

HOW SEWAREN GOT ITS NAME

Sewaren, New Jersey, situated on the Arthur Kill, opposite the southern end of Staten Island, New York, is one of nine sections of Woodbridge Township in Middlesex County, New Jersey. The land under the December 11, 1666 contract made by Captain Philip Carteret, Governor of the Province of New Jersey with John Ogden, Luke Watson of Elizabethtown, and Daniel Pierce of Newbury, Massachusetts, was originally purchased from the “natives” on October 28, 1664, and was called Woodbridge, in honor of the Reverend John Woodbridge of Newbury, Massachusetts.

In July of 1673 the Dutch invaded and captured New York City, and the whole of New Jersey was subjugated. The Dutch refers to the shores along the Atlantic coast as “Zeewanhacky” – Zee meaning sea, and wan meaning fan; hacky was a place where shells are found. The Raritan Indians sought perch, eels, oysters, and clams in the local waters. *

Earliest records make mention of Sewaren as a little hamlet was called East Woodbridge. In 1665 it was referred to as Pierce’s Landing, an area near the mouth of Papiack Creek (later Woodbridge River) where boats unloaded cargo onto the beach. It was also called Woodbridge Beach. After 1844, a steamboat dock was built at the foot of Ferry Street.

About 1877, Cassimer W. Boynton, who owned a clay brick and tile factory at the southwest end of town, developed the beach area with picnic tables in a grove, bath houses, a restaurant, and dance pavilion. In 1878 the famous Sewaren Hotel was built and operated until 1913. The area then became known as Boynton Beach. A depot was completed in 1876, and visitors arrived by train, trolley, bicycle, horse and carriage, and ferry. It, became so well known as a summer resort that Boynton Beach in Florida was named after this site.

During the 1880s, John Taylor Johnston, President of the Central Rail Road of New Jersey, bought the rest of the waterfront property north of West Avenue and planned the development of the town. His extensive art collection became part of the Metropolitan Museum of art, and in January of 1870 he was elected its first president. From 1872 to 1886 he was president of the University Council of the University of the City of New York. **

It was Mr. Johnston who gave Sewaren its final name “after his friend Mike S. E. Warren, as Mr. Dunn another of his friends named Dunellen after his daughter. Mr. Johnston called Fanwood after Mrs. Farragut – his daughter whose husband was Admiral Farragut’s son. Mrs. Robert DeFrost was also a Miss Johnston, and Sewaren was given to her by her father, as he gave Fanwood to his other daughter.” ***

Boynton Beach Closed in 1914. On May 30, 1917 the dance hall, pavilion, and restaurant burned. Shell Oil bought the property in 1927 and the homes of residents now end at Ferry Street, which still has a dock and boat ramp, tables and benches for the many people who still enjoy the continuous marine traffic on the Arthur Kill.

* Woodbridge and Vicinity, J. W. Dally, Hunterdon House

** National Encyclopedia

*** Helen Glidden Grant Tombs, from a paper presented to the Sewaren History Club (of which she was the founder and President) at a regular meeting in 1910

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