ORIGIN OF THE TOWN NAME

The Borough of Pompton Lakes, located in Passaic County, takes its name from the lake that serves as its eastern boundary. The name Pompton derives from the Indian word meaning “wry mouth,” a reference to the crooked bodies of water that populated the area.

The rivers of Passaic County encouraged trade, transportation, recreation and industry to flourish in the region beginning in the 1680s, when Dutch settlers purchased farmland from the Indians.
Early Industry

The presence of iron ore and the availability of hydro power were the initial catalysts for the early development of Pompton Lakes. The construction of an ironworks on the Pompton River during the early 1700s earned Pompton Lakes a reputation as a colonial industrial center. The ironworks produced munitions for the French and Indian War; the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.

By 1850, steel had replaced iron as the chief product of the Pompton Ironworks; knives, saws, nails and railway carriage springs were manufactured during the Civil War.

A disastrous flood in 1903 destroyed the wooden dam at the falls and led to the termination of the ironworks.

Today little remains of this early industry other than a sandstone bridge abutment located near the intersection of Hemlock Road and Paterson-Hamburg Turnpike.

Completion of the Morris Canal in the 1830s and connection to the Borough by the Pompton Feeder abetted the iron industry by providing an ample supply of anthracite coal for furnaces. However, Pompton Lakes remained pastoral through the 19th century and was a desirable destination for those seeking a quiet vacation spot.

Mill Street in town (where the DPW is currently located) is the former home of the iron works mill. The street kept its name even after the mill was long gone.
Early Tourism

A resort known as the Romain Hotel operated on the banks of Pompton Lake beginning in the 1830s, at the site of the present Lakeside School. The hotel no longer stands but the barn remains and is still used for storage (although not for livestock!).

The hotel served vacationing New Yorkers, and at one time included a cider mill, boating and stables. The hotel and barn were both constructed using the same decorative concrete as another historic site in town, 103-109 Wanaque Avenue. The use of this concrete for building was popular at that time because it was cheap but could be molded into beautiful shapes.
Incorporation and Business

It was not until the late 1870s, when the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railroad opened a local station, that Pompton Lakes began to be transformed into a thriving suburb.

Incorporated as a Borough in 1895, the population of Pompton Lakes increased rapidly during the early 1900s, partly because of the growth of local employers such as the German Artistic Weaving Company (later Artistic Identification Systems), which opened in 1889.

In 1905, E.I. DuPont de Nemours & Company established its local operations by purchasing the Smith Powder Works. Much of Wanaque Avenue, the Borough’s main commercial street, was transformed when commercial buildings such as the Washington Building, at the corner of Colfax Avenue and Wanaque Avenues, replaced older homesteads that had lined the street.
Historic Figures

Joe Louis In the 1920s, Doc Bier’s Boxing Camp attracted well-known fighters such as Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson. It was here, that Joe Louis trained for many of his fights, including Billy Conn (twice) and Max Schmeling, for his historic bout on June 22, 1938.

Joe Louis, heavyweight boxing world champion from 1934 to 1949, holds a special place in the history of Pompton Lakes. In 1935 he held boxing exhibitions to raise $2600 for the purchase of an ambulance and an additional $2000 to help build a police communications center.

Located on Pompton Lake, adjacent to the Elks, is Joe Louis Memorial Park, where the life-size likeness, black granite monument of Joe Louis now stands. Dedicated on May 29, 1999 at a cost of about $80,000 this magnificent monument carries the famous, fitting line about Joe Louis, credited to sports writer Jimmy Cannon, “He is a credit to his race, the human race”.

James Hart Wyld and others developed a rocket that was successfully tested on Lake Inez in Pompton Lakes. A picture of Mr. Wyld and a model of his rocket are in the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. That successful firing led to the foundation of Reaction Motors. Mr. Wyld worked with the Atomic Energy Commission until his death in 1953.

Notable Pompton Lakes Figures

Cat Bauer (born 1955), author.
Cecil B. DeMille (1881–1959), director.
Charlie Getty (born 1952), played 10 seasons in the NFL, mainly for the Kansas City Chiefs.
Christine Terhune Herrick (1859-1944), author who wrote 30 books, mostly about housekeeping, and who built a home in the borough she called The Outlook, where she resided for 13 years.
Gary Jennings (1928–1999), author of historical fiction, including Aztec.
Historic Figures

**Martin J. Ryerson** purchased the Pompton Ironworks on the Ramapo River in 1797. He expanded his iron holdings and within a few years was running forges in Bloomingdale and Waneque to supplement his business. Mr. Ryerson was also one of the founding members of the Pompton Reformed Church.

In 2017, the Pompton Reformed Church began fundraising to restore the site of Mr. Ryerson's grave which is located in the church cemetery. In addition to the Ryerson grave site, the Pompton Reformed Church's cemetery is also home to many other historic graves including civil war veterans and a section devoted to former slaves.

