

## Historical Narrative

**Name of Property:** Port Murray Dairy, Port Murray Historic District  
City or Vicinity: Port Murray (Mansfield Township)  
County: Warren County  
State: New Jersey

The Port Murray Dairy is situated at the southeastern most border of the Port Murray Historic District. The District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.

The Port Murray Historic District is significant for its association with settlement patterns, industry, transportation, commerce, and architecture. Unlike most rural New Jersey villages, Port Murray did not originate as a small commercial center serving an agricultural hinterland. Rather it developed as a service node along transportation corridors created by 19th century technological developments: the opening of the Morris Canal in 1831 and the construction, in 1850, of the Morris and Essex Railroad through the village. Though Port Murray shares a linear development pattern with most other rural New Jersey villages, it does not follow the important transportation corridors of canal and railroad, but rather the current main roadways. The locations of some key buildings and features do, however, relate to the canal and railroad. <sup>1</sup>

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries Port Murray flourished as the site of small industries, attracted by the excellent rail service, with the only station stop in the area<sup>2</sup>, and the opportunity to exploit the region's natural and agricultural resources. Although the canal ceased to operate in 1924 and the railroad no longer stops in the village, Port Murray, as the location of Mansfield Township's town hall and two churches, continues to serve as a center for the surrounding area. The majority of buildings in the village predate 1910. <sup>3</sup>

Port Murray reached its zenith in the 50 years between 1890 and 1930. The Port Murray Dairy, which processed milk products, including the making of cheese, was started by Miss H.L. Hurley of Hope in 1900. At that time, the first Dairy workers are said to have occupied a newly constructed triple house row-house nearby. <sup>4</sup>

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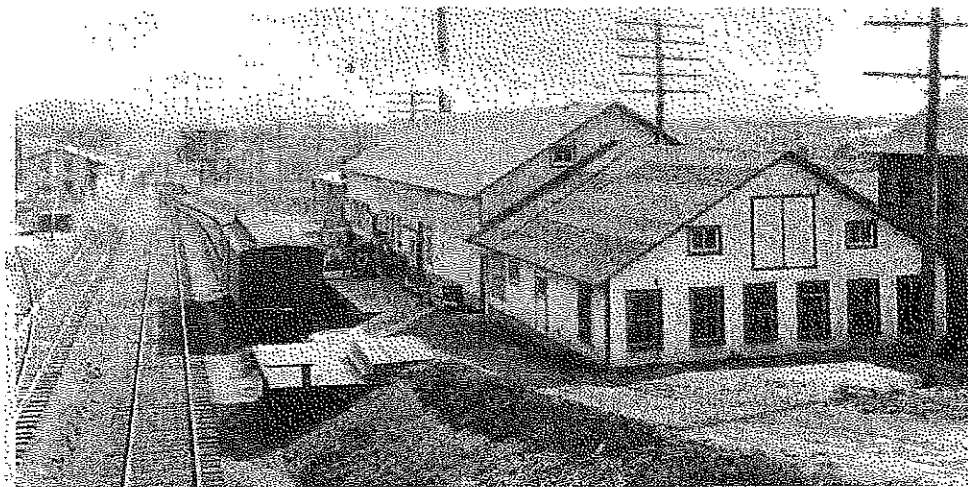
<sup>1</sup> www.livingplaces.com, Port Murray Historic District, The Gombach Group, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> "Historic Sites of Warren County", George Wayne & Susan Morgan, Warren County Cultural & Heritage Commission, no. 46, p. 133.

<sup>3</sup> www.livingplaces.com, Port Murray Historic District, The Gombach Group, 2013.

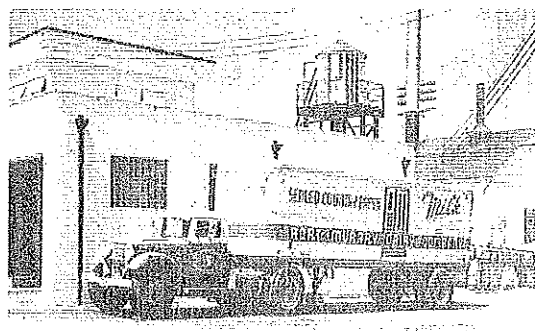
<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Port Murray Dairy thrived and expanded through several building campaigns during the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The first set of buildings were erected starting in 1900 (Fig.1), adjacent to the south side of the rail line, given that rail was the primary mode of product distribution and transportation at that time. Here, raw milk could be brought by local farmers, processed, and loaded directly onto rail cars upon the dairy's dedicated rail siding for distribution to cities and towns throughout northern New Jersey.



