

# Historic Califon

A Walking Tour



# Historic Califon

## Step Back in Time

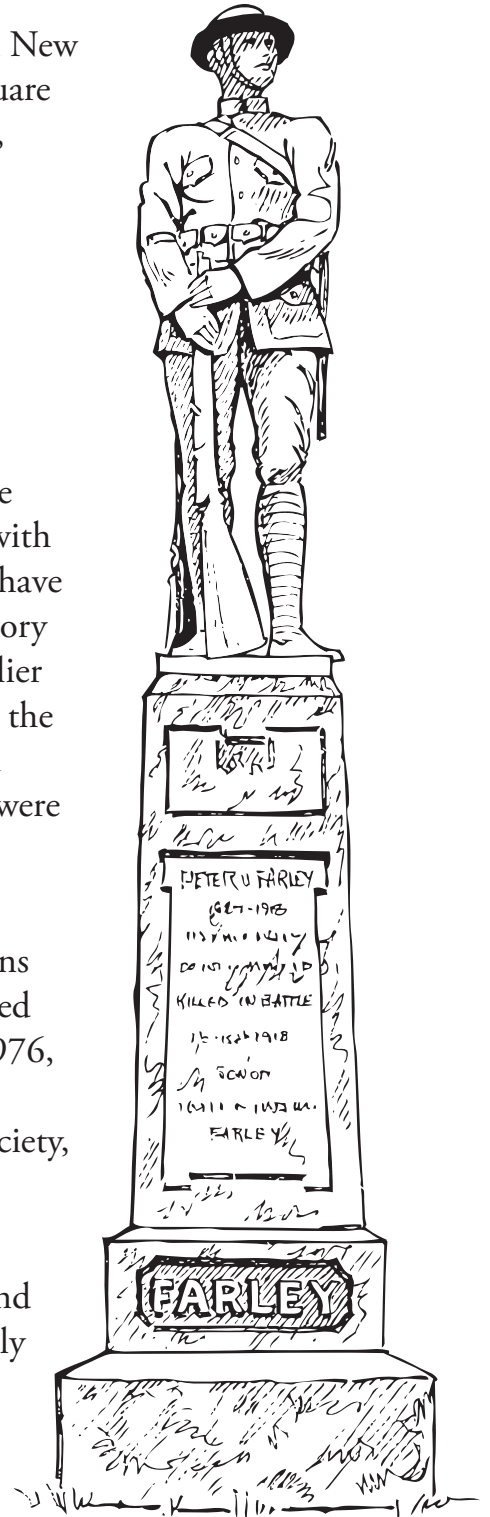
Califon is an example of a rapidly disappearing way of life – the small New Jersey town. Although its political boundaries encompass only 0.9 square miles, it is a self-sustaining borough with its own government, school, businesses and town services.

The town is a time capsule of the lives of the hardworking men and women, farmers and tradespeople, who built this nation.

The Historic District is a prime example of New Jersey vernacular architecture of the mid-nineteenth century. The majority of houses are two-and-a-half story rectangular (I) clapboard units, one room deep with gable roofs, gable returns and end fireplaces. Generally, the buildings have three bays with a center entrance. Nearly all the buildings have one-story front porches. L or T shaped additions are common to many. The earlier buildings, some of which date to the late 1700's, are made of stone in the German manner or are Georgian in style. Later homes include several Victorian styles and some craftsman bungalows. Central to the town were the railroad and the bridge, which made transportation possible.

Recognizing the unique status of Califon, a group of concerned citizens undertook to set aside the main portion of the town as a site recognized on both the State and the National Registries of Historic Places. In 1976, Califon became the second site in the state of New Jersey to be so recognized. This group was the precursor of the Califon Historical Society, that is now headquartered in the Califon Railroad Station.

This self-guided tour will take you through the heart of the District and point out places of importance to our eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth century forebears.



# Califon – A Walking Tour of the Homes, Businesses and their History

This tour starts and ends at the Califon Railroad Station (Number 1 on the map). It is arranged to be followed in numerical order but, because of the compact size of Califon, can be followed in any order desired.

All the structures on this tour are privately owned. Please observe all buildings from the street or sidewalk. This tour does not provide access to any homes, buildings or gardens.

