



THE HISTORY
OF THE
BOROUGH OF
FAR HILLS



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The Borough of Far Hills in the Somerset Hills of New Jersey was set off from Bernards Township and incorporated as a political entity in 1921 by means of a special act of the New Jersey Legislature and a successful local referendum in which 117 votes were cast in favor of forming a borough and 15 votes were in opposition.

The new, five square mile municipality had about 200 residents and was possessed of spectacular terrain and geological formations. The rift valley of the Ramapo Fault transected the borough, separating the Jersey Highlands and the gorge of the North Branch of the Raritan River from the foothills of the Second Watchung Mountain.

The fractured basalt columns on I-287 near Layton Road, where ice freezes on the rocks, are a visible outcropping of the lava flows which formed the Watchung Mountains 160 million years ago. Moggy Hollow, near Liberty Corner Road, once was the outlet for Glacial Lake Passaic, a gap through which water spilled down into the alluvial valley below.

The Peapack path, an ancient Indian trail, followed the course of the North Branch and was traversed by tribes of the Lenni Lenape in their migrations from the northwest mountains to the Jersey shore. Indian tools and points have been retrieved from sites near Mine Brook and the Raritan River.

When the English succeeded the Dutch as owners of the American colonies, the lands that later became Far Hills were patented by the Proprietors of East New Jersey to William Penn and his associates and to Donald Danielson Dunstar and James Alexander, the father of Lord Stirling.

Early settlers leased and later purchased land. Among them were the Comptons, Dumonts, Frosts, Laytons, Linns, Whitenacks and Wyckoffs who farmed the upland meadows and the bottom lands along the river. Millers employed the water power of the streams for industrial use. Zachariah Smith built a saw mill and brush block factory on the North Branch shortly after 1800. Eighty years later it was still in operation under his grandson, Oscar Smith.

Further south on the river, in the area known as Forge Hollow and later as Hub Hollow, William Ludlow was a shoemaker and his son, Charles, had a saw mill and woolen factory which were succeeded by the Ludlow Family's hub factory.

There were 19th century lime kilns along Route 202 and Liberty Corner Road, a grist mill and saw mill on Mine Brook, a brick kiln on Old Mine Brook Road and quarries in the hills. Presbyterian churches at Basking Ridge and Lamington, and a Dutch Reformed

Church near the Lesser Crossroads in Bedminster offered spiritual sustenance. Children attended schools at Mine Brook, Mount Prospect and Union Schoolhouse.

The beginning of rail service to nearby Bernardsville in 1870 opened the area to city people seeking a respite from the heat and hurry of urban life. Anticipating the demand for country properties was Evander H. Schley, a land developer and real estate broker from New York state. Schley, a bachelor, bought several thousand acres of farmland, some of it sight unseen, in Bedminster and Bernards townships in the 1880's.

One day in 1887, Schley's brother, Grant, and his wife, Elizabeth, came out by horse drawn carriage to have a look at Evander's farms. Elizabeth is said to have exclaimed on the beautiful vista of "far hills", thus giving name to the place where there was yet no village. They both liked the area so much that they bought 1,500 acres on the North Branch from Evander, including the hills which since have been known as Schley mountain. On the knoll above the river the Schleys built Froh-Heim, a rambling country house with Japanese accents, and all the auxiliary buildings required for an estate which was to be a working farm as well.

Other fin de siecle families buying farmland from Evander Schley were those of Judge John Forrest Dillon, his son, attorney John Milton Dillon and Newark industrialist Zachariah Belcher. But the story of Far Hills really centers on Grant B. Schley.

Grant Barney Schley (1845-1917) was a solidly built redhead who was a whiz at numbers and who was often mistaken for Teddy Roosevelt. He married the boss's daughter, became one of the wealthy men of his time and was frequently said to be the only one who built his own town.

Schley was born in 1845 at Chapinville, N.Y., near Syracuse, to a farm family of humble circumstances. He obtained only an elementary school education. At the age of 16 he went to work as a peach picker and shipping clerk for Wells, Butterfield and Company, a Syracuse firm which later merged with others to become the American Express Company.

According to a story in the Schley family, in those days the directors of American Express would travel around in their private train cars to see their properties and each company agent would try to put on some kind of a show to impress them. Usually, two men were required to hoist the peach laden baskets into the freight cars but Grant Schley was strong enough to do it without assistance. He caught the eye of George F. Baker, a director of American Express and the president of the First National Bank in New York City.

Baker gave him a job in the money order department of American Express in New York City. Here, Schley demonstrated the ability to add up a whole column of numbers without going down one column and carrying over, a great feat in the days before adding machines and computers. So, Baker brought young Schley into the First National Bank, where within a few years he became head of the bank's foreign exchange department and in 1879 he married Baker's daughter, Elizabeth.

