The Batsto Story

Batsto Village is the site of a former bog iron and glass-making industrial center (1786 - 1847). Currently, it reflects the agricultural and commercial enterprises that existed at the site in the late 19th century. "Batsto" is derived from the Swedish word "Bastu", meaning "bathing place". It is believed the Leni - Lenape Indians borrowed the term because old deeds of the area mention an "Indian Bastu".

REVOLUTIONARY WAR PERIOD

Batsto was founded in 1766 by Charles Read of Burlington, New Jersey, who was the most noted ironmaster in West Jersey prior to the Revolution. He built the Batsto Iron Works near the mouth of the Batsto River. It was the first known bog iron furnace to be established here.

By 1773, John Cox, a Philadelphia merchant and trader, became owner of the Batsto Iron Works. During his ownership, and that of Joseph Ball to whom he had sold Batsto in 1779, the Works became an important supplier to the Continental Army during the American Revolution. Such wartime products as munitions, camp kettles, iron fastenings and fittings for artillery carriages, wagons, and ships were manufactured.

THE RICHARDS ERA 1784 - 1876

The Batsto Iron Works was sold in 1784 to William Richards, whose descendants, most notably his son Jesse and grandson Thomas, continued to own and operate Batsto for the next 92 years. The Richards family constructed most of the current village buildings and facilitated the establishment of the post office which opened in 1832.

During the Richards era, Batsto was noted for its production of pig iron, cast iron water pipe and its various specialty castings such as firebacks. After the demise of the iron industry in 1855, Batsto became known for its production of window glass. By 1867, even glass manufacturing declined. With its enterprises at a standstill, Batsto fell into receivership.

THE WHARTON ERA 1876 - 1909

Batsto was purchased by Joseph Wharton, a Philadelphia industrialist, at a masters sale in 1876. Although his initial plan to dam the streams and rivers on his South Jersey properties and sell the water to Camden and Philadelphia failed, he had, over the years, sought other means of profit by engaging in various agricultural pursuits and expanding the manufacture of forest products.

Wharton made considerable changes to the village landscape. He built the sawmill and underground sluice. He enlarged the mansion and transformed its appearance to reflect the Italianate style of architecture. He also cleared vast areas of land to cultivate crops, including cranberries. By the end of the nineteenth century, Batsto had become Wharton's "gentleman's farm".

1909 - PRESENT

Joseph Wharton died in 1909 and his extensive land holdings in the Pine Barrens were managed by the Girard Trust Company of Philadelphia until 1954, when the State of New Jersey purchased the property. Today, his former lands comprise the core of Wharton State Forest.

Batsto Village is listed on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places. Batsto and all of Wharton State Forest are also part of the Pinelands National Reserve. This Reserve, the first of its kind in the country, was established by Congress in 1978 to protect the unique natural and cultural resources found in the Pinelands.
12. Stone Horse Barn - Built in 1830 and constructed of Jersey limestone, this barn housed horses. There are four stalls, with hay storage above.

13. Blacksmith and Wheelwright Shop - The blacksmith shop was utilized for shoeing horses and making tools. The shop and equipment are a significant example of ironworking.

14. Frame Building - Historic use not determined at this time.

15. Male Barn - Constructed in 1826 of Jersey limestone, it has served as a tenant stable, hay store room, and milk barn. It contains eight stalls with storage above.

16. Corn crib - Corn was stored and shellered here. The shellor, located on the second story, was operated by a belt and shaft system powered by the gristmill's water turbine.

17. Grist mill - This water-powered gristmill was built in 1818, and originally operated with a wooden water wheel. In 1852, the water wheel was replaced by a more efficient 'side winds' water turbine. The mill ground and processed wheat, corn and other grains which were stored and sold in the general store.

18. Hydraulic Ram - A device which pumped the water it received from Batsto Lake to the water tanks in the mansion and piggeries.

19. General Store and Post Office - The general store primarily served the village residents. Groceries, clothing, hardware, and toys were sold in the store. The post office, on the second floor, was established in 1847 and is still in operation. Mail is hand-carried and because of its historical significance, no zip code is required.

20. Carp Pond - In the late quarter of the 19th century, Joseph Wharton created a carp pond here. This is a typical Victorian landscape feature.

21. Site of the Iron Furnace - The iron furnaces and other buildings necessary to the production of iron ore were situated here. None of these buildings exist today.

22. Charcoal Kiln Exhibit - Charcoal was needed to produce iron. Wood from nearby forests was burned in a kiln like this one. Heat would expel tar and moisture, leaving charcoal.

23. Sawmill - Built in 1882, this water-powered circular sawmill produced lumber products for sale and for use on site. The mill also contains a shingle maker.

24. Annie M. Carter Interpretive Center

25. Site of the Glassworks - The Batsto Glassworks, originally constructed in 1846 and consisting of seven buildings, produced window glass and glaze for street lamps. Production stopped in 1867 and never resumed. None of these buildings exist today.

26. Hands-On History Center - Visitors can see reconstruction of household objects that were commonly used during the 19th century.

27. Village House - Public Restrooms.

28-42. Village Houses - Workers employed at Batsto lived in these houses. Built in the early 19th century, the single dwellings typically had three rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs. The duplexes had two rooms downstairs and one room upstairs, plus an attic. During the Wharton era, the rent was two dollars a month.

43. Batsto-Pleasant Mills Church - Privately owned. Erected in 1806, this Methodists church continues to serve the Pleasant Mills community. Residents of Batsto attended church here as well as weddings and funerals. Several Richards family members, including Joe, are buried in the cemetery adjoining the church.