

A SELF GUIDED TOUR OF **The Deserted Village of Feltville/Glenside Park**



Over the course of three centuries, this area has been a farming community, a quasi-utopian mill town, a deserted village, and a summer resort. This brief guide will help you understand the history of the village, its archaeological remains, and other features of the site.

The walking tour described is about one mile long, starting and finishing in the parking lot just off of Glenside Avenue. Some of the houses in this Village are inhabited; others have very weak porches. Therefore, you are asked to not walk up onto the porch of *any* building except the restored Church/Store Building.

**To upload this self-guided tour to your phone
scan this QR Code:**

**For questions or further information
about the Deserted Village: dv@ucnj.org**





Hold your next...
...Birthday Party
...Baby Shower
...Bridal Shower
...Wedding
...Awards Dinner
...Conference
...Staff Retreat
at
MASKER'S BARN

Located in the Deserted Village of Feltville, **Masker's Barn** is perfect for private parties and meetings.

Nestled in Union County's 2,142-acre Watchung Reservation, **Masker's Barn** provides a quiet, rustic setting to make any event a memorable one.



For information on rental fees and available dates, go to www/uenj.org/dv, call 908-654-9805 or e-mail parkrequest@uenj.org.

For the safety of your pet and the enjoyment of this area by other park users, you are asked to adhere to the County ordinance that dogs be restrained by a leash.

Walk down Cataract Hollow Road to the first bridle trail crossing and turn left on that trail. Turn right onto the first hiking trail and follow it to the Village cemetery.

The first settler of this area was Peter Willcocks, an Englishman who moved to this area around 1736 from Long Island. Peter built a dam across the Blue Brook to harness the brook's water to power a saw mill which he constructed. Clearing the trees from the surrounding forest, Willcocks produced lumber which was purchased by settlers developing farms in the surrounding frontier countryside. In the fields created by the removal of trees, the Willcocks family farmed the land for the next century, attracting other settlers, such as the Badgley and Raddin families.

Of the five headstones seen in our cemetery today, only one is original. The others were placed here in the 1960's to replace stones that are missing. Two of the headstones are for the same person, John Willcocks. None of the stones stand over the actual grave of the person shown. It is believed that about two dozen people were buried in the Willcocks family plot.

At the far left is a headstone commemorating Phebe Badgley Willcocks. Phebe Badgley met and married Peter Willcocks while both were still living in Long Island. When she and Peter moved here to the second Watchung Mountain, her brothers and sisters came with them and settled in an area on the First Watchung Mountain which today is the Scout Camping Area behind the Trailside Nature & Science Center on the other side of the park.

The original stone near the right, and the newer stone to the right of it, commemorate John Willcocks, one of five children of Phebe and Peter. The old stone bears a fairly typical Puritan-influenced design called the Death's Head by archaeologists. This style originated in New England and is typical of 17th and 18th century tombstones throughout the Northeast.

Although the dates on the stones would seem to indicate that Phebe and her son died on the same day, we currently believe that Phebe died in June of 1776, but her death was not recorded until after her son's death. John served in the New Jersey militia and is thought to have been mortally wounded during the retreat of General Washington's army from Fort Lee.

Return along the same path to Cataract Hollow Road. Turn left and walk down the road to the first house (House #1).

David Felt ran a stationery business in New York City, with a store in Manhattan and a factory in Brooklyn. In 1844, he began buying up property here from Peter Willcocks' descendants in order to establish another factory. Within two years, from 1845 to 1847, Felt built a mill down along the Blue Brook, two dams to supply water power for that mill, and an entire town here on the bluff to house all of the people who would work in that mill. That town became known as Feltsville.

Like many of his contemporaries in the Unitarian church, Felt approached life with a desire to better the lot of his employees and peers, regardless of their station in life. In a time of exploitative labor practices, Feltsville provided a nice alternative to urban industrial cities, like Paterson, NJ, and Lowell, Mass. Felt's workers had yards to grow produce, relatively spacious accommodations, a post office and a school for their children. Some of these structures are now only visible as archaeological remains.

The building you see in front of you was built to serve as the office for Felt's business. As originally constructed, this building was only two-thirds the size that it is now. It was expanded late in the 1800's, after its use changed from commercial to residential. As with all of the buildings here in Feltsville, you need to use your imagination to visualize the buildings as they were first built in 1845, without the large porches and roof dormers that you see now.

Continue walking down Cataract Hollow Road to the next building (Building #2—the Church/Store).

