



MANTUA TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL COMMISSION QUARTERLY BULLETIN

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Mantua Academy Bell

Made by the Meneely Bell Foundry in West Troy, New York

By Jeff Gellenthin, Chairman & Herb Hood, Vice Chairman, Mantua Township Historical Commission



The story of the Mantua Academy Bell begins with the land upon which the schoolhouse that the bell rested in was built on. In 1804 a man named Martin Turner donated a section of land to the community of Mantua, then known as Carpenter's Landing. The land is currently bordered on two sides by Norris Street and Mantua Boulevard.

In 1804, Mantua Boulevard was known as Union Street, probably in reference to the community's unity amongst its residents. Obviously, with a date of 1804, the name of Union Street has no correlation or reference to the Union side in the Civil War.

Part of this land was set aside for a graveyard and became known as the Union Graveyard under the trusteeship of the Union Graveyard and United Association. The rest of the land was set aside for the construction of a school. This school was a one-story, brick structure measuring thirty-four feet by forty-eight feet. It was partitioned in the style of Friends' Meeting houses.

This first schoolhouse served the community for 70 years but was torn down and replaced with a new school in 1874. It housed grades 1 through 8 and was a two-story wooden structure with an attic and basement. Some materials for the new school came from the old school. Board of Education records from their minutes dated April 18, 1874, states, "Trustees of the Mantua School District #9, Gloucester County met at the house of William Middletown, all present. On motion it was agreed to hire Joseph Sharp to take down the old schoolhouse and agreed to pay him \$225 per thousand to clean off the bricks and pile them up and agreed to pay fifty cents per perch taking down the stone and placing them where they may be ordered on the lot by the trustees. Also, to take out the floors, doors, and windows and all wood works and pile it up in a workman like manner. On Motion it was carried to close the school in the old schoolhouse on the first day of May." The cost of the new school was \$4,747.79.

Over time the new schoolhouse has been called the Mantua Academy, the Union Street School, the

Norris Street School and Public School #2. This new school finally closed its educational functions in 1942.

As a reference to names, Mantua Township was formerly a part of Greenwich Township. A portion of Greenwich Township was set apart in 1853 and became known as Mantua Township. Later, the community of Carpenter's Landing became Mantua. On November 19, 1866, the townspeople of Carpenter's Landing met in the 1804 schoolhouse. Dr. Sickler, a well-known and famous local physician, township committee member, local judge, and church trustee, was chosen as chairperson for the meeting. By a vote of 48-1 the townspeople voted to change the name of their village of Carpenter's Landing to Mantua. This new name for Carpenter's Landing helps to explain why the new schoolhouse built in 1874 became known as the Mantua Academy.

The Mantua Academy had a belfry which housed the school's bell. On the front of the building in the foundation bricks there are two "cornerstones" marking the dates of the two schools that stood on this property. One reads 1804 and the other reads 1874.



The school's bell was manufactured by the Meneely Bell Foundry in West Troy, New York. The bell's manufacturer's name is clearly indicated on the frame holding the bell and the bell itself. The

bell is currently on display in the Mantua Township Historical Commission Museum.

By March 3, 1916 an addition had been put on the school to alleviate overcrowding. A confirmation newspaper article appeared in the Courier Post.



After the school ceased being used as an education building it was leased. It ultimately became the home of a dress manufacturer called Jewel Frocks. That company ceased operations in 1982. The building remained abandoned from that time. It was to be torn down, but a grant saved the building, and it was renovated and became the home of the Mantua Township Historical Commission. Following is a partial newspaper picture of the building prior to renovation. In the picture you can see that the belfry had been removed. The structure on the roof resembling a belfry is a cupola. A cupola's purpose is to add ventilation or light to the inside of a building and/or enhance the exterior aesthetics of a building.

Trivia Time

What was Mantua previously called?

