



Newsletter of the Middletown Township Historical Society

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MIDDLETOWN'S DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE

Continued from February 1989 issue

General impressions of Victorian era housing embrace large, richly decorated structures with irregular shapes. The long reign of Great Britain's Queen Victoria, 1837 - 1901, spanned several architectural periods. The Italian Villa, popular c. 1865-1885, belongs to the romantic era, though it is embraced by popular impressions of the Victorian era.

Second Empire, popular during the 1860s and 1870s, is an early example of a style developed in and popular during the years that things Victorian were shaping public taste. (Both were described in this article's February 1989 installment.) The style of the era perhaps best characteristic of the time, especially in popular imagery, is the Queen Anne. Others include the shingle and stick styles. Houses of each were built in the early years of the century, as architectural periods generally overlap. However, they were on the wane in the United States by 1900, replaced by an emerging interest in our national origin. Use of the period's architectural terminology would be more accurate if it were better perceived that "Victorian" is a period, not a style.

Queen Anne houses are often large and richly decorated. Richard Norman Pshaw led a group of English architects that popularized the style. Its peak era was the 1880s and 1890s, the time when Middletown Township was becoming popular as a site of summer homes for wealthy urban businessmen. Several fine examples were built in the eastern bayshore and Navesink River regions. Principal features of the Queen Anne style are steep, irregular roofs and wall surfaces using elements such as towers, bay windows, wall insets and projections. Two outstanding examples are illustrated. Figure 10 is 458 Navesink River Road. It was designed by one of the area's leading architects of the time, Robert D. Chandler of Fair Haven, for Newark brewer J. Christopher G. Hupfel. It was designed for luxury and finished in 1894.

The *Red Bank Register* of December 7, 1892 described plans. Such detail is infrequently encountered and merits repeating.

"Mr. Hupfel's house will be 41 x 55 feet. It will present a nearly square appearance. A hall, finished in oak and ten feet wide, will run through the center of the building. On one side of the hall will be the parlor, music room, and library. There will be an archway between the parlor and music room, and sliding doors between the music room and library, so that the three rooms can be thrown into one. All of these rooms will be finished in cherry. In the middle of the house, on the opposite side of the hall, will be an open staircase constructed of quartered oak. The dining room will also be finished in quartered oak. Five bedrooms, a bath room and a trunk room occupy the second floor, and there will be three additional bedrooms on the third floor. The outside of the house will be enclosed with clapboards on the first story, and the second story and roof will be of white Virginia cedar shingles, treated with lime water before being laid. The hall will be illumined by a big stained glass window. There are three balconies on the second floor, and on the first floor a piazza is on three sides of the house. Basins with hot and cold water will be in every sleeping room. Stereo relief ornaments will be over the door and on the tower. The house will be supplied with water from an eighty foot windmill and water tower on the barn"

Figure 11 commands a magnificent view from the top of the hill of serpentine Drive. It adjoins the Hillside neighborhood. This house was built in 1894 on property including the site of the Quinn African Methodist church and cemetery. The owner was E. Tillotson of Chicago, who gave his name to the hill. He did not live long enough to enjoy the house, dying suddenly at Philadelphia January 9, 1895. Details of design are lacking, including the identity of the Chicago architect. Its size may be contemplated from the foundation's masonry.

It took nearly 100,000 bricks. Widow Mary Tillotson stayed on, expanding her land. The property includes several other buildings, including an attractive shingle style carriage shed with a tower.

The Society's home, the Melvin Rice house at Croydon Hall, symbolizes the change from Victorian era style to the colonial and classical. It was built as a Queen Anne in 1896 by Donald MacLeod. Melvin Rice's c. 1911 classical alteration left the original house unrecognizable. See the October 1988 Newsletter for its history and illustrations.



Figure 10. 458 Navesink River Road



Figure 11. Serpentine Drive, Hillside

★★★★

MIDDLETOWN QUIZ

52. Where may the Landmarks Commission find Biblical inspiration?
53. Who was "Black Bill" Conover and how did he get the nickname?
54. What transportation distinction had William Maxson at his 1897 death?
55. How did Captain Jacob Decker help make shell fishing history?
56. How did Harry Hopping become a casualty of the Spanish-American War?

NEHEMIAH BROWER

LOCUST BUILDER



Figure 1. Nehemiah Brower built many Locust houses. Physically active into old age, he often walked to Atlantic Highlands on business. One could say he really got around.

Nehemiah Brower (Figure 1) built houses in Locust and the surrounding area. He had a long productive career during the latter half of the nineteenth century through the early years of the twentieth. His sixty years' activities were recorded in three account books lent to the Society by Cynthia Wessel, a great-granddaughter, who still resides in the area. The records provide insight into the times, including the value of a day's work and goods in barter.

