

DENNIS TOWNSHIP OLD

Newsletter



William S. Townsend House

POOR BESSIE'S ALMANAC

By Janet McShain

On both sides of my family, I had ancestors that date back to the beginnings of white settlement of America. Both of my grandmothers, my "Granny Clark" and my "Grandma Bessie" told me stories of their parents and grandparents. With the help of our family Bible that my dad gave me, we've been able to research our ancestor connections going back to New England, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and beyond.

Just this year, I completed a memoir called "CLARK" (Editor's note: a copy of "CLARK" is on display at our museum.)

The memoir includes many stories going back to the 17th century. I hope this is just the first of my memoirs. Now, I'm working on things I forgot to mention in "CLARK".

To learn more about my roots, my husband and I took a trip to New England to see the towns where my great grandparents came from. GPS said four hours and 18 minutes to New Haven where they lived in the 18th century. However, it was Labor Day weekend and traffic at the George

SCHOOL HOUSE MUSEUM 2018

Washington Bridge made a much longer trip.

Frustrated but undaunted, we visited port towns London and Mystic Connecticut, along Long Island Sound. We camped near Hartford on the Connecticut River. Early settlers lived near the water just like down here in southern New Jersey.

Many of Cape May's first colonists came from Long Island in the 1600's including the Ludlam and Townsend families. They traveled on paths established by Lenni-Lenape Indians and along navigable waterways like Dennis Creek. This was the only way to travel until the mid-18th century, near the time of the Revolution.

Later, paths were widened for wagon use and stage coach travel between towns. Early paths connected the headwaters of creeks, including the Cohansey Trail that went through Dennisville. It connected Salem, Gloucester, Cumberland, and Cape May Counties at the fording places of all the tributaries along Delaware Bay.

The path was crossed where elks, called "nos" in Lenape, made the way. A dugout canoe was found in Dennis Creek, now on view in Trenton. It's an example of the Lenape way of travel.

These original paths were crooked trails changing to horse trails along the highest, driest possible routes down to Cape May Point. The Indians traveled by foot and used teepee style wigwams in summer when

“POOR BESSIE” from page 1 traveling south to campgrounds. Most lived in bark covered shelters 10 by 20 feet for the rest of the year, locating them near the creeks for ease of travel, water, and hunting.

Automobiles changed travel. By the end of World War I, straightened paths became two lane highways for cars and trucks. Eventually summer traffic jams became the norm with long jams at the dreaded red lights here in Dennisville.

Returning to our Connecticut adventure, we slept in a two person tent for three nights but gladly went to a resort for the remaining four, where we enjoyed comfort for our hips.

We took the slow scenic route through Massachusetts, enjoying the Mohawk Trail, going from the Connecticut River up to northwestern Massachusetts. We saw the Clark Institute with its Van Gogh exhibit, one of the goals for our trip.

Crossing the Hudson River at Poughkeepsie on the way home, we enjoyed great views and a feeling of the old mountain trails. We took a whole day to get back to our old home here on Delsea Drive, after running into traffic jams in the middle of New Jersey, trying to avoid the traffic from New York City.

We have our scenic highway in Dennis Township, the high point of Cape May County. It kept moccasins dry. But I was looking for hills when I got back. There are hills in New Jersey...at High Point State Park (northwest corner of New Jersey).

I can't imagine how long it took Joseph Ludlam and John Townsend to bring their families down here, including their oxen and

cattle! They had to cross the Egg Harbor and numerous swamps...

But at least they didn't have to pay tolls!!!!



Magnolia Lake in Autumn

Mill at the Lake

Having relocated to southern New Jersey from Long Island in the late 17th century, John Townsend constructed a dam in 1690, creating what we now know as Magnolia Lake. Earth was piled around the dam's clay wall, forming a roadway that eventually became a section of Route 9.

Townsend subsequently built a mill at Magnolia Lake in Ocean View. It was the first use of water power in Cape May County. The original mill featured two stone sets, one for grinding corn, the other for wheat.

To increase efficiency, a water wheel was later installed and a sawmill was added to the works. Lumber for many of South Seaville's (still standing) oldest houses was sawed here.

