

The County Circular

Morris County Heritage Commission

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1816 Indenture Rediscovered

The Heritage Commission has recently acquired an important local historical document, the original 1816 Indenture Agreement conveying the Morristown Green to the Trustees of the Morristown Green from the First Presbyterian Church of Morristown. The three-page document, written in fine penmanship on parchment paper, has been stored for 165 years in a tin cylinder case, the standard 19th century protective device for important legal papers. The document is well preserved, and the Commission plans to exhibit the Agreement in the Morris County Court House lobby, after the papers have been treated for archival preservation.

The Green had been part of the First Presbyterian Church property since 1758, and its boundaries greatly exceeded the present 2.5 acre park. Its borders extended to Pine Street, South Street, Spring Street, and the recently demolished Water Street. Patterned after a New England Common, the Green was also the site of the first Morris County Courthouse (1755). In 1770 the Church sold one acre of the Green for 5 English pounds to the Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders for the second Court House and Jail.

In 1816 the Church sold the remainder of the Green for \$1600 to thirteen leading Morristown citizens who agreed to administer the property as "a common forever for the use and enjoyment of the public." The individual signatures of these thirteen men and their financial contribution towards the

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Morristown Green (circa 1900). Courtesy Morristown-Morris Township Library.

Mansion in Forest

by Sharon Doremus

It's not the White House. Yet its owner wanted a home as fine. In 1833-36 William Gibbons, a wealthy Southern planter, built a distinguished Greek Revival house for his family on his 1000 acre estate, "The Forest," outside of Bottle Hill, now Madison. Originally called the Mansion, the building has been known since 1867 as Mead Hall, presently Administrative Center of Drew University.

No building records exist to verify the family tradition that the home was "architecturally a duplicate of the White House in Washington." However, the impressive dwelling is considered one of New Jersey's architectural gems, a Greek Revival mansion on the grand

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MONUMENT!

Household Items From Another Era

by Frances Pingeon

The Morris County Heritage Commission and the John Ralston Historical Society present "Household Items from Another Era" on exhibit in the Court House lobby. The household artifacts, loaned by the Friends of the Ralston Historical Society, offer fascinating glimpses of rural domestic life in the late 18th and early 19 century.

Three primitive "grease" lamps, the pan lamp, the all-saver lamp and the three spout lamp illustrate an ancient form of lighting. Housewives used left-over fats from chicken, fish or other animals to fuel these lamps. The fat was burned in liquid form at room temperature. Their light was essential

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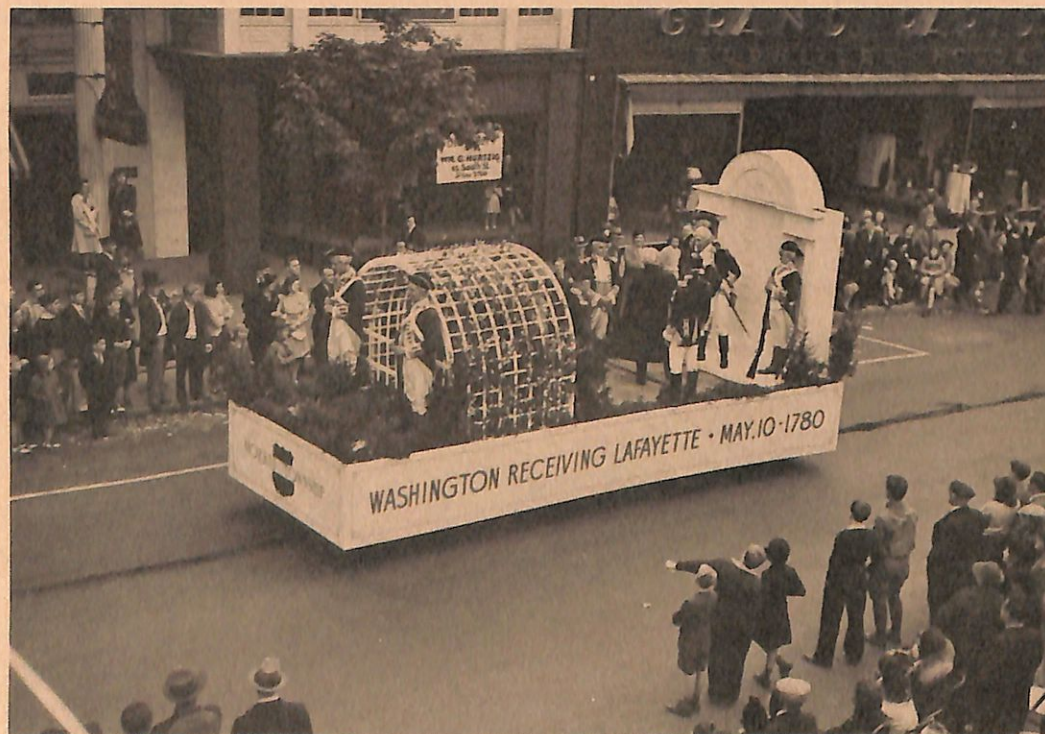


Dorothy Sherer of Roxbury Township, beauty queen of the 200th Anniversary Parade.



Wages were less before World War I. Six men in picture were each paid \$1.75 for a nine hour day in 1914 photograph. The identity of the men and place where picture was taken are unknown.

