

Welcome to the Deserted Village of Feltville/Glenside Park

This site is listed on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places due to its development in 1845 as Feltville, a self-sufficient manufacturing town. While its most significant history relates to Feltville, the site has had multiple uses, beginning in the early 18th century as Peter's Hill, an outlying Elizabethtown farmstead, to its present use as a historic site within the Union County Park System.

1730s

Colonial Settlement of Peter's Hill

Peter and Sarah Willcocks and members of the Badgley family settle a remote hillside in the Watchung Mountains. Though the family built mills on the Blue Brook, a 1770s gravestone is the only remaining visible evidence of the Willcocks occupation.

1845

From Farmstead to Company Town

David Felt, the prominent owner of stationery stores in New York and New Orleans, creates Feltville on the Willcocks site. By 1850, about 175 residents live in the community, manufacturing stationery products at a factory on the Blue Brook and tending to the daily operations of the village. Nine extant buildings and numerous archaeological sites date from the Feltville period.

1860

A "Radical Abolitionist" Makes Feltville His Farm

Dr. S. P. Townsend, the New York manufacturer of sarsaparilla, a patent medicine, buys the site primarily for real estate speculation. Townsend is a vocal, pro-Union activist against the area's pro-South New Jersey secessionists during the Civil War.

1870s

An Abandoned Village

All activities cease at the former community, and the site becomes known as the Deserted Village, often attracting tourists and potential residents, including Thomas Moran, a famous American landscape painter.

1882

Glenside Park, a Victorian Summer Resort

Warren Ackerman purchases the site at an auction, and transforms the former Feltville into a summer resort. An extant carriage house built by Ackerman, a tennis court, and the rustic porches added to the Feltville buildings all date from the Glenside Park period. Glenside Park closes in 1916.

1920s

An Artist Leaves a Lasting Impression

E. J. Grassmann, a Union County real estate investor, purchases a portion of the site in 1919. In the 1920s he hires Roberto de la Sella, a Nicaraguan-Mexican artist, to decorate the interior walls of one cottage with Mexican murals.

Late 1920s

A Park System for All

The newly formed Union County Park Commission, envisioning the future need for public parks and open spaces, hires the renowned Olmsted Brothers firm of Boston to design a park system, and purchases extensive land, including the former Feltville, to create the Watchung Reservation. During the Great Depression, the Commission rents out the cottages, which become known as Glenside Village.

1970s

Archaeologists Investigate the Site

Archaeological studies undertaken as part of pre-construction planning for U.S. Interstate 78, as well as the celebration of the nation's Bicentennial, arouse interest in the history of Feltville.

1980

Site's History Recognized Nationally

Due to the significant history of Feltville, the Feltville Historic District is listed on both the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places.



Though there are many inaccuracies in this mid-20th century rendering of Feltville, its artist captured the charm of the pre-Civil War village. Interpretive panels placed throughout the site should help visitors envision the community during several periods of occupation. Together, the art and the remains of the village will continue to evoke an enchanting, special place.

Your Visit: *A History to be Shared*

As the site's buildings gradually undergo restoration and rehabilitation, ongoing archaeological and documentary research will continue to reveal new information about the site. To make your visit more meaningful, interpretive signage is located throughout the village, and additional information is available at the Visitor Center in the former Feltville Church/Store.



We hope you enjoy your visit and return often.

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UNION COUNTY

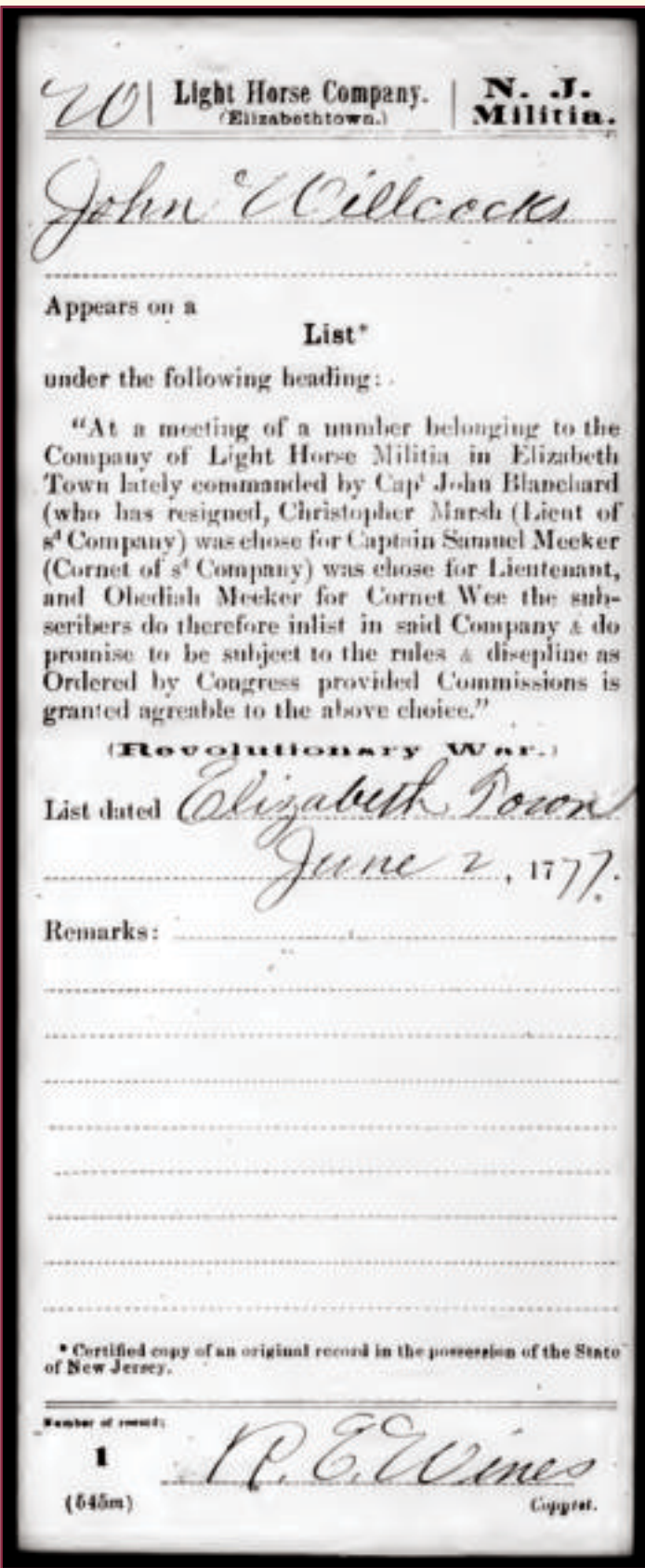
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PETER’S HILL, A COLONIAL SETTLEMENT

More Than One Hundred Years Before Feltville

Sometime in the early 18th century, more than a century before David Felt established Feltville, Peter Willcocks, his wife Phebe Badgley Willcocks and members of their families moved from Long Island to the Watchung Mountains, an outlying section of the Elizabethtown tract. The Watchungs were named by the native Delaware Indians, who called them *Wach Unks*, or “high hills.” The Willcocks family settled near the Blue Brook, also known as the east branch of the Green Brook, on a land grant of more than four hundred acres, and their homestead became known locally as Peter’s Hill.

Farmstead, Mills and a Copper Mine



Peter Willcocks farmed and established mills on the Blue Brook, creating a millpond to supply his mills with power. These mills served scattered farmsteads in the area, as well as the Willcocks family. The property also included a small copper mine, which Peter may have worked for a time. While historical documentation is scant, members of both families served in the American Revolution. Subsequent generations remained in the area.

The Willcocks name was widespread, though there were variations in the name’s spelling: Wilcox, Willcox, Willcocks, Willcoxie.

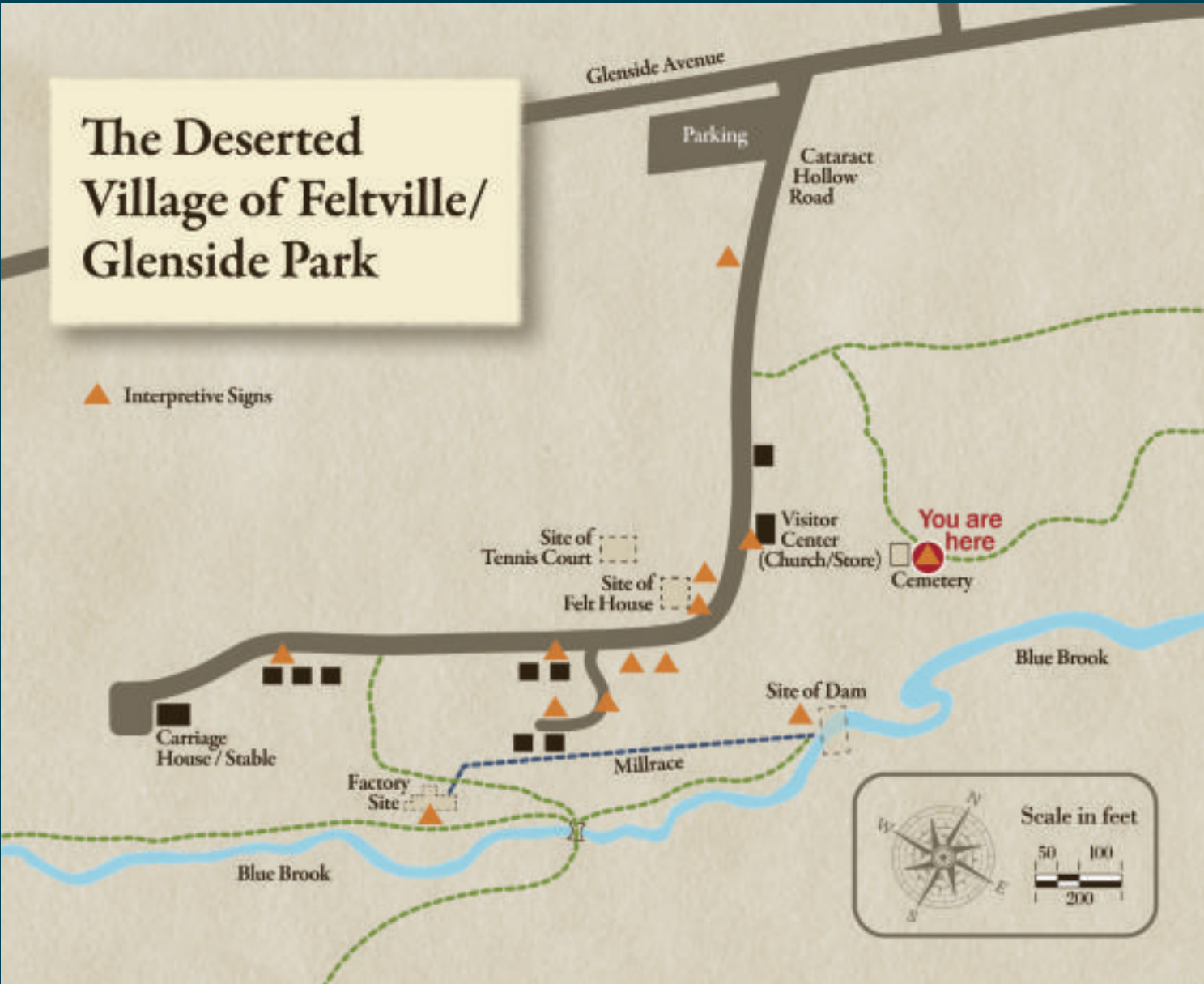
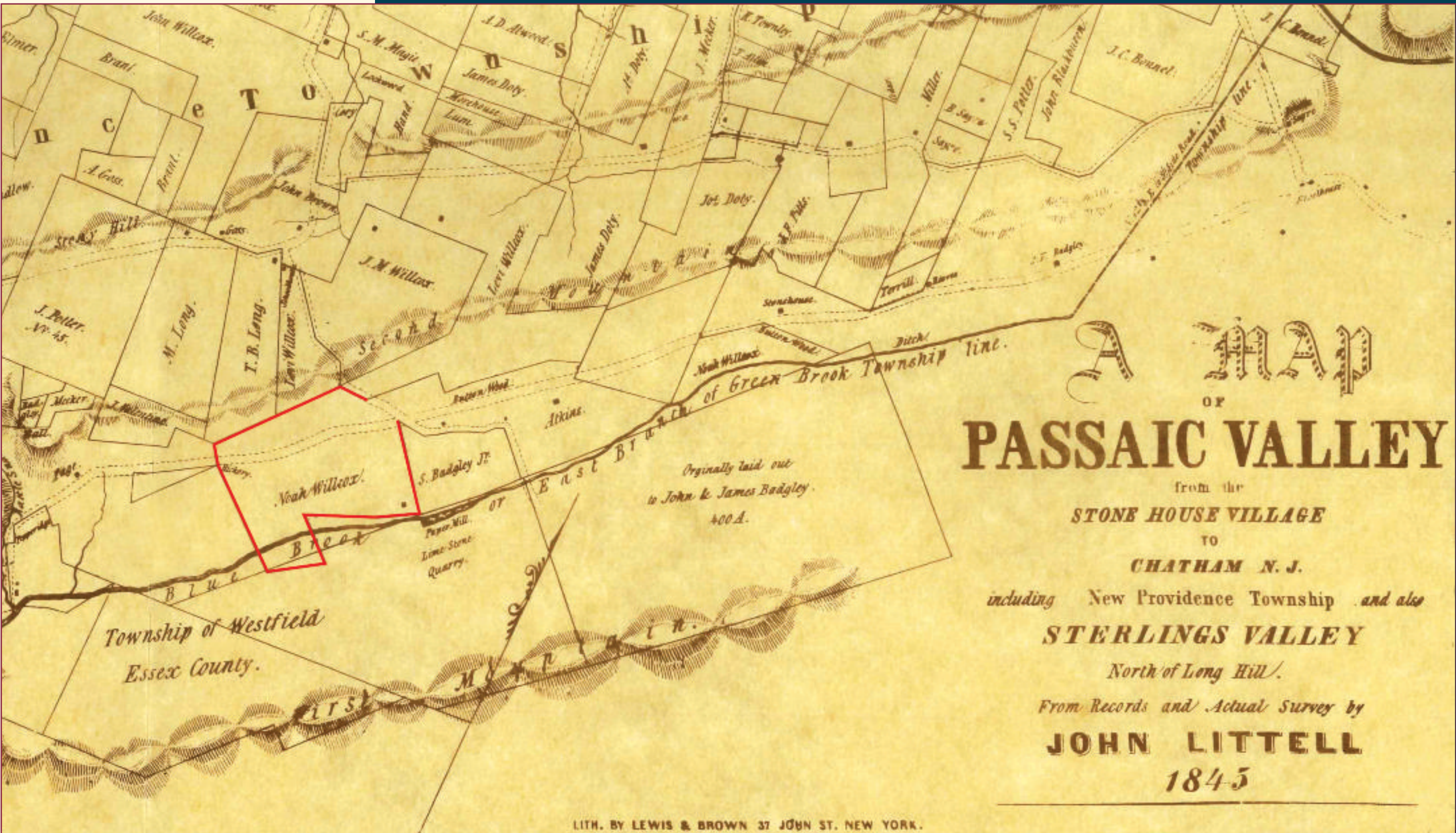
In the 1770s there were two John Willcocks, thought to be father and son. Though one did fight in the American Revolution, the other died in 1776, and his death was unrelated to the war.

