

Brief History

Prior to its European settlement in the late 1600s, what would become Moorestown Township and its region were occupied by various peoples. By the time of European arrivals, these Native Americans called themselves the Lenni Lenape. Later, they were called the “Delaware” by Europeans. The Lenni Lenape inhabited much of southern New Jersey and their settlements were usually located along stream banks. They fished and hunted, and there is some evidence that certain wild plant communities were managed. The Lenni Lenape valued the area for its abundance of fish and game and utilized the regional creeks extensively for transportation. Evidence of early Native American sites and activities has been documented near riparian and other natural resource areas of Moorestown Township. Although some archeological sites have been developed, there



Indian Spring Historic Marker

Source: DVRPC

are others that still exist, such as along Hooten Run and Swede Run. Archeological evidence has been uncovered along Second Street in the town center and Pleasant Valley Avenue, among other places. The “Indian Spring” on the east side of Main Street in the town center is believed to have been used by prehistoric settlers. This evidence mostly suggests small ephemeral encampments of individual, family, or group proportions and ranges in history from 10,000 BC to 1500 AD. Larger, multi-seasonal base camps were once associated with the North Branch Pennsauken Creek and Rancocas Creek Main Stem on either side of the township.

The first European settlers in Burlington County were the Dutch, who populated Burlington Island in 1624. A fort and civil center were established on the island, along with a number of dwellings and a tavern. As early as 1638, Swedish settlers also ventured into the Delaware Valley and purchased land from the Indians to build small settlements along the Delaware River. In 1644, King Charles II of England took control of much of America’s eastern seaboard and deeded most of present-day New Jersey to his brother, the Duke of York, who split it into East and West. The British quickly sought to occupy the land and secure its control. West Jersey was settled mostly by English Quakers. Moorestown Township, located in West Jersey, was initially settled in 1682, the same year that William Penn chartered Pennsylvania.

The origins of Moorestown begin in 1682 as two communities separated by approximately two miles: Rodmantown to the west and Chestertown to the east. Rodmantown was named after Dr. John Rodman, who purchased 500 acres of land in 1686 in what is now

the western section of Moorestown. What is now the eastern part of Moorestown was called Chestertown, and later called Chester.

James and Esther Adams conveyed a plot for the Friends Meeting House, which was built just after 1700. This was the first community building in what would become Moorestown. The daughter of James and Esther Adams, Elizabeth, married Thomas Moore. Moore purchased 33 acres of land on the north side of the Kings Highway, which occupied the area from the Friends Cemetery to Locust Street. Moore subdivided this land and sold the parcels for residential and commercial development. Moore himself opened an inn in 1743 near the intersection of Union and West Main streets. Because of Moore's Inn, the area became known as Moorestown around 1760. The area was officially known as Moorestown in 1802, with the establishment of the Post Office.



Moorestown Friends Meeting Complex
Source: DVRPC

The King's Highway was a main reason for the success of Moorestown's growth. Also known as Old Salem Road, the construction of King's Highway was authorized in 1681 by the West Jersey Assembly and completed in 1686. This road connected the English settlements at Burlington and Salem and was the first road constructed in Burlington County. King's Highway crossed the Rancocas Creek near the present-day border of Moorestown and Delran at a place known as Hollinshead's Ferry (also spelled Hollingshead) and later as Hackney's Dock. The Hollinshead family operated a ferry for many years, which traveled between their property on the south side of the Rancocas Creek and Adam's Wharf, located on the north shore.

In the years prior to the Civil War, Moorestown was a civic hub for the surrounding agricultural area. The early town contained grist mills, tanneries, blacksmith shops, and distilleries. The resource needs created by the Civil War and pressure to industrialize provided a boost to Moorestown's development. During and after the Civil War, the construction of railroads and canals in the region provided an enormous boost for shipping agricultural and other products, as well as provided the infrastructure for increased job opportunities and economic expansion. The first railroad came to Moorestown in 1867, after the war ended.

Local Quaker communities founded the first schools, both one-room stone schoolhouses, in 1785. Quaker communities established several types of community institutions in Moorestown, including schools, elderly boarding homes, and athletic facilities. In 1827, disagreements within the Quaker community caused the Hicksite and Orthodox Friends to build different schools. In 1827, the Hicksite Friends built Moorestown Friends High School on Chester Avenue near Second Street. In 1878, the Orthodox Friends consolidated the two schoolhouses, built in 1785, as Moorestown Friends Academy, on the current Moorestown Friends School site.



Browning-Hess Farm Market
Source: DVRPC

Many of the early Quaker community facilities have been renovated and are now part of other institutions.



