



Newsletter of the Middletown Township Historical Society

Vol V No. 2

April 1989

GAIL HUNTON'S ARCHITECTURE TALK AT SEPTEMBER 25 MEETING

Gail Hunton, a historical architecture and preservation specialist with the Monmouth County Parks System, will present a slide lecture, "From the Victorian Era to the Colonial Revival," at the September 25th meeting. The time and place are 8:00 p.m. at the museum, Leonardville Road and Chamone Avenue, Leonardo. The public and members are invited.

Ms. Hunton is a transplanted midwesterner. She moved in 1981 from Wisconsin where she studied history and preservation planning. Professional credits there included work for the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and the City of Milwaukee. Ms. Hunton is co-author of Built in Milwaukee, a work about historic buildings in that city, published by the University of Wisconsin Press. The trip east was made with some misgivings and the usual misconceptions out-of-staters have about New Jersey. They were dispelled during the first drive around the county when she learned that the rural landscape survives in Monmouth County.

The County's character is rapidly changing, however. Helping preserve it has become an important part of Ms. Hunton's job. Taking stock of Monmouth's built heritage was Mrs. Hunton's first project. The Monmouth County Architectural Survey, which she co-compiled with James McCabe, is a monumental work of vast breadth. It is an illustrated record of architecturally significant structures as they existed in the early 1980s. The survey established a baseline from which to view our built environment. The Township is amply represented, including an entry for the building housing our museum.

The Survey has had measurable benefits. Fifteen municipalities used it directly in their master plans or historic preservation ordinances. Presence there has helped save threatened buildings, with the Forman Farm in Freehold Township a notable, recent example. It has brought to the public's attention important, but unrecognized resources. One example is the farmstead, a house with outbuilding complex. Another will be addressed in Ms. Hunton's talk, the great late Victorian, early twentieth century building boom. It saw the construction of many large, high-design residences whose importance is not as widely appreciated as it should be. Some of the era's work is not well documented. This demonstrates that one need not sift through colonial records to uncover historical knowledge. The period is very important to Middletown Township as the era of large county summer homes was a major step in the transition from rural to bedroom community.

Join us for an informative, entertaining evening. Ms. Hunton's knowledge of the area will give listeners a new appreciation for the houses in our midst.

NEW MEMBERS

Eric and Toni Baller	Keansburg
Hilda Druback	Madison
Glenn Dye	Wildwood
Henry and Nancy Gulick	Holland
Erin and Michael Cermak-Henry	Locust
Richard and Margaret Hughes	Leonardo
Barbara Katel	Navesink
Stanley Lewis Family	Locust
Elizabeth Mahoney	Lincroft
Kenneth and Eunice Vellon	River Plaza

JANE CLAYTON PUBLISHES BLACK BIRTH BOOK OF MONMOUTH COUNTY NEW JERSEY 1804 - 1848

Jane Clayton, Monmouth's County Clerk, published the Black Birth Book of Monmouth County, New Jersey, 1804 - 1848. The book was presented to the public during an event at the Monmouth County Eastern Branch Library on August 1, 1989. Its publication makes widely available a most useful resource for black, agricultural and social history of the nineteenth century.

George Moss, Monmouth County's most distinguished historian and a Society member, is better known for works in the fields of early photography, maritime, and Sandy Hook/Sea Bright coastal history. He discovered the manuscript book Birth of Slaves, 1804-1848 about twelve years ago(1) in the Hall of Records basement while researching deeds. Its existence was "unknown". He and Barbara Kendall copied the records on 3 x 5 cards, realizing early the book's potential value to historians and genealogists. A discussion about two years ago stemming from another Moss project for the County captured Ms. Clayton's interest and publication plans began in earnest. The birth registers of the several New Jersey counties originated with the 1804 New Jersey Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery. It stipulated children born of slaves after July 4 of that year were "free", subject to involuntary service to their owners or their assigns, until age 25 for males or 22 for females. The registers were created as an aid for assuring the eventual freedom of the slaves' children. The original register is completed chronologically by registration date. The first entry was October 21, 1804, for the October 6, 1804 birth of Caroline, owned by Jacob Fleming.

