



Newsletter of the Middletown Township Historical Society

Vol V No. 1

February 1989

MEETING SPEAKERS MARK YOUR CALENDAR NOW

July 24 – Ed Kemble

August 24 – Fanny McCallum
See Articles Herein

September 25 – Gail Hunton
Article in Next Issue



MIDDLETOWN QUIZ SPECIAL WITH PRIZE

Windows in earlier times were often made to serve a decorative purpose. This opportunity was largely ignored by 20th century architects until recently. Now we are seeing a proliferation of decorative windows with semi-circular, circular, and fan shapes reappearing everywhere.

But stroll Kings Highway and be reminded that there is nothing new. Each of the illustrated windows appears there. How many of these historic building windows can you locate? The first reader to mail in the correct answers will be awarded an attractively-matted 7" by 14" hand tinted replica of a 19th century Middletown map. The earliest postmark will determine the winner. Write to the editor at 71 Fish Hawk Drive, Middletown, NJ 07748. Second and third place prizes will also be awarded. Anyone associated with newsletter production and distribution and their families are not eligible.



A.



B.



C.



D.



NEW EXHIBITION OPENS

The exhibition "Middletown Domestic Architecture" has opened. Regular museum hours are Saturday and Sunday from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. The exhibition portrays changing styles of house architecture through Middletown Township examples, primarily through pictures and sketches.

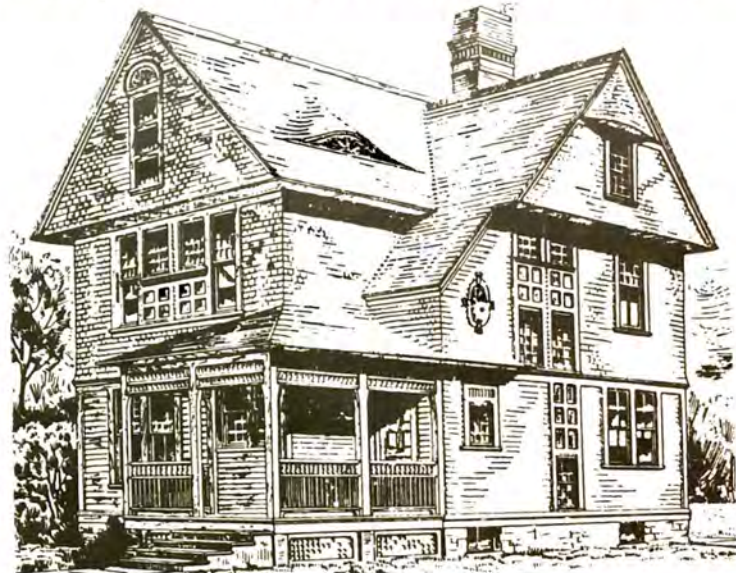
One outstanding object is a scale model house by Ellen Broander. It embodies several Victorian era styles and is a masterpiece of craftsmanship.

The Ivy-Shoppell's Design 534

"The Ivy" is one of the more charming houses on Locust Point Road. Brower family lore long spoke of its construction for the bride of the builder. Recent searching uncovered its construction date and design source. *The Most Beautiful House in the World*, the title of architecture teacher Witold Rybczynski's book on his house building experience, according to him, is the house that one builds for himself. George Brower built this house and his pride still shows. The house is still occupied by a Brower, proud of her family's building tradition.

"George Brower is finishing his new house at Locust Point and it will soon be ready for his occupancy", reported the December 13, 1893 *Red Bank Register*. The January 3, 1894 edition reported the wedding of Mr. Brower and Lottie Boeckel at All Saint's Church on December 27 concluding with, "After the ceremony, Mr. and Mrs. Brower held a reception at their house at Locust Point which the groom had built and furnished for his bride".

The form of "The Ivy" and Shoppell Design Number 534 are so close as to lead one to conclude that it is the design for the house. Detailing differs and the basic plan's interior was changed. Plan book alterations were common. Un-



fortunately, no plans survive. Robert W. Shoppell was a major figure as form book house designer in the late Victorian period. His work is widely known through the Dover Publications, Inc. reprint taken from various Shoppell publications. It is titled, *Turn-of-The-Century Houses, Cottages and Villas* (1984). It was the source for the illustration and much of the information about Shoppell.

R. W. Shoppell founded the New York City architectural firm, the Cooperative Building Plan Association, which employed about fifty architects at one point. They issued various inexpensive house design publications with the aim of selling detailed construction plans. Shoppell aimed to bring the services of architects to house builders who would ordinarily not be able to afford them. His firm was a rival to an earlier popularizer of design book houses, Palliser, Palliser and Co. Although Palliser plan books were priced lower than their predecessors, their \$5.00 price was high compared to the \$.25 of Shoppell's 1881 *Artistic Modern Houses of Low Cost*. The nature of their rivalry can be inferred through their publications' accusations and self justifications. Shoppell's inexpensive publications and growing plan sales created a market for architect-designed houses at a fraction of the cost of an individually-hired architect. His plans were accompanied with actual construction costs. Detractors claimed a builder could add too high a profit as the homeowner often lacked the cost information.

