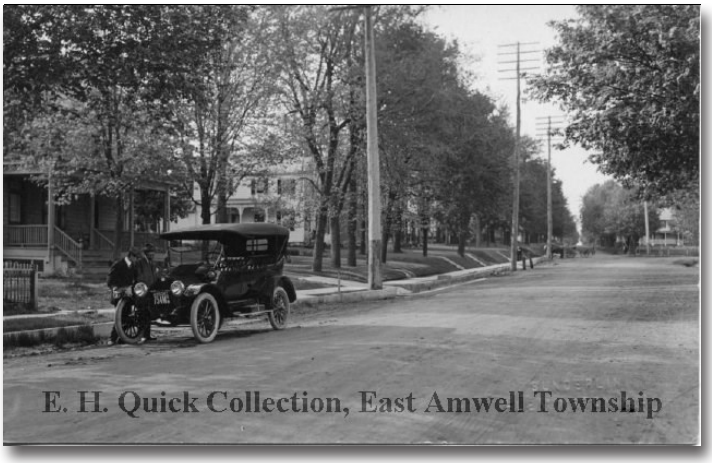
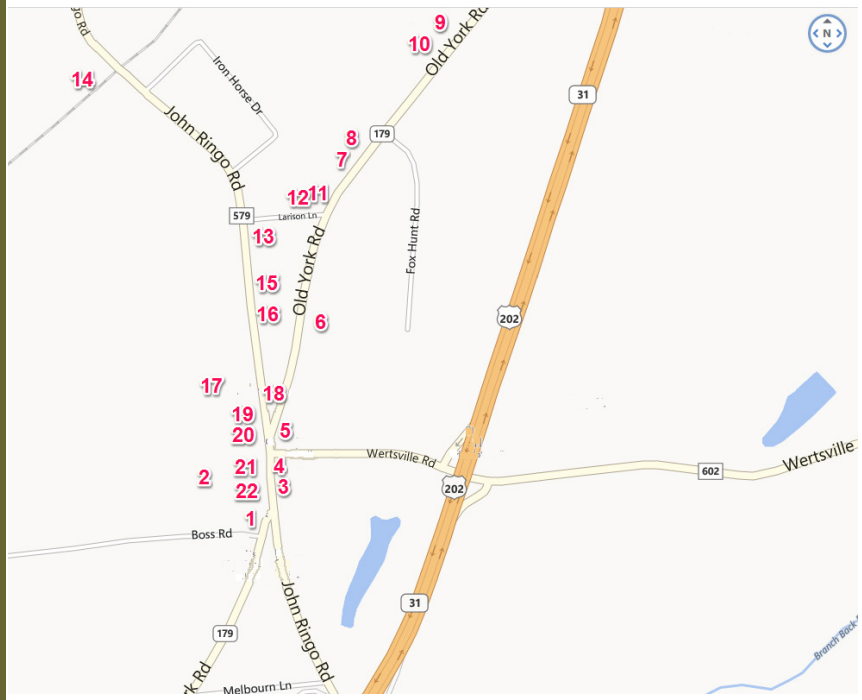
Exploring Ringoes

A Self-Guided Tour



The East Amwell Historic Preservation Committee invites you to explore the historic village of Ringoes. This self-guided tour lets you learn the history of our community by visiting the sites in person or from the comfort of your easy chair.

If you choose to get out and see the sites, we urge you to be careful as Old York and John Ringo roads are both quite busy and there are stretches of road without sidewalks.



We suggest you begin your tour at the corner of Boss Road and Old York Road facing north. This vantage point will help you understand why the village of Ringoes was established here.

1 You are standing just south of the crossroads of two significant trails used by the Lenni Lenapes. One trail later became the King's Highway and then the Old York Road. This road crossed the Delaware River at New Hope, into Lambertville at Coryell's Ferry, and swung through Mount Airy before reaching the point where you're now standing. This road continues on to Three Bridges, Raritan, Plainfield, Westfield and Elizabeth Port, and was a major route for anyone traveling from Philadelphia to New York City in the 18th century. The road which comes from the right and crosses the Old York Road (Route 579) runs from Trenton up to Philipsburg. No one can say for certain exactly where at these crossroads the first John Ringo built his log cabin when he arrived here in 1720.

Head down Boss Road, past the building at the corner (most recently a bank), until you pass 12 Boss Road, but before you reach the sign for the bridge. There's a grass and dirt driveway that leads up a slight incline. Climb it and veer right, toward the white monument. This is the monument commemorating John Ringo, for whom this section of East Amwell is named.