- A. Carpenter's Landing
- B. Eastlack's Landing
- C. Smith's Landing
- D. Cozens' Landing
- E. All of the above

Answer is at the end of the Bulletin



In renovating the above structure to eventually house the Mantua Township Historical Commission's Museum and Library, the cupola was renovated also. It is situated on the roof between where the original 1874 schoolhouse ended and the addition that was built onto it. The current building has no belfry. It does, however, have the school's bell on display in the foyer of the museum. The bell is in excellent physical condition and all its moving parts are in working order.



The Mantua Academy as it appears today.

It houses the Mantua Township Historical Commission Museum and Library

The building's address is 145 Mantua Boulevard,
Mantua, New Jersey

On Friday August 27, 2004, a news article was published in the Courier Post (Camden, New Jersey newspaper) on page 2B. The article was titled "Mantua Academy's wandering school bell back in original home". It was continued on page 7B. At this time, John Mihlebach was the chairman of the Mantua Township Historical Commission.

From the newspaper article and referring to the bell, "How it got down from the top of the school and how it ended up where it is, we don't know," Mihlebach said. "It just disappeared. It's still a mystery today."

The article further states, "He" (John Mihlebach) "said the bell was likely removed from the schoolhouse about 1940, when the school was replaced by the J. Mason Tomlin Elementary School."

"Mihlebach said members scoured old school board records but found no mention of it selling or removing the bell."

The article further states that "He" (John Mihlebach) "said 93-year-old township resident Marion Brown told members she remembered ringing the bell decades ago as a student at the old schoolhouse."

Did You Know?

Two schools in Barnsboro also had a bell which was made by the Buckeye Bell Foundry. It was first placed in the Emlin School on Richwood Road. When the Barnsboro Academy opened, the bell was moved to that school. When the Barnsboro School of 1913 was built, the bell was transferred over to the Barnsboro Fire House where it remained until the firehouse closed. It eventually found its way to the Mantua Fire and EMS Museum on Main Street in Mantua where it is located today. The bell was made in 1873 and weighs about 350 pounds.



John Mihlebach (above), chairman of Mantua's historical commission, describes the old school bell that now rests in its former home. A Midwest man used the information on the bell to find its original owner. Photos by TINA MARCOE KINSLOW/CourierPost

Mantua Academy's wandering school bell back in original home

By GENE VERNACCHIO
Courier-Post Staff

MANTUA

After nearly 65 years, the bell is home again. A 350-pound bell, which summoned generations of children to class at the old Mantua Academy, is back in the building from where it disappeared decades ago.

John Mihlebach, chairman of the township's historical commission, said the bell was missing for nearly six decades until a letter from a Midwest man in the mid-1990s informed a commission secretary of its whereabouts.

The more-than-120-year-old bell was returned to the township in 1996 and had been on display in the lobby of the township hall. But ongoing renovation at the township hall forced

workers to recently relocate the bell to the township's new senior citizens center — the former Mantua Academy.

The old schoolhouse, at Mantua Boulevard and Norris Street, was later known as the Norris Street School and the Union Street School.

Dolores Allen, a longtime township resident, said she's glad to see the bell back in its original home.

"I think that's where the bell belongs," Allen said.

Mihlebach said he, too, is happy the bell is back inside its original home.

EVER WONDER?

"The senior citizens center is the place this bell should be," Mihlebach said.

A bell collector in Iowa had bought the bell from an elderly woman in Pennsylvania years ago and researched the Mantua Academy name it bears.

After restoring it himself — dismantling it, cleaning and sandblasting it — he wrote a letter to Betty Kravchuk, a historical commission member, in which he stated "the bell is in excellent condition and has beautiful detail and tone."

"They started to correspond and it was determined that that was indeed our bell," Mihlebach

See MANTUA, Page 7B



Special Sale of Nursery Stock and Spraying Material While They Last

Peach \$7 to 12 per Hundred. Apple \$15 to 20 per Hundred.