Thank you for your cooperation.



1. The Station at Califon – circa 1875. Stone. The proud citizens of California (as the town had been known since the Gold Rush days of 1848) replaced, at their own expense, the wooden station originally supplied by the Jersey Central Railroad in the 1870's with this stone building. Folk history says that when the citizens painted the station sign, they could not fit "California" so they shortened the name to "Califon." Passenger trains ran daily until the mid-1930's; freight service continued until the late 1970's. The Califon Historical Society restored the Station in 1987 as its headquarters and a museum.

## Academy Street

2. Jeremiah Hoffman Homestead – circa 1880. (33 Academy Street) Rectangular I-form with additions. Jeremiah Hoffman was the owner/proprietor of the Califon Basket Factory (Number 43) in the early 1890's. His son, Floyd, was married to Ida Hoffman, who was Hunterdon County Democratic Chairwoman from the 1950's until the 1970's.

3. Schoolhouse – circa 1875. One-and-a-half story rectangular I-form, with additions. This building was used as a school until 1918, when the current school (Number 40) was built. It was then



purchased by the Califon Improvement Association and used as a theatre for local Minstrel shows and later, movies. Two jail cells were added to its basement in 1922 but were seldom used. These were dismantled to make a garage and the area was used by the Califon First Aid Squad from 1967-1997. Upstairs was used by the Califon Fire Company as offices from circa 1936 to circa 1971, and later, for storage. The building was updated in 1997 and now houses the Municipal Offices.

4. George W. Beaty House – circa 1850. (16 Academy Street) T-form with additions. Mr. Beaty bought the Neighbor General Store (Number 22) in 1888. The first mayor of the Borough of Califon, Elston Beaty, spent his boyhood in this house. The Beaty Ice Business was on this property.

5. The Jacob S. Apgar House II – circa 1860. (12 Academy Street) L-form dwelling with additions. Jacob S. Apgar, proprietor of the Califon Hotel, (located on the site of the current Post Office) built this house for his daughter and her husband, the McCann's. Jacob lived "downtown" (at Number 45).

## Railroad Avenue

Houses on this street are circa 1860 wood-frame structures. The railroad ran along the west side of the street, transporting students to High Bridge High School, picnickers to Lake Hopatcong and peaches to the cities. During both World Wars, munitions were shipped from Taylor Wharton Company in High Bridge to Picatinny Arsenal near Dover along these tracks.

6. Neigh House – circa 1868. (1 Railroad Avenue) Rectangular I-form with additions. This building once housed the Neigh Barber Shop, whose customers often preferred to be "clipped" by Mrs. Neigh because she had a "lighter touch" than her husband, Almyer.

## Main Street

7. Waldron Creamery – circa 1900. Three-story commercial structure. At its height, the Creamery produced 15,000 quarts of milk a day. It closed in the late 1960's. It now houses Califon Fire Company facilities.

8. Neigh Clothing Store – circa 1908. (37 Main Street) Three-story commercial construction with second/third floor overhang supported by cast iron columns. The top floor of this building was a lodge hall where Califon's only all-female lodge, the Daughters of Liberty, met.

9. Jane Philhower House – circa 1910. (33 Main Street) Clapboard dwelling. Originally built for Jane and her widowed sister, this building was eventually both the home and office of Dr. Poe and then Dr. Montgomery, chiropractors, until it was purchased by St. John Neumann Church in the late 1980's for use as a rectory. It is now a private residence.

The remainder of the houses on this side of the street are mid-to-late 1800's, with various additions.

10. John T. Fritz House – circa 1885. (40 Main Street) Late Victorian dwelling. Built by John Fritz of High Bridge as his "retirement" home. This house, and the three following uphill ones, had cellar kitchens when they were built.

11. Peter Philhower House – circa 1880. (42 Main Street) L-form clapboard dwelling with stone wrap-around porch. When he brought electricity to his store (Number 12), "Pete Goat" also electrified his home, making it the first residence in town to have lights.

## Philhower Avenue

12. Philhower General Store – circa 1847. (101 Philhower Avenue) Two-and-a-half story rectangular commercial structure with flat roofed additions. Opened by Peter Philhower in 1847, the General Mercantile was operated by the same family until it closed in the late 1930's. This was the first business in Califon to have electricity.



