

MILLBURN & SHORT HILLS

How Pioneers, Patriots and Moguls
created a New Jersey Town



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Chickadee Chai

A Chickadee Chai Company Book
Short Hills, NJ

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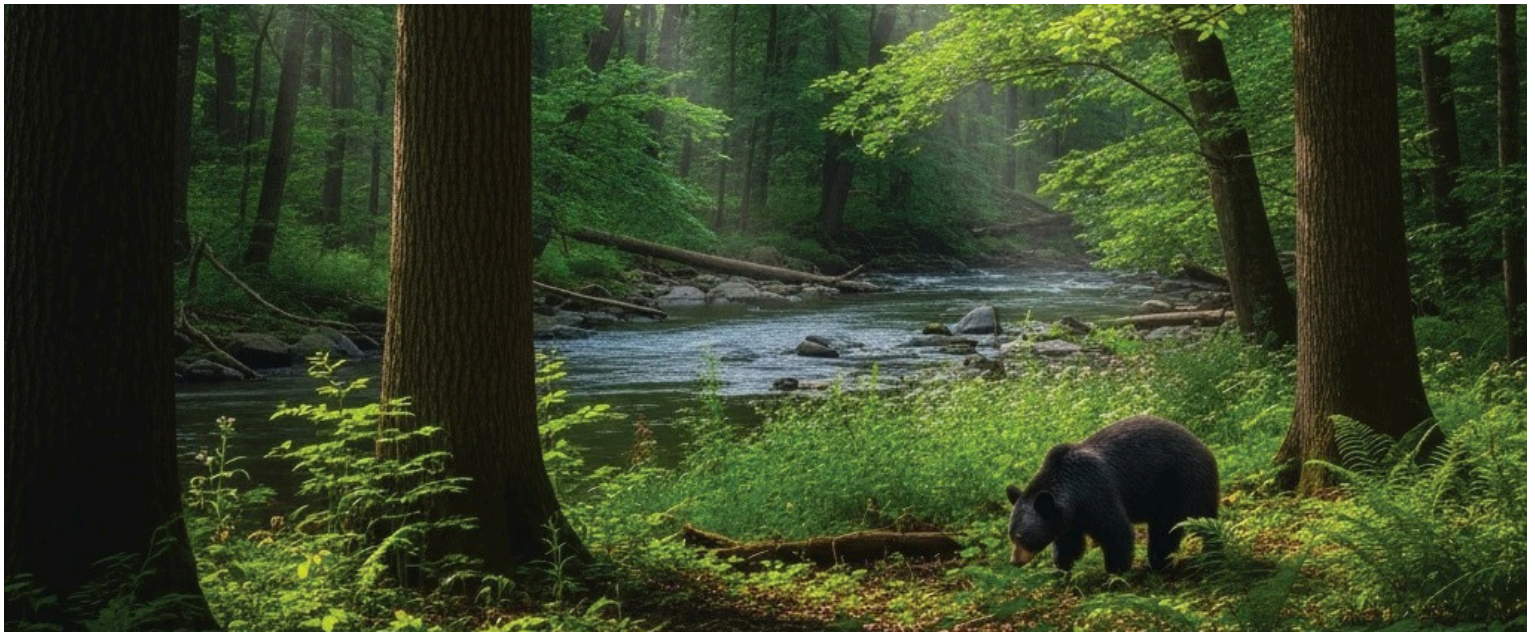
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Chapter 1:

The First Footprints

The history of the land and the Lenape people



For millions of years, New Jersey lay submerged beneath the sea, a watery abyss where time stood still. Then, 250 million years ago, the crust of the earth buckled. Volcanoes buried deep underground erupted with molten lava, sending sheets of liquid rock spewing out between thick layers of mud and sand. The subterranean lava cooled into a dense, crystalline traprock that forms the bones of today's Watchung Mountain range – spine like structures that will one day shape the course of human history.

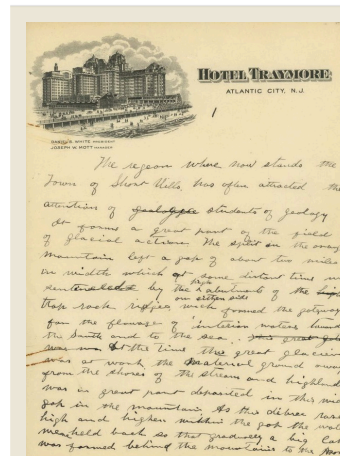
Some time elapsed, and as the world grew colder, a thick glacier made its way down from the north. Its incredible weight destroyed everything in its path, and carved deep valleys into the landscape. It also scraped up vast quantities of earth and rock from the bed of the continent.

Then the earth started to warm again. The ice sheet melted and left behind the rubble it had carried, depositing it like a conveyor belt to the farthest-most edge. These deposits formed a rumpled blanket of low, rolling mounds that geologists refer to as a terminal moraine – or better known as “Short Hills.”

The meltwater from this ice had to go somewhere. Trapped between the ridges of the Watchung Mountains to the west and the newly-formed dam of the Short Hills moraine to the east, the water began to pool. A vast glacial lake emerged, getting larger as time went by. Straining against its dam, the lake eventually breached a weak point in the moraine. A torrent of icy water flowed out and created a path that would one day become the bed of the Rahway River.

For millions of years afterward, the land of short hills and the river next to it was a forest of towering and untouched oak, chestnut, beech, and birch trees. The air smelled like the damp scent of the forest floor and, in late summer, the perfumed scent of wild grapes.

At times, the stillness would be broken by the cry of a hawk circling high above, the rustle of a black bear searching for food under the canopy of the trees, or the splash of a trout breaching the clear waters of the Rahway River. Panthers stalked the ridges, wolves hunted in packs, and majestic elk moved like shadows through the trees.



