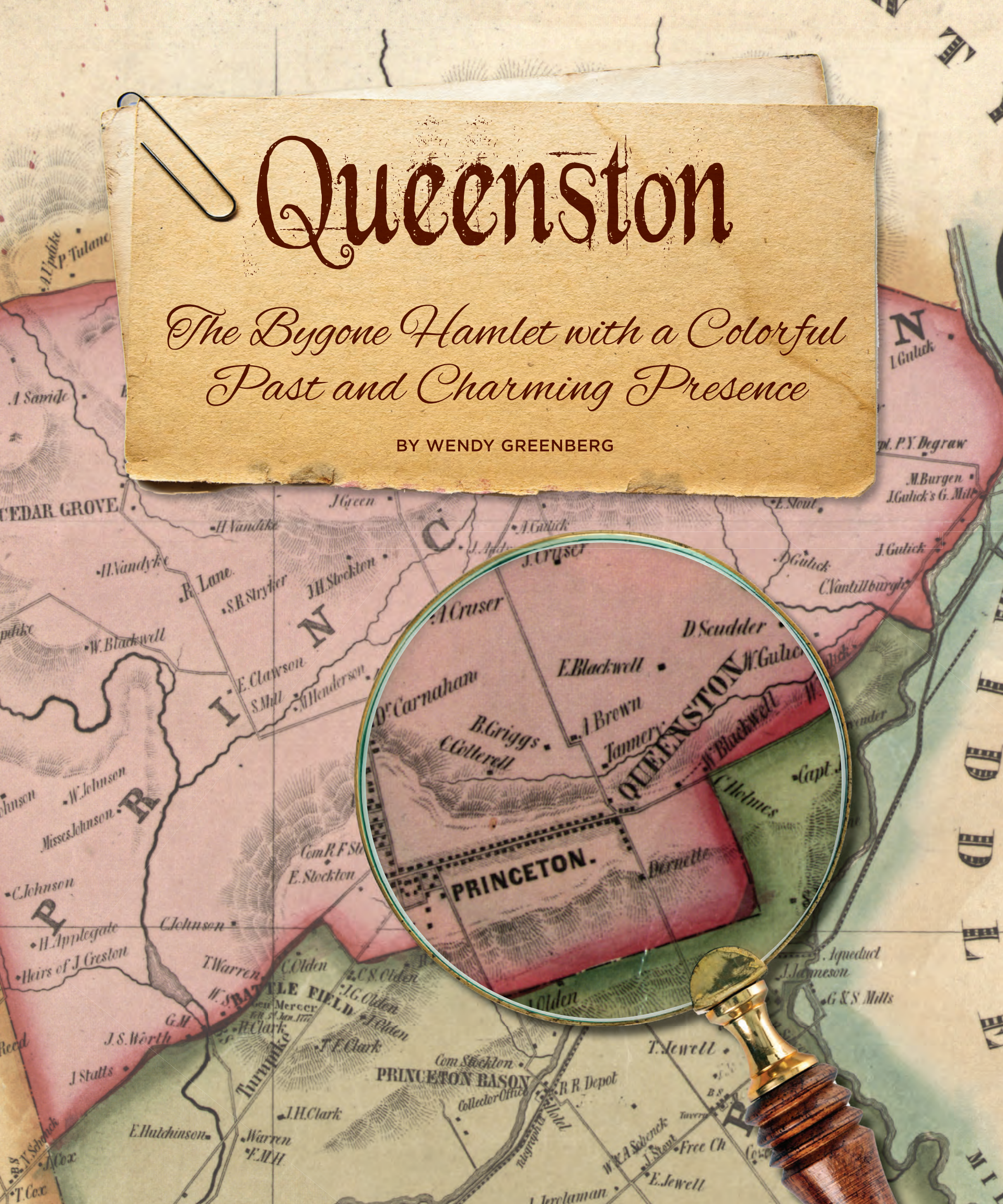


Queenston

*The Bygone Hamlet with a Colorful
Past and Charming Presence*

BY WENDY GREENBERG





342 Nassau Street, 1912. The clapboard wing of 342 Nassau Street was later moved to the other side of the main house to allow for widening of Harrison Street. (Collection of the Historical Society of Princeton)

Neighborhoods come and go, and if we are lucky, they leave remnants and memories. In the case of Queenston, which was centered at Nassau and Harrison streets, the hamlet has blended into its surroundings, and is now seamlessly part of Princeton.

