



# History of Chesterfield Township

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Chesterfield Township encompasses 21.81 square miles in the northern part of Burlington County.<sup>1</sup> It is bound by the Crosswicks Creek, which divides Burlington and Mercer Counties, North Hanover, Mansfield, and Bordentown.<sup>2</sup> The Crosswicks Creek is the most prominent geographical feature of the township. Ending at the Delaware River, this navigable waterway brought the first European settlers to the area and was the center of a preexisting Lenni-Lenape settlement.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the years, the Crosswicks Creek was used for the transportation of goods, and numerous industries were located along it, including mills and ice houses.

The Township of Chesterfield consists of two historic districts, Crosswicks Village and Chesterfield Village. Crosswicks Village, the older of the two, is in the northern part of the township, on the south side of the Crosswicks Creek. It includes the northern parts of Bordentown Crosswicks and Crosswicks Chesterfield Roads, the eastern part of Ward Avenue, the western part of Ellisdale Road, and the entirety of Buttonwood, Church, Front, Main, and New Streets. The other village, Chesterfield, is located two-and-one-half miles to the south, in the center of the township. It includes Chesterfield Georgetown Road north of Blacks Creek, the eastern part of Newbold Lane, the western part of Chesterfield Arneytown Road, the southern parts of Bordentown Chesterfield and Crosswicks Chesterfield Roads, and the entirety of Matthews Lane.

Chesterfield Township was chartered in 1712 and has retained much of its rural character. The first Europeans to settle in this area were English Quakers in 1677.<sup>4</sup> This was typical for much of Burlington County and what was then known as West Jersey.<sup>5</sup> The major industries of early Burlington County included agriculture, glass, and iron.<sup>6</sup> Chesterfield Township was primarily agricultural, including both crop cultivation and livestock. Popular crops included apples, cabbage, corn, hay, peaches, potatoes, small grains, spinach, tomatoes, and wheat.<sup>7</sup> Commonly raised animals included cattle, chickens, horses, pigs, and sheep.<sup>8</sup> The Quakers chose the Crosswicks area because there was already an established Lenni-Lenape community nearby. The name "Crosswicks" comes from the Lenni-Lenape word "Crossweeksung," meaning "separation."<sup>9</sup> Main Street is the oldest road in the township, with the earliest settlers building their houses along it.<sup>10</sup>

Chesterfield Village was settled by Europeans at the beginning of the 18th century. The village was originally called Recklesstown, after the Reckless Family.<sup>11</sup> Joseph Reckless constructed one of the first houses in the village, possibly near 5 Chesterfield Georgetown Road; however, it was destroyed in a fire in 1937.<sup>12</sup> Joseph's grandsons, Anthony and Robert, were also notable, having fought in the Revolutionary War.<sup>13</sup> Recklesstown retained its name until 1888, when Congressman Anthony Bullock had it changed to Chesterfield, to be the same



as the township's name. Bullock lived in Bullock Mansion at 187 Crosswicks Chesterfield Road, which was constructed in 1876.<sup>14</sup> Since 1947, it has been under the ownership of the Shady which was constructed in 1876.<sup>14</sup> Since 1947, it has been under the ownership of the Shady Rest Bible Conference.<sup>15</sup>

The Chesterfield Inn, at 633 Chesterfield Arneytown Road, is the oldest tavern in Chesterfield Village. Historically known as the Recklesstown Tavern, it was constructed in the first decade of the 18th century, with numerous additions made throughout the century.<sup>47</sup> In 1864, the tavern held a village meeting, where the residents agreed to implement a \$5 poll tax in order to pay for volunteers to join the Union Army.<sup>48</sup>

After the Civil War, an African Methodist Episcopal congregation was organized. For one decade, starting in 1868, services were held in a local schoolhouse, until the Grace A.M.E. Church was constructed on Crosswicks Chesterfield Road in 1878. The parsonage, originally located on Main Street, was moved to be adjacent to the church in 1916 by Hannah DeCou.<sup>49</sup> It had been constructed in the late 18th century to early 19th century by Charles Knowles between 458 and 460 Main Street.<sup>50</sup>

By relocating the parsonage, Brick's General Store, located at 460 Main Street, was able to construct a parking lot for its customers. This building was first constructed by Edgar Brick in 1858 and had been the location of several general stores and eateries, including Applegate's Market and the Crosswicks Country Deli.<sup>51</sup> The village's first telephone was installed here in 1909 by Charles W. Brick.<sup>52</sup>

To the west of the building is Brick Alley, which connects the old Brick General Store to the Edgar Brick House at 31 Front Street.<sup>53</sup> This house was constructed in 1858 and was originally a Saltbox before undergoing alterations in c.1900, bringing it to its current form. It was one of the first houses in the village to have both central heating and indoor plumbing, due to Josiah Edgar Brick, son of Edgar Brick, being the founder of the Crosswicks Water Company. <sup>54</sup> Started in 1910, the company installed water pipes and fire hydrants, and operated the water system for Chesterfield Township.<sup>55</sup> At the halfway point of Brick Alley, on the west side, is a garage for the house. This structure was built at the same time as the house and the store, but was originally used as a residence until the early 20th century, when it was converted into a garage.<sup>56</sup>

Many of the houses on Front Street were built in the mid to late 19th century after a fire had destroyed the first homes built there.<sup>57</sup> While not much is known about this fire, in 1822 the Union Fire Company No. 1 was formed in Crosswicks.

