

A BIT OF HISTORY OF HAZLET TOWNSHIP

On February 24, 1848 the Legislature of the State of New Jersey officially created this municipality, identifying it as the Township of Raritan, a municipal corporation, with authority to initiate and develop its own local government, as provided by law. Prior to that date, it had been a part of Middletown Township, which was formed in 1683. The name Township of Raritan remained until the general election in November 1967, at which time a majority of the voters casting ballots favored changing the name to Hazlet Township, which remains today.

At the time of its creation in 1848, the Township was much larger in size, including what is now the municipalities of Holmdel, Aberdeen, Matawan, Keyport, Union Beach and Keansburg, all of which from time to time and for varying reasons were separated from Hazlet Township by legislative action similar to that which divorced then Township of Raritan from Middletown Township many years before.

Throughout the decades since its founding, the official headquarters of the Township has had many locations - from private homes to schoolhouses, to firehouses, to the old Keyport Boro Hall on the northerly side of East Front Street near Church Street, and at one time in an old roadside stand on Poole Avenue. The Archives in the State House at Trenton hold the first minute book of the Township and the opening paragraph of the very first minutes reads as follows:

At an annual town meeting of the inhabitants of the Township of Raritan, (being the first held in said Township) held at the house of W. William Brookfield in the Village of Keyport on Tuesday, the 14th day of March A.D. 1848. George W. Bell was chosen Moderator and elected to the Township committee were Richard D. Walling, Joseph W. Carhart, James Sproul, Samuel Carhart and William Vandine.

This first Minute Book gives an indication that either very little by way of official business was transacted in the Township during the Nineteenth Century or the Municipal Clerks of those days were inclined to the lazy side in recording happenings. This first book, which began with the first meeting in 1848 was finally filled with the recording of the Minutes of May 3, 1895, a span of approximately 47 years. By comparison, a present day Minute Book of similar size might possibly hold the records of one year.

In spite of the extreme brevity of Minutes in the early years of Hazlet's history, the record does disclose that both serious and amusing incidents did occur, as indeed is still the case today. One incident, which in retrospect appears very amusing, but which might well have been a serious matter in its day, is the following excerpt from the Minutes of November 5, 1901:

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“Police Justice Taylor was present and presented a communication from Dr. W. E. Johnson requesting the Committee to furnish William Schoffer with one drink of apple whiskey per day. He gave as his reason for recommending such that it would be better and cheaper for the Township than medicine, as it would serve his case better. On motion, it was decided to instruct Mrs. Conover to give William Schoffer one drink per day as ordered by the Doctor.”

In 1970, which was forty-five years after the last municipality, Union Beach Boro, separated from the Township of Raritan, the population of Hazlet Township was a little over 22,000, an increase from 15,287 in 1960 and a dramatic rise from the 1950 Federal Census of 2,763. In 1973, Hazlet Township was the fifth largest municipality in Monmouth County from a population standpoint. Residential development of the Township got notably underway a few years after the conclusion of World War II and the opening of the Garden State Parkway in the mid 1950's provided the impetus for rapid large scale single family residential development for over a fifteen to twenty year period. What was generally spoken of as a farming community changed dramatically and today there were only two or three small farms remaining.

The Federal Census of 1980 lists a population of 23,013 and the Monmouth County Planning Board estimates the 1998 population at 22,253, ranking Hazlet Township tenth of fifty three Monmouth County Municipalities, notwithstanding that housing continues to be built on much smaller tracts of land. It is estimated that nearly ninety five percent of presently acceptable land in Hazlet Township has been built upon. One might wonder why continued residential construction does not reflect an increase but rather a decrease in total population. The explanation is that the family size in the 1950's and 1960's, brought about by the “baby boomer” era, gave a larger density of persons per household. With the children becoming adults in the 1970's and 1980's, the number of persons per household has reduced. Also aiding this change is the trend of couples having a smaller number of children.

State Highways 35 and 36 traverse the township and most of the frontage along the highways acceptable for building has been developed into various shopping, food stores and restaurants. A main railroad line between New York City and Bay head was taken over by New Jersey Transit some years ago and in 1988 electrification of the line was extended from South Amboy to Long Branch, thus providing better and faster commuter service to and from the Jersey Shore and the metropolitan area. Raised platforms with shelters were constructed at various stations, including the Hazlet station, located between Holmdel Road and Hazlet Avenue. Paved commuter parking facilities in the immediate vicinity provide for about 400 vehicles and 500 to 600 commuters utilize the train service on an average weekday. At present about 27 trains stop at the Hazlet station in a twenty four hour period on weekdays. A bus company, with a station and a vehicle parking area for commuters, located on Highway 36 near Middle Road, operates between Leonardo in Middletown Township and New York City with service through Hazlet Township on an almost around the clock schedule. The Garden State Parkway, which traverses the westerly portion of the township, operates an interchange in Hazlet Township that connects with State Highways' 35 and 36. Because of its strategic location, Hazlet Township can truly be called “The Gateway to the Shore”.



The Hazlet Family burial plot (see photo above) is located in Cedarwood Cemetery on Florence Avenue, adjacent to State Highway 36. Cedarwood Cemetery was at one time known as Raritan Cemetery, and in substantiation thereof the following is taken from Ellis History of Monmouth County, published about 1885:

“The Raritan Cemetery is located south of Keyport, but adjoining the corporate limits, on the south side of Chingarora Creek. A burial-ground containing about four acres of the farm of William Van Dine had been in use many years prior to 1867. On the 2nd of April, in that year, the Raritan Cemetery Company was incorporated, with power to enlarge the ground to an area of ten acres. The Act of incorporation named as trustees Cornelius Brittan, Theodore Aumack and Alfred Walling, Jr.---”.

**“COMPLIMENTS OF NATIONAL AMUSEMENTS,
OWNERS AND OPERATORS OF SHOWCASE CINEMAS”**

THE HAZLET FAMILY HOMESTEAD AND CEMETERY PLOT

As mentioned elsewhere in this 150th Anniversary Journal, the unincorporated community of Hazlet derived its name from one of its citizens, Dr. John Hazlet. (Efforts to determine if Dr. Hazlet was a medical doctor have not been successful. One tax record lists John Hazlet as a Rev.; perhaps he was a Doctor of Divinity.)

The photo below is that of "Hazlet Villa" believed to be at one time the homestead of the Hazlet family. It, also like another structure along Holmdel Road on the south side of the railroad crossing, was utilized, at least partially at one time, as a hotel. A present Hazlet Township resident, Joseph Siano, Sr., born there in 1920, recalls living at the Hazlet Villa as a young child with his parents, Frank and Rose, and a younger brother Frank. Later the Siano family moved to a farm on the west side of Holmdel Road, further north of where the Hazlet Villa stood. Today, part of the Siano farm can be identified from a public street, Siano Place along which there are a few residential homes.

The Hazlet Villa was gone by 1932. It stood on a hill about midway between Holmdel Road and Hazlet Avenue, approximately 400 feet north of the railroad tracks, and is part of the wooded vacant acreage that Hazlet Township purchased in the late 1970's for future recreational and park facilities.

