



Volume 26, Issue 2 **The Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance** Summer, 2022

September 17, 2022, RMHA BOARD MEETING

AT HISTORIC FORSGATE COUNTRY CLUB HOUSE

The September 17, 2022, RMHA board meeting will be held at the historic Forsgate Country Club House c. 1931. Established by the successful Scottish immigrant, John Forster in farmlands of rural central New Jersey, the Club House is at 375 Forsgate Drive, Monroe Township, NJ 08831 (phone 732-521-0070). Parking is conveniently situated, and the Club House is ADA accessible. All individual and site member representatives are invited to attend. Due to a lack of a quorum at the previous meeting, new officers and directors previously nominated will be elected at this meeting.



For this September meeting a delicious inexpensive luncheon has been planned. This meeting/luncheon will begin at 1 o'clock in the afternoon. After many long years of service to the RMHA, a tribute will be paid to our retiring president, The Reverend Dr. Fred D. Mueller. The speaker for this important event will be the noted author, Bob Mayers. He will speak about his recent book "*Middlebrook – The Revolutionary War Encampment That Saved America.*"

A graduate of Rutgers University, Bob is an active member of 10 historical societies and is a frequent speaker. He has written insightfully about the harrowing seven weeks of the summer of 1777, and the entire winter of 1777 and 1778 at Middlebrook. In words of praise the noted New Jersey historian, Linda Barth, has written "Bob Mayers digs deep in his investigations and uncovers important facts that no one else has found."



The Reverend Doctor Fred D. Mueller, retiring Senior Pastor of the historic c. 1766 Hillsborough Reformed Church, 1 Amwell Road, Millstone, New Jersey, has served for many years as the president of the Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance with distinction and the Board of Directors and the entire membership of individuals and sites are grateful for his service.

RARITAN-MILLSTONE HERITAGE ALLIANCE

PO Box 5583, Somerset, NJ 08875-5583

www.raritanmillstone.org

*An organization of individuals,
organizations, and sites working to promote
preservation and understanding of the rich,
eventful, and cultural heritage of significant
historical,
educational, environmental and cultural sites
located in Central New Jersey.*

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The Board of Directors meets on the third or
Fourth Saturday of March, May, September,
November at designated historic and
Museum member sites in the region.

The Executive Committee

Meets in January and June

YOUR LINK TO THE PUBLIC:

The link is on a quarterly publication schedule. News
of major upcoming events for possible placement in
the newsletter may be mailed, emailed, or faxed to the
following address: Any questions, please contact:

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FOREVER LOST AND NEVER TO BE FOUND ?

By Donald Johnstone Peck

The past is constantly pouring into the present, informing our days, and enriching our lives. One of the goals of historic preservation is continuity: restoring, revitalizing, and maintaining treasured buildings, landscapes, and neighborhoods in order to foster stronger communities. When we tear down buildings communities quickly become “anyplace,” another American town lacking any unique characteristics.

One of the most ubiquitous establishments in the seventeenth century was the tavern or public house, also called “ordinaries.” They were considered an absolute necessity for travelers, overland shipping, and transportation. A law in 1668 ordered every East Jersey town to provide an ordinary for the relief and entertainment of strangers. In pre-Revolutionary War days, and for long years after, the local ordinary represented the political, legal, and social center of a community. Here major affairs took place; here revolution was fermented, and news and gossip were exchanged. The ordinary was town hall, theatre, newspaper, office, lodge hall, and overnight stop all under one roof.

THE WIDOW WHITE TAVERN AND THE SIGN OF THE MERMAID

Many of the famous historic taverns and inns in the greater Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance area are not described in the Fifth Edition of our *Guide to Historic Sites in the Raritan and Millstone Valleys* as they are no longer standing. The Widow White Tavern in Basking Ridge, where American Major General Charles Lee was captured by British Lieutenant Colonel “Bloody Ban” Tarleton is no longer standing. Gone is The Sign of the Mermaid, Kingston, a favorite stopping place for George Washington and the governors of New Jersey in passing from eastern towns to the State capital.

