



MANTUA TOWNSHIP HISTORICAL COMMISSION QUARTERLY BULLETIN

Volume 4, Issue 3

Fall 2025

The Historic Sewell Railroad Station



The Sewell Railroad Station – (courtesy of Jeff Gellenthin)

The Historic Sewell Railroad Station

"It is never too late to discover new details about the past."

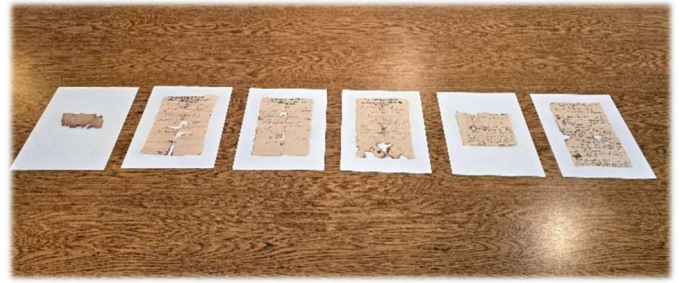
By: Jeffrey Gellenthin

A remarkable discovery was made on April 24, 2025, at the Historic Sewell Railroad Station. The owner, Robert Layton, is preparing the property for renovation and restoration. In doing so, he and his crew cleared the basement of debris while studying the overall structure. While working around the remnants of the basement staircase, a jar was discovered. In all the excitement, the jar fell to the floor and broke, revealing a mass of papers that were stuck together and crumbling as they were handled. Not knowing what it was, Rob contacted me, the local history enthusiast, and asked if he could stop by my office with his find. Within minutes of that call, we met, and Rob presented his little pile of paper shreds. After some conversation and sharing extreme curiosity, I told Rob that I would look at them and report back.



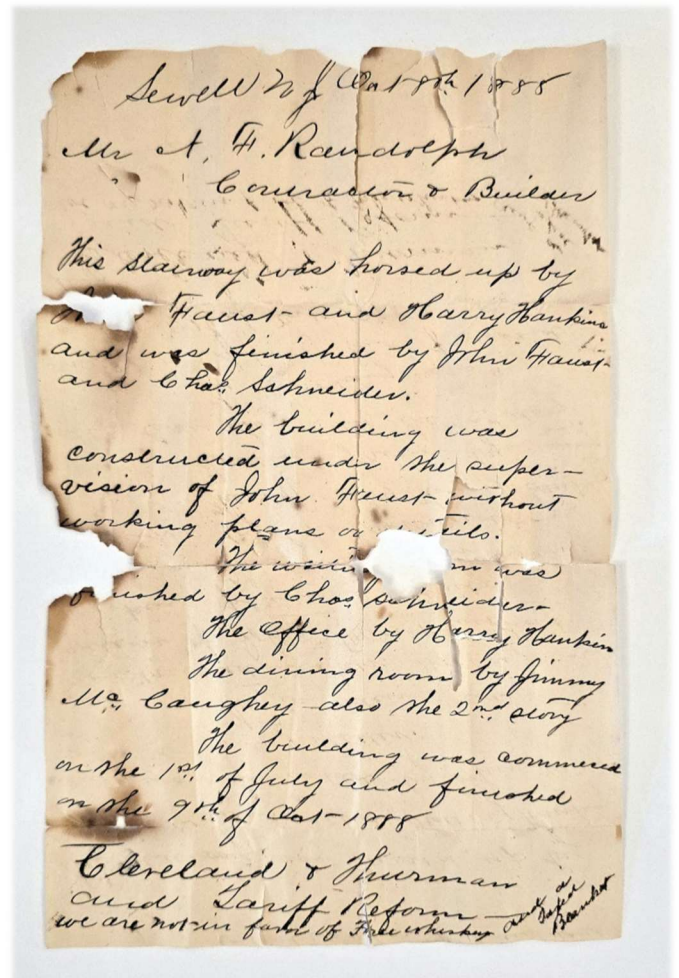
Portion of the papers as delivered to Jeff Gellenthin

After receiving the papers, I was able to carefully treat them and slowly separate, unfold, and reveal what each piece contained. There are now six preserved documents.



