Explore
Three Centuries of New Brunswick

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the Historic Downtown Walking Tour of the City of New Brunswick, New Jersey. We are proud to share with you some of the stories of our treasured past, and we hope that this tour will help you discover the important role our City has played throughout our nation’s history. From Queen’s College to the State Theatre and beyond, we invite you to explore three centuries of New Brunswick history.

Sincerely,

Jim Cahill, Mayor

In the late 1600s, individual families began to settle in the New Brunswick area. A group led by John Inian purchased 10,000 acres of land from the Leni Lenape in 1681, using stockings, rum, shot, wampum, and other items as currency. This area would later become the lower edge of New Brunswick along the Raritan River. In 1730, the City was named in honor of the English royal house of Brunswick. Queen’s College was founded in 1766, named in honor of Queen Charlotte – wife to King George III of England. We know it today as Rutgers University.

By 1776, New Brunswick was a busy port and stagecoach stop. The city had a ferry service across the Raritan River, which made it an appropriate place for the public reading of the Declaration of Independence. In November 1776, George Washington and the Continental Army rested here briefly during their retreat across New Jersey.

In the 19th century, New Brunswick saw tremendous industrial growth fueled by trade on the river, the Delaware and Raritan Canals opening in 1834, and the first railroad in 1839. Numerous industries took root in the “Hub City” including surgical bandage manufacturer Johnson & Johnson, founded in 1886.

In the first half of the 20th century, New Brunswick was a small developing industrial city. But after World War II, New Brunswick – like all urban centers in New Jersey – began to decline, losing jobs and residents. In the mid-1970s, City leaders embarked on an ambitious program of redevelopment that has created a remarkable renaissance led by the rise of New Brunswick’s healthcare industry and the expansion of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Today, New Brunswick is one of the fastest growing urban centers in New Jersey.

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Come take a walk and explore three centuries of history.