
◇ The General Store ◇

Mendham Township as described by Hon. S. B. Axtell in 1882

The following excerpts are from W. W. Munsell's History of Morris County, NJ published in 1882.

MENDHAM is the smallest township in Morris county. It contains 14,746 acres and has no marsh land. It lies at an altitude of about 600 feet above mean tide. It is bounded north by Randolph, east by Morris, south by Somerset county, and west by Chester. It is well wooded, and watered by numerous springs and small brooks. The waters of the western part flow into the Raritan River, those in the eastern part into the Passaic. The township is remarkably well drained and very fertile. All fruits, grains, berries and grapes natural to this latitude grow to great perfection and are exceedingly well flavored. Men and animals are healthy and longevity is the rule.

There are no authentic records of the township earlier than 1713; nor much of tradition. The first white

men probably came up the Raritan. The trapper, following the streams, first penetrates to a new country. James Wills, said to have been an Englishman married to a French woman, bought land of the original proprietors about Ralstonville. Roxiticus has an Indian name and is on a branch of the Raritan. The brook above the village is called Indian Brook. At this place the first settlement of white men was made. They are said to have been Scotch and Irish Protestants.

The early settlers of Mendham were industrious and ingenious. Their circumstances compelled them to manufacture for themselves. It was with extreme difficulty that they could get cash to buy with, and then it was necessary to go to Elizabethtown, on horseback or with ox carts, to bring up their goods. This state of affairs compelled them to make wool and flax into clothing and leather into shoes. They brought ore on horseback from Dickerson's mines, near Dover,

to the mills on their streams; and with the charcoal of the heavily wooded hills made their pig iron, and carried that again on horseback to a market. It was their currency. Theirs was truly an iron age. The value of money may be understood when it is stated as a fact that John Cary came from Bridgewater, Mass., to build the first church, and worked for thirty-one cents per day. Carding, spinning, weaving and making shoes were carried on in nearly every house, and so scarce were purchased articles that thorns were constantly used in place of pins. With all other industries and economies to correspond, we can easily comprehend that our ancestors of Mendham township were not consumed by sloth nor enervated by luxury. With them all useful industries were honorable and all idleness and extravagance disreputable. They were independent, honorable and self-reliant, and their children's children rise up and call them blessed.

As the first church is the most striking feature in the landscape of Mendham village so is the history of its establishment and progress the most interesting part of the records of the township. It will be necessary therefore to devote some space to the history of this church. It is noticeable that our ancestors called these buildings simply meeting-houses. They

RHA Fall Event October 3, 2010

This fall the Ralston Historical Association will be hosting a fall event, on Sunday October 3rd, from 1-4 PM. The Ralston Museum will be open as well as the John Ralston Manor

House. We will have demonstrations of weavers, loomers, blacksmithing, knitting and a silhouette artist will also be present. All are welcome to stop in and see the museum and our demonstrations.

See Mendham Township – Page 2

Ralston Historical Association is Seeking Volunteers

When you volunteer, you give back to the community by helping to preserve the Ralston General Store Museum, a local national treasure. What you may not realize is that volunteering also benefits you! You can make new friends, enrich your knowledge of our local history, and feel good that you've made a difference.

Whether you are an accountant who can provide guidance to our board or a student interested in gaining some experience, your donation of time is greatly appreciated. Here are some ways you can help:

- Be a Board Member (meets 7:30 PM on the first Thursday of each month)

- Share your expertise (e.g., accounting, law, marketing, etc.)
- Research / Write articles for this annual newsletter
- Participate in our Spring and/or Fall Clean Up (e.g., dusting the artifacts, cleaning windows and sweeping floors)
- Help with Special Events
- Other?

Even a few hours of your time can make a big difference. Please let us know how you can help by calling 973-543-7834 or sending an e-mail note to rjp543@comcast.net.

From the Collection



Two candle lanterns from the museum collection.

Candle lanterns allowed light to be portable and many styles were created of tin, iron, wood, glass and horn. One could venture out to the stable or the woodpile without losing one's flame with the protection of a lantern. Punched tin lanterns, as seen on the left, were very common and fairly cheap to produce. These gave off a faint light but if kicked over they would not immediately start a fire.

Panels of glass were sometimes used in tin and wood lanterns to allow for better illumination but more often, thin translucent sheets of flattened cattle horn, as seen on the right, were used. These were less breakable and also more available to the craftsman in outlying areas or small villages.

The name *lantern* actually comes from the name 'Lanthorn' because of the use of cowhorn that light could pass through.

Mendham Township

were neither temples nor Lord's houses nor churches--they were simply "meeting-houses." Whatever may have been their creeds, their form of government was a pure Congregationalism; that is, the congregation--the people--met and decided all important questions relating to building, paying salaries, etc. The place adjoining the church, where they buried their dead, was the property of the society or congregation. It was a church yard. Services were held both in the forenoon and afternoon, and during the intermission in pleasant weather those who came from a distance went into the church yard, to eat their luncheon, to chat, to shake hands, to read inscriptions on old headstones, to kneel down and shed bitter tears by new made graves, to criticise the doctrinal points of the sermon, and--barely possible--occasionally some worldly matters would creep in.

The schools of Mendham have been exceptionally good. The first academy, as we have seen, was established by Rev. Henry Axtell, D. D., about 1795. Since that day Mendham has never been without good schools.

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



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Established in 1941

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RHA Annual Meeting – Sunday, July 25, 2010
1 PM at the General Store
Visit our website: www.ralstonmuseum.org

2010-2011 Membership Renewal Form

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)

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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: rjp543@comcast.net

Name: _____

Phone: _____

RHA is a 501(C)3 organization. Please make your tax deductible check payable to:

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