



Newsletter of the Middletown Township Historical Society

VOL. IV NO. 1

FEBRUARY, 1988

The Blizzard of '88

The centennial anniversary of the Blizzard of '88 is March 12. What happened and why did this storm achieve such celebrated status? After all, other storms have dropped more snow in colder temperatures.

A torrential rain fell on Sunday night, March 11, 1888. It turned to snow after midnight. Ten inches were on the ground by 7:00AM and another five by 3:00PM. The cold was not severe with temperatures ranging between 10 and 35. However, the wind reached a maximum of forty-eight miles per hour and averaged thirty-three. Monday's snow totaled sixteen and one-half inches and it did not stop then. Three inches fell on the 13th and one and four-tenths on the 14th for a three day total of twenty and nine-tenths inches. The weather readings are from New York City.

Daily activity started in many places Monday morning, but continuing snow and high winds impeded travel. Slowed movement may have more severely impacted the cities. New York had spread-out in recent decades. It depended on street and elevated rail transportation to take its large corps of workers to business. Many became snow-bound. Some attempted long trips by foot; not all survived the journey. Many rural areas were immobilized.

The first trains on today's North Jersey Coast line were blocked, the south bound in Little Silver and the north bound in Red Bank. They stayed there all day and the north bound passengers spent Monday night on the train. Telegraph wires were down and communication reached no farther north than Woodbridge. The train could not reach New York until Friday.

Roads were blocked and most business was at a standstill. An exception was the sale of cards and game materials to the snowed-in. Some heavily drifted Middletown roads were not passable a week later. Most roads were cleared by farmers rather than the road overseers. One hearty Middletown traveler, noted horseman D.D. Withers, managed the trip from Lincroft to Red Bank. He overcame drifted roads by making much of the trip over adjoining fields. Imagine his disappointment learning there was no train to New York.

Conditions on water were also severe. The Keyport steamer stayed in port Monday and Tuesday. The first trip to New York Wednesday took about five hours, slowed considerably by ice. The storm in the harbor was unexpectedly reported by William O. Inglis of the New York World. He was doing a feature on the life of harbor pilots when the storm caught him at sea. No water lover, he became sea-sick even in good weather. He noted three wrecked pilot boats ashore in Horseshoe Cove on the bay side of Sandy Hook. Many other vessels were blown ashore, most escaping serious damage. A woman there fell overboard. She was rescued, but her frozen legs had to be amputated above the knees.

The Matawan Journal noted at week's end that such a scene may not occur in a lifetime and it would be remembered "as the great snow storm of March, eighteen hundred and eighty-eight". It was long remembered, but by the short and catchy "Blizzard of '88". Why was it long remembered? Memory was actively cultivated by a "survivors" group, the Blizzard Men of 1888. They collected and preserved memoirs and held convention-type meetings. They met as late as 1968. See their memories at a small, but well-done exhibition of pictorial, graphic and documentary blizzard material at the New-York Historical Society, Central Park West and West 79th Street, New York City through April 5.

Heavy snow fall, combined with severe winds and an unwary public gave this storm its legendary reputation. Better forecasting, preparedness and snow removal capability will preclude other storms reaching the heights of the Blizzard of '88.

Aspects of Highway History The Street

A narrative of Kings Highway events, organizations or leading residents is virtually a history of Middletown village, beyond the scope of the newsletter. These remarks focus on Kings Highway as a throughfare, particularly on two twentieth century events, the re-alignment and the cut-off.

Middletown developed around the Highway in the mid 1660s. The original settlers were ordered to dwell nearby one another to aid common defense. They divided into lots property on both sides of the only street of significance. It hardly needed a name and was often referred merely as



"the street". Local paths and cart-ways were cut to reach farmland and nearby water-ways. Sailing vessels provided the principal transportation and would so until the development of rail. Until then, any settlement of size was located on either coastal or inland water.