Portion of 1845 John Littell *Map of the Passaic Valley* showing the Noah Willcox property, related Willcocks and Badgley holdings and the early road to New Providence, Summit and Springfield.



The Willcocks Family Cemetery

By the mid-20th century the 1776 John Willcocks gravestone was the only original stone left standing in the cemetery. Partially dislodged by a tree, the stone was removed for safekeeping. When it was reinstalled at the site, there was some question as to the precise location of the cemetery which, in addition to the graves of Willcocks and Badgley family members, included the graves of two teenage Irish girls, workers in Felt’s factory who drowned in the millpond in 1858. Today, the John Willcocks gravestone and a few 18th century archaeological sites comprise the only physical evidence of the Willcocks occupation of the property. In addition to the original Willcocks stone, a few commemorative Willcocks and Badgley stones have been placed in the cemetery. The newer John Willcocks stone was supplied by the federal government. The Department of Veterans Affairs will issue a free gravestone for any American veteran’s grave, regardless of where in the world the veteran is buried.



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THREE SPECIAL FELTVILLE BUILDINGS

The Feltville School

David Felt provided community services for the residents of Feltville. He constructed a school for village children near the entrance to the village, now a parking area. In 1850 Sarah Felt Toby, age 19, taught about fifteen Feltville children in the Feltville school.

Circa 1900 photograph of the Feltville school. The building's classical corner pilasters may have been Felt's nod to the Greek Revival style of architecture popular in the 1840s when Felt developed the village. The rustic Adirondack style porch was added in the 1880s during the Glenside Park era.



The Church/Store

The large building you now face was built to serve several functions. Its first floor housed a general store, the Feltville post office and possibly a storeroom, while the second floor served as a chapel for religious worship. Village residents shopped at the store and picked up or posted their mail at its mail counter. Clergymen of various Protestant denominations preached at the church. One, the Reverend Austin Craig, resided in Feltville from time to time, and sometimes taught at the school.

Space in the church/store may have served additional functions. Its large basement with windows and a rear entrance could have been used for a variety of purposes, perhaps even as living quarters. The large porch and the rustic two-story tower were added in the 1880s; however, Feltville residents most likely gathered in the store and on the original front steps to socialize and exchange news.

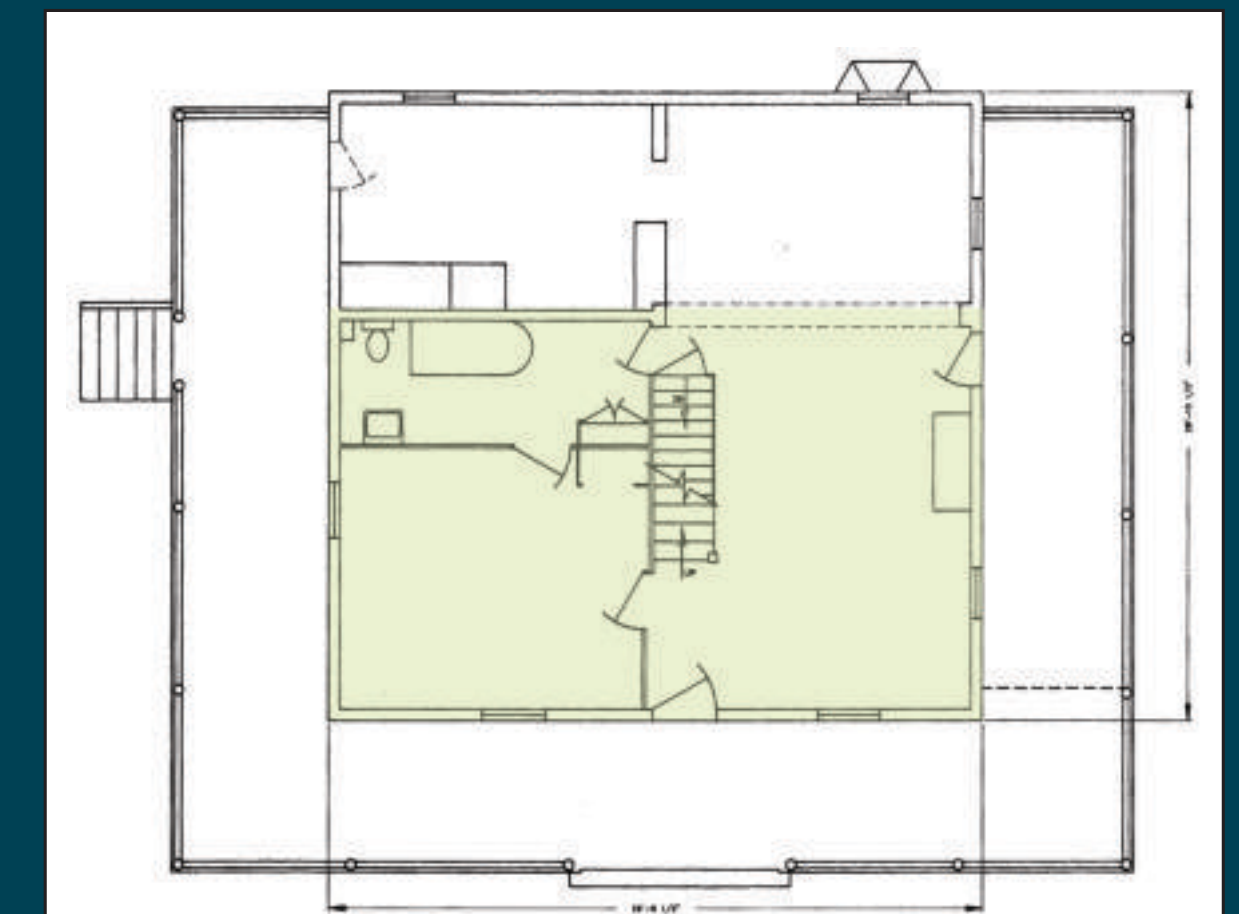


Rendering of the Feltville Church/Store façade showing how it may have looked in 1845. While today the front and side elevations represent the Glenside Park era, the rear elevation looks almost the same as it did in 1845.

The Mystery Cottage

The school, the church/store, Felt's mansion, workers' housing and the factory are mentioned in most period accounts of Feltville, and are shown on mid-19th century maps. Curiously, the house that stands to the north of the church/store appears on no contemporary map, and its use during the Feltville period is unknown. At that time the house had no porches and was much smaller. In the late 19th century a large rear addition was constructed, and the roof was raised to create a more habitable second floor.

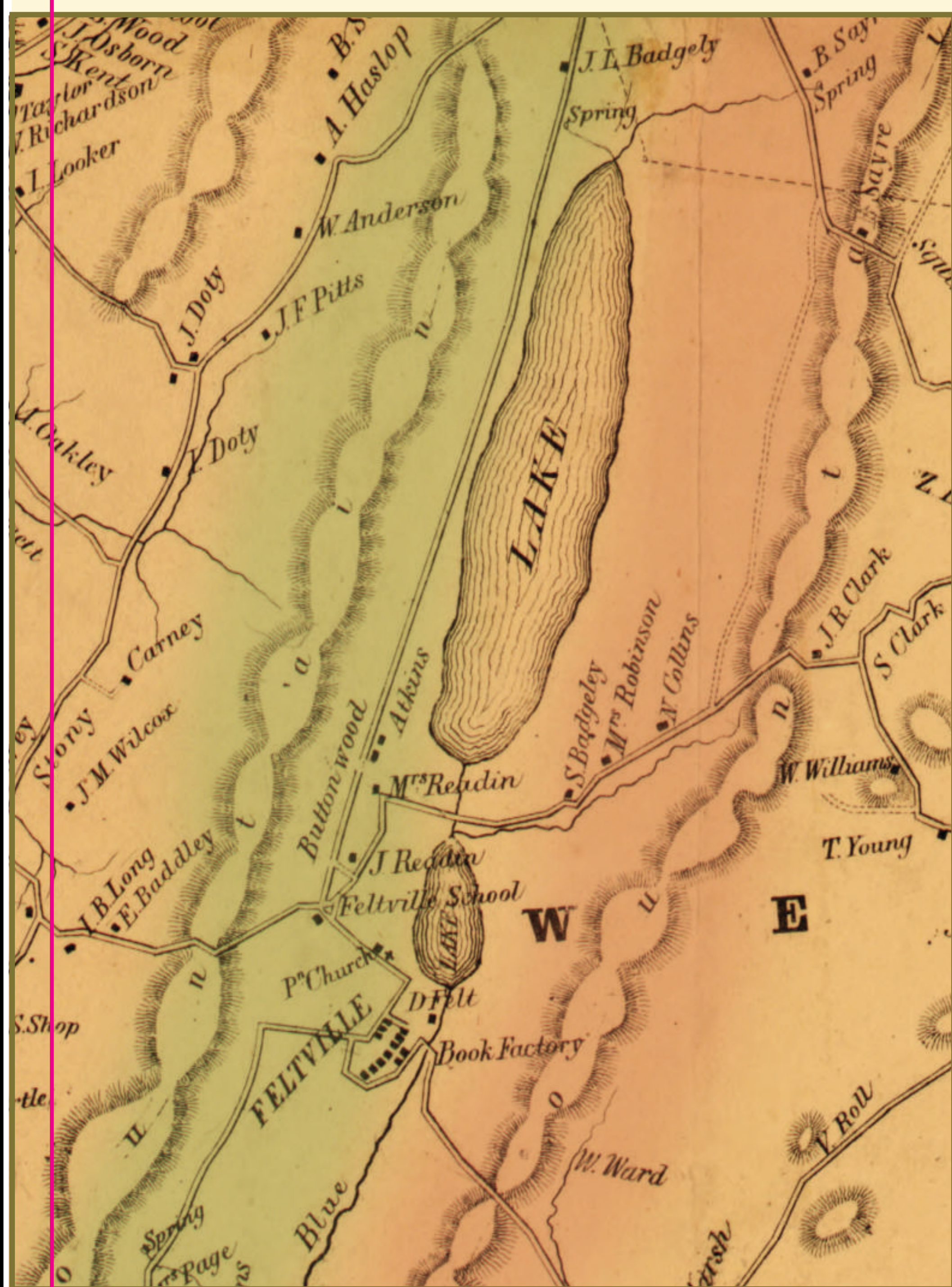
The large sill plate that supports the house is hand-hewn and may have been salvaged from an earlier building constructed by the Willcocks family, for it has characteristics of colonial construction. Unlike other Feltville houses, this house has always had just one entrance, though it does exhibit the small, knee-high windows placed just below the front roofline of other Feltville houses.



Floor plan of house as it exists today. The shaded area represents the circa 1845 footprint; however, the bathroom fixtures and partitions are a later improvement.

Some have suggested that the house was actually a Willcocks building that was moved and placed on a Feltville-era foundation. Others surmise that its original function was as the construction manager's office and residence during the 1845 development of Feltville. Additional documentary and archaeological research may add to the history of this house.

FELTVILLE: A COMPANY TOWN, 1845–1860



Until Union County was created in 1857, Feltville was in Essex County. This portion of the 1850 Belding “Map of Essex County,” shows the major buildings of Feltville, including the school, the church/store, Felt’s mansion, workers’ houses and the factory.

Summit, N.J., August 19, 1882 . . . Feltville was a thriving factory and farming village of two hundred inhabitants as of 1852, with a busy mill, a bustling country store, one room school, and a well attended church. . . . The land was laid out in apple and peach orchards, meadows, groves and pastures; two broad streets. met at right angles on the point overhanging the pond; two rows of trim double houses were built on the bluff that extended along the brook and rose above the mill to a height of seventy feet . . . One looked down upon the pond, where light rowboats floated among the reflections of green trees and blue sky in the water. . . . Down the nearly perpendicular bluff ran zig-zag paths formed of stone steps which led from the tenements across the mill-race on little plank bridges to the mill.

Developed in 1845 on land purchased from the Willcocks family, Feltville was a paternalistic company town. Self-contained industrial communities like Feltville, consisting of a water-powered mill, the mill-owner’s mansion, housing for workers, a church, a company store and auxiliary buildings, first appeared in New England in the early 19th century. Though many of Feltville’s buildings have been lost over time, the church/store, eight houses and considerable archaeological features and sites survive in surroundings relatively unchanged.

A Wholesome Environment

Although developed for manufacturing, there is evidence that Felt, a philanthropic and religious man, desired to create a community that would provide a wholesome environment for factory workers, as life in the city could be harsh for the poor. The self-sufficient community included orchards and the requisite barns and outbuildings for farming and animal husbandry. Felt established rules, such as a curfew, for the welfare of the community. He lived with his wife and domestic help in a two-story stone and frame house or “mansion,” commuting to New York regularly for business purposes. Social purposes aside, Feltville was developed to produce business ledgers, pamphlets and other stationery products for Felt’s New York and New Orleans stores.

“a thriving factory and farming village”

June 27, 1850, *Plainfield Gazette*

FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION AT FELTVILLE

THE inhabitants of Feltville design to meet for the celebration of our National Independence on the next approaching anniversary. The meeting will be held in the grove adjoining the Village or (in case the weather should be unfavorable) in the Chapel. The services will commence at 2 o’clock P. M. The following order of exercises has been appointed for the occasion.

1. Ode
2. Salutatory address by Rev. Austin Craig
3. Ode
4. Reading the Declaration of Independence
5. Ode
6. Oration by Rev. Wm. Whittaker of Plainfield

After these exercises there will be a COLLATION. Tickets to the Collation 25 cents. A tent will be erected near the Village where REFRESHMENTS may be procured during the day. Music will be performed at intervals by a BRASS BAND.

The whole to be concluded with a display of FIRE WORKS in the Evening.

The Citizens of neighboring Villages and vicinity are respectfully invited to attend the Celebration.

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE AND UNION FOREVER.



1850, 30-star U.S. flag

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DAVID FELT

Letter to David Felt

Washington, Nov. 8th, 1833

Sir,---I tender you my sincere thanks for the honor you have conferred me by the present which accompanied your note of the 5th inst. The specimen of stationery, which it describes as having obtained the first premium [at] the late Fair of the American Institute, has only to be seen to be pronounced worthy of this honorable distinction, and to entitle its manufacturer to the thanks of all those who take a proper interest in the success of American skill and labour.

