

Newsletter of the Middletown Township Historical Society

VOL. III NO. 4

AUGUST, 1987

Glimpses from the Past

Your editor recently had the privilege of reviewing microfilm of the *Morrmouth Democrat* for the 1830s and 1840s through the courtesy of the Morrmouth County Historical Association. It is our usual practice not to reprint, but several items from those years are worth a closer look.

Surprisingly, there was little local news in the *Democrat's* early years. County coverage increased in 1849. James S. Yard purchased the paper in 1854 and he kept his promise to increase their coverage of local news. The advertisements were the most interesting local items in the early years.

**SPRING AND SUMMER
ARRANGEMENTS.**

FOR
Keyport & Middletown Point.
Touching at Seguin's Dock, Staten Island



The new and elegant Steamboat
WASHINGTON IRVING,
CAPT. J. T. WEEKS,

COMMENCED her daily trips on Monday
April 14, 1845 leaving Keyport every morning
at 8 o'clock, and New York every afternoon
at 3 o'clock, from the Steamboat Pier at the
foot of Chamber street, (Sunday excepted,)
touching at Seguin's Dock as usual.

For further information, apply on board, or to
T. W. & A. M. MARSH, 153 West Street, N
York.

All Baggage at the risk of the owners.
N. B.—Stages for Freehold in readiness on the ar-
April 17, 1845.

The *Democrat* ran numerous ads for steamers. This one the "Washington Irving" is typical. George Moss' landmark "Steamboats to the Shore" contains lists of vessels traveling to the Bayshore and Shrewsbury Rivers. The lists were not intended to be all-inclusive, but they enumerate nearly all steamers regularly plying these waters. Lists are popular in many fields. Seeing this candidate for inclusion, one wonders how many other ships might be listed. Some unlisted ships may appear readily, if unexpectedly, but one suspects complete records of shipping may

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Middletown's Trains and Trolleys (Continued)

Since one railroad improved travel facilities and increased the value of surrounding land, the public thought competitive roads would further the benefits. Legal, fiscal and tidal constraints were to re-define rail possibilities, however. The Camden and Amboy's injunction prohibiting the Raritan and Delaware Bay Railroad from going west cost the latter revenue. The traffic to Long Branch grew, but not sufficiently to support competing roads, such as the Long Branch and Sea Shore Railroad.

The Raritan and Delaware Bay Railroad was beset by financial problems from its creation. It was near bankruptcy in 1867 when management was turned over to W.S. Sneden. Although he was an effective manager, the weak road was dealt a major blow in November when the Court of Errors and Appeals barred its use of the connecting line west of Atsion. The road was reorganized as the New Jersey Southern Railroad in 1870, the same year the lines point of origin was changed from Port Morrmouth to Sandy Hook. The Long Branch and Sea Shore Railroad was sold to the New Jersey Southern in 1870 and short-term prosperity was attained. Steamer service to the dock at Port Morrmouth had long been unreliable, especially in winter. The dock was washed away in a storm in February, 1875. Its pilings can still be a hazard to navigation.



Belford station, Atlantic Highlands division of CRR of NJ. The sign, virtually no protection by today's standards, was required by law at all grade crossings in an attempt to reduce accidents.

Railroad originated development of Middletown Township was minimal. Land near the railroad increased in value, but their was little construction, particularly when compared to northern New Jersey suburbs. The move of the dock to Sandy Hook assured that growth would follow the coast. Railroad promotional material reflected the

lines' appeal. Northern New Jersey roads promoted their station towns as healthful, affordable, attractive living alternatives to New York City. They projected the costs of building and financing houses on readily available lots, comparing it favorably with city rentals. The shore lines promoted vacation destinations.

The comparison may not be fair in view of the shore's greater distance from the city than the northern suburbs. An additional problem was the need for a distant and unreliable steamer ride to start the journey to the shore. A line avoiding Raritan Bay would remedy this.

