



Newsletter of the Middletown Township Historical Society

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SHADOW BROOK FARM

ITS HISTORY AND THE LIFE AND TIMES OF DR. ERNEST FAHNESTOCK

The years 1907 and 1908 brought profound change to the northern Monmouth real estate market. City businessmen had for over two decades been buying property near the water and building large summer homes. Four New Yorkers began accumulating large parcels of local land in those years. They hired major architects, erected high design buildings, and used the land as part of their country lifestyle. The four and their architects were Robert Collier (John Russell Pope), J. Amory Haskell (York & Sawyer), Percy and Herbert Nathan Straus (Alfred Hopkins) and Dr. Ernest Fahnestock (Albro & Lindeberg), the subject of this study.

INTRODUCTION

The 1910 completion of Shadow Brook Farm by Dr. Ernest Fahnestock marks the high point in the transformation of Shrewsbury from an agricultural to a residential community. The establishment of this wealthy New Yorker's country seat around ample acreage for gentlemanly farming pursuits was part of a five-decade movement that helped change the character of the outlying regions of many of the nation's urban



Dr. Ernest Fahnestock

population centers. The house was the largest and grandest ever built in Shrewsbury.

The unexpected death of Dr. Fahnestock during the depression led to the re-birth of Shadow Brook as a fine restaurant. The book closing the country house era has varied chapters. Shrewsbury's included adaptive use of the house while the farm evolved to residential and mercantile occupancy. This place and process were vital links in Shrewsbury's change from ancient settlement to dignified suburb.



Mrs. Ernest Fahnestock, the former Georgette DeGrove Perry

SHREWSBURY HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Shrewsbury is one of the oldest towns in New Jersey. It was settled at about the same time as Middletown, shortly after the 1665 granting of the Monmouth Patent by royal governor Richard Nicholls to a group of twelve men charged with building permanent settlements. Shrewsbury and Middletown were known informally as the Two Towns of the Navesink. Shadow Brook is located about one half mile from Shrewsbury's historic four corners, an intersection rich in political, church, mercantile and military history. The Shrewsbury Historic District, embracing Broad Street and Sycamore Avenue around that cross roads, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Allen House on the northwest and the Wardell

BENJAMIN J. PARKER

N 17° 05' E 1830'

FORMERLY WYCKOFF

BROAD STREET

FORMERLY WYCKOFF

M. COCHRAN

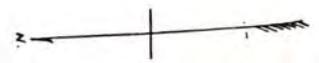
WILLIAM J. PARKER

FORMERLY SMITH

PATTERSON AVENUE

THOMAS J. WHITE

Formerly Joseph Aspin
later Samuel Smith
Condemned 1851



MAP OF PROPERTY OF
ENNES P. FANNESTOCK
SHREWSBURT
N. J.
CONTAINING 112 1/2 ACRES
SCALE 1" = 200'
GEORGE D. COOPER, C. E.
REBORN, N. J. JULY 16, 1905.

Received and recorded July 23rd, A.D. 1908 at 1-40 P.M.

Joseph Holden

House on the southwest corners are individually listed. Christ Church on the southeast corner and the Quaker Meeting House on the northeast are major landmarks.

The surrounding countryside was farmed. One notable, well known industry developed in the midst of the farms. E. C. Hazard expanded a ketchup factory north of Sycamore Avenue, east of Broad Street, behind the Hazard house. The plant purchased the production of an extensive network of local farmers and brought Shrewsbury widespread recognition. Hazard made his town a brand name for ketchup and a variety of condiments.

Age and history notwithstanding, old Shrewsbury remained a quiet village. By the turn of the twentieth century, it was more influenced by outside towns than they were by Shrewsbury. One regional issue would be growth of neighboring Red Bank, a town which, by virtue of a favorable waterfront location, had become the political and business center of Shrewsbury Township. Red Bank's commerce was centered on Front and Broad Streets, which intersected near the waterfront. Residential growth extended east and south of the town. Middletown Township's first major housing development, at Fairview, was also influenced by Red Bank, its siting chosen because of its location on the trolley line to the latter town.

COUNTRY HOUSES

The desire for a temporary home in the country has existed since ancient times when man was first urbanized. The earliest Monmouth County country house is William Ingham's, in Rumson. He bought an old farm house in 1791 and expanded it greatly. It still stands on Bingham Avenue, recently remodeled. His estate was more than a summer vacation spot on the shore as his family twice took refuge there from Philadelphia smallpox epidemics.

