

# CROSSROADS

Newsletter - Fall 2022

## ASSOCIATION NEWS

After two years of limited activity due to the pandemic, 2022 turned into a busy year for the Historical Association of Woodbridge Township.

Our program season for 2022-2023 began in September with the engaging presentation “A Cradle of our National Pastime: New Jersey Baseball from 1855 to 1880” by John Zinn. HAWT program director Don Peck continues to schedule the most interesting and informative presentations that are open to membership and the general public. Program meetings are on the fourth Monday of each month from September through June (date changes may occur due to holidays) in the Fellowship Hall of First Presbyterian Church of Woodbridge, right in the heart of the earliest beginnings of our township.

A grant award from the Middlesex County Cultural Arts Trust Fund allowed us to offer five additional programs during 2022 in a series titled “Our Life in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.” These presentations, held at the Avenel Performing Arts Center, began with “The Lost Theaters of Woodbridge Township” and ended with “100 Years of Shopping on Main Street.” Special thanks to Irv Hyatt and Laura Bradshaw who diligently worked on the grant process and preparation for these programs, and to the many participants who made this series an enjoyable trip down memory lane!

Our association also participated in various community and fundraising events – including the Barron Arts Center Flea Market in July and the St. James Fair in September. Members are always invited and encouraged to participate in these events.

The new HAWT website is now up-and-running. Check it out at [www.woodbridgetownshiphistory.org](http://www.woodbridgetownshiphistory.org). Interest in our Facebook group continues to grow with over 5200 followers!

*And last but not least...*

Work continues at 86 Green Street – site of the future museum. We'll provide updates as they become available.

Exciting things are in store for 2023!



Donald Peck, HAWT program director, and Daniel D'Arcy, HAWT president, with Alisa Dupuy after her presentation “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow – A Preview to the Victorian Age” in October.



“100 Years of Shopping on Main Street” program at the Avenel Performing Arts Center in October.

## **This issue of “Crossroads” features articles previously printed in HAWT’s earlier newsletter “The Brickyard.”**

*Excerpts from*

### **Dateline: Woodbridge, September 1929**

When Bob Ringwood came into my office and dropped the stack of old yellowed newspapers on my desk for the newsletter, I knew they would be a treasure trove of the mundane. Old small town newspapers provide a glimpse into the average everyday life of the community, offering an intimate glimpse of the way things used to be. These were from the weekly Perth Amboy Evening News for September 1929.

Under the heading “From All Sections of Woodbridge Township”, the social life of the area was reported. Relatively minor and personal events were deemed newsworthy, such as reporting that various individuals or families had gone visiting relatives or had returned from vacation. The September 5<sup>th</sup> edition included a short article about the surprise birthday party Mr. and Mrs. C. Clinton Shain of East Green Street threw for their daughter Janet’s seventh birthday.

Local charitable and fraternal organizations abounded as evidenced by the large number of meeting and event announcements. There was the Pride of New Jersey Council, the Ladies’ Aid Society of the Union Protestant Church, the Ceramics Athletic and Social Club, the Builder’s Society of the Methodist Church, the Iroquois Camp Fire Girls, the Catholic Daughters of America, the Buschman Guild of the First Presbyterian Church, the Woman’s Club, the Lions Club, the Democratic Club, the Motorcycle Club of Fords, the Bridge Club, the Holy Name Society of Our Lady of Peace Church, the Just Social Club, the Ladies Auxiliary of the West End Republican Club, the Presbyterian Young People’s Society, the Woodbridge Rotary, the Congregational Church Woman’s Association, the Avenel Woman’s Club, and on and on!

The advertisements were also interesting. In many cases, the brand names will be familiar – Maytag was selling washing machines (and noting that “For homes without electricity the Maytag is available with in-built gasoline motor”); Bayer Aspirin was advertising that it was good for more than just headaches; Goodyear was introducing its Pathfinder tires and Frigidaire was touting its “Cold Control.” Just \$119 would get you a nine-piece living room set from Ludwig’s. And you could now buy a Pierce-Arrow automobile in different colors – for between \$2,775 and \$8,200.

The September 19<sup>th</sup> edition has an interesting piece with the title, “Fleeces Cash From Laborers.” It would appear that a con artist “hired” three black men and a white man from Rahway to mend a fence on “the grounds of the Polish orphanage in Strawberry Hill.” About fifteen minutes into the job, the boss asked if any of them had change of a five or fifty dollar bill. When none did, he asked them how much they had. The black men produced fifty, sixty, and eighty cents and the white man \$40. The boss took it all, telling them he was going to the bank and would return. He never did and the nuns in charge of the orphanage told the men that no one had been engaged to do any work on the grounds! “Police are hunting for the boss,” the article concluded, “and so are the men.”

Obviously, there was more substantial news as well. There was the holdup of George Moroz’s shoe shop by two armed robbers “in the State Theater building here, a stone’s throw from the police station.” The two bandits, along with a third, were involved in robberies in both Woodbridge and Rahway. Police traced the men from the license plate on their get-away car to a house on Kerly Court in Elizabeth where they were routed out by “tear bombs.” It was hoped that they would also be linked to the bogus job con which fleeced the day laborers at the orphanage.

