



Newsletter of the Middletown Township Historical Society

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NUT SWAMP A NAME ETCHED IN HISTORY

Continued

1950s. The Brasch Farm housing development sign on Middletown-Lincroft Road is a reminder that most of Nut Swamp has been transformed from rural farm to suburban home. A major exception exists, however.

Heavily paved Nut Swamp will have a generous expanse of open space thanks to Monmouth County Park System's purchase of the farm at Middletown-Lincroft and Sunnyside Roads. The 121 acre site was owned recently by Harry and Katherine Neuberger. He was a New York broker while she was a political activist, achieving prominence in state and national Republican party circles. Mrs. Neuberger's public service included twelve years on New Jersey's Board of Higher Education. The farm was later owned by a builder. Their plans for development resulted in protracted litigation and local regulatory action. One result was the voiding of Middletown's Landmarks law as unconstitutional. The law was since amended and the Township's Landmarks Commission reorganized. The site has a long history and is associated with well-known area names.

Ownership has been traced to a 1759 sale by William and Elizabeth Hoffmire to Sylvanus Grover for a tract that was then 52 acres.¹⁷ John Johnson bought a 97 acre parcel in 1823, which by then included land on the west side of Middletown-Lincroft Road.¹⁸ He is shown as owner on the 1851 Lightfoot map of Monmouth County (figure 8.) The tract was owned by the Crawford family from 1856, when George Crawford bought the property at John Johnson's estate sale,¹⁹ until the Neuberger's acquired it in 1933.²⁰ The Parks System's acquisition was made in March 1990.



Figure 9. the 1851 Lightfoot map of Monmouth County

How much water remains in Nut Swamp? The Middletown High School South football field is nicknamed "The Swamp." This affectionate label stems from footing that ranges from soft to muddy. Fondness over the condition originates from the advantage offered the home team accustomed to the damp ground. The name was likely given without realization of the area's historical wetness. Early Park System investigation is finding unexpected wet pockets. Local ponds are man-made, built either for a water supply to fight fire or for farm irrigation. They hold water, even in drought conditions. An area old-timer recalls frequent wet footing while hunting many years ago. Nut Swamp once supported an ice pond estimated at a sizeable 350 feet by 65 feet.²¹ The 1886 topographical map of the Monmouth shore, (figure 9) shows a section of "pine swamp" in the area. Late twentieth century environmental regulations now designate swamps as wetlands and restrict or preclude development. One can conclude that

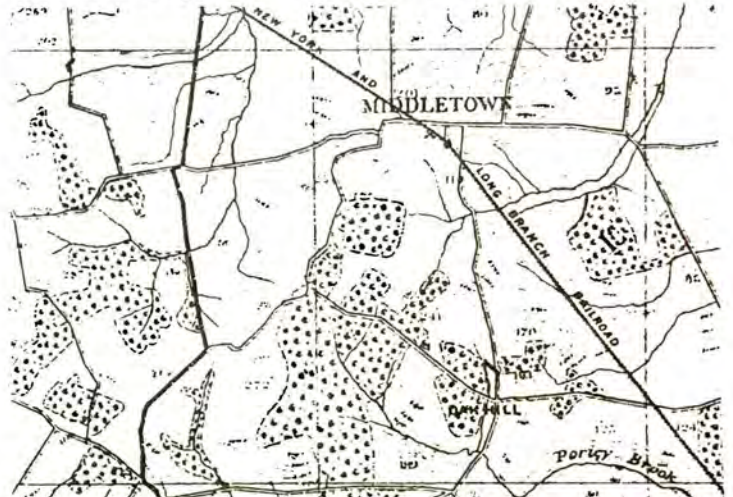


Figure 10. 1886 Topographical map of the Monmouth Shore, plate 9 from The Geological Survey of New Jersey

Nut Swamp would not be as extensively built if developed today. The preservation of the former Neuberger tract is, thus, that much more significant.

The events, people and history of Nut Swamp are important in the fabric of the Township's history. It is regrettable that this once prominent name has diminished usage today. The new park will bring more visitors to Nut Swamp. This name, etched in history, is due for resurgence.

R.G.

17. Monmouth Deeds, Book A-3, p. 453.
18. Monmouth Deeds, Book G-2, p. 254 (with thanks to Gail Hunton, Architectural Historian, Monmouth County Parks System).
19. Monmouth Deeds, Book M-6, p. 368 (with thanks to Gerald Ceres, President, Holmdel Historical Society)
20. Monmouth Deeds, Book 1641, p. 389.
21. Red Bank Register, August 1, 1935.