There was no time constraint for recording births. Many listings were made shortly after birth. However, some slave owners registered theirs in groups. Joseph Van Mater of Middletown recorded eight births in 1813, including those from 1811 and 1812. In June of that year his farm saw births of three females on the 26th, 27th and 29th. Peter Schenck took his time. He recorded six births in 1825, the earliest from 1808!

Irregular chronology was only one handicap to usefulness. The first name of the child is an important finding aid. The entire holdings of a slave owner is important for evaluating the economic and social aspects of slavery. Utility of the birth book was increased immeasurably by a computerized database made by Ellen Thorne Morris, the book's compiler and likely the foremost practitioner of black genealogy in Monmouth County. It created additional lists in the published work by parents and children's names, total births by slave owners and occupations of slave owners. Slave identification is primarily by given name. There are two much shorter lists by surnames for the few parents and children for whom family names were recorded.

Most slave owners were farmers, as might be expected. The Dutch settlers were renowned for their productive farms. A glance of the slave holder names reveals a high percentage of Dutch owners. A brief look is no survey and there is certainly no judgement made on the Dutch or any other slave holder making use of the custom of the time. Others included physicians, merchants, millers, shoemakers and boatmen. Each had three slaveholders listed. There were two each for clerks, distillers, innkeepers, and tanners. Single listings were for a carpenter, storekeeper, and even a minister. Some apparently did not list occupations including Philip Freneau, well known in 1819 as a poet, publisher and retired revolutionary-era troublemaker. His entry, illustrated herein, is reproduced from the cover of the book.

Cross checking the birth book with records of individuals one suspects should be recorded in it is fascinating. It casts doubt on the register's completeness or the other accounts of slave births, or both.

*Patel was born April 20th 1820, (May 12th 1814
Christian June 9th 1810 all children (born) of the
Slave of Philip Frenau & sent forward to be recorded
in the Clerk's office of Monmouth County with a
request that I should hand them in for that purpose
Freehold March 1819. - Corlis Lloyd -
Rec'd to be recorded 10th January 1820*

Other records of nineteenth century blacks exist, largely in the local press. Veneration for age was strong in the decades around the turn of the century. The elderly often received lengthy personal sketches and/or obituaries. There was no racial distinction. The accounts of blacks provide insight into black life and create this opportunity to cross-check the Birth Book.

Mrs. Elizabeth Johnson was taken to the county poor farm at Wayside in 1919 requiring verification of her age. She was born on a farm at Vanderburg, as a young woman "worked as a slave for a storekeeper at Middletown," (2) and convinced the overseer of the poor that she was 103 years old. She was also a slave for the Covenhovens and for the Haight family of Colts Neck.

A female named Elizabeth, born May 1, 1825 to Lettice, owned by William Haight was recorded on page 78.(3) She is likely Mrs. Johnson who apparently was "only" 94 when admitted to the farm. Lettice gave birth to boys, June 12, 1812, November 1, 1813, and August 8, 1820 and girls July 6, 1811, and June 19, 1822, all for William Haight. Access to the missing register would have proved Mrs. Johnson's age, but, perhaps, have denied us her interesting account.

Isaac Wales was one of Navesink's most respected black men when he died in 1896.(4) The October 14, 1875 Monmouth Inquirer reported, "Two colored men Michael Stillwell and Isaac Wales, now living in the adjoining village of Riceville, were born as slaves on the place when owned by the Woodwards." Nimrod Woodward had major holdings in the Highlands area in the c. 1800 era. He established a hotel at the juncture of the Navesink River and Sandy Hook Bay around 1812. Nimrod and George Woodward list three slaves' births on page 64, but no Isaac or Michael.

