



## The History of Blairstown - USA

Blairstown Township is in the north-central portion of Warren County along the summit of Blue Mountain and, in a succession of hills and valleys, down the Paulinskill River. Tammany<sup>1</sup>, Indian chief of the Delaware tribe, called this area *Touockonetcoug* (*Gem of the Paulinskill*).

The Kittatinny Ridge frames the northwest border of the Township. Views of the Delaware Water gap, a natural wonder to the west of Blairstown, can be seen from many of the higher elevations in the Township.

Blairstown's most important waterways are the Paulinskill River, Jacksonburg, Walnut and Yards Creek. The Paulinskill runs through the centre of the Township from east to west and is stocked by the New Jersey Division of Fish, Game, and Wildlife with Brook, Brown, and Rainbow Trout. Other notable bodies of water are Cedar Lake and Lake Susquehanna.

Blairstown has approximately 1,717 acres of open space, which is largely under State or Federal ownership. A 495-acre parcel, Camp Mount Allamuchy Boy Scout Reservation, is owned by the Boy Scouts of America.

Blairstown Centre was first settled by John Hyndshaw who purchased a thousand-acre tract in 1729. Others came to live on his property and in 1760 the village had two houses, a gristmill and a sawmill. It is now called Smith's Mill. By 1795, a road extended as far as the community, and early in the nineteenth century Jacob Butts built a bridge across the Paulinskill River. The community was now called Butt's Bridge. However, the Butts family fell out of favor, and the community was named Gravel Hill, in 1825.

John Blair, born in nearby Belvidere in 1802, is given credit for the advancement of the community. Blair was originally a merchant who learned the mercantile business from Squire James Dewitt in Hope, and then in 1821, established a general store in Gravel Hill (*Blairstown*) which grew to branches in Huntsville, Paulina, Marksboro and Johnsonburg. Blair located his residence called "**The Homestead**" in Blairstown, and in 1838, Blair donated a lot for the Methodist Episcopal Church. By 1844, Blairstown included Blair's general store, a grist mill, a sawmill, a hotel, a tannery, a wagon shop and 15 to 20 dwellings. Still surviving are the Old Mill (1825) which was remodeled in 1903, adding the trademark stone arches, and the Vail and Cook Houses built in 1837.

As early as 1852, John Blair worked on the establishment of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad, and in 1876, broke ground in Blairstown for the Paulinskill Railroad. Blair made his fortune building railroads, and in the process, made Blairstown a trading center for northern Warren County. Blair became a major force in railroad development, which included the ownership of twenty railroads, and two million acres of land. He was known as "**The Railroad King of the West.**" (*Warren County Cultural Resources Survey 1991, III-16*)

One of John Blair's most lasting accomplishments was the establishment of Blair Academy in 1848 as a coeducational day school for children of Presbyterian ministers. By 1883, the campus consisted of 100 acres, including the five-acre Blair Lake. The school stopped accepting female students in 1910 but became coeducational again in 1970. The school is credited by some to be one of the town's most important institutions and has played a key role in Blairstown's survival once its prominence as a trading center faded in the twentieth century. Blair Academy is on the National Register of Historic Places.

John Blair had such an impact on the community that its citizens began to call it Blair's Town, and in 1839, officially changed the name to Blairstown.

The township of Blairstown was incorporated on February 20, 1845.

Communities within the township are:

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<sup>1</sup> He is believed to have lived in the 17th century. He was variously called Temane, Tamenand, Taminent, Tameny, and Tammany. According to one account, he was the first Indian to welcome William Penn to this country, and was a party to Penn's famous treaty.



- Blairstown,
- Paulina,
- Cedar Lake,
- Jacksonburg,
- Walnut Valley and
- Vail.

## Blairstown

Then, as previously stated, the name Blairstown was adopted in 1845.

## Paulina.

Paulina was an important community in the region during the eighteenth century. However, following the Revolutionary War, it was surpassed in importance by Blairstown. In 1874, it contained about a dozen houses, a post office, school and Presbyterian Church.