500 Champion Peach	2000 Elberta
500 Carman Peach	700 Old Mixon Free Stone
1000 Niagara Peach	500 Iron Mountain
500 Stumps	100 Fox Seedling
400 Late Crawford	500 Early Crawford

The following apples are 1 and 2 yrs. old: Yellow Transparent, William Parley Red, Summer Hagloe, Starr, Gravenstein, Red Astrican, Maiden Blush, Wealthy, Smith Cider, Baldwin, Dutches of Oldenburg, Grimes Golden, Vinesap, Parigon, Ben Davis, Mammoth Black Twig, Smoke House, Winter Belle Flower.

5,000 California Hedge	5,000 Blackberry and Dew Berry Pits.
0,000 Asparagus Roots, Ridgway Kind	2,000 Norway Sugar Maples
0,000 Strawberry Plants	500 Catalpha

The above nursery stock is of my own growing and the buds were selected from some of the best bearing fruit orchards in this state, among them being the Stanger Farm, at Glassboro and the J. Howard Porch Farm at Richwood; Richard Evans, Sr., Cross Keys.

Anyone thinking of putting out an orchard or a few trees, and want them good and true to name, will do well to write or call on

W. C. Evans Nursery, Sewell, N. J.

Gone Now, But Not Forgotten

Mantua/120-year-old school bell returns to original home

Continued from Page 2B

said.

Mihlebach said the commission negotiated a \$4,000 deal to have the bell shipped back to Mantua. When it arrived here, a forklift was required to position it on display in the township hall, he said.

Mihlebach still considers the bell's return somewhat miraculous.

He said 93-year-old township resident Marion Brown told members she remembered ringing the bell decades ago as a student at the old schoolhouse.

"How it got down from the top of the school and how it ended up where it was, we don't know," Mihlebach said. "It just disappeared. It's still a mystery today."

He said the bell was likely removed from the schoolhouse about 1940, when the school was replaced by the J. Mason Tomlin Elementary School.

After the school closed, the

building was leased to the American Legion, which subleased it to a sewing factory. The building operated as a sewing factory for years before it closed in the 1960s.

The vacant structure was later acquired by the township, which has invested more than \$400,000 into rehabilitating the aging facility.

Mihlebach said members scoured old school board records but found no mention of it selling or removing the bell.

Mayor Tim Chell said the bell was a conversation piece during its time inside the township hall.

"Kids like it," Chell said. "My kids liked to ring it every time they saw it in the municipal building."

He said the township is planning a mini museum inside the new senior center and the bell will remain there.

"It's back home," Chell said.

Reach Gene Vernacchio at (856) 251-3343 or gvernacchio@courierpostonline.com.

School Year	School Grade	Age	End of School Year
1918	First	7	1919
1919	Second	8	1920
1920	Third	9	1921
1921	Fourth	10	1922
1922	Fifth	11	1923
1923	Sixth	12	1924
1924	Seventh	13	1925
1925	Eighth	14	1926

After 1926 Marion Brown went on to attend high school from which she did graduate.

School Year	School Grade	Age	End of School Year
1926	Ninth	15	1927
1927	Tenth	16	1928
1928	Eleventh	17	1929
1929	Twelfth	18	1930

The above two charts are important because they illustrate what years Marion attended the Mantua Academy or Public School #2 as it was then referred to and what years Marion was in high school. The most important years that Marion was in high school were her junior class years.

On page 8 of the aforementioned book is an article called "Bell Tolls for History Buffs". It was written by Jane M. Reynolds who was an *Inquirer* (Philadelphia newspaper) correspondent. Within this article is a story about Marion Brown and the school bell.

"One Mantua resident who has heard the bell toll is Marion Brown. Brown attended the school from 1918-1926.

When Brown was a junior in high school, she and a friend went back to their alma mater to pay the principal a visit.

School was still in session, so Brown and her friend decided to climb the bell tower."

News Flash – Sewell, N.J.

