



# Newsletter of the Middletown Township Historical Society

VOL. II NO. 2

APRIL, 1986

## Meetings and Slide Shows

The Society meets on April 28 and May 26, Mondays, at 8:00 PM at the Museum building. The April meeting will feature a slide show "Where Is That Place?". The slides will be old views for which the Society has not determined the exact location. THE SLIDES MAY BE OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO OLDER, LONG TIME RESIDENTS WHO MAY WISH TO SHARE THEIR MEMORIES. Identification may have a value in addition to recording history. The views then may be added to the "Middletown: Then and Now" slide show and traveling exhibit.

The "Then and Now" slides, after a first viewing at our January meeting, were shown at a political club in February and were scheduled for an early April showing at another. The Keyport Historical Society will see it in May. It is available to other local community groups, generally for no charge.

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## 1790 Freeholders List

The Monmouth County 1790 Freeholders List has been published and indexed by Elaine D. Anderson and Ellen T. Morris. Ms. Morris wrote the preface telling the story of the discovery and preservation of this important document. Ms. Anderson's introduction describes the meaning and significance of the Freeholders Lists in giving a profile of early Monmouth County.

The published List includes photocopy reproduction of the handwritten names and a typed index. The original recorder wrote with an amazingly clear hand and nearly every name is clearly readable. Copies are available from the Morris Genealogical Library, P. O. Box 63, Allenhurst, N.J. 07711 and the Monmouth County Historical Association,

70 Court Street, Freehold, N.J. 07728 for \$7.00 and \$1.50 for mailing.

The Society extends its thanks to Elaine Anderson for donating a copy to our library.

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## Map Exhibit Opens

The Society's exhibit "Maps of Middletown" will open Saturday, April 5 and continue through September 28. It depicts the Township's history through cartography. Over thirty maps are included. They range from a copy of a pre-independence land survey to contemporary street maps. The exhibit's focal point is a newly restored Jesse Lightfoot 1851 wall map of Monmouth County donated by June Truex Hoffmire.

The exhibit also celebrates the recent reprinting of 19th century Monmouth County atlases by Gerald Ceres. See below for the announcement of the 1889 Wolverton. The exhibit brochure has an order blank for it and the 1873 Beers.

See the Page 2 article for historical background on the exhibit and on the mapping of New Jersey.

Many of the exhibit's maps are hand colored copies. Other examples are available for purchase. These include the town plans of Middletown, Port Monmouth, Navesink and Lincroft (Leedsville).

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## Wolverton Atlas Reprint

A second 19th century Monmouth County atlas has been reprinted by Gerald Ceres, president of the Holmdel Historical Society. The Chester Wolverton atlas appeared in 1889. It depicts sixteen years of Monmouth's development. Many of its maps were issued in a larger scale than the earlier atlas, showing greater detail. The atlas outlines county school



districts and has town plans of Middletown village and Navesink. The reprint size is the same 12" x 15½" of the Beers. The size of the original was reduced a few inches for printing needs, but the two volumes make an attractive, informal set. The series will be continued with the reprint of the 1872 Beers Atlas of New Jersey.

The price of the Wolverton is \$25.00 + \$1.50 for mailing.

## Maps of Middletown

N.B. This article is a companion to the exhibit "Maps of Middletown". It will be at the Museum at Croydon Hall from April 5 through September 28. The items designated by a letter prefix, e.g. Item A, correspond with a checklist in the exhibit brochure. A copy of the brochure is included with the newsletter's mailing. Others are available at the Museum.

John Adams wrote about the importance of geography stating in 1776 "Geography is not only very useful, but absolutely necessary to every person...in civil or military life...America is our country, and therefore a minute knowledge of its Geography, is most important...". We can reinforce Adams 210 years later by noting that familiarity with our Township's area, both present and historical, is necessary for understanding it's history and many current issues. Maps provide an excellent pathway to this knowledge. They can tell us things we cannot readily learn through any other means. Maps are also fun. Many people have a fondness for them. Thus, the Society expects that viewing the largest-ever gathering of Middletown on maps will be both pleasurable and informative.

The history of our Township on maps is linked to the mapping of New Jersey. The historical background is illustrated with small segments from maps not in the exhibit. New Jersey rarely appeared on early maps, which were crude and generally inaccurate. The earliest map to give shape to the New Jersey shore is an anonymous manuscript believed to have resulted from a commission by England's King James I in 1610. Middletown's bay shore area and Sandy Hook are shown in figure 1.



fig. 1

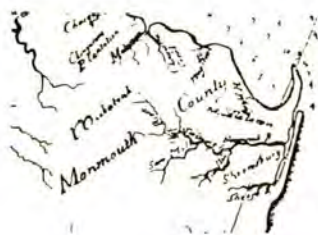


fig. 2

Other 17th century maps included Joannes deLaet's of 1630 which mapped the coast from Virginia to Nova Scotia and W. J. Blaeu's beautiful 1635 production "Nova Belgica et Anglia Nova". Neither showed much detail of the northern shore area but Blaeu's indicated much of Monmouth's river system. Two mid-century classics are Nicholas Visscher's 1656 "Novi Belgii Novaegae Angliae Nec Non Partis Virginiae Tabula", better known as New Netherland and New England and John Seller's 1675 "A Mapp of New Jarsey" (sic). The former was often reproduced in atlases, while the latter was the first of New Jersey alone.