Another unrecorded slave birth is Charles Reeves, the great-grandfather of Society member Amanda Mae Edwards. He was born in the then Holmdel section of Middletown Township around 1820, was owned by David Williamson and freed at age 25.(5) He was a Baptist, attended the church in Red Bank, walking there from Lincroft twice per Sunday in the early years of his marriage. He worked for George Crawford for many years. Mrs. Edwards recalled Mr. Crawford's promise of a gift of property after twenty years of service. Mr. Crawford gave Mr. Reeves land nearby today's tennis courts on Middletown-Lincroft Road. A house on the present Christian Brothers Academy site was moved by rolling on logs to Mr. Reeves' land.(6) Mrs. Edwards also related that her great grandmother was a highly respected person. Hannah Reeves survived Charles for twelve years. The Lincroft general store closed for her funeral. Both are buried in Cedar View Cemetery near Hurleys Lane in Lincroft, one of many old, private burying grounds threatened by contemporary encroachment.

Speculation on the age of "Uncle Jerry" Harmon at his 1902 death reflects the uncertainties of poorly recorded births. He claimed he was 82, but also claimed to be a childhood playmate of Charles Reeves, who would have been 104. The Register suggested an age in between. He was born and raised on the Jonathan Stout farm in Middletown. He is not recorded and his obituary does not mention if he was born free. He also worked for Captain Daniel Hendrickson and James H. Patterson, leaving the latter for Navesink when Paterson was elected sheriff in 1868. He performed odd jobs and died with a reputation for industriousness and honesty. He is buried in Navesink's black cemetery.(7)

John Robinson, a contemporary of the foregoing, has no known slave origin, but merits mention. He was a trapper, living near Pine Brook, an early black settlement near Tinton Falls. His take included the variety of 'varmint's' that inhabited local field and swamp. He sold pelts. Raccoon and opossum skins brought about \$1.00 and \$.25 around the turn of the century. They were eaten, too, and sold for the tables of even the well-to-do. His special 'possum preparation method was a three day affair.(8)

The Black Birth Book of Monmouth County is a major source reference. The field needed same and this one should support varied research projects. The County and local historians are indebted to publisher Jane Clayton, compiler Ellen Morris, editor George Moss and Barbara Kendall. The material was placed on cards during a period of about fifteen working days of intensive activity. The Freneau illustration suggests the magnitude of the copying job. The books are distributed through written request to Mrs. Clayton's office, Hall of Records, Freehold, NJ 07727. There is no charge, but remaining supply, if any, is not known.

Those wishing copies of the aforementioned articles in Harmon, Johnson, Reeves and Robinson may request same from the MTHS editor by sending a stamped business size envelope to PO Box 434, Middletown, NJ 07748.

1. Conversation with George Moss August 1989
2. Red Bank Register, December 17, 1919
3. Black Birth Book, pages 12, 25, 37, 53
4. Red Bank Register, June 24, 1896
5. Red Bank Register, September 5, 1900
6. Conversation with Amanda Mae Edwards, August 19, 1989
7. Red Bank Register, April 23, 1902
8. Red Bank Register, November 13, 1901

THE PALLISER PLAN

Palliser, Palliser and Company was a major architectural plan book publisher. They popularized the medium at a time of great expansion of the country's housing stock, the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Their business methods changed substantially over that period, an apparent effect of competition with rival Robert W. Shoppell. At their end, the Palliser designs were given away in local newspapers. They included the Red Bank Register, leading one to wonder about their penetration of the local market.

George and Charles Palliser were English immigrants. George started the architectural practice in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1877. Eleven years later they were located at 24 East 42nd St, New York, NY.(1) His first book, Palliser's Model Homes for the People, was published in 1876. He aimed to broaden the market, reducing the cost when architecture books were priced at \$10 - \$15 each and selling small editions of 700 - 1000. Palliser's book sold well, but its success was compromised by the poor quality of some of the woodcut illustrations. A second, improved edition was issued in 1878. A new volume, Palliser's Model Homes also appeared that year.

