



Township Times

The Newsletter of the
Middletown Township
Historical Society

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

Vol. IX, No. 2

Fall 2004

The "Alice C. Price" docks

Local artist and long-time society member, Irwin J. Kappes, donated a watercolor that he painted of the "Alice C. Price" steamboat going along the Shrewsbury River. Twin Lights can be seen in the background.

According to George H. Moss, Jr.'s *Steamboat to the Shore* book, the "Alice C. Price" was built in New York in 1853 and operated between Red Bank and New York until 1858. In 1859, the 283 ton sidewheeler shifted to the Keyport-New York route, and eventually began docking in Port Monmouth.

Leon Reussille's *Steam Vessels Built in Old Monmouth, 1841-1894* states that the boat was the first to call at the new terminal in Port Monmouth on Jan. 13, 1860. Edmund T. Williams, Red Bank Steamboat Co. president, was her first owner, and she was built expressly for the line by William Collyer at New York.

Megan E. Springate's *Steamboats in Monmouth County: A Gazetteer* states that the 152' long boat ran on the Shrewsbury River 1853-55, was chartered to the U.S. Quartermaster's Dept. for Civil War service, and was sunk by a Confederate torpedo in 1864 at St. John's River, Fla.

The Society thanks Irwin for his generous donation, and also thanks Richard Sass of River Reproductions (732-671-2178) who did the matting and framing. Please come see this wonderful painting on display in the museum.

Earle Pier quick facts

The luxury liner "Alexander Hamilton" had been towed to Pier 1 at the Earle Pier as a safe haven but sunk there in 1977. It still lays at the bottom and Pier 1 is no longer used.

**** Please note! ****

The Nov. 15th meeting will be held at the Taylor-Butler House (127 Kings Hwy, Middletown) We will tour the house and talk about its history. Meet at Taylor-Butler, 7:30 p.m. Parking is at the Middletown Village Elementary School. All are welcome to attend.



Image of the Taylor-Butler House courtesy of the Monmouth County Historical Association, owner of the house.

Dempsey Pumphouse

The Dempsey Pumphouse on the corner of Thompson and Center avenues in the Leonardo section, along with 5 acres of wooded property, was acquired by Middletown Township under the Municipal Open Space Program. The Township Committee approved an ordinance in August to enter into a contract of sale with the Dempsey Family to fund the \$1.3 million purchase. The Township Committee had been in negotiation with the family for 4 years.

(cont. on page 2)

Sandy Hook & Fort Hancock at Middletown Day

This year's annual Middletown Day was held September 18th. The day was chilly, windy and dreary and the teenagers were especially rowdy, but we had a great time anyway. Over 350 guests signed our guest book and visited our exhibits. For some, this was their first time to the MacLeod-Rice House. We hope to see them again soon!

Our special guest this year was Tom Hoffman, park historian from Gateway National Park at Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook. It is a little known fact that Sandy Hook is part of Middletown Township.

Sandy Hook is a 1,665 acre barrier beach peninsula, and includes seven miles of beaches, salt marches, a habitat for migratory birds, hiking trails and 264 acres of maritime forest.

The Sandy Hook Lighthouse is the oldest lighthouse still in use in the country, operating since 1764. During the American Revolution, Sandy Hook was occupied by British Loyalists, and the lighthouse was defended by them to ensure British access to New York City.

The U.S. Army first fortified Sandy Hook during the War of 1812, and Fort Hancock was established in 1895 to protect the New York harbor. Weapons were tested at the Sandy Hook Proving Ground and a series of gun batteries were built. In the 1950s, the fort added Nike Air Defense Missiles.

Fort Hancock consisted of many buildings that formed a "town" including officers quarters, barracks, post headquarters, hospital, guardhouse, and by 1911 had a commissary, post office, bakery, library, chapel, school, YMCA, laundry and tailor shops.

The fort was deactivated in 1974 and transferred to the National Park Service. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Earle Pier quick facts

The Earle Pier in the Leonardo section was completed in 1944 and is 2.9 miles long. On April 30, 1946 a weapons handling accident occurred on the U.S.S. Solar, causing an explosion at 11:33 a.m. which killed 7.

Our sympathies

Middletown Township lost two special people recently, Ken Norton and Marcia Rissland. Both were active in local history issues and will certainly be missed. Our sympathies to their families.

Kenneth A. Norton was born in Iowa but was raised and lived in the Belford section of Middletown. He was president of the Middletown Township Historical Society during the Seabrook-Wilson House initial preservation project. He was especially interested in the history of the Port Monmouth, Belford and New Monmouth areas, and willingly served as a resource for those neighborhoods.

Marcia Stoddart Rissland had been a resident of Middletown since 1955. She was one of the founders of Poricy Park in 1970, and assisted in various phases of land acquisition, the construction and equipping of the Nature Center and was responsible for the restoration of the Joseph Murray farmhouse and barn. She also served as curator, and was mentor to many.

Dempsey Pumphouse (cont.)

The property had been vacant and overgrown for many years, prompting folk tales of ghosts. The house and surrounding wall are made of peanut-stone, which is native to the Leonardo area. Peanut-stone is composed of quartz and other pebbles that are imbedded into iron-oxide rock.

The house was built in 1926, and this year along with 2 "D"s are recorded in the iron gate in front of the house. It was built over an artesian well that provided water to local families, and while no one ever lived in it, the Dempsey children throughout the years used the house as a play area.

Since the acquisition, trees and brush have been cleared away, allowing for a clearer view of the distinctive house. Last year, the owner replaced the front porch which had been damaged due to a fallen tree.