EZRA OSBORN BEFORE AND AFTER

Ezra Osborn, 1792-1877, lived a successful life. By the time of his death, he obtained stature as one of Middletown's leading citizens. Notwithstanding accomplishments attributable to hard work, he would have attracted attention by marrying a daughter from one of the most prominent families in town. His background had been obscure, with histories noting he came to Middletown around 1815 to work at a harness shop. It was at the western end of the Village's Kings Highway, now the foot of Red Hill Road. His ancestors were not known to local historians. His eldest son, Ezra Asher Osborn was also prominent but knowledge of the family after the next generation was also obscure. The research of Robert Stanley Osborn has filled that void. His genealogical work has resulted in a document of pictorial and public interest, *The Descendants of Captain David Osborn of Scotch Plains, New Jersey*.

Ezra Osborn was born September 19, 1792 to Captain David and Charlotte Osborn. Charlotte's family is unknown. David held office in the New Jersey Militia. He was elected ensign on March 8, 1793 and resigned as captain April 6, 1807. David held a number of local offices. He was the first postmaster of Scotch Plains, appointed December 8, 1804. Ezra married Hannah Dorsett Taylor, September 14, 1817.

Ezra and Hannah had nine children. The eldest, Charlotte, born in 1818 died when 16. Their fourth daughter, Mary, died in 1836 three months short of her second birthday. Ezra Asher Osborn is the eldest son, born March 9, 1823. His middle name or initial are sometimes omitted from historical records making it easy to confuse him with his father. They followed the same business, surveyor and landlord farmer. Edward Asher Osborn was a founding trustee of and surveyed Fair View Cemetery. He was also active as one of several Middletown promoters of coconut growing and development of Key Biscayne, Florida.

Ezra Asher Osborn was born at the southwest corner of Red Hill and Holland Roads in an old house that was later replaced there by the present Middletown landmark. He later owned a large house west of Red Hill Road near the Holmdel border that was later owned by Mrs. Norman Munro, widow of the well-known publisher of *Munro's Monthly Magazine*.

The house was destroyed by fire in 1967. It was then owned by Matthew Gill, publisher of the *Courier* whose plans to convert the house to a restaurant were thwarted by zoning regulations.

Ezra Asher had one son, Frank, 1856-1924, who was also a surveyor. Some of his real estate maps are still referenced. He is probably the last Osborn with a public profile.

The forty-four year old Hannah Taylor Osborn gave birth for the last time in 1841. Her girl died in infancy or was stillborn. She was named Charlotte Mary for her two deceased sisters. The Osborn's youngest surviving child was Aaron Miller Osborn, born July 17, 1837. This brother of Ezra Asher is the great-grandfather of Robert Stanley Osborn.

Bob's work is in a computer's database. The printed family history is expansively displayed following the computer program's format. It is readily expanded and filled-in. It includes documentary material and background on the Osborns to a progenitor who was a friend of William the Conqueror.

The Society thanks Bob for a donated copy of his book.

MIDDLETOWN QUIZ

57. When and Where was there a meeting of a type that became the Hunt Meet?
58. What Middletownite was a sheriff in California gold rush territory?

MIDDLETOWN DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE CONTINUED

The Queen Anne style was also expressed in simple folk or vernacular buildings. A sub-style is the Carpenter Queen Anne, reflecting a rich use of frame decoration. It is exemplified well by figure 12, 46 Cherry Tree Farm Road. Another good example is on the northeast corner of First and Middletown Avenues in the Hillside neighborhood. See its irregular surfaces, vergeboard and many porches. The house at 137 Hubbard Avenue, near the River Plaza school, is another fine example. A white exterior was recently painted light blue with reddish trim, reflecting current coloring trends for Victorian period houses.