Their early business methods appear similar to Shoppell's - secure individual commissions from plan book exposure. Pallisers' self-advertising in their books described a diverse practice including buildings of every description for erection in any part of the world. They also gave special attention to the remodelling of existing structures and the design of furniture, interior decorations and monuments. They corresponded with a widely scattered client base, claiming clients in every state, Canada, and Brazil.(2) Their early work exhibited typical styles of the era, with the emphasis on stick and to a lesser extent Queen Anne.

The Pallisers published New Cottage Homes in 1891. It reflected changing styles and attacked their competition. The late 19th century saw the colonial revival predominate over several Victorian era styles, a change that would have occurred without the violence of the Palliser attack. They described their designs as belonging to the emerging National style. They denigrated the classical tubs, the Italian villas and Mansard roofed boxes of all styles and grades, claiming it folly for those amidst 19th century inventive genius to transplant foreign styles, perfected centuries ago. They hoped to relieve the countryside of "vulgar, meaningless, square box-like or baroque style of architecture, sometimes pretentious and therefore jig-sawed and gingerbreaded to the death with white lead for exterior painting and the regulation green blinds." (3) Their scale of detail drawings was large enough to enable any good mechanic to execute them without the least difficulty, or 3/8" to the foot. The plans and elevations were 1/16" to the foot. They proclaimed they were "not in the ready made plan business, and in all our experience, serving as we have upwards of two thousand clients all over the United States by correspondence, we have not found two persons wanting to build just the same house." (4)

The Pallisers claimed competitors were incompetent imitators asserting "their methods are of the worst order of quackery, making deliberate calculations to mislead the public by issuing pictures, sketches of the imagination, never built, and with impossible costs of construction, given to catch the ignorant, only to prove disappointing to them when tried. Rumor has it that one of the quacks has been scheming to close up all the Architects' offices in the country, so as to have a monopoly of the plan business himself, though he is not an Architect, but claims to know more than them all." (5)

The Pallisers followed popular taste. Early work such a figure 1 from the 1876 Palliser's Model Homes for the People is the very Italian Villa and Mansard roofed box they came to condemn. The newspaper series provides a look at late Palliser and its possible local influence merits a closer look.

The Red Bank Register architecture series began October 7, 1896. First entry was copyrighted 1896 by George Palliser, 32 Park Place, New York. It ran for 139 columns, ending September 13, 1900. They appeared at irregular intervals, sometimes weekly. At other times, there were lapses of months between columns. Many were labeled by Palliser; others were in his style with

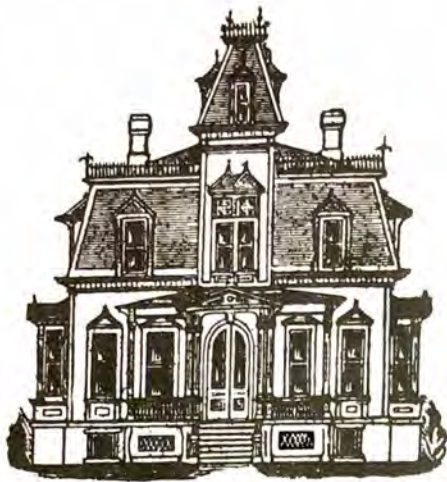


Figure 1

no attribution. The last copyrighted Palliser appeared September 13, 1899, the 106th in the series. A few later ones were also in his style. The November 22, 1899 design was marked "From American Home". The next week's was unsigned, but it was a style similar to later ones copyrighted by George Hitchings, 1000 Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn. No connection with Palliser is known. The columns likely attributable to Palliser total 115. They include 11 farm buildings, 6 public buildings, including churches and schools, 4 stores, 4 double houses, 1 four family dwelling, and 89 private residences.

