Historical Summary of the Borough of National Park, NJ

April 15, 2002, was the 100th birthday of the 1902 Incorporation of National Park NJ. But National Park on the Delaware, as it was originally named, really began a few years earlier. The community began with the incorporation of The National Park Association (NPA) in 1895 by the Reverend James E. Lake and others. The stated purpose of the NPA was to create a religious resort community. Within one year, the NPA had purchased and sub-divided land, sold lots, and established a Camp Meeting Ground.

The Camp Meeting Grounds provided a religious retreat for members of the Methodist Episcopal faith. Most of the attendees came by steamboat, trolley, or hired wagon from the Camden/Gloucester area, while others in Western Gloucester County traveled by horseback or personal wagons. Many of these people bought lots and built cottages adjacent to the campgrounds, which was in the area now used as a playground. In 1899, Reverend Lake also established the National Park First Methodist Episcopal Church. There is no doubt that Reverend Lake is the founder of this community.

The greatest influx of people began after Reverend Lake formed the National Park Amusement Company to build an amusement center at the top of Beach Hill, summer cottages along the beachfront, and a 300-foot pier at the foot of Beach Hill. Reverend Lake also formed the National Park Navigation Company to provide steamboat transportation between the Arch Street Pier in Philadelphia and National Park. This Philadelphia/National Park linkage not only provided large crowds for such beach activities as swimming, boating and fishing, it also radically changed the religious profile of the community. A large portion of the Philadelphia traffic consisted of Irish Catholics that came to National Park to enjoy the resort aspects rather than the religious aspects of the community. National Park changed from an exclusively Methodist Episcopal community to one that was shared about equally with the Catholics.

While National Park was flourishing as a resort, it was also moving toward a residential community. The permanent population changed over the years from 160 in 1905, to an estimated present day number of 3237.

Up through the 1920's, the Delaware was clear and beautiful and the National Park waterfront offered 1700 feet of white sandy beach. Shad fishing and crabbing were excellent and 69 beachfront cottages were available through the summer season. However, in spite of this, resort activity began to decline. Advances in transportation technology began to provide leisure time alternatives far more attractive than National Park. The New Jersey seashore offered more activity with more conveniences. As an example, the National Park cottages had no internal plumbing, fire protection, or road access. In fact, most of the cottages had been destroyed by fire by the end of the 1940's, because the cottages were so close together that a fire in one cottage quickly spread to others.

It was in the 1940's that National Park completed its transition from a resort to a rural community. World War II created massive job opportunities in the nearby shipbuilding industries. This caused many summer cottages to be converted for year round usage and brought about an increase in the number of permanent residents. That increase, in turn, created demand for more borough services and greater attention to borough politics. By 1945, National Park had come into its own as a Gloucester County community.

The 1905 New Jersey State census recorded 160 residents in National Park.

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