John Reid settled in an area once part of Middletown Township. His homestead "Hortencia" was in the area now

the Pleasant Valley section of Marlboro Township. He explored and surveyed much of the surrounding area. His circa 1690 "East Jarsey in America" (fig. 2) shows good detail.

New Jersey was divided into two colonies when Lord Berkeley sold his share to John Fenwick in 1674. Mapping activities of the late 17th and early 18th centuries focused on the division of the colony into East and West Jersey. Surveys by George Keith in 1687 and John Lawrence in 1743 were landmark mapping projects. Property surveys dominated mapping for much of the 18th century. The project was led by James Alexander, Surveyor General of East and West Jersey from 1715 to 1746. Item AA is an example of a property survey done in 1763 of the Kings Highway area.



fig. 3



fig. 4

Major travel in this region was done on water. Roads or paths were infrequently mapped. One example is fig. 3, Map No. 11, an engraving by James Turner from John Alexander's manuscript map of 1747. Note the Minisink Path, an Indian trail from the Kitatiny Mountain area of the Delaware River to the shores of this region.

Louis Evans made in 1749 the first reasonably accurate map of New Jersey and surrounding areas. However, the best known map of the era was less accurate, but more detailed and attractive. It was based on a 1769 survey by Bernard Ratzler, a lieutenant in the Royal Artillery and published in 1777 (revised in 1778) by William Faden, a major London map maker. It is simply known as "the Faden map". Figure 4 shows the Middletown section.

Military need of the Revolutionary War resulted in many maps and a necessity for American independence from British map makers. John Hills, a surveyor and lieutenant in the British army, was one of the most prominent map makers and the most important to the Monmouth area. His best known work was done while attached to the forces of Sir Henry Clinton. He drew the first map of Monmouth County in this capacity, Item A, a major document known as "the Hills map". He also drew a plan of Middletown, through which the Clinton army traveled on it's trip to the shore and redeployment in New York (Item B). The American army was not engaged in the Middletown region and American maps of the Township are not known.

John Hills stayed in America after the War. He lived much of the time in Philadelphia and used his knowledge of New Jersey by continuing to map here. He redrew Monmouth County in 1896 with additional detail.

Early 19th century mapping focused on major inland routes, such as New York to Philadelphia, toll roads, which appeared first in New Jersey in the north, and the movement of minerals, such as iron in northern New Jersey or coal from Pennsylvania. The major State map of the period was by William Watson in 1812. It was large, covering four miles to the inch, and was the first to outline all townships in the State. It contained many errors, but shows the Middletown Township's bay shore area in greater detail than the Faden map, which Watson apparently used as a base.

Thomas Gordon's New Jersey legislature-supported large scale three miles to the inch map of New Jersey issued in 1828 was an accurate improvement of the State's mapping. The first State geologist was appointed in 1835. One aim was the drafting of topographical maps. Progress was slow.



County maps took prominence in 1849 with the publication of a Burlington County sheet map from surveys by J. W. Otley and R. Whiteford. It was a large scale .84 miles to the inch and showed property owners. It established a style followed by Jesse Lightfoot, whose 1851 map of Monmouth County is the focal point of this exhibit (Item C). The scale is a large 2/3 mile to the inch compared with one mile to the inch of the 1781 Hills. The detail is incomparably greater. The map also has street plans of four areas, Freehold, Red Bank, Keyport and Middletown Point. The latter was part of Raritan Township (the former name of Hazlet Township) which, in 1848, was formed from Middletown Township. It was so named when it was a principal port of Middletown Township. Matawan Township was separated from Raritan in 1857 with the present borough of Matawan not created as a municipality until 1895. The Society's copy was donated by June Truex Hoffmire.

Lightfoot was from a long line of surveyors from the Philadelphia area dating from the 18th century. He was living in Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1850. He mapped the Philadelphia region, but also surveyed the 1853 Morris County map. Later positions included Clerk of the United States Mint and presidency of the Fire Association of Philadelphia.

Lightfoot was followed by a sheet map by Beers with an even larger scale, 5/8 of a mile to the inch. Middletown Township is excerpted in the copy as Item D. A street plan of Middletown Village appeared on the top center margin, Item E. Beers was published in 1860 with an apparent second edition in 1861. It contains 24 street plans and business directories in the margins. Its size makes it difficult to handle and display. The map could give the impression of an atlas in sheet form. The atlas was soon published.

