

# Hillside Township

The Hillside area, bordered by the cities of Newark and Elizabeth, was first inhabited in the late seventeenth century by families from Newark and Elizabethtown settlements. Taking the names of two of these families, the northern section of Hillside became known as Lyon's Farms, and the southern as Woodruff's Farms. Mills were built along the Elizabeth River, and small farms were developed in the surrounding country. No first period farmhouses remain, but houses from the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are in the three-bay, half-cape, vernacular style.

The main road from Elizabethtown to Newark (North Broad Street) ran through this region, and, from an early date, a small village grew up by its side at Lyons's Farms. By mid-nineteenth century there were sixty families in the village.

Although never a large commercial center, the village provided several business and civic services. The Swiftsure and Speedwell Stage Company, which operated coaches between Pittsburgh and New York between 1794 and 1820, had its headquarters at Lyons Farms ! A blacksmith's shop was located in the village in 1780, and one continued to be found in the area until the early twentieth century. Peter Sparks opened a general store around 1820; the store passed to Jonathan Harrison in 1830, became the local post office in 1836, and was operated by the Lookers after 1872. The first school was conducted in 1812/13 at a private house in Lyon's Farms, and a frame school house was built five years later.

On March 23, 1853, the Evergreen Cemetery Corporation was incorporated. Laid out just outside Elizabeth on North Broad Street, the cemetery provided additional employment for several area families as grounds keepers, florists, and stonecutters. Transportation to the rural Evergreen Cemetery was possible on the Newark –Elizabeth omnibus (1847), and later on the horse trolley (1865).

**For years after the Civil War, the Hillside Community continued to be a predominantly agrarian one. In addition to the dairy farms and large orchards, truck farms now thrived. The Earl brothers on Conant Street were particularly successful as produce farmers and were able to open a cannery around 1870.**

**The decade following the Civil War also saw the beginning of Hillside's era of residential, small lot development. With the construction of the Newark Bay Train Bridge during the War, Union County became readily accessible to commuters to New York and to New York residents who sought the benefits of summering in the country. Several summer residences were built along Salem and Conant Street at this time.**

**The most ambitious development of the period was carried out by J. Edwin Conant, who purchased land on the Road to Salem Mills (Conant Street) from the Woodruffs. Conant started to build large and architecturally rich planbook houses, but his efforts were thwarted by the Panic of 1873 and the houses that had been constructed stood empty for many years.**

**The next great period of residential development followed the completion of the Lehigh Valley Railroad connection between Newark and Roselle in 1891, and the construction of a station (West Elizabeth) at Lyon's Farms. The electrification of the trolley (the Main or Union Line) in 1895 was another push to suburbanization.**

**Saybrook was laid out in 1892, the Hollywood and Lyonia Manor subdivisions were planned along Hillside Avenue, and Williamson Avenue was developed. Construction in Lyon's Farms was aided by the formation of a building and loan association in 1904.**

**Also, in 1904, the Irvington Branch of the Lehigh Valley was built, and, before the end of the decade, E. E. Meechem purchased the Long and Bloy Farms and created the West Newark subdivision. Many Italian and East European immigrants who had been living on the Lower East Side of Manhattan were attracted to the inexpensive country lots of West Newark. Industry, such as Heddon Iron Construction Co., Bristol-Myers, and L. Mundet & Sons followed the railroad and labor supply, and was soon established along Long Avenue.**

**In 1913 the growing population of Hillside voted to secede from the still rural Union Township, to which Hillside had belonged since 1808. The new township continued to grow through the years. Hillside Township, located between two cities, owing to the World's War and the housing problem had a real estate boom. In 1920 the population was 5,400 and by 1930 the population had risen to 17,601. These new residents were accommodated by subdividing additional farmland, and Hillside was rapidly transformed from a rural community into a suburb with several industrial parks.**

**Today Hillside is a densely developed community with a variety of residential neighborhoods which reflect different architectural and economic approaches to the suburbanizing process. Industry is located along the railroad and U.S. Route 22 & Interstate Highway 78. For many earlier years there was no true business center, the proximity of Elizabeth and Newark and the modernization of Union Township have hampered the formation of one. In recent years, Liberty Avenue has become, logically, a major shopping thoroughfare.**