

THE GENERAL STORE



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NEWSLETTER OF THE RALSTON HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

SUMMER 2005

House Tour Planned for Fall

In the course of the day, hundreds of people drive up and down Route 24 and Roxiticus Road, oblivious to the fact that they are passing through Ralston, one of the earliest industrial centers in 18th century Morris County. This area, previously known as Rocksiticus, is the product of over 250 years of history. While little remains of the way of life that once made Ralston a vital crossroads community, the buildings that survive serve as reminders of Mendham's earliest days.

The Ralston Historical Association is honored to host a tour of homes in the Ralston area this fall. On Sunday, October 16th from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm, seven historical homes and the General Store will be open to the public. The owners of these homes have graciously accepted our invitation to celebrate the history of their homes and the historic Ralston area.

The homes featured on the tour span a time from the 1780s to the 1920s. John Ralston, a prominent businessman from Philadelphia, purchased the Manor House, Mendham's first mansion, which served as home to Ralston, his wife Margaret and their seven children. His mill operated until 1900, when it became a private home.

RHA Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Ralston Historical Association will be held at 1 p.m. on August 7, 2005 at the General Store Museum, 313 Mendham Road-West (Rt. 24), at the intersection of Roxiticus Road. Trustees and officers will be elected and a review of last year's accomplishments and plans for this year will be discussed. The trustees nominated for the Class of 2008 are Owen Carlin, Dolores Crammer, Paula Duer, Tracy Kinsel and Patricia Rhodes. The 2004 museum season began on Memorial Day and continues through mid-October. Hours are from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. The museum docent is Paula Duer.



John Ralston's Manor House

Much of the original charm of the old mill has been maintained. The family home and barn of Hugh Nesbitt, Ralston's business partner, will be viewed as well.

In the 1800s two tenant houses on Roxiticus Road provided living quarters for the mill workers. One of these tenant homes will be open during the tour. In 1842, Dr John Wick Ledell presented a home designed by a local architect Aaron Hudson to his son, Samuel Ledell and his new bride. This lovely home is part of our tour.

Many homes and barns made use of the rolling hills of the Ralston area by being built into their very banks. A wonderful example of a bank house is at the corner of Roxiticus and Ironia roads. The tour will include this fine stone house as well as the ponds and gardens.

In the 1920s the Sears Roebuck Company sold house kits in their catalogs. Ralston's house tour will include an example of the "Del Ray" model marketed in 1921 – 1926.

What better way to experience the history of Ralston than to join us for this Sunday afternoon tour? Tickets priced at \$20.00 will be for sale in advance Sunday afternoons at the General Store or by mail from the Ralston Historical Association, 313 Mendham Road West, Mendham, New Jersey 07945. Tickets will also be available the morning of the tour. The event will help support the Ralston Historical Association's mission to preserve and interpret the history of the area for current and future generations.

