

Towns of West Creek and Staffordville
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
U.S. Highway 9, West of Edwin B. Forsythe
National Wildlife Refuge
West Creek
Ocean County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1028

HABS
NJ
5-CREKW,
3-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TOWNS OF WEST CREEK AND STAFFORDVILLE

HABS No. NJ-1028

Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, U.S. Highway 9, West of Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, West Creek, Ocean County, New Jersey.

Significance: West Creek is significant as an early industrial town which developed around Westecunk Creek in the early eighteenth-century. Typical of eighteenth-century bay towns, West Creek depended on a combination of maritime industries and extensive natural resources. Staffordsville was established from part of West Creek in the mid-1800s.

History: One of the earliest settlements in Ocean County, West Creek, south of Manahawkin, was founded by Gervas Pharo, who moved to the area around 1705. The original Pharo home, a two-story clapboard framehouse with end chimneys, still stands at the corner of West Street. Pharo is credited for inventing the "Pharo" or Garvey boat, especially designed for bay travel. Many of the early settlers were probably Quaker farmers who attended meetings in Tuckerton. The Indian name Westecunk or Westecunk, which translates as "a place to get meat or eatables," suggests their dependence on the bay as a source of food and income.¹

In his 1834 Gazetteer, Gordon identifies the town as Westecunk creek, and notes the presence of "a grist mill and saw mill, and in the vicinity, some 15 or 20 dwellings."² He also mentions the existence of a "former forge," that once operated on the north branch of the creek. From 1797 to 1808 John Lippencott used pig iron from Martha and Speedwell furnaces to manufacture irons, plows, pots and other items at his "forge, water works, and drowned lands Iron house."³ A few years later the forge was sold and enlarged, but failed to prosper. The property, pictured in the Woolman and Rose Atlas of 1878, became the Stafford Forge Cranberry Bog between 1838-1839. Daniel B. Gowdy's improved farming techniques yielded between 8000 and 10,000 bushels of berries per bog. Now a state owned fish and game preserve, no sign of the once flourishing industry with "extensive" buildings remains along Forge Road.⁴

Beginning with boatbuilding and shipping in the eighteenth century, West Creek industry followed the characteristic shore pattern; lumber, iron and charcoal were marketed until the turn of the nineteenth century, when supplies began to dwindle. Cranberry farming and maritime industries were particularly important before the

¹ Edwin Salter, A History of Monmouth and Ocean Counties (Bayonne, N.J.: E. Gardner & Son, 1890; reprint, Ocean County N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society. [n.d.]), 273.

² Thomas F. Gordon, Gazetteer of the State of New Jersey (Trenton: Daniel Fenton, 1834; reprint, [place...?]: Polyanthos, 1973), 263.

³ Charles Boyer, Early Forges and Furnaces in New Jersey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931), 246.

⁴ Gloria Barone, "Bushels of Cranberries Kept Ancestors Bustling," Ocean County-Times Observer (Nov. 18, 1979), C1.

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Tuckerton Railroad arrived in the 1880's and made ice and salt hay exportable.⁵ Though West Creek never developed a significant commercial district, Cox's General Store opened for business in 1837. The building, which once also served as the local post office, still stands on Route 9 in altered form.

By 1850, West Creek residents were building homes along Main Street (Route 9) and in the neighborhood between Church and Division Streets. Today, Route 9 traffic whizzes by an impressive well-preserved array of Victorian Queen Anne, Greek Revival, Gothic Revival and Second Empire homes. In 1868, a Methodist church was built at the top of Church Street, overlooking the cemetery. The streets surrounding the church are packed with Greek Revival homes, such as the corner home built in 1860, Victorian Gothic residences like the two story L-shaped home on Division Street, and several nineteenth century sheds and farm buildings. The West Creek Schoolhouse, a clapboard structure with three bay windows, a cupola and a gable roof also stands on Division Street. Built in 1888 by John Jones, the schoolhouse is now used as a county municipal building.⁶

The growing community of West Creek gave birth to Staffordsville, during the second half of the century. The small settlement of commercial buildings and Victorian homes just north of West Creek was named for the nearby forge. Today, in Staffordsville, a housing development called Eagleswood village suddenly appears off Route 9, a startling contrast with the surrounding pinelands.

One of the most remarkable buildings in West Creek is a three and one-half story wood shingled watertower moved to the town from Beach Haven in the 1930s. The house, originally built around 1875 was transported to its present site by Mr. Lindholm, a retired steeplejack. Lindholm, who used to dangle himself from the roof of the building for "practice," placed a chair on top of the tower. The chair, since replaced by the current owner, Henry Tiska, is now the chosen perch of a trained mockingbird who performs a looping dive at the command of the Birdman's whistle. A small sign with an arrow pointing to the rear of the home directs the visitor to the Birdman's workshops, a group of remodeled chicken coops. The Birdman builds and sells wooden replicas of his house for the habitation of local birds. The birdhouses, and others like them, are a popular form of vernacular architecture seen throughout the area.

⁵ "Ocean County Historic Sites Survey, Eagleswood" (Toms River: Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, 1981), 2-3.