Beers published county maps in several eastern states and issued five county atlases in New Jersey. The first was Morris County in 1868. An atlas of the State was published in 1872, followed by Monmouth, Somerset, Middlesex and Hunterdon in 1873 and Warren in 1874. Four street plans of present Middletown Township were included. Port Monmouth (with New Monmouth) (Item H), Navesink (Item I), Lincroft (then Leedsville) (Item J) and Middletown village (Item G). Highlands village, then part of Middletown Township, was also mapped, and is part of Item H. The Township map is 2,640 feet to the inch, a scale about 26% larger than the 1860 map. A full page is given to Fair View Cemetery, which map has the distinction of the atlas' largest scale, 90 feet to the inch (Item K). The largest town plan in terms of area shown was Port Monmouth. However, its scale was smaller, 990 feet to the inch, than the smaller towns which were 495 feet to the inch. Port Monmouth was then the heaviest settled section of the Township. It included, and the map shows, Belford, which was not to attain a separate identity until the 1890s.

Continued in June.

## Dues... Are Yours Paid?

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## Jacob Brower Remembers Old Middletown c. 1866

The memories of old-timers have long been useful in recalling the past. Some find their way into print, resting between hard covers, where they are readily available on the library shelf. Others are lost in obscurity, even when preserved in print. The recollections of Jacob Brower have been rescued from that bare

of researchers, an unindexed newspaper. The following comments appeared in the Red Bank Register of June 2, 1901. The tense has been changed in some places for smoother flow for the contemporary reader.

It was 35 years that spring since Jacob Brower, the harness maker at Middletown, started in business there. He first located at the corner where the turnpike turns toward Keyport, and remained there twenty years. The shop he then used was converted into a dwelling. It was owned by Ezra Osborn and occupied by John Nevason. He moved to his then present location, adjoining Casler's blacksmith shop, in 1886.

A great many changes took place at Middletown since 1866. Many of the farms were still in possession of the same families, having descended from father to son. However, hardly any farmer of 35 years ago was still alive. The owners of many of the farms thereabouts were little boys when Mr. Brower began doing work for their fathers.

The greatest change that took place within Mr. Brower's time was in a business sense. Middletown, claimed Mr. Brower, when he located there, was a great trading center for all the shore section, with as much business being done there at that time than was done at Red Bank. Three general stores supplied the wants of the people. One near where Mr. Brower's house stood was kept by Samuel I. Taylor. This burned down. Another store kept by William S. Cooper was located nearly opposite Henry C. Taylor's residence. This building was in 1901 a stable on the Greenwood place. The third store was located in what was then known as the old Beekman house. This was kept by David VanBrakle.

John Thompson had a blacksmith shop where the Baptist parsonage was later built. Wesley Mason was in charge of the wheelwright department of the shop. John Casler conducted the blacksmith business, which in 1906 was owned by his son, William T. Casler, at the same stand. William Furman had a wheelwright shop about where Lufburrow & Thompson's store stood. Isaac Bedle had a shoemaker shop on the site of Dr. Edward Taylor's residence. The practising physicians of the village at that time were Dr. Taylor's father and Dr. William Hartshorne. Rev. David Stout was pastor of the Baptist Church, Rev. Alexander Millspaugh was pastor of the Reformed Church and Rev. Harry Finch preached at the Episcopal Church. The old tannery kept by John I. Taylor was about closing down when Mr. Brower went to Middletown. According to Mr. Brower, the only person alive in 1901 who was employed in the tannery was James K. Walling, then over eighty years old.

The road from Middletown to Red Bank was very sandy in the mid 1860s and it took half a day to drive there and back. The nearest railroad station was at Chapel Hill. Many new houses were built at Middletown since Mr. Brower located there. The village improved greatly in appearance but Mr. Brower thought it was not nearly so prosperous as it was in 1866.

Mr. Brower's observations are of two types. They include what we hope are factual recollections of Middletown Village and personal impressions of business activity. The former are very interesting, but one suspects the latter cannot be supported by available evidence.

Mr. Brower describes the village about fifteen years later than Mandeville did in his "The Story of Middletown". The village had grown and Mr. Brower provides depth to our knowledge of the 19th century scene. His first location was likely on what was then the western end of Kings Highway. It is now probably the beginning of Red Hill Road with the street changing with the realignment of Kings Highway. The Highway then did not curve north as one traveled west past the Reformed Church, but crossed the railroad. One turned right after passing the tracks to take the turnpike to Keyport, crossing the tracks again. Thus, realigning the road eliminated one bridge and the necessity to cross the railroad while traveling north.