In 1850, a permanent wooden bridge was installed and replaced by a modern structure in 1910 when the highway was built.

In winter, locals harvested ice from the mill pond. Sawdust from the mills was used as insulation to keep the ice which was stored in underground ice houses in the region.

Another local industry in the pond area was a wintergreen distillery. Oil produced from locally grown plants was used as food flavoring and as a remedy for various ailments such as rheumatism.

Also grown locally was hops. Dr. Way grew the plant on nearby farmland at what is today the corner of Sea Isle Boulevard and Route 9.

Magnolia Lake continues to be the scene of innovative agriculture. Alma George, a 5th generation farmer, and husband John currently grow beach plums and aronia on either side of Route 9 in Ocean View.

The Georges have created a business producing fruits jellies, jams and other products which they sell at area farm markets.



Magnolia Lake (headwaters) Main Street



CAPE MAY PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB ENJOYS LUNCH AFTER VISITING MUSEUM EARLIER THIS FALL.



The Mill at Magnolia Lake today

“A History of Education in Dennis Township” adapted from manuscript (Master’s thesis) of William Garrison Hunter

In colonial times, free public education was a luxury many communities could not afford. There was more work for uneducated people than educated ones in rural places like Dennis Township. The wealthy provided tutors or other private education for their children.

However, as local populations grew and churches became part of individual communities, the church assumed the role of educator. Education was a family responsibility and while youngsters were often taught how to read and write it was more important for them to begin to learn a trade.

In the late 18th century, Dennis Township local residents recognized some value of modestly investing in public education. In 1793, 31 residents paid 5 shillings for land on the north side of what is now school house lane in South Dennis. The land was to be used as site of a school “for as long as time shall last”. Not quite, but it was a start for public education in Dennis.

In 1801, residents on the north side of the creek bought an acre for a buck to build another school house that was supposed to last forever. This group of community activists proved more prescient. That building, which housed the Ludlam School, operated over 150 years. It still stands on the site.

Each village in the township supported its own one or two room school house where local boys and girls matriculated faithfully...until they were needed to work on the family farm.

As the times changed, notions about public education changed, especially as the numbers of family farms in the township diminished and new industries...requiring new skills...became more important in the lives of local residents. Student populations grew, as did the costs associated with providing even a basic education.

The first Dennis Township Board of Education was created by election in 1894 in

part to address the growing complexity of education.

Eventually, one room community school houses proved to be inadequate to handle a growing student population in a fiscally responsible way while providing local young people with the basic skills needed to function in a changing world.

Belleplain was the last community school in Dennis Township to have all 8 grades in the same building. It closed in 1957.

