

David Cochran, 6 min.

## Getting to and from Blawenburg

The roads that intersect in Blawenburg were built before there were enough houses to call it a village. We have seen that there was an old pathway along the ridge now known as Route 518, and it intersected with roads that led to Princeton and Belle Mead. But it wasn't until the Georgetown – Franklin Turnpike was built that the small village emerged.



This is what the Georgetown-Franklin Turnpike looked like around 1890 -1900. Notice the old school and then the church on the right. In the distance you can see Blawenburg Tavern. The parsonage is on the left (south) side of the road. It looks like electricity was arriving in Blawenburg.

Note the poles on the left.

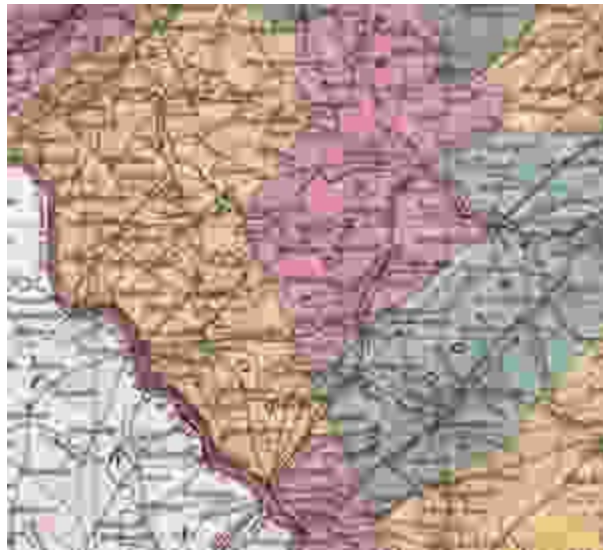
The Georgetown - Franklin Turnpike has been described as an ancient road, which was probably a Native American pathway carved along the shale ridge atop which Blawenburg sits. Even when the area was first settled, it was probably a trail no wider than a cart. Horses and wagons would have to travel in single file along dirt paths filled with many holes. With no drainage, the road had many washouts that made travel perilous at best.



The bridge from New Hope, PA to Lambertville, NJ was built in 1904. While not the original bridge that led to the development of the Georgetown-Franklin Turnpike, it is in the same general location as the original.

The communities in the area benefited from a bridge that was built in Georgetown (now Lambertville) to make it easier to cross the Delaware River from Coryell's Ferry (now New Hope). Originally, both Lambertville and New Hope were called Coryell's Ferry. The two villages were considered a halfway stop on the then major road from Philadelphia to New York. Soon after the bridge was built in 1814, people realized that those who crossed the river had terrible roads to travel on. These roads were in desperate need of improvement if they were to support the increased traffic that the bridge allowed. They decided to widen, improve, and extend the roadway from Georgetown to Franklin. To pay for this project, they made the road a turnpike and charged a fee for its use. Individual towns would be responsible for its upkeep. The turnpike was chartered in 1816 and built between 1820-22.

The Georgetown - Franklin Turnpike runs from Georgetown in the west to Franklin (near Kendall Park) in the east, a distance of 23 miles. In Franklin, it merged into the New Brunswick Turnpike, known today as Route 27. Georgetown was later called Lambertville or Bungtown, depending on who you were talking to. The road that led from Lambertville to Hopewell (Route 518) was called Bungtown Road before the turnpike was built.



*This 1834 map shows that Burlington, Hunterdon, Somerset, and Middlesex Counties occupied the area where Mercer County is today. Note that parts of Princeton were in three of these counties. Blawenburg was in the lower tip of Somerset County.*

The part of the turnpike that runs through Blawenburg has had at least two other names in its lifetime - Hopewell - Rocky Hill Road and County Route 518. The road running North to South has had three names. The section from the Georgetown - Franklin Turnpike to Princeton is called Great Road. At some point, the people of Princeton renamed the section of Great Road as Elm Road. Originally, Great Road was in Somerset County, but Mercer County was carved out of parts of Somerset, Hunterdon, Middlesex, and

Burlington Counties in 1838. This is likely when the name was changed to Elm Road in Princeton. The other part of the road starts at Route 518 and looks like a continuation of Great Road. It originally was Belle Mead - Blawenburg Road, and that name is still on street signs along with its more common name, Route 601. Before it was Route 601, it was County Route 13. These roads were developed in stages as the need for access to new areas arose. The good news is that when you ride on them today, you can just go to your destination and not worry about all the name changes.



### Washington Well

Perhaps the most prominent use of the east-west road came in the Revolutionary War in June, 1778 when Washington and his troops trudged toward the Battle of Monmouth from Valley Forge. They marched east through Blawenburg toward Rocky Hill and allegedly drank the well dry at the Washington Well Farm, the Dutch farm of the Duryea family for many years.

We think of those marching into battle as men, but there were a number of women who traveled through Blawenburg with Washington's troops. They helped make meals, tend to the wounded, and supply the troops. Perhaps the most famous woman was Mary Hays, a native of Trenton. She traveled with her husband and served as a carrier, providing water for the soldiers. Mary provided water in pitchers for the soldiers and acquired the nickname, Molly Pitcher. Some say that the thirsty soldiers would yell, "Molly! Pitcher!" when they needed water. She is one of the few women in the Revolutionary War to earn a military rank. When her husband left the battlefield due to injury or exhaustion, Molly took his place loading cannon artillery. For her efforts, she was given the non-commissioned rank of Sergeant and became known as Sergeant Molly. Some say that the Molly Pitcher story is a myth, but I prefer to think of Molly walking through Blawenburg with the troops.

The development of these roads provided the impetus for Blawenburg to grow as a village. Because of the turnpike, a tavern, blacksmith/wheelwright shop, store, and church as well as several new houses were built, and a village emerged between 1818 and 1845. Oh, what a difference a bridge and a road make!

**Blawenburg Fact:** The Georgetown-Franklin Turnpike had a short lifespan. The idea of tolls was not a financial success, so the road was turned over to the municipalities around 1840.

### **Looking Ahead: Blog 5. What's in a Name?**

#### Sources:

Brecknell, Ursula C., *Montgomery Township, An Historic Community, 1702-1972*, Van Harlingen Historical Society, Montgomery Township, NJ, 2006.

Luce, T. J., *New Jersey's Sourland Mountain*, Sourland Planning Council, 2001.

Photo: Georgetown-Franklin Turnpike from Bill Van Zandt Collection

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molly\\_Pitcher](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molly_Pitcher)