I am, very respectfully

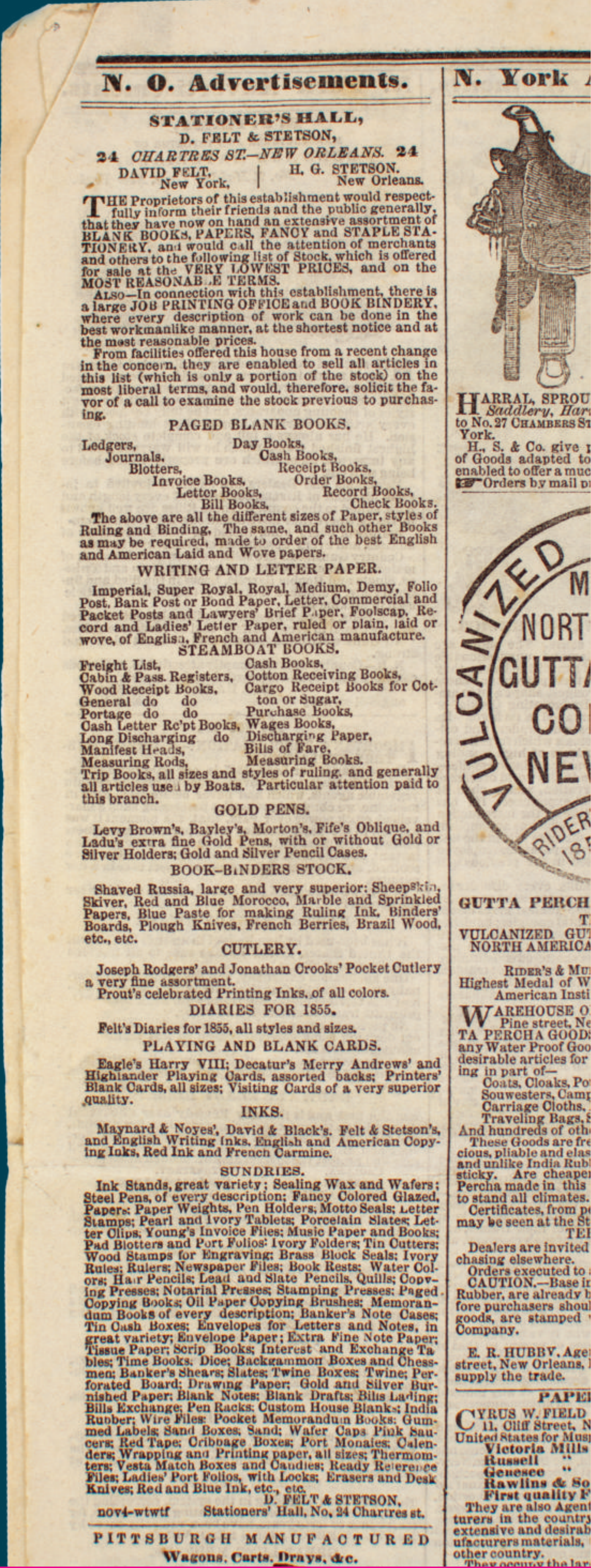
Your obedient servant,

ANDREW JACKSON



Andrew Jackson,
President of the United States,
1829-1837

David Felt, born in Milton Massachusetts in 1793, established a stationery business in Boston in 1815. In the 1820s, with his wife Sarah Green, Felt moved to New York, which was fast becoming the leading city for the stationery industry. During his many years in the trade, letters and news articles were to reveal much about Felt’s goals, work ethic and his concern for those less fortunate.



Excerpts of a Letter from Felt to the Rev. Austin Craig, c. 1850s

Three weeks ago yesterday I went to the city as usual . . . and when I had got through with the business, I retired to the hotel and sent for my physician and you can judge of my confusion when he informed me that it was a decided case of the varioloid [mild case of smallpox]. Now think of my situation as the resident of a hotel with 300 persons in it . . . and if it was known, half would leave the house with fright and the keeper of the house thought I could very well be sent home but to that I could not assent, for the first and best reason that in the city I had the best of medical advice . . . Again I thought it might spread in the village and if I died or got well, no one need take it of me . . . Mrs. Felt, not having been vaccinated, when a child, the doctor said she must not on any condition come to the city . . . Doctor Craig from Plainfield was sent for to vaccinate her and others in the village.

“What he did was done with a vim that astonished everybody . . .”

. . . he [David Felt] was a man of somewhat remarkable attainments, an[sic] adept at his trade; in some things as shrewd as a modern curbstone broker, but in others as simple as a child. . . . He had one store in Pearl street, another in Wall street, a factory in Williamsburg [Brooklyn] and a branch house in New Orleans. . . . He acquired considerable real estate and was reputed to be wealthy. What he did was done with a vim that astonished everybody . . . He purchased a large tract of land about 3 miles from Scotch Plains and there [created Feltville].

Feltville’s praises were sung everywhere. . . . The workmen regarded David Felt as their benefactor; the children were taught to reverence him, while the village dominie at all times implored the blessings of heaven upon David Felt of Feltville. . . .

Excerpt from *The American Stationer*, January 3, 1889: “Reminiscences of the Stationery Trade”

Concern for the Plight of Unfortunate Women in the City

NEW YORK, Feb.25 [circa 1860s]

To Miss Emma Hardinge

The undersigned have heard with great pleasure, of a plan proposed by you for the relief of outcast women. That this plan may be made known to our fellow citizens, and thus public attention called to the solution of this distressing social problem, we respectfully request you to deliver a public address on this subject at your earliest convenience. It seems entirely fitting that in an effort to reclaim the sisters of shame and sorrow, a large minded and warm hearted woman should take the initiative.

Peter Cooper, George Opdyke, David Felt et al

The presentation was held at the Cooper Institute. Both David Felt and Peter Cooper, staunch supporters of efforts to help the disadvantaged, were active in the Unitarian Church. Other signers included James Renwick, architect of St. Patrick’s Cathedral; Horace Greeley, founder of the *New York Tribune*; and William Cullen Bryant, poet and editor of the *New York Evening Post*.



Peter Cooper,
an industrialist and
philanthropist,
founded the Cooper
Institute (now Cooper
Union), a college which
until 2014 provided a free
education for its students.



George Opdyke,
Mayor of
New York City,
1862–1863



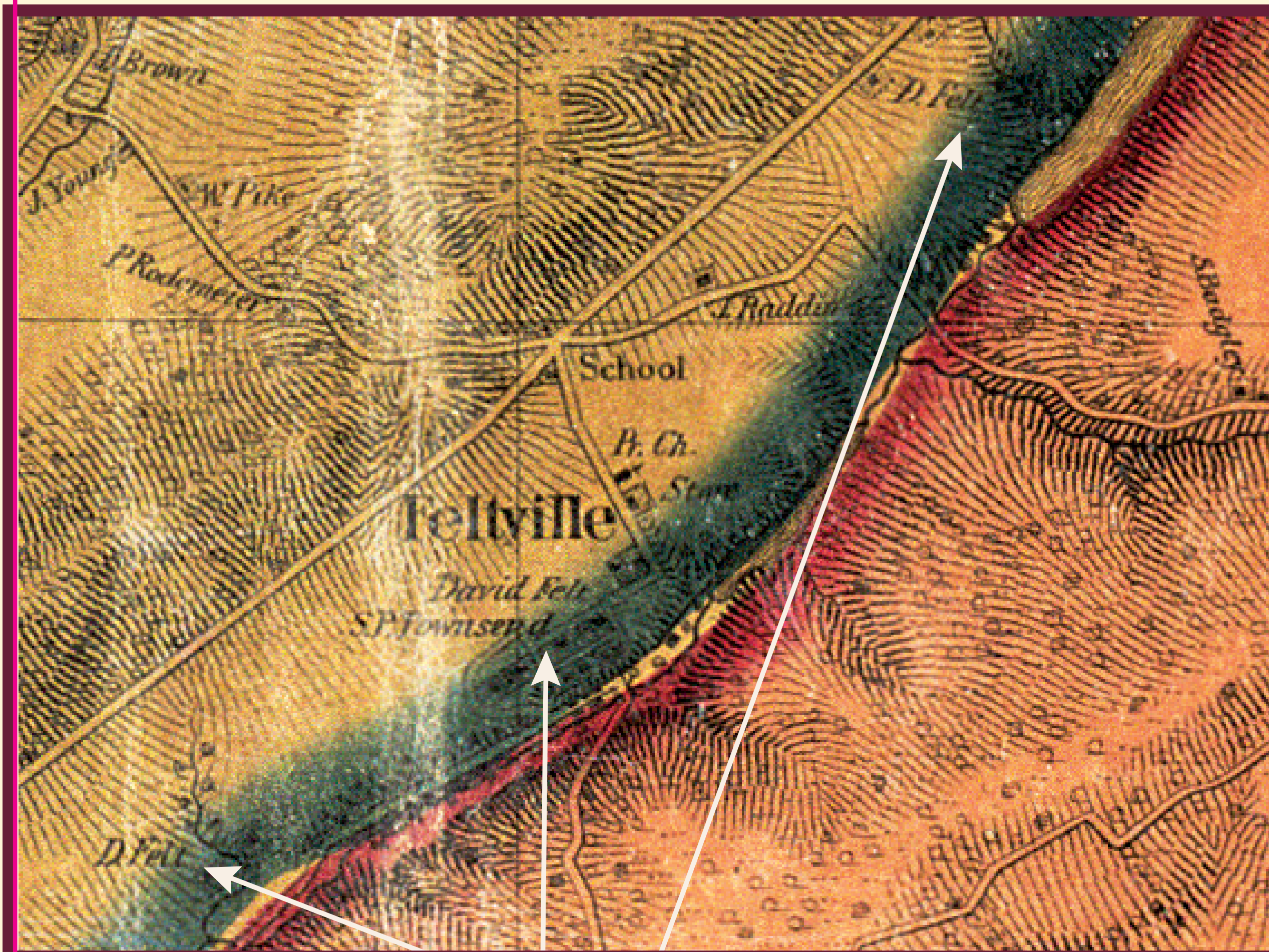
There are no
known pictures
of David Felt.



FELTVILLE, 1845–1860

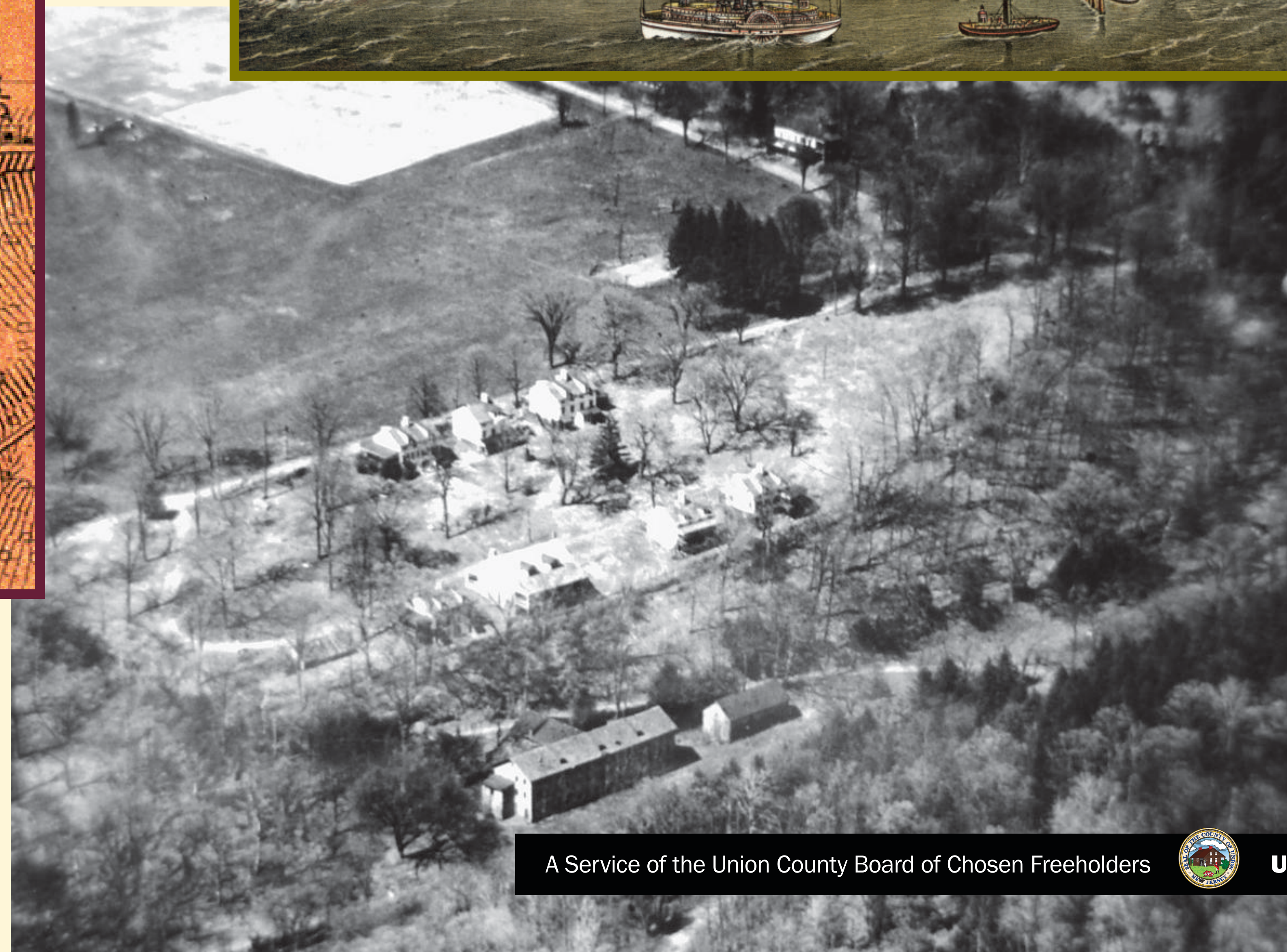
The Grand Experiment Ends

Inexplicably, David Felt decided to end manufacturing at Feltville in 1860. Years later, a circa 1895 article reported that Felt's business had failed due to the Panic of 1857, a worldwide financial crisis that negatively affected some of his real estate investments. Felt moved back to New York, where his wife Sarah died in 1862. In January of 1868 he declared bankruptcy in Federal District Court. Felt, who had remarried, died in 1873.



The 1862 Ernest L. Meyer and P. Wetzel *Map of Union County* shows both David Felt and S.P. Townsend as having real estate interests in Feltville, but does not indicate any factory operations.

Circa 1930 aerial photograph shows two rows of Feltville houses, the church/store and the factory complex.



Published in 1873 by George Schlegel, whose print shop was not far from Felt's stationery store, the map shows the southern tip of Manhattan much as it was during the Feltville period. From the 1840s through the 1860s, Felt's New York store was located on Pearl Street, three blocks west of the East River seaport. Construction of the Brooklyn Bridge (shown) started in 1870 and was not completed until ten years after this map was published.

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ARCHAEOLOGY: SEARCHING FOR THE PAST

A Recent Discovery

The location of David Felt's mansion has been one of the mysteries of Feltville. Prior to Feltville, the home of Noah Willcox stood on the property, and that house, perhaps with an addition, may have become Felt's "mansion."