## Cedar Lake.

Located near Blairstown, this area was once known as Buttermilk Pond, and a boarding house was located there by 1874. It was a fashionable resort community during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A few houses remain around the lake.

## Jacksonburg

Jacksonburg is a small crossroads community of about twenty houses west of Blairstown. Jacksonburg was settled around 1800 by Joseph and Zebedee Stout. In 1881, it was described as containing a schoolhouse, several smithies, a store, a grist mill owned by Samuel McConachy, a distillery operated by I. F. Read and about twenty dwellings.

## Walnut Valley

Walnut Valley is a dispersed community west of Jacksonburg. It was named after the walnut trees that once dominated the region. Settlers moved into the area in the early nineteenth century to utilize the valuable wood, which was notably used to produce gunstocks during the War of 1812. By 1874, there were a few houses, a hotel and smithy shops in the community, surrounded by farms.

## Vail

Presently a small, dispersed community of about twenty houses, the village of Vail was established in 1888 by I. W. Smith, who built a store and post office next to his creamery. Smith was hoping to have a town grow around his settlement, although it never materialized.

## Blair Academy.

Blair Academy was founded by John I. Blair in 1848. In the 1850's he added three buildings:

- Blair Hall
- Locke Hall
- Insley Hall

All were named for himself, his wife and his mother.



## Blair Homestead.

The homestead of John I. Blair was built near Blair Lake in 1833.

The homestead was torn down in the late 1970's.





## Blacksmith Shop.

No information was found as to the location or proprietor.

This picture was taken from a postcard dated 1912.



## Blairstown School.

This one-story school was built in 1896. The school burned in 1928.



## Surrounding Communities

### **Hardwick Region**

The township of Hardwick was incorporated on January 22, 1750, which then included the areas of Frelinghuysen and Allamuchy townships, Hackettstown and Green Township of Sussex County. In 1782 these areas were removed from Hardwick Township leaving the present boundaries.

John Peter Bernhardt and Casper Shaffer were Germans who settled at Stillwater in 1742 and were among the earliest settlers in the township. Like the other mountainous regions within Warren County, the township has experienced little settlement during its history, being mainly comprised of large farmsteads.

One of the few remaining stone farmhouses in the township, the Philip Wildrich House located on Stillwater Road route 521, was built around 1790. It was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 because it retains evidence of the high level of skill of the early master builders and artisans.

Townships within the township include Hardwick, Squires Corner and Franklin Grove.

### Hardwick

The village of Hardwick arose during the mid-nineteenth century as a saw and gristmill location. As late as 1874, it contained few houses around the milling complex. Although the village remains in existence, it is marked by only a few scattered houses of recent origin.

### Squires Corner

Squires Corner is located at an outlet of White Lake, near the center of the township. A minor crossroads community, it was the location of the residence and blacksmith shop of P. W. Squire in 1874, and dispersed surrounding farms.

### Franklin Grove

Franklin Grove is located near the western edge of the township. Never more than a dispersed settlement, in 1874 there were in the vicinity residences of the Harris and other families. The area retains the name, although only a few houses are in the vicinity.



## Bridge over the Paulinskill.

This bridge was located at the Hardwick-Frelinghuysen township line.

The old mill can be seen in the upper left.



## Spring Valley School.

This school was built in the early 1900's.

It is the only remaining one in the township but has not been used as a school since 1945.



## Squire Homestead.

The original homestead of Samuel and Catherine Wildrick Squire.

It was built about 1791, and the home is still located on Stillwater Road at the crossroads named for the family.



## Hope Region

The township of Hope, taken from parts of Knowlton and Oxford townships, was incorporated on February 15, 1839. The earliest settlers of present Hope township were Samuel Green Jr. who arrived in the 1750's and Sampson Howell who settled near Jenny Jump Mountain around 1767 and established a sawmill. The village was settled in 1769 by a group of Moravian farmers, of which most of the history of the township was found. Communities developed around important crossroads and industrial sites.