The six preserved documents

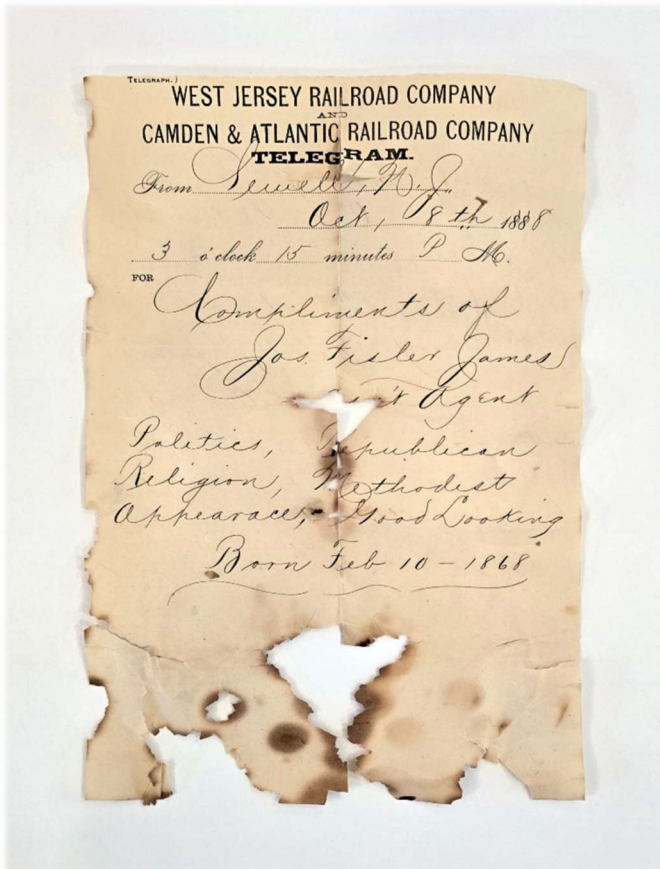
The following is a copy of each document after restoration, along with an interpretation of its contents.



The above reads: Sewell, NJ Oct. 8th, 1888 - Mr. A. F. Randolph, Contractor & Builder

This stairway was horsed up by John Faust and Harry Hankins and was finished by John Faust and Chas. Schneider. The building was

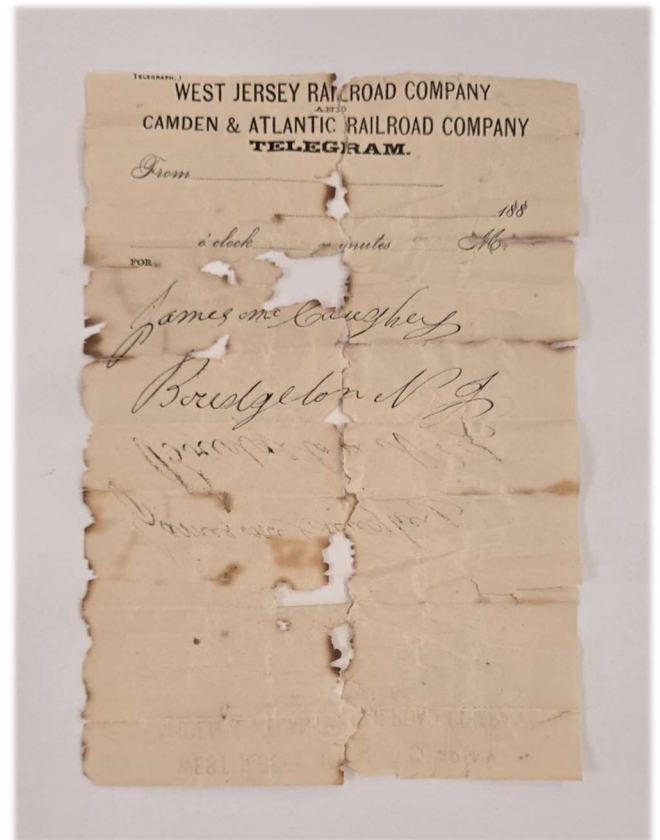
constructed under the supervision of John Faust without working plans or details. The waiting room was finished by Chas. Schneider, The office by Harry Hankins. The dining room by Jimmy McCaughey – also the 2nd story. The building was commenced on the 1st of July and finished on the 9th of Oct – 1888. “Cleveland & Thurman and Tariff Reform. We are not in favor of free whiskey and a taxed blanket.”



