

# BERKELEY HEIGHTS

*Teri Says ...*

***"Berkeley Heights is one of Union County's premier communities, with its excellent schools, beautiful parks, well-maintained neighborhoods, and thriving business district along Springfield Avenue. It is also home to a large professional business community of industrial giants like Alcatel-Lucent (formerly Bell Labs), and to Runnells Specialized Hospital.***

***Berkeley Heights residents enjoy lovely tree-lined residential neighborhoods, with upscale homes in every variety – including a number of new construction developments. They benefit from a thriving business district and easy access trains and buses to NYC, and to Rt. 78, one of the major high-speed corridors from PA to NYC.***

***One interesting and very unique area of Berkeley Heights is the 65-70 acre area known as "Free Acres", established as a social experiment in 1910 by Bolton Hall, Residents own their homes, but the land on which their homes sit is owned collectively by the community and managed by the Free Acres Association.***

***To this day, residents of Free Acres pay tax to the Association (which is now a more common version of the property tax) based on the value of their land and any improvements. The Free Acres Association then, as always, pays a lump sum to the Township of Berkeley Heights."***

## **Some Facts**

Berkeley Heights was essentially a sleepy rural and farming community until the end of World War II. Returning vets loved the quiet and serenity of the area and helped to develop Berkeley Heights into a suburban community of single-family homes.

Today, some 13,000 mostly professional residents make their home within Berkeley Heights' 6.2 square miles. The wide open spaces of Berkeley Heights also encouraged the development of some large, stable, industrial parks, most notably the Bell Technology Laboratories (now Alcatel-Lucent), employing thousands of professionals and fortifying the Townships' coffers.

The name Berkeley Heights has only existed since 1952 when the township changed its name from New Providence Township to avoid confusion with the neighboring New Providence Borough. The name Berkeley Heights honors Lord John Berkeley, one of the two proprietors who jointly owned the east and west portions of the state. The center of what is the town's business area became known as Peppertown in the late 1800's, most likely a reference to the color of the peppers Italian settlers hung out to dry during the harvest season.

Over the course of its history, the area of Berkeley Heights was known more for the villages that lie within it. The first community was Feltville, which grew up in the 1700's

with the building of grist and saw mills along the Blue Brook, now part of the Deserted Village in a county-owned park on Cataract Hollow Road.

Berkeley Heights includes an area known as Free Acres, established in 1810 by Bolton Hall, a New York entrepreneur and reformer. Mr. Hall believed in economist Henry George's idea of single taxation, under which residents pay land value tax to the community, based on the value of the land alone. The Free Acres Association then pays a lump sum to Berkeley Heights.

Residents of the 85 households in Free Acres own their homes, but pay a lease for the land -- which is owned collectively by the community. The *Free Acres Association* maintains the community's streets and community swimming pool, approves architectural changes to homes and pays a lump sum in taxes to the Berkeley Heights municipality. Among the early residents of Free Acres were the actor James Cagney and his wife, Billie.