This building was built by David Felt to serve as the general store for his mill town. Six hundred acres of fields around this site were being farmed, with the crops that were harvested being sold to the village residents through this store. The mill workers were presumably also able to buy meat from livestock that Felt raised, as well as the fruits of his apple and peach orchards. However, it is interesting to note that bone remains from the meals of some of Felt's workers which were recovered from a privy excavated in 1999 indicate that meat was more often obtained through local hunting and fishing, and contemporary descriptions of the village discuss gardens surrounding each of the workers' houses. By 1851, a Post Office was established in this building, as well.

David Felt ruled Feltville with a beneficent but stern hand, and earned for himself the paternalistic nickname "King David". Village residents were required to attend religious services each week in a church on the second floor of this building, but were allowed to worship and practice religion in accordance with their own beliefs. Felt provided a priest, minister, or rabbi each week to conduct the services, and eventually hired a non-denominational minister to remain in full-time residence. .

Children were taught in a one-room schoolhouse which stood in the area that is now the parking lot at the top of Cataract Hollow Road. It is important to realize that the average 12 year old in a working class family during Felt's time was immediately recruited into domestic or factory labor. Felt's free school and provision of a liberal house of worship show that he was concerned with the social welfare of his employees' families to an unusual degree.

Interestingly, the steeple or belfry which we see today did not yet exist during any of the time that this building was being used as a church. This building was the subject of the Village's first full-scale restoration project, completed in 1998.

Continue your walk down Cataract Hollow Road. Stop at the split-rail fence, just as the road begins to curve to the right.

In the summer of 2004, archaeologists from Montclair State University's Center for Archaeological Studies uncovered the foundation of

David Felt's residence. Formerly described as a 'mansion,' Felt's humble abode is, in fact, no larger than any of the workers' houses in the village.

Walk about a hundred yards and stop at the next intersection.

The road to your left (south) is called the Lower Road, and the area including the four standing buildings is *The Commons*. This was the main block of housing for Felt's managers, specialists and some of his mill workers. In a sense, it is the middle class section of the village. In addition to the four houses which you see now, there were four others which have since been torn down or burned (for a total of three in the front row and five along the back road).

All of the cottages were connected by gravel-lined walkways running between the back and front porches. Artifacts recovered from these walkways indicate that they were created and used in the late 19th century, during the site's resort phase, while artifacts recovered below them are from Felt's time. From the artifacts, archaeologists have learned that people living in the eastern portion of the village were generally better able to afford fashionable housewares such as porcelain and whiteware, than those located further west.

All of the houses in Feltville, regardless of size, were partitioned down the center, much as a duplex house is today. Each side had its own entrance and staircase. Fireplaces on the ground floor of all of the houses, and in the basements of the larger houses, were back-to-back against a central chimney. With about 175 residents living in Feltville by 1850, and only 11 total buildings in which to house them, there were probably four families living in each of these larger houses and two families in each of the three smaller houses that you will see further down the road.

Feltville thrived for fifteen years under the patriarchy of David Felt. In 1860, he was sixty-seven years old. In August of that year, he sold Feltville to Amasa Foster and returned to New York City. Why Felt decided to sell his business and property in New Jersey at that time is not entirely clear, though we speculate that his decision was tied to the failing health of his brother, Willard, who had been managing the affairs in New York. In any case, as he left Feltville, David

Felt is reported to have predicted, "Well, King David is dead, and the Village will go to hell." Over the next two decades, ownership of the property changed hands six times. Several business ventures were initiated on the property, including the manufacture of sarsaparilla, cigars, and silk at various times. However, all were unsuccessful, and for a while the former mill town may have been abandoned. During this time it became known as the Deserted Village.

In 1882, Feltville was purchased at public auction by Warren Ackerman, a prominent land holder, for only \$11,450, a fraction of its former worth. Ackerman converted Feltville into a summer resort and renamed it Glenside Park. All of the former workers' dwellings were renovated. Dormers were added to the roofs of the larger houses to make the second story space more liveable. Wide porches with rustic, Adirondack-style cedar posts and railings were constructed, giving each building its own unique appearance for the first time.

Proceed further along Cataract Hollow Road to the dip in the road, where a bridle trail and stone wall turn off to the left. Stop here to read the next section, or go down the bridle trail to see the Blue Brook and the site of the former mill at the bottom of this hill and then return to this point.

At the base of this hill was the 3 ½ story mill that had been the center of life in Feltville. Water routed from a dam upstream flowed through a raceway and over a waterwheel on the side of the mill. The turning of the wheel generated twelve horsepower and was used to operate presses, polishers, and book binding machines. Felt's operation produced all types of business stationery, including blank journals and ledger books. Finished products were transported to the store in New York by Conestoga wagon.

During the resort period, Ackerman also was involved in raising fancy cattle. He used Felt's vacant mill as a stable for his cattle, and built this road as a quick way to get his cattle up to the former farm fields for grazing. The abandoned mill was torn down in 1930 after it was deemed to have become a safety hazard.

