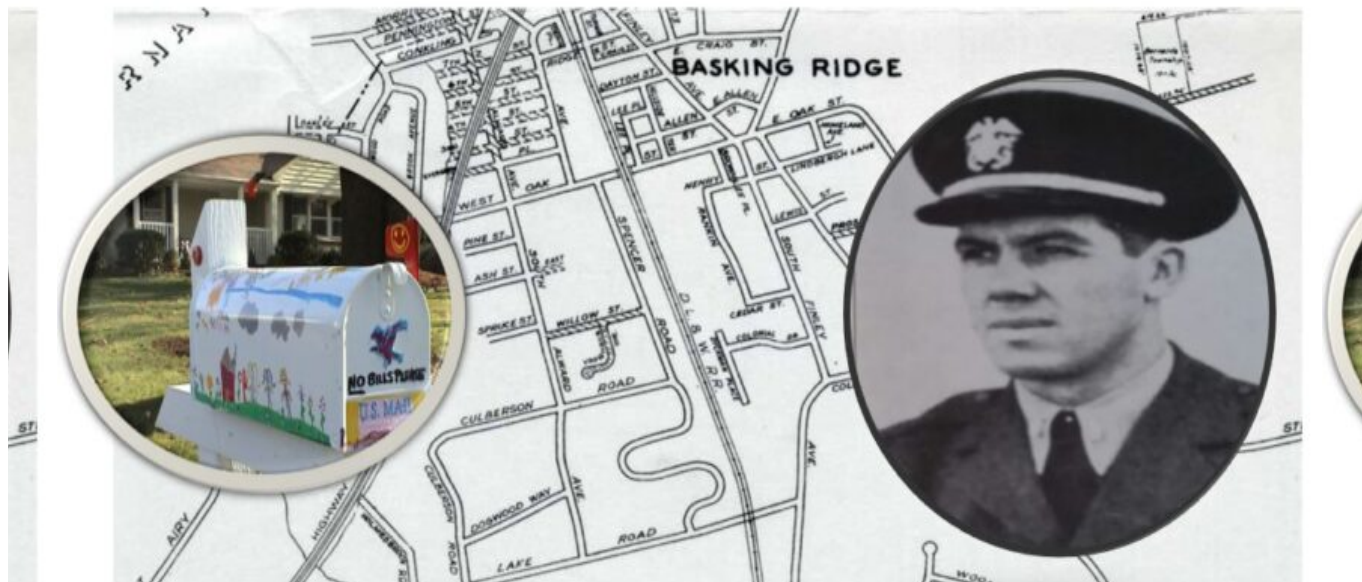




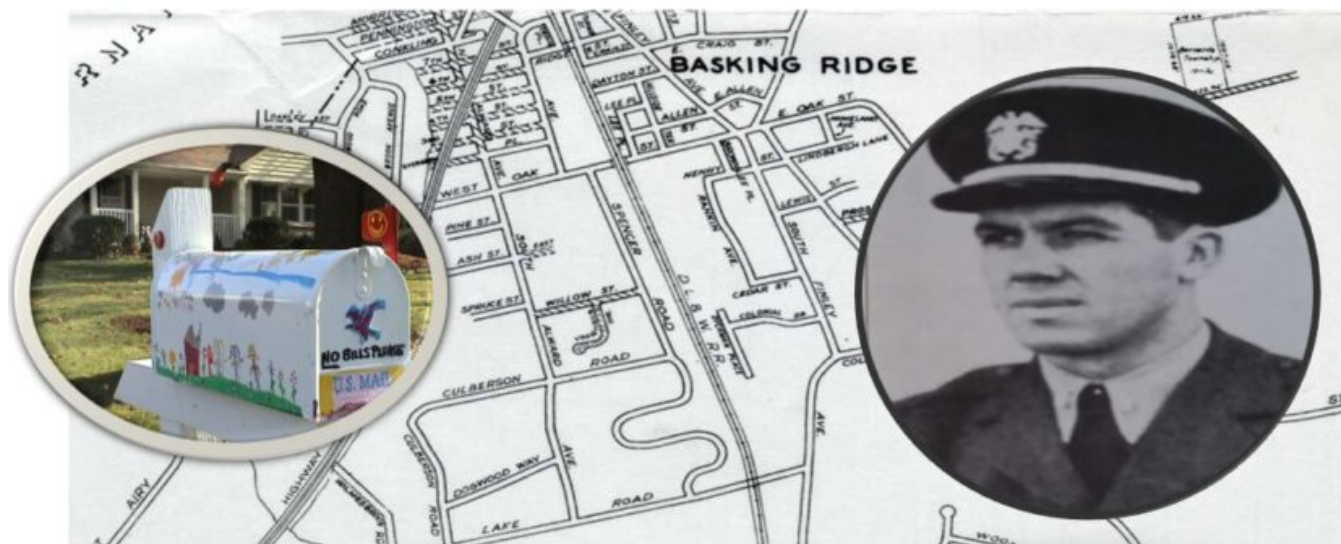
Basking Ridge's Spencer Road is Important to Mr. Local History Too