Archaeological excavations at this site by Montclair State University in 2004 and 2005 revealed the foundations of a house with a later addition. The original house had an 18 x 26 foot mortared sandstone foundation, while the smaller addition had a sandstone and basalt foundation. Brick nogging used between the interior and exterior walls as insulation now fills the foundation. The entire house footprint was not excavated, because a portion of the foundation continues underneath the road, which was realigned in later years.

Archaeology at Feltville

The Deserted Village is home to over a dozen known archaeological sites and has the potential to yield even more. These sites reflect most periods of the region's history and provide an excellent cross-section of New Jersey historical archaeology dating from the 18th century through the early 20th century. The sites are especially significant as they relate to important 19th century patterns of development, including industrialization, immigration and utopian and other social movements. In addition to domestic sites, archaeological resources include a colonial mill site and Felt's 19th century industrial complex, dam and millrace.

Scholarly Studies and Future Excavations

Beginning in 1977, professional archaeologists have investigated some of Feltville's archaeological sites, both as part of legally mandated cultural resource management surveys and through the research of archaeological field schools. Deserted Village archaeology has also been the focus of numerous academic papers and presentations, and the village has been the site of Operation Archeology, an award-winning program that introduced fifth grade students to the techniques and value of archaeological excavation and interpretation.

While documentary research has provided significant historical information, archaeological investigation has supplied knowledge not available in books and documents. Fieldwork continues to reveal much about the lives of Feltville workers and Glenside Park visitors, the physical arrangement and landscapes of the community, and the types of buildings and features no longer present.

Sites that await future investigation include the factory and other mill-related sites, sites of extant and missing workers' houses, farm sites, and the area around the house standing just north of the church/store. As one of New Jersey's preeminent archaeological sites, continued research and interpretation of the former Feltville/Glenside Park can provide a unique opportunity to introduce New Jerseyans of all ages to the state's rich historical and archaeological heritage.



Montclair University Archaeological Field School, directed by Matt Tomaso, at a Deserted Village excavation unit.

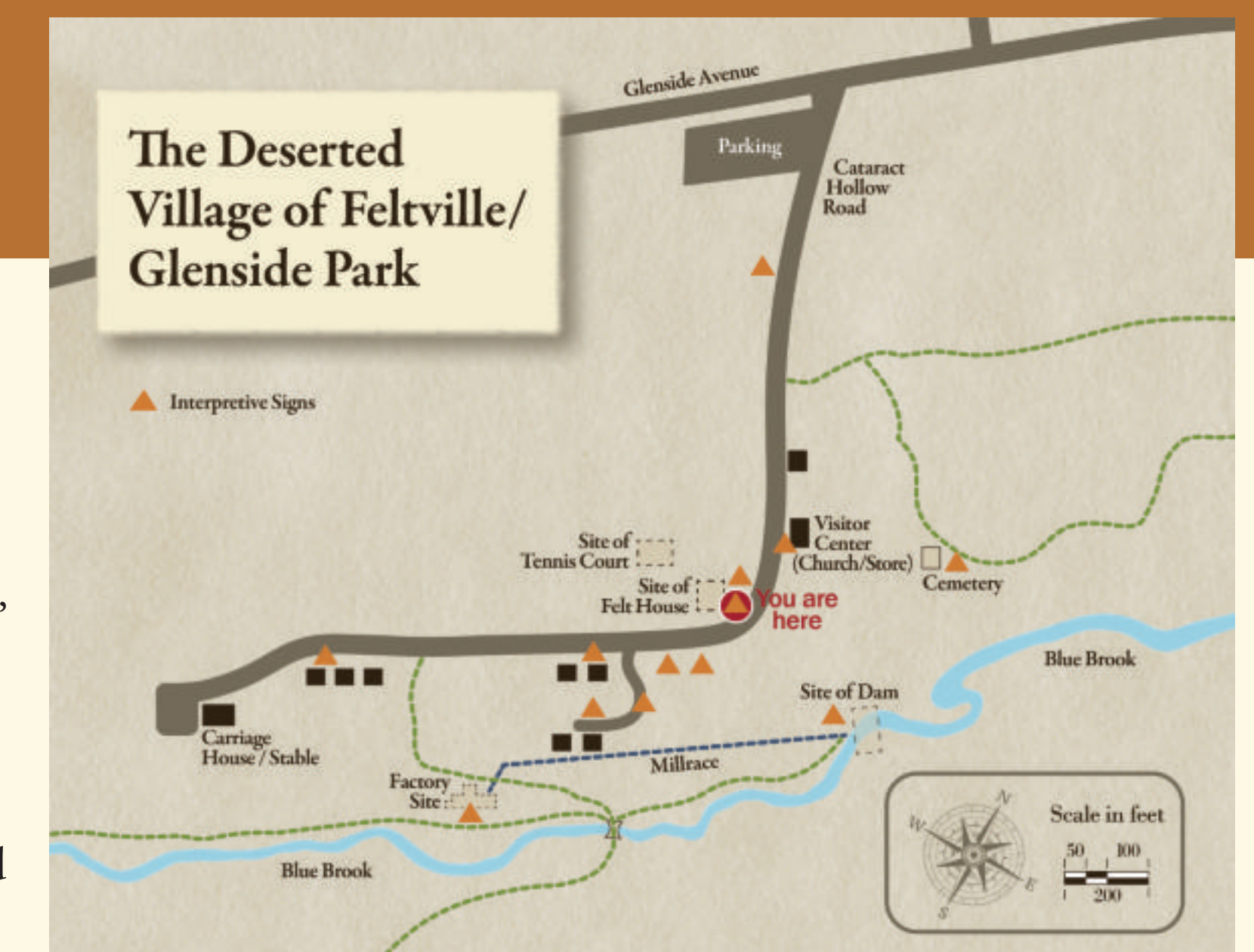
How Do Archaeologists Work?

Archaeologists undertake extensive documentary research before digging. Then they carefully excavate each stratum with shovels and trowels, and record their finds at each level with written descriptions, photographs and a precise map of the excavation unit. They screen all of the excavated soil to make sure that no tiny artifacts have been overlooked. These steps are important, because once excavated the site is destroyed; however, foundations and other permanent features can be preserved in situ.

When investigating a large area that may hold archaeological resources, archaeologists often employ ground penetrating radar, which may yield clues to the locations of foundations and other features. Archaeologists may also undertake a large number of shovel tests performed at regular points on a grid to determine the locations of features and deposits of artifacts. Both methods have been used at the Deserted Village, and will continue to be used in the future.



A privy behind the workers' cottages yielded a rich assemblage of redware, chamber pots and apothecary bottles. Walkways associated with the cottages, as well as a large, brick and stone-lined well were also excavated.



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FELTVILLE WORKERS, CIRCA 1850

The 1850 United States Census documented 172 residents of Feltville, including single male and female workers and married couples with families. Felt’s employees either worked in the factory or filled jobs that helped to sustain the community.

Employment at the Factory

Period maps and articles described Feltville’s industry as bookbinding, but the factory also produced a variety of stationery items in addition to business ledgers. Factory operations were overseen by William C. Brooks, superintendent, and skilled labor included six printers, ten bookbinders, one sealing wax maker, one stationer, one paper ruler, one paper colourer, one machinist and two blacksmiths.

The census listed a few men and twenty-two girls and women simply as “factory workers” or “works at Felts.” Fourteen-year-old Isabella Hickley from Ireland was the youngest. She and many of the other women may have sewn or glued the pages of books together because bookbinding sewing machines were not yet in use. John Duffie, 23, also from Ireland and employed as a porter, may have transported both raw materials and manufactured goods, in addition to serving as a general maintenance man. Joseph Crowter, 44, a New Jersey wheelwright, no doubt kept the wagons in good repair.



In 1850 farmers tended crops, livestock and orchards at the Feltville farm, helping to make the community self-sufficient. Note the peacock on the fence and the dovecote in the gable of the barn in this typical country farmyard scene.

Child Labor at Feltville

Children as young as five were employed in 19th century factories and tenement sweatshops. Paid less than adults, they often worked from morning to night. While Felt did advertise for a boy, the census lists no Feltville workers younger than fourteen, though two younger boys, one just eleven and the other twelve, lived in the men’s dormitory and did not attend the school. The U. S. government did not completely regulate child labor until 1938, almost one hundred years after the founding of Feltville.

Non-Factory Employees

Some residents were employed to provide village services. Sarah Felt Toby, 19, taught at the school, and George A. Stover, also 19 and listed as “merchant,” kept the store. The Reverend Austin Craig, 26, conducted religious services. Feltville also included a large farm that employed eight farmers. At 75, farmer Matthew Frazee was the oldest worker in the village. Both Frazee and fellow farmer Jacob Randolph were most likely from the Plainfield area, as their surnames were common among the area’s settlers. The other six were foreign-born.

Feltville employees included William Rogers, a shoemaker, and John Higgins, a tailor, both from England. Irishman Owen Clark was employed as a gardener. Catherine Dunnegan, also from Ireland, was the cook at the single men’s dormitory, and Mary Anne Bradley, a 47-year-old Englishwoman, served as matron of the single women’s residence. Two others were domestics in Felt’s household, while Mary Jane Bogle was housekeeper at the factory superintendent’s home, and Mary Lines was a servant in another. Stephen B. Todd, a New Jersey man, served as village overseer.

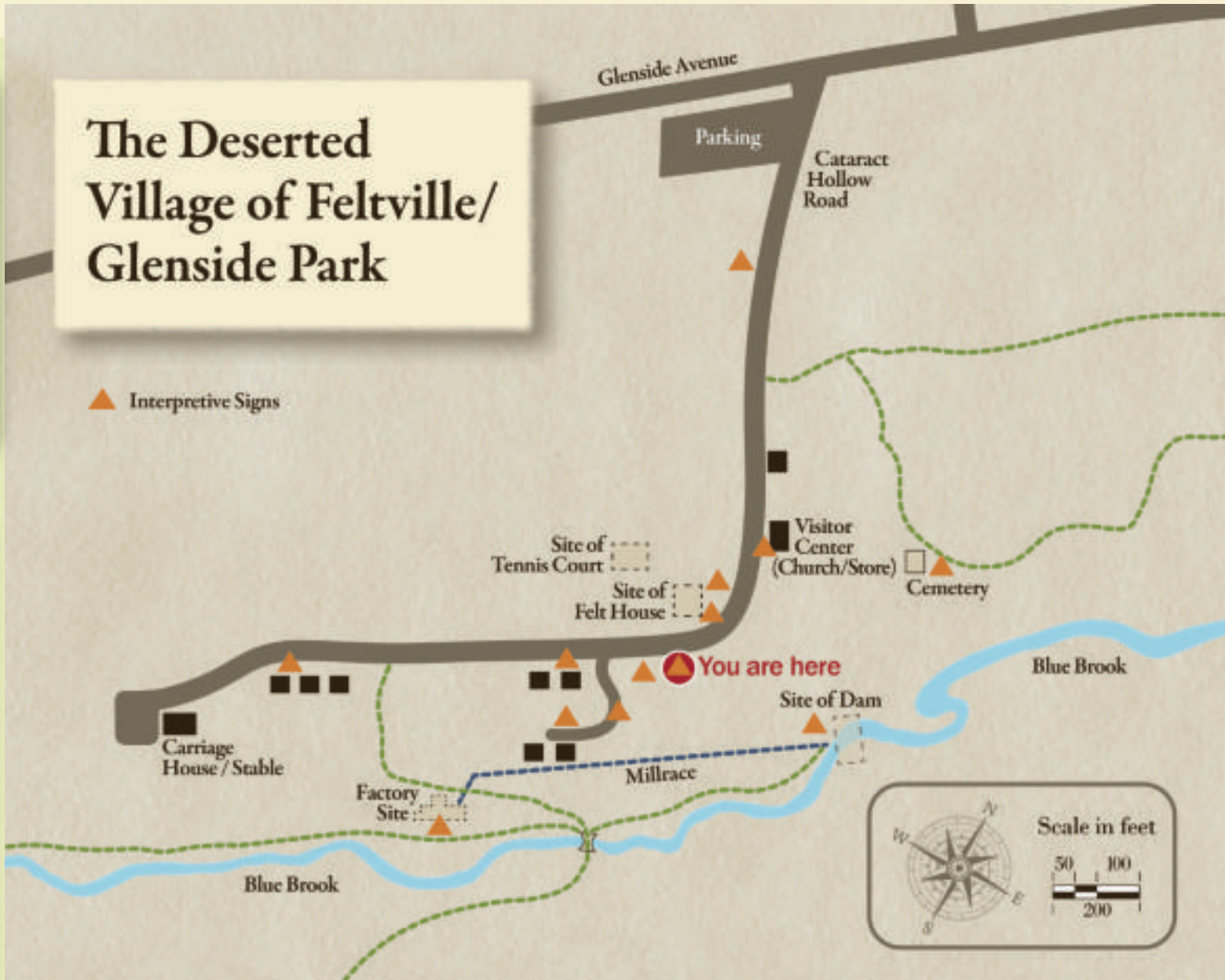
PROTESTANT WOMEN WANTED.—Three or four Protestant young women at our works in New-Jersey. The work is light and easy to learn, and the utmost care is taken of their morals that the most anxious friend could desire.
DAVID FELT & CO., No. 14 Malden-lane.

BOOK BINDER—WANTED an extra man, as a general workman, at the Blank Book Bindery, at our works in New Jersey. Also, an ordinary workman for the Ruling Room, and a good Boy.
DAVID FELT & CO., 174 Pearl st.

FARM LABORERS WANTED—Protestant men with families taken, and good moral character.
DAVID FELT & CO., No. 14 Malden-lane.

GOOD JOB PRINTER WANTED—At our works in New-Jersey. A man with a family will be preferred, as the situation may be made permanent.
DAVID FELT & CO., No. 129 William-st.

HELP WANTED.
WANTED—A STEWARD TO TAKE CHARGE OF the farming department of my place in New-Jersey. He must be a man who understands agriculture in every respect; a thorough knowledge of cattle and the dairy. A Protestant with family and a working man.
DAVID FELT, No. 129 William st., or Feltville, New-Jersey.



TO BLACKSMITHS.—Wanted, at our works in New-Jersey, a respectable Protestant man, with family. He must understand forging and shoeing, and if he has a knowledge of machine work would be preferred.
DAVID FELT & CO., No. 129 William-st.

BOY WANTED.—An active, intelligent and trustworthy boy for a silk goods jobbing house. Address...

