

Township Description

Bethlehem is one of the northwest townships of Hunterdon County and was incorporated in 1798. It is approximately eight miles wide; bounded in the northwest from Warren County by the Musconetcong Creek; southeast by Kingwood, southwest by Alexandria, and in the northeast by Lebanon and Clinton.

The first settlers of the township were Hollanders and came here in the mid to late 18th century to early part of the 19th century. Many of the descendents of these settlers still retain properties or portions of original purchases made by their ancestors.

Some of the more prominent names which are found in the township are: Drake, Smith, Henderson, Vliet, Cornish, Lake, Case, Rodenbaugh, Wene, Duckworth, and Hull.

West Portal was originally known as Bethlehem Village, and later known as West End, due to the fact that the West End Iron Company was responsible for a major part of its early 19th century developments. The West Portal District of Bethlehem Township consists of workers' houses and a hotel.

Approximately half the houses in West Portal are "I-Houses" with banked foundations. These homes were probably built as a group in the late nineteenth century. The buildings are irregularly spaced, but most of the homes are parallel to the road. The district consists of sections of Tunnel, Valley Station, Route 173, Brunswick Pike, and Asbury-West Portal Roads. Joseph Cornish operated a store in 1825 on Asbury Road, which was later owned by the West End Iron Company. Jacob Smith kept a tavern across from the West Portal Hotel as early as 1815. (Snell, pp. 457-66) (Barber, pp. 243-4).