⁶ "Ocean County Historic Sites, Survey, Eaglewood," 1-7.

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Despite its potential as a suburb for commuters working in Toms River or Atlantic City, West Creek has seen limited growth in the last twelve years. The lack of municipal sewers restricting development has allowed the town to remain much as it was in the nineteenth century.⁷

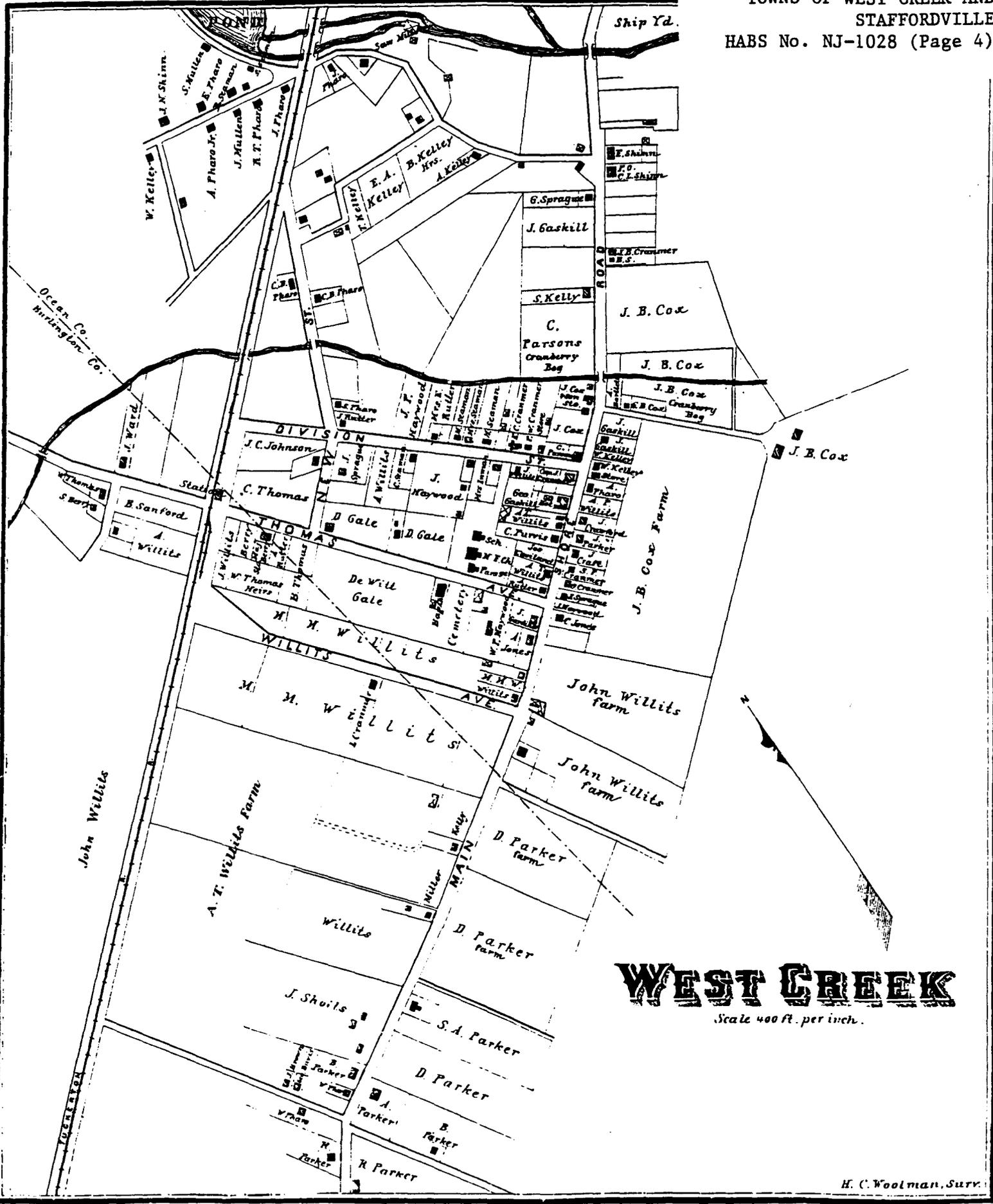
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Summer 1991

- Sources: Barone, Gloria. "Bushels of Cranberries Kept Ancestors Bustling." Ocean County-Times Observer, 18 November 1979.
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Project Information:

This project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of HABS historian Sara Amy Leach, project supervisor. Three historians completed the research during summer 1991: Field supervisor Sarah Allaback (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), Alfred Holden (University of Vermont), and Camille Gatza (North Carolina). David Ames (University of Delaware) made the large-format photographs. Historian, Elizabeth Harris May (George Washington University), edited the HABS reports.

⁷ Lee Cohen, "West Creek Shows Little Development," Asbury Press (December 10, 1989), G7.



H.C. Woolman and T.F. Rose, Historical and Biographical Atlas of the New Jersey Coast (Philadelphia: Woolman and Rose, 1878; reprint, Toms River, N.J.: Ocean County Historical Society, 1985), 303.