The New York and Long Branch Railroad was not conceived as an all-land route. It was chartered on April 8, 1868 to run from South Amboy to any point on the Raritan and Delaware Bay north of Eatontown with the privilege of extending through Long Branch. An 1869 amendment permitted an extension north across the Raritan to Perth Amboy. The all-land road would require the engineering capability of spanning the Raritan with a bridge. One was built, and when completed in 1875 at 472 feet, it was the longest draw bridge in the world. The incorporators included several prominent men of Red Bank. They were intent on remedying their town's diminished rail service resulting from the redirection of the New Jersey Southern to a Sandy Hook origin.



Middletown Station, c1930s

Work on the new road began in 1873. Preparation included filling a cut in the Headdens Corner vicinity and filling marsh in Matawan. The increase in property value was immediate. A big Middletown booster was Azariah Conover. He invested in the road's stock and permitted free passage of the railroad through his property. He also sold lots near the Middletown station, but local real estate development was small. The line was opened in June 1875 by a special train of invited guests. It was a cause for local celebration. The July 1, 1875 *Morrmouth Democrat* reported that "The church bells were rung at Middletown and a boy waved a flag from the Baptist steeple..." Later comments reported fine service, although at high fares. Amenities of modern travel followed. A mail agent was placed on the train and the November 25, 1875 *Morrmouth Inquirer* observed that the New York papers arrive in Matawan by 9:00AM instead of 5:00PM. Middletown must not have been an important stop, however. On February 15, 1877 the *Inquirer* reported "This out-lying town suffers for coal accommodations. It just seems impossible to get a car load to stop at the depot. Long trains go by every day or two, but we can not get one, and have to cart coal from Keyport or Red Bank..."

The relative importance of the stations can be inferred from their size. Large, elegant depots were erected north and south of Middletown at Matawan and Red Bank. The small Middletown station quickly became inadequate. The public met in 1894 to consider an appeal for a new station. One was not obtained, but the old one was kept well as is indicated in this c1930s picture. Much Middletown traffic was produced. A separate freight depot was built, but was demolished following diminished shipments.

The NY and LB initially terminated at Long Branch. It was extended south through the late 1870s and had an immediate effect on growth of the resort towns along the right of way. Middletown's residential growth continued to be slight, a trend that would change with the coming of the electric trolley. ...to be continued...

N.B. An excellent new book "The Unique New York and Long Branch Railroad" by Don Wood, Joel Rosenbaum and Tom Gallo tells the history of the entire line. It is well illustrated and includes several pictures of the Middletown area. It is available at the Museum for \$25.95.

Naming Places

The East Keansburg name issue causes our continued reflection of place naming. Henry Thoreau in his "Walden" took righteous indignation over the name Flints Pond. His gripe was actually over farmer Flint, for whom the pond was named. Flint was a careless, neglectful owner who bespoiled the land, but had his name memorialized by the pond. While irking Thoreau, the matter taught him the first and most important issue in place naming—public acceptance establishes the name.

There is one important exception, naming municipalities, generally done in the act creating them. However, most "places" are topographic features or neighborhood nodes, without formal organization or boundaries. This article focuses on the latter with a view to the municipal ordinance passed August 24 establishing the name North Middletown for the limited scope of municipal correspondence.