In 1885, with John G. Moore, he formed the brokerage house of Moore and Schley, and in 1900 with Thomas Fortune Ryan, he effected the combination of the American Tobacco Company. One of Schley's major interests was the Elliot-Fisher Company, which was later merged into the Underwood Typewriter Company, of which he was chairman of the board for many years.

Schley became president of a number of mining companies, the Croesus Gold Mining Company and Manufacturing Company, El Potosi Mining Company, the Tintic Company, the Howe Sound Company, and the Chihuahau Mining Company, and was vice president of the Electric Storage Battery Company. He was a director of the American Smelting and Refining Company, the Northern Pacific Railway Company, the Republic Iron and Steel Company and the Puitsburgh Coal Company.

Grant and Elizabeth Baker Schley were the parents of three sons, Kenneth B. Schley, Evander B. Schley and Grant B. Schley, Jr., and a daughter, Evelyn or "Missy" who married Max H. Behr.

Schley died from pneumonia in 1917 and was buried in Kensico Cemetery in New York City.

Through Grant Schley's efforts, the Delaware, Lackawanna and the Western Railroad built an extension line from Bernardsville to Gladstone. Service began in 1890. A train station was constructed at Far Hills, around which a rural commercial center soon developed.

David Dumont gave up farming, opened a coal and lumber business and became the station agent. L.V. Ludlow built a meat market where he held forth as the first Far Hills postmaster, Mark Lance and Richard V. Potter opened a general store near the station. William F. Parks set up a blacksmith shop and Charles Welsh opened a livery stable. The state road, then Route 16, was macadamized in the 1890's.

Among the lands which EVander Schley acquired was a half interest in David Dumont's farm. In 1899, Schley and Dumont drew up a subdivision plan and offered lots for sale in what was to become Far Hills village. A unique clause was written into each deed prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages on the premises.

"And said party of the second part further covenants and agrees for himself, his heirs, executors and assigns, that neither he nor they shall or will at any time erect or permit to be erected on the premises hereby conveyed any building for the purpose of selling intoxicating liquors, beer or wine or where intoxicating liquors shall or may be sold or given away, nor shall he nor they sell or permit the sale on said premises or any part thereof any intoxicating liquor, beer or wine.

"And it is further covenanted and agreed that the foregoing covenant in the restraint of the sale and use intoxicating liquors shall be deemed to be a covenant running with the land a similar covenant or reference to said covenant".

Despite the prohibitive provision, the lots sold rapidly. Houses soon began to appear on new streets named DeMun Place, a variant of the former farmer's family name and Dumont Road, which the new homeowners fondly called Ragweed Alley. Many of the houses were built by Horace Carkuff, William Flomerfelt and William Skillman and were purchased by artisans and merchants who were closely related by blood, marriage and employment.

On lands set aside for community uses, Grant Schley paid for the costs of building a village school, a church, a firehouse, a social club and a recreational area. Flood plain lands along the river were drained, graded and seeded for a fairgrounds for agricultural and sporting events.

Schley built stables, barns, and a grandstand to the fairgrounds, and organized the Far Hills Athletic Club, the Somerset Hills Agricultural Association and the Somerset Hills Bridle Path Association. It was a time of intense activity. There were jobs for all and lots of home town spirit.

Grant Schley also established the Union Band of Far Hills, a brass band composed of local men to whom he supplied instruments and uniforms. The brass band was a fixture of small town life at the turn of the century. The Far Hills band, like countless others across the nation, played in parades, on the Fourth of July, at picnics, and at public events and socials which were a part of community life in those days.

A village came into being on old fields and pastureland, a turn-of-the century town with architecture reflective of the times. The big, roomy houses were generally simple versions of the Queen Anne, Shingle, Temple Homestead, Bungalow Cottage and Foursquare Styles which were popular then.

They differed from the older farm houses of the area in that the Far Hills village houses were built to have central heat from coal fired furnaces. Fireplaces were decorative and not the prime

source of heat. Running water was achieved by hand pumping well water or water collected in cisterns, to attic tanks. A boy could be hired for 25 cents to fill the attic tank. Some houses had water closets and cesspools in the backyard or others were privies or outhouses.

Automobiles began to appear on local roads about 1906 and Charles Welsh installed a gasoline pump at his livery stable. It is well remembered that Percy Pyne and C. Ledyard Blair had the first cars and how frightened the horses were of the machines.

Electricity came to Far Hills about 1910 and telephone service began about 1912. The Gravity Water Company of Peapack, with a reservoir on Chester Hill, extended its lines in 1915 to serve Far Hills village. Brooks Brothers, a Virginia contractor, installed the water lines. In 1919 the original village school, built by Grant Schley, was moved to the fairgrounds and a new four room brick school house was constructed on its site and again paid for by Grant Schley.