## Basking Ridge's Spencer Road is Important to Mr. Local History Too

Posted on March 30, 2025

Views: 2,138





It's always fun to hear how a story becomes a story for us. In fact, there's always a story about a new story. History is a bit like sewing.... when you pull a thread, you never know where it will go and who is involved. This one is no different. We were researching veterans and soldiers from the area. We stumbled upon this fascinating story, which is tied to today's New Jersey affordable housing developments, the cost of living, and how to help provide housing in a suburban environment. Spencer Road brought us here.

This story came about after the Mr. Local History Project researchers prepared research of Bernards Township developments in the 20th century. Many residents started asking about the Spencer Road development, one of the first in the township to provide lower-income homes for veterans returning from WW2. Spencer Road was one of the township's first large-scale developments with a few of the area's developers.

Coincidentally, Mr. Local History's founder and his family moved to Basking Ridge in 2004, and guess where they chose to live? YES, Spencer Road.

### **Spencer Road - An Affordable Housing Development Paves the Way (1940s)**



Typical ranch-style block homes were the most straightforward and most affordable homes of the time in one of Basking Ridge's first mass-produced communities, the Spencer Road Project.

### **Official Street Dedication - August 1945**

In 1945, two years after a tragic event at sea, a new street in Basking Ridge was dedicated as a memorial to Ridge resident and Navy pilot Austin Spencer. The 33-acre tract from West Oak Street to Lake Road, owned by Bernardsville's Stuart Sutton, was later developed by Stewart K. Sutton, Dobbs Realty, the Basking Ridge Development Company, and others.



## NAME NEW STREET AS MEMORIAL

**"Spencer Road," Basking Ridge, Now  
Being Built, Honors First Basking  
Ridge Youth Lost in Present War.**

As a permanent memorial to Basking Ridge's first young resident to die in World War II, a new road which bisects a tract of thirty-three acres on the west side of the railroad and north of Lake road, recently purchased by Stewart Sutton of Bernardsville, has been named "Spencer Road" in memory of Lt. Austin P. Spencer, son of Mr. and Mrs. Trueman H. Spencer of Oak street. Lt. Spencer, Navy pilot, was lost at sea in the North Atlantic, May 1, 1943, while flying a Vega Ventura bomber on submarine and convoy duty.

Lt. Spencer enlisted in June, 1940 at Floyd Bennett Field just after his graduation two days earlier from the University of Connecticut. He was called for active duty in November, 1940, reporting at the Philadelphia Naval Air Base for preliminary training, going from there to Jacksonville, Florida Advanced Naval Air Station, where he received his wings in August, 1941 and was commissioned an ensign.