The volunteer organization purchased a fire engine and equipment dating to 1744 from Seneca Falls, New York, which was originally used by Philadelphia's Union Fire Company No. 1.<sup>58</sup> The New Jersey Association for the Insurance of Houses and Other Buildings from Loss by Fire was founded in Crosswicks in 1823. This was the first farm mutual created in the United States and was intended to provide protection to farmers.<sup>59</sup> The Crosswicks Public Library, at 483 Main



Street, was originally an engine house for the fire department. It was built in 1922 in memory of Edgar Brick, funded by his son Charles W. Brick and grandson Arthur R. Brick. The Bricks also donated a new fire truck and equipment.<sup>60</sup> When the Chesterfield Fire Company formed in 1940, it was first located at 213 Matthews Lane, which was previously used as a blacksmith shop.<sup>61</sup>

483 Main Street has been the home of the Crosswicks Public Library since 1931 when it moved in to the second floor of the then-firehouse. The Crosswicks Library Company had originally been organized in 1817 and until 1931 was located in different homes throughout the village, dependent on who the librarian was at the time.<sup>62</sup> In 1963, the library temporarily relocated to the second floor of the Crosswicks Community House at 480 Main Street. When the fire department moved into the old public school at 18 New Street in 1964, the library was able to move back to its current location in 1968, this time utilizing the entire building.<sup>63</sup>

Much like the library, the Post Office had also resided in numerous homes around Crosswicks Village, but primarily along Main Street. The Crosswicks Post Office was first established in 1823, with Nathan Satterthwait as the first postmaster.<sup>64</sup> In 1960, the Post Office was located at 471 Main Street, the old Franklin Hall, along with the Holloway Store.<sup>65</sup> The postmistress, Barbara Grosskreuz (Gill), was the youngest woman in the United States appointed to the position at the time. The Post Office moved to its current location at 3 New Street in 1967. This building has served numerous other uses, including a blacksmith shop, barn, and the Charles Ellis Store. There was also a Post Office in Chesterfield Village that operated from 1830 to 1925.<sup>66</sup> The first postmaster there was James Wonderly, and the Post Office building was located near the center of the village.<sup>67</sup>

The aforementioned Franklin Hall at 471 Main Street was the former home of the aptly named Franklin Hall Association. Although the association held its first meeting at the Quaker Friends schoolhouse in 1850, the members' primary goal was to build a public hall as a place to exchange knowledge and opinions on all subjects; this was accomplished in 1851. Since construction, the building has served many uses, including hosting meetings of the International Order of Odd Fellows and held the first services of the Grace Episcopal Church. It has also housed businesses such as a poolroom, a barbershop, the Holloway Store, and the Post Office, before eventually becoming a private residence.<sup>68</sup>

Another community space, the Crosswicks Community House at 480 Main Street, was built on land leased from the Society of Friends in the early 1920s by the Crosswicks Community Association. The mission of the association, founded in 1919, was to represent the organizations and religious groups of the village with the Community House serving as an activity building that serves many local organizations, including Crosswicks Public Library and LifeSpring City Church.<sup>69</sup>

Regarding education, the Society of Friends built the first school in Chesterfield Township in 1784 on the grounds of the Friends Meeting House. The eastern half of the present-day



structure was built using bricks in the same style as the Meeting House, and the western half is a later wooden addition.<sup>70</sup> Education was important to the Friends, and they made efforts to teach children from all backgrounds.<sup>71</sup>

After the Orthodox Friends split and started a separate Quaker Meeting constructed at 530 Ward Avenue, they purchased and moved a building from John Lippincott's property to use as a school in 1833. This building was moved again in 1853 to Alexander Wood's property to use as a wheelwright shop. The Orthodox Meeting House was then moved into the school's former location to be used as a new school building, and a second Meeting House was built in its place.<sup>72</sup> The school eventually closed in 1901.<sup>73</sup> Presently, this building is used as the Chesterfield Township Historical Society Museum.

A Baptist Sunday School was first started in 1839 by Margaret Burtis and Margaret Keen in the Village of Chesterfield.<sup>74</sup> The Baptist Church, at 209 Matthews Lane, was later given land by Congressman Anthony Bullock to build a schoolhouse and parsonage in 1890. This schoolhouse may have been located near the present-day Chesterfield Floral Co., which is housed in the former parsonage building at 307 Bordentown Chesterfield Road.<sup>75</sup>

In 1909, the Crosswicks Public School, a four-room schoolhouse, was built at 18 New Street and educated students through 8th grade. In 1931, the building was expanded to six rooms and the basement was converted for use as a cafeteria and auditorium. The Home and School Association, established in 1920 as the first parent-teacher association, was responsible for obtaining hot lunches, electricity, and a library for the school.<sup>76</sup> The Crosswicks School eventually closed in 1964 and the Union Fire Company No. 1 moved into the building for the next eleven years.<sup>77</sup> Presently, students attend the Chesterfield Township Elementary School at 30 Saddle Way and the Northern Burlington County Regional Schools in neighboring Mansfield Township.





## Endnotes

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