



Township Times

The Newsletter of the
Middletown Township
Historical Society

Our 36th year of preserving and promoting the history of Middletown Township

Vol. VIII, No. 4

Spring 2004

Still Croydon Hall after all these years

This April the Middletown Township Historical Society celebrates its 21st year at Croydon Hall in the house that's in the very center of activity at the Township's Parks and Recreation Department. Here's a brief history of the white mansion.

The land that Croydon Hall sits on was originally part of the Burdge Farm, which dated back to the 18th century. Edward C. Burdge sold the land to the Highland Park Improvement Company in 1892. The company sold lots for summer homes for wealthy New York citizens, but due to the depression of 1893, many of the lots remained empty. In order to entice buyers, a golf course was added around some of the houses that had already been built, becoming what is now known as Beacon Hill County Club.

The old Burdge farmhouse had not been demolished and Donald W. MacLeod, a New York City linen importer, bought it along with 2 lots in 1894. A new house was built onto the front of the old farmhouse and designed in the Queen Anne style with a tower.

MacLeod died in 1901, and his widow later married Melvin A. Rice who was president of MacLeod's company. Rice remodeled the house, demolished the tower and built the columned front porch. Known as Drynoch Farms, it was a gentleman's farm with 300 acres of corn, clover, potatoes, chickens, cows, and 24 employees.

A Democratic political figure from Brooklyn, Rice was a good friend of Woodrow Wilson who was a frequent guest at the house.

Rice was also active in education and became president of both the Middletown Township and later the New Jersey Boards of Education. He donated 2 acres of his land in order for the first Township high school to be built, located where Bayshore Middle School presently stands. He also gave money to the school for equipment. It was regarded as a model rural high school at the time.

After Rice died in 1924, his widow continued to live there until Dr. John M. Carr bought the property in the early 1940's with the idea of turning it into a private boys boarding school.

Croydon Hall Academy opened its doors in 1946 with classes held in the mansion and eventually expanded into the Rice outbuildings. Several buildings were added, including the classroom building (now the Parks & Rec office), the dormitory (now the senior center), and the gymnasium.

When the Academy closed in 1975, the Bayshore Christian School signed a lease for a year until the Township acquired the property in 1977 through a

(cont. on page 2)

*Image of the MacLeod-Rice House, Croydon Hall
by Irwin J. Kappes, 1985
Middletown Township
Historical Society
collection*



We have a new website!

The Middletown Township Historical Society has just posted our new website. Check it often for up to date information on our events and articles about the Township and the Society.

<http://www.home.earthlink.net/~lmpoll>

While we are on the subject of websites, the following is a website about the Dempsey pump house in Leonardo. The site was created for an oral history project by Jenn Van Ness, a Ph.D. student in American History at the University at Albany. She is a part-time resident of Atlantic Highlands and teaches summer school at Kean. The website shatters a few of the more bizarre myths surrounding the pump house.

<http://home.earthlink.net/~jenn9454>

Happy Anniversaries to us!

April is a good month for us! The Historical Society was incorporated on April 22, 1968, and we signed our lease for the museum at the MacLeod-Rice House on April 25, 1983.

Do you remember the 1958 Chapel Hill Nike explosion?

Please share your memories of that unforgettable day with us at our May 17th meeting. We will also show a brief video (made from film) of the damage that occurred in town, shot by long-time resident Frank Vosk. Please contact program coordinator Randall Gabrielan for more information at 732-671-2645 or monmouthhistory@aol.com

One person's clutter . . .

We are seeking for the museum's collection commemorative items from the Bicentennial Anniversary of the United States (1976 for those too young to remember!). We have a growing collection of mugs, plates, booklets and other souvenirs from the various celebrations held around the state and around the country. Come see a portion of this collection at the "Our Road to Liberty" exhibit currently at the museum.

Croydon Hall (cont. from page 1)

Green Acres purchase. Carr and his family retained lifetime rights to the apartment on the second floor of the house. He died in 1984. The third floor, which had been used for dorm rooms, is now vacant.

Besides the Historical Society's offices in the library wing (formerly Rice's library and Academy administration offices), our meeting room (former dining area), and our museum (former ballroom), other groups share first floor space. Crossroads Substance Abuse Services is located in the back wing (former cafeteria), and a wrestling room is located off the library wing (former study hall). Locker rooms are in the basement.

Howard Goch, a member of the faculty for 10 years, visited the museum one Sunday last Spring and pointed out that part of our meeting room had been walled off with glass partitions and used as the faculty dining area. The room where we keep many of our items not currently on display had been the office where students who wanted to go "into town" would sign themselves out. And our desk in the office is situated just as Dr. Carr's had been.

The Historical Society recently found several old photographs of the mansion when the columns were round instead of the now familiar square columns. The columns must have been replaced early on in the Academy's history since there is one picture where a brace replaces one of the round columns. Perhaps this first round column was the inspiration for the Academy's yearbook, *The Column*.

Nearly 30 years after Croydon Hall Academy closed its doors, we still call the area "Croydon Hall" and use it as a landmark for many activities associated with the Township, including Middletown Day every September. The mansion, though now showing its age, is a magnificent structure that sits grandly back off of Leonardville Road, waiting for the next event to fill the area back up again with activity.