The above reads: (Letterhead) West Jersey Railroad Company and Camden & Atlantic Railroad Company Telegram.

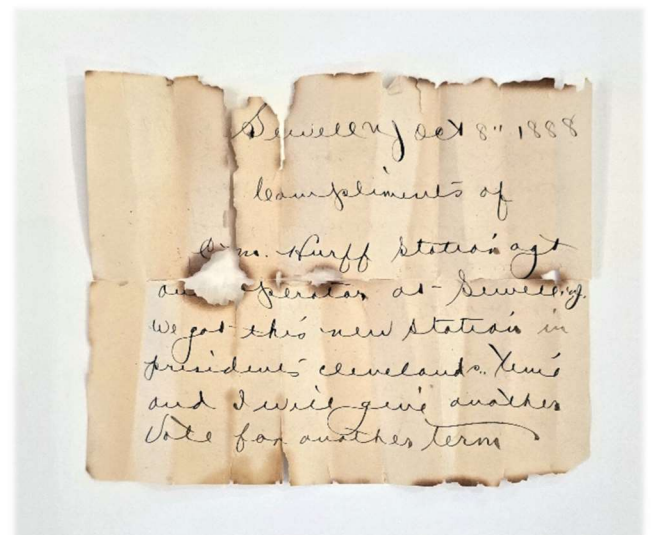
From: Sewell, N.J., Oct 8th, 1888, 3 o'clock 15 minutes PM. Compliments of Jos. Fisler James ___ Agent

Politics – Republican, Religion – Methodist, Appearance – Good Looking, Born – Feb 10 - 1868



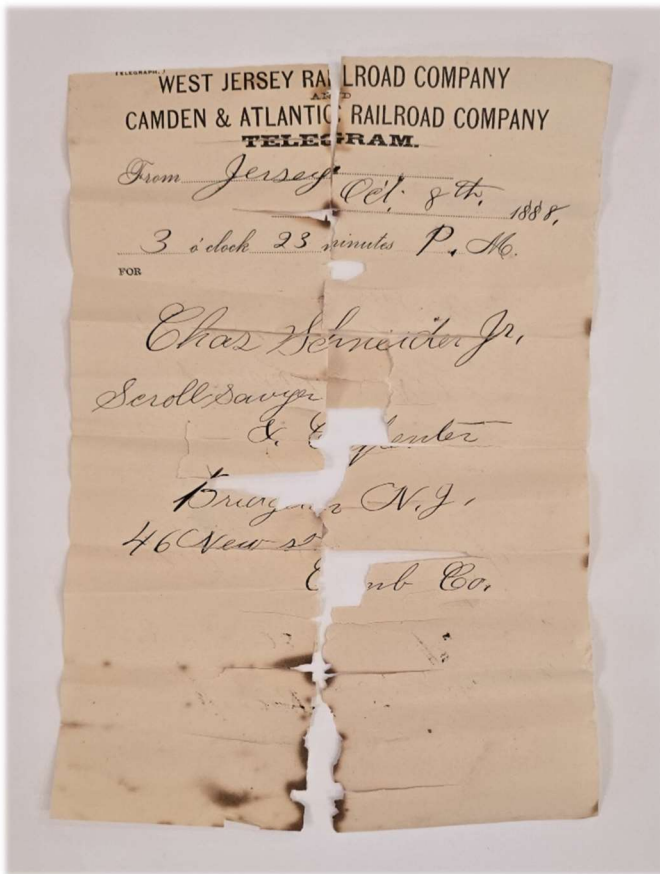
The above reads: (Letterhead) West Jersey Railroad Company and Camden & Atlantic Railroad Company Telegram.