The books follow no formal bookkeeping system. They record costs of time for Mr. Brower and helpers and some materials. Charges were crossed off when paid. The numbering of Volumes I, II and III reflects their chronological order.

Nehemiah Brower's line in America was traced to Adam Brower Berchoven. His birth year is unknown, but in 1641 he sailed to Brazil as a soldier in the West India Company, arriving in (New) York in 1642.¹ Adam appeared to be prosperous and was surely prolific, as wife Magdalenna gave birth to fifteen children. One son, Jacobus, married the granddaughter of Annette Jans, whose farm later became the site of New York's Trinity Church. Later litigation over the land makes up ancient lore of the Brower clan.² The Browsers became well-established in Brooklyn.

Adam's great-great grandson, John A. Brower, Nehemiah's father, emigrated to New Jersey at an unknown date. He married Elizabeth Burdge, whose family owned an extensive tract including the Locust Point end of Navesink River Road. He was born there in 1829, the last of six children, in a stone house that burned around the turn of the century. Nehemiah married Amelia Sewing in 1855. He died in 1915, a few weeks short of their sixtieth wedding anniversary. Nehemiah reflected at the time of their golden anniversary that if all the houses he built could be put together, they would make quite a city.³

Volume I begins June 8, 1852 as Nehemiah began work for Joseph Leonard at Joseph Thompson's for fifty cents per day. The site was likely Thompson's Pavilion at the juncture of the Navesink River and Sandy Hook Bay. It was the first of the great resort hotels of the area and opened that year. His daily rate increased to \$1.00 a year later and \$1.50 in 1854.

The accounts listed total days without specifying the nature of the work. One is tempted to infer that an engagement of several weeks meant the erection of a house. However, the evidence is not conclusive. Although Mr. Brower's later accounts included reference to materials and construction contracts, Nehemiah worked by the day in his early career. The name of employer does not give evidence of a job site either. Ownership of ones home was not prevalent in the nineteenth century. Thus, even suspected house erection projects for his regular employers could have been at unspecified sites of their multiple house holdings.

Most of Nehemiah Brower's work was at Locust or the surrounding area for names familiar to the region. Perhaps construction dates for now landmark property can be gleaned from his account entries, as not everyone was a multiple homeowner. In 1854, there were jobs for Mintron, presumably Minturn and Bromel Andrews. Lengthy jobs in 1854 were for Joseph Thompson again, and William Burdge, with shorter ones for Ritcherd Bound (sic), Ritcherd Lufburrow (sic) and Captain William Johnson. Brower built houses for H. P. Wild and Robert Paterson (sic) in 1855, making his first reference to materials, having paid (or been paid) \$3.25 "for fetching the lumber down from the Bank". Work from beginning to end on the Paterson house is evidenced by entries from "on loading boat", to "painting on house".

The next two years saw increases in his daily rate. The big job of 1856 was for Mr. Housewort or Hoaldsworth at \$1.625 and 1857's were for Mr. Beyard and John Mount, both at \$1.75. Remuneration did not rise constantly, nor did

Brower always have his own work. Much of 1859 was spent working for Joseph Leonard at Mr. Mount's for \$1.62 daily.

A rising house was its own record of progress. Lesser work may have required detailed explanation for a perhaps absent owner. March through May 1860 was spent primarily on the grounds of Mr. Platt, erecting lattices, gates, fences, and arbors. One typical day was April 3, "fixing pump and building privy".

The name Frazer is forgotten locally. Brower worked for him much of October 15, 1862 through June 1863, presumably building a house. One wonders if it still stands. Equally obscure are Phelen Colender and Jerome Welch. Their houses occupied the rest of 1863 and part of 1864. Likewise, did Mr. Cook's in 1865.

As it does today, weather then curtailed or postponed construction. Nehemiah Brower undertook other jobs in February 1866, filling Mr. Wild's ice house on the 5th and 6th and cutting wood for Benjamin Burdge. Stacking 4 cords of wood, cutting 160 rails and making a gate seem a productive seven days' work. Remember, there were no chain saws then.

Better known names appear too, including a summer of 1866 job for Samuel Duryea and others for Michael Despreaux and Captain Irving in 1872. It was not clear what help Mr. Brower had, but in 1871 he recorded work performed for him by Joseph Johnson and John Van Hice.

