



Township Times

The Newsletter of the
Middletown Township
Historical Society

Our 36th year of preserving and promoting the history of Middletown Township

Vol. IX, No. 1

Summer 2004

The Chapel Hill NIKE base and other weapons explosions in NJ

"Why was the Earle base located at Leonardo and Colts Neck?" questioned Society president Randall Gabrielan to introduce Frank Vosk's presentation on May 17th of film taken of local damage following the May 22, 1958 explosion of the NIKE base near Chapel Hill.

The answer of "because they were near New York City but away from built-up areas" not only showed how times have changed, but of the basic fear of storing and handling explosives near populated areas. His remarks included a brief accounting of other notable weapons explosions.

Although Earle, built between 1943 and 1944, went through World War II without a fatal explosion, a blast on the USS Solar at the Leonardo pier on April 30, 1946 killed seven. Safety was assured for the NIKE program, the installation of which ringed the New York City area.

Another in town was at Sandy Hook's Fort Hancock, while the system's command and control center was the Missile Master base in the Middletown Township hills of Navesink. The blast in 1958 was labeled as "the accident which could not happen." Ten people were lost.

A World War I explosion in New Jersey motivated the move of a loading pier away from a population center. The Black Tom blast on July 30, 1916 in Jersey City was never solved, although it is thought to have been the work of German saboteurs. Five died.

An explosion at Morgan in Sayreville on October 4, 1918 killed between 100 and 200. Definitive casualty tolls are often impossible as the exact number exposed is usually not known and remains are not always found.

A massive blast at Lake Denmark at the Picatinny Arsenal on July 10, 1926 was set off by lightning.

The May 19, 1950 explosion at South Amboy which killed 31 is also remembered by some locals.

The greatest casualties were suffered at Halifax on December 6, 1917 where one death toll recorded 1,654. A great number were blinded as residents went to their windows to see what happened after the first explosion only to be hit by shattering glass during a second blast.

Closer to home, the Chapel Hill blast was remembered by many in the audience. Mr. Vosk, whose mother lived on Kanes Lane and whose property backed up against the base, said that he heard the explosion and went over the next day to take 8mm movies of the damage. He also picked up some debris that his son brought to school. MPs came the next day wanting the items back! One was solid propellant fuel.

Mr. Vosk showed the short snippet of film that he made of the devastated area which is now occupied by houses. The site had been east of Kings Highway and south of Sleepy Hollow Road, along Normandy Road. It is still unclear why seven of the 30 missiles exploded. Normally the missiles were underground, but it was believed that they were in the up position that day to be serviced.

Pamela Parker Mancellus whose father, Lee, was one of the civilian employees killed, said that the family was never told what happened.

Considered one of the worst missile-related accidents of the Cold War era, the military cleaned up the site and continued until 1960 when its operation was transferred to the NJ National Guard. By 1963, the military discontinued using the site. A monument that had been erected in memory of those killed was eventually moved to Guardian Park at Fort Hancock.

Our Tour of Roosevelt

On May 16th, a group of 25 people journeyed to Roosevelt, N.J., for a special tour of the historic town given by town historian Arthur Shapiro and his wife, Ellen. The tour began at 3 p.m. with a 45-minute lecture in the grade school in the room that had Ben Shahn's mural on the wall. Photos don't do the mural justice - it is HUGE - both in size and in scope of social and political commentary. Other art works are also on display in the school, many by well-known artists.

After the talk, the group walked the school grounds, visiting the small amphitheater that is used for school graduations and other functions. A motorcade was formed, which drove through much of the small town and out to the cemetery where everyone got out and walked around. Arthur pointed out the different sections: members of the synagogue, artists, regular townspeople, and so on. On the drive back, some housing areas that Arthur spoke about in the lecture were passed.

After the tour, the group drove to the Clarksburg Inn, where everyone had a very nice dinner, with Arthur and Ellen as the guests. The weather was superb!

Many thanks to Pete Brady who orchestrated the tour!



Arthur Shapiro was our guest speaker last September and he graciously invited us to tour his town. We took his offer!