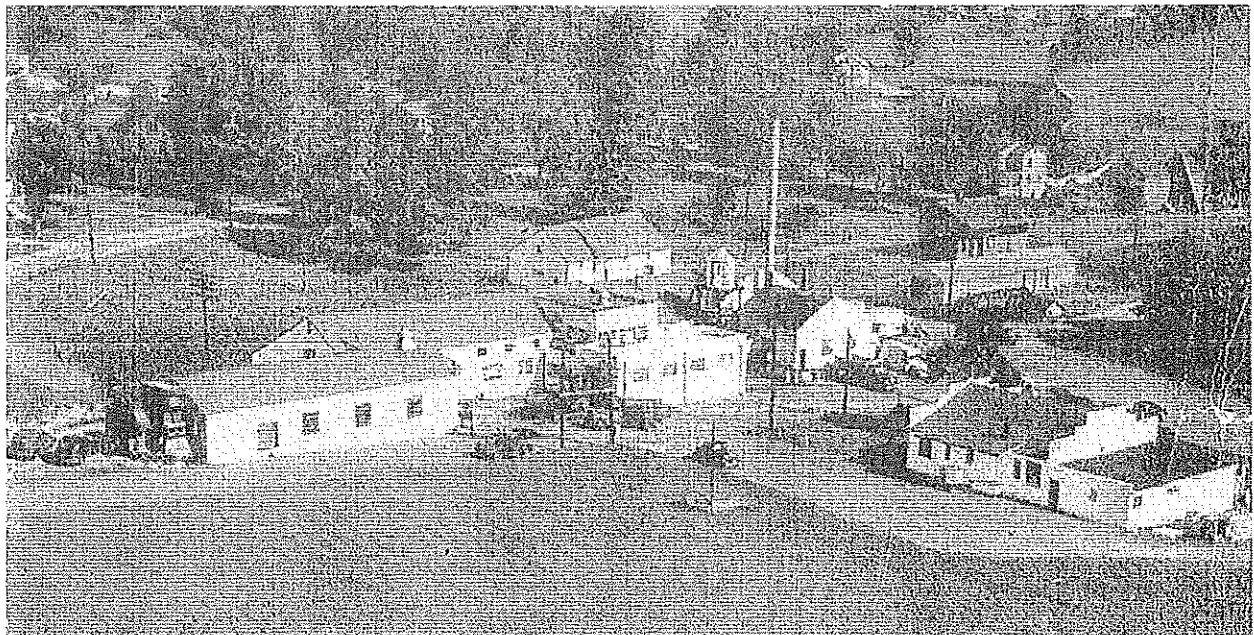
(Fig.1) Dairy complex with railroad siding, from southwest, c. 1915

With the mass production of automobiles and long haul trucks in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Dairy quickly adopted this modern form of transportation to distribute their products. Throughout the 1920's and 1930's the Dairy modernized and expanded their existing receiving, testing, pasteurizing and bottling building complex. In the 1920's, they assembled a fleet of refrigerated trucks (Fig.2) and erected a new "modern" freestanding loading and shipping building to serve a growing retail distribution service. This building was situated approximately one hundred feet south of the original early 20<sup>th</sup> century complex. The new building was composed of Edison Concrete standard 8" x 8" x 16" hollow molded "split-face" concrete block units and industrial steel casement/hopper type windows.



(Fig.2) Refrigerated dairy truck, c.1940

This building had a 44' x 44' footprint, with the appearance of a shallow pitched central gable roof and stepped rectilinear principal gable end parapet walls. At the north and south sides, large central garage door openings were located. Shortly after the erection of this building, a 12' deep x 44' long porch type covered loading dock was erected at the rear south end so as to serve multiple trucks at the same time that could back up to the continuous loading dock area. The large central rear door opening was sealed at that time.



(Fig.3) Dairy complex from southeast, c.1940 (loading & shipping building, lower right)

Around 1940 (Fig.3), the facility was expanded again, where an approximately 12' x 44' flat roofed addition was erected at the south side, composed of unfinished standard 8" x 8" x 16" concrete masonry units, that subsumed the former loading dock to create a 24' x 44' space into which a series of administrative offices, laboratory and testing rooms were placed along a single loaded corridor that ran from the west side of the building through to a newly reoriented open loading porch that was erected along the east side of the building.

By the 1940's, as trucking transport became much more competitive than shipping by train for dairy products, the dairy removed their railroad siding, and reoriented all of their shipping activities to the opposite side of the dairy complex (Fig.4). With the advent of suburbanization in the 1950's, the dairy began to increase the home delivery service of their dairy products. Due to this expansion in services, the Dairy quickly outgrew the original distribution facility space and sometime around 1960 a final large flat roofed addition was erected at the east side of the building subsuming the shallow linear porch

type loading dock. This structure was composed of standard plain 8" x 8" x 16" concrete block units, with no exterior finish. This new truck loading structure was approximately 28' x 74' and housed six interior truck loading bays, accessed by large sliding aluminum paneled doors.



(Fig.4) Dairy complex with railroad siding removed, viewed from southwest, c.1950

Unfortunately the home delivery of dairy products had its zenith in the late 1960's as milk by the gallon was being sold in grocery and convenience stores. With the growth of the suburban retail grocery industry, many dairies consolidated and began to distribute directly to them, providing greater convenience to customers. The dairy home delivery business collapsed by the late 1970's and with it, so too did the Port Murray Dairy company.<sup>5</sup>

By the mid 1990's as the Port Murray National Register Historic District was being formed, all that remained was the freestanding concrete block truck distribution facility. The longtime abandoned dairy complex and site were acquired by Mansfield Township in the 2003.

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<sup>5</sup> "Glimpse of History: Bringing dairy to your door was a family affair in Irvington", The Star-Ledger, Greg Hatala, 14 April, 2014.

References:

Preservation Office, *Port Murray Historic District, Warren County, NJ*, nomination document, 1994/1995, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, Washington, D.C.

Figure 1 provided by Mansfield Township as a photocopy from page 59, the *History of Mansfield Township, 1754-1964*. Mansfield Historical Publication Committee, 1964.

Figures 2 & 3 provided by Mansfield Township, attributed to a Port Murray Dairy brochure published circa 1940.

Figure 4 provided by Mansfield Township, a photographic copy of a framed large format color photograph. Date and photographer unknown.