World War II touched close to Sewell when a U.S. Navy World War II fighter, a Grumman F6F Hellcat, an aircraft carrier-based plane, crashed in a field in Sewell. Pictures at the Mantua Township Historical Commission Museum.

“The stairs were so narrow and so steep, but we made it to the top,” Brown said laughing.”

“While making their ascent, however, Brown and her companion kicked over a can. It made a lot of noise as in bounced down the steps, prompting the principal to close, and lock the door leading to the bell.

Brown and her friend tried to attract attention by yelling down to passersby, “but they looked up and laughed.” she said. The pair were released from their lofty prison after about 20 minutes.”

Since the school bell weighed 350 pounds, removing it from the belfry was not a middle of the night, clandestine operation. Someone would have heard this. Removing it in broad daylight would have also led to discovery. The question becomes how did the bell get out of the belfry or bell tower? A possible answer might be that the bell was removed during daylight hours and that operation was a known, legal, and approved event, the record of which remains undiscovered.

A further question is why didn't Marion Brown and her companion simply bang on the bell or move the bell and cause it to ring? The bell's ringing certainly would have attracted attention to Marion and her companion's plight.

Jean Keeler and Dorothy Lewis are two other Mantua residents who attended the Union Street School in the mid to late 1930s. They don't remember a school bell being in the belfry. Jean does remember a bell being in the school yard. Perhaps the reason that Marion and her companion didn't bang on the bell or move it to cause it to ring when they were trying to attract attention was because it wasn't in the bell tower then. It was in the schoolyard instead.

This conclusion would support the speculated reason that Marion Brown and her companion didn't ring the school's bell to gain attention from people passing the school on the street when the pair got locked in the belfry area of the school. If this conclusion is true, then it would indicate that the

Mantua Academy bell was removed from its belfry by 1928 and possibly placed in the school yard.

In the same news article by Jane M. Reynolds, it states:

“A piece of Mantua's history turned up more than a thousand miles away from its original home.

A 119-year-old, 350-pound bronze bell, which rang out more than a half-century ago atop the old Mantua Academy, was in Iowa. The Mantua Township Historical Commission wanted it back as part of its quest to renovate the former schoolhouse into a community senior citizen center and small museum.

The bell collector in Iowa had purchased the bell from an elderly woman in Pennsylvania. After restoring it himself, dismantling it, then cleaning it up and sandblasting it, he wrote a letter to the commission, “The bell is in excellent condition and has beautiful detail and tone.”

After negotiating a price, the historical commission recovered the bell. Internationally known Paul Stankard donated one of his glass paperweights to the commission to help raise funds.

“I think it's great to get it back because it's an integral part of the building,” said Betty Kravchuck, a member of the commission.”

For several years, each spring, the Mantua Township Historical Commission is host to an outing from the fifth-grade classes at J. Mason Tomlin School in Mantua, the school that replaced the Mantua Academy. Over a two-day period, each of the fifth-grade classes walks from the nearby J. Mason Tomlin School to the old schoolhouse turned museum. Shortly after arrival the class is split into two groups, one tours the museum, and one is given a graveyard tour of the Union Graveyard next to the former schoolhouse. At the appropriate time, the old Mantua Academy Bell is tapped on and rung as a signal for the two groups to switch places in the outing. At the end of the first switch, when the next fifth-grade class is approaching, the old bell is rung

again as a signal that the current tour that is in progress is over, sort of like when the old bell rang out to signal that class was over for the day when students were attending the Mantua Academy.

For Mantua Township, the bell has become an icon, a reminder of what life was like for school children decades and decades ago. There are less than a handful of former students of the old schoolhouse still living. One such person is Theresa DiGiamberardino. She remembers having the privilege, as a student of the 1874 schoolhouse when she was known as Theresa Ratz, of being allowed to personally ring the Mantua Academy Bell.

When the 1874 schoolhouse was built, the township and school officials obviously wanted a state-of-the-art building for the children of the community. The Mantua Academy Bell made by the Meneely Bell Company was a perfect example of that desire.