PETER COCHRANE’S TAVERN AND WHITE HALL TAVERN

Peter Cochrane’s rambling New Brunswick tavern served as headquarters for Washington from November 29 until December 1, 1776, during Washington’s “Long Retreat” across New Jersey. Nothing also is left of New Brunswick’s White Hall Tavern, built in 1756. Here the Provincial Congress met from January 31 to March 2, 1776. Here George Washington lodged after he was nominated by John Adams on June 15, 1775, and unanimously elected as the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army.

THE HICKS TAVERN

Lost forever is the Hicks Tavern, Perth Amboy where on May 22, 1776, George and Martha Washington stayed and where George Washington formulated his “Flying Camp” strategy to protect the coast of New Jersey from Elizabethtown Point to Perth Amboy from the British. Headquartered at the Proprietary House, Hugh Mercer together with James Madison and John Marshall administered the “Flying Camp” shortly after Royal Governor William Franklin was removed June 19, 1776. The Hicks Tavern was previously called the Kings Arms and had played host to many of the Royal Governors of New Jersey. During the ‘public times,’ when the courts were in session, the King’s Arms was the center of social, political, and business activity.

THE INDIAN QUEEN TAVERN

Fortunately The Indian Queen Tavern, New Brunswick, was saved by an initiative led by Dr. Joseph H. Kler. It stood for 241 years at the northwest corner of Albany and Water Streets in the center of old New Brunswick. As a result, it was removed and became the first piece in a mosaic that would preserve the visual record of New Jersey culture, known as East Jersey Olde Town, located in Johnson Park, Piscataway. It is administered by the nationally acclaimed Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission. Even Fraunces Tavern, in Manhattan, restored after it was damaged when the British arrived in New York harbor, July 1776, and where George Washington bid a brief but touching farewell to some of his officers, is a complete reconstruction.

REVOLUTIONARY WOODBRIDGE, NEW JERSEY

Place offers a powerful lens through which we can view the past; it challenges us to think the full history of the space and reconsider significant questions about our local history. One such place is the historic town of Woodbridge, the oldest chartered township in New Jersey in 1669. During the American Revolution, Woodbridge Township was a battleground as it was a crossroads of the Revolution and still is of the state today.

A center of activity during the Revolutionary War, soldiers were often marching through the village. In Woodbridge Township were countless farmhouses, dwellings in and out of town, taverns, and churches where officers and rank-and-file armies slept and ate, met and the Americans and British planned, guarded and spied, and occasionally engaged in armed conflict.

Both George Washington and the British Army saw action in Woodbridge, from Washington's "Long Retreat" from Fort Lee through Woodbridge on November 29, 1776, to the banks of the Delaware on December 8, to the "Foraging Wars" of '76 and '77 as well as the Battle of the Short Hills, the third most significant battle fought in New Jersey and that was fought in historic Woodbridge Township. In their retreat from this battle on June 28, 1777, the British vandalized, looted and burned houses in their retreat to Perth Amboy.

FORD CORNERS TAVERN

Lost forever, John Ford's Ford Corners Tavern today is marked by the Woodbridge Township Preservation Commission's historic site marker. Patriots gathered here when Ebenezer Ford was innkeeper. The tavern and the nearby Timothy Bloomfield House, no longer standing, were both a rendezvous for the "Jersey Blues." The "Blues" are the oldest continuing militant militia organization in point of continuous service on the western continent and were organized in 1673 in Woodbridge and Piscataway to control Native Americans from upper New York and Pennsylvania who came to the area during the summer months for fishing, often making a nuisance of themselves.

ELM TREE TAVERN

The Elm Tree Tavern, now gone, received its name from an ancient American Elm that spread its branches in front of this tavern and was known the country around for its size. It was felled in 1837. It had a circumference of 32 feet and shaded this tavern for more than two centuries. It is reminiscent of other New Jersey ancient trees: the Salem Oak, the Mercer Oak, and the Basking Ridge Oak all which fell down in the 21st century. Old American Elms in Woodbridge dappled with the splendor of sunlight matched those of Connecticut towns. These magnificent stands of timber, especially the oaks, would be used to build homes, barns, and fences of early Woodbridge colonists.