Thomas Cowperthwaite House
Source: DVRPC

The first school in Moorestown was built sometime before 1830 at the southeast corner of Second and Church streets. This school, open to all local children, was known as the Friendship School, and parents paid a small fee for each child enrolled.

The first free public school in Moorestown was opened in 1873. This new brick school building was located on the north side of Second Street near Church Street, and offered free education to all local children. An adjacent high school was built in 1898, which closed in 1970. Stanwick School was built in 1895, closed in 1964, and destroyed by fire in 1976. A segregated school for African Americans, School #7, was built on North Church Street in 1900. This school was enlarged in 1928, integrated in 1949, and closed in 1969. Another brick school building, School #9, was built in 1906 on Second Street, and closed in 1961. A new high school was built in 1914 on Church Street at the northeast corner of Second Street, and the 1873 school was demolished. Lenola Elementary School was built in 1917, and an addition was built in 1952. Lenola Elementary School was closed in 1980.

Passenger travel by rail in the 1800s allowed Moorestown to become a suburb of the cities of Camden and Philadelphia, as residents could commute to work with relative ease. Residential areas expanded along the rail line. The central neighborhoods of Moorestown were established between 1875 and 1910. The diverse architectural composition of the township illustrates that era's popular domestic American architectural styles of Federal, Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, Queen Anne, Shingle, Colonial Revival, Arts and Crafts, Bungalow, and Tudor Revival. The far eastern and western areas of the town were still primarily agricultural at this time period.

The Moorestown Improvement Association was formed in 1904 to preserve and enhance the quality of life in the municipality. The association initiated a study that led to the establishment of the township water works in 1912. In its initial years, the association worked to install concrete sidewalks, plant shade trees, install street signs, purchase property for parkland, initiate a trash removal system, and conduct other civic initiatives.

There are several unique community facilities in Moorestown. The Perkins Center for the Arts, for example, was established as a plant nursery that specialized in ornamental trees. The adjoining residence, initially called Perkins Homestead, was built in 1832. In 1910, Philadelphia architect Herbert C. Wise designed a home on the former nursery site. This Tudor Revival style home, Evergreen Lawn, was a wedding gift to the Perkins' son and his wife. Mable Sullivan, Alice Perkins' sister, bequeathed the property as a park or other community facility to Moorestown Township. The Perkins Center for the Arts honors the Perkins' gift by providing an arboretum and art programs for Moorestown Township and Collingswood Borough. Another important community facility is the Moorestown Community House. Eldridge Reeves Johnson, the founder of the Victor Talking Machine Company, donated the funds to build the Moorestown Community House in 1923. Opened

in 1926, the Moorestown Community House offers a ballroom, meeting rooms, offices for nonprofit organizations, and a heated indoor swimming pool for residents of Moorestown and surrounding communities.

Moorestown Township was officially incorporated on March 11, 1922, by an act of the New Jersey State Legislature, from portions of Chester Township (now Maple Shade Township). The 1920s led to rapid suburban expansion, as more families were able to afford automobiles. This led to more residential development away from the concentrated areas around rail lines, as many workers could now commute by car to the urban centers of Philadelphia and Camden. Residential development was stagnant during the Great Depression of the 1930s and the war effort of the early 1940s. The economic boom and mass ownership of automobiles of the post-World War II era greatly impacted Moorestown, as the population shifted from the cities to the suburbs. Development spread outwards from the older center of Moorestown to the surrounding agricultural lands. Moorestown experienced a surge of population in the 1950s and 1960s, growing from just over 9,000 people in 1950 to over 15,000 in 1970. Population remained relatively flat between 1970 and 1990, and then grew again between 1990 and 2010, from 16,000 to nearly 21,000.



Moorestown Community House
Source: DVRPC

The George C. Baker Elementary School was constructed in 1952, and the Mary E. Roberts School was built in 1957. An annex to the Church Street High School was opened in 1940. A new high school was built in 1962 on Bridgeboro Road, with an addition constructed in 1969. South Valley Elementary School was opened in 1964. A new middle school was built in 1971 on North Stanwick Road, renamed the William W. Allen, III Middle School in 1979. The Upper Elementary School opened in 2001 to house grades four through six.

The Moorestown Mall was opened in 1964, with John Wanamaker's and Gimbels as anchor tenants. The mall was reconstructed after a devastating fire in 1992. Currently, there are four anchor tenants: Boscov's, Sears, Macy's and Lord and Taylor. A large, multiscreen theater is currently under construction.

Today, Moorestown Township honors its rich history, while planning for the future. The Moorestown Improvement Association offers a series of walking tours of the township, with accompanying brochures that highlight buildings in the historic district. The Moorestown Historic District, listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, protects the distinct cultural and architectural heritage of Moorestown.