



RELIQS

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Township Was Almost 'Wild Ridge'

Confusion over the municipality's name has long plagued residents of our oldest Pascack Valley town. Is it called Township of Washington? Washington Township? And how do you abbreviate "township" on all those forms where the full name just won't fit? The jury is out on whether it's "Twp." or "Twsp." It seems the one thing everyone can agree on is that the township never, ever goes by plain old "Washington."

What's more, there are four other Washington townships in New Jersey: they exist in Burlington, Gloucester, Morris and Warren counties. There used to be another, but Mercer County's changed its name to Robbinsville in 2008. Incorporated in 1840, our Bergen County version is actually the youngest of all these.

Fifty years ago, all of the confusion inspired a movement to change the name of the township. If history had gone a little differently, it might have become Wild Ridge.

LOOKING TO LOCAL HISTORY

The name "Wild Ridge" has a historical precedent in the region, but one must dig deep to find it. More than 200 years ago, the name Wilde Rug (translated from Dutch as "Indian Ridge") was applied to the area of present-day Linwood Avenue at the border of the Township of Washington and Paramus. The Dutch word *wilde* (pronounced vill-deh) had a definition akin



The familiar town sign at Pascack and Ridgewood roads. Can you picture the word "Washington" replaced with "Wild Ridge"?

to "wildman." The Jersey Dutch used it to describe the natives they encountered in America.

Linwood Avenue was an old colonial road that appears on the maps that Robert Erskine and Simeon DeWitt created for Gen. George Washington in 1780. The 1854 "Bergen County Road Returns" describes Linwood as the route "from the Paramus Road across the Wilde Ridge to the road leading to Kinderkamack."

Paramus farmer Jan J. Zabriskie's will, dated Jan. 6, 1816, references the land by two names: Wilde Rugh and Ingin Ridge. The 1830 last will and testament of

Albert J. Zabriskie, whose 1805 sandstone homestead is now a law office at 7 East Ridgewood Avenue in Paramus, bequeaths to son Peter, among other property, a 6-acre lot of woodland "in the place called the Wildridge."

POSTAL PROBLEMS

While a name change had been suggested in the township back in 1966, the effort really gained traction in the autumn of 1968. A prime mover in the effort was Rev. Eugene F.X. Sullivan, founder of Our Lady of Good Counsel Roman Catholic Church on Ridgewood Road.

Other suggested names also had a foundation in local history: Pascack (a word of Lenape origin whose meaning historians have speculated about for years); Musquapsink (the name of a brook flowing through the

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town, also an ambiguous word of Lenape origin); and Chimney Ridge (after the 1745 house Seven Chimneys, the oldest structure in town).

The name "Wild Ridge" had already been used by a pharmacy in the town center on Pascack Road starting in 1962, after the owners delved into local history. The gas station on Washington Avenue was for years the Wild Ridge Getty.

The inspiration for the name change came down to misdirected mail.

"Letters to residents often go astray—to one of the other five Washington Townships in the state," wrote *The Record*, the region's daily newspaper, on Nov. 21, 1968. "Residents would like to have a post office in town instead of using the Westwood facility. Mail addressed to town, even pieces with the Westwood zip code, often wind up in other Washingtons. The long township name fills windows on business envelopes, one resident suggests, so the zip code is often covered."

Before the use of zip codes, township addresses had to include the words "Westwood Post Office" in order for mail to reach the correct town. The zip code, which stands for Zone Improvement Program code, was implemented nationwide in the early 1960s, but even after that the five-digit postal codes took time to catch on. By 1965, about 60 percent of Bergen County residents reported using zip codes on their outgoing mail—higher than the national average of about 50 percent.

"No one can guarantee us that a change in name will bring the town its own post office," Father Sullivan said at the time, "but it is guaranteed that we will not get a post office unless we change the name."

RESIDENTS SURVEYED (AND SURVEYED AGAIN)

The question of a name change was to be decided via a referendum during the general election in November of 1969. Before the referendum could appear on the ballot, at least 30 percent of people who voted in the 1968 general election had to support the measure by signing a petition. Over the winter and spring, different organizations tried to gauge public sentiment.

In December of 1968, the Democratic Club's Civic Action Committee conducted a telephone poll of township residents to measure interest in a name change and specifically the name Wild Ridge. Twelve people manned the telephones to reach out to 500 township homes. The phone survey showed that 360 randomly sampled households favored a name change, and three-quarters of those preferred the name Wild Ridge.

A *Record* reporter queried shoppers at the strip mall on Dec. 2, 1968 and got different results.

"Residents of the Township don't seem overly excited by the proposal of living in a town called

Plans Advanced For Changing Township Name To Wild Ridge

Does Wild Ridge Appeal? Tell It To Phone Survey

Not Wild-Ridge, Please! What's in a name? Confusion for one Bergen town

News titles spanning late 1968 to the summer of 1969 tell of the evolving issue of a name change in the township.

