Self-Guided Walking Tour of Historic Main Street, Chatham, NJ

WELCOME TO CHATHAM BOROUGH!

In the late 1720s, Chatham's earliest settlers built their dwellings on the east side of the Passaic River. By 1773, the village had spread west crossing the river, where they built some 30 plain wooden houses, taverns, stores and blacksmiths' shops, plus a gristmill and sawmill, all clustered near the Passaic bridge.

The town's most important concentration of early buildings is situated along the historic eastern end of Main Street, where our tour begins. Though most of these structures were altered over the years, they still retain some of their eighteenth-century character. It was in 1773 that the settlement found the need for a distinctive name. Residents chose "Chatham" in honor of William Pitt, the outspoken Earl of Chatham, who had opposed the unfair taxation levied on the Colonies.

Chatham has remained a small town with an idyllic environment. The architectural integrity of the Borough's attractive residential neighborhoods has survived, remarkably intact. The Main Street, with its diversity of historic buildings, imparts a special character to the Borough that appeals to residents and visitors alike. This tour will highlight some of Chatham's notable landmarks.

1 Shepard Kollock Park

The starting point for our tour is the parking lot to Shepard Kollock park. To get there, take Main Street to Parrott Mill Road, then turn left on Henderson Road.

There is an informational sign that provides an introduction to the park's namesake and his accomplishments. Once parked, you can begin with the Historic Riverside Walking Trail by the Passaic River. There are several kiosks along the trail where you can learn how generations of local people have had a connection with the Passaic. Here is where the Lenni Lenape forded the river at the place they called "the crossing of the Fishawack in the valley of the Great Watchung."

You can read about George Washington's Ruse de Guerre, when in the summer of 1781 he ordered the building of bread ovens to create the impression that he was planning to keep his troops in the area to prepare for an attack on New York. While the bread was baking overnight, Washington marched his troops out of town under cover of darkness. This early start gave Washington the advantage over Cornwallis at Yorktown. It is said that this battle marked the beginning of the end of the Revolutionary War.

Notice the recently dedicated Jack's Playground, named in memory of Jack, a young enslaved boy who lived during the late 18th century. He was enslaved by Shepard Kollock, the prominent local printer and patriot for whom the park was named. This dedication marked a significant moment in Chatham's commitment to acknowledging its full history—both its triumphs and its tragedies—and honoring the lives of those who were too long left out of the narrative.

Leaving the park, turn right at the parking lot entrance onto Parrott Mill Road, named for George T. Parrott, the miller who lived on the corner. He operated a gristmill that was one of five mills located along the Passaic River banks.

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2 The George T. Parrott House, 47 Main Street

Walk to the corner of Parrott Mill and Main St. A gambrel-roofed federal-style dwelling built between 1790 and 1800 was the home of the Parrott family for many years, and they are rumored to have had a pet parrot.

George Parrott owned the last mill on the Passaic River. Parrott Mill pond covered what is currently the park. At the water's edge, canoes and row boats were available for a quarter an hour, and during the winter, ice was cut for use for the guests at the local hotels and taverns. During the 1850s, four mills were located on the river and provided power for the production of flour, machinery, lumber, and textiles.

In 1970, 47 Main Street became the Stoneleigh Motel. In 1986, locals Frank and Betsy Kennedy renamed it the Parrot Mill Inn where they ran a bed-and-breakfast for many years. The original building was preserved and is maintained by KinderCare, a childcare center and school currently located at the site. Preservation of the building was a condition of KinderCare's approval by the Chatham Borough Planning Board.

3 *The New Jersey Journal*

Across Parrott Mill Rd., near the southwest corner of the intersection, is a historical marker with more information about Shepard Kollock and the New Jersey Journal.

As Shepard Kollock himself might explain: "In February 1779, I began publishing the *New Jersey Journal,* at a press I first set up in Day's Tavern, Chatham, New Jersey. In an April 1780 newspaper ad, I said I was located near the liberty pole, which stood in front of the tavern. This was New Jersey's second newspaper, my friend Isaac Collins having established the *New Jersey Gazette* in 1777. My print shop in Chatham also published books and pamphlets and I expanded my business to include selling many items from tea to slaves. My articles stirred up my readers, especially the British who called me 'the rebel printer' and tried to put me out of work. When the redcoats attacked Springfield, in June 1780, I moved my press, fearing its destruction. Some say I hid it in the Great Swamp. However, I was back to printing a week later. I printed the *New Jersey Journal* in Chatham until December 3, 1783."