Notes from the 1824 minute book of the Board of Chosen Freeholders: Resolved that a bounty of \$20 be paid for every full grown wolf caught and killed within the limits of the county and \$10 for each young wolf... the County Poorhouse "granted relief" in 1840 to 207 persons;... Resolved that the Freeholders "take measures" to ascertain the number of lunatics and persons deaf and dumb in their respective townships... Resolved that a jailer be hired for \$60 a year;... Resolved that the County Collector be authorized to borrow on the credit of the county any sum not exceeding \$4,000... Ordered that the Sheriff be allowed 25-cents a day for each prisoner boarded... Ordered that the Sheriff be allowed the sum of \$150 for personal services in capturing, retaining and executing LeBlanc.



The Morris Township float depicting Gen. George Washington receiving Lafayette on May 10, 1780 is shown in line of march of Morris County's 200th anniversary parade held in Morristown in 1939.



William Gibbons, owner of "Mansion in Forest" Story on Page 1.

Mead Hall...Cont. From Page 1

scale.

Gibbons was a millionaire. He inherited a tremendous fortune from his father, Thomas Gibbons, a famous attorney and Southern rice planter, who owned 500 slaves, extensive plantation holdings in Georgia, and a half interest in the New York-New Jersey ferry rights. The Gibbons' were famous as well as wealthy. The successful litigation of father and son against the New York ferry boat monopoly resulted in an 1824 U.S. Supreme Court landmark decision which established Congressional control over interstate commerce.

After his father's death in 1826, Gibbons sold his inherited ferry rights, and put together a small stable of thoroughbred race horses. Needing a country home for his growing family, and pastureland for his horses, he and his wife, Abigail, were attracted to a lush wooded area outside of Bottle Hill. In 1832 Gibbons began buying parcels of farmland for \$170 an acre in "The Forest," as the area was known. By 1851 the property totaled 1000 acres, acquired through 83 different deeds.

In 1833 he commissioned construction of a magnificent 20-room brick mansion. Set amid giant oak trees, it resembled a Southern plantation house with its doric-columned 90 foot long front piazza. The interior floor plan was presidential in scale. A two-story center hall with an Italian marble floor led to an elegant ballroom, library, office, and formal dining room with an adjoining plant-filled conservatory. The rooms had 18-foot ceilings, carved mahogany woodwork, Italian marble fireplaces, Irish crystal chandeliers, and massive Empire furniture. Gibbons' bonded negro servants lived in the basement.

In 1836 Gibbons, his wife and four children moved into the Mansion. He divided his time between his self-sufficient estate, and racing stable which bred some of the finest race horses of the era. They were trained on his private racetrack at an outlying farm. His filly, "Fashion" became the greatest racing mare of the century.

The golden days ended with the death of Abigail in 1844, and William in 1852. Their spinster daughter, Caroline, lived in the Mansion until her death in 1857. Shortly thereafter, Gibbons' son and heir, Heyward, closed the Mansion and stables. His Southern ties were strong, and he returned to Georgia to enlist in the Confederate Army.



Mead Hall - 1867 - on opening of Methodist Seminary.

When the Union won the war, he lost his inherited plantations and slaves. He returned north, and in 1867 sold "The Forest," for \$140,000 to Daniel Drew, the Wall Street financier. The self-made millionaire gave the property in 1868 to the newly formed Drew Methodist Theological Seminary. The Mansion was renamed Mead Hall, honoring Drew's wife, Roxanna Mead Drew.

Mead Hall today exemplifies successful adaptive use of an historic building. The first floor, elegantly appointed with William Gibbons' original furnishings, co-exists harmoniously with the basement's Administrative computer and word processing center. The building, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is open to the public. The Heritage Commission, recognizing the contribution of Mead Hall to County history, has placed an historical marker on the campus near the building's entrance.

(This article is the ninth in a series on Historical Marker sites.)

Indian Exhibit Opens At Seton Hall

A display on the prehistoric Indians of New Jersey is on exhibit in the main lobby of the Humanities Building of Seton Hall University, South Orange. Twenty display cases, floor exhibits and photographs, document Indian life during the Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Woodland and Historic Contact periods.

Scheduled for exhibit through June, 1982, it is open to the public, free of charge, Mondays through Saturdays, when the University is open.

Bogert and Decker Appointed

Eleanor Bogert (Mrs. Charles), Pequannock Township and Joseph M. Decker, Washington Township, have been appointed by the Board of Chosen Freeholders to fill the vacancies left by the resignations of Mrs. Jean Socolowski, Denville, and Earl Whritenour, Kinnelon.

Mrs. Bogert has lived for 46 years in Pequannock, residing in the Pre-Revolutionary Martin Berry House. She is a trustee of the Morris County Historical Society; Vice-Chairman - Pequannock Historic Commission; Vice-Chairman of the Morris County Trust for Historic Preservation; and on the Ringwood Manor Citizens Advisory Committee.

Joseph M. Decker lives in the historic Neighbor House in Long Valley, Washington Township. Decker, as an active member and past president of the Washington Township Historical Society, will be spearheading the taking over of the old school building in Long Valley, now being used by the Washington Township Library Association to be used as the Washington Township Society Museum. He hopes for a formal opening in the fall.

The commission regrets the resignations of Jean Socolowski, a former chairman and member for 7 years, who left to serve as president of the County PTA and Earl Whritenour, who was chairman of the commission's CETA Program to preserve the early public records.