Acquisitions

2003 Nutswamp School yearbook
- Gift of Gail Fegley

Inventory reports for the Navesink (1997) and Locust (1996) historic districts
- Gift of Mary Lou Strong
Midd. Twp. Landmarks Commission

Program booklet from "Cherokee Ike and the Monmouth County Sand Hill Band of Indians"
- Gift of Claire Garland

Middletown Folk Festival programs (1977, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1984)
- Gift of Dr. Richard Levine

Beer mug, River Plaza Hose Co. 50th Anniversary (1977)
- Gift of Domonic Koehler

Beer glasses, Brevent Park & Leonardo Fire Companies wet down (1972), East Keansburg Fire Dept. truck dedication (1966); commemorative pewter plate, Declaration of Independence (1973); ash tray, Keansburg-Middletown National Bank 50th Anniversary (1963); Middletown Trifles game (1985)
- Gift of Laura Poll

Committees are forming

Below are brief descriptions of committees being formed to help with various aspects of the Society. If you would like to help, call us at 732-291-5610.

House & Grounds - responsible for general upkeep of the Society's museum, public areas of the MacLeod-Rice House, and grounds in front of the building, including light cleaning, trimming and weeding, and flower box maintenance.

Membership & Fundraising - responsible for annual membership appeal and fundraising opportunities, creating incentives for membership, and reaching into the community to promote the Society's activities.

Newsletter - responsible for writing and publishing the Society's quarterly newsletter, including doing research, soliciting advertisers, and distribution.

Library & Collections - responsible for care and management of the Society's records, documents and artifacts, including collecting items that fulfill our mission statement, and newspaper clipping and filing.

Museum & Exhibits - responsible for planning, research, collecting items for, and installation of our annual exhibits.

Events - responsible for orchestrating social events and activities.

Hospitality - responsible for planning and setting up refreshments at monthly meetings and functions, as well as organizing the holiday party and exhibit opening receptions.

It's a frame-up!

We thank Richard Sass of River Reproductions (732-671-2178) for re-matting and reframing the Society's painting by Herman Dasler of the Bayside Beacon in Keansburg. The Bayside Beacon and the Waackaack Light were range lights for Gedney's Channel, and were erected in 1856. After their decommission in 1923 and complaints from tugboat captains, they were relighted. Both were gone by the 1960's.

Thanks so much!

Special thanks go to Joseph Azzolina and Food Circus Super Markets, Inc. for supplying the cookie and pastry platters at our monthly meetings! Visit their website: <http://www.foodcircus.com>

And many thanks go to Ray Veth of Beacon Awards & Signs (732-747-9588) for the glass display case; Domonic Koehler of Home Renovation & Repairs (732-291-5610) for making shelves for the library, assembling our new coat rack, and other small repairs; Monmouth County Historical Association for the atlas case; Eileen Toner for working on our vertical file. **And all our members - we couldn't do it without your support!** Please renew your membership for 2004 now if you haven't already done so - please also tell us what types of events and exhibits you would like to see us present, or if you have a good idea for a future newsletter article.

Sponsors

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

Frank A. Vaccaro, P.E.
Consulting Engineers &
Construction Management
34 Circle Drive, Rumson
732-530-8497

Attorneys Land Title Agencies, Inc.
Experienced - Professional - Friendly
"We welcome your inquiries"
16 Cherry Tree Farm Rd., Middletown
732-706-7337 -- Joan A. Smith

Beacon Awards & Signs

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

Wish List

If you are doing your spring cleaning and would like to get rid of some items that you no longer can use, please think of us! We need the following: VCR player, TV cart with wheels, map case, small refrigerator, and a few Spring season silk flower decorations and centerpieces for our lobby area.

Calendar of Events

Meetings start at 7:30 p.m. and are held at the MacLeod-Rice House at Croydon Hall, Leonardo section of Middletown Township. All events are free of charge, and all are welcome to attend. Light refreshments are served.

April 19th - Dr. Richard Levine, founder of the Middletown Folk Festival, will speak about its history with a videotape presentation

May 2nd - A new season begins for our exhibit, "Our Road to Liberty." 1-4 p.m. at the museum. Museum will be open every Sunday, 1-4 p.m. through Nov. 21

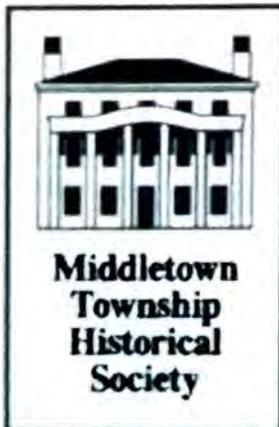
May 16th - Trip to Roosevelt, N.J. for a special tour by Arthur Shapiro. Free of charge, but space is limited. Check our website or contact event coordinator Pete Brady for more information at 732-671-9249 or ptbrady@aol.com

May 17th - Frank Vosk will show a short video (made from film) of damage in town following the May 1958 NIKE explosion, along with a discussion from those who remember that tragic day

June 21st - Topic to be announced. Check our website for regularly updated

information about our events:

<http://www.home.earthlink.net/~lmpoll>



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

Visit our website:
<http://www.home.earthlink.net/~lmpoll>

*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