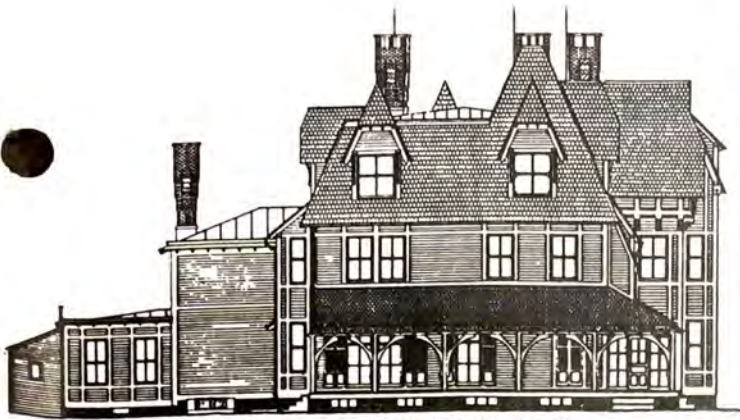
Figure 12. 46 Cherry Tree Farm Road

Belford was a booming community around the turn of the century. Many houses of the period reflect Victorian era styling. A simple, good example is at 414 Main Street. Another was at the northwest corner of East Road and Highway 36. Incompatible repair of fire damage impairs the integrity of the latter, while the former is marred by a massive expansion.

Stick style merits mention as a major style, although it is rare in Middletown, if extant at all. It was current from c. 1860 - c 1890. Stick evolved from Carpenter Gothic. The houses expressed their inner structure through exterior ornament, particularly vertical members. Roofs are often gabled and steeply pitched. Some examples are found on the Monmouth shore. Figure 13 from South Jersey is Cape May's famed Emlen Physick house, built in 1879.

The Shingle style was an American originated design popular around 1880 - 1900, contemporary with Queen Anne. Its principal characteristic is continuous wood shingles as roof and as wall cladding. Shingle style reflects post-centennial interest in our colonial past. It originated in the Northeast and Atlantic coast, particularly at locales of fashionable summer homes. Shingle was largely a high-design style, favored by several influential architects of the time. One of the finest gatherings of shingle style houses in the region exists in Monmouth Hills, the little known Middletown neighborhood adjoining Highlands. It is located south of Highway 36 and north of Hartshorne Woods. It was founded in 1895 as Water Witch Park. Many of its organizers were architects and artists. The community was planned to appeal to the artistically inclined who could afford to build substantial houses.

The finest of the shingle style houses was likely the Walter I. MacDougal house located on Witches Lane. It was designed by Lyman Ford, who also resided at Water Witch



113 Emlen Physick House, Cape May, New Jersey, 1879; attributed to architect Frank Furness. The weblike porch supports and spiky roof silhouette lighten the dwelling's apparent mass.

Figure 13. Emlen Physick house



Figure 14. 14 Monmouth Hills, Witches Lane



Figure 15. 33 Monmouth Hills, Sea View Terrace

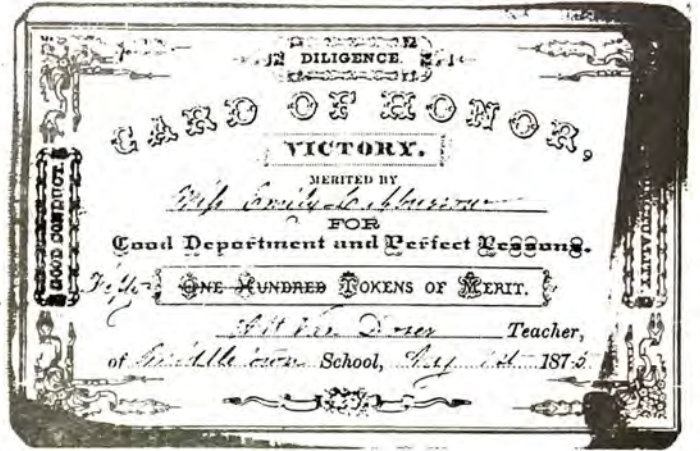
Park. The house embodies typical characteristics of the style including continuous wood shingle wall cladding, steeply pitched roof lines, cross gables and extensive porches. Figure shows the house before mid-1930s alterations. A second Water Witch Park example is figure 15, on Sea View Terrace.

To Be Continued

MERITORIOUS MIDDLETOWN MISS

The illustration is a reduction from a 3 1/2 by 5 5/16 card. Jefferson Burdick's "American Card Catalog" classifies it under Minor Card Types as a Reward of Merit. The type had its origin before 1800 as small slips of paper, issued by either Sunday schools or grammar schools. They were mass produced by lithography after 1880 and were of minor collector interest.

They are of greater fascination to the local historian, especially an example issued to a member of an early



Middletown family, the Lufburrows. The school was located on Kings Highway at the old Franklin Academy building. By then, it was a Township school. The teacher, A.H. Van Doren, has penmanship that is a source of envy. Note the old style double "s" in "miss". Note, too, the date, August 1, 1875. Was this the end of the school year or is the paperwork late? Why was the printed 100 tokens of merit reduced to 50? The card seems uncompromising in one important aspect, "perfect Lessons". The Society thanks Robert Schoeffling for the donation of this interesting memorabilia.