13. Coleman Carriage House – circa 1900. (109 -111 Philhower Avenue) Two-and-a-half story clapboard commercial structure. This building is on the site of the wheelwright/blacksmith shop of David K. Apgar. It has housed several businesses including a car dealership and a cabinetry shop.

## Main Street

14. Hezekiah Philhower House – circa 1885. (44 Main Street) Late Victorian. In the early 1900's, Mrs. Philhower was well-known for selling generous portions of homemade cake and ice cream on her front porch on hot summer days. The cellar was a pool hall. This building also housed Califon's telephone exchange, run by Hezekiah's daughter, Mary Philhower Dumbrique, until rotary phones came to Califon in 1963.

Between this structure and the Califon Lumber Co. (established in Califon in 1918) is a building which housed a pastry shop. The proprietor was forced to close because of anti-German sentiment rampant in the area during World War I. It was at this time that German Valley became Long Valley and New Germantown became Oldwick. It was also Neigh Brothers Butcher Shop (circa 1910) run by Thomas and Samuel Neigh.

15. Site of the Compton House – circa 1800. (Grassy area between commercial buildings.) Califon's only murder took place near this dwelling in 1907. A fence picket from the property was used to beat a town resident, Manning Reilly, to death. The murderer was never brought to justice.

16. Old Califon Post Office – circa 1892. (64 Main Street) Late Victorian. Operated as a Post Office until 1966, when it was replaced by the red brick building in the Main Street triangle.

## Bank Street

Houses on this street are mid-to-late nineteenth century dwellings in the L-, T-, or I- form.

17. Blacksmith Shop – circa 1840. This wooden barn and the residence next door housed one of Califon's three blacksmith shops. The others were at Number 13 and between Numbers 7 and 8, (where the Fire Company garage is currently located.)

## Mill Street

18. Site of Jacob Neighbor Grist Mill and raceway. This later became the Geist Mill, and operated into the 1970s when it was destroyed by fire.

19. Mill House – circa 1850. (101 Mill Street) One-and-a-half story frame structure with additions. This dwelling was part of the Neighbor Grist Mill complex.

20. Stone remains of building housing a distillery and later, a tannery, circa 1825.

21. Tanner's House – circa 1825. (106 Mill Street Extension) Stone. Referred to in early deeds as the “Mansion House,” this structure was occupied in 1825 by John Kline who owned most of the land on this side of the river in Califon and who operated the tannery next door (Number 20). Joseph Tiger, then owner of the Neighbor Grist Mill (Number 18), lived here in the 1880’s.



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## Main Street

22. Neighbor General Store – circa 1860. (74 Main Street) Original building in center; additions at rear and left (circa 1895) and right (1912). Built by Jacob Neighbor who also ran the grist mill on the river behind the store (Number 18), this store sold food, hardware, clothing and shoes until 1930. In the early years, the third floor housed Califon’s lodges including the Knights of Pythias and the Knights of the Golden Eagle. It was a confectionery store in the late 1950’s, known as Bischoff’s. Since then, it has been a café and is currently a florist shop.

23. G. Apgar Confectionery Store – circa 1900. (72 Main Street ) Two-story clapboard. A confectionery shop run by Gene Apgar occupied the ground floor in the early 1900’s. His wife, Cora, ran a millinery shop upstairs. Since the 1970’s it has been a dressmaker’s, a gift shop and is currently a bookshop.

24. J. Barton Apgar House – circa 1900. (70 Main Street) T-form clapboard. J. Barton Apgar, who purchased the general store next door, lived here.

25. Abraham Philhower Store – circa 1888. Three-story commercial building. This general store was purchased in 1905 by Barton Apgar, in 1951 by Leonard Rambo, Sr., in 1980 by Leonard Rambo, Jr. and in 1998 by Don and Marie Freibergs. At one time, the second floor was used as the town hall and the town theatre. A hand-painted curtain is still hanging on the former stage.



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26. Hunterdon County Trust Company – 1923. Yellow brick commercial structure. In 1959, three men attempted to rob the bank. Vice-president Raymond Apgar was talking on the telephone when they entered. He calmly said into the phone, “The bank is being robbed. Get help.” The entire town was alerted and the robbers were quickly captured. It is currently a spa.