Ensign Spencer left Jacksonville in September, 1941 for Norfolk, Va. and in December of the same year was sent to Argentia, Newfoundland where he received his commission as Lieutenant. Here Spencer spent his last four months doing convoy duty and acting also as test pilot on Vega Venturas.

A brother, Trueman N. Spencer, U. S. Army, is now in training at Maxwell Field, Ala., as a flight officer on B-29s. He entered the service in July, 1944, following his graduation from Bernards High School in June of that year, had his boot training at Keesler Field and was set to go overseas as a top-turret gunner on a B-24 when V-E Day came.

A sister, Alice C. Spencer, member of the Waves, is an aviation machinist's mate third class, in the Navy and is stationed at the Naval Air Station in Trenton. Graduating in 1940 from Bernards High School, she enlisted in the Waves in November, 1942 and was called for duty in January, 1943. She took her basic training at Cedar Falls, Iowa and at Norman, Okla., going from there to Floyd Bennett Air Field before being based at Trenton.

Spencer Road will eventually run from West Oak street to Lake road, Basking Ridge. Construction has already been started and when opened, the owner expects to offer the abutting land in three-quarter acre plots for the erection of new homes in the \$8,000 class.

Ellsworth Dobbs, the developer, who has also been responsible for the opening of the two adjoining developments, the "Garden Homes" and "Holmes Brook" tracts, announces that nine parcels have already been

Spencer Road street dedication - August 23, 1945. Bernardsville News

### Austin Pendleton Spencer - US Navy

Lieutenant Austin (Spike) Pendleton Spencer was born in Colchester, Connecticut on January 17, 1918. He was later raised as the eldest of four siblings, Emily, Alice, and Trueman Jr., in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, and grew up on West Oak Street, across from today's Oak Street Elementary School. After graduating from Bernards High School, Spencer graduated from the University of Connecticut in May 1940. Shortly after he graduated, Spencer enlisted in the United States Navy.





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SERIAL NUMBER <b>3677</b>		1. NAME (Print) <b>Austin Pendleton Spencer</b>		ORDER NUMBER <b>2546</b>
2. ADDRESS (Print) <b>WEST OAK STREET BASKING RIDGE, SOMERSET NEW JERSEY</b>				
3. TELEPHONE <b>BERNARDSVILLE 895</b>	4. AGE IN YEARS <b>22</b>	5. PLACE OF BIRTH <b>COLCHESTER CONNECTICUT</b>	6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP <b>U.S.A.</b>	
7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS <b>Mr. Townsman Howe Spencer</b>				
8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON <b>Father</b>				
9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON <b>West Oak Street Basking Ridge Somerset New Jersey</b>				
10. EMPLOYER'S NAME <b>Peter Brown</b>				
11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS <b>Rockwood Amers. Maine</b>				
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.				
REGISTRATION CARD D. S. S. FORM 1		Signature <b>Austin Spencer</b>		

Austin Spencer's Military Registration Card



Austin's home growing up on W. Oak Street

During World War II, Spencer was lost at sea in 1943 while piloting a Lockheed PV-1 bomber on a submarine search mission in the North Atlantic. "Spike" Spencer served as a naval aviator after achieving his pre-war



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Aviation Cadet (AVCAD) program credentials.

Spencer held the rank of Lieutenant Junior Grade, with the service number 0099935. Although his remains were never recovered, a memorial stone exists in his honor alongside his parents.



Lt. Austin Pendleton Spencer – US Navy – Call sign “Spike”



Austin's lost plane – a Lockheed PV-1 bomber.  
Spencer was eventually declared missing in action on May 1, 1943.