Rising taxes led the 200 residents of Far Hills to decide to separate from Bernards township and to incorporate as a Borough. The local property tax rate jumped from \$2.72 in 1919 to \$3.53 in 1920. Both the villagers and Far Hills estate owners objected to having to share the costs of road upkeep in the 60 square mile township with its population of 5,100 and also to the school taxes for educating the township's 800, of which only 90 were from Far Hills. Further, they protested the lack of police protection.

Twenty new boroughs had been formed in New Jersey at this time. The advantage was said to be the consolidation of ratables within a smaller area resulting in lower municipal costs. Public meetings were held in Far Hills to promote the idea which was enthusiastically received. A committee was formed to chart the course for succession. Its members were the cousins, Reeve and Kenneth B. Schley, Milton Dillon, L.V. Ludlow, William B. Flomerfelt and Alfred C. Arnott.

A bill, Senate 332, authorizing the incorporation of the Borough of Far Hills was introduced into the Legislature by state Sen. Clarence E. Case. Fifty residents went to Trenton to cheer for the favorable action. In a 30 minute session on March 28, 1921 the Far Hills bill was "introduced, heard and first and second readings, referred to committee, voted out, and passed by the Senate." The Assembly concurred a week later.

In a local referendum on MAY 12, 1921 Far Hills voters approved the incorporation of the borough by a vote of 117-15. "Far Hills is now a fact", announced The Bernardsville News.

On June 7, at a meeting in William Sutter's barbershop, local officials were named in an uncontested election. They were Mayor L.V. Ludlow and Councilmen Milton Dillon, William Flomerfelt, Reeve Schley, William Sueter and Charles Welsh. Alfred Arnott was named assessor, Peter D. Lane justice of the peace, and Herman Gutleber tax collector. Irving Frost was borough clerk and Frank S. Tainter borough engineer. They agreed to hold council meetings in Mayor Ludlow's office at the lumberyard until the new firehouse was completed later in the year.

Named to the new Far Hills Board of Education were Mrs. Clarence B. Mitchell, president; William Skillman, vice president, and Mrs. George O. Allen, Mrs. Esther Dumont, Reuben R. McClure, David Rinehart, Charles Rogers, Mrs. Kenneth B. Schley and Charles Todd, board members.

In November 1921 the Essex Fox Hounds Race Meeting, which previously had been held in Bedminster, moved to Froh-Heim. More than 2,000 people came to see the fourth running of the New Jersey Hunt Cup Race - it rained.

The official opening of the Union Hook and Ladder Company's new firehouse on November 18, 1921 was celebrated with a ball and cafeteria supper attended by 500 people. The fire company netted about \$600.

Far Hills was indeed a fact.

Even as the borough was beginning, changes were occurring which would impact the life of the community. Thirty-two young men, sons of working families and estate owners alike saw military service in World War I. On their return, they found that the enactment in 1918 of the federal progressive income tax and the inheritance tax could curtail the free spending that had financed the operation and staffing of the big country places.

In 1920, a major flood occurred as the North Branch spilled over its banks. The 18th constitutional amendment was adopted, prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, not only in Far Hills, but everywhere. It was soon followed by the 19th amendment which extended the right to vote to women.

The wooden truss bridge across the North Branch was replaced with a concrete structure in 1922. The state highway was hard topped and renamed Route 32. Peapack Road was paved in 1925. Automobiles and trucks succeeded buggies and wagons as the prime means of transportation. The gasoline tractor displaced the horse in the field, making it increasingly expensive for the small farmer to compete in the marketplace.

Mark Osborne's farm north of the Fairgrounds was sliced into building lots. New houses were put up on new streets named Schley Avenue and Far Hills Avenue. Lots were even offered for sale on the flood plain lands along the river. But, the stock market crash in 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression halted land development and further restricted the lifestyle of both the wealthy and the working people.

The times called for job-producing public works projects. The Far Hills sewer system, a gravity flow system with red tile pipes, was installed in 1930. The builder was Ellis Edgar. A wood frame sewer plant was built at the confluence of Mine Brook and the North Branch. The plant was a simple chlorinator. The sewage was treated with chlorine and trucked to Kearny for ocean dumping or sometimes just released in the river. The plant was in operation until 1975.

In 1931, electric trains replaced the old steam powered engines on the DL&W tracks. The borough adopted its first zoning ordinance in 1932. With the exception of village lands, the whole of Far Hills was zoned for a 25 acre minimum lot size. In the village, lands between the river and Peapack Road were designated for small residential lots, including the Fairgrounds and the floodplain. Lands between Peapack Road and the railroad were zoned for business uses.