The back of the book includes informal listings of cash receipts, notations of an oyster trading business (perhaps Mr. Brower accepted them as payment in kind) and payment in food. Some sample 1860 values follow: 25 lbs cabbage, \$1.00; 550 sweet potatoes, \$1.36; four shad, \$.75; 1/2 bushel turnips, \$.12; 200 lbs flour, \$.75; each bushel of corn, \$.62; and pork at \$.10 the pound or \$.06 if one took the entire hog. Perhaps trade was another business. Some oyster transactions were labeled "partnerships", while others were marked "own". Family lore tells of his sailing his sloop to New York on trade.⁴ But there are no details other than these brief entries.

Volume II was begun in 1873. Records are not as detailed as the historian would hope, but useful facts appear regularly. 1875 marked the start of a long work association with Caroline G. Reed. Her home "Reedmont" remains a Locust showpiece. Her land on the Clay Pit Creek shore included a compound for family members. She operated a private girls school in New York City. Locust was her summer home. Mrs. Reed was interested in local history. She was a founder of the Monmouth County Historical Association, with their organizational meeting having taken place at her home in 1898.

Brower started lengthy work for Henry Wright on September 14, 1875. It was at the site of the east side of the access road to the Oceanic Bridge. The record is obscure as to whether it was erection or reconstruction. Brower also built there in 1891 for Mrs. Reed's daughter, Mrs. Barclay Parsons. Details are obscure. It "opened" Volume III.

October 14, 1876 marked the beginning of a job for Joseph Luffburrow, apparently the construction of a house. Work now appeared to be on a contract basis, inferred from the listing of extras. They included a kitchen roof for \$20.00, a 10 x 12 piazza for \$15.00, a mantle on partition, \$3.00, a sink closet for \$1.50 and a \$.75 closet in the cellar way. He also hired an employee, Joseph Johnson.

Brower also did repair work. His July 2, 1877 entry for Mrs. Yallale is particularly interesting, "fixing table & refrigerator, \$.25."

Brower repaired boats, built a "house" on a boat, sharpened saws, built clothes racks, stairs to the river (the embankment west of the Oceanic Bridge is very steep), fences, fireplaces and extra bedrooms in attics.

Most of Locust's old housing stock survives. A notable exception is the

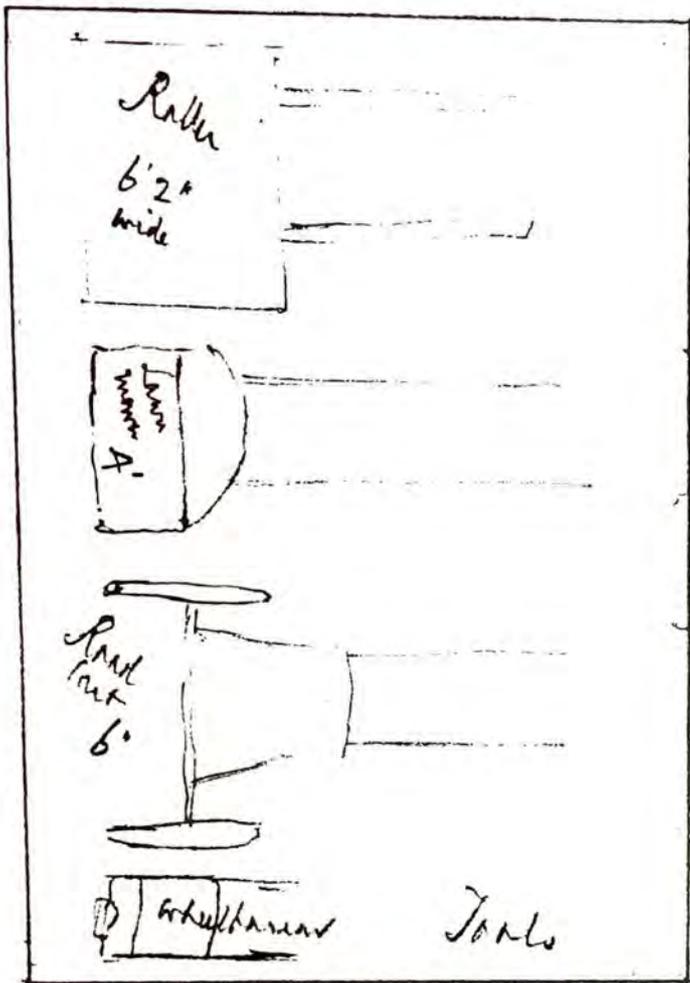


Figure 5. Drawing, unidentified stable

Another instance of a now old house on an even older site is the former Yallalee place on Claypit Creek. Eliza Yallalee sold the Navesink River Road house to Henry Amey in 1883. It is marked, but obscured, on the 1877 map. The *Red Bank Register* of July 12, 1893 reported:

"Wm. P. Yallalee is tearing down his house at Locust Point and will build a new house on the site of the old one. Mr. Yallalee is a member of the wholesale dry goods firm of Wheelwright, Eldridge & Co. of New York. The work of tearing down the old house is being done by Nehemiah Brower."