John Casler, a relative of William S. Truex, succeeded him at the wheelwright-blacksmith shop still



standing on the southwest corner of Kings Highway and Conover Avenue. The Caslers had the business longer than Truex, but the location is generally known as the Truex Blacksmith Shop in view of the later prominence attained by Mr. Truex as a general in the Civil War.

The tannery had been quite active. Families were self-sufficient with meat then, butchering as well as raising their own animals. Mr. Taylor secured hides from Middletownites and from merchants in nearby communities who accepted them in trade from their customers. There were leather tanners in nearby towns, but they tanned only, sending their tanned hides to Taylor for processing into leather.

One wonders how Mr. Brower could support his statement that Middletown was a great trading center for all the shore section, doing as much business in 1866 as Red Bank. There is no known area business directory for the 1860s, but the 1851 Lightfoot map shows street plans for sizable downtown sections for both Red Bank and Keyport. The cost of and time for transit was a major factor in the stream of commerce. Goods were often shipped literally on a stream, or larger body of water. Both Red Bank and Keyport were well-developed ports prior to 1866. How would one travel to Middletown, on the sandy road which took a half day for the Red Bank trip? The railroad arriving in 1875 would affect commerce. Red Bank's position was reinforced. Moving the direction of the New York and Long Branch railroad to bypass Keyport and stop instead at Matawan, benefitted the latter to the detriment of the former. Middletown Township's bay shore also handled much of the area's business, but Mr. Brower was obviously not thinking of it.

Middletown's farms were very prosperous and surely supported considerable local trade. However, it appears doubtful Middletown village's retail commerce extended much beyond the nearby area. Two basic instincts may have contributed to Mr. Brower's grand memory. They are nostalgia for the "good old days" and pride of place. The "good old days" were often not as good as later recalled. Many still think this way. We share Mr. Brower's pride of Middletown, embracing our entire Township, and can be similarly expansive with our civic boosterism. However, historic facts have to be treated carefully and separated from opinion. Thus, we can appreciate Mr. Brower's description of old Middletown while questioning his conclusions.

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## New Members

Joining the Society in January and February are:

Mr & Mrs Irvin B. Beaver Jr	- New Monmouth
James P. Coughlin	- Fairview
Mrs Earl DeVesty	- Navesink
Elaine K. Everett	- Lincroft

Mr & Mrs Brian Feeney	-Port Monmouth
H. Gregory Gulick	- Middletown
Clinton P. King, Jr.	- River Plaza
Edward P. Gillespie	-Port Monmouth
Mr & Mrs Roger Goddard	- Navesink
Mrs June C. Hansen	- New Monmouth
Mr & Mrs Alexander B. Iler	- Middletown
J. Louise Jost	- Red Bank
Mr & Mrs Jerry J. Massell	- River Plaza
Anna H. Morford	- Middletown
Mr & Mrs Thomas Morford	- Middletown
Debbie Oberdick	- New Monmouth
Mr & Mrs Robert Schoeffling	-Atl Highlands
Robert Orzechowski	- Leonardo
Mark A. Sessa	- Highlands
Mr & Mrs Robert W. Weigand	- Leonardo
Mr & Mrs Joseph Wichnick	- Middletown

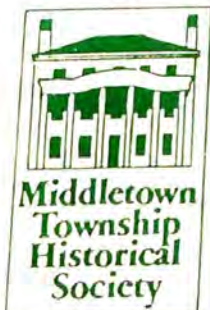
Mrs. DeVesty sent a note reflecting her interest in the February article based on "The Reflector". Rightfully so, when she was known as Anne Brainard, one of the graduation issues named her class beauty.

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## Art Exhibit

The Society is planning an exhibit of paintings of Middletown Township scenes to open in the fall of 1986. We seek loans or donations of works of museum exhibit quality. Entries will be juried by Society member artists and officials.

Criteria for subject matter are flexible. Subjects should reflect sites of historic character or scenic beauty. The artist may be still active or not. The Society is already working on securing loans of paintings of deceased artists. Please write us or call Society President Randall Gabrielan if you have an available painting or have information about a possible loan. His number is 671-2645.



P.O. BOX 434

MIDDLETOWN, NJ 07748

PHONE: 291-8739 during museum hours.

EDITOR: RANDALL GABRIELAN

DEDICATED TO RESEARCHING, COLLECTING AND EXHIBITING THE HISTORY OF MIDDLETOWN TOWNSHIP.

Museum: In the main building at Croydon Hall on Leonardville Rd. between Chamone and Bellevue Aves. in the township's Leonardo section. Open Saturdays & Sundays.

Meetings: 8:00 PM at the museum, generally on the fourth Monday with occasional exceptions for major holidays.

Donations of historical materials: Please see a museum guide or write to the Society.

MEMBERSHIP DUES  
PER CALENDAR YR.

Individual — \$5.00

Family — \$10.00

Dues for new members  
joining after Oct. 1 include  
following year.