Dates from Mantua's Past

September 1, 1869: At 2 o'clock on a Saturday, the Barnsboro M. E. Church was dedicated.

September 21 and September 22, 1870: The Gloucester County Fair was held in Mantua.

November 26, 1737: Reverend Jesse Chew was born. His house and cemetery are on Mantua Boulevard in Sewell.

October 26, 1870: As reported in the newspaper, the *Constitution*, the population of Mantua Township on the Federal Census of 1870 showed an increase of 155 people over the Federal Census of 1860.

The Great Mantua Fire of 1911 and the Need to Modernize

By Herb Hood and Jeff Gellenthin



In December of 1967, the magazine *Popular Science*, which began in 1872, published a story starting on page 68 called "Our Biggest Naval Guns to Boom Again...in Vietnam." It was a story about the reactivation of the battleship USS New Jersey. The USS New Jersey had been built during WW II. It fought in that war and in the Korean War. It joined the mothball fleet by the early 1960's. It was reactivated and modernized to fight again in the Vietnam War to answer an urgent need for fire support for US Marines. After a brief service in that war, it again, joined the mothball fleet, to again await a time when its country might recall it into service one more time. Could such an entity of a different kind, that served the township in the past, that was built in the same time period when the USS New Jersey was built, rest and wait for a time when it too might possibly be recalled into service for a dire emergency still exist in Mantua Township? Think not? Then think again!

In the late evening of May 10, 1911, at about 11:30 P.M. a devastating fire broke out in Mantua. It started in a toilet that was attached to a barn. It quickly spread and eventually destroyed two barns, one shed and a bottling house. For a time, the fire threatened to rapidly spread to other structures and to go on and destroy Mantua. Only the dedication and hard work of volunteer firefighters and the assistance of two other fire companies who responded to Mantua's peril was the community of Mantua saved. On the heels of that fire, another fire broke out on Turner Street on May 11, 1911, at about 1:30 in the afternoon, less than 24 hours since the fire on May 10th.

As a result of the second fire, Charles H. Hollweg, donated land upon which the Mantua Volunteer Fire Company could build a fire house. The Mantua Volunteer Fire Company volunteers had saved his house from being destroyed in the fire of May 10, 1911.

Following this, the Mantua Volunteer Fire Company purchased a combination Chemical Engine & Hook and Ladder Truck from a Mr. W. W.

Wunder in Reading, Pennsylvania. The apparatus, fully paid for, arrived in Mantua on June 13, 1911.



As noted in the above newspaper article, the Mantua Fire Department had just been recently organized (October 1910) and had little fire-fighting equipment available.

The Mantua fire of 1911 and the fire in Woodbury which destroyed the Woodbury High School in 1910, opened the eyes of community citizens, leaders, and volunteer firefighters in their respective communities to the urgent need to modernize their fire departments. The days of the old bucket brigades was over.

Sitting in the Mantua Township Fire Department and EMS Museum is a 1915 Mack Pumper. It belonged to the Sewell Fire Company and would have responded to a fire in Mantua if needed. It was an answer to modernization needs.



On March 9, 1970, the largest fire in the history of not only Woodbury but all of Gloucester County occurred. The fire was in the old Belber Trunk Company building on Green Avenue. The blaze eventually reached 10 alarms and at its height was visible from the Walt Whitman Bridge, eleven miles away. It burned for two nights and two days.

At least forty fire companies responded, 31 from Gloucester County, 8 from Camden County and one from Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. It took an estimated ten million gallons of water to put out the fire. In all, 45 pumpers pumped water for 276 total hours.

In the immediate area of Mantua Township, Clarksboro responded, Pitman responded, Oak Valley responded, and Wenonah responded. According to newspaper accounts, Wenonah sent almost every man and trucks they had. As for Mantua Township, Sewell responded, and Mantua responded.