2 You are standing in the Ringo family burial yard. The monument in front of you dates to 1932 to honor the first John Ringo (his Dutch name was Jan Philipszen Ringo). He was born to Philip Janszen Ringo and Geertje Cornelis in 1655 at Fort Beversreede on the Schuylkill River. (This fort was located near Philadelphia, just southeast of the Walt Whitman Bridge.) The family soon moved to New Amsterdam (now New York City), and John later became a sailor.

The legend of John Ringo and his buried treasure begins at the seashore of a small port on the Spanish Coast. John was attacked by pirates, who dragged him to a small ship manned by several other pirates and two slaves. Ringo gained the confidence of the two slaves, and one day when the pirates left the ship, Ringo and the slaves sailed away. The ship later reached New York City, where Ringo sold the pirates' cargo except for a heavy chest. After much trouble, he finally succeeded in opening the chest and discovered it was full of gold. "Ringo realized the treasure had been taken from people, who were murdered by the pirates and therefore he determined never to use it," one Ringo family history states. Fearing the pirates would find him in New York City, Ringo scurried to the wilds of New Jersey. Legend says he buried the treasure "in the deep of night and died without disclosing the hiding place because he did not want any of his family to taint their hands with this 'blood money'."

A number of Ringo family members are buried here including the second John Ringo, who ran the well-known tavern during the American Revolution.

Retrace your path to where the Old York and John Ringo roads intersect. Cross the street and head toward Wertsville Road. Stop between the Carousel Deli and the building next to it.

3 The building to your right was the Washington Hotel. Built in 1851, it featured a pool room, dining room, private accommodations and a large veranda-type porch, and was a popular spot in town. The Swift-Sure stage coach stopped here during the hotel's infancy. Later, four to five trains arrived in Ringoes daily (we'll get to the train station later), and a buggy from this hotel would meet each one to collect the mail and take travelers here. The hotel was a wild place according to Dr. Cornelius W. Larison (who we'll learn more about later). He lived and had an office here in 1863 but probably couldn't wait to get out. He described the place as a "boisterous, hell-raising, filthy-languaged place," and "if there was not a fight at the hotel on a Sunday morning before breakfast then things were monotonous." Prohibition and the automobile killed what by the 1920s was known as the Slater Hotel. The livery stables, which stood where Dave's Sunoco station is now, were torn down in 1923. Visitors at one time enjoyed sitting on the porch to watch baseball games played on the road, but that ended when the roadbed was reconstructed. By the 1960s, this building was converted into apartments.

Now, turn to the Carousel Deli.

4 This store dates back well over 100 years, and was known as the "Lower Store." Elmer Holcombe ran it for more than 50 years, and the building has undergone some remodeling; and at one time there were gasoline pumps in front of the store.

Cross Wertsville Road to the historic sign. This is the site of the Ringo Tavern, a hotbed of activity during the American Revolution.

5 While the first John Ringo to settle here ran a tavern of sorts, the building most people remember got its start on Aug. 6, 1736, when Philip Ringo – a nephew of the first John Ringo – received a deed for a five-acre plot at these crossroads and shuttered his mill in Hopewell. Twenty years later, the tavern was known throughout the region, but it wasn't until Philip's son, John (the second), took over that the business gained its place in local history. A boisterous, outspoken person, the second John Ringo threw himself into the Rebel cause and joined the Sons of Liberty. In March 1766, they met at this tavern to protest the Stamp Act. Patriots met at Ringo's Tavern over the next several years to discuss their grievances and to appoint people to represent Hunterdon County at a statewide meeting protesting British policies. When the Rebellion began, supplies were collected here and shipped north to Boston and Quebec, which were both under siege at the time.

In 1776, the populace of Amwell was strongly Whig, who for the most part favored the American cause. However, when the British chased General George Washington's troops out of New York, Amwell Loyalists became emboldened, sparking a series of meetings at the tavern that led to a group of loyalists being

imprisoned at the neighboring Landis house. By year's end, the British had chased the Rebels through New Jersey, and Ringo likely shuttered the tavern and took down the sign hanging above the doorway with Washington's portrait on it. Shortly following the firefight on Copper Hill in late 1776 – which saw the death of Cornet Francis Geary at the hands of the militia led by Capt. John Schenk – British troops raided buildings throughout the area including the tavern and Dawlis Mills, which is just south of the village.

