

New Hope's New Image

*Serenity and scenery abound in this
historical area of Pennsylvania*

By DAN SCHLOSSBERG

Remnants of the underground railroad used by fleeing slaves were found on the grounds of the historic Wedgwood Inn



Photo by Dan Schlossberg

George Washington slept there. So did author James Michener, football star Michael Vick, and a myriad of actor types in town to perform in the Bucks County Playhouse.

New Hope's reputation is larger than the actual town, home to 2,500 permanent residents and thousands more when the weather warms. The one-time transportation hub and mill town now thrives on tourism, with more bistros, boutiques, and galleries than cities several times larger.

A mere speck on the map of eastern Pennsylvania, New Hope sits on the west bank of the Delaware River, six miles from the spot where Washington crossed the Delaware to surprise the sleeping Hessians in 1776 and turn the tide of the Revolutionary War. New Hope is 15 miles from Princeton, 35 miles from Philadelphia, and light years from anywhere else on the East Coast. Packed into its 1.4 square miles are nearly 250 historic buildings, some predating Washington's bivouac, and remnants of a canal Irish immigrants dug by hand early in the 19th century. As recently as 2004, mules pulled tow barges packed with camera-toting tourists.

One of those buildings, the Wedgwood Inn, was built in 1720, redone in 1870, and enlarged in 2000, the year remnants of the Underground

Photos courtesy of visitbuckscounty.com

Railroad were discovered on the property. Coupled with two adjacent structures, it is the centerpiece of the 18-room Wedgwood Collection, a bed & breakfast operated by the husband-and-wife team of Carl Glassman and Dinie Silnutzer for 35 years — far longer than the tenure of other innkeepers. Escapees from the corporate rat race of New York City, they relish their roles as hosts for out-of-towners lured by the surprisingly long list of local attractions.

Among other things, New Hope has antique shops, museums, music venues, and riverside restaurants with outdoor patios where dogs are encouraged to join their owners. There's even a working steam locomotive, which can be heard miles away when it's out of view.

All these things are within walking distance of the Wedgwood, a verdant oasis from the frenetic cities that supply most of its visitors. The blend of Victorian architecture, classical music, and enticing kitchen aromas serve as a siren call to guests who return on a regular basis (the fresh-squeezed orange juice is a great way to start *any* day). Each room in the Wedgwood Collection has its own personality, with antiques, art, piles of pillows and comforters, and private bath. Hardwood floors, brass ceiling fans, and four-poster canopy beds are features of some and a few even have hot tubs and fireplaces. Even the dogs, which are allowed, seem to enjoy the accommodations.

Both the inn and the town look like they were figments of someone's imagination.

The town is both tiny and tony. Packed into a single square mile, it is part of a 1,000-acre tract given to William Penn by King Charles II as payment of a debt to Penn's father. Robert Heath acquired the land and set up the first mill in 1700. Remnants of both a grist mill and a cotton mill converted to silk still stand on the south bank of Aquetong Creek.

Called Wells Ferry until 1765 and later renamed Coryells Ferry, the town got its current name when locals rebuilt Benjamin Parry's Hope Mill after a serious fire. Parry Mansion, a stone structure that still stands, was built in 1784. Five generations lived there before the New Hope Historical Society bought the property. Parry's barn has morphed into an art gallery while his grist mill is now the Bucks County Playhouse.

Because he operated mills on both sides of the Delaware, Parry built the first bridge to Lambertville, opened the first bank in New Hope, and helped finance the construction of the Delaware Canal — an enterprise that thrived for a century before competition from railroads made it obsolete.

Before the bridge, locals leaned on a ferry service launched in 1722. What's known today as Ferry Street was once used by stagecoaches traveling from Philadelphia to New York. The Logan Inn, appropriately called Ferry Tavern in its early years, was a stopping place for stages.

