

Retyped by Sewaren.net

Editor's Note: The following history of Sewaren was compiled and written by Mrs. Morrison Christie, of Sewaren and given as a paper at a recent meeting of the Sewaren History Club. The Writer has obtained a number of her facts from various old residents and though she is fairly certain that the incidents related are true, she does not guarantee their accuracy.

By: Mrs. Morrison Christie

The earliest records of Sewaren as taken from Daily's "History of Woodbridge and vicinity" make mention of Sewaren as a little hamlet which was later called East Woodbridge. There are several stories as to how the name, Sewaren, originated. One is that a friend of Mr. Johnson, a sea captain, was called Captain Warren and that the town was named after him. Another is that Mr. Johnson's agent, who had charge of the town, was named Warren and whenever anyone asked about the place, they were told to see Warren, and from that the town was named, "Sewaren."

Probably the oldest land mark still existing is the old Acker homestead. This building dates back to the at least 1876 and was the first home of Henry Acker. When the latter first came to Sewaren, he raised seed for Peter Henderson and later opened a canning factory. Sunday school picnic parties were held with frequency at Acker's. Another member of the family, R.O. Acker, was a boat builder, not only constructing his own, but was under contract to build government boats.

Another of the old land marks is the store at the corner of West and Woodbridge Avenues. For a good many years the building housed the only general store in the town and was owned by John Whitaker. The latter was the first postmaster in Sewaren. He conducted the post office in the old store.

John Whitaker's sons also owned and operated a coal and wood business. The lumber yard was located in the rear of where Whitaker's gas station is now located. The Whitakers made clothes props, some of which are still in existence. The Whitakers are one of the oldest families in the State of New Jersey, residing in Sewaren since 1875.

On July 8, 1876 the depot was completed. On May 7, of the following year, Thomas Zettlemoyer was appointed postmaster. The post office equipment was moved from the corner building to the railroad station.

Another famous resident of Sewaren was C.W. Boynton who conducted a factory which

Sewaren was the home-town of several mayors. E.W. Christie served as Committeeman - at large in the early '90s. He was the one responsible for the appointment of the late Chief P.W. Murphy and Patrick "Paddy" Culinane to the police force. Ernest Waring was another mayor of the Township and in 1921 Christie accepted another term. However, after six months Christie, a Democrat was forced to retire on account of illness, and his place was taken by Louis Newberg, a Republican.

Transportation facilities in the old days were not too much to brag about. Howard Tappen would send salt hay to New York in a sailing vessel which would take two to three days. The hay was used for bedding horses. Hackensack was sending hay faster by train. In order to meet competition Mr. Tappen had to send hay via New Brunswick Steamboat which stopped at the Hotel Dock at 8:30 A.M. Daily, returning back between 5 and 5:30 P.M. A freighter called the "Keyport" also stopped not only by signal. The tugboats were side wheelers.

The winters were very severe. After Thanksgiving there was no navigation. The sound was solidly frozen two months. On Sundays, the boys would skate from the Hotel Dock to Elizabeth, starting early Sunday morning and making it an all-day journey. Then they boys from Tottenville would come up with their ice-boats to race. Where the hotel stood was a red barn. In the summer they would press hay and in winter cart it over to Staten Island on sleighs.

However, the sound was kept open for transportation after 1892, when Philadelphia and Reading started operation at Port Reading. Coal was brought from the mines and loaded onto the barges and thence taken to the New England States.

The first homes built on Cliff Road were: Drakes, Gimbernats, and Turners (this home was moved back to its present location to make room for Mr. Hawkins to build on Cliff Road;

made drain pipe and tile. The factory was located where the Shell Oil plant now stands. It was C.W. Boynton who constructed "Boynton Beach" about 1880. The beach became very popular and scores of excursions visited there. It was "quite the thing" to visit the beach in those days.

In 1895 a trolley line was built between Rahway and Boynton Beach with the purpose in mind to bring the people to the resort. Mr. Boynton was the largest stock holder in the line.

In 1880, what is now Sewaren, was owned by four people. John Taylor Johnson, of Plainfield, had purchased all the available land, including the water front, east of Old Road. The land west of Old Road from what is now Woodbridge Avenue to Port Reading and west to Woodbridge Creek, was know as the "Henry Brewster Farm". The land west of Old Road and running from Woodbridge Creek to about what is now Arbor Street was a farm owned by Captain Ellis. The land west of Old Road between Arbor Street and Woodbridge Avenue was another farm owned by Captain Holton.

When the main part of Sewaren was laid out by John T. Johnson, paths were constructed and shade trees were planted all through the town. This work was done under the direction of Daniel Turner. A private sewer and waterline was constructed and the same lines are in use on West Avenue. The water was supplied by an old windmill which was located on a farm run by George Wittenberg, who supplied residents of Sewaren with milk. The wind mill site was in the rear property owned by Mr. Whitcher. West Avenue also ended at that spot, there was a large pond and swamps all around where the Port Reading School and firehouse was now located.

One of Sewaren's old landmarks was torn down last summer, the Cuppia house, corner of Cliff Road and Holton Street, which was a farm owned by Mr. Brady, who sold it to Captain Smith. The latter caught fish, claims and oysters and shipped them to New York. He sold the house to Mr. Cuppia. Mr. Brady moved to Bayonne and went into the building material and cement business. His grandson became the mayor of Bayonne.

this dwelling is now owned by T. Vincent) the other was moved to West Avenue and is now the Cheslak residence.

Mr. Treider's home on West Avenue was a school. At that time it was a one story frame building. The following is a brief history of the Sewaren school:

March 3, 1891 - At a meeting held at the office of Brokn's Drug store "it was resolved that we ask the district at the next annual meeting for \$2,650 that amount being though necessary for running the school and for \$700, being an amount thought necessary to establish a primary school at Sewaren, N. J"

July 13, 1891 - "On motion the Sewaren school matter, namely find out the number of children likely to attend school, furniture required, janitor, ect., was left to Mr. Boynton. The salary of teachers at Sewaren was fixed to \$325. Clerk to write Miss Runyon about position at Sewaren." (there is no further mention of Miss Runyon, who it seem did not accept the position, from the action taken at a later meeting.)

To Be Continued Next Week

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