Brower's notes are revealing. Demolition took 29 1/2 days. Carpentry work on the new house took 285 days of ten hours labor. The rate charged the owner was the same \$3.00 per day for tearing down or building up. Digging cesspools and trenches was less, \$1.50 per day.¹⁰

Conjecturing changes in altered old houses can be fraught with peril. The aforementioned Parsons house is an example. It was enlarged in 1905, fourteen years after erection. The October 4, 1905 *Register* reported,

"The house will be cut in two, the two sections will be moved apart and three living rooms will be built in the center, besides three bathrooms. The improvements will cost about \$4,000. Nehemiah Brower has the contract." The work is noted in

Volume III, but a loose insert is more revealing. Brower summarized costs. Suppliers and subcontractors are itemized, totalling \$2,771.35. Brower's work was \$1,712.52 for a total cost of \$4,483.87. Brower stayed ahead of costs. Parsons owed Brower \$768.87 at completion, while Brower owed suppliers \$805.03.

Brower built many barns and outbuildings. Another insert gives us what maybe the only example of a work drawing. Figure 5 shows that dimensions were taken by noting space required for storing certain equipment. The structure is referred to on the original drawing as "stable". The notation questions proximity to the fence line, a barely useful identification hint.

Nehemiah Brower's last major construction was a job for Mr. Kuper, presumably a house, in 1909. He was 80 years old. He employed five men at times, likely reflecting diminished personal activity. However, Nehemiah kept active until the year before his death. The last pages of Volume III reflect smaller jobs for familiar employers. The final entry was undated in 1914, one day's work on Amey's fence.

Nehemiah Brower's career spanned the emergence of his region as a summer resort to its later dominance as country seats for the urban wealthy. His books provide revealing detail on building of the times, especially when used in conjunction with other sources. The elusiveness of learning exactly what he built and where is a reminder that much of the history of Locust Point and Navesink River Road is yet to be written.

(R.G.)

1. *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, Vol. IX, No. 3, July 1878.
2. Brower, Roger. Appendix to an unpublished genealogy of Nehemiah Brower's line.
3. *Red Bank Register*, October 4, 1905.
4. Conversation with Cynthia Wessel, August 12, 1989.
5. Brower, Nehemiah, Volume II.
6. Leonard, William J. Seabright, Rumson Road, Monmouth Beach, Atlantic Highlands, Oceanic, Leonardville Road, Navesink, Water Witch Club; Concerning Summer Homes Along the Shores of Monmouth County, New Jersey. *Sentinel*, Sea Bright, NJ. 1903.
7. Brower, Nehemiah, Volume III, page 25, the only paginated volume.
8. *Red Bank Register*, October 3, 1900.
9. *Red Bank Register*, February 13, 1901.
10. Brower, Volume III, page 69.

QUIZ ANSWERS

52. Proverbs 23:10. "Remove not the old landmark..."
53. William W. Conover, born in the Brookdale area of Lincroft in 1824 was an abolitionist. "Black Bill" helped distinguish him from other William Conovers at this time. The name stuck and became an honorific. (*Red Bank Register*, December 23, 1896.)
54. At age 92, "He had never traveled on the (railroad) cars or a steamboat in his life", per the *Red Bank Register* of October 20, 1897. When will similar comments be made about those never having driven an automobile and taken an airplane flight?
55. "He and the late Captain Peter Metzgar were the first oyster planters at Keyport, having formed a partnership in that business in 1839", per the *Red Bank Register*, December 29, 1897. Keyport was then part of Middletown Township
56. He died from typhoid fever contracted at the Tampa, Florida Army camp, per the *Red Bank Register*, September 21, 1898. Deaths from disease and accidents exceeded American battle deaths in that war and all wars up to World War II.

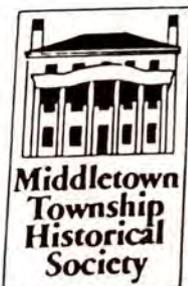
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Museum: In the main building at Croydon Hall on Leonardville Rd. between Chamone and Bellevue Aves. in the township's Leonardo section. Open Saturdays & Sundays.

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.



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QUALITY	READERS INTEREST	ITEM
		A- Long historical articles
		B -Short Historical articles
		C- Middletown Quiz
		D- Society news items
		E- Pictures
		F-Doing Local History

What material would you like to see in the newsletter, e.g. articles on neighborhoods, famous people, events, houses or buildings, recent history, interviews with noted people, etc.

THANK YOU for your participation.

Randall Gabrielan, President and Editor