Today, the entire town is a stopping place for visitors searching for serenity and scenery. With the weather warmer, a visit to New Hope is both a spectator and a participation sport. Out-of-towners enjoy bicycling on back-country roads, hiking wooded trails in state parks, walking the canal towpath, or relaxing on a riverboat, horse-drawn carriage, or antique train. Shopping,



A quiet riverside town by day, New Hope sparkles after dark with fireworks, festivities, and more than a dozen vibrant nightlife venues

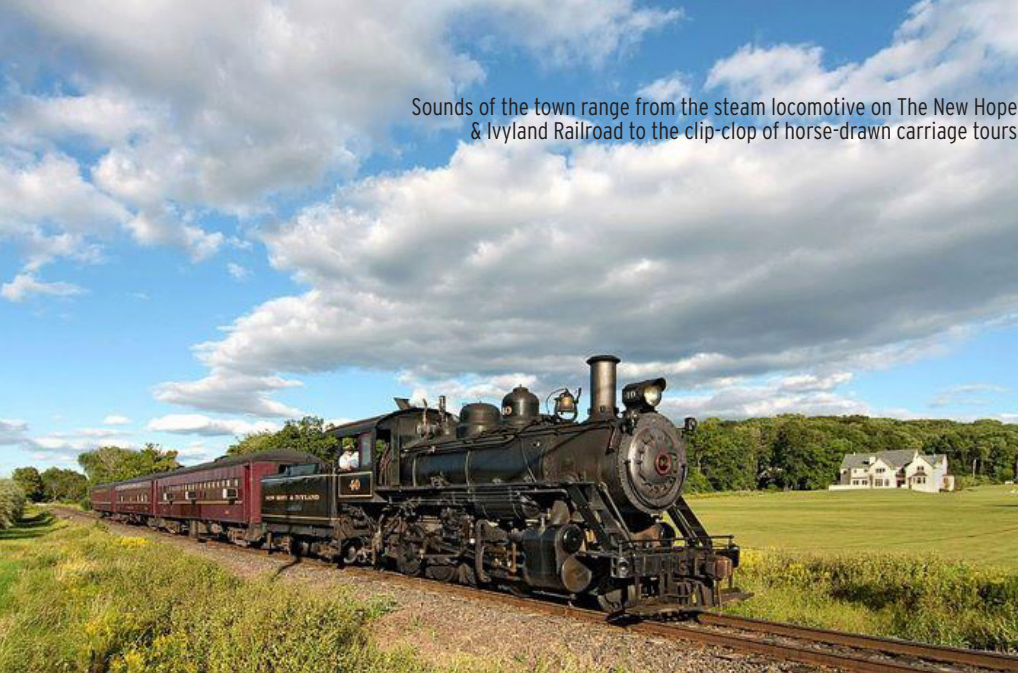


A one-time stagecoach stop with a tradition of welcoming out-of-towners, New Hope attracts shoppers to galleries and bistros on its tree-lined main street