The authorities ordered road construction in the latter decades of the seventeenth century. Several important roads were designated and called the King's highway. Claims they formed a lengthy, single network are unfounded. Inland travel from Middletown was primarily to nearby settlements, such as Shrewsbury, founded about the same time as Middletown. The two towns alternated as sites of the county court until c.1714 when it was relocated to Freehold. The Middletown court was at the corner of Church Street. The Highway was a longer, different road then. Lower Red Hill Road was part of Kings Highway until the re-alignment. Kings Highway East was joined, too, taking travelers east to the Navesink hills. Two seventeenth century houses remain, the Hartshorne House on the northeast corner of "the street" and New Monmouth Road, possibly the oldest house in the Township, and the Squire Taylor House, known now as Marlpit Hall, on the north side of "the street", just west of today's Red Hill Road.

The British passed through town after the 1778 Battle of Monmouth. This map was drawn by John Hills, one of their best cartographers. Generals Henry Clinton and Lord Cornwallis lunched at the site of the Hendrickson-Morford House, now number 35.

Kings Highway grew as commercial and spiritual centers. It was the site of some of the Township's finest farms. The railroad came in 1875 with some expecting large-scale development. Several houses were built and much produce was shipped from there. However, Middletown village remained a quiet place.

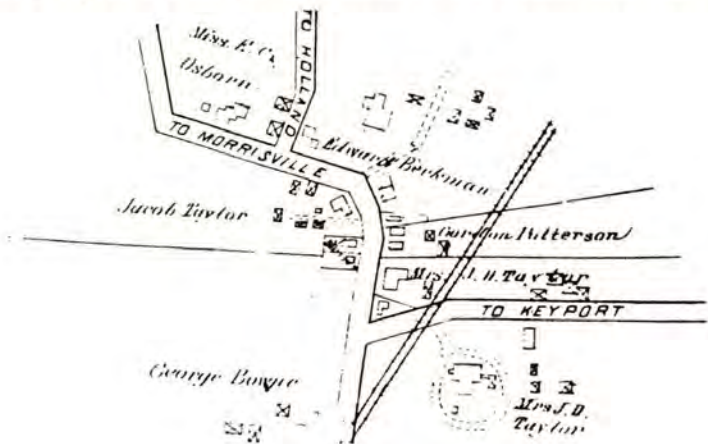
SKETCH of MIDDLETOWN



Early motorists' trip books were explicit in their directions and precise in their measured distance guidance. The driver from the shore to New York was guided at Middletown "straight through small village". Two-tenths of a mile later he was given the odd instruction to "cross bridge over RR; immediately turn right and cross second bridge over same RR". The photo mis-labeled "Maine Road" is Kings Highway in front of the Reformed Church. The pictured road is straight, but it now curves there. This map from the 1889 Wolverton atlas depicts the quoted directions. Note that Kings Highway was straight until one reached Beekman's, which is now the first curve on Red Hill Road. Note, too, the house with the circular drive and the house north of it (on the right). They are the Orchard Home and Marlpit Hall respectively.



A half-mile beyond the two bridge turn the motorist was advised to proceed left at a fork to a "direct road with frequent curves". This pre-Highway 35 continuation of Kings Highway followed early property lines and twisted around both sides of the present road. Straightening roads improved speed and safety. Occasionally it eliminated a bridge. The Kings Highway re-alignment would come uncomfortably close to the Orchard Home while Marlpit Hall was directly in its path. Mary Holmes Taylor fought a long, losing battle with the highway authorities. The road was re-aligned in 1919. She lost a corner of the Orchard Home's lawn and many large trees. Miss Taylor had Marlpit Hall moved to its present site, but the



house was damaged in the move. The road became straighter and faster, while disguising an early Kings Highway travel pattern. The former western end of "the street" was then reached by a sharp turn over the one remaining bridge and it took a new identity as the foot of Red Hill Road. Kings Highway was still on the main road, but that would also change.

The Cut-Off

The automobile changed the fabric of American life and the course of Middletown's main road. Kings Highway at the turn of the century was better fit to remain a horse-way than become a motor way. However, the automobiles came in great number, nearly choking the Highway on driving season Sundays.