James McCaughey, Bridgeton, NJ (signature)



The above reads: Sewell NJ Oct 8th, 1888 - Compliments of ___ Hurff station Agent and Operator at Sewell, NJ.

“We got this new station in President Cleveland’s time, and I will give another vote for another term.”



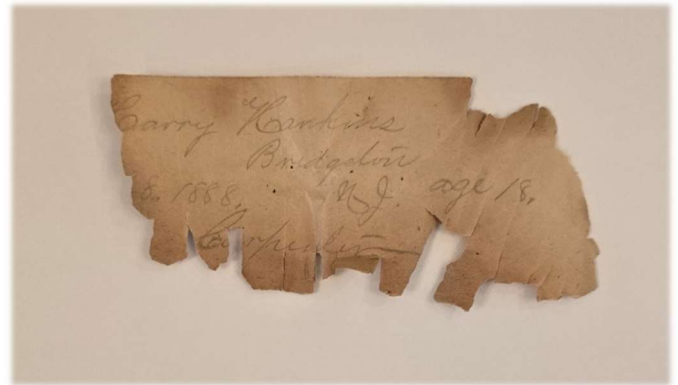
The above reads: (Letterhead) West Jersey Railroad Company and Camden & Atlantic Railroad Company Telegram.

From: Jersey, Oct, 8th, 1888, 3 o'clock 23 minutes PM.

Chas Schneider, Jr., Scroll Sawyer & Carpenter, Bridgeton, N.J., 46 New Street, Cumb. Co. (signature)

—Yesterday the foundation was laid for a handsome new station to be built at Sewell on the West Jersey R. R. A. F. Randolph of this city is the builder.

From the Courier Post – June 16, 1888



The above reads: Harry Hankins, Bridgeton, NJ, Oct 8, 1888, age 18, Carpenter

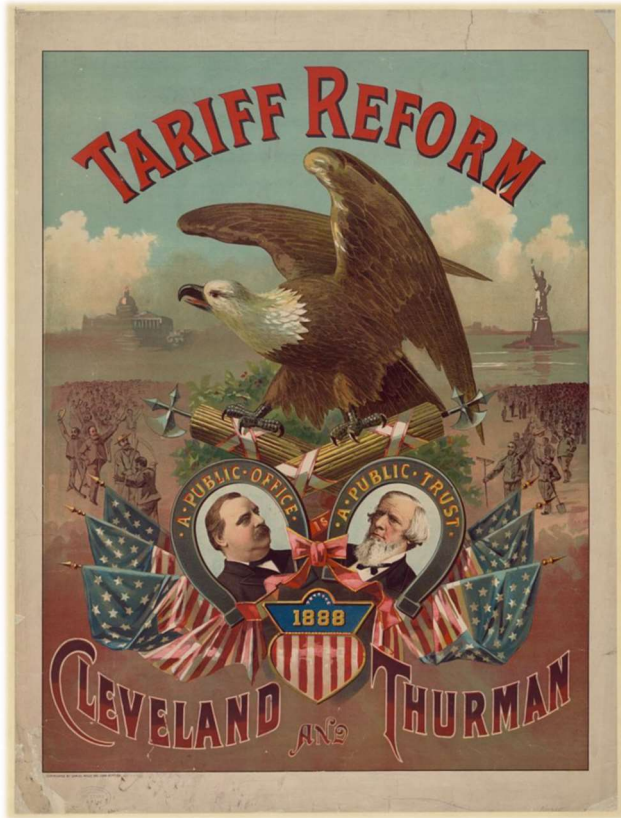
The newly discovered Sewell Railroad Station documents have presented fascinating details, the likes of which may not have been known until now.

