
OLD LYONS FARMS

•
*By the Staff of
The Hillside National Bank*

•
Sept. 1, 1958

The name Lyons Farms as present day Hillside formerly was known for more than 200 years has nearly disappeared from use since the township's organization 45 years ago.

The section was so named because of the many families by the name of Lyon who lived in it. Boundaries of the area were not defined. However, by tradition they began in the vicinity of Hawthorne Avenue, Newark, and stretched through Weequahic Park, Evergreen Cemetery, most of present day Hillside to the North End of Elizabeth.

There were of course some conflicts in designations. The North End of Elizabeth and land along Conant Street also was known as Woodruff Farms for that early Elizabeth family. The section from Conant Street to Hollywood Avenue later became known as Saybrook.

The area around Salem Dam on the Elizabeth River was called either Salem or West Lyons Farms.

THE FIRST LYON

The first Lyon to own property here was Henry Lyon, who witnessed the execution of Charles I on January 30, 1648, at Whitehall, England when serving as a soldier in Cromwell's army.

Henry Lyon fled shortly afterward to New Haven, Conn. In 1666, he sailed from Milford, Conn. harbor with Robert Treat to the "rich meadowland and timber on the hills" as the Newark area was described by a contemporary writer.

Henry Lyon served as Newark Town's first treasurer, holding the office from 1668 to 1673. Since no money was paid in taxes, he had to collect and store each man's half bushel of grain.

He also was designated as Newark's first inn keeper in January, 1668. He apparently moved to Elizabethtown before 1677 because his children are not listed when the first school began in Newark in that year.

In Elizabethtown, he continued his activities in government. He was mentioned as a member of the General Assembly of the Colony of New Jersey on November 8, 1675. He subsequently was named as a "Judge of Small Causes" in February 4, 1681; Justice of Peace in August 1, 1681; commissioner of highways for Essex County in December, 1682; a representative of the Council of the Governor November 26, 1684; commissioner of ten Judgeships and one of the Elizabeth Town Associates on May 1, 1686.

His property was acquired by drawing lots, initial associate rights and purchase. He owned some 130½ acres in Newark and 306 acres in Elizabethtown. Among these were parcels at the intersection of today's Salem Avenue and North Broad Street, Elizabeth, land in Clinton Place near Lyons Avenue, Newark, Liberty Avenue, North Broad Street and along the Elizabeth River here.

Since boys of 14 years of age were permitted to acquire property some of his sons participated in the drawings in Newark and Elizabeth land partitions. These included Benjamin Lyon who had considerable property along Bound Creek, the dividing line between Elizabethtown and Newark, Joseph Lyon, Samuel Lyon and Ebenezer Lyon.

With the exception of the Woodruff family who settled Elizabethtown first and the Winans family who came from Rahway, most of the early settlers of Lyons Farms were included among the early residents of Newark.

According to tradition, they were among a large company that arrived in Boston from England about 1638. Seeking to form a separate community, they moved to New Haven in 1639 and to Newark in 1666.

The exact date of settlement here is unknown. Apparently the land was used for grazing, farming and wood lots. As the families grew, sons built dwellings on the property making the Lyons Farms settlement.

These early settlers included the Bonds, Baldwins, Meekers, Thompsons, Wards, Tichenors, Heddens, Morrises, Bruens and Bakers.

TRANSPLANTED NEW ENGLAND

Because of their earlier association with New England, the farms area has been described as a "bit of transplanted New England which long remained true to type."

Many of the families were closely related. Thomas and Joseph Grumman for instance migrated to Newark in 1714 from their home at Fairfield, Conn., because their maternal great-uncle, Henry Lyon, had property in the area. Joseph Grumman became the first Grumman to move into the Lyons Farms area.

Professor Samuel R. Winans Jr. of Princeton University wrote in the "Lyon Memorial" in 1905 that Lyons Farms was composed of drift deposits, shale, gravel, sand and yellow clay. There was a plain toward Elizabethtown and abrupt steep rounded hills, gullies and depressions toward Newark.

