Middletown Township's history is old, varied and rich. So much has happened here to forebears with much different backgrounds giving our history an interest wider than most. Middletown's history is vital because familiarity with it can increase our municipal pride, help us understand how this great township is made up and how all parts fit together. These pages are only a brief introduction, but it is hoped they will encourage greater exploration of the history that surrounds us.

The area that became Middletown Township in 1693 was settled on land surrounding a coastal bay. The hills of the Navesink Highlands surrounded the shore. The sea was essential for transportation and a natural source for food and commerce. The land behind the hills and bay was attractive and fertile. The first white settlers came in the 1660's, settling inland in the Middletown Village area and by the shore. The history of man, though, started much earlier. The region was populated by native Americans centuries earlier. The story of Penelope Stout and the Indians is legendary here. The varied legacy of the Indian has been continually uncovered for many years. Our history has the depth of time.

The settlers prospered and their numbers increased. The political and economic era produced yearnings of freedom for many, but the ties to the mother country were strong in the midst of prosperity. The forces clashed during the war for independence with neighbor against neighbor strife common. It seems fitting now that homes of both a loyalist to England, Edward Taylor (Maxipit Hall) and a patriot of the revolution, Joseph Murray (Murray Farm in Policy Park) are restored house museums.

Time healed the wounds of war, although many loyalists lost their property and left the area. The century turned, with much remaining to be learned about the early 1800's in Middletown. Times were simpler. Some Township concerns were building and maintaining roads, establishing an educational system and controlling farm and domestic animals. Development differed following the nature of the land and the inclination of the settlers. Water and agrarian business flourished. Municipality development also flourished and several were formed from Middletown Township including Riverian Township (a name changed to Hazlet) in 1848, Atlantic Highlands in 1887 and Highlands in 1900. Others were formed from Riverian Township making Middletown the 'fatherland' of Keypoint, Keansburg, Union Beach and Matawan. The latter was once known as Middletown Point, when the region including Matawan Creek, was a shipping point for Middletown Township.

Diverse sections took different characters. A brief description by neighborhood follows:

Belford has a long maritime background with its residents having worked the sea for generations for a variety of marine life. A commercial fishing fleet now makes its home port in Belford, the successor of this long tradition. Belford was once part of Port Monmouth. A post office opened in 1891, helping to create a separate Belford identity.

Chapel Hill was known in the 1700's as High Point. British soldiers camped on this high ground in 1778 following the Battle of Monmouth. The chapel was built in the early 1800's as a Baptist meeting house. It was later used by several other denominations until 1960, but was demolished several years afterwards. An 1850 lighthouse was built with a green lighted navigational beacon now erected on a tower.

East Keansburg is the Township's beach community on the Bay shore. It was developed in the early 20th century, taking its name from Keansburg, then a very popular resort town to its west. Keansburg was named for John Kean, great-uncle of the Governor.

Everett is now a small, quiet residential section on the Holmdel border. It was named for the local school teacher when a post office was opened in 1901. The section was once the Morrisville and was a well-known farming area dating back to Colonial times.

Fairview, once known as Headens Corners, may have taken its name from the Fair View Cemetery Association. The Cemetery was organized in 1855 and was an early example of park-type cemetery design. This residential neighborhood is in the vicinity of Route 35 and Chapel Hill Road.

Leonardo's past includes farms, a shipping dock, dairies and location of the Township's first high school. Named for the Leonard family, today Leonardo is the home of a State marine, but is primarily residential.

Lincroft's late 17th century settlers included Scots who called the area Sandy New for Walter Scott's ancestral home. Leedsville is another earlier name, for William Leed. D. D. Withers, nationally known racing figure assembled the vast Brookdale Farm for horse breeding. The tradition was carried on by Colonel William Payne Thompson and his family.

Locust once had resort hotels on Clappton Creek. Large estates were established in the 19th century with early prominent settlers including Hazlett McKen and Mrs. Sylvanus Reed, founder of the Monmouth Historical Association.

Middletown Village was established around 1664 in the Kings Highway vicinity. Numerous landmark buildings are here including Old First, Christ and the Reformed churches and several houses including Maripit Hall.