By mid-nineteenth century there were many settlements or neighborhoods, commonly known as "villages", but few municipalities. Travel was difficult and life centered around the village which might consist of several houses or farms, perhaps a church and one or more commercial establishments, typically a store, mill or in coastal sections, a dock or landing. A thorough examination of place name nomenclature and practice is too vast for a newsletter. However, describing several types of names in the Township will enable us to review some principles.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the formation of many municipalities in New Jersey. Existing names of neighborhoods were often retained at the time of municipal organization. Examples include Holmdel and Keansburg. Sometimes a new identity is desirable. The former name of Matawan is Middletown Point, so called because the area was Middletown Township's port or shipping point. The Matawan name has an Indian origin with its earliest reference the "Matovancons" on the 1682 Vanderdonk map. When Aberdeen Township changed its name from Matawan Township, it, too, returned to the past for identity. The northern part of early Middletown Township was known as New Aberdeen in the late 17th century, having been settled by Scots. New municipal borders are drawn ignoring traditional neighborhood lines. Holmdel Township bisects the two Middletown Township sections of Holland and Everett. Use of the Holland name, which also stems from the origin of early settlers, appears to be declining. Everett had an interesting change required by the post office. As noted in the June newsletter, the locale was previously known as Morrisville, a name with similar sounding post offices in the state. Thus, a new post office for the area required a name change to avoid confusion. Everett is claimed to be the given name of the then local school teacher. Local news was reported for many years by neighborhood. One can not tell if Everett news involved a Middletownite or a Holmdeler without knowing the individual or his location.

Postal influence established the Leonardo name. The area had long been known as Leonardville. It had a post office since 1862. A second one known as Leonard Avenue was established in 1892, but was discontinued in 1894. It reopened in 1897 as Leonardo, a name retaining the Leonard identity. That name prevailed for the entire community.

Postal service is a issue apart from municipal organ-

ization. The full subject is also beyond the scope of this article, but it is tied to the matter of local identity. Mail distribution patterns were drawn pursuant to Post Office Department criteria that often ignored municipal borders. This is particularly true for large, sprawling townships. Middletown Township is an excellent example, but is not unique in this regard. Many post offices were established when patrons had to pick up their mail. Numerous post offices, often located in the village store, aided this system. Subsequent delivery routes only partially improved matters. A new office was the source of local pride. A name change was no impediment, as noted with Everett above or with Belford in the June issue. The Post Office Department's trend changed to fewer offices. Smaller, cost inefficient offices were closed, including Township offices of Chapel Hill, Locust and Everett. The New Monmouth office became of branch of Middletown. Township mail is delivered by four outside offices, Keansburg, Atlantic Highlands, Rumson and Red Bank. There is some confusion, but hardly an identity crises in the affected areas. Three Monmouth townships have no post office of their names, Aberdeen, Manalapan and Tinton Falls. Monmouth County is not unique, either.

A summary of name sources follows. Places are often named for physical characteristics of the land or for what man builds. High Point is the former name of Chapel Hill. Elevation gave rise to the earlier name; the erection of a church to the later one. The chapel is gone, but the name has stuck. Red Hill is also named for the land. Beacon Hill, the site of Twin Lights, also takes a name from a man-made object. Some descriptive names are not complimentary. It is not surprising a Shoal Harbor became Port Monmouth.

Settlers or other owners of the land often leave their names. The best example, Leonardo, has already been cited. Campbells Junction is another. The land was once farmer Derek Campbell's corn field before the Jersey Central Traction Company acquired it for a trolley transfer point. Sometimes a first name appears as in Riceville for Rice Matzell. It was succeeded by an Indian name, Navesink. The two names co-existed for about twenty years in the nineteenth century. Indian names are numerous in the United States, but their origins are often obscure. Indian languages were oral, not written. People names are often changed or fall into disuse. Chanceville, named for an early tavern keeper, was changed to New Monmouth and Leedsville to Lincroft. Two that have virtually disappeared are Dorsettown and Gillville. The latter is remembered by a street name. Combinations of built objects and the settler or builder exist. An example is Phillips Mill in East Keansburg near the Township's western border. Mills were an important business in early times. Mill names dotted the landscape as milling was a local enterprise. They can be vexing to the researcher as many mills lent their names to the surrounding community, but others merely denoted the business. Large mills captured the milling business in the nineteenth century and most local mills closed. The mill locality names often followed the mills into oblivion.