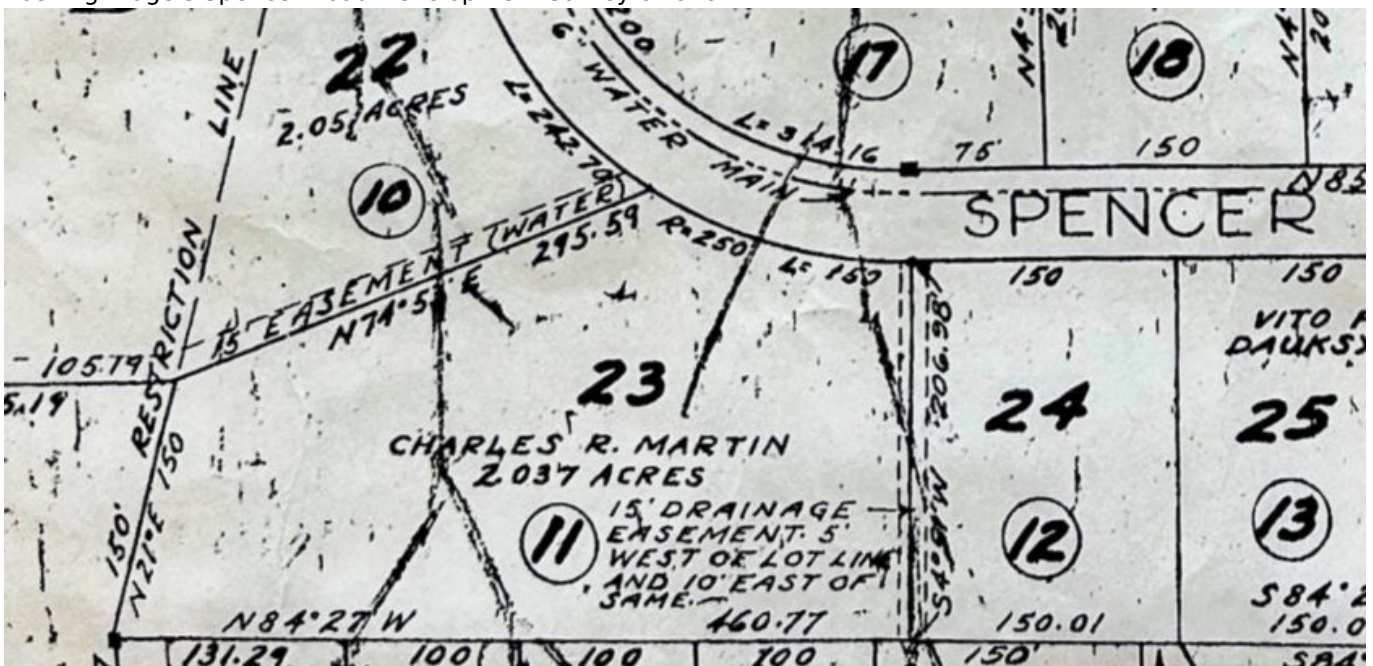
## Spencer Road Development

There's a general assumption that the curvy part of Spencer Road is the original and older section between the curvy and straight sections, but this doesn't seem to be true. After looking at the age of the homes, most homes were built along both sections between 1950 and 1955. We found one built in [1946](#), which seems to be the oldest house on the street. Yes, it's on the curvy section. Did Spencer Road have a street name before the dedication? The answer is leaning towards no. The curved section meanders a left and right based on elevation since Lake Road is at a lower height than the top of the curve by Culberson Road, which may have started as a trail up the hill that was later turned into a dirt road in the mid-1940s to build the first house off Lake Road. MLH will continue to dig.