Relief came via a new section of highway built by the State Highway Commission. Its one and 7/10 mile length ran from Harry Morris' Triangle Farm on the north to Oliver Holton's Twin Brook Farm, near the site of his recently closed zoo, on the south. Today's reference is Harmony Road to Twin Brook Avenue. The project's acquisition of private land brought typical controversy. Some were pleased to sell for good reason, as some of their remaining land became roadside property with an enhanced value. One dispute came from the aforesaid Mr. Morris, who already had considerable frontage on the old road. He claimed the State's price was inadequate, especially in view of his loss of a roadside stand and two income producing signs. Another came from Charles Dresser, owner of the former Hembling farm near the southern end of construction. He was not satisfied with the price and the reduction of lot size on his planned subdivision. The house was on the then existing highway. The cut-off went through the property leaving the house on an island between the new and old roads. Today the island separates opposing vehicle lanes and creates a great traffic hazard. Both men caused brief work stoppages, but the road, of course, was finished. The continuation to Red Bank was widened with much of the space coming from the old trolley right-of-way.

The expected happened. Traffic through the village was reduced and building near the cut-off started. Charles Steurwald, who lived on the former Murray-Coudert farm on Kings Highway, bought a part of the old Charles Hendrickson farm on the cut-off and New Monmouth Road. He opened the development "Oak Knolls" in 1932 with initial plots selling from \$ 400. per acre. The name reflected the thick woods there, but he likely found inspiration on an old deed map showing the oak knolls.

Motorists advocating road improvement was not new even in the 1920s. Much of the basic road network in the late nineteenth century was owned by private turnpike companies. The State fostered the system to fund road maintenance. Public ownership of the old turnpikes was not completed until the early years of this century. The first automobile owners, the rich and powerful of their time, helped prod the counties to purchase the turnpikes. Sixty years ago motorists could travel through town not knowing the proximity of Middletown's historic highway. Garden State Parkway travelers can now drive through our borders not knowing they passed Middletown.

★★★★

By the Wayside

"By The Wayside" is the title of a short monograph written as a guide to the use of early census records for studying family history of Blacks and Indians. It was written by genealogist Ellen Morris, who contends that a lack of representation of these races in local histories denies us full understanding of regional development.

The study's early focus was a history of the Berry family, Monmouth Blacks since the 18th century. Its ultimate greater use is the organization and explanation of several study guides of value to all local historians. The census is a rich source of information. However, it is underused. The census reports contain more than names. Its availability is generally limited to research libraries and then, in microfilm form. Ms. Morris' book has spurred the Society, aided by the Middletown Township Public Library and Ms. Morris, to make prints of the Middletown section of several censuses available at the Library.

Early local histories often displayed a bias for inclusion. Examples are age and ancestry, such as in George Beekman's "Early Dutch Settlers of Monmouth County" (1901) or price and the ability and willingness to pay, which is how most entrants were pictured in Franklin Ellis' "History of Monmouth County" (1885). The subscription fee for inclusion substantial, a practice typical of the time. (See Newsletter, Dec. 1985) Thus, the "average" citizen had small chance for inclusion, notably the immigrant and poor white. This chance was even smaller for the Indian and Black.

The principal application of "By The Wayside" beyond family history is the correlation of geography and maps to census and other personnel records. Several of its exercises direct the reader to seek answers from readily accessible material.

"By The Wayside" is available from the Center for Educational Research at Brookdale Community College. A copy is in the Society's library, for which we thank Ms. Morris.

Glimpses from the Past

FOR SALE LOW.

A Few Fresh Cows, Jersey and Holstein Grades.

Apply to Foreman at Chas. Coudert's,
Middletown, N.J.

Even an eleven word ad from 100 years ago (Red Bank Register, July 6, 1887) presents two opportunities to examine the language of agriculture. "Fresh" cows did not refer to barnyard behavior reminiscent of goats, but to cows in milking condition. "Grades" appears to mean breeds. However, the animals were not pure bred, but were mixed Jerseys and Holsteins. The two breeds had been introduced to New Jersey only in the recent past with the predominant milk cow then a mixture of Durham and Devon. Coudert's farm house was illustrated in the December 1987 Newsletter. (Thanks, Tom Harrington, Director, N.J. Agricultural Mus.)

STEAMER HOLMDEL,



CAPT. JOHN S. CONOVER.

FOR THE MONTH OF JULY, 1877.

RATES OF FREIGHT.