FROM ACROSS THE ATLANTIC



Leaving Ireland



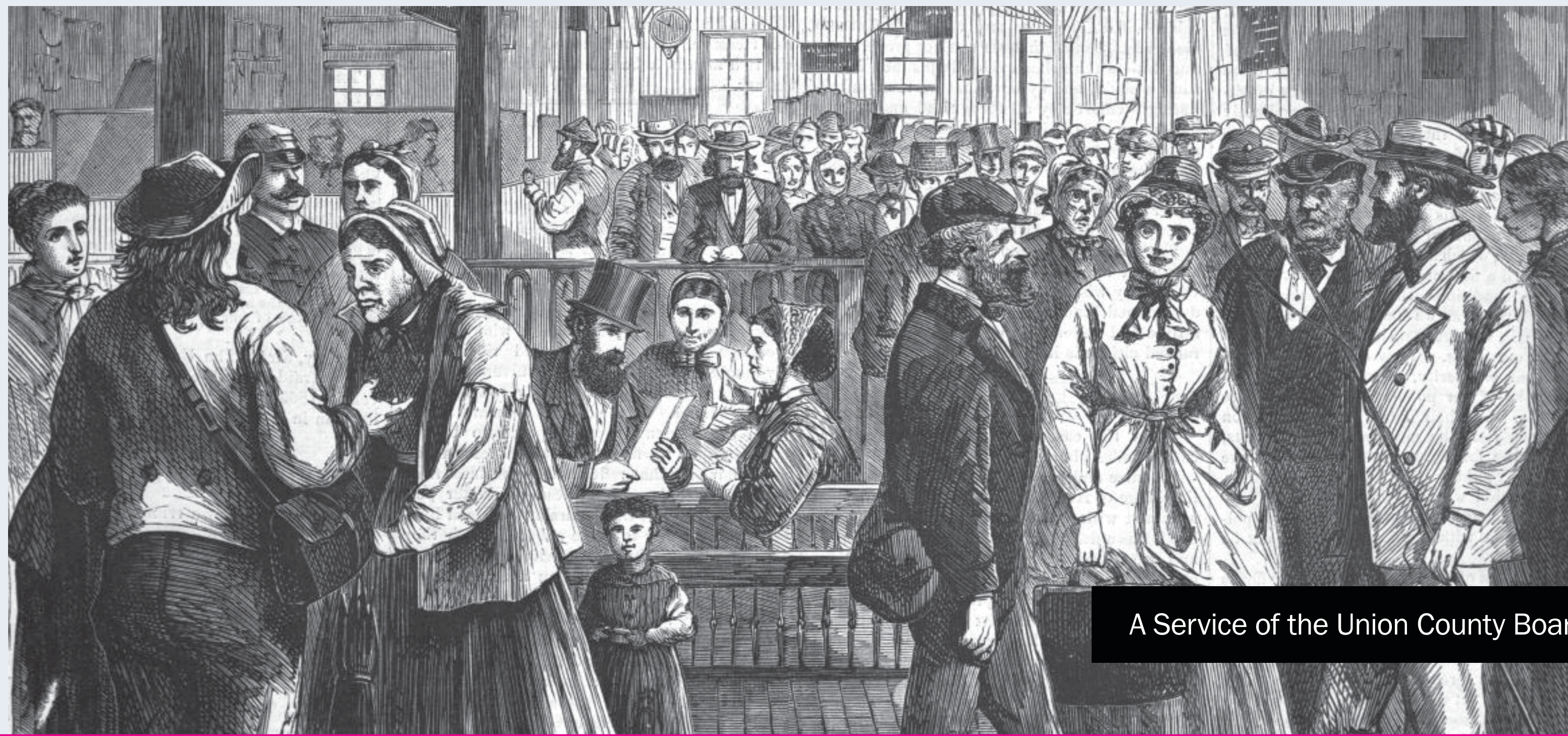
Drawing of German emigrants boarding a ship bound for America.

The Irish

When Feltville was established in 1845, the United States was experiencing a surge in foreign immigration. The poor of Ireland depended largely on potatoes for sustenance, and more than 750,000 died from starvation when Ireland's potato crops failed for three consecutive years. Between 1845 and 1850 well over a million Irish traveled to the United States to escape poverty and starvation. Because they tended to be poor and lacking in skills, most traveled to northeastern cities to look for work in factories or to serve as laborers and domestics. Upon arriving at the Port of New York, some went to the labor exchange to find jobs. A small percentage of immigrants were Protestants, but the majority were Catholics who experienced much hostility from Protestant Americans. In fact, based on Felt's advertisements for workers, it seems clear that he preferred to hire Protestant workers, though a few may have been Catholic.

The Germans

Between 1845 and 1855, more than one million Germans arrived in the United States. Most German immigrants sailed the Atlantic to escape political unrest and social instability in their homeland. Many had money, and some purchased farmland. Others were skilled tradesmen who established their own businesses or sought jobs as skilled workers. Many were educated and at least half were Protestants who, unlike the Irish, did not suffer religious discrimination when seeking employment. David Felt hired several skilled Germans.



The Labor Exchange - Interior View of the Office at Castle Garden, New York

The English

The English have had a long history of American immigration. New Jersey was settled by the English in 1664, and the tradition of English and Scottish immigration continued throughout the 19th century. Felt himself was of English descent.

The Feltville Population

The population of Feltville in 1850 was fairly evenly split between the foreign-born and American citizens, though some of the American-born were the young children of Feltville's immigrant workers. Forty-five residents were from Ireland, nine hailed from Germany, and twenty-seven came from England. Some of the younger immigrants may have traveled to America alone. Most of the teen-age Irish girls working in the factory had no other family members living in Feltville, and one can only wonder about Thomas Davis, 11, John Henry Davis, 12, and Richard Davis, 14. The three Irish boys lived in the single men's dormitory, yet there was no adult Feltville resident named Davis, and the census lists no occupation for the boys.

Indentured Workers

David Felt, who seemed intent on creating a utopian community, desired that Feltville workers should have pleasant lives that were free from the problems and ills of the city; however, not all were satisfied as an advertisement for a Feltville runaway suggests.

New York Daily Times, March 4, 1853

***RUN AWAY** from the subscriber on the morning of the 3d inst. from our works at Feltville, New-Jersey, an indentured apprentice to the bookbinding, named HENRY STEPHENSON, aged 20 years and six months. All persons are cautioned and forbid [sic] harboring, trusting, or engaging him. DAVID FELT & CO.*

Henry Stephenson, listed in the 1850 census as an 18-year-old Irishman, was working as a Feltville bookbinder. From the advertisement, we know that David Felt had at least one indentured worker, and there may have been others. An indenture was a legal contract that specified the number of years of free or low-paid employment the worker owed his sponsor in return for being taught a trade. After that obligation was met, the indentured worker was free to leave and seek employment elsewhere.



FELTVILLE'S COZY COTTAGES

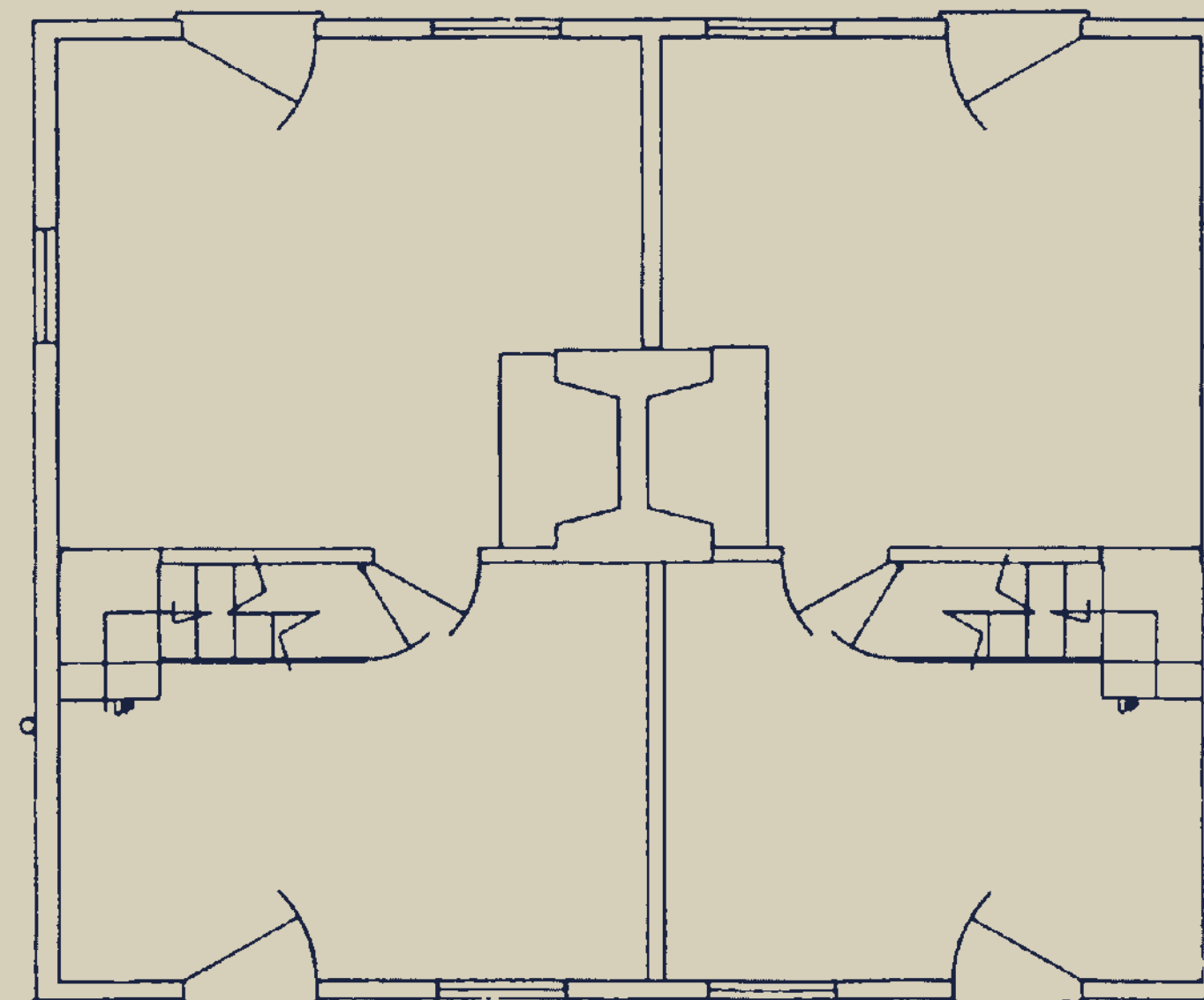
The house you are facing is one of fifteen duplexes that housed two families side by side, each side with its own entrance. A dwelling unit consisted of two small rooms on each of two floors. The front room most likely served as a parlor, and the rear room, which included a fireplace, was a kitchen/dining/multi-purpose space. Approximate room sizes were 10 x 10 feet and 11 x 10 feet. The second floor was reached by a closeted staircase featuring a small internal window, thereby providing the staircase with light.

The Jennings family, which included the parents and seven children ranging in age from 8 to 22, must have been cramped in their lodgings. Children shared beds and, as in a New York City tenement, a few family members most likely slept in the kitchen and the parlor. Some houses included a two-room, walk-out basement on each side, visible only from the rear. The cottages with basement units may have housed the larger families or families with boarders, for census records indicate that some family households included a few unrelated single employees.

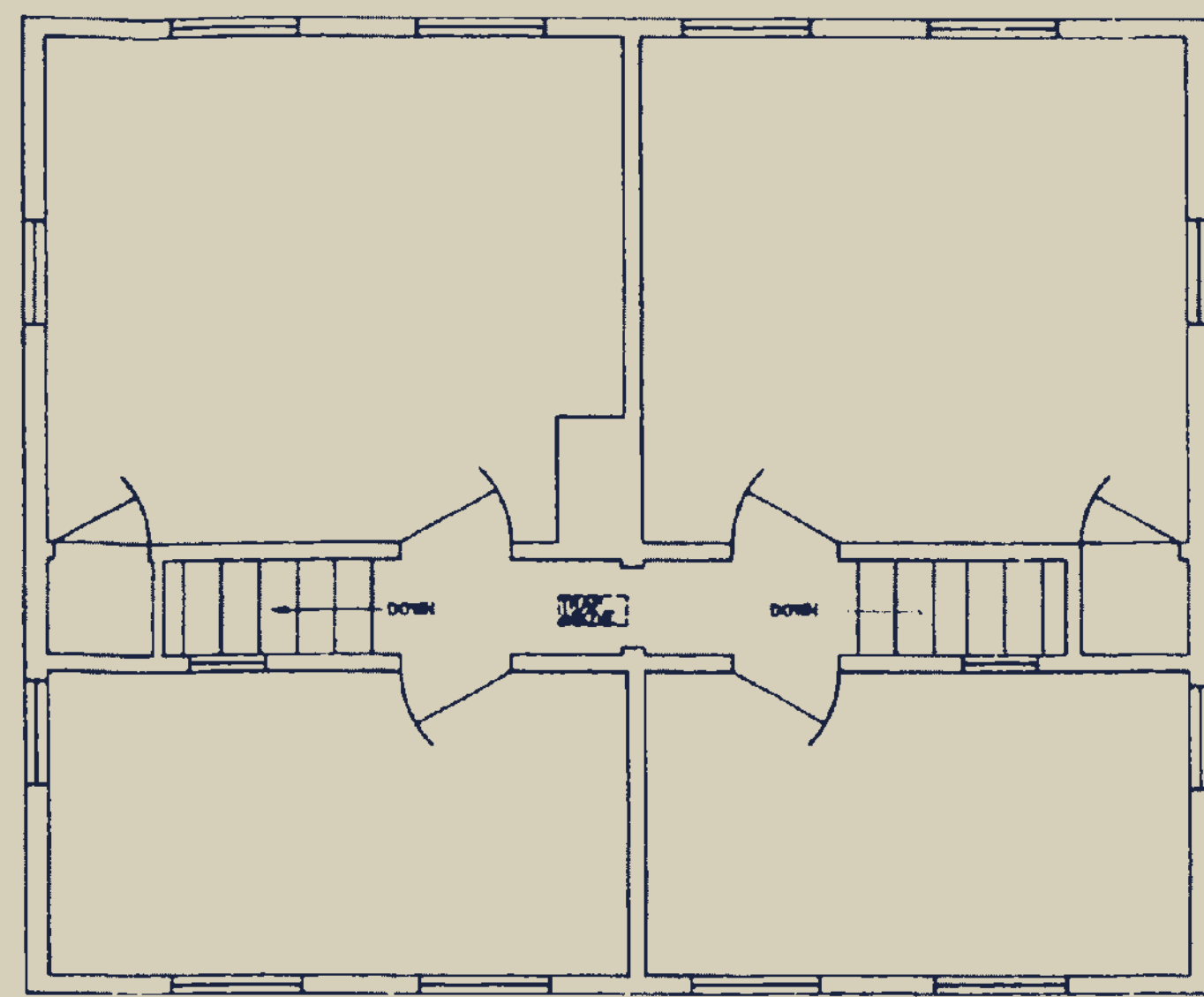


Some Feltville cottages had additional rooms in habitable walk-out basements, visible in this house, which was altered during the Glenside Park period with the addition of dormer windows and Adirondack-style porches.

Original duplex first floor and second floor plans.