**Albert Payson Terhune** (1872–1942), author of *Lad, A Dog* and other dog stories. These short stories were first published in magazines, the novel is based on the life of Terhune’s real-life rough collie, Lad. Today, part of Sunnybank was made a historical park, Terhune Memorial Park (where dogs are also welcome to roam).

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**Notable Pompton Lakes Figures**

**Patty Shwartz** (born 1961), United States Circuit Judge of United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit.

**Mary Virginia Terhune** (1830–1922), author known by her pen name of Marion Harland who was the mother of authors Christine Terhune Herrick and Albert Payson Terhune.

**Michael Weiner** (1961-2013), Executive Director of the Major League Baseball Players Association

**Jeordie White** (born 1971), bassist and guitarist for Marilyn Manson.

**John Wolters** (1945–1997), drummer for Dr. Hook & The Medicine Show.
Historic Sites

A walk through historic Pompton Lakes

1. Pompton Reformed Church  Paterson-Hamburg Turnpike and Ringwood Avenue
   - The Pompton Reformed Church is the Borough’s oldest house of worship. Founded by the members of the Pompton Plains Reformed Church who resided in Pompton Lakes, the building was completed in 1814 on land donated by Martin Ryerson. Martin Ryerson, owner of Pompton Ironworks during the 19th century, was among the original founders.

2. The Vreeland House  516 Wanaque Avenue
   - One of the largest and most elaborate Victorian residences within the Borough, the Vreeland House is associated with one of Pompton Lakes’ original families. This house was constructed c. 1880, and was purchased by Dr. Clarence Vreeland and his wife Ethel, one of the Borough’s first historians, in 1921. At various points in its history, it had been used as a boarding house and inn and was at one time known as the Ramapo Valley House.
     - It stood at the site of what is now the Valley National Bank. It was demolished in 1994.
     - This was also the site of the Yellow Tavern and residence of the Ryerson family during the revolutionary war.

3. Maine Monument
   - Dedicated Labor Day, 1914 in honor of the local members of the Council of the Jr. Order of the United American Mechanics, the monument contains a copper ventilator from the Maine battleship. The ventilator was transported to Pompton Lakes by Harry Hershfield, a Pompton Lakes Mayor who went on to become a state Senator. The town memorial was erected to honor several Pompton Lakes residents who lost their lives aboard the U.S.S. Maine. This site is one of the few in the United States that houses relics recovered from the U.S.S. Maine.
     - The liberty bell was donated by the Elks Club in memory of the men who lost their lives in Havana Harbor during the Spanish American War. During both the Spanish American War and World War I, troops were stationed in Pompton Lakes to protect the Rand (later DuPont) Powder Works.

According to local legend, General George Washington visited the Yellow Tavern while passing through Pompton Lakes. The Yellow Tavern was torn down in 1903 when Hamburg Turnpike was widened.

The cemetery located to the rear of the church includes the grave of Albert Payson Terhune (1872-1942) noted author and area resident.
4. Mystery Building
– Opposite the library on the river bank below are the remains of a mysterious building. Local legend says that it was a jail or a spring house. It could have been a fish hatchery or a cooling shed for milk from local farmers.

5. Emanuel Einstein Memorial Library 333 Wanaque Avenue
– The Pompton Lakes Library is named for Emanuel Einstein, president of the Raritan Woolen Mills and a frequent summer visitor to the Borough. Donated by his wife at the time of his death in 1909, the library was completed in 1921. Originally the second floor provided a living space for the librarian, a gymnasium and an assembly hall. While the building still serves civic functions, residential quarters have been eliminated. The library is an excellent example of the Tudor Revival style, characterized by steep gabled roofs, grouped casement windows, and Gothic detailing. The construction of the library parallels the development of Pompton Lakes as a rapidly expanding suburb with a need for civic facilities.
– It was privately managed until it became a public library in 1952.
– The first librarian was Thomas Wood. He and his family lived on the second floor in the librarian quarters.

6. Pompton Lakes Fire Department
– Now Mack’s American Bar and Grill, the fire department was organized in 1895 and incorporated in 1901. Its equipment was stored here until the new firehouse on Passaic Avenue was built in 1979. The first fire fighting equipment consisted of a wagon carrying barrels of water with buckets hanging along its sides.

7. Reaction Motors 281 Wanaque Avenue
– In this building, now R&M Hardware, James Hart Wylde and others developed a rocket that was successfully tested on Lake Inez in Pompton Lakes. That successful firing led to the foundation of Reaction Motors. The firm was moved to Pequannock and later to Lake Denmark in Rockaway Township.
8. **Pompton School (Lenox School)**

- Historically known as Pompton School, Lenox elementary school still operates as an educational institution today. Note the entrances on either side of the main entrance. One is inscribed with “Girls”, the other “Boys”. While waiting for the school to be built children were educated in Durling’s store on Wanaque Avenue. This site was declared a local historic landmark in 2001.