Sunday, October 16, 2005 11am to 3pm

Tour of Historic Homes in the Ralston Historic District of Mendham Township

Sponsored by the Ralston Historical Association

Also Featured on the Historic Homes Tour

Bank House



Ledell House



Hugh Nesbit House



Ralston Mill House



Sears Roebuck House



Tenant House



Oldest Known Photograph of the General Store



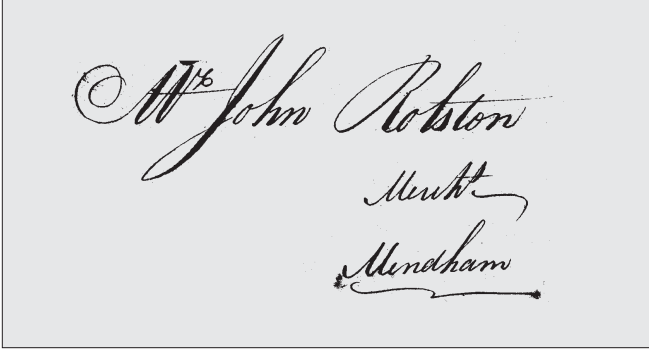
The General Store Today



Old Document Preservation and Accessibility

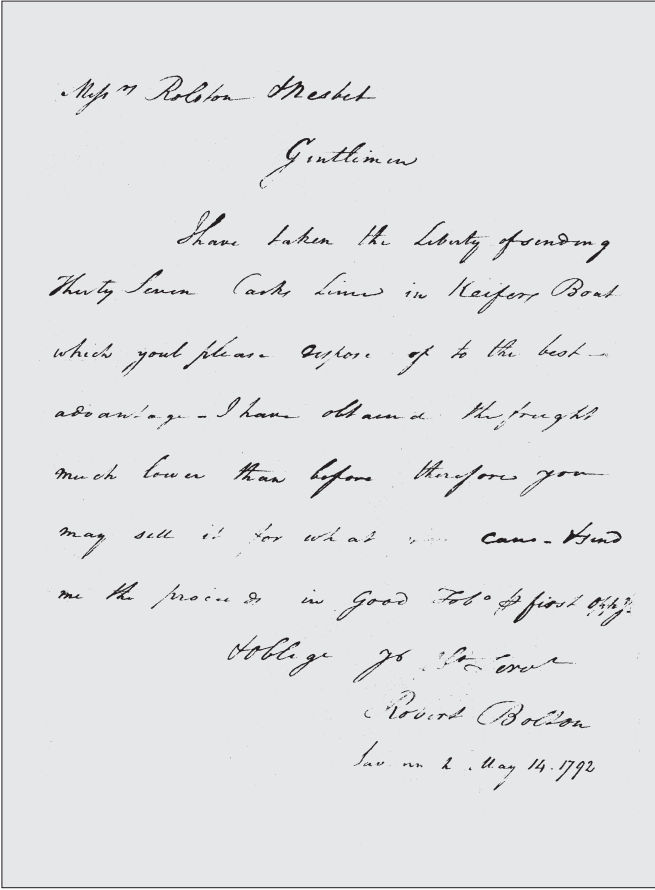
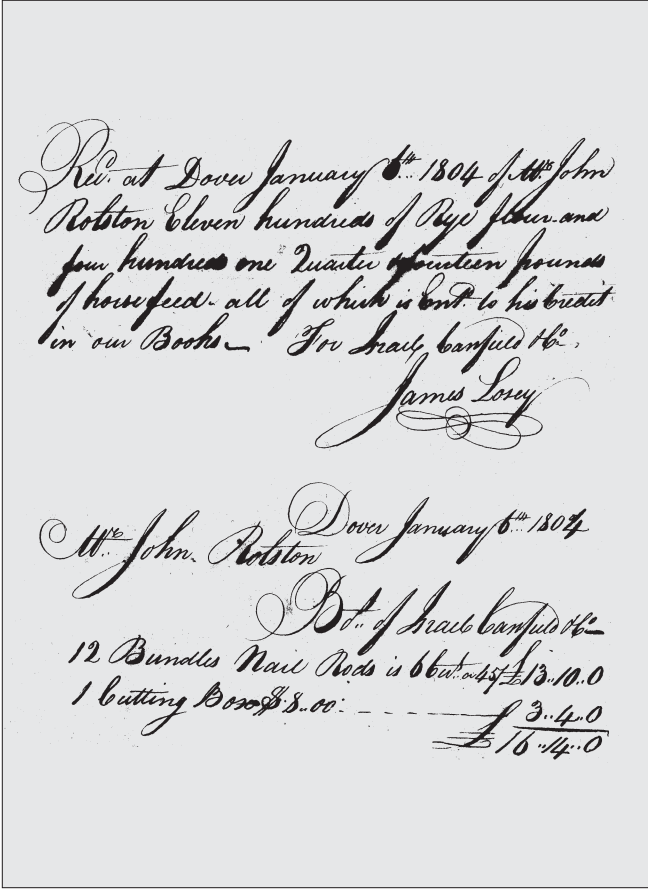
Over the years, the Ralston Historical Association has been the recipient of old original documents relating to the Rolston family, Rolston commerce, personal letters, and more. John Rolston (the spelling was changed to Ralston in the 19th century) came to Mendham in the early 1780s and quickly became a leader in local commerce. His business included shipping goods to and from the Mendham area. These documents reflect aspects of everyday life and commerce as it was from 1792 (our oldest document) to the mid 19th century. They reflected the customs and penmanship of the times with many flourishes.

We have received and stored these documents but feel we must preserve them from deterioration and for the interest of future generations, in order to preserve a facet of Ralston and Mendham history. The documents



themselves come from local families including descendants who look to the RHA as a repository of their history as their family membership dwindles and disperses.