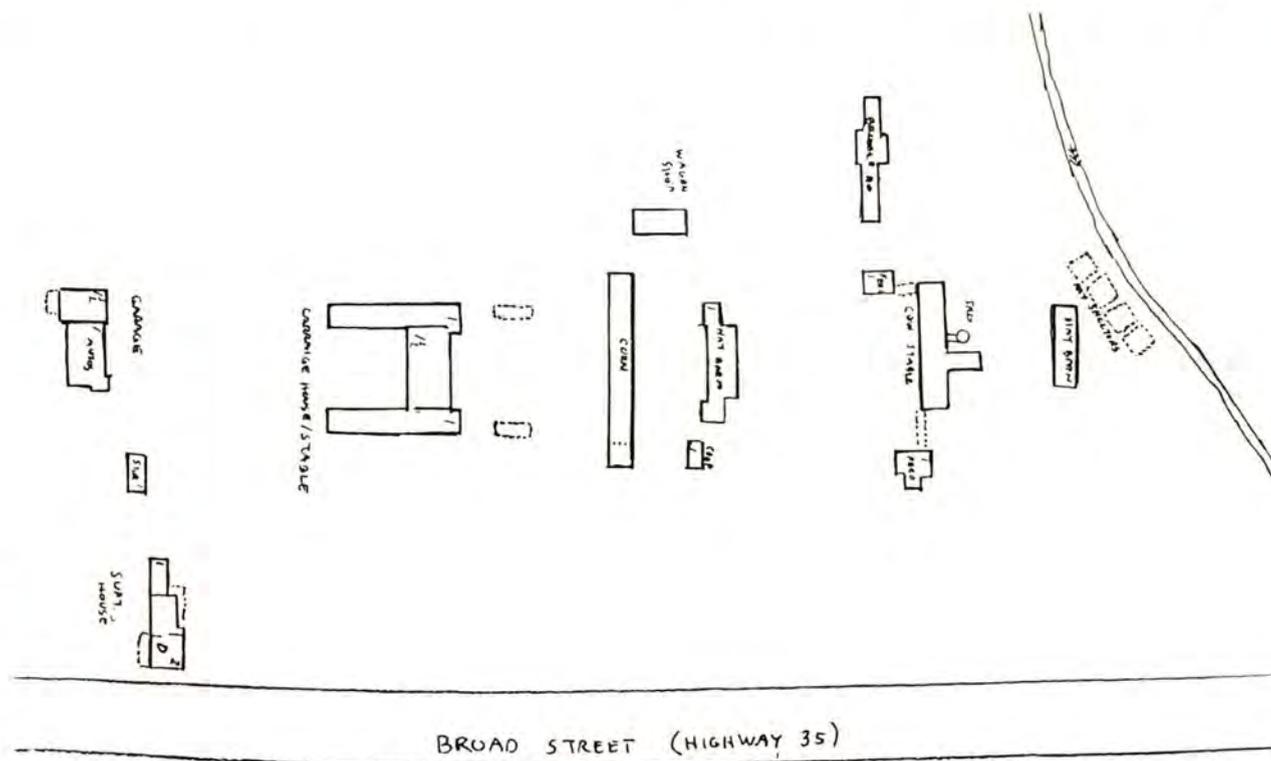
The ocean front saw Monmouth's earliest intensive development for summer houses. They were tightly packed amidst a burgeoning hotel industry. The shore had little open space by the mid 1880s. Many houses were large, elaborate, and costly. However, their absence of substantial land made them more houses in the country rather than country houses.

Transportation routes established Monmouth's growth patterns. Access to water transport was a virtual necessity for much of the nineteenth century. Early rail routes linked or followed steamship routes. Monmouth's first railroad was opened in 1860. The Raritan & Delaware Bay Railroad began at Port Monmouth on Middletown Township's Raritan Bay shore. One of its branches terminated at Long Branch. Although the line ran through Shrewsbury, its effects in building the town were minimal. Most country house construction was in close proximity to the two branches of the Shrewsbury River.

Major houses were begun in the 1880s, their numbers increased in the 1890s, with many major works erected in the first decade of the twentieth century. The process was spurred by two bridges that greatly improved inland travel in an area long dependent on water transport. The 1870 Sea Bright-Rumson Bridge stimulated growth of the latter town and enhanced property values. The Oceanic Bridge, connecting Rumson with Middletown Township's Locust shore, had a similar effect there.

Rumson Road and Navesink River Road and the areas surrounding them became widely known as the setting for summer mansions and gentlemen's farms. Leisure and recreational facilities characteristic with country life followed, including tennis, yachting, polo, golf, and fox hunting.