Washington's defeat at Brandywine and subsequent loss of Philadelphia in 1778 encouraged the General's envious fellow officers to try to lure the Marquis de Lafayette away with command of a second expedition into Canada. Lafayette left Valley Forge to meet powerful New York Congressman William Duer at the tavern. Duer never showed, and Lafayette took off for Albany. He would return to Ringo's Tavern months later. (We'll discuss that trip at your next stop.)

American troops and Washington passed through Ringoes a few times during the war. The war continued for several more years but John Ringo didn't see it end. He died suddenly on April 12, 1779, at age 43. Pallbearers carried his body through the tavern door across the Old York Road and up to the family burial ground. The tavern would last another 61 years, burning to the ground in April 1840. The house you see before you was built several years later.

Head north along the Old York Road and stop at the stone house with the historical marker in front of it. (Watch for it on the right side of the road.) This is the Henry Landis House.

6 Henry Landis (1716-1809) learned the saddler's trade in Germantown, Pa. before moving to East Amwell in 1737. He built this stone house in 1750. His saddlery became so highly regarded that he attracted customers from as far away as New York. Henry and his first wife Elizabeth had 10 children. Following her death in 1753, Henry married Catherine Graff to whom 14 children were born.

As the historical marker in front of the home attests, the Marquis de Lafayette stayed here during an illness. Here's what we've pieced together about this incident based on the Ringos' family history, Washington's correspondence and Lafayette's memoirs:

> *Lafayette was traveling from Philadelphia sometime between Oc. 27 and Nov. 2, 1778, after receiving permission from Congress to return to France. Before departing, he "stayed up all night, had drunk freely and worked very hard." He left in a hard rain, stopped at Ringo's Tavern where he became ill and was taken to an upper bedroom there. Dr. Gershom Craven recommended Lafayette move to this home so he could rest in comfort and quiet. Lafayette, impatient to leave, stayed an additional evening at this home before setting off, still with a fever and facing more bad weather. He made it all the way to Fishkill, NY, before falling gravely ill and nearly dying. It took several months for him to recover.*

J. W. Lequear's *Traditions of Hunterdon* states: "Landis was much respected by his neighbors. Though religiously opposed to wars and fightings, and consequently taking no part in the Revolution, he was a favorite of (George) Washington, who, when in the neighborhood, would stop at this house; and when but taking observations, would walk up to him and pat him familiarly on the back, and call him a good fellow, or something of the sort."

Landis died "sitting in his chair" in the summer of 1809 at the age of 93. "He had gone into the house from overseeing his workmen in the fields, and, as was his usual custom, had returned to his room to await the call to dinner. When called on to ask a blessing upon the meal, he was found dead." He was buried in St. Andrew's Cemetery, which is next door to our last stop on the tour, the Harvest Moon Inn. The cemetery was larger at one time than it is today.

This building was also home, according to an 1819 deed, to the Rev. Jacob Kirkpatrick (for whom the Kirkpatrick Presbyterian Church is named) and Julia McNair Wright (1840-1903), who wrote roughly 30 books, mostly about temperance, religion and history.

The house changed owners who altered its appearance over the years. At one point the house sported a neoclassical porch and three large dormers. The two-story home now resembles its original appearance more so than it did a century ago.

Carefully proceed toward the house that fronts Marion F. Clawson Park.

7 This home was built around 1811. The home was owned by Harold and Marion Clawson for many years in the 20th century, and the land behind it was farmed. Several years ago the land became a park. The East Amwell Historic Preservation Committee is working diligently to convert the home into a local history museum, and learning and community center.

Continue north toward the Harvest Moon Inn.

8 The first house past Clawson Park is now a private, two-family home that once served as a public school. Built in the early 1900s, the building was used as a school until 1938.

Continue on to just past the Harvest Moon Inn, stopping at the historical marker and the cemetery before you.