27. Califon National Bank – circa 1908. (43 Main Street) Two-and-a-half story clapboard structure with cast iron column supports. This building housed Califon’s first bank, which printed its own money. It has housed a frame shop, several gift shops and a yarn shop. It is currently an antique shop.

28. Adrian Sutton House – circa 1900. (45 Main Street) Irregular form clapboard with irregular shingles on second floor. Adrian Sutton married Dr. Miller’s niece and built this Victorian home next door to Dr. Miller’s office. It was converted to a confectionery store and restaurant called Tiger’s Den in the 1960’s.

29. Dr. Theodore Miller House and Pharmacy – circa 1881; shop, 1900. Victorian clapboard shop with store front window. Residence, office and pharmacy of Califon’s first resident physician of record.



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30. Neuwiesinger Butcher Shop – circa 1890. Late Victorian. The smoke house is still standing in the rear yard.



31. Califon Bridge – 1887. Built by the Bartley Foundry in Bartley, NJ, this is one of only a few extant examples of a Pratt through truss bridge. It was the center of a controversy in the 1970s and 1980s when Hunterdon County wished to replace it with a modern span. Instead the decking was widened and the original trusses were reinstalled.

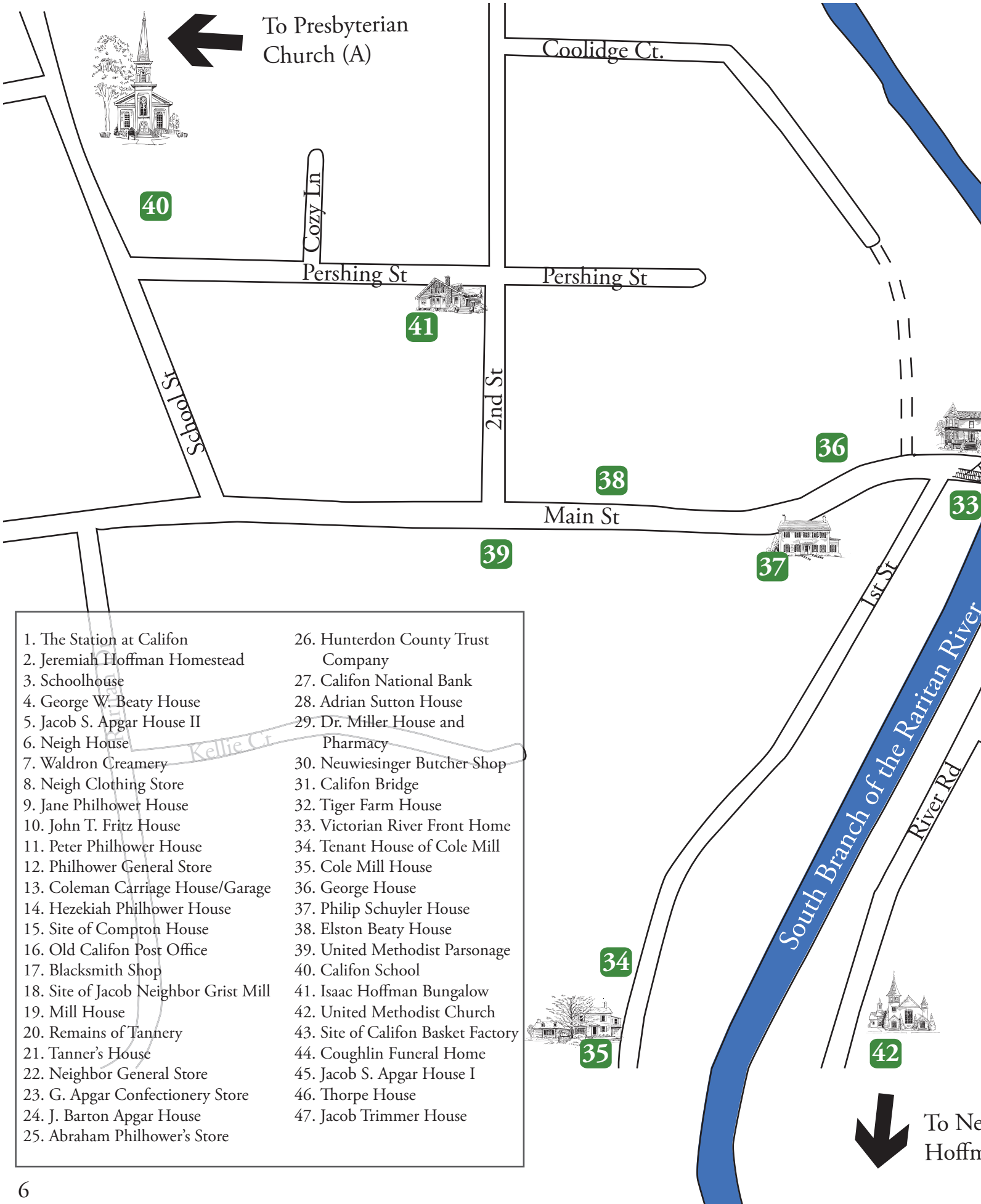
32. Tiger Farm House – circa 1850. (78 Main Street) Cows from this farm were driven across the bridge to pasture on the hillside behind the present day Fire Company. At one time, this farm included all the land that now makes up the Hoffman Drive development.