Amazingly, the bottle and the messages from 137 years ago have gone undetected till now. How they survived over the years, while the building saw much use and abuse, is a miracle. It was wonderful and timely that Rob Layton discovered these treasures, as he is now interested in reviving this historic landmark. It is as if the past is speaking out in support of his good work.



In the heart of Sewell, NJ
(Courtesy of Rick Grenda)

Regarding the references made to the politics of the day in some of the documents. Stephen Grover Cleveland (March 18, 1837 – June 24, 1908) was the 22nd and 24th President of the United States, serving from 1885 to 1889, and from 1893 to 1897. He was the first U.S. President to serve nonconsecutive terms.



Campaign post

Some details about Sewell and its Railroad Station

By: Jeffrey Gellenthin

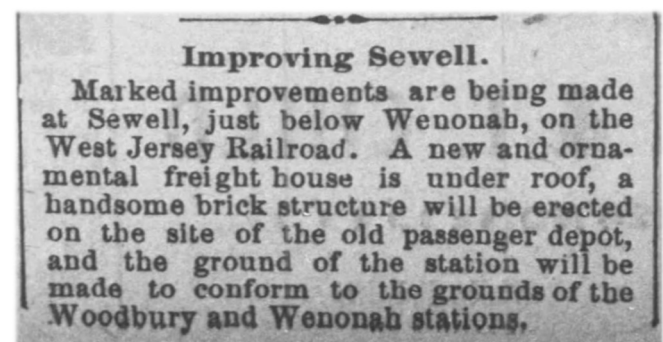
As recorded in the *A Bicentennial Look at Mantua Township* (with edits). Sewell was called Barnsboro Station because of the stagecoach line from the present Sewell to Barnsboro and from Sewell to Hurffville. The Sewell area was then a summer resort for visitors on route to the Pitman Grove Meetings. The name remained Barnsboro Station even after the railroad came on the scene because of its location on top of the hill. Mantua Boulevard was called *Chew's Lane*, and Center

Street was called the *Road to Hurfftown*. In the 1880s, the Road to Hurfftown, the railroad, and the station were relocated. The new station was named Sewell Station. The surrounding community was called Sewell City, after General William Joyce Sewell, an officer of the railroad.

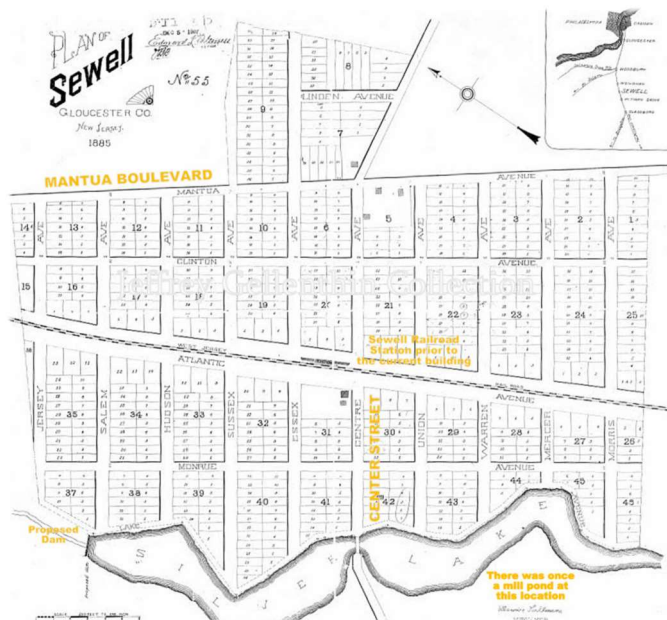


The Daily Evening Telegraph - August 12, 1870

The original intent of the railroad location through this area was partly to support the mass hauling of the rich marl soil mined from the local pits of Barnsboro and the surrounding region. I believe that over the years of this operation, William Sewell saw great potential in creating small communities along its path. The birth of Wenonah and then Sewell is evidence of this.