First floor plan



Second floor plan

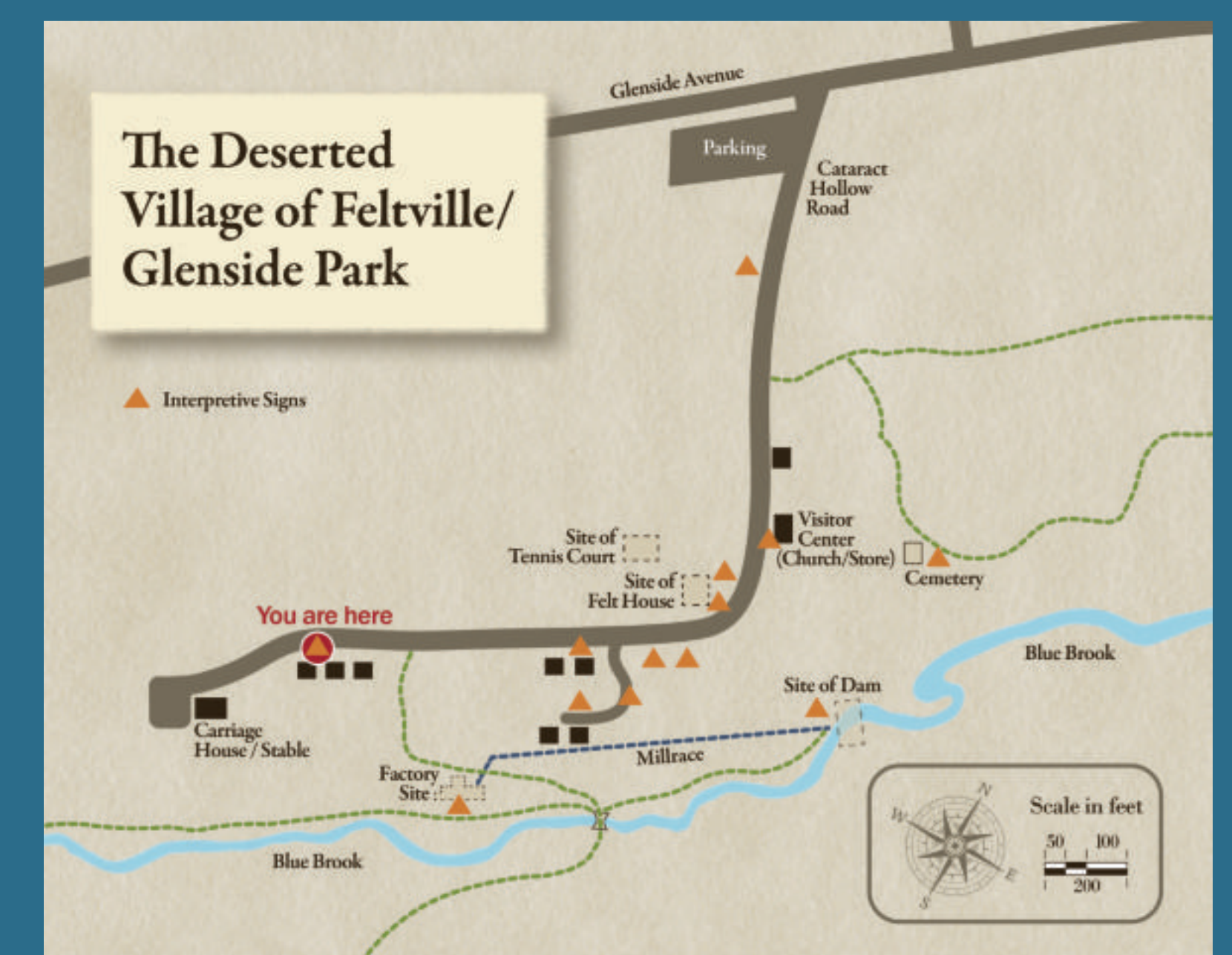
Dormitories

Historical accounts of Feltville speak of dormitories for single men and single women. The 1850 census lists twenty-two single female factory workers and a matron living in one residence. The men's dormitory, headed by William Middleton and his wife, Catherine, housed sixteen Irish, German, English and American workers and a female Irish cook. With the exception of the house thought to be Felt's, to date, no remains of larger residential buildings have been discovered, and no known records tell us much about this housing arrangement. If large dormitories did exist, future archaeology may eventually locate their foundations.

Residential Amenities

Feltville houses had no indoor bathrooms, electricity, central heat, running water or closets. It was common practice in 1850 to use privies, also called outhouses, and they could be found to the rear of the houses. Household furnishings may have included a washstand in each bedroom, with a pitcher and a bowl for water. A chamber pot would have been used during the night or in bad weather when residents did not want to use the outhouses.

While all house floor plans have been modified over the years, particularly during the development of Glenside Park, the interiors of the cottages located near the carriage house most closely resemble the Feltville houses as they were originally built.



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SARSAPARILLA MAN TO DESERTED VILLAGE, 1860–1882

The Albany Evening Atlas, c. 1840s

There probably has never been so popular a remedy, or patent medicine as Dr. S. P Townsend's Sarsaparilla, which was originally, and continues to be manufacture [sic] in this city at first by the Doctor himself, and afterwards for several years and to the present time by Clapp and Townsend, the present proprietors.

Dr. Samuel P. Townsend, a real estate investor and manufacturer of sarsaparilla, purchased Feltville in 1860. According to newspaper accounts, he bought the property on speculation, and the site became known locally as Townsend's large farm. However, it was politics, not sarsaparilla or real estate for which Townsend achieved notoriety while at Feltville.

ARRESTED!

New York Times, December 14, 1862

Among the persons indicted by the Grand Jury of Union County, for an alleged misdemeanor, consisting of breaking up a so-called Democratic meeting, but in reality a meeting of secession sympathizers at New Providence, last Summer, is S. P. Townsend, the famous "Sarsaparilla" man, who resides at New Providence.

Many New Jerseyans had close business ties to the South and supported the secessionists during the Civil War. Townsend, who described himself as a as a "Radical Abolitionist," and an "engineer" on the underground railroad, was not among the secessionists. In an impassioned speech given in Plainfield in 1862, Dr. Townsend offered examples of the cruelty suffered by slaves, which he himself had witnessed. He supported President Lincoln and the battle to preserve the Union, giving pro-Union and anti-slavery speeches throughout the period.



Townsend and his partner Clapp produced 5,000 bottles of sarsaparilla per day at their New York factory. Sarsaparilla enjoyed widespread medicinal use in the 19th century, later becoming a popular soft drink similar to root beer. While it appears to have disappeared from American supermarkets, it can still be found in other parts of the world.

Feltville For Sale Once Again

By the late 1860s, Townsend composed this ad for the sale of Feltville:

... at Feltville containing 500 acres of excellent Lands situated 2 miles from Scotch Plains Depot and same from Summit by good [roads] ... was one of the prettiest places in N.J. Large Factory ... 21 foot wheel, ample water power with a head or reservoir dam 30 dwellings, one fine mansion stone &c 6000 [sic] peach trees, 200 cherry trees, large quantities of every variety of choice fruit, 22 miles of N.York. Most of the land under best cultivation a good fence, well watered, all in good order the bal [sic] in good timber and Wood. A portion of the purchased [sic] money can be on Bond & Mortgage Buildings all in good order 1 = 33 by 133, 3 story and attic 1 = 15 by 133 1 story 1 = 30 by 40 2 story Stone house, & Store, School house &c or sell 50 acres across the middle including all the buildings, Water power &c for 55,000 or will lease the Factory, Stores, Tenant houses for 10 years at \$2500 ...
Price \$95,000

Townsend's 1870 obituary in the Plainfield Gazette refers to the former Feltville as Townsend's large farm. In 1872, the W. M. Trafton Turning Mill was operating in the former Feltville factory, but the site soon fell into receivership and gradual decline.

The Deserted Village: A Melancholy State of Ruin



Photograph by G. Thorn

Vacant cottages after the village was deserted in the 1870s.

Some years after Townsend's death, the site's romantic appeal as a deserted village drew visits by many who had heard of its charms. One, the noted American landscape painter Thomas Moran, spent two weeks sketching its scenic vistas in the summer of 1878.

Summit, N.J., August 19, 1882----- About four miles southwest of [Summit] ... lies the deserted village of Feltville, in the midst of nearly eight hundred acres of meadow, orchard and woodland. ... The place changed hands again and fell little by little into the melancholy state of ruin in which it is today. It requires a strong effort to realize that the now silent and grass-grown streets, the ruined mill and the windowless houses were once filled with busy life. ... Rugged clumps of thorny shrubs before [the cottages] show where climbing roses grew ... The mill wheel has gone ... The store is standing empty with empty shelves and counters, but the wooden steps outside where the male gossips of the village were wont to gather of summer evenings have vanished. ...

GLENSIDE PARK, 1882–1916

The Gilded Age

Nineteenth century American industrial development created a fabulously rich upper class, and the period from the 1870s through the 1890s became known as the Gilded Age. The rich built grand summer homes in the country and at the shore, had great lakeside lodges in the Adirondack Mountains, and frequented fashionable spas. The growth of industrial cities also created a new middle class, and entrepreneurs seized opportunities to encourage its members to take summer vacations.

The American Middle Class, c. 1880s

The middle class of Victorian America was more a social class than the larger, more inclusive economic middle class of the late 20th century. No tradesmen or laborers were members. The class was comprised of professionals, businessmen and white-collar workers. While the more affluent could afford a large home with a few servants, white-collar workers and teachers had rather meager incomes. Nonetheless, an accepted code of manners facilitated social interaction among all members of the class.

“Not a Hint of Malaria”

In 1882 Warren Ackerman of Scotch Plains saw an opportunity to develop a middle class resort by transforming Feltville into Glenside Park. The rustic country setting with nearby rail service was ideal. Feltville duplexes were converted into single family cottages, and dormer windows and porches that mimicked the style of the grand Adirondack camps were added. Though the village was not electrified until the turn of the century, Ackerman provided lush landscaping and recreational amenities such as tennis, golf and croquet.

A resort brochure touted the clear air as having “not a hint of malaria,” and boasted accommodations in fifteen cottages. Board at the new inn included fresh vegetables grown on site. Guests’ horses and carriages were accommodated in the new carriage house, and the resort’s driver met the New York trains.



In the late 19th century, Glenside Park tennis players would have looked very much like this Plainfield area group.



Ackerman built a large carriage house at the end of Cataract Hollow Road. He also constructed an inn with dining facilities (left; no longer standing) and provided luxuriant landscaping around the cottages (bottom).



1889

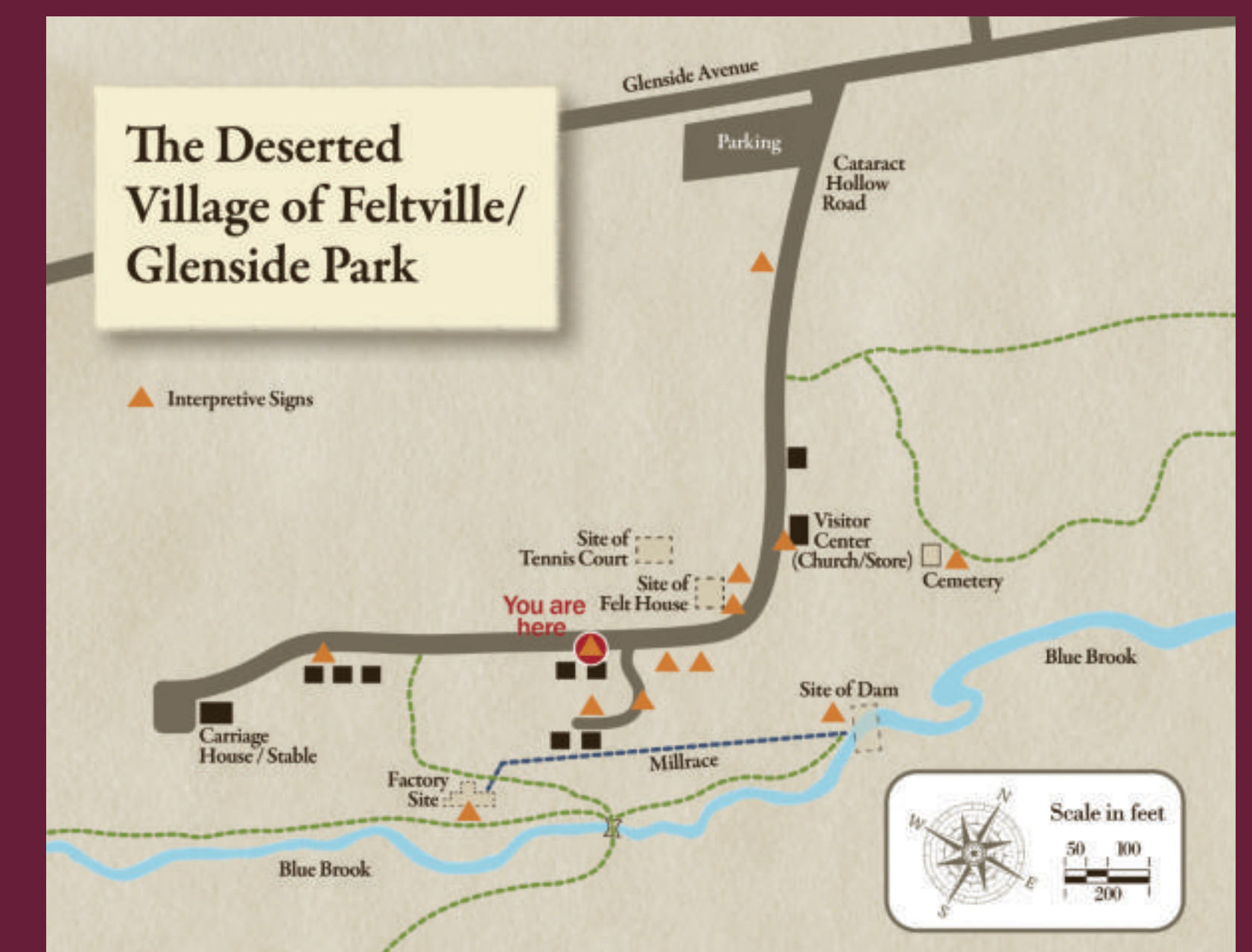
The 1889 summer season found Glenside Park mentioned in newspapers from New York to California. The following account was printed in *The New York Times*.

JERSEY’S LOSS BY FLOODS

Plainfield, N.J. August 1---The present estimate of the damage done by the flood from the broken dam at Feltville to the Cadmus dam, a distance of five miles, is \$250,000. Streets in Plainfield are damaged to the extent of \$20,000. The large upper dam at Feltville, which did not give way, is reported to be leaking badly, and it may break at any time. More rain will prove disastrous. The dam is 20 feet high and holds back a lake a mile and a quarter long, from 300 to 500 feet wide, and 30 feet deep in places. If it gives way, Fanwood and Scotch Plains will probably be swept out of existence, and Plainfield will be inundated. The dam is on property now owned by Warren Ackerman, the wealthy cement manufacturer who bought the property . . . several years ago. . . . It is now known as Glenside Park.

Men spent the night at the dam so they could warn the townspeople below by lighting rockets should the dam give way. It lasted through the night to the relief of all, and Ackerman repaired the leaks promptly.

