

A BRIEF SKETCH OF MEDFORD HISTORY

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This pamphlet has been prepared to acquaint the newcomers of our Township with some of the history of Medford. We hope you will enjoy it.

References: The material in this pamphlet has been researched by the writer, in the case of deeds or wills. Other information was obtained from the following:

The Historic Rancocas, by George DeCou
Iron in the Pines, by Arthur D. Pierce
Ploughs and Politics, by C. R. Woodward
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If we were to go back in time a few hundred years, when the first settlers arrived in our area, we would not recognize any of the landmarks such as the lakes and roads that we have today. The lakes were non-existent. In their place were swift running streams with lazy pools. The main road consisted of a footpath following the general route of Stokes Road (Route 541). It was used by the Indians to and from the fishing grounds on the coast. This path was known for many years as the Shamong Trail. One of the sites where the Indians camped on their route was the location now occupied by Medford Leas. Many Indian relics and fire holes were unearthed during the grading operations for this development. For years, prior to these operations, the farmers had been finding Indian relics and artifacts during the spring plowing. Roy Mickle and Everett Mickle have a fine collection from this site which were picked up over the past few decades while operating the farm.

The first landowners in the vicinity were, what they called, "legally possessed of English rights". This meant that they had grants from the King for lands in the province of New Jersey. The majority of these landowners never saw their land but sold off sections to speculators and settlers. William Penn and others, acting for Edward Billynge, sold 900 acres of land to Samuel Coles in 1670 some years before Penn ever came to America. This was in what is now Medford Township. A record of this transaction is in the archives in the State Library in Trenton. Other large landowners in our area in the late 1600's were Simon Bozorth, John Goslin, John Haines, and William Hewlings. The next few years brought many more names to the area such as the Braddocks, Pricketts, Wilkins, Stratton, and Branin.

These original settlers became, if not originally so occupied, farmers and mill operators. John Goslin started a saw-mill on the Southwest branch of the Rancocas creek which later was purchased by David Oliphant and even today is known as "The Oliphant Mill Site". This would be at the intersection of Hartford Road and Taunton Road. Joseph Hewlings also established a mill. This was later known as Christo-

pher's Mill at Tuckerton Road and Christopher's Mill Road. Portions of the original structure still remain.

For years the logging industry flourished but there was nothing resembling a real community until about 1767. At that time Medford was beginning to be a village with a school-house, also used as the Friends Meeting. The Shamong Trail had become a traveled road, narrow, sandy, soggy and sometimes impassable, but still a link between Burlington and Clamtown. (Tuckerton) then a busy seaport. Fadens map of 1777 did not even show this route. The only road shown in the area was the one from Burlington to Eayrestown and on to Read's Mill, now Medford Lakes.

The development of the Village and its surrounding area in the 1760's through the 1780's was largely due to the founding of Etna and Taunton furnaces by Charles Read. The Etna furnace (Medford Lakes) went out of blast in 1773, however the grist and sawmill continued operating into the 20th century.

Medford, or Upper Evesham as it was known, was not closely associated with the Revolutionary War as a battleground since the British never, to any one's knowledge, came closer than Mount Holly. However, Taunton Furnace supplied shot and shell to the Continental armies. Adonijah Peacock, whose farm was located on what is now called Branin Road, manufactured gunpowder for Washington's army. It was a sad day for the community when Adonijah was drying powder in his kitchen and it exploded, killing him. The following extract from John Hunt's diary, dated January 20th, 1777, is interesting.

"This day Nijah Peacock was buried, a very ingenious man in Evesham. He had, since the wars began, erected a powder mill and carried it on to considerable perfection till one day he was at work amongst his powder and by some means it caught fire and kild him and hurt several of his family besides. It was said that the rroof of the house was blown off and very much shattered to pieces with the blast of the powder heard for ten miles around". Adonijah is buried in the Peacock graveyard in Chairville.