9. **Pompton Lakes High School** 45 Lakeside Avenue

- This impressive Colonial Revival structure was designed by the firm of Hacker & Hacker in 1933, and features stone quoining, keystone lintels and triple portal entrance wings embellished with garlanded stone panels.

- The original high school was built in 1933 and a contemporary addition was added in 1959. Students were educated in Butler prior to the construction of the high school.

- When it first opened students were accepted from Midland Park, Oakland and Wayne. Riverdale students presently attend PLHS.
10. **United States Post Office** 47 Lakeside Avenue

Like many public buildings erected during the 1930s, the Post Office was built as a result of the New Deal. The Pompton Lakes Post Office was designed in 1936 by Louis A. Simon, then Supervising Architect for the Department of the Treasury, and built by Shurman Construction Corporation of Passaic, New Jersey. A portrait of Benjamin Franklin made of cast stone by the artist Stirling Calder, is located in the lobby. It’s symmetrical massing and materials make it typical of federal architecture of the period.

11. **103 - 109 Wanaque Avenue**

Built circa 1905, the distinctive appearance of this building derives partly from the use of decorative concrete block, which closely imitates stone in its texture. This ornamental cast block was popular from the late 1880s through the 1930s because it was cheap, quick and practical building material. Molds to produce this block were marketed widely by Sears, Roebuck & Co in the early 1900s.

It was here where Pompton’s first post office and telephone exchange were housed. For many years, Mannie Card had carried mail from the trains to the post office which was located in a store serving the Ludlum steel works, located near the Pompton Furnace in the southern end of town. After T.J. Durling opened his store on Wanaque Ave, he applied for a Post Office. He also brought the first telephone service to the Borough and is credited with giving Pompton Lakes its name.

12. **Cowdrey’s Playhouse**

Located at the corner of Wanaque Avenue and Babcock Place. This building houses the Smiling Rhino Theater and is owned by the Windsor School. It was originally Cowdrey’s Play House and became the Colonial Theater, one of the first movie houses in the area to have talking pictures. The playhouse was originally across the street behind the VFW Hall, and was established by Mr. Cowdrey who made money in the Alaska gold rush.
13. **Railroad Station** Lakeside Avenue

- Known as Station Plaza, this site is home to Pompton Lakes’ first railroad station which was located on the north side of the New York, Susquehanna and Western railroad tracks. The present station which dates from 1927, stands opposite the original site. Its rubblestone walls, tiled roof and broad eaves make it one of the best examples of the Craftsman style in the Borough.
- It is privately owned. It replaced the original train station, which was on the other side of the tracks.

14. **DuPont Village** Howard, Maple, Poplar and Walnut Streets

- E.I. DuPont de Nemours & Company began its presence in Pompton Lakes in 1905 when it purchased the Smith Powder Works during a period of major corporate expansion. In order to house its workers, the DuPont Company built an enclave of one and two family homes in simplified versions of the Colonial Revival style. The older houses (c. 1905) facing the tree-lined grassy median on Howard Street, were for single-family occupancy and feature an L-shaped plan. Although most of the homes in DuPont Village have been altered to the taste of their owners, together they still impart a strong sense of unity through similarities in their design.

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*The grassy island that divides the two sides of the street is quite wide. This is because DuPont Village used to have its own railroad tracks that went directly into the plant. The tracks are gone but the island remains.*
15. **Schuyler House** 15 Perrin Avenue

- The Schuyler house, named for Captain Arent Schuyler, was built in 1715 and served as Headquarters for the Continental Army from 1781 until 1782. During the 1920s and through the 1950s, the house operated as a boxing camp where such prominent athletes as Max Baer, Joe Louis, Sugar Ray Robinson and Jack Sharkey came to train. Although it has been altered, the Schuyler House still retains characteristics of its original, Dutch Colonial appearance including a rough stone wall.

16. **33 Ramapo Avenue**

- A stately Queen Anne style home beautifully restored by its current owners. Many of the original features of the dwelling have been retained such as the cross gabled roof, gabled center entry, second story balcony and paired Queen Anne windows on the 3rd floor. The style was named and popularized by a group of 19th century English architects. The rationale for naming the style is a mystery since the historic precedent used had little to do with Queen Anne who reigned from 1702-1714. The home was declared an historic landmark in 2002.

17. **Bartholf Homestead** 322 Broadway

- The oldest portion of the Bartholf Homestead dates to c. 1697. As the oldest house in the Borough, the Bartholf Homestead is a prominent reminder of Pompton Lakes’ colonial past. The discovery of two revolutionary war officer’s diaries within the house indicates its possible use as a campsite for American soldiers stationed in Pompton Lakes to guard critical roadways leading to West Point. Its simple design, the use of stone as a building material and the linear development of the plan over time make it a typical Dutch Colonial dwelling.