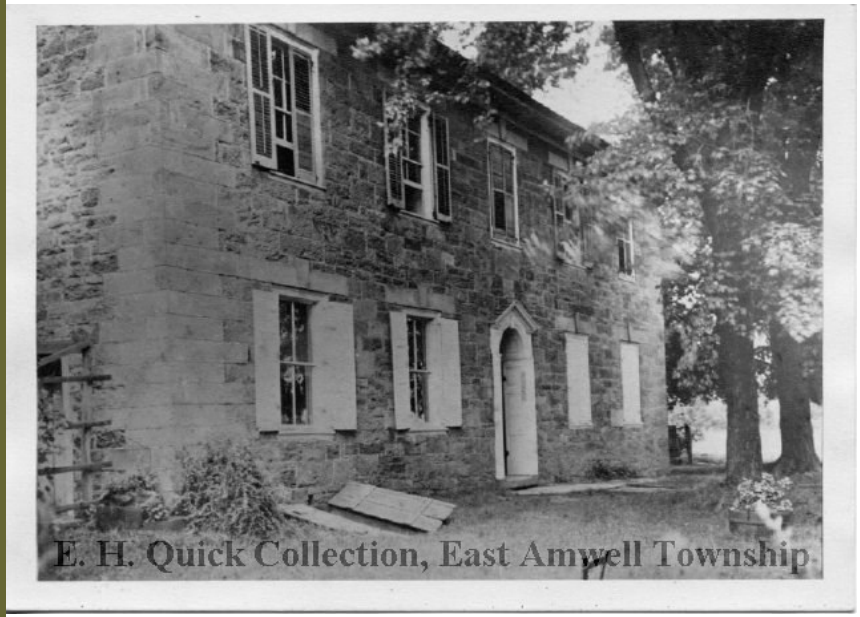
9 This small cemetery, which was larger many years ago, is the only reminder of the St. Andrew's Anglican Church that once stood here. An early log church was built on 11 acres around 1720, and later replaced by a stone structure. St. Andrew's parish relocated to Lambertville in the early 19th century. Among those buried here is Dr. Gershom Craven, who treated the Marquis de Lafayette. The graves all face east, as was the custom at that time. (According to Ethnicity and the American Cemetery, the belief was based on the Christian tradition that when Jesus Christ returns, the departed will rise from their graves already facing his direction.)

Now, let's turn to the building that now houses the Harvest Moon Inn.

10 This building once was the Amwell Academy, and it got its start in May 1811 when Titus and Hannah Quick deeded 56 perches (a perch is about 14½ feet) of land for the construction of this stone building. Local masons and carpenters donated their services and farmers hauled the stones which came from Sandy Ridge and the Sourland Mountains. When its doors first opened later that same year, there were three classrooms on the second floor and a curriculum offering classes in Greek, Latin, English, French, geography, arithmetic, writing, logic, geometry, philosophy and the art of speaking. By 1830, the academy had closed and the building was put to other uses.

About 40 years later, Dr. Cornelius W. Larison and his brother, Rev. A. B. Larison, purchased the building and opened their famous seminary in Ringoes. For the next dozen years, the school offered broad curriculum for boarders and day students of both genders stating: "It is earnestly desired that each student shall be prepared for an honorable and conscientious performance of the duties of life."

For the first two terms (January 3 - July 8, 1870) tuition per term was $10 for "Classics Courses" (Latin and Greek) and $8 for "English Branches" (rhetoric and literature). Tuition also included mathematics, history and sciences, but French, drawing and piano instruction cost extra. Rev. Larison died in 1872 and



Cornelius had less to do with the seminary around that time, serving in 1874-75 as the professor of Natural Science at Bucknell. He resigned in 1875 to resume his medical practice in Ringoes and start the Academy of Science and Arts – not to be confused with the seminary – just down the road at the corner of Old York Road and Larison Lane.

The Seminary closed in 1881. Polly Blackwell operated a school here from 1898 to 1907. Several restaurants operated out of this building in the 20th century.

Now, let's learn more about one of Ringoes' most prominent citizens in the late 1800s. Retrace your path to the home on the corner of Old York Road and Larison Lane. This building once was the home of Dr. C. W. Larison.

11 Dr. C. W. Larison was born Jan. 10, 1837, in Delaware Township. He was an educator, physician, historian, author, phonetic-spelling advocate and a truly unique character. Larison was the prototypical country doctor, traveling to patients' homes in his horse and buggy, charging 25 cents to pull a tooth and $5 to deliver a baby. In his *Jurnal of Helth* (yes, that's phonetic spelling), he offered tips on combatting influenza, baldness and poison ivy. He touted the health effects of some foods and warned of others. Cabbages, for instance, were harmful. Larison told of a pregnant woman who developed an uncontrollable craving for cabbages and gave birth to a deformed child whose head bore a startling resemblance to the vegetable.