In the 19th century, a school named the Elm Tree Institute was founded here by James Stryker. It was he who delivered the welcoming address when Lafayette visited the Cross Keys Tavern in Woodbridge. After an absence of 40 years, Lafayette returned to America. During his whirlwind tour of the United States, the Marquis de Lafayette addressed crowds at Woodbridge on September 24, 1824. He was given elaborate ceremonies on the Woodbridge Town Green and stayed at the Cross Keys Tavern. One of the distinctive features of his reception was the presence of 16 little girls, each bearing on her dress a letter made of marigolds, which together formed the words "Welcome Lafayette."

THE PIKE HOUSE

The Pike House, also no longer standing, at Heard's Square in Woodbridge, once stood on the southwest corner of the foot of Green Street where it meets Rahway Avenue and was on the opposite corner from Samuel Moore's Tavern. Captain John Pike of Newbury, Massachusetts Bay Colony, was one of six original settlers and an associate who signed the Article of Agreement dated December 11, 1666, to pur-

chase Woodbridge Township from the original land purchase from the Lenape of October 28, 1664. During the Revolution Colonel Zebulon Pike was the proprietor.

While enroute from Massachusetts to Philadelphia to help organize the First Continental Congress in 1774, John Adams stopped at The Pike House sharing his vehement anti-British sentiment with fellow travelers. Adams argued that American interests were not represented in Parliament, but in colonial legislatures, which alone could justifiably speak for American interests because they were elected to do so.

Adams had a hollow feel and distrust of taverns. He understood that taverns and alcohol were destabilizing social forces, but he was coming to understand that the raucous energy of America's taverns would soon become the galvanizing force behind the revolutionary struggle that would define his legacy.

MOORE'S TAVERN

Samuel Moore, an English Quaker, arrived from Barbados to Newbury, Massachusetts Bay Colony and was among the earliest known Quakers to settle in North America. Quakers were barred in Massachusetts Bay Colony under penalty of death. Finding himself unsafe in Newbury, he joined with the Reverend John W. Woodbridge, VI and the other Newbury pioneers arriving in Woodbridge, East Jersey in 1667. The "Concessions and Agreements" of the Lord's Proprietors given by East Jersey deed holder, Sir George Carteret, contained a particularly emphatic, strong, and specific guarantee of religious liberty to promote rapid settlement.

By 1683 Samuel Moore established Moore's Tavern, the first 'Ordinary' in Woodbridge. Moore served as Town Clerk from 1668 to 1688. Many a discussion of the public welfare was discussed at Moore's Tavern. Prior to being torn down in the 1940s. It was the oldest tavern in New Jersey. The site became an automobile dealership and is now a high-rise residential building. Today New Jersey's oldest tavern, built in 1706, is Ye Olde Centerton Inn, Pittsgrove, and is still operating.

THE ROWLAND HOUSE

The Rowland House was also torn down in the 20th century. It was situated on the northwest corner of Green Street and Amboy Avenue (Route 35). At one time Phillip Brown was the innkeeper. The Rowland name survives in the nearby residential street named Rowland Place. An important visitor to the Rowland House was William Dunlap (1766-1839) who was among the earliest of playwrights and novelists to make use of American material as well as the first historian of the theater and of the *History of the Arts of Design in the United States*.

Dunlap was the country's first professional playwright, whose best-known play is "*Andre; a Tragedy in Five Acts*." It is one of the first uses of a native theme by a native dramatist. At the age of seventeen, Dunlap painted George Washington at Rockingham, Rocky Hill, New Jersey, Washington's last official war-time headquarters. This painting now hangs in the United State Senate. In addition to Washington, Presidents Adams, Jefferson, and Madison also sat for Dunlap.

A true renaissance man, William Dunlap is often considered to be the father of American drama. He climaxed his career in 1832 with *A History of the American Theatre*, the first documented story of the growth of the stage in America in the 19th century. Dunlap became the most prolific playwright America had produced and was responsible for the construction of the first theatre in New York City. To this day he remains one of New Jersey's most illustrious citizens.

THE CROSS KEYS TAVERN AT WOODBRIDGE, NEW JERSEY

In the twenty-first century, we are fortunate to have a bottomless variety of businesses providing what was once available only in a tavern. Our century has no equivalent to the tavern as an institution. To huddle beneath the posts and beams of the tavern ceiling, ale in hand, beside the same fire that sustained Washington, Adams, or Lafayette, is to engage with history in a way that no book or museum can match.

