

Town of Tuckerton
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
Intersection of U.S. Highway 9 and
County Road 539
Tuckerton
Ocean County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1030

HABS
NJ
15-TUCK
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TOWN OF TUCKERTON

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Location: New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail, Intersection of U.S. Highway 9 and County Road 539, Tuckerton, Ocean County, New Jersey.

Significance: Founded as Quakertown by quakers in the early eighteenth-century, Tuckerton prospered as a port, shipping essential commodities to inland communities. The town also had a prosperous tourist industry, serving as a mainland stop for visitors traveling to Tucker's Island, or Sea Haven and Beach Haven. In the early twentieth-century Tuckerton gained fame when the U.S. Navy siezed the Goldschmidt Wireless radio tower, which Germans had been building, and used it for communication operations during World War I.

History: When Henry Jacobs Falkinburg Sr. arrived in Little Egg Harbor toward the end of the seventeenth century, an Indian village was already well-established along the shore, where Tuckerton is now located. Though any sign of this legendary first white settler has long since disappeared, the celebrated "Tuckerton shellmound" remains as evidence of the early Indian community. The village, sometimes called Quakertown or Andrew Mills, was founded by Quaker brothers who came from Upper Burlington County. In 1704, Edward Andrews built a gristmill on his farm and donated property for the meeting house completed a few years later. Mordecai owned a farm and house on the other side of the Pohatcong creek. Both meeting house and mill, rebuilt on their original sites during the second half of the nineteenth century, still occupy prominent positions downtown.

Even before the revolution, the port furnished distant inland and foreign communities with the products of forest and sea. "The chief occupation of the inhabitants, then, was fishing, fowling, ship-building, manufacturing lumber, such as pine and cedar boards, rails and shingles, which were shipped coastwise to the cities and direct to the West Indies."¹ The success of maritime industries, reflected in Tuckerton's early names, Clamtown, Middle-of-the-Shore and Fishtown, included a lucrative privateering business. Identifying the port as a headquarters of American privateers, the British sent one of its largest military fleets to the village in 1778. A monument to Count Casimir Palaski, commanded by Washington to meet the British attack, stands at the corner of Old Radio Road.

During these revolutionary years and well into the next century, the little village was transformed by the Tucker family, which moved from New York in 1765. Rueben Tucker bought an island, known first as Tucker's island and later named Sea Haven, and a plantation near the town. His son Ebenezer became wealthy on the profits of Pine-Barren lumber. The ships Ebenezer built transported his wood to the West Indies and returned with the exotic goods sold in his general store. A prominent businessman, Ebenezer acted as collector when the village became a port of entry in

¹ John Barber and Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey* (New York: S. Tuttle, 1846), 108.

1787. The postmaster of the first post office in Burlington County conducted much of his business from the Union Inn, a stage-coach stop on Main Street.² According to local legend, Ebenezer hosted a huge feast of "boiled beef and pork, turnips, potatoes and rye bread" on the condition that the village be renamed in his honor.³

Tuckerton became the mainland stop for visitors traveling to Tucker's Island, or Sea Haven and Beach Haven. "In the early days of the summer boarding houses on Long and Tucker's Beaches, city boarders to these houses by the sea, reached Tuckerton by the stages, and then embarked in sailboats for the beaches."⁴ When the Pennsylvania Railroad completed its bridge across the bay to Long Beach, Tuckerton was annexed from the main line. Baymen solved their transportation problem by navigating the abandoned tracks in "Clamtown Sailcars," flatcars rigged with masts and sails.⁵ Most vacationers chose the easier, more fashionable trip to Long Beach. As previously described, Tucker's Island was destroyed by severe storms in the 1920s and entirely disappeared by 1938.

As its tourist trade dwindled, the Tuckerton economy received an unexpected boost. The town became famous in 1913, when the U.S. Navy discovered the Goldschmidt Wireless, a 820' high radio tower the Germans had been building for almost a year. After a 1914 government investigation verifying the absence of a federal license, President Wilson seized the tower for American communication during the war. The wireless brought workers in need of food and shelter, jobs for locals, and extensive media coverage. Though the tower itself was removed in 1955, the remaining concrete building, brick smokestack, and three 1,100 ton concrete blocks attest to the impressiveness of a structure once equivalent in height to a seventy-six story building.⁶

The excitement over the wireless was still alive in 1916, when Tuckerton and Barnegat high schools debated whether "the United States should own and operate the telephone and telegraph lines within its borders."⁷ Sponsors of "The Tuckerton High School Review" advertising the debate included tailors, shoemakers, a jeweller and optician and a commercial printer. Reuben Gerber displayed a variety of products in his Route 9 store, modeled after Macy's in New York. Now divided into several shops within the Tuckerton Emporium, the store's art deco light fixtures recall these

² Jack Lamping, "The Life and Times of Ebenezer Tucker" (Ocean County: Ocean County Bicentennial Monograph, 1975), 2.

³ Alfred Heston, Jersey Waggon Jaunts, vol. 1 (New Jersey: Atlantic County Historical Society, 1926), 194.

⁴ Leah Blackman, History of Little Egg Township (1879; reprint Tuckerton: The Great John Mathis Foundation, Inc., 1963), 216.

