

Newsletter of the Middletown Township Historical Society

VOL. III NO. 1

FEBRUARY, 1987

Middletown Quiz



- Is this place for real? What former New York Giant outfielder lived in the Apple Brook development?
- 22. Would 1860s observers of bay shore shipping have noticed similarities between the "Jesse Hoyt" and the "J. D. Beers"?
- 23. Does the 19th century death of John Walling rank among the bay shore's five most unusual maritime accidents?
- 24. What Locust resident composed the first musical score for a motion picture?
- 25. What well-known Middletownite was an early World War I naval aviator, a member of the "Bald Eagles", a group of the first 200 naval pilot licensees?

Dues... Are Yours Paid?

Will members who have not yet paid 1987 dues please do so soon. If you receive a sample copy of the newsletter and would like to help the Society, please join. Dues are \$5.00 or \$10.00 for individuals or families. Our address is P.O. Box 434, Middletown, New Jersey 07748.

The Railroad at Middletown-

The Society's next exhibit will be on the three railroads (not counting the Navy's) that went through the Township. Please write or call Society President, Randall Gabrielan, 671-2645, if you are willing to lend artifacts or memorabilia.

The Short Unhappy Life of Holton's Twin Brook Zoo

An employee in the Route 35 retail strip between Howard Johnson's and Twin Brooks Avenue was delighted to learn a zoo once occupied the site. She exclaimed that the spirit of the zoo was embodied in the store. The speaker used, of course, more blunt language, characteristic of the young and one frustrated with the present retail climate.

Oliver W. Holton started a farm for raising and selling birds in the early 1920s. His stock included pheasants, ornamental waterfowl and birds unusual to the area. An Australian emu attracted attention in 1924. Its peculiar habits included swallowing half an apple with a single gulp.

THE RENDEZVOUS OF POPULAR INTEREST

Twin Brook Zoological Park

**STATE HIGHWAY
MIDDLETOWN**



P I C N I C G R O V E

P E T S H O P

AMERICAN BLACK BEAR

"Molly" is Enjoying a bottle of Root Beer.

OPEN	ADMISSION
Week Days, 10 A. M. to 8 P. M. Sundays, 1 P. M. to 8 P. M.	Adults - - 25 Cents. Children - - 15 Cents.

The farm was on the south side of Highway 35, then part of the Kings Highway. Its western border was a hill near Twin Brooks Avenue, since leveled for parking space. Woodland Drive was the eastern limit. Holton's property was 214 acres, extending to the south to include what became the Twin Brooks housing development.

Holton expanded his operation to a zoo in 1925. He noted a north Jersey fox farm that adapted to visitors attracted thousands the previous summer. Holton's foreign contacts, built in part from his farm operation, would

enable him to build a private zoo on a greater scale than had ever been attempted. His animals would include lions, tigers, buffalos, monkeys, snakes, bears, the inevitable birds, leopards and wolves. The latter two resulted in escapes; the wolf's ended in tragedy. An entertainment quality was present with some animals. Note the advertisement from 1925 illustrating "Molly", the root beer drinking bear. Two animals are recalled fondly by Society trustees Mrs. Sarah Broander and Ellen Broander. Mrs. Broander worked at the zoo in the summer of 1927. One of her assignments was the admissions gate, where a monkey would take the money from visitors. That monkey, Mrs. Broander's favorite animal, escaped custody and was killed by an automobile.

The elephant is "Judy", advertised as the smallest elephant in captivity. Ellen was a small girl when she took a ride on her, but recalls the incident vividly. We should, too, had we the experience available to mid-1920s Middletown visitors. Mrs. Broander recalls the handler as Richard, an employee from India. Auto touring became a major recreational activity in the 1920s and the zoo was a major local attraction.