But some 250 years ago, Queenston, or Jugtown as it was also called, was a settlement all its own. It comes alive through oral and written history as a place that influenced what Princeton is today.

“Lost in the glamor enveloping Princeton University is the fact that there once existed within the present limits of the university town a separate community called Jugtown — named for the primitive pottery operated by the Horner family, the first settlers, from 1765 until 1856,” says *Old Princeton’s Neighbors*, a 1939 publication of the Federal Writers Project.

“Jugtown as a political entity no longer exists although it continues to contribute more than its share of officials to Princeton. But the peaceful charm and dignity of the old community live on. Under its ancient trees and its mellowed houses, historic and unsung, lingers many a tale,” notes the publication.

Queenston was one of four royally named neighborhoods along the Assunpink Trail, also including Princeton, Kingston, and Princessville briefly in Lawrence. The West Windsor Historical Society explains that, prior to the

mid-1800s, that township’s western boundary ran to Nassau Street in Princeton, so Queenston belonged first to New Windsor, and then West Windsor when it incorporated in 1797. The borders of Queenston were much negotiated, but the historical society places it within Wilton Street on the east, Pine Street on the west, Margerum’s Quarry on Ewing Street on the north, and Lake Carnegie on the south.

Joshua Hall McIlvaine as a coordinate of the all-male Princeton, borrowing the concept from Radcliffe College at Harvard University. Woodrow Wilson taught at Evelyn, as did Helen Magill White, the first woman in the U.S. to earn a Ph.D. One of its main buildings at **8 Evelyn Place** was the home of the late former Princeton Borough Mayor Barbara Boggs Sigmund and the late Princeton Professor Paul Sigmund.

The college closed after 10 years, and its end was blamed on “the opposition of Princeton University to work for the higher education of women,” according to an 1897 letter to the *Boston Transcript* written by its principal Elizabeth McIlvaine, as noted on westwindsorhistory.com.

JUGS, POTTERY, AND THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Queenston/Jugtown histories invariably begin with the Horner family and their pottery business at the corner of Markham and Nassau streets. The ceramics made there from the 1770s to the 1870s gave the town the nickname Jugtown. The Horners descended from the area’s first settler, John Horner, who arrived around 1695, according to the West Windsor Historical Society. In 1765 the Horners established the area’s first pottery shed which lasted until 1856. Horner was among a local group (including Thomas Leonard, John Stockton, and Nathaniel FitzRandolph) who led the founding of College of New Jersey, later Princeton University.



Queenston was home to a college other than Princeton University — Evelyn College for Women, from 1887 to 1897, named for Sir John Evelyn, an English diarist and landowner. The first women’s college in New Jersey, it was founded by Princeton alumnus and professor

Some early Americans idealized and mythologized the yeoman farmer as the epitome of American values, as with the above engraving that was printed in the “Columbian Magazine of Philadelphia” in 1786. Common farmers dotted much of Princeton’s expansive land. (Library of Congress) Map of Mercer County, New Jersey relief shown by hachures, left. Includes names of property owners. Otley, J. W. - Keily, James. 1849. (Library of Congress)



298 Nassau Street, ca. 1900. (Collection of the Historical Society of Princeton)

The Horners lived at **344 Nassau Street**, where the first floor of the stucco section is part of the original structure. Joseph Horner built it around 1760 on land originally belonging to John Horner. According to the Historical Society of Princeton, the house “was also purportedly a stop” on the Underground Railroad, and a tunnel under Nassau Street led there.