Monmouth Hills is a quiet residential section with parts identified as Locust or Navesink. It includes the 17th century homestead of Richard Hartshorne. His name is remembered and open space is preserved in Hartshorne.
Middletown Township’s history is where you find it and it can be found in a great number of places — Township buildings, organizations, streets and fields. The Pride in Middletown Committee, sponsor of this special issue, and the Historical Society, preparer of this article, hope these comments lead to a greater appreciation of the Township's varied, vital and vigorous history. We also hope you keep in touch with Middletown's heritage through the organizations, museums and published works that cultivate and display it.

A brief bibliography follows:

- Jolliffe, Thelma K., "Acher Coll to Zoning", 1992 - $10.00. This dictionary type collection of historical notes is informative on numerous subjects. Available from the author at 53 Kings Highway, Middletown, 07748 or at the Society's museum.

- Leonard, Thomas H., "From Indian Trail to Electric Rail", 1923 - $31.80. Although written as a history of Atlantic Highlands, much of the book is about the Township's bayshore area and Chapel Hill. Reprints are available from the Atlantic Highlands Historical Society, P. O. Box 108, Atlantic Highlands, 07716.


- Northern Monmouth County Branch of the ANM - "A Triangle of Land" 1978 - $2.98. This history on the site and founding of Brookdale Community College includes material on Lincroft.


Several County and State histories include references to Middletown Township. In addition, several churches and community organizations have published books or booklets with useful historical material.

A visit to any of the sites will be educational and enjoyable. Each seeks and deserves your support.

The new museum at Croydon Hall features temporary exhibits, and is building a permanent collection. It will include a Middletown reference library. It is located on Leonardville Road in Leonardo, address P. O. Box 434, Middletown, NJ 07748.

Marlprit Hall was begun in the late 1600’s as a small Dutch house. It was enlarged in the Georgian style in the mid-1700’s. Today life from both eras is displayed magnificently. Marlprit Hall is located on Kings Highway, although Monmouth County Historical Association is headquartered in Freehold at 70 Court Street, 07728.

The Murray Farm House is an 18th century structure rescued from deterioration in recent years by the Poricy Park Citizens Committee. Colonial craft activities make this a living museum. The adjacent Nature Center gives Poricy Park a dual cultural-educational role. Contact them at Box 36, Middletown, 07748.

The Shool Harbor Marine Museum is located in the Whittlock-Seabrook-Wilson House, one of the bayshore's most historic buildings. It contains period rooms and an extensive collection of marine memorabilia, telling the story of the area's watermen. This folk museum of the bayshore people has long attracted a wide audience and is a leading advocate of area tourism. See it at 119 Port Monmouth Road, Port Monmouth, 07758.

These brief notes can hardly do justice to this vast subject. Our history is really a chain of ongoing events linked to one another and to a vitality affecting all of us. Middletown Township’s history is where you find it and it can be found in a great number of places — Township buildings, organizations, streets and fields. The Pride in Middletown Committee, sponsor of this special issue, and the Historical Society, preparer of this article, hope these comments lead to a greater appreciation of the Township’s varied, vital and vigorous history. We also hope you keep in touch with Middletown’s heritage through the organizations, museums and published works that cultivate and display it.

A brief bibliography follows:

- Jolliffe, Thelma K., "Acher Coll to Zoning", 1992 - $10.00. This dictionary type collection of historical notes is informative on numerous subjects. Available from the author at 53 Kings Highway, Middletown, 07748 or at the Society's museum.

- Leonard, Thomas H., "From Indian Trail to Electric Rail", 1923 - $31.80. Although written as a history of Atlantic Highlands, much of the book is about the Township's bayshore area and Chapel Hill. Reprints are available from the Atlantic Highlands Historical Society, P. O. Box 108, Atlantic Highlands, 07716.


- Northern Monmouth County Branch of the ANM - "A Triangle of Land" 1978 - $2.98. This history on the site and founding of Brookdale Community College includes material on Lincroft.


Several County and State histories include references to Middletown Township. In addition, several churches and community organizations have published books or booklets with useful historical material.
People helping people for the betterment of the group is an old concept. Children learn of the early mutual help efforts of the coveners and pioneers. The same concept has thrived in Middletown through civic associations, using the power of numbers to solve common problems. The earliest local groups were organized in the 1950's to solve home construction problems. The members found that joint action could also influence local government. Collective action, a unified voice and publicity in the press produced results. The civic association concept grew, resulting in twenty-six homeowner groups today. The civic association is a covenant in the deed in some areas. Dues are incorporated in the mortgage and by-laws, the election of officers and meetings at specified times are mandated.