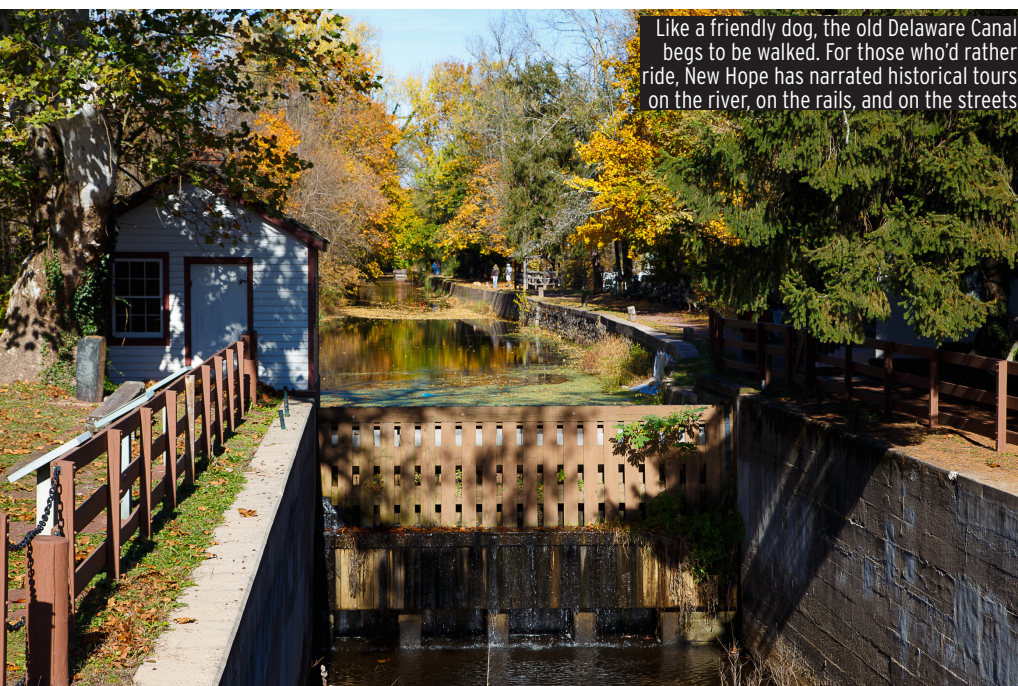


One of the oldest structures in New Hope, the Logan Inn, also includes a restaurant

Sounds of the town range from the steam locomotive on The New Hope & Ivyland Railroad to the clip-clop of horse-drawn carriage tours



The New Hope Winery is among the town's 240 historic buildings



Like a friendly dog, the old Delaware Canal begs to be walked. For those who'd rather ride, New Hope has narrated historical tours on the river, on the rails, and on the streets

LIFESTYLE TRAVEL

swimming, and photographing any of a dozen nearby covered bridges are other options.

Not surprisingly, New Hope is full of ghosts — with lantern-led ghost tours allegedly encountering Aaron Burr, a phantom hitchhiker, and other apparitions. Although ghost sightings are not guaranteed, visitors don't have to look hard to find living history lessons.

In addition to the Parry Mansion, condominiums that stand on the site of the Union Mills Paper Manufacturing Company were built on the spot where Washington hid the boats used in his surprise Christmas morning attack on the Hessians.

A cannon fronted by a mound of cannonballs was actually used in the historic Civil War sea battle between the Monitor and the Merrimac. A viewing window in the floor of the Wedgwood Inn provides a peek into the Underground Railroad, used by northbound slaves escaping the clutches of southern plantation owners. Several structures even have unexploded British bombs — the result of a shelling directed against the Continental Army — stuck in their roofs.

Now that peace and prosperity embraces the town, the only noise comes from the motorcycles that clog the streets on summer weekends. There's an occasional train whistle too.

There are lots of whistles, plus clapping and cheering, inside Bucks County Playhouse, a testing ground for potential Broadway shows. Robert Redford and Grace Kelly actually started their careers there.

There are plenty of places to eat and drink, though most don't take reservations. Ideal on a moonlit night, The Landing features patio dining with perfect views of the two-lane steel bridge to the Jersey side of the Delaware. The pocket park next to Martine's, where patrons can also partake of a patio, was once used for river crossings.

In deference to city slickers, Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts face each other on opposite sides of Bridge and Main Streets. For those who want to make maximum mileage from limited time — or just can't fathom the idea of waiting for a table — there are plenty of places to grab a hot dog, slice of pizza, or ice cream cone.

New Hope will leave a sweet taste no matter how long visitors stay. There are free Saturday night concerts at Canal Locktender's Park, a spectacular auto show at the local high school, and an annual arts and crafts festival each fall that draws visitors from as far away as Florida. In addition to a fall foliage show that rivals the best leaf-peeping in New England, the town celebrates Halloween for the entire month of October.

Some visitors may never leave: Carl Glassman is an active speaker and consultant who wrote a book called *How to Start and Run Your Own B & B Inn*. Some of his students are now competitors! ■

For further information, contact Visit New Hope, tel. 215-528-9620, www.visitnewhope.com or The Wedgwood Collection of Historic Inns, tel. 215-862-2570, www.WedgwoodInn.com.

The New Hope Visitors Center at 1 West Mechanic Street is staffed all year.

Award-winning journalist Dan Schlossberg is travel editor of New Jersey Lifestyle and the host of both TRAVEL ITCH RADIO and "Travel Tuesday," a weekly morning segment on WLIS Old Saybrook and WMRD Middletown.