As to the responding communities, some equipment was left at the fire houses on standby to cover the possibility of a local fire while the overwhelming bulk of the area's fire trucks were sent to Woodbury.

At the time of the fire in Woodbury, sitting in the Mantua Fire Department was a "tank" of a pumper. It was acquired by the Mantua Fire Department during World War II (same time period as the USS New Jersey). It required them getting

permission from the War Department for its purchase. It was built to military specifications. That pumper remained at that Mantua Fire House to not only guard Mantua Township but also Wenonah. Its mission, in military terms, was to "hold the fort", while other fire equipment responded to the fire in Woodbury.

Fifty-two years have passed since that fire in Woodbury in March of 1970. Many of the firefighters who were there, leaving their families home in the warmth and comfort of their houses but worrying all the while their husbands, sons and brothers were waging a desperate battle against the flames have passed away. The auxiliaries of the fire companies, most of them women, who were on scene at the time and stood ready to feed the firemen, have also passed away. The remains of the Belber Trunk Company building have long since been torn down and replaced with a senior citizens complex. As to those 45 pumpers that were sent, most likely all of them are probably gone too, replaced with newer pumpers in the fifty-plus years since the fire in March of 1970. Since that time many fire departments have disbanded or been forced to cease operations. In the Mantua Fire and EMS museum sits that 1945 Mack Pumper, a veteran of a bygone era. It is fully operational, tagged, insured, and can be driven out of the fire museum at any time.

It waits there like the old battleships of World War II that waited in the mothball fleet to be called back into the service of their country. In the 1980's, President Ronald Reagan did call them back into the service of their country. They fought off Lebanon and in the First Gulf War, with distinction and tremendous effectiveness despite having been built in the 1940's. Today, those battleships have been converted into floating museums.

Who is to say, that if a disaster of sufficient magnitude and destruction should occur, would the doors of the Mantua Township Fire and EMS Museum, former home of the Mantua Volunteer Fire Department, open once again and passing through them would be a fully operation 1945 Mack Pumper

to answer Mantua Township’s call to duty one more time just as it had many times in the past?

On July 19, 2022, on a visit to the Mantua Fire and EMS museum, that same question was posed to Larry Smashey. Larry is a long-time veteran fireman and past fire chief whose faithful service to his community goes back decades. The stories he tells, the experiences he can share and the knowledge he possesses go far beyond just interesting. They are awesome. They speak of an organization and the volunteers of all the Mantua Township volunteers, present and past, who often put their lives on the line in fighting fires. Any fireman who enters a burning building to put out a fire or to save a life is a brave hero. That is not even questionable. As to the question to Larry concerning whether the 1945 Mack Pumper is capable of responding to a disastrous fire today, his answer was short, emphatic and to the point. He said, “Absolutely!” There was no doubt in his mind.

If that dreadful day should ever come, when a disastrous fire emergency should occur and that 1945 Mack Pumper was called into service one more time, it would be eerily similar to when President Reagan recalled 40-plus-years old battleships back into the service of their country. Only this time, it would be a 75-plus-years old pumper being called into service for the community of Mantua Township one more time.

Fun Story About Barnsboro

In the past, people living in Barnsboro were innovators. They found ways to overcome difficult situations. For example, in the early days of refrigeration, when winter snow storms would cause power outages, some people in Barnsboro would place a metal box with a door on it into a window in their house. The subfreezing temperatures would drop the air temperature in the metal box and the Barnsboro people would then use the box as a refrigerator until electrical power could be restored. Ingenious? Absolutely!



1945 Mack Pumper

Fully operational, fully equipped, registered, and tagged and insured. It stands ready and willing to be called into service one more time if needed. How many communities can boast of such a thing? The 1945 Mack pumper is an iconic tribute for all the Mantua Township Fire Companies to have ever existed!

Remembering Dale Ledden

Dale Ledden was a lifelong resident of Mantua Township and a member of one of its oldest families. During his 80 years, he accumulated a vast amount of local historical knowledge through his family and his own experiences. Dale showed great interest and had a wonderful talent for sharing this knowledge with citizens of the Township and anyone else that had time for a good story.