Basking Ridge's Spencer Road Development Survey c.1949

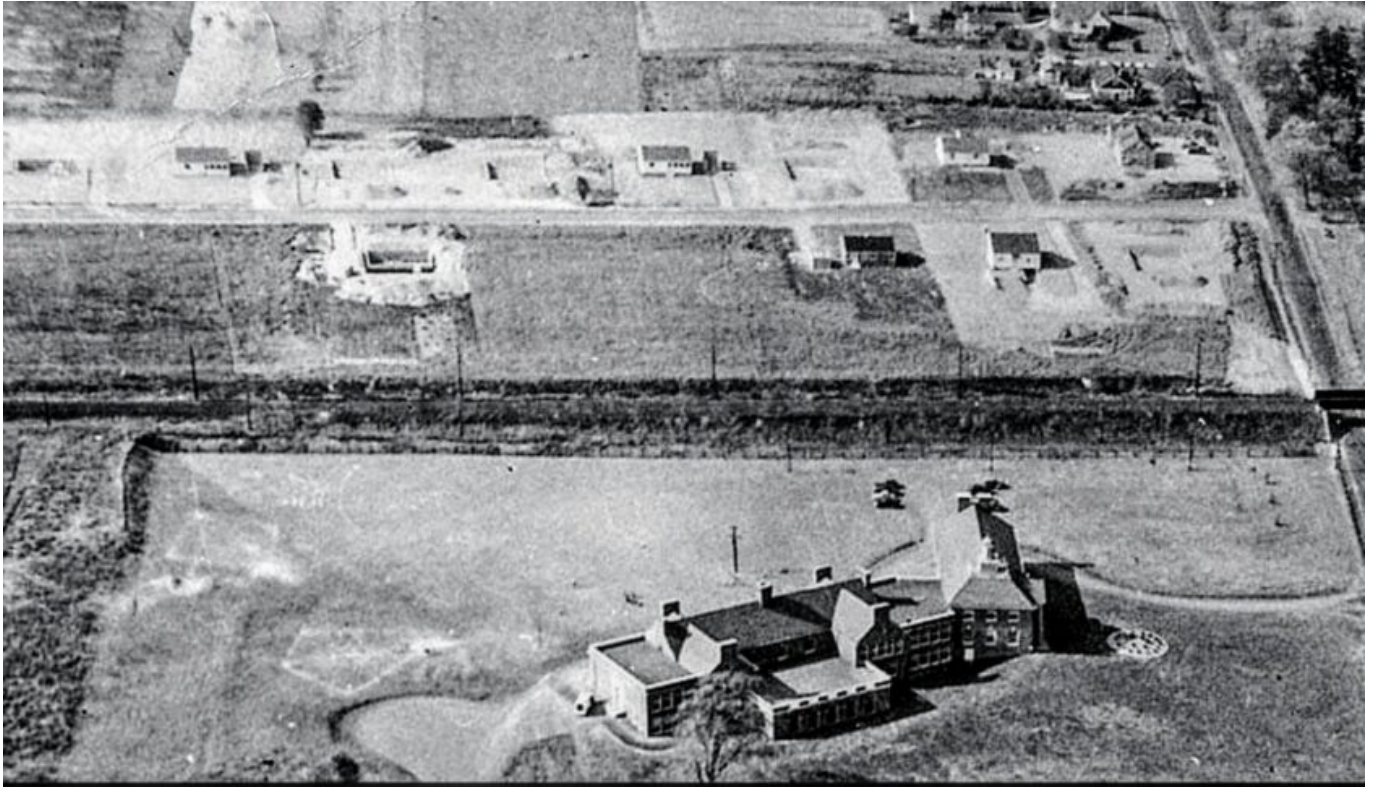


Charles r. Martin's property appears to hold the oldest house on Spencer Road.





On September 20, 1949, the Bernards Township Committee passed a resolution to approve developer Stewart K. Sutton's construction of a new 3,200-foot road connecting Oak Street to Lake Road, eliminating two dead-end roads. Then, on October 20, 1949, it was reported that the Spencer Road request was approved to connect Lake Road up the Spencer Road hill (the curvy part) north to West Oak Street.



Spencer Road Development - c.1950. The empty lot at the end was built in 1950, and the first house to the left of the empty lot is 5 Spencer Road, built in 1947. Most of the houses in this view were built around 1950.