Interviews from *The Princeton Recollector*, which was published from 1975 to 1986 as the official publication of The Princeton History Project, bear this out:

“Now there’s a little wing on that house by the corner, and I must tell you a story about that wing. There was a room in there that was used as a station on the Underground Railroad for runaway slaves. There was a tunnel that went under Nassau Street to the triple house where Esther Johnston lived. At that time that house was a hay press.”

“I lived in the triple house and at the back of the cellar there was a tunnel where they used to hide the slaves and transport them. This tunnel went under the road and over to the Montieñ house, and could still be under Nassau Street.”

Some of the clay used by Horner pottery came from the back of **85 Harrison Street**, according to *Old Princeton’s Neighbors*, and this excavation became a popular swimming hole and ice-skating rink until 1925 when the pit was filled in for a row of Princeton faculty houses.

An interview in *The Princeton Recollector* notes, “Years ago there was a clay pit down on the west side of Harrison, just below Patton Avenue. Those holes were still there when we were children. I remember we used to go over there to pick blackberries and we had to look out for those holes. In my father’s time there was a brickyard on that property.”



A clay jug of the time. (Wikimedia Commons)



Clay pipe bowl found near site of Jugtown pottery. (Collection of the Historical Society of Princeton)

NOTEWORTHY BUILDINGS

Among Queenston’s historic buildings:

At **342 Nassau Street**, a basement beam is marked 1730, making this one of the oldest Queenston houses still standing, today used by Eastridge Design. The house belonged to

members of the Scott family, John and his two sons Richard and Samuel, local masons credited with much of early Princeton’s stonework. During the Revolutionary War, according to the Historical Society of Princeton, it housed both British and American troops (at different times), and may have been rented out to members of the Continental Congress in 1783. The stuccoed tall eastern section is part of the original structure.

An early photograph in the historical society collection shows the section in its original position before it was moved to the opposite side to make way for the widening of North Harrison Street.

Another building that remains is The Red Farm House at **145 Ewing Street**. Once attached to a larger piece of farmland, and dating to about 1755, the tallest section of the house is original, as is a doorway, according to the Historical Society of Princeton.

The house at **306 Nassau Street** is said to have been built around 1760 by someone with the last name Vanderveer and was later occupied by Roger Gerard van Polanan, a diplomat from the Netherlands who lived in South Africa and Europe. Called The Captain’s House, it is named for Captain William Rogers, who lived there from 1836-66.

The house known as Queen’s Court, at **341 Nassau Street**, and now home to Michael Graves Architecture and Design, dates from about



344 Nassau Street, Horner House. (Collection of the Historical Society of Princeton)

1760-65. It was a store owned by John Harrison, Princeton's postmaster, at the end of the 18th century. Harrison is known to have sold goods to members of the Continental Congress in 1783. The building became known as Queen's Court when it was a girl's prep school in the late 19th century.

The home at **323-325 Nassau Street**, built sometime before the Revolutionary War, is largely unchanged, according to the Historical Society of Princeton, which calls it "perhaps one of the most authentic 18th century structures still standing in Princeton."

Traces of an outdoor oven were found in the backyard at **41 Harrison Street**, with two large sycamores, which were likely planted as a tradition to celebrate a first home.

The historical society has few details on the house at **319-321 Nassau Street**, but the 321 section dates from either the late 18th or early 19th century. The 319 section was added later.

Once the residence of Princeton University president James McCosh, **387 Nassau Street** was formerly located on Prospect Avenue. Following his

death in 1894, the building was moved to the intersection of Nassau Street and Markham Road. The building is not recognized within the boundaries of the 1986 National Register of Historic Places application but was considered

by Princeton Architect J. Robert Hillier, FAIA (*Princeton Magazine* publisher).

The home at **298 Nassau Street** has little written history. Although tax records suggest it was constructed in 1830, *Old Princeton's Neighbors* claims that the residence, then known as Green Shutters, was built in the early 18th century.

The house at **338 Nassau Street** was for many years the office of Dr. William G. Chase, one of Princeton's few dentists in the late 1800s. Earlier it alternately sheltered both British and American troops during the Revolution, according to *The Princeton Recollector*.

