



Township Times

The Newsletter of the
Middletown Township
Historical Society

Our 35th year of preserving and promoting the history of Middletown Township

Vol. VIII, No. 3

Winter 2004

Seabrook-Wilson House

The Historical Society held its November meeting at the Seabrook-Wilson House in Port Monmouth. Gail Hunton of the Monmouth County Park System was the guest speaker who talked about the house's past and future. Formerly known as the "Spy House," it is one of the oldest houses in the Bayshore and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The oldest section has been dated from the early 18th century, with several additions occurring into the 19th century.

Originally owned by the Township, it was transferred to Monmouth County as part of a land swap in 1998. The County made it an addition to the 200-acre Bayshore Waterfront Park. The museum's artifacts which had been under the care of then curator Gertrude Neidlinger, were returned to lenders who could be located. Some of the museum's collection is now housed at the Heath Farm on Harmony Road in Middletown.

The Park System plans to preserve the house for public use as a visitors center and place for Park System programs and events. The first floor will be used as a public reception area, program space and exhibit area, while the second floor will be offices for rangers.

The house has structural

problems and does not meet some codes. An architectural firm completed an assessment of the house and prepared plans for its rehabilitation that include the restoration of historic fabric and features, as well as replacing outdated mechanical and electrical systems. Ancient oak timbers will be reinforced instead of replaced. Landscaping will also be done around the house. Work will be funded by the County and a grant from the New Jersey Historic Trust. Construction on this long-term project is planned to begin in 2005.

Our meeting at the Seabrook-Wilson House was indeed special considering the house is currently closed for construction, and had previously been open only for limited Park System programs due to its condition. The grounds are open for the public's use.

*Image of the Seabrook-Wilson House
by Irwin J. Kappes, 1985*

Middletown Township Historical Society collection



What is an Historical Society?

As we do every year, the Historical Society is one of the organizations that sponsors a "Best in Show" trophy for the Classic Car Show at Middletown Day held every September. It was my turn this year to choose who would get this coveted prize and I took the duty very seriously.

I wanted to pick a car that would somehow represent the Society - should I choose an army jeep since it was part of World War II history, or perhaps the oldest car because it represented automobile history, or maybe a truck because of Middletown's agricultural history? I had originally thought that I would choose the car that was still being restored or "worked on" since history is a work in progress.

After three times around the parking lot gazing at the beautiful old gems, all polished and chromed, I still was unable to decide although there was one car in particular that I personally liked - a 1963 slate blue Cadillac convertible. It reminded me of my grandmother's 1964 Cadillac, nearly identical except for a few minor differences.

I hovered around that Caddy for the longest time and the memories flooded back to me. She would pull the front seat up so close to the steering wheel in order to reach the pedals that I always had to ride in the back because my legs just would not fit. I felt like I was a movie star and my grandmother was my own personal chauffeur. It was always the car of choice for family gatherings, funerals, and any time when comfort and class were a must.

Shaking my head of the memories, I walked around the parking lot again, still glancing over my shoulder at the Caddy. What a beaut, but I didn't want my choice to be personal - I was choosing on

behalf of the Historical Society. Finally after the 4th go around and my pending vote for another car, I decided that I needed to go with my gut and I chose that blue Cadillac.

Even though it wasn't exactly like my grandmother's black hard-top, it sparked enough memories. This is what historical societies are all about - the memories they bring back. How many times have I overheard visitors to our museum at the MacLeod-Rice House say: "I remember that store where they had the . . ." or "When I was a kid, we used to hang out on that street over by the . . ."

Whether someone has lived in the area all their life or if they just moved in last week, historical societies exist to show what once was, to commemorate the past, preserve it for posterity, and touch off the memories to keep it alive.

-- Laura Poll

Lighthouse Challenge

Presented by the New Jersey Lighthouse Society and the Lighthouse Preservation Organization of New Jersey, the 4th annual New Jersey Lighthouse Challenge was held over the October 18-19 weekend. It consisted of traveling the shoreline of the state to visit 11 participating land-based lighthouses. This year's souvenirs were trading cards with vintage images of each light, collected at the respective sites. Upon arriving at the last lighthouse, a special "11 Points of Light Club" cover card was presented to complete the boxed set.

The Challenge is a fantastic opportunity to visit these lighthouses across the state, two of which are right in our own backyard - Twin Lights and Sandy Hook. The other lights were Sea Girt, Barnegat, Tuckers Island, Absecon (with a short detour to visit Lucy the Margate Elephant being a must),

Hereford Inlet, Cape May, East Point, and Finns Point and Tinicum rear ranges. Let's hope that eventually the Conover Beacon on Leonardo beach will be part of a future Lighthouse Challenge.

For more information on the N.J. Lighthouse Society, contact them at www.njlhs.burlco.org; or P.O. Box 332, Navesink 07752; or 856-546-0514; or NJLHS@burlco.org

Information Request

We are searching for a photograph of the Baptist chapel, built in 1809, which had been located at the top of Chapel Hill before it was demolished in the 1960's. Does anyone have a picture they will share?

