, 1685, another group of about 100 left Scotland under the leadership of George Scot. Scot had just published "The Model of the Government of the Province of East New Jersey in America," a book based on accounts and letters of the 1683-4 Scottish settlers extolling the beauties and virtues of this new area of colonial development. However, the ill-fated group, including Scot and his wife, never reached Amboy as a fever swept through the ship reducing their number by almost half. Nevertheless, some historians believe Scotch Plains (sometimes identified in old manuscripts and on old maps as "Scotsplain") was named to honor George Scot.

For the next 200 years Scotch Plains grew slowly, mainly as an agricultural community. The first building of any significant size was erected in 1737 with the laying of the hearth in the home (later the town inn or tavern) of John Sutton. Situated on the corner of Park Avenue and Front Street, Ye Olde Stage Coach Inn has been an historical center of Scotch Plains for over 200 years.

A Baptist Church was dedicated in 1747 with the Reverend Benjamin Miller, locally born, as first pastor. It was here in 1764 that James Manning, also a native and later the first president of Brown University, was ordained. A white marble monument, surrounded by one of the oldest cemeteries of East Jersey, marks the site of the original church at the intersection of Park and Mountain Avenues. The earliest private school of education in the town was the Baptist School Society founded in 1768. Consequently, by 1775 there were in Scotch Plains proper eleven houses, including the Inn.

Although no major battles of the Revolution were fought in Scotch Plains, a fair share of residents from the hamlet and the surrounding countryside served in the militia. Those who remained witnessed troops of both the British and the colonists advancing or retreating from more significant battles in surrounding areas. For example, local lore includes the tale of Terry's Well, still in existence today at Cooper and Rahway Roads, which exhausted British troops drank