SCORE TWO POINTS

This issue is printed in 10 point type rather than the customary 8 point. The change originated with a typesetting problem rather than a conscious decision to use the larger type. No decision has been made on a permanent change of type size. Some readers have complained about the prior small print. What do you think? Your editor welcomes feedback. He hopes some will say that you have read more of the newsletter due to the larger type. Reader comments are always sought, particularly for historical information, as in the appeal for Straus material.



BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

The tardiness of this issue will long be recognizable as a May 1990 gift is acknowledged in our October 1989 number. We shall catch up. Much interesting material is in preparation. One difficulty is the obscurity of needed information.

NEW CHAIRS

Reason number seventeen for not attending meetings is, "The seats are uncomfortable". We have remedied that through a donation of thirty padded chairs from Gerald Ceres. The chairs are stackable c. 1960s Holiday Inn rather than new new. However, the design is still made, often with a hard seat rather than foam rubber cushions. (Historical Society members are easier on chairs than motel visitors.) They make comfortable seating, eliminating reason number seventeen. Thanks, Gerry.

A more important reason affecting attendance is lack of interesting programs. Some meetings have speakers; others do not. We need a program chairperson!



WHERE WAS THE CRAWFORD BARN?

The Crawford barn and Micheau store illustrations were made from copy prints of faded photographs taken in 1896. The Society regrets their lack of clarity. On the other hand, it is fortunate to have any image of these lost structures. They were taken by an unidentified photographer with possible forethought on preserving the landscape for posterity. The locale of most was written on the reverse, but not the exact perspective.



Where precisely was the barn, anyway? The reverse is noted "Nut Swamp," a hint, not a location. The Crawfords had extensive holdings, with most in nearby Everett and adjacent Holmdel. A companion picture is labeled, "Richard Crawford's House". It is not the house marked "R. Crawford Res." in the upper left corner of plate 56 of the Beers 1873 atlas according to one member who was in that house before it was demolished. Reader help identifying the Richard Crawford 1896 house and barn will be appreciated.

The pictures were donated by Anna Morford. The Society expresses its thanks for one of its best pictorial insights into 19th century.



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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.

QUIZ ANSWERS

57. On October 14, 1911 at the Robert J. Collier estate in Wickatunk, Marlboro Township. The event was an entertainment for local farmers as thanks for consenting to drag hunts through their farms, the same as the one of the hunt meet in Middletown. The Collier event featured a polo match and airplanes. Many saw an airplane for the first time. A smaller number took their first flights. (per *Red Bank Register*, October 18, 1911.)
58. William Hopping, as reported in the *Register's* February 26, 1913 obituary of his deputy, Joseph Burrowes, another Monmouthite.



ED STRAUS DONATES OLD COIN

Cobble Close Farm is located at 375 Cooper Road, east of the Bodman Park Tennis Courts and west of the Navesink Country Club golf course. A small mail box marks a winding path to the Township's most spectacular farm complex. It was built by Herbert N. Straus in 1929. During construction, a 1752 British half-penny was discovered at the site of the silo. It was given by Mr. Straus to Edward, the second of his three sons, who held it as a farm keepsake until donating it to the Society on May 17, 1990. The Society extends its thanks and appreciation for the gift.

Cobble Close Farm and the rest of the Herbert N. Straus estate is undergoing study by the Society. Other parts include a large, old, remodeled house opposite Cobble Close and a second farm of French Norman style, north of the house. The Straus family called their home "Therberton", an acronym combining their names, Theresa and Herbert. The house and each is separately owned now. The coin is symbolic of the link between colonial Middletown and its recent development as a suburb. Part of Cooper Road runs parallel with Navesink River Road. The former is much older than the latter. The old farms generally extended from Cooper Road (or further inland) to the river. The Straus house apparently was part of the Gordon Farm. That family was prominent well into the 19th century, but left the area without a well documented record.

The Society needs help to supplement its growing body of information on the Straus farms and the Gordons. If you have a memory, an old picture or document, please call Randy Gabrielan at 671-2645. He would like to talk to you and perhaps copy helpful material. A lengthy article will follow.



MEMBERSHIP DUES PER CALENDAR YR.

Individual — \$5.00
Family — \$10.00

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