Following the abandonment of Hope by the Moravians, the township was mainly devoted to agriculture, with the main centre of trade and social activities continuing in Hope. During the mid-nineteenth century, the Delaware Branch of the New Jersey Midland Railroad was constructed through the southern portion of the township. As late as 1874, most of the township consisted of widely scattered farmsteads.

Other smaller communities included: Swayze's Mill, Mount Hermon, Feebleville.



# The McConachy Clan

## Hope

The origins of the village of Hope are founded in the friendship and eventual conversion in 1749 of local resident John Samuel Green, Jr. to the religious belief of Moravianism. Green offered to the church a gift of a thousand-acre tract, but the leaders of the church declined the gift, purchasing the land from Green instead. The first Moravian to settle on Green's land was Peter Worbass, who arrived in 1769 and was followed by many others.

The emerging settlement was called Greenland, but during its first five years was not an officially sanctioned community. In 1774, the Moravian leadership in Germany decided to have Greenland established as a permanent community. Early in 1775, the village was renamed Hope, and many buildings constructed. The Moravian community of Hope operated successfully for almost forty years.

Several factors contributed to the abandonment of the community by the Moravians. During the first decade of the nineteenth century, a smallpox epidemic killed many of the town's inhabitants. Financial trouble of the church in Germany resulted in a need for money, and the church leadership decided to sell the community. In 1808, the Moravian church sold the entire village. The remaining Moravians relocated to Bethlehem, PA.

## Mount Hermon

The village was known originally as Green's Chapel, after Thomas Green located a Methodist Episcopal Church on his farm in 1798. The village name was changed in 1849 by the students of Honeywell Academy in the village to Mount Hermon.

## Swayze's Mill

Swayze's Mill was located on Muddy Brook in 1787 by Joseph Swayze Jr. He constructed a mill which competed with the Moravian Mill at Hope. In 1874, there was a grist and sawmill complex as well as various residences. Today a few scattered farms remain.

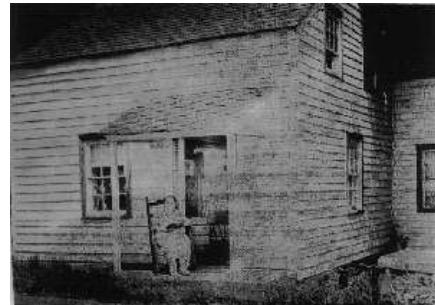
## Feebleville

This crossroads community was known as Feebleville during the nineteenth century, because of Dr. Gibbs who lived here, and cared for the elderly. A gristmill and school were located here, and dispersed farming settlement.

## Toll Collectors Home.

This small building near a bridge over Beaver Brook is believed to have been built as a home for the toll collector.

A Mrs. Arch lived here in 1874.



## Moravian Inn.

The Moravians built this structure in 1781 to hold religious observances.

In 1828, the building was converted to a hotel.

In 1911, it became the First National Bank of Hope.





## The McConachy Clan

### Grist Mill.

The grist mill was the first building constructed in Hope in 1769.

The mill was gutted by fire in 1808 and 1856.

It was rebuilt and operated until 1951.

It is now a restaurant.

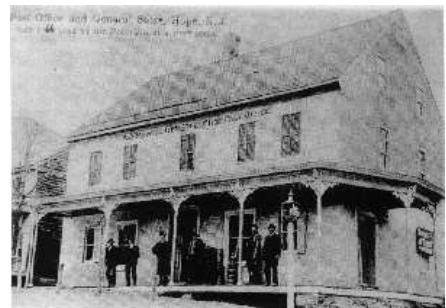


79 The Old Moravian Mill (1769), Hope, N. J.

### Store.

The general store was built by the Moravians in 1776.

The building is now home to a real estate agency.



Past Office and General Store, Hope, N. J.