LUDLAM SCHOOL

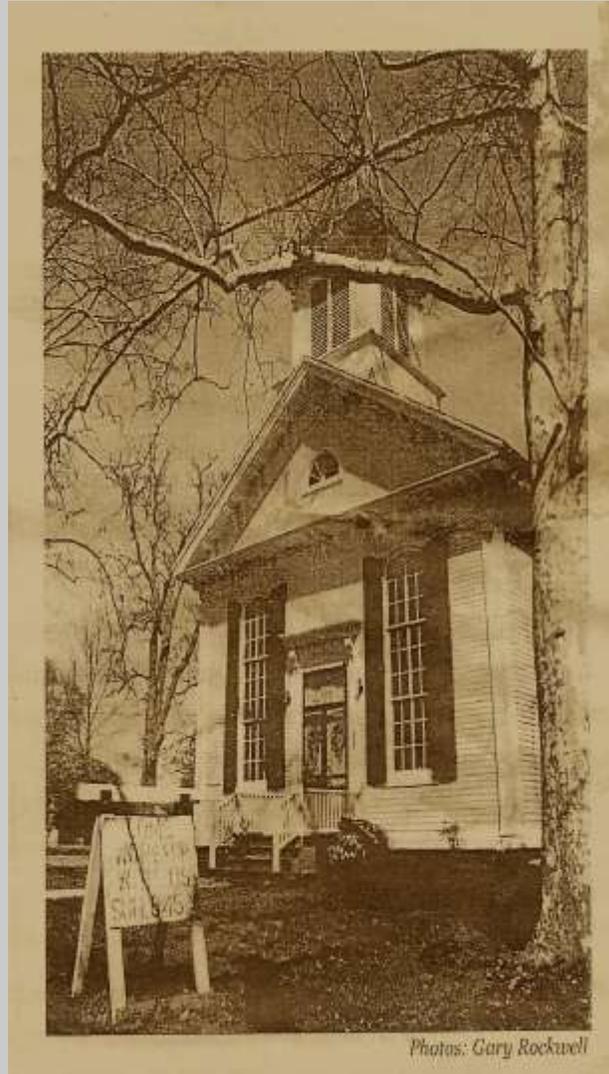


A few years before that, the school board and township committee exchanged land and building containing the Dennisville school, for a larger piece of township land on Academy road. The old school house (today’s museum) was converted into the township’s municipal building. Meanwhile, the school board built the Academy Road school, including four classrooms, a clinic, Teachers room, principal’s office, storage and lavatories. This happened in 1952.

Five years later, 8 classrooms and a kitchen were added.

All community township schools were closed and all students were sent here.

Local Church Still in Operation



Trinity United Methodist Church

is located on Route 47 in South Dennis. Its present location is the third for the church.

The first church, built cooperatively by area Baptists and Methodists in 1803, was called Union Meeting House. First sermon

was preached by John Goff From Eldora.

In 1853, a new Methodist church was built across from Union Cemetery. Meanwhile, the old church continued in use until it was sold at auction in 1884 for \$100. The building was moved, eventually ending up in Goshen where it was rebuilt as a public hall.

The newer church served as a community center as well as its religious function. The last service there was held in 1935. In the interrim, Baptists had built a church of their own on the opposite corner of the site of the original Union Meeting House.

It was this building that Methodist trustees purchased and renamed it Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church.

Old School House Museum

Hours: 9am-1pm

. 1st and 3rd Saturdays

Local Soldier Killed in World War I

Morgan, Abram H. 1,261,407 *White *Caucas

Residence: Claremont, N. J.

*Enlisted ~~1917~~ *N. C. ~~1917~~ *Inducted at Ocean City, N.J. on Apr 13 1917

Place of birth: Claremont, N. J. Age or date of birth: 19.4/12 yrs

Organizations served in, with dates of assignments and transfers:
Co. G 3 Inf NJ NG to Oct 13/14; Co. H 114 Inf to death.

Grades, with date of appointment:
Pvt; Pvt 1st June 18/19

Engagements: Bois de Ormont

Served overseas from a June 16/18* death from* to*

*Killed in action *Died Oct 12/18

Other wounds or injuries received in action:

Persons notified of death: Mrs. Mattie Morgan, Mother,
Cape May Court House, N. J.

Remarks:

*State not recorded applicable. *Date of departure from and arrival in the U. S.

Abram Morgan Death Certificate



Morgan and Parents Headstone Calvary Baptist Cemetery in Ocean View

The 29th Division was first constituted on paper 18 July 1917, three months after the [American entry into World War I](#)

The division's infantry units were the [57th Infantry Brigade](#), made up of the [113th](#) and [114th Infantry Regiments](#), both from [New Jersey](#). As the division was

composed of men from states that had units that fought for both the North and South during the Civil War, it was nicknamed the "Blue and Gray" division, after the blue uniforms of the [Union](#) and the gray uniforms of [Confederate](#) armies during the [American Civil War](#). The division was actually organized on 25 August 1917.

The division departed for the [Western Front](#) in June 1918 to join the [American Expeditionary Force](#) (AEF).¹ The division's advance detachment reached [Brest, France](#) on 8 June. In late September, the 29th received orders to join the [U.S. First Army's Meuse-Argonne Offensive](#) as part of the French XVII Corps. During its 21 days in combat, the 29th Division advanced seven kilometers, captured 2,148 prisoners, and knocked out over 250 machine guns or artillery pieces. Thirty percent of the division became casualties—170 officers and 5,691 enlisted men were [killed](#) or [wounded](#).

One of those killed was Abram Morgan, son of Charles and Mattie. The three are buried at Calvary Baptist Cemetery on Route 9 in Ocean View.

He was not yet 21 years old when he was killed in action in the Argonne Forest.¹