

Welcome to Morris County

The Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Morris County Heritage Commission invite you to use these brochures to discover the towns and villages of Morris County.

Until the late seventeenth century, American Indians of the Lenape tribe were the only inhabitants of this area. Dutch and English settlements began around 1685. The distinctive Dutch stone farmhouses of Pequannock and the clapboard East Jersey cottages of the English settlement at Whippany represent the earliest architecture in Morris County.

Morristown became the military capital of the Revolutionary War when Washington's army encamped there for the winter of 1777 and again during the winter of 1779-80. Morris County's iron mines provided ore for local furnaces, which produced shot and cannon for the Continental troops. The newly built mansion of Jacob Ford Jr. became Washington's headquarters.

Completion of the Morris Turnpike in 1804, the Morris Canal in 1831, and the Morris and Essex Railroad in 1837 ushered in a century of growth for rural, sparsely settled Morris County. Early architecture changed slowly, but by the 1850s, Gothic Revival,



1918 panoramic photo of Scrub Oak Mine in Mine Hill

Italianate, and other Romantic Revival styles had become popular. By the late nineteenth century, the now familiar front-gabled workers' houses abounded in industrial towns such as Boonton and Dover.

In the 1890s wealthy New Yorkers discovered Morris County, and the Gilded Age began. Working farms became estates, and elegant mansions—some inspired by British manors and castles—changed the landscape around Morristown. Development proceeded steadily but slowly until the postwar boom of the 1940s, when housing developments proliferated, creating affordable new homes.

In recent years the thriving county has become an economic magnet on the periphery of the metropolitan region, a center for large and small corporations and associated residential development. Yet much of Morris County has retained its traditional charm, and many of its historic neighborhoods remain almost unchanged.

Mine Hill and Victory Gardens

Of Morris County's thirty-nine municipalities, Mine Hill and Victory Gardens alone have names descriptive of their history, which tells the story of working men and women and the role they played in the development of our county, state, and nation.

Originally part of northwestern Randolph Township, the Township of Mine Hill covers an area of three square miles and has a population of approximately 3,700. It has a commercial district along Route 46.

Mine Hill has its roots in the early eighteenth century when settlers came here to exploit the vast quantities of iron ore that could easily be surface-mined. Outcroppings of iron ore first were discovered in 1710 by surveyor John Reading at a site that became the Suckasunny Mine, later called the Dickerson Mine after Jonathan Dickerson who bought the property from Joseph Kirkbride in 1779. Dickerson's son Mahlon took over management of the mine in 1810. Mahlon Dickerson is best remembered for having served as governor of New Jersey from 1815 to 1817. On land surrounded by his mining properties he built his Greek Revival estate "Ferro Monte" (meaning "Iron Mountain"). No longer standing, it was known for its beautiful gardens and a library containing many rare books.

The Dickerson Mine prospered through the nineteenth century and finally was abandoned in 1917. At least twenty-one other mines operated in Mine Hill including those owned by the Baker, Crane, Dover, Boonton, Trenton, Repogle, and Alan Wood companies. The last of these, the Scrub Oaks Mine, closed in 1966.

The mining workforce, originally composed of ethnic English and Scots; eventually included many Irish and Welsh immigrants who began arriving here in the mid-nineteenth century. Miners' homes still can be seen today, an important reminder of the township's working class heritage.

As cheaper ore from Minnesota became available during the early twentieth century, the local iron industry declined. Some city dwellers built vacation homes in this area, though such development remained on a small scale. In 1923 Mine Hill separated from Randolph Township to become the independent municipality it is today.

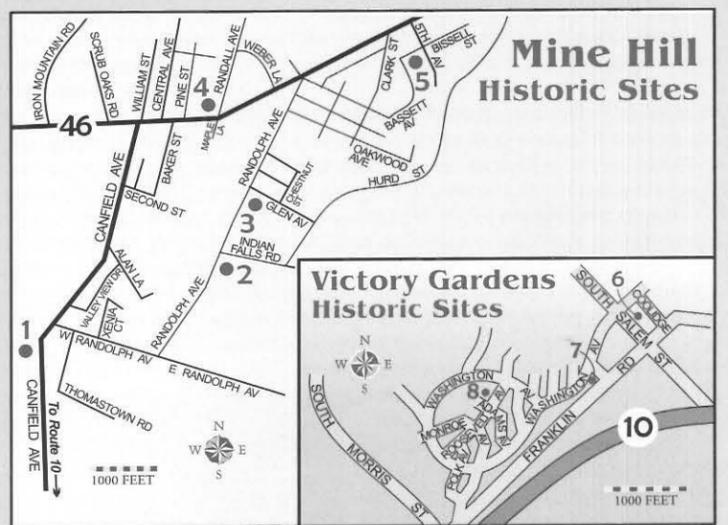
Ten miles east of Mine Hill is the Borough of Victory Gardens, Morris County's newest municipality. Having a total area of one-fifth of a square mile and a population of about 1,600, it also is the smallest. Like Mine Hill, Victory Gardens was once part of Randolph Township. The borough originated at the onset of World War II as a federally funded three-hundred-unit

housing project for workers employed at Picatinny Arsenal and other nearby defense-related industries. At that time Randolph officials agreed to provide services to the new community in exchange for federal subsidies. Despite its contribution to the war effort, Victory Gardens never gained full acceptance. Political differences were a factor, but finances were the main issue. Following the war, the loss of federal subsidies, which had helped fund Randolph's schools and infrastructure, caused growing resentment. On September 18, 1951, when Randolph held a public referendum to determine the fate of Victory Gardens, residents voted 735 to 711 to sever their relationship with Victory Gardens. Only thirty of Victory Gardens' 513 voters favored separation. Following the vote, Randolph succeeded in petitioning the state legislature to expel Victory Gardens. The orphaned community made an attempt to join with neighboring Dover but was rebuffed. With no alternative, Victory Gardens incorporated as a separate borough in 1952. Despite a history of financial difficulties, Victory Gardens has become a thriving, independent, and diverse residential community.