The period following the Revolution, and into the 1800's, finds Upper Evesham a stragling little village with a few houses strung along Main Street. A few of these can still be seen today. One is the residence of J. Stanley Braddock at 70 South Main Street, another is the John Reily House at 53

South Main Street. The Braddock property was also the site of the tannery, which was one of the first industries in the township. The Indian Chief Tavern, on the corner of Main and Union streets was erected by Richard Reeve in 1810. It was a scene of great activity with the arrival and departure of the stage coach. A second tavern (or inn) was opened in 1823 where Braddock's Tavern now stands. The iron porch pillars of this building were cast at Batsto and have a small "B" cast into the base of each pillar. Other old taverns in the area were Shinn's tavern at Shinnstown (now the corner of Hartford Road and Old Marlton Pike) and the Cross Keys Tavern on Stokes Road, just north of Jackson Road. Union Street was originally called Shinnstown Road and was in existence for many years prior to the development of the northwest part of the town in 1815.

In 1800 a merchant came to Upper Evesham who was destined to be remembered in our area. His name was Mark Reeve. Besides being a merchant of sundry goods, he built a machine to manufacture cut nails, the first in the country. However, he never obtained a patent. The building where he kept store, specializing in tobacotwists, and made nails was located on the corner of Friends Avenue and South Main Street. It is now located on the farm of Dr. Jennings on Jennings Road off of Route 70, and appropriately called "The Nail House".

Mark Reeve was also responsible for naming Medford. The story goes, that after making a visit to Medford, Massachusetts, he was so impressed that on his return to Upper Evesham he called a town meeting, proposed the name, and it was accepted. When the Post Office opened in 1820 the town was officially called Medford, of Upper Evesham.

The Burlington County National Bank, now Midatlantic National Bank, was organized in 1837, becoming a National Bank in 1865, the first in Burlington County. The first banking business was conducted in the store of Caleb and Benjamin Shreve until the bank building was built. The Shreves of course were among the first directors of the bank.

On February 4th, 1847, Medford Township was "set apart from" Evesham by act of legislature. The first township meeting was held at the Cross Roads on March 9th, 1847. This was located at the traffic light at the corner of Route 541 and Church Road. The seat of the township government remained there for several years. At that time one could find there a Metho-

dist church, a store, a tavern and about a dozen homes. Dr. James Still had his home and office just East of 541 on Church Road. His office still remains. At that time 541 was called the Lumberton or Great Road.

The churches were an important part of the development of our community. The first religious group to conduct formal services were the Quakers, or Society of Friends. The Upper Evesham Meeting was established in the Twelfth Month of 1793, and the first Session held on the First Month 11, 1794. The old frame Meeting House that stood south of the brick building on Union street is said to have been built as an "cell" to the old schoolhouse. The well kept graveyard, adjoining the Meeting, contains the graves of many of the early settlers. The oldest marked stone "M.S." is probably that of Mark Stratton, 1759. It may seem odd that the rear of the Meeting House faces on Union Street, but most Quaker Meeting Houses were built facing south. In 1812 the Society of Friends were granted a right of way off the Great Road to their property. This right of way is Friends Avenue. In 1842 the Hicksite Meeting House was erected off Main Street at South Street. Both Meeting Houses are still in use.

The Methodist Episcopal Church was the second branch of the Christian Church to be established in Medford. The first services were held in the home of William Sharp, near Charville, in 1816. The first class was formed in 1821 and services were held in the log dwelling on the road to Read's Mill, now Medford Lakes. The original church building was erected in 1824. The present church was erected in 1854, re-modeled in 1896, and is presently the Faith Bible Church.

Although the First Baptist Church in old Evesham was established in 1805, the Medford church was not organized until 1841. A small frame building was erected at the foot of Bank Street in 1842. In 1893 the present church was built, still on Bank Street.