Wild Ridge," the newspaper said. "Eight of ten people interviewed at the shopping center on Pascack Road during the weekend on the proposed renaming of the township as Wild Ridge were either opposed or indifferent to the new name."

The grassroots Committee for Citizens Concerned with Change (CCCC) formed early in 1969 headed by former Mayor Victor Luis and co-chaired by John Martini, former Democratic Club chairman. Father Sullivan was a member, along with others who supported a name change to Wild Ridge. The group's goal was to circulate a petition and collect the 1,417 signatures needed to get a referendum on the 1969 ballot.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Helen Fadini of Devon Road, wife of Republican council candidate Victor Fadini, in March of 1969 sent out 1,000 inquiry cards to registered voters about the name change. She received 496 responses, but not a lot of support for the name Wild Ridge. Sixty-one percent said they wanted no change. Some people suggested even more names, like Washington Hills, Hickory Hollow, Rolling Ridge and—from one humorous person—Mudville.

IS IT WORTHWHILE?

Former Mayor John Tammens—owner of the hardware store in the town center—brought up some practical concerns. "If the name of the township is changed, will residents have to pay to have changes made on deeds to land and homes?" he asked. "We

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Wild Ridge Pharmacy, which was located in the Pascack Road strip mall, predated the name change controversy.

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must think of the cost of driver's registration, business stationery, and printing on municipal vehicles."

Another former mayor, John Markert, said he had inquired several years earlier about the possibility of the township getting a post office, and was told it was unlikely, as the postal service was already running at a deficit. Even with a unique name, he said, it was unrealistic to expect a new post office in town.

Officials in the southern Bergen County borough of Wood-Ridge also opposed the change, asserting that the name Wild Ridge was too close to their own.

"Wood-Ridge says there's not enough room for another ridge in Bergen County," *The Record* reported Dec. 13, 1968.

In a letter from Wood-Ridge's borough attorney, the mayor and council of that borough told Township of Washington officials, "The residents of Wood-Ridge have been sore-pressed during the borough's almost 75 years of existence with mail, parcel post, freight, etc. intended for Wood-Ridge that has been sent to Woodbridge, Ridgewood, and Woodridge, N.Y. The officials of this borough are very fearful that another community in Bergen County with the word 'ridge' in its name would undoubtedly aggravate this situation of misdelivery."

"Jumping from the frying pan into the fire," is how the attorney described the proposed name change.

DONE IN BY INDIFFERENCE

Township of Washington Mayor Arthur Mann appointed a five-member committee to study the issue. This Municipal Name Change Committee sent out 3,200

questionnaires in June of 1969 asking about length of residency, past difficulties receiving mail, whether the name should be changed, and suggestions. Of the 743 questionnaires returned, 547 said they did not want a name change, 173 expressed an interest in a change, and 23 were indifferent.

When the mayor's committee held a June 9 public hearing on the matter at the town hall, less than a dozen of the town's 10,577 residents attended.

The initial excitement about a name change had fizzled out. By the autumn of 1969, after nearly a year of talk, hundreds of volunteer hours spent, and multiple citizen surveys, the matter was dropped.

For decades, the Township of Washington shared the 07675 zip code with Westwood, Woodcliff Lake, Old Tappan and River Vale. In 1975, then Democratic council candidate James A. Johnson led a movement to obtain the unused zip code 07676 for the township in celebration of the bicentennial. Rep. Andrew McGuire (D-NJ) wrote to the postmaster general requesting the same. However, it wasn't until the start of the new millennium that the township finally got its long-awaited 07676 zip code, as well as its first post office in the rear of the town center on Pascack Road.

by Kristin Beuscher

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'THE THINGLESS THINGS': A 1902 editorial

commend itself to smokers. It is the poisonous nicotine which has made tobacco popular throughout the world, and robbed of this it must be vapid and unsatisfying. The same is true for coffee. To remove that which makes coffee deleterious is to deprive it of the power to set a man up in the morning.

Whatever the inventors may promise, a whiskey which does not intoxicate is no better than mere water. There is quite as much reason to oppose the gurgless jug, save for uses in the prohibition states and in the communities where Sunday is really observed. The "glug-glug-glug" which testifies to the heavy specific gravity of the liquid is an appetizer. Persons whose moral strength may enable them to withstand an invitation to drink must nearly always surrender when the stimulating sound of the pouring out of a generous drink strikes the ear. While a gurgless jug might promote temperance, if it should be used, the persons in whose interest it has been invented will decline to use it.

All such things mean a waste of American inventive genius, since they undertake to abolish the particular qualities which men seek.