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## ROAD ACCEPTANCE SENT TO PLANNERS

**Bernards Board Asked to Review Proposal to Take Spencer Road Section Into Township System.**

The Bernards Township Committee, which last month agreed to accept a section of Spencer road into the township road system, Tuesday night, October 18, ordered that the proposal be submitted to the township planning board for review.

Stewart K. Sutton, the developer, and Chalres A. Hartman, a Spencer road resident, protested the delay, but the Committee reluctantly told them that the planning board action was necessary because Spencer road had never been recorded on a filed subdivision map.

The planning board review was estimated to take up to five weeks. Mr. Hartman pointed out that, in the meantime, trucks and other vehicles were using his driveway as a turn-around.

The road section is approximately 3,200 feet long. After he received the Committee commitment, Mr. Sutton completed the road and it was approved by Township Engineer Kenneth A. Turner. The section eliminates two deadend streets.

The Committee approved on final



# **BUILDERS ACTIVE IN SPENCER ROAD**

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**Close to Half of Township Building  
Permits Cover Construction in One  
Street. Fees Total \$320.**

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About half of the new building in Bernards Township during the last month was in Spencer road, Basking Ridge, according to a report submitted to the Township Committee by Fred W. Kampmier, Jr., building inspector.

Mr. Kampmier said that a total of 47 permits and certificates of occupancy were issued during the month, with three applications for permits rejected. Fees totalled \$320, the highest monthly collection this year.

Eight of the 17 permits for new residential construction were issued to the Springbrook Homes, Inc., for projects in Spencer road. The other new house





# **BERNARDS ACCEPTS NEW ROAD IN RIDGE**

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**Spencer Road Extension Ordinance  
Passed On First Reading. Total  
Length Is 3,253 Feet.**

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Bernards Township Committee Tuesday, October 22, passed on first reading an ordinance to accept two new sections of Spencer road in Basking Ridge, and set Wednesday, November 6, as its next meeting date when a public hearing will be held on the ordinance before final passage.

The new sections include that portion starting at Lake road and extending 2,228 feet northerly and another 1,025 feet southerly from West Oak street. The road was recently completed and built according to required specifications. Kenneth A. Turner, engineer, advised the committee at a previous meeting.



Page Three

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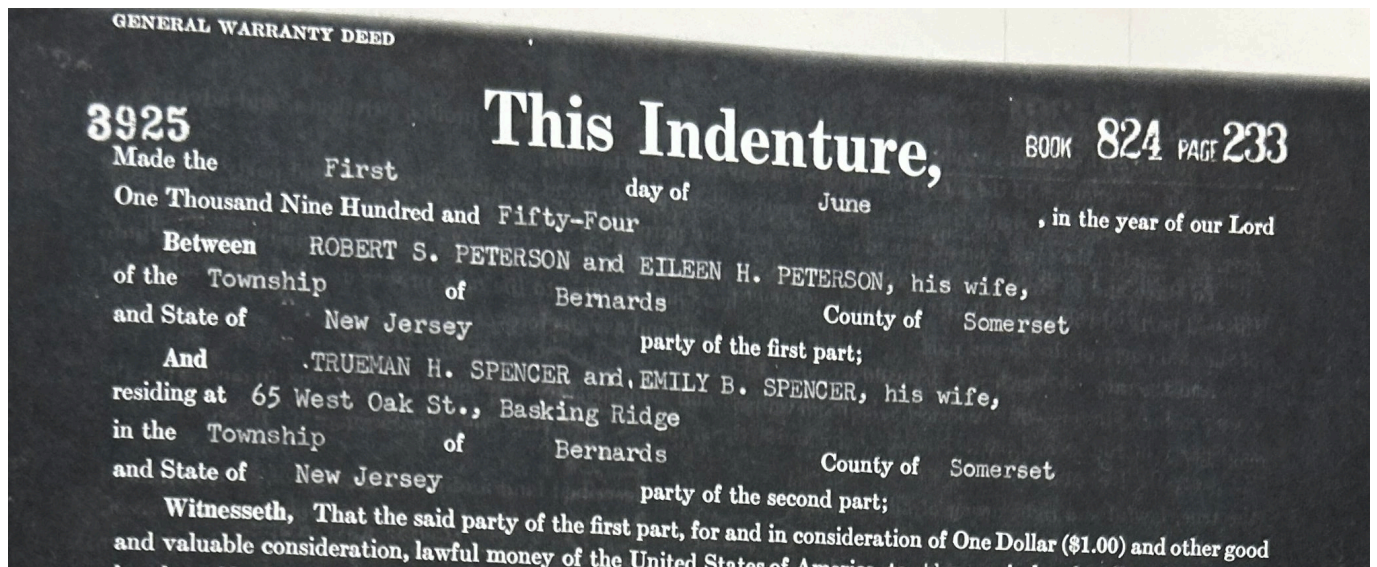
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## Spencer's Parents Move from West Oak to the Road Dedicated to Their Son