Ackerman died in 1893. The resort continued operation until 1916, and was sold at auction in 1919.



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BOOKBINDING AT FELTVILLE

Felt's stationery business thrived in New York and New Orleans. While some merchandise was imported from England, his Brooklyn factory was a principal source of inventory. Like the Brooklyn factory, the Feltville bookbindery produced a variety of stationery items; however, the production of account books, journals and other books for businesses was its most important operation. The factory sometimes produced other non-fiction publications such as almanacs and *Littell's Genealogy*, which is on display at the visitor center. Local paper mills were a ready source of paper, and by 1850 the factory employed more than fifty workers, including twenty-two women. A substantial mail order operation kept the Feltville post office busy.

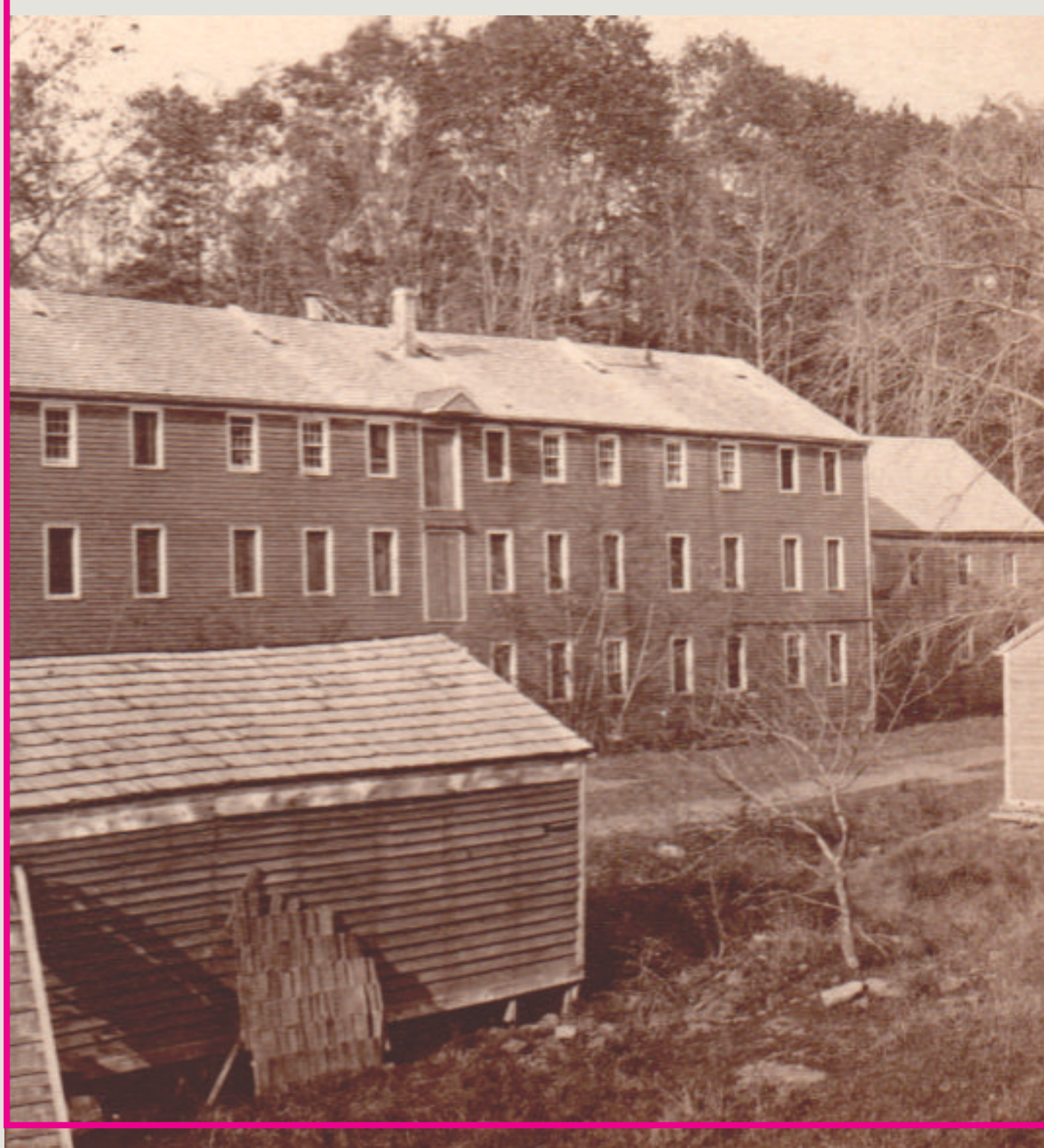
In the first half of the 19th century, book manufacturing machines were often constructed on site. That may have been the responsibility of machinist Benjamin Foss, with the help of a blacksmith. Henry Martin and James West were specialists who printed lined paper for ledger books. Once printed, the pages were folded and assembled in the proper order and then affixed to the binding.



The Remains of the Factory

Foundation stones outline the location of the former 3½ story factory, the largest structure of a multi-building manufacturing complex. The factory relied on manpower, as well as the water power supplied by the millponds. The water was carried from the lower millpond to the factory's water wheel via an 1,100-foot-long millrace. Remains of the millrace are located northeast of the factory site on the bluff behind the houses. A narrow trail next to the millrace leads to the dam site. Future archaeological excavations at the factory site may provide a better understanding of factory operations.

Half of a late 19th century stereograph of the abandoned Feltville factory complex taken by Guillermo Thorn, a Plainfield photographer



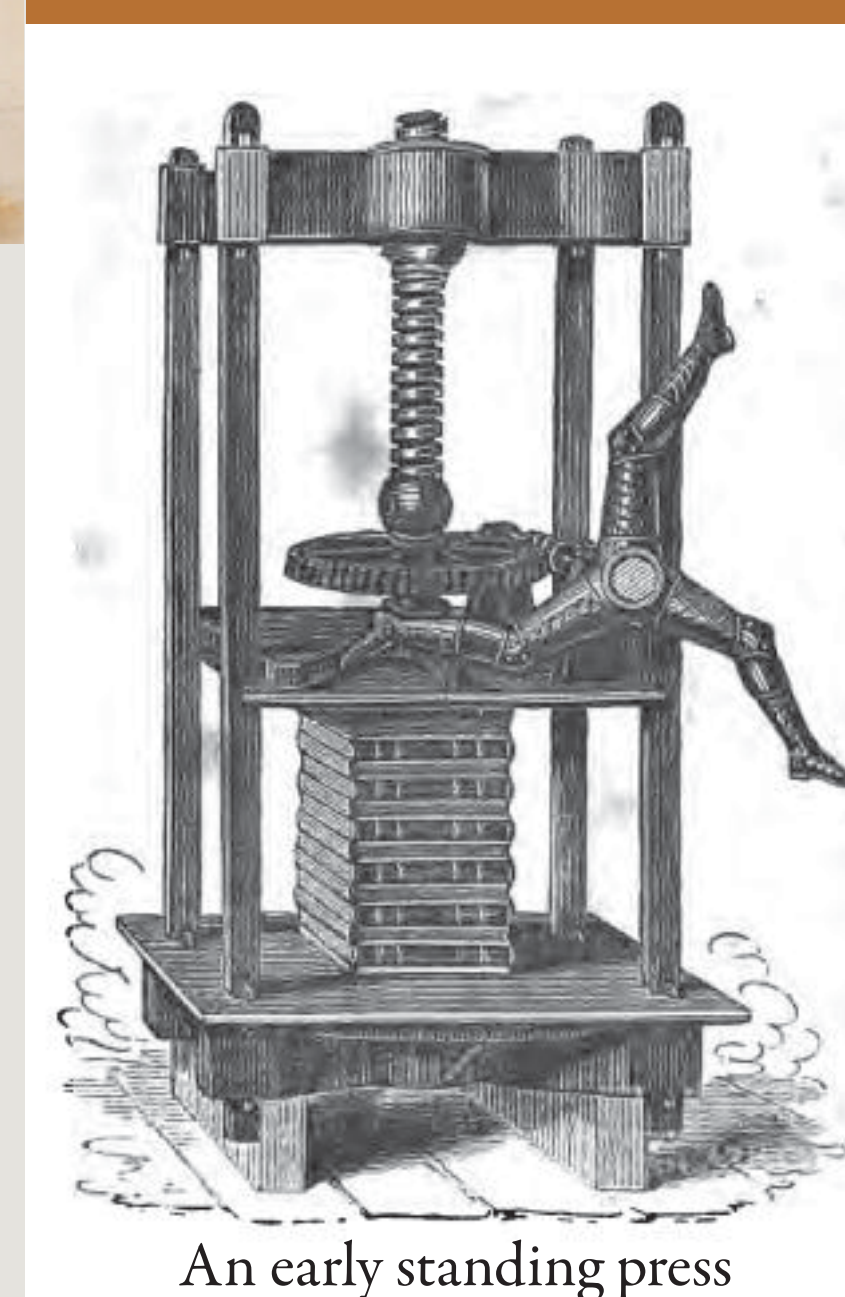
David Felt's Patented Adhesive with Honey

IMPROVED ADHESIVE COMPOUND FOR BINDING BOOKS, 1838
[U]se of an elastic adhesive compound for attaching the leaves of books together which entirely obviates the necessity of sewing.

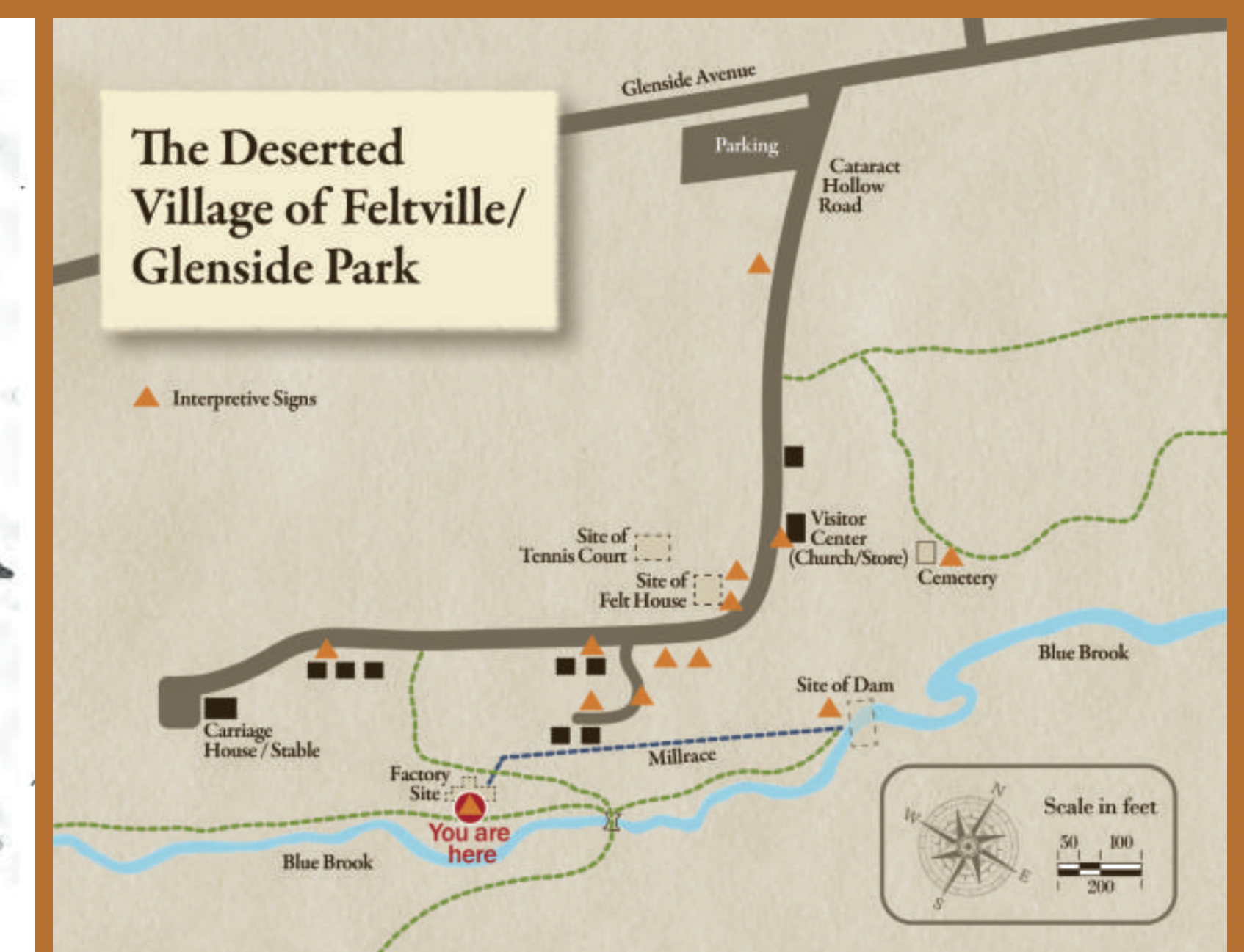
The following is the mode of application: The section or folds of the book are first made in the usual manner of one sheet carefully pressed and knocked up on the back and cut on the front. The back is then put into a curved mold to give the back the proper form. It is then put between two cutting or press boards and placed in a press and screwed up, after which the back is made rough and the elastic adhesive compound applied with a stiff brush and then left to dry. When dry, or nearly so, another coat is put on, so as to form a sufficient body. Some cotton or other flexible cloth is then prepared with two coats of the compound. A strip of this cloth is then put quite over the back, extending down on each side about two inches, and after rubbing it well on the back to make it adhere and leaving it a short time to dry it will be ready for binding in the usual way. . . .

The compound may also be used as a substitute for glue when books are sewed and stitched in the usual way. . . . Instructions for preparing the adhesive compound: Take 8 parts of isinglass, 2 parts of gum-arabic and, after soaking them in a little rain water until they become soft, add 4 parts of pure honey, then dissolve the whole with alcohol over a slow fire.

Once the pages were assembled they were placed in a press to force out the air between the pages. The paper colourer, James White, would have been responsible for marbling the endpapers and the page edges of the more expensive books.



An early standing press



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POWER FOR FELT'S FACTORY

Water from the Blue Brook provided power for some of Felt's machinery. To ensure a steady flow of water, two millponds were created by building dams. The larger of the two Feltville ponds, now known as Surprise Lake, created a large reservoir that fed a smaller pond closer to the mill. While the smaller pond no longer exists, the remains of two embankments, visible from this spot, indicate the site of the former dam.

Each workday morning, a sluice gate at this dam was raised to allow water to enter the millrace. Part of the channel was covered by a brick roof to keep debris from impeding the flow of water. Sections of the millrace are still in place.