Larison married Mary Sergeant on March 26, 1863, and the couple moved into the Washington Hotel briefly before purchasing this home from Nathaniel

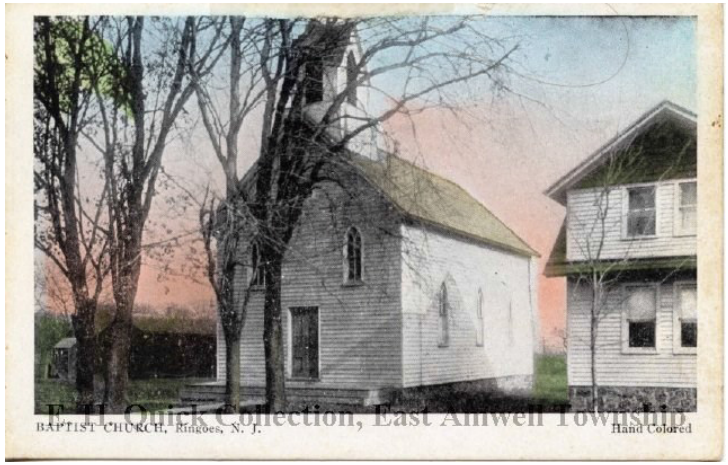
Higgins a year later. The couple lived in this home the rest of their lives. Larison likely suffered a stroke in February 1910, dying two months later. He's buried in Union Cemetery off Boss Road.

Continue to the stone house on Larison Lane, next door to Dr. Larison's home, and stop at the historical marker.

12 This building served as Dr. Larison's Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the publishing house for his "Fonic Speling Wurks in Orthoepy." Built in 1875 of "riven" basalt, the building hosted young men interested in pursuing studies in natural science, mathematics and the arts. As a historian and advocate, he published several magazines and books from here including: *Silvia Dubois: A Biografy of The Slav who Whipt her Mistres, Reminissensez ov Scul Lif,* and *The Ancient Village, Amwell.* Unfortunately, his magazines had few subscribers and his books few readers.

Continue to the end of Larison Lane.

13 To your left near the corner would have stood the old Ringoes Baptist Church, organized in 1868, where C. W. Larison's brother Andrew preached. The brothers worked diligently to purchase the land and have a modest frame structure built to serve as a place of worship, even though there were only four Baptists in Ringoes at the time. Perhaps their motivation stemmed from their concerns for the morality of the village. Dr. Larison said the people of Ringoes were all of one weak faith, and Sunday was the worst day. On this day "carousing, gaming, horse racing, visiting relatives and friends, visiting hotels, drinking, wrestling, fighting and accompanying vices" occurred constantly. Horse racing was a favorite sport and it was common practice for many to race to and from church. These races attracted crowds, betting, quarrels and fights, according to Harry Weiss's biography of Dr. Cornelius Larison.



If you wish, turn right at the corner and head toward the train station.

14 The railroad came to Ringoes in 1854, allowing travelers to hop on a train to Trenton, Philadelphia or New York City. Because of the railroad, the third quarter of the 19th century witnessed considerable residential, commercial and institutional development in the village, and Ringoes nearly doubled in size. Several buildings popped up near the railroad station, including a canning factory (which in 1900 canned roughly 130,000 pounds of tomatoes), a feed mill, a mattress factory and a lumber company. According to newspaper accounts, 300,000 baskets of peaches were shipped from the station in 1882. In 1906, a milk station was constructed on the north side of the tracks at the depot. Several homes were built along Route 179 as the railroad drew a steady stream of traffic. The installation of flagstone sidewalks was completed in 1889, thanks to the hard work of the Ringoes Improvement Association, to lead from the station to the village. In 1965, the Black River and Western Railroad took over the old Pennsylvania line from Ringoes to Flemington and restored the station.

Retrace your path heading south on John Ringo Road.