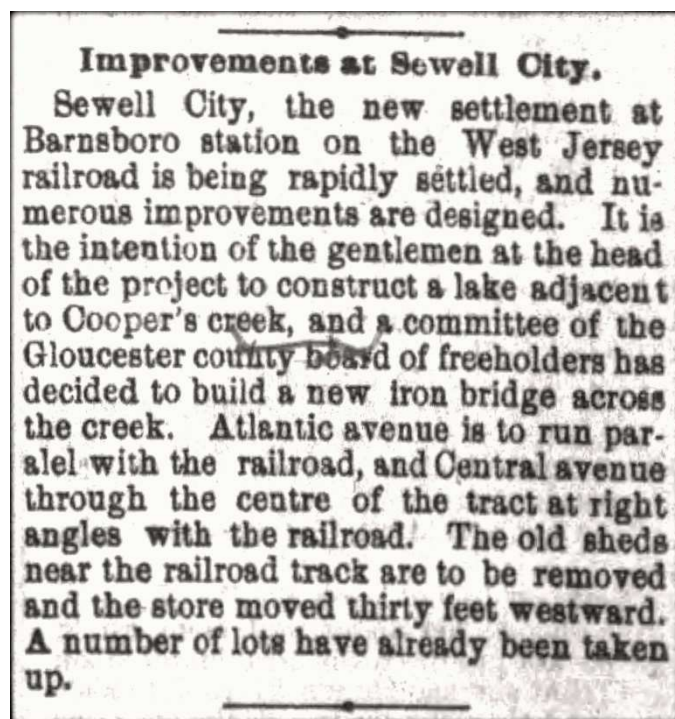


From the Morning Post – July 13, 1888



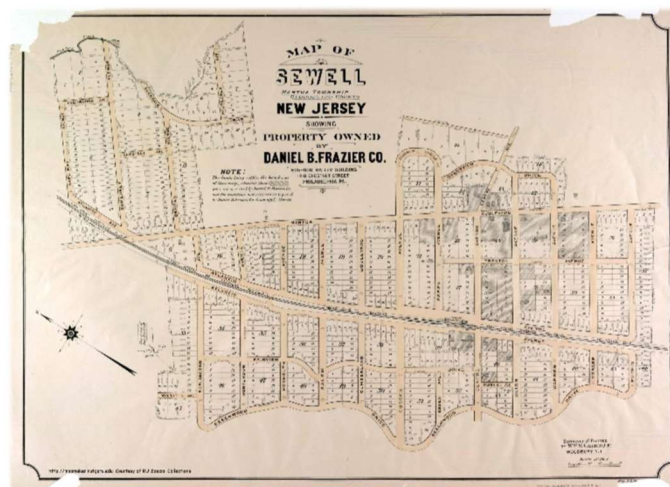
Plan of Sewell - 1885

The above plan depicts a layout that was superseded by the Map of Sewell, created in 1911. An interesting detail is the proposed Silver Lake. This would have been possible if the proposed dam shown at the end of Salem Avenue had been built. The Sewell Railroad Station did not exist yet. Shown are the docks and structures of Barnsboro Station.



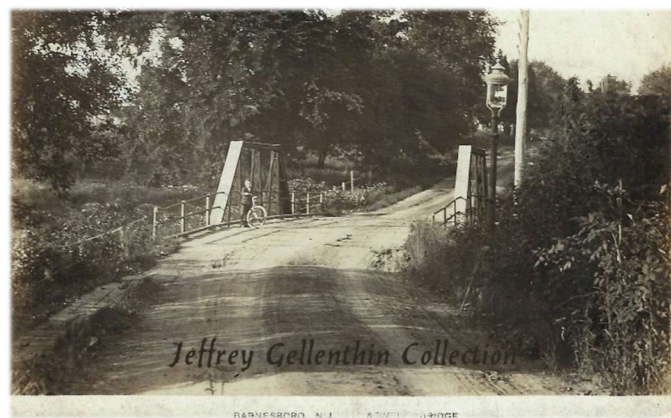
From the Courier Post - May 30, 1885

The article above highlights the goals of the original developers. The mentioned lake was never constructed, and Central Avenue became the now Center Street. The name "Cooper's Creek" is known today as Sewell Creek or Chestnut Branch.



