

Sussex County *Then and Now* ...

Agriculture

Centuries ago, when people first settled in northwest New Jersey, agriculture was a necessary way of life. People provided the food and fiber needed from their own farms and communities. Even as recently as 50 years ago, there were more cows in Sussex County than people! Although many changes have occurred to our landscape since that time, agriculture is still an important revenue generator in the county. Dairy farms are fewer but they are being replaced with livestock, including beef, sheep, and goats. Horse operations, offering boarding, breeding, and riding facilities, are widespread. Many farmers have recognized that their proximity to New York City and Philadelphia provides an opportunity for niche markets; hence, many greenhouses, nursery growers and specialty vegetable operations have been established. Add "agritourism" (pick your own vegetables and fruits, cut your own Christmas trees, harvest hay rides, farmers markets, horseback riding, etc.) to the mix, and you have a well-rounded, four-season agricultural base in Sussex County.

Commerce

Early commerce in Sussex County revolved around agriculture. Residents had to be self-sufficient, since they were isolated from New Jersey and New York centers of industry. Sussex County's first mills were operated by farmers. The first blast furnace and forge was built in Andover, soon to be followed by ones in Franklin, Hamburg and Sparta. Although there were several turnpikes linking Sussex with the "outside," the County's isolation truly changed with railroad charters in the mid-1800s. With railroads, farmers were not able to transport their products to more developed locations in a timely manner. And tourists were able to take advantage of Sussex County's scenic beauty for leisurely holidays. This is still true. Today, Sussex County boasts of many service-oriented industries that employ significant numbers. They include Selective Insurance, Newton Memorial Hospital, Mountain Creek/Intrawest, the County of Sussex, Andover Subacute and Rehabilitation Center and Ronetco Supermarkets, Inc.

Manufacturing

Sussex County manufacturing in the latter part of the 18th century centered on charcoal iron plantations in Andover, Hamburg and Franklin. Bar iron, anchors and agricultural implements came out of bloomeries on major rivers and creeks. Stanhope hosted the first anthracite furnace in New Jersey, followed by others in Franklin and Waywayanda. Plants for crushing and separating zinc ores operated in Ogdensburg and Franklin. Lime burnt in kilns was used for soil dressing by farmers. Quarries throughout the county produced slate and building stone. Water power was vital to mills and distilleries processing grain, orchard fruit, wool and hides. The widespread forests yielded charcoal, lumber and tanning bark. After 1854, the railroad revolutionized industrial production. This included many railside creameries bringing milk to a market not previously available due to distance and travel time. In 1873, the Merriam Shoe Factory opened in Newton announcing the arrival of the modern factory system. Factories producing shoes, textiles, and photographic supplies followed and expanded to Stanhope and Sussex. Although many manufacturers closed during the Depression, textiles, garments, plastics and chemicals continued to be produced in Sussex County through the latter part of the 20th Century.

Mining

Northwest New Jersey's mining history extends back to the late 1600s. Being close to industrial centers throughout Sussex County's history has allowed it to utilize the geology that Mother Nature provided. Iron production has occurred in this region for centuries; in fact, England passed a law forbidding its production after the French and Indian War, recognizing its importance in the war effort. This ban was disregarded and Sussex County was an important contributor to the Revolutionary War with its production of iron. Communities including Ogdensburg, Sparta, Franklin and Hardyston had their origins in iron mining. Additionally, one of the oldest iron operations was located in Andover – Andover Forge was begun in 1760. The zinc mine in Franklin was prominent between 1850 and 1880; its ore body was one of the richest in zinc content and contained 30 minerals not found anywhere else in the world. Franklin is known as the Fluorescent Capital of the World.

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