Oddly enough, as impossible to believe as it is, the only original structure still standing where George Washington visited or stayed enroute from Mount Vernon to New York City to be sworn in as the first president of the United States is the Cross Keys Tavern. By 1775 there were several hundred taverns in New Jersey.

The Cross Keys Tavern, c. 1740, an historic witness, and a headquarters for revolution, no longer guards its heirlooms of history, its rooms chock-full of period furniture. The sagging floors and creaky floorboards of original floors, the tall case clock ticking away in the corner and the settings that graced its lovely mantels over hearths are idle now. The graceful main staircase, which led to the room where General Washington stayed the night, now appears indifferent to its famous guest. Although sunlight still filters through its windows, they now stare like blank eyes at the sky. The tread of great men and women pledged to ardent causes no longer cross its thresholds.

Seditious talk at the Cross Keys Tavern gave patrons much fodder for discussion at their dinner tables. Here these Americans expanded the public sphere of political speech, engaging in every means of dissent available to them, from newspapers and pamphlets to songs, sermons, speeches, letters, petitions and more. Townspeople were moving quickly from a public subdued to a public informed.

Many of the issues facing the patriots of Woodbridge Township were formally debated and argued out at the Cross Keys Tavern. Issues later characterized as the "Great American Experiment" were incorporated into the First Amendment which reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

There would be a price to be paid for the cost of incorporating into common life the values outlined in the Bill of Rights while at the same time facing all the hard demands of an infant society and the life of a gradually unfolding republic – values that are particular to Americans as well as inspirational to other countries. The fundamental achievements of modern democracy – representative government, that is, government elected by the people and responsible to the people – found a voice when, on November 20, 1789, at Perth Amboy, New Jersey became the first state to ratify the Bill of Rights, enumerating the individual freedoms guaranteed to every citizen.

The whole town was astir with the arrival of George Washington, the President-elect, as he entered historic Woodbridge, April 22, 1789. Washington's company was escorted into town by the Woodbridge Cavalry as an adventurous crowd of eye witnesses welcomed Washington with their cheers. As documented in Washington's expense account, he stayed the night at the Cross Keys Tavern. Receiving Washington was William Livingston, New Jersey's governor and many of the surviving residents who had taken part in the struggle for independence at the historic Battle of the Short Hills and during the 29 skirmishes that occurred in Woodbridge Township.

On hand that day was Brigadier General Nathaniel Heard, who with the Middlesex County Militia, had arrested Royal Governor William Franklin as well as Janet Pike Gage. A true heroine, she had raised a Liberty Pole to fly the Stars and Stripes for the first time in Woodbridge at the Cross Keys Tavern. Other of the 75 distinguished officers and the rank and file of the American Revolutionary War, who now rest quietly in the old Burying Ground of the Old White Church, were also present.

At dinner that evening the warm candlelight flickered as Washington listened with grave urbanity to the officers seated around his table. The hardship, danger, and grinding anxiety of his venture were now behind him. As the madeira wine circulated, Washington impressed his guests as courteous and polite but extremely cautious and reserved, all the while expressing words of enormous thanksgiving for all the patriots of Woodbridge had done to help win the war. Tradition reports that Washington loved to dance and that evening at the Cross Keys Tavern was no exception.

Opening the shutters on a new day, the morning light streamed into his bed chamber that April 23, 1789. Later waving good-bye to his host John Manning, George Washington departed Woodbridge. A large contingency of the militia and jostling crowds of citizens escorted him as he traveled to Rahway where military companies from Newark, Connecticut Farms and Elizabethtown escorted him to Boxwood Hall and his celebrated journey across Newark and New York Bays to Manhattan. One wonders, without intervention, will the Cross Keys Tavern ever be restored, saved and historically interpreted?



THE CROSS KEYS TAVERN TODAY

RARITAN MILLSTONE HERITAGE ALLIANCE

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Thank you!
Visit our website: raritanmillstone.org

The Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance consists of committed individuals and organizations representing sites within the region of Raritan and Millstone systems. In an area that has continually contributed to the strength of the United States, we seek through our programs to promote, protect and preserve an understanding of our rich historical, cultural and educational heritage as we work to be a model for current and future generations by promoting the rich heritage of our American society.