The difficulties with out-of-control animals may have been hinted in a harmless way before the zoo opened. Holton had Himalayan thares, brown mountain goats similar in appearance to our farm variety. However, they are more active and, perhaps, aggressive. Louis Jones, a farmer with Holton, stared at the thares through an open window. They stared back. One leaped through the window, knocking down Jones. It rolled him over, but he was not hurt. Were they playful or harmful?



Holton's Zoo attained great notoriety when a leopard escaped on August 5, 1926. The full-grown spotted male from India was a recent arrival by rail from New York. It was still in its shipping cage when it worked loose two bars. The zoo was working on a permanent cage when the unwitnessed break-out occurred. Workers returned for the leopard after completing the new cage and discovered his absence. Their first thought was that he could be in the woods around the zoo. After an unsuccessful search, means to warn the public were taken. One early sighting was reported with unwary innocence. A young girl told her farmer father that she saw a strange, large dog with spots all over him. The news was broadcast by radio and immediately made newspaper headlines. The area numbered many eager to hunt and kill the leopard and those afraid to venture out. Some of the latter were more afraid of the hunters than they were of the leopard.

Holton offered a \$100 reward for the leopard, dead or alive. He exhibited a stuffed one with no charge to visitors as Holton realized few knew what a leopard looked like. There were many reports of leopard sightings; most

were erroneous. Many reported sightings sent packs of hunters to the scene. One, Abram Decker, claimed to have taken a shot at him, perhaps wounding the beast. The reactions of some people were strange, claiming to hear noises leopards do not make or see tracks with claw marks, which do not appear on cat prints.

The leopard went undetected for weeks. The story was reported with alarm by New York newspapers. When no animal was found, some claimed the report was an advertising ploy. One retailer advertised with a whimsical touch. Tetley's, in Red Bank, offered a \$1.00 leopard surprise package giving \$1.25 to \$3.00 worth of toys. A leopard was hiding in one package with the lucky finder to receive an \$8.00 surprise package. Means to attract the leopard in areas of reported sightings included tethered "bait" animals, such as goats, with armed men waiting in hiding. The Department of the Interior sent a quart of oil of catnip. It was thought if the leopard could be induced to eat catnip coated meat, he would become docile, easing the task of shooting him.

The leopard remained at large for over two months. This was not surprising to some, as leopards are known for stealth. There were large wooded areas for cover. Feeding consisted mainly of small game or farm fowl. Despite fears of the populace to the contrary, leopards did their best to avoid people. The leopard was caught in a trap and killed by Willard F. Irons on October 15, 1926. The locale was very surprising - Island Heights in Ocean County. It is about 30 miles from the zoo as the crow flies. It is not known how the leopard traveled, but some thought following a railroad track was a possibility. Eliza Irons, Willard's mother, had been losing ducks for two weeks. Finding some partially eaten led suspicion to an animal, but not the leopard.



Irons called Holton, initially skeptical about the claim of the shooting, who told him to deliver the dead beast to the zoo. He did and collected the \$100. The reaction of the public and press was immediate. Holton sought apologies from newspapers that accused him of a publicity stunt. Paid admissions soared with the exhibit of the dead leopard. Decker was an early looker and spotted a scar to support his earlier claim of possibly wounding it.

The zoo animals spent the winter on exhibit at Atlantic City's Steel Pier. Holton opened in Middletown the following spring. A large shipment of new animals

included two leopards and two lions. Headlines would next be made by a wolf.

A female lobo wolf escaped from its cage on July 22, 1927 and killed Thomas Holton, Oliver's 2½ year old son. The wolf was born in captivity and appeared gentle. It was often mistaken for a dog and stroked by zoo employees. The escape was made while the wolf was being transferred to another place. The Holton home was adjacent to the zoo park. The boy was playing on the lawn with Henry Mazza, the four year old son of Alma Mazza, a Holton domestic employee. Young Mazza was bitten near the ear, but ran away from the wolf to tell his mother what was happening. Armed with a broom, the terrified Mrs. Mazza managed to chase the wolf, which had been tossing around the Holton boy, and carry the boy inside. His bad bite injuries did not seem fatal then. Mrs. Mazza applied first aid and searched for a gun, leaving Tommy on a couch.