The residents used turf from a peat bog on the Lyon tract for burning in the "ten plate stoves." There also was a large wood supply, Professor Winans said, which was quickly removed and not replenished.

Eastward of Lyons Farms was the great marsh and salt meadow. The sluggish waters from the head of the cove in today's Weequahic Park flowed into Bound Creek and emptied into Newark Bay.

In the nineteenth century, Lyons Farms was famous for its apples, Professor Winans continued. Wagons, carriages and shoes were made here. The area had no saloons, but tolerated mosquitoes, he said.

A FAVORITE WALK

In 1889, an unidentified Newarker wrote in the "Elizabeth Daily Journal" that his favorite walk was from Elizabeth to Newark following the "picturesque old road to Newark through Lyons Farms."

"After passing the stately mansions in Elizabeth," he said, "we come to Evergreen Cemetery, 'God's acre,' with nothing to disturb the solemn solitary stillness of the place but the chirps of birds and the click, click of the monument makers on the other side of the street as they form their letters on marble to tell future generations virtues of the departed ones."

He continued, "We stroll onward glancing on either side at the farm houses as we pass along until we reach the pond where Elizabeth's young men and maidens, old men and children skate in the winter time." This pond was located near the old Lehigh Valley Railroad station.

"In front of us stands the blacksmith shop and we wonder as we go by how many more generations will have their Dobbin's shoes fastened on here. In front stands the old car horse with head hung down, blinking his eyes in the sunlight as it streams from over the pond to the west of us. He is waiting to be hitched up and draw his load of farms people to the city to shop," the article continued.

"To our right is the old Lyons Farms store where in the evening the farmers will betake themselves to have a chat about the crops and kindered topics before retiring," he said. This was the first general

store operated by Horace Greeley Looker. Opposite in addition to the blacksmith shop were the horse barns for the horse cars and Looker's hall.

"The road to our left looks inviting," the walker continued, "but we don't have time to go up it." If he had he would have found the old Red School House in Hillside Avenue.

"Climbing up the little rise of ground and past a deserted crumpling building to our left and the many smiling doorways of well-to-do country squires we come to the Old Stone School House," he asserted. This school stood in Chancellor Avenue near Elizabeth Avenue, Newark.

"We see the Farms Church on its high eminence overlooking the road," he wrote. He did not indicate which church he was passing. The Lyons Farms Presbyterian Church was formed in 1849 and stood near Chancellor Avenue, while the Lyons Farms Baptist Church organized in 1769 stood near Lyons Avenue.

"Still a little further we are at the long hill and see farmers and wagons returning from Newark and the turnouts of city folk visiting the country. We can see the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks, green meadows and white sails of boats on the bay," he concludes his visit to Lyons Farms.

Another glimpse into old Lyons Farms is given by an essay written in 1916 by the late Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Kennedy Tichenor, 1841-1923, who described childhood visits to the old Lyon Homestead in Lyons Farms in Lyons Avenue at Clinton Place, Newark.

She especially enjoyed the delights of the "champer," attic or open garret area which extended over the whole ceiling portion. The room was lined with corn, dried herbs for medicines and seasoning, bags of chestnuts and heaps of walnuts and hickory nuts.

Elizabeth and Newark expanded. The Lehigh Valley Railroad began service to Lyons Farms in 1891 and the farms area gave way to suburban life with its demand for a separate aggressive community.

SAFETY MONTH

Peaceful and pleasant as life in old Lyons Farms may have appeared, it was full of hazards.

Children strayed into swamps. Horses ran away and farm accidents were frequent.

Today these hazards have been eliminated, but have been replaced by a wide variety to plague the community. To combat these, the Hillside Kiwanis Club has set September aside as "safety month" in an overall effort to encourage prevention of vehicular, pedestrian, household, industrial and other types of accidents.



The Hillside National Bank urges each person to maintain a savings account to meet these emergencies. The bank also has available personal and other loans which officers will be happy to discuss with the applicant to assist in meeting unexpected needs.