

# PROPERTY REPORT

Property ID: 1509831717

**Property Name:** Brainerd Lake      **Ownership:** Public  
**Address:** Main ST      **Apartment #:**      **ZIP:** 08512

**PROPERTY LOCATION(S):**

County:	Municipality:	Local Place Name:	USGS Quad:	Block:	Lot:
MIDDLESEX	Cranbury township	Cranbury	Hightstown	33	68

**Property Photo:**



**Old HSI Number:**      **NRIS Number:**      **HABS/HAER Number:**

**Description:**

Brainerd Lake is an approximately 12-acre manmade lake, created through the damming of Cranbury Brook in 1736. A concrete dam and spillway (reconstructed 2014) are situated at the western end of the lake. Main Street travels on a north-south alignment over the dam, flanked by concrete sidewalks and a four-rail, metal pipe railing (added 2014, similar in appearance to historic railings). An arched metal sign reading "Brainerd Lake" (1997) and a fieldstone water fountain (installed 1979) are located along the east side of Main Street, accompanied by wood benches. The lake's natural banks are reinforced by fieldstone and concrete retaining walls along the north and south shorelines, adjacent to residential properties and Village Park. Mature hardwood trees line the lake to the north and south.

History: The first dam along Cranbury Brook was constructed in 1736, creating a mill pond that would later become Brainerd Lake. The mill pond powered a gristmill and later a sawmill. In 1810, a new dam was built, but it gave way shortly after its construction and was subsequently replaced (Nissen 1997:14). Brainerd Lake first appears on an 1850 map of Middlesex County, showing its current footprint (Otley and Keily 1850). The mill powered by the mill pond operated through the late nineteenth century. In 1896, a new dam was built to replace the 1810 dam. The construction of the 1896 dam coincided with the construction of a stone arch bridge to carry Main Street over Cranbury Brook, adjacent to the west of the dam. In 1905, the body of water was officially named Brainerd Lake after David Brainerd (1718-1747), a prominent Presbyterian missionary who preached in Cranbury. A local civic organization known as the Village Improvement Society made several additions to the area surrounding Brainerd Lake in the early twentieth century, including sidewalks, a metal sign reading "Brainerd Lake, and the construction of a bandstand suspended over the dam. The Women's Christian Temperance Union also installed a fieldstone water fountain along Main Street just west of the dam, in 1907. Throughout the twentieth century, the lake was used for recreational activities, including ice skating, swimming, boating, fishing, and camping (Nissen 1997:14-15). In 1964, in response to increased development in Cranbury, the township purchased 13 acres along the lake's north shore and converted it into what is now known as Village Park. In the late 1960s, material dredged from the lake was deposited in the east corner of Village Park, creating a 50-foot-tall dirt mountain that has been used for sledding and biking (Chambers II 2012:155-156). In 1979, the 1907 Women's Christian Temperance Union fountain along the dam was replaced with a replica fountain. The metal sign installed by the Village Improvement Society in the early twentieth century was replaced with a replica sign in 1997. In 2014, the 1896 dam was replaced with the extant concrete dam and spillway (Cranbury Township 2023). The extant four-rail, metal pipe railings were also installed in 2014. The extant railings are similar in appearance to railings that historically flanked Main Street in the vicinity of the lake. Brainerd Lake continues to function as a scenic and recreational space for Cranbury residents.

**Survey Name:** Cranbury Historic Sites Survey Phase III

**Surveyor:** Matthew Goldberg

**Organization:** Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc.

(Primary Contact)

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Character-defining elements of Brainerd Lake include fieldstone retaining walls, four-rail metal pipe railings, and scenic vistas of the lake as viewed from Main Street, Village Park, and surrounding residential properties.

**Setting:**

Brainerd Lake is sited on two irregularly shaped parcels (Block 33, Lot 68 and Block 7, Lot 24) in Cranbury Township, Middlesex County, New Jersey. The body of water is bounded by Main Street to the west and US Route 130 to the east. Village Park and residential properties are located adjacent to the north bank, along with residential properties to the south. Cranbury Brook flows to the east and west of the lake. The subject property is located adjacent to the south of the commercial and residential core of downtown Cranbury.

**Registration and Status Dates:**

National Historic Landmark?:

National Register: 9/18/1980

New Jersey Register: 8/9/1979

Determination of Eligibility: 3/25/1977

Certification of Eligibility:

SHPO Opinion:

Local Designation: 9/26/1988

Other Designation:

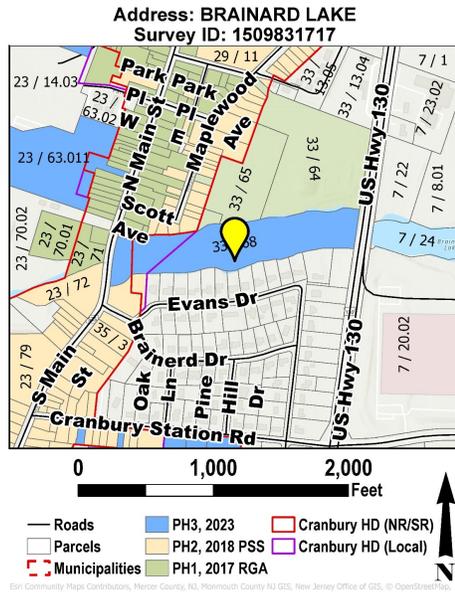
Other Designation Date:

Eligibility Worksheet included in present survey?

Is this Property an identifiable farm or former farm?

**Location Map:**

**Site Map:**



**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Author:	Title:	Year:	HPO Accession #:	(if applicable)
Chambers, John W. II	Cranbury: A New Jersey Town from the Colonial Era to the Present. Rivergate Books, New Brunswick, New Jersey.	2012		
Cranbury Township	Memorial Park and Brainerd Dam. Electronic Document, <a href="https://www.cranburytownship.org/parks-commission/pages/memorial-park-and-brainerd-dam">https://www.cranburytownship.org/parks-commission/pages/memorial-park-and-brainerd-dam</a> .	2023		
Nissen, Lee, editor.	Cranbury: 1697-1997. Historic Cranbury, Cranbury, New Jersey.	1997		
Otley, J.W. and J. Keily	Map of Middlesex County, New Jersey. Lloyd Vanderveer, Camden, New Jersey. New Jersey.	1850		

**Additional Information:**

Richard Grubb & Associates, Inc. recommends Brainerd Lake as a contributing resource to the Cranbury Historic District due to its date of construction and design. This landscape feature and its associated elements retain sufficient integrity of materials, design, workmanship, setting, location, feeling, and association to convey the significance of the historic district.

More Research Needed?  (checked=Yes)

**INTENSIVE-LEVEL USE ONLY:**

Attachments Included: 0 Building 0 Bridge  
0 Structure 0 Landscape

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Historic District ?  0 Object 0 Industry

**District Name:** Cranbury Historic District

**Status:** Contributing

**Associated Archeological Site/Deposits?**   
(known or potential sites. If Yes, please describe briefly)

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Conversion Problem?  ConversionNote: 1202\_33\_68

*Date form completed:* 6/21/2023

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**PROPERTY REPORT: PHOTO CONTINUATION SHEET**

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**Property Name:** Brainerd Lake  
**Address:** Main ST



*Photo 2*



*Photo 3*

Property Name: Brainerd Lake  
Address: Main ST



Photo 4



Photo 5

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Photo 6



Photo 7