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL LIFE

According to westwindsorhistory.com, the thriving neighborhood boasted "a tanyard, leather shop, carriage shop, tavern/inn, meat-packing store, wheelwright, bakery, cooperage, several general stores, a blacksmith shop, paint store, two barbers' shops, an ice company, and even a silkworm



341 Nassau Street when it served as a girl's prep school. (Collection of the Historical Society of Princeton)

within the scope of Queenston according to *Old Princeton's Neighbors*. It was restored in complete conformity with the original drawings

bakery, cooperage, several general stores, a blacksmith shop, paint store, two barbers' shops, an ice company, and even a silkworm



145 Ewing Street, The Red Farm House, ca. 1910. (Collection of the Historical Society of Princeton)

raising establishment.” Queenston residents enthusiastically joined a statewide silkworm craze in the mid-1830s when the state offered money for cocoons, and mulberry trees were planted to attract silkworms.

“Where Judy’s Flower Shop is today, that’s where the carriage shop was,” according to an interview in *The Princeton Recollector*. “Dad told us they did such beautiful work there. The carriages were all made by hand, and they would sand them down ’til they were like glass. They would put a coat of varnish on and sand it down; another coat of varnish and sand it down; and finally, they put the third coat of varnish on. But he always talked about what beautiful work they did.”

Woodhull General Store was established at the Nassau and Harrison intersection and specialized in bartering, which was popular in the 1870s.

Queenston was musical. In the 1880s, the Jugtown Brass Band and the Jugtown Fife and Drum Corps were formed in preparation for the 1880 and 1884 presidential campaigns. It is said the brass band was engaged by New Jersey to march in Ulysses S. Grant’s funeral procession in New York City, but its members got lost, sought “refreshments,” and ended with an altercation with police.

The Queenston Chapel, constructed in 1832, was long the center of religious life in Queenston. The Sunday school was the first of its kind in the state, according to the West Windsor Historical Society. It says, “that a large sundial determined dismissal, causing arguments about the end of class on cloudy days.” John Maclean, later president of the College of New Jersey – Princeton University’s forerunner – taught in the school. And *Old Princeton’s Neighbors* notes that Walter M. Lowerie, who was superintendent of the chapel school from 1839-1841, drowned when his ship was attacked by pirates as he was traveling from Shanghai to Ningpo to prepare a revised translation of the New Testament into the Chinese language.

THE BOUNDARY CHANGES

When Princeton Borough was incorporated in 1813 as a legal entity created to oversee police protection and public works, Queenston remained partially in West Windsor (then part of Middlesex County) and partially within Montgomery Township (Somerset County). It became part of Mercer County when Mercer incorporated in 1838. It wasn’t until 1843, when the state legislature transferred West Windsor’s portion of Princeton Borough to Princeton

Township (which had also been incorporated in 1838), that Queenston was no longer part of West Windsor. Ten years later the boundary between Princeton and West Windsor townships shifted to the Delaware & Raritan Canal. And, in 2013 Queenston’s municipal home shifted again, when Princeton Borough and Princeton Township merged.

There are differences of opinion as to the boundaries of Queenston/Jugtown. *The Princeton Recollector* notes that, “Most Jugtowners in automobile times would tell you, when you come up Nassau Street from Jugtown and you come to Princeton Avenue, that’s the end of Jugtown. But I have heard old-timers say, ‘Now wait a minute, The House of the Seven Gables (280 Nassau Street) is the end, and that’s at the corner of Linden.’”

Whatever the official boundaries, Queenston/Jugtown lives in the hearts of many for its colorful history and charming homes.

“Queenston remains a well-preserved hamlet, showcasing architecturally diverse, venerable buildings that once housed the hamlet’s aforementioned businesses,” says the West Windsor Historical Society. “Stroll down Nassau Street and you will find yourself immersed in centuries long gone, amidst a still-thriving crossroads community.” ■