Acquisitions

2004 yearbooks from Bayview Elementary, Christian Brothers Academy, Mater Dei High, Middle Village Elementary, St. Mary School, Thompson Middle
-- gifts of the schools

2002 & 2003 8th grade memory books
-- gift of St. Mary School

1980 Middletown H.S. North yearbook with various school certificates
-- gift of Domonic Koehler

A Triangle of Land - The History of Brookdale Community College
-- gift of Charles S. Harris

12 glasses and mugs from various Midd. Twp. fire companies and first aid squads
-- from the collection of Richard O'Shaughnessy (former fire chief)

Flower Power

Our thanks to Windmill Acres Farm (732-291-0011) for their kind donation of geraniums and marigolds. Located at Monmouth Ave. & Whipoorwill Valley Rd., Navesink section of Middletown Twp., they will be re-opening Sept. 25th with fall flowers, pumpkins and hay rides.

Thanks also to Bernice Maguire and her green thumb for planting the flowers for us on the front porch of the MacLeod-Rice House. Beautiful!

Wish List

We will be having a Trash & Treasure fundraising table at Middletown Day - please clean out your closets, attics and basements and donate your still-nice but unwanted items to us by Sept. 7th. Drop off items on Sundays 1-4 p.m. or during our monthly meetings. Or call 732-872-9153 for special arrangements.

Also, we need the following for the museum: TV cart with wheels, map case, small refrigerator.

Calling all Researchers

If you have conducted research on aspects of Middletown Township or its residents, please consider donating a copy of your findings for our files.

Middletown Day is coming!

The annual Middletown Day will be Saturday, September 18th, 11 am - 6 pm rain or shine. Join your neighbors for a "Community Fun Day" of activities, including a classic car show, granny's attic sale at the Senior Center, entertainment, food, fun and games. We will open the MacLeod-Rice House for visitors to see our current exhibit, "Our Road to Liberty" as well as special displays set up just for the day.

As in past years, Middletown Day will be held at the Croydon Hall complex off Leonardville Road in the Leonardo section of Middletown Township. We are fortunate that our museum and library are located right in the middle of the festivities in the "big white house." Over 500 visitors stop by, and for many this is their first opportunity to learn about the Historical Society, the house, and the history of the township.

This year, our special guest will be Tom Hoffman from Gateway National Park with a display about the history of Sandy Hook and Fort Hancock. Did you know that Sandy Hook is considered part of Middletown Township? It's a little-known fact.

Society member Richard Sass (River Reproductions) will be on hand with his postcard reproductions of local scenes. Society president Randall Gabrielan, author of 30 Arcadia books on local history, will be autographing many of his titles. And don't forget to help us out at our Trash & Treasure fundraising table - we just may have the widget you have been searching for!

P.S. The museum will be closed the next day (Sunday, Sept. 19th). We need to rest from all this excitement!

Share your scrapbooks with us

Do you have a scrapbook that relates to Middletown Township in some way? Were you a clipper of high school sports events or other items of note that occurred around town? We'd love to see your scrapbook memories and would like to make photocopies for our files. Please dig out and dust off those old scrapbooks and show us!

Looking for a few good volunteers

We are looking for volunteer certified electricians, plumbers and builders with a love of old houses to help us with some minor upkeep of our own Classic Revival MacLeod-Rice House. Please call 732-291-5610 if you'd like to lend a hand.

Welcome aboard

Welcome aboard to Marian Finn who has volunteered to help out in the library sorting through our unprocessed documents. It's a big job but made easier by another set of hands. Marian even found two Mardean maps (Leonardo section of Middletown) - something that she was hoping to find. If you'd like to join the treasure hunt, give us a call!

Flag etiquette

We are sprucing up the MacLeod-Rice House and have put up some patriotic bunting for the summer months (many thanks to Ray Veth of Beacon Awards & Signs 732-747-9588 for the discount, and Domonic Koehler of Home Renovation & Repairs 732-291-5610 for putting them up). It got us thinking about the proper way to display the U.S. flag.

On buildings and flagpoles, the flag should only be displayed from sunrise to sunset and illuminated during darkness. It should not be displayed during bad weather unless for a very special reason. The flag should never touch the ground, but raised with "heartly briskness" and lowered slowly and solemnly.