Records show that on June 1, 1954, Austin's parents, Trueman and Emily Spencer, moved to 122 Spencer Road. Before moving to the street named after their son, the Spencers lived at 65 West Oak Street, across from the Oak Street School off Hillside Terrace.



Bernardsville News - Sept. 20, 1962 on the curvy section of Spencer Road





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Trueman Spencer, a WW1 veteran was the Bernrads Township tax collector for 25 years.







c.1949 – Spencer Road Survey



After raising his family with his wife Emily, the Spencers would move from 65 West Oak Street to this home on Spencer Road.

## Cosmic Occurrence

2025: Interestingly, we learned that the home Austin Spencer grew up in in the 1930s actually has another “Austin” living in the same house. The owners reached out to let us know. We’re glad this **“Austin came home.”**





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### Mr. Local History's Connection

After WWII, many veterans wanted to take advantage of the GI Bill and get a piece of the American dream. In Bernards Township, that area became Spencer Road. While not a "typical complex development," it became known as one of the first neighborhoods built at a rapid scale.

In 2003, before there was a Mr. Local History Project, there was Spencer Road. After losing out on a bidding war on our new home on Melborune Way, we went on a one-day fifteen-house tour and FINALLY closed on our first home on Spencer Road. Our life in Basking Ridge began.



Basking Ridge's Spencer Road is Important to Mr. Local History Too



Mr. Local History's Basking Ridge Spencer Road story began on August 22, 2003.





Basking Ridge's Spencer Road is Important to Mr. Local History Too







Basking Ridge's Spencer Road is Important to Mr. Local History Too

Looking towards the curvy portion of Spencer Road



Basking Ridge's Spencer Road is Important to Mr. Local History Too







Basking Ridge's Spencer Road is Important to Mr. Local History Too

Looking down the straight portion of Spencer Road







Basking Ridge's Spencer Road is Important to Mr. Local History Too



Spencer Road with the Railroad tracks behind the tree. A Spencer Road staple.



Basking Ridge's Spencer Road is Important to Mr. Local History Too



Our first community gathering "Betzapalooza"





Basking Ridge's Spencer Road is Important to Mr. Local History Too







Basking Ridge's Spencer Road is Important to Mr. Local History Too

Our first Spencer Road Thanksgiving



Our first Basking Ridge and Spencer Road Easter.

## Share Your Spencer Road story

Post in the comments section below.

## More New Jersey Local History

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Basking Ridge's Spencer Road is Important to Mr. Local History Too

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[Thinking of Living in Basking Ridge, New Jersey? Top 10 Reasons](#)

[The History of Bernards Township Street Names](#)

[History of Housing Developments in Bernards Township](#)

[Brush's Deli Served the Community for Three Generations and Now It's Just a Memory](#)

[Basking Ridge Sticker – Show Your Community Pride](#)