Glimpses from the Past

Your editor recently had the privilege of reviewing microfilm of the Middletown Democrat for the 1830s and 1840s through the courtesy of the Monmouth 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.

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 Ashtan. The road was reorganized as the New Jersey Southern Railroad in 1870, the same year the lines point of origin was changed from Port Monmouth 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. Steam service to the dock at Port Monmouth 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
The NY and L&B 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 on place naming. Henry Thoreau in his "Wild" took righteous indignation over the name Flints Pond. His gripe was actually over former 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 neighborhoods, 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 early documentation as the "1682 Vanhoutendorp 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 was named 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 Holmdeliter 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 1861. 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 Leonardo 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 branch of Middleton. Township mail is delivered by four outside offices, Keansburg, Atlantic Highlands, Ramson and Red Bank. There is some confusion, but hardly an identity crisis 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 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 farmed by 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 Riceatzell. 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. Some names are often changed or fall into disuse. Chanceville, named for an early tavern keeper, was changed to New Monmouth and Leaselsville 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 Headens Corner, now Fairview. The demolition of the old Headen store has hastened the demise of the name, which co-existed with the 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, Port 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 Middle-town, in the County of Monmouth, and State of New Jersey, on SUNDAY night, the 16th inst.,

2 COLOURED BOYS, one named AARON, 5 feet 10 or 11 inches high, about 10 years of age—light complexion—has a large scar over the left eye—was dressed in a light brown Cassian Coat, grey mixed Satinet Pantaloons, and Swanadown Vest. The other named ABRAHAM, about 17 years of age, 5 feet 3 or 4 inches high—dark complexion—a shrewd intelligent boy—was dressed in grey mixed Satinet Roundabout and Pantaloons, and Swanadown Vest.

Sad 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.

Abolition was 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 vileness 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 Coonery, 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 Coonery.

June 4, 1840.

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.

Sheriff Joseph Thompson came to the Township in 1844 as
keeper of the Pavilion was perhaps by 1840 he had heard
about the successful Pavilion on Long Island. He contacted
his original landlord, Judge Labrecque, who was interested
in the idea. Judge Labrecque thought it was a good idea,
making even a brief glimpse useful.


tell the story of rail transport in the
enthusiasm of the subject make the judge a very special
speaker. Be there!

The two next meetings will be fourth Mondays September
28 and October 26 at 8:00PM at the museum. Mark
your calendar 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 forested speaker on transpor-
tation 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 Jer-
sy Central Traction Co. trolley line. His personal and
professional interests have long been close to transpor-
tation. As chairman of the Monmouth County Transpor-
tation Advisory Committee, Judge Labrecque is partici-
pating 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!

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 fea-
tured 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.

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.

MEMBERSHIP DUES
PER CALENDAR YR.
Individual — $5.00
Family — $10.00
Dues for new members
joining after Oct. 1 include following year.

Middletown Township
Historical Society

Donations of historical materials: Please see a museum guide or write to the Society.

Doing Local History:
ORAL HISTORY

It has been said often "We should record the recol-
lections 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 re-
cord 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 his-
tory at a Society meeting. We should have members in-
terested before seeking him.

The 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
reliantly with only a minor cue. Relied 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, watermen or teacher,
etc., one background knowledge could be about his oc-
cupation 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, particu-
larly 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 pre-
ferrable to the tired effort of a talker tapping beyond his
fatigue point.

A third person is crucial to the process, the tran-
scriptionist. Listening to tapes can be cumbersome. A
printed record of the talk is so 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 insight-
ful 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.