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33. Circa 1890. (1 First Street) This basic T-form clapboard with three bays and center entrance is a classic example of a Victorian river front home. It was the home of one of the later owners of the Cole Mill.

34. Tenant House for the Cole Mill – circa 1840. (21 First Street) Rectangular form clapboard. This dwelling housed workers in the Cole Mill (Number 35).



To Presbyterian Church (A)



40

Cozy Ln

Coolidge Ct.

Pershing St

Pershing St

41



School St

2nd St

38

36

33

Main St

39

37



1st St

- |                                       |                                    |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. The Station at Califon             | 26. Hunterdon County Trust Company |
| 2. Jeremiah Hoffman Homestead         | 27. Califon National Bank          |
| 3. Schoolhouse                        | 28. Adrian Sutton House            |
| 4. George W. Beaty House              | 29. Dr. Miller House and Pharmacy  |
| 5. Jacob S. Apgar House II            | 30. Neuwiesinger Butcher Shop      |
| 6. Neigh House                        | 31. Califon Bridge                 |
| 7. Waldron Creamery                   | 32. Tiger Farm House               |
| 8. Neigh Clothing Store               | 33. Victorian River Front Home     |
| 9. Jane Philhower House               | 34. Tenant House of Cole Mill      |
| 10. John T. Fritz House               | 35. Cole Mill House                |
| 11. Peter Philhower House             | 36. George House                   |
| 12. Philhower General Store           | 37. Philip Schuyler House          |
| 13. Coleman Carriage House/Garage     | 38. Elston Beaty House             |
| 14. Hezekiah Philhower House          | 39. United Methodist Parsonage     |
| 15. Site of Compton House             | 40. Califon School                 |
| 16. Old Califon Post Office           | 41. Isaac Hoffman Bungalow         |
| 17. Blacksmith Shop                   | 42. United Methodist Church        |
| 18. Site of Jacob Neighbor Grist Mill | 43. Site of Califon Basket Factory |
| 19. Mill House                        | 44. Coughlin Funeral Home          |
| 20. Remains of Tannery                | 45. Jacob S. Apgar House I         |
| 21. Tanner's House                    | 46. Thorpe House                   |
| 22. Neighbor General Store            | 47. Jacob Trimmer House            |
| 23. G. Apgar Confectionery Store      |                                    |
| 24. J. Barton Apgar House             |                                    |
| 25. Abraham Philhower's Store         |                                    |