St. Peter's Episcopal Church on Union Street, next to the Friends graveyard, was a Mission of St. Andrews, Mount Holly. It was established as a Mission about 1875. This building is an attractive Gothic structure and is now a doctors office. The present Episcopal Church is located at Hartford Road and Taunton Boulevard. There are other churches and denominations in the area now, and we by no means mean to slight them. They are, however, relatively new members to the community at the time of this writing.

The glass factory in Medford on Mill Street was started in 1825 for the manufacture of window glass. Many of our older homes in the township still have glass from this factory in their windows. The factory survived several owners and a depression or two. However, by 1920 the glass industry started to automate, and with labor trouble and the high cost of automation the glass factory closed.

One of the biggest boons to the community was the coming of the railroad in 1869. At this time the glass factory was in its glory, there were sawmills and grist mills running full tilt, and now they had an easy method of transporting their products to the Philadelphia and New York markets. Medford was really in its "heyday".

The first railroad originated in Mount Holly and terminated on Branch Street, across the street from the Methodist Church. In 1883 there were four trains a day to and from Mount Holly.

In 1889 the Camden and Atlantic Railroad came into town and connected Camden and Medford. The present police station on Main Street was the passenger station of this line. The route of the Camden line is now Route 70. In the 1920's with the coming of the automobile, passenger service had declined. The glass factory had closed its doors, and the Western sawmills were putting the local sawyers out of business. In 1927 all passenger service was discontinued. The tracks of the Camden branch were torn up when Route 70 was built. The railroad is no longer in use.

The cranberry industry began flourishing in the township in the 1800's and is still producing a good percentage of the New Jersey harvest. These bogs, however, were ideal to dredge out for lake front developments, along with the dammed up areas left by the mills. At first most of these lakes were summer developments, but as time went on they became year-round homes until today the lakes area comprise the largest percentage of our population. The first of these areas was Medford Lakes, which was the site of Ethra furnace and later Ballinger's Mill. The upper lake or dam was the site of Buzby's Mill. Braddock's Mill was as the name implies, Braddock's Mill. There was another mill at the point where Birchwood crosses Jackson Road. This mill was built and operated by the Branin family in the late 1700's. There was no lake or dam on the northwest side of Jackson Road, just a small creek called Branin Mill Branch. Lake Pine is shown on early maps

as a swamp area which adapted itself to cranberries. When the water level is down in the lake, as with many others, you can see the natural course of the water. The area of Oakwood Lake was also made more by man than Mother Nature, although the water from Oliphant's Mill dam had a natural back up in the low areas. The drowned lands from the dam originally built by Samuel Phillips and Johnathan Haines, then named Haine's Mill and now known as Kirby's Mill have never been developed, and probably never will be, as our foresighted township officials purchased these drowned lands and the area around them for township park lands. One of the main reasons for not developing this area in the past is that Kirby's Mill was an operating saw and grist mill long after the other mills had stopped operations. In fact, up until 1961 the mill was operated with water power. At that time it was converted to electricity. In September, 1972 the mill was entered on the National Register of Historic Places.

There were other industries in the township that came and went and some that are still with us. To name them all would take a volume in itself, just as many of the other facets of our township would.

We have tried to give you a brief sketch of the township's history in this brochure, and hope we have aroused your interest enough to make you look around you and ask questions of some of the old-timers in the area.

The Medford Historical Society is endeavoring to stimulate an interest in local history and asks that you join us in our endeavor. We meet the first Tuesday of each Month, at 8:00 PM at the Community Center on Main Street.

We hold a Gull Show the first Saturday and Sunday each June, an Apple Festival the second Saturday each October, and a Torchlight House Tour every other December. All are invited to our meetings. If you are interested in joining the Society, our mailing address is P.O. Box 362.

The foregoing sketch of Medford tells of its past. Its future depends on its citizens to preserve the fine town we now have with its old homes, farms, treelined streets and roads, outstanding schools, and progressive government. We hope it will always be a great town in which to live and in which we will continue to take pride.