The blue field should be on the left side as you face it, or as viewed from the street. Only flags that are in good condition should be displayed.

When flown with other flags, the U.S. flag should always be at the top, or if flown from different staffs, should be at the center of the highest point. During peacetime, the U.S. flag must be flown at the same height and be the same size as other national flags. It is the first one raised and the last one lowered.

As for the colors of the flag, red stands for hardiness and courage, white is for purity and innocence, and blue is for vigilance, perseverance and justice.

Calendar of Events

Meetings start 7:30 pm at the MacLeod-Rice House at Croydon Hall (except August - see below). All events are free of charge, and all are welcome to attend. Light refreshments are served.

August 16th - Our annual outing at Twin Lights in the Highlands. Curator Tom Laverty will tell us about current activities at the lighthouse and in the N.J. lighthouse community. We will also climb the South Light for a spectacular night view. Meet at Twin Lights at 7:30.

Sept. 18th - Middletown Day and our Trash & Treasure fundraising sale! Stop by the MacLeod-Rice House to see our current exhibit and other special displays! 11 a.m. - 6 p.m., rain or shine.

Sept. 19th - Museum closed while we recuperate from Middletown Day

Sept. 20th - "Encyclopedia of N.J. Night" Newly published, the book is a massive compendium of information on N.J. of every description including history, geography, biography, and more. This is the one book about N.J. to buy if you buy only one. There will be a presentation on its make-up, as well as member participation. Send your thoughts on what a state encyclopedia should be and do to monmouthhistory@aol.com. Copies will be available for purchase at a discount.

Oct. 21 - Dan Lieb of Historic Shipwreck Divers of N.J. will present "Identifying the Cecelia M. Dunlap", a wreck he has studied for years. Truly underwater detective work, he will give a spellbinding tale of piecing together small bits of evidence to reach an historic conclusion.

Check our website for the latest updates:
<http://www.home.earthlink.net/~Impoll>

Sponsors

Thanks to the following for supporting our summer newsletter:

Frank A. Vaccaro, P.E.
Consulting Engineers &
Construction Management
34 Circle Drive, Rumson
732-530-8497

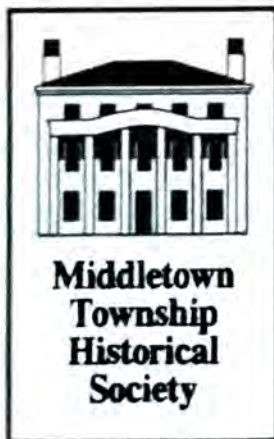
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Out of print books, magazines, sheet music, autographs, paper items
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81 First Avenue, Atlantic Highlands
732-291-4133 -- R.A. Schoeffling
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16 Cherry Tree Farm Rd., Middletown
732-706-7337 -- Joan A. Smith

Thanks so much!

Our thanks to Bernice Maguire who made the beautiful flower wreaths for the front doors of the MacLeod-Rice House, and donated a hydrangea swag for the mantel in the lobby area; committeeman Thomas G. Hall who stopped by our museum for the season opener and had the VIP tour; Jim & Pat Coughlin for the projection screen and lovely round vase; Domonic Koehler of Home Renovation & Repairs (732-291-5610) for the andirons and for cleaning out the lobby fireplace, a scanner for the computer, repairing the coat stand, and rewiring the glass display case in the museum so that we can now shed some light on our new bottle display. Thanks also to Joseph Azzolina and Food Circus Super Markets, Inc. for the cookie platters at our meetings! **Most of all, thank you to all our members - we couldn't do it without your support!**



Middletown Township Historical Society
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Visit our website:

<http://www.home.earthlink.net/~Impoll>

*Dedicated to researching, collecting, and exhibiting
the history of Middletown Township*

Editor: Laura M. Poll

Meetings: 7:30 p.m., third Monday of the month
MacLeod-Rice House, Croydon Hall
intersection of Leonardville Rd. & Chamone Ave.
Leonardo section, Midd. Twp., Monmouth County

Membership Dues
per calendar year

| | |
|------------|-------|
| General | \$ 10 |
| Sustaining | \$ 25 |
| Corporate | \$100 |

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