How extensive was Shoppell's local influence? It may be difficult to state. A New Jersey Shoppell survey is probably best begun along the old Erie railroad lines. Shoppell started an illustrated quarterly, *Soppell's Modern Houses* in January 1886, which quickly brought new designs to the market. Commuter railroads cultivated home ownership with cost and life style comparisons of city renting versus country home owning. The Erie advertised in the Shoppell publication showing its route map. Middletown's example appeared by chance. Perhaps there are others, as George Brower was an active builder.

N.B. A companion article on Palliser, Palliser and Co. will appear in the next issue.

MIDDLETOWN DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE

Continued from last issue

The Italianate style enjoyed several decades of popularity in the mid to late 19th century. It came to the United States via England and was especially well-adaptable to informal country styles. The Italianate was part of the picturesque movement, a reaction to long popular classical ideals in art and architecture. Italianate characteristics included two or three story height, tall, narrow, windows, overhanging eaves supported by decorative brackets and low pitched roofs. There are numerous examples in the Township including 392 Nut Swamp Road (at Whiteacre Blvd.), 42 Chapel Hill Road (at Danemar Drive) and the south side of Kings Highway East (east of Stillwell Road). Note figure 5, ignoring the tower and roof for now. It embodies several Italianate features and was likely built as such. The basic Italianate is often a simple, box-like structure. Elaborate detailing can occur. A variation, often called Italian Villa, is characterized by a square tower or cupola. Middletown has an outstanding example at 600 Oak Hill Road, the northeast corner with Middletown-Lincroft Road. It is the former Elnathan Field home and was adjacent to his Oak Hill Nurseries.

A minor, short-lived mid 19th century movement attracts interest due to the fascinating shape of the octagon structure. It was founded by one man and his book. Orson S. Fowler, who published *The Octagon, A Home For All* in 1849, claimed many virtues for the octagon including increased sunlight and ventilation. This may be true if an octagon can be used as a single room, but as figure 6 shows, this is not true in a room-divided octagon. Several NJ schools were octagons. Middletown had a 19th century octagon of obscure origin. It was small and not attractive. However, it survived and was here, a source of local pride. A series of fires and neglect and vandalism during vacancy left an unrestorable shell. An octagon was totally reconstructed in 1987 on the same site. The old landmark is gone, but a reminder of Fowler's movement remains (figure 7).

A major architect at mid century was Andrew Jackson Downing. He published several architectural works, with the last, the 1850 *The Architecture of Country Houses*, the most influential. The small Gothic villa was a Downing favorite, such as figure 8.

Other European influences include the Second Empire style from France. Its key stylistic element is the mansard roof. The style was named for the reign of Napoleon III, 1852 - 1870, with 1860 - 1880 its dates of popularity in the United States. Many Second Empire house have rich decorative details. Middletown lacks a good example. Figure 9 shows how the mansard roof could lend dignity to an otherwise plain building.