Continue along Cataract Hollow Road, stopping in front of the third small cottage (#12)

As with the other houses we have seen, these three small cottages were divided down the middle. Though smaller, the 1850 federal census suggests that these cottages housed from 6 to 12 people each. House #12 gives us the best glimpse of a true mill worker's house, with both of the original entry doors still intact. The back yards of these cottages revealed many interesting archaeological features, including a two-seat privy, a thick spread of scattered artifacts, walkways corresponding with those of the Commons area described above, and a well, the top of which can still be seen between the two westernmost cottages.

During the conversion from mill town to summer resort, the interior partitions were opened up to make these single-family dwellings. A water supply and a steam laundry were constructed at a spring-fed pond further out along this road. Electric lights were installed along the resort streets. With indoor plumbing and electricity, residents of the village no longer needed oil lamps and chamber pots, so such materials were taken into the back-yards and dumped into the no-longer used privy. The privy, excavated by archaeologists in 1999, has a vault that is constructed of loosely laid basalt without mortar. It was very poorly maintained, since one of its walls partly collapsed in the 19th century and was never repaired, and perhaps never cleaned, since the artifacts within it represented every time period of the village's occupation. .

Continue along Cataract Hollow Road a short distance to its end at Masker's Barn.

Many of the summer resort visitors were from New York, Orange, and Newark. A barn was built here in 1882 to house horses and carriages which would be used to transport businessmen to the train station at Murray Hill, and thence by train to their jobs in Manhattan, while their families stayed behind to enjoy resort life.

While at Glenside Park, visitors could participate in many activities, including golf, tennis, croquet, baseball, fishing, and horseback riding. Their guests could get meals at an inn established in one of the houses. Dances were held here in the barn.

Glenside Park flourished until 1916, when the hamlet began losing its appeal. The advent of the automobile permitted former patrons to travel further away from their homes, especially to the developing Jersey Shore area. For a while, the village became almost deserted again.

In the 1920's, the property was purchased by the newly-formed Union County Park Commission, and incorporated into the Watchung Reservation. The Park Commission began to rent out the houses, especially during the Great Depression, and had full occupancy until the 1960's. An Outdoor Education Center operated here and used several of the houses as classrooms until it closed in 1984.

This site was listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places in 1980. Stabilization work was performed on all of the buildings in 1992 using a New Jersey Historic Trust grant. Another Trust grant and funding from the Union County Open Space, Recreation and Historic Preservation Trust Fund enabled the restoration and rehabilitation of Masker's Barn, completed in 2011, for use as a public assembly building and school lecture hall.

Masker's Barn is home to Union County's own Operation Archeology, a program in which fifth-grade students learn the principles and practices of archaeology, both in their classroom and during three visits to this site.

Return to the parking lot by walking back up Cataract Hollow Road.

Thank you for visiting the Deserted Village of Feltville/Glenside Park. Please come again!!!

If you would like to contribute to further restoration efforts and programming at The Deserted Village, please consider making a donation to:

*County of Union - Deserted Village Trust Fund
c/o Union County Dept. of Parks & Recreation
10 Elizabethtown Plaza, Elizabeth, NJ 07202*

Bringing the Village Back to Life...

The Union County Department of Parks and Recreation hopes you are enjoying your stroll through the Deserted Village. While there is still much work to be done, what you see could not have been accomplished without the support of the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders; the New Jersey Historic Trust; the Union County Open Space, Recreation & Historic Trust Fund; and other contributors.

Nearly \$4.7 million has gone towards building infrastructure and stabilizing and renovating the historic buildings. Masker's Barn and the Church/Store are the cornerstones of the Deserted Village restoration project. Gas, water, sewer and electrical lines are now in place to enable preservation of additional buildings and use of them by the general public.

The work is far from done, as we hope that one day visitors will be able to walk Cataract Hollow Road and get a true sense of life in David Felt's mill town or the Glenside Park resort. To learn more about the Village's history, check out: ucnj.org/dv

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Thank you...

The County of Union thanks the volunteer carpenters who came to the rescue when one of the homes in the Village required emergency repairs.

A roof needed to be secured as quickly as possible to prevent damaging the interior of a home that contains murals by Roberto de la Selva, a student of Mexican artist Diego Rivera.

A crew from the NJ Carpenters Apprentice Training and Educational Fund erected scaffolding and secured the roof. They expect to return this spring to continue their repair work.



Programs at the Deserted Village


This unique historic resource is located within the 2,142-acre Watchung Reservation, the largest of 36 parks in the Union County Park System. This site is listed on both the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The Deserted Village is one of 27 historic sites across Union County open to the general public on the 3rd weekend in October as part of the **Four Centuries in a Weekend** program. Visitors can take a guided tour, view exhibits in the restored Church/Store, ride a haywagon, and take part in other activities, free of charge.