The preservation of the documents is relatively simple, as we were shown by Connie Gates, a Mendham expert. However, to make them readable and available to the public without jeopardizing their physical state (200-year old paper is very fragile) we are copying and indexing them. A copy of each document has been placed in a notebook that can be read by anyone at the Ralston General Store. The originals will be in safe and stable storage. Stop by for a look at this facet of Ralston whenever the store is open. You will find it interesting.



THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As president and a trustee of the Ralston Historical Association, one of the questions I'm frequently asked is, "What do you do with the money you collect from the members?" It's actually a very good question, and I thought I would share this information with you as part of my column this year.

In fiscal year 2004, we received approximately \$5,100 in membership dues/building fund contributions and a \$1,000 donation from the Township of Mendham. We also received \$300 from the sale of items in the general store bringing our total revenue to about \$6,300. On the expense side, we spent close to \$3,000 on the printing and mailing of our annual newsletter to Mendham Township and Mendham Borough, a little over \$1,100 for fire and liability insurance, \$1,500 payroll for our docent and \$3,000 on maintenance. Total expenses in 2004 were about \$8,300. There is a small endowment that we use to maintain the building. This year because of the amount of work that was done, we did have to dip into the interest income to cover our expenses.

Just this past month, we had the interior walls and trim painted - the first time in 40 years - and yes, it was long overdue. We also had the chimney repaired as it had begun

to leak. The cost for these items totaled about \$3,300. For many years, much of the store maintenance had been deferred and we are now trying to catch up on these items - i.e. last year, the wood shake roof was cleaned and restored and the year before that, the exterior was preserved. We try to get several estimates for the large jobs, but as most of us know, finding contractors these days can be a challenge, especially when they hear that we have special requirements because of the building's age and historic significance.

I hope you find the information above helpful and will consider joining or continuing your support of the Ralston General Store. Stop by and see the new interior paint job - the feel of the old building has been retained and the collection has been reworked to group things more logically. Please note that we are having a fund raiser on Sunday, October 16, in the form of a house tour. The lineup of prospective dwellings is most impressive. Once again, thanks so much for your continued support!

Jeff Purcell
President - Ralston Historical Association

From the Collection

A wax jack often goes unrecognized by today's collectors. It is usually made of silver, but sometimes it's of iron or brass. It looks like a candle, but it was not used for light. The bottom of a wax jack is a footed flat dish with a handle and an upright spindle. At the top of the spindle are a holder and a candle snuffer. The wax jack held a long, waxed wick that coiled around the spindle up to the holder. The waxed wick was lit to heat the block of sealing wax used to fasten

letters and documents. Usually, a personal seal with a design cut into the bottom was pressed into the hot wax to leave personal identification. After the seal hardened, it was almost impossible to secretly open the letter, because the wax would break. A wax jack was kept on a desk near other writing necessities: pen, ink, blotter and sander. Wax jacks were popular in England, but some were made and used in the United States.

Silver Wax Jack



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* Additional contribution

Ralston Historical Association
313 Mendham Road West
Mendham, NJ 07945



Ralston Historical Association
Established in 1941

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Vice President – *Tracy Kinsel*
Recording Secretary – *Wilma Sagurton*
Corresponding Secretary – *Rose Carlin*
Treasurer – *Judy Craig*

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Dolores Crammer
Paula Duer
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Patricia Rhodes

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Lucille Heimrod

Visit our website: www.ralstonmuseum.org

A large print version of this newsletter is available by calling 973-543-7834

2005 – 2006 Membership Renewal Form

Check the Appropriate Membership

Please indicate your membership information

New Member _____ Renewal _____ Corporate/Matching Gift _____

_____ John Ralston Society (\$1,000.00 one time)

_____ Life Member (\$250.00 one time)

_____ Sustaining Member (\$100.00 per year)

_____ Family/Institution Member (\$40.00 per year)

_____ Individual Member (\$25.00 per year)

_____ Senior Citizen (\$15.00 per year)

Building/Collections Fund \$ _____

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Email _____

The Ralston Historical Association is always looking for volunteers to help in a variety of ways. If interested, please include your name and phone number below or send an email to purcell.r@att.net.

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Please make your tax deductible check payable to:

Ralston Historical Association
313 Mendham Road – West
Mendham, NJ 07945