Of course, there are many more stories than could be covered here – everything from a flight of the Graf Zeppelin to the Matawan police chief’s arrest. Also from those pages may be seen events on the world stage. The League of Nations was facing big problems as it attempted world disarmament and a “United States of Europe” (not unlike the modern U.E.C.). Its failure would usher in events which would sweep away forever the quaint world of those yellowed pages.

*By Gordon Bond, February 2004*

## The Ancient Origins of Woodbridge's Clay

*(Information from "Woodbridge and its Clay" by John Kreger, Independent Leader, June 11, 1964)*



*Clay pits on Metuchen Avenue*

Out of the clay-pits of Woodbridge Township, fortunes were made and families provided for. It was the economic lifeblood of the community from its earliest days to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As long as the history of the Woodbridge clay industry may seem, the clay itself is the product of a much more distant past.

Clay comes in two main types. "Residual" clay results from the patient weathering of rock and is usually found associated with its source. The other type is known as "sedimentary" clay. When residual clays get washed away by rain, they are carried by streams and rivers and deposited,

sometimes great distances away, as sedimentary layers. Residual clay can differ depending on the type of rock it came from, but becomes mixed with other types to form the sedimentary type. Such deposits are characterized by stratification – the laying down of layer upon layer over time. They are usually not associated with the type of rock found below them. This is the type of clay with which Woodbridge was blessed.

Geologists have found that the Woodbridge sedimentary clay was washed there by streams emanating from glaciers some 125,000,000 years ago. This was the Late Cretaceous age when the reign of dinosaurs was nearing its conclusion, trees and flowering plants were making their first appearances on the landscape, and the Rocky Mountains were being pushed skyward. It was also the beginning of an ice age, when an ice sheet covered some 4 million square miles of North America and is believed to have been as much as 2,660 feet thick! Huge boulders from upper New York State were transported by the advance and retreat of this ice, leaving them in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

A reminder of the clay's ancient origins was revealed in 1930 when the footprints of a dinosaur were found in the claypits of Hampton Cutter. Four prints roughly 20 inches in length from a bipedal *Megalosauropus* showed the creature had a stride of nine feet. The prints were carefully removed and can still be seen at the Rutgers University Geology Museum in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

*By Gordon Bond, September 2002*

## Colonial Lotteries

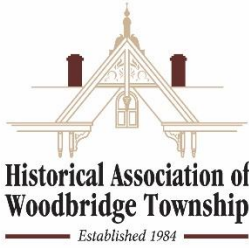
It pays to dream, or so the NJ Lottery's ad campaign tells us. The dream is an old one! Lotteries were part of Colonial America almost right from the start. In 1612, King James I granted permission for the holding of a lottery in England to benefit the colony of Virginia. Over £29,000 was raised and the winner, a tailor named Thomas Sharplys, won £4,000.

The tax base in the more rural part of England and her colonies was small, so the practice began of holding state-sponsored lotteries to raise funds for public works projects. Everything from building and maintaining roads and bridges to digging canals to building jails was financed by such gambling.

New York appears to have held out for some time, not sanctioning its first lottery until 1746. The third French and Indian War was in full swing and western New York was on the frontier front lines. An act was passed on February 27<sup>th</sup> to raise £3,375 to help build fortifications. Woodbridge's own James Parker was living and working in New York at the time and was tasked with printing the tickets.

While some viewed such gambling as a vice, the Anglican Church seemed to approve. In 1764, the Rev. Samuel Seabury recorded in his diary he had won £425 and his "thanks and praise to Almighty God, the giver of all good gifts." Puritan sects lamented how gambling lured the poor away from the virtues of hard work and frugality they saw as the key to success. The strongest opposition came from the Philadelphia Quakers. As pacifists, they took particular issue when the lottery was in aid of the military. But that didn't stop Benjamin Franklin raising £3,000 in 1748!

*By Gordon Bond, September 2002*



Historical Association of  
Woodbridge Township  
*Established 1984*

PO Box 83  
Woodbridge NJ 07095

Historical Association of Woodbridge Township  
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Irv Hyatt, Laura Bradshaw



Future home of the museum at  
86 Green Street, Woodbridge

## MEETING ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Let's celebrate the holidays with a Victorian flair!*

Our December meeting will feature an hour of food and refreshments, followed by a delightful Victorian holiday choral presentation by the Village Carolers. Come gather around the holiday punch bowl and enjoy some good cheer!

**December 19, 2022 at 7pm**

Fellowship Hall at First Presbyterian Church  
600 Rahway Avenue, Woodbridge

*Upcoming Events:*

**January 23, 2023** – Monthly Meeting

“A Token on the Freedman’s Coat,” the story behind Thomas Mundy Peterson’s 1884 Voting Medal – presented by Gordon Bond at First Presbyterian Church, 600 Rahway Avenue, Woodbridge

**February 17, 2023** – Spaghetti Dinner / Tricky Tray Fundraising Event at Woodbridge Elks, 665 Rahway Avenue, Woodbridge  
*(Save the date...more information to follow)*

*Historical Association of Woodbridge Township is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit tax-exempt charitable organization.*