Figure 5. 59 Riverside Drive, Red Bank

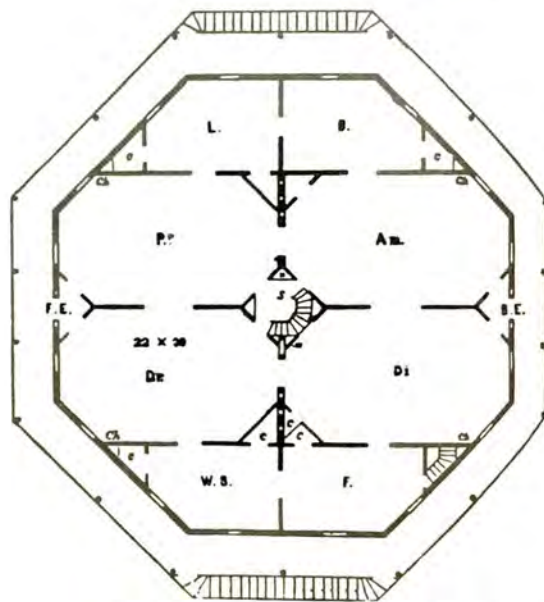


Figure 6. Sample octagon floor plan



Figure 7. 26 Church Street, Belford

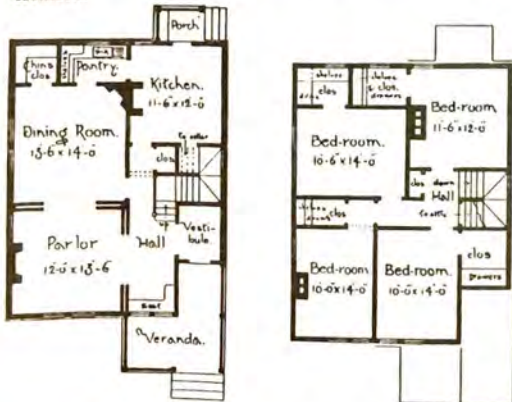


Figure 8. 12 Grand Avenue, Navesink



Figure 9. 386 West Front Street, River Plaza

Figure 5 is an excellent representation of the homeowner's desire to stay stylistically current. The owner added a Second Empire half-story to his Italianate house with the mansard roof. The conical tower is a prominent feature of the Queen Anne style current during the late Victorian period. The triangular pediment over the small porch was a popular colonial revival element.



Shoppell
NO. 534
Floor
Plan

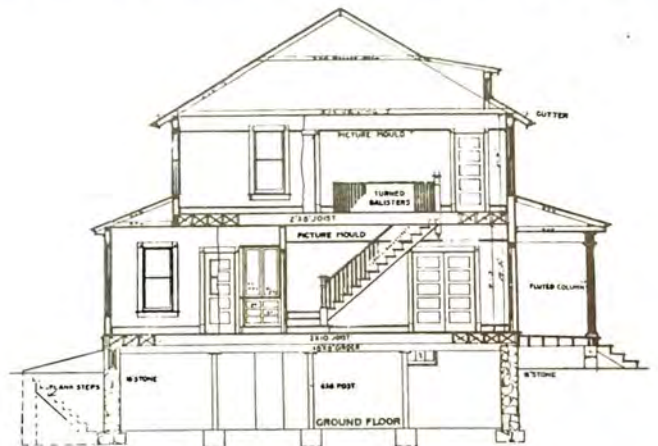
experience with Kodachrome slides captured former aspects of Monmouth life which had a century or more tradition and preserved them for modern suburbia to view. Ed Kemble's slides portray the substance of much local history. However, they're not dry print, but sharp, vivid color brought to our meeting and enlivened by a keen observer with a skillful lens. Ed talked at the Society last year and at nearby groups in the recent past. Audiences are intrigued by his programs as with few others. Listen to Ed tell about the last of the old ways of life and commerce. "There is an old country store and a grain grinding windmill nearby, the horse as he plows, pulls wagons or carriages, hauls in the heavy fish boats on the beach or waits patiently as his owner hucksters vegetables or loads up a farm wagon. And you will see the last of the sailing ships and steamboats in the area, and hear some interesting sidelights on the Battle of Monmouth."

Dues... Are Yours Paid?

Fanny McCallum talks on Sears houses August 28

Fanny McCallum, President of the Atlantic Highlands Historical Society, will give her slide talk "Sears Houses" at our August 28 meeting, 8:00 pm at Croydon Hall, Leonardville Road and Chamone Avenue, Leonardo. All are invited.

Mail order houses sold by Sears have received increasing attention from historians and preservationists in recent years. Articles in *Historic Preservation* and *Smithsonian* and the realization that New Jersey was a key market for the houses helped stimulate Mrs. McCallum's interest. House designs offered by plan book had long been a part of the American building business (see companion articles). The books typically offered the carpenter-builder drawings he could work from, or the opportunity to purchase large-scale plans from the architect-publisher. The builder was given price estimates, but it was up to the owner and builder to secure materials and meet the cost guide. Sears actually provided nearly all materials needed to complete. Mass production factory methods helped contain costs, resulting in more house for the dollar.



The period of Sears house catalogs was 1908 to 1940. Their peak sales were from the end of World War I to the start of the depression. Mrs. McCallum's talk will be illustrated with houses within walking distance of Croydon Hall.

A fascinating sidelight of Fanny McCallum's talk is the revelation from the audience of other nearby Sears houses. If you have a Sears house, know someone who does, or know of the existence of one in the area, come tell about it, or call Mrs. McCallum at 291-2718 or Randy Gabrielan at 671-2645. The houses are well illustrated in Katherine Cole Stevenson's and H. Ward Jandl's 365 page detailed study, *Houses by Mail - A Guide to Houses by Sears, Roebuck and Co.* Sears houses reflected the styles of their periods and generally do not stand out from their contemporaries. Thus, personal revelation is the best means for identifying them prior to confirmation by the book or other documentation.

Where are examples in Middletown Township likely? It appears a greater possibility exists in sections with many houses constructed on small lots in the 1910 - 1940 era. These include most of the bay shore north of Route 36, River Plaza and the south side of Route 35 from Fairview to the Navesink River.