Today Mine Hill and Victory Gardens occupy an important place in Morris County's history. They share a legacy that honors the role played by working men and women in sustaining the economic vitality of our nation in times of peace and protecting its freedom in times of war.

Historic Highlights of Mine Hill & Victory Gardens

Mine Hill and Victory Gardens, located ten miles apart, once were part of Randolph Township. As you tour the sites featured in this brochure, you will travel routes connecting both municipalities that will take you through sections of Randolph Township and/or Dover, where you may find additional sites. During your tour drive cautiously along busy routes, and please respect the privacy of homeowners.



1

Dickerson Mine Canfield Avenue

Lenape Indians living near this site called it "Suk-ahsun-ing" meaning "place of the black rock." Succasunny, a corrupted form of the Lenape word, became the name of the village and plain to the west, today known as Succasunna. The black rock—magnetite iron ore—attracted European settlers.

Jonathan Dickerson, father of Governor Mahlon Dickerson, acquired title to this land in 1779. The tract was worked under a system of long rights until 1807. The mine, under previous owners, had operated since 1710, making it the oldest iron mine in the United States. (Caution! Flooded mine shaft openings make the surrounding terrain very dangerous. Visitors are discouraged from exploring this area.)



5

Craftsman House 9 Bissell Avenue

This c.1915 Craftsman style bungalow was built during the period following the iron industry's decline, when city dwellers began to acquire summer homes in this area, attracted by the fresh air and the remoteness of the hills. The Craftsman style, made popular by Gustav Stickley, material and the Arts and Crafts Movement in America, emphasized the use of natural material and designs that harmonized with the natural world. Here this is exemplified by the use of boulderstone in the porch and chimney, a material that may have come from local mines.



2

Bridget Smith House 124 Randolph Avenue

Irish immigrant Bridget Smith bought this c.1855 house nine years after her husband John died in an iron mining accident. She lived in half of the house with her two children, while renting the other half to another Irish mining widow and her six children. The Bridget Smith house typifies nineteenth century miners' dwellings. The structure survives as one of the least altered examples of miners' architecture in northern New Jersey. Today the township owns the house, now a museum operated by the Ferromonte Historical Society of Mine Hill.



6

Victory Gardens Municipal Building 337 South Salem Street

The original Victory Gardens municipal building, neo-Colonial in design, was dedicated at this site in 1978. The structure burned in 2001 and was replaced with this 2004 building of contemporary design. A Morris County Heritage Commission marker acknowledges the municipality's historical significance. Victory Gardens is unique in that the entire borough is considered historic, having been created for wartime purposes by the U.S. government, which initiated the project two weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, completing construction of the borough in only six months.



3

Millen-Bassett Farm 86 Randolph Avenue

Influential Quaker Hartshorne FitzRandolph, after whom Randolph Township is named, built a house on this property in 1753, which the Millen family later owned. The English immigrant Bassett family took residence here in the 1870s and later rebuilt the house after it burned in 1876. They ran a 527-acre, two-hundred-head dairy farm that spanned both sides of present day Randolph Avenue. Extant structures include a 2 1/2-story frame house and a c.1890 L-plan house.



7

Garden Chapel 89 Washington Avenue

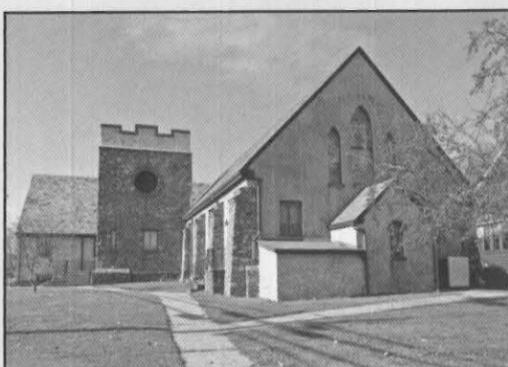
Devoid of pretension and ornamentation, this Mennonite chapel was created in 1971 when the Mennonites first came here. Purchasing one of the original government-built houses, they adapted it for religious purposes. Plain, almost self-effacing in appearance, the chapel reflects Mennonite spirituality, with its emphasis on simplicity and non-attachment to the world. The house of worship has served the spiritual needs of many local adherents as well as those from outside the community. Many members are Mennonite converts. The Mennonites have religious and cultural links to the Amish, sharing with them many key beliefs and practices, including an adherence to strict pacifism.



4

Mine Hill Presbyterian Church 213 Route 46

The congregation of this church originated as an informal body in 1849 when Elias Millen began holding Sabbath school classes in an old schoolhouse on Randolph Avenue near his home. Welshman David Jenkins, an agent for the Crane Iron Company, reorganized the school in 1865, becoming its superintendent. Later, Welsh miner and preacher Pearce Rogers organized the congregation into a self-sustaining body, which built a wooden church in 1874. The church burned down in 1925 but was rebuilt in 1927. The present structure, built of local boulderstone, is a fine example of late Gothic Revival architecture.



8

Victory Gardens Streetscape

The U.S. government developed Victory Gardens at the beginning of World War II to create a stable workforce and optimize productivity and efficiency. In that sense it resembled a nineteenth century company town, but while the houses in Victory Gardens were uniformly designed like company dwellings, they differed insofar as they were situated not on a grid but along winding curvilinear roads characteristic of the "garden suburbs" that first appeared in New Jersey in the late 1920s. The homes are plain and simple, though many have been altered over the years to meet the requirements of individual owners.

