

EARLY COLONIAL HISTORY OF LAUREL SPRINGS

While this land first belonged to the Lenni-Lenape people, the early settlers arrived in the 1600s. The relationship between the native peoples and European peoples were better here than in any other colony. The Dutch and Swedes first settled in southern Jersey with only the Swedes leaving a permanent settlement. The King of England also claimed title to the land due to its discovery in 1497 by John Cabot. The king gave two Englishmen all land between Manhattan and the Delaware River; they in turn sold the southern part, called West Jersey, to the Quakers. The Quaker Proprietors divided West Jersey into ten parts, called "Tenths." The area including Laurel Springs was the Third Tenth. In 1694 the Tenths became counties, and the Third and Fourth Tenths became Old Gloucester County (Camden County separated from Gloucester County in 1844. Laurel Springs was a part of Clementon Township until 1913). The Tomlinson name dominates early history in this area. Joseph Tomlinson came to the Newton Settlement of the Third Tenth in 1686 where he apprenticed in the dyeing trade. In 1690 he married and located on 117 acres on the east side of Gravelly Run on the Blackwood-Clementon Road. In 29 years he increased his holdings, became Sheriff of Gloucester County, then King's Attorney and raised 10 children - a much repeated American story. Ephraim Tomlinson's son, another -Ephraim (1695~1780), purchased 619 acres lying on both sides of Timber Creek, part of which lies in the present boundaries of Laurel Springs. And it was still another Ephraim (1806-1893) great-great-grandson of Joseph Tomlinson who built a gristmill and a sawmill in 1834 on the banks of Timber Creek just west of the present dam site. Ephraim Tomlinson's mills were the largest in this area of the County south of the White Horse Pike.

In 1844 Ephraim Tomlinson built his home, which is the brick mansion (across Laurel Road in Stratford). Around the mill and mansion he began a small community consisting of a slaughter house, about 12 homes for his workers and the Schoolhouse on the Hill which is now a small church (across Laurel Road and across the creek in Lindenwold). Owner of three farms and three stores, his mule teams served the iron and glass factories throughout South Jersey.



Because of the dense growth of laurel all about, he chose the name Laurel Mills. Soon both the beautiful lake that formed behind the mill dam and the general area became known as Laurel Mills. A dirt road that wound down one hill, over the creek, past the dam and climbed the opposite hill became Laurel Mills Road. Ephraim Tomlinson's mill community marks the beginning of Laurel Springs as it is today.