The "corners" names have a background similar to mills. A property owner, typically a small business such as a store, might lend its name to the surrounding locality. Middletown's best example is Headdens Corner, now Fairview. The demolition of the old Headden store may have hastened the demise of the name, which co-existed with Fairview for some years. Popular usage prevailed for the latter. The corner/s names can mislead researchers as early deeds often cited "corners" in boundaries. It is often not clear if the expression is merely an adjacent property or a publicly recognized community name. Other usage indicating a corner name village settles the issue, but records are often scant.

Places named for people include those chosen to honor contemporary individuals and those not directly connected with the land. Parks and military installations offer frequent examples. Township names include Huber Conservation Area for the family donating the land to the County, Tatum Park for the Tatum family whose Indian Spring Farm became the park, Fort Hancock for Civil War general Winfield Scott Hancock and Earle Naval Weapons Station

for Rear Admiral Ralph Earle, chief of the Bureau of Naval Ordnance in World War I.

A minor category is coined names, those created for a sound or effect. Ideal Beach is one.

What will East Keansburg be called after the turn of the century? Although legislating a neighborhood name is unusual, usage will prevail. Perhaps change has been sparked by the Township Committee's action and the East Keansburg name will be history by the year 2000. Or, perhaps the time honored name has deep roots and popular sentiment will keep East Keansburg as East Keansburg. Time and usage will tell.

Glimpses (Continued)

not be possible to reconstruct. Is there a volunteer?

\$50 Reward.

RANAWAY from the Subscriber, residing in Middletown, in the County of Monmouth, and State of New Jersey, on **SUNDAY** night, the 26th Inst.,

2 COLORED BOYS,

one named **AARON**, 5 feet 10 or 11 inches high, —about 19 years of age—light complexion—has a large scar over the left eye—was dressed in a light brown Circassian Coat, grey mixed Sattinet Pantaloon, and Swansdown Vest.

The other named **ABRAM**, about 17 years of age, 5 feet 3 or 4 inches high—dark complexion—a shrewd intelligent boy—was dressed in grey mixed Sattinet Roundabout and Pantaloon, and Swansdown Vest.

Said boys are brothers, and will probably be found together. \$50 will be paid to any person who will secure them so that the owner may get them again; or \$25 will be paid for securing either of them.

DANIEL D. CONOVER.

Middletown, N. J., April 30, 1840. tf.

Abolition was long a hot political issue in New Jersey. If 1840 seems late for slave holding, note that slavery was not legally abolished until 1846. That year all slaves were made "apprentices". Although they ostensibly had legal rights, exercising them was at times not practicable and true freedom could be elusive.

Middletown farms were prosperous. Thus, it could be expected that profitable fiscal practices were followed, including the vile one of slavery. Is there a moral judgment here? Certainly not, as the Conovers must be viewed in the context of their times.

WANTED,

Twelve or Fifteen Girls or Boys!!

AT DAVENPORT'S COCOONERY, in Middletown, to pick Mulberry leaves and feed Silk Worms. Girls who go out to work by the week will find it their advantage to seek employment at this establishment. Enquire of

G. G. GLEASON

at Davenport's Cocoonery.

June 4, 1840.

3w.

Silk worm raising was a state mania in the late 1830s. It was an early manifestation of industrialism and wide-

spread employment in factories. Growing immigration would not only support, but require such work. If Gleason filled his needs, he must have been one of the largest employers in the Township. The silk craze ended suddenly.

Doing Local History: ORAL HISTORY

ATLANTIC PAVILLION.

THE Subscriber having taken the House formerly kept by Peter W. Schenck, on the Neveink Highlands, near the Light House, will have the same opened for boarders and visitors, by the 10th day of June, inst., and respectfully solicit the attention of the public to its accommodations as a summer resort.
June 7, 1849. EMELINE THOMPSON.