For more information on the history of the house and property, see Jennifer Van Ness's website which is linked to ours at www.home.earthlink.net/~middletownhist/

"Home" Improvement

We made great progress at the MacLeod-Rice House this past summer, and wish to thank Domonic Koehler of Home Renovation & Repairs (732-291-5610) for his energy and enthusiasm.

The bathroom is functioning again. The handle, washers and seat were replaced on the toilet, the sink was snaked, and everything was scrubbed down. Unfortunately, the ceiling still has sheets of paint peeling off due to the leaks occurring on the second floor of the building (where we don't have access) and the water coming in from the outside walls, but at least we now have a clean, working rest room!

We were able to spend August in comfort with the "new" window air conditioning unit, but might have to keep it running all winter -- the radiators in our section of the building cannot be regulated so the temperature gets up to 90 degrees in the dead of winter. We need a licensed plumber who will donate some time to help up get the heat under control. Please contact us!

Calling all Veterans

We are gathering information for a new permanent exhibit about those who have gone to war for our country. We want names and photos (copies please) of all people who were residents of Middletown Township when they served in both the World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, and Iraqi wars, as well as other conflicts. We also want to compile the names of those serving in all branches of the military during wars dating back to the Revolution.

Calling all Researchers

If you have conducted research on aspects of Middletown Township or its residents, please consider donating a copy of your findings for our files.

Ephemera anyone?

Ephemera is any of those short-lived items such as program brochures or advertising give-aways. Let us help declutter your homes -- we want ephemera from local organizations and businesses!

If you like local history

There are many historical societies in the area. Here are just three. More in future issues.

Atlantic Highlands Historical Society

P.O. Box 108, Atlantic Hlds 07716

A group of volunteers dedicated to preserving their local heritage. They are located in the Adolph Strauss Mansion (27 Prospect Ave., Atl. Hlds), a 21-room house built in 1893 as a summer "cottage." By 1980, the house was going to be demolished due to its deteriorated condition, but the Society purchased it for use as their museum, library and headquarters. Extensive restoration continues through volunteer labor and grants. Very active in the community, they have many events as well as their monthly presentations. Their newsletter "Portland Poynts" comes out regularly.

Twin Lights Historical Society

Lighthouse Road, Highlands

Formed in 1956 by a group of concerned citizens who wanted to do something about the then-decaying condition of the Navesink Lightstation. The Society collects and maintains historic objects on display in the maritime museum at the lighthouse. Over the years, they have helped bring the South Tower Fresnel Lens back to Twin Lights, and helped renovate the Electric Generator Building. Their annual membership meeting is in the Spring. "Lighthouse Log" newsletter is published a few times a year.

Keyport Historical Society

P.O. Box 312, Keyport 07735

732-264-6119

They operate the Steamboat Dock Museum which is open Sundays 1-4 p.m. and Mondays 10-12 p.m. May-Sept. Their monthly presentations are on the first Monday of the the month (March-Nov.) at 8 p.m. Their "Steamboat Dock News" comes out regularly.

More information about these organizations can be found on their websites, which are linked to ours under "Links" at www.home.earthlink.net/~middletownhist/

Calendar of Events

All events are free of charge, and everyone is welcome to attend. Light refreshments are served.

Nov. 15 - Tour of the Taylor-Butler House (127 Kings Hwy., Middletown) with a talk on its history. Meet at Taylor-Butler at 7:30 p.m. Parking is in the Middletown Village Elementary School lot.

Dec. 20 - Our Holiday Party! Come and enjoy some holiday cheer with us. The MacLeod-Rice House will be decorated, and refreshments and good conversation will be plentiful. Feel free to bring favorite holiday goodies to share! 6-8 p.m.

Check our website for the latest updates:
www.home.earthlink.net/~middletownhist

Acquisitions

2004 yearbook from Leonardo Elementary School -- gift of the school

Newark Star Ledger newspaper, May 23, 1958, Chapel Hill Nike blast headline stories and photographs
-- gift of Judith Patterson

"His-Story: New Monmouth Baptist Church at 150" by William J. Roberts
-- gift of the author

Arrowheads and clay pipe pieces
-- Irwin J. Kappes

Wish List

If your business has obsolete but reusable envelopes, donate them to us! We can slap a label over the old address and use them for our newsletter mailings.

Sponsors

Thanks to the following for supporting our fall newsletter:

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

Thanks so much!

The front of the MacLeod-Rice House is dressed for the season thanks to Bernice Maguire who made the wonderful wreaths that greet our visitors, and also planted the colorful mums around our sign on the front lawn. Thank you Bernice!

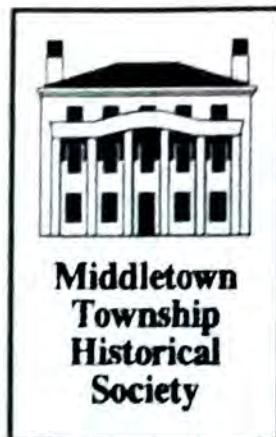
Now that our electrical plugs have finally been updated, Marian Finn and Jim Coughlin were able to set up the computer in the library and begin inputting data on our collection. They, along with Eileen Toner, have also been busy filing away the endless piles of clippings and boxes of papers. Thank you Marian, Jim and Eileen!

Thanks to Joseph Azzolina and Food Circus Super Markets, Inc. for the cookie platters at our meetings.

Most of all, thank you to all our members - we couldn't do it without your support! Don't forget to renew your membership today!

Looking for a few good volunteers with tools

We need volunteer licensed electricians, plumbers and builders with a love of old houses to help us with some minor upkeep of our own Classical Revival MacLeod-Rice House.



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

Visit our website:

www.home.earthlink.net/~middletownhist

*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