Map of Sewell - 1911

The above map is referred to in almost every deed written during the conveyance of residential lots in Sewell over the past 100 years.



Barnsboro, NJ - Sewell Bridge - 1910

The above postcard, postmarked March 17, 1910, shows the iron bridge across the creek as described in the prior newspaper article. This was taken from the Barnsboro side of the bridge as you head into Sewell. There were few homes

in place when this picture was taken, as the community had slow growth between the 1880s and 1930s. It was not until *Cinderella Village* and *Buckingham Village* opened up that the vacant land began to fill with homes.

The child in the picture could make for an interesting story. What was it like then? Did he deliver the newspaper? Did he ever ride the train? Was he dared to enter the nearby old Chew and Driver Cemeteries? Was he a good student at the Sewell School? Did he work at the Ledden's farm as a teen? Did he swim in the creek? Did he stay in Sewell as an adult?



In the left background of the above photo, you can see the freight building. It was constructed and under roof before the construction of the station in 1888. All of the cargo that came to or left the Sewell area passed through its doors.

The story has it that in July of 1960, a tornado came through town by way of Barnsboro, across Sewell Creek, and straight on into the freight building, knocking it over toward East Atlantic Avenue. There it rested on its side, fully intact. Imagine how well it had to have been built to withstand that moment. Made from heartwood pine, the railroad company spared no expense. The owners at that time, the Ledden's, had a choice: either to put it back where it originally sat or to put it on their other lands across the

street. They opted to place it on the lot next door to what is now Louie G's property.

In the mid-1990s, a developer bought the lot with the freight building on it and began building two new homes there. The location of the freight building was smack dab in the middle of their back yards, and it had to go. At this point, the building was in rough shape. It had been used for storing lawn and garden supplies and had experienced several fires set by vandals. The developer discussed allowing the local fire company to use it for firefighter training. This meant it would be destroyed through the process. The developer shared his idea with me, and I expressed interest in it. His reply was "if you want it, you have to move it". And so, I did.

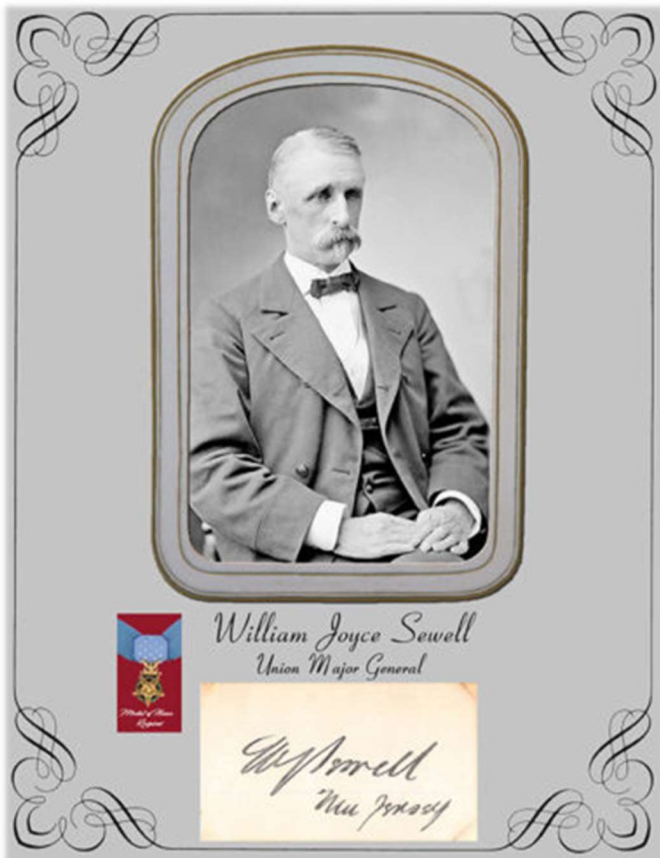
After many months of planning, permitting paperwork, the construction of a new foundation, and the actual moving of the building, this monstrous timber structure now sits plumb and square on its new foundation at 150 Center Street, a block away from its original location.