Hay, Straw, &c., per Ton.....	\$2 00
Grain, per Bag. (2 bushels).....	06
Potatoes, Apples, &c., per Bbl.....	12
Pork, Poultry, &c., (Dressed), per Cwt.....	12
Sheep and Lambs, per Head.....	12
Oysters, per Basket.....	04 to 06
Molasses, per Hhd.....	1 00
" " Tierce.....	30
" " Bbl.....	20
Sugar, " ".....	15
Rice, " ".....	15
Flour, Crackers, &c., per Bbl.....	12
Oil, Vinegar, Ale, Liqueur, per Bbl.....	20
Butter, per Tub, (Firkin).....	08 to 10
Lard, " ".....	06 to 10
" " Tierce.....	25
Hoops and Shoes, per Case.....	12
Horse Shoe, Nails, &c., per Keg.....	08 to 10
Old Iron, per Ton.....	2 50
Soap, Candles, Flour, &c., per Box.....	06 to 08
Lime, Cement, &c., per Bbl.....	12
Laths, per M.....	30
Berries, per 45 pt. Crato.....	12
" " 60 ".....	15
Berries, other pkgs, per qt.....	1/4
Grapes and Currants per Box.....	04
Green Corn, per Bbl.....	12
In Sacks, per Hund.....	06

This item was printed as part of an 1877 timetable ad in the Monmouth Democrat. Timetables were common, but freight rate lists are rare. These rates provide insight into the economy of agriculture. Freight costs were crucial to Monmouth development, as elsewhere. The list can answer many questions, but raises several. Were discounts given? Was publishing rates a sign of cost-competition with another line? What were charges from nearby ports?

LIST OF LETTERS

Remaining in the Post Office at Middletown, N. J., April 1st, 1835.

Michael Smith, John Lewis, Dr. John Grigg, Garret Hagerty, Mr. Winters, Peter Smock, John Smith, Benjamin & Joseph Frost, A. C. Dennis, Elizabeth Stevenson, Rev Charles Hoover, Daniel Van Mater, Henry Scott, James G. Crawford, Lewis F. Wilson, Rice Hadsal, 2, B. Smock. WILLIAM W. MURRAY, P. M., April 9, 1835.

Advertising unclaimed letters today seems an extraordinary way of getting the mail through. The ads are interesting as they show who was in town. Rice Hadsal's name is of special note. It is generally spelled Hatsell. He founded a store in what was first known as Riceville and is now Navesink. He is claimed to have arrived in 1830, but the census does not list him. The Riceville post office was established in 1849, though the village was known by that name for some years prior.

ONE CENT REWARD.

RANAWAY from the subscriber an indentured apprentice to the Farming business, named RICHARD CARLIN. Said boy is about 16 years old, is hard of hearing, and his left hand is smaller than his right. All persons are forbid harboring, hiring, or trusting him under the penalty of the law.

WILLIAM V. CONOVER.

Middletown, June 30, 1857.—18-3w.

Slavery was not the only form of bondage. Indentured workers also ran away. Why the miniscule reward? One wonders if advertising a reward, even one cent, provided entitlement to hold the wanted person or established some legal distinction or status.

Briefly Noted

A lack of understanding of the process of changing place names was underscored in the comment of a local historian during a referendum to change the name of Dover Township. She stated that "tampering" with names was tampering with history. Not true. People will refer to places by names with which they are comfortable or, in the case of municipalities, what is legally proper. Historians merely record what the public used, when and why any change may have been made. Usage shall prevail.

Towards the end of the recent "Trains and Trolleys" exhibit your editor discovered in a 1912 newspaper a recipe for "Railroad Pudding". It is a steamed concoction and resembles the current Brown Pudding. Although it is no culinary discovery, one wonders about the name. Was it a dining car favorite? Or, did the dark hue characteristic of its molasses, raisin, clove and cinnamon ingredients resemble a steam locomotive or its soot, so often dropped on summer passengers. Write for the recipe if you would like to try it and serve railroad pudding at a meeting.

"Then and Now" - Part 2 Debuts at April Meeting

The slide show "Middletown: Then and Now - Part 2" will be shown for the first time at the April 25th meeting. The time is 8:00PM at the museum. The format is identical to the earlier show - older and current comparative views of various sites in the Township. Many of the earlier views are over eighty years old. However, in our rapidly changing township, in some cases the "then" view's age can be measured in months. There is still time to add other views to the show. The Society would appreciate the opportunity to borrow old pictures for copying. The originals will be returned.