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4 Chatham's Main Street

Cross the street to the corner of University Ave. and Main Street.

You are now standing on the Minisink Indian Trail, which crossed the Passaic River at this spot. Each summer the Lenni Lenape tribe made their way to the Jersey Shore by crossing the river, which they referred to as the Fishawack.

The first settlers on the east side of the river were John and Daniel Day. They were farmers who arrived in the 1720s. Shortly thereafter they built a bridge across the river. Travelers referred to the village as Day's Bridge since it was constructed on the Day property. In Revolutionary times, this road was called King's Highway, later the Morris-Essex Turnpike, and today it is known as Main Street.

5 7 University Avenue

Walk down University Avenue to the first house on the left, number 7. It was originally situated on the corner or Main St. and is believed to have been built in 1792.

During Revolutionary times, Dr. Peter Smith, the village physician, lived here. Then for many years it was occupied by Mahlon Minton, a storekeeper who owned farmland on both sides of Main Street. The house was moved to its present location after World War II.

6 Liberty Pole

In 1775, a Liberty Pole was raised near the intersection of University Avenue and Main Street.

This was a visible symbol that the people of the village supported the fight for freedom from England and became a key meeting place. It was here that the village gathered to hear news of the war and where they heard the first reading of the Declaration of Independence.

7 The Jacob Morrell House

Take a few steps west and look across the street to 63 Main St., currently Scalini Fedeli.

This fine restaurant is otherwise known as the Jacob Morrell House and is the only pre-revolutionary building remaining on Main Street. Built around 1740, it is generally believed that General George Washington made his headquarters here for a few days in August 1781. He wrote seventeen published letters in Chatham preparing for the march to Yorktown, which marked the beginning of the end of the war. Jacob Morrell, whose general store was adjacent to his house, was probably Chatham's wealthiest resident at this time.

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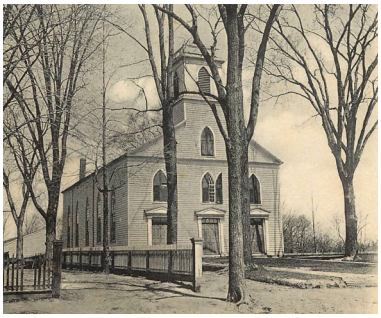
8 Village Church of Chatham

Now look to your right at the Weichert Real Estate office, 64 Main St.



From 1828-1873, this was the site of the Presbyterian Church. Following the arrival of Joseph Meeker Ogden, a Princeton Theological Society Seminary graduate, there was an increase in parishioners. It was decided a new church was needed, and the congregation moved to a new location further down Main St. In 1907, the front half of the building was moved forward toward the street and remodeled as a residence. The rear half of the building was made into a barn, which was later demolished.

9 The Captain William Day House

At 70 Main Street, we see a building known as the Captain William Day House.

With its vernacular Georgian symmetry and simplicity, it stands as one of the most significant of East Main Street's early houses. Built in 1780, this was the homestead of William Day and his wife Nancy Bonnell. William Day was a Revolutionary War soldier who fought in the Battle of Springfield. The house includes an intact beehive oven, which you can see on the right, and several "nine-over-six" façade windows. The property remained a 100-acre farm into the twentieth century supplying villagers with eggs, poultry, and vegetables.

10 76 Main Street

Traveling west, we come to 76 Main Street, which was built around 1796.

The Vanderpoel, Day, and Crane families are known to have lived at this address at varying times. Originally only two stories tall, the house was remodeled during the Victorian era when porches and "gingerbread" woodwork were added to the exterior. A small addition was added around 1880 to house the office of Dr. George Swaim, the village doctor at the time. In 1887, Dr. Swaim built a new office at 262 Main St. We will see that later on our tour.

11 The William Pitt

Next, look to 94 Main St.

This was the location of the home of Samuel Crane, the postmaster circa 1800. It was also the site of the William Pitt restaurant, which began in the 1930s as a tearoom and continued for many years as a popular restaurant. In February of 1986 the restaurant was destroyed by a devastating fire. The building we see today is a completely new building, modeled somewhat after the original.