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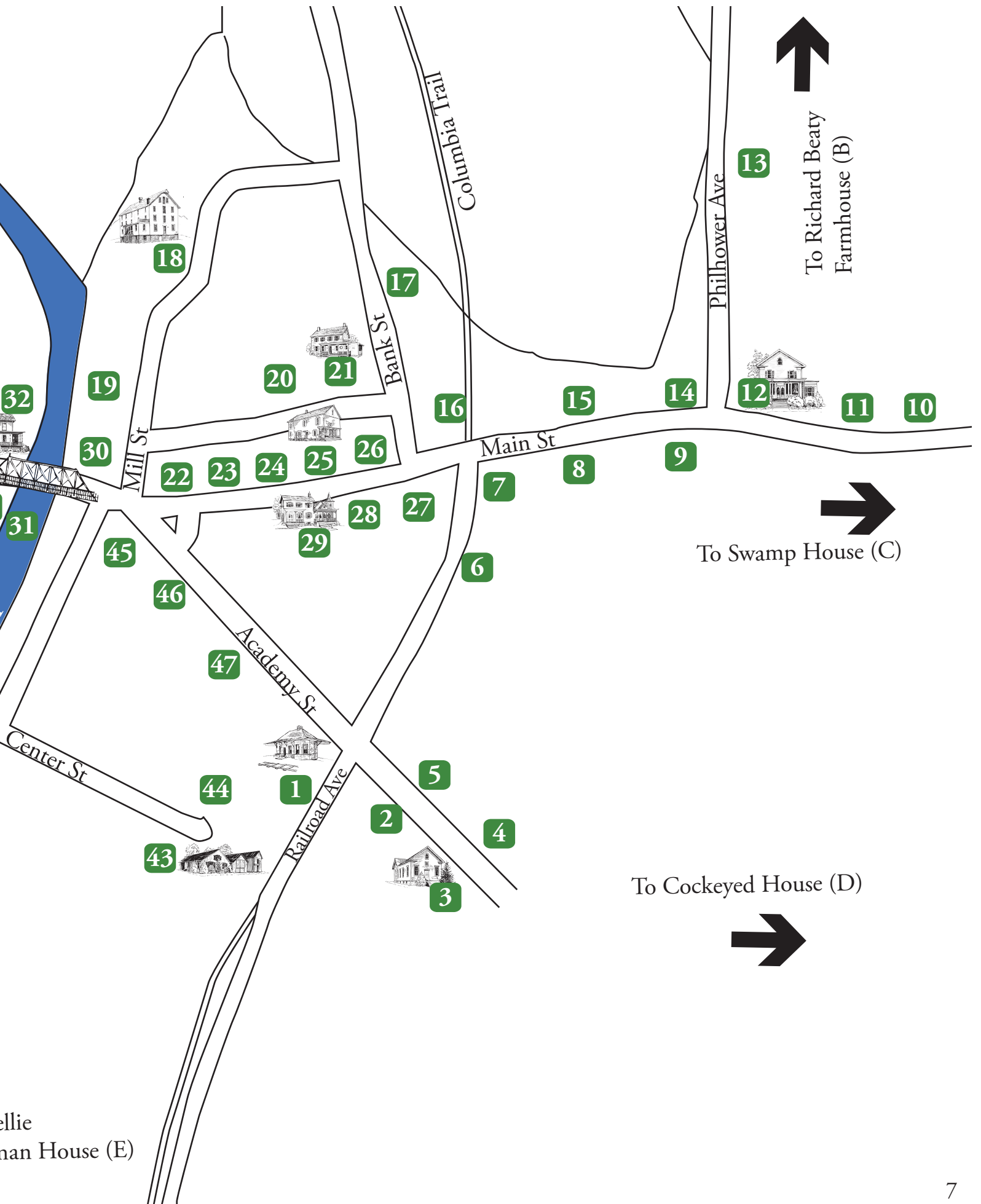
South Branch of the Raritan River

River Rd

42



To Ne Hoffman



To Richard Beaty  
Farmhouse (B)



To Swamp House (C)



To Cockeyed House (D)

ellie  
man House (E)

## Main Street (Cont.)

35. Cole Mill House – circa 1840. (23 First Street)

Wood frame with additions. This house and the Tenant House next door are all that remains of one of Califon's two 1840's flour mills. It was the home of the mill owner, Benjamin Cole. The mill was on the opposite side of the road, near the dam.



36. George House – circa 1895. (84 Main Street) Mr. George and his partner, Mr. Weise, operated one of the limestone quarries located in Vernoy.

37. Philip Schuyler House – circa 1760. (55 Main Street) Georgian colonial with original kitchen in basement. Built by Philip Schuyler, whose estate encompassed most of what is Califon today. It was then given by Schuyler to his daughter and her husband, Aaron Sutton, who lost the house in a bankruptcy proceeding.