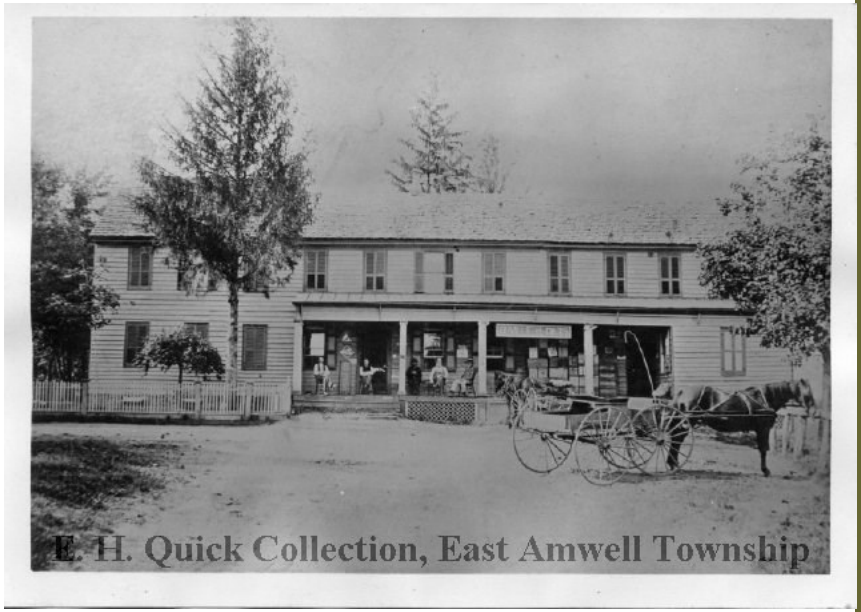
15 After passing Larison Lane, you'll notice the Joseph Inslee Tavern (50 Ringo Road). Inslee purchased a three-acre lot, built this home in 1734 and received a tavern license renewal in 1738.

16 Two doors away is a two-story, three-bay, gable-roof building that served as a blacksmith's shop run by Arthur Danberry, where he performed horseshoeing, blacksmithing and general repairs. This building later became a Chevrolet dealership. Continue on to Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church.

17 The Kirkpatrick Church got its start because of a disagreement between members of the Larison's Corner Presbyterian Church. The cornerstone was laid on Oct. 3, 1868, and the building was finished the following year. The church is named for the Rev. Dr. Jacob Kirkpatrick, who served as pastor for 56 years in the Amwell Valley, but was never the pastor of Kirkpatrick. A wooden platform in front of the church was used by female passengers to disembark from carriages until a team of runaway horses destroyed it in 1881. On Nov. 25, 1950, a hurricane destroyed the 65-foot steeple, causing it to topple and damage a large portion of the roof and the ceiling inside the sanctuary. It was replaced with the 40-foot steeple you see before you today.

According to Dr. C. W. Larison, the foundation for the lecture room next to the church was built from the stone fence around the old Ringo family burial ground.

18 Across the street, where Mom's Restaurant now stands, was a general store, typically called the "Upper Store" to distinguish it from the "Lower Store," where Carousel's Deli now stands. Records indicate Captain David Bishop built a home/store at the northern fork of these crossroads in 1810.



Orville Dilts later ran this store. In 1895, the Upper Store burned down and its owner opened a new store in the lodge hall nearby, until it was taken over by his clerk Calvin Holcombe. Now go past the church to the Solomon Landis house, which you'll find at (35 John Ringo Road).

19 Solomon Landis was born Oct. 5, 1770, and died March 21, 1847. He married Elizabeth Reeder (b. June 23, 1776; d. July 23, 1831) on Jan. 18, 1798, with the Rev. Joseph Rue of Hopewell officiating. Both are buried in the Amwell Second Presbyterian Churchyard in Mount Airy. In 1811, Solomon Landis erected a substantial brick dwelling (at 35 John Ringo Road) across the road from Bishop's new house in 1811, and in 1814 he purchased "Ringoes Old Tavern" from his brother. Solomon lost the tavern at a sheriff sale in 1818, the successful bidder being Isaac Lowe, who owned and operated the tavern until the 1830s.

Continue south on John Ringo Road, but stop at the next house.

20 The International Order of Odd Fellows Lodge Hall was chartered in 1848 and met on the second floor of this building. This building also housed the Dilts/Holcombe general store and Paul Cronce's barber shop in the basement. Barns behind this building were used by funeral director Charles Holcombe as a mortuary and to store a hearse. The local court later met in these barns.

[see photo next page]

Stop #20 - International Order of Odd Fellows Lodge Hall

Continue heading south on Route 179.

21 William Case's restaurant once stood here. This building, constructed in the mid-1850s later became the Mutual Grocery Store and in the 1960s was called the Village Grocery Store.

Continue walking to the Ringoes Grange.

22 Ringoes Grange No. 12 was established on Oct. 11, 1873 by George Thompson, the general deputy of New Jersey, and this two-story, white clapboard building was constructed in 1909. It quickly became a hub for a local farmer's co-op to buy grain and other supplies from Philadelphia. It also housed a meat market, a library, and a meeting and social room, where farm families gathered for square dancing, plays and card parties until the second floor could no longer handle the stomping. The Grange's most famous member was Paul Whiteman (1890-1967), the King of Jazz, whose band featured Bing Crosby. Whiteman took the train into New York City from the Ringoes station every day.