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12 The Phipps House

100 Main St. is the current location of the Blue Iris Boutique.

This quaint old house is an excellent example of the clean, simple lines of houses built in the early 19th century. This was the home of the Phipps family for almost a century. Thomas Phipps married Elisa Spencer in 1833. They had four children, two of whom served in the Civil War. Thomas died of typhoid in 1863. The Chatham Historical Society is fortunate to possess correspondence between Elisa and the doctor that tended to Thomas as he lay dying. Their son William did return. Twenty Chatham men enlisted and only 11 returned, four of whom were seriously injured. Two Phipps sisters remained in the family homestead; Emily died there in 1931 at the age of 90. Later, the home became a retail space, hosting a candy store and several baby boutiques over the years.

13 The William Pitt Gift Shop

Head nextdoor to 104 Main St.

Once the William Pitt Gift Shop, the building was constructed in the late 19th century but altered in 1937 with a cape-style addition on the front. It housed a gift shop for many years starting with the Harned family and continuing as the William Pitt Gift Shop.

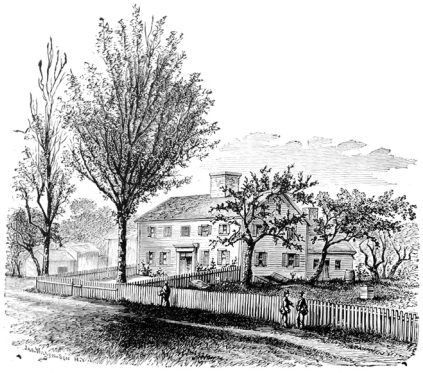
14 Chatham's Dunkin'

At 118 Main St. we find a Dunkin', which looks different than most of the freestanding Dunkin' Donuts we encounter.

Through the efforts of Jan Westfall, Chatham Historical Society board member and chairperson of the Chatham Historic Preservation Commission, the building was built to blend in with the aesthetics of our small town. The developers were compelled to remake the trademark orange and pink edifice of the usual Dunkin' Donuts building into a more sophisticated and tasteful rendition in keeping with the historic nature of Chatham's Main Street. Over the years this plot of land has had several different uses, such as a carriage manufacturing business and a gas station.

15 The Dusenberry House

Continue walking along Main Street for a few blocks, crossing over Hedges Ave. and North Summit Ave. to our next stop, just past North Hillside Ave.: The Dusenberry House, at 186 Main Street, is the only Chatham building listed on both the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places.



When built as the manse for the Reverend Joseph Meeker Ogden of the Presbyterian Church in 1848, it was only half its current breadth and width. Newark businessman Frederick Dusenberry purchased the house in 1907 and enlarged it in 1912, doubling its original size. The house exhibits an exceptionally fine doorway, heavy window cornices, and gable returns as an excellent example of Greek Revival architecture. The building is currently home to Turpin Real Estate.

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16 St. Paul's Episcopal Church

A little further on you will come to 200 Main Street.

The Chatham Academy, built in 1806, was the second schoolhouse in Chatham. It originally stood on the site of what is today St. Paul's Church. Records show that it cost $872.95 to build. It was moved in 1873 to 36-38 Summit Avenue, where it now continues its life as a two-family residence. A school bell sits on the roof above the front porch. It is said that the logs used to move the building are in the basement of the house.

In its place, the Presbyterians built a chapel where they worshiped after moving from 64 Main St. in 1873. A small community of Episcopalians sought to establish a church in Chatham in around 1898. Services were held in a few different locations, including a private residence donated by Mr. and Mrs. John Gould that is now the site of the Ogden Memorial Presbyterian Church, which you will see at the end of our tour.

In 1902, The Presbyterians and the Episcopalians traded this property for the Gould property. The new owners made changes to the interior, but used the Presbyterian chapel for many years. The current church building was dedicated in December of 1966.

17 The Fairview House

Adjacent to St. Paul's is the Library of the Chathams on Main Street, once the site of the magnificent Fairview House.

In the late 1800s, Chatham was a well-known resort town. There were boarding houses for visitors arriving by horse-and-carriage or train, and the Fairview House was a grand hotel where up to 150 guests passed carefree days gently rocking on porches shaded by towering pines and tall maples while enjoying the "salubrious" air. Rooms cost three dollars! The Fairview also provided dancing, bowling, distinguished cuisine, and a large bar.

World War I changed many aspects of life in Chatham. The hotel served as a place for the Red Cross to prepare for first-aid needs for a time. Eventually it fell into disrepair and mysteriously burned down. The building was demolished in 1920. To honor Chatham's lost soldiers, the lot was named Memorial Park. Eventually the townspeople, led by a founding Lum family member, built the original portion of the library with a donation from his friend.