As water from the millrace turned the mill wheel and activated the power train, the water from the millrace was channeled back to the Blue Brook via a tailrace just beyond the factory. At night when the machines were shut down, the gate at the dam was closed to stop the water supply. That this system for water power was more than sufficient for Felt's needs is underscored by the following advertisement:

New York Morning Courier, c. 1851

WATER POWER FOR SALE OR LEASE-----Having a superabundance of water. We will sell or lease rights to erect mills and houses sufficient, as applicants may want, in the pleasant and healthy village of Feltville, N J, 20 miles from Jersey City. The Morris and Essex Railroad passes on the north and the Central Railroad on the south--- communication with the city six times a day. For particulars, enquire of **DAVID FELT & CO., Stationer's Hall, 174 and 176 Pearl St., NY.**

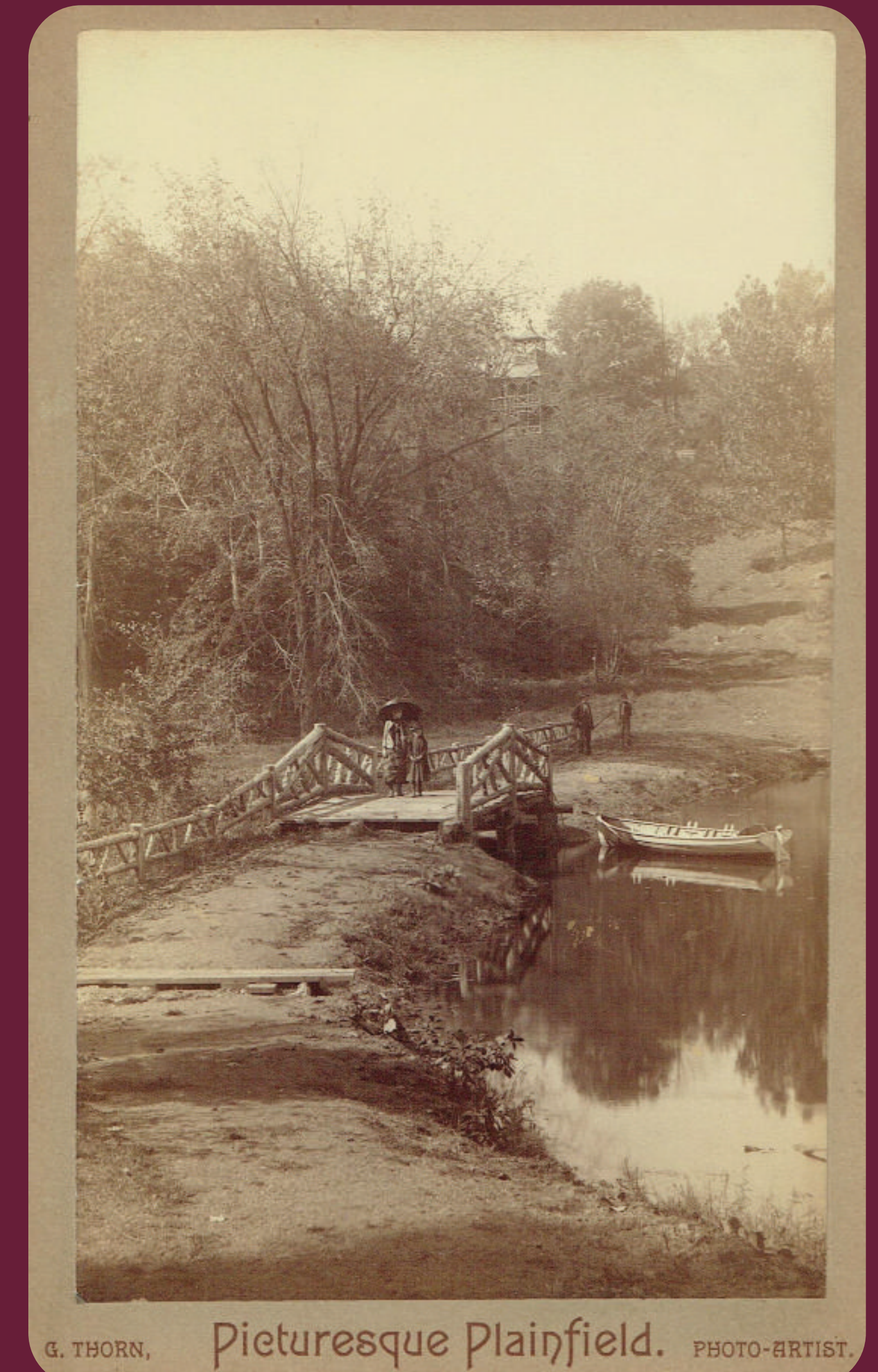
While the millponds provided essential water power, they undoubtedly were a scenic feature of the community. They could also be used for the workers' weekly bath. Unfortunately, the larger pond was the scene of a tragedy.



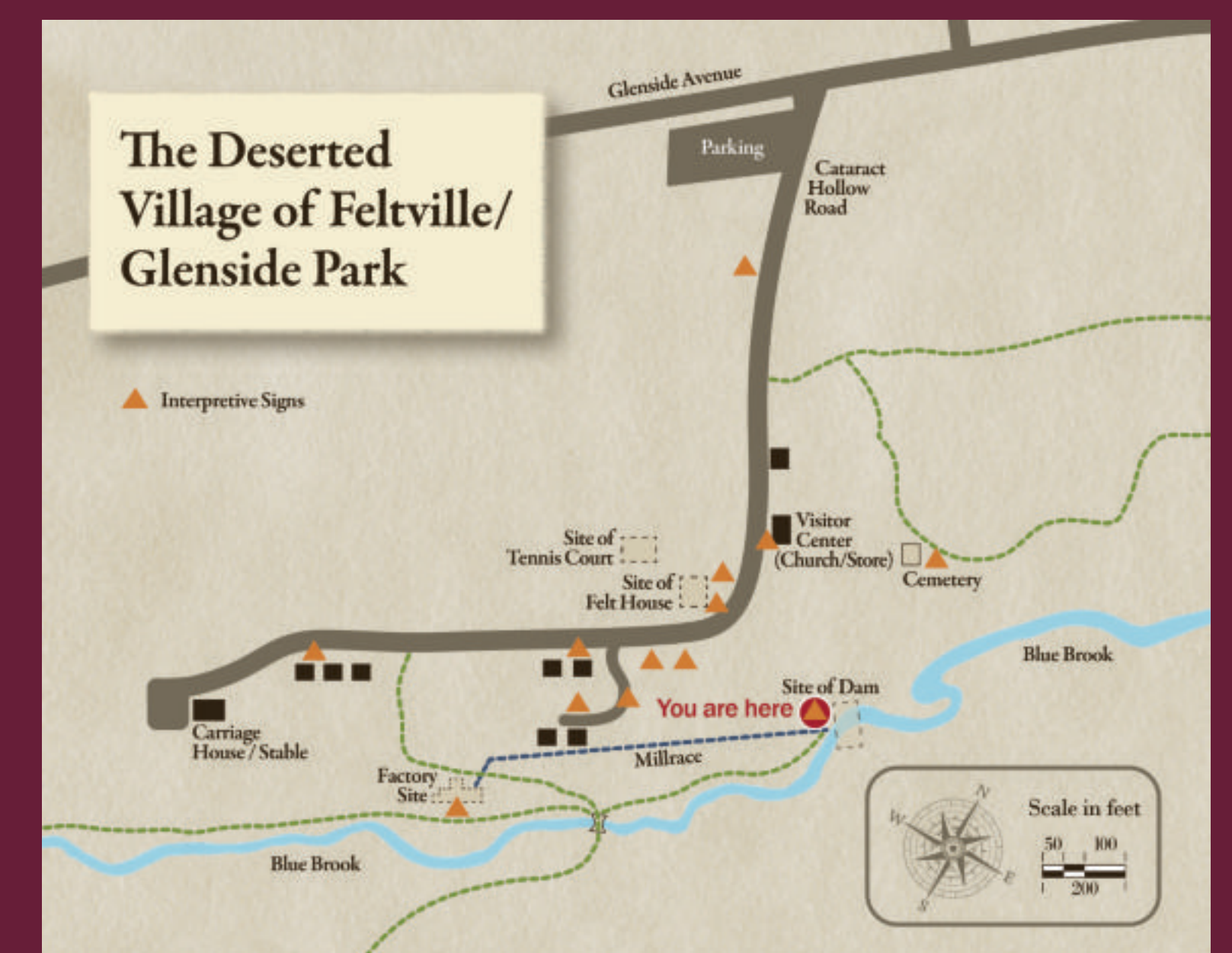
A Tragic Loss at Feltville

The New York Times, June 12, 1858

A MELANCHOLY OCCURRENCE -----The quiet and pleasant village of Feltville, N.J. has been the scene of a very sad accident. Two girls, Anna H. Guest and Ellen McCaffrey, employed in the factory, and each about 16 years of age, went into the upper lake, on Tuesday, the 8th inst. to bathe, when they were both drowned. They were unusually cheerful, contented, industrious girls, and one of them in particular, was generally admired for her sweet disposition, beautiful person and graceful manners. And what is a little remarkable, is that they were both good swimmers; and this probably led to their death, by making them insensible to their danger. An inquest was held by Jotham D. Frazee, Esq., of Plainfield, and they were interred in the village burying ground by Mr. Felt, followed by a large company of mourners.



1880s photograph taken by G. Thorn. Warren Ackerman's Glenside Park featured rustic bridges including this one over the dam at the millpond. In this photo, taken from the south side of the pond, the rustic tower added to the former Feltville store can be seen on the hillside.



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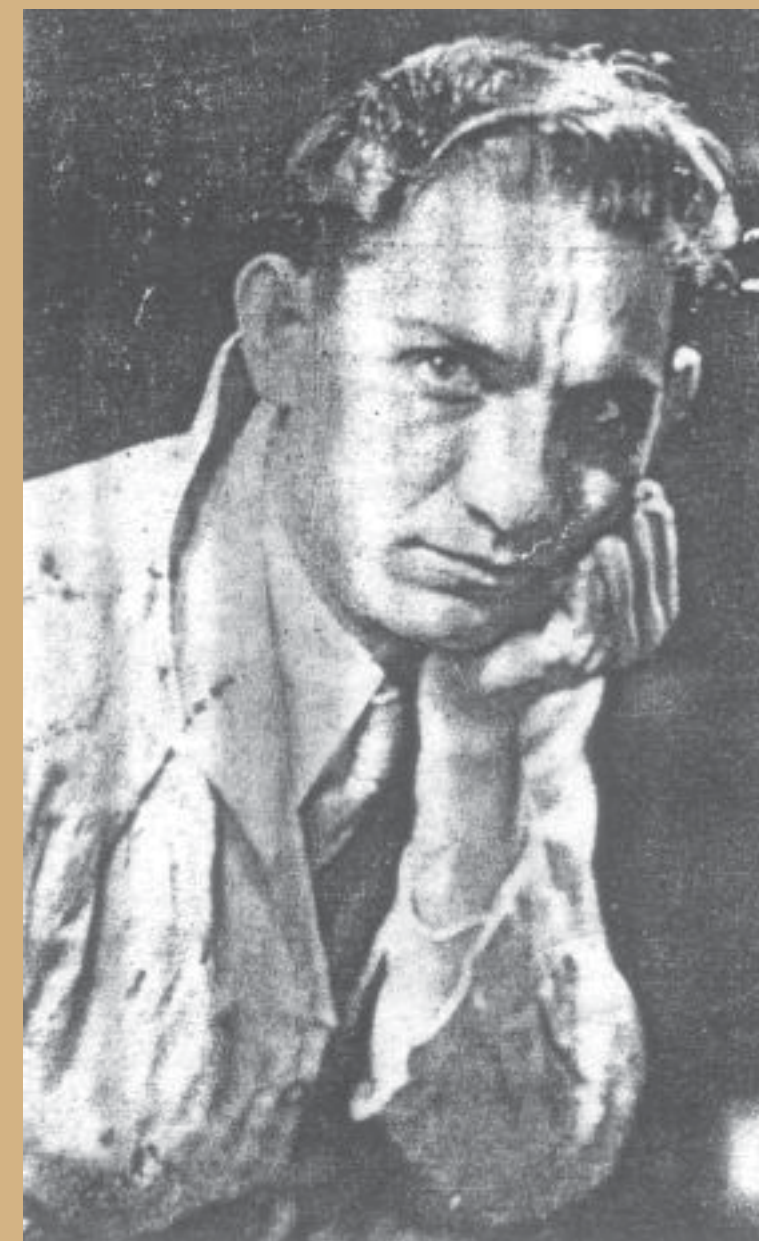
THE MEXICAN MURALS, CIRCA 1920s

Edward Grassmann Purchases Village Cottages

In 1919 Edward Grassmann, a successful civil engineer and real estate investor, purchased much of the village, and used a few cottages for the entertainment of friends and family. To decorate this cottage Grassmann, who was fond of both Mexico and the Southwest, engaged Roberto de la Selva to paint Mexican murals on its interior walls.

Roberto de la Selva

Unhappy with American political control of Nicaragua, his homeland, and its occupation by United States Marines, young Roberto de la Selva, who had acquired woodcarving skills from indigenous artisans, moved to Mexico where he studied art the Academy of San Carlos. Following graduation in 1925 he left for New York City to join his brother Salomon, a poet and a journalist, who was teaching at Columbia University. It was during this time in the late 1920s that De la Selva was hired by Grassmann. Roberto de la Selva died in 1957.



Art Tied to Social and Political Reform Movements

Not known as a muralist, the bulk of De la Selva's work as an artist is comprised of bas relief sculpture in wood, and he was one of the first artists to use this medium. His art combines traditional wood carving with Mexican Modernism, an art form that connected art to social reform movements of the period, and many of his scenes make political statements. Some carvings illustrate the daily lives of Mexican villagers, and others depict Aztec or Mayan civilizations. Much of De la Selva's sculpture is polychromed, though some is stained to emphasize the fine mahogany he used. His work, influenced by that of Diego Rivera, also includes expertly carved busts of such notables as Gandhi, Edison, Moses and Benito Juarez, the latter work described by Rivera as "the best 'Juarez' I have seen." By the 1930s, De la Selva had achieved a significant reputation following exhibitions in several major cities, including New York.

The Only Existing Examples of De la Selva Murals

Sometime after the Union County Park Commission acquired the Deserted Village and rented out the houses, the walls of this cottage were covered with wallpaper, hiding the murals. The art was rediscovered when the wallpaper was removed during a 1975 renovation. The catalog of a recent San Antonio Museum of Art exhibition of De la Selva's work identified the Deserted Village murals as the only existing examples of the artist's work as a muralist. The murals have deteriorated over time; however, some may be candidates for restoration.

In addition to the collection of De la Selva work owned by the San Antonio Museum of Art, and the murals in this cottage, here in the United States examples of De la Selva's work can be found in several private collections. His bust of Ruben Dario, the famous Nicaraguan poet, was donated by the sculptor himself to Columbia University, and ten large De la Selva panels are on permanent display at the Nelson A. Rockefeller Center for Latin American Art at the Witte Museum.



De la Selva is known for his bas relief sculptures in wood. Some, like *Revolutionaries*, address political themes.



The image on the left shows a deteriorating mural. Following restoration its appearance would resemble the image on the right.