Above: Notes from Stewart Hartshorn describing the geological history of the area

"The region where now stands the Town of Short Hills, has often attracted the attention of students of geology. It forms a great part of the field of glacial actions. The split in the Orange [now Watchung] Mountains left a gap of about two miles in width which at some distant time was re-enforced by the abutments of the high trap rock ridges, which formed the gateway for the flowage of interior waters towards the South and to the sea. This great job was at the time the great glacier was at work, the material ground away from the shores of the streams and highlands was in great part deposited in this wide gap in the mountain. As this debris rose high and higher within the gap the waters were held back so that gradually a big lake was formed behind the mountains to the North."

This was the land the native Lenape people knew. Their highway, the great Minisink Trail, was one of the first roads to cross the local landscape. It was not a road in the modern sense, but a very slender network of arteries that had been gently beaten into the earth by generations of moccasined feet, connecting their tribal headquarters on Minisink Island in the Delaware River to the salt bays and fishing grounds near the coast, in the area of present day Newark.

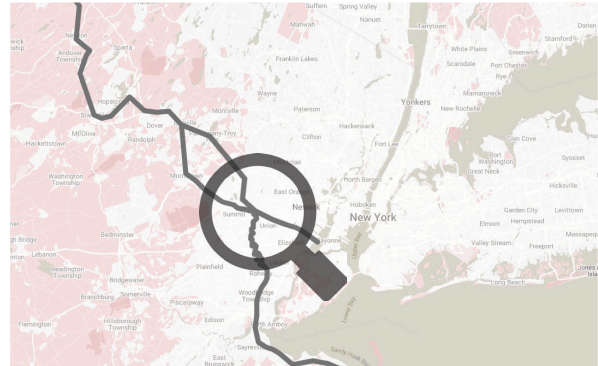
This was a path of convenience, not conquest. The Lenape designed it to follow the driest ground and to go around the treacherous swamps of the Passaic Valley, which enabled them to find the best grounds for hunting.

One branch of this trail followed the route of what locals in Short Hills now know as White Oak Ridge Road, running down Parsonage Hill Road to the future center of Millburn. Another branch created a path along today's Morris Turnpike, fording the Passaic River at a crossing that we now call Chatham Bridge.

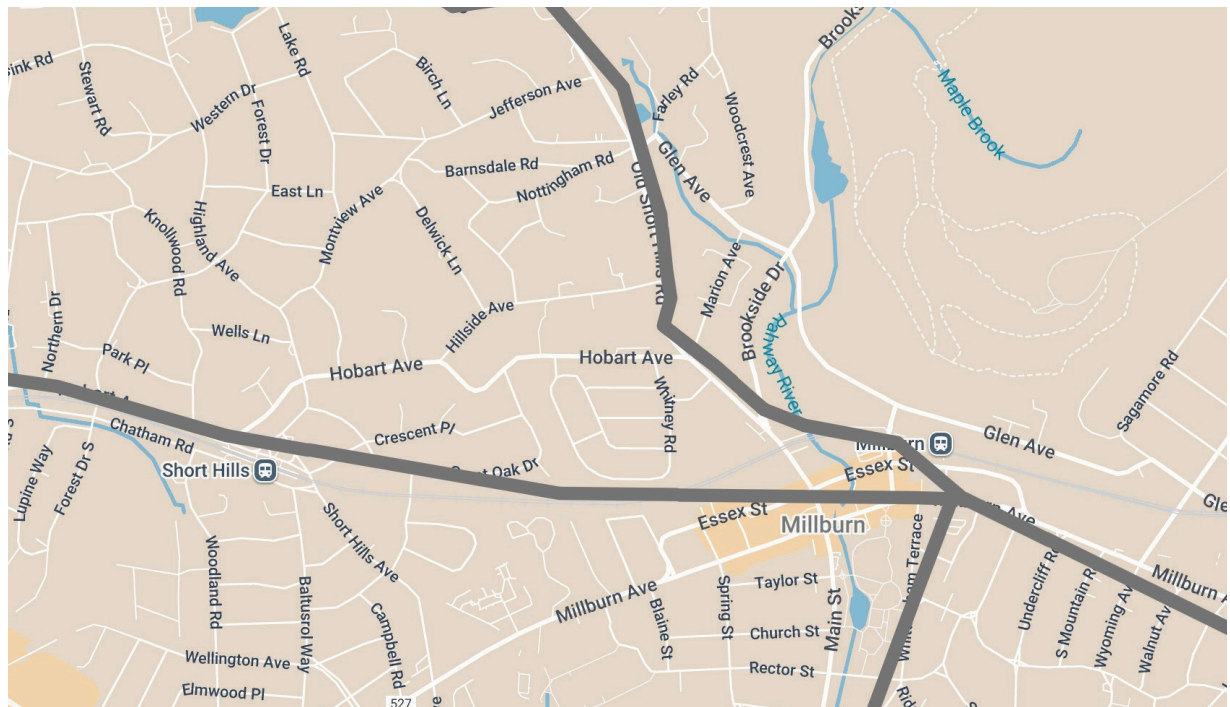
Remarkably, the future center of Millburn was a

natural crossroads for different branches of the trail, each following the most practical route, yet somehow converging precisely in Millburn – an early indicator of the geological blessings that would one day drive great prosperity in the area.

Today, when we drive down the familiar curves of Old Short Hills Road, we are following the ghosts of those ancient journeys, tracing a line drawn upon the earth by people who lived in harmony with its rhythms.



An approximation of key parts of the Minisink Trail - as described in a book by Marian Meisner (see bibliography) - superimposed on a contemporary map of New Jersey (Trail shown as dark grey line)



With magnification of its crossroads within Millburn (area under magnifying glass on small map), indicating the importance of the area.

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