⁵ "Clamtown Sailcar Rushed Clams to Market," Tuckerton Chronicle (April 25, 1968), 16.

⁶ Roy Nunn, "The Goldschmidt Wireless of Tuckerton, New Jersey (Albright College, 1967), 1-10.

⁷ "The High School Review," vol 3., no. 5 (Tuckerton: February, 1916), 11.

more prosperous days. Though the increased traffic on Route 9, a new Wawa market and several fires have caused considerable change, the basic core of Tuckerton's compact commercial center remains.

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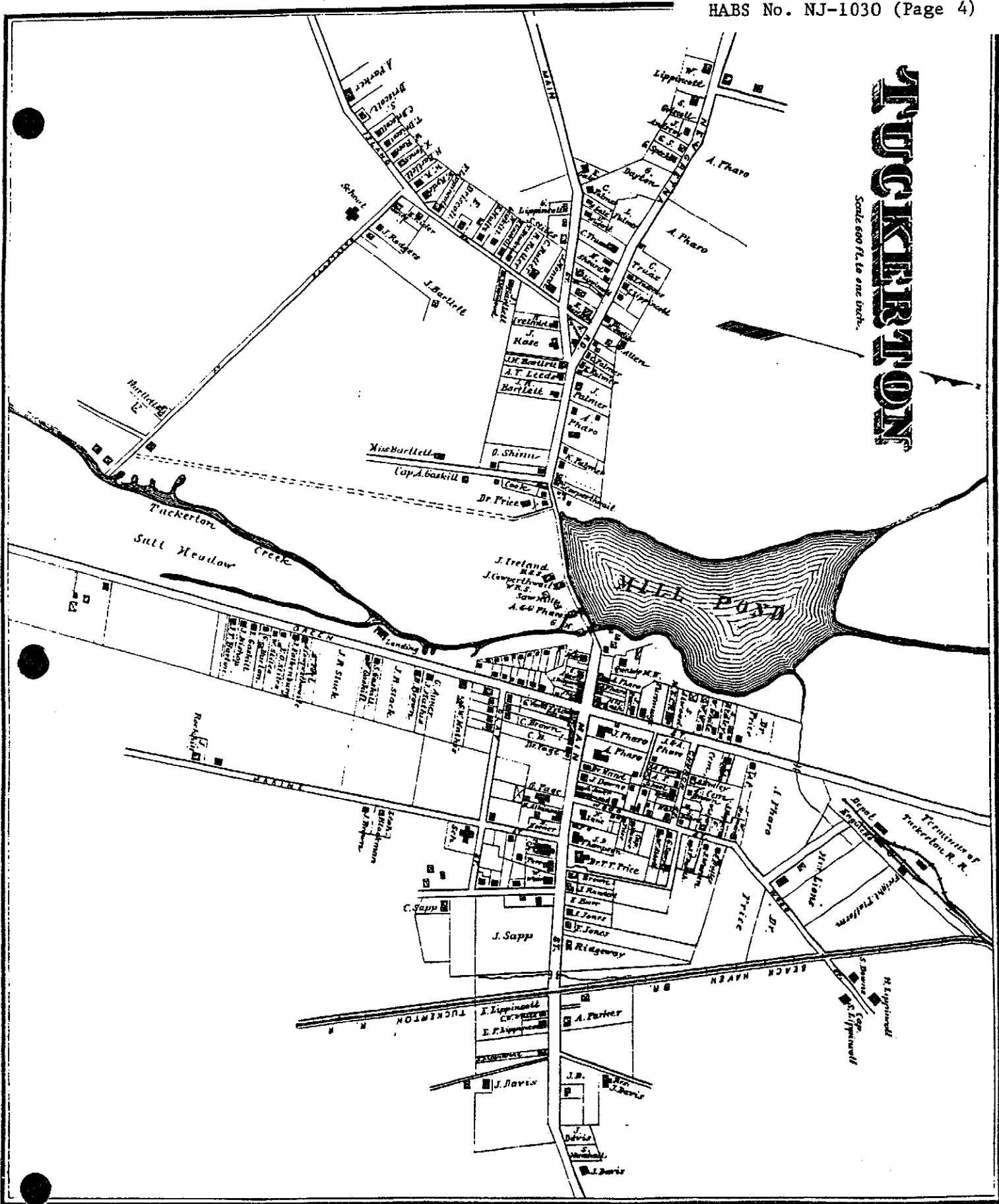
- Sources: Barber, John, and Henry Howe. Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey. New York: S. Tuttle, 1846.
- Blackman, Leah. History of Little Egg Township. 1879; reprint Tuckerton: The Great John Mathis Foundation, Inc., 1963.
- "Clamtown Sailcar Rushed Clams to Market." Tuckerton Chronicle, 25 April 1968, n.p.
- Heston, Alfred. Jersey Waggon Jaunts. New Jersey: Atlantic County Historical Society, 1926.
- Lamping, Jack. "The Life and Times of Ebenezer Tucker." Ocean County: Ocean County Bicentennial Monograph, 1975.
- Nunn, Roy. "The Goldschmidt Wireless of Tuckerton, New Jersey." (Thesis) Albright College, 1967.

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.

TUCKERTON

Scale 600 ft. to one inch.



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), 309.