The colonial revival was well-established by the late eighteen-nineties. The Palliser designs of the time followed the movement. The first (figure 2) was a typical Palliser "colonial". It retained, however, the characteristic tower of the then fading Queen Anne style. Several Pallisers were gambrel-roofed Dutch colonial revivals per the November 25, 1896 figure 3. Many were simple,



Figure 2



Figure 3

inexpensive designs such as the August 18, 1897 figure 4. Palliser houses were designed in a wide range of sizes and a variety of decoration, with the February 2, 1898 figure 5 example typical of a costlier but not lavish colonial design. Some seemed to be one-of-a-kind examples, such as the October 27, 1899 elaborate Jacobean style house that "was built a few years ago on a beautiful site overlooking the Hudson River..."

The Pallisers encouraged home ownership by comparing the cost of building versus renting. The April 28, 1897 column showed the tenant with a \$10 monthly rent how the same sum could finance a 2 1/2 story 27 feet by 36 feet house. This comparison technique was similar to the railroads who sought to make suburban commuters of city tenants.

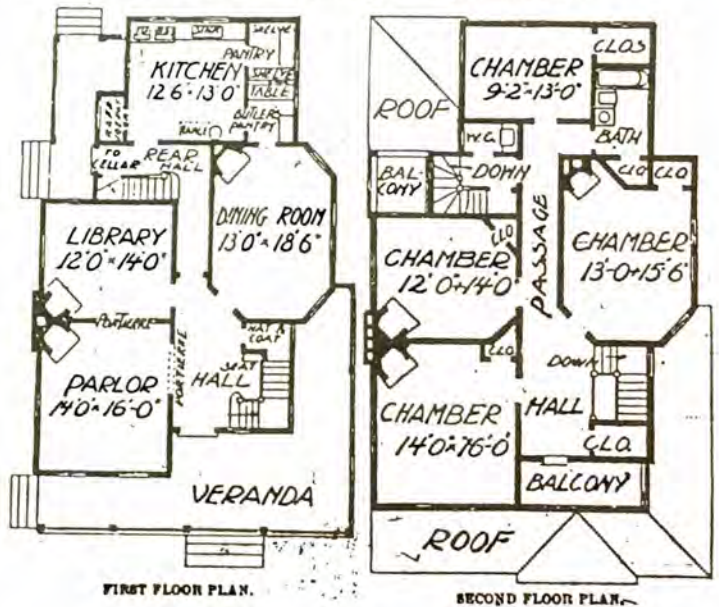


Figure 4



Figure 5

The number of local Palliser houses is not known and has likely not been studied. It stands to reason that the column would not be run for four years unless it had reader-appeal. It is not clear if the columns were paid advertising or printed as space fillers. They appeared on pages containing local news, rather than on pages of non-news feature material made up by a central source for widespread use in weeklies. The Society is encouraging an informal survey of the newspaper designs by making available copies of the house drawings. They are organized by the basic shape of the house and/or roof. Each is marked with the date of newspaper publication. If one spots a likely Palliser house, consult the Red Bank Register microfilm of that date or write the editor. We maintain a set of the columns in date order. Areas built at the turn of the century are likely places to find Palliser newspaper houses. They are numerous in the Township and along coastal Monmouth. If you would like a set of the newspaper drawings, write the editor at 71 Fish Hawk Drive, Middletown, NJ 07748. Send \$1.00 to cover mailing costs. Noteworthy findings will be published here.



The Newspaper plans were small and were not a complete guide to a builder. However, they provided a good insight to the skilled draftsman. These plans, smaller here than newspaper size, are for the figure 5 house.