Speaking of Chapel Hill, does anyone have any further information, besides news clippings, about the Nike explosion that took place there on May 22, 1958? The essentials are mentioned on page 97 of Randall Gabrielan's Arcadia book, "Middletown in the 20th Century." We'd like your remembrances for a future article.

Thanks so much!

Special thanks go to Jim & Pat Coughlin for the vacuum cleaner; and Dorothy Senk and Domonic Koehler for the folding tables.

Wish List

If your company is upgrading its equipment or if you have some items around the house no longer in use, and the surplus equipment is still in working condition, please consider donating it to us for a possible tax deduction and the satisfaction of helping us improve our operations. We need the following: large Rubbermaid storage tubs, button making machine, small refrigerator, map case, legal size filing cabinets, display cases, long folding tables, VCR player, TV cart.

One person's clutter . . .

Do you have items that are somehow connected to Middletown Township? We are seeking for the museum's collection advertising items from local businesses, past and present such as ash trays, coffee mugs, matchbook covers, pencils, pens, notepads, calendars or any other ephemera. We would also like commemorative items from the local fire departments wet downs and anniversary celebrations.

Calendar of Events

Please note: We will now be starting our meetings at 7:30 p.m. All our meetings are held at the MacLeod-Rice House at Croydon Hall, at the intersection of Chamone Ave. and Leonardville Rd., Leonardo section of Middletown Township, Monmouth County. Light refreshment is always served - bring a friend!

January 19th - Randall Gabrielan will present "Monmouth County African Americans - Commemorating People and Places"

February 16th - Claire Garland, a resident of Lincroft, will present "Cherokee Ike of Monmouth," a presentation on the Monmouth County Sand Hill Band of Indians

March 15th - Jean Klerman will present "Jewstown, Monmouth County, NJ - 1778." She is co-author of *Peddler to Suburbanite, A History of Jews in Monmouth County*

Lend a hand

We are forming committees to help with various aspects of the Society. If you would like to help with planning events, fundraising, membership, hospitality, landscaping or anything else, contact Laura Poll at 732-291-5610. We also want to hear from you what events you would be interested in attending. Let us know!

Acquisitions

Raser, Edward J. (2002). *New Jersey Graveyard and Gravestone Inscriptions Locator, Monmouth County*

- Gift of Marcia Rissland

Survey reports for Monmouth Hills (2002), Middletown Village (1990) and Chapel Hill (1989) historic districts

- Gift of Mary Lou Strong, Middletown Township Landmarks Commission

Commemorative plate, Leonardo First Aid Squad 25th Anniversary (1976) and commemorative cup, Navesink Fire Co. 100th Anniversary (1986) - Gift of Randall Gabrielan

Set of 3 brass coasters, Marine View Savings Bank, Middletown (1972); coffee mugs, Brookdale Community College Alumni Assoc. 20th Anniversary (1987), King of Kings Lutheran Church (1960), Harmony Bowling Lanes (n.d.)

- Gift of Laura Poll

Membership

Thank you to all our new and returning members for their support. We couldn't do it without you and appreciate your interest in the Historical Society. There's still time to renew if you haven't done so yet. Send your dues of \$10 for general or \$25 for sustaining membership.

Our sponsors

Special thanks to our sponsors for supporting the publication and mailing of our newsletter. Say you saw them in the MTHS newsletter! If you would like to sponsor a future newsletter, please contact the editor.

Beacon Awards & Signs

Trophies, plaques, banners, flags, t-shirts, embroidery, varsity jackets
285 Hwy. 35 North, Middletown
732-747-9588 -- Ray Veth

Howard Johnson Inn

"Where You Feel at Home"
750 Rt. 35 South, Middletown
732-671-3400 -- Spiro Pappas
info@middletownhojo.com

Royal Senior Care Medical Adult Day Service

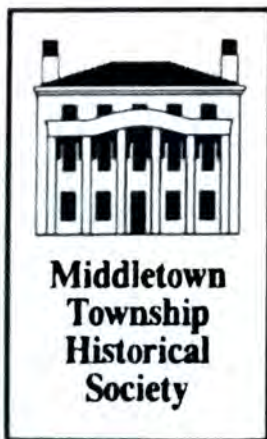
"Your Care, Dignity and Respect is our 'Royal' Commitment"
1041 Hwy. 36, Atlantic Highlands
732-291-0710

Book Compound

Out of print books, magazines, sheet music, autographs, paper items -- Bought & sold
81 First Ave., Atl Hlds, 732-291-4133

Suzi's Sweet Shoppe

Village Mall, 1100 Hwy. 35, Midd.
732-796-0115 -- Susan Hordych
SuzisSweetShoppe@comcast.net
www.SuziSweetShoppe.com



Middletown Township Historical Society
P.O. Box 180
Middletown, N.J. 07748
732-291-5610
middletownhist@earthlink.net

*Dedicated to researching, collecting, and exhibiting
the history of Middletown Township*

Editor: Laura M. Poll

Meetings: 7:30 p.m., third Monday of the month
MacLeod-Rice House, Croydon Hall
intersection of Leonardville Rd. & Chamone Ave.
Leonardo section, Midd. Twp., Monmouth County

Membership Dues
per calendar year

General	\$ 10
Sustaining	\$ 25
Corporate	\$100

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