38. Elston Beaty House – circa 1900. (88 Main Street) Late Victorian, clapboard dwelling. Elston Beaty was the first mayor of the Borough of Califon (1918).

39. United Methodist Parsonage – circa 1900. (63 Main Street) Late Victorian with additions. This house gave its name to this section of town: "Parsonage Heights." It and the Beaty House (Number 38) were the only buildings in this area until the 1920s and were surrounded by corn fields.

Upper Main Street: Most houses are 1920s and 1930s. Note the classic bungalow construction of many and the "Four Square" architecture and stained glass windows of the others.

40. Califon School – 1918. Hollow brick covered by stucco. Additions in 1956, 1975 and 2006. When originally opened in 1918, there was no electricity and the indoor plumbing proved inadequate so the pupils had to resort to outhouses.

41. Isaac Hoffman Bungalow – circa 1900. (1 Second Street) This is a fine example of a craftsman style bungalow house. Note the overhanging rafters and graphic detailing typical of this response to Victorian exuberance.



## Recross the Califon Bridge.



## River Road

42. United Methodist Church – circa 1860 with 1892 addition. The oldest section of this church (the rear portion) was moved to its site by sled from New Germantown (now Oldwick) during the winter of 1866.



## Center Street

Houses on this street date from the late 1800s and are typical of vernacular workers houses.

43. Site of the Califon Basket Factory – circa 1885. Built by John Neighbor, Sr. and later operated by Jeremiah Hoffman and his son, Floyd, this was the last steam-powered basket factory on the east coast.



44. Coughlin Funeral Home – circa 1920. Clapboard dwelling. Built by Daniel J. Coughlin as a home and mechanic's shop and renovated into a funeral home by him in the 1940s.

## Academy Street

45. Jacob S. Apgar House I – circa 1850. (1 Academy Street) T-form clapboard. Jacob Apgar also built the Califon (Union) Hotel (on the site of the present day Post Office) and operated it for many years. The hotel was the center of Saturday night activity, which often became quite rowdy.

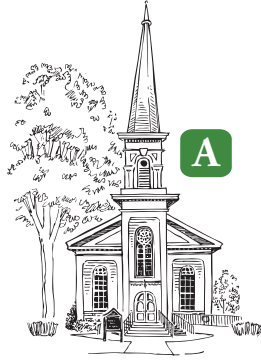
46. Thorpe House – circa 1870. (3 Academy Street) Rectangular form with additions. In the early 1900s, this building housed Califon's first confectionery store, owned by Orie Thorpe, a dressmaking shop run by Susan Weise, a music store owned by Bertie Trimmer and, in the basement, a barber shop operated by Lance Alpaugh.

47. Jacob Trimmer House – circa 1875. (9 Academy Street) Rectangular form clapboard. Note the round window in the front gable. Built by Jacob Trimmer, one of the first Elders of the Califon Presbyterian Church. In the early 1900s, rooms in the house were rented to teachers who taught at the two-room Schoolhouse (Number 3).



## Sites outside the mapped area:

A. Presbyterian Church – 1871.  
(Route 513) This church was built with a combination of volunteers and paid labor. Rev. Mr. John Reid was the first pastor. The Manse was built in 1894, the parish house in 1949 and basement renovated into Sunday School rooms in 1962. The church is part of the Presbytery of Morris and Orange.



B. Richard Beaty Farm House – circa 1840. (Philhower Avenue)  
Stone. Originally a stock farm, this property became part of the Waldron Creamery in the 1930s, producing their grade AA milk.

C. The Swamp House – circa 1824. (Off Main Street on Old Califon Road.) Stone. This was once used as a stagecoach stop. Natural springs beneath the house gave it its name.

D. Cockeyed House – circa 1825. (Route 512) Stone. This dwelling takes its name from the upper, slanted windows. It was part of one of Califon's original farms.

E. Nellie Hoffman House – circa 1846. (River Road). Stone. Originally a mini-farm, this property is owned by the Borough and is open to the public.







## Sources

*The Califon Story*  
by Helen Haggerty Geist

*History of Hunterdon and Somerset Counties 1881*  
New Jersey Historic Sites Inventory

## Credits

Artwork by Joyce Carlson  
Text by Kathleen Andersen

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