The present library building opened on Main Street in 1924, and its first librarian was Lynda Phillips. She was one of the few college-educated women in Chatham and was asked to attend to the library. She gave up her love of the outdoors and golf and reluctantly accepted the position. Because her job required her to walk home after dark, her mother insisted that she carry a gun, which she did, keeping it hidden in her desk during the day. You can find a quote from her over the fireplace in the library's reception area.

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18 Memorial Park

The library resides in Memorial Park. The park was originally dedicated to the WWI soldiers who perished.

Today, memorial plaques honor soldiers from the Revolution, Civil, WWII, Korean, and Vietnam Wars. A memorial for the townspeople who were lost at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, is adjacent to Memorial Park. Chatham lost 13 residents that day.

On a different note, observe the girl with the Hula-Hoop just off the path beside the library. That is Seward Johnson's bronze sculpture "Attic Trophy," a life-scale girl playing with her Hula-Hoop, on loan from The Sculpture Foundation since 2009. Seward Johnson was a sculptor, artist, and philanthropist that created the Johnson Atelier and Grounds for Sculpture, a 34-acre sculpture park in Hamilton, NJ.

19 The Chatham Business District

By the mid-1800s, the center of town had moved west near the Main Street and Passaic Avenue railroad crossing. Our downtown area is centralized around this intersection. This is a great opportunity to get some food or drink from one of our many local shops.

In the 1860s, at the corner of Main Street and Budd Lane (known today as North Passaic Avenue) stood the Nelson and Frank Kelley Store. The Kelleys were father-and-son merchants of groceries and clothing. Theirs was the most prominent store in town and took up the entire block between Center Street and North Passaic Avenue (or Budd Lane, as it was known then). There was a meeting hall above the store that hosted minstrel shows. It also housed the town library and sixth- and seventh-grade classrooms for a time. Frank Kelley worked in his father's store and served as mayor of Chatham from 1903 to 1915. He owned all the land behind the store on Center Street and Center Place. This area became known as "Kelley's Elbow."

Looking across the street, the Hudson Minton General Store and Post Office at the southeast corner of Main Street and Fairmount Avenue was a gathering place for the town. During the Civil War anxious Chathamites would come here to pick up letters written home from the men on the battlefields. Hudson's son, Guy, became Chatham's first lawyer. The store was built around 1850 and was demolished in 1930. Today, a bank building occupies that corner. Up until the summer of 2025, this was a Bank of America branch. What might its future hold?

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20 Dr. George Swaim's Office

The quaint building to your right at 262 Main St. was originally constructed in 1887 by Dr. George Swaim as a combined medical office and drugstore.

By 1899 the doctor could boast of having installed Chatham's first public telephone and a small soda fountain. On the second floor, Dr. Frederick Lum, Jr., son of Chatham's first mayor, established the town's first dentist office in the 1890s. Today the building is home to Crew, a popular spot that specializes in homemade English muffins.

21 Ogden Memorial Presbyterian Church

Looking ahead, across Elmwood Avenue, the stone church on your right is Ogden Memorial Presbyterian Church, Chatham's oldest congregation.

Its roots trace back to the colonial-era Green Village Church, officially incorporated in 1823 as the Trustees of the Village Church of Chatham. The congregation's longtime pastor, Reverend Joseph Meeker Ogden, served from 1828 to 1873 and became such a guiding presence that the church was later renamed in his honor.

Originally located at 64 Main Street—now the Weichert Realtors office—the church moved to its present home at the corner of Main and Elmwood in 1905. The striking stone tower was added in the 1930s, followed by the stained-glass windows that fill the sanctuary with color and light. Nearly two centuries later, Ogden Memorial continues to stand as a steadfast symbol of faith and community in the heart of Chatham.

CONGRATULATIONS!

You've journeyed through centuries of Chatham's vibrant past, from the native crossroads of the Lenni Lenape to the civic, religious, and commercial heart of our borough today. You've walked beside the sites of mills and printing presses, met homes of merchants, doctors, ministers, and activists, and glimpsed how the town continues its tradition of thoughtful growth and community.

Please feel free to linger awhile—visit a café, browse a shop, or sit in the park and reflect on the stories you've encountered. If you'd like to learn more, the Chatham Historical Society welcomes you to explore the New Jersey Room at the Library of the Chathams. Thank you for showing an interest in our shared heritage.