Since that time, the building has served as a wood shop, a music studio, a land surveying office, and an excellent place for entertaining.



The Sewell Railroad Station Freight Building, at its current location at 150 Center Street, Sewell, NJ

The Sewell Railroad Station provided public transportation services for nearly 75 years. Its life after being decommissioned has not been the most glamorous. Rarely cared for, yet used for storage until it became unsafe. It has witnessed the growth of the Sewell area, from farm fields and orchards to paved roads, with homes and businesses now abundant. This was likely General William Joyce Sewell's vision.



RECENT NEWS

On September 3rd, the Mantua Township Historical Commission held a "Night at the Museum" featuring our very own, Kathy MacGregor. It was a special night, as Kathy shared her memories of being part of the team of Mantua Township volunteer EMT and ambulance squad responders during the September 11, 2001, attacks. The evening began with the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag, followed by Kathy's sharing of her vivid memories of her time spent at Ground Zero. Kathy's presentation was wonderful and moving, and we are grateful to her for sharing her experience with us.



THE CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

We mourn the passing of commission member and friend, Michael DiGiamberardino.

Michael grew up in Mantua Township, and after a life's journey and career that took him away from the area, he recently returned home to New Jersey to enjoy his retirement near the community he loved.

Following in the footsteps of his mother, Theresa DiGiamberardino, a past member, Michael enjoyed visiting and eventually volunteered with the Mantua Township Historical Commission. Seeing his passion and our desire for him to be a member, the commission's bylaws were amended to allow non-residents to be official voting members. This became known as Michael's Law in a lighthearted manner. Michael officially became a member of the Mantua Township Historical Commission in January 2025.

Michael showed a great interest in our local history and was actively involved in several research projects. He brought his years of experience with the Rockford, MI Historical Society and his fresh ideas to the table.

Michael lit up the room with his smile, and we looked forward to seeing him every Saturday morning during the museum and library's public opening. He always had a story to share and items to donate from his family's collection of local artifacts.

Michael's commitment and enthusiasm toward the continued success of the MTHC were greatly appreciated. He was a genuinely kind-hearted and giving person. He will be sorely missed.



Michael DiGiamberardino
April 25, 1959 – June 26, 2025

RECENT DONATIONS

Walter Taggart – a historic copy of a picture of the Sewell Railroad Station.

Michael DiGiamberardino – miscellaneous pictures of Mantua Students, pictures from a Pitman High School Class of 1949 reunion, a Cub Scout pocketknife, and a tailor's scissors.

Carolyn & Art Olsen – a new coffee maker for the meeting room.

Kathy MacGregor – A collection of vintage cookbooks

Jeff & Debbie Gellenthin – antique student school slates, and a book set of 12 volumes of Life – History of the United States.



THANK YOU

Mayor Robert Zimmerman and the Mantua Township Committee members - for your continued support.

Robert Layton – For sharing your discovery that allowed for the writing of the feature article of this bulletin.

Herb Hood – The Commission would like to thank you for all your dedicated years of service as a member and Vice Chairman of the organization. We wish you the best of luck in all your future endeavors.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Mantua Township Historical Commission

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Mantua, New Jersey 08051

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or by appointment

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Facebook page:

[www.facebook.com/MantuaTownshipHistorical
Commission](https://www.facebook.com/MantuaTownshipHistoricalCommission)

COMMISSION MEMBERS

Jeff Gellenthin – Chairman

Debbie Gellenthin – Secretary

Kathy MacGregor

Carolyn Harris

Carolyn Olsen

Art Olsen

Sue Altimus

Scott Altimus

Tom Downing

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

The Historic Mantua Academy (built in 1874) and the home of the Mantua Township Historical Commission Museum and Meeting Place – 145 Mantua Boulevard, Mantua, NJ 08051



Contributors, Authors, and Editors of this Bulletin

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Scott Altimus

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