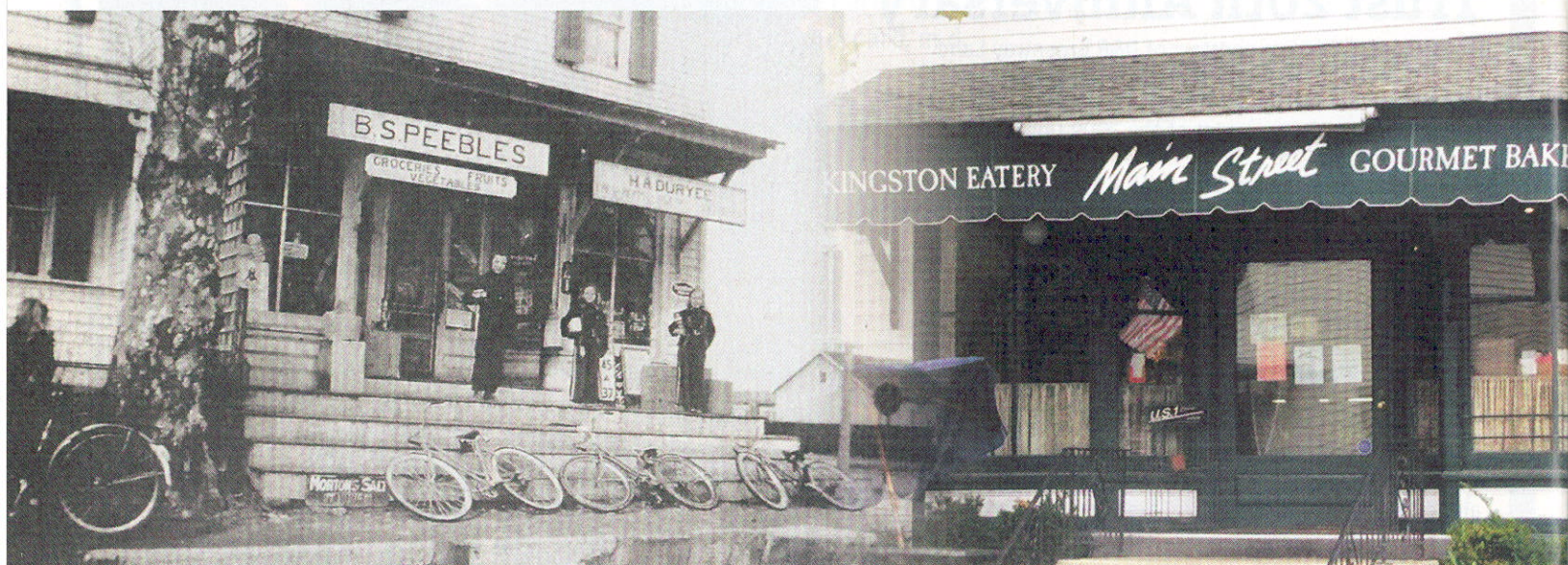


B.S. Peebles grocery store (left) served Kingston residents in the 1930s where Main Street Eatery and Gourmet Bakery serves them today, at the corner of Laurel Avenue and Main Street. | B.S. Peebles photo courtesy of Rick Goeke.



Kingston: Well Traveled

by adam grybowski

The Lenni Lenape Indians called it the Assunpink Trail. Dutch fur traders called it the Old Dutch Trail. Colonial Americans called it the King's Highway and then, later, the Post Road, the Upper Road and Lincoln's Highway. But what's in a name? In Kingston, that which we call Route 27 by any other name would always be well traveled.

For more than a century (roughly 1700-1800) the King's Highway was part of the main thoroughfare between Philadelphia and New York and also served travelers and traders moving between Trenton and New Brunswick.

Today Route 27 weaves through a historically rich village, dotted with shops, studios and restaurants. Last year the Momo brothers ventured outside of Princeton, where they own Mediterra, Teresa Caffe and the Witherspoon Bread Company, to open their new restaurant, Eno Terra. On its Web site, Eno Terra presents a timeline of local history that begins in 1675 when Jedediah Higgins acquired 1,000 acres in what is now Kingston and ends when their restaurant opens.

Following in their footsteps, Tuscan Hills left Princeton to set up shop in the former Union Line Hotel building, which opened in 1878 on the corner of what is now Main Street and Heathcote Brook Road. The store sells imported home furnishings, accessories, and gift items from Italian artisans. The space next door, the former Union Line Garage, is used for storage.

Tuscan Hills owners Greg and Suzanne Evans moved to Kingston primarily to have more space, inside and out — they now have 75 parking spaces as opposed to seven. "In addition to that I wanted to be in a highly visible location," Mr. Evans says. "It's a major north-south, as well as east-west, commuter route. Then there's the building itself. We liked being in a historical location."

Behind the former Union Line Garage building is another historic house, Mr. Evans says, that used to be for a blacksmith. While

travelers stopped overnight at the hotel, the blacksmith would reapply horseshoes to their horses before they continued on their journey.

In the 18th century, business owners operated several inns and taverns along the King's Highway to accommodate travelers. A man named Van Tilburgh owned an inn called the Sign of the Mermaid that opened before the Revolution at the intersection of what is now Laurel Avenue and the King's Highway. The inn is remembered as a favorite stopping place of George Washington and New Jersey governors.

In 1811 Phineas Withington opened his own inn, Withington's Inn, across the street from the Sign of the Mermaid. By that point so many people were traveling along the King's Highway that tolls had begun to be collected for its use. A story, perhaps apocryphal, that survives about the Withington Inn illustrates the transportation boom Kingston was experiencing. One night 49 stagecoaches arrived at the inn and found more than 400 horses standing in front of the building.

Across the street from Tuscan Hills are the Kingston Deli Market and Main Street Coffeehouse & Bakery, which has been here since 1984. The space was formerly home to a store owned by Luther Anthony in 1914 and then, in the 1930s, a grocery store called B.S. Peebles, "a favorite place in Kingston to fetch groceries by bicycle," according to *Rocky Hill, Kingston and Griggstown* (Arcadia Press, 1998).

Kingston's role as a transportation hub changed after the Trenton and New Brunswick Turnpike Company completed the Straight Turnpike, which became Route 1, in 1804. Although the construction of the Delaware & Raritan Canal in 1834 revived commercial interest in Kingston, as overland transportation decreased, so did the activity of inns and taverns and other forms of commerce. The town evolved into a rural village. 