During the 1930's and the subsequent years of World War II, there was little development in Far Hills. In the memorial plaque at the Fair Hills station plaza are inscribed the names of 62 borough men who served in the military in the second world war, and the name of one woman, too, Mildred A. Mitchell, who was a Red Cross nurse.

In 1947 the Zoning Ordinance was revised, reducing the 25 acre zone to a 10 acre minimum lot size. The Borough Council adopted an ordinance in 1948 establishing a police department. Fred Koenig, who had been policing Far Hills as a deputy sheriff, was named chief and was authorized to buy a uniform.

In 1964, earth movers and dozers appeared on Schley Mountain, signalling the beginning of construction of I-287, through Far Hills. In 1965, Mayor J. Malcolm Belcher retired after serving in that office for 28 years. A new zoning ordinance in 1966 held to the 10 acre zone but curtailed the business zone, and prohibited flood plain development. I-287 opened in July 1966. It cut across Schley Mountain close by Moggy Hollow and Buck Gardens but there was no access or egress in Far Hills.

Declining school enrollment and rising educational costs led to the closing of the Far Hills school in 1967. It was a decision painfully reached and sharply opposed by local families who had

sent three generations of children to the village school. The borough's 80 kindergarten through 8th grade students began attending Bedminster school in the fall of 1967.

The same year Elizabeth Shackford Jordan was elected to the Borough Council. She was the first and only woman yet to serve and, appropriately, was a descendant of Far Hills' founding Schley family.

In 1968, 28 acres of land on the North Branch, subdivided but never developed in the 1930's was purchased and deeded to the Upper Raritan Watershed Association by a private donor. A 12 year long controversy with neighboring Bedminster over the location of a community library began and was not resolved until 1982 when the two towns agreed to form a joint municipal library to be housed in the former New Jersey Bell Telephone building on Lamington Road in Bedminster.

Lured by the magnet of the interstate highways in 1971, AT&T acquired 225 acres in Far Hills and an adjoining 140 acres in Bedminster, lands once part of Grant Schley's Froh-Heim and constructed a corporate headquarters for its Long Lines Division near the river in Bedminster. AT&T pledged to keep the Far Hills lands open space forever and to continue to make the race course available for the annual Essex Fox Hounds Race Meeting. Further, AT&T constructed a sewer treatment plant to serve the villages of Far Hills and Bedminster, and Far Hills little timber chlorinator shack at the confluence of Mine Brook and the North Branch disappeared from the local scene.

Heirs to the original owners of some Far Hills estates put the family lands up for sale and subdivision. New houses were built in the 10 acre zone and legal challenges were instituted against the borough's large lot zoning. Corporate and residential development in surrounding towns has produced heavy rush hour traffic through Far Hills. Demands on emergency services have increased. Homeowners in the village would like their houses rezoned for commercial use.

Far Hills terminated its K-8th grade send-recvie relationship with Bedminster and began sending all its students to the Bernardsville school in 1984. Conrail deeded the train station to the borough, and a restaurant opened in the waiting room, also in 1984.

In 1986 the voters and Borough Council rejected a proposal to permit sale of alcoholic beverages in the borough, and St. Brigid's Church celebrated its 50th anniversary in the parish which now includes many residents new to the area as well as the old Far Hills families.

Today, in the closing years of the 20th century, Far Hills looks to a future that was unimagined when the village was laid out and city people bought up land to operate as working farms. As in other New Jersey municipalities, local decisions are increasingly influenced by social and economic conditions outside the community.

One hopes that the borough will be able to retain those elements of its heritage which have made it unique, and that sense of "small town-home town" that yet endures when the firemen march down Main Street on Memorial Day;

The list of Mayors of the Borough of Far Hills is as follows:

LOUIS VERNON LUDLOW - June 13, 1921 to December 31, 1923

REEVE SCHLEY - January 8, 1924 TO December 31, 1937

J. MALCOLM BELCHER - January 3, 1938 to December 31, 1965

EDWIN BURKE - January 10, 1966 to December 30, 1970

JOHN WETZEL - January 4, 1971 to May 15, 1974

EDMOND P. ROCHAT, JR. - June 10, 1974 to December 31, 1978

HENRY ARGENTO - January 9, 1979 to December 31, 1982

HARRY HOFFMAN - January 3, 1983 to June 2, 1986

WILLIAM C. LAYTON, JR. - June 16, 1986 to December 31, 1994

CARL J. TORSILIERI - January 2, 1995 to present

NOTE: The above history was written by Bedminster Township Historian ANNE O'BRIEN, which appeared in the Bernardsville News on October 23, 1987. Mrs. O'Brien died on October 10, 1987.