Red Bank, the commercial hub for the country house region, was also growing in the years before and after the turn of the century. The demand for small building lots for houses



expanded past the borough's borders and was heading for Shrewsbury.

FAHNESTOCK ORIGINS ON THE SHORE

The first Fahnestock in Monmouth County was Harris C. Fahnestock, Ernest's father. Harris was born February 27, 1835 at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania of German ancestry. The Civil War created a venue for his financial acumen. His first fiscal affair aided the sale of the Pennsylvania bond issue. This resulted in a banking partnership with Jay Cooke and a close wartime relationship with the Federal government. Their firm was a fiscal anchor for the Civil War-torn Lincoln Administration. Fahnestock had a major role in Jay Cooke & Company's newly opened New York City office. He earned a substantial income. The failure of the firm's railroad bond venture led to the closure of the New York office in 1873 and was a major factor in the onset of that year's depression.

Fahnestock later became a Vice President of the First National Bank of New York and built a second fortune there.¹

Harris bought land in Elberon in 1881² and built a house on the shore side of Ocean Avenue. He retained the property until 1909,³ the year after Ernest bought land in Shrewsbury. His house there was designed by McKim, Mead & White. No picture is known to exist. Harris Fahnestock gave generously to various church, charitable and cultural organizations. Ernest, one of five sons and two daughters, continued the philanthropy. Harris died June 4, 1914.⁴ He was then resident at the noted Villard Houses on Madison Avenue, New York. Ceiling panels would later be moved to Shadow Brook from the Villard Houses, an interesting historical coincidence.

Ernest married Georgette DeGrove Perry, daughter of Edward Ritzema DeGrove and widow of Edward Perry. They had two children, Mildred Helen and Evelyn.⁵ Mrs. Fahnestock also had two children from her first marriage.⁶

THE STILWELL FARM

George W. Stilwell, a descendant of an early Monmouth family, was born around 1810. He was a farmer, real estate investor, cattle dealer, and butcher. The farm was profitable and he was widely recognized as an expert judge of the market value of cattle.⁷

The larger part of the Stilwell farm, about eighty-three acres, was the former Richard Wyckoff farm. It was bought by Stilwell in 1853.⁸ It spanned both sides of Broad Street. Stilwell expanded his farm by purchasing about thirty-four acres

adjoining the New Jersey Southern Railroad (successor to the Raritan & Delaware Bay) in 1889.⁹

Stilwell died February 21, 1901. His estate held the farm for seven years. His daughter, Anna T. Stilwell, sole surviving executrix, sold the farm to Ernest Fahnestock of New York City July 21, 1908.¹⁰ The farm then contained 115.35 acres, reduced slightly by the sale of a lot on the east side of Broad Street in 1861. The property was surveyed by George D. Cooper of Red Bank. His map was recorded with the aforementioned deed. It indicates an unnamed brook which marks the northern boundary of the section east of Broad Street. The brook bisects the western sector via an irregular course. The farm included the Stilwell house and farm outbuildings on the west side of Broad Street at the entrance to the present Shadowbrook Road.

Fahnestock's purchase and house construction were well covered in the local press. His plans were known before the deed was issued as a newspaper account appeared two months prior. A Red Bank Register article from May 20, 1908 merits extensive quotation.

"The greater part of the STILWELL farm is high, rolling land, with sufficient variety to make a magnificent country place. A competent landscape gardener will be employed, who will take advantage in laying out the grounds of every natural beauty the place possesses...Part of the farm will be made into a woods. Trees will be planted suitable to the situation and Dr. Fahnestock hopes to have a forest effect within the next ten or fifteen years. When the

Continued

- ¹ Dictionary of American Biography, Volume III, p. 245
- ² Monmouth Deeds, Book 339, p. 187 Dated December 13, 1880, recorded July 26, 1881
- ³ Monmouth Deeds, Book 847, p. 23, dated February 26, 1909, recorded March 3, 1909
- ⁴ *New York Times*, June 5, 1914
- ⁵ National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, Volume 30, p. 552, New York, James T. White & Co., 1943
- ⁶ *Red Bank Register*, May 2, 1957
- ⁷ *Red Bank Register*, February 27, 1901
- ⁸ Monmouth Deeds, Book D6, p. 313, dated March 30, 1853, recorded April 19, 1854
- ⁹ Monmouth Deeds, Book 447, p. 167, dated March 23, 1889, recorded April 16, 1889
- ¹⁰ Monmouth Deeds, Book 830, p. 379, dated July 21, 1908, recorded July 23, 1908



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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.

MEMBERSHIP DUES PER CALENDAR YR.

Individual — \$5.00
Family — \$10.00

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