1. Palliser, Palliser & Co., American Architecture, New York, 1888, page 93.
2. Ibid.
3. Palliser, Palliser & Co., Pallisers New Cottage Homes and Details Containing Nearly 250 Designs, 1891.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

THE COLOR DOCTOR

The white exterior of the Navesink Methodist Church seems almost obligatory (blue doors optional) for a nineteenth century or earlier frame church. What was the color scheme at the turn of the century? A brief news item and a conversation with paint expert John Freeman were very revealing. The Register of September 19, 1902 reported:

"The Methodist church at Navesink is to be painted. The body is to be painted a straw color and the trim is to be painted olive green. The window sash will be painted maroon. The painters of the village will give their services free."

John Freeman came to our attention as the head of the American Life Foundation, reprinter of various Palliser, Palliser and Company architectural plan books. His other calling as a color expert offered insight to the painting practice of the Victorian era and can also be helpful to interested readers.

John advises the church chose an attractive color arrangement while following good, standard economic paint choice of the time. The straw was made from yellow ochre, a common earth pigment. The olive came from adding lampblack to white lead, another home made color. John thinks the maroon was probably Indian red, another earth pigment, adding that red sashes were very popular at the time. Their frequent copying in the Victorian revival make them virtually boring today.

John Freeman's paint and color consulting advice can be obtained in three ways. He can be brought to the site at \$500 per day plus expenses. Organizations can arrange to sponsor a visit by several members sharing the cost and dividing his services. One can mail pictures to John for analysis and a report for \$300, or take the pictures to him at Norristown PA for the same \$300. Write John Freeman at 1601 Sheridan Lane, Norristown, PA, 19403.

The Palliser's offered many hints on decorating, materials and design. John Freeman points out they often recommended white as a sash color for contrast and to help show off the sash against the house color. He adds that the Victorians had six basic pigments. All were cheap, accessible and stable. The yellow ochre and Lampblack were mentioned previously. The others were raw umber or ferrous oxide, burnt umber (heated, the iron was redder), sienna, and burnt sienna.

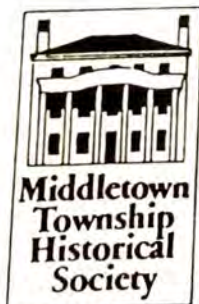


NEW EXHIBITION OPENS

The exhibition "Middletown Domestic Architecture" has opened. Regular museum hours are Saturday and Sunday from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. The exhibition portrays changing styles of house architecture through Middletown Township examples, primarily through pictures and sketches.

One outstanding object is a scale model house by Ellen Broander. It embodies several Victorian era styles and is a masterpiece of craftsmanship.

N.B. The Middletown Domestic Architecture Article will continue in the next issue.



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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.



MIDDLETOWN THEN & NOW

Leslie Gray's Hassock Shop is a readily recognizable Highway 35 landmark. It and the 98 years young Mr. Gray have been there about fifty years. The building's past as a gas station with luncheonette is well-disguised and little remembered. The "then" picture probably dates from the late 1920s. It was identified as just east of the Atlantic Highlands Road, as Cherry Tree Farm Road was once known. It and Leonardville Road were the major route to that town before the construction of Highway 36.

Signage is important to roadside businesses. At whom was the "Lunch" message directed? One wonders if they had an aviation clientele. The size of the "sanitary" sign makes one wonder if it really was. Early highway eateries were "rough and ready" places, leading to the tea room movement for the family trade. This place had an image, if not a reputation to soften.

Leslie Gray came to Middletown after a fire destroyed his Hazlet establishment. His first location was on the south side of the highway, a few hundred yards to the east. It was a former vegetable stand. It rented for all of \$10 per month, but was hot. His present place appeared cooler in part since the windmills of its lawn ornament business always seemed to catch a breeze. When that business moved out, Mr. Gray was delighted to move in, although rent was up to all of \$25 per month. He later bought the property.

The hassock is no longer the popular accessory it once was. The business changed greatly over the years. Mr. Gray is pleased with it and for retaining the loyalty of customers who return old hassocks for repair.



MEMBERSHIP DUES PER CALENDAR YR.

Individual — \$5.00
Family — \$10.00

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