Haunted Hayrides take place at the Deserted Village the weekend before Halloween and offer a mix of historical narrative, costumed characters and special effects. Tickets go on sale mid-September.

Fifth-grade students can learn the principles and practices of archaeology in the **Operation Archeology** program. Students take a site tour and participate in an excavation.

You can learn more about all County programs at the Union County website - www.ucnj.org.



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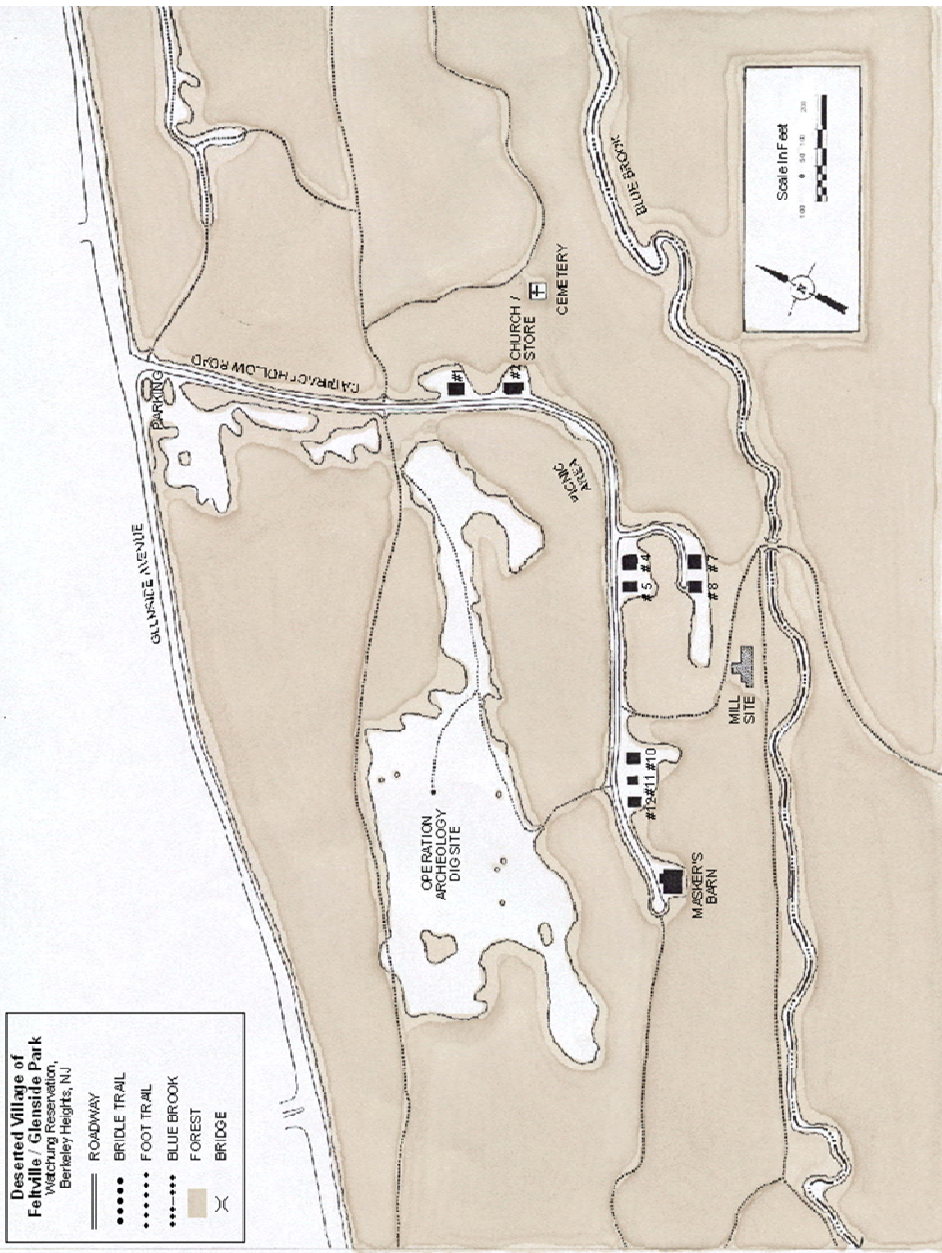
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**Deserted Village of
Feltville / Glenside Park**
Watchung Reservation,
Bertlesy Heights, NJ

- ROADWAY
- BRIDLE TRAIL
- FOOT TRAIL
- BLUE BROOK
- FOREST
- BRIDGE



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