KEMBLE TO SPEAK JULY 24

Ed Kemble will present his slide talk, *Colorful Monmouth* at the July 24 meeting at 8:00 pm. The place, as usual, is the museum at Croydon Hall, Leonardville Road and Chamone Avenue, in Leonardo. The date is the usual fourth Monday, but five Monday months are potentially confusing. Mark the date now.

Ed formerly called the talk *Edge of Time*, a good sub-title. His fifty year



OLIVER HOLTON'S TWIN BROOK ZOO, REVISITED

THE TWIN BROOK ZOOLOGICAL PARK was first opened to the public on June 25th, 1925. In the short period of its existence it already has the distinction of being the largest zoological park in the State and the largest privately owned Zoo in the Eastern United States.

The collection of Wild Animals, Birds and Reptiles usually consists of over eight hundred living specimens from all parts of the world.

Among the most interesting exhibits to be seen are:

AFRICAN LIONS, MALAYAN TIGERS, INDIAN LEOPARDS, BLACK PANTHERS, PUMAS, WILD CATS, BLACK RUSSIAN and MALAY SUN BEARS, WOLVES, RACCOONS, KANGAROOS, INDIAN ELEPHANTS, CAMELS, ZEBRAS, LLAMAS, BUFFALO, ELK, DEER, MONKEYS, APES, BABOONS, SNAKES, ALLIGATORS, TORTOISES, CRANES, PEAFOWL, SWANS, PHEASANTS, COCKATOOS, PARROTS, EAGLES, VULTURE OWLS, and many other rare and interesting birds.

The Middletown Township Historical Society February 1987 newsletter described the zoo, focusing on two accidents. The first, the escape of a leopard, brought the zoo great notoriety. The second, the escape of a wolf that killed the owner's son, effectively closed the zoo. The recent uncovering of this post card illustration by member Rodney Klami is cause to take a second look at Holton's Twin Brook Zoo. The picture is a stylized drawing. It is similar to others of local subjects from c. 1930s. This one dates earlier and is a single color double card rather than the usual colored, 3 1/2 by 5 1/2 cards. The reverse of the message - address side describes the zoo. The other side of the picture is a map showing roads to the zoo.

This may be the only extant view of the zoo. The log cabin entrance in the foreground was located about where Howard Johnson's restaurant now stands.

The name Twin Brook was coined by Lillian Maehl from two brooks of near equal length on the property.¹ She built the substantial Italian Renaissance house on a part of the former Mary Louise Hendrickson farm behind Kings Highway. The farm, its breakup, and sale, would make an interesting study. It appears that Mrs. Maehl built in the early years of the century. Oliver Holton's mother, Mrs. Royal Matice, bought the property in 1920, apparently intending to use it as a dairy farm. She resided in the Philadelphia area and raised prize winning cattle.²

A glimpse of life there was provided by Mrs. Holton many years later. Her name was then Milly Johnstone and she wrote *Brother Wolf* a "tone poem" for her grandson Thomas Lee Holton, 40 small pages telling how the force and spirit of the wolf attack shaped her life. Oliver graduated from Cornell, studying animal husbandry. The training was probably intended for his mother's show animals. They "lived on a farm, 'A gentlemen's farm', prize bulls, prize dogs, ornamental ducks, and a greenhouse, hundreds of pheasants for the State Game Farm, black swans, peacocks, and a pool".³ She alluded to his wealthy mother's financing the operation. "Gilt-edged Securities turned three hundred acres into a zoo-animals from around the world, the most modern design and equipment. We built a log cabin on the highway, travelers came from everywhere, bought tickets and took pictures. They roamed around the grounds and watched the zebras frolic in the pen, heard lions roar and fed the monkeys. They leaned over the snake pit and were silent."⁴

The zoo experience followed the Holton's home. "The house where Tommy lived was high on a hill, full of windows, a white house surrounded by gardens, a formal terrace and clipped hedge. Inside was a long narrow hall with bedrooms on both sides. Baboons and chimpanzees filled the extra guest rooms, yanked down the chandeliers and cried all night. Once rattlesnakes were born in the sun room. They slid under the door sill and scared all the bridge players away."⁵

The card pinpoints the opening date. The operation appears to have an earlier existence as a "farm". *The Register* of March 19, 1924, described an emu, "the latest bird curiosity on Oliver W. Holton's Twin Brook Farm". See the February 1987 Newsletter for a closer look at the zoo. The wolf attack was July 22, 1927; the zoo closed that October 16.

The Holton's marriage ended sometime after their son's death. The Holton's returned to Pennsylvania and the house was sold in 1933.

Thanks to Rod Klami and *The Courier*.

- 1 Red Bank Register, October 27, 1915.
- 2 Red Bank Register, Feb 25, 1920.
- 3 Johnstone, Milly. *Brother Wolf*, Center Publications, Los Angeles, CA, 1979, pps 24-25.
- 4 Ibid
- 5 Ibid

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 in-
clude following year.