The Holton's had a large "police dog", "Trix", presumably a German shepherd. The wolf and dog were acquainted from the latter's trips to the zoo. Some thought the wolf had sought the dog at the Holton home. Trix opened a door, permitting the wolf to enter the house. The wolf grabbed the boy, returned to the lawn, tossing and biting him. Mrs. Mazza found an unloaded gun, clubbed the wolf and returned to the house. Mr. Holton was summoned and shot the wolf. Young Holton was taken to Dr. Frank Goff in Red Bank, who advised he be taken to a hospital where he died.

The Town made an investigation of the zoo. Some residents wanted the zoo closed for public safety reasons. Others claimed it was safe and a town asset. The public debate on the issue continued for weeks, but Oliver Holton decided the issue by closing the zoo. Mrs. Broander recalls he was a broken man after his son's death and wanted no more of the zoo. The zoo's last day was Sunday, October 16, 1927.

The cabin visible in one photo was located slightly west of Howard Johnson's site. It was standing for many years, used in the 1960s by the contractor during the erection of what was then Two Guys store and demolished. Middletown had a major attraction in the decade in which auto touring developed. It is regrettable it ended so soon and in such tragedy.

The Octagon Shapes Housing History - Our Belford Example

by
Marie Davenport

Some landmarks attain that status by age and others by architectural excellence or association with well-known persons or events. Belford's Octagon House achieved landmark recognition through its unusual shape in an unlikely setting. There are probably no more than a half-dozen octagon structures in New Jersey. The Township's sits at the foot of Church Street on the edge of Compton Creek's salt marshes. Its story is actually divided between a former old house and its present reincarnation.

A brief vogue for the octagon shape during the 1850s and 1860s originated with Orson S. Fowler's book "The Octagon House, A Home For All". Although there were precedents, including one by Thomas Jefferson, and seven form books were issued following Fowler, he exerted a strong influence on the movement. Perhaps the bay shore location was not incongruous as Fowler promoted the octagon for increased light and ventilation. Fowler stressed that the octagon encloses more floor space per linear foot of exterior than does the usual square or rectangle. However, Fowler overlooked many practical problems, such as interior room partitions, which were not octagonal, creating many corners, including triangular spaces. In addition, most of their rooms had only an exterior exposure rather than the two in corner rooms of the conventional rectangle.

The Belford octagon is surrounded by legend. It was probably built in the "Fowler decades". It was brick, while most octagons are frame. The documented history starts with its purchase by Joseph S. Walling in 1869.

He owned it for six years and sold it to Frank Morcnewsky. Charles and Amelia Lube bought the building in 1910. The prolific Lubes raised ten children there, passing the house to son Harold on the death of the elder Lubes in 1951. The house succeeded to son Edward who died in 1975.

The decline of the Octagon House followed shortly after Edward's death. A fire destroyed the roof and gutted the interior, but the mutually supportive brick walls remained intact. The house was a local favorite. It had an affectionate nickname, "The Brickie". Efforts to save the building were encouraged, but nothing effective happened. Time, vandalism and the elements took their toll. The Township bought the derelict shell.

Middletown Township sold the property in 1985 to Richard Cramer and Edward Bennett with the proviso that the building be restored if possible or, if not, rebuilt in a manner keeping with the original's historic character. The burnt, weathered remains were beyond restoration. The old structure was demolished. Reconstruction commenced. A new foundation rests and framing stands as this is published. Soon an eight-sided reminder of a brief, curious, fascinating and attractive chapter of American architecture will grace the bay shore.

For further reading see the aforementioned Fowler book, available in an inexpensive Dover reprint. "American Heritage" of Aug.-Sept. 1983 contains a useful article, illustrated by several current views of old octagons. Virginia and Lee McAlester's "A Field Guide to American Houses" has a brief, but informative chapter on octagons, placing them in historical perspective of Victorian and all American domestic architecture.