Dale had a tireless zeal in planting a love for our community’s past in the hearts of its citizens, especially the children. Dale lived by our mission statement, as we strive to educate the public on how wonderful our local history is. For this, the commission is forever grateful.



Interesting Fire and Ambulance Facts from Mantua Township's Past

As late as the year 2000, four fire departments protected Mantua Township. They were the Mantua, Sewell, Barnsboro and Center City fire Departments. In addition, at that time there was also the Sewell Ambulance and the Mantua Township Community Ambulance.

Mantua Township Historical Commission member Kathy MacGregor was a member of the Mantua Ambulance. Kathy and her fellow squad members responded to the 9/11 attack in New York City, not once, but twice. She wrote a small book about her experiences at that time. It can be read for Mantua Township Historic Commission Museum visitors along with viewing the Museum's 9/11 display.

For a comprehensive look into the volunteer fire fighters and fire houses of Mantua Township's past, please visit the Mantua Fire and EMS Museum at 42 Main Street in Mantua. The museum is open on Tuesday evenings from 6 to 8 PM.

Message from the Chairman – Jeffrey Gellenthin

We are excited to launch the inaugural edition of the Mantua Township Historical Commission Quarterly Bulletin.

To start, let me walk you from our past into the present.

The Mantua Township Historical Commission was created after the Mantua Township Bicentennial Committee had served its purpose. Much work and planning were involved as the Committee organized events associated with the celebration of the Bicentennial of the United State of America. A large undertaking was the writing of the book "A Bicentennial Look at Mantua Township". This book was developed with the help of historians, scholars, librarians, and local residents that dug deep into the archives to bring to light the rich history of our community. This book is still available at our museum.

The following is as stated in an ordinance of the Township Committee of the Township of Mantua, County of Gloucester, and State of New Jersey: *Whereas, interest in the bountiful history of Mantua Township was kindled as a result of the Bicentennial years, and Whereas, Mantua Township Bicentennial Committee, which in large measure was responsible for the renewed interest in the history of Mantua Township will cease to function officially as of June 30, 1977, and Whereas, a substantial percentage of the membership of the Bicentennial Committee is interested in continuing the exploration and propagation of the history of Mantua Township, now, Therefore, be it ordained by the Township Committee of the Township of Mantua that there is hereby created the "Mantua Township Historical Commission". Be it further ordained that said Commission shall be established as of July 1, 1977.*

Since 1977, the Mantua Township Historical Commission has continued to grow. In 2006, the restored Mantua Academy (Union Schoolhouse) became the home of the Commission's Museum, Library, and meeting place. The museum houses many artifacts and bits of history that have been donated by residents of our area. The library was started by a founding member and is now named in her honor. Over the past several years, the library has expanded beyond the genealogy of many prominent historic families of Mantua Township. It now includes a collection of books covering local, County, State, Regional, and US history, research binders that cover persons, places and things from days gone by, local graveyard and cemetery lists of residences and many of their stories, historic pictures of streets, structures, and people of the area, and much more. We continue to make great strides as we dig deeper into the past, uncovering the riches of our Township's history.

Thank you to all that have helped us in our mission of "Keeping the Past Alive". Our work will continue, as history is made each day.

RECENT NEWS

Six new displays have been added to the museum, a Mantua Oak display, a Chew Bible display, an Orol Ledden display, a fossil museum display, a postal display concerning the change from Carpenter's Landing to Mantua, a small agriculture display and a 9/11 display.

Several dozen books have been added to the museum's library for visitors to consult while doing research into their family's history, Mantua Township history or even county and South Jersey history.