Sheriff Joseph Thompson came to the Township in 1844 as keeper of the Twin Lights. This was prior to the construction of the present, well-known landmark. His Atlantic Pavilion was long the outstanding resort of the northern shore. Here is a reminder of the start of the Thompson regime. Emeline was no-doubt a relative. Thompson enlarged his original purchase over the years, later buying property from the Hartshornes. Thompson's was located well-up the hill. The earliest inn was nearer the water, perhaps opened by N. Woodward. The records are obscure, making even a brief glimpse useful.

Judge Labrecque to Speak

The next two meetings will be fourth Mondays September 28 and October 26 at 8:00PM at the museum. Mark your calander now for the latter date as the Honorable Theodore Labrecque will speak on "Pioneer Railroads of New Jersey". The talk is presented in conjunction with the current exhibit.

Judge Labrecque is a foremost speaker on transportation and brings a century-wide vision to the subject. He lived at the Campbells Junction station in the early years of the century, soon after the coming of the Jersey Central Traction Co. trolley line. His personal and professional interests have long been close to transportation. As chairman of the Monmouth County Transportation Advisory Committee, Judge Labrecque is participating in planning for the 21st century. Affable, knowledgeable, experienced and eager to share his enthusiasm of the subject make the judge a very special speaker. Be there!

Railroad Exhibit Continues

See "Middletown's Trains and Trolleys" at the Museum. It tells the story of rail transport in the Township, largely through pictures, maps and timetables. The "Blue Comet", one of the shore's most popular trains is featured with an antique Lionel model and a painting lent by New Jersey Bell, which was the subject of a "Tel-News" article. Hours are 1-4:00PM Saturdays and Sundays.

It has been said often "We should record the recollections of the old-timers before the memories fade". A fine idea, but "we" could be a small corps of volunteers who have not yet expressed an interest. The Society would like to encourage such work and be a repository of the tapes and transcripts.

Oral history, like most worthwhile projects, is not as simple as it may appear at first glance. A good recording requires an interviewer with training, who has done background work on the subject. Most of the training can be self-taught by reading a good guide. The Society can secure assistance. Perry K. Blatz, Director of the Oral History Program, of the New Jersey Historical Commission, has offered to conduct a program on oral history at a Society meeting. We should have members interested before seeking him.

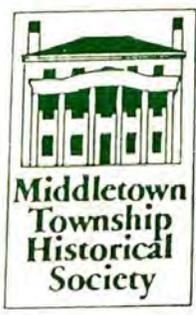
Two fundamentals of good oral history sessions are the preparation work for talking with a subject and creating an environment conducive to an easy-flowing conversation. There are few people who will talk readily and relevantly with only a minor cue. Trained speakers or those often before the public may, but they are the rare exceptions. The interviewer should know his subject's background, which may not appear as difficult as it may seem. If the subject is a farmer, waterman or teacher, etc., ones background knowledge could be about his occupation and place. If this information is not readily available, a conversation before the taping session to review what one will talk about can be very useful.

The equipment should be reliable and out-of-the-way, preferably out of sight. The cost of usable equipment is modest now. Some ordinary household tape recorder-radio have sensitive built-in microphones with a range of six to eight feet, though an external microphone is preferable. Reliable, quality tape often costs no more than \$1.00 per cassette.

Consider the energy level of the subject, particularly the older person. Oral history can be tiring and a session longer than an hour is rarely practicable. A good interviewer tires, too. Multiple sessions are preferable to the tired effort of a talker taping beyond his fatigue point.

A third person is crucial to the process, the transcriptionist. Listening to tapes can be cumbersome. A printed record of the talk is often more useful to the researcher, making the role of the typist vital. Reading his remarks often helps an interviewee correct errors or refresh his memory, perhaps amplifying the spoken material.

Oral history rarely provides the only information on a given subject. However, it can be a useful and insightful supplement of traditional sources. Work as a team can be more productive than an individual venture. The Society would like to form that team. See a museum guide or call Randall Gabrielan 671-2645.



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 include following year.