Early Travel to Sandy Hook

Samuel Latham Mitchell was a scientist of considerable accomplishment during the 1790s until his death in 1831. He wrote the first guide book to New York City, "The Picture of New York; or the Traveller's Guide, Through the Commercial Metropolis of the United States", published in 1807. It includes a side "Trip to Sandy-Hook and the Sea-Bass Banks".

"There are several modes of being conveyed thither, One is, to engage a passage on board the public revenue cutter. Another is, to procure accommodation in one of the pilot-boats. But a third, and more easy course is, for a convenient number of gentlemen to charter a suitable coasting vessel or packet, to carry them a short trip to sea, and bring them back again".

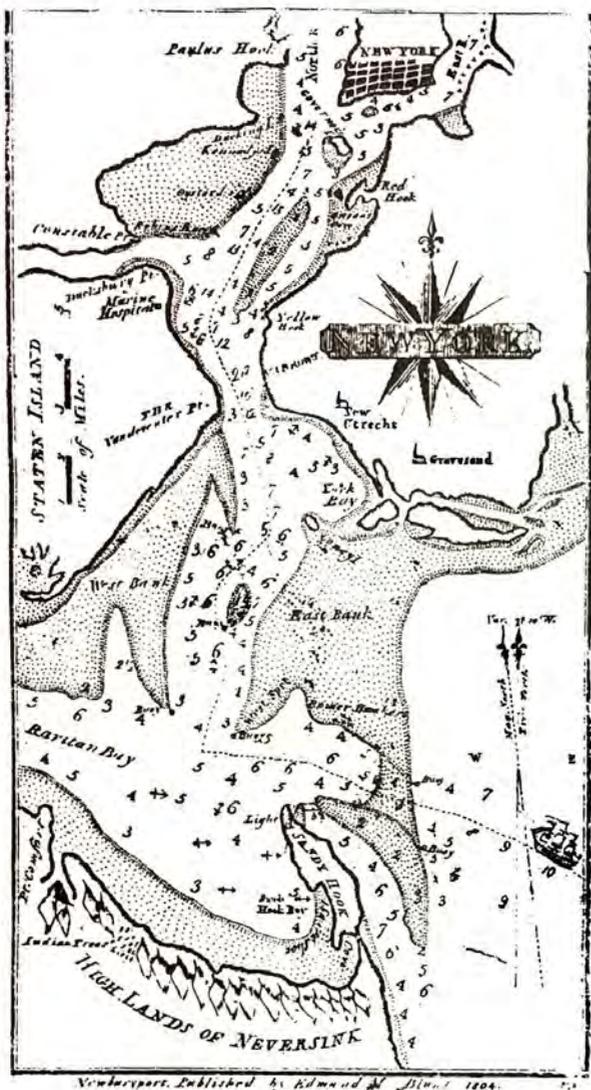
The trip is described in greater detail than we can reproduce. The case for Governors Island as a naval base is outlined. The base would be located up river in Brooklyn. "Two smaller islands appear to the westward of the channel, on the margin of the shoal, reaching to them from the Jersey shore. The northernmost is called Bucking, Ellis's or Oyster-Island. The southernmost is known by the name of Kennedy's, Bedlow's or Gibbet-Island". We call the former Ellis and the latter Liberty Island. This was 70 years before Lady Liberty was an idea. And the islands still appear as if they should be part of New Jersey.

The Staten Island quarantine station is described. A local controversy would arise in the 1860s with the proposal to relocate to the station on Sandy Hook. New Jersey's Governor, Joel Parker, a Monmouthite, protested strongly in 1865. It was not located here.

"As you advance on your voyage, the Neversink hills, the light-house, and the buoys which designate the shoals, present themselves to your view. The former is the highest land on this part of the American coast, and first described by mariners at sea. The second, and its assistant lamps, direct those who wish to enter the harbour. The others direct the pilots in keeping the true channel."