Some associations are active only during times of problems, but others have continued for many years. Social activity and friendships developed. Participants have become knowledgeable about Middletown's master plan, zoning and land use laws and related subjects. Some members have held elected or appointed Township posts.

John Karlin conceived the idea of linking the many associations for inter-group contact. The result was the forming of the Middletown Council of Civic Associations in the 1960's. The Council, known informally as the C.C.A., consists of one representative from each neighborhood group, who choose their officers and directors. The C.C.A. acts when a problem has Township-wide implications, when invited by a local group or the Township. A key example of C.C.A. action might be combating inappropriate construction, for example, a commercial structure is a residential zone, by the use of legal and other hired professional help.

Civic associations offer many reasons for joining. The principal ones are protecting homeowners' rights and preserving the character of our neighborhoods and Township. Their aim is to preserve greenery, maintain small-town values and help make a better Township for all.

* * * * *

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF MIDDLETOWN TOWNSHIP

The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan, national, state, county and local organization dedicated to active, informed participation of citizens in government. Membership is open to any citizen over 18 who subscribes to the purpose and policy of the League.

The Middletown LWV has been actively involved in the Township since 1956. Our current local programs include, voter registration, candidate forums, in-depth study of school districting looking to revision of the 1974 publication "Seventeen Schools and Counting", study of the recently released Bayshore Development Plan and ongoing monitoring of local government bodies. At the county level, we are very active with the water quality and supply issues. At the state and national levels, we are studying items such as Mount Laurel II and the budget deficit. The state and national LWV provide at a nominal price many fine publications that cover a wide range of subjects.

For additional information feel free to call the State LWV at 1-800-792-VOTE, or Jane Pecsvaradi at 671-6194.

* * * * *

SPECIAL MUSEUM HOURS

Four museums will have special open hours on Friday, November 15th, History and Heritage Day in Pride of Middletown Week. Marlpit Hall, 137 Kings Highway, is open from 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM with regular admission in effect. The following museums in Township owned buildings are open from 3:30 - 9:00 PM; Middletown Township Historical Society Museum at Croydon Hall, Leonardville Road, Leonardo; Murray Farm House in Poricy Park, Oak Hill Road and Shoal Harbor Marine Museum (Spy House) Port Monmouth Road, Port Monmouth.

* * * * *
In 1974 MAP (Middletown Advisors on Planning) advocated a Landmarks Commission. The result was Chapter 16A of the Township Ordinances, authored by that citizen's group. Its purpose is "to promote the educational, cultural and general welfare of the Township by the preservation and protection of historic buildings, places and districts... imparting...a distinct aspect of the Township, the State and the Nation."

The Commission consists of seven Township Committee appointees serving without pay. The Commission must include an attorney, an architect and an archivist. No Commissioner is permitted to serve longer than two full terms. A full term is four years.

The Commission's duties are to review and classify buildings, places and structures individually and collectively for merit as to association with historic events, architectural merit, persons of note associated therewith and significance in the development of the Township, County, State or Nation. The "Historic" designation may apply both within and outside Historic Districts, for all or any of the above merits, if of a degree deserving such distinction. When so classified, a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Commission is required for any exterior change. Sixteen buildings and four districts are presently classified "Historic". The buildings still requiring research for consideration of the "Historic" designation, number several hundred.

The Landmarks Commission invites interested residents to help research properties with the potential for "Historic" designation, using its mini-library in a room ordinarily locked at the Middletown Public Library. Access to it is gained through the reference librarian who will sign you "in" and "out". Available here is a collection of accepted historical reference volumes and guides for restorations. And if one of the Commissioners is present you may even peruse their "classification" files.

The present Commissioners are:
Marie Davenport
Robert De Santis
Suzanne Farley
Janet Hurd
Thelma Jelliffe
William Strong
Richard Thompson

A few of the buildings from the Landmarks Commission's "Classified List":

Marlpit Hall, Middletown Village
The "Spy" House, Port Monmouth
Tracy House Tavern, Chapel Hill
The Little Red Schoolhouse, Lincroft
General Store, Locust
Thompson House, Brookdale
Portland Place, Hartshorne Woods