Both the earlier and newer versions of "Middletown: Then and Now" are available to be shown to public groups.

The March meeting is, as usual, scheduled for the fourth Monday, the 28th, at 8:00PM. No speaker is planned. Contact Randall Gabrielan 671-2645 for meeting information or to arrange a viewing of the slide shows.

Survey Results

Early returns reflected overall satisfaction with the newsletter. A few trends were noted. Historical articles are well-liked, with shorter ones given a slight preference over longer articles. We attempt to mix type and length, with subject determining the latter. A point that can be made in four inches, will. However, if four issues are required (as with the railroad article), it will be done.

Less popular were items about the Society and the Quiz. This is a society newsletter and informing members about events is essential. We are proud in using less space for this purpose than most newsletters. The Quiz may be misunderstood. It is an opportunity to present an interesting or useful fact not now placable in an article. It is not a test of knowledge. Many of its items are trivial, but your editor dislikes labeling useful information "trivia".

The Doing Local History feature is more popular than the lack of "doers" would imply. Remember, the column's aim is to spur participation among readers who are reminded their interest may be done within the Society.

The several suggested topics for future inclusion each attracted backers. The strongest response was for articles on neighborhoods and buildings. Neighborhood pieces should be thorough and a building article should be more than a repetition of existing in-print material. We shall be pleased to print such articles as information gathering and space permit. Subjects suggested by readers included genealogical "summaries" and a history of ethnic groups in the Township. We avoid genealogy because the subject is vast, there is much in print and since superlative genealogical resources are available nearby in the Monmouth County Historical Association's library. The ethnic suggestion is a good one.

The Society would be pleased to enter discussions with those whose information, recollections or pictures will help produce a better newsletter. Thanks to the early respondees. If you still have your survey form, please submit it NOTING THAT IT ALSO CONTAINED THE 1988 DUES NOTICE.

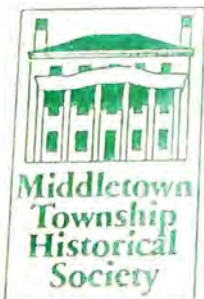
P.O. BOX 434
MIDDLETOWN, NJ 07748
PHONE: 291-8739 during museum hours.
EDITOR: RANDALL GABRIELAN

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.



SARAH BROANDER

Sarah Broander, Society trustee, died February 9 at age 91. She was likely known to many as one of our "costume ladies", donning a colonial outfit for many Society activities. Mrs. Broander was known to her fellow Society activists as a person of remarkable energy, a participant until her end, and one not inclined to be slowed-down by "old-timers". We admire these qualities and esteem our spry, vigorous colleague who portrayed them for so long. May Sarah rest in peace, knowing she is missed by many.

Doing Local History: SCHOOL RESEARCH

No institution is as important in shaping the character of a community or making it a desirable place to live as its school system. Knowing its past may be helpful in understanding the present and useful in avoiding future problems. The subject can be enjoyable even in the absence of great insight.

School history should be explored with a base wider than one district. State and county regulations governed educational development. Perhaps this could stimulate a regional study group. Monmouth contributed two important state commissioners in the formative years, Samuel Lockwood and James Enright. Our own Melvin Rice was president of the New Jersey Board of Education. He issued educational policy material that appeared to be his own work.

The available literature on school history is scanty. Much tends to be memories and sentimental recollections. However, substance for serious research comes with the topic.

Our Middletown Schools

"Our Middletown Schools" is a forty-five page booklet describing the Township's school system. Its detailed, well-illustrated depiction of contemporary education is preceded by a three page history. The history is the barest of outlines, bringing to mind a needed history project. See the "Doing Local History" column.

"Our Middletown Schools" is bound to become a valuable historical reference. If similar works had been issued even as infrequently as every twenty years, our knowledge of the past would have been enhanced greatly. One hopes the work appears regularly. It was written by The Middletown Township League of Women Voters and published by The Middletown Township School District. Free copies are available at several locations, notable the Township libraries. A few are available at the Society's museum.

MEMBERSHIP DUES PER CALENDAR YR.

Individual -- \$5.00
Family -- \$10.00

Dues for new members
joining after Oct. 1 in-
clude following year.