Upcoming Events:

Mantua Township Cemetery Tour – This fun and educational event is returning, having been paused for 2 years during the Covid mandated lockdowns. This activity includes a visit to the Union Graveyard (1804), the Mantua Methodist Church Cemetery (1866), the Jesse Chew Cemetery (late 1700s), the Driver Family Cemetery (1740s) and the Mount Zion Methodist Church Cemetery (circa 1852). This event is by reservation only. Sets are limited. It is also weather permitting. The cost is free. The date is: Saturday, October 29, 2022. Additional information will be posted on our Facebook page, as well as sent to those who have joined our email list of friends. Be sure to send us your name, email address and location.

Night at the Museum – Stay tuned, as a Night at the Museum series of events returns to our schedule. Announcement of each event will be posted on our Facebook page, as well as sent to those who have joined our email list of friends.

RECENT DONATIONS

Marion White – a historic picture of the Tomlin Blacksmith shop in Barnsboro and a vintage newspaper article about Kirkbride's store.

Don Keeler – artifacts and pictures concerning the Mantua Methodist Church, Political buttons from Mantua Township.

Kathy MacGregor – old farm basket of the type that would have been used for the harvesting of blueberries, cherries, and strawberries and for vintage seed packets from Oral Ledden and Sons.

Linda Sims – copy of 1952 pocket magazine called Quick News. Early 1900's handheld corn huskers belonging to her great grandmother, Katherine Ott (nee Sutton) who settled in the 1812 farmhouse on Jessup Mill Road with her husband, William E. Ott in 1915.

Gloucester County Historical Society – eighty dollars' worth of books for the MTHC library.

Jeff Gellenthin – four drawer flat file cabinet for the storage of maps for the commission and museum.

Kathy Bitikofer – Kathy is from Texas and sent pictures of a table that Jesse Chew made for his daughter's wedding. Additionally, she sent copies of pages from the Earley Bible listing births, deaths, and marriages.

Cathy Mullen – Family Bible from the line of David Chew and Hannah Stille, printed between 1851 and 1863. Cathy purchased the Bible in 1991 at the estate sale of the late Sara (Chew) Biddle, daughter of Stille Chew.

Kiersten Chinnock – Portion of a limb (slice) from the historic Mantua Oak Tree. This nearly 600-year-old tree fell on August 8, 1949.

Barbara Kravchuck Reiners – From her family archives, several Mantua Township 130th Birthday celebration collectors' mugs, Mantua Fun Day vintage documents and posters, and Chestnut Branch Park documents associated with its development.

Fred and Barbara Kershaw – monetary donation in memory of Wayne Kircher.

IN MEMORIAM

Dorothy Marie Lewis – Aunt of former commission member Don Keeler – September 8, 1927-May 30, 2022.

THANK YOU

Mayor Pete Scirrotto and the members of the Mantua Township Committee, for their continued support.

Larry and Frieda Smashey of the Mantua Fire and EMS Museum for joining the Mantua Township Historical Commission at the Mantua Township Night Out at Chestnut Branch Park. Larry gave out souvenir fireman's helmets and plastic bags with fire prevention materials in them to each of the children who visited our booth.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Mantua Township Historical Commission

Location: 145 Mantua Boulevard

Mantua, New Jersey 08051

Mailing address: 401 Main Street

Mantua, New Jersey 08051

The Museum and Library are open to the public on the first and third Saturday of each month from 10 AM to Noon or by appointment

Call: 856-630-9704

mthc1977@gmail.com

Our mission is to preserve and share the rich history of Mantua Township

Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/MantuaTownshipHistoricalCommission

MEMBERS

Jeff Gellenthin – Chairman

Herb Hood – Vice Chairman

Carolyn Olsen – Secretary

Kevin Hale – Treasurer

Kathy MacGregor

Carolyn Harris

Barbara Heitman

Debbie Gellenthin

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Trivia Time Answer

The correct answer is E, All of the above. Mantua did not become known as Mantua until November 19, 1866 by a vote of 48 to 1.

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The Mantua Township Historical Commission is always accepting donations of pictures, documents and stories concerning the Township's history.