"Sandy-Hook is a narrow beach, running about N. and S. for seven or eight miles, from the foot of the Neversinks. It used to be connected with the continent. But during the winter of 1804, it was detached from its connection, and formed into an island. Small coasting craft can pass through the opening at high-water. On the Hook there is a variety of shrubbery, a plentiful supply of

salt-grass, and some upland picking for cattle and horses. But there is no arable land. The light-house stands about due south from the City-hall of New York...The keeper, Mr. Schenck, entertains travellers with great civility. A commodious house, rising out of the sands, supplies you



New-York: Published by Edmund M. Blount 1804.

with almost every thing you want. Persons fond of shooting, may find that pastime here. Nothing can excel the horse-shoe, a place on the west side of the Hook and within the bay, as a place for hauling the seine. The shores are so clean and sandy, and so free from mud and shells, that you enjoy the full luxury of sea-bathing. From this place, the British troops disembarked for New York, after their disaster and retreat from Monmouth court-house."

A foot-note describes the Haliburton monument and its claimed destruction by vandalous French sailors. The monument and its history are described in depth by Sandy Hook historian, George Moss, in "Nauvoo to the Hook". He

quoted Barber and Howe for a date attribution of the incident as around 1808. Mitchill, presumably writing in 1806, states the vandalism occurred "a few years ago". Thus, this book draws the date closer to the turn of the century for an incident still shrouded in mystery. Mitchill over-states the results of the battle. It was a draw. The British accomplished their objective of moving an army to New York City. Thus, the post-battle trip through Middletown could as well be termed an advance to their transfer point as it can a "retreat".

Samuel Latham is the Mitchill of the Mount Mitchill name. His trip here with a U.S. Military Academy surveying team is described in the Niles Register of August, 1816. The mountain, in the highest point on the northeast mainland (but not the region if one includes Staten Island), was named for him then.

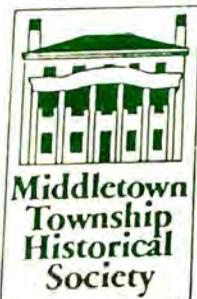
Mitchill served in both houses of Congress, contributed to several scientific periodicals, studied medicine, conducted mineralogical surveys and taught, as professor, the natural sciences. The Britannica described him in 1903 as "a scientist of universal attainments". Fame was fleeting. Mitchill is not listed in the current Britannica. His namesake mountain was misspelled Mitchell for many years. Some maps are still wrong, as the S. L. Mitchill of the name was "re-discovered" only several years ago. Today the name is remembered in Mount Mitchill Memorial Park. Although the park is named for the mountain rather than the man (in place name nomenclature a derivation goes back only one step), it is a fitting tribute to the person who helped measure it over 170 years ago.

Meeting Notice

March 23 (the 4th Monday) and April 27 at the Museum 8:00 p.m.

Quiz Answers

16. (From the Dec. 1986 issue). The well is in front of Marlpit Hall, on Kings Highway, north of Red Hill Road.
20. Yes, it is part of a house on the east side of Chapel Hill Road, north of Commanche Drive. But what is that pediment doing on a round tower? Did the carpenter mix-up pages from his plan book? In any event, unusual and distinctive.
21. Norman "Babe" Young
22. They should have as they were the same ship. The Hoyt route was purchased by William Terry for the Raritan Delaware Bay Railroad. Mr. J. D. Beers of Keyport assisted Mr. Terry in the purchase. An unsuccessful effort was made to change the ship's name.
23. Probably. The usually reliable Capt. Charles B. Parsons recalled his fatal injury coming from a loading accident during which a watermelon slipped through his hands striking him in the stomach.
24. Carl Edouarde, who also was one of the first to experiment in the synchronization of music with film cartoons. He died in 1932.
25. Amory L. Haskell. He held license number 168.



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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.