



(History of Woolwich, New Jersey, from the former web site at <http://www.woolwichtwp.org>)

Location and Size

Woolwich is an incorporated Township located toward the northwest end of Gloucester County, New Jersey. The township is bounded by four Gloucester County townships - Logan Township on the north, East Greenwich to the northeast, and Harrison and South Harrison Townships to the east and southeast. The western boundary is the Oldmans Creek, which forms the dividing line between Gloucester and Salem Counties. On the Salem side are two neighboring municipalities - Oldmans Township to the north and Pilesgrove Township to the south. At the center of Woolwich is the incorporated borough of Swedesboro.

Woolwich Township occupies 13, 714 acres or just over 21 square miles situated on the coastal plain of New Jersey, within 4 miles of the Delaware River. It is in an area that is still primarily rural, although the township is undergoing extensive development due in part to its proximity to the Philadelphia-Camden and Wilmington metropolitan areas and the ever enlarging suburbanized perimeter of those urban centers.

BRIEF TOWNSHIP HISTORY

Woolwich Township was first incorporated on March 17, 1767 and takes its name from an English town on the Thames River famous for its naval school. The township was part of the Civil Organization of West Jersey, established in 1676, and was originally within Greenwich Township, one of the four incorporated jurisdictions in what is now Gloucester County. When Woolwich Township was first formed from Greenwich Township in 1750, before incorporation, it encompassed an area of 40,000 acres and was known as South Greenwich. Subsequent secessions reduced the land area, with Franklin Township being formed from Greenwich and Woolwich in 1820, and Harrison Township in 1844. In 1877, West Woolwich, which is now known as Logan Township, was set off from Woolwich, although in 1901 part of Logan was returned to Woolwich. In 1902, Swedesboro, the principal town of Woolwich, incorporated as a separate municipality.

Recent archaeological finds show that humans have been present on the land within township boundaries for approximately 10,000 years (Mounier, 1998). Early Native American communities relied on the township's natural resources until the arrival of Europeans. Most pre-European settlements were associated with stream corridors. Indian villages are known to have existed beside both the Raccoon and Oldmans Creeks. The Narraticons lived in the vicinity of the Raccoon. Their name, which means "raccoon,"

survives in the names of the creek and the main lake in Woolwich, Narraticon Lake. The Kagkakaini Sakins lived along the Mosackas Creek, now called Oldmans Creek.

In 1638 Swedish settlement came to the Delaware Valley and a colony was established on the east side of the Delaware River that was referred to as "New Stockholm" (also "New Sweden"). This began to grow when the land was purchased by the Swedes from the Indians in 1641. The first settlement was located on the banks of Raccoon Creek and was called "Raccoon" until 1765 when the name was changed to "Swedesborough." Swedish and Finnish inhabitants moved into the area and created homesteads. It is they who gave shelter to the passengers of the first English ship to arrive in 1677, which docked at the Raccoon Creek.

With English settlement in the region, Swedish place names began to be replaced with English names, including that of "Woolwich." Early settlers raised grain, fruit and vegetables, and tended stock. Peter Kalm, a Swedish botanist and one of the most famous recorders of botany in the colonies, traveled in the region between 1748 and 1751. He began his stay in Swedesboro and in his important account, *Travels in North America*, reported on all kinds of fruit-growing on local farms and "peaches so thick on the ground that one could hardly miss stepping on them." Some of New Jersey's richest farmland is located within Woolwich Township and farming has always been a principle industry of the area.

Waterways were important to Woolwich and Swedesboro from its earliest days. Farm products, as well as timber from the rich forests, were conveyed to markets along the wide tidal Raccoon and Oldmans Creeks. Along with other vessels, an early steamboat plied the Raccoon Creek from the wharves at Swedesboro to Philadelphia, carrying produce to the Dock Creek Farmers Market. Early mills in the area that ground flour and sawed lumber relied on the tributaries to these streams to provide their power. Mills were established at Lake Narraticon next to Swedesboro, on Bascalore Creek, on Purgey's (or Pargey's) Creek forming Warrington Millpond, and on Oliphant's Creek.

Travel on roads was nearly impossible during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Road quality was exceedingly poor and bridges were frequently in disrepair or nonexistent. However, the first highway to cross both Camden and Gloucester Counties, Kings Highway (also called Salem Road or the Great Road), was laid out in 1682 and provided an alternative to water travel. The Kings Highway travels through the center of Woolwich Township and Swedesboro and has several historic houses and structures along its length.

Railroads became an important means of travel and transport of goods, especially farm produce, in the latter half of the 19th century. One of the earliest lines in the southern part of Gloucester County was the Swedesboro Railroad, established in 1854, and subsequently operated by the West Jersey Railroad Company and then the Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Line. This line opened new markets for products from the Woolwich area. It also carried passengers until 1933. It continues to operate today as a freight line.

The railroad served new processing plants that were established in Gloucester County in the late 19th century. One of these, founded by Edgar Hurff, was the largest privately

owned processing plant in the world. Hurff also developed the largest seed business in the world and was the first to process canned asparagus in the eastern U.S. The Hurff plant became the California Packing Corporation plant that packaged Del Monte vegetables for many years. The plant operates today as a Del Monte distribution facility and sits on the western boundary of Swedesboro and Woolwich.

Highways and trucking began to replace railroad transport of both goods and people after World War II. When the New Jersey Turnpike was built, one of its exits was placed on Rte. 322 in the northeast corner of Woolwich Township. The turnpike bisects the township on a northeast –southwest line. In the 1960s the construction of I-295 began to bring major changes to Woolwich. Although the road is west of Woolwich, in Logan Township, it provides easy access in and out of Woolwich. A major residential development called Beckett was planned for Logan and Woolwich Townships in the 1970s. In Woolwich, this development is now called Wetherby and will bring a total of 4500 housing units along Centre Square Road in the southwest quadrant of the township.

Today, Woolwich Township is home to a wide array of people from many ethnic and social backgrounds, with a diverse set of occupations reflecting today's 21st century service and light manufacturing economies. Automobile transportation corridors provide the framework for land uses today. Many residents commute throughout the tri-state region for employment and for other basic services. This has made the township something of a bedroom community for the more urbanized portions of southern New Jersey. However, Woolwich Township still supports an active farming community and is still served by and connected to the historic town center of Swedesboro.